

# **The Forest of Hands and Teeth Study Guide**

**The Forest of Hands and Teeth by Carrie Ryan**

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## Plot Summary

"The Forest of Hands and Teeth" is a young adult novel by Carrie Ryan, which involves the efforts of the teenaged Mary and a handful of companions to escape the undead Unconsecrated, which prowl the Forest of Hands and Teeth.

When the novel begins, Mary lives a simple life in the village that is enclosed by the Forest, which is in turn, kept out by a fence. Guardians act as soldiers and also repair the fence. Mary has grown up listening to stories of the ocean, told by her mother. A few months before the novel begins, Mary's father went out into the Forest, never to return. Mary now awaits one of two futures: either she will be married, or she will be brought to the Sisterhood, a group that controls the village, its laws, and people. The Sisterhood praise God for allowing their village to continue to thrive despite the increasing number of Unconsecrated undead that roam the Forest. Mary's mother is ultimately killed by the Unconsecrated while looking among them at the fence for her disappeared husband. Mary's brother, Jed, is enraged by this, and sends her to the Sisterhood. At the Sisterhood, Mary is proposed to by Harry, whose sister has married Jed, and whose younger brother, Travis, is engaged to Mary's best friend, Cassandra. But Mary is in love with Travis. Mary consents to Harry's proposal, ultimately hoping she and Travis can find a way to be together.

However, the arrival of a stranger, an Outsider named Gabrielle, who is thrown to the Unconsecrated and becomes one herself, paves the way for the breaching of the fences. Gabrielle's Unconsecrated form leads the way, and Mary, Jed, his wife, Beth, and Travis, Harry, and Cassie escape the village, along with Mary's dog, Argos, and a little boy named Jacob. Beth is later killed as she is infected. They head out into the woods, along a path protected by fences. They come across the town from which Gabrielle had come, which has been overrun. While escaping that village, Travis is killed helping the others escape. At last, they come to a gate which leads out into the woods. From there, Mary makes a run for it, only to be chased by the Unconsecrated. Jed saves Mary's life, only to disappear among the Unconsecrated. Mary falls into the water of a river, and when she wakes up, a man is hacking off the heads of the undead. He explains that he lives in the lighthouse up the shore, and his job is to kill the undead to keep them out of the nearby town. Mary realizes that she is at the ocean.



# Chapters 1 - 18

## Chapters 1 - 18 Summary

In Chapter 1, Mary remembers her mother telling her about the ocean, and remembers a photograph of her grandmother standing in the water. Mary wonders what that kind of a world would be like, without the Forest of Hands and Teeth and the Unconsecrated. Mary's father has gone off into the Forest, and never come back. Mary's brother, Jed, is a Guardian patrolman, who guards the fence that keeps the Forest and the Unconsecrated beings away from the village. Mary and Jed's mother believes that her husband will one day come back, but Mary and Jed believe their father has become one of the Unconsecrated. Their mother goes to the fence daily to look among the Unconsecrated for her husband. Mary always goes with her, fearing she might do something crazy. Jed's wife's brother, Harry, is Mary's age, and often visits with her.

Harry asks Mary if she will attend the Harvest Celebration with him - a time during which marriage engagements are announced. Love has nothing to do with marriage in the village, but commitment is everything. Mary hopes for love, and wants to win over Harry's younger brother, Travis, but Travis is attending the Harvest Celebration with Cassandra, Mary's best friend. Just as Harry is about to kiss Mary, a siren goes off. The siren means the fences have been breached. The procedure calls for ascending to platforms stationed in and around the village, and pulling the ladders up. Mary goes to the Cathedral, where she learns that someone has been grabbed through the fence by one of the Unconsecrated. Members of the Sisterhood surround Mary's mother. Mary's mother will have to options, according to the Guild -the most elite Guardians. She will either be killed or pushed through the fence to join the other Unconsecrated.

In Chapter 2, Mary's mother has chosen to join the Unconsecrated, since she is now of the Infected, and Jed has been summoned back from his patrols. He won't be home for at least a day. Mary is given the ability to stay near her mother while her mother turns, but if Mary is bitten, she is to be put to death at once. Cassandra brings Mary dinner and eats with her, and Mary asks Cassandra if she believes in the ocean, if she thinks it's out there, somewhere. Cassandra cannot imagine a place free of the Unconsecrated. Mary's mother's changing into an Unconsecrated -her Return -means that Mary now stops believing in God. Mary's mother is then pushed through the gates, which are then closed behind her. When people die, they return as the Unconsecrated -and Mary wants to know why. Jed returns a short while later.

In Chapter 3 , the Sisters bring Mary to the Cathedral, where they bathe her in holy water and pray and chant for her. Sister Tabitha tells Mary it is better if she stays in the Cathedral for the night. Mary spends a week at the Cathedral, and Jed doesn't visit her. Mary wonders if Jed blames her for their mother's death, because Mary was not at the fence with her mother. At home, Jed confronts Mary, demanding to know why she let their mother go alone to the fence. Mary says it was her choice. As a Guardian, Jed is tasked with keeping out the Unconsecrated, mending the fence, and protecting the



village. He is also assigned to kill the Unconsecrated, and he knows he will now be forced to kill his own mother, that he can't simply go by and see her without ending her horrible existence. Jed also reveals to Mary that she will be joining the Sisterhood, because Jed does not want to watch out for her, and because Harry has not spoken for her. Jed also reveals that his wife, Beth, has lost their child.

Mary is sent to the Cathedral, but she spends time walking around the village. She knows the Cathedral predates the Return, but most of history has been lost. Beyond the village are old paths, but to where they go, nobody remembers or knows.

In Chapter 4, Mary returns to the Cathedral. Sister Tabitha welcomes Mary. She explains to Mary that long ago, the Forest used to be fields of grapes, and the Cathedral was once a plantation's stone winery house. Mary is brought down to the tunnel beneath the Cathedral. Mary wonders why these things have been kept secret. Mary is brought up through the tunnel to a small enclosure in the Forest outside the village, where the Unconsecrated surround her. Mary is terrified, and Sister Tabitha explains that entering the Sisterhood is not to be taken lightly, and that there is a huge difference between them and the Unconsecrated. Mary chooses to join, and is given the Scripture, which she must read five times to begin earning privileges. The winter comes on. Mary reads less and less, and thinks more and more. One day, shouts and screams echo down the hall, and Mary wonders who the newest patient of the Sisterhood is.

In Chapter 5, Mary is given the task of tending to the patient. The patient is Travis. He has been severely injured, and he asks if Mary can come and pray for him, and Sister Tabitha agrees to this, but then sends Mary back to her studies. Mary sees Travis as more of a man than a boy now. Mary tells Travis about the oceans, since she doesn't want to pray for him to a God in which she does not believe, and she realizes she is in love with Travis. Mary knows she will never be a true servant of God, or a true Sister, because she loves Travis too much.

In Chapter 6, one day, Cassandra and Harry come to visit Travis. Cassandra is happy to see Mary. Travis is happy to see Cassandra, and Mary is saddened by this. Mary wonders why Harry did not speak for her for marriage. She also wonders how Travis broke his leg. But she cannot speak, as is part of her vow. Sister Tabitha explains that it was Jed who brought in Travis, that he was dragging himself through the fields, unable to speak of his injuries or what had happened. Cassandra asks if she can return to pray with Mary, and Sister Tabitha allows this. With Mary's completion of reading the Scripture five times, she is given the privilege to speak. One day, Harry comes to visit without Cass, and Harry tells Mary she loves Travis. Mary responds that Harry did not speak for her, and he apologizes, and leaves. Mary begins crying, for everything that has happened to her and those she loves.

In Chapter 7, over the next weeks, Mary begins the next part of her studies, from learning how to make candles to cleaning and cooking. She is not allowed to go outside the Cathedral, and she tries to hide whenever Cass comes to visit, unable to handle the fact that Travis has chosen Cass over her. Mary sneaks out at night to go and be with Travis. She holds his hands, and her heart races. She does this for the next week. One



night, Sister Tabitha comes in to check on Travis, and Travis hides Mary under the blankets. Outside, Mary hears someone tell someone else that they will not be told until the time is right. Travis's door has been locked, so Mary will have to leave by going outside. She heads through the cemetery, As she does so, she realizes she is following the footsteps of someone else -an Outsider, it seems. The Sisters are keeping it quiet. Mary knows she is not supposed to know. Mary realizes that a world beyond the village exists, and she must get to the Outside, to the ocean.

In Chapter 8, three days pass, but the Sisters say nothing about the Outsider. Travis has also been moved. Sister Tabitha explains to Mary that the Unconsecrated were originally people who tried to cheat death, and break God's will, and that their time as the Unconsecrated is God's retribution, and penance for the living. Mary realizes that the Sisters have many secrets, and that she will never be trusted enough to learn these secrets, and that her life will never be her own. Sister Tabitha tells Mary not to ask questions, to not tempt God's wrath, because that is how the village and its expanding population has managed to survive -by not crossing God. She explains that before the Return, people were cruel to each other, that there were wars and selfish behavior and greed, and people starved and were kept out in the cold. But the village means everyone is loved and cared for, while the rest of humanity perished because of itself against the Unconsecrated. The rest of the village lives in happy ignorance of these things. Sister Tabitha gives Mary the privilege of leaving the Cathedral, then, and Mary heads to bed. But then a knock comes at her door. It is a girl, named Gabrielle, who says she has come through the gate, and Mary explains that Gabrielle is in the Cathedral. Mary goes outside to look through the window, and sees that Gabrielle looks very much like her, except taller. Gabrielle's appearance means there is a world beyond the village.

In Chapter 9, Mary is determined to find a way to speak to Gabrielle. One day, Mary is called into Sister Tabitha's office, where Harry is waiting. Harry has spoken for her. They will marry in the spring if Mary accepts. Mary has no choice. She later speaks to Cassandra, who admits she has fallen in love with Harry, and that the arrangement with Travis was not one of love. Cassandra doesn't want Mary to break Harry's heart, so that is why she is going along with things. That is how much she loves him, and because it is right for the village. Mary continues to live at the Cathedral, because Beth is pregnant again, and Jed doesn't want anything to disturb Beth's pregnancy. Mary uses the time to search around the Cathedral for Gabrielle, but she cannot find her anywhere.

In Chapter 10, spring comes to the village, and with it, marriages and baptisms. Only two marriages are taking place -that of Travis and Cass, and Harry and Mary. Mary is heartbroken to see Travis, now fully recovered and healthy, prepared to wed Cass. She knows she will never have him again. After the week of pre-marriage ceremonies, Mary goes to sit on the tallest hill by herself, and Travis is there. They cuddle up together. Travis tells her that life in the village is not enough, that there must be something more out there in the world. But down below, Mary notices one of the Unconsecrated is different -faster, more agile, more angry. It is Gabrielle. Despite the horror of seeing Gabrielle there, Mary is ready to throw everything away for Travis. She and Travis even kiss. Mary then goes to get the Guardians, to tell them about Gabrielle.



In Chapter 11, while the Guardians keep an eye out for Gabrielle, Mary wonders when Travis will come for her. Harry, who is apprenticing to the Guardians, tells Mary that they refer to Gabrielle as "The Fast One". The villagers are frightened by her, but Sister Tabitha says that fast Unconsecrated are not new, it's just that the village has never been troubled by one before. Mary wonders how it was that Gabrielle could have come to be turned into an Unconsecrated. Mary goes exploring the cellar, in the rooms that once held wine. She goes looking for the secret tunnels, and finds her way in. She comes to a door, and is able to open it, and the rush of air and the darkness terrify her, and she reflects on the failure of childhood dreams and the fear of the unknown. And then she enters.

In Chapter 12, the room into which Mary enters is small, and resembles any dorm upstairs. Mary finds a Scripture with handwriting in the margins, talking about sending a girl to the Unconsecrated to see how long she lasts. Gabrielle's name appears at the end of a list of names. Mary leaves for the night, promising to return. The next morning, she hopes that Travis will claim her before the final marriage ceremony -the Binding -that night. She spends time in the cottage that will become her new home with Harry, and Sister Tabitha comes to visit her. She tells Mary that her mother had lost children before her.

In Chapter 13, Mary is stunned. Her mother had lost children both before and after Mary. Sister Tabitha tells Mary there is nothing worthwhile at the fences, and that she must learn to love outside herself -and Mary knows Sister Tabitha is right. She must not be selfish. Harry shows up a few moments later with a black puppy -a wedding gift for Mary. Sister Tabitha binds their wrists with a rope, and leaves a blade for them to sever the rope if either one of them wants to back out of the marriage. Sister Tabitha then leaves, and Mary reflects on her happy childhood with Harry. She tells Harry she wants to leave, and tells him about Gabrielle. Harry asks if leaving the village would make Mary happy, and Harry tells Mary he will find a way to make her happy. They then consummate their marriage.

In Chapter 14, the next morning, Argos -the name Mary has given to her puppy -begins barking as the siren goes off. Harry undies the binding rope, packs food and supplies for them, and Mary dresses. She sees Gabrielle race past the window, and knows the Unconsecrated have broken through. Outside, a young boy and his sister are racing away from a pack of the Unconsecrated, but the boy, Jacob, has been left behind by his sister. Harry rushes out to grab him, and brings him into the house, and continues packing. Harry then puts Jacob over his shoulder, grabs an axe, gives Mary the knife, and takes her hand, leading her out. The first platform they make it to, the ladder is pulled up early. They then rush for another platform where Travis and Cassandra are climbing up. Harry and Mary then begin heading toward the Cathedral, but Mary is attacked by one of the Unconsecrated.

In Chapter 15, Harry comes to Mary's rescue, cutting off the head of the Unconsecrated woman that has attacked her. They rush toward the Cathedral once more, seeing friends and neighbors being killed and Returning as Unconsecrated. At the Cathedral, the sisters feverishly work to secure the building, closing shutters from the outside, until



only Sister Tabitha is struggling to close one last shutter. As she gets the shutter closed, she holds up the door for Mary and Harry, but Gabrielle leaps onto Sister Tabitha, mauling her, and Sister Tabitha holds onto Gabrielle while the doors to the Cathedral are shut. Mary and Harry then flee toward the gate through which Gabrielle entered, and head through. They shut the gate just as Gabrielle arrives, who then leaves to head back into the village. As Mary tells Harry that the Sisters have caused this catastrophe, they see Travis and Cassandra come limping toward them.

In Chapter 16, Mary, Harry, Travis, and Cass watch the mayhem before them through the fence. Nearby is Jacob, terrified, and Argos barks. With the village overwhelmed, there is nothing left. They worry about the lock on the gate. It is meant to guard the path, not stop the Unconsecrated. They decide to wait out the night to see if the village can be reclaimed in the morning. Mary attempts to convince Cass that they should go and find the ocean, but Cass doesn't want to hear talk of it.

In Chapter 17, in the morning, Jed and Beth join the group. Jed and Mary embrace. Jed explains the village is gone, that too many have turned. Gabrielle led the breakthrough, and killed too many Guardians, destroying the ability to stop the breakthrough. They realize the path is their only option. Jed explains they will be fine. The path has been stocked with food and supplies in the event of a breakthrough, and the need for an escape. Harry takes the lead, since he is the only one with a weapon. Further down the path, Jed reveals quietly to his sister that Beth has been bitten. Mary urges Jed to kill his wife, but he doesn't have the heart. Jed tells Mary that the Sisterhood has it all wrong- that life should be about love. Jed believes Beth still has a day or two, and he wants that, at least.

In Chapter 18, Mary stays true to her promise not to tell the others about Beth. Further down the path, they come upon an old, rusted trunk, with the numeral XIV on it. Using the axe, Harry hacks open the trunk, and the food supplies are collected from it. In the middle of the night, Gabrielle catches up, slamming against the fence. She has several arrows sticking out of her, but she is not slowed by them. The others wonder why Gabrielle is the way she is, and Mary believes the Sisterhood are to blame.

Mary reflects on Gabrielle writing similar numerals on her window, and what the connection could be. The letters XVIII are etched into a metal plate beside a small gate. Mary continues to wonder about the connection. Eventually, the path splits, and they decide to head left, away from Gabrielle. They follow more splits in the path, ultimately coming to a dead end.

## Chapters 1 - 18 Analysis

When the novel "The Forest of Hands and Teeth" begins, Mary is like any typical teenage girl, who dreams of a good life. She wants to marry and have a family, but even more so, she wants to find the ocean that her mother has spoken about all her life. Mary has a difficult time handling her desires for something greater and more important than the village and the married life, though she does not despise these things -they simply





come secondary to seeing the ocean. Mary becomes part of the Sisterhood when her mother dies and her brother refuses to take care of her, and Mary stops believing in God, being unable to understand the death of her mother, and the apparent lack of human freewill. In so doing, Mary challenges her beliefs in the Sisterhood and in God in a very Hegelian way -and this challenge will ultimately come full circle.

Knowledge about the world beyond the Forest is unknown; entire generations have lived and died enclosed by fences and the Forest, and Mary doesn't want to settle down and die the way that others have done in the past. Whereas others believe there is nothing beyond the Forest, Mary harbors hope that something else exists beyond the fence. Indeed, the marriage that has been proposed by Harry also makes Mary reconsider her own life, including the fact that she is absolutely in love with Travis, who is bound to Cassandra. Indeed, Mary gets what she wishes for, when she is propelled into the world beyond the village because the world in the form of the Unconsecrated has forced its way into the village, destroying it.



# Chapter 19 - 36

## Chapter 19 - 36 Summary

In Chapter 19, Cassandra is horrified by the dead end. She begins sobbing uncontrollably for everything that has happened, and Travis holds her and comforts her. They decide to make camp for the night. Beth has been slowing down. Seeing Travis so close to Cass makes Mary want to hurt Travis, and she begins talking about Beth. Beth wakes up, having fallen asleep, and the shawl slips from her shoulder, exposing the hideous bite. Travis is in shock. Mary runs off on her own. She comes to a fork in the path, and begins shouting for Gabrielle. Gabrielle arrives seconds later. Mary apologizes for what has happened to her. Mary realizes there is a connection between Gabrielle and the numbers, perhaps about who she is, and where she is from. When Mary returns, Beth has been decapitated, and her grave is being dug. Jacob is asleep, clutching Argos, while Cassie looks after them.

In Chapter 20, Mary goes and talks to Jed. Jed explains that Beth didn't want to go down the path originally, that she wanted to try for a platform, so they hid in an empty cottage. When they attempted to get to safety, Beth was bitten by Gabrielle, whom Jed sent in the direction of another person. Chased by arrows from those on the platforms, Jed and Beth fled for the path. The next morning, three days since the attack, everyone wonders what to do. Cassie wants to return to the village. Travis thinks they should scout for water. But Cassie won't have any of it. She is in shock. She tells Harry they can head back to the village, and it can be just her and him, like it was before the marriage. They begin to wonder if they were lied to about the path, and about what is beyond the Forest, just like Mary says. They also wonder if they are the last people alive.

In Chapter 21, Mary and the rest of the group decide to backtrack. Ahead of the others, Mary and Travis kiss and hold each other. Travis then disentangles himself to go back to the others. Mary then returns, and Harry removes the rest of the remnants of her binding rope. As they travel along, they lick dew from leaves to survive, and sleep during the day to avoid the heat. Ten days after the breach, they finally come to a square clearing with gates on every side. They find a gate with Gabrielle's number -XIV, and decide to go through. From there, they can see another village.

In Chapter 22, there are no people in the village, which itself is very well-built. Platforms are built into the trees, with houses and buildings on the platforms, and pathways running between each of the platforms. Suddenly, the Unconsecrated begin pouring out of the houses and buildings on the ground, and everyone becomes separated. Mary and Travis decide they have to make it to a platform to be safe, but instead run to a three-story house at the end of the street. Inside, they head upstairs, and find an Unconsecrated baby in a crib. She brings the baby out of the crib as Travis enters to announce that all the others are safe. She then drops the baby out the window. While



they are there, Mary tells Travis about the ocean again, telling him she is afraid it might not exist.

In Chapter 23, Mary wonders why the village they are in seems so much better prepared for Unconsecrated incursions than their own. The houses and the platforms are stocked with incredible amounts of food. As Mary heads out on the balcony of the house, she realizes she can find no inscriptions about God, and she can see no Cathedral. Mary begins to wonder then, if it is possible to believe in God without needing the Sisterhood. Mary also sees Harry and the others in the trees, and realizes the house they are in one served as an anchor bridge for the platforms. She wonders if they can make it over to the trees. They spend several days where they are. They settle into a routine of eating and guarding against the Unconsecrated. Mary comes across some old trunks full of beautiful clothing, and plain clothing, and wonders what the occupants who lived there were like. Mary begins looking over the Unconsecrated, needing to know who among them lived in the house. Travis wants to know why it matters. Mary explains it is because she is worried no one will ever remember her, or the woman, or their stories. Travis says he knows about Mary, and Mary is worried that he is not enough.

In Chapter 24, Mary wonders what else is in the other trunks. She roots through them, to find vests similar to Gabrielle's, but also to find old photographs. Among the photos are of a girl at the ocean. Suddenly, Mary is no longer happy there with Travis, and she wants to get out. Mary waves to Harry and Jed and Jacob and Cassie on their platform every day. Eventually, Harry devises communication by tying papers to arrows and shooting them at the house in which Mary and Travis occupy. She is so happy about this, she refers to Harry as her betrothed, which upsets Travis -and Mary realizes she is lonely, even with Travis. They kiss, but then Mary untangles herself, and searches for paper to write back. Mary finds a stack of paper, and fires off arrows, hitting twenty of the Consecrated before reaching Harry. The note ponders escape.

In Chapter 25, when Mary returns inside, Travis announces the Unconsecrated are beginning to break through, that the wood of the doors is giving way beneath their weight. Mary talks to Travis about escape. He explains that he used to go to the tower on the big hill to reflect on life, and on the day he gave up, believing that Mary would be Harry's, he slipped and fell and broke his leg. He explains that Harry has always wanted Mary, and that either he or his brother may not be enough for Mary. Mary wonders why her own mother never left to search for the ocean, and then realizes that, despite the ocean, her mother was happy with her father. Mary realizes now that Gabrielle must have escaped the village in which they now find themselves. But then below them, the groaning and cracking of wood startles them.

Chapter 26 - The Unconsecrated have broken through. Using a sheet, Mary puts Argos in a bundle and pulls him up to the attic by the ladder. Using an axe, Mary jumps back down, and begins hacking away at the Unconsecrated. Mary fights the Unconsecrated back to the stairs, and then sees a girl in a vest like Gabrielle's come up. Mary loses focus, and is grabbed by the Unconsecrated. But then Argos leaps into action, tearing at the Unconsecrated, as Travis pulls Mary up to the attic. Mary then reaches down, and



grabs Argos by the scruff of the neck, pulling him up. Travis asks Mary if she has been bitten, since her legs are covered in blood. She doesn't know. Travis feels along her legs for bites. He tells her he loves her, and she falls asleep against him.

Chapter 27 - Mary awakens. She has bandages around her legs. She wants to know if they are bite marks, but Travis cannot be sure. But Mary just knows the injuries are scratches, not bites. Using old clothing and garments, they fashion a rope. Using an arrow, they fire it across to the platform where Jed and Harry anxiously wait. Beneath Mary and Travis, the Unconsecrated surge.

Mary discovers that many of the items in the cases in the attic have been overturned or emptied. Among these items she finds old newspapers, with articles talking about the rise of the Unconsecrated, and the CDC being unable to determine the cause of the infection. Areas that are cleared of the Unconsecrated are reclaimed by the walking corpses, and citizens are urged to head north. Mary finds a picture of New York City, which she takes along with her.

Chapter 28 - Travis empties a barrel of flour, and puts Argo inside. Travis makes Mary go with him. Harry pulls them across to safety, but Travis is still trapped. He uses the rope to clamber along, and is coaxed along by Mary. Finally, he reaches the other side. Mary faints.

In Chapter 29, when Mary wakes up, Travis explains they have enough food to last through the winter. Using a similar system, they can use ropes to make it to the fence. But someone would have to make it to the Forest to tie the rope off. They decide to wait until winter, when the snow will either slow or freeze the Unconsecrated. Travis confesses that he spoke to Gabrielle at the Cathedral, that she had been to the ocean. Travis says that Gabrielle says the water is infested with the Unconsecrated, and that pirates roam the waters. He says he never came for her, or told her about the ocean, because he has wanted to keep Mary safe. Travis says he can't be Mary's second-choice dream to the ocean. He asks her if she could ever leave the ocean for him. She doesn't answer, and leaves the room.

In Chapter 30, Mary goes through one of the old books she has taken from the house. It has a photograph of New York City tucked away inside, and the book is called "Shakespeare's Sonnets". The pages are marked with letters -numbers, like on the gates. Mary realizes there is a pattern to them. Jacob comes across Mary, asking if she is changed, but Mary says she is not. Mary gives Argos to Jacob to make him happy, to be less scared. Later, Cassie and Mary talk. Cassie says both Travis and Harry have always loved Mary, and not her. She says her priority now is to make sure Jacob has a good life. Cassie has given up hope.

In Chapter 31, everyone is awoken by a fire. The need to escape the platform is immediate. Either Jed or Harry will have to tie off the rope. But it is Travis who seizes the initiative and goes running, limping along the way. Jed and Harry fire arrows to protect him after the Unconsecrated pile on top of him, and he makes it to the gate. Mary goes first, to discover Travis is near death.



In Chapter 32, Travis tells Mary that he was bitten when he left the house. Mary tells him that she will pray for him. Travis tells Mary to promise him she'll go to the ocean. Mary tells Travis she chooses the ocean over him. Harry arrives, and pulls Mary back from Travis. Mary uses a scythe to decapitate Travis. Jed carries Mary away.

In Chapter 33, the small group carries on, with the spreading fire at their backs. Harry is falling for Cassandra, who is utterly devoted to Jacob now, as if she was his mother. The days pass by and they continue walking, through the smoke and ash. Jacob, who started the fire on the platform, apologizes again and again for what he has done. Mary tells Jacob about the ocean, and says she knows it exists because she has faith. Finally, storm clouds appear, and the rain falls. Mary cries and screams and rolls around in the mud and taunts the undead, and Harry comes to comfort her, telling her he misses Travis, too. Mary apologizes to Harry, for everything. She tells him to be with Cassandra. Then Jed motions for everyone. The path appears to be a dead-end. But Mary realizes it is not a dead-end, but a gate, meaning they are supposed to go out into the forest. Mary says she will go through the gate -but Jed doesn't want her to, because she is all he has left of family.

In Chapter 34, Jed implores Mary to turn back, to see if they can find another home, another village. Mary insists on going out, because the rain will throw off her scent. With an ax, Mary slips through the gate, and begins running, Mary becomes surrounded by the Unconsecrated, and swings the axe wildly, hacking her way through them. Just as she is about to be overcome, Jed comes to her rescue, and they can hear running water. Jed is tackled by an Unconsecrated. She struggles to get to Jed, only to be tackled by an Unconsecrated woman, whom she fights off. She has no idea if either she or her brother have been bitten, and she realizes there are too many Unconsecrated to fight off.

In Chapter 35, Mary and Jed struggle along as best they can, coming to a river and a waterfall. Using roots, they hang over the side of the waterfall's cliff, and the Unconsecrated tumble into the darkness below them. While they are hanging on, Jed apologizes to Mary for everything, and says he came after her because he is her big brother. Suddenly, one of the Unconsecrated slams into Jed, knocking him down into the water below. Trying to search for Jed, Mary is pulled into the water by the Unconsecrated. She loses consciousness, and dreams of being attacked by the Unconsecrated.

In Chapter 36, when Mary awakens, she is about to be decapitated by a man with a shovel. She stops him, and then realizes she is looking out at the ocean. Mary sees hundreds of undead washed up on shore, and goes looking for her brother -but the man tells her to stop, that some of the Mudo are still dangerous. Mudo, the man explains, means speechless. He says he lives in the lighthouse that rises above them, and his job to decapitate the Mudo that wash up on shore after storms so they can't make it to town. The man is stunned to hear that Mary was living inside the Forest, and the man explains that the paths were taken out at their end when his grandfather was a child, because too many kids thought the paths led somewhere special. Mary and the man watch the tide come in and wash away the undead bodies, and then they go to the lighthouse.



## Chapter 19 - 36 Analysis

The idea that there could be something beyond the Forest of Hands and Teeth now becomes a matter of faith and of survival. The ocean and God become synonymous to both Travis and Mary, and Mary confesses to Jacob that she has faith the ocean exists, just as she discovers it is possible to believe in God without the Sisterhood being attached to that faith. That the ocean, or something at all beyond the Forest of Hands and Teeth exists, is now what is driving Mary to continue living. She is able to encourage Travis with the belief, though he feels that he is secondary to the ocean. Mary is unable to convince Cass of the ocean, and Harry and Jacob stay with her. Jed follows Mary out into the Forest itself, to save her, giving his life to save her, so that she might have her own life.

Interestingly enough, Cassandra's ocean becomes Jacob's mother in a way, treating Jacob like her own son. She is determined that Jacob will have a good life despite everything that has happened, though her fate, and that of Jacob, Harry, and Argos remains unclear at the end of the novel. Indeed, while it is presumed that Jed has been killed, even his fate cannot be absolutely ascertained beyond a shadow of a doubt. Interestingly enough, Mary comes to discover that there is not only an ocean outside of the Forest, and there are towns that are still thriving -despite the Unconsecrated roaming among the trees. When Mary arrives at the ocean, and at the lighthouse keeper, the symbolic imagery should not be lost on the reader. God has often been compared to a lighthouse in a storm, and Jesus, the Son of God, calming the storm for a quiet sea. The ocean appears to Mary below a lighthouse, as if she has been guided along through the darkness of the night to the light of dawn -and everything that that Light means: forgiveness, acceptance, vindication, and conquering of death.



# Characters

## Mary

Mary is the protagonist and narrator of the novel "The Forest of Hands and Teeth" by Carrie Ryan. Mary is a teenaged girl in her marrying years, who lives in a village surrounded by the Forest of Hands and Teeth, inhabited by the undead Unconsecrated. Mary is best friends with Cassandra. Mary has grown up with her brother, Jed, listening to their mother's stories of the ocean. Mary dreams of making it to the ocean one day, to a place where life is beautiful and full and free of Unconsecrated. Yet, the death of Mary's mother means her expulsion from her own home by her brother, who sends her to become a member of the Sisterhood under Sister Tabitha, the religious order that safeguards the moral order of the village. Mary loses her faith in God with the death of her mother, but she does not lose faith in the existence of the ocean. Mary is saved from the Sisterhood when Harry, the brother of Jed's wife, proposes marriage to her. Mary reluctantly accepts, because she is in love with Travis, the younger brother of Harry. Mary also comes to learn an Outsider has come to the village -a girl named Gabrielle -kept secret by the Sisters.

Ultimately, the night after Mary and Harry consummate their marriage, the Unconsecrated breach the fence, led by the now-Unconsecrated Gabrielle. Mary, Harry, Travis, Cassandra, Jed, Beth, Jacob, and Mary's dog, Argos, flee the village into the gated and fenced paths beyond. They come across an abandoned village -Gabrielle's village- which has been overrun. Travis dies helping his friends and family escape. Mary comes to understand that she can believe in God without the conditions of the Sisterhood, and their religious faith. Ultimately, Mary ventures off into the Forest itself, followed by Jed, who saves her from the Unconsecrated, but ultimately gives up his own life to save hers. Mary falls into a nearby river, dragged in by the undead. When she awakens, she is almost killed by a friendly lighthouse keeper, who believes that she is dead. He then helps her look for her brother, but they are unable to find him. Instead, she travels with the keeper to the lighthouse.

## Jed

Jed is the older brother of Mary. A member of the Guardians, he is a soldier tasked with keeping the fence around the village secure, and defending the village if it should come to that. Jed is married to Beth, the sister of Harry and Travis. Jed blames Mary for the death of their mother. During the breach of the fences, and the overwhelming of the village, Jed and Beth escape by meeting up with Mary and the others. Beth is ultimately decapitated, as she is infected. Jed travels with Mary and the others along the paths, and tries to stop her when she ventures out beyond the fenced paths. He ultimately saves her life by defending her against the Unconsecrated, and is presumed to have been killed in the process.



## Mary's Mother

Mary's Mother is a sweet and kind woman, utterly in love with her husband, who went into the Forest of Hands and Teeth months before. She loves her children, Mary and Jed, dearly, and tells them stories of the ocean. Mary, who goes to look for her husband at the fence, is bitten by the Unconsecrated, and she is released beyond the fence when she turns. Jed kills her, not being able to bear to see his mother exist in that condition.

## Cassandra

Cassandra is the teenaged best friend of Mary. She is in love with Harry, but Harry is in love with Mary, who is in love with Travis. Cassandra is heartbroken by the fact that neither Harry nor Travis truly wants her, and so she allows Harry to marry Mary to make him happy. Cassandra ultimately loses faith in the future quickly, though she is determined to give Jacob the life she never had, assuming a very motherly way with him. Ultimately, Harry falls for Cassandra, and the three are last seen on the path when Mary ventures out into the Forest.

## Travis

Travis is the younger brother of Beth and Harry, and is the betrothed of Cassandra. Secretly in love with Mary, Travis saves Mary's life on a number of occasions, and is ultimately bitten by the Unconsecrated while escaping to treetop platforms in Gabriella's old village. Travis is heartbroken by the fact that Mary will always put the ocean first, and him second, and so he does not want to marry her. In the end, Travis gives his life up for the others while helping them to escape the village.

## Harry

Harry is the older brother of Travis, and the brother of Beth. Harry is an apprentice to the Guardians, and proposes marriage to Mary, which she accepts. After they consummate their marriage, Harry helps save the lives of Mary, Argos, and Jacob from the Unconsecrated attack on the village. Harry helps lead the surviving group down the paths in the Forest. He knows Mary is not in love with him, and he ultimately falls for Cassandra, choosing to remain behind with her and Jacob.

## Jacob

Jacob is a small child who is almost killed during the Unconsecrated attack on the village. Harry saves his life, and brings him to safety. Jacob is terrified throughout most of the novel, and is given Argos by Mary to keep him safe. Jacob accidentally sets fire to the treetop platform on which they are staying. Jacob is closely protected and cared for





by Cassandra, who assumes a motherly role toward him. The last time Jacob is seen, he is with Harry and Cassandra, staying on the path.

## **Gabrielle**

Gabrielle is a girl from another village who escapes to the safety of Mary's village. She attempts to talk to Mary one night, but is unable to talk to her for long, as they are both staying in the Cathedral under the watchful eyes of the Sisterhood. Hence, Gabrielle is thrown to the Unconsecrated and becomes part of the group, leading the attack on the village. She is later killed.

## **Sister Tabitha**

Sister Tabitha is the head of the Sisterhood, and closely controls the actions and behaviors of the people of the village, so as not to offend God and provoke Him. Sister Tabitha is at once strict and kind, and manages to get Mary to realize that there is love outside of herself, that being selfish is not a good thing. Sister Tabitha's selflessness is on full display when she attempts to keep the Cathedral doors open for Mary, Harry, Jacob, and Argos, but she is ultimately cut down by Gabriella's Unconsecrated form and savagely killed.

## **Beth**

Beth is the sister of Harry and Travis, and the wife of Jed. She is bitten by an Unconsecrated during the attack and is later decapitated and buried while walking on the path outside the village.



# Objects/Places

## The Forest of Hands and Teeth

The Forest of Hands and Teeth is a massive plot of woodland that surrounds the village, and is divided up by small, fenced-in paths. The Forest of Hands and Teeth is populated by isolated, small towns and villages, and borders the ocean. It is into the Forest of Hands and Teeth that Mary and her companions seek to escape through using the paths.

## The Village

The village is surrounded by the Forest of Hands and Teeth, and is dominated by the Cathedral. It is a well-populated village, having grown up from an isolated, at-risk hamlet. It is surrounded by farmland and fields, and is ultimately enclosed by a fence. The village is where Mary, Harry, Jed, Cassandra, Travis, Jacob, and others live.

## The Fence

The fence is what protects the village and the farmland from the Unconquered that roam the Forest of Hands and Teeth. The fence is regularly maintained, but is eventually breached by Gabriella.

## The Cathedral

The Cathedral is the home of the Sisterhood, and the spiritual and moral law of the village. It is where Mary spends half a year and is also where Sister Tabitha resides.

## Platforms

Platforms are constructed throughout the village. They are used by soldiers and civilians to climb above the Unconsecrated, and to be safe.

## The Path

The path leads beyond the village, behind the Cathedral. It is fenced in and has numerous divergent, fenced-in paths and gates. It is onto the path through the Forest of Hands and Teeth that Mary and her companions travel to reach safety.



## **The Ocean**

The ocean lies beyond the Forest of Hands and Teeth and it is where Mary wishes to go. It is where the lighthouse and another town are located.

## **Shakespeare's Sonnets**

Shakespeare's Sonnets is a slender book that contains Roman numerals, which help Mary understand the markings on the gates on the path.

## **Axes**

Axes are wielded by Harry, Jed, and Mary throughout the novel. They are used as weapons to hack apart the Unconsecrated.

## **Photograph of the Ocean**

A photograph of the ocean is kept by Mary's mother, and is of Mary's grandmother in the water. The photograph is destroyed in a fire, but the image is burned into Mary's mind, and propels her on to the ocean.



# Themes

## Love

Love is a major, dominant, and overarching theme in the novel, "The Forest of Hands and Teeth" by Carrie Ryan. Love appears in the novel in two very distinct forms, but with similar consequences for the characters, and for the plot. Love appears in both the romantic and the familial form.

In terms of romantic love, the characters of Mary, Cassandra, Harry, Travis, Beth, and Jed are all affected. While love is not the basis for marriage in the village, love often blossoms between those engaged, and prompts men and women to become engaged. Love fuels the marriage of Jed and Beth, as Jed risks his life to save his wife for just a little while longer. Mary's love of Travis prompts her to want to risk everything to be with him, including betraying Harry. Harry's love of Mary compels him to ask her for her hand in marriage, even after all of the trouble that Jed believes Mary has caused with their mother's death. Cassandra's love for Harry prompts her to marry Travis, because she wants Harry to be happy. Ultimately, Harry does fall for Cassandra, while Travis's love for Mary (and his familial love for Harry) prompts him to give up his life to save them.

In terms of familial love, the characters of both Mary and Jed are principally affected, with Cassandra in a similar way. It is Jed's love for his sister, Mary, that ultimately compels him to give up his own life to defend her when she ventures out into the Forest of Hands and Teeth. It is Travis's love for his brother, Harry, that compels him to want to see his brother happy by marrying Mary in the first place. And it is Travis's love for his brother, and Mary, that compels him to give up his life to help them escape.

## Coming of Age

Coming of age is a major and dominant theme in the novel "The Forest of Hands and Teeth" by Carrie Ryan. The theme of coming of age involves the ethical, emotional, spiritual, and character growth or maturation of a character forced to confront real world experiences. In this case, coming of age mainly involves the characters of Mary and Cassandra, with each character coming of age in different respects.

When the novel begins, Mary is a girl who dreams of the ocean, and revolves her life around the ocean, with everything else being secondary, and thereby, almost unimportant. This is made shockingly real by Travis, who did not want to marry Mary, because he would always come second to Mary's dreams of the ocean, and by Sister Tabitha, who makes Mary realize she has been selfish, and that she needs to learn to love outside herself. By the end of the novel, Mary is a stronger, more capable, and more selfless person, who constantly worries about the others, and sees to their welfare. She becomes a better person because of it.



For Cassandra, when the novel begins, life is the village, and no more. She dreams of a happily-ever-after marriage, a family, and a content and quiet life. But the invasion of the Unconsecrated, and the destruction of the village and her family, means she will not have a quiet life. She is forced to go from teenager to mother in a matter of days, becoming a mother figure to Jacob, and protecting him and guiding him. She loses her sense of wonder and hope, and becomes very realistic and pragmatic, seeking above all to make sure Jacob has a good life.

## Faith

Faith is an important and subconscious theme that runs consistently throughout the novel "The Forest of Hands and Teeth" by Carrie Ryan. Faith -believing in something that cannot always be seen, felt, or heard -occurs in two ways in the novel, specifically for the character of Mary. Faith in the novel includes religious faith, and personal faith.

When the novel begins, Mary -and the other members of the village- live by the laws and moral belief system of the Sisterhood, a religious order devoted to not angering God. Mary loses her faith in God, for she sees God and the Sisterhood as irrevocably intertwined, and she cannot understand why God would allow such bad things to happen to the world. Ultimately, Mary rediscovers her faith in God, by learning that God and the Sisterhood are not necessarily one in the same. Indeed, faith in God ultimately helps Mary to have faith in the fact that the ocean exists, and vice versa.

Mary's personal faith originally has to do with her belief that the ocean exists somewhere beyond the Forest of Hands and Teeth, and that she will one day be able to reach it. It is Mary's undying faith in the ocean's existence that helps her to recognize that she can believe in God without the Sisterhood having to be attached, and that her faith in God and in the ocean is both personal and inspiring.



# Style

## Point of View

Carrie Ryan tells her novel "The Forest of Hands and Teeth" in the first-person and limited perspective from the point of view of Mary. This is done for at least two reasons. The first reason is that the story primarily concerns Mary and there is no one to better tell the story than Mary herself. This allows the reader intimate glimpses into her mind, thoughts, and emotions. This insight is especially crucial given the apocalyptic nature of the novel, and brings the reader that much closer to the action. The second reason is that, in order to maintain an air of mystery about the novel, and not to explain everything fully, the first-person perspective allows the reader to know only as much as the narrator and to thus fill in the blanks and discover new things along with Mary.

## Setting

Carrie Ryan sets her novel "The Forest of Hands and Teeth" mainly in the hometown village of Mary, and in the Forest of Hands and Teeth. Since this is the post-apocalyptic world (the origins of which are shrouded in mystery), names of the former world have passed away to more descriptive terms that belie the nature of the described. For example, the Forest of Hands and Teeth is full of hideous Unconsecrated undead, and the Cathedral is the home of the Sisterhood and is the religious center of the village's world. This allows the reader to at once both understand and be mystified by a world that is very similar to his or her own, but entirely unrecognizable as well.

## Language and Meaning

Carrie Ryan writes her novel "The Forest of Hands and Teeth" in language that is both flowing and poetic. This is done for at least two reasons. The first is that the narrator, the teenager Mary, is full of beautiful thoughts, ideas, and emotions, and is just beginning to discover the world. In many ways, she is innocent and untouched by the evils of the world, and her beautiful and poetic language is reflective of that. The second reason is that the beautiful language evokes strong emotional responses from the reader, making seemingly fantastical plot elements such as zombie-like creatures killing a loved one all the more realistic and moving. Indeed, the beautiful language provides a stark contrast to the horrors of the events described and the evils encountered in the novel.

## Structure

Carrie Ryan divides her novel "The Forest of Hands and Teeth" into thirty-six consecutive, linear, and chronological chapters. This is done because the novel is full of fast-paced events, and a totally familiar and unfamiliar setting, with a plot that encompasses many miles and many different characters. The uncomplicated structure

of the novel therefore allows the reader to focus on the novel and the poetic language themselves, and not be distracted or deterred by the ordering of the plot.



## Quotes

"As the Sisterhood always reminds us: this is the way after the Return -life must continue. It is our cycle to bear" (Chapter 2, p. 12).

"I think about how we are so focused on the peril presented by the Forest that we forget that the rest of life can be just as dangerous. I think about how fragile we are - like fish in a glass bowl with darkness pressing in on every side" (Chapter 4, p. 37).

"I sob because this is not a life. This is not the way life should be and because I don't know how to fix any of it" (Chapter 6, p. 51).

"There is proof of life outside our fences. And I cannot help but wonder how this will change our lives. There is a world out there, out beyond us. And now we are part of this world. It is terrifying and wonderful" (Chapter 8, p. 72).

"Every night I drown and every morning I wake up struggling to breathe" (Chapter 16, p. 146).

"I wonder if maybe all paths lead to the Unconsecrated. If it's a fate that none of us can ever escape - as certain as death. I wonder if maybe I was right as a child, that there can be no such place as the ocean, no place too large to be untouched by the Return" (Chapter 19, p. 171).

"Because I do not accept the hand of God; I do not believe in divine intervention or predestination. I cannot believe our paths are pre-chosen and that our lives have no will. That there is no such thing as choice" (Chapter 20, p. 175).

"Who are we if not the stories we pass down? What happens when there's no one left to tell those stories? To hear them? Who will ever know I existed" (Chapter 23, p. 207).

"I'm thrown over his shoulder and I can feel how his body shakes and I know that he is crying. For me, for Beth. And I wonder if there was ever a crueller world than this one that forces us to kill the people we love most" (Chapter 32, p. 277).

"That there had once been a path but that had fallen off track in the slippery darkness" (Chapter 36, p. 307).





## Topics for Discussion

Discuss the theme of love in the novel "The Forest of Hands and Teeth" by Carrie Ryan. What forms does love take in the novel? Which characters do these forms of love affect, and how do they influence the plot? Is one kind of love stronger than the other? If so, why? If not, why not? Use examples from the novel to support your claim.

Mary loves Travis, but Travis refuses to marry her. What are his reasons for this? Is he justified in his reasoning for not wanting to marry Mary? Why or why not?

Discuss the theme of coming of age in the novel "The Forest of Hands and Teeth" by Carrie Ryan. What is coming of age? How does it affect the character of Mary? How does it affect the character of Cassandra? Is this for the better or for the worse? Why?

Why does Mary insist on running into the Forest of Hands and Teeth at the end of the novel? Is she justified in her decision? Why or why not?

Discuss the theme of faith in the novel "The Forest of Hands and Teeth" by Carrie Ryan. What is faith? What forms does it take in the novel? How does faith affect the characters of Mary and Cassandra? Is faith a positive or a negative thing in the novel, both, or neither? Explain.

The novel "The Forest of Hands and Teeth" by Carrie Ryan includes numerous religious references. What are some of these references? How do they fall into the plot? What purpose do these religious references have? Do they enhance or detract from the plot? Explain.