

# **Into the Forest Study Guide**

## **Into the Forest by Jean Hegland**

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# Plot Summary

The following version of this book was used to create this study guide: Hegland, Jean. *Into the Forest*. The Dial Press/Bantam. Bantam Trade Paperbacks Edition. 1998.

*Into the Forest* is a young adult survival novel by Jean Hegland in which teenaged sisters Nell and Eva endeavor to live on after civilization has collapsed. The novel itself takes the form of an unfolding accounting of their experiences set down in a notebook by 17-year-old Nell at 18-year-old Eva's recommendation. Much of the novel blends together the present and the past as the girls struggle to adapt to a world that has lost its everyday luxuries, and in which survival itself becomes a luxury. Nell is a very practical, very academic, very careful girl, while Eva is more sensitive, cultured (she is a ballerina), and determined to live in the moment while she can. The girls live alone in their family cabin at the end of a forested mountain road some miles from the nearest town (Redwood) following the death of their mother the previous year from cancer, and the recent accidental death of their father while cutting down trees for firewood.

Early in the novel, both girls seek a return to normalcy. They want to return to the comforts, conditions, and stability of the past. A return to normalcy essentially becomes their reason for living, as the girls ration their food, seek to maintain what they have, and spend time devoting themselves to their previous pursuits. Nell spends her afternoons preparing for Achievement Tests for application to study at Harvard while Eva rigorously practices her ballet routine. But as time passes, and things like the electricity and the internet fail and gasoline runs short, their world rapidly contracts to the point it consists only of one another. A visit from a young man named Eli (whom Nell has romantic feelings for) surprises both sisters. Eli reports that most people in town have either left or died from illness, and that he and several others are preparing to trek to Boston where it is rumored life has resumed as normal. Nell considers joining the expedition, but decides to remain with her sister instead.

Things take a dramatic turn for the worst when Eva is raped by a stranger. Nell soothes Eva as she recovers, only to learn Eva is now pregnant. Eva will not even consider an abortion, determined to have a child and to see that some good comes out of their situation. Eva notes that the baby inside her is his own person, and so deserves life. It is Eva who ultimately recognizes that life will never be what it used to be, and so they had better prepare for life as it is rather than waiting for life as it was. In so doing, Nell and Eva begin to sow crops, can food, and hunt and gather from the forest around them, just as local Indians did many years before. Eva gives birth to a baby boy she names Robert (after the sisters' dead father) and later discovers the boot prints of a man in the mud near the edge of the forest clearing, obviously staking the place out. Eva decides they should burn their house, and take to living in the forest with everything they can carry.



# Pages 1 – 50

## Summary

Seventeen-year-old Nell begins by saying the words she now sets down have been encouraged to be written by her 18-year-old sister, Eva. Nell admits she would have rather used the notebook in which she writes for her studies. It is Christmas Day. Nell hopes by next Christmas everything will return to normal – that power will come back, computers will work again, planes will return to the sky, and so on. Nell and Eva live in an isolated house at the end of a mountain road, a house they once shared with their father and mother. Their mother has been dead for more than a year due to cancer. For the present Christmas, Nell has given Eva a repaired pair of Eva's dancing shoes. Eva's gift has been the notebook, which she says she found behind her dresser. Nell wishes she could give Eva some gasoline to power the generator to provide electricity to Eva's CD player, so Eva could dance to music rather than a metronome. That evening, Nell and Eva light their Christmas carousel, which features candles lighting up a Nativity scene. Nell and Eva reflect on how their mother once said that Jesus could have been a She. If that was the case, Eva thinks everything would have turned out differently.

Nell worries Eva will use up her repaired dance shoes too quickly. While Nell likes to make things last as long as possible, Eva has a use-it-while-you-have-it, live in the moment mentality. Nell looks back appallingly and jealously on the past when she would throw away clothes no longer in style or uneaten food. Nell's entire life now seems unlike her past life. She compares it to a "fugue state," in which a person with amnesia for an extended period of time begins a new life totally unrelated to his or her previous life. Nell reflects on how living so far away from town (Redwood, California) often meant power outages, which was not unusual. She reflects on how eventually, the power began getting interrupted on a daily basis until it was uncommon for the power to come on at all. She remembers how the generator would be used frequently to power the house in such times until gas became so scarce their father insisted it only be used for emergencies. At the same time, she remembers how telephone service and mail deliveries became worse and worse.

Nell reflects on how there was not one single cause to the current disaster, but a series ranging from war and terrorism to natural disasters and environmental crises. Nell reflects on how, for a while, she and many others believed the crisis would lead to a better America while drawing on lessons from the past to handle the present. She also recalls how her father reminded her that their isolated cabin was a means to survival. In the present, Nell does her best to learn, study, and get by through use of books and encyclopedias, and worries about taking achievement tests necessary for entry into Harvard. Eva reminds Nell that Harvard will make exceptions given the current situation. Nell desires to be either a doctor or a researcher. Most of the day now is spent doing chores – such as chopping firewood – while afternoons are spent by Nell studying and Eva dancing.



Nell watches Eva's practicing of ballet one day to discover a less graceful form of dancing Eva is apparently developing, one which seems more wild. It causes Nell to reflect on how their mother was also a ballerina, and how she tried to talk Eva out of studying ballet. It also causes Nell to reflect on how she felt she had less time to play with Eva all those years ago as Eva devoted more and more time to perfecting her ballet. Nell recalls how when things began to get bad, Eva wanted to move to stick to ballet, but their father refused. Nell thinks about how her own mother gave up a promising ballet career to get married, have children, and live in an isolated area. Nell does not know why, especially because her mother disliked so much of rural life. Nell now finds herself grateful for her father's habit of keeping everything and throwing nothing away, as many of the things once considered trash which he kept are now coming in handy. Nell and Eva discover that Eva's ceiling is now leaking.

## Analysis

When the novel begins, readers are introduced to the academic, practical Nell, and the sensitive, cultured, and live-in-the-moment Eva. Immediately, the structure of the novel is formed in addition to the introduction to both sisters: the novel will take the form of journal entries in a notebook recounting the past and detailing unfolding events as they relate to the girls' struggle to survive in a collapsed world. Nell becomes the narrator of the novel, explaining why she is writing down things. There will be no chapters, but instead amorphous vignettes, brief passages, and sometimes a handful of sentences in their place. There are no dates as these are irrelevant to the lives the girls now live beyond general seasons. In a sense, the notebook account gives Nell a sense of purpose, as she becomes the official chronicler of their experiences.

This sense of purpose is utterly critical in a survival environment. As Jean Hegland argues here in the first section of her novel, and as she will continue to argue throughout the novel, one has to have something worth surviving for in a survival environment. But the notebook is only part of Nell's reason to get through each day. She and Eva both long for a return to the normalcy of the past, and their routine is a mix of old and new: part of their day is spent geared toward survival, while a part of it is geared toward life in the old world. Nell spends afternoons studying while Eva dances. So confident are the girls of what they believe will come, they do not even give serious consideration to the thought that such a thing may not occur. In a sense, this too becomes a reason and a purpose for surviving – to return.

At the same time, this allows Hegland to begin to form a subtle theme that will appear throughout the novel in bits and pieces – that beauty makes life worth living. Despite the uncertainty of their times, the girls find beauty in art: Eva dances while Nell writes. Beauty is soul-affirming and heartening, and provides a kind of comfort and consolation not easily found in difficult times. Yet even the refinement of these forms of beauty are under stress from the situation. Readers should note the very telling scene in which Nell watches Eva practice dance which seems more wild than refined – an omen of things to come for the girls. It is only a matter of time – with the metronome Eva dances to keeping time not only for dance, but as a reminder that time is passing, and things are



changing. Nell notes this in how she desperately tries to conserve things, while Eva is ready to use them while they have such things; and, at the same time, Nell acknowledges things done in the past – such as throwing away uneaten food – are now no longer possible if they mean to survive.

Hegland also paves the way for feminist foundations in her novel. Readers should note that there are no major male characters present, and that the one major male figure in the lives of both sisters is dead. Women are capable of surviving on their own without men, Hegland asserts, and this becomes a core thematic argument of hers that stretches through the length of the novel. Hegland makes her case so subtly that readers do not actually realize it until they pay attention to the fact that there are no major male characters, and that each situation in which the girls find themselves normally reserved for men, are handled well by the girls. Readers should note that Eva's observation that if Jesus was a girl, things could have turned out very differently, is reflective of the feminist approach with the assumption being women – and a matriarchal society – would not have allowed civilization to collapse. Readers should also note the scene in which Nell reads about fugue states –which itself becomes symbolic of a changing life.

## Discussion Question 1

Why has Nell decided to keep a written record of the experiences she and Eva have had? What, specifically, does this have to say about the situation when Nell would use a notebook for something other than academics?

## Discussion Question 2

How does the present situation in which Nell and Eva find themselves cause them to think differently about how they lived in the past? Why?

## Discussion Question 3

What is a fugue state? How does Nell consider that she and Eva are now living in a fugue state? Why does this matter to Nell?

## Vocabulary

scoffing, immersed, voracious, abeyance, implacable, fugue state, pivotal, inevitable, permeate, matriculate, arabesque, indignation, noncommittal, ethereal, discordant, unalterably, compulsive, desultory



# Pages 51 – 100

## Summary

Nell reflects on going to play with Eva in the woods when they were little, which their father allowed but their mother worried about because of things like wild pigs. Nell reflects on how, when Eva turned to dance, she turned away from the woods. In the present, the roof continues to leak. Nell and Eva must work together to unclog the spring water tank to restore water to the house. It helps Nell feel a connection to her father. She recalls how she, Eva, and their father would go into Redwood once a week to run errands, and how she and Eva would always visit the Uptown Café, where local kids their age hung out before going over to the Plaza, a kind of town square and park where Nell had her first taste of alcohol. Nell remembers how they continued to go into town early on, before the situation got really bad. She remembers how it was in Redwood that she first met Eli, a handsome loner in his twenties she quickly fell for. Nell remembers how hurt she was when the family could no longer go to town because gas has become so scarce, for it meant she could no longer see Eli. She remembers taking out her anger on her father.

Nell remembers the very last time she, Eva, and their father went into town sometime after the previous decision not to go back into town unless absolutely needed. Nell remembers passing the house of the nearest neighbors, a devout Christian family named Coleman, to discover their house broken into and ransacked. Nell remembers how Redwood itself looked horrible, with most of the people gone. Nell recalls how only the Fastco wholesalers store was open, and how little was left –but that their father made the most of it by grabbing everything possible from baking soda and garlic salt to flour to damaged cans and boxes of food overlooked by others. Nell recalls how they were checked out by Assistant Manager Stan, who also checked to make sure they were Fastco members. Nell recalls how Stan explained that most people had cleared out on rumors of power and civilization still functioning elsewhere, that those remaining had hunkered down to wait things out, that the government was trying to get back on its feet, and that Mick Mitter at the Exxon station claimed to be expecting a shipment of gasoline.

Nell remembers how after the last trip to town, her father spent his time cutting wood or preparing food for long-term storage. Nell recalls how a branch fell on their father, forcing his leg onto his chainsaw, leading to his death moments after Nell and Eva arrived to try to help. Nell reflects brokenheartedly on how neither she, nor Eva, knew what to do, and how their agnostic father told them to pray before telling them it was okay as he died. Nell recalls how she and Eva were devastated and felt lost as a result, and how they came to view the forest around them as cruel rather than kind. Nell remembers digging their father's grave, burying him, and then dreaming about wild pigs unburying him. In the present, Nell and Eva work on organizing their father's workshop where they discover nearly five gallons of gasoline. Eva wants to use the gasoline now, but Nell urges conservation. They will need at least four gallons to get back and forth to



town should the need arise. Eva wants a few minutes of dancing to music, but consents to saving it for now.

## Analysis

The experiences of Nell and Eva in the present continue to unfold against reflections on, and recollections of the past. As Hegland demonstrates, the past retains a powerful hold over the present. Although their situation has not improved, and although there are no signs of any progress of a return to normalcy, Nell and Eva continue to live half-between the past as it was and the present as it is. In a sense, the recollection of the past itself becomes a kind of exercise in beauty, in which good times are measured against, and help sustain against, the darkness of the present. Even the language Nell employs to speak about the past –in particular, good times –is reflective of the desire for beauty and the consolation and comfort it provides. Consider how Nell explains in a few, simple, but utterly poignant words what it was like to live in the moment in uncertain times before everything went wrong in a large way: “We were immortal that summer, immortal in an ephemeral world...” (57).

However, those times of uncertainty gave way to a struggle for survival, as Nell recalls. Life, therein, is a daily struggle in a survival environment, Hegland argues. Nell reflects on the early days of survival, when their father acted as their guide and took them through a kind of scavenging-shopping in a town that had nearly entirely shut down, and how early frustrations now seem like minor inconveniences compared to what is currently being faced. In the past, for example, Nell complained about a lack of gasoline to get to town to see the guy she liked. Now, she worries about conserving enough gasoline for an emergency. Gasoline, once a symbolic representation of the blood of the body known as civilization, now has only marginal value.

At the same time, readers are jarringly reminded in this section of the novel that Nell and Eva are living alone and are entirely dependent upon themselves. This section of the novel deals with the death of their father, Robert – formerly their rock and guide. Now, the girls are left without him, his love, his experience, and his guidance. The girls are now entirely alone. Yet it is clear that they are capable of surviving, as months after the accident, the girls are still struggling to adapt – but getting by nonetheless. Readers should pay attention to the scene in which the different approaches and personalities of the girls clash over use of gasoline: Nell wants to save it; Eva wants to use it. Nell ultimately wins out, as conservation in a survival situation is crucial.

## Discussion Question 1

How does the town of Redwood change over time? How does the town itself alter Nell’s consideration of the situation in which she and her family find themselves?





## Discussion Question 2

How do Nell and Eva want to use the gasoline they find? Why? Who ultimately wins out on determining how it is used? Do you believe this is fair? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

Why is the death of Nell and Eva's father so devastating to the girls, even beyond the sadness associated with such an event? Specifically, what does this mean for them in the forest?

## Vocabulary

mythic, predominantly, aghast, vacillating, vigorously, surreptitiously, excruciatingly, benevolent, odious



## Pages 101 – 150

### Summary

Lilith, one of Nell's chickens, dies seemingly from an egg getting stuck inside her. Three days pass, and Nell and Eva do not speak to one another because of the disagreement over the gasoline. While Nell is going through old things in her room, she discovers a heart-shaped tin box she used to keep treasures in as a child. Among those things are four sticks of gum, and a foil-wrapped chocolate kiss. Nell considers what to do next. Part of her wants to share the kiss with her sister, while part of her does not want to after the gas disagreement. She ultimately chooses to eat the chocolate, then rinses her mouth out. The month of March comes on. Eva begs Nell for the use of some gasoline so she can dance to music. Nell refuses, shows Eva the gum, and confesses to eating the chocolate. Eva is furious, and refuses to speak with Nell for another two days. Nell realizes that fighting is a luxury one does not have if one only has one other person in her life.

The fight between Nell and Eva is interrupted by a surprise visit from Eli. Both girls are stunned to see someone else, and Nell is especially happy to see Eli. Eli brings grim news: Redwood still does not have electricity, an epidemic of some kind (possibly the flu) killed many people including Eli's mother, and rumors of electricity in the East abound. Eli explains he came up to the forest for a change. He stays several days, during which time he and Nell go for a walk to an old, hollowed-out redwood tree. There, they have sex. They do the same thing the next day. It is then, after sex, then Eli reveals a friend of his uncle's has been to Sacramento and returned with news that things are indeed beginning over again in the East, including Boston, where they have electricity, food, and jobs. Nell is both excited and disbelieving. Eli wants Nell and Eva to come along when he, his brothers, and their cousin begin the journey to Boston. Eva thinks the whole thing is crazy. She refuses to go, and Nell decides to stay with her even after Eli promises to find a way to send for Eva.

Bit by bit, food in the pantry is running out. Nell is amazed by how much human beings consume, and that all of life is a series of lasts – such as last bit of sugar, last beans, and so on. Nell and Eva disagree over whether to open the last jar of tomatoes, as it is their last significant source of Vitamin C that they have. The jar of tomatoes is dropped and shatters. Nell and Eva are stunned. Nell grabs another bottle intent to hit Eva with it, only to discover she has grabbed a bottle of orange Grand Marnier. She and Eva decide to drink it and get drunk. Some days later, Eva is out in the yard chopping wood when a stranger arrives asking about their father and gas. The man ends up raping Eva, then rapidly leaves the area. Nell comes upon Eva, worried at first she is dead. She helps Eva inside to bathe. Eva's body is already bruising from the attack. Nell ensures Eva takes the last aspirin they have in order to ease the pain. The world beyond the cabin now becomes dangerous. The forest, Nell considers, killed their father, and also brought the rapist to their yard. The forest itself is dangerous. Nell boards up the windows and doors to keep the outside world, out. Nell considers how civilizations have



risen and fallen over the course of history. As the spring comes on, Nell considers committing suicide. When Nell leaves the house at dark with the gun, Eva questions why she is going to collect firewood with the gun. This causes Nell not to kill herself.

## Analysis

Life is a daily struggle in a survival environment, Hegland continues to argue in this section of the novel. The fight that occurs between Nell and Eva over gasoline, and then chocolate, does nothing positive for either one of them. It expresses how attitudes and behavior from their previous life still encroach upon the very utilitarian necessity of survival. In other words, the selfishness common in the past still appears in the present to the endangering of the present. Nell and Eva only have one another to depend upon, and this is something they cannot afford to waste. Nell's selfishness in eating the chocolate, and Eva's refusal to forgive, speaks of petulance in an age when tantrums and offended feelings are recipes for death. There is a strengthening that has to occur.

The fight between the girls is interrupted by Eli's visit, initially casting doubt on the idea that women may be able to survive without men. It is not known what would have happened had Eli not arrived – but his arrival also brings about a forced and hurried peace between the sisters. Eli's presence also brings about a change for the girls: rumors of life returning to normal on the East Coast are contrasted with the worsening situation on the West Coast. Eli and a small group are setting out for Boston, and Nell, who initially wants to go with them, ultimately decides against it in order to remain with Eva. Eva is all she has. Despite their fights, their love and loyalty matter more. Readers should also understand that this decision is not merely one of action, but of deeper foreshadowing: the rejection of the pursuit of the old world in the East. It is the first major step Nell takes toward letting the past go. While the past may have a tremendous influence and hold on the present, it does not have to determine the future. By choosing not to seek out the way things were, Nell has opened the door to the way things are, and the way things will be.

In another sense, Nell's rejection of Eli is certainly no rejection of his love or a life with him – but is a rejection of patriarchy, in a way. Nell would arguably be safer among men, but her decision to stay with her sister and go it alone speaks of a feminine fierceness. Eva, who is also offered the chance to go, refuses. Women are indeed capable of surviving on their own without men, Hegland contends – but this does not mean they are invincible. The very masculine, but very civil and respectful Eli is contrasted with the roaming, wild-like stranger who appears and swiftly overpowers Eva, raping her and fleeing. This violation of Eva is also a violation of the life the girls have lived: they have now experienced horror firsthand, and this is a stinging reminder that they can never let their guard down. Their isolation and survival so far does not guarantee their future. The forest, once a source of love and life, has become a place of death because of what happened to their father, and now seems outright dangerous because of the rapist.



## Discussion Question 1

Is the sisters' fear of the forest and the surrounding world justified especially in lieu of Eva's rape? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

How does the animosity between Nell and Eva affect their overall relationship? How does this in turn affect Nell's decision not to leave with Eli?

## Discussion Question 3

Eli and the stranger present two different versions of visitors to the cabin. Why do you believe they differ in their nature and in how they impact the lives of Nell and Eva?

## Vocabulary

wistfully, irony, etiquette, lolling, languorous, serene, keenness, monolith, withering, inexorable



## Pages 151 – 200

### Summary

Nell begins learning how to use her father's hunting rifle. Eva's body continues to heal, but her heart, mind, and soul have been shattered. As Nell walks around the property, she realizes the gardens have been left untended and seedlings have gone unplanted. Nell commits to planting and expanding the garden. Nell asks for Eva's help, wanting to bring her back into the swing of things to survive. Eva agrees to help put in garden posts. Her appetite begins to return, and she begins to resume chores around the house and outside. When Nell hurts her back, Eva provides a massage to make it better. Nell then does the same thing for Eva, to help relieve stress and sadness. As Eva relaxes, Nell beams because she knows she can now help her sister heal. As June comes on, Nell and Eva throw themselves into working in the garden and sowing seeds. Whenever they are outside, they keep a watchful eye on the forest.

Eva begins to get sick in the mornings. Nell quietly studies Eva through the days, believing Eva is pregnant. Nell considers an abortion practical, but Eva will not hear of it. She is determined to make things work, and she says the baby is its own person. Nell ultimately comes to accept Eva's decision. She then shifts her focus to trying to find what she can regarding pregnancy and childbirth. Eva becomes happy and carefree, her thoughts focused on the baby growing inside her. Nell and Eva go visit their father's grave to lay down flowers. There, they discover strawberries growing, and as they head home, eat strawberries along the way. Nell begins to realize they can forage in the forest for food. She begins to learn about the plants and trees growing in the forest. She is especially stunned to find that acorns can be used for food, and the forest is full of oak trees. The gardens are bearing good food, and Nell and Eva are beginning to crossbreed and experiment for better yields. She studies the Pomo Indians of California, and how they ordered their years based on what kind of food was available month to month.

Nell and Eva begin canning foods in preparation for the coming winter. While in the creek, Nell believes she sees the tracks of bears in the mud. Some nights later, while eating dinner on the porch, Nell and Eva believe they smell smoke on the breeze. They keep watch overnight, fearing intruders, but then realize a massive fire can be seen on the horizon. Fortunately, the fire never comes. Nell and Eva rededicate themselves to harvesting everything they can from the garden. They also take to the forest to collect acorns. They begin to fill up entire barrels. Eva's belly grows with the baby inside while Nell takes to learning more about pregnancy. She learns Vitamin B-12 is critical for proper pregnancy, meaning she will have to go hunting for meat. She climbs a tree to await a wild pig, thinking of all the ways she will positively influence her niece's life in the years to come.



## Analysis

Women are capable of surviving on their own, Hegland continues to argue, but there will be setbacks. Situations traditionally reserved for men now become matters of survival for young women like Nell and Eva. In the past, it would be up to the man to protect the home at gunpoint while the women served as a last line of defense for the children. Now, Nell and Eva – who are becoming young women – must assume those frontline roles. Nell teaches herself how to use a gun not only for the purposes of hunting, but self-defense. There is no one who can protect the girls beyond themselves – and Nell takes the lead on making sure they have the ability to defend themselves as needed. This is especially important in such dark times, as Eva struggles to return to some semblance of her former self.

Interestingly enough, what brings Eva back around is a recommitment to survival. The desire to survive becomes the reason for living. As Hegland argues once more, you have to have a reason to survive, because life is a daily struggle in a survival environment. Eva's desire to create and produce occurs in response to the destructive act of being raped. When Eva discovers she is pregnant, she will not even entertain the idea of abortion. The baby inside her is his own person with his own rights, including a right to life. Something beautiful has come out of something horrendous, and this is what Eva next chooses to dwell upon. The baby comes to symbolize new life, and hope for a new future. This kind of beauty is what makes life worth living: in the midst of death, destruction, and a collapsing world, having a baby is a commitment to the future and to new possibilities.

As Nell and Eva commit to the future, they begin to reconsider the forest. As children, the forest was bright, wondrous, and innocent, just as their childhoods were. After that, the forest became a place of death and danger as they were forced to suddenly grow up and confront the harsh realities of the world – of things like death and rape. Now, they see the forest as a matter of life and death. The forest is, in and of itself, without benevolence or malevolence. Instead, it is a means to an end. It can be used and relied upon for survival. Life is possible, but so is death. The forest must be respected and utilized well, just as the Indians did long before Nell and Eva arrived. A new way of looking at the forest is to be seen in conjunction with the pending arrival of new life in the form of a baby – and this paves the way for a whole new world.

## Discussion Question 1

Why, upon discovering Eva is pregnant, does Nell encourage abortion? Do you believe she is right in doing so? Why or why not? Why, upon discovering she is pregnant, does Eva refuse any talk at all about abortion? Do you believe she is right in doing so? Why or why not?



## Discussion Question 2

How do Nell and Eva respond to Eva's rape? How do they move beyond these responses? Why is this important especially as it relates to their survival?

## Discussion Question 3

How does Nell's perception of the forest change along with events, situations, and circumstances? What understanding regarding the forest does Nell finally come to arrive at? Why?

## Vocabulary

luxuriated, ministrations, fickle, reminiscences, omnivorous, unfathomable



## Pages 200 – 241

### Summary

Three wild pigs approach. Nell aims, fires, and hits a sow. The sow writhes around, so Nell shoots it again in the back of the head to kill it. She then commits to gutting the pig for meat. Nell and Eva work for days to use and preserve the meat from the kill. Considering everything she and Eva have done, Nell feels as if she has passed her Achievements Test. Despite this, as the autumn and winter come on, the house begins falling apart around them from neglect and disrepair. Nell begins to think the redwood stump would be a safer place to live than the house. Not long after Nell's considerations, Eva finally goes into labor. Nell brings her to the stump where she helps settle Eva in and then builds a fire. Nell and Eva bet the use of the gasoline on whether the baby is a boy or a girl. Eva gives birth to a baby boy, and the sight of him delights both Eva and Nell (though Nell loses the bet). Eva comes down with a fever, during which time Nell does all she can to care for the baby and for Eva. She makes a variety of medicinal teas using forest ingredients that finally helps make Eva better.

Eva decides to name the baby Robert, after their father. Nell nicknames Robert "Burl." She spends as much time with him as possible. Meanwhile, the house continues to fall apart. Nell and Eva have a fight over Nell wanting to take care of Robert so often, which results in Nell moving out to the stump. Now truly alone, Nell thinks of the past, of the world before. She dreams of the Forest assuming a womanly, human form, and birthing her. Nell then returns to see Eva and Robert. Eva tells her they have been living wrongly, waiting to return to a past that is dead. The past no longer makes sense, she says, and so she has decided to use the gasoline to burn down the house, destroying the past. Eva then shows the stunned Nell boot prints, meaning someone has been watching the house. They will take all they can from the house, and move into the stump where they will begin again. Anything they do not know, they will learn, says Eva. Eva explains that man has been around for more than 100,000 years, and that things like electricity are the real fugue state of man. Nell reluctantly agrees. Among the things she takes are only a few books, including the encyclopedia's index. She and Eva decide to bring along the hens as well. They burn the house, then head into the forest.

### Analysis

Beauty makes life worth living, Hegland argues through the end of the novel. While Nell and Eva may no longer be studying and dancing, respectively, they find beauty in other ways – such as new life by way of baby Robert, a new home, and a new willingness to live in the forest itself. Indeed, this new life becomes their purpose and reason for living. As Eva philosophically considers it, perhaps the real fugue state of humankind has not been the past year, but the past few hundred years living with modern comforts that were never required for survival before. This is a fascinating concept to consider, and offers up the idea that human beings – provided they are willing to commit – are much





more capable of survival outside of civilization and in a survival situation than they might initially suspect. This is especially true of women, as Nell and Eva have become young women in their own right, having come of age: they are stronger, braver, more resilient, and more capable than they ever have been before.

The reader is reminded again of the feminist argument made by Eva that, if Jesus has been a woman, things would have turned out differently. Eva now effectively argues that they have been wrong waiting to return to the past, when they should be looking to the future. The future the sisters create for themselves is a future of their own making. Though the past exerts a tremendous influence on the present, and should be borne in mind in the future, it does not have to determine the future. The past is symbolized by the house in which Nell and Eva have been living. This house – and the past – is burned as they take to life in the woods. They carry with them elements of the past – books, blankets, and other important basic needs in addition to establishing a direct link to the past by naming baby Robert after his grandfather– that will serve as a foundation for the future. It is a very Burkean-conservative path forward: the sisters honor the past in the building of their future. They do not cut out the past entirely, but learn and grow from it. They then journey into the forest to begin the world again for matters of life and survival.

## Discussion Question 1

Do you agree or disagree with Eva's assertion that humankind currently exists in a fugue state? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

Why do Nell and Eva venture into the forest to begin the world again? Why do they choose to burn so much, and take so little with them? Why do they choose the forest?

## Discussion Question 3

If you were in the place of Nell and Eva at the end of the novel, what would you do? Would you burn the cabin and head into the woods? Or would you do something differently? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

incredulity, alchemy, foundering, furtive, absurdity, equitable



# Characters

## Nell

Nell is the 17-year-old narrator of the novel, and the chronicler of the account in the notebook. She is the younger sister of Eva. Intelligent, practical, and a secret romantic, Nell is much like any other teenage girl when the novel begins. She is lulled by luxury and a desire for college until the collapse, but then must actively work to transition from teenage girl to young woman bent on survival as she comes of age through experiences like hunting, planting, and self-defense. Nell becomes a more confident, capable, and adaptable young woman by the end of the novel, taking to the forest with Eva and baby Robert for a new life.

## Eva

Eva is the 18-year-old sister of Nell. Gentle, cultured, and very much for living in the moment, Eva is a ballet dancer and very much a typical teenage girl. Only the collapse shocks her into transition, coming to accept that long-term plans and goals are necessary, and that survival is tantamount to all other things like dance. When Eva is raped, she is further shocked into seeing how the world has changed – and this in turn helps steel her determination to bring her baby (Robert) into the world in order that some good may come out of so much darkness. The baby becomes Eva's hope for the future, and her reason for survival in the present.

## Dad (Robert)

Dad (Robert) is the father of Nell and Eva, and the widowed husband of Gloria. Kind, brave, responsible, and humorous, Dad provides an exceptional example of civility and resilience to the girls in the early days of the collapse. He is ultimately killed in a woodcutting accident.

## Mom (Gloria)

Mom (Gloria) is the deceased mother of Nell and Eva, and the deceased wife of Robert. Mentioned and remembered but never actually seen, Mom has been dead for over a year because of cancer. A former ballerina, Mom gave up a career in dance to be a wife and mother. She is remembered as creative, kind, cultured, intelligent, and gentle.

## Eli

Eli is a young man in his twenties who briefly becomes romantically involved with Nell. Eli comes to visit Nell during the course of the novel, and the two have sex out in the



forest. Eli entreats Nell and Eva to join him, his brothers, and their cousin on a quest to find civilization in Boston, but both girls refuse. Eli then heads off. His fate is unknown.

## **Stan**

Stan is the assistant manager of the Fastco wholesalers club warehouse in Redwood. Stan carries a gun with him to work, and now has the only open store in all of Redwood. Stan is very much a law-and-order kind of guy, wanting to make sure that Robert is a member of the Fastco club before he checks out with his purchases. Stan also provides important information for Robert and the girls regarding what has been happening in Redwood.

## **The rapist**

The rapist, an unknown male, arrives one day at the house while Eva is cutting firewood. He seems to be interested in gasoline, but when Eva does her best to stall him and then get him to leave, he savagely rapes her. He then flees the area.

## **The unknown stranger**

The unknown stranger, never seen, is creeping around the house and forest at the end of the novel. He is revealed by his boot prints, though he is never actually spotted. He appears to be casing out the property and house, and his mere presence serves as a catalyst to propel Nell and Eva into the forest to live.

## **Baby Robert**

Baby Robert is the son of Eva and her rapist. Robert is carried to term and given birth to out of love and hope for a better future. Robert becomes the whole world of Eva and Nell when he is born, and everything the girls do from thereon in is determined by their love for, and desire to protect Robert.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Notebook

A notebook symbolizes the story of Nell and Eva, and how much their lives have changed. The notebook is where Nell, at Eva's encouraging, writes down their story and their experiences. The notebook would have formerly (in better times) been used for academics, but that the studious Nell would even consider using a notebook for something other than studies demonstrates how much their lives have changed.

## Dancing shoes

Dancing shoes symbolize life before, and life now. The dance shoes belong to Eva, and represent life when it was stable and things were normalized. Eva could dance as she wished and could buy new shoes as needed. Now, she cannot. The dancing shows are a luxury of the world before. Now, Nell repairs a pair to give Eva for Christmas so that Eva may dance a few hours more, even though there seems to be no real point of dancing in the present.

## Metronome

A metronome symbolizes time. A metronome keeps time in rhythm for dancers like Eva. The metronome is the only thing she has to dance to do when the electricity fails. Rather than helping to remind her of dance movements, the metronome comes to remind her of how much time has passed, and how much time the girls now have on their hands in a world where keeping time no longer matters.

## Waste

Waste symbolizes both an appalling and envious excess in good times. Nell reflects on how she used to throw away clothes simply because they were out of fashion, or food because she did not eat it at dinner. When she had much at hand, she was careless. Now that she has so little, everything matters. In the present time, Nell would kill for the things she used to throw away without a second thought.

## A fugue state

A fugue state symbolizes living conditions completely unrelated to the past. A fugue state is normally brought about when someone who suffers from amnesia for a long time begins a new life unrelated to their old life. Nell now feels like she and Eva are in a fugue state, for their current life has little if anything to do with the way they lived their old lives. Nearly everything has changed.



## The generator

The generator symbolizes the last hold on civilization. Powered by gasoline, the generator provides electricity to the cabin, and allows Nell and Eva the use of lights, computers, CD players, and other devices taken for granted in normal, daily life. As the gasoline dwindles, so does use of the generator, and so does the grasp Nell has on her old life.

## Chainsaw

A chainsaw symbolizes death. When Nell's father takes to the forest, his goal is to stockpile firewood for the coming winter and rainy season. However, an accident leads him to cutting into his own leg with the chainsaw, which in turn leads to his death. This changes everything for the girls, as they must now rely on themselves.

## Night

Night symbolizes uncertainty. When Nell's father dies, night is fast approaching and daylight is waning. The death of their father means uncertain times are ahead, as their father always made light and made sense of everything unknown to them. Now, Nell and her sister must rely on themselves to make it through the darkness ahead.

## Gasoline

Gasoline is symbolic of changing times and shifting priorities. In the past, gasoline was the lifeblood of the civilized world, allowing it to function and operate – from cars, trucks, and planes, to travel, delivery, and the economy. Now in the collapsed world, gasoline has little value in the day-to-day survival of people like Nell and Eva. In the past, they would want gasoline to travel to visit friends. Later, Eva wants it for electricity. Ultimately, the girls only use it to burn down their house to cover their escape into the forest.

## A chocolate kiss

A chocolate kiss symbolizes selfishness. It defies the natural law that in a survival environment, everything must be shared. Nell discovers the chocolate kiss in her old things. Rather than sharing it with Eva, Nell selfishly eats it, then later reveals what she has done. This causes a fight between the girls that lasts several days.

## Rifle

A rifle symbolizes life and death. Nell commits to using how to learn her father's hunting rifle for the purposes of protecting the lives of herself, Eva, and baby Robert; and for sustaining their lives through the hunting of animals. The wielding of the gun is an

awesome responsibility, for it must be done competently, capably, and morally, for the gun has the ability to kill human beings as well as to save them.

## **Baby**

A baby symbolizes new life, hope, and the future. When Eva learns she is pregnant by rape, Nell suggests abortion, but Eva will not have anything to do with it. Eva explains the baby is his own person, and has a right to life. Additionally, a baby will mean something good that comes out of so much darkness, and the baby becomes a symbol of a better future. The baby in turn becomes the reason for not only surviving, but genuinely living once more.



# Settings

## The forest

The forest symbolizes life and death, and serves as the primary setting for the novel. Neither inherently good or evil, the forest is simply the forest. It can sustain or it can kill. It can be used and respected, or it can be misused and disrespected. The forest also represents uncertainty, not knowing what awaits Nell and Eva through the trees, or in life ahead of them. The forest is where Nell and her family make their home, far above the town of Redwood. The forest is heavily pine and oak, and it features a panoply of plant and animal life that comes to sustain Nell, Eva, and later baby Robert.

The forest, depending on their stage in life, represents different things to the girls. As innocent children, the forest is kind, peaceful, full of wonder, and goodness. As girls in a changing world, the forest represents isolation and means protection. As young women, the forest can mean death, such as when their father dies. As young women, the forest can also be a place of fear and paranoia, such as after Eva's rape. As stronger, competent, and resilient young woman – and a mother and an aunt – the forest offers the possibility of a better future and a means for life and survival. As the novel ends, Nell, Eva, and Robert head into the forest to make their new lives.

## The cabin

The cabin symbolizes the past. The cabin sits on 80 acres of the forest above the town of Redwood. Though isolated at the end of a mountain road, the cabin features electricity, running water, phone lines, the internet, and all the other typical modern conveniences associated with contemporary living. The cabin is a place of love, warmth, and happiness, but also comes to symbolize the past. The cabin essentially becomes a physical manifestation of the old world, of everything that no longer exists after the collapse. As such, the girls decide to burn the cabin as they look ahead to a better future.

## Redwood tree stump

A massive, hollow redwood tree stump symbolizes a return to nature and the promise of a better future. The stump serves as a cabin of sorts for Nell, Eva, and baby Robert. It is in the stump that the girls store food, and it is in the stump that Nell and Eli make love. The stump later becomes their home as they flee into the forest to get away from the arrival of a stranger, and as they choose to look ahead to a better future rather than waiting around for a return to their past.



## Redwood

Redwood, California, is the town below the mountain road where Nell and her family live. By all accounts, it seems to be a regular American town: it has stores, gas stations, restaurants, and a lively and bustling community of people. Yet it is in Redwood that the effects of the collapse are most visibly seen – from stores closing to people dying to civilization decaying as pride of ownership and common public beauty withers under the weight of survival.

## Boston

Boston, Massachusetts, symbolizes the desire to return to the past. Boston is a major city on the East Coast. Rumors, based on eyewitness knowledge, circulate that the East – including cities like Boston – have resumed normal function and have electricity, food, and jobs. Boston is the target goal of Elia and his group. To get there, they will have to travel across thousands of miles of territory. They invite Nell and Eva to come along, but Nell and Eva refuse. They decide to stay to embrace life as it has become, not to seek out a return to life as it was in Boston.





# Themes and Motifs

## Beauty makes life worth living

Beauty makes life worth living, argues Jean Hegland in her novel *Into the Forest*. In everyday life for Nell and Eva, whether it is before or after the collapse, beauty plays a central role in their existence. The recognition of, and treasuring of beauty, makes life richer, and offers consolation and comfort to the soul.

Prior to the collapse, Nell and Eva have clear futures. Nell wishes to attend Harvard, while Eva wishes to become a professional ballerina. Both girls find beauty in their efforts. Nell finds beauty in knowledge and in the written word, while Eva finds beauty in music and movement. These are very cultural, refined recognitions of beauty, and these are the things around which Nell and Eva want to live their lives.

Indeed, so strong is the pull of beauty that Nell and Eva continue to read and dance at first as if the collapse was only temporary. Their mornings are dedicated to survival, while their afternoons are dedicated to pursuit of beauty. This comforts them, and reminds them that life must go on even in dark times. The practice and immersion of beauty is direct link to the comfort of the stability of the past. Even Nell's act of writing about their experiences, and recalling the past, is an act of loving beauty. The love of beauty can be seen in the words she uses, and how gently she describes even tragedies. For example, her father's death is one of heartache and description, not gory, bloody details.

But the kind of beauty the girls come to love changes in time. It is not that they stop loving the written word or music and dance, but they find new things beautiful. Their survival becomes a thing of beauty to them. The forest, which can provide life, becomes an intrinsically beautiful thing to them. Pregnancy and baby Robert become a matter of beauty from darkness, as the miracle of human life comes to be the greatest beauty of them all to the girls. That beauty, that love of life, becomes the reason for which the girls decide to create a future. It comforts them against the uncertainty of things to come, and gives them hope and strength to persevere.

## You have to have something to survive for

You have to have something to survive for, argues Jean Hegland in her novel *Into the Forest*. Merely living just to live is not enough, Hegland therein contends. There must be something that not only causes one to want to live and survive, but to live well and rightly.

This is true of the rapist. The rapist is living merely just to live, else he would not have raped Eva. It is clear his presence was never any good, as rape is not needed for survival. Survival is something done of the self, not done to another person. Nell and Eva work together for survival, doing their best to respect one another in their common



goal. The rapist has only his own animal appetites in mind, which is why he committed to violation of the rights of another.

This helps found Eva's opposition to ideas about abortion. Eva explains her baby is his own person, and has his own rights to life. Abortion would violate the baby, just as Eva herself was violated by the rapist. The baby becomes Eva's whole world, and whole reason to survive – to give the baby a better world than the one she herself had. The baby thus serves as Eva's reason for doing, being, and living better.

Eva also looks at Nell as a reason to do, be, and live better. In the past, Nell and Eva were driven to survive and live well with the hope that the world would return to its pre-collapse state of existence. Now, Nell and Eva seek to live and survive out of respect for the other. Nell and Eva are reason enough to live on, in order to care for and protect the other. The baby, as for Eva, becomes a reason for Nell to do even better and to become a more capable person – including hunting and respectfully living from the forest. The baby symbolizes a better future, and a better future is what Nell and Eva ultimately set as their goal and their reason to thrive.

## **Women are capable of surviving on their own without men**

Women are capable of surviving on their own without men, argues Jean Hegland in her novel *Into the Forest*. The novel itself features two teenage girls struggling against a horrible backdrop of societal collapse, alone and isolated in a forest. With no one else to depend on, the girls must depend on themselves, and prove women are, indeed, capable of such things. It is a clarion defense of feminism.

Early in the collapse, the girls are guided along by their father. He serves as their rock and guardian. His death thrusts both girls into the fore on their own. They now have only themselves to rely upon. They must begin to assume roles traditionally carried out by their father (and by men) in general. This includes some of the more difficult gardening and farming, the use of guns for hunting and self-defense, and foraging in the forest. They choose to forgo the trip to Boston, determined to make it on their own in the forest.

Nell and Eva come to very capably manage their affairs. Their garden thrives. Their food stores grow. They forage from the forest to provide everything from food to medicine. The forest setting helps to isolate and insulate them from the ordeal below in Redwood. However, despite their success as women living free and independently, Nell and Eva are not immune from the dangers of the collapse, or from other people. Eva is raped by a passing man, and proves defenseless against him.

It is this which propels both Nell and Eva into new stages in their life. Nell learns how to efficiently use a rifle, while both Nell and Eva lay the groundwork for pregnancy and baby Robert's birth. Even in the midst of tragedy, both Nell and Eva do not depend on any man to get through. They depend on themselves. Early in the novel, Eva notes that



if Jesus had been a woman, the world would be very different. Now, in the world they seek to create, Nell and Eva have that very same chance to do things differently.

## **Difficult times pave a short, direct way for coming of age**

Difficult times pave a short, direct way for coming of age, argues Jean Hegland in her novel *Into the Forest*. Uncertainty is constant in the novel, and the life and death struggle Nell and Eva face is no exception. Because of the experience they are plunged into by way of the collapse, Nell and Eva become independent, capable, and courageous young women.

When the novel begins, both Nell and Eva are very much teenage girls. They argue, are self-absorbed, are interested in having a social life, and do not think much about things like wasted food or throwing away unfashionable clothing. Nell is very practical but closed-minded, while Eva is very passionate but selfish. Both girls rely completely on their father for everything from food and money to clothes, computers, and cars. But the collapse changes everything.

When their father is tragically and accidentally killed, Nell and Eva are thrust into adulthood. If they want to survive, they have to eat. If they want to eat, they have to work hard to find food, plant crops and vegetables, hunt, and study so that they make safely forage the flora and foliage the forest offers. They have to learn to care for themselves, to rely on themselves, and to depend on themselves not only for their own sake, but for the sake of the other. Growing pains toward adulthood are felt when Nell must stand against Eva over use of the gasoline, or when Nell must accept driving into town is simply no longer feasible short of an emergency.

The rape of Eva thrusts both girls into the harsh reality that their isolation and success in survival do not preclude them from danger. There are monsters in the world. Their decision to double their efforts, struggle beyond the rape, and become mother and aunt to a baby boy when neither have ever been caregivers before, demonstrates a complete role reversal and coming of age. They are now concerned with a life beyond their own, and have become parents when only a relatively short time before, they were children.

## **The past may have a powerful hold on the present, but it does not have to determine the future**

The past may have a powerful hold on the present, but it does not have to determine the future, argues Jean Hegland in her novel *Into the Forest*. The past is constantly presented in conjunction with the present as Nell writes the account of her experiences with Eva. The past is something to which Nell and Eva initially wish to return, but ultimately, mostly abandon in pursuit of the future.



Early in Nell's account, Nell spends just as much time – if not more – reflecting on the events of the past as well as things unfolding in the present. Nell and Eva both miss the past dearly – for its stability, security, and civility by way of everything from electricity, music, and the internet, to having a social life and both their parents. Nell wants to go to college, while Eva wants to be a dancer. Both girls long to return to the past so that their lives – seemingly preordained – can continue on uninterrupted. Reality, however, makes this impossible.

The collapse makes a return to the past impossible. Civilization will not resume where it left off, and both girls come to realize this through the course of the novel. The past can now only be recalled in memory. Recalling the past becomes an act of beauty for the girls, but also serves as a reminder about what has been that cannot be again. It is Eva who points out that the way they have been living – waiting for the past to return – is wrong. The past is gone, Eva says, and they must look to the future. In a very conservative way, the girls draw lessons and knowledge from the past as they abandon much of it for a new future in the forest.

As Eva once argues, if Jesus had been a girl, things would have turned out differently. The girls cannot wish for the past to be changed, however, and must now take it upon themselves to determine how the future will be. A sense of continuity between the past, the present, and the future is had when the house is burned, but the important items from within are kept, and when baby Robert is given his grandfather's name.

# Styles

## Point of View

Jean Hegland tells her novel *Into the Forest* in the first-person reflective, limited-omniscient perspective from the point of view of Nell. When the novel begins, Nell explains she is writing in a notebook given to her as a gift by Eva, in which Eva has encouraged Nell to record their experiences and their story through the collapse. As Nell undertakes such a diary of events, it is only natural that she write in first-person about the experiences which she herself has personally participated. Much of the early part of the novel is a mix of past and present events, usually told after they occur – whether by minutes or by years. As such, the novel employs reflective and wistful language. The same is true later in the novel, when events recorded have often happened within hours of their being recorded. Consider, for example, when Nell yearns for the things she so casually threw away in the past: “How I long for those brimming wastebaskets, those leftovers” (11). The limited-omniscient aspect of the narrative lends itself to the state of existence in which Nell and Eva find themselves: they are isolated, without access to the news, and without reliable information on what is going on in the world. As such, Nell can only write about what she knows for sure, and record rumors about everything else.

## Language and Meaning

Jean Hegland tells her novel *Into the Forest* in language that is reflective, poetic, and beautifully descriptive. This is reflective of the fact that the novel actually takes the form of notebook entries by the secretly-romantic and naturally curious Nell. For Nell, writing is an act of beauty, and an exercise in soothing her soul by committing things to paper. The love of writing is inherent in her love of beautiful language, and the strangeness of the situation in which she and Eva find themselves. Consider, for example, when Nell reflects on the time just before the final collapse: “We were immortal that summer, immortal in an ephemeral world...” (57). Or consider the weighted depth of the simple but poetic description of uncertain life and darkness after the death of their father: “And then we were orphans, alone in the forest, with night closing in” (94). Nell’s writing is not only therapeutic to her, but it allows her to focus on beauty and creation in the midst of darkness and destruction, bringing light to a world that has otherwise lost it.

## Structure

Jean Hegland divides her novel *Into the Forest* into untitled, unnumbered, undated notebook entries. Each entry varies from the length of a vignette or short story to a couple of sentences. Each entry is separated by a space and a tiny drawing of a stylized fruit-bearing leaf, reflecting both the forest as setting and the symbolic and literal fruit Nell and Eva are trying to bring forth in their own lives. Early in the novel, the



notebook is given to Nell as a gift by Eva for the purposes of recording their experiences after the collapse. As such, the novel takes the form of a notebook full of entries made by Nell. The early entries often recall the past of the previous few years in conjunction to current events, while the novel later on focuses much more on very recent events – sometimes only a few minutes old. Some of the entries are actually even written as soon as they occur, especially toward the end when the house is burned and Nell and Eva take to the woods.



## Quotes

It's strange, writing these first words... After all this time a pen feels stiff and awkward in my hand.

-- Nell (n/a)

**Importance:** Here, Nell introduces herself and her sister, Eva, to the readers, and sets the stage for the book. The narrative will take the form of a notebook memoir of sorts. The story that Nell is about to recount is one that will be painful, but necessary, to write down. Whatever the story is, it has been a long time in coming, as Nell has not held a pen in her hands for a long time.

This morning I was so certain I would use this notebook for studying that I had to work to keep from scoffing at her suggestion.

-- Nell (n/a)

**Importance:** When Eva suggests that Nell use the notebook (which now forms the novel) as a way of writing about the present time, Eva is disdainful. She had imagined using the notebook for her studies. However, this demonstrates just how much things have changed for the studious Nell to be willing to use a notebook intended for academics for a personal account of their time together, instead.

How I long for those brimming wastebaskets, those leftovers.

-- Nell (n/a)

**Importance:** Here, Nell talks about how the excess of the past meant treating the excess carelessly, while in the present, Nell takes great pains to save, conserve, or use everything she has. She is both appalled and jealous of her past behavior, when she could throw away so much so carelessly. Now, she would long for the things she used to throw away. This demonstrates just how much times have changed, and how important things become when there is so little.

We were immortal that summer, immortal in an ephemeral world...

-- Nell (n/a)

**Importance:** Here, Nell reflects on how she and Eva would visit town right when things began to get bad, and continued visiting until things got worse. They would meet up with friends at the Uptown Café, and go for walks. They realized the times were uncertain, that things could fall apart any minute, and this made the time they had there in those moments precious and memorable.

And then we were orphans, alone in the forest, with night closing in.

-- Nell (n/a)

**Importance:** Here, Nell relates the first great tragedy of the lives she and Eva live in the forest – the death of their father from a woodcutting accident. The death of their father



leaves them alone except for each other in a terrible situation. The night closing in is symbolic not only of the end of the day, but uncertain times ahead without their father.

I stood weighing the kiss in my open palm.  
-- Nell (n/a)

**Importance:** Here, Nell wonders whether she should eat or share a chocolate kiss she has found. Nell feels an urge to share it with Eva, but she and Eva are fighting. She also knows Eva is not a big fan of chocolate. Nell ultimately decides to eat the chocolate, but this leads to another fight between the two girls.

Even fighting is a luxury you can't afford if your whole life has been pared to one person.  
-- Nell (n/a)

**Importance:** Here, Nell deals with the consequences of the fallout after the argument over the chocolate kiss. Nell realizes that in their new era, fighting is something that can no longer be afforded. You cannot fight with the one person you depend upon. Nell belatedly realizes this, and struggles to be better.

Now it seems as if all of life is a series of lasts... I never knew how much we consumed.  
-- Nell (n/a)

**Importance:** Here, Nell reflects on the dwindling food supply, and how much human beings consume in their lives. Every day seems to be a day of new lasts –last sugar, last beans, etc. – and the amount that it takes to keep Nell and Eva alive is shocking to Eva. It only makes sense to her now why the Earth is so polluted, why things like wars happen, and why economies collapse.

So my sister is going to have a baby.  
-- Nell (n/a)

**Importance:** After Eva is raped, she and Nell realize Eva is pregnant. While Nell suggests an abortion, Eva flat-out refuses. Eva wants something good to come of what has happened, and argues that the baby is its own person with its own right to life. It helps give Eva something to focus on, and to live for. Nell then shifts her focus from abortion to prenatal care.

I thought of the bags of seeds.... of the barrels in the stump, heavy with acorns and berries and sow jerky, and I felt as though I had passed the Achievement Tests, after all.  
-- Nell (n/a)

**Importance:** Nell is impressed with what she and Eva have done. Instead of preparing for college, Nell has been preparing for survival. In essence, she has passed a different kind of test than the one which she was anticipating passing. It can be argued that her test – one of survival, moral character, and coming of age – is far more important than college.





Our parents' house is falling down around us.  
-- Nell (n/a)

**Importance:** Nell here makes a profound statement. She is not just describing the literal fact that the house her parents built is falling apart, but a much deeper, more metaphorical statement about their lives. The world they knew, symbolized by the house their parents built, is gone. The life that she and Eva now lead is one of their own making, drawing on knowledge of the past but also depending upon experiential knowledge and foundations they are building which will form their future world, i.e., their future house.

All this time we've been living in the past, waiting to go back to the past. But the past is gone. It's dead. And it was wrong, anyway... This is our life... Like it or not, our life is here – together. And we've got to fix it so we won't forget it again, so we can't make any more mistakes.  
-- Eva (n/a)

**Importance:** Here, Eva defines the future by rejecting the past. She explains she and Nell have been living their lives in the hopes that their lives will return to the way they were, not the way they are and not the way they might become. Because of this, they have not been realistic. They must accept things as they are, draw from the past, and work toward the future, rather than trying to return to the past itself.