

The Great Fire Study Guide

The Great Fire by Shirley Hazzard

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Plot Summary

The Great Fire is the tale of Major Aldred Leith, a decorated war hero. The story begins in Asia in 1947 and encompasses two years, crosses several continents, and concludes in the remote island nation of New Zealand. Aldred is the son of a famous author, and has hopes of being an author himself; as the novel opens, he is exploring the war-ravaged lands of Asia for a book he is writing. His book will be the summation of his experiences and explorations of Asia, the land and its peoples, in the aftermath of World War II. At this point, Aldred has already spent a year traversing China for research and is now on his way to Japan, with plans to continue his work from the hills of Kure. Early on in the story, it becomes clear that Aldred has been affected both by the tragedies of war, and by what he remembers as a loveless childhood; his experiences have led him to harbor a deep cynicism for his fellow man.

Once in Japan, Aldred meets Benedict and Helen Driscoll, siblings. Benedict is a young man of twenty, but he suffers a debilitating disease from which will eventually rob him of the capacity for speech and mobility; he is dying, and the sixteen year old Helen is Benedict's primary care giver and companion.. Aldred develops an immediate attraction for Helen upon his arrival in Kure, though at thirty-two, he struggles with the improbability of a relationship with the teenaged girl. Benedict and Helen Driscoll provide the backdrop against which the reader will learn of Aldred's war-torn Asia. As his relationship with the Driscoll siblings begins to develop, Aldred also comes to experience the death of his cynicism, the rebirth of his optimism, and his own capacity for love.

In the midst of his time with the Driscolls, Aldred hears from his old friend, Peter Exley. Peter is a member of the British Army and has come to China to prosecute war criminals. China has just come out of the Second World War, only to find itself on the verge of its own Civil War. Hong Kong is dismal, and clean water and food are in short supply. The author uses the interactions between Peter and his fellow soldiers and coworkers to demonstrate the differences in people's abilities to adapt in this postwar society. Peter's own attempts to adapt revolve around his desire to settle down and start a family; his awareness of others is often influenced by his perceptions of whether or not they would be viable companions in that goal.

Peter invites Aldred to visit Hong Kong. Aldred accepts the invitation and the opportunity to put temporary distance between himself and Helen, since he believes a relationship with the young girl would be impossible. When Aldred arrives in Hong Kong, Peter manages to convince his friend that he is happy there. During his visit, Aldred meets Audrey Fellowes, who is in Hong Kong visiting her relatives. Aldred speculates that Audrey and Peter could have a relationship if he arranged for them to meet. Meanwhile, in Aldred's absence, Thaddeus 'Tad' Hill is introduced to Helen Driscoll. Tad is interested in pursuing a relationship with Helen but realizes that her feelings are for someone else. Aldred finally accepts the convictions of his feelings for Helen and returns to Kure knowing he is determined to have her.



Aldred and Helen grow closer, though since Aldred believes that Helen's parents would not consent to his attentions to Helen, the relationship is kept secret from them. As their relationship grows, however, Benedict's condition worsens. He becomes physically incapacitated, and Helen and Aldred become his only sources of exposure to the outside world. Aldred continues in his research during this time, and one day returns from short trip exploring Nagasaki to find Helen distraught. Her parents had sent her on a false errand and moved Benedict to a Tokyo hospital in her absence. Ultimately, Benedict will be moved all the way to California, in the United States, for care. Helen will not see her brother alive again.

Aldred gathers the mail that had collected while he was in Nagasaki and immediately travels to Tokyo to check on Benedict. In the course of his errand, he receives report after report of bad news. He runs into Audrey Fellowes at the hospital, and is informed that Peter has contracted a serious illness and been admitted to a hospital in China. In his mail, Aldred discovers that he had received word of his father's death. Returning to Kure with news of Benedict, Aldred learns that General Driscoll has received a post in New Zealand and that Helen and her parents will immediately be moving to that remote island nation. Faced with the need to return home to London to settle his father's estate, Aldred is unable to remain with Benedict or travel to see Peter. He requests permission for Helen to become a ward of his mother's until she is of an age to marry, but his suit is denied by the elder Driscolls. Without her parents' approval, Aldred is unable to confirm his relationship to Helen, and she moves to New Zealand with her parents.

Aldred returns to London to settle his father's estate. It is here that Aldred resolves his conflicted relationship with his mother, Iris. He also becomes reacquainted with Aurora Searle, a friend and former romantic liaison who had been the mistress of Aldred's father for a number of years. It is while Aldred is in London, and Helen in New Zealand, that word of Benedict's death comes. Helen's parents board a ship to America to claim his body, and Aldred travels to New Zealand to join Helen, who has remained behind.



Part 1, Chapter 1

Part 1, Chapter 1 Summary

It is two years after the conclusion of the Second World War. Traveling by train, Major Aldred Leith, a soldier for the Allies, leaves Tokyo heading to Ita Jima, an island in the Inland Sea of Japan. On the train, Aldred ponders a loveless relationship with his father, Oliver Leith, while viewing a book bearing the elder Leith's picture. On the island, he is met by Brian Talbot, a young enlisted man with whom Aldred will spend time touring Japan.

Staying a night on Ita Jima, Aldred stops to visit to a Professor named Gardiner. The professor is of German descent and had been living in Japan at the beginning of the war. Being given the choice of protection or prison by the Axis forces, Professor Gardiner chose the latter. Gardiner had spent more than three years in prison and contracted tuberculosis there; he is dying. When Aldred goes to visit him, Gardiner tells him to call him Ginger and then starts talking about the Driscoll family. Aldred listens with interest, as he will be staying with General Barry Driscoll and his family in the hills of Kure; the family, he learns, has obtained a level of some significance in the area. Before Aldred can begin to ask his questions, though, Gardiner becomes tired; he politely apologizes, thanks Aldred, and then dies.

Part 1, Chapter 1 Analysis

This first chapter establishes the stylistic writing of the author. Presented in the civil etiquette of the 1940s, the patterns of speech are rich, with the brusque colloquialisms of the later 20th century noticeably absent. The story is mired in description, making it a slow and sometimes difficult read.

Aldred is characterized as a cynical man who has been changed by war and is a casualty of a loveless childhood. The personal relationships of Aldred, past and present, are key to the story. He is a man who, two years after the Second World War, must learn to live with peace. At the conclusion of this chapter, the reader is still somewhat bemused as to Aldred's purpose for being in Japan.



Part 1, Chapter 2

Part 1, Chapter 2 Summary

Aldred leaves Ita Jima for Kure, a waterfront village near Hiroshima. Traveling with Brian Talbot, his assigned escort while in the area, Aldred observes his surroundings. The two gentlemen discuss home and settling down after the War. Arriving in Kure, Aldred meets the Driscoll family. The parents are pretentious and the children subdued in their presence. The father, Barry Driscoll, is mean-spirited and overbearing; Melba, wife to Barry, gives the first appearance of being the power behind the man. Benedict is a twenty-year old wunderkind who is dying. Helen, at sixteen, is possessed of maturity beyond her years. She has spent her childhood loving and caring for an ill sibling for whom neither parent has time or understanding. Soon after his arrival, Aldred is witness to Barry Driscoll's verbal chastisement of a servant, reinforcing an opinion of the elder Driscoll that had been expressed by Professor Ginger Gardiner. The servant who is chastised is Asian and remains expressionless in the face of his offense. Barry Driscoll, for his part, refuses to acknowledge that Aldred witnessed the interaction.

Part 1, Chapter 2 Analysis

In this chapter, the author introduces the Driscoll family. The stage is almost set as Aldred is introduced to Benedict and Helen Driscoll. Aldred meets and is unimpressed the elder Driscolls, but Helen is to become the counterpoint around which the story of Aldred will be told. In these early chapters of the book, the author also begins to present a recurring theme of death surrounding Aldred, even as it is countered by the joy of his relationship with Benedict and Helen.



Part 1, Chapter 3

Part 1, Chapter 3 Summary

Aldred rises early. In his examination of his surroundings in Kure, he views Helen through a window, asleep in her room. Continuing on his exploration, he discovers the servant whom Barry had chastised; he is dead of suicide. After reporting the incident, Aldred returns to his room, where Helen joins him to commiserate on the servant's death. She invites him to dine with her and Benedict, and as Aldred eats with the Driscoll siblings, he becomes enchanted with them. Later that day, he writes out his statement on the morning's events and begins contemplating his friendship with another gentleman, Peter Exley. Peter, an Australian on loan to the British Army, is in China. Aldred writes to Exley of his intention to travel to Hong Kong to visit with him. This chapter also includes notebook entries in which Aldred speaks of Benedict and Helen Driscoll.

Part 1, Chapter 3 Analysis

The attraction Aldred is beginning to feel for Helen is introduced. The sadness he feels about his attraction is perhaps the result of a belief that the situation is impossible. Thus begins the transition between war and peace that Aldred will undergo. The death of the Driscoll servant reinforces the dark feeling the author creates to represent the ravages of war and of Aldred's past. That the servant acted as a result of his offense is inferred. The feeling of death is offset by a sense of renewal that Aldred experiences when he is with Benedict and Helen, though the introduction of Peter Exley further reminds us that the experience of war is still with Aldred.



Part 1, Chapter 4

Part 1, Chapter 4 Summary

Benedict and Helen share the story of how they came to Kure, and Aldred shares to a lesser degree. When asked what he plans do with all of his experiences and explorations, Aldred tells the siblings about the book he hopes to write and offers an explanation of the events that have brought him to this time and place. He remembers a child, Charlotte, whom he had known when he was a boy and believes that she is the cause for his open-mindedness toward new experiences. This is a trait that serves Aldred well as he continues to explore the countryside and its people. In spite of his open-mindedness in some regards, though, Aldred was a child of one war and a soldier of another; he has experienced a great deal and has become cynical. In another reminder of the recent war, Aldred also speaks to Benedict and Helen of the first time he met Peter Exley.

Part 1, Chapter 4 Analysis

This continues the acquaintance of Aldred with the Driscoll siblings, and it is through the sharing of experiences between them that Aldred begins to heal. It is revealed that Aldred was asked to write of Asia and the aftermath of war as a result of his extensive experience. However, Aldred is circumspect throughout the conversation, preferring to share fewer of his own experiences and listen more to those of Benedict and Helen. As the three of them talk, it becomes obvious that Helen cares for Aldred.

Part 2, Chapter 5

Part 2, Chapter 5 Summary

Peter Exley, a soldier whom Aldred is credited with saving, arrives in Hong Kong, only to find that his lodging arrangements have been lost, and that housing is scarce. Peter is an Australian soldier on loan to the British Army and a prosecutor of war criminals; he writes to Aldred about his experiences. A deposed Captain invites Peter to dine aboard his ship. A discussion of the war and its comparison to murder are broached, and Peter writes of his experiences. In the autumn, Peter celebrates his birthday with three coworkers, women, from his office. His lack of companionship weighs on him, and he begins to adopt the lassitude of his roommate, a predilection he fails to notice until Aldred travels to visit him.

Part 2, Chapter 5 Analysis

The author uses this opportunity to introduce Peter Exley. In the first person narrative, Peter shares his opinions and impressions of Hong Kong, its people, and the Allied soldiers' occupation of the area two years after the war. This introduction of Peter conveys a second point of view of life after war. He and Aldred are both learning to live with peace. Each is affected by his service and his residence in a place greatly impacted by the war. Their letters and journals discuss learning to live with peace, learning to live with death, and learning to live with one's own self after experiencing the totality of it all.



Part 2, Chapter 6

Part 2, Chapter 6 Summary

Benedict tells Aldred about the time he and his sister had journeyed to China. He also recalls a time in Marseilles, when Helen had contrived to journey to a remote location without escort, and without apology or permission. Benedict's recollection reminds Aldred of Helen's youth. He also realizes that although the elder Driscolls demonstrate a lack of interest in their children, Barry and Melba have exposed Benedict and Helen to the world. Aldred writes down his experiences and feelings in his journal.

Later, he is contacted by Aurora Searle, who is the mother of a dead friend and had been his own past liaison. Aldred remembers his first meeting with Aurora, the couple's past affair, their continued friendship, and Aurora's on-going liaison with his father, Oliver Leith.

Part 2, Chapter 6 Analysis

The author builds on the relationship of Aldred to Benedict and Helen Driscoll. The introduction of additional characters at this point serves as an enhancement to the shared memories. Later, both Bertram Perowne and Aurora Searle will contribute to the relationship of Aldred and Helen Driscoll.



Part 2, Chapter 7

Part 2, Chapter 7 Summary

At Benedict and Helen's urging, Aldred relates his own past experiences to the two young Driscolls, and we learn about some of his acquaintances and past infatuations. He tells about Raimonda and Gigliola, daughters of an Italian family Aldred had stayed with while studying in Florence; the temperate Raimonda, already spoken for, and the fair Gigliola, both had attracted his attention at length. His studies had carried him through autumn and winter while he pursued both women, and Italy became embroiled in the war.

His last summer in Florence, Aldred had become aware of the ways in which war had influenced Raimonda and Gigliola's family. Their father had been tortured and the family had been fined. Aldred had gone to his own father to request monetary assistance for them.

Aside from discussing his memories in this chapter, Aldred makes plans to travel to China to visit Peter Exley. He recognizes that his desire to leave for China, as well as his memories of Raimonda and Gigliola, are driven by his awareness of Helen and what he perceives as the impossibility of their situation.

Part 2, Chapter 7 Analysis

More of Aldred's past is exposed, and the author explains how his past relationships had been doomed by his own actions. The younger Aldred's generosity to the Italian family had set both daughters beyond his reach, as circumstances and behavior in the 1940's dictated. Inference is made that Aldred's present actions could prevent his furthering a relationship with Helen.



Part 2, Chapter 8

Part 2, Chapter 8 Summary

Aldred's arrival in Hong Kong is precluded by the crash of a flight from Canton. For a short time, Peter believes that his friend had died. Eventually, Aldred and Peter are reunited, and they travel by ferry to Hong Kong. Memories are shared and comparisons made by each. Aldred mentions the time his mother took him to London to view a monument to the Great Fire. He also gets his first showing of Peter's housing arrangements and is introduced to Roy Rysom, Peter's roommate. Peter gives Aldred letters from Benedict and Helen, which have been sent to Aldred at Peter's address.

During his explorations in China, Aldred meets Audrey Fellowes, an unmarried woman who is in the country to visit her injured brother. In Kure, Helen celebrates her seventeenth birthday. Aldred tells Peter of his infatuation, though he offers no names; however, Peter guesses from Aldred's previous correspondence that the infatuation is with Helen.

Part 2, Chapter 8 Analysis

Peter is overcome by the perceived loss of his friend, Aldred. His anger at the possibility is explained as one of the "great fires" of one's existence. When Aldred shares his experience of Helen, the reader is made aware of Peter's own desire for companionship. This desire will be prevalent throughout Peter's story.



Part 2, Chapter 9

Part 2, Chapter 9 Summary

Peter is spending an afternoon at work, largely alone. He reminisces on his childhood and the events that have brought him to Hong Kong, remembering his first love, Patti, of the fair hair and viola, and a Mr. Crindle. He tells Aldred about the influence Crindle had had on his life and about the money he had left to Peter upon his death in 1939. Over dinner, Aldred and Peter discuss Aldred's ex-wife, Moira, and the young Charlotte. Aldred reveals to Peter his affection for Helen and invites Peter to visit Japan to meet the Driscoll siblings.

On a visit to Stanley, and after, Aldred and Peter share experiences that remind Aldred of the book he must write. He is to describe the war and its aftermath on the people and the land. Aldred is invited to lunch with a General, and they discuss what will become of Hong Kong now that the war is over. Upon his return from lunch, Aldred informs Peter that he has arranged new accommodations for him; Peter is mortified to think that his friend had requested this favor of the General.

In Japan, Helen and Ben receive letters from Aldred. While resting in Aldred's own room, Helen reads her letter and recalls her own stay in Hong Kong.

Part 2, Chapter 9 Analysis

Aldred's successful interference over Peter's housing arrangements is the first demonstration of Aldred's influence and standing. Decorated in the war, Aldred has achieved a notoriety that the author has briefly hinted at but not explained.

The discussions between Aldred and Peter are also important in this chapter, and Peter and Aldred spend much of their time recounting past events. Also, where Peter had already suspected that Aldred's infatuation was with Helen, Aldred confirms it here. The author uses Peter's insecurities to verbalize the hurdles that Aldred will face in his pursuit of Helen.



Part 2, Chapter 10

Part 2, Chapter 10 Summary

Aldred plans to continue his exploration in Canton, and he makes arrangements to stay with a family friend there. Listening to Aldred's plans to travel to that area, Peter is reminded of his own visit to Canton when he was newly arrived in Hong Kong. In the midst of his travel plans, Aldred finds himself amused to be plotting Peter's introduction to Audrey Fellowes.

Peter moves into his new quarters at MacGregor Road. He believes the change to be a valuable one and feels that his time with Rysom had encouraged him to passivity. Upon his return from Canton, Aldred invites Audrey Fellowes to dine with Peter and himself, by way of contriving a meeting between Audrey and Peter. It is only later that Aldred ponders that, under different circumstances, he might have been interested in Audrey himself. Peter and Aldred again discuss the Aldred's relationship with Helen.

Part 2, Chapter 10 Analysis

The author uses narrative from both Aldred and Peter, and it can be difficult to determine who is the lead character and who is the support at times. The plots turns from the two men's experiences in learning to live with peace to the capacity that both have for love. Peter's concern that he will be left alone in life weighs heavily upon him, and the author introduces Audrey Fellowes as a possible companion for Peter. Audrey is a woman who wants the best for everyone and is possessed of a motherly instinct. If Aldred is successful in bringing her together with Peter, Peter's desire for companionship may be fulfilled.



Part 2, Chapter 11

Part 2, Chapter 11 Summary

Aldred travels again to Japan. He sits aboard the ship bound for Kure and contemplates Helen and the impossibility of their relationship. In Kure, Helen prepares in anticipation for Aldred's return. He arrives in time for dinner, amidst the thunder and lightning of a storm. Seeing Helen, Aldred forgets the impossibility of their relationship for the improbability that is his love for her. He suggests a later meeting with Helen and Benedict.

Aldred meets Thaddeus "Tad" Hill. Likeable and closer to Helen's age, Tad is an American soldier from Washington and Aldred's competition for Helen's favor. While spending time with Helen, Tad sees her with Aldred and realizes that she cares for Aldred rather than himself. Aldred and Tad discuss the situation with Helen, and they also discuss Benedict's impending fate. Tad gives up his desire for a personal relationship with Helen and commits to friendship with the Driscoll siblings. As this situation comes to resolution, Aldred receives correspondence from his father. The letter leaves Aldred introspective, as the elder Aldred's message conveys a sense of reparation and imminent death. Tad leaves Japan soon after, and continuing his research, Aldred travels to and from Tokyo.

Part 2, Chapter 11 Analysis

The cast of characters is expanded by potential competition for Helen's favor in the form of Thaddeus Hill. Aldred is overcoming his cynicism and the trauma of war, and his relationship with Peter has grown to become a true friendship. Aldred's capacity for love has further expanded to include both a romantic love for Helen and a brotherly bond with Benedict. His new feelings are tested when the author brings Aldred's past to bear in the letter from Oliver Leith. After this, Aldred's concern for Benedict's health leaves the reader unsure as to whether Aldred is confusing his feelings for Benedict with assumptions about his father's health and a desire for a happier relationship with the elder Leith. Each chapter is laced with Benedict's worsening condition and his brother's desire for a better situation for his sister.



Part 2, Chapter 12

Part 2, Chapter 12 Summary

Audrey Fellowes moves to Yokohama, Japan, and Peter sees her off as she departs. The relationship with Audrey hadn't been the passionate one Peter had been pining for, but he had felt comforted by her and comfortable talking to her. In her absence, Peter seeks a relationship with a coworker, Rita Xavier. He also attends the weddings of two acquaintances, and after the weddings feels more alone than ever. Not content with the company of Miss Xavier, he wishes for the company of Aldred.

Part 2, Chapter 12 Analysis

The author continues to develop the character of Peter and his relationships, which have yet to bear fruit. Given Aldred's budding relationship with Helen, the reader hopes for a romantic opportunity for Peter.



Part 2, Chapter 13

Part 2, Chapter 13 Summary

Aldred has acknowledged to himself his love for Helen, and they begin to go out together, in secret. Aldred tells Helen of his injuries, and of how he came to receive the Military Medal. Tad sends news of his travels. Benedict's condition grows worse, to the point that he is no longer physically capable of providing for himself. His mental capacities, however, seem to be increasing in proportion to his physical demise. Aldred and Helen spend time speaking with and reading to Benedict. He is aware of Aldred and Helen's relationship and is accepting; Barry and Melba Driscoll do not appear to be aware of the situation. Aldred knows that, because of his age and the fact that he had witnessed Barry Driscoll's loss of composure with his servant, Helen's parents would not welcome his attention toward Helen. Aldred continues to gather testimonials and experiences for his book during this chapter, and he finally speaks to Helen of Love.

Part 2, Chapter 13 Analysis

The author demonstrates how an illicit relationship might occur in the 1940s. The fact that they are in Asia may make it easier for Aldred and Helen to pursue their growing feelings without the prying eyes and judgmental whispers of neighbors and friends. The plot is enriched by the developing relationship of two people living in a foreign country and trying to find peace within and overcome the trauma of war. .



Part 2, Chapter 14

Part 2, Chapter 14 Summary

Peter admits to himself and Aldred that he is happy in China. He is reluctant to give up the idea of a relationship and continues to explore one with Rita Xavier, whom he happens to meet in a café one day, while he is on his way to visit his tailor. They agree to meet at a local theatre after his errand, but upon discovering that his tailor's child is ill, Peter seeks Rita's assistance to find help. Rita is of Asian descent and possessed of a more cynical attitude than either Aldred or Peter. Believing the cause to be fruitless, Rita responds in a manner that puts Exley off. The only assistance Peter succeeds in finding is someone who tells him he must carry the child to the hospital, as medical services cannot come to the child. Peter discerns that Rita's behavior is a symbol of their cultural differences and concludes that a relationship with her is impossible.

Part 2, Chapter 14 Analysis

The author puts one struggle after another in front of Peter, and in this chapter he is faced with another failed attempt at a relationship along with a struggle to avert the death of a child. The attitude that Rita Xavier exhibits is indicative of the cultural difference between her and Peter. Her indifference is testimony to the change war has wrought on her society. It also shows Peter two things: first, Rita is not the right person for him; and second, the possible path of his own cynicism. Following his realizations, it doesn't appear that Peter wishes to change either Rita or himself.



Part 2, Chapter 15

Part 2, Chapter 15 Summary

A return to Japan sees the end of Brian Talbot's tenure there. Talbot contemplates his return and the changed perceptions of himself and those around him. Aldred, who has been in Nagasaki, returns to find Helen waiting and distraught. Helen had been sent on a false errand while her brother was removed to a hospital in Tokyo. From Tokyo, Benedict would be transferred to a specialized care facility in the United States. Helen is aware that Benedict's situation is dire and that he will not recover; she knows that she has seen her brother for the last time.

Helen also tells Aldred that her parents have announced their intentions to immediately remove themselves to New Zealand. Aldred hails Talbot and leaves immediately for Tokyo.

While at the hospital in Tokyo and awaiting word of Benedict, Aldred learns of his own father's death. By chance, Audrey Fellowes is also at the Tokyo hospital, waiting while her brother receives a prosthetic limb. Aldred renews his acquaintance with Audrey, and she tells him that Peter has taken ill and is himself in hospital in China. She shares her intention of returning to Peter's side.

Returning to Kure, Aldred finds that the Driscolls have indeed departed for Tokyo. Brian Talbot's tenure is done and he is preparing to depart for Melbourne. Helen remains at Kure, awaiting her arranged transportation from the island and Aldred's arrival with word of Benedict.

Aldred has not received approval from the Driscolls to marry Helen; she must leave, as she is yet her parents' ward. He tells Helen of his father's death and explains that he must return to his home to settle the family estate. Aldred promises to write her parents and ask their permission for Helen to stay with his mother in Britain until she is of age to marry.

Part 2, Chapter 15 Analysis

The author has reached the climax of the story here, and this is the most exciting and quickly paced chapter of the book. Critical to the multiple plots and storylines, the author uses this single chapter to enhance reader interest and maintain the audience through the end of the story.

The parents, Barry and Melba Driscoll, had realized that Helen would not be easily parted from her gravely ill brother. Thus, the arranged errand and secret plans. Their lack of concern for Benedict is further enhanced by their immediate departure to a country far from the location of Benedict's continued care. It is intriguing that Helen did

not depart with them, a fact that is perhaps another indicator of their own pretentious self-interest.

Aldred runs into Audrey Fellowes at the hospital while awaiting word of Benedict Driscoll. The author introduces another opportunity for Peter and Audrey to develop a relationship when Audrey announces her intention to travel to visit Peter.



Part 3, Chapter 16

Part 3, Chapter 16 Summary

Peter receives a visit from the doctor while he is in the hospital in Hong Kong, and the doctor describes Peter's condition and prospects. He explains that the paralysis caused by the virus is temporary and tells Peter that he will exhibit some weakness on the affected side after the paralysis is gone. Rita Xavier becomes a constant companion while he is incapacitated, and she is the one who discovers Peter when he attempts suicide. Peter's attempt to take his life is thwarted, and Rita is credited with saving him. Many of their acquaintances speculate that Peter and Rita Xavier will become permanent companions.

Part 3, Chapter 16 Analysis

The author indicates that while Rita spends considerable time at the hospital with Peter, he has not shown any indication of making his relationship with her permanent. Interestingly enough, this is the last we hear of Peter, Rita, or Audrey, except for a brief letter later in the book. This cast of characters is folded without any resolution to Peter's search for love and companionship. In light of Aldred's good fortune, one might expect that the same would occur for Peter. This however, does not appear to be the case, and the character of Peter serves as counterpoint to that of Aldred. While Aldred has overcome the attitude and trauma with which the author first introduced him, Peter has not taken advantage of his opportunities to do the same. The depression Peter feels increases during his confinement, and he attempts to take his own life.

Part 3, Chapter 17

Part 3, Chapter 17 Summary

It is the spring of 1948 and the eve of another war. Aldred leaves Asia for home, understanding that there is unrest in Russia, Korea, and China. Arriving in post-war London, he renews his acquaintance with the city during a ride to his apartments and again later, on foot.

Aldred also arranges to meet Aurora Searle for dinner, and they share a meal and memories of Aldred's father. Aurora recounts the last time she saw Oliver Leith and tells about a few of the times when her affair had taken her to the Leith estate, in Aldred's mother's absence; Aurora grieves for Oliver. Aldred considers Aurora to be a friend. He wants to tell her about Helen but recognizes that this is Aurora's time of need, and he remains silent. Aurora lets Aldred know that she will be leaving for Kenya soon, and the news puts him in a quandary. Aurora notes that he seems to have expected all to remain as he had left it, when he had gone away and changed. Aldred realizes that he will miss Aurora Searle.

Part 3, Chapter 17 Analysis

A civil war is beginning in China. The ravages of another war are about to occur in an already battle-scarred land. Aldred is glad to be leaving Asia, and he believes he has something to live for in his relationship with Helen.

Upon meeting Aurora Searle again, the author brings closure to a relationship that had influenced Aldred his entire adult life. When Aurora admits that she had not told Oliver about her affair with Aldred, she is acknowledging that it had been Oliver Leith's nature to desire to be first in everything.



Part 3, Chapter 18

Part 3, Chapter 18 Summary

Returning to his home, Aldred revisits memories of his childhood. As he moves through his father's rooms, he remembers childhood impressions of his home and his father. He imagines Helen in his home. His mother, having moved the beneficiary to his father's rooms, discusses with Aldred how life has changed after the war. Different servants are assisting the household, and this change is a reminder that the war has affected everyone. Aldred is reminded of Aurora Searle's comment that he had expected everyone to remain the same. Meeting Dick Laister, a young man who has come to deliver wood, Aldred learns that Dick's father had been injured in the war. Aldred arranges to meet the elder Laister. He also anticipates a letter from Helen or from Tad, who had gone to visit Benedict in California.

Aldred meets with George Laister, whose war injury has left him wheelchair bound. Aldred finds that a cousin of Dick's is awaiting trial for an altercation of some kind, and Aldred determines to do what he can to help.

Part 3, Chapter 18 Analysis

The story begins to take a positive turn as Aldred reaches out to help those in need. Aldred's memories of his childhood and his mother are colored with his new capacity for love. He has learned to accept and move on. He remembers Japan and considers that everything that reminds him of Helen also reminds him of that country.



Part 3, Chapter 19

Part 3, Chapter 19 Summary

Aldred has written to the Driscolls about Helen. They have denied his request. A series of letters go back and forth between Helen and Aldred and Tad and Aldred. Helen tells Aldred of the acquaintances she has made: a gardener and the mother and daughter Fry. She also tells him of Tad's intention to travel to California and study at Berkeley. Once there, he will renew his acquaintance with Benedict and write Helen of her brother's status.

In New Zealand, the mother and daughter Fry befriend Helen, and she spends quite a bit of time with the two women. It is with their help that Helen finds an outlet without thought of judgment. Helen does not share her feelings for Aldred with the two Fry women. However, unbeknownst to her, they are both aware of the situation, having heard Melba Driscoll gossip about it. Elinor (the younger Fry) believes that she sees in Helen the conditioning that New Zealand forces on its inhabitants. The two Fry women tell Elinor the story of how New Zealand came to be their permanent residence and note that it is considered the end of the world by many. Both women hope that Helen's relationship with Aldred will succeed, though they don't speak their thoughts aloud.

Part 3, Chapter 19 Analysis

That time and distance appear to grow greater between Aldred and Helen Driscoll is a given, and in New Zealand, the love story has taken on a dreamlike status to the young Helen. The cast of characters has now expanded to include two kind-hearted women who befriend Helen in her new home. The author appears to suggest that both Elinor and Mrs. Fry have realized that they grew old in New Zealand, and alone.



Part 3, Chapter 20

Part 3, Chapter 20 Summary

Before her departure to Kenya, Aurora and Aldred dine together again. He shares his Japanese experience and shows Aurora a picture of Helen. Aurora is glad for him. Aldred writes to Helen of his dinner and an invitation he has made to Bertram Perowne, the Driscoll siblings' confidant and companion on their trip to Japan. Aldred also confides to Helen that a gentleman named Calder, whom Benedict and Helen had met in Japan, had approached him with a proposition. Calder, it seems, is a spy and had offered the same status to Aldred in the belief that his language skills and knowledge of Asia would stand him in good stead. Aldred declares to Helen that he did not accept Calder's offer.

Aldred has found his status much improved by his military commendations. With the inheritance left him by his father and his heroic war reputation, Aldred is placed in a position to help those who are close to him. He seeks medical care for George Laister and legal aid for Dick's cousin Tone.

Bertram Perowne meets with Aldred, and they remember the Driscoll siblings and the parents. Aldred tells Bertram of his feelings for Helen. Bertram reveals that Barry Driscoll maintains a mistress and has done so for some time, without his wife's knowledge. Perowne suggests that this information may release Helen from her parents, but Aldred is hesitant to use blackmail to secure Helen's release. However, his separation from Helen continues to wear on Aldred.

Part 3, Chapter 20 Analysis

In this chapter, the author again shows the change in Aldred. The offer of work as a spy would likely have proven irresistible to a soldier who was determined to do his duty. To this new Aldred, the offer is not even worth consideration. Aldred is determined to start anew and intends for Helen to be a part of his life.

This chapter closes the story of Aldred and Aurora Searle. She is departing for Kenya, knowing of his feelings for Helen, but Aurora and Aldred remain friends.

The situation Bertram Perowne describes is less amiable. Perowne offers Aldred his knowledge of Barry Driscoll's affairs as a way to get Helen away from her parents. Regardless of Aldred's reticence in using the knowledge, he now has information that will prove useful in the future.



Part 3, Chapter 21

Part 3, Chapter 21 Summary

In New Zealand, Helen spends time studying and further developing friendships. It is while studying with girls from her French class that Helen finally faces the reality of life in New Zealand. Many arrive, intending to leave after a brief visit, and find that they stay there without purpose, at the end of the world.

Helen makes the acquaintance of Sidney Fairfax, a gentleman who has come, voluntarily, to New Zealand for respite. Upon learning that Sidney's brother has recently suffered a trauma, Helen agrees to meet Gerald Fairfax. Sidney recognizes in Helen the experience of other places. He believes the distance between her and Aldred is too great and that her gentleman will forget her.

Part 3, Chapter 21 Analysis

Additional characters are added on the New Zealand front. The Fairfax brothers are young men; one who has suffered a trauma. Neither brother is a permanent resident, and they refrain from interacting with the community, especially the women. The author infers that to develop a relationship would create an unbreakable tie to this remote place. Meeting with the traumatized brother is a release for Helen as she continues to worry about Benedict.



Part 3, Chapter 22

Part 3, Chapter 22 Summary

Aurora finds herself in Kenya meeting Mrs. Ray Harkness. Mrs. Harkness has discovered the link Aurora had to the elder Leith, Oliver, and explains that she is the former Raimonda Mancini of Aldred's youth.

There are several letters in this final chapter. Aldred writes to Helen of his time in Germany doing an analysis of the Occupation for the British government, and he recounts the news of Bertram Perowne and of Peter. Thaddeus Hill writes to Aldred of his studies, memories of Germany, and Benedict's status. Audrey sends news of Hong Kong and Peter's failed attempt to take his own life.

Returning to London from Germany, Aldred remembers the feeling of disassociation he had experienced before meeting Helen. He considers traveling to China to visit Peter but then thinks instead his separation from Helen. He begins his arrangements for travel to New Zealand. Calling ahead, he speaks with the Driscoll housekeeper, who informs him of Benedict's death and says that Barry and Melba Driscoll are on a ship bound for America. While waiting for a telephone call to get through to Elinor Fry, Aldred receives telegrams from Thaddeus Hill and Helen, each informing him of the death of Benedict Driscoll. From Elinor Fry, Aldred finds that Helen has not accompanied her parents to America. He informs Ms. Fry of his intention to travel to New Zealand; she wishes him well. Aldred arrives in New Zealand to find Helen asleep in a porch swing awaiting his arrival. He remembers the many who have perished by his hand and by the hands of others and contemplates that he and Helen have survived to reach the happiness of this moment and beyond.

Part 3, Chapter 22 Analysis

In this final chapter, the author reaches the culmination of the story of Aldred Leith, Benedict and Helen Driscoll, and finally Peter Exley. Aldred has acquired a professional reputation as someone who can analyze political situations and make recommendations for efficient action. He is again confronted with the negative influences of war and death as he visits Occupied Germany at the request of his government, and when he returns from Germany, it is to receive news of Peter's attempt at suicide. Peter's attempt to take his own life demonstrates his failure to overcome his personal struggles and represents the dark side — in contrast to the light of Aldred — in this story of the soldier's transition from war and cynicism to peace, optimism and love. The stories of the main characters are played out when Aldred begins to recognize how he was once influenced, before Japan.



Characters

Aldred Leith

Aldred Leith is the character around which the story is centered; he is thirty-two years old at the time the novel takes place. Aldred is a Major in the Allied occupation forces and had served as a soldier during the Second World War after having grown up as a child of the First World War.. Because war had been the constant background to his youth and early adulthood, he questions whether he had even had a childhood. Aldred also carries memories of his famous, but self-indulgent father, and along with his memories of war, this makes him cynical. Aldred does not expect to fall in love; he doesn't even realize he has the capacity for it, and when he travels to Japan, he believes that his sole purpose is to continue his work on a book he is writing. However, upon meeting Helen and Benedict Driscoll, not only does Aldred discover love, but he also finds redemption. Aldred has seen and caused death and has become skeptical of the motives of others. Eventually, though, examination of his relationship with Peter Exley leads Aldred to realize he is healing. As he witnesses the descent of Peter into passivity and disconsolation, Aldred begins to believe in and desire a relationship with Helen Driscoll. The capacity for love that Aldred feels also enables him to seek closure on unresolved issues with his mother. The story ends happily for Aldred.

Helen Driscoll

Helen has lived with the war, self-absorbed parents, and an ailing brother who is everything to her. When Aldred comes on the scene, though, things change for Helen.. She does not question the improbability of her love for the older man as he questions his own for this teenaged girl. At sixteen, Helen's budding feelings are secreted from her parents and applauded by her brother Benedict. Helen continues to aid Benedict in his daily routine and shares her time with her brother and Aldred, until one day, her parents send her on a false errand, from which she returns to find that Benedict has been dispatched to a hospital in Tokyo. Helen becomes distraught, but with the assistance of Aldred, she overcomes her grief and becomes resigned to Benedict's imminent death. She is given only moments to say farewell to Aldred before she too is moved away, to the remote location of New Zealand. It is there that Helen first questions her relationship with Aldred, as she begins to view her time in Japan as though it were a dream. Helen does not lose hope, though, and the story ends happily for her.

Benedict Driscoll

A young man of twenty, Benedict Driscoll suffers from a disease that will eventually kill him. Largely ignored by parents whose self-absorption cannot accept his infirmity, Benedict is lovingly cared for by his sister Helen. Eventually, Benedict is completely incapacitated physically, and he lives his final days in Japan through Aldred's tales of



the outside world. Benedict's illness is the antecedent that fires Aldred to action, in that it instills in him the realization that death eventually comes and that every living moment is precious. Benedict is removed to the hospital in Tokyo, and then to California, in Part 2 of *The Great Fire*, and the story culminates with his death in Part 3.

Peter Exley

Aldred's friend Peter Exley is an Australian soldier on loan to the British Army and a prosecutor of war criminals. The impact of war on Peter is made clear in his consuming desire to settle and have a family, and when he learns of the infatuation his friend has for Helen, Peter feels jealous of Aldred's good fortune. In spite of this, Peter's friendship with Aldred is his only anchor as he navigates a land that is foreign to him. Peter's lack of companionship hints at obsession with his own aloneness.

After attempting to help a sick child, Peter is stricken with an ailment that induces a temporary paralysis. Although he is expected to make a complete recovery with only some lingering weakness, his health coupled with his obsession causes his mental state to become unstable. While hospitalized, Peter attempts to take his own life. His coworker, Rita Xavier, had remained with Peter at the hospital and is credited with saving his life.

Audrey Fellowes

Audrey is in Asia to care for a brother who had been injured during the war. She has relatives in Hong Kong and will eventually choose to reside in Japan. Audrey Fellowes is a mature, matronly, woman introduced to Aldred while he is in Asia. However, Aldred recognizes his feelings for Helen and does not encourage a romantic relationship with Audrey, instead choosing to introduce her to Peter Exley.

Thaddeus 'Tad' Hill

Thaddeus Hill is an American soldier and one of two men sent to see Aldred at Kure. Tad becomes interested in Benedict, and romantically interested in Helen. Closer to her age than Aldred, Tad begins to spend time with her while Aldred is in Hong Kong. When Aldred returns to Kure, though, Tad sees Helen and Aldred together. Recognizing the feelings the two have for each other, Tad resigns himself to having only friendship with Helen. It is Tad who tells Aldred of the Driscoll parents' knowledge of the relationship developing between Aldred and Helen.

Rita Xavier

A woman of Asian descent, Rita Xavier is one of Peter Exley's coworkers in the offices of the War Crimes Commission. Peter explores a relationship with her until their cultural

differences become an issue. It is Rita Xavier who remains beside Peter when he is hospitalized, and she is later credited with saving his from an attempted suicide.



Objects/Places

Japan

First on the island of Ita Jima and then the hills of Kure, Aldred begins his recovery in Japan. It is 1947 and two years after the great fires of Hiroshima, and then Nagasaki, had traumatized the nation. Aldred is in Japan to continue research for the book he has been petitioned to write, but the book in large part gives way to other considerations. In Japan, the scorched lands and disconsolate people provide the backdrop for the relationship between Aldred and Helen.

Hong Kong

Aldred had traversed China for the year prior to his arrival in Japan, and he revisits Hong Kong at the invitation of Peter Exley. The city is overcrowded; the people live in squalor. Food and clean water are an issue. Medical care is available to those who come into the medical facilities, but practitioners will not go out into the city. China had not had the chance to recover from the Second World War before it was again faced with armed conflict, this time in the form of a brutal Civil War. Hong Kong is the place where Peter will play out his role of the victor to the vanquished.

Aldred Leith's Home in London

In his London home Aldred begins to put his childhood behind him., When he returns there, he is confronted with his mother and his boyhood memories of his father. Having experienced Benedict and Helen Driscoll, though, Aldred realizes that he can finally give his mother his understanding and his dead father, his forgiveness. In London, he also spends time with the Laister family, people who come into his home to help his family; the Laisters play a pivotal role in his recovery. It is through them that Aldred rediscovers his confidence and sense of identity when he realizes that he has achieved some renown from his military accomplishments. Aldred uses this renown to the advantage of those closest to him.

New Zealand

Perceived as the end of the world in this story, the author infers that to go to New Zealand is to stay in New Zealand. It is given the appearance of having been unaffected, even forgotten, by the recent war. On the remote island nation of New Zealand, time appears to have stood still. Helen becomes affected by the passivity that pervades the people, and her memories of other places take on dreamlike qualities. It is here that Aldred will find her as the story concludes.



Themes

The Individual In Society

The Great Fire is a story of men and women affected by war and the ways in which they work to fit back into society in war's aftermath. The influence of war is one that Aldred must overcome if he is to heal. Helen and Benedict Driscoll play pivotal roles in demonstrating to Aldred what is possible should he open himself to the capacity for love. Benedict's ill health has not made the boy bitter or cynical, and Helen's loving care of her sibling represents the emotional support that has been absent in Aldred's own life.

Peter Exley represents what may have become of Aldred had these social influences not been available or had he been unwilling to be influenced by them. In Hong Kong, on the eve of a Civil War, Peter is surrounded by less savory social influences. He associates his ability to fit into society with his ability to obtain companionship and settle with a family. Of his coworkers, the lone Asian woman in the group garners Peter's interest. While getting to know her, though, he discovers that her culture has affected her in a way he cannot readily accept. Peter is unable to establish a long-term relationship in Hong Kong, and so he never seems to develop his own identity.

Growth and Initiation

In the story, Aldred overcomes his childhood insecurities and the trauma of war and realizes his potential through writing and influence. This is made possible by the fact that he meets crises head-on, which forces him to renew his confidence and establish his identity. The relationships he begins developing in Japan first ground him and then lift him up.

First among these relationships is the one Aldred develops with Professor Gardiner, who for a very short time takes on a fatherly role, as he offers Aldred wisdom and advice. Aldred finds himself remembering the words of this man called Ginger time and again. Later, Aldred's discussions of war with Benedict Driscoll allow Aldred to revisit these dark events, this time in the company of a young man who will suffer and die from a disease without hope of recovery. Aldred's time with Benedict changes his outlook on his own future by making him appreciate that he has one, in spite of the horrors of his past. Upon returning to London, the foundation is set for his mother, and finally, his acquaintance with the Laister family to create situations where Aldred further establishes his own identity and shores his confidence.

Peter, on the other hand, seems unwilling to create his own identity. His emotional turmoil had begun with his feelings of disassociation as a soldier fighting a war in a foreign country. When Peter acquired Roy Rysom's lassitude, he struggled further with his loss of confidence and identity.



Time

Throughout the novel runs a fear that an understanding of what is really important in life often comes too late to do any good. Aldred, having seen so much death during the war, feels this fear of time very keenly, and his fear is sharpened as he recognizes that Benedict's life will end while he is still young. Benedict, by contrast, already understands the importance of love in a person's life, in spite of the fact that he won't live long. When the importance of love becomes clear to Aldred, and he accepts his feelings for Helen, he determines to go to her without delay.

Death

Without love, one believes death to be the only alternative, and we see this juxtaposition between love and death many times throughout the novel. Until coming to Japan, Aldred had felt purpose only through his writing. He felt inferior even in this endeavor, however, and was constantly comparing himself to his father. It seems clear that his writing would only have delayed his loss (or death) of self, and not prevented it, had he not come to love the Driscoll siblings.

Benedict is possessed with the knowledge of his own imminent demise. He lives with the devotion of his younger sister, Helen, and he realizes that Helen must find another outlet for her love, or she too will wither and die after he is gone. First Benedict, and later the mother and daughter Fry, are glad to learn that Aldred loves Helen.

Peter Exley has no ties other than Aldred, for in Hong Kong, he has failed to cultivate friendships with any of the people he works with. After learning Aldred's feelings for Helen, Peter feels jealous and more alone than ever. When he becomes temporarily incapacitated, without the love and companionship he craves, the reality of Peter's despair culminates in his attempt to take his own life.



Style

Point of View

The author introduces the character of Aldred in Part 1 by combining the voice of a narrator with Aldred's personal account added throughout. As the story progresses, and the focus changes, this narrative and first person account alters to use the voice of the primary character in each chapter and Part. Peter becomes the focal character in the first chapter of Part 2, and it is through his eyes that the reader experiences Hong Kong. In the final chapters, it is Helen Driscoll and the experience of New Zealand that are examined. This shifting method of narration can best be described as limited omniscient.

"Omniscient narration" refers to an all-knowing, all seeing point of view; "limited omniscient" narration occurs when multiple characters exhibit the omniscient trait for the telling of their own tales. While no one character can know everything that has gone before, or infer what might occur next, the reader knows more than any one character. The limited omniscient point of view is common in novels, as it provides a way to develop multiple characters to their fullest extent.

Setting

The Great Fire is set on several continents and over a period of two years, and in all of the story's settings, Hazzard describes the effects of World War Two in great detail. The first setting of the book is Japan, where Aldred arrives in the spring of 1947. His purpose is to explore and document the ravages of war on the country, with Hiroshima and Nagasaki being critical to his research. It is in Japan, among the hills of Kure, that Aldred and Helen Driscoll first meet in the Driscoll home.

Aldred later visits Peter Exley in Hong Kong, and also travels to Canton and elsewhere to continue his work. China, a country that has only just exited the world war, finds itself on the verge of its own Civil War. Hong Kong is explored through the eyes and obsessions of Peter Exley.

A year passes, and Aldred returns to his home in London. He had expected to find little changed there, but finds himself moved when he sees the destruction London has sustained in the war.

The end of the story follows Helen Driscoll, who is moved from Japan to New Zealand by her parents. New Zealand in the late 1940s is considered to be at the very edge of the civilized world. Perhaps even now, the same could be said for these remote islands. The author conveys, through the residents of Kelburn and Lowry Bay, the impression that when an individual travels to New Zealand he or she will stay on as a permanent resident - regardless of the person's original intentions.



Language and Meaning

The pace of this novel never quite seems to reach a speed that would make it a true joy to read, for the impact of war on land and people is constantly conveyed through Shirley Hazzard's extensive use of imagery. Forbearance is necessary to get through the early chapters of the book, and it isn't until Chapter 15, at the climax of the story, that the imagery is reduced to a level that does not overpower the characters' tales. The culmination of twenty years' worth of Ms. Hazzard's dedication and due diligence to *The Great Fire* is exhibited in the amazingly detailed imagery with which she surrounds the story's plot.

It must be remembered that Aldred and Helen's love story would have played out differently had it occurred in another era of the twentieth century. For one thing, the strict civility of the characters' language is indicative of and expected for a story set in the late 1940's. The effects of war on the characters' behavior certainly influenced the setting and action of the story. Beyond this, though, societal influences would have impacted the conclusion of the tale; it is very likely that the ending would have been different had it been set in a different decade. The idea of a girl of sixteen meeting, loving, and eventually marrying a man of thirty-two was acceptable in the 1940's and 1950's, but it was less so from the 1960's through the late 1980's. A relationship of this nature is receiving some renewed acceptance now, which is perhaps one reason the book has been able to enjoy such success in literary circles.

Structure

The Great Fire is a novel comprised of three parts and twenty-two chapters. The structure is based primarily on the limited omniscience of the reader and the first person accounts of the current focal character. In Part 1, chapters one through four, the main character of Aldred, about which this love story is written, is introduced. The development of the relationships that will be key to his outcome begins. In Part 2, Peter is introduced and accepted as a friend of Aldred. Inclusive of chapters five through sixteen, Part 2 flows from the point of view of Peter, interspersed with the research Aldred will conduct for his book and the evolution of the relationship between Aldred and Helen Driscoll. The incomplete relationships of Peter are explained and exemplify the failure that awaits Aldred should he falter with Helen. It is in Chapter 15 that all manner of character trials come to a head. A rapidly deteriorating Benedict Driscoll is removed to a hospital in Tokyo, and ultimately California, for specialized care. It is recognized that Helen had seen her brother for the last time. Helen's parents, Barry and Melba Driscoll, move the remaining family members, themselves and Helen, from Japan to New Zealand. Aldred is informed of his father's death and becomes aware of the hospitalization of Peter. Part 2 concludes with the contemplations of Peter as he lies in his hospital bed. Part 3 begins one year from the beginning of the story and continents away. Aldred arrives in London, where he reconciles with his mother and the memories of his father. His work evolves to include analysis of postwar Occupied Germany by request of his government. Aldred's fear of time and distance from Helen comes to its

apex when he receives word of Peter's attempted suicide and notice of Benedict Driscoll's death. Part 3, and the book, conclude when Aldred travels to New Zealand for Helen.

Quotes

"Peace forces us to invent our future selves." Part 1, Chapter 1, pg. 10

"You won't need war now, Talbot, to see the world - hardship maybe, but not slaughter. Until this, war has been the way out, for most men." Part 1, Chapter 2, pg. 24

"If I get through this, the hours will be made to count." Part 2, Chapter 5, pg. 75

"We both, Peter and I, feel pursued by evocations of wartime violence, unexorcised. In my case, I think these now recede." Part 2, Chapter 8, pg. 112

"The price of vigilance is eternal liberty." Part 2, Chapter 9, pg. 127

"A man who hasn't killed is incomplete, analogous to a woman who has never given birth." Part 2, Chapter 9, pg. 133

"When we're indecisive, yes, the wishes of others gain." Part 2, Chapter 10, pg. 146

"What I come back for, to be loved like this." Part 2, Chapter 11, pg. 156

"Having expected, repeatedly, to die from the great fires into which his times had pitched him, he had discovered a desire to live completely; by which he meant, with her." Part 2, Chapter 13, pg. 195

"I was supposed to be looking out for him, saving him from himself." Part 2, Chapter 15, pg. 217

"The rational is still worth stating." Part 2, Chapter 16, pg. 228

"People tell you that time will help-they have to say something. They don't realize that one dreads time, the diminution. One doesn't want to get over it." Part 3, Chapter 17, pg. 242

"Luck is always welcome, but you won't find it here. This is not a venturesome society. In any case, one must make the great changes for oneself or it doesn't amount to destiny." Part 3, Chapter 19, pg. 277



Topics for Discussion

Discuss the significance of the historical setting in which this book was written. How would the story change if it had been set in the 1990's?

Discuss the relationship of Aldred Leith to Helen Driscoll. How would it have developed differently had the book been set ahead twenty years? Fifty years?

Discuss the significance of Roy Rysom. What thematic part did he play?

Discuss the ending to the story with regard to the character of Peter Exley. What do you think will happen to him?

Discuss the significance of Aurora Searle's character to the story.

Discuss the imagery used by the author. Do you believe it contributed to the story or not, and why?