

Life After Life Study Guide

Life After Life by Kate Atkinson

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Plot Summary

In the acclaimed novel, *Life After Life*, by Kate Atkinson the reader begins the novel as if they've been thrust into the middle of a novel already in progress. A young, unnamed, but beautiful woman has arrived at a small party. The year is 1930. There are military leaders there and the man she, more importantly, came to see, the supreme leader. Through a series of clues and suggestions, the reader learns that this man is Hitler. He flirts with her, as she knew he would. He has studied her, like a predator stalks its prey, and here, finally, finds herself able to get close enough to him to try and kill him. She fails and everything goes black.

The next chapter, titled *Snow*, takes place in 1910. A baby is being born, but it is not an easy birth. In fact, the child has come prematurely in the dead of winter, the doctor has been delayed, and Sylvie, the mother, is quite alone except for her scullery maid, Bridget. Sylvie's husband, Hugh, is away trying to track down his wayward sister who has run away to Paris. The baby is born with the cord wrapped around its neck. Its heart stops beating and it seems to die.

Luckily, Dr. Fellowes, arrives just in time to revive the child, who still doesn't have a name, and Sylvie is ecstatic that this, her third child, will live. The reader isn't told the gender of the child, only that the Doctor doesn't care for the emotional display that Sylvie gives toward the child. Later, the reader learns that Sylvie doesn't like the doctor at all and is glad when he leaves early the next morning.

Sylvie lies in bed recovering from the birth and reflects on her life before Hugh. She'd been a happy and naive little girl living in the world of the wealthy. Then, her father died an untimely death and Sylvie's world crashes down around her. As a young teenager she and her mother lose everything because of her father's gambling debts. Not too soon afterward, her mother dies, too, leaving Sylvie without many options in the world. At seventeen she meets Hugh, who is a rising star in the banking world. They marry when Sylvie turns eighteen. Though she has been 'rescued' from her poverty she still misses the old life and ways and in many ways shows herself to be resentful of the fact that Hugh cannot provide the luxury items of her childhood.

Mrs. Glover arrives with the breakfast tray. On it is a single snowdrop flower in a vase. Sylvie calls it a brave little flower to have managed to survive to bloom in the snow. Mrs. Glover thinks that Sylvie is foolish to think such things about a flower. Mrs. Glover comes back later with the children so that they can see their new sister, Ursula. Sylvie has named her Ursula because it means little she-bear. Maurice, her oldest son, is despondent because it is another girl, while Pamela is happy to have a sister. Mrs. Glover twists Maurice's ear when he reaches out to poke baby Ursula with his finger. Sylvie is upset that Mrs. Glover would dare lay a hand on her children, but she doesn't say anything. Later, Mrs. Glover turns a disdainful eye toward her when she has the baby brought to her so she can nurse it.



Hugh sends a telegram saying that he's staying on in Paris because he is having trouble locating his sister, Isobel. Sylvie can't seem to think of anything to write back to Hugh about their baby. She's worried that since the baby was oxygen deprived for a short while that there may yet be something the matter with her. She stalls off sending a response for the time being. When Bridget comes to take the breakfast tray away she asks that the snowdrop be left on her bedside table.

The time jumps ahead to 1914 and Sylvie and the girls are at the beach enjoying the day in the sun. Ursula, now four years old, is playing with Pamela down near the water's edge. Pamela drags Ursula into deep water despite Ursula not wanting to. A wave crashes over them and they are pulled out of the surf by Mr. Archibald Winton, a senior clerk at a factory in Birmingham. But it is too late, Ursula has drowned.

Ursula is reborn, and this time when she goes to the beach, she refuses to go into the water, screaming for Pamela to stay out as well. This time none of them die. In a subsequent timeline, their cousin, Roland, is the one to die.

Later, there are a series of incidents where Ursula loses her life. First she goes out onto the roof to rescue a doll, then she contracts influenza from the maid at the house, then later she dies from a botched abortion, then she dies several times in the war. Later, she has a total psychotic breakdown as all of her past lives crash in on her and she doesn't know how to sort them out.

Luckily, throughout her life there's been a Dr. Kellet, who has told her about reincarnation. It is his steady influence and ability to calm her down that makes Ursula realize that her 'gift' has been so that she can save humanity from the horror of Hitler. She kills herself, this time knowing that she will be born again.

This time she gets closer to Hitler than in any previous timeline and pulls a gun on him. She is killed before she has the chance to kill Hitler. However, when she is reborn again, this time she determines to make better choices and most of the snags that have caused her issue throughout her lifetimes are straightened out. Her brother, Teddy, is still living, and has not died in his plane. As a result, his mother has not committed suicide, and Ursula has met and married the boy she was able to give her heart to, Benjamin Cole.



Be Ye Men of Valor, Snow, Snow

Summary

Be Ye Men of Valor (November 1930)

The book opens with the main character, who is not given a name, having refreshments with some high ranking military gentlemen and none other than Hitler. He flirts with her, and she doesn't disappoint. She has studied him, knows the kind of woman that he likes. After she eats a pastry she reaches into her handbag to get a handkerchief to wipe her lips, but instead brings out a service revolver and levels it at Hitler. She only needs one shot. Then, everything goes dark.

Snow (11 February 1910)

A baby is born too early to a woman named Sylvie. It is the dead of winter and the doctor can't make it to her bedside. Her husband, Hugh, is in Paris trying to chase down his wayward sister, Isobel. Bridget, one of the maids, is helping to deliver the baby, but it is evident that she's not as practiced as some others might be. When the baby arrives, the cord is wrapped around its neck. Sylvie, who has had several babies, asks for Bridget to give the baby to her so that she can see what might be done for the poor thing. Unknown to both women the baby's heart had been beating, but stops suddenly, like a bird falling from the sky, after a single shot.

Snow (11 February 1910)

Dr. Fellowes, the doctor, arrives finally and is able to save the baby and revive her. The reader learns that the manor where they live is called Fox Corner. After the baby is stabilized it is decided that the doctor must stay the night, though it is obvious that he doesn't want to. Sylvie relaxes and thinks about poor Bridget, who is only fourteen, and that it had been remarkable that she'd been of use at all. Sylvie remembers that at fourteen she was more innocent by far than Bridget. In fact, she remembers that, that innocence extended to her marriage bed and had made her ill prepared for the sexual relationship that would be expected of her. The doctor seems embarrassed when Sylvie holds her child and speaks softly to it.

Analysis

Be Ye Men of Valor (November 1930)

This chapter offers a situation that thrusts the reader into the middle of the action. The reader is not told the person's name, nor much more about her, except that she is there under false pretenses, that she has stalked the man in the scene in order to do him harm, and that most likely the man she is there to kill is Hitler. It is interesting to note that the author does not mention names that would make it easier on the reader as to



identity, but the author does give enough information that the reader understands that this person attempted to kill Hitler because of something he did to her family, and that she is most likely killed, herself, in the attempt.

Authors often don't give their main characters names for a variety of reasons. In this instance, it may be that the author isn't ready to reveal the name of the character in this scene, or that in the overall scheme of things, her name is inconsequential.

Snow (first occurrence)

A common motif throughout the novel is that of life and death, and how both are intricately and exquisitely intertwined. In this first introduction to SNOW, the reader sees the death of a child who has only the experience of life for a few flutters of a bird's wings. Born with the cord around her neck, blue and unable to breathe, Sylvie's child is shown to struggle for life, helpless against death that, as the author writes, seems to beat against the shudders of the house with black bat wings. Death comes swiftly to the infant.

Snow (second occurrence)

In a continuation of the first Snow entry, this scene has happened just moments later, when the doctor has finally been able to arrive. He has been able to revive the baby and it seems to be doing well. The reader is not told the sex of the child, the child's name, and it is evident that to everyone, especially the doctor, that the child is viewed as a product or a piece of property rather than a human live with a consciousness. The reader sees this in the interaction between the doctor and Sylvie when the doctor, Dr. Fellowes, becomes embarrassed by Sylvie's demonstration of motherly love for the child. The author tells the reader that if it were up to Dr. Fellowes, all children would be raised as they did in ancient Sparta, removing all element of emotion or weakness from the equation.

Discussion Question 1

Why doesn't the author give the woman in *Be Ye Men of Valor*, a name?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Sylvie's character and how she interacts with her staff, the doctor, and her husband. What does this suggest about Sylvie?

Discussion Question 3

What might make Dr. Fellowes have the opinion he does about children and people, in general?



Vocabulary

slipstream, inflate, prawn, stoked, cherub, curtsy, alliteration, bonhomie, hysteria, midwife, scullery, hawing, lingered, baffled, conjugal



Four Seasons, Snow, War

Summary

Four Seasons

It is February of 1910 again, and the day after the premature birth of Sylvie's baby. Sylvie reflects back to her own childhood and how her father gambled away their wealth, a fact that she and her poor mother only learned about after his untimely death. Her father had too much to drink and had fallen down a flight of stairs. The reader learns that at 17 Sylvie married Hugh, an up-and-coming young banker. She seized on the opportunity, as she was left destitute when her mother died. She had almost ended up being an artist's model, but then, as luck would have it, she met Hugh.

She jumps forward in her memories to their purchase of Fox Corner. The naming of the house, a place that overextended them a bit financially, was their first disagreement. When Sylvie saw a mother fox with her cubs playing on the lawn, she suggested the name. Hugh wasn't thrilled with it, thinking it had too much whimsy about it, but Sylvie was adamant. Hugh argues that foxes might be considered vermin. Sylvie hotly replies that perhaps people are the real vermin.

Sylvie's musings are interrupted by the entrance of her other two children, Maurice and Pamela. It is here that the reader learns that the baby is a girl and her name is Ursula. Sylvie says that the name Ursula means little she-bear. Mrs. Glover is there with the children and boxes Maurice's ears when he pokes the baby and makes it cry. Sylvie is appalled that Glover would dare lay a hand on her child, but she is still too weak to say anything to the woman. She asks for the baby and announces that she will feed her. When she pulls her breast out, Mrs. Glover is obviously disgusted at the sight and shoos the children out of the room. She leaves with them.

May 1910

A telegram arrives from Weisbaden, where Isobel (nicknamed Izzie) ended up living. The telegram says that she's had her baby. The man she ran away with was married and after learning that Izzie was pregnant, abandoned her in Germany. Her mother, Adelaide, had declared that once her indignantly was through she should adopt the child out as quickly as possible, and then return home. Ursula experiences the changes of the seasons through her observation of the world outside of her home. Her mother believed in lots of fresh air, and so Ursula is outside most days in her pram. Her idea of the world is discovered and fashioned from the confines of her boxlike pram. Once, Maurice poked her with a stick, then tried to cover her up with a pile of fallen leaves. Hugh shoos him away and dug Ursula out. She wasn't fazed by the incident. When winter rolled around again, though, she remembered it in her bones, the narrator says, as the memory of her first winter was ever present.



June 1914

Sylvie has had another child, a boy, whom they've named Edward. However, they call him Teddy because, as Sylvie says, Teddy and Ursula are her two teddy bear children. They've taken a holiday down by the beach and Sylvie is watching them play by the water's edge while she sits with the baby back on the beach. Ursula is now five years old. Sylvie muses about the depth of feeling she has for her children, something she hadn't considered about her own parents. The children return from fishing and the reader experiences Maurice. He has not grown into a nice young boy, but rather a boy bent on destruction, mischief, and is by any definition a narcissist. Sylvie muses that she is glad that he is going to be going away to boarding school in the fall.

Pamela takes Ursula out into the surf to swim and pulls Ursula out too deeply into the surf. A large wave crashes over them suddenly, knocking them both off of their feet. Ursula goes under. Then everything goes dark.

Snow

February 11th, 1910. Bridget comes to take away the breakfast tray, and Sylvie asks her to leave the snow drop in the vase on the bedside table. Sylvie receives a telegram from Hugh saying that he's going to have to stay longer, as his sister has done a great job of hiding in Paris. Sylvie wonders about how she should reply since the baby almost died. However, she is fearful because she worries that the baby might have something wrong with it since it was deprived of air for a while. She settles on not telling him anything alarming just yet, or even to let him know that the baby has been born.

War June 1914

The time frame jumps ahead to June of 1914. The focus is, initially, on a man named Archibald Winton, who is at the beach painting seascapes. There are two little girls playing down by the water's edge and he decides to include them in his work. The little girls are Pamela and Ursula. Pamela drags Ursula into the surf, but Ursula is afraid. Mr. Winton ends up having to drag them out when a wave crashes over them. Sylvie, who'd been reading on the beach further up, hadn't seen anything and is shocked when Winton appears by her blanket with her two little girls who are sobbing and frightened. They thank him by giving him tea and cakes at the club house. Later, Hugh finally arrives and has brought a Petter engine that will allow the house to run electric lights. Sylvie is frightened by it and doesn't like the surprise at all.

July 1914

It is the height of summer and Sylvie entertains some of her former school friends, Margaret and Lily. Sylvie envies both of them because they've both managed to not get married and are living exciting lives without the constraints and confines of many of the Victorian Era strictures. Margaret is an artist, and Lily was involved in the suffragette movement. They have come to see the new baby, Edward, that has been born.



The Narrator tells the reader that a new dog has also been obtained. It is a huge bull mastiff, but is also a kind and gentle companion and watchdog for the children and the grounds. The dog seems to prefer Ursula and they are usually to be found together. Maurice puts up a makeshift tennis net and attempts to teach Pamela how to play. He wearies of it claiming that Pamela can't learn because she is a girl.

Later, the reader sees Hugh speaking animatedly with the visiting women, even flirting with them. Sylvie begins to wonder at how at ease he is around other women. The reader also sees that Ursula and Pamela share a room with Mrs. Glover and Bridget, which is at odds with the image of the landed gentry. To have children sleeping with the help would have been scandalous had it been a known factor.

One evening after her friends have left, she takes the children and Bridget to see the harvest being brought in by Mrs. Glover's son, George. They pack a picnic and set off across the fields to get there. Once there, they watch the harvest and meet George. Sylvie notices and is attracted to the down to earth goodness of the man, and that he is a better specimen physically than Hugh. Bridget and Sylvie discuss Jews and the Jewish as they watch the work being done, having recalled that some of the neighboring farms were owned by Jews.

Later, Sylvie looks around for a discreet place to breastfeed the baby. She finds a small copse of trees and bushes and goes behind there to feed the child. Before she's been there very long someone comes crashing towards her in the underbrush. George emerges from the undergrowth and is shocked to see her there, her breast exposed. He stands there gazing at her longer than he should, and then hurriedly turns away. They don't speak of it.

Later that day after returning, Ursula overhears a conversation between her parents as they discuss Maurice's tutor, Mr. Cole, who is Jewish. Sylvie says that she'd like to reward him for putting up with Maurice but that she's unsure of what to give him, not wanting to offend. Hugh tells her that Cole doesn't practice Judaism.

An incident between Pamela and Maurice is chronicled, in that Pamela had found a bird's nest, shown it to Maurice, who'd taken the eggs and smashed them on a stone, laughing while he did it. He knows that if Pamela tells their mother that he'll get in trouble since he's been told that he should nurture nature. So, when Pamela hits him in the head with a stone, he lies about it and tells his mother that he just fell down. Since he's nine years old and allowed to roam the estate at will, often with other little boys his age, Sylvie doesn't question it.

Pamela and Ursula were given two baby rabbits by George when they visited the farm the day before. When they'd come home they'd created a nest for them out in the garden. However, when they come out the next morning to see their babies, all that is left is a tuft of hair. The foxes have eaten them. Later that night Sylvie makes love to Hugh, but the entire time she is thinking of George. Hugh mentions afterward that she was more 'lively' than she's been before.



January 1915

War has reached Sylvie's idyllic surroundings and Hugh has gone off to fight in World War I. The women have taken to knitting all sorts of clothing items for the war effort, though most of what they knit isn't the best quality in the world. At Christmas they send a care package to Hugh, but they don't know if it reached them or not. Izzie, Hugh's sister, visits and declares that she's going to join the war effort to which Sylvie declares that she has no viable skills with which to assist. Bridget has fallen in love and her boyfriend, Sam, who has gone to war as well. She calls him an 'old boot', but laughs every time she says it.

By New Years all of the children have come down with Chicken Pox. This is enough to drive Izzie away. Most of them recover quickly, except for Maurice. His departure back to boarding school is delayed because of it, a fact that almost all of them regret. Maurice has taken to terrorizing the girls, taking their toys and destroying or hiding them. He takes Ursula's knitting doll, Madame Solange, and throws her out of the two story window where her bedroom was. Ursula climbs out onto the roof to try and rescue her doll, and falls. Darkness descends.

Analysis

Four Seasons

February 11 1910

One of the more interesting things that comes out in this chapter is Sylvie's outlook on death. When Mrs. Glover asks her about the near death incident with the child, Sylvie thinks to herself that there is such a fine line between living and dying. When her father died no one had heard him and he had simply died without fuss or bother. Later, she will remark on the death of her mother, Lottie, who went downhill sharply after her husband's death. Consumption took her mother, and Sylvie is grateful that her mother died, relieving herself of a life that didn't seem to want her any longer. Through these musings the reader can begin to understand Sylvie's detached manner of looking at death, not as something to be feared, but as something that can be a liberator, something that leveled playing fields, and a friend.

A great deal of Sylvie's history is reviewed and replayed in this chapter, allowing the reader to see why she tries to make the most of the situation she finds herself in. The reader learns that she won out on the name of the house and grounds, despite Hugh's dislike of the name. The discussion about perspectives is also of note in this chapter. Sylvie sees the foxes as brilliant individuals, with a right to live where they live without harm. Hugh, however, sees them as Vermin. This is the first bit of foreshadowing that indicates that even in the early times between them there will be a vast difference in their views of the natural world and people, in general. It is also obvious that she still resents her fall from wealth and that even though Hugh is well off, he is not as wealthy



as Sylvie had once been. She misses the trips abroad and the luxury furniture and items that she remembers from her childhood.

The interaction between Mrs. Glover and Sylvie is an interesting one, too. Mrs. Glover works for Sylvie, but in many ways it is Sylvie who is hesitant to call the shots. She allows Mrs. Glover to set the tone, decide the menus, and run the house. She overlooks the under-cooked food and that laziness. At first she rationalizes that Glover is better than their previous Cook who'd burnt everything. In her mind, Sylvie still calls Glover, Cook, just as she did her childhood maid and cook. When Glover brings a small snowdrop flower in with the breakfast tray, Sylvie claims it is a most heroic flower, but Mrs. Glover just looks at her like she's insane.

The baby's gender and name are finally revealed. The name Ursula, Sylvie states, means little she-bear, which is an interesting choice of names. Does she expect Ursula to be a fighter? Surely based on her struggle and will to live this may very well be a fitting name.

May 1910

The strict rules of the Victorian era are explored in the first part of this chapter as the reader sees how Adelaide, Hugh's mother, treats her only daughter, Isobel when she learns of her pregnancy. Sending Izzie off to Germany is as much to protect the family's reputation as it is to protect Isobel's.

The symbolism of the silver hare ornament is introduced into this section. The hare will appear many times more throughout the novel as successive children are born. Representing new birth, innocence, and rarity, the silver hare used to be Sylvie's when she was a child and was part of her childhood rattle. By repurposing it Sylvie has, in effect, been able to rescue some of her own idyllic childhood to share with her own children.

June 1914

Sylvie is astonished at the depth of her emotion for her children. She never knew how deeply or completely a person could love their children, and marveled that she'd never experienced it from her own parents. Her connection with Maurice has changed, however, and she is secretly glad that he will be leaving to go to boarding school in the fall as she is completely at a loss as to how to deal with a child that only wants to destroy those things that are weaker than himself. Though she has tried to change him, he is as stubborn and spoiled as he was when he was born.

Ursula meets death once more in the surf. The author uses the same metaphor as before, which is that of a caged bird fluttering helplessly underneath the waves. This is meant to represent her fluttering body in the waves as well as the fluttering of her heart. Just as in the first chapter where the infant died, here, too, the author talks about a bird dropping from the sky.

Snow



When Bridget comes to take away Sylvie's breakfast tray, she asks the girl to leave the snowdrop in the room. The flower, having been brought in by Mrs. Glover in the preceding chapter, represents Ursula. By asking Bridget to leave it with her, she is also showing that she deeply wants the child to remain there, safe with her. In the Victorian era, most babies were relegated to a wet nurse and a nursery. Ursula can't bear to part with her child and so she nurses the child, herself. Something that she obviously didn't do with the other children, based on Glover's reaction.

War

June 1914

This chapter is titled War but war hasn't officially broken out in Europe, yet. But there is a war going on, though subtly. First, there is the obvious war between Sylvie and Hugh. When they greet one another it is obvious that neither one respects or loves the other. That Hugh doesn't care about the fact that Sylvie doesn't like surprises, or Hugh doesn't like Sylvie's greeting, indicates that there's is a marriage of duty and little more. Death, it would seem, has attempted to take Sylvie's girls once more. But for the intervention of Mr. Winton, Ursula's check would have been cashed.

July 1914

In this chapter Sylvie is once again reminded of a life that she might have had but for the death of her father. Her friends come to see the baby, but in the end, the result is that their visit leaves Sylvie both stubbornly proud of her children and the life she's managed to secure for herself, and alternately despondent because she is not able to travel and see the world. She longs for the freedom that she believes the other women have. She is at war with herself, then.

Sylvie takes the children to see the harvest comes in and finds herself drawn to George, Mrs. Glover's son, who is the farm's foreman. He gives the girls two baby rabbits that had been abandoned in the field to take home. The girls are ecstatic until they find the rabbits gone in the morning, most likely eaten by a fox. This represents the stealing of innocence, and may be a bit of foreshadowing on the part of the author.

January 1915

The author offers a bit of foreshadowing in this chapter with the inclusion of the imagery of Hugh's wartime letters home to that of a brittle fall leaf. The symbolism of birds is introduced again as the author states that the scars on Maurice's face looked like a bird had been pecking him. Likewise, when Ursula climbs out onto the rooftop to find Madame Solange and falls, the author says that the 'wings' of night close around her.

Discussion Question 1

What is Sylvie's perspective on Death?



Discussion Question 2

Which incident seems to suggest that Sylvie's ideas about marriage may be challenged?

Discussion Question 3

What does Sylvie resent about Hugh as a banker?

Vocabulary

vanquished, newfangled, aversion, trampled, devilled, portraitist, cognac, idly, genteel, consumption, bourgeois, growlery, threshold, swath



Snow, War, Armistice

Summary

Snow

Feb 11 1910

This short chapter focuses primarily on Dr. Fellowes and his perspective on life. He sees everything and everyone as only a biological manifestation of parts. As he eating a bite of supper in the kitchen after delivering Sylvie's baby, he thinks about a suckling pig that he'd pointed out to someone earlier in the day for slaughter. He is shown to be a man without any feeling for the people he treats or the life that is around him. He uses it as he can, which is shown in his imaginings about Bridget as she takes him to his drafty bedroom. As he falls asleep he wonders at the name of the manor, Fox Corner, and finds it appalling since he is, by nature, a huntsman.

War

January 20 1915

Time skips forward again, and this time Ursula has opted NOT to climb out onto the rooftop to rescue her doll. Later, Pamela rescues it for her. Later, while having tea the children discuss the rumor that Germans ate babies. Pamela has overheard some adults speaking about it and thinks she has something to tell the other children. She is certain that they eat dead Belgian babies.

Later, at dinner, the reader learns that Sylvie has taken to keeping chickens in a coop on their property. Most meals involved chicken or eggs in some form or another, as a way to supplement their wartime rations. Maurice taunts the girls telling them that the chicken they are eating is one of their favorites, but Sylvie lies and says that it isn't. A telegram comes for Bridget telling her that Sam has been killed in the war.

Armistice

June 1918

It is Teddy's birthday and they are planning a surprise birthday. Sylvie has turned her hand to gardening and, as a result, they've had a bumper crop of berries. She has also decided to start growing 'real' vegetables, but Mrs. Glover tells her that it is more difficult. She had hoped to bring back their gardener but for some reason he's decided not to come back, though he continues to garden at the next door estate. A man named Clarence Dodds, who was a war buddy of Sam's, has taken to gardening. He has returned from the war horribly disfigured and wears a mask over half of his face. Sylvie first saw him when the mask wasn't covering all of the injury and before she could stop



herself screamed impolitely. He took it in stride however, and how helps them with the garden.

Bridget starts dating Clarence and after a few months they decide to get married. Neither of them have the money for a ring so Sylvie gives them a ring that she says is 'just a trinket' but in reality it was a ring that Hugh gave her just after Pamela was born. To Sylvie, it means little to her.

November 11 1918

The girls are excited because a new family has moved next door and they have five girls, many of them close in age to Pamela and Ursula. Mrs. Glover's son, George, was wounded and is convalescing in a neighboring township. Mrs. Glover had gone to see her son but reported back to Sylvie that he was different, changed. Bridget and her fiancé, Clarence Dodds, go into London to take part in the Victory celebrations. They return later that night exhilarated. Ursula comes down with a cold that has a high fever accompanying it. They call Dr. Fellowes.

The fever is very high and Ursula says that her mother's voice by the side of the bed sounds like bees buzzing. Then, the author writes, darkness falls. She says that it felt like an enemy at first, and then she considered it a friend.

Analysis

Feb 11 1910

This chapter illustrates one of the perspectives that was likely prevalent at the turn of the century. Science and industry were revered and other matters such as social conscious and self-development were scarcely mentioned. He is not given to musing about the future, thinks little of the past, and lives in each moment for what it is worth.

The author offers the juxtaposition of the suckling pig to Sylvie's newborn child, whom he says he rescued from the brink of death with a snip of his scissors. Comparing an animal, whose reputation is that of filth and whose sole purpose is for consumption by humans, is jarring and disconcerting. The fat that he feels that he, alone, saved the child from death, shows that he considers himself in control of the fate of his patients.

War

January 20 1915

The focus of war in this chapter is more subtle than World War I. Here it is the war between siblings, and the war against poverty as supplies become less and less due to the actual war. Maurice is seen to be the aggressor in all things, while Pamela attempts to be the mediator between them all. Ursula simply tries to stay away from him whenever possible. Maurice seems to delight in finding the most horrifying descriptions



of things, calling jello and pudding, dead babies, as well as taunting the girls about the likelihood that their favorite chicken Henrietta has been butchered.

In contrast and as Sylvie believes she's reached her limit with the children and their war games, the telegram arrives indicating that the 'real' war has claimed another life, and that the love that Bridget had hoped to share with him will not happen. What is interesting to note is that it is Pamela who has overheard the conversation between Sylvie and Izzie about the Germans eating Belgian babies. Sylvie was quick to tell Izzie and to reassure Pamela that it was not true in the least she is sure. However, Pamela doesn't believe her and declares that it is true.

Armistice

June 1918

Interestingly, Ursula mentions that Pamela is able to keep events in a straight line in her mind, whereas Ursula's memories were not linear. This is a direct correlation with the order in which the book is told, in a non-linear fashion. Bridget is going on with her life and readily accepts Sylvie's generosity with the gift of the ring. What is telling, here, is that the ring means very little to Sylvie and though she tells Bridget that it cost very little and 'isn't worth much', in reality she recalls that Hugh spared no expense buying it for her. What this shows the reader is that Sylvie has no sense of the cost of things and can easily give away things that are valuable. Also, it shows that she does not place value on many of the things that Hugh has given her over the years.

November 11 1918

This chapter demonstrates the theme of War in that it shows that even in the aftermath of war, there is devastation. This is evident in Mrs. Glover's son, George, having to recuperate away from home and the fact that because of what he has experienced, is dramatically changed. Clarence Dodds, Bridget's soon to be husband, has been physically damaged by the war, having lost half of his face.

Additionally, there is the juxtaposition of 'life going on' with the discovery of the five girls living next door. The reader also sees that Sylvie's perspectives on how the 'lady of the manor' and the 'servants' should interact. For the most part, she's in the kitchen or outdoors with them since the war began. The symbolism of wings occurs again in this chapter, just as Ursula succumbs to the fever, likening her mother's voice to a buzzing bee.

Also, the theme of Death, is also touched upon lightly in this chapter, having Ursula being initially afraid of it, and then, embracing it. Since this chapter has also been about the end of the war, this can also be related to how the soldiers who fell on the battlefield may have felt. In her own way, it is Ursula's own type of armistice.



Discussion Question 1

What is the character of Dr. Fellowes like?

Discussion Question 2

How is the theme of Life and Death touched upon in the section titled, November 11 1918?

Discussion Question 3

What details combine to give the reader a view of Sylvie and Hugh's marriage?

Vocabulary

drizzle, hedge, glimpse, stickler, propriety, sherry, jubilation, pagan, disinclined, puttees, giddy, influenza, high jinks, meringue



Snow, Armistice, Snow

Summary

Snow

February 11 1910

This chapter leaps backward in time to just after Ursula's birth. The doctor is wakened in the middle of the night by Mrs. Glover who tells the doctor that he's needed at a farm.

Armistice

November 12 1918

Ursula is awakened by noises downstairs in the kitchen. It is the evening of the Victory celebration in London and Bridget and Clarence have returned. Ursula starts to waken Pamela to tell her that they have come back, but all of a sudden she feels a sense of foreboding, as if something bad were about to happen. She decides against waking her sister, and instead pulls the cover over her head to hide from what is about to come.

Bridget becomes very ill and Sylvie tells Mrs. Glover to keep the children home and to send for Dr. Fellowes. Mrs. Glover just thinks that Bridget is hung over from too much alcohol at the parade in London. Sylvie becomes stern and tells her that Bridget's illness is NOT a hangover.

The girls and Teddy are placed in Mrs. Glover's care who sets them to practicing their schoolwork. The butcher's boy, Freddy, arrives with a package of tripe. Mrs. Glover gives him a roll from the cake tin. With everyone's attention diverted, Teddy disappears. Ursula is sent to find him. About that time Dr. Fellowes arrives to see Bridget. Ursula looks everywhere for Teddy, then decides to try the attic. Again, she is hit with a sense of foreboding.

She finally finds him in Bridget's room. He is sitting on Bridget's bed with his airplane. The author's description of Bridget allows the reader to understand that Bridget is dead, but the children, without any experience with death, have no idea that she is already gone. Finally, it seems to dawn on Ursula that she is dead and she urges Teddy to get off the bed. Sylvie and Dr. Fellowes enter and Sylvie immediately drags the children from the room.

Later, Sylvie remarks that Teddy's skin is the same color as Bridget's had been. The doctor unemotionally tells Sylvie to 'pray' as there's nothing he can do for her. She has a particularly nasty strain of influenza. Sylvie starts to tell him that she doesn't believe in God, but stops herself. However, if it would help Teddy, then she's willing to try it. It doesn't work. Teddy dies. Dr. Fellowes seems irritated at Sylvie's howls of grief. Hours later, Ursula sees the 'black wings of the bat' close around her. She dies, too.



November 11 1918

The time frame for this takes place before Bridget and Clarence return from London. Having been hit with another one of her 'bad feelings' Ursula writes a note and tapes it to the door for Bridget. Pretending to be her mother, she writes out a note to Bridget telling her to stay at Mrs. Dodd's home that night upon their return. The next morning, Bridget isn't in the house and Sylvie confronts Ursula about locking her out and leaving a note on the door.

Unfortunately, Ursula learns that Sylvie has sent Pamela to Mrs. Dodd's house to bring Bridget home. Ursula is terrified and runs all the way to Mrs. Dodd's. She meets them on the road and throws herself into Pamela's arms. Bridget complains of a headache. Darkness soon fell again, the author writes.

Snow

February 11 1910

The timeline for this section is shortly after the doctor has departed to help the farmer trampled by a bull, only hours after Sylvie has given birth. Bridget and Mrs. Glover discuss the family and whether Sylvie should have more children. Bridget thinks she should stop at these three, but Mrs. Glover thinks it is silly to think that she will, especially since the Todds can afford to have them. Great detail is given to the fixing of Mrs. Todd's breakfast of milk soaked kidneys. Mrs. Glover cooks them, then asks Bridget to go and find a flower to put on the tray. Bridget looks at her as if she's crazy as there are several feet of snow on the ground.

Analysis

Snow

February 11 1910

This chapter is two pages long, however, it furthers the character of the doctor. What the reader can determine is that Mrs. Glover doesn't care for him anymore than anyone else does in the house. Nonetheless, she is there to give him the message, rather joyfully, and to send him on his way.

Armistice

November 12 1918

This chapter demonstrates the theme of Loss as Sylvie deals with the death of two of her children, and one of her most trusted maids (and friend). Of note is the fact that Teddy is so innocent that he doesn't understand the Bridget is dead; he doesn't recognize death when it arrives. Ursula doesn't either at first, but then it dawns on her,



even though she is four or five years old. She wants to get Teddy away from its embraces. But, of course, it is too late for either of them, as they've also been infected.

Dr. Fellowes serves as the 'reality' check throughout the novel, and in this chapter he is at his finest. A mother has lost two of her youngest children and he's irritated at her wailing. He has no compassion, and even less tolerance for something beyond his control. This is the same indifference he exhibited when the children were born, too. He simply does not see death or life as consequential. They just exist and there's nothing more. This fatalistic outlook and perspective is why no one really likes the Doctor. They need him, just as they need reality, but they don't want to be reminded of it. They don't like 'reality's visits' and try to send him out of the door as fast as they possibly can.

Once again, death and the darkness are likened to a bat and its wings, as Ursula dies. She calls the congestion in her chest a 'yellow custard', which is a jarring image against what is an impending death. Custard is thick and sweet and is a treat, and it seems that Ursula views death in a different way than the others.

Snow

February 11 1910

This chapter is quite short, but it shows a great deal of contrast between Mrs. Glover and Bridget. Mrs. Glover is a very practical woman and things are very black and white in her world. For Bridget, a younger servant, however, things are not so cut and dried. She doesn't think that Mrs. Todd should have any more children because it is so hard on her. Mrs. Glover doesn't consider this as it is a wife's duty to have children, especially if they can afford to care for them. It is interesting to note that the breakfast that what Mrs. Glover fixes makes Bridget squeamish, indicating that Mrs. Glover's perspectives and beliefs are slightly repugnant to Bridget. Here is quite clearly a juxtaposition of the old with the new at the turn of the century. Additionally, the eating of kidneys, especially those soaked in milk, would seem to symbolize death, or eating death for new life. This would demonstrate the theme of Life and Death and how they are very entangled in everyone's life, especially Sylvie and her children.

Discussion Question 1

In the Armistice chapter, the section titled, November 12 1918, how is the theme of Loss demonstrated?

Discussion Question 2

What is the function of Dr. Fellowes literary function in the Armistice chapters?



Discussion Question 3

In November 11 1918, how is the theme of Precognition (Premonitions) demonstrated?

Vocabulary

cackle, rumbling, interrogate, dread, treacherous, escapade, heroic, staggered, porridge, scoffed, short shrift, fretfully, indecisive, sums, blunt, wafting, advent



Armistice, Snow, Armistice

Summary

Armistice

November 11 1918

In this version of the time and date, Bridget isn't able to go to the Victory celebration in London because she's sprained her ankle. She says that the unseen hands of a 'ghost child' pushed her up the step as she was going into the kitchen and she went down. Sylvie instantly suspects not a ghost child, but a very real child: Ursula. Mrs. Glover tells Bridget that this injury puts an end to her 'high jinks' in London, but Bridget is stubborn and refuses to cancel. She goes, becomes infected, and things turn out as they did several times before. Death follows.

Snow

February 11 1910

It is the same day as Ursula's birth, this chapter moving backward in time. It is five o'clock in the morning. Sylvie hears the newborn, Ursula, mewling in the cradle and goes to get her. As she does she hears someone coming up the drive. It is George Glover astride one of his great plow horses. She likens him to a knight of yore, and then chastises herself for thinking that way. She puts the babe to her breast and finds herself slightly annoyed that the baby isn't good at nursing just yet. She wonders about her own breakfast.

Armistice

November 11 1918

The time frame for this takes place before Bridget and Clarence return from London. Having been hit with another one of her 'bad feelings' Ursula writes a note and tapes it to the door for Bridget. Pretending to be her mother, she writes out a note to Bridget telling her to stay at Mrs. Dodd's home that night upon their return. The next morning, Bridget isn't in the house and Sylvie confronts Ursula about locking her out and leaving a note on the door.

Unfortunately, Ursula learns that Sylvie has sent Pamela to Mrs. Dodd's house to bring Bridget home. Ursula is terrified and runs all the way to Mrs. Dodd's. She meets them on the road and throws herself into Pamela's arms. Bridget complains of a headache. Darkness soon fell again, the author writes.



Analysis

Armistice

November 11 1918

This is an interesting chapter, as the reader sees Ursula taking action based on one of her premonitions. The theme of Premonitions is most evident in this chapter as Ursula tries to prevent the event that she fears will come if Bridget were to be let into the house. However, the theme of Death is also apparent in that death could not be stopped. In the end, while it isn't Teddy and Ursula who die, two people DO end up dying: Pamela and Bridget. This indicates that death comes and makes an accounting for the lives and the timeline that exists for every human being. A balance must be kept. In disrupting that timeline, Ursula still ends up paying the price because two people she cared very much for ended up dying.

Ursula innately understands something that only Sylvie guesses at. She understands death and recognizes it when it approaches. She is nearly frantic when the feeling washes over her, and as a result she incurs her mother's wrath the next morning when it is discovered what she's done. Without thinking, Sylvie sends Pamela to her own death, essentially.

Snow

February 11 1910

This chapter is quite short, but serves to act as an indication of how immature and self-serving Sylvie still is at this point in her life. As compared to other chapters that take place four years in the future, this Sylvie still wonders about her own creature comforts, has fantasies about George, and drowsily contemplates poetry. Compared to the later version of Sylvie, this version is shallow and not the strong Sylvie that must bear great loss, who must live in a loveless marriage, and contend with War and its aftermath.

Armistice

November 11 1918

This chapter demonstrates the theme of Loss as Sylvie deals with the death of two of her children, and one of her most trusted maids (and friend). Of note is the fact that Teddy is so innocent that he doesn't understand the Bridget is dead; he doesn't recognize death when it arrives. Ursula doesn't either at first, but then it dawns on her, even though she is four or five years old. She wants to get Teddy away from its embraces. But, of course, it is too late for either of them, as they've also been infected.

Dr. Fellowes serves as the 'reality' check throughout the novel, and in this chapter he is at his finest. A mother has lost two of her youngest children and he's irritated at her wailing. He has no compassion, and even less tolerance for something beyond his



control. This is the same indifference he exhibited when the children were born, too. He simply does not see death or life as consequential. They just exist and there's nothing more. This fatalistic outlook and perspective is why no one really likes the Doctor. They need him, just as they need reality, but they don't want to be reminded of it. They don't like 'reality's visits' and try to send him out of the door as fast as they possibly can.

Once again, death and the darkness are likened to a bat and its wings, as Ursula dies. She calls the congestion in her chest a 'yellow custard', which is a jarring image against what is an impending death. Custard is thick and sweet and is a treat, and it seems that Ursula views death in a different way than the others.

Discussion Question 1

What is Dr. Fellowe's literary function in all of the instances where he appears?

Discussion Question 2

Why does the author focus on Sylvie's breakfast of Kidneys soaked in milk?

Discussion Question 3

What is the symbolism of 'bats' wings?

Vocabulary

inexplicable, overwhelmed, mantelpiece, disconcerting, creditors, grate, mewling, gingerly, brutal, shaft, nicker, shires, hallucinate, wet-nursing



Peace, Snow, Like a Fox in a Hole

Summary

Peace

February 1947

This jumps forward significantly to find Ursula grown and living on her own in London. It is after the war and things are quite austere in London. Ursula had been sharing an apartment with a friend named Millie, but Millie had become a 'war bride' and moved away to America. The apartment had been bombed out anyway, so Ursula found an apartment that hadn't sustained too much damage. She hates that it isn't as good as the last one, and she is lonely without Millie, but it is what she has. Her sister, Pammy, sends her a care package with fresh vegetables and eggs from back home. She alludes to the fact that there is a small little parcel in the cellar at Argyll Road and that it depresses her to think about it. Nothing more is offered to indicate what that might have been.

The reader also learns that besides her brother Teddy, there was possibly one more addition to the family. His name is Jimmy. The reader also learns that Sylvie, on VE day, laid down on Teddy's old bed and took a bottle of sleeping pills and killed herself. She's managed to rescue Sylvie's old golden carriage clock from her former home. Her father, also, died asleep in his garden, Ursula shares. She works in an office where they compile statistics and tallies from the war. One of the jobs she has had to do is compile the lists of the dead and missing from the concentration camps. At the end of the chapter, she climbs into bed with a bottle of whiskey and tries to drown her sorrow at all of the loss that surrounds her. She briefly contemplates her own death, by gassing, and goes to sleep, very cold, and very tired. The author writes that darkness was beginning to fall.

Snow

February 11 1910

In this version of Ursula's birth, she is suffocated by Mrs. Glover's cat, Queenie, who jumps into the basinet and takes a nap on top of the baby, smothering her. As if she knew what to do Sylvie frantically places her mouth over the baby's face and mouth and blows, reviving her. Dr. Fellowes later tells her that he is doubtful that anyone could revive someone using this method.

Sylvie tells Bridget to tell Mrs. Glover that the cat is to be sent off, or killed, or both. Mrs. Glover tells Bridget that she will not do any such thing. The chapter cuts to the Blue Lion pub where Mrs. Haddock, the midwife, has taken refuge from the winter storm. She quietly and happily drinks rum and listens to music.



Like a Fox in a Hole

September 1923

Ursula is thirteen years old and her Aunt Izzie has taken her to a restaurant. She asks if Ursula is still seeing a Dr. Kellet. She tells her Aunt that she is cured and has been for more than a year. The reader learns that Izzie is writing a column about being a modern day spinster for a newspaper. She's bobbed her hair and considers herself a bohemian and a feminist. She writes under the pen name of Delphine Fox. Hugh and Sylvie both find her appalling and ridiculous. This inspired Pamela to go against her father's wishes and get her hair bobbed as well.

During her visit with her Aunt, as they are driving around London in Izzie's new car, Ursula sees her mother dressed very nicely and in the company of an elegantly dressed man. Ursula doesn't know what to make of it, and so she doesn't mention it to anyone. Her Aunt clearly never saw it.

Sylvie still harbors bad feelings towards Izzie for giving up her child for adoption. She muses that the child would be about Ursula's age, though most likely living in Germany.

The reader learns that Ursula was sent to see Dr. Kellet because of her bouts of déjà vu. She says that she's mostly cured. This is what she tells everyone but in reality she's not sure that it's gone. She says that the 'feelings' that she gets are like echoes cascading. Dr. Kellet, if anything, has taught Ursula to be more precise with her language, and has taught her, though inadvertently, to disguise her premonitions. She misses the meetings with Dr. Kellet as it was a grown up that gave her his full attention. At their house there are so many children that Ursula feels like the 'odd man out' most of the time. Dr. Kellet is the first to introduce Ursula to the idea of reincarnation. In this timeline the reader learns that Bridget and the Todd family all escaped having influenza, but that Clarence Dodds died from it shortly after returning from the celebration of Armistice Day in London.

Mrs. Glover has moved out of the house and rents a cottage in the village so she can care for George, who is mostly a vegetable and needs constant care.

December 1923

It is Christmastime and the children are gathering and creating decorations for the celebration. Ursula and Teddy take their dog, Trixie, out into the woods looking for holly and mistletoe when Trixie comes across something dead. When the kids arrive they can only see the scant outline of a human body. Teddy runs back to the house for help. The dead body belonged to a young girl of about eight years old. Her teeth had been smashed in prior to death. No one had reported a missing child and it is thought that perhaps she was a gypsy's child. A lady in the town, Lady Daunt, offered to let the local police keep the girl's body in her ice house. When it came time to remove the body, Lady Daunt had decorated it with flowers and created a shrine. Having lost three sons in the war and a daughter in infancy, it was thought that she had gone out of her mind. No one ever identified the girl nor was the murderer caught. There were rumors that



'terrible things' had been done to the child. The town names her Angela and buries her with full rights in the churchyard. Teddy has nightmares for weeks after the discovery of the body. Ursula doesn't.

February 11 1926

It is Ursula's sixteenth birthday and Maurice has returned from University with a couple of his friends. He hadn't particularly recalled that it was his sister's birthday, but is happy for the celebration all the same. He hasn't gotten any better with age and though Ursula states that most girls found him attractive, but once they got to know him, ran away just as fast. His friends Gilbert and Howard (from America) are more pleasant to be around. The next door neighbor girl, Millie, who is Ursula's best friend comes for the party. The rest of the sisters from next door come around later on.

Izzie blows into Fox Corner in a whirlwind of furs and packages for Ursula. There are a number of inappropriate gifts for Ursula, such as negligée and champagne, which are commandeered by her parents. Lastly, there is a gift for Teddy, which shocks everyone. It is the first copy of Izzie's book, *The Adventures of Augustus*. She tells Teddy that she based the character on him. He is appalled and starts pointing out all of the differences. Later they go to the foot of the hill to see Izzie's new car. Ursula and Millie walk back together, and Millie goes home. On her way back to the house she runs into Howard the American. Ursula is stricken at how nice he is. She remarks that she's cold and he tells her he can warm her up, then grabs her and gives her a very intimate kiss. He leaves her standing there confused and dazed.

May 1926

This chapter shows Pamela's disappointment at having failed her college entrance exam. She wants to be a scientist, but Sylvie attempts to talk her out of it. She says that being a wife and a mother is the highest calling for a woman, which Pamela scoffs at. Sylvie says that all science ever did for people was make better weapons for mass destruction.

The reader learns that Trixie has passed away and there is a new dog, a Westie, named Jock. He is a gift from Izzie and isn't the breed of dog either of them would have chosen. They seem to be doing very well financially and Hugh has bought Pamela a car.

Howard (Howie) returns to visit during breaks in school with Maurice. Ursula is glad to see him but realizes that he doesn't even remember her name. This particular visit Maurice and Howard are on their way to London to help in the workers' strike by taking up municipal jobs like running trains and driving buses.

Later that day as Ursula is going up to her room Howie catches her on the landing and rapes her, backing her against the wall and holding his hand over her mouth. She doesn't even know what has happened, though she struggles and tries to get free, she can't. After he is finished with her he acts as if she arranged the whole chance meeting on the stairs. She can't bring herself to tell her parents what has just happened. She



somehow reasons that maybe she asked for it without knowing. She is disappointed in 'love' and thinks that the act of romantic love must only be in books.

Pamela is accepted into Leeds to study Chemistry and is ecstatic. Ursula begins to feel queasy, but Sylvie says it must be a summer cold. It is Maurice, who has returned home to visit that notices that Ursula is 'filling out'. He calls her a heifer. Ursula begins to fear that something is amiss and sneaks over to her friend's house to look in an encyclopedia about sexual reproduction. She does the math and figures that she must be carrying Howie's child.

She goes down to the train station, thinking to throw herself under the train when Fred Smith, a childhood friend who works on the trains shows up. He offers to give her a free ride, and she gets on board. She thinks she will go to London and lose herself there. She wanders around in London for most of the day, then ends up at Izzie's posh new manor house. Izzie calls her parents and makes excuses, then takes her to an abortion doctor who performs surgery and removes the fetus. The next thing Ursula knows, she's waking up in Izzie's car on the way home. Ursula does not know that she had an abortion, as she believes that the baby was born alive and given to a good family like Izzie had done when she was younger.

The abortion causes an infection and, afraid of what might happen, Izzie calls Hugh and Sylvie to come right away. They take Ursula to a hospital where she almost dies. Her father stays with her the entire night and when Ursula wakes, at last, it is his kind face that she sees.

August 1926

Rather than return to her senior year in school the family decides she can study shorthand at home. Sylvie still is cold and distant towards Ursula. The rest of the staff have been told that Ursula had contracted a horrible disease that she almost died from in London, which is why the family went to her side for at least a week. Pamela is the only one who knows the whole truth about what Howie did to her, aside from Izzie. Hugh doesn't blame his daughter at all and chastises his wife for being so judgmental. She asks her mother if she might go back to seeing Dr. Kellet, but her mother tells her that he is most likely retired.

At dinner that night Major Shawcross, their neighbor comes by, distressed because Nancy, his daughter, is missing. She'd gone looking for leaves for her scrapbook and had not returned for dinner. They find Nancy, who has been murdered and stuffed into a cattle trough. She was 'interfered' with, says Hugh. Sylvie says that Nancy's death is Mrs. Shawcross's fault for not keeping a better eye on her daughters. Hugh is appalled at her lack of compassion.

Pamela leaves for college and Ursula goes by train to a private secretarial college. The instructor continues to sexually harass her by stroking her neck as he walks past, or petting the back of her sweater while she is working. Ursula wonders if she is somehow doing something to warrant the unwanted attentions by bad men.



June 1932

Pamela is getting married in this chapter to a boy that Sylvie does not approve of. He is a doctor, but Sylvie says that it doesn't matter what he does for a living, but that his family were 'inferior'. Hugh chastises Sylvie and reminds her of her own humble fall from grace. Hugh goes on to say that he rather likes Howard's family, especially his mother, Olive, who speaks her mind and says what she means.

Ursula has moved out of the house and lives in London with a roommate who is seldom there. For Ursula it is a freedom that she relishes. However, it does dawn on her that she really doesn't have any close friends. She begins to drink. Pamela gets married and settles into wedded bliss.

One night on the way home from work, her arms loaded with groceries, Ursula is bowled over by a man in a hurry. He turns back to help her to her feet. Three months later she marries Derek Oliphant. He is a school teacher at a boys school. All of her family are excited for her, except Sylvie, who tells her daughter that it is too easy to mistake gratitude for love. Just as suddenly as she'd begun to drink, Ursula stops.

Ursula and Derek are married by a Justice of the Peace in the register's office. She tells Pamela that neither she nor Derek wanted a big fuss and the only people invited were Sylvie, Hugh and his mother. After the wedding at the reception, Sylvie continues to register her disdain for the entire proceeding by telling Ursula the old idiom that to marry in haste was to repent at leisure. Later in the bathroom she asks Ursula if Derek is okay with her not being 'intact'. Ursula ignores her and Sylvie says that he wouldn't be the first bridegroom to be fooled on his wedding night.

Derek changes almost immediately after the wedding. On their honeymoon he is rough and crude, demeaning, and brusque. When they return to the house that they've bought, she finds that he has already decorated it to his tastes and won't abide her changing anything. He demands that she keep everything spotless and in its place. Sexual relations between them are very one sided as well.

To alleviate the boredom of housework, Ursula joins a tennis club. Derek is furious that she hadn't asked his permission. When they visit Derek's mother Ursula has some time to speak alone with Mrs. Oliphant and learns that a great deal of Derek's background that he's told her is false. His father didn't die, Derek didn't have a sister, and he didn't almost drown when he was a young boy. He also refuses to allow Ursula to have any of her family over to visit.

Finally, Pamela tells Ursula that she is coming to visit and won't take no for an answer. Later that evening she tells Derek that her sister will be visiting. At breakfast the next morning nothing Ursula does is right and Derek beats her, claiming that the egg isn't cooked right. She was made to quit going to the tennis club and Derek is angry all of the time. Her life is miserable. Her sister visits and they manage to put on a good face for her, congratulating her on the impending birth of her first child. After she leaves things become even more unbearable for Ursula.



After a sporting event at Derek's school, Ursula travels home alone and finally decides to go into Derek's study. There she discovers that he never had any money left to him from his father, and that his 'book' that he supposedly was working on never existed. She also finds multiple letters from creditors. When he walks in the door and catches her in his study he beats her senseless and she loses consciousness. She wakes up the next morning on the floor.

She gets her coat, takes some money from Derek's coat, and leaves. She flees to London, and to Izzie. Her Aunt's dentist fixes the broken teeth, and slowly Ursula heals. Teddy tracks her down and comes to visit her. They have a great afternoon, but it doesn't last. Derek comes to the door and immediately attacks Ursula accusing her of whoring around with Teddy (whom he doesn't recognize). She loses consciousness, worried about Teddy and Derek, who have begun to fight. Darkness falls.

February 11, 1926

This timeline takes place during Ursula's sixteenth birthday, but is a better version. In this version, instead of standing there in shock when Howie kisses her, she slugs him and almost knocks him down. Ironically, he says that all he wanted was a kiss and it wasn't like he was going to rape her or anything. As the reader knows, that's exactly what he had in mind. This version of Ursula doesn't let it happen.

August 1926

In this timeline Sylvie is still the loving mother to Ursula. It is a hot summer afternoon and Ursula is sitting under a tree in the yard reading a book. Ursula comes and tells her that it is time for tea and that Aunt Izzie has arrived. They talk for a while, discussing whether Ursula should go to University or not. Sylvie thinks that University doesn't teach a woman how to be a wife or a mother. Ursula offers that maybe she doesn't want those things. Sylvie tells her she is silly. Izzie's visit isn't social, she wants to adopt Jimmy. Sylvie almost faints.

Later, when Ursula is out walking in the garden, in one of Sylvie's favorite hideaways, she is suddenly overcome by one of her feelings of utter dread. She runs away from the house, the railway station in her mind. When she gets there Fred Smith is there, but all looks well. On her way back to her house she sees Nancy Shawcross picking up leaves for her scrapbook. All of a sudden Ursula 'feels' that she should walk with Nancy. A man passes them by, then leaves them alone.

Analysis

Peace

February 1947

The title of this section is misleading and ironic since, for Ursula, there is very little peace. She's alone in London, her best friend having left, and most of her family dead



or living very far away. She works for the war offices or some governmental office where she has to count and reduce to statistics all of the dead and missing people from the war. A depressing job in itself, her existence outside of the office isn't much better.

The imagery in this chapter is exquisite and at the same time gives the reader a deeper insight into Ursula's inner landscape. She declares early on in the chapter that she's become mean spirited and blames it on both the bloody war and the bloody peace. There is also the image of being cold and frozen, not just physically, but emotionally and spiritually. She recalls a line from a poem called, *The Eve of St. Agnes'* that talked about the effigies in the church, frozen in icy hoods and mails. This image of forever frozen and unmoving parallels how Ursula feels at this point in her life. When she unpacks the care package that her sister has sent her, the author describes it as laying everything out on the little wooden draining board like a poor man's still life.

There is also the biblical allusion to the scene of Jesus at the Well. During this time in London there was very little running water, so most municipalities had created a standpipe where people could come and fill up buckets for home use. It is during one of these trips to the standpipe that Ursula recalls the biblical tale and wonders what ever happened to the woman, since it was rumored that she had five husbands and was actually living with another man who was not her husband. Ursula thinks that maybe the woman poisoned the well. This inner monologue that she has while waiting for life sustaining water is ironic on many levels. She is speaking about death when she's about to obtain the very essence of life: water. Secondly, she takes a passage from a holy book, the Christian Bible, and twists it to something more sinister. Ursula's mind and spirit are in a very dark place.

The symbolism of the golden carriage clock that had belonged to Sylvie appears in this chapter. Representing Sylvie, herself, this is a little piece of her childhood as well as her mother that she carries with her. The entire history of the clock is one of survival and beauty in the midst of horror. The fact that it was bequeathed to Ursula is significant.

She feels like a refuge in London, and is actually asked if she was one by someone in a café at one point. She tells the kindly man that asks her that she is. This is very telling in that Ursula, as far as the reader knows at this point, chose to be in London, and could go back to Fox Corner instead of London. The reader also learns that Ursula has enough money to find a better apartment, but that Ursula just doesn't care where she is staying right now. It is clear from all of the gathered imagery, irony, and dialogue in this chapter that Ursula is in a dark and terrible place at this point in time.

Snow

February 11 1910

The author uses the imagery of a bird falling, shot from the sky, once again as an extended metaphor in this chapter. However, perhaps it is instinct, or something else, but Sylvie uses mouth to mouth resuscitation to bring Ursula back to life after the cat has smothered her. It is interesting to note that Dr. Fellowes downplays the quick



thinking and ministrations of Sylvie in saving her own child, saying that it was just good luck that the baby lived. This is, of course, ironic to the reader, who knows for a fact that it was Sylvie's quick thinking that saved Ursula.

What is interesting to note in this version of the event is that there is a cat that smothers Ursula. Since Cats are the natural enemy of Birds, and the bird metaphors seem to always involve Ursula, it can be seen that the cat was a danger to Ursula from the beginning. The midwife, whom Sylvie would have preferred to have delivered her baby, is shown to be quite content staying at the pub, and how she isn't worried at all about Sylvie or the baby.

Like A Fox in A Hole

September 1923

Of particular note is the title for this chapter. A fox in its hole is, essentially, trapped. Throughout many of the entries for this particular date, there will be moments where Ursula feels trapped.

This chapter offers the reader a social context as well as a historical one. While Sylvie and Hugh embrace the old Europe that was, or as closely as they still can, Izzie represents the new and modern movement that was evolving. She bobs her hair, lives on her own without a husband, and owns a car. She works for herself, and encourages her nieces to follow their own dreams. She's chosen Ursula to invite to her home in London because, as she says, she finds Ursula interesting with all of those funny thoughts in her head. Ironically, Izzie says 'life can be quite short now you know as she offers a 13-year-old Ursula a cigarette.

When Ursula sees her mother with another man in London, she has to take time to process what she saw and what she should do about it. She is still rather naïve when it comes to male/female relationships and so was more puzzled, than shocked, at seeing her mother.

What is most interesting about this chapter is the section that features Ursula's discussions with the psychiatrist, Dr. Kellet. Through these meetings, which went on for several years, Ursula was able to give a name to the 'echoes' that she experiences; her *déjà vu*. It is Dr. Kellet that mentions reincarnation and says that the Buddhists belief that sometimes a bad thing happens to prevent a worse thing from happening. This consoles Ursula as she did feel compelled to shove Bridget down the stairs in order to save her life. He tells her that she should become who she is, having learned what that is, now.

The theme of War is demonstrated in this chapter through various descriptions and discussions about those who survived the war with both physical and mental wounds. While driving in Izzie's car around London she'd witnessed countless amputees. The prevalence of amputees drives home the point that the war took a devastating toll on the population and that there weren't enough 'whole' men to go around to repopulate the country (according to Izzie). Secondly, on a more metaphysical level, the country



feels as if it's had its symbolic legs cut out from under it and must learn to cope with a new set of circumstances.

December 1923

The theme of Death and Life is introduced into this chapter through the discovery of a little girl's body by Ursula and Teddy. It is interesting to note that Teddy is scarred emotionally by the discovery, but Ursula is not. She views it as a sad thing, but does not allow herself to feel anything more than that, musing that death and rebirth were a constant in the world. This can be from her own understanding of her continual death and rebirth. Juxtaposed with that is the actions of Lady Daunt who becomes attached to the dead child's body, creates a shrine to death, and goes mad when they come to remove the body.

The hint that 'things' had been done to the girl only serve to create a sense of foreboding and perhaps foreshadowing that something of the same sort may befall someone else. On a deeper level it can be said that while the 'big' war has ended, there are many smaller wars occurring, still. That a certain depravity has been introduced into the world because of the war is suggested by the conversations regarding the dead child.

February 11 1926

The reader sees that Ursula and Millie's friendship has continued to bloom. Izzie hasn't changed, but is in a better financial situation with the publication of her first book. She is still very out of touch with what would be appropriate for children and this is exemplified by the gifts of champagne and lingerie. The kiss from Howard is very unexpected and shocks readers almost as much as it does Ursula, which is the point. The abrupt and invasive nature of the kiss throws Ursula off kilter for a few pages, but then she manages to come to her senses and determines that 'life must go on'.

She and Millie compare Maurice's friends to Maurice and they can't determine why or how he came to have friends that are 'regular' and affable. Maurice is still as cold and unfeeling as ever. The visit with the boys adds an additional element of unsettled energy which seems to unhinge poor Sylvie making her glad when they leave for school.

May 1926

This is a disturbing chapter as it chronicles an assault and its aftermath on Ursula by Howard, one of Maurice's friends. Ursula is shown to be quite naïve about sex and men in general. As a result she is unprepared for the advances by Howie or his violent rape. Because she's unsure of what has just happened she doesn't talk about it. Unfortunately, she begins to figure things out and realizes that she has to leave home. She feels a kinship to Izzie and hopes that she will help her out in the same manner in which Izzie, herself, was helped out when in a similar state.

It is evident from the trip to the hospital that Sylvie blames Ursula for the pregnancy, while Hugh does not. She is his daughter and he refuses to leave her side. This is a



side of Hugh that hasn't been shown before. Ursula muses when she is coming out of the pain medication that her father is a grown version of Teddy, and that in turn, one day Teddy will become like her father. She is glad, because at that moment she feels her father is the most wonderful person in the world.

Prior to her waking in the hospital she'd almost died. The author uses the symbolism of the black bat's wings unfolding. This time, Ursula does not fear them but reaches up to embrace it. However, she only loses consciousness.

Pamela and Maurice's lives have moved forward with advanced education and a first job, while Ursula is in the last year of school at home. The reader does not know what Ursula will choose to do with herself, though it is clear that Sylvie will not support anything other than becoming a wife and mother. This is ironic since Ursula becomes pregnant and her mother is the first to condemn her even though it was not Ursula's fault.

August 1926

This chapter demonstrates the theme of Life and Death in that Nancy, one of the girls that Ursula has grown up with, is found violated and dumped in an animal's trough. The loss of respect for human life is evident, but in the wake of that death is the forward momentum of both Ursula and Pamela who are working on their educations and careers.

Ursula is also having to deal with the unwanted attentions from her instructor at the secretarial college. She is very vulnerable and fragile, emotionally, and often muses about reincarnation and if it could be true. She feels on a deeper level that it must be so and wonders if she should have ended this 'trip' earlier so as to avoid dealing with her mother and the fallout resulting from Belgravia (her word for her rape and abortion).

Ursula's mother is shown to be very myopic in her views on motherhood. She now loathes her daughter who 'killed' her baby in the womb, and at the same time extends the same loathing to Mrs. Shawcross, whose daughter was abducted and murdered. Sylvie is without compassion for either Ursula or Mrs. Shawcross and blames both of them for the situation they found themselves in. Sylvie is uncompromising in her views and her judgment.

June 1932

This chapter demonstrates the theme of Loss. Not only has Ursula lost her dreams of a happy marriage and companion, but she's lost her own self-respect, beauty, and health. Her desire to have solitude but not loneliness is fulfilled in frightful fashion when she hurriedly marries Derek after only knowing him for several months. Her mother's words, "Marry in Haste, Repent in Leisure" come back to haunt at the end of the chapter. She loses her freedom, and Derek robs her of any sort of status in the community. She discovers this when she attends the sporting event at Derek's school and she sees how everyone treats him.



Ursula finally reaches her breaking point when she goes into his study and learns that everything he has ever told her has been a lie. When she reaches this point in her mind, she doesn't care what happens to her and she confronts him. Furious at being caught in his stack of lies, he becomes violent and almost kills her.

Interestingly, when she wakes up the next morning in the kitchen, she realizes that she actually wants to live...just not there. She takes some money from Derek's coat and leaves. The entire time she is making her way to the train station she is fearful that she will be caught or stopped. Luckily, she ends up at Izzie's house who welcomes Ursula with the open arms that she knew she would never be received at Fox Corner.

It is easy to see, as an outside observer, that Derek suffers from obsessive compulsive tendencies, that he's quite likely mentally disturbed in some way from the onset. Some of the ways that the author suggests that he's not quite what he pretends to be is early on when he meets Ursula's parents at Fox Corner and he misquotes Shakespeare. In fact, he is continually misquoting famous authors, but Ursula stops correcting him, fearing retribution. This is a clear indication that he doesn't have the schooling or the upbringing that he claims to have had. And, as a teacher, these sayings and education should have been quite evident.

The comparison of Pamela's marriage and married life to Ursula's is jarring. Pamela's life is full of happiness, comfort, and support, whereas Ursula's is full of pain, misery, and loneliness. Pamela has a new life beginning in her, whereas, Ursula is lucky to have escaped with her own life.

Of particular note is the fact that when Ursula runs away, she doesn't go home. She goes to her Aunt Izzie, whom everyone in the family thinks is the black sheep and bohemian. Sylvie certainly never approved of her, though Ursula always has. There is a special bond since Belgravia between Izzie and Ursula, and so, when she's once again in a bad way, it is natural that she would return to Izzie who is not judgmental and gives her the loving care that her real mother could never extend.

February 11 1926

In this very short chapter the reader sees that in this version of time Ursula thwarts the kiss and therefore, one hopes, the later rape that takes place. This one act will ripple through Ursula's life and instead of making her feel ostracized or demoralized, cut off from her family, marrying an abusive husband, and it is hoped that things will now turn out better for her.

August 1926

In this timeline things are better for Ursula and she's got her whole life ahead of her. She and her mother discuss her possible plans for the future. What is interesting to note is the comparison of Sylvie's perspective of what it means to be a woman, and Ursula's. Industrialization, World War I, have all occurred, and women are afforded more freedom than in Sylvie's earlier days.



The theme of Precognition comes into play in this section because when Ursula walks home from seeing Millie to her house Ursula has a dread feeling come over her and she begins running, ending up at the train station. All is well but the feelings of panic don't subside. When she sees Nancy, she knows what she must do...see Nancy safely home, which she does. Because she is listening to her feelings, the 'echoes' of a former timeline, the precognition has saved Nancy from a grisly death.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the themes of Loss in the section titled, Like a Fox in a Hole.

Discussion Question 2

Compare Pamela's marriage to Ursula's.

Discussion Question 3

Why is Sylvie unable to forgive or support Ursula in these timelines?

Vocabulary

enameled, vaguely, cured, scapegoat, haunch, scurried, peppering, droll, ravenous, banting, disreputable, extravagant, concomitant, embattled, drivel, plastered



A Lovely Day Tomorrow, A Lovely Day Tomorrow, A Lovely Day Tomorrow

Summary

September 2 1939

Pamela is expecting her fourth child in this chapter, and is hoping for a girl this time. She and Ursula discuss Maurice and the fact that he had two children. Pamela says that her boys didn't get along with Maurice's children because they didn't know how to play at all. They discuss Edwina, Maurice's wife. They figure she is a martyr to be his wife.

Ursula is working in London for the war office, just as she did in a previous timeline, though in much better circumstances. The instructor at Ursula's college, attempting to sexually harass the female students, is outed by Ursula and all of her classmates. Ursula earns the admiration of all of her classmates and they tell her that she's such a 'rebel'. She does well, graduates with honors, and lands a very nice job in the government where she runs her own department. She is also involved with a married man, Crighton, who is fifteen years her senior.

She and Pamela have a good visit at Pamela's house, enjoying their tea and cakes without all of Pamela's boys around (they stayed with Harold's mother). Harold arrives and says that he has heard it officially that England will be declaring war the very next day. Working in a hospital he'd been busy evacuating many of the more critical patients. Pamela supposes she will take the children and go stay with a friend away from the major cities and so forth. Ursula says that she will stay since they may need her in the Ministry where she works. She wishes that she hadn't talked herself out of purchasing the crepe de Cine tea dress that she'd seen in Kensington High Street.

November 1940

In this chapter Ursula finds herself lying in a ruined room, the smell of gas in the air. She is stunned and confused, her mind floats around all sorts of topics and lands, for the most part on a visit from her mother. They had talked about curtains and Chamberlain over a good pot of tea. Her mother had given her nice curtains. She misses Izzie who has married a famous playwright and moved to the U.S. to avoid the war. Her mind drifts over to consider all of the other occupants in her apartment, each tenant getting their fair share of discussion and description.

She muses that Pamela hadn't had a girl, she'd given birth to yet another boy. She'd given up living in the countryside with the boys and had broken down and gone to live at Fox Corner for the duration. Finally, her mind starts to clear a little and she realizes that her apartment building has been bombed. She has ended her affair with Crighton,



though he'd called it off, really, and she's dating a boy named Ralph whom she met in her German Language class.

She's fallen into a well and isn't in her apartment at all, she figures out. She remembers having gone down to the bottom floor along with the other tenants when the air raid sirens had gone off. Now, she's cold. Very cold. Everyone else seems to be gone somewhere. Mrs. Appleyard, her next door neighbor with a loud baby, finds her and frantically screams that she can't find her baby. Then, some things begin to come into focus. The robe that was hanging by the door wasn't a robe at all, but the headless and lifeless body of one of the tenants. She drifts out of consciousness and is roused when a man comes to rescue her. She is out of her mind and tries to tell them to go find Mrs. Appleyard's baby. They misunderstand her and think she's saying that her name is Susie and that she has a baby. She's too injured to argue with them. She is very cold and suddenly, the darkness falls.

A Lovely Day Tomorrow

September 2 1939

In this reset timeline, Ursula has not talked herself out of purchasing the crepe de Chine tea dress and wears it to visit with Pamela. She wonders if at age thirty she's too old to have children of her own. Sylvie calls her a spinster as if it were a bad thing, but Ursula considers it a compliment. She is still with Crichton in this timeline and is to meet him later. The rumor that the war will be declared the next day has made him want to meet her immediately. He tells her that he's left his wife and family; that life is too short to be unhappy. He's taken an apartment and wants her to move in with him. She says that she doesn't want to get married, and he agrees. They toast to the new arrangement.

April 1940

It is Hugh's 60th birthday and Ursula is catching a ride with Maurice from London back to Fox Corner. Ursula would like Crichton to come and meet her family but he bows out. He reminds her to take off the wedding band, which she had taken to wearing in order to avoid embarrassing remarks or scandals while living in London.

The gathering is more a verbal jousting session than anything else and Ursula is glad that Izzie has come to be a part of the celebration (even though she wasn't particularly invited). When Maurice calls Ursula an old maid, Izzie puts him in his place. Teddy is dating Nancy from next door and everyone expects a wedding in the future.

Just as Hugh is about to blow out the candle on his cake there is a commotion in the hallway. It is Pamela with all of her children in tow. She looks almost ready to drop from exhaustion. She is taken in and declares that she's come to stay where it is safe.

Later, back in London, Ursula tells Crichton about the festivities. Ursula realizes that she is very happy with him and is glad that she had him to come back to. She decides that home is more of an idea than a place. He tells her the next morning that the war is going badly and that Norway had fallen to German advances.



November 1940

In this timeline Ursula has moved from Argyll Road and has moved to an apartment complex that has not be experiencing nearly as many bombings. Her brother, Jimmy, is on furlough and they are enjoying an evening on the town when they are forced to take shelter in an underground coffee house until the unexploded bomb can be defused. While there they run into one of Ursula's former apartment neighbors from Argyll Road.

Having promised to come round for a visit to her old neighbors, Ursula goes to visit Mrs. Appleyard, who has recently had a baby boy. Ursula has a bag full of infant clothes that Pamela has sent over and Ursula is going to take them to Mrs. Appleyard. Just as she's finished visiting with Mrs. Appleyard, and moved on to visiting the other tenants, the air raid siren goes off. Everyone starts heading for the cellar, except one of the tenants who wants to turn back for her knitting. Ursula has a dread feeling and screams at her to stop. Ursula offers to go instead. She dies, again.

A Lovely Day Tomorrow

September 1940

This is a reset timeline and once again she's at the Savoy Hotel meeting with Crichton, who is calling their affair off. Ursula accepts is stoically, because she hadn't really been in love with him to begin with. An air raid siren goes off but neither of them seem panicked by it. They leave the hotel and part ways. Ursula watches him walk away and decides that maybe she will go to Finchley, where Pamela lives.

November 1940

The date of her two previous deaths, this timeline replays and finds her living back in her apartment building at Argyll Road. A terrible sense of foreboding is pressing down on her. Though there's been no air raid sirens she finds herself filled with fear. She looks out of the window and sees a dog cowering in a nearby doorway. She determines to rescue it. She passes one of the tenants on the stairs who tells her it is bad luck to pass on the stairs. Ursula feels compelled to tell the tenants that they are going the wrong way on the stairs. One of them says they need to get their knitting.

She makes it to the street just as the bomb hits the building. It knocks her off of her feet just as she's grabbed the dog and they both go sailing. Debris hits her and she loses consciousness. She comes to with the dog licking her face. Everywhere she looks there is devastation. She tells the dog his name must be Lucky. Two firemen show up with a hose then scream for Ursula to move quickly, the wall behind her is falling. She dies.

August 1926

It is summertime and Ursula is learning how to shoot a gun. Maurice has decided to teach her how to use a gun. She rather enjoys target shooting and is good at it. Her mother comes to speak with her about her future and Ursula is still determined to go to University. Her mother says that University won't teach her how to be a wife and a



mother. Ursula says that she may not want to be either one. Sylvie tells her she's being silly.

She goes for a short walk after her birthday party and muses about the kiss that her brother's American friend had given her. When he'd tried more, she'd given him a swat and told him to behave. She walked down to the station to visit with Fred Smith. She catches the train pull away from the station, then walks back and meets Nancy. Soon Benjamin Cole comes by on his bicycle and walks home with them. He invites Ursula to his brother's birthday party. Ursula is ecstatic because she has a crush on Benjamin.

After Ben leaves her, she runs into a man down the lane a ways. He asks her where the station is. She points him the direction and he asks if she could walk with him and show him the way. She says no and he grabs her forearm. She wrenches it away and runs as fast as she can towards home. When she gets home she doesn't tell anyone about it.

The next week she goes to the party at Ben's house, but it is a dull affair and Ben doesn't pay any attention to her, which makes her pout. Later, having felt completely invisible the whole evening, she returns home and speaks with Teddy. He asks about the party and Ursula gives him a piece of cake that Mrs. Cole had sent home for him. They sit on the front steps together.

Analysis

A Lovely Day Tomorrow

September 2 1939

This chapter shows the marital bliss that has come to Pamela. One remembers that she always wanted to be a scientist, but now it would seem that she has become, in many ways, her own mother. She has had three children in succession and is carrying her fourth. Ursula is the one that is shown to be the adventurous type, flirting with disaster by having a scandalous affair with a senior official, who is also a married man. It is also telling that Ursula does not care that he won't leave his wife, in fact she doesn't want him to. The arrangement seems to suit her as she is not being asked to give up her freedom and become domesticated.

The discussion of war and the imminent declaration demonstrates the theme of War. Having already gone through one war, the girls are dreading the rationing and the devastation that it could bring. It is perhaps the fact that this has been looming over Europe for a few years that has contributed to Ursula's indifference to Crighton, and in her stern resolve not to become too emotionally involved with him. She does admit that she cares for him, and that she looks forward to spending time with him, but she does not love him; not like Harold and Pamela seem to love one another.

November 1940



Ursula and those living in her apartment building have been the victims of a bombing. It would seem that she is only one of several survivors. At least at first. Her mind drifts from one thing to the other. First she thinks about her family, her sister, Pamela. Then she thinks about all of the people who live in her building, how some of them are happier than others.

Izzie, who has been a comfort to her through the years is no longer in the country, having taken the opportunity to leave before the war started. Ursula has also moved on to a relationship that is more fulfilling than the one she had with Crichton. Ralph is more her age and they have an easy comradeship. Still, she is quick to state that she is not in love. It is friendship with benefits, nothing more.

On each page of this section there is at least a spark of clarity and she realizes where she is and what has happened. She also realizes that she is unable to move and that she is in shock. She views the horrors of war first hand, and her reaction to it demonstrates the theme of War in living color. First, she sees the headless body of one of the tenants with whom she used to share records with. Then, she sees that another woman has lost her baby. This particular scene represents the loss of innocence and innocent lives in a War.

One of the large ironies that Ursula muses about as she lies waiting for the darkness to claim her, is that Jimmy, her brother had been born to celebrate the peace after the war to end all wars....and ends up fighting in one. He has managed to enlist in the army and has been sent to Canada to train. She hopes he stays there, away from the madness.

When her rescuer comes, he doesn't even know her name, getting it wrong and calling her Susie. At this point Ursula doesn't even care. She's tired, cold, and exhausted. When the rescuer picks her up and struggles out of the building to take her to the hospital, she says that she can hear the bat wings coming for her once again. Then, as many times before, darkness falls.

A Lovely Day Tomorrow

September 2 1939

In this short reset timeline, Ursula is still listening to her 'echoes' and 'little voices' that compel her to take certain actions or avoid certain circumstances. One good example of this is the purchase of the crepe de Chine dress that she loved in the previous timeline, but never bought. She is a spinster in this timeline and regrets not having children, something that will come into play in future timelines. The interweaving of Life and Death are demonstrated as a theme in this chapter, as each reset timeline has echoes of both the past timelines and the future ones. Later, Ursula will offer an understanding of this theory when she thinks about the things that Dr. Kellet had taught her about reincarnation.

April 1940



This family gathering is anything but joyous as all of the sibling rivalries that existed emerge once again. Pamela isn't there, so there is no buffer between Ursula and Maurice. Jimmy and Teddy are busy with their own guests, and do their best. The author introduces some foreshadowing when Nancy declares that Teddy has his wings (like an angel) since graduating from flying school. This makes the reader understand that, perhaps, he will be a real angel as a result of this war.

Additionally, more foreshadowing occurs at the very end of the chapter when Ursula says that if she had realized that this would be the last time they'd all be together like that, she'd have paid more attention. As it was, she manages to get through the evening, making an effort to not start fights and to just get through it. She does speak with Izzie alone a small while and is reassured that she can be who she is, and that it is okay to not want children and to want a career.

Sylvie is still as caustic as ever when it comes to a woman's duties, but she also bows to the spirit of the occasion and they have a nice dinner and cake. With Pamela's arrival the party lasts only a few more hours, and then she and Maurice, who is as mean as he ever was, leave to head back to London. Sylvie has taken in a couple of evacuee children from London for safety. They run around the room much like the two new puppies that Sylvie has purchased.

November 1940

This chapter is a replay of the initial bomb raid where she wakes up and doesn't know where she is and the rescuer calls her Susie. The difference in this replay is that she's moved herself out of harm's way, opting to live many miles away from the heat of the bombing raids. Unfortunately, she finds herself back there to visit and ends up falling into the same set of circumstances as before. The results are pretty much the same, though she doesn't see the bodies of her friends in this replay. All she knows is that she is almost divided in two, and that the darkness is calling her.

A Lovely Day Tomorrow

September 1940

This replayed timeline shows Ursula making a different choice. She's not deciding to stay in London at all, but rather has cut all ties at this point. Her unemotional parting from Crighton underscores the fact that she never really felt for him what he so obviously felt for her. He is the effusive one, telling her good bye and holding her hand, gazing into her eyes one last time. Though she doesn't say it out loud, she thinks he's acting rather maudlin about the entire thing.

November 1940

This replay of her previous death date continues to end with her death. The reader believes that this time she will escape with only minor injuries, but then, at the last minute, a wall comes down on her. So many elements conspired to keep her safe,



especially the fortuitous addition of the dog that lured her out of the doomed building. Unfortunately, the building still killed her, in the end.

August 1926

The difference in this timeline reset is that Maurice is teaching Ursula how to shoot a gun, and she's a good shot. Instead of telling her mother that she wants to become a secretary, she opts to go to University and study languages. Additionally, Howie has attempted to do more than just kiss her, but she has more than handled and rebuffed his advances, and later, when she runs into the village rapist (the one who in a previous timeline killed and raped Nancy) she manages to run away from him, saving herself.

In this new timeline reset she's interested in boys, primarily Ben Cole, but also Fred Smith. She's infatuated with them both, and frustrated when they seem to just view her as a 'friend'. This is poignantly pointed out when she attends the Coles' party and Ben doesn't say two words to her. She feels diminished by the whole experience. Teddy speaks with her afterward and they share a piece of the cake that is left over.

Discussion Question 1

In these reset timelines what does Ursula do when Mr. Carver starts sexually harassing the girls at the secretarial college?

Discussion Question 2

What is the irony in Jimmy's birth to the family, according to Ursula?

Discussion Question 3

What decision does Ursula keep making that ultimately still ends up with her death in November 1940?

Vocabulary

bluster, exhortations, mired, objections, Bohemian, sophisticated, bluestocking, gung-ho, disciple, admiringly, proficiency, bridled, precautions



The Land of Begin Again, A Long Hard War, The End of the Beginning

Summary

The Land of Begin Again

August 1933

Ursula is gathered with a large group of young women who are waiting along the road to a mountain retreat. They are all hoping for a glimpse of The Fuhrer. Soon he makes an appearance, riding in a black Mercedes. The Fuhrer gives a little salute, and most of the girls swoon. After he has passed by they all make their way back down to the Youth Hostel. Ursula muses about how much these girls like to sing. They sing everywhere they go.

Ursula has ended up here because she's graduated and has decided to make a 'grand tour' of Europe, except on a budget. She's staying with willing families throughout Europe. She'd been staying with the Brenner family in Munich, but didn't intend to stay much longer. She graduated University with a degree in languages and would be going into teaching in another year, after she'd seen the continent.

There is a small incident on the train to Munich. A man tries to push her into the lavatory and rape her, but she continues to struggle and scream and the officers take the man away. She is shown to a better car with all women on it. Later, she hears that a man, whose identity isn't given, has fallen from the train.

The Brenner family have several children, but Klara becomes Ursula's favorite and confidant. They attend several Nazi related events, even going to a Hitler-Jugend rally. Klara and Ursula join the movement and go on a week's long trek with the Young Women's group through many Alpine villages and into Austria. At a local festival Klara introduces Ursula to Jurgen Fuchs. Ursula is stricken by him immediately. She writes to her friend Millie that it is love at first sight, then laughs about it. The entire week's festivities seem like something out of a novel, she writes.

August 1939

Ursula and several other girls are at the Berghof eating a light lunch, enjoying the scenery. She has befriended a woman named Eva, who is THE Eva Braun, mistress to Hitler. Frisking about on the porch is a five year old girl, dressed in traditional Alpine clothing. The child, named Frieda, is alluded to be Ursula's child. She writes to her sister and to her mother, who both know about Frieda, that the other women and wives who are attached to senior officials hate Eva because of her particular position with Hitler. She shares with Ursula that she longs to be a movie star. Adolph has promised to make her a star. Ursula rather doubts that he will make good on his promise.



The reader learns that Ursula has married Jurgen Fuchs and that the little girl is their first child. He has become a lawyer, but has had to join the Nazi party if he wanted to continue his practice. Behind closed doors he tells Ursula that he can't stand the Nazis, but in public he tows the line to keep up appearances. In order to be married she'd had to renounce her English citizenship and become 'German' something that Hugh disliked. However, they had visited in 1935 and Hugh and Sylvie both thought that Jurgen was a nice fellow.

The reader learns that when Eva heard of Frieda's illness (pneumonia) that she'd told Ursula that she must bring the child to the Alps immediately to convalesce. At the time she and Eva had never directly met, but had a common friend: Klara. They stayed for two weeks and Frieda made a full recovery. However, Ursula's headaches didn't get any better. If anything they grew worse.

Ursula learns that Klara's husband, a Jewish Professor, has been taken to work in a 'factory'. She longs to leave the castle and be freed of the endless hours of servitude to the man and his party, even when he wasn't in residence. She marvels that women seem to swoon over Hitler, when in reality her mother, Izzie, or even Mrs. Glover would have put him in his place. She finds him rather unintelligent and common, though she's smart enough not to say that to anyone.

Finally, she declares that Frieda is well enough to leave. The day after they leave, Germany invades Poland. In a flashback, Ursula shares that she'd planned to take Frieda and go to Fox Corner. She'd had their suitcases clandestinely packed, but when she went to get their passports they were gone. Jurgen subtly lets her know that he has them and won't divulge where they are.

April 1945

Ursula shares that with the British and Americans bombing by day and night, they stayed in the cellars around the clock. Once, she and Frieda had ventured to the zoo, but the bombing was so intense that they'd taken shelter in a public bomb cellar. The experience was so terrible that she swore never to go out again. She receives word from her sister that Hugh has died, peacefully, while sleeping in the garden at Fox Corner.

She'd tried to leave Germany shortly after they invaded Poland, but without passports and all of the train stations closed, she was stuck. She tried to go to the British Embassy, but they'd already vacated and left for England. She also shares that in 1944 Jurgen is killed in an air raid at the ministry offices. She feels badly for Frieda who loved her father, but feels only relief for herself. He had become increasingly distant and angry as their marriage had progressed.

They are suffering as there's very little food, no heat, and they don't have the proper clothes to fight the cold. Frieda is ill again. Ursula learns that Hitler has died and wonders about poor Eva, whether she, too, is dead. Meanwhile, Frieda is worse and worse. Ursula risks running to the drug store to see if there's anything that can be



offered to help her child. The only thing the pharmacist can offer is a pain pill and two ampules of cyanide. She cradles her child in her arms. She tells her about wonderful days at Fox Corner and about her happy childhood there. When she's sure Frieda is asleep, she places the cyanide capsule in her tiny mouth, and crushes it. She takes her own, and they die in one another's arms.

A Long Hard War

September 1940

In this timeline reset, Ursula is in London and has volunteered to be part of the ARP (Air Raid Precautions) department. After air raids, she and a team of people would go and try to dig people out of the rubble. She describes the training that all of the wardens must go through, from rescue techniques to first aid. They live in a group in a Methodist Church. She discusses some of the early cases and says that even now, after many, many cases, she still vomits after each one. Most often, they uncover and dispose of bodies, than rescue them.

She visits her family at Fox Corner and finds her mother and father quarreling openly. Sylvie has become a miser with everything and has turned their entire back yard into a chicken farm. She rations out the rations so that they aren't sure who eats better, the chickens or the people. Ursula tells them that she's seeing a boy named Ralph. Instead of going to the cinema or any sort of normal activity for dating couples, they walk the streets and view the devastation.

After her visit with her parents she goes to get on the train, but the only thing left that runs is the Engine. Fred Smith offers to give her a ride in the Engine car if she's game. She agrees and off they go. She reports that it was an adventure and a terror. They arrive and she sets off in the dark, immediately tripping over some rubble. Fred comes to her rescue. Later, it is so dark that she can't see her way to find the church where she's been staying. She links arms with various people who are headed her way...all of them total strangers.

October 1940

Ironically, this timeline opens up with Ursula and her warden friends standing on a rooftop watching the bombardment many miles away across the Thames. Ursula is very aware that while the 'show' is spectacular, on the ground it must be spectacularly horrifying. Later she meets up with Ralph and they go to his apartment and have sex.

She feels guilty afterward because she can't bring herself to feel anything for him. Later she meets up with Jimmy who's on furlough. They go to one of the only open restaurants in the area. In the restroom she meets a young woman crying her eyes out. She offers Ursula a cigarette from her gold case and she sees the initials on it of: A.C. and she knows that it is Crighton's. She knows that he's been with other women, besides just her. She's glad she's with Ralph.

October 1940



They are attending Hugh's funeral and Ursula finds herself put out with her mother's theatrics. She had been horribly nasty to Hugh during the last few months of his life, so her wailing seems put on to Ursula. Later, the duty of sorting through Hugh's belongings and disposing of them falls to Ursula and Bridget. This is raw and difficult for Ursula, but she manages to do it. Later, when she is in the chicken coop, because her mother had taken to her bed, Izzie finds her and tells her about the baby she had and gave away. She regrets not having cornered Hugh and asked who adopted her son. She muses that he would be Ursula's age now. And, with Hugh gone, there's little chance, now of ever finding him. She worries that maybe he was given to a Jewish family and had been rounded up and sent to a concentration camp. About that time Sylvie walks in on them and downplays Izzie's dismay. Ursula asks if Izzie wants to come back to London with her.

November 1940

Ursula is at the Methodist Church with the rest of the wardens. Mr. Palmer, one of the volunteers, has died and it has caused all of them to be a little touchy. Miss Wolf, the warden in charge decides that they should all have a small concert. One of the wardens states that many of their volunteers are strange, that one is a pansy, a tart, and the other is a 'yid'. Miss Wolf chastises him at overhearing it, saying that intolerance was what started the war in the first place. She also remarks that she despairs of ever being clean again. All of London is dirt and she wonders if it will ever be back to the way it was.

The air raid siren ends their concert and they run into the streets warning people, then go to their own designated shelter. Later, when they are going to do their job after the bombing is over, she has one of her dread feelings wash over her. They start digging out a building and there are mangled bodies everywhere. She thinks that she sees an ordinary dress hanging on a peg, but realizes that it's a body without a head or limbs. On the dress is pinned a black cat brooch with Rhinestone eyes.

As they dig out the latest building and search for survivors, she finds what is left of one of the tenants from a previous timeline, the woman who always wore a black cat brooch with a Rhinestone eye. She finds another woman who is gray with ash. Ursula can tell that she's near death. The woman asks for her baby. The woman dies and Ursula frantically starts looking for the baby.

Later, she sees a dog trembling in a doorway of a bombed out building. She leaves the warden group and goes to get the dog. It runs away from her and she follows it up about a block. She catches it and as she turns to go back the way she's come, the entire building where she found the dog collapses into the road. She runs into Fred Smith who has given up driving the trains to be a fireman. They meet when Ursula returns to the warden's Church to find most of it destroyed. Many of her fellow wardens are dead. Miss Woolf barely escaped but is horribly devastated by the losses. After settling everyone as best she can, Ursula and Fred (along with the dog) go to Izzie's house. Izzie is in America so no one is there. They have sex.



May 1941

The war continues to rage on. Ursula continues dating Ralph, never telling him about Fred. She finds Crighton and gives him his cigarette case back (the one she took off of the dead tenant's body). He says he has no idea who she is, and Ursula doesn't believe him.

Later, she meets up with Teddy who's on furlough and they eat at a nice restaurant. The war has made both of them very tired and disillusioned. Teddy agrees to take Lucky, the dog Ursula rescued that night, back to Fox Corner to live. A few months later, while neither Millie or Ursula are there, their apartment is partially bombed. Ursula lives there in a tent until Millie returns, then they go and seek other arrangements. The warden's headquarters is bombed as well and this time two more of the group are dead.

It is so overwhelming that Ursula just wants to shut everything out for a while. She finds Fred and they meet at a nearby hotel and have sex. He apologizes for being rather crude the last time they were together, but Ursula shrugs it off. He rushes off saying that he's supposed to be on duty. She receives a note a few hours later saying that he's been killed when a wall collapsed on him.

November 1943

Maurice deigns to come down to Ursula's lowly secretarial offices at the Ministry. He tells her that Teddy has 'caught one'. And that his plane has gone down. He is very unemotional and seems confused that she should be so torn up. He says that there's no body but that a fellow pilot flying nearby said that no one had jettisoned out. Maurice says that he already told their mother over the phone and Ursula is incensed that he would be so cold as to tell her over the phone.

There is a gathering, a makeshift memorial at Fox Corner, and everyone is devastated. Ursula cries for days on end, inconsolable. Later, as a special request from Nancy, she and Izzie determine to find out once and for all if Teddy is dead. They go the air field and speak with Roy Holt, who was the pilot who presumably saw the plane go down. He tells them that there is no way that Ted survived. He gives them the dog, Lucky, back. Apparently he hadn't wanted to take it to Fox Corner and had kept it as a good luck mascot. However, now that Ted was gone, the men didn't want it around reminding them of Teddy's death.

VE day is declared the next week. Sylvie lies down on Teddy's childhood bed, takes a whole bottle of sleeping pills and kills herself. They find out in the reading of the will that Hugh had left the house to Pamela. Maurice, as the oldest child, is upset beyond belief. Partly to rub it in his face, Pamela and Harold, her husband, decide to keep the house and continue living on there.

Maurice, honing in on the clause in the will that said that the contents of the house were to be divided among them, brings a van and starts looting the house. Jimmy wants nothing at all and leaves for America shortly thereafter. Ursula just wants the little carriage clock of Sylvie's.



February 1947

This is a reset from a former timeline. This time Ursula climbs into bed with the Whiskey, is so cold, thinks about the gas filling the room and killing her. Darkness begins to fall, only this time she wakes up. She had been 'dreaming' that she was trapped in a cellar.

June 1967

This is a new timeline that is introduced. Thus far, none of the timelines have reached this far out into the future. The television states that the Jordanians opened fire on Tel Aviv. Ursula is worried about Ben Cole who is a member of the Israeli parliament. After WWII he'd helped to create the new sovereign country of Israel. She recalls that she'd met up with him a few years previously and he'd wanted to take her to bed. Having long since gotten over him, she turned him down. She's just retired from her ministry job and has not married, nor has children.

She learns that many people she cared about have died. Miss Woolf has long since died when, at the end of the war, a stray bomb had killed her and another woman on top of the rooftops of the warden's hall. Crichton had died of a heart attack. Jimmy, Pamela tells Ursula, has 'come out of the closet' in California. Pamela finally had a daughter, who is named Sarah. Ursula dotes on her. Izzie is very senile and still living in London in her house. Her books have lost favor and she's feels that yet another part of Teddy is lost.

Ursula shares that she's been having sharp pains in her head, worse than headaches. The doctors don't really know what it is. She has luncheon with Pamela's oldest son, who is a history teacher. She muses that if Hitler hadn't been allowed to implement the holocaust that perhaps the horrendous war wouldn't have happened after all. They both muse how things might have turned out differently had Hitler never been allowed to come into power. Nigel remarks that it was Hitler's charisma that unified all of the psychopaths to a purpose.

Ursula says that she knows for a fact that Hitler was very charismatic. She says that he had the most compelling eyes and that if you ever looked into them you'd do whatever he asked. Nigel asks her if she'd met Hitler. Ursula smiles, and realizes that she's had one of her 'flashes'. She recovers quickly and tells Nigel that she's imagining what made him so popular.

After she tells Nigel good bye, Ursula goes to sit on a bench in the park. The pain in her head starts in on her and she knows that she can't make it back to her apartment. She shuts her eyes and hopes for it to pass. Slowly her mind begins to divest itself of every memory, of every sound that she hears in the park, as if she is a part of the larger world around her. She is once again an infant with the snow falling outside. She is cradled in loving arms and her father's green eyes are smiling at her.

The End of the Beginning



It is once again February 11, 1910 and the night of Ursula's birth. What is different in this reset is that Hugh has made it through the snow to be there for the birth, and that the doctor has also made it in time to assist with the birth.

Hugh had also managed to find and forcibly remove Izzie from Paris. He brought her aboard a ship sailing for England. She is already pregnant. They have to pretend that they are husband and wife to keep up appearances and Izzie delights in making Hugh uncomfortable. He wires ahead to his mother to let her know that he's found her and what her condition is. His mother refuses to take Izzie in, so Hugh brings her along with him to Fox Corner.

She has the baby and then leaves to go to a finishing school. Hugh and Sylvie agree to adopt the child and say that it was an orphaned relative. They name him Roland. It becomes evident, however, that Roland is not quite normal. He doesn't progress like the other children.

The scene skips forward to the beach. Ursula and Pamela are building a sandcastle near the water's edge. Mr. Winton is painting a few yards down the beach. Sylvie and Bridget are there as well, watching after the newest member of the family, Teddy. All of a sudden, Ursula has a terrible sense of foreboding. She feels as if something bad is about to happen. She leaves the castle and goes running to find her mother. Sylvie scans the water's edge and can't see Roland. Winton goes into the surf to rescue the little boy, but it is pointless. Roland is dead.

George Glover offers his condolences when Sylvie and the girls go to watch the harvest be taken in. Sylvie reflects on little Roland's funeral and how Izzie had made an appearance making a loud and dramatic display of grief. Sylvie had turned on her for daring to claim him in death. Afterwards, Ursula watches a thunderstorm roll in while standing by her bedroom window. She muses that the loud thunder sounds like war.

Later, Ursula tells Bridget while she's helping with the cooking that she saw Clarence Dodds at the sweet shop in town and he was kissing the shop maid. She claims to have overheard him tell the woman that he wasn't in love with Bridget and was only using her to pass the time. This has the intended effect and Bridget calls her engagement off.

Later, when she hears Maurice's indian war whoops, she quickly hides her favorite doll, Madame Solange so that Maurice won't take it and throw it out on the roof. Instead he throws one of Pamela's dolls on the roof.

Sylvie takes Ursula to Dr. Kellet. To Sylvie's shock, Ursula remembers Dr. Kellet, appropriately names his pipe, then draws the snake with its tail in its mouth...the same one he'd drawn for her many timelines before. He asks Sylvie if she knows what reincarnation is. Ursula says that she does. Dr. Kellet begins to ask her questions and she answers them without batting an eye.

On her sixteenth birthday she runs into Benjamin Cole on his bicycle as she's returning from walking Millie home. This time the kiss she receives on her birthday is from Ben. It was sweet and heady, and everything Ursula had ever thought it might be like.



The timeline jumps ahead again, and Ursula is finishing up school. She's deciding whether or not she wants to go to University to study languages. Maurice teaches her to shoot the rifle and she bests him. He asks her if she's done this before. Ursula smiles.

Nancy, in this timeline, is abducted, raped, and killed. Everyone grieves, especially Ursula who feels as if she should have known better. She goes to stay with Izzie for a few days in London. While in the a tea room Izzie leaves to powder her nose and Ursula is hit with a wave of horror and terror. She bolts from the restaurant and down roads that are not familiar to her in this timeline, but totally familiar to her from past timelines. A man runs into her, offers her his hand. His name is Derek. She shrieks and runs off, straight to a place called Belgravia. Finally, being overcome with past memories she collapses.

She wakes up in the hospital with Dr. Kellet standing near her. She tells him that time isn't circular, but rather like a palimpsest. They have placed her in a sanatorium, and she learns that Dr. Kellet has long since retired. He continues to visit her. He cryptically asks her if she now has had enough.

It isn't clear at first what he's talking about until Ursula returns home to Fox Corners. She doesn't tell anyone, but now she knows exactly the sequence of events that will take her into the inner circle of Hitler, so she can stop the unspeakable from happening. She needed one more lifetime, she thinks in answer to Dr. Kellet's question. That night she throws herself off the rooftop.

Analysis

The Land of Begin Again

August 1933

Ursula has finished University and wants to see the world before settling down. Having made many friends at school, she has a whole host of families who are willing to give or rent her a room as she passes through the countryside. Her father, Hugh, also sends her a small allowance so that she can make her way around.

One of the places that she lands, first, is Munich where she meets Klara. Here the reader gets to see the theme of War demonstrated in a very interesting way. In this chapter, the reader sees the underpinnings of what will be the beginning and rise of Adolph Hitler and the Nazi party. From the German perspective, Hitler is a rock star. Klara is as infatuated as the rest of them, but Ursula, is not. She plays along and understands why the others may feel as they do, but in the end, she hopes that he will put things back to a democratic system shortly. Thus, War is shown to be a slow growing cancer, whose purposes may often seem wrapped in good intention, and that often war is begun under the guise of many rationalizations.

As in many other timelines, Ursula has a run-in with a lowlife male on the train. Just as in other timelines she has to defend herself as he attempts to force himself on her. With



the exception of the one timeline where she is raped, every other time that this situation has been presented, she's managed to fend it off and survive. She muses about the fact that only men who seem to want to do her harm are attracted to her. She wonders what must be wrong with her that she attracts this type of man. However, when Klara introduces her to Jurgen Fuchs, she hopes that this tendency might be over.

August 1939

The reader learns of the long two weeks that Ursula spends at the Berghof with Eva Braun, and sometimes Hitler. She attends endless parties, dreadfully boring lectures, and is appalled and amazed at the excesses that are present at the castle. Movies are shown at the castle and Eva tells Ursula that one of Hitler's favorites is Snow White. Ursula muses that Hitler sees himself as the Prince, whose 'kiss' has wakened Germany. She finds it a flawed analogy as she's certain that there will be no 'happily ever after'.

It is clear to see that while she loves Jurgen, she is also becoming afraid of him. He is changing along with the entire country's attitude. There is an atmosphere of paranoia, as exemplified by the fact that she writes Pamela constantly, but doesn't post the letters for fear that they will be read. When there's a parade, she throws her arm up in the Nazi Salute though she does not feel that way at all.

She finds herself horribly homesick for Fox Corner, and realizes that living in Germany she has never felt as if she were 'home'. She realizes that England is where she longs to be. Unfortunately, she also knows that Jurgen won't leave Germany. This is made clear to her when he takes the passports from their regular spot.

An allusion is made to the fairy tale of the Emperor's New Clothes, where the Emperor is really walking around naked, but the crowd goes wild, praising him for the stylish cut of the material, pretending that he's not naked at all. Ursula states that in many respects this is the way the German people are towards Hitler, many of them seeing him for what he truly was, but afraid to tell him that he is little more than a middle aging despot.

April 1945

The theme of War is demonstrated in this chapter as Ursula recalls having to run for a bomb shelter while at the zoo with Frieda. She'd crammed into a shelter with so many people that they had to light a candle to make sure that there was enough oxygen. If the candle went out they were told they'd have to all leave the shelter. An old man died in the confinement, while in the corner two adults were engaging in 'adult' behavior. Ursula hated the experience so much that she vowed never to be caught out like that again.

The theme of Life and Death also runs strongly in this chapter. At one point Ursula muses about a line from Shakespeare: Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage. Life used to matter, Ursula muses, but now, everyone is a walking shadow she says. Life is the cheapest thing on the planet. Later, she refers to Donne's Holy Sonnets as she contemplates what it is she's about to do to herself and Frieda. She remembers the line from Donne's poetry that says, I run to



death, and death meets me as fast, and all my pleasures are like yesterday. In this timeline, she is purposely choosing death over life, and the theme is suggesting that in many instances, death is the sweeter experience.

A Long Hard War

September 1940

Most of this chapter is dedicated to the theme of Death and Life. At one point she states that death and decay are on her skin, in her hair, in her nostrils, everywhere, all of the time. It was a part of her. The theme of War is also touched upon with the mention of the chickens whose feathers were blown right off of them due to the close calls with various bombs. Ursula says that she's seen people with the clothes blown off of them too. This indicates that War is an unnatural thing and that it has a terrible impact on the natural world. War is also shown to have a heavy impact on love. While courting Ralph, they should have been able to do normal activities, but instead they visit bombed out localities. He asks her if that's ghoulish, but Ursula replies that they do it to bear witness.

October 1940

This chapter serves to underscore the irony in perspectives. They are all on the top of the building watching the bombardment as if it were a fourth of July presentation. Yet, the truth of the matter is that the spectacle they are watching is murderous and thousands of lives will have been lost when it is done.

Additionally, it is clear that in this reset timeline that Ursula does not know the girl in the bathroom, though in a previous timeline she knew the girl quite well. She is also not involved with Crighton like she was in a previous timeline, but rather has moved forward with her relationship with Ralph.

October 1940

Hugh's death underscores the theme of Life and Death. It is interesting to note that the author juxtaposes Hugh's death with Izzie's thoughts about the birth of her child. Also, the author seems to be reiterating that the child would have been in Germany and would have been Ursula's age. Since this seems to be a repeated phrase, in most timelines, it is worth it to pay attention and attribute a bit of foreshadowing to the statement.

Izzie's regret is notable because she very rarely admits to having any regrets. She has always been one to live life in the moment and to take things boldly and grandly. But, here, at Hugh's death, she shows a deeper more sentimental side to Ursula. It is also telling that neither Sylvie or Izzie can bring themselves to go through Hugh's belongings in order to dispose of them. It is Ursula, and Bridget, who is very torn up about Hugh's passing, that must do the deed. It makes the reader wonder if there might have been something going on between Hugh and Bridget at some point in time.



November 1940

The theme of Reincarnation is demonstrated when Miss Woolf talks about Herr Zimmerman telling her that the situation in Germany is so terrible. Ursula says that she knows. Miss Woolf asks if she's been there, but Ursula tells her that sometimes she just 'knows'. Later, when she's digging out the carnage of a bomb attack, for the briefest of moments, she has a daydream of a staircase, wisteria blooming, of falling out of a window. This is, of course, from previous timelines where traumatic events had happened to her.

The theme of War is also demonstrated in this chapter. It shows that after a while of being exposed to horrors, that they become common place and people become desensitized. This is true of Ursula who views the carnage of the area with a mechanical eye. She says that she finds she's almost become indifferent to death and that her soft soul had finally crystallized, a sword tempered in fire.

When Herr Zimmerman plays his violin, Miss Woolf tells Ursula that it is astonishing how much German music they listen to, and that great beauty transcends everything. She hopes that maybe music will heal the war too. An air raid siren ends the concert early and they scramble for shelter. They pass a public shelter on the way to their own shelter and, once again, the theme of Reincarnation is demonstrated as she declares to herself that she will never set foot in one of those shelters ever again.

May 1941

At one point when she's having dinner with Teddy, he wonders that there's something horribly wrong with the human race. The theme of Life and death is demonstrated in Ursula's response. She says, 'No point in thinking, you just have to get on with life. We only have one after all.'

The theme of Reincarnation is demonstrated in Teddy's response back to Ursula's statement about having only one life when he asks what if a person had a chance to live again and again. And to keep living again and again until things were done rightly.

November 1943

With the death of Teddy, who was the best of them all, as all agreed, something seems to crumble at Fox Corner. Sylvie can't take it and after VE day kills herself in Teddy's bed. The theme of Loss is demonstrated in this chapter as another loss is presented to the family. Ted's loss is made even greater still because there was no body to recover, no body to bury or mourn. The loss of the house and its contents is also presented, as well as Maurice's avarice.

It is interesting that Teddy never got rid of Lucky the dog, and instead decided to keep him, himself. This underscores the kind and gentle nature of the man. Ironically, it is shown that some of the best and brightest were killed in the war, setting civilization back many, many years.



February 1947

This is a reset timeline and instead of dying this time, she revives and listens to the radio crackle into life...just like her.

June 1967

The theme of Death and Life is demonstrated in this chapter by the retelling and mourning of past losses. That Crichton has died does not affect Ursula as much as she thought. She speaks with Pamela and says that whatever happens one must take the good and the bad the same and that death is just one more thing to be embraced.

Later, as she sits dying in the park, she muses on the fact that Life was about becoming and about being. What is interesting about this death is that she doesn't fear the bat wings, nor is there any mention of birds or darkness falling.

The End of the Beginning

February 11 1910

Interestingly, this first section is not titled with the date. However, the reader quickly understands that it is the day of Ursula's birth. This chapter demonstrates the theme of Reincarnation in that a very young Ursula has had several instances where she's 'known' something before it happened. A good example was on the beach when she knew that someone was going to drown. In many other replays of this scene, it was always her. This time, of course, it is Roland. Later, she says that the thunder sounds like bombs dropping, like the sounds of war...something that a four year old child couldn't know.

The theme of reincarnation continues as a young Ursula persuades Bridget, through a series of obviously fabricated tales, to call off her relationship with Clarence. This will prevent Bridget from going to the Celebration on Armistice day and coming down with influenza that kills so many. Later, when they learn that Clarence goes to London, contracts the flu and dies, Ursula remarks that at least no one had to be pushed down the stairs. Later, she 'instinctually' hides her doll when she hears Maurice coming down the hall, thus sparing her from climbing out onto the roof to rescue the doll, and dying as she had in previous timelines.

Her meeting with Dr. Kellet is fortuitous as he recognizes what is happening with Ursula and tells her mother that they will do very well together. Ursula remembers everything from the past timelines in regards to Dr. Kellet, though in this timeline he doesn't have a son named, Guy. Her first kiss is with Ben in this timeline and it is special and sweet. When she shoots the guns with Maurice she is already a crack shot.

Later, when she runs from the tea room and through the streets of London, running into Derek, finding herself in Belgravia, she remembers everything. Later, it is Dr. Kellet that helps her gain clarity and make sense of all of the timelines and why she's been granted them. She must kill Hitler.



Discussion Question 1

How does Ursula feel about motherhood?

Discussion Question 2

What is Ursula's observation of Eva and Hitler?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the allusion of the Emperor's New Clothes.

Vocabulary

bemused, siesta, glimpse, ecstasy, bonnet, constipated, youth hostel, obsession, chaperon, detour, lodge, provinces, vetoed, continent, hullabaloo, rationale, scrutiny, embittered, spinster.



Be Ye Men of Valor, Snow, The Broad Sunlit Uplands

Summary

Be Ye Men of Valor

December 1930

In this timeline Ursula has inserted herself into the life of Eva Braun and has become her best friend. They go everywhere together and as such, when Eva begins seeing Hitler, Ursula is often with them. Because she is a woman, she is often overlooked. This suits Ursula just fine.

She walks into the room, makes polite conversation, enjoys a pastry and a hot chocolate, then reaches into her purse for a handkerchief. The handkerchief is hiding her father's old service revolver. Ursula pulls the trigger, but doesn't know if she killed him or not. Darkness falls.

Snow

February 11 1910

She is reborn again. She's born blue, Hugh isn't there, nor is the doctor. She is delivered by Bridget who declares that the baby is blue. Sylvie is quick to act, however, and pulls out a pair of surgeon's scissors and cuts the cord, saving the baby. She declares that one must always be prepared. Practice makes Perfect, she says.

The Broad Sunlit Uplands

May 1945

This is a new title for the novel. It is 1945 and Teddy and another man are drinking in a pub. He had been shot down and taken to a Stalag where he and Vic had met. They helped each other survive. He'd bailed out of the cockpit at the last minute, but ended up in a Stalag. Now, of course, they had been freed. He manages to get a call out to Nancy who is hysterical, having thought he was dead all of this time.

Nancy and Ursula make their way to the pub and Nancy throws her arms around Teddy. Teddy mouths the words 'thank you' to Ursula.

Analysis

Be Ye Men of Valor



December 1930

In comparison to the earlier installment regarding this scene, it turns out exactly as it had earlier. The reader still doesn't know if she managed to kill Hitler, nor if all of it was wasted effort.

Snow

February 11 1910

The cutting of the cord by Sylvie using the surgical scissors is a direct 'echo' back to the very same words that the doctor said in one of the previous timelines. What one can derive from this, also, is the fact that Sylvie is taking fate into her own hands instead of allowing Dr. Fellowes to do so. Also, in a previous timeline it was Bridget who was enamored of the scissors and declared them most useful. The phrase, Practice Makes Perfect is introduced again in this chapter, reminding the reader that these characters have all been through their own timelines over and over, not just Ursula.

The Broad Sunlit Uplands

May 1945

This brings some of the loose ends together as the reader gets to see Teddy still alive. Teddy would seem to know something about Ursula's abilities because he thanks her. At one point when Ted thinks he is going to die in his plane he has a very certain feeling that Death wasn't ready for him yet, and so he has the presence of mind to open the cockpit. A friend clips on the parachute and pushes him out.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Ursula think killing Hitler will change many timelines?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the significance of Sylvie using the surgical scissors instead of Dr. Fellowes.

Discussion Question 3

How had Teddy survived the war?

Vocabulary

lingered, Brownie, flattered, mugged, fledgling, sophisticated, infatuation, conducted, simper, adoration, mince pies, sifted, mothballed, bustling, monogrammed, dabbed, yelped.



Snow

Summary

February 11 1910

Ursula's birthday again. This time Mrs. Haddock, the midwife, is shown to be drinking rum in the pub again because of the snow. Thus the cycle begins again.

Analysis

February 11 1910

This ending to the book may seem abrupt to many readers as it seems such a nonsensical chapter to end on. The point, however, is this....there is never an ending... just a pause between moments. Life and Death, Death and Life, are nonlinear, and like a tablet used, wiped, and reused again, and again, it continues without end.

Discussion Question 1

Why would the author choose to end the book this way?

Discussion Question 2

What is the author saying about the nature of time?

Discussion Question 3

What is the author suggesting about life and death?

Vocabulary

sipped, refuge, snug, necessity, convivial, gleamed, rowdier, accompaniment, polished, singsong, parachute, uncomplicated



Characters

Ursula

Ursula is the main protagonist in this novel. As such, the novel focuses on her as the 'time traveler' though the first third of the book chronicles Sylvie's life as she interacts with Ursula. What one can take from the early chapters and Ursula's childhood is that she became 'aware' of her past lives memories. The first inclination was when she felt complete dread at the beach. Having drowned and died in that surf one timeline previously, in the new timeline, she is terrified to go into the surf. In yet another timeline, her cousin, Roland, dies, instead. Also, as a child, she died by crawling out onto the roof after a doll, then falls to her death. On the 'reset' she does not go out onto the roof and lives. Later, in several different timelines reset, she manages to make sure that Bridget does not go to the celebration in London where influenza is spreading, and that she ends her relationship with Clarence (who dies in all of the timelines from influenza).

After this, Sylvie begins to worry that her daughter is psychotic, as she says some of the strangest things. She takes Ursula to a doctor named, Dr. Kellet. He immediately recognizes that Ursula is very special and has been granted the gift of remembering most of her past lives. He tells her that it is very unusual for a person to be reborn back into the exact same family and body, but accepts what he is sure has happened. While he tries to tell Sylvie that this is what is going on, she refuses that diagnosis. Therefore, Dr. Kellet teaches Ursula how to disguise her knowledge so that people don't find her odd. He tells her that she must listen to the 'echoes' that she hears because it is important.

She lives many times and manages to fix all of the things that go wrong in the various timelines. From rape, to loss of a child, an abusive husband, the loss of her mother to suicide, losing Teddy, and the death of Nancy by a rapist, all of these things are eventually fixed. As her mother was always saying, Practice Makes Perfect.

Ursula does listen to the echoes and the reader sees her, especially during the war chapters, attempting to understand war, come to terms with loss, and how life and death are intertwined. She suffers greatly during the war, in all of her lifetimes, even spending time in the company of Hitler, himself. Though she is unable to kill Hitler, she believes that it would have been the ultimate reason that she'd been given the gift of reincarnation.

Finally, in the end, Ursula gets things 'right'. Most of the terrible things in her timeline (for example an abusive husband, a dead child) are erased and she lives as a spinster, much like her Aunt Izzie. Unlike the other times when she has died, the last time she dies, she does not hear or see the black bat wings coming for her, nor did darkness fall. In the end, she embraces Life as it buzzes around her, and she is glad to be a part of it.



Sylvie

Sylvie is Ursula's mother. The reader meets her early on in the novel, beginning with the first entry, Snow. Sylvie was born into a very wealthy family, was kept innocent and ultimately naive about the ways of the world, or intimacy. She shares that she didn't even know what sex was until she was married, having not been prepared or educated by any of the women in her family prior to her wedding. The reader learns that while she has done her duty as a good wife, she also longs for the times of her childhood when the Cook's name was simply, Cook. She doesn't care for Mrs. Glover or many of her current staff. Thus, she turns to Bridget, a 14-year-old maid to help her deliver her baby, when she could have had the benefit of an older and wiser woman in the household.

The relationship that she has with her husband seems to be one of duty and friendship, but little more. Her husband is often away from the home, and is gone more than he is home. From this the reader can deduce that he does not care much for his family, the life he leads when he's with them, and certainly has other pursuits aside from the family from which he finds his fulfillment. This leaves Sylvie very much alone, and as a result she throws herself into spending time on her children and the running of the house.

While her childhood began in an idyllic way, Sylvie also experienced hardship at the hands of her father. He was an acclaimed portraitist but was also an avid gambler, a fact that neither Sylvie nor her mother knew until his untimely death. After his death, they lost their status, money, home, and Sylvie had to say good bye to her pony, Tiffin, whom she states she loved more than her father.

Her true strength comes out when WWI appears. She must put aside her pretensions and focus on survival, which she does magnanimously with her chicken coop, the eggs, and the garden. These things, moreso than having the children and keeping the house, make her feel empowered as if she now has a purpose and a skill that is useful.

However, having this experience still does not make her change her perspective on the duties of a wife and mother, or as a female. When both of her girls determine that they will have occupations outside of the home she is floored. She can't imagine a woman wanting to take on more than the job of being a wife or a mother. When both of her girls, at one point or another, say they might not want to be a wife or a mother, she is almost overcome with worry for them. She believes that she's failed them.

Though she had her own fall from grace early on in her life, she is still very judgmental, as when Izzie marries an American, or Ursula marries a German. She also despises Catholics and Jews. She is upset when Pamela marries Harold, a doctor, because it is a blue color job, in her opinion. Later, she is overcome with grief when Teddy is thought to be dead and takes sleeping pills, ending her life.



Teddy

Teddy is the fourth child to be born to Sylvie and he is the best of them all. Kind, generous, always trying to soothe ruffled feathers, he is also a poet, and a deep thinker. The author writes that he never meets a stranger, that all women and girls feel comfortable around him, and that his sense of justice and morality are beyond reproach. This is why it is particularly heartrending when he is believed to be dead.

Later on, in a reset timeline, Teddy doesn't die but is taken in as a prisoner of war at the end. He and a friend manage to escape toward the end of the war and he makes his way back to London where he is reunited with Nancy, his long time sweetheart, and his family.

Dr Fellowes

Dr. Fellowes serves as not only the country doctor, but he is also used in a literary sense by the author. When Sylvie delivers Ursula (in time line after time line) it is Dr. Fellowes who constantly brings everyone's views back to the black and white view of things. He is a pragmatist, not given to sentimentality (at all), and he doesn't really like people. This, of course, is very odd since he is the village doctor. Sylvie detests him and there is no great admiration by the rest of the staff, either.

The doctor does not believe women and those who are not trained doctors, should be attempting to treat themselves or others on their own. He credits his scissors to reviving Ursula, and in several reset timelines, it is other people that have the scissors. These scissors represent fate and the fact that, initially, he believes that he holds the fate of his patients in his hands.

Pamela

Pamela is Sylvie's second child. She is athletic, intelligent, and interested in science. In none of the timelines does Pamela come to any harm, nor does she suffer any sort of trauma or significant loss (except when they believe Teddy is dead). She also acts as the buffer between Maurice and the other children, because she has the ability and keen intellect to 'manage' her brother.

Pamela wants to go to University and study science. She is accepted into a program, in one of the timelines, and it is there that she meets her future husband. It is unclear as to whether she completed University or not since she settles down at Finchley in wedded bliss and has five children. She is very straight forward with people, and often blunt when she has a point to make. This ultimately gives Ursula a trusted confidant in all things.



Izzie

Izzie is Hugh's sister, and Sylvie's sister-in-law. In all timelines she is depicted as a free spirit, unconventional, and often the family embarrassment. In all timelines she has run off to Paris with a married man, who dumps her and leaves her pregnant. Hugh finds her and brings her back, after giving up the child for adoption. In all but one timeline the baby is never heard from again. In one timeline Hugh adopts the child into the family.

Izzie is as unconventional as Sylvie is prim and proper, and is often a direct foil. She challenges authority, notions about gender stereotypes, and embraces all of the new fashion and lifestyle choices that become available to women after World War I. She works, at first, for a newspaper writing articles. Later, however, she gets a publisher and launches into a long running and popular series of children's novels for boys.

Izzie, however, is extremely generous and kind. She recognizes in Ursula an unconventionality that the others don't have. She often invites her to London to her home to stay. Ursula turns to her, in one time line, when she has left her abusive husband, and in another timeline when she's been raped and she finds herself pregnant. Izzie attempts to help her have an abortion, though it ends up almost killing her. Izzie meets and marries an American screenwriter and they live in America for the last part of the novel.

Maurice

Maurice is the oldest of Sylvie's children. He is brash, arrogant, narcissistic, and mean spirited. He constantly tells the girls that they are useless simply because they are female. When he goes away to boarding school, everyone, even Sylvie, is glad to see him go. He shows himself to be greedy and self aggrandizing at every opportunity. Later, it is his friend, Howie that attacks Ursula.

Hugh

Hugh begins the novel as an emotionally distant father and husband. He is not there for Ursula's birth and Sylvie is glad for it. Though he 'rescued' her from an impoverished life, he hasn't provided her with the lifestyle she'd hoped for. Hugh, of course, is very aware of Sylvie's expectations and it causes a distance between them.

However, in most of the reset timelines he is loving, kind, caring, and most often challenges Sylvie's notions about how children should behave, what his daughters should be allowed to do, and offers good advice to everyone. His generous nature is exemplified in how he still loves Ursula even after her abortion. He also goes to Izzie's rescue many times, both financially, and physically. He dies peacefully in his chair in the garden as an old man.



Mrs Haddock

Mrs. Haddock is the area's midwife. She is the one that is initially called for by Sylvie when she is giving birth to Ursula, but because of the snow isn't able to get there. Instead, she is a practical woman and takes refuge in a pub to wait out the storm. She begins and ends the story, showing the cyclical nature of time, life and death.

Mrs Glover

Mrs. Glover is the cook for Sylvie's household. They keep her for reasons that go beyond her cooking, which is not that great. Sylvie shares that her food is more undercooked than overcooked, but is better than the last cook's all together. Sylvie believes that she should be able to call Mrs. Glover, 'Cook', instead of Mrs. Glover, but Mrs. Glover won't hear of it. She has staunch opinions, and runs the household quite well. She also assists with the children from time to time as well.

Lottie

Lottie is Sylvia's mother. She'd been married to a portraitist who painted the great portraits of the rich and famous all throughout Europe. As a result, they were extremely wealthy. Unfortunately, when her husband falls down some stairs and is killed, she learns that he had a gambling habit and that everything they enjoyed is now forfeit. She and Sylvie end up penniless in the street. She manages to hide the carriage clock in her petticoats when the bankers come to take everything away. She never recovers from the fall from glory and dies of consumption when Sylvie is 17.

She never prepared Sylvie for married life, and never told her about sex or men. Thus, when Sylvie is first married she has no idea what to expect, and things are frightening for her.

Archibald Winton

He is a clerk in a factory in Birmingham. They manufacture pins and he is single. He is a member of a cycling club and often takes vacations by the sea so he can pretend he is an artist. He is taking art classes at night and the instructor has told him that he needs to try and put figures into his work to give it motion. He decides to try by placing two little girls in his beach portrait. Those two little girls are none other than Pamela and Ursula.

Adelaide

Adelaide is Hugh's widowed mother. She is extremely strict and is the perfect icon for the Victorian Era woman. When her daughter, Isobel becomes an unwed mother, she refuses to even let her in the door, deciding, instead, to send her 'abroad' to have the



child. She told her daughter that only after she'd disposed of her disgrace would she be allowed back into the house. She is very dour, very judgmental of everything and everyone.

Dr. Kellet

Dr. Kellet is the psychotherapist that Sylvie takes Ursula to see after Ursula pushes Bridget down the stairs. He is also the one that recognizes what is happening with Ursula. He teaches her about reincarnation. Later, in a reset timeline, Sylvie brings her to his office and she declares that she's been there before, begins to tell him about reincarnation, and then draws a picture for him that he drew for her one reset timeline previously. He finds her charming and fascinating. Dr. Kellet helps her to understand that she is not going crazy, and when, in a later timeline, all of her past memories come crashing down on her causing her to have a psychotic break, he is there at the sanitarium to help her piece everything back together.

Olive

Olive is Pamela's mother-in-law. Hugh professes to like her because she says what she means and doesn't put on airs. He says this directly as a result of Sylvie's attempt to look down her nose at Olive.

Howie

Howard the American, is a friend of Maurice's who comes with Maurice on holiday from school. In one timeline he kisses Ursula on her 16th birthday, then later rapes her, getting her pregnant. In another timeline, Ursula smacks him and thwarts any other attempts at anything else. In another reset timeline, he doesn't even get the chance to kiss her at all.

Derek Oliphant

Derek bumps into Ursula while she is living in London, working in an office building. She meets him shortly after Pamela's big wedding and allows herself to believe she's found her true love, too. Unfortunately, he is anything but Prince Charming. Instead, he is abusive, a liar, and in the end beats her to death.

Mrs. Appleyard

Mrs. Appleyard is Ursula's neighbor at Argyll Road. In all of the timelines she dies when the building is bombed. She is an immigrant from Slovenia and has a thick accent. She also has a loud baby named Emil. Her husband, loud and abusive, leaves early on in every timeline and is not heard from again.



Ralph

Ralph was an architect before the war, and hopes to be once again after the war. He and Ursula meet in a German Language class and become casual sexual partners. Though Ursula wishes that she could feel more for him, as he so obviously feels for her, she just can't return those feelings.

Fred Smith

Fred Smith is a boy that Ursula knew as a child. He works for the train station as an engineer. Once, he gives her a ride in the engine compartment all the way to London. She is covered in soot, but finds it an exhilarating ride. Later, in another timeline, she becomes casual sexual partners with Fred. He doesn't expect anything from her and she likes that about him.

Klara

In another reset timeline Klara becomes Ursula's best friend in Germany. After graduating from University, Ursula wants to take a year off and see the continent. She stays with various families along the way. Klara's family, the Brenners, are one of the families that she stays with. Klara was a schooltime friend with Eva Braun, which is how Ursula manages to join Hitler's inner circle.

Frieda

Frieda is Ursula's child in a reset timeline. She marries a man named Jurgen and together they have a blue eyed blonde haired child. Hitler adores her, but she is prone to sickness. She is allowed to recuperate at the Bergholf, a mountain retreat, where Ursula meets Eva Braun. Later, Ursula and Frieda are caught in a bomb shelter during an air raid in Germany and Frieda catches pneumonia. Rather than see her daughter suffer any longer, Ursula gets a sleeping pill and two cyanide capsules from the chemist. She kills the both of them.

Bridget

Bridget is the Irish scullery maid that first makes an appearance as Sylvie is giving birth to Ursula. Her own mother had died in childbirth but she never told Sylvie that. So, when Sylvie asks her to help deliver Ursula, who has come early, the idea terrifies Bridget. However, she is devoted to Sylvie and stays with her. When, in one of the timelines, Ursula is born blue and not breathing she doesn't know that there's anything to be done. When the doctor uses his surgical scissors to save Ursula, Bridget makes a mental note to save up and get herself a pair.



Later, Bridget is pushed down the stairs, and tripped going up into the house, by Ursula, who knows that it will be Bridget who will bring influenza into the house and kill most of them. Thus, in several timelines Ursula tries to end Bridget's relationship with Clarence, who takes her to London where they contract Influenza. Finally, Ursula succeeds in her mission and Bridget breaks up with Clarence.

Jurgen

Jurgen Fuchs is a German national that Ursula meets when she is with Klara. She is struck by the beauty of the man, and when they are first married she is blissfully happy. When she has Frieda her happiness is unparalleled. Then the war breaks out and Jurgen, as a higher official to the Reich, becomes increasingly moody and paranoid. He often snaps at Ursula, then when Ursula thinks that she'd like to take Frieda and leave for England, he hides their passports. Later, he is killed in an air raid.

Jimmy

Jimmy is the last child born to Sylvie and Hugh. He ends up moving to California where he is finally able to live as a homosexual. He is also the child that Izzie tries to adopt from Sylvie, saying that Sylvie could spare one.

Crighton

Fifteen years her senior, Crighton becomes Ursula's lover in several timelines. In one timeline he leaves his family and children to be with her, while in most timelines he just keeps her as a mistress. Ursula likes being with him, but doesn't fall in love with him. He takes it worse than she does when he breaks it off at the onset of the war.



Symbols and Symbolism

Dr. Fellowes' Scissors

In the beginning of the novel Dr. Fellowes shows his surgical scissors to Bridget just shortly after Sylvie has given birth. Bridget makes a mental note to acquire either a pair of scissors just like those, or maybe a very sharp knife for future uses. The scissors, however, have a deeper, more significant meaning for the rest of the novel, and is an allusion back to the tale of the Fates, from Grecian Mythology. Told to hold the yard of life for each person in their hands, it would be their scissors that cut that string ending the life of the mortal to whom it belonged. Since the book reflects on the death and rebirth, over and over, of a particular individual, the scissors represent that cycle of birth and death.

Birds

At the beginning of the novel, the narrator describes the beating of the baby's heart as similar to a bird trying to take flight. And, when the baby dies, the author says that 'like a bird that dropped out of the sky' the child's heart stopped.

Bats

When Sylvie gives birth to her child, who is being born prematurely, she imagines that she hears the wings of black bats beating against the shudders on the windows. The bats represent death, and it is this that Sylvie fears when she delivers the child and sees that it is blue and not breathing on its own. Later, after the doctor has arrived, she notes that the bats have been repelled for one more night.

Family Name Todd

The Todd family's last name is the German word for 'death' and has been chosen by the author to represent the fact that death walks among the living and that in an intimate entanglement, life is death, and death is life. It is also, according to Hugh, an ancient name for Fox.

Tiffin

Tiffin was Sylvie's pony when she was a girl. She often remarks that the only thing she remembers fondly was the love that she had for her pony.



Snowdrop

This was the flower that Mrs. Glover put on Sylvie's breakfast tray the day after Ursula is born. She is delighted to see the flower and says it was a very brave flower to have forced its way through the snow to bloom. This is a metaphor for Ursula, who also struggled against dire odds to be born. This is later reinforced by the fact that when the baby first opens its eyes, one of the first things it locks onto is that flower on the bed stand.

The Silver Hare Ornament

This is a little ornament that used to belong to Sylvie when she was a child. Though it was formerly on a rattle, Sylvie now has it adorning the pram's bonnet. Both the significance of the hare and its color represent Sylvie's childhood, how lost and precious it was to her. It is also representative of innocence, which is why it hangs on each child's pram.

Christmas Box

While Hugh is at war over Christmas, Sylvie decides to make a care package for him. All of the family makes something and sends it along in the box. Sylvie does not know if it ever reaches him.

Little Golden Carriage Clock

This was originally Sylvie's mother's clock. It was one of the only things that she saved from the liquidation of their vast and wealthy estate after her husband died. She hid it under her petticoats when the bankers came to the mansion. She passed it along to Sylvie who has always had it with her. When Sylvie dies, it comes to Ursula. It represents the best of times and the hope for wealth. In many instances, it also represents Sylvie, who identifies with the carriage clock.

Crepe de Chine Tea Dress

This is a special yellow tea dress that Ursula sees in a storefront. In one timeline she talks herself out of the extravagance of the purchase because of the war. Later, in another timeline, she's wearing the dress as she is determined to seize the day.

Black Cat Broach

This was a piece of jewelry that was shaped like a black cat with a rhinestone eye. One of the tenants, an old spinster, from Argyll Road wore it. In each timeline it is how Ursula can identify her after a bomb blows most of the spinster to bits.



Settings

Fox Corner

A great deal of the timelines take place at Fox Corner. It is in the English countryside and well removed from London. It is a nice estate but not as large as the mansion that Sylvie lived in as a girl. Pamela and Ursula initially share an attic room with both Bridget and Mrs. Glover, which makes Sylvie very disgusted.

It was named Fox Corner because Sylvie saw a Vixen and her cubs playing on the back lawn her first day there. This is also where many of the deaths occur, and where Hugh dies in the garden. It is where Ursula is first kissed, then raped. Later, in several different timelines, it is where an unknown man abducts and rapes several girls.

London

Izzie moves to London where she can enjoy the pulse of city living. After her books become famous she purchases a grand building where Ursula goes many times. London is also where Ursula goes when she graduates from University, or secretarial school, depending on the timeline. In many of the times she chooses the same apartment building, but in the last time line, where she gets it 'right' she opts for an apartment complex further away.

Argyll Road

Argyll Road is the area where Ursula's first apartment is. In one timeline she dies of hypothermia in the middle of winter. In another timeline she is bombed and dies there. In another timeline, she escapes the building but then the wall falls on her, killing her. In each instance, Argyll Road is not a good place to live. Finally, she gets it right by moving further down to a place called Eggerton Place.

Belgravia

This is where Izzie takes Ursula to have her abortion. Ever since that time she calls the abortion and whole pregnancy by the code name Belgravia. It also echoes back through reset timelines and causes her to become fearful when she nears it.

Berghof

This is the mountain retreat where Ursula takes her daughter, Frieda, to recuperate from a bout of pneumonia. It is there that she meets Eva Braun and she begins to formulate the idea to kill Hitler. It is located in the Alps and is extremely secluded from the world.



Themes and Motifs

Life and Death

The theme of Life and Death ripple throughout this novel. The first instance of it occurs at Ursula's birth, and her initial death. Death is called by many names in this novel. Sometimes it is called 'the black bat' or 'bats wings', or simply Darkness. Birth continues to happen, and is represented by the flower, a snowdrop, that Bridget brings to Sylvie's room in every reset timeline of Ursula's birth.

Many times Ursula dies as she is born, and then is given life. This occurs in many different ways. First, it is Dr. Fellowes who uses his scissors to cut the cord and save the baby. Then, later, it is Sylvie who uses mouth to mouth resuscitation. Later, it is Sylvie who has a pair of scissors of her own.

Death and Life, Life and Death are also shown to be interchangeable. Ursula begins to become unafraid of death, seeing it as a gateway to life. And, conversely, each life is a gateway, eventually, to death. When Dr. Kellet draws the picture of the snake eating its tail (the symbol for infinity) it resonates with Ursula in that she understands first hand what it means. However, she also tells Dr. Kellet that time, life and death, are not circular, but nonlinear, like a book whose pages can be wiped clean and rewritten upon many, many times, until it is gotten right.

What is also shown is that there is a balance to things. When there is a death, there is a birth, of sorts, whether it is Ursula's or someone else's.

War

Throughout the novel there is a reference to War, and is featured as a title to numerous chapters. The type of war that is being waged occurs on many fronts. First, there is the actual war, World War I, in which Hugh naively enlists against Sylvie's wishes. He considers it a grand adventure which infuriates Sylvie. The author shows how most during that time period didn't understand the harsh realities of war, the ugly side of destruction. At the platform when Sylvie sees Hugh off to war, she is stricken by all of the cheering and manic patriotism that she sees. It floors her and she wonders that the women, of all the people gathered, should be so supportive of an event that will most likely leave them without husbands or means.

At one point Sylvie muses that Izzie's baby would be no older than Ursula, but since it had been adopted by a German family it was now considered the enemy. They also discuss the rumor that German soldiers ate babies, in particular Belgian Babies. Symbolically, it can be said that war eats innocence, so in many ways, figuratively she is right. This is reiterated when Mrs. Appleyard's baby is lost in one timeline, and crushed in another. Also, Ursula's own child, Frieda, dies as a direct result of the war.



War is also shown to be a great destroyer of families, of love, and that the immorality of it all influences people to do things that they ordinarily would never do. This is true when Teddy dies and Sylvie grieves so deeply that she takes her own life. Ursula does the same thing in that she kills Frieda and herself in one wartime timeline.

The inhumanity of war is exemplified in the several timelines where Ursula notices an old dress hanging on a peg on the wall in Argyll Road after the bomb reduces their building to rubble. Only it isn't a discarded dress. It is one of the tenants whose arms, legs, and head have been blown off. The unnaturalness of war is also exemplified when Jurgen tells Ursula that he's seen chickens with their feathers blown off, as well as people with their clothes blown off because of the bombs.

Loss

Throughout this novel there is a great deal of loss. How each character deals with the various losses is chronicled, offering the reader a chance to understand the depths of grief, and the consequences of losses on many levels.

First, there is the loss by Sylvie of her father, and with him the lifestyle she had been accustomed to. She also lost her pony, Tiffin, whom she freely admits she loved more than her father. Shortly after, she loses her mother to consumption and would have been lost in the world if not for Hugh. She feels as if she has not been rescued as much as punished in marrying Hugh, as she had hoped for a return to the lifestyle she'd enjoyed as a girl. The loss of this dream and the reality of her current situation appears throughout the book as an unquiet restlessness of her soul.

There are the losses incurred during the war, as well as the loss of a way of life. World War I was a new type of warfare, never before seen. The men who returned were changed and scarred forever, much like the countryside. Life was different for everyone and never again would Europe be the same. Clarence Dodds lost half of his face, George Glover lost his zest for life, while Sylvie lost two of her children and Bridget to Influence (Armistice).

Precognition

Throughout the novel Ursula has these waves of foreboding that wash over her. As a very young child she often hides under her covers from them. Later, she begins to act on them, without knowing exactly what they entail. As she begins to listen to her own inner voice and to give attention to these premonitions she is able to steer bad luck from their doorstep, or at least to try.

For example, in one chapter she and Teddy die from influenza that they catch from Bridget who dies from it a few hours before they do. In a later chapter, Ursula has a terrible feeling that Bridget should not be allowed in the house. So, she constructs a letter and locks her out of the house. Unfortunately, Ursula's premonitions don't always save everyone as this time, instead of Ursula and Teddy dying, it is Bridget and Pamela.



Later, in another timeline, Ursula is at the beach with her family when she becomes 'reminded' of a former timeline. She is able to keep herself from drowning in this timeline. The same 'echo' saves her from going out of a window to get a doll that Maurice had thrown onto the rooftop. Again, she realizes that if she allows Howie to kiss her that something terrible will happen as a result. Therefore, when he makes an attempt to kiss her she soundly rebuffs him.

And, later, she has an overwhelming feeling on her birthday that she must take a walk to the train station. Though there's not anything wrong at the station, on her way back she encounters Nancy, who in another timeline is abducted and raped. In another timeline Ursula is the one that is attacked by the rapist, but recognizing who he is and what he's about, allows her to escape.

Reincarnation

The theme of reincarnation is reinforced by the motto: Practice Makes Perfect. Several of the characters say this throughout the novel, most often, Sylvie and Ursula. It is clear that Ursula lives many timelines over and over again until they go the way that works out best for Ursula's happiness. Initially, even Ursula's birth is harrowing. Finally, after many repeats, the birth is uncomplicated and her father is there to lovingly be there for her birth. The cat is forbidden anywhere near the room, and Sylvie has a pair of scissors handy.

Later, Ursula meets Dr. Kellet who gives Ursula and Sylvie the official theory on reincarnation. It is he that allows Ursula to accept what it is that she remembers and the freedom to act on her instincts when it comes to her. It is this ability to listen to herself that allows Ursula to grow and progress through the novel and what allows her to save the lives of many others in the story as well.

When she wonders if she would have been a good mother, as well as wondering what the Germans really thought about Hitler, she is reborn into a timeline that allows for both of those things to happen for her. She marries a German, makes friends with Eva Braun, and has a beautiful daughter named, Frieda. When she dies in this timeline, she never revisits Germany or has a child, having learned what she needed to learn.

It is this awareness of her own past lives that helps Ursula to come to the conclusion that in order for so many people to be able to live, for things to be righted, that Hitler must die. She is in a particularly good position to make that happen since she remembers from all of her past lives how to get close to him and how to accomplish the task. Unfortunately, she never executes that plan well and in the end, Hitler dies by his own hand.



Styles

Point of View

There are shifting points of view throughout the novel, but most notably the viewpoints are from Sylvie's and Ursula's viewpoints. While Ursula is young, it is Sylvie's viewpoint that the reader shares. Her perspectives are shown to shape and mold all of her children's notions about life and family.

Later, it is Ursula's primary viewpoint that the reader enjoys, seeing the replay of timeline after timeline through her eyes.

Language and Meaning

There are several points to note when considering the use of language in *Life After Life*. Definitely British in its flavor and tone, there are also foreign words, German, Italian, and French, peppered in to provide a very eclectic tone to the work. The narrative employs a fairly sophisticated vocabulary utilizing words that would have been known to those living during the historical framework, but whose meaning would have been lost to modern audiences. This is especially evident in the mention of literature, music, and fashions of the various time periods. The author does an exquisite job of giving the reader context from which to fill in the information as to the music, styles, and literature, as well as the historical foundations of the series of events that take place.

Structure

The structure of *Life After Life* is both daunting and daring for an author to attempt. The onus is on her to create a nonlinear array of timelines that, once pieced together in the reader's mind, make a cohesive whole. All of the chapters are titled by dates that are pertinent to Ursula's lifetime. It begins on February 11, 1910 and ends on November 1967. The significant times also have days attached to them, whereas others simply have the month and year listed. This gives the reader an 'anchor point' as the various historical points also provide. For example, at the end of World War I women were questioning their previously defined roles, and then there is the rise of Nazism and World War II.

Chapters are also designated by sections that, themselves, repeat. Snow, War, Armistice, for example repeat many times throughout the novel. Each titled section may have from 1-8 chapters attached to them, and gives the reader several alternate versions of the same event that takes place.

Of all of the events that are replayed the most Ursula's birth, the war chapters, and Ursula's determination to save Bridget, are the winners. They are focused upon because they are shown to be hinge points upon which all of Ursula's lifespans cling. If



these events are righted, then the rest seem to fall into line. The War chapters, in particular, show her ability to survive and it shows with stark reality the horrors of war.

Additionally, unlike many traditional novels, this novel doesn't offer a clear cut beginning or ending. This is as much a statement on the nature of life and death, of time, as any the author makes overtly within the text. There are many storylines that are never explored further, such as the serial rapist in the village. He is never caught, nor identified. Ursula never has any more children in any of her other lives. It is the possibility, for the reader, of a better outcome with the next timeline that makes the structure so captivating.

There is some method to the madness, however, in that Atkinson does tend to group significant events together. For example, most of the childhood incidents happen in a large group, then her teen years, young adult years, then older age. What stays unchanged from one possible timeline to the other is the use of the black bat or darkness fell to provide quick context for death occurring.



Quotes

The little heart. A helpless little heart beating wildly. Stopped suddenly like a bird dropped from the sky. A single shot.

-- Narrator (Snow paragraph Page 8)

Importance: This quote shows the death of Sylvie's unnamed child, if only for a moment. It sets the tone for birth, death, rebirth that is going to be a recurring motif throughout the novel. It also shows the use of the symbolism of birds and wings.

Sylvie was pleasantly surprised by her elder daughter's capacity for monotony. It would stand her in good stead for her life to come.

-- Narrator (War paragraph Page 55)

Importance: This shows Sylvie's disdain for the life she is forced to lead. A woman's life is full of monotony and temperance, and Sylvie, at this point in the book, still mourns for a life of luxury and excitement that she will never know.

Darkness fell swiftly, at first an enemy, but then a friend.

-- Narrator (November 11 1918 paragraph Page 83)

Importance: This is significant because it is the euphemism that the author uses throughout the book to denote death. Darkness falls, bat wings spread...these are all references to death. In this particular quote, Ursula is beginning to understand Death in a different way.

And sometimes, too, she knew what someone was about to say before they said it or what mundane incident was about to occur— if a dish was about to be dropped or an apple thrown through a glasshouse, as if these things had happened many times before. Words and phrases echoed themselves, strangers seemed like old acquaintances.

-- Narrator (November 11 1918 paragraph Page 121)

Importance: This is Ursula's first conscious understanding of reincarnation and the fact that she knows things about people and places because she's lived before.

She hadn't expected to die like a fox frozen in its den. Pammy would see the postcard, know that she'd been appreciated. Ursula closed her eyes.

-- Narrator (Peace paragraph Page 138)

Importance: This comes from one of the sections happening during the war. Ursula is despondent, misses home, feels completely alone, and crawls into her bed with a bottle of whiskey. She goes to sleep totally okay with the fact that she might not wake up. Which she doesn't.



You may as well have another tot of rum. You won't be going anywhere in a hurry tonight.

-- The Landlord (Snow paragraph Page 142)

Importance: This is of importance because the author chooses to place this small scene with Mrs. Haddock, the midwife, being trapped in the local pub because the snow is too difficult to get through. She'd been on her way to help deliver Ursula. The author uses this scene to end the book, too, indicating the nonlinear and cyclical nature of time.

Sylvie's feelings about Izzie went deeper than hair or makeup. She had never forgiven Izzie for the baby.

-- Narrator (Like a Fox in a Hole paragraph Page 150)

Importance: This shows one of Sylvie's overriding character traits. Sylvie sees herself, first and foremost, as a mother, and then a wife. She cannot fathom someone who would 'murder' her own child, let alone give it away. She is resolute on this point.

Reincarnation," Dr. Kellet had said to her. "Have you heard of that?"

-- Dr. Kellet (Like a Fox in a Hole paragraph Page 154)

Importance: This is the first instance that Dr. Kellet mentions reincarnation to a 10-year-old Ursula. She is fascinated and has a depth of understanding that makes her an interesting subject to Dr. Kellet.

Most ancient religions," he continued, "adhered to an idea of circularity— the snake with its tail in its mouth, and so on.

-- Dr. Kellet (Like a Fox in a Hole paragraph Page 158)

Importance: This is where Ursula first comes into the concept and depiction of the snake with its tail in its mouth. This drawing she will reproduce for him in an alternate timeline, confirming for him that she does understand reincarnation, even at age 10.

There are some Buddhist philosophers (a branch referred to as Zen) who say that sometimes a bad thing happens to prevent a worse thing happening," Dr. Kellet said.

-- Dr. Kellet (Like a Fox in a Hole paragraph Page 160)

Importance: This lets Ursula know that there is a reason for her compulsions to save people, or to push Bridget down the stairs.

The silver hare spun and shone and shimmered before her eyes.

-- Narrator (The End of the Beginning paragraph Page 485)

Importance: This small silver hare ornament has been in her bassinet after each birth, and she begins to remember it. Because of its special color and the way it catches the light, Ursula is rather captivated by it.



Teddy had been shot down near Berlin, only managing to escape from the cockpit at the last minute.

-- Narrator (The Broad Sunlit Uplands paragraph Page 524)

Importance: This is important because a timeline has been corrected. One of the great tragedies of Ursula's lives has been the loss of Teddy. In this timeline he does not die, Sylvie doesn't kill herself, and Nancy is able to be reunited with her fiance.