

Silence of the Grave Study Guide

Silence of the Grave by Arnaldur Indridason

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Plot Summary

Erlendur and his team are called in after a child finds some bones in a construction site. They call in a few people from various fields to help date the skeleton. While at the site, Erlendur trips over what appears to be an outstretched skeletal hand. Erlendur then receives a call asking him for help. He recognizes the voice as his pregnant daughter, Eva Lind, and begins rushing throughout the city to find her. His search ends when he finds her unconscious and bleeding.

Erlendur does not show up for work the next day, which is unusual for him. Instead, he asks the team to look to see if there was a house by a group of redcurrant bushes he found the day before and to see if there was a military base near the site.

Erlendur returns to work and is brought up to date by the rest of his team. He then returns home to sleep and is awoken by a call from Elínborg telling him that she found information about the house by the redcurrant bushes. It was owned by a man named Benjamín Knudson.

Erlendur finds Benjamín's niece, a woman named Elsa, and asks her about her uncle. She tells him that her uncle's fiancée broke off their engagement and is believed to have committed suicide soon after. She gives Erlendur and his team full access to her cellar where she keeps all of her uncle's belongings.

Meanwhile, Elínborg and Sigurdur Óli visit an elderly man named Róbert Sigurdsson who had lived near the dig site when the body was believed to have been buried. He is currently in poor condition in a hospital. After a great deal of patience, Róbert is able to convey to Elínborg that they need to look for a crooked woman in a green coat.

The group decides that they are looking for an old missing persons case and that they should procure some DNA from Sólveig for tests.

Erlendur heads to the British embassy to see if they have any information on the base that was there. He learns that there had been a base and that it had been handed over to the Americans soon after it was built.

Erlendur and Elínborg go to visit a man named Höskuldur Thórainsson where they learn that the owner of the tenant may have abused his wife.

Elínborg goes to visit the sister of Benjamín's fiancée, a woman by the name of Bára. Bára reveals that her father committed suicide soon after his daughter's death.

Sigurdur Óli continues to search through Elsa's cellar to try and find clues about the buried body. During one of his breaks he begins talking to Elsa about the state of his relationship. She also gives him Róbert's locket which contains a lock of Sólveig's hair. She says that Sólveig was pregnant with another man's child and that her father killed himself before Sólveig died.



Erlendur meets with a man named Ed who had worked with the American military police. Ed says that the man who had lived in the house with his kids had been smuggling American goods from the base into Iceland for money, though he cannot remember the man's name. Ed adds that that the man was an abusive husband.

Elínborg returns to Bára's home demanding that she tells her the truth. Bára confesses that she did lie and that her sister had been raped by their cousin.

Skarphédinn, the archeologist in charge of the dig, calls Erlendur at home to tell him about the state of the dig. He also says that there is a lame woman in a green coat near the site. Erlendur rushes over to find her and learns that she is the child of the family that lived in Benjamín's house. Her name is Mikkellína, and she begins to tell Erlendur about her family.

Throughout the book, flashbacks occur giving information about Mikkellína's family. Her father, Grímur, abused her and her mother for years until he was caught by the Americans for smuggling goods into Iceland. He is sent to prison and her mother, Margrét, falls in love with an American soldier named Dave. However, Dave has to leave Iceland and Grímur returns home. The abuse continues and the family learns that Margrét is pregnant with Dave's baby. In order to protect the baby, Margrét has begun to poison Grímur. Grímur learns of this as the baby is being born and tries to kill her and her baby. In the scuffle, one of Mikkellína's half-brothers, Símon, kills his father. They then burry him and the dead infant in the ground where they are now digging.

Mikkellína tells Erlendur and Ellínborg this story over a few days and invites them to meet Símon. He suffers from a mental disorder where he does not mentally age and stays at a nursing home.



Chapters 1-6

Summary

Chapter 1 begins with a mother and a medical student finding a human skeleton at a little boy's birthday party. The book then goes to a flashback of a man and a woman having a violent conversation. The man hits her and accuses her of flirting with another man. The woman was a maid for a merchant and his wife and the man was a delivery person when they met. They were married soon after despite the fact that the woman's daughter, Mikkelfína, seemed terrified of him. The wife stopped working shortly after they were married and they moved to a new place.

Chapter 2 begins with Erlendur and his team assembling at the site where the bones were found. Elínborg is the one who receives the call about the bones. Sigurdur Óli and Erlendur are contacted soon after and told to come to Millenium Quarter.

The team arrives at the site to find the police and the media already present. The forensics department is at work removing the bones. Sigurdur Óli has called in an archeologist to tell them more about the bones and Elínborg suggests that they call in a geologist to tell them about the ground the body was buried in.

Skarphédinn, the archaeologist, is a man with teeth that resemble fangs. He tells the team that they are excavating the body incorrectly. Erlendur allows Skarphédinn and his team to take over the dig, even though he knows it will take them much longer than the forensics department.

A group of redcurrant bushes catches Erlendur's attention and he wonders how they came to be in this area.

The geologist arrives in Chapter 3 and is of little use besides affirming Skarphédinn's hypothesis that the bones are approximately 50-70 years old. The team questions the people who found the body and the medical student also agrees that the bones are about 70 years old.

Erlendur stumbles across a skeletal hand outstretched in the ground, signifying that the body may have been buried alive. His thoughts on the matter are interrupted by a phone call from someone pleading for his help.

Chapter 4 identifies the person who called Erlendur as his pregnant daughter, Eva Lind. Erlendur searches for his daughter among drug dealers, drug addicts, and strippers. Erlendur finally finds Eva Lind unconscious in front of an old maternity ward. Her jeans and the grass in front of her are bloody. She appears to be seven months pregnant.

Chapter 5 contains another flashback to the abused woman from Chapter 1. No one is willing to do anything to help her. The police blame her saying she must have been drinking and the vicar says that "a good wife does not leave her husband" (56). She has



tried to escape twice, but has not been successful. The second time he tracked her down and threatened to throw her disabled daughter in the ocean, so she never tried to run away again.

The abuse continues throughout the years, and he becomes more wretched as they go on. He no longer feels any remorse when he hits her and even blames her for the abuse. She does not have many interactions outside of her family due to her husband's jealousy and abuse. Her children have come to mean the world to her and are her only friends.

Chapter 6 begins the next day at the dig site with Skarphédinn harping to Elínborg and Sigurdur Óli about how Erlendur had improperly dug up the hand. Skarphédinn says that the person may have been trying to dig themselves out, but it's impossible to know for certain. Sigurdur Óli and Elínborg notice that Erlendur is not at the dig site, which is strange given how addicted he is to his work.

Erlendur finally calls at 2:00 p.m. to tell them to look into whether there was a house near the redcurrant bushes he found yesterday and the old military base that was near the dig site during WWII. He refuses to tell Ellínborg about his daughter.

Erlendur is at the hospital with his daughter. She has had a miscarriage and is still unconscious. The doctors are unsure if she will make it.

Analysis

The birthday party serves as a hook to get the reader interested in the book. By presenting the case in such a shocking fashion, the author has stirred up an interest in the case because the reader wants to know more about this human bone that a baby was teething on. This opening is unique and draws the reader's attention from the first few pages.

The second half of Chapter 1 introduces the audience to the relationship between Grímur and Margrét, the couple in the flashback. Again, a shocking opening is used to draw the reader's attention and leave no questions as to the condition of their relationship. Grímur is the dominant force in this relationship and whatever he wants goes. He does not care about Margrét or her life since he does not even ask about her friends or family. Rather than asking if she wants to get married, he says, "I want us to get married" (21). Already Grímur has begun the process of breaking Margrét's spirit by showing a lack of concern for who she is, insulting her child, and claiming that she is promiscuous.

The incident with Snorri also establishes the domestic abuse present in this relationship. Margrét is shocked that something like this could happen to her and rather than believe that it is really true, she rationalizes why this must be a one-time incident. In order to do this, she believes that the abuse is not Grímur's fault, but her own. This common response to domestic violence foreshadows the effects that this relationship will have on



Margrét. She will blame herself for everything that happens and will start to believe the horrible things Grímur says about her.

Chapter 2 primarily serves to introduce the team to the reader. The phone calls at the beginning of Chapter 2 provide the reader with a snapshot of who these people are and how they run their lives. These calls also foreshadow a major conflict for Sigurdur Óli, his relationship with Bergthóra. The two people are at odds with where they want their relationship to go and Bergthóra is hoping to convince Sigurdur Óli to have children through frequent sex.

Erlendur's call highlights his rural upbringing. Erlendur is attracted to this restaurant because it resembles the country food and dining room that he would have grown up with. This is an example of how Erlendur serves as a symbol of traditional Icelandic culture.

This chapter also introduces Skarphédinn, the archeologist. Skarphédinn's most prominent characteristic are his two fangs. This feature brings to mind vampires like Dracula who are often portrayed with two fangs used to draw blood. While not a literal vampire, Skarphédinn is a figurative vampire in this novel. Skarphédinn will drain this position for everything it is worth by using it as a teaching opportunity for his archeology students and using the experience for lectures.

The fourth and fifth chapter introduce Erlendur's primary conflict and characterize his daughter. Erlendur's relationship with his family is strained at best and his ex-wife refuses to talk with him. Most of Erlendur's struggles will involve communicating with his daughter and sharing his history with someone else. These chapters also show how much Erlendur cares about his daughter despite the condition of their relationship. Erlendur travels throughout the city visiting all of Eva Lind's seedy contacts in a desperate attempt to find his daughter. This is an extreme act of love and devotion for someone that he has not seen in months.

The second part of Chapter 5 returns to Margrét as she struggles through her marriage. No one is willing to help her in this obvious case of abuse, not the police and not the vicar. Not only does no one help her, these people actually defended Grímur's right to beat her. The Vicar tells Margrét that good wives do not leave their husbands, they must suffer through because God believes that marriage is sacred. The police try to blame her for the abuse by asking if she had been drinking. Here the reader sees the way that domestic violence is trivialized by society. This woman is obviously being abused by her husband, yet everyone is willing to turn their head and pretend it is not happening.

Margrét also fully adopts the views that Grímur holds of her. She begins to think of herself as an "ugly old bag" (62) who's only purpose is to attend to Grímur's every whim.

Chapter 6 shows just how devoted Erlendur is to his family. Erlendur is a man who is obsessed with his work. Even when he is not working, he is researching missing persons cases. However, Erlendur is not at the excavation site. This is his work, and a



missing persons case no less, yet his love and concern for his daughter is greater to him than his work.

Erlendur's private nature is also present in this chapter when he refuses to tell Elínborg why he is not at the dig site. These are Erlendur's partners, and the closest thing he has to friends, yet he is unwilling to let them in to his life and tell them that he is at the hospital with his daughter.

At the hospital, Erlendur shows that he has not given up on Eva through the conversation he has with the doctor. He has not given up the hope that his daughter is trying to stop her drug addiction. Whether this is true or not, the fact that he has not given her up as a lost cause says a great deal about Erlendur's devotion. As Erlendur's search through the city shows, Eva Lind is not a casual drug user, she is a hardcore drug addict, yet Erlendur still has faith that she can recover.

During the search for Eva Lind, Erlendur finds an abused baby in one of the houses. This adds to the pain that Erlendur feels when he learns that Eva Lind's baby is dead. It hurts Erlendur to know that while his daughter's child is dead, there are other healthy babies that are cast aside and abused by their parents.

Discussion Question 1

Why does the author take so much time to describe the restaurant Erlendur is in?

Discussion Question 2

What is the significance of the last line in Chapter 5, which reads, "Ugly old bag"?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think no one was willing to help the abused woman in the flashbacks?

Vocabulary

extortionate, reticent, profusely, succession, scrutinized, brooder, repressive, taciturn, throes, veneer, trowel, strata



Chapters 7-12

Summary

Chapter 7 opens with Erlendur at the hospital watching his daughter. Her condition has not changed and he decides to go see Elínborg and Sigurdur Óli at the office. While he has been away, the work on the skeleton has continued at a painstakingly slow pace and Sigurdur Óli has searched and organized missing persons cases to find who this skeleton could be. Despite how long the bones have been there, Erlendur decides it is best to pursue the case in order to find out what really happened. Erlendur reluctantly tells Elínborg some basic information about his daughter and admits he feels responsible for her condition.

Erlendur returns home and falls asleep. He is awoken by a call from Elínborg telling him that there was a building near the bushes as he suspected. The owner was a man named Benjamín Knudson who died years ago.

Chapter 8 begins with Elínborg and Sigurdur Óli traveling to talk to one of the chalet owners on the hill. During the drive the two discuss Erlendur's daughter. Sigurdur Óli feels no remorse for her and insinuates that they bring misery upon themselves while Elínborg is sympathetic to Eva Lind's situation. After this conversation, Sigurdur Óli thinks about his home life and how Bergthóra has been acting suspicious and may be trying to get pregnant despite the fact that he does not want to have children.

The man they visit cannot provide them with the information they are looking for, but he does point them to a man named Róbert Sigurdsson, an elderly man who lived in the area for decades.

Meanwhile, Erlendur travels to meet a woman named Elsa about Benjamín, her uncle. While talking with Elsa, Erlendur learns that his fiancée disappeared and was believed to have drowned herself at sea. Once she suspects that the police think her uncle murdered his fiancée she becomes very upset and Erlendur calms her down. She does not remember who her uncle rented his chalet to, but offers access to her cellar where she keeps his belongings and papers. Elsa also tells Erlendur that the fiancée has a sister named Bàra who is still alive.

In Chapter 9, Elínborg and Sigurdur Óli visit Róbert Sigurdsson in the hospital. The man is in poor shape and has difficulty talking; making the process of questioning him long and frustrating. Sigurdur Óli becomes incredibly annoyed and Elínborg sends him out of the room. The man tells Elínborg that there was a couple with three children in the chalet during the war, but he does not know their names. However, Róbert does remember that a green lady often visited the bushes. After this the nurse becomes angry that Elínborg is making him talk so much and carts him away. Before he leaves, Róbert motions for a paper and pencil, but the nurse refuses.



Elínborg hides outside of the room until the nurse leaves and then re-enters to further question Róbert. She gives him a paper and pencil and he writes the word “crooked.” Then his cardiac monitor goes off. Elínborg rushes out of the room and she and Sigurdur Óli head back to the car.

After this scene finishes, another flashback occurs. The man beats the woman in front of her children; the narrator says that this is not an uncommon occurrence in the house. This is the couple who had rented out the chalet and the woman had planted the redcurrent bushes.

Chapter 10 begins with Erlendur going through Elsa’s cellar looking for information on Benjamín or his tenants. Elínborg calls him during the search to inform him about what happened at the hospital. Erlendur instructs them to ask the owners if they had ever seen a woman around the bushes and to look to see if Róbert had any family they could talk to. The only thing of interest Erlendur finds is an old love note from Benjamín to his fiancée.

Erlendur leaves Elsa’s cellar and heads back to the hospital to see Eva Lind. On the way he calls Skarphédinn to see how the dig is going. Skarphédinn says they are making process, but they have not found any indication of what killed the person. He also refuses to give an estimate of how long the dig will take. At the hospital Erlendur sees his ex-wife, Halldóra, in Eva Lind’s room. He closes the door and walks away.

Erlendur and his team discuss their plans on how to handle the case in Chapter 11. Sigurdur Óli has been demoted to searching through Elsa’s cellar for information on Benjamín. Erlendur suggests that they look for people in the missing persons cases because he believes that this person may have been murdered and made to appear missing. They suggest that Benjamín may have kept a lock of his fiancée’s hair that they could use in a DNA test to determine if the body is his missing fiancée.

The chapter continues into another flashback. This flashback is from the point of view of Símon, the eldest son. Símon hates his father, Grímur, but he adores his mother. Despite their father’s abuse, the rest of the family treats Mikkellína as a normal person and her mother teaches her to read and write.

Grímur takes a liking to Símon and has him accompany him to town. Símon notices that Grímur acts like a regular person in town, despite the terrible things he does at home. Grímur also tells Símon that he was about the age of Tómas, the middle child, when a woman and her husband did something terrible.

Grímur begins to degrade Simon’s mother by saying that she was a “doomsday kid” (122) born in an orgy at the Gasworks and that is why she does not know who her parents are.

Chapter 12 begins at the dig site with Erlendur asking Skarphédinn if it is possible for them to speed up the digging. Skarphédinn says that this is not possible if they want the job done right. The dig team still hasn’t gathered enough information to say anything new about the body.



Analysis

Sigurður Óli's primary conflict is better explained in Chapter 8 where he is contemplating the reason for Bergthóra's sudden change. His contemplation reveals that he is devoted to the relationship that he has with Bergthóra, but he is not interested in having kids. It also reveals, along with the conversation he had with Elínborg prior to his contemplating, that Sigurður Óli can be a jerk. During the conversation that he has with Elínborg, Sigurður Óli says that he is incapable for feeling any sorrow or pity for Eva Lind's condition because he feels she and all drug addicts are losers who will never change. Even if one favors Sigurður Óli's point of view on the subject, the rhetoric he uses to describe drug addicts, like "creeps," "wankers," "losers," and "bums," implies a lack of respect for other people. Furthermore, during his contemplation Sigurður Óli characterizes women as plotters and schemers. His last thought before the conversation with Elínborg continues is that "women are unpredictable...you never know what they are up to" (77). Sigurður Óli believes that women are not honest and straightforward about what they want. Instead, he believes that women rely on deceit and scheming to get what they desire.

Elínborg's meeting with Róbert Sigurdsson is an example of the importance of patience. Robert's difficulty speaking is enough to frustrate most people. However, if Elínborg had become frustrated and given up like Sigurður Óli had, they would never have known to look for a "crooked" (92) lady in a green coat. The word "crooked" and the information about the lady in green are the clues that lead to the eventual meeting with Mikkalina. The interaction with Róbert Sigurdsson also furthers Sigurður Óli's characterization as a jerk when he begins giggling while Elínborg explains that the old man died shortly after giving them the information they needed. This man died because of the effort that he put into helping the case that Sigurður Óli is working on, and rather than appreciate that sacrifice, Sigurður Óli laughs at it.

Elsa and her cellar are another example of how important patience is. Sigurður Óli's assignment to this task tests his patience, but if he had given up, Elsa would have never opened up to him and given him the bit of Sólveig's hair needed to test the skeleton's DNA.

The relationship between Benjamín and Sólveig serves not only as a red herring for the Millennium Man case, but also as a foil for Margrét's marriage and for Erlendur's marriage. Benjamín and Sólveig were the ideal couple. As Benjamín's note shows, he was madly in love with her and his feelings were reciprocated despite the fact that Sólveig called the marriage off. This ideal marriage accentuates the horrors of Margrét's situation by having a healthy relationship to compare it to. It will also highlight the issues with Erlendur's prior marriage by showing what a happy couple looks like.

Skarphédinn's dig is another matter that requires patience. Erlendur and his team have to wait for days while Skarphédinn and his team meticulously dig up the skeleton. Not only does the team have to wait longer than they are used to for a body to be dug up, they also have to put up with Skarphédinn acting like he is smarter than everyone and



treating people like his own servants. In Chapter 11, Skarphédinn calls to tell the team that it will take at least two days to retrieve the skeleton. As soon as he is done giving them this information he requests that Erlendur stop and get him some Danish pastries. Erlendur is the one who brought Skarphédinn in on this job in the first place, and now Skarphédinn is treating him like a go-for. It will take a great deal of patience for Erlendur and the team to deal with the archaeologist's slow pace and attitude while the body is recovered.

The second half of Chapter 11 primarily serves to characterize Símon and his relationship to his family. Símon uses fantasy imagery to describe the relationship with his father. He imagines his father as a terrifying monster that he is incapable of defeating no matter how hard he tries. This belief is especially damaging since Símon believes that he is the one that has to protect his family. When paired with how Grímur influences Símon's religious views, the dragon image invokes the Book of Revelation from the Bible. In the Book of Revelation Satan is often presented in the form of a dragon. So by using this fairy tale scenario and having Grímur as the dragon, the author is not only portraying Grímur as a monster, but also as the devil.

Grímur's contemplation of his life foreshadows that he himself was abused. While watching Tómas playing, Grímur talks about how he was about the same age when something happened to him. This indicates the theme that violence begets violence. Grímur was abused by the people that were caring for him and other children and he in turn has become an abusive husband and father. This may be because he has a need to feel in control. Being abused like Grímur was leaves a person feeling powerless, as Margrét's condition shows, so Grímur may be trying to compensate for the lack of control he had in his own childhood and to keep from ever feeling that powerless again. Given how out of control his life has been in regards to his work, the only place where he can feel in control is at home. So, by abusing his wife and kids physically, mentally, and emotionally, Grímur is ensuring that he has complete control over this one part of his life.

At the end of Chapter 12, Erlendur states that Skarphédinn reminds him of a fairy tale monster. This is another use of the fairy tale motif, and strengthens the idea of Skarphédinn as a figurative vampire. By evoking fairy tales and folklore with this line, the author has made the reader question what mythical creature Erlendur could possibly mean. Given the constant reference to Skarphédinn's fangs, the mind is automatically drawn to vampires. Already Skarphédinn has begun to suck everything that he can from this case by lowering Erlendur to the status of a go-for, taking complete control of the dig site, and using the site to teach his students how an archeology excavation works.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Grímur take an interest in Símon?



Discussion Question 2

Why does the author pay special attention to Skarphédinn's fangs every time he is mentioned?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Grímur have such a strong hatred for Mikkelína?

Vocabulary

monotonous, chalet, tactless, anemic, faculties, wracked, reproach, pallid, canteen, divan, meningitis, acrid



Chapters 13-18

Summary

Chapter 13 begins with Erlendur thinking about the abused woman and child he had encountered while looking for Eva Lind. An enquiry into the woman's situation had revealed that she had been seen in the emergency room multiple times for injuries that she claimed were due to a car accident and that her partner has a police record.

Elínborg goes to see Róbert's daughter, Harpa. Harpa does not know anything about a group of children in the chalet or the crooked woman by the redcurrent bushes.

Erlendur arrives at the British embassy to see if there was a military base near the hill. He learns that there was a base in the area during WWII and that the Americans took over the base. His contact is doing more investigation into the base to give him more information.

Meanwhile, Sigurdur Óli finds an invoice paying rent to Benjamín. The man's name is Höskaldur Thórarinsson.

Chapter 14 begins with Erlendur at Eva Lind's bedside. He is trying to talk to her, but is having difficulty finding a subject to talk about. He then goes into a flashback of a conversation between the two of them. Eva Lind is asking him what happened between him and her mother and Erlendur is avoiding the question the best that he can.

Erlendur and Elínborg go to visit Höskuldur Thórarinsson to inquire about Benjamín and the people that lived in the house prior to him. Höskuldur never saw any signs of murder in the home; in fact, it was very well kept. The bushes were already there when he arrived. Benjamín had told Höskuldur that he believed that the man who lived there last abused his wife and there were rumors that she was the result of a doomsday orgy that occurred as Haley's Comet went by.

Chapter 15 begins with Elínborg visiting Bàra, the sister of Benjamín's fiancée, to inquire about the relationship between her sister and Benjamín. Bàra says her sister loved Benjamín and that he was a bit of a dreamer. Bàra also tells Elínborg that their father had committed suicide shortly before her sister went missing and it had a devastating effect on her sister. It is also revealed that Benjamín did keep a lock of hair from his fiancée. The reason that everyone believes the fiancée threw herself into the sea is that people saw a woman about the same height with the same coat, a green jacket, near the water at the time of her disappearance.

After this encounter, the chapter returns to the family in the flashbacks. The military base is being constructed by the British and then handed over to the Americans. Grímur manages to get a job at the base and begins bringing home American goods for his family. One day an American soldier comes by the house and begins trying to communicate with Simon. The two eventually manage to communicate through writing.



The soldier, Dave, comes into the house to meet Simon's parents. Simon's mother is terrified of the soldier and demands that he be taken out of the house. The soldier backs out of the house apologizing for intruding.

Grímur has begun to show an interest in Tómas and starts talking to him in private. Grímur is pressuring him to degrade Mikkellína. This causes the mother to brandish a knife at Grímur and demand that he leave Tómas alone.

In Chapter 16, Sigurdur Óli thinks back to an argument he had with Bergthóra the night before. Bergthóra is angry that Sigurdur Óli doesn't want to get married even though they have been living together for years and says he is becoming like Erlendur.

Sigurdur Óli is back at Elsa's looking through her cellar. During one of his breaks Sigurdur Óli asks if she has a lock of hair that Benjamín kept. She says that she does not believe so, but she does not know everything in the cellar. After talking to Sigurdur Óli about family, she reveals that she lied and she does have a lock of the fiancée's hair. She also tells Sigurdur Óli that the fiancée's name was Sólveig.

Elsa also reveals that Sólveig was pregnant with someone else's child, but she does not know who the father was. It is also discovered that Sólveig's father hung himself after his daughter went missing, not before.

In Chapter 17, Erlendur is back in his daughter's room trying to talk to her. The only thing he can think of is the case he is working on. As he is leaving he runs into a medium that tells him that a boy in a blizzard is telling him it was not his fault. Erlendur seems troubled and walks away from the woman.

In Chapter 18, Erlendur receives a tip from the embassy to talk to a man named Edward Hunter. Edward was a part of the military police and remembers an incident at the base on the hill. Ed tells them that there was a great deal of theft occurring at the depot on the hill and that there was an Icelandic man involved, though he cannot remember the name.

Ed goes into a flashback of when they investigated the man's, Grímur, home. It was obvious that the woman was beaten and Ed was appalled by what was done to her. Grímur was arrested, but went through the Icelandic court system, so he likely had a short prison sentence.

Another flashback occurs picking up where Ed's flashback left off. One of the soldiers hits Grímur, knocking him down. The soldiers then escort Grímur out of the house. Soon after a jeep comes by to clear the home of stolen goods.

The family is ecstatic after they process what has occurred. The mother begins cleaning the house, bathing the children, and taking care of herself. Dave begins to visit the house regularly and bonds with the family. Dave and the mother become very close and spend a great deal of time together, doing things like taking long walks while holding hands. Dave has promised that he will take care of Grímur, though he has not explained how.



Analysis

Erlendur's inquiry into the woman and abused baby he met while searching for Eva Lind shows that not much has changed regarding domestic violence. Even though it is decades after Grímur and Margrét's relationship, this couple bears striking similarities to this modern-day mother and child. The mother has been taken to the hospital multiple times with marks of abuse. Not only does she lie about the abuse, no one even inquires into the abusive relationship. Like Margrét with her friends, this woman is trying to cover up the abuse she suffers because she is embarrassed and ashamed of it. Like Margrét's situation, there are people that should have an idea of what this woman is dealing with at home. This woman has been to the hospital twice over the past year alone for broken limbs and other injuries. The doctors likely know that her injuries are not the result of an accident. After all, these are trained medical professionals who have likely seen numerous patients injured in car accidents as this woman claims to have been. However, no further inquiries are made into her injuries. Despite the injuries and the removal of the baby, the man responsible for the abuse has yet to receive any punishment. The baby has been taken away for obvious signs of abuse, yet it does not appear that the father is suffering any sort of punishment for his actions. Finally, this woman has not tried to go to the authorities. She likely feels that they will not do anything to help her, because even though it's been decades, she will be treated the same way as Margrét; they will try to find a way to blame her and then give her husband a slap on the wrist. All of these similarities show that despite the passage of time, the way people treat domestic violence has not changed at all.

The author uses Elínborg's conversation with Bára to strengthen the red herring. Elínborg rushes back to Bára's house as she is about to leave to ask the color of Sólveig's coat, which turns out to be green. By including this section, the author has made it look more likely that Sólveig is in some way connected to this murder because they already have a lead on a woman in a green coat.

The scene with Dave in Chapter 15 marks a turning point for Margrét. Although terrified of Dave's entrance in the beginning, she quickly changes her mind about him and even smiles while saying his name. The fear she feels stems from the paranoia Grímur exhibits about her promiscuity. As was seen in Chapter 1 with Snorri, Grímur believes that Margrét is unfaithful to him. If Grímur were to see or hear of this man's entrance into their home, he would be outraged and beat her even worse than what he already does. However, her sudden change is due to the fact that Dave treats her like a human being. Dave respects her and what she wants. He treats her like someone who was in charge of her own life rather than as a slave with no control.

Near the end of Chapter 15, Grímur begins to take Tómas away and talk to him in private. Soon afterwards, Tómas begins to say horrible things to Mikkellína because his father tells him to. This is the first step in him becoming like his father. Even if he is unwilling, he has begun to partake in the same abuse that his father practices. He will eventually become desensitized to these practices and it will be easier and easier for him to insult and degrade Mikkellína and the rest of his family. This example of a parent



passing on his violent tendencies to his child is an example of the theme of violence begetting violence.

Sigurður Óli's work in the cellar finally yields some results, both in the case and in his personal life. Through the patience of rooting through her uncle's belongings day after day and talking to her during his breaks, Sigurður Óli has earned Elsa's trust. This has enabled him to acquire what the team has been hoping to find, some of Sólveig's hair. Sigurður Óli has developed some patience by rooting through an old cellar, and it has paid off. This time in the cellar has also allowed Sigurður Óli to contemplate the kind of person that he wants to be. After a heated argument with Bergthóra about their future together, Sigurður Óli takes some time to really look at the kind of person he wants to be and what that will mean for his relationship with Bergthóra.

Erlendur is forced to contemplate his past through a stranger he meets in the hospital. Erlendur's encounter with the medium forces him to think about the death of his brother. The encounter itself is jarring enough for Erlendur. This is a man who likes to keep his private life private, a man who has difficulty talking to his own daughter (the closest family he has) about his life. Now there is a woman that is not only talking to him about his life, but already knows things that he has never told anyone before. The encounter also reminds him of the guilt he feels over his brother's death. He feels somewhat responsible for what happened that night and all of that has been brought up to the surface by his encounter with this stranger.

Grímur's arrest begins one of the family's happiest times. For the first time in their lives, the brothers get to see what a happy, functional family looks like. Símon no longer feels like he needs to protect his mother, Tómas doesn't have to degrade his sister, and Margrét has some of her self-respect restored. While Grímur is in prison and it is unofficially due to the way he abused his wife, he has received no formal punishment for his actions. Since Dave is the one that calls in the stolen goods and knows what Grímur has been doing to his family, it is likely that part of Dave's motivation for reporting the incident is to have Grímur arrested and taken away from his family. However, officially he is being arrested only for being a part of a smuggling ring. The only real punishment that he has received for the domestic abuse is the humiliation and degradation he suffers in his own home when Ed hits him and shouts at him. While this is not a formal punishment, it is the worst thing that one could do to someone like Grímur. The entire reason he abuses his family is to feel important and like he is in control of something in his life. To have a stranger walk into his home, hit him, and shout at him in this way destroys all that he has worked to build for himself. He is no longer the powerful, terrifying man he made himself in his family's eyes; he has become nothing more than a weak little man lying on the floor. While this itself is not enough to break the spell Grímur has on his family, it is enough to weaken his hold on them.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Grímur take an interest in Tómas?



Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Grímur's behavior changes when he gets the job at the military base?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Bára lie about when her father committed suicide?

Vocabulary

decorum, stilted, broaching, trimmings, immaculate, idiom, glum, tetchy, corrugated, fathom, reticent, implying



Chapters 19-24

Summary

Chapter 19 begins with Sigurdur Óli filling Erlendur in on his conversation with Elsa. Sigurdur Óli says he still feels like they are wasting their time on this case and hangs up.

Erlendur goes into another flashback. This time he thinks about the last argument he and Eva had two months prior. Eva has returned to her addiction to drugs and alcohol despite being pregnant. Erlendur believes she needs to stop using drugs and alcohol, but she refuses to listen to him because she believes he is being too controlling. Eva then retorts that Erlendur had not even wanted her and that he told her mother to have an abortion. Erlendur denies this and says it is all a lie, but Eva does not believe him. Eva storms out of the house and Erlendur does not hear from her until her desperate call for help.

Erlendur snaps out of his flashback while in his car and calls Skarphédinn to see how the dig is progressing. There is nothing new to report and Skarphédinn becomes quite irritated that Erlendur keeps calling him. Shortly after this call, Jim, Erlendur's embassy contact, calls and gives Erlendur a list of all the Icelandic employees at the military depot.

After this call, Erlendur goes to one of the places he went while searching for Eva, a rundown building where he found a woman and her abused baby. Erlendur waits for the father, who has been abusing the child, to come home and ponders what he will do. Erlendur gives up and goes to see his daughter.

In Chapter 20, Sigurdur Óli informs Elínborg of his conversation with Elsa. Elínborg goes to Bàra's house to find out why she lied about her father's death and why she did not mention her sister was pregnant. Bàra eventually breaks down and tells Elínborg that Sólveig was raped by their cousin and they covered it up.

At the hospital, Erlendur begins telling his daughter about a young boy from Reykjavik, Erlendur, who moved to the city. The boy met a woman and before he knew it found himself married to her, but he felt like he did not even know her. The couple grew distant and he eventually left. He was not allowed to visit his kids and was cut out of their life. As he finishes this story, his ex-wife, Halldóra, comes into the room and demands that he leave. Erlendur leaves.

Chapter 21 begins with Sigurdur Óli overjoyed that he has searched through all of Benjamín's belongings, even if he did not find any other useful information. Sigurdur Óli drives back home and talks to his partner about the state of their relationship. Sigurdur Óli talks about how they should take that trip to Paris they have been talking about for so long.



Erlendur is woken up at his home by his telephone. Jim calls to tell him that Ed, one of soldiers at the old depot, has found the name of the person who informed the military of the thefts.

After this call, Skarphédinn calls to tell Erlendur that they will uncover the bones the next day. However, during this conversation, Skarphédinn greets someone. Erlendur calls back shortly after and demands to know who Skarphédinn greeted. Skarphédinn tells him that it was a lame woman in a green coat. Erlendur tells him to keep her there and rushes over to the dig site.

The chapter then goes into a flashback involving the family again. Dave and the mother have continued seeing each other right up until the day that Grimur returns. Grimur has a large burn mark on one side of his face where Dave threw an entire pot of scalding hot coffee at him. Grimur demands that one of the boys bring their mother home from work and Tómas goes off to fetch her. Meanwhile, Grimur begins asking Símon about what happened while he was gone, primarily what his mother has been doing. Símon tells him some information about Dave, but lies about how often he came to visit. Grimur knows his son is lying and demands to know the truth. Símon tells him the truth and Grimur says that Símon's mother has been sleeping with Dave.

Chapter 22 begins with Erlendur arriving at the hill to meet the lame woman. The woman turns out to be Mikkellína.

Chapter 23 continues with Erlendur and Mikkellína on the hill. They continue talking about her family while she waits for her son Símon to pick her up. Erlendur learns that Grimur had been taken in as a foster child by an abusive couple known for hurting the children they took in. He had been beaten, malnourished, and had seen the death of one of the other boys.

Tómas has turned out like his father and is an abusive husband.

Chapter 24 begins with the team exchanging what they learned the day before. Erlendur and Elínborg then go to Ed's house to see what he has uncovered. He tells them that Dave was the person who exposed the thefts.

Erlendur goes to the hospital to talk to Eva. He tells her about how he and his brother got lost in a blizzard and how his brother was never found.

After this, the chapter returns to Símon and his family. Tómas and his mother return home from her work. Grímur retakes control of the house and begins tormenting the mother. Tómas tells Grímur that the mother had called someone before she returned home.

Analysis

As Grímur has demonstrated, not all abuse is physical. Erlendur's ex-wife is verbally abusive and manipulates her children into hating their father with lies. What she is doing



is similar to what Grímur does with Tómas. She is taking advantage of the time she has in private with her children in order to tell them whatever she wants about their father just as Grímur uses his private time with his son to convince him to mistreat his sister and forge a bond that allows the boy to later betray his mother by telling his father that she made a call before returning home.

Erlendur's story is the story of his own life and the move from a rural village to the big city. This story shows personal growth on Erlendur's part because he is opening up to someone about his personal life, even if it is his daughter who is unconscious. His story also supports the idea that Erlendur is a symbol for the change in the Icelandic way of life. Erlendur grew up in the old rural villages that have been there for years. Life was simple and they found their entertainment in things like telling old stories by the fire. However, his family moved into the city and the old ways are gone. Erlendur and his family had trouble adapting to their new home. Erlendur soon lost the stories that he had cherished as a child and felt lost in this foreign city with no ties to anything.

The need to have a tie to someone or something is what made him marry Haldóra. He had allowed her to take control of his life because it was a bond to something. It was only when he realized that he did not know this woman, that they did not really have a bond at all, that Erlendur discovered that he did not want to be in that relationship.

Sigurður Óli has also experienced some growth. His conversation with Bergthóra about their relationship and what it will be going forward is a major shift in his character. Before Sigurður Óli had believed that there was no point in talking to Bergthóra because it is impossible to know what a woman is thinking and he refused to bring up the topic himself when he suspected it may be an issue. However, now Sigurður Óli is willing to sit down and honestly talk about their relationship and where it is heading.

Erlendur's nightmare is his mind replays the night that he lost his brother, forcing him to confront his fears even in his sleep. However, it also exemplifies how isolated Erlendur is in his life. Erlendur is alone, lost in the cold blizzard. He is trying desperately to make his way through, but is never able to make any progress until he finally gives up. Erlendur has been trying to adjust to life in the city ever since he was a child, but he has since given up. When talking to his daughter, Erlendur says that the man he was is lost and has been lost for a long time. Erlendur is trying to find the life he had before, the life in the village sharing stories with others. That time is gone though, and try as he might there is no way to bring it back. The only hope he has is to find a connection with someone to ground him so he can find his way out of the storm of his life, and that one person is his daughter.

Mikkelína's speech about domestic violence supports both the idea that domestic violence is not taken as seriously as it should be and that Grímur's abusive behavior was the result of his need to be in charge of something in his life. Mikkelína opens her speech by saying how the very term domestic violence detracts from the act. The term domestic makes it sound as if the crime is less, since domestic often has the connotation of being tame (like a domestic dog). It makes it sound like domestic violence is tame violence and somehow less dangerous than assault. Mikkelína also



talks about how people like Grímur use abuse to make themselves feel big. By being able to abuse the people in their lives, people like Grímur can break them down and make them feel worthless and insignificant. This allows Grímur and those like them to feel like they have complete control over this part of their lives.

Mikkelína also establishes the redcurrant bushes as a symbol of her mother. Mikkelína describes the bushes as being exceptionally hardy and able to survive the harshest winters while still bearing beautiful green leaves and red berries. Mikkelína's mother was like this. She managed to survive through the harshest of Grímur's punishments intact, and when Dave came and Grímur was off in prison, she quickly recovered and returned to the woman that she had been all those years ago, before she had ever even heard the name of Grímur.

Mikkelína confirms that Grímur was abused as a child. This supports the theme that violence begets violence because Grímur's abusive attitude was in part the result of the neglect and abuse he suffered as a child. Grímur was powerless for a period of his life and suffered degradation and abuse at the hands of the people that were supposed to care for him. His need to keep power likely has roots in this time because he never wants to be in that situation again. So, in order to keep from feeling powerless, he does whatever he feels he needs to do.

Mikkelína also alludes to the fact that Tómas became an abusive father and husband when he grew up. This strengthens the theme that violence begets violence because it shows that Grímur's situation was not a fluke or an outlier. He's just following the pattern that many fall into.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Erlendur return to the house where he found the cigarette burned baby?

Discussion Question 2

Does the information about Grímur's own past as an abused child change the way you feel about him? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Who do you think Margrét called? Why would she call that person?

Vocabulary

sadist, posh, tart, pianoforte, sheepcote, capitalize, zest, nick, tenants, croft, primitive, pilfering



Chapters 25-30

Summary

Mikkellína continues her story in her sitting room with Erlendur and Elínborg in Chapter 25. She tells them that Dave had promised to protect her mother, but he never came back after Grimur came home.

Going back to the flashback, Grímur questions Tómas about who his mother called. Tómas reveals that no-one answered. Grímur continues his abuse.

Returning to the present, Mikkellína says that Símon became more distant after that. Erlendur receives a call during the conversation and learns that the dig team has finally reached the bones. They believe that it is Benjamín's fiancée.

Once Erlendur and Elínborg arrive at the dig site in Chapter 26, they learn that there are two skeletons in the grave, one is a tall adult while the other is a small infant. They move the skeletons to the morgue so they can be more thoroughly examined. The medical examiner says they should wait for the pathologist to return before an in-depth examination takes place. Erlendur agrees.

Erlendur and Sigurdur Óli go to Elsa's to tell her the news. She refuses to believe that it is her uncle's fiancée and becomes very defensive. Erlendur calms her down by telling her the circumstances of the fiancée's pregnancy. Elsa does not believe that her uncle knew anything about the rape.

Meanwhile, Elínborg is at Bára's explaining what they have found. Bára reveals that their parents gave Sólveig two options: She could have the baby in secret, give it away, and then continue on with her life, or she could have an abortion. Bára also reveals that her sister was fairly short.

The medical examiner reveals that the child was likely stillborn and that the adult skeleton they found is that of a man.

Chapter 27 begins with a flashback to Mikkellína's family. Things return to the way they were for the most part, except for the fact that her mother is, indeed, pregnant. Tómas begins to spend more time with his father and begins to act like him.

The story again returns to the present where Mikkellína explains that her mother began to slowly poison Grímur with rat poison.

The team contacts Elsa and Bára to inform them that it was not Sólveig they found buried in the grave. Ed calls Erlendur and tells him that he could not find anything on what happened to Dave Welch, but that he would continue looking.



Erlendur goes to see his daughter and talks about his brother's death and how it made him leave his home and come to Reykjavík.

Erlendur continues his conversation with Mikkellína and she tells him that it was not the poison that killed Grímur.

The chapter resumes the flashback with Grímur seriously ill in his bed while the mother is giving birth at home since her husband will not let her go to a hospital. Símon and Mikkellína are helping their mother while Tómas is with his father. The mother sees Tómas about to eat some of Grímur's food and screams at him not to. Realization strikes Grímur and violence breaks out.

Chapter 28 continues with Mikkellína and Erlendur's conversation. Mikkellína invites Erlendur to meet her brother and they continue the story on the way.

The flashback continues on and Símon stabs Grímur with the scissors. They then realize that the baby is dead. Tómas goes back to the bedroom like nothing happened. The rest of them carry Grímur and the baby outside to be buried. Once they begin burying them they realize that Grímur is still alive. The mother sends the kids back to the house while she finishes burying Grímur. They report that he is missing after they remove any evidence from the house.

Chapter 29 begins with Mikkellína and Erlendur coming up to Símon's house. Símon has Hebephrenia, a kind of schizophrenia, where he does not mentally age past a certain point. Tómas has had two children and has divorced twice. He has grown up to be like his father.

Erlendur learns that the name of Símon's mother is Margrét.

In Chapter 30, Eva opens her eyes.

Analysis

Grímur's behavior towards Margrét shows that she has changed since he went into prison. She is no longer as easy to control as she once was. She has her pride back, and Grímur knows he cannot break it down directly. Grímur moves carefully around her and diverts his attentions to Tómas. He hopes to break her down by turning her own child against her. He spends a great deal of time with Tómas, even to the point of sharing a bedroom with him, and tells him how his mother and brother are "turning a bit funny" (268). By doing this, Grímur hopes to gain an ally against Margrét and break her down by having one of her beloved children become her abuser.

Grímur's plans work. Tómas begins to distance himself from the rest of the family and appears angry whenever his mother tries to talk to him. This reaction could stem from the fear Tómas has of Grímur. Tómas is terrified of Grímur to the point where he even wets his pants when Grímur is interrogating Margrét. Therefore, his attitude could



currently stem from his fear that if he disobeys his father he will be beaten like his mother. No matter the case, Tómas has become one step closer to being like his father.

Margrét's behavior shows how her pride and sense of self has returned since Grímur has been away. Margrét suggests ways to deal with the pregnancy without resorting to killing the child. She suggests things like adoption, that Grímur lie and say he is the father, and even goes as far as to suggest that they get a divorce. Before, Margrét would have never been able to stand up to Grímur and suggest anything to him, especially not the idea of divorce. Not only does she begin talking to Grímur as an equal, she begins to take action against him. In order to protect her children and unborn baby, Margrét begins to poison Grímur's food. Margrét would have never even thought of doing this a few months ago for fear of what Grímur would do to her, but now she is confident enough to take the risk for the good of her family. This shows how crucial these months without Grímur have been to the development of her character.

Tómas's reaction to Grímur's death illustrates just how much his exposure to Grímur has changed him. After Grímur's death, Tómas just walks back into the master bedroom without so much as a change in his facial expression. He does not say anything to anyone, does not do anything, just walks back into his room and closes the door. Most people would show some sort of emotion; whether it be joy that this tyrant has died, or sorrow that his mentor has been murdered. However, Tómas does not seem to care about any of it. He has no strong feelings towards anyone. He just closes the door and continues his life.

Símon's hebephrenia is a result of the abuse that he suffered for years with the trauma of Grímur's death being the tipping point. Mikkelína suggests that hebephrenia can be caused by extreme trauma. Seeing your mother be beaten and tortured day in and day out for years is enough to damage anyone. The fact that Símon stabbed Grímur and knows that his mother buried the man alive is likely what sent him over the edge.

The redcurrant bushes are used at the end of Chapter 28 to symbolize the coming of better times. In order to comfort her son, Margrét tells him that there will still be berries on the bushes come the fall. This is her way of saying that even though the present is painful and hard, life will continue on and things will get better.

Tómas' life after that day further supports the prevalent theme throughout the book that violence begets violence. Mikkelína explains that Tómas is an abusive husband and father with an alcohol problem. Even if Mikkelína does not want to believe it, the similarities between his story and his father's suggest that his father's influence did play a part in his abusive relationships. Tómas was a scared child who felt powerless to stand up to his father. Like Grímur, he abused his children and his wives to feel like he had power. He wanted to be in control so he never went back to being that terrified child that he once was.

The author closes the book with an extremely short chapter in which Eva Lind finally opens her eyes. The novel has been rather dark and ending the story with Eva Lind waking up allows the author to end on a hopeful note. Eva Lind's awakening also



suggests that her recovery may play a role in the next novel in the series, which may draw in readers who want to know what happens to her.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Grímur treat Margrét differently when he returns?

Discussion Question 2

Do you think Grímur's interactions with Tómas contribute to how Tómas turns out? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Why does the author wait so long to give Margrét a name?

Vocabulary

doyenne, petite, morgue, stillborn, phosphorous, entrust, lethargy, frenzy, hebephrenia, meticulously, imploringly, schizophrenia



Characters

Erlendur

Erlendur is the protagonist of the novel. He is a middle-aged divorced man who is a detective with the police department. Erlendur went through a rough divorce and no longer has contact with his ex-wife. Due to the divorce, he has a rocky relationship with his two children, Eva Lind and Sindri. He genuinely loves his children, but has had little contact with them and his wife has told their children terrible lies about him. Despite this, he drives through the city desperately trying to find and save Eva Lind when she asks for his help. While she is in the hospital, Erlendur spends most of his time there talking to her.

Erlendur grew up in rural Iceland, but moved to the city to join the police force. He keeps to himself most of the time and feels that he is out of place in the big city. Instead, he often stays at home and reads about missing persons cases in Iceland. This obsession with missing persons cases stems from the loss of his brother. The two of them were lost in a snow storm and he was the only one that survived.

Margrét (The Mother)

Margrét is the abused woman in the flashbacks. She is the wife of Grímur and the mother of Mikkelína, Tómas, and Símon.

Margrét is an orphan growing up and does not know who her parents are. She is working for a merchant when she meets Grímur. She is unsatisfied with her job because her employers are overly harsh and miserly.

She soon learns that Grímur is an abusive man, but blames herself for the abuse. She slowly becomes more distant from her friends and family and soon her only friends are her children. Margrét attempts to run-away twice, but her husband finds her and threatens to kill Mikkelína. Over time Margrét stops taking care of herself because no matter what she does, it will never be good enough for Grímur. Margrét will not defend herself from Grímur, but stands up for her children whenever he does anything to them.

Once Grímur is arrested, Margrét's confidence returns and she begins to care for herself as she had before her marriage. Margrét even enters into a relationship with Dave, an American soldier, while Grímur is away. Even after Grímur returns, Margrét's confidence remains. She begins to take steps to stop Grímur, like poisoning his food. She even buries him herself after the incident with the baby.

Even though she is one of the primary characters of the story, she is not named until the second to last chapter in the book. This serves two purposes. First, it creates an air of mystery about the character because the reader is unsure of who she is. This keeps the reader engaged because they want to know who this woman that they have been



reading about for so long is. Second, it emphasizes the lack of identity she feels in her life due to Grímur's abuse. As the book says, "her entire existence revolved around him" (62). By not giving her a name, the author has emphasized this lack of self and self-worth by denying The Mother something that even minor characters possess, a name. By giving her a name at the end of book, the author has established that Margrét has regained that sense of self and pride that she had lost all those years ago.

Grímur

Grímur is Margrét's abusive husband. Grímur is a man who constantly dreams of being better than he is, and constantly fails at achieving those dreams. He first meets Margrét when he is delivering goods to her employer's store and tells her about his dreams of owning his own home and working on a fishing boat. However, Grímur learns that he is afraid of the ocean and his dreams are crushed. He frequently abuses his wife physically and mentally to feel like he still has some control of his life.

Grímur received work on the army base and used the opportunity to work a smuggling deal with a group of American soldiers. He is eventually found out and sent to prison for months. He eventually returns home and accuses his wife of sleeping with an American soldier. After the confrontation, he leaves Margrét alone. Grímur becomes furious when he learns that his wife has been poisoning him and tries to attack her. He is stabbed by Símon and then buried alive.

Grímur was abused when he was an orphan. He was about Tómas' age and was malnourished and beaten along with the other children.

Mikkelína

Mikkelína is one of Margrét's children. Mikkelína was Margrét's child from a previous relationship. She fell ill when she was three and was left physically disabled and incapable of doing much for herself.

Grímur despises Mikkelína for her disability, and often insults her in front of the family, hides her in the closet when they have company over, and even threatens to kill her to keep Margrét in line. Mikkelína fears Grímur and refuses to say anything when he was present. The rest of her family treats her like they would any other child and cares for her. The brothers even carry her outside when the weather is nice so she can enjoy nature.

Mikkelína's condition is treatable with therapy, but Grímur refuses to allow it. However, after his death, Margrét puts Mikkelína through therapy and she is able to regain most of her mobility, though she still has a noticeable limp. Mikkelína goes on to earn a degree in psychology and adopts a boy who she names after her brother Símon.

Mikkelína is the one who tells Erlendur the history of the bodies they find and, without her, the case would likely have never been solved.



Símon

Símon is one of Margrét's children. He is the older of the two boys and feels that he needs to protect his family. However, he knows that he is not capable of defending his family from Grímur. Despite Símon's disdain for his father, Grímur takes an interest in Símon and has the boy accompany him into town. Here Símon sees that his father wears many different faces depending on who he is with. Símon befriends an American soldier named Dave and invites him into their house where he sees Margrét.

Símon helps his mother give birth to her child and, when Grímur comes out of his room, stabs him with the scissors during the scuffle. Símon also helps bury Grímur until his mother realizes that Grímur is not dead yet.

Due to the trauma of this event, Símon develops hebephrenia (a form of schizophrenia), so he has not aged mentally past that point. He is currently in an institution.

Tómas

Tómas is one of Margrét's children. He is the younger of the two brothers and is characterized as being a loner. Grímur eventually takes an interest in him and begins talking to him in private. Once these private sessions start the family notices that Tómas begins to act cruelly around Mikkellína. He regrets doing it and apologizes profusely, but continues because his father wants him to. Tómas and Grímur grow closer throughout the book to the point where the two share a room after Grímur comes home and Tómas serves as Grímur's caretaker when he is sick.

Tómas becomes an abusive man much like his father who has gone through several failed marriages. He is not an active part of Mikkellína or Símon's lives.

Elínborg

Elínborg is one of Erlendur's partners. She is a middle-aged woman and one of the few female detectives on the police force. She has a degree in geology, though she has not used it, and is a great cook. Elínborg is a kind and charismatic person who handles most of the interviews for the team. She often accompanies Erlendur when he is gathering information.

Elínborg is concerned for Erlendur and Eva Lind, but knows that pushing too hard will only make things harder for Erlendur.

Sigurður Óli

Sigurður Óli is one of Erlendur's partners. He is in his thirties and a detective with the police department. Sigurður Óli is in a long-term relationship with a woman named



Bergthóra, but has no interest in marriage or children. This has created a rift between the couple. Sigurdur Óli is also accustomed to getting what he wants when he wants it and has little patience for anything that inconveniences him.

Sigurdur Óli feels no sympathy for Eva Lind because he feels that she deserves the misfortunes that have befallen her. He feels that she brought these things upon herself with her drug usage and life choices.

Skarphédinn

Skarphédinn is the archeologist that Erlendur calls in to dig up the skeleton. His most prominent feature is his yellow fangs. He is an archeology professor at the university. Skarphédinn takes over the dig like he is in charge and uses it as a training exercise for his students. His dig takes an incredibly long time and he becomes upset whenever someone comments on the speed of the dig or touches anything at the site.

Sólveig

Sólveig is a woman who went missing decades ago. Erlendur and the team suspect that she may be the person they are digging up. However, this is merely a red herring for the reader.

Sólveig was engaged to a man named Benjamín, who happened to own the house Margrét's family lived in, but broke off the engagement and is believed to have drowned herself. Sólveig was raped by her cousin and was pregnant as a result. She broke off the engagement for Benjamín's sake and never told anyone outside of the family what happened to save face.

Benjamín

Benjamín was Sólveig's fiancée. He was madly in love with Sólveig and was heartbroken when she broke off the engagement. He lost a lot of ambition after her death.

Erlendur and the team suspect that Benjamín may have killed his fiancée after she broke off the engagement, but this is merely a red herring.

Dave Welch

Dave is the American soldier that Margrét falls in love with. Dave came from a family with an abusive parent, so he did whatever he could to help Margrét and her kids deal with Grímur. He and Margrét fall in love and Dave promises that he will take care of Grímur. Margrét calls him on the day that Grímur came back, which is also the day that



Dave is being shipped off to somewhere else. Rather than tell him that Grímur is there, she wishes him farewell.

Elsa

Elsa is Benjamín's niece. She is a woman in her 60's who lives alone in a large home. She has all of Benjamín's belongings in her cellar and allows the team to search through them as they please. She also gives them a bit of Sólveig's hair that Benjamín kept with him.

Bára

Bára is Sólveig's sister. She tells Elínborg that their father committed suicide years before Sólveig's death and that it took a toll on her sister. This is a lie and her father actually committed suicide after Sólveig's death. When confronted about her dishonesty, Bára reveals that her sister was raped by their cousin and that she did not tell anyone to keep the family from shame.

Róbert Sigurdsson

Róbert is an old man that lives in a nursing home. He once lived on the hill where the body was found and Elínborg goes to ask him about the family that lived near the redcurrant bushes. He has difficulty speaking, so it takes him a long time to talk. Elínborg returns to his room after she is kicked out by the nurse where he writes down the word "crooked" for her. He dies shortly after.



Symbols and Symbolism

Redcurrant Bushes

The redcurrant bushes in this novel represent people's ability to make it through difficult times in their life. Mikkellína explains that no matter how harsh of a winter they have, the bushes still produce green leaves and plump red berries. Likewise, people can struggle through the hard times in their lives and still be happy when life is going their way. The best example of this is Margrét. She suffers through Grímur's constant abuse for more than a decade, yet when Grímur is out of the picture for a few months, she is able to collect herself and enjoy her life.

Erlendur

Erlendur represents traditional Iceland. Born into the quiet rural life that many have come to associate with Iceland, Erlendur bonded with his surroundings and the stories people told each other. However, he and his family moved into the city to find work. This symbolizes Iceland's shift from rural towns and villages to urban cities. Erlendur is unable to bond with his new home like he did his birthplace and is left to wander the city to look for something to connect with. Erlendur is drawn to things that remind him of the place where he was born because they represent a remnant of the Iceland he remembers. When Erlendur first appears in this book, he is eating at a restaurant that serves traditional Icelandic food and is made to look like a traditional Icelandic kitchen. This place reminds him of home and Iceland as it was in his childhood.

Blizzard

The blizzard in Erlendur's dream is a symbol of the loneliness and isolation he feels. In his dream, he is desperately trying to escape a blizzard that he has been caught in, but is unable to make any progress so he eventually gives up. When Erlendur arrived in the city, he tried to find something that he could connect to, but had no success. This is him struggling to escape the blizzard without making any progress. At this point in his life, Erlendur seems to have given up that struggle to find something to bond with. He does not have any real friends besides his coworkers; he does not reveal anything about his personal life to anyone, including his daughter; and he spends most of his free time studying missing persons cases. This is him giving up the struggle and just waiting for it all to be over.

Benjamín's Locket

Elsa giving Sigurdur Óli the locket is a symbol of her trust in the team of detectives. Elsa did not give away the locket at first because she was not sure if she could trust this group of people. She feared that they had an agenda already and they were going to



use the locket to prove her uncle's guilt. It is not until Sigurdur Óli has been at her house for a few days and talked about himself and his personal life that Elsa finally hands over the locket. This shows that by spending time and getting to know each other, the group has earned her trust and complete cooperation in this case.

The Gasworks

The Gasworks is a symbol of the lower class. During the appearance of Haley's Comet, the Gasworks was supposedly the site of a doomsday orgy. Being called a child of that orgy is the equivalent of being a bastard child. The Gasworks also represents a safe haven for the lower class. It is now a warm place that the homeless can go to for shelter in the cold Icelandic winters. So the Gasworks has seen the highs and lows of society's rejects and orphans.

The Color Green

The color green is seen as a symbol of hope. Margrét tells Mikkellína that green represents hope. After Grímur leaves, the color green begins to appear in the house. For example, the soap that she cleans herself up with is green and the color of the dress she is wearing in Símon's picture is also green. This represents that with Grímur gone, the hope for a happy family has begun to appear in the house. Green is also the color of the leaves. Since the redcurrant symbolizes people's ability to make it through the tough times, the green leaves represent the happy periods of people's lives.

Símon's Dreams

Símon's dreams of a knight and a dragon represent the relationship he has with his father. Since Símon views himself as the knight, he sees himself as a protector of the helpless innocent people (his mother and siblings) that are terrorized by the dragon. Símon sees Grímur as the dragon that he is fighting. Imagining Grímur as the dragon shows that Símon views him as the evil that he must fight in order to protect those in need. Contrary to most children's fairy tales, the knight in shining armor loses to the dragon in Símon's dream. This shows that Símon feels powerless to stop his father.

Bára and Elsa's homes

The emptiness of Bára and Elsa's homes symbolize how the old ways are dying out. These two women were members of wealthy and prestigious families 70 years ago. They were the wealthy and powerful families that people aspired to be like. However, when Erlendur and his team are investigating their case in present time, their houses contain only memories of the families' pasts. This represents how society has changed because these families are now just a shell of what they once were; their houses contain only the memories of when they were powerful.



Military Base Job

The job that Grímur gets on the military base is a symbol of hope for Grímur. Grímur wants to be successful and have control of his life. Up until this point that has not been possible because all of his plans have been thwarted. He cannot be a fisherman like he dreamed because he is afraid of the ocean, and he gives up on his dream of fixing up his house when he learns that their landlord does not care one way or the other. This job gives him a chance to make something of his life and get rich. He begins to dream of having a nice home and a car. However, like all of his other hopes and dreams, this one comes crashing down on him as well.

Margrét's Baby

Margrét and Dave's baby is a symbol of their relationship. The child is a reminder of the joy and happiness that Margrét felt when she was with Dave. She felt safe and cared for when she was with him and she was her own person rather than someone's servant. This baby is what ultimately ends the marriage between Margrét and Grímur as it represents the love between Margrét and Dave. While the child is a symbol of love to Margrét, it is a symbol of infidelity and dishonesty to Grímur. To him, this child represents all of his fears, that his wife is not his to control. The baby's sudden demise represents how short of a time Dave and Margrét had together. The child dies shortly after its birth, similar to how these two lovers had only a few short months for their love to flourish before they were separated. The baby's death also represents the death of Dave and Margrét's relationship. While the two will love each other for the rest of their lives, their relationship will never be able to flourish again. So burying the baby is Margrét's way of accepting the fact that this relationship can never be.



Settings

Margrét's House

Margrét's house is the setting for the majority of the flashbacks. This is where Margrét and her children live most of their lives and where Grímur's abuse occurs. Grímur also stores most of the smuggled American goods in his home and is arrested there because of it. Despite the misery that occurs here, the house also carries a sense of hope since it is where Dave meets and woos Margrét.

The Millenium Quarter

The Millenium Quarter is the place where the skeleton is found. The Millenium Quarter used to be a rural part of Iceland, but growth in Reykjavik has turned it into a suburb. The area symbolizes how Iceland is changing from a rural country to a bustling urban nation. Skarphédinn's dig occurs here and Erlendur finds Mikkellína visiting her mother's redcurrant bushes in this area.

Elsa's House

Elsa lives alone in a large house. This is where most of Benjamín's belongings are stored and where Sigurdur Óli spends most of the case. This place is where the reader learns a great deal about Sigurdur Óli's life as he is contemplating the state of his relationship with Bergthóra.

The Hospital

After Erlendur finds Eva Lind unconscious and bleeding, she spends the remainder of the novel in the hospital. Erlendur spends most of his free time here talking to his daughter while she is in a coma. Erlendur also encounters his ex-wife while visiting his daughter and runs into a medium that makes him confront the memory of his dead brother. The reader learns about Erlendur's history and his relationship with his family at the hospital as Erlendur is forced to contemplate his life and share his darkest secrets with his daughter.

Bará's House

Bará's House is where Sólveig's sister lives with her husband. It's here that the team learns the truth about Sólveig's family and why the body they found cannot be Sólveig's. The information gathered here solves another unsolved case by revealing why Sólveig committed suicide all those years ago and putting the minds of Benjamín's family at rest.



Themes and Motifs

Violence Begets Violence

Many of the violent characters in this story are created by their experiences of being abused by others. Two examples of this are Grímur and Tómas. Both of these characters were abused as children, and subsequently grow up to become abusive towards their own wives and children. The childhood abuse influences these characters' thoughts and behaviors and helps to form them into the abusive figures that they became.

Grímur was neglected and abused as a child. The feeling of anger and the need to never be that weak and powerless again leads him to do whatever he needs to feel like he is in control of his life. Unfortunately, Grímur's life is far from perfect, which makes him even more violent. His dreams of being a fisherman fall through when he finds out he is afraid of the water and he is barely able to make ends meet. So, the only place that he can feel in control of his life is at home. In order to compensate, Grímur does the only thing he knows to have complete control over a situation, beat his family down until they are under his complete control.

Tómas is born and raised under Grímur's dictatorship. He sees and experiences an abusive parent first hand. Like Grímur, Tómas feels powerless through this time in his life. He has no ability to stand up for himself or his mother for fear he will be beaten by Grímur. So when Grímur begins taking a liking to him and telling him to do things, he initially only does them out of the fear of what will happen if he refuses. However, by the time of Grímur's death, Tómas has become unfeeling towards others. When his father dies, he does not show any emotion whatsoever. Neither the joy of being free from the abuse or the sorrow of losing his father comes onto his face. This lack of empathy for others and the need to be in control of his own life leads him down the same road as his father—one of spousal and child abuse.

Fairy Tale Motif

Fairy tales and folklore are referenced in this novel to characterize certain characters. A prime example of this is Skarphédinn. During the investigation, Erlendur mentions that Skarphédinn is beginning to remind him of a Brothers Grimm monster. This suggests that Erlendur has a negative opinion of Skarphédinn. The fantasy monster that comes to mind when one thinks of Skarphédinn is the vampire. Skarphédinn's most prominent trait are his two fangs that the author points out whenever Skarphédinn makes an appearance. While he may not be an actual blood sucking vampire, Skarphédinn does try to suck whatever he can out of this case. Skarphédinn uses his position in this case to make everyone else do what he wants. He even goes as far as to tell Erlendur, the person who brought him in on the case, to pick up some pastries for him on his way to the dig site. Skarphédinn has also turned this dig into a training exercise for his



students. He has turned this missing persons case into a classroom exercise for his students. He also plans to use this experience for lectures at the college. Skarphédinn is certainly doing everything he can to suck this case dry and get as much as he can from it.

Another example of the fairy tale motif is Símon's knight in shining armor fantasy. In his dreams, Símon sees himself as a knight while Grímur is the dragon that he has to kill. However, unlike in classic fairy tales where the knight always slays the dragon, in his dreams, the dragon always wins. By comparing Grímur to a dragon, the author has established that Símon sees Grímur as a terrifying and violent monster while he sees himself as the defender of the innocent (like his mother and siblings). The fact that the knight always loses shows that he does not believe that he is strong enough to stop Grímur. Given the fact that Símon's views on the Christian God and religion follow soon after, comparing Grímur to a dragons is also implying that he is Satan himself. Throughout the Book of Revelations in the Bible, Satan appears as a dragon. Having dragon comparisons come just before Símon's views on Christianity would alert those who are familiar with the Book of Revelations to this implied comparison.

Abuse is Treated as an Unimportant Crime

Despite the atrocities that have been inflicted on characters like Margrét, no one seems to be willing to help. When Grímur first starts to beat Margrét, she does everything she can to get herself out of the situation. However, no one is willing to help. Quite the opposite in fact; instead of helping her, people actually try to blame the abuse on her and say she is a bad wife. This shows that the people do not think that spousal abuse is a serious crime. No one in Iceland seems to be willing to help her despite the fact that the marks of abuse are prevalent.

The only person that does anything to help her is Dave. Dave has experienced life in an abusive family himself, so he knows what they are going through. While it does show that there are people in the world who do take domestic violence seriously, it also shows just how few people there are who do so. It took a World War to bring someone from across the ocean to help Margrét deal with the horrors that she faces every day.

Unfortunately, the mother of the present day baby burned by cigarettes shows that not much has changed. The woman has been in the hospital twice in the past year for broken bones and other injuries. Even though she tried to pass them off as the marks of a car accident, it should have been obvious to the doctors that that was not the case. These are professionals who have likely seen hundreds of road accidents and other injuries; they should have some idea that this is not the result of an accident. Despite this, neither the doctors nor anyone else seem to lift a finger to help her or her baby since they are still living with the man who beats her. It takes Erlendur searching frantically for his own daughter for something to be done, and even that has not saved the woman from her abuser.



Finally, Mikkellína's speech about domestic violence supports the idea that it is not taken seriously. She points out that even the name of the crime undermines the nature of it. The term "domestic" is often used to describe something that has is tame, like a dog or a cat. So domestic violence makes it sound like it is a tame violence. However, this is obviously not the case as has been shown by the struggles that Margrét has suffered both physically and mentally.

Patience is Crucial to Success

The author demonstrates throughout the novel that patience will be rewarded in life. Much of the work that the team does involves a great deal of patience. Without it, this case would be much harder to solve. For example, all of Erlendur's interactions with Skarphédinn take a great deal of patience on his part. Not only is the dig itself taking more time than he had anticipated, but Skarphédinn's snobbish attitude makes interacting with him a chore. However, Erlendur's patience pays off when the skeletons are finally unearthed and the case is solved.

Talking with Róbert Sigurdsson also requires a great deal of patience, though for different reasons. Since it takes Róbert so long to say anything, it takes a great deal of patience to wait for the words to come out. If Elínborg had given up, like Sigurdur Óli did, she would have never gotten the clue that they needed to look for a crooked woman in a green coat.

Elsa and Benjamín's cellar also takes a great deal of patience to sift through. However, if Sigurdur Óli had not done this they would never have gotten the locket with Sólveig's hair. Elsa also reveals that Sólveig was pregnant with someone else's baby and that Bára had lied about when her father committed suicide after she trusted Sigurdur Óli. So, if he had not been there patiently searching through the cellar and building her trust, the group would have never learned this information and the case would have never been closed.



Styles

Point of View

This story is told in third person limited perspective. The story primarily follows Erlendur's perspective throughout the case, though it does occasionally shift to one of his coworkers. There is no single character that the story centers on during the flashbacks, but it instead shifts between the mother and children when flashbacks occur.

This perspective allows readers to have a more in-depth understanding of the characters they are following by giving readers a peek into the minds of the character they are following. This allows readers to have a deeper understanding of who the character is, how they think, and what motivates them. For a story that has such a large emphasis on character development, this feature makes third person limited the ideal point of view to use, as it allows the reader to see how all of the characters thoughts and beliefs have changed over time rather than just the one or two that first person may allow.

The only major character the reader never gets to experience in this way is Grímur. This is meant to keep the mystery and chaos that surrounds him intact. Part of the horror about Grímur is that one can never be certain what he will do. The reader does not have access to his mind like the other characters, so how he operates is unknown. This fosters the same sense of uncertainty that Margrét and her children feel in the reader.

Language and Meaning

The language in this book is of a high school vocabulary level. There are no words that are overly difficult to comprehend, but should provide a suitable challenge. Since this is a translated text, there may be times when the text is confusing, as some sentences are not written well and certain phrases may be confusing to the reader. This is due to the difficulty in translating a text into another language where words may not translate perfectly and sentence structure may differ.

The author is slow to give the names of the family members involved in the flashbacks. For example, the mother is not named until the end of the book. This builds some mystery around these characters because their identities are unknown. Without a name, it is difficult for a reader to identify a character. Waiting until the end of the book to give Margrét a name is the author's way of representing Margrét's view of herself. Margrét's sense of self was crushed by Grímur early on in the novel. She was not her own person, she was just Grímur's slave to do with as he pleased. She has no name because she had no identity of her own. However, by the end of the novel she has retaken her feelings of self-worth and her identity by removing Grímur from her life completely. She

sees herself as her own woman with her own identity; and at that point only is she given a name.

Structure

The book is separated into 30 chapters, averaging six pages in length each. These chapters jump between two stories. One story is the detective case that Erlendur and his team are trying to solve while the other is the story of a family that lived about 70 years ago who struggle through life with an abusive husband/father. These two stories eventually intermingle and the flashback story resolves the story of Erlendur and his team. Having these two stories occurring at the same time helps create a sense of mystery about the story of the family. The reader is left to wonder how this story is relevant to the case they are also reading and how the two stories will connect.



Quotes

He knew at once it was a human bone, when he took it from the baby who was sitting on the floor chewing it.

-- Narrator (chapter 1)

Importance: This shocking opening line creates a sense of mystery that draws the reader in from the very first sentence of the book.

Marriage was sacred in the eyes of God and people had to put up with much in order to keep it together.

-- Narrator (chapter 5)

Importance: This line emphasizes how people treat domestic abuse like it was an unimportant crime. Even the vicar, a religious leader who is supposed to help and care for their flock is brushing aside Margrét's abuse as just another trial people endure in life.

It sometimes occurred to her, which perhaps he too knew deep down inside, that the violence he inflicted on her was above all a manifestation of his own weakness.

-- Narrator (chapter 5)

Importance: This quote introduces the idea that Grímur's abuse stems from an insecurity of his. Although it does not specifically say what his weakness is, this quote strengthens the idea that Grímur's need to maintain control over his own life is a major factor in why he abuses his wife and kids.

Ugly old bag.

-- Narrator (chapter 5)

Importance: This quote illustrates that Margrét's will has been broken. She has lost her sense of self and adopts Grímur's views of her as her own.

Time, it doesn't heal any wounds.

-- Erlendur (chapter 6)

Importance: This quote explains both Eva Lind's and Erlendur's experiences. Eva Lind has been trying to turn her life around for a while now, but try as she might she always comes back to her addiction. Time has not healed any of Eva Lind's physical or mental wounds. It has at best allowed the pain to lessen until they are reopened. Erlendur's attempts to fit into the city are also an example of this quote. Erlendur had tried to fit in, but has long since given up this quest. No matter how long it has been, the loneliness he feels has not gotten any easier to deal with.

He had to listen if he was to do what he needed to do.

-- Narrator (chapter 9)



Importance: This quote foreshadows that Simon will eventually kill his father. He is aware that he has to pay attention to his surroundings and the way his father treats his mother if he is to one day protect her from the abuse she suffers. He has begun to see himself as needing to protect his mother.

He imagined the inevitable battle like an adventure story in which the knight vanquishes the fire breathing dragon, but in his dreams Símon never won.

-- Narrator (chapter 11)

Importance: This quote explains the relationship Símon has with his father. Símon sees himself as the brave knight who defends the helpless from dangerous creatures. Grímur is a dragon that terrorizes people. So Símon feels like it is his duty to protect his family from Grímur, but he also feels like he is unable to defeat Grímur.

It makes me furious to think I couldn't have been much older than him.

-- Grímur (chapter 11)

Importance: This is the first time the reader learns anything about Grímur's past. While it does not reveal that he was abused as a child, it does show that something traumatic happened in Grímur's past that still haunts him to this day.

Patience is a virtue, remember that.

-- Skarphédinn (chapter 12)

Importance: This quote formally introduces the theme that patience is crucial to success while also further characterizing Skarphédinn as a condescending person because he is again telling Erlendur what to do and how to do it.

He disappeared and I think he's still lost and has been for a long time, and I'm not sure he'll ever be found.

-- Erlendur (chapter 20)

Importance: Erlendur says this about himself as he is talking to Eva Lind. This quote shows that Erlendur does not feel comfortable in the city. The boy that Erlendur was growing up in the country has been lost for years due to his inability to fit into the city that he has found himself in.

Such a convenient term for soul murder.

-- Mikkelína (chapter 22)

Importance: Mikkelína says this about domestic violence when she is talking to Erlendur. Mikkelína's view on the term "domestic violence" emphasizes how people do not take domestic abuse as seriously as they should. She points out that the term domestic violence makes it sound harmless or tame; when in reality it is anything but.



There was too much of his father in him. Too much hatred.
-- Mikkellína (chapter 23)

Importance: This quote supports the idea that violence begets violence. Tómas became an abusive husband and father just like his father was. Like his father, his experiences changed him and filled him with hatred and anger. As a result, he beats his wife and children just as his father did.