

Before I Burn Study Guide

Before I Burn by Gaute Heivoll

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Plot Summary

Before I Burn by Gaute Heivoll tells two stories that begin some thirty years apart; but, in the end, they intersect. Although the book is considered a novel because there are elements of the story that are dramatized and imagined, it is based on actual events in the lives of real people.

Gaute Heivoll was born in a rural community in southern Norway. The idyllic countryside was dotted with dense woods and featured many scenic lakes. The people of the small towns and villages of this region were conservative, church-going people who were good neighbors. They welcomed strangers. Nothing ever happened in this mundane existence until the month of terror brought about by a series of ten fires.

It was May, 1978, and Gaute was just a few weeks old. Although he was alive at the time of the fires, he only learned about them later from the stories his parents told him and in other conversations when the subject would just kind of pop up. It was such a traumatic time for the gentle hills and dales as well as the gentle people of the region that the violence and fear heralded in by the fires lingered in the minds and hearts of the people for years.

Fires rarely happened in the area. One fire was unusual; two fires were unheard of. But, when a third fire occurred, everyone knew that something was very wrong. There wasn't a soul in the community who wouldn't have bet that arson as the source of the fires. The police formed a task force to hunt down the culprit. They developed a profile of the arsonist, who was probably a young, local male resident. After the tenth fire, it became obvious to the parents of the arsonist that their son was the guilty party. When an arrest was made there was relief mixed with astonishment over who was arrested.

Gaute had been a good student and always wanted to please everyone else more than he did himself. When he was seven, a perceptive teacher saw that he had a vivid imagination and said that he was a "future" writer. Although the teacher was well-intentioned, young Gaute feared that being a "writer" would make him different than the other students and make him stand out – a fate worse than death! He vowed to never think of a story again.

But, his creativity and talent wouldn't go away that easily. Eventually, he had to face the fact that he was different – in a good way – and that his teacher was right. He was a writer. Once Gaute found himself, he decided that he owed something to the place he where he had spent his childhood. For years he had been haunted by the story of the hometown pyromaniac. Gaute decided that he needed to write a book about the incidents for the people and to make that final connection that he'd always felt for his hometown and the fires that raged when he was a baby sleeping in his mother's arms.



Part 1: Sections I through VII

Summary

Part 1: Sections I through VII

Section I

Just past midnight, Johanna Vatneli shut off the lights and noticed a vehicle passing slowly in front of their house. Johanna felt a premonition about the car which circled back around and headed back toward the house. She couldn't rouse Olav, her sleeping husband. She returned to the kitchen to be met by a wall of fire and smoke and the strong smell of kerosene. She caught a glimpse of a shadowy figure disappearing from the other side of the room.

Olav had finally awakened when Johanna attempted to call for help. But, the phone was dead. The fire short-circuited the fuse box and zapped the electricity. Johanna and Olav made it out the front door just as the fire broke through to the second story. They found cover under a tree and stood watching the house they had lived in since 1950 go up in flames.

Johanna pulled away from Olav who was silent and dumbstruck. She made her way back inside toward the kitchen where some of the smoke had dispersed. She then went upstairs; every step she took was impeded by a stabbing feeling in her lower abdomen. She entered Kare's room which had remained the same as it was before his death. His dresser contained his old shirts and her bag containing 3,000 kroner. Seeing Kare's old shirts made Johanna want to give up. She sat on his neatly made-up bed and watched as the smoke seemed to turn into a figure with arms and legs. A loud noise from behind her made her come to her senses. She rose with her kroner in hand and made it down the stairs which were engulfed in thick smoke.

Johanna was met by her neighbor Odd Syversten. The house was completely consumed in flames. They ran around to the back and found Olav standing between the house and the barn. She grabbed him and pulled him away from the hot wind that was emanating from the house to the safety of the road where they watched the flames destroy their home. It was June 5, 1978, and the eighth such incident in a recent series of fires that all occurred after midnight.

They heard the sirens announcing the arrival of the fire engines. The first fireman who arrived wasn't sure that everyone had gotten out even though Odd confirmed that no one was inside. Four men dressed in black arrived soon after. The men began to activate their fire hose when the house exploded. Laughter was heard over the night air but its source was unknown. Odd escorted Johanna and Olav to his house where he called Knut Karlsen with the news. Knut and his wife came immediately. They offered Johanna and Olav a place to stay until they could recover.



Others arrived including Gaute's father. (Gaute is Gaute Heivoll is the author.) But there was no hope for the house. Although the firemen fought the blaze and eventually doused the flames, the house was razed to the ground and in the end only the chimney was left standing. Olav was unable to speak to the photographers and reporters. Johanna remained composed as she spoke and was interviewed and photographed. She only began to cry when she realized that she had left her false teeth inside the house.

Section II

Over the years, Gaute had been told the story of the fires by his parents. The stories had popped up from time to time unexpectedly and in conversations. The story had haunted Gaute for thirty years. He recalled driving past the pyromaniac's house on the way to visit his grandparents. He saw the new barn across from the bridge that had been erected after the old barn burned down. Gaute was christened in that old barn. Perhaps that was why he felt a connection to the fires. He had thought of writing about it for a long time but it seemed to be too big a subject. That changed in 2009, when Gaute moved back home.

Gaute had been rummaging through some old boxes in the loft at Lauvslandsmoen School where he and his friends used to hide during woodworking class. He came across a stack of old photos. He realized that they captured some of the years he spent at the school. He discovered a photo of himself singing on stage at a Christmas pageant. Seeing this picture reconnected him to his childhood and the stories of the fires. It was then he decided to write about it.

Section III

The first fire was set in the region of Finland in Southern Norway in early May, 1978. Gaute was only a few months old. The winter's snow had disappeared and the forest was left perilously dry. It began on May 6 and was all over by June 5, the night after Gaute's christening and one day after Olav and Johanna's house had burned down. There had been ten fires. There was a fear that the church was at risk and therefore a vigil was established to watch out for the arsonist. Gaute's father was armed with a rifle.

No one had any idea who the arsonist was. The police had set up a task force and when an arrest was made, the news spread quickly through the community. When the identity of the arsonist was revealed, everyone was astonished. But the people could finally sleep at night without fear of their homes being set ablaze. It had literally been a nightmare. On June 3rd, the local papers featured photos a number of torched buildings. Ingemann, the fire chief, had been featured in a photo standing by one of the burned buildings, a quizzical look on his face. The fires had been featured in radio and TV reports. In archived tapes, Gaute watched as firemen fought the blazes and observed images of the destroyed buildings in the aftermath.

Section IV



In April, Gaute rented a room in Kilen in hopes of fitting all the pieces together of those months of terror. The first day, he didn't write a word. It was a lovely setting – Lake Livannet dominated his view. He bought a few groceries at a nearby store where he knew everyone he ran into – had known them since his childhood. He assured them he was back just for a short stay. By the time summer ended, Gaute still hadn't written about the fires. There was a mental block but Gaute couldn't figure out its source. He had absorbed himself in the crimes by viewing a DVD of all the reports and interviews about the incidents. Although he recognized images on the video, they all seemed changed, bygone. Yet there was a timeless, paradoxical aura about the images and reports. The people seen in the video seemed to be supporting one another. Gaute knew, of course, that his father was outside the Vatneli house the night it was reduced to ashes. He also knew that he had been to the farm belonging to Olga Dynestol on Sunday after his christening, but Gaute was fast asleep in the back seat.

Section V

Gaute took a break from his homeland to attend a literary festival in Mantua, Italy. He was nervous before his planned reading and started to feel ill on stage when it was his turn. He didn't know if his nausea was caused from the oppressive heat, his nerves or from something he ate. He became overwhelmed with visions of people – dead and alive – from his childhood including his father and grandparents and old friends and neighbors. It somehow gave him the strength to recover and carry on. He read a few pages from his prepared material. He was surprised when his reading was met with resounding applause.

The next day he took a plane from Bologna to Rome for a connecting flight to Schiphol, Amsterdam. As the plane flew over the Alps, he thought of all the newspaper cuttings awaiting him back home. He was sure that his experience in Mantua was the catalyst for his writing about the fires. While on his flight over the darkness of the North Sea, he began to write about the last fire on June 5, 1978, the fire at Olav and Johanna Vatneli's house – two people he had never met but felt he grew to know.

Section VI

Finally back home, Gaute felt he had direction. Early on a quiet September day, he visited the church verger, and was able to review the cemetery records. He walked directly to the grave of Olav and Johanna. Gaute recalled how Olav in interviews had boasted about how strong and brave Johanna had been during the incident. He found the graves of Ingemann and Alma a short distance away. He visited his father's grave who, at his request, had been buried in the same grave as his great-grandfather who he so admired. According to the records, Kare was buried in grave number 19 but that grave no longer existed.

Section VII

A few days later, Gaute telephoned Alfred. He explained that he was writing about the fires. Alfred said he remembered everything as if it were yesterday. Gaute visited Alfred



and his wife, Else, that evening. Alfred was a part of Gaute's childhood. He remembered taking his piggy bank into the bank where Alfred was the bank manager and head cashier. Alfred had been a member of the voluntary fire service in 1978. Like the other twenty volunteers, Alfred lived within a few kilometers of the fire station which allowed them to hear the alarm sound. The fire station was at the center of the region. Ingemann, the fire chief, was sixty-four years old and lived with his wife. He lived the closest to the station. They had only one son Dag late in life.

Alfred and Else had read other books by Gaute and felt confident about his writing abilities. Alfred was prepared and gave a full accounting of his experience with the fire. After he finished, he told the story of the man who blew himself up and his mother who walked around and picked up the pieces of her son and collected them in her apron. It wasn't directly connected to the fires but it seemed appropriate. As Gaute was about to leave, Alfred retrieved a letter and gave it to Gaute. Just by glancing at the letter, Gaute commented that he must have been intelligent. Alfred confirmed that he was very smart. Alfred walked Gaute to his car. It seemed he didn't want Gaute to leave or that he'd forgotten to tell him something. Alfred told Gaute that he was just like his father and that it was too bad that he was no longer with them.

Analysis

Tension and mystery are both established in this section. There is an arsonist, a mysterious shadowy figure that set the home of Olav and Johanna Vatneli on fire. He was apparently still in the area when the house collapsed because laughter was heard over the cool night air. Olav was immobilized by the incident that night but Johanna stayed calm and brave and even re-entered the burning house to get a last look at their deceased son's old room and to retrieve their 3,000 kroner – their life savings. By beginning with this incident, the author is piquing the curiosity of the reader who immediately has questions and wants to know who the laughing arsonist was.

The author of *Before I Burn*, Gaute Heivoll, was only a baby when this fire and a series of such fires occurred. His father was at the house that burned that night. Despite his young age during the time of the fires, Gaute always felt a connection to them. His parents had told him the stories about the fires and he had been christened at the site of an old barn that had burned to the ground. As an adult, he became a writer and was haunted for thirty years by the story of the fires. He was compelled to write about the incidents that terrorized his parents, neighbors and entire community when he was just weeks old.

The incidents that Gaute decided to write about all took place between early May 1978 and early June 1978. It was obviously a time of fear and terror. Ten devastating fires were set. No one initially had any idea who the arsonist was although it was obviously someone in the immediate area since the rash of fires was set so close in time to one another. Was the arsonist a mad man or did he have an axe to grind with the community?



Gaute moved back to his hometown for inspiration. Oddly, his home time failed to inspire him. He had a difficult time getting started on his book about the fires. He recognized that he had a writing block but didn't know its source.

However, when he visited Italy for a literary festival, he had visions of dead and still living people from his childhood. It seemed to give him direction. Perhaps the images made him realize that he owed it to his community to write their story, tell of their horrors and describe the criminal who was behind it all.

It was ironic that leaving his hometown was the catalyst that propelled him into starting his book.

Gaute felt compelled to visit the graves of Olav and Johanna. He felt their sadness when he was unable to locate the grave of the son that they had lost and mourned. He also visited his father's grave. Perhaps he needed his blessing and support for what he was about to undertake. It was a huge challenge and though he had written other books, he felt nervous and unsure of himself. Writing about such personal tragedy about people from his hometown was more emotionally jarring than he had imagined.

Although many of the people who had suffered in the fires were dead, he was able to interview Alfred who was a voluntary fireman at the time. After they talked, Alfred gave Gaute an old letter. Alfred said that it was written by a very smart man. The identity of the writer isn't revealed in this section of Part I. Perhaps, it was a letter of confession or an explanation written by the arsonist.

Discussion Question 1

How old was Gaute when the first fire was set? How old was he when he wrote the book?

Discussion Question 2

How did Johanna and her husband Olav each react to the fire?

Discussion Question 3

What comment did Gaute make about the letter that Alfred gave him? Who was it from?

Vocabulary

Pervasive, petrol, kroner, acrid, voraciously, slaughterhouse, shriller, exultation, pyromaniac, sultry, arsonist, reminiscent, celestial, congenial, extant, paradoxical, fathom, concentric, verger, verbatim, disgorge.

Part 2: Sections I through VIII

Summary

Part 2: Sections I through VIII

Section I

Dag was very much wanted by his parents and was a perfectly formed baby boy. As an only child, he never had to share the love of his parents with a sibling. He learned to read early and loved books. Ultimately, he became the best in his class in writing and reading. He wrote stories that were often bloody and violent which seemed out of character for the quiet, shy young boy who was overly polite. He was first to help the elderly with shoveling snow and other chores. Ingemann and Alma were filled with pride when it came to their son. It was their unrestrained love they responded when asked how they had gotten such a perfect son.

As a youngster, Dag had seen two houses burn to the ground. He could hear the siren from the station and accompanied his father to several fires. When Ingemann received a phone call that there was a fire, he lifted Dag up so he could turn the crank on the alarm. He'd watch his father pull on his fireman's suit and followed him to the station where he would climb up in the cab of the fire engine and ride along.

Ingemann insisted that Dag stay back from the fire and not get in the way. He was to just watch from a safe distance. He'd watch as the house burned and collapsed and waited for the "song" that was only heard from a dying, burning house. His father didn't seem to understand what Dag referred to when he spoke of the "wailing" of a burning house. He witnessed his first fire up close when he was seven. He sat in a tree and heard the barking of a dog in the burning kitchen. He told no one about the dog but at the trial he spoke of the dog and how he felt the weight of the dog on his feet as he lay in his prison cell.

Ingemann taught Dag to shoot at a young age – first with a small-bore gun and then with a rifle. It turned out he had a talent for shooting and won cups, often first-place, at regional shooting matches. His parents were duly proud of their talented son. When he didn't win, there was always an excuse – the wind or the rain or something – caused him to lose. He was the best student in his class and was good at Norwegian, history and math. When he didn't do well on a test, he glared daggers at the teacher. The other students knew to leave him alone when he was these dark moods.

Over the years, his performance at school declined. He still did well but he was no longer the best. He had receded even more into the background. The students learned to leave him alone; he was fine when left alone. The school newsletter in the spring of 1976 said that Dag liked school, shooting and the local fire service. He loved to ride in



the fire engine. What the newsletter wrote about Dag was true – he did like to ride in the fire engine but there weren't many emergencies.

Dag did well enough to be accepted at the university but was first called up for military duty. When he left for Finnmark, his mother gave him an envelope with 500 kroner and a note not to forget his parents as he goes out in the big, wide world.

Section II

A few days after meeting with Alfred, Gaute contacted Karin. He remembered her from the library where she had checked out books for him. Karin was Teresa's daughter and Teresa had been Alma and Ingemann's closest neighbor. Gaute had taken piano lessons from Teresa. He met with Karin at the family house and from there could see the house where Ingemann, Alma and Dag had lived.

Teresa had received two letters from prison and had made daily entries in her diary. Karin found the letters and diaries in a drawer after Teresa died. Gaute read the letters. Apparently, Teresa had given him a guitar which she brought to him at the courthouse. In one of his letters, he thanked Teresa for teaching him to play the piano. He taught himself to play the guitar. Music had become very important to him. The other letter was incoherent and disjointed. Gaute thumbed through the diaries. He didn't see his name but saw quite a few passages about Dag – especially around the time of the fires and afterwards. He now had three letters written by him but heard that there had been many more. Apparently, the words poured out of him after he was imprisoned. He wrote to his victims but it was unknown what was said or if they responded to him. Most of those Gaute asked responded that they didn't remember what he wrote. "He was out of his mind, wasn't he?" (57)

Section III

She looked forward to seeing him again. She waited expectantly each week for the small brown envelope postmarked Porsanger Garrison to arrive. At first, he wrote long letters that Ingemann read aloud at the kitchen table. She would read them again later when she was alone. It was a way for her to feel close to him again. He told his parents what life in a garrison with the other soldiers was like. He wrote that the food was awful especially compared to Alma's cooking. They went on exercises along the cold Russian border. In every instance, she tried to visualize Dag being in the midst of everything.

They were disappointed when he wrote that he lost the lottery and had to stay on duty at Christmas. There was a brief call from him on Christmas Eve. Alma was concerned; he sounded strange. He sent a postcard of the watch tower on the border of Norway and the Soviet Union. He said the soldier in the tower was him. Alma was pleased and put the postcard on the wall. But, Ingemann saw that the soldier wasn't their son. Neither Ingemann nor Alma discussed it again although Alma left the card

They received a postcard in March with only the words, "Coming home on 14th." It was signed, "the soldier". Again, Alma had an eerie feeling. It wasn't like Dag. The very next day on the 13th, she spotted a man walking down the road in front of their house. She



looked more closely – it was Dag! He embraced his parents and told them he'd never go away again. Dag almost immediately wanted to go to bed. Alma understood – after such a long journey home. Her own sleep was fitful that night.

The next day, Dag still didn't tell his parents anything. He claimed to be tired from his journey and spent most of his time in his bed or in his room. Sleeping late became a habit. Winter melted into spring and Dag barely left the house. For as much sleep and rest as he got, he had no energy. Alma said nothing and catered to his every wish. But she was concerned. Suddenly, there was a change on morning when he got up early, showered and seemed upbeat for the first time since his return. Dag and Ingemann began doing a lot of target practice.

The heat was oppressive in midsummer. Dag would drive to the lake and swim alone. Alma remained silent but her concern about her son did not dissipate. He spent most of the time in his room playing loud music. He still didn't talk about the Russian border. Once he volunteered that he'd seen a wolf on the border. Although they both asked him a lot of questions at first, they finally stopped asking. The music was louder. Alma thought she heard him singing or talking along with the music. She thought she heard someone laughing.

At Christmastime, Alma asked Dag what his plans were for the New Year. He hadn't thought about it, he told her. She suggested that he return to school. The three of them attended Christmas Eve service where all their neighbors had also gathered. Gaute's father was there. The New Year – 1978 – arrived heralding in a bitterly cold January. Dag helped his father clean up his shop. He found all his old comics and read them during the day and took his old car out at night. Alma never knew where he went but he was often gone for hours. It was a cold and snowy winter with only a slight break in March. By April, it was spring and the snow was melting and the ice was vanishing. Alma got up the nerve to ask Dag where he was heading one night. He snapped at her; it had nothing to do with her.

Section IV

On May 6, 1978, a brush fire caught hold in the forest. The fire was blamed on the dry spring. The siren sounded and Dag, behind the wheel, and Ingemann holding onto the door handle were heading to Kilen. Sjur Lunde, owner of the land, came running out when Dag and Ingemann arrived. It was his property that was on fire. He had been trying to control the blaze himself. One by one all the volunteer firemen drove up to help. Ingemann helped for a while but there were tiny stabs of pain in his chest – he thought it was his heart. He felt better when he stopped working and watched the others. Dag manned the hose while the others stood behind him watching.

Section V

In May, 1978, Gaute was being walked around in his pram. One fire was easily forgotten; but, then there was a second fire. It happened ten days after the first. The blaze took the Tonnes' old hay barn which was close to Gaute's grandmother's house.



Even though it was the middle of the night, word spread and quite a few curious neighbors showed up to watch the controlled burn-out. The structure collapsed and burst into flames again. Someone laughed, but no one saw who it was.

The next day was May 17th, Norway's Constitution Day. Everyone went to church for a ceremony in honor of the day. Gaute's parents had attended and joined in the banquet afterwards. That evening there was a party at the Brandsvoll Community Centre which Gaute's grandparents attended. Other neighbors including Alma and Ingemann were also present. Several neighbors spoke to Ingemann about the two fires. He had nothing to say about them.

When Ingemann was cleaning and maintaining the fire engine, Dag joined him. Ingemann said he hoped that the second fire would be the last one. He was getting too old to put out fires. Dag told him that he was fine and he'd be with them for the next one. The comment bothered Ingemann, but he said nothing.

Section VI

Gaute was enjoying the beauty and serenity of his hometown. If he had never left for Oslo or gone off to study and write, he would have lived a different life. He looked out the window to where Olva and Johanna's house had stood. It was near the lake. He imagined how the fire must have reflected in the lake that night. He read and reread Dag's letter in hopes of discovering something he missed that might reveal the mystery surrounding him.

Gaute recalled when he told a story before class when he was seven or eight. He totally made it up but had the class completely engaged. After the class, his teacher held him back to talk to him. She was amazed by his story and his imagination. She told him that he was a writer. Gaute vowed to never tell stories like that again. He was different; he was a writer which he thought must be something to be ashamed of. Perhaps he couldn't hide it. It was probably written all over his face.

Section VII

A few minutes past one in the morning, Alma couldn't sleep. She heated up some coffee and sat at the table where she could see across the plains toward town. She'd been unable to sleep, always listening for Dag's comings and goings. As she drank her coffee, she saw headlights speeding toward the house. It was him. He stopped the car and walked to the door. She heard him talking to himself. He had begun to ask himself questions and answer them. That night he joined her for coffee and bread.

Alma asked him to tell her about Porsanger and what really had happened there. She told him that he had changed. She wanted to know what had changed him. He was hesitant. His face took on an eerie grimace that she had seen before. It frightened her but she persisted. She wanted to know what happened to him. She suggested they sit in the living room and that he play something of his choice on the piano first. He played one song and then another. After he finished, he slammed the piano lid shut. She asked



him to tell her everything. Just then the phone rang. There was a fire. Dag called Ingemann, and Alma made them sandwiches to take with them.

Dag ran and sounded the alarm while Ingemann woke from his slumber and dressed. Dag was out the door and waiting for his father behind the wheel in the fire truck.

Section VIII

On June 7, 1978, two days after the fire, there was a lengthy interview of Olav and Johanna Vatneli. It was the one in which Olav lauded his wife's bravery and composure and confessed to his own "softness" during the tragedy. Johanna recollected the explosion in the kitchen and the shadowy figure outside the window. Earlier in the day, Alma and Ingemann had stopped by to visit with them. The couple talked about their dead son, Kare, who had died nineteen years before. He was their only child. Olav planned to visit his burned down property. Johanna and Olav were seventy-three and eighty-three and had to start all over again.

Gaute arranged to meet with Aasta, Johanna's sister-in-law. He wanted to know more about Olav and Johanna and their son. Aasta related that fourteen-year-old Kare had an open wound on his left leg from an accident on a ski slope. Kare developed a high fever from his injury and was taken by Johanna to a surgeon. The doctor advised them that the particular kind of wound that Kare had wouldn't heal. Although Johanna did everything possible to treat the wound, it worsened and the doctor concluded that his leg had to amputated.

Kare seemed to recover from the amputation and was hobbling about on crutches. Eventually, he learned to walk again and to cycle and even learned to ride a moped. Kare stayed with Aasta for a time because her house was close to his school. Kare adjusted to his disability. He seemed happy and even "chirpy" often singing love songs.

Johanna never recovered from Kare's death. Months after the fire Aasta was helping Johanna and discovered bloody clothes that must have come from her womb. After leaving Aasta's house for his short walk home, he recalled how he had passed her house as a child fearful that a man would suddenly loom up before him in the dark night.

Analysis

Dag was adored, even worshiped, by his parents. Perhaps, that was where his problems began. He wanted to be the top student in his class and the best marksman. But when he fell short on his marksmanship, it was never due to his lack of skill or just that he was having a bad day; his failure to be the best marksman was due to the wind or rain or other conditions. It was the same scenario at school. He was the top student. But, when a test was returned to him with a B, he glared at the teacher. Somehow it was the teacher's fault, not his.

Alma was especially at fault in feeding into this aberrant behavior. She lauded and praised him endlessly. She ignored signs that there was something not quite right about



him. She ignored his sullen moods and his lack of companionship with kids his age. As he matured, the situation only deteriorated. Later as Dag's mental state worsened, Alma would hear him laughing loudly in his room and even talking to himself – he would ask himself questions and answer them. He also slept most of the day and went out cruising in the dark night. He would never tell his parents what he was doing. That freedom of movement allowed him the opportunity to start fires. From a young age, Dag showed an unnatural fascination with fire. It was ironic that his father was the fire chief and that his son became a dangerous pyromaniac. Setting fires gives the pyromaniac a sense of power and control that is missing from his personal life.

Apparently, Dag's piano teacher Teresa had a positive relationship with Dag and kept in contact with him even after he was imprisoned. He apparently wrote many letters including some to victims. He may have apologized to them; but, a pyromaniac is not really sorry for the fires he sets. The fires give him a life and an identity. Dag was probably only apologetic because he was caught and had no way to carry on with the expression of his anger through setting fires.

Dag was drafted into the military and came home before his tour of duty was up. He would never explain to his parents what happened. He pretended that he was just discharged early. From his strange behavior, he was probably dismissed on a dishonorable or mental capacity basis. But he would never tell his parents and they were reluctant to push him because he would become angry and sullen. Alma couldn't stand it when Dag was upset with her.

Ingemann's deteriorating health is foreshadowed in this passage. He is having pains in chest. Dag's ability to help fight fires would be greatly diminished if his father was no longer fire chief and no longer had control over the siren and fire truck. It was the full package for Dag – he set the fires, sounded the alarm, drove the big fire truck to the scene and helped douse the fire that he set. There was laughter heard sometimes emanating from someone at the scene of a building collapsing in flames. Alma also heard a strange laughter coming from Dag's room over the loud music he played incessantly.

Dag lets his true nature slip when he tells his ailing father that he will be fine and fit for the next fire. Ingemann couldn't help but react to the comment. One fire was rare in that small community, two were nearly unheard of. Why was Dag hinting at a third fire?

Gaute struggled with his artistry. His teacher recognized that he was a writer from the time he was just seven. She told him he was a "writer". He took it as something to be ashamed of and vowed to stop telling stories. Though he fought against his own creativity, it persisted and eventually as an adult he learned to express himself in his writing. Perhaps this is a lesson to teachers to be cautious of what they tell impressionable little children even if their words are meant to be positive.

Alma could no longer hide her concern over her son's behavior and his mental state. His behavior was abnormal and she had to face whatever it was. If she loved him, she could only help him if she was honest about his illness. He was just about to tell her



what happened on the Russian front when he was in the military. But their conversation was interrupted by a call reporting a fire. Of course, Dag wasn't surprised. He had set it. The call kept him from telling his mother about his experience and allowed him to bury it once again.

Kare who was Johanna and Olav's only child died nineteen years before the fire. He was their only child. Johanna never recovered from his death. When they lost their home in the fire, memories of her lost son dominated her thoughts. Aasta described the injury and amputation Kare had suffered; but, it was yet to be revealed how he died. There is more to come about Kare.

Discussion Question 1

How did Dag characterize the sound of a house collapsing from fire?

Discussion Question 2

How did Dag react when he didn't get an "A" on a paper or didn't win first prize at a shooting competition?

Discussion Question 3

Where was Dag sent when he was called to serve in the Army? What tales did he tell his parents? What was mysterious about his return?

Vocabulary

Harrowing, cascading, torrent, fortnight, intransigence, incoherent, garrison, apparent, palpable, insuperable, warily, pithily, cassock, gravitas, interval, unfurled, tarmac, fastidiously, assiduously, fabrication, vacillated, apathetically.



Part 3: Sections I through XIII

Summary

Part 3: Sections I through XIII

Section I

On the night of May 19, 1978, there was another fire. It was a remote storehouse in Haerasen in the forest north of the region. The storehouse and its contents including eight tons of artificial fertilizer were ablaze. The flames could be seen from many kilometers away. Everyone realized that something was seriously amiss. The firemen came but it was too late to salvage anything. Dag was there holding the hose from which water was shooting at a rapid pace. After a while, someone took over for Dag. He watched from the sidelines and waited for his father who was coming by car. When the call first came in, Ingemann complained of chest pains and said he didn't feel well. Dag had taken over. He sounded the alarm and drove the fire engine to the scene. Dag scoured the scene for his father but he never came.

Dag told Alfred he was leaving the scene to see if the "nutter" had set any other fires. He passed by his home and saw a light in the kitchen but kept driving. He turned his sirens on by the community center and continued all the way to Kilen. He stopped at Kaddeberg's shop and although it was closed knocked on the door. When Kaddeberg answered the door, Dag announced that he was the fire brigade and needed provisions. Dag collected a basketful of food and snacks and told the astonished Kaddeberg to put it on Ingemann's tab.

Dag drove past his house again and honked three times as he drove by. He drove the truck as fast as it would go all the time, while he devoured the snacks he commandeered from Kaddeberg. He returned to the scene of the fire where the blaze was under control and around thirty neighbors had gathered. His father had never come. In another hour everything was over. Most neighbors got in their cars and left. A few remained behind to keep an eye on the pile of embers. Everyone knew that the fire was set. A fire didn't start by itself – especially a storehouse out in the middle of nowhere.

When Dag drove home, his father was standing outside. Ingemann hadn't come because of his heart. Dag would have to manage everything from then on. Ingemann smiled and said that Dag would be the fire chief. But Dag didn't smile. He told his father not to worry. There wouldn't be any more fires. The people were stunned. They really didn't want to think about what was occurring in their community.

Section II

In the attic in his family home, Gaute found his baptism paper, reports from Teresa about his progress on his piano lessons and other old papers including his



grandmother's diaries. Gaute looked through the diaries not really expecting to find anything and was surprised to find that his grandmother had written about the fires. She wrote about trivial things like birds she saw and about her neighbors. She expressed the pain of losing her husband. She also wrote that a "boy" had arrived. That "boy" was Gaute. She noted the nice weather during the spring in May, 1978.

Section III

Teresa had written that Gaute didn't relax when he played the piano. But he tried to let his fingers rest on the keys like she instructed him to do. He was never any trouble. He did well in school, was always punctual and didn't contradict anyone. He learned early that he had to avoid the darker side of life which included drinking beer. He was determined to stay on the sunny side of life. What compelled Gaute to be so well-behaved was that he wanted more than anything to blend in – not stand out in any way. He read a lot and often bicycled to the library and returned with a big sack of books.

Reading his books began to take him outside of himself to another place. But there was a conflict within him. He wanted to stay where he was, where he was safe and sound and especially stay with his father. Gaute spent much of his growing years not knowing who he was. His teacher's words that he was a writer would sometimes come back to haunt him. But he learned to camouflage his conflicts and act and talk like the other kids. But he wasn't like them. He loved to read; he was nearly obsessed with books. When a story touched him and made him cry, he felt ashamed.

As Gaute grew older, the other boys began to realize that he wasn't like them. As a result, his peers began to distance themselves from him. The other boys liked to hunt and drink and chase women. Gaute attended parties but wouldn't smoke or drink. He himself felt that there was an aura of purity about him. On the last New Year's Eve he spent at home, he attended a party. One of his friends was so drunk that he passed out and was lying in the bathroom in a pool of vomit. Gaute felt duty-bound to help him clean up. But after the incident, Gaute knew that it was time for him to leave. He was nineteen and that August he left to attend university in Oslo.

Section IV

Gaute's grandmother wrote general comments in her diary about early May 1978. There was nothing about the fire on May 6 or the one at the storehouse. On May 20th after the fire at Haerasen there were no new fires for thirteen days which allowed the people to relax and feel that it was over. They explained away the three fires as coincidence. The area was dry and people had probably been careless with cast away cigarettes.

Section V

Dag found a job as a fire officer at Kjevik Airport. He had to go through a few days of training but already knew most of the material covered. One subject new to him was first aid and how to save lives to which he paid apt attention. Alma felt relieved that Dag was finally straightening his life out. It was a lonely job. He worked the night shift and was often alone in the duty office. He was fascinated by the planes descending from the sky



and landing on the tarmac. There wasn't much to tell his parents in response to their questions about his job. After he ate dinner with them, he generally went upstairs to bed. That was how the first ten days of his employment went.

One night, Dag took a rifle with him. He hid it under some clothing in his car and then took it into the office. He went to the window and aimed his rifle at the last plane that was scheduled to land that night. When the plane was sixty to seventy meters above the ground, he pulled the trigger. He hit the target. On the morning of June 2, it began to rain. Dag returned home early. He wasn't hungry; he just wanted to go to bed. Alma took coffee out to Ingemann who was in his workshop. She told him that she thought that Dag was ill because she had often heard him talk to himself. Ingemann responded that he didn't think there was anything wrong with Dag.

While Dag slept and Ingemann worked, Alma decided to visit Teresa. When she reached Teresa's front steps and was about to knock, the siren sounded. She watched as Dag ran out of the house and up to the fire engine. He sped off toward Breivoll. Next, Ingemann came inside and when he returned he was wearing his fireman's uniform. He deactivated the alarm.

Section VI

Gaute decided to study law at the August University in Oslo. He felt comfortable in Oslo, somehow liberated. He felt that in Oslo he could become the person he was meant to be and that he would always live there. One night his father called. He was ill. Both lungs had taken on fluid and had been drained. His father's condition worsened. An x-ray revealed a shadow on one of his kidneys. Gaute took his father to the doctor. It was on that day that his father was told by his doctor that nothing more could be done for him.

Section VII

Dag went at top speed in the fire engine, skidding around the curves and nearly veering off the road. He nearly mowed down Aasta and her mother who were walking on the road. A barn in Skogen had started to smolder just after sunrise. By the time Dag arrived, it was on fire. The fireman soaked the barn but it could not be saved and the farmhouse was severely damaged. This fire was different than the others; it had started in the day time. The police were sure that the Tonnes barn had been deliberately set. They suspected the same about the Skogen barn and the storehouse. The police asked for any information that could lead to the identity of the arsonist.

Section VIII

Teresa had just made an entry in her diary. She made a comment about Ingemann and Dag taking target practice in their back yard. As she watched them from her window she thought that at one point Dag was aiming his rifle at his father. Reading Teresa's description reminded Gaute of when his father practiced shooting, passed a test and got a hunter's license. Gaute was puzzled at the time and remained just as puzzled twenty



years later. His father wasn't a hunter. Why did he want to become an elk hunter? Gaute could never figure it out.

Section IX

After the bad news about his father's health, Gaute had to return to Oslo for exams. It was May 1998. It was difficult for him to concentrate. He could hardly open a book much less read it. But he went through the motions – talked to his friends and ate with them. Gaute realized that he laughed too much and too long at jokes that weren't that funny. He had not studied at all for his finals. His elementary school teacher's words ran through his mind. She said he was a writer but he wasn't. He was going to be a lawyer. He would stay on the sunny side and not be lured away to the dark side where artists and writers tried to give their lives and careers some semblance and meaning. Instead of studying, Gaute spent his time reading in the library. His father called the night before his exam to wish him luck. He went out that night and had his first beer.

The next day he was on time for the exam. He printed his name and student number on each of the sheets and turned them in blank. He was supposed to have found himself in Oslo but he hadn't. He called his father that night and said that the exam had gone okay. His father was proud of him. He had always wanted to study in Oslo and become something. Gaute told him that he had become something.

Section X

Gaute discovered that Kare Vatneli had attended a confirmation service with Gaute's father in 1957, two years before he died. Gaute's father was fifteen and Kare was sixteen. Friends and acquaintances of Kare shared their memories of him with Gaute. Tom and Willy confirmed his cheerful demeanor. To Gaute, Kare was an enigma. How did he retain his cheery spirits? Kare's friend told Gaute the moped story. Kare had driven his moped inside the church. Because of his disability, the police gave him a special dispensation. No one mentioned his disease.

When he was taken to the hospital for the last time, he talked about getting a car when he was discharged. Willy was the last person to visit him before he died. Johanna was with him. He was skeletal and pale and didn't have enough energy to talk. Then Kare died. The happy, cheerful boy was gone. Tom and Willy recalled that Gaute's father was an expert ski jumper.

On his way back home, Gaute made his way to the fire station. He wasn't able to see into the garage but noticed that grass had grown up around the door. There weren't any fires. He walked to Slogedal's house and spotted the barn that had been built after the old barn had burned down. As he walked, he saw the headlights of a car approaching. He didn't know why but he panicked and sprinted up to the house. He watched as the car drove on to the fire station.

Section XI



Dag set off to Kilen shortly after seven o'clock. It was Friday and he was off the whole weekend. He wasn't due to return to work until Monday evening. He pulled off the road and listened to the broadcast of a soccer match for a short while. He drove around for awhile. then, he stopped on the crest of a hill where he took his rifle, aimed, and shot at the image of an elk on a road sign. He drove down to confirm that he had hit his target. He drove to the fire station and put a jerrycan of petrol in his car, hiding it on the back floor. Dag drove home and retired to his room. His parents were watching the soccer game on TV.

Alma thought she heard Dag talking to himself. Ingemann was drifting off. Alma was in the kitchen when Dag came downstairs. He looked dead tired. She told him that he needed sleep. But, Dag insisted that he was going out on patrol. Someone had to make sure that the "nutter" wasn't up to no good again.

Section XII

Despite turning in a blank exam, Gaute celebrated the night after the exams with his friends. He was drinking heavily. No one had ever seen him behave like that before. No one knew that he hadn't taken the exam even though he stood up once and proclaimed that he had turned in a blank exam. They thought he was joking. He was quite inebriated and recalled later being on a crowded dance floor and feeling all alone. Many hours later, he wound up walking along a street supporting himself on tenement walls as the world swayed about him. He tried to stop the passage of a group of people and was punched in the face. He made his way to a cemetery hoping to get punched again. He staggered along a path that led to the Grove of Honour where famous authors and composers were buried. Gaute sat down on a grave. A panic overtook him that it was his father's grave and that no one had been able to reach him to tell him that his father died. Later, he fell asleep across the grave of the writer Bjornstjerne Bjornson.

Section XIII

As Dag passed Lauvslandsmoen School, he switched off his headlights. It was nine years ago that he had attended the school. He had been the best, at the top of his class. His teacher had been sure that Dag was meant for big things in life. He had felt that he could achieve greatness. His father had encouraged him to be a doctor or lawyer. He drove into the playground and stopped the car. Despite the circumstances, he still envisioned himself becoming an important lawyer or ambassador or diplomat. His parents would be proud of him.

Dag got back in the car and drove towards Dynestol. As he drove down the rugged road past a cabin and lake, he spotted a house and barn. He parked and got out of his car and walked the property. He took the half-filled jerrycan from the back of the car. He ran behind the barn, spotted a door and slipped into a room. He illuminated the dark room with a match. When it went out he struggled with the cap of the jerrycan that was momentarily stuck. He finally got the cap off and began pouring the petrol onto the wooden plank floor. He went outside and struck several matches that immediately extinguished. The third match stayed lit. He walked to the door and threw the matches



inside. He hurried back toward the field. He was surprised at his handiwork. The room immediately exploded. He watched while he saw the yellow and orange flames begin to emerge from within.

Dag ran to his car with the petro can and sped off without a backward glance. He drove a short distance and noticed an abandoned storehouse. Carrying his petrol can he walked into the dark storehouse but stopped abruptly. He thought someone was there, watching him. He called out, but no one answered. He thought it was his father, but he lit a match that illuminated the room. Ingemann was not there; no one was there. Dag repeated the vow to his father that there would be no more fires.

But Dag imagined that his father reappeared, kneeling in prayer. Dag told him to get out. He didn't want him to be burned. But the image of his father didn't move. Dag told him not to blame him, struck a match and lit up the room which was soon on fire. Dag ran to his car and drove back to the school. He used the rest of his petrol to set a shed that they used to use for woodworking class on fire. It only took one match this time.

Dag drove home and cleaned up. There were some cuts and grazes on his face and his hands smelled of petrol. He had just enough time to run up the stairs and get under his covers before the phone rang.

Analysis

Dag was completely absorbed in his dual role of arsonist and fireman. Dag wanted to relive the joy he experienced as a child when he rode in his father's big fire truck to fight fires. But there weren't many fires in this small community. One way to recapture the thrill and excitement of fighting fires was to set them himself. Dag wanted to be thought of as a hero to his parents as well as to the community. By commandeering the fire engine, fighting the fires and even announcing that he was going to hunt the "nutter" down so that there wouldn't be any more fires, Dag was fooling everyone perhaps maybe even himself. Dag experienced a conflict when his father complained of heart problems. The stress of fighting the fires at his age and in his state of ill health was too much for him. Although Dag didn't feel shame or guilt, he assured his father that there would be no more fires but as is already well known, there were many more fires. The health of his father did not dampen Dag's compulsion to start fires for the power and glory and excitement that they brought to him.

Discovering his grandmother's diaries and the entries she made about the fires made Gaute feel more connected to his grandmother and the story he felt compelled to tell. He may have looked at her diary entries as a sign, an omen, for him to continue in his pursuit of telling the story of the fires.

From Teresa's diary entries, Gaute relived his childhood. As his piano teacher, Teresa noted that he was too tense and that she instructed him to let his fingers rest on the piano keys. But, piano playing wasn't a natural pursuit for Gaute. However, he wanted to please everyone. So, he did everything that Teresa told him to do. As he put it, he



wanted to avoid the darker side and stay on the sunny side of life. . He equated the dark side of life with writing and the sunny side with blending in and not standing out among his peers in any way. He instinctively knew that he had a good imagination which could lead to writing. Since being a “writer” would make him stand apart from his peers, writing would catapult him to the dark side.

The fact that he was different was confirmed by none other than a teacher at school who was amazed by his storytelling abilities. She told him that he was indeed a “writer.” Instead of being encouraged, Gaute felt shamed and doomed. He vowed to himself that he would never tell any more stories. Unfortunately, his teacher’s good intentions backfired. Perhaps, it’s a lesson that one has to be very careful when telling a seven-year-old anything – especially telling him that he is something like a “writer” which a child that age could not fully grasp.

But, Gaute could only hide his “differentness” for a short while. His fellow students sensed that he was different despite his efforts to act like them. When he was nineteen a series of events told him to leave the clutches of his mundane hometown and go for a bigger prize. In this sense, his being different propelled him to a stratosphere that he would have never achieved had he stayed in his little, safe community.

Just how dangerous Dag was becoming was made clear when he took a job in the fire department of an airport. He was fascinated when planes landed. He was so fascinated that he tried to shoot one down. He apparently hit the plane with his rifle fire, but the shot did not cause it to crash. He would have probably loved to see the plane up in flames.

The job was a pivotal point for the mentally deteriorating Dag. He was alone all the time at work on the night shift and slept all day at home. He was having less and less contact with others and less and less connection to reality. It was at this point that Alma was compelled to tell Ingemann that she thought Dag was ill. The frequency of his talking and answering himself was increasing. Ingemann may have noticed the same problems with his son but he was in denial and didn’t want to see what was becoming more and more obvious – his son was insane. Had they acted on Alma’s concerns much misery would have been avoided. And Dag may have gotten the help he needed.

Although Gaute was close to his father, there was a disappointment he felt about his father learning to shoot and then killing an elk. Gaute felt it was against his father’s nature and it was definitely against the fragile, artistic nature of Gaute. It remained a mystery throughout his life that his father shot an elk. It haunted Gaute and perhaps made him feel that he didn’t know his father as well as he wanted to or thought he did. Such emotional conflicts can be fodder for good writing. He lied to his father about his final exams. He characterized his lie as the last thing that he did for his father. But he justified it by knowing that it brought him peace before he died.

Perhaps it was the guilt and worry over his father coupled with the stories his parents told him about the fires and the fact that he was writing about them that made him feel frightened and near panic as he walked about in the properties that had been burned.



Gaute imagined the arsonist suddenly jumping from the bushes and attacking him. Gaute sensed that the pyromaniac would not have wanted this story written.

Dag's madness is intensifying. He is taking more risks as though he wants to be caught. Perhaps, he does want to be caught since he recognizes that he can't stop himself. Even though he's not in his right mind, he knows that it can't go on forever. When he envisions his father kneeling before him in one of the buildings he sets on fire it is a sign that he is experiencing some kind of guilt and shame because his father is ill and the fires are stressful on his weak heart. However, his compulsion is so overpowering that he chooses the fire over his father. He tells the image of his father to get out before he's burned. But when the image remains on his knees, Dag sets the building on fire any way.

Discussion Question 1

Why didn't Ingemann show up at the storehouse fire in Haerasen? What assurance did Dag give his father that evening?

Discussion Question 2

What did Dag find fascinating about his job at the airport? What did he do one evening when a plane was landing?

Discussion Question 3

How much did Gaute study for his law final exams? How did he do on them? What did he tell his father about them?

Vocabulary

Conflagration, translucent, trivial, voracity, irksome, intangible, mundane, hiatus, fuselage, illuminated, fjord, erudite, post-haste, menacing, conundrum, unperturbed, frenetic, edifice, lucidity, semblance, enigma, cauldron, cacophony, plinth, inferno.



Part 4: Sections I through VIII

Summary

Part 4: Sections I through VIII

Section I

Gaute's grandmother wrote in her diary on June 3rd that Olga's old house and outbuilding had burned down. Kasper Kritiansen was the current owner. She wrote that she and Kristen and Steiner had accompanied Olga to Oslo with a mental patient who had been staying at Olga's house. The woman had become uncontrollable and had to return to the asylum in Oslo. On the front page of the June 3rd paper an article reported that Lensmann Knut Koland and his officers had met to discuss the recent fires. An arsonist was on the loose in the area. They noted that he had limited his crimes to abandoned and empty structures. The three fires that Dag had set were referenced.

Section II

Gaute knew about the practice of placing mentally ill patients in homes in rural areas. The people were paid for keeping them and it was thought that the fresh area and stress-free life would be beneficial for them. Gaute was surprised to read that his father had helped Olga escort one of these patients back to Oslo. The woman had been having loud conversations with God and showing violent tendencies. Olga decided she had to go back. The patient took the ashes from the wood-burning stove and put it in her purse to take back with her. Ironically, the ash lay blackened in that same chimney on June 3 1978 – a chimney that stood alone in the ruins of the fire.

Section III

Gaute contacted Kasper and his wife Helga. He told them he was writing about the house they lost to a fire on June 3rd over thirty years before. They were very willing to tell them about the incident. Just after one o'clock in the morning on June 3, 1978, Kasper's phone rang. They had bought Olga's house and were renovating it but hadn't moved in yet. Olga called and told them that the house was on fire. She had moved out of the house but saw the fire engine and dashed out to find her old house on fire. There were four terrible explosions that caused the flames to intensify.

Kasper couldn't believe the house was on fire. He and Helga jumped in their car and drove over to see for themselves. They passed the burned down shed across from the school and the razed barn on their way to the house. They drove up to their house and saw the firemen finishing the hosing down of the house. There was virtually nothing left of the house and barn. Alfred and the other firemen told Kasper and Helga that there was nothing they could do to save their house. The tractor that Kasper had brought over to the house was burned and charred, too. The four explosions that Olga heard were from the tractor's four tires that had exploded from the flames.



Dag drove up in the fire engine with a bag of food for everyone. He retrieved a stick from the woods and stuck a sausage on the end of it. He was angry that there weren't enough flames on which to roast it. He laughed loudly and walked around and offered everyone a cold sausage.

Section IV

Gaute spent the summer of 1998 at home. His father was steadily declining. It got to the point that he needed 24-hour nursing care so his mother arranged for accommodations at a nursing home for him. His mother was away on the day the medics came to take his father away. Gaute couldn't bear to see him go, so he stayed in his room in the basement while his father was wheeled away and placed in the van. Gaute spent his time reading and re-reading the many books he had accumulated over the years.

The last time Gaute saw his father alive was in September 1998. He visited him at the rest home and took him for a ride in his father's red pick-up. Gaute was astonished at how light and frail his father was and how large his eyes seemed to have become. Ironically, his father wanted to buy a couple of lottery tickets hoping still to win big.

Gaute's father asked how his exams had gone. Gaute lied and said they had gone fine. But his father pushed the matter and wanted more detail. Gaute finally said he had gotten a distinction on his exams. The news pleased his father. Gaute thought to himself that the last thing he'd done for his father was to lie to him. But it was a lie that gave him peace.

Section V

On Saturday afternoon, June 3, 1978, the police formed a task force at the community center in Brandsvoll. Police were brought in from all the surrounding area police departments to help hunt down the arsonist. All the police had to go on were the descriptions of two vehicles seen in the area around the time of the fires – one was a dark-colored VW beetle and the other was a large American-style car. The fires had caused a power outage – all the phones in the area were dead. Flames had melted phone cables and disabled the service temporarily. Workers were busy trying to restore service which they accomplished by that evening.

It was agreed that the community would organize a neighborhood-watch to be on the lookout for the arsonist. Emphasis was placed on remote storehouses and farms. Dag volunteered to help in the vigil. While Dag was out inspecting some of the burned up buildings, he was speeding down a road and failed to negotiate a curve and wound up in a ditch. He wasn't hurt badly – a bang to his head and a few cuts and scratches to his face. Alma tended to his cuts when he returned home.

The police set up a roadblock. All cars were stopped and screened. There were no fires that night.

Section VI



On the morning of June 4, 1978, Gaute's grandmother commented in her diary about walking around at the scene of one of the fires. She was astonished that there was a pyromaniac among them. It was the same day as Gaute's christening. The church filled up for the christening but the fires were on everyone's mind – the four last ones: the one in Skogen, the two storehouses and Olga's house. Gaute lay on his mother's lap as the ceremony proceeded. She had been having trouble sleeping lately and was wondering what kind of world she had brought her son into. Gaute was serene throughout the ceremony and didn't cry out when the priest splashed him with water and blessed him.

After the christening, everyone went over to Olga's house to inspect the damage. That evening they had the TV on while they watched and worried about another fire. His mother listened to the radio news for any word of new fires. They were in bed by midnight. His father was sure there would be no more fires. A short while later they were awakened by John who was whispering to them outside their bedroom window. Two fires had broken out in Vatneli. Gaute's father left to help.

The lights were lit in all the houses as well as the temporary police station at the community center. Gaute's father drove through the area and after being stopped and cleared by the police drove on and saw the gleam of the two fires. Quite a few people had already gathered. He watched as Olav and Johanna's house collapsed into the fire. From there he could see the glow from the Knutsen's house that was located a short distance away. After a while, everyone was asked to leave and scout around for more fires. Everyone had to be on the lookout.

As Gaute's father took off to scout the area for more fires, he encountered an accident that had just occurred between a motorbike and a car. The two boys on the motorbike had been thrown off in the collision. One boy was lying on the ground still and lifeless. The other boy was in a state of panic. Gaute's father stayed with the unconscious boy until the ambulance came and took him away.

Section VII

Instead of going home so that his mother could use the pick-up to visit her husband, Gaute drove to the ferryboat terminal. He felt he was about to do something important that would define and distinguish him although he wasn't sure what it was. He drove the truck onto the ferry that would be crossing the sea to Denmark. He drank an ale as the ferry finally rumbled to life and took off. The autumn day reminded him of a day in the eighties when he went hunting with his father. They had sat in the tall grass overlooking Lake Hessvannet. Gaute recalled how he felt he should have been somewhere else – perhaps in his room reading.

After awhile, two elk came bounding out of the brush. His father took aim and shot. The animals ran off; Gaute was sure his father had missed them. But his father told Gaute to go look for the elk and when he did, he found one lying still on the ground. He shouted back to his father that one of the elk



was dead. His father gave the appearance of a seasoned hunter although Gaute knew that it was his first kill.

Gaute moved about the ferry and found his way to another bar where he had more to drink. He pictured the image of his father plunging a knife into the dead elk's neck to allow the blood to drain out. He thought of that afternoon when he had seen his fragile, dying father. He also imagined that his mother was watching out the window for Gaute to return with the truck. Gaute accused another ferryboat passenger of staring at him. As everyone's eyes were on him, Gaute smashed his glass and put a shard of glass in his mouth like it was a pill.

With the taste of blood in his mouth, Gaute left the bar and found his way in the dark to the upper deck. He thought someone would be after him to lock him up for the remainder of the trip but no one came for him. He leaned on the railing as the rain fell on him. He was alone and thought of the dead elk. He recalled how he had to hold the dead animal's head still while his father cut open the abdomen and removed the intestines. It was a nauseating and frightening experience for Gaute that lingered in his mind over the years. They were joined by Kasper and some other seasoned hunters. Kasper was an experienced hunter and cut the elk's heart out for his father.

Gaute watched as the ferry cut through the turbulent water. He spat the glass shard out and stood motionless until the blood stopped flowing from his mouth. He climbed on the rail, closed his eyes and let go.

Section VIII

Early on the morning of June 5, 1978, the road had been cleared after the accident. The two boys survived the accident although one had serious injuries. Gaute's father returned home and sat for a while on the front porch with his rifle. Dag drove past the accident scene. He was stopped by a police officer. He told the officer that he was the fire chief's son and that he was heading home. He told Dag to get his headlights fixed. He had bent one headlamp when he veered off the road causing its beam to be skewed upward.

Dag felt invigorated. He listened to a soccer game and hummed a nondescript tune as he drove. Dag stopped his car at Andres Fjeldsgard's house. He walked to the rear of the house and tried the door. It was locked as was the front door. He retrieved his jerrycan and ran back up to the front of the house. He broke a glass pane in the door and began pouring petrol through it. Inside, Agnes Fjeldsgard was trying to wake her husband. Agnes told her drowsy husband that the pyromaniac was there. She had seen him. She hurried downstairs and saw the man bent over; she smelled the petrol. She stood face to face with the shadowy figure who finally lit a match and threw it toward her as she screamed.

Else stayed awake watching TV after Alfred left to battle the fires. She had three young children to protect. She walked about the house and saw Teresa's light on and the glimmer of light from Alma and Ingemann's house just beyond. Eventually, she fell



asleep but woke with a start at the sound of a car. She looked out and saw a car with one broken headlight driving toward the house. She met Dag who parked in the yard and exited the car. He told her he had to use his own car in helping to fight the fires in Vatneli. He told her the latest – the pyromaniac had struck in Solas – Anges and Ander's house. She said it was the work of a madman and Dag agreed.

When Else turned back from looking up at her childrens' bedroom windows, Dag seemed to have changed. He told her the worst thing that could happen was for a fire to break out in her house. With all the fire equipment in Vatneli, it would be difficult to transport it there. Else was understandably frightened by his words. He told her to pray to God that there were no more fires.

Alma was awake preparing breakfast. After the alarm sounded, Ingemann had stayed awake for a while but grew tired and went up to bed. Dag set off in the fire engine. He returned a few hours later telling them about the fires and the accident. Alma realized that Dag smelled of petrol. Hours later Dag returned, passing up the house and heading for the engine house. Alma made a quick decision, grabbed a windbreaker and headed for the engine house. When she reached it, the car was wide open and idling but there was no Dag. She decided to walk on up the hill to Nerbo where the Slogedal house was. Though heavy mist limited the range of her vision, she sensed that Dag was walking in front of her. Alma picked up her pace until she was nearly running.

Out of breath she stopped by a tree. That's when she saw him a short distance away. She saw him bending over and setting the white jerrycan down. She heard the striking of a match. The match light illuminated his face. There was no doubt who it was. The little boy she had wanted so badly had only been her's for a while it seemed. They would be losing him. She watched as he threw the match and the flames flare up. Within seconds one wall of the barn was on fire. He looked at her; their eyes locked for a second. He smiled. She turned and walked the short distance home.

Analysis

Going back to his childhood home and reading his grandmother's old diaries gives Gaute an insight into his family that he hadn't had before. He was extremely close to his father. He enjoyed the ability to read about his father as a young boy through his grandmother's eyes. There was an irony that a mental patient that Olga was taking care of for the state put ashes from the fireplace in her purse to take with her when she returned to the institution. So many years later Olga's house burned down and all that was left was that same chimney that stood alone among the ashes of the house.

The reaction of Kasper Kristiansen to the burning of his house was probably indicative of all the victims of those fires. He didn't believe it when Olga, the former owner, called to tell him that the house he bought from her and was renovating before he moved in was burning down. He thought Olga had become senile and was imagining things. This attitude captures the feeling of disbelief that was common during the month of fires. If it wasn't so tragic, it would have been funny how Dag, the arsonist, appeared at Kasper's



fire with hot dogs. He was disappointed that all the flames had burned down and they wouldn't be able to roast the hot dogs.

Losing his father was particularly painful for Gaute. He had been close to his father and greatly admired him. Always wanting to please people, Gaute didn't want to disappoint his dying father by confessing that he failed to take the final exams at law school. Gaute thought of it as a gift to his father. Although it was a lie, it gave his father a final peace. Gaute wasn't ready to tell anyone that he was really a writer... in fact he hadn't admitted that to himself yet.

Dag was enjoying himself during the months of fires, at least on some level. Although he was obviously sick and needed treatment, he played out the role of helpful fireman and fire inspector until the end. When the police formed a task force to hunt down the arsonist and established a neighborhood watch so that the community would be on the lookout for the pyromaniac, Dag was one of the first to volunteer. Although he was mad, there was a cunning intelligence about him. He felt powerful because knew things that no one else did. He had everyone fooled.

The traffic and roadblocks on the road caused a serious accident in which a young man was gravely injured. Although the accident wasn't the aim of the arsonist, the fires at least indirectly caused the accident.

Dag continues to enjoy his masquerade as a concerned citizen. He demonstrates that he is duplicitous, cunning and calculating despite the fact that he is clearly mad. To be able to keep a front and face his victims as though he sympathizes with them and wants to help them reflects his eerie capacity to maintain his demeanor and appear normal and sane.

Devastated over his father's terminal illness, Gaute escapes for a day to try to deal with the impending tragedy. Without intending to do so, he finds himself on that trip. He realizes that he was a writer and needed to go where his art took him. He didn't want to disappoint his father who wanted him to be a lawyer. His father's death in a sense liberated Gaute to allow his natural talents to emerge and pursue a writing career.

Dag is feeling more and more invigorated by the fires and enjoys the attention they was getting from the people of his community. He was driven to escalate his crimes and to take more risks. It was dangerous yet exciting for him. He was bold enough to come face to face with the owner of a property that he had tried but failed to torch. Did he want to get caught? He was smart enough to know that it was inevitable. Perhaps he just wanted to see how long he could keep the charade going. It was part of the risk he took and the thrill he felt in outsmarting everyone. He enjoyed frightening Else by pointing out that if her house caught on fire, it would be impossible for the fire equipment to get to her place soon enough since they were busy with another fire (one that he set, of course). She immediately felt terrified. Her first concern was her three young children upstairs asleep. Dag seemed to enjoy her fear over the prospect of her house being in flames. Dag being the all-powerful could set Else's house on fire if he decided to. His mother was the first to catch him in the act. She had suspected that her



son was insane. Watching him set a fire confirmed her darkest worries. Dag even saw her watching but he was unmoved. It was ironic that the person who loved him the most was the first person to realize that he was the arsonist.

Discussion Question 1

What was the source of the loud explosions that Olga heard the night the house she had just sold caught on fire?

Discussion Question 2

Under what circumstances did Gaute write the first text? Where was he going and why?

Discussion Question 3

Why did Alma suspect that Dag was the arsonist? How did she confirm her fears?

Vocabulary

Undulating, razed, surmise, emaciated, incomprehensible, voracity, jauntily, carafe, adjudged, sinister, roundabout, lethargic, distractedly, trundled, tangible, careened, succumbed, vestibule, foundry, juggernaut, furtive, copse, turbid.



Part 5: Sections I through VI

Summary

Part 5: Sections I through VI

Section I

In September, Gaute let himself in the Finsland Church. He sat in a pew recalling the many times he'd been in the church. Later, he walked to the stairs to the church tower. Once at the narrow top, he saw the black bell hanging above him in the darkness. He tapped the bell... the tone was the same as he remembered. After he walked back down, he stopped by the organ hardly believing that the same organ still existed. He tried to remember something that Teresa had taught him but couldn't. He reflected on how she had been there when his father was christened, when Kare was confirmed and when he was christened during the fires. Gaute walked down the main aisle and sat where he had sat during his father's funeral, recalling that day when others had entered behind him. He sat like that for a few moments then turned around.

Section II

The ferry arrived in the Denmark port at sunrise. Gaute had slept all night on a bench. He was the last to leave the boat. His mouth was sore and there was dried blood down his chin. He drove his father's red pick-up off the ferry and down a street and stopped near a pub. His head ached as he tried to understand what had happened during the ferry ride. Had someone stopped him from jumping? After washing up, having some hot coffee, writing a bit and recovering himself, Gaute headed back to the ferry to return home. On the ferry, he re-read what he had written in the coffee shop and edited and revised it a bit. It was the first time he wasn't ashamed of what he'd written. Gaute's father died the next night without ever knowing that his son had become a writer.

Section III

The headlines in the local papers on June 5, 1978, were filled with stories about the fires, the failed attempt to torch Anders and Agnes' house and the motorbike accident. There were photos of Johanna sitting in Knut Karlsen's cellar holding her head in dismay. A story featured an Alsatian dog that had been brought in to try to track down the arsonist. But the dog seemed confused and confounded and yielded no leads. The police developed a profile of the arsonist. He was probably a young man who used petrol to set the fires. He also drove a car with extinguished headlamps. The pyromaniac was taking huge risks in that the fires were set while the police were conducting roadblock checks. It appeared that the culprit almost wanted to get caught.

A large tarp had been affixed across Anders and Agnes' broken door. There was a strong smell of petrol and broken glass everywhere. The police and reporters were most interested in talking with Agnes who had seen the arsonist. She had watched as he tried



but failed to throw two matches into the house through the broken glass panel. The matches had fallen harmlessly to the porch. She described the criminal as tall and good-looking. The police decided to provide protection for both the couple in Solas and the couple in Vatneli.

Section IV

Alma returned home from Slogedal's house as the fire in the barn picked up strength. She went inside and crawled into bed beside Ingemann. He was awake but she said nothing to him. Soon Alfred came by alerting Alma that Slogedal's barn was on fire. Ingemann initially resisted talking with Alfred but finally agreed to come downstairs. Alfred reported to Ingemann that they were able to save the Slogedal farmhouse although they lost the barn. Ingemann and Alfred walked over to the Slogedal property. Alfred told him that Dag had provided the firemen with food and commented that he'd almost become the new fire chief.

A short while later Bjarne Slogedal and his father Reinert, who had both been away, arrived at the scene. Alfred and Ingemann told them that they had no suspects. When Dag joined them, Reinert remarked how Dag had grown and matured. Dag commented that the fire had been "terrible" and that the nut had to be caught.

Section V

The photograph of Ingemann in one of the papers displayed an expression that was difficult to interpret. Surely he was suspicious by then. But nothing was reflected in his interview in which he lauded the efficiency of his fire equipment. Bjarne Slogedal kept watch over the property that night in fear that the arsonist would return to finish the job. He was armed with several guns and hid in the bushes. The Solas police kept watch over Anders and Agnes' house. Dag dropped by their house and chatted with Anders on the lawn and accepted a plate of pancakes from Agnes. Agnes was preoccupied with trying to remove the smell of petrol that had permeated the floorboard in the front entry.

Alfred was summoned by the police that afternoon. He was a suspect because he'd been very active in extinguishing the fires. He was subjected to a long interrogation during which he was asked about the fires. Meticulous notes of his responses were taken down. He asked if he was a suspect. The police were evasive in their response. Else did not take the possibility that Alfred was a suspect seriously. They listened to a recap of the fires that night on the evening news.

Ingemann walked over to Alfred's house. He showed him a cap from a jerrycan that he'd found. He said he knew who the arsonist was. He had found the cap when he surveyed the damage at the Slogedal's barn. The cap was lying in the grass by the barn. He was surprised no one had seen it. Suddenly, he understood who it was. He told Alfred and Else. He asked Alfred to go to the police. He didn't think he was capable of doing so himself.

Section VI



Teresa wrote that she had found Alma. She had an inkling that something was amiss. She discovered Alma wearing her coat and shoes, lying on her bed, staring at the ceiling and whispering that it was him and that it was all over. She looked at Teresa and said that she couldn't move. Teresa took off Alma's shoes and coat. Suddenly, piano music was streaming from downstairs. It seemed to calm Alma. Teresa went downstairs and complimented Dag on his playing. Teresa noticed a strong smell, his torn clothes, and dirty hands. The police followed by Alfred and finally by Ingemann entered the house. Ingemann's face was ashen and he seemed near collapse. The police told Dag that he had to come with them. He stood and turned and smiled at Teresa as he left with the police.

Analysis

Gaute embraced the irony of how the fires that he was writing about were connected to his life when he sat alone in the church where his father was christened, Kare was confirmed and Gaute himself was christened many years later during the fires. Kare had died nineteen years before the fire in which his parents lost their family home and all the memories of their only child. Gaute sat in the same pew he had sat in for his father's funeral.

When he woke on a bench on the ferry, Gaute was uncertain why he wasn't dead. His last memory was standing on the rail and looking down at the dark ocean. Had the spirit of his ailing father saved him? In explicably it was the exact moment when that Gaute wrote something that he thought had substance.

Although the police were closing in on Dag, he took more and more chances. The police had developed a profile of the arsonist: a young, local man who used petrol to start the fires. The profile fit Dag but who would suspect the fire chief's son and a young man who was always at the scene of a fire fighting to put it out? Dag wanted to be a hero yet wanted the power that starting fires gave him.

Dag became so bold that he stopped by the house of one of his victims to chat about the fire and the madman who was setting them. Dag was unsuccessful in starting the fire at this house and the woman named Agnes had seen him from a distance. They even locked eyes.

Dag had accepted Agnes' offer of a plate of pancakes. A photograph captured a look on Ingemann's face at the scene that spoke to Gaute. The look told Gaute that Ingemann knew or at least suspected that his son was the pyromaniac.

It had to be painful for Ingemann to do the right thing. He found evidence that led him to believe that his son was the arsonist. Then, he told the authorities. It was a difficult thing for a father to do with regard to his son; but, it was the right thing, the only thing, that Ingemann could do.



Discussion Question 1

When Gaute visited the old church what thoughts and memories went through his mind? Why did he go there?

Discussion Question 2

What behavior demonstrated that Dag was getting bolder? Why was it odd for him to accept a plate of pancakes from Agnes?

Discussion Question 3

In what state of mind was Alma in when Teresa discovered her in her bedroom? Why was she in such a state?

Vocabulary

Vestibule, inaudible, quay, illegible, publican, frothy, alacrity, harrowing, corrugated, sexton, prosaic, permeate, acrid, blithely, inkling.



Part 6: Sections I through V

Summary

Part 6: Sections I through V

Section I

It was so cold that it was difficult for Gaute to write. He recalled going to Olga Dynestol's barn and seeing three animals, including the elk that his father had slain, hanging from the ceiling. He watched as men lowered the animals and cut the throats of the animals with a compass saw. A gush of blood flowed out from each of them. The men proceeded to butcher the animals into small pieces which were distributed to those who had gathered. When his father's name was called, Gaute helped him put the meat in the tub they had brought with them. The elk's head was mounted in another section of the barn. Gaute felt that its black eyes followed him as they left with the meat.

Section II

A short time after his father died, Gaute visited his grandmother. They both needed to talk about him. Gaute told her about the elk he shot. She had never heard the story before. He told her that he'd begun to write. She was afraid he'd ruin his life. No one earned a living from writing, she told him. He gave her the text he'd written on the ferry. She never mentioned it but he found that she had kept it among her papers. Perhaps she understood.

Section III

At first, Dag denied everything. He explained in detail how he responded to the alarms and fought the fires. He wasn't sure if he knew some of the victims or not. He'd joined the fire department because of his father. He wanted to rescue burning houses. The police asked him about his job at the airport and about his military experience. He was asked for details about the setting of fires to which he pleaded ignorance. He was sure that the arsonist was a madman.

While Dag was being questioned, Bjarne Slogedal, armed with a rifle, hid in the bushes opposite his house. He brought a book to pass the time. He didn't know what to expect. At the same time, Gaute's father was putting him to bed. He joined Gaute's mother in the kitchen and poured himself a cup of coffee. Armed with his loaded rifle, he took a seat on the front steps and drank his coffee. Olav got dressed and quietly walked down to see the ruins of his house. It was the first time he'd seen it since the fire. He encountered someone walking toward him. They stopped and looked at each other without a word. It had been twenty years since they'd seen each other. The person turned away and blended into the night. The only building that was undamaged was a wood shed where a bike had been stored. The bike had belonged to Kare. It had two flat tires and was a little rusty but otherwise was in good condition.



Section IV

The petrol cap that Ingemann had found was laid on the table before Dag. His face was changing, tightening. When he was told that his father found it, Dag confessed to everything. He signed a statement of confession. Dag was handcuffed while he awaited a police car to take him to Kristiansand District Prison. After news of the arrest leaked out, the police were hit with a deluge of questions from reporters and citizens. They would not reveal the suspect's name yet only that he was a young man and local resident. Dag would appear before the magistrate where he would be charged with arson with intent to murder.

Section V

An interview of the police chief appeared in the local paper on June 7, 1978. The pyromaniac had been remanded in custody for twelve weeks. He still did not identify him. There was another article about the motorbike accident. The severely injured young man was still unconscious.

Later that morning, Alma and Ingemann drove to Kaddeberg's shop. They purchased only a sympathy card. Back in the car, Alma wrote, "In our thoughts" on the inside of the card and signed their names. They drove on and visited Johanna and Olav who were glad to see them. No one knew what they discussed.

Analysis

It seemed that whenever Gaute got into a dark spot, when it was difficult to write, he thought of the elk that his father had slain. Gaute shouldered the guilt and shame that he felt about the elk. Perhaps, he felt he was carrying the burden of the dead elk for his father.

When Gaute was not swayed by his grandmother's negativity about a career in writing, it showed that he had found himself and that his decision to become a writer was something he would stick to no matter what.

Olav visited the ruins of his house for the first time. He saw a figure in the shadows that he hadn't seen in twenty years. The figure turned and blended into the night. Who was it? It was probably a hallucination. Olav's son, Kare, had died twenty years before. Olav imagined that his son was there either to strengthen him or to visit the site of the only house he had ever known.

Although Dag at first denied that he had set the fires, he caved rather quickly. He was compelled to confess to his crimes because he was proud of what he had done and how he'd outsmarted everyone.

This section captures the pain that Dag's parents suffered. It had to have been terribly difficult for Alma and Ingemann to face their neighbors after the revelation that it was their son who had caused so much terror and destruction.



Discussion Question 1

Why was Gaute haunted by the elk that his father killed? What had surprised and disappointed Gaute about his father?

Discussion Question 2

What advise did Gaute's grandmother give him about his career? How did Gaute react?

Discussion Question 3

How did Dag behave during his trial? How was he helpful to the prosecution?

Vocabulary

Westerlies, squelched, unscathed, magistrate, unsullied, remanded.



Part 7: Sections I through III and Epilogue

Summary

Part 7: Sections I through III and Epilogue

Section I

It was as though there were three of him -- Dag, the lad, and then the "I." The lad lit the fires and Dag put them out. The "I" emerged in letters that Dag wrote to all the victims. What he said has been lost in time since most of the letters were quickly put in the trash bin after they were scanned over. It was as if they might be infected and no one wanted them in their houses. Apparently, many of the letters were incoherent. As the weeks passed, the number of letters began to dwindle until finally they stopped completely. The boy who was in the accident woke from his coma. He survived, but he suffered permanent brain damage. By the fall, rebuilding and reconstruction had begun. Johanna died in January. Like her son, she was the model of composure until the end.

Section II

The court case began on February 19, 1979. The judge was chief Justice Thor Oug. Detective Inspector Hakon Skaugvoll was the counsel for the prosecution and Bjorn Modenes was the defense counsel. Also present were two psychiatric experts. Dag seemed in a pleasant almost cheerful mood. Alma and Ingemann entered the courtroom just before proceedings began. The prosecution read the charges, ten in all, against Dag. Dag listened intently as if he wanted to find out what happened, too. Skaugvoll read the charges, stated that Dag was suffering from a serious mental disorder and asked him to state that he performed the actions described. Dag responded that he had been responsible for the actions he was accused of.

The prosecutor described the fires and was often corrected by Dag who acted as though someone else had committed the crimes. By the end of the morning, many unanswered questions about the fires had been answered through Dag's detailed accounts. The counsel and other experts left the courtroom at one point leaving Dag and his parents alone in the room. Dag asked if Ingemann was spending time in his workshop and if Alma was dusting his trophies. Alma smiled; but, when she tried to talk, she nearly collapsed and had to be taken from the room. The sound of her sobbing could be heard from the hall.

When court resumed, Alma and Ingemann were back in support of their son. A brief, personal summary about his life and unblemished record was read before the court. The sentence was passed down on March 12th, a day before Gaute's first birthday. There was no punishment and no insurance claims. He was to spend only five years in



detention in a psychiatric hospital. He would be 27 when released and would have a whole life ahead of him. Dag was jubilant. The only disturbing thing was that his parents had not come to his sentencing.

Section III

Gaute's grandmother's diary entries were not quite as sad a year after her husband's death. Then, they became more emotional again when her son, Gaute's father, became sick and died. The latter years of her entries reflected on her life with her husband. She shared some endearing stories about their good times together. Gaute felt closer to both his grandparents after reading his grandmother's diaries. After his retirement, Gaute's grandfather had gotten a job as a driver of a city train. There was a postcard of his grandfather standing beside the city train. Years after he died, dozens of these postcards with his father's image were still on the display stand in Kaddeberg's. No one ever bought the cards, and they lingered on the display for years. It bothered Gaute. There were photos in the diaries that he'd never seen before – some of them from vacations that his grandparents had taken decades before.

After battling illness for several years, Gaute's grandmother died in 2004. She had wanted a line from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians – "But the greatest of these is love" – on the gravestone when Gaute's grandfather died. She wrote in her diary that she wanted the same words on her gravestone.

Epilogue

In August 2005, Gaute was home in Finsland for a short period to finish a novel about Friedrich Jurgenson, the man who tried to interpret the voices of the dead. He went for a long walk and encountered the helicopter that was used to fly over the region during a festival called Finsland Days. He and another man climbed into the helicopter, Gaute in the front and the other man in the back. The helicopter took off over the region. It was the first time Gaute had seen his homeland community from the air. He saw his home, the church and the many lakes of the region. He spotted Olga Dynestol's house and where his grandparents were buried. He glanced at the man in the back. It was him. Gaute was distracted for the rest of the tour. All he could think of that it was him – the pyromaniac was in the back seat.

Dag had moved back into the region after he was released from the institution. The helicopter tour had been his closest brush with Dag other than the letter Dag sent to Alfred. It was a friendly letter in which Dag expressed his hope that Alfred wouldn't think badly of him and that he'd visit him. During his confinement he had trained as a nurse. When he was released, he returned to his family home but couldn't get a job. Everyone was afraid of him. He moved to north Norway where he married and settled down. His marriage didn't last and he returned to the family home. Alma was sick with "smoker's legs" and had to have both legs amputated. She died ten years to the day of the Dynestol fire.



Dag watched the Lillehammer Olympics with his parents with very little conversation. They never spoke about the fires. Ingemann collapsed and died in his workshop in 1995. Dag remained in the family home and finally got a job as council refuse collector. Dag did his job faster and better than any other collector. He was eventually fired, sold his house and moved. As Dag flew over the region he loved, he saw all the places he knew so well and the roads that allowed him to escape from his crimes. Dag died in the spring of 2007, twenty-nine years after the fires.

Teresa wrote about an incident that took place during Alma's last summer. She was surprised to see that Dag was home. She hadn't heard about his release. He was wheeling his mother in her wheelchair. Neither one acknowledged her. She wrote about the incident in letter form. It was dated May 23, 1988. Obviously, it was never sent. Ten days later, Alma died. It wasn't clear who Teresa was writing to but she began her letter as follows: "My dear, Let me put this into words before I burn."

Analysis

Gaute suggests that Dag may have had a split personality or perhaps was schizophrenic. Dag wrote letters to his victims but there was no indication that he had remorse. He wasn't regretful. He was insane and he had enjoyed his moment of infamy.

Dag quickly confessed to the crimes in court. The prosecutor was willing to stipulate that Dag was suffering from a serious mental condition. Dag almost enjoyed the court proceeding after that. At times he would play close attention to the proceedings as if he wanted to find out what happened, too. At other times, he would correct the prosecutor and witnesses about details of the crime. In the end, he was remanded to a mental institution for five years. It didn't seem a fitting sentence for the damage and terror he caused but he was apparently treated sympathetically because of his mental condition and perhaps because his parents were well known and well liked by everyone. The judge may have thought that Ingemann and Alma had suffered enough. Dag seemed jubilant at his sentencing.

There was a secondary benefit to Gaute's writing the book about the fires of 1978. Through the diaries of his grandmother he discovered things about them that he didn't know. He felt closer to both of them after reading her diaries and seeing photos of them when they were young.

Epilogue

In 2005 when Gaute was back in his hometown on another writing project, he took a helicopter ride during a festival called Finsland Days. The helicopter flew over the entire area. There was another passenger in the back seat. When Gaute turned to look at his fellow passenger, he was stunned to see that the other passenger was Dag. Gaute wanted to have a bird's eye view of his childhood home. Dag wanted to have an aerial view of the scene of his crimes. It was ironic that their lives crossed again in such an unexpected way.



During the time he was writing about the fires, Gaute had found a letter that Teresa wrote but never sent. It indicated that she, too, had been frightened of the fires. The letter had no salutation; but, it started off with “My dear, let me put this into words before I burn.”

Discussion Question 1

When Gaute suggested that perhaps there were three Dags, what did he mean?

Discussion Question 2

Why did Gaute feel closer to his grandparents after reading his grandmother’s diaries? What new things did he learn about them?

Discussion Question 3

Where did Gaute get the idea for the name of his book? What did that passage mean in the book?

Vocabulary

Incoherent, cerebral, luminous, barrister, jubilation, throe, mundane, clambered, quorate, scoundrel, resuscitation, frenetic, amorphous.



Characters

Gaute Heivoll

Gaute Heivoll is a native of a rural community in southern Norway. He was just a few weeks old when there were a series of ten fires in one month – May 1978 – that terrorized the conservative community where nothing much ever happened. Gaute was a quiet, shy young boy who was a people pleaser and never wanted to stand out among his peers. But after telling a fascinating story that captured the full attention of his first-grade class, his teacher pulled him aside and told him that he was a potential “writer”. Horrors! Gaute thought that sounded like something that would make him different – and not in a good way – in fact, to him there was no way to be different that was good. He wanted to stay on the sunny side of life and make no waves. Being this scary thing called a “writer” sounded like a walk on the dark side.

Gaute repressed his “differentness” for as long as he could. He tried to talk and sound like the other boys. He pretended to be interested in what they were interested in. But that only worked so long. He loved books and loved to read. Soon his classmates knew he was different and began to distance themselves from him. When he was nineteen, he knew it was time for him to “loose the shackles” that bound him to the safety and mundane life in his sleepy hometown. He felt that he had lived an uninspired existence.

Gaute went to Oslo. After deciding to become a lawyer because it would please his family, the creativity that he had suppressed all those years just wouldn’t go away. He began to write and he began to no longer be ashamed of who he was and what he could do. He returned to his hometown to write the story of the hometown pyromaniac who terrorized his community and about his own evolution that made it possible for him to write that story.

Dag

Dag was the son of Alma and Ingemann. Dag was a precocious child and an overachiever. He always had to be top in his class. When he received anything less than an “A” on a paper, he shot daggers at his teacher. He was also a marksman at a young age and won many first-place trophies for his shooting skills. When he didn’t win a competition, he blamed the wind or rain or other circumstances. Ingemann was the region’s fire chief. Dag loved to sound the alarm when there was a fire and to ride along with his father when there was a fire to extinguish.

As Dag matured, Alma began to see troubling signs that weren't quite right. He would talk to himself and answer himself. He played loud music in his room, but Alma could hear a strange laugh filter over the noise. When Dag learned to drive, he drove his father’s fire truck to the scenes of the fires. There was one problem – there weren’t many fires in the quiet region where they lived which was one of the reasons he began



to set fires. He wanted the excitement, thrill, and power that he perceived the fires gave him.

Dag set ten fires in May, 1978. The people of the region were terrorized. They lived in fear of what house or barn might be next on the pyromaniac's list. Dag would set a fire and return home just in time to sound the alarm and drive the truck to put the fire out. As the month was ending, Dag began taking more and more risks as if he wanted to be caught and stopped. His father figured out that his son was the arsonist. Dag was arrested and stood trial. He was recognized as having a serious mental condition and was sentenced to only five years in a mental hospital. He trained to be a nurse while he was institutionalized. He worked as a refuge collector when he was released. He died in 2007, twenty-nine years after the month of fires. His death was due to natural causes.

Johanna & Olav

Johanna and Olav were two of the last victims of a series of fires that broke out in a normally quiet area in southern Norway. Johanna saw the shadowy image of the arsonist steal away in the night after he'd set their kitchen on fire.

Kare

Kare was the only child of Johanna and Olav. He injured his leg in a skiing accident years before the fires. The leg wouldn't heal and had to be amputated. He died a short time later of a disease. Johanna never recovered from his death.

Alfred

Alfred was the head cashier and bank manager when Gaute was a little boy. Gaute remembered bringing his piggy bank to him. Alfred was also a volunteer who helped fight the fires during the month of terror in May, 1978. He was suspected for a short time by the police of being the arsonist.

Ingemann

Ingemann was the fire chief in the southern Norwegian area during the month of fires. When his only son Dag was a little boy, Ingemann would bring him along in the fire truck.

Alma

Alma was Dag's mother. She had Dag late in life and adored him. She was always proud of her son and of anything he did. She suspected that Dag was having mental problems; but, she kept her concerns to herself and remained silent.



Teresa

Teresa was a resident of the area during the fires. She was a piano teacher who taught Dag. Years later, she also taught Gaute. When Gaute gathered information to write his book, he discovered Teresa's diaries which contained some useful entries about the fires.

Gaute's father

Gaute was close to his father and greatly admired him. When Gaute was away at the university, he got word that his father was ill. Gaute didn't take his final exams; but, to keep from upsetting his dying father, he told his father that he had taken them. Gaute commented that the last thing he did for his father was lie to him. It gave him peace that his son would become a success.

Gaute's grandmother

Gaute's grandmother kept diaries and made some comments about the fires. Gaute discovered her diaries and found them useful for his book. When he told his grandmother that he was going to be a writer, she discouraged him by saying that writers don't earn enough to make a living.



Symbols and Symbolism

Fire

Dag was fascinated by fire from the time he was a young boy. He loved the excitement of riding in the fire engine with his fire chief father when there was a fire to put out. Later, the fires gave Dag's empty life purpose and meaning and a false sense of power.

Diaries

Gaute decided to write a book about the fires that had occurred in his hometown region thirty years before. He discovered the diaries of his grandmother and his piano teacher who both made entries about the fires. Their diary entries gave Gaute some insight for writing his book.

Letters

Alfred, one of the volunteer firemen at the time of the fires, had a letter from Dag after he was institutionalized. In the letter he showed no remorse for his actions but expressed his hope that Alfred didn't think bad of him and that he would visit him. Dag wrote letters to all the victims; but, no one knows exactly what he wrote.

Fire Engine

Dag's father, Ingemann, was the fire chief. As such, he was responsible for the care and maintenance of the fire engine. When he was a little boy, Dag loved to go along with his father to fires. During the month of fires, Dag took the wheel and drove the fire engine to the scene of the fires that he had set.

Siren

When Ingemann received a telephone call that there was a fire, he would go outside and sound the alarm to alert the other firemen in the area to report for duty. Ingemann would hold his young son up so he could crank the siren. When Dag matured, he enjoyed sounding the alarm for the fires that he had set.

Petrol

Dag used petrol stored in a jerrycan to start the fires. He hid the can in the back seat of his car when he headed out to start a fire. The cap of his jerrycan was found at the



scene of the last fire. It was discovered by his father who recognized the cap. He then knew that his son was the arsonist.

Ferryboat

Distraught over his father's impending death, Gaute escaped on a ferryboat to Denmark. He drank too much on the trip over to Denmark and contemplated suicide.

Glass Shards

While on the ferryboat to Denmark, Gaute was drunk. He broke his glass and put a glass shard in his mouth. The shard cut the inside of his mouth and caused some bleeding. In his grief, he was apparently punishing himself from displaced shame and guilt.

Writing

Gaute's potential as a writer was recognized by his teacher when he was just seven years old. Although he tried to ignore his talent because he thought it would take him to the dark side of life, his talent won out in the end. He became a successful writer and returned to his hometown thirty years after the fires to write the story about them and to retrace his personal journey that was strangely intertwined with the fires.

The Elk

Gaute was mystified when his father learned to shoot and took him on a hunting trip where he killed an elk. Gaute was troubled by the slaying of the animal and was troubled by the revelation that his father wasn't who he thought he was. Thoughts of the dead elk stayed with Gaute over the years.



Settings

Finsland, Norway

Before I Burn takes place in Finsland, Norway, in the southern part of the country. It is a rural area that is dotted with farms and small communities. The region was beset by a series of arson fires during May, 1978.

The Firehouse

Ingemann was the fire chief for the rural region where he lived in southern Norway. He was in charge of the fire equipment and the fire engine that was kept in a firehouse near his home. From a young age, his son Dag would ride along with him to fires in the fire truck.

Oslo

Gaute left his hometown when he was nineteen to attend a university in Oslo. He felt that it was where he belonged. He thought that he'd live the rest of his life in Oslo. He had initially entered law school; but, he eventually decided to become a writer.

The Burned Buildings

During the month of May 1978, there were ten fires in the Finsland area. The burned buildings included houses, barns, sheds and storehouses. A fire event was a rare thing in the region, two fires in a row was unheard of. After the third fire, everyone in the community knew that the fires had to have been set and that the arsonist was among them.

Denmark

After Gaute visited his dying father, he drove to a ferry that crossed the ocean to Denmark. He was devastated by his father's condition and knew he'd probably never see him again. Gaute was confused about his future. But, it was on this brief trip that Gaute began to write. For the first time, he was not ashamed of what he had written.



Themes and Motifs

Denial

Dag was the pyromaniac who set ten fires during May, 1978. Although no one died, his actions struck terror in the hearts of all the residents of the quiet, conservative area where nothing ever happened. His actions had ramifications and caused irreparable damage to the property and psyches of the victims and other residents and neighbors.

Alma and Ingemann had Dag late in life. He was their only child. As a young child, he was always top in his class and the best marksman. But, when he wasn't perfect, he would blame circumstances or others for his perceived failures. His parents chose to ignore the times when he grew sullen and non-communicative when things didn't go his way.

As he grew into an adolescent and young adult, Alma knew there was something very wrong with him. He would play loud music in his room, but it failed to drown out the conversations he was having with himself. He would ask himself questions and answer them. He also would laugh uncontrollably when he was by himself. As a mother who adored her son, she did not want to think that he might have a mental problem so she remained silent about her observations although she didn't fail to notice them. They increased and intensified over the years.

During the month of fires, Alma worried about her son cruising about in his car in the middle of the night. She had to connect his movements to the fires that would break out during his absences. When she saw that he was disheveled and smelled of petrol, she strongly suspected his involvement in the arsons. She tried to broach the subject of her son's mental state with her husband Ingemann. It is ironic that Ingemann, Dag's father, was the fire chief. However, Ingemann wouldn't even discuss it. He said that Dag was fine.

No parent wants to think that his or her child is insane or a criminal. However, as in any such case, denying what was obviously before them caused pain and suffering that could have been avoided. Also, it delayed treatment for their son which could have helped him and salvaged his future.

Self-Discovery

Gaute's journey to find himself was a circuitous one. He was a shy, reserved child who wanted to please everyone. What he didn't want to do was to stand out in any way. When he was seven years old, his teacher recognized his talent in storytelling and told him that he could be a writer. It sounded like a curse to him and Gaute vowed to stop making up stories. But, his talent wouldn't go away so easily. He had stops and starts in writing over the years. He was always ashamed of what he wrote. As an adolescent he tried to talk and act like the other boys; but, it didn't work. While they liked to drink and



carouse, Gaute was happier at home reading – which was almost an obsession for him. Soon the other boys recognized that Gaute was indeed different and distanced themselves from him.

When Gaute was nineteen, he knew it was time to leave his small rural community. He enrolled at the university in Oslo where he studied to be a lawyer – something that would please his parents, especially his father. But he wasn't happy. During a series of events, including his father becoming terminally ill, Gaute knew that he wasn't cut out to be a lawyer. Ironically, when his father was near death, Gaute tried his hand at writing again. It was the first time he wasn't ashamed of what he wrote. He had broken through. Perhaps, the death of his father had liberated him to write.

Gaute had found himself. He abandoned any plans to earn a law degree and focused on his writing. He told his grandmother that he was a writer. She discouraged him by saying that writers didn't make enough to support themselves. But, Gaute was undeterred. He went on to become a published and successful author. He returned to his hometown thirty years after the fires to tell the story of the terror that struck his community during the month of May in 1978.

Abandonment

There are any number of ways a person can be abandoned. There are the obvious ones. A parent leaves a child; or, a husband leaves a wife. There are more subtle forms of abandonment, however, that are just as emotionally damaging. In *Before I Burn*, Dag is an arsonist who sets ten fires in May, 1978. Dag was the only child of Alma and Ingemann. They had him late in life; and, they both adored him. Alma almost worshiped him.

As a child Dag had to be the best in class and the top marksman at competitions. If he wasn't on top, he would blame others or blame circumstances. He would become sullen and uncommunicative when things didn't go his way. Alma and Ingemann noticed his dark moods and instead of trying to find out why he demonstrated such behavior they just bragged and boasted about him to try to get him out of his mood. By not giving him the right kind of attention and glossing over problems, they abandoned him as his parents, as his guardians. Had his emotional or mental problems been diagnosed at a young age, perhaps he would not have gone mad and become an arsonist. Years later when he had lost his sanity, it was apparent that there had been signs that pointed to deeply rooted problems all along that Alma and Ingemann chose to ignore as well.

When Gaute was just seven years old, he captured the rapt attention of his first grade class with a fantastic story he told. After class, the teacher pulled him aside and told him she admired his imagination and that he was a writer. Although she was well-intentioned, Gaute took the news that he was a writer as something to be ashamed of. He didn't understand that being a writer was a good thing. The teacher should have been more sensitive to his young age. A child of seven has no idea about his identity. Teachers often make the mistake of talking to a gifted child like an adult because they



seem more mature than the other kids. However, despite their advanced intelligence and abilities, emotionally bright children are just children. His teacher's words haunted him and caused him to suppress his writing skills for many years until he had the maturity to understand his own talents. The teacher was impressed with Gaute's vivid imagination; however, at the moment she pulled him aside to tell him that he was a writer, she became a fan and abandoned him as his teacher.

Styles

Point of View

Before I Burn by Gaute Heivoll is written from the author's point of view. Heivoll returned to his home town region as a successful writer thirty years after the month of terror during which a pyromaniac set ten fires and wrecked horror among the small towns and villages of this normally quiet community. Heivoll was just a few weeks old when the fires occurred; but, he'd heard the stories of the fires from his parents and from others all through the years. It was a subject that often came up in conversations many years after it was all over.

Heivoll naturally felt connected to his hometown; but, he also felt an almost inexplicable connection to the fires. As a baby he was christened at a church that was near a barn that had been burned down. His father helped to hunt down the arsonist. His grandmother and piano teacher both kept diaries in which they made entries about the fires.

Heivoll felt duty-bound to write the story about the terror that struck his hometown region. While doing so, he also retraced how he evolved from a little boy who feared standing out and thought that being a writer would wind him up on the dark side of life. Heivoll pieced together the story of Dag the young man who was mentally ill and who torched his neighbors' houses and barns. Out of necessity, Heivoll imagined and recreated some of the conversations and events that took place during the month of fires.

In Before I Burn, Heivoll also tells his own story and journey of self-discovery. He was a young man afraid of his own potential and talent. Eventually, he broke through his fears and conflicts to become what he was supposed to be – a successful and accomplished writer.

Language and Meaning

Before I Burn by Gaute Heivoll is the story of a rural region in southern Norway that was under siege in May, 1978, by a pyromaniac who set ten fires that terrorized the quiet idyllic community. Gaute Heivoll was just a baby, only a few weeks old, when the fires took place. Many years later, Heivoll became a writer and returned to his home roots to write the story of the pyromaniac and his own journey of self-discovery.

The story was originally written in Norwegian and was translated into English by Don Bartlett. The surnames and names of villages are tongue twisters for the English reader. They are difficult when first encountered. However, as the reading progresses, the importance of trying to pronounce them correctly wanes and is overpowered by the story that is told.



Cultural practices that are unique to the area are explored. There is only a volunteer fire department in the region. When a fire occurred, a phone call was made to the fire chief who ran outside to the siren and sounded it. The volunteer fireman had to live in a locale close enough to hear the siren. Constitution Day is celebrated as a national holiday. In Finsland, the area where Gaute was born and raised, a Finsland Day is celebrated.

Descriptions of the area include the mention of fjords which are bays that originate from the ocean. There are multiple lakes in the area which are described as deep and still. Throughout the story there was mention of the people following important "futbol" games on the TV and radio. The rural area that was the focus of the story was probably very much like many rural areas throughout the world. The neighbors were friendly and supported one another. Everyone seemed to know everyone else.

Structure

Before I Burn by Gaute Heivoll is separated into seven numbered parts. Each part is separated into sections defined by Roman numerals. The last chapter is followed by an epilogue.

Part 1 describes one of the last fires to be set in the region. Johanna, one of the victims, gets a fleeting glimpse of the arsonist who had been terrorizing the area for a month. Gaute Heivoll was born in the area but had been just a baby when the fires occurred. He returned to the region to write the story of the fires and to retrace his journey of self-discovery.

Part 2 describes Dag's childhood and his relationship with his parents. Dag is the arsonist.

In Part 3, the incidence of fires increases. Years later, Gaute discovers some diaries and letters that give him insight about the fires. They also revisit his personal devastation when his father fell ill and died.

In Part 4, the police form a task force and begin to close in on Dag. However, Dag is enjoying his masquerade. His father is the fire chief. Dag helps extinguish the fires he starts.

In Part 5, Dag is getting bolder and taking more and more risks. He almost comes face to face with a victim when he tries to torch her house. Later, he comes to chat about the fire and accepts a plate of pancakes from her.

In Part 6, Dag's father realizes that his son is the arsonist and turns him in.

In Part 7, Dag stands trial and is sentenced to five years in a psychiatric hospital. The epilogue tells of a brief encounter that Gaute has with Dag years later when Dag had been released and Gaute was working on another book.



Quotes

The flames and the smoke are being sucked up into the sky, or so it seems; there are creaks and groans, like distant responses. It is frightening, it is terrible and it is beyond comprehension. And it is almost beautiful.

-- Gaute (Part 1 paragraph Page 10, 4)

Importance: This passage captures the terror and beauty of fire.

Next came the lament, or the tone, or the song, or whatever one might call it. A loud, high-pitched, singing tone that did not exist anywhere else but in the middle of a burning house.

-- Gaute (Part 2 paragraph Page 47, 1)

Importance: Young Dag would accompany his father, the fire chief, to fires. He would anticipate when the collapsing house would make a sound that was like a “song.” Dag was mesmerized by this and the other elements of a burning house.

Every now and then I have the feeling that I am living two parallel lives. One is secure, simple a life without so many words. The other is apparently real life, with me in the middle of it, at my desk writing every day.

-- Gaute (Part 2 paragraph Page 74, 2)

Importance: This passage captures the conflict that Gaute has as a writer and a man who longs for the easier life without the pressure and demands that beset a writer.

Take it easy, Pappa. There won't be any more fires. This was the last.

-- Dag (Part 3 paragraph Page 101, 5)

Importance: This was Dag's response to his father who told him that he was having heart trouble and could no longer fight fires.

Sometimes what Ruth had said – You're a writer, that's what you are – came back to me. The words were still out there, although I had completely stopped telling stories. I didn't dare, for it might be considered that such behavior might lead me into the 'darker side of life'.

-- Gaute (Part 3 paragraph Page 110, 1)

Importance: Gaute was a gifted writer, but he suffered from an inner conflict about being “different” than the other boys. He thought that making up stories – writing – was a path that would lead him down the dark side of life.

I think Dag is ill... he talks to himself.

-- Alma (Part 3 paragraph Page 119, 8)

Importance: Alma tried to approach Ingemann about Dag's mental state. She had



heard him talking to himself for months and finally was able to broach the subject with her husband.

I had lied to him, the last thing I did for my father was to lie to him, and the lie gave him peace.

-- Gaute (Part 4 paragraph Page 191, 2)

Importance: Gaute had failed to take his final exams at law school. He had changed his mind about what he wanted to do. But, his father was dying. Gaute didn't want him to be upset that Gaute hadn't taken his final exams.

He appeared from the great unknown and disappeared leaving not a trace, except for flames... He had thrown the last match at the window after discovering her presence. She had screamed, he had seen and heard her, and this notwithstanding he had thrown it.

-- Gaute (Part 5 paragraph Page 241, 3)

Importance: At the end of his reign of terror, Dag was unsuccessful in torching a house. The woman who lived in the house saw him but it didn't deter him from trying to set her house on fire. He had begun taken more and more risks and probably wanted to get caught.

Now I've told you, Alfred, would you be so kind as to notify the police? I don't think I'm capable of doing it myself.

-- Ingemann (Part 5 paragraph Page 253, 5)

Importance: Ingemann figured out that his son was the arsonist. He told one of his fire deputies, asking him to tell the police. It would have been too difficult for Ingemann to go to the police himself.

Most binned the letter after quickly skimming it. It was as if it were dirty, an infection they didn't want in the house.

-- Gaute (Part 7 paragraph Page 284, 1)

Importance: No one knows what were in the letters that Dag wrote to the victims of his arsons. This captures how the recipients of his letters must have felt about the young man who brought terror and destruction to their community.

As the accused is suffering from a serious mental disorder and is therefore in terms of criminal law not responsible for his actions, I am asking you not to plead guilty or innocent but to say if it was you who performed the actions described in the list of charges.

-- Detective Inspector Hakon Skaugvoll (Part 7 paragraph Page 286, 3)

Importance: After reading the list of charges against Dag, the prosecutor turned to the accused and asked him to basically admit to the wrong doing. Dag responded that he had performed the actions described.



I don't know who Teresa was writing to, but the letter was never sent. It was neatly folded in an unaddressed envelope. It starts as follows: My dear, Let me put this into words before I burn.

-- Teresa (Epilogue paragraph Page 307, 1)

Importance: This passage captures the terror that everyone lived under during the fires of May, 1978.