

# The Buried Giant



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF KAZUO ISHIGURO

Kazuo Ishiguro was born on November 8, 1954 in Nagasaki, Japan. In 1960, when Ishiguro was five years old, his family moved to England after his father (an oceanographer) was offered a job at the National Oceanography Centre. Although his parents spoke Japanese at home to keep their culture and heritage alive, Ishiguro didn't return to Japan until he was in his 30s, after earning his Bachelor of Arts in English and Philosophy, his Master of Arts in Creative Writing, and publishing his first book, *A Pale View of Hills*. In 1983, Ishiguro officially became a citizen of the U.K. Since the publication of his first book in 1982, Ishiguro has written six novels, a collection of short stories, four screenplays, and five songs. Ishiguro received the Booker Prize for his novel *The Remains of the Day* in 1989, the Order of the British Empire for his literary achievements in 1995, a Nobel Prize in Literature in 2017, and in 2019 received a knighthood for services in literature. Today, Ishiguro lives with his wife, Lorna, and their daughter, Naomi, in London, England.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Kazuo Ishiguro chose post-Arthurian England for the setting of *The Buried Giant*. In the novel, had been over 100 years since the Romans left England, leaving Britons to defend themselves against the Saxons, Germanic tribes who were coming from continental Europe to settle in England. In the year 460, after the deaths of several English kings, there was a rash of particularly violent land-grabs carried out by groups of Saxons, which escalated the tension and mutual hatred between the two groups. Although the existence of King Arthur is a hotly-debated topic among English historians, it is widely believed that he ruled and led armies of Britons in the late-5th and early-6th centuries. One battle in particular, the Battle of Badon, occurred around the year 500 and was particularly bloody, but it resulted in a few years of peace between Britons and Saxons similar to that which is seen in *The Buried Giant*. Ultimately, war did break out between Saxons and Britons again. Despite several periods of peace, violence and tension existed between the two groups until well into the 11th century.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The revelation of long-buried secrets is a favorite theme of Kazuo Ishiguro's and he explores it in some of his other works, including *Never Let Me Go* and *The Remains of the Day*. Sir

Thomas Malory's classic collection and retelling of the legend of King Arthur, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, tells the story of King Arthur's time on the English throne and the stories of his loyal Knights of the Round Table, which includes Sir Gawain, who features prominently in *The Buried Giant*. Richard Yates's novel *Revolutionary Road* features a seemingly happy couple with serious marital problems lurking beneath the surface, similar to Axl and Beatrice's marriage in *The Buried Giant*. Additionally, *Possession* by A. S. Byatt involves a quest to discover the hidden secrets and truth about English history, particularly for two 19-century poets whose turbulent affair ran contrary to stereotypical beliefs about sexuality in Victorian England.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Buried Giant
- **Where Written:** England
- **When Published:** 2015
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Fantasy
- **Setting:** Post-Arthurian England (early- to mid-6th century)
- **Climax:** Sir Gawain's recounts King Arthur breaking the treaty and ordering that a forgetting spell be put on Querig's breath.
- **Antagonist:** King Arthur
- **Point of View:** Third Person; First Person

### EXTRA CREDIT

**High Praise.** Although Kazuo Ishiguro only won the Booker Prize once in 1989, he was nominated for it a total of four times: *Artist of the Floating World* (1986 shortlist), *The Remains of the Day* (1989 winner), *When We Were Orphans* (2000 shortlist), and *Never Let Me Go* (2005 shortlist).

**Source Material.** Before achieving fame as a full-time writer, Kazuo Ishiguro was a social worker, which is how he met his wife. His experience as a social worker influenced his writing of *Never Let Me Go*, which is set in a school for children who have been created to donate organs to other people once they are adults.



## PLOT SUMMARY

The narrator describes the landscape of England at the time of the story, with ogres haunting the forests and very few castles to be found. On the edge of one of the bogs found in the rural countryside, Axl and Beatrice, an elderly Briton couple, live

together in a communal warren dug into a hillside. They live alone in one of the back rooms, far away from the communal fire, and are not allowed to have candles. Axl is awake and excited about a decision he has just made, but decides to keep it to himself until Beatrice wakes up. As he waits, Axl thinks about their lives in the warren and wonders if they have always lived as societal outcasts, relegated to the back corners and treated with little to no respect. Axl thinks about a problem that everyone seems to be having: they forget things that they should remember, even their own children or people who once lived among them.

Finally, Beatrice wakes up and Axl tells her that he's decided they should go on a journey to their son's village. They have not seen their son in many years, and can't remember the details of why he chose to leave or even his name. Still, they are certain that he's waiting for them and that they'll be able to live with him when they get to his village. Beatrice agrees and, after talking to the pastor about their plan, they set out on their journey alone. It is dangerous to walk through parts of the English countryside because of the monsters that still live there, so Beatrice often asks Axl (who walks behind her) whether he's still there. When it begins to rain, they take shelter in an abandoned house. Inside, they meet a boatman and an old woman who is about to slaughter a rabbit. The boatman hates the woman, who has been harassing him since he took her husband across the river to an **island** but left her behind. The island is a place where people can live in peace forever, but if they go alone then they may never run into another person there, even their loved ones. Only couples who are bound by true love and whose relationship is not characterized by anger, resentment, or indifference can go there together, according to the boatman. When the boatman tells the old woman to "look into her heart" and determine whether her bond with her husband was really strong enough for them to be taken to the island together, she refuses to answer him. Beatrice is particularly interested in this idea and wants to go there with Axl one day after they see their son.

When the rain stops, Axl and Beatrice leave the boatman and continue their journey until they reach a Saxon village where Beatrice often does trading. Not only will they stay the night at the village, but Beatrice wants to see a medicine woman who might give her medicine for a pain in her side she's been experiencing. When they get there, however, the townspeople are on edge because a young boy, Edwin, had been kidnapped by ogres. Beatrice and Axl watch and listen to the uproar around them, taking notice of a haggard-looking man who is at the center of a group of people. Eventually, Beatrice notices Ivor, a Briton who serves as mayor of the town, and he tells her that the man they noticed, Wistan, is going to lead a group of men out to rescue Edwin. Because the town is so tense, Ivor invites Beatrice and Axl to stay at his home instead of having to go to the inn. At Ivor's house, Beatrice, Axl, and Ivor discuss the

mysterious **mist** that permeates the land and makes everyone forget. Ivor says he believes the mist has invaded because God has forgotten their pasts, and Beatrice soon adapts this theory and believes God is ashamed of something they did in the past and is willing them all to forget what it was. Ivor leaves the house to wait for Wistan's return and so Beatrice and Axl can sleep. During the night, however, Edwin is found and returned, but his family turns against him because he was bitten by a mysterious creature. Ivor sends him to stay in a nearby barn until it's safe.

When Axl wakes up, he sees Beatrice is still sleeping and feels a rush of tenderness mixed with an indecipherable sense of sadness. He pushes the sadness from his mind and waits for Beatrice to wake up. When she does awake, they get their stuff together and leave Ivor's house to find breakfast and prepare to continue their journey. Wistan seems to remember Axl, but he can't remember from where, and neither can Axl. While they talk, Ivor asks Beatrice and Axl if they'll take Edwin with them because it's not safe for him to stay in the village. They agree, and Wistan decides to journey with them for a little while. Beatrice wants to go to a monastery where the well-respected Father Jonus, a monk with a penchant for medicine, might have a cure for her pain. The group agrees and they set off together.

As Beatrice, Axl, Wistan, and Edwin walk along, they run into a band of Briton soldiers who are guarding a bridge they need to cross. Wistan foresees danger because he is a Saxon warrior sent on a mission by a Saxon leader to see how Saxons and Britons are getting along. He tells Beatrice and Axl to pretend that he is mute and mentally ill, and that Edwin is his brother in order to avoid suspicion. Going up to the soldiers to ask to pass, Beatrice and Axl convince the leader, a grey-haired soldier, that they are innocent farmers and are given permission to pass. Once they are far away from him, Wistan stops acting like a mute and they press on. A short time later, they run into a knight resting near a tree. Although Wistan resumes acting like a mute at first, he soon recognizes the knight as Sir Gawain, one of King Arthur's nephews and most trusted knights. Sir Gawain and Wistan start talking about the past, although Wistan clearly can't remember all of it. At one point, Wistan tells Sir Gawain to look at Axl and see if he remembers him. Sir Gawain looks taken aback, but says he doesn't remember Axl. They continue talking until suddenly hearing someone coming: it is the grey-haired knight from before. This time, the knight, who is working for the Briton Lord Brennus, confronts Wistan and they duel. The grey-haired knight asks Sir Gawain for backup, but Sir Gawain refuses and Wistan easily defeats the knight. Sir Gawain agrees to help bury the body, but he and Wistan argue over Wistan's mission of slaying the dragon Querig. Sir Gawain insists that it is his duty because King Arthur would have wanted him to, but is unable to get Wistan to promise not to kill the dragon himself.

Sir Gawain accompanies the group to the monastery, but leaves

shortly after getting them there. Wistan is suspicious of what's going on there, especially when Beatrice is told that she can't see Father Jonus yet. As time passes, they discover a device that they fear the monks use to torture people. This is verified when Father Ninian, a silent monk, sneaks them in to see Father Jonus and they discover that he had been tortured. Father Jonus gives Beatrice medicine and makes something to treat Edwin's bite before the group leaves him to rest. Wistan observes to Edwin that the monastery shows evidence of once being a Saxon stronghold with traps for Britons, proving past violence. That night, the group is woken up by Father Brian, who tells them that soldiers are everywhere looking for them and Wistan. While Wistan is left behind in a tower, the rest of the group is led to a secret tunnel. Once inside, Father Brian shuts them in, and they realize they've been trapped. Fortunately, Father Ninian warned Sir Gawain, who is waiting for them in the tunnels to protect them from the monster there. He successfully defeats the monster in the tunnels and the group gets out, but Edwin runs back to help Wistan.

After their escape from the monastery, Sir Gawain goes his own way and Axl and Beatrice head in what they believe is the direction of their son's village. Following directions from Sir Gawain, Axl and Beatrice arrive at a river and convince a merchant there to lend them two large baskets that will help them float down the river and get to their son's village faster. At this point, Beatrice is very weak and Axl is worried about her ability to continue on the journey. His concerns are made worse when they stop to help a woman in a boat and are attacked by pixies, who tell Axl to leave Beatrice behind. The pixies imply that this is what Axl himself wants to do because "there's no cure to save [Beatrice]" and he will have to take care of her as she gets sicker. Axl, however, fights the pixies off, gets Beatrice, and escapes to safety. They continue walking and stumble upon a house in which three kids are living alone. The kids tell Beatrice and Axl that their parents have forgotten them, and they plan on killing Querig with a goat that has eaten enough of a poisonous plant that any monster who eats the goat will also die. The children convince Axl and Beatrice to bring the goat up the mountain to feed it to Querig—once Querig is dead, the mist will be lifted, and everyone's memories will return.

Meanwhile, Edwin has found Wistan, who is injured but alive and tells Edwin he wants to train him to be a warrior. Wistan tells Edwin that he not only has the spirit of a warrior, but of a tracker, too, and can lead them to Querig, so they plan to go find and slay her together. On the way, Wistan tells Edwin that once they complete their mission, he needs to always remember to hate the Britons and that they have a duty to kill all of them, including women and children. Although Edwin doesn't understand, he makes a promise to remember Wistan's words.

On the way up the mountain, Axl and Beatrice run into Sir Gawain, who is also heading up to Querig's lair. He says he is going to slay her and agrees to help Axl and Beatrice, along with

the poisoned goat, get up there. Once they get there, they discover a **giant's cairn** and decide to tie the goat up and rest for a while. As Axl ties up the goat, Sir Gawain whispers to Axl that he remembers the past and knows Axl made a treaty with the Saxons that King Arthur broke, and he criticizes Axl for yelling at King Arthur over the treaty. Axl doesn't respond to this except to say that he wants the memories of his marriage back. Sir Gawain sees Wistan and Edwin coming and prepares to fight Wistan. When Wistan and Edwin get there, Edwin has been compelled forward by a mysterious force and is tied up next to the goat. Wistan insists on killing Querig, but Sir Gawain argues against it, saying she should be allowed to live out her life, ensuring continued forgetfulness (and peace) for Britons and Saxons for a little while longer. Wistan criticizes this idea and he and Sir Gawain duel. Wistan kills Sir Gawain and then goes to Querig and slays her, too. Afterward, he tells Axl that he remembers him from his childhood and knows Axl made the treaty that King Arthur broke. Wistan is beginning to regret what he's done because war will ensue now that people's memories will be restored, and he urges Axl and Beatrice to get out of the country as quickly as they can. Axl and Beatrice leave Wistan and Edwin with Querig and continue their journey.

Axl and Beatrice, who is even weaker than before, find shelter from a storm and discover that a boatman (the narrator) who can take them to the island from there. With their memories returning, they agree to take the test to see if they can go together. The boatman discovers that Beatrice once had an affair and that Axl had harbored a lot of resentment about it. Frustrated with them both, their son left home and died of the plague shortly thereafter. Axl had refused to take Beatrice to their son's grave when they got word. The boatman says he can bring Beatrice to the island and will be back for Axl, but Axl, who remembers what the old woman they met earlier said about being left behind, is suspicious that the boatman might be lying. Still, Axl makes sure Beatrice is comfortable in the boat and tells her he loves her before walking back to shore. On his way, the boatman repeats that Axl should wait, but, without a word, Axl keeps walking away from him, having accepted that he and Beatrice will not dwell on the island together. Axl's true motives in walking away—whether he believed that he and Beatrice were never actually going to be allowed to go to the island together, latent and residual anger at her for her past infidelity, the fact that it was simply not his time to die and go to the afterlife, or something else—is ultimately unclear.



## CHARACTERS

**Axl** – Axl is an elderly Briton and Beatrice's husband. They live alone together in the back room of a warren in which they are regularly mistreated, especially after the pastor decides to take away their right to keep a candle to light their room. Axl loves Beatrice and always calls her "princess," but the couple can't

remember their lives together because of a **mist** that has descended over England and taken away people's memories. Axl seems to be able to retain more short-term memories than those around him, which unsettles him and contributes to his decision to take Beatrice on a journey to find their son. On the road, Beatrice becomes more and more enthusiastic about the idea of finding out what causes the mist, why, and how they can stop it so that she and Axl can remember their lives together and pass the boatman's test to travel to the **island** together. Axl agrees, but is less excited than Beatrice because he senses that he wronged her in the past and is afraid she'll hate him once their memories are restored. They meet Wistan, a Saxon warrior who seems to remember Axl from the past, although neither of them remembers the details. Sir Gawain, too, remembers Axl, but pretends he doesn't until near end of the story when he reminds Axl that he had also been a knight of King Arthur and was the one who brokered the treaty with the Saxons that King Arthur broke. It's also revealed that Wistan had seen Axl when he was a knight and knew he was the one who made the treaty, which is why he lets Axl go in peace. Axl remembers some of the details from his time in King Arthur's army, namely that he had been a diplomat and hated the violence of his companion, Harvey. When Axl and Beatrice finally make it to the boatman to take the test to go to the island, Axl reveals the anger he harbored against Beatrice for having an affair and chooses to let her go to the island alone even though he still loves her.

**Beatrice** – Beatrice is an elderly Briton and Axl's wife. Although their memories of their past have been taken away by a mysterious **mist** created by Querig's breath, Beatrice loves Axl and is determined to find their long-lost son, who they believe left home many years before. Beatrice is unhappy in the warren where she and Axl live because the pastor has refused to let them have a candle and has made them take a room far away from the warmth of the main fire. Beatrice is the first to propose leaving to find their son and she is the most determined to find out why they keep losing short-term and long-term memories. On the road, it becomes clear that Beatrice is suffering from a mysterious pain, so they decide to go see a wise monk named Father Jonus who can make a medicine that may cure her. During their journey, Beatrice constantly theorizes about the mist that has taken their memories and why it was created, ultimately deciding it is because God is ashamed of something they did in the past. After leaving Father Jonus and escaping the treachery of the other monks in the monastery with the help of Sir Gawain, Beatrice starts getting weaker and sicker. Still, when they are presented with a poisoned goat which may kill Querig she eats it, Beatrice insists on bringing it to Querig in the hope that the dragon's death will restore her memories of her son and marriage. Axl agrees, but they are only able to get up the mountain after running into Sir Gawain, who lets Beatrice ride his horse, Horace. As they get closer, Beatrice worries that the

bad memories that come back will ruin her marriage, but is determined to risk it. Once Querig is slain, Axl and Beatrice continue their journey, ultimately deciding to ask the boatman to take them to a mysterious **island** where couples who love each other can live together forever. Beatrice is taken to the island, but Axl—realizing the likelihood that the boatman has no intention of returning for him—chooses not to wait for his turn in the boat and leaves.

**Wistan** – Wistan is a Saxon warrior traveling through England to see how the Saxons and Britons are living together and to slay the dragon Querig, whose breath has made everyone living in the country forget the past. On his journey, Wistan stops in a Saxon village and discovers that a young boy, Edwin, has been kidnapped by ogres and the people are too afraid to go find him. Wistan volunteers and is able to find and save Edwin, who was, however, bitten by a dragon while he was with the ogres. Wistan brings him back to the town and meets Axl and Beatrice there. Wistan believes he recognizes Axl from his past, but cannot remember who he was or what he did. Still, Wistan agrees to accompany Beatrice and Axl, along with Edwin, for a while on their journey to help protect them from ogres. On the road, they meet Sir Gawain and he and Wistan, although respectful to each other, find themselves at odds when both profess their desire to kill Querig. Despite being ambushed by a band of Britons sent by Lord Brennus, Wistan takes Edwin under his wing, and together they go to find Querig. As they get closer, Wistan remembers more and more of the past, including the fact that King Arthur broke a treaty (one Axl had brokered) with the Saxons, and had slain innocent women and children. Wistan confronts Sir Gawain about this and Sir Gawain comes clean about what really happened, but refuses to let Wistan slay Querig and restore everyone's memories. This leads to a duel between the two during which Wistan kills Sir Gawain. After this, Wistan successfully slays Querig. Although he accomplishes his mission, Wistan feels regret that so many Britons (including Axl and Beatrice) will likely be killed in the inevitable war to come. Still, he decides to follow through on his orders and to train Edwin to be a Saxon warrior after allowing Axl and Beatrice to leave safely.

**Sir Gawain** – Sir Gawain is both the nephew and a dedicated knight of King Arthur. As one of Arthur's closest friends, Sir Gawain was entrusted with the responsibility of both overseeing Merlin as he cast a spell on Querig's breath to make everyone forget the past and staying in the area to serve as Querig's protector. Sir Gawain, unlike those around him, *does* remember the past and. Therefore, he's aware that by protecting Querig he is also protecting the peace that exists between Britons and Saxons, as well as King Arthur's false reputation as a wise and just leader. Sir Gawain meets Axl, Beatrice, Wistan, and Edwin while they are on their way to the monastery where Father Jonus lives. Sir Gawain tells them that he is going to kill Querig, and Wistan tells him that he is on a

quest to do the same. Sir Gawain insists on being the one to do it and tells Wistan to give up his plan, but he does this just so he won't have to get into a swordfight with Wistan, who is much younger and stronger than Sir Gawain is. Sir Gawain also tells Lord Brennus where Wistan is at the monastery so that soldiers will be sent to stop him, but this fails and Wistan gets away. Sir Gawain decides to go back up the mountain where Querig is, knowing Wistan is on his way there. On the way, Sir Gawain meets back up with Axl and Beatrice and they are there to hear Sir Gawain reveal the real history of Querig and King Arthur. Wistan and Sir Gawain then have a duel and Sir Gawain is slain trying to protect Querig.

**Edwin** – Edwin is a young orphan being raised by his aunt in the Saxon village where Axl and Beatrice stay at on the first night of their journey. Edwin's mother was kidnapped by a group of men when he was a young child, and he is determined to go and rescue her when he is grown-up enough. Although he is not popular with other children, Edwin becomes friends with a man named Steffa, who tells him that he has the spirit of a warrior and, with training, could become a great one in the future. When Edwin is kidnapped by ogres, Wistan volunteers to lead a group of men into the forest to save him, which he successfully does. Edwin, however, had been bitten by a mysterious creature and the village turns against him, so Ivor asks Axl, Beatrice, and Wistan to take Edwin with them when they leave. Wistan takes on Edwin as an apprentice and tells Edwin that he will teach him how to be a warrior. Edwin is excited to have found a warrior to train him, but is also still determined to find his mother. By the end of the book, it is made clear that because he has been bitten by a dragon, Edwin believes Querig is his mother and has developed a sort of sixth sense enabling him to find her. Wistan uses Edwin to find Querig so he can slay her and restore everyone's memories. On the way, Wistan makes Edwin promise to hate the Britons and kill them when the time comes. Edwin agrees, but, in the end, chooses not to kill Axl and Beatrice even though they are Britons.

**King Arthur** – King Arthur was king of the Britons and led them in a bloody civil war against the Saxons living in England. He gets Axl, who had been a great diplomat in his youth, to create a treaty banning both Britons and Saxons from entering the other's village to slaughter women, children, and the elderly during battles when the men were away. However, King Arthur decided to break the treaty and send men to kill an entire village full of Saxon women and children. King Arthur did this believing that he was preventing future wars by robbing Saxons of their future: their children would never grow into adults to avenge their fathers and their women were killed to prevent new generations from being born. Knowing that he had crossed a line, King Arthur also ordered Sir Gawain and a group of knights to find and trap Querig so Merlin could cast a spell on the dragon's breath so that anyone who breathed this **mist** would lose their memories of the past. King Arthur did this

because he believed it would establish peace long enough that the generations who had fought would die of old age and leave behind the younger generation that had not been alive during the war, thus establishing eternal peace. While the Britons remember Arthur as a great king, the Saxons remember him as a traitor and villain.

**Querig** – Querig is a female dragon that has been trapped in a pit at the top of a mountain by Merlin and King Arthur. King Arthur ordered Merlin to cast a spell on Querig's breath so that anyone who breathes this **mist** loses both short-term and long-term memories. Because of where she's trapped, Querig's breath permeates the entire country of England and forces both Britons and Saxons to forget that they were ever at war, which also helps establish peace between them. King Arthur also ordered Sir Gawain to serve as Querig's protector. At the time of the story, Querig has grown very old and Sir Gawain believes she only has one or two years left to live. Once she dies, everyone's memories will be restored. Wistan, a Saxon, does remember the crimes the Britons committed against the Saxons and is sent by a Saxon leader to slay Querig. After Edwin is bitten by a dragon, Wistan uses him to discover where Querig lives. Axl and Beatrice also discover that Querig is the one making them forget their pasts, so they also decide to help kill her by feeding her a poisoned goat. In the end, Sir Gawain is killed by Wistan while trying to protect Querig. Wistan then slays Querig and, once she stops breathing, people slowly begin to remember the past and a new war seems imminent.

**Father Jonus** – Father Jonus is a wise monk who is famous in England for his intelligence and ability to make medicines that heal all kinds of illnesses and injuries. He lives in a monastery on a mountain, and Axl, Beatrice, Edwin, and Wistan decide to go there so Beatrice can ask Father Jonus for a cure to a pain she has in her side. Father Brian, who is in charge of the monastery, shows obvious reluctance to bring the group to Father Jonus, so another monk, Father Ninian, sneaks them into Jonus's chamber, where they discover that Jonus has been subjected to a form of torture where a monk is put in a special device to protect his face and then left outside for the birds to attack. Although he is badly hurt and cannot leave his bed, Father Jonus examines Edwin's dragon bite and Beatrice's pain, giving them both medicine to help them. Father Jonus knows that Father Brian plans on betraying Axl, Beatrice, Wistan, and Edwin, so he gets Father Ninian to find Sir Gawain and enlist him to help defend Axl and Beatrice from the mysterious monster in the tunnels beneath the monastery.

**Axl and Beatrice's Son** – Axl and Beatrice know that they have a son who is an adult and may be married and have children, but they do not know where he lives. Axl and Beatrice leave their warren with the intention of going to their son's village, and they hope he will invite them to live with him and his family. Although they do not remember his name or his face, Axl and Beatrice are sure he is waiting for them. As their memories

gradually return, Axl and Beatrice remember that their son had decided to run away from home because he wanted to escape the bitterness that existed between them after Beatrice was caught having an affair with another man. After leaving home, Axl and Beatrice's son caught the plague and died. Out of pettiness and anger, Axl had refused to let Beatrice go to visit their son's grave when he first died. Both Axl and Beatrice believe that their son is on the mysterious **island** and that the boatman will be able to bring them there so they can be reunited with him.

**The Narrator / The Boatman** – The boatman is responsible for carrying people to **the island**, but is also responsible for putting couples who want to go together through a test to determine whether or not their marriage is strong enough. Axl and Beatrice meet the boatman at the beginning of their journey to find their son and he tells them about the test, and that, unfortunately, even the marriages that seem to be maintained by the strength of the love between husband and wife, he frequently finds only resentment, anger, or indifference. In all the years he has spent administering this test, the boatman has learned how to tell just by looking at a couple whether or not they will be able to go to the island together. The test the boatman gives involves asking the couple about their happiest and saddest memories together, but most fail when sharing their bad memories and reveal how much anger they still have. The boatman is eventually revealed to be the narrator of the book who has been telling the story from some point in the future. In the end, the narrator gives Axl and Beatrice the test that determines whether they can go together after they begin to regain their memories of their lives together. Although it seems as though they've passed, the narrator only brings Beatrice to the island. Axl does not listen to the narrator's request that he wait on the shore for his turn, believing they have failed. He walks away from Beatrice, much to the narrator's disappointment.

**Merlin** – Merlin is a legendary wizard who practiced alchemy and magic in Arthurian England. Merlin was a valued friend of King Arthur and was highly respected by Arthur's knights. During one of the bloodiest battles between the Saxons and Britons, Arthur ordered Merlin to take Sir Gawain and a group of knights to find Querig, cast a spell on her, and trap her on the mountain. Merlin conjured a special spell on Querig that gave her breath the ability to make any who breathes it in forget their pasts. After his success, it is unclear where Merlin goes or what happens to him, but Sir Gawain insists that Merlin was never a "dark" man, but had followed both the will of God and King Arthur by agreeing to enchant Querig's breath.

**Edwin's Mother** – Edwin's mother was kidnapped by a mysterious band of men when Edwin was very young. Edwin does not know where his mother is, but somehow knows that she has been travelling all over the country and is waiting for him. Edwin is determined to get out of the Saxon town where

he lives with his aunt, find his mother, fight the men who took her away, and set her free. As the story progresses, it becomes clear that, due to the effects of a dragon bite, Edwin believes his mother is the dragon Querig and has a kind of sixth sense that leads him to her. When Querig is slain by Wistan, Edwin also senses this, and becomes determined to kill whomever killed his mother.

**Horace** – Horace is Sir Gawain's faithful war horse. Horace obediently follows Gawain's orders and seems to sense when things are not right—as when Sir Gawain and he stumble on a group of widows who want to hold Gawain to account for something he did in the past. Sir Gawain often speaks to Horace because usually Horace is the only company Gawain has. When Axl, Beatrice, and Sir Gawain prepare to go up the mountain where Querig lives for the final time, Horace carries Beatrice, and stays behind to watch over Edwin when the group meets Wistan and Edwin on the mountain. Before Sir Gawain is slain by Wistan, he gives Horace to Axl and Beatrice, who promise to find him a nice field in which he can live out the rest of his days. At the end of the book, Axl and Beatrice bring Horace with them and then let him wander off when they prepare to cross over to the **island**.

**Father Ninian** – Father Ninian is one of the monks at the monastery Beatrice, Axl, Wistan, and Edwin stop at on their journey. Father Ninian has taken a vow of silence, but he is very close with Father Jonus, who is bedridden and relies on Ninian to keep an eye on what is going on in the monastery. Father Ninian finds ways to help Axl and Beatrice, namely by bringing them to see Father Jonus because Father Brian will not. Ninian also helps make medicine for Beatrice, who suffers from a mysterious pain and has asked Jonus to help cure her.

**Lord Brennus** – Lord Brennus is a Briton and has accumulated a large army that threatens to bring war back to England. He sends out soldiers to find Wistan, who is a notorious Saxon warrior searching for Querig so that he can kill her. Wistan argues that Lord Brennus has found a dragon tamer and is going to find and tame Querig to use her for his own benefit when he goes to war, presumably against the Saxons. Lord Brennus is not very well-liked by any of the characters, even those who are Britons.

**Father Brian** – Father Brian is one of the head monks at the monastery that Axl, Beatrice, Wistan, and Edwin stop at on their journey. Father Brian is at first very welcoming and kind to the group, but is not able to spend a lot of time with them because the abbot is coming for a visit. Later, it is revealed that Father Brian (a Briton) is treacherous: he, along with Sir Gawain, warned the abbot and Lord Brennus that Wistan was there with an old couple, and then he led Axl, Beatrice, and Edwin into a trap tunnel where he keeps a monster that kills anyone who is left there. Sir Gawain, who knows Father Brian well, is horrified, and mourns how "dark" Father Brian's heart has become over the years.

**Ivor** – Although he is a Briton, Ivor is the mayor of a Saxon town that Beatrice frequently travels to with other women from the warren. Ivor and Beatrice are friends, and when she and Axl stop in the town on their way to find their son, Ivor lets them stay the night in his home. While they are there, they see Ivor give directions to Wistan and a band of other men to go beyond the gates to find Edwin, who has been taken by ogres. Ivor believes the reason for everyone's forgetfulness is because God himself has forgotten their pasts, and mere human beings cannot remember what God forgets. Beatrice is impressed with this explanation and adopts it, believing that God wants to forget the past because He's so ashamed of it.

**The Medicine Woman** – The medicine woman is a friend of Beatrice's in the Saxon town where she and Axl stay in on the first night of their journey. Beatrice goes to the medicine woman to ask about a pain she's having in her side, but the medicine woman tells her it's just a ache associated with aging. Although this explanation seems reasonable, neither Beatrice nor Axl are very comforted by it and choose to go see Father Jonus shortly thereafter.

**The Pastor** – The Pastor was a well-respected leader in Axl and Beatrice's warren. He both makes and enforces the rules, but Axl and Beatrice feel he mistreats them. The pastor encouraged the warren to make Axl and Beatrice stay in the room furthest back from the main fireplace in their warren and took away their right to candles, forcing them to live in isolated in the cold and darkness. Because the pastor is the leader of the warren, Axl and Beatrice have to get permission from him to leave the warren to find their son.

**Steffa** – Steffa was an elderly man in Edwin's home village. He was the one who first told Edwin that he had the spirit of a warrior and encouraged him to train as a soldier from the time he was very young. As Edwin and Wistan travel together, Edwin frequently thinks about Steffa and how he encouraged Edwin to believe in himself for so many years.

**Old Woman** – Axl and Beatrice meet the old woman while taking shelter from a storm in the beginning of their journey. The old woman is preparing to slaughter a rabbit to irritate the boatman, who is also taking shelter there. The woman does this because the boatman was supposed to take her and her husband across the water to **the island** together, but only took her husband. Although she waited, he has never taken her, and now the woman makes a point of harassing the boatman whenever he returns to his childhood home after weeks of hard work.

**Edra** – Edra was a young Briton woman whom Sir Gawain met during a major battle between Britons and Saxons. Edra as searching for the Saxon who killed her mother and sisters, and Sir Gawain promised to help her if she would wait for him while he went on a mission with Merlin and a band of knights. Edra did wait, and Sir Gawain brought her into the battle, where she

found the Saxon lord and violently killed him. Sir Gawain had been attracted to Edra, but now, for him, she represents the violent hatred that was born out of the civil war between Britons and Saxons.

**Marta** – Marta was a young girl living in Axl and Beatrice's warren. One day, Marta went missing and everyone in the warren panicked and decide to go look for her, afraid that an ogre or giant had taken her. However, they forgot about her before they could go find her, which alarmed Axl, who still remembered her and was appalled that she was forgotten so quickly. Marta showed back up by herself, but Axl frequently thinks about Marta and this incident as an example of just how powerful **the mist** that makes people forget is.

**Harvey** – A fellow Briton and companion of Axl's many years ago when they were soldiers. Axl did not like Harvey because he believed Harvey was needlessly violent and vicious with even the most innocent people. As the story progresses, Axl develops more memories of Harvey and what they did during England's civil war together.

**Grey-haired Soldier** – A soldier of Lord Brennus who is sent to look for Wistan and kill him. When he does find Wistan, the soldier does not recognize him at first and Wistan is able to get away. However, the soldier soon remembers and follows him. When he finds Wistan the second time, they get in an argument and he and Wistan duel. Wistan slays him, and Sir Gawain buries his body.

## TERMS

**Briton** – Britons were a people native to England, united by a common language, belief system, and culture. For many years, the Romans—who settled in England for a period before returning to Rome and who were much more technologically advanced—had helped protect the Britons from possible invaders, but their departure allowed the Saxons to migrate to the country and settle there. Britons felt that all of England was theirs by right and that they were morally and intellectually superior to Saxons because they had converted to Christianity. For centuries, Britons and Saxons fought each other for land and resources. The most famous Briton king was **King Arthur**, whose life inspired dozens of legends. Ultimately, the Britons were not able to completely eradicate the Saxons, but lasting peace was eventually established between them.

**Saxon** – The Saxons were Germanic people from Continental Europe who began invading and occupying land in England after the Romans left. Saxons were often targeted by Britons, who were native to England and did not want the Saxons to stay. Competing land claims were at the center of a number of Saxon-Briton wars for several centuries. The Saxons were considered pagans because they chose not to convert to Christianity and they typically isolated themselves from the

Britons. Despite a number of extremely violent and bloody wars, eventually peace was established between the Saxons and Britons in England.



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



### MEMORY, TRUTH AND JUSTICE

Lost memories and the fight to get them back is the most pervasive theme in *The Buried Giant*. In the novel, only a handful of people know that Merlin cursed the breath of Querig to create a mysterious **mist** which make everyone forget the past—namely the fact that King Arthur broke his treaty with the Saxons. While this creates peace, it also makes people forget the details of their personal histories. Axl and Beatrice have been married for many years and yearn to remember what their life together was like in the past. Wistan, a Saxon warrior, accepts their company and help on his quest to slay Querig, which will restore everyone's memories. As Axl and Beatrice find out, however, not all memories are good, and some even have the power to reintroduce war and slaughter to a peaceful land. In *The Buried Giant*, Kazuo Ishiguro addresses the question of whether the past and its wrongs are best left forgotten in the interest of peace, or if it's better to rediscover bad memories to uncover the truth and achieve justice.

Axl and Beatrice know that having their memories restored means they will remember all the bad parts of their marriage as well as the good, but they're confident that their love is strong enough to survive remembering the bad. Without their memories, Axl and Beatrice only know what they feel for each other from one moment to the next, and because that love is strong, they want to remember everything else they've shared. Beatrice says, "Axl and I would remember our lives together, whatever its shape, for it's been a thing dear to us," which shows her willingness to accept the bad memories along with the good. Furthermore, Axl accepts that there will be bad memories, but for him those bad memories are made beautiful by being part of the greater good, shown by his assertion that "black shadows make part of its whole." Even so, Axl insists that Beatrice make him a promise: "keep what you feel for me this moment always in your heart." Although they both accept that not everything will have been perfect between them in the past, what they most value and fear losing is the present.

Despite their confidence in the strength of their love to withstand regaining all of their memories, Axl and Beatrice

worry about what restoring memories will mean for the positive relationship between the Saxons and Britons. Speaking of England's landscape, Sir Gawain tells Axl it's a "fine green valley," but that "not far beneath the daisies and buttercups [...] lie the remains of old slaughter." Similarly, one need not dig far into the pasts of the Saxons and Britons to find treachery, hatred, and violence, even though they now live in peace. However, that peace was only achieved by forcing forgetfulness on the people. When Sir Gawain pleads with Wistan to "Leave this country to rest in forgetfulness," he also means that Wistan should not bring back memories because forgetfulness is the only way to ensure continued peace. Wistan, however, scorns "the drawing of a veil over the foulest deeds," meaning achieving peace only by forcing forgetfulness and allowing wrongdoers to go unpunished after committing "the foulest deeds." For Wistan, memory is the surest road to winning justice for the slaughtered.

In the end, Axl and Beatrice's worst fears regarding the Britons and Saxons seem likely to come true. Unfortunately, their one chance for happiness seems to have been reliant on forgetting the past despite their belief that their love would stand strong. As Axl and Beatrice prepare to help Wistan slay Querig and restore their memories, Axl becomes hesitant and wonders "what good's a memory's returning from the mist if it's only to push away another?" This reveals his growing fear that bad memories of the past will obscure their current happiness. Furthermore, Beatrice has already begun to experience "remembrances to make [her] shrink from [Axl]." Although she still has no definite idea of what their past lives were like, this indicates that some of those bad memories are worse and more powerful than they previously imagined. Ultimately, it is Axl who reveals, and seemingly succumbs to, the intensity of his past anger and resentment at Beatrice. After revealing his long-held resentment of Beatrice for having an affair, Axl initially holds out hope that they can go to the island together, but is soon persuaded to leave Beatrice to be taken to **the island** (which represents the afterlife) alone.

Remembering has different results for everyone in this book: Axl and Beatrice split up, the Saxons get justice, and the Britons are held accountable for their wrongs. The variety and complexity of these outcomes leaves the question of whether some things are best left forgotten, and Ishiguro leaves this unanswered for the reader to form his or her own opinion.



### WAR, PEACE, VENGEANCE, AND FORGIVENESS

In *The Buried Giant*, Ishiguro takes readers back to England in the years following the death of King Arthur. A mysterious **mist** created by the breath of Querig, the last dragon, has permeated the land and made nearly everyone forget the past, including the bloody wars King Arthur (a Briton) led against the Saxons. With this forgetfulness comes

peace: Saxons and Britons live side by side with no trouble. Axl and Beatrice, an old married couple who are Britons, leave their home in search of their lost son. On the way, they meet Wistan, a Saxon warrior, who wants to slay Querig and who retains a lot of his memories. They also meet Sir Gawain, an Arthurian knight whose secret duty is to protect Querig and, therefore, peace in England. If Wistan slays the dragon, people will gradually regain their memories of the past, including the fact that King Arthur broke the treaty between Britons and Saxons not to kill innocent women and children, and further slaughter will inevitably follow. Through this tenuous balance between upholding peace and unleashing chaos, Ishiguro explores the fragility of peace after civil war and challenges traditional beliefs about the strength of forgiveness to withstand calls for vengeance.

Very few characters in the book retain detailed long-term memories, but most realize that they are forgetting things that they should remember. Although there is peace because of this, the people are still haunted by what they don't remember, revealing the continued existence of fear and tension even in peacetime. Axl and Beatrice are Britons, which means they belonged to the side that committed the worst of the atrocities during the war. While pondering the cause of their forgetfulness, Beatrice theorizes that "God's so deeply ashamed of us, of something we did, that he's wishing himself to forget," indicating that she has some sense that they had done wrong in the past even though she doesn't remember what it was. Wistan, a Saxon, takes another view: he knows that the Britons did something unforgivable and believes they are also at the root of the forgetting, saying "isn't it a strange thing when a man calls another brother who only yesterday slaughtered his children? And yet this is the very thing Arthur appears to have accomplished." This shows that Wistan, and perhaps other Saxons, continue to be suspicious of the Britons. Peace exists in England, but these two divergent opinions on why everyone has forgotten the past (the Britons attributing it to God because He's ashamed and the Saxons believing King Arthur did something wrong) reveals unresolved tension that threatens to boil over.

Sir Gawain reveals that King Arthur ordered Merlin, a wizard, to cast a spell on Querig's breath to make everyone in the land forget, thus ensuring both peace and that no one would remember that he broke the treaty with the Saxons and slaughtered innocent women and children. The final argument between Sir Gawain and Wistan highlights how dubious such a peace is. When Sir Gawain finishes his account of what Merlin did to Querig and why, Wistan asks, "How can old wounds heal while maggots linger so richly? Or a peace hold for ever built on slaughter and a magician's trickery?" These questions highlight both the insincerity and fragility of the peace that existed between Saxons and Britons: the Saxons' forgiveness was achieved through fraudulent means, and once the mist is lifted

there is little hope that the peace will last. Sir Gawain also agrees that once the Saxons get their memories back there is danger that war will erupt. But he holds out hope that if Querig is allowed to live for "another season or two" then it "may be long enough for old wounds to heal." Sir Gawain, then, believes that peace—no matter how it was won—will prevail if it's allowed to exist for long enough, even if it was achieved dishonestly. Despite his desire to reveal the truth, after Wistan has murdered Sir Gawain and slain Querig, he begins to regret his actions and says that "now the hour's almost upon us, I find my heart trembles like a maid's." Although peace was achieved dishonestly, it still exists, and Wistan's feelings after fulfilling his mission highlight the fact that there is no easy answer as to whether honesty that leads to vengeance is better than dishonesty that leads to peace.

Not only peace, but forgiveness, existed between Britons and Saxons for years before Wistan killed Querig, but that peace was contingent on a collective forgetting that primarily benefitted the Britons, who betrayed the treaty made with the Saxons. The inevitability of war once their collective memories are restored shows that the desire for vengeance can be stronger than existing peace, and forgiveness counts for very little in the face of impending war.



## LOVE AND HATRED

At its heart, *The Buried Giant* is about love and hatred, on both the personal and national levels.

Although the breath of the dragon Querig permeates the land, makes everyone forget the past, and establishes peace, old hatreds—which have roots in the time before they began forgetting—still exist. Axl and Beatrice are an old married couple who love each other intensely but can't remember the history of their marriage and decide to leave their home to find their long-lost son. However, Axl carries with him an unidentifiable sadness and anger at Beatrice, although she professes to love him very much and is determined to find a solution to the **mist** that makes them forget so they can remember their lives together. On a broader level, England is at peace after a bloody civil war between the Britons, who were led by the treacherous King Arthur, and the Saxons. Although there is peace, hatred bubbles just under the surface; like the sadness and anger Axl carries with him, nobody can identify this hatred because nobody can remember its cause. In *The Buried Giant*, Ishiguro shows how strong emotions of love and loyalty can obscure underlying conflicts, and questions whether people whose pasts are characterized by hatred can experience genuine love in the present.

Axl and Beatrice have a seemingly happy marriage: Axl often feels a rush of tenderness when he sees Beatrice and refers to her as "princess," and Beatrice is never happier than when she's with Axl. As rock-solid as this marriage appears, however, it is gradually revealed that their love is largely an illusion. Axl loves

watching over Beatrice, but as the story goes on and they get closer to regaining their memories, he begins to feel “a trace of sadness” and soon he feels “both memory and anger growing firmer” when he looks at her, although he hides this from her. This shows that Axl, at least, knows that his feelings for Beatrice are not as strong as he outwardly professes. As the moment when Wistan will slay Querig and restore everyone’s memories approaches, Beatrice becomes fearful of what Axl will remember about her. She tells him she’s afraid of some “dark things” and she “trembles [...] to think they may be returned to us,” which shows that she, too, has reason to doubt the strength of their love.

Like the love between Axl and Beatrice, there is something illusory about the camaraderie between Britons and Saxons. Sir Gawain (a Briton and knight of Arthur) points out to Wistan (a Saxon warrior) that, currently, “old foes” are living “as cousins.” In describing them as “old foes,” Gawain implies that enmity existed in their lifetimes, which indicates a predisposition for mutual hatred. This idea is further supported by Axl’s observation that “custom and suspicion” divided Saxons and Britons. This means that even though they get along, Saxons and Britons have not fully accepted one another. Furthermore, it’s revealed that what peace *does* exist was forced upon both Britons and Saxons by Arthur, who ordered Merlin to cast a forgetting spell on Querig’s breath. Axl notes that “Arthur’s shadow will fade” in step with Querig’s breath, which means peace will be overturned and the old hatred between Saxons and Britons will be restored, if not intensified.

In the end, hatred and resentment (felt by both Axl and the victimized Saxons) conquer love and the desire for peace (felt by Beatrice and the fearful Britons). Wistan slays Querig knowing that “old hatreds will loosen across the land,” meaning wars will break out once the Saxons remember that they were betrayed, their women and children slaughtered by the Britons during the war. Where friendship and love once existed, hatred will take the day. When Axl’s memories come back, he tells the narrator (a boatman who will decide if Axl and Beatrice can go on to **the island** and live out their afterlife together), “I spoke and acted forgiveness, yet kept locked through long years some small chamber in my heart that yearned for vengeance.” This shows that not only had Axl resented Beatrice for an earlier infidelity, but had long nurtured that resentment, although he claims to love her now. The boatman notes that “a couple may claim to be bonded by love, but we boatmen may see instead resentment, anger, even hatred.” This description perfectly captures the reality of both Axl and Beatrice’s marriage and the relationship between Saxons and Britons: outwardly friendly, even loving, but with a past characterized by mutual anger and betrayal.

At the end of the story, the Saxons and Britons are left to fight amongst themselves as their memories are restored, and Axl chooses to send Beatrice with the boatman (presumably to her

death) and walk away, even though the boatman tells him to wait. On both levels, the personal and the national, Ishiguro illustrates the power of old hatred to transcend new love even after years of peace.



## DENIAL AND REWRITING HISTORY

In the years following a bloody civil war between the Britons (led by King Arthur) and the Saxons, peace reigns. However, this peace was achieved by means of a mysterious **mist** created by the breath of Querig (the last dragon, who had been put under a spell on Arthur’s orders), which makes all who breathe it forget the past. King Arthur did this to make people forget that he broke a promise not to kill Saxon women and children. This forgetting, then, is really a form of denial and an attempt to rewrite history by obscuring it, allowing King Arthur to retain his reputation as wise and just. However, there are those who do remember: Sir Gawain, one of Arthur’s knights, is devoted to the protection of Querig and, thus, Arthur’s reputation. Wistan, a Saxon warrior, also knows about Querig’s breath and is sent to slay her, which will end the forgetting and lead to a Saxon uprising. Ishiguro examines the practice of rewriting history by burying the truth and denying reality and proves that, ultimately, the truth will make itself known.

King Arthur betrayed the Saxons by breaking his promise, and he knew this action would destroy his reputation. The use of Querig’s cursed breath is meant rewriting Arthur’s history and casting him as a wise and judicious ruler. When Sir Gawain first meets Wistan (along with Axl and Beatrice), Sir Gawain introduces himself as a knight of “great Arthur who once ruled these lands with such wisdom and justice.” This shows how Sir Gawain wants Arthur to be remembered and reflects most people’s beliefs about him. As Wistan regains more and more of his memories, however, he refers to Arthur as “hated Arthur,” which represents the opinion that the Saxons will adopt once they remember Arthur’s real history. Even as Sir Gawain sees that the truth will be revealed, he continues to portray Arthur as honorable, angrily saying, “Will you not understand the acts of a great King, sir? We can only watch and wonder.” This statement is meant to discredit negative perceptions of Arthur by insinuating that ordinary people are incapable of understanding the justice of his actions.

Furthermore, Sir Gawain is eager to rewrite his own history, knowing that hatred and vitriol will be levelled at him if the truth is known. When Wistan asserts that Arthur had been treacherous, Gawain tries to convince him that they were actually ordered to “spare the innocents caught in the clatter of war.” Not only would this exonerate Arthur, but it would vindicate Gawain, too. Gawain sees that he must admit the role he played in the slaughter, so he tells Beatrice, “I acted as I thought would please God.” This is meant to send the message that, whatever he did, he did it for good reasons and therefore

shouldn't be treated as a villain. Wistan, however, refuses to let Sir Gawain continue to rewrite history, saying, "I see how devoutly you wish it, for your horrors to crumble as dust." This reveals that Wistan understands why Sir Gawain is anxious to stop the truth from revealing itself: Sir Gawain is as guilty as King Arthur.

Unfortunately for Gawain, too little has been done to hide history—the truth, although buried, can still be seen all around them. Gawain believed the slaughter of Saxon children and women would help end the cycle of hatred because there would be no more children, either born or unborn, to grow up and avenge their fathers. Axl, who had made the treaty, insists that the "circle of hate is [...] forged instead in iron by what's done today," meaning Axl knew it would be a lasting hatred that wouldn't go away. In fact, there's evidence of violence all around them. This is shown by a statement Wistan makes while they are at a monastery that used to be a Saxon shelter for women and children and which contained traps to kill Britons: "This is today a place of peace and prayer, yet you needn't gaze so deep to find blood and terror." After Querig is slain, Wistan notes that, "The giant, once well buried, now stirs." By this he means that now that people will remember the truth, history (which has been quite literally buried on battlefields and in villages) will become the present and the violent deaths of innocent Saxons will be avenged.

Ishiguro believes that history, no matter how desperate people try to rewrite it, has a way of making itself felt. Furthermore, he advocates his own belief that even the ugly side of history should be shown honestly, as the narrator apologizes to the reader, "I am sorry to paint such a picture of our country at that time, but there you are."

thick and impossible to see through, but it doesn't entirely erase what one can't see. In this sense, the mist represents exactly what rewriting history does: it obscures the truth, but it doesn't change it. Because the past was hard to see, both Britons and Saxons stopped looking and forgot all about it. No one questioned when Sir Gawain spoke of the wisdom and judiciousness of King Arthur. However, in the end, the mist rises after Querig is slain and people gradually begin to remember the past. When history exists as firsthand memories in the minds of much of the population, it can no longer be altered or rewritten. So, with the disappearance of the mist, the rewriting of history ends, and the truth being obscuring from view is revealed.



## THE GIANT'S CAIRN

Near the end of the story, Axl, Beatrice, Sir Gawain, Wistan, and Edwin meet at the top of a mountain near a mysterious monument known as the giant's cairn, which sits near the pit that Merlin was ordered to help trap Querig in. This cairn—which is similar to other mysterious monuments throughout the land—symbolizes the ugly, hidden truth of England's history. It is noted more than once, by Sir Gawain and by Wistan, that one doesn't need to look far to find evidence of past battles and violence; fields filled with buttercups also hold bones from bloody battles just beneath the surface, and seemingly peaceful monasteries were once witness to unimaginable carnage as Saxon villagers made their last stand against bands of Britons. The "giant" buried beneath the cairn is not a monster in the literal sense, but rather a culmination of the dark truth of this conflict: mutual hatred, betrayal, the slaughter of innocent women and children, and an unquenchable thirst for revenge. These are the things that are unloosed when, as Wistan says, "The giant, once well buried, now stirs" after the death of Querig restores everyone's memories. Once the giant (the truth) is unburied, the nation that had enjoyed peace for years will inevitably revert back to war, and violence will ensue as Saxons exact revenge against the Britons for the atrocities they committed under King Arthur.



## THE ISLAND

In the world of the novel, death is a physical journey in which a boatman ferries a person across the water (reminiscent of the River Styx) to mysterious island—supposedly the physical location of the afterlife. Throughout the book, Axl and Beatrice frequently hear about this island (a place where people spend eternity in peace), which symbolizes the comforting myths that people tell themselves about death. Beatrice and Axl's knowledge of the island comes from rumors they hear about what it is like and how to reach it. At one point, they meet an old woman who is



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



## THE MIST

Throughout *The Buried Giant*, the characters speak of a mist that descends upon them and robs them of both their short-term and long-term memories and they discuss what the cause of the mist might be, why it occurs, and how it can be stopped. This mist symbolizes the collective forgetting that results from rewriting history. The mist is actually created by the breath of a dragon, Querig, who had been put under a spell by Merlin on orders from King Arthur after he broke a treaty with the Saxons that forbade his armies to raid Saxon villages and murder women and children. In essence, King Arthur rewrote history even as it was happening in order to ensure that his future reputation would remain immaculate. Mist obscures one's view of something—it can be

harassing a boatman for taking her husband to the island and leaving her behind. From these two, Beatrice and Axl gather that, although the island is highly populated, most people wander it for eternity without encountering another person. In rare instances, apparently, couples who are bonded by love are ferried there together to spend eternity as a pair, but couples whose relationships are more fraught are destined to spend eternity on the island alone. From this, Beatrice becomes preoccupied with the idea that she and Axl *must* go to the island together, expressing a common human desire not to go alone into death nor leave behind loved ones. As Beatrice's death approaches, she finds purpose and comfort in trying to deepen her marriage to ensure that she won't go to the island alone.

However, Beatrice and Axl's beliefs about the island might not be true—they are based on rumors and hearsay, pieced together from things said by those left behind when their loved ones departed and from the evasive boatmen who ferry people to the island. These are not credible sources, as the boatmen are proven liars (the initial boatman told the old woman he would come back to bring her to her husband, but he didn't), and the grieving people don't have firsthand knowledge of the island. Because of this, it's never totally clear whether the island is a real place—let alone whether it's actually true that some couples can go there together.

At the end of the novel, Beatrice and Axl stand at the shore with a boatman negotiating their passage to the island. In this moment, Beatrice, who is clearly dying, is able to see the island and is eager to go, while Axl (who still enjoys good health) struggles to see the island at all. This discrepancy lends credence to the notion that the island is perhaps not a physical place (or else Axl would be able to see it, too), but rather a myth or metaphor for death and the afterlife, one that seems more urgent and real to Beatrice as death approaches. Furthermore, their conversation with the boatman (who seems to be telling them what they want to hear in order to coax Beatrice to get into the boat alone) suggests that it might not have ever been true that couples can go together to the island. Perhaps all people are destined to die and spend eternity alone, as Beatrice ultimately does. The reader never learns the true nature of the island—whether it is myth or reality—but its significance throughout the novel seems to be its role in the stories that people tell one another about death. Beatrice's belief that it's possible for her to die with her husband lends her comfort, and her quest to recover their memories and repair their relationship gives her purpose, which prevents her from fixating only on her fear.

## Chapter 1 Quotes

☞ I have no wish to give the impression that this was all there was to the Britain of those days; that at a time when magnificent civilizations flourished elsewhere in the world, we were not much beyond the Iron Age. Had you been able to roam the countryside at will, you might well have discovered castles containing music, fine food, athletic excellence; or monasteries with inhabitants steeped in learning. But there is no getting around it. Even on a strong horse, in good weather, you could have ridden for days without spotting any castle or monastery looming out of the greenery. [...] I am sorry to paint such a picture of our country at that time, but there you are.

**Related Characters:** The Narrator / The Boatman (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 4-5

### Explanation and Analysis

In the opening paragraphs to *The Buried Giant*, the narrator describes what England was like at the time of the events of the story. Only a few years had passed since the death of the legendary King Arthur, which places the story at some point in the sixth century. The narrator is keenly aware that when people think of England, they think of an advanced and even glamorous country—England, after all, would eventually colonize dozens of countries and islands all over the world, London would become one of the most important cities in the Western world, and English universities would become famous for producing some of the greatest philosophers, writers, inventors, and scientists of all time. This is why the narrator feels compelled to apologize for presenting to the audience an England that was largely unpopulated, undeveloped, and, as the narrator says, “not much beyond the Iron Age.”

One of the major themes of *The Buried Giant* is the rewriting of history and denial of truth. The narrator's apology for “paint[ing] such a picture of our country at that time” serves a double purpose: first, reminding the reader that England was not always as important and developed as the picture most have in their mind; second, to assure the reader that he, the narrator, will not shy away from being honest about the story and will present the events and characters as they are, with all of their faults, without sugarcoating or changing anything to make it more pleasant.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *The Buried Giant* published in 2015.

## Chapter 2 Quotes

“But isn’t it hard, sir,” Beatrice asked, “to see what truly lies in people’s hearts? Appearances deceive so easily.”

“That’s true, good lady, but then we boatmen have seen so many over the years it doesn’t take us long to see beyond deceptions. Besides, when travelers speak of their most cherished memories, it’s impossible for them to disguise the truth. A couple may claim to be bonded by love, but we boatmen may see instead resentment, anger, even hatred. Or a great barrenness. Sometimes a fear of loneliness and nothing more. Abiding love that has endured the years—that we see only rarely. When we do, we’re only too glad to ferry the couple together.”

**Related Characters:** The Narrator / The Boatman, Beatrice (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 43-44

## Explanation and Analysis

On the first night of Axl and Beatrice’s journey, they take shelter in an abandoned and decaying villa, where they meet a boatman and an old woman. The old woman tells Beatrice and Axl of how the boatman separated her from her husband, bringing him to the island and leaving her on the shore and thus dooming them to spend eternity apart. Once the old woman leaves, Beatrice asks the boatman how he determines which couples can go to the island together and which cannot. The boatman requires couples to be “bonded by love,” but that love has to be genuine and pure, which is rare. The boatman determines this by listening to each talk about their good memories together, or, more importantly, by determining similarities and differences in how each perceives the same good memory. For most couples, those whose marriages are actually characterized by anger or resentment, the fine line between remembering the good and reliving the bad is very thin and easily crossed, such as when Axl and Beatrice think back to a time they were walking together as young lovers and end up having a disagreement over whether Axl had gotten jealous of another young man or not.

This quote also highlights the idea that undercurrents of hatred can still exist in even the most seemingly loving and idyllic relationships—an idea that can be applied equally to both personal and national or political relationships.

“But Axl, we can’t remember those days. Or any of the years between. We don’t remember our fierce quarrels or the small moments we enjoyed and treasured. We don’t remember our son or why he’s away from us.”

“We can make all those memories come back, princess. Besides, the feeling in my heart for you will be there just the same, no matter what I remember or forget. Don’t you feel the same, princess?”

“I do, Axl. But then again I wonder if what we feel in our hearts today isn’t like these raindrops still falling on us from the soaked leaves above, even though the sky itself long stopped raining. I’m wondering if without our memories, there’s nothing for it but for our love to fade and die.”

**Related Characters:** Axl, Beatrice (speaker), Axl and Beatrice’s Son, The Narrator / The Boatman

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 45

## Explanation and Analysis

After asking the boatman how he determines which couples can go to the island together and learning that he makes his decision after asking them each about their most cherished memory, Beatrice becomes worried that the relationship she has with Axl is not as strong as it seems at the present time. Without memories, Axl and Beatrice can only really experience their relationship from one moment to the next, making it rather two-dimensional. Memories, both good and bad, of the history of their marriage add depth and shape to their relationship. Beatrice’s greatest fear is that, without that added depth and shape, what they share is not strong enough to stand up to the boatman’s questions when the time comes for them to go to the island.

Beatrice’s insecurity and fear about the strength of their love stands in contrast to Axl’s confidence and firm belief that what he feels for Beatrice in this moment can withstand anything. Instead, his final question to Beatrice reveals that his real insecurity may be that she doesn’t love him as much as he loves her. In either case, these insecurities are the first indication that perhaps there is something beneath the surface of their relationship that would prevent their love from standing up to the scrutiny of the boatman who will decide whether or not they can go to the island together.

## Chapter 3 Quotes

“It was just a thought. That perhaps God is angry about something we’ve done. Or maybe he’s not angry, but ashamed.”

“A curious thought, princess. But if it’s as you say, why doesn’t he punish us? Why make us forget like fools even things that happened the hour before?”

“Perhaps God’s so deeply ashamed of us, of something we did, that he’s wishing himself to forget. And as the stranger told Ivor, when God won’t remember, it’s no wonder we’re unable to do so.”

**Related Characters:** Axl, Beatrice (speaker), Ivor

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 76

**Explanation and Analysis**

During their stay at Ivor’s house, Beatrice asks Ivor what he’s heard about the mysterious mist that permeates the country and makes everyone forget the past, both near and distant. Ivor tells them a stranger had suggested that the mist is the result of God forgetting the past, thus making it impossible for mere human beings to remember it.

Beatrice’s addition to this theory, that God has willfully forgotten the past out of shame, is notable because it raises the possibility that something truly horrific and shameful has happened in the past, and that they were the ones who committed it. Either way, the idea that God has forgotten the past is akin to denying the reality and truth of history, and that denial is forced upon all of the people in England in an attempt to create a fresh slate from which to move forward.

It is also notable that Axl does not see the forgetting of the past, both personal and national, as a punishment in itself. Unlike Beatrice, Axl does not appear to be haunted by all the things he can no longer remember of the past. Axl, then, is more comfortable than Beatrice with allowing some things to be hidden from view, implying that he has done something in the past that he was ashamed of and he senses this even if he does not quite remember what it was.

## Chapter 5 Quotes

“Even so, sir, isn’t it a strange thing when a man calls another brother who only yesterday slaughtered his children? And yet this is the very thing Arthur appears to have accomplished.”

“You touch the heart of it just there, Master Wistan. Slaughter children, you say. And yet Arthur charged us at all times to spare the innocents caught in the clatter of war. More, sir, he commanded us to rescue and give sanctuary when we could to all women, children and elderly, be they Briton or Saxon. On such actions were bonds of trust built, even as battles raged.”

**Related Characters:** Sir Gawain, Wistan (speaker), King Arthur

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 112

**Explanation and Analysis**

After stumbling upon Sir Gawain on the road between the Saxon village and the monastery, Wistan begins a conversation about the peace that currently exists between Saxons and Britons after decades of brutal civil wars and violence between the two groups. Wistan’s question shows that he strongly doubts that Arthur would have been able to establish such peace so quickly through honest means. Sir Gawain, who is a knight of Arthur’s as well as his nephew, has numerous reasons for wanting to protect Arthur’s reputation. As one of Arthur’s knights, Sir Gawain would have been among those who committed the kind of slaughter Wistan describes, so saying that he was on orders to spare innocent lives distances himself from such unwarranted violence. However, Sir Gawain also has his family’s reputation to protect since Arthur was his uncle. It is not enough to distance himself from the slaughter of children; he must also distance Arthur from it. He does this by saying that Arthur continually sent orders to his knights not to kill women and children, which would mean those who did commit these crimes would have gone against Arthur’s orders and, presumably, would have been punished. Above all, Sir Gawain wants people to remember Arthur, the leader of the Britons, as just and wise and good.

Wistan’s questions also reveal unresolved anger, if not on the part of all Saxons, then at least on his part. His question is an indirect challenge to the image of Arthur that Sir Gawain wants to perpetuate and is indicative of how most, if not all, Saxons would view Arthur if they could remember clearly the civil wars he led against them, despite Sir Gawain’s description of him as just and generous.

## Chapter 6 Quotes

☛☛ What had brought the pair of them to that village that morning? Axl remembered the cries of outrage, children crying, the looks of hatred, and his own fury, not so much at Harvey himself, but at those who had handicapped him with such a companion. Their mission, if accomplished, would surely be an achievement unique and new, one so supreme God himself would judge it a moment when men came a step closer to him. Yet how could Axl hope to do anything tethered to such a brute?

**Related Characters:** The Narrator / The Boatman (speaker), Harvey, Axl

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 136

### Explanation and Analysis

After watching Wistan kill the grey-haired soldier in a duel and listening to the discussion about King Arthur between Wistan and Sir Gawain, Axl begins to spontaneously recover memories of his past life, among them a memory of traveling the countryside with a companion named Harvey. Harvey was a very different person from Axl: much more violent, short-tempered, needlessly cruel, and blood-thirsty. This memory, while it does confirm that Axl had been a soldier or knight in his youth, also reveals a lot of important details of what he is like as a person. Axl sees being assigned to work with Harvey as being “handicapped” and he feels “tethered,” both of which mean he sees no way to get rid of Harvey and he believes that Harvey will make it harder, if not impossible, to carry out his real mission.

Furthermore, the fact that Axl finds Harvey’s violence so repulsive and deeply offensive implies that Axl is gentle, kind, judicious, and wise. He has patience and keeps an open mind even when dealing with people he does not agree with. Above all, Axl is a humanitarian and values human lives, no matter which side of the war they are on. This is something that is confirmed later when Axl remembers that he had always been a better diplomat than soldier.

☛☛ “I speak of people at the end of a brutal road, having seen their children and kin mutilated and ravished. They’ve reached this, their sanctuary, only after long torment, death chasing at their heels. And now comes an invading army of overwhelming size. The fort may hold several days, perhaps even a week or two. But they know in the end they will face their own slaughter. They know the infants they circle in their in their arms will before long be bloodied toys kicked about these cobbles. They know because they’ve seen it already, from whence they fled. They’ve seen the enemy burn and cut, take turns to rape young girls even as they lie dying of their wounds. They know this is to come, and so must cherish the earlier days of the siege, when the enemy must first pay the price for what they will later do.”

**Related Characters:** Wistan (speaker), Axl

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 141-142

### Explanation and Analysis

Once inside the monastery, Wistan quickly recognizes that it must have once been a Saxon stronghold and points out all the different signs of this to Axl. These signs include traps, areas where people within the fort could look down at those coming up the mountain toward them, and entire buildings designed for luring people in and killing them. Wistan tells Axl that the people in the fort would have been happy to see the violence against the invaders, but Axl denies that this could have been the case, suggesting that the people in the fort would have spent their last days praying and hoping for peace. Wistan’s graphic description of the people who would have sought sanctuary in the fort shows that he not only understands their hatred for those who drove them there, but that he has felt this hatred himself. Even though it has been years since the events he describes, Wistan is still appalled and still keenly feels the injustice and inhumanity in how the Saxons were treated by the Briton armies.

Wistan’s description also challenges what Sir Gawain said earlier about King Arthur ordering his armies not to slaughter innocent women, children, and the elderly. Even if the fort itself wasn’t the site of the violence Wistan describes, the fact that these traps have been built into the fort indicates that whoever built it felt that such precautions were necessary because of how violent the Britons were and how unsafe the Saxons felt.

“How can you describe as penance, sir, the drawing of a veil over the foulest deeds? Is your Christian god one to be bribed so easily with self-inflicted pain and a few prayers? Does he care so little for justice left undone?”

“Our god is a god of mercy, shepherd, whom you, a pagan, may find hard to comprehend. It’s no foolishness to seek forgiveness from such a god, however great the crime. Our god’s mercy is boundless.”

“What use is a god with boundless mercy, sir? You mock me as a pagan, yet the gods of my ancestors pronounce clearly their ways and punish severely when we break their laws. Your Christian god of mercy gives men licence to pursue their greed, their lust for land and blood, knowing a few prayers and a little penance will bring forgiveness and blessing.”

**Related Characters:** Father Jonus, Wistan (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 151

### Explanation and Analysis

Hearing that a group of people have come to the monastery to meet him, Father Jonus asks another monk to sneak the group into his cell where he is recovering from injuries sustained after he was chained outside so the birds that live in the monastery could peck at him. For the monks in the monastery, this practice is a form of penance for atrocities committed in the past, and it is what Wistan refers to as a “drawing of a veil over the foulest deeds.” Although neither Wistan nor Jonus says so directly, this conversation makes it clear that they both know the monks are guilty of something but do not agree that submitting to being tortured is an adequate method of penance.

Wistan clearly has no interest in a god that offers “boundless mercy,” which shows that he, himself, is not very forgiving and will not be easily convinced to extend mercy to other people. Furthermore, Wistan’s hostility and continued anger is representative of what the rest of the Saxons in the country will feel when they, too, remember what was done to them by the Britons. Additionally, Wistan launches a direct attack on Christianity, holding it responsible for how easy the Britons found it to treat the Saxons inhumanely. Christians, according to Wistan, believe they can get away with even the worst crimes because “a few prayers and a little penance” will earn them their god’s forgiveness.

“Yet are you so certain, good mistress, you wish to be free of this mist? Is it not better some things remain hidden from our minds?”

“It may be so for some, father, but not for us. Axl and I wish to have again the happy moments we shared together. To be robbed of them is as if a thief came in the night and took what’s most precious from us.”

“Yet the mist covers all memories, the bad as well as the good. Isn’t that so, mistress?”

“We’ll have the bad ones come back too, even if they make us weep or shake with anger. For isn’t it the life we’ve shared?”

**Related Characters:** Beatrice, Father Jonus (speaker), Axl

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 157

### Explanation and Analysis

When Beatrice is finally allowed the opportunity to talk to Father Jonus, her primary concern becomes finding out if he knows anything about the mist. To her delight, he is able to tell her that Querig the dragon causes the mist, which means that if Querig is slain then everyone’s memories will come back. Beatrice is excited by this news because it offers a solution to her fears that, without memories of their relationship, she and Axl will not pass the boatman’s test. This is one of the first open conversations the characters have about the bad memories that will return with the good. Beatrice describes the loss of memories as being similar to a “thief” robbing them at night, meaning she feels personally targeted and victimized.

Beatrice admits that it might be better “for some” that some things are kept hidden, but her focus is on her and Axl. However, what Father Jonus was really asking is if it wouldn’t be better on a national level for the past to remain obscured. This also emphasizes Beatrice’s confidence in the strength of the friendship and positive relationship between Saxons and Britons that has developed over the years.

## Chapter 7 Quotes

“What are you suggesting, sir? Skulls? I saw no skulls! And what if there are a few old bones here? What of it, is that anything extraordinary? Aren't we underground? But I saw no bed of bones, I don't know what you suggest, Master Axl. Were you there, sir? Did you stand beside the great Arthur? I'm proud to say I did, sir, and he was a commander as merciful as he was gallant. Yes, indeed, it was I who came to the abbot to warn of Master Wistan's identity and intentions, what choice had I? Was I to guess how dark the hearts of holy men could turn? Your suggestions are unwarranted, sir! An insult to all who ever stood alongside the great Arthur! There are no beds of bones here!”

**Related Characters:** Sir Gawain (speaker), King Arthur, Axl

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 169

**Explanation and Analysis**

Axl, Beatrice, and Edwin are betrayed by the abbot of the monastery and sent to the tunnels, where they regularly send people that they want to have killed by a monster. Fortunately, Father Jonus got a message to Sir Gawain who meets them in the tunnels and promises to help defeat the monster and get them out. In the tunnels, however, Beatrice believes she saw the bones of a child and, on closer inspection, Axl sees them too, which seems to offend Sir Gawain. In this instance, Sir Gawain's reaction seems indicative of a guilty conscience, which is confirmed when he reveals that he was the one who warned the abbot about Wistan and, therefore, is the indirect reason the group was put into the tunnel.

Sir Gawain, however, reveals that what is actually preying on his mind is the guilt he feels about murdering innocent people under King Arthur. Sir Gawain is in denial about the reality of what he did in the past, insisting on referring to Arthur as “the great Arthur” even though he remembers being ordered to do terrible things. The bones in the tunnels remind Sir Gawain of the numerous people he killed himself.

“We need not quarrel, Master Axl. Here are the skulls of men, I won't deny it. There an arm, there a leg, but just bones now. An old burial ground. And so it may be. I dare say, sir, our whole country is this way. A fine green valley. A pleasant copse in the springtime. Dig its soil, and not far beneath the daisies and buttercups come the dead. And I don't talk, sir, only of those who received Christian burial. Beneath our soil lie the remains of old slaughter. Horace and I, we've grown weary of it. Weary and we no longer young.”

**Related Characters:** Sir Gawain (speaker), Horace, Axl

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 171

**Explanation and Analysis**

A short time after refusing to acknowledge the presence of piles of human bones in the tunnels beneath the monastery, Sir Gawain finally admits that there are bones there and that they are human. However, he refuses to admit that it means something tragic happened there. Instead, Sir Gawain suggests that the site was an “old burial ground,” which is meant to eliminate any lingering suspicion that bodies had simply been thrown down into the tunnels to dispose of them after brutally murdering them during war. However, Sir Gawain also admits that he and Horace have seen more than their fair share of violence, which makes them “weary,” not just in body but in soul.

Sir Gawain also describes the incongruity between the surface appearance of the English countryside and what lies beneath the earth. Even the most beautiful places, according to Sir Gawain, may well have been a battlefield where so many people were killed that not all of them could be given a Christian burial. This reflects the relationship between Saxons and Britons: although things are peaceful and even friendly between the two groups now, one doesn't need to dig far into their history to find violence, mutual hatred, and a thirst for revenge for past wrongs.

“What do you suggest, mistress? That I committed this slaughter?” He said this tiredly, with none of the anger he had shown earlier in the tunnel, but there was a peculiar intensity in his voice. “So many skulls, you say. Yet are we not underground? What is it you suggest? Can just one knight of Arthur have killed so many?” He turned back to the gate and ran a finger along one of the bars. “Once, years ago, in a dream, I watched myself killing the enemy. It was in my sleep and long ago. The enemy, in their hundreds, perhaps as many as this. I fought and I fought. Just a foolish dream, but I still recall it.” He sighed, then looked at Beatrice. “I hardly know how to answer you, mistress. I acted as I thought would please God.”

**Related Characters:** The Narrator / The Boatman, Sir Gawain (speaker), King Arthur, Beatrice

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 173

### Explanation and Analysis

After arriving in a large chamber that allows some of the moonlight from outside in, Axl, Beatrice, Sir Gawain, and Edwin take a moment to look around. They are clearly surrounded by bones and Sir Gawain overhears Beatrice ask Axl if the monster in the tunnels could really have killed so many people. Mistaking her meaning, Sir Gawain jumps to the conclusion that she is talking about him. Sir Gawain's assumption reveals that the actions he committed in the past are eating away at him. He feels guilty, and so he answers Beatrice in a guilty way: “tiredly, with none of the anger he had shown earlier.” In fact, Sir Gawain finds a way to half-admit his crimes by saying he dreamed of “killing the enemy” in the hundreds. It is clear that Sir Gawain is struggling to keep the truth of the past locked away but is still determined not to admit that truth and instead promote the image of King Arthur as a hero to Britons and Saxons alike.

Sir Gawain also tries to deflect blame away from himself by saying, “I acted as I thought would please God.” By this Sir Gawain means he believed in the rightness of what they were doing at the time but has since begun to realize that much of what he did under King Arthur's orders was wrong. Although Sir Gawain goes on to describe how he warned the abbot about Wistan, he clearly yearns for the opportunity to come clean about what happened in the past and be given some sort of absolution or forgiveness.

“So many skulls we trod on before coming out to this sweet dawn! So many. No need to look down, one hears their cackle with each tread. How many dead, sir? A hundred? A thousand? Did you count, Master Axl? Or were you not there, sir?”

**Related Characters:** Sir Gawain (speaker), Axl

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 180

### Explanation and Analysis

After finally killing the monster in the tunnels and finding their way out, Sir Gawain prepares to leave Axl and Beatrice so they can continue their journey and he can go to Querig. Sir Gawain has asked Axl more than once if he was “there,” by which he means in the battles led by King Arthur. Although it is Sir Gawain's job to prevent the past from being remembered, he continually challenges Axl to answer this question, indicating that he wants Axl to remember. This is because Sir Gawain believes that if Axl remembers the past, Sir Gawain will have the chance to talk about what happened with someone who might not judge him as harshly. However, this also implies that Axl took part in the murder of hundreds or even thousands of people, which contradicts the image of Axl as kind, peace-loving, and hesitant to commit violence.

Sir Gawain's first line, “So many skulls we trod on before coming out to this sweet dawn,” refers to both getting out of the tunnels that had been full of bones and the peace that exists in England after years of violence. Thousands of people died and were killed in the name of future peace, and that has been achieved. For Sir Gawain, all the previous horrors and the guilt he feels are justified by the “sweet dawn,” full of peace that has allowed Saxons and Britons to finally live side by side without bloodshed for so many years.

## Gawain's First Reverie Quotes

“These cursed Saxons. Why fight on this way with only Death to thank them for it?”

“I believe they do so for sheer anger and hatred of us,” he says. “For it must be by now word has reached their ears of what’s been done to their innocents left in their villages. I’m myself just come from them, so why would the news not reach also the Saxon ranks?”

“What news do you speak of, Master Axl?”

“News of their women, children and elderly, left unprotected after our solemn agreement not to harm them, now all slaughtered by our hands, even the smallest babes. If this were lately done to us, would our hatred exhaust itself? Would we not also fight to the last as they do, each fresh wound given a balm?”

**Related Characters:** Axl, Sir Gawain (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 212

### Explanation and Analysis

After leaving Beatrice and Axl outside of the tunnels, Sir Gawain rides Horace back towards Querig. On the way, he looks back at the past and remembers the time when both he and Axl were knights of Arthur. This particular memory is from the same day that Arthur ordered his soldiers to go into Saxon villages and kill everyone in them, including women, children, and the elderly. The news evidently takes Sir Gawain by surprise, and Axl is obviously enraged by it. In fact, Axl is so hurt and mad about the slaughter of innocent villagers in Saxon towns that he is unable to be mad at the Saxon warriors for fighting so hard against the Britons. Axl also indirectly condemns Arthur’s decision by claiming that if the situations were reversed then there would be nothing to stop Britons from fighting to the death out of hatred and anger.

This memory also reveals that the war between Britons and Saxons had shifted in intent. Rather than fighting over land and cultural differences, they seem here to be fighting for revenge and out of profound hatred. Hatred, as they all seem to know, precludes the possibility of being able to bring peace and understanding between the Britons and Saxons. Had the battles simply been about land, then negotiations and agreements might have helped end the war, but this hatred ensures that war will continue and it will only get more violent.

“Master Axl, what was done in these Saxon towns today my uncle would have commanded only with a heavy heart, knowing of no other way for peace to prevail. Think, sir. Those small Saxon boys you lament would soon have become warriors burning to avenge their fathers fallen today. The small girls soon bearing more in their wombs, and this circle of slaughter would never be broken. Look how deep runs the lust for vengeance! [...] Yet with today’s great victory a rare chance comes. We may once and for all sever this evil circle, and a great king must act boldly on it. May this be a famous day, Master Axl, from which our land can be in peace for years to come.”

“I fail to understand you, sir. [...] This circle of hate is hardly broken, sir, but forged instead in iron by what’s done today.”

**Related Characters:** Axl, Sir Gawain (speaker), King Arthur

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 213-214

### Explanation and Analysis

Sir Gawain thinks back to a particularly bloody and violent battle between the Saxons and Britons and the account Axl has brought him about the mass slaughter of innocent Saxon women, children, and elderly people back in the unprotected Saxon towns. Although Sir Gawain has expressed surprise that this happened (particularly because there was a treaty barring this kind of unwarranted violence), he immediately sets to work defending King Arthur’s decision to break the treaty. What Sir Gawain knows and Axl does not is that Sir Gawain had gone on a secret mission to enchant a dragon’s breath so that all who breathe it will forget the past. The past that they want people to forget, however, is still ongoing in the form of the battle. Sir Gawain expresses the hope that the day will be a “famous day” that brings peace, which is the beginning of his active attempts to change everyone’s perceptions of what happened that day. Even while history is still happening, Sir Gawain begins to rewrite it, denying the ugly truth and instead promoting a positive message about Arthur’s decisions.

Axl, however, is of a very different opinion. Once again, Axl’s deep emotional intelligence and understanding is highlighted by his statement that he believes the “circle of hate” is being made permanent and lasting. Although the dragon’s breath may make people forget, that circle of hate remains just beneath the surface. Despite Sir Gawain’s optimism about the future, Axl sees only future trouble and, instead of fighting against it like Gawain, he accepts it as inevitable.

☛ Yet I was a good knight who performed his duty to the end. Let me say so, and he will see I do not lie. I will not mind him. The gentle sunset, his shadow falling over me as he moves from one side of his vessel to the other.

**Related Characters:** Sir Gawain (speaker), The Narrator / The Boatman

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 214

### Explanation and Analysis

When Sir Gawain is done reminiscing about the conversation he had with Axl about the broken treaty years before, he tries to comfort and convince himself that, when it is time for the boatman to take him to the island, he will have nothing to regret or be haunted by. He imagines an idyllic death very different from the chaotic and stressful life he currently leads trying to protect King Arthur's memory and reputation. In fact, Sir Gawain idealizes death, perhaps knowing that he has not much longer to live, either because of current tensions in the country or because he is getting older himself.

Sir Gawain reassures himself that he has done the right thing: "I was a good knight who performed his duty to the end." Sir Gawain sees performing one's duty as the most morally good thing they can do. This is also how Sir Gawain avoids taking personal responsibility for the atrocities he committed in war. By shifting blame off of himself and onto whoever gave him orders, Gawain is able to justify his actions and convince himself that he had been in the right. This need to reassure himself that he did nothing wrong reveals a hidden propensity to blame himself. He is haunted by guilt over what he did, even if he did only do them because he was ordered to.

## Chapter 12 Quotes

☛ "There are Britons who tempt our respect, even our love, I know this only too well. But there are now greater things press on us than what each may feel for another. It was Britons under Arthur slaughtered our kind. It was Britons took your mother and mine. We've a duty to hate every man, woman and child of their blood. So promise me this. Should I fall before I pass to you my skills, promise me you'll tend well this hatred in your heart. And should it ever flicker or threaten to die, shield it with care till the flame takes hold again."

**Related Characters:** Wistan (speaker), King Arthur, Edwin

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 242

### Explanation and Analysis

When Wistan and Edwin begin tracking down Querig, Wistan feels compelled to ready Edwin for what is about to come. Both Edwin and Wistan are Saxons, so it was their people who were most wronged by King Arthur during the war. Wistan, who values justice above all else, realizes that in order to get justice for the murdered Saxons, he will need to fuel the flames of hate that will flare up in the hearts and minds of the old Saxons who were alive during the war. However, that hate will only exist in the hearts of those who remember it, which is why Wistan takes the time to explain to Edwin that he has a "duty" to hate Britons and needs to keep that duty in mind.

Wistan has spent a lot of time around the Britons, including Axl and Beatrice, so this conversation with Edwin is also his way of reminding himself of his duty to "hate every man, woman and child" with Briton blood. Wistan's commitment to his hatred and his desire to pass that on to younger generations also confirms what Axl said about hatred being made permanent by Arthur's decision to break the treaty and kill unprotected Saxon women and children during battle.

## Chapter 13 Quotes

☛ "Axl, tell me. If the she-dragon's really slain, and the mist starts to clear, Axl, do you ever fear what will then be revealed to us?"

"Didn't you say it yourself, princess? Our life together's like a tale with a happy end, no matter what turns it took on the way."

"I said so before, Axl. Yet now it may even be we'll slay Querig with our own hands, there's a part of me fears the mist's fading."

**Related Characters:** Axl, Beatrice (speaker), Querig

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 249

### Explanation and Analysis

After leaving Sir Gawain, Axl and Beatrice continue their

journey to their son's village only to be sidetracked by a young girl who has poisoned her goat in order to leave it with Querig so that Querig will eat the poisoned goat and die. Seeing an opportunity to kill the dragon and restore her memories of her marriage to Axl, Beatrice coaxes Axl to take the goat up to Querig's lair. As the possibility that they actually could get their memories back begins to seem more likely, Beatrice's earlier insecurities come back with a vengeance. Now, however, she worries about the possibility that the bad memories that return might ruin what she and Axl have in the present, thereby guaranteeing that they will not be able to cross over to the island together.

Axl, who had once seemed at best ambivalent and at worst unwilling to have all of their memories restored, is now the one who believes that no lasting harm can come from having their memories restored. Axl believes their life already has a "happy end," which shows his confidence that no bad memory will be strong enough to ruin what they currently enjoy together. Axl has begun to focus more on the whole picture of their marriage, not just the present or future, and this thought encourages him to be more optimistic about what getting their memories back will mean for them.

☝ "Should Querig really die and the mist begin to clear. Should memories return, and among them of times I disappointed you. Or yet of dark deeds I may once have done to make you look at me and see no longer the man you do now. Promise me this at least. Promise, princess, you'll not forget what you feel in your heart for me at this moment. For what good's a memory's returning from the mist if it's only to push away another? Will you promise me, princess? Promise to keep what you feel for me this moment always in your heart, no matter what you see once the mist's gone."

**Related Characters:** Axl (speaker), Querig, Beatrice

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 258

### Explanation and Analysis

As Axl and Beatrice get closer to Querig's lair with the poisoned goat that they believe can be used to kill her, Axl succumbs to the nagging fear that Beatrice is going to stop loving him because she will remember that he committed some unforgivable wrong against her. By making her

promise to keep loving him, Axl is able to get some reassurance that they will be okay. Furthermore, Axl is coming to appreciate just how strong their love is at the present time. No matter what the past was, Axl truly treasures the relationship he has with Beatrice.

Axl's fears also indicate that he thinks he it is he—not Beatrice—who has done something wrong in their marriage. This harkens back to past thoughts he has had—a "trace of sadness" while looking at her in the morning—about the strength of their love for each other. Still, it does not cross his mind that he might remember something that Beatrice did and stop loving her. This shows that, above all, he has faith in the idea that Beatrice has always been good to him, even in times when he may not have deserved it.

## Chapter 15 Quotes

☝ "I accuse you of nothing. That great law you brokered torn down in blood! Yet it held well for a time. Torn down in blood! Who blames us for it now? Do I fear youth? Is it youth alone can defeat an opponent? Let him come, let him come."

**Related Characters:** Sir Gawain (speaker), Wistan, Axl

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 271

### Explanation and Analysis

Sir Gawain, Axl, and Beatrice meet up on the road to Querig's lair. When they get to the top of the mountain, Sir Gawain begins to talk more and more about what happened in the past. Sir Gawain holds Axl blameless for what happened, which implies that, on some level, he does blame King Arthur. Sir Gawain calls the treaty between Saxons and Britons—which apparently Axl had created—a "great law," which shows that he personally really liked and respected that treaty, just as he did Arthur, whom he calls a "great king" many times throughout the book. Sir Gawain's statement that the treaty was "torn down in blood" means that it was not dissolved willingly by both parties but was violently broken and betrayed.

Sir Gawain dwells on youth, particularly Wistan's youth. Those who fought during the time of Arthur are old, like Axl and Sir Gawain. If forgetfulness continues to reign in the land, then the old will die and take the memories of past hatred with them. It is youth learning the truth and then reigniting the earlier wars that Sir Gawain really fears, although he is unwilling to admit it. Still, by repeating "Let

him come, let him come,” Sir Gawain shows that he is ready to take a last stand and face Wistan knowing that if he loses, Querig will be slain and everyone’s memories, including those of being betrayed, will return, inevitably leading to new wars.

“Will you not understand the acts of a great king, sir? We can only watch and wonder. A great king, like God himself, must perform deeds mortals flinch from! [...] Who calls me a coward, sir? Or a slaughterer of babes? Where were you that day? Were you with us?”

**Related Characters:** Sir Gawain (speaker), King Arthur, Axl

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 275

### Explanation and Analysis

While Axl, Beatrice, and Sir Gawain prepare for Wistan to make it up the mountain where Querig’s lair is, Sir Gawain becomes more and more unhinged due to his fear of what is going to happen when everyone remembers what he did during the war between the Saxons and Britons. Still, Sir Gawain is eager to continue defending King Arthur’s reputation. Sir Gawain’s question about “understand[ing] the acts of a great king” is meant to discredit anyone who might offer a divergent opinion of what kind of person Arthur was. As a “great king,” Arthur would only ever have acted in the best interest of the entire country, although Sir Gawain implies that this is something ordinary people cannot truly understand.

Sir Gawain also asks Axl where he was during the battle when the treaty between Saxons and Britons was broken. By asking this, Sir Gawain implicitly accuses Axl of being either equally guilty if he was there or unable to understand why Arthur broke the treaty if he wasn’t there. Either way, Sir Gawain’s questions imply that Axl must have been in some way complicit, thus alleviating some of the guilt Sir Gawain feels about his own role in breaking the treaty.

“A dark man he may have been, but in this he did God’s will, not only Arthur’s. Without this she-dragon’s breath, would peace ever have come? Look how we live now, sir! Old foes as cousins, village by village. Master Wistan, you fall silent before this sight. [...] Her breath isn’t what it was, yet holds the magic even now. Think, sir, once that breath should cease, what might be awoken across this land even after these years! Yes, we slaughtered plenty, I admit it, caring not who was strong and who weak. God may not have smiled at us, but we cleansed the land of war. Leave this place, sir, I beg you.”

**Related Characters:** Sir Gawain (speaker), King Arthur, Querig, Merlin, Wistan

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 285

### Explanation and Analysis

Once Wistan and Edwin make it up to the top of the mountain where Sir Gawain is waiting with Axl and Beatrice, Sir Gawain openly admits that King Arthur was the one who decided to enlist the wizard Merlin to curse the breath of Querig to make all the people, both Saxons and Britons, forget the past. This, according to Sir Gawain, was necessary to establishing peace between the warring groups. Without Querig’s breath, people will gradually recover their memories and, despite having lived in peace together for years, Saxons will take up arms against Britons to get revenge. This shows a deep lack of trust in the power of friendship to overcome past hatred on Sir Gawain’s part, but this is understandable because that hatred is rooted in the fact that Gawain and other Britons “slaughtered plenty [...] caring not who was strong and who weak.”

Peace in England was only achieved by using magic and a dragon’s breath, which means that no matter how friendly Saxons and Britons have become, their friendship is not genuine. Peace in England was based on lies and a concerted effort to rewrite history. Despite this, Sir Gawain hopes to convince Wistan that, in this case, it is better to let the people live with the lie in order to prevent war from breaking out again.

“Foolishness, sir. How can old wounds heal while maggots linger so richly? Or a peace hold for ever built on slaughter and a magician’s trickery? I see how devoutly you wish it, for your old horrors to crumble as dust. Yet they await in the soil as white bones for men to uncover.”

**Related Characters:** Wistan (speaker), Merlin, Sir Gawain

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 286

### Explanation and Analysis

After listening to Sir Gawain's impassioned plea to let Querig live just a little while longer so that "old wounds" can finish healing, Wistan rejects what Sir Gawain has to say and asserts that there was never any chance that peace would last. Where Sir Gawain only saw peace, Wistan says there were "maggots" just below the surface, meaning that no wounds have healed and, therefore, hatred and suspicion have never entirely died out. Wistan believes that peace can only last if it is genuine and founded on truth and that it is better to risk war to get the truth out than to allow peace to continue if it's founded on lies and "trickery."

Furthermore, Wistan makes things more personal for Sir Gawain by saying that what Gawain wants is his own "old horrors to crumble as dust." By saying this, Wistan is accusing Sir Gawain of being an active participant in the slaughter of innocent women and children, which is at the root of the hatred that he believes will sweep through the land. Like the fraudulent peace that exists, Wistan believes that the crimes Sir Gawain took part in would have inevitably been discovered in time. For Sir Gawain, that would mean that he had devoted his entire life to protecting King Arthur's reputation for nothing.

☝☝ "You and I longed for Querig's end, thinking only of our own dear memories. Yet who knows what old hatreds will loosen across the land now? We must hope God yet finds a way to preserve the bonds between our peoples, yet custom and suspicion have always divided us. Who knows what will come when quick-tongued men make ancient grievances rhyme with fresh desire for land and conquest?"

"How right to fear it, sir," Wistan said. "The giant, once well buried, now stirs."

**Related Characters:** Wistan, Axl (speaker), Querig, Beatrice

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 297

### Explanation and Analysis

Wistan slays Querig after killing Sir Gawain in a duel, which means it is only a matter of time before everyone fully

recovers all of their memories. For the first time, Axl begins to understand the larger implications of restoring everyone's memories. Despite knowing that "old hatreds" are about to wreak havoc in England, Axl holds on to his hope that mankind's better nature and love of peace will prevail. However, his statement that "custom and suspicion" has always divided Britons and Saxons shows that, even in peace, nothing has ever truly been resolved between the two groups. This would also mean that the predisposition for violence and hatred has always been there, just below the surface.

The "giant" that was "once well buried" is the secret history of King Arthur and his decision to break the treaty. Evidence of the broken treaty and the mutual hatred between Britons and Saxons was quite literally buried just below the surface of the earth on what used to be battlefields and villages. Now that the giant "stirs," it will not be long before fresh violence breaks out, most likely leading to a new war.

## Chapter 17 Quotes

☝☝ "What did you hope to gain, sir, preventing not just your wife but even yourself grieving at your son's resting place?"

"Gain? There was nothing to gain, boatman. It was just foolishness and pride. And whatever else lurks in the depths of a man's heart. Perhaps it was a craving to punish, sir. I spoke and acted forgiveness, yet kept locked through long years some small chamber in my heart that yearned for vengeance. A petty and black thing I did her, and my son also."

**Related Characters:** The Narrator / The Boatman, Axl (speaker), Axl and Beatrice's Son, Beatrice

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 312-313

### Explanation and Analysis

After witnessing Wistan slay Querig, Axl and Beatrice run into the narrator, who is also one of the boatmen who takes people to the island and who questions Axl and Beatrice about their relationship. Axl reveals that Beatrice had an affair in the past, which caused a lot of anger and tension in their house and ultimately drove their only son away from home. A short time later, Axl and Beatrice were reunited, but when they learned about their son's death, Axl had refused to let Beatrice go to mourn at his grave. Axl says he had "a craving to punish," but does not specifically say that he wanted to punish Beatrice. This could mean that he wanted to punish himself, as well.

Axl's account of his hidden anger and resentment toward Beatrice hearkens back to the first conversation between Beatrice and another boatman who told her that, for many couples, the love between them is not genuine and instead masks something much darker. Axl's description of his

actions and motives confirms what the boatman told them. Unfortunately for both Axl and Beatrice, the thing they wanted most (their memories to come back) proves to be much more powerful than they expected and it threatens to tear their relationship apart.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## CHAPTER 1

The narrator notes that the English landscape at the time this story is being told is very different from what it would become famous for in the future. Instead of “winding lane and tranquil meadow,” one finds “miles of desolate, uncultivated land.” Roads that the Romans created have been grown over and ogres still haunt the forests and marshes. The people there, rather than living in constant terror of the ogres, focus on trying to grow food and stop the spread of plague. The people have grown to accept that every once in a while, an ogre will carry a child off.

On the edge of a bog, an elderly couple, Axl and Beatrice, live together in one of many communal warrens in the area, a lot of which are “dug deep into the hillside.” These buildings are connected by underground passages and hallways, but despite having numerous neighbors in the warren, Axl and Beatrice lead “an isolated life” there. The narrator notes that warrens are a primitive habitat and reassures the reader that there are castles to be found in the countryside, though they are very few and far between, and not always hospitable. “I am sorry to paint such a picture of our country at [this] time,” the narrator apologizes, “but there you are.”

Axl and Beatrice live “on the outer fringes” of their warren, far from the large fire in the Great Chamber and less protected from the cold. Axl believes there was a time when they lived closer to the fire with their children, and this thought would occasionally “gnaw at his heart” and keep him from sleeping. This may be why, on this morning, Axl has left the warmth of his bed to sit outside in the cold. Noticing the sun rising, Axl returns to his room, happy that he has remembered things that had been forgotten long ago. Axl senses that he’s “about to come to some momentous decision” and he is excited about it.

Back in their room, Axl sees that Beatrice is still sleeping and is careful not to make too much noise and wake her up, although he is tempted to do so because he’s excited to share his decision with her. Quietly sitting on a stool, Axl wonders if this is how he and Beatrice have always lived, alone “at the periphery of the community,” or if things really had been different once. When he was outside, Axl had received “some fragments of a remembrance” of walking through the warren with his arm around one of his children when he was much younger. However, he can’t be sure this memory is real and not “just an elderly fool’s imaginings.”

*The narrator provides the first indication that this is a fantasy novel when he introduces ogres and claims they carry off children. He also indicates that the land is experiencing a peaceful period because, aside from the ogres, all anyone is worried about is cultivating land and illness, not fighting with each other.*



*Axl and Beatrice are “isolated” even in a large warren, indicating that they are not living with or near their children and grandchildren and all they have is each other. This further indicates that they love each other deeply and, in the absence of friends or other family, have only each other to rely on and confide in. The narrator’s apology for his portrayal of the country indicates that he is unwilling to sugarcoat or glaze over the realities of what life was like at the time and will, to the best of his ability, be honest and open in telling the story.*



*Although he can’t clearly remember having children, the gnawing sadness Axl feels shows that he loves them and the sense that they’re missing from his life is painful. The excitement he feels over his “momentous decision” promises a coming happiness that is closely related to his distant memories of children and the happiness he believes he felt at the time, if they did in fact exist.*



*Even though Axl is excited, he places Beatrice’s need for rest above his desire to share his thoughts and feelings with her. This is a further indication that he loves her very much and wants to take care of her. His continued thoughts about whether they’ve always lived in such dismal and isolated conditions also shows that he resents the way they’re forced to live now. However, within that is a seed of doubt because he can’t be sure that he actually remembers that happier past and isn’t just a fool.*



The narrator notes that the reader may wonder why Axl doesn't ask someone in the warren for answers as to whether he and Beatrice had had children once. The reason for this is that nobody in the warren speaks of the past. This isn't because it's taboo, but because "it ha[s] somehow faded" and never occurs to anyone to discuss it anymore, "even the recent [past]." An example is that Axl remembers a woman with red hair who had been kind to him and Beatrice, and lived in the warren for a time. But one day she disappeared and no matter who he asked, Axl couldn't find anybody who remembered her ever existing.

Recalling the incident of the red-haired woman and how everyone, even Beatrice, had forgotten her, Axl wonders if he's mistaken about her existing. However, "this instance [...] had been merely one of a steady run of such puzzling episodes." One of these episodes involves a young girl named Marta who was unusually adventurous and had wandered off shortly before nightfall. Fearful that ogres or wolves might find and eat her, the community started to panic until two shepherds came in and started talking about seeing a wren-eagle, which was notable because wren-eagles are capable of scaring wolves away. Everyone stopped looking for Marta to listen to the shepherds talk and debate amongst themselves whether it was an eagle. Suddenly, Marta appeared and only Axl could remember how scared everyone had been for her.

The sun is rising higher and lighting up Axl and Beatrice's room. Watching her sleep, Axl notes that she looks peaceful and he experiences a "sudden rush of happiness" as he watches her. Rather than waking her, Axl quietly sits on his stool and waits for the sun to wake her up. As he sits, he wonders how the talk of him and Beatrice taking a journey had begun. He decides the talks must have started when a strange woman had entered the village last November. Although others believed this stranger was a demon, Beatrice had insisted on bringing her food and Axl was sent to talk to her.

Beatrice was with the stranger at a tree called "the old thorn," but she ran down to meet Axl before he could come up and talk to the stranger himself. Axl agreed with Beatrice that the stranger was safe and simply in need of food. Beatrice sent Axl away, saying she wanted to talk to the stranger a while longer. Later, after finishing his day's work, Axl hurried back to the old thorn and found Beatrice alone there. Beatrice was deep in thought, but Axl noticed that she was walking differently, as if she was "nursing some secret pain somewhere." Beatrice assured him the stranger hadn't upset her, although Axl noted that she was in "a strange mood."

*The fact that it's not just Axl's memory that is unreliable is evidence that there is something bigger and more insidious at play that has made everyone in the warren a victim. This means that nobody can truly be considered a reliable source of information, and it even calls into question the narrator's reliability.*



*Perhaps the most frightening thing about the mysterious forgetfulness that is plaguing the people here is that they can forget their own families and friends just moments after losing sight of them. This has dire implications for those who are forgotten; what if Marta had been cornered by wolves and might have been saved if only her mother hadn't forgotten her? This means that anyone who leaves the warren, even for just a few hours, is in danger of being forgotten and, if they need help, they can't trust that anyone will remember them well enough to realize they're gone.*



*Beatrice chose to go to the strange woman even though everyone else was afraid the woman was a demon, which shows that Beatrice is not as susceptible to the kinds of superstitions and fears that most of their neighbors entertain. This further sets them apart from their neighbors and makes them stand out, which helps explain why they are treated as poorly as they are.*



*Axl knows Beatrice well enough to tell just by the way she walks whether or not she is in some kind of pain. This "secret pain" of Beatrice's began after her conversation with the stranger, which indicates that it is not something physical but emotional and mental. Beatrice shows her love for Axl by trying to spare him whatever pain she is harboring and not telling him what happened to upset her; she is willing to carry the pain herself rather than burden Axl with it.*



Suddenly, Beatrice told Axl that she was beginning to agree with his belief that it's "queer the way the world's forgetting people and things" and compared it to a sickness. Beatrice worried about what else they weren't remembering and Axl saw that her eyes were full of sadness. Beatrice said that even though Axl was against it, she thought it was time for them to take a journey to their son's village. Axl wondered why Beatrice thought he was the one against it, but she said she couldn't remember why she thought that, she just did. Axl agreed that they might be able to go in the spring, but insisted that they talk about it later because they had to help with some more work around the warren.

Despite their promise to talk about the trip, Beatrice and Axl have rarely brought it up again. They become "oddly uncomfortable" whenever it is brought up, and their conversation typically ends in "evasiveness or bad temper." So, talks of a journey have dropped, but Axl has now decided that he wants to take the trip after all. Part of why he's willing to leave the warren is because just a couple of weeks prior, a young girl had made a candle for Beatrice and Axl, who had long been prohibited from having candles because of their age and the likelihood of them inadvertently burning the warren down. Beatrice was excited to get the candle, but then everyone else surrounded her and tried to take it back. This sent Beatrice into hysterics until Axl found her and held her to him. The pastor, a leader in the community, broke up the group, but demanded that Beatrice return the candle.

Walking away from the scene of the incident, Beatrice told Axl that all she could think about was their son and how Axl had refused to let her go to him. Axl was astonished, believing he never would have done such a thing, but Beatrice insisted that it was him. Rather than talk about it further, Axl and Beatrice went back to their room for the rest of the day.

*Beatrice tells Axl that he was against them going to see their son in the past, which means that this is something they have fought about before. Axl doesn't remember ever being against the idea, which calls into question which (if either) of them is remembering correctly. If Beatrice remembers correctly, then it would mean that Axl had been very cruel in the past, although it is unclear why. If it's true that Axl was never against the idea, then it begs the question of why Beatrice would accuse him of something like that.*



*By taking Beatrice away from the warren to find their son, Axl is also trying to protect his wife from being mistreated and forced to live in the dark by the neighbors in the warren. He is willing to do this at the expense of his own possible comfort and happiness there, which is a testament to how much he loves her and how much he's willing to sacrifice for the possibility of giving her a better life even in their old age.*



*By avoiding a serious talk about whether or not Axl had prevented Beatrice from going to see their son, they are also deliberately avoiding having to seriously consider some of the negative elements of their past that their forgetfulness has saved them from having to think about too seriously. By avoiding these serious discussions about the bad parts of their past, they are also trying to rewrite their relationship in accordance with their current happiness together.*



As more people wake up around the warren, Axl notices Beatrice starting to move. He leaves his stool to go sit on the edge of their bed. When she finally wakes up, Axl immediately tells her that he thinks it's time for them to start their journey to their son's village. Beatrice is happy, although she admits that sometimes she struggles to remember their son at all, and nobody else in the warren remembers him either. Axl also says he has a hard time remembering their son or why he left, but Beatrice says she knows that their son a good man and can "feel things about him." Axl and Beatrice agree that their son will be excited to see them, and the journey will only take a few days. Although they don't remember the way, Beatrice believes it will come back to them once they start. They begin preparing for the journey immediately.

*Both Beatrice and Axl are relying on their deep internal instincts as parents to guide them towards their son, even though their minds struggle to remember him. They are choosing to put all of their faith in the power of love—specifically the love parents have for their children, no matter how old they are and how long they've been apart—to guide them to their son. Furthermore, they are trusting that their son, even if he was sent away and Axl prevented Beatrice from going to him, will feel the same amount of love for them and any past resentment will have dissipated.*



## CHAPTER 2

Before taking off, Axl and Beatrice must get permission to take certain things with them, like communally owned blankets and water flasks. Between the time it takes to gather supplies and the long wait for good weather, it takes a while for them to begin their journey. When they do, however, they stay close together out of fear of the monsters that inhabit the bog and forests. Beatrice leads the way because she knows how to get to the nearest Saxon town. She continually calls back to Axl to make sure he's close behind her and hasn't been taken by an ogre or other monster. Without roads to guide them, the journey can be dangerous and the two don't talk often because they pay a lot of attention to their steps, making sure they don't twist an ankle or trip over anything.

*As they travel through the Great Plain, known for being a hotspot for ogres and wolves, all Axl and Beatrice worry about are the monsters, not bandits or running into hostile armies. This emphasizes that the people in the land are at peace with one another, something that is further demonstrated by the fact that they, Britons, are going to stay at a Saxon town overnight and are confident that they can do this without any fights about differences in culture, religion, and lifestyle. Beatrice continually checks on Axl, demonstrating her concern for his well-being and fear of losing him.*



After reaching the end of the Great Plain, Axl and Beatrice rest in a safe corner and talk about meeting their son again. Beatrice dreamed of their son the night before and tries to describe his face, but Axl says he can't remember their son's face and assumes it is "the work of this **mist**" that gathers in the area and makes people forget. Still, Axl believes either he or Beatrice will remember the details of their son's life at some point and Beatrice encourages him to try.

*Axl and Beatrice maintain a firm belief that the love they feel in this moment for their son will help guide them to him. Still, it is disconcerting for both of them that they do not remember his face, which testifies to the power the mist has of making people forget even the most important parts of their lives.*



After resting, Axl and Beatrice prepare to continue walking. Beatrice gives Axl some smooth stones to carry as a charm to keep them safe. She also warns Axl to be careful walking around a hill where a giant is buried and that they should not talk to any strangers they see walking. Axl agrees with this, and they start walking. The path is difficult and muddy from past rain, so they stay very close to each other and keep an eye on the sky for fear of more rain. They stop to rest by a brook one more time, but Axl notices the sky starting to darken. He is prepared to stay beneath a thick tree to stay dry, but Beatrice says there's an abandoned villa ahead that they can reach and take shelter in before it rains. Axl agrees to go there and they hurry on.

It starts to rain shortly before Axl and Beatrice reach the villa, which "must have been splendid enough in Roman days," but is now decaying and largely obscured by foliage. Axl calls in to see if anyone is there and they walk in believing it's empty when he doesn't receive a reply. Only after walking through some ruined rooms do Axl and Beatrice arrive in a safe shelter, but they notice a "small, bird-like old woman" holding a rabbit and a tall man standing as far away from the woman as he can. Looking at his coat and shoes, Axl realizes he must be a sailor or fisherman. The man is staring at a wall silently, but looks up when Axl and Beatrice come in. Axl and Beatrice find a dry seat and the four people sit silently together, listening to the rain and thunder.

Once the rain "settle[s] to a steady fall," the old woman greets Axl and Beatrice and asks where they're going. Axl tells her they're going to their son's village but will seek shelter at a nearby Saxon village for the night. Suddenly, the woman grabs a rusted knife and puts it against the rabbit's throat. Just then, Axl notices old bloodstains all over the floor and asks the woman to break its neck rather than cut it open while it's still alive. The man turns around and asks Axl and Beatrice to hear him out. He says he's "a humble boatman" and works hard, and this is one of his rare spells of free time. The house they are in used to be his family's and he enjoys reminiscing there, but the woman always shows up there, insults him, and kills a small animal. The boatman asks Axl and Beatrice to convince the woman to leave. Silence fills the room.

*The stones that Beatrice insists she and Axl carry and the fact that they need to be very cautious while they walk around the buried giant reveals how superstitious and afraid they are of hidden dangers in their country. Although they don't fear other people, Axl and Beatrice do fear what the country itself is hiding.*



*The existence of this apparently "splendid" villa means that there was a time, back when the Romans lived in England, when there were a greater number of rich and powerful people who built grand houses to show off their power and wealth. Now, however, the villa is in ruins and covered in plants, which means that it has been a really long time since the days of these grand families. This harkens back to when the narrator describes how hard it would be for a traveler to find a castle. Furthermore, this villa and its condition brings up the question of why the Romans left and provides evidence of past turmoil.*



*Although Axl and Beatrice struggle with remembering the past, the fact that the boatman says he likes to remember his childhood in the villa means that he does not share the same struggle, or at least not to the same extent as other people. The old woman, however, disrupts his ability to reminisce by darkening the villa (quite literally by covering the floor in blood) and making it a place of bloodshed and violence. This shows that even though the land is largely at peace, there are still serious conflicts going on.*



Watching the woman stroke the rabbit, Beatrice asks her not to cut open the animal and to instead let Axl help her kill it cleanly. Beatrice scolds the woman for harassing the boatman, but Axl tells her to get the woman's side of the story before rushing to judgment. The woman agrees and tells them that the boatman is the reason she's separated from her husband. The boatman was supposed to take them to a mysterious **island** together but insisted on bringing her husband first and promised to come back for her. Although she waited while the boatman took her husband to the island, upon returning the boatman ignored her calls and pleas for him to take her there, too, as promised. The boatman instead gave her a rabbit, thinking she'd like it for her dinner. Since then, she's brought him a rabbit each year. The boatman insists that he was only trying to be kind by giving her the rabbit, which he had intended for his own supper.

Beatrice tells the boatman it was cruel of him to separate the married couple, but the boatman tells her that the **island** they wanted to go to is "no ordinary one." Even though it must be heavily populated by now, those who go to the island can spend all day walking around and never run into another person. The boatman says he had been willing to bring the woman, but she no longer wanted to go once she heard that she wouldn't be with her husband there. The woman argues that the boatman is telling half-truths, that married couples who go together can stay together instead of being alone. The boatman agrees but says it's "rare" that a couple is permitted to go there together. It requires "an unusually strong bond of love between them" and they don't even have to be married. It is the boatman's job to decide whether or not a couple is truly bound by this kind of love; the old woman and her husband were not, and she knows it.

Although the old woman is invited to argue against this point, she remains silent. Axl tells the woman she can walk with him and Beatrice for part of the way and talk if she likes, but that she needs to leave the boatman in peace. The woman doesn't answer, but silently stands up, walks to an opening, and releases the rabbit. She turns around and says that the "strangers" have made her lose her appetite for the moment, then steps out and walks away. The boatman thanks Axl and Beatrice for helping him get rid of the old woman for the time being.

*Although the boatman had seemed innocent and as if he were an undeserving victim of a deranged woman's anger, the woman's account makes it clear that her actions are not without justification. By not sharing the details of his shared past with the woman, the boatman had, in a sense, rewritten history and cast himself as a faultless character. The truth, however, turns out to be far more complicated and makes it clear that neither person is entirely right or wrong in this situation. Both the amount of blood and the accounts of both the old woman and the boatman indicate that this situation has happened again and again over a number of years, which shows how dedicated the woman is to the memory of her lost husband and the love she has for him.*



*This is the first time that Beatrice and Axl are told what the island is like and how to get there, and it is, therefore, the first time they seriously begin to consider whether their love is strong enough that they would be allowed to go to the island together. The fact that the woman could have gone to the island but chose not to when she knew she couldn't go with her husband shows that her primary concern wasn't just getting to the island, but also not being alone there. The boatman, from her perspective, was condemning her to an eternity of isolation and loneliness by not bringing her with her husband.*



*The old woman chooses not to argue with the boatman about whether or not she loved her husband, which reveals that she knows the love between her and her husband was not genuine and reaffirms that her anger is directed at the prospect of being alone and not at losing a loved one. Confronted with this reality, the woman is able to accept the truth and walk away, leaving the boatman in peace for the moment.*



Beatrice observes that the house must have been magnificent in its prime and the boatman agrees, saying that he's just happy it's still standing and that it has survived past wars. As the boatman talks about these wars, Axl suddenly grabs Beatrice's arm and tells her that hearing these descriptions makes it seem like he is "the one remembering things here." Axl attributes this to foolishness, however, and Beatrice expresses her anxiety to leave the place, so they get their stuff together and prepare to leave.

The boatman wishes Axl and Beatrice a safe journey as they walk away, but suddenly Beatrice stops and asks the boatman if he'll answer a question she has. Beatrice expresses curiosity about how he determines which couples can go to **the island** together and asks him how he questions them. The boatman tells her that it's strange that they've met at all because "by rights" they shouldn't have. Still, he agrees to answer her question because they helped get the old woman to leave him alone.

The boatman explains that he separates the couple and asks them each what their most cherished memories of each other are, and the truth soon reveals itself. Beatrice asks if this is hard to do and the boatman says it is, but that with experience he's gotten really good at quickly deciphering the truth. Where most couples "claim to be bonded by love," boatmen recognize "resentment, anger, even hatred. Or a great barrenness." True love, according to the boatman, is rare. Beatrice thanks him for the answer and she and Axl leave.

As Axl and Beatrice make their way back to the road, Beatrice tells him that she's afraid. When Axl asks why, Beatrice tells him about the time she discussed **the mist** that makes people forget with a strange woman whose husband had also been taken to **the island**. The woman had asked Beatrice how she and Axl could ever get to the island if they couldn't remember their lives together. Axl reassures Beatrice that they will be fine because they have no plans to go to the island, but Beatrice asks what will happen if their "love withers before [they have] a chance even to think of going to such a place?"

*The boatman's story about the villa he lived in as a child surviving past wars indicates that these wars were actually pretty recent. This is further proven by the fact that Axl has such a visceral reaction to hearing stories of battles and feels like he's "remembering things," too; it means that Axl, too, may have had some part in the wars or been affected by them in some way.*



*Beatrice's decision to ask the boatman about the questions he asks couples who want to go to the island together indicates that she herself is beginning to think of going there and is assuming that Axl would want to go with her. It also means she wants to be prepared to face the boatman's questions so they can go together, which also means she's worried that the love between her and Axl wouldn't be strong enough on its own without preparation.*



*The boatman's description of the hidden resentment and anger between even the seemingly happiest couples furthers the message that the characters in this story need to learn to look below the surface and do some digging to arrive at the truth. This, however, is complicated by the fact that everyone struggles with memory issues and can't completely trust their own minds. This also plants the idea in Beatrice's mind that the love between her and Axl may be illusory, something which can only be affirmed by getting their memories back.*



*Beatrice is worried that the reality of the love between her and Axl is contingent on retrieving their lost memories. Without their happy memories, she worries that they won't be able to maintain their current happiness, which indicates that, even with that happiness, she senses something beneath the surface that prevents them from truly being bonded by the kind of love that is required to go to the island together.*



Again, Axl comforts Beatrice and assures her that their love is very strong, but Beatrice is worried about the fact that they can't remember the details of their marriage and she worries that, without their memories, love will "fade and die." Axl says God would never let that happen, but he still feels a pang of fear. Axl tells Beatrice that their memories aren't lost, "just mislaid somewhere on account of this wretched **mist**" and they'll remember everything when they find their son. Beatrice says she hopes that's true and they prepare to continue their journey.

*It's not just Beatrice who is worried about the love between her and Axl; Axl, too, shares a sense that not everything is right between them and that the love he feels for her and the happiness they share is not as deep as they would like it to be. However, he also clearly believes that they can remember again, shown by his description of their memories as simply "mislaid" and not irretrievably lost.*



## CHAPTER 3

The Saxon village, notes the narrator, looks more like a traditional village: it's made of houses and buildings, not dug into a hillside like Axl and Beatrice's warren. Around the town is a large fence with sharpened poles to keep creatures (and people) from climbing over it. Looking down at it, Beatrice observes that there are several soldiers guarding the gate, which is different than in the past when it was just one or two men and a couple of dogs.

*The heightened security at the gates of the village indicate that there is some new tension or problems in the town and the people have become afraid and suspicious of outsiders. Even though there is peace, there is still this feeling among the Saxons that they need to protect themselves with large fences and guards, unlike the Britons who live in unsecured warrens.*



Axl worries that they won't be welcome here, but Beatrice assures him that they know her because she trades there with other women from the warren. Furthermore, the leader of the town is a Briton and a friend of hers. Even still, Beatrice says that the increased security means something serious has happened. Axl is prepared to find shelter for the night somewhere else, but Beatrice disagrees because it's nearly dark and she wants to see a medicine woman in the village about a discomfort in her side she's been experiencing. Axl is worried, but Beatrice tells him it's "nothing to worry about."

*Even more evidence of peace is shown by the fact that this Saxon town is being led by a Briton and Britons are also welcome to come and go when they have goods to trade, which shows that Britons and Saxons are cooperative and work together instead of trying to avoid each other. Still, Axl seems to fear that, being Britons, they will not be welcome, which reveals suspicion and tension despite apparent peace.*



As they approach the gate, the Saxon guards look "panicked," so Beatrice insists that she go up alone and Axl wait for her at a distance. After checking both Beatrice and Axl out, the guards let them enter the town, which is not as orderly as it had appeared from a distance. Beatrice notes that it is "eerily still" in the village, which is usually busy and lively. Beatrice decides to go to the medicine woman before going to the inn. Stepping into what appears to be a village square, they see a bonfire and a number of people talking around it. Axl and Beatrice, however, continue on their way to the medicine woman's house.

*All around them in the town, there is evidence of unexplainable tension. As Britons, both Axl and Beatrice are "others" in this environment, which makes them vulnerable to suspicion and that could put them in real danger. Even Beatrice, who was confident about their welcome even when she saw the guards, senses that something truly serious is going on by how "eerily still" the town is.*



Beatrice finds the medicine woman and they talk together in the Saxon language (which Axl can't understand) for a while before the woman leads Beatrice toward her hut. Beatrice tells Axl to wait outside, so he leans against a wall and observes the people in the square. There is "a growing restlessness" and many people are walking back and forth hurriedly. Just as he's about to nod off, the crowd makes a simultaneous movement and several men walk out of a nearby building. One man seems to be the object of everyone's attention, and Axl realizes the man is dressed and acts like a warrior. The two men who emerge with the warrior look nervous even though they carry spears.

Suddenly Beatrice is next to Axl and tells him that the warrior arrived shortly before they did, and that he is a Saxon from a distant part of the country. Beatrice also explains that, earlier in the day, a villager ran into the village with a hurt shoulder and a story about ogres attacking him, his brother, and his nephew. The ogres killed the man's brother and "carried off the boy, who was alive and struggling." The man had come back to get backup and return to where the ogres had been to rescue his nephew. Unfortunately, there was a trap and three of the party were killed before the rest were able to return to the village. Shortly after the group returned, the warrior came into town asking for shelter. He volunteered to help search for and rescue the boy with the help of several more men from the village.

The medicine woman tells Beatrice that she and Axl need to go straight to the longhouse (an inn) and stay inside until morning because the whole town is so tense. Before they can leave, however, the crowd starts cheering and chanting with the warrior and the group of men accompanying him begin to head out. Once the group moves away, Beatrice asks for directions to the longhouse and she and Axl start walking there. Before long, however, they are lost and find themselves walking along the perimeter fence. Suddenly Axl and Beatrice hear a rush of footsteps, and before they know it, they are surrounded by guards. Axl panics, but Beatrice speaks in Saxon to one of them. They hear shouting from somewhere and an elderly man appears, scolding the guards for leaving their posts.

The elderly man, addressing Axl and Beatrice in the Briton language, wonders how the guards could so soon forget their duty to stay at their posts. Beatrice, addressing the man as Ivor, observes that all the men are exceptionally jumpy that evening. Ivor apologizes for the guards' behavior and Beatrice asks for directions. Ivor tells her it'd be better if she and Axl stay at his house for the night, and they agree to follow him there.

*Saxons have a completely different language than Britons, which highlights how different the two groups really are. Axl is able to recognize the strange man at the center of attention as a warrior, which harkens back to his own sense of remembering things when the boatman talked about past wars and battles. This could indicate that Axl recognizes something in this warrior that is also applicable to some part of his own past, possibly as a warrior himself.*



*Beatrice's confirmation that the strange man is indeed a Saxon warrior from far away brings up a new question: if the land is at peace, why is a mysterious warrior traveling through it? In fact, the existence of a warrior at all implies the continued existence of Saxon armies, which would mean that, even in the absence of conflict, this group stands in readiness for future conflict.*



*The medicine woman's advice is more evidence that, as Britons, Axl and Beatrice are vulnerable to suspicion in a Saxon town. Given the events earlier that day involving the young boy, there is evidently a fear that Axl and Beatrice might find themselves in trouble if they stumble on the wrong group of people, which appears to happen when they are suddenly surrounded while innocently walking down the street.*



*Even though the guards clearly don't trust Britons in general, they trust and respect Ivor in particular. This means that, taken individually, Saxons and Britons can and do get along and any distrust between the two groups exists in a general sense and can be gotten over on an individual basis.*



Ivor's house is large, comfortable, and warmed by a big fire. Axl unpacks his and Beatrice's blankets as they find comfortable spots to sit. Ivor apologizes for the guards once again, and Axl tells him he understands and appreciates the kindness Ivor is showing them. Ivor notes that it's still strange that the men forgot their orders to stay at their posts and says that "such strange forgetfulness" happens all the time. Axl says it's the same where he and Beatrice are coming from. Ivor thinks this is interesting and wonders if it's because he's old or because he's "a Briton living here among Saxons" that he seems to remember more than those around him. Axl notes that he and Beatrice remember more than "the younger ones" and asks Ivor if he knows where **the mist** that makes them forget comes from. Ivor says he's heard a lot about the mist, but before he can share what he knows, a noise outside distracts him and he excuses himself.

With Ivor gone, Axl and Beatrice wonder what he would have said about **the mist**. Axl asks Beatrice if Ivor has always lived with the Saxons and Beatrice tells him it's only been since Ivor married a Saxon woman, but she isn't sure what happened to the wife since then. Beatrice also says it would be "a fine thing to know the cause of the mist." Axl agrees, but doubts that it would do any good. Beatrice is upset by this and asks how he can speak "so lightly of it" when it could make "such a difference" to them. Axl apologizes and says he was thinking about the men who went out in search of the kidnapped boy. Beatrice, still upset and believing he's speaking too "harshly," tells him there's no need to snap at her. Axl apologizes again and says they'll talk to Ivor about the mist before they leave.

Axl asks Beatrice if she received an answer from the medicine woman about her pains. Beatrice tells him that the medicine woman told her the discomfort was a normal part of aging. Axl says he knew there was no reason to worry, but Beatrice reminds him that he had insisted on her seeing the medicine woman that night. Beatrice tells him that the medicine woman mentioned a wise monk named Jonus in a monastery nearby who helps a lot of people from the village. Axl says they may as well go visit Jonus even though Beatrice says the trail will be hard to climb up. Axl insists on at least thinking about going there and then sees Ivor coming back.

*Ivor's account of the forgetfulness in the village confirms that the mist is affecting a much larger area than perhaps Beatrice or Axl had considered. Ivor also believes that there is something about being a Briton makes him less susceptible to the mist's ability to make people forget, which implies that he believes he has a stronger mind than the Saxons. This type of bias, if it is indicative of what most Britons think of the Saxons, could contribute to ongoing tension and suspicion between them, despite the prevalence of peace and cooperation.*



*Ivor's marriage reveals just how integrated the Saxons and Britons have become over time and also explains how he may have come to be the leader of the town. The argument between Axl and Beatrice, even though it is only a minor one, reveals a huge difference in what they think of the mist and the possibility of getting their memories back. Beatrice is preoccupied with being able to remember her life with Axl, but Axl has managed to put it largely out of his mind, which could indicate that he is already unsure that getting their memories back would actually be a good thing.*



*Even though they just had an argument, Axl's primary concern is Beatrice's health, shown by his questions about what the medicine woman said and his insistence on going to see Jonus even though the climb up the mountain will be difficult and exhausting for him. Although neither of them have said it openly, it is clear that both Axl and Beatrice are concerned that Beatrice's pain might be more serious than she is willing to admit.*



Ivor comes back into the house and says that a “young fool” thought he saw a “fiend” come over the fence, but it turned out to be just a dream—the man had fallen asleep at his post. Ivor tells Axl and Beatrice that they’ll have to sleep in the main room while he sleeps in an inner room. Axl thanks him again for giving them such a comfortable space in which to stay the night. Ivor asks where they are traveling and Axl tells him about their plan to find their son’s village and to take a detour to meet Father Jonus. Ivor observes that the path to the monastery is in “Querig country,” which somewhat startles Axl and prompts him to ask if the “she-dragon” is still feared there. Ivor says that there are accounts of her attacking travelers but he thinks that it may actually be wild animals or bandits doing this.

Ivor says that he thinks the real danger associated with Querig “comes less from her own actions than from the fact of her continuing presence.” Ivor believes a “dark force” surrounds Querig and draws evil toward her, and he thinks it is “a disgrace she remains unslain all these years.” Beatrice asks Ivor who would be brave enough to face Querig and Ivor tells her there’s an old knight from the days of King Arthur who says his plan is to slay the dragon, but he doubts that “the old fool” has ever given Querig “a single moment of anxiety.” Ivor tells Beatrice and Axl to press on to the monastery, but to be careful.

Ivor starts going toward his bedroom, but Beatrice sits up and stops him, asking him to finish what he had been saying earlier about **the mist**. Ivor says that a strange Saxon had come through the year before and was really interested in why the people in the village were being affected by the mist. The stranger theorized, and Ivor has begun to agree, that “God himself had forgotten much from our pasts, events far distant, events of the same day,” and that if God forgot these things then human beings stood no chance of remembering them either. Beatrice asks Ivor if God would really forget everything, but Ivor doesn’t know how to answer. Instead, he excuses himself for bed.

*Axl’s surprise that Querig is still roaming the mountains near the monastery reveals that he has some kind of long-term memory associated with the dragon, as does everyone else. Querig, it would seem, is perceived as being a greater threat to everyone in the country than anything else, but her extended absence and Ivor’s lack of belief in the accounts of recent attacks casts doubt on the idea that she is actually alive and/or able to do anyone any real physical harm.*



*Ivor’s story of the old knight and his relation to King Arthur places the story after King Arthur’s death. This knight, however, is still alive, which confirms that the wars between Saxons and Britons, in which King Arthur is known to have played an important role as leader of the Britons, took place in the not too distant past. This would mean that Axl was alive at the time and his memories that were aroused by the sight of the Saxon warrior and the boatman’s stories of war, which indicates he may have taken part in these wars as soldier.*



*Ivor’s opinion that the mist is the result of God’s desire to forget the past is a way of denying the past’s reality. If it was God who made everyone forget, then it would be akin to him giving both Saxons and Britons a clean slate from which they could build more peaceful relations, but this, it would seem, could only happen by making everyone forget. However, this forgetting also means people forget the good parts of their pasts, which is why Beatrice is appalled that God would do that to them.*



Axl is suddenly shaken awake by Beatrice in the middle of the night. There are noises outside, and Ivor tells them to hope for good news as he rushes out the door. Beatrice tells Axl to get out of bed so they can go see what's happened. Still "bleary with sleep," Axl takes Beatrice's arm and they walk out toward the town square with the villagers. The bonfire is burning fiercely, but just beyond it, Axl spots the warrior, who appears calm even though he has specks of blood all over his face, standing there. As the crowd closes in, the warrior begins talking, although Axl can't understand what he says. The crowd reacts as he makes gestures and tells a story. To his horror, Axl sees the warrior lift up the severed arm of a large creature and then toss it on the ground. The warrior continues talking and Beatrice tells Axl that the warrior has killed both monsters and points out the rescued child, who is sitting on a stone staring at the warrior and surrounded by women who are cleaning his face.

Looking at the boy, Axl feels not happiness, but a "vague unease" that he attributes to the "odd manner of the boy himself." However, Axl soon realizes that what's really odd is how the boy is being treated: "there [is] a reserve, almost a coldness" rather than jubilation. This reminds Axl of Marta and he wonders if the boy was being forgotten when he was suddenly found. Beatrice has trouble understanding what's being said as the crowd grows louder, but suddenly Ivor appears next to the warrior and tries to say something. The crowd starts shouting and Beatrice tells Axl they should go back to Ivor's house. Axl asks her what was being said, but Beatrice is unsure and says there's an argument over the boy and that they will find out more in the morning.

Axl wakes up the next morning just as the sun starts lighting up the room. He is "in good spirits" because he woke up with a "pleasant memory drifting through his head." Looking at Beatrice, Axl feels a rush of "tender joy," but he is unsettled when, unexpectedly, there is also "a trace of sadness." Axl hears noises outside, but they seem to be the regular noises of daily life in a village. He realizes they've slept in later than he planned, so he opens a door, letting the sunlight in to wake Beatrice up. Beatrice also realizes it's late in the morning but is comforted by sounds outside that indicate life is going on as usual after the events of the night before.

*The sight of the warrior covered in blood and holding the severed arm of a large monster, presumably an ogre, is an alarming sight, particularly because this is a town that has only known peace for a long time. The warrior's calmness implies that he has seen some kind of combat before and is unbothered by violence and bloodshed, but also begs the question of how he experienced these things in what is supposed to be a peaceful land.*



*If Axl is right and the boy was being forgotten by his family and the rest of the village, then this could explain why they're acting suspicious of him now that he's returned. Once again, despite peace, Beatrice and Axl worry that if violence breaks out, they will be targeted because they are two of only three Britons in a well-protected Saxon town.*



*The "trace of sadness" Axl experiences is yet another indication that there is something wrong between him and Beatrice, but it's buried under the surface and Axl is actively trying to bury it further, not wanting to remember the reality. The return to daily life after such violence just the night before could be another sign of the power of the mist to make people forget, although it's clear that some people, including Axl and Beatrice, remember something of what happened.*



Axl and Beatrice quickly get dressed and pack up their belongings before heading outside to find something to eat. The town is bustling with life as they walk into the street and spot Ivor talking with the warrior. Spotting them, Ivor tells them he tried not to wake them up too early and offers to bring them to the longhouse for breakfast. He also introduces the warrior as Master Wistan and tells them that Wistan speaks the Briton language with ease. Axl greets Wistan and tells him it's an honor to meet such a brave man. As Wistan thanks him and commends his comrades from the night before, he stares intently at Axl, "as though some mark on the latter's face greatly fascinate[s] him."

Axl tells Wistan that he speaks "our language" very well. Wistan, catching himself staring, tells Axl that although Wistan is a Saxon, he lived among Britons for many years. Axl also notes that Wistan wears his sword like a Briton and not a Saxon, which Wistan laughingly confirms, explaining that he had been very well trained by a Briton. Wistan, observing that Axl is not from the village, asks Axl where he comes from. Axl describes the warren, but Wistan asks again if he's not from some place further west. Axl denies this and Wistan apologizes, saying he finds himself "seeing everywhere shadows of half-remembered faces" before asking Axl where they're going. Axl explains their journey and decision to go to the monastery. Ivor tells Wistan he needs to bring Axl and Beatrice to the longhouse for breakfast, and they leave.

Ivor, Axl, and Beatrice reach the longhouse and Ivor shows them in. Beatrice asks Ivor what happened the night before and he shares that some women found a small wound that looked like a bite on the boy, whose name is Edwin, and wanted to have him killed. Ivor locked the boy in a barn to keep him safe. Beatrice asks how this could happen and Ivor explains that "pagans will not look beyond their superstitions"—they think the boy will be transformed by the bite. Ivor has asked Wistan to take the boy with him and leave him at a village of Britons where he'll be safe, and Wistan has agreed to think this plan over. Before leaving them to eat breakfast, Ivor asks them to come say goodbye before leaving and then walks back into the town square.

*Wistan speaks both the Briton and Saxon languages fluently, which means that he has spent a lot of time in both groups and cultures and would have an elevated understanding of their relationship, differences, and perhaps take a unique view of the peace that exists between the two groups. Wistan staring at Axl in fascination implies that he recognizes Axl from somewhere, but this memory would likely be something locked away in his long-term memory, which has been shown as particularly vulnerable to the mist's influence.*



*As someone who spent much of his life with both Britons and Saxons, Wistan brings with him the best of both worlds. This is shown by his adoption of the Briton way of carrying his sword. Wistan says he was trained by the Britons, but this once again brings up the question of why he is being trained as a soldier in addition to why he, a Saxon, was being trained by a Briton. Wistan's questions about where Axl is from confirm that he recognizes Axl from somewhere long ago, but he can't quite remember where or how and hopes to remember more details about it if Axl can verify where they would have met.*



*Ivor confirms his belief that, as a Briton, he is somehow superior to the Saxons, who are plagued by what he sees as nonsense superstitions that limit their ability to think intelligently because they "will not look beyond" them. Furthermore, his choice of words (that they will not look instead of cannot) implies that he believes that Saxons are willfully living in ignorance and choosing not to be reasonable, presumably by adopting the beliefs of Britons.*



As they eat, Beatrice asks Axl if he thinks there was anything to what Ivor said about **the mist** the night before. Axl says he doesn't know what to think and Beatrice tells him that she thinks God is angry and ashamed about something they did in the past and is wishing for them all to forget it. Axl asks what they could have done, but Beatrice doesn't know what it might have been. Axl tells her that maybe the wise monk they are going to see will have an answer and he shares with Beatrice a happy memory he woke up with: walking arm in arm with her when they were young. Beatrice, trying to remember, says that Axl had gotten jealous over something a drunken man said to her that day, but Axl disagrees with this. Even though they disagree about the memory, Beatrice asserts that it's a wonderful thing to remember anything, and they continue eating.

Walking back to Ivor's house, Beatrice and Axl spot Wistan sitting on a lookout platform. All three are leaving shortly, but Wistan asks Axl to come up to him to talk for a moment. Beatrice tells Axl to go while she prepares for their departure. Up in the lookout post, Axl and Wistan admire the view of the countryside, which Wistan says stirs up strange feelings and memories in him. Wistan then tells Axl about Edwin's plight, saying that he wants to bring the boy to a village of Britons where Edwin will be safe. Wistan asks Axl if he would consider taking the boy to a Briton village himself, although Wistan will also accompany them for a while on the road, and Axl says they'll be happy to help and can bring the boy to their son's village. Axl and Wistan decide they should leave soon.

## CHAPTER 4

Edwin sits at the top of a tree, admiring the view of his village. The old woman is telling him not to climb any further, but the warrior had told him to keep watch from a height. From this vantage point, Edwin can see three soldiers guarding a bridge and arguing with a rider. The tree Edwin is in reminds him of Steffa, an elderly man who had been crippled but had the spirit of a warrior. Steffa had seen the same spirit in Edwin and predicted that someday he'd "become one to fear."

*Beatrice's opinion that human beings in England have done something unbelievably terrible in the recent past and that God has grown ashamed of them indicates that she herself believes some major sin has been committed, although she struggles to imagine what that sin might have been. The disagreement Axl and Beatrice have over what was supposed to be an innocent and happy memory is alarming because it reveals that, even though they are happy together now, they can't agree about the happiness they might have shared in the past, which, as Beatrice knows, would be a problem if they had to answer the boatman's questions.*



*Wistan once again drops a hint that he recognizes Axl from somewhere by stating that just being in the country there is calling back to his mind a number of memories from the distant past. It is another testament to the general amiability between Britons and Saxons that Wistan is so confident Edwin, an injured Saxon boy who presumably does not speak the language of Britons, will be treated well and welcomed into a Briton village.*



*Edwin, it seems, remembers a number of things from his past, namely his friendship with an elderly man in his village. Although he has undoubtedly been introduced to Beatrice, Axl, and Wistan by name, he doesn't refer to them by name, instead putting a distance between himself and them by referring to their age and professions when describing them, even to himself.*



Edwin thinks back to the events leading up to his departure from the village. His aunt, who cared for him since his mother left, had cursed him, and Elder Ivor was forced to drag him away and push him inside a barn for his own safety. In the barn, Edwin listened to the others throw rocks at the building. For hours Edwin had turned a wheel in the barn, hallucinating his mother's voice. Just as he felt that he was about to collapse with exhaustion, Edwin's mother's voice told him to call for the warrior. A short time later, Wistan opened the barn doors and examined Edwin's injury, which Wistan had made him promise not to talk about with the villagers. Wistan told him not to scratch the bite and to keep it clean, which Edwin agreed to.

Edwin momentarily forgot how he received the wound, but after leaving the village he remembers being back in the cage he had been trapped in by the ogres. They had tormented him with a "vicious little creature" by allowing it into the cage to attack him periodically, and during the final attack the creature had bitten him. The bite doesn't hurt, but it scared the people in his village so badly that he had to leave with the warrior. Edwin remembers Steffa's prediction that he'd find someone to train him to be a warrior one day and he rejoices that, by leaving with Wistan, it seems to be coming true. Edwin looks back down at the old Britons and Wistan and wonders why they're traveling together. He looks back to the soldiers on the bridge and realizes Wistan wanted to avoid them, which is why they weren't on the main road. However, there will be no way around them if Edwin and Wistan want to go forward. Edwin hopes that he will find his mother on their journey.

## CHAPTER 5

After a long hike upwards, Axl, Beatrice, Wistan, and Edwin realized they would have to find a bridge to cross a large river. However, the bridge was guarded by a group of soldiers, and even though they waited in the trees for a long time, the men didn't leave. Realizing the soldiers belong to Lord Brennus (a Briton) and aren't about to leave their post, Wistan suggests that he will keep his "jaw slack like a fool's" and leave the talking to Axl and Beatrice, who will say that Wistan is "a mute and a half-wit," that Edwin is his brother, and that they have been given to Axl and Beatrice to pay a debt. Beatrice asks if this is necessary and Wistan says it is merely a precaution.

*Edwin hears his mother's voice while he is locked in the barn, which means that he still feels a lot of love for her even though it's been years since she left. His aunt found it easy to curse him and was happy enough to send him away, which could mean that they were never particularly close. The voice of Edwin's mother told him to call to Wistan, which prompts him to see Wistan as his primary protector and the one he now owes the most loyalty to after his aunt cursed him earlier.*



*Although Edwin seems to have maintained many of his long-term memories, including those of Steffa and his mother, it's clear that he has trouble with short term memories because he somehow forgot how he was injured, which is notable because his abduction was clearly violent and traumatic. Edwin sees leaving with Wistan as an opportunity to live up to what he believes his potential is as a warrior. Just as Axl and Beatrice believe the love they have for their son will guide them to him, Edwin believes the love he has for his mother will guide him to her.*



*Wistan's plan to act like "a mute and a half-wit" rather than risk appearing able-bodied and mentally stable in front of Briton soldiers shows that he, at least, doesn't trust that existing peace means he won't be stopped and ill-treated by Lord Brennus' soldiers. This is also the first clue that Wistan has something to hide and could be lying about his intent in traveling through the country.*



Although they're not wearing chainmail, it is obvious that the three men are trained soldiers, and one of them, the grey-haired soldier, is apparently in charge. Walking up to them, Axl bids them good day and asks if they can cross the bridge, assuring them that they are "simple farmers" going to their son's village. One of the soldiers asks Axl who the two boys traveling with them are and Axl explains that they are brothers and will be trained to help them on the farm. The grey-haired soldier watches as Edwin holds their horse and Wistan giggles manically to himself. Axl notes that the grey-haired soldier seems ready to reprimand the two other soldiers for harassing Wistan, which reminds him of something he may have done himself once.

Axl comments that the soldiers must be busy and again tells them that he and his group just want to cross the bridge in peace. Tension is thick in the air when the grey-haired soldier finally comes over and tells them that there are some broken planks on the bridge and says they might be there to warn travelers of the risk. The grey-haired soldier asks Axl if they've seen any strangers, but Beatrice is the one who answers in the negative. The grey-haired soldier's look softens as Beatrice tells him they are going to visit their son. He tells her that he hasn't seen his own parents in a long time before allowing her and the others to go "in peace." His fellow soldiers hesitate but let them pass.

Once out of sight of the soldiers, Wistan drops his act and suggests they take a shortcut to avoid the main road. As they hike, Beatrice calls back to Axl from time to time to make sure he's still there. They wonder if the people back at their warren miss them, although Beatrice insists it was wrong of the people to take their candle away, and she believes the darkness is what caused the pain in her side. Axl reassures Beatrice that her pain is "nothing more than a tiny trouble," but promises that he'll ask for a candle when they return.

When they emerge from the forest back onto the main road, Wistan realizes that there is a rider somewhere ahead of them. Standing in the road, the group sees a man wearing armor and sitting against a tree next to a horse. The man calls out and demands that the group tell him who they are. Wistan tells Axl to do the talking, so Axl calls back that they're "simple wayfarers" who "wish only to go by in peace" with their horse, a young boy, and "a half-wit mute." The man tells them to come and rest next to him and he'll share his bread. Beatrice asks if they should accept the invitation and Wistan says they should, so they go forward after establishing that Edwin will keep the horse nearby, Wistan will resume acting like a mute, and Wistan's sword will be kept well-hidden.

*Axl relates to the grey-haired soldier's evident desire to tell the other two soldiers not to be needlessly cruel, particularly because Wistan appears to be mentally ill. This shows that Axl himself is not a willfully cruel person and is predisposed to kindness and understanding rather than bravado. Axl's sense that he's been in a position similar to that of the grey-haired soldier also indicates that he remembers a time when he would have been the one in charge, but unable to exercise complete authority over those under him.*



*Beatrice reminds the grey-haired soldier of his own mother, which causes him to be much kinder and gentler to the whole group. The soldier's ability to relate to Beatrice because of the love she evidently has for her son, which is similar to the love the soldier has for his mother, is enough to do away with the suspicion that all of the soldiers clearly felt. This shows that while suspicion existed, it was something easily gotten over once two people could find common ground.*



*Even though they now travel with two more people, Beatrice and Axl stand apart because of their relationship and age. The fact that Beatrice associates her pain with having their candle taken away validates Axl's desire to get her away from the warren. Clearly the social environment there was worse for her than she had let on at the time.*



*Although Wistan remains suspicious enough to want to pretend to be weaker than he is, the stranger is clearly very trusting and truly believes that no matter who these people are, he will surely be safe with them. The stranger has more confidence in the peace between Saxons and Britons, giving him no reason to be as suspicious as Wistan, Beatrice, and Axl clearly are.*



Seeing their hesitation, the man calls out that he's a knight, but only carries his sword and armor "out of duty" to King Arthur, who died many years before. As they get closer, Axl notes that the knight is, in fact, very old and that his armor is rusted and creaky. The knight says that his horse, Horace, tricked him into stopping to rest and eat. He invites Axl and the others to share some fresh bread. Axl and Beatrice sit next to the knight, but Wistan and Edwin stay at a distance with the horse. The knight asks where they are going, so Beatrice tells him about going to find their son's village and their intention to stop at the monastery. The knight tells them he's sure the monks will welcome them.

Wistan suddenly walks up, drops his act, and apologizes for having pretended to be a mute before introducing himself and telling the knight that he is on a mission for his king. The knight observes that Wistan is far from home. Wistan agrees with this and then hazards a guess that the knight is none other than Sir Gawain. The knight confirms that he is, and that King Arthur had been his uncle. Wistan tells Sir Gawain that even though he's a Saxon, he holds King Arthur in high esteem.

Having become friendly with each other, Wistan asks Sir Gawain to look at Axl, who is about as old as Sir Gawain, and tell him if he's seen Axl before somewhere. Beatrice is surprised, and Axl asks how Wistan thinks he recognizes him. Instead of answering, Wistan says they should let Sir Gawain do as he asked. Sir Gawain, thinking it's a game, turns and looks. As he looks at Axl, however, Sir Gawain is evidently surprised and Axl looks away. Sir Gawain says he's never seen Axl before, and Beatrice asks Wistan what he's looking for in Axl. Wistan says Axl's face reminds him of someone from the past, but he can't remember whom. Axl tells Beatrice not to worry, that Wistan has just made a mistake. Still, Beatrice wants to know if Axl's face brings Wistan good or bad memories, so Wistan tells her that he thinks they're good memories but can't remember.

Axl asks Wistan why he insists on using a disguise even though the country has been at peace for years. Wistan says that the question is a fair one and explains that he doesn't want to get into a fight with Lord Brennus or his soldiers on account of being a Saxon in Briton-ruled territory. Furthermore, Wistan has been asked by his king to look into rumors about Saxons being ill-treated by Britons in the area. Sir Gawain says he understands Wistan's situation perfectly, having traveled in Saxon-ruled land himself.

*The knight serves the now deceased King Arthur, which is further proof that the wars between Saxons and Britons occurred only a few short years before the current day. The knight's willingness to own that he was part of King Arthur's army (made up of Britons) so close to a Saxon village means that he expects all those in the country to share his respect for Arthur and is not worried about any lingering anger. It's also clear that the knight is very familiar with the area, which is near where Querig is said to live, because he knows the monks enough to be able to reassure Beatrice that they'll all be welcomed there.*



*Even though he is a Saxon, Wistan seems to know that he is safe around a knight of King Arthur, which seems to confirm Sir Gawain's feelings that Arthur is universally respected and liked. Because King Arthur is Sir Gawain's uncle, it means that Arthur's reputation reflects directly on his own and that of his family, which makes Sir Gawain even more anxious to see that Arthur is considered a positive figure in English history.*



*Wistan expects that Sir Gawain will be able to remember who Axl was once upon a time, which is another indication that Axl had been part of the army led by King Arthur. Sir Gawain evidently does remember Axl, and Axl senses that this is so, but he is also anxious to convince Beatrice that this can't be possible and that a mistake has been made. This shows that there are other things Axl is worried Beatrice might learn about their past that would challenge her love for him. Wistan's assertion that he associates Axl's face with good memories is comforting to all of them, including Axl, who is still not entirely sure of what role he might have played as a soldier.*



*Wistan confirms that there is still a predisposition for violence and a deep lack of trust between Saxons and Britons when he says that he was sent to check on the state of Briton-Saxon relations. Presumably, if Saxons are being mistreated then the Saxon king will send armies to defend them, bringing war back to England.*



Wistan asks Sir Gawain if he receives the same respect as a knight of King Arthur in areas where Arthur “was once such a dreaded enemy.” Sir Gawain assures him that Arthur’s name is a well-respected one everywhere he’s gone because he had been so generous even after defeating the Saxons. As they talk about Arthur, Axl discovers a “fragment of a memory” of himself being in a tent near and battlefield and feeling very angry about something.

Beatrice tells Wistan that there are several Saxon families in their own village and he points out the prosperity of the Saxons in the town they lately left. Sir Gawain also assures Wistan that, although there are wars in other places, Saxons and Britons have “long been friends and kin” in this country. Wistan agrees and says he’ll be happy to tell his king as much. Wistan also asks Sir Gawain how King Arthur brought peace to the land. Sir Gawain says that the people who were conquered by Arthur simply “saw his fairness and wished him as their king.” Wistan finds this hard to believe after so many Saxon children were slaughtered, but Gawain tells him that Arthur had always ordered them not to touch innocent women or children. Still, Wistan says that the peace there is “remarkable” and wants to know if Axl agrees.

Just then the group notices Edwin calling to them from the road and then they hear hooves approaching. The grey-haired soldier from the bridge appears and greets Sir Gawain. Wistan resumes acting like a mute and Edwin stealthily moves closer, but the grey-haired soldier tells him not to come any closer, telling Sir Gawain he wants to question Axl and the others. Axl watches the soldier adjust his position, which makes it impossible for Wistan to rush at him without being killed. Axl and Beatrice stand up and then help Sir Gawain up. Axl asks the soldier if he’s forgotten quizzing them not long before. The soldier says he does remember them, but at the time had forgotten his duty, only rushing after them once he remembered that he was looking for a Saxon warrior and a young boy.

*Wistan says Arthur was once a “dreaded enemy,” which is a direct challenge to the image of a wise and just leader that Sir Gawain encourages. Wistan’s awareness of this previous perception of Arthur means that nothing about Arthur’s history is as simple as Gawain makes it out to be. As Wistan and Gawain discuss Arthur and his legacy, Axl receives a clearer memory of battle and being angry. The timing of this memory suggests that Axl’s anger had something to do with Arthur.*



*Beatrice’s anxiety to convince Wistan that Britons and Saxons get along shows that she understands how dangerous things can get if Wistan decides Saxons are being mistreated. Sir Gawain’s explanations, however, seem inadequate. He fails to account for the fact that, as Wistan says, women and children were slaughtered during war and it is highly unbelievable that entire Saxon villages that had been threatened and even plundered by Arthur’s armies would simply accept him as a leader because he was generous. Wistan is of this same opinion, which is why he continues to challenge what Gawain is saying. Gawain is choosing to share the image of Arthur that he wants people to remember but refusing to admit any of Arthur’s faults or mistakes, thus endowing him with a much better reputation that he would otherwise have.*



*The appearance of the grey-haired soldier and Wistan’s immediate reaction to resume acting like a mute is a stark reminder of the danger of letting one’s guard down in the country at the time. The event also highlights that nobody is truly safe from the mysterious mist that makes people forget, as shown by the fact that the soldier had forgotten the one assignment he had been given by his commander.*



Axl explains to the grey-haired soldier that he doesn't think the Saxons he's traveling with are the ones the soldier is looking out for because they were given to Axl to pay off a debt. The soldier asks Sir Gawain what he knows about them and Sir Gawain confirms that they are "simple creatures." Even when the soldier raises his sword to Wistan, he doesn't break character and continues to act like a mute. Sir Gawain grows angry at the soldier, but the soldier insists on inspecting Edwin to see if he is the same boy he's looking for. The soldier is distracted just long enough for Wistan to call his horse and grab his sword. Preparing for a duel, the soldier begs Sir Gawain to help, but he refuses.

The grey-haired soldier tells Sir Gawain that Wistan is here to slay Querig, which alarms Sir Gawain. Wistan confirms that this is part of his mission but says he doesn't see why anyone would be against it. Sir Gawain explains that King Arthur had entrusted the slaying of the dragon to Sir Gawain himself, and he doesn't want help doing it. He tries to talk Wistan out of pursuing the dragon. The soldier continues asking for help, but Sir Gawain continues to refuse. Beatrice asks Wistan if he can't just disarm the soldier and send him away, but Wistan predicts and the soldier confirms that he would just go to Lord Brennus for backup. This established, the soldier is forced to face Wistan alone and is quickly killed in a duel.

Turning away from the dead soldier, Wistan tells Sir Gawain that the Saxon king has also received word that Lord Brennus wants to wage war and take the land in which they're traveling. Furthermore, he reveals that they have received word that Lord Brennus has a man who can tame dragons with him, and he intends to tame Querig and use her in battle. Wistan's mission is to kill the dragon before she can be taken by Lord Brennus. Sir Gawain is surprised but believes Wistan's words. Sir Gawain then says he will help bury the soldier's body and then return the soldier's horse to Lord Brennus and say he was attacked by bandits. He also begs Wistan to return to his homeland and leave Querig to be slain by himself.

## CHAPTER 6

Although he's exhausted, Axl has a difficult time sleeping because their bed is in an upper story and he's never been able to sleep so high up. Axl thinks his sleeplessness might also be due to the strange sounds in the monastery, although Beatrice fell asleep quickly in spite of them. Edwin, too, is asleep, but Wistan waited until the monks retired to bed and then snuck out to explore and, even though he was warned not to, cut more wood. Although he hasn't heard their voices in a long time, Axl believes there are dozens of monks listening to Wistan just below the window.

*Sir Gawain grows just as angry with the grey-haired soldier as the same soldier grew with his own men when they harassed Wistan, which had reminded Axl of similar feelings he had experienced once. This shows that all three men are keenly aware of the importance of being just, but also shows that they struggle to stand up for people who are being wronged when those in the wrong are doing what they're told to. This calls into question exactly how much wrong they would allow to happen on their watch in the name of following orders, even if they know those orders are unjust or inhumane.*



*The grey-haired soldier seems to know that Sir Gawain would be alarmed by the news that Wistan means to kill Querig, but Sir Gawain's insistence that he be the one to do it just because Arthur told him to seems rather inadequate. This implies that there is a different, secret reason for Sir Gawain's alarm. More importantly, the soldier is obviously trying to justify the use of violence against Wistan and knows that Sir Gawain will not stop him because, secretly, Gawain will want him to win, thus ensuring Querig's safety from Wistan.*



*It would seem both Lord Brennus and the Saxon king are prepared for war to break out despite the peaceful relationship between most Saxons and Britons. This indicates that, for a select few at least, the wars from the past are not entirely over; their mutual preparedness to do battle together means this period of peace is doomed to end in the near future. And, as is soon discovered, whether Querig lives or dies is one of the most important determining factors in how soon violence breaks out across the country again, hence Sir Gawain (who loves peace) is anxious to convince Wistan to let Querig live.*



*Wistan is cutting wood even though he was told not to, which means he has an ulterior motive for wanting to be outside in the courtyard even in the middle of the night. The warning to Wistan also shows that there is some kind of suspicion attached to him and by cutting wood he is drawing a dangerous amount of attention to himself.*



Earlier that day, Axl looked out at the monks and noticed “a furtive mood among them” as they whispered to one another and looked impatiently at one of the stone buildings. Another monk, Father Brian, brought up a tray of food for Axl and Beatrice while Wistan and Edwin were out exploring the monastery. While Axl and Beatrice eat, Father Brian talks about other visitors, fishing in a nearby stream, and a dog they had cared for once. All the while a group of birds inside the building flew back and forth above them until another monk came running up to scream at the birds, trying to chase them out and throwing rocks until Father Brian convinced him to leave.

Once the monk who yelled at the birds was gone, Beatrice asked Father Brian if she could meet with Father Jonus to ask his advice soon. Father Brian told her that Father Jonus was unwell and that there were orders from the abbot not to let anyone disturb him, although he promised to ask the abbot to make an exception for her as soon as he could. Beatrice spotted the abbot returning and pointed him out to Father Brian, who promised to talk to him that day if he could.

Listening to Wistan chop wood, Axl thinks back to their parting from Sir Gawain, who had attempted up until the last moment to make Wistan promise not to try to kill Querig and instead speed home immediately after bringing Axl and Beatrice to the monastery. Wistan refused to give Sir Gawain this promise. Afterward, Sir Gawain looked at Wistan “with intense hostility.”

Lying in the dark in the monastery, Axl feels sorry for the grey-haired soldier and suddenly remembers being on horseback behind a man named Harvey, whose entire posture “announced malevolence” toward a group of people heading their way. Knowing the “savagery” of his companion, Axl carefully brought his horse up next to Harvey’s, thus coming between him and the people trying to pass safely. Harvey, not realizing Axl’s real purpose, simply nodded to him. Axl had been “especially anxious” for these travelers because not long before he had seen Harvey suddenly start beating innocent villagers. Axl was angry at whoever had “handicapped him with such a companion,” but he had no choice but to press on.

Axl also remembers talking with Beatrice, who was much younger then, about whether or not a plant they had found was rosemary or a weed that brought bad luck to maidens. Beatrice had called him off the road to ask him if he could recognize the plant, but he believed it was just a weed and teased Beatrice for thinking so much about its potential for bad luck. Axl wonders if this was the first time the two of them had talked, or if she had known him already.

*The “furtive mood” in the monastery shows that the monks are ill at ease with the arrival of Wistan, Axl, Beatrice, and Edwin. This implies that the monks know something about the group and are suspicious, but are also anxious to avoid that being noticed, further implying that something is not right and the group could be in danger.*



*Although he is not directly saying no, Father Brian is knowingly making a false promise to Beatrice that he will get her an interview with Father Jonus. His promise to talk to the abbot falls through immediately.*



*Sir Gawain’s eagerness to make Wistan promise not to kill Querig and “intense hostility” when Wistan refuses to make that promise confirms that there is a lot of distrust, suspicion, and even hatred on Sir Gawain’s part. Furthermore, Gawain feels threatened by Wistan, as shown by his desire to exact the promise not to kill Querig.*



*As more of Axl’s long-term memories come back to him, it becomes clearer that he had been a soldier under King Arthur, but that he had not entirely fit in. He sees his companion, Harvey, as a burden because of his violence, which shows that Axl himself was not violent and preferred peace to war. This would also mean that Axl got very little pleasure from being a knight, but his concern for the safety of the shepherds shows that he may have been better suited to politics or diplomacy.*



*Axl’s memory of Beatrice shows that they had once been very playful together. This differs from their current attitude toward one another; now they are serious, gentle, and careful with one another even though, at one point, Axl had been comfortable teasing her.*



Axl hears Wistan resume cutting wood and wonders why the warrior is so intent on working so late at night, especially after Father Jonus told him not to do it anymore. Axl had believed that the woodcutting was just out of courtesy, but Wistan explained to him that the view from the woodshed allowed him to keep an eye on everything going on in the monastery. Furthermore, delivering wood where it is needed gives Wistan further opportunities to explore the area.

Axl leaves Beatrice dozing in their room to talk to Wistan in the courtyard while the monks are away in a meeting. Axl asks Wistan if he's suspicious of the monks. Wistan says that he wants nothing more than to sleep, but now that they're in the monastery, he can't shake the idea that it "holds dangers" for them. In explanation, Wistan tells Axl that when brought his horse to the stables, he heard the sounds of another horse behind a wall but couldn't find access to it. He had asked another monk, but that monk said they didn't keep any horses. Wistan says this leads him to believe that another person has arrived, and that the monks are trying to hide this fact from them. Axl points out that Father Brian mentioned an important visitor was due to arrive, and Wistan agrees that this may be the explanation but says that he sent Edwin to explore some more just in case.

Wistan tells Axl that Edwin came to him earlier to report that he had heard moans "as of a man in pain" coming from a nearby shelter, and had noticed blood, both fresh and old, by a locked chamber. Axl tells him that it may be that a monk fell down the narrow stairway, which Wistan agrees might be the case. Still, Wistan wishes he had his sword nearby and mentions that the "walls whisper to [him] of days gone by." Axl asks what he means and Wistan explains that the building had not always been a monastery but was very likely a Saxon fort with traps to keep the inhabitants safe and trap invaders. Wistan states, "This is today a place of peace and prayer, yet you needn't gaze so deep to find blood and terror."

*Wistan confirms that he is suspicious of the monks and what is going on in the monastery. Wistan wants to explore the area, which could also mean that he wants to be sure of being able to find an exit when they need one, which reveals that his suspicion is that someone might come looking for him in the monastery.*



*The secret space in the stable implies that there are a number of secretive things that happen in the monastery at all times, not just now that Wistan and the others are there. This casts suspicion on all of the monks themselves and whether they are really there out of faith or if they have some other motive and are using their status as monks to deflect suspicion from outsiders. Unlike Wistan, Axl is predisposed to give the monks the benefit of the doubt, which is a testament to how much of a trusting person he is.*



*Wistan is evidently familiar with Saxon military history and traditions because he is able to recognize details that indicate traps and imply some sort of past violence. By turning the fortress into a monastery, the monks are trying to cover up the truth. Between this and evidence that the monks are on edge and hiding something, Wistan begins to see the monastery as a dangerous place, shown by his desire for his sword.*



Axl shudders at Wistan's description but realizes it's the truth. Wistan goes on to say that, in times of war, the Saxon families would have stood in the yard to "witness the invaders squeal like trapped mice" as they were slaughtered at the gates. Axl disagrees and says they would have hidden and prayed to God because such people "would take no pleasure in bloodshed, even of the enemy." Wistan, however, argues that they were a people "at the end of a brutal road, having seen their children and kin mutilated and ravished" and, although the fort would have been their final retreat before being overtaken, they would have cherished the sight of the invaders being killed. Still Axl disbelieves that it's possible "to hate so deeply" for something that hadn't happened yet and insists they would have held out hope. Once again, Wistan says that Axl is wrong and that he himself has seen "dark hatred as bottomless as the sea" in the elderly and children alike, and felt this hatred himself.

To end the argument, Axl says he's glad that the idea will never be put to the test. Wistan looks "strangely" at Axl before apologizing for "questioning that good knight" about whether or not he recognized Axl. Axl tells him that he took "no offense" and has no doubt that Wistan made a simple mistake. Wistan tells Axl that he mistook him for a man who was "a thing of wonder" to him when he was a child and who often came to the village to talk with the elders and move amongst them, even though he was a Briton. This, however, was before Wistan was taken by soldiers and trained as a warrior by Britons. Wistan tells Axl that seeing him the first time brought back memories of this man from his childhood, but he admits he was mistaken.

Edwin comes back from his exploring and speaks to Wistan for a moment. Axl walks over to them and Wistan tells him that Edwin found something that they should go see for themselves. On the way, Wistan says he may keep and train Edwin as a warrior instead of leaving him at a village. Edwin leads them to a distant part of the monastery in which there is a cart with a cage full of chains, manacles, and an iron mask with only a small hole for the mouth. Observing it, Wistan realizes that the device is for holding a man in place while the mountain birds peck away at him. Wistan also sees that it has been used recently, an observation that sends a chill down Axl's spine.

*Axl and Wistan's discussion reveals how differently they think: Wistan readily sees the hatred and negativity present in men's hearts, but Axl focuses on the good, hope, and light in men. This further confirms that Axl is more of a diplomat than a soldier and that he would struggle with having to commit violence. Wistan's description of the people who would have used the monastery as a fortress also implies that Wistan has had similar near-death experiences during a war and is, therefore, better able to understand the fear and hatred the Saxons felt there.*



*Wistan looks "strangely" at Axl after hearing Axl say that he's glad they'll never witness the kind of violence Wistan just described. This look shows that Wistan is still struggling with the feeling that he recognizes Axl as someone from his past, which was evidently characterized by hatred and war. This calls into question exactly what role Axl played in the war in his youth and whether he had always been so unwilling to use violence against another person.*



*The torture device Edwin finds was obviously not supposed to be found because it reveals a side to life at the monastery that is not as cheery and straightforward as Father Brian tried to portray. Instead, it becomes clear that something dark is going on there and it goes beyond the fact that the monks are suspicious of the group.*



Axl says he wants to return to Beatrice, and Wistan agrees. As they start walking back, Edwin abruptly stops, and they notice a monk watching them silently. Wistan leads them over to the monk and asks him what the purpose of the device they just found is. The monk remains silent but leads them down narrow paths back inside the monastery, where Beatrice is waiting for them. The monk leads them to a small room and a “frail voice” welcomes them. There is a monk in the bed suffering from numerous injuries, who introduces himself as Jonus, and the silent monk as Ninian. Beatrice asks him how he got his injuries, but he changes the subject.

Jonus asks Edwin to come forward, but Wistan doesn't let him even though Beatrice says he should let Jonus look at Edwin's wound. Jonus asks why Wistan seems so cautious, so Wistan explains that he has seen the torture device and believes they use it as a form of penance for past iniquities and questions how their God can be bribed this way. Jonus tells Wistan that their God is merciful, to which Wistan replies that “boundless mercy” is useless since it allows people “to pursue their greed, their lust for land and blood” knowing they can receive mercy later. Jonus agrees with Wistan's feelings and says the presence of the birds is a sign of God's anger. Wistan becomes more understanding and asks if this means he has “friends” in the monastery, which Jonus confirms. Wistan then allows Edwin to be examined by Jonus, who says the wound will go away if kept clean.

Interested in the conversation between Jonus and Wistan, Beatrice tells Jonus about her conversation about **the mist** with the medicine woman. She asks Jonus if either he or Wistan knows where the mist comes from and how she and Axl “might be free of it” and get their memories back. Wistan tells her that Querig causes the mist and that the monks in the monastery protect her. Beatrice tells Axl this means that everyone's memories will come back if either Wistan or Sir Gawain can kill the dragon. Still, there is danger that Wistan will not be able to do so if he is caught at the monastery, so both Beatrice and Jonus urge him to hurry on his way. Wistan doesn't agree, but steps out with Edwin so Beatrice can ask Jonus about her pain.

*Ninian brings Axl, Beatrice, Wistan, and Edwin to Jonus in private, which reveals divisions between monks in the monastery. This also implies that Father Brian is suspicious of what Father Jonus might tell them and is using Jonus's injuries as an excuse not to give him the chance to talk to them.*



*Wistan evidently scorns the Christian god because Christians use the possibility of forgiveness to justify their crimes. This attitude allows them to commit the worst atrocities without allowing it to weigh too heavily on their conscience—at least, if they truly believe in God's forgiveness. Wistan's condemnation of the Christian god also shows that he prefers vengeance and making those who did wrong pay for their crimes. It follows that Wistan himself will not show much mercy to those who wrong him. Father Jonus's confirmation that Wistan has “friends” in the monastery means that there are others who are supportive of Wistan's mission in the country and may be able to help him in some way, which further highlights the divisions between monks in the monastery.*



*Father Jonus says that the monks in the monastery are there to protect and help care for Querig. It is also known that the monks are Britons, which means that whoever gave them the orders to take care of Querig was also a Briton. Beatrice's immediate thought is that they can use the knowledge of the source of the mist to end it and benefit themselves by restoring their memories. This shows either a lack of consideration for the possible negative repercussions of reminding the entire country about all that used to divide them, or a firm belief that, for all those in England (as well as themselves), the return of bad memories along with the good will not be enough to disrupt the peace and happiness they are all enjoying.*



Axl struggles to identify the emotions he felt when he and Beatrice were told the cause of **the mist**, but he is unable to. Jonus asks Beatrice questions about her pain and where it started, eventually telling her that she'll be able to go to her son in safety, although Axl can't remember how Jonus arrived at this conclusion. Jonus notes that Beatrice is happy to know about the mist. Beatrice confirms this and says it gives her and Axl a clearer idea of what they should do going forward. Jonus asks her if she's sure it's not better for them to have forgotten the past, but Beatrice insists they're ready to know the whole truth.

A bird flying across the room startles Axl and he realizes he had fallen asleep. He notices the sound of Wistan's woodcutting has stopped. Axl thinks about Jonus's questions about Beatrice's pain, but realizes that the questions Beatrice is really afraid of are the boatman's.

## CHAPTER 7

Axl is woken up by Father Brian shaking him. Beatrice is already awake, and Edwin is getting out of bed while Father Brian urges them to hurry. Axl hears voices outside and Father Brian assures them that he is going to try to save them, but they have to hurry and do as he says. Father Brian says the "older Saxon brother" is trapped but is distracting the soldiers. Father Brian tells them to leave their stuff and follow him quietly. The three follow Father Brian to a room full of boxes and broken furniture. Axl asks what has happened and Father Brian says it's "a mystery" and the soldiers had simply appeared and demanded the two Saxons. Beatrice expresses anxiety about Wistan's safety, but Father Brian says they have very little time and must go down through a trapdoor and escape the monastery through some secret tunnels.

Axl helps Father Brian lift the heavy door so they can go down, but Edwin initially refuses and insists on going to help Wistan. Axl tells Beatrice to tell Edwin whatever she has to in order to get him into the tunnels. Beatrice says something and Edwin goes straight down the ladder into the tunnel. Beatrice and Axl follow him and then hear the trapdoor slam shut. Beatrice says that this seems a bit strange, especially because they can hear furniture being moved back over the door. Axl agrees but reminds her of the soldiers and says they should go forward in the tunnels.

*Axl's inability to recognize how he felt when he learned there was a way to restore his memories indicates that he is as yet unsure that he wants the past to be revealed to them and is keenly aware that, as strong as the peace between Britons and Saxons (as well as between Beatrice and himself) may be, nobody can be sure that restoring everyone's memories is actually the best thing for anyone.*



*Beatrice's primary concern is that she will be separated from Axl by the boatman, which means they will both be alone for eternity. Axl realizes this and it tells him that Beatrice is insecure about their relationship even though they are so happy in the present.*



*Wistan was right to be suspicious of the monastery, as shown by the presence of soldiers there. Furthermore, the presence of soldiers provides yet another striking contrast between what the monastery is supposed to be and reality. Once again, a Saxon is being targeted there by Britons just as Wistan described happening in the past.*



*Beatrice and Axl both blindly trust the goodness of the monks just as they blindly trust appearances. However, as has been seen, appearances can be deceiving: the monastery appears to have been made for prayer and peace, but Wistan had been able to recognize the hidden truth that it had initially been a scene of gruesome violence.*



As they walk, Axl, Beatrice, and Edwin notice a “feeble light” that allows them to see each other a little bit. Edwin suddenly comes to a stop and Beatrice grabs Axl’s hand and asks if he also hears the noise, saying that there is something in the tunnels with them. There is a sudden loud sound and some flashes that make a flame before Sir Gawain announces his presence and tells them he’s relieved to see them. Beatrice asks what he’s doing in the tunnels and he explains he’s been walking in front of them to protect them from a beast that lives in the tunnels. He says the monks deceived them and sent them into the tunnels to die, but Ninian got word to Gawain about the plan and brought him to the tunnels earlier.

Axl asks about the monster in the tunnel and Sir Gawain explains that the monks, and even the abbot, “send down here those they wish dead” rather than poisoning or stabbing them. Beatrice asks if the monks want them dead, and Sir Gawain says that they certainly want Edwin dead because he is a danger and they would have Beatrice and Axl killed to keep them from being witnesses to their crimes. Sir Gawain assures them that he, as a knight of Arthur, can keep them safe from the monster and that Ninian told him the tunnel had an exit.

As they walk, Beatrice is alarmed when she feels her foot hit against what she thinks is a child. Although Sir Gawain tries to keep them moving, Axl uses the candle to look around and sees a dead bat for a moment before the candle goes out. Beatrice, however, insists she saw a child’s bones and Axl tells Sir Gawain he thinks he saw bones under the bat. Sir Gawain insists he saw no bones and asks Axl if he ever stood “beside the great Arthur,” because Sir Gawain had. Sir Gawain then admits that he told the abbot about Wistan but asks if he was to know “how dark the hearts of holy men could turn” before insisting again that there are no bones.

Sir Gawain continues talking loudly despite Axl’s warning until they hear a sudden noise down the tunnel. For “several moments” the group stands still and listens, but no more sounds are made. Beatrice says she wants to get out of the tunnels and Sir Gawain tells them they have no choice but to keep going forward. Eventually, they find themselves “in some sort of mausoleum” with pillars and traces of murals on the walls. They also realize that they are now surrounded by human bones, which Sir Gawain no longer tries to deny. He says, “our whole country is this way,” with bones from times of slaughter lying just beneath the surface of the earth. Sir Gawain says he and Horace have “grown weary of it.”

*Sir Gawain’s account further justifies Wistan’s suspicions. This highlights how dangerous it could be to be too trusting in England at the time even though there is peace and, seemingly, no further reason for violence between anyone. Still, Beatrice and Axl find themselves with few choices other than to continue trusting those around them, especially Sir Gawain.*



*The monks rely on their appearance as holy and pious men to avoid suspicion of the truth that they are dangerous, treacherous, and guilty of committing some of the worst sins. In this, they resemble the very monastery they live in: peaceful on the surface, but full of darkness within.*



*Sir Gawain’s dramatic response to Beatrice and Axl claiming to have seen human bones reveals that Gawain is being weighed down by a guilty conscience. Sir Gawain considers the most noble time of his life to have been when he was fighting alongside the supposedly just and wise King Arthur, which is why he brings up the fact that he had been with Arthur once. Sir Gawain’s guilt is associated with the fact that he had turned Wistan in, and the bones Beatrice found remind Sir Gawain that Wistan may be killed and, if he is, it will be Gawain’s fault.*



*The fact that Sir Gawain and Horace are “weary” with the evidence of past slaughter means that he is able to recognize the signs of it just as well as Wistan is. Furthermore, Sir Gawain extends the concept that, despite surface appearances of beauty and peace, the entire country is pervaded by an undercurrent of darkness and bloodshed that can only be recognized once one actively tries to dig beneath those surface appearances.*



Sir Gawain and Axl realize that there is a portcullis that can be raised or lowered with a pulley, but it is currently raised so they can pass through it. Sir Gawain believes this is how the monks stay safe while they feed the monster. Sir Gawain also notices that Edwin has begun to sing what sounds like a lullaby while facing the wall and rocking his body. Sir Gawain notes that Edwin sounds bewitched. Axl then decides to cut the rope holding the gate open to let it close, in the hope that the monster will come forward and they can see what it is before fighting it. Sir Gawain agrees and cuts the rope. Relaxed now that the gate is closed, they wander around the chamber.

Referring to the skeletons, Beatrice asks Axl if “this beast” really killed so many people. Sir Gawain turns to them and asks if Beatrice is suggesting that he “committed this slaughter,” but he says it “tiredly, with none of the anger he had shown earlier.” He says that he had seen himself kill hundreds at a time in a dream once. He tells Beatrice, “I acted as I thought would please God.” Sir Gawain then explains that as soon as he found out what was in store for Axl, Beatrice, Wistan, and Edwin, he had asked Ninian to put him in the tunnel to protect them.

Edwin starts singing again and Axl says it’s because the boy is overwhelmed before asking Sir Gawain why the monks want Edwin dead and if it has to do with the ogre bite. Sir Gawain explains that the bite came from a dragon, not an ogre, and that this bite will compel Edwin to “seek congress with a she-dragon.” This, Sir Gawain explains, is why Wistan is interested in Edwin: he can lead Wistan to Querig. Edwin suddenly rushes to the gate and Sir Gawain grabs him. Edwin resists, but soon they both step back and the monster reveals itself. It is the size of a bull, but with a wolf-like head. Sir Gawain, however, says he had imagined worse and, despite Axl’s warnings, is confident that he can slay it.

They form a plan for Axl and Beatrice to pull the rope that opens the gate while Edwin stands and back with Sir Gawain so that when the monster charges at Edwin, Sir Gawain can step out and kill it. Although Axl and Beatrice initially struggle with the gate, eventually it opens, and the beast charges out as planned. Sir Gawain swings his sword, but it seems as if he misses and the creature continues running down the tunnel. Axl tells them to run and he’ll distract the beast, but they ignore him and stare at something on the ground near Sir Gawain’s feet: the beast’s head, although the body has kept running and the jaw keeps snapping. Axl congratulates Sir Gawain, who says they should hurry out of the tunnel.

*Not only do the monks use these tunnels to trap people so they can be killed by a monster, but they actively feed that monster to keep it alive so they can carry on with their work. This means that the monks are always prepared to betray someone when needed. Ironically, the monastery—supposed to be an immensely peaceful place—is one of the most dangerous and treacherous places any of them have been.*



*When Sir Gawain hears Beatrice mention a “beast” that has killed a lot of people, his immediate conclusion is that she is talking about him. This reveals that, on some level, Sir Gawain considers himself a beast for the things he has done in the past, including killing people. Sir Gawain is trying to right some of his past wrongs by volunteering to help protect Beatrice and Axl now.*



*Wistan had feigned interest in the boy as an innocent person in need of protection, but Sir Gawain’s story means that Wistan has been exploiting Edwin for his own ends from the beginning. This calls into question just how honorable and just Wistan (who has consistently argued in favor of fairness and justice) actually is.*



*Despite evidence of Sir Gawain’s treachery and the danger having Edwin has put them in, the whole group is able to work together towards a common end. Furthermore, Axl’s initial reaction to seeing the beast keep running is to get everyone else out of the tunnels and leave him to distract the monster, which highlights his selflessness and concern for others that was first implied in his disgust with his former companion’s violence towards other people.*



Soon they reach the end of the tunnel and find themselves in the forest. Axl and Beatrice sit down, but soon notice Edwin is gone. Sir Gawain tells them the boy immediately ran off—he believes Edwin is going back to help Wistan. Axl is upset, but Sir Gawain insists there was nothing he could do to stop Edwin. Beatrice asks Sir Gawain if they're to understand that he turned Wistan in, but instead of an answer Sir Gawain asks, "Why go through it again, mistress?" Axl tells Sir Gawain he thanks him for protecting them and then asks if they were "comrades once long ago." Again, Sir Gawain doesn't answer, but says he must go to Horace. Axl tells him the talk of King Arthur "stirs long-faded thoughts," but Sir Gawain simply tells him to go to his son and that the fastest way is to sail downstream.

## CHAPTER 8

A young monk leads Edwin through a forest. Edwin asks him if his "brother's wounds seemed not to be mortal." The monk says that Father Jonus said they're not. Edwin knows this means Wistan "could not be so badly hurt." According to the monk, Father Jonus instructed him to take Edwin to the cooper's cottage, which is where Wistan is. Edwin feels bad for having abandoned Wistan, but had only gone in the tunnel because he thought his mother was in there. Edwin ran back to the monastery once he emerged from the tunnel and was very careful not to be seen when he first got there. In the monastery, Edwin sees evidence of a battle: corpses, a blackened stone tower, and what look like pools of blood. Ninian appears behind him and Edwin asks if Wistan is lying in the courtyard. Ninian shakes his head and signs for him to be quiet before leading him away.

On the previous day, Edwin asked Wistan how he knew the soldiers would come. Wistan said he didn't know for sure but had a sense that someone would tell Lord Brennus where they are. Edwin was helping determine which bales of hay had wooden slats in them, but Wistan had "given no hint as to the purpose." Edwin asked if it's "the old couple" who will betray them, doubting that it could be them because "they're too foolish and honest." Wistan said he didn't think they'd do it but warned that Axl isn't foolish and is actually "a deep fellow." Edwin asked why they're traveling with them and Wistan explained that he wanted to spend some more time with Axl. He asked Edwin to check another bale of hay, then told Edwin he counts on him.

*Axl's questions about his shared past with Sir Gawain shows that Axl is beginning to understand and accept that he once lived a very different life from the one he leads now. On the other hand, Sir Gawain loses interest in reminding Axl of all they went through together under King Arthur, a possible act of mercy on Sir Gawain's part because he does not want to cause Axl undue pain by reminding him of the darker elements of their past.*



*Edwin is torn between competing loyalties: loyalty to his mother and her memory and loyalty to Wistan as the man who can help Edwin fulfil his potential as a warrior. Sir Gawain's revelation that Wistan is using Edwin to find Querig, however, calls into question whether Wistan ever truly planned to train Edwin or if he was only going to use him to further his own ends and then abandon him.*



*When Wistan calls Axl a "deep fellow" and warns Edwin not to think him too simple, he reveals that he has his own reasons for being suspicious of Axl. Axl's memories indicate that he was once a soldier for the Britons and it is known that Wistan is a Saxon warrior who had been trained by Britons in his youth. It follows that Wistan recognizes Axl for something Axl did while serving King Arthur, although it is not yet clear whether what Axl did is something Wistan considers good or bad.*



Edwin regrets having let Wistan down by falling asleep and then going into the tunnel. As he follows the young monk, Edwin thinks of a time he found and freed a young girl who'd been tied up. The girl had told him he was old enough to go rescue his mother. This made Edwin feel ashamed, but Wistan's arrival and decision to take Edwin had changed that, and Edwin hopes that he will be able to find his mother while traveling with Wistan.

From the moment they entered the monastery, Wistan had been "preoccupied" with a stone tower there. He frequently stopped to look at it and took trips around it to examine it. Eventually, Wistan told Edwin they were going to go inside the tower and examine it. As they walked in, Wistan pointed out that there was a type of moat dug inside the doorway that can only be gotten over with a bridge of planks that had to be put down. Wistan said he believed the tower was a place of slaughter once. It is shaped like a chimney with steps circling up to the open top. Wistan said he thought this was once a trap: Saxons would lure bands of Briton soldiers in after filling the moat with firewood, run up the stairs so the soldiers chased them, and then throw a torch down into the moat, setting a fire from which no one could escape. Near the top of the tower is a doorway that someone can open and jump out of into a cart of hay waiting below.

The young monk leads Edwin across a stream and Edwin thinks back to when he met the monk, who cheerfully announced that he'd be Edwin's guide, near Father Jonus's cell. On the way, the monk tells Edwin about the soldiers that came and how Wistan had gone straight into the tower with the soldiers behind him. Despite the predictions of the monks, Wistan was not quickly captured, but injured soldiers were brought out of the tower. Suddenly, the tower caught fire and killed many. Ninian found Wistan wandering the corridors and Jonus had secretly treated him before sending him to a cottage. Jonus told the monk that Wistan and Edwin should leave the country together. Edwin continues following the monk, planning on what to tell Wistan when he is reunited with him.

## GAWAIN'S FIRST REVERIE

Sir Gawain wonders why God had put "dark widows" on his path on the mountain. He wonders if it's not enough that he saved the old couple and boy. Even though the widows insulted him and threw dirt at Horace, Sir Gawain talked to them "courteously." Sir Gawain told Horace that they must "bear all such trials well" because they would soon face worse.

*Edwin, like Axl and Beatrice, is motivated primarily by love: he loves his mother and he wants to find her and save her. Coincidentally, he is using Wistan as a means of doing this, meaning they are each using the other for their own ends.*



*Wistan is able to recognize the stone tower for what it is: a trap that, used correctly, can kill a large number of people at one time. This implies first-hand familiarity with how the trap works, which explains why Wistan finds it so easy to validate the Saxons' hatred and his immediate condemnation of Britons. Wistan's familiarity with the trap also implies that his warrior training has prepared him to use it to his advantage. The reason for Wistan's insistence on chopping load after load of firewood is revealed: Wistan knows the soldiers are coming and plans to use the trap against them.*



*The young monk's description of the fight between Wistan and the soldiers shows that the monk, at least, did not fully understand what had happened or that the whole thing had been planned by Wistan. This shows that not all the monks in the monastery are as treacherous as Father Brian and the abbot.*



*The "dark widows" Sir Gawain sees remind him of all the men he has killed in the past. Not only is Sir Gawain responsible for the deaths of many men, but he is also responsible for the ongoing loneliness and despair of those men's wives. On some level, Sir Gawain knows God sent the widows to him to remind him of the consequences of his past and the wrongs he committed.*



Waking up that morning, Sir Gawain “felt the lingering joys” of having had a good dream about a beautiful woman he had seen once years before. Horace woke Sir Gawain up, knowing it was time for them to leave. Despite being unhappy about waking up, Sir Gawain gently rested his head against Horace and thought of how much he’s put Horace through. Sir Gawain wanted to get Horace some breakfast, but a monk ran out and told him Wistan had escaped the monastery. This news made Sir Gawain happy even though it “br[ought] back a heavy task.” Sir Gawain thinks that even King Arthur would be impressed with Wistan’s abilities, but Gawain also thinks he had noticed a weakness in Wistan’s left side when he fought the grey-haired soldier.

Sir Gawain wonders, “Yet these dark widows, why do they cross our path? Is our day not busy enough?” The widows are gathered in a “barren spot” and Sir Gawain urges Horace to “remember them as ladies” because they had once been young and beautiful. One of them calls Gawain an “impostor knight” and the rest start saying the same. The women say they know him as “the foolish knight too timid to complete the task given him” and they scold him. Sir Gawain asks them why they are distressed and he offers help, to which they reply that he should have slain Querig by now. By way of explanation, one widow says that as she was preparing to go to **the island** with her beloved, she suddenly lost her memories of their relationship because of Querig. Sir Gawain asks how they know about Querig and they say few things can be hidden from widows.

Sir Gawain urges Horace forward, and the widows let them pass, but they chant “coward” at Sir Gawain as he goes. He wonders if they would have called him a coward if they could have seen him face Querig with a band of men the first time. Furthermore, Sir Gawain had fulfilled a promise to Edra, a “young maid” who was determined to get onto the battlefield to get revenge on a Saxon lord for what he did to her mother and sisters. Sir Gawain tried to persuade Edra not to go, but eventually made her promise to wait for him so he could protect her on the battlefield. Sir Gawain kept his promise to come back and lead her through the field. While there, Edra found the Saxon lord and brutally murdered him.

*Sir Gawain is happy that Wistan escaped because it means that Sir Gawain is, so far, not responsible for another death. Thinking about possible weaknesses in Wistan indicates that Sir Gawain, although glad that Wistan is alive, is already thinking of the inevitability of having to fight him to the death very soon. The highest compliment Sir Gawain can give Wistan is that King Arthur would have been impressed with his skill.*



*Although he doesn’t admit it, the reason Sir Gawain is so bothered by the sight of the widows is because it is getting harder for him to justify his past actions. By calling him an “impostor knight,” the widows are reminding Gawain that he did not always act justly or with chivalry because he caused them to lose their husbands. This is because Sir Gawain is not only responsible for killing a lot of innocent people, but also for continuing to force forgetfulness on everyone in the country because he helps protect Querig. Because of that, these women are not allowed to rest on the island with their husbands.*



*The widows call Sir Gawain a coward not because he is going on to defend Querig, but because he refuses to let someone slay her and restore everyone’s memories. The story of Edra highlights how the hatred that was born out of war extended to everyone; male, female, young, old, Saxon, or Briton—everyone wanted revenge for wrongs done to them, and everyone had been wronged. Through war, the Britons and Saxons had created a vicious cycle that was stripping everyone of their humanity and driving even the most innocent looking people to commit gruesome acts of violence.*



As Sir Gawain watched Edra kill the Saxon, Axl appeared on the battlefield. Axl was without a shield and showed no interest in defending himself. Sir Gawain wondered why the Saxons went on fighting so hard, and Axl said that he believed it was out of anger because word had come back to them that all the women, children, and elderly they left unprotected in their village had been slaughtered. Sir Gawain questioned why Axl would dwell on this and Axl reminded him that he had “befriended” them “in Arthur’s name” and was known as the Knight of Peace in some places. Sir Gawain told Axl not to blame himself and praised the “law [Axl] once brokered.” Axl said the Saxons had believed in that law up until this day but now took “no joy in Arthur’s victory.” Still, Sir Gawain argued that breaking the treaty was for the best because by killing the women and children, Arthur would break “this circle of slaughter.” Axl disagreed, saying that they had rather forged this circle in iron.

Sir Gawain wonders if they had merely been “slaughterer[s] of babes” that day. He reminds himself that he hadn’t been there, and even if he was, that it wasn’t his place to question Arthur’s decisions. Sir Gawain thinks that when his time comes, he will “greet the boatman contentedly” because he was “a good knight who performed his duty to the end.” For now, however, Sir Gawain and Horace must go to Querig because their “work is unfinished.”

*Axl’s lack of interest in defending himself on the battlefield shows just how deeply he felt the betrayal of the treaty with the Saxons. It is as if Axl wants to punish himself for the betrayal of the treaty by putting himself at risk of being killed just like the innocent women and children in the villages. For Axl, the breaking of this treaty was also a personal betrayal: he had worked hard to develop a good rapport and befriend the Saxons, so this broken treaty means that his hard work was not valued and that now those Saxons might possibly blame him for what happened.*



*Sir Gawain, although he likes to brag of having fought alongside the great King Arthur, feels enough shame to wish to distance himself from the events of that day. Sir Gawain’s attempts to reassure himself that he is okay with meeting the boatman when it’s his time actually reveals that he worries what will happen when that time actually comes, believing that others will recognize his complicity in the treachery shown by King Arthur.*



## CHAPTER 10

Edwin doesn’t mean to “deceive the warrior,” but does so before he realizes what’s happening. He walks into the cooper’s cottage and Wistan greets him. Edwin asks him if his injuries are very bad and Wistan says that they aren’t serious but have brought on a fever that he’s struggling to overcome. Edwin apologizes for having abandoned Wistan the night of the attack, but Wistan tells him that he has a way Edwin can make it up to him. Wistan remembers jumping from the burning tower into a cart of hay and then being cared for by “gentle monks loyal to Father Jonus,” but not much else.

*By having Wistan cared for after the attack at the monastery, Father Jonus shows his total approval of and desire for Wistan to succeed in killing Querig and restoring everyone’s memories. This also means that Jonus, like Wistan, believes that it is time for the Saxons to get justice, which can only be achieved by making them remember the way in which the Britons, under Arthur, had wronged them.*



Edwin apologizes again and Wistan asks him if he thinks he was chosen merely for his bravery. Wistan admits Edwin has a “remarkable spirit,” but that he also has a “hunter’s gift” and ability to track the location of Querig’s lair. Edwin says that not even Steffa had seen a quality like that in him, but Wistan insists he is right and that once he feels better, they will begin their journey. It is in this moment that Edwin begins lying, saying that he feels Querig’s pull when he’s really just listening to his mother’s voice begging him to find her. Edwin says they should go soon before he loses the scent and Wistan nods in satisfaction, telling Edwin he knew that the boy was a born tracker.

Edwin asks Wistan if there’s “some special feud” between him and Lord Brennus. Wistan says that he and Brennus had been trained to be warriors for the Britons together as children. Although Wistan had grown close with most of the other children, he had never been close with Brennus, who was the son of a lord and not as strong as the others. Because of who Brennus’s father was, the other boys had to let him win at all their games. Still, Wistan says he must thank Lord Brennus for being the one who stopped him from loving all the Britons by reminding him that the Britons hated him. To do this, Brennus told the other boys that Wistan was really a Saxon and they turned against him. As revenge, one day Wistan caught Brennus alone and stood threateningly in front of him, knowing Brennus was a coward but was also so full of pride he wouldn’t dare call for help. That night, Wistan ran away. Years later, Lord Brennus still lives in fear of Wistan. Wistan notes that Edwin is restless and assures him that they will start their journey soon.

## CHAPTER 11

Axl wishes the sun would come out and warm Beatrice, whose shivering has grown progressively worse. Just as he’s about to suggest another rest, they spot the roof of a boathouse and walk over to it. Seeing a man inside, Axl tells him that he and Beatrice want to go downstream to visit their son. Noticing Beatrice shivering, the man asks if she’s alright. Axl says Beatrice is fine but is too tired to continue walking and asks if the man will take them downstream in his boat. The man says he can’t take them in the boat because he’s waiting for a load of barley that needs to be taken down. However, the man points out two large baskets and suggests that they tie them together so the two of them can float down to the next boathouse. Beatrice doesn’t like the idea of being separated from Axl, but Axl tells her this is the best solution and promises they won’t be separated.

*It is evident that Edwin is beginning to mistake love for his mother for the power a dragon’s bite has to draw human beings toward them. Although it is still love that drives Edwin forward, it is no longer the genuine love and sadness at having lost his mother that he experienced when he was younger in the Saxon village.*



*Wistan’s story illustrates how tension and even hostility continue to exist between the Britons and Saxons. For Wistan, just being a Saxon was enough to cost him the respect and approval that his superior abilities as a soldier had won him. This also means that Lord Brennus’s pursuit of Wistan is not merely due to a desire for warfare, but also due to personal hatred. To satisfy this hatred and desire for revenge, Lord Brennus is willing to take military action. These same motives are what caused the earlier wars between Britons and Saxons to be so deadly and inhumane, which means that success on Lord Brennus’s part could have the same eventual consequences of restoring everyone’s memories.*



*It is becoming clear that Beatrice is seriously ill, which adds urgency to their desire to get to their son. Furthermore, Beatrice’s fear of being separated from Axl represents her growing fear that they will have to spend eternity away from each other because they will not be able to pass the boatman’s test since they still don’t know what their happiest and most cherished memory is.*



As Axl reassures Beatrice that they won't get separated, the man helps them into the baskets and gives Axl a large pole to help direct the baskets when needed. Axl asks the man if there is a covering that he can put over Beatrice, so the man gives her a large fur and instructs them to leave the baskets and fur at the lower boathouse. The river is icy and Axl continuously checks on Beatrice. Beatrice tells him that she has an image in her mind, either dreamed or remembered, of herself standing and waiting for him in their room in the middle of the night after he'd gone away from her. Axl says it was just a dream, but Beatrice says she knows that Axl left her that night and that their son had left a day or two before. Axl tells her it was just a dream brought on by a fever and Beatrice agrees.

Up ahead, Axl spots a small rowboat that he and Beatrice might be able to float in together, so he directs their baskets toward it. As they get closer, their baskets get stuck in the reeds, but Axl tells Beatrice that if the boat is in good shape then they can use that for the rest of their journey. Axl boards the boat and sees what looks like a "pile of rags" that is actually an old woman, who asks Axl to help her. Beatrice asks what's going on and Axl tells her about the woman. Beatrice tells him not to forget her and Axl says he'd never forget her. The woman hears Axl and Beatrice talking and says they can all share her boat if Axl will help her.

The woman tells Axl to "Show them a fierce face" as he reaches out to help her. Axl spots a small creature running in the boat. Axl asks the woman if rats are bothering her and turns around to investigate what the creature is. A sound makes him turn back around and he sees the woman covered in pixies. Axl reaches for a hoe in the boat but feels himself "enveloped by a sense of tranquility" and moves slowly. Swinging at the pixies with the hoe, Axl remembers that he had always been a better diplomat than a swordsman. Still, Axl is determined to fight the pixies off and protect them all, but wonders if Beatrice is safe.

*Beatrice's "image" of being alone indicates that whatever happened in their past, they had not always been together as they are now. This thought is deeply uncomfortable to Axl because, as he feared, it would mean he had left Beatrice and, therefore, she might decide to stop loving him because of whatever he had done. Furthermore, Beatrice's memory could mean that this separation is the reason their son left them, which, to Axl, would also mean that it's his fault they can't find or remember their son.*



*Beatrice's fears take a terrifying turn: if they have forgotten their son, Axl might forget her. Absence leads to forgetting, so Beatrice sees Axl's decision to leave her in the basket, even though he's just steps away, as him risking forgetting her. This would also condemn her to having to go to the island alone.*



*As Beatrice grows weaker, Axl's firm health and ability to fight off a horde of pixies is notable. The island they hope to go to is representative of the afterlife, which one typically only goes to when they die. If Axl is in such good health instead of growing ill along with Beatrice, then it could mean that he will be left on the shore to finish living while Beatrice is carried to the island alone.*



Axl hears a voice telling him to “Leave her.” Fearfully, he turns around and sees pixies swarming Beatrice’s basket. Horrified, Axl lets out a “warrior’s bellow” and jumps into the water to wade to Beatrice’s basket. Axl feels and sees pixies climbing up all around them but he pushes on toward Beatrice. As he wades forward, Axl hears a voice telling him to let them have Beatrice because they can ease her suffering. The voice, which is coming from the pixies, tells Axl that Beatrice is only going to get sicker and it will get harder and harder to take care of her, but they can take responsibility for caring for her if Axl leaves her there. Axl refuses and charges toward her.

*Axl is given the opportunity to leave Beatrice in that space that was made tranquil by the pixies. His “warrior’s bellow” shows just how unready Axl is to lose Beatrice and his unwillingness to let her go even if it will be less painful for her, as the pixies promise. The pixies have the ability to read the latent thoughts and desires of those who fall under their spell. It is, therefore, telling that what they choose to offer Axl is freedom from having to continue to care for Beatrice, indicating that they sense that, on some level, Axl wants to be free from the responsibility of having to care for an ailing wife. However, this could also be read as Axl having genuine concern that Beatrice would be better off being left with the pixies, who can ease any pain and suffering she’s experiencing. In that case, it would be out of concern for her and not for himself that Axl would consider leaving her there.*



When Axl reaches Beatrice, he discovers that she is fast asleep even with pixies all over her. He throws the pixies out and pushes the basket to safety before lifting Beatrice out and carrying her to dry land. Beatrice wakes up and asks him what they’re doing. Without explaining, Axl says the spot is “evil” and they must walk, but that Beatrice can ride on his back.

*The “evil” in that spot is the temptation to leave Beatrice behind rather than press on with her and face an uncertain future; a temptation that Axl is uncertain he’d be able to continue to resist. Axl’s anxiety to leave reveals that he is just as afraid of them forgetting each other as Beatrice was that he would forget her.*



## CHAPTER 12

Edwin can hear Wistan calling to him to slow down but he ignores him because Wistan is walking too slowly. Edwin is looking forward to reaching the top of a hill so that he can run down it, although he can’t recall their destination. Edwin also knows there is something he needs to come clean about to Wistan but can’t remember the details. Reaching the top of the hill, Edwin looks down and decides to break into a run for the trees in the distance. Suddenly, Edwin feels the wind knocked out of him and realizes Wistan is on top of him with his knee pressed into Edwin’s back. Wistan ties Edwin up so he can’t run away anymore. They walk on this way, with Edwin pulling forward and singing loudly.

*Although the force that seems to be pulling Edwin forward is created by the venom of the dragon bite on his chest, Edwin is consumed by it and his earlier thought that it is leading him to his mother. Edwin’s inability to remember where exactly his destination is, however, is evidence that he is also falling under the sway of Querig’s breath.*



Edwin and Wistan enter the forest and walk on until they come to a clearing. Edwin wants to press on and follow his “hunter’s instincts,” but Wistan insists that they stop in the clearing and he ties Edwin to a tree to prevent him from running away. Edwin tells Wistan that he’s been lying about bringing him to Querig. Wistan asks him to explain, but Edwin can’t because he forgets what his confession was supposed to be. Wistan says that it’s because they’re so close to Querig and that he’ll forgive Edwin if he’ll only lead the way to the dragon. Edwin, however, says that he’s not leading Wistan to the dragon at all, but is tracking his mother, who had been taken away by Britons and “longs” to return to him. Wistan looks at Edwin strangely, almost as if he’s ashamed, but says nothing at first.

*Wistan understands that, despite what he believes, Edwin is no longer tracking his mother, but Querig. Wistan’s shame can be attributed to the fact that he is deceiving Edwin and, by not telling him the truth, is setting him up for heartbreak in the near future.*



Wistan then tells Edwin that he’ll forgive Edwin’s deception if Edwin makes a promise to him. Edwin asks what the promise is, and Wistan replies that it’s to “carry in [his] heart a hatred of Britons.” When Edwin asks if this includes Britons who share bread with and protect him, Wistan says that it was Britons who “slaughtered our kind” and took their mothers away. Because of this, Wistan says they have a duty to hate the Britons and demands that Edwin promise to keep a hatred for Britons in his heart and never let it die out. Edwin agrees, but says he hears his mother calling. Wistan agrees to keep going forward, saying that even if they’re “too late for rescue, it’s still early enough for revenge.” Edwin again promises to hate the Britons and asks if they can keep going.

*Wistan knows that they are not far from Querig and soon he will slay her, which will restore memories and bring war back to England. Even though Edwin feels he is being drawn forward by love, Wistan begs him to instead harbor hatred. In this way, Edwin is turned into another link in the chain of hatred that has bound the Britons and Saxons together for decades. Furthermore, Wistan’s statement about it being “early enough for revenge” is meant to prepare Edwin to commit some kind of violence.*



## CHAPTER 13

Axl watches the goat munching on the grass while he and Beatrice rest. Looking down at the countryside, Beatrice asks if the river had only carried them a short distance, and Axl explains that they were stopped before they could finish their trip. Axl worries that the young girl hid the “true hardship” of taking the goat back up the mountain, but Beatrice says they can’t blame her because she’s just a child and has “more cares that one her age should bear.” Looking down at the valley, Beatrice and Axl notice some large black figures, but can’t agree about whether they are soldiers or birds. Axl again talks about the young girl, but says he can’t blame her because she had helped them when they were “soaked and shivering” and because the girl wasn’t the only one anxious “to have this goat go up to the **giant’s cairn**.” Beatrice says she’s still anxious for this to happen because it would be “a fine thing” for Querig to die and **the mist** to be lifted.

*Beatrice is rejuvenated by the prospect of being able to be the one to kill Querig and therefore make it possible for her and Axl to go to the island together because they will have their memories back. By deciding to take the goat up to the dragon instead of continuing to try to find their son’s village, Axl and Beatrice are showing that they value being able to remember the truth about the past over all else.*



In a flashback to that morning, Beatrice points out to Axl a cottage against the hillside that Axl initially mistakes for an entrance to a warren like the one they live in. In front is a fenced enclosure holding a goat who's eating contentedly, and they spot three children, "unaware of their approach," standing by a ditch and looking in. Beatrice asks Axl what the kids are doing and Axl predicts it's "mischief." Axl calls out a greeting, which surprises the children. However, the children become excited and say that they prayed for someone to come and help. Axl tells the young girl that he and Beatrice are just two travelers and asks the child to call their mothers so that Axl can ask if he and Beatrice can seek warmth and shelter there. The girl tells Beatrice and Axl that it's just her and her brothers living there and insists that they go inside, get some food, and sit by the fire. Axl is reluctant, but the girl insists that he and Beatrice go inside.

Back in the present on the hillside, Axl urges Beatrice to sit and rest instead of looking at the figures in the valley. Sitting next to Axl, Beatrice asks if he can believe that "before the great knights and warriors, it's a weary old couple like us [...] who may slay the she-dragon" with a goat. Axl shares Beatrice's wonder, but also notes that the solution may have been in the girl's head. Beatrice asks Axl if he's afraid of what they will remember when **the mist** clears, but he tells her their story already has a happy ending. Beatrice agrees but says part of her is still afraid of what will happen when the mist clears, and Axl says he is more afraid of what Beatrice told him earlier. Beatrice says she can't remember what she said and asks if they had a fight, but Axl won't elaborate on it, saying that "it's best forgotten."

Back in the flashback, Beatrice is sleeping in the cottage while Axl dries their clothes and stokes the fire until it roars. Beatrice shoots awake and is bewildered for a moment before saying that she was "thinking of a night long ago" when Axl had left her, wondering if he would ever come back. Axl says this is the work of the pixies and Beatrice admits that he may be right, but that the memories are enough "to make [her] shrink from [him]." She asks Axl to keep a distance from her when they're ready to walk on. Beatrice slips back to sleep quickly, leaving Axl to think about what she said, and he envisions them walking separately.

Axl wakes up and sees Beatrice looking through a window. Axl recalls their previous conversation, but Beatrice shows no sign of remembering it. Watching the children from the window, Beatrice asks Axl what might have happened to their parents. Axl says it's none of their business and that they should get going. Beatrice asks if they had fought about something, but Axl says it's nothing they "can't put aside" and that they might talk about it later. He urges her to get ready to leave.

*Although there have been several instances of adults forgetting children thus far, this is the first time Axl and Beatrice have found children whose parents were the ones who wandered off. This is further proof that the mist is powerful enough to disrupt all families and separate parents from children. However, it also makes helping the children by bringing the goat up the mountain seem more appealing to both Beatrice and Axl.*



*Axl's statement that whatever happened between him and Beatrice that morning is "best forgotten" directly contradicts what they are trying to do, which is to remember everything again. However, it also means that Axl is becoming more and more sure that Beatrice will cease to love him when she gets her memories back. Axl has given up most of his hope, but his determination to help bring the goat to Querig because doing so will make Beatrice happy is evidence of how much he is willing to sacrifice for her happiness.*



*Beatrice's remembrance confirms Axl's worst fears: that he has deeply wronged her and that remembering it will make her want to leave him alone. It also means that their relationship was not always characterized by love, but there was a period in which Beatrice hated him, and it may or may not have been reciprocal.*



*Axl wants to get Beatrice to leave quickly because he has a sense that if they stay, the children will compromise their current mission to find their son. Furthermore, Axl is anxious to get out of the environment that had called to Beatrice's mind a past wrong that he had done her.*



Once outside, Beatrice asks the children where their parents are, but they don't answer. Beatrice asks what they keep looking at in the ditch and the oldest child says their goat is dead in there. She invites them to look, explaining that an ogre had stolen and eaten the goat after she fed the goat special leaves that would make it poisonous in the hope of using it to kill Querig. The children ask Axl and Beatrice if they will take their remaining goat up to the **giant's cairn** and leave it for the dragon to eat. The girl also explains that killing Querig will help their parents remember them and finally come back home.

Axl refuses to help bring the goat to the **giant's cairn**, saying they are too old to do it. Despite the pleading of the children, Axl leads Beatrice onto the road and they walk away for a while before Beatrice stops him. She asks Axl to think about how valuable the opportunity is. Doubtful, Axl says they don't know if the goat will kill the dragon, but Beatrice reminds him that they just need to get the goat to the giant's cairn and then leave, so they should turn back and take the goat up the mountain.

As they climb the mountain with the goat, Axl wonders if "he had been foolish to give in." Axl tells Beatrice that, in case they succeed, he wants her to promise him something. Beatrice asks what it is and Axl tells her that if they kill Querig and get rid of **the mist**, he wants her to promise not to forget how she feels about him in this moment and to keep it in her heart. Beatrice makes the promise and suggests they start walking.

## GAWAIN'S SECOND REVERIE

Sir Gawain curses the wind. He knows Horace won't mind a storm but does mind that a stranger is sitting on him. Sir Gawain reminds Horace that it's just an old woman but wonders at Axl for bringing Beatrice up the mountain when she's clearly ill. Sir Gawain sees figures below and points them out to Horace, who seems to ask him if this will be the last time that they climb the mountain together. Gawain wonders what Arthur would have him do about the figures coming up the mountain. Still, Gawain believes God will thank him for saving the boy from the monks.

*The children's request that Axl and Beatrice bring the goat to Querig forces Axl to confront the inevitable: Querig will die and Beatrice will remember everything. Unfortunately, it also means that he will help, making him co-author in his own future unhappiness because he believes that restoring memories will directly lead to Beatrice hating him.*



*Even though Axl wants to get as far away from temptation as they can, he does not have the heart to deny Beatrice anything that she wants because, as the possibility of being separated grows nearer, he is beginning to value their current happiness more and more.*



*The promise Axl asks Beatrice to make clearly tells both her and the reader about his real fear that she will forget their current happiness when her memories return, and that memories of the distant past will ruin the love they have in the present. However, this also shows how strongly Axl believes that he is the one who will need to be forgiven. He has not yet considered that he will be the one called on to do the forgiving.*



*As Sir Gawain climbs the mountain, he begins to consider his own mortality. His belief that God will thank him for saving Edwin means that he's counting on his recent good deeds to cancel out the sins he committed in the past.*



Sir Gawain “put a little spur on Horace” and looks around at the trees, which grow oddly and remind Gawain of Merlin, who had been such a brave help when they had first come up the mountain to Querig and lost two of their companions. Gawain remembers when one of them, Buel, had been mortally wounded and begged to be brought to water. Sir Gawain wonders if he, too, will long to be back with the water when his time comes to die.

Sir Gawain presses on with Beatrice astride Horace and Axl tugging the goat. Sir Gawain knows the others are coming. When Sir Gawain had first run into Beatrice and Axl there, he had urged them to go back but they refused and looked at him suspiciously. Finally, Sir Gawain had agreed to accompany them to the **giant’s cairn**, eager to get there before Wistan and the boy.

## CHAPTER 15

The narrator states that some people will have “fine monuments by which the living may remember the evil done,” some will only have wooden crosses, and some will have nothing. It is possible the **giant’s cairn** was erected as a memorial to a tragic loss of innocent lives—there aren’t many other reasons for it to exist. The narrator is sure Axl is baffled by the sudden view of the giant’s cairn. The goat begins struggling to get away, although it soon stops, prompting Beatrice to ask if **the mist** makes goats forget, too.

Sir Gawain looks out at the landscape while Axl and Beatrice struggle to tie up the goat. Sir Gawain turns around and says, “I see them below,” noting that there’s “nothing now to turn them.” Axl asks who Sir Gawain is talking about and learns that it’s Wistan and Edwin. Beatrice is excited that they are coming to help, but Sir Gawain becomes uneasy and asks Axl if she still thinks they have “gather[ed] here in this forsaken spot as comrades.” Sir Gawain walks to Axl and asks if they hadn’t parted ways years ago, but when he sees Beatrice following, he tells her to go rest and leave the goat with him. Watching her walk back to the **giant’s cairn**, Axl feels “distinct shadows of anger and bitterness” and wonders if it was her who left him alone once. He also feels “both memory and anger growing firmer” as he looks at Beatrice. When he looks at Sir Gawain, Axl sees tenderness in his eyes as he watches Beatrice.

*Retracing his steps up the mountain also reminds Sir Gawain of the role he played in trapping and enchanting Querig. More importantly, it reminds him those who died, because some part of him suspects that he is heading towards his own death this time.*



*Sir Gawain’s willingness to help Beatrice and Axl up the mountain shows that he is truly beginning to accept that the whole truth will soon come out and he will no longer be able to deny it, making it pointless to deny Axl and Beatrice help. It is one more good deed for Sir Gawain to do that might win him God’s favor.*



*The giant’s cairn was erected by someone who wished to commemorate the truth about what happened in the past, but knew they could not do it where just anyone could see it because it would lead to them asking questions and might make it easier for them to figure out just why the cairn was built.*



*Sir Gawain’s observation that there is “nothing now” that will send Wistan and Edwin back is the moment that he truly accepts the inevitable: he and Wistan, who is much younger and stronger, will duel over the life of Querig. The difference between how Axl feels looking at Beatrice in this moment and how Sir Gawain feels could indicate that Gawain had cared for Beatrice in the past and that she is possibly the beautiful woman Gawain mentions dreaming about when he thinks about his regret over not having a romantic partner. This would also mean that Gawain and Beatrice had had an affair, which could account for Axl’s feelings of anger while he and Gawain sit together and watch Beatrice. Axl’s spontaneous anger also suggests that he was mistaken in thinking he wronged her, which forces him to confront the question of whether his love for her can actually withstand remembering the truth if she is the one who betrayed their marriage. The answer is perhaps found in the fact that, instead of confidently being able to say he will always love her, Axl actually feels “anger growing firmer,” indicating that he would struggle to keep the same promise he insisted Beatrice make earlier to always keep the love she feels for him in the moment alive even when their bad memories return.*



Sir Gawain asks if it's not possible that Axl's decision "wasn't the more godly," leaving Arthur and investing himself in his marriage to Beatrice. Sir Gawain wonders if it wouldn't have been better for him to make the same choice as Axl because there have been days when he's longed for a "kind shadow" to follow him. Sir Gawain walks away, leaving Axl to finish driving the stake and tying the goat to it.

Axl goes to Beatrice and says that the goat is secure and that he is ready to leave when she is, but Beatrice is reluctant to enter the forest again. Suddenly Sir Gawain calls out, "They'll soon be upon us!" Axl tells Beatrice they should go to him. Sir Gawain tells him the "Saxon warrior" will be there soon and then tells Axl that he remembers the night Axl cursed at Arthur in front of the other knights, who had kept their heads lowered. Sir Gawain asks Axl if he remembers this and Axl says he doesn't. Sir Gawain explains that he and the rest of the knights feared for Axl's safety, but Arthur had used "gentle words" and excused him. Although Sir Gawain "shared something of [Axl's] anger," he criticizes Axl's choice to yell at Arthur after he won a battle.

Sir Gawain notes that there had been a shift in what they fought for during the war: "Where once we fought for land and God, we now fought to avenge fallen comrades," and children were growing up only knowing war. Axl remembers "God himself betrayed" by Arthur's betrayal of a treaty that Axl had brokered. Sir Gawain says that he had initially agreed with Axl but changed his mind when he saw how peace was restored. Axl says he doesn't want these memories, but only those of his "dear wife," and asks to borrow Sir Gawain's horse to get down the mountain. Sir Gawain, appalled, refuses. Beatrice expresses interest in waiting to see if Wistan will slay Querig.

Axl continues trying to get Sir Gawain to let him borrow the horse while Beatrice questions whether Axl really wants to see the dragon slain and **the mist** lifted, and Sir Gawain asks if Axl thinks that no "tender flower or two" had tempted Gawain to make the same choice Axl did. He tries to justify King Arthur's actions by saying ordinary people "can only watch and wonder" at the "acts of a great king." The three shout over each other until the warrior and Saxon boy arrive and shout over them. Everyone falls silent and looks at the warrior and boy.

*While Sir Gawain has undoubtedly regretted that he had no romantic partner to pass his days with, his description of choosing to leave Arthur as "more godly" shows that he recognizes that some of the things Arthur asked the knights to do were wrong or immoral and it may have actually been ungodly to stick by Arthur after everything.*



*As the time when he will have to face Wistan draws closer, Sir Gawain is evidently more anxious to speak plainly with Axl about what happened between them and Arthur. The fact that Axl stood up to Arthur is a testament to his strength of character and unwillingness to show deference to someone whom he sees as immoral or wrong. Unlike Sir Gawain, Axl was not a "yes man" for Arthur. Still, Sir Gawain persists in portraying King Arthur in a positive light out of a continued sense of duty.*



*Although Sir Gawain prides himself on his sense of honor and justice, his description of the reasons for continuing the war "to avenge fallen comrades" implies that honor had fallen by the wayside as more and more people gave up their humanity and compassion in the quest for revenge. War without honor had turned barbaric, which, in Sir Gawain's eyes, meant it was better to tell a great lie to achieve peace rather than to keep telling the truth and continue fighting in a war that was ruining the entire country.*



*Axl wants to get Beatrice far away because, by doing so, he might delay the moment at which they both remember the past, which he now accepts will compromise their future. Sir Gawain, by saying they "can only watch and wonder" at King Arthur's decisions, continues trying to convince Axl that all that had been done during the war was done for a higher purpose and so he cannot be condemned for his part in it, nor can the misunderstood Arthur.*



Wistan walks forward, laughing at the sight of Axl and Beatrice, and asks why they are on the mountain instead of with their son. Beatrice explains that they want to see Querig slain and that they brought a poisoned goat. Edwin strains against the ropes Wistan tied him with and Wistan decides to tether him next to the goat. As Wistan does this, Sir Gawain keeps a close eye on him, drawing out his sword and watching until Wistan turns around. Edwin begins shouting about a bandit's camp up ahead before slumping to the ground and falling silent.

Axl asks that there be “no more disguises between us” and asks Sir Gawain if he is the dragon’s protector, which Sir Gawain confirms is true. Wistan asks if Querig is close and Sir Gawain says that this is true, as well. Beatrice asks how Sir Gawain came to be the protector of Querig and Wistan says he’d like to hear the story, too. Sir Gawain reluctantly agrees to lead them all to the pit Querig stays in.

As they walk on, Beatrice tells Axl she’s beginning to think she’s “the one to fear most **the mist’s** clearing” and is afraid she betrayed Axl somehow in the past. Still, she is determined to “see freely the path [they’ve] come together,” no matter how light or dark it is. Axl is struck by a sense that he was the one waiting alone in their room and wonders if Beatrice is right.

Sir Gawain indicates that they are close, and the group silently walks on until Sir Gawain asks Wistan if he won’t reconsider his mission there. Wistan refuses, so they continue on quietly. Sir Gawain leads them to a pile of rocks from which they can look down and see Querig, who is sleeping and looks as if she is aging and fragile. Beatrice says that the dragon looks “no more than a fleshy thread” and Sir Gawain agrees but says that as “long as she’s breath left, she does her duty.” Axl says he remembers Merlin’s work and calls it “dark.” Sir Gawain rejects this idea and points out that, because of Merlin’s work, Saxons and Britons live side by side in peace.

*By pulling out his sword, Sir Gawain is sending a clear message to Wistan that he is ready to fight and that Wistan will have to get through Sir Gawain to get to Querig. This also gives Sir Gawain the opportunity to size Wistan up and plan how he wants to approach their now unavoidable duel.*



*Axl’s request to do away with “disguises” shows that he is ready to hear the truth, but he wants to know the whole truth. This, Sir Gawain knows, is likely his final opportunity to share his side of the story.*



*Despite their fears, both Axl and Beatrice are determined to know the whole truth of their marriage rather than live in doubt as to who wronged who, how, and why. Beatrice’s desire to “see freely the path” that brought them to this point shows that she now wants to be able to judge for herself whether their marriage and the love they have is strong and genuine.*



*Sir Gawain’s defense of Merlin against Axl’s accusation that Merlin was dark provides further evidence of Sir Gawain’s adamant belief that no price is too high if it achieves peace. This, of course, could be due to the fact that only Sir Gawain can truly say he remembers everything from the war, including the mutual and insurmountable hatred between Saxons and Britons that he believed would only grow and get worse if it were allowed to continue.*



Sir Gawain begs Wistan to think about “what might be awoken across this land” if he kills Querig and to just leave. Wistan questions what kind of god “wishes wrongs to go forgotten and unpunished.” Sir Gawain admits the justice of this question and acknowledges that his god “looks uneasily” on what was done that day, but suggests that allowing Querig to finish out her life (which won’t last much longer) because that might give time for “old wounds to heal for ever.” Wistan argues that this is “foolishness” and asks how Sir Gawain can think a “peace [will] hold for ever built on slaughter and magician’s trickery.” Wistan says he sees “how devoutly” Sir Gawain wants the past to be forgotten, but refuses to give in. Wistan asks Sir Gawain to leave, but the knight refuses and they prepare to duel.

Sir Gawain asks Axl to use his “fine eloquence” to help him and Wistan leave the place as friends, but Axl says he and Beatrice are there to see the dragon slain and won’t help Sir Gawain if he tries to stop it. Sir Gawain says he understands and asks if, in the event that he is slain, they would be willing to take Horace and find him “a fine green meadow where he may eat to his heart’s content and think of old days.” Axl agrees to this. Wistan, too, asks a favor: that if he is slain, Axl and Beatrice will take Edwin to a safe village. Axl agrees to this, as well. As the two men draw their swords and prepare to fight, Beatrice looks away and leaves Axl to watch. Wistan and Sir Gawain duel as Axl looks on, remembering how to do some of the moves they are doing. The duel is close, but Wistan defeats Sir Gawain after a hard fight.

Wistan stands over Sir Gawain’s body until Axl calls down, “Bravo, sir,” and tells him that nothing stands between him and killing the dragon. Wistan walks by Axl and Beatrice to look down at Querig. Beatrice asks him to hurry and slay the dragon, but Wistan is staring at Axl again. Wistan asks Axl if he is the “gentle Briton” that he remembers from his childhood and had tried to “keep innocents beyond the reach of war.” Axl says that if this was him, he only remembers it “through the haze” of **the mist**. Wistan thanks him for his honesty and Axl requests some honesty in return before asking if Wistan would want to seek vengeance on the man he remembers. Wistan says that he has dreamed of revenge, but now realizes that the man did his best. Wistan would ask him to go in peace if he were to see him, even though “peace now can’t hold for long.”

*Wistan’s youthful idealism means he values truth over all else. Sir Gawain’s age and greater experience, however, have shown him that there are times when letting the truth be known is not worth the consequences. In this case, the truth will lead to war: a bloodier, more serious war in which Britons will be targeted and slaughtered for the actions of their parents and grandparents. All Wistan sees in this argument, however, is Sir Gawain’s desire that his own reputation not be sullied by the truth coming out that Arthur had broken the treaty and Sir Gawain had helped cover it up.*



*Sir Gawain’s final bid to stop the inevitable reveals his fear of dying. Sir Gawain knows that he does not stand a chance against Wistan unless Axl is able to help them both find common ground. However, Axl is unwilling to do this because he does not want to disappoint Beatrice, who is still determined to watch Querig be slain and get her memories back.*



*Now that nothing stands between Wistan and successfully killing Querig, he begins to show signs of regret. Even though Wistan had made Edwin promise to always hate Britons, Wistan himself is finding it difficult to hate Axl and Beatrice, particularly because he remembers the good that Axl tried to do during the war. Axl, too, realizes that because he is a Briton, he will soon be the target of hatred and violence. Without directly saying so, Axl looks to Wistan for some reassurance that both he and Beatrice are not in danger of being killed by him even though Axl knows Wistan can’t guarantee their safety beyond that.*



Wistan descends into the pit without waking up Querig and only examines her for a few moments before cutting off the dragon's head. Axl and Beatrice note that it's over, but Axl wants to stay and ask Wistan something. When Wistan gets out of the pit, he looks "overwhelmed and not in the least triumphant." Beatrice asks him why he looks "so despondent" and Wistan says he doesn't rightfully know, but thinks that he's "been too long among you Britons," having admired and despised them every step of the way. Now that his mission is done, Wistan struggles to wrap his mind around what he's done and what the future holds. Beatrice asks what he means and Wistan says that "justice and vengeance await" and the Saxons are planning a conquest, made possible by the returning memories of Saxons all over the country who will want revenge for past wrongs.

Axl tells Beatrice that Wistan is right and observes that while they had longed for the dragon's death for the sake of their personal memories, they had failed to consider "what old hatreds will loosen across the land now." Wistan agrees and says, "The giant, once well buried, now stirs." Once that giant rises, all the friendships and relationships between Saxons and Britons will be torn asunder and violence will break out. Wistan notes that this vengeance, for the Saxons, will be "justly served," but he is ashamed to say that part of him "turns from the flames of hatred." Axl and Beatrice prepare to leave, but before they walk away Wistan tells them to "ride fast from these parts" to escape the coming violence, and to untie Edwin and send him over.

## CHAPTER 16

The goat chews on grass near Edwin's head, which annoys him, but he's too tired to chase it away. Edwin is surprised by "the sudden conviction that his mother [is] gone" and he no longer hears her voice. He feels someone untying him and he opens his eyes to find Beatrice with him. When he stands up, he remembers what the warrior had said about it being "early enough for revenge" and decides to make whoever killed his mother pay. Edwin doesn't see Wistan, just the old Britons. Beatrice tells him to go to Wistan, so Edwin runs forward. Suddenly he stops and looks back at the couple. Beatrice calls out to him and tells him to remember them and their friendship in the coming days. This reminds Edwin of the promise he made to Wistan to hate Britons, but he decides Wistan didn't mean for him to hate *these* Britons, and runs off to find him.

*Despite Wistan's growing sense that killing Querig might do more harm than good, he does it anyway. Once he does and it cannot be undone, the full force of what Sir Gawain had tried to tell him about the hatred that would be unleashed hits him, forcing Wistan to realize that he had grown closer and seen more good in the Britons than he had been willing to admit. Although he has succeeded in his mission, Wistan fears that he has committed a greater error than that which Arthur committed when he broke the treaty with the Saxons.*



*Similarly, Axl and Beatrice realize they had been short-sighted in their desire to get their memories back at any cost. The cost, as it turns out, is their safety and any chance that their lives would simply pick up where they left off. Meanwhile, Wistan undergoes a rapid change, even advising Axl and Beatrice to leave the country. This goes against his earlier belief that all Britons are inherently bad and deserve death, no matter how kind they may seem. This change of heart will presumably make it difficult for Wistan to continue moving forward as a warrior.*



*Edwin, who had been propelled by love towards Querig believing her to be his mother, is now driven by hatred. However, that hatred is not directed towards Britons as Wistan had advised, but towards whoever killed his "mother," meaning Wistan. Edwin is determined to kill whoever killed his mother, calling into question whether Wistan is going to be safe now that Edwin has been let loose by Axl and Beatrice.*



## CHAPTER 17

The narrator sees the old couple riding through the rain and wonders why they get off their horse so far from shelter. The narrator calls to them, inviting them into take shelter under the pines. The old man doesn't hear at first, but soon he does and looks around until he notices the narrator. The old woman slides off the horse and the old man attempts to carry her, but the narrator runs out to help carry her to the trees, setting her down against the trunk while the old man comforts her.

The narrator listens as the old woman tells Axl that she remembers their son lives on an **island** and it is nearby. Axl wonders how that is possible, but Beatrice swears she can hear the sea nearby and says they forgot because of **the mist** but she knows their son is there. Axl thinks it's just her fever, but the woman tells him to ask the narrator. The narrator wonders if he's supposed to stay silent, but instead turns and tells Axl, "The good lady's right, sir." Axl looks alarmed, but the narrator goes on describing the close proximity of the island and explains that he can bring them over there in his boat once the rain clears. Axl asks if the narrator is a boatman, and he says that he is. Axl fearfully holds his wife closer.

Axl asks if there is shelter with a fire nearby to warm Beatrice. The narrator says he has one in the cove, but Axl says that they'd better stay under the tree and they don't really have an interest in going to the **island**. Beatrice, shocked, asks what Axl means and insists on going to the cove. Axl agrees to bring her there but is reluctant to let the narrator carry her despite his own weakness. From the cove, the narrator points out the island, calls it "a gentle place," and wonders if the couple is there "of their own will."

Beatrice calls to the narrator and asks if the **island** they see is the same she heard of in stories where a person can walk alone forever without running into another person. The narrator says that it may be, but he has no way of confirming. Beatrice asks if it's true that couples can be taken there together so they are not separated, but the narrator gives her another evasive answer, saying it's only his job to carry people who want to go across the water. Beatrice asks if the narrator could bring her and Axl there together so they won't have to part, and the narrator assures her that they would be permitted to be together there. This excites Beatrice, who also hopes to occasionally run into their son.

*Axl's attempt to carry Beatrice indicates that she is, once again, growing too weak to walk. Axl, however, remains in good health. It also shows Axl's continued love for Beatrice even though Querig is slain and they have presumably begun to remember their past together.*



*The island represents the afterlife, so by saying their son is there, Beatrice is confirming that he is actually dead and that she is ready to go to him. Axl wants to convince her this is wrong because he wants her to stay with him, but Beatrice will no longer allow Axl to tell her what to think and which of her memories are real and which are not. Axl's alarm at the narrator's answer is due to his growing realization that Beatrice is about to go to the island and that he might not be going with her.*



*Axl's reluctance to go to the cove is explained by his realization that the closer they get to the sea, the sooner the narrator (who is evidently a boatman) will put their relationship to the test. Unlike Beatrice, Axl is not ready for this, which indicates that he knows their relationship is not strong enough for the boatman to be willing to bring them to the island together.*



*The narrator's unwillingness to provide direct answers to Beatrice's questions serves to draw both her and Axl out even more. Beatrice is the only one showing any excitement or asking questions, which shows that she is the only one who is really ready to be taken to the island. Axl's silence reveals his fear that he is about to lose Beatrice.*



The narrator prepares to get the boat and give the couple time to decide what to do when Beatrice asks if they'll be questioned. The narrator says he nearly forgot about that, but that they will be. Axl is sent away while the woman talks about her memories of Axl. After a while, the narrator says it's time for him to talk to Axl. The narrator shares a memory that Beatrice had told him about her and Axl walking together with a basket of eggs. Axl smiles and says he remembers. The boatman says they should go get the boat ready and they start walking back.

On the way, the narrator asks if there are any memories that cause "particular pain," assuring Axl he is no longer being formally questioned. Axl shares the story of the abrupt departure of their son and says he shares the blame, having created a toxic home life after discovering his wife's infidelity. Their son had vowed never to return and was gone even after the couple was "happily reunited." When they got word that their son had died of plague, Axl says he "forbade her to go to his grave" because he still had "a craving to punish" even as he "spoke and acted forgiveness." The narrator asks what has changed since then to make Axl love his wife again, and Axl explains that there was no one thing, but that he had gradually fallen back in love with her.

When they return to Beatrice, Axl wants to carry her to the boat but the narrator insists on doing it, which makes Axl suspicious. When they get to the boat, Axl gets in, but the narrator says he can only bring one person at a time because the water is choppy. He will return shortly for Axl. At first, Axl refuses to get out, but eventually his wife tells the narrator to give them a moment. She tells Axl that she trusts the boatman will return for him and asks him not to argue. Axl asks her if she thinks the only reason their love has grown so strong is because **the mist** had erased their pasts long enough for old wounds to heal, but she says that doesn't matter now and encourages him to apologize so the narrator will return for him. Axl agrees to get out of the boat and the narrator hears him tell his wife goodbye. Axl walks past the narrator, who tells him to wait, and continues walking off into the distance.

*With their memories returning, Beatrice and Axl are able to share their most treasured memory. When the boatman tells Axl that they should get the boat ready, it lulls Axl into a false sense of security because he believes they have passed the test and that now it is over.*



*Although Axl is able to recall in detail what made him hate Beatrice, he is unable to remember how he learned to love her again. Furthermore, he admits to harboring negative thoughts and feelings about her, even though he insists that this was all in the past and it is different now. Still, his inability to remember how or why he fell back in love with Beatrice shows that it was not as memorable to him as the pain she had caused him and his desire to cause her pain in turn.*



*Axl clearly understands that if he gets out of the boat, there is a chance that the boatman will not come back for him and it will be the last time he sees Beatrice. Whether Beatrice understands this or not is less clear, but it is telling that she finds it easy to send him out of the boat now, especially when just the day before she had been so scared of him leaving her for even a moment because she didn't want to lose him. Axl's decision to get out of the boat and Beatrice's decision to encourage him to do so, even though they both promise each other they will see each other soon, implies that they both realize and accept that they will not be on the island together. This is further confirmed by the fact that Axl walks away entirely, not even stopping to listen to the boatman or to watch Beatrice be taken away. This can be read as indicating that the love that they had such confidence in has failed under the stress of the "buried giant" of Beatrice's affair and Axl's resentment. But it can also be read as a recognition of the brutal realities of human life and death. Being taken to the island can be read as a metaphor for dying—and dying, the novel makes clear, is always something that happens alone.*





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