

# **Jacob Have I Loved Study Guide**

**Jacob Have I Loved by Katherine Paterson**

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# Plot Summary

Jacob Have I Loved, by Katherine Paterson, is the story of thirteen-year-old Louise Bradshaw's coming of age on the crabbing island of Raff during World War II.

When the novel opens, thirteen-year-old Louise Bradshaw spends her days crabbing on the island of Raff, where she lives her parents and twin sister, Caroline. Louise and Caroline have a tempestuous relationship, as Louise believes Caroline, who is musically gifted, has been favored since birth. She longs to work on her father's crab boat with him. But, since she is a girl, she is resigned to her own small skiff, which she works with her best friend, Call. When a mysterious stranger arrives on Raff, Louise begins investigating his identity, imagining that he is a war spy and that outing him will bring her the international recognition she craves. During her first interaction with the old man, however, Louise realizes that he is not a spy. The old man, whom she calls "The Captain," tricks her into working for him, for free, for the entire summer.

Call and Louise spend most of their days with the Captain, while Caroline travels back and forth to the mainland to receive her expensive private music lessons. Louise is shocked one afternoon when, returning a stray cat to the neighbor's house, she finds her neighbor, Auntie Braxton, passed out on the kitchen floor. With the Captain's help, Louise is able to alert her father, who arranges for Auntie Braxton to recover from her stroke on the mainland. A few days later, a giant storm hits Raff, damaging Louise's home and completely decimating the Captain's. With nowhere else to go, the Captain moves in with the Bradshaw family. While taking the Captain out on her skiff to survey the damage, Louise surprisingly finds herself explosively attracted to the seventy-year-old man, and it is with a mixture of shame, excitement, and awe that she welcomes him into her home.

The Captain only stays with the Bradshaws for three days before moving into Auntie Braxton's home to repair the damage while she recovers on the mainland. Rather than move out when Auntie Braxton is released, the Captain marries her, shattering Louise's heart. Louise is unable to control her emotions, lashing out at everyone around her, most notably Caroline. When Call is drafted for the war and Caroline is sent to a prestigious music college, only Louise is left on the island, to work silently alongside her father on the crab boat. Louise withdraws from her religion, all social interactions, and her belief in love. Her parents begin to worry about her emotional state, and with great effort, convince her to leave the island and attend midwifery school. The novel ends with Louise moving away from Raff for good, moving to the mountains, and delivering a set of twins eerily similar to her own delivery, which brings the story of her relationship with Caroline full-circle.



# Rass Island, Chapters 1 & 2

## Summary

### Rass Island, Chapters 1 & 2

In the introduction, “Rass Island,” Louise Bradshaw creates a strong image of her hometown. Rass is a fisherman’s island, full of crab shacks, crabbing boats, a single church, and a general store. Although Louise says that she loves the island more than anything, she laments, “it is a pure sorrow to me that, once my mother leaves, there will be no one left with the name of Bradshaw” (Page 4). Louise has one sister, Caroline, and it’s clear to Louise that neither of them could stay.

Chapter 1 opens in the summer of 1941. Louise spends every weekend crab fishing with her neighbor, an outcast like Louise, McCall Purnell. Call, as Louise calls him, is fat, near-sighted, and completely lacking a sense of humor, which is why the island boys often dismiss him. From the beginning of the chapter, it’s clear that thirteen-year-old Louise has an active imagination. She’s heard that one of her teachers, Mr. Rice, has a girlfriend in Baltimore. This seems extremely exotic to her. Louise wonders whether Mr. Rice’s girlfriend has a terrible disease or whether her parents would approve of her marrying an island man. The entire time Call and Louise are fishing, she tries to tell jokes even though it’s clear that Call does not understand, or care to understand, any of them.

After their day of fishing and selling their catches, Louise – Wheeze – runs home, proud of the \$2.45 she made that day. When her mother asks her to go to town to purchase butter and cream, usually consider splurge ingredients, Louise knows she’s made a real financial difference. Her pride dissipates when she hears her sister Caroline bragging about writing her memoirs because once she’s famous, everyone will want to know where she came from. Louise knows that even though they’re twins, she’ll be relegated to a tiny role in Caroline’s story.

In Chapter 2, Louise tells the audience a bit about her family’s history. Her father was sent home from the war with shrapnel wounds in 1918. Around the same time, her mother arrived from the mainland to work as a schoolteacher on Rass. Soon after, they were married and Louise and Caroline, twin girls, were born. When her mother tells the story, Louise is always saddened that she remembers very little about Louise and everything about Caroline because she was quite sickly. Growing up, their mother spent most of her time shuttling Caroline to and from hospitals, leaving Louise to be raised – almost like a boy – by their father. Their father taught Louise how to crab fish, as it was his trade, and her greatest disappointment in life is that she, as a girl, is not allowed to work on her father’s boat. She settles for fishing in her own small skiff and selling her catch for a tiny profit.



When the girls were four-years-old, their maternal grandfather passed away, leaving them a piano in his will. It was sent to the island, and both girls, as well as many of the island children, were given lessons. Immediately, it became clear that Caroline was incredibly talented, not only as a pianist, but also as a singer. At the urging of Mr. Rice, the school music teacher, Caroline began taking vocal lessons on the mainland every Saturday, despite the extreme financial strain it put on the family.

## Analysis

In this opening section, Louise creates a strong sense of place with her narration. It's clear that the narrator is an adult Louise looking back on her childhood. The vocabulary, past tense narration, and adult understanding of the world continue to hint at this narrative style throughout the novel. The Rass Island Louise describes is dreamlike and idyllic – a scarcely populated village in the early 1940s. There is one general store, a Methodist church, and a ferry house. Aside from the houses, the only other buildings that line the horizon are the crab shacks. Nearly every family on Rass Island is a fishing family, Louise's family included. Throughout the novel, Louise delivers long passages of description of how the various shellfish on Rass Island are cooked, sold, prepared, and eaten. Her whole identity is wrapped in the crabbing seasons, so it makes sense that the crab houses would be prominent in her dreamlike recollections. Louise ends this opening section by acknowledging that as an adult, she left the island. This tidbit of information may seem insignificant at the opening, but as the novel progresses, the reader will see deep foreshadowing in this seemingly insignificant statement.

In the first few chapters of the novel, the reader sees Louise as a boisterous, carefree thirteen-year-old proud of the fact that she can man her own fishing skiff and provide a bit of income for her family. The reader sees her on her skiff with her best friend, Call, cracking jokes and dreaming about escaping off the island. This image of Louise will be particularly poignant for the reader as they see Louise slip deeper into anger and depression. Here, she is clearly a child, but she will mature as the novel progresses. It is interesting to note that Louise spots a female crab, known as a "sook" who is moments away from shedding the last time and becoming a "grown up" female. Of this process, Louise says, "When [the sook] was soft, there would be a proper crab wedding, of course, with the groom staying around the watch out for his bride until her shell was hard once more, and she could protect herself and her load of eggs on her own" (Page 12). Louise's understanding of romance, even in the animal world, is juvenile and innocent. Keen readers should be encouraged to note the way Louise's attitude toward the sooks change as she matures.

One of the most important back stories in the novel is introduced in this section when Louise retells the story of her birth. She and Caroline are twins, and Louise was born a few minutes before her sister. She cherishes those few minutes in her mind, because she knows they were the only time in her life when she was the center of attention. Caroline had been born sickly, and needed individual attention from the moment she was born. Louise resents the fact that the nurse bundled her in a blanket and gave her a bottle of tinned milk while she and Louise's mother worried and cooed over sick



Caroline. Caroline required frequent visits to the mainland for medical care growing up, and as a result, she was always viewed as delicate or fragile, while Louise, healthy and plump, was not. The only benefit of being raised with her mother away was that Louise became very close with her father and grew up idolizing his profession. The fact that Louise cannot work on her father's fishing boat with him – her deepest desire – highlights the strict gender roles that were prevalent at the time of the novel's setting (the 1940's). By introducing the reader to the story of her birth in the novel's opening section, Louise prepares the reader for the fact that she has never been able to overcome the jealousy she believes was bred into her from birth. For now, she believes that her mother favored Caroline. But, in time, that will change.

## **Discussion Question 1**

How does Louise's love of Rass Island help characterize her as a narrator?

## **Discussion Question 2**

How are gender roles introduced in the relationship between Louise and her best friend Call?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Why is humor so important to Louise? What do her failed jokes with Call tell us about her character and their relationship?

## **Vocabulary**

Terrapin, prim, brackish, skiff, precarious, porthole, emphatic, benevolent, shrapnel, strenuous, eek, cajole, lugubrious, affluent, polonaise, rankle.



# Chapters 3 & 4

## Summary

### Chapters 3 & 4

In Chapter 3, Louise begins her narration by saying that the bombing of Pearl Harbor shocked her and the rest of the world. As a child, she is devastated by the terrible tragedy. Louise hears the news of the bombing over the radio, even though she is not allowed to listen to the radio on Sundays. She rushes upstairs to tell Caroline the news, and they both stand frozen, holding hands, in front of the radio. When their parents come home, they don't chastise the girls for breaking one of their Sabbath rules, but stand as shocked as the girls, listening.

At school, Louise dramatically suggests that the school Christmas pageant should be cancelled due to the news of war, but Mr. Rice ignores her suggestion, which embarrasses her deeply. After school, she hides in the marsh, too embarrassed to even walk home. Caroline finds her a few hours later and takes her home without mentioning the embarrassment. She expects her parents to chide her for being late to dinner, but they only nod in her direction. Louise realizes that Caroline must have explained the situation to them, and she feels overwhelmed with gratitude toward her sister. At the Christmas pageant the next day, Louise imagines everyone talking about her behind her back. She does her best to ignore everyone. Mr. Rice has given Betty Jean Boyd the showy solo, surprising everyone. Caroline is given a very plain solo. During the concert, however, Caroline's voice cuts through the audience "like a single beam of light through the darkness" (Page 37), and the audience is overwhelmed with emotion. When Louise sees the look of pride on Caroline's face when she turns her back on the audience after the solo, whatever feeling of camaraderie she felt toward her sister vanishes. At home, Caroline mocks Betty Jean Boyd's solo. Neither of her parents scolds her, which further annoys Louise.

In Chapter 4, Louise waits with her grandmother for the four o'clock ferry to arrive. Her mother has, once again, taken Caroline to the mainland for a doctor's appointment. Grandma urges Louise to go to the dock to help her mother carry the groceries home, as Caroline is far too fragile to carry bags. Grandma is as annoyed with Louise as ever. She scolds her loudly about such insignificant sins as whistling or being "sassy." Annoyed, Louise begrudgingly walks down to the docks. She sees her father disembarking the crab boat. She wishes, just for a moment, that he had come to the dock to greet her, even though she knows he has come to greet her mother. Caroline emerges from the ferry and rushes into her father's arms, which also annoys Louise. As she is loading the groceries into the wagon she's brought, Louise notices a strange old man. It's rare for strangers to arrive on the island, especially with as much luggage as this man has. She tries to eavesdrop on his conversation with the dock hand, but her mother pulls her away. On the walk home, Louise is further intrigued when the old man walks briskly past them, past the last house on the road, and into the woods.



## Analysis

Just like in many novels, the outbreak of war symbolizes the beginning of the loss of childhood innocence for Louise. When news of Pearl Harbor hits, her mother pours everyone, including the girls, coffee, an adult beverage, which Louise innately understands that she is now mature enough to drink. In the moments before the news of the bombing, Louise had been considering her strict Methodist upbringing and the seemingly ridiculous constraints that go along with it. She sneaks out to listen to the radio, even though it is forbidden, and hears the news of the bombing. On some level, this may also symbolize the beginning of Louise's fall from religion. Had she maintained the strict rules of her religion, she rationalizes that she would have missed out on international news. There is also religious symbolism to be found in the fact that at the very moment Louise decides to break a religious rule, there is news of a violent explosion.

In school, Louise suggests that the class skip the Christmas pageant, and she is ignored. It is her first experience with social mortification. She is not only embarrassed, but she feels as if no one understands her. This will be a resounding theme for Louise's character – her tendency to feel victimized and misunderstood. It is interesting to note that after Louise runs away, it is Caroline who comes to find her and kindly lead her back home. Throughout the novel, Louise speaks about Caroline as if she is a treacherous, manipulative snipe. When the reader judges Caroline's actions devoid of Louise's judgment, she appears to be a sweet, thoughtful, and socially generous person. This puts the reader in an interesting position. Emotionally, most readers will find Louise sympathetic simply because she is the narrator, but many readers may struggle to truly feel sorry for Louise when it appears that she is bringing much of her heartache onto herself and pushing away from family members who truly love her. This is an interesting position to be in because it provides insight in to the true mindset of a teenage girl who is emotional, jealous, and erratic. For this reason, Louise Bradshaw is one of the most memorable narrators in Young Adult fiction.

During the Christmas pageant, Caroline sings "I wonder as I wander" to an enraptured audience. When she finishes her solo, she turns to Louise with a look of sheer pride on her face. It's clear to Louise that Caroline has found her place in life, a certainty that makes Louise jealous. That night, Louise struggles to say her prayers – another hint of her fall from religion – and wishes that at the very least, she could have been born a monster: "Monsters always command attention, if only for their freakishness" (Page 42). It is also interesting to note that when she tries to pray, Louise feels completely isolated from God. He is so grand and powerful that she feels as if she cowers in his presence, even in her own prayers. She says that praying is like "being with Caroline" which is an interesting comparison. As Louise continues to slip further and further away from her religious tradition, the reader will see that no one is free from her irrational jealousy, not even God.

Grandma, on the other hand, is a complete foil to Louise's religious apathy. Grandma is a wicked spinster who viciously spouts Bible verses as a way of condemning those





around her. She spits verses like venom, and is clearly slipping in her sanity. Grandma is the polar opposite of “Christian love” using her religion to taunt, humiliate, and damn everyone, including her family.

## **Discussion Question 1**

What is Grandma’s relationship to her scriptures? Does this surprise you? Why or why not?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Describe Louise’s relationship with religion. How does it compare / contrast to her grandmother’s?

## **Discussion Question 3**

How does the bombing of Pearl Harbor affect Louise’s life directly? What clues are given that may suggest this event is the beginning of Louise’s adult maturity?

## **Vocabulary**

Machination, grotesque, quibble, remonstrance, petulant, discomfit, frivolous, sprocket, purge, trounce, pretentious, idle, caricature, valise, abreast.



# Chapters 5 & 6

## Summary

### Chapters 5 & 6

When no explanation of who the mysterious old man is given, the Rass residents begin inventing their own story. Since the old man walked to the old, abandoned Wallace place, most people believe him to be Hiram Wallace. Hiram had been the only child of Captain Charles Wallace. Hiram had left the island in disgrace because he panicked and cut down the mast on his father's boat during a lightning storm. When the other seamen saw that he had chopped the mast off willingly – that it hadn't been felled by lightning – he became the butt of everyone's jokes. So, he left the island for good. After Captain Wallace and his wife died, the Wallace house sat abandoned for twenty years. Although Louise has her doubts about the old man's identity, her senile grandma swears it is him. Growing up, Louise had always thought that the ramshackle Wallace place was haunted. Last summer, she even tricked Call into sneaking up to the shack to see if they could awaken Old Man Wallace's ghosts. When they peered in a window, a large orange cat sprung out at them, scaring them half to death.

Positive that grandma is mistaken about the old man's identity, Louise's imagination kicks into overdrive. The war has recently broken out, and the Wallace place is situated well enough to see the warships coming and going. Louise feels certain that the old man is a spy. She thinks that if she can uncover the truth, Franklin D. Roosevelt will call her to the White House to reward her bravery. Begrudgingly, Call agrees to go spy on the old man, if only to prove Louise wrong. They creep through the grass at the side of the house, peering intently into the living space. Call loudly comments that there's no one there. Just as Louise turns to leave, she comes face-to-face with a "great staring glass eye". The "glass eye" is actually the end of a periscope. The shock of it causes Louise to scream and Call to go sprinting into the woods.

Laughing, the old man greets Louise and Call warmly, inviting them in for a cup of tea. With shaking hands, Louise agrees, knowing that this is her best chance to identify the old man as a spy once and for all. Call walks slowly back out from the woods but stiffens when he sees the large, orange tabby cat lurking around the old man's feet. Despite their fears, the children go inside and share a cup of tea with their new neighbor. Call drinks only tinned milk, not tea. Despite the fact that milk is rationed, the old man accommodates him. When the children introduce themselves, the old man laughs at their names and says they should call themselves "Wheeze and Cough." Though the comment is shocking to Louise, it causes Call to burst out into laughter. She has never heard Call laugh, and is a bit jealous that the old man has caused it, not she. They pass a pleasant afternoon with the old man, whom they simply call "The Captain," and begin visiting him regularly.



As time passes, Louise continues to feel more distanced from and jealous of Caroline. Louise's hard-earned income helps pay for Caroline's music lessons, and she feels that Caroline should be more indebted to her. The hatred Louise feels toward her sister intensifies when she begins having dreams not only that Caroline is dead, but that she has killed her. Louise, fearing eternal damnation for her uncontrollable dreams, begins combing through the Bible searching for any evidence that she could still be saved despite her hatred. She decides to start splitting her earnings in two, giving half to her family, as usual, and saving the other half. She hopes to earn enough money to pay for her tuition at Crisfield boarding school on the mainland: "It seemed to me that if I could get off the island, I would be free from hate and guilt and damnation, even, perhaps, from God himself" (Page 83). To supplement her income, Louise begins writing song lyrics after reading an advertisement for such in the back of a magazine. She writes very emotional pieces that reference nature and the war, which Call, her only audience, does not even begin to understand. She mails off the lyrics hoping for success, crosses her fingers and waits.

## Analysis

In this section, the identity of the mysterious old man is revealed as Hiram Wallace, although his identity is accepted rather than proved. It is interesting to note that fishing is so engrained in the lifestyle of the families on Rass that one young fisherman's mistake during a storm could cause such familial shame that he would be forced to leave the island.

It should be no surprise to the reader that Call and the Captain bond as quickly as they do. Call lives a desperate, isolate life with a father who abandoned him, and a variety of poverty-stricken female relatives. He has never had a strong male influence in his life, so he gravitates toward the quick, kind words from the Captain. As soon as he steps foot in the Captain's home, something changes in Call – he even develops a sense of humor!

This section also introduces the orange tabby cat, which is a symbol of survival in the novel. The cat appears to have lived in the Wallace house, unattended, during the years that it was abandoned, leading the children to believe it was a ghost. As the novel progresses, the orange cat will survive a variety of scrapes, even some that claim the lives of other island cats. There is a clear parallel drawn between Louise and the cat – both must rely on their wily cunning to survive a hostile environment.

Perhaps the most important element in this section, however, is the elaboration on the hatred Louise feels for Caroline. She compares herself to the Biblical character of Cain, who killed his brother Abel, and describes dreams in which she beats Caroline to death with her skiff paddle. Louise's hatred for Caroline has been present since their birth, and despite Louise's complaints, it is clear that there is nothing Caroline could do or say to change the way Louise feels about her. In this way, the hatred Louise feels toward Caroline is unfair. Perhaps Paterson is suggesting that Louise does not actually hate Caroline, but that she hates herself instead. Caroline is fulfilled by her music and Louise



is left adrift, physically and emotionally, on her tiny crabbing skiff. The main theme of the novel is not Louise's relationship with Caroline. Rather, it is about Louise's relationship with herself and her quest toward happiness and acceptance in her personal identity. Readers should keep this in mind when analyzing Louise's violent reactions to Caroline's innocent actions.

It is interesting to note that after having these terrible dreams about Caroline, Louise still turns to the scripture, feverishly searching for any evidence that, even though she hates her sister, she may still be forgiven. As she expected, all of the biblical characters that kill a sibling appear to be smited by God, giving Louise little hope. She cannot control the hatred and jealousy she feels toward Caroline. In a way, she blames God for her feelings. Why would God force her to be born with a twin sister as maddening as Caroline? Although she had been looking for enlightenment in the Bible, Louise seems to have found further proof that God abandoned her before she was even born.

## **Discussion Question 1**

How does the Bible offer Louise guidance in her relationship with Caroline? How does the advice she actually receives compare / contrast with what she had hoped to discover?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Describe Call's relationship with the Captain. Why is he able to relax, and even find humor, with the Captain when he was unable to before?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What does the Captain's back-story of cutting down the mast tell you about life on Rass? Why do you think the Captain returned after such a humiliating departure?

## **Vocabulary**

Oblige, cunning, berth, periscope, vaudeville, feign, inferior, rivulet, exultation, zeal, allusion, varmint, parasite, saboteur.



# Chapters 7 & 8

## Summary

### Chapters 7 & 8

Call continues visiting the Captain every Sunday, but Louise usually stays at home. When she decides to join him one week, she can see that Call is jealous, and wants to keep the Captain all to himself. As soon as they arrive, the Captain puts them to work on his ramshackle dock. Call, eager to please the only man in his life, offers to work on the dock every day after crabbing. Inadvertently, he volunteers Louise as well. Louise is annoyed, particularly because Call refuses the Captain's offer of payment, saying that being paid for friendly work wouldn't be neighborly. Perhaps merely to amuse herself, Louise peppers the Captain with biblical questions, knowing that if he really had been raised on the island he would know the answers to them. She wants to keep her fantasy of the Captain being a spy alive, as she imagines catching him would be a great way off the island.

Call and Louise spend the next few months slaving under the Captain's orders for two hours each day. By August, Call has volunteered them for nearly five hours of free labor each day, which Louise nearly throttles him for. Louise works as hard as she can, not because she enjoys the chores, but because she wants the Captain and Call to regard her as physically strong, especially because she doesn't appreciate their sense of humor. At the same time, Louise starts her period – at fourteen – and skips her first week of church due to a bloodstained dress.

After a few weeks of waiting, Louise finally hears back from the lyric board. She excitedly opens the letter, which is little more than a photocopied, boilerplate letter with her name misspelled at the top. The letter claims that while the company cannot pay her for her work, her song is, indeed, a winner, and for a small fee (\$25), the company will put her lyrics to music. The letter urges Louise not to wait – her song could be the next number one single! Immediately recognizing the scam, Louise is heartbroken.

Shortly after, the orange tabby returns to the Captain's home, which outrages him. He's been trying to get rid of the cat since he arrived back on the island, but this pesky animal won't leave him alone. Louise recognizes the cat as belonging to Auntie Braxton, a cat lady generally regarded as crazy around the island, and volunteers to bring the cat back. She knocks repeatedly on Auntie Braxton's door, but there's no answer. Peering through the window, Louise sees Auntie Braxton lying on the kitchen floor. Assuming she is dead, Louise drops the cat and runs screaming back to the Captain's house for help. The Captain leaps into action, rushing to Auntie Braxton's side. Seeing that the woman is still alive, the Captain sends Louise for help. When Louise's father and a few other men from the dock arrive, the Captain is speaking softly to Auntie Braxton saying, "It's alright, Trudy, it's me, Hiram .... I'll take care of you" (Page 109). It's the first time



that the Captain has ever acknowledged his true identity, and the men all share meaningful looks.

## Analysis

An interesting transition happens for Louise's character in this section. At the opening, she still clings to her childish imaginings that the Captain is a spy. She knows that everyone on the island was raised strictly Methodist. Even if the Captain has lost his faith as an adult (which would explain why he is never at church) he should still know the answers to basic Bible trivia. Louise still sees discovering a spy as her most viable escape route off the island. To most readers, this plan is ridiculous. To Louise, the only way off the island is to be extraordinary, like Caroline. Since few people have actually left the island, Louise has no other model to help shape her dreams.

However, Louise's childhood imaginings come to a grinding halt when she learns that the Captain's true identity is, in fact, Hiram Wallace and that he is not a spy. It is no coincidence that this realization occurs after Louise has her first period, a symbol of her physical transition into adulthood. Now that Louise is "officially" an adult, her childish dreams must also disappear. She must learn to rely on her own skills and ingenuity to achieve her dreams. The reader sees this transition symbolized on a smaller scale through Louise's correspondence with the lyric board. While it was a childish hope that she would rocket to super stardom with her wartime lyrics, Louise is mature enough to recognize a financial scam when she sees one, so this dream dies too. Since Louise doesn't have strong influences to encourage her personal pursuits and social stigmas of the time prevent her from following her dreams of crabbing alongside her father, readers should assume that Louise's struggle for her own identity will be at the heart of her character growth in the novel.

## Discussion Question 1

Discuss two events in this section of the novel that signify Louise's coming of age.

## Discussion Question 2

Why is it significant that Hiram Wallace's true identity is brought to light in this section?

## Discussion Question 3

Describe Call's relationship with the Captain. Why is it different from Louise's relationship with the old man?

## Vocabulary

Integrity, ramshackle, recitation, deficient, malicious, mimeograph, futile, interloper, dilapidated.



# Chapters 9 & 10

## Summary

### Chapters 9 & 10

The Captain decides that while Auntie Braxton is recovering at the hospital, the three of them should clean out her house so that the dreaded churchwomen won't get their hands on her belongings. Auntie Braxton is not a churchgoing woman, so Louise knows the Captain is right when he suggests she wouldn't want the pious, judgmental women snooping around in her home. The Captain explains that when he lived on the island growing up, Auntie Braxton's father had been quite wealthy. He knows that Auntie Braxton's father must have left her all his money, and that, just like her father, Auntie Braxton probably refused to spend it. He imagines that the cash is hidden somewhere in the house, which is another reason why strangers shouldn't be snooping around. Intrigued, Louise agrees to the cleanup project.

At the house, the Captain announces that since most of the cats are starving and sick, they should be "disposed of humanely." Louise is horrified by the Captain's suggestion that the kindest way to kill the cats would be to drown them, but after a few minutes of terse discussion, she agrees. With Call's help, Louise catches each of the wily cats and stuffs them into two large burlap sacks. Then she gets her wagon, loads up the sacks, and drags them down to the boat where the Captain is waiting. As they are rowing out to the bay, a piteous cry, much like a baby's, rises from the sack and breaks Louise's heart. She shouts for the Captain to stop rowing, and when he doesn't, she leaps from the boat and swims back to the island, unable to watch. When she arrives home, she bursts into tears and, because there is no one else to talk to, confesses everything to Caroline. Caroline is sweet and compassionate to Louise, which only annoys Louise further. She starts back toward Auntie Braxton's house to finish the cleanup, and begrudgingly allows Caroline to join her. As the girls clean in silence, the Captain and Call return, still carrying the burlap sacks of cats. They were unable to kill the creatures, as their cries sounded too much like a baby's. Caroline concocts an idea to drug the cats so they appear less wild and beg the neighbors to each take one, as a gesture of friendship to Auntie Braxton. Louise is furious that Caroline has taken on this project as her own, and can only stand in frustrated silence as she sees Caroline's plan work. She cannot even bring herself to be pleased that each of the cats has found a new home.

A few days later, a huge storm blows through Rass. Louise's father can smell the storm coming, so he takes the day off to board up the house. Louise notices how happily her parents seem to be working together to prepare the house, even though they might all be dead tomorrow. Call, Caroline, and Louise head down to the Captain's house to help him board up his and Auntie Braxton's homes. Father invites the Captain to stay with them tonight, as the Captain's home is so close to the water, making it more susceptible to damage, but the Captain declines. When the storm hits that night, Father wakes Louise with a start. He tells her that the storm is bad and that she'd better run down to





the Captain's house and drag him up here if she had to. Terrified, Louise sprints down to the Captain's house and sees the entire house swaying on its foundation. She shouts the Captain's name, and somehow, miraculously, she wakes him. Bracing himself against the wind, he doesn't ask any questions. He simply wraps his arms around Louise's middle and the two lean against each other for the climb back up the hill. The wind nearly sweeps them away, but they manage to claw their way safely back to Louise's house. Inside, Grandma is praying furiously, begging God to save them, and Father and Mother are scrambling to further protect the house from the hurricane.

When the eye of the storm arrives, a terrifying silence fills the house. Father and the Captain leave the safety of the bedroom to inspect the damage, warning Louise not to follow them. While they are gone, Louise falls asleep and sleeps through the second, even worse, half of the storm.

## Analysis

Now that she is an "adult," Louise is faced with the horrifying task of drowning Auntie Braxton's cats. While Louise is sickened with the idea of killing the cats, she feels strangely honored that the Captain has included her in his plan. All Louise wants in life is to feel useful and needed, and in a sick way, the plan of killing the cats fulfills that desire in her. When the moment comes to actually kill the cats, however, Louise is unable to partake in the plan and promptly flees. She is devastated not only that the cats must die, but that the only people who have ever needed her – the Captain and Call – needed her for such a dark mission. Louise is devastated and, predictably, lashes out at Caroline. It is interesting to note that Louise – and later the Captain and Call – couldn't kill the cats because their cries sounded too much like a baby's. Paterson draws extra attention to this detail by repeating it twice, which highlights its symbolic importance to the reader. It's not immediately clear what parallel Paterson is drawing through this comparison, but it could be considered foreshadowing to the novel's final scene, when Louise saves a sickly newborn from death, which will be discussed in detail later in this study guide. For now, readers should be advised to make a mental note of this scene for later comparison.

It's interesting to note that Louise takes part in the cat plan, as well as with Call's plan for voluntary labor, because she feels the need to prove herself. Louise is desperate for a place of belonging, and the social constraints of the time prevent her from following her true goal of working on her father's crabbing boat. In the 1940s, women and girls were viewed as weaker than men, incompatible with physical labor, best kept in the home performing domestic duties. When she works on the Captain's dock, Louise works twice as hard as Call simply to prove that she is worthy of the task: "Both Call and the Captain seemed to regard me as mentally deficient since I couldn't appreciate their marvelous humor. I couldn't let them make fun of me physically as well" (Page 97). All of these scenes contribute to Louise's confused self-identity and her desperate desire to find a place where she "fits" on the island.



Finally, Louise is furious with herself for allowing Caroline to accompany her to Auntie Braxton's to clean after the botched cat plan because once she is there, Caroline takes to the project as if she were the one who started it. She doesn't gag on the smell of cat pee, like Louise hoped she would, she simply covers her nose, rolls up her sleeves, and gets to work. Caroline concocts the plan to find the cats new homes, which Louise is predictably jealous of. To the reader, Caroline is presented as a sweet, generous, and gracious person, but to Louise, Caroline is the bane of her existence. Although Louise twists Caroline's words and actions to be much more manipulative than they actually are, it's clear that the jealousy Louise feels toward her sister is real, however misplaced. Louise can't see through her jealousy to appreciate all the good Caroline does in their family and community. In this section it becomes clear: Caroline is not the obstacle standing in the way of Louise's happiness, as Louise claims she is. Louise's jealousy is the hurdle she must overcome.

## Discussion Question 1

What motivated Louise to initially help the Captain drown the cats? What does her decision to swim back to shore tell us about her character?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Caroline's reaction to Auntie Braxton's house surprise and anger Louise? Does it surprise and anger you? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

Compare / contrast the way the different characters react to the impending storm. Do any of their reactions surprise you? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

Aberration, flabbergasted, scrimp, yowl, wily, infernal, nocturne, dratted, paregoric, ominous, treacherous, litany, consternation, heathen, plumb.



# Chapters 11 & 12

## Summary

### Chapters 11 & 12

The day after the storm, Louise takes the Captain out on her skiff to inspect the damage. While the basement of Louise's house has flooded, they have escaped relatively unscathed. Louise is quite vocal about her pleasure in this. She excitedly pulls her skiff from the tree she's tied it to, exclaiming that even her boat has made it through the storm! Louise and the Captain climb into her skiff, and she uses a pole to maneuver them through the high waters. Even though Louise has paddled through this channel every day of her life, she has difficulty navigating the new terrain. The flood waters have filled the canals in strange places, making them deeper or shallower than usual. The further she paddles, the more confused Louise grows. She is sure they should have reached the marsh where the Captain's house is by now, but it's nowhere to be seen. With a sick feeling in her stomach, Louise realizes that the Captain's house has been completely washed away. Not even the foundation stands: "I was staring at nothing. Nothing. Not a tree, not a board. Nothing was left at the spot where the Captain's house had stood the night before" (Page 141).

Louise has no idea how to react to the Captain's terrible loss, so she simply stares as his eyes glaze over. Finally, she snaps out of her shock and rushes toward him, embracing him in a huge hug. As she hugs him, Louise realizes how long it's been since she actually touched another human being. The smell of the Captain's skin, the roughness of his beard against her cheek, and the warmth of his arms around her sends a shock like electricity through her body. She is suddenly and deeply aroused. She pulls back abruptly, blushing. She is embarrassed and ashamed. Without making eye contact with the Captain again, Louise quickly paddles them back home. At the house, Louise rushes inside, chastising herself for being aroused by such an old man – the Captain is seventy-years-old, she reminds herself! For the rest of the day, her heart bangs against her chest and she feels blood rushing to various parts of her body every time she sees or thinks about the Captain. Louise feels a mixture of horror and excitement when Father offers for the Captain to stay with them for a while, and Louise quickly agrees that it would be no trouble to share a bed with Caroline.

The Captain only stays with the Bradshaws for three days, but the entire time, Louise is too embarrassed to look him in the eye. Yet, whenever he speaks her name, tears spring to her eyes. He treats her as if nothing has happened, but Louise cannot forget the arousal or the shame. Out of nowhere, senile, old Grandma begins cackling that she knows what is happening in Louise's heart: "Yep. Yep ... Can't keep her eyes off that wicked man. I see it. 'Deed I do" (Page 153). Louise is mortified, but Caroline, who has overheard Grandma's outburst, bursts out into laughter at the thought of her twin sister being attracted to the Captain. With the mixture of both relief that no one has found her out and heartbreak that the idea of loving the Captain is insane, Louise nearly bursts



into tears. Starting that night, Louise begins putting lotion on her hands and tending to her nails so they will be as beautiful and clean as the Captain's.

When the Captain comes home on the third night, he tells the Bradshaw's that he visited Auntie Braxton at the hospital, and that she agreed to let him stay in her house in exchange for cleaning it up after the storm. He thanks the Bradshaws for their kindness, and leaves for Auntie Braxton's straight after dinner.

Time passes. When school reopens, Louise is thankful for the distraction from her impure thoughts. She has been unable to visit the Captain out of fear that she won't be able to control herself, and she's been lonely. She continues to manicure her hands as best she can, but she stops in a fit of jealousy when she catches Caroline using the lotion on her already perfect hands. Louise hurls the lotion bottle at Caroline, shouting for her to "Take it! Take everything I own!"

## Analysis

The most notable moment in this section is when Louise becomes sexually attracted to the Captain in the wake of the storm. At the time of her first urges, Louise is fourteen and the Captain is seventy. While this attraction may be confusing (and even disturbing) to some readers, Paterson has captured the unexpected, dramatic impulses of a teenage girl's sexual awakening. Although Louise feels sexual stirrings, she doesn't necessarily understand them. She is simply beginning to explore what these feelings mean and the impact they have, or could have, on her life. Due to her strict religious background, Louise believes that sexual feelings are shameful and private, but it's doubtful that she, with her sheltered upbringing, has any inkling of what sex actually is or how it is performed. All she knows is that she enjoys touching the Captain and that she wants him to love her. It's quite clear, even if only by the object of her affection, that Louise is emotionally immature for sex even if her body is physically mature.

Louise's crush on the Captain not only symbolizes her further maturity into adulthood, it also highlights her isolation on the island. While most girls crush on their schoolmates, or older boys in the neighborhood, Louise has a slim population to choose from. Perhaps she feels romantic about the Captain because he's someone new, because he offers a sense of mystery, or because he's been off the island. Louise's attraction is never explained, but while the crush may be inappropriate, when coming from a lonely, confused teenager, is certainly understandable.

When the Captain moves in with the Bradshaws after the storm, it is a bizarre domestic situation for Louise. Louise believes herself to be in love with the Captain – she cannot even look him in the eye without wanting to burst into tears – and now they are living together. Louise recognizes that her urgings are inappropriate, but, like most teenagers, she cannot control them. Thankfully, the Captain never even acknowledges the awkwardness between them. He remains an unflappable, asexual, friend to Louise. Her character is never in any danger of being exploited or abused. Still, Louise believes she



is at a high risk of being further ostracized and shamed should anyone find out about her affections.

Louise views her hands as the symbol of her femininity, and like so many things in her life, she strives to change her hands not for herself, but in the hopes that having more beautiful hands will make more people (the Captain in particular) like her. Louise's hands are dry and cracked from working on the crab boat, so she applies lotion, a topical treatment, in the hopes of repairing them. The fact that the lotion doesn't really work symbolizes the fact that Louise doesn't need a superficial treatment to be happy. She needs to change herself from the inside out.

## **Discussion Question 1**

How does the news that the Captain has lost his house affect the entire village?

## **Discussion Question 2**

How does Louise's relationship with the Captain change after the storm? Does this surprise you? Why or why not?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What does Louise mean when she shouts at Caroline to "Take it! Take everything I own"?

## **Vocabulary**

Sodden, drudgery, taut, reverie, raucous, capricious, thwart, vital, mooning, bedevil, whit.



# Chapters 13 & 14

## Summary

### Chapters 13 & 14

After the lotion incident, Louise feels quite certain that she is going insane. She imagines that she will spend the rest of her days cooped up in isolation, like Auntie Braxton, alone and generally forgotten on the island. Meanwhile, the Bradshaws are all concerned by the fact that Auntie Bradshaw is set to be released from the hospital, which means that the Captain will once again be homeless. Father says that the Captain should return to live with them, but Grandma is incensed, angrily preaching about how the Captain is a heathen who only wants to bed her. When Louise burns bright with embarrassment, Grandma cruelly continues, "Oh, she's the one stirred him up ... She thinks he craves her, but I know. I know who he's really after" (Page 165). Furious and embarrassed, Louise flees the room.

That afternoon, Caroline concocts a plan that the Captain should marry Auntie Braxton, if only on paper. That way he could continue to live in her home, and Auntie Braxton could have a live-in caretaker. Of course, Louise is outraged by the plan, but cannot tell Caroline why. Unable to stop her determined sister, Louise is forced to follow glumly behind and hope that the Captain has enough sense to refuse Caroline's ridiculous plan. Louise is further humiliated and heartbroken when the Captain listens intently to Caroline's plan, and goes off to marry Auntie Braxton the very next day. Louise joins Caroline and Call to welcome the new couple home. While Louise doesn't lash out violently, as she wishes she could, she is unable to partake in the celebration and flatly refuses to call Auntie Braxton by her new married name.

In the months that pass, Louise sinks further into her depression. The only thing that gives her pleasure is the knowledge that she has saved nearly fifty dollars, and that by refusing to share it with her family, she is depriving Caroline of her beloved music lessons, which the family can no longer afford after the storm. Louise goes only once to visit the Captain after his marriage, and it is a disaster. Everything about the Captain's marital home annoys her deeply, and Louise takes everything Auntie Braxton says and does as a personal attack. Additionally, Caroline seems to take great pleasure in the knowledge that she acted as matchmaker, so the fact that the Captain and Auntie Braxton seem genuinely infatuated with each other amuses her to no end. During dinner, the Captain begins telling Auntie Braxton a story about his life in Paris, and Louise is outraged that he never chose to tell that story to her. Throughout the meal, she lashes out at anyone who dares to speak to her, and when she's not snapping verbally, she sits in the chair and sulks, making it very clear that she is miserable, although she refuses to explain why. Finally, after the Captain calls her "Sara Louise," in such a sweet voice that it newly breaks her heart, Louise pushes back from the table and runs from the house. She never sees Auntie Braxton again.



A few days before Christmas, Auntie Braxton suffers another stroke and dies. Louise attends the funeral, and watches with an aching heart as the Captain weeps through the service. After the funeral, Grandma begins spewing that the Captain killed Auntie Braxton so he could have her house, and that because she is in love with him, Louise probably helped: “The shock was so enormous that I found my own puny fear of exposure melting into a much larger darker terror that seemed to have no boundaries” (Page 185). Louise realizes in that moment that depths of the evil in one person’s heart.

After Auntie Braxton’s death, Caroline and Louise begin visiting the Captain again once a week. Call has been called into service, and leaves for boot camp, returning home only on Sundays. Each week, Louise is shocked to see how masculine, even handsome, Call is becoming, and she is profoundly jealous by the fuss Caroline makes over him each time he returns. At the Captain’s house, the girls play poker with him each week, and Caroline laments how much she misses her music lessons. She says she would have loved to go to music college, but there’s no way her family can afford it. The next day, the Captain arrives offering to pay for Caroline’s tuition out of Auntie Braxton’s inheritance. He claims he wants nothing to do with the money himself and that Auntie Braxton would be delighted to know that her money is furthering Caroline’s beautiful music. Louise wishes the Captain would just shoot her dead on the spot. The jealousy she feels, that even the Captain has fallen victim to Caroline’s charms, slays her. Not missing a beat, Grandma sneaks up behind Louise and menacingly whispers, “Romans nine thirteen ... As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated” (Page 193).

## Analysis

Louise’s conversation with Caroline about sex proves how little she knows about the topic and highlights once again how immature and naive she is about the adult world. Louise is irrationally jealous of anyone who receives more attention than she does, including Auntie Braxton. Louise’s cruel treatment of Auntie Braxton seems particularly unfair because Auntie Braxton is a lonely, sick, old woman who never did anything hurt Louise. Louise’s greatest fear is being alone, despite the fact that she isolates herself from everyone in her life, so it’s possible that her hatred of Auntie Braxton is not only because Auntie “stole” the Captain from her, but because Louise is terrified that she might become her. Had it not been for the wily, orange tabby cat, Auntie Braxton probably would have died on her kitchen floor and no one would have known for days, weeks, or even months. If Louise cannot get off the island, she knows that her romantic prospects are slim, and without the ability to work on the crab boat, she fears that her life will end in a cloud of the same depressive isolation she feels now.

By the same token, Louise is also terrified that if the anger inside her continues to fester, she might turn out like her wicked grandmother. The sexual attraction Louise feels for the Captain is shameful, and possibly even sinful, but Grandma’s attacks of the Captain as a plotting wife-killer are downright evil. Grandma characterizes herself as a pious Christian woman, but she hypocritically exhibits the opposite of Christian love.



Although Louise doesn't yet know it, Paterson creates Grandma's vile character as a response to unrequited love.

In this section, Call leaves for boot camp, which is another reminder to the reader that it is wartime. Due to his training, Call becomes leaner, more muscular, and certainly more handsome. Not only is Louise physically attracted to Call, which only confuses her, she is also jealous of him: "the very things that made him stronger and more attractive were taking him deep into the world of men – a place I could never hope to enter" (Page 188).

When Louise and Caroline begin visiting the Captain again, Louise realizes that she is no longer attracted to him. Like burning fire, the heat has passed. At Auntie Braxton's funeral, Louise saw the Captain for who he truly is: a sad, lonely, old man. The heartbreak she felt for him during the service was platonic, no longer romantic. Despite this shift, Louise is still outraged by the Captain's offer to fund Caroline's tuition at music school. Although she no longer feels romantically tied to the Captain, she still feels as if he belongs to her. Ironically, she exhibits the same possessive jealousy over the Captain that she found so unattractive in Call the previous summer. Since the Captain has chosen to financially support Caroline, Louise feels as if he has "chosen" Caroline over her, and that he, like everyone else in her life, has fallen under Caroline's spell. Although her thoughts are irrational, Louise simply cannot break out of the cycle of victimization. Caroline is always the object of her blame, justified or not.

## Discussion Question 1

In what ways are Auntie Braxton and Grandma similar? Why is Louise afraid of turning into them?

## Discussion Question 2

How does Call's physical change affect Louise's feelings for him? In what ways does his maturity reflect gender roles and expectations during the 1940's?

## Discussion Question 3

Do you think the Captain has chosen Caroline over Louise? Why or why not? What other explanation could be behind his decision to fund her schooling?

## Vocabulary

Adamant, whiff, corsage, repentant, sulk, exuberant Jjeer, unperturbed, destitute, solemnity, perfunctory.





# Chapters 15 & 16

## Summary

### Chapters 15 & 16

Unable to process the news of the Captain's scholarship for Caroline, Louise flees the party and throws herself in bed, even though it's only three o'clock in the afternoon: "The Captain, who I'd always believed was different, had, like everyone else, chosen her over me. Since the day we were born, twins like Jacob and Esau, the younger had ruled the older" (Page 195). Her grandmother's words ringing in her ears, Louise rushes out of bed to search the Bible to find who had actually spoken the words "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." A cry escapes her lips when she sees that it was God who had spoken those words. This confirms to Louise that, like Esau, God had turned his back on her from the moment she was born.

Louise's behavior becomes so erratic and dark over the next few days that Mother finally pulls her aside. A bit embarrassed, Mother says that, even though they can't afford it now, she and Father had been saving money, which they would like to use to send Louise to Crisfield boarding school. Louise lashes out, "Crisfield! I'd rather be chopped for crab bait! Mother is crestfallen, and, unable to look at her, Louise demands that Mother leave her room at once. Soon after, Call leaves for service, and Caroline makes her dramatic exit to college. Louise throws herself into work on her father's boat. A silent agreement has passed between them that, even though Louise is not a boy, she may work on the boat. It's clear that Father could use the help with Call gone, and Louise could use the distraction. Louise drops out of school and stops attending church with her family, and to her surprise, no one, except Grandma, fights her about it. Months pass, and finally, Mother pulls her aside to say that she is worried about her, and that she should go back to school. By means of compromise, Louise agrees to let Mother tutor her after crabbing, so long as the Captain teaches her math. The tutoring goes well, and because Mother attends every tutoring session with the Captain, Louise is given no opportunity to explore her sexual attraction to him.

The war ends, and Louise receives a letter that Call is to return home. Caroline has been accepted into Julliard Music School, and won't be able to return to the island from New York before her school begins. Louise realizes that she is excited to know that Call is coming home, and she secretly hopes that he will return and realize that he is in love with her. The fact that Caroline will be far away in New York means that Louise can have Call all to herself. The other benefit of Call's return, of course, is that he can return to work for Father, which means that, if a romantic relationship doesn't work out, at least Louise will be free to pursue her dreams, which she has only allowed herself to imagine as seeing the mountains. When Call returns, Louise realizes that she is awkward with Call, so she retreats into silence. Call is much more adult and mature than Louise could have imagined, and he seems to look at Raff with a bit of disappointment. He claims that the fisherman who live here don't realize that the island is disappearing. A few more



big storms and there will be nothing left. He also mentions that he has been corresponding with Caroline, which further annoys Louise.

After their tour on the boat, Louise changes into fresh clothes and walks with Call to visit the Captain. There, Call drops the bombshell that he asked Caroline to marry him and that she said yes. Louise is shocked and appalled. She cannot believe that Call, too, has chosen Caroline over her. She immediately begins shouting at Call that the marriage is a bad idea, making such a scene that it embarrasses everyone. When the Captain suggests that Caroline needs Call because she is alone in the world, Louise nearly dies on the spot. Once again, she furiously excuses herself from the table and rushes back to the crab house.

## Analysis

In the Biblical story that gave this novel its name, Jacob and Esau were twin brothers born to Isaac and Rebecca. As was customary during the time, Esau, the older son by only a few minutes, would inherit everything from his father, while Jacob, the younger twin, would inherit nothing. Rebecca favored Jacob when the boys were growing up. As adults, Jacob tricked Esau out of his birthright with his mother's help. When Esau realized that his brother had turned against him and stolen what was rightfully his, Esau became a bitter, victimized, angry man. Jacob, fearing that his brother would kill him, left his hometown to pursue a new life, leaving Esau to toil away with all the domestic responsibilities.

There are clear parallels between Jacob and Esau's story and Louise and Caroline's story. Louise is the elder twin and feels that her life is worth nothing more than the service she can provide the younger, favored twin (Louise works on the crab skiff to help pay for Caroline's music lessons). Louise believes wholeheartedly that everyone favors Caroline, and that life has been unfairly stacked in Caroline's favor. When Grandma quotes the infamous line from the Jacob and Esau story, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated," the words resonate with Louise, first because she doesn't remember which character in the story spoke those words. Assuming it was the mother, Rebecca, Louise flips through the Bible to confirm. When she sees, in fact, that it was God who uttered those words, she is blindsided. Louise has often read through the Bible looking for confirmation in her own life, and this verse confirms to her that God had turned his back on her before she was even born. This realization validates all the anger Louise has felt toward her sister, her parents, and her religion. She also believes this explains why her life has always been so difficult – she was born unfavored. It is with the knowledge of Jacob and Esau's story that Louise throws herself into island work after Caroline, like Jacob, leaves Raff for a better life.

Most readers will realize that Louise is putting far too much stock in a Bible story. Just because God favored one twin over the other in Biblical times, it does not mean that he always favors one twin. This verse is an easy justification for Louise to continue her depressive, angry behavior. It gives her no motivation to change, which only perpetuates her problems.



During the time that Louise works on the crab boat, strong parallels are drawn between her own plight and the plight of the sooks – the female crabs moulting their shells. Louise’s heart wrenches for the female crabs that she sees shed their shells for the last time, without ever having bred, becoming old maids. Even though she is only a teenager, it’s clear that Louise identifies with these sooks: “Males, I thought, always have a chance to live no matter how short their lives, but females, ordinary, ungifted ones, just get soft and die” (Page 200).

It’s interesting to note how the belief that God has turned His back on her changes Louise’s attitude. She becomes so embittered that it’s almost as if she can’t see straight. Her mother generously offers to help send Louise to Crisfield, the very boarding school she had been saving to attend, and Louise takes the offer as an insult. It is ironic that now that Louise is finally able to work on her father’s boat, just like she’s always wanted to do, she isn’t happier: her depression and anger grow. Louise is really only looking forward to Call’s return so that he can get back to work on her father’s boat, giving her a chance to explore the world should she choose, but when he returns home to say that he is engaged to Caroline, Louise who has never been romantically interested in Call, is outraged that he “choose” Caroline over her. This section is the emotional climax for Louise, who has reached her whit’s end with frustration.

## Discussion Question 1

What parallels are drawn between Louise and the sooks she catches in this section?

## Discussion Question 2

Why isn’t Louise fulfilled during the time she works on her father’s crab boat, even though it’s been her life’s dream?

## Discussion Question 3

How does the story of Jacob and Esau compare / contrast to the story of Louise and Caroline?

## Vocabulary

Contemptuous, moult, prophecy, cull, elusive, ration, inexcusable, residue, hibernation, viper, admonish, basin, alto, staccato, aggravation, discomposure, inanity, extricate.



# Chapters 17 & 18

## Summary

### Chapters 17 & 18

When the time comes for Call and Caroline's wedding, Louise does not visit New York with her parents. Instead, she volunteers to stay home with Grandma: "Perhaps my soul, now as calloused as my hands, could have borne such a wedding. I don't know. I was glad not to be put to the test" (Page 229). Grandma doesn't understand where Louise's parents have gone, and she asks for clarification constantly. One afternoon, Grandma surprises Louise by bringing up "that heathen" – the Captain – and saying that when she was growing up, she used to be in love with him. All Louise can do is sit in silence and listen as Grandma, in a rare moment of sanity, recounts her heartbreak when Hiram Wallace left the island after that terrible storm. Hiram had been a grown man then, and Grandma only a child, but that didn't stop her from believing that he would return to the island and marry her. As tears begin running down Grandma's cheeks at the memory, Louise is filled with an overwhelming love and camaraderie for her Grandma. When Grandma realizes that the Captain is all alone on the island now that Auntie Brixton has died, she offers to invite him over for Christmas dinner. Shocked by Grandma's sudden show of kindness, Louise agrees to ask him.

Christmas dinner passes without much spectacle. Grandma and the Captain pass pleasant conversation – as pleasant as Grandma can manage – until she begins lamenting the fact that they are old and have nothing to live for now but their own deaths. The Captain corrects her saying, "It's so good to be old. Youth is a mortal wound" (Page 235). When Grandma doesn't understand, he clarifies by saying that when they die, as they surely will, at least they will be ready for it. Before he leaves, the Captain pulls Louise aside to say that she was never meant for this island, and that given the opportunity to leave, she should jump on it: "Don't tell me no one ever gave you a chance. You don't need anything given to you. You can make your own chances. But first you have to know what you're after, my dear" (Page 237). With a boldness she doesn't know she has, Louise admits that she wants to be a doctor. And by telling the Captain, she is filled with the urge to make it so.

When Mother and Father return from New York, Louise is still in a foul mood thinking about the wedding. While cleaning the house with her mother one afternoon, she explodes in anger, saying that her mother never should have come to this island. Her mother, a mainlander with education and skill, could have created a far better life for herself far away from here. Very patiently, Mother smiles and says that she is exactly the woman she hoped she would be. She is happy in her marriage, her place in life, and her family. She is clearly suggesting that she embraced her fear and ran with it, leaving her with no regrets, while Louise's fears are holding her back: "And, oh, my blessed, she was right. All my dreams of leaving, but beneath them I was afraid to go. I had clung



to them, to Rass, yes, even to my grandmother, afraid that if I loosened my finders an iota, I would find myself once more cold and clean in a forgotten basket” (Page 247).

## Analysis

In this section, Louise’s bruised esteem begins to mend. First, the parallels drawn between Louise and her grandmother are solidified when Grandma admits that as a child, she too was in love with the Captain. Louise realizes once and for all that if she continues down the path of embittered victimization, she will end up exactly like Grandma: bitter, vile, and alone. It is words from the Captain that finally begin her pursuit to change when he says, “Don’t tell me no one ever gave you a chance. You don’t need anything given to you. You can make your own chances. But first you have to know what you’re after, my dear” (Page 237). Now that Louise’s dreams of marrying the Captain and working on her father’s crabbing boat have passed, Louise isn’t sure what she is left with. All she knows is that someday, she would like to see the mountains, and that she regrets not taking her mother’s offer of tuition at Crisfield. No matter where she goes, Louise knows she must forge the path on her own.

Whatever fear of failure Louise had been holding onto is nullified during her argument with her mother. Because Louise isn’t yet convinced that she can survive off the island, the only place she’s ever known, she lashes out at her mother – a beautiful, talented, main lander – for choosing to live such an isolated, impoverished life. Louise wants her mother to feel depressed and angry about the way her life turned out, but Mother feels exactly the opposite. She knows that she followed her dreams, and her life with Truitt, Louise’s father, is one filled with love. This shakes Louise out of her stupor, and the Captain’s words resonate with her once again. As if clearing the fog from her eyes, Louise sees that she only has one life to live. If she wants happiness, she needs to go out and find it, as Caroline has done. She doesn’t need anyone else – her parents, her sister, or the Captain – to “choose” her happiness for her, she needs to choose herself.

## Discussion Question 1

What parallels are made between Louise and Grandma when Grandma admits her love for the Captain? What does this make Louise realize about herself?

## Discussion Question 2

Why is Louise angry with her mother for leaving the mainland? Does Mother’s to Louise’s accusations surprise you?

## Discussion Question 3

What words of advice does the Captain give to Louise in this section? How does she respond to them?



## Vocabulary

Insistence, callous, gnarled, gaudy, saucily, titter, twang, pious, contentious, throttle, rancor, renunciation, petulant, iota.



# Chapters 19 & 20

## Summary

### Chapters 19 & 20

With new ambition, Louise writes to the school board on the mainland that graded her high school papers from the time she was home schooled, and asks them to write her a letter of recommendation for college. She is accepted to College Park in the pre-med program, but upon hearing that there are no placements for female doctors due to all the wartime doctors returning to their posts, she leaves her studies to become a midwife. Upon graduation, she takes a position in an Appalachian community where the nearest hospital is two hours away. This way, she thinks, she'll be working like a doctor even though she isn't one. For the most part, Louise loves her time in the mountains. She delivers every pregnant woman's baby, and even some of the difficult animal deliveries. One evening, she is called to help care for a sick child with a high fever. The father, a widower, is eternally grateful for her help and offers her a drink when it's clear the child will survive. The two get talking, and Louise realizes that this man, Joseph, is the first person she has opened up to about herself in years. Louise's parents travel from Raff for the wedding, which is important to Louise, especially since her father dies soon after.

Time passes, and Louise gives birth to her firstborn, a son, whom she names Truitt after her father. She continues her work even after giving birth because. Otherwise, there would be no one to care for the village. The novel closes with a scene of Louise delivering a set of twins. The first baby is a boy who is healthy and strong, but the younger, a girl, is small and weak. Louise fears that the girl will not survive the delivery, so she quickly wraps the boy and sets him aside so she can focus her energy on the weaker girl. Louise works furiously, frantically to save the baby, flatly refusing to let her die. When the panicked father insists, Louise baptizes the girl. When it's clear that the girl will live, Louise panics, thinking she has misplaced the stronger twin. Picking up the baby boy, she gives him to his parents and makes them promise that they will hold him often. Then she walks out into the stars.

## Analysis

The novel closes with Louise finally reaching her dream of seeing the mountains and finding a place where she is truly needed. Even though Louise has left the church and never returns to her religion, Patterson seems to be making an argument that, in fact, God has never left her. In Christian religions, there is a belief in the holy trinity (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit). It is interesting to note that Louise was heavily influenced by Truitt (the father), Truitt (the son), and Truitt (the town). Christians believe that the Holy Spirit is the guiding force in one's life and the means through which a person can "feel" God's presence in their life. When Louise moves to Truitt (the town),



her husband says, “God in heaven’s been raising you for this valley from the day you were born” (Page 256), suggesting that God never turned his back on Louise, and that he’s been guiding her to this place of happiness all along. Religious scholar Patricia A Liddie writes, “The Holy Spirit is that part of the Trinity that is active and enabling: it enables us to see; it causes change and it enlightens; it moves a person from where she is to where she needs to be. The Holy Spirit is responsible for knowledge and wisdom. And it is in the town of Truitt that Sara Louise is enlightened, able to see and finally understand self. It is here that she recognizes, becomes, and accepts self, something that could only happen as a result of understanding her own haunting birth” (The Alan Review, Volume 21, Number 3).

It is interesting to note that even in adulthood, the relationship between Louise and Caroline is never mended. Some readers will be disappointed that Louise never realized the error in her hatred, but perhaps the longstanding rift between the sisters is more realistic than had they reunited. However, Patterson brings the Jacob and Esau story full circle by writing a scene in which Louise, as a midwife, helps give birth to a set of twins – the elder strong and healthy, and the younger weak and sickly. When she realizes that the younger twin is near death, Louise, like her own mother had done, abandons the stronger twin to focus her energies on saving the weaker. Louise begins referring to the younger twin as “my baby” and even nurses the infant with milk from her own breasts. This symbolizes a unity with, and perhaps even a level of forgiveness of, Caroline. In this scene, Louise also begins to understand the terrible fear her mother must have faced, and recognizes the maternal protection she must have felt over her sickly child. Through this recognition, Louise is able to forgive her mother, and through the baptism of baby Essie (Esau) Susan, there is also a forgiveness of God. Louise breaks the cycle by encouraging the mother to hold and love the stronger twin in the same way that she does the weaker. When she leaves the house that night, Louise sings “I wonder as a wander,” the same song Caroline sang at the Christmas pageant in Chapter 4. Keen readers will remember the look of accomplishment on Caroline’s face at the end of her solo. Since Louise is singing this song at the closing, the reader is to assume that she, too, has found her place in life.

## Discussion Question 1

What symbolism can be found in the fact that Louise’s father, son, and town are all named Truitt?

## Discussion Question 2

Does the life that Louise is living at the end of the novel seem like a “just” ending for her character? Why or why not?





## Discussion Question 3

Why is it symbolic that Louise should deliver twins at the end of the story? Why is it important to note that Louise nursed the weaker twin?

## Vocabulary

Alewife, elaborate, midwifery, denomination, sustenance, penicillin, idiocy, incubator, translucent, sacrament.



# Characters

## Sara Louise Bradshaw

Sara Louise Bradshaw is the protagonist and narrator of the novel. The novel follows Sara Louise (Louise) through her coming-of-age and her struggle for self-identity. She is living in the shadow of her talented twin sister. Ever since she was born, Louise feels like the world has favored her twin sister, Caroline. Louise is dark, awkward, and seemingly untalented. Because Louise was healthy at birth, her parents didn't worry about her the same way they worried about Caroline, which Louise has translated to mean that they love her less.

## Caroline Bradshaw

Caroline Bradshaw is the younger, weaker twin sister to Louise Bradshaw. Because she was sickly since birth, Caroline has always received a lot of attention from her parents and the community, which Louise interprets to mean that Caroline is better loved. Caroline is beautiful, fair-skinned and dainty. She is also an extremely talented musician, which literally puts her center-stage. Although Louise views Caroline as manipulative and evil, the reality is that Caroline is quite sweet and generous. Like Louise, she is also lonely on the island, but because Louise has cast her sister as the villain, she is unable to see it. Unlike Louise, Caroline does not hold back in her ambitions. She works hard on her music and is eventually given the opportunity to leave the island to study. She jumps at the chance, and succeeds in New York. She marries McCall Purnell, Louise's childhood best friend, and lives a happy life. After leaving the island, she has only limited contact with her sister.

## Truitt Bradshaw

Truitt Bradshaw is a crab fisherman and the father of twin girls, Sara Louise and Caroline. Truitt is a silent, hardworking man who sometimes wishes he had a son. He loves Sara Louise and enjoys working with her, but he follows the strict gender codes of the time and forbids Louise from working on his boat full time.

## Grandma Bradshaw

Grandma Bradshaw is a wicked, vicious old woman who lives with her son Truitt and his family. Grandma is obsessed with the Bible, but only as a means of judging everyone on the island. She is a hypocritical Christian who spends her days trying to make everyone around her miserable. In a rare moment of sanity, Grandma reveals that, like Louise, she was in love with the Captain when she was a child. At that point, Louise feels a moment of camaraderie for her grandmother.



## Hiram Wallace / The Captain

Hiram Wallace / The Captain comes to the island as a mysterious man whose presence on the island ignites the imagination of most of the population. It is later revealed that “the Captain,” as Louise has taken to calling him, is Hiram Wallace, the only son of a crab fisherman, who left the island in disgrace after panicking during a lightning storm. The Captain becomes the focus of fourteen-year-old Louise’s first love, although at seventy-years-old, he remains an unflappable friend to her. The Captain breaks Louise’s heart by not only ignoring her romantic feelings, but also by choosing to fund Caroline’s college education.

## Auntie Braxton

Auntie Braxton is an old cat woman who lives alone on Rass Island. Auntie Braxton is a bit of a hermit, rarely interacting with the rest of the population because she does not attend church. When Auntie Braxton has a stroke, she is inadvertently reunited with the Captain, who marries her for convenience, but ends up forming real feelings for her. Auntie Braxton dies after a second stroke. She remains a symbol for Louise of what she might become if she never leaves the island.

## McCall Purnell

McCall Purnell is Louise’s best friend growing up. As a child, he is overweight, nearsighted, and terribly poor. He has no sense of humor, and Louise is only friends with him out of sheer loneliness. As they age, however, Call finds himself closer to Caroline, as they have more in common. When Call joins the army and attends boot camp, both Louise and Caroline look forward to his return, although only Caroline expresses it. Call, like the Captain, breaks Louise’s heart when he chooses to marry Caroline over her.

## Joseph Wojtkiewicz

Joseph Wojtkiewicz is the man Louise marries when she finally moves from Rass Island. Joseph is a single father of two children, whom Louise tends to when they are sick. Joseph, a Catholic, suggests that God has been preparing Louise for life in the mountains ever since she was born.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Sooks

The sooks are the female crabs that Louise fishes for on Rass Island.

## The Skiff

The skiff is the only boat that Louise is allowed to man during crab fishing season. She must settle for captaining her own skiff, as the strict gender roles of the time prevent her from working with her father.

## The Piano

The Piano was an inheritance from Mother's father when he died. It was Caroline's first foray into the musical world.

## Lyrics

In an attempt to make more money, Louise tries her hand at writing wartime song lyrics, only to discover that the publishing house is a scam.

## The Storm

The great storm washes away the Captain's house, forcing him to move in with the Bradshaws.

## Hands

Louise becomes obsessed with people's hands after her sexual awakening to the Captain. She tries to beautify her own hands in an attempt to make herself more attractive.

## The Mountains

When Louise dreams of leaving Rass Island, all she knows is that she would like to see the mountains. She achieves this dream when she accepts a midwifery position in the Appalachian Mountains of West Virginia.



# Settings

## Rass Island

Rass Island is the novel's main setting and Louise Bradshaw's hometown. The island is connected to the mainland by a single ferry that comes to the dock once a day. The majority of the population on Rass Island is fishermen and their families, with crab and oyster being the main catch. The island is insular, with only a single Methodist church, a schoolhouse, and a drugstore. All other goods and services must be brought in from the mainland. Since the island is so small, most of the inhabitants live extraordinarily similar lives, which is both a blessing and a curse. It is rare for islanders to move to the mainland, but most of the children on the island dream of one day leaving their hometown. Even as a child, Louise seems to recognize that Rass Island is not long for the world, as a bit of the land disappears with each big storm.

## The Captain's House

The Captain's House is where Call and Louise spend their entire summer working. The house is a ramshackle building that is barely standing. However, with work and effort, the trio make the house once again livable. They are all depressed when the great storm completely destroys the structure and washes it away.

## West Virginia

West Virginia is the state Louise moves to after leaving the island. Here, she finishes her midwifery training and takes a job working in the Appalachian Mountains where she meets and marries her husband, has her child, and begins to mend the emotional wounds of her childhood.



# Themes and Motifs

## Coming of Age

Jacob Have I Loved is a beloved coming-of-age novel that has been cherished for generations. Perhaps, one of the main reasons for this novel's success is the realistic portrayal of Louise's maturity from child to adult. In the first few chapters of the novel, the reader sees Louise as a boisterous, carefree thirteen-year-old proud of the fact that she can man her own fishing skiff and provide a bit of income for her family. Louise spends her days cracking jokes and dreaming about escaping off the island. In these scenes, she is clearly a child. As she matures into adulthood, however, the reader sees this carefree exuberance melt away to reveal a bitter, jealous teenager struggling to find her place in the world.

Louise's realizations and maturations occur after she has her first period, a symbol of her physical transition into adulthood. Now that Louise is "officially" an adult, her childish dreams must also disappear. Louise loses her dream of discovering the Captain as a spy, and she must learn to rely on her own skills and ingenuity to achieve her dreams of leaving the island. The reader also sees this transition symbolized through Louise's correspondence with the lyric board. While it was a childish hope that she would rocket to super stardom with her wartime lyrics, Louise is mature enough to recognize a financial scam when she sees one, so this dream dies too.

The most notable moment in Louise's maturity, however, happens when she becomes sexually attracted to the Captain in the wake of the storm. At the time of her first urges, Louise is fourteen and the Captain is seventy. While this attraction may be confusing (and even disturbing) to some readers, Patterson has captured the unexpected, dramatic impulses of a teenage girl's sexual awakening. Although Louise feels sexual stirrings, she doesn't necessarily understand them. She is simply beginning to explore what these feelings mean and the impact they have, or could have, on her life.

## Jealousy

One of the most important subplots in the novel is the story of Louise's and Caroline's birth. Louise was born a few minutes before her twin sister and cherishes those few minutes in her mind because she knows they were the only time in her life when she was the center of attention. Caroline had been born sickly, and needed individual attention from the moment she was born. Louise resents the fact that the nurse bundled her in a blanket and gave her a bottle of tinned milk while she and Louise's mother worried and cooed over sick Caroline. Caroline required frequent visits to the mainland for medical care growing up, and as a result, she was always viewed as delicate or fragile, while Louise, healthy and plump, was not.



The jealousy Louise feels for Caroline grows throughout the novel, even venturing into violent hatred. Louise still turns to the scripture, feverishly searching for any evidence that, even though she hates her sister, she may still be forgiven. As she expected, all of the Biblical characters that kill a sibling appear to be struck down by God, giving Louise little hope. She cannot control the hatred and jealousy she feels toward Caroline. It feels to her that God turned his back on her in favor of Caroline, but she can't quite explain why until Grandma viciously utters the words "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." In the Biblical story that gave this novel its name, Jacob and Esau were twin brothers born to Isaac and Rebecca. As was customary during the time, Esau, the oldest son by only a few minutes, would inherit everything from his father, while Jacob, the younger twin, would inherit nothing. Rebecca favored Jacob when the boys were growing up, and as adults, Jacob tricked Esau out of his birthright with his mother's help. When Esau realized that his brother had turned against him and stolen what was rightfully his, Esau became a bitter, victimized, angry man. Jacob, fearing that his brother would kill him, leaves his hometown to pursue a new life, leaving Esau to toil away with all the domestic responsibilities.

There are clear parallels between Jacob and Esau's story and Louise and Caroline's story. Louise is the elder twin and feels that her life is worth nothing more than the service she can provide the younger, favored twin (Louise works on the crab skiff to help pay for Caroline's music lessons). Louise believes wholeheartedly that everyone favors Caroline, and that life has been unfairly stacked in Caroline's favor. Grandma's words resonate with Louise, first because she doesn't remember which character in the story spoke those words. Assuming it was the mother, Rebecca, Louise flips through the Bible to confirm. When she sees, in fact, that it was God who uttered those words, she is blindsided. Louise has often read through the Bible looking for confirmation in her own life, and this verse confirms to her that God had turned his back on her before she was even born. This realization validates all the anger Louise has felt toward her sister, her parents, and her religion. She also believes this explains why her life has always been so difficult – she was born unfavored. It is with the knowledge of Jacob and Esau's story that Louise throws herself into island work after Caroline, like Jacob, leaves Raff for a better life. It isn't until Louise, too, leaves the island to fulfill her dreams that the cycle is broken, although her relationship with Caroline is never fully repaired.

## Religious Direction

Louise and her family live on a strictly Methodist island during World War II. The few residents of the island that don't attend the single church (the Captain and Auntie Braxton) are viewed, however kindly, as outcasts. As a child, Louise turns to scripture to answer her questions, and peppers the Captain with Biblical trivia to uncover whether he is a fraud. Louise holds a simple understanding that what is written in the Bible is right, and everything else is wrong. This becomes problematic for Louise when she reads the Bible verse "Jacob have I loved but Esau have I hated," and takes it face value – meaning that God favors the second born of each twin set. Believing that God favors Caroline over herself, Louise begins to make her break from religion, turning her back on the God had has turned His back against her. Most readers will realize that



Louise is putting far too much stock in a Bible story, and that just because God favored one twin over the other in Biblical times, it does not mean that he always favors one twin. This verse is an easy justification for Louise to continue her depressive, angry behavior and gives her no motivation to change, which only perpetuates her problems.

As an adult, even though Louise has left the church and never returns to her religion Paterson seems to be making an argument that, in fact, God has never left her. In Christian religions, there is a belief in the holy trinity (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit). It is interesting to note that Louise was heavily influenced by Truitt (the father), Truitt (the son), and Truitt (the town). Christians believe that the Holy Spirit is the guiding force in one's life, and the means through which a person can "feel" God's presence in their life. When Louise moves to Truitt the town, her husband says, "God in heaven's been raising you for this valley from the day you were born" (Page 256), suggesting that God never turned his back on Louise, and that he's been guiding her to this place of happiness all along.





# Styles

## Point of View

Jacob Have I Loved is written in first-person, past tense point of view from Louise Bradshaw's perspective. In the narration, an adult Louise looks back on her childhood and comments on it. The opening section, "Rass Island," gives the day-dreamy effect of a nostalgic adult looking back at their childhood, which signals to the reader that Louise is now older and wiser. This perspective sheds light on many of the emotional scenes in the novel, giving them deeper meaning and stronger resonance. Louise is able to comment on her coming-of-age, and to assess her childhood with adult eyes.

Readers are given complete access to the inner thoughts and feelings of Louise herself, but can only learn what other characters are thinking when they specifically articulate them to her. This provides wonderful tension in the relationship between Louise and Caroline, as the reader can only process Caroline's words and actions through Louise's perspective. As a result, the reader sees Caroline's true nature as well as the skewed perspective through which Louise views her twin sister.

## Language and Meaning

Though Sara Louise has an ambivalent and ever changing relationship with her church and an issue with the idea of faith (she believes God has turned His back on her since her birth), she has clearly internalized her religious upbringing. The novel is littered with religious references. This is interestingly complimented by the many references to crab fishing – the descriptions of fishing processes and the keen comparisons made between the characters and the crabs – which creates a vivid image of what life on Rass Island is like for a teenager. Because the island is so small and scarcely populated, these two facets of life – fishing and religion – define the characters' entire existences, so it makes sense that they should feature heavily in the language.

Also, because Louise is telling the story of her childhood while in adulthood, the language reflects her maturity. Louise leaves Rass to become a doctor, and is highly educated on the mainland. This is clearly reflected in her sentence structure and adult vocabulary.

## Structure

Jacob Have I Loved is divided into twenty equal-length chapters. In the opening section, "Rass Island" Louise creates a strong sense of place with her dreamlike narration. Louise ends this opening section by acknowledging that as an adult, she left the island. This tidbit of information may seem insignificant at the opening, but as the novel progresses, the reader will see deep foreshadowing in this seemingly insignificant statement. From there, Louise delves into the years of her coming-of-age, her sexual,



religious, and personal awakening. The main thrust of the novel follows Louise as she matures in these three veins, discovering what makes her tick, what she is passionate about, and what she dreams for her future. The main conflict in the novel is Louise struggling to find her place in the world she is forced to share with her twin sister, Caroline. The jealousy Louise feels for Caroline is exacerbated by Louise's belief that God has turned His back on her in favor of Caroline.

The novel is arguably divided into two parts, while Louise is on the island and after Louise leaves. The entire novel has been building up to the moment when Louise finally moves to the mainland to pursue her education, but most readers will feel that the resolution of Louise's lifelong struggle is rushed. Paterson only devotes sixteen pages to Louise's adult life and crams years of experiences into them. Nevertheless, because so much of the novel happens within Louise's thoughts, the reader likely feels that they know her character deeply enough to imagine what life is like for her off the island.



## Quotes

Why was it funny? Was it because it was so wonderful to discover something on this island that was free – something unproscribed by God, Moses, or the Methodist conference? We could talk to cats any way we pleased.

-- Narrator (Chapter 7 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** In this quote, Louise first begins to bond with the Captain over Cal's shocked response to the Captain's cursing. Louise found the whole incident hilarious because it was her first interaction with another person on the island who didn't adhere 100% to biblical rules. The Captain breaks one of the ten commandments by cursing, and it's not the end of the world.

There was something about the thought of God being with me that made me feel more alone than ever. It was like being with Caroline.

-- Narrator (Chapter 3 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** In this quote, Louise first begins to lament her lost relationship with God. In the comparison to the biblical Jacob and Esau, Caroline is the beloved Jacob, which would make Louise the "hated" Esau. Louise feels abandoned by God, just as she feels isolated when with the favored Caroline.

But I had never caused my parents a 'minute's worry.' Didn't they know that worry proves you care? Didn't they know that I needed their worry to assure myself that I was worth something?

-- Narrator (Chapter 3 paragraph 3)

**Importance:** As soon as Caroline was born, Louise felt that she "snatched" the attention for herself. Louise has always been jealous of Caroline, and blames both her parents and God for "abandoning" her. Because Louise was much healthier than her sister, she didn't require as much one-on-one time from her parents, being carted to and from doctors' appointments. Her parents didn't realize that this left Louise feeling neglected, and she has not forgiven them for their seeming favoritism.

I always treasured the thought of those minutes. They represented the only time in my life when I was the center of everyone's attention. From the moment Caroline was born, she snatched it all for herself.

-- Narrator (Chapter 2 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** The narrator is stressing Caroline being the favorite.

We slept in the same room, ate at the same table, sat for nine months out of each year in the same classroom, but none of these had made us close. How could the, when being conceived at the same time in the same womb had done nothing to bind us together? And yet, if we were not close, why did only Caroline have the power, with a single glance, to slice my flesh clear through to the bone?



-- Narrator (Chapter 6 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** In this quote, Louise explains exactly why she struggles to love Caroline. Although they are as close as two siblings can be - they even formed in the same womb - she cannot love her sister. Louise believes that God is to blame for this. From the time of their conception, Louise believes God favored Caroline over her, just as he favored Jacob over Esau. As a result, Caroline has had an easy life filled with affection, while Louise has had to work hard for every shred of happiness in her life.

God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in trouble ... Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be trouble, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof...

-- The Captain (Chapter 10 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** This is a quote from the Bible, which the Captain reads during a terrible storm. It is a fitting passage not only for their present struggles - the storm that threatens to decimate the island - but also for Louise's life. Louise has never even seen a mountain before, and all she wants is to escape from the island. This passage seems to be telling her not to fear.

I fled the house and was headed for the south marsh before I remembered it was no longer there. I stood shaking at the spot where the head of the old marsh path had begun, and through my tears, I thought I could just make out across the water a tiny tump of fast land, my old refuge now cut off from the rest of the island, orphaned and alone.

-- Narrator (Chapter 12 paragraph 3)

**Importance:** After Louise finds Caroline using her hand cream, she erupts in frustration shouting that Caroline takes everything from her. When she flees the house, she is reminded that the storm has ravaged the island, including her childhood safe haven. Seeing the tiny bit of land cut off from the rest of the island symbolizes Louise's coming-of-age and highlights her sense of isolation.

You? What harm can she possibly do? You do not need to be delivered from evil. Can't you see? It's me. Me - I who am so close to being swallowed up in all that eternal darkness. But I didn't say it. I wasn't angry at her - just deadly tired.

-- Narrator (Chapter 14 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** In the height of her selfish narcissism, Louise refuses to see how her Grandmother's nasty tirades affect the rest of her family, including Caroline. Louise believes that she is the only one her family who has been hard done by, and therefore the constant victim.

Romans nine thirteen ... As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.

-- Grandma (Chapter 14 paragraph 5)



**Importance:** In this quote, Grandma gleefully highlights the exact Bible verse that has haunted Louise her entire life. Grandma, who inexplicably seeks to injure Louise, points out the verse as explanation for the reasons why Caroline is favored. In this one nasty exchange, Grandma validates every fear Louise has ever felt about her relationship with God, her parents, and Caroline.

When she launched into prophecies of eternal damnation, he told her that God was my judge, not they. He meant it as a kindness, for how could he know that God had judged me before I was born and had cast me out before I took my first breath?

-- Narrator (Chapter 15 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** In this quote, Louise once again states that she believes God turned his back on her before she was even born. In Louise's eyes, God could only love one of the twin sisters - her or Caroline - and he favored Caroline while leaving her alone and abandoned in the world. Because she believes that God chose to favor the better twin even before their birth, Louise views it as her birthright that she should never amount to anything, or ever be truly loved.

It's so good to be old. Youth is a mortal wound.

-- The Captain (Chapter 17 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** In this quote, the Captain laments youth. Although he doesn't state it outright, the Captain believes that youth is painful because you don't yet understand life, and you must fight for your identity. This is certainly true of Louise, who finds that she is much happier in life once she has found her own place.

Don't tell me no one ever gave you a chance. You don't need anything given to you. You can make your own chances. But first you have to know what you're after, my dear.

-- The Captain (Chapter 17 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** In these words of advice, the Captain chastizes Louise for wallowing in her depression. All her life, Louise has felt hard done by, and has been jealous of the opportunities afforded to Caroline. While kind, the Captain insinuates that Louise has no one to blame for her miserable attitude but herself. Caroline has always been clear about what she wanted out of her future, which made it easy for those around to assist her. Louise, on the other hand, has always been defeated, never stating outloud what her goals or ambitions were. As a result, no one has stepped in to aid her path, which is, the Captain claims, her own fault.

And, oh, my blessed, she was right. All my dreams of leaving, but beneath them I was afraid to go. I had clung to them, to Rass, yes, even to my grandmother, afraid that if I loosened my finders an iota, I would find myself once more cold and clean in a forgotten basket.

-- Narrator (Chapter 18 paragraph 5)

**Importance:** Louise has this thought moments after her mother chastizes her for never expressing her desire to leave the island. Louise has played the victim her entire life,



convincing herself that she had to stay on Rass to support her family, to care for her grandmother, to assist her parents. Her mother claims that this was never true, and in this moment, Louise realizes how wrong she had been. Although Louise blamed her family for never letting her chase her dreams, the truth is that she was too afraid to chase after them, lest she be abandoned all over again.

God in heaven's been raising you for this valley from the day you were born.

-- Joseph Wajtkiewicz (Chapter 19 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** In this quote, Louise's husband disproves Louise's entire life story. Ever since she was born, Louise has felt that God has abandoned her, but Joseph insinuates that Louise had to go through all of her life's struggles in order to end up where she truly belonged: on the island. Joseph believes that had life been easy for Louise, as it was for Caroline, she never would have chased her dreams or ended up living in her ultimate happiness.