

A God in Ruins Study Guide

A God in Ruins by Kate Atkinson

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Plot Summary

"A God in Ruins," by Kate Atkinson, tells the story of Englishman Teddy (Edward) Beresford Todd and the effect of his role in World War II on his life. Viola (Teddy's daughter), Teddy's two grandchildren (Bertie and Sunny), and an omniscient narrator tell the story. The novel takes place between 1925 and 2012. Each chapter takes place in a different year, but the story is not chronological. Each chapter includes past, present, and future tenses. The book requires a careful reading to avoid confusion.

Teddy joined the war effort almost immediately after then-Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain announced Britain's involvement in the war against Germany. Teddy joined because he wanted a life of adventure. Since the job he was doing at the time was so monotonous, he thought that serving in the war was a better choice.

During the war, Teddy was a bomber plane pilot. He regarded his crew as having become part of him, since they all trusted each other with their lives. Together, they saw first-hand the death and destruction of war. Teddy had a hard time reconciling the bombing of thousands of innocent lives by Great Britain and American forces, but he kept forward with the mission. Teddy went on three tours. He spent his leave between tours visiting Ursula, Nancy, and his mother. Teddy's last flight was part of a mission to bomb Nuremberg.

In Teddy's imagined life, he married Nancy in 1945. He had known Nancy since they were children. He loved her and was happy to have her as his wife. Together, they had Viola, who was a serious little girl. In 1960, Nancy died within months of receiving a cancer diagnosis. She had asked Teddy to help her end her life once she was past the point of no return. Teddy granted her request by holding a pillow over her head. Viola was in the doorway and watched the event, though Teddy never knew that she saw what occurred.

Viola's witnessing of her father killing her mother set her down a destructive path. She did not know how to love. As a result, she searched for love in many unhealthy places. She lived with a man named Dominic on a commune named Adam's Acre. It was there that their daughter named Bertie was born. Dominic was bi-polar, but Viola did not know that when she was with him. They became parents again to a son named Sunny.

Viola had a vile personality and treated others with little or no respect, depending on who they were. She held a deep sense of contempt for her father and openly conveyed her feelings. Since Viola was not fond of taking care of children, she gave Bertie and Sunny to Teddy. Living with their grandfather was a haven they much preferred anyway.

Bertie and Sunny's lives were deeply scarred by their parents' abandonment, but Sunny was the only one who obviously lashed out. Bertie became a marketing executive. She was happy with her life, especially after she married and had two children. Sunny sought peace on a global scale and ended up living in Bali as an internationally known



yoga instructor. Though Bertie and Viola do not reconcile their relationship, Sunny and Viola do when Viola visits Sunny in Bali after not seeing him for an entire decade.

Chapter 16 takes the story from past tense to present tense. The story line changes dramatically. The narrator describes the change as a falling "house of fiction." The story of Teddy's life after March 30, 1944 was imaginary. Teddy had died in a fiery crash when his bomber aircraft fell into the North Sea.



Introduction and Chapter 1: 30 March 1944 - The Last Flight - Naseby

Summary

"A God in Ruins" begins with three quotes, all of which pertain to different characters in the story.

The first quote is from the American poet and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson and states that a man is a god in ruins. The second is a quote by the main character's mother. It states that art should convey truth, but it should not be the truth. The third quote is by Robert Baden-Powell who wrote and illustrated "Scouting for Boys in 1908." The excerpted quote describes the expectation of Scouts to be able to face difficulties.

The first chapter takes place in 1944 and briefly introduces the novel's main character, Teddy. Teddy was a soldier whose morning ritual included walking to his station at the end of the airfield. His battle friends believed that Teddy's walk had protected them from harm.

Beyond the airfield lay flat farmland. On his walk, Teddy would see the farmer's daughter, who would always wave to him. Teddy never met the farmer's daughter, but he knew he appreciated her consistency in waving to him every morning.

Analysis

The inclusion of three quotes at the beginning of the novel sets the tone for the reader. The first quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson is significant because it holds the title of the novel. It seems that the author is directing the reader's attention to her meaning behind "A God in Ruins," which is that a man (person) begins as a higher version of himself. Then, with time, man falls.

The second quote is one from one of the main characters of the novel, Teddy's mother Sylvie. The reader does not yet know that the author of the second quote is a character from the book; however, the author's inclusion of it at the beginning of the novel tells the reader how much that character matters to the narrative. The author is also foreshadowing Sylvie's personality. The quote implies that she believes in the inherent value of art. She wants to see herself as a person who belongs in the world of art.

The third quote is an excerpt from "Scouting for Boys." It relates to the theme of perseverance. The excerpt is a short story about a boy slaying a dragon with limited tools. The story serves as an example for Boy Scouts. It teaches them how they should face life's difficulties. The author is foreshadowing Teddy's involvement with Boy Scouts, as well as the standard to which Teddy holds himself. Teddy faces great difficulties during the war. As he read "Scouting for Boys" during his times of uncertainty, the



sentiment of persevering through difficulty clearly resonated with Teddy and inspired him to act in such a way even as an adult.

The first chapter takes place in 1944 and is a short introduction of Teddy. From the limited text in the chapter, the reader can tell that Teddy was a loyal soldier whose peers respected him. Teddy's daily walk and his affinity for the farmer's daughter who waved to him every morning lets the reader know that Teddy appreciated stability, routine, and predictability.

The fact that the novel begins with Teddy's last flight is a foreshadowing of events. At the conclusion of the novel, the reader finds out that all of Teddy's life after this flight was fiction, a figment of his imagination. The author may have started with it because that is, in fact, the beginning of the narrative. Only two chapters take place before the war, and they could very well be events Teddy remembered as he imagined his future. The author is setting the stage for Teddy's actual last couple of hours, though that fact is unknown until near the end of the novel.

Discussion Question 1

The first quote at the beginning of the novel includes the title of the novel, "A God in Ruins." Why might the author have titled the novel after a quote from a philosopher?

Discussion Question 2

What does the tone of the first paragraph suggest about Teddy's character?

Discussion Question 3

What is the significance for Teddy of a reliable wave from the farmer's daughter?

Vocabulary

immortal, alchemy, disproportionately, superstitious



Chapter 2: 1925 - Alouette

Summary

Chapter 2 reverts to 1925 when Teddy was a child. Teddy spent time with Aunt Izzie, who was the sister of his mother. Overall, the chapter provides more depth to Teddy and other characters.

During Teddy's outing with his aunt, the two listened for a skylark. Teddy saw it first, but Izzie did not see or hear the bird before it flew away. His aunt's flightiness annoyed Teddy. His mind wandered to other things as he and Izzie stood outside. Teddy reminded himself of "The Knights' Code," from the book "Scouting for Boys," a book Teddy counted on for guidance during times of uncertainty. He knew that treating Izzie with respect, being cheerful, and being gracious were elements of chivalry, a characteristic Teddy seems to deem important. As he continued looking for the skylark, Teddy thought of his father's words of advice for his upcoming semester at boarding school.

Izzie began to sing, which took Teddy away from the thoughts about his family. She sang a portion of a song that was popular during The Great War, also known as World War I. The author flashes forward to 1944 when Teddy is a soldier in World War II. On a day during the war when Teddy made an emergency landing, he thought of this day he had spent with Izzie.

Izzie had stopped singing and stated "What larks!" She quoted the words from "Great Expectations." She said that she had eaten a lark in the past. Teddy was disgusted at the idea of someone eating a lark. The author again flashes forward to the 1970s. Teddy's future daughter Viola sends him a line from an Emily Dickinson poem pertaining to a lark.

Izzie did not understand why Teddy was disgusted with the idea of eating a lark. Teddy knew that her lack of emotion at eating a lark was a result of driving an ambulance during World War I. The two continued walking through what Izzie called the countryside, though it was really just Teddy's neighborhood. Teddy's thoughts drifted to the school where he would be going during the upcoming fall. It was his father's alma mater, and it thrilled Teddy to know that he would soon be attending the school. Izzie asked Teddy questions to get to know him, but Teddy was not always sure about what to say. They discussed his age and that he used to have a slingshot. They talked about his time as a Boy Scout. Now, he belonged to an organization called Kibbo Kift. Izzie asked whether or not he had a girlfriend and what kind of sweets he liked.

When Teddy returned home from his time with Izzie, he brought with him a bouquet of bluebell flowers for Sylvie, his mother. The author shifts the focus of Chapter 2 from Teddy to his mother



Sylvie was wealthy during her early childhood. After the death of her artistic father, she and her mother lost everything to a bankruptcy. Her father had left a considerable amount of debt. She and her mother attended the bankruptcy auction and watched as strangers bought most of their possessions. As an adult, Sylvie cared about Art, Truth, and Beauty, all of which the author says Sylvie talked about in capital-letter form.

Sylvie was getting ready for a secret meeting that had the potential to evolve into an extramarital affair. Her husband Hugh drove her to the train station so Sylvie could go uptown. She was going under the guise of meeting her friends for dinner and a show.

After Sylvie left for the night, Hugh returned home. He poured himself a small glass of whiskey and smoked an already half-smoked cigar. Pamela and Ursula, Teddy's sisters, were studying. Jimmy was at the table eating his milk and biscuits, and Bridget, the family's maid, was entertaining Jimmy.

At this point, the author goes into further detail about Izzie. She had left Teddy's house and was driving while singing "Alouette" to herself. She had been a member of a first-aid brigade in the war where she mostly drove ambulances. Izzie held many strong images of her experiences, all of which she considered to be horrible.

Several men had proposed to Izzie during the war. The first, Richard, she said yes to on a whim. However, he had died just days after his proposal. The second, Augustus, she truly loved. He had died with Izzie by his side in a field hospital. The third proposal came from a captain named Tristan. She had turned him down, too. A year after the war ended she saw that Tristan had become a member of parliament. He was incredibly wealthy and was about to marry a young woman.

Izzie's tenderness for Teddy was born out of knowing that many boys who died in The Great War were not much older than her nephew. As her thoughts continued, Izzie sped up her vehicle, as she could not stop thinking of Augustus.

Teddy's older brother Maurice was preparing for a Bullingdon Club dinner in Oxford, England. The author indicates that Maurice carries wounds, though he hopes they never show.

Sylvie was on her way to the hotel where she would meet the man with whom she planned to have an affair. She felt ashamed, but she continued forward with her plan.

At the same time that Sylvie was on her way to cheat on her husband, Hugh went through a break in the hedge between his home and the home of his neighbor, Roberta Shawcross. Hugh and Roberta had played opposite each other in a local production of "The Mikado." After the production, Hugh's feelings for Roberta grew. Hugh called her Mrs. Shawcross, but Roberta insisted that he call her by her first name.

Roberta did not wear a corset, which was different than many women in her time. She was an idealist who outwardly expressed her beliefs and passions, which Hugh appreciated. Hugh also appreciated that she knew and understood about the war. As



the two were moving their lips closer to one another, Roberta suddenly separated herself from Hugh, stating that she had to get to Kibbo Kift, as she was a leader.

While his parents were close to having extramarital affairs, Teddy was at Kibbo Kift, a rebellious offshoot of Boy Scouts. Mrs. Shawcross led the children in a dance. Teddy knew Mrs. Shawcross as Nancy's mother and as a woman who was big on handicrafts. Mrs. Shawcross had encouraged Teddy to join Kibbo Kift just as Teddy was about to graduate from Cubs to Scouts. She enticed him with the fact that Nancy, his crush, would be there.

Mrs. Shawcross started Kibbo Kift as a pacifist alternative to the Scouts, which she saw as militaristic. The group learned woodworking, went camping and hiking, learned to sew and dance, and participated in folk singing. Mrs. Shawcross planned activities with a dual purpose in mind. In addition to learning, Mrs. Shawcross wanted the group to focus on "the spiritual regeneration of England's youth." Teddy did not stick with the Kibbo Kift. Instead, he joined the OTC. The group was not pacifist, but the author never states the meaning of the group's initials.

The author returns to telling about Sylvie's attempt at an extramarital affair. She did not make it past the doorman at the hotel. Instead, she went down the street to view a concert. She seldom attended concerts with a significant piano presence because she used to play the piano before she and her mother were bankrupt. After the concert, Sylvie went back to the station so she could make her way home. Hugh was surprised to see her so early. Neither showed the inner disappointment about their failed attempts at affairs. Instead, they acted as though they were glad to be together.

That night, Teddy had trouble falling asleep. His sister Ursula tried to help when she checked on him, but she ended up talking about a movie that planted a sour image in Teddy's mind. Eventually, Teddy fell asleep with his "Scouting for Boys" book under his pillow.

Analysis

"Alouette," the title of the chapter, is the name of the song Izzie sang in her car after she left Teddy. The meaning of the word is 'a lark,' which is the bird Teddy and Izzie are talking about during their time together.

Teddy's time with his aunt is an important part of the story, as it is one piece of non-fiction within the fictional world Teddy imagined for himself. Izzie used the details Teddy provided about himself as part of Augustus, her fictional character written in a series of stories called "The Adventures of Augustus," which she left Teddy when she died. The reader may note that Teddy's irritation with his aunt continues with her stories about Augustus, though that is revealed later.

Izzie's presence in the story seems mainly to bring Augustus' stories, as well as to provide experience from the first world war. The significance of Augustus' stories may be that since he is based on Teddy, Teddy lives on even after his death during the war.



One element of war Teddy was certain of was the fact that there would be no afterward, that he would have no future after the war. Ultimately, he was correct, but his attitude was born of a fatalist attitude. Teddy couldn't imagine anything being okay or alive after the death he witnessed first-hand during the war. In his mind, why would anything want to survive after being surrounded by that much death? Izzie took control of that attitude and created an immortal Teddy.

Izzie's experiences during World War I are important to the narrative, as well. She saw much death, as did Teddy. However, she was on the other end as Teddy. Whereas Teddy caused the death from the bombs his crew dropped on Germany, Izzie helped those who were injured or dead get where they or their bodies needed to be, respectively. Teddy's respect of his aunt's war experiences were a premonition of the regard he would have for those who served. He knew of the heavy burden war creates, and he respected his aunt because of that. During the war, he knew the burden himself and his respect for his aunt probably increased.

The presence of Kibbo Kift begins the idea of a counter-culture. The group is not present for much of the novel, but that is likely because only a small portion of the novel takes place when Teddy was a child. Kibbo Kift is important, though, because it shows Teddy and his feelings on the war. Though Teddy appreciated "Scouting for Boys," he belonged to Kibbo Kift for a short time. It may have been because Nancy's mother was in charge of it, and it may have been because Teddy sensed through his father and aunt Izzie the effects a militaristic perspective could have on an individual. Teddy didn't stay with Kibbo Kift, but he didn't go with the Boy Scouts, either, meaning he didn't belong to a mainstream organization. Later in his (imagined) life, Viola would feel the same, though by then Teddy didn't understand such a way of thinking.

Both Hugh and Sylvie's contemplation of having an affair speaks to the idea that none of the characters were truly satisfied with their lives. This is especially true for Sylvie, since she came from high society and was embarrassed by her family's fall after her father's death. The idea of discontentment is laid out in the beginning of the novel, as the characters strive to find something to which they can belong, or someone to whom they can belong. Teddy didn't know his parents were discontent with their lives, but they might have passed down their attitude to him, as he struggled with the same idea once he was at war. "A God in Ruins" is about a man's legacy, which starts with his own parents' legacies. Attitudes can be passed down through the generations. The attitudes of being discontent and wanting to belong seem to have started with Sylvie and Hugh.

Discussion Question 1

What are some indications that Sylvie wishes she had a different life?

Discussion Question 2

Even though Teddy joins the renegade Boy Scouts, called Kibbo Kift, how can the reader tell that Teddy in fact prefers the Boy Scouts?



Discussion Question 3

What character traits do Teddy's parents, Sylvie and Hugh, seem to share with each other?

Vocabulary

transcendental, stalwart, gramophone, alouette, parapet, volubly, exaltation, choleric, belligerent, ephemeral, piratical, imprecation, growlery, subalterns, carapace, sundry, preen, suffragette

Chapter 3: The Adventures of Augustus

Summary

"The Adventures of Augustus" is the title of a story written by Teddy's aunt Izzie. The narrator mentioned in Chapter 2 that to deal with her feelings for her second betrothed, Augustus, she took to fiction. The first section of Chapter 3 is part of that work. There is no year associated with this chapter, though context suggests it is soon after his first term of boarding school, which would put the story in the Spring of 1926.

Izzie's work of fiction is an account of Augustus as he was getting into trouble with his parents after an incident involving green paint, a dog, and a woman's wig. In the story, Augustus's parents fault him for having a short-sighted sense of reality and not thinking through the consequences of his actions. Augustus is indignant and ardently defends himself.

After reading a short bit of his aunt Izzie's story, Teddy dropped the book to the floor. When he took a break from reading the story, Teddy lamented that his aunt completely changed Augustus into a different person.

The dog in the story bothered Teddy the most, since it reminded him of Trixie, his family's dog that had died just before the most recent Christmas. Trixie died before Teddy had come home from his first term at boarding school. To make up for the loss, Aunt Izzie brought Teddy a new Westie puppy named Jock, named after the dog in Izzie's story about Augustus. Teddy tried to dislike the dog out of loyalty for Trixie, but Teddy came to love Jock.

The narrator poses the question of what had gone into the making of Teddy. The reader learns that Teddy's parents had many euphemisms for the act of sexual intercourse, and that Teddy was conceived on a cold Autumn night. Teddy's given name was Edward Beresford Todd; Beresford was Sylvie's maiden name. Teddy was a content baby who liked to lie in a baby seat and play with a silver hare that dangled from the top of it.

When Teddy was a baby, his mother was the main caretaker. Teddy was her favorite, and she would tell him so. Teddy's father worked at the bank every working day of his adult life, with the exception of when he fought in The Great War (World War I). His sisters played with him and doted on him. His older brother Maurice was away at school for most of the time, and so when he came home for the holidays sneered at Teddy.

Analysis

"The Adventures of Augustus" is the only legacy of Teddy's that lived on after the war. The reader doesn't know that at this point in the novel, but that fact is the reason this chapter is so important. Augustus was based on Teddy, and since Teddy ended up dying in the war, Augustus was his legacy. The life Teddy had imagined for himself would have



been his legacy, had it actually happened. However, that was not the case and so the stories that were based on him were the only legacy he got.

Based on Teddy's reaction to the stories, he didn't seem happy about the fact that Augustus was based on him, especially since he was so different from Teddy. Teddy was a quiet, well-mannered boy (and man) and didn't want to be represented as otherwise. Since the life Teddy imagined for himself is about his legacy, which is obviously something Teddy cares about, what he will leave behind.

The fact that aunt Izzie's stories bother Teddy is something the reader should note. The details are similar to his life but Izzie changed Augustus into a different person than who Teddy expected him to be. Teddy didn't seem to want Augustus to be like him, but after he expected him to be, Teddy's feelings seemed to have changed.

In "A God in Ruins," Teddy's life is fiction within the fiction of the novel itself. Before that's the case - so before Teddy's death - fiction within fiction remains present with Augustus. The author's idea of having to imagine what one does not know comes into play in Izzie's stories. She created a boy's life who was named after her second betrothed and characterized after Teddy. She needed her favorite men to live on after their deaths, too, and she needed an outlet for bearing the burden of war and wondering what might have been with her true Augustus.

Discussion Question 1

What does Izzie's giving of "The Adventures of Augustus" to Teddy say about their relationship?

Discussion Question 2

What evidence does Teddy give that he is not overly fond of Izzie's piece of fiction, "The Adventures of Augustus"?

Discussion Question 3

What does Teddy's adaptation to Jock say about his character?

Vocabulary

barrister, pash, caverns, euphemism, ardour, pram, stoicism



Chapter 4: 1980 - The Children of Adam

Summary

Chapter 4 takes place in 1980 and is primarily focused on Teddy's daughter Viola and her family as they spend a day at the beach. During their time at the beach, the narrator goes into depth about Viola's adult life choices and goes back and forth between past and her current situation. However, since the novel is written in past tense, the tense of the summary remains in past tense.

Viola had two children, a son named Sunny and a daughter named Bertie. Their given names were Sun and Moon. Sunny kept his name, but Bertie called herself Bertie until everyone else did, too. The kids' father was a man named Dominic; he and Viola weren't married because Dominic didn't believe in the social convention/establishment of marriage.

To get to the beach, Viola's family took their commune leader Dorothy's van, though it broke down about a mile from the beach. A farmer neighbor helped to fix it, but Viola was still angry that it happened at all. To thank the farmer, Dominic dropped to his knees and bowed before the man. Dominic's moods resembled an acid trip, but the narrator states that it's in Viola's later years, after she had lost contact with Dominic, that she learned he was manic depressive. He died when the children were young, when he stepped in front of a train.

The farmer who helped Viola's family called Dominic a "grinning nitwit" when he returned home to his wife. The reader learns that Sunny and Bertie had showed up on the farmer's door a few weeks prior. The farmer's wife fed them cake and milk, and let them feed the geese and see the cows being milked until Viola showed up and took them home. Bertie wished the farmer would take her home with him.

Sitting on the beach, Sunny was whining, asking his mother for food. Viola, irritated with her son for whining, recalled how Sunny had thrown a hysterical fit on his most recent birthday. Teddy had come to visit, and Sunny worked his way up to a tantrum that ended with him biting Viola's forearm. Viola had already been irritated by her father's questions pertaining to Dominic, who hadn't come to the birthday party because he didn't participate in family events. Viola's reaction to Sunny biting her was to slap him across the face. Teddy disagreed with how Viola handled the situation, and took his grandson in the other room to find a sweetie, or a piece of candy, in order to distract him.

Viola considered her father to be The Voice of Reason. She was frustrated that he was so calm in such a situation, and she missed her mother, who had died many years before.

Still reminiscing about Sunny's birthday, the narrator tells that Viola removed all the orange Smarties from his cake. Then, she cleaned up the dirty dishes. From the kitchen



she could see her children, who were happily playing with Teddy. The scene made Viola sad, and the reader learns that Viola felt like she had been on the outside of happiness her entire life.

Back to the present day, Sunny was still whining for something to eat. Viola did not give him anything to eat because of his attitude. Bertie, on the other hand, was a grateful child and so Viola enjoyed giving her things. Sunny didn't appreciate his mother's attitude and expressed his opinion by shouting, "I hate you!" to Viola. She didn't react to his words, instead she pretended to be unruffled. Eventually she gave him the rucksack and told him to find something in there.

Viola had recently begun studying Magick, as in witchcraft and Tarot cards. Her father didn't understand it, but Viola was unapologetic for her interest in the subject. She smoked another cigarette and thought about how tedious and miserable her life was. She was taken out of her trance when Sunny threw his snack at Bertie instead of eating it; they screamed at each other until Viola gave them both money to buy ice cream.

The narrator describes Viola and Dominic's relationship from the beginning. They met at a university where Dominic was a drop-out but he still hung around on the university campus. Viola was attracted to how infamous Dominic was on campus since she was in a stage of rebellion at the time. She felt as though she had to justify a lot of his habits and attitudes to her father, but she didn't mind doing so. Eventually, Teddy told her that Dominic was a good-looking man if nothing else. Dominic slept with other women while he and Viola were together, but she stayed with him out of laziness. They never got married, which Teddy disagreed with, though he wasn't rude in his disagreement.

When Sunny was born, Viola and Dominic were living in a flat in London they shared with ten other people. Teddy sent them stuff he deemed necessary for a baby, though Dominic and Viola felt otherwise. Viola didn't invite Teddy to come meet Sunny, but Teddy arrived at their flat, anyway. After seeing their living conditions, Teddy was worried about his only child and grandchild, but he kept his worries to himself.

Viola and Dominic left the flat for a commune. Viola had secretly disliked the flat, and she came to feel the same about the commune. Though she defended it to her father, she felt lonely and isolated. Dorothy had named the farm Adam's Acre, but because the farm had been known since the Middle Ages as Long Grove Farm, nobody called it Adam's Acre.

Dominic loved living on the commune because he had an art studio. Viola was bothered by the situation because it wasn't what she thought it was going to be. For example, when visitors came through they were supposed to earn their keep by helping with household tasks, but according to Viola very few visitors actually helped with the chores. Viola also disliked being in the countryside, in the middle of nowhere, as she put it. Her father had always nagged her as a child to enjoy the outdoors, but she never did.

Viola's only sense of peace when she lived on Adam's Acre was when she pretended to go out and look for eggs laid by the commune's chickens. Since the chickens laid eggs



all over the farm, it wasn't unusual that someone would have to find them. Once, Dorothy found Viola out searching for eggs. Dorothy asked Viola her name, and then Viola's mother's name, and then announced that she knew Viola's aunt. Dorothy was disappointed to find out that Viola didn't know her aunt Millie very well, and also that Millie was no longer living.

Viola recalled being pregnant with Bertie, and how Dorothy wanted a natural birth on the commune. Viola, however, wanted the same kind of birth experience as she had with Sunny, which was high on pain medication while giving birth in a hospital. Viola got her way and had Bertie in a hospital. The author sarcastically remarks that the devil did not come calling for Bertie; he didn't have to, as he already had a hold of Sunny.

The author goes back to present-day and Viola's family's day at the beach. Viola had fallen asleep and awoke to realize that her children were nowhere near her. She found them at the Lost Children hut. Afterwards, she scolded Sunny because she thought he went there on purpose because he was mad at her. The reader gets insight into Sunny's thoughts and learns that Sunny didn't go to the hut on purpose and in fact he and Bertie were lost. He grew even angrier with his mom.

After the children were found, Viola and the kids realized they didn't know where Dominic was. Viola reported him missing and search parties, both sea and air, were sent to look for him. Viola, Bertie, and Sunny received a ride home from policemen, and upon their arrival learned that Dominic was already home. Dorothy was upset that policemen had come to her doorstep, and in fact called them 'pigs' within earshot, and the police were irritated they spent their time looking for a man who was not actually missing.

That same night, Viola packed a bag, took all the money from a reserve on the commune, and walked over to the neighboring farm with her children when she thought nobody was looking. The farmer couple welcomed Viola and her children, as they provided food and a comfortable place to sleep. The next day, the farmer drove Viola, Sunny, and Bertie to the train station so they could go home to Viola's father.

Analysis

Chapter 4 is essential to the narrative in that it explains the path Sunny and Bertie were sent on by their parents. As they lived in a commune, Bertie and Sunny learned that their parents didn't take a huge interest in caring for them. At a commune, typically responsibilities are shared among the members, to include child-raising. Viola's attitude at the beach and Dominic's basic disinterest were enough to teach Bertie and Sunny that parental love would either be something they each had to work for, or something they would never truly receive.

The author jumps from present to future often throughout "A God in Ruins." For example, the reader learns the reason for Dominic's death in this chapter, even though it happens years later. The author doesn't hold a lot of secrets from the reader as the



novel continues. Rather, the tone of the text is of an omniscient narrator who knows the whole of the story. This technique allows the author to fill in a detail from the future when she feels it lends to the story, which is the case with letting the reader know the cause of Dominic's death. The reader learns of Dominic's changing moods and how his way of living impacts his children, and knowing his disease early in the novel puts his narrative in perspective.

Viola's treatment of her children is the first peak into her personality, as she acts rather vile toward most people, especially her father. The reader might note that the reasons for Viola's contempt toward her father isn't revealed until Chapter 12, but the reader may draw the conclusion that her mother's death was extremely traumatic for her. So traumatic that she takes out her anger and bitterness on others, even her children.

The reader can project from Viola's interactions with her kids that she will not have a good relationship with them as they grow older. The author uses anecdotes from Sunny and Bertie's short lives to show that Viola was never a loving mother. Her contempt for the world in general seemed to extend to her children, but that may have been because she didn't know how to be a mother since she grew up without one. Viola was someone who liked to do things her own way, but having children seemed to be something that overwhelmed her to the point of not being able to do it well or even with a good attitude.

Viola's attitude plays into one of the themes of the novel, which is the presence of a counter-culture. Viola's participation in the counter culture may have appeared to the people around her as a buying-in of the counter-culture premise. However, it was rebellion against her father, whom she called The Voice of Reason, and whom she wanted to be nothing like. Teddy followed convention, and he believed in a simple, quiet, practical existence. Viola's hatred for her father fueled her sentiments of wanting nothing to do with what he believed. At this point, the reader may conclude that Viola's attitudes either stemmed from her mother's death in 1960, or she simply identified with a generation of counter-culture beliefs.

Viola's choice to leave Dominic may have been surprising, since Viola took them to the farmer's house where she had hastily taken her kids away from just recently. However, her exasperation with Dominic was obvious, especially after she thought he was missing and he was actually just at home in his paint studio. Viola was a woman who liked forward movement; she didn't like laziness or apathy, she just sometimes went along with it. Dominic had both traits, so leaving him was inevitable. Though she went to her father begrudgingly, she wanted his presence more than Dominic.

The title of the chapter, "The Children of Adam" most obviously comes from the fact that the chapter gives insight into Bertie and Sunny, who were both children of the commune Adam's Acre. However, since the author also references Eden from time to time throughout the novel, the title of the chapter also may refer to the fact that the subjects of the book are all children of the man who lived in the Garden of Eden, meaning everyone is connected and nobody is perfect.



Discussion Question 1

What can the reader draw about Viola's own sense of self-worth based on her relationship with Dominic?

Discussion Question 2

Does Viola seem to enjoy being a mother? How can you tell?

Discussion Question 3

What were some of the passive ways Viola expressed her dislike with life on the commune?

Vocabulary

drudgery, hegira, inertia, talisman, soubriquet, pantomime, occult, paganism, scion, cachet, laconically, innocuous, iconoclasm, kaftan, beatific, deriding, apoplectic



Chapter 5: 1947 - This Unforgiving Winter

Summary

Chapter 5 takes place on a cold winter's night of 1947, hence the title of the chapter. The setting is Teddy and his wife Nancy's home in Yorkshire; they were sitting in their house at night, Nancy was knitting by an oil lamp and Teddy was reading aloud a "Nature Notes" piece, which was a column he wrote for a publication called The Recorder. In between Teddy's reading to Nancy, which it seems he did for her critique, the author goes into detail about their life together as Teddy remembered various life experiences in the midst of his reading aloud "Nature Notes."

Teddy and Nancy had married in the autumn of 1945 at an informal ceremony with only one of Teddy's sisters, Ursula, and one of Nancy's sisters, Bea, present for the nuptials. In their conversations leading up to their wedding, both Teddy and Nancy were practical in their expression of desire to marrying each other. They didn't want a big wedding, especially so soon after the war had ended. Later in the chapter, the reader learns that Sylvie was unhappy with Teddy and Nancy's lack of a wedding.

Nancy was adamant that they distinguish the fact that even though they were neighbors, they chose to marry one another and were not assumed as good as married just because they were best friends growing up. Both Teddy and Nancy became teachers, though Nancy enjoyed it more than Teddy. They went together to obtain their teaching qualification. Nancy taught Math and Teddy taught Literature.

The war spoken of is World War II. At this point, Teddy's memories of the conflict remained fresh in his memory. He blamed himself for some of the destruction of Europe, since he was involved in the war, but his sister Ursula was quick to blame Hitler. Ursula encouraged Teddy to move on from the war; she reminded him that the boys had to fight because of the concentration camps started by Hitler, and now that the war was over it was time to move on. Teddy thought of Ursula and Nancy as two sides of the same coin, as they were complete opposites yet Teddy loved them both.

Nancy and Teddy lived in Yorkshire at Nancy's request. Teddy thought it was due to their time in Kibbo Kift as children that Nancy wanted a simple country life surrounded by nature, which she believed was the way man and woman were supposed to live. Their small cottage was called Mouse Cottage, though they never found a mouse in the home. They loved it during the summer time when everything was in bloom, but during winter the house was almost as cold as it was outside.

The author details Teddy and Nancy's relationship in regards to the war. Teddy felt he had lost Nancy to the Official Secrets Act, which demanded that those who worked on any kind of war duty, either home or abroad, was not to speak of their assignment.



Nancy eventually confessed to her responsibility, but Teddy never did. He kept many things - information and personal vulnerabilities - to himself. Nancy admitted to being intimate with other men when she thought Teddy was dead, but he never confessed to his own infidelity.

From time to time, Teddy pondered Augustus, his fictional doppelganger as written by his aunt Izzie. She continued to mail her accounts of Augustus to him either as she wrote them or whenever she felt like sending an anecdote. As he was pondering Augustus, Nancy commented that the eternal winter must end eventually. Teddy continued reading his "Nature Notes" column about snowdrops. Teddy thought Nancy was bored, as evidenced by her yawning, and asked her that she correct his mistakes.

The author describes Teddy's life before the war, which was one of poetry and literary experiences. After graduating from Oxford he tried to do a masters of philosophy degree, but he became restless and went home after just one term. He then, much to the dismay of his parents, became somewhat of a vagabond, roaming around Europe with his canvas tent, working his way through various towns.

Teddy's favorite place he visited during the year he lived as a vagabond was France; the narrator states that for the rest of his life, Teddy would be able to close his eyes and imagine the sight and smell of the food he ate in France. He wrote some poetry during his year of traveling, and he wrote to his sister Ursula. He returned home after receiving a telegram that his mother was ill with pneumonia. Sylvie's illness hadn't been as bad as it had been made to seem, but he was relieved to have an excuse to return home.

In Yorkshire, after he and Nancy had moved there, Teddy worked in a boys-only grammar school. He disliked the job for the monotony of it. Nancy, on the other hand, taught math at a girls-only grammar school and loved it. She hid the fact that she was married to have a better chance at getting the job. Nancy knew Teddy hated teaching, so she encouraged him to write. He didn't get very far, but he also didn't get very far with teaching, as he walked out of the school in between classes, quitting the profession.

On Teddy's drive home he came across a man who was broken down on the side of the road. He stopped to help and subsequently met Bill Morrison, the editor and owner of The Recorder. Thus began Teddy's career with the publication. Nancy supported Teddy's change in jobs and in fact encouraged him in his new writing post.

As Teddy continued to read his "Nature Notes" piece aloud to Nancy, Nancy had a correction that involved finding a composer who was German. She did not appreciate the reference, though, as she held a grudge against the Germans for causing the second World War. The narrator describes Teddy's experience toward the end of the war, which was that of a Prisoner of War (POW). He still had nightmares about what he experienced during the war, both as a soldier and a POW. Nancy woke him with soothing tones each time he had a nightmare.



The chapter concludes with Teddy making Ovaltine for Nancy and the two of them being intimate with one another in Ultima Thule, the name they had given their bedroom. After their period of intimacy, Nancy wished for a baby so that Teddy, and by extension the rest of the world, may be healed.

Analysis

Chapter 5 focuses on Teddy and Nancy's relationship. Their interactions with one another suggest the life-long familiarity they shared with one another, since they'd known each other since they were children. The author again goes back and forth between the present (in 1947) and Teddy remembering past moments from his relationship with Nancy.

At this point, the war has impacted everyone's lives. Teddy was a prisoner of war and Nancy slept with other men when she thought Teddy was dead. The couple's varying wartime experiences influenced their future selves, as well as their relationship with one another. For example, their conversation before they got married was one of little emotion, as they made the distinction that they did want to get married regardless of their shared history as what Nancy's mother called them, which was childhood sweethearts. Nancy wanted to know they were marrying for a good reason, not just because they felt like they had to. Their demeanor during the conversation matched their personalities, as neither Teddy nor Nancy tended toward grand displays of emotion. They each cared very much, which they showed by being there for one another with actions more than words.

Teddy's sense that he lost his wife during the war speaks to theme of belonging throughout the novel. During the war, Teddy carried heavily the burden of killing other people, especially the innocent lives that were ended at the hands of his military. It seemed that during the war, Teddy wanted to know he could count on two people outside of his crew, Ursula and Nancy. Teddy never questioned whether or not Ursula could be counted on, but the fact that he felt like he had lost Nancy during the war suggests that he didn't trust her as much as he had hoped to. The Official Secrets Act was to keep war secrets from being put into the hands of enemies, but Teddy assumed that he and Nancy would share about their war experiences since they were so close.

Teddy's pondering of life before the war was not surprising. He didn't like the fact that there was a war to begin with, let alone his responsibilities, so it would be normal for him to ponder his life before it was changed for - what he deemed to be - the worse. Teddy's life before the war was freeing, especially before he worked at the bank. The fact that Teddy still thought about specifics from France, such as the food, suggests that he didn't regret his experience, though he may regret the fact that nothing nearly as good had come into his life since.

The freedom Teddy experience in France was tempered by his job at the bank when he returned home, but it was jump-started again when he chose to become a pilot for the war. The monotony resumed, however, when he became a teacher after the war. One of



Teddy's main motivations for joining the war as a pilot was for adventure, something the exact opposite of his job at Hugh's bank. Returning to what Teddy considered to be excessively boring pushed him to do something extreme, which was to walk out of his job in between classes. Teddy, being The Voice of Reason according to Viola, uncharacteristically quit a job because it was numbing his soul. Teddy sought to feel alive and purposeful, and he sought a life in which every day was not the same.

Nancy's wish that she would get pregnant so that Teddy may be healed is significant. The chapter has given some details on how Teddy was psychologically wounded from the war, particularly from Nancy's perspective. She might have thought a baby would have healed him because he would see the renewing of life, the circle of life, and would be able to rejoice in that, instead of dwelling in death and the inevitable end to everything. Teddy's new job focused on life, as well, since he had to write about nature, generally a place where the circle of life takes place on a regular basis. Nancy knew that the only way to wake up Teddy from his war funk was to breathe a new kind of life into him.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways does Teddy show his discomfort with discussing the war?

Discussion Question 2

Does Teddy seem to be most uncomfortable in the past, the present, or the future? How can you tell?

Discussion Question 3

What do Teddy and Nancy's differences in preferred subjects (math and art) say about their relationship?

Vocabulary

austerity, didactic, pedagogy, provenance, torpor, dale, fey, scullery, antebellum, callow, minstrel, aperitif, yardarm, quotidian, dereliction, avuncular, vitae, absconded, erudition, legion



Chapter 6: 1939 - Teddy's War - Innocence

Summary

Chapter 6 takes place in 1939 on the day the Prime Minister of England at that time, Neville Chamberlain, declared the country to be at war against Germany. Teddy didn't hear the declaration made over the radio because he was out for a walk with Harry, the Shawcross' dog.

Teddy was twenty-five years old when he thought of proposing to Nancy. He thought that later, when they had children, Nancy could tell them that their father proposed to her the day the war broke out. Nancy was, at the time, completing her PhD in a specific mathematical topic. He knew marrying Nancy was inevitable, since her mother called them childhood sweethearts, but he also knew that he loved her. Ursula encouraged him to think of how he would feel he didn't marry her, which was what made Teddy finally decide that he wanted to marry Nancy.

Teddy thought about the state of the world as he walked Harry, since two days prior to Chamberlain's announcement Hitler had invaded Poland. Teddy felt the future closing in on him, and wished he had never left France. He thought of his father, who died just a year later, passing in his sleep. Upon returning Harry to the Shawcross', Teddy wasn't allowed near Nancy since she had a case of the whooping cough. Mrs. Shawcross was making Sunday lunch, which ended up being delayed because of Chamberlain's declaration of the war.

Mrs. Shawcross' warning for Teddy to stay away from Nancy was futile, Teddy thought, because just recently the two had been intimate with one another. The narrator notes that Teddy had never been nor would he ever be comfortable with the various terms for the act of sex, unlike his daughter who in the future would be unafraid to say whatever kind of sex she was having.

Teddy returned home. He and his father discussed the war in Hugh's growlery, a den of sorts. Hugh asked Teddy what his plan was, now that the war had started; Teddy responded that he would join the RAF, the Royal Air Force. Teddy felt this prospect to be a source of freedom from the life of tedium he was currently living, though he did not express those exact sentiments to his father.

Teddy found his mother picking mint from their garden. She spoke to the mint as she told Teddy she supposed he would have to fight in the war. For the rest of the day, Teddy's family received several phone calls. Many people asked Teddy what he was going to do; Ursula told him it was because he was their family's only warrior. Ursula assured Teddy that their older brother Maurice would avoid the war, and she still saw their younger brother Jimmy as a baby, even though he was almost twenty years old.



Bridget, the Todd's housekeeper, blamed the Germans for their lack of quality food. Later, Teddy and Ursula spoke over the phone again about the start of the war. She was dating a man who was married, which Teddy had a hard time accepting. On his way home after lunch with his parents, Teddy realized he was coming down with the whooping cough from his encounter with Nancy. Because of the illness, he was delayed several weeks in entering the service. In the Spring of 1940 when he was finally accepted, Teddy faced his work at the bank with ease, knowing he would soon be done there.

Over the following two years, Teddy completed training with the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan in Canada, which earned him a pair of wings on his uniform. Teddy was to return home to England for his father's funeral, but he didn't make it after his compassionate-leave request was rescinded. Eventually he made it home, just long after the funeral.

Izzie visited Fox Corner during Teddy's leave. She had escaped to the United States when war was declared, but returned shortly thereafter claiming patriotism was more important than safety. Sylvie contested that Izzie returned home because her marriage was in shambles. Izzie ignored her sister's criticisms and went straight to relating her experience of being an ambulance driver in The Great War. Sylvie continued to criticize her sister, and the narrator notes that Hugh was the only one in the family to have ever tolerated Izzie's talk of her war experience. The two had encountered one another during a battle at Somme.

When Teddy had returned home from training in Canada, Ursula let him know that he had missed a lot. While he had been watching much of the war in cinema previews in Canada, Ursula had been there, working for the war, though he didn't know exactly what, citing the Official Secrets Act. The two went to visit their father's grave, where Ursula encouraged him to not think morbid thoughts.

The narrator writes forward to 1999, about sixty years after Hugh had died. Teddy was visiting with Bertie (Viola's daughter). In the interaction, the two discussed what Teddy wanted on his gravestone. He told Bertie he wanted an oak tree for his memorial, not a headstone with a name on it. Also, he didn't want Viola in charge.

Teddy and Ursula attended a Sunday service, and afterwards roamed about the graves in the churchyard. Afterward, the siblings had dinner at their mother's house, their childhood home, but Teddy became ill at the sight of a chicken carcass. He remembered an instance during his training when an Anson aircraft had come in for an emergency landing. One member of the crew had been ejected from the aircraft; they found him with most of his skin burned off.

During the time Teddy was training, Nancy had been chosen to work for the war effort. She didn't talk a lot about her duties due to the Official Secrets Act. He suspected it was something mathematical, like translating German codes. Ursula told him not to mention that to anyone, which Teddy took for confirmation that Nancy was, indeed, translating German codes.



After lunch, Teddy suggested to Ursula that they have a glass of whiskey in the growlery, which was when he learned that it had been changed into his mother's sewing room. Instead, they strolled around the garden, which was full of vegetables and large chicken coops. One patch of flowers was overgrown, and Ursula decided to take some home with her. She pulled out a pen-knife from her coat pocket, citing the Girl Guide that one must always be prepared to face difficulty.

Teddy went back to London with Ursula, but he didn't stay with her, saying he was going to meet up with a friend. Before he left, she gave him a small stuffed hare as a good-luck charm. It was hanging from his pram (car-seat) when he was an infant. Instead of meeting up with a friend - who was fictional to begin with - Teddy visited some pubs and got drunk. He met a woman named Ivy, with whom he shared a one-night stand. Later that day, Teddy boarded a train at King's Cross for an OTU, or Operational Training Unit.

Analysis

Chapter 6 is the second chapter regarding the war, but the first that goes into detail. The chapter's title of "Innocence" is because of Teddy's vague denial of Great Britain's engagement in the war. He missed then-Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's radio announcement that England was joining the fight against Germany, and he desperately wanted to stay in a world where so much cold-hearted cruelty wasn't taking place.

Teddy and Ursula seem to be the best of friends. She was who he wanted to see, talk to, and spend time with as he felt the world spinning more and more out of control. The affirmation from his father about his joining the war as a pilot was significant for Teddy, especially since after Teddy left for training his father died. Without knowing that his father supported his work, Teddy would have had a much harder time reconciling walking away from the bank.

Teddy's motivation to join the war differed depending on what conversation he was having. It also seemed to change with time. He was relieved for the opportunity to escape life at the bank. He could leave the monotony for a noble cause, rather than explaining to his father how bored he was. Later, the motivation was to beat the Germans. While that's discussed more in depth in Chapters 8, 10, and 13, it's important for the reader to note that Teddy's current reason for joining the war as a pilot does not remain his reason throughout the war.

Ursula called Teddy the family's only warrior, which discounted Teddy's two other brothers and put a heavy burden on Teddy to represent the family well. The war was on everyone's mind, even though Britain hadn't yet seen a significant amount of fighting. However, Teddy's experience with burning flesh had begun at training. The author prepares the reader for worse war atrocities by starting with a smaller training accident, something that also began to prepare Teddy for what he would see, hear, and smell while in battle.



Teddy's request to Ursula to have a drink in Hugh's former growlery was a tribute to his father, and a way of gleaning what strength he could from the man's spirit. Teddy was always somebody who wanted a home base, so he found comfort in being where his dad spent much of his time. Fox Corner was a place Teddy cared about very much, or else he wouldn't have gone there between training and deployment. His quick exit does not suggest a disinterest in his childhood home, but rather a desire to be distant from that which made him feel deeper feelings than he may have wanted to feel. His drunkenness and meaningless one night stand were indicators of such a sentiment.

The silver hare given to Teddy by Ursula remained with him throughout the war. In Teddy's fictional life, he handed it down to one of his grandchildren, meaning he wanted his grandchildren to have a sense of security like he had when he carried his talisman. In Teddy's real-life, the silver hare lies with him at the bottom of the North Sea, the good luck charm sunk right along with its owner. Nobody needed it then, anyway, because the war would soon be over and Teddy didn't have any children or grandchildren to pass it down to.

Discussion Question 1

Why might Teddy have kept to himself the fact that he viewed a banker's life to be tedious?

Discussion Question 2

How are Teddy and his father similar in this chapter? Use textual evidence for support.

Discussion Question 3

For Teddy, is there is a distinction between the beginning of the war and Britain's involvement in it? Justify your answer with textual evidence.

Vocabulary

indolent, stolid, stultifying, wend, amble, assiduously, gimlet, abashed, histrionic, sorties, bellicose, indubitably, lichen,denude, noisome, abstruse, penitent



Chapter 7: 1993 - We That Are Left

Summary

Chapter 7 takes place in 1993 as Viola and Sunny clear out Teddy's house in preparation for his move to a senior living community.

The author goes into detail about Viola and Sunny's relationship, as well as Viola's general personality even apart from Sunny. Teddy had always seen her as an ornery individual, always complaining about something and feeling entitled to something. He was more proud of Bertie, Viola's daughter, than he was of Viola, because of Bertie's general life attitude and how she treated other people.

Viola was irritated with her father for having so much stuff that she had to pack up. She was also irritated with being a mother, and with Teddy's view on World War II and the lasting impact it had on his life.

Teddy's personal artifacts brought up memories for him from the war, called "his war" when it's referenced as Teddy's war experience. For example, Teddy didn't use certain products if, during the war, the company that made said product made anything to help the Germans.

Viola and Sunny took Teddy to visit the senior community where he would be living. Teddy noticed how determined she was to get him to Fanning Court, the senior community she had chosen for him. Viola made encouraging comments about the place, though Teddy thought they were forced and insincere. They toured the facility with a warden named Ann, and Teddy couldn't believe some of the patronizing things Ann and Viola were saying about why Teddy should like the facility. Viola told Ann Teddy probably wouldn't bring his car to Fanning Court, but Teddy disagreed.

Fanning Court reminded Teddy of his grandmother's home. He thought of her as a miserable person, and his memories there with his brother Jimmy weren't positive. Teddy wasn't paying attention to the tour so Viola had to bring him back to the conversation a few times, which annoyed her.

Teddy's journey to Fanning Court began when he slipped on black ice in his driveway. Strangers had helped him up and made sure to call the ambulance, and he knew that would be the beginning of Viola wanting him to live among other people. The hospital notified Viola even though Teddy asked she not be notified. She made a fuss about helping her father. When she called Sunny to help, she criticized him in the process. To Teddy, she said Sunny was so much like his father. Teddy inwardly thought Sunny was so much like her.

Sunny enjoyed staying with Teddy when he was a child, as well as a young adult. As a child, when he and Bertie would stay there together, Sunny would always make his way to her room sometime in the night. As a young adult, he smoked marijuana every night



from the upstairs room. Teddy didn't mind, and he enjoyed having his grandson stay with him.

The following day, Teddy let Sunny drive his car since he had his learner's permit. They went to lunch, then to the Valley Gardens. Before they headed home, Teddy asked Sunny to drive him to the cemetery. The gravestones were that of soldiers who died in training.

As Sunny and Teddy walked around the gravestones, all of soldiers who died in training. Teddy remembered pieces of his war, specifically some of the horrific things he saw, such as a woman being decapitated from a propeller blade. Teddy had picked up her head after it rolled on the ground; it was an experience he never forgot.

Sunny drove home from the cemetery. During the drive Teddy told Sunny about the different bomber planes in the war. It was Sunny's first time driving at night so he was nervous, but Teddy told him he did a good job. Teddy wanted to bolster Sunny's confidence, since he still had hope in his grandson. When they got home they shared a beer to celebrate their safe return.

As Viola continued clearing out his stuff the next day, Teddy almost wished he had moved back to the countryside when Viola went to college. Ultimately he was fine with having stayed in York. He had created a community in York through different clubs, and even though he generally preferred to be alone, he felt obligated to be part of a group.

Viola wanted to get rid of Izzie's Augustus books, but Teddy wanted to keep them. The books brought him thoughts of Izzie, and then also Pamela, his mother, and Nancy's sister Bea, all of whom were dead. He thought he should move his thoughts past people who were dead.

Sunny's attitude toward helping Teddy improved with each day. He sifted through boxes in the attic, where he found Sunny's old Nature Notes, though he didn't know what they were. He also found some of Teddy's war memorabilia, including medals he earned. He had enjoyed Teddy's stories about the war and secretly wished to converse intelligently with Teddy about it. After he returned from the attic, Teddy asked Sunny if he had found his medals; Sunny shrugged and said he wasn't sure.

When everything was loaded in the truck, Viola told him to do an idiot check, meaning he should check to make sure he hadn't left anything behind. All Teddy felt like he was leaving behind was his life.

Analysis

Chapter 7 is essential for showing the reader the extent to which Viola carried contempt for her father. The reason is not revealed until Chapter 12, but the reader may infer that it involves the fact that her mother died when she was young. Clearly, Viola carried her wounds for most of her adulthood. Forcing her father into a senior living community when he obviously was not ready to go was just one outward expression of her



unhealed wounds. If she had healed from her mother's death, Viola may have been more open to listening to her father and what he wanted. Instead, she resented him. She expressed her resentment for the amount of stuff he had, but it went deeper. She resented that he got more time with her mother than she did, and that he had more memories of her. Viola resented Teddy's attitude, as he was able to stay calm and enjoy his life, whereas Viola felt like she was on the outside of happiness and unable to participate in an enjoyable life.

The reader should note Viola and Ann's patronizing tone and Teddy's reaction to it. He remained fairly silent throughout the tour, as he was reminded of details of his younger life. Yet, his quiet demeanor didn't mean he wasn't paying attention or that he wasn't listening. Instead, it signaled disinterest, a desire to stay put in his own home. Viola and Ann's tone suggest they both thought Teddy was beneath them in cognitive functioning. Ann's attitude may have been a natural byproduct of working regularly with senior citizens. Viola's attitude, however, seemed born out of regular attempt to prove she was better and smarter than her father.

Teddy's personal character was the same in late adulthood as it had been when he was younger in that he knew who he was, what he liked and didn't like, and what mattered to him and what didn't. He also chose his battles when it came to confrontation with anyone, and he maintained that attitude with Viola so as to not set her off unnecessarily.

The fact that Teddy had a gift - as well as some gently used items - still sitting in their boxes, all because they were made by a German company that also made ovens for the concentration camps, shows a few things about Teddy. One, the act shows loyalty to his nation, since Britain opposed Germany in World War II. Second, the act shows that Teddy would not be a part of any company that at one time had a hand in a mass genocide. Third, the act shows Teddy was permanently changed by the war, for better or for worse. Viola saw the change as being for the worse, since she thought Teddy's non-use of her gift to be ridiculous. Teddy seemed indifferent to the change in him on account of the war; he seemed to just accept it as a plain reality, not something to be pondered or concerned about.

Some of what Teddy thought about during the tour was his life in York and the community he created there. As a child, Teddy belonged to Boy Scouts and then two subsequent off-shoots. He didn't enjoy them, but was a part of them anyway. His decision was the same as an adult, although as an adult he chose clubs that would interest him. His tendency toward being a loner had remained, however. The only time Teddy is described as being comfortable participating in a group is when he was part of his bomber crew during the war.

Sunny's presence in this chapter is small but important, as it shows the lasting impact Viola and Antonia had on him. The author characterized Sunny as a wounded boy who had no idea he was loved. Even with Teddy caring for him in all ways practical from a young age until he left the house, Sunny remained unsure that anyone truly cared for him, all because his parents and paternal grandparents treated him like a leper.



The title "We That Are Left" is a reference to the fact that Viola and Sunny were clearing out what was left of Teddy's life.

Discussion Question 1

What are some of the emotions Teddy seems to be feeling as he goes through the tour of Fanning Court? How can you tell?

Discussion Question 2

What are some of the reasons Sunny's attitude changes during Chapter 7?

Discussion Question 3

How do Viola and Sunny's differences create a rift in their relationship?

Vocabulary

culling, winnowing, dotage, xenophobia, emancipation, intransigent, mores, reductionist, scruples, opulent, profligacy, austere, legion, blight, derelict, pilloried, dispersal, ornithology, doolally, reparation, fusty



Chapter 8: 1951 - The Invisible Worm

Summary

Chapter 8 takes place in 1951 as Nancy and Teddy were trying and waiting to get pregnant. The two went to an adoption agency just in case they couldn't conceive. The adoption agent asked a lot of questions that made Teddy uncomfortable. He tried to make light of it, but the agent didn't appreciate his sense of humor. Nancy lied about their living situation, which was an old farmhouse that was drafty and somewhat falling apart. Nancy also lied about their religion, which was non-existent, saying they attended the Church of England on a regular basis.

Nancy did eventually become pregnant with Viola; she was overwhelmingly happy to be with child. When Viola was born, Nancy was in labor for two days. The doctors weren't optimistic about Nancy's ability to live through the birth, but Teddy chose to save Nancy over Viola, if it came down to saving one of them. Teddy wondered if his choice, though unknown to Viola, was in some way known by her in a subliminal manner and therefore caused the rift in their relationship.

Nancy had wanted to have Viola christened as an order of protection, which both Teddy and Sylvie believed to be hypocritical since Nancy didn't believe in God. Still Teddy defended Nancy to Sylvie, though he did so claiming Nancy's reasoning for the christening was reasonable. Nancy's sister Bea and Teddy's sister Ursula were Viola's godmothers.

As Viola grew, Nancy wanted to leave the countryside. She let him know one day after Teddy had taken Viola to an agriculture show. The show was an attempt on Teddy's part to forge a better relationship with Viola, but it didn't work. Though Viola enjoyed pieces of the show that Teddy didn't expect, such as the ponies, Viola got sick on the way home from all the cake she ate and when Teddy tried to comfort her, she rejected his comfort.

When Viola and Teddy got home from the show, Viola threw a fit. Nancy took care of her and Teddy took care of Goldie, the goldfish he won for Viola at the agriculture show. Goldie reminded Teddy of being in the Goldfish Club during the war, which was an award for ditching his aircraft in the North Sea and surviving.

That same night, Teddy confirmed with Nancy that she wanted to move. He was confused, since they'd both once wanted a rural childhood for Viola. Nancy insisted they'd both changed from who they used to be. He fell asleep that night thinking of Agrestis' current column about water voles.

The story moves to when Teddy lived at Fanning Court. There, he was known for being belligerent with the other residents. Ann, the woman who gave Teddy and Viola the initial tour of the facility, had Viola talk to Teddy about his attitude. Viola had been



wanting him to move into a nursing home, called a care home, anyway. Teddy had fallen recently and Viola used it as evidence for why Teddy couldn't manage independent living anymore.

When Viola came to visit Teddy at Fanning Court to discuss his recent fall, they talked about her novels and about how one of them was being made into a movie. Teddy noticed that Viola had been looking more professional lately in her dress and in her overall appearance. Teddy had read a magazine interview with Viola where she stated that the first of her novels to have been made into a movie, titled "The Children of Adam," had changed her life; Teddy could see that in her appearance, though not in her attitude toward him.

Viola promised Teddy that she would help with the costs associated with him going to a nursing home. Teddy just wanted to go back to Fox Corner, as even though it was sold long-ago, it was the only place he really considered home. His confession was a silent one as Viola walked away.

The story moves back to 1951. Teddy didn't fight Nancy's request to move. They found a practical house in the suburbs of York, one that Teddy thought had no character. York was a much different place than it had been in the war, but memories remained for Teddy. With nothing else that he truly liked about living in York, he focused on the garden in the back of the house. Goldie didn't survive the move, but they bought a bird and named it Tweetie.

During their marriage, after they had moved to York, Nancy went away for a few days at a time every once in a while. She always claimed to be visiting one of his sisters, and she added to her claim that wherever she was going lacked any kind of communication ability. However, one weekend when she claimed to be visiting Gertie, who would have no telephone service because she was moving, Gertie called Teddy to ask him a question, and when Teddy asked to speak with Nancy discovered that Nancy wasn't there.

Teddy had accidentally caught Nancy in a lie, but he didn't know how to confront her. He checked up on her every time she traveled and he began putting together some of her odd behaviors, such as stopping talking abruptly when Teddy walked in the room. Ursula told him not to worry about it, but curiosity got the best of him. Teddy finally confronted Nancy, who neither confirmed nor denied Teddy's accusation that Nancy was having an affair. She only told him he had no idea what was going on.

Analysis

Chapter 8 gives the reader more insight into Teddy and Nancy as individuals and as a couple. The previous chapter showed what was left of Teddy's life when he, Viola, and Sunny packed it all up before he moved into a senior living community. This chapter transitions to learning more of what Teddy built as a life over the course of his adulthood.



Teddy was a practical man who loved his family in the same way he took care of his life, which was by simple expressions of his love. For example, taking Viola to an agriculture show because it was something he was interested in and something he thought she'd like. Viola's attitude toward Teddy started at a young age, which is demonstrated in this chapter. Even before her mother died, Viola rejected Teddy's attempts at love and comfort. It is unlikely that she somehow knew Teddy would have chosen Nancy at the birth, but rather it's because she favors her mother and since she barely knows how to love anyway, she really has room to fully love just one person.

The fact that Teddy would have chosen to save Nancy over Viola shows the reader that he cared deeply for his wife and wished to live his life with her rather than as a single parent. It also shows that Teddy liked stability and reliability; since he didn't know Viola as a person yet and he knew Nancy, he would have rather stayed with what he knew. His thinking that Viola somehow knew of his choice to save Nancy over Viola is an example of Teddy's tendency toward believing everything is connected, and that the human mind is more powerful than one might think. His sentiments are confirmed at the end of the novel, but this is just one clue as to how Teddy views relationships.

The fact that Ann asked Viola to talk to Teddy about his poor attitude at Fanning Court was ironic, since Viola was typically the one with the belligerent attitude toward other people. The narrator doesn't state when or not Teddy took it well, but it is likely he took it in stride. Internally, he may have been incredulous, since Viola was the one with a poor attitude. However, Teddy didn't usually contend with others in any kind of harsh manner. Rather, he kept more inside than he expressed, especially if the other person was belligerent or insistent. Teddy's fairly passive way was part of his character since he was a child, but it became more so after the war; perhaps he was just done fighting. His attitude at Fanning Court toward other residents was either a misinterpretation by Ann, since she didn't seem to be fond of him, or a way of expressing his discontent for getting moved out of his house and into a senior living community.

The author begins to hint at Nancy's illness by her abrupt suggestion they move to York, and by her being gone for a couple days at a time and clearly lying about where she was going. One's initial thought may be that she was having an affair, since that is perhaps the most common reason married people hide where they're going when they leave their spouse for a couple days. However, the author has shown throughout her novel that she is unconventional in her storytelling. Therefore, a simple, obvious answer should not be assumed.

The title of the chapter, "The Invisible Worm," is appropriate because Nancy had a secret she wasn't sharing with Teddy. There was an invisible worm getting in between the two of them and their marriage.

Discussion Question 1

What are some of the ways Nancy and Teddy indicated dissatisfaction with their relationship?



Discussion Question 2

In what ways does Viola continue to express her contempt for her father?

Discussion Question 3

What are the the parallels between Teddy's experience of York during the war and his experience living in York in the 1950s?

Vocabulary

affably, dale, cornice, chattels, catarrh, scythes, vicar, catechism, pupa, febrile, mollified, dragoon, vole, tetchy, harangue, concertina, truculent, bolshie, doltish, martinet, tenebrous, budgerigar, triumvirate, incorporeal, scrupulous, lurid



Chapter 9: 1942-43 - Teddy's War - Experience

Summary

Chapter 9 takes place in 1942-43 when Teddy was a pilot with the Royal Air Force, one faction of the British Armed Forces, during World War II. Teddy was the leader of a group of soldiers, since he was the pilot and a captain, which was a higher rank than the others; he received the Captain rank because when he enlisted, he had enough schooling to be considered an officer.

When the chapter begins, Teddy and his crew were headed back from an op (a mission) where they made it through anti-aircraft artillery and a thick set of searchlights over the Ruhr district of Germany. His crew were more relaxed at that point because they had successfully completed an op, but Teddy liked to remain vigilant until they were back on the ground.

Teddy and his crew were on their last op of their tour, so they were thankful to be almost done. They were also apprehensive about their final op because they wondered if since they had been brought this far, everything would end. Reaching the required thirty ops per tour had taken a lot of time, effort, and energy, especially since some of their attacks only counted as a third of an op.

Staffing his crew had been different than Teddy had expected. Everyone was put in large hangar and told to sort themselves out. Teddy chose his crew based on what he needed, which was a navigator, a wireless operator, a flight engineer, a bomb-aimer, and gunners. Teddy first chose Keith as his bomb-aimer. When Keith called Teddy 'skipper,' Teddy felt like he had finally become who he was meant to be.

Keith helped Teddy choose George Carr next as his wireless operator. George then helped them choose Vic as a gunner, who then brought over Kenny as another gunner. Next, Mac was chosen as Teddy's navigator. Last, Norman was chosen as their flight engineer. All men were different from one another, but they all got along well.

As the crew flew, they had to go through flak from below. They were in a bomber stream, which was a formation Teddy didn't like because of how easy he thought it was to be hit by one of their own rather than the enemy, simply because they were all stacked as they attacked German territory below.

Teddy and his crew were getting closer to their target. The gunners were vigilant in their watch, having fired their guns only a few times during their entire tour. An exploding plane nearby caused Teddy to pray for an instant death, if such a fate awaited his crew. He knew his crew was exhausted, himself included, but he had to stay as energetic and as lucid as possible. He thought of his mother and how she used to set the clocks



ahead ten minutes; he wished someone would have set their clocks backward so they thought it was their twenty-ninth op rather than their thirtieth, since they were all worried about something happening on their last op.

The author describes more about the guys on Teddy's crew. At the beginning of the war, Teddy didn't think any of them were going to live to see their children or grandchildren. Now, he wasn't sure. One of his crew members, Vic, was getting married the following week. Teddy didn't agree with making plans for the future. He wondered if Nancy knew the statistical chances of him dying. He had received a letter from her but burned it, especially since she referred to his soldiers as Teddy's colleague. Teddy felt much a much stronger tie to his soldiers than just colleague; they were a part of him.

Teddy's crew continued getting closer to their target. Most of them had a good-luck charm and future plans. Vic's talisman was a pair of red satin underwear belonging to his fiancée; he talked about her all the time and their plan to marry the following week. Teddy didn't think Vic should make plans for the future, just in case there wasn't one. Teddy's reason for not making future plans was George's reason for eating his chocolate ration; he didn't want to die in an op and then never enjoy the chocolate. Kenny's talisman was a worn little black cat, and Teddy's was a silver hare that Ursula had given him.

Teddy and Ursula exchanged letters throughout the war, and it was Ursula he went to see in London when he was allowed leave. He sent a letter through the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) the morning of the raid. He also had letters written to Nancy, his mother, and Ursula, all waiting in his locker in case he died on a mission. The following year Teddy came across a locker of aircrew uniforms of servicemen and women who had died in the war.

The aircraft they're flying was the S-Sugar, a replacement for their previous aircraft, J-Jig, which was grounded on a previous mission due to being hit by cannon fire.

Teddy remembered a time when he and his crew had to turn back from a target because of an engine problem. That's when Teddy realized that what they were doing at war wasn't so much being warriors, but rather a sacrifice for the greater good. It was then he decided that his crew would only turn back for absolute emergencies, otherwise, they would press on. He had his whole crew become proficient in Morse code and he took as many cross-country exercises as he could, all because he wanted his crew to feel ready for anything.

If Teddy survived the war, he wanted to go on a grand tour of England to see every open and hidden part of it. They were awestruck over the Alps in Switzerland, and Teddy wanted to know more about his own country. The crew watched a beautiful sunset as they flew. Once they got closer to their target, the weather changed and the turbulence was terrible, enthusiastically rocking the aircraft. Their experience flying through the bad weather was worse than any anti-aircraft fire.



On their return, however, Teddy and his crew experienced anti-aircraft fire as they approached the French Coast. The aircraft had been hit and Teddy thought they were going to have to abandon the aircraft. Instead, Teddy overshot the runway and crashed in a field near cottages. Everyone survived, though they had to pull Kenny from the burning rear-turret. The owners of the cottages were more understanding than the men thought they'd be. One woman even brought out tea.

The author describes a scene in the future where Teddy admitted to Mac at a reunion that he thought the bombs they dropped over Germany were a waste, since they didn't cripple the economy but most of the time killed innocent women and children. Mac reminded him that the Germans started the war, and that he shouldn't be a hand-wringer, changing his mind on whether or not the war was worth it.

On a later mission, Teddy had to drop S-Sugar in the water at 110 mph. The entire crew made it out of the initial crash, but Vic and George ended up dying soon thereafter. Vic drowned and George died two days after they were rescued. Teddy brought Vic's fiancée his talisman, and he found out that she named the baby Edward after Teddy because she said Teddy was the best man Vic knew. His last words to Vic's fiancée and his mother were the last words Vic said to him before floating away from their raft before the crew was rescued.

Analysis

Chapter 9 is essential to the narrative because it gives details as to what Teddy dealt with during the war. The author uses a heavy amount of imagery from her imagination as well as the accounts of the war she read as part of her research. This is explained in the Author's Note. The title of the chapter matches the facts, as Chapter 9 is about Teddy's experience at war.

The amount of death and destruction Teddy dealt with throughout the war was not a secret, since the purpose of World War II for the Allied Powers was to wipe out Germany due to Hitler's genocidal and dictatorship practices. In a previous chapter, when then-Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain announced Britain was joining other nations in fighting against Germany, Teddy was ready to fight, but he was ready to fight because it gave him adventure, not because he was ready to fight. It is likely he had no idea what to expect as a pilot in a war that was fought heavily from the skies.

The stress Teddy carried during war was enormous. He was responsible for keeping the aircraft safe, his crew alive, and being in the proper position so his bomb-aimers could properly aim their bombs over their targets in Germany. Teddy wasn't a man who showed his emotions, so should not surprise the reader that Teddy was fairly stoic before, during, and after the battles. In fact, the times when Teddy seemed to show the most emotion was during the crew binges, and that would've been only because his behavior was altered by alcohol.



Teddy's stoic nature was incredibly necessary during the war, because without it he would have had a much harder time being an effective pilot. His crew obviously appreciated his personality and character, as well, because they seemed to implicitly trust him. Trust in a war situation is paramount, as the men in this situation needed to work together without any contention between them.

The fact that Teddy had letters already written for Nancy, Ursula, and Sylvie matched his belief that there was going to be no future for him after the war. At times, Teddy's talk of the lack of a future after the war seemed to pertain both to his individual life, as well as the collective life of the British. However, that may have been because if he couldn't imagine himself living past the war, he likely couldn't imagine what the world would be like after the war.

Teddy's experience at war shaped the rest of his life. Even though his life after the war ends up being imagined, as revealed in Chapter 16, the war shaped his imagined life all the same. The reader catches a glimpse of the war impact on Teddy when the author flashes forward to a reunion where he mentions to Mac that he was unsure the war served a great purpose, as they had all thought in the midst of the fighting. Even though Teddy didn't actually live past the war, it is significant that he believed that if he did live past the war, it would have colored his very life perspective due to what he did and saw while on missions.

Discussion Question 1

How did Teddy's war experience impact his relationship with his daughter? Justify your answer with textual evidence.

Discussion Question 2

How might Teddy have felt differently about the war had Vic and George lived?

Discussion Question 3

What seems to be the most significant piece of Teddy's war experience?

Vocabulary

flak, slog, iniquitous, brevet, unflappable, derisive, egalitarian, incendiaries, skein, dickey, aphorism, sprog, vagrancy, unwieldy, niggles, cacophonous, dour, garrulous, jingoistic, miasma, insensate, portents, jettison



Chapter 10: 1982 - The Courage of the Small Hours

Summary

Chapter 10 takes place in 1982 when Sunny, Viola's son, is seven years old.

During the summer of 1982, Sunny stayed with his paternal grandparents at the request of Viola. Sunny had been staying with Teddy, but she requested that he go stay at Jordan Manor with the Villiers so he could learn some posh manners. Sunny hated it at his grandparents. They were embarrassed of him and let him know it, and his grandmother - named Antonia and called Grandmama by Sunny - constantly told Sunny that he was doing something wrong. Sunny often cried himself to sleep, but he had to be quiet when doing so because Grandmama would get mad if she had to go up the stairs to check on him.

The Villiers had two house servants, Mrs. Kerrich and Thomas, both of whom were from a different part of England that gave them different accents. Sunny liked to spend time in the kitchen with Mrs. Kerrich because then his grandmother wasn't pestering him, but even Mrs. Kerrich could be abrasive at times. Sunny heard Mrs. Kerrich and Thomas call their boss 'ladyship', but they also mocked Antonia.

Dominic was staying at his parents' house at the same time Sunny was, but he slept above the stable block, a structure on the Villiers' property but not attached to the house. Dominic warned Sunny of the things Antonia would have him do, like go to boarding school, but Sunny didn't believe everything Dominic said because some of it didn't make sense to him. Dominic didn't eat much and was on medication, much to the embarrassment of his parents.

Antonia was keen on making Sunny behave properly because she said the family line ended with him. Sunny wondered how that could be since he had a sister, and she was a Villiers, too. Mrs. Kerrich told Sunny that his father's condition was his fault just because he existed, but Sunny knew that wasn't true.

Antonia decided to send Sunny to school, which scared him because he knew that meant he would have to live with the Villiers longer. Sunny told Teddy, whom he called Grandpa Ted, about going to a local prep school but Teddy already knew about Sunny's situation. Teddy told Sunny he would see what he could do about it.

A few days before school was to start, Dominic took Sunny out on what he called an adventure. Dominic was in an up mood that day, so he took Sunny out of the house for the day. They walked for hours without any real aim; Dominic said that was because they were going wherever they were led. Sunny didn't know who was leading them since nobody else was with them, but he followed his father. They ended up sitting on a



railroad track. Sunny didn't want to sit on the track but Dominic had chocolate and Sunny was hungry, so Sunny didn't care. They fell asleep on the tracks and when Sunny woke up, he noticed a train was coming down the tracks. He wanted to get off the tracks but Dominic tried to keep him there. Sunny fell off the tracks just in time; Dominic, however, was hit by the train.

The chapter switches from Sunny to Teddy, who was on his way with Bertie to pick up Sunny from the Villiers' home. He pondered why Viola might have given Sunny to his paternal grandparents, and he believed it to be for money. Upset with how Viola had treated Sunny, he began the legal process for gaining custody of his two grandchildren without her knowing it.

Jordan Manor had cast iron gates at the front of them. They were open when Teddy arrived. The drive took longer than Teddy had expected, and he and Bertie were just about out of provisions for the trip. Teddy remembered that when Sunny and Bertie had first come to stay with him, Viola had given Teddy a set of rules for what they should and shouldn't eat. Teddy followed some of the rules, but not to the extent Viola had expressed them. Teddy wanted his grandchildren to experience stability and practical acts of love, such as regular mealtimes and clean school clothes.

As Teddy drove up the main drive to the house, he noticed that the trees that lined the drive were once magnificent elms, but now they were all stumps. Teddy knew that the trees had probably been hit with a widespread disease, he thought the Villiers should have replanted fresh trees. Teddy remembered meeting with Antonia and Dominic at the beginning of the school holidays when they came to collect Sunny; Antonia was aloof and Dominic acted high. He thought through his interaction with Antonia and Dominic and remains regretful of having sent Teddy to be stay with them. Before he had let Sunny go, Teddy had given him his good luck charm from the war, the little silver hare that Ursula had given Sunny from his old car seat.

Antonia had waited three weeks after Dominic's death before she let Teddy know, claiming that her own grief was enough to handle without having to notify others of the event. When Teddy broke the news to Bertie, he let her know of reincarnation and that maybe Dominic would become a cat in a future life.

Sunny had started school within days of his father's death. He was obstinate at school, acting out with violent and raucous behavior. He was bullied by other boys in the school, and nobody talked to him about what had happened with his dad. In fact, there was investigation as to what could have happened, and based on the train conductor's view of things, Dominic was hailed as a hero who saved his son from a moving train. In response, Sunny wet the bed every night and sometimes during day. Once, he waited too long because he wanted to have good manners, and he ended up defecating on Antonia's carpet.

When Teddy and Bertie arrived at Jordan Manor, it was some time before the door was answered. Teddy had gone to the house unannounced to collect Sunny, whom Antonia gave up willingly. That night, Teddy, Bertie, and Sunny stayed at a farmhouse that



offered lodging and food, and they arrived back home the next day. Teddy had milk and chocolate cake waiting for Sunny.

Sunny's grandfather died the following summer, but Antonia lived for many more years. Mrs. Kerrich and Thomas were found to be stealing from her, but eventually Bertie and Sunny got a few thousand pounds each from the Villiers' inheritance.

Analysis

Chapter 10 is important in helping the reader to understand Sunny's life. Even though characters may go through similar experiences, such as Bertie and Sunny both having Viola as a mother, each person experiences and interprets their situation differently.

For Sunny, sending him to live with his paternal grandparents seemed to be the worst thing that could have been done for/to him, as his grandmother was just as vile to him as Viola was. Mrs. Villiers had no patience for Sunny as he tried to learn how to live her way, which was nothing like he had ever known.

The fact that Jordan Manor was an unhealthy place for Sunny to live can be seen in his own actions, which were all reactions – conscious and subconscious – to his living situation. A child who feels loved does not fear those in authority over him, nor does that child feel like such a failure in others' presence.

It's important to note that Sunny had these feelings before his father died. To make Sunny's life worse, however, the fact that Dominic killed himself, and did it in Sunny's presence, put Sunny in even worse graces with his grandparents. After that point, there was nothing Sunny could have done to put himself back into good graces with his grandparents. There was nothing Sunny wanted to do to put himself into good graces with his grandparents, since they treated him so horribly.

The Villiers' seemed to hold a certain set of expectations for Sunny – and Dominic – that were impossible for either of them to meet. Dominic had trouble reaching his parents' expectations because of his mental illness. As a man with bi-polar, there were certain aspects of life that Dominic would not have been able to cognitively or emotionally handle, and his parents' expectations seem to fall into that category. For Sunny, the very fact that he was seven years old indicates that he would not have been able to meet his grandparents' high expectations. Compounded with the fact that Sunny was born on a commune and had no frame of reference for their rules or customs made it nearly impossible for him to live up to the Villiers' standards.

Teddy's mission to rescue Sunny was born out of love and necessity. He wanted custody of his grandchildren because he knew that their other options – their mother and their paternal grandparents – would not treat them properly. Teddy was a man who felt great responsibility for those in his charge, and since Bertie and Sunny seemed to have no one else to properly care for them, Teddy put them in his charge.



The reader can see how discarded Sunny was even up to when Antonia gave him up willingly to Sunny. Her actions, especially after his own mother had given him to someone else to raise, had to have hurt him. The emotional wounds he had gathered by the time he was seven years old and left Jordan Manor put into perspective his adulthood of actively seeking happiness and a sense of peace within himself. The author doesn't give any indication of what Sunny's like as an adult, but the reader can infer that he will have to work to heal.

This chapter shows one of Teddy's largest displays of emotion throughout the entire novel. He was furious with Antonia waiting three weeks to tell him – and by extension, Bertie - that Dominic had died, and he was even more upset that Sunny had gone right back to school. He understood Sunny's behavior to be that of lashing out, and Teddy was ready to love Sunny the best he knew how. The fact that he had milk and chocolate cake waiting for Sunny at home lets the reader know that his way of caring for others was practical.

Discussion Question 1

What seems to be the worst part for Teddy about Sunny being at the Villiers'?

Discussion Question 2

What does Teddy seem to be most worried about while staying with his paternal grandparents?

Discussion Question 3

Why might the author have made it a point to discuss briefly Antonia and her husbands' deaths?

Vocabulary

peasant, ladyship, garret, divining, rheumy, adenoidal, flayed, rhapsodize, dregs, progenitor



Chapter 11: 1943 - Teddy's War - A Thing of Beauty

Summary

Chapter 11 takes place in 1943, mostly during Teddy's leave between tours.

The chapter begins during one of Teddy's leaves from his tour of duty; he was with Nancy and they were walking Lucky, his unit's dog mascot given to Teddy from Ursula. He wanted to talk about the war, both what Nancy's duty was and what his experience had been thus far, but Nancy quieted him and asked that they talk about something else. They two had spent just about twenty-four hours together, since that's all Nancy could get off from her war duty. They met at King's Cross, stayed a night in a hotel on the outskirts of London, and said goodbye the following day from a different train station.

During their time together, Teddy proposed to Nancy with a ring she had purchased herself. The narrator tells the reader that Nancy kept that same ring when they got married, as opposed to a nice diamond ring. They had a small wedding at the Chelsea Register Office with just Ursula and Bea as witnesses, and Teddy - in the future - wondered if they should have made a bigger deal of it.

The morning Teddy officially proposed, he and Nancy went walking on a nearby beach. Nancy finally let Teddy tell her some about his war experience. He told her a story of how he had seen Gertie, Nancy's older sister, when she dropped off his next aircraft (Q-Queenie) to where he was stationed. Gertie was in the Air Transport Auxiliary; she flew aircraft to and from squadrons, factories, and maintenance units. Gertie stayed for a short while and had tea and scones in the mess hall with Teddy.

Before Teddy and Nancy started to head back to the train station, they had to search for Lucky. He was nowhere in sight and Teddy didn't want to leave without him. The dog had been a faithful friend ever since their first meeting, and Teddy wasn't ready for that to change. As they looked for him, Teddy thought of how the dog had stowed away on one of the missions, and how Lucky would wait for him while Teddy was out on a mission. After Teddy had become a POW, Lucky had waited at his post for days, watching the sky where Teddy would normally fly in.

On their way down the pier, a photographer stopped Teddy and Nancy for a picture, which was already waiting for him at his squadron when he arrived back from leave. It ended up with a brown stain across the top; Teddy told Bertie it was tea.

After Teddy's first tour he was moved to an Operational Training Unit as an instructor, but was quickly put back on ops. Ursula didn't like that he wasn't given much of a rest, but Teddy told her he could best help the war effort by being a pilot. He didn't want to do



anything else, anyway. Being a pilot during the war and all that entailed had become who he was. He had a new crew except for Keith, whom he was delighted to see back on his crew.

Still on leave after he and Nancy parted, Teddy met up with Keith and they went out drinking with Bea and another girl named Hannie. Bea had worked at the BBC but had changed to working at a mortuary where she worked to piece together maimed bodies. Hannie was a translator for the government. Aside from drinking together, they danced. The following night they went to the movies. Teddy learned after the war that Hannie had been a special agent and died during the war.

The day after the foursome went to the movies, Teddy and Keith went together to Fox Corner, as Sylvie had invited them to lunch. The narrator jumps to describing Teddy's only experience with being "in love" as far as he was concerned, which happened at a later date with an Italian girl named Julia. She laughed a lot, had naturally blonde hair, and her family was quite wealthy. They two spent a week together at her family's large London home, drinking champagne and having sex. Teddy loved the art in the home, especially an original Rembrandt. One morning Teddy went to meet her at her family's London home, and she had left a farewell note where the spare key would have been. He learned later that Julia was killed at an Army ordnance base when a bomb dump accidentally exploded.

At Fox Corner, while Teddy and Keith were on leave, Sylvie had invited over a local councilor and his wife, a solicitor, a widow who complained a lot, and a bishop. They drank sherry and had lunch as the local councillor complimented Teddy and Keith on their brave war acts and the success of their Hamburg mission. The bishop encouraged Teddy and Keith to finish them off, and Teddy wondered if he meant the rest of the German population. At one point, Teddy needed a break and so excused himself to get some fresh air with Lucky.

Teddy reflected on the Hamburg mission, which he admitted to himself was a "good show." He and his crew had journeyed over the North Sea at night. When they saw the German coast, they saw route markers that the author describes as "golden candles of fire" as they fell to earth. Over Hamburg, Germany, about 2,300 tons of bombs and more than 350,000 incendiaries were dropped over the city. The colors of the explosives were what made for a visually appealing mission. Teddy's aircraft had gone in on the second wave of attackers for the mission.

The following night Teddy and his crew went to Essen, but they were told to stand down for about twenty-four hours so the Americans could take over with two daylight raids on Hamburg. Teddy and his crew enjoyed their interaction with American fliers, especially the chocolate and cigarettes the Americans sent them home with.

Teddy walked back to Fox Corner so he could join Keith, Sylvie, and their guests for the rest of their visit. He tried to miss lunch, and he succeeded. He spent the last night of his leave with Ursula, who Teddy thought was happier to see the dog than she was to see him. The two went to see an orchestral concert; Teddy didn't feel as though he had



the energy but he didn't say so. During their night together, Ursula questioned Teddy's steadfast loyalty to the war, but later apologized. Teddy defended the work he and his crew, as well as crews like his, were doing for the war effort.

Teddy learned years later that their targets in Hamburg had indeed been mostly innocent German citizens, that people were burnt alive, suffocated, or they were boiled in fountains, among other ways of dying from the firestorm ordered by Teddy's military superiors. Teddy remembered the raid and how difficult it was to see for all the smoke from the explosives. He could smell burning flesh from the aircraft.

A few weeks after the battle at Hamburg, a German fighter sneaked into the bomber stream where Teddy was flying on his way back to where he and his crew were stationed. Q-Queenie was hit with a bomb, and Keith died in Teddy's arms after they had haphazardly landed in a field, upside down and hitting a tree.

The narrator jumps to the future again, letting the reader know that because of his war experiences, Teddy had resolved to be as kind as possible for the rest of his life.

Analysis

Chapter 11 displays more of Teddy and Nancy's relationship, and the events describe include more emotion from the two of them than during other interactions between the two of them, which may be why the subtitle for the chapter involves Beauty, capitalized like their mother preferred. The reason for the increased emotion may also have been because their time together in this chapter is during the thick of the war. Nancy and Teddy saw different sides of the war, but they saw it and watched the impact it had on the world around them. In a situation such as a war, emotions are heightened and individuals may be more likely to hold tighter to those they care about, for fear they would soon be gone.

Nancy's hesitancy in talking about the war could be related to her heightened emotions, as well. Since Nancy was surrounded by the war on a daily basis, her desire to remove herself from the situation was probably fairly strong. Carrying heightened emotions on a consistent basis is a heavy burden, and Nancy saw her time with Teddy as a refuge from the stress of it all.

Teddy seemed to have the opposite reaction. With the exception of heightened emotions, Teddy seemed to see his time with Nancy as a time when he could breathe and talk about the war, and be vulnerable while doing so. Teddy wanted to feel less alone, less isolated, than his time deployed seemed to be making him.

Lucky is present as a companion for Teddy. His name is on purpose, since Teddy wants his luck to continue through his tours. His name ended up being ironic, since Teddy did not survive the war, but he was a comfort for Teddy while he was alive. Lucky was a non-judgmental, ever-present companion who would show unconditional love, grace, and affection toward Teddy no matter what. That kind of dependability was essential for



Teddy as a man at war who was deeply burdened by his responsibilities and the ramifications of his responsibilities for the people on the grounds he destroyed.

The fact that Teddy spent some of his leave at Fox Corner can be interpreted as him wanting some kind of home base in the midst of his chaos. Though he felt distant from his childhood home, and even from his mother, Teddy had fond memories of where he grew up and those memories of contentment did much to soothe his burdened self.

Teddy's interaction with Ursula is something for the reader to note. Ursula was Teddy's favorite person and the person with whom he feels most comfortable and most free to be himself. The fact that they have a slight disagreement was more upsetting for Teddy than he let on. The fact that he had to defend the work he was doing for the war was unexpected, since Ursula was the one who told him he was their family's only warrior. He had already gone with her to do something he didn't want to do, and he was already feeling isolated and frustrated, so fighting with his sister was the last thing he wanted to do.

The omniscient narrator gives great insight to the reader, as information from the future is revealed, such as how Teddy learned the truth about the Hamburg targets and the fact that they were mostly innocent German citizens. For the rest of his life, Teddy had committed to being as kind as possible, as a way to earn redemption for the innocent lives he ended.

An important note is that though Teddy's crew actually ended others' lives, Teddy took responsibility for their actions since he was the captain of the aircraft. He was the youngest boy in his family, but held the greatest sense of responsibility within his character.

Discussion Question 1

How might Teddy have acted differently during the war and during his leave if he had believed that there was a future after the war?

Discussion Question 2

Is Teddy influenced, either in his behavior or in his way of thinking, by those around him during the war and during his leave?

Discussion Question 3

The author gives a glimpse into the future when Keith dies. In your opinion, does Teddy feel responsible for Keith's death? Justify your response.



Vocabulary

lexicon, cantankerous, cadging, panache, brocade, alloy, thrall, troth, pulchritudinous, elfin, chaff, incendiaries, pyre



Chapter 12: 1960 - His Little Unremembered Acts of Kindness and Love

Summary

Chapter 12 takes place in 1960. It is the story of Nancy's illness and the cause of her death, as well as how it impacted her family.

Nancy was teaching when she came down with a terrible headache. Soon after her first strong headache, Nancy visited the eye doctor who confirmed her headaches were due to poor vision. He prescribed her reading glasses and sent her on her way. That night, Nancy suggested that she, Teddy, and Viola move to York. In the future, Nancy would wonder if she had some sort of premonition the night she suggested moving, since at the time, she didn't know she would be dying soon thereafter.

Over time, Nancy began having trouble with everyday tasks. She dropped the lamb roast while taking it out of the oven, had numbness and a tingling sensation in her left arm, and lost total vision in one eye for several minutes on her way to an appointment with her general practitioner. She pondered Teddy and how he had kept his Nature Notes job even though they'd moved out of the countryside and into the suburbs.

At Nancy's appointment with her general practitioner, the consultant agreed to give Nancy a thorough exam, including blood tests and X-rays, but nobody told her exactly what was wrong. Instead, they asked her to bring Teddy with her to her next appointment. Nancy didn't want to tell Teddy that anything was seriously wrong if she didn't have to, since he worried easily. She thought of a woman she used to know, Barbara, who had developed a cancer that grew quickly and was incurable. Barbara died never knowing what was truly wrong with her because the doctors told only her family and friends the truth about her illness. Nancy didn't want that. She also thought she was immune to personal disaster since she had almost died when giving birth to Viola.

In the midst of her illness was when Nancy started lying to Teddy about where she was going for a weekend at a time. She lied each time and told him she was going to visit various sisters, all of whom encouraged Nancy to tell Teddy that she was actually going to seek out second opinions about her illness. Teddy caught her in the lie once but didn't approach her until months after he found out. When he accused Nancy of having an affair, Nancy told him he didn't know what he was talking about.

Nancy found out that her illness was indeed terminal cancer. She went to London and met with her and Teddy's sisters to let them all know. None of them was happy. They all continued encouraging Nancy to tell Teddy, especially Ursula. When Nancy got home



and after she told Teddy, she quit working so she could spend time doing other things. Viola's routine was changed because she used to ride with Nancy; now she would have to catch the bus. Nancy spent her time getting her house in order for Teddy and Viola; she cleaned each room, got rid of clutter and unnecessary items, and wrote lists - such as Viola's friends' names and addresses - for Teddy.

Nancy felt well the first weeks after her diagnosis. Teddy wondered if her burst of energy meant the doctor had mixed up the records and she was actually not ill. Nancy spent some time playing the piano, mastering Chopin. She had wanted to be as good as Sylvie, but she couldn't quite get that far in her talent. She still practiced every day, sometimes getting irritated with the fact that she couldn't master it the way she wanted.

One day, Nancy was sewing a name-tape on one of Viola's school uniform blouses. She asked Teddy to promise her that when the time came for her to die, he would help her along. He resisted her request, even though all he could think about was how he had easily killed thousands of innocent men, women, and children during the war, and now that his wife was asking for help to have a dignified exit, he had trouble agreeing.

Nancy spent time with Viola by reading with her. Nancy talked to her about fairy tales and the heroines in certain stories; she wanted Viola to focus on those. Nancy's sister Winnie helped her think of all the good fairy tales, but simultaneously Nancy was thinking of ways to kill herself in a way that wouldn't be so obvious and/or horrible for her husband and her daughter.

One day in October, Nancy changed completely as the illness took her over. She had banged on the piano keys without any sense to the rhythm and she thrashed wildly in bed. Teddy did as promised and helped her die by putting a pillow over her head. He hadn't noticed Viola was standing in the doorway watching. After Nancy died, the doctor came over and confirmed her death. Teddy went to Viola's room; she was seemingly asleep.

Analysis

Chapter 12 is about the most significant change in Teddy's family, which was Nancy's death. She died when Viola was about eight years old, and after Nancy and Teddy had been married for fifteen years.

Details in this chapter explain Nancy's secrecy with Teddy that the reader - and Teddy - had first learned about in Chapter 8. The secrecy had led to suspicions, but Teddy had only approached her once, a conversation that is repeated in this chapter. Through Nancy's conversations with her and Teddy's sisters, the reader can see that she didn't want to lie to Teddy, she wanted to protect him. Nancy knew Teddy already carried a heavy spirit from what he did and saw in the war, and that he was a worrisome person. Not only was Nancy the kind of person who didn't appreciate the spotlight, but she also cared deeply for her family and didn't want to make anything worse than it had to be.



Nancy's death as it fits into Teddy's life at first seems like a natural life event. It's a big change but it was a solid explanation for Viola's contempt for her father, since this chapter explains how Viola saw Teddy smother Nancy. However, in the context of the novel being fiction within fiction, meaning her fictional death fifteen years into their fictional marriage, suggests that Teddy assumed the worst for his imagined life. He assumed Viola hated him, that Nancy died and that he ended her life, no less, and he assumed that his grandchildren, while amicable with him, were scarred for life by his daughter. Teddy's fatalist attitude began as a child when he felt the burden of the Great War from his father, and only deepened with his own war experience.

Nancy's personality is made clearer in this chapter, especially as she worked to organize her home for her husband and her daughter before her death. She did not overtly express her sadness and regret at the fact that she was dying, but her actions spoke for her. By making lists for Teddy detailing Viola, Viola's schedule, Viola's likes and dislikes, office numbers, community resources, etc., Nancy showed her love for Teddy and Viola in a practical way, which is how Teddy preferred to express love, as well. As any mother would, Nancy hated knowing that she would not be present for the rest of Viola's life, so she did what she could when she was still alive to ensure as smooth a transition as possible on the logistics side of everything. Teddy's appreciation can be assumed, since it's never explained by the author.

Nancy's desire to move into her death on her own, without extraneous chatter or commentary from Teddy, was another example of suppressed emotions, a theme that runs throughout this novel. With the exception of Viola and Sunny openly displaying their anger for various people and situations, every main character holds back their vulnerability from their loved ones. Here, Nancy's biggest vulnerability was asking Teddy to end her life if the illness took over and she was no longer herself. Instead of asking Teddy to hold her hand and assuage her fears, she tried to cut off her life since she knew it was going to end anyway. She also wanted to stay in control of her illness and, by extension, herself, and asking Teddy to end her life before the illness did was in the same vain as preparing the lists and deep-cleaning her house, as both were Nancy's attempts to control something in an uncontrollable situation.

The title of the chapter relates to the fact that Teddy took care of Nancy during her illness, even during her most painful times. His act of smothering her with a pillow after the illness had taken her over was Nancy's request, that he end her life once she was no longer herself. Though Teddy knew it was an act of love, it would be remembered by Viola as the reason for her mother's death, thus making her death Teddy's fault.

Discussion Question 1

How does Nancy and Teddy's relationship evolve throughout Nancy's illness?

Discussion Question 2

What might Teddy and Viola have been experiencing as Nancy tried to master Chopin?



Discussion Question 3

Why might Teddy's feelings on Nancy's request that he help her die have changed just before he put the pillow over her head?

Vocabulary

nine pence, gabardine, tableau, occluded, macabre, gallows, fiendishly, enigmatic, virginal, ruminative, cache, homilies



Chapter 13: 2012 - Love, Mercy, Pity, Peace

Summary

Chapter 13 takes place in 2012 and focuses on Viola.

Viola was visiting her father at Poplar Hill, the care home (nursing home) she had convinced him to move to. She was watching the Queen of England on television as Teddy laid in bed, fairly unresponsive. He was coming to the end of his life and acted as such. She was with her father in an effort to erase her humiliation from the night before.

The previous evening Viola had been in York. She had hoped to meet up with some of her former girlfriends, but the phone numbers she had for them weren't the correct numbers anymore. She sat in her hotel room and had thought of her ex-husband, Wilf Romaine. She had kept his last name so that she might sound more interesting as an author. She pondered her writing career, which had included several well-selling novels. She wished her father was as impressed as she wanted him to be.

Viola couldn't decide what she wanted to do, so she decided to go out on the town. It was a bank holiday weekend, so there were people out in droves, many of them in groups of their own gender. Many females were in groups with identical shirts on, indicating bachelorette events. Viola wondered if she would ever attend such an event for Bertie, though Viola admitted to herself that Bertie didn't really talk to her mother about whom she did or did not date.

Viola visited Bettys Bar, an establishment her father had frequented during the war. Downstairs in the restroom, men's names were immortalized, written on the mirror on a visit during the war. She saw a group of men dressed as condoms and wondered why they had to be dressed as something so immature in one of Europe's greatest cities.

On her way back to her hotel, Viola was trying to sneak through the crowd. However, she was yelled at by passers-by that she should appear more congenial and not so miserable. With each comment she grew more upset, wondering why nobody loved her and why she was so lonely. Suddenly, she tripped and fell onto the pavement, her knees and hands taking the fall for the rest of her body. She was cackled by on-lookers until a group of women helped her to her feet, and when they asked if she needed anything she responded, in a whisper, "I want my mother."

The group of women escorted Viola back to her hotel; they were rowdy so the guard didn't want to let them in but there were too many of them for the one doorman to stop them. At the elevator, one of the women gave Viola a Valium, telling her to take half at a time since it was a strong pill. Once Viola got to her room, she took the entire Valium



and went to sleep without doing any of her nighttime routine. The next day, she took a taxi to see her father.

At Poplar Hill, Viola wondered why her father was hanging on for so long. She hated Poplar Hill, thought it to be too hot, stuffy, and foul-smelling. She could hear the other residents' televisions, since most of them were too deaf or far-gone to hear or understand them. No matter how terrible it was there, though, Viola knew she couldn't care for her father since she had never been one to take care of anyone or anything very well.

Viola thought of herself as someone who was made of up of a hard substance. She knew she wasn't a sociopath since she cared for animals and they were living things, she just didn't like people very much. She felt as though she lost out on love once her mother died.

Viola had been visiting her father every week for three years, even though she took no pleasure in doing so. Teddy felt like a stranger to Viola, more so now than ever. She wished she had been brought up at Fox Corner or somewhere like it, rather than in the suburbs of York. Viola watched the Queen as the television special continued and thought of how the Queen had been on the throne since Viola was about one year old, so almost her entire life. The thought depressed Viola and she only came out of her gloom when Teddy started to choke. She got him some water with thickener to soothe his throat.

Viola continued recounting the Queen's parade, called the Thames Pageant, to her father, since she knew he couldn't see well enough to watch television. Bertie called and the two of them made small talk until Bertie asked Viola to put Teddy on the phone. Viola did so reluctantly after telling Bertie that Teddy wouldn't be able to understand her.

Viola had a therapist named Gregory. Her sessions with him are interspersed throughout the chapter. She recalled one of their conversations as Bertie talked to Teddy, since much of what Viola discussed with the therapist was Teddy. Viola knew that if she could start again, she would learn how to love, something she felt she never learned to do with her father, since she watched him kill her mother. However, Teddy's character traits of being stoic, infinitely patient, and frugal, also contributed to Viola's dislike of her father. She was angry with him for many things, including a haircut he made her get soon after her mother died that looked terrible and greatly embarrassed her.

The pageant ended and Viola got up to leave. She wouldn't be visiting the following week because she would be in Singapore for a literary festival. On her way out of Poplar Hill, a resident tried to leave with her. Viola tried to keep the woman named Agnes in, but eventually let her out. The next day she saw a piece in the news about that same woman who has Alzheimer's and was missing from Poplar Hill.

Before Viola left for Singapore she tried to have dinner with Bertie, but Bertie maintained that she was too busy. On her flight to Singapore, Viola remembered a



dream she had the night before. She and Sunny had the task of making sure everyone got on the train, and when they finished the task Sunny had turned to her in delight and exclaimed that they did, in fact, get everyone on the train.

Before Viola left the airport, she went back up to the ticketing counter and bought a ticket to Denpasar, Bali, where Sunny lived.

Analysis

Chapter 13 jumps forward in time. The purpose of going from 1960 in the previous chapter to 2012 in this chapter may be to show the reader the lasting impact the loss of Viola's mother - and Viola's witnessing of that loss - had on her. The title pertains to the feelings Viola wants to feel, but can't since she's covered over her hurt and losses for the last fifty-two years.

The humiliating evening Viola had the night before she sat with her father was a pinnacle of sorts. She had had the experience of being upset, but never had she cried out for her mother. The pain and heartache she had been gathering up and covering up since her mother's death couldn't be contained any longer. Viola didn't dwell on her failings, rather, she quickly brushed past them in an attempt to ignore them. Before, she couldn't handle the vulnerability of admitting such wrongdoings. It seemed that in 2012, however, when she was about sixty years old, Viola regretted some of her choices and some of her ways. Otherwise, she wouldn't have tried patching things up with Bertie, she wouldn't have bought a ticket to Bali, and she wouldn't have gotten so upset when she was heckled. If she had been made of the hard substance she once thought she was made of, other people's teasing wouldn't have bothered her so much.

Evidence of Viola's change of heart is also in the fact that she went to see a therapist. An individual doesn't go to a counselor unless he or she wants to change. It may surprise the reader that Viola saw a male therapist, since her relationships with men tended to be unhealthy. However, a male therapist might have been able to better detect her trigger points and therefore help Viola deal with them.

The women who cared for Viola in her hour of need may have changed Viola's life, as they planted a seed of kindness in Viola that she may pay forward. Viola was grateful for their help, which she heartily expressed. The fact that women helped her instead of men was important because if a man had tried to help her, she may have reacted poorly, since Viola perceived men to be somewhat of the enemy.

The fact that Viola cared about not being able to get a hold of her former girlfriends, and then the way she cried tears while she cried out for her mother, indicated to Viola and to the reader that she wasn't as tough as she thought she was. The reader may have ascertained that fact beforehand, since Viola must have possessed some compassion and sensitivity in order to write best-selling novels full of deep emotion. Her sensitivity only lasted so long, though, since the source of her anger was her father and that's whom she spent the following day with.



Viola's commitment to spending time with her father can be interpreted a number of ways. One, Viola probably associates her father with her mother, and since she misses her mother so much, being near her father is better than nothing, since Teddy was closest to her than anyone else. Second, regardless of her contempt for her father, he is her father and did he did raise her and her two children. Buried underneath her anger seemed to be gratitude. Another interpretation of Viola's commitment to spending time with Teddy is that she related to his sense of loneliness. Viola had spent her life feeling on the outside of happiness, and now that her father lived in a depressing care home, she knew what it was like to be lonely and isolated, thus motivating her to give her father some company.

Viola's change of heart showed itself again when she asked to Bertie to dinner, something she wouldn't have done years before. Viola didn't like being a mother, and she didn't think she was good at it, so she shied away from inviting her daughter to spend time with her. In regards to Sunny, she hadn't seen her son in a decade, a fact that, combined with her recent softening of the heart, convicted her to drop her literary festival commitment so she could see her son. The act is significant, a grand gesture of love, since Viola initially gave up her children to Teddy so she could begin her writing career. The fact that it was spontaneous should not be a surprise to the reader, since Viola stalled emotional revelations for as long as she could before they were too obvious and/or strong to resist.

Discussion Question 1

How does Viola seem to be dealing with her regret? In your opinion, is she dealing with regret in a healthy way? Explain your response.

Discussion Question 2

How are Bertie and Viola similar, as described in this chapter? How might their similarity make either one of them feel?

Discussion Question 3

How does Viola feel about Poplar Hill? How does she express her sentiments?

Vocabulary

anorak, lauded, epistemological, bombastic, polemical, aggrieved, bugbear, retinue, eponymous, contrition, slalom, lees



Chapter 14: 30 March 1944 - The Last Flight - The Fall

Summary

Chapter 14 takes place in 1944 and mainly concerns Teddy's final flight during World War II.

Teddy was on his third tour when he went on his last flight. He was on a grassy field on the western side of the farmhouse that had always brought him comfort. He saw hares boxing in the field as he waited for Lucky to return after Teddy had whistled for him. That night he had a mission so he had to get back to his base.

Teddy was regarded as good luck by the other men on his base, since he was on his third tour and hadn't died. Teddy had volunteered for this third tour, which Ursula thought was crazy. When he flew in a sortie, he liked to fly the aircraft F-Fox; it was reliable and it reminded him of home. The aircraft became associated with Teddy so much so that the ground crew warned anyone who borrowed her to bring her back safely. Sometimes Teddy would fly in other aircraft, but only to test his own immortality.

Teddy went to visit F-Fox and her ground crew, who were getting F-Fox ready for the mission. Teddy wandered around until he landed at the pigeon loft, which was behind the men's sleeping quarters. The theory among the soldiers and airmen was if a pigeon was carried on board for an op, and the crew had to ditch the aircraft, the pigeon could relay messages written by the crew. Teddy thought it to be rubbish, and everyone knew not to put pigeons on his aircraft while he was flying.

Before the op, the crews had spent the afternoon in leisure, writing letters, playing darts, listening to the radio, or sleeping. Meanwhile, the target was told to the pilots and navigators, while the wireless (radio) operators and bomb-aimers attended a specialist briefing. Teddy's mind was on Nancy, as he had received a letter from her that morning.

When the briefing started, Teddy and the other pilots learned that their target was Nuremberg, and it would be the largest raid to date. The mission elicited discontent from the more experienced crews. It had been seven months since the city had been attacked and was therefore largely in tact. The city was an important target because of the fact that Hitler cared a lot about the city. Teddy thought about how it was also the hometown of an artist he liked, Durer.

The part of the op that upset the men the most was the fact that there was little cloud cover, a bright moon, and the fact that they had to fly through an area known as the Cologne gap, a route close to German defenses. The senior intelligence officer spoke, then the specialist leaders made a few remarks, then Teddy, who was a Wing



Commander at the time, spoke to encourage the troops. He last bit of advice was for them to keep a tight bomber stream up in the air.

Teddy and the crews from every aircraft flying in the op got ready with a thick layer of dress, including woolen long johns and vest, knee-length socks, roll-neck pullover shirt, battledress, sheepskin flying boots, and three layers of gloves. The men had difficulty walking in the aircraft from such heavy dress, but they did their best. The crewmen made sure they had their dog tags on, they picked up their parachutes, emptied their pockets of anything that would identify them, and headed to their aircraft.

Teddy was the second pilot on board; he stood next to Fraser, the pilot who was flying the aircraft, upon take-off. Teddy saw the farmer's daughter just before the farm field went out of sight. They flew over the North Sea, across Belgium, and reached their first turning point just before the op got dangerous.

The bomber stream encountered German fighters earlier than they had planned. So many English aircraft were hit and spiraled downward or exploded that Teddy's crew stopped logging the losses. Suddenly, F-Fox was hit. Teddy saw that Fraser, the pilot, was bent over the controls, and he had to be moved if Teddy was to take over so he could try to save his crew. The men worked together to get Fraser out of the pilot seat so Teddy could take control of the aircraft. Teddy managed to maneuver F-Fox around the German fire for some time, but eventually every member of his crew had to ditch the aircraft. Just before he thought he would die, Teddy was sucked out of the aircraft and floated by parachute in a silent night sky. He saw F-Fox crash beneath him. At that moment, Teddy was thankful to have been spared.

Analysis

Chapter 14 is one of the most essential pieces of the overall narrative, as the war was what started it all for Teddy, meaning that from the war and every day afterward, Teddy was a changed man.

From Teddy's point of view, the men on his first crew had become a part of him. Teddy's crew had a common understanding as a result of going through and surviving battles together. Their shared experiences contributed to their significance in Teddy's life, and the sentiment was the same for the men in Teddy's subsequent bomber crews. Now that Teddy was on his third tour with almost a completely different crew, Teddy still felt a great responsibility in bringing them safely back from missions. Yet, he did appear to move through his responsibilities with less enthusiasm and instead, more of a sense of obligation or rote duties.

The fact that Teddy was considered good luck is a fact to note, since at the beginning, Teddy almost didn't believe in luck. He had hesitated in taking the silver hare from Ursula. Though he eventually opted to keep it with him, he still wondered about the effectiveness of the talisman tradition. At this point, however, he was on his third tour



and pushing the odds of surviving further and further. The other men made a big deal of it, Teddy liked to just keep his head down and get the job done.

The first part of the chapter is a build-up to one of the biggest raids of the war, which was an attack on Nuremberg. The tone is anticipatory and cautious, especially after the airmen find out their target. Teddy likely wondered if his luck would run out during this op. Since he survived so many ops already, he wondered if the largest one yet would be the one to end his life. His trepidation is clear as he hesitated to participate in the crew's ritual of peeing on the wheel base, as well as by his reserved demeanor once he stepped into the aircraft.

Teddy's disposition when he gave his part of the briefing was expected. He wanted to encourage the men without riling them up too much, since extreme emotions were not his style. Plus, if one of the crew was emotional it would have been easier for him to make a mistake in the aircraft. Teddy's demeanor also spoke to his own worry about the op, as it was a tall order to complete on a night when there was little cloud cover. The description of the conditions during the briefing gave the bomber crews little hope, which was likely intended by the author since what they feared the most, happened. The bomber crews' concern over the mission prepared the reader for the bloody, explosion-laden battle that ensued.

It is fitting that Teddy's last flight of the war is on F-Fox, since F-Fox reminded him of home. In a metaphorical way, Teddy began and ended his life in a Fox, since Fox Corner was his childhood home and F-Fox was his adult "home." The aircraft could be considered a home because he spent so much time in it, felt an affection toward the aircraft, and no other structure was mentioned for when he was between leaving for the war and marrying Nancy. In the aircraft is where Teddy completed his missions, was responsible for others' lives, and felt free. It was a home base for him when nothing else was.

The conclusion of the chapter is written as a conclusion to Teddy's last flight, and since that is the title of the chapter the reader may assume that the flight was the last of Teddy's time at war. The latter is correct. However, there is a slight foreshadow in the text to indicate that the anecdote is actually fiction and Teddy's doesn't live. The description of the mission is deadly, as the crews expected and as Teddy had experienced throughout the war. The author is already indicating that Teddy will likely not make it out alive. Second, the fact that Teddy was saved at the very last second is a perfect-happy-ending, redemptive sort of conclusion to the story, which has not been the author's style throughout the novel. Lastly, if there was an intense air battle ensuing, Teddy's parachute down may not have been in a silent sky. While silence could have been possible, depending on where Teddy was in relation to the friendly and enemy aircraft, the fact that planes were exploding left and right may have made it a rather loud event.



Discussion Question 1

How is Teddy's earlier statement that being a bomber pilot had become him show itself in this chapter?

Discussion Question 2

What are some of the character traits Teddy displays in this chapter that he does not display after the war?

Discussion Question 3

What seemed to worry Teddy the most after their aircraft was hit?

Vocabulary

scudded, blithely, ropier, winch, fug, payload, raffish, sadhu, chock



Chapter 15: 2012 - All the Way to Bright

Summary

Chapter 15 takes place in 2012 and focuses on Bertie. The time frame in 2012 is simultaneous to Viola's experiences in Chapter 13.

Bertie was participating in a marketing conference. She was listening to a man named Angus speak about new marketing terminology and strategy, but she wished she wasn't doing that. The night before Bertie and Angus had had sex, an experience Bertie deeply regretted. The two were very different and bothered each other. Their night together had been born of drunkenness. Bertie had met him through Match.com.

Bertie daydreamed while Angus presented. She thought about her mother and grandfather, both of whom told her that becoming infatuated with one's own children happened to everybody. Viola had tried to push along the process by encouraging artificial insemination. Viola had also become dismayed when Sunny had gotten a girl pregnant, and then again when his girlfriend terminated the pregnancy. Sunny knew there was no pleasing his mother.

Viola was scared that her genes would die with her children and there would be nothing of her legacy. That fact notwithstanding, in 2014, Bertie had twins. She was happy with the man she married and with having children, though her emotions surprised her. Viola's feelings on the matter are not described by the author.

Bertie was still sitting at Angus's presentation. As he spoke, she silently recited opening lines from various poems until she accidentally recited a Shakespeare line aloud during the presentation, causing her to get up and leave the presentation. She got on the train - called the Tube in London - back to her home.

At home, Bertie called her Grandpa Ted's room, where Viola was visiting him and watching the Thames Pageant. Bertie asked Viola to put Teddy on the phone so she could talk to him. She thought of the family members she had never known, such as her grandmother, Nancy, and Teddy's brother Jimmy. Bertie talked to her Grandpa Ted as though he could make conversation. She didn't like how her mother spoke of him, wishing him dead sooner rather than later.

Viola took the phone back from Teddy and told Bertie she was going to Singapore the next day. Viola also offered to take Bertie to dinner but Bertie refused. Bertie did, however, encourage Viola to stop in Bali to see Sunny, whom Viola hadn't seen in about a decade. Within a couple days, Viola let Bertie know that Teddy was nearing the end, as the care home had called her to let her know they should get there as soon as possible.



Analysis

Chapter 15 is the author's first focus on Bertie. The author tells what Bertie was doing the night her mother was humiliated in public, although that fact is only implied by the timing of the chapter; it is not explicitly stated.

Bertie's scars from how her mother treated her and Sunny when they were children show in this chapter. In adulthood, Bertie had trouble relating to others on a truly intimate, vulnerable level. She also had no trouble being rude, which may have been from pent-up anger and/or bitterness from the fact that her mother didn't want to raise her. Experiencing abandonment leaves wounds and makes it difficult for someone to feel safe with another person who claims to care for them.

Bertie's favorite person is her Grandpa Ted because he was reliable for her entire life. Her connection to Teddy and how much she loves him as a grandfather and as a caretaker suggests to the reader that Bertie wanted to be taken care of. Her independence was clear, but in terms of emotional reliability, Bertie wanted someone she could count on, and that person was Teddy. She may have also wanted to make up to Teddy for the way Viola spoke to him on a daily basis. Bertie watched Viola tear Teddy down with snide comments and accusatory remarks, which was probably difficult given that he was more of a parent to Bertie than Viola. Bertie may have wanted to counter Viola's vile attitude with love.

Viola and Bertie's short conversation confirmed what the reader had learned through small details throughout the narrative, which is that both women knew that Viola was a terrible mother. Bertie had no problem telling Viola of her failings, something which Viola didn't appreciate and didn't seem to realize was exactly what she did to her own father. Bertie's straight-forward approach to Viola may have been a lack of tolerance for Viola's attitude, since Viola often seemed to act entitled to her rudeness.

Viola's fear that her genes would die with her children may surprise the reader. Since Viola gave no indication that she was interested in mothering, it may be confusing that she expected them to have children so she could be a grandparent. However, it was less about being a grandparent and more about having her own sort of legacy. Even though she barely participated in her children's lives - she hadn't seen Sunny in about a decade at this point - she considered them hers and a representation of herself, and her reputation was something she did care about. Neither Bertie nor Sunny seemed to feel a need to carry on their family name, and in fact Bertie's decision to have children was a natural progression of her life with her eventual husband.

The title of the chapter, "All the Way to Bright," suggests that Bertie kept moving forward toward what she hoped would be a better future. Her childhood was not the brightest, since she was abandoned by both her mother and her father. But she kept moving forward with her life, working to make it better, and eventually succeeding in being genuinely happy.



Discussion Question 1

Does Viola seem to understand why Bertie might not want to have children? How can you tell?

Discussion Question 2

What does Bertie seem to be wishing during her time at Angus's seminar?

Discussion Question 3

What does Viola's tone about Teddy's impending death confirm about her relationship with her father? How can you tell?

Vocabulary

gilded, jubilee, besotted, dormice, portentously



Chapter 16: 2012 - The Last Flight - Dharma

Summary

Chapter 16 takes place in 2012 and is the conclusion to Teddy's overall narrative. Though there are two additional chapters after Chapter 16, chronologically, Teddy's narrative ends in this chapter.

In the beginning of Chapter 16, the reader learns that instead of going to Singapore, Viola went to Bali to see Sunny. Nobody knew she was there, not even her agent; she told her agent and asked her agent to tell others that she was having an operation and would not be available for some time.

In Bali, Sunny was a yoga teacher at a place called the Bright Way, and the only way she was able to see him for an extended period of time was to take his classes. Sunny was an internationally respected yoga teacher and frequently traveled to Australia and America for yoga retreats. He was known as Ed, having taken the shortened version of Edward, his middle name.

Viola was surprised to see that Sunny was in perfect physical condition, had tattoos, and had a faint Australian accent. He lived in a small village close to her hotel, which she thought to be outrageously expensive. Viola had trouble with the yoga classes at first, but eventually was able to empty her mind and participate in the practice of yoga and meditation. When she was able to fully participate with an open mind, Viola felt like she had experienced a breakthrough. She finally understood the train dream she had a few nights before, and she understood it to mean that the act of her and Sunny getting everyone on the train meant being overwhelmed by love for her son.

While Viola visited Sunny in Bali, Bertie visited her grandfather at Poplar Hill. She thought about how he was once a baby, cradled in Sylvie's arms, all new and perfect.

In his fading mind, Teddy was fighting in F-Fox, trying to keep her level so he could save his crew. One of his crewmen had lost his parachute, so Teddy told the man to take his and jump. He continued wrestling with the aircraft to see if there was any hope of saving it and himself. With just moments left, Teddy tried to reconcile himself to death.

The author switches from past to present tense as a metaphoric scene takes place:

Trumpets sound as little showers of dust fall and birds fly into the sky.

Sunny is sitting on the veranda of the room he rents, meditating. He's preparing to say goodbye to Viola. Suddenly, he takes in a sharp breath as if he has been asleep and just woken.



One of five walls shivers and crumbles. A second wall falls, stones tumbling to the ground.

Viola is drinking her coffee and convincing herself to remain unafraid as she realizes she is learning to love.

A third wall comes down with a large crash, sending up a cloud of dust and debris.

Bertie is holding Teddy's hand, hoping to pass on her love to him.

A fourth wall falls quietly.

Teddy's last bit is told in past tense: he could no longer fight the F-Fox, the aircraft too wounded to be saved. It fell with Teddy still inside. He sank to the bottom of the North Sea right along with the aircraft.

The author changes back to present tense for one last time: the fifth wall comes down as the "house of fiction" falls. Viola, Sunny, and Bertie disappear into thin air. The books Viola wrote vanish from the shelves, and Dominic met and married a girl his parents approve of.

The narrator speaks of how millions of lives across the globe are altered by the absence of those who have died. Millions of men and women between all the wars that have been fought since Cain killed Able in biblical times, and this story, "A God in Ruins", is the story that existed in Teddy's imagination.

Analysis

Chapter 16 is the chronological conclusion to Teddy's overall narrative. It's important for the reader to note that while the chapter starts in 2012 when Teddy was on his death bed, his story actually concludes in 1944, which is why "The Last Flight" is included in the chapter title. The inclusion of "Dharma" in the title relates to Sunny and his practice of Hinduism. It could also relate to one meaning of the word 'dharma', which is virtue. In this chapter, Viola reconciled with her son and came to a place where she was remade into a brand new person. Her virtue was restored.

Sunny's life in Bali was calm, peaceful, and successful, three traits that the reader may not have expected given his upbringing. However, the reader can see that Sunny worked hard to rid his life of the toxic and fill it with the healthy and holy. Without hard work and concentrated effort, Sunny wouldn't have achieved international recognition for his work as a yoga instructor. Yoga in itself is a peaceful practice, meant to center the mind and body to a place of release from the material world.

The interaction between Viola and Sunny where Viola came to terms with what her dream meant was her pinnacle moment. It is then that she realized what she wanted in life, and what she was capable of, which was love. Viola's realization seemed to fill every void she held in her heart prior to that moment. Sunny's reaction seemed to



indicate that he knew already what she was missing and how she could find it, but also that it was up to her to do so.

The author transitions near the end of this chapter from the past tense to the present tense. When Teddy was slipping in and out of consciousness, thinking about the war and his last flight, the text transitions to a scene in which five metaphoric walls crumble. The scene is a metaphor for the entire life Teddy built up after the war crumbling, because it was all imagined. Thus, the fictional life Teddy built in his imagination falls as he dies during his last flight on 30 March 1944.

There are five walls, one for each main character and one to represent the world in which the characters lived in.

The first wall seems to be for Sunny, who has achieved his pinnacle of existence by reconciling with his mother. The fact that he's meditating as the wall falls shows the reader that Teddy carried out Sunny's imagined story until Sunny was completely at peace.

The second wall seems to be for Viola. She has reached her pinnacle, as well, as she recently realized that she could learn to love and that she wanted to learn to love. Since she has redeemed herself, her wall can now fall.

The third wall is for Bertie as she gives her love to her grandfather. Bertie's hope for her grandfather was to give him the love that he didn't receive from his daughter, which she is doing when her wall falls. She's sitting with the person who means the most to her when her fictional life disappears.

The fourth wall is for Teddy, who has already died when he fell into the North Sea with his aircraft when he couldn't escape a burning, spiraling F-Fox. He had given a crew member his parachute. The wall falls quietly because Teddy was a quiet man.

The last wall is for the entire "house of fiction" as it's called. The life Teddy imagined and the one the reader has been learning about since Chapter 4 has fallen; it has disappeared into thin air because it never actually existed, as it was a figment of Teddy's imagination. The author's purpose for this story point is explained in the Author's Note, but the significance for the narrative is the fact that Teddy hadn't believed in a future after the war, and he was right. Teddy was certain about the fact that there was not going to be a future for him past the war, and even though he lived through three tours, he met his end just as he thought he would. The life and legacy he imagined for himself had he lived in a future he didn't believe in was dismal; his relationships were taut, his wife died young, and his daughter scarred her own children. The future Teddy was afraid would happen is the future Teddy imagined, and it was just as awful as he thought it would be if he had lived.

The narrator's explanation that millions of lives are altered by the absence of those who have died is a poignant message for the novel. It gives the impression the author believes that all of humankind is connected and when those who die, die, the lives of the living are greatly impacted. In the absence of the dead, routines are changed, hearts



are broken, relationships are lost, all of which contribute to people making different choices than they would have, had the dead not died.

Discussion Question 1

What does Viola seem to expect to encounter when she gets to Bali to visit with Sunny?

Discussion Question 2

What seems to help Viola most in her realization of the meaning of her train dream?

Discussion Question 3

How does the fact that most of the novel is a figment of Teddy's imagination impact the overall narrative?

Vocabulary

trawl, teak, changeling, absconded, tallow, wan wood, leaf meal, fractal



Chapter 17: 1947 - Daughters of Elysium

Summary

Chapter 17 takes place in 1947. Ursula and Nancy spoke of life and death. Nancy wished they had a grave to visit; Ursula was glad they didn't. They could imagine him free instead of trapped in the ground.

Nancy wondered about reincarnation and what Teddy might come back as if the concept were real. Ursula believed Teddy lived his life perfectly, and so he would not be reincarnated as anything.

Analysis

The purpose of Chapter 17 is to show a real-life situation after Teddy died in the war. The reader has just learned from the previous chapter that every part of Teddy's life and legacy after March 30, 1944, was fiction. However, the scene in Chapter 17 is reality, as it is Ursula and Nancy reminiscing about Teddy three years after his death.

The timing of the scene makes sense, since the war didn't end until 1945. It is likely that the two women to whom Teddy was closest would visit with each other to support one another. The two women are different in their grieving, though. Nancy wished they had a grave to visit because she was a math person, she liked absolutes and concrete information; a gravestone would have given her an absolute place to reminisce about Teddy. Ursula had a more imagined sense of things, and so she didn't need absolutes; she appreciated art, truth, and beauty like her mother, so she liked to think of Teddy as being completely free and uninhibited.

The title of the chapter relates to Greek mythology, as Elysium is a conception of the afterlife in which loved ones of the gods and heroes were accepted. Teddy is considered the god, since he is the man who died a hero in a war for a noble cause, and Ursula and Nancy are the loved ones. The author's inclusion of Greek mythology is par for the course of a novel that included classic literature throughout the entire narrative.

Discussion Question 1

Why were both Nancy and Ursula Teddy's favorite women, even though they were so different?

Discussion Question 2

Does the response by the ladies to Teddy's death fit in with Teddy's imagined life? Justify your answer with textual evidence.



Discussion Question 3

How might Nancy and Ursula's different beliefs about death impact their individual grief journeys?

Vocabulary

reincarnation, coral, tremulous, absurd, hawthorn



Chapter 18: The Adventures of Augustus - The Awful Consequences

Summary

Chapter 18 is an installment of Izzie's tales of Augustus. His age is unclear, but it is likely that Augustus is a young boy, given his activities in the narrative.

In the story, Augustus was in a school production. While on stage, some kind of potentially embarrassing scene was unfolding before the audience, as someone whispered in Augustus's parents' ears wondering if the boy on stage making some kind of spectacle was their son. The show was "England Through the Ages" and involved the students acting as royalty. The scenery had collapsed and dogs were wandering around the stage, and while all of the other students were carrying about the play, Augustus, acting as a female, was losing his costume, including the red wig he wore as Gloriana. The play continued to be a spectacle, as the dogs started barking and Augustus fell, taking the rest of the scenery that had yet to collapse with him.

Mr. and Mrs. Swift lamented afterward that they should have expected the scene that unfolded at the pageant. Everyone had been excited to put on the show, Augustus and his friends included. Before the pageant, the Swifts had asked Mr. Robinson (the man who discovered the original script for the pageant) over for dinner, along with the vicar of the village, a woman named Miss Slee who was upset by the pageant debacle, Mr. and Mrs. Brewster, who were new village residents, Colonel Stewart, who didn't like young boys, Miss Carlton, and the Swifts' neighbor Mrs. Garrett.

Augustus listened to the grown-ups even though he wasn't supposed to. He thought he might be a spy when he grew up. He had snuck some of the food their cook had prepared for the event, earning the irritation of said cook. Augustus heard Mrs. Garrett clap her hands and exclaim that the village should put on a pageant to celebrate the village's history. Colonel Stewart was adamant that none of the terribly misbehaved boys be in the play, which was to include Augustus.

Miss Carlton apologized to Mr. Swift, since Augustus was one of the misbehaved boys, but Mr. Swift stated that he and his wife found Augustus on their doorstep. Augustus was still eavesdropping so he heard his father's false admission. Augustus immediately turned the thought around to be glad to be an orphan, hoping his real parents were incredibly rich and had been looking for him ever since they accidentally dropped him at the Swifts' doorstep.

As Augustus spied on the adults, he thought of how he wasn't overly fond of Mrs. Garrett, as she was the leader of Afor Arod, his alternative group to Boy Scouts. He didn't like how she led the group, nor did he appreciate how she acted like his first



meeting with them had been the first time she encountered them. He also worried that his friends would catch him in the group.

The reader learns that Ursula is actually reading "The Adventures of Augustus" to Teddy. He asked her to stop reading the story. Ursula told him that Augustus was nothing like Teddy, and he said he knew that, but would she please stop reading.

Analysis

"The Adventures of Augustus" is fiction within fiction, as it was the series of stories Teddy's aunt Izzie wrote. Augustus was supposedly based on Teddy, though neither Teddy nor Ursula agreed with the characterization. The reader may not agree, either, since Augustus was a fairly unruly and adventurous. While Teddy craved adventure over monotony, he didn't do so at the expense of being a well-behaved child.

The stories of Augustus were a grain of truth throughout Teddy's imagined life, as his aunt wrote them from the time Teddy was a young age. The importance of the stories lies in the fact that she kept writing them after Teddy's death in World War II. Teddy assumed she would, which is probably why he included them in his imagined future.

Izzie had been a part of the first world war, so she knew the heavy burden carried by men and women who fought or had a role on or around the battlefields. Teddy seemed to be her favorite nephew, which is probably why she started writing a character based on him. If she did in fact keep writing "The Adventures of Augustus" after his death, it was a way for Izzie to stay connected with someone who meant a great deal to her.

Teddy didn't like the fact that Izzie wrote a character based on him, because he felt as though his life wasn't his anymore and that Izzie had twisted him to be someone he wasn't. The narrator explained that concept in Chapter 3, so it follows suit that he would ask Ursula to stop reading.

The chapter does not have a year attached to it, but it would have to have been before the war or during one of Teddy's leaves in between tours, since he was alive while reading it. Also, the fact that the chapter and by extension the book end with a short conversation between Teddy and Ursula suggest to the reader that what mattered most to Teddy wasn't romantic love, but rather the loyalty and favor of his favorite sister. The reader has seen Teddy and Ursula's friendship exist above their being siblings, and especially since "A God in Ruins" is a companion novel to "Life After Life," which is the author's previous novel about Ursula, it is fitting that the novel finish with the two of them in the spotlight.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways did Izzie make Teddy and Augustus similar, if any?



Discussion Question 2

Why might Ursula have been reading "The Adventures of Augustus" out loud to Teddy?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Teddy seem to be the favorite brother, nephew, and son of his family members?

Vocabulary

shudder, inscrutable, trident, glowering, marauding, viler, conker, teetotaler, odious



Author's Note

Summary

In the Author's Note, Kate Atkinson explains that when she set out to write a novel set in World War II, she underestimated how long of a book she would need to write. Therefore, she chose to focus on the London Blitz, which was present in one of her previous novels, "Life After Life." The London Blitz was the strategic bombing campaign against Germany. It is Teddy's war experience in "A God in Ruins." Her choice allowed her to write the impacts of the war on Teddy's life. The author thinks of "A God in Ruins" as one of Ursula's lives, since Ursula lived many versions of her life in the novel focused on her.

The author explains where she based Teddy, which is in Yorkshire where most of the Halifax airfields were situated during the war. She imagined Teddy as part of the 76 Squadron, whose operational records she used as a guide for Teddy's experiences. The bibliography after the Author's Note is meant to be of interest to the reader, as many of her sources are first-hand accounts of individuals' air crew experiences during the war. Kate Atkinson feels indebted to the squadron's records, as the information provided in them was invaluable to her writing process. Everything that happens during the war chapters in "A God in Ruins" is based on a real-life incident she came across in her research, although each incident was modified in some way in order to contribute to what the novel needed.

The author lists those from whom she borrowed, including Geoffrey Jones's "Raider" and Keith Lowe's "Inferno." Yet, she points out that "A God in Ruins" is fiction and that all novels are about fiction, not just fiction themselves. She wants her books to be rich in text, plot, character, narrative, theme, and image. She does not think of herself as a traditionalist.

Kate Atkinson explains that "A God in Ruins" is essentially about fiction and how we must imagine what we do not know. It is also about the Fall of Man from grace. She goes on to state how there are plenty of references to Utopia, Eden, and the like. Imagery is important to the author, and she notes how she noticed upon a final reading of the proofed version that the red thread of blood that binds the Todds matches the red ribbon on the map to show the Nuremburg op, which matches the thin red cords of Teddy's housing.

The author addresses the fact that the book is fiction within fiction, and that in order to do so one must genuinely care about what one is writing. Otherwise, the text is in a two-dimensional space where it is no longer a common boundary between the self and the wider world. She does not care if her views are a rejection of modernism or post-modernism, as she believes any category that restrains should not be considered.



Atkinson goes on to state that war is man's greatest fall from grace, since there is a moral obligation to fight that inevitably comes with ethical confusion. She insists that one must never doubt the courage of the bomber crews, but she also wants the reader to recognize that the bombing war was brutal and incredibly destructive. She states that Great Britain has been afflicted with questions about the morality of the war, especially since thousands upon thousands of innocent people died at their hands. Still, she insists "A God in Ruins" is a novel, not a political argument. As such, the characters and the text itself can be searched for answers and opinions.

The author is sure to note that Augustus resembles William Brown of "Just William," a British children's book series written by Richmal Crompton.

Analysis

The Author's Note explains some of Kate Atkinson's reasons for writing two novels about the second world war. The other one, "Life After Life," is considered a companion novel to "A God in Ruins," since she considered that the main character from "Life After Life" lived one of her lives through "A God in Ruins." The author addresses whether or not this is trickery, which she supposes it might be. However, it doesn't bother her. Atkinson has written a total of ten best-selling novels. Her idea of letting the story move the details is one she sticks with because it works for her.

The author gives off a tone of both gratitude and indifference, as she is grateful for the men and women who provided detail for this story and she is indifferent toward those who may question her structure of the novel. She included the bibliography so the reader can know the source for the included details. The bibliography is also evidence of the tremendous amount of research she did in order to write a novel about one of the most significant events in global history. She modified most of the information she gathered from her research because she wanted the book to remain fiction and not closely resemble a historical account.

When people wonder what "A God in Ruins" is about, the author wants them to understand that it is about fiction and how we imagine what we cannot know. It is also about the fall of man from grace. She believes war is man's greatest fall from grace because a man joins a war effort under moral motives. Yet, the needs of a war involve death. In this war's case, millions of deaths were caused by man. Soldiers and airmen are aware when they enlist to serve during a war that they might be required to kill people. However, it is not real until they are called upon to do so in battle. Sometimes, it is not just one person whom they must kill. It is several.

The author seems to want to believe that a Utopia could exist, even though she knows that is impossible. Her references to Utopia, Eden, and an Arcadian past throughout the novel and in the Author's Note show that Atkinson wants the attributes of Utopia to be true and present. Those perfect attributes include human kindness and goodness, life instead of death, truth, and beauty.



The author insists that the novel is not a political argument, but rather a work of fiction. The characters and text speak for themselves. However, Atkinson's perspectives on war in general are implied or stated.

Discussion Question 1

What does the volume of research Atkinson did for the writing of "A God in Ruins" suggest about her feelings about the importance of accuracy?

Discussion Question 2

What tone does Atkinson take in the "Authors Note"? Is it similar to the tone of any of the characters? Use textual evidence to support your answer.

Discussion Question 3

What seems to be Atkinson's favorite part of the novel? How can you tell?

Vocabulary

enigmatically, mulishly, fictive, grandiosely, polemic



Characters

Teddy (Edward) Beresford Todd

Teddy is the main character in "A God in Ruins." He is the "god" referred to in the title. The reader gets a glimpse of him as a child when he spent time with his Aunt Izzie in 1925. As a child, Teddy seemed fairly dry, both in humor and in personality. He was close with his sisters, especially Ursula, and was not at all close with his two brothers, one younger and one older.

Teddy did not like monotony. Rather, he craved adventure. As an adult, Teddy traveled to various countries around the world for the adventure of it. He also joined the armed forces in the war against Germany almost immediately after the then-Prime Minister declared Britain's involvement in the war. Teddy's actions suggest the character of a chivalrous man who is loyal to his country. He is disgusted by Germany's crimes against humanity and has a desire to be part of something greater than himself.

The war impacted Teddy from the moment he joined until the end of his life. The war obviously impacted his living situation, as he had to report to a certain station, as well as his job. His emotional and spiritual selves were also impacted by the war, and mostly by the destruction he carried out through missions directed to him by his superiors. Teddy was a gentle soul, he thought deeply about himself and other people. Therefore, killing innocents was not something that set well with him. Teddy believed in fighting the Germans, but he was unsure of how he felt about the method chosen by his government. The bodies he knew were below him after his crew dropped bomb after bomb seemed to haunt him for the rest of his life.

Teddy cared very much for his family, his wife, daughter, and two grandchildren. His relationship with Nancy was solid, and her death was almost as hard on him as the war, if only because he had been the one - at her request - to end her life when she was no longer herself. His daughter was a different story, however. Since her personality was off-putting and she treated him poorly, he loved her but didn't like her very much. He held a special spot in his heart for both of his grandchildren, especially knowing what they had to deal with when they lived with their mother. Teddy mostly raised Bertie and Sunny, since Viola went off to pursue a writing career, which gave him and his grandchildren a better relationship than either child had with their mother.

Teddy lived a long (imagined) life, dying in his mid-to-late 90s (his exact age at the time of death is not specified, only indicated). After the war he never flew again. He wasn't afraid, rather he once indicated that he had flown so much the desire to do so anymore was completely gone. However, he may have had latent concerns about going up in an aircraft since when he did so during the war, he was the cause - and target - of death.

When the end of the novel reveals that all of Teddy's life past his last flight on 30 March 1944 was a figment of his imagination, the reader may note that as Teddy was able to



imagine his entire life and the lives of his legacy while on his way to death, he believed that if he had lived, the future he was afraid of would have been just as frightful as he imagined it would be.

Viola Todd (Romaine)

Viola is Teddy's daughter, his only child. She had a vile personality almost from the beginning of her existence in the narrative until almost the end of the novel. As a child she was fairly docile, and as a sixty-year-old woman she redeemed herself with her son. In between, however, Viola treated other people as though she were better, smarter, and stronger. She could not stand her father and wished for him to die many years before he actually did.

Viola had a terrible relationship with her children. She was happy to rid herself of them, first Sunny to his paternal grandparents and then both Bertie and Sunny to Teddy. Teddy believed she did it because Dominic's parents paid her to, but Viola never admitted that. Instead, she insisted it was because Sunny needed time with his father, even though Dominic was high most of the time. Her actions show that she didn't know how to be a sacrificial mother, as she put her own needs first. Viola's narrative does show, however, that she knew she wouldn't be a good mother and made sure her children received a better guardian than she.

Viola was a best-selling novelist. The interviews she gave to magazines and newspapers painted a different picture of her life than her family saw, a lie for which she never sought penance. She was technically only married once, to a verbally abusive man whom she quickly divorced. Viola had never married Dominic because at the time of their union, they were part of the counter-culture movement that opposed marriage on the grounds that it was an establishment and they were anti-establishment.

Toward the end of the novel, Viola started to seek redemption. She was tired of having poor relationships with her children and mostly made half-hearted attempts to change it. Bertie seemed to only talk to her because she took care of Teddy and Bertie wanted to know how he was doing. At sixty years old, Viola hadn't seen her son in about a decade. She knew that was a terrible thing. To others, she made as though she didn't care. Inwardly, however, she did care, thus making a last-minute decision to visit him in Bali.

Viola's redemption with Sunny was genuine. She wanted to learn how to love, and indeed by taking her son's yoga classes, she was able to start loving others, not just herself. One person with whom she did not seem to reconcile was her father. In Viola's mind, her attitude was justified since she saw Teddy hold a pillow over Nancy's head when Nancy was toward the end of her illness. Teddy never knew that Viola saw what she saw, so her spiteful attitude toward him both confused him and made him sad.

When the end of the novel indicates that Viola's life was really a figment of Teddy's imagination, the reader may conclude that Teddy was glad to have never had to raise a child, since his characterization of Viola was so repulsive.



Nancy Shawcross Todd

Nancy was Teddy's wife. She and Teddy were childhood sweethearts, according to Nancy's mother, although neither Nancy or Teddy were interested in one another until they were older. Nancy worked for the war effort, though she never told Teddy what she did on account of the Official Secrets Act, which prohibited those who worked for the war effort to tell others what their job entailed.

Since Nancy died in 1960, she is not present for most of the novel. She was dry, similar to Teddy, and loved being a mom to Viola. She played the piano, though not as well as Sylvie like she always wanted. During the war Nancy cheated on Teddy, which she felt guilty about. He didn't reveal that he had slept with other women, too, but he also didn't hold a grudge against Nancy.

Nancy died fairly young from a brain tumor that started as a migraine. As a response to her pending death, Nancy did as much organizing for her family as she possibly can, indicating to the reader that she took her role of mother and caretaker of the household quite seriously. Her actions show the reader that she enjoyed being a caretaker and a problem-solver, character traits that worked well with Teddy's practical approach to life.

Nancy loved Teddy's sisters. She didn't have a large family and so she seemed to relish in the comfort of her in-laws. She was fairly straight-forward and liked to think and speak of happy things. It was Nancy who suggested they move from Ayswick to York. She seemed to be a fairly intuitive person.

Having to leave her family was likely hard on Nancy, though she wasn't one to express grand emotions, similar to Teddy. Her actions of organizing the household and moving them to York to be in a more central location were here expressions of love.

Ursula Todd

Ursula Todd is one of the supporting characters. She was one of Teddy's older sisters. Another one of the author's novels, "Life After Life," is about Ursula. The author explains in the Author's Notes that she included Ursula in "A God in Ruins" because she believes this novel to be one of Ursula's lives, which is likely better explained if the reader has read "Life After Life."

She and Teddy seemed to have a different relationship than he shared with any of his other siblings, let alone those outside of his family. Teddy listened to Ursula, and vice versa. It was Ursula that Teddy chose to see when he was on leave during his tour, and it was Ursula who provided him with his war talisman of the silver hare that hung off his car-seat when he was young.

Ursula spoke with an authoritative air, no matter the subject. She seemed as impacted by the war as Teddy. At times she seemed more hopeful and positive about a future than Teddy, but that might have been because she didn't witness the death and



destruction first-hand as Teddy did. Her positive nature can be seen at the end when she notes that she believed Teddy lived his life to the fullest.

Ursula carried a certain loyalty to her brother. She faithfully wrote him while he was on his military tours, she gave him his good-luck charm, and she advocated for Nancy to tell Teddy about her ailing condition as soon as possible. Teddy returned the loyalty, as evidenced by his visiting her and not his parents on leave and the fact that he wrote to her, as well.

Sunny

Sunny is one of Teddy's two grandchildren and his only grandson. He has a fairly morose sense about him for most of his presence in the novel, which is likely due to the broken home from which he was born.

Sunny's relationship with his father consisted of a short time at the commune, and again a short time living with Dominic's parents. Sunny witnessed the death of his father when the two were on what Dominic had called an adventure. Early in the novel, the narrator explains that Dominic was bi-polar, but Sunny was only seven years old when his father essentially committed suicide, and the meaning of bi-polar wouldn't have carried any weight at that age.

Sunny was a boy who felt like he was always doing something wrong, likely because he was frequently being told by his mother and his paternal grandmother that he was doing something wrong. He hated that about himself and he seemed to hate himself while he lived at his grandmother's. Teddy had a soft spot for Sunny, and so the two of them got along well and Sunny behave much better under Teddy's care than under his grandmother's.

Sunny became an internationally known yoga teacher. When Viola saw him in Bali, he was at peace with himself and with his life. Though the reader does not know the missing links between when he helped Viola pack up Teddy's house and several years later when he was a changed man, the reader can assume that he put distance between himself and Viola, since she was the most toxic part of his life, and that he sought love and belonging. He loved his Grandpa Ted and felt at home with him, but since his parents didn't love him, a gaping hole seemed to be left in his heart; he searched the world until he found it within himself.

Sunny's sense of peace is evident with Viola visited him. She was riled up, but he stayed the course. Sunny kept his same schedule, didn't let Viola boss her around, and identified her wounds without judging her for it. He also worked to help her heal by offering her a spot at his yoga classes. For Sunny to accept someone who had basically abandoned him would mean that he has truly healed.



Bertie

Bertie is Teddy's other grandchild, his only granddaughter. Bertie was a no-nonsense child and adult. She treated her brother well, she loved her Grandpa Ted, and she didn't like her mother. Bertie's affections lay with those who cared for her and reciprocated love. She had no tolerance for her mother's behavior and was open with Viola that she was a bad mother. Bertie's straight-forward way of telling Viola what a bad mother she was is an attitude that may surprise the reader, since nobody else stands up to Viola the way Bertie does.

As a 37-year-old adult, Bertie was, as of yet, unmarried. The narrator notes briefly that she married two years later, had two children, and was happy, something she hadn't expected from married life with children. Bertie's hesitancy to have a family likely stemmed from the broken home her parents gave her. With a father who was strung out a lot of the time and a mother who essentially gave them up to her father, Bertie might not have felt like she knew how to have a family and be happy within it. She also may have just had a bad enough experience that she didn't even want to try having one of her own. The narrator doesn't specify what made her change her mind, but it may have been Teddy's advice, which was that Bertie would be enamored with her own children, should she have any. Bertie put a lot of stock into Teddy's advice.

Sylvie Beresford Todd

Sylvie is Ursula and Teddy's mother. She cared very much about appearances, as she acted as though she were from a high society family. She loved living on her property at Fox Corner and she cared about Art, Truth, and Beauty, all of which she spoke about with a capital letter, indicating a great importance for each noun. The capital letters also indicate that Sylvie regarded Art, Truth, and Beauty as more than just simple nouns, but perhaps an experience to be had or to encounter.

The narrator described Sylvie as a belligerent pacifist on account of World War I, or The Great War. The two words used for her description seem opposing, but they fit Sylvie because she regarded the men who died in The Great War as somewhat dishonorable, since they were dead. She was angry that individuals had to die in the war and spoke of the situation quite angrily. Yet, she believed war should not be waged, either by nation or in her own home.

Sylvie played the piano and played it well, which relates to how she regarded Art as an experience to be had. She toyed with having an affair, though ultimately she decided against it. Sylvie didn't seem to be overly fond of her husband, but that may have been because she wasn't an affectionate person by nature. The reason for an affair was more than likely for a sense of adventure, since that seemed to be in her spirit.

Sylvie's piano playing and her regard for Art, Truth, and Beauty and capital-letter subjects were not lived loudly. Rather, she liked to experience them for herself and by herself.



Teddy was Sylvie's favorite boy, and by extension her favorite child. She didn't treat the others with ill will, but she especially cherished Teddy. Before it is revealed that the whole of the novel after 1944 was fictional, Sylvie died when Viola was six. When the reader finds out Teddy actually died in the second world war, the reader learns that Sylvie died of a suicidal medication overdose as a result of losing her favorite son.

Hugh Todd

Hugh was Teddy's father. He is not present for most of the novel, since he died soon after Teddy left for training to be a pilot.

Hugh was a banker. He was a formal man who enjoyed liquor in his growlery every evening. He liked order and predictability, though he didn't seem to expect his son to want the same. When Teddy joined up for the war, Hugh didn't act disappointed that Teddy wouldn't have the same bank career he had. Instead, Hugh wished Teddy good luck and safety on his new adventure.

Hugh and Nancy are similar, as they both prefer numbers, which are absolute, and order. Teddy had a good relationship with his father, and may have transferred his likeness for Hugh's orderliness to be an appealing trait for Nancy since Teddy was so used to his father's preference for absolutes and certain answers.

Hugh, like Sylvie, was not an overly expressive individual. He cared for his children through practical ways, much like Teddy cared for Bertie and Sunny when they needed a caretaker. He didn't make much of a fuss over anything and was considered by his family to have a rather bland personality, even his death was irritating to Sylvie because of the lack of fanfare with which it came.

Aunt Izzie

Aunt Izzie is mostly present in the second chapter of the novel, however her influence colors the entire narrative. Aunt Izzie was the author of "The Adventures of Augustus." The reader of "A God in Ruins" only reads two excerpts, however, according to Teddy, there are dozens.

"The Adventures of Augustus" is supposedly based on Teddy. The stories tell of misguided adventures of a young boy. Though Teddy wasn't described as having misguided adventures, he knew his aunt Izzie had written the stories for him. Hence Teddy's references to Augustus and what Augustus might do in certain situations throughout the novel.

The reader gets a glimpse into Izzie's character in the second chapter when she and Teddy are in the countryside, which Teddy didn't think it should be called since it was on the other side of his street, having what Izzie considered to be an adventure. Information is revealed about Izzie that shows she had a wounded heart and a resilient spirit. Izzie worked as a First Aid Nursing Yeomanry during The Great War, which meant



she saw a lot of dead bodies. She had been engaged twice, but both men died in battle. Then, the third man to propose to Izzie she turned down, and he ended up becoming a wealthy member of parliament.

Aunt Izzie wasn't well-liked by her sister Sylvie. Though Sylvie had an affinity for Art, Truth, and Beauty, she seemed to like each in an orderly fashion, whereas Izzie lived out her dramatics. Sylvie didn't trust her, as she questioned any of the children who spent time with her. However, Izzie's taking to Teddy was likely as a response to not having a family of her own. Teddy was kind to Izzie and let Izzie treat him as her son, even if she did annoy him from time to time

Hannie

Hannie is a refugee who has a small part in the novel but gives Teddy a reason to keep fighting. Teddy met her as one of Bea's friends during one his leaves. Teddy and Hannie danced together and had a nice time, but she didn't stick around for too long.

In Chapter 7, the reader learns that Hannie was killed in Auschwitz via cremation, though she was believed to still be alive when she was pushed into the oven. In chapter 11, the text reveals she was a special operations executive who was parachuted into France before D-Day.

Hannie's death had a profound affect on Teddy because he could put a face to the war; he knew that atrocities being committed by the Germans were real and that they were happening to nice girls who wore sweet-smelling perfume and wore little emerald earrings.



Symbols and Symbolism

Teddy's Silver Hare

Ursula gave Teddy a stuffed silver hare as a talisman for when he was on a tour. The hare was hanging from his car-seat when he was a baby, and Ursula had kept it. Teddy pretended it did not really matter to him. But, it did matter, especially since he lived through almost three tours.

Teddy's Wartime Aircraft

Teddy's wartime aircraft meant a great deal to him, as they were the vessels by which he would either live or die. Teddy trusted his aircraft and had specific ones he liked to fly more than others. His favorite was F-Fox because it reminded him of his childhood home, Fox Corner. The aircraft were powerful, built to be a fortress for its crew and meant either life or death for the men inside, depending on the mission.

Vivian's Train Dream

As Vivian was trying to redeem herself with her children, she had a dream about her and Sunny trying to get everyone around them onto the train. At the end of the dream, Sunny was excited because they met their goal, everyone got on the train. It wasn't until she was in Bali visiting Sunny that she realized what the dream meant: the "everyone" was all the love in her heart she had for her children, and the "train" was herself. Before that moment, Vivian had difficulty knowing how to love anyone, let alone her children.

Teddy's Bank Job

Before Teddy joined the armed forces for the war, he worked at the bank with his father. He didn't like it because it was the same thing day in, and day out. The job to him symbolized order and predictability, neither of which he appreciated. Teddy especially couldn't identify with what the bank job meant for him once the war started, since, to him, nothing would ever be ordered or predictable again.

Classic Literature

Classic literature, especially poetry, is a staple throughout the novel. The authors and specific poems are rarely named, but the reader can know a line is from a piece of classic literature because it is italicized, as it is a reference to another text, and it is always a thought in someone's head.



The author used classic literature throughout "A God in Ruins" because most of the characters themselves turn out to be fiction. She wanted to add to the fictional world by adding other fictional characters or lines from various texts. Also, classic literature is a significant element of British culture, so the inclusion of it throughout the novel is appropriate.

Diseased Trees

The driveway up to Jordan Manor, Dominic's parents' house, was lined with diseased trees. The path is described as being lifeless and desolate-looking, when at one time it was probably full of beautiful greenery. Teddy saw the trees on his way to pick up Sunny. The diseased trees may mirror the death of Sunny's father, which happened just a few weeks prior to Teddy picking up Sunny. Jordan Manor is a depressing place on the inside, too, which was marked on the outside by the ailing trees.

Sunny's Pebbles, Stones, and Rocks

When Sunny was a child, he collected pebbles, stones, rocks, and sometimes pieces of gravel. He would put a piece or two in his pocket from time to time. Once, he slept with a pebble under his pillow. The pebbles, stones, and rocks he kept as his own were something concrete he could hold on to. Sunny had a disheveled childhood, with parents and paternal grandparents who acted like they didn't love him, so to have something of his own that he could hold on to was important.

Pebbles, stones, rocks, and gravel are all hard, almost unbreakable substances. They symbolize what Sunny hoped for his life. He wanted a life of his own that would not fall apart.

Teddy's French Food

Before Teddy joined the armed forces, he traveled to a variety of countries, one of which was France. For the rest of his life, Teddy would always wish he could go back to France. Specifically, he wanted to return to eat the food, which he thought was the most flavorful and wonderful food he had ever had in his life. It remains in his memories as something positive and good to look back on when his life gets difficult with Nancy's illness, the war, Viola's bad attitude, or the war atrocities he witnesses first-hand.

Viola's Novels

Viola was a best-selling novelist. Each of her novels seemed to be about one area of her life that she explored emotionally through the writing of the novel. For example, her first novel was titled "Sparrows at Dawn" and was about a girl (Viola) being brought up by her single father (Teddy). Bertie indicated at one point that she knew Viola was



writing about her life in her novels, but she did not seem to care. Viola took her writing career quite seriously and was proud of every one of her works.

Light on Church Spire

There was a light on a church spire near Teddy's base. Teddy used it to guide him and his crew home after a mission, and he and his crew always felt a great relief when they could see it in the distance. The light meant they were back safely and would live to see another day and another op. The fact that the light is on a church may relate to the one of the smaller themes, which is religion. Though a person's faith is not a big aspect of "A God in Ruins," the subject is discussed lightly throughout.

Uniforms of Injured and Deceased Soldiers

During his second tour, Teddy saw the uniforms of the deceased and injured in a storeroom. The uniforms were blood-stained, still with their brevets, stripes, and ribbons attached. The uniforms affected him, as they laid there empty and lifeless like the soldiers and airmen from which they came. Teddy was never able to reconcile the death and destruction he and his men caused during the war effort, and the uniforms were a symbol along the way of that death and destruction.

Teddy's Garden in York

Teddy had a garden at the house in York where he lived with Nancy and Viola. All sorts of flowers bloomed there. The garden was full of color and variety. Gardening was a way Teddy calmed himself. The garden was also a way of giving life to the universe, since he had brought so much death to it during the war.

Flimsy Blues

Flimsy blues were used during the war to communicate. Individuals wrote on them and sent them to whomever the letter was addressed. Communication with a person's loved ones was important during the war. Since Teddy was fairly isolated and was carrying out missions that troubled him deeply, having the grounding experience of writing to and from Nancy and Ursula was paramount to his emotional wellness.

Crew Binges

Teddy's crew, along with most other crews in the military during the war, would go on drinking binges when they had a night off. The reckless abandon with which they drank and fooled around with women indicated their worry that they might not live past their next mission. Also, the men were under great stress during the war, as they carried a heavy burden of executing important missions that killed thousands of people over time.



Binging on alcohol, a substance that would change one's state of mind, was a way they forgot for a little while the destruction they were causing.

Poppies

Poppies were used in the Bomber Memorial Ceremony that Bertie stumbled upon. Typically, poppies are a symbol of the sacrifice given by men and women in uniform during a time of war. During the ceremony, that meaning was upheld. Poppies were also present at Fox Corner before the property changed hands. Since Fox Corner held fond memories for Teddy, the poppies can also be seen as honoring Teddy.

Teddy's Pen-name, Agrestis

Teddy used Agrestis as a pen-name when he wrote "Nature's Notes." The cover-up of his real name might have been because Teddy often felt like an outsider. He was just watching life go by. He was living in a future he never imagined would happen. Sometimes the truth of living his life was a lot for him to bear. A pen-name may have made it easier, at least when he wrote "Nature Notes."



Settings

London

"A God in Ruins" takes place in England. Most of the novel takes place in the suburbs and countryside of the United Kingdom, but London is where Bertie lives and where Teddy blows off steam during the war. Each time London is included, it is a bustling city full of merry people.

Fox Corner

Fox Corner was where Teddy grew up, and it was the place he wished to return to for much of his (imagined) life after the war. Teddy has fond memories of playing with his sisters, spending time with his aunt Izzie, and feeling - and being - free. Fox Corner seems to be in the suburbs, since it is surrounded with bluebells and Teddy puts quotations around "countryside" when he refers to how his aunt seems to regard the home.

Fox Corner seemed to be an average size house that fit Teddy, his parents, his two brothers, and his two sisters. It had a den, as well, which his father called a growlery. Later in the novel the reader learns that there were actually foxes that roam about the property, which Sylvie came to dislike. Fox Corner was sold after both of Teddy's parents perish.

Battle skies of World War II

The battle skies of World War are important for the reader to note as a setting. Teddy was a pilot in the second World War, so he spent a lot of time in the battle skies of the war. Teddy's personal character was set in place from his wartime experiences, much of which was in the air during a bomber stream or a targeted mission. In the battle skies Teddy saw death and destruction to a great extent, since he had a bird's eye view of the ground and air battles.

Ayswick

Ayswick is important because it was one of the houses Nancy and Teddy lived in. It was a large farmhouse on the outskirts of a small village. Bertie took Teddy there on his "farewell tour," where it stood looking the same as it had decades before, just turned into a small inn. Teddy and Bertie stayed the night. Teddy's first room assignment was his old bedroom with Nancy, and his second room assignment was Viola's old room.



The property looked down the length of a valley and had a small garden. Ayswick is where Viola spent most of her childhood, and it's where Nancy's illness began. It was the house the three of them lived in just before they moved to York.

Mouse Cottage

Mouse Cottage was another home Teddy and Nancy shared. It was on the edge of an area of moors. It was small, drafty, and difficult to live in, but Teddy remembered it fondly because it was a place he had shared with Nancy. Teddy and Bertie tried to visit Mouse Cottage on his "farewell tour" but it was no longer standing.

House in York

Teddy, Nancy, and Viola moved to a no-name house in York the year Nancy died. It was in the suburbs and therefore had only a number rather than a name. Viola spent the second half of her childhood, as well as her adolescence, at the house in York. Bertie and Sunny lived there, too, when Teddy was in his 60s and Viola didn't want them living with her.

Fanning Court

Fanning Court is the independent senior living facility in which Teddy resided once he moved out of his house in York. He didn't mind it there, but he didn't love it, either. It was considered a sheltered retirement housing complex, and Viola had convinced him to move there. Fanning Court is described as being decorated in bland colors and "offensive" Impressionist paintings.

Teddy lived at Fanning Court for many years but never considered it home. He left Fanning Court after a fall, when Viola was adamant he needed a care (nursing) home.

Poplar Hill

Poplar Hill is the care home Teddy lived in after he left Fanning Court. Viola adamantly insisted Teddy move to Poplar Hill after he fell outside. However, Viola hated Poplar Hill because she felt as though nothing they promised was actually available, such as the three hot meals a day. She thought their title was a misnomer, as well, since there were no poplars or hills anywhere in sight.

Teddy was in his 90s when he moved to Poplar Hill. The other residents were either just as old or just as out of it. Televisions could be heard from every room up and down the hallway, since the volume was turned up on each one just in case someone could hear or understand what was going on. Teddy was living there when Viola got the call that he would likely be dying within hours.



Adam's Acre

Adam's Acre was the commune Viola and Dominic lived on with Sunny and Bertie. It was run by a woman named Dorothy who controlled most of the commune. Many people stayed on the commune, either coming from or going to somewhere, though most of them didn't help out the way Viola thought they ought to be expected to.

The property had been called Long Grove Farm from the Middle Ages, but Dorothy renamed it when she bought it at an auction. Dominic had been vetted to make sure he was suitable for Adam's Acre, indicating the owner had a process she followed in order to let people in.



Themes and Motifs

Legacy

Legacy is a significant theme in "A God in Ruins," as the entire novel is Teddy wondering what his legacy would be had he survived the war. Near the conclusion of the novel, the author reveals that every experience past Teddy's last flight was a figment of his imagination. What Teddy imagined was his legacy, and he did not think highly of it.

Teddy's legacy rested on Viola, Bertie, and Sunny. They tell much of Teddy's story through their own stories. Teddy seemed to believe that his story was their story, as they were his living legacy. Teddy was fairly disappointed, however, because not only did he have just one child and she was a girl, but that girl held a great deal of contempt for him and did not keep her last name after she got married. Thus, Teddy's lineage as connected to a surname ended with him.

Bertie and Sunny were also part of Teddy's legacy, and he was more proud of them for how they represented him and their family. Bertie was a kind, fairly honest woman who held a good relationship with her Grandpa Ted. She was kind to her brother and listened to Teddy when he spoke wisdom. Teddy was also proud of Sunny and the legacy he carried forward. Even though Sunny often seemed like the black sheep as a child, Teddy had always held a soft spot for him, knowing how difficult it had to be for Sunny to live with his parents. However, Sunny carried on the kindness his Grandpa Ted showed by being a compassionate adult and a yoga instructor. Yoga is typically a calm practice, therefore Sunny would have to have a certain temperament to be an internationally revered teacher. Thus, with his grandchildren, Teddy was happy with his legacy.

Since Teddy actually died during an air fight, his actual legacy is quite different than described in the novel, as it is just the memories of him and the inspiration he provided to Nancy and to his sisters.

Effects of War

The effects of war on an individual and their loved ones is one of the most obvious themes in "A God in ruins" since most events of the novel are all byproducts of Teddy's experiences as a bomber pilot during World War II.

Teddy's personal experience during World War II was the foundation for his life perspective. The fact that his crew was responsible for likely thousands of death did not sit well with Teddy, during or after the war. He carried the burden of those deaths with him for the rest of his (imagined) life. So much so, that from time to time Teddy wondered if the war was truly justified, if there was another way to stop Hitler aside from how England, America, and the other nations went about it. Teddy seemed to have a permanently broken heart as a result of his war responsibilities.



The war also impacted the way Teddy saw the present and the future. During the war, Teddy didn't think he was going to live. Thus, he was unprepared for survival. He had seen no future past the war, for anyone or anything, and yet there was a world after the war. The experience put Teddy under great duress, as he didn't know how to live in a post-war world. He felt he had seen too much death and destruction to live a normal, day-to-day life.

The end of the novel reveals that Teddy's entire life after his flight on 30 March 1944, including his marriage to Nancy, Viola, and Bertie and Sunny, was a figment of Teddy's imagination. Even so, the effects of war on his psyche and on his imagined life were real, since Teddy believed that if he had lived, the war would have changed his life as described throughout the novel.

Death

Death is a strong theme of "A God in Ruins," before, during, and after the war. The first character to die in the narrative was Hugh, who died in his sleep soon after Teddy went to training for his job as a bomber pilot. Hugh's death had a small impact on the overall narrative, except that Teddy likely wished he could have shared his war experiences with his father since his father had been in The Great War just twenty years prior.

During the war, the presence of death was great. Teddy's entire job involved killing individuals on the ground. Though their targets were not specifically the people, citizens of the villages, towns, and cities they bombed were casualties, anyway. Teddy and his crew never saw the bodies up close, but sometimes they could smell the burning flesh, a smell that Teddy remembered for a long time after the war.

Also during the war, Teddy dealt with the knowledge that thousands of soldiers and airmen perished in battles, air warfare, and accidents. Once, he came upon a storeroom filled with uniforms of the deceased or injured. He viewed it with emotional distance, but the fact was he couldn't escape the idea of death, it was all around him.

Teddy dealt with death again about fifteen years after the war when his wife of fifteen years died of brain cancer. He was the one to officially end her life after the illness had made her into someone entirely different, an act she had asked him to perform should the need arise, which it did. Her death was another one Teddy carried with him, as he never remarried and lived a rather quiet life.

Viola's experience of death was just as traumatic as Sunny's experience, since each of them watched someone close to them die. In the aftermath of each experience, Viola and Sunny lashed out in different ways. Viola was quieter about her anger until she left the house, and Sunny was ill-behaved at school as a way of dealing with the death of his father.

The reader learns toward the end of the novel that Teddy did indeed die during the war. On his third tour, Teddy did not survive a bomber raid. The character who carried heavily the burden of thousands of deaths, was dead himself. The author's intention behind



such a high volume of death in the novel may have been to indicate the fleetingness of life.

Each character who experienced death responded to their respective situations differently, which follows suit with their differing personalities. The theme throughout the novel matches the premise of the novel, which is the lasting effect of war, since death and war go hand-in-hand.

Huan Experience

"A God in Ruins" explores the human experience, which can also be considered a theme for the novel. The story is told from an omniscient narrator's point of view, and each character's human experience is laid out. Though each chapter mainly focuses on one character, the other characters are included, too, so that each person's story is told throughout the course of the novel.

The human experience includes a range of emotions, situations, circumstances, interpretations, and life perspectives that impact how an individual encounters the world. One of the themes the author works into the narrative is how each character experiences the world around him or her, as well as the world at large.

The human experience may be considered universal, as well as incredibly personal. For Viola, she isolated herself from her family, but not from her fans. Therefore, she isolated her human experience from her father and her children, but was open and vulnerable with her fans. She did so by choice, although she felt as though she had no choice after the trauma of watching her father end her mother's life.

Similar to Viola's experience, Teddy's human experience was both personal and universal. He was a quiet man who was not given to great fanfare for anything. Even at war, he was known as the steady one. He experienced victory, fear, death, grief, loss, life, truth, and so much more with the men and women who served alongside him, making part of his human experience universal. However, the fact that he believed men should hold their emotions close to them and not outwardly express them, put his human experience firmly in his hands. He cared for his family in practical ways, but in regards to how he was emotionally and psychologically experiencing life, his human experience was incredibly personal.

Bertie and Sunny's human experiences should be noted, since they were born into the same household and yet took completely different paths, as they interpreted their childhoods quite differently. Bertie accepted her parents for the poor parental units they were. Sunny, however, internalized his parents' poor behavior.

Happiness

Happiness is one of the smaller themes in "A God in Ruins," but nonetheless is present. Characters either sought after it throughout their lives, felt as though it was going to



evade them so there was no point in pursuing it, or felt that it was right in front of them and there was not anything more they needed or wanted in life.

Viola is a character who consciously acted as though happiness would never be hers to experience so why should she even try. However, subconsciously, Viola vigorously pursued happiness and contentment with one's self and the world at large. She spent almost her entire adult life seeking happiness in a variety of ways, to include giving up her children, writing best-selling novels, searching for her father's approval, and romantic pursuits, among others. However, the way she acted toward her life - discarding relationships that would have been meaningful, expressing her angst through her writing - suggest that was a miserable person who thought she would always be miserable, so why even try to make things better. She didn't work to better her relationships with her children until she was close to sixty years old, possibly because for a long time she didn't really think it was possible. She couldn't seem to figure out what will make her happy. When she did realize what might finally settle her spirit - learning to love - she avoided it at first, probably wondering if happiness and contentment were even possible for her. Once she succumbed to learning to love, however, her spirit seemed more settled.

Teddy's happiness fluctuated. He was a fairly even-keel man who tended towards the melancholy. Since he hadn't expected to live past the war, the future he lived in post-war was both confusing and wonderful. When Teddy escaped F-Fox in his last flight, he was thankful to have been spared. Yet, when Nancy died and when Viola treated him horribly, his melancholy seemed to deepen.

One character whose happiness is mentioned rather fleetingly, yet the implications are great, is Bertie. She didn't marry until she was thirty-nine years old. She ended up having two children, and the happiness she felt from having a husband and two children surprised her. The implications of Bertie's happiness in the middle of her adulthood suggest to the reader that, due to her upbringing, Bertie might have thought it impossible to be genuinely happy inside of a family. Yet, when the opportunity seemed to present itself, she welcomed it into her life, which was likely Teddy's influence on her more than anything else.

One aspect of happiness that might seem confusing was Dominic's pursuit of happiness, since it was matched with depression. When Dominic was on his high days, he seemed happy and attempted to be normal, such as the morning of his adventure with Sunny when he came downstairs and asked for a hearty breakfast before going to spend time with his son. Dominic's happiness was an illusion, though. He was medicated, too psychologically ill to experience a genuine, unadulterated happiness. If he was able to feel happiness, he may not have let himself get hit by the train. Instead, he only experienced periods of medicated wellness, which he thought was happiness, but for him was just a light period in between the dark ones.

Sunny best exemplifies being content. When Viola visited him, one might expect that he would have been upset or gotten riled up from the emotions she was likely to trigger for him. However, he was content with himself, his place in life, the respect he received



from the international yoga community, and therefore Viola could not rattle him. He knew who he was, what he wanted and didn't want, and he knew how to stand firm in his happiness and not let others take him away from it.

Internal Conflict

Internal conflict is a theme that presents itself mostly through Teddy and Viola, but also through some of the other characters in "A God in Ruins."

Teddy's internal conflict lies in the fact that he didn't expect to live past the war. The world in which he lived was one he didn't think was going to exist, and not just for himself but for the world at large. When Teddy thought of the war, and when he was in the thick of battles, bombing cities in Germany and causing thousands of deaths and tons of destruction, he thought there was no way the world was going to exist past the war. He saw no way out of it for any one person or any one nation. He never referenced Armageddon, but that's what he seemed to convey.

Thus, since Teddy lived through the war, it seemed as though he felt like he didn't have a blueprint for how to live. He made his decisions based on practicality and what Nancy wanted, when before the war he tended toward the adventurous route. He wanted certain things, for example he didn't want to move from Ayswick, but he also didn't want to upset Nancy. He wanted a good relationship with Viola, yet he didn't like her personality. He wanted to live his life well, but he didn't know how to do that. Each day was something that seemed to confuse him or haunt him.

Teddy's consistent sense of internal conflict seemed to have stemmed from his war experience. It is likely that he felt guilty enough for all the innocent lives his bombs took, that he struggled with being alive when so many others were unnecessarily dead. He had trouble reconciling the commission of the war with his survival of it.

Viola's internal conflict is somewhat harder to see because she buried it beneath a vile personality. To others and to herself, Viola made herself out to be victim, having always been wronged by one person or another. However, on her clearest days, Viola knew it was up to her to change. She was conflicted between the hurts she suffered as a child, and knowing it was up to her to move on. She could stay stuck in the past with the hurt, or she could move forward and learn to love. The conflict arose when she was comfortable in her pain and knew who she was when she was angry; loving others didn't come naturally to her so when she started to try, it felt unnatural at first.

Sunny, too, carried the burden of internal conflict when he was living with his paternal grandparents. He wanted so badly to be better behaved than he was, but he could never remember how to do better. He also wanted his dad to love him, yet knew there had to be something wrong with his father because of the way he acted. Sunny was caught between what he wanted and what he knew to be true, causing an internal conflict that set him on a course of self-discovery later in life.



Isolation

Isolation is a key theme throughout "A God in Ruins" for every major character. Each individual carried the burden differently.

Teddy's burden of isolation started before the war, when he felt strongly about not wanting to work at the bank and stay near Fox Corner. He seemed to feel isolated from his family since he wanted a different type of life. Teddy didn't openly express his desire to have a different kind of life, but he also did not feel guilty about such desires. Rather, he used the war as a way to escape the monotony. During the war, though he experienced battles and death with his crew, and he viewed his crew as being part of himself, the destructive nature of his job took a toll on him. He became more withdrawn as time went on, easily isolating himself from friends and family.

Viola's sense of isolation began after her mother died. Teddy assumed she missed her mother as any young girl would, but he was unaware they she saw Teddy smother Nancy with a pillow. Viola had a therapist, though it's not clear if she ever divulged her trauma. Regardless of whether or not she did, Viola's sense of isolation was strong as she was a single child with no siblings, and now with only a father to teach her through life. Viola had no female influences, since Sylvie had already died and Mrs. Shawcross, Ursula, and Pamela were not described as having been around as a caretaker after Nancy's death.

Viola's way of dealing with her isolation was destructive, as it led her to unhealthy relationships, a lack of a relationship with her father and her children, and an angry spirit that transferred into every other area of her life. The only aspect of Viola's life that was helped by her sense of isolation was her writing, as Viola let herself be vulnerable in her novels, and so her writing was her closest companion.

Bertie and Sunny's sense of isolation was somewhat different than Viola and Teddy's, and it didn't last as long. For Bertie, her experience of isolation was simply from her mother, and since she didn't like her mother she seemed to have no concerns about it. Sunny, on the other hand, seemed to feel isolated because he had a difficult time relating to others. With his paternal grandparents he was always in trouble, with his mother he was bothersome, with his Grandpa Ted he wanted to be vulnerable but wasn't sure how. Sunny ended up finding peace in becoming a yoga instructor, but his sense of isolation was profound as a young boy.

Family

Family is one of the most predominant themes throughout "A God in Ruins," especially since Teddy's story is told through the story of his legacy. Teddy, his wife Nancy, their daughter Viola, and her two children are the focus throughout the entire novel, each one being the focus of one or more chapters. Teddy's parents are also explained throughout the novel.



Much of the family members' interactions with each other paint a rather morose picture with the exception of Teddy's relationships; the only person with whom Teddy didn't have a good relationship with was his daughter. Yet, the fact that the only other people who really mattered to the main character were his crew - which he regarded as closer than family - indicates to the reader that even in a situation where the family is not a close-knit group, one's family ties can have a lasting effect.

Teddy's interactions with most of his family members were positive. With the exception of his mother and Viola, Teddy genuinely loved his family. He was loyal to them, saw love as a practical exercise and therefore strived to be consistently present. With Sylvie, Teddy was fairly indifferent. He was her favorite child, but his experiences at war changed his view of home; nothing was the same and regarded his mother with apathy as time went on. Regarding Viola, Teddy didn't know why she treated him the way she did because he didn't see that she watched Teddy end Nancy's life, an act that Nancy had requested he do for her should her illness take her to the brink of death. Viola's treatment of Teddy was vile, disrespectful, and full of contempt, and though he died not knowing where her anger came from, he never stopped treating her with respect.

Viola's interactions with everyone were fraught with selfishness and an air of superiority. The narrator reveals toward the end of the novel that Viola knew all along that she didn't know how to love, which explains why she gave up Bertie and Sunny to their grandparents, and why she stayed with two emotionally abusive men. Viola's sense of family was basically non-existent after she lost her mother. She didn't know what a family felt like because after seeing Teddy smother Nancy, she felt alone in the world.

Bertie and Sunny's sense of family was similar to Viola's, though not as extreme since they experienced stability with Teddy. They regarded Viola as a terrible mother. Bertie was able to not take Viola's treatment of her personally, but Sunny struggled with being at peace with himself and the world. It wasn't until he found his sense of self as a yoga instructor on another continent that he seemed to feel whole. He was calm with his mother when she visited, but somewhat wary. He wasn't given an example of what a healthy mother-son relationship should look like, so it made sense that he didn't know how to treat her when she came to visit.

Nancy's sense of family seemed to be just as strong as Teddy's. She was steadfast in her love for her parents, her husband, and her daughter. She was a caretaker and worked to organize her household before she died. Nancy, Teddy, and Teddy's sisters were the only major characters in the novel to come from a steady, whole household, and not coincidentally were the most stable, emotionally healthy individuals.

Imprisonment and Escape

Imprisonment and subsequent escape is a subtle theme throughout "A God in Ruins," and it is either literal or metaphorical, depending on the character.



Some characters seemed imprisoned within their own lives. For example, Viola. As a result of seeing her father smother her mother when Viola was ten years old, she could not love other people, according to her way of thinking. She felt imprisoned in a loveless life, one that went from one dysfunctional relationship to the next. She seemed helpless to stop it and it wasn't until she visited Sunny in Bali that she felt freed from her inability to love. Visiting her son, taking his yoga classes, and being completely outside of herself and her comfort zone helped her escape her cycle of psychological imprisonment. She learned to love and therefore, felt free.

Teddy experienced imprisonment both metaphorically in his real life and literally in his imagined life. Before he joined the war, Teddy worked at his dad's bank where he felt sentenced to a life of boredom and monotony. He felt stuck, and was almost relieved when there was a strong enough reason to break free of a life working at a bank. Hugh didn't know how Teddy felt about working in the bank, and again Teddy was likely relieved that he wouldn't have to break the news to his father that he didn't want to do with his work life what Hugh did with his. Even though the adventure of the war might not have been Teddy's preferred method, it provided him an escape from a life he believed he would have hated.

Teddy was imprisoned during the war as a POW, or Prisoner of War. That part of Teddy's imagined life is not discussed in great detail, but the reader can assume that it was a difficult experience for Teddy to imagine, which is perhaps why it's not detailed. The fact that Teddy escaped his imagined POW experience is part of Teddy living in a future he didn't expect.

The detail that the whole of Teddy's life after World War II was fiction doesn't change Teddy's metaphorical imprisonment before the war. Though he was never actually a prisoner of war, the fact that he was stuck with the war effort until it was over does suggest that he may have felt imprisoned before he died, hence the detail being present in his imagined life.

Freedom

Freedom is a theme in "A God in Ruins", especially since its premise is a war between nations as they fight for freedom from the dictatorship of Adolf Hitler. Nations and individuals alike want freedom. The idea of freeing Germany and the Jewish population from the hands of Hitler and his men was not discussed in depth, only that the reason for the war was never a question. Individuals' freedom, however, was discussed at length.

Teddy's desired freedom was from the boredom and monotony of a job at his father's bank. He traveled the world to escape such a life before the war started, and when the war started he quickly joined up. Though he did not wish to see a world at war, Teddy felt as though it freed him a life he didn't want to live.



Later, Teddy wished to be free of his daughter's unkindness. The reader finds out that her contempt stemmed from watching Teddy suffocate Nancy, but Teddy never found that out. Instead, Teddy wished his daughter would be nicer to him and to her children, and that she would free him from whatever he had done to cause her so much anguish.

Viola's desire for freedom centered on knowing how to love. When she finally admitted that she didn't know how to love other people, she was able to seek a solution. The loveless life she was living was getting her nowhere, even her daughter didn't participate in any kind of reconciliation Viola offered. She needed to be freed from her pain so she could be free to love, and not live such a desolate life any longer.

Dominic's definition of freedom was different from everyone else in the novel. Though Viola claimed to her father she agreed with him, she in fact did not. Dominic was bipolar, so his parents sought freedom for him from the mental illness that eventually claimed his life. Dominic was also anti-establishment, and thus sought freedom from the bureaucracy of government. His perspective on freedom caused him more pain than pleasure, but he didn't give them up right until his last moment of life.

Trauma

Trauma is a theme present for each of the main characters, as well as for a few of the supporting characters, in "A God in Ruins." Each character experiences their trauma in a different way, and each experience has a different lasting effect.

For Teddy, his trauma happened during the war. He had difficulty reconciling the thousands of innocent lives he ended when his crew dropped bombs on Germany. Though he and the others felt strongly about ending Germany's crimes against humanity, it seemed like nobody thought they would have to go through so many dead lives in the meantime. He was traumatized by his war responsibilities, the effects of which can be seen during various times the rest of his life.

For example, after the war, Teddy didn't fly. He stated it was because he had had enough flying during the war, which is probable. However, he may also have been worried that flying may have caused an associative memory to arise. Just about every time Teddy was in the air during the war, bombs were dropped and innocent lives were lost. It may have been difficult for Teddy to withstand such a pungent memory.

Viola was also traumatized, though she at a much younger age than Teddy, giving her more time to remain traumatized. At ten years old, Viola saw Teddy smother Nancy with a pillow. She didn't know that Nancy had asked Teddy to end her life if the illness got to a certain point, but Teddy didn't realize Viola had been standing behind him as he did that. Seeing her mother's life ended by her father caused her a life of searching for love but not knowing how to give and receive it in a healthy way. The trauma also caused a life-long contempt for her father, as well as a life-long yearning for her mother, though she didn't outwardly admit that until she was about sixty years old.



Bertie and Sunny suffered mild trauma from being with Viola as young children. Sunny, however, suffered a major trauma when he witnessed his father being killed by a train. Bertie was living with Teddy at the time. Bertie and Sunny's difference in childhood experiences likely led to their different ways of dealing with adulthood: Bertie had her own life, had a good relationship with Teddy, and eventually married and had children, much to her delight. Sunny, on the other hand, sought out to find peace, which he found on the opposite side of the world in Bali as an international yoga instructor. His interaction with Viola toward the end of the novel indicates that he healed from the trauma she and Dominic caused him.

Viola and Sunny each carried their trauma for most of their lives, letting it influence their way of living, their relationships with others, and their perspective on life. Bertie and Sunny let their trauma improve them, as they chose instead to focus on the good in their lives.

Communication

Communication is a theme in "A God in Ruins," both implicitly and explicitly. During the war, communication happened either on leave and in person, or on flimsy blues as delivered through a postal service. Ursula and Teddy wrote regularly, as did Teddy and Nancy. Their communication was mostly surface-level, since the war was on everyone's minds but they weren't supposed to discuss their war responsibilities with those outside their units.

Communication was essential for Teddy during the war. It was what kept him moving and looking forward, especially when he got a letter from his sister Ursula, as she was his favorite person. Communication was also what kept Teddy from possibly believing there could be life after the war. Though he seemed resolute that there would be no life after the war, he had to believe in something if he kept communicating with others. If he thought the entire exercise was pointless he likely wouldn't have engaged in writing back and forth with Nancy and Ursula.

The idea of implicit communication is also present in the novel. For example, aunt Izzie's writings of Augustus communicated to Teddy how much he meant to her. She wrote them for Teddy and left them all to Teddy, which communicated her love for him and how important he was to her, more than any of her other nieces or nephews.

Implicit communication is also present in Viola's novels, since each one is based on one of her true life experiences. For example, her first novel, "Sparrows at Dawn" is about a girl being raised by her single father. She wrote another one titled "The Children of Adam," which was based on her family's life at the commune named "Adam's Acre." Viola's angst toward her father and others in her life was expressed verbally to the subject of her contempt, but it was expanded upon in her novels.



Literature

Literature is a theme throughout "A God in Ruins," as random lines from various pieces of mostly classic literature are inserted throughout the novel. Referenced authors include Emily Dickinson, Charles Dickens, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Robert Frost, and A.E. Houseman, among others. Additionally, Viola is a best-selling novelist, though her books are not considered classic, or even literary, literature, just simply fiction.

The inclusion of various lines from classic literature may indicate that the novel is literary fiction, as it explores the lasting impacts of war on a man's legacy. The inclusion of literature also gives clues about the characters who use them.

Aunt Izzie, Bertie, and Viola are the three characters who most reference literature, and all three have distinct personalities. The author may have also wanted to show that even though individuals are very different, literature can be a binding agent to them together, especially if they are part of the same legacy narrative.

Belonging

The idea of belonging is woven throughout "A God in Ruins." Each character has a person and a place to whom they either already belong, or to whom they'd like to belong.

For Teddy, he belonged with his crew at war. The men with whom he fights were a part of him, and he was a part of each of them. As a pilot in the war, Teddy felt most comfortable in regards to belonging to a group. He was more of an introvert, but at war, he wanted to belong to his group of men. He trusted them, and vice versa. Belonging for Teddy meant a group of men who stayed together, no matter what.

For Bertie and Sunny, their sense of belonging did not come as easily since their parents abandoned them at an early age. Dominic's abandonment was his death, but before that he wasn't much of a father, as he was often strung out on medicine or drugs. Viola's abandonment was a choice, which left Bertie and Sunny not knowing where they belonged. Teddy took them in as young children, so they found a haven there. Bertie was able to feel a sense of belonging with Teddy, but Sunny was so scarred by his experience with his parents that it took him until adulthood to find his sense of belonging as an international yoga instructor, stationed mainly in Bali.

The war as a catalyst for much of the story provided a sense of belonging because in a war situation, a sense of belonging is highly desirable. Soldiers and civilians alike want to know they belong to something bigger and stronger than themselves, especially as they or their nation is thrown into a situation they can't control.

Viola's sense of belonging may be the strongest, or it may just appear to be the strongest since she expresses her emotions stronger than any other character. Viola



searched for belonging her entire adult life until she reconciled with Sunny. Since she had always felt as though she were on the outside of happiness, Viola wouldn't have felt as though she belonged anywhere: not with her father, since he smothered her mother; not with her mother since Nancy was dead; not with her children since she didn't like being their mother; and not with her two significant others because she was so different from both of them. Her sense of belonging was part of her reconciliation with Sunny at the conclusion of the novel, when she finally learns to start loving, and therefore belonging.

Counter-culture

Counter-culture is a small theme in "A God in Ruins," as it is present throughout the novel with various characters. Most prominently, the idea of counter-culture presents itself with Viola, as she bought into the anti-establishment ideas of the 1970s. She and her significant other lived in a flat with ten people, then on a commune. Though Viola didn't always necessarily believe in the counter-culture movement, she so badly wanted to be separated from her father that she participated in it and defended it to Teddy.

The counter-culture present in "A God in Ruins" as it pertains to Viola was destructive. Because she believed in an anti-establishment lifestyle, her children felt abandoned, she had a terrible relationship with her father, and she stayed in an unhealthy relationship with a man who was high a lot of the time.

Teddy's brush with counter-culture was as a child, when he didn't want to belong to Boy Scouts. Even though Teddy read the Boy Scout handbook in uncertain times in order to find comfort and answers, he belonged to two different off-shoot organizations that were less mainstream. The important thing to note about Teddy's experience with counter-culture, however, is that he didn't have a solid reason as to why he didn't want to belong to the mainstream Scouts. His participation in counter-culture was neither destructive nor productive, rather, it was neutral.

The idea of rebelling from one's culture was not something Teddy advocated for as he got older. As a pilot in the war, Teddy remained loyal to his nation and even times when he did not feel loyalty to Britain, he wasn't one to express his feelings. In a time of war, rebellion against mainstream is usually considered taboo. Thus, Teddy's counter-culture attitude ended with adolescence.

Religion

Religion is a small theme in "A God in Ruins," present more as a peripheral for characters or scenes. The title of the book suggests it would be a greater theme, however, 'god' in the sense of the title is a hero, or someone others can look to for having done something noble, rather than a religious figure.

In Teddy's imagined life, Sunny got deep into Hinduism when he became a yoga instructor. It was something to center him and keep him grounded, especially when his

mother threatened his centeredness with her presence. Sunny didn't overtly practice the religion, and therefore he didn't push it upon any of the other characters. Rather, it is implied through the title of a chapter that focuses on him with the word Dharma, which is a Hindu principle.

In Teddy's imagined life, when he parachuted down after almost dying in F-Fox, he thanked whichever god saved him. Teddy's views on whether or not there was an omniscient god were not described, though his reference to an ambiguous, non-specific god when his life was spared suggests it was something he thought about.



Styles

Point of View

"A God in Ruins" is told from an omniscient narrator's point of view. Every word, thought, and action of every character is on display for the reader throughout the entire novel. Even when the story is being told from one person's perspective, information about other characters is thrown in because the narrator knows everything. It's as though the entire story is laid out and when a future piece impacts a present piece, it is given to the reader.

The perspective helps the reader wholly understand the narrative. The main character's life is told mostly through the stories of his legacy, his daughter and his two grandchildren. Since the story is revealed to be fiction within fiction - meaning the story itself is a figment of Teddy's imagination - having the whole story as the narrative goes along is helpful to the reader.

The reader should note that since the story is told from an omniscient narrator's point of view, and since information about characters is sometimes thrown into others' stories, some details are repeated. Though this may seem redundant, it seems to be because the detail is laid out from two different perspectives, once from the person whose detail it is, and the other from the omniscient narrator who interjects pieces of others' stories when it sees fit.

Language and Meaning

The author of "A God in Ruins" is British, and therefore the novel is written British vernacular. Words that are spelled with just an "o" in American-style texts are spelled with an "ou" in the novel, i.e. color versus colour. Some terminology specific to British vernacular is used, such as prat, moorland, and soubriquet.

The purpose of the British vernacular is likely because that is the author's first- and most well-known form of speaking and writing. The novel is about an Englishman during World War II, so it is befitting of the characters that the language and vocabulary be chiefly British. By writing in her native tongue, the author can make the story most authentic to the characters and the reader might have a greater understanding of the narrative.

Structure

The structure of "A God in Ruins" is a mix-up of chronology. It is a story told one piece at a time, from one person at a time. The narrator is omniscient, but each chapter tends to focus mostly on one of the main characters, either Teddy, Nancy, Viola, Sunny, or Bertie, so it's mostly that character's thoughts, words, and actions that are in his or her chapter.



There is no pattern of whose story is told when. For example, over the course of four chapters, the focus goes from Viola to Teddy and Nancy, to Teddy, then to Sunny. There is also no pattern of time. For example, over the course of four chapters, the story is being told from the years 1925, 1980, 1947, then 1939.

The author explains her purpose for the structure in the Author's Note, which is that she believes that within all novels is another set of fiction. She believes the elements of a novel can be played with in order to make a great novel.



Quotes

She had two others but sometimes they hardly seemed to count.

-- Narrator (chapter 2 paragraph 1)

Importance: Here, the author is speaking of Sylvie, Teddy's mother. It is important for the reader to note that Teddy is regarded as somewhat of a special child, in that his mother seems to care most for him out of all three of her sons. Teddy's being regarded as special is important for the rest of the novel, since he is the main subject. The statement also gives the readers a clue as to Sylvie and Teddy's relationship, as well as the firm foundation of love and support from which Teddy originates.

She hesitated again, balancing what she was about to be given against what she was about to give away.

-- Narrator (chapter 2 paragraph 1)

Importance: The author is again speaking of Sylvie. Though Teddy is the main character of the novel, it is clear by how much of Sylvie is explained that she is important to the story. Here, she is deciding whether or not to have an extramarital affair. The quotes speaks to a theme that goes on throughout the novel, which is the balancing of what one wants against what already exists, or internal conflict.

She didn't mind if they were fascists, she really didn't, not as long as they had central heating and tumble dryers, and white bread instead of rye sourdough and soft mattresses instead of futons on the floor.

-- Narrator (chapter 4 paragraph 2)

Importance: The author is speaking of Viola. The quote is important because it illustrates the tug-of-war Viola clearly played between what she thought was expected of her because of the generation she belonged to, and what she actually wanted in the moment. Viola felt pressure from both ends of the spectrum regarding how she should live, be it against the establishment or "with" the establishment, i.e. traditional living. She did not seem to like expectations being put on her, but she also seemed caught in the middle of not knowing exactly what she wants out of her life.

He had the soul of a country parson who had lost faith.

-- Narrator (chapter 5 paragraph 4)

Importance: Much of Teddy's story is told through the people in his life, rather than through his eyes. Up until this point, the reader has read more about Teddy's wife, daughter, and parents than about Teddy. This statement is how Teddy saw himself, which is an important detail to note since it gives insight into how he operated based on what he thought of himself at a soul-level. To see himself as a metaphorical clergyman who had lost faith indicates his sense of aimlessness in most areas of his life, to include his career and his relationships.



Now it would not be the geography of Empire that would make him, it would be the architecture of war.

-- Narrator (chapter 6 paragraph 5)

Importance: "A God in Ruins" is about a man's life experience as it is shaped by a world war. This statement lets the reader know that what shaped Teddy, what made him the man he was before, during, and after World War II, was the war itself. Some of what shaped Teddy is how he experienced the war as a global event, but also his own experience with the war and the impact it had on his life. At this point in time, the war has not started, therefore the author is letting the reader know from an omniscient standpoint what will shape Teddy's life.

There had been a flurry of phone calls between various permutations of the family all afternoon and Teddy, if he was honest, was getting rather weary of being asked what he intended to do, as if the future of the conflict was on his shoulders alone.

-- Narrator (chapter 6 paragraph 9)

Importance: At this point, the war was just declared by Britain's then-Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. It is expected that Teddy's relatives would have wondered what he was going to do now that the war had started, since Teddy was of age to join and it would have been typical for young men to have an expectation of national loyalty and want to join the armed forces. Teddy had a decision to make, not just for himself but for his family as well.

At the twisted heart of every war were the innocents.

-- Narrator (chapter 7 paragraph 1)

Importance: The premise of "A God in Ruins" is how a man's life was impacted, before, during, and after, by a major world war. Part of the lasting impact on Teddy was the fact that innocents died in some of his bomber attacks. At this point, Teddy didn't seem to have reconciled the purpose of the war. Even though he knew it was against the Nazis, he also knew innocent people had died. His heart grew callous toward the impact of war, and he knew that innocent people dying was just one of the costs of war.

If it had been a choice between saving you or the baby, I would have had to choose the baby.

-- Nancy (chapter 8 paragraph 4)

Importance: Nancy was one of the most significant parts of Teddy's life. As Teddy's story is told over the course of the novel, the stories of and attitudes of his closest people help tell his story. Here, Nancy told Teddy that she would have chosen the baby if she had to choose between Teddy and the baby. Her attitude was in opposition to Teddy's, who chose to save Nancy over Viola, should the situation arise. Their differing attitudes, along with the context of their relationship and his relationship with Viola, shows the reader that Teddy often cared more about his loved ones than they expressed in return.



The dead were legion and the gods had their own secret agenda.
-- Narrator (chapter 9 paragraph 1)

Importance: In this context, the word 'legion' means great in number. Millions of individuals from nations around the globe died during World War II. The significance of this statement is how helpless Teddy and the other characters in the novel felt about the war. They were doing what they were told to do, fighting against the Germans, trying to end the atrocities, but they felt as though there was a force higher than themselves keeping them in the war state.

Love had always seemed to Teddy to be a practical act as much as anything - school concerts, clean clothes, regular mealtimes. Sunny and Bertie seemed to agree.
-- Narrator (chapter 10 paragraph 2)

Importance: At this point, Teddy was caring for his two grandchildren because their mother has chosen to do other things. The narrators description of Teddy's view of love fits with the whole of his character as far as the reader knows it. He had never been given to grand gestures, but rather found joy in simplicity. Teddy was a person who showed others that they mattered to him by being there in everyday life. He was like that as a child, and his character has remained into his adulthood.

Teddy paid the man and gave his squadron address and when he came back from his six days' leave, the photograph - which he had already forgotten about - was waiting for him.
-- Narrator (chapter 11 paragraph 4)

Importance: Teddy's story is told mostly through his legacy, meaning the stories of his wife, daughter, and grandchildren. However, Teddy's affections are rather distant from all three of them for much of the story, as evidenced by this statement. It is understandable that he would forget about the photograph in the thick of the war, but Teddy's experience colored the rest of his life; he reserved his affections, mourned privately, and shared little with others. However, the reader may note that in a previous chapter that takes place in the distant future, Viola got annoyed with her father for keeping as many mementos as he did. Though Teddy had a very here-and-now attitude during the war, once he got out of the POW camp and was given a future, Teddy held on to things that mattered to him. The reader can see the difference between this statement and other clues of Teddy's character throughout the book.

It was harsh for Viola that she was being thrust into an independence that she should have grown into slowly, but it had to be about practicalities now, not sentiment.
-- Narrator (chapter 12 paragraph 1)

Importance: In this chapter, the story of Nancy's demise from her brain tumor is told. This statement exhibits two pieces of the overall narrative: one explanation for Viola's attitude later in life, as well as a glimpse into Nancy's overall character, which is essential since she is the novel subject's wife. Later in life, Viola was nasty to her father and was an overall bitter person. Later in this chapter is a second explanation for her



behavior, but this statement shows the reader that Viola was pushed into an early independence; she was likely not ready and fairly unprepared since she was still in grammar school. In regards to Nancy, the reader can see that her priority was to take care of her family for as long after her death as possible. Her character is shown throughout the novel, but it is best shown in this chapter. As Nancy came to terms with the end of her life, Teddy was in the background doing what he can to cope with the situation.

As you got older and time went on, you realized that the distinction between truth and fiction didn't really matter because eventually everything disappeared into the soupy, amnesiac mess of history. Personal or political, it made no difference.

-- Narrator (chapter 13 paragraph 5)

Importance: This statement pertains to Viola and how she felt about the world. She was a novelist and therefore it is fitting that she would have such poignant thoughts on time and the dividing line between truth and fiction. However, the reader should note that this is a foreshadow to the conclusion of the novel, where the reader discovers that the whole of Teddy's life after his last flight was actually fiction and a figment of his imagination.

He mourned for the foxes, he would have placed them above a coop of chickens in the order of things. Above many people, too.

-- Narrator (chapter 14 paragraph 3)

Importance: Here, the narrator is referring to Teddy's thoughts on his mother Sylvie setting traps for the foxes on their home property. It is important because not only does the narrator indicate Teddy had a sharp difference of opinion with his mother regarding his home property, but also because the fox is a symbolic creature in "A God in Ruins." Teddy grew up at Fox Corner, and his childhood home means a lot to him. In fact, the rest of his life, as described throughout the novel, Teddy wished to return to Fox Corner or somewhere like it. During his third tour, he liked flying F-Fox because it reminded him of home. Therefore, the fox is symbolic for him and killing them off would mean losing another part of himself.

And with a massive roar the fifth wall comes down and the house of fiction falls, taking Viola and Sunny and Bertie with it. They melt into the thin air and disappear. Puff!

-- Narrator (chapter 16 paragraph 6)

Importance: These three sentences put the entire novel into perspective, as they explain to the reader that the majority of this novel is fiction within fiction, as Teddy's life after his death during the war was all in his imagination. The author builds up the truth of the statements with four other fictional walls that crash before the final one, crashing the metaphorical house of fiction.

And when all else is gone, Art remains. Even Augustus.

-- Narrator (chapter 17 paragraph 4)



Importance: Augustus is the character Teddy's aunt Izzie wrote about whose experiences and life seemed to parallel Teddy, if even in a fictional way. The capitalization of "Art" should be noted, as the narrator explained early in the novel that Sylvie capitalized Art, Truth, and Beauty, as they were three things Sylvie cared very much about. The statement confirms for the reader that Teddy's life after his death during the war was a figment of Teddy's imagination, and that even though he didn't live past 1944, Augustus, the fictional version of himself as referred to throughout the novel, did.