The Stone Angel

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MARGARET LAURENCE

Margaret Laurence had a painful childhood marked by loss. Her mother died when she was four, and her father when she was nine. She spent the rest of her childhood living with her stepmother and brother in her maternal grandfather's home, and in the mid-1940s, left her hometown to attend Winnipeg's United College. She published poems, stories, and essays throughout her collegiate career and edited the student literary journal. After graduation, she worked at a local independent newspaper until her marriage, at which point her husband's engineering job took them overseas to England and Africa. She began a literary career in the 1960s, and soon thereafter separated from her husband. Newly independent and flourishing as a writer, Laurence traveled around Canada and held positions at the University of Toronto and Trent University. A deeply literary and left-leaning writer, Laurence's works engaged the ethical failures of colonialism, the pain of loss, the indignity of aging, and the difficulty of domestic love—and were frequently set in a fictional town of her own making, Manawaka. *The Stone Angel* and *The Diviners* are loosely-related novels whose characters briefly overlap—both books are frequently cited as classics of Canadian literature, and yet are often banned from school curriculums. Laurence, having received a metastatic cancer diagnosis in 1986, committed suicide at her home in 1987, and was buried in her hometown of Neepawa. Her legacy and contribution to Canadian literature have been widely celebrated throughout the country, and several university buildings and lecture series have been named in her honor.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Hagar, born in the late 1800s, comes of age and grows into womanhood and, eventually, old age over the course of the late nineteenth and early-to-mid twentieth century. As such, she bears witness to several major historical moments. Because the book is mainly concerned with Hagar's subjective life experiences, the hard facts of history mostly fade into the background—and yet Hagar, her family, and her town all feel acutely the effects of the Great Depression and the financial desperation it inspired all across the globe. In the novel's present timeline, set in the early 1960s, Hagar must reckon with changing times and social and familial relationships. While families used to generally all live together in one home and support each other their entire lives, Hagar reluctantly comes to see that this dynamic is changing, and that the ways of the world are remarkably different than they were in her girlhood.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

In *The Stone Angel*, Margaret Laurence brings to life a small Manitoba town called Manawaka. Based on her real-life hometown of Neepawa, Manawaka teems with very real problems related to class, tradition, and stifling interconnectedness. Laurence created the town for *The Stone Angel*, but returned to its setting in her subsequent novels and story collections *A Jest of God*, *The Fire-Dwellers*, *A Bird in the House*, and *The Diviners*. Laurence's lyrical, detail-oriented, evocative prose is similar to that of Marilynne Robinson (*Housekeeping*, *Gilead*) and her unsparing portrait of the beauty and difficulty of life in the Canadian countryside is echoed the 1941 novel *As For Me and My House* by Sinclair Ross—also set in a fictional Canadian town.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Stone Angel*
- **When Written:** Early 1960s
- **When Published:** 1964
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary Canadian literature
- **Genre:** Literary fiction; Canadian fiction; coming-of-age tale; historical fiction
- **Setting:** The fictional town of Manawaka, Manitoba
- **Climax:** After running away, the elderly and ailing Hagar Shipley's family finds her and brings her home—revealing in the process that she has stomach cancer, and will spend her final days in a hospital.
- **Antagonist:** Brampton Shipley; Doris Shipley; Marvin Shipley; Time
- **Point of View:** First person

EXTRA CREDIT

Adaptable. *The Stone Angel* has been adapted for the screen and the stage. In 1995, Canadian playwright James W. Nichol adapted the story into a play, and in 2007, Canadian director, writer, and producer Kari Skogland filmed a movie adaptation starring Ellen Burstyn, Kevin Zegers, and Ellen Page.

Controversial. Though widely hailed as a classic of Canadian literature, *The Stone Angel* is frequently banned from school curriculums. Hagar's irreverent, often vulgar voice, her disdain for religion and propriety, and her intensely sexual, tumultuous relationship with her husband Bram are just a few reasons young people are prevented from reading the novel. Despite the controversy surrounding it, many institutions in Canada assign *The Stone Angel* to older students in their final year of

secondary school.

PLOT SUMMARY

At ninety years old, the frail but stubborn Hagar Shipley—born Hagar Currie in Manawaka, Manitoba in 1886—reflects on her life. As she has grown older, she has found herself slipping more and more often into memories as a way of escaping her confining and unhappy present situation. She lives with her son Marvin and his wife Doris—or rather, they live with her, in a house she purchased many years ago—and constant gastrointestinal discomfort and arthritic stiffness plague Hagar's every waking moment. As Hagar grows paranoid that Doris and Marvin are planning on sending her away to a nursing home, she retreats into the past with increasing frequency.

Hagar's mother died bringing her into the world, and since her burial, an expensive **stone angel** with unseeing, blank eyes has guarded over her family's plot in the Manawaka cemetery. Raised by her widower father, Jason Currie—a Scottish immigrant from a prominent family of Highlanders who struck out on his own and founded the first general store in Manawaka—alongside two brothers, Matt and Dan, Hagar cultivated a small group of friends in town including Charlotte Tapper, Lottie Drieser, Telford Simmons, and Henry Pearl. Hagar's brother Dan died as a teenager after a bout of pneumonia. In a pivotal moment that resonates through her life for years, Hagar refused her brother Matt's requests for her to impersonate their mother and comfort Dan on his deathbed. Hagar's indecision in that moment was repeated throughout her youth until, frustrated by her stagnancy and feeling constricted by the demands of traditional womanhood, she made a decisive choice that would splinter her family forever. Hagar chose to accept a marriage proposal from Brampton Shipley—an older farmer who lived on the outskirts of town, and whose crass, coarse ways, two grown children from a previous marriage, and dubious finances made him a poor choice in all ways but one: marrying Bram freed Hagar from her strict father's demands, and allowed her to strike out on her own for the first time in her life.

After stumbling upon a newspaper advertisement for a nursing home called Silverthreads, Hagar's worst fears are confirmed: Doris and Marvin are planning to send her away. Hagar fears leaving behind her home and the possessions she's accrued throughout her life. Still, as the days go by, Hagar becomes more aware of the strain she's putting on Doris and Marvin—her frequent falls require their constant attention and often physical effort, and her stubborn temperament grates on their nerves. Marvin and Doris suggest that Hagar meet with a doctor and get his advice about where to live.

After her marriage to Bram, Hagar's brother Matt died and her friends around town began viewing her differently. She'd abandoned the social world of Manawaka for Bram, and her only solace was her deep physical attraction to her new husband. Otherwise, his terrible behavior, unclean ways, and blatant disregard for her feelings made their marriage an unhappy one.

Hagar's meeting with her doctor, and the subsequent X-rays she endures, confirm to Marvin and Doris that Hagar would be better off with professional care, though they refuse to share the results of the tests with her. They attempt to bring her by Silverthreads just to show her the facilities, but the angry and panicked Hagar is closed-off and contemptuous, and insists on being taken home at the earliest possible opportunity. After Hagar continues to wet the bed, rail against Marvin and Doris, and speak coarsely about strangers in public over the next few days, Marvin makes a decision, and tells Hagar definitively that she is going to enter the nursing home in one week.

Hagar bore Bram two children, Marvin and John. Hagar loved John best from the moment of his birth, and constantly favored the boy—who was more sensitive, it seemed, than his older brother—with attention, affection, and special treatment. Even when John began exhibiting wild and rebellious behavior in school—fighting with classmates and playing games of chicken on the railway tracks on a nearby trestle bridge—Hagar could never see her son as anything but perfect. Bram, however, paid the boy almost no attention, even after Marvin, at seventeen, went off to fight in the first World War. After an embarrassing incident in town that forced Hagar to see how much her marriage to Bram had changed her and alienated her from everyone else around her, she chose to pack up her most valuable things—and John—and leave. Bram barely cared, and yet leaving Manawaka, surprisingly, pained Hagar.

Hagar, afraid of being sent off to the nursing home, comes up with a plan to thwart Marvin and Doris's plan. When Doris leaves her home alone one morning, Hagar takes one of her social security checks and flees, boarding a bus to Shadow Point, a woody nature spot on the coast. Though exhausted upon her arrival, Hagar shelters in an abandoned building and hides out, risking exposure, attacks by vagrants, and starvation in order to retain her independence.

After leaving Bram, Hagar took John and found a job working as a housekeeper to a wealthy former smuggler named Mr. Oatley. The old man took to Hagar, and Hagar relished having a room of her own in the sprawling house. John, however, resented being forced to live in someone else's house, and began to become more secretive—conducting relationships with girls and communicating with Bram through a series of letters, all without telling Hagar. When the Great Depression hit and John and Hagar lost a large sum of invested money meant to send John to college, John became even more resentful of Hagar, and chose to return to Manawaka rather than face the failure the Depression foisted upon him. After several years, John wrote to Hagar to tell her that Bram was

dying, and Hagar rushed off to nurse her husband through his final weeks. Upon her arrival, she found the house in a state of squalor and disrepair—and both Bram and John's brains addled by their overconsumption of homemade wine. John engaged in reckless behavior, talked coarsely just like his father, and wore his poverty like a badge of honor. Unable to recognize either her son or her husband, it came as almost a relief to Hagar when Bram at last passed away—though the man's passing shattered John.

Hagar putters around Shadow Point, existing on a small sack of provisions purchased before she left town and walking through the woods. She soon falls victim to her own frailty and exhaustion, though, and as she struggles more, she retreats further into her memories.

Shortly after Bram's death, John began an affair Arlene Simmons—the daughter of Lottie Drieser and Telford Simmons, Hagar's childhood friends. Fearing her son's rejection and also Arlene's fall from grace, a seeming mirror image of her own, Hagar conspired with Lottie to send Arlene out East to find work. The blow to John was painful, and though Hagar urged him to see that all she ever wanted was his happiness, John reacted in anger and began spending more and more time out, driving through town drunk and making an embarrassment of himself.

Hagar takes shelter in an abandoned cannery, and as night falls, she hears a noise and fears an intruder has come to rob her. The man who enters the dilapidated building, though, is just as frightened of Hagar as she is of him. The man introduces himself as Murray F. Lees, and though Hagar believes that Marvin and Doris have sent him to retrieve her, Murray insists he has no connection to either of them. Drunk and alone, Murray offers to share some wine with Hagar, and as the two of them talk about their lives, they realize that they have both suffered the painful loss of their sons.

One night, back in Manawaka, Henry Pearl came to the door to tell Hagar there'd been an accident. Driving his truck across the trestle bridge—with Arlene in tow—John had come face-to-face with an oncoming train, and drove his car off the bridge. Arlene was killed on impact, but John was taken to the hospital. Hagar arrived just in time to say goodbye to John, who died due to the internal injuries sustained in the accident. Hagar never wept for her boy, though, and felt she had become as unfeeling, unchangeable, and unseeing as the stone angel in the cemetery.

The following morning, Hagar wakes up to find that Murray is gone. She feels ill, nauseous, and cold, and just as her thoughts begin to grow jumbled, Marvin, Murray, and Doris walk into the cannery. Though Hagar initially resists their attempts to remove her, she softens and allows them to bring her into the car, where they tell her the truth—her X-rays revealed a disease in her bowels, and rather than going to Silverthreads, she needs to go straight into a hospital.

On a public ward in a local hospital, Hagar struggles both against the care the nurses offer her and the friendship her fellow patients show her. After she's moved to a semi-private room, she slowly befriends her roommate, Sandra Wong, a young girl admitted for appendicitis, and begins to accept that her own death is imminent. Hagar receives visits from Doris and a minister, Mr. Troy, as well as Marvin and Doris's son, Steven. As her condition deteriorates, she struggles to open herself up to the kindness those around her are showing her in spite of all the turmoil she's put them through. She apologizes to both Doris and Marvin for her behavior, and tells Marvin that he was always a better son to her than John. Hagar's pain worsens, and as she spends more and more time floating into the "cocoon" her pain medicine offers her, she approaches a state of peace and ease—however, when a nurse attempts to help Hagar drink from a glass of water, Hagar proves herself as stubborn as ever by insisting to hold the glass herself.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Hagar Shipley – Hagar Shipley is the novel's protagonist and narrator. A ninety-year-old woman whose rapid physical and mental decline often sends her reeling backwards into memories of her youth in the fictional Manitoba prairie town of Manawaka, Hagar is a heavy, flatulent, raving mess of a woman who nonetheless clings to the small remaining scraps of agency over her own choices. At the start of the book, Hagar is living with her oldest son Marvin and his wife Doris, though she resents their company, the fact that they have moved into her home, and the concerned way they talk to and handle her. Hagar begins to suspect that Marvin and Doris want to be rid of her, and when she comes across an advertisement for a nursing home left out on the kitchen table, she knows her time is limited. Hagar takes one of her social security checks and runs away, boarding a bus bound for the coast. As she hides out in the coastal forests, she declines even further, and her moments of lucidity grow farther and farther apart as she reflects on her strict father's dominion over her and her brothers' childhoods, the end of her marriage, years ago, to the crass, coarse farmer Brampton Shipley, and the chaotic life and tragic death of her second, favorite son John. Hagar is eventually rescued and brought to a hospital, where she lives out her final days in a haze of stubborn resistance and, eventually, conscious attempts to overcome her own stubborn personality and finally give her family the kindness they have long deserved. Hagar's life is a rich tapestry of indecision and wrong decisions, dependence and independence, as well as love, lust, and loss. Her complicated life is the basis for several of the novel's major themes: womanhood, choices and identity, and the twinned love and resentment that often coexist within—and can even come to define—one's life with one's

family.

Marvin Shipley – Hagar's oldest son Marvin is, at the start of the novel, a veritable mess. Caught between the demands of his ailing mother and his frustrated wife Doris, he knows that a decision about Hagar's well-being must be made, but is, for a long time, too afraid to make it. Marvin is represented as a quiet, stoic, and occasionally emasculated individual whose desire to please everyone around him competes directly with his own strong moral compass. After leaving Manawaka to join the army at seventeen, Marvin never returned to live in his hometown and instead struck out on his own, making a life for himself away from his parents and his ancestral homeland. Marvin has always been something of a loner, though his marriage to Doris and the two children they share have given him a sense of family—even if Hagar has lingered around to put that hard-won foundation to the test. As the novel progresses and Marvin's relationships with both Hagar and Doris weather pain, anger, and resentment, his painful past as his parents' least-favorite son and his claustrophobic future as his mother's only lifeline collide.

Doris Shipley – Doris is, in Hagar's eyes, a frumpy but shrill woman undeserving of her husband Marvin's affections. In reality, though, Doris is a supportive partner to Marvin and even, despite her resentment for the woman, a steadfast caregiver to Hagar. Doris works hard to keep Hagar comfortable, picking her up from her many falls, washing her sheets that she wets almost every night, and attempting to make her comfortable by introducing her to the local minister, Mr. Troy. All of Doris's kind actions measure up to nothing, however, when Hagar realizes that Doris and Marvin are about to "betray" her by placing her in a nursing home. Doris, a religious woman who is deeply concerned with how she and her family appear to others—a trait Hagar abandoned in her youth—is a direct foil to Hagar, and is often depicted as bumbling and self-absorbed. In reality, though, Doris often puts her concerns about her own health and well-being second to her concerns for Hagar, whom she dutifully loves more out of obligation than anything else.

Brampton "Bram" Shipley – Hagar's coarse, crass, domineering husband Bram is a farmer fourteen years her senior, with two children from a previous marriage. Bram has a reputation throughout town as a shiftless, drunken womanizer—to Hagar, he represents the chance not only to escape from her father's home but to publicly flout the controlling rules and traditional femininity her father has attempted to thrust upon her all her life. Hagar's marriage to Bram gets her disowned from her family and cut out of her father's will—but she is free for the first time in her life, and believes that she'll eventually be able to change Bram into a respectful and dutiful husband. Hagar's plan backfires, though—she is unable to change Bram's ways, and as the years go by, she actually becomes more like him: weathered, worn, contemptuous of the social order and polite society. As Bram's lazy indigence becomes more and more of a burden, though—and as Hagar realizes just how low she has stooped in the name of freedom, only to become more trapped than ever—she flees Manawaka with her youngest son John in tow. Bram doesn't seem to care much about Hagar's departure, and the two never really see one another again. Though Hagar returns to Manawaka to care for Bram in the weeks before his death, his brain has grown so addled by alcohol that he doesn't even recognize her—a metaphor for the fact that the two never really saw one another for who they were throughout their entire marriage.

John Shipley – Hagar's second son John is her favorite from birth. A bright and inquisitive child, John provides Hagar's life with the kind of softness it's been missing in the years since her marriage to Bram. Sensitive and emotional, John is pained by the taunts he endures at school because of who his father is—"Brambles Shitley." Sensing her son's pain, Hagar takes John with her when she leaves Bram—unknowingly setting off a chain of events that will turn John against her forever. The seeds of resentment towards his own family and legacy have already been sown in John by the time he leaves Manawaka, and as his mother takes up a housekeeping position and brings him to live in the large, luxurious home of the wealthy Mr. Oatley, John's embarrassment over his low social standing deepens. When Hagar loses the funds for John's college education in the stock market crash of 1929, John becomes even more hateful, and eventually decides to return to Manawaka to live with his estranged father and work on his farm. The decision leaves Hagar sad and lonely, and she misses her boy—but when he summons her to Manawaka to help care for Bram in the weeks leading up to his death, Hagar is startled to find that her son has transformed into a malnourished drunkard, living in squalor alongside his demented father. As Hagar realizes just how much like Bram John has become—and perhaps always was, though she was too blinded by love to notice—her concern for the boy grows, and she begins meddling in his affair with the wealthy Arlene Simmons in an attempt to control him and refocus his affections on her and her alone. The plan backfires tremendously—just as Hagar lashed out at her controlling father, so too does John defy the warning Hagar issued him in childhood: never to "play" on the railway tracks over the trestle bridge in town. John and Arlene are killed in a terrible accident during a game of chicken, though Hagar cannot bring herself to shed even one tear for her son's loss, so stony and disconnected has she become.

Jason Currie / Hagar's Father – Hagar's father. A Scottish immigrant from a prominent but not particularly wealthy family of proud, strong Highlanders, Jason Currie originally rose to prominence in Manawaka as the founder and proprietor of the town's first general store. A strict and sometimes abusive man, Jason Currie demands total control over his children's lives and behaviors—ultimately leading to Hagar's rogue defiance of his

wishes for her. After Hagar chooses to marry Bram against her father's orders, Jason disowns Hagar and cuts her out of his sizable will, instead leaving all of his hard-earned money to the town of Manawaka itself. A hardscrabble widower who gives everything for his children only watch them leave him, one by one, through illness and defiance, Jason's life foreshadows Hagar's own. Though she took a vastly different path than her father and did everything she could to distance herself from him both physically and emotionally, their lives ultimately took remarkably similar paths.

Dan Currie – Hagar's older brother. A weak, frail child who milks every sickness he endures to gain affection from Jason and Auntie Doll, Dan eventually succumbs to pneumonia and dies. Hagar's failure to comfort him in her final hours is a pivotal moment of indecision in her life, and comes to affect the choices she makes as a young woman.

Matt Currie – Hagar's older brother. The stronger of the two, Matt nonetheless succumbs to influenza in his twenties and dies, resentful of Hagar until his last days for the fact that she received an education while he wasn't allowed to—and also because she refused to comfort their dying brother Dan in his final hours, leaving the painful task to Matt.

Lottie Drieser – One of Hagar's childhood friends. Lottie, teased as a young girl and called "No-Name" because her father abandoned her and her mother, eventually rises in Manawaka society to become the wife of the wealthy Telford Simmons. Lottie tries to warn Hagar not to take up with Bram, but Hagar ignores her advice. Later on, the two women reconnect when their children embark upon an affair—together, Lottie and Hagar conspire to stop Arlene and John from marrying, fearing that their children's youthful foolishness will result in their eventual misery, though their plan backfires in ways that neither of them could have ever foreseen.

Arlene Simmons – The daughter of Lottie and Telford, Arlene is first introduced as a prissy and silly young girl, her wealthy parents' only child. After the Depression hits Manawaka, though, Arlene takes up with John. The two become lovers, relieved that the class distinctions that once separated them from one another have been all but erased by the leveling force of the Great Depression. Arlene toughens up but remains somewhat flighty and idealistic, dreaming of marrying and sharing a life with John despite the fact that they're both destitute and aimless. Hagar, seeing her own past mistakes in the one that she believes John and Arlene are about to make, severs the union before it can be cemented, leading John and Arlene to act out and put themselves in danger. Arlene and John are both killed in a terrible car accident, and the loss shakes Hagar and the Simmons family to their cores.

Mr. Troy – A minister from Doris's church who comes to call on Hagar several times. He attempts to offer her solace through prayer and quiet contemplation, but Hagar rejects his entreaties for her to accept the mercy of God into her life. Nevertheless, Mr. Troy is a good listener, and allows Hagar to tell him many stories about her youth.

Murray F. Lees – When Hagar runs away to Shadow Point and takes refuge in an abandoned cannery, one evening she becomes afraid that an intruder, tramp, or vagrant has come to rob her—however, it is a scrawny and ruddy man, Murray F. Lees, who was wandering through the park when he heard Hagar's pained groans. Murray sits with Hagar a while, shares his wine with her, and the two trade stories about their painful lives, which share in common the loss of a son. Though Hagar begs Murray not to tell anyone where she is, lest Marvin find her and bring her home, Murray sees how ill Hagar is, finds a way to contact her family, and leads them to her, ensuring her safe return home.

Sandra Wong – A young girl who shares Hagar's semiprivate hospital room. Admitted for an appendectomy, Sandra worries that the operation will be painful. Hagar assures her it'll be a breeze, but when Sandra wakes up from the procedure in debilitating pain, she becomes angry with Hagar for not warning her of what was to come. The two slowly develop a friendship, and Sandra comforts Hagar through her final days.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Auntie Doll – The Currie family's housekeeper.

Charlotte Tappen – One of Hagar's childhood friends, a well-to-do young girl whose family throws Hagar and Bram a wedding celebration when Hagar's own family refuses to acknowledge the union.

Telford Simmons – One of Hagar's childhood friends, Telford is the scrawny son of the local mortician who eventually grows up to become a wealthy banker.

Henry Pearl – One of Hagar's childhood friends, Henry is the one to eventually deliver the news of John's horrible car accident.

Mr. Oatley – A wealthy "import-export" man—in truth, a former smuggler—who hires Hagar and takes both her and John in at his massive house after she leaves Bram.

Jessica "Jess" Shipley – One of Bram's daughters from his first marriage.

Doctor Corby – Hagar's doctor.

Mrs. Jardine – A kindly, frail, gossipy woman on the public ward at the hospital who befriends Hagar and helps her adjust to life there, giving her tips on how to deal with the doctors and nurses and get the medicine she needs.

Mrs. Dobereiner – A woman on the public ward at the hospital who sings in German all night every night and who, apparently, prays each day for death.

Mrs. Reilly – An obese woman on the public ward at the hospital.

Steven Shipley – Hagar's grandson, a confident young man who briefly visits her in the hospital.

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 AND THE PAST

Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel* is narrated by Hagar Shipley, an elderly woman looking back on her life as a way of escaping, or perhaps understanding, her dire present-day circumstances: she lives uneasily with her son Marvin and his wife Doris, whose care she requires but continually shirks even as she battles senility and a debilitating gastrointestinal condition. As Hagar looks back on her youth, her contentious marriage, and her difficult relationships with her children, her stories are imbued with both nostalgia and embarrassment, longing and revulsion. In telling Hagar's story, Laurence shows that for Hagar—as is surely the case for many—the past often feels more alive, more vital, and more important than the present moment, even though the events contained within it may have been anything but pleasant. Ultimately Laurence suggests that memories are dangerous things: to deny their potency and importance is to do oneself a disservice, but to linger in them too long is to risk ruining one's "real" life in the present.

Towards the end of the novel, as Hagar lies dying in the hospital, one of her nurses tells her that she's "lucky" to have had so many years of life. "Nothing," the nurse says to Hagar, "can take them away." Hagar "dryly" responds, "That's a mixed blessing, surely." Over the course of the novel, Laurence shows how memory is indeed a "mixed blessing." At the start of the book, Hagar describes herself as an individual who, though "rampant with memory," doesn't choose to very often "indulge" in her remembrances of the past. She believes the old trope of elderly people living in the past is "nonsense," and seems to view memory as a kind of luxury she can't really afford. She tries to prevent herself from looking back on the past, but even as she tells herself she "will not" think back on her "lost men," she finds herself slipping into memories of her girlhood, seemingly pulled into the abyss of the past by forces beyond her control. The past's hold on Hagar, despite her contempt for the concepts of memory and nostalgia, shows how vital her past is to her. She attempts to deny its power, but when she does at last dive into memories, her recollections are plentiful, vivid, and sharply detailed. The past is full of pain, though, and as Hagar reflects on the beatings her father inflicted on her and her brothers, the casual violence she and her schoolmates witnessed throughout their hometown, and even the death of her brother Dan, she tries to stop herself from returning to such a painful time. Even her memories of pleasant things, such as the scent of the lilacs that grew around her old house, are memories of their "seasonal mercy"—a brief reprieve from a difficult status quo.

As the novel progresses, Hagar finds herself having a harder and harder time keeping her memories at bay. She begins spending longer chunks of time lost in the past, and when she comes back to the present moment, she's often confused and disoriented. She is "mortified" by these lapses, and often can't remember what was happening or being said when she drifted off into her recollections. She begins losing more and more time as the story of her past speeds toward the most painful event within it: the death of her youngest and favorite son, John. There seems to be a direct correlation between the emotional difficulty of what Hagar is recalling and her inability to stop stewing in it. Even though her memories get more and more painful, she finds herself lingering in them for longer and longer amounts of time. She is risking becoming all but lost in the maze of her past mistakes, cruelties, and sorrows, when she at last, for the first time in her life, finds a way to properly mourn her son John's death—by telling the story to a stranger, Murray F. Lees. By sharing the story with someone else in her present, she stops the cycle of her memories existing only as personal, private demons that torment her without end, and takes a step—if a small and shaky one—towards living in the present. Shortly after this breakthrough, though, Hagar receives the news that she has stomach cancer and will have to be admitted to a hospital—which she may not ever leave.

Hagar previously spent too much of her life regretting the past, denying its events, and shoving down her emotions—at the start of the novel she has reached a tipping point, it seems, and begins swinging the other way, becoming lost in her memories as the book progresses. Ultimately, Hagar learns that she cannot survive this way either—as she becomes a danger to herself and loses her awareness of space, time, and what's happening to her own body, she realizes that she must pull back and commit to living in the present. She learns her lesson, some would argue, too late—by the time she has exorcised the demons of her past, she is diagnosed with stomach cancer and sent to a local hospital to await her death. This final irony proves too much for her, and as her condition worsens and she becomes more and more reliant on pain medication, which lulls her into a "sleek cocoon" of oblivion, she longs to go to that place more and more often to "collect [her] thoughts."

Throughout the novel, it becomes evident that Hagar is, in many ways, very like **the stone angel** that keeps watch over her mother's grave at the cemetery in Manawaka—hardened to her surroundings, all-seeing, and helpless to stop the passage of time. Hagar's journey through her own memories is painful and burdensome—though she wishes she could change the

mistakes of her past, she cannot. Towards the end of the novel, Hagar at last accepts the permanent and unchangeable nature of the past, knowing that to continue lingering in memory and shut out her present moment will only lead to her own spiritual "defeat."

CHOICES AND IDENTITY

Throughout *The Stone Angel*, as Hagar Shipley reflects on her past and struggles against an unhappy, embarrassing, and undignified present, she attempts to figure out how she has arrived at the moment she's in: elderly, antagonistic, willful, and yet weak in mind and body and entirely dependent on the care of her least favorite son Marvin and his bumbling wife Doris. As Hagar looks back on the choices she's made, Margaret Laurence shows how swiftly—and often slyly—the choices people make become their identities, and argues that every person is ultimately the sum of the decisions they've made.

Raised in a respectable household in Manawaka, the young Hagar—a beautiful, black-haired young woman with dreams of being a schoolteacher—is very different from the Hagar Shipley of the present day—a stubborn woman who condescends to everyone and everything and whose worn, bloated face and body have become unrecognizable even to Hagar herself. The novel, comprised of Hagar's memories interspersed with scenes from her difficult present, unpacks the choices that have made Hagar who she is. In the early years of her life, Hagar describes feeling stifled by her small town and few friends, threatened by her violent father, and confused by her own impulses and desires. She remembers being given the chance to comfort her brother Dan as he died from a horrible fever by wrapping herself in a shawl and pretending to be their mother in order to bring him comfort—and yet, she balked at the idea of doing so, and instead her brother Matt assumed the disguise and held Dan in his arms until his dying breath. Hagar also remembers watching one of her school friends, Lottie, stamp on some recently-hatched chicks that were dying in the sun at the town junkyard, abandoned by their mother. Hagar knew that Lottie's decision was "the only thing to do," and yet recalls being "troubled" by her own inability to take action and make a choice. The stagnancy of Hagar's youth shows how the choice not to make a choice is often an important decision in and of itself. Her refusal to comfort her brother in his hour of need or to do the right thing and end the baby chicks' painful, doomed lives haunts Hagar as the years go by—and as she grows older, she finds herself making decisions often just to make them, starting herself down a path that will forever change the course of her life.

At one point towards the middle of the novel—after her marriage to the crass Brampton Shipley and her subsequent fall from grace in Manawaka society, disinheritance from her father Jason's will, and trying role as mother to her and Bram's two boys—Hagar stops to use a public restroom on Main Street while out running errands and finds herself shocked by the person she sees in the mirror. "I stood for a long time," she remembers, "looking, wondering how a person could change so much and never see it. So gradually it happens. […] My hair was gray and straight. I always cut it myself. The face—a brown and leathery face that wasn't mine. Only the eyes were mine, staring as though to pierce the lying glass and get beneath to some truer image, infinitely distant." Hoping to distance herself from her father—and from the waffling indecision of her youth—Hagar has struck out on her own, married someone her father does not approve of, and borne two children to a man whose values, outlook, and beliefs do not align with her own. Feeling unmoored in her own hometown, embarrassed by her lifestyle, and aged beyond her years, Hagar realizes that the choices she's making are changing the course of her life forever—and that she'll perhaps never be able to get back to the "infinitely distant" root of herself.

Throughout the novel's "present" timeline, set in the 1960s, there are many references to Hagar's astonishment at how time, age, and disease have warped her body. She experiences the host of pains, discomforts, and embarrassments she suffers daily—constipation, pain, poor balance, loss of bladder control—with a kind of detached awe. As Doris and Marvin try to warm her to the idea of accepting their plan to put her in a nursing home, Hagar lashes out verbally and physically and at last full-out runs away in an attempt to retain some semblance of control over what happens to her life and her body. Just as she too late came to understand the perils both of ignoring memory and overindulging it, Hagar has overcorrected again in her old age, this time in regard to agency and decision-making. Afraid of remaining stagnant and pliable as she was in her youth, Hagar instead pursues the bullish, blind rebellion that categorized her adulthood. Though she doesn't know it, she is veering even further off course despite her age, and making choices that affect not just her own health, well-being, and happiness but that of her adult son and his wife as well.

In the end, Hagar remains as incorrigible as ever. She knows that the choices she has made and continues to make are just that—choices—and yet she "can't help" her reliance on old, familiar ways of behaving and speaking. Lying in her bed one night, Hagar tries to "recall something truly free that [she's] done in ninety years," and can only think of "two acts"—acts that remain ambiguous—that she feels were really her own decision. Nevertheless, Hagar's life has been a series of choices and consequences, and though the events of the years have molded her mind and body into someone she hardly recognizes, she has indeed played a part in everything that's happened to her—whether she can identify this or not.

FAMILY, LOVE, AND RESENTMENT

At the heart of *The Stone Angel* is a story about the ways in which families sometimes foster feelings of pain, anger, confusion, and resentment rather than feelings of love and comfort. As Hagar Shipley remembers her own fractured family, and the new one she attempted to build with her husband Brampton Shipley, she is forced to confront the ways in which resentment—not love—has calibrated her relationships with her brothers, her father, her husband, and her own sons. As Hagar wrestles with pain and resentment, her son Marvin and his wife Doris struggle behind the scenes to weigh their love for the woman they both call "Mother" against the quickly-snowballing resentments they feel towards her as old age makes her more and more of a stranger to them. Ultimately, Laurence suggests that resentment and love—or "anger and tenderness"—are unavoidable and even necessary emotions within a family unit, and can coexist side-by-side.

Throughout the novel, Laurence shows time and time again how within the book's families—both born and made—there exists a tenuously-balanced blend of love and resentment. The most profound example of love and resentment coexisting is found in the novel's present-day timeline, set in the 1960s. As the elderly Hagar enters into steep physical and mental decline, her already-difficult relationship with her son Marvin is further strained by the fact that Marvin and his wife Doris are Hagar's caregivers and must contend with her poor attitude, stubborn stoicism, and increasingly frequent falls and bed-wettings. The three individuals love one another more out of obligation than anything else, and harbor strong resentments towards one another that only deepen as the novel unfolds. When Doris and Marvin decide that they want to put Hagar into a nursing home to relieve the burden of caring for her from their shoulders, Hagar becomes frightened and irate. She sputters and rambles any time the nursing home comes up, and on the one occasion they take her to the facility to visit, she runs away from the main building and gives them a fright. Doris, Marvin, and Hagar are, for the majority of the novel, trapped in a horrible standoff: the more sharply Hagar declines and the greater a burden she is to her son and daughter-in-law, the more they resent her. At the same time, the more they attempt to find ways to relieve the burden and stop the vicious cycle of frustration and anger, the greater Hagar's resentment of them grows as she begins to believe that not only do they not love her, but actively hate her.

Hagar's past, too, is rife with love-hate relationships which vacillate between tenderness and resentment. Her marriage to Brampton Shipley—a bear of a man whose crass language, indifference to the opinions of others, and free-living existence on a farm at the outskirts of town all appeal to Hagar in her youth—quickly sours, and in Hagar's description of her and her husband's volatile relationship, Laurence shows that this dynamic has followed Hagar all her life. Hagar chose to marry her husband Bram because he represented the first time in her life that she could make a choice for herself: though he was very different from her and a little bit intimidating, she knew that choosing to marry him would provide her with the radical change in her life—and the distance from her oppressive father—that she craved. As Hagar's relationship with Bram evolved, though, she found herself embarrassed and even disgusted by his crass behavior, his callous speech, and his rejection of societal norms. At the same time, Hagar, in the present, recalls her intense desire for the man: "his banner over me was only his own skin," she says. Though her physical desire for her husband was intense and constant, she "never let him know," and instead "prided [her]self upon keeping [her] pride intact." Hagar's twinned emotions of love and desire for—and resentment and loathing towards—her husband of many years reveals that even in the families one chooses to make or build, these two opposite but intertwined emotions often take root. Hagar eventually left Bram, unable to abide him any longer, but when she received word that he was nearing the end of his life, she rushed to be by his side and cared for him even though his brain had grown so addled by his alcohol addiction that he barely recognized her. During the final days of Bram's life, Hagar still felt the peculiar mix of tenderness and repulsion that defined her relationship to him in her youth.

Towards the novel's end, Marvin, talking with one of his mother's nurses, remarks: "'She's a holy terror.'" Hagar, still awake in her room, can plainly overhear the exchange. She reflects on what she's just heard: "Listening, I feel like it is more than I could now reasonably have expected out of life, for he has spoken with such anger and such tenderness." This passage shows that Hagar understands what a hard time she's given her eldest son over the years, and the resentment she has inspired in him—and yet, at the same time, she can hear in his inflection how much he cares for and even admires her, in spite of it all. Love and resentment are often intertwined, and can be felt in the same breath.

WOMANHOOD

The complicated duties and burdens of womanhood are laid bare over the course of *The Stone Angel* as the elderly Hagar Shipley reflects on her life. Hagar's story encompasses her childhood, her coming-of-age, her uneasy début into womanhood, and her steady decline in health and spirit over the years. In Margaret Laurence's careful hands, Hagar's story becomes an indictment both of the societal and economic forces that devalue and oppress women as well as the ways in which those forces can drive women to make poor choices out of desperation or exasperation. As Hagar struggles against the trappings of traditional womanhood, Laurence argues that to be a woman is to be in a state of constant becoming—clearing hurdle after hurdle only to find that more obstacles to contentment undoubtedly lie ahead.

Throughout the novel, Hagar has an uneasy and even adversarial relationship to her own womanhood and the demands womanhood makes of her. As the novel traverses an enormous span of time—from roughly the 1880s to the early 1960s—Hagar experiences changes, advancements, and setbacks in her journey through life as a woman, and, in a cruelly ironic turn, begins aging out of her ability to care for herself and assert agency over her own body just as the women's liberation movement is about to dawn.

As a young girl being raised by a single widowed father, Jason Currie, in Manawaka, Manitoba—with two brothers at her side—Hagar finds herself pushed and pulled by her family and her friends alike, and always feels like something of an outsider. Her uneasy relationship to the demands of moving through life as a woman is encapsulated by an early instance in the novel. When Hagar's brother Dan, fevered and on the verge of death, calls for his dead mother, Hagar's other brother Matt urges her to wrap a plaid shawl around her head and approach the delusional Dan, pretending to be their mother, to comfort him in his final moments. Hagar is terrified and even repulsed by the task. She stiffens up and tells Matt she can't do it—she's "not a bit like [their mother,]" who has been described to Hagar as having been meek and frail. Hagar balks at the idea of being forced "to play at being her," and even "detest[s]" Dan for longing to be comforted by such a presence. Hagar's reluctance to embody the presence of her mother—a woman she never knew, but has grown wary of because of her frailty and early demise—shows that she does not want to participate in traditional womanhood, and would rather deny someone she loves a moment of grace than "play at" being weak, feminine, or motherly even for a moment.

As Hagar grows older, she attends college for two years and then returns to Manawaka with dreams of being a teacher. Though it's a stereotypically female occupation, Hagar longs to teach so that she can leave her hometown and go East, where she can have more freedom and agency. Her father refuses to let her go, though, and instead she stays at home, keeps his store's accounts, and "play[s] hostess" at parties he throws for friends and acquaintances. After three years of this life, Hagar meets Brampton Shipley, and begins seeing him as a way of escaping the boring, undignified, traditionally feminine life she's leading. Of course, after marrying Brampton, Hagar finds herself veering farther and farther off-course—she is still subjected to wifely duties around the house and eventually becomes mother to two boys, forced to watch as they grow older and participate in the world in a way she never can. She attempts to control her favorite son John's increasingly dangerous, boyish behavior—playing on train tracks with his friends, getting into other various troubles around town—perhaps as a way of making sure that he's not able to have any adventures she herself could not as a girl. She finds herself confronted, as she grows older, with her failures as a wife and a mother—failures that are a blend of her own poor choices and a set of societal expectations she never wanted to reach—and when she runs into women she was friendly with as a girl around town, is reminded starkly of the ways in which she herself has tried to reject femininity and womanhood when she sees their traditional lives and families.

Towards end of the novel, Hagar—having become an overweight, raving, flatulent mess—finds herself on a public women's ward, surrounded by others who have faced the same trials of love, loss, pain, suffering, and embarrassment that accompany the many stages of one's emergence into womanhood. As she makes friends with these women—the first real female friends she's had in her life—she feels solidarity and recognition of her struggle in others' lived experiences for the first time, and is surprised to find herself comforted and bolstered rather than repulsed. Just as Hagar is learning all her other lessons too late, she now learns on what is perhaps her literal deathbed that in denying the complexities of womanhood all her life, she was doing herself a disservice, and only isolating herself more.

"'I wouldn't say you'd been exactly pretty—handsome is what I'd say. You've got such strong features. Good bones don't change. You're still handsome." One of Hagar's nurses in the hospital speaks these words to her towards the end of the novel, symbolizing and cementing Hagar's journey through her own womanhood. She is a "handsome," not "pretty" woman: she has never wanted to get lost within the traditional trappings of womanhood, and has sought to make a life for herself in which she can be bold, free, and inoculated against the indignities and responsibilities so often thrust upon women.

SYMBOLS

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

THE STONE ANGEL

There is a tall, expensive, sightless stone angel carved from marble that stands watch over the grave of Hagar Shipley's long-dead mother, Regina, "who relinquished her feeble ghost as [Hagar] gained [her] stubborn one"—in other words, she died giving birth to Hagar. The stone angel is thus Hagar's twin in a way, and throughout the novel comes to symbolize Hagar's painful, demoralizing journey through life. The stone angel was brought into the world around the same time as Hagar, and suffers the same weathering, embarrassment, and indignity that Hagar herself endures throughout the course of her life. Hagar, a character who wrestles with her own agency and the ways in which the choices she has made pile up and become her identity, is in many ways as unseeing as the stone angel herself. Hagar, too,

often "topple[s]" both physically and emotionally, and though her sons have helped to right her time and time again, she knows a time is approaching when no one will even "bother" to right her—to fix her mistakes, to clean up her messes, to attend to her in moments of pain or suffering.

The stone angel has been carved "with[out] even a pretense of sight"—whoever formed her "left the eyeballs blank." The angel was expensive to procure, and was imported from Europe by Hagar's father Jason, a self-made man whose recent windfall of money was a point of pride for him and perhaps the only thing that sustained him through the loss of his wife. Throughout the events of the novel—over the course of about ninety years—the stone angel remains in the cemetery. Her wings grow "pitted" and worn, occasionally she topples, and once she is even defaced and smeared with garish lipstick; but through all the events of Hagar's life, the stone angel remains, watchful yet unseeing. Hagar is wary of the stone angel in her youth, and only as an older woman—who has to bury her husband Brampton and, later, her youngest son John—does she begin caring about how the angel fares. When she visits the cemetery with John before his death, she finds that the angel has been toppled and defaced. With John's help, she rights the angel and cleans its face—though the novel implies that it was perhaps a drunken John who overturned and painted the angel in the first place, symbolizing the often painful, thankless role of motherhood. The final time Hagar sees the stone angel in her life—on a visit to Manawaka as an old woman, accompanied by her son Marvin and his wife Doris—the angel appears "altered" through lack of care. She is "askew and tilted," and Hagar knows that one day "she'll topple entirely, and no one will bother to set her upright again." As Hagar and her family contemplate the angel together, a caretaker at the cemetery comes over and, failing to recognize who they are, begins telling them the story of their own family, and of the stone angel who has stood watch over their plot for years and years.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the University of Chicago Press edition of *The Stone Angel* published in 1964.

Chapter 1 Quotes

Above the town, on the hill brow, the stone angel used to stand. I wonder if she stands there yet, in memory of her who relinquished her feeble ghost as I gained my stubborn one, my mother's angel that my father bought in pride to mark her bones and proclaim his dynasty, as he fancied, forever and a day.

Summer and winter she viewed the town with sightless eyes. She was doubly blind, not only stone but unendowed with even a pretense of sight. Whoever carved her had left the eyeballs blank. It seemed strange to me that she should stand above the town, harking us all to heaven without knowing who we were at all. But I was too young then to know her purpose, although my father often told me she had been brought from Italy at a terrible expense and was pure white marble. I think now she must have been carved in that distant sun by stone masons who were the cynical descendants of Bernini, gouging out her like by the score, gauging with admirable accuracy the needs of fledgling pharaohs in an uncouth land.

Related Characters: Hagar Shipley (speaker), Jason Currie / Hagar's Father

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

The opening passages of the novel introduce its central symbol: the stone angel that keeps watch over the cemetery plot which will eventually house the graves of Hagar's entire family. The angel—having been brought into the world roughly at the same time as Hagar—is in some ways Hagar's twin, and a mirror for the ways in which Hagar, over the course of her life, attempts to make herself impervious to the passage of time, the weathering of the years, the opinions of others, and her own self-criticism. The angel is stalwart but unseeing—and as Hagar grows older, she, too, will find herself unable to see clearly her own mistakes and choices, and will remain staunchly, stubbornly the same, unable to change or grow out of a strange mixture of pride and self-loathing.

"Do you know what he's got in his dresser, Hagar?" Matt went on. "An old plaid shawl—it was hers. He used to go to sleep holding it, as a kid, I remember. I thought it had got thrown out years ago. But it's still there."

He turned to me then, and held both my hands in his, the only time I ever recall my brother Matt doing such a thing.

"Hagar—put it on and hold him for a while."

I stiffened and drew away my hands. "I can't. Oh Matt, I'm sorry, but I can't, I can't. I'm not a bit like her." "He wouldn't know," Matt said angrily. "He's out of his head." But all I could think of was that meek woman I'd never seen, the woman Dan was said to resemble so much and from whom he'd inherited a frailty I could not help but detest, however much a part of me wanted to sympathize. To play at being her—it was beyond me.

"I can't, Matt." I was crying, shaken by torments he never even suspected, wanting above all else to do the thing he asked, but unable to do it, unable to bend enough.

Related Characters: Hagar Shipley, Matt Currie (speaker), Dan Currie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Hagar, confronted with a chance to comfort her dying brother in his final hours by pretending to be their long-dead mother, chooses not to. She doesn't want to—and seemingly even *can't*—"play at being" the woman who died bringing her into the world, a woman who has always seemed to her weak, frail, and vulnerable. Hagar's own pride and shows of strength are more instinctual to her than compassion, empathy, and the care of others—and as she fails to act in this pivotal moment, she does not yet see how it will come to affect her decision-making throughout the years, as her latent guilt over her inaction propels her into hasty and unwise decisions for years to come.

We saw a huge and staggering heap of eggs, jarred and broken by some wagoner and cast here, unsaleable. July was hot that day— I can feel yet its insistence upon my neck and my wringing palms. We saw, with a kind of horror that could not be avoided, however much one looked away or scurried on, that some of the eggs had been fertile and had hatched in the sun. The chicks, feeble, foodless, bloodied and mutilated, prisoned by the weight of broken shells all around them, were trying to crawl like little worms, their half-mouths opened uselessly among the garbage. I could only gawk and retch, I and the others, all except one. [...]

[Lottie] looked at the chicks. I didn't know whether she made herself look, or whether she was curious.

"We can't leave them like this."

"But Lottie—" that was Charlotte Tappen, who had an exceptionally weak stomach, even though her father was a doctor. "What can we do? I can't look, or I'll throw up."

"Hagar—" Lottie began. "I wouldn't touch them with a ten-foot pole," I said. "All right," Lottie said furiously. "Don't, then." She took a stick and crushed the eggshell skulls, and some of them she stepped on with the heels of her black patent-leather shoes.

It was the only thing to do, a thing I couldn't have done. And yet it troubled me so much that I could not.

Related Characters: Charlotte Tappen, Lottie Drieser, Hagar Shipley (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 27-28

Explanation and Analysis

Dan's death, and her failure to comfort him in his hour of need, have deeply affected Hagar—but this incident with Lottie and the chicks cements to her even more clearly her "troubl[ing]" inability to act decisively in crucial moments. Hagar's latent guilt not just over her failure to be there for Dan, but her failure in this moment to take action in putting the chicks out of their misery, will propel her onward through the years and come to influence the often rash choices she'll make in the future. Additionally, as Hagar watches Lottie take action, their future relationship is foreshadowed—one day, in many years, they will come together to do what they believe is best for someone else, only to find that their actions have unbearable repercussions for them both.

Chapter 3 Quotes

"Do you—" I hesitate. "Do you ever get used to such a place?"

She laughs then, a short bitter laugh I recognize and comprehend at once. "Do you get used to life?" she says. "Can you answer me that? It all comes as a surprise. You get your first period, and you're amazed—I can have babies now— such a thing! When the children come, you think—Is it mine? Did it come out of me? Who could believe it? When you can't have them any more, what a shock— It's finished—so soon?"

I peer at her, thinking how peculiar that she knows so much.

"You're right. I never got used to a blessed thing."

Related Characters: Hagar Shipley (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 104

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Hagar visits the local nursing home, Silverthreads, after being tricked into the tour by her son and daughter-in-law. As she sits on the verandah of the facility talking with a kind, chatty woman, Mrs. Steiner, the two discuss the fleeting nature of life and the incomprehensibility of aging. Mrs. Steiner's words are wistful but at the same time awestruck—she is amazed by how quickly her life has passed her by, but also clearly has a reverence for the experiences she's had. Even though Hagar's life has been marked by difficulty, pain, and loss—she rarely looks back on her past with a reverent, longing eye—she too can see how wise Mrs. Steiner is, and how true her assessment of life's beautiful impermanence is.

Chapter 4 Quotes

"Judas priest, woman, what do you want me to do? Get down on my bended knees?"

"I only want you to behave a little differently."

"Well, maybe I'd like you different, too."

"I don't disgrace myself."

"No, by Christ, you're respectable—I'll give you that."

Twenty-four years, in all, were scoured away like sandbanks under the spate of our wrangle and bicker. Yet when he turned his hairy belly and his black haired thighs toward me in the night, I would lie silent but waiting, and he could slither and swim like an eel in a pool of darkness. Sometimes, if there had been no argument between us in the day, he would say he was sorry, sorry to bother me, as though it were an affliction with him, something that set him apart, as his speech did, from educated people.

Related Characters: Hagar Shipley, Brampton "Bram" Shipley (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 116

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Hagar and Bram get into one of the many arguments which slowly served to "scour away" their relationship over the years. They take digs at one another, highlighting the things they hate most about the other—Hagar hates that she hasn't been able to change Bram, and Bram hates Hagar for wanting to change him in the name of respectability. As bitter as the fight is, this passage also takes a turn and shows why Hagar and Bram stayed together for so many years. Even though they fought and despised one another, there was an intense physical attraction between the two of them—an attraction that kept Hagar believing that things might work out in the end, and kept Bram believing that only he knew the true woman his wife was underneath all her layers of social anxiety and "respectable" appearances.

It's better to know, but disappointing, too. I wonder now if I really want to fling this door wide. I do and don't. Perhaps the thing inside will prove more terrible even than one's imaginings.

Meantime, Doris feels it behooves her to bolster Marvin.

"It's just as Marv says—the doctor says you'd be much better off—"

"Oh, stow it," Marvin says, all of a sudden. "If you don't want to go there, Mother, you don't need to."

"Well, I like that!" Doris is outraged. "And who'll do the laundry, I'd like to know? You, I suppose?"

"I don't know what in hell I'm supposed to do," Marvin says. "I'm caught between two fires."

Related Characters: Marvin Shipley, Doris Shipley, Hagar Shipley (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 118

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Marvin and Doris—who have received a report on Hagar's health from her doctor but have not allowed her to see it herself—try to convince her that her doctor, in addition to the two of them, believes she'd be better off with professional care. As the latest in a series of many escalating arguments about where Hagar should live out her days begins, the frustrated Marvin, at the end of his rope, tries to do the impossible—he tries to please both the stubborn Hagar and his exhausted wife Doris. Marvin wants to be a good son to his mother, but knows that to make her happy is to further exhaust and alienate Doris. The love and resentment between the three of them is palpable in this moment, as they reach an impasse that wearies them all.

A Rest Room had recently been established in the town. I'd never been inside it, not fancying public conveniences. But I told John to let me off there that night. One room it was, with brown wainscoting and half a dozen straight chairs, and the two toilet cubicles beyond. No one was there. I made sure of that before I entered. I went in and found what I needed, a mirror. I stood for a long time, looking, wondering how a person could change so much and never see it. So gradually it happens.

I was wearing, I saw, a man's black overcoat that Marvin had left. It was too big for John and impossibly small for Bram. It still had a lot of wear left in it, so I'd taken it. The coat bunched and pulled up in front, for I'd put weight on my hips, and my stomach had never gone flat again after John was born. Twined around my neck was a knitted scarf, hairy and navy blue, that Bram's daughter Gladys had given me one Christmas. On my head a brown tarn was pulled down to keep my ears warm. My hair was gray and straight. I always cut it myself. The face— a brown and leathery face that wasn't mine. Only the eyes were mine, staring as though to pierce the lying glass and get beneath to some truer image, infinitely distant.

Related Characters: Hagar Shipley (speaker), Brampton "Bram" Shipley, Marvin Shipley, John Shipley

Related Themes:

Page Number: 133

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Hagar—who has recently taken up delivering hen's eggs around Manawaka in order to make some extra money for herself and John—sees herself truthfully for the first time in ages. The choices she's made in her life have wearied, weathered, and impoverished her economically, socially, physically, and spiritually. She has veered so far off course that she hardly recognizes herself any longer—even her eyes, the only thing about her which have remained unchanged, seem "distant" and uncomprehending as they encounter Hagar's worn visage. The years are taking a toll on her, and the hopes Hagar had for herself are not coming true. She realizes that she can no longer linger in indecision—she must make a decisive choice about her future, or risk watching herself fade away piece by piece over the course of the years to come.

Chapter 5 Quotes

Winter was the right time to go. A bell-voice, clear in the cold air, cried "All aboard!" and the train stirred and shook itself like a drowsy dragon and began to move, regally slow, then faster until it was spinning down the shining tracks. We passed the shacks and shanties that clustered around the station, and the railway buildings and water tower painted their dried-blood red. Then we were away from Manawaka. It came as a shock to me, how small the town was, and how short a time it took to leave it, as we measure time.

Into the white Wachakwa valley then, past the dump grounds and the cemetery on the hill. Peering, I could see on the hill brow the marble angel, sightlessly guarding the gardens of snow, the empty places and the deep-lying dead.

Related Characters: Hagar Shipley (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 142

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Hagar and John finally leave their lives in Manawaka—and their lives with Bram—behind. As the train pulls out of the station and makes its way beyond the city limits, Hagar realizes how easy it was to leave all along, and how small her town—which seemed to contain everything of her past, present, and future—has been all this time. As her hometown fades in the distance, so too does the stone angel, the symbol of Hagar's inertia and her ironclad attachment to the town, to her family, and to the undesired legacy she is and always has been a part of.

My room has been prepared for me. The mattress is mildewed, it's true, and musty from never being aired. But it's here and mine. From the bedroom window I can look out to the darkening trees and beyond them to the sea. Who would have thought I'd have a room with a view? Heartened, I plod back down the stairs, and then return, bearing my bag and my hat.

To move to a new place—that's the greatest excitement. For a while you believe you carry nothing with you—all is canceled from before, or cauterized, and you begin again and nothing will go wrong this time.

Related Characters: Hagar Shipley (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 155

Explanation and Analysis

Hagar finds refuge in an abandoned building, having run away from Martin and Doris to the seaside town of Shadow Point. She is all alone, as she has fled from home in hopes of thwarting her son and daughter-in-law's plans to admit her to a nursing home. Even though Hagar finds herself surrounded by dilapidated, lonely conditions with little food and no water, she admits to feeling a great "excitement" at being in a new place. She also expresses hope that the shift will allow her to "cauterize" her old life, just as she hoped, years ago, that leaving Manawaka would allow her to start a fresh new life and thrive on her own in a new place.

It was a becalmed life we led there, a period of waiting and of marking time. But the events we waited for, unknowingly, turned out to be quite other than what I imagined they might be.

And here am I, the same Hagar, in a different establishment once more, and waiting again. I try, a little, to pray, as one's meant to do at evening, thinking perhaps the knack of it will come to me here. But it works no better than it ever did. I can't change what's happened to me in my life, or make what's not occurred take place. But I can't say I like it, or accept it, or believe it's for the best. I don't and never shall, not even if I'm damned for it. So I merely sit on the bed and look out the window until the dark comes and the trees have gone and the sea itself has been swallowed, by the night.

Related Characters: Hagar Shipley (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 160

Explanation and Analysis

Looking back on her move away from Manawaka and into the lavish home of the wealthy ex-smuggler Mr. Oatley as the man's housekeeper, Hagar remembers feeling "becalmed" in her new surroundings, yet also excitedly looking forward to the things she "imagined" and hoped would happen for her and her son: happiness, success, opportunity. Now, as in the past, Hagar finds herself in a new place with new hopes for herself—but knowing how things turned out the last time she fled home, she has trouble mustering genuine belief that things will go right

this time. She knows that her life has been little but a series of mistakes and poor choices, and yet though she is nearing its end, she can't bring herself to "accept" that this is the narrative of her existence. Even now, she is trying to rewrite the way she lives, the way she is seen, and the way her future will unfold.

Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ John put an arm around the girl's shoulders, smearing her white pique dress.

"See you around, eh?" he said, and we left, he whistling and I bewildered.

"You could have been a little more polite," I reproached him when we were out of earshot. "Not that I was much impressed with her. But still and all—"

"Polite!" He snorted with laughter. "That's not what she wants from me."

"What does she want—to marry you?"

"Marry? By Christ, no. She'd never marry a Shipley. It tickles her to neck with one, that's all."

"Don't talk like that," I snapped. "Don't ever let me hear you speak like that again, John. In any case, she's not the sort of girl for you. She's bold and—"

"Bold? Her? She's a rabbit, a little furry rabbit."

"You like her, then?"

"Are you kidding? I'd lay her if I got the chance, that's all."

"You're talking just like your father," I said. "The same coarse way. I wish you wouldn't. You're not a bit like him."

'That's where you're wrong," John said.

Related Characters: Hagar Shipley, John Shipley (speaker), Brampton "Bram" Shipley, Arlene Simmons

Related Themes:

Page Number: 174

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Hagar has returned to Manawaka to help John care for the sickly Bram. It has been two years since, in a flash of anger and frustration with Hagar's inability to send him to college, John moved back to Manawaka to live on the Shipley farm. Here, Hagar realizes that she doesn't know her favorite son at all any longer—he talks coarsely even to fine ladies, and speaks denigratingly but almost proudly of his own low social standing. He also speaks crassly about sex and seems to have no regard for anyone but himself—just like Bram always spoke. When Hagar tries to tell John that he's not like his father, John tells Hagar that she's the one who's wrong—and indeed she is. She has been so blinded by her love for John that she's incapable of seeing how he's always been like Bram: resentful, coarse, disrespectful, and self-loathing.

❝ The marble angel lay toppled over on her face, among the peonies, and the black ants scurried through the white stone ring lets of her hair. Beside me, John laughed.

"The old lady's taken quite a header."

I turned to [John] in dismay. "Who could have done it?"

"How should I know?"

"We'll have to set her up," I said. "We can't leave it like this."

[...]

"Oh, all right," he said. "I'll do it, then."

[...]

He sweated and grunted angrily. His feet slipped and he hit his forehead on a marble ear, and swore. His arm muscles tightened and swelled, and finally the statue moved, teetered, and was upright once more. John wiped his face with his hands.

"There. Satisfied?"

I looked, and then again in disbelief. Someone had painted the pouting marble mouth and the full cheeks with lipstick. The dirt clung around it but still the vulgar pink was plainly visible.

"Oh, Christ," John said, as though to himself. "There's that."

"Who'd do such a thing?"

"She looks a damn sight better, if you ask me. Why not leave it?"

I never could bear that statue. I'd have been glad enough to leave her. Now I wish I had. But at the time it was impossible.

Related Characters: John Shipley, Hagar Shipley (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 178-179

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, John takes Hagar to visit her family's cemetery plot, and she is shaken when she sees that the stone angel, vigilant protector of her family's crumbled legacy, has been toppled onto her face. Hagar begs John to pick the angel—a metaphor for Hagar herself—up off of her face, and John

reluctantly agrees. When the angel is at last upright, however, Hagar is further horrified to see that she has been crassly defaced. John seems to find amusement in the act of vandalism—and the narrative implies that he may even have been responsible for it himself. As Hagar realizes just how little regard her son has for the stone angel—and, by proxy, for herself—she feels that she cannot abandon the angel, and must work to fix her up. Hagar wants to save herself from the spiral she's found herself in, but doesn't know how. What this passage makes evident, though, is that she can't rely on her son to help her anymore.

Chapter 8 Quotes

[The nurse] put a well-meaning arm around me. "Cry. Let yourself. It's the best thing." But I shoved her arm away. I straightened my spine, and that was the hardest thing I've ever had to do in my entire life, to stand straight then. I wouldn't cry in front of strangers, whatever it cost me.

But when at last I was home, alone in Marvin's old bedroom, and women from the town were sitting in the kitchen below and brewing coffee, I found my tears had been locked too long and wouldn't come now at my bidding. The night my son died I was transformed to stone and never wept at all. When the ministering women handed me the cup of hot coffee, they murmured how well I was taking it, and I could only look at them dry eyed from a great distance and not say a single word. All the night long, I only had one thought—I'd had so many things to say to him, so many things to put to rights. He hadn't waited to hear.

I guess they thought it odd, some of the Manawaka people did, that after the funeral service was over I wouldn't go out to the cemetery. I didn't want to see where he was put, close by his father and close by mine, under the double-named stone where the marble angel crookedly stood.

Related Characters: Hagar Shipley (speaker), Marvin Shipley, John Shipley

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 242-243

Explanation and Analysis

After John dies after being driven off the local trestle bridge by an oncoming freight train, the stunned Hagar—who always warned John, as a child, not to play on the bridge—finds herself unable to cry, even in the privacy of her own home. As she realizes that she has indeed become very much like the stone angel guarding over her family's cemetery plot—unseeing, unfeeling, unable to change or move on other than to slowly depreciate in beauty, value, and strength—the idea of going to the cemetery to watch her son be buried is too much for her. To encounter the stone angel would be to admit defeat, to see herself as she does not want to. Though it is "odd" and against social custom to forgo attending her son's burial, Hagar once more flouts social norms and chooses to preserve, however frailly, her own self-regard.

Chapter 9 Quotes

What could I possibly tell her, I wonder, that could do her any good? She knows a lot more than I did when I married. Or maybe she doesn't, really, but who's to tell her? I haven't a word to send her, my granddaughter. Instead, I tug at my right hand, pull and shake, and finally wrench off the ring.

"Send her this, Doris, will you? It was my mother's sapphire. I'd like Tina to have it."

Doris gasps. "Are you—are you sure you really want to, Mother?"

Something in her eyes saddens me, makes me want to turn away.

"Of course I'm sure. What use is it to me? I should've given it to you, I suppose, years ago. I could never bear to part with it. Stupid. Too bad you never had it. I don't want it now. Send it to Tina."

"Mother—" Marvin has a very loud voice sometimes. "Are you sure?"

Speechlessly I nod. Why all this fuss? In another moment I'll take the wretched thing back, to shut them up. Doris pops it in her purse, as if she's been thinking the same thing.

Related Characters: Marvin Shipley, Doris Shipley, Hagar Shipley (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 279

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Hagar—who, after several days on a public ward full of ill, dying women, has realized that her own life is perhaps coming to an end—decides to offer her granddaughter, and indeed her daughter-in-law, some grace for once in her life. Hagar has been stubborn, cruel, and incorrigible for years, never granting Doris and Marvin a

moment's thanks or peace. Now, though, at the news of Tina's impending marriage, Hagar decides to soften a bit. As she does something nice for Tina, she also apologizes to Doris for the years of difficulty she's foisted upon the woman, tacitly admitting that she's been "stupid" in her constant judgment, her incorrigibility, and her staunch refusal to give up any of her possessions or her home even in the face of her own decline.

Chapter 10 Quotes

"You girls are so slim these days."

She smiles. She's used to the inane remarks of old women.

"I'll bet you were just as slim, when you were young, Mrs. Shipley."

"Oh—you know my name." Then I remember it's on a card at the foot of my bed, and I feel a fool. "Yes, I was quite slender at your age. I had black hair, long, halfway down my back. Some people thought me quite pretty. You'd never think so to look at me now."

"Yes, you would," she says, standing back a little and regarding me. "I wouldn't say you'd been exactly pretty— handsome is what I'd say. You've got such strong features. Good bones don't change. You're still handsome."

[...]

"That's kind of you. You're a nice girl. You're lucky, to be young." I wish I hadn't added that. I never used to say whatever popped into my head. How slipshod I'm growing.

"I guess so." She smiles, but differently, aloofly. "Maybe you're the lucky one."

"How so, for mercy's sake?"

"Oh well—" she says evasively, "you've had those years. Nothing can take them away."

"That's a mixed blessing, surely," I say dryly, but of course she doesn't see what I mean.

Related Characters: Hagar Shipley (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 283-284

Explanation and Analysis

As one of the hospital nurses attends to Hagar and fixes her up in her new room, Hagar makes small talk with the young woman, whose youth, beauty, and slender frame she both admires and covets. As the young woman compliments Hagar's strong and "handsome" features, it becomes clear that though Hagar was never pretty in her youth, she always had "good bones" that made her appear strong and capable, and in some ways, this is more valuable than beauty. Hagar is slightly moved by the nurse's kindness and politeness, but also retains her signature dryness and brashness as she deflects the idea that her many years have been a "blessing." Hagar doesn't know how to communicate the truth of her life to a stranger, but is still unwilling to passively lie and say that it's all been a walk in the park.

Doris returns. She fusses over me, fixes my pillows, rearranges my flowers, does my hair. How I wish she wouldn't fuss so. She jangles my nerves with her incessant fussing. Mr. Troy has left and is waiting outside in the hall.

"Did you have a nice chat?" she says wistfully. If only she'd stop prodding at me about it. "We didn't have a single solitary thing to say to one another," I reply. She bites her lip and looks away. I'm ashamed.

But I won't take back the words. What business is it of hers, anyway?

Oh, I am unchangeable, unregenerate. I go on speaking in the same way, always, and the same touchiness rises within me at the slightest thing.

"Doris—I didn't speak the truth. He sang for me, and it did me good."

Related Characters: Hagar Shipley (speaker), Mr. Troy, Doris Shipley

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 293

Explanation and Analysis

Just as Hagar gave her ring to Doris for Tina in the previous chapter, she now too tries to give something to Doris herself. When Doris has previously brought Mr. Tory to talk with Hagar, Hagar has dismissed the man as a useless dolt and claimed that their talks have done nothing for her. This most recent visit with Mr. Troy, however, has actually moved and calmed Hagar. She tries to lie about the truth of what transpired in the room with Mr. Tory to Doris—but then realizes that she is, in lying, sealing herself up in hard, unchangeable stone. Hagar, knowing the end of her life is near, offers Doris an unexpected moment of grace, in

acknowledging what Doris has tried to do for her and in thanking her the only way she knows how.

"Don't you remember how you used to give me pennies to buy jaw-breakers, when I was a kid? Mom used to be livid, thinking of the dentist's bills."

I'd forgotten. I have to smile, even as my mouth is filled once more with bile. That's what I am to him— a grandmother who gave him money for candy. What does he know of me? Not a blessed thing. I'm choked with it now, the incommunicable years, everything that happened and was spoken or not spoken. I want to tell him. Someone should know. This is what I think. Some one really ought to know these things.

But where would I begin, and what does it matter to him, anyway? It might be worse. At least he recalls a pleasant thing.

Related Characters: Hagar Shipley, Steven Shipley (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 296

Explanation and Analysis

As Hagar receives a visit from her confident, easygoing grandson Steve, he reminisces with her about his memories of her from his own childhood. Though Hagar is bolstered by the company, she's saddened and overwhelmed by the fact that to Steven she's just a kindly grandmother—he doesn't know the truth of her life, the truth of her soul, or the "incommunicable" small moments which have come to define her. Moreover, there's no use in trying to tell Steven her story—she feels he wouldn't care, and that to know the truth of her would annihilate the pleasant but insubstantial memories he has of her. She decides to allow him to "recall a pleasant thing" rather than burden him with the truth of her pain, her suffering, and her doomed stubbornness.

"If I've been crabby with you, sometimes, these past years," he says in a low voice, "I didn't mean it." I stare at him. Then, quite unexpectedly, he reaches for my hand and holds it tightly. Now it seems to me he is truly Jacob, gripping with all his strength, and bargaining. *I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.* And I see I am thus strangely cast, and perhaps have been so from the beginning, and can only release myself by releasing him. It's in my mind to ask his pardon, but that's not what he wants from me.

"You've not been cranky, Marvin. You've been good to me, always. A better son than John."

The dead don't bear a grudge nor seek a blessing. The dead don't rest uneasy. Only the living. Marvin, looking at me from anxious elderly eyes, believes me. It doesn't occur to him that a person in my place would ever lie.

Related Characters: Hagar Shipley, Marvin Shipley (speaker), John Shipley

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 304

Explanation and Analysis

This complex passage shows Hagar, who has been steadily granting her beleaguered family more and more acts of grace as her condition declines, offering one final "blessing" to her least-favorite son, Marvin. Though she doesn't feel in her heart that he is truly her favorite, she knows that the only way to "release" both of them from the pain and resentment they've caused one another is to acknowledge, for Marvin's sake, how "good" he's been to her. Marvin has long languished in obscurity, the Esau to his brother's Jacob (in the Biblical analogy), and even though he's put his life and marriage on the line to help keep Hagar healthy and cared for, he's received nothing but guff from her. In this moment, she offers him what may be a "lie" in order to release him from his resentment of her—and release her from her own unrequited attachment to her true favorite, the ungrateful and long-dead John.

As he goes out, I hear the nurse speaking to him in the corridor. "She's got an amazing constitution, your mother. One of those hearts that just keeps on working, whatever else is gone."

A pause, and then Marvin replies. "She's a holy terror," he says.

Listening, I feel like it is more than I could now reasonably have expected out of life, for he has spoken with such anger and such tenderness.

Related Characters: Marvin Shipley, Hagar Shipley (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 304-305

Explanation and Analysis

After a heavy, difficult conversation with Hagar, Marvin leaves her room to head home, and engages in this exchange with one of his mother's nurses. Though the nurse—whether out of genuine admiration or politeness—remarks upon Hagar's strong, "amazing," constitution, the exhausted Marvin, wearied by his mother's stubbornness, cruelty, and wildness over the years, can only reply that she is a "holy terror." His simultaneous love and resentment for Hagar manifest as twinned reverence and repulsion—he admires her grit and her spirit, but also admits that her nature has made things incredibly difficult for him all his life. Overhearing this exchange, Hagar feels a kind of pride—she has managed to inspire strong feelings in her son, even if they're not always positive.

"You took your time in coming, I must say. Hurry up, now—" I must get back, back to my sleek cocoon, where I'm almost comfortable, lulled by potions. I can collect my thoughts there. That's what I need to do, collect my thoughts.

"You're so slow—"

"Sorry. That better?"

"Yes. No. I'm—thirsty. Can't you even—"

"Here. Here you are. Can you?"

"Of course. What do you think I am? What do you take me for? Here, give it to me. Oh, for mercy's sake let me hold it myself!"

I only defeat myself by not accepting her. I know this—I know it very well. But I can't help it—it's my nature. I'll drink from this glass, or spill it, just as I choose. I'll not countenance anyone else's holding it for me. And yet—if she were in my place, I'd think her daft, and push her hands away, certain I could hold it for her better.

I wrest from her the glass, full of water to be had for the taking. I hold it in my own hands. There. There.

And then—

Related Characters: Hagar Shipley (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 308

Explanation and Analysis

In the novel's final passage, Hagar, who has been drifting in and out of consciousness and lucidity due to the higher and higher doses of pain medication administered by her nurses, calls for yet another injection of medicine. As the nurse approaches, though, Hagar confuses the woman with her daughter-in-law Doris, and begins barking orders at her. When the nurse hesitates to let Hagar hold a glass of water for herself, the old woman becomes enraged and insists that she can care for herself. Even as she brusquely demands to hold the water, she knows that to "not accept" the woman's help is only to "defeat herself." Still, she cannot help her stubborn nature, and is determined to hold the glass herself even if it means she spills its contents. As the novel cuts off its narrative mid-sentence, it is unclear whether Hagar is able to drink from the glass or not—or even whether she lives past this moment or not.

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

Hagar Shipley describes a **stone angel** that marked—and may still mark—her dead mother's grave. Hagar's mother died bringing her into the world in 1886, "relinquish[ing] her feeble ghost as [Hagar] gained [her] stubborn one." Her father, Jason Currie, brought the "sightless" stone angel in from Italy "at a terrible expense" to stand watch over his wife's plot in the Manawaka cemetery. Though the angel was not the only one in the cemetery, "she was the first, the largest, and certainly the costliest."

The novel begins with a description of the stone angel—its central symbol, and in many ways a kind of silent twin to Hagar herself. This passage also establishes Hagar's disdain for meekness or weakness, and the pride—rather than the pain—she feels at having "stubbornly" survived something that took her mother's own life.

Hagar, now ninety years old and "rampant with memory," is sure that she herself is as "forgotten in Manawaka" as her long-dead mother is. Though she tries her best not to live in the past and indulge her memories, having come to see a "rarity" in the days that remain of her life, Hagar often slips into reverie. She lives with her eldest son Marvin and his wife Doris, and is well-aware of the fact that they're frightened of her and her bad habits—such as cigarette smoking and talking out loud while she's having one of her detours into memory. Hagar's bedroom in her own house has no lock, and she feels like Marvin and Doris are denying her her freedom and her very humanity in her old age.

This passage establishes the point Hagar is at in her life. She feels constricted by her present circumstances, and as a result spends much of her time revisiting the past in her mind.

Hagar looks back on her childhood: raised in Manawaka, Manitoba, she was a spirited young girl who enjoyed tormenting her governess, Auntie Doll, and dreaded helping her father Jason out at his prosperous general store, the first in their town. Despite her wariness of her father, Hagar can see now that she was always more like him than her brothers, Matt and Dan, who were "graceful unspirited boys" and took after their dead mother. Hagar, on the other hand, was always "sturdy" and direct, bearing her father's whippings—and her brothers'—with stoicism and defiance. Hagar's father seemed to both resent and admire her gutsiness, aware that for all the trouble she caused him she "did take after him."

Hagar has prided herself all her life on her stoicism and sturdiness, and as the novel progresses, it will become evident that these traits are both a blessing and a curse.

Hagar's best friend in school as a girl was Charlotte Tapper, and the other children in their small school included Lottie Drieser, whose father had left their family and disappeared, Telford Simmons, the son of the town mortician, and Henry Pearl, a large and gawky farm boy who was often precluded from joining the others for afterschool playtime and hijinks around town because of his chores back at home. Hagar recalls getting up to all kinds of trouble with her friends, such as sneaking into the funeral parlor to look at corpses, but also remembers being very clever in school.

This passage introduces some characters whose lives will intersect with Hagar throughout the years as the choices they make and the paths they take pull them apart and bring them back together in unexpected ways.

For all his talk of being a self-made man and "pulling himself up by his bootstraps," Hagar's father Jason Currie came from a good family. His father had been a silk importer and a Highlander, and Jason took great pride in teaching his children their family's clan name, pipe music, and war cry. Hagar loved hearing stories about the Highlanders, and wished that she too could be a fearless Scottish warrior. Jason was a devout man who went to church each Sunday, though Hagar doubted and doubts still if he really believed in and feared God. He never remarried after his wife's death, though Hagar accidentally learned that he was having an affair with Lottie Drieser's mother when she spotted them together at the cemetery one afternoon. The woman died of consumption soon after Hagar spotted them together, and she remembers that her father bore the news stoically and unemotionally.

This section demonstrates the Curries' social standing in the town. Though not wealthy or aristocratic, Jason built their family up and made a name for them in the community. His mingling with Lottie Drieser's mother—an unmarried woman of, it's suggested, a lower social standing—foreshadows his own daughter's subversions of class and social strata in her own relationships, and demonstrates the hypocrisy of Jason's rejection of Hagar's choices.

Hagar's older brothers, Matt and Dan, often helped out at her father's store, though he never paid them a cent for their work. The clumsy, dull Matt tried to save money to head East to go to college, but gave up when he realized he'd never save enough and instead spent it all on a fighting cock whose neck he wrung after it lost in its first match. Dan, meanwhile, "cultivated illness as some people cultivate rare plants." Always delicate and frail, he often stayed home sick from school to revel in the attentions and affections of Auntie Doll.

Hagar has always been headstrong and sturdy, but her brothers, despite the privileges and priority afforded to men at the time, remained frail, weak, and shiftless.

As young teens, Hagar and her brothers often ice-skated in winter on a frozen river nearby. One year, on a day that must have been thirty below zero, Dan fell through a patch of thin ice. Matt and Hagar hurried him home, where their father scolded Dan for not watching where he was going. Dan soon came down with pneumonia, and within days, his fever spiked one evening while both Auntie Doll and Father were out of the house. Hagar went to fetch the doctor, but he too was unavailable, and by the time she returned home, Dan had worsened tremendously.

Hagar always saw Dan as someone who played up his illnesses as a way of avoiding responsibility, but now, as he falls seriously ill, it becomes clear that his delicate constitution has been more of a dire threat all along than anyone in the family believed.

Matt informed Hagar that Dan was calling out for their mother, who died when he was four, and suggested that Hagar don one of their mother's old plaid shawls, go to Dan, and hold him a while. Hagar stiffened and balked at this, not even wanting to "play at being" the "meek woman" she'd never met. Matt, repulsed by Hagar's cruelty, donned the shawl himself, and cradled Dan for several hours until he died.

Hagar is so afraid of acting in a stereotypically feminine manner, or giving herself over to weakness of any kind, that she refuses to extend a simple act of care and empathy to her dying brother. This is a complicated moment, as Hagar essentially freezes and finds it impossible to act as Matt asks her to.

Hagar recalls one more striking, dark incident from her youth—when she was nearly grown, she and her friends were traipsing through the town dump one July day, a place they admired in spite of or because of its reeking decrepitude. They came upon a huge heap of eggs, from which some "feeble, foodless, bloodied" chicks had managed to hatch. Knowing the creatures would never live on their own, Lottie Drieser crushed the chicks with the heels of her boots while Hagar and Charlotte watched. Hagar was "troubled" by her inability to do the thing that needed to be done—and reminded of the incident with Dan.

The incident with the chicks—and Hagar's failure, again, to act out of mercy and care—shows that the choices she's making in her youth, though seemingly small, are slowly turning her into the person she will ultimately become.

A "timid tapping" at Hagar's bedroom door snaps her from her reverie, and her daughter-in-law Doris—a plain, frumpy woman who often condescends to Hagar and paints herself as a "martyr" for caring for the old woman—enters the room. She asks Hagar if she'd like to come down to have some tea with her and Marvin. Hagar says she wants to stay upstairs for now, but would like Doris to make her a pot for later. Doris says she won't—she accuses Hagar of dumping down the drain a pot made specially for her the other day. Hagar insists she did no such thing, and, flustered, agrees to come downstairs.

Hagar resents Doris, and the feeling is clearly mutual. The adversarial relationship between the two women shows that neither of them approves of the other's choices, decisions, or actions. Though they're family, they sometimes act cruelly towards one another and attempt to destabilize each other when they should be lifting each other up.

As she stands up from her chair, Hagar feels an aching stiffness spread through her body, and as she walks toward the door, she falls and feels a horrible pain behind her ribs—a pain that has been coming more and more often lately. Doris struggles to help Hagar up, but cannot. She calls for Marvin as Hagar unwillingly begins crying—Hagar sees her tears as "the incontinent wetness of the infirm."

Hagar falls, and, in a moment of shock and frustration, begins crying. She sees her tears as a sign of weakness, and resents them for coming unbidden.

Marvin comes upstairs and helps Hagar up. Her sixty-five-year-old son is generally calm and unshaken, but as he hoists Hagar to her feet, he is visibly upset and says that Hagar's falling—and Doris's strained attempts to help her up—have "got to stop." Hagar blames her fall on the "pesky rug" that Doris has placed in her room, and then both Doris and Marvin slowly help her down the stairs. They all sit down for tea, but Hagar is aware of a strange energy in the room, and sees a "questioning look" pass more than once between Marvin and Doris as they serve her.

This passage makes it clear that Hagar, Doris, and Marvin are all at some kind of breaking point. Hagar has fallen much more than once, and Doris and Marvin having to continually pick her up and right her serves as a metaphor for all the other things they do to keep her "standing" throughout her life.

The three of them live together in a fairly large four-bedroom house Hagar bought for herself years earlier. Doris and Marvin have two grown children, Steven and Tina, who are in their twenties and live on their own. As they have tea, Doris remarks how big the house feels. Marvin suggests that Hagar sell the house and look, together with the two of them, for a smaller home or apartment that's easier for Hagar to get around in. Hagar feels the pain in her ribs return, and forbids Marvin from ever selling her house. Marvin reminds Hagar that he technically owns the house, as Hagar signed it over to him many years ago. When Hagar protests, Doris and Marvin, visibly upset, accuse Hagar of overreacting and acting like they're trying to cheat her or take advantage of her.

There is a deep lack of trust between Hagar, Marvin, and Doris. While Marvin and Doris's concerns are completely valid and come from a place of genuine concern for Hagar's well-being and the desire to reclaim their own "golden years" for themselves, Hagar believes that any investment Doris and Marvin make in their own happiness is a direct attack on hers.

Hagar apologizes for being a burden, but Marvin and Doris quickly try to placate her and insist she isn't one. When Hagar again begs them not to sell the house, Marvin says they should leave the conversation alone for now, and gets up to go watch some television. Doris invites Hagar to come along with her to an evening church service. Hagar declines, and Doris says she'll bring the minister, Mr. Troy, to come call on Hagar later in the week. Hagar tries to dismiss Doris's offer, but finds that "tact comes the hardest of all to [her]" lately.

The atmosphere within the house is tense and angry, and Hagar herself knows that she is only making things worse with her lack of tact. Still, her stubborn and stoic manners prevent her from feeling like she's able to make a change in her behavior—she's too afraid of being weak and vulnerable or being taken advantage of to relent for even a moment.

Hagar feels that her age seems "arbitrary and impossible." Whenever she looks in the mirror, "beyond the changing shell that houses [her]," she recognizes herself only in her eyes. The eyes, she believes, are the only things that never change—indeed, her other son John's eyes stayed the same, containing a hopeful sparkle, all his life—even "near the last." Hagar relents and tells Doris that she can invite the minister over next week.

Hagar hardly recognizes herself—and as she reflects on the loss not only of her youth, her health, and her former self, but of her son John, she softens momentarily.

CHAPTER 2

The following week, Mr. Troy calls on Hagar—but he has picked a bad day to visit. Hagar is feeling unwell. The pain behind her ribs has returned, and her belly roils as her "locked" bowels leave her feeling bloated and "weighted down." Mr. Troy speaks in contrived platitudes as he asks Hagar about her life back in Manawaka. Hagar's answers are combative and cynical, and she reveals that her father, though a wealthy man, never gave her a "red cent" of an inheritance. Hagar again begins slipping into memory, recalling "that Hagar with the shining hair," the younger version of herself going off to a young ladies' academy in Toronto to be schooled.

Every aspect of Hagar's present life is painful and embarrassing, from her physical ailments to her memories of rejection and disenfranchisement within her own family. She retreats into memory to reflect on better times and better things, and avoid her painful reality.

When it was time for Hagar to go to college, she knew that her brother Matt should be the one to benefit from higher education, but their father was staunch in insisting that only Hagar would be allowed to go away because while Matt could "learn all he needs right here," there was no one to "teach [Hagar] how to dress and behave like a lady." The argument settled, Hagar was shipped off to school, and never told anyone how she cried tears of guilt on the train the whole way there.

Hagar's education is not meant to prepare her academically or practically to take care of herself—it is meant to make her more feminine, and educate her in the ways of womanhood. Hagar always saw this as a waste, an opportunity better spent on educating Matt in earnest, but she complies with her father's wishes anyway.

Two years later, Hagar returned from school knowing French, embroidery, menu-planning, poetry, hairdressing, and other womanly skills—"hardly ideal accomplishments for the kind of life [she'd] ultimately" lead, but still a source of pride for her father. Though Hagar confessed that she wanted to use her new skills to teach back East, Hagar's father insisted she stay in Manawaka and help him keep the accounts for the store, throw dinner parties, and remain under his watchful eye, away from men. Hagar ruefully agreed to stay, and though she went through the motions of keeping house, playing hostess, and working on the books, she "snubbed" every man her father brought home to introduce to her and looked forward to the day she could "reimburse" her father for her education and strike out on her own.

Hagar's education superficially prepares her in the ways of womanhood, but leaves her feeling trapped, lonely, and without any control over her own life and choices. Hagar longs for the day when she can at last determine her own fate, and she envisions in more and more detail the moment she'll finally break free of her father's grasp.

After three years back in Manawaka, Hagar met Brampton Shipley at a local dance. Bram had a ruddy face, a thick black beard, and "crescents of ingrown earth" below his fingernails; a hardscrabble widower fourteen years older than Hagar, he had a reputation in Manawaka for being as "lazy as a pet pig." At the end of the night Bram complimented Hagar's dancing, and offered to show her his "place" in the valley just outside town sometime. On her way out of the dance, Hagar was stopped by Lottie Drieser, who warned her that Bram was "common as dirt" and known to take up often with "half-breed girls." Hagar dismissed Lottie's words as "silly."

Despite Bram's bad reputation all over town, Hagar cannot help her attraction to him—and perhaps even finds her desire to be with him inflamed by the fact that it will allow her to flout social convention, defy her father's plans for her, and take control of her own life.

Some time later, Hagar received a marriage proposal from Bram, and told her father of her intent to accept. Jason was infuriated and forbade Hagar from marrying anyone. Hagar implored her father to let her, pointing out that she'd been working for him for three years—she defiantly said she'd marry without her father's consent, even though in Manawaka such things were "not done." Jason roughly grabbed Hagar's arm and told her not to "go"—but she "went [...] all the same." No one from Hagar's own family attended the wedding, and she received no gifts from them either. Charlotte Tappen's mother gave a small reception in Hagar and Bram's honor, and Hagar was certain that in time her father would "soften and yield" as her influence on Bram took hold and he "prospered, gentled, learned cravats and grammar."

In marrying Bram, Hagar severs herself from her family—and from her elevated social standing—in one fell swoop. She defies convention while still believing that she'll be able to influence Bram, and mold him to her liking. She does not yet realize that Bram is as incorrigible as she herself is, and that she'll actually be the one forced to make changes over the course of their relationship.

Hagar moved into the Shipley house right away, and was immediately disheartened by how dirty it was, and how "shoddy and second-hand" the furnishings were. No sooner had Hagar set foot in the house than Bram commanded her to disrobe so that he could see what she looked like "under all that rig-out." Hagar complied, but found making love with her new husband painful and unenjoyable. The next day she set to work cleaning the house, having no money for hired help.

Things are not working out for Hagar the way she planned—she is new to sex and sexuality and doesn't see it as a pleasant thing at all, but rather an obligation. Meanwhile, she is too poor to afford the lifestyle to which she's accustomed, and yet determined to recreate it in her new home—even though she fled it at first opportunity.

Back in the present, Mr. Troy marvels at the story Hagar has been telling. He asks if she has any friends nowadays—"contemporaries […] to talk with, and remember"—but she says she has none. Mr. Troy prays briefly with Hagar and then leaves, and Hagar is overcome with paranoia that Doris and Mr. Troy are working together to get her out of the house.

Even a nice afternoon and a pleasant conversation with the minister arouse Hagar's suspicions—she knows what a burden she is to Doris, and is just waiting for the moment Doris chooses to get rid of her.

Sure enough, walking back into the kitchen from the garden, Hagar finds a newspaper ad for a nursing home called Silverthreads laid out on the kitchen table—"Only the Best Will Do for MOTHER," it reads. As Hagar reads the advertisement, she feels the pain behind her ribs flare, and can hardly breathe. She feels a terrible panic come upon her. She recalls how when he was a child, her other son John used to hold his breath during tantrums until either she or Bram would smack him and make him breathe in through a shout—she now forces herself to continue breathing just as Doris enters the kitchen. Doris seems aware that Hagar has seen the advertisement, but does not mention it, and instead asks about her visit with Mr. Troy. Hagar replies that Mr. Troy is a stupid man with bad teeth.

Hagar has been suspecting for a while now that Marvin and Doris want her out of the house, and the advertisement confirms this fear. It almost seems as if they've left the ad out on purpose so that Hagar could discover it herself—clearly, Marvin has been avoiding having whatever conversation needs to be had about Hagar's care.

Doris replies that at least Hagar looked nice for the visit, pointing out her flowered dress. Looking down at her own body, Hagar feels embarrassed by its girth, and recalls the twenty-inch waist she maintained as a girl through the use of corsets. It was only when Bram ridiculed her corsets that she stopped wearing them and began growing heavier.

Hagar resents herself in the same way that Marvin and Doris resent her. She herself feels that her body has become unmanageable and unrecognizable, and she longs for the days she felt a sense of control over it.

Doris shakes Hagar from her reverie. Hagar, momentarily confused, desperately pleads with Doris not to sell the house or place her in a home. Hagar suggests Marvin and Doris move out and leave her alone in the house with all of her things. Doris urges Hagar not to get "worked up," but when Hagar continues escalating the argument, Doris resignedly admits that she simply can't lift Hagar when she falls anymore—her own health is catching up to her.

There is more at work here than simple frustration and resentment—Doris is growing older, too, and cannot physically keep up with the demands of sustaining herself, Marvin, and Hagar, too.

Hagar goes to sit in the living room and looks around at all of her things. She cannot believe Doris and Marvin "regard the house as theirs." As Hagar looks around at the knick-knacks, bric-a-brac, and family heirlooms that surround her, she feels wistful and pained at the thought of leaving it all behind. When she lingers on a framed picture of herself at twenty—still "handsome" and oddly beautiful—she again dives back into reverie, recalling her brother Matt's death.

Hagar has sacrificed greatly and endured a lot of pain in order to make a life for herself, and her many possessions represent the journeys she's been on and the things she's overcome. As she sits among them, she feels nervous at the thought of leaving them behind—and of having nothing to show for all of her hardships.

Matt died of influenza during a terrible season that his wife Mavis nursed him through. He was only in his twenties, and passed on without ever having had children. Matt's wife soon remarried a farmer, raised three healthy children, and received "a few decent cards" in the hand fate dealt her. Meanwhile, Hagar was disappointed to learn that even after the death of his second son, her father still did not want a relationship with her. Even when her son Marvin was born, he still refused to come to the Shipley farm—Hagar now suspects that Jason didn't feel that Marvin was truly his grandson.

Hagar's family life has long been a lonely one—the losses of her brothers compounded with her alienation from her father left her without anyone to lean on or reflect upon the past with. Hagar is, and has always been, very much a loner.

Hagar continues looking around the living room and thinking about what she'll bequeath to her granddaughter Tina, an independent and headstrong young woman who has not yet married. Hagar becomes emotional at the sight of Bram's decanter, which was always filled with wine during their years together. Hagar considers the chair she is sitting in—something she took from her father's house after he died, though he willed her no money or possessions and instead left his fortune to the town of Manawaka. Hagar isn't angry that she didn't inherit anything from her own account, though she always wished she'd had some money to pass on to her boys.

Hagar's possessions have been cultivated and collected throughout her life—every object has a sharp, clear significance that cuts through the veil of time and takes her backwards through her life.

Doris comes into the room to tell Hagar it's almost time for dinner, and Hagar begins asking which of her own possessions Doris's children, Steven and Tina, might like to have after she dies. Doris warns Hagar not to talk about such things, as the thought of Hagar dying upsets Marvin, but Hagar curtly replies that Marvin never gets upset—"not even at what happened to his own brother." Hagar then tries to change the subject, and asks if Tina will be coming for dinner. A concerned Doris replies that Tina lives hundreds of miles away, and has been gone from home for over a month. Hagar quickly pretends that the fact just "slipped [her] mind," but Doris, worried, goes into the kitchen and tells Marvin what Hagar's just said. Hagar overhears Marvin reply: "We've got to have it out with her."

Hagar is clearly confused—not just now, but seemingly often—and this contributes to Marvin and Doris's concern for the woman and their desire to place her in a facility where she can be properly watched over. There is plainly a lot of painful family history that exists between these people, contributing to the tense and uncomfortable present moment, but no one seems to want to talk about anything of consequence for fear of further rocking the boat and really making the situation at home untenable.

Marvin comes into the living room and Hagar asks him to fetch her cigarettes for her. Doris appears and says she'll go, as Marvin is tired, but Marvin insists he can go upstairs to get them. Hagar apologizes for being so much trouble. Doris tells Hagar that she and Marvin want to go to a movie and have arranged for a neighbor to come sit with Hagar while they're out. Hagar protests and says she doesn't "need a sitter, like a child," and a fight breaks out between the three of them. Marvin tells Hagar that last night she left one of her cigarettes burning, and it fell down to the carpet—if Marvin hadn't found it in time, the whole house might have gone up. Hagar apologizes for being a burden, and the exasperated Marvin tells Doris to cancel their night out—it's not worth it.

This passage shows just how miserable things are in the house—every request Hagar makes is seen as a burden, because caring for her and doing all the things she needs take up all of Marvin and Doris's time. When they do try to carve out time for themselves, Hagar becomes jealous and indignant, and her refusal to accept that she needs help makes her even more of a burden to her frustrated, put-upon son and daughter-in-law.

Hagar sits in a large armchair in her room, relieved to be away from Doris and Marvin if only for a little. She looks through the pictures she keeps in her room: photographs of herself as a young girl, of her father, and of her second son, John. She has no pictures of her ex-husband, Bram. Looking over the pictures, Hagar slips back into memory, and recalls how after her marriage to Bram, something "changed" between her and the friends she'd had in her youth, especially Charlotte Tappen.

Hagar can no longer stop herself from slipping into memory again and again—with nothing ahead of her but pain and rejection, her life seems to exist only in retrospect now.

Anytime Hagar and Bram went into town and saw her old friends at the store or in the street, Bram spoke coarsely towards them, and yet at the same time Hagar noticed that her friends and acquaintances would "bait" Bram and try to provoke him into saying something rough or controversial. Slowly, through these uncomfortable interactions and the quickly-spreading rumors of Bram's impropriety, Hagar became distant from everyone else in town, and soon let Bram run errands on his own so that she wouldn't have to be seen with him.

Hagar's life slowly begins to change right before her eyes—all while she stands by and allows it to morph into something unrecognizable. Through her own stubbornness, she begins to lose not just her family but her friends as well, and becomes isolated by the knowledge that she made the wrong choice in marrying Bram after all.

Marvin knocks at the door and asks to come in. When he opens the door, Doris is beside him, and she urges Marvin to do what he "promised." Marvin, visibly uncomfortable, explains to Hagar that he and Doris, in declining health themselves, can no longer look after Hagar. Between her frequent falls, nighttime coughs, and bedwetting—the last of these things something Hagar had been unaware of—they simply can't keep up. Marvin suggests that Hagar needs a full-time nurse and would be better off in a place where people would care for her all the time. Marvin says that in a nursing home, Hagar could be around people her own age and have access to the care she needs. Hagar knows that Marvin is simply parroting the advertisement, and she repeats the printed words back to him and laughs.

Marvin and Doris's argument for Hagar's admittance to a nursing home is soundly and even gently delivered—and yet Hagar is so on edge, so worried about suffering further indignities, and so afraid of being forgotten by the only people she has left in the world that she cannot stomach the suggestion.

Marvin and Doris continue begging Hagar to see reason, but Hagar insists that "if it were John," he wouldn't "consign his mother" to such a place. Marvin starts an argument about John, stating that his brother wasn't exactly "marvelous with Dad." Doris begs the two of them not to bring up "ancient history," and an argument is averted. Marvin suggests Hagar go for a checkup with her doctor, Doctor Corby, and see what he says about going into a home. Hagar begins wondering privately whether she could really be forced to leave her own house, but soon cannot contain her thoughts and begins begging Marvin and Doris not to make her leave her home and her things. Hagar's emotions clearly frighten Marvin and Doris, and they drop the issue and get her ready for bed instead.

It's unclear what happened between Hagar, Marvin, John, and Bram, but what is clear is that Hagar obviously favored John his entire life and has only erased his shortcomings since his loss. Marvin clearly experiences pain over being second-best, and longs to placate his mother in order to keep her from becoming too upset or irate—out of a desire to keep her from causing herself any pain, surely, but also out of a desire to keep himself from falling any further from her good graces.

Hagar cannot sleep, and when she gets up to relieve a cramp in her foot, she knocks over a lamp, shattering it on the floor. Doris flies into the room, asking what the matter is, and "moans" about the broken lamp. Hagar tries to downplay the incident, but Doris is shaken, and insists on helping Hagar to and from the bathroom. Back in her bedroom alone, Hagar lights a cigarette, reminding herself to put it out properly when she's done. As she sits on the edge of the bed and looks at herself in the mirror, she hardly recognizes her bloated, veiny face and body. She knows that if Bram were alive, he wouldn't see her as the burdensome "Mother" Doris and Marvin believe she is—she'd still be "Hagar to him yet."

Doris and Marvin's life has been completely overtaken by Hagar and her needs. Hagar knows this, and resents their hovering as much as she resents her need to be hovered over. She hates being the burden that she knows she is, and wishes there were someone alive who remembered the old her.

Hagar retreats into memory, recalling her passionate but adversarial relationship with Bram. Her deep, intense attraction to him was what forged their relationship and kept it going even though they disagreed on almost everything and quarreled often. Hagar "never let him know" how much erotic power he had over her, and took pride in keeping the depths of her feelings for the man to herself. Coming back to the present, Hagar puts out her cigarette and laments that now, she has no one to turn to or speak with late in the night—her bed is "cold as winter."

Hagar is lonely, frail, and elderly, and relies on her memories of the passion of her youth to sustain her through the pains and indignities of aging. Even in her prime, though, Hagar kept a firm hold on her desires, repressing her femininity and sexuality to maintain the illusion of control.

CHAPTER 3

As Hagar sits with Doris in the waiting room at Doctor Corby's office, its bare walls remind her of the old Shipley house in Manawaka. When Hagar moved in with Bram the walls were bare, and over the years she put up only a few pictures. Hagar's favorite was a picture of a pair of horses, though she never cared for Bram's real horses, a fact he teased her about for years. Bram had purchased a stallion and several mares from Henry Pearl in an attempt to "make a living," but the "venture" never amounted to anything. Nevertheless, Bram loved the stallion deeply, and was devastated when the horse escaped one winter and died in a blizzard. In the spring, when the snow melted, Bram found the horse and gave him a proper burial—though he was sheepish and embarrassed about doing so.

This passage shows how the triggers that send Hagar reeling back into her deep memories of the past can be simple and banal. All it takes is one small reminder, and suddenly she finds herself reflecting on the often-painful memories of her misspent youth, and the embarrassments, indignities, and losses she and her husband suffered.

As Hagar, in the doctor's office, remarks aloud on how few paintings there are—and how a man in the doctor's position could "afford" to hang more paintings—Doris shushes her and begs her to mind her manners. Hagar is reminded of how she herself used to do the same to Bram during their marriage. Hagar is horrified at the thought that Doris must feel the same about Hagar as Hagar once felt about Bram, and resolves to keep quiet from now on—even though a part of her knows she won't be able to keep her mouth shut and "never could." Hagar's name is called, and Doris takes her back to see the doctor. Doctor Corby examines Hagar and suggests she make an appointment to get some X-rays of her kidneys, gall bladder, and stomach.

Hagar has become the very thing she once loathed: she is crass, loud, and impervious to criticism, just like Bram always was. This fact briefly horrifies her, but Hagar is able to see clearly and even accept that she has changed, through the amassing of her life's choices, in ways she never imagined she would.

That night, after supper, Doris suggests they all go for a drive. Marvin and Doris tuck Hagar carefully into the back seat, bundle her up with pillows, and set off. Hagar is actually happy to be off on a drive, and she takes in the scenery and the cool evening breeze. Soon, though, her delight turns to horror as she spots the sign for Silverthreads—the nursing home from the newspaper advertisement. Hagar immediately panics, trying to open the car door while the vehicle is still moving. She wonders if Doris and Marvin will physically force her into the home and "make a madwoman" out of her. Marvin and Doris beg Hagar to calm down—they haven't brought her here to stay, just to visit the facility. Hagar stops trying to get out of the car, but remains nervous and suspicious.

The painful and tense struggle between Hagar, Marvin, and Doris continues as the two of them escalate their methods from calm talk to decisive action. They want Hagar to understand that they're only looking out for her best interest, and that her stubbornness and paranoia will only harm her further, but Hagar is so convinced that Marvin and Doris are trying to cheat her out of what little agency over her own life she has left that she can't see their point of view.

Inside, the matron of the home shows Marvin, Doris, and Hagar around. She offers lovely descriptions of the activities and amenities provided to residents, but Hagar remains condescending and cynical, calling the rooms "barracks." While Marvin and Doris meet with the matron privately in her office, a nurse takes Hagar out onto the verandah for a cup of tea. As she sits down and relaxes, "alone in a strange place," she is reminded of the first time she was in a hospital—when Marvin was born. Hagar had wanted to have her child at home, convinced that the birth would kill her. Bram, though, drove her into town, excited and hopeful that they'd soon have a son—"somebody to leave the place to." Hagar understood for the first time that Bram longed for a "dynasty," just has her own father had in some ways.

Again, in this passage, a very small trigger—just a feeling—sends Hagar toppling back into her memories. As she goes deeper and deeper into the reverie, she's no longer just remembering a parallel sensation from her youth, but begins thinking deeply about the ways in which her life, a constant search for agency and independence, has regularly been impeded by the desires of the men around her. After the actions of Jason and Bram, Marvin is just another man, she feels, with designs on her independence.

Now, on the verandah, an elderly woman in a pink cotton robe sidles up beside Hagar and begins speaking to her as if they're old friends. Another woman soon comes up and explains that the first woman, Miss Tyrrwhitt, will talk at length to anyone who will listen. The second woman, Mrs. Steiner, sits down beside Hagar, and together they discuss their children. Hagar says that though she once had two boys, one "was killed—in the last war."

More clues about the death of Hagar's son John emerge—but because of Hagar's disgruntled, disdainful state of mind and her apparent distrust of everything about the nursing home, including its kind residents, it's hard to be sure whether she's telling the truth.

The two women discuss the nursing home, as well as aging more generally. Mrs. Steiner remarks how quickly life goes by, and Hagar is surprised by the woman's wisdom. Hagar bids the woman goodbye hurriedly, though, and stands up to leave without having anywhere to go. She walks down off the porch and into the yard, walking without any sense of direction towards a small summer house in the distance. As she approaches the window, she sees a bearded man inside, and is reminded of Bram. She wonders if Bram has somehow traveled through time. When the man looks up, though, she sees that he is in fact elderly, and realizes she hasn't left the Silverthreads property at all.

This passage—and Hagar's confusion within it—suggest that Hagar's dips into memory are not merely reminiscences or reveries: she is losing track of time, becoming disoriented more and more easily, and confusing the past with the present. This is dangerous, and even Hagar is disoriented and confused for a moment.

Doris comes running across the lawn towards Hagar, shouting about what a "scare" Hagar's given her and Marvin. She points out that Hagar looks as if she's been crying, but Hagar waves her away and insists on being brought home immediately. Together, they walk back to the car, and Marvin drives them all home.

This passage shows that though Doris has been set up as an adversary of Hagar's, she really does care for the old woman, and wants her to be safe and healthy.

CHAPTER 4

Hagar and Doris make a series of trips to the local hospital so that Hagar can have her X-rays taken. Doris is often fidgety and impatient during the many hours of waiting around, setting Hagar on edge and causing her to fidget, too. On the day of Hagar's stomach X-ray, she is forced to drink a chalky white substance known as barium, which allows the stomach to be seen more clearly on the scan. The drink nearly makes Hagar sick, but a nurse warns her that if she can't keep it down, she'll just have to start the process all over again. Hagar defiantly downs the barium, but admits to the nurse that it doesn't "matter much what's wrong" with her stomach—she is, after all, over ninety.

Hagar's medical visits hammer home the lack of agency she has over her own body. Whatever is going inside of it is beyond her control to begin with, but the miserable and disgusting barium swallow serves to symbolize just how little choice Hagar has in the way her body is attended to.

As Hagar waits for the X-ray to start, she's reminded of other times in her life when she's "waited like this, for things to get better or worse." Most of her time at the Shipley place, as she calls it, was just waiting for "something else" to happen. Hagar's days were filled with nonstop work, often incessant cleaning, and as soon as the children were old enough, she trained them to help out around the house and do their chores. Bram, on the other hand, was often lazy, and only ever really worked hard during the harvest.

Hagar's frustration over her present lack of agency triggers a remembrance of another such time—the early days of her marriage to Bram, during which she found herself subjected to labor and wifely duties she did not want to be responsible for.

Hagar often found herself disgusted by Bram and his friends, and when Bram was once yelled at by a mounted police officer for publicly urinating on the steps of the Currie general store, she and Bram fought terribly. The years "were scoured away like sandbanks under the spate of [their] wrangle and bicker," and yet still, Hagar nursed a strong attraction to her husband even as their marriage crumbled.

Every small choice Hagar makes—and her ultimate, overarching choice not just to marry Bram but to stay with him in the face of his crass cruelty—adds up over the years, leading both her and Bram down a path that makes them all but unrecognizable to one another, and to themselves.

After the doctor's report reaches Marvin and Doris days later, they are "secretive about it" and tell her only that the doctor has recommended "professional care"—in other words, the nursing home. Hagar demands to know what Doris and Marvin are keeping from her, but Marvin says Hagar's just "getting on" in age. Hagar is unconvinced by Marvin's words, and feels threatened, anxious, and suspicious. Doris tries to open up the conversation about Silverthreads again, but when Hagar protests, Marvin suggests they all "stow" the matter—the exasperated man is "caught between two fires."

Marvin is clearly struggling with what to do about Hagar. He knows that she needs more specialized care—and possibly even knows something about her health she doesn't—but is torn between appeasing his wife and keeping his mother from descending into greater fear and depression.

Doris calls Mr. Troy once again, knowing their family is in need of advice. He comes to talk with Hagar in the garden, and urges her to "accept the things which [she] can't change." Hagar insists that she can't leave her things behind, and Mr. Troy suggests she pray for clarity and to ease her mind. Hagar retorts that prayers have never done her any good. Mr. Troy asks Hagar if she believes in "God's infinite mercy," but Hagar replies that God has never been "merciful" towards her—she lost a son. Mr. Troy continues to prod Hagar about her life and her faith, but she clams up and eventually he leaves, halfheartedly assuring Hagar that "things will work out."

Hagar's second meeting with Mr. Troy is more confrontational than the last, and yet even when up against the old woman's cynicism, Mr. Troy continues trying to help and soothe her—to a certain point. Hagar, however, proves inconsolable and unreachable, isolated in her pain, misery, and anger.

Hagar looks back on her memories of her son John. Bringing him into the world was easy, and she labored for fewer than six hours. He was born with bright eyes and thick black hair, and Hagar thought from the moment she saw him that he was more like her than Bram. John was not as big as Marvin as he grew, but nor was he delicate. Hagar loved John best, and was always worried for his well-being, though he was a healthy boy. John and Marvin often argued and squabbled, but Hagar tried her best to teach the boys to be civil and speak eloquently—unlike their father. Hagar found herself telling John stories of her father's family, the Highlanders, and even entrusting him with a family heirloom: a silver pin.

This passage begins to explain Hagar's enduring love for her son John over the love she has for Marvin. Though the details of her relationships with both boys have not yet been made fully clear, it's evident that Marvin is giving up much of his life and his own happiness to help Hagar, yet remains overlooked and insignificant compared to his dead brother. This detour into memory shows that John was always favored, for reasons Hagar herself has trouble articulating.

Bram took to Marvin, but never to John—even when he tried to be kind towards John, there was an "edge to it." Once, Hagar watched as Bram offered John a comb of fresh-cut honey, balanced on the edge of a knife "that in another season slit the pigs' carcasses."

This scene shows how even in moments of tranquility and sweetness, there was always an impression of darkness and an unsavory underside to life in the Shipley home.

Wanting some money of her own, Hagar took a tip from Bram's daughter Jessica and began selling hen eggs to make some cash on the side. Bram "never said a word" about the endeavor, and Hagar is unsure to this day whether he ever even knew about it. Hagar hated chickens, and wouldn't even eat them, but used the extra money she earned from their eggs to purchase a gramophone and other things for the house.

The desperate Hagar wound up taking on extra work in order to provide extra things for herself and her children, because her lazy husband's meager income did not provide enough for them.

As John grew older, he grew wilder and more defiant—he swore, fought at school, and hung out with a group of equally wild boys, the Tonerres, sons of Jules Tonerre—a boy who'd been Matt's friend growing up. John and his friends often dared one another to walk across a trestle bridge where the trains came through, a mile from town—one time Hagar caught them, and yelled at John, embarrassing him in front of his friends. Even though John was angry with Hagar on the way home, she could sense a kind of relief in his face.

In spite of John's bad behavior, he remained Hagar's favorite all through his youth. This scene foreshadows a love of risk and danger that will ultimately plague John throughout his life, and even have a hand in his death.

At seventeen, Marvin joined the army and went off to fight in the first World War. After the fighting was over, he never returned to Manawaka, and wrote home only occasionally. Even after Marvin left home, Bram still didn't pay any more attention to John, who, at seven, couldn't help Bram with the kind of tough chores that Marvin could. One evening, John confided in Hagar that the kids at his school called Bram "Bramble Shitley." John laughed at the joke, but then immediately began crying, and ran upstairs to be alone in his room.

Marvin, feeling unwanted and out of place in Manawaka, struck out on his own for good at just seventeen. John, meanwhile, continued feeling stifled in his own home and outcast in the community despite his mother's favor. Bram's disrepute and embarrassing ways began to affect not just Hagar's position in town, but John's as well.

One Saturday, John and Hagar went to town so that she could deliver eggs. When Hagar knocked on the door of a house, a little girl with ringleted hair and beautiful clothes answered the door, greeted John by name, and then called for her mother, shouting that "the egg woman" had come. When the girl's mother came to the door, Hagar saw that it was Lottie Drieser, now married to Telford Simmons. After the awkward exchange, Hagar and John walked away, and John told her that Telford was now the bank manager—he and Lottie have a lot of money. When Hagar then began talking about how Telford was always homely and stupid, John yelled at her to shut up.

Confronted with the awkward situation of having to deliver eggs to someone who had once been her friend and equal—but was now socially and financially superior to her—Hagar felt ashamed, and it's clear her son did too. What's more, Lottie once warned Hagar about what it would mean to get involve with Bram. The headstrong Hagar ignored her, and now lives in squalor and desperation while her friend enjoys comfort and luxury.

Hagar, embarrassed, quickly ducked away from John and into a public restroom. In the empty facility, Hagar found "what [she] needed"—a mirror—and stopped to look at herself, "wondering how a person could change so much and never see it." As Hagar examined herself, she saw herself for the first time for what she had become: an overweight, gray-haired, leather-faced woman dressed in ragged men's clothing. The only thing she recognized about herself were her eyes, but even those appeared "distant."

This scene is a pivotal one in the novel. In it, Hagar comes to realize that the choices she has made have changed her not just on the inside, but on the outside as well. She hardly recognizes herself anymore, and feels disconnected from the woman she once was and the woman she wanted to be.

After exiting the restroom, Hagar paid her first visit in many years to her father's old general store in hopes of buying some new clothes that would "render [her] decent." Inside, she flagged down a manager and asked for credit, hoping that her status as the former owner's daughter would help her chances of receiving special treatment. The manager walked off to check on whether he could meet her request—and then Hagar heard Bram, on the other end of the store, trying to buy stale doughnuts at a discounted price along with some lemon extract. Hagar overheard the clerks discussing how Bram only wanted the extract so he could sell it back to local Indians for three times the price. Hagar walked firmly through the store towards Bram and then dragged him out into the street—"that was the last time" they ever walked anywhere together.

Hagar, reeling from what she has just seen in the bathroom mirror, goes into the general store in hopes of beginning to repair her image and shattered identity. Instead she encounters her husband, who is continuing to chip away not just at his own reputation but her own, taking advantage of his wife's tenuous connections to her past and her family.

Hagar returned home and gathered up her most valuable things—heirloom earrings, sterling silver candleholders, and fine china—and took them into town to sell to Lottie Drieser. She used the cash she got from the transaction to leave Manawaka on a trip, refusing to look back.

Reclaiming her agency requires giving up parts of her past even further, but at this point, Hagar is completely desperate to try and salvage what is left of her life and her control over her own circumstances.

Doris shakes Hagar from her memories. Hagar is confused as to what time it is, and asks if it's morning, but Doris tells her it's nearly dinnertime. After dinner, Hagar goes along with Doris on a walk to the corner store. While paying for their ginger ale, Hagar sees a young woman in front of them paying for a loaf of bread. The young woman's nails are painted black, and Hagar loudly remarks on the polish, asking what the girl's mother must think of her daughter's choices. Doris quickly tries to hush Hagar up, begging her to be quiet "just for once," and Hagar quickly grows embarrassed. Back at home, as soon as they walk in the door, Marvin—who has been pacing the living-room "like a bear in some zoo pit," announces that Hagar will be going away to live in the nursing home a week from today.

Though Hagar remembers acutely the embarrassment and shame she felt at her own husband's outbursts, crude speech, and bad behavior, it is almost as if she cannot control herself in her old age. A lifetime with Bram has clearly rubbed off on her, and she is continuing to alienate Marvin and Doris—her only family and source of support—as she also embarrasses herself and the family even further.

CHAPTER 5

Doris helps Hagar get into bed, but Hagar knows she will "not sleep a wink tonight." She resolves not to "bend meekly" to Doris and Marvin's plans for her, and begins scheming of ways to avoid her quickly-approaching fate. She tries to recall a "quiet place" the three of them went for a picnic earlier this year, Shadow Point, but becomes "stumped" when she considers financials—she doesn't have a cent to her name. It occurs to her, though, that there may be an unsigned social security check downstairs—in the morning, she decides, she'll check to see if it's still there.

Hagar is determined not to fall prey to her own past mistakes. She knows now that the choices she makes—or fails to make—ultimately define her life, and resolves to make one last choice in pursuit of her own agency, no matter the cost to her or to those she loves.

Considering fleeing Marvin and Doris, Hagar looks back on the last time she fled home—years ago, when she took twelve-year-old John and left Bram. John seemed both excited and reticent to leave—he suggested sneaking off without telling Bram, but was reluctant to help Hagar pack. When she asked him what he'd done with the pin she'd given him, he replied that it was around somewhere. John then asked if they were going to go live with Marvin. Hagar said they weren't—they were going to find a place of their own where Hagar could find work, perhaps as a housekeeper. Thinking of how she'd be "like Auntie Doll," Hagar laughed aloud.

Looking back on her departure from the Shipley house, Hagar is surprised by how life comes full circle again and again. When she left Bram, she was dismayed but also amused by the prospect of becoming a housekeeper like Doll—now, considering fleeing Marvin's home, she is again struck by the irony of how the past keeps repeating through the years.

Once packed, Hagar and John went into the kitchen, where Hagar told a drunken and swaying Bram that they were leaving. Bram did not seem surprised, and did not ask Hagar to stay or show any sign of "caring about the matter one way or another." He merely suggested Hagar boil some eggs for the train journey.

Bram did not grow angry or violent at the idea of Hagar leaving—he simply let her slip away. This shows how isolated he was within his own vices, and how he never really cared for Hagar after all.

As the train pulled out of Manawaka in the morning, Hagar was "shock[ed]" by how small Manawaka was, "and how short a time it took to leave it." Hagar watched out the window as the train passed the cemetery and the **stone angel**, "sightlessly guarding" over the dead still. As the train chugged along, John haughtily told Hagar that he'd traded the pin away for a jackknife. Hagar felt the urge to cry, but stopped herself, refusing to rise to John's "daring [her] to rage."

For most of Hagar's life, Manawaka was her whole world. Now, as she prepares to leave it behind, she is struck by its smallness. Her final—or what she believes to be final—look at the stone angel foreshadows that, like the angel, she may one day soon find herself more rooted to the town, incapable of leaving or changing, than she thought.

Now, back in the present, Hagar wakes up, recalling her plan, and stands up to dress herself. She moves slowly, though—the pain in her ribs has returned, and there is a terrible taste in her mouth. Doris comes and helps her downstairs. While Doris is in the kitchen, readying breakfast, Hagar sneaks into the den, finds her check, and hides it underneath her dress. After breakfast, Doris heads out to do the shopping, and before leaving asks if Hagar will be all right alone. Hagar replies that she'll be fine, and will "just sit quietly."

Though Hagar is physically uncomfortable and clearly in need of help, her desire to leave the house and strike out on her own is as sharp as ever.

As soon as Doris is gone, Hagar makes her way to the bank. As she stands in line, she is achy and nervous. The transaction with the teller goes off without a hitch, but as she leaves the bank, Hagar becomes confused about where she can pick up the bus to downtown. She sits on a bench and makes sure she has everything she needs—she has the money, she is wearing her special shoes with arch support, and she has a cardigan with her in case of chill.

Even simple tasks have become arduous, confusing, and fraught for Hagar. As she moves through the world, she is hyperconscious every second of her body and its limits, and aware of how dangerous the plan she's undertaking could be.

With some help and directions from the bus driver, Hagar arrives downtown at the depot where she can purchase a ticket on another bus to Shadow Point. In the busy station, though, Hagar becomes confused and overwhelmed, and asks a young woman nearby to help her get a ticket. Someone else—Hagar doesn't know who—helps her board the bus to Shadow Point, and as Hagar takes her seat, she feels her anxiety spike. The trip through the depot has been a whirlwind—but at last the bus is off, and after a quick nap, Hagar arrives at Shadow Point.

Hagar has to rely on the kindness of others to make what would be, for a person more able of mind and body, a simple journey, and yet she is determined to proceed forward and leave Doris and Marvin behind.

At a small gas station store just next to the bus stop, Hagar stops in and buys herself some snacks—biscuits, jam, chocolate, and cheese. After paying, Hagar starts walking down the road, following a sign with an arrow that directs her "To The Point." She is pleasantly surprised to find that her legs are holding out better than expected, but is nevertheless relieved when a man in a truck offers her a ride to the Point. Hagar accepts, and the man tells Hagar she's lucky he came along—it's a three-mile distance to the Point, and Hagar would never have made it.

Again, Hagar accepts the kindness of a stranger in order to continue on towards her goal. The fact that she was prepared to undertake a long walk, without knowing how long it would be or where it would lead her, shows how easily Hagar could slip into a dangerous situation out here on her own.

After the driver drops Hagar off, she takes in the sights and sounds of the nature all around her, and then begins her journey down a slightly rotten staircase made of wood and stone down into a little forest. Hagar doesn't feel weak, though—she is so happy to be free that she "could sing." As Hagar makes her way through the woods, though, she's struck with a terrible realization—she's forgotten water, or anything to drink. She can't climb the steps again, and all of a sudden feels frail and exhausted.

Even as Hagar faces another setback—one that for the first time all day truly scares her—she does not make any attempt to go backwards.

Hagar comes upon some old abandoned buildings and decides to take shelter inside one of them, feeling "limp as a dishrag." After a brief nap on a dusty floor, Hagar wakes up, confused, wondering whether Doris has her tea ready yet. When she remembers where she is, she becomes frightened, and realizes what a mistake she's made in coming here at all. Hagar calms herself by having a snack, but again becomes panicked when she realizes she has nothing to drink. She explores the building a little more, and finds that though it is falling into disrepair, parts of it have clearly been recently used by "tramps or fugitives." Hagar slowly makes her way upstairs to a little bedroom, comforting herself with the idea that she has a room of her own and has made her way someplace new—the "greatest excitement" one can know in life.

Hagar continues to face more and more threats of danger to her health and well-being out at Shadow Point, and yet she also feels a strange sense of freedom and excitement. She has made a choice to strike out on her own, and shows no signs of going back on it, no matter how many warning signs she encounters.

Hagar looks back on the past, remembering how she and John came to live at a "gigantic" house owned by a lonely old man, Mr. Oatley, who hired Hagar as his housekeeper. Hagar kept the many large, ornate rooms clean and also provided Mr. Oatley with some company, laughing at his stories and playing chess with him each night. Though his stories were often slightly macabre, Hagar listened attentively, and feels she "earned" the things that Mr. Oatley eventually left her in his will.

Having a room of her own for the first time in a long while triggers Hagar's memories of the last time she felt such a feeling of excitement and possibility.

John and Hagar had their own separate rooms upstairs, and Hagar used her early paychecks to purchase new clothes for the both of them. John did quite well in school and told Hagar that he was making many friends, though he couldn't bring them home to Mr. Oatley's to play as the house wasn't theirs. One afternoon, though, when Hagar called the home of one of John's friends to ask when he was coming home for dinner, the woman on the other end said their family had no son. Hagar never confronted John about his lies, though for a long time "he kept on spinning his spiderwebs."

Though Hagar was relieved and even actively happy to be on her own with John, this passage—and the lies John tells within it—make it clear that John was not as happy with their circumstances as Hagar was, and had a difficult time adjusting, making friends, and feeling normal.

John and Hagar lived in "reasonable content[ment,]" and came to learn that Mr. Oatley had made his fortune working as a smuggler, helping women immigrate from overseas. Hagar didn't tell Mr. Oatley much about herself—only that she came from a good family. She lied and said her husband was dead, wanting to make no mention of Bram.

Though Mr. Oatley is happy to share even the shady details of his past with Hagar and John, Hagar insists on keeping her private life private—even going so far as to conceal the truth about her past.

As John entered high school, he began making friends in earnest—they would come by the house in their cars and honk for him to come out, and though Hagar suspected his friends drank, John assured her that they were "swell guys." John grew tall and handsome and developed a "careless confidence." He began dating, but never brought any girls to meet Hagar. One night, though, Hagar overheard John saying goodnight to a girl outside. She learned that he was lying to his friends and girlfriends, stating that he lived with his mother and his uncle. When Hagar heard John and his girlfriend begin making love in the grass, she grew embarrassed and angry, and ran back to her room. Upstairs, Hagar reflected on how though she was glad to be rid of Bram, she did miss him physically, and felt at times that she'd "return to him, just for [sex.]"

As John grows from a boy into a young man, Hagar struggles to accept the changes within him, and perhaps even fears becoming replaced in his heart by one of his girlfriends. At the same time, Hagar's loneliness is exacerbated by the realization that her son is forging new connections outside of their relationship—while Hagar's life remains lonely, sexless, and fairly empty after her departure from Manawaka.

Now, as Hagar falls asleep in her new little room in the abandoned building at Shadow Point, she looks out the window as the night sky rolls in and reflects on how she "can't change what's happened to [her] in [her] life"—but also can't quite bring herself to believe it's all been "for the best."

Hagar is conflicted about her memories. She knows they are sealed and can't be changed, but also has a hard time accepting them.

CHAPTER 6

Hagar wakes in the darkness, feeling groggy. Rain is slanting into the room through one of the broken window panes, and Hagar is shivering with cold. She is overcome with pain and anxiety, but rather than getting up and risking falling, she forces herself to lie still and calm herself. She finds herself wishing that Bram were here to ward off any intruders, and listens intently through the darkness for any strange sounds. She knows that if trouble came and she cried out, no one would ever hear her.

Hagar's first night at Shadow Point is an uneasy one marked by fear and restlessness. She wishes she weren't alone, and even longs for Bram's presence in the face of her fears of being attacked or hurt in this strange place.

Hagar becomes irate and confused, berating herself for leaving home but also believing for several moments that she is back in her house with Marvin and Doris. She gets angry with them for trying to unseat her from her home, and feels her nausea intensify. She strains her ears, listening for the sound of Marvin and Doris moving around downstairs, but can't hear them. She thinks angrily and sadly about how "every last one of them has gone away and left me."

Hagar's difficulty differentiating between what's real and what's imagined is exacerbated in her drowsy, confused state. It seems that her perception of the past, too, is altered and inaccurate—though she believes her family have all "gone away and left" her one by one, it's clear that Hagar is the one who keeps doing all the leaving.

Hagar recalls more of her time at Mr. Oatley's. When John was old enough to go to college, Hagar couldn't afford to send him—instead, Mr. Oatley got John an office job while Hagar invested some money in the stock market in hopes of making enough to send John off. When the stock market crashed in 1929, however, her shares became worthless, and the money was lost. John was angry and upset, and cruelly rejected Hagar's suggestion that he apply for some scholarships. He explained that having already been out of high school for four years, it was "too late" for him to qualify for a scholarship. The two argued about John's work ethic, and Hagar accused him of spending too much time with his wild friends.

This passage shows how John's resentment towards Hagar—already stoked by her decision to move them away from Bram and Manawaka—became exacerbated by her loss of his college fund, though the financial downturn was not her fault or her choice.

Eventually, Hagar and John committed themselves to working hard and saving money in pursuit of their common goal: to get John to college no matter what. As the Great Depression settled over the globe, however, John was let go from his job and had trouble finding another. He worked temporary jobs in factories for a couple of years before becoming indignant, and at last announced that he had decided to return to Manawaka, to the Shipley place, to try and find some work there. John admitted that he had been writing Bram secretly for some time, and that Marvin, too, had been in communication with their father. Hagar warned John that Bram only wanted him to come home to get even with her, but John darkly laughed and suggested that Manawaka might be "just the place" for him.

Factors beyond Hagar and John's control continue to derail John's hopes of ever getting to college. History repeats itself, as Matt's resentment towards Hagar over her education comes around full circle through John's resentment towards Hagar over her inability to provide him with the gift of his own education.

John returned to Manawaka and wrote to Hagar only infrequently over the next two years, telling her little of his life there. One day, though, John wrote to tell Hagar that Bram had fallen ill, and might not last very long. Hagar left Mr. Oatley's and went straight to Manawaka, arriving back at the Shipley farm in the middle of a terrible drought. The entire town was suffering, and "the upright men and the slouches" had all amounted to the same thing in light of the depression.

Even though Hagar hated Bram and left him behind without looking back, at the news that he might die soon, she immediately returns to Manawaka to say her goodbyes—and to comfort her favorite son.

John picked Hagar up from the station and drove her back to the Shipley farm, which had fallen into terrible disrepair. Hagar felt her heart "break" at the sight of the place, but when she muttered about Bram's laziness and failure to keep things up, John jumped to his father's defense, citing his illness as the reason for the place's slow demise.

The Shipley farm was always a step down for Hagar, but never an eyesore—returning to the place for the first time in years, she feels heartbroken to see how inaction has warped it, just as earlier in the novel she was stunned to see how her own inaction had taken its toll upon her.

Inside the house, Hagar encountered a horrible, rancid smell—the kitchen was "a shambles," and rotting food sat out all along the counters. The house looked terrible, and John himself looked thin and ragged with a face "like a skull's." Hagar noticed for the first time that John was drunk, and when she confronted him about it, he replied blithely that he and Bram had been making their own wine for years.

The situation at the Shipley place is indeed dire, and Hagar is horrified by what she finds there—squalor, poverty, and her own son turned skeletal and demented through abuse of alcohol.

Hagar went into the front room to see Bram, and was shocked by how small and frail he'd grown. Bram's eyes were milky and "absent of expression," and he did not recognize Hagar upon seeing her. John entered the room announcing it was time for "medicine," and put before Bram a huge glass of wine. Hagar, taking in the rotting house, her addled husband, and her drunkard son, became deeply upset, and begged John for an answer to what had happened here. John reassured Hagar that he knew what was best for him and Bram—and that she never had.

As Hagar realizes that Bram and John have been enablers in one another's decline for years, Hagar sees how her own choices over the years have also snowballed to this moment. Just as her father's attempts to keep her away from Bram only made her want him more, so too did her own attempts to keep her favorite son away from his father make him loathe her and idolize Bram to the point that he became lost in his father's deteriorating world.

Over the days that followed, Bram experienced only fleeting moments of clarity. During one, he remarked that he "should of licked the living daylights" out of his wife Hagar, failing to recognize her even as she stood right in front of him. Bram could only manage to observe that Hagar reminded him of someone—his first wife, the "cowlike" Clara.

Hagar is pained to find that not only can Bram not recognize her, and not only is he speaking ill of her, but the person she reminds him of was his plain, fat first wife.

Hagar went into town with John to deliver eggs, and there they encountered a pretty but "silly" girl on the front steps of Currie's General Store—John introduced the girl as Arlene Simmons, the daughter of Lottie and Telford. After Arlene walked away, Hagar inquired about the nature of their relationship—she overheard them talking about attending a dance together—and John snorted that Arlene would never marry a "Shitley." When Hagar asked if John liked Arlene, John replied that he'd "lay her if [he] got the chance."

With each day, Hagar becomes more and more aware of how much John has become the spitting image of Bram, both in terms of his low-class appearance and the way he speaks, thinks, and moves through the world. John even seems to take a perverse kind of pleasure in being branded a "Shitley," and in transforming himself into an undesirable outsider.

Another day in town, Hagar ran into Lottie on the street. Lottie said she was happy that Hagar had done well for herself in the end, becoming the companion of a well-to-do "export-import" man. Hagar was forced to admit that she was only Mr. Oatley's housekeeper, further embarrassing herself. When Lottie asked why Hagar had returned to Manawaka, Hagar replied that Bram was dying, further deepening the conversation's awkwardness.

Even though Hagar removed herself from Bram's orbit and made a life for herself elsewhere, encountering Lottie still manages to make her feel embarrassed, awkward, and downtrodden.

In Manawaka, John went out every night after dinner, and returned in his car-buggy only after daybreak. When Hagar called attention to John's secretive behavior and asked what else she didn't know about him, he revealed that he'd played dangerous games of chicken out on the railroad tracks with the Tonerre boys long after Hagar had told him not to, and that he'd sold the jackknife he got for Hagar's family pin for cigarettes.

John continues his painful attempts to hurt Hagar through his words and actions, revealing that he defied her at every possible opportunity all throughout his childhood. Not only did he trade away her valuable family heirloom, but he even discarded the thing he traded it for without a second thought.

One afternoon, Hagar asked John to drive her out to the cemetery so that she could see whether the Currie plot had been cared for. He reluctantly agreed, and when the two got there, Hagar found that **the stone angel** had toppled over on her face. John mocked the "old lady," meaning the ange., but Hagar begged John to help her set the statue right. John begrudgingly struggled to right the statue, reminding Hagar of Jacob's biblical struggle with an angel, and eventually got her upright, only to reveal that someone had painted the angel's mouth and cheeks with "vulgar pink" rouge.

The defacement and in many ways the dethronement of the stone angel symbolizes Hagar's own fall from grace, and the ways in which her own life had, at this point, careened far out of her control. John's struggle with the angel is symbolic of his ongoing struggle with his own mother—a struggle of Biblical proportions (emphasized as well by both characters' Biblical names).

When the horrified Hagar asked who would do such a thing, John responded that the **angel** "look[ed] a damn sight better" for the makeup. Using John's handkerchief, Hagar scrubbed the angel clean, afraid that her ruined visage would bring further shame upon Hagar and her family. On the way back to the buggy, Hagar asked again who could have done such a thing, and John replied, "some drunk." Hagar, though, never believed him.

It is clear that John was the one who defaced and even upset the angel. Because the angel is Hagar's silent, stony twin, his disregard for the angel symbolizes his disregard for his own mother, and his desire to topple her and make her pay for what he apparently perceived as slights against him or mistakes at his expense.

Marvin came home for the holidays and urged John to return to the city to find work, but the two fought and squabbled as John insisted he'd prefer to stay in Manawaka. John mocked Marvin for his safe, cushy life, and Marvin denigrated John for his laziness, idleness, and sense of superiority towards work. John ended the argument by apologizing for his cruelty towards his brother, but also declaring that he was "through living in other people's houses."

John clearly resented the life Hagar made for him, even though she chose to take him away from Manawaka in order to pursue a better life for both of them. John wants to be completely dependent only on himself—foreshadowing, in a way, Hagar's stubbornness in her own old age.

One morning after Marvin had already left, John and Hagar found Bram dead in his bed—he'd died in the night, with no one beside him. Hagar, looking down at her husband's body, thought that he "looked like the cadaver of an old unknown man." Marvin sent money to cover the funeral expenses, but Bram's own daughters didn't even attend the service, angry that Bram hadn't left the house to them. Hagar had Bram buried in the Currie plot, and carved the name Shipley into the namestone at the edge of it. When Hagar asked John if he thought that carving the Shipley name on the plot had been the right thing to do, John said that it had been—the families were "only different sides of the same coin." Back at the house, Hagar did not shed one tear for Bram, though John wept bitterly.

Though Hagar always wanted to get away from her own family, when she married Bram she was taken aback when ties between her and the Curries were severed entirely. After Bram's death, in choosing to list his family name on the stone marking the Currie plot, Hagar tries one last time to bridge the gap between the world she left behind and the world she made, however begrudgingly, with her husband. John, too, clearly believes that there was not as great a distinction between the two families as the Curries would've liked to believe.

CHAPTER 7

In the morning, Hagar wakes up feeling stiff and sore. She feels "tempted" for a moment to head back home, to the comforts of the house she shares with Marvin and Doris, but then becomes determined not to give up—or to allow herself to be sent off to Silverthreads. Hagar is overcome by an intense thirst—she hasn't had a drop of water in over a day. Nevertheless, she rises from bed "almost gaily" and heads out the door, where she takes in the golden morning light and the wet greenery all around.

On this journey, Hagar keeps encountering obstacles that make her wonder if she would be better off giving up and giving in to Marvin and Doris. Ultimately, though, even in the face of fear, discomfort, and danger, Hagar decides that her independence is more important than her safety.

Hagar spots an old rusty bucket which has collected some rainwater, and she brings some water to her mouth with her hands, drinking it despite its terrible taste. Hagar walks down the little path towards the sea and watches two young children play on the beach, arguing angrily as they pretend the shells they're collecting are plates and bowls. As the little girl bosses her friend or brother around, Hagar wishes she could tell the little girl to "watch out [or] lose him." When Hagar calls out to the children and offers them some of her biscuits, they become scared and run away. Hagar realizes that the children must have seen "only a fat old woman" when they looked at her, like the witch from Hansel and Gretel.

Once again, Hagar's image of herself does not align with how she appears to others. She keeps forgetting the toll the years have taken on her body, and can't seem to believe that her life has both passed her by and transformed her into someone she doesn't recognize—someone others might even fear.

Hagar sits on the beach and eats some of her snacks, but quickly feels a horrible taste flood her mouth—she hasn't moved her bowels in days, and nausea grips her as she stands and walks back into the forest. As she makes her way through the woods, she stumbles and falls, scratching her legs on some rough bark. Hagar cannot get herself up this time, and begins crying. She becomes enraged, "curs[ing] like Bram," and through her anger summons the strength to at last "yank [her]self upright."

Hagar always hated Bram's brash personality and crass vocabulary, but in a moment of weakness and pain, she finds that channeling his defiant energy is the only thing that makes her feel strong.

Hagar walks a little before deciding to rest on a fallen tree trunk and enjoy nature. As she sits and looks around the forest, however, she grows anxious and antsy, noticing all of the insects, sounds, and fungus around her. She thinks about the children playing house down on the beach—and then recalls "some other children, once, playing at house, but in a somewhat different manner."

Hagar's increasingly frequent retreats into memory are triggered not just by sights or sounds that remind her of her past, but also by the desire to escape the moments of intense anxiety and discomfort that more and more often define her present.

Hagar retreats into memory again. After Bram's death, she recalls, she wrote to Mr. Oatley to ask him for a few more weeks' leave—she didn't feel she could leave John just yet. However, as the days went by, she saw less and less of her son: he was always out. Hagar cleaned the house top to bottom to occupy herself, and even came upon some of Bram's first wife's things in the attic. She resolved to give the box to Bram's daughter Jess, and took out the wagon, driving three miles to the girl's home.

Hagar stayed at the Shipley house to make sure that John was all right. Her growing concern for her son's well-being and her meddling in his life and affairs mirrors the investment Marvin and Doris now have, in the present day, in her own life.

At Jess's house, Hagar was surprised to find, as she passed the kitchen window, that John was sitting in there with his half-sister. They were talking about Bram, and it became evident from listening in that their sister Gladys felt neither of them did enough to care for their father—though she didn't do very much to help in Bram's time of need, either. John asked Jess to comfort him with stories about Bram from Jess's own childhood, and became emotional at her remembrances.

As Hagar overhears her son reminiscing with his half-sister about their separate but equally powerful relationships with the father, she realizes that she was not as much a part of her son's life as she'd thought she was—and that despite her attempts to separate him from Bram's influence, he came to love, admire, and want to emulate the man.

Unable to take anymore, Hagar knocked at the kitchen door, interrupting John and Jess's emotional conversation. She gave Jess the box containing Clara's things. Jess was grateful, but John was angry that Hagar had come to "fetch" him. She insisted that she hadn't known he was here, but John angrily left the kitchen, and together the two of them headed for home.

Hagar fears that though she always felt a kind of ownership over her favorite son, she really didn't know him at all and never did.

One night, to Hagar's surprise, Arlene brought John home in her father's car. John was drunk and nearly passed out, and Arlene struggled to get him out of the front seat and inside. Hagar could not "muster [any] disapproval" for the two of them, though it did surprise her that John and Arlene had apparently been seeing each other regularly. Together, the two women helped John to lie down on the couch, and then Arlene left somewhat brusquely.

Though Arlene and Hagar both clearly worry about and care for John, there is an unspoken hostility between the two women, which will only grow deeper.

The next morning, John remembered that he'd attended a dance in town, but couldn't recall anything about how he'd gotten home. When Hagar told him that Arlene had brought him back, he remarked that though Arlene had long liked to "fool around with [him] because she wasn't meant to," he was surprised that she would stay with him in a moment of real need. John then revealed that he'd gotten into a fight at the dance—in front of Arlene as well as her parents, and most of the rest of the town.

John is truly growing up to take after Bram, continuing his father's legacy of drunken carousing, hardscrabble antics, and absolute contempt for social graces and keeping up appearances in public.

Hagar soon returned to the coast to work, but came back to Manawaka the following summer to visit with John during her vacation. She was surprised to find that the place was clean and orderly—John revealed that Arlene had been coming out "quite a bit" to help out around the house. That very afternoon, Arlene came to call, and Hagar was surprised to see that the girl had grown thinner and plainer. When John went out to the barn, Hagar and Arlene talked, and Arlene revealed that though when they were children, John avoided her because she was wealthy and prissy, they were now on even ground at last—neither of them had anything to their name.

There are several parallels between Hagar and Bram's relationship and Arlene and John's. There are differences, too, in that Arlene seems to genuinely love John and view him as her equal—whereas Hagar always felt a sense of superiority to Bram, and had feelings of lust rather than love for him from the start.

Hagar warned Arlene not to marry John, citing his poverty and heavy drinking. Arlene retorted that John hadn't been drinking so much lately, but Hagar responded that Arlene would be "in for a sorry shock" if she thought she could change John—"you'll not change a single solitary soul in this world," Hagar declared. The two argued back and forth about who knew John best, but Hagar eventually shut the fight down, and they passed the rest of the afternoon in silence.

Just as Hagar thought she would marry Bram and cause him to change his rough-talking, hard-drinking ways, Arlene believes that she can change John, too. Hagar's advice to Arlene surely seems cruel and condescending to the girl, although it comes from a place of experience and concern.

After dinner that night, John took Arlene home while Hagar sat up waiting for him to return, looking around the house and reminiscing about her youth. When John came back, Hagar confronted him about his relationship with Arlene, demanding to know if the two were going to be married. John told Hagar that his choices were none of her concern.

Hagar sees history repeating itself through John and Arlene's relationship, and becomes determined to stop it from going any further. John, though, does not want his mother to have any control over his life.

One day, while napping on the couch in the front room covered with a heavy blanket, Hagar awoke to the sound of whispers and footsteps. John and Arlene had come home, and after looking around for Hagar but believing her to be out of the house, began discussing their plans for the future and anticipating a time when they could "have the place to [them]selves." Arlene suggested they pretend that the place was already theirs for a little while, and the two began making love in the kitchen. Hagar stewed silently in anger as she listened to them pretending that the house was theirs, though it was hers. She waited on the couch for the rest of the afternoon until the two went out again, and then Hagar went straight up to bed, "planning what to do."

Hagar sees Arlene and John's relationship—and their desire to be left alone in the Shipley house—as a direct invalidation of her own relationship with John and her own efforts to keep up the house. She also sees something of herself in Arlene—a polite girl from a well-to-do family slumming it, so to speak, with a no-good Shipley. Hagar begins scheming and plotting to tear Arlene and John apart, perhaps attempting to keep history from repeating herself and saving Arlene from making the same mistakes she herself did as a young girl in love.

The next day, Hagar called upon Lottie to discuss the relationship between their children. Lottie seemed to be fairly happy for the two of them, citing Arlene's claims that John had "settled down." Hagar said that she didn't have anything against the two of them marrying in the future, but didn't want them to do so now, when they were both so broke. At the thought of Arlene and John—and their potential children—living in squalor and destitution, Lottie grew panicked, and suggested sending Arlene East to go work for a cousin. Hagar told Lottie to make sure the suggestion came from the cousin, not from her, and then the two women moved on to a discussion of their girlhoods. When Hagar asked Lottie if she remembered stomping on the chicks at the dump, Lottie said she didn't remember the incident "at all."

Lottie and Hagar are both afraid of their children making a mistake in marrying one another, though for very different reasons. Hagar is particularly sensitive to this fear, as she made a huge mistake in marrying Bram—but it's clear that Lottie, who once tried to warn Hagar about Bram, sees John as an extension of Hagar's husband, and does not want her precious daughter to one day meet the same sad fate as Hagar has.

For the next month, Arlene came by the Shipley place every day, and her presence agitated Hagar. As a result, John and Arlene began conducting their affair somewhere else—Hagar suspects now that they spent their days in roadside ditches and fields. As she snaps from her reverie and returns to the present, she realizes that she is holding a hank of moss in her hand. She wonders how long she's been sitting on the log—a slug is crawling across one of her shoes. The woods have grown cold, and night is coming on. Hagar reluctantly makes her way back to the abandoned house, but rather than entering it she goes across the way to an abandoned cannery, fearing vagrants and tramps.

Hagar is spending longer and longer in her memories the more painful and agitating they become. This shows that memory is not really a refuge for her—it is a form of self-abasement, and her reveries are a pastime that only serve to upset, confuse, and alienate her. At the same time, she may be exorcising necessary demons of her past by revisiting these painful memories in such a vivid fashion.

CHAPTER 8

Inside the greasy and dilapidated cannery, Hagar makes a bed out of some discarded old fishnets and eats some of her provisions as dinner. She finds a pile of scallop shells and dead junebugs, and uses the objects as "jewels" to adorn her hair. She tries to ignore her swollen feet and painful stomach by remembering the events of the day, but finds that before the walk through the forest she can remember nothing.

Though Hagar has, up to this point, been confused but mostly lucid, in this passage she starts to lose her grip on reality in a more serious way.

A seagull flaps about the room, and its presence "scares and disgusts" Hagar. She flings a small wooden fish box at it, hoping to scare it away, but the box strikes the bird and bloodies its wing. Hagar is unsure if she should kill the squawking bird out of mercy, and as she languishes in indecision, she wishes Marvin were with her—he'd know what to do. She wonders where the two of them are, and whether they've taken advantage of her absence and sold the house.

This scene mirrors the earlier scene in which Hagar couldn't step up and be the one to squash the suffering chicks in the Manawaka junkyard. Over fifty years later, Hagar still can't act decisively in moments of truth.

As night descends, Hagar hears some dogs barking in the distance. As they get closer and closer, Hagar grows afraid—but just as they arrive underneath the window, right outside, Hagar hears the sound of scuffle, and their steps retreat. Hagar wants to move, but finds that she is shaking and sweating so badly she can't stand. At the sound of the door opening, Hagar becomes outright terrified—she knows a person has entered the cannery.

Hagar's fears of being set upon by an assailant seem realer than ever. She has ignored danger up to this point, and now may have to face it head-on.

The figure inside the cannery lights a match—it is a man. Hagar, believing the man to be a vagrant, offers him her purse, but he is just as frightened as she is. Hagar realizes the man must be off-put by the junebug carcasses and shells in her hair, and she apologizes for her appearance. The man asks what an old lady is doing all alone, and asks if Hagar's all right. Hagar suddenly believes that Marvin and Doris have sent the man to bring her back, and she tells him that she refuses to go with him—she "won't be lugged around like a sack of potatoes."

Hagar apparently frightened her new acquaintance just as badly as he frightened her. Though she's relieved that he's not here to attack her, she can't shake off the suspicion that he's here to put her journey to an end and drag her back to Marvin and Doris to meet her fate. Her paranoia is symptomatic of her loosening grip on reality.

The man begs Hagar to calm down, and insists he doesn't know her and hasn't been sent to fetch her. He introduces himself as Murray F. Lees, and says he's nothing but a life insurance salesman out on a walk. Hagar introduces herself, and Murray sits down beside her. Though she doesn't quite trust him, she's grateful for the company. He tells her that on his walk he noticed a pack of dogs fighting over a wounded bird—Hagar admits she was the one who downed it.

Murray doesn't know who Hagar is, where she comes from, or what she's doing in the abandoned cannery—and she is grateful for the anonymity, happy to have avoided Silverthreads yet again.

Murray shares his cigarettes and wine with Hagar, and she is grateful to have something to drink. Hagar thanks Murray for his kindness, and the two begin talking about their lives, sharing details here and there. As Murray tells Hagar about his job and his past, she finds herself slightly bored, but comforted by his voice and warmed by the wine. Murray tells Hagar about his religious upbringing and his worrywart mother who, despite her frail appearance, was tough as a morning glory—a flower which resists being weeded out.

Murray's mother sounds very similar to Hagar, both past and present—frail and vulnerable to the world, but secretly tough as nails and not easily changed, moved, or eradicated.

Murray also tells Hagar about his wife and son, and their participation in increasingly strange religious sects which foretold that the end of the world was coming soon. Murray and Hagar both keep drinking, and Murray reveals his frustration with doctrine that tells its adherents they're "[in] for it" but declines to tell them when the end will come. Murray reveals that one day he left church in a huff, fed up with their "malarkey," and returned home to find that his and his wife's house had caught fire—with their son inside.

Murray's story takes a strange and sad turn, and Hagar comes to understand that he too has known indecision, stagnation, and terrible loss.

Murray and Hagar commiserate over the fact that they have both lost children, and then after sharing some more wine and soda biscuits, cozy up side-by-side. Hagar shivers with the cold, but insists to Murray that she's perfectly warm enough. Hagar slips back into memory, and into the story of her own loss.

Hagar feels she has found a kindred spirit and a trustworthy friend in Murray, and hearing his painful story triggers her own memories of John. This chance encounter between two strangers thus leads to a real connection in this moment.

One afternoon, back in Manawaka, John came into the house to tell Hagar that Arlene had decided to go East for a year to work. Arlene told John she was determined to stop living off of her parents, and wanted to work for a year in hopes of beginning to pay them back. Hagar quietly said she admired Arlene's resolve, but John was concerned that Arlene would meet "some well-fixed guy in Toronto." He also pointed out that Hagar didn't seemed surprised by the news, and asked if she had been "expecting it." Hagar pretended to be confused by John's accusation, and John told Hagar that he was planning on bringing Arlene back to the house every night during the two weeks she had remaining in Manawaka. John confessed that he hoped to impregnate Arlene soon, so that she'd be forced to stay behind.

In this passage, as Hagar reflects on what would come to be a pivotal confrontation with John, it becomes evident that John knew all along that Hagar had a hand in sending Arlene away. This latest slight was, to him, just another one of his mother's many cruel, unfair acts against him, and he lashed out in anger and sadness.

Hagar broke down, begging John to see that all she'd ever wanted was his happiness, and never wanted to see him make a mistake or "take on responsibilities beyond [his] means." John chastised Hagar for failing, all these years, to see that Marvin was always "[her] boy," not him.

Though Hagar has tried all her life to favor John and to help him, her efforts have seemingly been wasted—he never wanted her love, only Bram's. In the meantime, Hagar was blind to the son who really both loved and needed her—Marvin.

Every night for several nights, John took the truck into town. One night, Hagar decided not to wait up for him, but found that when she went to bed she couldn't sleep. She soon heard some thumping at the door, and when she went downstairs to answer it, found Henry Pearl standing there. He told Hagar to come along into town—something had happened to John. On the drive in, Henry told Hagar that John was in the hospital. John had taken on a bet in the middle of a local dance—that he could drive his truck across the trestle bridge. Apparently, though no train was due, an unscheduled freight came down the tracks towards John, and John steered the truck off of the bridge. Arlene had been in the car, and had been killed instantly. John, however, was still alive—for the time being.

The news of John's accident must have felt horribly familiar to Hagar—she had warned him countless times about goofing off near the railroad tracks as a child, but even as an adult, he could never heed her wisdom. His drunken foolishness has also resulted in Arlene's death—through his own folly, he has literally driven their relationship off a cliff rather than let it end naturally.

At the hospital, Hagar sat with John, whose scant superficial injuries were nothing compared to the internal ones he'd suffered. John apologized for acting "like a kid," and begged Hagar to ask someone to give him something for his pain. In the middle of his agony, John expired. To this day, Hagar does not remember her last words to her son.

Though Hagar's memory has, throughout the novel, been sharp and seemingly trustworthy, this moment—the most painful moment of her life—has been wiped clean.

As one of the nurses walked Hagar out, she urged Hagar to let herself cry—but Hagar shoved the nurse away, determined not to cry in front of a stranger. That night, back at the house, though, Hagar found that her tears wouldn't come even at her own bidding—Hagar felt she'd "transformed to stone." At John's funeral, days later, Hagar did not go out to the cemetery to see the burial—she did not want to see her family's plot, or **the stone angel** watching over them all.

Hagar has long prided herself on her stoicism and her strength, but now, even in the darkest moment she's known, she refuses to allow herself even a moment of vulnerability. Hagar has so often chosen to ignore emotion that now, when it counts, the choice is no longer her own, but some strange mechanism inside her working on its own.

Hagar visited Lottie and Telford, but the visit was short, awkward, and painful for all of them. Over the next few weeks she packed up the Shipley place, and sent anything of value to Marvin. Hagar returned to Mr. Oatley's and got back to work. When he, too, died in just a year, he left her ten thousand dollars in his will, with which she bought herself a house.

The events following John's death are relayed quickly and brusquely—it is almost as if Hagar moved through the next years of her life on autopilot, relatively unfeeling even in the face of a generous gift from her employer.

Hagar snaps back to reality, realizing that she is, at last, crying. Murray comments upon how sad her story is, and Hagar is shocked to realize she's been telling the whole thing aloud. Murray urges Hagar to let all of her feelings out. Hagar laments that John's death was senseless and pointless—for years, she's felt enormous anger over what happened. Murray says that though anger won't do Hagar any good, it's hard not to feel "empty." Murray knows his wife will soon start to worry about him, but is overcome with the need for a nap. The confused Hagar begs Murray not to tell her son, Marvin, where she is. Murray promises, and Hagar believes him. They "slip into sleep" side by side, overcome by the cold.

After all these years, Hagar has at last allowed herself to give in to the emotions she's guarded so long. She has defied her dark twin, the stone angel, and accepted that sometimes control must be relinquished. She is not made of stone, and this random moment of connection with a stranger has finally allowed her to give in to her humanity.

Hagar wakes up in the middle of the night feeling cold, ill, and nauseous. Her heart is pounding and she can barely breathe. She vomits onto the floor, and then hears a man's voice beside her lamenting that she has had too much to drink. Hagar believes that the person beside her is John, though it's still Murray sitting with her. Murray, concerned, says that Hagar needs a doctor, but she insists she's fine. Hagar begins apologizing to "John" for being cold to him, and for telling him he couldn't bring Arlene to the house. Hagar waits for "John's" response—Murray tells her that he forgives her for "everything," and urges her to get some sleep.

Hagar's grip on reality continues to loosen. She's no longer just confused about where she is, but is now essentially hallucinating her dead son's presence, demonstrating how painful her trips into her own memories have made her present circumstances.

CHAPTER 9

Hagar wakes up in the morning, feeling just as ill as she did the night before. She has been covered by a shoddy tweed coat, and as she opens her eyes, she looks around for Murray, but finds that he is gone. Hagar feels "bereaved," though she can't remember enough of the previous night to recall why. As her thoughts "ramble from this to that," she wonders whether Murray will come back for her. She feels faint and drained, and after a while, hears footsteps approaching. When the door opens, she turns her head to face it: Marvin, Doris, and Murray have all come for her.

Though Hagar has been terrified of being found and dragged back to Marvin and Doris's, it's clear that at this point their arrival is a rescue mission. Hagar is ill, weak, and infirm, and though she struggled to maintain her independence in the face of change, she has gone too far and as a result lost it forever.

Marvin is relieved that they have found Hagar. Doris, though, is furious with the woman for throwing them into an "awful scare," and says that when she went to the police to tell them Hagar had gone missing, "they looked at [her] in such a funny way, as though [she] should have taken better care."

Doris, slightly selfish as always, is worried about how Hagar's disappearance reflected on her—just as Hagar was always worried how Bram's behavior made her look in the eyes of others.

Marvin urges Doris to shut up—they need to take care of Hagar, who is clearly suffering from exposure. Marvin asks Hagar if she can understand him, but Murray interjects to tell him that Hagar is confused. As the three of them discuss what to do with her, Hagar admits to feeling a slight relief at seeing her son before her. At the same time, she laments having "grown so weak [that she] must rejoice at being captured."

Hagar is both angry that she's been found and relieved to be back with her son. She has come to realize that in order to survive she is going to have to sacrifice some of her agency—being alone and desperate in the wilderness is not so much a choice as it is a sentence.

Murray offers to help Doris and Marvin take Hagar out of the cannery, but they tell him he can leave. Hagar allows Marvin to lift her to a standing position and take her slowly up the stairs and outside. In the car, Doris and Marvin swaddle Hagar in pillows and blankets and then begin driving. She asks them if they're taking her straight to Silverthreads, but Marvin says it's "too late for that"—she's going to the hospital. Marvin at last tells her the truth about her X-rays. Hearing her diagnosis, Hagar is "repelled and stunned."

Hagar worries that she is going to be taken to the nursing home, but then realizes that something even worse is in store. Her diagnosis—though never revealed to the reader—is serious enough to shock and upset Hagar even in her disoriented state, and as she prepares to enter the hospital, it occurs to her that she may never leave.

Hours later, Hagar's "world has shrunk." She is on a public ward in a hospital, in a room full of at least thirty beds. Constant noise surrounds her as her fellow patients moan and shriek and nurses with trolleys and trays walk up and down the aisle, administering drugs and food to their patients. When a nurse brings Hagar her pills, she threatens to spit them out, but the nurse brusquely forces Hagar to swallow them down. As the lights go off and night descends, she can hear the noises of the other women: whimpering, snoring, praying, and singing.

Hagar hoped that in running away she'd free herself from being bound to the will of others. Now, in a dreadful public ward, Hagar is more alone, and in more difficult circumstances, than she would have been at Silverthreads.

In the morning, a nurse rouses Hagar from sleep to take her temperature. As the kindly nurse ministers to Hagar, the old woman finds herself crying "shamefully" and uncontrollably. The nurse gives her some pain medication, and though Hagar tries to fall back asleep, she finds that she can't.

Hagar is disoriented, upset, and ill, and it is as if the seal she broke back in the cannery by crying at last over John's death has released a flood of torrential, unbidden emotions.

The scrawny, small woman in the next bed engages Hagar in conversation, asking how she slept. Hagar replies that she couldn't sleep "with all the moaning and groaning," but her neighbor reveals that Hagar was the one "doing most of the talking," and even got up from bed twice and had to be restrained by the nurses. When Hagar tells the woman she doesn't believe her, the woman calls out to an obese lady across the aisle, Mrs. Reilly, who confirms that Hagar was up and down all night.

Hagar believed herself to be restless and half-asleep in her bed all night, but was really causing a ruckus that the whole ward observed. She is perhaps more disoriented than ever, and is beginning to forget or block out her own actions.

Hagar still can't believe that her neighbor is telling the truth, and asks who was singing in German all night. Her neighbor reveals that the German woman is Mrs. Dobereiner, who, despite her beautiful voice, often "gets pretty down" because she doesn't speak much English and has trouble communicating with those around her.

The other women on the ward, though, are no quieter than Hagar, and are in at least as much emotional distress as she herself is presently.

Hagar says she wishes Marvin had gotten her a semi-private room. Her neighbor reveals that she met Marvin yesterday, and remarks how nice it is that Hagar has a child to look after her—the neighbor has no children of her own, though she and her husband Tom have been married for over fifty years. Hagar's neighbor asks her if her "man's" name is John, as she cried the name out all night. Hagar turns her face away from the woman, and the neighbor apologizes for upsetting her. She introduces herself at last—her name is Mrs. Jardine. She attempts to gossip with Hagar about the other women on the ward, but Hagar begs to be left alone.

Hagar's recently-accessed memories of John's death seem to have affected her more than she realizes. Hagar's neighbor is just trying to make small talk with her and even gossip a little, but when confronted with the depths of her pain—secret even to her—Hagar retreats into herself, seeking the isolation that has become so familiar over the years.

Hagar naps, and wakes to find Marvin sitting beside her. Hagar is pleased to see him, and doesn't mean to start complaining, but as soon as she opens her mouth she can't help herself—she tells Marvin about the noises on the ward and begs him to look into a semi-private room. Marvin asks what else he can do for her, and Hagar asks to be brought her satin nightgowns, hairnets, and a perfume given her by Tina. Marvin asks if she wants any food from home, and when Hagar complains about the eggs and gelatin she's served on the ward, Marvin explains that she's on a soft diet because of her stomach. Hagar berates her doctor, calling him Doctor Tappen—Marvin reminds her that her doctor's name is Corby, and Hagar is embarrassed.

Hagar is confused, disoriented, and agitated by her surroundings. Marvin is quick to ask Hagar to make a list of everything she needs, and clearly eager to make her as comfortable as possible. Her situation is worsening, even if she doesn't yet know it.

Hagar asks where Doris is, and Marvin explains that she's had a "spell" and isn't feeling well. He admits that he's worried about Doris, as her heart isn't so good anymore. Hagar is overcome with shame and fear that Doris will die before she does in an "unnatural" turn of events. Marvin bids Hagar goodbye and walks away, promising to look into a more private room.

Hagar has been so concerned about how Marvin and Doris have been treating her that she's never stopped to think about her treatment of them has affected their lives.

Hagar overhears a sweet visit between Mrs. Jardine and her husband Tom, and is surprised by how happily Mrs. Jardine speaks to him about life on the ward—she is happy about the food and the company. Soon, though, visiting hours are over, and as Tom leaves and the ward grows quiet, Hagar becomes aware that Mrs. Jardine is crying. Mrs. Jardine blows her nose, brushes her hair, and sings to herself, then takes out her teeth for the night, having snapped herself out of her sadness.

Mrs. Jardine is, like her fellow patients, sad and lonely, but knows how important it is to the others that she maintain her spirits and put on a brave face.

Mrs. Jardine talks with Mrs. Reilly across the way about food, dieting, and youth. When Mrs. Dobereiner cries out for a pan, Mrs. Jardine flags down a nurse to help her, and then asks the same nurse to help her out of bed so that she herself can walk to the bathroom. The nurse asks Hagar if she needs a pan, and Hagar replies that when she feels the urge to go, she'll walk herself to the bathroom like Mrs. Jardine, but the nurse insists that Hagar isn't to get out of bed or go anywhere on her own. Hagar wonders how bad her condition really is.

Hagar is shocked to realize that she's doing worse than the women surrounding her—their plight has seemed more dire to her, but just as she was unaware that she was crying out in the night, she is perhaps unaware of how her health measures up to theirs.

When Mrs. Jardine returns, the women compare how long they've been on the ward—Mrs. Jardine has been here three months, but insists it's not long at all compared to Mrs. Dobereiner, who's been here for seven. Apparently, one of the German-speaking nurses has overheard Mrs. Dobereiner's prayers each night: according to her, the woman "prays to pass on."

Mrs. Dobereiner's dark prayers reveal that for many, swift death with dignity is preferable to languishing alive but alone and in pain.

As soon as the lights are out, the ward becomes a noisy place. Hagar goads a nurse into giving her more pain medicine to help her sleep. When Hagar wakes up in the middle of the night and tries to go to the bathroom on her own, the nurse insists on helping her walk. Hagar is reluctant to accept the nurse's assistance, but the nurse urges her to think of the times in her life when she herself has "given a hand" to others, and accept now a hand in return. Hagar, though, "can't think of many" she's given a helping hand.

The idea of allowing herself to be helped—or of genuinely extending help, empathy, and love to another—is unthinkable to the slightly narcissistic Hagar, whose whole life has been a series of manipulations and maneuvers executed primarily in her own self-interest.

The next day, Hagar receives visits from Doctor Corby, Doris, and Marvin. Doris brings her flowers to cheer her up, along with the other things she's asked for. Doris and Marvin announce that Tina has called to say she's going to be married. Hagar removes an old sapphire ring from her finger and urges Doris to send it to Tina as a present. She apologizes for not having given it to Doris herself years ago.

Hagar is learning to be a little less selfish. She even apologizes to Doris for not doing the right thing earlier—she is beginning to realize that in the time she has left, she might as well start to make things right.

Marvin tells Hagar that he's arranged for her to move to a semi-private room. Rather than feeling relieved, though, Hagar experiences a "quick sense of loss" and begins to cry. Marvin asks if she's changed her mind, and Hagar replies that she's simply gotten used to the public ward. Depressed and agitated, Marvin laments that he can never keep up with Hagar, or do the right thing for her. Hagar says she'll move, attempting to quell Marvin's temper, but it's too late—he and Doris are upset, and they leave. After they go, Hagar pretends to be asleep—though she can feel some nurses heaving her onto a large trolley and carting her away, out of the public ward and far from her friends.

This passage shows just how much tension and resentment there still is between Marvin and Hagar. He knows that his mother is near death, and is trying to do all he can to make things good for her even after all she's put him through. Still, though, his efforts are never enough, and Hagar is always displeased. Hagar is embarrassed and ashamed of this fact, and decides to make Marvin happy even though it means saying goodbye to the tenuous connections she's formed on the public ward.

CHAPTER 10

Hagar wakes up in her new room, feeling that the world has grown even smaller. Aloud, she remarks that the "next room" she visits will be "the smallest of the lot." Her nurse, horrified, urges Hagar not to talk about such things. Hagar looks around her light, airy room—though there is another bed on the other side, it is empty, and Hagar is all alone.

Hagar is learning to be practical about her own death, and talking about it with her nurses in her signature coarse way betrays the ways in which she's renounced her illusions about herself.

Another nurse comes in, and Hagar remarks on how slim the young woman is. The nurse says that Hagar was probably slim when she was young, too, and Hagar agrees that when she was a girl "some people thought [her] quite pretty [though] you'd never think so to look at [her] now." The nurse, though, replies that Hagar is still handsome, if not quite pretty, with strong features and good bones. Hagar tells the nurse she's lucky to be young, but the nurse says Hagar is the lucky one—she's had so many years, and nothing can "take them away." Hagar grunts and responds that the fact is "a mixed blessing, surely."

This passage shows that Hagar's "handsome" features, a metaphor for her staunch, stubborn personality, have endured throughout the years. Even so, Hagar is not sure that the years of her life and the cruel lessons they've contained are a blessing—she believes them to be more of a curse, one which has warped her beyond recognition.

Hagar sleeps through most of the night, astounded by the quiet. As she wakes in the middle of the night, though, and swings her legs over the edge of the bed, she is confused as to where she is, and believes she is home with Marvin and Doris. As she stands to walk to the bathroom, a nurse stops her and puts her back into bed—strapping her down with a contraption she refers to as "little bed-jacket." Hagar struggles and howls, but the nurse insists she's just trying to keep Hagar from hurting herself.

Hagar's worst nightmare is being controlled so closely, and yet here in the hospital she no longer has any agency over even seemingly small, personal choices.

When Hagar wakes up in the morning, there is a teenaged girl in the other bed. Seeing Hagar awake, the girl introduces herself as Sandra Wong, and says that she's going to have her appendix out. The girl is nervous, and asks Hagar if she's had hers out. Hagar, lying, replies that she has, and that the "routine" procedure will hardly hurt. A nurse soon comes to wheel the nervous, antsy Sandra off to surgery, leaving Hagar alone again.

Hagar lies blatantly to her new roommate, unaware of how her lies could impact both of them. She is perhaps envious of the girl's youth, and of how much life she still has ahead of her.

Hagar wakes from a nap to find Doris and Mr. Troy at her bedside. Doris leaves the two of them to talk while she goes to speak to one of the nurses. When Mr. Troy asks Hagar if she'd like to pray, she rebuffs his offer. After a moment, though, she asks him to sing her a hymn from her childhood. As Mr. Troy sings, Hagar begins crying. Mr. Troy stops singing, worried he's upset her, but Hagar assures him that she's fine. Mr. Troy goes out to the hall, and Doris comes in to fluff Hagar's pillows. She asks how the visit went. Hagar responds that she and Mr. Troy didn't have "a single solitary thing to say" to each other. Doris is visibly pained, and Hagar regrets her lie. Angry at herself for being "unchangeable [and] unregenerate," she admits that Mr. Troy's visit did her much good.

Hagar is at last opening up and casting aside the old thought patterns and automatic decisions that have kept her angry and isolated for years and years. She finds herself surprisingly moved by Mr. Troy's kind gesture, and even more shockingly allows herself a moment of real connection with Doris.

Several hours after Doris and Mr. Troy have left, Hagar has another visitor, a young man whom she doesn't immediately recognize. The young man reminds Hagar of his name, Steven—he is her grandson. Hagar is surprised to see him. Though she knows Steven was sent to visit by his parents, she's grateful for his company. They discuss Tina's impending marriage, but when the wedding itself comes up, it becomes clear that the whole family is waiting to see what will happen to Hagar before planning anything.

Steven's visit is both pleasant and awkward. Hagar knows that the end of her life is nearing, and that people are behaving differently towards her because of it—all she can do, though, is smile through the discomfort of the situation and make the others around her feel at ease.

Steven lights a cigarette for Hagar, and she remarks how very much he looks like his grandfather. Steven says his mother always tells him that he looks like one of her own brothers, but Hagar dismisses this as nonsense—she tells the boy he's "a Shipley through and through." Steven reminisces with Hagar about his youth, and as he tells stories of how she used to buy him candies when he was little, she realizes that the young man before her doesn't really know her at all—she wants to tell him about her life and all "the incommunicable years," but doesn't know where she'd begin.

Though Hagar was once embarrassed by everything about Bram, she now declares proudly that her grandson looks like him and has inherited the best of him. Though she feels a moment of kinship with Steven, she is aware that to him she is just an old woman, a sweet granny—she can never communicate to him the vast tragedies and small pains of her life.

After a few more pleasantries, Steven gives Hagar a quick kiss and bids her goodbye. Soon, Hagar is overcome with pain and nausea, and she calls for the nurse, who gives her some medication with a needle. Just as the medicine goes to work, Hagar sees the curtains around Sandra's bed being pulled aside. Her mother is leaving after a visit, and Sandra, in bed, looks miserable and puffy. When Hagar asks how she's feeling, the girl replies that she feels awful, and chastises Hagar for lying and telling her the pain wouldn't be so bad. Hagar amusedly tells her that if this is the worst pain Sandra ever experiences, she'll be lucky. Sandra looks outraged, but won't speak another word.

Hagar, as an old woman, knows that Sandra will certainly face greater challenges and pain in her life than an appendectomy. To Sandra, though, what she's feeling now is the worst pain imaginable, and she's angry with Hagar for failing to warn her about it. Women, though, cannot prepare one another for the traumas they'll face in their lives.

In the middle of the night, Hagar is awoken by the sound of Sandra crying. Hagar calls out and asks Sandra to put her light on for her and summon the nurse—she needs the bathroom. Sandra kindly does so, and says that she has to go, too. As the minutes pass, though, no nurse comes through the room, and Sandra's pain intensifies. Hagar stands up to get her a bedpan from the bathroom, and though it's only a few steps, every moment is agony. Nevertheless, Hagar fetches the bedpan for Sandra—when a nurse at last comes in and sees Hagar up out of bed, she is shocked, and reprimands Hagar before putting her back to bed. After the nurse leaves, Sandra giggles, remarking upon the stunned look on the nurse's face when she saw Hagar up and about. The two women laugh together through their pain, then fall asleep.

Sandra and Hagar bond as they face a common enemy—the nurses who want to impose rules and structure upon them. They have been adversaries up to this point, but as this incident brings them together, they both find their spirits at least temporarily bolstered and renewed.

One afternoon, in the midst of a terrible pain, Hagar receives a visitor—Marvin. At the sight of her son, she tells him how frightened she is, but immediately feels ashamed when she sees how sad Marvin is. He apologizes for being "crabby" towards her over the years, and then reaches for Hagar's hand. She sees that Marvin is Jacob—the one who has always been wrestling with the **angel**. Hagar sees that the only way to release herself is "by releasing him." Hagar attempts to placate Marvin by telling him that he's always been "a better son than John."

Hagar's words toMarvin in this scene are both selfish and selfless. She knows that the only way to "release" them from one another is to tell him what he's always wanted to hear—even if it's not necessarily the pure truth.

In the hall, Hagar overhears Marvin speaking to one of the nurses. When the nurse remarks that Hagar has an "amazing constitution," Marvin replies that she is a "holy terror." Hagar is relieved and moved to hear her son speak of her "with such anger and such tenderness."

When Marvin leaves, visibly moved but also shaken, his remark to the nurse shows the weight of the years of history between him and his mother, and the twinned love and resentment they have for one another.

Hagar recalls the last time she ever went to Manawaka. She visited alongside Marvin and Doris, and was shocked to see the changes in the town. The old Shipley place had been torn down and replaced with a brand-new, beautiful green house, and the yard had been cleared of weeds.

The Shipley home, once in terrible disrepair, was cleaned up and bulldozed to make way for newer things, symbolizing the ongoing march of time.

The three of them drove out to the cemetery, and though Doris stayed in the car, Marvin and Hagar walked out to the family plot. **The stone angel** still stood, but had been "altered" by harsh winters and lack of care. Hagar knew that one day, the angel would "topple entirely, and no one [would] bother to set her upright again."

Hagar knows that just as the stone angel will one day no longer be able to weather the elements and remain standing, she, too, will one day "topple entirely."

At the sight of Marvin and Hagar, a young caretaker came up and spoke to them. Taking them for tourists, he began telling them all about the cemetery and the town—and the odd but interesting Currie-Shipley stone, marking the place where two families "connected by marriage" had been laid to rest. Relieved that the two families were "both the same" now, Hagar took her leave and began walking back to the car, while Marvin stayed behind and talked with the caretaker.

Hagar's life was consumed by issues of class, social standing, pride, and prejudice—now that everyone she loves is dead, they are all equals. This cruel irony still satisfies Hagar, and she is able to turn and walk away from her family's resting place in peace.

Hagar is awash in a sea of pain and discomfort when Sandra approaches her to tell her some good news: Sandra is soon going to be released from the hospital. Hagar congratulates her, and Sandra replies that she hopes Hagar is "outa here soon, too." Sandra realizes she's misspoken and starts backpedaling, but Hagar simply thanks the girl for her kind words. As she lies prone on her bed, she tries to think of "something truly free" she's done in her ninety years, and can think only of two—one being her recent lie to Marvin.

Hagar knows that the end of her life is approaching, and she doesn't correct Sandra when the girl expresses hope she'll soon be "outa here." As she tries to assess whether her life, lived in pursuit of freedom, has actually contained any, she takes only a small amount of pride in the few but meaningful "free" acts she's undertaken.

Hagar is overcome by pain as her thoughts drift and meld together. She imagines herself as an "**angel**," and begins praying to God to bless her. She is disgusted by her own feelings of bloatedness, and calls for a nurse. Hagar's whole "world" has become nothing but a needle. Confused and agitated, Hagar calls for Doris, desperate to get back to her "sleek cocoon." The nurse comes to her side and administers the medicine, but Hagar still feels no relief, and asks "Doris" for a glass of water. The nurse starts to hand it to her, but asks if Hagar can hold it herself. Hagar snaps that she can, even though privately she's not sure whether she'll drink from the glass or spill it. Whatever she does with it, though, she is determined to have it be her choice. Hagar pulls the glass from the nurse's hand and holds it.

In this final scene, Hagar's mind is leaving her. The pain medication has become both a balm and a poison. Even in the "cocoon" of her thoughts, however, Hagar retains the spirit she has always had. She is fiercely independent, wanting help or pity from no one, and determined to be the master of her own destiny. The novel ends midsentence, on something of a cliffhanger—it is unclear whether Hagar will hold onto the glass or drop it; whether she will live through this very moment or die.

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