

# **The Life We Bury Study Guide**

## **The Life We Bury by Allen Eskens**

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# Contents

<a href="#">The Life We Bury Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 1-2.....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 3-5.....</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 6-7.....</a>	<a href="#">10</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 8-10.....</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 11-12.....</a>	<a href="#">14</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 13-15.....</a>	<a href="#">16</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 16-18.....</a>	<a href="#">18</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 19-21.....</a>	<a href="#">20</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 22-23.....</a>	<a href="#">22</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 24-26.....</a>	<a href="#">24</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 27-29.....</a>	<a href="#">26</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 30-31.....</a>	<a href="#">28</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 32-33.....</a>	<a href="#">30</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 34-36.....</a>	<a href="#">32</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 37-39.....</a>	<a href="#">34</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 40-43.....</a>	<a href="#">36</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 44-47.....</a>	<a href="#">39</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 48-50.....</a>	<a href="#">42</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 51-54.....</a>	<a href="#">44</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">47</a>
<a href="#">Symbols and Symbolism.....</a>	<a href="#">53</a>
<a href="#">Settings.....</a>	<a href="#">55</a>



[Themes and Motifs.....](#) 57

[Styles.....](#) 64

[Quotes.....](#) 66



# Plot Summary

"The Life We Bury" by Allen Eskens is a mystery novel about a young college student whose assignment in a biography class leads him to investigate a thirty-year-old murder. He finds inconsistencies in the case and realizes the convicted murderer may have been wrongfully accused. This engaging narrative explores the concepts of justice, honesty, and responsibility as Joe seeks to uncover the truth hidden in the past.

When Joe Talvert visits Hillview Manor in search of a subject for his biography class assignment, the director and the receptionist suggest that he interview Carl Iverson, a convicted murderer dying of cancer. Receiving a call about his mother's arrest, Joe rushes off to take care of Jeremy, his autistic brother. Carl agrees to talk to Joe whose research reveals that Carl was found guilty of raping and murdering seventeen-year-old Crystal Marie Hagan in 1980. While Joe is gone, Jeremy has a problem with the television and is assisted by Joe's neighbor, Lila, who agrees to a friendly dinner with the brothers. Joe uses his tuition money to bail his mother out because taking care of Jeremy is her responsibility.

Carl agrees to allow Joe to write his dying declaration after Joe promises to be honest. Upon learning that Joe plans to interview this monster, Lila convinces him to obtain copies of the trial transcripts so he can tell the whole story. Although Carl signs the release for Joe to get the transcripts, his friend Virgil is irritated because he insists Carl is innocent. As Lila helps Joe with his research, she is appalled by Carl's crime, but after several more interviews, Joe has difficulty reconciling Carl's traditional upbringing with the vicious murderer depicted in the trial transcripts. He meets with Virgil who shares a story about Carl saving his life in Vietnam.

Joe receives a call from his mother's landlord after Jeremy nearly burns down their apartment because their mother left him alone for several days. While caring for his brother, Joe is furious to find bruises left behind by Larry, his mother's boyfriend. He buys a cell phone for Jeremy to call him if anyone tries to hurt him again. When his mother returns, Joe lectures her about her responsibilities, but she seems indifferent.

As they continue their research, Joe and Lila are intrigued by Crystal's coded diary entries which were never deciphered and which could prove Carl's innocence. In exchange for Carl's promise of honesty, Joe confides about watching Grandpa Bill die, an event he blames on himself. Carl suggests Joe look for the anomalies in the trial photos, and Lila discovers a face in a window in the picture taken before the fire department arrived, forcing her to accept the possibility that Carl was wrongfully accused.

When Joe questions Carl about saving Virgil's life, Carl admits that he saw it as a righteous sacrifice and a way to commit suicide without damning his soul; however, he also tells Joe the story about Sergeant Gibbs raping and killing a girl in Oxbow. After deciding to interrogate Crystal's boyfriend, stepfather and stepbrother, Joe and Lila begin with Andy Fisher who tells them about Lila losing her glasses when they stole and



crashed a car from her stepfather's car lot. While seeing a play with Lila, Joe is haunted by the similarities to his personal life. After Lila is taunted as Nasty Nash at the pub, she explains her past promiscuity to Joe who comforts her.

Joe's mother leaves Jeremy at Joe's apartment so she can take a trip with Larry. As Lila and Jeremy discuss typing, she makes a connection between a typing lesson and Crystal's coded diary entries, breaking the code to reveal that Lila was blackmailed and raped by DJ who they assume to be her stepfather, Douglas Joseph. They share their findings with Detective Max Rupert who, unwilling to reopen the case without more evidence, directs them to Professor Boady Sanden. Professor Sanden warns that it is unlikely that Carl will be exonerated before his death without a confession.

Determined to clear Carl's name, Joe visits Douglas who knocks him out and kidnaps Joe with the intent of dumping his body under the ice in a river. Fortunately, Joe escapes and hides in a cabin during the snowstorm. However, when he makes his way to a nearby farmhouse, the sheriff arrests him. Then, Rupert picks Joe up. Rupert believes Douglas is guilty, but he has disappeared and his farmhouse has been burned to the ground. Rupert warns Joe of the investigation since this dangerous man has his wallet. Sanden is able to prove that a DNA sample under Crystal's nail did not belong to Carl. Since Douglas is missing, Joe decides to obtain a sample from Danny because he shares his father's DNA.

At Dan's house, Joe and Lila are surprised when Mrs. Lockwood refers to her husband as DJ. After fleeing when he returns, they steal trash that night in hopes of obtaining a DNA sample from one of his cigarette butts. On the drive home, Joe receives a call from Jeremy because Larry hit him. Joe rescues his brother and invites him to live with him, chiding their mother for her lack of concern for her children. After leaving Lila and Jeremy at the apartment, Joe returns home to receive a call from Dan who has kidnapped Lila.

Dan offers to exchange Lila for his trash, and Joe drives off to meet him, knowing that Dan plans to kill them both. He uses Jeremy's phone to alert Detective Rupert, but he fears the call went to voicemail. At the farm, Joe tries to attack Dan who shoots him in the thigh and ties him up to make him watch what he plans to do to Lila; however, Rupert and several other officers lurk in the shadows and kill Dan at their first opportunity. Carl is overjoyed when he learns that he has been exonerated, but he dies that night in his sleep. At the funeral, Virgil praises Joe for clearing his friend's name. At coffee with Rupert and Sanden, Joe and Lila learn that Dan's DNA solved several other murders, and they are entitled to \$120,000 in rewards; Joe is thrilled to find that he can now afford to take care of his brother and continue his education.



# Chapters 1-2

## Summary

Chapter 1 begins one month after Joe runs away to college to avoid arguing with his mother. Joe is filled with a sense of dread as he drives his twenty-year-old Honda Accord to Hillview Manor to find a stranger to interview for his biography class. At the nursing home, he explains his assignment to the receptionist, Janet, and Director Longren, lying that he has no family nearby. Since few of their residents retain their memories, Janet suggests that he should interview Carl Iverson. Iverson was convicted of raping and murdering a fourteen-year-old girl thirty years earlier. He was recently relocated from prison to Hillview Manor because he is dying of cancer. Joe's pleas to talk to Carl are interrupted by a phone call from his mother who is being arrested for a DUI. As Joe leaves to tend to his eighteen-year-old autistic brother, Mrs. Longren agrees to talk to Carl on his behalf.

In Chapter 2, Joe drives home to Austin, Minnesota, where he attended community college for three years before transferring to the University of MN. He recalls how his mother made him babysit Jeremy from age ten and his own grief when he injured his brother, though their mother's only concern was for the mess they made. At age eighteen, Jeremy can stay alone for hours but not for days. At their mother's apartment, Joe uses their mother's usual excuse of a meeting as the reason that Jeremy will be staying with him for a couple days. On the drive home, Joe wonders how he will care for Jeremy in between work and classes. Also, he wonders how he became the parent in their family.

## Analysis

The first chapter of this novel introduces the two main characters, Joe and Carl, though Carl does not physically appear in this chapter. The allusions to Joe's assignment foreshadow a relationship with the person he interviews. The little bit that Joe mentions of his past indicates his tumultuous relationship with his mother, especially as it pertains to his running away to college to avoid an argument with her. At Hillview Manor, the receptionist suggests that he interview Carl Iverson, a convicted murderer, which foreshadows Joe's future interactions with Carl. Joe's difficult personal life is indicated again when he receives a call from his mother who has been arrested. Her arrest has left Jeremy, Joe's eighteen-year-old autistic brother, to fend for himself. The haste with which Joe rushes to Jeremy's age shows his sense of responsibility and brotherly love.

Joe shares a bit more about his past in Chapter 2, revealing his mother's tendency to leave Joe in charge of Jeremy from a young age because of her alcoholism. Joe shows his tenderness and love in his ability to persuade Jeremy to come with him. Yet, Joe also admits that he resents his familial situation as he wonders how he became the



parent in his family. Joe's early interactions with his mother and Jeremy foreshadow the later decisions he makes concerning his dysfunctional family.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why does Joe lie to Mrs. Lorngren about having family nearby?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Who is Carl Iverson? What does Joe first learn about him?

## **Discussion Question 3**

How does Joe reveal his responsible nature during his first interactions with Jeremy in the novel?

## **Vocabulary**

premonition, grandeur, solicitations, facade, acquire



# Chapters 3-5

## Summary

In Chapter 3, Joe thinks of how little time he and Jeremy spent apart before he left for college. Although their mother was always subject to wild mood swings, they worsened after Grandpa Bill died. She began hitting Joe. When Joe turned 18, she started hitting Jeremy. Joe stopped her when he was around; but, he ignored knowing that it would get worse after he left.

Joe takes Jeremy to Joe's apartment. Once there, Jeremy refuses to enter. Their face-off is interrupted by L. Nash, Joe's beautiful, quiet neighbor. The distraction calms Jeremy. Joe settles his brother into bed with a movie and listens to his voicemail, mostly from his mother. There is also a message from Mrs. Lorngren that Carl will meet with Joe.

In Chapter 4, Joe's library research reveals that Carl was accused of murdering his neighbor, Crystal Marie Hagan, on October 29, 1980. Carl's arrest came after her remains had been found in his burned down shed. The picture of Carl at his arrest does not reveal pride, calmness, or fear; instead, he merely looks confused.

In Chapter 5, Joe is surprised to find his neighbor, who introduces herself as Lila, watching "Pirates of the Caribbean" with Jeremy. She explains that she helped after Jeremy hit the wrong button on the remote, but she avoids Joe's attempts at conversation and rejects his dinner invitation because she is not looking for romance. When Joe walks Lila to her apartment, she explains that she is familiar with Jeremy's symptoms because she has an autistic cousin. She finally agrees to dinner with the brothers when Joe insists it is for Jeremy's sake.

## Analysis

Chapter 3 begins with Joe reflecting on his early years with his mother as well as how Grandpa Bill cared for Joe and Jeremy. He warned Joe that he would have to be responsible for his brother. Joe's memories of his mother beating him and Jeremy foreshadow the abuse Jeremy suffers, while Joe again shows his resentment of his situation by ignoring what he knows to be inevitable. Lila is introduced in this chapter when she comes upon Joe coaxing Jeremy into his apartment. Joe, as the narrator, confesses his attraction to Lila which foreshadows their romantic relationship. Joe's voicemail stating that Carl has agreed to meet him foreshadows his interviews with the convicted murderer.

In Chapter 4, Joe's research reveals vague details about Carl's conviction. He was found guilty of raping and murdering his seventeen-year-old neighbor. However, when Joe examines the photograph of Carl at his arrest, he notices that Carl seems confused.





This is the first clue that Joe finds to indicate that Carl may not actually be guilty of Crystal's murder.

In Chapter 5, Joe returns home to find Lila watching a movie with Jeremy. The fact that Jeremy had a problem in such a short amount of time demonstrates the difficulty of caring for the autistic young man. Lila's willingness to help shows her caring nature and foreshadows her relationships with both Joe and Jeremy. Although she objects to dinner with Joe because she does not date, she agrees to join him and Jeremy for a friendly dinner. This foreshadows their relationship as well as the revelation of Lila's past which inhibits her from dating.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Describe Joe's and Jeremy's mother.

## **Discussion Question 2**

What does Joe's initial research teach him about Carl's case?

## **Discussion Question 3**

How does Lila's friendship with Joe begin?

## **Vocabulary**

amplified, exacerbate, cadence, procrastination, archive



## Chapters 6-7

### Summary

Janet, the receptionist, is friendlier when Joe arrives to talk to Carl in hopes that the convicted murderer will agree to be the subject of his biography assignment. When Carl asks why he is receiving such an honor, Joe claims that he finds the story compelling since he does not meet a killer every day. Claiming there is a difference between killing and murdering, though he has done both, Carl insists Joe cannot understand since he is attending college on his father's money. When Joe angrily corrects him for the assumption, Carl is pleased that Joe understands how wrong it is to judge someone without knowing their entire story. Having already denied many interview requests, Carl requires Joe's assurances that he will be fair and honest if Carl shares the truth. Then, he asks about Joe's family, raising the student's ire. Joe asks why Carl would agree to spend much of his last days with him. Claiming that this will be his dying declaration, Carl admits that he needs to tell someone the truth before he dies, even if it is never written or never read.

In Chapter 7, Joe is excited for dinner with Lila since he has rarely dated after his mother embarrassed him in front of his first girlfriend, who avoided him afterward. After arriving, Lila divides her attention between the movie she watches with Jeremy and perusing Joe's notes about Carl. She is outraged that Joe will give the criminal notoriety by writing his story and asks if he will write whatever Carl tells him. She suggests obtaining a copy of the trial so Joe can review the evidence. She calls her aunt to learn that Carl just needs to sign a release for Joe to gain access to the trial documents, noting they will know Carl is lying if he refuses.

### Analysis

In Chapter 6, Joe finally comes face-to-face with Carl. Although he expects a sixty-year-old monster chained to his bed, he finds a weathered old man who looks closer to eighty, eliciting his sympathy. Janet feels similar sympathy for Carl until she recalls what he has done. Her prediction that Carl will not live until Christmas foreshadows his imminent death. When Carl ponders why he has deserved the honor of being interviewed for Joe's paper, Joe states that it is not every day he meets a killer. Carl's rebuttal that there is a difference between killing and murdering introduces an important distinction in the novel. Joe again hints at his rough upbringing through his reaction to Carl's assumption that he is a rich college kid studying on his father's dime. At this point in the story, it is known that Joe works hard to put himself through college. Instead of being offended at Joe's outrage, Carl is relieved that the young man recognizes the importance of not judging someone without knowing their whole story.

It is important for Joe to be honest with Carl in order for the old man to reciprocate. So, he asks about Joe's family and why Joe is not interviewing one of them for his



assignment. Although Joe admits his mother is in detox and he does not know his father, he grows agitated at Carl's questions about Grandpa Bill, foreshadowing the tragic story about that particular relative. When Joe questions why Carl would tell him the truth after refusing so many interviews over the years, Carl admits that he sees Joe's assignment as his dying confession, and it is important that he tell someone the truth, even if it is not written; this foreshadows that Carl will confess all of his crimes to Joe.

In Chapter 7, Joe is excited for dinner with Lila, even though it is not a date, and this shows his romantic interest in his neighbor and foreshadows their relationship. Joe recalls the only girlfriend he ever had, Phyllis, who wanted to meet his mother but avoided him after a disastrous introduction to his home life. This serves as yet another example of Joe's upbringing and his mother's irresponsible behavior. Joe is excited when Lila arrives, though he feels an odd jealousy watching her with Jeremy, and Lila's interest in Joe's assignment research foreshadows her involvement with Carl's case, though she cannot believe he is interviewing such a psychopath initially. Earlier, Joe felt good about his project and was excited to discuss it with Lila, but now he wants to avoid the topic; unfortunately, Lila pursues the subject, suggesting that Carl will not be honest about his crimes, but she shows her usefulness when she suggests Joe obtain a copy of the trial documents as support to ensure he tells the whole story. She insists that they will know Carl is guilty if he refuses to sign the release needed for Joe to obtain the paperwork.

## Discussion Question 1

What is the significance of Joe and Carl's conversation about honesty?

## Discussion Question 2

Why has Joe rarely dated?

## Discussion Question 3

How does Lila initially feel about Joe interviewing Carl?

## Vocabulary

vigil, inevitable, compelling, proverbial, juvenile, coax



# Chapters 8-10

## Summary

In Chapter 8, Joe drives to Mower County Courthouse to visit his mother who insists on him paying her \$3000 bail because she refuses to agree to an alcohol monitor. Joe refuses because he needs the money for next semester and knows she will not pay him back. Then, she reminds him that he will have to take care of Jeremy. This forces him to choose between his brother and his education. Filled with rage as he signs the check, Joe has to believe that his mother is Jeremy's keeper in order to leave Austin.

In Chapter 9, Joe stops by Hillview on his way home and is surprised that Carl has a visitor, Virgil, whom he introduces as the painter. When Joe asks Carl to sign the release, Carl mocks him for not believing Carl will tell the truth, but Virgil angrily insists the trial is the last place to learn the truth about Carl. Although Carl signs the release, he warns that it will make Joe hate him and reminds the boy that it is not his whole story. As Joe leaves, Virgil hands him a business card and says to call him for the truth because, even though he was not there, Virgil knows that Carl did not kill that girl.

In Chapter 10, it takes a week for Joe to obtain the files on Carl's trial. The attorney, Mr. Collins, claims there was not much to the case other than Carl rejecting a second degree plea. Carl claimed he did not kill Crystal, but he drank until he passed out that day. Collins' belief that the boyfriend killed her was irrelevant because her fingernail was found on Carl's porch and her body was incinerated in his shed. Collins warns that Joe will believe Carl's innocence as he did at first, but no one lies as convincingly as a pedophile. The evidence proved Carl's guilt. He hands over copies of the trial transcripts, claiming Joe will not find anything new, but it should keep him busy for a while.

## Analysis

In Chapter 8, Joe's interactions with his incarcerated mother once again highlight her maternal indifference and her irresponsible attitude. Rather than simply agree to stop drinking, she coerces her son to spend \$3000 bailing her out, using Jeremy as leverage. For the first time in the narrative, Joe is forced to choose between his brother and his education. He chooses both by bailing his mother out to care for his brother, though he knows he will have to pick up extra work to restore the money his mother will never repay. This is a recurring choice that Joe is forced to make at various points in the novel. Joe makes a conscious effort to believe that his mother will take care of Jeremy, but Joe is only trying to convince himself of something that is not true. It seems that further conflicts are ahead between Joe and his mother in regards to Jeremy's care.

In Chapter 9, Joe meets Virgil, Carl's only friend and the only person who believes Carl is innocent. Virgil's loyalty to Carl is revealed through his distaste for Joe's assignment



as he obviously believes Joe will not tell the truth. Despite mocking Joe's lack of faith in his honesty, Carl's willingness to sign the release indicates his desire to be truthful and hide nothing. The horrors of the trial are hinted at when Carl warns that Joe will hate him after reading it, but Carl reminds the young man that it is not his whole story, foreshadowing their future conversations about Carl's past. Virgil's insistence on Carl's innocence and his offer to explain the reason for his belief foreshadow his future discussion with Joe.

In Chapter 10, it takes Joe a week to obtain the first portion of Carl's trial records. When he picks them up, he questions the attorney, Mr. Collins, who claims there was not much to the case. Joe learns that Carl proclaimed his innocence on the night of his arrest. However, since he had passed out from drinking the afternoon of Crystal's murder, he did not have a solid alibi.. Collins believed Crystal was murdered by her boyfriend, but the evidence pointed to Carl. Collins warns Joe that he will want to believe Carl's professions of innocence because no one lies as well as a pedophile, and he also alludes to the harassment pedophiles are subjected to in prison, foreshadowing Carl's future story to that effect. Collins provides Joe with plenty of information to begin his research. Joe will need help to read it all.

## Discussion Question 1

How does Joe's mother force him to choose between his brother and his education in Chapter 8?

## Discussion Question 2

Why is Virgil angry about Joe's interest in Carl?

## Discussion Question 3

What does Mr. Collins say about Carl's guilt?

## Vocabulary

pathetic, collateral, delusion, vacuous, inexplicable, contraband, burlap



# Chapters 11-12

## Summary

In Chapter 11, Joe curses himself as he thumbs through the transcripts. Seeing the file as an excuse to visit Lila, he goes next door to beg for her assistance. Taking turns reading aloud, they learn of Crystal's aversion to the "pervert next door" (page 77) who caught her fooling around with her boyfriend, Andy Fisher, in his car. Her journal also mentioned her stepfather's threats to send her to private religious school if she ruined the family reputation by being immodest. Coded entries indicate that she was blackmailed to perform sexual favors, though she does not explicitly implicate Carl, as well as her relief when her guidance counselor assured her that her rapist would be arrested since he is not a minor. Crystal was strangled with an electrical cord, and her body was burned in Carl's shed. Carl did not answer when police knocked because he was passed out from liquor consumption; but, when they returned the next morning, they found him with a whiskey bottle and a 45 caliber pistol. The prosecutor asked for a guilty verdict of first degree murder. Disgusted with Carl, Lila cannot understand how Joe can talk to him and insists he tell the whole story, not just a tale of a sick old man. Joe assures her, "I made a promise to write the truth. And I will" (page 80).

In Chapter 12, October flies by, and Joe visits Carl twice, submitting his first chapter. On November 1, he visits again and wonders what turned Carl into a monster. He learns about Carl's traditional upbringing and his service in Vietnam. Carl admits to being attacked in prison because of his crimes, but he did not request segregation because he felt he did not deserve to live; however, after an Aryan brother tried to slit his throat, he was forced into solitude for most of his thirty years imprisonment. Joe asks if Carl met Virgil in prison, but tired, Carl says that is a story for another day. Janet warns that Carl will be out of it tomorrow since he did not take his medicine so he would be clear-headed for their conversation. Joe decides it is time to talk to Virgil, the only person who believes Carl is innocent.

## Analysis

Overwhelmed by the sheer volume of information in the trial transcripts in Chapter 11, Joe considers dropping the course, but hearing music from Lila's apartment, foreshadowing is fulfilled when he tells her he has obtained the records and she offers to assist him. Reading together, Joe and Lila discover Crystal's feelings about "Creepy Carl," and subsequent journal entries seem to indicate that Carl blackmailed Crystal for sexual favors in exchange for keeping secrets from her strictly religious stepfather about her physical activities with her boyfriend. Ironically, Crystal was murdered on the same day she planned to confront her tormentor, and Carl's intoxication fueled the belief of his guilt. The mention of Crystal's broken nail which was found on Carl's porch foreshadows its use as evidence in the present, but its location, combined with the fact that her body was found burned in Carl's shed, convinces the jury to return a guilty verdict. Lila's



disgust with Carl extends to Joe, and she cannot understand how Joe can talk to the man. Joe's promise to write the truth demonstrates his intense interest in Carl's case and the lengths he goes to in order to uncover the truth of Crystal's murder.

In Chapter 12, Joe learns about Carl's youth and his honorable discharge from the military. The things he learns are hard to reconcile with Crystal's monstrous murderer. His discovery presents the possibility of Carl's innocence. Questioning Carl, Joe asks if the scar on his throat is from Vietnam and learns he was attacked in prison, fulfilling foreshadowing derived from Joe's conversation with Collins. Carl's admission that he did not want to live at that point in time foreshadows his future confessions. Joe decides it is time to talk to the only person who believes Carl is innocent, Virgil.

## **Discussion Question 1**

What do the trial transcripts teach Joe about Crystal's opinions of Carl and her life in general?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What "evidence" was used to prove Carl's guilt in 1980?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Describe Carl's time in prison.

## **Vocabulary**

quixotic, vivacious, transcript, synopsis, composure



# Chapters 13-15

## Summary

In Chapter 13, Joe does not pick up the rest of the attorney's file for several weeks after it is ready, retrieving only when he visits that side of town to meet with Virgil. Virgil worries about Joe's intent, fearing he will harm Carl more than has already been done. Joe wonders why Virgil did not testify at Carl's trial since he is the only one who believes his friend is innocent, and Virgil explains that the attorneys did not want to incorporate character evidence that would highlight Carl's aversion to work and dependence on alcohol. Virgil explains that he met Carl in Vietnam in 1967, and revealing his prosthetic leg, Virgil claims Carl is the only reason he is still alive. Virgil and Tater were walking point when gunfire exploded, hitting Virgil once in the shoulder and twice in the leg, and though their sergeant ordered their platoon back, Carl surged forward to protect his friend, taking several bullets in the process. The conflict ended when air support dropped napalm on the enemy, and Carl still has the burn scars from covering his friend. Although Joe enjoys the story, it does not prove Carl's innocence, and while Virgil admits that Carl killed during the war, he argues that it is different from murdering a young girl because countries agree to kill each other in battle. When Joe points out that Carl told him he has killed and murdered, Virgil admits there is another story from Vietnam that convinces him of Carl's innocence, but as he swore never to tell anyone, Joe will have to ask Carl for that tale and then he will understand that there is no way Carl killed Crystal.

In Chapter 14, Joe collects the rest of the attorney's files in hopes of learning what turned Carl from a war hero into a murderer. Intrigued by the case, Lila joins Joe in reviewing Crystal's journal while Joe looks at the photos. Joe feels sick as he surveys the high school photo compared to the photo of Crystal's charred remains, understanding the jury's rage and wishing Carl had received a death sentence for this atrocity. Joe's research is interrupted by a call from his mother's landlord who informs him that she has been in a meeting since yesterday and Jeremy nearly burned the apartment down. Lila overhears enough to encourage Joe to go, and he rushes out.

In Chapter 15, the landlord, Terry Brener, is a good guy who hired Joe at age 18 so he could help pay the rent, but now he warns Joe that he will have to evict Joe's family if he gets sued because no one is available to watch Jeremy since Joe went to college. Joe promises to talk to his mother and checks on Jeremy, learning their mother went to a meeting with Larry. As he prepares Jeremy for bed, Joe notices bruises on his brother's back, and Jeremy timidly admits they came from Larry. After comforting Jeremy and putting him to bed, Joe decides he needs to have a talk with Larry, whoever he is.





## Analysis

Chapter 13 focuses on Joe's conversation with Virgil where Virgil describes his young friend. Although Carl killed many men in Vietnam, Virgil describes him as a pacifist because of how his conscience plagued him. Virgil also shares a story about how Carl saved his life in Vietnam as proof of Carl's innocence, but Joe does not accept the story as proof, noting that people change, especially since Carl returned to war after Virgil was sent home. Virgil reiterates the difference between killing and murdering, noting that countries agree to kill each other in war. Carl did his duty as a soldier in Vietnam, but Virgil insists that Carl did not kill Crystal. Virgil alludes to another story that shows Carl's innocence. Since he has promised to keep the secret, he suggests that Joe ask Carl, foreshadowing Carl's recounting of the Oxbow story.

Joe and Lila's relationship continues to develop in Chapter 14 as she helps with his research. Joe's desire to spend time with Lila fuels his interest in Carl's case. Looking at the trial photos, Joe is filled with rage and wishes Carl had been executed, but his research is halted when he receives a call from his mother's landlord and must fly to his brother's rescue again, showing his responsibility and loyalty.

In Chapter 15, the landlord is nice but firm about Jeremy's situation. He knows that Jeremy needs supervision and laments his mother's indifference, but he cannot afford to be sued if an accident occurs. Tending to Jeremy, Joe is furious to learn that his mother has left Jeremy for days while going to a meeting, a common excuse that means she is boozing with Larry, her new boyfriend. Joe's rage spikes when he learns that Larry has beaten his brother, leaving bruises. His reaction foreshadows his decision to confront Larry.

### Discussion Question 1

How did Carl save Virgil's life in Vietnam?

### Discussion Question 2

How does Joe feel about Carl after seeing the trial photographs?

### Discussion Question 3

Why does Joe have to take care of Jeremy? Why is he angry about it?

## Vocabulary

bluntly, pacifist, scampering, satiate, deviant, mundane



# Chapters 16-18

## Summary

In Chapter 16, Joe buys Jeremy a cell phone and teaches him how to use it for emergencies. When their mother finally arrives late in the afternoon, Joe yells at her for leaving Jeremy alone. When Larry tries to poke him, Joe takes the man to his knees and tells him never to touch his brother again. Joe's mother complains that Jeremy is 18 and she only left for a couple days, but he reminds her that Jeremy will never really be an adult and warns her that they could be evicted. Though he ignores her quip about how he abandoned Jeremy, Joe is bothered by the sadness in his brother's eyes as he leaves.

In Chapter 17, Lila wakes Joe from a nightmare the following morning to announce that she has finished reading Crystal's diary. Fifteen entries mention her neighbor, Creepy Carl, watching her from his window. Shortly after meeting Andy Fisher, Carl sees them fooling around in Andy's car. Two days later, Crystal begins writing in code about something bad happening with the last coded entry dated for the day of her death. These entries allude to threats and to Crystal's relief after her guidance counselor informs her that the age difference will mean jail for the person who has harassed her. Although Lila doubts that it is coincidence that the coded entries start after Carl saw Crystal in Andy's car, Joe insists the code could change everything. The attorney's attempts to crack the code were in vain, and Lila suggests Carl did not press the issue because he already knew what the entries would say.

In Chapter 18, Joe calls Berthel Collins to ask about attempts to decode the diary entries. He learns that Carl demanded a speedy trial, not allowing time enough for his attorneys to construct a solid defense. John Peterson, the main attorney, tried to convince Carl to delay the trial so they could crack the code, but it seemed like Carl was working against them and wanted to go to jail.

## Analysis

Joe again demonstrates his desire to care for Jeremy in Chapter 16 when he buys his brother a cell phone. This purchase foreshadows the use of the cell phone later in the novel. Foreshadowing is fulfilled when Joe confronts his mother upon her return, and he also confronts Larry, a man he recognizes from throwing out of a bar at his previous job for hitting a woman. This demonstration of Larry's nature predicts his continued abuse toward Jeremy. Joe's indifference towards his mother is seen by his concern for Jeremy which does not extend to their mother. In response to her claims about Jeremy being old enough to stay home alone, Joe reminds her of her younger son's mental disabilities and tells her that she cannot run off. Her rebuttal that Joe ran off shows her lack of maternal instinct and her inability to recognize that Joe should not be responsible for his



brother since that is her duty. Jeremy's sadness when Joe leaves shows the bond between the brothers and the extent to which their mother has made his life miserable.

In Chapter 17, Lila's interest in Carl's case is obvious when she wakes Joe the next day in order to resume their research. They continue reading Crystal's diary, noting that she seemed like a normal teenaged girl. Her entries about "Creepy Carl" demonstrate the reason for Carl's conviction, but after Carl catches her in a compromising position with her boyfriend, Crystal writes in code with the last entry dated on the day she was murdered. An entry about her guidance counselor indicates that Crystal was being molested by someone over the age of eighteen. Joe points out that they cannot be certain Crystal was writing about Carl, yet Lila insists that it cannot just be coincidental that the coded entries began so soon after Carl caught her with her boyfriend. The trial transcript of the guidance counselor's testimony seems to point to Carl, though she admitted that Crystal was very vague about what was going on during their conversation. Crystal planned to confront her harasser that day which was the same day Carl bought a gun, again leading to more evidence against him. Still, Joe has his doubts and is disappointed that no one tried harder to crack the code. Lila suggests that Carl did not want them to crack the code because he already knew what it would say.

In Chapter 18, Joe's interest in the code leads him to call Mr. Collins who tells him that Carl did not seem interested in decoding Crystal's journal entries. In fact, Carl did all he could to hasten the trial, and Collins notes that it seemed as if Carl was working against them and wanted to go to jail. Joe's conversation with Collins foreshadows his questioning Carl and learning why Carl was so eager to go to trial, despite the lack of evidence to support his plea of innocent.

## Discussion Question 1

Describe Joe's first confrontation with his mother and Larry.

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Joe learn from reading Crystal's diary?

## Discussion Question 3

What is the significance of Crystal's coded diary entries? Why is Joe so intrigued by them?

## Vocabulary

contorted, maneuver, adolescence, decipher, lingers



# Chapter 19-21

## Summary

When Joe questions Carl about the coded diary entries in Chapter 19, Carl tells him to look at the trial photos if he likes puzzles, suggesting he compare the photos taken before and after the fire department arrived to search for the anomaly that took Carl years to find in prison. Joe asks why Carl did not fight harder to stay out of prison and is told "I thought it would silence the nightmare" (page 119). Reminding Carl that this is his dying confession, Joe asks for more details, and when Carl asks about Joe's grandfather, Joe admits what he has never told anyone; he watched Grandpa Bill die, and it was his fault.

In Chapter 20, Joe recounts how Grandpa Bill often took him fishing but warned him against leaving trash in the boat because that is how accidents happen. At age 11, Joe did not heed the warning, and Grandpa Bill slipped on a bottle and was ejected out of the boat, his pants catching on a dead tree so Joe watched him struggle until he stopped moving. Carl tells Joe that he was just a kid and it was not his fault, but Joe insists he had the choice to try or watch, and he chose wrong. Leaving, Joe feels cheated that he did not hear Carl's story yet, but looking back, he wonders about the look of pain on the old man's face.

In Chapter 21, Joe invites Lila to join him in searching for the anomalies in the trial photos, and finally, Lila notices a pulled curtain and face in the window in the photo taken before the fire department arrived. Lila admits that it is either a mystery person or someone lied to the police, and although she wants to believe Carl is guilty, it is obvious that she also recognizes the possibility that something went terribly wrong during the trial 30 years earlier.

## Analysis

Foreshadowing is fulfilled in Chapter 19 when Joe questions Carl about all he learned during his discussion with Collins. In regards to the coded entries, Carl suggests Joe look at the photos before and after the fire department arrived to search for the anomaly, foreshadowing this discovery in the near future. Carl also admits that he thought going to prison would silence the nightmares of horrible things he had done in the past, foreshadowing later confessions, but first, Carl seeks a moment of honesty from Joe and asks about Grandpa Bill.

In Chapter 20, Joe finally shares the story of his grandfather's death, admitting he saw Grandpa Bill die and that it was his fault. Joe recounts his grandfather's lessons about safety on the boat and how his disregard of those lessons caused Grandpa Bill to trip on trash Joe had left in the boat. Joe watched his grandfather struggle against the current until he drowned, and although Carl insists it was not the eleven-year-old's fault, Joe



believes he had the choice to watch or try to help; he chose wrong, and this guilt foreshadows his determination to prove Carl's innocence. The pain on Carl's face foreshadows a similar feeling to Joe's which is explained during their next interview.

In Chapter 21, Joe sees Carl's hints about the puzzle in the trial photos as an excuse to see Lila, but he is confused by her flirtatious grin which foreshadows their romantic relationship. Joe and Lila review the photos for some time before she notices the anomaly - in the before photo, a face is barely visible in a window of Crystal's house which is very significant because her family claimed no one was home. Lila and Joe consider the implications of this discovery, recognizing the possibility of Carl's innocence. Joe notes feeling a tremor, but they do not realize how quickly their finding will crack the case wide open.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why didn't Carl take an interest in his case before his conviction?

## **Discussion Question 2**

How does Joe feel about Grandpa Bill's death? What does the death teach him?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What anomalies do Joe and Lila find in the trial photos taken before and after the fire department's arrival? Why is this important?

## **Vocabulary**

insignificance, anomaly, agility, cavalry, dousing



# Chapters 22-23

## Summary

In Chapter 22, Carl smiles when he sees Joe because he knows it is his turn to open up, especially since Joe's mid-term paper on a major turning point in Carl's life is nearly due. After hearing how vehemently Virgil protested his innocence, Carl laughingly admits that he was not acting heroic when he saved his friend; he wanted to die. However, since his religious upbringing prohibited suicide, he saw his acts as a righteous sacrifice. Reminding Carl of his promise to be honest, Joe asks about the second story in Vietnam that Virgil mentioned. Though Carl does not know what it will prove, he agrees to share the tale. After listening attentively for two hours, Joe writes Carl's story as the turning point in his life.

Chapter 23 explores Joe's turning point assignment as he shares how Carl met Virgil in Vietnam on September 23, 1967. Their squad leader, Sergeant Gibbs, was a cruel man who urged them to kill more men than could kill them. After only four months, Carl felt he had seen enough war to last a lifetime, but Virgil encouraged him with the reminder that they still had some decisions about how much of their soul remained intact. On a peaceful morning in February 1968, their squad tried to move the village of Oxbow out of the free-fire zone. While the rest of the squad cleared the road, Gibbs ordered Carl and Virgil to accompany him. Seeing movement in the grass, he ordered them to fire; however, Carl refused to kill the teenaged girl as she entered a hooch in the distance and talked to someone inside. Gibbs offered to handle the hooch while Carl and Virgil killed the cows and set fire to the barn. When they entered the hooch and found Gibbs raping the girl, Carl objected. Gibbs claimed he was interrogating a Viet Cong sympathizer. Putting a gun to Carl's head, he ordered Carl to do the same. When Carl refused, Gibbs slit the girl's throat, yelled at Carl for disobeying orders, and commanded the men to burn the hooch. As Virgil set the fire, Carl's chest was filled with ice. The girl's hand reached out to him before the fiery roof crashed on top of her.

## Analysis

Joe is excited to interview Carl in Chapter 22 because he feels that Carl owes him some sort of confession after telling about his grandfather. The fact that Joe's midterm assignment is nearly due foreshadows his use of Carl's story for the paper. Their conversation begins with Joe sharing what Virgil told him, and Carl admits that he wanted to die in Vietnam. However, his Catholic upbringing did not allow suicide. However, since the Bible also says there is no greater sacrifice than laying down one's life for his brother, Carl saw his heroism as a loophole. He laughs that Virgil's loyalty is based on a lie. When Joe asks if the only person who believes in his innocence is wrong, Carl insists he did not kill Crystal. Joe's admonishment for honesty indicates that he still believes Carl is guilty. Recognizing this, Carl admits that he does not expect Joe to believe him. Joe's interest in Carl's story and his mention of using the story for his



assignment fulfill earlier foreshadowing while simultaneously foreshadowing the recounting of Carl's story which occurs in the following chapter.

In Chapter 23, the point of view changes as Joe writes about Carl's story for his midterm assignment on the turning point in Carl's life. Joe recounts how Carl met Virgil in Vietnam. He describes Sergeant Gibbs as cruel and contemptuous, which sheds light on that individual's actions in this and a future narrative. Within a few months, Carl has seen enough war to last a lifetime. When he tells Virgil that he can feel himself slipping, Virgil encourages him with the reminder that they can choose how much of their soul they leave behind. It's one of the few choices that they have. The crack in Carl's world that makes him yearn for death comes shortly after when he and Virgil accompany Gibbs on a mission. First, Carl refuses to gun down a young girl running through the field. When Gibbs goes to take care of the situation, Carl finds him raping the girl. Despite being held at gunpoint, Carl refuses to engage in such a treacherous activity, yet Gibbs still kills the girl and burns her body. This parallel to Crystal's death makes Carl seem to be the likely murderer. However, it also makes it impossible that he would commit such an act. Carl obviously feels guilty about the girl's rape and death, drawing a parallel to Joe's feelings about passively watching Grandpa Bill's death instead of acting.

## Discussion Question 1

What does Carl say about Virgil's faith in his innocence?

## Discussion Question 2

How did Carl feel about his service while he was deployed in Vietnam?

## Discussion Question 3

When Carl finally shares the Oxbow story, how does it show the unlikelihood of his guilt? What parallels can be drawn between the Oxbow murder and Crystal?

## Vocabulary

rejuvenated, tepid, perforated, segregation, barrage, transport, taunting, latrine, thatched, condemned



# Chapters 24-26

## Summary

Lila's face is stunned when she hears the Oxbow story in Chapter 24. Though it seems strangely coincidental that the Oxbow girl's body was also burned, Joe is starting to believe Carl's innocence. Joe and Lila consider what his innocence would mean. They decide that Crystal's stepfather, stepbrother, or boyfriend are the most likely suspects. They decide to begin with her boyfriend, Andy Fisher. Joe asks Lila to dinner. While she will not agree to a date, they make plans to see "The Glass Menagerie," a play Lila can watch for extra credit.

In Chapter 25, Joe and Lila track Andy down to ask about Crystal's murder, but he hates talking about this case that will not go away and has ruined his life since rumors spread that he was the killer. Andy insists Crystal was alive when he left. Though he did not think anyone was home, he never spoke to Doug or Danny Lockwood about that day. When Joe mentions Crystal's diary, Andy admits that the prosecutor got it wrong - Andy and Crystal had "borrowed" and crashed a car from her stepfather's car lot, but someone had found the eyeglasses Crystal lost. They were blackmailing her with the information. Andy never told anyone for fear of being prosecuted for the car theft, but the evidence seemed to indicate Carl was guilty.

In Chapter 26, Joe is excited for his non-date with Lila, but the play reminds him of his personal life, making him pensive and withdrawn. Lila takes his hand when he cries at the end of the play, holding it until the pain in his chest subsides. However, they do not look at each other.

## Analysis

In Chapter 24, Lila recognizes the irony of the manner of the Oxbow girl's demise being so similar to Crystal's, but while she believes it is more than a coincidence, Joe is beginning to believe the possibility that Carl is innocent. Considering what his innocence means, Lila and Joe agree that Crystal knew her murderer, and they identify her boyfriend, stepfather and stepbrother as the likely suspects, foreshadowing their interrogation attempts. Joe asks Lila out, but knowing her aversion to dates, he insists on a friendly outing, and she agrees that he can accompany her to see a play for an extra credit assignment she has received.

In Chapter 25, foreshadowing is fulfilled when Joe and Lila track down Andy Fisher, Crystal's boyfriend, to question him about her murder. Andy insists the killer was already caught, but he begrudgingly talks to them when they inform him that they believe Carl is innocent. Andy laments that the case will not go away and admits that he still dreams about Crystal because the case ruined his life since people believed him to be the murderer despite Carl's conviction. Andy insists Crystal was alive when he left her, but





he also admits that while he did not think anyone else was home, he does not know for certain. His negative descriptions of Danny and Doug foreshadow their involvement in Crystal's murder. Andy's reaction to the mention of the diary indicates that he knows more than he told at the trial. This is proven when he admits that he has nightmares because the prosecutor misunderstood it.

Although Carl caught Crystal and Andy having sex, the entries about her being blackmailed were unrelated. Andy confesses that he and Crystal "borrowed" a car from Doug's used car lot and crashed into a parked cop car. They made it look like a theft at the dealership, but Crystal lost her glasses and was concerned about the evidence. After this event, Crystal grew distant so Andy does not know who was blackmailing her. The setting of this fiasco also implicates Doug and Danny who both worked at the dealership. Andy never told the attorneys about the theft because he worried what it would do to his already damaged reputation, but he still has nightmares about all of it.

In Chapter 26, Joe is excited for his non-date with Lila. Lila's refusal to explain why she did not go home for Thanksgiving indicates her troubled past. Joe is disturbed by the play and admits that he would not have agreed to see "The Glass Menagerie" if he had known how much it would remind him of his family life, but he keeps his thoughts to himself until he cries at the end. Lila's attempt at comfort by holding his hand foreshadows her changing feelings toward Joe.

## Discussion Question 1

How does Lila feel about Carl's recent confession? How does it influence her view of the case?

## Discussion Question 2

Describe Andy's reaction to Joe and Lila's interrogation. What new information do they learn?

## Discussion Question 3

Why is Joe affected by seeing "The Glass Menagerie" with Lila?

## Vocabulary

inquisitive, incredulous, vignettes, gusto, cognizant



# Chapters 27-29

## Summary

In Chapter 27, after the play Joe tells Lila about Jeremy's bruises as an explanation for his reaction to the play, and she notes that everyone has baggage. At the pub, a rowdy drunk recognizes Lila as "Nasty Nash," calling her a sure thing and causing her to run from the pub. Joe slyly punches the guy in the gut and flees before anyone realizes what happened.

Joe goes to Lila's apartment in Chapter 28, and she explains that she was wild in high school and developed a reputation for promiscuity. Consequently, no one believed her when she was raped the night of graduation. Lila spent a year in therapy afterward. Joe tucks Lila into bed. Then, since she does not want to be alone, he crawls in beside her.

In Chapter 29, Lila and Joe make breakfast and discuss the case in his apartment the next morning, but they are interrupted when his mother brings Jeremy for Joe to watch for a few days so she can go to the casino with Larry. As Lila types a homework assignment, Jeremy praises her typing skills and tells her about learning to type "the quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog." Lila has an amazing epiphany and uses the sentence to crack Crystal's coded diary entries. The entries reveal that DJ found her glasses. Her stepfather's name is Douglas Joseph. Joe and Lila are excited that they have found the murderer.

## Analysis

In Chapter 27, Joe tells Lila why the play bothered him and states that caring for Jeremy is not his job. Lila simply insists that everyone has their baggage, again foreshadowing her confession about her own past. More foreshadowing occurs at the pub when Lila is insulted. After she runs off, Joe defends her honor by punching the guy in the stomach.

Earlier foreshadowing is fulfilled in Chapter 28 when Lila tells Joe that she partied a lot and had a reputation for sleeping around. On the night of her graduation, she was drugged and raped by two guys, but no one believed her story. She spent a year in therapy before college. Joe insists he is not afraid of her issues. Their romance is further foreshadowed when Lila asks him to stay with her. Joe shows his character by his excitement to just hold Lila until she falls asleep.

In Chapter 29, Lila kisses Joe in the morning, which begins their relationship. While they make breakfast and discuss the case, his mother arrives with Jeremy. She insists on Joe watching Jeremy for a few days while she goes to the casino. This reinforces her irresponsibility, and she shows a lack of humanity and maternal instinct in her rants about Joe shacking up with Lila while leaving her to care for her younger son. Although Joe tells his mother that this is not his duty, he does not argue for fear of upsetting Jeremy, again showing his sense of responsibility for his brother. Jeremy's comments



about Lila's typing leads Lila to connect an introductory typing course sentence to the fact that Crystal began a typing class that semester. She uses this sentence to decode the journal entries, learning that DJ found Crystal's glasses. Since her stepfather's name is Douglas Joseph, they believe they have found their killer. This foreshadows their attempts to reopen the case to prove Carl's innocence.

## **Discussion Question 1**

How does Joe react to the slob at the bar insulting Lila?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What is the significance of the nickname Nasty Nash? What else does Lila tell Joe about her past?

## **Discussion Question 3**

How do Joe and Lila break the code in Crystal's diary? What do they learn from the diary's entries?

## **Vocabulary**

ample, exquisite, paralyzed, mesmerized, testimony



# Chapters 30-31

## Summary

In Chapter 30, Joe, Jeremy, and Lila spend a great Thanksgiving weekend together. Jeremy does not want to leave when their mother picks him up. On Monday, Joe and Lila go to the police department and tell Detective Max Rupert everything they have learned about Carl's case and wrongful conviction. Rupert objects to reopening a thirty-year-old case, especially since there is no way to reverse the conviction before Carl dies. Joe is furious at his indifference. Rupert directs him to Boady Sanden at the Innocence Project who can help get the evidence back in court if Carl is innocent. Rupert warns that Sanden will be very angry if Joe is wasting his time.

In Chapter 31, Joe drives to Hillview to tell Carl about his breakthrough and his hopes of Carl being exonerated. Carl insists that he is not worried about overturning his conviction. Carl does not regret going to prison since he was planning to kill himself because of his guilt over the Oxbow girl. Because he promised to be honest with Joe, Carl shares a story he has never even told Virgil. After Virgil was sent home, Carl went on another mission with Gibbs in July 1968. On that mission, he caught Gibbs following a girl into a hut. Nothing mattered except stopping him, and Carl stabbed Gibbs to death. However, while he saved the girl, he had no right to murder a man. He figured it was time to pay his debt when he was accused of murdering Crystal. Carl thought prison would silence the nightmares, but there are some things that cannot be outrun. Their interview is cut short when Carl is seized with pain, and Joe wonders how long his friend has left.

## Analysis

Joe again shows what a good brother he is in Chapter 30 by how much he enjoys his weekend with Jeremy, and Jeremy's aversion to leaving with his mother foreshadows his willingness to move in with Joe. Foreshadowing is fulfilled when Joe and Lila go to the police department with their newly uncovered evidence, but the detective objects to opening such an old case. He also explains the difficulty of undoing Carl's conviction before he dies, foreshadowing Joe's determination to do just that. Rupert directs Joe to Sandy Boaden, foreshadowing that gentleman's involvement with Carl's case, but he warns that he will be very angry if Joe is wasting his time, indicating that he does not actually believe the college students have found anything important in their research.

In Chapter 31, Joe excitedly visits Carl to share his good news, but the old man's sickness foreshadows his imminent death and reminds Joe of the need to act hastily to overturn Carl's conviction. Mrs. Lorngren's guilt over how she has treated Carl foreshadows her assistance with Joe's investigation. In response to the reminder of Crystal's references to Creepy Carl in her diary, Carl admits that he was shocked to learn that she thought of him as the pervert next door since he always viewed her as a



sweet girl. Although Joe hopes to exonerate Carl with the newfound evidence that DJ was blackmailing Crystal, Carl insists he does not want that; he always knew that he did not kill Crystal, and he is just happy that someone else believes him. It is ironic that Joe seems to care more about Carl's exoneration than Carl does himself, but Carl does not regret his arrest because he would not still be alive if he had not gone to jail. Fulfilling foreshadowing, Carl admits that he planned to kill himself that day, but he passed out from alcohol consumption before he could finish the job.

Fulfilling foreshadowing, Carl decides to tell Joe something that he has never confessed to anyone, even Virgil. Carl remembers July 1968, after Tater died and Virgil had been sent home. Seeing Gibbs following a young girl into a hut, Carl forgot the war, and nothing mattered except stopping Gibbs. Carl killed Gibbs and saved the girl, showing the importance of protecting the young and innocence and reinforcing his innocence in Crystal's murder. Still, Carl realizes that he had no right to kill his commanding officer. So, when he was arrested for Crystal's murder, he felt it was time to pay his debt, and he hoped that prison would silence his ghosts.

Carl now realizes that there are some things you can never escape. He explains that prison made him want to live, alluding to Pascal's gambit that it is safer to live as if there is a God. Carl also thinks about how he has wasted his life if there is no God. Because Carl is in pain, their conversation is cut short, causing Joe to wonder how long his friend has left and how long he has to do what he needs to do. It is apparent that Joe is determined to clear Carl's name. His determination foreshadows the actions he takes to exonerate the wrongfully convicted old man.

## Discussion Question 1

How does Detective Max Rupert react to Joe and Lila's discoveries about Carl's case?

## Discussion Question 2

How does Carl react to the news of Joe and Lila cracking the code in Crystal's diary?

## Discussion Question 3

Why doesn't Carl regret his conviction?

## Vocabulary

reminiscent, decoded, placard, melancholy, eons



# Chapters 32-33

## Summary

In Chapter 32, Joe meets with Professor Sanden to again share his findings, and Sanden is not surprised at the notion that Crystal's stepfather was her murderer. However, he worries that the DNA evidence will be too deteriorated. Sanden convinces Rupert to request the sample and reopen the case if the DNA does not match Carl's, but he warns Joe that the process could take six months. He goes on to say that they could move faster if the murderer confessed. Joe develops a rash idea for clearing Carl's name and finds Doug Lockwood's address, deciding to track him down and try for a confession.

In Chapter 33, Lila is not home to confide in so Joe leaves a voicemail for Detective Rupert before driving to Doug's old farmhouse with a voice recorder in his pocket. Joe asks about Crystal and questions why Doug lied because he knows the truth. Doug claims that Crystal earned God's wrath, and his hands shake as Joe reveals the decoded diary entries. Swigging from a bottle of Jack Daniels, Doug insists that Joe does not understand what the Bible says about parental love. Feeling Doug is about to confess, Joe coaxes him with the idea that things just got out of control, but Doug hits him over the head with the bottle, knocking him out. Joe wakes as his body is dragged through the grass. With no strength to escape, he is disgusted that he has been beaten by this old man and child molester.

## Analysis

Joe calls Professor Sanden in Chapter 32 and shares the information he has uncovered about Carl's case. He explains that he and Lila suspect Douglas of killing Crystal. They believe that Douglas convinced his son to cover for him. Sanden agrees that it makes sense since Douglas lived in the same house as Crystal. He suggests that they may still be able to test DNA if it has not deteriorated too badly. Unfortunately, most of Crystal's body was burned in the fire, but Joe reveals his familiarity with the case and his determination to clear Carl when he reminds them of Crystal's fingernail. Sanden calls Rupert who agrees to request the evidence and reopen the case if the DNA proves to belong to someone other than Carl. Tragically, the men warn that the process could take as long as six months, causing Joe to remind them that Carl is dying.

Joe wonders if he is doing this for himself, Grandpa Bill, or Carl. This demonstrates the connection that Joe feels between Grandpa Bill and Carl. Although he cannot actually save Carl's life, he sees exonerating him as a form of salvation. He wants to act, not just watch. This desire foreshadows his actions when Sanden suggests that they could move things along faster if the murderer confessed. As the narrator, Joe admits that he develops a rash idea to exonerate Carl before his death. Faced with another choice to



act or wait, he decides to act by trying to elicit a confession from Douglas Lockwood. He researches Crystal's stepfather so he can track him down and seek a confession.

In Chapter 33, Joe is unable to share his plan with Lila because she is not home, and his call to Detective Rupert goes to voicemail. The fact that he is all alone with no one aware of his whereabouts foreshadows the danger that Joe puts himself in by visiting Douglas Lockwood. At Doug's farmhouse, Joe notices a face in the window, drawing a parallel to the face in the window depicted in the trial photograph taken before the fire department arrived. Joe is filled with fury that Crystal's murderer has gone free for thirty years while Carl's name was tarnished. The theme of justice is brought to the fore.

Armed with a voice recorder to prove Douglas confessed, Joe visits his suspect to ask about Crystal, aggressively asking why Douglas lied about what happened to his stepdaughter because he knows the truth. Cornered, Douglas starts rambling about how Crystal earned God's wrath, proving claims of Douglas's religious fanaticism. Douglas is visibly affected when Joe informs him that he broke the code in Crystal's diary entries, but his rants about the Biblical nature of parental love cause Joe to try to coax him with claims of understanding and the belief that things simply got out of control. Just as Joe believes that Douglas is going to admit that he murdered Crystal, Douglas hits him over the head with his liquor bottle and drags him outside, foreshadowing his intent to kill Joe to protect his secret. Joe is disgusted with his inability to beat the old man, and his irritation is likely compounded by the realization that being beaten means he cannot save Carl, paralleling his inability to save Grandpa Bill.

## Discussion Question 1

What does Professor Boady Sanden say can be done with the new evidence pertaining to Carl's case?

## Discussion Question 2

Due to the predicted difficulties of overturning Carl's conviction in a timely manner, what does Joe decide to do?

## Discussion Question 3

What happens when Joe visits Douglas Lockwood?

## Vocabulary

evaporate, pedophile, isolate, exonerate, naivete



# Chapters 34-36

## Summary

In Chapter 34, Joe wakes up in the trunk of his car as it speeds down the road. There are cinder blocks tied to his ankles. He knows that Doug plans to dump his body. Fortunately, Joe is familiar with his vehicle, so he pops a taillight out so he can see and manages to unhook his ankles and ties rags around his bare feet. Examining his options, waiting for the police or breaking out, Joe fights through the hypothermia to remove screws so he can open the trunk and shove a wrench in the tailpipe, causing the car to stutter and stop. Joe jumps from the trunk and flees into the treeline as Doug yells in rage and fires a gun at the escapee.

In Chapter 35, Joe hides in a gully as Doug fires more shots, and after Doug returns to the car, Joe battles hypothermia as he makes his way through the woods, finally coming upon an empty cabin. Joe breaks in and lights a fire to warm up, despite his fear that Doug will find him. There is no phone or electricity, but Joe feels reasonably safe even as he grips a knife and fire poker in preparation for another fight.

In Chapter 36, Joe sleeps fitfully, waking at every noise to look for Doug. In the morning, he melts snow for water and borrows clothes, leaving a note of gratitude and apology for the cabin owner. Strapping boards to his feet for snow shoes, Joe cautiously goes outside, knowing Doug wants him dead since he can send him to prison for murdering Crystal.

## Analysis

In Chapter 34, Joe wakes up in the trunk of his car. The cinder blocks tied to his ankles prove Douglas's intent to kill the young man and dump his body. However, Douglas made a mistake because Joe is extremely familiar with his car. All of the tools he owns are in his trunk, so he uses them to disengage his ankles and pops the taillights out in hopes of attracting the attention of a police officer. Unfortunately, Douglas is not stopped after ten minutes, so Joe knows that they must be driving on a country road where no policemen are around. He examines his options to wait for someone to rescue him, to wait until they stop to learn Douglas's plans, or to break out. It is the middle of winter, and Joe struggles to keep himself warm. He battles hypothermia as he decides to act again. Joe wraps his feet since his shoes are gone, and he shoves a wrench into the tailpipe to cause the car to fail. Acting again, he jumps from the trunk and runs into the tree line. Douglas's intentions are definitely proven when he shoots at Joe running away.

Joe continues to act in Chapter 35 as he runs away, dodging bullets and staying still after he falls into a gully. The fact that Douglas returns to the car suggests that he believes Joe to be dead, though Joe suspects Douglas will continue searching for him.





Joe's integrity is shown through his guilt in breaking into the cabin that saves his life. He demonstrates cunning and intelligence in his ability to find shelter and warm himself in the cabin. He feels fairly safe in his escape, but he is still cautious and worried about being found. His feelings predict danger from his future investigations.

In Chapter 36, Joe finds refuge from the storm in the cabin, continuing to feel guilty for using the supplies, and when it comes time to leave, he leaves a message for the cabin owner, apologizing for the destruction which he promises to repay and offering gratitude for the use of the cabin which saved his life. He shows ingenuity by strapping boards to his feet to use as snow shoes. Although Joe does not believe Douglas is still in the woods, he straps a knife to his hip because he realizes that Douglas needs him dead since Joe knows the truth about Crystals' murder.

## **Discussion Question 1**

How does Joe escape from his trunk?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What danger does Joe face after his escape? How does he circumvent it?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Where does Joe find safety after his escape? Describe the location.

## **Vocabulary**

descend, hypothermia, unintelligible, impotently, ricocheting



## Chapters 37-39

### Summary

In Chapter 37, Joe's arduous journey through the woods leads him past a river and to a farmhouse where he is greeted by an old man with a shotgun. When Joe explains he has escaped his kidnapper, an old woman invites him inside and feeds him while he waits for the sheriff. She tells Joe he is in North Branch, Minnesota, near the St. Croix River. Joe shudders at how close Doug came to his goal of dumping his body.

In Chapter 38, the sheriff listens to Joe's story. However, since he does not know the young man, he takes him to the station and calls Detective Rupert who is off duty. In his prison cell, Joe wakes to Rupert's voice. On the way home, Rupert says Joe's car was abandoned and impounded, but his wallet and voice recorder are missing. He agrees that Doug planned to kill Joe, and he's issued a warrant for Doug who has disappeared. Rupert is starting to believe Joe's findings on Carl's case, but they need Doug's DNA to charge him with Crystal's murder. There's no way to do that without finding him since his farmhouse has been burned to the ground. Joe asks what is next, but Rupert says he is off the investigation since it nearly got him killed already. He suggests for Joe to lie low since Doug has his wallet with his address. Joe agrees to stay with Lila. Thinking of his grandfather, Joe is irritated to be dismissed from the case and decides that he needs to do what he can to keep the investigation on pace to clear Carl's name before he dies.

In Chapter 39, the police hold Joe's car for evidence. Lila picks him up, and he recounts his kidnapping. At her apartment, Lila feeds and tends to Joe, forcing him to sleep in her bed. Wearing an unbuttoned jersey, Lila joins him, and they make love. Staring at her in amazement, Joe stores the vision of Lila in his arms in his memory forever.

### Analysis

Beginning his arduous journey through the woods in Chapter 37, Joe follows a cart path since he knows it leads to a road. As he passes a river, he wonders which one it is even as he realizes that Douglas likely intended the river to be his grave. Despite his exhaustion, Joe is relieved to see a farmhouse which represents safety and a return to civilization, but ironically, he is met with a shotgun. Joe explains his situation and is warily admitted into the house to wait for the sheriff. Learning that the nearby river is the St. Croix, Joe is disturbed by how close to death he came.

The sheriff does not know whether to believe Joe in Chapter 38, especially since no missing person report has been filed. After hearing the young man's story, he decides to hold Joe at the jail to keep an eye on him until he reaches Detective Rupert. When Rupert retrieves Joe, he informs Joe that his car was abandoned. He agrees that Douglas planned to kill Joe and probably thinks him dead, but Douglas has disappeared. Rupert is starting to believe Joe, but there is no way to confirm his



suspicious through DNA since Douglas's farmhouse was burned down. Rupert does not want Joe involved in the investigation any further since he was nearly killed. He points out that Douglas has Joe's wallet, reiterating Joe's continued danger. Rupert giving Joe his cell number foreshadows the need for Joe to reach Rupert again. Joe feels guilty that his actions caused Douglas to flee, but seeing Grandpa Bill in his mind, he cannot let go again; Joe's decision to do what he can to keep the investigation on pace to put Douglas in jail before Carl dies foreshadows his future actions on the case.

In Chapter 39, Joe's romantic relationship with Lila progresses quickly when she picks him up from the police station. She tends to his injuries and lets him stay at her apartment. She crawls into bed with Joe to cement their physical relationship.

## **Discussion Question 1**

How is Joe greeted at the farmhouse? How does his story change his reception?

## **Discussion Question 2**

How does the sheriff react to Joe's story of being kidnapped?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What changes in Joe and Lila's relationship after his kidnapping?

## **Vocabulary**

drudgery, dispatch, pungent, deranged, paranoia



# Chapters 40-43

## Summary

In Chapter 40, Joe wakes in the morning to a phone call from Professor Sanden who informs him that he was able to pull some strings to get a DNA test which confirms that Carl did not rape Crystal. Now they just need Doug's DNA. Joe feels sick that his actions caused Doug to flee, but Sanden cautions that Doug could argue that he lived with Crystal. Fortunately, Lila points out that Mrs. Lockwood's testimony showed that Crystal showered after Doug left for work that morning. Sanden believes Doug is likely the murderer. In order to exonerate Carl, they need the DNA evidence.

In Chapter 41, Joe and Lila update Carl on their findings, Carl smiles at the thought that they will undo his conviction. Joe and Lila visit for an hour, listening to stories from Carl's youth. On their way out, Mrs. Lorngren asks about their progress. Learning of Doug's flight, she reminds them that a father passes his DNA to his sons. Lila reminds Joe that Detective Rupert does not want him involved, but he protests that he is not going after Doug. Joe and Lila research Dan Lockwood, Crystal's stepbrother. Lila insists on going with Joe since he does not have a car and he's already been attacked once.

In Chapter 42, Joe and Lila visit Dan's home in Mason City, Iowa. Mrs. Lockwood tells them that her husband has gone to Minnesota to search for his father. Joe is surprised that Dan left on the day of the storm, before anyone knew Doug was missing. He and Lila are confused when Mrs. Lockwood recounts a voicemail in which Crystal's mother addressed Dan as DJ. Dan's wife explains that Crystal's mother went by Dani so Dan's nickname was DJ for Danny Jr. Joe's head spins as he realizes he is in the murderer's living room, and then Mrs. Lockwood announces that Dan is pulling into the driveway.

In Chapter 43, Lila saves the day by claiming they forgot some forms in the car, and she and Joe flee past Dan to her car, driving away as he calls after them. Joe realizes Doug protected his eighteen-year-old son and likely called Dan after he kidnapped Joe. He suspects Dan burned Doug's house down, but he cannot get rid of all the DNA unless he gets rid of his father too. Joe is distraught that they did not grab any cigarette butts. Lila insists on going back for Dan's DNA before he burns his own house down and disappears. She reassures Joe that they will not go inside. They are just going to pick up some garbage.

## Analysis

In Chapter 40, Joe wakes to a phone call from Professor Sanden who was able to pull strings to get Carl's DNA tested. They now have evidence that Carl did not kill Crystal, but their case is not complete since they cannot prove who murdered her without Douglas's DNA. Joe feels sick that his actions caused Douglas to flee. This will strengthen his determination to clear Carl's name as Joe blames himself. This guilt



parallels his guilt related to Grandpa Bill's death. Lila shows her familiarity with Crystal's case by remembering the testimony that Crystal showered after Douglas left for work; therefore, Douglas has no excuse for his DNA being found under her nail if they can just get a sample that matches.

In Chapter 41, when Joe and Lila visit Carl, Joe is frightened at first to find Carl's room empty. Even when he learns that they moved his friend, his fear reinforces the urgency of their situation and the fact that Carl could die at any time. Despite his protests, Carl's reaction to Joe sense of urgency demonstrates that he does care about being exonerated. Knowing that Carl will likely die before they clear his name, Joe again compares the situation to Grandpa Bill. Joe had felt helpless to save him, too.

Unforeseen advice comes from Mrs. Lorngren who points out that Douglas would pass his DNA on to any sons. This realization foreshadows Joe's decision to visit Danny Lockwood. Further research confirms Mrs. Lorngren's claims and provides an address for Danny. Lila insists on accompanying Joe to Danny's house. All indications are that they are heading into danger.

In Chapter 42, Joe and Lila buy a DNA sample kit on their way to Dan's house with the intent of requesting a sample. Once they reach his house, Dan's wife tells them that Dan is out of town searching for his father. The mention of the two varieties of cigarette butts in the ashtray offer an opportunity for using Dan's Marlboro butts to collect a DNA sample. Joe is confused to learn that Dan left to search for his father on the day of the storm since that occurred before anyone knew he was missing. Joe draws the conclusion that Douglas called his son to share his dilemma. This is significant because it indicates that Dan was involved with Crystal's murder.

When Mrs. Lockwood recounts the message Crystal's mother left about Douglas's disappearance, Joe is confused that she refers to Dan as "DJ." but Mrs. Lockwood explains that Crystal's mother, Danielle, was called Dani so Dan was dubbed Danny Jr. which was eventually shortened to DJ. This unintentional confession alerts Joe and Lila to the fact that Dan murdered Crystal, fulfilling earlier foreshadowing about his involvement. Dan's arrival poses danger for Joe and Lila.

In Chapter 43, Joe panics as Dan nears the house, but Lila quickly comes up with an excuse to allow them a hasty departure. Dan's attempts to stop them again foreshadow the danger he poses. As they drive away, they draw several conclusions: Dan obviously killed Crystal, his father protected his eighteen-year-old son decades ago, and Douglas also alerted Dan to Joe's inquiries. They suspect Dan burned his father's house down. Their realization that he cannot destroy all of Douglas's DNA unless he got rid of his father, too, suggests that Douglas is dead. The absence of Rupert's business card foreshadows Joe's inability to update the detective on their findings. Yet, he continues to endanger himself when he and Lila decide to return to Dan's house to steal cigarette butts from his trash. Danger is getting closer.



## **Discussion Question 1**

In Chapter 40, how do Joe and Lila plan to use DNA to prove Carl's innocence?

## **Discussion Question 2**

How does Mrs. Lorngren aid Joe and Lila in their plan to find Crystal's murderer?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Describe Joe and Lila's visit to Dan Lockwood's home.

## **Vocabulary**

protocol, fugitive, hapless, culprit, prematurely, alibi, epiphany



# Chapters 44-47

## Summary

After developing their plan in Chapter 44, Joe and Lila pull down the alley behind Dan's house, and ensuring no movement outside, Joe creeps onto Dan's property to retrieve a trash bag; however, he does not notice the beer bottle dangling precariously on the edge which falls and breaks. Joe runs to the car, and Lila speeds off with Dan's shadow chasing them in the distance. Joe peeks into the trash bag, and seeing Marlboro butts, he tells Lila, "We got him" (page 260).

As Joe takes over driving for a bit in Chapter 45, Jeremy calls Joe for the first time because he remembers what his brother told him to do if anyone tried to hurt him, and when Jeremy hesitantly admits Larry hit him, Joe instructs his brother to lock himself in his room and put all of his clothes in pillowcases. Joe hops on the interchange and is only twenty minutes away.

In Chapter 46, Joe visits his mother's apartment where he finds his mother and Larry with beer in their hands. Joe demands to know what they did to Jeremy. He shoves Larry aside to knock on Jeremy's door. Seeing his brother's black eye, Joe orders Jeremy to wait with Lila in the car because he is coming to live with Joe. Though their mother objects, Jeremy walks past without looking at her. His mother claims that Jeremy pushes Larry's button. Joe argues that Jeremy is autistic and does not know how to push buttons. Also, as Jeremy's mother, she is supposed to protect him. She has chosen Larry; so, Jeremy is coming to live with Joe. His mother says he is not getting Jeremy's social security check. She mockingly asks Joe what he will do about college. Joe responds that he has also made his choice. As Joe leaves, Larry attacks. Joe knocks him to the ground before looking at his mother one last time as he walks out of her apartment.

In Chapter 47, Joe tries to come to grips with the changes he has just made in his life, knowing he cannot afford to care for Jeremy and attend college. Lila offers to help and points out how soundly Jeremy is sleeping now that he knows he is safe. When they reach the apartment, Jeremy throws a fit because he forgot his toothbrush. Lila puts him to bed while Joe buys a toothbrush. Lila does not answer the door when he returns. As he tries again to ask her advice on whether to call Detective Rupert, his phone rings. A voice tells him he has something that belongs to Joe and that he knows his name because Joe's girlfriend told him. Joe opens Lila's door to see her apartment in shambles as Dan says that he has something of Joe's and Joe has something of his.

## Analysis

In Chapter 44, Joe and Lila concoct a plan to steal Joe's trash with the intent of updating Rupert when they return home. Joe stealthily creeps to Dan's house, but a lack of



observation causes him to make noise that attracts Dan's attention. Joe and Lila escape, but the fact that Dan is aware of their theft of his trash foreshadows the actions he will take to circumvent discovery. Joe feels confident that they have enough evidence on Dan after ensuring that the trash he stole contains Marlboro butts.

In Chapter 45, Joe's relief that everything is coming together is short-lived as his personal life intrudes on his victory when Jeremy calls him. The fact that this is Jeremy's first call foreshadows the quickly fulfilled fact that Larry hit him again. Joe's fury and his instructions for Jeremy to pack foreshadow his confrontation with his mother and Larry as well as his decision to assume responsibility for Jeremy.

Joe arrives at his mother's apartment in Chapter 46, and foreshadowing is quickly fulfilled as he yells at Larry. However, Joe shows his priorities by checking on Jeremy and sending him to the car's safety with Lila before confronting his mother and Larry. With Jeremy out of the way, Joe chides his mother for allowing Larry to hit Jeremy, and she repeatedly shows her irresponsibility and lack of maternal instincts in her arguments, as well as in her refusal for Joe to receive Jeremy's social security money when he fulfills foreshadowing with the insistence that his brother come to live with him. In fact, she even mocks Joe's decision since it will prevent him from going to school, but Joe truly shows his exceptional character by choosing his brother over his education.

In Chapter 47, Joe's realization that he will never return to Austin indicates his decision to sever all ties with his mother. Although he knows he has made the right decision, Joe still laments his inability to afford next semester while caring for Jeremy. Lila's offer to help Joe indicates the depth of her feelings for him. She also makes him feel better by pointing out that Jeremy is sleeping soundly as if he had not rested in days. Joe's presence assures Jeremy of his safety.

Joe's absence combined with Lila's lack of response when he returns foreshadows another tragedy, and this is fulfilled when Dan calls Joe. Dan kidnapping Lila fulfills foreshadowing related to her danger and the lengths Dan will go to in order to keep his secret. Dan's offer to exchange Lila for his trash foreshadows Joe's decision to meet him, while his reference to Lila as Joe's property indicates Dan's misogynistic viewpoint when it comes to women, offering further evidence of his role as Crystal's murderer.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Joe detour to Austin on his way home from Dan's house?

## Discussion Question 2

Describe Joe's interaction with his mother and Larry in Chapter 46. How does this change his life?





## Discussion Question 3

Why does Joe leave Jeremy with Lila? What happens while he is gone?

## Vocabulary

stealth, ambient, junction, vigilant, interchange, parallel, withering, fragile, dissolving, abated, convulsed



# Chapters 48-50

## Summary

In Chapter 48, Dan orders Joe to drive north on I-35 and bring Dan's trash. Threatening Joe, Dan promises that Lila will suffer the consequences if Joe does not do as he's told, punching her to make his point. Dan keeps Joe on the phone to prevent him from calling the police, but looking around for a weapon, Joe sees Jeremy's phone in the backseat. Asking about Doug to keep Dan talking, Joe grabs his brother's phone and dials Detective Rupert's number while Dan talks about his father's deficiencies and his surprise at what Joe found in Crystal's diary. Holding the phones so Dan cannot hear Rupert but Rupert can hear their conversation, Joe admits his surprise to learn Dan is DJ, hoping that Rupert will figure out what is going on.

In Chapter 49, Joe realizes Dan is going to kill him and Lila, and although Dan confesses as much, Joe's choices are going to the police while Dan kills Lila or showing up and trying to kill Dan. Joe warns that he will not even stop if Lila is not alive when he gets there, and his comment that Dan probably killed his father makes Dan admit that he is going to enjoy killing Joe slowly. Dan figures they will blame Joe and Lila's deaths on his father too, and he eagerly agrees that they understand each other when Joe threatens what he will do if Lila is not alive. Dan decides that Joe should be there in ten minutes, and Joe concurs.

In Chapter 51, Joe slows down to allow Rupert to catch up, hoping the detective has figured out their dilemma. Listening into Jeremy's phone and whispering "Rupert," Joe hears only silence and fears he has been leaving a voicemail. With no plan to save Lila and himself, Joe digs a bottle out of Dan's trash to use as a weapon. Letting Joe hear Lila's voice, Dan gives him two minutes, but he can already see Joe's headlights. Knowing he will get stuck in the snow, Joe drives as far as he can and wonders what to do next.

## Analysis

In Chapter 48, Dan demands that Joe return his trash in exchange for Lila, showing his callousness and his true intentions when he hits her after allowing Joe to verify that she is still alive by briefly speaking to her. He is indifferent to Joe's threats, but Joe continues talking to keep Dan's focus off of Lila, showing his protective nature. Dan explains how he located Lila; he had friends in mall security run her license plate information, causing Joe to feel guilty yet again that he endangered her through his investigation. Since Dan keeps Joe on the phone to prevent him from contacting the police, Joe searches for a weapon, and the discovery of Jeremy's cell phone in the back seat foreshadows Joe's ability to contact Detective Rupert as well as Rupert's arrival to save Joe and Lila. Joe calls Rupert's numbers and shows wisdom in positioning the phones so Rupert can hear Dan but Dan cannot hear the detective. Filled with



determination to save Lila, Joe drives to Douglas's farmhouse as he prays that Dan will reveal his secrets and that Rupert will figure out what is going on.

In Chapter 49, Joe realizes that Dan intends to kill him and Lila, so he makes an appeal for honesty, and Dan admits his intentions. Joe verbalizes his options, admitting that he plans to kill Dan first, and this foreshadows their physical confrontation. As the conversation turns to Douglas, Dan is angry that Joe figures out that he killed his father, but he also reveals his intent to have Douglas blame for murdering Joe and Lila as well since his father already made himself a scapegoat. Dan and Joe understand each other, and Dan's announcement that Joe has only ten minutes to arrive foreshadows the imminence of their confrontation.

In Chapter 50, Joe has a little extra time to prepare for Dan since he is closer than the murder suspects. After Joe does not receive a response from Rupert, he fears that he is on his own, leaving him with no plan for salvation. Joe uses those extra moments to dig out a glass bottle to use as a weapon, but he hopelessly feels that Rupert may have to avenge Joe and Lila posthumously and hopes Rupert understands his message. Joe demands to hear Lila's voice once more as he arrives, and recognizing the difficulty the snow poses, he ponders what to do next. As his quick thinking in the past has led to success, it's apparent that Joe will develop a plan.

## Discussion Question 1

Describe the phone call Joe receives from Dan Lockwood.

## Discussion Question 2

How does Joe alert Detective Rupert to Dan's plans?

## Discussion Question 3

What is Joe's backup plan in case Detective Rupert is unaware of what is going on?

## Vocabulary

queasy, dominance, errant, colossal, enunciating, consonants, spire, futility



# Chapters 51-54

## Summary

In Chapter 51, Joe's headlights reveal Lila tied up in the pasture with Dan pointing a gun at her head. There is 70 feet of snow between Joe and the barn; so, he climbs out the window with the bottle and seeks cover near the creek, inching closer. Dan orders him to bring the trash, threatening to shoot Lila if Joe does not comply. When Joe breaks a branch, Dan fires at him. Joe grunts as if he has been shot and throws his phone as a distraction. Dan insists that he holds the cards. As Dan nears him, Joe steps out from hiding and swings, but Dan ducks and shoots Joe in the thigh; Joe falls face first into the snow.

In Chapter 52, knowing that he and Lila will both die if he gives up, Joe tries to fight; but, Dan handcuffs him and binds him to a post by the throat. Dan's attentions are for Joe to watch as he rapes and kills Lila, promising she will scream like all the others have done in the past. Dan points his gun at Lila's head as he gropes her. When he tilts the gun up to undo his belt, three shots rip through his head and neck. Dan falls dead as Detective Rupert and two deputies step out of the trees.

Because of the press's interest in the case, the city hurriedly reopens the case and verifies Dan murdered Crystal. They also learn that he was responsible for the rape and death of another girl. Joe receives extensions for all of his classes, but he still writes Carl's story while in the hospital, leaving only the final chapter about Carl's official exoneration. When Joe is released two weeks before Christmas, Professor Sanden meets him in the lobby with a court order declaring Carl's innocence. Virgil, Lila, Mrs. Lorngren and Janet join them to tell Carl the news. Carl's smile and tears cause all of them to cry. Joe plans to visit Carl again the next day, but his friend passes quietly in his sleep that night.

In Chapter 54, there are only thirteen mourners at Carl's funeral. Detective Rupert and Professor Sanden ask Joe and Lila to meet them for coffee later that day. Joe says goodbye to Virgil who presents him with Carl's three war medals and tells him he did a good job. When Joe and Lila meet Rupert and Sanden for coffee, they ask how Jeremy came to live with Joe and note that it will be difficult for Joe to go to school. They exchange a smile when Joe sadly admits he will not be able to afford school. They show him emails containing messages about \$120,000 in rewards for the murderer of several girls. Since Dan is the murderer, the money belongs to Joe and Lila. Lila insists Joe keep the money, but there is a compromise and the money is split three ways among, Joe, Lila, and Jeremy. As Joe cleans the snow off his car, he thinks of Carl telling him that heaven can be here on earth. He observes and savors the setting. Then, Joe sees things he would have never noticed if he had not met Carl.



## Analysis

In Chapter 51, Joe's headlights illuminate the pasture. He can see Lila tied up with Dan pointing a gun at her head. Joe quickly determines that there is 70 feet of snow between him and the barn, and although both the trees and the creek provide cover, he decides the creek will get him closer. To prevent Dan from discovering his intention, Joe crawls out of the car window as he lies that the snow is too deep. He tries to persuade Dan to come to him in hopes of putting distance between Lila and the murderer, but Dan just grows angry and threatens to kill Lila immediately so Joe intentionally pulls a branch off a tree to make noise, causing Dan to shoot at him. In hopes of distracting Dan, Joe grunts as if he were shot and throws his cell phone. Dan arrogantly insists he holds the cards, proving it when he shoots Joe in the thigh. For the second time since beginning his investigation, Joe is defeated by his enemy.

In Chapter 52, Joe refuses to give up, trying to fight since he knows that he and Lila will both die if he stops his attack. Dan restrains Joe and shares his plan to rape and kill Lila first, promising she will scream like the others. This confession that Crystal was not his only victim foreshadows the number of girls Dan has killed and how Joe's assistance on this case will benefit him. Dan proceeds with his lascivious attempt, but when he lowers the gun momentarily to unclasp his belt, shots ring out. Joe's plan to alert Detective Rupert worked, and the police officer arrived with reinforcements in the nick of time. Joe emerges victorious as Dan dies.

The interest of the press in the case hastens the police work, and Dan's DNA is quickly revealed to match the sample from under Crystal's nail. He is also determined to be the killer of another girl who was raped, killed and burned, proving Dan's claims and foreshadowing the effects of Joe's involvement. Despite receiving extensions from all of his professors, Joe works on Carl's story from his hospital bed because of his determination to exonerate his friend. When Joe can finally tell Carl that he has been exonerated, Carl's joy and relief are palpable, disproving his earlier claims of indifference. That night, Carl passes away in his sleep. His death has been foreshadowed throughout the story; but, he stubbornly held on until his name was cleared.

In the final chapter, Joe attends Carl's funeral. His coffee date with Rupert and Sanden predicts the news they want to share with him. Virgil praises the young man for a job well done, showing a drastic change in how he sees Joe since Joe was able to prove Carl's innocence. He also gives Carl's war medals to Joe at Carl's request, indicating that Carl felt a sort of paternal kinship with the author of his life story. At the coffee house, Rupert and Sanden question Joe about assuming responsibility for Jeremy. His work to prove Carl's innocence pleases the men. Joe also helped solve several similar cases, and some of those include a reward. By sticking to his guns and doing the right thing, Joe is rewarded in life by being able to pay for school and care for his brother, and he is happily in love with Lila. Instead of happiness coming to those who wait, this narrative shows that happiness comes to those who deserve it. No character truly deserves happiness more than Joe.



## **Discussion Question 1**

Describe the confrontation between Joe and Dan.

## **Discussion Question 2**

How does Carl react to the news of his exoneration?

## **Discussion Question 3**

How do Joe's actions in proving Carl's innocence impact his life positively?

## **Vocabulary**

illuminating, menacing, ratcheting, abrasions, discharged, expedite, unfettered, modicum



# Characters

## Joe Talvert

Joe Talvert is the protagonist and narrator of "The Life We Bury." A college student, Joe is a responsible young man who works hard to achieve an education, despite the inattention of his self-absorbed, alcoholic mother. He often puts the needs of Jeremy, his autistic brother, ahead of his own as he begrudgingly accepts the parental role that his mother neglects to fill.

Joe's story begins when he receives an assignment in his biography class which requires interviewing a older person. With his grandfather dead and his wish to avoid his mother, the young man visits a local retirement home to find a subject. The receptionist suggests that the only clear-minded resident is Carl Iverson, a convicted murderer released from prison because he is dying of cancer. Joe's mother calls him from jail after being arrested for a DUI, and Joe rushes off to pick up Jeremy for a few days. Leaving his brother at his apartment, Joe researches Carl's case. After returning home to find his attractive neighbor, Lila, keeping Jeremy company, Joe invites her to dinner with both brothers. Lila takes an interest in his biography assignment. Joe eventually uses tuition money to bail his mother out of jail so that she can care for Jeremy while he attends college.

Carl agrees to allow Joe to write his dying declaration after Joe promises to be honest. Upon learning that Joe plans to interview this monster, Lila convinces him to obtain copies of the trial transcripts so he can tell the whole story. Although Carl signs the release for Joe to get the transcripts, his friend Virgil is irritated because he insists Carl is innocent. As Lila helps Joe with his research, she is appalled by Carl's crime. But, after several more interviews, Joe has difficulty reconciling Carl's traditional upbringing with the vicious murderer depicted in the trial transcripts. He meets with Virgil who shares a story about Carl saving his life in Vietnam.

Joe receives a call from his mother's landlord after Jeremy nearly burns down their apartment because their mother left him alone for several days. While caring for his brother, Joe is furious to find bruises left behind by Larry, his mother's boyfriend. He buys a cell phone for Jeremy to call him if anyone tries to hurt him again. When his mother returns, Joe lectures her about her responsibilities, but she seems indifferent.

As they continue their research, Joe and Lila are intrigued by Crystal's coded diary entries which were never deciphered and which could prove Carl's innocence. In exchange for Carl's promise of honesty, Joe confides about watching Grandpa Bill die, an event he blames on himself. Carl suggests Joe look for the anomalies in the trial photos, and Lila discovers a face in a window in the picture taken before the fire department arrived, forcing her to accept the possibility that Carl was wrongfully accused.



When Joe questions Carl about saving Virgil's life, Carl admits that he saw it as a righteous sacrifice and a way to commit suicide without damning his soul; however, he also tells Joe the story about Sergeant Gibbs raping and killing a girl in Oxbow. After deciding to interrogate Crystal's boyfriend, stepfather and stepbrother, Joe and Lila begin with Andy Fisher who tells them about Lila losing her glasses when they stole and crashed a car from her stepfather's car lot. While seeing a play with Lila, Joe is haunted by the similarities to his personal life, and after Lila is taunted as Nasty Nash at the pub, she explains her past promiscuity to Joe who comforts her.

Joe's mother leaves Jeremy at Joe's apartment so she can take a trip with Larry. As Lila and Jeremy discuss typing, she makes a connection between a typing lesson and Crystal's coded diary entries, breaking the code to reveal that Lila was blackmailed and raped by DJ who they assume to be her stepfather, Douglas Joseph. They share their findings with Detective Max Rupert who, unwilling to reopen the case without more evidence, directs them to Professor Boady Sanden who warns that it is unlikely that Carl will be exonerated before his death without a confession.

Determined to clear Carl's name, Joe visits Douglas who knocks him out and kidnaps Joe with the intent of dumping his body under the ice in a river. Fortunately, Joe escapes and hides in a cabin during the snowstorm, but when he makes his way to a nearby farmhouse, the sheriff arrests him until Rupert picks Joe up. Rupert believes Douglas is guilty, but he has disappeared and his farmhouse has been burnt to the ground, so Rupert warns Joe off the investigation since this dangerous man has his wallet. Sanden is able to prove that the DNA sample under Crystal's nail did not belong to Carl, but since Douglas is missing, Joe decides to obtain a sample from Danny since he shares his father's DNA.

At Dan's house, Joe and Lila are surprised when Mrs. Lockwood refers to her husband as DJ, and after fleeing when he returns, they steal trash that night in hopes of obtaining a DNA sample from one of his cigarette butts. On the drive home, Joe receives a call from Jeremy because Larry hit him, so he rescues his brother and invites him to live with him, chiding their mother for her lack of concern for her children. After leaving Lila and Jeremy at the apartment, Joe returns home to receive a call from Dan who has kidnapped Lila.

Dan offers to exchange Lila for his trash, and Joe drives off to meet him, knowing that Dan plans to kill them both. He uses Jeremy's phone to alert Detective Rupert, but he fears the call went to voicemail. At the farm, Joe tries to attack Dan who shoots him in the thigh and ties him up to make him watch what he plans to do to Lila; however, Rupert and several other officers lurk in the shadows and kill Dan at their first opportunity. Carl is overjoyed when he learns that he has been exonerated, but he dies that night in his sleep. At the funeral, Virgil praises Joe for clearing his friend's name. At coffee with Rupert and Sanden, Joe and Lila learn that Dan's DNA solved several other murders, and they are entitled to \$120,000 in rewards; Joe is thrilled to find that he can now afford to take care of his brother and continue his education.





## Carl Iverson

Carl Iverson begins as the novel's presumed antagonist, but as his story unravels, he becomes a catalyst for the climax of Joe's story. Thirty years earlier, Carl was convicted of murdering his seventeen-year-old neighbor, Crystal Marie Hagan, but having been released from prison into a nursing home because he is dying of cancer, Carl agrees to grant an interview to a young college student, Joe Talvert, whose research reveals a secret that only Carl (and his friend, Virgil) ever knew: Carl did not murder Crystal.

Carl is first approached by Joe Talvert through the nursing home director who suggests that the student should interview the convicted murderer for a biography assignment. Carl agrees to meet with Joe. After obtaining a promise of honesty, he begins working with the student. Carl signs a release for Joe to obtain the transcripts from his trial, only asking for Joe to remember that it does not tell the entire story. As Carl tells Joe about his traditional upbringing, Joe begins to wonder how this nice, young Vietnam veteran became a killer. Joe's questions prompt the reader to ponder if Carl really committed the horrendous crime described in the trial transcripts.

A portion of Carl's story is revealed when Joe meets with Virgil who shares how his friend saved his life in Vietnam. This alludes to another story that he promised he would never repeat. When Joe questions Carl about what he learned from Virgil, Carl elicits a story from Joe about his Grandpa Bill as a way of ensuring that Joe is willing to be honest with him. Carl attempts to comfort the young man by protesting that it was not his fault, but Carl obviously understands Joe's guilt and pain.

During his next visit with Carl, Joe returns to the topic of Carl saving Virgil's life, and Carl admits that he was not being brave; he wanted to die and saw the attempt as a righteous sacrifice. He also confides in Joe about the story Virgil alluded to which occurred in Oxbow when Carl was overwhelmed with guilt for his failure to stop Sergeant Gibbs from raping and killing a young Vietnamese girl and then burning her body. In a subsequent interview, Carl admits what is obviously his dying confession since he never told even Virgil: that he later killed Gibbs to prevent another girl from suffering the same fate as the Oxbow child.

These matters convince Joe and Lila that Carl did not murder Crystal, and after they decode her diary entries which do not identify Carl as her blackmailer, the couple work diligently to interrogate potential suspects until they uncover that Crystal's stepbrother killed her. Throughout their efforts, Joe's main concern is that he will not clear Carl's name before his friend dies, but because of the danger posed to Joe and Lila in uncovering the truth, media attention forces the state to reopen and close the case hurriedly. As a result, Carl receives an exoneration, and although he protested his indifference throughout the narrative, his relief is palpable. That night, Carl dies in his sleep, leaving his war medals to Joe posthumously through Virgil.



## Lila Nash

Lila Nash is Joe's pretty neighbor who does not really seem to notice him until he first brings Jeremy home. After that, a slow friendship develops between the two as she helps him research Carl's case. Although Lila is first determined only to show how horrible Carl is, she eventually begins to see the possibility of his innocence as she helps Joe cracked Crystal coded diary entries and participates in his interrogations. Lila is also sympathetic to Jeremy and seems to appreciate Joe's feelings of responsibility to his brother. Their platonic relationship begins to heighten when Lila reveals her past to Joe after an encounter in a bar, and it develops into more with Lila's relief at Joe's safety after he is kidnapped by Douglas Lockwood. Lila visits Danny Lockwood's house with Joe, and realizing that Dan is the murderer, she helps Joe steal a DNA sample. As a result, Dan kidnaps Lila, using her as blackmail to lure Joe with the intent of killing both. Joe's efforts alert the police who rescue the two college students. Because Joe and Lila's efforts solved Crystal's murder and several others, the pair are entitled to a large reward which Lila agrees to partake of only after insisting that Jeremy receive a third.

## Jeremy Naylor

Jeremy Naylor is Joe's eighteen-year-old autistic brother who Joe feels very responsible for due to his mother's neglect. Jeremy spends time with his brother at various points in the novel, facilitating the first time that Joe and Lila spend time together and helping to solve Crystal's coded diary entries with a reference to a typing lesson he once received. Larry, the boyfriend of Joe and Jeremy's mother, gets frustrated with Jeremy several times and hits him, leaving bruises that infuriate Joe. Joe warns his mother and Larry once, leaving Jeremy with a cell phone to call him if it happens again. Jeremy calls Joe the next time that Larry hits him, and Joe decides that Jeremy is coming to live with him, despite the fact that it will prevent him from being able to afford tuition. Jeremy leaving his cell phone in Lila's car also allows Joe to alert Detective Max Rupert to the ongoing events when Dan Lockwood kidnaps Lila. In addition to being an important supporting actor, Jeremy serves as a symbol of many of Joe's heroic traits.

## Kathy Nelson

Kathy Nelson is Joe's irresponsible, self-absorbed, alcoholic mother. She often neglects Jeremy and Joe's chidings. This neglect, combined with her indifference and even mockery of Joe's scholarly ambitions, make her a minor antagonist in this novel. She also serves as a foil to highlight many of Joe's heroic characteristics by comparison.

## Grandpa Bill

Grandpa Bill is Joe's grandfather who helped raise him as a child before his death. Joe blames himself for Grandpa Bill's death because he did not attempt to save the



drowning man. This teaches Joe that he must decide to watch or to try to help, and this influences his relationship with Carl and his actions concerning the case.

## **Crystal Marie Hagan**

Crystal Marie Hagan was the seventeen-year-old girl who was raped, killed and burned in Carl's shed. Carl was convicted of the murder. Joe and Lila use Crystal's diary and several interrogations to prove that she was actually killed by her stepbrother, Dan Lockwood.

## **Douglas Joseph Lockwood**

Douglas Joseph Lockwood was Crystal's religious zealot stepfather. Joe and Lila suspect him of murdering Crystal after decoding her diary reveals that she was blackmailed by "DJ," and when Joe confronts Douglas, he kidnaps and tries to kill the young man. Douglas disappears so they cannot obtain his DNA, but after Joe learns that Douglas did not murder Crystal, he accuses Dan of killing his own father.

## **Dan Lockwood**

Dan Lockwood was Crystal's stepbrother who blackmailed, raped and killed her after learning that she and her boyfriend stole a car from his father's lot for a joyride. His father covered for him during Crystal's trial. When Joe and Lila discover that Dan is the murderer because his wife tells them his nickname was DJ as a child, they steal his trash for a DNA sample. To protect himself, Dan kidnaps Lila to lure Joe out to his father's farm, intending to kill them both. He confesses that Crystal was not his only victim. His intentions with Lila are thwarted by Detective Rupert and his back-up. Dan is killed, and his DNA proves that he murdered Crystal and several other girls.

## **Andy Fisher**

Andy Fisher was Crystal's boyfriend before she died. Rumors spread that he killed her so he never told the police about them stealing a car from her stepfather's lot and her fear after losing her glasses. He reveals this information to Joe and Lila, helping them solve the case.

## **Detective Max Rupert**

Detective Max Rupert is the officer who directs Joe and Lila to Professor Boady Sanden who helps them find evidence to open the case. He comes to Joe's rescue after he escapes from Douglas Lockwood, and he arrives just in time to save Lila and Joe from Dan.



## **Professor Boady Sanden**

Professor Boady Sanden is a professor involved with the Innocence Project. He helps Joe and Lila test DNA which proves Carl's innocence.

## **Sergeant Gibbs**

Sergeant Gibbs was Carl's commanding officer in Vietnam who raped and killed a young girl in Oxbow. When he attempted to repeat this atrocity with another girl, Carl killed him, leading to decades of guilt.

## **Virgil**

Virgil is Carl's only friend and the only person who believes Carl did not kill Crystal. They served together in Vietnam, and Carl saved his life. Virgil was also present in Oxbow and saw how his friend was affected by that tragedy.

## **Mrs. Lorngren**

Mrs. Lorngren is the director at the nursing home who disdains Carl for his crimes, but she feels guilty when the truth is revealed.

## **Janet**

Janet is the receptionist at the nursing home who first suggests for Joe to interview Carl.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Joe's Apartment

Joe's apartment symbolizes his freedom from his mother and his past, as well as his intent to build a new life. His willingness to allow Jeremy to live with him is indicative of his fraternal love and caring.

## Trial Transcripts

At Lila's suggestion, Joe obtains a copy of the trial transcripts for his research, and the horrible things that happened to Crystal make both Joe and Lila hate Carl. The transcripts also show inconsistencies in the case which suggest Carl's possible innocence, and they symbolize the differences between justice and injustice.

## Carl's Shed

Carl's shed is where Crystal's body was dumped and burned. It symbolizes the main evidence of Carl's guilt.

## Crystal's Fingernail

Crystal's fingernail, found on Carl's porch, was also used as evidence against him, but Joe and Lila use it to prove that Carl's DNA is not underneath the nail. Eventually, this DNA is matched to Dan, so it also serves as a symbol of justice.

## Carl's Gun

Carl bought a gun the same day Crystal was murdered, and this evidence was used against him. In actuality, Carl planned to commit suicide, and this symbolizes the guilt and depression he felt because of his actions in Vietnam.

## Crystal's Diary

Crystal's diary is also used in the trial to show Carl's guilt since she refers to him as Creepy Carl. Her coded entries were not deciphered in 1980, but when Joe and Lila decode the entries, it leads them to Doug and then Dan. This also symbolizes justice and injustice as well as Joe's determination to prove Carl's innocence.



## **Nasty Nash**

Nasty Nash was Lila's nickname in high school due to her promiscuity, and this explains her aversion to men. Joe's reaction to Lila's story separates him from other men and symbolizes his accepting, caring nature.

## **Carl's Oxbow Story**

The Oxbow story symbolizes Carl's innocence as he feels guilty for his inability to save the girl Gibbs raped and killed.

## **The Glass Menagerie**

The Glass Menagerie reminds Joe of his past and symbolizes his desire to take care of Jeremy, though he tries to deny that it is his responsibility.

## **St. Croix River**

Doug plans to dump Joe's body in the St. Croix River, symbolizing his violence and the danger Joe faces as a result of his determination to clear Carl's name.

## **Dan's Trash**

Joe and Lila steal Dan's trash for a DNA sample, and this sample symbolizes Dan's guilt, especially since he kidnaps Lila to retrieve this evidence.

## **Carl's War Medals**

After Carl's death, Virgil gives his friend's war medals to Joe, showing his recognition of what the young man did for Carl. This also symbolizes the almost paternal relationship that developed between Joe and Carl.

## **Reward Money**

Proving Dan murdered Crystal allows the police to solve several other murders, and Joe and Lila are entitled to the reward money because they solved the case. This allows Joe the means to continue school and to care for his brother. It symbolizes justice in the sense that good deeds are rewarded.

# Settings

## Minneapolis, MN

Minneapolis, MN is the main setting of this novel. This is where Joe lives in an apartment after enrolling at the University of Minnesota. Most of his research takes place in Minneapolis. It is also the setting for the development of his relationship with Lila.

## Austin, MN

Austin, MN is Joe's hometown where his mother and brother live. Joe attended community college in this town before transferring to UMN. He returns to Austin to care for Jeremy after their mother leaves for several days. He also takes Jeremy away from their mother after Larry hits him a second time.

## Hillview Manor

Hillview Manor, located in suburban Richfield, is the nursing home where Carl Iverson is transferred from prison because he is dying from cancer. Joe visits Hillview in search of a subject for his biography assignment and spends much time there, interviewing Carl.

## Joe's Apartment

Joe's apartment is located near the University, and he tries to make it nice. He lives next door to Lila. Eventually, Jeremy comes to live with Joe.

## Lila's Apartment

Lila's apartment is located next door to Joe's apartment. Joe hides here after escaping from Douglas, and Danny kidnaps Lila from her apartment.

## Mower County Courthouse

Joe's mother calls him from Mower County Courthouse after she is arrested for a DUI, and she convinces Joe to spend his tuition money to bail her out. Otherwise, he will have to care for Jeremy.



## **Oxbow**

Oxbow is the name of a small Vietnamese village where Gibbs raped, killed, and burned a young girl. This story serves as evidence of Carl's inability to kill Crystal.

## **Seven Corners**

Seven Corners is a hub of taverns on the West Bank of campus where Joe and Lila go after the play. Here, Lila runs off after being recognized as Nasty Nash, and Joe hits the offender.

## **North Branch, MN**

North Branch, MN is the location of the farmhouse where Joe seeks refuge after escaping Douglas and leaving the cabin. The owners call the sheriff who arrests Joe until Rupert rescues him.

## **Mason City, IA**

Mason City, IA is where Dan Lockwood's house is located. Joe and Lila visit to obtain a DNA sample. Instead, they learn that Dan is the killer. They steal his trash to prove their case.





# Themes and Motifs

## Honesty and Truth

Honesty and truth play a vital role in this novel by connecting characters and unveiling secrets that help to develop their relationships as well as give insight to each one's individuality. Throughout the novel, the need for honesty and the search for truth lead these characters on adventures that challenge them and shape who they become. Part of this struggle lies in truthfully admitting who they are in the beginning. The events that befall them help the characters to accept their past, change their present, and begin to shape their future.

The theme of honesty is introduced when Carl and Joe meet for the first time as Carl agrees to grant the interview to the young student if he promises to be honest. This promise yields several instances where the truth is unveiled by both parties. Joe confides in Carl about Grandpa Bill's death, a situation for which he feels guilty but that also teaches him the importance of acting instead of watching and waiting. This invaluable lesson leads to Joe's need get to uncover the truth about what happened to Crystal Marie Hagan. As his research leads him to doubt that Carl killed Crystal, Joe is driven by his determination to discover the truth which leads to identifying the true murderer and exonerating Carl.

In return for Joe's confession, Carl makes several of his own. He tells Joe about the tragedy of the girl's death in Oxbow and how this led to a yearning for death which caused him to save Virgil's life in an attempt to make a righteous sacrifice. Carl's promise of honesty also leads him to share a story with Joe that he has never told anyone, even Virgil. He describes another encounter where he found Gibbs attempting to rape and kill another girl, and Carl prevented the horrendous act by murdering Gibbs which increases his guilt. Carl is plagued by guilt, and he finds relief in confessing the truth of his crimes to Joe. After Joe provides evidence to convict Dan of murdering Crystal, Carl is exonerated and finally knows true peace.

In contrast, Douglas Lockwood's fear of the truth derives from his desire to protect his son, but Dan's fear of the truth serves only to protect himself. Dan does not feel guilty or regretful in regards to his crimes. In fact, he has no qualms about killing Joe and Lila to continue protecting his secret. These characters who try to hide the truth serve as a foil to the characters trying to unveil it.

Another aspect of this theme demonstrates how Lila's promiscuous past and subsequent rape lead her to be isolated and refrain from dating. Although she befriends Joe rather early in the narrative, she keeps him at a distance until after she is identified as Nasty Nash. Forced to tell Joe the secrets of her sordid past, Lila seems to soften after the confession, proving the adage "the truth sets you free." Her relationship with Joe blossoms into much more than friendship.



The theme of honesty is also used in relationships through Joe's battle with the truth about his mother. He desperately wants to believe that she is capable of experiencing maternal love and will take care of Jeremy, although the bulk of his childhood has taught him otherwise. Joe attempts to bury his belief of the past because he wants to believe that he can choose his own future which includes attending college. However, after being forced to rush to his brother's rescue several times only to witness his mother's continued neglect, Joe accepts the truth that his mother will never properly care for his autistic brother. Joe accepts the responsibility of his brother's care, insisting that Jeremy live with him even though he knows he will not be able to afford to continue his education.

The use of the themes of honesty and truth in "The Life We Bury" effectively conveys the moral concept of karma. When the truth is revealed, each character receives his just desserts according to his actions. Carl is essentially a good man who is plagued with guilt for murdering an evil man, but his confession and later exoneration of the crime he did not commit lead to peace. Douglas and Dan Lockwood both die as a result of their crimes and their attempts to cover the truth. Lila finds a relationship after confessing the truth. Both she and Joe are rewarded for uncovering the truth of Crystal's murder by receiving a reward for also solving several other cases where Dan was guilty. This money allows Joe to afford school and take care of his brother. Though this novel is dark at times, the heroes are rewarded and the villains are punished.

## Responsibility

The theme of responsibility influences many of the events and decisions that occur in this novel. Responsibility takes many forms in this narrative, ranging from the acceptance of responsibility to battling responsibility to neglecting it altogether. This theme also touches many spheres in these characters' lives, including the familial, the emotional, the intellectual, and even the criminal. Some characters accept responsibility beyond what is necessary. Others neglect responsibility for all of their wrongdoings. The guilt motif heavily informs this theme which is also influenced by the themes of honesty and war.

The theme of familial responsibility is introduced briefly early in the novel with small references to Joe's past and allusions of his mother's lack of maternal ability. Throughout the novel, Joe's mother serves as a foil to Joe with her irresponsible attitude when it comes to taking care of Jeremy. This is in contrast to Joe's willingness to drop his own life to nurture his autistic brother. Joe's mother does not seem to accept her child's needs, constantly evading her responsibilities and complaining that she deserves a social life. Conversely, Joe often puts aside his personal plans to tend to his brother, though he struggles with accepting the responsibility fully because he cannot admit the truth that his mother never will. Ultimately, Joe realizes that the responsibility for his brother Jeremy rests with him because their mother's neglect could put his brother in greater jeopardy. She has already allowed her boyfriend to beat him.



Joe also feels responsible for Grandpa Bill's death, not only because he left the trash in the boat over which his grandfather tripped, but also because he waited and watched as Grandpa Bill struggled and drowned, rather than acting and helping. From this, he learns the importance of a decision, and he decides he must act. This feeling of responsibility leads to his determination to uncover the truth when he is confronted with Carl's innocence. Intellectual responsibility combines with the theme of honesty to drive Joe to hasten Carl's exoneration.

Although Carl was not guilty of murdering Crystal, he did not fight the charges because he felt that he deserved punishment due to his actions in Vietnam. While Carl felt minimal responsible for killing Vietnamese soldiers because that was his duty in war, he suffered immense guilt from his inability to save the Oxbow girl and his subsequent decision to murder Sergeant Gibbs to prevent another like atrocity. Prison does not silence Carl's guilt, and he finally accepts responsibility for his true crimes by confiding in Joe in his dying declaration. As a result, he finds peace.

An inability to accept responsibility plagues Douglas and Dan Lockwood. Douglas helps his son evade responsibility for Crystal's murder in 1980, but he is plagued with guilt that leads him to become an alcoholic. When the past comes back to haunt him in the form of Joe's interrogation, Douglas kidnaps and attempts to kill the young man rather than accept responsibility for his own sins and allow his son to do the same. Dan's desire to evade responsibility is so great that he kills his own father and plans to add Joe and Lila to the list of his victims. Although Dan does not personally accept responsibility for his crimes, he is found guilty of murdering Crystal and several other girls based on DNA evidence acquired through Joe and Lila's efforts. Like honesty, the theme of responsibility serves to show that good attracts good, while bad actions yield their due return.

## War

"The Life We Bury" focuses on a lot of dark themes and concepts such as war, which plays a large role in this novel. The narrative includes the events of an actual war with Carl's recollections of Vietnam. Joe's efforts to uncover the truth about Carl's guilt or innocence in Crystal's murder lead to another war as he endures danger and harm to solve the case. This theme is heavily influenced by the motif of killing versus murdering. Early in the novel, Carl explains that the difference between killing and murdering is "the difference between hoping that the sun rises and hoping that it doesn't" (page 44). This is shown in the narrative's examples which identify killing as a last resort, while murder is a chosen option.

Carl's experiences in Vietnam serve as the most literal example of the use of this theme. As a soldier, killing enemy forces is Carl and Virgil's job. Carl grows depressed quickly, and Virgil comforts him with the hope that they can choose how much of their soul they leave behind. Carl's hope is short-lived when, later that day, he witnesses Sergeant Gibbs rape and kill a young girl in Oxbow. Although Carl refuses to join in, even upon threats of death, he is haunted by his inability to act. This leads to his desire



for suicide that causes him to see saving Virgil's life as a righteous sacrifice. Carl does not die. Months after, he finds Gibbs in a position to repeat his crimes in Oxbow upon another girl. To prevent another such nightmare, Carl murders Gibbs.

Because he was not doing his duty to his country like he was when battling the enemy, Carl sees this as murder because he chose to end Gibbs' life when he did not have any such right. Alternately, this can be seen as a propagation of justice. Although Carl may not have been following orders, it seems he was following his conscience. At the very least, it raises the question of whether he did the right thing since he prevented innumerable girls from suffering the same fate as the Oxbow girl. In prison, Carl ends another life. He kills a man to prevent the man from killing him. It is ironic that he views committing this act to protect himself as killing while he saw it as murder when he ended Gibbs' life to protect another person.

As it pertains to Carl being accused of murdering Crystal, he is appalled at the accusation, but he does not fight to avoid prison because he feels guilty for his previous crimes. Since the only murder Carl commits is to protect a young girl, it seems highly unlikely that he would kill Crystal after the guilt he suffers for killing Gibbs who deserved it. Thirty years after Carl's conviction, Joe Talvert begins investigating the case for his biography assignment, and Joe's interviews with the convicted murderer lead him to accept the possibility of Carl's innocence. Joe undergoes an intellectual battle to discover the truth. In the process, he faces real danger.

When Joe interrogates Douglas Lockwood, Douglas tries to murder Joe to protect his son, but this attempt could almost be seen as killing since it was committed for the benefit of another, similar to Carl killing Gibbs. However, the similarity ends there as Carl killed Gibbs to prevent a wrong, while Douglas attempts to kill Joe to prevent Dan from suffering for doing a wrong.

Still, Douglas's act is nobler than Dan who attempts to murder Joe and Lila to protect his secret. In fact, Dan boasts about killing Crystal and several other girls, even eagerly anticipating how he will take his time killing Joe for the trouble the young man has caused him in continuing to hide his crimes. The last violence of the novel occurs when Detective Max Rupert and several other officers deliver justice by killing Dan Lockwood. Again, this action is seen as killing because it was effected in order to protect another person's life. Thus, this theme seems to prove that Carl was never guilty of a murder, but his character was simply of such a high stature that he felt guilty even for a righteous kill.

## The Past's Influence on the Present

"The Life We Bury" frequently alternates between the narrative occurring in the present and flashbacks of Carl and Joe's individual pasts. This backstory serves to show how past experiences have shaped these characters and how it motivates their present existence. This motif is closely linked to the motifs of guilt and decision-making in the



novel as well as to the themes of honesty, responsibility, and war. The characters often attempt to hide their pasts, inspiring the novel's title.

Joe's past was plagued with familial discontent. His mother's neglect made it necessary for Joe to begin caring for Jeremy at a young age, and this influenced his view of responsibility. Instead of following his mother's parental example, Joe strives to follow an opposing path. He works hard and saves money to put himself through school, but his mother constantly thwarts his efforts. Despite his desire to build a future for himself, Joe consistently puts his life on hold to care for Jeremy until he finally accepts the fact that Jeremy is not safe under his mother's care. Joe recalls the past and insists Jeremy live with him even though it will prevent Joe from pursuing his education. Joe is also heavily influenced by watching Grandpa Bill drown. Joe blames himself for his actions and lack of actions, learning that it is better to act than to wait and watch. This mentality follows Joe into his research of Carl's case. When he begins to suspect that Carl is innocent, he does everything he can to see Carl exonerated before his death at great peril to Joe's own safety.

Lila is also influenced by her past. Her high school promiscuity and subsequent rape lead her to avoid dating. However, after she befriends Joe and learns more about his character, he teaches her that some people can be trusted. Since Carl saved Virgil's life in Vietnam, Virgil's faith in Carl is unwavering despite the multitude of evidence against his friend. Andy Fisher admits that he still has nightmares about Crystal. In 1980, Douglas Lockwood lied to protect his son from being charged for Crystal's murder. It is likely that this is what causes him to succumb to alcoholism. He is confronted with the past when Joe visits to interrogate him, and he kidnaps the boy to protect his son's secret yet again. Dan Lockwood does not seem to be influenced by the past, but he has been. Dan was not punished for murdering his stepsister. Then, even after marriage, he continued to be a cruel rapist and murderer, evidenced by his plans to kill Lila and Joe. Perhaps, Dan would have changed his ways if he had been punished, even minimally, for his crimes. Instead, he learns that he can get away with it. So, he continues to commit these atrocious acts.

Most obviously, Carl's past influences his present in large ways. Carl's traditional upbringing creates a moral man who falls into depression in the violent atmosphere of war. When Gibbs rapes and kills a young girl in Oxbow, Carl's guilt becomes overwhelming, causing him to attempt a righteous sacrifice when he saves Virgil's life. His guilt over the Oxbow girl later leads him to murder Gibbs to prevent his commanding officer from raping and killing another girl. Although his crime was committed to preserve another person's life, Carl is haunted by his guilt after being discharged, and this leads to his depression and alcoholism.

Carl contemplates suicide, so when he is accused of murdering Crystal, he puts little effort into proving his innocence because he feels that he deserves to be punished. Prison does not silence Carl's nightmares. After meeting Joe, he agrees to give his dying declaration in hopes of finding peace. Joe's efforts lead to Carl's exoneration, and he finally finds peace, dying shortly afterward. All of the novel's characters are



influenced by their past, and the author does an excellent job of delving into these intricacies to provide a clear explanation to the reader.

## Guilt

Guilt is an important motif utilized in this novel to inform all of its major themes. Guilt inspires Carl and Joe's need for honesty as well as Joe's feelings of responsibility. Carl's experiences in the war cause him much guilt which influences his actions. Guilt is also a major component of how the past influences characters' present existences.

Lila's promiscuity in high school led to a poor reputation which prevented her from being believed when she was raped. This leads her to blame herself for her past actions, and she only forgives herself when she confesses to Joe who comforts her and assures her that it does not matter to him. Mrs. Lorngren feels guilty for her disdain of Carl and how she has treated him after Joe discovers his innocence.

Joe is plagued by guilt over Grandpa Bill's death and his mother's lack of maternal ability. Although Joe is aware of his mother's self-absorption and neglect, he attempts to ignore this knowledge in order to pursue his education; but, his guilt is revealed by his frequent thoughts of Jeremy. Joe repeatedly neglects his own life to rescue his brother from their mother's inattention. In addition to blaming himself for leaving the bottle in the boat that Grandpa Bill trips on, Joe blames himself for deciding to watch and wait rather than try to help. This decision influences his future decisions as he strives to prevent himself to being subjected to such guilt again. It also explains his stubborn determination to uncover the truth of Carl's conviction and to see his newly found friend exonerated.

Carl is also wracked by guilt. He blames himself for his failure to save the Oxbow girl. But, when he kills Gibbs to prevent another girl from suffering the same fate, he is overwhelmed by guilt for taking a life. After becoming an alcoholic, Carl plans to commit suicide, and his guilt prevents him from properly defending himself when accused of murdering Crystal. Also, since he murdered Gibbs, Carl feels he deserves to go to prison and hopes the punishment will silence his guilt-induced nightmares. Thirty years in prison do not alleviate Carl's guilt; so, he attempts to find solace in confessing his sins to Joe in his dying declaration. He finds sanctuary from his guilt after he is exonerated of Crystal's murder.

Ironically, the antagonists who should suffer the most from guilty consciences seem to be not phased. Joe's mother's neglect is disheartening, but she does not recognize any need for guilt. Instead, she tries to make Joe feel guilty for his failure to fill her role as Jeremy's parent. Neither Joe's mother nor Larry feel any guilt for their abuse of an autistic boy, blaming him for deficiencies beyond his control. Although Doug's guilt over protecting Dan from being charged for Crystal's murder leads him to become an alcoholic, his guilt does not prevent him from trying to kill Joe to save his son. Finally, Dan demonstrates absolutely no guilt for killing Crystal. In fact, he boasts that there have been others. Rather than mournfully seeing the need to kill Joe and Lila as an



unavoidable evil to save himself, he actually relishes and eagerly anticipates his actions. Dan is arrogant and ruthless, and he suffers no qualms about his horrendous crimes. All of the novel's main characters are influenced by guilt in some way. Whether it drives their actions or is noticeable only in its absence reveals a lot about these characters.



# Styles

## Point of View

A first person, limited point of view is employed in "The Life We Bury." The protagonist, Joe Talvert, narrates the novel, sharing his thoughts and experiences. Readers are admitted into Joe's private life, but the thoughts and behaviors of other characters remain private until they are revealed to Joe. A significant amount of foreshadowing is utilized to predict these revelations. An example of this is found in Lila's aversion to men and dating which is later explained after the encounter with the slob at the bar who identifies her as Nasty Nash. More importantly, it propagates the mystery surrounding Carl and his guilt or innocence as the reader discovers the evidence alongside Joe as the narrative unfolds.

The use of Joe as narrator also allows for his reflections on his past, specifically his family history. This provides an opportunity to witness how his present is influenced by his past. The point of view also informs many of the narrative's themes and motifs in addition to identifying and describing the development of his relationships. Joe's description of Grandpa Bill's death indicates his guilt associated with the tragedy. This event's influence on the theme of making decisions plays a large role in his frantic desire to prove Carl's innocence, particularly since Joe's relationship with Carl progresses to an almost paternal nature. Joe's role as narrator also allows the reader to see the transition of his belief in Carl's guilt to the certainty of his friend's innocence. Joe's thoughts about his familial situation reveal disdain and frustration with his mother's lack of responsibility as it applies to Jeremy which contrasts sharply with Joe's own feelings of duty and tenderness. Delving so deeply into the protagonist's innermost thoughts and feelings creates a sense of empathy and pity which is relieved only by the reward money bestowed upon him at the novel's conclusion. Several chapters serve as a portion of Joe's biography class assignment and are written in third person as he recounts stories from Carl's past.

## Language and Meaning

The language used in this novel is fairly simplistic. While some legal jargon is used infrequently, it is explained at a level to avoid confusion. By focusing on the narrative instead of distracting readers with unnecessarily complex text, the author provides an easy understanding of the key themes and motifs employed. Joe's ruminations about his mother and his brother offer focus on the theme of responsibility with his mother serving as a foil to the protagonist's care giving nature. This also presents a touch of irony in the fact that a son must repeatedly lecture his mother about her maternal duties.

The narrative also explores the theme of justice and injustice through Joe's research into Carl's case and his attempts to rectify the incorrect verdict of the 1980 trial. Crystal's coded diary entries reinforce this theme because they were never thoroughly





investigated, but they also offer an important use of language by demonstrating how differently a message can convey information by changing just a few words. Cracking the code, assumed to refer to Carl, actually allows Joe and Lila to prove Carl's innocence instead of damning him as the trial did. Although Joe's investigations endanger him, his experience with Grandpa Bill's death only reinforces his determination to uncover the truth of Crystal's murder. The narrative fluctuates between the past and present, but proper tenses are utilized to prevent confusion.

## Structure

"The Life We Bury" consists of 300 pages divided into 54 chapters. Although there is a significant amount of backstory pertaining to Joe's past, Crystal's murder and Carl's service in Vietnam, these excerpts are clearly indicated by the use of the past tense. These flashbacks serve to highlight characters' motivations and to demonstrate their natures. The portion of the narrative that occurs in the present is written in the proper tense and is chronological. As Carl's case is 30 years old, the novel is set around 2010, but it spans back even further to the 1960s when Carl was deployed to Vietnam.

"The Life We Bury" by Allen Eskens is an intriguing narrative about Joe Talbert, a young college student assigned to write a biography for his class. His search for a subject leads him to Carl Iverson, a dying Vietnam Veteran convicted of murder thirty years earlier. Carl's claim of innocence and Joe's own inability to reconcile the celebrated war hero with a cold-blooded killer lead to Joe investigating the case and unraveling inconsistencies. As Carl's health deteriorates, Joe is pressed for time to solve the thirty-year-old murder and see his friend exonerated. Dangerous risks are posed as he uncovers the truth that has remained hidden for decades. The use of a limited, first person point of view provides a lot of insight into Joe's actions, but the proper use of tenses allows for an accurate conveyance of the time period in which each portion of the narrative occurs. Several chapters serve as a portion of Joe's biography assignment and are written in third person as he recounts stories from Carl's past.



## Quotes

There are people in this world who would call that kind of feeling a premonition... I've never been one to buy into such things. But I will confess that there have been times when I think back to that day and wonder: if the fates had truly whispered in my ear - if I had known how that drive would change so many things - would I have taken a safer path? Would I turn left where before I had turned right? Or would I still travel the path that led me to Carl Iverson?

-- Joe as narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** This quote foreshadows the narrative's adventures related to Joe's interactions with Carl Iverson and how their relationship changes the young man's life.

Joe, this is Mary Lorngren from Hillview Manor. I just wanted to call and tell you that I spoke to Mr. Iverson about your project... and he has agreed to meet with you to discuss it. He wanted me to make it clear that he is not agreeing to do it, mind you. He wants to meet you first.

-- Mrs. Lorngren (Chapter 3 paragraph 39)

**Importance:** In this quote, Carl agrees to meet with Joe. His interest in meeting Joe first indicates his desire to get to know the interviewer which foreshadows their relationship.

When I zoomed in on Carl Iverson's face, on his eyes as he looked at the photographer, I saw no pride, no false calm, and no fear. What I saw was confusion.

-- Joe as narrator (Chapter 4 paragraph Last)

**Importance:** The look in Carl's eyes on the photograph suggests his innocence.

There is a difference. I've done both. I've killed... and I've murdered." "It's the difference between hoping that the sun rises and hoping that it doesn't.

-- Carl (Chapter 6 paragraph 34 & 36)

**Importance:** In this quote, Carl explains the difference between killing and murdering, and this suggests the importance of this motif in the novel.

That's good." "That you understand how wrong it is to judge someone before you know their whole story.

-- Carl (Chapter 6 paragraph 41-43)

**Importance:** This quote suggests the importance of not being judgmental, and it shows that Carl really wants to tell Joe his story. It also indicates that Carl either did not kill Crystal or that there is more to the situation than indicated at this point.

If a man whispers the name of his killer and then dies, it's considered good evidence because there's a belief - an understanding - that a person who is dying would not want to die with a lie upon his lips. No sin could be greater than a sin that cannot be rectified,



the sin you never get to confess. So this... this conversation with you... this is my dying declaration. I don't care if anybody reads what you write. I don't even care if you write it down at all. I have to say the words out loud. I have to tell someone the truth about what happened all those years ago. I have to tell someone the truth about what I did.

-- Carl (Chapter 6 paragraph Last)

**Importance:** In this quote, Carl admits that he wants to share his story with Joe, foreshadowing their following interviews. His promise of honesty also foreshadows his confessions.

He'll have to sign it. If he doesn't sign, then you know that he's full of crap. Either he signs it or he's nothing more than a lying, murdering bastard who wants to keep you in the dark about what he really did.

-- Lila (Chapter 7 paragraph Last)

**Importance:** This quote shows that Lila distrusts Carl, and she encourages Joe to get the full story, foreshadowing her interest in the case as well as the development of her relationship with Joe.

Come down to the jail and bail me out.

-- Joe's mother (Chapter 8 paragraph 18)

**Importance:** This quote indicates that Joe's mother does not care about bettering herself or about Joe's education. It shows her selfish nature and irresponsible attitude.

You see, shortly after that night in the alley, Crystal wrote in her diary that a man was forcing her to do stuff she didn't want to do - sexual stuff. He told her that if she did not do what he wanted, he was going to expose her secret. Now, Crystal doesn't expressly say that Carl Iverson was the man threatening her, but when you see her words in that diary, it'll leave no doubt in your mind who she's writing about.

-- Lila reading trial testimony (Chapter 23 paragraph 11)

**Importance:** While reading the trial transcriptions, Joe and Lila learn that Crystal was caught having sex in her boyfriend's car and was blackmailed. The court assumed that Carl was the blackmailer and killed her.

I made a promise to write the truth. And I will.

-- Joe (Chapter 11 paragraph Last)

**Importance:** Joe's promise to write the truth foreshadows that he will become emotionally invested in finding the truth.

It's hard to explain. Most guys who are guilty will take a plea bargain. He refused a second degree. And, most guys who are innocent will delay trial for as long as it takes to get their case prepared. He demanded a speedy trial. We were trying to decipher the code, and it seemed like he was working against us. I gotta tell you, Joe, it seemed to me like Carl Iverson wanted to go to prison.



-- Berthel Collins (Chapter 18 paragraph Last)

**Importance:** This quote suggests that Carl is willing to go to jail which foreshadows his later admission that he was suicidal at the time and felt like he deserved to be incarcerated.

I thought it would silence the nightmare." "I've done things... things that I thought I could live with... but I was wrong.

-- Carl (Chapter 19 paragraph 37 & 39)

**Importance:** In this quote, foreshadowing is fulfilled as Carl explains why he did not fight harder to stay out of prison, admitting that he was haunted by his bad deeds.

I saw it as my chance. I would get in front of Virgil and take the bullet that was meant for him. It was kind of like killing two birds with one stone. I could save Virgil's life and end mine all at the same time." "That's the messed up part of it. Instead of getting my head shot off they gave me medals, a Purple Heart and a Silver Star. Everyone thought I was being brave. I just wanted to die. You see, Virgil's belief in me, his loyalty to me, is based on a lie.

-- Carl (Chapter 22 paragraph 24 & 26)

**Importance:** This quote serves as the first indication of Carl's suicidal tendencies and also shows the irony of Virgil's belief that Carl saved him on purpose.

We don't have a vote on being here, and for the most part we don't have a vote on how we leave. But we do have control of how much of our soul we leave behind in this mess. Don't ever forget that. We do still have some choices.

-- Virgil (Chapter 23 paragraph 23)

**Importance:** In this quote, Virgil attempts to provide hope to his friend, insisting they get to decide who they become in this guilt. This possibly causes Carl's guilt over Gibbs and the Oxbow girl.

There was a ton of evidence against that Iverson guy. What'd it matter if they misunderstood the diary? I wasn't gonna stick my neck out for him. He killed my girlfriend... didn't he?

-- Andy Fisher (Chapter 25 paragraph Second to Last)

**Importance:** After Andy tells Joe and Lila about Crystal losing her glasses, Andy admits that he knew they misunderstood the diary, meaning that Carl was not blackmailing Crystal. Still, he claims that he still believes Carl killed Crystal because of the evidence. However, the way that he looks back and forth between Joe and Lila while asking "didn't he" suggests that he is unsure.

We looked at each other, trying to grasp the enormity of what we had just learned. Crystal Hagen's stepfather had the initials DJ. DJ is the person who found Crystal Hagen's glasses. The person who found Crystal's glasses was forcing her to have sex.



And the person forcing her to have sex was the person who killed her. It was a simple deduction. We had found our murderer.

-- Joe as Narrator (Chapter 29 paragraph Last)

**Importance:** In this quote, Joe and Lila crack Crystal's diary code, proving that the murderer was DJ, not Carl. They have evidence to suggest her stepfather is DJ.

I murdered Gibbs, and as far as I'm concerned I murdered that girl in Oxbow. I didn't pull the knife across the throat, but I murdered her just the same. When they arrested me for the murder of Crystal Hagen... well, I think part of me figured it was time to pay my debt." "I thought that by going to prison, I might silence my ghosts - bury that part of my life, those things I did in Vietnam. But in the end, there's no hole deep enough. No matter how hard you try, there are some things you just can't run away from.

-- Carl (Chapter 31 paragraph 41 & 42)

**Importance:** In this quote, Carl admits his guilt that made him want to go to prison was because he murdered Gibbs and also felt guilty for the Oxbow girl. Carl sought solace in prison, but he was still haunted. He never told this secret to Virgil, suggesting this is the story that he referred to when he mentioned his dying declaration.

He wanted me dead. He needed me dead. I had the ability to send him to prison for trying to kill me - if not for murdering Crystal Hagen.

-- Joe as Narrator (Chapter 36 paragraph Last)

**Importance:** This quote shows Joe's fear of being hunted by Doug Lockwood because he can prove the old man's guilt.

They'll undo my conviction.

-- Carl (Chapter 41 paragraph 14)

**Importance:** Despite his claims to the contrary, Carl shows that he cares about being exonerated as he smiles and sinks into his pillow.

DJ's not missing. His ol' man's missing. Doug's missing." "Yeah, but his dad married that bitch Danielle when Dan was a little kid. She liked to be called DAni, thought it made her sound like a tomboy. And since there couldn't be two Dannys in the family, she made everyone call her Dani and call him Danny Junior. After a while they just called him DJ.

-- Mrs. Lockwood (Chapter 42 paragraph 38 & 43)

**Importance:** Mrs. Lockwood inadvertently tells Joe and Lila that Dan's childhood name was DJ, alerting them to the fact that he is Crystal's murderer.

You're supposed to protect him. You're supposed to be his mother." "You made your choice. You chose Larry, so Jeremy's coming to live with me.

-- Joe (Chapter 46 paragraph 20 & 22)

**Importance:** Joe finally tells his mother off and cuts ties with her. He takes on the



responsibility for Jeremy even though it means he will not be able to afford school. Joe makes his decision, and this action says a lot about his character.

He's sleeping so soundly. It's like he's been awake for days. He knows he's safe now. You should feel good about that. You're a good brother.

-- Lila (Chapter 47 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** Lila points out that Jeremy feels safe with Joe and praises Joe for being a good brother. This stirs memories in Joe of how Grandpa Bill told him this day would come.

I hold the cards. I'm in control. You get your ass here or I'll kill her right now.

-- Dan (Chapter 51 paragraph 10)

**Importance:** Dan admits that he plans to kill Lila and Joe for learning the truth. He also shows the controlling nature that causes him to enjoy raping young girls.

I won't be going back to school.

-- Joe (Chapter 54 paragraph 10)

**Importance:** This quote shows that Joe is willing to give up his education to make sure that his brother is safe. This is the reason that Detective Rupert and Professor Sanden are so excited about the reward money that Joe and Lila will receive. They know what it means to Joe. Also, this concept of Joe being rewarded for doing the right thing seems to suggest that there is justice in the law, foiling the majority of the narrative which shows major injustices.