

# **Pet Sematary Study Guide**

## **Pet Sematary by Stephen King**

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# Plot Summary

*Pet Sematary*, published in 1983, is a fictional exploration of the author's greatest fear. Stephen King has become a much-beloved American author partly due to his ability to tap into primal human fears. Generally his books focus on the universal fears all human beings share of things that go bump in the night. This book, however, delves into the all too realistic fear of losing a loved one, particularly a child. King found himself so frightened by the story he created with *Pet Sematary* that the reluctant author had to be talked into allowing the novel to be published.

The story centers on Louis Creed, a family man and a doctor who is finally beginning to establish himself professionally. The novel begins as the Creed family moves into their beautiful new home in Ludlow, Maine. Louis has recently accepted a position as head physician at the University of Maine student medical facility. The job, and the two-story New England colonial house, marks his new success and begins an idyllic time for him and his wife, Rachel, and their two children, Ellie and Gage. The day they move in, Louis meets their neighbor, Judson Crandall, who quickly becomes both friend and father figure to Louis. Jud and his wife Norma help the Creeds feel at home in Ludlow. Jud shows them around and helps the family explore the vast boundaries of their property. A path on the edge of the Creed property leads up to a pet cemetery, which has been maintained for years by generation after generation of neighborhood children. The sign marking the place is labeled *Pet Sematary* in childish printing.

On Louis' first day of work, a student is hit by a car and dies before Louis' eyes. That night, in either a dream or a vision, the student, Victor Pascow, appears to Louis and warns him never to cross the boundary between the Pet Sematary and the Indian woods beyond it. Meanwhile, Jud warns Louis that the road between their two houses is dangerous, and many animals have fallen victim to speeding trucks on the road. This conversation terrifies Rachel, who has a deep-seated aversion to the idea of mortality, developed in childhood as she watched her sister die a long, painful death. When little Ellie Creed's cat, Winston Churchill (Church), is killed on the road a few days later, Louis is afraid to break the news to Rachel and Ellie. Fortunately, they are out of town visiting Rachel's parents. Louis does not accompany them due to the rift between him and his in-laws.

Rachel and Ellie's absence gives Jud the chance to show Louis the real Pet Sematary. Jud instructs Louis to bring Church's corpse along as they cross the boundary from the Pet Sematary into the Indian woods beyond. The path takes them through what the Micmac Indians called Little God Swamp. The journey is perilous, and the swamp feels haunted. They arrive at an ancient Indian burial ground, where Jud instructs Louis to plant the cat. The place has a power all its own, and Louis feels compelled to comply. The next day, Louis is hardly even surprised when Church returns from the dead. The cat smells awful and acts strange, but when Rachel, Ellie and Gage return, no one seems to notice the difference.



When young Gage is run down and killed by a truck in the road one day, Louis decides to make another trip to the Indian burial ground. Jud implores him not to and tells him the story of another grieving father who once buried his son beyond the Pet Sematary. The boy returned as an evil creature. He knew secrets from beyond the grave and used his terrible knowledge to threaten Jud. The boy's father was finally forced to kill his son and then committed suicide. Louis promises not to bury Gage in the stony ground beyond Little God Swamp, but the place co-opts his free will and lures him back anyway.

Louis sends his family away so that he can exhume Gage from the regular cemetery in town and rebury him in the Pet Sematary. The spirit of Victor Pascow appears to little Ellie in a dream, and she convinces her mother to return to Ludlow to stop whatever awful thing may be about to occur. Rachel races back by airplane and rental car from Chicago while Jud keeps watch from his porch, both of them intent on stopping Louis, although only Jud knows what Louis is up to. The evil power, however, hampers both Jud and Rachel from getting to Louis in time. Louis reburies Gage, and by the time Rachel arrives on the scene, her son is back from the dead and has already killed Jud Crandall. The evil being which now inhabits Gage's body gleefully stabs his mother to death before Louis can stop it. Louis takes morphine from his doctor's bag and puts down the cat as well as his reincarnated son, intending to put an end to the evil once and for all. Yet the power of the place has not let Louis go quite yet. It inspires him to take Rachel's corpse into the woods and bury her there. The end of the novel finds Louis waiting at home for his dead wife to return.



# Part 1, Chapters 1-5

## Part 1, Chapters 1-5 Summary

*Chapter 1:* Stephen King's exploration of mortality and the grieving process begins as the Creed family arrives at their new house in Ludlow, Maine. Having come from Chicago, the family is frustrated and tired from the long journey. Louis Creed is irritated at being cooped up in the car with his apprehensive wife, Rachel, his fidgety children, Ellie and Gage, and Ellie's restless cat, Church (short for Winston Churchill). He briefly entertains a fantasy of leaving his job, home and family and becoming a medic at Disney World. However, his family's joyful reaction to the New England colonial house that Louis had to choose by himself on an earlier scouting trip causes him to forget his ridiculous fantasy immediately. As the family stares with wonder at the house, young Gage utters his first real word: home.

*Chapter 2:* Louis' irritation is reignited practically the moment the family exits the car. First, he cannot find the house keys. Then, while he is searching, Ellie cuts her knee in a fall from the tire swing and begins screaming loud enough to concern any neighbors in the house across the street. As Louis tends to her cut with mercurochrome, Gage begins to scream in pain as well, having been stung by a bee. Surrounded by screaming children and a fretful wife, Louis loses his last ounce of patience. Just then their new neighbor, an elderly man by the name of Judson Crandall, arrives on the scene and advises them to remove the bee's stinger from Gage's neck. His presence lends a measure of calm to the situation, and Louis likes him immediately.

*Chapter 3:* Deftly, Jud Crandall removes the stinger from Gage's neck. Jud's rural New England colloquialisms amuse the Creeds and defuse their tension. Thanks to the small town grapevine, Jud already knows that Louis is the new doctor. Jud suggests that Rachel take the children across the street to the Crandall residence to freshen up a bit. His wife, Norma, would like to meet them, but her arthritis is so bad she doesn't get out of the house much. The moving truck arrives, and Louis still doesn't have his keys. Jud has a set the previous neighbors gave him, and he offers to go home to retrieve them. Before he walks away, young Ellie notices a man-made path at the back edge of the new property. Jud promises to tell her about it sometime.

*Chapter 4:* By the time Jud returns with the keys, Louis has found his set. Louis feels uprooted and displaced by the move. He learns that eighty-three-year-old Jud has lived his entire life in the same house. Jud invites Louis over for a beer once the movers are done. Louis, expecting Jud to ask for free medical advice for his wife's arthritis, hesitates to accept.

*Chapter 5:* By nine in the evening the movers are gone, and the kids are asleep. Louis sends his exhausted wife to bed and heads across the street to take Jud up on that beer. Rachel teases him that Jud and Norma will want free medical advice, and Louis is amazed at how well she knows his mind.



## Part 1, Chapters 1-5 Analysis

The tone established in this early exposition becomes increasingly important as the novel continues. After these early chapters, the Creeds settle into their home and domestic harmony prevails. Louis Creed's character will shortly be established as a loving family man. Here in the early chapters, though, the reader has an opportunity to see into Louis' stony heart. It is often said that a man's true character is revealed in times of trouble. He handles his worries about his new home and job by daydreaming about abandoning his family and hitting his daughter. The negative aspects of Louis, presented here deceptively as a normal human reaction to frustration, are to become integral to the plot later. *Pet Sematary* is not only a story about the fear of losing a child. It is primarily a story about the fear that the dead can see into our hearts. When Louis' loved ones die, they will learn about the secret hateful thoughts to which the reader is already privy, but which Louis never openly expresses to his family.



# Part 1, Chapters 6-10

## Part 1, Chapters 6-10 Summary

*Chapter 6:* Louis returns home later that night feeling petty. The Crandalls do not presume to ask him for free medical advice. In fact, by the time he arrives, Norma is already asleep. Louis feels immediately at home sitting on Jud's screened-in porch. A large truck cruises past them along the road separating their houses. Jud warns Louis about the truck traffic on the road. He refers to the path that Ellie noticed earlier and tells Louis that it leads to a pet cemetery. The road "uses up a lot of animals," warns Jud (pg. 15). Louis mentions that Ellie has a cat. Jud advises Louis to get Church fixed so that the cat will be less likely to cross the road. Louis agrees to consider it, but he loves Church's wildness. Before Jud's warning, he figured that since they were moving to the country, Church could be allowed to roam free. Louis leaves after two beers because he has an early start the next day. The college kids aren't due on campus for two weeks, but Louis needs to familiarize himself with his new medical facility. He checks on his sleeping children and then crawls into bed next to his wife. That night, Louis dreams of driving a medic van at Disneyland, with Gage by his side and Church on the dashboard.

*Chapter 7:* Over the next two weeks, the Creed family begins to settle into their new home. Gage begins sleeping through the night again, but Ellie suffers from pre-kindergarten jitters. Louis' evening beer or two with Jud becomes a habit, and he meets Jud's pleasant wife, Norma. At Louis' own suggestion, she allows him to examine her and review her doctor's prescriptions for her rheumatoid arthritis. To Louis' disappointment, her doctor is doing everything that can be done for her, and he can offer her no relief. Louis takes the day off when Ellie starts kindergarten. Ellie's anxious parents feel somewhat let down when Ellie returns home exhilarated. The day is marred for Louis by a terrifying presentiment of Gage's death. Louis, who does not believe in such things, brushes it off as a result of his anxiety over Ellie's first day.

*Chapter 8:* The following Saturday, Jud arrives and invites Ellie for a walk up the path behind her house. Rachel and Louis, who carries Gage on his back, join Jud and Ellie for the walk to the pet cemetery. The path tops a hill at the back end of the Creed property, and the group pauses to look at the stunning view. The path continues through the woods, and Jud admonishes Ellie never to leave the path or she might get lost in the woods. This causes Rachel to worry about the safety of the path, but Jud assures her that the local children frequent the path to the pet cemetery and maintain it nicely. The family begins to tire as the path continues. Louis marvels at the older man's unflagging energy.

At last the group arrives at the "PET SEMATARY," as the sign over the entrance arch reads. The pet grave markers have obviously been made by the hands of children, but despite their clumsy appearance, Louis notices the odd symmetry of the overall layout. He notices his wife's obvious discomfort in the face of death, which he attributes to the





fact that her younger sister, Zelda, died when Rachel was a child. Rachel has never talked about Zelda, and Louis assumes it's because Zelda died a long, painful death from spinal meningitis, which must have scarred Rachel deeply. Looking more carefully at the pet graves, Louis realizes that they go back many years and form a huge spiral. He finds it odd that children, known for their short attention spans, would have kept the cemetery looking so nice for at least a century, judging by the dates on the markers. Jud warns Ellie away from a blowdown of piled up tree trunks that separates the pet cemetery from the woods beyond. Louis notices that the blowdown seems too artfully random, and its location as a barrier to the Micmac Indian woods seems a little too convenient.

*Chapter 9:* The next day, as Louis works on a hobby model in his study, Ellie comes to him for a father-daughter chat. Skirting the real subject, she starts by asking him if he's rich. A boy at school has told her that all doctors are rich. Louis informs her that many doctors get rich, but he says that it takes time and that it's only the specialists, not general practitioners like himself, who pull in the big bucks. Church enters the room, and a frowning Ellie tells Louis that the boy at school also told her pets don't live as long as people. Louis discusses the subject of death honestly with his daughter, and he holds her as she cries, seeing this as a necessary first step in Ellie's acceptance of one of life's harsh realities. However, the next morning, Rachel is furious with Louis for his honest response to Ellie's questions about Church's mortality. As a doctor, Louis accepts death as a part of life. Rachel, however, stubbornly refuses to entertain the idea that Church will ever die. The argument becomes one of the worst in their marriage, and Louis wonders, not for the first time, how hard Zelda's death must have been on Rachel.

*Chapter 10:* That evening, Jud and Norma ask Louis how Ellie is dealing with her first confrontation with death. The elderly couple tells stories about various children over the years and how the ritual of burying a lost pet has ultimately helped the kids cope with the reality of death. The students are returning to the university the following day, and as Louis leaves, Jud invites him back over tomorrow night to share the details of his first real day on the job. Louis returns home to his sleeping wife, who even in sleep is surrounded by a wall of icy anger. Unable to sleep because of the on-going rift with Rachel, Louis finally gets up and tacks a note to the kitchen bulletin board asking Rachel to call the vet for an appointment to get Church fixed.

## **Part 1, Chapters 6-10 Analysis**

During this section of the novel, the Creed family goes about the business of settling into their new home and community. Life moves forward as Louis acclimatizes himself to his new job and Ellie adjusts to kindergarten. On the surface, things are going well for the Creed family. Louis feels properly prepared for the onrush of students expected on campus soon, and he has even found a treasured new friend in Jud Crandall. However, the seeds of disaster have already been subtly sewn by the author. Stephen King lays the groundwork for the novel's major theme by introducing Rachel's fear of death. The death of her sister, Zelda, has scarred Rachel emotionally to such a degree that she has never even discussed Zelda's death with her husband. The author has yet to reveal the



underlying reason for Rachel's fears, but when he does, the reader will discover a parallel between Rachel's fear and the subsequent events in the novel. Meanwhile, King foreshadows the nature of those events through Jud's warning about the dangerous road.

King does a subtle and masterful job with Louis' characterization in this portion of the text as well. Louis is established as a caring, responsible man who loves his wife and his children deeply. This portrait has emerged from the rather negative introduction of Louis in the first few chapters of the book. Louis' initial thoughts about his daughter Ellie are extremely hostile, and thus in Chapter 7 when Louis thinks that "Most of the time, Ellie was what she had always been - a dear," (pg. 19) the reader is initially surprised to hear such positive thoughts from this formerly negative man. King forces the reader to reevaluate Louis and his relationship with his daughter.

The reader comes to realize that Louis does love his family and that his initial hostility was nothing more than a product of stress and exhaustion. Yet at the very same time, King continues to drop faint hints about Louis' fundamental negativity. One example is the tense argument between Louis and Rachel caused by her excessive fear of death. Certainly the situation is tense, but the couple has been married for ten years and should be able to weather such arguments without fear of losing the relationship. Louis, however, doubts the capacity of his marriage to withstand this situation, as he reveals in Chapter 10. "He supposed it didn't take a great many blows like that before the marriage sustained structural damage...and then one day, instead of reading about it in a note from a friend ('Well, I suppose I ought to tell you before you hear it from someone else, Lou; Maggie and I are splitting...') or in the newspaper, it was you." (pg. 47) With these thoughts, Louis reveals to the reader his lack of commitment and faith, for he truly believes this relatively minor squabble is the sort of thing that ends a marriage.



# Part 1, Chapters 11-15

## Part 1, Chapters 11-15 Summary

*Chapter 11:* At breakfast, Ellie asks her father about the note on the bulletin board. Louis explains that it means Church will not want to cross the road anymore after he sees the vet. Ellie's deep relief makes him understand how upset she must have been over the thought of Church's death. His decision has melted the ice with Rachel as well, and she sends him off to his first day of work with a lingering kiss. Louis is still concerned about Zelda's death, but he has no desire to reopen any wounds by asking Rachel about it now that he's back in her good graces.

*Chapter 12:* The reopened campus is filled with students. Turning into the university, Louis has to stop his car for the sea of bikers and joggers who cross the road with total disregard for vehicular traffic. He parks in his newly reserved parking space and notices with alarm that the ambulance is not in its spot. Inside, Nurse Joan Charlton informs him that the ambulance had to be towed away for service on its leaky radiator. She finishes examining a young co-ed patient and cynically advises Louis that the patient is one of the many hypochondriacs who visit the infirmary usually just prior to final exams. Louis ensconces himself comfortably in his office and works on a mountain of insurance paperwork until Steve Masterson, his physician's assistant, screams for Louis in a panicked voice.

In the waiting room, Louis first notices a huge quantity of blood and two screaming candy strippers. Masterson bends over a young man who bleeds copiously from a gaping hole in his skull. Louis examines his first patient at this new job and instantly realizes the young man is going to die. Even if the ambulance were available, it is already too late. Charlton says she's never seen a situation this grave in all her years at the Student Medical Center. Louis orders her to get a campus police or fire vehicle with a siren to transport the young man to a hospital immediately. Masterson informs him that some students brought the man in a blanket sling, and Louis sends him away to find the students. As Louis is briefly alone with the dying man, the man speaks. He grins evilly and tells Louis the Pet Sematary is not the real cemetery. "'The soil of a man's heart is stonier, Louis,' the dying man whispered. 'A man grows what he can...and tends it.'" (pg. 59) With that the man dies.

*Chapter 13:* As if on cue, the lobby fills with people again as Louis struggles to understand how the dying man could have been capable of speech or of knowing Louis' name and about the Pet Sematary. Louis gropes for control of himself. He learns that the dead man was named Victor Pascow, and was hit by a car while jogging. Louis announces the official time of death and begins to take charge of the situation.

*Chapter 14:* By 4:30 that evening, Louis and the head of Campus Security have made a statement to the press. Pascow was mortally wounded upon being struck by a vehicle. The driver is being held for reckless driving while under the influence and vehicular



manslaughter. At 5:30, Rachel calls. She heard the news on the radio and tells him to come home.

*Chapter 15:* Rachel greets him at the door wearing a net bra and semitransparent panties. She has arranged for a sitter so she can provide him with life-affirming sex. They make love twice, and in between, she feeds him her homemade stroganoff. Afterwards, Louis picks up the kids from the sitter, Missy Dandridge, and returns to an evening of comfortable domesticity at home.

## Part 1, Chapters 11-15 Analysis

This section begins and ends with a show of strength in the Creed marriage. The bitter argument which Louis was convinced would end his marriage is patched up easily, and at the end of this section, Rachel provides Louis with the physical and emotional nourishment he needs after an extremely tough day at the office. However, in between comes a harbinger of ill fortune. Victor Pascow's untimely death and surreal dying words create an element of dramatic tension that will underlie the action from this point until the end of the novel. Stephen King, a master at manipulating dramatic tension, allows this negative event to fade from memory a bit before reviving it with gruesome gusto. Victor's dying words are now spoken to Louis by another man, Jud Crandall. "The soil of a man's heart is stonier, Louis,' the dying man whispered. 'A man grows what he can...and tends it.'" (Chapter 12, pg. 59) This sentiment is particularly frightening given what the reader already knows about Louis' stony heart.



# Part 1, Chapters 16-20

## Part 1, Chapters 16-20 Summary

*Chapter 16:* Late that night, Louis wakes to find Victor Pascow standing in his bedroom doorway. Pascow, with his bashed-in head covered in dried blood, orders Louis to follow him. Louis looks over at his sleeping wife and realizes he must be dreaming. Louis' Uncle Carl, a funeral director, taught the young Louis details about what is done to dead bodies by pathologists and undertakers, and Louis comforts himself with the knowledge that Pascow's body is in an autopsy drawer right now, his skull filled with brown paper. Accepting this visitation as a dream, Louis throws aside the covers and follows Pascow. Pascow walks through the wall to exit the house, but even in his dream, Louis bumps into the hard wood of the wall. He exits through the doorway and finds Pascow waiting for him outside.

Together, Louis and Pascow take the path to the Pet Sematary. The walk is decidedly realistic, and Louis comes to believe he is not dreaming. Pine needles stick to his bare feet and branches poke him rudely along the dark path. At the Pet Sematary, Pascow points to the deadfall that Ellie was playing on just a few days before. It is a writhing mass of moving bones. Terror drives Louis to his knees. Pascow tells him that the power here is old and restless. He exhorts Louis not to cross this barrier, no matter how tempted he may be. Pascow calls this a friendly warning, but Louis could swear that Pascow speaks in a foreign language that Louis somehow understands.

*Chapter 17:* The clicking of the bones from the deadfall becomes the sound of Gage's toy car racing down the hallway as Louis awakens in his own bed. Blissful relief fills his mind, and he is not even annoyed that his wife has intentionally allowed him to oversleep. She calls upstairs that breakfast is ready, and the kids join her downstairs. Rachel calls up again to ask if Louis wants one egg or two. In a hurry due to the hour, Louis throws aside his blankets, but before he can answer his wife's call, he sees the dirt and pine needles under the covers. Rachel's voice moves closer up the stairs. In a panic to hide this bizarre evidence of his night wandering, Louis asks for two eggs. While she prepares them, he gets rid of the evidence and then washes the dirt off his feet and legs in the shower. His fear manifests as hysteria, which he passes off to Rachel as his being in a good mood. At work, he jokes with his colleagues as if all is well.

*Chapter 18:* That morning at work, Louis reviews Pascow's file and finds no possible connection between himself and the dead young man. He calls the morgue and feels reassured to learn that Pascow's body is at a mortuary in Victor's home state. By late afternoon, Louis has found a plausible explanation for the dirt in his bed. He went sleepwalking, probably in response to the distressing events of the previous day. This even explains why Pascow was able to walk through the wall and he was not. He is grateful he managed to return to his bed safely, imagining with horror the prospect of awakening in the Pet Sematary. That evening after dinner, he makes an excuse to go



out. He walks up to the Pet Sematary and sees evidence that he was there in the night. He examines the deadfall, with its dangerous pile of dead tree limbs, and against his will, he finds himself climbing it. The pile starts to crumble, and he jumps down, but not before spotting a path leading from the deadfall further into the woods. That night he lies awake late, afraid of sleep. In the morning, when he finds his sheets and feet clean, he is overcome with relief and finds himself whistling in the shower.

*Chapter 19:* That afternoon, Rachel takes Church to vet to be fixed. Ellie cries all night because she says she cannot sleep without Church. When her tantrum finally subsides, Louis finds her sleeping with Church's cat bed clutched in her arms. Louis pins a note to the cat bed which says, "I WILL BE BACK TOMORROW, LOVE, CHURCH," (pg. 83) and then returns to his bed and makes love to his wife. Church returns the following day. Neither Ellie nor Rachel seems to notice any difference, but Louis is saddened by the lack of feistiness in the cat's eyes.

*Chapter 20:* Early autumn is a good time for the Creed family. As the weather changes from Indian summer to cold rain, the children start looking forward to Halloween. Louis finds his work routine challenging but agreeable. His evening visits to Jud Crandall become a comfortable routine as well. He thinks of Jud as the father he never had. Louis usually returns home before ten, and most evenings he makes love to his wife. Not since they were newlyweds have the Creeds made love so often or so well. Rachel jokes that it's the water. Louis thinks it's the Maine air. Victor Pascow's death begins to fade from memory on campus, although of course the Pascow family continues to grieve. Louis spoke to Mr. Pascow on the telephone. The father wanted reassurance that everything possible was done for his son. Louis still remembers the sleepwalking incident, but he thinks of it like something that happened to someone else, just as he thinks of his one visit to a whore in Chicago six years before.

On Halloween night, the Creeds start out at the Crandalls' house. Only Louis and Ellie go out, because Rachel must stay home with Gage, who has a cold. Norma's arthritic hands drop the candy she tries to put into Ellie's bag. Alone on the porch, Jud and Louis discuss Norma's health. Jud finally asks Louis for medical attention because Norma has been too afraid to see her regular doctor due to her failing health. Suddenly Ellie's panicked voice summons them back into the kitchen, where they find Norma on the floor in cardiac arrest. Louis performs CPR and sends Jud across the road for his medical bag. He gives Norma an Isodil pill, and she comes around. The other trick or treaters and Jud all thank God for Louis' presence and timely intervention. After Norma is loaded onto the ambulance, Louis takes Ellie out trick or treating. He is surprised by Ellie's nonchalant acceptance of Norma's mortality. Since Norma is old, Ellie finds the idea of her dying more natural. That night, Louis wakes to the sound of dragging footsteps on the stairs, and his fears about Pascow return. When he checks the stairs, he finds no one.



## Part 1, Chapters 16-20 Analysis

In this section, Louis reveals a stubbornly rational mind. He is an atheist at heart, but his lack of belief seems rooted in fear of the beyond. Louis' ability to repress Victor Pascow's ghostly visitation appears to be related to Louis' stubborn insistence on believing only in a rational world controlled by living human beings. He cannot accept that something may exist beyond what his rational mind accepts as truth. The seeds which the author plants here are again subtle, but Stephen King seems to indicate that Louis' lack of belief in the beyond stems from his fear of having his stony heart discovered. Given Louis' hidden propensity towards negative thoughts about others, including his loved ones, it makes sense that he would not welcome the idea of a God or supernatural spirits that could see into the dark recesses of his heart.



# Part 1, Chapters 21-25

## Part 1, Chapters 21-25 Summary

*Chapter 21:* The next day, Norma's doctor reports that thanks to Louis' efforts, Norma's heart attack caused only minor damage. As Thanksgiving approaches, snow blankets the town, and Rachel and the kids prepare to spend the holiday in Chicago with Rachel's parents. Louis skips the trip because his in-laws dislike him. Rachel is aware that her parents, the Goldmans, disapprove of Louis because he was poor when she met him and allowed her to work as a waitress to support them while Louis was in medical school. What Rachel doesn't know is that Irwin Goldman tried to give Louis money to break his engagement with Rachel. Louis has never forgiven him. Ten years later, the grandchildren have softened the Goldmans, and Louis knows he could probably work things out with them if he tried. However, he has no desire to do so. He sends his family off, feeling lonely despite the Crandalls' invitation to Thanksgiving dinner.

*Chapter 22:* Louis returns home after Norma's fine meal, only to be jolted out of a nap by the telephone. Jud tells him he better come over right away. There is a dead cat by the road that looks like Church. It is Church, and he is dead. With Norma away at a church function, Jud tells Louis to bring Church and follow him. Bringing a pick and a shovel, Jud leads Louis up to the Pet Sematary. Louis is surprised by how good he feels. Jud tells him that the place has power. He leads Louis over the deadfall. Louis is shocked that the old man would walk over such a dangerous blowdown, but Jud assures him that as long as they don't look down, they are safe. Pascow's warning about not crossing the barrier returns to Louis, who dismisses it. He feels wonderful and willingly follows Jud three miles beyond the barrier into Micmac Indian territory. Jud leads him through the quicksand in Little God Swamp. He tells Louis not to worry if he sees funny shapes in the fog or hears voices. Jud claims such things are only St. Elmo's fire and loons. He refuses to tell Louis where they're going, but Louis feels compelled to follow. The sound of something huge moving through the underbrush reaches the men, and Jud freezes. As the terrifying sound recedes, Jud moves on.

Jud and Louis climb a series of stone steps carved into a cliff. At the top is another burying ground. As in the Pet Sematary, the graves are ordered in a perfect spiral, except these graves are decorated with piles of stones, as cairns. These cairns have all been disturbed. The graveyard is ancient, a Micmac Indian burial ground according to Jud. Jud tells Louis to bury Ellie's cat, and he does, adding a stone cairn at Jud's instruction. Like a sleepwalker, Louis follows Jud back out through the dangerous territory. When they finally reach home, Jud hurries back before Norma returns. Louis asks what they have done. Jud tells him to wait and see, and he tells Louis to keep it secret. "The soil of a man's heart is stonier, Louis - like the soil up there in the old Micmac burying ground. [...] A man grows what he can...and he tends it." (pg. 121) Jud admits to having learned about the place from old Stanny B. and to having buried his own dog there when he was ten. Later that night, Louis recalls that Jud previously told





him his dog had died when he was fourteen, not ten. As he falls asleep, he again hears footsteps on the stairs.

*Chapter 23:* Rachel calls first thing the next morning. Louis, aware he is crossing a line, lies to Rachel about what he did the previous night. When Ellie asks him about Church, Louis goes further over that line and tells her Church is fine. He is planning to pretend that Church simply wandered away, thinking it will be easier for his wife and daughter to accept than the truth.

*Chapter 24:* Louis spends the morning trying to concentrate on an article he's writing for *The Magazine of College Medicine*. He gives up and heads over to Jud's house, where he finds a note from Jud. In the note Jud advises him not to mention Church's death to Ellie. He says a lot of people have buried their animals in that place, even a bull once, but he reminds Louis it's important to keep it secret, even from Rachel and Norma.

*Chapter 25:* Around one in the afternoon, Church returns to the house. Louis is not even surprised. He realizes that subconsciously he's been expecting Church to return. He picks up the cat and examines him. The broken neck is mended. On Church's muzzle is dried blood and bits of the green plastic bag Louis buried him in. Louis is overcome by a dizzy vertigo and puts the cat down. Inside the house, Louis feeds him, disgusted by Church's new habit of smacking his food. The purring cat feels loathsome to Louis and smells like earth. Overcome, Louis goes upstairs to take a hot bath, trying to convince himself that Church was not really dead yesterday, that he buried a live but comatose cat which woke up and found its way home. To Louis' horror, he finds Church staring at him in the tub with murky, yellow-green eyes. Church sways as if drunk. He has lost his natural grace. Louis kicks the cat out of the bathroom, but as he hurries downstairs a few minutes later, he finds Church waiting on the stairs as if intentionally trying to cause Louis to fall.

## Part 1, Chapters 21-25 Analysis

This section reveals the secret of the Pet Sematary. The reader is hardly surprised when the cat dies. The author has been foreshadowing death since the family first arrived at Ludlow. Each time Louis crosses the road to Jud's house, he must pause and wait for a truck to roar past. In fact, when Louis crosses the road to see if the dead cat is indeed Church, he is nearly run down by a speeding truck. Jud, of course, has warned Louis about the danger the road presents to animals, and the Pet Sematary itself foreshadows Church's death. Ellie's natural childlike fear of losing her pet both foreshadows and complicates Church's death for Louis. Had it not been for Rachel's experience with her sister, Zelda, Ellie might have been better prepared to accept the loss of her animal. Ellie has picked up on her mother's unreasonable fear of death and made it her own. Rachel treats death like a dirty secret that must be hidden from the children, and this instigates Louis' desire to hide the cat's death from his family. The seemingly miraculous return of Church hardly quells the reader's fear that further brushes with death await the Creed family.



# Part 1, Chapters 26-30

## Part 1, Chapters 26-30 Summary

*Chapter 26:* That night after Norma goes to bed, Jud tells Louis about Stanny B. Stanley Bouchard was considered a bit crazy by the townspeople, but his family knew the Micmac Indians generations ago when the Bouchards were trappers and traders in the 1800s. The Micmacs stopped using the burial ground, according to the story they told Stanny B.'s grandfather, because a Wendigo soured the land there. Jud explains that the Micmacs told stories about an evil Wendigo that touches human beings and gives them a taste for evil. Jud, however, believes the Wendigo story was made up by the Micmacs to rationalize some incidents of cannibalism within the tribe during particularly brutal winters. Jud thinks the Micmacs buried their human meals in the burying ground and then decided the ground was sour because of it.

In any case, on the day ten-year-old Jud was crying behind the livery stables because his beloved dog, Spot, had to be put down, Stanny B. told him the secret of the burial ground. That afternoon, Jud's father put a bullet in Spot's head. Late that night, Jud snuck out with Stanny B. and buried Spot in the secret cemetery. Stanny told Jud to ignore the St. Elmo's fire and the loon calls. Jud admits that he saw something that night, but he won't even tell Louis what. The next day Spot returned, a round patch of white fur marking the spot where the bullet had entered his head. That night, Jud's father had a man to man talk with his son. His dad already knew about the burying ground, but he demanded to know who had told Jud about it.

Louis can't believe he is listening to this bizarre tale with credulity, but Church's resurrection is all the evidence he needs. Jud's dog Spot came back changed for the worse. Jud also tells Louis about the bull, named Hanratty, which came back so mean that his owner had to shoot him down. Now Jud doubts the wisdom of showing Louis the burial ground. He tries to rationalize his choice, but Louis can read in his eyes that the decision may not have been entirely Jud's. Jud covers his eyes and admits as much. He says the place has some power that brings people back. Even Hanratty's owner took a little girl up to the burial ground after her dog was killed. Jud, regretting his decision, is horrified when Louis asks if anyone has ever buried a person there. He denies it vehemently, but Louis thinks he is lying. Nonetheless, Louis thinks to himself: "*Jud, I didn't go through all that just to kill the damn cat again.*" (pg. 147)

*Chapter 27:* Returning home through his darkened garage, Louis realizes he is drunk. He becomes disoriented in the dark and is overcome by fear wondering where Church might be lurking. Blind in the dark garage, he recalls a Stevie Wonder concert he attended six years ago with Rachel when she was pregnant with Ellie. He stumbles into the station wagon, and just then Church's loathsome tail wraps around his ankles. Louis screams.



*Chapter 28:* The children run to greet Louis as they disembark the plane. Rachel greets her husband wearily. Gage has been sick on the plane. Ellie is relieved to hear Church is fine. She had a dream in which the cat died. By the time they arrive home, Gage has a roaring fever. In the garage, Louis sees a rat corpse, freshly disemboweled by Church. Quickly he covers it up so that his family won't see. After dinner, Ellie calls her cat, and Church lurches into the house. Ellie thinks Church smells bad. Louis suggests the cat might have rolled in something. Later that night, Louis is furious to learn that his in-laws have bought the children whole new wardrobes. Rachel begs him to be kind to her parents, but Louis feels they are trying to buy his children away from him. Ellie wakes up and asks Louis to put the smelly cat outside. Louis is sure he already put Church out, but he does it again. Gage's fever hits a hundred and three, and Rachel decides to keep him in bed with her. Louis sleeps on the hideaway and has a nightmare about killing Church and burying him again. A child's cry comes from the grave in the dream. Louis wakes up to hear Gage crying upstairs. Church lies on his chest, purring. Rachel screams for her husband, and Louis runs upstairs to find Gage choking on his own vomit. He saves his son, and then before he goes to bed, he puts the cat outside for the third time.

*Chapter 29:* By morning, Gage's fever is nearly gone. The family has a good laugh over breakfast, though Louis' laughter borders on hysterical mania. He feels the worst is over.

*Chapter 30:* A week later the entire family except for Louis comes down with bronchitis. Louis is kept busy with similar ailments on campus during this final week of classes. By mid-December, the family is healthy and looking forward to spending Christmas together at home. Louis has reconciled himself to Church's weird presence. The rest of the family doesn't seem to notice his oddity, although Louis realizes that people instinctively avoid touching Church. On Christmas Eve, Rachel and Louis share a magical time putting together the children's toys. Louis is inspired to stamp one of his boots in the fireplace ash, leaving Santa's footprints for Ellie to find in the morning. Rachel is pleased, and Louis tells her she married a winner. Then he gives her the first piece of real jewelry he's ever bought her. Rachel heads up to the bedroom to thank him properly, but before he can join her, he has to clean up a crow corpse left on the doorstep by Church. Louis feels responsible for cleaning up Church's messes. "*A man grows what he can...and tends it.*" (pg. 167)

## Part 1, Chapters 26-30 Analysis

Earlier, in Chapter 20, the reader learns that Louis Creed visited a prostitute six years ago in Chicago. Now in Chapter 27, the author reveals that Rachel was pregnant with Ellie six years ago. The author intersperses these clues throughout the narrative but never directly connects the dots for the reader. Louis' trip to the prostitute is linked with the theme of a man's heart being stony, and that "*A man grows what he can...and tends it.*" (pg. 167) Louis has a deep, dark secret already, and now with the death and resurrection of Church, he has two. In fact, he likens the burial of Church in the Pet Sematary to his trip to the prostitute. Both seem to him to be things that happened to

someone else. In other words, Louis is in denial about his own actions. It is easier for him to pretend that neither of these things ever happened. Yet the fact that Louis cheated on his wife with a prostitute while she was pregnant with their first-born child lurks beneath many of Louis' fears about death and the afterlife. Louis prefers to think there is no afterlife, for if there were, his wife, his children and his in-laws would all one day learn about his gross infidelity. Church's return shakes Louis deeply, causing him to realize that there is something beyond death, and if there is an afterlife, then Louis will ultimately be held accountable for his actions. This theme will be revisited in later chapters, and it fundamentally drives all of the events in the novel, particularly the grand finale.



## Part 1, Chapters 31-35

### Part 1, Chapters 31-35 Summary

*Chapter 31:* The Crandalls' visit on New Year's Eve marks the last time Norma Crandall is in the Creed house. Louis notes her failing health and is not surprised when Rachel calls him at work a month later with news of her death.

*Chapter 32:* Louis leaves work to be with Jud. Together they get drunk, and Jud reminisces about Norma while making the funeral arrangements. Louis realizes how important Jud has become to him, as both friend and father figure. Rachel takes the death badly and tries to hide it from Ellie. Louis has a father-daughter chat with Ellie, which Rachel overhears. His honesty with his daughter inspires Rachel to finally share the gruesome details of her sister Zelda's death. From what Louis can tell, Zelda was clinically insane due to the horrendous pain of her deadly spinal meningitis, and she frightened Rachel badly. Relieved to have shared her story at last, Rachel slips off to sleep that night peacefully.

*Chapter 33:* Louis is a pallbearer at Norma's funeral, which Rachel declines to attend. Ellie takes the funeral well, other than being afraid her dad will drop Norma's coffin. After the funeral, Louis learns that Church has brought another dead rat into the house, and Rachel had to clean up the mess in his absence. Louis is wracked by guilt because he takes personal responsibility for Church's behavior.

*Chapter 34:* Ellie turns six, and life goes on in the Creed household. Jud gets through the first six weeks of intense grief and settles into the long haul of mourning his dead wife.

*Chapter 35:* March 24, 1984 is the last happy day of Louis' life. He spends it flying a kite with his son Gage. It is Gage's first experience with a kite, and the day is wonderful for both father and son. That night, Louis tucks Gage into bed. He finds Church hiding in Gage's closet and on instinct throws one of Gage's toys hard, striking the cat. Louis tucks his son in and watches over him.

### Part 1, Chapters 31-35 Analysis

More is going on in these chapters than the reader yet realizes, and later chapters will cause the reader to reevaluate the events detailed in this section. The author has already established that Louis fears the possibility of an afterlife because he does not want his wife to know that he saw a prostitute during their marriage. Having laid this groundwork regarding Louis, the author now puts Jud in the very same situation, although the reader does not yet know it. It will turn out, in later chapters, that Jud has frequented prostitutes throughout the course of his marriage. Thus, upon the death of his wife, Jud must deal with the possibility that Norma knows everything now. His fear

goes unremarked in this chapter, but in the end, Jud's fear of Norma's reaction to the truth will be his Achilles' heel.



## Part 2, Chapters 36-40

### Part 2, Chapters 36-40 Summary

*Chapter 36:* Gage's funeral is on the seventeenth of May. Louis gets into a fistfight with his father-in-law at the funeral home, which sends Rachel shrieking out of the mortuary. The morning viewing is uneventful. Rachel, so overcome with grief that she cannot dress herself, stays home that morning. Louis eats a bowl of Gage's favorite cereal, Cocoa Bears, and then represents the family at the viewing. Louis is unable to help either his wife or his daughter with their grief because he is busy reliving the final seconds of Gage's life, hoping to create a different outcome. Steve Masterson, however, sees how poorly Rachel and Ellie are coping and prescribes bed rest for them both. He remains at the house to watch over them while Louis goes to the funeral home. Steve tells Louis to get a hold of himself for his wife and daughter's sake, but Louis is still busy reliving his desperate chase to grab Gage before he ran into the road in front of an on-coming truck.

The Goldmans, Rachel's parents, fly in from Chicago, but Steve doesn't allow them to come over to the house while Rachel is still in shock. Louis sees them instead at the funeral home during the morning visitation hours. Louis decides it is time for a rapprochement, but Irwin Goldman refuses to shake Louis' hand. Before the second viewing, Steve Masterson takes Rachel and Louis to lunch and tries again to get Louis to comfort his wife. Louis cannot do it.

*Chapter 37:* At the afternoon viewing, Goldman keeps Rachel away from Louis. He tells Rachel that Gage's death is her fault for marrying Louis, and then he tells Louis the same thing. Louis takes a swing at the old man. Goldman hits him back and kicks Louis while he's down. Louis grabs Goldman's foot and shoves hard, sending him flying into Gage's closed casket, overturning the coffin. Mercifully, the lid stays closed, and Gage's body does not tumble out. At home, Louis apologizes to Rachel. Ellie carries Gage's picture around and eats Cocoa Bears. Louis decides to get drunk. As the beers go down, he begins to think about the Pet Sematary. Jud knocks on the door past midnight, and Louis reluctantly lets him come inside.

*Chapter 38:* Jud has come to talk Louis out of burying Gage in the Pet Sematary. Jud knows Louis has ordered a lighter weight grave liner for Gage's coffin instead of a concrete sealing vault. Jud talks to him about the preternatural influence of the ancient burying ground. He tells Louis the story of Timmy Baterman. Timmy died in World War II. His father, Bill Baterman, went wild when he learned his only son was dead and decided to bury him in the Pet Sematary. Louis tells Jud to get on with the story and be done with it.

*Chapter 39:* Bill Baterman has a funeral hack waiting for his son's body when it arrives by train. The body is taken to a funeral home and buried in Pleasantview Cemetery with full military honors. Timmy was shot down on July 15 and is buried on the 22nd. Mrs.



Baterman has been dead for ten years, and she and Bill have no other children. Four or five days later, Timmy is seen walking the streets of Ludlow. The eyewitnesses report his behavior as strange and menacing. The War Department receives several letters about the supposedly deceased boy and begins to investigate. Jud and three of his friends, aware of what Bill must have done with Timmy's body, take it upon themselves to settle the matter once and for all.

Jud and his friends arrive at the Batermans' and find Bill and Timmy together. Insanity haunts Bill's eyes as he defends his right to get his son back. Timmy smells like a rotting corpse, and he knows things about Jud and his friends. He tells one of the men that his beloved grandson actually hates his guts and only wants his money. He tells another man his wife has been sleeping around. He tells the third man he knows about the funds he's been embezzling. Finally, he calls Jud a whoremonger.

Jud admits to Louis that he went to whores regularly until he was in his mid-seventies. He claims Norma would not have left him if she'd known. Jud says Timmy Baterman was a nice kid. The thing they met that day was a monster. Two nights later, Bill shot Timmy and then lit the house on fire before shooting himself. Finally, Jud tells Louis that he thinks he killed Gage. By taking Louis up to the Pet Sematary, Jud believes he has started a chain of evil - or, rather, that the place has used its evil power to lure Jud and Louis both. Louis promises not to return there.

*Chapter 40:* Luckily, none of this ever happened. When Gage ran toward the road, Louis ran after him and tackled him to the ground moments before the truck roared by. Gage went on to grammar school and eventually became an excellent swimmer. Years later, Gage converts to Catholicism after dating a Catholic girl, whom he eventually does not marry. He wins a gold medal in the Olympics as his proud parents look on. Louis wakes up from this wonderful dream to the stark reality of his son's death. Louis weeps into his hands, wishing for a second chance.

## Part 2, Chapters 36-40 Analysis

This section finally exposes the stony heart of the matter. By presenting Gage's death after the fact instead of chronologically, the author lends a surreal quality to the events. This surreal feeling makes it easier for the reader, and for Louis, to envision bringing his son back to life, or rather back to the half-life that the Pet Sematary provides. Jud, intent on stopping him, tells him that Norma believed Timmy Baterman to be an abomination. As Jud tells the story, Timmy is little more than a zombie. However, the part that Jud finds so frightening is that Timmy "*knew things*." (Chapter 39, pg. 242) The resurrected Baterman boy knows all about Jud's whore-mongering. This, more than anything, frightens Jud, to be forced to face a being who knows all the bad secrets hidden in Jud's heart. Timmy discounts any and all good things Jud has ever done. It is as if he was sent back to judge Jud and his friends.

The central theme of Pet Sematary is revealed, man's fear of a judgment. If Jud believed in truth, forgiveness or redemption, he might not have felt the need to hide the





secrets in his heart from his wife or his maker. Judgment plays a large role in the nightmare at the funeral home as well. In his heart, Louis blames himself for his son's death. This is a natural extension to losing a child, and unfortunately, society often does blame the grief-stricken parents for such a loss. The fact that Rachel's father actually voices that judgment lends depth to what is already a story about every parent's worst nightmare. Louis hates Goldman in part because Goldman judges him and because Louis fears in his heart that Goldman has every reason to judge him.



## Part 2, Chapters 41-45

### Part 2, Chapters 41-45 Summary

*Chapter 41:* At the graveside service, Louis notices how his father-in-law has aged, but he still cannot find any pity in his heart for the man. Jud comforts Ellie. In Jud's eyes, Louis sees an accusation for Louis and Rachel's inability to comfort Ellie themselves.

*Chapter 42:* That evening, Louis tells his wife he is going to get a pizza. He calls ahead to a pizza place very near the cemetery in Pleasantview where Gage is buried. He thinks back on the funeral party. His wife cried on her mother's shoulder as Mr. Goldman looked triumphantly at Louis. He goes to the cemetery, surprised to find the gates still unlocked this evening. He finds Gage's grave and thinks about Timmy Baterman and the bull, Hanratty. He wonders how to handle Gage's return, but he tells himself that he'll deal with that later. First, he must deal with the details of burying Gage in the Pet Sematary. An idea comes to him, and he returns home and quickly convinces his wife to take Ellie and go to Chicago, promising to join them later. Rachel doesn't want to leave, but he insists it's time to make up with her parents and that they should get away from the memories of Gage for a while. Louis, who has some knowledge of the grief process, knows that this is exactly the wrong way to handle grief, but he does not intend to be grieving over Gage for long. Rachel thinks he is hiding something, but he convinces her anyway. Her parents are overjoyed, and that night, Irwin Goldman calls Louis to apologize for misjudging him. Louis is disgusted by the apology, but he pretends to accept it.

*Chapter 43:* The next day, Louis takes what's left of his family to the airport. The Goldmans meet them there. Ellie asks him if he's still angry at her grandfather. Louis is shocked by her prescience, having never discussed the issue with her. Ellie clings to him at the airport. She tells him she's scared because she dreamt that Gage's coffin was empty and that there was dirt in his bed. Louis remembers the dirt in his own bed after Victor Pascow's death, but he tells Ellie it's only a dream. Reluctantly, she leaves him to board the plane with the others.

*Chapter 44:* Louis drives from the airport to a small town across the river called Brewer. Here he purchases a pick, shovel, spade and a length of rope. Nervous about being caught by Jud, Louis doesn't return home. He checks into a Howard Johnson's near the Pleasantview Cemetery. At the motel, he considers his options. If all goes well, he will bury Gage in the Pet Sematary this very night. If Gage returns whole and sound, or perhaps only mildly retarded as Church seems to be, then all will be well. However, if Gage returns as some kind of monster, Louis will give him an overdose of morphine from his medical bag and return his body to Pleasantview. Louis wonders if he will get caught the second time, but then he realizes that he should worry about digging up his son's grave the first time. Louis recalls his fantasy of being a Disney World medic and thinks that may be the best plan if Gage does wake up. The entire family can relocate to Florida under assumed names. Louis' fantasy includes cutting the Goldmans out of their



lives. Meanwhile on the plane, Ellie has a nightmare about Gage, alive and holding a knife from Louis' medical bag.

*Chapter 45:* By the time the plane lands, Ellie is totally terrified. Rachel takes her to the ladies' room at the airport where she dry-heaves into the toilet. Rachel asks what's wrong, and Ellie replies that there's something wrong with Daddy. Rachel remembers her intuition that Louis was hiding something. She asks about Ellie's dream and learns that Ellie dreamt she was in the Pet Sematary with Paxcow (a mispronunciation of Pascow's name), who told her something terrible was going to happen. Rachel searches her memory for the familiar-sounding Paxcow name. Ellie says Paxcow was sent to warn but that he couldn't interfere. Rachel and Ellie return to the Goldmans, who wait at the gate. Suddenly Rachel remembers the name. She asks Ellie if the man's first name is Victor. When Ellie says yes, Rachel tells her parents that something is wrong with Louis. She calls home but gets no answer. She calls Charlton at the university infirmary and asks her to have Louis call if she hears from him. Fear grips Rachel, and it occurs to her that Louis may be contemplating suicide. She calls Jud who is disconcerted to learn that Louis has sent Rachel and Ellie away to Chicago. Rachel can tell he knows something. She tells him about Ellie's dream.

## Part 2, Chapters 41-45 Analysis

The stoniness of Louis' heart is at last unearthed as he plans to exhume his son's body. Louis feels that allowing Gage to die is the worst, most shameful, most unforgivable thing he's ever done. He reacts to it in the way he reacted to previous acts he committed that he felt were unforgivable. Just as Louis covered up the fact that he saw a prostitute when Rachel was pregnant, now Louis wants to cover up Gage's death. His fantasy of running away with Rachel, Ellie and the newly resurrected Gage mirrors his fantasy from Chapter 1 of running away from his family and responsibilities. Unable to face the facts of his life, Louis would rather run. Louis is in denial about Gage's death, and Louis feels ashamed of his previous thoughts and actions regarding his family. If he had been a better father, if he had been a better man - these thoughts torment him, as they must torment any parent who loses a child. Rather than accepting Gage's death as a tragic accident, Louis in his heart takes full responsibility, but it is a responsibility he cannot shoulder. This leads to his desire to revive Gage and run away. What Louis really needs is forgiveness. His wife could probably help him in this area, but Louis' shame over Gage's death is so deep that he cannot allow his wife to help him. He cannot ask for her forgiveness, since that would mean admitting his feelings of culpability.



## Part 2, Chapters 46-50

### Part 2, Chapters 46-50 Summary

*Chapter 46:* After he hangs up with Rachel, Jud checks out the Creed house and finds Louis absent. He notices the Honda Civic hatchback is gone as well. He considers driving to the Pleasantview Cemetery, but he realizes Louis will have to come back to his house to access the Pet Sematary. Jud decides to wait and keep watch for Louis.

*Chapter 47:* Meanwhile, Louis eats dinner at the Howard Johnson's restaurant. Part of him wishes that a friend or acquaintance will see him here. If people start asking questions, Louis will not be able to carry out his plans. In fact, a couple that he knows does show up, but the waitress seats them far away. They do not notice Louis. He returns to his room and watches television to pass the time. At eleven o'clock, he snaps off the TV set and leaves.

*Chapter 48:* Rachel's parents think her desire to return to Ludlow is grief-induced insanity. While Louis is eating at the Howard Johnson's, Rachel is on the phone to the airlines for a ticket back. The airline says they can get her to Ludlow, but there will be several connections due to the last-minute arrangements. Rachel speaks to Ellie again, who has perked up a bit since her mother's decision to return home. Rachel asks if she recalls anything else from the dream. Ellie does not, but she tells her mom it's important to go back. Rachel feels the same fear as Ellie now.

*Chapter 49:* Louis finds the practicalities of unearthing his son's grave a challenge. The nine-foot-tall cemetery gates are locked. Because of the nasty iron points at the top, Louis doesn't think he can safely climb the fence. He tosses his canvas roll filled with his digging tools over the fence, and then he skirts the fence for two blocks until he sees a tree with a branch overhanging it. Louis climbs the tree, and after much effort, he drops into the cemetery, hitting his knee on a tombstone in the process. Painfully, he walks along the fence back to where his tools are and then finds Gage's gravesite. He unrolls the canvas tarp and begins digging in the light of his hooded flashlight. By one in the morning, his shovel hits the cement grave-liner covering his son's buried casket. Threading the rope through the iron rings on the grave-liner, he opens it up and then breaks the latch on the coffin itself.

*Chapter 50:* Rachel misses her connection in Boston shortly after eleven in the evening. The ticket agent suggests that she rent a car to travel the rest of the way.

### Part 2, Chapters 46-50 Analysis

The power of the Pet Sematary has Louis in its thrall, and in this section, he crosses the line between family man and grave-robbing criminal. Louis is surprised at how quickly that line can be crossed. It only takes one or two actions and choices to make Louis a wanted man. His deeds have not yet been discovered, but when they are, everyone will



assume that he has gone insane and perhaps even killed Gage intentionally. After all, who would believe the story of the Pet Sematary? Being discovered with the corpse of one's child a couple of days after the burial is not something easily explained away. Louis is partly determined to go through with his plan and partly desperate to be stopped. His subtle cries for help go unnoticed by his grieving wife until she is already in Chicago. That is when she realizes that the emotion she saw on Louis' face was naked fear. This, more than anything, convinces her to go back. However, the evil power is determined to have its way. It has used Louis' fears and shameful secrets to turn him into a pawn. Louis' grief over his son's death is the lifeblood which feeds the power, and the power is only intent on increasing Louis' grief in order to increase its own food supply.



## Part 2, Chapters 51-57

### Part 2, Chapters 51-57 Summary

*Chapter 51:* When Louis opens the grave, the smell hits him full force. He is horrified to see that Gage's head is missing. When he looks again, he realizes the head is still there. It has merely been overgrown with dark moss. He worries about being caught, but at this point Louis is so far gone that if someone did catch him, he would bash the person's head in with his shovel. Fighting back his fear, he lifts Gage's body from the coffin and rocks his son in the darkened graveyard. By 1:45 a.m., Louis has finished filling in the hole. He wraps Gage's body in the tarpaulin and leaves to find a way out of the cemetery. He notices the artificial hill that hides the cemetery crypt. It rises to nearly the height of the fence. Louis tosses his tools over the fence and then gets Gage's body. He has to toss that over as well. It lands with a sickening thud. Finally, he swings himself over. Louis has to make two trips to his car, first with the tools and then with Gage. At the Honda, he cannot find his keys. Finally he realizes he has left them in the ignition. Gage doesn't fit in the hatchback. Just as headlights from an oncoming car approach, Louis shoves the body in the passenger seat.

*Chapter 52:* At one in the morning, Rachel calls Jud. The phone wakes him, and she hears the fear in his voice. When he learns that she is two hours away by car, he advises her to get a motel and get some sleep, promising to watch for Louis himself. Rachel begs to know what is going on, but Jud says he will tell her later. He promises her he can handle it and that things will get no worse.

*Chapter 53:* Louis parks in his garage and makes a sling for Gage's body. Twenty minutes later, he is at the Pet Sematary. Here he rests for twenty minutes before climbing the deadfall.

*Chapter 54:* Rachel pulls into a Holiday Inn parking lot, trying to imagine what is going on at home. She does not really believe Louis is suicidal, but clearly something is happening. Just as clearly, Jud knows all about it. She thinks of the look on Louis' face when he sent her away. Not only was he lying, but he was also scared. This startles her because Louis is never scared. She peels out of the hotel parking lot and gets back on the road.

*Chapter 55:* Louis traverses the dangerous trail leading to the ancient burial ground. When he came before, with Jud, Louis was unable to remember the trip. Now, however, everything is familiar, and he remembers his previous trip down the trail clearly. He hears a sobbing laugh and tells himself it's only a loon. The sound follows him, but he ignores it. He sees a face hanging in the air in front of him. He tells himself it's St. Elmo's fire, although he can see the grisly details of the head, tongue and scaly face. Suddenly he comes to a complete halt. Something is coming. Whatever it is, it's huge, and Louis is terrified. "*The Wendigo, dear Christ, that was the Wendigo - the creature that [...] can touch you and turn you into a cannibal. That was it. The Wendigo has just*



*passed within sixty yards of me.*" (pg. 329) He moves on after it passes and finds the stone steps. He climbs them and is filled again with that odd exhilaration. At the top, he sees the huge spiral shape created by the graves and wonders if anyone has ever seen it from the air. All of the cairns have been disturbed, as each grave's occupant found its way free. Louis begins to dig.

*Chapter 56:* Rachel slaps her face to stay awake on the road. Twice she falls asleep going sixty miles an hour and brushes the guardrails. The sleepiness does not seem natural. "*Something is trying to keep me away from him.*" (pg. 333) Rachel stops for coffee, but after slamming down three cups, her rental car will not start. She begins to cry.

*Chapter 57:* Exhausted, Louis finds himself almost back at the Pet Sematary. He briefly considers sleeping right where he is. The false comfort of that thought feels like the evil power talking, so he forces himself up and reaches the deadfall ten minutes later. One the other side of the deadfall, something moves. It is a stealthy, sneaky sound. He calls his son's name, but then he realizes it's too early. It's not Gage over there. He flees toward the house. Back home, he finds that Church has gotten inside again. He looks at his body and sees that it is a mass of bruises, cuts and swelling. In the bathroom, he finds his black doctor's bag and checks to make sure there is enough morphine and syringes if needed. He leaves the bag by his bed and falls asleep. In his dream, he, Gage and Church ride together in the medic van at Disney World. They fight Oz the Gweat and Tewwible, as Rachel's dead sister Zelda pronounced the Wizard of Oz' name. In Louis' dream, Oz represents death, and he and Gage ride around preventing it in the medical van. Just before dawn, footsteps echo up the stairs. Louis sleeps on, as a small hand reaches into his medical bag and comes out with something gleaming and silver.

## Part 2, Chapters 51-57 Analysis

The spiral shape of the graves in the ancient burial ground symbolizes infinity, in this case, the infinite power of evil. Likewise, the action in this chapter spins towards the story's conclusion. The four characters of Louis, Gage, Rachel and Jud spiral together from their respective positions and will all converge in a final showdown. Author Stephen King builds dramatic tension by moving back and forth in time. As Louis prepares to leave the cemetery at one in the morning, the next chapter shows Rachel at eleven in the evening, en route to intercept Louis. The time sequence moves forward and back during these critical hours, and the reader waits with breathless anticipation to see if Jud or Rachel will be at the right place at the right time to stop Louis.



## Part 3, Chapter 58-Epilogue

### Part 3, Chapter 58-Epilogue Summary

*Chapter 58:* Jud wakes suddenly, startled by some noise. He calls himself a stupid old man when he realizes that he has slept till nearly dawn. He calls for Louis, but he knows somehow that the footsteps he hears don't belong to his friend. The smell enters as the door swings open. Church enters the room. Jud backs away and kicks at the purring cat. He tells himself it might not be too late. Gage can be killed again. He backs into the kitchen and grabs a meat cleaver from the drawer. Gage enters, grinning at Jud. Gage says he's come to send Jud to hell. Jud holds up the cleaver and tells him to come and get it. Jud reminds himself not to be tricked by the evil thing. It may look like Gage, but it's not. Gage tells Jud that Norma slept with every one of Jud's friends. Norma's voice issues from Gage's mouth, laughing at Jud and telling him she knew all about his whores. Furious and upset, Jud springs at Gage, only to be tripped up by Church. Too late, Jud realizes he's been fooled by the evil thing again. Gage raises a surgical scalpel over Jud's prone body and brings it down again and again.

*Chapter 59:* A truck driver repairs Rachel's rental car. He's surprised that a car as new as this would have such a problem. He accepts no money, and Rachel drives towards Ludlow. She goes directly to Jud's house. She finds the front door open and muddy tracks on the mat. The tracks are tiny, and she thinks of Gage. The doorbell sounds too loud. In response, she hears Church's aggravated meow. She walks inside and finds Church licking blood off his whiskers. She calls for Jud but gets no answer. She hears a groan from upstairs and starts up the steps. Upstairs she finds her dead sister Zelda, reaching for her, ready to kill Rachel as Rachel always feared she would. No, it is not Zelda. It is Gage. Rachel cries out for her son and opens her arms. He runs to her, one hand behind his back.

*Chapter 60:* Louis wakes up to full sunlight. The pain of the previous night's exertions makes movement virtually impossible. Eventually he is able to get himself out of bed. Looking out the window, he sees a strange car parked at Jud's house. Church sits on top of the car. Telling himself everything is well and that his son will be back soon, Louis goes downstairs to fix breakfast. He looks out the window again at the car, feeling that it means trouble. As he begins breakfast, the telephone rings. Louis is afraid to answer. He believes that whatever trouble he started last night will be revealed to him by that ringing phone. He picks it up. It is Irwin Goldman calling to see if Rachel got in all right. Suddenly Louis understands the meaning of the strange car at Jud's house. He understands everything. He tells Goldman that Rachel is fine but that she has gone out to the store. Goldman is frightened because Ellie has had another dream. This one was so bad that they took her to a doctor, who sedated her. Goldman and his wife are both scared because Ellie dreamt that Oz the Gweat and Tewwible has killed her mother. Ellie pronounced it exactly as Zelda had pronounced it, and Goldman doesn't think Ellie knows that much about her late aunt Zelda. Goldman tells Louis that Ellie needs them. Louis promises he and Rachel will come to Chicago as soon as possible.





Louis hangs up in a daze. He feels the urge to kidnap Ellie from her in-laws and flee. Still, Louis knows that Gage will follow them. He wonders how he could have been so stupid. *"Grief, not stupidity, Louis. There is a difference...small, but vital. The battery that burying ground survives on. Growing in power, Jud said, and of course he was right - and you're part of its power now. It has fed on your grief...no, more than that. It's doubled it, cubed it, raised it to the nth power."* Louis realizes that he is supposed to commit suicide now. He already knows he's lost Rachel and Jud in addition to Gage. Louis cannot leave Gage out there, though, not the way he is. On the stairway, he sees Gage's footprints. They lead right to the medical bag. He sees his scalpel missing, and a sound of despair issues from his throat. Downstairs, he uses the can opener and exits his house through the garage.

*Chapter 61:* Louis crosses the road and puts a can of cat food down in front of Church. While the cat eats, he grabs it and sinks a syringe into its body. The cat goes wild, but Louis hangs on long enough to depress the plunger on the syringe. Louis glances inside the rental car and sees Rachel's purse and airline tickets on the front seat. When he looks up again, Church is dead, again. Inside Jud's house, Louis calls out for Gage. In the kitchen, he finds Jud's dead body in a pool of blood. Louis recalls Jud's belief that Jud set Gage's death in motion by taking Louis to bury Church in the Pet Sematary. Now Louis wonders if it didn't start well before that. Stanny B. told Jud, and he had been told before that by his own father, who had known the Micmac Indians.

Louis hears a noise upstairs and moves towards it. He finds Rachel's blood-drenched body in the hallway and begins to scream. In mid-scream, he sees Gage. Gage's mouth is smeared with blood, and he's grinning. He holds Louis' scalpel. Gage brings it down, but Louis ducks. Gage falls over awkwardly, as clumsy as Church was. Louis pins his son to the floor and jams two syringes into his small body. As Gage dies, he looks at his father, and for one moment, Louis sees his real son beneath the monster. For two hours after Gage's death, Louis lies in the fetal position in a corner with his thumb in his mouth. A while later, an idea comes to him. He gets up and wraps his wife's body lovingly in a sheet. Humming as he works, he douses Jud's home with gasoline and lights a match.

*Chapter 62:* Steve Masterson drives to the Creed home, deeply worried about Louis. Charlton has told him of Rachel's telephone call from the previous evening, and Steve is plagued by a nasty feeling that something is very wrong. He sees the smoke from Jud's house when he parks in Louis' driveway. Steve watches the neighbors gather at a safe distance from the flames, and he hears the fire engine approaching. He turns back to Louis' house, and from the corner of his eye he sees Louis moving up the path beyond the house, carrying a white bundle. His instincts tell him he needs to stop Louis, but his fear keeps him rooted in place. Finally, he makes up his mind and breaks into a run as he chases Louis down the path.

As Steve catches up to Louis, he sees a woman's foot dangling from the sheet Louis carries. Louis' hair has gone white. With a sick certainty, Steve realizes that Louis is carrying Rachel's body. Steve screams at Louis to stop, but Louis has reached the deadfall and continues to the other side. Only then does he turn back to look at Steve.



Louis tells Steve he's going to bury Rachel and asks if Steve will help. Louis explains that he waited too long with Gage but that things will be different with Rachel. Steve can see that Louis has gone insane. Louis disappears down the path after asking Steve for help again. Steve pauses a moment and then starts to cross the deadfall. A wild exhilaration comes over him as he reaches the top. Louis turns back and informs him if he hears sounds like voices it is only the loons. Steve feels pulled towards Louis, and a desire to help him bury Rachel fills his mind. Then a branch snaps on the deadfall underneath him, and he comes back to himself.

*"She's dead and I think that maybe Louis has killed her, Louis has gone mad, utterly mad, but - But there was something worse than madness here - something much, much worse."* (pg. 371)

Steve can feel the woods pulling at him like a powerful magnetic force. Suddenly the force abates, as if it has chosen to let Steve go for some reason. He topples back over the deadfall to the Pet Sematary side. Then he hears laughter from the other side. He runs away as fast as he can. He calls in sick to work and spends the day in bed. Steve never really remembers what he saw that day in the woods, but the nightmares haunt him for a long time. He never returns to Ludlow, and the following year he takes a job across the country in St. Louis.

*Epilogue:* The police visit Louis that afternoon with routine questions about the fire. Louis wears gardening gloves and a hat so that the police don't see his white hair or bloody hands. They seem satisfied with his answers. After they leave, he plays solitaire late into the night. When the back door opens, he does not even turn around. He remembers Jud's admonition to the effect that a man reaps what he sows.

"A cold hand fell on Louis's shoulder. Rachel's voice was grating, full of dirt. "'Darling,' it said."

## Part 3, Chapter 58-Epilogue Analysis

In Chapter 61, Louis voices the truth about the ancient burial ground, which the author also endeavors to show in symbolic fashion. Louis realizes that the cycle of death and destruction stretches back much further than Church's death. The evil power in the burial ground has been operating through the people of Ludlow for many generations. Jud feared that he was responsible for Gage's death by initiating Louis into the secret of the Pet Sematary. However, Jud himself was initiated when he was a child, and Louis realizes that the power of the evil spirit inhabiting the Micmac Indian land encompasses all evil and all death. The forces of both good - as symbolized by Victor Pascow's attempts to warn Louis away - and evil set in motion by the Pet Sematary draw from an all-knowing spiritual plane. This all-knowing plane gives Pascow the knowledge he needs to warn Louis, and it gives young Ellie the dream about Oz the Gweat and Tewwible.



Whether this all-knowing consciousness is good or evil, judgmental or forgiving, is the question Louis must face. When his wife's corpse returns from the dead, Louis does not even turn to face it or defend himself. He has tried and convicted himself for his actions with respect to his marriage and family, and he feels the need to accept the punishment that the evil Rachel will most likely mete out. Now that Rachel has died and come back, she has full knowledge of the things that Louis hid from her in life. In life, she may have been able to find forgiveness for her husband. However, now that the evil of the Pet Sematary controls her mind, it seems certain that she will seek deadly revenge on Louis.



# Characters

## Louis Creed

Louis Creed is a likeable guy. On the surface, he has a lot going for him and many fine qualities. Louis has worked his way up from his impoverished childhood to a position as head doctor and administrator at the University of Maine Student Medical Center. Louis' choice of career demonstrates his patience and maturity. Not only does he have the patience and faith to obtain the schooling required to be a doctor, but he knows his personal strengths and weaknesses well enough to choose the right career area in the medical field. Louis likes diversity, and therefore he eschews the more lucrative careers available to specialists. He chooses to be a general practitioner knowing that he will be more satisfied with such a diverse patient-load in the long run. Louis is also a patient and loving father, for the most part. The father-daughter talks he has with Ellie demonstrate his wisdom and maturity. He does not lie to his daughter about the inevitability of death. He merely holds onto her as she cries and does his best to help her learn this difficult life lesson. Louis values his work and his family, and he has the potential to be an extremely decent guy.

Louis' fatal flaw is his lack of confidence in himself. He allows this lack of confidence to erode every positive thing he creates in his life. When Rachel gets upset that he tells Ellie the truth about dying, Louis shifts his position and begins to lie to Ellie instead of trusting that his wisdom is capable of teaching both his wife and his daughter something important. He also erodes his marriage by lying to his wife and cheating on her with a prostitute. Louis does not trust that Rachel will understand his deeper emotions. He assumes she is emotionally fragile, and so he cheats on her emotionally by not letting her past his defenses. Perhaps part of Louis agrees with his father-in-law's assessment that he is not good enough for Rachel, and therefore Louis would rather pretend to be perfect than to let Rachel see his very human and understandable imperfections. Such a drive for perfection, illustrated by the scene in which he presents Rachel with the first piece of real jewelry he's ever been able to afford, leads Louis to behave in terrible ways, specifically by seeking out a prostitute when Rachel is pregnant. If Louis allowed himself to voice his natural fears about fathering a child and accepted that such fears are normal and do not make him a lesser human being, he might have felt comfortable discussing them with his wife. She certainly would have preferred this to the alternative he chose for dealing with those fears.

## Rachel Creed

Rachel's character is developed nearly exclusively through the eyes of her husband, who tends to underestimate her ability to deal with life. Louis has a pattern of lying to his wife that he does not recognize, thinking he is merely protecting her. He lies to her during their engagement by not telling her that her father tried to pay off Louis to break the engagement. For ten years after this incident, Louis maintains the secret. He thinks



he is shielding her, but he is actually denying her the opportunity to stand up for him to her father. Louis' secrecy prevents her from healing her relationship with her parents, and instead she becomes an object over which Louis and Irwin Goldman play tug of war.

Rachel is also unaware that Louis visited a prostitute when she was pregnant with their first child. Louis is perhaps the type of guy who tells himself he's protecting his wife by not sharing with her his natural fears about having a baby. Such misguided nobility has led Louis to break his marriage vows with paid sex during a time in her life when Rachel most needed his support. Thus, given that Louis treats his wife as an object to be managed rather than a person to relate to, the reader gains little sense of Rachel's inner world through her husband's eyes.

Only at the end of the novel does the narrative switch to Rachel's point of view. Here the reader learns that she is much stronger than her husband has given her credit for, and her race to save Louis from himself adds to the excitement of the climax. When she returns in the end, inhabited by the evil power of the ancient burial ground, Louis is finally ready to face up to the lies he has told her. In death, she presumably knows everything. If he had told her his secrets while she was still alive, she likely would have worked to forgive Louis. However, the evil creature that returns from the burial ground in her body is not likely to be so forgiving.

## **Gage Creed**

Young Gage is learning to speak as the novel begins. He is still young enough to be called a baby, but he is almost to the age where he can walk on his own. By the midpoint in the novel, shortly before his death, Gage is able to stand and fly a kite with his father, Louis. Gage's untimely death is the subject of this book, which deals primarily with the loss of a child.

## **Eileen (Ellie) Creed**

Ellie Creed is Rachel and Louis' oldest child. She turns six years old during the course of the novel. Her character is written thoughtfully and with knowledge of the combination of naivety and sophistication that inhabit a child her age. However, her purpose in the story is largely that of a catalyst. Ellie's entry in kindergarten serves to remind Louis of his own mortality. The fact that his daughter is growing up makes him realize that he will get old and that his own time will pass. In this way, her character helps foreshadow the theme of death in the novel. She is also the catalyst that spurs the dramatic climax. Because of the disturbing dreams Ellie has about Louis, Rachel decides she must return home to avert what may be an impending catastrophe. Because she is young and innocent, her character has an easier time accepting her dreams as a true warning. She is not impeded by logic or experience, and she trusts the gut instinct which warns her that her father is in mortal danger.



## Judson (Jud) Crandall

When Louis Creed meets Jud Crandall for the first time, he instantly takes to him. This is unusual for Louis, who generally requires some time to warm up to people. However Jud's easy presence and matter-of-fact demeanor restore calm to the Creed family during their hectic moving day. The initial impression the author gives of Jud is of a salt-of-the-earth man whose faith in the life process has been tempered by time and wisdom. Jud is not one to get upset when something goes wrong. His life experience and stable home life have taught him that life goes on no matter how bad things may seem today. That wise attitude has helped Jud cope with the everyday trials of life, and no matter what happens, he does not panic, knowing that a calm response will get better results. Jud also has the ability to appreciate the little things in life and knows that they matter most in the end.

However, this picture of Jud is subsequently overlaid with some very dark colors. Jud is hiding a terrible secret, and he involves his friend Louis in that secret without really giving Louis a chance to say no. After Church dies, Jud takes Louis up to the Pet Sematary without explaining his motives. When Church returns, alive but changed, Jud at first tries to justify his decision to revive Church, but later he repents his actions entirely. By the end of the novel, Jud feels that he has corrupted Louis Creed by introducing him to the evil powers of the Pet Sematary. Also by the end of the novel, the reader learns that Jud is not what he seems. He admits to having frequented prostitutes for fifty of the fifty-eight years of his marriage. This makes Jud a cheater, a man who shrinks from the challenges and joys of an intimate relationship, preferring to seek out honesty and intimacy with a prostitute rather than embracing his wife in this sense. His supposedly stable home life has been anything but stable, and the reader learns that Jud does not possess the very qualities that Louis appreciates about him.

## Norma Crandall

Norma Crandall is the Creeds' neighbor and the wife of Judson Crandall. Norma is plagued by rheumatoid arthritis, and when Louis first meets the Crandalls, he fears that they will pester him for free medical advice for Norma's condition. However, upon meeting the Crandalls, Louis is so charmed by the elderly couple that he volunteers his services. Louis is disappointed to determine that there is nothing he can do for Norma's arthritis that her regular doctor is not already doing. However, on Halloween night, Louis winds up saving her life when she goes into cardiac arrest. Had Louis not been present at the time, Norma would most likely have died. Unfortunately, this small miracle is short lived. Three months later, Norma's death upsets their peaceful lives. Ellie and Rachel, who are both having a hard time dealing with the concept of death in general, are able to accept Norma's death. Although they miss their dear neighbor, they realize that Norma lived a full life. Therefore, her death seems more natural than the death of someone in his or her prime.



Norma's death plagues Jud in more than just the usual sense of mourning his wife of fifty-eight years. As the story nears its climax, the reader learns that Jud has been a regular customer of prostitutes for half a century. Jud kept this disturbing news from Norma. However, upon her death, Jud must face the possibility that if the soul goes on, then Norma most likely knows all of his secrets. Jud's view of the afterlife, colored by the Pet Sematary, leads him to believe that Norma will want to take revenge on him. At the end when Gage is resurrected, Gage tricks Jud by speaking in Norma's voice and informing him that not only did Norma know about Jud's whores, but that Norma was herself a whore and slept with all of Jud's friends. Whether or not this is true, it serves to upset Jud so badly that he loses the showdown with the evil baby Gage.

## **Irwin Goldman**

Irwin Goldman is Louis' rich father-in-law from the tiny Chicago suburb of Lake Forest, Illinois. The bad blood between the two men stems from the incident ten years prior when Goldman tried to bribe Louis into breaking off his engagement to Rachel. Goldman hated Louis then because Louis came from an impoverished background. Later, Goldman comes to resent Louis further for expecting Rachel to support him while he completes medical school. After Gage's death, their mutual resentment comes to a head when Goldman blames Louis for the death of his grandson. This accusation results in a fistfight in the funeral home, which sends Goldman crashing into Gage's casket.

## **Victor Pascow**

On Louis' first day of work, Victor Pascow bleeds to death in the infirmary foyer. Later, his ghost appears to both Louis and Ellie in dreams and tries to warn them away from the Pet Sematary.

## **Joan Charlton**

Not even Joan Charlton's boss and co-workers at the University Medical Center dare call this tough old bird by her first name. Sometimes Louis cringes at Charlton's cynically harsh attitude, but mainly he is grateful to have such a no-nonsense woman on his staff.

## **Steve Masterson**

Steve is the physician's assistant at the University of Maine. Although he is Louis' assistant, he has worked there for several years and thus is responsible for orienting Louis to his new job. Steve becomes Louis' racquetball buddy, and in the wake of Gage's death, the family relies on him for emotional support.



# Objects/Places

## The Path

There is a neat and well-maintained path leading from the back of the Creed property to the Pet Sematary. This path is somehow luminous and attracts the eye.

## The Pet Sematary

The Pet Sematary has been maintained by area children for at least a century and probably much longer. While the concept of burying one's beloved pet is not necessarily morbid, the fact that the children spend a great deal of time and effort maintaining the graves is obsessive and bizarre.

## The Deadfall

The deadfall, or blowdown, is a pile of dead trees which serves as the barrier between the Pet Sematary and the dangerous terrain beyond. As Victor Pascow warns Louis Creed, the barrier is not meant to be crossed.

## The Micmac Burying Ground

Also known as the *real* Pet Sematary, the ancient Micmac Indian burial ground has the power to reincarnate dead bodies. Unfortunately, the bodies come back possessed by an evil spirit. The place has a power to lure people in and feeds on their grief. It has the power to lead people and animals to their deaths as well, causing more grief for the evil spirits to feed on.

## The Road

The road, or *the rud*, as Jud pronounces it in his New England twang, runs between the Crandall home and the Creed home. Large trucks frequently speed by on the road, and over the years passing vehicles have killed many animals. Both the Creeds' cat and their youngest son, Gage, fall prey to the dangerous road.

## Jud's Porch

Jud Crandall's screened-in front porch is the place where Louis feels most comfortable. The time he spends here with Jud gives him a sense of belonging and acceptance in Ludlow.





## **Little God Swamp**

Of all the dangerous terrain leading to the ancient Micmac burial ground, Little God Swamp is by far the most dangerous. It is full of quicksand and disgusting ooze, and it is home to evil spirits.

## **University Medical Center**

Louis Creed moves his family from Chicago to Ludlow, Maine in order to take a job at the University of Maine infirmary. Here he is the head doctor and administrator, which represents a significant step up the ladder for Louis.

## **Cocoa Bears**

Cocoa Bears is Gage's favorite breakfast cereal. After his death, both his sister and father start eating them, too.

## **The Bulletin Board**

The bulletin board in the Creeds' kitchen is covered with phone messages, reminders and bills. Across the top in neat capital letters, Rachel has labeled the board's contents as "THINGS TO PUT OFF AS LONG AS POSSIBLE." To settle their argument over Church's mortality, Louis tacks a note to this board asking Rachel to call the vet for an appointment to neuter the cat.

## Social Concerns And Themes

Generally considered to be Stephen King's most frightening and disquieting work (a view which he himself apparently shares), *Pet Sematary* is also a relatively complex novel in terms of the diversity and intertwining of its various themes and social concerns. Since the core of the narrative involves that most basic of human attempts to interfere with the natural order - the recalling to life of those who have died — the seemingly timeless problem of distinguishing between the province of the gods and that of man — is immediately set squarely before the reader's eyes. As if to emphasize this distinction through dramatic counterpoint, King prefaces various sections of the novel with a number of New Testament quotations concerning Jesus's raising of Lazarus from the dead.

Further, by making his protagonist a man of science — in this instance a medical doctor — he echoes an essentially dyspromethian view of human scientific endeavor which has been recurrent in literature from Mary Shelley onwards.

At another level of thematic interest, King returns to the notion of the "Bad Place" explored in *The Shining* (1977) and elsewhere. In this case it is the ancient burial ground of largely defunct Micmac Indians, a place loaded with culturally specific mythic dread and whose evil power, long dormant, is once again stirring. Moreover, as is generally the case in King's treatment of such themes, there is present the assertion that evil can only accomplish its purposes through the control and ultimate absorption of human subjects.

This work is again pervaded by an air of helplessness (indeed, with the possible exception of *Cujo*, this is undoubtedly King's most darkly pessimistic statement on the human condition), but in delicate contrabalance to the novel's largely naturalistic framework there is added another factor only hinted at in *The Shining* — that of moral responsibility for one's acts.

Throughout the novel one seemingly enigmatic phrase recurs in leitmotif fashion at significant points in the action — "A man grows what he can...

and tends it" — and it is only gradually that the reader, as well as protagonist Louis Creed, comes to understand and appreciate its full metaphorical implications. This insistence upon the inescapable effects of moral responsibility, so dominant a feature in King's later works, may well provide the key to understanding and accepting an ending to the novel which some readers have found too horrifying even to contemplate.

## Techniques

Perhaps more than in any of his other works, the dramatic effectiveness of Stephen King's prose style is evident in *Pet Sematary*. The use of italics and other typographical devices — a practice he occasionally overworks in other novels — here functions especially well as a means of gauging characters' inner states, and all of the stylistic touches familiar to King readers, from the prevalence of brand name products to the most wrenchingly visceral of images (e.g., Gage Creed's baseball cap lying in the highway, filled with blood), seem here harnessed directly to the novel's unrelenting force of statement.

As in *The Shining*, King makes effective use of multiple point of view and of a structure which establishes a sense of comforting, leisurely normalcy in its early stages, to be counterbalanced by an ever intensifying aura of horror as the novel proceeds inexorably to its conclusion.



# Themes

## Loss

The grieving process, or how mankind deals with loss, is the core concept behind *Pet Sematary*. Stephen King does a nice job of presenting the clinical stages of grief and the emotionally wrenching feelings that accompany those stages. It is easy to understand, intellectually, that denial is a part of the grieving process. It is significantly harder for Louis to accept that he is in denial about Gage's death because he is in the thrall of painful emotions. *Pet Sematary* is an exploration of every parent's greatest nightmare, the loss of a child. The author, a father himself, deals with these fears in a moving and realistic fashion. The characters of Rachel, Ellie and Gage are drawn with such attention to detail that the reader becomes emotionally invested in the success and happiness of the Creed family. Even Louis, with all his flaws, desperately loves his family, and this is his most redeeming quality.

Louis' occasionally negative attitude towards his wife and children always comes in direct response to his fear of losing them. When Louis fears the loss of his family, he protects himself emotionally by momentarily convincing himself that they are a burden with which he is plagued. His true feeling for his family is one of deep love, and the fears triggered by the thought of losing them is so awful as to be unacceptable. Louis simply cannot process the fear of losing, or failing, his family. This likely contributed to his visit to the prostitute when Rachel was pregnant with Ellie. Rather than dealing with his fears about having a child rationally or expressing them to his wife, Louis chooses to sabotage his family even as he is creating it with Rachel. Similarly, when Louis is afraid his family will not like the house he has spent all their money to buy, he reacts with self-defensive hostility towards them. Louis' hostility melts the moment everyone expresses enthusiasm for the house he has selected. Still, when Louis' greatest fear becomes a reality upon the death of his son, he believes in his heart that he has failed his family. Louis is not responsible for Gage's death, but it is a normal reaction for a parent in this situation to internalize the blame. Louis feels he has murdered his son, and this thought is so unacceptable to him that he lashes out at Goldman for expressing it. Instead of realizing that Goldman is grieving too, and probably projecting his own sense of responsibility onto Louis, Louis gives in to his feeling of culpability about Gage's death.

## Judgment

Mankind's fear of judgment is the underlying theme of *Pet Sematary*. While on the surface it is about the death of a child - every parent's greatest nightmare - the theme of loss is actually a means to explore the judgment and recrimination a parent faces after losing a child. Had Louis been a perfect husband and father, secure in the belief that he had done everything right and done everything possible to ensure his son's survival, he might have been able to accept the loss of Gage. Louis might have been able to go through his grief and eventually move forward with his life. Who among us is perfect,



though? The Christian Bible states, "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone." However, Christians and non-Christians alike are wont to ignore such admonitions about judging others.

Parents who have suffered from the most grievous loss imaginable, the loss of a child, often judge and blame themselves for not having prevented their child's death. Instead of consoling the grieving parent by acknowledging that tragic accidents do happen even to the most careful of people, modern society, unfortunately, is often quick to cast blame upon the parents. Mankind continues to try and convince itself that we can conquer death. The fact that Louis is a doctor highlights his ability to conquer death, as when he saves Norma. Every accident is avoidable, and every death is preventable. Norma's death a short time later belies the fiction that death can be conquered. The attempt to conquer it is an extension of denial. When we don't want to believe that something bad can happen, we look to blame others. If a child could die, through no one's fault, then perhaps *my* child could die. That is too frightening. It must be someone's fault. The effect of this way of thinking sometimes causes society to persecute and prosecute grieving parents who have lost their children. It is not only the death of a child which is a parent's greatest nightmare. Being blamed for that death by others - or even merely perceiving that one is being blamed by others - adds a whole new level to the nightmare. In the book, judgment is closely tied with guilt. Even though they don't admit it, the characters condemn themselves more harshly and more readily than others condemn them.

## Secrets

Louis Creed juggles a lot of secrets in *Pet Sematary*. At one point, the weight of the secrets is so heavy that he is surprised when he looks in the mirror to find his appearance normal. This causes Louis to wonder how many people in the world are wandering around masking terrible secrets. That precise question is what author Stephen King explores in this novel about human frailties and fears. Keeping secrets and how this relates to integrity is addressed repeatedly in the novel. The fear of being found out contributes to Louis' aversion for his father-in-law, Irwin Goldman. On the day, ten years prior to the outset of the novel, when Goldman tries to bribe Louis into breaking his engagement, Louis' righteous anger is partly a relieved response to the fact that Goldman did not find out and did not accuse Louis of being sexually intimate with Rachel. Louis entered that meeting cringing at the thought of being so accused. The worst part, for Louis, would have been the truth of the accusation; he and Rachel had indeed become intimate prior to their wedding. Even by the most conservative standards, this is hardly a terrible secret, but Louis' strict moral code apparently forbids premarital sex, even to one's fiancy. His guilty fear of this secret being found out causes him to resent Irwin Goldman.

Perhaps some of Louis' resentment for his family, expressed mainly in Chapter 1 when the family is undergoing a move with all the attendant upheaval, also stems from his fear of being found out. Louis has locked away the memory of his one night with a prostitute so deeply in his psyche that it feels like something that happened to someone



else. Yet this secret is an ever-present danger to Louis, since he cannot fully enjoy his family for fear that Rachel will find out the truth. He might then lose his family. Rather than deal with that fear, Louis convinces himself that he resents his wife and children, devaluing the precious family he is afraid of losing. It's certainly easier to lose something of little value, so Louis' reaction to his deeply buried secret is a normal, if unhealthy, psychological adaptation.

Jud's response to secret-keeping is wholly different, and Louis finds it comforting. In Chapter 24, Jud states in his note to Louis that he's "*told Norma more than one lie in the fifty-eight years we've been married, and I'd guess that most men tell their wives a smart of lies, but you know, most of them could stand before God and confess them without dropping their eyes from His.*" (pg. 128) On the surface, Jud's words make sense. One can imagine a whole host of lies a man might tell his wife without causing her harm (e.g., "I love the tie you bought me for Christmas," or, "No, honey, it's no trouble to rearrange all the storage boxes and label them.") Even larger lies might be acceptable if designed to ease one's spouse worries about finances or other such issues. In the end, it turns out that Jud's lies to his wife do not fall in the category of acceptable half-truths. Jud admits to Louis that he has frequented whores for fifty of the fifty-eight years he has been married to Norma. Jud's comforting view of secret-keeping proves to be no more than an old man's rationalization for his bad behavior. Perhaps this is why Louis feels so at home with Jud from the beginning. The two men have something in common: They both keep dark secrets in their hearts, and they both justify those secrets by choosing to believe that all men are liars.



# Style

## Point of View

The point of view in *Pet Sematary* is not clearly defined. Primarily, the story is told through Louis' eyes, in the third person limited narrative style. In order to meet the demands of this suspense story, however, the author switches liberally between Louis' point of view and that of the other characters, particularly Jud and Rachel. Some aspects of the story are told through Louis' co-workers' points of view as well. The point of view is not clearly defined for two interesting reasons. The first and most important reason is the Pet Sematary itself. The ancient burial ground houses some vague, ill-defined evil which has the power to take over men's minds and affect objects in the physical world. Louis comes to realize that Jud's decision to take Louis to the Pet Sematary may not have been Jud's own decision. Jud, like most every other character in the book, is influenced by this evil power. Occasionally, Louis, Jud or the other characters consciously realize they are being influenced. When the power is at its strongest, though, the characters assume that the power's will is actually their own will operating. This power feeds on self-deception, and so it is not always possible to know who or what is responsible for the viewpoint being presented.

The second reason the point of view is not clearly defined is because, in lieu of an omniscient narrator, the author resorts to using the third-person limited historical perspective to present facts that could otherwise not be known at the time. The historical perspective is always Louis', and yet this future Louis is somehow able to know the thoughts of the other characters in the book. It seems impossible that Louis would survive to tell the tale. The dramatic cliff-hanger ending leaves the reader with the clear impression that Louis is about to be killed by the Rachel thing, begging the question of how he could possibly survive to narrate the tale from a historical perspective. The truth is that the narrator is an "invisible" narrator, not truly Louis, but taking Louis' point of view, gazing into the minds of others as required for storytelling.

## Setting

The settings in *Pet Sematary* are so macabre that only an accomplished master of horror like Stephen King could possibly do them justice. On each of the three occasions protagonist Louis Creed ventures down the path to the ancient Micmac burial ground, the landscape is described with evil animation. By Chapter 55, when Louis is making his second trip into Little God Swamp on the way to the burial ground, the place has come alive: "The groundmist began to swirl around him, first covering his shoes, then his shins, finally enclosing him in a glowing white capsule. It seemed to him that the light was brighter, a pulsing effulgence like the beat of some strange heart. He had never before felt so strongly the presence of nature as a kind of coalescing force, a real being...possibly sentient." (pg. 326) Yet, this is one of the less gory descriptions of the swamp in the novel. The Micmac Indian woods, including Little God Swamp and the



burial ground, are an embodiment of humanity's natural fear of disgusting, oozing muck and are made further frightening by the presence of the evil spirits that haunt the place.

By contrast, the lovely two-story colonial New England home where the Creeds live, at the edge of the gorgeous Maine woods, is an absolutely idyllic homestead. There is a breezy, grassy meadow nearby for Gage to fly kites in, and the crisp, salutary Maine air, or perhaps the crystal clear water in the vicinity, revives the Creeds' love life. The house is picturesque, with plenty of room for the Creeds to spread out as the family grows. It is convenient to the amenities of Ludlow, but since the surrounding woods are owned by an Indian tribe, there is no danger that a new housing tract or commercial development will mar the family's view of the local nature. This desirable setting embodies the American dream and helps the author create sympathy for the Creed family. The reader wants nothing more than for this nice, young family to live out their days in domestic harmony, enjoying their beautiful, woodsy property. The contrast between this beautiful setting with such promise and the deadly woods behind the house enhances the tension as the events of the plot unfold. Symbolically, the dark woods are the secrets living underneath the pleasant exterior of the family's life.

## Language and Meaning

Stephen King has long suffered from a reputation of being a poor writer who writes good stories. His phenomenal success seems to put the lie to such aspersions, and yet they persist. Certainly his style of writing is not academic in nature. Stephen King is more prone to writing from the 'average Joe's' perspective, and his text is littered with modern popular culture references. For example, he often uses well-known name brands instead of generic words for objects. In Chapter 54, he does not once use the word hotel or motel. He states only that Rachel pulls into the parking lot of a Holiday Inn. This style works so well for King because for most Americans, his target audience, the name brand evokes particular and concrete associations. King does not need to describe the type of motel Rachel has found. The reader already has a definite picture of the green and white Holiday Inn sign stored in memory.

Stephen King's language is also full of colloquialisms and popular slang, which he tailors specifically to the New England region where the story takes place. Another thing King does which has relegated him to the bottom of the academic heap is to play fast and loose with writing rules. All fiction authors do this to some extent, but King's writing is particularly informal with its plethora of parentheses, ellipses and chopped off and run on sentences. Yet all of these elements combine beautifully to create a remarkable amount of human depth in his characters and stories. His easy to read and absorbing style reflects the writer's art at its most engaging, and his works will probably outlive all of his critics.





## Structure

*Pet Sematary* is divided into three parts and further subdivided into sixty-two chapters plus a chilling Epilogue. Part 1, The Pet Sematary, takes up two hundred pages and makes up the bulk of the novel. In this longer part, Stephen King takes his time laying out the plot and gradually building the normal world that his characters inhabit. He makes great use of foreshadowing techniques and even tells the entire story of the cat's death and resurrection in this part. However, the Creed family remains intact throughout this long beginning. Rather than killing off any characters in this horror novel right away, King spends a great deal of time getting the reader to care about each and every one of the Creeds through his clever command of character detail.

Part 2, The Micmac Burying Ground, opens with a horrific jolt as the reader suddenly learns of Gage's death. Rather than taking the reader through the death scene chronologically, the reader is instead treated to the gruesome aftermath first. This allows King to create suspension of disbelief so that in Chapter 40, when the author states that Gage has not in fact died, the reader is as ready to believe this as Gage's grief-stricken father. In a sense, King uses mankind's natural tendency toward denial to play with the reader, convincing the audience for a brief span of pages that the death never took place. Only after this does King cement Gage's death by revealing the exact details of the accident that claims his young life. Then finally, in Part 3, Oz the Great and Tewwible, Louis Creed reaps what he has sown, as foreshadowed by the author all along. This three-part structure, as it is laid out, is well paced and dramatically satisfying.



## Quotes

"A wild but not unattractive idea suddenly came to him: He would suggest that they go back to Bangor for something to eat while they waited for the moving van, and when his three hostages to fortune got out, he would floor the accelerator and drive away without so much as a look back, foot to the mat, the wagon's huge four-barrel carburetor gobbling expensive gasoline. He would drive south, all the way to Orlando, Florida, where he would get a job at Disney World as a medic, under a new name." Chapter 1, pp. 3-4

"Lou, she's - ' "Tired, I know.' He capped the Mercurochrome and looked grimly at his daughter. 'There. And it really didn't hurt a bit. Fess up, Ellie.' " *"It does! It does hurt! It hurrrrr - ' "His hand itched to slap her and he grabbed his leg hard."* Chapter 2, pg. 7

"Death was a vague idea; the Pet Sematary was real. In the texture of those rude markers were truths which even a child's hands could feel." Chapter 9, pg. 37

"The soil of a man's heart is stonier, Louis - like the soil up there in the old Micmac burying ground. Bedrock's close. A man grows what he can...and he tends it." Chapter 22, pg. 121

"That bull turned mean, really mean. But he's the only animal I ever heard of that did. Most of them just seem...a little stupid...a little slow...a little..." "A little dead?" "Yeah," Jud said. 'A little dead. Like they had been...somewhere...and came back...but not all the way.'" Chapter 26, pg. 145

"Louis said: 'Has anyone ever buried a *person* up there?' "Jud's arm jerked convulsively; two of the beer bottles fell off the table, and one of them shattered. "Christ on His throne,' he said to Louis. 'No! And who ever would? You don't even want to talk about such things, Louis!'" Chapter 26, pg. 146

"He knew that babies make *all* the sounds the human voice box is capable of...the liquid trill that proves so difficult for first-year French students, the glottal grunts and clicks of the Australian bush people, the thickened, abrupt consonants of German. They lose the capability as they learn English, and Louis wondered now (and not for the first time) if childhood was not more a period of forgetting than of learning." Chapter 35, pg. 195

"I saw through you, you prancing little fraud of a doctor. You enticed my daughter into a stupid, feckless marriage and then you turned her into a scullery maid and then you let her son be run down in the highway like a...a chipmunk." Chapter 37, pg. 218

"Nobody could understand how bad it was unless they was there. He was *dead*, Louis. But he was alive too. And he...he...he *knew* things.' "Knew things?' Louise sat forward." Chapter 39, pg. 242



"'I don't know what's wrong,' she said. 'But I knew *something* was wrong ever since Daddy told me about the trip. Because something was wrong with him.' "*Louis, what are you hiding? You were hiding something. I could see it; even Ellie could see it.*" Chapter 45, pg. 282

"Each time he brought the pick down he collapsed over the end of it, like an old Roman falling on his sword. Yet little by little the hole took shape and deepened. He clawed the rocks out, and most he simply pushed aside along with the growing pile of stony dirt. But some of them he saved. "For the cairn." Chapter 55, pg. 331

"It was Gage. His face was not black but dirty, smeared with blood. And it was swollen, as if he had been terribly hurt and then put back together again by crude, uncaring hands. "She cried his name and held her arms out. He ran to her and climbed into them, and all the time one hand remained behind his back, as if with a bunch of posies picked in someone's back meadow." Chapter 59, pg. 351

"*What you buy is what you own, and sooner or later what you own will come back to you,* Louis Creed thought. "He did not turn around but only looked at his cards as the slow, gritting footsteps approached." Epilogue, pg. 374

# Adaptations

A motion version of *Pet Sematary*, directed by Mary Lambert, was released in 1989. It stars Dale Midkiff, Fred Gwynne, and Denise Crosby in a faithful rendering of the novel. The motion picture was well received by critics and fans. A sequel, *Pet Sematary Two*, was released in 1992. This was also directed by Mary Lambert, and stars Edward Furlong as a young man trying to bring his mother back to life.

This sequel was not well received.



## Key Questions

Pet Sematary is counted among Stephen King's best novels. It is also one of the darkest; in fact, it was promoted (inaccurately) as being too horrifying even for King, who did not answer media questions about it. The premise of this darkness is represented as Louis Gage buries his son in the Micmac burial grounds, and draws a spiral on the site. While the novel is patterned after a spiral down into loss, obsession and death, this spiral pattern is as purposeful as it is inexorable. King notes at the beginning of Part 2 that this work is about exploring the question: "how much horror the human mind can stand and still maintain a wakeful, staring, unrelenting sanity," given that "horror is spawning horror."

While this particular onslaught of terror is not inevitable, King has stacked the deck against the Creed family, allowing a close exploration of personality and events in the novel.

1. The opening of the novel is slowpaced, allowing readers to understand Louis and Rachel Creed, and Jud Crandall. What details and experiences do his characters have which draw you into their lives? Establish their character?

2. Both Jud and Louis believe that "The soil of a man's heart is stonier. . .

A man grows what he can . . . and tends it." How is this perspective reproduced in the settings of the Pet Sematary and the Micmac burial grounds? How would you characterize those qualities of emotion and landscape? In a larger perspective, how does this assumption regarding the male emotional landscape work in King's other novels?

3. Critics note in the novel that "some exponential effects begin to obtain . . . as one coincidental evil begets other, often more deliberate evil." What are the "coincidental" events in the novel? Is this an unrelieved darkness or does King give Louis a way out? What does King say regarding coincidents and accidents, choice and free will, responsibility and consequences?

4. Examine the craft of the gruesome or scary scenes in the novel. When are King's descriptions or tone overstated?

When are they subdued? How does this affect the interpretation and emotional impact of the scenes?



## Topics for Discussion

Author Stephen King leaves the story on a cliffhanger ending. Write at least three paragraphs to end the story. Write any ending you feel suits the story, taking care to match the tone and writing style of the original author.

Do you believe Louis Creed's character is ultimately sympathetic? Do you believe his character contributes to his own downfall?

According to the Author's Note, Stephen King researched the stages of grief when writing this novel. Why would he do this? How does the natural grief cycle relate to the events in the novel?

Rachel accepts her daughter's dream as a legitimate warning. Had you been in her shoes, would you have taken Ellie's dream seriously, or do you believe a dream is just a dream? Why?

Many of Jud's flaws are revealed through the course of the novel, including his fixation with morbidity and his lifelong obsession with prostitutes. Yet, Louis likes him and admires many of his qualities. Given what you know about Jud, do you believe he is a good friend to Louis? Why or why not?

While Mrs. Goldman consoles her daughter at the funeral home, Mr. Goldman flashes Louis a look of triumph. What does this look imply?

If you had to define a moral to this story about death and loss, what would it be?

## Literary Precedents

Pet Sematary, quite evidently, touches upon one of the most basic of all archetypal taboos, and as such, warrants comparison to a staggering number of narrative treatments — ranging from such ancient accounts as those of Icarus and of Eve's fateful decision in the Garden — to the contemporary medical horror novels of Michael Crichton and Robin Cook. Certain of the premises which underlie Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), a work which also, albeit from a radically different perspective, focuses upon reanimation of the dead, seem to have bearing on King's work, while the novel undoubtedly owes something to W. W. Jacobs's classic tale of terror, "The Monkey's Paw" (1902). The zombie, though not nearly as frequent a visitor to horror literature as ghosts, werewolves, and vampires, does have his own tradition in the genre, and it may be worth noting that the zombie films of director George A. Romero (*Night of the Living Dead*, 1968, and *Dawn of the Dead*, 1979) are frequently mentioned by King as among his favorite horror movies. In the last analysis, however, it must be said that, notwithstanding its nominal indebtedness to a variety of precedents, *Pet Sematary* is in most respects a largely innovative work.

## Related Titles

As noted previously, the themes of recurring evil and the "Bad Place" are present in a variety of King's works, and, as shall be seen presently, the question of moral responsibility is of particular importance in *Thinner* (1984). Owing to its uniqueness in the King canon, it may be somewhat misleading to consider *Pet Sematary* as being closely related to any of his other works, although its central premises are explored with startlingly different results in his short story "Word Processor of the Gods" (in *Skeleton Crew*, 1985).





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