

The Night Gardener Study Guide

The Night Gardener by Jonathan Auxier

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Plot Summary

The following version of this book was used to create this study guide: Auxier, Jonathan. *The Night Gardener*. Amulet Books. Amulet Paperback Edition, 2015.

The Night Gardener is a young adult mystery-horror novel by Jonathan Auxier in which the orphaned Molly and Kip work at, and face down the sin of greed in the form of the phantasmic Night Gardener at the Windsor estate in Victorian-era England. When the novel begins, Molly and Kip (who has a deformed leg) have fled Ireland, which has been ravaged by a horrible famine. They are nearly killed when their boat sinks crossing over to England, but their parents ensure they are on the final lifeboat. Unfortunately, their parents die at sea. In England, Molly and Kip take on work at the Windsor Estate in the woods near the town of Cellar Hollow. As they travel to the estate, locals warn them to stay away. At a crossroads in the woods, they meet Hester Kettle, a storyteller who also encourages them to be careful. Kip worries about going on, but Molly says they have no choice as they need the work.

The Windsor estate is located on an island in a wide river in the woods. The island itself is wooded, except for a lawn full of miniature hills along which rests the Windsor manor and the stables. Beside the manor is a large old tree which intertwines and grows inside the house. There is a small clearing in the island woods where a night garden blossoms. Molly and Kip are wary about working for the Windsors, who all look pale, thin, and ill, from seven year-old Penny to the young-teenaged Alistair to their mother, Constance, and their father, Bertrand. Only Penny is friendly toward Molly and Kip, but as time goes on, Molly and Kip learn that things are not what they first seem. The Windsors are a family in crisis because of the tree. Molly awakens at night to see a man in black clothing moving through the house and sopping the perspiration from the foreheads of the nightmare-stricken Windsors to water the tree.

As Molly and Kip learn through their own investigations, and through information from Hester in the village, the tree is a wishing tree that grants the heart's deepest desires through a knot hole that opens up into an empty room on the second floor, locked behind a green door. Each time the tree grants a desire, however, it takes a piece of the wisher's very soul. Bertrand, heavily in debt, receives money. Constance, wishing for the love she first had with her husband, receives wedding rings (which are constantly resized smaller because she is wasting away). Penny, who misses story-time with her mother, receives storybooks. Alistair, greedy for candy, receives candies. Even Molly succumbs to the tree, wanting letters from her dead parents. Only Kip manages to avoid falling into the trap by refusing to use the leg balm provided by the tree. It is learned that the Night Gardener was once a kind and friendly gardener who sold his soul for immortality to be with his family forever – only to be consumed and connected to the tree.

With the help of Doctor Crouch, a medical doctor and scientist from the village, Molly and Kip attempt to capture the Night Gardener. A freak accident leads to Hester – who appears at the estate out of curiosity – being caught and hurt to the point where it kills



her. The Night Gardner kills Crouch. Before Hester dies, she gives Molly an oilskin package, telling her to open it when the time is right. Molly and Kip, who have fled the estate, realize they must go back and try to save the Windsors. They finally get through to Bertrand when they show him that the Night Gardener has dug graves for them all, and all of the tiny hills on the lawn are actually graves. Bertrand, who believes he would have nothing without the tree, finally decides his family is worth more, so he decides to move them out. However, two loan sharks, Fig and Stubbs, appear to enforce payment of Bertrand's debt, trapping the family. Only through showing them the tree does Molly make escape possible, for the Night Gardener emerges from the tree and kills Fig and Stubbs. Molly and Bertrand work together to burn the tree and house down, which in turn destroys the Night Gardener.

As the novel ends, Constance offers to let Molly and Kip become a part of the family for all they have done, but Molly and Kip say goodbye and move on. The oilskin parcel from Hester turns out to be a map with a red dot in the corner, indicating where Molly and Kip might find home. Molly and Kip decide to journey to the red dot, and adventure along the way. As they travel, they tell stories to one another.



Chapters 1 – 11

Summary

Part One: "Arrivals"

In Chapter 1: "Storyteller at the Crossroads," it is March in Cellar Hollow, England, but it feels like autumn. Molly and her brother Kip, both Irish redheads, are in Cellar Hollow to meet the Windsors at the Windsor estate. Everyone they ask for directions along the way tell them they are going to their deaths, and mention the "sourwoods." They come upon a woman named Hester Kettle, who reveals herself to be a storyteller, and who correctly wonders why the two parentless children are traveling on a stolen fish cart. Kip denies the cart is stolen. The two siblings ask about the Windsors. Hester explains it surprised everyone in the area when Master Windsor and his family moved back to the area the previous autumn. Molly does not know why returning to the place where one grew up is so strange. She also asks about the sourwoods. Hester explains that everyone who grows up is brought up with the knowledge to stay away from the sourwoods and that to go into them changes people and brings out something horrible in them. She mentions that there is something else tragic about the woods, but will not say more. She agrees to direct the children to the Windsors in exchange for a payment of information. Molly agrees. Hester directs them down three miles, to listen for the river, and to take the overgrown fork in the road to the bridge.

In Chapter 2: "The Silent Trees," Molly and Kip continue down the road through the woods. Both are concerned as to what might await them in the sourwoods. Even Galileo, the horse, seems concerned. They come to the river and an old bridge, across which is a wooded island in the middle of the water. It is the place they are seeking. The center of the island has been cleared of trees for a lawn, and small, grass-covered tiny hills make up the lawn. At the end of the lawn is the Windsor mansion, old and worn. Nearby is a massive, old, and scary looking tree. Parts of the tree seem to combine with the house. Molly reminds Kip they must take on work here, or be put into an orphanage until their parents came to fetch them. Molly tears the last button from her coat and gives it to Kip, saying it is a magical wishing button. She says she is giving it to him because she needs him to be strong and brave and not complain. Galileo suddenly seems scared, and both Molly and Kip believe someone has been watching them from one of the second floor windows, as the curtains are moving.

In Chapter 3: "Miss Penny," Molly heads to the mansion while Kip seeks out the stables for Galileo. Molly reminds herself to be brave, reflecting on how she and Kip were hired through a solicitor in the city rather than directly by the Windsors. When Molly knocks, the door opens. A girl with thick glasses at the top of the stairs inside tells her to enter voluntarily so that she will not get in trouble for answering the door. Inside the huge mansion, a tree branch twists up to the ceiling like a chandelier. The inside of the mansion itself is very dusty, dirty, and old. The girl says brothers are pests, and introduces herself as seven-year-old Penelope "Penny" Eleanor Windsor. Molly



introduces herself. She does not try to stop Penny from going through her clothes, imagining Penny does not often hear the word “no.” Molly, who has a gift with words, gets Penny to stop by telling Penny she comes from an enchanted isle. This excites Penny, wondering if the island gives Molly such thick and radiant hair. As Molly compares Penny’s own black hair to Cleopatra, Penny’s mother appears, and does not sound pleased.

In Chapter 4: “The Help,” Penny’s mother, Constance Windsor, questions Molly. Constance is not happy Molly is telling stories and has let herself in. Penny says she let Molly in, which earns a glare from Constance that Penny melts under. Molly explains she and her brother were hired through a solicitor by way of her husband, but Constance says she does not want or need any hired help. Alistair Windsor, the ugly and pimple-faced brother of Penny, suddenly appears and says Molly and Kip should be arrested. Constance wants Molly and Kip to leave, but Molly insists on staying, saying they will work for room and board, and saying that Kip is not in the best health. Molly explains that their parents have not yet come over from Ireland, and that they have no one to turn to. Constance says the house is no place for Molly or Kip, and to leave before it gets dark. Constance says Molly does not know what she is asking. Molly asks Constance to imagine a story, to imagine waking up to a happy morning with breakfast, and sausage being cooked. Constance asks what happens next. Molly says she will have to find out in the morning. Penny pleads to let Molly and Kip stay. Constance reluctantly agrees.

In Chapter 5: “Portrait of a Lady,” Constance gives Molly a running tour of the house, pointing out that things still need to be unpacked, describing when and what meals are to be, and what other duties will be expected of them. Molly asks about a small green door at the top of the stairs, but Constance says not to be concerned with it, doubting she even has the key for the door. Despite Constance’s roughness, she is a member of the upper class and fascinates Molly. Because Kip has a bad leg, Constance calls him a cripple and orders that he sleep in the stables or the woodshed so her children do not catch the deformity. When Molly protests, Constance tells her she will throw Molly out if Molly does such a thing again. Constance explains that her husband, Bertrand, spends much of his time in town. His study, full of books, is dusty. The wind causes the big tree’s branches to tap against the window. When Molly suggests cutting it, Constance says that the tree is never to be touched under any circumstances. Molly is startled by a portrait of the family in the study, showing them all to be happy, healthy, and bright, much unlike their current states as pale and miserable. Constance orders Molly to begin dinner.

In Chapter 6: “The Figure in the Fog,” Molly goes down to get ready for bed in the servants’ quarters. She has never before had a room to herself. She then uses a lantern to signal for Kip through the window. She sneaks Kip in through the window so Kip does not have to sleep outside, but reminds him he must be up and out by dawn so no one sees him. Kip says he believes he was followed by someone in a tall black hat that he thought he saw in the fog, but Molly does not believe him. As they lay down to sleep, Kip asks Molly why their parents had to go around the world without them. Molly says it



is because they did not want her or Kip to get hurt. When Molly falls asleep, she is too tired to think about anything or to hear the mansion door open with heavy footsteps.

In Chapter 7: “Pit and Pockets,” with hot meals and good sleep, Kip feels better and better. He has been told to expect Master Bertrand Windsor returning at the end of the week. Kip works hard on the grounds of the estate, seeking to level the lawn, chopping wood, repairing the stables, and caring for Galileo. One day while out working, Kip sees the bullying Alistair force his sister to go into a hole covered up by leaves near the big tree, saying it is a game called Pits and Pockets. He says the hole is the Pits, but that he has something in each of his pockets – either sweets, or certain doom. Penny must eat whatever comes out of the pocket she chooses. The unhappy Penny chooses left, out of which pocket Alistair pulls worms. When Penny refuses to eat them, he drops them around the hole and she panics. Kip now intervenes, hobbling over on his crutch. Alistair now cruelly turns on Kip, threatening to have the orphaned Kip turned out. This leads to a fight between the boys, but Constance breaks it up and demands to know what has happened. Molly intervenes, lying that she saw what happened. Constance recognizes what has happened based on the crying Penny and Molly’s testimony, and tells Alistair his father will hear of this. She sends Alistair to his room and tells Molly to get back to work. When Constance carries Penny inside, Molly admits to Kip she told a story to protect them.

In Chapter 8: “Master of the House,” Molly works hard inside the house, cleaning all she can. At midday on Friday, Master Bertrand Windsor returns home. Molly knows she and Kip must do extra well to earn his approval. Molly is surprised by his appearance when he arrives. He is thin, pale, and has a stutter. He is kind and polite upon meeting Molly and Kip, however. Penny realizes Master Windsor is disregarded by the rest of his family, and does not have their respect. They largely ignore him at dinner. He tries to tell jokes to amuse them, but they are not impressed. Constance is annoyed, and directly asks about Bertrand’s meetings with the banks and the speculators, but they move away before Molly can hear anything else. She later overhears them continuing to talk, with Constance wanting everything to end and saying that there is no more time. Bertrand agrees, but says there is a way to buy time. Molly notes he carries a key in his hand.

In Chapter 9: “The Room at the Top of the Stairs,” Molly gets Penny ready for bed. Penny loves to hear the stories Molly tells her at bedtime. Penny reveals her mother used to sing to her, tell her stories about Princess Penny, and to tuck her into bed, but not since moving to the ugly estate. Molly notes that there are a stack of books, all including Princess Penny in the titles. Penny asks why Molly and Kip left Ireland. Molly explains it was because she had a dream that Penny needed a maid. Penny says she and her family all have bad dreams, and that at night, she hears someone moving through the house. Penny refers to him as the night man, and always sees the strangely-shaped muddy footprints he leaves behind as he moves from room to room in the house. After tucking Penny in, Molly heads out. She notices there is light under the green door. As she approaches, Bertrand exits the door pulling a large sack with something clinking inside. He looks afraid. When Molly offers to help him with the sack, he politely refuses, and says they must all be off to bed.



In Chapter 10: “Footsteps,” Molly is awakened in the middle of the night. She realizes her bedroom door is opened, so she shuts it. She then discovers a dried leaf in her hair and hears footsteps. Molly decides to be brave as her parents taught her, and goes in search of the source of the footsteps. The front door is open, and the footsteps are now on the second floor. Molly follows them nervously. She can hear the Windsor family members tossing and turning in their sleep as they have bad dreams. Molly calls out, thinking the footsteps are from Bertrand, but everything goes silent. A gust of wind knocks her over, and suddenly, the footsteps and leaves are all gone. The only thing that remains is tall black hat, meaning Kip was telling the truth, and meaning the night man is real.

In Chapter 11: “Chamber Pots,” Kip is repairing the bridge when Molly tells him about the previous night as she deals with chamber pots. Kip is skeptical, but Molly is insistent what she saw was real, was not a dream, and not the dark playing tricks on her. Molly shows him the hat, but Kip cannot say it is the same hat he saw. Kip does admit to a nightmare in which he stopped a gang of boys from attacking a stray dog, only for the dog to attack him. Kip wonders that if there really is danger, they should leave. Molly says Kip knows they cannot do that. Kip admits to missing their parents. Molly suggests writing them letters, sending them to the navy postmaster or sending them in bottles down the river. Kip suggests using the back of an advertisement for a metal leg brace for the letter, but Molly says it will not do. She tells Kip to meet her at the stables at sundown.

Analysis

Stories are very important to the narrative that Jonathan Auxier tells in *The Night Gardener*. Through the eyes of Molly and Kip, readers are exposed to a variety of stories – tales, legends, rumors, lies, and so on. Molly herself tells lies about the fate of their parents to Kip in order to help keep Kip brave and moving forward now that they have fled the famine in Ireland. The work they take at the Windsor estate brings them concerned warnings from countless people along the way, but Hester’s story about Bertrand Windsor’s childhood, as well as the ominous nature of the woods at the estate, are enough to give Molly and Kip pause. Molly, who knows they are desperate for work and for survival, also knows they must take the job because they have no alternatives. She gives him her last button – a button symbolizing hope and courage – to help instill the same in Kip.

Early on, readers note plainly that something is very wrong at the Windsor estate, from the tree that grows into the house (around which nothing else grows) to the gaunt, sallow, and ill-looking complexion of the family. The Windsor family portrait in the study is a symbolic omen of the way that sins can eat away not only at one’s soul, but one’s very physical being. The principal sin concerned here at the Windsor estate is greed. The green door at the top of the stair symbolizes greed (money being green, and the greed of money being represented by green; and greed in general being represented by green). Bertrand exits the room dragging a sack full of something which makes a loud clinking sound – and might be anything from coins to valuable objects. Readers should



also pay careful attention to the candy which Alistair constantly eats, and to the Princess Penny books which Penny does not want to talk about.

Although this has not been delved into in full detail, readers will learn, bit by bit, that greed is eating away at the core of the family. Comparisons here can be made to Oscar Wilde's *Portrait of Dorian Gray*, in which the sins Dorian Gray commits disfigure a portrait of him. Rather than the Windsor family portrait being disfigured by their sins, their very physical bodies are being destroyed instead. The idea that sin eats away at more than just the soul becomes an incredibly important thematic argument that Auxier will make through the course of the novel.

As Molly and Kip get into a routine at the estate, their initial fears are slowly confirmed. Something is very wrong with the place. While Molly and Kip try to be rational, reality determines for them that something supernatural is at hand. The man in the fog and the night man are one in the same, and will later be revealed as the Night Gardener, proper. The black top hat left behind by the Night Gardener symbolizes ominous truth – a dark, cold, hard, undeniable truth. It demonstrates the Night Gardener is real, that he is moving through the house, and that Kip himself has indeed seen someone in the fog. The Gardener is someone to be feared, for he dwells only in night and seeks to remain undiscovered.

Discussion Question 1

Why have Molly and Kip left Ireland? Why do they take on work at the Windsor estate even when everyone, and their own common sense, warn them against doing so?

Discussion Question 2

What about the Windsor family seems strange to Molly? Why does she take such interest in the portrait of them? What could the portrait itself mean?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Molly's interest so piqued by the green door at the top of the stairs? Why is she so interested to see behind it? What clues to what might lay beyond it does Molly come upon? What do you think is behind the door? Why?

Vocabulary

tolerated, vagrant, punctuated, stoic, provocation, demurred, tedious, accustomed, amorous, contradicted, audible, ineffectual, domestic, prowess, milksop, victuals, oblige, noncommittal



Chapters 12 – 22

Summary

Part One: "Arrivals," continued

In Chapter 12: "The Stationary Box," Kip is urged onto the roof of the stable by Molly, who says the fresh air makes for good writing. She has brought along a stationary desk complete with paper and pens from the study, which Molly explains is rarely used. This is why she figures no one will miss the desk. Kip does not like the thought of taking things without asking, so wants to find a way to pay the Windsors back. Molly suggests doing extra chores, and Kip agrees. They write their letter and seal it in an envelope as the night comes on. Molly and Kip both hope their parents receive the letter.

In Chapter 13: "A Visit from Fig and Stubbs," Constance heads out to the gardens while Bertrand works in his study and Alistair and Penny are in their bedrooms. With a moment to herself, Molly wonders what to do with the letter, knowing it could not possibly ever be delivered. She puts the letter in her trunk. A ferocious knocking comes from the front door where she finds two men, one very tall and one very short. The tall one is named Fig; the short one is named Stubb. They insist on seeing Bertrand. Molly is unable to turn them away, but fortunately, Bertrand appears. He tells them to stay outside the house, saying that he has what seems to Molly to be a payment of some kind, upstairs. As Fig and Stubbs head outside, they tell Molly never to fall into arrears unless she wants blokes like them stopping by. Bertrand drags what seems to be the same bag as the other night down the stairs and to the front door. He has a difficult time doing so. The bag again makes clinking sounds. Fig and Stubbs look in the bag. It is full of pence. Bertrand explains he is paying them all he has. This enrages Fig and Stubbs, who slam Bertrand against the wall. Molly is horrified. Bertrand says there is more money, family money, but that it will take time to get. Figs and Stubbs give Bertrand a month to pay the balance on what he owes. As they leave, Constance appears, asking who the men were. Molly intervenes and says they were evangelizers. Molly, meanwhile, thinks about the green door and the idea that there might be money beyond it.

In Chapter 14: "Catch as Catch Can," Molly plays on the front lawn with Penny and Kip. Even Alistair has joined them. Molly looks to the house to see Bertrand with a leather briefcase, apparently having a disagreement with Constance. Since the visit of Fig and Stubbs, the two have been arguing and far less friendly. Alistair says the trip his father is taking to town is to pawn goods from the dining room, including Alistair's own silver pocket knife, for money. Alistair explains the move from town was in order to sell off things there to pay creditors off. Alistair says his father promised such days were behind them, but clearly they are not. Molly watches as Constance gives up a dark ring with a pale blue diamond from her hand, throwing it at Bertrand. Molly returns to the game at hand. When Penny counts to play hide-and-seek, Molly goes into the house to try to find



out what is behind the door. Instead, she runs into Constance emerging from behind the door with a ring identical to the one she had just given up.

In Chapter 15: “The Other Thing,” Kip spends his free time waiting at the bridge for a letter from Ma and Da. One evening at the bridge, Kip sees Hester approach. Hester says that she saw Bertrand racing for the town, so she thought she would come check on her investment for a story. She also says she wanted to make sure Molly and Kip were alright. Kip tells Hester he has been told that Bertrand was an orphan following a fever that took the rest of the household and forced him to move away. Hester says that this is not true beyond the fact that Bertrand is an orphan. She reveals a young Bertrand came to town saying an evil had come for him and his parents, leading to villagers heading to the estate to seek the evil out. When they arrived, she says, Bertrand’s parents had simply disappeared. Hester says it is because there is something about the land that simply draws people into it. Hester decides to head out, saying she always reminds herself to walk in straight lines.

In Chapter 16: “The Garden in the Woods,” Molly is shocked to find Constance has left an old dress for her to wear on her errands into town. Molly does not know whether it is a peace offering or a bribe. Still Molly tries on the dress. She realizes she looks exactly as she is – a 14-year-old girl in a rich woman’s old dress. When Molly goes into her trunk, she discovers the black top hat is gone. She is then startled by Kip, who tells her Galileo has gone missing. He also reports that Hester has been by asking after them. They follow Galileo’s hoof prints to where Galileo has had a tree root wrapped around his leg several times, like a rope. They free Galileo, only to discover the ground is full of night-blooming silver-white flowers that seem to glow in the moonlight. Kip and Molly realize they have been planted, like a garden. As they return, they see the front door of the mansion open. Out into a swirl of leaves steps a man dressed in black and in a top hat. It is the night man.

In Chapter 17: “The Night Man,” Molly and Kip hide behind a hill. Molly wonders where the night man has come from, and what he wants. They sneak over behind the well and watch the man. He is thin, has dark eyes, a beard, and carries gardening tools. He also carries a watering can that he uses to very carefully pour a strange liquid around the big tree. The man digs a hole, and then heads toward the well. As the man whispers, the wind obeys his commands. Galileo neighing at the barn takes the man’s attention. He whispers the wind to shut the stable door, then leaves to continue digging.

In Chapter 18: “A Rude Awakening,” Molly and Kip have fallen asleep at the well and are awakened by Penny and Alistair in the morning. It is ten, and they have missed their morning chores and breakfast. Penny and Alistair say Constance is having a fit looking for them. Molly and Kip decide they must leave, but first, Molly wants to square things up with Constance.

In Chapter 19: “Roots,” Kip decides to use what time he still has at the estate to learn about the big tree. The tree is bare despite it being spring, and nothing grows around the base of the tree. Kip tries to plant a flower by the tree, but it quickly dies. He realizes many of the branches of the tree are not branches at all, but overgrown axes, hatchets,



knives, swords and other such things which were used in the attempt to cut down the tree in failure. Kit then pulls away leaves to reveal the trench the night man had been digging. He goes into the hole and discovers the man's boot prints. He also finds a root from the tree that moves when he touches it. He sees roots all around him growing as he watches. One of the roots grabs hold of his finger, and will not let go. He manages to get free and out of the hole, but then realizes his finger is bleeding. Kip wonders why anyone would build a house next to such a tree.

In Chapter 20: "Behind the Door," Molly is surprised by the warm and grateful welcome she receives from Constance, who has believed her and Kip dead. Molly is so grateful she decides to clean the house one last time before leaving, knowing it is not safe to stay. Penny insists Molly spend time with her, instead. Penny wants Molly to promise her she will not leave, but when Molly does not promise, Penny shrieks and runs away. Sometime later, Molly hears Penny laughing. She follows the sound of laughter to the green door room. The room is empty, and one wall is taken up by the tree. Penny is reading a book in the center of the room, and is unhappy with what she has read. She storms over to the tree, in the middle of which is a giant knothole. She demands another story from the hole. Molly looks at the discarded book. It is from the Princess Penny series, and features a picture on the cover that includes Molly herself. Penny is startled by Molly's presence, and begs Molly not to tell her parents she was in the room. She argues that everyone else uses the room, so she should too. Molly takes the room key from Penny, and tells Penny to run along. As Molly goes to leave, she hears water in the tree hole. When she investigates, she sees it is seawater, and there is a note in the water from her mother.

Part 2: "Pursuits"

In Chapter 21: "Special Delivery," Kip is amazed at the letter from their parents, which says they received Molly and Kip's letter. The letter from Ma and Da tells them to stay put, and reveals Ma and Da have had a shipwreck and are currently with the Eskimos. Kip asks how the letter arrived. Molly says it is hard to explain, but calls it a special delivery. Kip then reveals everything he has learned about, and experienced with the tree. Molly is skeptical. She now argues they must stay at the house because the letter from their parents tells them to stay put no matter what. Kip is unsure about this, but reluctantly agrees.

In Chapter 22: "Sweets," three more letters arrive for Molly and Kip. She constantly looks forward to the next. As she cleans Alistair's room, she considers the tree. It seems to be a wish-granting tree, and that it grants only one wish per person. Bertrand gets money, Constance gets jewelry, Penny gets stories, and Alistair gets candy. Molly asks Alistair about this, why he would want sweets of all things. Alistair explains they are just waiting for him. He says that when he was little and the family was wealthy, his dad would take him to the candy shop all the time and let him get whatever he wanted – but that he only ever picked one small thing to be modest and make his dad proud. He now realizes he was a fool, because he should have taken all the candy he could have when it was possible to do so. Alistair questions Molly about her letters, but she tells him the letters are none of his business.



Analysis

Stories and lies are two different things, argues Jonathan Auxier in this section of the novel. While Auxier will not give clear articulation to this theme in future chapters, it becomes apparent here. Molly continues to lie to Kip about the state of their parents by encouraging the writing of a letter to them, knowing full well they will never receive the letter. This means that Kip begins wasting his time waiting at the bridge for a letter from their parents. It is a waste of time because Kip has been lied to, and is waiting for a letter that will never come. However, a letter does come, but it is not a letter from their parents. It is a letter from the tree.

The letter from the tree is presaged by the arrival of Fig and Stubbs. A number of things become very clear through their unwelcome visit. First, Bertrand is horribly in debt, and the move to the country was to attempt to get a handle on the debt – but Bertrand has clearly been unable to do so. Second, it is clear that Bertrand is besieged by the sin of greed – greed again being symbolized by the green door and the money he brings down in the sack. Third, the money comes from the tree. The tree itself grants the heart's deepest desires, as Molly comes to learn through the letters she receives that appear to be authored by her dead parents.

The tree, like the door, symbolizes the sin of greed. The more sins the household commits, the more entangled the tree becomes with the house. The more sins a person commits, the more the tree becomes entangled with their lives. Molly herself becomes greedy about the letters, going back to the tree for another as often as she can sneak in to manage it. The empty room in which Molly finds herself – and Penny – is empty. This is psychologically important, as it symbolically places a person in view of their greed and only their greed. Nothing else in the room is there to distract them. A person has the ability to turn back or be overwhelmed by greed – and the empty room almost ensures consumption.

Molly has the ability to keep away from the tree, but she chooses not to because she is overwhelmed by her greed for more letters. What is tragic about this is that Molly knows better. She has seen the Night Gardener mopping perspiration – drops of souls, as it will later be learned – from the Windsors, and using that to water the tree. This alone should be sufficient enough to keep Molly away from the tree, but she cannot help herself. Greed, Auxier herein begins to argue, is difficult to resist and can often be confused as something good. Bernard's desire for money from the tree is to pay his debts to protect his family – but it is greed nonetheless. Molly's desire for letters from the tree is because she desperately wants to believe her parents can actually communicate with her, but also because she wants to protect Kip – but this is all still greed. Alistair's desire for candy is rooted in childhood, and it is candy that Alistair takes from the tree. Constance herself obtains another wedding ring from the tree – a symbol of the love she is losing with her husband. In all cases, greed is greed. (Readers should also note the glowing garden discovered by Kip and Molly. This will have tremendous significance in future chapters.)



Discussion Question 1

Why is Bertrand so unhappy about the arrival of Fig and Stubbs? What do Fig and Stubbs want? How does their appearance lead Molly to learn about the tree?

Discussion Question 2

What do each of the Windsor family members gain from the tree? What compels them to desire such things? How does Molly respond to the strange power of the tree and the Windsors succumbing to it? Why?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Molly, despite seeing the Night Gardener's tending to the tree, decide to trust the tree and take letters from it?

Vocabulary

blokes, denomination, arrears, superstitious, flustered



Chapters 23 – 33

Summary

Part 2: "Pursuits," continued

In Chapter 23: "Doctor Crouch," the postman arrives at Windsor Manor, delivering mail to Kip. Kip asks about any special deliveries, but the postman denies knowing about any. The mail from town is from Bertrand, who writes that he has hired Doctor Ezekiel Crouch to check on the family while Bertrand is away. Kip is assigned to pick the man up in the village, which he does. Doctor Crouch is happy to ride with Kip, and reveals an interest in flowers, plants, and trees during the ride, especially for medicinal possibilities. Crouch reveals he is to see to the health of the family. He is stunned by the estate's poor condition, and says he did not know Bertrand had fallen on such hard times. Doctor Crouch says he should be done within the hour, and offers Kip a tuppence. Kip asks Crouch to look at his lame leg instead, and Crouch kindly agrees. Crouch notes that no metal leg brace will cure a crippled leg. He then goes to the house. The label of "cripple" hurts Kip deeply.

In Chapter 24: "Cold Hands, Warm Heart," a few nights later, Bertrand returns home. Molly is shocked to see he looks ten years younger and very healthy. Bertrand gives each of his children surprise packages, and then tells Constance that they have a chance this time if the markets rally. Constance says she has heard this before. Bertrand is stunned to see the ring on Constance's finger when he gifts her with perfume. This crushes Bertrand. Molly tells him she thinks the perfume was a very nice gift, then rushes off into the kitchen, expecting to be yelled at by Constance. Molly decides to check for another letter, and goes through Constance's things for the key as she always does. Instead, she discovers a box full of rings identical to the one Constance is wearing. Molly is then caught by Constance. She reveals the rings are not real silver and diamonds, but nickel and quartz. She reveals she married a penniless Bertrand, who worked back then as a clerk, against the wishes of her family. She says that her wealthy family disowned and disavowed her, and that she was thrilled to receive even the ring during her wedding from Bertrand. She says it was more than she expected, and that it has great sentimental value. Constance explains she is wasting away, and must constantly get smaller rings from the tree.

In Chapter 25: "The Pallor," Penny refuses to take medicine prescribed by Crouch because Alistair says it is rats' blood. Molly convinces Penny to take the medicine, and then catches sight of herself in the window glass. She tucks Molly in, then races downstairs to her room to consult a mirror. Her freckles and skin are paling, and her hair is turning black. Molly is stunned.

In Chapter 26: "Horse Apples," Kip has taken to sleeping in the stable, hoping it will help him to sleep better at night. His mind races as he thinks about the top hat, the tree, the man, and everything going on. Molly comes to spend the night with him. Kip says they



should leave, because whatever is happening to Molly is not good. Molly knows the night man is to blame, and feels as if she has become trapped in her own dreams. Kip says it is time they found out what the man is up to.

In Chapter 27: "Ichor," Molly and Kip decide they will spy on the night man. While they wait up and keep watch from the cart, Kip asks for a story. Molly cannot bring herself to tell one, and has not told one in weeks. When the night man appears in the house, they sneak inside and follow him. He carries an empty watering can. The sounds of the Windsor family having nightmares can be heard. Molly and Kip watch as the night man puts a rag to Bertrand's sweaty head as he dreams horrible things. The night man then wrings out silvery liquid from the rag into the watering can. He does this several times. When Molly's foot creaks the floor, the night man turns toward them. He has no eyes, and his beard is tangle of roots. He grinds leaves into a dust in his hands, and blows the dust at Molly. She then blacks out.

In Chapter 28: "Asleep," Kip rushes to his sister, who is asleep and dreaming horrible things. Kip confronts the night man, demanding he make Molly better. The night man instead summons wind to try to knock Kip down the stairs. Kip holds on, and flings his lantern at the night man as the night man collects perspiration from Molly. The lantern explodes on the man, setting him on fire. The man then chases Kip outside, but he is unable to follow into the night flowers. The man is enraged, paces, and disappears. He leaves something behind, which Kip realizes it is a gift.

In Chapter 29: "To Market," Molly wakes up in her own bed. She receives money from Bertrand to go to market, which barely enough to cover food for the week. She drives out with Kip and Galileo. As they shop, Kip recounts the events of the previous evening to Molly, who does not remember much. Molly refuses to talk about her bad dreams, however. Kip now shows Molly the gift left by the night man. It is a key made of twigs and leaves. Molly tells Kip that if he ever finds a lock for the key, he must never use the key. Molly knows it goes to the tree, but she does not tell him. Kip realizes Molly knows where the key goes. Molly takes the key away from Kip and throws it into a ravine. Kip is angered. Molly tells him he can never accept anything from the night man. It is then that they see Hester sitting next to the bread stall.

In Chapter 30: "A Story Bought, A Story Sold," Hester thinks that Molly has been avoiding her. Molly says she has just been busy. Hester learns that Molly and Kip do not have much money on them, so she asks her friend Tolliver what Tolliver is charging them for bread. Molly is unhappy to learn the price is four pence. She knows they are being chiseled because people mistakenly believe the Windsors are very wealthy. Hester tells Tolliver to tell all the other stall keepers to charge fair prices of Molly and Kip as they are Hester's friends. If not, Hester will tell everyone that Tolliver spikes his flour with ground-up cat bones. Molly does not like the idea of owing Hester, or anyone, a favor. Kip goes on to brag about Molly's storytelling skills, which embarrasses her. Molly says all she is, is a servant. Hester, however, compliments Molly, telling her not to confuse who she is with what she does. Hester reminds Molly that the king of storytellers, Aesop, was a slave. Hester also reminds Molly she owes her a story about the Windsor estate. Hester has noticed the change in Molly's physical appearance, and



presses her on this. When Molly still refuses to talk, Hester prepares to leave – but Kip blurts things out about the man and the tree.

In Chapter 31: “The Legend of the Night Gardener,” Hester prepares to tell the story of the tree and the night man (the night gardener) in the warmth and safety of the tavern The Moon Under Water. She says that the story is actually a legend, and legends are only ever repeated. No one knows how they start. Kip surrenders his magic button to Hester as payment for the story, as the sack of objects Hester carries around each represent a story. Hester begins by saying there was once a wise man who lived in a garden that would only bloom at night. As such, he earned the nickname the Night Gardener. One day, Hester continues, a strange tree grew that would give people whatever their hearts desired. However, Hester reveals, the tree took away a drop of the wisher’s soul whenever a wish was granted. The Night Gardner himself wished for immortality, Hester notes, and the tree promised what the Night Gardner wanted inside of itself if the Night Gardner helped it grow big and tall. The Night Gardener set to work doing just that, Hester explains – and then the tree swallowed him whole. Molly does not like this ending, and calls it a lie. Hester asks what the difference is between a lie and a story. Molly insists a lie hurts people, while stories help them. As Hester leaves, she asks Molly what stories help people to do. Molly wonders whether the letters are really from her parents, or the tree.

In Chapter 32: “Fruit,” Molly and Kip return to the Windsor estate. At the stables, Kip sees a window on the mansion he has never seen before, and shadows moving within. He also pulls out the night man’s key, which he has secretly gone back to find. He sneaks into the mansion and uses the key on the green door. The door unlocks and opens.

In Chapter 33: “Collapse,” as Molly serves tea to Constance, Molly looks out over the grounds of the estate. They are beautiful, lush, green, and full of flowers thanks to the efforts of Kip. Kip is out chopping firewood, and has been distant from Molly the past two days. Molly asks Constance why she stays if the house is making her sick. Constance responds by saying that she stays for the same reason Molly does – the things granted by the tree. Constance says a touch of the fever they suffer is a small price to pay the tree. Inside, Molly decides to burn the letters, but she pulls them out of the fire at the last second. Outside, she hears a crash. She discovers Constance collapsed and ice cold to the touch.

Analysis

Any concerns Molly has had about dealing with the tree are confirmed in this section of the novel through a conversation with Hester in town. Hester reveals not only the legend of the Night Gardener, but more information about the tree itself. The tree itself does indeed represent the sin of greed. Each time the sin of greed is committed through the individual’s acceptance of the temptation of what the tree offers, a piece of their soul is taken away from the individual. Molly’s dealing with the tree has eaten away at her soul and her physical being as well. As Auxier argues, human sin eats away at more than



just the soul. Again, in reflection of Wilde and the Portrait of Dorian Gray, the sin of greed is physically eating away at Molly and the Windsors.

Molly comes to learn more about the Windsors and their foundations for greed. Constance's greed is borne of heartbreak. The wedding ring she takes from the tree represents the love she shared with Bertrand, and hopes to revive. She must constantly seek out resized, smaller rings, because she continues to waste away the more and more she relies upon the tree. The box of rings that Molly finds demonstrates just how frequently Constance must rely on the tree. Molly also gets to the root of the Princess Penny books, which symbolize a happier time for Penny when Constance would tell stories to get her to sleep. Despite all of these warnings, Molly is still prone to the tree's temptation – but she now has a chance to turn away. As Auxier argues, it is never too late to change things in your life and make things right. Molly is now beginning to realize this.

At the same time, Kip has taken to sleeping in the stables to avoid the house. The Night Gardener does not come near the stables, and Kip is deeply concerned about the tree and the house. Readers should carefully note that Kip here emerges as the only truly pure, moral character in the novel. His physical distance from the tree is a manifestation of his distance from sin and immorality. The Night Gardener does not have the ability to cross over into the night garden – the garden he himself planted before he lost his soul for immortality, a Garden of Eden (a morally pure place) from which he cast himself out – but he does have the ability to lure Kip out of the garden with temptation (like Satan when he was a serpent toward Adam and Eve) which symbolically takes the form of the key.

Keys in and of themselves mean nothing. Keys can be used, or can be disused. Sin exists, and can be embraced or rejected. The key therefore symbolizes choice. The Gardener is tempting Kip with the key – with the sin of greed – and it will be up to Kip whether or not he will ultimately embrace it. Readers should also note that Kip is the only person on the island who is able to beautify the place with flowers and landscaping. This is because the work he does is done from love and from a place of moral goodness. One reaps what one sows. When one delights in beauty and creation, beauty and creation are the result. When one delights in greed, destruction is the result. Kip is able to bring beauty to the island because he is morally pure and righteous.

Readers should also pay careful attention to the conversation that Molly has with Hester regarding the nature of stories and lies. Here, Auxier gives clear articulation to his thematic argument that stories and lies are two different things. As Molly herself explains later in the novel, lies hurt and help people hide from life, while stories give people strength and courage to face life. She has been outright lying to Kip regarding the letters from her parents. As Molly also recognizes – demonstrated through her throwing away of Kip's key – it is never too late to change one's life. Molly knows she must now find a way to break away from the tree.

Additionally, Hester gives Molly more sound advice, which becomes a thematic argument for Auxier: do not confuse what you do with who you are, he argues. Just



because Molly works as a servant does not mean she is not a storyteller by nature. Just because Molly and the others have committed the sin of greed does not necessarily mean they are horrible human beings. As Molly has learned, the Windsors, despite their outward coldness, rudeness, or distance, are genuinely good people. Here, Auxier draws on a strong tenet of Judeo-Christianity: hate the sin, and not the sinner. Separate the sin from the sinner. Destroy the sin and save the sinner. This will ultimately translate into the plan to destroy the tree and save the family.

Discussion Question 1

What important things does Molly learn from Hester about stories and lies? Where has Molly lied? Where has she told stories? Why does the difference between the two affect Molly so deeply now whereas it did not before?

Discussion Question 2

Do you believe there is a difference between a story and a lie? If so, what? If not, why not?

Discussion Question 3

What important information about the tree do Molly and Kip learn from Hester in this section of the novel? How does this information affect Molly and Kip? Why?

Vocabulary

corpulent, prehistoric, malady, invigorating, mortified, ritual, provision, paltry, begrudge, bustle, inexplicably, reproachfully, affinity, prodigious



Chapters 34 – 44

Summary

Part 2: "Pursuits," continued

In Chapter 34: "Leeches and Lizards," Constance writhes in pain in bed in a state between sleep and being awake called somnambulism. She is watched over by Bertrand and Dr. Crouch while Molly brings boiling water to help warm her. Crouch advises the fever is getting worse in everyone, and they must take bed rest or they will end up in a similar state as Constance. Molly watches as Bertrand rushes to the green door room and the tree. The tree overflows with money, but Bertrand does not care for it. He demands to be let out and that he wants no more money, only a cure for his wife. He collapses and cries. Molly goes to him to comfort him. She realizes she is a part of their story now. Bertrand admits he went into speculation to make money and to make something of himself to make Constance comfortable in life – even if she said such things did not matter to her. Bertrand explains the economy went bad, plunging him into debt and requiring the family to move back to his boyhood home. He says that he first intended to sell the land, but then remembered the green door and how his father's studies brought the family to the island in the first place. It was then, Bertrand explains, he believed he could use the wishing tree to save the family from ever-growing debts. Bertrand compares the debt to a snake. Molly says there are no snakes in Ireland, but there are lizards who seek out fire-hot rocks to sleep on to avoid the cold, only to be cooked to death by morning. Bertrand then collects money for the doctor. When he leaves, Molly finds another letter in the tree.

In Chapter 35: "A Spirited Debate," Bertrand has Molly and Kip join the family and Dr. Crouch at dinner rather than Molly and Kip eating a different meal separately as they usually do. Crouch speaks about his disdain for the medical community wanting to investigate the spiritual realm. Crouch does not believe in mediums, magic, or stories – but says he is open to scientific proof of their existence. Penny hints at the magic tree, but Bertrand dismisses her talk as only a story. Crouch checks on Constance before turning in for the night. Molly speaks with Crouch, saying it is magic that has brought on the disease. She speaks of the night man, but Crouch thinks Molly is delusional. Nevertheless, he agrees to stay up with her for proof in the hopes of curing Molly. Molly asks only that Crouch catch the spirit, and take the spirit away.

In Chapter 36: "Traps," Kip does not see what good a doctor can do in their current situation, but Molly thinks Crouch's scientific abilities will help them. Kip, as directed by Crouch, is clearing away leaves from around the tree. He discovers another hole and calls to Molly. They now see six long holes lined up side by side. They realize these are graves, and the entire lawn with the little hills is nothing more than a giant cemetery. Molly tells Kip he is right, that she should never have brought them there. Kip tells her that they have a monster to catch.



In Chapter 37: “Camera Obscura,” as darkness falls, Molly finishes setting up a twenty-foot net for Crouch. The net is covered with leaves and attached to a rope over a branch which is tied to Galileo and the wagon. While Crouch still doubts Molly’s story, he has prepared himself to conduct a real scientific experiment decked out in a leather apron with various tools and black-lensed goggles. The three then hide behind the wagon. Crouch explains he intends not only to capture the creature, if it exists, but to take a photograph of it using a camera obscura. Suddenly, a darkened figure approaches the tree. Crouch is stunned and springs the trap, sending up the net and taking a photo. When the net is lowered, everyone is stunned to see Hester in the net.

In Chapter 38: “Shears,” Hester is carrying shears, which leads Kip to believe she wanted to take a cutting of the tree. Crouch is annoyed, saying Hester has ruined an experiment. Hester says they might still get their chance, and points behind them. The Night Gardener is watching them.

In Chapter 39: “The Broken Bough,” the Night Gardener looks at Molly, Kip, Crouch, and Hester with curiosity rather than anger. Crouch is stunned and moves forward to take a picture, despite Molly’s protests. Leaves and wind grab the camera and send it flying. Crouch rushes to the wagon, wanting to flee. He struggles with Molly and Kip for the wagon, slapping Molly and shoving Kip. The branch and net holding Hester now breaks, sending her to the ground. Black ooze comes out of the broken tree, and the Night Gardener falls to the ground. He struggles to his feet as Crouch flees on foot. The Night Gardener uses wind to rip the stable door off its hinges, and slams Crouch flat into the earth with it. Hester, bleeding from the mouth, urges Molly and Kip to run. Molly grabs the camera flashpan and ignites it, catching the Night Gardener on fire. It allows Molly and Kip to get Hester into the wagon, and race across the bridge. The Night Gardener pursues, but is unable to cross.

Part 3, “Departures”

In Chapter 40: “The Last Story,” Hester is dying. She knows she will never reach the village alive, so she has Molly and Kip pull the wagon over at the crossroads where they first met. Hester tells Molly and Kip this is not their fault, but her own fault for letting curiosity get the best of her. Hester explains that, while Aesop was the king of stories, her wish was to be remembered as the queen of stories. She says it is now time to tell the Last Story, but it is for her alone. She gives them a small oilskin parcel, telling them to open it later when there is time. Hester hobbles into the trees and into the darkness to die.

In Chapter 41: “Alone in the Dark,” Molly and Kip are sad. They go through Hester’s bag to pull out things they will need, such as food. They decide they must move on. They do not know where they will go or what they will do, but they know they do not have a choice. Molly and Kip speak about the Night Gardener. They believe the key was given to Kip to draw him back in, while the Gardener and the tree are somehow connected. Molly confesses the truth about the letters, while Kip tells Molly he went to the tree for Wonder Balm to cure his leg – but that he never used it or opened it because he knew he would have to keep going back for more. Molly explains that Kip was feverish and



did not remember much of their past as they fled famine in Ireland – that the ship they were on carrying them across the water was wrecked in a storm, and their parents managed to get her and Kip into the last lifeboat before being killed. Molly says she did not know how to tell the truth to Kip, so she told a story. Kip says what Molly did was simply lying. Molly says she thought she was doing right. Kip asks her how many people are buried around the tree that thought they were doing right. Molly realizes now that lies help people hide from the world, while stories help them face the world. Molly and Kip now realize they must return to save the Windsors.

In Chapter 42: “Return to the Sourwoods,” Molly and Kip return to the estate in the morning. They intend to gather their things, give Crouch a proper burial, and attempt to convince the Windsors to leave. At the estate, Kip confronts the tree. He realizes the tree may die without fresh victims, so the bridge must be destroyed when they leave. When Kip studies the bridge, he realizes black tree roots from the big tree are keeping it up. Kip realizes the Night Gardener can only go as far as the roots. Kip is suddenly confronted by an angry Alistair, who holds Kip’s crutch. Alistair wants to know where Kip has been. Kip says the family must flee because of the tree. Alistair, even angrier, drops the crutch in the river. Kip is furious, but rather than attacking Alistair, tells Alistair he feels sorry for him. This stuns Alistair. Kip feels sorry especially for Constance, who will die thinking her son is cruel and a bully. Kip then heads over to the stable. Alistair remains at the bridge, watching him.

In Chapter 43: “Body of Evidence,” Molly collects the letters in her trunk, then goes to see Bertrand who is sitting at his wife’s bedside. Molly explains she and Kip are leaving, and that the Windsors should, too. Bertrand says he must stay to get more money to pay his debtors. Molly takes the green room door key from Bertrand, saying she will give it back after Bertrand comes to see something. She brings him to where Kip has placed Crouch’s body in a grave. Molly tells Bertrand the grave was meant for him, and that there is one for each of them. Bertrand is stunned and angered. Molly points out that the lawn is really a cemetery. Bertrand explains the night his parents disappeared, his father had turned against the tree and wanted to destroy it, while his mother told Bertrand to flee the island. Bertrand says he cannot leave now, for the house and the island is all he has. Molly tells Bertrand his mother wanted him to live, and he needs to flee the island once again.

In Chapter 44: “Flight,” Bertrand agrees to flee the island. Molly checks in on Penny as Penny packs. Penny hates the island, but does not want to leave the Princess Penny books and the tree behind. Molly tells her there are better stories in the world than those books. By the afternoon, the family is packed. Meanwhile, Kip assembles every bit of flammable liquid and substance he can find, from lamp oil to turpentine to lard. He tells Molly he plans to destroy the bridge. All that remains is for Constance to be removed. Constance suddenly awakens, not wanting to leave without her ring. Bertrand tells Constance they are leaving. As the family prepares to depart, Fig and Stubbs show up.



Analysis

It is never too late to change things in your life and make things right, Auxier argues in this section of the novel. Molly belatedly realizes that she cannot go on dealing with the tree. She decides to break away by refusing to accept anything else from the tree. The letters she takes with her, however, she realizes are only lies. They have harmed her more than they have helped her. In essence, greed itself is a lie. It is easy gratification without having earned something. What is gained by greed is not real, especially where the tree is concerned. Bertrand himself comes to realize what is happening when Molly shows him the graves. The graves are both warning and omen – a warning of what could happen, and an omen of what will happen if Bertrand does not find the moral strength to free himself of the sin of greed. When Bertrand realizes his family could well be in the graves, he has had enough and vows to be and do better.

Readers should note that Kip remains the only morally pure character in the novel. He is the only one who has faced down temptation and rejected sin. Having seen what it does to others – including Molly herself – and knowing that he will become dependent on the tree to satisfy his greed for what he wants but has not earned, Kip is able to make a rational as well as moral choice to reject the tree, and therein reject sin. Kip is so horrified at what the tree can do that he vows to destroy the bridge that leads to the estate. His intention to do so is demonstrative not only of his rejection of sin, but his desire to fight sin and to save others. Kip also has it out with Molly over the lies regarding their parents. He is angry, but ultimately forgiving. In many ways, Kip is becoming a Christ-like figure, set against sin and helping others to see the errors of their ways. Molly draws strength from Kip, which in turn helps her to give strength to Bertrand.

But things get worse before they get better, however. Constance's fall into a coma-like illness brings out Dr. Crouch and compels Bertrand to see the situation with the tree in a way he has never before considered it. Only love for Bertrand is strong enough to fight sin – love of his wife and love of his children. Love is greater than sin, than evil, than immorality. Love will destroy sin. Love will destroy the path to sin (the bridge). Love will ensure that Bertrand's family will be freed from the curse of sin. However, the untimely and unwelcome arrival of Fig and Stubbs throws the future into doubt.

Discussion Question 1

What is Bertrand's own history with the family estate? What finally changes his mind in the present regarding the tree? Why?

Discussion Question 2

How does Kip respond when Molly admits to lying about their parents? Does Kip forgive or reject Molly's apology? Why?



Discussion Question 3

Why does Crouch take so seriously claims about the Night Gardener from a scientific standpoint, but not from a personal standpoint? Why does he, for that matter, not take the Night Gardener seriously at all until the Night Gardener throws his camera?

Vocabulary

macilent, somnambulism, accelerated, esteemed, symposium, monologue, hoodwinked, credulous, cumbrous, prodigal, disarray



Chapters 45 – 56

Summary

Part 3: “Departures,” continued

In Chapter 45: “Unwelcome Guests,” Fig and Stubbs have tied everyone up and left them in the foyer. Fig and Stubbs go through the house, looking for valuables. They decide to cut open the mattress on which Constance lays to see if there is money inside. When Bertrand demands they stop, Stubbs kicks him in the face and bloodies his nose. Molly intervenes, saying she, Stubbs, and Fig are not like the rich people. She says they must take what they can get. She says she can show them what they want. She tells them about the key to the green door in Bertrand’s pocket that will give them everything they want. They untie Molly, and have her lead the way.

In Chapter 46: “Trust,” Kip reassures Bertrand, Penny, and Alistair that they must trust Molly. Upstairs, Fig and Stubbs shout and cheer. They rush down from the room with their arms full of promissory notes. Fig and Stubbs rush back upstairs with an emptied trunk for more. Stubbs, Kip notices, is missing his knife.

In Chapter 47: “Comeuppance,” Molly carefully uses the stolen knife to cut the ropes on her hands. Meanwhile, Fig and Stubbs try to find the bottom of the hole in the tree to see if they have cleared out all the promissory notes. Fig leaves the room while Stubbs explains that despite the promissory notes, Molly and all the others will have to be killed. This stuns Molly, who thought she had managed to find a way to save the family. Fig suddenly returns with an axe, determined to make the hole in the tree bigger. Before Molly can stop him, he begins hacking away at the tree. Suddenly, the axe is stopped by the Night Gardener, who emerges from the tree. Fig and Stubbs are frozen in fear. Molly, meanwhile, has managed to cut herself free. She rushes out and locks Fig and Stubbs in the room. She then runs downstairs and cuts loose Kip and the Windsors. Suddenly, the door flies off its hinges and the Gardener steps into the upstairs hall. Alistair breaks off a branch of the tree to slow the Gardener down as they flee.

In Chapter 48: “Hide-and-Go-Seek,” Alistair helps Kip along away from the house and put a plan into action. To buy time, Alistair throws a rock at the Night Gardener, and gets the Night Gardener to chase after him. Kip does the same, causing the Gardener to turn back toward him. They both continue doing this, working their way along toward the night garden.

In Chapter 49: “Lamp Oil,” Molly loads Penny up into the wagon hitched to Galileo. Bertrand puts Constance in the wagon. Bertrand worries about what will become of Alistair and Kip. He decides the tree must be destroyed to stop the Gardener.



In Chapter 50: “Moonlight,” as Kip and Alistair struggle for the night garden, they are pursued by the Gardener. The moonlight shows the glowing garden up ahead, but the Gardener stops and motions with his arms in the air. Suddenly, the moonlight goes out.

In Chapter 51: “The Hero and the Damsel,” Penny is given the reigns and the wagon to flee across the river if things go south. Meanwhile, Bertrand soaks the tree with flammable liquid. As Constance watches her husband work, she thanks Molly for giving her her husband back. Molly then brings matches to Bertrand, who lights one and drops it.

In Chapter 52: “Courage,” Kip and Alistair struggle forth, unsure of where to go without the help of the moonlight. The Night Gardener suddenly appears, and just as he is about to take the boys, he bursts into flames. He turns toward the house and the tree. Kip knows Molly must have set the tree on fire, and will need more time. Kip grabs hold of the Night Gardener’s cloak, and pulls himself and the Gardner into the river.

In Chapter 53: “The Conflagration,” Molly and Bertrand watch in horror as the house burns up, but the tree remains untouched. Molly knows there must be a way to hurt the tree, that there must be a weak point somewhere. She then realizes it must be the knot hole itself. Bertrand does not try to stop Molly, but promises to slow down the Night Gardener if he appears. Molly races into the burning house and into the green door room. Each match she tries to drop into the tree, a puff of wind puts it out. She realizes the tree will only take back its own gifts. She then pulls the letters from her pocket.

In Chapter 54: “Ashes,” Molly lights the letters on fire, and puts them into the tree. The fire takes hold just as the Night Gardener appears in the room. As the fire in the tree grows, pieces of the Gardener begin breaking off. The Gardener finally crumbles into a pile of ash. However, the fire in the house has grown around her. She must now jump from the window to safety. Below, Bertrand pulls his wife’s mattress to break Molly’s fall. Molly jumps to safety, landing on the mattress. Alistair then appears with Kip, who is soaking wet and seems lifeless. As Molly holds him, she tells a story about a boy named Kip whose sister made a mistake. She apologizes for lying to him about their parents. Kip gasps and wakes up, asking what happens next.

In Chapter 55: “What Happened Next,” the village becomes aware of what has happened by the morning. Residents from Cellar Hollow flock out to see what has happened, and to leave gifts of food, clothes, and blankets for the Windsors. Molly and Constance happily watch Alistair and Penny playing. They may have lost everything, but they have their lives and have each other. Constance tells Molly that she and Kip will be taken in by the Windsors once more – not as servants, but as family. Bertrand then appears with Galileo, having set off looking for Galileo, who had gone missing. Galileo is alive and well, munching on flowers. Kip tells Molly he cannot understand how a good and wise gardener could be so transformed, and why Kip – also a gardener – should live when the Night Gardener should not. Molly says not everything can be known. Despite the offer by the Windsors, Molly and Kip know they must make their own way. They say goodbye, and head off.



In Chapter 56: “Storyteller at the Crossroads,” Molly and Kip come to the crossroads. She pulls out a gift given to them by Hester – a small oilskin parcel. It is empty, but they realize it is not a parcel at all. It is a map. There is a single red dot in the corner, which Molly believes is a home. Kip suggests stopping at a lake rumored to be full of dragons. Molly agrees to make a stop along the way to their new home. As they travel, they take turns telling stories.

Analysis

As if Bertrand did not need any more proof to do and be better, the fate of Fig and Stubbs are the final proof. As Auxier argues, it is never too late to change. Fig and Stubbs have been consumed by their greed – but Bertrand has enough of his soul left in him by way of the love for his family that allows him to break free. Fig and Stubb demonstrate the Judeo-Christian certainty that the wages of sin is death. Fortunately for Bertrand and the rest of the family, they themselves are able to break free of the island through the heroic actions of Kip, Molly, Alistair, and Bertrand. Kip fully embodies a Christ-like demeanor when he sacrifices himself against evil by pulling the Night Gardener into the river. Kip, like Christ, recovers; and evil is ultimately vanquished when sin itself is targeted by Molly by way of the tree.

Molly, who recognizes that the letter she has from her parents are nothing more than the lies of the tree, uses the enflamed letters to set the tree on fire. (Note that in some cultures and religions, fire is seen as cleansing rather than destructive – and the way in which Molly destroys the tree, sin, is by fire.) Because the tree and the Night Gardener are mutually dependent upon one another for survival, and because they have essentially become one entity, the destruction of the tree leads to the destruction of the Night Gardener. Greed, Auxier once again notes, can be confused as something good when one believes one is doing something in greed in service to another.

Greed, however, is still greed. Readers should note carefully that when the Gardener gives chase, he must blot out the light of the pure garden in order to prevent the good (Kip and a recovering Alistair) from reaching it. Nevertheless, even when one stumbles and falls, there is still hope. The salvation of Molly, Kip, and the Windsors through their break away from sin, and their escape to new life, demonstrates Auxier’s argument that it is never too late to change things in your life and make things right. Remember that the tree, representing sin, is targeted, but the sinners – Molly and the Windsors – are saved.

Discussion Question 1

Why have Fig and Stubbs come to the Windsor estate a day early? Why are they killed? What do their deaths demonstrate?



Discussion Question 2

How does Molly destroy the tree? What does this mean for the Night Gardener? What does it mean for Molly and for the Windsors? Why?

Discussion Question 3

The Windsors are willing to take Molly and Kip in not as servants, but as family. Why do Molly and Kip gently refuse this offer, and instead strike out on their own?

Vocabulary

involuntary, promissory notes, lurch, conflagration, ablaze, bramble



Characters

Molly

Molly is a 14-year-old orphan who has fled famine-stricken Ireland for England with her brother, Kip, for a better life. Molly is a bright, compassionate, and creative girl who loves to tell stories. She encourages Kip to be brave but lies to him regarding their parents, telling him they are alive and will be coming to get them soon.

Molly takes on work as a maid for the Windsors at their island estate, where along the way, she and Kip meet Hester. At the estate, Molly quickly realizes something is wrong with the Windsors and the place, and soon after discovers the night man, who will soon be revealed as the Night Gardener. As time passes, Molly's health fades, but she comes to grow close to and respect each of the Windsors.

Finally, Molly and Kip decide they must leave, and convince the Windsors to leave with them. It is Molly who manages to destroy the Night Gardener when he tries to stop them when she lights his tree on fire. Molly apologizes to Kip for the lies about their parents, and the two set off to find a home at the end of the novel.

Kip

Kip is the ten-year-old younger brother of Molly who has a leg deformity. Like Molly, he is an orphan who flees famine-plagued Ireland for work and a new life in England. He becomes a stable boy and groundskeeper for the Windsors through his sister's accepting work at the estate.

Kip is very kind, very morally right, and very creative, and he quickly senses evil about the estate. He takes to sleeping in the stable to avoid the reach of the Night Gardener. Kip longs for balm to heal his leg, but refuses to use the balm provided by the tree, knowing he will be lost to the tree if he does so.

Kip and Molly decide they must flee the island, and bring the Windsors with them. Kip, who has had a kind of feud with Alistair, ends up working with him to distract the Night Gardener to help everyone to escape. When the Gardener is destroyed and the family is saved, Molly and Kip set off on their own to find their own place in the world.

Hester

Hester Kettle is a local storyteller to the Cellar Hollow area. She is elderly, spry, intellectually sharp, and very creative. She encounters Molly and Kip on their way to the Windsor estate, warning them against it and telling them little about it. She emerges as a grandmotherly figure to them, watching out for them through the novel. However, when Molly and Kip speak of the Night Gardener, her curiosity gets the better of her.



She seeks to investigate the tree, but gets caught up in the trap for the Gardener, which leads to her death. She bequeaths to Molly and Kip a map to a new home for them before she dies.

Penny

Penelope “Penny” Windsor is the seven-year-old daughter of Bertrand and Constance, and is the younger sister of Alistair. Penny is bright, gentle, and friendly, but succumbs to the tree based on her desire for stories about herself the way her mother used to tell them before moving away from town. Penny quickly takes a liking to, and looks up to Molly when Molly arrives. Penny becomes inseparable from Molly, and is sad to see Molly go at the end of the novel.

Alistair

Alistair Windsor is the older brother of Penny, and is the son of Bertrand and Constance. A bully, Alistair succumbs to the tree for the candies he denied himself as a boy to earn the respect of his father. Alistair is confronted by Kip, who tells Alistair he feels sorry for Alistair because he is nothing more than a bully. Alistair has a moral awakening because of this, and works with Kip to distract the Night Gardener so that Molly may destroy him.

Constance

Constance Windsor is the wife of Bertrand and the mother of Alistair and Penny. Constance at first seems a cold, formal woman, but her callousness is a result of her succumbing to the tree for the ring, symbolizing love, given to her by Bertrand on their wedding day; and because she is angered and horrified by Bertrand’s debts and speculating. Constance is the first to fall truly ill with the soul fever from the tree. When the Gardener is killed and she recovers, she offers to bring Molly and Kip into the family for what they have done for them, but Molly and Kip head out on their own instead.

Bertrand

Bertrand Windsor is the husband of Constance, and the father of Alistair and Penny. Bertrand, whose parents were killed by the Gardener, has a title and no inheritance when he marries Constance. All he can give her is a ring. He turns to speculation for quick money, and is very successful and wealthy until the economy turns bad. Bertrand goes into heavy debt and is hounded by Fig and Stubbs. He must sell off the town house and move his family to his old estate where he turns to the tree for money for his debts. Bertrand belatedly awakens to the dangers of the tree when Molly points out how it is killing them all, and he decides he must escape with his family. Bertrand and Molly work together to burn the tree, and Bertrand later helps Molly escape from the burning Windsor mansion.



The Night Gardener

The Night Gardener is the tragic antagonist of the novel. Once a wise gardener with a loving family and a beautiful garden on the island, he was surprised to find a wish-granting tree sprout up from his work. The gardener and others in the area realized the powers of the tree, and came to seek it out to have their desires fulfilled. The gardener, happy with his family and garden, wanted to live forever to be with them and so struck a deal with the tree. He would help the tree grow so long as he could live forever. However, this corrupted and destroyed his soul, transforming him into the Night Gardener. As Night Gardener, he continues to tend to the tree and see that souls are stolen to sustain the tree, becoming a part of the tree itself. When the tree is destroyed by Molly, the Night Gardener is also destroyed.

Doctor Crouch

Doctor Ezekiel Crouch is a medical practitioner and modern scientist living in Cellar Hollow. He is hired by Bertrand to tend to the Windsor family, but Crouch cannot find a cause for the sickness. He doubts Molly's explanations of magic until he encounters the tree and the Night Gardener. When Crouch attempts to photograph the Gardener, he only succeeds in angering him and getting killed.

Fig and Stubbs

The tall and lanky Fig and the short and fat Stubbs are two ruthless loan sharks involved in speculation, and serve as antagonists. They torment Bertrand to collect debts he owes. At the end of the novel, they arrive to steal from and kill the Windsors, but Molly leads them to the tree. When Fig and Stubbs attempt to chop open the tree to get at more promissory notes in the knot hole, the Night Gardener emerges and kills them.

Symbols and Symbolism

The Tree

The tree is at once both character and object symbolizing the sin of greed. The tree delivers that which a person most desires in exchange for a drop of the person's soul. People become overwhelmed by their desires being fulfilled, trading more and more of their souls for easy gratification rather than actually earning such rewards or behaving morally. People therein sell their moral selves for what pleases them. The tree is joined with the Night Gardener, who protects and tends to the tree. Each time the tree is damaged or injured, so too is the Night Gardener. The tree is hardy, but not indestructible. Molly discovers the tree's weakness, which is the knot hole that opens up into the green door room. The hole accepts only which it gifts, and so she lights letters received from the tree on fire and places them inside. This destroys both the tree and the Night Gardener.

Wishing Button

Molly's wishing button symbolizes hope and courage. Molly knows she and Kip are in a desperate place as orphans without food, water, shelter, or employment. To ensure Kip remains brave and does as he must, she tears the last button from her coat and tells him it is a magic button that will help give him hope and courage. The button later becomes payment for Hester, who gives Molly and Kip the information they need to finally decide to flee the island.

The Portrait

The portrait of the Windsor family symbolizes the ominous toll selling one's soul takes on a person physically. The portrait is hung in the study and studied by Molly. In the portrait, the Windsor family appears happy and healthy – a complete contrast to their current state as pale, ill, and wasting away. The portrait also alerts Molly to dangers the island can present should she choose to submit to the tree.

The Green Door

The green door symbolizes greed. The color green is often associated with money and greed. The door that shields the room to the wishing tree is green. To open the green door is to prepare to submit to greed with the tree. The tree gives what the heart greedily desires, while the tree greedily takes one's soul.



The Key

The key to the green door symbolizes human choice. The door to greed remains locked. It can be opened or left locked, voluntarily, by Molly, Kip, and the Windsors. Using the key is a symbolic act of voluntarily surrendering to one's greed.

The Black Top Hat

The black top hat symbolizes truth. The black top hat belongs to the Night Gardener. Molly finds the hat and realizes it is proof that there is an evil being lurking about the property. She stashes it away in her trunk, where it is later retrieved by the Night Gardener.

The Wedding Ring

The wedding ring symbolizes true love and heartbreak. The wedding ring, which is dark in color with a blue quartz resembling a diamond, is given to Constance by Bertrand on their wedding day. Knowing he is poor, she does not expect such a gift. She does not care that it is not composed of real silver or a real diamond, but she treasures it because it represents the love she shares with Bertrand. When Bertrand falls into debt, sells the ring, and submits to the tree, Constance feels as if Bertrand's love is slipping away. She continually seeks out new rings from the tree as she wastes away, wanting his love back and feeling brokenhearted in the process. Constance must constantly seek out new rings to remind herself of that love because the thinner she gets, the current ring stops fitting. It is a wasting away of love as much as her body and soul.

The Twig Key

The twig key is symbolic of temptation. When Kip defies the Night Gardener, the Night Gardener fashions a special key for Kip to use on the green door. Despite Kip using the key to the door, bringing himself face to face with greed and the balm for his leg, Kip refuses to use the balm because he knows it will take away his soul and leave him powerless against the tree. Thus, Kip manages to defy temptation and remain morally just.

Empty Graves

The empty graves are a warning and an omen. The Night Digger digs six graves near the tree for Molly, Kip, and the Windsor family, expecting them all to succumb to greed and the tree. The graves are a reminder that they can still fight greed and turn their lives around. When Molly shows Bertrand the graves, Bertrand stares his own future in the face unless he changes. He therefore has a moral awakening that compels him to flee the island with his family to save them.



Candy

Candy is representative of greed for Alistair. As a child, when the family was wealthy, Alistair practiced restraint, choosing not to eat lots of candy. Now poor, Alistair realizes he should have eaten all the candy he could have when he could have done so. Candy is now his desire, and the tree provides it in copious amounts.

Princess Penny Books

Princess Penny books are representative of greed for Penny. Penny misses the stories her mother used to tell her, so she turns to the tree for stories. Penny does not always like the stories, but she does like some, and so keeps them hidden by her bedside. Penny, who is young and innocent, much prefers the stories Molly tells, and so increasingly turns away from the tree toward Molly through the novel.

Money

Money is representative of greed for Bertrand. Money is the ultimate manifestation of greed, for money can buy almost anything. Bertrand, heavily indebted, seeks money from the tree to satisfy the debts he keeps running up through speculation. Money, in the form of promissory notes, becomes the source of greed for Fig and Stubbs, and ultimately leads to their own undoing.



Settings

The Windsor Estate

The Windsor Estate is located on an island in the middle of a wide river across a bridge in the middle of a vast woods far from Cellar Hollow. The island itself is home to the sourwoods, a place of tragedy and horror. The center of the island is cleared away to reveal a green lawn with tiny hills. At the end of the lawn is the Windsor mansion, which is old, decayed, and sagging. Directly beside the mansion, and growing into it, is the wishing tree, around which nothing grows. At the other end of the lawn are the stables, and in the woods on the island is the night garden. The tree's roots stretch out beneath the island, holding up the bridge and making it possible for the Night Gardener to travel only as far as the roots can grow. The roots are stopped by the river, which symbolizes cleanness and purity, and by the night garden, which symbolizes truth, beauty, and purity. Only Kip is able to make the rest of the island beautiful with flowers and landscaping, because only Kip has been morally untainted by the tree.

The Sourwoods

The sourwoods are the woods on the Windsor Estate island. These woods surround the green lawn, and have been undergrown by the wishing tree. These woods are referred to as the sourwoods because they are the domain of the Night Gardener, who can move through them while the roots of the wishing tree grow below him. It is in these woods that the Night Gardener can overcome people and destroy them.

The Empty Room

The empty room is located just beyond the green door on the second floor of the Windsor mansion at the top of the stairs. The empty room is symbolic of the emptiness one feels without what their hearts most desire. It produces a psychological effect that focuses the individual directly on what he or she desires, and on what the tree provides. It is through the empty room that one gains access to the tree's knot hole. It is in the empty room that Fig and Stubbs are slaughtered by the Night Gardener, and it is in the empty room that Molly destroys the tree and the Gardener.

The Night Garden

The night garden symbolizes purity – both moral goodness and beauty. The night garden is found in the sourwoods. The wishing tree's roots cannot grow beneath the garden, and so the Night Gardener cannot cross into the garden. The garden was once the domain of the Night Gardener, before he lost his soul to the tree. Now, the night garden protects Kip and proves to be one of the few places the Night Gardener cannot go.

The Crossroads

The crossroads symbolizes choice and decision, and is where Molly and Kip first meet Hester. At the crossroads, they have a chance to turn away from travelling to the Windsor Estate but choose not to do so. At the end of the novel, they come upon the crossroads once more, and choose to seek out a new home and better lives.



Themes and Motifs

Stories versus Lies

Stories and lies are two different things, argues Jonathan Auxier in his novel *The Night Gardener*. Auxier articulates this argument through Hester and Molly, based on a discussion the two have toward the middle of the novel. Stories and lies are indeed different, and serve different purposes. These both are in turn contrasted with legends, which serve deeper purposes.

Molly comes to realize that lies are harmful, and help people hide away from life. Stories are helpful, and encourage and empower people to face life head-on. As a storyteller, it is important that Molly knows the difference. Through much of the early part of the novel, Molly wants her brother to be strong and not complain after arriving off the boat and reaching the Windsor estate. She lies to him and tells him their parents will soon be coming for them.

Molly's lies not only give Kip false hopes, but help Molly to avoid the reality of the situation she is facing. The letters given to Molly by the tree trigger her greed for more letters, for even though she knows her parents are dead and the letters are false letters, she wonders if somehow, they are indeed contacting her. Rather than confront the truth of their deaths, Molly only hides from them. This is in stark contrast to the stories that Molly tells Penny – stories about historical figures like the bravery of Cleopatra – which excite Penny's imagination and help her to cope with the tragedy surrounding her.

Legends, on the other hand, have unknown origins and are only ever repeated. They often serve as warnings. The legend of the Night Gardener is a legend repeated by locals of Cellar Hollow not to help hide people from life, or to give them courage to face life, but to save their own lives. Molly learns this through Hester, as every part of the legend Hester tells turns out to be true. Hester's own curiosity into investigating the legend ends up leading to her death.

What People Do versus Who They Are

Do not confuse what you do with who you are, argues Jonathan Auxier in his novel *The Night Gardener*. The idea that one should not confuse who one is with what one does is spoken by Hester in her conversation with Molly. This has tremendous implications not only for Molly's life, but for the idea of sin.

Molly is a servant. Molly believes she will only be a servant. This is what she does for a living. However, Hester tells Molly that just because Molly works as a servant, that does not mean she is not a storyteller. Molly's existence is based on being a storyteller for this comes naturally to her. Being a servant pays the bills. Being a storyteller makes life matter.



The Judeo-Christian faith in forgiveness, sin, and sinners is also explored through this idea. Though a sinner may commit a sin, the sinner is not the same as the sin. Those of the Judeo-Christian faith believe that one must hate the sin and not the sinner. Molly first realizes this through meeting Constance. Though Constance is at first cold and unkind, in reality, she is heartbroken and her greed has warped her life.

The same is true of the other members of the Windsor family. They are, at heart, good people, but they have become slaves to their sins of greed. By separating the sinners from the sin, they are saved. Bertrand decides he will not allow his family to be overcome by the sins of the tree, so he ensures his family flees the island and helps Molly to destroy the tree for all their sakes. Free of sin, they are able to recover and begin their lives all over again.

Greed

Greed is difficult to resist and can often be confused as something good, argues Jonathan Auxier in *I The Night Gardener*. Greed in the novel takes many forms, but each time it appears, it has the same thing in common. The practice of greed through the tree is believed to be good.

Bertrand's greed takes the form of money. Bertrand is heavily in debt after a windfall of wealth was destroyed by a bad economy and speculation. Bertrand believes by selling his soul for money, he is providing comfort for his family and paying off his debt. Penny deeply misses story time with her mother, so her greed takes the form of books from the tree. Penny relies on the tree for comfort through stories that her mother no longer provides, thinking this is good.

Constance is heartbroken, and sees the love she shares with Bertrand symbolized in her wedding ring. When Bertrand sells her ring, she goes to the tree for another, believing the replacement ring has the same meaning as the original. Her greed for more rings she believes to be based on pursuit of love. Alistair's greed takes the form of candy, for which he refused to indulge in as a child. He now believes he has a right to the candy because of his denial, and believes it is good he does not rely on his parents for the candy.

Molly's greed takes the form of letters from her parents. She has lied to Kip about their deaths, and the letters help fuel the lies she tells for the good of protecting him. Molly herself even begins to wonder if they are really writing to her, almost losing herself in them. Kip is given leg balm for his bad leg, but he refuses to use it, recognizing the balm is not good at all because of its origin. As such, Kip remains the only pure character tempted by, but rejecting outright, greed.



Sin

Human sin eats away at more than just the soul. The tree in this novel takes a piece of soul for each wish it grants. But the loss of one's soul does not only have consequences in the afterlife – it has consequences in the here and now.

When Molly and Kip first arrive at the Windsor estate, they are struck by the physical appearance of the Windsors. They all look ill. They are thin, weary, sad, angry, pale, and almost ghostlike. Molly encounters a portrait of them from an earlier time in town where they looked vibrant, healthy, and happy.

This serves as something of a reverse portrait of Dorian Gray from Oscar Wilde's *Portrait of Dorian Gray*. In Wilde's novel, Dorian Gray's sins are reflected through illustration in a portrait of himself. In *The Night Gardener*, the sins of the Windsors do not appear in their portrait, but appear in themselves as the loss of their souls and their morality causes them to physically waste away with each act of sin.

Molly herself becomes a perfect example of such sin. Her thick red hair turns straight and black. Her freckles and full complexion fade and turn pale. She becomes thinner and appears ill. Kip notices the change. Kip, who retains his soul and his morality by refusing to deal with the tree, is the only one who does not physically change.

Fate

It is never too late to change things in your life and make things right, argues Jonathan Auxier in his novel *The Night Gardener*. Life is full of wrong paths, mistakes, and poor choices. No matter how many of these are made, it is never too late to make a change and strive to be better.

The decision to be better comes from separating the sinner from the sin by way of the choice of the individual to be better. Molly comes to realize this late in the novel, and must convince Bertrand of this. Bertrand's committing of the sin of greed through the tree he believes he is doing in the best interests of the family – but Molly changes his mind with the graves.

When Bertrand sees the graves that will belong to him and his family, his mind changes. His love for his family far outweighs his greed, even if he has forgotten it until now. Bertrand loves his family more than himself, and he loves his family more than money. Because of this, he vows that the family will leave the island. They will start all over again. It does not matter if they do not have money or a home, because at least they have each other, he reasons correctly.

That it is never too late to change one's life is confirmed by what happens when the tree, the Gardener, and the house are destroyed and the island is departed. Constance quickly begins recovering. Alistair and Penny are to be seen laughing and playing with one another by Molly, something which she knows has not happened in a very long

time. Even Bertrand is quickly recovering, now being decisive and morally upright once more.

Styles

Point of View

Jonathan Auxier relates his novel *The Night Gardener* in the third-person limited perspective from the point of view of an unnamed storyteller. The storyteller is reflective of the fact that the novel itself is full of stories told by storytellers, such as Hester and Molly. The narrative focuses primarily around Molly and Kip, though the narrator does spend limited amounts of time in consideration of other characters as well. This allows the narrator to fully explore and flesh out these characters. For example, Molly at first assumes Constance to be a cold and uncaring upper-class woman – but soon after learns that Constance is merely heartbroken and terrified for her family. The limited perspective of the narrator allows for suspense in the mystery of the Night Gardener, keeping readers on the edge of their seats. The narrator, the characters, and the readers never know what will happen next until it actually happens.

Language and Meaning

The Night Gardener is related in language that is poetic and alternately simple and formal. The poetic language in the novel forms the core of the narration by the third-person narrator. The poetic language also allows for excellent descriptions of things like the beauty of the night garden and the squalid condition of the house, and allows readers to clearly form images in their minds of what Molly and Kip are confronting on the island.

The language assumes a formal tone whenever any of the Windsors are speaking, as they are upper-class and well-educated. Consider the formal warning Constance gives Molly on page 38 in Chapter 5, saying “Under no circumstances are you or your brother to touch the tree,” rather than simply, “Stay away from the tree.” Words spoken by Molly and Kip betray their country origins and relative lack of education. Words they speak are often very simple and often clipped of syllable endings, such as when Molly speaks about the Night Gardener in Chapter 26 on page 180: “I just wish I knew what he was doin’... and I wish I knew why.”

Structure

Jonathan Auxier divides his novel *The Night Gardener* into 56 linear, consecutive chapters divided into three parts. Each part is formed by a series of black pages featuring a reverse black-and-white illustration. Each part deals with a primary part of the overall story plot. Part 1 deals with the arrival of Molly and Kip to the estate, and their early exploration of the Gardener mystery. Part 2 deals with the bulk of their time on the island, and their first real confrontation of the Gardener. Part 3 deals with the decision to flee the island.



Each chapter within each part deals with a smaller portion of the section of the plot contain in the part itself. For example, Chapter 40 of Part 3 deals with Molly and Kip's decision to return to the island to try to save the Windsors following the death of Hester and Crouch. Each chapter is also headlined and sub-lined by a black-and-white illustration of leaves blowing in the wind.



Quotes

And they were riding to their deaths. This, at least, was what Molly had been told by no fewer than a dozen people as they traveled from farm to farm in search of the Windsor estate.

-- Narrator (Chapter 1)

Importance: When Molly and Kip first seek out the Windsor estate, they are told by everyone they ask for directions to avoid the place. Because Molly and Kip have no choice but take the work they have found at the estate, they must continue on to find the place. However, the warnings are not without reason.

I need you to be brave.

-- Molly (Chapter 2)

Importance: When Molly and Kip near the manor, she reminds him that she needs him to remain brave and not to complain. They are living on the edge of survival, and will need the work they take in order to survive. Without the job at the Windsor estate, they will have nowhere else to go. This reveals just how serious their situation is, and why continue on.

Under no circumstances are you or your brother to touch the tree.

-- Constance (Chapter 5)

Importance: Here, Constance gives Molly her first real warning, and an ominous warning at that. Constance tells Molly to stay away from the tree because the tree is a cursed wishing tree. Constance warns Molly away from the tree for two reasons –first, because she does not want Molly to succumb to the tree; and second, because she does not want to share the tree.

But there is, of course, a way to buy time.

-- Bertrand (Chapter 8)

Importance: Here, Bertrand and Constance speak of the family's debts caused by Bertrand's debts. While Constance wants the family to survive on an honest living, Bertrand wants to play in speculation and pay off mounting debts. He will do this with money from the tree, and this will buy them time to figure out the rest of the debt.

The night man was real.

-- Narrator (Chapter 10)

Importance: When Molly awakens at night, she hears footsteps upstairs. She journeys through the house and realizes the man Kip reports having seen in the fog is real. There is a dark entity that is prowling the house and the grounds, and his leaving behind his hat is proof of this. The danger is real.



He did the same thing before we moved away from town –trying to pay off creditors. When we came here, he gave his word that those days were over and done with. Shows what his word is worth.

-- Alistair (Chapter 14)

Importance: Alistair explains to Molly the sad reality of the Windsor family. They are heavily indebted because of Bertrand. Bertrand's speculation was an early, easy source of wealth for the family when the economy was good, but when the economy went bad, so too did the speculation. Alistair also reveals the reason for the journey to the estate – that the days of gambling speculation were over and the family was to recover. This turns out clearly not to be the case.

Where did he come from? What did he want?

-- Narrator (Chapter 17)

Importance: Here, Molly wonders about the Night Gardener. It is clear he is lurking around the property and traipsing through the manor for a reason. This brings Molly closer to the answer, but she still does not have it. This ultimately leads to Molly and Kip deciding to stake out the Night Gardener to see what he is up to.

I just wish I knew what he was doin'... and I wish I knew why.

-- Molly (Chapter 26)

Importance: Here, Molly discusses with Kip her own nightmares and how she is succumbing to the Night Gardener. Only by tracking down the Night Gardener do they have part of the truth. Only through following the Night Gardener does Molly see he is collecting souls, in the form of perspiration, from the Windsors to water the tree with.

Don't confuse what you do with who you are, dearie.

-- Hester (Chapter 30)

Importance: Here, Hester gives Molly some sound advice which matters in two ways. First, just because Molly works as a maid does not mean she is not a storyteller. What she does is not who she is. Second, because Molly may commit a sin in greed through her lies and the letters, this does not mean she is a bad person. The sin can be separated from the sinner. The same is as true of the Windsors as it is of her.

We got a monster to catch.

-- Kip (Chapter 36)

Importance: Molly and Kip decide that they will do their best to defeat the Night Gardener by capturing him. Kip proves brave and courageous when Molly regrets coming to the island and nearly loses her confidence. This occurs when they discover the front lawn is a giant cemetery.

How many folks buried round that tree thought they was doin' right?

-- Kip (Chapter 41)



Importance: Here, Kip strikes the heart of the matter as it relates to greed, and to sin as a whole. Greed can often be confused as something good being done due to the circumstances. But the wages of sin is death, both as Judeo-Christian faith observes, and as the front lawn cemetery illustrates. Kip reminds Molly that they must break free of the tree, and of sin, or they will all die.

A story helps folks face the world, even when it frightens 'em. And a lie does the opposite. It helps you hide.

-- Molly (Chapter 41)

Importance: Here, Molly comes to the truth about lies and stories. Her lies to Kip about their parents have only hurt both her and Kip, rather than helping them. Stories, in turn, give courage and help people to confront the world. Molly and Kip now return to the Windsor estate to save the Windsors and defeat the Night Gardener.