

# **Bird Box Study Guide**

**Bird Box by Josh Malerman**

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# Plot Summary

Josh Malerman's novel "Bird Box" begins with Malorie inspecting her stomach. She and her sister Shannon find out that Malorie, in her early 20's, is pregnant. Alongside this discovery, a wave of news reports comes about strange occurrences of murder-suicides. As these incidents spread, the sisters cloister themselves in their apartment in the hope of surviving the end of the world. Soon, people identify that the way that creatures affect humans is through sight. With this discovery, people lock themselves in their houses and blindfold their eyes when they must go outside. 3 months after the outbreak, Shannon kills herself in the bathroom after accidentally seeing a creature. Distraught, the pregnant Malorie answers an old advertisement in the newspaper about a safe place. There, she meets Tom, Jules, Cheryl, Don, and Felix who live in the house. The housemates accept Malorie into their home.

Soon after, another, equally pregnant woman named Olympia arrives at the house and after her, a man named Gary knocks on the door. Since the house is full, the group debates whether to allow Gary into the home. After a vote in which Malorie broke the split, they allow Gary into the home. He tells the group of how a crazy man named Frank in his old house pulled the blinds down because he believed the creatures could not affect him. As time passes and the women near their ninth month, Gary begins to convince Don of Frank's logic. Slowly, a divide forms in the group between Don and Gary and the others.

Suspicious of Gary, Malorie sneaks into his room and finds Frank's notebook, the book in which he wrote of his beliefs. When Malorie brings this evidence to the group, the others vote Gary out of the house over Don's protestations. On a stormy night, the 2 women enter labor at the same time. Tom and the others scramble to help the women deliver their babies in the attic, the safest room in the house. While Malorie gives birth, she hears Don and the others fighting below. Terrified, she shouts for them, but they do not tell her what is going on below. Soon, she and Olympia hear screams from below then Gary enters the attic.

Malorie realizes that there never was a Frank and that Gary had been lying to them all from the beginning. Gary tells her that Don pulled down the blinds and opened the doors to let the creatures inside because Gary convinced him that the creatures only harm people who expect to be harmed. After a while, the screaming subsides and Gary opens the attic door to let a creature inside. Malorie, covering the eyes of her baby boy and Olympia's baby girl, closes her own eyes until the creature and Gary leave the attic. The telephone rings for the first time in Malorie's time in the house. She answers a man named Rick who tells her that Tom called him and that he has a shelter just down the river from Malorie's house. He tells Malorie she is welcome if ever she wishes to come and live with them.

After she buries the bodies of every single housemate, Malorie and the children spend 4 more years in the house alone. She trains the boy and girl everyday in order to improve their hearing. Soon, the two are able to hear and identify sounds from other streets.



With their ability, Malorie hopes to be able to respond to Rick's offer and travel down the river in a rowboat. After 4 years of training the children, Malorie sets off in the rowboat with her boy and Olympia's girl. After encountering a deranged man, a pack of wolves, and a flock of warring birds, the 3 make it to the shelter where Rick welcomes them. Finally about to feel safe, Malorie sees that some of the inhabitants of the shelter are blinded. She cries and asks Rick not to blind her babies, but he responds that they do not blind themselves anymore. Reassured, Malorie introduces the boy as Tom and the girl as Olympia then the novel ends.

# Chapters 1 - 8

## Summary

"Bird Box" by Josh Malerman tells the chilling story of a post apocalyptic world in which unknown creatures cause any human who lays eyes upon them to kill those around them and then to kill themselves. The novel follows Malorie through 3 different time periods of her life: when the creatures first appear, when she stays in a house with other survivors, and finally when she goes by river to a shelter. Using Malorie as a focus, Malerman explores the idea of captivity and its both detrimental and beneficial effect on the individual in short, snapshot chapters.

Chapter 1 starts with Malorie and her two 4 year old children in a self-imposed bird box of a house. Malorie, blindfolded, fetches water from a well outside and notices that the air is foggy. She believes this fog will provide cover for herself and the children when they set out on their blind journey along the river. Frustrated with their terrifying situation and her own helplessness, Malorie cries then shrieks for Boy and Girl to get up. Malorie blindfolds the two children, whom she has trained into being almost echolocators, and the frightened group leaves the house totally blindfolded. They board a rowboat on the river behind the house and Malorie begins paddling downstream.

In Chapter 2, Malerman introduces the second time period of the story to be 9 months before the children are born. Malorie, who has missed her period, inspects her stomach in front of the bathroom mirror in the modest rental in which she and her sister Shannon live. Shannon bangs on the bathroom door shouting about an homicidal incident in Alaska that matches the murder/suicide trend sweeping through Russia and social media. Shannon barges into the bathroom to find Malorie crying and inspecting her stomach.

Brief Chapter 3 flashes forward to Malorie and the children on the river where she stresses that the children's hearing is the only sense they can use. After Chapter 3's minute interlude, Chapter 4 finds Malorie and Shannon driving to the pharmacy and noting the way that people cover their eyes to avoid the possibility of seeing whatever it is that makes people go mad with bloodlust. The sisters drive home after buying a pregnancy test and notice that no one is on the streets.

After the test result is a positive, Malorie calls Henry Martin, the man who impregnated her, but gets no response, then calls her parents. Malorie tells her mother that she is pregnant just as the CNN news anchor reports another incident in the Upper Peninsula, the area where the sisters' parents live. While Shannon talks to her mother, Malorie reads about a home in Riverbridge that is acting as a sanctuary. Shannon nails a blanket over the window.

With Chapter 5, Malerman moves the sisters' plotline forward three months into Malorie's pregnancy and the Apocalypse. The Problem, as news stations call it, has



become worse, and the outside world is lost to the creatures. Malorie calls to her sister, but gets no response. Worried, she rushes upstairs to find a window partly open and Shannon dead on the floor with a pair of scissors sticking out of her chest. Malorie rushes from the house and drives towards the Riverbridge sanctuary.

Chapter 6 returns to Malorie and the children on the boat when Boy hears something big splash in the water in front of them and the birds go silent. Chapter 7 sees Malorie drive with her eyes half closed to 273 Shillingham Lane in Riverbridge. Malorie knocks on the door and a group of people rush her into the home. The group searches around Malorie to make sure that nothing snuck in with her then both the group and Malorie open their eyes. Tom, the leader of the house, invites her sit in the kitchen where Jules, Don, Felix, and Cheryl introduce themselves. When the housemates notice that Malorie is pregnant Cheryl debates whether or not to accept her, but eventually relents. Tom shows Malorie the house which still has power, a working telephone, a well, and a canned food cellar. Tom begins to tell Malorie that living creatures are the ones causing the Trouble then Malorie faints.

She wakes up in her new bed in Chapter 8. She walks into the kitchen to find Felix calling random numbers on the telephone without a phone book for guidance. Tom continues to show Malorie around the home remarking that the attic is the safest room. Tom then tells the story of how his 8-year-old daughter Robin, whose mother died in childbirth, slit her wrists with Tom's razor in the bathtub after seeing a creature.

## Analysis

Within this first section, Malerman introduces his main characters, the novel's dystopian setting, and his tone. Section 1's action occurs over 3 different time periods, but each of the 3 follows the same main character, Malorie. Working as the author's lynchpin, Malorie keeps the novel's complex and interwoven narrative grounded. The frame story, the tale told from Malorie's present, features Malorie and the 2 children as they travel along the river. Within this frame, Malormen flashes back to the beginning of the Trouble with the creatures and also to Malorie's time in the sanctuary in Riverbridge.

The most striking and notable feature of this section is the horribly grotesque murder and suicides that Malerman forces the reader to confront. The most shocking death described here is that of Tom's daughter Robin who, at 8 years old, slits her wrists with her father's razor. On one hand, this disgusting and depressing story gives the reader insight into Tom's psyche and speaks to his past. On the other, it serves a broader purpose for the novel as a whole. It forces the reader to confront the disturbing reality of Malorie's world. With this forced confrontation, Malerman gives the reader a taste of what will follow and he establishes his tale within the generic convention of horror fiction and establishes the novel's theme of Horror.

Besides being post apocalyptic and dystopian, Bird Box is, above all, a horror story. The general purpose of horror fiction is to startle and frighten the reader. In this section when Malorie describes finding her sister's dead body, the author firmly grounds his story



within the context of horror fiction. Another feature of the horror novel that Malerman embraces in this section is the supernatural. The creatures are not worldly. Tom says they are not some virus or a supersonic frequency, but sentient beings that, whether purposefully or ignorantly, cause humans to go mad.

He delves deeply into this genre when he attempts to induce feelings of repulsion in the reader. Robin's suicide is a perfect example of Malerman's intention to repulse. Furthermore, horror fiction usually features a central menace that can be interpreted as a metaphor for society's larger fears. In this case, the creatures at whom humans cannot look, are the story's central menace. When seen, they induce homicidal insanity. In this light, they represent humankind's inability to accept or acknowledge certain truths. Immediately, from only Section 1, this analysis of the creatures' role in the novel begins to develop as an overarching metaphor.

Since the first section only features Malorie's perspective, her understanding of events and her own fears come to the forefront of the reader's experience. Malorie constantly questions herself. Her inner thoughts, which Malerman italicizes, are wrought with frustration, confusion, and anger. These emotions cloud her judgement and skew her perception of the Trouble, the name for the creatures' arrival. During the frame narrative which follows her and the children on the rowboat, she tells herself, "You're a bad mother." She says this because she had devoted her every moment to conditioning her 2 children, turning them into echolocating robots. Rather than positive encouragement, she berates them and even beats them for their mistakes instead of congratulating them on almost supernatural talents. The punctuation mark that Malerman gives Malorie's harsh, but true self-assessment is a period. Malorie does not question the fact that she is an awful mother. She simply accepts the stark reality that her raising the children into robotic hearing aids makes her a poor parent. This assessment is typical of Malorie as a character. Instead of leaving room for doubt and the possibility that her behavior has been in the children's best interest, she denounces herself and moves on. In Malorie's mind, her punishment is already enacted by the terrifying word in which she lives.

The particularly intelligent weaving that the author does with Malorie's three different settings and narratives allows him to draw parallels and contrasts between different points in the novel in order to accent these similarities and differences. For instance, Malerman cuts from Malorie's blind driving after Shannon kills herself to Malorie on the boat with the children hearing a large splash in the water. Because in both scenes Malorie is blind, author Malerman puts more and more emphasis on the unknown and the importance of hearing. Malerman also uses adjacent situations to comment upon each other in Chapter 4 when Malorie learns she is pregnant and calls Henry Martin, the man who impregnated her. As she calls him, the television plays the voice of a news anchor describing the apocalypse, but Malorie hardly notices. While Malorie herself ignores the broadcast, the reader experiences both Malorie's personal strife and the situation of her world through her phone call and through the news report. In this way, Malerman contrasts Malorie's personal challenge with the greater world's difficulties. The reader can see the differences in scope between the two, but also understand that, for Malorie, her pregnancy is just as life changing as the world's apocalypse.



## Discussion Question 1

How do the creatures affect the world? What changes and what remains the same?

## Discussion Question 2

What is Malorie's reaction to the end of the world? What does her reaction tell you about her?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Malerman give the reader three distinct narratives? What purpose do they serve for the novel up to this point?

## Vocabulary

lithe, draped, grisly, comprehends, trembling, stammers, scenarios, tendency, erupting, notoriety, besieged, amateur, amphitheatre, muses, evolution, derided, immolation, harrowing, din, jarring





# Chapters 9 - 18

## Summary

Chapter 9 begins with Malorie and the children aboard their rowboat. Malorie considers the nature of the word “creatures” that humans have ascribed to their tormentors. She believes it is insufficient. As she ponders, the children hear a engine. A boat’s engine cuts as it draws alongside them and Malorie screams at the children telling them not to remove their blindfolds despite the fact that the man in the boat told them they could. He begins to urge them to remove the blindfolds and see the world around them. He speaks directly to the children saying their mother is a monster who is trying to hide the world from them. Malorie, trapped between the riverbank and the man’s boat, finally manages to push past the boat. The man screams after them but he goes mad and kills himself before he can reach them.

Chapter 10 cuts back to Malorie in the house, 2 weeks after her arrival. The housemates throw a party using the little liquor they have, playing a piano in the living room, and listening to Rodney Barrett, a radio host. Rodney talks of all the people they have lost to the creatures then he shoots himself. Seconds later, a pregnant woman named Olympia knocks on the door. After searching her and asking if her eyes have been closed, the group lets her into the house. Both she and Malorie are 4 months pregnant.

Chapter 11 finds Malorie and the children on the river while Malorie considers whether or not she is a good mother. In Chapter 12, Malorie, in the house, asks Tom about George, the man who put the ad in the paper. George, the original homeowner, constantly thought of ways that they might beat the creatures. Finally, he decides to videotape 5 hours of footage from outside the house. With Tom’s help, he plays recording through a TV while he is tied to a chair. The housemates, waiting downstairs, hear George slowly go insane. He screams, begs, and curses then goes silent. Blindfolded, Tom and the others turn the VCR off then open their eyes to see George’s horrid remains. He had pulled against the ropes so hard that the restraints had cut through to his bone and the rest of his body was a pulpy remnant.

In Chapter 13, Felix fills 3 buckets with water from the well outside the house. Blindfolded, he listens to Jules, who keeps speaking so that Felix will have a sense of where he is. While he sets up the second bucket, Felix hears something and drops the steel bucket into the well. On the third bucket, he hears something in the water. Terrified, Felix rushes inside with the third bucket while Jules yells to him. Once inside, Tom hears Felix’s story then fortifies the house and the group settles down to listen in tense silence.

Chapter 14 returns to the river where Malorie recalls her time with the children in George’s house. She hears a crash from the babies’ room and rushes upstairs blindfolded and swinging an axe only to find that it was Boy who had managed to climb



out of his chicken wire crib. While on the river, Malorie clings to the idea that her children are smarter than her because it is their only hope for survival from the creatures.

In Chapter 15, the housemates are dying of thirst because no one will drink the possible creature-contaminated water. Finally, Tom decides to drink the water while restrained in the same chair and the same room, where Malorie now lives, that George died. After a while Tom calls down that he is okay and that they can drink the water.

In Chapter 16, while on the river the rowboat runs aground on the riverbank. This time, deranged wolves attack them while the blindfolded Malorie and her 4-year-old children try to disentangle themselves from the vegetation along the bank. One wolf shreds Malorie's shoulder with its claws, but she eventually pushes the boat away.

In Chapter 17, Olympia tells Malorie that the other housemates are scared of them because they are both pregnant. While they consider how difficult natural childbirth will be, Tom comes up with the idea of finding stray dogs from the neighborhood and using them as seeing eye dogs and as protection. The group agrees to Tom's expedition after a vote in which Don denounced the idea as stupid and needless. Tom and Jules leave the house telling the others that they will be back in 12 hours.

The story returns to the river in Chapter 18 where Malorie struggles to remain conscious after the blood loss she suffers from the wolf attack. She remembers the harsh lessons she gave the children to enhance their hearing then the narrative turns back to Malorie, 5 months pregnant, and the housemates. The tension in the house grows with each minute that Tom and Jules are out in the neighborhood. Victor, Jules's dog, starts barking and Don shrieks at the animal to be quiet. The other housemates are afraid Victor heard a creature outside the house. Felix goes to grab garden tools that they might use to protect themselves from whatever the dog barks at.

## Analysis

Section 2 develops the theme of Garrison Mentality/Isolation that the author introduces in the first Section. Malorie feels isolated and is anxious and quick to scare. She and her children have seemed to live in isolation most of the time and certainly now that they are on the house. The author also creates dramatic tension in the plot with the psychological tactics of the creatures and the anxiety that is created whenever they appear or the possibility they could appear comes up.

On top of this thematic development, Malerman gives the housemates backstories that explain their situation and some of the reasons as to why they behave the way they do. While Tom's story of his daughter's suicide was in Section 1, the others, who had been little more than names, begin to come to life. Malerman makes a conscious effort to turn Felix, Cheryl, Olympia, and Jules into fuller characters in this section, but he only does this through superficial backstories. Despite his concern for the status of his ensemble



characters, backstories are not a substitute for the character development that the reader sees in Tom, Malorie, and Don.

Most particularly, Section 2 explores the subtle differences in Malorie's character between timelines. When she is on the river with the children, she is a harsh and even cruel mother, but when she is with the housemates during her pregnancy, she is able to laugh and at least try to enjoy the company she has. All in all though, Malorie's most obvious characteristic is her worry. After her sister's death, she devolved into an anxious mess who sees shadows around every corner. Rather than being able to denounce Malorie's anxious character, in Malerman's world, this reaction is justified.

While the meat of the action in Section 2 occurs while Malorie stays with the housemates in George's erstwhile home, the river narrative leaks into the book almost every other chapter. In brief, sometimes 1-page chapters, Malorie and the children continue along the river. This frame narrative serves to layer the story's main setting and to serve as another point for suspense and tension. Malorie is also at her most introspective while on the river because she and the children hardly talk. When the kids do try to ask her questions, she brutally silences them then immediately considers whether she is a good mother. For the reader, this sequence of berating then silently regretting appears almost ridiculous, but with an understanding of the harsh context in which Malorie lives, one may forestall judgement. When Malorie asks herself, "Are you a good mother?" in Chapter 17, she almost instantly comes to the conclusion that she is not. This conclusion is largely the same decision to which most readers would come after reading about Malorie's draconian training regiment. She refused to breastfeed the children when they could not answer her questions what they could hear.

Chapter 17 is the first instance that 2 female characters interact without others around them. Olympia and Malorie sit at the kitchen table and Olympia comments on how their pregnancies are a constant source of strain for the other housemates. The naturally reserved Malorie responds with only 1 word answers to Olympia's almost hysterical questioning. Olympia serves as a foil to Malorie. Although their situations are exactly similar, both are pregnant and live in the same house without the men who impregnated them, Malorie is quiet and introspective while Olympia is bubbly and ridiculous. Olympia speaks and reacts without thinking, while Malorie thinks far too much and speaks to little. Their polar characteristics serve to extenuate their differences yet also brings up the theme of Human Contact.

The most important character introduction in this section is that of George, the original owner of the house. George placed the ad in the paper to which all the housemates responded. The fact that George put an ad out reveals that he was a social person who wished to share his ideas with others and also offer his home to strangers so that they might find shelter. Tom, the first to answer the add, tells Malorie that George was an inquisitive person who wished to save himself and the other housemates from the creatures' hold. In his desire to accomplish this goal, he watched a video of the creatures and went insane then killed himself. George's story and his character remind one of Tom, the current, de facto leader of the house. Tom, despite the warnings of the other housemates, takes risks and tries to move forward. In this light, George's end



serves as both a warning and a foreshadowing of the fate that awaits Tom if he does not temper his urge to improve by risking himself. He tells Malorie, “We can’t stop trying.” It is this optimism that glues the house together and makes Tom the leader of the others. His infectious good temper makes him an invaluable leader. While his effect on the group is beneficial, he is also too important to risk. While he and Jules search the neighborhood in Chapter 18, the others cannot cope and begin to snap at each other just a couple hours after the pair leaves. The others' reaction to Tom's absence reveals just how necessary he is to the group. When along the river, Malorie reminisces of Tom, she reinforces his importance and the monumental effect he had on all of the housemates.

## Discussion Question 1

How are Malorie and Olympia different and what do these differences tell you about each woman?

## Discussion Question 2

Is Malorie, as she herself believes, a bad mother? Is her treatment of the children justified? Consider the episode with the deranged man on the boat.

## Discussion Question 3

In what specific ways does Malerman build suspense?

## Vocabulary

rogue, behemoth, providence, gargling, subsist, claustrophobia, partake, devastating, fumbles, sloshes, circumstances, jerks, finite, profanities, hypothesized, slack, unfastens, anxious, contamination, acquiesce



# Chapters 19 - 28

## Summary

Chapter 19 starts with the housemates waiting for Tom and Jules to return from their dog hunting trip. With strained nerves, Don and Cheryl then Don and Felix almost come to blows, but then there is a knock on the front door.

In Chapter 20, Malorie thinks of Don while on the boat with the children who complain that the blindfold is hurting them. Don told her that she should blind the babies. Malorie remembers when she almost blinded the children with paint thinner then Chapter 21 begins with Tom and Jules returning with 2 dogs that they found in the neighborhood. Although Don protests saying that they should not open the door, the others override him and follow Tom's procedures for allowing people to enter the house. They all keep their eyes closed, then allow the two inside and search around them with broomsticks for creatures. When Cheryl asks Tom about a box he carries, he tells the group that they are birds that will serve as an alarm for them. When people get close to the bird cage, they chirp louder. Everyone in the group is relieved that Tom and Jules are back except Don who was already counting their rations as his own. Tom and Jules sit down and tell the others what happened on their trip.

In Chapter 22, the author shifts perspective from Malorie to Tom just after he and Jules leave the house. With broomsticks, the 2 tap their way along the street while Tom battles his fear of the creatures by thinking of his daughter Robin. Tom plants a post in the ground in front of their house so that the 2 will be able to find their way back home. As they move along the sidewalk, Jules trips over what he thinks is a suitcase, but what Tom discovers is a body. The 2 move along to the first house they find and break into it in search of dogs and anything useful. Despite being inside, the two cannot open their eyes because they feel a breeze, meaning that another window is open. Frightened, the two leave the house after a cursory search in which they found nothing useful. They go to the next house where, after they search the building, they remove their blindfolds to see the grimy interior of a stranger's house. Tom, smelling something putrid, finds the starved body of a boy laying in his parents' bed. Jules yells from the basement that he found a dog and Tom leaves the decaying boy's body alone. The husky dog, almost starved to death, gorges on the meat that Jules throws to him in an attempt to gain the dog's trust. Eventually, Tom and Jules move to a third house.

Chapter 23 finds a woozy Malorie trying to stave off unconsciousness while on the river with the kids. Her brutal shoulder wound slows down her paddling to the point that the rowboat spins in aimless circles until Boy, at 4 years old, helps her row. After the river interlude, Chapter 24 begins with Tom and Jules waking up from their sleep in the third house. The 2 men and the dog cross the street to continue their search. Jules finds a tent in the middle of the street that Tom says could be from the military. The 2 enter a house across the street where Tom finds an ice-cream scooper and a bowl filled with a thick, sticky substance on the house's kitchen table. Blindfolded, Tom realizes that blood



fills the bowl and the sphere that floats around in the blood is the eyeball of a body that sits in the chair. Deciding the head home, the 2 pass a garage that the husky barks at. The pair finds another dog and a birdcage that they then bring to the house.

In Chapter 25, Malorie forces the Girl to eat by threatening to leave the Girl behind. As they continue along the river, Malorie stares at the clouds and thinks of how she used to identify their classmates in the clouds' shapes with her sister Shannon. As she daydreams, her hands fall from the paddle and she passes out. In a time shift, Chapter 26 commences with Malorie waking from dreams of babies to hear a knock on the house's door. A man shouts that he has to get into the house because he can't handle being alone anymore. Don refuses to let him in, but Tom and the others agree to let Gary, that is the man's name, into the house. After their security ritual, Gary ambiguously answers the questions that the housemates ask him. The group feeds Gary then, after Tom's questioning, everyone goes to bed. Gary sleeps on the couch while Olympia asks to sleep in Malorie's bed. Malorie readily agrees.

Chapter 27 describes the morning after Gary's arrival. Malorie notes that Gary speaks like an actor because of his dramatic flourishes. Gary tells the housemates that the house he was in before was filled with an all-male, martial group that wanted to wage war on the creatures. One man, named Frank, was discontented with the others' behavior. He wrote furiously in a notebook and hardly spoke to the others. In Chapter 28, Gary continues his story. One day, Gary snuck into Frank's room and read the notebook to find hateful writings declaring his intention to kill the others. The next day, all the drapes had been pulled down and the doors unlocked. No one was hurt, but Gary left anyway.

## Analysis

Section 3 introduces Bird Box's major rising action. After Tom and Jules find the dogs, they return to the house and soon thereafter Gary arrives. While much suspense exists in this section, the general sense of this section is that the author builds towards a greater, more encompassing climax. Gary's arrival becomes the final chain in a sequence of events that threaten to destabilize the tentative harmony of the house. In many ways, Gary's presence pushes this balance to its breaking point. His story and the way he conducts himself leads the reader to question whether or not he is the well-meaning, innocent man he intends to appear to be.

The very first night that Gary stays in the house, Olympia asks Malorie if she can sleep in her room. Malorie readily agrees to this idea because she too is afraid of Gary. From this instance, one observes the immediately negative effect that Gary has on the house's atmosphere. Section 3's most important feature is its introduction and development of character. While the creatures are the book's obvious, major adversary, Gary begins to take his place in Malorie's list of enemies. In terms of character development, Malorie becomes far more suspicious than she had been in previous chapters. Before Gary, Malorie accepted each housemate at face value and became close to each one, especially Tom. With Gary, Malorie does not feel that sense of



security that she feels with the others. In a wildly insightful moment, Malorie refers to Gary as an actor. She thinks he has dramatic flourishes that belong more to the stage than to real life. Malorie comes to this conclusion just the morning after Gary arrives. Malorie's understanding of Gary is a moment of foreshadowing. Actors pretend to be something they are not. They perform and attempt to become something other than what they are. In this way, they lie. With this logical train, one sees Gary not as an overly dramatic buffoon, but as a deceptive fraud.

This section also brings up the theme of Blindness. During one of the interludes to Malorie and the housemates, the Boy tells his mother that "the blindfold is hurting [him]." Malorie offhandedly tells him to rub water on the cloth so as to soften the material. He does so then remarks how much better the blindfold feels. Since this rather innocuous exchange occurs in an almost single page chapter, the event gains significance. Why would Malerman include a passage so generally insipid? The answer lies in the fact that the blindfold is more than a physical object. It is a symbol. It represents the self-imposed restraints that hinder their lives. While the blindfold is protection from the creatures, it is also a burden to both Malorie and the children. Without sight, all humans become like children. For this reason, Malorie trained her two kids to be more than she could ever be. She trained them to listen with everything they had. All the attention usually devoted to sight goes to straining to hear the approach of creatures.

For the first time in the novel, Malerman consciously and overtly evokes the novel's title. On their voyage around the block, Tom and Jules finds a bird box. Tom insists that they bring it home because the animals will act like an alarm system. With this possession, Tom finds new hope and he shares this optimism with the others when he returns home. In Tom's mind, their situation constantly improves. Despite the fact that they are still stuck in a self imposed prison, Tom feels that every new item that they find and every new member that they accept brings them closer to the lives they once had. Bird box comes to mean more than one thing to the group. To Tom, the birds are a stepping stone towards normality and security. With his past in mind, his desire to return comes from his need to have his daughter in his life again. For the other housemates, the birds are another chore, but also an item that reflects Tom's infectious spirit. For the reader, the bird box is more than these interpretations. Although the characters do not realize it, they are all too similar to the birds trapped in that cage. Not of their own will, they remain in the same house because forces greater than themselves force them to live like animals. The creatures are to the housemates as the housemates are to the birds. While Malorie and the others do not depend on the creatures for sustenance, both the birds and the humans are locked in a cage.

A dramatic shift occurs in Chapter 22 when the narrative shifts perspective from Malorie to Tom. This instance is the first in the book where the reader gets a perspective other than Malorie's own. When Tom and Jules return from their trip, Tom sits down to recount the story, and Chapter 22 begins with a close, third person narration that follows him from the moment he left the house. Malerman uses this literary technique in order to avoid a possibly boring and long-winded retelling of his travels. This choice by the author reveals Malerman's desire to free himself from his character and narrate by himself. While on this trip, Tom and Jules encounter a tent pitched in the middle of the



road. Since every other part of the expedition had a precise reason for being included, the seemingly unsuspecting tent should raise concerns. Tom, unsure of what the tent may be, says that maybe the military set it up, but the narration reveals that he feels as if someone is watching him. He does not mention his concerns to Jules, and the 2 carry on with their trip. Tom takes on the burden of concern and of knowledge. Whether he acknowledges his role as leader or not, he naturally behaves in a way that inspires confidence. When he finds the eyeball in a soup bowl filled with blood, he says nothing to Jules and takes on the horror by himself. With the entire book in mind, the discovery of the tent is an instance of foreshadowing. During the novel's climax, this tent plays a significant role despite its conspicuously insignificant introduction.

## Discussion Question 1

How does gore play into Malerman's story?

## Discussion Question 2

What purpose does Jules and Tom's expedition play in developing the characters who remain behind?

## Discussion Question 3

In what way does Malorie's character who journeys along the river differ from the Malorie who is pregnant and lives in the house?

## Vocabulary

emaciated, devours, erratic, excruciating, flourishes, strike, withdrawn, hygiene, gingerly, all-encompassing, vulnerable, encouraging, duration, confronted, pennants, fortified, raving, magnitude, mantel, serpentine





# Chapters 29 - 37

## Summary

In Chapter 29, Malorie wakes, keeping her eyes closed, on the rowboat. She realizes that the children are rowing for her because she had passed out. Relieved by the fact that the children still have their blindfolds on, Malorie resumes paddling despite her wounds and the mess of blood and vomit at her feet. Chapter 30 begins with Cheryl speaking of how she is the only one to feed the birds and how she likes it because it gives her a chance to go outside. Today though, she heard what she describes as an "abandoned step." Usually when she gets close to the birds, they chirp loudly, but today they were dead silent. Malorie wonders if the world of the creatures is pressing in on them.

In Chapter 31, she continues her pessimistic consideration of the house's status. Since Gary's arrival, the house is divided. Don spends more and more time with Gary to the point where one is never without the other. Gary explains to Don the way that Frank thought. Gary tells Don that he thinks that people go crazy because they expect to go crazy when they see the creatures, not because the creatures actually cause them to go mad. When Olympia expresses her worries over their deliveries, Malorie facetiously tells her that they can deliver each others' babies.

Chapter 32 continues with the housemates just as Tom and Jules are about to leave the house again, this time to go to Tom's old home. Tom and Jules use the seeing eye dogs to travel the 3 miles to Tom's place to retrieve medicine that will help in the deliveries. While they are gone, Malorie takes charge of the near-hysterical group and gives them each a task to do to keep their minds off their friends.

Chapter 33 finds Malorie on the river as she reminisces about the time she drove to a bar to find microphones while the children slept in the house. She took Victor, Jules's dog, to help her wander through the town blind. Finally, she and Victor find the bar where she drinks some rum then hears Victor whine. Victor pulls her towards the bar's cellar where Malorie smells something rotting. Malorie feels as if someone is in the room with her, then Victor goes wild. Just before he starts growling, Malorie ties him to a bar post. Fleeing the bar, she hears his teeth breaking as they snap together. Luckily, Malorie stumbles upon microphones then runs to the car outside and heads back to the house alone.

Malorie sneaks into Gary's room while he sleeps, retrieves his briefcase which contains a notebook, then quietly goes into the cellar to read it in Chapter 34. She realizes that the notebook is the one that he said Frank had. She returns the notebook and briefcase to Gary's room. Chapter 35 continues the now week-long wait the housemates endure while Tom and Jules are away. Malorie considers who she can tell about Gary's notebook when Gary snaps at her asking if there is something on her mind. She says there is, but just then Tom and Jules knock on the door. Once the pair sits at the kitchen



table, Tom reveals the medicine, some food, and a phone book with numbers that they can call.

In Chapter 36, the Boy hears something following them on the river, but cannot identify what it is. Back at the house, Chapter 37 sees Malorie trying to find a moment alone with Tom to tell him about Gary, but Gary follows them. While they all sit at the dining room table, Malorie reveals what she found in Gary's briefcase. After voting, the group decides to kick Gary out despite Don's protestations. They all put blindfolds on the open the door for Gary to leave.

## Analysis

Section 4 builds upon the previous sections and begins the novel's steep climb to its climax. Chapter 29, the first of this section, begins in absolute horror for Malorie and to a lesser extent the reader. As discussed, Malerman nurtures a constant sense of anxiety in his novel, and Section 4 is no different. Malorie awakes to find her 4-year-old children rowing for her because she passed out from blood lost after a wolf tore her shoulder apart. The chapter ends with a disgusting description of the status of the canoe's interior. Malorie notes that she rows with her legs in a puddle of piss, vomit, and blood. Since Malerman actively engages in the genre of the horror story, he embraces gore and emphasizes his theme of Horror.

The grotesque bleeds into the narrative just as the profane poisons characters' words. Malerman is not afraid to be ugly and to revolt his readers. He uses gore not only as a cheap way to elicit an emotional response in the reader, but also to embed the story with a frightening realism. Violence, profanity, and bodily fluid all combine to create a world that is too real to ignore. One cannot dismiss Malerman's prose outright because the world in which Malorie and the others live contains too many real components. Malerman's urge for his story to appear real stems from his generic convention. He employs supernatural creatures who turn anyone who looks upon them into raving homicidal and suicidal monsters. At face value, this convention is almost ridiculous. To combat this dismissive reaction, Malerman steeps his world in horrific violence and revolting gore.

In cultivating a steady sense of suspense and anxiety, the author foreshadows heavily. For instance, in Chapter 31, Malorie contemplates Gary's effect on the group and his ideology about the creatures. When she hears Gary talking about Frank, Gary's old housemate, she thinks, "always the way Frank thought. Never quite what Gary thinks himself." With this line and the overall context, Malorie adds to the story's suspense because the reader knows that Frank tore down the curtains of his old house and unlocked the doors because he believed the creatures were not malignant. As Malorie continues her wary appraisal of Gary, she comes to the conclusion that there is no Gary and that Gary is in fact Frank. Thus, the house is in as much danger as Gary's old house. To compound the divide in the house's atmosphere, Malorie notes the conspiratorial whispers of Gary and Don in dining room and Tom's joyous training of the huskies in the kitchen. Here the author brings up the theme of Deception.



The author also addresses the theme of Survival. Tom and Jules complete their second foray into the "new world" once again. The narrator's use of the word "new" is telling. It reveals the novel's obsession with the reversal of hierarchy and the upheaval of the normal. No longer is the world that into which the characters were born. It is now a hostile place that cannot even be seen because one must travel blindly in order to avoid suicide. The most notable difference between the first foray and the second is the duration of the trip and the temperament of the housemates. Rather than a day and a half, Tom and Jules leave for over a week and a half. Rather than immediately turning on each other and coming to blows, Malorie takes charge and commands the others to perform chores rather than mope and brood. Consequently, the most interesting internal development in this section occurs when Malorie decides to lead. She learns to discipline both herself and others in these chapters then moves on to use these same skills to hone her children into new world survivors.

Besides character development, Malerman also employs a literary device akin to a chaptoral pivot. Once Tom and Jules leave with the dogs, the chapter ends in a cliffhanger then Chapter 33 begins with Malorie describing her own journey out of the house with Victor, Jules's dog. Malorie's chapter ends with Victor going mad and killing himself and Malorie comes to the conclusion that animals can go mad as well. With this ending, Malerman almost overtly suggests that the same could happen to the 2 huskies that Tom and Jules use to navigate. Thus, the author yet again builds suspense.

## Discussion Question 1

How do the 3 narratorial timelines comment upon each other?

## Discussion Question 2

In what way does Malorie change in the eyes of the other housemates? How does she take charge in this section?

## Discussion Question 3

Why would Malerman include Chapter 33, in which Malorie goes to the bar, directly after Chapter 32, which ends with Tom and Jules leaving the house?

## Vocabulary

skeptical, facetious, discrepancy, conspiratorial, hysterical, stagnant, examining, tumble, stench, agony, torturous, scorching, saturated, ceaseless, erratically, souvenir, satisfactory, circumstances, banished, ostracized



# Chapters 38 - 43

## Summary

Chapter 38 features a snapshot of Malorie wondering if Gary follows her and the children on the river. In one page, Chapter 39 tells the reader that Don now sleeps in the cellar.

In Chapter 40, Malorie inspects her now full stomach. She and Olympia are 9 months pregnant. From downstairs, Victor growls at the cellar door. Tom and the others decide to enter the cellar. Tom invites Don to spend the night upstairs again and Don begins crying saying he is sorry then agrees to go upstairs. Malorie goes into labour as she climbs the stairs then she falls asleep and dreams of birds.

In Chapter 41, Malorie sees that the birds in the trees along the riverbank are restless. Something agitates them. Malorie is afraid that they will not be able to hear the recorded voice that will indicate the shelter's location over the noise of the birds. Despite her fears, the Boy hears a voice just as the birdsong peaks. The birds go mad and fight in the air above the boat. Dead and dying birds plummet from the sky and strike the desperate trio. The birds war above them as the three clutch their blindfolds. Malorie hears Tom's voice over the din. The recording is the message that Tom left on every single phone he could call. Hearing Tom's voice, Malorie realizes that she must remove her blindfold to see which way they must go. The river splits into 4 tributaries and, to know where the second from the right is, she must use her eyes. The Boy screams to her that something is right next to them. Suddenly the rowboat stops in the middle of the water. In the water, Malorie feels the presence of a creature. Then, the creature tugs at her blindfold.

She screams then Chapter 42 begins with her opening her eyes, but in the house when she is giving birth rather than picking up with the river again. Olympia is already in labour in the attic, the room that Tom calls the safest in the house. Felix and Jules move Malorie to the attic where Olympia, Cheryl, and Tom are. Once she reaches the attic, Malorie feels a moment of peace knowing that her friends are with her. Tom brings the cassette and speakers that Malorie requested just as thunder booms outside. As lightning flashes, she sees Don's features in stark relief as he stands in the corner of the attic. Time passes and she hears Don and the others arguing downstairs as the storm grows in power. Malorie hears the birds shrieking in their cage outside, alerting those inside that something is near. Malorie, delirious with exhaustion, sees Gary, who was hiding in the cellar with Don, standing beside her in the next flash of lightning. Gary reveals that he never closed his eyes to the creatures, he saw them constantly. He tells Malorie that he was in the tent that Tom inspected in the street and that creatures move past the house constantly.

The housemates downstairs scream because Don pulls the curtains down and creatures enter. Just as Olympia gives birth, the attic door breaks and a creature enters.



Olympia sees the creature and her eyes go wide with wonder. Malorie urges Olympia to hand over her baby and, the now insane woman, does. Malorie gives birth to a boy then she cuts her own umbilical chord with a steak knife as Olympia gnaws at her own chord. Malorie, her eyes closed and her hands covering the babies' eyes, hears Gary laugh and say that Olympia hung herself by her own chord. Malorie feels the creature leaning in close to her then Gary, and the creature leave the attic. In the ensuing silence, she hears the telephone ringing. She walks downstairs and speaks to a man named Rick who operates a shelter close to Malorie's home. He directs her to take the river to find them. In the following days, Malorie buries every single housemates' body then waits 4 years before telling Rick that she is coming.

In Chapter 43, Malorie opens her eyes on the river after the Boy tells her that the creature left. The world's beauty stuns her, but then she collects herself and rows towards the shelter. After a ways, Malorie blindfolds herself and the rowboat hits an automatic fence. They wait then a woman named Constance approaches and says she is with Rick. Constance leads them to Tucker, the name of the shelter, where they meet Rick and others who voluntarily blinded themselves after creatures got into the shelter years earlier. Malorie pleads with them not to blind her children, but Rick explains that they don't do that anymore. Malorie and the children take their blindfolds off then she introduces the Boy and Girl, giving them the names Tom and Olympia after the housemates. The novel ends with Malorie remarking that she and her children are now safer and not alone.

## Analysis

Section 5 consists of the novel's final chapters. In this section, the story's rising action, climax, and falling action occur. Malerman continues to build on the foundation of suspense that he laid at the book's start. One can trace the story's pacing by following Malorie's pregnancy. As she gets closer to giving birth, the novel's pace increases. Don becomes more suspicious, the group gets more stressed, and finally Malorie and Olympia go into labor. During their labours, the novel's climax occurs. Subsequently, the book's entirety revolves around the women's pregnancies.

The author overtly indicates that the climax begins in Chapter 40 when he writes, "It is what Malorie will later consider to be the last night in the house." With this statement, Malerman commences his climax. After reading this opening, one knows that a pivotal moment will occur. The discrepancy between Malorie's situation with the children on the river and her circumstances with the other housemates constantly nags at the reader. Malerman purposefully crafts these 2 settings and layers them in such a way that their placement begs the question of how Malorie's situation changed so dramatically from one setting to the next. When one reads Chapter 40's opening, the reader knows that the answer to that question is forthcoming. Not only does Chapter 40 signal the climax, it foreshadows the novel's ending and affects the story's mood.

Chapter 40's initial scene also brings the novel full circle. The story began with Malorie inspecting her stomach after she found out that she was pregnant. Her sister Shannon



then barges in on her and demands that she hear the news about the world's end. When Chapter 40 starts, Malorie is inspecting herself in the mirror and seeing a physically different version of herself. Besides the fact that she is 9 months pregnant, Malorie notices her gaunt frame, her protruding ribs, and her sunken eyes. Seeing these differences, she notes her progress. She has come far and, most importantly, she has survived. In many ways, Malorie's drive to live comes directly from her maternal feelings of protection for her own child and Olympia's child. Malorie's physicality reflects not only her bodily changes, but also her internal development. She develops from the naive and largely self-absorbed young woman she was with Shannon into a hardened woman who can lead just as easily as she can endure the hardships that her new life brings.

At the end of Chapter 40, Malorie hears the birds along the river screeching. Malerman leaves this chapter on a cliffhanger in which the birds begin fighting in the sky, then he moves to Malorie and the housemates along the river. This jump between settings and story lines allows the author to build the novel's action side by side rather than starting and finishing one plotline then doing the same with another. Malerman continues this interwoven thread throughout this section. Chapter 41 ends with Malorie about to open her eyes while on the river. It ends with the words "And, so..." then Chapter 42 begins with "...she does". Since the author gives no indication of which storyline he pursues from chapter to chapter, the reader naturally assumes that this continuation is only one storyline. Instead, Chapter 42 features Malorie opening her eyes after passing out in the house with Tom and the others. She awakes in labor, a painful time in a woman's life. With this jump cut, to use a film term that means an abrupt switch from camera shot to camera shot, Malerman compares the rigors of childbirth to that of opening one's eyes in a world where the odd glance can kill.

During the climax, Malorie and Olympia give birth while Don pulls down the curtains and lets the creatures into the house because Gary convinced Don that the creatures could not harm him. While the women give birth, a storm grows outside. Malorie notes that the storm feels menacing. She believes there is something different about this storm. The author's inclusion of his first comment on the weather in the novel is an example of pathetic fallacy. Pathetic fallacy, a literary device in which nature reflects a character's emotional state, is a contrivance that breaks from Malerman's erstwhile desire to keep his novel as realistic as possible. Throughout the story, Malerman engages in the generic conventions of the horror novel by including scenes of horrible violence. In building a space for suspense and credibility, he attempts to shock the reader out of thinking about the fact that the book is only a story and is inherently made up. The inclusion of a highly artistic device such as pathetic fallacy undermines Malerman's attempt to craft a realistic space. In real life, the weather does not reflect people's emotions, but in the novel's climax, the storm reflects Malorie's emotions.

The final point of analytical discussion for this section is the falling action. In Chapter 43, Malorie and the children reach the relative safety of Tucker where Rick greets them. After a moment of fright in which Malorie believes the residents will try to blind her children and herself, Malorie feels secure and happier that she has reached the shelter. This ending is largely unsatisfactory, but also typical of dystopian literature. Malorie feels safer and more at ease because she is not alone anymore, but her world is still



wretched. She cannot go outside without blindfolding herself and her children will always live in the same building. The moral of the story, if there is one to be had, is that humans have to do the best that they can with what they have. Despite the fact that Malorie's situation is better, the idea that she has done the best that she could is passive. In this final chapter, when Malorie names her children, she finally acknowledges them as people. Before, as Boy and Girl, Tom and Olympia Junior were nothing more than their gender. In naming them, she allows herself to become attached to them.

## Discussion Question 1

Why is Gary able to see the creatures? What allowed him to hide this ability from the housemates?

## Discussion Question 2

How does Olympia act selflessly in her final moments?

## Discussion Question 3

What is the significance in Malorie's naming the children? What do the children's new names tell you about Malorie?

## Vocabulary

cacophony, guttural, horizonless, penetrating, symphonic, grotesque, communal, morph, madcap, lunatic, contraction, menacing, sullen, refuting, silhouettes, kaleidoscopic, stricken, paranoia, delirious, illuminates



# Characters

## Malorie

Malorie is the protagonist in "Bird Box." Through her perspective, the reader gets all of the action in the book, save one chapter which features Tom's perspective. In following Malorie through the Trouble, Malerman spits her story into 3 distinct narratives. In the earliest, she finds out she is pregnant while staying with her sister. Alongside this knowledge, the world discovers something that drives humans mad with bloodlust. Shannon and Malorie cloister themselves in their apartment until one day Shannon kills herself.

Malorie then goes to the Riverbridge house where she meets Tom, Don, and the others. Here, most of the novel's action takes place. Malorie spends the next 6 months of her pregnancy in the house where Olympia and Gary end up staying as well. Gary eventually persuades Don to remove the blinds from the house and open the doors to allow the creatures to enter the home. The birth of Malorie's son and Olympia's daughter takes place the same night that Don opens the blinds and the housemates kill each other.

Only in her early 20's when she got pregnant, she never had a career or finished school. This version of Malorie is a stark contrast to the one that takes her children on a rowboat down the river to find the Tucker Jane School for the Blind. During the trip, Malorie harshly reprimands the children as she paddles along the river. During her troubles on the way to Tucker, she reminisces about her time with the children in the house. These remembrances are the story's third narrative.

During her time at the house, she trained the children constantly. Soon after their births, she began demanding that they listen as best they could to everything she did. She would walk around the house and make specific noises, then return and quiz them. If the children were wrong, she would not breastfeed them. Because of these harsh measures, she considers herself to be a bad mother, but she also rationalizes her behavior by calling it a result of the creatures' effect on the world. All in all, Malorie is a distinct character who progresses and changes from storyline to storyline.

## Tom

Tom is the novel's only other main character. While he remains flat and unchanging, Tom cements the housemates in a way that no other person can. Since the novel focuses heavily on Malorie, Tom is only significant through his relationship to her. After Shannon's death, Malorie is desolate. She is desperate for human contact in a terrifying world that she cannot even see. Her only hope for solace is a 3 month old advertisement in a newspaper.





When she finds the house, Tom and the others accept her, after reservations about her pregnancy. Tom, obviously the leader from the instant he introduces himself and the other housemates, gives Malorie his personal attention. He shows her around the house and then gives her hope. The difference between Tom and the others is not only the fact that he naturally assumes authority, but the way that he hopes and works towards a better future.

Instead of wallowing in self-pity like Don or Cheryl, Tom actively works to improve their situation. He organizes the housemates into chores around the house incessantly and finds projects to complete himself. He and Jules forage out into the new world, blindfolded and horrified in order to improve the group's situation. It is Tom who drinks the potentially creature-contaminated water when the group is dying of thirst and it is Tom who tries to calm Don when he is about to pull the curtains down.

After Tom's death, he becomes a symbol of hope for Malorie. She remembers Tom's voice and face everyday she is alone with the children. During her trial on the river, it is Tom's voice that plays through the Tucker speakers in order to notify Malorie that the shelter is close. Tom's hopeful mentality is infectious with the housemates and remains inspiring even after his death.

## Don

Don is the house pessimist. He arrived at the Shillingham Lane residence just after Tom. He and Tom lived with the house owner, George, for a time then the other members began arriving. Don acts selfishly throughout the story and constantly argues against acts of charity. He argued against Malorie being allowed into the house, did the same for Olympia, and began counting Jules and Tom's rations as his own moments after the two left the house. Gary convinces Don that the creatures are harmless and that anyone can view them without going insane. With this mentality, Don pulls down the blinds and opens the house's doors. He and the other housemates go insane and kill each other.

## Gary

Gary is the house's last addition. He arrives carrying only a briefcase and tells the others that he had to leave his last house because the other housemates were violent. A man named Frank believed that the creatures could not harm them then he exposed himself and the others to the creatures. After convincing Don with the idea that the creatures are harmless, he hides in the house's cellar then reveals himself to Malorie as she gives birth. Malorie realizes that when they kicked Gary out of the house for having Frank's notebook, Don hid him in the cellar and that Frank does not exist at all. It is Gary who pulled the blinds down in his last house.



## Olympia

Olympia is the penultimate housemate to arrive at George's home. Miraculously she is just as pregnant as Malorie. She eventually gives birth to Olympia the younger. Just as the baby arrives, she sees a creature and goes insane. Despite her insanity, she gives Malorie her baby girl then hangs herself by her umbilical cord while Gary watches and laughs.

## Rick

Rick is Malorie's savior and the man who set up the Jane Tucker School for the Blind. He calls the house just after Tom and the other skills each other after seeing a creature. Malorie answers the phone just minutes after giving birth and losing her friends. Rick, who's blind himself, gives Malorie directions to the shelter and welcomes her 4 years after that first phone call.

## Shannon

Malorie's sister Shannon is the second character that the reader encounters. She is loud, energetic, and immediately takes charge of her sister when they find out that Malorie is pregnant. She acts as something of a foil for Malorie who, at the beginning of the story, is introverted and broody. After 3 months of living in an apartment with Malorie, Shannon accidentally sees a creature through a crack in the window and kills herself.

## Boy and Girl, later named Tom and Olympia

The Boy and Girl are Malorie's son and Olympia's daughter. After Olympia and the other housemates die, Malorie becomes the Girl's mother. She trains both the Boy and Girl to focus on their hearing far more than on their sight. While breastfeeding them, Malorie tested them on what they heard and if they could not answer her questions, she did not feed them. When they reach the school for the blind, Malorie introduces the children as Tom and Olympia after the housemates.

## George

George is the man who owns the Shillingham house. He places an advertisement in the paper at the start of the creatures' invasion. George constantly tried to think of ways to outsmart the creatures' power. He finally decides to record 5 hours of the view from the house's front window. When he watches the video tape while chained to a chair, he goes insane and kills himself by pulverizing the veins in his arms.



## Jules

Jules is a staunch supporter of Tom's. He arrives at the house soon after Tom and Don arrive. Jules is kind to Malorie as he is with all the other housemates. He and Tom go on two forages outside the house, both of which are successful. Victor is Jules's dog who, after Jules dies, becomes Malorie's only companion when she lives with the children.

## Cheryl

Cheryl is the first woman of the house. She is staunchly against allowing Malorie to enter the house when she sees that Malorie is pregnant. After Malorie breaks down crying, Cheryl relents and the group allows Malorie to stay. Cheryl dies along with the others when Don opens the doors to the creatures.

## Felix

Felix is the quietest male of the house. He does his chores like everyone else, but one day he goes to well and feels as if creatures are at the bottom in the water. He tells the group of this revelation, then they stop drinking the well water. As they begin dying of thirst, Tom drinks the water and declares it fit for consumption.

# Symbols and Symbolism

## Creatures

The creatures affect everything in Malorie's world. Each character behaves differently because they exist. Some hide from the creatures, while others give into their power, and others still remain unaffected by their power. The creatures affect humans when a person lays eyes upon them. Once that happens, the affected human kills those around them and then commits suicide. In thinking about the way that the creatures affect humans, one begins to understand that they are more than animals. The creatures are in fact symbols for something more than what their physical bodies are. Since the creatures affect humans when a person sees them, they represent that which humans cannot fathom. They are the embodiment of the ugly truths that people prefer not to acknowledge. They represent that which humans cannot understand.

## Blindfolds

Whenever Malorie or the housemates leave their shelter, they wear blindfolds. The blindfolds are these characters' only protection against the creatures' power. Since the creatures kill people through sight, there are two ways to protect oneself. The first is to blindfold oneself while the second is far more severe. Many characters in *Bird Box* blind themselves in order to avoid ever being able to look upon a creature. While Malorie and the others consider blinding themselves, none of them can bring themselves to do it. On the other hand, Rick and many of the others who live at the Jane Tucker School mutilated their eyes and made themselves blind. Malorie attempts to blind the children with paint thinner, but cannot. The difference between these two methods of protection is inherently symbolic. Malorie and the children use blindfolds on the river even though being blind would be safer. Despite this fact, Malorie and the children do not blind themselves because that is the ultimate solution. By using blindfolds, they acknowledge the idea that one day, the world might be better and safer. In this way, the blindfolds represent hope.

## Gary's Notebook

When Gary first enters the house, he tells the others a story of his last residence. He tells Malorie and the others that his last home had a man named Frank in it who eventually tore down the home's blinds and opened the doors to let the creatures inside. In speaking about Frank, Gary mentions his ideology. He says that Frank believed that creatures only harmed those who thought that they could be harmed. Gary tells them that Frank wrote his ideas down in a notebook he kept with him at all times. Once the group begins to fracture in the wake of Gary's arrival, Malorie sneaks into Gary's room and finds what is supposedly Frank's notebook. She realizes that Frank does not exist at all and that Gary is the one who let the creatures into his last house. The notebook is



the symbolic evidence of Gary's deception. It is this item that is the watershed moment that kickstarts the story's climax.

## Telephone Book

Tom funnels his ambition and desire for the house to return to normalcy into the pursuit for a telephone book. After his daughter kills herself, Tom seeks to return life to the way it was before the creatures existed. The most particular object that he pursues is a telephone book. Since the house has power and a functioning telephone line, when he eventually gets this book he is able to make calls to other houses that have a functioning telephone line. On the night of the children's birth and the attack of the creatures, the phone rings. Malorie answers it to hear of a shelter down the river that had received a call from a man named Tom. The telephone book represents not only the fulfillment of Tom's desire and protection, but also a way of connecting with others. With the book, the housemates can speak to others and regain their sense of normalcy and community.

## Bird Box

After Jules and Tom's second foray outside the house, they return with 2 dogs and a bird cage filled with canaries that sing whenever something comes near them. Tom sees the birds as another step towards improving their situation and gaining control over the power of the creatures. With the bird box, Tom and the others have an alarm system in case any creatures approach the house. On the climactic night in which all the housemates besides Malorie die, the birds do function as an alarm system, but Tom and the others cannot react because Olympia and Malorie are giving birth. The housemates and the birds in the box are metaphorically linked. The birds do not have control over their situation. They are confined to a pen in which they pass all of their time and, presumably, long to be free. In the same way, the housemates cannot control the creatures and are stuck within their house, without a hope of escaping. In this light, the birds and their box are an important symbol, so important that Malerman named his novel after it, that reflects the housemates' situation.

## Canned Goods

The canned goods are the group's source of food. Since they cannot leave the house except when they are blinded, they have only one way to eat. Each member who arrives at the house shortens the food supply proportionally. Don, the house's pessimist, focuses on how much food they all have to the point where he constantly urges the others to refuse entry to people who knock on the door. Because of his obsession with survival, Don disregards feelings like compassion and sympathy. The canned goods supply becomes a thing of constant worry for all of the characters, but most especially Don, who allows the idea of starvation to inform his every action.



## The Well

The house's well is also a symbol of the group's desperation and dependence. To provide for themselves, they must eat the rationed canned goods and pull water from the well outside the house. This dependence marks their situation by reminding the characters each day just how fragile their existence is. When Felix goes out to pull water from the well one day, he believes he hears a creature down in the well. After telling the group about this event, they begin to die of thirst because no one wishes to drink from the well. Eventually Tom drinks the water and finds that it is uncontaminated. This episode reveals the dependence that haunts the housemates situation and speaks to the significance of the well as more than a physical object.

## Girl's Puzzles

The Girl's puzzles are her only semblance of normality. She is born into a harsh world in which her mother does not breastfeed her if she is not able to identify certain sounds around the house. In an attempt to compensate for the Girl's situation, Malorie gives her little iron puzzles. The Girl brings these puzzles with her on the rowboat along with a set of clothes, but nothing more. The little puzzles are a symbol of normality.

## Bike Horns

After their first trip outside the house, Tom and Jules find bike horns that they give to the others. The bike horns allow them to do chores outside the house without losing one and other. After the birth of the children and the death of the housemates, Malorie plays with the children using the bike horns. The Boy and the Girl become attached to the toys that come to represent a hope of normalcy in a sea of troubles.

## Pregnancy Test

At the start of Bird Box, Malorie and her sister Shannon go to the pharmacy and buy a pregnancy test for Malorie. Terrified for the result, Malorie locks herself in the bathroom and finds out that she is pregnant. While she learns the monument news that she is pregnant, Shannon instead focuses on the world news about the creatures and the death in the world. Just as Malorie learns that she will bring life into the world, Shannon learns of the death that the creatures bring into the world. The pregnancy test becomes a symbol that exacerbates the creature's effect on the world at the same time that it highlights Malorie's fragile position.



## Settings

### **273 Shillingham Lane, Riverbridge: October, 4 years after Birth**

Malorie and the 2 children, both 4 years old, live in a house by themselves. This first setting in the novel's frame. Malorie and the children leave the house shortly after this storyline begins and begin to travel down the river towards the School for the Blind. The Shillingham Lane house is a suburb of Detroit in Michigan. This first setting is desolate. There are no other characters because there is no one around the house. It is here that Malerman begins the novel's journey into horror and the idea of isolation.

### **Rental Home, Westcourt: Months 1 - 3 of Pregnancy**

Malorie and Shannon stay in a modest rental home for the first 3 months of the creatures' invasion. The creatures invade at the same time that Malorie's pregnancy starts. Consequently, the first 3 months of her pregnancy are spent in the rental home with only her sister for company. The pair do not see anyone else and do not leave the house once. This is also the apartment in which Shannon kills herself in the bathroom after accidentally seeing a creature outside. After the death of her sister, Malorie decides to leave the apartment.

### **273 Shillingham Lane, Riverbridge: Months 3 - 9 of Pregnancy**

After Shannon kills herself, Malorie answers an ad placed in the paper which describes a safe house in the town over from Malorie's apartment. Malorie drives, largely blindfolded, to the Shillingham Lane house and the housemates there let her in after voting. After learning that she is 3 months pregnant, they hesitate to let her inside, but then relent. Malorie spends the next 6 months with the others until Gary and Don allow the creatures inside and all the residents except Malorie die. It is here that the novel's main action occurs and the bulk of the novel's characters are portrayed.

### **The River: 4 Years After Pregnancy**

The novel's third major storyline takes place along the river behind the Shillingham house. After receiving a phone call from Rick, Malorie decides to take the children down the river and to Rick's shelter. The river is a constant trial for Malorie who paddles the entire way blindfolded while the children listen for signs of danger. A man who sees a creature tries to take their blindfolds off, a pack of deranged wolves attacks Malorie and injures her shoulder, and two flocks of birds attack each other in the air above the boat. After these difficulties, Malorie and the children reach the shelter.



## **Jane Tucker School for the Blind: Riverbridge shelter**

After all the struggles of the novel, Malorie and the children finally reach the shelter and its safety. Malerman's story takes place here for the shortest and most peaceful time. All the tension in the novel to this point releases and both Malorie and the reader are able to relax for almost the first time in the novel. The School for the Blind is a refuge, founded by Rick, in which a little over 100 people live and work. There are sustainable crops, plenty of beds, and even a school. Presumably, Malorie and the children spend much if not the rest of their lives here after the novel ends.





# Themes and Motifs

## Garrison Mentality and Isolation

The garrison mentality, originally coined by literary critic Northrop Frye, describes the sense of claustrophobia and isolation that exists in an army outpost in the wilderness. While Malerman does not consciously participate in Frye's literary tradition, "Bird Box" is an archetypal example of the garrison mentality. Characters who suffer from the garrison mentality fear the oppressive vastness of their habitat. In order to protect themselves, people build walls against this vastness and the danger that it represents. In walling the danger out, they also wall themselves in.

The house on Shillingham Lane is a type of garrison. Instead of an army barracks, the house is a bastion against the oppressive power of the creatures who haunt the world. The housemates lock themselves in, bar the doors, shutter the windows, and leave only out of necessity. Consequently, they suffer from a sense of isolation due to the vastness of the now empty world in which they live.

While the house gives the characters a sense of security and protection from the creatures and the empty and dangerous open world they inhabit, it also cages them. As the title suggests, they are like birds in a box. Malerman openly agrees with this idea of the caged human seeking solace in enclosed spaces. He continually compares the housemates to the birds that Tom and Jules find on their second foraging mission outside the house.

Just like the birds, the housemates are stuck together and stuck in a tight space with no space to roam free. This isolated mentality forces the housemates to encounter each other constantly. As a result, the strained relationships between characters causes the characters' situation to worsen. While before the creatures arrival, the world was bustling and full of people, now the house is a sole dot of humanity in a wasteland of rotting houses and bodies.

## Horror

Another theme of the story is a generic convention. "Bird Box" is a horror story. It features scenes in which characters endure horrible circumstances and outcomes are intended to shock the reader. When Tom tells Malorie that he used to have a daughter, but then she saw a creature and slit her wrists with his razor, that is an instance of a moment intended to disgust the reader.

The horror story also contains elements that not only frighten the reader but act as a metaphor for society as a whole. In the case of "Bird Box," the creatures are the story's central menace. Although the characters never encounter a single creature, the novel focuses on these monsters. Everything that the housemates do derives from their fear



of the creatures. They hoard food in their basement, they hardly ever leave the house, and they are horrified to open their eyes.

In addition, the supernatural plays into the horror novel. The creatures are not a thing of reality. They appear suddenly and quickly decimate the human population. When a person views them, that person goes insane, kills anyone around them, and then kills themselves. Consequently, *Bird Box* engages in the horror novel's tradition of the inclusion of the supernatural.

In an effort to combat the natural feeling of detachment and disbelief that comes along with the inclusion of a supernatural element, Malerman combines the horror novel's proclivity for gore and violence with supernatural elements. The creatures, unwittingly or not, murder humans who look at them. In this way, the author embraces the generic conventions of the horror novel.

## Seeming and Deception

Malerman plays with the idea of deception and the discrepancy between what seems to be true and what actually is true. After the creatures arrive, the world changes. People stop using their eyes, they stop leaving their houses, and they become distrustful of each other. In this altered world, lies and truths become muddled and the distinction between a friend and an enemy blurs.

The biggest example of seeming versus believing is the character who ultimately destroys the home, Gary. Gary arrives at the house just after Tom and Jules make their first voyage outside. The gang votes on whether or not to allow Gary into the house. The vote splits and then Malorie must decide his fate. She agrees to let him in and then quickly regrets her decision because Gary divides the house into factions.

Gary seems to be friendly. He goes out of his way to be polite and to interact with all the housemates in order to persuade them of his gentility. Malorie notices that he seems to perform. The way he gestures and speaks seems theatrical and put on. Because of her growing suspicion that he is lying or tricking the group somehow, she sneaks into his room and reads his notebook.

Eventually, the house devolves into a cesspit of deception. Gary, the ultimate liar, pretends to be kind while plotting to let the creatures into the house. Malorie, once she sneaks into Gary's room, lies to him when he asks her if she has something on her mind. After the housemates vote to kick Gary out, Don then deceives them by hiding Gary in the cellar. Because of Gary's presence and his introduction of deceit, the author can play with the idea of humans lying to each other. Throughout "*Bird Box*," what seems to be true is almost certainly not true and what appears false or unbelievable, may be true.



## Blindness

The creatures have the power to make humans go insane. All a person needs to do is look at one and they lose their mind. The only protection against the creatures' power is blindness. In a novel where the characters cannot trust their eyes or even use them, blindness becomes an overarching theme. The unknown can ruin one's mind just as easily as knowing can destroy. In other words, not being able to see is just as dangerous as seeing.

Knowing that the only way that creatures can affect you is through the eyes, some character voluntarily blind themselves. When Malorie arrives at the Jane Tucker School for the Blind, she notices that many of the inhabitants are blind. Rick, the leader of the colony, has horrible scars on his eyes. When she sees this mutilation, she screams and attempts to protect her children whom she believes are in danger of being blinded.

The idea of voluntarily blinding oneself becomes a notion that haunts Malorie in her early days with the children. Don tells her and Olympia that their children would be better off they blinded them the second they came out of the womb. Olympia dismisses the idea, but Malorie toys with it. When the Boy and the Girl, later named Tom and Olympia, are around 1 month old, Malorie tries to force herself to blind the children with paint remover.

Ultimately, blindness becomes a metaphor for something greater than lack of sight. Malerman poses the questions about what it means to not be able to see, but he also brings the idea of the unknown to a level of metaphorical significance. When the characters blindfold themselves, what are they actually doing? Besides protecting themselves from the creatures, they are depriving themselves of the world. They only see the inside of one building because they cannot see when they are outside.

## Human Contact and Survival

As the population dies, human contact becomes scarce. Because people kill each other and then themselves after seeing the creatures, not only are there fewer people, but the possibility of meeting another person is dangerous. When Malorie encounters the man on the river, she does not think for a second that the man might help them or that he might be kind. Instead, she yells at the children to keep their blindfolds on, then begs the man to leave them alone.

After Shannon's death, Malorie answers the advertisement that George put in the paper because she needs to be around others despite the danger that it poses. The apartment that she and Shannon rented had enough food for Malorie to last for a while, but simply surviving is not enough. When Malorie finds the house, she breaks down and sobs when Tom and the others let her inside.

Similarly, when Gary enters the house, he says that when Malorie touched his face while blindfolded, he almost cried. Since Gary can only pretend to be sane like the rest



of the housemates, he guesses at what most people would feel. In this case, he is correct in his guess. Each and every other housemate came to the home not only in search of food, but in search of companionship.

Since the post-apocalyptic world is dangerous, people begin to place a larger importance on survival than companionship. Despite the desperate need to survive, the humans who survive the initial wave of deaths realize that they must have something besides food and water. Tom lost his daughter, then searched for the house. Olympia lost her husband, then found the housemates. Malorie's sister killed herself so she answered the advertisement in the paper.

Each of these cases reveals the desire for something more than sustenance. The author makes human contact a central theme in the motivation of his characters. They act out of a need for connection to something more than themselves. Survival and companionship become nearly synonymous because each character needs the others just as much as they need water and food. For instance, even though Don constantly argues with the others, he does not leave and he does not seclude himself until he finds a connection with Gary. Once he does so, he removes himself from the others and lives in the cellar with Gary. In "Bird Box," human contact and survival go hand in hand.



# Styles

## Point of View

Malerman uses closely focused third person to tell the tale of Malorie in "Bird Box." He uses the third person pronoun she when referring to Malorie, but he focuses almost exclusively upon her and even gives Malorie's internal thoughts. From the novel's first chapter, Malorie is the reader's first point of contact and it is her perspective that informs the reader's perception of events.

The close third person that Malerman employs is typical of many fictional tales and functions in much the same way as other novels of the same point of view operate. Malorie's fears, hopes, and thoughts both inform and skew the way that actions are presented to the reader. Rather than an omniscient third person perspective, Malerman limits the reader to Malorie in order to force an attachment between reader and character. He also employs this enforced claustrophobia of perspective in order to develop the reader's sense of suspense and tension.

Rather than being able to distance oneself from Malorie's plight, the reader must sit upon her shoulder throughout the terrors she endures. In this way, the reader both bonds with the reader and feels the novel's action much more intensely than if Malerman used a distanced or omniscient third person perspective. The author's choice to focus this closely on Malorie is not only a trope of most modern novels, but also a convention of the horror genre in which the novel operates.

As in all stories that begin with a specific perspective, the importance of point of view is enforced through the deviation from that point of view. In other words, exceptions define and enforce the rule. For instance, the point of view changes for one chapter in the novel. Throughout Chapter 22, the only chapter in the novel in which the perspective shifts, the reader follows Tom on his trip outside the house with Jules. On this trip, Malerman employs the same techniques to produce horror and revulsion in the reader that he does for all the other chapters that follow Malorie. In switching perspective, the reader is able to see the differences between Tom and Malorie and the similarity of style from section to section.

## Language and Meaning

Since "Bird Box" is a horror novel intended for adults, the language switches between advanced passages in which the language is sophisticated and then passages with simple, rapid bits of dialogue. With both dialogue and narration in mind, one can analyze the entire linguistic style of the author.

Throughout his narration, Malerman attempts to convince the reader of the impossibility of his characters' situation. When describing events through Malorie's eyes, and Tom's eyes for Chapter 22, he wields language as a means of shocking and horrifying the

reader. Rather than simply describing events, Malerman tries to employ words that intend to illicit an emotional response from the reader.

In further considering Bird Box's narratorial language, Malorie herself becomes more important. As the book's focal point, Malorie acts as both an anchor for the novel's action and as something of an inhibitor. Malorie herself is, in the first arc of the story, easily horrified and overwhelmed. Since the author forces the reader to consider Malorie's perspective as their own, Malorie's language becomes important.

The way in which Malorie speaks and her reaction to events reveal her age. When the novel begins, she is in her early 20's. Because of her young age, she does not use elevated language when she speaks. Instead, she employs contractions and sentence fragments, especially when she is overwhelmed. Conversely, Gary, the character closest to being the novel's villain, speaks in highly eloquent terms and flowery phrases. Where Malorie speaks simply and directly, Gary obfuscates and his words hide his meaning. Malorie even points out that Gary speaks like an actor. This difference in language gives the reader insight into the characters' minds and their hidden intentions.

## Structure

The structure in "Bird Box" is a complex interweaving of 3 major storylines. In tracking the novel chronologically, the first storyline features Malorie at the beginning of her pregnancy and the start of the creatures' attack. In this section, Malorie herself is the novel's focus. The author delves into her internal ideas about being pregnant at such a young age and then tracks the idea of the creatures as a secondary theme. This storyline finishes when Malorie finally reaches the house on Shillingham Lane.

The second storyline tracks Malorie's time in the Shillingham Lane house with the housemates. In this storyline, she Malorie changes and becomes more coldhearted. This change reflects itself in the novel's mood. The author's tone becomes more grating and difficult while Malorie's interiority develops as well. In this way, the second of the 3 major storylines is a change in the novel's structure that affects the tone and mood of the narrative.

In the third major storyline, Malorie and the children traverse the river. While wading down these treacherous waters in a simple rowboat, the 3 endure various trials that press the limits of Malorie's capacity to endure. In this section, Malerman comments upon the other 2 storylines and diverges from the style he employs in the other 2 sections.

All in all, these three narratives come together to form a cohesive and comprehensive story that allows Malerman to play with the complexities of storytelling. Namely, he weaves these 3 storylines together in a way in which each section comments on the others. In commenting upon one and other, the individual parts become more than they would be separately. Consequently, Bird Box's overall structure is complex and allows

each section to comment upon the others in a manner that strengthens the overall novel.



## Quotes

You are saving their lives for a life not worth living.

-- Malorie (chapter 1 paragraph 17)

**Importance:** These words of internal thought from Malorie reveal the deeply troubling struggle that marks her life. Here, she struggles with the purpose of her existence and thinks of the horrors her children will have to endure. As in the entirety of the novel, Malerman attempts to develop character alongside mood in order to build a feeling of both suspense and near hopelessness.

The chicken wire...has served as armor, protecting the children not from what could see them, but from what they could see.

-- Narrator (chapter 1 paragraph 32)

**Importance:** When Malorie gives the reader this insight into the children's situation she also displays her own feeling of helplessness. Malerman reverses the usual idea of danger by noting that what the children can see is what should scare them. No longer is the monster under the bed the fear, but the monster that they might accidentally see.

Malorie comprehends fully that, at last, the journey out has begun.

-- Narrator (chapter 1 paragraph 44)

**Importance:** Here, Malerman sets up the frame narrative that will inform the rest of the novel. The storyline in which Malorie and the 2 children travel down the river inserts itself into the other 2 narratives throughout the novel. Malorie's voyage on the rowboat marks the beginning of the novel's major arc and introduces the idea of the odyssey, the extended trip which includes trials that test the will of the protagonist.

Shannon's blond hair betrays their mother's Finnish roots. Malorie looks more like her father: strong, deep-set eyes and the smoot fair skin of a northerner.

-- Narrator (chapter 2 paragraph 9)

**Importance:** This statement reveals the difference between Malorie and Shannon. While the two are siblings, their physical appearances differ in ways that comment upon their internal differences. Shannon, light haired, is energetic and bright. On the other hand, the somber and moody Malorie has dark hair. This quote highlights the dichotomy between the sisters.

How far can a person hear?

-- Malorie (chapter 3 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** While rowing down the river, Malorie worries that the training she has given the children will not be enough to help them survive the voyage. While Malerman includes these words in order to cultivate suspense, it also displays Malorie's





dependence upon the children and the reversal of the traditional parent-to-child hierarchy.

Cracks, Malorie thought then. Showing even in the skeptics.  
-- Malorie (chapter 5 paragraph 3)

**Importance:** This internal thought, that the author gives the reader in italics, is the instance in which the young and pregnant Malorie at the beginning of the creatures' invasion finally realizes that the situation is grave. While she and Shannon cloistered themselves in their apartment, Malorie was mainly concerned about her pregnancy and the creatures were secondary.

Well don't let it be. It's just one of the old-world fears, carrying over...the fear of the cellar.  
-- Tom (chapter 8 paragraph 22)

**Importance:** When Tom says these words to Malorie when she arrives at the house for the first time, he unwittingly spells his end. Tom dismisses the cellar as a silly fear, but it is in the cellar that Don eventually spends all of his time and hides Gary. Tom also notes the differences between the old world and the new. He is the first character to begin thinking that the world in which they live is radically different from the old one.

They'll eventually get us, Don said. There's not reason to think otherwise. It's the end of times, people.  
-- Don (chapter 20 paragraph 21)

**Importance:** Although Don is the house pessimist, his words are not necessarily empty of meaning. Eventually, his words prove prophetic because the creatures do eventually get them as Don predicts. Ironically, he is the ultimate reason that the creatures get them because he is the one who lets them into the house.

You oughta blind those babies the second they come out.  
-- Don (chapter 20 paragraph 5)

**Importance:** Again, Don spews brooding, depressing words, but yet again these words are important. When Malorie begins raising the children by herself, Don's words plague her every moment until she eventually decides to take his advice and blind the children. Just before she blinds them with paint thinner, she pulls back and breaks down crying. These words are those of a defeatist who cannot hope for a better future.

You guys are going to get us killed one day.  
-- Don (chapter 21 paragraph 12)

**Importance:** Don says that the others will be the death of him, but the final truth is that Don brings death upon not only himself, but also the other housemates, save Malorie. While these words are ironic, Don is also right because it is the housemates' urge to



open the door to strangers that eventually allows Gary into the house. Gary then poisons Don's mind with his theory about the creatures.

Like war veterans coming home, Malorie thinks. From a trip around the block.  
-- Malorie (chapter 21)

**Importance:** When Tom and Jules finally come back from their first trip, they return haggard and relieved. Malorie's remark emphasizes the group's impossible situation and gives the reader an example of Malerman's dark and haunting humor. If a trip around the block is a war, then the characters live in a constant, silent battle against the world which they can never win.

A divide...is growing.  
-- Malorie (chapter 27 paragraph 57)

**Importance:** After Gary's arrival, the group splits and fractures. Here, Malorie notes this difference in the house's dynamic. Like with Gary's arrival, the novel divides itself into distinct sections in which events mark major turns in the narrative. The invasion of the creatures, Malorie's pregnancy, and the introduction of Gary are all examples of events that change the novel in major ways and affect the course of the story.