

The Mirror Study Guide

The Mirror by Marlys Millhiser

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Plot Summary

The Mirror is the story of Shay Garrett and Brandy McCabe Maddon, granddaughter and grandmother, who switch times and bodies when they are twenty years old through the Wedding Mirror. Shay is transported into Brandy's body the night before her wedding to Corbin Strock and Brandy is transported into Shay's body the night before her wedding to Marek Weir. Shay, in Brandy's body, is considered mentally unstable and Corbin Strock marries her to get control of the Brandy Wine Mine. Shay befriends Thora K, Corbin's mother, and she continues to live with her even after Corbin's death. Shay marries Hutch Maddon, the man she recognizes as her grandfather from Bran's wedding photo, and they move onto a ranch. Shay is happy with Hutch and her family comes to regard her predictions as a part of life.

Shay gives birth to her own mother, Rachael, and makes sure her father Jerry is taken care of as a child. Rachael grows up revering the Gingerbread House, feeling something is missing from her relationship with her mother. After Hutch dies, Shay travels the world in Brandy's body. All of her predictions for Rachael come true, including Rachael's career as a writer and her marriage to Jerry Garrett. Brandy finds herself lost in Shay's body, in a world that moves at a much faster pace than her own. Grandma Bran dies the very night before Shay is supposed to get married, and Brandy finds herself attending her own funeral. She is attracted to and afraid of Marek Weir, and startled to discover that Shay is pregnant. Rachael and Jerry's marriage has deteriorated, and they are basically staying together for Shay. Marek feels that Shay is an entirely new person, and he feels protective of her. Brandy runs away from the Gingerbread House when Rachael and Jerry discuss abortion, and she is carried by Shay to the home of Mr. St. John. He cares for Brandy and for Shay's growing pregnancy, though Shay's family and Marek think she may be dead.

Mr. St. John's granddaughter Lottie finally reveals Brandy's true whereabouts to her family, and she and her twin sons are taken to Nederland to live in Jerry's cabin. Rachael reads her mother's old diary and discovers the truth: that Shay and Brandy switched bodies. The Gingerbread House is broken into and the mirror stolen. Marek eventually commits to Brandy and the children, with full knowledge that the woman he loves is Brandy McCabe and not Shay Garrett. The mirror continues on its path of destruction en route to New York City.



Part One, Backward, Chapters 1-5

Part One, Backward, Chapters 1-5 Summary

The Mirror is the story of two women lost in time, Shay Garrett and Brandy McCabe, granddaughter and grandmother, switch bodies and lives via a mysterious and dangerous mirror known as the wedding mirror. Each must learn to live in completely different times, though in the same places, and with their past or future families. Both women are dissatisfied in their own lives, and through trials and tribulations find happiness, satisfaction, and even love in their new lives.

The Backward gives information on the wedding mirror—its disturbing history of being involved in suicides, madness, and unexplained electrical storms. The mirror came into the possession of the McCabe family when John McCabe purchased it as a wedding gift for his daughter Brandy and brought it to Boulder, Colorado.

Chapter One introduces Shay Garrett and her family: father Jerry, mother Rachael, and invalid grandmother Bran. The family inhabits the Gingerbread House, a residence that has been passed down through the generations. They are gathered because Shay is getting married. Rachael has given her an old family relic, the wedding mirror, as a gift for her upcoming nuptials. Upon sight of the mirror, the previously comatose Grandma Bran utters the word "mirror" and clutches Shay's hand.

In Chapter Two, the family is shocked by Grandma Bran's sudden speech after twenty years of silence. Shay's family is afraid she is getting married because she is pregnant, and Rachael does not think she loves her fiancé, Marek Weir. Jerry and Shay Garrett do not care about the family history of the Gingerbread House, but Rachael is obsessed with it. In the middle of discussing Shay's boredom and their worries about her impending marriage, an explosion racks the Gingerbread House. Meanwhile Shay is upstairs with Grandma Bran, who speaks again, this time the word Book. As Shay prepares for bed she muses over the mirror, which she hates. Grandma Bran appears in her nightgown and screams Corbin just as the mirror begins to hum and Shay blacks out.

In Chapter Three, Shay regains consciousness in a strange place. Shay is being called Brandy, and the people who come to her rescue are dressed like "museum pieces" (pg. 21.) Shay is in the body of Brandy McCabe, who is getting married the next morning. Sophie, Brandy's mother, sits her down to discuss relations between a wedded man and woman. Shay confronts the mirror in an attempt to learn what has happened, and observes her new body as a blue-eyed brunette, shorter than Shay and missing a molar. She is in the Gingerbread House in another time, in twenty-year-old Brandy's body. John McCabe is determined to marry her off.

Shay drinks milk in Chapter Four, which Brandy hates. Shay wanders out the back door of the house, shocked to discover how different this world is from her own. She worries



about Marek, her fiance in her own time, and what has happened to her own body. She wonders if she has died and is experiencing the afterlife. After a visit from her brother Elton, who is attempting to quell her anxiety, Shay realizes she is inhabiting the body of Grandma Bran.

Chapter Five follows Shay through her wedding and departure from the Gingerbread House. Though during the ceremony Shay plans to say "I don't," John McCabe speaks for her before she has the chance. Sophie McCabe reflects on the change in her daughter: she was the apple of her father's eye until she turned eighteen, then she changed, perhaps in an attempt to avoid suitors. Shay suspects the mirror may have had something to do with her situation. McCabe's mine, the Brandy Wine, is signed over to Corbin as a dowry, and Shay has a vision of her own body screaming. She cannot take the mirror with her to Corbin's house, and rides away from the Gingerbread House in a state of shock.

Part One, Backward, Chapters 1-5 Analysis

The Background section and the Forward sections are switched in this novel, representative of the two main characters' situations. Each also concern the mirror, and how it enters and leaves the main story. The Background foreshadows the mirror's dark past and explains how the mirror came to be in the hands of John McCabe, whom the reader will not meet until later chapters.

Chapter One reveals that Shay is in a complicated situation: pregnant with the child of a man she does not love, she has agreed to marry him essentially out of boredom. She feels oppressed by the Gingerbread House, which she regards as her mother's monstrosity and is using the marriage as an escape tactic. Shay notices an old photograph of Grandma Bran and her husband, marveling that her slight invalid grandmother could be the same person as the woman in the picture. A storm is brewing outside, which the reader later learns is a telltale sign of activity from the mirror. Eerily, Grandma Bran speaks for the first time in twenty years: the word "mirror." Shay and Bran connect in this moment, Shay feeling her grandmother's struggle for speech and attempt to overcome her frail and ancient body.

Chapter Two is the aftermath of Grandma Bran's dramatic foray into speech: Rachael, presented as stubborn and determined, hopes that her mother will finally return to normal after so many years. Shay is on edge about the mirror, suspicious of why Bran would emerge from her long-established state to mention the mirror. Rachael and Jerry are clearly against Shay's impending marriage, worried she is simply marrying because she is pregnant and she does not love Marek. Jerry and Shay do not have the same regard for the family history contained in the Gingerbread House that Rachael has, instead feeling hedged in by the various trinkets and antique furniture. All three admit to feeling strange, foreshadowing the presence of something strange. Shay feels drawn out of herself as the storm around the house grows more violent, and Bran's scream "Corbin" is Shay's last warning before she descends into blackness.



Chapters Three, Four, and Five follow Shay through her first impressions of Brandy's world. Though in Chapter Three and most of Chapter Four she is convinced she is living in a realistic dream, after she discovers that Brandy is Grandma Bran she begins to panic. Brandy's family thinks she is acting strange, but chalk it up to anxiety over her approaching marriage. She thinks Corbin Strock is a severe man and still hopes somehow she will be switched back to her correct time and body. She understands that John McCabe thinks he is doing the best thing for his daughter, who has gotten the reputation of being mentally unstable. Shay's state of shock continues through her wedding and into the ride away, where all she can do is sit numbly and try to absorb her situation. Her family loves her very much, but in Brandy's day and age women's roles were much more traditional than Shay's.



Part One, Chapters 6-10

Part One, Chapters 6-10 Summary

In Chapter Six, Shay rides with Corbin into town. Everyone thinks Brandy is crazy, so if she mentions her situation it will probably be chalked up to Brandy's mental state. She still hopes to be returned to her own body. People stare at them as they ride into town, though Corbin tells her to ignore them. They drive through the old fashioned town and stop at a Boarding House for Fancy Ladies. Shay ridicules Corbin for dropping off a gift for a whore, though he and Brandy have only been married for an hour. Corbin thinks Shay is joking when she asks where he lives, and warns her not to try her foolishness on her new mother-in-law, Thora K. He lives in Nederland in a cabin. Shay explains her situation to him, and though he listens he does not believe her. They pull off of the road because of a freight wagon, and Shay is shocked to see the man in Brandy's wedding picture of her grandfather.

In Chapter Seven, Brandy learns the man's name is Lon Maddon. Corbin warns her to stay away from him, and she wonders how Brandy ends up married to Maddon instead of Corbin. Corbin does not think Brandy is mad like John McCabe does, but that her memory has been affected. Corbin married Brandy to gain control of the silver mine Brandy Wine. He offers to bring the mirror to the house if it will make Brandy feel better, and requests to hear more of her stories of the future. He is confused by her as she seems too smart at times and completely clueless at other times.

In Chapter Eight Brandy arrives at Corbin's cabin. She meets Thora K and is depressed by Corbin's gift to his mother: an icebox. Thora K has a thick accent. Corbin's cabin is a one larger room with two tiny bedrooms off on either side and a loft. Shay discovers the buffet from the Gingerbread House is Thora K's. Back at the Gingerbread House Elton and John McCabe discuss Brandy's well-being, Elton wishing she could have stayed with them and John convinced they did the right thing by marrying her to Strook. As Elton and John move the mirror Shay has a vision of herself at Grandma Bran's funeral. Dr. Seaton comes to check on Shay, and advises her to throw away her corset. He is upset from the death of Cara Williams, whose child he was attempting to deliver.

In Chapter Nine, Shay overhears Corbin and Thora K discussing Brandy's potential madness. Dr. Seaton has assured Corbin that she is a virgin. Shay decides that she will pretend to be Brandy until the mirror arrives to avoid being institutionalized. Corbin sleeps in the loft. The next morning Shay is shown around the property and is responsible for fetching water, baking bread, cleaning the lamp, sweeping the cottage, and preparing supper, among other daily chores. Corbin returns to find her bungling her chores, unable to use a cookstove and forgetting her apron. He is moved by her, but attempting to avoid a physical relationship.

In Chapter Ten, Shay makes a successful stew for dinner but forgets to bake the bread. After supper Corbin leaves for the saloon in town, though Thora K does not approve.



Thora K teaches Shay how to make bread, and she senses Corbin watching her. She wonders if he has been to see a woman, and how prostitutes avoid pregnancy. Shay is sent to get Samuel Williams's clothes to wash, since his wife has died and is laid out in the ice barn. On her way to the cabin Shay encounters Lon Maddon.

Part One, Chapters 6-10 Analysis

In Chapter Six, Shay's frankness and willingness to discuss the whorehouse startles Corbin, who expects Shay to be a refined and demure lady. She is still hoping to wake up as if from a nightmare, and her questions about her new life are construed as bad jokes or insanity by Corbin. Though taking him to task over the whorehouse is something that makes sense for someone to do in her own time, he is shocked at her openness and uncomfortable. He is good-natured enough to let her tell her stories, but does not believe her, which is something Shay finds incredibly distressing. She is shocked to encounter the man in Brandy's wedding picture on the road, and feels repulsed by Lon Maddon.

In Chapter Seven Shay realizes that Brandy will eventually be married to Maddon instead of Strock, but she is wary of becoming too involved in Brandy's life. Corbin however does not believe she is feigning insanity, but that she truly believes what she says. This disturbs him more, but he is willing to put up with any number of things to get the Brandy Wine. Though he is a stern man, he listens to Brandy's fantastic stories of times and places in the future. He is conflicted about his new bride, but resolved to pour his efforts into the Brandy Wine.

Chapter Eight is Shay's first glimpse of her new home. Thora K is a tough old bird who criticizes Brandy's name: she thinks being named after a liquor is inappropriate. Though Thora K is ecstatic to receive the icebox, it only serves to remind Shay of how impossible her situation is: she is the wife of a man she does not love and who does not love her, living in the rough with no amenities and no idea how to survive in this world. When Shay faints during a vision of herself at Grandma Bran's funeral, it is apparent the two women are still somehow connected. The visit from Dr. Seaton serves to remind her how different this time is than hers: he has just come from an unsuccessful childbirth, where both mother and baby died.

Chapter Nine is where Shay decides she will pretend to be Brandy. This is a smart move for her because if she is institutionalized she may be stuck as Brandy forever. Shay feels inadequate when she cannot perform the simplest tasks assigned to her: cooking, cleaning, and upkeep tasks that would have been taught to Brandy from childhood have Shay completely at sea. Corbin is physically attracted to Brandy but wary of her unusual behavior. He is driven by one thing: the Brandy Wine, and is not willing to let a new wife distract him.

Shay's stew in Chapter Ten is a point of pride for her, and even Corbin is impressed, though he and Thora K still find it strange that she cannot bake bread. Shay is horrified to realize that the bodies are kept in the same ice barn they use for their ice box, which



is unsanitary and potentially dangerous. Shay is afraid of Lon Maddon, terrified that he is the man in Grandma Bran's wedding photo and worried about how their marriage comes about.



Part One, Chapters 11-14

Part One, Chapters 11-14 Summary

.In Chapter Eleven Shay speaks to Lon Maddon, who makes her uncomfortable. She picks up the wash from Samuel Williams, who has consumption. She learns that the Maddon twins' mother was a prostitute and their father was hanged for murder. Thora K teaches Shay how to do the wash, and thinks Shay has the Sight. Shay is alone at the cabin and decides to see if Samuel Williams needs any help. She muses about how she does not miss Marek, and meets May Bell, a friend of Corbin's. On Sunday the family goes to Samuel Williams's wife's funeral, and Elton visits her afterward. He has not brought the mirror, but hopes Brandy has written letters for Sophie.

In Chapter Twelve, Shay, Thora K, and Corbin are attending a Fourth of July celebration in town. Corbin and Tim Pemberthy are in a drilling contest. Shay finds the celebrations exhilarating, and thinks her husband is attracted to her. Shay was depressed when Elton did not bring the mirror, but the celebrations bring her back to life somewhat. Thora K shares some of Corbin's family background, revealing she married a Norweigan and did not want Corbin to be a miner. During the drilling contest Shay meets the other Maddon twin. While picnicking, Hutch Maddon brings Shay a piece of fried chicken. Corbin confirms her suspicions that May Bell is a prostitute, and asks her to have nothing to do with Hutch Maddon. She overhears discussions about her marriage and how Corbin has not changed his bachelor ways.

In Chapter Thirteen, Shay and the family attend a rodeo in town. Hutch Maddon is thrown from his horse and lands at Shay's feet. She helps the doctor treat him. Dr. Seaton has to set his broken leg in the field, thanking Shay for her nursing assistance. Thora K thinks Shay has the gift of healing as well as the gift of Sight, and has come to like Brandy. Shay is disturbed by her grandfather's blood on her hands. Shay goes with Thora K to Caribou, an old mining town. She learns that Thora K is forty-five years old, and that she lost most of her children and her husband to diphtheria. Corbin brings Shay a dead chicken to cook and laughs when she is disgusted by the animal, pointing out that she had no problem setting a man's leg. They share a moment and kiss, but are interrupted by Lon Maddon and a telegram that John McCabe is very ill.

Shay returns to the Gingerbread House in Chapter Fourteen. She is certain she is going to return to her own time. John McCabe has had a stroke. Shay sits with him and says she forgives him, and before he dies he warns her about the mirror and cries out for Joshua. Elton tells her John McCabe was found in front of the mirror during a thunderstorm. Shay decides to write down her experiences in a diary so Brandy will have a guide when she returns to her body. Brandy had another brother, Joshua, to whom she was very close. She and Corbin are put in the same room to sleep and though he promises not to bother her, they have sex. The next morning Corbin leaves in a hurry, but tells Shay she can stay as long as she wants.



Part One, Chapters 11-14 Analysis

Lon Maddon makes Shay uncomfortable. She does not understand how Brandy comes to be married to him, and she thinks he is a harsh man. Thora K and Shay are beginning to form a real relationship, and Thora K theorizes that Shay is not crazy, but she has the Sight. It is significant that Shay does not miss Marek—she does not love him, and in a way has been saved from a loveless marriage. Shay still expects to be rescued from this life by the mirror, and is crushed when Elton does not bring it. She is trying not to get too involved in Brandy's life since she still expects to be leaving it.

When Elton does not bring the mirror in Chapter Twelve, Shay is disappointed and withdrawn. The Fourth of July celebrations bring her out of her shell, and she muses how odd it is that she would be brought back to life by such a simple town celebration. She is conflicted to meet Hutch Maddon, the other Maddon twin, because she finds him much more polite and agreeable than his brother. Shay is embarrassed when she overhears discussions about her marriage. Shay and May Bell have a strange sort of friendship, and she is intrigued by Hutch Maddon bringing her a piece of chicken. Shay is annoyed by Corbin's double standards. She may not interact with May Bell, but he most likely does. This is an example of her 20th-century sensibilities superimposing onto her attempts to exist in Brandy's world.

In Chapter Thirteen, Shay is shaken when her grandfather lands at her feet. She is taken aback by his blood on her hands: the irony that it will one day run through her body's veins is too much for her. She feels differently about Hutch than his twin, but is still expecting to escape from Brandy's life. She and Thora K have developed a real regard for one another, giving Shay a true friend in Brandy's world. She and Corbin are slowly getting used to one another as well, and even feel comfortable enough to finally have some physical contact. Lon's interrupting of their kiss is symbolic, foreshadowing that Shay will not be with Corbin for long. In Chapter Fourteen when Shay returns to the Gingerbread House she is convinced that she will be going back to her life, and decides to begin writing her experiences in a diary so Brandy will not be completely at sea when she returns. The diary is extremely important, and will eventually help Brandy, though not in the way that Shay expects. The consummation of Brandy's marriage surprises Shay because Brandy is actually a virgin. Corbin is uncomfortable with Shay's blatant sexuality and is even more confused about the woman he has married. The death of John McCabe is hard for Shay because she wants to help him but does not know what to say. She suspects the mirror had something to do with his death, and unsuccessfully tries to get some answers from it. Sleeping with Corbin is disappointing for Shay because she feels insecure about her lovemaking skills, and she is not expected to participate and simply to lie still and hope to bear children.



Part One, Chapters 15-18

Part One, Chapters 15-18 Summary

In Chapter Fifteen, the Maddons decide to leave town. A man named Tom Horn is looking for Hutch on behalf of James B. Collard III, whose granddaughter Hutch impregnated. They decide to take a train to Utah, hoping Hutch's leg will heal on the train so he can ride a horse. Hutch thinks of Brandy to take his mind off his leg. While watching the mirror at the Gingerbread House, Shay briefly inhabits her own body, which is in a ditch on the side of the road. She picks up a bag of kittens and staggers to a house with a dog tied out front. She sees an old man with a white beard.

In Chapter Sixteen, Shay is back in Brandy's body. She develops a sore throat and a fever. Meanwhile May Bell receives a visit from Tom Horn, who is searching for Hutch Maddon. While resting from her illness, Shay realizes that she and Brandy have switched bodies—all this time, Brandy has been living in Shay's body. She asks to return to Nederland, though Sophie offers her divorce as an option. Thora K speaks to a man at the hotel who mentions plans for a reservoir, proving that Brandy is not crazy and does have knowledge of the future. Shay and the wedding mirror return to Nederland, and Corbin is uncomfortable with Brandy's behavior in bed. On the way through town they learn Tom Horn has been killed. Thora K mentions the reservoir to Shay at dinner.

In Chapter Seventeen, Shay has another crossover experience with Brandy and must be carried back to the cabin by Corbin. He tries to ignore her. Shay finally tells Thora K the entire story, and inadvertently reveals that Thora K will outlive Corbin. Shay wonders how women in this time keep from getting pregnant after Corbin comes to her bed because it is too cold to sleep in the loft. This occurs every other Saturday night. One day Shay is walking on Main Street when a fire breaks out at May Bell's house.

In Chapter Eighteen, Shay, the Maddons, Mr. Binder, and Thora K fight the fire at May Bell's. Hutch Maddon makes Shay uncomfortable with his intense stares. The fire, started by May Bell's cigarette, destroys Main Street. Most of the men in the town are at a court in Boulder, and Corbin and Tim in the mine. Corbin prepares dinner. The Maddon boys have purchased a ranch. Shay asks Dr. Seaton about contraception and he tells her to abstain, though he does not understand why she is asking. Thora K probes Shay for information about her future, and Shay reveals her descendants will be Maddons. May Bell recommends a contraceptive penny. While at May Bell's Shay has a vision of her body screaming and a bloody hand. Thora K and Corbin hide the mirror. Thora K and Shay see a phantom Corbin, and Tim runs up the path in bloody clothes.



Part One, Chapters 15-18 Analysis

In Chapter Fifteen the reader gets some insight into Hutch Maddon. He is less wild than his brother, and is interested in Brandy (or Shay) in a more gentlemanly way than just her body. Shay's brief return to her own body is significant because she has physically come back to herself. She makes decisions for herself and moves her own body. In Part 2, all of Shay's crossover experiences will be imagined from Brandy's point of view.

In Chapter Sixteen, Shay is inexplicably ill, and the doctor and her family are relieved when she develops regular symptoms instead of the odd malady she has been displaying. This is the first time she realizes that while she has been living in Brandy's body, Brandy has been living in her body—they have truly switched bodies across time. Shay is adamant about returning to Nederland because it is easier for her to pretend to be Brandy there—her family knows her too well for her to successfully pretend. Corbin thinks she is odd anyway and Thora K thinks she has the Sight, so she can retain some measure of herself at Nederland. After learning the Reservoir will come to be, Thora K puts more stock in Shay's stories—this is an important moment in their developing relationship.

Chapter Seventeen is the first time Shay's knowledge of the future works against her. In revealing to Thora K that she will outlive Corbin, she hurts the older woman and treats Corbin like his days are numbered. She becomes more obsessed with preventing pregnancy, still clinging to the thought that Brandy will return to her correct body. Corbin pays slightly more physical attention to her, but they are not in love and he expects her to remain demure. Shay is slowly settling into a routine, even going to town to order a rocking chair. When she encounters Hutch Maddon there she pointedly ignores him, trying not to tempt fate.

In Chapter Eighteen, Shay fights the fire with the Maddons and the others. Though she is still wary of Hutch, she is slowly accepting her attraction to him. She does not tell anyone about May Bell's cigarette because she feels a kinship with her: in her own time May Bell's behavior would not be nearly as scandalous, and Shay envies May Bell's freedom. Shay regrets telling Thora K that her descendants are Maddons, especially because of all the hardship Thora K has gone through with her own family.



Part One, Chapters 19, 20, and Interim

Part One, Chapters 19, 20, and Interim Summary

In Chapter Nineteen, Shay prepares for Corbin's funeral. Thora K accuses her of being a witch. Though she did not love Corbin she misses him. Brandy's body is pregnant, which excites Thora K but depresses Shay. On a walk to the well she encounters Hutch Maddon, who declares his intention to eventually marry her. President McKinley is assassinated and Thora K drags the mirror out, requesting Shay to warn them if anything might happen to Roosevelt. Shay gives birth to Penny, and Dr. Seaton claims she may never have another child. Penny died after two weeks of life.

In Chapter Twenty, Hutch Maddon invites Shay for a ride on his wagon. He takes her to his brand new ranch house, hoping to impress her enough that she will accept his marriage proposal. She accepts.

The Interim gives an overview of Shay's life juxtaposed with historical events: World War I, the building of the dam, the tungsten boom, and the influenza epidemic. Shay decides it is too late for her to return to her old life, but worries what she will do when Rachael is born.

Part One, Chapters 19, 20, and Interim Analysis

In Chapter Nineteen, Thora K is crushed by Corbin's death and even calls Shay a witch. Shay knows she does not love Corbin, who she still thinks of as Brandy's husband, but she has a certain regard for him: however strange their relationship, Corbin basically treated her well and she could possibly have grown to love him. Brandy's pregnancy is depressing for her because she knows the baby will die. The name Penny is ironic and symbolic of the copper contraceptive penny that did not work. Shay still hopes to be returned to her correct time and body, but has reached the end of her endurance when Hutch proposes. She gives herself to him, relieved to be leaving loneliness behind her. Even through the beginning of their lives together Shay finds some form of happiness, though she continues to oddly predict events before they happen. She is able to love Remy and Dan as sons because she never knew them as uncles, the same as she is able to love Hutch as a husband because she never knew him as a grandfather. She worries about when Rachael is born, and how she will be able to relate to her own mother as a child. She eventually stops seeking answers from the mirror, instead becoming involved in her strange life as Shay and Brandy.



Part Two, Chapters 1-4

Part Two, Chapters 1-4 Summary

Part Two takes the point of view of Rachael, Brandy's daughter and Shay's mother. In Chapter One, Mr. Binder, ancient from Rachael's point of view, asks about Bar Double M and Brandy. She shares her candy with a boy. Rachael arrives home to her twin brothers fighting, and Brandy asks if Rachael has trouble at school because of her crazy mother. Rachael says no, lying, and mentions a boy she would like to have over for dinner.

In Chapter Two, Dan and Rachael pick Jerry Garrett up for dinner at the ranch. Shay is surprised to meet her father as a child. Jerry mentions his mother is looking for a woman named Christine Pintor. She is too ill to search for herself and his father is long gone. Shay has become Brandy in the last 31 years, hardly thinking of who she used to be. Jerry and his mother are living in the old Strock cabin. Shay realizes that May Bell is Christine Pintor, Catherine's mother, and Jerry's grandmother. Shay asks May Bell to take care of the family in return for warning her about the stock market crash.

In Chapter Three, Shay lets slip that Rachael will marry Jerry Garrett someday. After school, Rachael goes to the Strock cabin to meet her mother. Jerry Garrett is playing with insects in the yard. Rachael dares him to go into a forbidden door—the cave where Thora K stashed the mirror. They discover the body of Mr. Pemberthy.

In Chapter Four, Shay and Thora K hide the mirror in the Brandy Wine. They think the mirror may have killed Tim Pemberthy just like it killed John McCabe. Rachael forever has a fear of caves and dark places, but has blocked out the specific trauma of that night. Dan takes a job on a cabbage truck. The Bar Double M Ranch is going downhill. Rachael and Jerry go to May Bell's house, daring each other that she is a witch.

Part Two, Chapters 1-4 Analysis

In Chapter One, although Shay has tried to raise her mother normally, crazy Brandy's reputation has followed Rachael to school and affected her friendships with the other children. When Mr. Binder asks after Brandy, Rachael understands he is trying to find out if she has had any episodes. Shay is sensitive to Rachael's situation at school, and requests that she bring a friend home for dinner. Though only trying to appease her mother, Rachael is embarrassed when her brothers tease her about bringing a boy home.

Shay is shocked to discover in Chapter Two the boy Rachael brings home is Jerry Garrett, her former father. Rachael is afraid her mother is going into one of her moods because of the intense way she regards Jerry. Shay has gotten used to being Brandy, and never expected Shay's life to interfere with Brandy's so soon. Living isolated on the ranch she has been able to exist with her knowledge of the future, with people who



Rachael and Jerry's childhoods have differed greatly as evident in Chapter Three, Jerry's rougher upbringing has left wanting attention. He kills the insects with gusto, inwardly thankful to be inflicting harm instead of receiving it. Their discovery of the body bonds them in a strange way: though Rachael blocks out the body in the cave, she feels drawn to Jerry for the rest of her life.

Chapter Four confirms Shay's suspicions about the mirror's supernatural powers: though she knew the mirror was responsible for switching her with her grandmother, she is now certain that the mirror has killed people. Rachael blocks out the trauma of the cave, but the experience will come back to her in the form of a children's book years later. The forgotten trauma is indicative of Rachael's personality: she does not like to face her problems head-on, instead pouring her time and energy into the Gingerbread House. Objects do not disappoint her, but people constantly do.



Part Two, Chapters 5-10 and Interim

Part Two, Chapters 5-10 and Interim Summary

In Chapter Five, Rachael discovers her Uncle Lon secretly making Thora K's tonic: whiskey, molasses, and chloroform. During the winter Shay becomes ill and irritable, making Rachael uncomfortable. Remy goes to join Dan in California. Lon must stash away his bootleg liquor to avoid capture by the authorities, who are searching for him at the rodeo. He hides in the Brandy Wine, telling Hutch he will return in a couple months. He notices the strange mirror in the corridor with him.

In Chapter Six, Lon sees visions of Shay and Brandy in the mirror. In a panic, he flees into the Brandy Wine and falls. Chief Geronimo, peddler of tonic, drives by the Brandy Wine and hears Lon's scream. He takes the liquor and covers the mirror with a blanket. Hutch assures Rachael that Lon will come back when he is ready. Jerry Garrett's mother dies, and he is sent to a private school in Pennsylvania by the Smith Foundation or May Bell. Thora K dies, and Hutch searches for Lon. Brandy is very ill but insists she will not see a doctor. Brandy goes to a Sanitarium, sending Rachael to the Gingerbread House to live with Sophie.

In Chapter Seven, Rachael learns the treasures of the Gingerbread House from Grandma Sophie. She likes the objects in the house better than people. Rachael and Sophie visit Brandy in the TB hospital, and Shay blames Rachael for never telling her Brandy was so sick for so long. Shay misses time spent with Hutch, but goes out to California to visit the twins and their families. Rachael lives at the Gingerbread House. The family sells the ranch. Rachael rescues Thora K's buffet and the mirror from the junk heap. After years of not being found, Lon Maddon's body is discovered in the Brandy Wine.

In Chapter Eight, Lon Maddon is buried and Shay returns from California. Rachael attends college off the proceeds from the Brandy Wine, and May Bell dies of a heart attack. Rachael clears the graves of her family members and encounters Jerry Garrett visiting his mother's grave. He is going to war in the navy. She invites him to dinner with her family and he kisses her.

In Chapter Nine, Hutch has a heart attack and is in the hospital. Shay moves into the Gingerbread House to be closer to him, though will not sell the cabin because Jerry will need it someday. Dan and Remy are in the war, though Shay worries only about Hutch's health. Rachael begins to go out with boys drinking and smoking, and returns one night after Hutch has had another heart attack. Shay attempts to give him CPR, not yet invented even, but to no avail. She refuses to see his pink granite tombstone. Sophie Euler McCabe dies and leaves the Gingerbread House to Rachael, who gets a job teaching. Shay decides to travel and leaves Rachael alone.



In Chapter Ten, Rachael begins the writing career her mother always predicted she would lead. She encounters Jerry Garrett while attending a party for GIs. They go back to the Gingerbread House for a snack, Rachael knowing her mother will not be surprised.

In the Interim, Rachael and Jerry get married. Rachael wears her mother's wedding veil. Rachael invests in improvements to the Gingerbread House and in helping Jerry through law school. Brandy or Shay continues to travel the world and invests in Dan's used-car business. As Rachael gives birth to baby Shay, Brandy has a stroke and the mirror gains the large crack in the top.

Part Two, Chapters 5-10 and Interim Analysis

Chapter Five explores Rachael's relationship with her mother more deeply. Though Shay has tried very hard to give Rachael a normal upbringing, Rachael still feels something is lacking from her relationship with her mother. Lon's bootlegging, while a profitable business, puts him in the path of the mirror and in danger, especially since Hutch will not try to look for him for months. When the mirror shows Lon the visions in Chapter Six his fate is sealed. Seeing visions in the mirror for the men of the novel almost always means death. The evidence of Lon's presence in the Brandy Wine is erased by Geronimo, and he will not be found for years. Brandy's trip to the Sanitarium is a surprise for Shay. Because she knows for a fact that Brandy survives to be at least ninety-eight, she is not worried as she gets more and more ill. In Chapter Seven Shay blames Rachael for not telling her that Brandy was in the Sanitarium for so long, yet another confirmation for Rachael that something is different about her mother. Rachael loves the Gingerbread House because it does not disappoint her. She has always felt estranged from her mother and the Gingerbread House is something she can control.

In Chapter Eight, Rachael reencounters Jerry Garrett. She tries to stay away from him but cannot, even though she knows her mother will not be surprised to see him show up at the house. Rachael feels that she has no control over her life, which is why the Gingerbread House is so important to her. When the family ranch is sold, Shay and Hutch move into the cabin, Shay with the knowledge that her husband will not be around forever.

When Hutch dies in Chapter Nine, Shay tries to give him CPR, which makes Rachael suspicious. Shay also refuses to see Hutch's tombstone, which she knows is pink granite. Rachael knows something about her mother is different, and feels even more abandoned when Shay decides to travel the world. Shay knows her time is limited and at some point she will go into a coma, and she wants have as full of a life as she can without Hutch and before the baby Shay is born. Chapter Ten explains how Rachael began her writing career—with an interesting idea about two children and a cave, her repressed memory from discovering Tom Pemberthy's body. Rachael knows her mother will not be surprised when she randomly brings Jerry Garrett home from a party, nor is Brandy surprised when Rachael marries him.

Ironically, Brandy has a stroke just as the baby Shay is born. This begins her twenty years in a coma. It seems the mirror will not allow two Shays to be in the world at the same time. The crack in the mirror is somehow representative of the meeting of two of the same person.



Part Three, Chapters 1-5

Part Three, Chapters 1-5 Summary

In Chapter One, Brandy and Elton formulate a plan to save her from marrying Mr. Strock. She wants to attend school, but John McCabe insists that she marry. She plans to run away to Aunt Harriet Euler, but instead the mirror transports her into Shay's body.

In Chapter Two, Brandy is in a future version of the Gingerbread House. She realizes she is in a different body whose name is Shay. The mirror has a large crack on the top. Brandy learns Shay has a wedding the next day also, and is shocked when Marek Weir kisses her and touches her thigh in front of everyone in the room.

In Chapter Three, Brandy is shocked by Shay's clothes and by Marek's behavior toward her. She is terrified when she accidentally turns on the boom box and Rachael rushes in to turn it off. Rachael gives her a sleeping pill. She wakes up the next morning groggy, and answers the antique telephone instead of the house phone. Brandy asks Rachael to pick out clothes for her, though she is uncomfortable in blue jeans. She sees a brief vision of her body in a traveling outfit. At breakfast, she discovers the old woman who died was named Brandy Harriet McCabe. She has switched bodies with her granddaughter.

In Chapter Four, Brandy about being Shay Garrett. The family decides to let Brandy go out with Marek in hopes that he will help ground her. Rachael and Jerry's relationship is ending. He plans to leave her, but they agree to stay together while Shay is still acting strangely. Brandy is intrigued by Shay's world, but is shocked by the discotheque. She thinks Marek must be Satan. He suspects something is wrong with Shay, but Brandy does not tell him who she really is.

In Chapter Five, Brandy attends her own funeral. Rachael shares the family history with Brandy. Marek meets with Shay's parents in the living room of the Gingerbread House, swearing they have switched Shay with a twin. They are afraid that Shay is going crazy. Brandy goes to the National Center for Atmospheric Research with Marek and is intrigued by the modern building. Marek is intrigued by the new version of Shay. He is afraid when Shay writes "I am Brandy" on the chalkboard. They watch a film in which a girl gets an abortion.

Part Three, Chapters 1-5 Analysis

Chapter One is the body switch from Brandy's point of view. It provides more information on Brandy's plan: had she and Shay not switched bodies, she would have run away to Aunt Harriet's house and probably never met Hutch Maddon, thus changing the future already set in motion.



In Chapter Two, Brandy is confused and does not yet know she has switched bodies with her granddaughter. While Brandy is inquisitive and progressive for her time, she is shocked at Marek's familiarity with Shay. Though Brandy is trying to fit in, to her family she is clearly behaving strangely.

Chapter Three is the first instance where Rachael is truly concerned about Shay—she slips her a sleeping pill after turning off the boom box. Brandy's shock over whose body she is inhabiting causes her to faint. She is terrified that when she returns to her body she will know the exact date of her death. Rachael can tell that Shay is different, but she hopes the shock of seeing her grandmother die is to blame for the change in behavior.

Rachael and Jerry allow Shay go out with Marek, hoping he will restore her to herself. Their relationship now revolves entirely around Shay as the problems rooted in Rachael's childhood have come back to haunt them. Jerry thinks she blocks out the bad things in her life and fills her time with the Gingerbread House, and has not felt like she needs him. Rachael is both the victim and the perpetrator in the novel: because she feels distanced from her mother, who is actually her daughter, she turns to the Gingerbread House and her possessions for fulfillment in life. This causes her to bring the mirror to the Gingerbread House in the first place, where her daughter Shay will be in the future. Brandy tries to act at ease around Marek, but he awakens a sexual impulse in her that makes her uncomfortable. She thinks he must be Satan, but she is fascinated by him nonetheless.

In Chapter Five, Brandy is shocked to learn the fates of her family members. She is worried about returning to her own body and time with her new knowledge of the future. Little does she know, she will never return. When she goes to work with Marek he is distracted by her fascination with riding in the car. He theorizes she is a changeling or a twin. He knows she is not Shay, but he is intrigued by this new woman. She awakens a protective instinct in him that had not existed with the world-weary and bored Shay. Even her handwriting has changed, evident from the message "I am Brandy" she writes on the chalkboard. Marek is a man of science and has a hard time believing there is a different person in Shay's body. He prefers to think she has some psychiatric problem, but is still inexplicably drawn to the new version of Shay.



Part Three, Chapters 6-11

Part Three, Chapters 6-11 Summary

In Chapter Six, Brandy requests to go to the Presbyterian church. Rachael takes her, though the service is lackluster for Brandy. Rachael introduces her to the TV, and Brandy is mesmerized. The cleaning crew comes to the house, and Brandy is sent to see Gale Sampson. She determines that Shay does not have amnesia, and her symptoms are more similar to culture shock.

In Chapter Seven, Brandy's life is controlled by the television. Marek leaves for Wyoming because his mother is dying. Brandy thinks she is falling in love with Marek. After a visit to the doctor, everyone discovers Brandy is two months' pregnant. Rachael discusses the possibility of abortion, horrifying Brandy. Jerry is furious and attacks Marek when he comes to the house. Brandy runs away in a panic, a dog running alongside her. She briefly re-inhabits her body to discover John McCabe has died and that Shay has been stuck in Brandy's body the whole time Brandy and been in Shay's. She reads a passage from the diary just before succumbing to the mists again.

In Chapter Eight, Brandy returns to Shay's body, listening to a missing person report on the radio. There is an old man who tells her she showed up with five kittens after his cat Stina's kittens died. He seems mentally off, but not dangerous. Marek is worried about Shay and their unborn child and vows to keep her safe when he finds her again. Ansel St. John takes care of Brandy during her fever, and she dreams of Marek.

In Chapter Nine, Brandy comes out of her fever to discover she is in a bed full of kittens. Mr. St. John feeds her and insists she drinks milk for the baby, though Brandy hates milk. He refers to his cat as Stina Mark, and tells Brandy that the rest of the world is crazy—not the two of them. He shows her around the farm and introduces her to the other animals. The goats are feisty and potentially dangerous, and Mr. St. John also introduces one of them as Stina Mark. The terrifying dog is named Happy. Jerry walks out on Rachael, saying she loves her house more than him. Rachael packs a bag and leaves also. Marek thinks about Shay, missing her and wondering why he likes her better crazy. Her message is still written on his blackboard.

In Chapter Ten, Brandy discovers a graveyard at the farm, all the graves labeled Stina Mark. Marek Weir drives up in his Porsche looking for Shay, but Mr. St. John sends him away. Mr. St. John questions Brandy about Marek, sharing how upset Marek seemed. Mr. St. John tells Brandy that her father owned Water Street and Sophie McCabe had been living off the profits of whores and gamblers. Brandy is angry that such a joke was made of her mother. Mr. St. John believes that Brandy is from a different time. She stays in his granddaughter Lottie's room, and Brandy cannot resist Lottie's scandalous magazines.



In Chapter Eleven, Jerry Garrett returns to the Gingerbread House and hears the mirror humming. He sees a vision of Shay in the mirror. He discovers Rachael has left and has asked any information about Shay to be relayed to Marek. Jerry goes to visit Marek, but he does not know the whereabouts of either Shay or Rachael. Marek says Rachael wanted to remind Jerry when the bills are due each month but did not want to speak with him. Brandy worries about Mr. St. John's sanity, and wonders about the process of childbirth.

Part Three, Chapters 6-11 Analysis

In Chapters Six and Seven, Brandy is descending into a deep depression. She feels alone in an unfamiliar world and is beginning to despair of ever returning to her own time. Even the church service, the rock of the community in her time, is lackluster. The doctor cannot diagnose Shay's problem, causing stress on Rachael and Jerry's relationship. The television is a way for Brandy to temper her homesickness and learn about the new world she lives in. She is mesmerized by the talking box, and it helps numb her confusion about her former life, her current life, and her growing feelings for Marek. Shay's pregnancy is a shock for Brandy, her family, and Marek. Though Brandy is terrified that she is pregnant, she is equally terrified that they will force her to have an abortion. She runs away after Jerry hits Marek because she is shocked by the violence. While Brandy is briefly in her own body, reading the diary helps to explain much of what happened to her. Shay, arguably the stronger of the two, gets Brandy safely in the hands of Mr. St. John before they are switched back.

In Chapters Eight and Nine, Brandy's fevered dreams are of Marek. She is in love with him, though she will not admit it to herself. Mr. St. John is kind to her but is a strange man, and Brandy is not quite at ease around him. Brandy is more comfortable on the farm because it reminds her of her former life, and she does not have to put on a show around Mr. St. John. He believes her story and does not think she is crazy. Jerry and Rachael's tenuous relationship abruptly ends when Jerry walks out on Rachael—he snaps something inside of her forever. She knows he is at his cabin, probably with a woman. Though Rachael is a creature of habit, she leaves the Gingerbread House, abandoning her daughter and the life she has known for so long. Marek struggles internally with losing Shay—his brief encounters with her changed self have made him look at the world in a completely different way.

Brandy's discovery of the graveyard in Chapter Ten is eerie. Though Mr. St. John seems to want to help her, the mystery of the graves labeled Stina Mark make Brandy uncomfortable. Brandy hides when Marek drives up to Mr. St. John's, though she secretly longs for him to take care of her. Mr. St. John's knowledge of Brandy's family shocks her. The McCabes she always thought of as respectable and genteel people are descendants of whores and gamblers, and she married a Maddon brother famous for his antics. Brandy prays for Shay to return to her body, fearful that she will not be able to resist the temptation of Marek Weir.



Jerry's vision of Shay in the mirror in Chapter Eleven frightens him, though he brushes it off as a trick of the mind. It is significant that the mirror does not take Jerry's life, as it did the last to men who were under stress and alone with it. Jerry is startled by the change in his wife: never before would Rachael have taken off at a moment's notice. He is angry that she has left him with chores and instructions, but Marek points out that he has not been there for Rachael at all. Brandy wonders about childbirth, but her only experiences are negative such as a mare foaling, her mother's miscarriages, a friend who died in childbirth, and a preacher who blames Eve for the pain of giving birth. Brandy identifies with Eve, thinking that she must have been a curious person as well.



Part Three, Chapters 12-15

Part Three, Chapters 12-15 Summary

In Chapter Twelve, Chris Davenport and a mysterious gray-haired man rob the Gingerbread House. The wedding mirror is taken, ending up at an auction in Texas. Rachael is in a hotel in Denver and has begun a new novel about a pregnant teenager who runs away as her parents verge on divorce. Brandy has moved into Lottie's room, but must hide in the barn when Lottie unexpectedly comes home.

In Chapter Thirteen, Lottie discovers Shay in the barn, and recognizes her as the missing girl from the radio announcements. The wedding mirror is being sold in the middle of the night before an auction. Lottie makes Shay uncomfortable with her posters of naked men and her frank attitude about sex. The only items from the Gingerbread House that didn't sell in the night auction are the mirror and a rocking chair. Cindy Wilson sees visions in the mirror and convinces her husband to buy it for their antique shop. Brandy has a crossover experience with Shay.

In Chapter Fourteen, Lottie thinks that Brandy had a fit and Mr. St. John sees Marek in the paper. The wedding mirror is purchased and driven back to Colorado. After Thanksgiving with his in-laws Jerry returns to the Gingerbread House and discovers the theft. Lottie and Mr. St. John have a disagreement and he storms into town to get coffee. Brandy asks if Stina Mark, Lottie's grandmother, is buried in the graveyard, but Lottie does not know.

In Chapter Fifteen, Rachael rushes back to the Gingerbread House after talking to Marek about the theft. She thinks about all the years the house had sheltered her, and remembers her mother doing CPR on her father before CPR was invented. Jerry and the police are at the house when Rachael arrives. Brandy prays to be sent home because she does not want to give birth to Shay's baby. Mr. St. John promises her a surprise for Christmas. Rachael is upset and shocked by the theft of her beloved family items, and she begins to read her mother's old diary to comfort herself. She thinks the handwriting looks like Shay's writing, and reads the diary until 2:00AM. Remy visits Rachael and she informs him she has found Shay.

Part Three, Chapters 12-15 Analysis

Chapter Twelve is setting up for the events of the novel to reach a climax: Rachael is lost and beginning a semi-autobiographical novel, unaware that her beloved possessions at the Gingerbread House are being pillaged. The mirror's theft is mysterious, feeling almost as if the mirror itself has organized the raid. Brandy is uncomfortable with the vulgar posters on Lottie's wall, but is slowly allowing herself to come alive and be curious in a way that she could not in her own time. Brandy tries to remain detached from the baby growing inside her but finds it difficult.



In Chapters Thirteen and Fourteen, Brandy is discovered by Lottie, but Brandy is prepared to defend herself with a pitchfork—a sign that she is getting more bold. She and Lottie are very different people and Brandy still does not quite trust her, but is relieved to be around a woman again. The mirror seems to have cast its spell on Cindy, who is usually the business mind of the shop, and winds up on its way back to Colorado, though Mr. Wilson has a foreboding feeling about it. Though Mr. St. John has taken care of Brandy and done nothing untoward, the possibility of Stina Mark actually lying in one of the graves on the property has both Brandy and Lottie on edge.

Chapter Fifteen is Rachael's discovery. She reads the diary and finally knows the truth. She does not believe it at first, but when she really thinks about it the situation makes sense. Mr. St. John's promise to Shay is foreboding: what can a Christmas surprise really mean to this man? Brandy's anxiety about giving birth is increasing, and she still hopes to be changed back into herself. Shay's vision of Brandy and the bloody hand foreshadows that perhaps Brandy will give birth to Shay's children after all. Brandy misses her family even more at Christmastime, which prompts Mr. St. John to try to cheer her up with a surprise.



Part Three, Chapters 16-20 and Forward

Part Three, Chapters 16-20 and Forward Summary

In Chapter Sixteen, Mr. St. John takes Brandy for her Christmas surprise. Rachael guides Jerry and Remy to the her mother's grave at the cemetery, claiming Shay is in the grave. Mr. St. John takes Brandy to an apartment, brushes her hair and asks if she has any lipstick. He hides in the closet. Marek is on his way home, reminiscing about the sad death of his father and hoping Shay has not died alone. He knows instantly something is different about his apartment, and discovers Brandy in his bedroom. She has no idea where Mr. St. John has taken her and is as surprised to see him as he is to see her. They argue and Mr. St. John subdues him. Brandy leaves a note asking him not to come after her.

In Chapter Seventeen, Rachael reveals the diary to Jerry and Remy, and her theory that the mirror switched Shay and Brandy. Marek calls to tell them Shay was at his apartment and comes over to the Gingerbread House. They discuss the real possibility that Shay is Brandy. They decide to leave the doctor and the police out of the discussion, and Jerry stays with Rachael, afraid for her sanity. She goes on antidepressants. Meanwhile, Brandy goes into labor during another storm. Mr. St. John has gone outside and been knocked unconscious by the storm. Brandy tries to drag him back to the house, but must retreat from Hooligan the goat's charge.

In Chapter Eighteen, Brandy surfaces from her pain to find Mr. St. John in the room. He tells her to go lie down in the bed. Brandy sees a vision of May Bell. Meanwhile, Cindy Wilson hears about a stolen mirror, but decides to ignore the fact that it is probably her mirror. She watches images in the mirror. Brandy gives birth to twin boys and passes out. Lottie discovers that Brandy has given birth and tells Jerry. He drives to Mr. St. John's house and tells Brandy that Shay is not going to return. Jerry takes Brandy to Nederland, making a stop at the Gingerbread House to pick up the diary. Brandy names them Joshua and Elton after her brothers.

In Chapter Nineteen Dan and Remy visit Brandy and the babies. Brandy is reading through the diary. Mr St. John brings her goat's milk for the babies. Rachael comes to visit her and the twins, and decides to search for the wedding mirror. Brandy is finally coming to realize that she will not be going back to her own time. Marek comes to visit her and the twins for the first time. He is confused with the knowledge that Shay is Brandy, and thinks people should be married before having children. Meanwhile, Cindy Wilson is obsessed with the visions she has seen in the wedding mirror.

In Chapter Twenty, Brandy has fallen into a routine and is bored. Jerry and Rachael visit her often, though Mr. St. John and Remy visit less often. Marek is uncomfortable around her. One day in an antique store Brandy runs into Lottie, who tells her Mr. St. John was horrible to Stina Mark until her illness. The Garretts and Marek argue about who will



support Brandy. Brandy sees a vision of Corbin Strock at the cabin. Later in the evening Marek arrives with a station wagon. He and Brandy will start lives together.

The Forward explains that Cindy Wilson killed herself and the mirror is bought and being sent to New York as a wedding gift.

Part Three, Chapters 16-20 and Forward Analysis

Brandy is traumatized by her Christmas surprise in Chapter Sixteen. Marek Weir is the last person she expects to see. Rachael is slowly losing her grip, and after reading the diary she believes that Shay is in fact Brandy. Brandy is afraid of her feelings for Marek, just as she is afraid of the new world she is being forced to live in. Marek is overcome with emotion when he sees that Shay is alive: he still knows she is behaving differently but cannot stop thinking about her.

Rachael's big surprise in Chapter Seventeen cause Jerry and Remy to doubt her sanity, though when presented with the diary they are wavering toward the impossible truth themselves. Rachael is a shadow of her former self after the discoveries about her daughter. Where she was once a leader, she now must go on anti-depressants. Though Jerry does not leave her, she surely never wanted to keep him under such circumstances.

In Chapter Eighteen Brandy's worst nightmare has come true. She is giving birth to her great-grandchildren. Her brief vision of Shay living her life is the last one she will ever have. After the twins are born the crossovers stop. Brandy is still very lonely for her real family, and names the twins after her brothers. Lottie finally blows the whistle on Mr. St. John, and Jerry picks Brandy up, though he is conflicted about the stranger living in his daughter's body.

In Chapter Nineteen Brandy finally realizes she is stuck. She will raise her great-grandchildren and will never be returning to her own time. She is confused about her feelings for Marek and still suffering from culture shock, as well as her brand-new status as a mother. She observes that, even with all the changes in women's statuses, Jerry seems to prefer the subdued and broken Rachael to the strong capable woman she had been. Cindy Wilson's obsession with the wedding mirror foreshadows a dark end.

In Chapter Twenty, Brandy is lonely. The twins are her only reasons to continue existing, though Rachael and Jerry visit her often. Her vision of Corbin Strock is fleeting, and she tells it aloud that she will not be coming back. Marek's decision to spend his life with her is hard-won, and though she is still overwhelmed by her new life, she is in love with him and feels it is right for them to raise the children together.

In the end, though the mirror is presented as an evil thing, it gave both girls what they wanted. Shay was bored with her life and longed for substance to her existence and Brandy was constrained by her society and longed for the freedom to learn. Each of them found true love and eventual happiness. The mirror, now on its way to New York for another wedding, is continuing its path.



Characters

Shay Garrett

Shay Garrett is one of the two main characters in the novel. She is transported out of 1978 into the body of her grandmother in the 1800s. Shay is a practical and modern woman, and confused by the Victorian rules she formerly considered part of antiquity. Though engaged to Marek Weir, she does not love him and is generally bored with her life. She dislikes the Gingerbread House that her mother loves so much, and feels stifled by the numerous family relics that surround the house. When she is transported into Brandy's body Shay is convinced she is dreaming, and desperate to get back home. Her marriage to Corbin Strock is awkward for her because she feels he has unrealistic expectations of her as a woman of the 20th century she has very radical ideas for the time period. She befriends Thora K, her mother-in-law, who prefers to believe that Shay has the Sight. Shay is conflicted by a real desire to succeed as Brandy and the constant desire to be taken back to her own time. Ultimately, living as Brandy wakes Shay up to the life she should be experiencing: she falls in love with Hutch Maddon and lives a life in which she earns what she has. Hutch allows her to be as unusual as she likes, while Corbin wanted her to be a specific kind of cookie-cutter wife.

She has to live with the knowledge that she will outlive Hutch, give birth to her own mother, and spend the last twenty years of her life in a semi-vegetative state. She is distant to Rachael because the situation is a lot for her to handle: giving birth to and raising her own mother is not something for which she is mentally prepared. She shares her predictions with her family, even telling Rachael she will marry Jerry Garrett and become a writer. Shay's life as Brandy is difficult because she has so much knowledge of what will happen. She is taken from being bored and frequenting discos to a real life where she can work for what she wants.

Brandy McCabe

Brandy McCabe is Shay Garrett's grandmother, transported by the mirror into Shay's body in the future. She gets the surprise of her life when she discovers she is in her granddaughter's body and has watched her granddaughter die in her former body. Brandy plans to run away the night before her marriage to Corbin Strock, who she does not love and is afraid of. She longs to go to the university and learn, but before she can set off for Aunt Harriet's house she is switched by the mirror. Though she tries to pretend to be Shay, she has no idea how to behave in Shay's world. Everyone can tell she is different, including her fiance Marek Weir, to whom she is uncommonly attracted. When the family discovers that Shay is pregnant, Brandy overhears them talking about abortion and runs away. Shay briefly re-inhabits her own body and takes them safely to Mr. St. John's house, where he nurses Brandy back to health. Brandy is more comfortable on Mr. St. John's farm, where she does not have to pretend to be anyone



else and he believes her story. She is uncomfortable with her reaction to Lottie's photographs. Although she is a progressive woman for her own time, she is hopelessly old-fashioned in this world.

Brandy hopes to be switched back before giving birth to Shay's babies, but unfortunately the mirror has other plans. She gives birth to twins, as is the Maddon tradition, and is eventually taken to Jerry's cabin in Nederland to live. The family has read Shay's diary and basically accepted the idea that Brandy is inhabiting Shay's body, but the knowledge leaves Rachael a broken woman and Marek confused as to what his responsibilities are toward the stranger Brandy. Brandy takes care of the twins as if they are her own, finally letting go of the hope that she will be returned to the correct time and body. As she lets go, she embraces Marek, with whom she is in love and who promises to take care of them all as a family.

Rachael Maddon Garrett

Rachael Maddon Garret is the daughter of Brandy Maddon, and was unknowingly raised by her own daughter Shay Garrett, who inhabited the body of Brandy Maddon. Rachael meets her future husband Jerry as a child, and fears her mother's strange moods and uncanny predictions about the future. Rachael and Jerry discover the body of Tom Pemberthy in a cave, but Rachael is so traumatized she blocks the memory. Though her mother predicts that she will marry Jerry Garrett, Rachael does not believe her. Rachael goes to school and becomes a teacher, but quits after a couple of years to pursue a writing career, just as her mother predicted she would. Jerry Garrett goes to war, but Rachael encounters him at a party for GI soldiers. Rachael typically loves things and objects more than people, and her main hobby is upkeep of the Gingerbread House and its antiques. She is scarred from feeling inadequate as a children and it later translates into resentment toward her mother, who seems to know everything. She does marry Jerry Garrett, and they eventually have Shay.

Though Jerry and Rachael's marriage lasts a long time, by the time Brandy is in Shay's body it is deteriorating. They agree to stay together for Shay, though Rachael knows that Jerry is entertaining other women at his cabin. She is crushed by the realization that she was raised by her own daughter and her mother is in her daughter's body. At the end of the novel Rachael's mind has weakened under the pressure of her realizations, including the theft of the Gingerbread House.

Jerry Garrett

Jerry Garrett is Rachael's husband. He has an itinerant childhood: his mother is ill and poor, and his father left them with little to nothing. He is the grandson of May Bell, the town prostitute, whose real name is Christine Pintor, and his mother is searching for her for help. Rachael invites him over to the ranch for dinner and Shay is shocked to see her father as a child. She tells May Bell that he is in town and wants her to support them. Jerry and Rachael discover Tom Pemberthy's body in the cave, and Jerry



eventually leaves town for the army. He feels needed by no one after his mother dies. When he sees Rachael again at the GI party he tries to stop himself from seeing her but cannot. He later feels needed by Shay for a while, but eventually realizes that Rachael loves her house more than she loves him. He retreats to his cabin, on the same grounds at Corbin Strock's old cabin, and only returns to the Gingerbread House after Rachael's breakdown.

Jerry struggles with the idea that Shay is in fact Brandy, though seems to like Rachael better after she cracks. She needs him again when she has not needed him for so long. Jerry's rough childhood and his loner attitude shaped him into a man who, if not specifically needed, loses interest and wanders elsewhere. He does not feel tied down to anyplace, especially after Shay grows up. He feels obligated to help Rachael after her breakdown, but is unclear about repairing their relationship.

Corbin Strock

He is Brandy's first husband, an old-fashioned man intent on becoming a miner. He marries Brandy to get control of the Brandy Wine and though the potential for love is present in the relationship, he dies two years into their marriage.

Thora K.

She is Corbin's mother and Brandy's mother-in-law. She is a feisty Cornish lady and the original owner of the buffet. After Corbin dies, she lives with Brandy and her new husband, Hutch Maddon.

Marek Weir

He is Shay's fiancé and a successful professional storm analyzer. Though he is not in love with Shay, once Brandy is in her body, he falls in love with her. He decides to help Brandy raise their twin boys.

Hutchinson Maddon

He is Shay's second husband, considered wild by others in the town. He builds the ranch and presents it to Brandy as incentive to marry him.

Sophie McCabe

She is Brandy's mother and Shay's grandmother. Rachael identifies with her because of the Gingerbread House.



John McCabe

He is Brandy's father and decides she must marry Mr. Strock.

Lon Maddon

He is Hutch's twin brother.

Tim Pemberthy

He is Corbin's mining partner.

May Bell/Christine Pintor

She is the town prostitute and Jerry Garrett's grandmother.

Remy and Dan Maddon

They are Brandy's children and Shay's uncles.

Ansel St. John

He is the mentally unbalanced man who takes Brandy in after she runs away from the Gingerbread House.

Lottie

She is Mr. St. John's niece.

Joshua and Elton

They are Brandy's brothers, as well as Shay's twin boys.



Objects/Places

The Wedding Mirror

This object is mysterious, of an undetermined age, and covered in gilded hands. It is responsible for switching the bodies of Brandy and Shay.

The Gingerbread House

This place is the home of both Brandy and Shay and also the place Rachael loves most in the world.

Thora K's Cornwall Buffet

This object was brought from Cornwall by Thora K.

Corbin Strock's Cabin

This place is where Shay is taken to live after her first marriage.

Boulder, Colorado

This is the town around which the events of the novel take place.

Marek's Apartment

This is where Brandy's Christmas surprise takes place.

Mr. St. John's Farm

This is where Brandy takes shelter after her flight from the Gingerbread House.

Brandy Wine

This is the mine, formerly John McCabe's, that eventually belongs to Corbin Strock.

Storms

Much of the activity of the mirror takes place during this type of weather pattern.

Nederland

This is the place where Corbin's cabin stands.

The Diary

This object is what Shay uses to record her life as Brandy. Rediscovered later, it is responsible for shedding light on their unique situation.

The Tonic

This is the medicine that Thora K takes for her rheumatism, peddled by Chief Geronimo.

The Office Building

This is the place that Brandy thinks looks like a castle and has no smell.

Marek's Porsche

This blue-green vehicle is traded in at the end of the novel for a station wagon.



Themes

Journeys

Both Shay and Brandy take huge journeys in the novel, not only through time, but also within themselves. The mirror switches their consciousnesses into each other's bodies, and they must learn to live in different times: for Shay, that means learning to live without the amenities and ease that she is used to. For Brandy, it means adapting to a new, more liberal world without that she does not at all understand. Before they were switched by the mirror, each woman was unhappy with her own existence. Brandy longed to go to university and learn, but her father thought it only fit for her to marry and begin a family. Shay felt bored with her life and viewed everything with cool detachment, even her possibly pregnancy and her upcoming nuptials. Shay does not really love her fiancé, and is getting married basically because she has nothing else to do. However, when she is transported by the mirror, she must learn basic survival skills, which are things any other woman from the time period would already know, but are new to Shay. Shedding her detachment, Shay finds satisfaction in learning a daily routine. She and Corbin are not in love, but she appreciates her role in his life. When she marries Hutch Maddon she finds true love, although she is haunted by her knowledge of the future. They journey together until the end of his life, and then Shay takes advantage of the rest of her life by traveling and able at last, to be herself and not someone else.

Brandy's journey through the future is fraught with difficulties as well: she must give birth to babies that she had no hand in conceiving. She is extremely old-fashioned for this new, fast-paced world. She also misses her family and falls into a depression. She cannot tell anyone the truth about who she is, though she tries, and constantly thinks about going back home. Her ordeal at Mr. St. John's helps to ground her, and drive home the fact that she will never get to go back: she will live the rest of her life as Shay. The diary saves Brandy from her loneliness when Rachael reads it. Though it is difficult to accept that Brandy is in Shay's body, the family's knowledge gives Brandy the freedom to be herself. She loves the twin boys and she loves Marek, who feels more for Brandy than he did for Shay. His promise to take care of her and the twins sets Brandy free, and ironically gives her the family she was planning to flee from in the past. Each woman is ultimately fulfilled by the journey they take in ways they would not have been had the mirror never switched them.

Love

Brandy and Shay are each marrying men they do not love—for Brandy it is a matter of obligation and her father's demands, and for Shay it is out of boredom and a possibly pregnancy. John McCabe thinks he is doing what is best for his daughter by marrying her to Corbin Strock, and Rachael and Jerry think they are doing what is best for Shay by trying to give her a way out of the marriage to Marek Weir. Though Shay does not love Corbin Strock after the switch, she feels there is potential in their relationship for a



mutual appreciation and understanding, but when Corbin does not provide a satisfying physical relationship for her she feels unfulfilled. Shay is afraid of Hutch Maddon because she knows he is the man she will marry, but eventually can deny her feelings no longer and agrees to marry him after Corbin's death. She can be herself around Hutch because he meets her as Shay, not as Brandy.

Similarly, Brandy is afraid of Marek Weir—not because she knows she will marry him, but because of the feelings he awakens in her that she never knew she could have. He feels dangerous to her, although in his day and age he behaves perfectly normally. His familiarity with Shay's body startles Brandy, but she is fascinated by Marek and cannot stop thinking about him. She tries to push him from her thoughts because he is her granddaughter's fiance, but ultimately the freedom to live as she sees fit wins out. She also tries to stay distanced from the twins, still hoping she will be switched back to her original self, but cannot help but love them, even as she grows bored with the routines in her life. Marek's decision to join Brandy and the twins makes them a real family, and proves that he is in love with Brandy—not with Shay, but the woman in Shay's body, just like Hutch Maddon. Each woman finds love to make their new lives worthwhile—a love they may not have ever found had they remained in their own times and bodies.

Destiny

The novel is part science fiction, part romance, and part historical drama. However, the sense of destiny woven throughout the text affects each characters' life. Shay even wonders at one point, after the twins are born, if she would have named them Remy and Dan had she not already known those were their names. It brings to mind the age-old adage of "which came first, the chicken or the egg?" The women are switched on the evening before each of their nuptials, and happen to be the same age of twenty. Shay's knowledge of the future makes some people view her as a witch or a crazy woman, but ultimately she knows she will marry Hutch Maddon and have his children, but does she fall in love with him because she knows she is supposed to or because she actually loves him? Brandy also seems destined for another time, radically planning to escape to her Aunt Harriet's house and attend the university instead of getting married. When she begins living with Mr. St. John, who has knowledge of her family and what became of them, what at first seemed a random event now seems planned.

Even the mirror, an apparently inanimate object, finds itself in the ideal situation to switch Brandy and Shay. It was bought by Mr. McCabe as a wedding present, brought back to the Gingerbread House by Rachael because of her love of antiques, and is stolen from the house. After being sold at an auction in Texas, it makes its way back to Colorado, but eventually ends up on the way to New York City as a wedding present. Though it seems the mirror has arranged the events of the story, the characters still find fulfillment and ultimately lead their lives like everyone else, through the good times and the bad, one day at a time. Whether or not the mirror was destined to switch Shay and Brandy, their experiences ultimately make them stronger and better people.



Style

Point of View

The novel is written from a third-person omniscient point of view, which allows it to jump to multiple characters' perspectives and even the perspective of the mirror, an inanimate object. This allows the reader to view the main characters' situations even from the perspective of the lesser characters, and helps explain how odd Shay and Brandy behave as each other. For instance, when Corbin muses about Shay forgetting her apron, the point is driven home for the reader about how strange her behavior must seem. The story being told from multiple perspectives also drives the story forward. When the reader is following Rachael, her confusion over her mother's reaction to Jerry Garrett makes complete sense, though the reader understands who he really is. The author's extensive knowledge of the Boulder, Colorado area makes its way into the story, with the characters setting the scene for a very specific place in two different time periods. The detailed descriptions of the Gingerbread House and the precious objects it contains help bring the story to life. Each of the characters have very specific goals, and telling the story from multiple perspectives helps to highlight how each decision plays into the future of another character.

The three main points of view are Shay, Rachael, and Brandy and they divide the story into three sections. Shay is telling the story from a 1970s perspective in an 1800s world, Rachael is a confused young girl and an unfulfilled and troubled woman, and Brandy in an old-fashioned woman stymied by the advancements of the 1970s, suffering from culture shock. The author is able to embody both the liberated woman and the sheltered woman, and weaves the story together by juxtaposing all the different perspectives.

Setting

The story is set in Boulder, Colorado from the late 1800s to the 1970s. The Gingerbread House is the center of Shay, Brandy, and Rachael's worlds before the mirror switches Shay and Brandy. It is a historic house filled with the antiques and belongings of the Maddon family, later taken care of by Rachael Garrett. When Shay is switched into Brandy's body she lives in Nederland in Corbin Strock's cabin, a rough building with no modern conveniences that sits on land that later with hold Jerry Garrett's cabin. The nearby town has the appearance of a frontier town, complete with a general store and a saloon, not to mention a flophouse. After Corbin Strock's death, Shay marries Hutch Maddon and moves to the Bar Double M Ranch, which Hutch has built with his own hands. The ranch sits in a beautiful valley, though occasionally Shay gets fed up with living in the wilderness. Rachael moves into the Gingerbread House when Shay becomes ill and has to live in the Sanitarium. Brandy, in Shay's body, spends a short amount of time in the Gingerbread House before running away and finding herself at Mr. St. John's doorstep. This is a rustic, run-down building with a barn and a front yard full of junk, but she finds herself at home there. She finds herself in Marek Weir's sleek,



modern apartment as a Christmas present from Mr. St. John, though it is an unwelcome surprise. When she is found by Jerry, she moves into his cabin, which is strange for her because Corbin Strock lived there so many years ago. The mirror makes a journey from Colorado to Texas and back in the hands of an antique dealer, but eventually is on the road to New York City.

The incredible details of Boulder provided by the author bring to life the world of the story with accurate and believable description.

Language and Meaning

The characters' language is important to the story because it is one of the telltale signs that Brandy and Shay have been switched: Shay's language is oddly informal in Brandy's body, and Brandy is oddly formal and reserved in Shay's body. Corbin Strock remarks on Shay's use of her favorite slang words, though he does not understand where they came from or why she says them. The change in Brandy's language is noticed most explicitly by Marek, who cannot reconcile the newly shy and reserved girl with the detached Shay he had come to know. Since the novel was written in the 1970s, much of the "present day" language is peppered with phrases and colloquialisms popular to that time period. Mr. St. John has a very specific pattern of speaking, meant to convey his mental instability. Hutch and Lon are both fairly uneducated and their language is more simple, a working man's dialect. Thora K has a very specific Cornish dialect that Shay has difficult understanding at first. It is in fact difficult to read as well. She is superstitious and hardworking, having come from Cornwall and lost her entire family exception Corbin. The author occasionally uses incomplete sentences and ellipses to convey a character's mood or feeling, often when a character is in shock or when Brandy and Shay are crossing over to each other. The vocabulary is fairly simple. The messages on the gravestones are presented in all caps, just as they would have been visually.

Structure

True to the idea of time travel, the first section of the novel is a Backward instead of a Forward: it presents the mirror and sets the scene for its mysteries. Though it is an inanimate object, the mirror is like another character: it is omniscient and sets the events of the story in motion. The story begins with Shay, who is safe in her own time for Chapter One but transported to Brandy's body in Chapter Two. Part One of the novel is from Shay's perspective. She is in the past and by giving her story first, the author is assuring that the reader will understand the stories of the other characters. Each part is divided into chapters, Shay and Brandy have twenty chapters each and Rachael has ten. Shay's section is separated from Part Two, Rachael's section, by an Interim explaining the events of the passing years and basically acting as a fast-forward to Rachael's childhood. Though in Part Two, Rachael does not understand her mother's strange behavior, the reader has already read Shay's story and knows exactly why she behaves the way she does. Similarly, at the end of Part Two, there is an Interim before

Part Three, which is told from Brandy's perspective in Shay's body. At the end of the novel, there is a Forward, which explains the fate of Cindy Wilson and the future of the mirror on its way to New York City as a wedding present. The Backward coming first and the Forward at the end of representative of the subject matter of the novel. Shay has gone backward to the past and Brandy has gone forward to the future.



Quotes

"And again Shay had the sensation of being drawn out of herself" (pg. 18.)

"Shay'd always heard her grandmother referred to as Bran, or Grandma Bran...Short for Brandy" (pg. 28.)

"Here, at last, was the man in Grandma Bran's wedding picture in the hall" (pg. 39.)

"Who would have thought such a silly thing as two grown men hammering a hole could hold her breathless?" (pg. 65.)

"She had the feeling this one wasn't Lon, because when he surveyed the crowd and found her staring at him, he didn't grin" (pg.67.)

"Shay'd been about to make up a name, any name, but in her present mood and with her friend threatening her like that she spat out, 'Maddon. It's Maddon. Now are you happy?'" (pg.109.)

"Except during the scary times, of course, when he was too troubled to notice her because his wife was acting so strangely" (pg. 135.)

"She could never be Shay again. Now she didn't feel like Brandy either" (pg. 138.)

"Her childhood nightmares would be filled with monstrous black spiders emanating from forbidden dank caverns" (pg. 150.)

"Rachael looked up at the Gingerbread House as they approached it, and it seemed to say to her: 'You can't count on people. But I have been here since your Great-Grandfather McCabe built me" (pg. 165.)

"This house is your problems and you're welcome to it" (pg. 177.)

"No one had needed Jerry Garrett since his mother died except his daughter for a while...and God those years had gone fast" (pg. 207.)

"Brandy fought the temptation to forget she wasn't Shay, to learn and experience as much of her granddaughter's wicked by interested world as she could before she returned to her own" (pg. 208.)

"She wondered if the wedding mirror had maliciously punished her by leaving her in this world long enough to fall in love with Shay's intended" (pg. 223.)

"Shay was in the apartment tonight. Or Brandy. Whoever. She's alive" (pg. 278.)

"I'm sure their real mother will wish to do that, but for now I'm calling them Joshua and Elton after my brothers" (pg. 289.)



Topics for Discussion

How is each characters' destiny present in the story? How much of the situation do you think is caused by the mirror? Do you think that Brandy and Shay are better off leading each other's lives? Why or why not?

Discuss the phrase, "which came first, the chicken or the egg." How does it apply to the novel?

Of the three main characters in the story, Shay, Rachael, and Brandy, which do you identify with the most? If you were in the same situation, would you rather be transported to the past or to the future? Why or why not?

Discuss Corbin Strock's double standards. Why did Shay have a problem with his expectations of her? Do you agree or disagree?

The author provides incredibly detailed descriptions of the Boulder, Colorado area. Do you think these descriptions helped tell the story? Why or why not? Could the story have been set anywhere, or is it essential for it to be in Colorado?

Discuss the use of irony in the story. Where is it most prevalent? Why? How does the author make use of other literary devices such as foreshadowing or symbolism?

Do Brandy and Shay fall in love? If so, does it help or hurt their situations? It is easier or harder for them to live and love in different times?

Describe Mr. St. John. What is his role in the narrative? Why is his possible insanity important to the plot? How does his behavior affect Brandy?

What is Rachael's role in the story? Does she have a choice in who she becomes or is she shaped by the events around her? Why or why not? Does she marry Jerry Garrett because she wants to or because Shay told her she would?

Describe the mirror's role in the novel. How is it like another character? What personality traits are assigned to the mirror by the author?