

What She Left Behind Study Guide

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Plot Summary

Izzy Stone is a 17-year-old with a worrisome past history as a foster child. Ever since her mother shot her father to death when Izzy was 7, Izzy has bounced from one inadequate foster home to another, save for a few years with her grandmother and now a stint with Peg and Harry, who treat her well.

Peg gets Izzy involved in a mystery. Suitcases from former inmates who never left a notorious local asylum have been preserved, and Peg needs Izzy's help cataloging the vast archive of personal effects. Peg hopes to undercover who these lost souls were by what they left behind. One of the focuses of their inquiry is Clara Cartwright from the late 1920s. When Izzy is given Clara's journal by Ethan, a cute boy she likes, Izzy devours the personal contents, becoming hooked on Clara's outcome, however difficult to puzzle together from the few remaining clues.

In 1929, Clara, the 18-year-old daughter of a rich banker, rebels against her parents' strictness and secretly attends the notorious Cotton Club by night, dressed as a flapper. She falls in love with Bruno Moretti, a young but poor immigrant. She is soon secretly pregnant by him, as well. Not liking Bruno after meeting him, her father unjustly accuses Clara of "having an episode" and on very flimsy grounds, is able to have his daughter held in a series of asylums. The worse by far of these is state-run facility known as Willard asylum, which takes little mercy on Clara even when she reveals she is pregnant.

In the present, Izzy's own problems threaten to interfere with the search for Clara's past. Izzy is fighting a desire to cut herself, a problem she has only recently brought under control. Ethan's jealous girlfriend Shannon targets Izzy for a series of bullying incidents in which Izzy is made the victim. The search for Clara triggers painful memories Izzy has repressed about her own mother's long stay in a mental ward.

In the 1930s, Clara fights for her liberation from Willard asylum, especially after her baby is taken from her and given up for adoption. Bruno successfully infiltrates the asylum attempting to rescue Clara, but Dr. Roach, the head of Willard, prevents Bruno's plan. Bruno is held at Willard under false pretenses by Dr. Roach, but eventually Bruno successfully concocts an escape plan with Clara and the help of Lawrence Lawrence, an old inmate who digs graves, to escape. The plan is foiled and Bruno is killed in the escape attempt, breaking Clara's heart.

In the present, Izzy's birth mother slips into a near-death coma. Peg thoughtfully arranges transportation to the prison so Izzy can visit her dying mother. Izzy tries to make peace, but the pain is great. One saving grace occurs when Izzy reads the letters her mother sent to her over the years which Izzy has never read. They reveal the reason Izzy's mother shot her father was because the father was attempting to molest Izzy. Izzy realizes her mother sacrificed all for her.



Nurse Trench, who knew Clara, is located and interviewed by Izzy and Peg. The old nurse reveals that none other than Dr. Roach kept Clara's healthy baby girl. Childless, he and his wife named the baby Susan, never telling Clara the truth. After visiting Susan, Izzy and Peg are next shocked to learn from Susan that her birth mother, Clara, is still alive in an assisted living facility.

A first-ever reunion is staged for Clara and Susan. Reunited mother and daughter hug and Clara thanks a beaming Izzy for making it possible because of her passionate investigation. On her 18th birthday, Izzy is surprised by Peg and Harry with a surprise birthday party. They also reveal they plan to adopt her as their own daughter, just as her friends arrive with presents.



Chapters 1-2

Summary

17-year-old Isabelle "Izzy" Stone is no stranger to being a foster care child. Since the moment she witnessed her mother shoot her father as a 7-year-old, she has been shuttled from one foster home to the next, each new home to more tragic results. As the story begins on the grounds of the long-abandoned Willard state asylum, Izzy thinks about the fact she is "aging out" of the foster care system at age 18, which means she will be entirely on her own in terms of care and expenses. Willard is a creepy, disturbing place, even emptied of its former patients.

Peg, Izzy's new foster care mother, has invited Izzy to Willard for a reason. Peg is a curator at a local museum, and has learned of a major new discovery worthy of cultural preservation inside the closed psychiatric hospital. Peg wants Izzy to help her with the project, briefly mentioning that when Willard was first opened, it was a model of how to help the mentally ill. But budget cuts and societal neglect resulted in a known historical pit of horrors into which over 50,000 former patients died with the asylum's walls.

Izzy is happy to oblige, as she genuinely likes Peg and her foster father Harry. Peg teases Izzy, wondering why Izzy never wears short sleeves, even in the heat. Izzy makes a lame joke but clearly she is hiding something with her attire. Izzy notes a group of patients across the lake at the Elmira Psychiatric Center. She darkly recalls how her mother was housed there after shooting her father. Izzy's background with doctors has been disappointing, as none have cured her nightmares and trauma at all she has witnessed from a young age.

Peg and Izzy are shown an entire storage area in Willard filled with former inmates' luggage and personal effects. Peg is delighted. It is as if she is being given access to the lost lives of the Willard asylum via these remnant suitcases, which were only stored for inmates who checked into Willard but never checked out. Izzy remembers the smell of gunpowder that lingered in her parents' room after the shooting and how it sickened her, then and now. Peg expresses her joy at the discovery, but Izzy is not thrilled, uncomfortable with the way the asylum triggers painful memories in her own biography.

Meanwhile, back in 1929, 18-year-old Clara Cartwright faces off with her father Henry and mother Ruth. Clara, a proper young lady raised by her wealthy parents to always maintain a chaste manner, secretly attends the infamous Cotton Club, dressed as a flapper. She meets Bruno Moretti there, a poor but handsome young immigrant. They fall in love. But Henry has made plans for Clara to wed his business partner's son, James Gallagher, which Henry considers a proper fit. A dinner arranged by Clara between her and Bruno goes disastrously, with Henry and Ruth rudely hostile and insulting to Bruno, despite his best efforts to be a gentleman. Clara nervously arranges her skirt to hide her unannounced pregnancy with Bruno's baby, desperate to be able to legitimately marry the baby's true father.



Clara and her outraged father engage in a screaming match of accusations. Clara accuses her parents of both having a contributing hand in her brother William's death. She says no matter how hard William worked for his parents' approval, they never gave it to him. Henry loses control, calling the police and telling them he needs help because his daughter "is having some kind of episode."

Analysis

Notice the narrative construction opens the story with Izzy waiting for her foster mother to appear against the background of the shuttered Willard asylum. Even before the reader knows much about the characters, the central conflicts or themes, the author vividly places two major elements from the story into motion: Izzy as a natural worrier and the imposing artifice of Willard.

Izzy's worrisome nature is established from the moment readers meet her. She is having a vivid memory recall about the night her mother shot her father to death when she was a 7-year-old. Izzy has been shopped from one foster home to the next, and it shows on her battle-worn psyche. She wants to put the past behind her and make a new life with foster parents Peg and Harry. But she is having a hard time letting go past injuries and horrors, and this struggle will define her conflict throughout the following chapters.

To a large degree, imposing Willard asylum acts almost like a character in this story as much as a background setting only. The asylum is constantly integrated into the narrative, even if it is not animate and truly only a collection of buildings. The author places it in the background so often that it comes to be much like a haunted house in a ghost story. That is, Willard becomes central as a visual motif from the opening lines, and this literary quality continues throughout the book.

The connection between Izzy, the asylum, and her own personal history are explicit in the opening chapter. Her own mother wound up in an asylum after murdering Izzy's dad, and Izzy has abandoned her mother to her fate rather than visit her regularly. This underlying connection will become more apparent as Izzy becomes involved in solving the mystery of Clara's identity, as Clara must suffer as a sane person and maintain her sanity in an asylum just as Izzy's mother had to struggle to do the same. But as the story opens, none of these connections have yet to be made by Izzy.

Symbolic imagery is used when Izzy finds the supposedly lost gosling. The metaphorical idea of a mother goose that has lost her child is a narrative prefiguring of Clara's own story about losing her child. It also echoes Izzy's own sense of lost childhood, and how she herself has had to depend upon the kindness of strangers for her well being.

Peg's brief history of Willard is relevant. It demonstrates that while Willard became a psychiatric horror museum by the time of its demise, that it was actually started with the



best of humane intentions. Cut-backs and neglect are what make it into a nightmare factory, not its first incarnation, when it worked.

Izzy's hiding her arms because she cuts is a dark but important character detail. Izzy is a secret sufferer, not prone to demonstrate her feelings, especially her darker feelings, in a public way. Her use of long-sleeved shirts to cover the marks is symbolic, for Izzy is a natural hider, both physically and emotionally, from too much display of emotion.

In Chapter 2, Clara confronts her parents about her long-term plans post high school graduation. The foyer she waits in to see her father Henry and mother Ruth is described as being stifling conservative décor, which prefigures and echoes the parents' ultra-Victorian manners perfectly.

Clara uses the fact she blames her parents for her brother William's suicide to secretly rebel against their overly-controlling authority. The history Clara recalls as she waits to meet her parents is one of neglect and presumption. Henry has shouted at Clara her place is in the home learning how to raise children, not partying in and running around the city.

Clara leads a double life from the moment the reader meets her. By day, she is a dutiful daughter and student. By night, however, she is a flapper and party girl in some of the city's most glamorous nightclubs, such as the Cotton Club. This duality between repressed and expressive selves will become a major character conflict for Clara throughout the remainder of the novel, and she will pay a heavy price for her attempts at self-liberation. The asylum confinement she later experiences is like a grotesque exaggeration of her earlier suppression under her father's fist, only made monstrously so. Clara has to fight against authority figures who know what is best for her (or so they claim) until the end of the story.

Bruno literally sweeps Clara off her feet at the Cotton Club. His entrance into the story as well-dressed, handsome and gallant is something of a romantic novel cliché, but the author positions the telling of the events so that the reader is enthralled by the rush of excitement Clara is experiencing as it unfolds.

This rush of excitement told from Clara's point of view contrasts nicely with Clara's recall of Ruth's obsession with making the young Clara wear a corset, even while she sleeps at night. The rough handling by Ruth of the corset and Clara's inability to say no vividly prefigure Clara's later adult treatment in the asylum by the matronly nurses on staff. From an early age, Clara is presented as a character who has had to endure much, even if she was born into wealth.

The disastrous dinner with Bruno and Clara meeting her parents sets the stage for Henry's later rash reaction of summoning psychiatric care. For what Henry really can't tolerate is his daughter's sense of independence in the face of his fatherly resistance. Henry's sense of order is destroyed by Clara's suggestion that a woman can think for herself, and so Henry destroys the source of irritation. He calls the doctors to "come



take her away” not because she's really mentally ill, but because she has the audacity not to live as her patriarchal father commands.

Clara's accusation that Henry killed William wounds Henry deeply, as William was his only son. But Henry's reaction against his daughter (to deliberately confine her into an asylum) is monstrously out of proportion to any wrongdoing on Clara's behalf. This sense of unjust proportion will be continued throughout the rest of “What She Left Behind.”

Discussion Question 1

Why does Izzy wear long-sleeved shirts year round, even in the hottest months? She is normally reluctant to be untruthful, but refuses to tell Peg the true reason she keeps her arms always covered from easy inspection by others. Does avoiding telling Peg help or hurt Izzy's relationship with her foster mom?

Discussion Question 2

Why doesn't Clara tell her father Henry that she is secretly leading the life of a flapper? How does Henry's reaction to her accusation that he made William, her brother, commit suicide seal Clara's fate with her father?

Discussion Question 3

What parallels are there between Izzy's secret cutting of herself and Clara's secret double life as a flapper? How do each pay a price in their respective eras for the choices they make to keep secrets from parental figures, whether they are biological or foster, in nature?

Vocabulary

gallivanting, asylum, institution, morgue, goslings, psychiatric, Saratoga trunk, flapper, fermenting, settee, engagement, boroughs



Chapters 3-4

Summary

Izzy knows being the new kid at Lakeshore High School her senior year will not be easy based on her past foster care in which she has been placed into many different school systems. She drops an armload of papers in a busy hallway her first day at school, but only Ethan Black stops to help her. Shannon Mackenzie, Ethan's girlfriend, takes an immediate dislike to Izzy.

Izzy reflects on her bad history with foster care parents. They included an alcoholic foster parent, as well as negligent, absentee, and even suicidal foster parents. And always with a sudden, new school as punctuation mark to each new foster care sentence. She is very glad Peg and Harry, her latest parents, take such good care of her.

In Mr. Hudson's class, Izzy is pelted by a condom. She keeps her cool and turns the prank into a class-shared laugh. Later, Izzy darkly recalls her secret of secrets: she has been cutting herself for relief for 7 lonely years. Only recently has she brought it under control. Izzy fears she will wind up in a mental institution like her mother. After class, Mr. Hudson advised Izzy not to take the bullies too seriously. Alexandra, aka Alex, befriends Izzy, offering Izzy a ride home. But Izzy declines, wary of being duped. Shannon and her entourage arrive, tentatively inviting Alex and even Izzy to an upcoming party.

Meanwhile back in 1930, Clara is spending a long, cold New Year's Day as forced patient in the Long Island Home for Nervous Invalids. Dr. Thorn, the head doctor, takes Henry's side over Clara's own in terms of her true state of well-being, keeping her against her will. Clara touches her unborn child and wonders about Ruth, her mother, and how she could abandon Clara, her only daughter. She knows that as soon as anyone knows she is carrying Bruno's child, her fate will be a homeless pregnancy.

Dr. Thorn believes Clara is truly mentally ill. He diagnoses her with paranoia because Clara blames her father for her brother's death. Clara demands to know what would happen if she tries to escape, but Dr. Thorn is unconcerned owing to the tight security.

After no communication for months, Henry contacts his daughter via a letter. He explains that he has suffered huge financial losses in the stock market crash. He will no longer be able to afford her care at the quality level he's previously paid. Clara is scheduled for transfer to Willard asylum, a state-run facility. Nurse Yott is friendly with Clara, and so Clara shares the truth of her pregnancy. Nurse Yott reveals her own secret: she has read the letters Clara attempted to send Bruno, which were intercepted. Clara writes Bruno a hurried letter and asks Nurse Yott to secretly mail it for her.



Analysis

Izzy's meeting of Ethan at the first day of school is symbolic. He is arm-in-arm with Shannon, his current girlfriend, and yet he stoops to help Izzy retrieve some dropped papers. This three-way tug of affections will come to define much of the conflict Izzy experiences in the coming chapters as she struggles to make emotional sense of her feelings for someone who is not technically available to date.

While waiting for a teacher, Izzy recalls the foster homes where she's stayed. Neglect is a recurrent theme for Izzy as character. Because she has been abandoned so many times at a young age, she feels self-sheltering at times, desiring little contact with people, especially if she is dependent upon them. Ethan's bid to stand up for Izzy against bullying clearly announces his feelings for the newcomer. But ironically, this will not help Izzy much, as this only enrages Shannon to seek revenge against Izzy.

Izzy's failed attempt to resolve the lingering pain of her childhood has been to cut herself. She bitterly thinks about it in class, remembering how she has been only recently stopped. She wonders why she cannot control her emotions better, which is key to Izzy's character struggles. Izzy can't control her emotions, but paradoxically, she will never seek anyone out to reveal her deepest emotions to in order to gain perspective. This keeps her held in an emotional bind, and cutting has been her dysfunctional way of trying to resolve it.

In Chapter 4, Clara's first asylum stay is with the private residence Long Island Home for Nervous Invalids, and this sets in stark contrast to the latter abuses of Willard state asylum. While Clara does not enjoy being confined as she is at Long Island Home, there is still a world of differences between private and state care such as Willard, as the reader will come to see. Clara's father Henry does not bother to communicate with her by visiting. Instead, he sends letters to her at key moments. This cold, distancing technique in which he maintains ultimate control is why Clara has such disdain for her father. He can't even risk the bitter truths that might emerge in any face-to-face conversation.

The session she has with Dr. Thorn brings out Clara's charge about her parents' problems, when she accuses them of loving money and power more than their children. But her moment of honesty costs her, as Dr. Thorn labels her a "paranoid" based on her hostilities towards those in her life, even if there are just and sound reasons for the resentments not based in mental illness.

Dr. Thorn mentions her steamer trunk of personal belongings. Notice how the author uses the trunk from this point forward. Whenever it appears, there is a growing sense that it will somehow also later be seen in the text. The author uses the device to create maximum suspense, as the reader realizes that much of the mystery of what is uncovered throughout the book originates from Clara's trunk. So every time Clara's trunk appears in the story, it builds a narrative thread throughout the book.



As a symbol, Clara's trunk represents more than just her clothing, a journal, etc. Her trunk, with the stickers from around the world adorning it, becomes a kind of repository for all of Clara's failed dreams. Her dreams for personal freedom, for a life dedicated to love and all her other hopes become stillborn throughout most of the book, relegated to a trunk that will ultimately come to tell her story to another generation via Izzy and her efforts.

In his typical manner, Henry sends a letter informing Clara that the Stock Market Crash has made it impossible for him to support Clara in a private asylum. Clara's frantic scribbling in her journal that she is being gotten rid of by her father is deadly accurate, as is the foreshadowing of her naïve questioning of whether or not she should be afraid to be sent to Willard.

Nurse Yott is a friendly helper who emerges in Clara's moment of need. Such characters are littered throughout the book, often emerging in the form of archetypes, such as nurses, fellow patients and even a gravedigger, all of whom play a part in Clara's journey through Willard. These helpers often offer assistance to Clara that seems nearly impossible to expect, such as Lawrence Lawrence the gravedigger who later helps her in an escape attempt. In Nurse Yott's case, she helps Clara secretly mail a letter to Bruno begging for his help as well as return the unmailed letters she's written to Bruno.

Discussion Question 1

Izzy relieves her emotional turmoil by cutting herself. Why do you think she does this, and why doesn't it work as a successful coping strategy despite Izzy's attempts to rely on it?

Discussion Question 2

Clara's father uses the rationale he can no longer support her in a private asylum, so she is shipped to Willard. Is there anything more Henry could do for his daughter despite his financial setbacks, or is Willard truly the only choice for Clara? Why do you think Henry has her committed to Willard?

Discussion Question 3

Nurse Yott takes pity on Clara when she learns Clara is destined for Willard. How would the story have altered if Nurse Yott had not mailed Clara's desperate letter to Bruno, begging for his help?

Vocabulary

pheasant, formaldehyde, alcoholic, therapy, breakdown, suicide, lieutenant, trauma, balustrade, esophagus



Chapters 5-6

Summary

Izzy's first day at school doesn't go well. Shannon, Crystal and Nicole prank Izzy, deliberately misleading her into the boys' locker room filled with hooting, semi-naked male students who laugh at the humiliated Izzy as she retreats. Izzy reports the incident to the principal's office, not wanting to be bullied, and yet not wanting to be labeled a snitch for her efforts, either. She contemplates cutting herself for relief, but does not want to become addicted to cutting again.

The taunting and pranks continue. Crystal glues a ketchup-soaked Kotex inside Izzy's locker. Izzy notices Ethan is in on the prank and is disappointed, hoping he might be a friend. Izzy realizes Shannon rules over the school with terror and intimidation as tactics.

Izzy joins Peg and other museum volunteers to help catalog the 427 suitcases recently uncovered in the defunct Willard asylum. To Izzy's surprise, Ethan is there, acting as assistant to Peter, his photographer father, who documents the proceedings. Careful records are made of each opened suitcase and its personal belongings. Izzy blinks tears as she realizes the overwhelming intimate nature of what the suitcases meant to each lonely patient at Willard. Only the thought of working alongside Ethan keeps her involved in the project.

Peg serves a picnic lunch. Peg tells Izzy Ethan's parents are good people, noting Izzy's attraction to Ethan. To Izzy's chagrin, Ethan joins them for lunch, asking Izzy for a smile with his food. Izzy accidentally cuts herself with a knife because Ethan's presence makes her nervous. Izzy examines a trunk once belonging to Clara. Inside, a photo of Clara and Bruno in happier times. Izzy sighs, recalling a stack of unopened letters her mom has sent her from prison over the years that Izzy has never brought herself to read. She identifies with Clara's emotional plight.

In the 1930s, Clara's adjustment to Willard does not go well. She considers escaping, but can't find any way to do so. She recalls on the bleak trip inside for her first night's stay, the car radio played a love song she and Bruno considered their special song. Dr. Roach receives Clara when she arrives, but refuses to engage her as a human being, merely a patient to be dealt with in a rain storm. Clara feels degraded.

Clara witnesses all sorts of horrors inside the asylum. Women who stare into the black night through barred windows. Women who bang their heads against the same bars. Willard is a nightmare to endure. Clara falls asleep lying next to 50 other patients, some of whom groan, moan and sob the whole night long.



Analysis

Crystal's prank of misleading Izzy into the boys' locker room is designed to humiliate and embarrass Izzy. For Izzy, such situations are to be expected, and while she is hurt, she is not overly-sensitive to bullying having encountered it so many times in previous schools. Continuing her struggle with cutting, Izzy has a hard time resisting sneaking into Peg and Harry's bathroom once they're asleep and stealing a razor blade with which to hurt herself. Even though Izzy is beholden to thoughts about cutting herself, she is in control of her actions. And while she struggles, it is important for Izzy's sense of self-esteem that she not resort to actual cutting ever again.

Izzy meeting Ethan at the warehouse where the suitcases will be examined plays like fate personified. Earlier the two have met by accident when Izzy dropped her papers, and now they are placed together on an assignment. It feels like kismet, as if the stars are pushing Ethan and Izzy together. Their relationship mirrors the swift manner in which Bruno and Clara met and fell in love in their lifetimes. Throughout the story, parallels such as this will be drawn between the modern and previous century, with characters' actions and romances echoing back and forth in time.

One old suitcase contains baby clothes. While Izzy rightfully wonders why anyone would bring such items to an asylum, the answer perhaps lies with the symbolic value of baby clothes. They evoke the image of a baby within an asylum, and Clara will later spend a good portion of the tale attempting to give birth to and nurse her baby. So this moment foreshadows Clara's later mother/baby struggles.

The sense of being pushed together between Ethan and Izzy is again invoked when they wind up having a picnic lunch together provided by Peg. Ironically, as she has struggled with cutting, Izzy accidentally cuts herself on a paring knife, but the damage is minimal. At one point, Izzy examines the suitcase of Lawrence Lawrence. The story is crafted so that even though characters such as Lawrence have not yet been very heavily used in the Clara storyline, they nevertheless have sudden weight in the modern narrative. The past is always intruding upon the present in the narrative with each new discovery and reminder of it.

This is made explicit in the story with the discovery of Clara's trunk. Clara's battle against living a conventional existence is echoed in the books Izzy finds in the trunk. They are "The Great Gatsby" by Fitzgerald and "Lady Chatterley's Lover" by Lawrence. One echoes her flapper obsession with being a modern woman, and the latter a look at how society oppresses women based on their sexual choices. It is significant she chooses to read these notorious books as opposed to less controversial texts of her time. The photographs also capture an objective look at the characters. Bruno and Clara look like the perfect romantic couple, happy and carefree. This contrasts with the family photo of Clara with her father and mother, whom are described as looking unhappy.

Again the past is shown to mirror the present when Izzy suddenly feels guilty about all the piles of mail her own mother has sent her that she has not read. Izzy begins to



understand that the deeper she delves into the mystery of Clara, the more she also forces herself to question her own past. These feelings are triggered when Clara's bundles of letters are found, which echo the bundle of unopened letters from her mother Izzy keeps in storage.

In Chapter 6, when Clara catches sight of herself upon admittance to Willard, she sees herself as disheveled. For the moment she enters Willard, the place has a seeming hold on Clara, right down to degrading her personal appearance. This is a good visual externalization of the powerful grip the asylum has on all its inhabitants, including doctors, nurses and orderlies who work there. Clara learns how residents make the pine coffins used to bury those who die on the grounds. This is a foreshadowing of the later chapter in which she will be temporarily nailed into a coffin to attempt escape from Willard. Coffins and graveyards play a significant background role as visual metaphors throughout the book.

The arrival scene takes awhile to unfold as Clara is driven into the institution. The asylum is revealed in sections, such as the graveyard and then the main housing unit. This creates the proper sense of scale, as Willard is practically a small city unto itself as much as a medical facility. It also makes Clara's hope to escape seem impractical against such a gloomy, towering structure. Dr. Roach ignores Clara when they first meet. This character trait of dehumanizing Clara is repeated in all the following chapters. At no point does Dr. Roach ever allow for Clara's possible sanity, condemning her to a life of incarceration in exchange for her father's approval.

The moment wherein Clara hesitates, trying to decide whether or not to keep her letters for Bruno or leave them in her trunk, plays upon the reader's knowledge these letters will be important to the revelation of Izzy's quest into Clara's life. This creates suspense, as the reader worries Clara will make a bad choice and effect Izzy's outcome, if not her own.

Nurse Trench tells Clara to do as you're told and you'll get along fine at Willard. Although this phrase is repeated to the residents, in fact it is quite the opposite. Complying with authority at Willard is just as risky to one's health as defying it. Many innocent patients are shown throughout the book doing as they're told, only to be subjected to cruel, injurious "treatments" by the authorities.

Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast the way in which Izzy is bullied in her new institutional environment (high school) and Clara is humiliated in her new institutional environment (asylum). Both circumstances are different, but how and why are they the same in some respects?



Discussion Question 2

Why is it ironic that Izzy accidentally cuts herself with a knife during the picnic in regards to her overall backstory? Do you think it is entirely accidental, or partly subconscious on Izzy's part?

Discussion Question 3

Clara is repeatedly told to do as she's told for her own good, and not to question authority. Do you think this is sound advice? Is Clara willing to heed it because she believes such a philosophy, or because she is incarcerated and has little choice of her own?

Vocabulary

bullying, perpetrators, deteriorating, bonnet, hummus, sarcasm, EMT, emporium, cemetery, fortress, foyer



Chapters 7-8

Summary

Izzy draws some determination from the suitcase project's effect on her emotions. She vows never to let the past become the future and become mentally unstable like her mother, who shot her father. Ethan tosses pebbles at her window to draw Izzy's attention. He surprises her with Clara's journal. Izzy knows Ethan has borrowed the journal without permission from the suitcase project, but she is so intrigued with Clara's story she decides to temporarily keep the journal.

Ethan apologizes for his part in Shannon's pranks. Shannon, he explains, is from an abusive family situation. Her father has drained the bank accounts and abandoned them. Shannon uses her anger to bully others instead of feeling pity for them.

Back in the 1930s, Clara is given an ice cold water treatments in which she's forced to endure freezing cold water baths for extended time. Worse, Dr. Roach gropes her breast while supposedly giving her a physical for admittance. Clara vomits on Dr. Roach after his brutal use of tongue suppressor, and she reveals she's pregnant. Several patients hear the news of Clara's pregnancy and swarm her to touch her belly until Nurse Trench calls them off.

Clara watches a woman patient with a toy doll demand more bread for her doll, whom she refers to a living baby. The nurses finally calm her, but Clara is upset. She dwells on what will happen to her and her baby, but no one will inform her.

Analysis

Izzy worries about her own genetic make-up in terms of possible insanity. The passage in which the reader accesses her thoughts mirrors the manner in which Clara must also engage with her own sense of what is sane versus disturbed as she carves out a life at Willard. Despite their being literally worlds apart and differences in time, Izzy and Clara have some shared overlap.

Izzy tries to be a moral person, but sometimes makes mistakes and bad choices like all humans. She feels guilty about keeping Clara's stolen journal which Ethan provides, but not bad enough to return it. She rationalizes it is okay because it will reveal even more about Clara, her fascination. Izzy admits to herself her obsession with Clara is because Clara's supposed loss of sanity mirrors Izzy's mother's loss of sanity. Izzy recognizes that the only way she may ever understand her own imprisoned mother locked away is to somehow understand Clara, hence Izzy's interest.

Ethan tells Izzy that Shannon was abused as a child. Her alcoholic father also beat Shannon's mother. Izzy is reluctant to forgive Shannon, but sees another side. Shannon herein acts like a reverse doppelganger of Izzy, a complimentary character but who



made different life choices. Whereas Izzy has chosen to take out her despair on herself by cutting, Shannon has chosen to unleash her pain on others by bullying.

In Chapter 8, Nurse Trench utters to Clara another phrase used by the doctors and nurses inside Willard: “Do as you're told.” This is another deceptive utterance, as more often than not, the residents of Willard are forced into painful treatments even if they follow orders. The ice water baths Nurse Trench tortures Clara with are representative of the lengths to which Willard will go to “help” its patients. Nurse Trench catches Dr. Roach flirting with Nurse May, even while Mrs. Roach is in his waiting room. Dr. Roach is shown to be a thoroughly repugnant character from many perspectives and situations. Though it may be exaggerated, his namesake seems purposeful by the writer.

When Dr. Roach gropes Clara's breast during a physical exam, the worst aspects of his nature are being graphically illustrated. His pretense to have not committed the assault on top of it adds to his despicable character, suggesting he may actually be a sociopath ironically in need of mental help himself.

When Clara sees the woman with the baby doll having an episode, she identifies on a basic level with the woman. Clara is expectant and so sees the parallels between herself and the mentally ill woman's demand to feed her baby doll more food, however unbalanced such a concept.

Discussion Question 1

Why does the the suitcase project she volunteers to work on so disturb Izzy? What parallels does she draw to her own life's story?

Discussion Question 2

Do you think Izzy should have returned Clara's stolen journal, or do you think Izzy's search for the story of Clara's life warrants extreme measures, such as using a misappropriated item? What, if anything, could Izzy have done to make this choice easier? Is there anyone she could have entrusted to help her with such a complex decision?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Clara identifies on a surface level with the unbalanced woman patient who insists on feeding her plastic baby doll more food?

Vocabulary

scraggly, fleur-de-lis, perpetuate, hierarchy, porcelain, apothecary, octagon, curvature, depressor, lullaby



Chapters 9-10

Summary

Izzy is fixated by Clara's spellbinding journal. Ethan tells Izzy that Shannon is jealous of the fact Izzy and Ethan are working together on the museum suitcase project. Mr. Defoe discusses what makes a person commit a crime in his class. Shannon rudely suggests Izzy's mom would know, since she killed Izzy's father with a gun. Ethan stops her and berates the class for laughing at Izzy, while Alex reminds the class of Shannon's family troubles as revenge.

Outside Mr. Defoe's class, Izzy is cornered by Shannon and her lapdogs Crystal and Nicole. They slam Izzy against her locker and Shannon warns her of working with Ethan and the suitcases. Alex arrives at the last second and rescues Izzy, leading Izzy to Alex's parked car. As they drive away leaving Shannon in the dust, Alex reveals Shannon's father used to molest Shannon. The reason he abandoned his family was Child Protective Services was preparing to intervene, so he fled. Despite herself, Izzy feels for Shannon's pain. Alex also reveals Shannon sleeps around, cheating on Ethan. Feeling guilty about Clara's journal, Izzy decides to tell Peg and Harry about her part of the deception in her borrowing it.

Back in 1930, Clara inadvertently causes a ruckus when she throws up on an orderly's shoes, owing to her morning sickness. Several nearby patients lose control as a result, causing pandemonium. Clara is hauled into tiny Room C and given a syringe injection, causing her to pass out. Clara tries relating to Nurse Trench about a Hemingway book they have both read, but Nurse Trench refuses to allow her emotions to get the better of her, and blankly non-reacts to Clara's attempt at human communication.

Clara finds a small hole in a fence and attempts over time to widen it and escape. She is caught and interrogated by Dr. Roach for her failed efforts. Dr. Roach insists Henry is correct about Clara's mental illness and refuses to release Clara from Willard. He also reveals Henry maintains that Bruno is not real, but a figment of Clara's demented imagination.

Clara befriends Madeline and Esther. The trio enjoy walks around the Willard grounds together, where they talk and make plans. They speculate what will happen to Clara and her baby, but no one knows. Lawrence Lawrence, an elderly patient turned gravedigger, waves to the women as they pass him. A fight bred of boredom breaks out in the kitchen. Clara intervenes on Madeline's behalf, but falls backwards, hitting her head on the tile as a result. The accident starts Clara's labor. She delivers her baby, and then is injected with a syringe until she passes out.



Analysis

Izzy's mother's history is discussed in class by Shannon to wound Izzy. Ironically, having Shannon tell the class about Izzy's mother is not unlike the kind of unmasking Izzy herself is doing to the legacy of Clara by reading Clara's journal, inspecting her personal belongings, and examining her trunk. But of course, Izzy is a living character who feels the pain. Another similarity occurs between the way Shannon, Crystal and Nicole forcibly restrain Izzy against her locker. The event takes place in another institution other than an asylum, but swap the students for nurses and the scene is reminiscent of the way in which Clara is often portrayed, being roughly handled by female nurses and orderlies.

After Alex rescues Izzy from Shannon's gang, Alex reveals the complete history of Shannon. Shannon was sexually abused by her father, not just physical violence. At this point in the book, Izzy does not yet recall her own father tried to sexually assault her. Instead, Izzy reacts with understandable horror at the pain Shannon has clearly undergone, thus humanizing her rival. This story is not only told to humanize Shannon. It also sets up the later revelation in which Izzy realizes she, too, is a sexual abuse survivor. By having another character's story share similarities across the plot of the book, the use of prefiguring and then echoing is invoked.

In Chapter 10, Clara is strapped to a bed because she complains about needing to use the bathroom. Nurse Trench takes pity on Clara, and after getting assurances from Clara she will be compliant Nurse Trench releases Clara from confinement. Even though the gesture is small, the later chapter in which Nurse Trench will be visited by Izzy is dependent upon this earlier scene in which the reader sees compassion from the nurse, as it makes it believable Nurse Trench would later talk about it to Izzy. This moment also rhymes with a similar moment later in which Nurse Trench releases Clara from being strapped to an ECT bed during the flood.

Madeline and Esther, Clara's friends, encounter Lawrence Lawrence, the gravedigger on a walk. Again, Lawrence has not entered the story yet in any significant fashion, but the author has been carefully prefiguring his appearance, first with his luggage, and then with his small appearance in this chapter. He will of course figure prominently later in Bruno's and Clara's escape attempt.

There is an element of horror to the birth scene. Clara is roughly strapped to a gurney and lead to the delivery room, whereupon the baby is taken from her as soon as she is born. Clara is injected with a syringe, which makes her sleep. The sense of loss of control and having others possessing it over one is vividly captured in these pages.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Shannon so obsessed with telling the other students in class all about the most sordid aspects of Izzy's parental background, including that her mother shot her father



to death? What deeper motivation drives Shannon to be so cruel beyond any jealousy over the budding romance between Izzy and Ethan?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Nurse Trench takes at least some pity on Clara? What actions does Clara take that makes it possible for Nurse Trench to view her as not just another inmate, but a human being in a tragic circumstance?

Discussion Question 3

In addition to Henry's insistence not to do so, why does Dr. Roach not release Clara despite the fact she's sane and pregnant? What motivates Dr. Roach shortly before the baby's birth to keep Clara at Willard no matter how much Clara protests her innocence? Is it true belief Clara is unbalanced, or is there an ulterior motive on Dr. Roach's behalf?

Vocabulary

depression, paranoid, manifested, acting out, psychology, sarcastic, equilibrium, gargantuan, enclosure, forewoman, morphine



Chapters 11-12

Summary

Izzy confesses her possession of Clara's journal to Peg. Peg is disappointed, but forgives Izzy. They journey to Willard, where they have a brief amount of time to scour the old medical records of patients. Izzy chooses Clara's records to read. Izzy wonders why she has become obsessed with Clara while searching for Clara's history so much. It's not as if she doesn't already have problems enough of her own. Clara's records reveal her baby was born a healthy baby girl. But nothing is given as to her, or Clara's, destiny. Izzy becomes determined to learn what happened to Clara's baby.

Back in the 1930s, Clara names her baby girl Beatrice. Dr. Roach cruelly informs Clara that while she was on the birth table, he also sterilized her as permitted under state law. Clara is horrified, but nurses her newborn, intent on being a good mother. One day a Miss Mason arrives, her mission to take Beatrice and place her in a foster home. A scuffle ensues as Clara fights to keep her child, but the orderlies win out, separating child from mother. For having resisted giving up Beatrice, Clara is assigned to the Rookie Pest House, a mini-prison within the Willard facility typically used for the violent offenders.

Analysis

When Peg and Harry tell Izzy and the others to don medical scrubs to protect themselves from asbestos exposure in the old facility, the imagery is echoing the similar attire the various doctors and nurses wear in scenes with Clara.

Even though the old asylum is abandoned, it is still threatening as it was back when it was open. The author makes the structure itself have a complete character arc. First, it is first-class, well run, and well-intended. Then it degenerates into a torture house. Finally, it takes on the form of a sinister relic. As a structure it acts also as a silent character, as well, always looming over events and characters' lives.

Izzy wonders why she is involved with Clara, rationalizing she's got problems enough of her own. This is a recognition by Izzy that not only is the search digging up painful memories of Izzy's family troubles, but that she has not yet successfully dealt with them, emotionally. In other words, her character has progressed enough to realize she has problems, but not yet resolve them.

In Chapter 12, Clara bonds with her newborn daughter Beatrice. As this will be the only time in the book mother and daughter are together until the finale, these pages are necessary to establish the deep, psychic horror that is inflicted upon Clara when her baby is suddenly taken away from her.



The forced sterilization Dr. Roach performs is historically rooted. Both the Germans and the Americans used such now discredited techniques in crude attempts at social engineering. The concept that some were fit for living in society and others predetermined for extermination would ultimately lead to the Nazi death camps as unintended but direct outcome. The book accurately notes that many other documented atrocities later used in German death camps were first tried in asylums on unwilling patients.

That it is not only the asylum, but also the state authorities, who are in on the forced deprivation of the patients' lives in places such as Willard is emphasized by Miss Mason, who comes to forcibly remove Beatrice from Clara. Clearly, Miss Mason knows of the deplorable conditions at the asylum, and yet does nothing about it except blindly follow orders and take Clara's baby. Again, the parallels between historical atrocities of the 20th Century and such mistreatment of the mentally ill are implied.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Izzy fear telling Peg about the Clara's stolen journal? How does Peg's reaction surprise Izzy?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Izzy feel that the suitcase project is so tough on her nerves? What incidents in her own past does Clara's journal bring back memories of that Izzy finds repellent?

Discussion Question 3

Given the authorities are determined to separate Clara from her baby, do you think it was necessary for them to so heinously strip baby Beatrice from Clara, or could they have arranged to do this, for example, while Clara was asleep? What does it say about the way the asylum staff view the patients and their well-being that they are so brutal about this process?

Vocabulary

hospital scrubs, threshold, porcelain, delusion, hallucinating, thoracic, isolation, infirmary, procedure, unconscious, conscience



Chapters 13-14

Summary

Izzy goes to a senior party with Alex held on the old Willard grounds. Izzy feels guilty for not telling Peg and Harry her true destination. Alex explains to Izzy word around school is that Ethan plans to dump Shannon and ask Izzy out instead at the party. Shannon surprises all by apologizing for her past behavior. But Izzy, Alex and Ethan remain skeptical to Shannon's sudden conversion to nice.

At midnight, Izzy and the group divide up and explore the Willard asylum remains. In the shadows, Izzy glimpses rusted water tubs used for treatments, an old electroshock room where scores of inmates could be shocked all at once, and barred holding pens barely the size of a human. In the morgue, they find stacked, decaying coffins. Crystal decides to hold a séance and invoke the spirits to come forth. The seniors gather around a flickering candle. Ghostly sounds rap back to questions. Then darkness as Izzy is grabbed by unseen assailants and slammed into an underground holding vault.

In the 1930s, Clara endures the Rookie Pest House. Chained to a bed and unable to move most of the day, she watches Lawrence Lawrence go about his daily routine, seemingly happy to bury bodies. After losing her child, Clara fights depression. She takes laudanum to relieve her inner pain, but becomes addicted to it. Between the numbing of the drug, she longs to die or for suicide to escape the monotony and horrors of Willard. Then, Clara dreams of Beatrice as a grown woman and becomes inspired. She quits taking laudanum and breaks her addiction. She tells Dr. Roach he was right to give Beatrice away, trying to gain favor with him.

Analysis

Alanis Morissette's song "You Oughta Know" plays as an unheeded warning to Izzy when she lies to her foster parents and goes with Alex to the senior party. The song's title is foreshadowing what Izzy's conscience is telling her, that she knows better than to mislead Peg and Harry, who have only treated her fairly and without deceit.

Shannon's sudden conversion from mean-spirited to good person is not believed by Izzy, but Izzy goes along with it, mostly out of peer pressure to forgive and forget. Izzy typically resists such situations for this very reason. She doesn't like having to conform to group expectations or demands, having lived in so many different environments owing to her foster childhood, and developed a taste for privacy.

There is a small but intentional irony when the seniors have to virtually break into the decrepit asylum during their party. The inmates of Willard asylum spent their whole lives trying to escape it. And yet, one dark night, a handful of students successfully break their way in.



The midnight Willard break-in acts as a kind of museum tour of mental illness horrors. The students see back in time the nightmares the patients endured during their confinement by looking at the rusting old equipment and various rooms. For the students, they're mostly fun items to spook themselves by, but for Izzy with a mother in a mental institution, they're no laughing matter. Juxtaposition between Izzy and her friends shows that perspective is everything in terms of how such settings are viewed.

The finding of the coffins stacked against the wall is a foreshadowing of the later escape attempt made by Clara, and how Lawrence Lawrence will also factor into the narrative more dynamically.

The manhandling by Josh in placing Izzy into the vault is similar to the way Clara is equally brutally handled by orderlies whenever Clara is non-compliant. Likewise, the dark enclosed vault into which Izzy is placed echoes the stays in solitary confinement Clara experiences. The language used to describe Izzy's confinement is very similar to the language used to describe Clara's temporary passage inside the coffin later. Both describe the protagonists as feeling as if they've been buried alive.

Lawrence Lawrence finally enters the story with some detail in Chapter 14. Primarily, he is observed by Clara from her solitary confinement. Ironically, as she watches him dig graves, she prays every night that the next grave Lawrence digs will be her own.

After her baby is removed, Clara loses the will to live. Only a dream that is stark and vivid suddenly reanimates her spirit. Clara dreams her daughter is alive and well. Clara decides to make a stand as a character and live. She indicates this by no longer taking laudanum, which she was becoming addicted to, and instead facing even life in the asylum soberly.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Shannon apologize to Izzy at the senior party? Is Shannon sincere, and if not, what is her ulterior motive?

Discussion Question 2

How do the stacked coffins Izzy and friends find in the morgue foreshadow Clara's story line?

Discussion Question 3

After her baby is taken, what substance does Clara become addicted to in order to relieve her pain? How is Clara's decision to use such a substance similar to the way in which Izzy uses cutting?

Vocabulary

lunatic, pshaw, otherworldly, crustaceans, plasterboard, epileptic, chronic, electroshock, medieval, lobotomies, laudanum



Chapters 15-16

Summary

Locked in an underground holding vault, Izzy remembers a frightening childhood incident in which a hazy man laid down in bed with her one night. Her memory of the incident is otherwise blurry. Ethan and Alex free Izzy from the vault. They reason it was clearly Shannon who designed the prank. But Josh, one of Shannon's childhood friends, helped Shannon, too. Izzy confronts Shannon over the incident, but Shannon denies all responsibility. Anger flares and a fight ensues. Ethan punches Josh in the face. But throughout it all, Shannon denies any wrongdoing.

Back in the 1930s, Clara is finally released from solitary. She visits with Esther and Madeline. Esther is groggy, barely awake. Madeline explains when Dr. Roach made an advance on Esther and Esther refused him, Dr. Roach subjected her to an insulin-induced coma. Clara tries to talk with Esther, but it is difficult. Still, Esther manages to tell Clara some shocking news. A work man has recently approached her, asking about Clara. The work man is Bruno.

Analysis

The stress from being imprisoned in the vault causes Izzy to re-experience a flashback to when her father attempted to molest her. This first glimpse is vague and acts mainly to foreshadow the later revelation Izzy will receive that the reason her mother shot her father was in self-defense of Izzy. The reader is not necessarily supposed to know the father is a culprit at this point, but a premonition that something went terribly wrong in Izzy's childhood beyond the shooting is definitely implied.

Shannon's pleas of innocence over having had Izzy tossed in the vault are even less genuine than her previous apologies to Izzy. The deception and manipulation lead to physical violence when the party degenerates into a game of accusations. There is a symbolic sense that the old order of Shannon ruling the school with her insidious pranks has been toppled as much as Josh, her henchman, has been by Ethan's well-placed fist. In no uncertain terms, Shannon's grip on power, and Ethan, is lessened from this point forward.

Matilda in Chapter 14 prefigures a form of character echoing with the later, elderly Clara when Iggy meets her. Clara in her older age is very much like Matilda, an elderly woman who has overcome the many grievous harms that have been done to her throughout life and found joy in living, anyway.

The revelation about the way Esther has been treated by Dr. Roach further creates a portrait of a true monster in his character. But the insulin-induced shock comas he uses against Esther are not fictional in the least. In fact, asylums worldwide used them for decades, only systematically discontinuing their use after decades of abusive



treatments with them. They have very little medical therapeutic value, and are life-threatening as a procedure if administered incorrectly.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think Izzy deliberately forgets the details of the incident with her father attempting to molest her, or is there another possible reason, such as memory repression, at play in this chapter? What triggers her hazy memory to flood her mind in this scene?

Discussion Question 2

What parallel can you find between Izzy being momentarily locked in the vault at the decrepit Willard asylum, and Clara's nearly lifelong stay there against her will?

Discussion Question 3

What does it say about a mental institution designed to help the patients that a man such as Dr. Roach runs the facility, when he is shown to molest female patients, lies about taking Clara's baby, and subjects those under his care to unethical, even torturous, medical care without regard to patient safety?

Vocabulary

compartment, investigate, hoax, envisioned, embalming, brocade, chandeliers, placate, insulin-induced coma, orderlies, Victrola



Chapters 17-18

Summary

Izzy recollects how fast her romance with Ethan is going. She keeps a Green Day button she found in his jacket pocket as a charm for him. Peg and Harry have breakfast with Izzy. Peg tells Izzy the good news is that they have located a nurse who knew Clara at Willard and who is willing to talk about her. But the bad news is bad, indeed. Izzy's mother has slipped into a coma from a stroke while still in prison and is now expected to die any day.

Devastated, Izzy withdraws to her room, reading old letters from her mother she has never read. One of them reveals why her mother shot her father. Her mother caught her father trying to molest a child Izzy, and shot in self-defense. Izzy finally understands her mother's actions. Izzy asks Peg to take her to the prison where her mom lies in a coma so that she may pay her final respects.

In the 1930s, Clara learns from Madeline that Bruno has been seen, disguised as a workman, scouring the asylum for Clara. Clara devises a plan to break a window in a staged accident. Sure enough, Bruno arrives as one of the repairmen and confers with an excited Clara. Dr. Roach intercepts the meeting and interrogates them both. Dr. Roach refuses to believe anything Bruno or Clara tells him, intent on keeping Clara's baby out of her grasp and determined to keep Bruno from alerting any authorities. Bruno is taken against his will and Clara is left wondering if she'll ever see him again.

Analysis

Izzy is staggered by the depth of emotion she feels when her dying mother falls into a coma. Izzy has not forgotten her mother, but rather, repressed her emotions as much as possible. But the coma causes a dam break in Izzy's feelings, and she is overwhelmed for the first time in the story.

When Izzy takes out the old letters her mother sent her, there is an interesting parallel made explicit in the story. That is, Clara longs for her missing child while held in an asylum, and Izzy is a child who longs for her mother who is placed in an asylum. It doesn't take much effort to understand why Izzy so deeply identifies with Clara's plight, as Clara and Izzy are a symbolic version of mother and daughter, just removed from actual lineage.

Izzy is stunned when she reads a letter from her mom explaining the reason she shot Izzy's father was to stop him from molesting Izzy. Izzy's viewpoint of her mother is shattered. Instead of a psycho mom who shot her father for no reason, Izzy sees her mom as a protective mother who acted to defend her child, Izzy. This revelation causes Izzy to view her mother, and therefore her life, in a much more open manner. If one presumed truth can be revealed to be a falsehood, then so can others.



In Chapter 18, Clara regains hope with news from Madeline that Bruno is in the asylum looking for her, posed as a workman. Her character becomes action-oriented, filled with optimism for the first time in many chapters. Demonstrating her new strength, she plans a clever ruse, breaking a window and arranging for Bruno to repair it.

Dr. Roach intercepts, causing a ruckus with Bruno, who is taken into the asylum under false pretenses. Clara's hopes are seemingly dashed. This chapter shows the stark, overwhelming control many asylum doctors wielded during the 1930s, when abuses were at their most rampant. Clearly the civil laws protecting innocent citizens are being broken by Dr. Roach, but he shows no concern. Later reforms would make such abuses nearly impossible, but in the era, the physician in such facilities were unquestioned by authorities.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think Izzy refuses to have any contact with her mother until it is too late? What does such a decision cost Izzy in terms of her self-esteem and feelings about her biological family?

Discussion Question 2

What causes Izzy to read the letters her mother has sent her over the years that previously Izzy has refused to even consider? How does reading the letters change Izzy's viewpoint about her mother's shooting of Izzy's father?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Dr. Roach so intent on keeping Bruno and Clara apart once he discovers both are inside Willard? Why is he concerned that Bruno may make an effective spokesman when he advocates for the reunification of Clara and her missing baby?

Vocabulary

brawl, reinforcement, stroke, coma, banister, esophagus, infinitesimal, incarceration, infraction, forewoman, mesh, shards



Chapters 19-20

Summary

Peg takes Izzy to see her comatose mother in Bedford State Prison. She feels a twinge of guilt when she sees the scores of children visiting their incarcerated mothers. Izzy is allowed only a few minutes for a visit. She sits by her mother's bedside and regrets the missed opportunities she had to visit her. She says good-bye and painfully leaves her mom to pass away.

Back in the 1930s, Bruno vanishes within the walls of Willard from Clara's ability to track. She secretly tries to find where he might be for 10 months. Dr. Roach tells Clara she may never be judged sane enough for release. Clara endures months of insulin shock therapy. She attends a Valentine's Day Party where Bruno is in attendance, in disguise. Bruno has an escape plan and Clara commits to enacting it the next day.

The following day, Clara fakes a seizure and races into the basement. She finds an empty coffin Lawrence Lawrence, who is helping with the escape, leaves for her. Clara hides in the coffin. Bruno and Lawrence arrive and seal the coffin with nails to provide her hidden transport out of Willard. As soon as they are outside of the asylum near the burial grounds, Clara is free from her morbid container.

Clara hides in Lawrence Lawrence's decaying cabin. She stays in a trap door basement. Inside, she marvels at the dragonflies and praying mantises Lawrence makes and uses to mark the graves he digs. Two orderlies visit and Clara is detected. A fight erupts, with Bruno arriving to help win the day. Lawrence helps Bruno and Clara move their hidden boat to the lake to escape. But Dr. Roach and guards arrive to thwart the plan. Bruno suffers a fatal blow to the head. Clara collapses atop the dying Bruno, defeated.

Analysis

Izzy's relating of her own mother's plight to Clara's plight becomes explicit when Izzy visits the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility to visit her dying mother. From Izzy's point of view, the only difference between Bedford Hills and Willard is the barbed wire around the former. The fact that Clara and Izzy's mother are both basically imprisoned for a majority of the story makes this connection explicit. The portrayal of Izzy's mom as comatose is not like the fanciful one Izzy relates to in Stephen King's "The Dead Zone" novel. Instead of having paranormal powers and aiding the living as in that book, Izzy's mother is passive, without signs of life, and non-responsive.

Izzy's mother is called Joyce by the nurse who attends her, but it is interesting that the author chooses not to embody Joyce with a name until this point in the narrative. Prior Joyce is perennially "Izzy's mom" or other descriptor, not a person with a full name. The author does this to embody the state of mind Izzy feels towards her mother. Izzy has



refused to accept her mother's actions or life choices, and so she doesn't assign a name to her mother, but an occupational role: absentee mom. This slight but noticeable dehumanization of Joyce throughout most of the text leaves her as a mystery character of sorts. Everything about her remains largely in the reader's imagination, with filtered clues through Izzy's remembrances.

The Valentine's Day dance that Clara attends in Chapter 20 is a rhyming allusion to the earlier chapter wherein Clara and Bruno danced at the Cotton Club. Only now, instead of mere parental disapproval of Bruno, Clara faces a true life sentence behind bars should she fail to somehow escape or alter her destiny. So while it is romantically hopeful to see the couple reunited at a dance, the tension and stakes are dramatically higher in this chapter.

Nurse Trench discovers the deception Bruno is using by being in disguise in order to be close to Clara. But rather than turn them in, she shows a modicum of empathy and allows the couple to talk. This echoes the earlier moments wherein while not overly generous, Nurse Trench has allowed for at least some small measure of humanity now and again in regards to Clara's concern.

Bruno hides Clara in a coffin with Lawrence's help to smuggle her out of the prison. The symbolic scene where Clara hides in a coffin and transported as if she were dead plays on Clara's worst fears of dying in Willard without ever seeing her baby or Bruno again. The use of the coffin metaphorically suggests the precarious nature of life and death at the asylum, and how Clara must actually feign being dead in order to escape alive. The coffin prefigures the ultimately unsuccessful nature of Clara's escape attempt, and how it costs Bruno his life.

Discussion Question 1

How is Izzy's mother's confinement for much of her adult life in a mental institution similar to the Clara's life as a young adult in an asylum? Does this similarity draw Izzy further into the mystery of Clara's mysterious life incarcerated in Willard, or push Izzy away from wanting to know more about the story of Clara's existence, or both?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think the author does not name Izzy's mom until the final scene in which Izzy's mom is dying? What effect does it have on the reader to have Izzy's mom reduced in effect to a descriptive possessive pronoun ("Izzy's mom") rather than call her by her name, Joyce, throughout the book?



Discussion Question 3

What is the symbolic value of Clara having to be smuggled out of the asylum in a wooden coffin that is nailed shut? Does it prefigure any of the chapter's ending imagery in which Bruno and Lawrence die in their vain attempt to free Clara from Willard?

Vocabulary

infirmary, curry, partition, prediction, ventilation tube, boutonnières, corsages, tuberculosis, hypoglycemic, intravenous, gramophone, phonograph



Chapters 21-22

Summary

Izzy grieves the loss of her mother. She withdraws from much of her social interaction at school and privately grieves. She mourns the fact that despite the fact she felt all alone most of her life, she now literally is alone. Ethan and Alex drop by to tell her how much they miss her and feel sorry for Izzy's loss. Izzy has dinner with her foster family and newfound friends and realizes she may not be as alone in the world as she imagined.

In Chapter 22, Clara is almost defeated. The death of Bruno, her own miserable condition, and the loss of her baby have all resulted in her regretting ever having lived. She sits waiting to experience the first electroshock treatment, and is not comforted by the fact a prior patient is taken out with her back broken from an incorrect setting. A sudden flood alters everything. Patients are abandoned as the medical staff scramble for cover, thinking only of themselves. Clara nearly drowns, strapped to a table, but Nurse Trench swims over and releases Clara, saving her life. Clara passes out underwater, trying to swim for her life.

Analysis

Izzy takes stock of her life in Chapter 21, and she does not like the complicated twists and turns, many tragic, that her life has taken. Her greatest fear is to be alone in the world, with no parents and no friends. Ironically, it takes her foster parents and her new friends dropping by to open Izzy's eyes to the fact she is far from alone, even if all of the people that are important to her are newer in her life.

Izzy's awakening to the fact that her life will go on with new family and new friends is an important one for her, for she has struggled throughout most of the novel to find some form of self-acceptance and love where such persons are concerned. The fact she is willing to find love on its own terms, rather than seek them out as she would like them to be only, is a sign of her growing maturity.

Clara is a grieved woman in Chapter 22, worn down by the constant struggles and unending nightmares of Willard. She wishes she had been buried by Bruno and Lawrence, unable to face a future without him or their baby.

The ECT or electroshock therapy that is described is accurate to the era. Though ECT is still used in some psychiatric facilities today, it has been vastly modified to be far less destructive. The depiction of an unfortunate patient having her spine snapped by an orderly using too much electricity is also known to have happened in the early years of ECT.

The flood acts as a form of *deus ex machina* in that it wipes out the existing order of abuse at Willard and stages the asylum for reformation. Many die in the flood, staff and



patient alike, and it is implied this infamous event was what brought much-needed change to the asylum. The ending of the chapter creates the erroneous impression that Clara has drowned, but this is a moment used by the author to create suspense, not actually kill the character.

Discussion Question 1

Why does it take Izzy's mom dying to force Izzy to understand her greatest fear is being alone in the world? Who offers Izzy support in her greatest hour of need, showing her unconditional love and caring when she needs it most?

Discussion Question 2

What happens to the first patient wheeled out of the ECT room whom Clara witnesses before Clara's own first treatment with electroshock? How does Dr. Roach's reaction yet again demonstrate he is not truly concerned with the patients' well-being at the facility?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Nurse Trench saves Clara from drowning during the flood scene? What later story event does this set in motion in terms of echoing of this moment?

Vocabulary

interment, damask curtains, ruddy, condensation, thimbles, settee, rubbish, electroshock therapy, schizophrenia, current, disoriented



Chapters 23-24

Summary

Izzy and Peg visit Miss Trench as an elderly woman. Miss Trench recalls Clara and her baby from the bygone Willard era. She says Clara was medically normal but being falsely held as mentally ill. Miss Trench tells them Dr. Roach kept Clara's baby for himself and his childless wife and raised the baby as Susan. Izzy is shocked, but a bigger shock awaits. Miss Trench concludes by telling them Clara is still alive in a nearby nursing home.

Izzy and Peg have lunch with Susan, Clara's daughter. Susan looks eerily like her mother Clara. Susan reveals she never met her biological mother and knows little about her. Izzy explains that she and Peg know quite a bit about Clara owing to their museum project. She tells Susan the story of Bruno's infiltration of Willard and his failed attempt to rescue Clara. As they leave, Peg gives Susan Clara's journal as a keepsake.

Analysis

Miss Trench, aka Nurse Trench, continues her empathetic nature, however crusty her octogenarian personality, as she Izzy and Peg the truth about Dr. Roach's adopting Beatrice, whom the doctor and his childless wife renamed Susan. The bigger shock occurs when Izzy is told by Miss Trench that Clara is still alive. Throughout the story, all facts have indicated Clara was dead.

In Chapter 24, Izzy and Peg meet with Susan, Clara's daughter. Susan is stunned to learn that her mother is still alive, because she has been told her natural mother died birthing Susan. This chapter goes a long ways towards tying up many narrative loose ends from Susan's point of view, such as the fact she never knew her real parents, or anything about their true mental health. But it also shows how Izzy's determination to uncover the mystery of Clara's past has directly impacted the present, as well. Izzy's drive has resulted in a positive change despite a terrible past. This demonstrates a huge change in Izzy's character, as she has begun to show she can turn tragedy into redemption, a quality she will need in the coming years to manage to live a successful life not filled with guilt and shame, but hope and truth.

Discussion Question 1

Miss Trench reveals Clara was completely normal, and yet was held in Willard against her will and had her only child stripped away. Do you think Miss Trench feels guilty about her part in holding such patients as Clara for years on end despite her personal knowledge? Does she speak of the past out of fondness or a sense of guilt at having participated in it without question during the time?



Discussion Question 2

Susan reveals to Izzy that Susan has no knowledge of Susan's biological mother Clara. How does this parallel the way in which Izzy ignored the truth of her own mother for so many years? Does this draw Izzy closer to the mystery of Clara, or repel her further away from it?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Peg give Susan the old journal once kept by Clara? How does this action rhyme and alternately contrast in terms of story construction with the way in which Izzy came about possessing the stolen journal?

Vocabulary

Victorian, transom, curator, allergic, figurines, gilded mirrors, chaise lounge, wingback chair, fluorescent, sophistication, biological mother, bloodline



Chapters 25-26

Summary

Izzy, Peg and Susan visit Clara at the assisted living facility where she resides. They show Clara various personal effects from her long-lost steamer trunk, which they've recovered from Willard. Clara feels nostalgic for Bruno and a life that was never lead. Clara hugs Susan, the mother and daughter team reunited after many decades apart. Clara cries, explaining that all she ever dreamed of since losing her daughter was this moment. Clara kindly thanks Izzy for making so much of it possible. Izzy is humbled. Susan invites Clara to live with her in a private home and a grateful Clara accepts.

On her 18th birthday, Peg and Harry throw Izzy a surprise birthday party. They privately tell her they're planning on adopting her as their own daughter before Alex and Ethan arrive, bearing presents.

Analysis

The fated encounter between Izzy and Clara in Chapter 25 plays very much like the reunification scene that Izzy never had were her mother, only with Clara substituted as the mother figure. Likewise, from Clara's point of view, Izzy represents a daughter figure for the missing child she never knew. So when the two meet, they have an ability to resolve past conflicts within their lives via the encounter. Each helps the other to make a form of peace with the most troubling aspects of their respective lives.

Similarly, the tearful meeting of Susan with her estranged mother Clara acts as catharsis, especially when Clara recognizes Susan. Witnessing the love between the two offers Izzy as form of release. They represent a wish-fulfillment of Izzy's of how her own relationship with her mother could have evolved. If Izzy cannot have the relationship she wants with her deceased mother, at least she can help Clara and Susan to achieve such a thing. It is a noble act Izzy performs, and it changes her character into a much more accepting, loving person.

In Chapter 26, Peg and Harry surprise Izzy with an 18th birthday wish to adopt her as their own daughter, completing the opening character arc in which she is afraid she will age out of the system and wind up homeless. She goes from being a worried, self-cloistered foster child to a confident, accepting young adult in the course of the book.

Discussion Question 1

How does Izzy's action in helping reunite mother and daughter in the form of Clara and Susan also help bring about needed perspective and healing for Izzy?



Discussion Question 2

What unexpectedly happy gesture does Susan make in regards to Clara's future living arrangements that moves everyone present?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Izzy's 18th birthday so particularly significant for Izzy? What events transpire in the form of family and friendship at the party that make her believe her future is not doomed to be a series of dark events, but one in which she can learn to cope and survive?

Vocabulary

disinfectant, Alzheimer's, wizened, raspy, quivering, armrests, sheet music, false teeth, spindly, reinforcement, glistening



Characters

Izzy Stone

Izzy, aka Isabella Stone, is the 17-year-old high school senior and novel's protagonist. She has a history of being shuttled from one dysfunctional foster home to another when the story begins. She also hides a dark personal secret: she's been cutting herself for more than 7 years without anyone knowing. She does it to achieve a sense of relief, but her pain is so deeply-held, even cutting will not work.

She also hides the reality that her mother shot her father when she was 10-years-old from anyone she meets. Izzy has broken off all contact with her mother as a result, but aches for resolution.

Owing to these traits, Izzy is distanced, emotionally flat and very secretive at the novel's beginning. It is through the unraveling of the mystery of Clara, the flapper from the 1920s whose life disappeared into institutionalized care, that Izzy slowly is challenged to grow. In order to solve the puzzle of Clara's life, Izzy will need to open up and take chances with people in her life, as many hold the key to the riddle of Clara.

Like many protagonists, Clara has a call to action. That call herein is the suitcase containing Clara's personal effects, which hooks her deeply. She becomes obsessed with finding the last thread to Clara's life story, and of wanting to know what happened to Clara's baby, removed at birth inside an asylum.

The transformation of Izzy as protagonist is profound, though subtle. By the time the book ends, Izzy has become a young adult, filled with confidence for the first time ever and looking forward to a continuity of relationships with her newly adoptive parents and genuine friends. She abandons any need to cut herself and resolves to bravely face the world after her biological mother's death in the story.

Clara Cartwright

Clara Cartwright, 18-year old New York socialite from the 1920s, is the story's structural antagonist, in that she is the one who causes the protagonist, Izzy, to undergo change and resolve difficult personal conflicts. This occurs even though Clara and Izzy do not meet until the next-to-final chapter in the book, and even though most of the story shifts from the 1920s/1930s and the modern era. Clara and events from the past come to haunt Izzy, as they overtake Izzy's concentration and passion, finally acting as catalyst for a change in Izzy herself, as she drops her pain and learns to accept reality on its own terms.

Clara fights sexual oppression and male domination, as witnessed by her daring flapper nights at the Cotton Club. She insists on marrying the man she loves because she carries his child over a man of position as arranged by her parents. But it is Clara's very



strong-willed sense of personal liberation that will lead her to being sent to an asylum because her equally strong-willed, traditionalist father Henry will not bend, either. In a sense, Clara's tragedy is that because she cannot lead an inauthentic life, she is condemned to live in an asylum, against her will and controlled by the worst form of patriarchy imaginable.

Clara is unjustly placed into Willard, the state asylum, but she tries to escape repeatedly. Ironically, she is quite sane when first wrongly admitted to the asylum, but years of mistreatment and abuse result in her changing into a much more subdued, and finally broken, character as the endless time passes behind bars.

Peg and Harry

Peg and Harry are Izzy's foster parents. She has only been with them a short while when the story begins. Both Peg and Harry work at a local museum, helping curate exhibits. It is Peg's fascination with the leftover luggage from the closed asylum that jump starts the story and also hooks Izzy's fascination re: Clara. Despite numerous previous foster parents that neglected Izzy, Peg and Harry are decent, kind people. Both foster parents show nothing but support and generosity towards Izzy, but they still expect her to maintain a high standard for herself. It is this respect that is at the heart of why Izzy is so grateful to have them as her foster parents.

Though Peg and Harry are often smaller players in the narrative, they are crucial to Izzy's ability to stabilize, explore the mystery engulfing her, and offering her the unquestioned support that she has been missing for so long in her life.

Bruno Moretti

Bruno Moretti is a proud, first-generation Italian Immigrant who falls in love with Clara and sweeps her off her feet. Though poor, Bruno is shown time and again as resourceful and, above all else, loyal to Clara. For his feelings of love for her, Bruno suffers the wrath of her father, Henry, who rejects him as a potential mate for his daughter. Later, when Clara is unfairly placed in Willard, Bruno infiltrates the facility as a workman, all in an attempt to liberate her and reunite them both with their missing baby. He suffers when he is found out by being placed into 3 months' isolation, and then later pays the highest price possible when he dies attempting to escape with Clara from Willard. He is a very noble character who suffers a bad fate.

Ethan Black

Ethan is the young man who catches Izzy's eyes and vice versa. From the first day at school when Ethan helps Izzy retrieve some dropped papers, there is a strong, mutual attraction between Ethan and Izzy. Ethan is handsome, has good grades and desires to become a doctor. He is torn character-wise between feelings for his old girlfriend Shannon and the new arrival at school, Izzy, throughout the first parts of the book. But



Shannon's cruelties to Izzy (and other students) as a class bully inevitably drive his affections towards Izzy, whatever the consequences. Ethan is very much the romantic love interest of the story from Izzy's point of view, and her feelings for Ethan mirror the ones felt by Clara and Bruno back in their time, too.

Alex

Alex (Alexandra) is a kooky, carefree spirit who adopts Izzy the first day of school, offering Izzy a ride home. She acts as a confidant to Izzy, filling Izzy in on the relevant details about Izzy's new school environment, which students to avoid and likeminded business. Alex's character is written into the narrative to allow exposition about Ethan and Shannon to be more easily given to the reader as Alex tells Izzy information about her classmates. Alex's non-judgmental attitude, key to her personality, plus her openness to Izzy, make Alex a powerful lure as friend for the new arrival Izzy, who is friendless when she first sets foot on campus.

Dr. Roach

Dr. Roach is the cold, remote ruler of Willard. He supervises many of the cases himself, including Clara's, as a means of commanding control over the vast facility. He is lecherous despite the calm façade, groping Clara's breasts during the intake assessment to the asylum. He is willing to use such now illegal techniques as ice water baths, insulin shock therapy and spine-snapping electroshock (ECT) without regards to the patient's well being. He takes Clara's baby and raises the girl along with his wife without ever telling Clara, perhaps his ultimate act of sadistic cruelty he performs in a litany of many such abuses.

Lawrence Lawrence

Lawrence Lawrence is a key helper to Clara and Bruno. A gravedigger for all the patients who die at Willard, Lawrence is a habitualized resident of the asylum, having lived most of his life there. He is resigned to his fate and actually tells others he likes it at Willard. But in reality, the reader is left with the impression Lawrence is more self-defeated than he is self-energized by burying the bodies. He lives in a squalid hut as Clara learns when she is hidden in it during her escape. Lawrence pays the ultimate price for trying to help when one of the guards kills him during Clara's last abortive attempt to flee Willard. Lawrence acts as a kind of ghostly conscience for the patients of Willard, a reminder in living form of how institutional care can, when misapplied, result in persons like Lawrence who are too damaged to ever function outside the asylum's walls after decades of neglect.



Shannon Mackenzie

Shannon is the bully at Izzy's new school and Ethan's girlfriend when the stories start. Through Alex's exposition as well as Ethan's, a more complicated portrait of Shannon is sketched to the reader than Shannon presents as a manipulator of other students at school. It turns out Shannon was sexually abused and that her father abandoned her family, hence the source of much of her acting out. Shannon acts as a reverse doppelganger of Izzy's, in that both young women have suffered abuse at the hands of their fathers. But whereas Izzy has drawn deep within herself and cuts herself to deal with her pain, Shannon instead externalizes her pain and tries to inflict it on others. Though they use radically different approaches, both Izzy and Shannon share similar deep wells of personal anguish. How each chooses to do so determines much of their social fates.

Nurse Trench

Nurse Trench acts as a seemingly indifferent caretaker to Clara throughout much of the Willard sections. At once stand-offish and a physical presence, Nurse Trench nonetheless has a fondness for reading books that Clara shares, as well as a soft spot for Clara. Nurse Trench allows Bruno and Clara to cavort at a dance, and later she saves Clara's life during a severe flood. As Miss Trench, she discusses Clara's history with Izzy and Peg as the story nears conclusion. She is a classic unexpected helper, a character that is often an archetype (like this one, who is a nurse) who appears to help characters on their respective quests.



Symbols and Symbolism

Baby Goslings

Izzy finds some baby goslings in a field near a road. She hesitates, uncertain as to whether or not she should move the baby geese, or leave them for their mother's return. Izzy allows the mother to return and watches the happy family of geese reunited. This is a very symbolic early moment. It illustrates a theme that will run throughout the story of younger children who are left on their own with absentee mothers. Since Izzy will spend the majority of the story struggling with issues relating to her mother, her foster mother and even Clara as young mother, the writer is clearly using the goslings to symbolically set in motion a major theme of the book.

Long Sleeves

Izzy wears long sleeved shirts because she cannot afford to let anyone know she has been cutting herself for years. Peg playfully notes the long sleeve shirts and admonishes Izzy to wear something more comfortable in the heat, but Izzy cannot bring herself to let anyone know what she has been doing to herself. The long sleeves represent Izzy's attempt to cover herself from others' scrutiny, and not just physically, but symbolically in the way they see her as a person. But as Peg's inquiry reveals to Izzy, she will not be able to both grow into a mature person and hide her darkest inner flaws from everyone at the same time. The long sleeves signify Izzy is covering up what should be opened and resolved.

Clara's Trunk

Clara's luggage trunk acts as a symbolic object for her own life. It is filled with clothes, photos and other dream mementos. Stickers from previous ports of call when she travelled as a younger girl adorn the outside. But as Izzy will come to see as she delves into Clara's pain-filled life, Clara's dreams of travel and adventure never come to be, instead (like the trunk itself) remaining locked inside a small, confining area, never to see the light of day.

Lawrence's Figures

Lawrence Lawrence crafts the bodies of dead praying mantises into tiny little crosses by adding strands of straw or wire. He attaches these to any grave he has to dig and fill when the deceased is buried without a proper burial marker. Deeply religious, Lawrence feels human beings being buried in such a manner is disrespectful. The display of hundreds of such tiny crucifixes as seen by Clara when she hides in Lawrence's hut moves her, as she realizes that each insect cross represents a living, feeling person who has succumbed to the evils of Willard.



Clara's Journal

Clara's Journal is given by Ethan to Izzy in a surreptitious manner when Ethan "acquires" it temporarily to impress Izzy. But even though she feels badly about how she received it, Izzy cannot resist reading the journal. It becomes symbolic beyond the words Clara records, however, owing to the horrors Clara has to undergo as a person at Willard. It becomes like a memento from someone who survived an epic ordeal of human suffering. Indeed, Clara's journal represents the unrecorded pain of all of Clara's fellow patients, many of whom never had the luxury or ability to write a journal. This makes the journal have reverence beyond personal, almost like a religious relic, and this is demonstrated by the gesture Peg makes when she gives Susan, Clara's daughter, the journal to keep after their meeting.

Coffins

Clara, with the help of Lawrence, hides in a coffin to attempt escape from the asylum. While Clara does not die in the attempt, the coffin nevertheless acts as a symbolic harbinger of bad things to come, including the death of Lawrence and Bruno during the break-out. The coffin is seen throughout the novel, both in the 1930s and in the modern era through Izzy's eyes, which elevates its symbolic value. Whenever a coffin is presented in the story, there is an accompanying sense of dread and despair that permeates the pages in which it appears. The coffin symbolically represents both Clara's and Izzy's feelings of being trapped in dead-end situations.

Izzy's Letters

Izzy has a stack of unopened letters her incarcerated mother has sent her over the years that Izzy has never read. They tell the true story of how and why Izzy's mother came to shoot Izzy's father to death. They symbolically act to remind the reader of the irony that while Izzy has the courage to read the private journal of Clara and fully investigate Clara's life, Izzy lacks the confidence to apply the same detective skills to her own mother. Only when Izzy loses her mother to death can Izzy bring herself to finally confront the truth of what is contained in the letters. So in this sense, the letters also act as a marker to show how much Izzy has matured as the story progresses.

427 Willard Suitcases

There are precisely 427 suitcases left at Willard by the former, mostly deceased patients. The number is quite large and specific in order to represent the 50,000 patients who wound their way through the asylum over its historical existence. While only 427 suitcases remain, each suitcase is filled with personal effects from former owners who never had a chance to reclaim the suitcases, or their private lives, once they went inside Willard. So the impact of each lost soul from the asylum becomes large



in impact (especially on the volunteers who unlock them and catalog the contents) because of the unusual intimacy of their left-behind personal effects.

Clara's Letters

Inside Clara's trunk are a stash of love letters she has written to Bruno but never mailed. They represent the tragedy of a love lost, as Clara cannot deliver them to Bruno no matter how hard she tries, thwarted by asylum officials. They also echo the bundle of letters Izzy maintains from her mother which Izzy has never read, which is another case of a one-way communication from one person to another person, the latter of whom never reads the messages.

Clara's & Bruno's Song

Clara is upset when she hears "Someone to Watch Over Me," a song about love, on the radio being driven into the asylum. This is because the song was Clara's and Bruno's favorite when they danced to it at the Cotton Club. The song's title is darkly ironic, as Clara will truly have almost no one watching over her while she's held in Willard. That is, until Bruno sneaks into the facility and attempts to free her, at which point Bruno literally is watching over Clara, trying to cause her escape from the facility.



Settings

Willard Asylum

Willard State Asylum is in New York state, located on a remote piece of land surrounded by a flowing lake to prevent/lessen the possibility of patient escape. It is like a small college, filled with multiple dorms for housing, treating and even punishing the patient population that makes up the facility. While it was created with the well being of the patients in mind, the actual reality is that the asylum is more akin to a sadistic prison population than any facility that can possibly help its struggling patients to recover from mental illness. By the time Izzy explores Willard after it has closed and rotted, it becomes a de facto horror house, filled with creepy, dark passages and abandoned equipment from its former bustling days. Almost like a character, the reader sees Willard first as a young facility, and then later as a decrepit, abandoned structure, almost as if it has aged like a living being.

Peg and Harry's House

Izzy resides with Peg and Harry, her foster parents, in their two-story house not far from Willard. It is a modest but comfortable house, and Izzy has her own bedroom, a rarity as a foster child. Though it's not special or roomy, Izzy is very happy in her surroundings, and considers blessed to be living there with Peg and Harry. It has all the creature comforts she can desire, and her foster parents insure she is never lacking for what she truly needs. However, her home is also where Izzy will struggle to overcome her urges to cut herself, as well as the scene of her many struggles to come to terms with her locked away mother.

Lakeshore High School

Lakeshore High School is the school Izzy attends as a new student. It is a busy, crowded facility, filled with students hurrying about and a bit overwhelming to Izzy as she learns to navigate the grounds. It has all the modern conveniences of any school, including a gym, expansive campus, and multiple classrooms. It also has a lot of the modern problems that one associates with many schools, including a sense of overcrowding and rampant bullying. It faintly echoes the sense of confinement that Willard asylum invokes in Clara in that Izzy is trapped within the institutionalized walls throughout her day (even if she is allowed to go home at the end of the school day).

Rookie Pest House

Rookie Pest House is a separate wing of Willard designed for problem patients. Designed to isolate the patients when they're having an episode, it actually works more akin to a low-grade torture chamber. Patients are chained to the bed and must endure



endless hours simply staring out onto the grounds through the windows while they are shackled. Both Clara and Bruno spend time in the Rookie Pest House, and the sights they see while incarcerated are disturbing to them, as patient abuse by the administrators is not only tolerated, but routinely applied.

Morgue

There is a morgue inside Willard to take care of all patients who die and are buried on the grounds. It is beneath the facility in a basement area. The morgue is described as dark, small and barely adequate for the task in terms of size. The morgue is where Clara begins her escape attempt hiding in a coffin. Decades later, Izzy will be trapped in the morgue by bullying student Shannon in a nasty prank turned sour. Both Clara and Izzy experience unforgettable terror as a result of the morgue, even though the two don't meet until much later.

Themes and Motifs

Abuse of the Mentally Ill

One underlying theme that appears throughout "What She Left Behind" is the notion that the history of mental illness in terms of patient care is littered with inhumane failures, at least in the past. The treatments that the various patients receive at the hands of the cruel Dr. Roach and staff at Willard are actually disguised forms of torture in all practicality. So while the doctors at Willard profess their devotion to making the patients well, in actuality, they are mostly dedicated to keeping their jobs, whatever the cost to the patients.

No attempt is ever made to actually rehabilitate the ill, rather they are subjected to unending forms of sadism with such "techniques" as insulin shock therapy, freezing cold water baths, and electroshock to their brains. Because of the manner in which they're treated, it's tempting to call the patients "inmates" because like prisoners, they are treated as if they've been convicted of a serious crime, rather than merely happening to be born with an untreatable mental illness.

Clara is a prime example of this kind of systemic abuse. In fact, it is quite clear in the narrative that she is not even mentally ill, but rather defiant of her father's authority, as motivating reason for her to be committed to the asylum. Dr. Roach interviews her any number of times, but never with any real intention of helping her. Rather, his intent in these first assessments is to confirm Clara's father's bias and somehow come up with a diagnosis that fits Clara's willful self-determination to be free and independent of her father's control. In all reality, Clara's choice to remain independent, rather than go along with her father's will, is a sign of true mental health, in that Clara is not willing to allow anyone to control her without good reason.

Ironically, as the story progresses and Clara is subject to more and more dehumanizing "therapies" designed to "help" her (but which in fact only make her situation that much more dire than previously), Clara actually experiences forms of mental illness, such as depression at her life's situation of unfair confinement. But it is worth nothing that these reactions are entirely reasonable given her incarceration, and that most normally functioning people would equally become clinically depressed if confined against their will in an insane asylum. Clara becomes so depressed she even wishes for suicide as a form of escape from the daily horrors she encounters. Again, given the severity of her situation, this is not unexpected, but it does not indicate that she was ever depressive prior to being locked in the asylum.

By the book's conclusion, the elderly Clara is shown in an old folks' home as subject to the onset of Alzheimer's, a form of mental illness mostly experienced by older people. But her onset is mild and described as barely a factor in her life's quality. It is ironic, if slightly tragic, that Clara has survived untold tortures in an asylum falsely accused of



being mentally ill, only to be later freed and to spend the rest of her life in a retirement shelter suffering an actual real mental illness.

Self Abuse vs. Survival

Izzy is a closet cutter throughout the story, In fact, even though she has quit cutting herself before the narrative begins, she still has a 7-year history of cutting prior to the story's beginning. Izzy does not cut for attention, but rather, to secretly self abuse and rid herself of her pain. The reader quickly learns that Izzy cuts herself because the physical pain she experiences when she does so temporarily alleviates the emotional distress she's been feeling prior to hurting herself. This mirrors the self-abuse Clara wishes to impart on herself at various points in the story, particularly after each failed attempt to escape Willard.

Though Clara never cuts herself, she spends great lengths of time wishing she were dead rather than having to live to face another day in Willard. While understandable, this positions Clara and Izzy as sharing an unhealthy mental outlook when it comes to dealing with complex, difficult personal emotions. That each wrestles with a self-destructive urge to escape their respective pain but manages not to act out on it is also a sign that both characters are strong-willed and able to overcome even the most tragic circumstances that life throws at them.

Izzy's self abuse is oriented towards denial of her own needs, whereas Clara's problems emerge because of her need to assert against her controlling father. Izzy is withdrawn and internal in her pain, using her cutting as a means of externalizing her feelings of inadequacy and not belonging owing to her complex personal and family life. Izzy has quit actively cutting herself when the story begins, thus showing that she nominally has her problem under control. But in actuality, the need to self abuse arises despite her modest level of control over it whenever she is stressed out by life's situations. This puts her squarely in conflict with a need for surviving bad situations with a conflicting need to harm herself to escape the pain such situations bring out in her low self-esteem.

Clara's self abuse comes not in the form of cutting, but in the need to assert her own free will no matter the circumstances. While such an attitude might be considered admirable and noteworthy for a young woman today, in Clara's time of the 1920's, it was reckless and life threatening in the wrong situations. With her brother's earlier suicide having already poisoned Henry against his only surviving daughter, Clara's choice to openly see Bruno and risk her father's wrath seems an almost self-abusive choice on Clara's part, especially considering the impact it has in her in ultimately being held in an asylum because of it.

Both Izzy and Clara will have to manifest enormous reserves of survival instincts in their respective eras to overcome their many respective obstacles. Clara must use her wits as a sane person in an asylum to try and escape throughout her life unfairly held there against her will, and not succumb to despair when she faces defeat, time and time again. Likewise, Izzy has to overcome the feelings of being a new kid in a harsh school



climate time and time again while battling her own dueling instincts to cut herself in secret shame, or stand strong and try to emerge triumphant despite her crushing doubts.

The Past Haunts the Present

Throughout "What She Left Behind," the two major characters (Izzy and Clara) are haunted by past decisions and situations that influence their current ability to live full, happy lives. For Izzy, this manifests via the fact that her mother is in prison for having killed Izzy's father, and yet Izzy never visits nor communicates with her there. In effect, Izzy is cut off from her mother, but rather than make peace with her past, Izzy chooses to delay dealing with the feelings. The reader quickly sees how this manifests externally in Izzy's character by her need to cut herself and inflict pain. Even though she has a stack of unread letters from her mother, Izzy would rather cut herself to rid herself of the pain such letters bring back, rather than read the letters and open up a possible avenue for self-healing.

Clara is trapped by the past in her respective era's present, too. She makes one bad decision via Bruno and pays for that mistake for the rest of her life, owing to her father's Draconian need to place her in a mental institution rather than allow her to be a free young woman who makes her own decisions. Clara combats her dire situation in Willard as best she can, but ironically, she is mostly left with all the time in the world on her hands to ponder how differently her fate might have turned out had not she met and fallen in love with Bruno. This aura of melancholy is interwoven throughout the book for both characters.

Tragically, neither character ever fully escapes the hold their respective pasts have on them. While Izzy fares far better than Clara, one senses this is as much a matter of modern times catching up to the life situations unfolding, as much as it is for Izzy standing alone in the face of her problems. Izzy chooses to ignore her past as actively as she can, but ironically, the more she does so (through cutting herself and ignoring her mother's plight), the more Izzy actually deepens her problems, placing herself further into their control over her present. Even moving to a new school doesn't really help, because stories surrounding Izzy's mother's having shot Izzy's father follow her to the new school, and are voiced in class by school bullies. Izzy has to physically wear long sleeved shirts in order to hide her earlier bouts of cutting herself, adding to her consternation and fear of discovery.

Another example of the past haunting the present is in the form of the suitcases that Izzy must catalog, especially the trunk belonging to Clara. This example is more external and symbolic than internal and conflict-centered, as is Izzy's cutting and struggles to fit in with a new school. But it is nevertheless difficult as a conflict for Izzy to deal with, as the lost life aspects of cataloging such individuals who were confined to an asylum (many for the rest of their lives) reminds Izzy of her own mother's confinement in prison for having killed her father. Here the past difficulties of Clara's difficult life are



mixed with Izzy's own current struggles making the past seem practically insurmountable.

There are some minor good aspects shown to the past haunting the present, however, worth noting. For example, the fact that Susan is introduced to Clara as her mother after years of wondering who her biological mother was shows that not all past associations that haunted characters resolve negatively. Indeed, Clara in this case is invited to live with Susan for the remaining years of her life, a positive outcome from a haunted past. Likewise, Izzy is able to resolve the emotional trauma she associates with her own estranged mother by helping reunite Susan and Clara, thus also showing good can come from conflicted pasts as well.

Secretive vs. Openness

Throughout "What She Left Behind," both Izzy and Clara, as well as such supporting players as Shannon, have much they keep hidden in their personal and public lives. For example, Izzy would rather keep her history with her mother shooting her father a subject few, if any, know anything about throughout the narrative. Likewise, Clara keeps her pregnancy with Bruno's baby hidden from her parents, Dr. Roach and many others until it is effectively too late to make any difference by the time she discloses her condition in terms of keeping her child when born.

Both Izzy and Clara have their secrets exposed in institutional settings (Izzy in high school and Clara at the asylum). The result is that both feel a loss of self-esteem and an invasion of privacy at the hands of others who seemingly do not have their best interests in mind or at heart. The book subtly implies that had either Izzy or Clara learned to parcel out their secrets in a more healthy, productive manner, the outcomes of their lives may have been altered for the better. While the narrative is not suggesting a person should simply tell all secrets and hope for the best, it does imply that a selective, judicious use of friends and family, and trusting them with deeply-held personal problems, might have altered the dramatic outcome in a more positive way for the chief characters in question.

Alas, neither character feels in their respective stories that they have much luxury in the face of overwhelming societal pressures. Izzy feels as if she has hit the ground running without a chance for a rest for most of her young life. Shuttled from one foster home to the next, and often responsible for her own well-being in many of the homes she has been placed within, Izzy has developed a hardened attitude towards disclosing much in the way of personal information. She has survived and managed to make it to where she is when the story begins by keeping her pain buried beneath the surface and self-injuring when she had to in order to relieve the pain. In short, Izzy has developed a secretive nature.

Clara similarly - though from different means - has also been institutionalized. But unlike Izzy's softer forms of institutionalization (school and foster homes), Clara's harsher confinement means more severe punishments for even minor infractions. Despite the



differences in settings and eras, both Izzy and Clara are keepers of secrets throughout much of the story. Clara begins the story by not telling the secret to her father or the doctors that she is pregnant with Bruno's child. Later, in the asylum with no choice but to survive at all costs, Clara will keep even bigger secrets from all present, including that Bruno has slipped into the asylum and is plotting to rescue her.

Both Izzy and Clara pay enormous prices for their secrecy. Izzy is left to deal with her self-cutting on her own and struggle with self-acceptance in a new, loving foster family's home, while Clara is reduced to a non-person in status at times despite her mental clarity the longer she stays confined in Willard asylum. Conversely, it is the keeping of their respective secrets that makes each one of them strong, true survivor types, in difficult situations many would not survive. Had either Izzy or Clara been more open in their natures, they might not have each survived their respective ordeals. And yet, by the end of the story, it is the openness with which both Izzy and Clara can share their lives that provides their deepest sense of mutual bonding.

Patriarchal Dominance

The male characters in "What She Left Behind" have all the power and authority to make key decisions that irrevocably impact both Izzy's and Clara's life. While from a modern point of view Izzy's life is less damaged by such male figures (though they are still omnipresent), Clara's life is destroyed by her father's heavy-handed inability to foresee a world in which his daughter can be both free and responsible. Because Clara refuses to conform to Henry's wishes, her father falsely labels her mentally unstable, even going so far as to have her committed to an insane asylum because she will not comply to his vision of her life.

This level of control over a young modern woman, like Izzy, would be almost unthinkable today, but was a once reality. The fact Clara can be taken away to an asylum merely because her father insists to the police that she's insane (when all evidence suggest contrary) is an example of the powerful patriarchy as would have existed for an upper crust New York socialite like Henry. His daughter Clara's own opinions and wishes do not enter into the discussion, despite their outcome effecting her entire life.

Izzy's life is less obviously held in partial control by patriarchal powers. Still, the influences are present and felt. For example, Izzy finally recalls a repressed memory in which his father attempted to molest her. This moment explains to Izzy why her mother shot her father in self-defense of Izzy. The author chooses to have the female bully Shannon also with a father who molested and abandoned her, as well, to act as mirroring device to Izzy's background.

Throughout the book, many male figures in positions of power are presented as self-aggrandizing and untrustworthy and subsisting via the patriarchal influence. This horrific theme is most aptly demonstrated in the figure of Dr. Roach, who runs the asylum like a true house of horrors. He not only denies the female patients any sense of liberty or



hope for recovery, but actively conspires to make their lives worse with institutionalized torture in the guise of various therapies. Dr. Roach selects his female patients for his worst offenses, including many forms of sexual harassment with which he does not target the male patients in comparison. The ultimate psychological abuse he reserves for Clara by literally stealing her baby shortly after birth and secretly raising as his own daughter with his wife. In every manner, the prison acts as a patriarchal shelter for Roach to rule as he sees fit and unfit.

The portrayal of Izzy's story in a more modern context makes the stifling patriarchy of the Clara sections more bearable. For the sections set during the patriarchy's height of powers in America feel very oppressive and stuffy. Choices seems predetermined and set, and young women like Clara hardly more than decorative in value. But these are correctly evocative of how it would have felt for Clara to live in such a patriarchal world and asserted expectations of freedom of rights.



Styles

Point of View

Though the overall narrative is told mainly from Izzy's point of view, significant portions of the story are concurrently intercut with Clara's storyline from the 1920s through the 1930s. Both women's stories are told from a third person perspective, which makes them mirror one another in terms of style.

When Izzy encounters a difficulty, she also does so in the past tense, making her actions and obstacles seem as if they have just occurred as they unfold. Similarly, Clara's story, though set in the more distant past, is also told from a past tense perspective, which like Izzy's quest makes Clara's goals and conflicts seem similar in linguistic construction to the reader.

Past tense storytelling is effective in storytelling because events have always just unfolded, have already occurred, even as the reader first learns of them. This also means the reader is having to perpetually "catch up" to the author, as events have previously unfolded, rather than are unfolding, in the real time present. In a sense, the author is always one step ahead of the reader in past tense storytelling, because the reader is always learning of events after, rather than as, they unfold.

In terms of "What She Left Behind," the aforementioned use of third person and past tense is particularly effective for the mystery aspects of the book. At heart, Izzy's search for meaning in Clara's shrouded life history is augmented by the author's choice to use these literary techniques. There is a leapfrogging effect going on throughout the book between Izzy's modern mystery solving and the distant past of Clara's own tale also builds the suspense, as crucial pieces of exposition are gradually, rather than suddenly, revealed to the reader.

Language and Meaning

The language used throughout "What She Left Behind" is mostly contemporary in use and meaning. This makes sense, of course, when examining Izzy's story in the present, as she is very much a teen who is a part of her generation.

When Izzy is at school, for example, she is more subdued in her word choice and expression, which fits into her shyness as being the perennial new kid at school. It is noteworthy that her contemporaries, such as Josh and others, use slang more often, such as calling Izzy "Izzy Pop" as a hurtful nickname. For the most part, Izzy avoids slang words and media jargon, which indicates she is a much more serious student than many at her school, including her contemporary students.

For the most part, Clara is relatively free of speaking in any lingo or terminology easily identifiable with the past. While this may mark her character as less authentic to the era



in which she existed, it offers a positive for modern readers, as well. That is, Clara does not come across as a stereotypical flapper, for example, even though she dresses the part. Given that she is very much a young woman of the 1920s when the story begins, this is notable. Again, however, it offers the modern reader the ability to read into the character without having to know a lot of vocabulary from the time. In effect, it makes Clara's character more immediate and accessible to modern readers, and this is important because the author does not want Clara to remain a one dimensional character, but nuanced and well-rounded. By concentrating more on her interior thoughts and feelings and less on her "Swing Era" word use, the author makes Clara much more accessible to modern readers.

There is some technical language used throughout in terms of the various procedures the asylum doctors utilize on patients. So while "insulin shock therapy" and "electroshock therapy" are not difficult to understand, per se, these terms do render a medical specificity to the various techniques used. They are also accurate to the era, in which abuses of the mentally ill in such facilities were not unusual, but normative. Still, there is something quite sinister about certified doctors using fancy names for inhumane treatments to justify their actions. It is cynical and sadistic that Dr. Roach, for example, continually experiments on his patients without an ounce of regret when things almost invariably go horribly wrong, such as when a session of ECT (electroshock) snaps the spine of one unfortunate patient. In this sense, the author has used the technical jargon not just for accuracy, but to also show the dark underside of the people in power using language to mask their truer actions.

Structure

Structurally, the book is compromised of two distinct narratives, each told in mostly alternating chapters. So for example, Izzy and her contemporary plot will fill one chapter, while the next chapter will go back in time and concentrate on Clara's ordeal. Neither of the parallel plot lines intersect directly very often, instead relying on oblique and tangential connections (such as Izzy pouring through Clara's trunk) to intertwine the two characters, until the end, when both characters finally collapse the divide as Clara finally enters Izzy's plot line in the concluding chapters.

This has the effect on the reader of making the two characters truly seem alone in their respective eras. So for example, Clara is very much alone throughout most of the book, isolated not just in Willard, but by the very narrative structure itself. Clara is cut off and isolated in a horrific past, and try as she may to solve the mystery of Clara's aborted life, Izzy is likewise "trapped" in her own contemporary series of conflicts.

In the end, the structure collapses into one story thread, Izzy's, but with Clara as the climatic character who appears to resolve the former split narrative into one cohesive whole. By having Clara meet with Izzy at the story's near conclusion, the author brings both stories to a simultaneous climax, neatly resolving the book's central conflict experienced by Izzy of having to somehow track Clara's life story. In the end, the two story lines "meet" and structurally the story is concluded.



Quotes

But that's why Willard was built. It was supposed to be a place for the incurably mad who were taking up space in poorhouses and jails.

-- Peg (Chapter 1 paragraph 21)

Importance: Peg sets in motion at the very start of the book the once noble purpose of Willard prior to its descent into institutional madness of its own kind. Because the reader only experiences the darkest hours of Willard rather than these loftier, earliest times in Willard's existence, Peg's words remind that Willard was not designed to be exploitative of its patients, but rather, it fell into such practices slowly, over time, without anyone the wiser for the degeneration.

Your place is here, at home, learning how to cook and care for children, not out gallivanting all over the city!

-- Henry (Chapter 2 paragraph 7)

Importance: Henry, Clara's father, is not just a traditionalist, but would be considered a sexist by today's standards. Of course, for the 1920s and in reaction to his daughter's becoming a flapper, Henry's position is actually quite the normative one. The roles allowed for women in society were severely curtailed, and Clara's rebellion sparks this quote from Henry as an attempt to put Clara "back in her place" as a young woman.

The best thing to do if anyone tries to egg you on is ignore them.

-- Mr. Hudson (Chapter 3 paragraph 45)

Importance: Mr. Hudson, Izzy's teacher, means well by this comment re: Izzy's being bullied by the other students. But in reality, it points out to Izzy just how bleak her situation actually is. The teachers can only offer bromides about pretending the problem doesn't exist, not actually intervene to make matters better. In many ways, the advice is similar to the advice offered to Clara while she's in Willard, in essence advising her to go along to get along. So the quote also echoes a major theme of Clara's plot as well as Izzy's story.

Isn't it a father's job to do what's best for his children?

-- Dr. Thorn (Chapter 4 paragraph 12)

Importance: Dr. Thorn, like every other doctor in the story, automatically takes the side of Henry over Clara. It is implied this is because there is an inherent bias of men preferring the opinion of other men to those of any women in the presence. The sad irony of Dr. Thorn's incorrect statement is that Clara's father does not do what is best for his children. In fact, Henry's cold distancing from his children is so acute that his son commits suicide before the book begins, and then he later has Clara unjustly incarcerated into Willard. These are hardly the actions of a parent aiming to do "the best" for his offspring, though Dr. Thorn fails to see the hypocrisy.



Then I'll open the suitcases and tell you what's inside. We have to record everything, right down to the smallest detail.

-- Peg (Chapter 5 paragraph 29)

Importance: Peg is giving Izzy instructions on how they will proceed to work in opening and then cataloguing the contents of the 427 suitcases at Willard. But Peg cannot and indeed is not aware of how much irony is front-loaded into her otherwise instructive but benign comment. For Izzy will become obsessed with the contents, and in particular Clara's trunk's contents, as the story progresses. Indeed, Izzy will go far beyond even "the smallest detail" in her quest to uncover everything about Clara she can uncover.

Some patients spend decades at Willard.

-- Mr. Glen (Chapter 6 paragraph 13)

Importance: Clara is horrified when she first arrives at Willard to discover that it is not a facility that treats and releases its patients, but rather keeps them indefinitely confined, some until death. This quote also acts as foreshadowing, as indeed, Clara is destined (though she can't possibly know this when she first arrives) to spend the majority of her adult life held at Willard against her will.

Do as you're told, remember? It's for your own good.

-- Nurse Trench (Chapter 8 paragraph 5)

Importance: Throughout the story, whenever she complains or comments on the harsh treatment she and others receive at Willard, Clara is told to mind her own business and get along with the program, not dig in her heels obstinately. But the advice is contrary to the reality of the brutal manner in which the patients are treated. None of the inhumane treatments Clara and the rest are subjected to seem to have any therapeutic effect. Rather, they seem to make the patients feel worse, both short-term and over time. The institution demands patients follow along blindly, and at the same time, abuses them at every turn.

Today we're going to talk about what makes a seemingly normal person suddenly commit a horrendous crime. Like murdering their spouse or bringing a gun to school to shoot their classmates.

-- Mr. Defoe (Chapter 9 paragraph 25)

Importance: Izzy's teacher brings up the apparently contradictory idea that even a "normal person" can commit acts of irrationality, such as murder, given the right provocation. The fact that he mentions a spouse's murder is of course very much a sore spot for Izzy, who still grieves over her mother's murdering of her father. This also gives Shannon, a bully, an opening with which to taunt and harass Izzy in front of her fellow students.

Let me go! You're supposed to be helping people, not torturing them!

-- Clara (Chapter 10 paragraph 11)



Importance: Clara issues her rebellious comment to an orderly who insists on making her sit for hours on end in the Sun Room. But while she specifically means her sitting sentence is torture, Clara may as well be addressing the entirety of her stay at Willard, for others as well as herself. The patients are all uniformly abused, tortured and made to suffer even more pain than their acute mental illnesses already cause. Clara's quote is stinging condemnation of all that is wrong with Willard.

Dr. Slade performed a small procedure on you. It's nothing to worry about. You'll be good as new before you know it.

-- Dr. Roach (Chapter 12 paragraph 16)

Importance: After performing an unscheduled operation on Clara in which she is made to be incapable of having any further children, Clara is understandably outraged and grieved, as she and Bruno wanted more children. The quote highlights the unusually cruel nature of mental health laws in Clara's era, in which forced sterilization was considered a humane option because it spared society further members who might have a mental illness. Although many mental illnesses can be hereditary, there is no reliable evidence that all such children will inherit the parents' illness, and so Clara feels rightfully violated by Dr. Slade and Dr. Roach.

This is mine. Someone very special gave it to me. I always wanted to learn to play piano, but my father wouldn't allow it.

-- Clara (Chapter 25 paragraph 31)

Importance: Clara says this quote to Izzy when they first meet and Izzy presents sheet music for the song "Someone To Watch Over Me" to Clara, which was found in Clara's trunk. The sheet music is representative of Henry's hold over his daughter, both before and after the events of the narrative. Even prior to the arrival of Bruno in her life, Clara's desire to learn how to play the piano has been negated by Henry's obsessive need to control what he and he alone believes is proper conduct for his daughter. The quote also symbolically represents the need Henry has to break apart Bruno and Clara, as this is their favorite song to dance to together.

We love you and want to be here for you.

-- Peg (Chapter 26 paragraph 12)

Importance: Throughout the entire book, Izzy struggles with self-acceptance and a belief that she will never achieve anything resembling a normal family in her life. Between her sexually abusive father and her institutionalized mother, both of whom are dead by the end of "What She Left Behind," Izzy attempts to find some peace of mind, but faces an uncertain future as she ages out of the foster care system when she turns 18. This quote represents Izzy's fondest desire come true: a foster family that not only cares for her, but wants to adopt her despite her young adult status as an 18-year-old. For Izzy, life is finally offering a chance to put her painful childhood behind her, and hopefully now emerge into adulthood with caring, concerned parents who treat her as if she were their own biological child.