

# **The Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake Study Guide**

**The Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake by Aimee  
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# Plot Summary

The Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake is about Rose, a young girl who discovers on her ninth birthday that she has a special ability for tasting the emotions of the person who has made the food. The first time she notices her unique tasting talent, she senses the tremendous sadness of her mother when she bakes Rose a chocolate lemon cake. Rose cannot bear to eat the cake. This puzzles her mother, Lane. Rose thinks a lot about the emotions in the food and begins to notice them in everything she eats, eventually pinpointing the origin of the ingredients. She turns to George, the friend of her distant and seemingly anti-social brother Joseph, to try to understand what is happening to her. Like Joseph, George has a keen interest in science and agrees to do some research experiments on her ability. While Rose's newfound ability fascinates George, he is unaware of her growing crush on him.

Joseph is socially withdrawn. He keeps to himself in his room, aided by the addition of a door, crafted by her mother, for his bedroom. He barely interacts with his family at the dinner table. When he does, it is often reluctantly. He does, however, have a stronger relationship with his mother. She views him as special and looks to him for guidance. The father, who is withdrawn in his own way, does not really connect with Joseph. Joseph and Rose seem to understand one another and foster a relationship built on small talk and similar interests in television programs.

Through her mother's cooking, Rose learns that Lane has been having an affair. She keeps the secret to herself. While she does not initially confront her mother, the knowledge of the affair weighs heavily on her. Her relationships at school also suffer. Rose is distant from her classmates, relying on her friendship with Eliza. When she meets a new transfer student, Sherrie, she befriends her and tells her about her special talent. Rose's ability to sense the emotions fascinates the friend. Though a novelty at first, it escalates into Sherrie taking advantage of Rose to understand how she really feels about something. Rose attempts to see Sherrie outside of the context of food, but she is no longer interested. Rose walks away from the friendship. The situation prompts her to return to keeping her special skill hidden.

Rose notices that Joseph's behavior is becoming more strange. When she goes out, Lane leaves Joseph in charge to babysit Rose. Rose does not think she needs a babysitter, and Lane ends up paying her daughter to go along with it. One night, Rose realizes that Joseph has disappeared. Concerned, she looks for him and runs into him in the hallway. He does not indicate where he was, but over time, Rose notes that he continues to disappear and for longer stretches of time.

After universities reject Joseph's applications, he agrees to go to a city college if he can get an apartment on his own. His parents arrange for the apartment, and Joseph disappears without a trace. Rose tries to understand where Joseph has gone and how it may or may not be a connection to her special skill as well.



# Part One: Food, Chapters 1-8

## Summary

Chapter 1 opens in Hollywood with Rose's mother Lane baking her a birthday cake for her ninth birthday. When Rose comes home from school, she asks to help. Her mother tells her no and lets Rose work on her spelling. While her mother does not bake much, she likes to work with her hands. She likes gardening and carpentry. Recently, she had installed a door to Joseph's room. A contractor helped her with the project. She took time off from an office job to work more with her hands after her husband paid off his law school debt. Rose knows that her parents fought the night before. Lane puts the cake in the oven and tells Rose she is going to go lie down because she has a headache. Rose sneaks a bite of the cake.

In Chapter 2, Rose explains that her mother spent the first six months after quitting her job working on the house. Rose asks why she cannot have a door for her bedroom. Her mother tells her that she is too young for a door. The birthday cake is her mother's latest project, and they picked out the recipe together. While the bite Rose takes tastes good, she begins to notice something else. She can taste her mother's emotions, the headache, the aspirin. Unsure of the cause, Rose eats an entire piece of cake to understand. When her mother wakes up, she confesses to eating the cake, and Lane asks how she liked it. Rose says it's fine, but Lane picks up that something is off. Rose asks if Lane and her father had a fight. Lane dismisses it as just a discussion. Finally, Rose confesses that the cake tastes "empty." Lane tries to understand whether an ingredient was missed. Rose cannot get through to her mother what she is feeling. Lane prepares dinner and Rose watches, concerned about what she may taste. Dinner is slightly better. Then, the family eats the birthday cake. Rose tries to eat another piece of cake, but it leaves her in tears. Lane is understanding about people having different tastes. Rose asks to be excused.

Chapter 3 begins with Rose explaining where the family lives in Los Angeles and the neighborhoods. She eats a breakfast bar and takes her mother a glass of water. The lunch Lane made for her is in the fridge. Joseph and Rose make their way to the bus stop, and Rose thinks about Eddie Oakley, a classmate. Rose keeps some distance from Joseph so that she doesn't bother him. Joseph points out Jupiter and a sliver of a moon. Rose thanks him for telling her by touching his sleeve instead of his arm. On the bus, Joseph is engrossed in his textbook. Rose waves at a man on a motorcycle, and she wants to tell Joseph. Instead, she imagines that she tells him and that he laughs in response. After lunch, she drinks from the water fountain to get rid of the taste of her sack lunch.

In Chapter 4, Rose thinks about her mother's difficulties with sleep. Lane is frequently up in the middle of the night. Sometimes, Rose hears her and gets up and sits with her in the armchair. However, Rose always wakes up in her own bed. She reveals that her parents met at Berkley, where her mother could not pick a major and her father studied



law. The extended family lives away from them or is deceased. Rose has a grandmother, Lane's mother, who lives in Washington State. She never visits, but she sends boxes of random items on occasion. Rose receives a towel with her name on it, and her father Paul gets a broken teacup. Joseph gets blue pillowcases and Rose a baggie full of cracked rouge in tins. She calls once a month. She shares traits with Joseph, particularly disdain for other people. Once Rose told her grandmother that she loved her. Her grandmother responded that she did not know her and called her clingy.

Chapter 5 picks up after lunch. Rose visits the school nurse. Eliza, Rose's friend, told the teacher that Rose was very thirsty after lunch. The nurse asks Rose about her symptoms, which she does not have, except that food tastes bad. The nurse asks about Rose's body image, concerned that she might have an eating disorder. The nurse determines that Rose is fine and that her issue could be an allergy or an active imagination.

Rose finishes out the school day in Chapter 6. After school, Joseph's friend George joins them, and they walk to the bus. George does not understand why Rose walks behind them. George notices her and Rose asks if George has ever been to see the school nurse. He replies no and she tells him not to bother. She then asks him what she should do about food tasting bad. Joseph is annoyed, but George takes an interest. Rose explains that food tastes like it has a hole in it. Joseph makes circles with a compass on graph paper. He messes up the page and starts to throw it away. George wants it because he wants to make an "all mistakes" wallpaper. George tells Rose they will test her with a snack. She eats a variety of items from the refrigerator, some made by her mother and a pudding made by her dad. Joseph makes toast, and Rose senses something. Rose tries to explain the difference between the food having a feeling and that she is experiencing the feelings of the people who prepared the food. Joseph thinks she's crazy, but George decides they will further test Rose's new ability.

In Chapter 7, Rose explains that a year earlier she drew soccer balls for her dad. The soccer balls looked like soccer balls, but she put eyes and lashes and a red smile on the balls because they looked too plain. She compares herself to Joseph, who is a genius. Instead, Rose is regarded as being friendly.

In Chapter 8, Lane returns home after Rose and George have raided the refrigerator. She has just spent her first day at the carpentry shop. Lane and Rose go outside, and Rose points out different types of tree wood. They eat leftovers for dinner, and Rose declares that the food is full of feelings. She explains that she could not eat her lunch or the cake. Paul asks if something is wrong. Rose says that Lane wants support. Lane dismisses Rose's comment and asks what Rose wants to do on Saturday. Rose tells her she has plans with George. Lane and Joseph do the dishes after dinner. Rose tells Joseph he does not need to get her a birthday present and asks if he is feeling better. Joseph thinks she thinks everyone is in bad shape and says that he is fine.



## Analysis

As the novel opens, the importance of food in the story is apparent. Rose returns home from school, and her mother is baking her a birthday cake. Rose has played a part in selecting the kind of cake and comments on the fact that she is currently fond of sour. Sour is strong and not the first thing that most people think of when they think of cake. This alerts the reader to expect something out of the norm. Rose is excited for the cake and sneaks a bite even before it is cool. Prior to this, her mother Lane has retreated to the bedroom because she is not feeling well. This foreshadows that something is not quite right.

Chapter 2 gives background information on the mother. Lane is a creative type, who feels stifled by her office job. This background information about her character helps illuminate the theme of Disappointment Leading to Self Discovery. Lane does not want to be confined to an office, preferring to work with her hands and create something tangible. The cake is the latest in her attempts to create. Lane's baking introduces Food as a theme. Rose is confused and horrified when she eats the cake. She does not understand why she is experiencing the taste of the cake differently. She is overwhelmed by the emotions. This addresses the theme of adolescence. Rose is maturing and is being confronted by a spectrum of emotions. She can taste her mother's sadness and emptiness, and this represents how a child must eventually acknowledge that their parents are human and experience a full range of emotions, even the bad ones. For Rose, she now realizes that her mother, while seemingly happily baking her a birthday cake, is actually unhappy. This has nothing to do with Rose. It is a reflection of Lane's disappointment. Lane's disappointment leads her on a journey to self discovery via an affair.

Chapter 3 is the first look at Rose in school. Building on the theme of adolescence, Eddie Oakley teases Rose at school. Rose sometimes refers to him as her enemy, and they do tend to spar with each other. While the relationship with Rose and Eddie is not fully examined, it becomes a milestone relationship for her as she matures.

There is mention of her friend Eliza who, like Eddie, remains a part of Rose's life over the course of the novel. The theme of food is addressed again with Rose's response to the sack lunch her mother prepared for her. The contents of the lunch are of little consequence; her reaction is the emphasis. The reader witnesses Rose gulping water at the drinking fountain, desperate to rid the taste from her mouth. It is possible that Rose would react differently if the emotions were positive, but Rose is again confronted with her mother's reality.

Chapter 4 addresses issues she has noticed about her mother. Lane has difficulty sleeping. Prior to Rose's experience with her mother's emotions, she regards her mother's sleep patterns as something that is comforting for her. She is able to crawl onto her mother's lap and sleep, but she always wakes up in her own bed. This is a childhood experience that many people can relate to, but it is not often accompanied with considering the hows and whys of the parents being up late at night. A multitude of



factors could contribute to it, be it stress or other issues. This also reflects on Rose's relationship with her mother. It is clear that Lane loves and cares for her daughter. This is important to note when in a later chapter, Rose acknowledges what some might consider a hard truth about how Lane feels about her children.

The introduction of the grandmother reveals more about the family dynamics. It is clear that Lane and her mother do not have a close relationship, but they do maintain some type of relationship. From the phone call with Grandma, the reader learns that Grandma is direct, somewhat aloof, and perhaps cold. While it is unclear how much of a factor her age or health may play into the perception of her character, it is interesting to note the similarities in the personalities of Joseph and Grandma. While later chapters will reveal other and more dramatic anomalies in Joseph's character, the interaction with Grandma indicates that Joseph's coldness or indifference to other people may be a family trait from Lane's side of the family. By this point, the reader is likely wondering if Joseph is just socially awkward or if his personality indicates something more serious.

In Chapter 5, Rose goes to see the school nurse. The event plays out in a fairly typical fashion. As Rose explains her symptoms as best she can, the nurse begins to wonder about more serious issues. Her concerns about Rose having a body issues or an eating disorder are logical and appropriate to have. This, of course, is not the issue Rose is having, but it is possible that Rose is having issues with food and body image and that her symptoms are masking this problem. The reader determines whether to accept the improbable as real or to think of Rose's ability to taste emotion as a metaphor for eating disorders, which can present problems for girls entering into and going through puberty. While the eating disorder metaphor is a logical possibility, it is important to note that Rose is actively seeking help. She tries to discuss it with her mother, but she lacks the ability to fully explain herself. She also goes to see the school nurse. Finally, she turns to the people who are most likely to have an answer: Joseph and George.

Chapters 1 - 8 establish Relationships as a theme in the story. Rose and Joseph have a fairly typical brother/sister relationship. Rose is the pesky younger sister, and Joseph is the older brother with more important things to tend to in his life, such as work. However, work as it applies to Joseph, is not strictly defined. George, however, differs. Rose comments that she thought that all smart people had personalities like Joseph because they were smarter than everyone else. George then becomes a foil for Joseph. George is friendly, sociable, and charming. He is very likeable and extends both patience and kindness to Rose. He does not doubt or mock her claim of being able to taste emotions. Rather, he sets out to better understand the issue and help put Rose's mind at ease.

Rose seeks out Paul, her father. Paul is generally removed from his family. He provides for them and, by all accounts, is nice to them. However, he does not connect with them. This seems to be something he actively does. It is Rose who seeks her father out. Since the novel is told strictly from Rose's perspective, this may simply be her perception of her father, but she does reach out. When the family has dinner together and Rose divulges that food is full of feeling, she is making an attempt to express the feelings her mother cannot, thereby reaching her father. As Paul removes himself from the family



following dinner, it foreshadows an irreparable gap in Lane and Paul's relationship, the scope of which will be revealed in later chapters.

## Discussion Question 1

What do the emotions Rose senses from her mother's cooking reveal about Lane's character?

## Discussion Question 2

What does the grandmother's comment about Rose being too clingy reveal about Lane's upbringing?

## Discussion Question 3

How is George a foil for Joseph?

## Vocabulary

tactile, doilies, mangroves, liling, bickered, obvious, ceramic, calluses, impression, subtle, sensor, scope, unfurling, ellipsis, inadequate, anecdotes, diluted, jovial, fluorescence, flourish, thoroughfares, indignant, clingy, basalt, gingham, eddies, helices, torrent, weary, resentment, tremor, masticate, plundered, meticulous, innards, peripheral, brusque





# Part One: Food, Chapters 9-12

## Summary

In Chapter 9, Rose reveals that she knows her mother loves her brother more and that Joseph has always been distant. Rose remembers going with her mother to get Joseph out of school for a doctor's appointment. Instead, she took them to a market. She asked Joseph for advice and continued to take Joseph out of school. Lane ended up speaking with the president of student affairs and the principal where she explained that she took Joseph out of school because he was bored. Joseph had to resume a normal school schedule after that. She remembers meeting George the first time he came over to the house to work on science homework. She thinks about how she thought Joseph was odd because he was smart, but George was smart and also sociable.

George arrives in Chapter 10 to continue the experiment with Rose. He suggests they go to a bakery that specializes in cookies. George, Joseph, and Rose all go. Even though Rose is nine, Lane still thinks Rose should hold someone's hand while crossing the street. When the three of them reach the corner, Rose grabs George's hand, and they cross together. They reach the bakery, and Joseph opts to stay outside to work. George and Rose go inside. Rose tries several cookies and identifies from where the chocolate chips, the eggs, and the butter. Then, she senses the anger in the baker. George asks the baker questions, and he gets a sense of how the baker feels. Rose is bothered by the ease with which George is able to eat the other half of the cookies she tries. The baker asks if Rose's talent works with other food. He gives her a bite of the sandwich his girlfriend made for him. She tastes the girlfriend's desperation to make him love her. On the way home, Rose identifies with the girlfriend's emotions when she takes George's hand as they cross the street.

Chapter 11 continues later in spring with Paul playing tennis and Lane spending more time learning carpentry. Joseph helps Lane remove all of her splinters. In school, Rose continues to struggle with food. She buys her lunch from the vending machines and eats raw fruits and vegetables. She asks her father if they can go out to eat more, but he does not like the large portions. She has a follow-up with the school nurse. She asks Joseph and George what she should do about her food issue. George tells her to do nothing because it is a great talent.

Six months later, Lane makes a pie from scratch. Lane has been baking a lot and taking the sweets to the carpentry shop because her boss has a sweet tooth. When Rose tries the pie, she drops to the floor. Lane asks if she is okay, and Rose spits the pie out. She tells her mother that she could taste her bad feelings. Her mother takes her to the emergency room where she tells the doctors Rose is inconsolable.

Chapter 12 begins with the doctors unable to diagnose her, suggesting that Rose is delusional. A doctor asks her questions about her sleep schedule. She eats soup and crackers from the hospital cafeteria. She tastes resentment in the soup. When she is



discharged with a clean bill of health, Rose is given a cherry lollipop. She tastes no emotions in the lollipop. She thanks her mother for taking her to the hospital when they leave. Lane tries to convince Rose that she is fine and that the episode scared her. When she gets home, Joseph is nicer than usual.

## Analysis

In Chapter 9, Rose is aware that her mother feels differently about Joseph than she feels. At first blush, the notion of a child being cognizant of a mother loving another child more feels harsh, but Rose does not process it as such. It is clear through Lane's actions that she loves and cares for Rose, but there is a different connection with Joseph. It is possible that Lane must work harder to connect with Joseph. As a result, she feels a deeper sense of connection with Joseph. Rose has also been introduced to what Joseph is feeling when she eats the toast he makes. Joseph deflects her claim that he is not well because Joseph already views himself as special. Joseph rejects Rose's claim to a special gift because he fears it marginalizes his own genius.

As Chapter 10 opens, George makes good on his promise to take Rose out on Saturday to conduct more research. At the bakery, the theme of food is reinforced. Rose tries different cookies and experiences the feelings of people she does not know. She recognizes the anger in the baker of the chocolate chip cookies. She is able to differentiate that someone else made the oatmeal cookies. In George's presence, she is able to convey the truth about what she is experiencing, even in front of people she does not know. She is not judged by the staff at the bakery. Like George, they demonstrate an interest in her ability, whether they completely believe in it or not. During the exchange at the bakery, Rose is aware of George and comments on his ability to eat the remainder of the cookies without consequence. His nonchalance is something she envies. She longs to return to when she was not burdened with the taste of other people's emotions. This also represents a disconnect between Rose and George. True, the age difference clearly separates them at this juncture in their relationship. Rose looks up to George, and she is developing a crush on him. Rose begins to see George differently from the way that George sees Rose. In this way, it is appropriate that Rose notes the difference between the way they are both able to eat the cookie. Rose wants what George can do, and George cannot relate to what Rose is experiencing. This is further developed when Rose tries the sandwich that the bakery employee's girlfriend made for him. She tastes the desperation in the girlfriend trying to making her boyfriend love her. The sandwich was made with love. However, Rose is able to taste the articulation of how the girlfriend wants him to feel. The desperation might stem from the man not feeling the same way about the girlfriend. It could also be that he does not express his feelings of love in ways that the girlfriend appreciates. Rose identifies with the girlfriend as her feelings toward George come into focus. The author introduces the theme of adolescence through this events.

The opening of Chapter 11 further demonstrates the distance between Paul and Lane. Both are interested in other hobbies, but they coexist in a natural way. When Joseph removes the splinters from Lane's hands, it seems that Joseph has the capacity to care



for someone other than himself. Lane compliments him, which demonstrates the closeness between them.

This first significant time jump moves the story ahead by six months. Lane bakes a peach and berry pie from scratch. While carpentry is becoming her passion, she continues to create in other mediums. Lane is cheerful and playful when explaining the pie to Rose. This is in sharp contrast to Rose's reaction after consuming the pie. Even though George has told her that he thinks her ability to taste emotions through food is cool and Rose has had six months to try and make sense of the experience, eating the pie sends her mind into chaos. She cannot handle the taste, scraping at her tongue to rid herself of the pie. She is inconsolable, which terrifies Lane. While the reader's understanding of Lane's reaction is limited to what Rose is able to convey, the fact that Lane takes Rose to the emergency room reveals the extent of Lane's fear. She wants to help her daughter, but she does not know what to do.

By this point, Rose must know that what is happening to her is not likely to go away. The doctors do not give her a diagnosis, aside from suggesting that she is delusional. She eats the soup, in spite of tasting the resentment of the cook, to prove to the doctors that she could eat and that her experience is not an eating disorder. Surprisingly, Rose does not end up speaking with a psychiatrist, as would be expected. Instead, she gets a lollipop and finds comfort in the factory-like taste of the candy. This demonstrates the coping mechanism that Rose is developing. This is symbolic of the various coping mechanisms many adolescents develop.

## Discussion Question 1

Why do Joseph and George have such different responses to Rose and the food experiment?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does George show such an interest in Rose's new skill?

## Discussion Question 3

What are the implications of the doctors suggesting that Rose has a delusion about her mouth?

## Vocabulary

siphoned, monologue, gradation, contingency, solvent, probation, bronchial, benign, ecosystem, rickety, granular, prodigious, plummet, ramifications, geode, lithe, facets, intricate, jacaranda, acute, torque, tentative, specificity, shellac, spontaneity, savored,

fractals, resin, teak, dexterity, potent, convergence, imprecise, inconsolable, delusion,  
insomnia, dregs, limpid, vivid



## Part Two: Joseph, Chapters 13-19

### Summary

Chapter 13 begins Part Two, which is titled “Joseph.” Rose explains how her parents met at a garage sale, which Paul’s friend Carl had. Lane arrives looking for a velvet footstool. They do not have one, but Paul asks to join her as she continues to look at other sales. He later calls Carl and tells him to pick up velvet from the store and recover the footstool that they have in the house. Carl does not want to do that, but he agrees and asks his girlfriend to help. When they return to Carl’s garage sale, Lane sees the velvet footstool. Paul suggests that someone must have traded the footstool for something else at the sale. When they later marry, Carl tells the story about the footstool at the wedding, which Lane had not heard before. Rose asks her mother if it upset her because she had trusted signs that she should be with Paul. Lane tends to look for signs, seeing them sometimes in the things that Joseph says or does. Lane and Rose find the old footstool in the garage. Lane offers to make her a new and better one, but Rose wants the one that brought her parents together.

Chapter 14 jumps to when Rose is twelve. She eats a roast beef dinner and tastes that her mother is having an affair. Joseph now reads at the dinner table, further withdrawing from the family. Rose no longer talks at the dinner table because she is concentrating on eating the meal, having chosen not to discuss her skill after the episode at the emergency room. She is now able to identify down to the county the source of an egg. Lane talks about the other people in the woodworking co-op and mentions Larry, the co-op president. Rose determines that Larry is the man with whom her mother is having an affair. After dinner, Lane declares she has errands to run. Rose asks to join her, but Lane tells her she should do her homework instead.

Chapter 15 opens with more packages arriving from Grandma. Rose asks why she does not visit. She finds out that her grandmother does not like to travel. Rose then asks why they do not go to see her. She finds out that her grandmother does not like guests. Rose reveals more about her dad. For example, he takes leftovers from restaurants and gives them to homeless people. Also, he hates hospitals. He hates hospitals so much that he did not go inside the hospital when his children were born. Instead, he waited on the sidewalk outside and sent the nurses tulips and roses. He first saw Joseph when Lane brought the baby to the hospital window and held him up.

Chapter 16 finds Paul in the TV room working. Rose asks if she can do her homework in the room with him, and he agrees. She asks her father what he would do if he knew something that he was not supposed to know. He says that he would keep the secret. She also asks why he hates hospitals and he says he does not like sick people. She then asks if he can feel their sickness. He answers, “How do you know about that anyway?” Rose is not sure if he is joking. Lane returns later, and Rose asks about the errands and why she does not have any bags with her. Lane explains that they are in the car and that Rose should go to bed.



Chapter 17 is a brief chapter in which Rose is in bed thinking about cookies and Larry. She knocks on the shared wall and calls for Joseph. Minutes later, Joseph appears in the doorway.

Chapter 18 reveals that Joseph has been disappearing. Their mother paid Joseph to babysit Rose, but Rose tells her mother that Joseph does not watch her. Lane tells Rose she will pay her as well to stay home with Joseph. Lane buys a new dress for a work party and wears it out to dinner with Paul. Rose now uses the footstool as a nightstand. Paul sees it, and Rose tells him that Lane wants to re-upholster it. Paul puts his arm around Lane, but Lane does not reciprocate. They go out to dinner, leaving Rose and Joseph at home. Rose knocks on Joseph's door, but gets no answer. After repeated attempts, she goes into his room and does not find him. Unsettled by the room, she rushes into the hallway and finds Joseph. He tells her he was in her room and attempts to make a joke about a pink pen. They both start laughing uncontrollably.

As Chapter 19 begins, Rose wakes up and finds Joseph in the kitchen. She tries to recapture the moment of the joke about the pen, but the moment is gone. At school, Rose talks about her crush on George to Eliza during Spanish class. In her next class, she gives a presentation. She uses a bag of Doritos as her prop, passing them around to the class. Eliza's parents will not let her eat Doritos, so she is excited to get the chance. After the presentation, the teacher gives Rose a copy of the food pyramid and talks to her about nutrition.

## Analysis

The second part of the novel shifts the focus to Joseph, as viewed through Rose's perspective. The reader learns about the footstool and how Lane and Paul met. While this story has its charms, it does establish a divide between the couple. From their first meeting, all was not as it seemed. The footstool deception does not reflect poorly on Paul or Lane. It demonstrates how people ultimately settle with each other. Lane believes the magic that Paul creates, while Paul knows it is not real. Later, this becomes especially interesting when Paul reveals a truth about his own family.

In Chapter 14, Rose now knows that her mother is having an affair. She has opportunities to confront her mother about it, and she even attempts to broach the subject with her father. By listening to her mother, she learns the identity of the man she's having the affair with. Rose isn't able to discern that Larry is her lover from the food, but rather by making sense of other clues. When Rose speaks with her father about knowing a secret that she should not, Paul tells her that the secret is better kept. This may indicate that Paul knows about Lane's affair, but he chooses to ignore it and not upset the status quo. Paul is content with the life he leads, so it may be logical that he accepts the affair to keep what he wants. He allows his wife to seek out what she needs as well. There is no indication that the affair is purely sexual. As more is revealed about Lane and the affair, her primary need is emotional support. While Rose is too young to understand the full scope of this, she is beginning to understand that emotional support is what her mother needs. She even suggests it in front of her father, which



Lane then dismisses. How much Lane and Paul really know and understand of the affair is unclear, largely because Rose is incapable from fully piecing that together.

Joseph begins disappearing, which is something that is first witnessed by Rose. Lane pays Joseph to babysit Rose while she is out; but, Rose is forthcoming about how little Joseph watches her. When Lane offers to pay Rose and then continues with that arrangement, the reader understands that the babysitting jobs are more about Rose staying with Joseph. In part, this is role reversal for the siblings, but it is also an attempt to give Joseph a typical teenage experience.

The fact that Joseph's disappearances are first witnessed by Rose may be intentional. Since Joseph must have some control over these episodes, it is possible that he feels comfortable enough to reveal them to Rose because he is aware of her special skill. This may be an attempt to connect with his sister in the only way he knows. The laugh that they share over the pink pen is one of the more natural shared experiences between siblings. Rose delights in sharing the laugh with him because she has been trying to reach him for so long. Joseph extends this offer to her once. The joke no longer exists the next day when she attempts to recreate it. While it is natural for people to try to recapture the magic of something that was pleasurable, the moment is fleeting. This expands on the themes of relationships and adolescence.

## Discussion Question 1

What does the story about the footstool reveal about Lane's relationship with Paul?

## Discussion Question 2

What does Paul's reaction to Rose's questions about special skills reveal about him?

## Discussion Question 3

What are the implications of Rose learning about her mother's affair?

## Vocabulary

fastidious, tawny, trod, abyss, tangible, dubiously, confounding, wallop, flux, mantra, colluded, respite, nuances, gamut, mortise, transom, ottoman, conjure, emphatic, caverns, antidote, vector, inhabitants, flanked, revered, inexplicable, plagued, iridescent



## Part Two: Joseph, Chapters 20-28

### Summary

In Chapter 20, Rose is taking the bus home by herself because Joseph had to stay after school. She finds another delivery from Grandma. Her mother is trying a new recipe. Lane asks if Rose wants to help cook, and she grates the cheese. She tells her mom about Joseph disappearing. Lane wonders if he is sneaking out; she does not think that being secretive is a bad thing. The next time Joseph babysits, Rose discovers that he has disappeared again. When he comes back, Rose notes how old he looks. She asks if he is sick. He explains that he is practicing something difficult. Rose asks Joseph for a favor.

The next day at school, George comes to see Rose, telling her that Joseph told him to stop by. Rose wants to show George off to Eliza. George and Rose talk about George going away to college in the fall.

Chapter 21 reflects on when Joseph was born and Lane's best friend Sharlene came to be with her in the hospital. Rose remembers being told the story when she was around seven. Lane also told Rose that Rose laughed when she was born. Infants do not usually laugh. Lane explains that she knew Joseph would guide her, and Rose asks if she guides her as well. Lane says yes. At dinner, Joseph eats his meal with his eyes closed so that he can be in his own private cave.

In Chapter 22, Rose is now thirteen. Joseph is receiving rejection letters in response to all of the applications he sent to universities. The letters state that his grades are erratic and he participates in no extracurricular activities. Unfortunately, he was not able to convey on the applications that he was a genius. After Joseph locks himself in his room, Lane picks the lock. Joseph wants to move out of the house.

In Chapter 23, Joseph disappears again. Lane witnesses this disappearance. It happens before his high school graduation. George arrives, and Rose tells him Joseph is missing. They all call out for Joseph. Amidst Joseph's disappearance, Rose asks George if she will see him again, and he tells he will come by from time to time. Rose answers a telephone call from Larry, who tells her that it is nice to meet her over the phone. She tells him that she knows, but she will not tell. However, he should not call the house. She leaves a note for her mother that Larry called. They continue looking for Joseph. Rose says that he will be back soon. She finds him in the hallway. He is looking weathered.

As Chapter 24 begins, it is August and George is moving to Pasadena for college. Joseph is on his way to Los Feliz to attend Los Angeles City College. George gives Rose a long hug before leaving and hugs Eliza as well. Joseph takes folding chairs and a table with him. Originally, the plan was for Joseph to have a roommate. He had applied to the same school as George so that they could be roommates. Unable to find





a roommate, Lane rents the apartment for him. When he learns the apartment is his, Joseph dances around and thanks her. George is serious at school, and Joseph is withdrawn, living on his own. Time passes and Rose is now a senior in high school. At school, she runs into Eddie Oakley. They occasionally make out by the boys' locker rooms. Sherrie, a transfer student from Montana, befriends Rose. Rose tells her about her special skill, and Sherrie gives her food to eat. Rose tells her that she is depressed. Whenever Rose is around Sherrie, she eats Sherrie's food so that she can feel what Sherrie is feeling. Rose doesn't want this to define their friendship. She tries to get Sherrie to do something normal, like going to a movie. Sherrie tells her she can do that with anyone; Rose's skill is interesting. Rose withdraws, and the friendship ends.

Chapter 25 starts in the spring. Joseph has lived on his own for five years. He calls daily at a specific time. When he does not call one day, Lane worries and goes to the apartment. Paul does not seem overly concerned. Lane finds a dehydrated Joseph face down on his mattress. She calls an ambulance. Paul sends tulips and roses to the nurses at the hospital to make sure Joseph gets proper care. Joseph is released and returns to the apartment. Lane wants to go on a trip with the co-op to Nova Scotia and wants Rose to keep watch over everyone.

Rose has her learner's permit now and her dad takes her driving. She sees Eddie at school, and he asks if she wants to keep in touch after graduation. She tells him no. On Thursday, Rose and Paul go for a drive and he starts up a father/daughter conversation with questions about boys and how they get better as they get older. He asks about school. Rose tells him a story about a kid who was smart, though he did not do well in school. He was from a poor family, and he needed eyeglasses. He gets home with his new glasses and sees his mother and the house for the first time in years. He sees that his mother is exhausted and the house is dilapidated. He steps on his eyeglasses so that he does not see the reality of the situation.

Chapter 26 is a brief chapter in which Rose leaves a rambling message for George. He picks up halfway through her leaving the message, and she thinks she hears a girl in the background.

Chapter 27 picks up after Rose ends the phone call with George. The phone rings and it is Lane. She cannot reach Joseph. She wants Rose to go check on him. Rose asks if Larry is on the trip and tells her mother that she knows about the affair and has for years. Lane is shocked, confused, and ashamed by it. She asks if Paul knows, and Rose tells her that she is the only one who knows.

In Chapter 28, Rose drives to Joseph's apartment. He does not answer the door, so she goes in with a spare key her mother hid. She walks through the apartment, but there is no trace of Joseph. She calls for him at the closed bedroom door before opening it. She finds him sitting in the middle of the room at the card table on a folding chair. He tells her he got rid of the bed because the floor was better for his back, but he does not move from the chair. He tells her that he is working and needs to concentrate. Rose senses something familiar like when Joseph used to babysit her. She notices something strange with the chair and asks Joseph why the chair leg is in his pant leg. He tells her



he is fine and that she should go. She lifts up the pant leg and discovers that his leg has turned into the leg of the chair. She remembers how Joseph told their mother that he loved the folding chairs as each one arrived in the mail from their grandmother. She draws a line on the chair. She leaves the room to make a phone call, returning seconds later to find Joseph gone.

## Analysis

The theme of adolescence is further explored when Rose takes the bus by herself. Joseph is making up an exam, and Rose makes her way home alone. It is uneventful, but it demonstrates Rose's growing independence, although not one of choice, but rather circumstance.

When she arrives at home, Lane invites Rose to help her prep for dinner. Rose is not interested in doing cooking, but she takes pleasure in grating the cheese. It is an aggressive act toward the food, and it is satisfying for her. It also gives her the opportunity to speak with her mother. Perhaps empowered by grating the cheese, Rose tells her mother that Joseph has been disappearing. Lane's reaction is not one of alarm. Instead, it gives Lane the opportunity to consider that Joseph may be experiencing normal adolescent behavior by sneaking of and, perhaps, having a girlfriend. Rose, of course, knows this is not the case, but she also does not know what he is doing or where he is going.

When Rose confronts Joseph after her returns, he explains that he is doing something difficult. Much like Rose being unable to convey to people what tasting emotions must be like, Joseph is going through something as well. It is possible that he does not have the words to explain it or feels that Rose simply would not be able to understand it, or both. Rose takes this interaction as the opportunity to ask Joseph for a favor. The favor results in George coming to see Rose at school. Rose enjoys the attention and the fact that it is designed to make Eliza feel jealous. This also addresses the theme of Disappointment Leading to Self Discovery because Rose manipulates the appearance of her relationship with George only to be disappointed because she knows it is not real. She learns that she cannot fool herself.

As a theme, Relationships are highlighted in the story of Joseph's. The story gives details about Lane and Paul as a couple and how Lane's friend supported her during the birthing process. Rose is also reminded of the story of her birth and how Lane insists that Rose laughed after being born. She insists that Rose did so, even though the doctors told her that was not possible. The story is a reminder of how Rose is viewed by others. She is friendly and affable, a contrast to the range of emotions that Rose currently exhibits. This is a way for Lane to reconcile how her daughter is changing as she is growing up.

Joseph's university rejection letters hit him hard. He viewed getting in as a sure thing and targeted the same schools as George, figuring that they would agree on the same school and be roommates. George does not turn his back on Joseph after the



rejections, but Joseph does start to withdraw from George, foreshadowing Joseph's ultimate fate. Joseph was looking forward to moving out, stockpiling the boxes leftover from Grandma's packages. While he is clearly introverted, he is looking desperately for independence. Because the reader doesn't yet understand where Joseph goes when he disappears, it is reasonable to consider the same options that Lane did earlier. His haggard appearance, however, indicates otherwise. Something is happening to Joseph, or perhaps Joseph is doing something to himself, and it's causing some kind of harm. Just as it was reasonable for the nurse to consider whether Rose had an eating disorder, it is also reasonable for the reader to consider Joseph's mental stability. His personality and disappearances may indicate that Joseph is dealing with a mental illness. His disappearances could represent the onset of something such as schizophrenia, which often presents during teenage years and into early adulthood.

In Chapter 23, Joseph disappears on the day of his high school graduation. It is the first time that the rest of the family and George witness the event. Prior to this, it was likely easy to dismiss that Joseph was off doing whatever or that Rose was making a bigger deal out of what was happening. Now it's real. Paralleling this event is the phone call from Larry. Rose answers the phone and when she realizes who it is, is far more direct with Larry than would be expected from Rose. While she has not told her mother that she knows about the affair, she tells Larry that she knows. This moment of Rose exuding more power than expected in Joseph's absence foreshadows the ending of the novel.

George, of course, moves away for school and Joseph is allowed to move into an apartment on his own. These are typical rights of passage in adolescence. Joseph dancing around after learning he gets to move into the apartment is a moment when he finally exhibits what would be considered normal teenage behavior. It also demonstrates to the reader a time when Joseph appears happy. Rose's interactions with Eddie also example adolescence. While they do not date, they make out with each and continue to exhibit disgust or annoyances with each other as they explore more adult roles as they mature. Rose also begins a friendship with the new girl Sherrie. In the beginning, Rose is probably pleased that someone does not judge her ability as made up or weird. Sherrie likes that Rose is able to tell her things she is unable to confront on her own, from depression to how she feels about a particular boy in school. The difficulty arises when the friendship stagnates into only serving Sherrie. Rose is treated as an extension of Sherrie, instead of having a reciprocal role in the friendship. Sherrie dismisses multiple attempts by Rose to do something normal, like go to the movies. Sherrie wants Rose's special skill because it is of interest to her and, more importantly, about her. This addresses the sometimes narcissistic behaviors of teenagers and develops the theme of Disappointment Leading to Self Discovery. While Rose is disappointed that her friend is only interested in using Rose's special tasting ability, she also learns about true friendship. She discovers that she is strong enough to give up a friendship that only uses her.

Chapter 25 makes a significant time jump, moving the story five years into the future. Joseph has structure in his life and is required to call home daily. While he attends college courses, he does not have a job and is reliant on Lane to pay his rent. The



theme of relationships is brought to light when Lane discovers Joseph after one of his disappearing episodes. Paul's reactions to Joseph's disappearances are jarring in their lack of concern. Obviously, Paul cares for his children, but he remains emotionally withdrawn. This is another way the author foreshadows the reveal about Paul's family. He may have some indication, not of what Joseph is doing, but rather the implications of what is happening to Joseph. Because he is unable to change or fix what is happening, he remains distant.

The theme of relationships is further explored through Rose and George and Rose and her mother. The reader is given some insight into how George is progressing socially in college. He still makes time for Rose, but the reveal that Rose heard a girl in his room demonstrates how their lives are moving apart.

In Chapter 27, Rose confronts her mother about the affair. Given Lane's shocked reaction, it is apparent that Larry did not tell Lane that Rose knew after Rose confronted him on the phone years earlier. Lane's other concern is whether or not Paul knows. Rose can only confirm that she knows.

Chapter 28 focuses on Joseph. As should be expected, Rose is the one to discover the truth because she was the first to notice his disappearances. The reader may have difficulty accepting that after all the disappearances that Joseph has actually been turning into a chair. It is absurd to be sure. It is another way the author employs magical realism throughout the novel. If the reader is able to accept that Rose is capable of tasting others' emotions, then it should be natural to accept that someone is able to turn into a chair. The chair can be viewed as a symbol of Joseph's emotional stagnation. While he is older than Rose, he has not developed socially like Rose. It can also be viewed as Joseph turning into himself. He is increasingly so withdrawn that his attention turns inward, so much so that he becomes the chair where he sits.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why does Rose tell her mother she knows about the affair?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Why is it important that Rose be the one to discover Joseph and the chair?

## **Discussion Question 3**

How is the relationship between George and Rose evolving?

## Vocabulary

droughts, sonata, delicacy, exquisite, trundled, weary, chortle, endeavor, perihelion, erratic, jaunty, incredulous, assurance, divots, ruse, finicky, ravenous, augmented, stoic, filigree, fickle, envious, irrigated, corroded, scarce, amenities, sullenness, stucco, cupola, apparatus, ostensibly, incoherence, lucid



## Part Three: Nightfall, Chapters 29-34

### Summary

Chapter 29, which begins Part Three: Nightfall, is a short chapter that is set around Rose and Lane as they are looking at a photo album. Rose does not recognize her picture in the album.

In Chapter 30, Rose details what happened with Joseph in the apartment. There had been little food in the refrigerator, and the bedroom window was open. When Rose involves the police, they ask if Joseph is suicidal. Next, she calls George. She asks George to meet her. Then, she calls her father and mother. She waits for George and her father at the phone booth.

In Chapter 31, Rose, Paul, and George meet at the apartment. Paul suggests they go get something to eat because Joseph has done this before. They go to a French café called La Lyonnaise to eat. They order and Rose tells them what happened, leaving out the part about the chair leg. They discuss the details about the window being open, and Rose senses that George is picking up on details being left out. Paul thinks it is strange that Rose did not look out the open window when Joseph disappeared. She doesn't understand why he thinks Joseph may have gone out the window when the bushes below didn't appear to be damaged. Paul assures her that Joseph will come back and Rose's food arrives: it's the best soup she's ever had.

In Chapter 32, the three of them return to the apartment. Paul stays outside while George and Rose go inside to check for Joseph. On their way into the apartment, they make small talk. George reveals that he is going to MIT in the summer. He asks Rose to tell him what she really saw in the apartment, and she tells him she does not know how to describe it.

In Chapter 33, Rose and George make their way to Joseph's bedroom. Rose thinks about how, other than Eddie, she has rarely been alone with a guy. George squeezes her hand. They look around the room. George tries to make sense of everything, and she tells him that the chair is connected. George puts it together that Joseph has become a chair. They share a kiss.

In Chapter 34, Lane returns from Nova Scotia. She thanks Rose for checking on Joseph and goes to the apartment to see for herself. She is upset when she returns home. Rose cooks a pasta dinner for them. It is the first meal she has cooked and eaten. She tastes her emotions in the food. The emotions run the gamut from sadness to rage to guilt. Later while Lane is doing dishes, Rose overhears her ask out the window, "Where are you?"



## Analysis

Part Three: Nightfall begins in Chapter 29. The chapter is only a few paragraphs in length. Rose details looking at a photo of herself when she was younger. Lane is surprised that Rose does not see herself and blames it on the angle or a new haircut in the picture. This chapter allows the reader to digest the information about Joseph and to call attention to seeing something and not recognizing it. Rose is removed from the time period in the picture and it is confusing. This parallels what is happening with Joseph.

In Chapter 30, the police are involved and asking if Joseph was suicidal. This gives a strong indicator that what is happening with Joseph may have something to do with mental illness. The novel doesn't move away from the magical realism, however. It continues with Joseph's disappearance. Rose's response is what the reader should expect: she calls her parents and George.

The theme of Maintaining a Sense of Normalcy is explored further when Paul and George meet up with Rose. Paul suggests that they get something to eat. They are at a loss to help Joseph in any capacity and must wait. As would happen with many people, they go to eat and discuss what happened. George can sense that Rose is leaving something out when she describes what she saw. Rose's previous interactions with her father have cued her into not revealing too much about the otherness that she and Joseph experience, so she's not likely to divulge the details about the chair in front of him. George is more receptive and picks up on it. It is important to note that Lane is missing from this conversation. Lane would likely embrace Joseph's special skill because she highly regards her son.

When they return to the apartment building, Paul stays on the sidewalk. This gives Rose and George an opportunity to be alone and further discuss what happens, but also reinforces a defined element of Paul's character: he is withdrawn. He likely isn't prepared to face the reality of what may or may not exist in the apartment. His withdrawal shouldn't be viewed as apathy, however. The way Paul distances himself demonstrates his own otherness.

In the apartment, the theme of adolescence is further explored. Some may find it peculiar that Rose and George kiss in the apartment where Joseph disappeared. They are inextricably connected to Joseph. Allowing this moment to transpire in Joseph's shadow solidifies the connection. While the lens for this relationship has been Rose's, the reader has gotten subtle hints that George has feelings for Rose. Because the kiss is wish fulfillment for Rose, a sustained relationship between the two seems impossible.

Following Joseph's disappearance, Rose cooks her first meal. She cooks for her parents likely because she can't fathom the pain and sadness that would undoubtedly be in the food if either prepared it. This is the first time she must confront her own emotions. When she discusses it later with George, she comments that it tasted like a factory. Rose compares the experience to not recognizing herself in the photo. This is an apt comparison, since this illustrates how detached from her own emotions she is.



## **Discussion Question 1**

Why does George kiss Rose in Joseph's apartment?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Why does Paul not go into the apartment with Rose and George?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What are the implications of Rose enjoying the soup on the night of Joseph's disappearance?

## **Vocabulary**

emaciated, jangle, façade, gilded, telepathically, intent, refuge, perfunctory, fissure





## Part Four: Here, Chapters 35-47

### Summary

Chapter 35 begins Part Four: Here. This section moves time forward. Rose did not go to college. She continues to live at home with her parents. Though Joseph had left, he returns briefly. Doctors test Joseph, and he disappears again. It is the last time Rose sees him. They must let the apartment go. In the car, Lane and Rose talk about the affair. Lane wonders if Joseph left because of the affair. Rose dismisses the thought and tells her that she has known about the affair since she was twelve. Lane admits that she loves Paul, but Larry is helpful to her. Rose tells her she does not want the details, but she is not asking for her to give him up. They move Joseph's belongings back into his room. Lane does not want to get rid of anything.

Chapter 36 opens with George leaving for MIT for graduate study. George and Rose talk about the kiss and she reveals that she never expected it to be more than one time. He asks why not and tells her that it meant something to him. She tells him that she tasted her own food for the first time that night. She tells him it tasted like a factory.

In Chapter 37, Rose reveals that she wasn't ready for college after Joseph's disappearance. She compares eating her own food to not recognizing herself in the photo album or discovering the truth about Joseph. She takes an office job and eats out most of the time. Her favorite restaurant is La Lyonnaise.

Chapter 38 opens with Rose eating roast chicken at La Lyonnaise. She goes to the delivery door of the restaurant and Madame DuPont answers the door. Rose compliments her cooking and asks if she could work in the restaurant on the weekends. She offers her a job as a dishwasher.

In Chapter 39, Grandma dies. Before she checks herself into the hospital, she instructs a nurse to send a final package to her family. Inside the box are random items, including a teak box with ashes inside. Lane made the box.

In Chapter 40, Rose works in the restaurant on the weekend and at an office during the week. She goes on a few dates with Eddie, and they finally have sex. George still calls once a month and sends Rose a wedding invitation. She goes on a date with Peter, a man from her office. At the restaurant, Monsieur DuPont is having a wine tasting.

Chapter 41 finds Rose attending George's wedding. It is the first they have seen each other in three years. He hugs her and they share a dance. He asks her if she remembers the bakery. He then asks if she is still a factory and she says she's getting better. She tells him about the dish washing job and the free meals she gets there. He asks why she's not a taster for them. He later comments that Joseph should be there.

In Chapter 42, Rose returns home after the wedding. She has a conversation with her father and he tells her that his father had a special skill. He could smell people's pain.



He would wear a strap over his face to block the smells. Ultimately, he smelled his own death. Rose tells him she can taste people. He tells her that he was afraid of going into hospitals, thinking some special skill might reveal itself. She tells him he is lucky because whatever his skill might be, it is contained in one place. He knows she saw something the last day with Joseph. He tells her that he does not want to know what she saw. He only wants to know if Joseph is coming back. She tells him no.

In Chapter 43, Rose goes to La Lyonnaise and asks Monsieur DuPont to do a food tasting. A few other customers at the bar want to do it as well, and they all begin. The other customers taste eggs, something in the wine, etc. Rose begins to describe the different ingredients. She tells where they are from and identifies those that are organic. In one instance, she tells how a farmer picks parsley rudely. She comments on the state of the cooks. When the tasting is over, Madame asks her how she did it. Rose tells her she does not know how she does it, but she can. Another woman at the bar gives Rose her card and tells her she may be able to use her as well because she works with teenagers. Monsieur wants to speak further with Rose.

In Chapter 44, Madame DuPont asks if Rose wants to be a cook. Rose is not sure, but she wants to be around her when she cooks.

In Chapter 45, when people ask about Joseph, Lane says that he is on a journey. Rose cooks for Lane twice a week. She bakes her a coconut birthday cake. When Rose tastes it, the cake tells her that she wishes to be eight again. Lane tells Rose that she will make her a lemon cake for her next birthday. Rose says that she does not like lemon cake anymore.

Chapter 46 finds Rose on a lunch break, meeting the woman who works with high-risk teenagers. At the restaurant, the DuPonts give Rose a closet with a lock to store her belongings. That evening, she tells her parents about the closet and explains that she is not moving out yet, but making a step. She puts her things in the closet the next day, along with Joseph's folding chair.

In Chapter 47, Joseph returns for two weeks. Lane finds him and takes him to the hospital because he is dehydrated. Rose goes to the hospital to see him, but he is undergoing tests. Rose waits around. When she finally sees him, he tells her she is the only one who knows. She asks if he knows that he was away. He says that he did not know anything when he was away. She tells him about the line she drew on the chair and that he should only come back to the chair with the mark on it. He says that he will.

## Analysis

The theme of relationships is examined in the conversation between Lane and Rose. Lane held onto the apartment after Joseph's disappearance until the landlord insisted he wanted to be able to rent it to someone else. Paul is encouraging Lane to let it go, explaining that should Joseph come back, he would have a better use for the money that would otherwise be spent on rent.



While in the car, Rose and Lane talk about Lane's affair with Larry. The conversation takes a different tone than the previous conversation when Rose had confronted her mother. Lane reinforces that she does love Paul, but Larry offers her something Paul does not offer. Rose stops her from delving into the details, which is normal. After Lane suggests calling the affair off, Rose tells her not to stop the affair. Rose does not need the details to understand how the affair makes her mother feel. While Rose may not like it, she can appreciate her mother's need for emotional fulfillment.

Rose has previously acknowledged that she was not ready to move out of her parents' house, but she is ready to explore other aspects of her independence. The theme of Maintaining a Sense of Normalcy is addressed as Rose makes a fairly common decision. Rather than isolate herself in a different place, Rose chooses to get a job. Though she does not go away to college, she keeps in touch with George, Eliza, and even Eddie.

After all these years, Rose and Eddie finally consummate their relationship, but it is a relationship that goes nowhere. Rose does not have an emotional connection with Eddie like she does with George. In some respects, Rose's relationships with these two men mirror her mother's with Paul and Larry. Rose quickly moves on from Eddie after they have sex. She goes on a date with Peter. However, Rose's journey is not about finding the right man. Her journey is one of self-discovery.

Rose attends George's wedding, and she is able to speak privately with George during the chaotic day. When she tells him that she is working as a dishwasher at La Lyonnaise, George is puzzled as to why she is not working as a taster for them. Perhaps, Rose is not ready to be a taster, but it may also be that she needs the push of seeing George happily move on in his life to recognize that she needs to do the same. This is further addressed when George asks if she still tastes like a factory. George knows that Rose needs to let go and become who she is meant to be. Being emotionally closed off is one way that she is coping with Joseph's disappearance.

After returning from the wedding, Rose has a candid conversation with her father. It is simultaneously both of them making an effort to confront their emotions. While Rose will decidedly take the bigger step toward emotional acceptance, the conversation does illuminate quite a lot about the family. Paul reveals that his father had a special skill. He shares about the impact it had on his father, and by extension, on him. It is likely that Paul feels responsibility for what his children experience because of an assumed genetic component. Paul also explains why he stays away from hospitals and how he suspects that whatever skill he has would be discovered in the hospital. He witnessed the burden of his father's skill, and he is now witnessing its effects his children. Rose shares with him her skill and answers the questions that Paul has about Joseph. Rose also explains that Paul is lucky because, if he does have a skill, it is confined to one location. While Rose is left to consume hers, Joseph is consumed by his. Paul does not want to know exactly what Rose saw with Joseph. He wants to know if Joseph will be back. How exactly Rose knows that he will not return is unclear, but it does appear that



Joseph is too far gone. It is possible that the times that Joseph did return he did so reluctantly.

Following her conversation with her father and likely prompted by George's suggestion, Rose talks about her talent to the DuPonts. She impresses them with her ability and knows that she has found a place where she belongs with them at La Lyonnaise. Yet, she remains unsure of what exactly she wants. It is not important for Rose to find out where she needs to be and what she needs to do. Instead, the focus is on Rose readying herself for discovery. She has options before her, including with the woman who helps troubled teenagers. This is truly what sets her apart from Joseph. Either Joseph did not have options or only saw one option. Just as Rose accepts this element of her maturation process, she is able to leave her adolescence behind. While she has not completely moved out of her parents' home, her comment to Lane about not liking lemon cake anymore points her in the right direction to move forward with her life.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why does George tell Rose that the kiss meant something to him?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Rose does not ask Lane to give up her affair with Larry. Why not?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Why does Rose think that she is not ready for college?

## **Vocabulary**

vacant, fervently, nostalgia, harbinger, citadel, magnanimous, elongated, sundries, concentric, translucent, gratin, vortex, opalescent, procession, tendency, faltered, permutations, inertia, extricated, disillusioned, piquant, sculptural, sustain, voracious



# Characters

## Rose Edelstein

Rose ages over the course of the novel from eight to a young adult in her early twenties. Her most marked characteristic, according to her family, is that she is friendly. When she discovers her skill for tasting the emotions of others in food, she is overwhelmed and lacks the ability to articulate what is happening to her. She reaches out to her mother, sensing her sadness and pain. Rose does not understand how to explain what is happening to her mother.

Rose wants a relationship with her brother. However, Joseph's lack of social skills prevents them from being close. Rose recognizes that her mother feels differently about Joseph than about her. She is not jealous or angry. She understands her place in the family.

Her relationship with her parents remains distant. She knows too much about her mother, and it overwhelms her. She pursues what she thinks is the normal father-daughter relationship. She ultimately reaches out to her father after Joseph's disappearance. She is better able to understand her skill after learning that her paternal grandfather had one as well. Her father is frightened of discovering his own.

Her girlhood crush on George evolves over time. It represents her growing up, but it is also a relationship where she can feel understood and accepted. However, she does not expect much from it. This is similar to how her family's actions have led her to believe that she should not expect much from them. This delays her acceptance of herself.

## Joseph Edelstein

Joseph is Rose's older brother. The age difference is about five years. Joseph appears to be socially awkward, but he is a genius. His only friend is George, whom he considers his intellectual equal.

Joseph becomes increasingly withdrawn from his family. He closes his eyes or reads a book at the dinner table to avoid conversation. The project that he is working on is his priority. While he is a genius, he is rejected from each of the universities to which he applies. He wants to room with George at college, and he is not sure about how to deal with not being able to go away. He agrees to attend a local college on the condition that is able to move into an apartment. He needs the space to continue his work.

Joseph disappears frequently without explanation. He returns haggard and dehydrated. Rose is the first to witness his disappearances, and Joseph eventually confides in her. She discovers that he has turned into a chair, which leads him to exist between this world and space. Ultimately, he leaves for good.



## George

George is Joseph's best friend. He has an affable personality, which is in sharp contrast to Joseph's. While they are both exceedingly smart, George's personality helps Rose to realize that Joseph is not withdrawn just because he is smart. He has other issues.

George and Rose bond when Rose reveals her special skill to George and Joseph. While Joseph rejects it, George is open to understanding what it is. He is helpful and curious and genuinely cares for Rose.

Over time, George and Rose grow closer. He plays along with her crush. Eventually, he develops feelings for Rose when she is older. They share a kiss, and he tells her that the kiss is meaningful to him. He is unable to connect any further with Rose. He understands her difficulty in understanding and exhibiting emotion and helps push her toward accepting it.

## Lane Edelstein

Lane is Paul's wife and the mother of Joseph and Rose. She quits a job in an office to explore her creativity. She enjoys gardening, cooking, and carpentry. Woodworking becomes her favorite creative outlet. She joins a co-op and begins an affair with Larry, the co-op president.

While Lane loves her husband, her marriage offers her no emotional fulfillment. She favors Joseph, but she does not neglect Rose. Lane's relationship with her own mother is chilly. Perhaps, that distant relationship may set an example for how she interacts with her own daughter.

## Paul Edelstein

Paul is Lane's husband and the father of Joseph and Rose. He is withdrawn from his family, but he is able to provide for them. He works as a lawyer.

Paul has a fear of hospitals and refuses to go into one. His fear caused him to miss the birth of both of his children, which has led to Lane feeling emotionally unsupported by her husband.

Paul's fear of hospitals is rooted in not wanting to know if he has a special skill. His father was able to smell people's pain, and he recognized the burden it placed on his father. By avoiding the hospital, he can avoid a similar fate. He is slow to accept that both of his children have a special skill.



## Larry

Larry is a carpenter who teaches Lane about building furniture. He and Lane have an affair for years.

## Eliza

Eliza is Rose's friend at school. As they are close friends, Eliza protects Rose from classmates who criticize the way Rose eats. Eliza's family eats healthy food. During a class presentation, Rose arranges for Eliza to indulge in Doritos.

## Grandma

Grandma is Lane's mother. She is in her eighties when the novel starts and dies in her early nineties by the end of the book. She sends packages to Lane and her family over the course of many years. She sends the folding chairs and card table that Joseph takes with him. She leaves instructions that her ashes be placed in a box that Lane made for her after her death.

## Sherrie

Sherrie is a transfer student from Montana who befriends Rose. She is interested Rose's special skill only, thinking that she can only understand how she really feels when Rose tells her.

## Monsieur and Madame DuPont

Monsieur and Madame DuPont are the couple who co-own the La Lyonnaise restaurant where Rose likes to eat. They are both chefs. Madame offers Rose a job as a dishwasher.

## Rose's Grandfather

Rose's grandfather is Paul's father. He died at aged fifty-four before Rose was born. He wore a mask over his face to obstruct the smells of people around him. His special skill was being able to smell others, in particular their pain. He was able to smell his own death just before he died.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Chair

The chair is symbolic of Joseph and his removed personality. Rose ends up having possession of the chair, and it becomes a representation of her brother's absence. Should he return, Rose has asked that he only use the chair so that she will know.

## Lemon Cake

The lemon cake is symbolic of Rose's special skill. The tartness of the lemon indicates that her skill will not always be palatable.

## Vending Machines

Rose relies on the vending machines to supplement her lunches while she's in school. The machines are symbolic of how she views herself, which is revealed when George asks how her cooking tastes and she replies that it is like a factory.

## La Lyonnaise

La Lyonnaise is the restaurant where Rose eats the onion soup after Joseph's disappearance. There is comfort in the soup and she views the restaurant favorably, so much so that it is like home to her. It symbolizes that she will be able to find her place in the world and make peace with her skill.

## Footstool

The footstool is symbolic of Rose's parents' relationship. It is manufactured by her father into something that her mother loves, yet it does not satisfy her emotionally.

## Cooking

Cooking is symbolic of emotional relationships. Rose can taste how the person handling the food feels. She struggles to eat because she rejects the emotions. Until she is able to eat her own cooking and confront her own emotions, she rejects her skill.





## **The Affair**

The affair between Lane and Larry is symbolic of finding emotional fulfillment. Lane pursues the affair because she feels distant from her husband. The affair represents reconciling the reality of the situation and making the best of it.

## **Joseph's Door**

Joseph gets a door for his bedroom, while Rose does not. The door symbolizes that Joseph will isolate and remove himself completely from the family, whereas Rose will stay connected to the family.

## **The Bakery**

The Bakery is symbolic of the relationship between Rose and George. It is the place where the two are alone for the first time and Rose is able to reveal her skill to him without fear of judgement or rejection.

## **The Hospital**

The Hospital is symbolic of the special skills. Joseph becomes all consumed by his skill, so much so that he is removed from the family. Paul understands that the hospital is a place where his skill may be revealed, so he rejects it by never entering a hospital. Ultimately, the hospital is symbolic of how the skill needs to be accepted and compartmentalized, which is how Rose finally confronts her skill.



# Settings

## The Edelstein House

The Edelstein House is where Rose grows and lives with her brother and mother and father. It is a middle class home with a garage filled with some of Lane's projects. It has a TV room where Paul likes to work and watch television. Rose and Joseph both have their own rooms, which share a wall. Joseph, however, has a bedroom door, which his mother helped to make.

## The Hospital

The hospital emergency room is where Lane takes both of her children. Rose is tested and released after becoming hysterical after eating from a pie her mother made. Joseph is admitted to the hospital after being found in his apartment following one of his disappearances. Both of the children were born in the hospital, but Paul refuses to step inside a hospital. Instead, he waits outside and sends flowers to the nurses.

## Joseph's Apartment

Joseph's apartment is in Los Feliz, about fifteen minutes away from his parents' house. It is a modest apartment with a balcony. Joseph removes the mattress from his bedroom to make room for the card table and folding chairs his grandmother sent.

## The Bakery

The Bakery is a place that specializes in homemade baked goods, cookies in particular. George takes Rose to the bakery to conduct the second part of their experiment on her ability to taste emotions.

## La Lyonnaise

La Lyonnaise is the restaurant where George, Paul, and Rose eat after the discovery about Joseph turning into a chair. Later, Rose returns to the restaurant and asks for a job. She works as a dishwasher there until she reveals her special tasting ability to the DuPonts.



# Themes and Motifs

## Food

The theme of food is prominent throughout the novel. Rose develops a sense for tasting people's emotions. This is first revealed when her mother bakes her a lemon cake with chocolate frosting for her ninth birthday. She senses her mother's emotions. She then rejects the cake in the same way she would reject that her mother would feel this way.

Rose is capable of handling the emotions in the food if they are positive, which doesn't happen often, or if they're sterile, such as her being able to eat the lollipop after leaving the emergency room. Since the lollipop was completely manufactured by a machine, there was no direct human contact that created emotions for Rose. Unpleasant emotions are difficult to digest.

She is fearful of cooking for herself because she is frightened of her own emotions. When she finally does cook a meal, she does so after Joseph disappears and she wants to help her mother. The food is difficult for her to eat. While this is true, given the state her parents are in following Joseph's disappearance, she is more equipped to eat something she prepared rather than something made by Lane.

Another way that food is used as a theme is in how Rose's relationship with food changes because of George. When Rose asks Joseph and George for help, George is ready to get to the bottom of what's happening. He conducts an experiment with their afternoon snack. Later in the week, she goes with him to a bakery to further test her skills. Once Rose is older and she and George have grown closer, George asks her how the food she makes tastes. She claims it is like a factory. George follows up on this comparison and encourages her to break free from the confines of the factory. She ultimately reveals her skill to the DuPonts and finds comfort in their restaurant.

## Relationships

Another theme apparent in the novel is Relationships. Many relationships are explored throughout the duration of the novel. The primary relationship is how Rose interacts with others through food. Her relationship with her mother is the first affected when Rose discovers her skill. She no longer sees her mother in the same way and struggles with the depth of emotion her mother feels.

The way Joseph interacts with the family is another example of relationships. He is withdrawn and continues to move away from the family, whether by reading at the dinner table or closing his eyes while eating so that he feels like he's in a private cave. The door to his bedroom further isolates him from the family. He hardly interacts with his father, and reluctantly interacts with Rose. While his relationship with his mother remains distant, he does exhibit fondness or trust with her, especially in the way that he removes the splinters from her hands.



The relationship between Rose and George evolves over the years. George is Rose's first real crush, which is heightened by his acceptance of her skill. When they finally have the opportunity to expand on their relationship when they're older, Rose is unable to connect emotionally beyond the endgame of one kiss. It means something for George, although clearly they're not meant to be. George is able to help Rose understand what she needs in her relationship with herself before she can foster relationships with others.

Another way the theme of relationships is explored is in the affair that Lane has with Larry. Lane and Paul have been married for years and Lane loves him. However, his emotional distance has prompted her to seek companionship outside of the marriage. Rose learns about the affair by eating a roast her mother made. While she does not confront her mother about the affair for years, she is able to see how her mother reacts emotionally because of the relationship with Larry.

## **Maintaining a Sense of Normalcy**

Maintaining a Sense of Normalcy is a theme explored throughout the novel. What is considered normal behavior by most standards is not always what transpires. Instead, the characters are left with trying to understand and accepting that part of self which would not be considered normal. Then, the character moves forward in trying to maintain what normal looks like to most people.

Obviously, the special skills that both Rose and Joseph have qualify as being out of the ordinary. Rose can taste emotions in food, and Joseph is able to transcend time and space. Though Joseph disappears from time to time to keep his special ability of becoming a chair hidden, he tries to maintain a sense of normalcy in his life by applying to colleges that his friend George will be applying to as well. Actually, Joseph wants to be George's roommate. So, Joseph is maintaining what looks like a normal lifestyle for a teenager. When he disappears, his mother bolsters his normal image by telling Rose that it is normal for him as a teenager to leave the house without telling anyone and to meet girls.

Rose is honest when she tells her new friend at school about her special talent of tasting emotions. While it is fun for awhile to let her friend use Rose's ability for her own purpose, Rose wants a normal friendship, which includes going to movies. So, while Rose accepts herself as being different, she tries to maintain a sense of normalcy in her life. The so called friendship ends. Rose is also honest with George, Joseph's friend. George serves a twofold purpose in Rose's life. He can be trusted with the knowledge about her special ability, and he provides a sense of normalcy as a boyfriend. Although several years separate their ages, Rosie is normal because she has a crush on her brother's friend.

Paul is withdrawn from his family. Perhaps, this is because he does not want his unreasonable fear of hospitals to label him as being abnormal. He finally tells Rose why he does not go into the hospital. He also tells her that his father was burdened by his



ability to smell the pain of other people. Paul is further isolated from the family by his insistence to Rose that he does not want to know what happened to Joseph. Paul accepts his fears as parts of himself. He refuses to face the knowledge that he is different because he possesses different fears than most. Hence, his isolation helps him maintain a sense of normalcy in his life.

Lane's affair is not what is expected or accepted as normal for a married woman. Lane manages to accept her infidelity and to maneuver her everyday life in ways that maintain a sense of being normal in everyone's eyes, including her own. She admits to still loving her husband. When Rose tells her she knows about the affair, Lane does not attempt to justify the affair. She admits to still loving her husband and indicates that she should and will break off the affair with Larry. Rose's response is unexpected when she tells her mother that no one expects her to break off the affair. Rose knows that the affair helps her mother. She believes that if her father does not know and is not hurt, the affair should be allowed to continue. Rose's belief is another example of accepting an unexpected behavior (infidelity) to maintain a sense of normalcy within the family circle. However, unlike the behaviors of her husband and children, Lane has a choice. Maintaining normalcy in her life is being dishonest. Paul, Rose, and Joseph seek normalcy because they fear ridicule.

## Adolescence

The theme of Adolescence can be traced throughout the novel. The time frame for the novel follows Rose from ages nine until she is in her early twenties. As she discovers her special skill, she struggles to accept her gift. Broadly speaking, she has difficulty accepting her self and developing self-esteem. When she goes to see the school nurse, the nurse is concerned that she may have an eating disorder and perhaps some kind of body dysmorphia.

Another way in which the theme is explored is through Rose's relationships with boys. She does not really like Eddie Oakley. He teases her in grade school, but they end up having make out sessions outside the locker rooms in high school. Eddie comes in and out of her life. One summer when he comes home from college, Rose loses her virginity to him.

The other relationship that falls into the theme of adolescence is Rose's relationship with George. She has a crush on George from a very early age. She projects her ideal of what a boyfriend should be like based on how George treats her. He's kind and friendly and inclusive of her when she's young, but also makes an effort to understand her issue with food. As they get older, George develops different feelings for Rose, and they ultimately kiss on the night of Joseph's disappearance. The kiss is all Rose expects because her crush has been unattainable for her for most of her life. Any reciprocal feelings are new for George.

Rose interactions with her two girlfriends also indicate the theme of adolescence. Eliza is a good friend to Rose. When Sherrie transfers to the school, Rose takes the



opportunity to perhaps connect with a new friend. When Sherrie takes an interest in Rose's ability, it is fun or interesting at first. Once Rose realizes that Sherrie is not the friend she wants or needs, Rose walks away from the friendship. Sherrie makes attempts at peer pressure to get Rose to do what she wants, which is to tell her how she really feels about things. Rose learns that people will use someone by pretending to be their friend.

## Disappointment Leading to Self-Discovery

Building on the theme of Adolescence is the theme of Disappointment Leading to Self-Discovery. Rose struggles with her special skill, but she knows that it is not something that is going to go away. She must figure out a way to manage it and adapt to it. When George asks her if she still feels like a factory, it is a call to action for her to accept herself and make it part of her identity. By revealing it at the restaurant, she begins to take control of her relationship with the skill. Her disappointment over having the tasting ability is overcome as Rose continues to learn more about her inner self.

While Rose is disappointed to learn about her mother's affair, she tells her mother that it is okay to continue with the affair. It would be easy for Rose to call out her mother as soon as she knows about her infidelity. Instead, she recognizes the impact that Larry and the affair have on her mother's life and emotions. When Rose does tell her, Lane's reaction is to end the affair and assure her daughter that she loves Paul. Rose accepts that Larry is part of Lane's identity. While it is not ideal that her mother is cheating on her father, she knows that it is the right thing for Lane. Again, her initial disappointment leads to Rose learning that sometimes the best thing to do is to not interfere.

Joseph battles his gift, which is not as easy to identify as Rose's. Joseph knows he is a genius, and this contributes to why he withdraws from those around him. He concentrates any energy he has on fostering relationships with his friendship with George. He takes for granted that he will be accepted to all of the same universities as George because they are intellectual equals. But George's approach to schoolwork and Joseph's approach differ. This is reflected in their college applications. He copes with his disappointment by retreating even further into himself. He accepts his special gift to such a great extent that he completely loses himself in the process. His disappointment leads to a darker side of self-discovery.

Joseph's withdrawal and George's question are what lead Rose to make peace with her skill. As the novel concludes, Rose is not completely sure of what she is going to do or what she wants to be. She moves away from the sadness and past disappointments in order to make room to discover who she can become.



# Styles

## Point of View

The Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake is told from the first person point of view of Rose Edelstein, over the course of her adolescence. It offers a look into the mind of a young girl coping with ordinary milestones, such as first crushes and friend troubles, in the wake of an extraordinary revelation. She is able to taste how people feel.

The four sections of the book compartmentalize how Rose sees the world. "Food" is the first section. It reveals how and when she discovered her ability to taste emotion. She is afraid and confused by the revelation and does not know how to make it stop. This is a look at Rose in her most confused and chaotic state of mind.

"Joseph" is the second section. While the narration does not change, the emphasis of the novel focuses on the impact Joseph has on the family. Rose watches how her parents cope and accept the changes in Joseph's behavior.

"Nightfall" is the third section. Rose is older and has a better understanding of her world. She is ready to understand more about her brother. She discovers him before his significant disappearance. Nightfall foreshadows Joseph's permanent departure.

"Here" is the final section. In this section, Rose's perspective has changed. She has accepted more aspects about her life, particularly her special skill. The focus is on those people whom Joseph left behind.

## Language and Meaning

The language throughout the novel is accessible. The vocabulary is easily understood, with any advanced words largely understood by context. The vocabulary is appropriate, given the youth of the narrator.

As a narrator, Rose is candid and self-aware. She does not complain, but she clearly struggles with her special tasting skill. She considers it a problem to solve, which is why she asks for help from George and Joseph.

The author uses magical realism which challenges the reader to accept things that cannot be. In this way, the language works to assist the reader in a journey similar to what Rose is experiencing.

Some swear words are used throughout the book, but not excessively. The dialogue is natural and conversational. Additionally, Rose's dialogue and George's dialogue change appropriately as the characters mature.

## Structure

The novel begins with a quote from *The Physiology of Taste* about how the body reacts to food. Then, the novel divides into four parts: Part one – Food; Part two – Joseph; Part three – Nightfall; and Part four – Here. The four sections vary in length. There are forty-seven chapters overall, most of which are short chapters. Some chapters are as brief as one to two pages.

The brief chapters lend the novel a quick pace. They are easily read and understood. There is dialogue throughout the novel, but no quotation marks are used. Tag lines help the reader identify when someone is speaking, who is speaking, and to whom the person is speaking.

The novel follows Rose Edelstein from age eight to her early twenties in a linear fashion. Occasionally, the novel reflects on the past. For example, the reader learns the past story of the first time Lane and Paul met.

The novel also makes use of Magical Realism. Magical Realism employs fantastical elements, such as Joseph turning into a chair, in what would be considered realistic situations. The reader accepts that these magical elements are a logical part of the world the author has created.





## Quotes

I ate the whole piece, desperate to prove myself wrong.”  
-- Rose-as-narrator (chapter 2 paragraph 17)

**Importance:** Rose has just discovered her skill of being able to taste emotions in food. She is jarred by the depressive emotions involved with a cake meant to celebrate her birthday. The quote reveals her denial about her skill.

I made sure it was the part that didn't touch his actual arm, so he would not whip around annoyed.”  
-- Rose-as-narrator (chapter 3 paragraph 22)

**Importance:** The quote reveals Rose's awareness of her brother's complicated relationship with others and that she is mindful of the challenges in their relationship.

So every food has a feeling,' George said when I tried to explain to him about the acidic resentment in the grape jelly.”  
-- George and Rose-as-narrator (chapter 6 paragraph 54)

**Importance:** George demonstrates a desire to understand Rose's skill, which differs from Joseph's rejection of it. The quote demonstrates the mutual understanding and connection between George and Rose.

Mom loved my brother more. Not that she didn't love me—“  
-- Rose-as-narrator (chapter 9 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** Rose understands that her mother loves her, but she has observed enough of the relationship between her mother and Joseph to realize that the connection between the two of them is stronger. In part because her mother is able to communicate better with Joseph than anyone else, but also because Joseph, in his own way, is willing to communicate with her at times.

We hit the sidewalk, and dropped hands. How I wished, right then, that the whole world was a street.”  
-- Rose-as-narrator (chapter 10 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** Rose holds George's hand when they cross the street. The quote reveals her childhood crush on George.

The doctors didn't know how to diagnose me, but I did have a delusion, they said, about my mouth.”  
-- Rose-as-narrator (chapter 12 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** The quote signifies how easily Rose's skill is dismissed as being something in her mind, rather than something real.



I'd tasted my mother's affair and had the conversation with my father about skills."  
-- Rose-as-narrator (chapter 18 paragraph 5)

**Importance:** The quote represents how Rose is coming to terms with her ability, as well as the ramifications, not only of having it, but of being able to communicate with others about it.

Still: it gave me such pleasure to grate cheese, like I was killing it."  
-- Rose-as-narrator (chapter 20 paragraph 11)

**Importance:** Rose feels as though food, by way of the emotions imparted on her, has power over her, which can be oppressive. Grating the cheese gives her the satisfaction of turning the tables on the food.

My eyelids are my own private cave', he murmured. 'That I can go to anytime I want.  
-- Joseph (chapter 21 paragraph 26)

**Importance:** The quote reveals how insular Joseph's personality is. It also foreshadows his character arc of becoming a chair, thereby retreating into himself to hide from the rest of the world.

I'd go over to her locker and she'd shove a biscuit in my face and ask me how she was feeling, because she couldn't tell without me."  
-- Rose-as-narrator (chapter 24 paragraph 55)

**Importance:** The quote demonstrates the essence of Rose's friendship with Sherrie. Sherrie's interest in Rose is limited to what Rose can provide for her.

No one seemed bothered by the fact that the window was fairly small, and would be very uncomfortable to climb out of. No one seemed to ask questions or take into account the fact that the ivy bushes, below the window, were intact, and did not seem to have taken on the weight of a body."  
-- Rose-as-narrator (chapter 31 paragraph 78)

**Importance:** Rose is gradually accepting the reality of the magic that may be behind Joseph's disappearance. The details she observes about the scene beneath the window reveals her willingness to accept the magical, while also illustrating how George and her father are rejecting the evidence in order to accept a more logical explanation for Joseph's disappearance.

That if I went into a hospital something might come up, some skill. That's all. Better not to find out, that's what I say."  
-- Dad (chapter 42 paragraph 65)

**Importance:** Rose's father, knowing that his father has a special skill like Rose, has rejected the possibility that he may have a gift as well. He has projected that his skill

may involve hospitals. As such, he actively avoids going into hospitals, including for the birth of his children.