

I'll Give You the Sun



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JANDY NELSON

Raised in New York, Boston, and San Diego, Jandy Nelson studied writing at Cornell, Brown, and Vermont College of Fine Arts. After beginning her career as a literary agent, Nelson, trained as a poet, felt drawn to writing children's stories, and during her MFA in children's literature at VCFA wrote the first draft of her first novel, *The Sky is Everywhere*, which was published to great acclaim in 2011. Her follow-up novel, 2015's *I'll Give You the Sun*, debuted at #8 on the *New York Times* Best Seller list and was named a notable book of 2015 by the *New York Times*, NPR, *Publishers Weekly*, and the New York Public Library. Nelson lives and writes in San Francisco.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

I'll Give You the Sun is set in the present day but features little reference to contemporary culture or politics—Nelson's narrative is focused on the insular worlds of her protagonists, Noah and Jude, who spend a lot of time in their own heads or playing fantastical thought games with one another. At the same time, Noah and Jude draw great inspiration from the past—as artists, they intensely study the works of great painters and sculptors like Jackson Pollack and Michaelangelo. Jude and Noah's removal from the larger world around them—especially in the wake of the car accident which claims their mother's life—is actually a historical context in and of itself, and Jandy uses the twins' isolation in their own world to show just how stifling and paralyzing their codependent relationship is, and just how unprepared they are for a world in which the other is not the focus of it.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Jandy Nelson has cited as inspiration for *I'll Give You the Sun* several seminal works of contemporary young adult fiction. She writes that Francesca Lia Block's 1989 novel *Weetzie Bat*—which follows a young teenage girl through a dreamlike, parallel-universe version of Los Angeles as she and her friends confront issues related to sex, love, and AIDS—was a tremendous influence on her work, in addition to Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak* and Sharon Creech's *Walk Two Moons*, both of which deal with sex, love, grief, and trauma.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *I'll Give You the Sun*
- **When Written:** Early 2010s

- **Where Written:** San Francisco, CA
- **When Published:** 2015
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Young adult fiction
- **Setting:** The fictional Northern California town of Lost Cove
- **Climax:** Oscar and Jude save Noah from drunkenly diving off of Devil's Drop, the highest cliff in their hometown of Lost Cove, sparking a period of reconciliation between the estranged twins and the revelation of a mountain of secrets that have piled up between them.
- **Protagonist/Antagonist:** Twins Jude and Noah Sweetwine are, throughout the text, both the protagonists of their own stories and one another's antagonists. In their alternating point-of-view chapters, Jude and Noah wrestle with their intimate but complicated relationship.
- **Point of View:** First person, alternating between Jude and Noah's perspectives

EXTRA CREDIT

The Namesake. The character of Guillermo Garcia, the fiery and unpredictable “rock star” of the sculpture world who hails originally from Colombia, may or may not be named for one of Jandy Nelson's literary idols, the famed Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez.

Locked In. Nelson revealed in an interview with *Publishers Weekly* that in order to give Jude and Noah their distinctive, almost otherworldly voices, she composed the book alone in a dark room wearing earplugs, with the only light coming from her laptop. After writing Noah's timeline all the way through, she closed the file containing those pages and began a new one containing Jude's perspective, refusing to look back at Noah's for notes. She wanted to keep the characters as isolated from one another in her mind as they were in the story in order to provide authentic emotion and drama.



PLOT SUMMARY

Noah Sweetwine and his twin sister, Jude, are thirteen years old. Noah, a burgeoning artist, has trouble socializing and often retreats to the “invisible museum” inside his mind—a space where he imagines portraits of himself and others in order to process what's happening around him. Noah and Jude are extremely close, a comfort in the face of the many arguments that arise between their whimsical art-professor mother, Dianna, and practical research-scientist father, Benjamin. Noah and Jude can practically read each other's minds, and have a hard time playing **rock-paper-scissors** because they always

pick the same symbols. Noah and Jude's relationship is tested, though, when Dianna decides that she wants to start preparing the twins for admission to the prestigious local art school, CSA—and Jude's jealousy of Noah's talent causes her to sabotage his application.

Three years later, Jude, now sixteen, is a student at CSA—but Noah is not, and has in fact fallen in with Jude's old popular friends. Noah doesn't make art anymore, while Jude has grown eccentric through her obsession with the deceased Grandma Sweetwine's "bible" of superstition, lore, and aphorisms. The withdrawn Jude has shorn off her long blonde hair and dresses in baggy clothes—she carries onions in her pocket and adorns herself with strange talismans meant to ward off bad luck, evil spirits, and boys. Since Dianna's death, Jude has sworn off men—and has cobbled together a halfhearted artistic practice, though she is convinced that Dianna's ghost destroys every clay sculpture she makes. On the brink of expulsion, Jude has an idea—she decides to make an indestructible stone sculpture as a way of communicating with Dianna. Though there's no carver in residence at CSA, there is someone in town who could help—the "rock star" of the sculpture world, Guillermo Garcia. Jude looks Garcia up on the internet and is impressed by his enormous carvings. She hunts him down at his studio, stopping at a church along the way. In the church, she meets an attractive older teen—an English guy who flirts with Jude and takes her picture. When Jude arrives at Garcia's, she encounters him in a drunken state—and the English guy from church shepherds him into his studio and begs Jude to leave. As Jude heads home, she heads to the beach where she nervously watches Noah cliff-dive into the sea, his dangerous new hobby.

Back in the "past," Noah begins spying on summer figure drawing classes at CSA. He briefly befriends one of the models there—an English teenager—and witnesses the model as he is caught for his drinking on the job and is let go from his post. Meanwhile, Noah slowly befriends a new boy in the neighborhood, Brian—an amateur astronomer who attends boarding school on the East Coast and is the all-star pitcher for his school's baseball team. As Brian begins drawing attention of girls, Noah worries that his feelings for Brian will never be returned—and that Brian will soon abandon him for cooler friends. Noah, attempting to avoid both Brian and the tense environment at home, begins hanging out more at CSA. When Brian tracks him down there one day and apologizes for being distant, Noah senses that Brian does indeed have feelings for him, and the two rekindle their friendship. For the rest of the summer Noah frequently blows off Jude to hang out with Brian and his cool friends. Brian and Noah hold hands one evening during a movie, but nothing more happens. At the end of the summer, during a going-away party in Brian's honor, some kids start up a game of seven minutes in heaven. Noah urges Brian to leave the party with him, but Brian insists on staying. Noah is paired up with Heather and sent into the closet, but as he

begins kissing her, he imagines Brian and gets into the game. When he emerges from the closet, Brian is furious—and proceeds into the closet with Jude. Noah leaves the party, and on the lawn runs into the English model, who urges him to seek real lessons from a sculptor who lives inland—Guillermo Garcia. Noah stumbles home, where he rips up all of his drawings of Brian.

In the future, Jude returns to Garcia's studio to beg him to be her teacher. After a contentious first meeting, Jude tearfully explains how desperately she needs to make a certain sculpture out of stone—and Guillermo reluctantly tells her to come back the next day with a portfolio. The next day, Guillermo, Jude, and the English guy—whose name is Oscar—all sit down together, and Oscar disrobes so that he can model for Jude. Guillermo explains that to carve or sculpt, one must first learn to draw by feeling rather than seeing. After the lesson, Jude and Oscar have a flirtatious conversation, but Jude becomes suspicious when a girl named Sophia arrives to take Oscar out to dinner. While exploring Guillermo's studio, Jude comes across a series of notebooks which contain passionate love letters. The letters spook and excite Jude, and she pockets them. As Jude begins her next carving lesson, she realizes that the sculpture she needs to make is not of her mother, but of herself and Noah. After the lesson, Jude goes to the room where Oscar sleeps and begins going through his things. She is elated to find a series of photographs Oscar took of her scattered on his desk, with various love notes attached, but is startled when she hears him coming upstairs, accompanied by a woman named Brooke. Jude hides in the closet while the two begin kissing, and overhears Oscar telling Brooke that the photos are of "nobody." Jude bursts from the closet and flees the studio.

Back in the past, in the wake of his heartbreak, Noah decides to follow the English guy's advice and seek out Guillermo Garcia. He arrives at the man's studio and peeks through the yard to find him leading students in carving, sculpture, and figure drawing—Guillermo is happy and carefree, and his studio is a veritable utopia of art and learning. As Noah leaves the yard, he sees his mother's car parked on the street—though she is hunched over, clearly trying to avoid being seen, he approaches her, and she tells him to get inside. On the drive home, Dianna makes excuses for why she was parked on a street so far from home. Over time, Dianna takes up smoking and spends hours on the porch talking on her phone; when she's present in the house, she's lost in thought and easily distracted. Eventually, Benjamin and Dianna inform Noah and Jude that they are embarking upon a trial separation. Benjamin leaves for a hotel with nothing but a drawing Noah made him for his birthday in tow, and that evening, Jude and Noah reconcile as Jude informs Noah that nothing happened between her and Brian, and she's in fact interested in Zephyr instead. Over winter break, Brian comes over one morning to say hello, and he and Noah soon run off together into the woods. Brian kisses Noah

passionately, but warns him that no one can ever know that Brian is gay—because of his athletic career, he is afraid of facing ridicule and discrimination. A week later, when Noah and Brian are masturbating together in Noah’s room, Dianna walks in on them. Brian panics and leaves through the window, telling Noah that things between them are over. When Dianna attempts to talk to Noah about what happened, he refuses to answer her questions about his feelings or his sexuality. The next morning, Noah overhears a phone call between Dianna and someone he assumes is his father. Afraid that Dianna is going to tell Benjamin the truth about Noah, Noah follows Dianna to a local landmark—where she meets up with Guillermo Garcia, and kisses him passionately. Realizing the two are having an affair, Noah dashes home and draws a portrait of Dianna and Guillermo, leaving it for his mother to find. He runs into Brian—and a girl named Courtney—and sees that they are kissing. Noah screams out, “Brian Connelly is gay!” but instantly regrets his words and rushes home, where Dianna confronts Noah. She tells him that she wants to leave Benjamin and marry the sculptor—Noah is devastated.

The morning after her run-in with Oscar and Brooke, Jude goes into the studio, where she works on her “NoahandJude” sculpture. Jude asks Guillermo to show her how to use a powerful diamond-blade saw, and, with it, she cleaves the NoahandJude sculpture in half—“killing” them in Guillermo’s view, but “saving” them in her own. On the way home, Jude receives a text that Noah is drunk at a bonfire and about to attempt a perilous jump. Jude rushes to the beach and, with the help of Zephyr, tracks Noah to a high bluff overlooking the sea. She attempts to stop her brother from leaping off the cliff, but he squirms from her grasp and she is knocked out. When she awakes, she sees that Oscar has tackled Noah and stopped him from jumping. Noah is angry, as he wanted to jump badly—when he cliff-dives, he believes Dianna’s ghost helps him to avoid injury, and it is the only time she “forgives” him. Oscar helps Jude and Noah home, and Oscar at last kisses Jude. Jude is nervous to embark on a relationship with Oscar, but over the course of their conversation in which they venture the idea that they might be soulmates, she becomes convinced that Oscar is the one. As Oscar looks at various photographs around Jude’s room, though, he spots one of the whole Sweetwine family—and flees out the window, muttering under his breath, “Guillermo doesn’t know.”

Back in the past, Dianna leaves in the rain to tell Benjamin she’s ending things. As she pulls out of the driveway, Noah screams after her, telling her that he hates her. Soon, Benjamin arrives home with a policeman in tow and informs Noah that Dianna has been killed in a car accident. Noah tells Benjamin that she was on the way over to his hotel—to tell him that she loved him and wanted him to come home. The day after Dianna’s funeral, Noah goes to Day Street, where he runs into Guillermo Garcia. He runs to the sculptor and the two weep together for several

moments before Noah is overcome with anger. He tells Garcia that Dianna didn’t love him and was never going to marry him.

The next morning, when Jude arrives at Day Street with a series of new sketches of her mother for Guillermo to peruse, the sculptor realizes for the first time who Jude really is. Noah and Oscar burst into the studio, and Noah begins explaining to Jude just who Guillermo is. He reveals the truth—Dianna was planning on leaving Benjamin and marrying Guillermo. Jude allows herself to collapse into Noah’s arms, at last letting down her guard and surrendering to the pain of their loss. On the walk home, Noah and Jude reconcile, coming clean about all the secrets they’ve kept from one another for years, and Noah brings Jude to an abandoned construction site to show her an expansive mural he’s been working on in secret for years. Jude and Noah return home, where they tell their father the truth about Dianna and Guillermo’s love—he is relieved rather than angry. The atmosphere in the house is truly happy for the first time in years, and the three of them even discuss moving to a houseboat as part of a new adventure together. Oscar shows up to talk to Jude—he tells her that she’s too young for him, and that they should wait to begin dating until she’s older. Jude begs him not to pass up a chance at destiny and true love, and after some convincing, Oscar agrees that they shouldn’t waste a chance at happiness. The next day, Jude and Noah go to Guillermo’s studio so that Jude can work on her sculpture and Noah can begin drawing lessons. As they all work together in harmony, Jude reflects on the role of destiny in people’s lives, and considers that Dianna’s affair actually strengthened their family rather than weakening it. Two weeks later, Brian returns to town, and he and Noah rekindle their relationship at last. Benjamin and Jude come back from a swim in the ocean, and as a ladybug lands on Jude’s hand, she makes a wish.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Noah Sweetwine – Noah is the first of the novel’s two protagonists and narrators, roles he shares with his twin sister Jude. Sensitive, introverted, and closeted, Noah is thirteen years old at the start of the novel and uncomfortable everywhere except for the “**invisible museum**” inside his mind: an imagined space where Noah renders vivid but imaginary portraits of himself and others in order to make sense of the quickly spinning world around him. Insecure in his relationship with his father Benjamin, desperate for his mother Dianna’s attention, and smothered by but afraid of losing his relationship with his cool sister Jude, Noah turns to art when things get hard. Noah soon finds himself drawn to a new boy in the neighborhood, Brian, and as Noah experiences the highs and lows of first love over the course of several months, his relationship with his family is tested. In the novel’s “future” timeline, Noah is sixteen years old and has completely

transformed himself after a series of deep traumas—the tragic loss of his mother, the crumbling of his relationship with Brian (who was not ready to come out yet), and a rejection from the prestigious California School of the Arts—have rocked his world. Now popular, outgoing, and prone to undertaking drunken high dives off the cliffs at the edge of his coastal hometown, Noah has changed—but not forgotten—who he is. As Noah slowly begins to come back to himself with the help of his concerned sister, he learns to cope with their shared grief, atone for the pain he has caused his sister and his father, and to once again have faith in his identity as an artist.

Jude Sweetwine – The second of the novel’s two protagonists and narrators, Jude is Noah’s twin sister. At the start of the novel, she is a reckless social butterfly who throws herself into securing the attention of the other girls—and especially boys—her age when she begins to doubt her art, and how it measures up to her talented brother’s work. The narration is told in two timelines, and Jude presides over the later timeline, which takes place when the twins are sixteen years old. Having secured a place at CSA through sabotage and subterfuge (she secretly threw away her brother’s application), the frustrated Jude worries that her mother’s ghost is haunting her, and that her sculptures will never have any real meaning. When she is struck by a sudden flash of inspiration and decides to move from clay to stone, she enters into an apprenticeship with the passionate and tempestuous Guillermo Garcia—where she finds herself pushed to make the art she’s been afraid to for years and drawn, against all of her instincts, to Guillermo’s dashing assistant, Oscar. As the superstitious Jude comes into her own, she relies less on the ghost of her Grandma Sweetwine (and her grandma’s **bible** of superstition and lore) and more on her own heart to guide her.

Dianna Sweetwine / Mom – At the start of the novel, Jude and Noah believe that their art-professor mother, Dianna, is a “blow-in” from another realm or even another planet. She is so ethereally beautiful to them, so unlike their rational scientist father, and so attuned to both the twins’ inner worlds, that they revere her almost as a goddess. When Dianna, determined to make sure that both of her talented children are admitted to the prestigious CSA, begins trying to lead them on a crash-course of art history and practice, Noah and Jude’s desire to one-up the other and impress their mother begins driving a wedge into the relationship between all three of them. As the novel progresses, Noah and Jude wrestle for their mother’s affections and struggle with the inability to ever live up to her expectations. In Jude’s timeline, set three years in the future, both are wrestling with the pain of having lost their mother in a fatal car accident, and harboring separate but intense regrets about how they related individually to their mother during their final years with her. The twins are also forced to grapple with the fact that, on the day of her death, their mother was on her way to ask the twin’s father for a divorce, so that she could

marry her passionate, secret lover, Guillermo—the very man who unknowingly becomes Jude’s mentor.

Benjamin Sweetwine / Dad – Noah and Jude’s father and Dianna’s husband, Benjamin, is a scientist who studies parasites. A deeply rational man, Benjamin seems intimidated by and contemptuous of his wife and children’s beliefs in the supernatural and the mystic, and has a hard time relating to all three of them. He also could not be more different from his mother, Grandma Sweetwine, who embodies those beliefs in the supernatural more fully than anyone else. Benjamin figures in the background of most of the novel, but his contentious relationship with his children is tested when Dianna dies, leaving him in charge of bringing up two very different individuals, who have been traumatized by loss in very different ways. Ultimately, Benjamin is able to come to terms with his own grief when Noah finally tells the truth about Dianna wanting a divorce so that she could marry Guillermo. This revelation allows Benjamin to move on and try to embrace “mystery” and adventure in life again, just as Dianna was always pushing him to do.

Grandma Sweetwine – Grandma Sweetwine, Benjamin’s eccentric mother, is already dead at the start of the novel, but when Dianna purports to be able to communicate with the woman’s ghost, Jude and Noah’s beliefs in the afterlife and the supernatural are heightened. After Dianna’s death, Jude turns to Grandma Sweetwine’s **bible** of aphorisms, lore, and superstition to navigate the world—and begins talking herself with the ghost of her grandmother, who follows her around throughout her days and acts as a kind of conscience. Brash, unconventional, and somewhat needy, Grandma Sweetwine is always there to whisper in Jude’s ear the advice she needs to hear.

Guillermo Garcia – The “rock star” of the sculpture world, Colombian sculptor Guillermo Garcia is a bear of a man whose recent heartbreak has caused him to retreat into his studio and refuse much contact with the outside world. When Jude shows up at his doorstep and asks to be taken on as a student, Guillermo senses the need in Jude’s plea and agrees to mentor her. Through their working relationship (and from the help of Guillermo’s charming young assistant, Oscar), Jude learns about art, drive, determination, and comes to realize that the adults are around her are often just as heartsick, just as lost, and just as fearful of letting go of their pain and sorrow as Jude herself is. It is eventually revealed that Dianna had been having an affair with Guillermo in the months leading up to her death, and was even planning on divorcing Benjamin to marry the sculptor—but because of her waffling back and forth, she put her heart’s desires on hold, and when she finally went to confess her intent to marry Guillermo to her husband, she was killed in a car accident. Passionate, volatile, dedicated, and deeply artistic, Guillermo becomes a sort of second father-figure to Jude, and retains her devotion and admiration even

after the truth of his affair with her mother comes to light.

Oscar Ralph / The English Guy – Guillermo’s assistant, Oscar, is a university student and former wild child whose path crosses with both Noah’s and Jude’s at different times in the twins’ lives. When Oscar meets Noah, Noah never learns the young man’s name—Oscar is simply the cool, beautiful model for the life drawing classes at CSA. When Noah begins spying on the classes, he meets Oscar, and watches as Oscar is fired for drinking on the job. Years later, Jude meets Oscar in a church, and the two are instantly mesmerized by one another. Oscar, a fledgling photographer, is desperate to take Jude’s photograph despite her protestations. She is on her “boy boycott,” and gets away from Oscar as quickly as possible. When they run into one another again at Guillermo Garcia’s studio—and Jude realizes that Oscar is Garcia’s assistant—it becomes clear that a little bit of destiny is in the mix. Over the course of Jude’s apprenticeship with Garcia, she and Oscar flirt back and forth—though both are afraid to jump headfirst into anything. Ultimately, Oscar confesses his intense feelings for Jude, and reveals that his long-deceased mother once predicted he would meet his soulmate in a church. Oscar’s devil-may-care personality, crooked good looks, and belief in fate, destiny, and magic draw Jude in, but it is his heartfelt investment in her happiness and well-being that eventually shows her how right they are for one another.

Brian Connelly / The Boy from the Roof – A high school boy who comes to Lost Cove for the summer the year that Noah and Jude are thirteen years old. Noah and Brian are immediately drawn to one another, and embark upon a friendship that has undertones of deep sexual attraction. Though the boys flirt and even, on occasion, hold hands when no one is looking, nothing ever transpires between them—until Brian returns for the winter break and at last confesses his feelings to Noah. The two enjoy a brief period of happiness, until one afternoon Dianna walks in on them masturbating together. Brian, a student athlete, is afraid that word will spread and he will be bullied at school, and cuts off his relationship with Noah, quickly beginning a new relationship with a girl named Courtney to save face. Noah, incensed, outs Brian, leading to a permanent schism in their relationship. Brian is an athlete, an amateur astronomer, and in many ways a dreamer, just like Noah. He is drawn to Noah’s quiet intensity and careful artistry, and, while things are good, the two provide one another with support, understanding, and excitement about the possibilities of love and desire. The novel ends on an optimistic note with Brian and Noah reunited and holding hands after many years apart.

Zephyr – A high school boy who often bullies Noah despite his friendship with—and attraction to—Noah’s twin sister, Jude. Zephyr eventually takes Jude’s virginity when she is only fourteen, leading to years of stony silence between the two of them. However, Zephyr proves instrumental in helping Jude to

rescue Noah at a crucial moment two years later, when Noah is about to drunkenly jump from the steepest cliff in their town, possibly to his death.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Fry – A high school bully who is friends with Zephyr.

Sandy Ellis – The master ceramicist at CSA and Jude’s advisor.

Heather – A local girl who is friends with Noah and Jude. She helps Jude keep an eye on Noah as his behavior over the years grows more and more reckless. To impress his father, the closeted Noah pretends Heather is his girlfriend.

Courtney – A local girl who has a brief relationship with Brian. This sparks Noah’s outrage, and Noah cruelly outs Brian to her.

Sophia – A beautiful and glamorous friend of Oscar’s whom Jude assumes is his girlfriend. She turns out to be Oscar’s ex-girlfriend, and Jude learns that the pair has managed to remain friends.

Brooke – A girl whom Oscar kisses mere hours after he and Jude start to grow closer. Oscar later admits that he only kissed Brooke because he was so scared of Jude and what was blossoming between them.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



IDENTITY AND CODEPENDENCY

The emotional core of Jandy Nelson’s *I’ll Give You the Sun* is the intimate but paralyzing bond between Noah and Jude Sweetwine, thirteen-year-old fraternal twins coming of age in the Northern California town of Lost Cove. When readers first meet Noah and Jude, the twins are extremely codependent. They can sense each other’s emotions, they play strange theoretical thought games (including one in which they divvy up parts of the world such as the sun, the stars, and the sea), and they comfort one another by sidling into a shoulder-to-shoulder position known as “the smush,” the position they held in the womb. When tragedy and betrayal befall Noah, Jude, and the whole Sweetwine family, the twins drift apart, and it seems as if they will never be able to repair their fractured relationship. As the novel progresses—and as Noah and Jude’s isolated searches for their own emotional, artistic, and sexual identities go on—Nelson uses their separate but parallel journeys to argue that extreme codependency is a more isolating force than isolation itself.

Over the course of the book, Nelson charts Jude and Noah's relationship as it moves from stifling intimacy to devastated estrangement to something in between. Eventually, Noah and Jude discover a way to love one another without suffocating each other, and Nelson shows how the almost telepathic relationship Jude and Noah shared in their youth had to be bulldozed in order for them to grow as individuals and ultimately strengthen their bond. At the start of the novel, Noah and Jude are so close that they can essentially read each other's thoughts. They can never play rock-paper-scissors because they always throw out the same symbol and end in a tie; Noah can tell when Jude is upset, angry, or nervous, and even feels her unleash a "psychic air raid" on him in a particularly tense moment with their mother at the local museum. In uncomfortable moments, the two slide together into the so-called smush position, as they have since they were very small. Noah fears that they are getting "too old" for the smush even as he relishes the joy he feels when he and Jude, for the moments they hold the position, seem to morph into "one complete and whole person."

Noah's language when he talks about the smush reveals that he, at least, does not feel "whole" without Jude. The first section of the novel is told from Noah's point of view and reveals an anxiety about needing his sister as badly as he does, even as he worries that their relationship is too close for comfort. These anxieties form the emotional crux of much of the rest of the novel, and as Nelson alternates between Noah and Jude's points of view, it becomes clear that both siblings fear and desire codependency. Too close for comfort throughout their youth and bound to one identity—"NoahandJude"—the two are unable to handle even small conflicts or competition, a fact that will have devastating consequences when tragedy ruptures their lives.

Midway through the novel, in the sections told from Jude's point of view (and set three years in the "future"), Noah and Jude's relationship has become fractured and distant in the wake of the death of their mother, Dianna. Jude attends CSA, an elite art school, but Noah, who expressed a greater interest in the program and went so far as to spy on classes to prepare for his application, does not have a spot. Noah was always the quiet, introverted, artistic one, while Jude was the social butterfly—now, at sixteen, Jude has retreated into her shell, cut off all her hair, and chosen to dress in baggy clothing that hides her body, while Noah enjoys a vibrant social life with the very people he once mocked Jude for hanging out with. Noah has all but dropped his identity as an artist—and, after a disastrous night at an end-of-summer party during his thirteenth year, has chosen to suppress his gayness as well. Jude is unsure of who she really is and has taken up as a marker of her identity her obsession with the ghost of Grandma Sweetwine (and her "**bible**" of lore and superstition), enshrouding herself in a connection to the world of the dead rather than the world of

the living. As time goes by, Jude and Noah know less and less about one another, and are unsure of how to mend their relationship, knowing they are incapable of a return to the synergetic bond they once knew, but afraid of what their relationship looks like without that intense closeness.

By the end of the novel, after a series of revelations that allow Noah and Jude to finally see one another—and the events of the last several years—clearly, the twins are ecstatic to finally have each other back. At the same time, they're nervous to re-encounter one another in a "world remade" by time and grief. As they finally discuss their mother's life and death—her affair, her failed aspirations as an artist, and her occasionally selfish nature—they discover that they have grown apart just enough to allow one another the space to breathe. When they attempt a game of **rock-paper-scissors**, they are stunned—and delighted—to find that they pick different symbols every round.

Noah and Jude's identities fluctuate and morph throughout the novel. At the start, Noah is the "weird" one, while Jude enjoys popularity and normalcy; by the midpoint of the novel, Jude's anxieties, fears, and traumas have changed her into a veritable weirdo herself, while Noah has affected a totally "normal" personality in order to hide the truth of who he is. At the end of the novel, when Nelson emotionally reunites the twins, she shows how their identities needed the experimental period their "separation" brought; without the chance to detach from one another, they never would have discovered who they truly were. At the end of the novel, an elated Jude is grateful for the chance she and Noah have had to "remake the world" together rather than dividing it up between them. There is more to the world than just the two of them, and they have grown to see the beauty in that fact.



ART, SELF-EXPRESSION, AND COMMUNICATION

Noah and Jude, the twin protagonists of the novel, are both artists. Throughout the book, Nelson shows how the siblings' respective relationships to their art grows and changes alongside their relationships with themselves and one another. Noah at thirteen years old is the proprietor of his own "**invisible museum**"—he can hardly restrain himself from painting and drawing either on paper or in his mind everything and everyone he sees. Jude, meanwhile, is shy and private about her art—she only makes sand sculptures that wash away with the tide. Three years into the future, however, it is Jude—not Noah—who has secured a place at the prestigious local art high school while Noah has ripped up his sketchbooks and, as far as everyone knows, abandoned art-making altogether. As Noah and Jude take turns embracing, questioning, and denying their artistry, Nelson argues that art is a way of communicating through pain, through grief, and even through times when all other forms of connection have failed.

Art means different things to Noah and Jude at different points in the novel. As their relationships to their art grow and change, Nelson points out the ways in which art is, alternatingly, a way of self-expression and communication, both a selfish act and a communal one at different times in one's life. At the start of the novel, both Noah and Jude use art primarily as a mode of private, contained self-expression. The two, at thirteen, are still figuring out who they are, and wrestling with feelings of insecurity and uncertainty. In their art, Noah and Jude are able to take steps towards announcing who they want to be and how they want to be seen—by each other, and by the wider world.

Noah in particular has an intense creative drive. When he's not drawing in his sketchbook, he's painting pictures in his mind—he calls his mental drawings “the invisible museum.” His frequent invocations of portraits and self-portraits titled to reflect profound, happy, or traumatic moments in his life show that for him, art is a way of making sense of the world around him. As a nervous introvert struggling with budding feelings of desire for men, Noah uses the invisible museum as a way of imagining a world that makes sense to him and plays by his rules.

Jude, meanwhile, is intimidated by her brother's artistic streak—and her art-professor mother Dianna's admiration of Noah's drive and talent. Jude knows that art is something which connects Noah to their mother and feels it is an arena in which she can't hope to compete against Noah. Jude, however, has an artistic drive of her own. Her private passion is a series of “flying women” made out of sand, which she painstakingly constructs down at the beach just before the tide comes in only to watch them wash away at the end of each work session. Noah and Jude both regard their art as a private matter, and when Dianna tries to groom them for admission to the prestigious high school for the arts, CSA, the pressure becomes too much for the quietly competitive siblings to bear. When Dianna elevates Noah's work above Jude's, Jude begins pursuing a vibrant social life with a new group of friends and neglecting her artistic drive—until, shortly after Dianna's death, she sabotages Noah's application to CSA to ensure that she herself will be afforded a spot.

Later in the novel—in Jude's “future” timeline—art slowly becomes a way for Noah and Jude to communicate. Though the two have grown estranged in the years since their mother's death, in their sixteenth year, both twins find a way to use their art to bridge the schism that has formed between them and find a new way of looking at art, at each other, and at what their very different artistic practices mean to both of them. At CSA, Jude is floundering. She is working in clay sculptures, but her projects keep mysteriously breaking—she believes that her mother's ghost is haunting her work and purposefully destroying it as a result of her own subterfuge in destroying Noah's CSA application. She is feeling deflated and useless, and

even longs to drop out, when she is struck by inspiration—she wants to work in stone, and she wants to carve a statue of her mother as a way of communicating with Dianna. When Jude becomes a student of the reluctant, heartbroken, and intimidating “rock star” sculptor Guillermo Garcia, she soon realizes that what she wants to carve is not a statue of her mother, but rather a statue of herself and Noah. Over the course of her apprenticeship with Garcia, she comes to understand that though Dianna is gone, Noah is still here—and that saving their compromised relationship is more important than anything.

Noah, on the other hand, has ripped up all his childhood drawings by the age of sixteen. After a disastrous falling-out with his first real love, Brian, he has chosen to abandon art and repress not just his sexuality but his artistic drives as well. Noah makes friends with many of Jude's former pals and takes up dangerous habits, like drinking and cliff-diving, in place of his art. Still, the invisible museum cycles on, and Noah cannot stop imagining the pictures he would paint if he still considered himself an artist. Towards the end of the novel, after he and Jude reconcile, he reveals that all along, he has been working on a giant mural at an abandoned construction site. When Jude sees Noah's mural, she sees “the world, remade”; all the guilt she's harbored about destroying Noah's chances at an artistic future is washed away when she realizes that he has remained true to himself all along, and has not given up on finding a way to communicate with his sister despite all that has come between them.

Art is the force that drives Noah and Jude apart as children—and the thing that reunites them as young adults. When all other forms of communication between the once-inseparable twins have broken down, their tempestuous but ultimately nourishing relationships with art, a force they both in their own ways fear and worship, allow them to bridge the gap between them and find their way back to one another.



GRIEF AND GUILT

Though the novel starts off on an optimistic, even playful note, by the second chapter—set three years in the future—the book's atmosphere has been permeated by an awful sense of grief and guilt. Dianna Sweetwine, Noah and Jude's mother, has died in a horrible car accident—and both Noah and Jude, for reasons that will slowly be revealed over the course of the novel, feel responsible not just for her death but also for the deterioration of their family unit and their relationship with one another. As Jude and Noah seek to ameliorate their grief and guilt—or simply distract themselves from it—Nelson paints a portrait of a family in crisis and ultimately argues that grief and guilt, forces which should theoretically bond sufferers together, actually have the opposite effect. Instead, grief and guilt often scatter and isolate sufferers from one another, thus intensifying their pain.

Between the two timelines the novel exists in—the “past,” narrated by the thirteen- and fourteen-year-old Noah, and the “future,” narrated by the sixteen-year-old Jude—a terrible tragedy occurs. The Sweetwine twins’ mother, Dianna, dies, leaving behind a wealth of secrets and inspiring feelings of jealousy, grief, and guilt in her children and husband, Benjamin. Dianna’s death serves as a catalyst for many characters’ selfish, destructive actions—actions borne out of grief, which serve to isolate, antagonize, and distance even at a time of great need.

The two characters who bear the brunt of grief and guilt throughout the novel are Noah and Jude. As the novel progresses, many secrets, traumas, and tensions come to light. In the weeks leading up to Dianna’s death, she and Jude had been arguing nonstop about Jude’s risqué outfits and interest in makeup and boys, while Noah had recently uncovered the fact that his mother was having an affair—with none other than Jude’s present-day sculpture mentor, Guillermo Garcia. Noah’s guilt over Dianna’s death stems from the fact that on the day she died, she was going to end things with Benjamin, and Noah told her that he hated her; Jude’s comes from the fact that while Dianna was getting into the fatal accident, Jude was down on the beach losing her virginity to a local boy named Zephyr, defying her mother’s warnings not to turn into “that girl.”

It’s eventually revealed that Jude, who was tasked with mailing both her and her brother’s applications to art school, threw Noah’s away out of jealousy in the weeks following the accident that claimed their mother’s life. This act of sabotage, among others—including Noah destroying one of Jude’s favorite drawings, and Jude agreeing to a round of seven minutes in heaven with Noah’s crush, Brian—all stem from feelings of jealousy, grief, and anger that Noah and Jude develop as a result of their near-symbiotic relationship. When Dianna—whose prized attentions they’d always vied for—is ripped from their lives, the schism is too much to bear, as are the resulting feelings of jealousy and pain. Both siblings begin acting out against one another, and eventually become all but strangers to each other. Rather than coming together to mourn their mother, Noah and Jude isolate themselves, and their relationship grows increasingly complicated and estranged with each passing day.

Benjamin Sweetwine and Guillermo Garcia are two more characters whose grief and guilt calibrate much of their storylines. Noah and Jude’s dad, who’d already felt like an outsider in his own family prior to Dianna’s death (and even prior to their separation), retreats further into himself, becoming more of a roommate to his children than a father. Guillermo—the man Dianna had planned to leave Benjamin in order to marry—is the sixteen-year-old Jude’s sculpture mentor, and though she doesn’t know of the connection between Guillermo and her mother, she knows that Guillermo is in mourning for a failed relationship. Jude assumes that the

woman Guillermo loved left or rebuffed him—it isn’t until nearly the end of the novel that she understands that, had Dianna lived, Guillermo likely would have become her stepfather.

In both Benjamin and Guillermo’s cases, these two men isolate themselves in their grief and do not seek connection, help, or comfort from those around them. Guillermo stalks around his studio smashing sculptures and ranting in Spanish, while Benjamin becomes a shell of his former self. Neither man reaches out to anyone else in their time of need, and yet their attempts to sublimate their own grief in order to move past it only increases its power over them.

Towards the end of the novel, all of the secrets, lies, and feelings of guilt and shame between Jude and Noah—and indeed all of the tangential characters, including Benjamin and Guillermo—are expunged through a series of staggering revelations. As the connections between the various characters are at last revealed—and as each realizes how they have, in their own ways, maximized their grief and guilt by refusing to see the meaningful connections that have been all around them all along—the characters experience an ecstatic period of rejoicing as they vow to “remake” their little world together rather than hide any longer in their own separate worlds of grief, guilt, and shame.



MAGIC AND THE SUPERNATURAL

Nelson’s electrifying language and her protagonists’ shared preoccupation with the supernatural elevates the main story of *I’ll Give You the Sun* into an almost mythic level. Jude and Noah believe that their mother, Dianna, is a “blow-in” from another world or another planet, and their desperate love for her is reflected in how they see her as a supernatural being, even after her death. Meanwhile, their deceased Grandma Sweetwine may or may not pay regular visits to Jude, who clings to Grandma’s “bible” of superstitions, folklore, magic, and herbal cures in the face of her own grief. As the novel progresses and the circumstances of chance, coincidence, prophecy, and fate combine, Nelson argues that believing in magic can provide a balm against the pain, injustice, and trauma of loss.

Early in the novel, Nelson establishes that both Noah and Jude believe intensely in magic and the supernatural, and shows how Jude is particularly affected by these beliefs. Their recently deceased paternal grandmother, Grandma Sweetwine, was a superstitious and eccentric woman who composed a “bible” of aphorisms and maxims designed to bring its readers luck, prosperity, and health. In addition to—or perhaps because of—Grandma Sweetwine’s superstitions, the children believe that their own beautiful, ethereal mother is a “blow-in” from another realm or planet. Their rational, science-minded father, Benjamin, attempts to discourage the children from their beliefs, but Dianna encourages them, even spinning tales of

how she has communicated with Grandma Sweetwine's ghost. Against this backdrop of belief in the supernatural, Jude and Noah begin coming into their own—and the foundation provided by their mother and grandmother's beliefs will resonate throughout the twins' teen years as they wrestle with pain and tragedy. For instance, Jude is obsessed with playing Ouija board as a means of determining her prospects in life, and also engages Noah in a series of thought-based games which attempt to predict the future or exert control over the world around them.

After Dianna's death, Jude throws herself into her beliefs in the supernatural as a way of coping with the pain. First off, she believes that her mother is haunting her by destroying her art projects. She misses Dianna so much that a part of her is hopeful that even if Dianna is haunting her or punishing her for her meanness towards Noah, they have maintained a connection beyond the grave. Additionally, Jude carries Grandma Sweetwine's bible around with her and follows the wisdom in it to the letter—even when the bible recommends carrying an onion in one's pocket at all times to ward off disease, among other strange dictums. She also begins seeing Grandma Sweetwine's ghost. The ghost follows Jude around throughout her days, both heckling her and offering her support. Jude knows that her preoccupation with the bible is one thing, but that her ability to see a ghost is another thing entirely—still, she remains devoted to Grandma's bible, polite to the ghost, and determined to ward off her anxieties (which come in the form of hypochondria) through the wisdom Grandma has given her.

Most everyone around her ridicules Jude's beliefs, and, as the novel progresses and she finds creative satisfaction through her apprenticeship with Guillermo and her love for his young, damaged assistant, Oscar. Jude comes to see that perhaps her beliefs are just childish constructs meant to stave off the pain that comes with losing someone. Just when Jude's faith wanes, however, a series of incredible coincidences restore her belief in the power of the supernatural. When Oscar reveals that his deceased mother always prophesized that he would meet the love of his life in a church—the place where he and Jude first met—Jude senses a hint both of Grandma's aphoristic wisdom and Dianna's ethereal, airy optimism. When she learns that Dianna, through her relationship with Guillermo, came to know Oscar—and herself predicted that he and Jude would be a good match once Oscar overcame his drinking problem—Jude feels that her mother's hand has been guiding her all along, and that perhaps the destructive force Jude ascribed to her mother's ghost back at CSA was actually Dianna's way of turning Jude's fate in a new direction.

At the end of the novel, Benjamin, desperate for a change of pace and a new start to the family, recommends that he, Noah, and Jude check out a houseboat that's for sale nearby. Noah and Jude are elated at the idea of living on a boat, after years of

Noah's enduring sly references to his biblical name, and see the act of moving onto a real “ark” as a chance to reclaim their family's closeness, remake the world, and rise above the floodwaters of their grief. Additionally, in the novel's final pages, Grandma Sweetwine's ghost reminds Jude that she is here to stay. This symbolizes that even though Jude has grown past needing the trappings of her grandmother's spiritualism and superstitions in order to cope with her own pain and loss, Jude is still intimately connected to the spirit world; her steadfast faith has been rewarded, and she will be able to continue to reap the wisdom and palliative, comforting benefits of the everyday “magic” of her departed family members.

In the novel's ending, Nelson effectively rewards Noah and Jude's beliefs in magic and the supernatural. Through a series of shocking coincidences, metaphoric changes, and indeed the fulfilment of several prophecies, Jude and Noah come to a happy end in spite of all their suffering and begin to remake their relationship, their family, and their faith in goodness.



LOVE, SEX, AND FEAR

In *I'll Give You the Sun*, feelings of love and sexual longing crop up on almost every page. As Jude and Noah come of age, they wrestle with feelings of embarrassment related to their newly minted sexualities. The adults, too, wrestle with conflicting desires and painful romances: in Noah's timeline, Dianna's relationship with Noah and Jude's dad Benjamin dissolves, while in Jude's timeline, her sculpture mentor Guillermo Garcia mourns the failure of a recent relationship. Through these nuanced looks at what love and sexuality mean to different people at different times in their lives, Nelson argues in favor of abandoning fear, embracing love in all its complicated forms, and honoring one's desires even in the face of prejudice, ridicule, or other seemingly insurmountable barriers.

Nelson uses Noah and Jude's journeys of self-discovery related to love and sex to demonstrate how fears of rejection and disappointment are not just normal but conquerable. Noah, at thirteen, is intimidated by his sexuality—he knows he is gay, but has not come out to anyone, even Jude. Noah is introverted and lonely, and his only refuge is in his art—which is often related to figuring out his feelings about men. As Noah struggles with feelings of inadequacy and shame, his friendship with Brian—a boy visiting the neighborhood for the summer—ignites feelings of love and passion inside of Noah. Noah longs to be able to express his desire for Brian but is held back by fear of rejection and ridicule. When Brian and Jude are selected to play seven minutes in heaven during Brian's going-away party at the end of the summer, Noah feels betrayed, and worries that his chances at love are gone forever—but he is elated when Brian returns that winter and almost immediately takes Noah into the woods to passionately kiss him at last. When Dianna discovers Brian and Noah masturbating together some time later, Brian panics

and breaks off the relationship, while Noah fears Dianna will tell Benjamin and strain the already-tense relationship between Noah and his father further. It is in the midst of all this chaos that Dianna gets into the fatal crash which claims her life, leaving Noah feeling more alone than ever before.

Jude, the more social of the twins, is already flirting with boys and getting attention for her looks and risqué outfits at the start of the novel. Her sexuality is a point of contention between her and Dianna—Dianna warns Jude against becoming “that girl” and making a show of herself when she goes out with friends. Almost in retaliation against her mother’s warnings, Jude pursues a relationship with an older boy, Zephyr, who persuades Jude into having sex on the beach despite Jude’s youth. Jude later discovers that while she was losing her virginity, Dianna was getting into the accident which claimed her life. After Dianna’s death, Jude adopts a “boy boycott,” cutting off all of her hair and dressing in oversized, shapeless clothing in order to stave off all male attention. She can’t deny her feelings, however, when she meets Oscar—a slightly older English boy and her mentor Guillermo Garcia’s assistant. Jude is smitten with Oscar but knows of his shadowed past as a drunk and a womanizer. She slowly begins to allow Oscar in, but when he betrays her by kissing another girl, she re-ups her boycott for good. Oscar declares his love for Jude, though, and reveals that he’s been waiting for her all his life—his own deceased mother, he says, prophesized their meeting. Jude at last agrees to give into her desires and emotions, a decision the novel praises.

The twin’s fears of love and sex derail their youths in many ways. Their shame, guilt, and self-loathing prevent them from finding happiness with those they’re drawn to, and it’s only when they make the radical commitment to abandoning their fears that they’re able to find fulfillment in the arenas of love and sex. The novel ends on a hopeful note, as Jude and Oscar decide to pursue a relationship, and Noah seeks to reconnect with and apologize to Brian after outing him years ago in a fit of rage. The characters have all decided to cast shame aside and embrace their feelings at last.

The adult characters in the novel struggle just as intensely as their younger counterparts when it comes to sex and love. Fear, betrayal, and insecurity mar their relationships and hold them back from chasing what they truly want. The complicated triangle between Dianna, Benjamin, and Guillermo is only revealed in full towards the end of the novel. Dianna began an affair with Guillermo after profiling his work for a magazine. She began to feel that they were soulmates, and asked Benjamin to move out of the house in preparation for divorcing him and following her heart to be with Guillermo. Her fears of disrupting her family’s lives, however, held her back from fully committing to Guillermo—and yet, when she chose to at last declare her desire to marry Guillermo, she was killed on her way over to make the announcement. Nelson uses Dianna’s

story as a cautionary tale just as she did with Brian and Noah’s delayed love affair—warning against the pitfalls of ignoring one’s heart.

In the wake of Dianna’s death, Guillermo struggles with grief, pain, and fear. His work stalls, and his inability to create is implied to be tied directly to his fear of moving on from the loss of Dianna—or being unable to create anything that will fill the void left by the loss of her love. As Guillermo watches Jude and Oscar tentatively navigate a relationship and sees Jude overcoming her own fears related to art-making and human connection, Guillermo’s volatile temperament softens, and his creativity is renewed. By abandoning his fears and embracing his memories of the love and strength he drew from his soulmate, Dianna—he is able to move on.

As the characters in *I’ll Give You the Sun* wrestle with love, they also must wrestle with fear: fear of rejection, fear of happiness, fear of abandoning the memories of those they have loved and lost. Ultimately, Nelson argues that the redemptive powers of love outweigh the destructive, halting powers of fear and trepidation, and shows how her characters, in their own ways, embrace their sexualities, commit radically to love, and learn to stop their anxieties from controlling their lives.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



THE INVISIBLE MUSEUM

Noah Sweetwine’s “invisible museum” represents his desire to make sense of the world around him.

The “museum” is a mental space inside his mind where he composes paintings and drawings that reflect the world around him and his reactions to its pain, joy, and drama. Noah is constantly coming up with titles for portraits and self-portraits based on the things that are happening to him in real life; for instance, when he sees his sister come home from hangouts with her new friends—and boyfriends, he imagines a portrait entitled “*Jude Braiding Boy After Boy into Her Hair.*” Noah’s “invisible” portraits are often metaphoric, invoking a mood rather than a literal image. The shy, introverted Noah is, at the start of the novel, struggling intensely with his sexuality and a lack of self-esteem; within the invisible museum, however, the world is something Noah can control and make sense of. Thus, the invisible museum becomes a symbol throughout the novel for Noah’s desire to understand and indeed participate in the world, frightening and intense as it is to him—every time Noah paints a mental picture of someone he loves, draws in charcoal something that frightens him, or arranges into abstract cubes someone he’s puzzled by, Noah is working to understand his friends, his family, himself, and the world beyond the sleepy

town of Lost Cove, California.



GRANDMA SWEETWINE'S BIBLE AND APHORISMS

Just as Noah has the invisible museum, Jude Sweetwine, too, has a coping mechanism which allows her to see the world on her own terms: her deceased grandmother's "bible" of superstition, lore, and wisdom. With advice like "To avoid serious illness, keep an onion in your pocket" and "Every picture taken of you reduces your spirit and shortens your life," Grandma Sweetwine's bible is chock-full of unique—if slightly batty—advice for getting through life. Jude's chapters are set in the "future," when she and Noah are sixteen—they have lost their mother Dianna and are struggling to navigate their teenage years while dealing with the trauma of their loss and the schism it has created between the two of them. In this way, Grandma's bible and the aphorisms contain within it become a symbol of Jude's desire to make sense of a world that has lost all logical reasoning. Her mother is dead, her twin brother has gone from introverted weirdo to hapless normie, and her own bad decisions—such as losing her virginity to an older boy, Zephyr, despite not really wanting to, and sabotaging Noah's application to the prestigious CSA—have derailed her young life. Unable to understand why things are so out of control or how she can possibly get them back track, Jude turns to Grandma Sweetwine's aphorism to make her way through the world. Even if the advice contained therein is strange and offbeat, it at least gives Jude a pattern to follow and a way of understanding things in the wake of everything logical having fallen apart.



ROCK-PAPER-SCISSORS

At the start of the novel, as Noah describes his intensely close relationship with his twin sister Jude, he notes that the two of them have such a strong emotional link that they can't even play a regular game of rock-paper-scissors—whenever they throw out the symbols, they always pick the same ones, and end up tying. The game, then, functions as a mirror of Noah and Jude's symbiotic relationship. The game of rock-paper-scissors is a kind of litmus test which signifies and symbolizes where Noah and Jude are in relation to one another, whether they're too close for comfort or at a distance which allows them, at last, to see the other clearly. Though Noah and Jude draw solace from one another, they are suffocating each other—and in many ways, the emotional schisms which tear their relationship apart during their early teenage years, painful as they are, actually save the two of them. At the end of the novel, when the two reunite emotionally after years of brushing the other off, they try a game of rock-paper-scissors and are delighted to find that they are at last able to play correctly: when Noah picks rock, Jude

picks scissors, and so on and so forth. They welcome in a "new age" in their relationship as they mutually recognize that though their bond has changed, the shifts it has undergone have allowed them to mature and spread their wings without smothering one another.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Dial Books edition of *I'll Give You the Sun* published in 2014.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☛ [Jude] scoots over so we're shoulder to shoulder. This is us. Our pose. The smush. It's even how we are in the ultrasound photo they took of us inside Mom and how I had us in the picture Fry ripped up yesterday. Unlike most everyone else on earth, from the very first cells of us, we were together, we came here together. This is why no one hardly notices that Jude does most of the talking for both of us, why we can only play piano with all four of our hands on the keyboard and not at all alone, why we can never do Rochambeau because not once in thirteen years have we chosen differently. It's always: two rocks, two papers, two scissors. When I don't draw us like this, I draw us as half-people.

The calm of the smush floods me. She breathes in and I join her. Maybe we're too old to still do this, but whatever. I can see her smiling even though I'm looking straight ahead. We exhale together, then inhale together, exhale, inhale, in and out, out and in, until not even the trees remember what happened in the woods yesterday, until Mom's and Dad's voices turn from mad to music, until we're not only one age, but one complete and whole person.

Related Characters: Noah Sweetwine (speaker), Benjamin Sweetwine / Dad, Dianna Sweetwine / Mom, Fry, Jude Sweetwine

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 17-18

Explanation and Analysis

This passage, situated in the novel's first chapter, gives some insight into the relationship dynamic between Noah and his twin sister Jude. The two of them are incredibly close—even codependent—and seek each other out in fraught moments of hardship or confusion, of which there have been a lot lately, since their parents have been fighting

more frequently. During this particular fight, Noah and Jude, in the den, jumble together into the smush, and Noah reveals that he often feels that he is not “whole” until he and Jude are together like this, attempting to silence their fears and emotions and dissolve into one entity. In many ways, Noah and Jude’s respective journeys throughout the novel are journeys away from codependency and towards independence—but those journeys, in this passage, have not yet begun.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☛☛ That’s when he started telling me I could say no and that’s when I didn’t. Then his whole body was pressing me into the hot sand, burying me in it. I kept thinking, it’s okay, I can handle this. I can. It’s okay, okay, okay. But it wasn’t and I couldn’t.

I didn’t know you could get buried in your own silence. And then it was over. And then everything was.

There’s more, but I’m not going to get into it now. Just know: I cut off three feet of blond hair and swore away boys forever because after this happened with Zephyr, my mother died. Right after. It was me. I brought the bad luck to us.

This boycott isn’t whimsy. To me, boys don’t smell like soap or shampoo or cut grass or sweat from soccer practice or suntan lotion or the ocean from hours spent in the green curl of a wave anymore, they smell like death.

Related Characters: Jude Sweetwine (speaker), Dianna Sweetwine / Mom, Zephyr

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 47-48

Explanation and Analysis

When the second chapter begins, readers are thrust forward in time. In Noah’s chapters, the twins are thirteen and fourteen, but in Jude’s chapters, they are sixteen. In this passage, Jude reflects on losing her virginity to Zephyr at the age of fourteen—though the act was not rape or assault, Jude realized that she wasn’t ready for it and became “buried in [her] own silence,” unable to speak up and stop it. Later in the narrative, Jude will reveal that after the act, as she ran home hoping to find comfort in her mother, she found that Dianna had died in a car accident. After that, Jude instituted her “boy boycott,” because she believes that her negligence of her relationship with Dianna and interest in boys who didn’t care for her well-being brought bad vibes—and bad luck—into her family. Boys literally signal death to Jude, emotionally, and she has established a

complicated doctrine based on magic and superstition in order to avoid falling prey to their charms.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☛☛ Mom says Jude acts the way she does now on account of hormones, but I know it’s on account of her hating me. She stopped going to museums with us ages ago, which is probably a good thing, because when she did, her shadow kept trying to strangle mine. I’d see it happening on the walls or on the floor. Sometimes lately, I catch her shadow creeping around my bed at night trying to pull the dreams out of my head. I have a good idea what she does instead of coming to the museum, though. Three times now, I’ve seen hickeys on her neck. Bug bites, she said. Sure. I heard while spying that she and Courtney Barrett have been riding bikes down to the boardwalk on weekends, where they see who can kiss more boys.

(Portrait: *Jude Braiding Boy After Boy into Her Hair*)

Related Characters: Noah Sweetwine (speaker), Courtney, Jude Sweetwine, Dianna Sweetwine / Mom

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Noah reflects on the changes in his relationship with his sister, Jude. In the first chapter, he and Jude were nearly inseparable—but after Dianna took an interest in honing the twins’ artistic talents to prepare them for admission to CSA (a prestigious arts high school), Jude became insecure from all the comparisons of her art to Noah’s, and has now chosen to remove herself from Mom and Noah almost entirely. As Noah struggles to understand the shifts in his sister’s interests, behaviors, and seemingly her personality, he uses the invisible museum—the collection of imaginary portraits in his head—to try and make sense of what is happening to Jude.

●● He points to my pad. “So I guess you just talk in there, is that it?”

“Pretty much,” I say. We’re under a streetlamp and I’m trying not to stare but it’s hard. I wish the world would stick like a clock so I could look at him for as long as I want. There’s something going on in his face right now, something very bright trying to get out—a dam keeping back a wall of light. His soul might be a sun. I’ve never met anyone who had the sun for a soul.

I want to say more so he doesn’t leave. I feel so good, the freaking green leafy kind of good. “I paint in my head,” I tell him. “I was the whole time.” I’ve never told anyone I do this, not even Jude, and I have no idea why I’m telling him. I’ve never let anyone into the invisible museum before.

Related Characters: Brian Connelly / The Boy from the Roof, Noah Sweetwine (speaker), Jude Sweetwine

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 70

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Noah is making a new friend—his first real friend other than Jude—and also wrestling with his attraction to the boy, whose name he does not yet know is Brian. After a quiet walk through the woods, Brian calls Noah out for being so quiet, and Noah begins describing the invisible museum. He is amazed by the fact that he’s sharing it—not even his twin knows about Noah’s secret coping mechanism—and yet feels compelled to let Brian in for reasons he can’t quite understand. Noah has been afraid of his desires—and afraid of intimacy with other people—but with Brian, all of that changes.

●● “When Castor died,” he says, “Pollux missed him too much, so he made a deal to share his immortality with him and that’s how they both ended up in the sky.”

“I’d do that,” I say. “Totally.”

“Yeah? Must be a twin thing,” he says, misunderstanding. “Though you’d never know it from that Death by Window Maneuver.” I feel my face flush because I’d meant him, duh, I’d share my immortality with him. *I meant you*, I want to holler.

Related Characters: Noah Sweetwine, Brian Connelly / The Boy from the Roof (speaker), Jude Sweetwine

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 104

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Brian and Noah, who have been cultivating their friendship for the last several weeks, find themselves up on the roof looking at the Gemini constellation—the twins. Brian is an amateur astronomer, and wants to share the stars with Noah. For weeks there has been a romantic and sexual undertone to the boys’ friendship, and yet neither has been confident enough to act on it or confess their true feelings. In this scene, as Noah realizes that his desire for codependency and total intimacy has transferred from Jude to Brian, he longs to tell the truth about what he’s feeling—but his shame and fear hold him back.

●● After a while, she picks up her fist. I do the same. “One two three,” we say at the same time.

Rock/Rock

Scissors/Scissors

Rock/Rock

Paper/Paper

Scissors/Scissors

“Yes!” she cries. “We still got it, yes we do!” She jumps to her feet. “We can watch the Animal Channel tonight. Or a movie? You can pick.”

“Okay.”

“I want to—”

“Me too,” I reply, knowing what she was going to say. I want to be us again too.

(Portrait, Self-portrait: *Brother and Sister on a Seesaw, Blindfolded*)

She smiles, touches my arm. “Don’t be sad.” She says it so warmly, it makes the air change color. “It came right through the wall last night.” This was worse when we were younger. If one cried, the other cried even if we were on different sides of Lost Cove. I didn’t think it happened anymore.

“I’m fine,” I say.

She nods. “See you tonight then if Mom and I don’t kill each other.” She gives a salute and is off.

I don’t know how this can be but it can: A painting is both exactly the same and entirely different every single time you look at it. That’s the way it is between Jude and me now.

Related Characters: Jude Sweetwine, Noah Sweetwine (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 118-119

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Noah and Jude reconnect after a summer of being mostly disconnected from one another. Noah has been hanging out with Brian every single day, and even making friends with some of Jude's friends—much to her jealousy and dismay. Jude harbors feelings of insecurity because she believes that their mother likes Noah best—and the idea that now her friends do, too, has been more than she can bear. In this scene, however, the siblings reunite and apologize to one another. As they do, their seemingly psychic connection and codependent tendencies, such as their inability to choose different answers in rock-paper-scissors and their uncanny power to sense one another's emotions despite physical differences, reemerge. Though Noah is happy on some level to reconnect with his sister, he is also feeling wary: when he describes their relationship, he points out its simultaneous volatility and stagnancy, and seems to be longing for a change in how they see one another.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☝☝ “This sculpture needs to be made so much you cry like this?”

I turn around. He's leaning against the wall by the painting of the kiss, his arms crossed.

“Yes,” I gasp out, then say more calmly, “Yes.” Is he changing his mind? The sob begins to retreat.

He's stroking his chin. His expression softens. “You need to make this sculpture so badly, you will risk your young life by sharing space with a disease-carrying cat?”

“Yes. Totally, yes. Please.”

“You are sure you want to forsake the warm, moist breath of clay for the cold, unforgiving eternity of stone.”

“I am sure.” Whatever that means.

“Come back tomorrow afternoon. Bring your portfolio and a sketchpad. And tell your brother to give you back the sun, trees, stars, all of it already. I think you need.”

Related Characters: Jude Sweetwine, Guillermo Garcia (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 173

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Jude has gone to the home and studio of “rock star” sculptor Guillermo Garcia to beg him to mentor her. Jude has an idea for a sculpture she needs to make—a sculpture of her mother—but there is no one at CSA to mentor her in stone carving. Against the advice of her advisor, who urged Jude to wait to contact Garcia until after the winter break, Jude has approached Garcia on her own, a decision that emphasizes just how important and urgent this sculpture is to Jude. Now, she begs him to take her on as a pupil—and as the hardened Garcia senses the pain and need in her request, he relents, and agrees to tutor her.

☝☝ “I've tried everything to get through to her, Guillermo. Absolutely everything. I have this weird book and I scour it for ideas nonstop. I've done it all. I've slept with her jewelry under my pillow. I've stood on the beach at midnight, holding up a picture of the two of us to a blue moon. I've written letters to her and put them in her coat pockets, in red mailboxes. I've thrown messages into storms. I recite her favorite poem to her every night before I go to bed. And all she does is break what I make. That's how angry she is.” I've started to sweat. “It would kill me if she broke this.” My lips are trembling. Covering my mouth, I add, “It's the one thing I have.”

Related Characters: Jude Sweetwine (speaker), Dianna Sweetwine / Mom, Guillermo Garcia

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 192

Explanation and Analysis

As Jude's lessons with Guillermo begin, she becomes emotional as he teaches her the basics of carving. Jude attempts, in this passage, to explain to Guillermo how desperately she wants to contact her mother—and why she believes art is the only way to do it. Jude has become obsessed with superstition, lore, and magic and attempted to use talismans and rituals to contact Dianna—but nothing appeals to Dianna's “ghost” and eases her “anger” with Jude.

Jude's conscience is anything but clear; as the novel unfolds, she will reveal several cruelties and slights, both grave and petty, she has subjected Noah and Dianna to. Jude's conscience manifests as a "ghost," which creates bad luck in her life and will not allow her to be happy—Jude is desperate to sate her mother's ghost and go back to living her life. She will learn, though, that there is more she needs to do to clear her conscience than lean to carve stone.

Chapter 5 Quotes

☛ A week after Dad's forgotten birthday, with the rain beating the crap out of the house, Mom and Dad seat Jude and me in the frozen part the living room no one ever sits in to inform us that Dad's temporarily moving down to the Lost Cove Hotel. [...] Mom tells us he'll be renting a studio apartment by the week until they can work out some issues they're having.

Even though we haven't spoken in forever, I can feel Jude's heart clenching and unclenching inside my chest with mine.

"What issues?" she asks, but after that the rain gets so loud I can't hear what anyone's saying anymore. I'm convinced the storm's going to bust down the walls. Then it does and I'm remembering Dad's dream because it's happening. I watch as the wind sweeps everything off the shelves: knickknacks, books, a vase of purple flowers. No one else notices. I grip the armrests of the chair tight.

(Family Portrait: Assume the Crash Position)

I can hear Mom's voice again. It's calm, too calm, yellow fluttering birds that don't belong in this life-bucking tempest. "We still love each other very much," she says. "We just both need some space right now." She looks at Dad. "Benjamin?"

Related Characters: Dianna Sweetwine / Mom, Jude Sweetwine, Noah Sweetwine (speaker), Benjamin Sweetwine / Dad

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 259-260

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, told from Noah's point of view, Benjamin and Dianna inform the twins that they are beginning a trial separation. The intense, unexpected emotional news inspires very different reactions in each twin—Jude becomes inquisitive and angered, while Noah, as usual, retreats into himself and attempts to use the invisible museum as a way of comprehending and processing what's going on. He draws a "family portrait" in which he, Jude, and

their parents "assume the crash position"—Noah is gearing up for all-out chaos, rage, and pain, and as the novel continues to unfold, it will become clear that his fears—or instincts—were right.

☛ [Mom] gets up, walks over to me, puts her hand under my chin, and lifts my face so I'm forced into the earnest hold of her eyes. "Listen to me. It takes a lot of courage to be true to yourself, true to your heart. You always have been very brave that way and I pray you always will be. It's your responsibility, Noah. Remember that."

Related Characters: Dianna Sweetwine / Mom, Noah Sweetwine (speaker), Brian Connelly / The Boy from the Roof

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 281

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Dianna is confronting Noah shortly after she has caught Noah and Brian masturbating together in Noah's room. Noah doesn't want to talk about Brian, or his feelings, or his fears—he attempts to shut down, wall Dianna out, and redirect the conversation to blame their family's state of disarray on Dianna's having forced Benjamin to move out. Dianna coolly accepts that Noah doesn't want to communicate, but makes one final attempt to get through to him. The speech she makes to him in this passage—about responsibility, identity, and courage—will later inspire her to make some decisions in her own life that will have painful, and even fatal, repercussions for her and her family.

Chapter 6 Quotes

☞ “This afternoon I teach you to use the power tools. With these you must be so, so careful. The chisel, like life, allows for second chances. With the saws and drills, often there is no second chance.”

I stop walking. “You believe that? About second chances? In life, I mean.” [...]

“Of course, why not? Even God, he have to make the world twice.” His hands take to the air. “He make the first world, decide it is a very terrible world he made, so he destroy with the flood. Then he try again, start it all over with—”

“With Noah,” I say, finishing his sentence.

“Yes, so if God can have two tries, why not us? Or three or three hundred tries.” He laughs under his breath. “You will see, only with the diamond blade circular saw do you have one chance.” He strokes his chin. “But even then sometimes you make a catastrophic mistake, you think I am going to kill myself because the sculpture is ruined, but in the end it come out more incredible than had you not made the mistake. This is why I love the rocks. When I sculpt with clay, it feel like cheating. It is too easy. It has no will of its own. The rocks are formidable. They stand up to you. It is a fair fight. Sometimes you win. Sometimes they win. Sometimes when they win, you win.”

Related Characters: Jude Sweetwine, Guillermo Garcia (speaker), Noah Sweetwine

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 301-302

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Guillermo teaches Jude how to use heavy, dangerous power tools to carve the rocks she hopes to make into sculptures. As the topic of second chances comes up, Jude worries that the idea of no second chances in carving translates to the fact that there are no second chances in life, but Guillermo assuages her fears. He reminds her that even God had to make the world twice—and comforts her by telling her that even if she messes up and lets the stone “win,” there is always a chance to see things from a different point of view, turn things around, and make the most of a difficult or unexpected situation. Of course, while Guillermo is talking about the biblical story of Noah and the flood, Jude is thinking of her twin brother Noah. Regardless, Guillermo’s metaphoric speech lifts Jude’s spirits and drives her to do the work she knows she has to do—both artistically and emotionally.

☞ Dad drove us to the post office to mail off the applications. We couldn’t find a parking spot so Dad and Noah waited in the car while I went in. That’s when I did it. I just did it.

I only mailed mine.

I took from my brother the thing he wanted most in the world. What kind of person does that?

Not that it matters, but I went back to the post office the next day, ran all the way there, but the garbage had been emptied. All his dreams got taken out with the trash. Mine went straight to CSA.

I kept telling myself I would tell Noah and Dad. I would tell them at breakfast, after school, at dinner, tomorrow, on Wednesday. I would tell Noah in time so he could reapply, but I didn’t. I was so ashamed—the kind that feels like suffocating—and the longer I waited, the more the shame grew and the more impossible it got to admit what I’d done. Guilt grew too, like a disease, like every disease. There weren’t enough diseases in Dad’s library. Days kept passing, then weeks, and then, it was too late. I was too scared if I confessed, I’d lose Dad and Noah forever, too cowardly to face it, to fix it, to make it right.

This is why my mother destroys everything I make. This is why she can’t forgive me.

Related Characters: Jude Sweetwine (speaker), Dianna Sweetwine / Mom, Noah Sweetwine, Benjamin Sweetwine / Dad

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 305

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Jude reveals the root of a large measure of her guilt: when charged with mailing her and Noah’s applications to CSA, she deliberately sabotaged Noah by throwing away his application. Jude feels that this is why her mother has been sabotaging her work—as a way of reminding her of how cruel her actions against Noah were, and as a way of trying to guilt her into telling the truth. For years, Jude has allowed her grief and her guilt to tear her apart—as she confronts this horrible memory now, she knows that in order to ever move on and be free of her mother’s “ghost,” she will need to make a drastic change in her life and begin repairing the wounds of the past.

“I go outside and ask [Guillermo] to teach me how to use the diamond blade circular saw. He does.

It’s time for second chances. It’s time to remake the world.

Knowing I only have one shot to get it right with this tool, I wrap the cord around my shoulder, position the circular saw between Noah’s shoulder and my own, and turn on the power. The tool roars to life. My whole body vibrates with electricity as I split the rock in two.

So that Noah and Jude becomes Noah and Jude.

“You kill them?” Guillermo says in disbelief.

“No, I saved them.”

Finally.

Related Characters: Guillermo Garcia, Jude Sweetwine (speaker), Noah Sweetwine

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 308-309

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Jude finally takes the plunge with the dangerous diamond circular saw—the only tool, according to Guillermo, that does not allow for second chances in rock carving. Jude uses the saw to cleave the sculpture she’s been painstakingly carving right in two. Guillermo, her mentor, is shocked by the act, and believes that Jude has taken such drastic action in order to “kill” the figures in the sculpture and annihilate them; Jude, though, having reflected on the intense and damaging codependency that once existed between her and Noah, and the ways in which that codependency caused them to resent one another, insists that she is “sav[ing]” the Noah and Jude in the sculpture by allowing them, at last, to separate.

“[Oscar] didn’t save my life and it doesn’t matter how high it is.” [Noah is] getting drunker by the minute, talking with two tongues now. “It’s Mom who keeps me up. It’s like I have a parachute on. Like I can practically fly.” He makes a slow swoosh with his hand through the air. “I sail all the way down so incredibly slowly. Every time.”

My mouth falls open. Yes, he does. I’ve seen it.

This is why he keeps jumping then, so Mom will break his fall?

Related Characters: Jude Sweetwine, Noah Sweetwine (speaker), Oscar Ralph / The English Guy, Dianna Sweetwine / Mom

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 322

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Oscar and Jude have just saved Noah from jumping off an incredibly high cliff and launching himself into the sea. As the drunken Noah tries to explain to Oscar and his sister what he was doing, he tells them that when he cliff-dives, he feels invincible—it is the only time his mother, he will later go on to say, forgives him or pays him any attention at all. This resonates with Jude, who believes that her mother is haunting her in a negative way by breaking her artwork—she sees now that just as she took up rock carving in order to try and communicate with Dianna, Noah has taken up cliff-diving as a means to the same desired ends.

“Okay. So once upon a time, I saw this cubist portrait my brother did of you and had to have it.” I look at him. “Had to have it. It was love at first sight.” He smiles. “He and I were always playing this game where we’d swap parts of the world for others in a quest for universe domination. He was winning. We’re . . . competitive, that’s the nice way of putting it. Anyway, he didn’t want me to have you. I had to give up almost everything. But it was worth it. I kept you here.” I show him the spot where the picture hung by my bed. “I would stare and stare at you and wish you were real and imagine you coming to that window, just like you did tonight.”

He bursts out laughing. “That’s incredible! We’re absolutely split-aparts.”

“I don’t know if I want a split-apart,” I say honestly. “I think I need my own soul.”

Related Characters: Jude Sweetwine (speaker), Noah Sweetwine, Oscar Ralph / The English Guy

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 335

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Jude explains to Oscar that she has “known” him, in a way, for years—back when she and Noah were younger, he drew a portrait of Oscar when Oscar was a model at CSA and Noah was sneaking over to the school to observe classes. In order to cover up his sneaky ritual, he told Jude he’d imagined the man in the cubist portrait—but Jude was drawn to the figure, and surrendered everything

she had in her and Noah's make-believe game of world domination in exchange for the drawing. As she tells Oscar this, Oscar marvels at the winds of fate and chance, and declares that this anecdote proves that he and Jude are "split-aparts," or a single soul in two bodies. Jude's response, though, shows how much she has grown throughout the novel—she no longer desires the self-erasure of codependency, and instead longs to find a partnership that allows her to nurture her own soul and her individuality. She has learned from her stifling relationship with Noah that sometimes being too close can actually rip people apart.

begin a new life with Guillermo. As the twins, overwhelmed by the high emotions inside the studio, run out to the street, they comfort each other in earnest for the first time in years. Both of them have, in their own ways, been denying themselves the chance to feel the full force of their grief. Here, Jude admits that she has been hiding herself away from the world and from her own feelings in an attempt to stave off the pain she knows lurks just around the corner. As she finally submits to her feelings, however, she finds that her brother is there for her—as he always has been, since the womb—and is ready to help her heal.

Chapter 8 Quotes

☝☝ I take him by the shoulders. "Noah." My voice has returned. "It wasn't your fault. It wasn't." I repeat the words until I'm sure he's heard them, believes them. "It wasn't anyone's. It just happened. This terrible thing happened to her. This terrible thing happened to us."

And then it's my turn. I'm being shoved forward, shoved right out of my skin with just how terrible—Mom ripped out of my life the very moment I needed her the most, the bottomless unconditional shielding sheltering love she had for me taken forever. I let myself feel the terrible, surrender to it finally instead of running from it, instead of telling myself it all belongs to Noah and not to me, instead of putting an index of fears and superstitions between me and it, instead of mummifying myself in layers of clothing to protect myself from it, and I'm falling forward with the force of two years of buried grief, the sorrow of ten thousand oceans finally breaking inside me—

I let it. I let my heart break.

And Noah is there, strong and sturdy, to catch me, to hold me through it, to make sure I'm safe.

Related Characters: Noah Sweetwine, Jude Sweetwine (speaker), Dianna Sweetwine / Mom

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 348

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, there has just been a large confrontation at Guillermo's studio in which Noah revealed that Dianna and Guillermo had been having an affair in the months before her death—and that when she died, Dianna was on her way to ask Benjamin for a divorce so that she could marry and

☝☝ "Let's go," Noah says, and we're running together into the woods like we used to, and I can see how he'll draw it later, with the redwoods bowing, the flowers opening like houses for us to enter, the creek following behind us in winding wending color, our feet inches above the ground.

Or maybe he'll do it like this: the forest a blur of green over our heads while we lie on our backs, playing Rochambeau.

He picks rock. I pick scissors. I pick paper. He picks scissors. He picks rock. I pick paper. We give up, happily. It's a new age. [...]

I roll on my side to face him. "So can you believe how weird I've gotten and how normal you've gotten?" "It's astounding," he says, which cracks us both up. "Except most of the time," he adds, "I feel like I'm undercover."

"Me too." I pick up a stick, start digging with it. "Or maybe a person is just made up of a lot of people," I say. "Maybe we're accumulating these new selves all the time." Hauling them in as we make choices, good and bad, as we screw up, step up, lose our minds, find our minds, fall apart, fall in love, as we grieve, grow, retreat from the world, dive into the world, as we make things, as we break things.

Related Characters: Noah Sweetwine, Jude Sweetwine (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 353-354

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Noah and Jude have come clean to one another about all the slights and acts of cruelty and violence they have enacted upon one another and their larger family—and now that the air is clear, they rejoice in their ability to reconnect and begin their relationship anew after

all these years. When the twins play rock-paper-scissors, they are able to, for the first time in their lives, have a real game—they are no longer so entwined and codependent that they are unable to separate from one another's thoughts or feelings. The sensation is both thrilling and wistful, as it signals the end of one era and the start of a new. Jude, though, rejoices in the idea that life means "accumulating these new selves all the time" and constantly evolving—and allowing the people she loves to do the same thing.

☞ "How do you feel about moving? Not out of Lost Cove but to another house. [...] A houseboat." I can't decide what's more amazing: the words coming out of Dad's mouth or the expression on his face. [...] "I think we need an adventure. The three of us together."

"You want us to live on a boat?" I ask.

"He wants us to live on an *ark*," Noah answers, awe in his voice.

"I do!" Dad laughs. "That's exactly right. I've always wanted to do this." Really? News to me. Um, who is this man? "I just did some research and you will not believe what's for sale down by the marina." He goes to his briefcase and pulls out some pictures he must've printed from the Internet.

"Oh wow," I say. This is no rowboat. It is an ark.

"An architect owned it previously," Dad tells us. "Renovated the whole thing, did all the woodwork and stained glass herself. Incredible, isn't it? Two stories, three bedrooms, two baths, great kitchen, skylights, wraparound decks on both floors. It's a floating paradise."

Noah and I must register the name of the floating paradise at the exact same moment, because we both blurt out, imitating Mom, "Embrace the mystery, Professor."

The name of this houseboat is *The Mystery*.

Related Characters: Noah Sweetwine, Jude Sweetwine, Benjamin Sweetwine / Dad (speaker), Dianna Sweetwine / Mom

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 356-357

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Benjamin Sweetwine—who has always been the disbelieving, scientific, and suspicious one in the family—finally "embrace[s] the mystery" and revels in the joys of uncanny coincidences and unlikely twists of fate, in

an act which honors his wife's memory and his children's desires to start fresh and remake their lives as a family. In suggesting they all move to a houseboat—an ark, in a pointed reference to the biblical story of Noah, which has already cropped up in the story—Benjamin is placing his faith in their ability to "remake the world" they live in and connect with one another in new, unprecedented ways. Benjamin was always dismissive of his wife and children's interest in the magical, the supernatural, and the strange, and now fully embraces the weird, wacky, mystical world his family has always wanted him to.

☞ I glance around the room, sensing Mom so much, certain this is what she wanted. She knew we each held an essential part of the story that needed to be shared. She wanted me to know she saw the sculptures and only Guillermo could tell me that. She wanted Guillermo and Dad to hear the truth from Noah. She wanted me to tell Noah about CSA and maybe I wouldn't have found the courage if I hadn't come to Guillermo, if I hadn't picked up a chisel and hammer. She wanted us in Guillermo's life, and he in ours, because we are, each one of us for the other, a key to a door that otherwise would've remained locked forever.

Related Characters: Guillermo Garcia, Jude Sweetwine (speaker), Noah Sweetwine, Dianna Sweetwine / Mom, Benjamin Sweetwine / Dad

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 367

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Jude brings Noah to Guillermo's studio to study painting with the man. As she watches her brother learn from the man he once hated—the man he once believed was responsible for his mother's death—Jude marvels at how perhaps Dianna's affair was not an act that tore their family apart, but rather one which brought them together in a new way. Jude mentally gives thanks to her mother for giving both her and Noah—as well as Guillermo and Dad—the "keys" to information, self-knowledge, and tools they might otherwise never have discovered.

●● Our connection is still so natural, though now, for me, it's tinged with guilt because of Dad. I turn back to my clay model, start caressing my mother's shoulder into shape, her upper arm. "It's like some part of me knew," I tell him, working the bend of her elbow. "I don't know what I knew, but I knew I was supposed to be here. You made me feel better too. So much better. I was so locked in."

"This is what I think," he says. "I think maybe Dianna, she break your bowls, so you come find a stone carver."

I look at him. "Yeah," I say, the back of my neck tingling. "Me too."

Because who knows? Who knows anything? Who knows who's pulling the strings? Or what is? Or how? Who knows if destiny is just how you tell yourself the story of your life? Another son might not have heard his mother's last words as a prophecy but as drug-induced gibberish, forgotten soon after. Another girl might not have told herself a love story about a drawing her brother made. Who knows if Grandma really thought the first daffodils of spring were lucky or if she just wanted to go on walks with me through the woods? Who knows if she even believed in her bible at all or if she just preferred a world where hope and creativity and faith trump reason? Who knows if there are ghosts (sorry, Grandma) or just the living, breathing memories of your loved ones inside you, speaking to you, trying to get your attention by any means necessary? Who knows where the hell Ralph is? (Sorry, Oscar.) No one knows.

So we grapple with the mysteries, each in our own way.

Related Characters: Guillermo Garcia, Jude Sweetwine

(speaker), Oscar Ralph / The English Guy, Grandma Sweetwine, Dianna Sweetwine / Mom, Benjamin Sweetwine / Dad

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 369

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, which occurs towards the end of the novel, Jude reflects on her connection with Guillermo—and with how the forces of fate, chance, and destiny conspired to bring them into each other's lives. She wonders if destiny is a "real" force or whether it is simply a collection of the choices people make in reaction to the painful and beautiful things they endure as they are shaped into who they are. Jude, who has been superstitious throughout the entire novel, now recognizes that perhaps her specific brand of superstition was misguided, born more out of fear of being unable to control the world than a desire to understand it. As she marvels at the painful, strange, but ultimately edifying events of the last several years, and the collision course which has both torn her family apart and remade it anew, she gives thanks for the chance to "grapple with the mysteries" of life and resolves to continue moving through the world this way.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

One day after school, 13-year-old Noah is being tormented by Zephyr and Fry, two neighborhood high-school bullies. The sophomores chase Noah into the woods, place him in a chokehold, and taunt him over his drawings of “naked dudes,” ignoring Noah’s explanations that he has been drawing studies of Michelangelo’s *David*. Noah is worried that if Zephyr and Fry keep flipping through his sketchpad, they will reach the drawings he did earlier of two men holding hands as they emerged from the ocean after surfing. When Zephyr and Fry reach a close-up drawing of *David*’s genitals, they explode into laughter, and Noah can swear he hears their laughs echoing through the forest.

Fry begins ripping up some of Noah’s drawings, but Zephyr tells him to stop. Noah knows that Zephyr is showing him mercy because Zephyr has a crush on his twin sister, Jude, a talented surfer who has recently begun to catch the eyes of several boys from school due to her prowess on the waves, her long blonde hair, and her quickly changing body. As Noah thinks of his sister, who is always saving him from trouble, he **imagines a portrait** of the two of them in which he looks into a mirror while Jude looks out of it.

Fry drops Noah’s sketchpad, but Zephyr then orders Fry to pick up Noah’s legs—Noah knows they are going to throw him over one of the many steep cliffs where their Northern California town, Lost Cove, meets the beach. Noah goes berserk, whirling and punching and squirming like an eel. As Noah tussles with Zephyr, Noah realizes with misery and embarrassment that he has developed an erection. Zephyr suddenly drops Noah, to Fry’s confusion. Noah, on the ground, pulls his knees to his chest to hide his erection and waits for Zephyr to begin beating him in earnest. He **imagines another self-portrait** entitled *Funeral in the Forest*.

Zephyr orders Fry to leave Noah, and the two of them grab their surfboards and head back to the beach. Fry warns Noah that they’ll get him again—when he least expects it. Noah gathers up his sketchpad and runs as fast as he can from the woods until he finds a cave to hide in. There, he pulls out his charcoal and sketchpad and blacks out several pages, filling up the rest of the notebook. He entitles the “series” *Boy Inside a Box of Darkness*.

The novel’s opening scene establishes that Noah is an outsider and a loner who values art above human connection. It also features the bullies’ misunderstanding of Noah’s fixation with Michelangelo’s David, one of the most famous nude sculptures in history, to introduce how uncomfortable Noah is both with his own sexuality and others’ perception of it.



In moments of hardship or discomfort, Noah turns to the “invisible museum” within his mind (like this imagined portrait) as a means to comfort himself, cope with his feelings, or mentally escape the situation at hand.



Noah’s embarrassing sexualized response to being in such close proximity to another male body demonstrates how starved he is for connection, even when it’s accompanied by anger, ridicule, or derision. Noah again retreats into the invisible museum in order to escape his shame.



As Noah narrowly escapes even more intense harm and humiliation, he turns to his art for comfort, escape, and as a way to process his feelings.



The next night at dinner, Noah, Jude, and their parents, Dianna and Benjamin Sweetwine, are gathered around the table. Mom announces that earlier that day, Benjamin's deceased mother, Grandma Sweetwine, "joined her for a ride in the car" and delivered a message. Noah and Jude are enraptured by their mother's story, and demand to know Grandma Sweetwine's message was. Mom dramatically tells the story as Noah and Jude's father, who doesn't believe in the supernatural, clears his throat and zones out. Noah has trouble connecting with his father—and most of all fears that his father suspects he is gay.

Dad speaks up to remind Noah and Jude to listen to their mother's story "metaphorically," but Mom ignores him and launches into a detailed, ethereal tale of Grandma Sweetwine's visitation. Noah himself wonders if Mom is just making the story up to make Jude, who misses Grandma Sweetwine terribly, feel better; at that moment, Dad speaks up again and begs for the "Reign of Ridiculous" to end. When Grandma Sweetwine moved in with the family towards the end of her life, she brought with her a leather-bound "bible" full of superstitions, lore, and tips in luck and love. Dad, a scientist, was—and is—visibly uncomfortable with his mother's influence over the family.

Mom chides Dad for his practicality and urges him to "embrace the mystery." As everyone eats their dinner, Noah feels as if the tension between his parents is turning the air around them all black. Jude speaks up and asks what Grandma Sweetwine's message was after all. Mom animatedly reveals that as she was driving past CSA, the fine arts high school in town, Grandma "swooped in" to urge her to send Noah and Jude there in two years, once they graduate from junior high. Jude is disappointed by the message, but Noah feels as if a window has flown open in his chest.

Dad reminds Mom—a professor of art and art history—that going to art school might be too focused a trajectory for the children, but Mom insists that the school is one of the best in the country. She excitedly suggests that she, Noah, and Jude start taking weekly trips to the local art museum and having "drawing contests." Noah can sense that Jude is uncomfortable with the proposal—Jude is an okay artist, but she is so "shiny and funny and normal" that she doesn't need art in the way Noah does—or, for that matter the way Mom does. Their mother, Noah believes, is a "foundling" who blew in, possibly, from outer space. She was abandoned as a baby at a church in Reno, Nevada.

This scene establishes the family dynamics between the individual members of the Sweetwine clan. Jude and Noah's whimsical nature comes directly from their mother, who encourages—against her husband's protestations—fanciful ideas in her children. Noah is insecure about his relationship with his father and in thrall to his mother, and is both intensely close to and fearful of his twin Jude.



Benjamin's rational mind and Dianna's whimsical one result in Noah and Jude feeling pulled in different directions. The two of them want to believe in magic, partly as a way of coping with loss. This theme will recur throughout the novel as greater and greater tragedies befall Noah and Jude.



Once again, in the face of an uncomfortable and painful moment, the thought of his art is the only thing that makes Noah feel better.



This passage shows that though art is an essential part of the Sweetwine family, it is really only vital to Noah and Dianna—and even creates tension between the four family members as the whimsical Dianna tries to encourage artistic greatness in both of her children.



Dad and Mom, on the brink of an argument, order “NoahandJude” to take their plates into the other room and finish eating. The two dutifully obey, holding hands as they move to the den. They hear their neighbor’s new parrot, Prophet, squawking out the only phrase he can say: “Where the hell is Ralph?” As they take their places on the couch, Jude expresses her doubts about going to CSA—“California School of the Aliens”—but her indictment of the school as a place where misfits congregate only increase Noah’s enthusiasm. Noah reminds Jude of her “flying women”—sand sculptures she’s been making down on the beach for some time—and suggests that maybe Grandma Sweetwine saw Jude’s “art” and recognized her talent.

This comforts Jude, who scoots closer to Noah so that they are shoulder-to-shoulder—this position, “the smush,” is how the two were positioned in the womb, and how they sit together when one or both of them needs to feel comforted or calmed. The two sit together in the smush, quiet and still, as sounds of their parents’ argument float through from the next room.

The following weekend, Noah and Jude are at an art museum with their mother—she won the argument, and the two of them are going to apply to CSA the following year. As they enjoy lunch in the café, Noah is unsettled—he can feel that Jude is angry with him because she thinks that his drawings are better than hers. As Noah sketches a group of nearby boys, he overhears Mom telling Jude that Grandma Sweetwine willed her “**bible**”—an encyclopedia of odd beliefs—to Jude. Jude is elated.

As Mom and Jude continue discussing Grandma Sweetwine and ghosts, Mom wonders aloud about what kind of ghost she would be. She decides she’d be “the kind of ghost that interferes with everything,” and would never let Noah and Jude “be rid” of her. Though Mom is being lighthearted, the conversation scares Noah.

Mom asks to see Noah and Jude’s sketchbooks and examine the work they did while going through the museum. Noah excitedly shoves his book into his mother’s hands, feeling Jude’s agitation increase. As Mom goes through Noah’s drawings again and again, Noah gets an excited feeling inside: he knows that his mother thinks he is talented, and for the first time, believes he can get into CSA. Noah’s happiness is interrupted by a “psychic air raid” coming off of Jude. He can tell that she is jealous of the attention he’s getting from Mom, and recalls that when Grandma Sweetwine was still alive, she warned them that there was enough jealousy between them to “ruin [their] lives ten times over.”

The fact that Benjamin and Dianna refer to Noah and Jude as one entity—“NoahandJude”—begins to show that they have difficulty providing their children with the tools to navigate their way out of the codependent relationship they have, and even create situations in which that need for codependency is heightened.



This passage shows how Noah and Jude feel nurtured by one another—but also demonstrates that they are often forced to come together in painful or stressful moments, creating a negative and desperate association with these moments of togetherness.



This passage shows the root of Jude’s burgeoning obsession with Grandma Sweetwine’s so-called bible. Feeling left out of the connection Dianna and Noah share when it comes to art and insecure about her own talents, Jude finds something new to latch onto.



This passage foreshadows the role Dianna will take on in the narrative—that of a presence which looms large in Noah and Jude’s lives even after death.



This passage shows the intense rivalry between Noah and Jude—and how much of it stems from the attention they’re getting or not getting from Dianna. They both idolize and revere her, and when one of them receives more of her attention, the other feels pain and frustration. Grandma Sweetwine’s prophecy about the power of jealousy to destroy Noah and Jude’s relationship foreshadows much of the pain and anger that will develop between them as the novel progresses.



Mom quickly closes Noah's sketchbook and hands it back to him, declaring that drawing contests are "silly" and that the three of them should, from now on, just spend their Saturdays enjoying the museums and the art inside of them. Mom compliments Noah on his drawings—but doesn't even ask to see Jude's work.

Noah reflects on a game he and Jude often play. The game is called The Drowning Game, and in it he and Jude ask one another whom they'd save first if both of their parents were drowning—and, alternately, which of them they believe their parents would save first if the situation were reversed. Noah and Jude now "both know" who their mother would "dredge out of the water first."

CHAPTER 2

Three years later, sixteen-year-old Jude is standing next to a sculpture she's made in the studio at CSA. She has spent all morning crawling around in a clover patch looking for a four-leaf clover—she read in Grandma Sweetwine's "bible" that "a person in possession of a four-leaf clover is able to thwart all sinister forces," and wanted some protection on her critique day. Today, Jude is showing her fellow classmates on the sculpture track her eighth self-portrait: an abstract, broken, glued-together blob.

As Sandy Ellis, the clay instructor at CSA, begins facilitating Jude's critique, Jude scans her classmates' faces. Noah is not among them, and she knows that he belongs here, not her. No one speaks up to offer any praise or criticism of Jude's work, and she looks quietly at her watch—Mom's old watch, which Mom was wearing when, two years ago, her car sailed off a cliff, resulting in her death.

Sandy encourages the class to offer some thoughts about "CJ's" project. Jude reveals that everyone at CSA calls her CJ—short for "Calamity Jude"—because her work has a tendency to fall apart or mysteriously take "flying leaps off the shelves." Her bad luck confounds her other classmates—but Jude knows she is being haunted by Mom.

Dianna realizes—too late—the animosity she's unwittingly creating in her children and attempts to put a stop to it. Despite her good intentions, she still overlooks Jude.



Noah and Jude are so deeply affected by their competition for their mother's affections that they have turned it into a violent and high-stakes game.



As the timeline shifts ahead, Nelson disorients her readers by creating a great contrast between where Noah's story leaves off and where Jude picks up. At the end of Noah's story, Jude was feeling desperately insecure about her artistic skills—now, she is at a prestigious art school showing off her original creations.



What's even more disorienting about this timeline is the jarring realization that Dianna is dead, and that Noah—who was bursting with talent at thirteen—does not have a place alongside Jude at CSA. Nelson is setting up mysteries she will spend the rest of the novel unraveling.



Jude's new identity comes with a new nickname—but even though she's different from who she was at thirteen, she cannot escape the fear that she's being haunted by Dianna, just as Dianna always warned.



One of Jude’s classmates—a boy named Caleb she would think was hot if she weren’t in the midst of a “boy boycott”—speaks up and says that it’s impossible to critique “CJ’s” work because it’s always mangled. Another one of Jude’s classmates piles on, calling her work unintentional and careless. Sandy leads the class into a discussion about the role of intentionality in art, as Jude hears Grandma Sweetwine’s voice whispering to her. Mom breaks Jude’s art, but Grandma Sweetwine is the “good cop” of Jude’s ghost world.

Jude has become veritably obsessed with the world of the supernatural—not only does she believe in ghosts, but she actively communicates with the spirit of her deceased grandma.



For the rest of class, Jude’s classmates continue skewering her work. Towards the end of the critique, as one of Jude’s classmates delivers the closing, the table on which *Broken Me-Blob No. 8* sits gives way, and the blob falls to the floor and shatters into pieces. As Jude resignedly sweeps up the pieces, Sandy asks her to come see him in his office after class.

Jude does seem to have a dark cloud over her head, following her around—the bad luck and “hauntings” she believes to be part of her life are things she must contend with in some form every day.



In Sandy’s office, Jude stares at a print of Michelangelo’s *David* hanging on the wall. Sandy remarks that Jude’s mother’s biography of Michelangelo was “fearless” before asking Jude to talk to him about what’s going on. Jude doesn’t say anything. Sandy warns Jude that even though she’s been going through a hard time, if she doesn’t pass a studio class, she could be expelled. He reminds her of the young artists across the country who’d give anything for her spot at CSA, but Jude already knows this—she believes that Mom’s ghost is breaking everything she makes to remind her how much Noah deserves her place.

This passage shows that Jude knows she’s a fish out of water at CSA—and carries around an enormous amount of grief and guilt every single day of her life.



Jude admits that she doesn’t belong at CSA, and actually asks Sandy to give her spot to someone else. He reminds her of the “joyful, whimsical” sand women who were part of her admissions portfolio, but Jude is confused—she didn’t send any of her sand sculptures in with her application. She made sure that no one ever saw them—but now begins to wonder whether Noah could have photographed them. She recalls how when she was admitted and Noah wasn’t, he destroyed everything he’d ever made—and he hasn’t drawn, painted or made any art since.

Jude reveals that as her artistic identity has blossomed, Noah’s has decayed. This ties in themes of identity and codependency, as well as grief and guilt, as Nelson examines the effect loss has had on the Sweetwine siblings.



Sandy urges Jude to get back to basics and focus on what she needs to say through her art. Jude insists there’s nothing she wants or needs to say, but when she looks back at the *David* poster, she is hit with a flash of inspiration. She retracts her statement and tells Sandy that there is, in fact, something she needs to make—but she needs to make it out of stone. Jude reasons that if she makes something out of stone, Mom won’t be able to break it so easily—and maybe, just maybe, she’ll be able to actually communicate with Mom’s ghost, and get the spirit to “forgive” her.

Jude is at her lowest point when she receives the flash of inspiration she needs to save her career at CSA—and possibly her sanity—by trying to communicate with the spirit rather than deny its existence.



Sandy tells Jude that if she wants to work in stone, she'll need to mentor with someone outside of school. He knows that a "master carver" lives locally, but doesn't take on students anymore. Sandy mentions that Jude's mother actually wrote about this particular carver for an art magazine, and urges Jude to look up the article. Sandy insists on trying to contact the man before Jude does—if the sculptor agrees to take Jude on, Jude can visit him after winter break. Sandy writes a name and address on a piece of paper and passes it across his desk to Jude.

Jude wanders through the foggy streets of Lost Cove towards the address where the "master carver" Guillermo Garcia's studio is, determined to ignore Sandy's advice and talk to him herself. She has spent all afternoon reading articles on the internet about Garcia and his work—he is often described as "The Rock Star of the Sculpture World." As she walks, Jude can hear Grandma Sweetwine chastising her for her appearance—Jude wears hoodies and baggy pants as part of her boy boycott, determined to ward off "suitors" through her imposing getup. Grandma Sweetwine urges Jude to stop dressing like a "rutabaga" and grow her hair back, but Jude waves her off.

Cold, anxious, and damp, Jude begins growing nervous about how to approach Guillermo Garcia. She spots a church at the end of the block, and decides to go inside to gather her thoughts and warm up. In the pews, Jude tries to focus quietly on what she should say to Garcia, but a noise startles her. A young man has knocked a candlestick off of an altar, and, in an English accent, accuses Jude of "scaring" him. The English guy prattles on and on as he lights the candle. Jude stares at him—he has a crooked smile, two different colored eyes, two scars on his face, and is "wild-looking" and "hot." Jude recalls a line from Grandma Sweetwine's **bible**, which states that "Any marked peculiarity in the face indicates a similar peculiarity of disposition."

The English guy apologizes for startling Jude in return, and explains that he was taking photographs of the church. As he points his camera at Jude, she screams out a "No"—she believes, because of Grandma's **bible**, that "every picture taken of you reduces your spirit and shortens your life." Even though the young man seems "familiar" to Jude somehow, she doesn't want to let him take her picture.

Sandy clearly believes in Jude and wants to help her. This shows that after all of her insecurity about her own abilities, Jude is actually a talented artist, and there are people who want to support her growth.



Jude, who was a blossoming social butterfly at the start of the novel, has over the last three years decided to cover herself up as much as she can—not just to ward off boys, but to hide herself away from the larger world and retreat into the one inside her head, just as Noah did in the novel's first chapter.



When confronted with something intimidating—in this case, one of the "suitors" Jude is working so hard to keep at bay—she turns to her grandmother's superstitions and aphorisms the same way Noah turned to the invisible museum when he was younger.



This passage shows that Jude's attachment to the aphorisms is staunch and intense, preventing her from growing or expanding her social circle.



The English guy says Jude’s camera shyness is a shame—he thinks she looks like an “angel” sitting in the pews, albeit one dressed in borrowed men’s clothing. Jude is mesmerized and flattered. The guy asks one more time if he can take Jude’s picture, and this time, she agrees. As he begins snapping rapid-fire photos of her, Jude can hear the guy say, under his breath, “You’re her.” Jude asks the young man what he means, but he quickly finishes shooting her, gathers up his things, and leaves.

As Jude leaves the church, she chastises herself for almost letting her guard down fully with a boy. Jude reflects on what happened the last time she did—years ago, she lost her virginity on the beach to Zephyr, a guy four years older than her. Jude was ambivalent about consenting to the act, and felt “buried in [her] own silence” during the ordeal. Right after, she found out that her mother died. For Jude, her boy boycott isn’t an act of whimsy—boys, to her, literally signal death.

Soon, Jude is standing in front of the address where Guillermo Garcia’s studio is located. Grandma Sweetwine has disappeared, and Jude is alone. She knocks at the door several times before she gets an answer. When the door finally creaks open, a large man with thick black curls and a huge beard answers the door. His hands are thick with calluses, and though Jude realizes this man must be Garcia, she refuses to believe that this man is the “rock star” of the sculpture world. He smells as if he’s been drinking and looks as if he’s been asleep for “several centuries.”

Garcia orders Jude to go away and then closes the door on her. Jude, frightened but determined, knocks again. This time, when the door swings open, the English guy from the church is standing on the other side. He seems surprised to see her, but warns her that now isn’t a good time—indeed, at that moment, Jude hears Garcia screaming in Spanish and throwing something heavy across the room. The young English guy apologizes to Jude before closing the door in her face once again.

Jude heads down to the beach to wait in the brush for Noah. He comes here often to cliff-dive—a mutual friend, Heather, texts Jude to warn her when Noah is on his way. Two years ago, Jude had to save Noah from a rip tide in the weeks after their mother died, and both of them almost lost their lives in the struggle against the waves.

Jude has a moment of weakness, and allows a boy to get close to her for the first time in a long time. She is intrigued by the almost mystical air about him, and this is perhaps one of the reasons she lets her guard down a bit.



The trauma of Jude’s loss and the unenjoyable experience of her first sexual encounter—and the fact that she wasn’t there for her family when they needed her because she was busy exploring her own sexual identity—has created a deeply negative association where sex and romance are concerned.



Jude is desperate for help with her art—and when she encounters Garcia in his drunken, haggard state, she is more than a little frightened and discouraged.



One of the recurring ideas throughout the novel is that of fated connections and destiny as a collision course—everything in the book is interconnected, and Nelson shows this through this passage.



This passage introduces readers to the fact that Noah has, since his mother’s death, become obsessed with risky and dangerous behavior. Jude’s traumas have caused her to retreat into herself—but Noah’s seem to launch him out of himself, though not exactly in a good way.



Noah and his friend Heather arrive at the beach, and Jude watches as Noah jumps from the cliff and flies through the air. She does a double take as he seems to hover just above the water's surface before breaking it. Jude and Grandma Sweetwine agree that Noah, in that moment, looks like one of his own drawings. In the years since Mom's death, Noah has dropped art and become totally normal in every way—except for the cliff diving. Noah hits the water, and Jude holds her breath as she watches for signs of distress, but moments later he is scrambling up the beach. Jude wishes she could run to Noah, grab his hand, and travel with him backwards through time.

As Jude watches nervously, Noah accomplishes an almost supernatural feat. This passage calls into question the role of magic in both Noah and Jude's present lives—and also examines the very different ways the two of them are grappling with the traumas of the last few years.



CHAPTER 3

Noah, up on the roof, uses Dad's binoculars to scan the neighborhood and make sure that Zephyr and Fry aren't waiting nearby to torment him as soon as he leaves the house. He spots them down at the beach—they're with Jude, and a group of pretty girls in bright bikinis. Jude has been hanging with this group all summer, tanning with her girlfriends and kissing boys, and though Mom tells Noah that Jude's acting differently because of her "hormones," Noah knows that Jude must hate him. Noah **imagines a portrait** of Jude, *Braiding Boy After Boy into Her Hair*.

Noah, confronted with the fact that his sister is slipping away from him—and outpacing him in life almost in retaliation for his outpacing him in art—he once again retreats into the invisible museum to try and make sense of the changing dynamic between himself and Jude.



Jude is still making her flying sand women, though, and Noah has been following her down to the beach to watch each time she goes. He even photographed her once, but was overcome with such a horrible jealousy that as soon as Jude went back up to the house he destroyed the sand woman himself instead of waiting for the tide to wash it away. Noah feels that Jude gives off light, and he gives off dark, and **imagines a portrait** of them as a "flashlight" and a "flashdark."

Even though Noah and Jude have drifted apart, the jealousy between them is still palpable and even divisive. Noah compares himself to Jude constantly, worried that she is leaving him behind.



Noah uses his binoculars to watch a pair of ripped movers bring a black piano into a house two doors down. A feeling of longing comes over Noah, but it is immediately replaced by fear and embarrassment when he spots a boy on the roof of the house the movers are going into—looking straight at him with a telescope. The boy smiles at Noah, and throws something at him—Noah, to his own surprise, catches it. It is a flat black rock. Noah wants to ask the boy what it is, but he has already turned his telescope up to the sky. Noah pockets the rock, climbs down the ladder on the side of the house, and runs down the hill towards CSA.

Again, when Noah is caught in an embarrassing moment, he retreats into art—in this case, running toward CSA—as a way to escape his feelings of shame. This passage also emphasizes how deeply embarrassed and uncomfortable Noah is with his sexuality.



Since school got out for the summer two weeks ago, Noah has been doing “recon” at CSA—peering into the studio windows to spy on student artwork, and occasionally catching a glimpse of a class in session. Today, Noah crouches underneath the window where a figure-drawing class is usually held and waits for the session to begin. He hears a crunching noise and footsteps nearby, and, after they retreat, Noah sneaks around the corner. Someone has placed a bottle of gin in a brown paper bag behind the bushes. Noah quickly returns to his own spot.

The validation Noah receives from his mother is not enough—he longs to be a real artist, and to immerse himself in a world where everyone is like him rather than one where he’s a perpetual outsider.



Noah peeps up through the window and sees that class has begun. The model this week, though, is not a woman—it is a man. The model undoes his robe and walks naked to the platform at the center of the room, where he poses for the class. Noah stops his hands from shaking and slowly begins to draw in his own notepad. When the class breaks for a few minutes, the model dons his robe and exits the classroom—a few moments later, he emerges from the building. Noah crawls around the corner and watches as the model picks up the bottle of stashed gin and begins drinking.

The world of CSA is not all happiness and creativity—this passage shows that many of the people in the world Noah imagines as a perfect utopia of art and reason are just as unhappy, or even unhappier, than he is right now.



After a few moments, the model notices Noah. He is visibly startled, and, in an English accent, asks what Noah is doing spying on him. Noah is struck nearly silent, but the English guy chattily begins asking him questions anyway. He catches a glimpse of Noah’s sketchbook and admires Noah’s talent, then promises to sneak him a stand on his next break—and keep secret the fact that Noah is spying on CSA classes—while continuing to drink. When Noah asks the model if he’s okay, the model replies that he is not.

Nelson clues her readers in to the fact that the model Noah is meeting now is the same English guy Jude will meet in a few years, furthering the idea of interconnectedness and the theme of supernatural coincidences throughout the book.



Noah watches as the English guy heads back inside, but sees the teacher meet him at the door and motion for him to go back into the hall. When the model comes back in, he dresses quickly, keeping his eyes on the floor. The teacher goes to the center of the room and announces that, as CSA has a zero-tolerance policy, the model will no longer be working with the class.

Noah witnesses a painful moment full of guilt and clearly motivated by a large measure of grief.



As Noah walks home through the woods, he spots the boy from the roof. The boy asks Noah how “class” was, and then admits that he followed Noah down to the school and spied on him while he was drawing before heading to the woods to search for meteorites. Noah is struck by the boy, who seems slightly older than him. The boy asks if Noah drew the naked model in his sketchbook, but Noah hesitates to show the boy the drawing. The boy asks Noah to help him find his way home—he’s new to the neighborhood—and Noah reluctantly agrees.

Noah is so used to being taunted for his drawings—especially for his ones of the male form—that the idea that someone else, let alone another boy, is earnestly interested in them is completely foreign to him.



When the two boys emerge from the woods and onto their street, the boy from the roof marvels at how Noah didn't speak a word the entire time. He asks Noah if he "talk[s]" only through his notebook, and Noah shyly admits that he "pretty much" does. Noah confesses that he often paints in his head—this is what he was doing, he says, on the walk through the woods. He marvels that he is letting the neighbor-boy into the "**invisible museum**"—he never lets anyone in. When the neighbor boy asks Noah what he was painting, Noah replies, "You." Worried he has said too much, Noah quickly hurries inside.

The next morning, while working on a drawing of the boy from the roof, Noah hears Jude calling him from the hall. He quickly flips the page in his sketchpad back over to the figure drawing of the English guy. Jude, wearing high heels, teeters into Noah's room. Her face is caked in makeup, and she is wearing a short, tight dress. Noah knows that his sister's habits of sneaking out, breaking curfew, and texting with boys are all the result of the fact that Mom didn't ask to look at Jude's sketchbook that first day at the museum—and because, when it was time to go home that day, Noah and Mom drove off without Jude before realizing they'd forgotten her.

Jude sits on Noah's bed and asks him who the model in the drawing is. Noah insists it's just someone he made up, but Jude calls him out for lying. Noah promises her he's not. Jude cannot stop staring at the drawing though, and asks if she can have it. Noah is shocked—Jude has never asked for a drawing before.

Noah tells Jude he'll give it to her—in exchange for the sun, stars, oceans, and trees. This is a game the two of them play—for years, they have been dividing up the world. Jude refuses to make the deal at first, but then agrees to give Noah everything in exchange for the drawing of the "imaginary" guy.

Jude asks if Noah has seen the new "freak" on the block—she means the boy from the roof. As weird as the boy is, Jude says, he can't possibly be weirder than Noah. As she drones on and on, Noah tunes her out, but eventually blurts out that the new kid is his friend. Jude asks what the boy's name is, and Noah is embarrassed that he can't answer her.

The twins' father appears in the doorway and asks if everything is okay—both of them nod. Noah reminisces about how, as a child, he was so close to his father—now, though, they are practically strangers, and Noah remembers the fracture relationship as the day when, trying to teach Noah to swim, Dad almost let him sink. Noah feels that his father doesn't think he's brave or tough, and sees him as a "broken umbrella."

The invisible museum is the place where Noah's greatest fancies lie—alongside his innermost desires. Receiving positive male attention is such a rare thing for Noah that he can't help experiencing a kind of sexual excitement at the idea of someone wanting to actually connect with the truth of who he is.



Jude is acting out and seeking attention through her appearance as a result of her feelings of insecurity about her mother's clear favoritism towards Noah. She is trying as hard as she can to differentiate herself from her brother.



Jude's attachment to this piece of art is strikingly deep, especially considering the fact that she has never been as interested in art as Noah has.



This game, though seemingly innocent, is another high-stakes competition in which Noah and Jude attempt to assert dominance over one another, just like the aforementioned Drowning Game.



Jude is cruel with Noah—she attempts to point out how uncool he is and cut him down even though she should be his fiercest ally.



Noah's insecurity about his relationship with his father is now compounded by his insecurity about his relationship with Jude. He worries that he is not enough for either of them, and that both of them see him as the freak and outcast so many others do.



Dad leaves the room, and Jude asks Noah if he wants to play Ouija board—she has found one in Grandma’s old room. Noah agrees, and Jude leads him to their grandmother’s old room where she teaches him how to use the board. Jude insists that they need to ask their questions to the board out loud so the “spirits” can hear—she goes first, and asks if someone named “M.” loves her. When Noah asks who M. is, Jude won’t tell him, and so Noah pushes the Ouija planchette towards “No.” When Noah asks his question, he wonders aloud if he’ll get into CSA next year. Over and over again, the planchette lands on “No.” When Noah asks the board if Jude will get in, the planchette goes straight to “Yes.”

That night, Noah can’t sleep. He goes up to the roof to see if the boy is up on his, but he is not. Noah pulls out his notebook and begins drawing, but soon falls asleep. He wakes up to the sound of a garage door opening—the new kid, with his bag of meteorites, emerges into the street and locks eyes with Noah as he heads into the woods. Noah feels a surge of electricity and wonders if the new kid has known that Noah has been up on the roof all along. He feels like the boy is “telepathically” trying to tell Noah to follow him; reminded of his “mind-meld[s]” with Jude, Noah decides to pursue him into the woods.

Noah finds the new kid in the woods and, though he is nervous, introduces himself. The other boy introduces himself as Brian, and says he’s fourteen. Noah, lying, says he’s fourteen as well. Brian tells Noah that he attends boarding school back east, where he is ahead by one grade level and going into his sophomore years. Noah, lying again, says he himself goes to California School of the Arts before becoming embarrassed, backpedaling, and admitting that he doesn’t really go to CSA and is not yet fourteen.

When Brian doesn’t say anything, Noah gets nervous that Brian has become “freaked out” by his strange lies, but Brian makes a joke about Noah being a mess and the two laugh together. Noah feels as if he and Brian are “made of the same air.” Brian begins collecting rocks which he believes might have pieces of meteorite in them, and offers Noah use of a spare magnifying glass. Realizing that Brian brought along the spare just for him, Noah **imagines a self-portrait** in which he is standing on his own head.

Jude’s preoccupation with the supernatural is blossoming, and she uses Grandma Sweetwine’s old tools in an attempt to make sense of her life and her future—just as Noah uses the invisible museum to make sense of the world around him.



Noah and Jude have an intense connection that often transcends explanation—and yet Noah has a sense of anxiety about how that relationship is changing. When he catches even a glimpse of that same closeness in someone else, he is determined to chase after it.



This passage shows that Noah is so nervous about ruining a new friendship or seeming uncool that he’s willing to forsake the truth of who he is to seem more likable. Luckily, he realizes that to start a relationship based on lies is a misstep, and corrects his mistake.



Noah is so excited by the prospect of a new friendship with someone as intriguing as Brian that he retreats into the invisible museum in order to fully experience his disorienting but thrilling feelings.



Hours later, Noah and Brian have not found any meteorites, but Noah is taken with Brian, whom he sees as the “coolest person ever.” He wonders aloud if Brian is a “blow-in”; going along with the joke, Brian says that though he comes from another planet, he’s been prepared well to blend in as an earthling, and even plays baseball. Noah has never felt so relaxed around another person, and as he admits to Brian his struggles with social anxiety, he feels the mood between them shift. Brian asks Noah about the **paintings he does in his head**, and wonders aloud whether Noah has drawn him yet. Noah reluctantly shows Brian a drawing he’s done of him, afraid that Brian won’t like it. Brian, though, loves it, and Noah is elated.

At that moment, Zephyr and Fry wander through the woods, and begin teasing Brian and Noah for acting “romantic” with one another. Noah wishes he had the strength to tell Zephyr and Fry to “fuck off,” but is intimidated into silence. When Zephyr and Fry continue taunting the boys and calling them “homos,” Brian calmly offers them one chance to apologize. When they refuse, Brian picks up a giant rock and whips it at the boys. He begins lobbing rock after rock at them, and Noah is mesmerized by the “machine” of Brian’s arm. As Zephyr and Fry beg Brian to stop, he urges them once more to apologize. They say they’re sorry as they try to defend themselves from the hail of rocks, and then Brian stops attacking them and tells them to “get the hell out” of the woods. The bullies flee.

Noah asks Brian if he plays pitcher in baseball, and Brian, smiling, says that he does. They pick up the rocks they’ve gathered and run through the woods together. Noah worries aloud that the bullies will find a way to get payback, but Brian says they won’t. For a moment, Noah feels invincible.

Five days later, Noah is at his desk, sketching Brian. Every day this week, the two of them have spent time in the woods together, looking for meteorites and exploring. As Noah leans back in his seat to picture Brian, Jude walks in and asks Noah about his friendship with Brian. She reveals that all of her friends talk about Brian like he’s a “baseball god.” Fry’s cousin goes to the same school as Brian, and has told Jude that back home, Brian is nicknamed “The Ax” on account of his pitching arm.

Noah is able to be his full self around Brian—something that he’s nervous to do even around Jude or his mother, the two people closest to him in the world. Noah is in fact so excited by Brian that he worries the boy is not real, or worse, transient, and will soon leave. Noah doesn’t trust happiness, having learned to fear others—especially boys and men.



Though Noah has had, it’s implied, countless run-ins with Fry and Zephyr which always end in his debasement and humiliation, Brian has no tolerance for bullies. Brian has the confidence to ignore the bullies’ homophobic taunts and retaliate with a show of force—in other words, he knows how to speak their language, when Noah has no clue how to relate to other people at all.



Brian is a mess of contradictions—a “blow-in” obsessed with meteorites and a strong athlete, an observer who also likes to be observed.



Up to this point, Noah’s friendship with—and burgeoning attraction to—Brian has been a private thing which Noah can enjoy. Now that Jude has begun hearing about Brian, though, Noah begins feeling threatened and insecure, afraid that the most exciting thing in his life will soon be taken away.



Noah attempts to shrug off Jude's questions about his relationship with Brian, but at that moment, there is a tapping at the window—Brian himself has come by to see Noah. Jude tells Noah that she wants to meet Brian, but Noah wants the opposite—secretly, he wants Jude to “fall in a hole.” Nevertheless, he opens the window for Brian, who urges Noah to come up to the roof and look at the stars with him. Jude squeezes her head through the window and greets Brian. Noah is jealous when the two exchange a couple of quick jokes—and even more so when Brian invites Jude up to the roof, too. Noah **imagines a painting** of *Jude in Her New Home in Timbuktu*. Noah elbows Jude out of the way and quickly tells Brian that she can't join them because she's busy, before slamming the window in her face.

Brian and Noah walk down the street towards Brian's house, and Brian asks why Noah was so short with Jude. Noah doesn't have the chance to answer—his neighbor's parrot begins squawking about “Ralph” again, and Brian declares that they need to find Ralph, whoever he is. Noah asks Brian about his nickname—the Ax—but Brian laughs it off with both “embarrassment and pride in his voice.” He jostles Noah's shoulder with his arm and Noah feels his skin spark—it is the first time that Brian has touched him.

Noah and Brian climb up onto the roof, and Brian readies the telescope before showing Noah a book of constellations. He points out Gemini—the Twins—and explains the stars' namesakes to Noah. When Brian explains that Pollux traded his immortality in order to share eternity in the sky with his mortal twin, Castor, Noah excitedly says he'd do the same—but secretly he means he'd do it for Brian, not for Jude.

Noah smells jasmine on the air, and remembers one of Grandma Sweetwine's superstitions: that the smell of jasmine makes people tell their secrets. He relays this bit of lore to Brian, who asks Noah to tell him one of his own secrets. Noah reveals that he spies on people, and Brian asks if Noah has ever spied on him. Noah says he hasn't. The two trade small secrets, until Noah reveals a large one: he's never kissed anybody. Noah hopes that Brian will kiss him, but the moment passes, and Brian returns to fixing the telescope.

After a few minutes, Brian calls Noah over to use the telescope, and Noah is amazed by the stars. Brian tilts the telescope towards the Twins and urges Noah to look for them, but Noah can't make them out. Brian comes up behind Noah, pressing their bodies together, and helps him find the constellation. Noah, feeling as if he is about to “burst into flames,” hurriedly tells Brian he needs to go back home.

In this passage, as Brian shows an interest in Jude—not even a sexual interest, just a polite passing one—Noah reacts violently. He does not want Jude encroaching on the one thing that's his. Just as they have had to compete all their lives for their mother's affection, Noah now worries that he'll have to compete with Jude for Brian's attention, and the thought makes him angry.



Noah is attracted to Brian, but also really looks up to him. Brian's casual confidence and sense of self-worth are totally foreign to Noah, who spends a disproportionate amount of time scrutinizing his own actions and attempting to hide himself from the world. Brian, though, seems proud of who he is.



Noah is seeking the same closeness he once found in Jude with Brian—and realizing that there are things Brian can give him that Jude cannot. His desire for an intense and codependent relationship, though, remains the same.



In a rare moment of emulating his sister, Noah turns to Grandma Sweetwine's wisdom to help further his relationship with Brian.



Noah has wanted to get closer to Brian for a while, but when they actually seem on the verge of airing out the unspoken attraction between them, Noah shies away from the intensity of the moment.



The next afternoon, as Brian and Noah emerge from their daily trek through the woods, they find a group of popular girls from Noah's school perched on a rock. One of the girls, Courtney, greets Brian with a smile, and Noah can tell that she is interested in Brian. As Brian flirts back with Courtney, Noah begins feeling upset and threatened—not just because he's jealous, but because he knows he doesn't fit in with "normal" people. As the girls bring up Brian's tiff with Fry in the woods—and his nickname, the Ax—Noah realizes helplessly that Brian isn't a blow-in, but a cool kid just as capable of blending in and making friends as Jude is.

The girls take turns trying on Brian's hat as a way of flirting with him, and Noah is confused by the strange ritual. Though the girls laugh and joke with one another, Noah doesn't understand what's funny. Growing increasingly uncomfortable, Noah says he has to "bounce," trying to use some normal teen lingo; rather than following him, Brian bids Noah goodbye, and stays behind to continue flirting with the girls.

Back in the house, Noah goes to his room and watches Brian and the girls from his window. After a few minutes, Dianna comes in and tries to engage Noah in conversation. She tells him how proud she is of his art, and how excited she is for him to apply to CSA in just six months. In spite of the compliments, Noah remains at the window. Sensing Noah's quietness, Dianna reassures him that everything will be okay before leaving the room. Noah watches as Brian, Courtney, Heather, and the other girls head towards the beach together.

The next morning, Noah overhears Dianna and Jude arguing in the hallway. They are preparing to go into the city together for a mother-daughter day. Jude wants to wear lipstick and a short skirt out with her friends, but Dianna doesn't believe the outfit—or the makeup—is appropriate. She tells Jude that she's becoming scared of how "wild" Jude is, and hardly recognizes her anymore. Jude retorts that she doesn't recognize her mother, either, and Noah, overhearing this, realizes that Dianna has in fact been a little off lately.

Noah feels he is losing control over his relationship with Brian—he was threatened by the idea that Jude might intercede, and now, confronted with the cool, popular, "normal" girls from school, Noah is afraid to recognize that perhaps Brian is not as much like him as he wanted to believe—and not interested in the intense codependency Noah longs for.



Noah would rather abandon Brian than watch him drift away. He has been forced to watch his sister become more distant and attached to her friends, and does not want to linger in the shadows while the same thing happens with the boy he has grown to love.



Noah is so obsessed with securing Brian's attentions and affections that even attention from Dianna doesn't shake him from his need.



Noah seems to be the epicenter of a swirling storm of resentment and confusion—he is forced to watch as Brian, Jude, and his mother all spin away from him in opposite directions, leaving him alone and confused.



The argument ends, and Jude comes into Noah's room. She apologizes for trying to intrude on his evening with Brian and for generally being "awful" lately, and confesses that she's getting sick of her "normal" friends. She crawls into bed with Noah and together they assume the smush position. They try playing **rock-paper-scissors**, but keep picking the same symbols. Jude is delighted that they still have their link. She asks Noah if he wants to watch a movie with her later, and they make a plan to hang out that evening before she leaves with Dianna. As Jude leaves the room, Noah considers how his relationship with Jude is like a painting—"both exactly the same and entirely different every single time you look at it."

Though this passage depicts a moment of honesty, vulnerability, and reconciliation between Noah and Jude, Nelson also uses it to point out how codependent Noah and Jude are—to an unhealthy degree—and how stagnant their relationship is.



Later that afternoon, Noah decides to return to CSA and observe the life-drawing class. He draws the model for a while, but soon grows bored, and turns to a new page where he begins sketching Brian. He is focusing so hard on the drawing that he barely even notices when Brian approaches him and stands over him, blocking the light. Noah looks up, and Brian tells Noah that he waited for him this morning. There is an awkward silence between them, and Brian tries to apologize to Noah by explaining that sometimes he feels like a lonely planet. Noah, realizing the emotion in Brian's quasi-apology, lets him off the hook.

Though Noah has been getting nervous about losing Brian to the super-popular crowd that stole Jude away, when Brian comes to him and attempts to explain the feelings of loneliness and insecurity he himself wrestles with too, Noah is quick to forgive and forget.



That night, Noah blows Jude off to hang out with Brian, and continues blowing her off each night that week. Noah even begins hanging out with Courtney, Heather, and the other girls—Brian has told them all about Noah's skillful drawings, and they all want Noah to draw pictures of them. Jude becomes jealous that Noah is stealing all of her friends, but Noah ignores her, grateful to have Brian back. As the two hang out in the woods, on Brian's roof, and on the beach with friends, Noah notices that sometimes there is an "electric fence" between them, and sometimes there is not. One evening, at a movie, Noah feels Brian's hand drifting closer and closer to his. When Brian finally squeezes Noah's palm, Noah feels as if they have both been electrocuted.

Brian eclipses everything else in Noah's life. He lets his relationship with Jude fall to the wayside, and even begins letting go of his shell whenever Brian is around now that Brian has made it clear to Noah that he will not abandon him. Still, Noah feels he can't ever get quite close enough to Brian, and senses that Brian is holding back his true feelings for Noah.



One afternoon, Noah comes home and finds a note on the kitchen table—it is from Jude to Dianna, and asks Dianna to come down to the beach to see one of Jude's sand sculptures. Noah buries the note at the bottom of the garbage can, though the act "makes [his] soul hurt."

Noah has a new friendship in his life, and shouldn't be jealous of any closeness between Jude and his mother—and yet the idea that his mother might bond with Jude over art is still more than he can bear.



Weeks later, it is the end of the summer, and there is a party at Courtney's house. It is technically her older sister's party, but she is using the evening as a kind of going-away party for Brian, who is returning to boarding school the following morning. As Noah navigates the crowds in Courtney's house, he feels as if he is in the "underworld." A drunken girl with a strange, Dracula-like accent approaches Noah and begins flirting with him; she kisses him and then walks away, and he feels shocked and confused.

Finally, Noah spots Brian: he is following Courtney up a staircase. At the top of the stairs, Noah sees Brian turn around and scan the room below; he knows that Brian is looking for him, and the feeling fills him with electricity. Courtney pulls Brian down the hall, and Noah follows the two of them upstairs. At the top of the stairs he makes a left, and in the hall encounters two guys making out. Noah, rapt, watches them for several seconds, and the sight makes him feel like crying, though he's unsure why. Suddenly, a door opens, and Heather pulls Noah into a room where all of their friends are gathered—Heather explains that they have all been waiting for him.

Brian and Jude are there—Brian is talking to Courtney, and Jude is talking to a group of guys. Jude gives Noah a withering look, and Noah gets a "bad feeling." As he and Heather settle in, Noah realizes that many of the kids in the room are talking about playing a game—seven minutes in heaven. Noah gets a nervous feeling in his stomach as Courtney picks up Brian's hat, which has been filled with slips of paper bearing the names of the guys in the room.

Noah greets Brian, and suggests the two of them leave the party. Brian, though, wants to stay. Noah's heart sinks as he worries that the game is fixed—that Courtney is about to draw Brian's name, and that Brian wants for all of this to happen so that he can make out with Courtney. Noah sits down in a chair and begins drinking a half-empty beer. Heather and Courtney flash the lights on and off and announce that the game is about to start. Heather picks from the hat. She draws Noah's name, but he is feeling woozy and nervous and barely even notices as Heather takes his hand and leads him into the closet.

This passage is thematically reminiscent of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice—the famed Greek musician who was offered the chance to retrieve his bride from the underworld after her death, but failed to do so. Noah is following Brian to this party in hopes of once and for all winning his affections and cementing their connection.



This scene plays with the idea of identity, as Noah, encountering an outward expression of the person he wants to be and the life he wants to have, imagines himself as someone else in an intense moment of longing.



Noah has rejected his sister in favor of Brian—and a whole new social life, too—and as they face each other down at the party, Noah senses the same kind of "psychic air raid" Jude once launched when she felt that her relationship with their mother was threatened.



Noah wants Brian all to himself, but something in Brian—the desire to deny who he is, the need to fit in, or the fear of being truly vulnerable after weeks of the "electric fence"—causes him to want to stay at the party and be part of the group rather than isolate himself with Noah.



Once inside, Heather tells Noah that they don't have to do anything if he doesn't want to, but he insists that he does. Heather kisses Noah, and he kisses her back halfheartedly. Once he imagines that she is Brian, though, he becomes excited, and the kiss grows more passionate. The two barely even hear the ding of the timer, and have to be dragged out of the closet, ruffled and flushed, by their friends. Noah catches sight of Brian from across the room—his face is “bricked up with fury.” Noah focuses hard on Brian's face and wishes he could tell Brian telepathically that he was imagining him the whole time. He hardly notices when the next set of names are called, and is stunned when he sees Jude take Brian by the hand and lead him into the closet.

Noah is paralyzed, and draws a self-portrait in the **invisible museum** of himself as a gutted fish. He staggers from the room and then makes his way out of the house. On the lawn, he hears a familiar, English-accented voice, and turns around to see the English guy from CSA—he is drunk. He asks Noah what his name is, and Noah replies “Picasso” before telling the English guy that he seems like he's “from a movie.” The English guy states that if his life is a movie, it's a bad one—he's been homeless for weeks now. The English guy lights a cigarette for Noah and passes it to him. Noah takes a drag and chokes on the smoke. He is embarrassed, but then realizes that the English guy is so drunk he didn't notice Noah coughing.

Noah's mind wanders and he imagines Jude and Brian locked in a passionate embrace. Upset, he tells the English guy he's going to go home. As he turns to leave, the model tells him that he once worked with a “barking maniac of a sculptor” by the name of Guillermo Garcia. He urges Noah to seek the man out and take lessons from him at his studio on Day Street rather than hiding in the bushes at CSA.

When Noah gets home, he is disturbed to realize that his camera is not where he left it. He tears the room apart looking for it before spotting it on his desk. He wonders who moved it, and starts it up. He deletes all his pictures of Jude's flying sand women, erasing his sister's talent from the world. He goes to Jude's room, pulls the drawing of the English guy down off the wall, and rips it to shreds. Then he returns to his own room and rips up all of his drawings of Brian. When he's finished, Jude still isn't home from the party. Noah crawls into bed but can't fall asleep, buzzing with hope, against all odds, that Brian will come to his window.

This passage shows how starved for Brian's love and affection Noah really is. He feels he'll never get it—and believes that imagining it, just as he imagines things in the invisible museum, is better than not having it at all. When Noah's way of self-soothing backfires, though, and inspires jealousy in Brian, Brian turns right back around and decides to get even with Noah—and the cruelty is more than Noah can bear.



Unable to face what's happening, Noah uses his old trick of retreating into the invisible museum to cope and to escape. When he meets up with the drunken CSA model again, Noah is confronted by the only person in town who seems just as miserable and haunted as he is.



Nelson continues the thread of missed—and fated—connections as she creates yet another link between Noah and Jude, though a link that's separated by many years and many acts of anger and betrayal.



Hurt, upset, confused, and angry, Noah attempts to destroy Jude's art. Because of how important art is to Noah—and because of Jude's inferiority complex concerning her own artistic practice—Noah thinks that this is the surest and cruelest way to get back at his sister for her betrayal.



CHAPTER 4

Jude sits at her computer, looking up information about Guillermo Garcia on the internet. Meanwhile, she sucks on a lemon, hoping to nip her crush on the English guy in the bud—Grandma’s **bible** dictates that “nothing curdles love in the heart like lemon on the tongue.” The ghost of Grandma Sweetwine teases Jude about her crush, but Jude is determined to keep her boy boycott “in full swing.”

Jude finds some images of Garcia’s work, and is amazed by his stone sculptures. As she stares rapturously at the pictures, her concentration is interrupted by the sound of voices and footsteps in the hall—it is Noah and his friends. Jude wishes she had shut the door to her bedroom as they walk by and peer in at her nosily. As Noah’s friends from his high school cross-country team head into his bedroom, Noah doubles back and enters Jude’s room. She is uncomfortable—Noah hardly ever visits her in her room, and just being near him makes her nervous lately. She also feels guilty, believing that it was Noah who took the pictures of her sand women and submitted them to CSA on her behalf, only to wind up at the local public school himself.

Noah asks Jude if she would be “cool” with him and his friends having a house party while their father’s away for the week. Jude can’t do anything but stare at her brother, whom she believes has undergone a “soul abduction.” She barely recognizes this version of Noah who hangs out with “dangerous gangs,” goes out with girls, and now, apparently, throws house parties. Noah asks Jude if she’s aware that she has a lemon in her mouth, and Jude realizes that Noah is just as “disturb[ed]” by her new interests and obsessions as she is by his. Before leaving her room, Noah urges her to give “that totally lame book”—meaning Grandma’s **bible**—a rest. Jude wonders if her and Noah’s personalities have “swapped bodies.”

Jude calls Noah out for finding her embarrassing, to which he pulls several beans and seeds from his pocket and shows them to Jude. Jude admits that she placed the “extremely protective” things in his pocket for good luck. She can’t believe that Noah finds her odd and embarrassing—especially since he has picked up some weird, dangerous habits as well, namely an obsession with jumping Devil’s Drop, the highest cliff in town, and a tendency to zone out and retreat into his head when he thinks no one is watching. The strangest, most private thing Noah does lately, though, is post a message to the website LostConnections, intended for Brian each and every week.

This passage shows just how intensely Jude relies on the promises within Grandma Sweetwine’s bible—she really has faith in the power of lore and superstition to turn her “real” life around.



Where Noah used to be the one intimidated by his sister’s friend and desperate to avoid them—lest they see how strange he was on the inside—the roles have been reversed, and now it is Jude who hides from company and avoids socializing. She is painfully aware of the strange switch that has taken place between her and her brother.



This passage shows that not only have Jude and Noah swapped places ideologically or emotionally, but that this swap—and the distance between the two that has grown out of it—actually frightens and upsets Jude. Because Jude has been in her brother’s social butterfly shoes before, she knows the dangers of hanging out with this crowd—and of burying one’s true self deep in order to fit in.



Though Noah is derisive of Jude’s obsession with superstition, lore, and herbal cures, he is hiding some equally bizarre obsessions of his own as a way of coping with the grief the last several years have brought.



Jude knows what was going on between Brian and Noah that fateful summer—she could see Noah’s “dreams [about Brian] outside of his body.” Now, Jude finds herself regretting that going into the closet with Brian at his going-away party wasn’t even the worst thing she ever did to Noah.

Jude tells Noah to go ahead and throw the party. Noah asks her if she’ll come, but Jude insists she doesn’t do social events. Noah points out that she used to, but Jude doesn’t answer. All she can think about is how “if Mom came back, she wouldn’t be able to pick either of [them] out of a police lineup.”

Benjamin appears in the doorway. Jude muses on how her dead parent is more present than her living one—Dad wanders the halls of their house like a ghost, hardly interacting with her or Noah and spending most of his time going on long walks to “think.” Every time Benjamin leaves the house, Jude is worried that someone will call the house with the news that “there’s been an accident.” Dianna died when she was on her way to see Dad—they’d been separated for a month, and he was living in a hotel when she left that afternoon to ask him to come home and so they could all be a family again. She never came home.

The parrot next door begins squawking about Ralph, and Benjamin, Noah, and Jude roll their eyes in unison. Jude’s dad begins asking her a question but stops and turns pale when he sees her computer screen—Jude notices that Noah has gone quiet, too. Looking back at the images of Garcia’s work, Jude remarks how “incredible” his sculptures are. Noah and Dad both make quick excuses, and leave Jude’s room.

Jude opens her bedroom window for some fresh air—she is worried about both Dad and Noah and how poorly they seem to be doing in the wake of Mom’s death. When Jude smells the salty sea air, her memories take her back to a day two years ago when she had to save Noah from a riptide—she yanks her window shut again.

A week later, Benjamin is out of town and Noah’s party is raging. Jude wants to escape the chaos of the party, and decides to head out to Guillermo Garcia’s studio to ask him, once and for all, to mentor her. As she sets off on foot down the road, she realizes that a foggy white-out is closing in on Lost Cove—still, she remains committed to reaching Garcia’s studio.

Though Jude and Noah were shown to be inseparable at the start of the novel, this passage demonstrates just how much deception has transpired between them.



Jude knows that she and her brother are becoming unrecognizable—not just to each other, but to themselves as well.



This revelation about the circumstances of Dianna’s death shows how grief, guilt, and fear have impacted the Sweetwine family. Jude’s anxiety, Noah’s recklessness, and Benjamin’s abject misery are all results of their inability to cope with the loss they have all suffered.



There is something about Garcia’s work that startles Benjamin and Noah and makes them uncomfortable—Jude assumes it is the emotional impact of the sculptures, but the novel will go on to show that much more is afoot than meets the eye.



The grief and trauma Jude—and Noah—have suffered manifests itself in smells, sights, and memories, and both seem absolutely unable to escape the atmosphere of pain which permeates, now, every aspect of their lives.



Just as Noah always chose art over making new friendships and interacting with others, Jude now does the same.



Once at Garcia's, Jude sees that the lights in the rooms at the back of the building are on. She decides to peek into the studio by climbing the fire escape, and quietly shimmies her way up. As she looks in through the window at Garcia's giant sculptures—all of which depict couples “hurling themselves at each other passionately”—she feels adrenaline flood her veins. She watches as Garcia enters the studio and moves towards a clay work-in-progress in the middle of the room. He begins talking to himself in Spanish, and Jude wonders if Garcia “has ghosts too.”

Jude is mesmerized as she watches Garcia deftly mold the clay. She recalls elements of the things she's read about him online: he comes from a long line of gravestone cutters in Colombia and began carving as a young boy, soon drawing rumors in his village that he was enchanted or even possessed. Watching him work now, Jude believes he just might be.

Jude remembers reading a line from an interview-slash-profile her mother did of Garcia for an art magazine: “He's the kind of man who walks into a room and all the walls fall down.” Jude agrees with her mother's assessment of the man. Jude watches for hours as Garcia works, and realizes that perhaps “the sculpture is making him.”

After returning home to sleep, Jude comes back to the fire escape early the next morning. Garcia is still in the studio—he hasn't changed his clothes, and Jude wonders if he's worked straight through the night. The clay sculpture appears finished, but looks very different from how it did when Jude left—it depicts a woman crawling out of a man's chest, and gives Jude an “awful” feeling. Jude watches as Garcia stares at his own sculpture and cries. Aware of intruding on an intimate, painful moment, Jude decides to leave—as she does, she sees Garcia stand up and walk over to the sculpture, arms raised as if to destroy it. She shouts “No!” and Garcia turns to the window, shock and rage on his face.

Jude attempts to jump off the bottom fire escape and nearly falls on her face—until she feels a hand reach out and grab her. It is Garcia, who has come out the front door, and Jude stutters and stumbles over her words as she thanks him for saving her. Garcia begins ranting at Jude in Spanish—she is intimidated by the man's size and rage, and begins apologizing for spying on him all night. Garcia is outraged that Jude has been watching him, but she soldiers on, and begins begging him to mentor her. She explains that she thinks Garcia might be a little bit magic, and also offers that she understands his grief—because she is grieving, too. After a long pause, the sculptor invites Jude inside for coffee.

It is clear from Garcia's passion as he works that his art is vital to him—and perhaps the only way he has of truly expressing himself. Jude—unlike Noah and Garcia—has not yet found the medium that will allow her to fully express herself, but she desperately wants to.



Jude is willing to believe in the more supernatural elements of Garcia's origin story because magic and the ethereal are not frightening to her, but exciting.



There is something else that draws Jude to Garcia—the fact that her mother once knew him. Jude, desperate to connect with the ghost of her mother, possibly sees this connection as something that will allow her to “get in touch” with Dianna sooner.



In this passage, when Jude lays eyes on Guillermo's twisted sculpture—which seems to encapsulate the feeling of losing someone, and the slow process of healing from the grief of loss—she knows that he has suffered something terrible. At the same time, the sculpture is as beautiful as it is frightening, and the idea that Garcia would destroy his own work scares Jude out of hiding.



Though Garcia is an imposing and, as Jude has seen, often unstable figure, there is something about their shared experience of a grief that large that unites them immediately. Garcia softens and allows Jude in, taking a leap of faith for what seems to be the first time in a long time.



Jude is slightly nervous as she follows Guillermo through the dark, dusty halls of his home and studio, but is once again elated and mesmerized when she enters Guillermo's kitchen and sees one of his famous stone angels in the corner. She also sees sketches on the wall and finished paintings hanging all around the room—they depict love, lust, and bodies in amorous poses. Jude is spellbound, but, seeing no ring on Guillermo's finger, wonders what has happened to him to make him so consumed by an obsession with seemingly lost or unrequited love.

Jude begins telling Guillermo about the game she and Noah played as children, in which they divided up the world. She explains that Noah wound up with the trees, the sun, the stars, and the ocean, and Guillermo asks Jude if this is why she seems so sad. Jude is surprised by how at ease she feels in Guillermo's presence—until a black cat runs through the room and into Guillermo's arms. Black cats are terrible luck according to Grandma Sweetwine's **bible**, and Guillermo jokingly tells Jude that she is "totally *loca*."

Guillermo begins cleaning up—he is covered in clay from his long night of work. Jude reluctantly plays with his "bad-luck" cat, Frida, as Guillermo washes his arms and hair in the sink. Jude becomes lost in memories of her mother, and even believes, for a moment, that she can hear her mother's voice. She whispers to her mother's ghost, letting it know that she can hear it, but soon the voice is gone.

Guillermo finishes washing up, and then takes Jude on a tour of the large studio space down the hall, where Guillermo's giant rock sculptures live. Jude remarks that they make her feel tiny, and Guillermo himself admits that they make him feel "like an ant" as well.

Guillermo and Jude sit down for coffee, and Guillermo explains that when she came to him for the first time a few days ago, he was not in a good place. He explains that he's not teaching anymore—he feels he has become indistinguishable from the stone people he carves. Jude blurts out that she feels the same—she worries her sadness and anger are calcifying her into rock. Guillermo reassures her that she'll be okay, and Jude finds herself oddly warmed and comforted by Guillermo's tenderness.

Guillermo's art intersects nearly perfectly with both Noah's and Jude's. Noah's art is often meant to work through or ruminate on his fears related to love, lust, sex, and the impossibility of human connection; Jude's clay blobs are raw, self-critical works tied to her grief and guilt. Guillermo's work encapsulates all these feelings and more, and Jude longs to learn from him.



Just as Jude is beginning to feel a real rapport and connection with Guillermo, the black cat comes along—and tests whether Jude will, in the face of real connection and the chance at transformation, cling to the superstitions that have provided comfort in a tough time or open herself up to something new and abandon her fears.



Even as Jude prepares to let go of some of her superstitions, her connection to the world of magic and the supernatural remains strong.



Though an accomplished sculptor, Guillermo still feels intimidated by the power of works he himself has created—there is clearly great emotion encapsulated in each one.



The fact that Guillermo and Jude both spend their days trying to suffuse lifeless substances with life and emotion—but are aware of the limits of such an endeavor, and know that at the end of the day cold, hard stone is still just that—bonds them together in this moment.



Guillermo goes on, explaining that all he wants is to work—he doesn't know if he'll ever teach again. Jude resignedly stands up and thanks Guillermo for his time. She begins crying as she turns to leave, though, and Guillermo asks her if the sculpture she wants to make is so necessary that it's causing her to cry. Jude explodes, gasping that she needs to make this sculpture. Guillermo asks her if she's certain; when she says she is, he instructs her to go home, rest, and come back the next afternoon with her portfolio and a sketchpad. As Jude smiles, Guillermo warns her that all of his students end up despising him.

Jude leaves Guillermo's, elated that he has agreed to take her on as a student. As she walks down the street, a motorcycle screeches past her and comes to a stop just a few feet away—when the driver takes off his helmet, Jude sees that he is the English guy from the church. Jude struggles to put her “boy blinders” on as he greets her cheerfully. Jude chides him for his reckless driving, and he cheekily responds that he has “impulse-control issues.” Jude knows that by flirting with this guy that she's getting herself in trouble—he seems “tailor-made to torture [her].”

The English guy mentions that the photos he took of Jude in the church have been developed. He asks if Jude wants to see them, but she turns and walks away rather than answering. The young man calls out to her once more—he tells her he has a spare orange, and tosses it to her. Jude is baffled—according to Grandma Sweetwine's **bible**, “If a boy gives a girl an orange, her love for him will multiply.” Jude catches the orange, but tosses it right back. The English guy hands her the orange once more. Though smitten by his good looks, she tries to give it back, but he scampers up the steps to Guillermo's. Jude places the orange in his helmet, telling herself to “snap out of it” and reminding herself how serious her boy boycott is. She wonders if she can manage to “eat every last lemon in Lost Cove by morning.”

The next afternoon, Jude lets herself into Guillermo's and heads down the hall towards the studio. She is nervous—both to show Guillermo her portfolio, and to encounter the English guy once again. She has placed various talismans to ward off love, attention, and attraction in her front and back pockets. As she wanders down the hall, she hears sensuous moaning coming from one of the rooms—she worries that she has misread things, and that Guillermo and the English guy are lovers. She considers leaving, but as the moaning settles down, she decides to enter the studio—she finds Guillermo and the English guy playing chess and eating donuts.

When Guillermo sees just how passionate Jude is about her work, she realizes that she needs art in the same way he needs it—as a way to wrestle with the demons of love and loss that seem to be torturing her.



Though Jude wants to stand strong in the face of temptation and maintain her “boy boycott,” the fact that the English guy keeps cropping up in her life and enticing her does smack a bit of destiny or fate—an idea that Jude can't resist.



Jude is still clinging to superstitious wisdom as a way of staving off any potential feelings of love and attraction that might serve to distract from the overwhelming grief she feels. Jude is afraid to let herself really connect with another person—especially romantically.



This passage shows just how afraid Jude really is of anything to do with love and sex. She does not want any part of lust or romance—and is even uncomfortable with the possibility of witnessing it in others.



The English guy tosses yet another orange at Jude, and she catches it. He takes a bite of his donut and moans—Jude realizes that the moaning she heard was just a theatrical response to the pastry. Guillermo asks Jude if she’s met Oscar—with a flush of excitement at finally learning the English guy’s name, Jude admits that she has. Oscar, though, is confused as to how Jude and Guillermo have developed a rapport—Guillermo explains that Jude won him over after spying on him from the fire escape all night, just as Oscar won him over “long ago.”

Oscar tells Jude that Guillermo saved his life once—a while ago, Guillermo found Oscar half-dead from pills and booze, sleeping in the park. Guillermo took the young man in, helped him get clean by encouraging him to go to Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, and got him into college. Realizing how much Oscar has endured in his short life, Jude wonders whether she has “pressed pause” and refused to soldier onwards in the face of her own grief. Looking at Guillermo and Oscar, Jude wishes she could be a part of the found-family they have formed together.

Jude eats a donut, and then Guillermo—addressing her as CJ—tells her it’s time to get to work. Jude asks Guillermo how he knows her “name,” and he tells her that Sandy from CSA left a message about her. Jude is about to tell Guillermo her real name, realizing that she hasn’t formally introduced herself, but decides against it—for once in her life, she doesn’t want to be known as “Dianna Sweetwine’s poor motherless daughter.”

Frida the cat climbs into Oscar’s lap, and he jokingly remarks that he has a way with women. Jude replies that she wouldn’t notice, as she’s on a “boy boycott.” Oscar, grinning, tells Jude that he accepts her “challenge.” He then stands up and begins taking off his clothes. Jude is both confused and scandalized, until Guillermo explains that Oscar is going to pose as their model today—they are not going to start with stone or clay, but rather with figure drawing. Guillermo believes that drawing is critical to sculpture.

Oscar heads down the hall to the drawing studio while Guillermo sits down and begins looking through Jude’s sketchbook. When Guillermo gets to the blobs, Jude explains that her dead mother’s ghost destroys everything she makes because she is mad at Jude. Guillermo asks if the sculpture Jude needs to make is for her mother, and Jude answers that it is.

As Jude begins entering Guillermo’s world, she realizes that this is not a space where art lives in isolation from human feelings and human relationships—Jude must consider whether she’s ready to let others in and allow them to influence her art, her feelings, and her life.



As Jude hears Oscar’s origin story, she encounters—for the first time—someone who has dealt with grief, pain, and defeat, and carved out a new life. Jude allows herself to consciously realize how her own stubborn attachment to grief is holding her back.



For so long, Jude’s identity has been tied to other people. Now, as she prepares to embark on a new adventure, she wants to carve out this space for herself, and for once not lug the emotional baggage of her loss over this particular threshold.



It is almost as if fate has conspired to force Jude to confront her increasing attraction to Oscar time and time again—perhaps the supernatural is not all in Jude’s head after all.



Guillermo wants to understand Jude’s past, present, and future both as an artist and a human in order to figure out what motivates her, what frightens her, and what excites her.



Guillermo explains that when he looks at Jude's blobs, he doesn't see any of *her* in them—he wants for Jude to channel into her work the fearless, reckless girl who climbed up the fire escape at night. Guillermo tells Jude that if she wants to work with him, she needs to promise that she will put “that girl” into the sculpture she wants to make. Jude agrees.

Guillermo explains that Jude needs to start with clay and practice rocks before she moves on to the real deal, and asks if Jude is planning on carving her mother. Jude tearfully explains that she has tried everything she can to get through to her mother, but nothing works—all her mother does is break whatever Jude makes. Jude fears that her mother will try to break the stone sculpture, too—but that if that happened, it would “kill” Jude. Guillermo places a hand on Jude's shoulder to comfort her, and reassures her that her mother will not break this sculpture. Together, they head down the hall to the room where Oscar is waiting.

In the smaller studio, Oscar disrobes while Jude experiences “penis-panic.” Guillermo instructs Jude to start drawing, and tells Oscar to change position every three minutes. As he watches Jude sketch, Guillermo urges her to draw more quickly, loosen her grip on the charcoal, and keep her eyes on the model, not the page. His criticisms become overwhelming, and he wonders aloud whether Jude has learned anything at all at CSA. He urges her to stop thinking so much, and work with her eyes rather than her brain. Jude feels embarrassed. As if reading her mind, Guillermo tells her not to worry about Oscar—to focus only on her art. He reminds her that her work means so much to her that she climbed up his fire escape in the middle of the night.

As Jude begins drawing faster and faster, starting a new drawing every ten or fifteen seconds, Guillermo urges her on, reminding her of the wisdom of famous artists like Picasso and Michelangelo who stated that they used their brains, not their eyes, to work. After a few minutes, Guillermo goes so far as to take a scarf from around his neck and use it to blindfold Jude, who keeps drawing, finally understanding.

Guillermo senses that Jude is holding back out of fear or stubbornness, and wants her to relinquish that part of herself and surrender to the truth of who she is, what she wants, and what she is capable of.



In this passage, Nelson shows how whether or not supernatural forces are indeed at work in Lost Cove, Jude's grief is so intense that it is preventing her from reaching her full potential. Guillermo wants Jude to abandon her fears of failure and have faith in her own work.



Jude is sidetracked by Oscar's good locks and naked body, but Guillermo urges her to focus on the task at hand—learning how to use her art as a conduit for the way she sees the world rather than the way the world itself actually is. This is something Noah has always been able to do, but it is a skill that Jude must painstakingly develop.



As Jude experiences her first breakthrough, she allows herself to open up and commit to her feelings—perhaps for the first time in a long time, enshrouded as she has been in grief, pain, and self-denial.



Later, Jude is in another room waiting for Guillermo to return from an errand. Oscar, now fully clothed, peeks into the room and congratulates Jude on making a breakthrough earlier. He also asks her if she ever went back to the church where they met—he left one of the developed photographs there for her, with a note on the back. He lifts his camera and takes a picture of Jude, telling her that her eyes and face are ethereal—he confesses that he stared at pictures of her for “hours” the night before. Jude is still wary of her attraction to Oscar, but admits that there is something different about him—he makes her feel “seen.”

In many ways, Jude's internal conflict over whether or not she should surrender to her feelings for Oscar mirrors her struggle in surrendering to faith in her own art—both are tied to a kind of release which Jude has been trying to avoid for years.



Oscar asks Jude if he can photograph her nude sometime—he says it’s “only fair,” since she’s drawn him naked. Jude laughs off his request, telling Oscar that he’s “bad news.” He begs her to accept his invitation to live a little “dangerously,” but Jude rebuffs him again. At the same time, though, she hears the ghost of Grandma Sweetwine urging her to get a piece of her hair into Oscar’s pocket—Jude remembers her aphorism in the **bible**, “As long as a man has a lock of your hair on his person, you will be in his heart.”

This passage shows that as Jude's ease around Oscar grows, her superstitious tendencies evolve. Grandma's spirit is urging Jude not to throw away Oscar's oranges or eat lemons to drive him away, but rather to pursue the connection in earnest.



Jude hears a pair of heels tapping on the floor in the hall—Oscar explains that someone named Sophia has arrived to pick him up. Before he goes out in the hall, though, Oscar tells Jude that he is certain he was always meant to meet her—their meeting was prophesized, he says, by his mother when she was on her deathbed. Jude is breathless.

Again, the intersection of the supernatural and the romantic continues to drive Jude's attraction to Oscar—and, apparently, Oscar's to Jude.



The girl named Sophia enters the room—she is dressed like a pinup girl and “glitters.” She kisses Oscar on the mouth, and Jude’s heart sinks. She is deeply confused. Oscar introduces Sophia and “CJ,” but falsely states that Jude goes to The Institute—a nearby university. Jude is so distracted by her jealousy towards Sophia, who is gorgeous and has a sexy Transylvanian accent, that she doesn’t bother correcting Oscar. She wonders why Oscar would tell her about the prophecy—and flirt with her so openly—if he’s involved with somebody else.

Jude is off put and even upset by the mixed messages Oscar seems to be sending her. Jude, who has shorn off her beautiful hair and hidden her body in lumpy outfits, is intimidated (and perhaps even jealous) by the sensual freedom Sophie exudes.



Oscar and Sophia leave, and Jude runs to the window to look down at the street. She sees Sophia climb onto the back of Oscar’s motorcycle, and as the two of them take off, she berates herself for being unable to be the girl who “lives dangerously.”

This passage confirms that Jude is angry with herself for being unable to embody the fearlessness and self-confidence many other girls have.



Jude explores Guillermo's home, pressing against a door that's been left ajar and entering a study that looks as if it has been hit by a cyclone. Books, papers, and notepads are everywhere, and there are ashtrays full of cigarettes along with empty bottles of liquor. In the center of the room, on the floor, is a face-down stone angel. Jude recognizes that Guillermo has, at some point recently, trashed the room in an expression of his rage and grief.

Jude picks through the papers, finding consignment forms from galleries, proposals, and press releases from past shows. She looks through a small pad of sketches and notes written in Spanish—unable to understand any of it, she picks up another notebook and flips until she finds something written in English. She discovers a steamy yet melancholy love letter addressed to someone called "Dearest." The letter is unfinished, and Jude thinks of a piece of Grandma Sweetwine's wisdom from the **bible**: "If a man doesn't give his beloved the letter he writes, his love is true."

Jude hears the front door creak open, and knows she needs to get out of the room. She hears footsteps outside the study door, and smells smoke—she realizes that Guillermo must be having a cigarette just outside the room. She waits quietly in the dim room, staring at the art books scattered on the floor, until she spots one of her mother's. She quietly opens it to the title page, where she sees that her mother has signed the book for Guillermo. In the inscription, she thanks Guillermo for the "tremendous honor" of interviewing him. Jude, moved, stuffs the book inside her sweatshirt—along with one of Guillermo's notebooks—as she hears Guillermo calling for "CJ." She hears his footsteps retreating, and quickly scampers across the hall to the smaller studio, where she hides the books in her portfolio case.

Jude goes into the larger studio to find Guillermo, who asks her if she's ready for her life to change before allowing her to choose a practice rock and begin learning how to carve. He instructs Jude to be bold, wear protective gear, and let the rock tell her what is inside "directly." After hours and hours of practice carving, Jude returns home with aching muscles and bruised thumbs. She finds Oscar's oranges in her bag while unpacking it—remembering Sophia, she takes the oranges to the kitchen and turns them into juice.

As Jude comes face-to-face with yet another reminder of the intense grief Guillermo has recently had to endure, she is both frightened and intrigued, recognizing him as a kindred spirit.



Love, grief, intimacy, and magic continue to remain entwined in Jude's mind as she combs through Guillermo's old notebooks.



Though Jude is afraid of intimacy and raw emotion in her own life, she is mesmerized by it in the words and actions of others. She wants to possess Guillermo's notebooks so that she can understand the passion within them—and wants to take her mother's book with its personalized inscription as a way of collecting every last scattered "piece" of Dianna she can find.



Though Jude has made some breakthroughs today in terms of her art practice, she has faced some setbacks when it comes to love and emotional intimacy. Though all of these feelings are bound up and intertwined within Jude's mind, success in one arena does not guarantee happiness in the other.



When Jude returns to her bedroom, she finds Noah there, sifting through her sketchpad. She confronts him and asks him what he's doing going through her stuff, but Noah nervously states that he was just interested in seeing what Jude was working on. Jude is reluctant to talk to Noah about anything she's doing over at Guillermo's, not wanting to be vulnerable with him and discuss her art.

Jude says only that she's planning on working on a sculpture of their mother in marble or granite, but Noah is barely listening anyway—his phone buzzes in his pocket, and he picks up the phone and starts talking to one of his friends. He turns around and leaves the room. Jude goes to the door and watches as he walks down the hall—halfway to his room, Noah abruptly stops talking and puts the phone in his pocket. Jude realizes that he faked the call just to get away from her, and worries that their relationship will never be repaired.

Jude arrives at Guillermo's the next morning to find a note taped to the door—*Be back soon*, it says. Jude heads down the hallway, where Grandma Sweetwine's ghost is waiting for her in the large "mailroom" space. Grandma's ghost encourages her to give Oscar a chance, but Jude retorts that Oscar is bad news—and already has a girlfriend to boot. Grandma warns Jude not to judge Oscar so quickly. Jude remembers the very last passage written in Grandma's **bible**: "A broken heart is an open heart."

Grandma and Jude stare together at Guillermo's wall mural of the entwined lovers, and Jude wonders aloud what it must be like to get kissed so passionately. Grandma Sweetwine doesn't answer though—Oscar does. He appears behind Jude and says he'd be "happy to show [her,]" if only she'd abandon her boy boycott. Jude, embarrassed, worries that she looks "crazy" to Oscar, having been "chattering away" to the ghost of Grandma just moments earlier. Oscar seems more amused than off-put, though, and asks "CJ" who she was talking to. She admits that she was talking to the ghost of her grandmother, defensively adding that a large percentage of the population sees ghosts.

Becoming sincere, Oscar tells Jude that he's sorry for her losses—of both her mother and her grandmother. He then reassures Jude that he didn't hear very much of what she was saying—he was asleep in his room and heard her voice, but wasn't spying on her "conversation." Jude can't help feeling deeply attracted to Oscar, and wishes she could go over and kiss him—but then she remembers Sophia. She angrily asks him why he's flirting with her when he has a girlfriend, but Oscar claims he doesn't have a girlfriend—Sophia is his ex, he explains, and the two of them have remained friends throughout the years.

Just as Noah always hid the "invisible museum" from everyone else, Jude now feels a protectiveness over her own work—and, perhaps, about the new "family" she longs to become a part of.



This passage shows that Noah is not uninterested in what Jude is doing—but perhaps rather emotionally incapable of handling the idea that his sister is going off to make art with a famous sculptor, while Noah's artistic dreams have been mysteriously but decisively dashed.



Despite all of her lore and superstition concerning ways to ward off affection or unwanted advances, the ghost of Grandma Sweetwine seems to want Jude to connect with Oscar—and to see her "broken heart" not as a deficiency but as a strength.



This passage demonstrates the genuine interest Oscar has in Jude. Even when he catches her in a vulnerable moment, he doesn't taunt her—he seems curious about her relationship to the world of the supernatural and charmed by her feelings of wonder and curiosity about the world of love and sex.



This novel is full of coincidences of fate, chance, and destiny—as well as a slew of misunderstandings and miscommunications. When Oscar clears up Jude's misconception about his relationship with Sophia, a part of Jude's faith in the power of destiny is restored.



Oscar thanks Jude for calling him out on his devilish and flirtatious nature—he confesses that deep down it’s all an act. Oscar tells Jude that he is just as anxious and superstitious as she is, and that he too is haunted by ghosts—he misses his dead mother, and often carries talismans and takes naps at strange hours hoping to meet her ghost or see her in his dreams. As Jude looks at Oscar lovingly, he cracks a smile and tells her that Guillermo has recently warned him that he will “castrate” Oscar if he gets too close to Jude. Oscar admits that he doesn’t want to ruin things with Jude or Guillermo—he values Jude’s friendship, and can tell that she’s had a calming effect on Guillermo as well. Oscar holds out his hand for a handshake, and promises Jude that the two of them will remain platonic friends.

Jude shakes Oscar’s hand and declares the deal done. At the same time, as their hands are clasped, she prays for him to kiss her. Oscar lets go of her hand and turns to leave, but Jude asks him to stay and continue their conversation. As they exchange banter and laughter, Jude thinks of one of Grandma’s aphorisms from the **bible**: “Meeting your soul mate is like walking into a house you’ve been in before [...] You could find your way around in the dark if you had to.”

Jude asks Oscar why he puts on a front—Oscar asks Jude the same question back. Jude says only that she’s done “terrible things,” and Oscar admits that he has, too. He admits to passing out drunk while he was supposed to be caring for his cancer-stricken mother, and warns Jude that’s “just a starter anecdote.”

Oscar attempts to lighten the mood by asking Jude if she likes him better when he’s “full of it,” but Jude insists she wants to get to know “all” of him. Oscar tells Jude that he has to go get ready for his shift at a local café. Before he leaves the room, Jude asks what Oscar meant when he said Jude was “her” that first day they met in church, but he leaves without answering. Jude comes up with a piece of “**scripture**” of her own on the fly, and thinks that if she puts the “most passionate love note ever written” in Oscar’s jacket pocket, she will win his heart. Remembering that she has Guillermo’s “Dearest” letter in her pocket, she calls Oscar back into the room under the pretense of brushing some dirt off his jacket—she slips the note into his pocket and then bids him goodbye.

As Jude waits for Guillermo to return from his errand so that she can start carving, she feels as if, through her conversation with Oscar, something has loosened inside of her. She stares and stares at her practice rock, begging it to tell her what’s inside, and then receives a flash of inspiration—the sculpture she needs to make is not of her mother after all.

In this passage, Oscar truly levels with Jude for the first time in the novel. He confesses that for him, grief, magic, and love are also inextricably intertwined, and implies that he uses flirtation and sexual attention to distract himself from the overwhelming grief and guilt he feels every day.



Despite the agreement she and Oscar have just made, Jude cannot help but feel intensely attracted to him—and cannot shake the suspicion that there is more to their connection than just physical attraction.



In this passage, Jude realizes that she and Oscar are both people imprisoned by intense feelings of grief and guilt over their past actions.



In this passage, Jude—perhaps spurred by the realization that she and Oscar have both suffered intensely—decides to take an action which she hopes will bring her closer to Oscar. She is beginning to see the real him, and as she experiments with emotional vulnerability, she realizes that perhaps surrendering to another person is not as terrifying as it once seemed.



Jude receives a flash of inspiration related to her art directly on the heels of an intense emotional conversation. Jude is learning that to be vulnerable in her art, she must be vulnerable in life, and open herself up to new experiences and new feelings.



When Guillermo returns, he and Jude begin their daily carving lesson. Jude attempts to throw herself into the lesson to distract herself from the embarrassment of having slipped Oscar a love note—but can't help asking Guillermo a few questions about the guy throughout their session. She learns that Oscar is nineteen and a freshman at the local university—though he has a dorm room, he often stays over at Guillermo's. After several such questions, Guillermo puts his hand under Jude's chin and tells her that though he loves Oscar, if he had a daughter of his own, he would keep her "in another state" from Oscar. He warns Jude that Oscar is young, dumb, and careless, and does not have the right ideas about love yet. Jude promises Guillermo that she will do everything she can to nix her crush on Oscar.

Even though Jude has begun to feel excited about the prospect of connecting more deeply with Oscar, in this passage, Guillermo warns her that perhaps Oscar isn't prepared to give Jude the kind of emotional support she needs. This idea frightens her all over again—but perhaps doesn't scare her off entirely.



Guillermo gives Jude a bag of clay and tells her to make a small-scale rendering of what she wants her stone carving to look like. Jude begins molding a pair of "round bubble bodies, shoulder to shoulder"—as she works on the new "Noah and Jude" sculpture, she forgets about everything but Noah. After reviewing the model, Guillermo helps Jude make some markings on her practice rock, and soon she is placing hammer to chisel and carving into the stone.

Jude has realized that trying to connect with her dead mother and repair a relationship that no longer exists is futile. The real relationship that needs saving is hers and Noah's—and Jude believes that her art will allow her a way to do so.



As Jude hammers into the stone, she remembers a day not long after their mother died—the day Noah almost drowned after jumping off a cliff into the sea. Jude ran into the riptide after him and pulled him to shore where she beat his chest until he coughed up water and began breathing again. Noah promised Jude he hadn't been trying to kill himself—but Jude didn't, and still doesn't, believe him. In the moments that Noah was on the beach, not breathing, it was the first time since the womb that Noah hadn't been "with" Jude. This memory fuels her rage and pain as she chisels at her practice rock, finally working by feeling rather than seeing. Part of her hopes that in freeing herself and Noah from the stone, she can free them in real life from their pain and fury with one another.

Jude and Noah have gotten away from the intense codependency and overlap of identity that defined their youth—but they have swung so far in the opposite direction that they have lost one another entirely. The day Noah stopped breathing was definitive proof of how far apart he and Jude had drifted, and now, Jude is determined to stop them from losing any more of one another before it's too late.



An exhausted Jude heads back inside from the outdoor work area to find Guillermo, cursing in Spanish, pummeling a clay sculpture of a man. Guillermo finishes, then stands up to look at his ruined piece. He catches a glimpse of Jude, and motions for her to get out of his studio. Jude worries that she is not up to the task of truly putting herself into her art.

Jude wants for her artistic practice to be intense, cleansing, and revelatory—but when she sees Guillermo literally wrestling with his work, she realizes that intensity in art can be destructive and painful.



Jude wanders into the loft where Oscar sleeps. She inspects his room and lies down on his bed, breathing in his scent. On Oscar's bedside table is a picture of a woman whom Jude realizes must be Oscar's mother—she tenderly asks the picture to "forgive him already." Unlike Jude's own dead relatives, Oscar's mother doesn't answer.

Jude wants to know everything about Oscar, and ventures into his room as a way of discovering more about him and attempting to understand the things he won't share.



Jude begins rifling through Oscar's books and papers, and find an essay he wrote for an art history class—a class Dianna once taught. Jude realizes that if Dianna had lived, Oscar would probably be her student right now. As Jude stares at Oscar's name on the paper and sees his surname for the first time—Ralph—she thinks of her neighbor's parrot, always squawking after a mysterious Ralph, and wonders if destiny or a "miracle" has played a part in her meeting Oscar.

This passage highlights several more of the novel's twisting, dizzying ribbons of fate and destiny, and Jude finds her faith in magic and the supernatural fortified.



Finally, Jude lifts Oscar's jacket off of a hanger and puts it on. The note to "Dearest" is not in the pocket anymore, and Jude's stomach drops as she thinks of Oscar reading it. As Jude wraps herself in the jacket she looks down at Oscar's desk, and sees it is covered in photographs of her from church. Sticky notes affixed to the pictures reveal, in Oscar's handwriting, the prophecy his mother made—she told Oscar that he would meet the love of his life in a church. As Jude studies the photographs, she sees herself through Oscar's eyes—she is radiant and mysterious. One sticky note reads "I don't want to be just friends," and Jude realizes that she doesn't either.

Jude has, for so long, only been able to see herself through other's eyes in a negative light. She sensed her mother's judgement, her brother's derision, and her father's confusion—now, seeing herself through Oscar's eyes, she encounters someone who views her not with any negative emotions but with reverence and even idolatry.



At that moment, Jude hears footsteps climbing the stairs—and two voices. Oscar is talking with a girl—a new girl, not Sophia. Jude, panicking, quickly hides in the closet and listens as the two enter the room. When Oscar's date asks about the photographs splayed all over the desk—and who the girl within them is—Oscar assures her that the photos are of "nobody," and are just part of a school project. Jude watches through the slats of the closet as Oscar and the girl, whom Oscar keeps calling Brooke, begin kissing on the bed. Deciding she can't stay any longer, Jude pushes open the closet door, and Oscar and Brooke freeze. Oscar is stunned and Brooke is angry. Jude flees with Oscar's jacket still on. As she runs from the room, she hears him telling her to "check the other pockets."

As Jude overhears Oscar diminishing their relationship in order to win over a new girl, she is hurt beyond words. She opened herself up to Oscar—and witnessed him opening up to her—and now feels that that has all been made irrelevant by the cavalier way he dismisses the clearly reverent photos of her in front of someone else.



Outside, Jude feels around Oscar's jacket until she finds a picture tucked into the lining—a picture of her. Jude is unable to reconcile the fact that Oscar carries around a photograph of her like a totem while making out with random girls and calling Jude a "nobody." Jude, angry with herself, begins walking home. She is barely a block from Guillermo's when she hears footsteps behind her. Believing they are Oscar's, she turns around to confront him, but finds herself face-to-face with a "petrified"-looking Noah instead.

The mystery intensifies and the circumstances of connection and coincidence are heightened as Jude realizes that Noah has followed her to Guillermo's—and seems desperate to share something with her.



CHAPTER 5

It is the day after Brian has left for boarding school. Noah sneaks into Jude's room while she's in the shower and sees a chat pulled up on her computer—she is flirting with someone with the username "Spaceboy," whom Noah assumes is Brian. Noah is filled with jealousy, sadness, and rage at both Jude and Brian. Over the next several weeks, Noah enacts small acts of mischief and sabotage against his sister while secretly pining, in spite of it all, for Brian.

Noah is so hurt and angry about Jude's perceived betrayal that he begins intentionally eroding and undermining his relationship with his sister.



Weeks later, Noah is in his room when he hears his father answer the front door, and then senses a girl's voice—he realizes it is Heather, whom he hasn't spoken to since the night of the party. Noah leaps out the window and runs down the street, through the woods, and all the way to CSA. Summer classes are over and the campus is deserted, save for a few cool art kids. Seeing them, Noah is struck by inspiration, and decides to search for the sculptor's studio the English guy mentioned to him at the party.

Noah is so afraid to confront the mistakes of his recent path—and the truth of his sexuality, or the possibility that someone else could learn it—that he flees home.



After navigating through Lost Cove, Noah finds himself in front of a large warehouse space. As he stands on the street he is assaulted by memories of Brian—but tries to remind himself that what truly matters are the worlds he can make through his art, not the awful world he lives in. Noah decides to hop the fence outside the building and climb up the warehouse fire escape. In the warehouse yard, Noah encounters three enormous stone "monsters" in the shape of men.

In this passage, Noah once again takes refuge in art, uplifting the worlds he creates through his art as more "real" and meaningful than the world outside the confines of his mind.



A large, dark-haired man walks out of the building, speaking into his phone. As he laughs at something the person on the other end says, he throws his head back, appearing to Noah to be supremely happy. Before he hangs up, he whispers "Hurry, my love" into the phone and actually kisses it. Noah observes as the man leads a class of art students in a carving lesson. As Noah watches him talk to his students, Noah wishes he could "live on this man's shoulder like a parrot." When the man is finished with his carving students, Noah watches him go inside and begin instructing a group of drawing students. As Noah watches him sketch, he worries, for the first time, that he really might not get into CSA. Noah stumbles down the fire escape, having witnessed everything he wants to be—and everything he isn't.

Nelson has, through Jude's chapters, shown her readers a version of Guillermo who is haunted by grief and views art as a way of pummeling himself into submission—here, though, is a version of Guillermo who is deeply in love, who delights in art and his role as an art teacher, and who wants for his students to share in the joy he feels.



As Noah walks down the street, beating himself up for thinking he could ever get into CSA, he spots a familiar car—his mother’s. He checks the license plate to determine that it’s really her, and notices that she is hunched over the passenger seat. Noah approaches the car and raps on the window—but Dianna does not seem surprised to see him. She tells Noah that she dropped something on the floor of the car. Noah asks her what she dropped and she tells him it was an earring—but she is wearing both earrings. Noah, sensing that his mother is lying, decides to stop asking questions. Dianna tells Noah to get into the car, and though he is deeply weirded out, he gets inside.

On the drive home, Dianna tells Noah that there’s a dry-cleaner she likes on Day Street, and comes all the way out here to use them. She asks Noah what he’s doing so far from home, and he tells her that he simply went for a walk. Dianna’s phone buzzes in her lap and she silences the call, telling Noah that it’s work. Noah wants to believe his mother, but can see that she’s sweating profusely. He begins realizing that she followed him to Day Street—until, once back in their neighborhood, she parks her car in the wrong driveway. Embarrassed when Noah points out her mistake, Dianna restarts the car and drives towards home. Noah realizes then that something is not right. He tries to talk to his mother, but before he can get a word in, she says: “Everything’s going to work out.”

As the months go by, heavy rain falls nearly nonstop on Lost Cove. By November, the Sweetwine family’s roof is leaking. Despite the dreary atmosphere in town, there is one person, Noah notices, on whom it doesn’t seem to be raining—Dianna. Noah frequently catches his mother out on the deck smoking and talking on the phone—inside the house, she hums and wears jangly jewelry, two more activities that seem odd. Dianna often zones out, and when Noah calls her, he often has to say her name a few times to get her attention. He worries that his mother—a “blow-in”—is about to blow away.

Since the summer, Noah has grown three inches. Jude has maintained her online communication with “Spaceboy” and become obsessed with surfing. There is a great deal of animosity between Noah and Jude, and one evening, as he comes in from school, he kicks over a bucket of dirty rainwater onto Jude’s carpet. When Noah enters his own bedroom, he is surprised to find his dad inside, sitting on the bed. Benjamin asks Noah if he wants to go to a father-son dinner—Noah is bewildered but thrilled to finally have some one-on-one time with his dad.

This passage shows that there is something strange going on with Dianna. She is hiding something from Noah—and because their relationship has always been predicated on closeness and openness, he is deeply disturbed by the idea that perhaps they’re not as close as he has always believed.



Just when Noah thinks that he has found the source of his mother’s shame and nervousness, it becomes apparent to him that there is indeed something much deeper going on with her. Noah is not just disturbed but genuinely frightened as he witnesses his mother’s strange, erratic behavior and realizes that she is just as in need of assurance that “everything [will] work out” as he himself is.



Noah is now closely attuned to his mother’s increasingly strange behavior. She’s not frightened, nervous, or upset, though, as she was the day she found him on Day Street—she seems to be in a state of bliss, and drifting further and further away from her family with each passing day.



As Noah’s relationships with his mother and sister steadily deteriorate, his relationship with Benjamin—which has always been strained, cagey, and defined by Noah’s fear of not being “enough” for his father, may be beginning to blossom.



The two go out to a nice restaurant on the water and eat an extravagant meal. As they eat their steaks, Benjamin asks Noah a ton of questions about his art, and Noah is grateful to realize, at last, that his father is indeed proud of him. Benjamin reminisces about when the two of them used to watch nature programs together, when Noah was very young—Noah is horrified to not be able to remember these moments at all.

As the two of them pull into the driveway back at the house, they see that Dianna’s car is not there. Benjamin tells Noah about a dream he had in which Dianna was walking through the house, pulling frames, tchotchkes, and shelves off of the walls. He then asks Noah if Noah is “still” dating Heather. Noah, wanting to continue impressing his father, says that Heather is still his girlfriend. As Benjamin proudly cuffs Noah on the shoulder, he feels both embarrassed and proud.

Back in the house, Noah goes into his bedroom—where Jude has kicked a bucket of water onto his carpet in retaliation—and sees the date and the time on the clock on his desk. He realizes that today was his father’s birthday, and everyone forgot. Noah quickly draws a portrait of him and his father together on the back of a wildebeest and brings it into the living room, where he presents it to Benjamin. Noah sits together with his father on the sofa, and together they watch a football game on TV. Noah feels the lie about Heather sitting in his stomach like a stone, but ignores it, grateful to be able to share some closeness with his dad at last.

A week later, Dianna and Benjamin sit Noah and Jude down and explain that Benjamin is going to temporarily move into a studio apartment so that the two of them can “work out some issues.” They explain to the children that while they love each other still, they need some space. Noah feels as if their family’s house is crashing to the ground, just like in Dad’s dream. Jude announces that she wants to go live with Dad, and Noah echoes her—Benjamin, though, protests, and insists they stay at home with their mother. The arrangement, he reminds them, is only temporary. Jude storms out of the room angrily, but Noah collapses into Dianna’s arms. She tells him, once more, that everything is going to be okay.

Later that evening, Jude and Noah stand at the window, shoulder to shoulder, and watch their father load a single suitcase into the car. The suitcase looks empty, but Jude tells Noah that she peeked, and there is one thing inside of it—the drawing Noah made on Dad’s birthday.

Noah realizes that he has been so avoidant of Benjamin due to his own fears and insecurities that he has effectively warped what was once a strong and tender relationship.



As Benjamin and Dianna’s marriage falls apart, Benjamin seems to be searching for some confirmation that Noah has someone in his life—Noah, too afraid to tell the truth about his sexuality, lets his father keep on thinking that he and Heather are in a relationship.



Noah realizes how his, Jude’s, and Dianna’s neglect of Benjamin’s feelings has weighed on the man over the years. He has been made to feel like an outcast in his own family—even though Noah always felt that he, mom, and Jude were the “weird” ones, he now sees how their alliance has impacted Benjamin.



Noah and Jude respond to the news of the breakdown of their parents’ marriage with sadness and anger. This, they believe, is the greatest grief they will know—but even more trauma and turbulence is on the horizon for their family.



As Noah watches his father leave with only one thing in tow—a piece of art Noah made—Noah realizes how important he and Jude have been to Benjamin all along.



That night, Noah cannot sleep. As he lies in bed staring at the ceiling, his bedroom door opens, and Jude walks in. She crawls into bed with Noah, and Noah confesses that he always wished Dad would leave. Jude admits that she once wished their mother would die. Noah urges her to take the wish back before it's too late—since his obviously came true.

In this passage, Noah and Jude's shared belief in the power of the supernatural to impact the physical world is thrown into relief as they both confront their dark "wishes."



There is a silence between the two, and then Jude sits on Noah's chest and screams in his face that nothing happened between her and Brian in the closet. They simply talked about astronomy while they were in there together. Jude tells Noah that she knew all along that Brian was his "friend," and off limits. Though Noah crankily shoves Jude off of him, inside he is elated that nothing happened between his sister and Brian after all. Confused, he asks her who Spaceboy is, and she confesses that it's Zephyr she's been chatting with.

Jude is sick of the animosity between her and her brother, and longs to fix it. Just as Noah misjudged how Benjamin perceived him, he has also misjudged Jude's actions—and in both cases, failure to communicate has exacerbated the tension Noah feels with other members of his family.



Jude asks if Noah will stop hating her now, and Noah says he never hated her. They apologize to one another for their months of stony silence, and confess how much they've missed one another. They fall asleep together, peaceful and content.

As Jude and Noah finally communicate about their pent-up feelings, it seems as if they have patched things up—but their relationship will soon face even greater tests.



On the first morning of winter break, the smell of Dianna's delicious baking wafts down the hallway and wakes Noah up. He is anxious—winter break means that Brian will be coming back to town soon. As Noah heads to the kitchen, Jude stops him, and orders him not to eat one morsel of Mom's food in protest of the separation. However, once Noah gets into the kitchen, he can't resist the smell of the pastry and happily takes a piece of pie. When Jude comes into the kitchen and sees Noah eating she rolls her eyes, but sits down with him and secretly has him pass her bites under the table.

Though Jude attempts to distance herself from her mother, she cannot fully do so. Attempting to refuse Dianna's cooking is a metaphor for the ways in which Jude has tried to remove herself from Dianna's influence—and foreshadows the ways in which she will continually fail to do so in the years to come.



Without warning, the kitchen door opens and Brian walks in. Noah involuntarily jumps up, then sits down—Dianna greets Brian, who admits that he could smell her baking from all the way down the block and came to taste some pie. As Brian locks eyes with Noah, Noah is aware of the crazy face he must be making. He is ecstatic to see Brian again, and immediately wants to do "everything" with him. Brian greets Jude, and then asks Noah if he wants to go for a walk. Noah happily agrees. He and Brian run out of the house and race into the woods—once they're there, Brian pushes Noah up against a tree and begins kissing him passionately.

Noah has, for months, been unable to escape his feelings of grief, anger, and disappointment associated with Brian. But now, as Brian returns home for winter break, both boys are so elated to see one another that they begin immediately making up for lost time and acting upon the feelings they denied so strongly over the summer.



As Brian comes up for air, he admits he's wanted to kiss Noah for a long time. They kiss some more, and Noah thinks about the guys he saw at the party at the end of the summer and how spellbound he was by their affection for one another. Noah feels as if he and Brian are in a **painting**—he is completely ecstatic. The moment is shattered, though, when Brian pulls away and tells Noah that “no one can [ever] know” about the two of them. He worries that his coming out would be the end of everything—his scholarship, his baseball career, his social life. Noah kisses Brian again and promises him that no one will ever find out.

A few days later, Noah and Brian are up in Noah's room. Brian is watching footage of a meteor shower online, and Noah is sketching him. Brian has, for the last several days, been acting like the kiss in the woods never happened, and Noah has been following his lead. As the video on the computer ends, though, Brian confesses to Noah that he hasn't been able to think about anything but their kiss for days. As Noah remembers it, he feels himself developing an erection—Brian notices, and asks Noah if he wants to masturbate. Together, the two of them, on opposite sides of the room, unbuckle their pants and begin masturbating. Just as Noah is about to climax, Dianna bursts into the room. The boys fumble to shove themselves back into their pants as Dianna quickly exits the room and closes the door.

Brian leaves through the window hurriedly. Noah stewes in anxiety and embarrassment for an hour until Dianna knocks on his door and announces that she's coming in. She steps into the bedroom and says that she wants to talk to Noah about what happened. Noah says nothing, pretending to be working on a sketch, but when Dianna begins talking to him about “love” and “natural” urges, he remembers how, before Brian left, he confided in Noah that one of the other baseball players on his team at school was bullied, harassed, and even attacked when rumors that he was gay began flying around school. Before leaving through the window, Brian told Noah that things between them had to end.

Noah explodes in rage at Dianna, and tells her that it's “all [her] fault” that Dad has left and that he and Jude are miserable. Dianna insists that she wants to talk about Noah, not about her own marriage, but Noah rebuffs her and refuses to open up. Before leaving the room, Dianna tells Noah that it is his “responsibility” to be brave.

Noah is thrilled to finally realize that his feelings for Brian were requited all along—but confused and a bit hurt when Brian wants to keep their relationship a secret. Brian is clearly still afraid of fully admitting the truth of who he is, and surrendering to his feelings of love and lust for Noah. Noah, though, is so happy to have Brian back that he will agree to any terms the other boy proposes.



As Noah and Brian explore the sexual side of their relationship, they must combat feelings of secrecy and shame. When they at last surrender to their desires, they are discovered in an embarrassing turn of events—and the sense that their sexuality is somehow “wrong” intensifies for both of them.



Dianna is trying to get Noah to open up and express himself. She is not angered or upset by what she saw earlier—she simply wants to offer her son solidarity, love, and guidance. She doesn't know, though, about Brian's rejection of his feelings towards Noah—and the effect this has had on Noah.



Rather than admitting to the pain and confusion he's feeling, Noah spins the conversation around and places the blame for his misery all on Dianna. Dianna wisely instructs Noah to remember who he is even in the face of grief and guilt, and to never hide himself away from the world.



The next morning, Noah wakes up early in a panic—he is afraid that Dianna is going to tell his dad about the incident with Brian and ruin the burgeoning closeness between him and Benjamin. Noah tiptoes through the house to his mother’s bedroom door and listens—he hears her talking on the phone. She says “I need to see you,” and explains that “something happened with Noah.” Noah overhears her making plans to meet at the Wooden Bird, a local landmark, later. Noah knocks on the door and enters—Dianna has hung up the phone, and looks as if she’s been up crying all night. She explains that she’s going out to a doctor’s appointment—Noah knows she is lying, but doesn’t argue.

Noah tells Dianna that he doesn’t want her to mention what she saw to Dad, and she promises she won’t. She urges Noah, though, to be more open with Benjamin about who he really is—she warns Noah that he has “always” underestimated his father. Noah wants to believe his mother, but his thoughts begin spiraling, and he worries that she is lying to him about her intentions. Dianna tells Noah that she needs to start getting dressed for her “appointment,” but reassures him one last time that “everything’s going to be okay.”

Noah follows Dianna to The Wooden Bird—a local landmark made from a redwood tree carved in the shape of a bird. Noah hides in a bush and watches Dianna sitting on a bench, staring at the sea. After several minutes, a strange man approaches Dianna—it is the large artist from the Day Street studio. Noah watches as Dianna stands and runs into the man’s arms, embracing and kissing him. As Noah realizes that his mother is having an affair, he is filled with rage.

Noah runs away, and keeps running all the way home. When he is almost at his street, he spots Brian—walking with Courtney. He has a smudge of lipstick on his mouth, and his hand is in the back pocket of Courtney’s jeans. Noah, unable to handle the rage and confusion inspired both by his mother’s affair and this betrayal on Brian’s part, screams out, addressing Courtney: “Brian Connelly is gay!” Noah instantly wishes he could take back what he’s just said, but as he watches Brian’s face crumble, he knows he never will be able to.

Inside the house, Noah sits down with his sketchbook and draws a piece of art which he leaves on his mother’s bed before going out to look for Jude. Noah can’t find her anywhere, though—Brian is nowhere to be seen, either.

Noah and Dianna are caught up in a seemingly endless cycle of secrecy and miscommunication. Noah refuses to communicate with his mother, but also insists on knowing her secrets—in attempting to pin down her actions, he will soon realize, he is only creating more pain and shame between them.



In this passage, Dianna verbalizes what Noah has on some level always known, but only recently begun wrestling with: the fact that his own self-loathing and guilt undermine his ability to connect with others and accept love even from those closest to him.



Noah is at last able to put all the pieces together—the reason Dianna was at Day Street that afternoon and the reason for her newfound happiness and clandestine phone calls all come together in this moment.



Noah is overcome with feeling and is brimming with rage at himself, at Brian, and at Dianna. Seeing Brian hide the truth of who he is triggers Noah’s anger with Dianna’s choice to hide her affair—and with his own fear to proudly own his sexuality. Noah does something he can never take back—lashing out in a kind of anger that foreshadows the angry, withdrawn person he is becoming.



Noah used art to express love for his father—and now uses it to express his hatred for his mother.



Noah returns home, where Dianna is waiting for him in his room with his picture in her lap—he drew her and the sculptor kissing in the foreground, and drew himself, Benjamin, and Jude watching in the background. Dianna tearfully says that she wishes Noah hadn't followed her. Noah tells Dianna that he overheard her phone call and worried he would tell Benjamin. Dianna explains that telling Noah about his "responsibility" to his own desires the previous day triggered something in her—she realized she needed to follow her own heart. She now tells Noah that she is planning on asking Dad for a divorce.

Noah's mind reels and he accuses Dianna of abandoning their family. He asks if Dianna plans on marrying her new lover, and she doesn't deny it. Dianna explains that she and Benjamin have been trying very hard to repair their marriage for a long time—but in the end, "you can't help who you love." A silence falls over the room, and though Noah wishes that he could tell his mother everything and commiserate with her, he turns around and walks out instead.

CHAPTER 6

Jude lies in bed, but she cannot sleep: she keeps thinking of Oscar kissing Brooke, of her mother's and grandmother's ghosts, and of Noah. After they ran into one another, Noah haltingly told Jude he'd simply been out for a jog and had wound up at Day Street, but Jude doesn't believe Noah. She wonders why he followed her down there—and whether he's keeping something from her.

Jude thinks she hears a noise in the house—she grabs a baseball bat from under her bed and goes out to the hall, walking around her home to make sure it's safe. She pauses in the doorway of her parents' bedroom, which looks as if it is "still waiting" for Dianna to come back. All of her mother's antique perfume bottles and makeup jars are still lined up on the dresser, and a picture on Benjamin's bedside table of him and Dianna portrays them when they were happy and youthful.

Jude wonders what things would be like if Dianna had lived and moved back home, as she intended to. Her mother always seemed, to her and Noah, like she had "horses galloping inside of her"—wild, impulsive, and passionate. Jude realizes how little she knows about her mother's life before she was married and had children, and wishes Dianna were still here to tell her "everything."

Dianna is trying as hard as she can to lead by example—and to show her children that even in the face of mistakes they've made, their ultimate responsibility is to their own happiness. Noah can only see how selfish his mother is being, though, and is unable to understand the nuance and complexity of adult relationships.



Noah is, in this passage, on the brink of breaking down and allowing Dianna in—sharing with her the grief and confusion he feels both as a result of Brian's abandonment and her own infidelity. Instead, though, he retreats into himself, and refuses to be vulnerable.



Jude is distracted and disturbed by the lies, half-truths, and cover-ups which seem to be unfolding all around her.



This passage shows that the Sweetwine house—just like Jude's psyche—is haunted by the ghost of Dianna and the desire for her return.



Jude has trouble reconciling what she knew about her mother with all she didn't know. She regrets not taking advantage of the time she had with Dianna and learning all she could about her while she was still alive.



Jude dabs on some perfume, remembering a time when Dianna was still alive. After catching Jude putting on her makeup, Dianna came up behind Jude and began brushing her hair. She confided in Jude that their relationship was so difficult because Jude reminded Dianna so much of herself.

Jude and Dianna were both intense, rebellious, dreamy, and connected to the idea that there was more to life than met the eye. This sameness created tension rather than empathy between them.



Back in her room, Jude feels overwhelmed with emotion. When she's feeling something, Noah is often feeling it too, and she presses her ear to the wall between their rooms to see if she can hear him crying or sense any sadness. She is struck with a sudden idea—she wonders what would happen if she contacted Brian on her brother's behalf.

Rather than succumb to her feelings of sadness, grief, and despair, Jude decides to take the reins and actually try and improve someone's life—she decides to start with her brother's.



Jude goes over to the computer and begins searching for Brian on the internet. She reads that after coming out as gay, Brian was offered a scholarship to Stanford to play baseball there. Many articles describe how Brian's openness about his identity has begun to turn the tides in the baseball world, and even the MLB is recruiting openly gay players. Jude knows that Stanford is less than two hours away from Lost Cove—she goes to Stanford's online directory and finds Brian's email. She creates a fake account of her own and uses it to send a link to the recurring LostConnections post Noah makes each week. She then gets back into bed, wondering what happened between Noah and Brian, but excited by the thought of how happy her brother will be if he gets to reconnect with Brian at last.

There is so much secrecy surrounding whatever the truth of Noah and Brian's relationship was—or wasn't—that Jude has a hard time knowing where to begin. She does know, though, that Noah has intense feelings of grief and loss where Brian is concerned, and she hopes that by trying to reconnect them she can ease some of her brother's suffering.



In the morning, Jude gets up and heads straight to Guillermo's—she is determined to get “NoahandJude” out of her practice rock. When she arrives at the warehouse, she hears Guillermo and Oscar arguing in the mailroom. Guillermo is chastising Oscar for “hurt[ing others] before [he] can be hurt.” Even though Oscar betrayed her, she feels the urge to run into the room and wrap him in her arms.

Jude doesn't hate Oscar—rather, it's the opposite. She loves him so much that she wants to understand where his dark impulses and self-sabotage from. Jude is developing a more nuanced view of the world and of love itself.



Jude leaves the warehouse and goes to the church for an hour or so. When she returns, Guillermo and Oscar have stopped arguing—Guillermo, covered in white dust from carving stone, greets Jude and apologizes for scaring her off earlier. He comforts her by telling her that “what is bad for the heart is good for her art,” and urges her to get to work. Jude is flushed with pride that Guillermo sees her as a fellow artist. Together, she and Guillermo go outside to set to work on their rocks.

In this passage, Guillermo essentially gives Jude permission to experience the true depths of her feelings. Painful as they may be, he tells her, grief and longing will always feed her artistic practice and allow her to connect more deeply to the truth of who she is, not just as an artist but a person.



Guillermo teaches Jude to use power tools on her rock rather than a hammer and chisel, but warns her to respect the tools' power. Jude asks if there are second chances if she makes a mistake—not just in art, but in life—and Guillermo tells her that “even God [had] to make the world twice.” He encourages Jude to embrace even her mistakes when she's working with stone.

The idea of remaking the world and healing from past mistakes recurs several times throughout the novel—here, Guillermo encourages Jude to embrace not just her sadness but also her failings and to always strive to “make the world” anew.



Jude begins working—as she does, she becomes lost in thought, and recalls the afternoon her mother died. She wasn’t home when the news came—she was off at the beach with Zephyr. When she did get home at last and Benjamin told her the news, her first reaction was to put her hands not over her own ears but Noah’s—she feels the same instinct to protect him now as she wrestles to get him out of the rock.

This passage demonstrates that Jude has always shouldered the role of protector—even on the occasions when it is she herself who has needed protection.



Jude reflects even more deeply on what happened in the wake of Mom’s death. Noah became despondent with grief, and after he tried to jump from Devil’s Drop and got lost in the surf, Jude became angry with him. One afternoon, three weeks after Mom’s accident—and the night before her and Noah’s CSA applications were due—Jude hurriedly put together a work sample and then Dad drove both of them to the post office to mail off their applications. He and Noah waited in the car while Jude ran the packets inside—but she only mailed hers, and stuck Noah’s in the trash.

Whatever Jude’s motivations—grief, anger, jealousy, the desire for independence—she committed an act she couldn’t take back, just like Noah did when he lashed out at Brian and Dianna. As Nelson reveals her characters’ deepest mistakes, she does so simultaneously with the idea that they have permission to remake the world and recover from their transgressions, showing that there are always second chances.



For weeks, Jude told herself that she would come clean to both Noah and her dad. But every time there was an opportunity to make things right, she lost her courage. This, Jude knows, is why her mother destroys everything she makes—she cannot forgive Jude for sabotaging Noah.

Jude is projecting a vengeful, angry personality onto her mother’s ghost—when really, Jude’s own feelings of guilt and self-loathing are what have taken over her life and her conscience.



Guillermo offers Jude a cup of coffee and a short break, but Jude insists she needs to continue working. For hours she wrestles with the stone—and with her inner demons—as she wonders whether maybe, after all, she doesn’t need her mother’s permission or approval; maybe Jude can be “in charge of [her] own damn light switch.” Exhausted, and sick of making herself invisible, Jude pauses work and removes her baggy sweatshirt. She closes her eyes for just a second, feeling as if she has awoken from a deep slumber. She knows now that whether or not Noah decides to hate her forever, she needs to do one thing for him: “uncrush his dream.”

This passage is a major scene of transformation for Jude. She is struggling to disentangle herself not just from her codependent history with Noah—but from her difficult relationship with her mother, and from all the ways in which it made her feel like she could never escape her own perceived inadequacies. Jude realizes that she is in charge of her own fate, and that all she can do is give her all—in art, in love, and in her relationships with those she cares for.



Jude goes into the warehouse and uses Oscar’s computer to send an email to Sandy at CSA—she asks if she can meet with him before school on the first day back from break and bring along her brother. She presses “send” on the email, feeling free at last as she plans to give up her spot. She then texts Noah and tells him they need to talk.

Jude decides that she wants to right the wrongs of her past—and decides to start with correcting the perceived imbalance in the universe that is her having taken Noah’s spot at CSA. What Jude doesn’t realize is that unfair start or not, she has earned her place at CSA and her identity as an artist.



Jude returns outside and asks Guillermo to show her how to use the toughest tool he has—a diamond blade circular saw. After a brief tutorial, Jude picks up the saw and cleaves her “Noah and Jude” sculpture in half. Guillermo, shocked, asks Jude why she has killed “them.” Jude responds that she has “saved them.”

Jude walks home after the sun has gone down, feeling light and free for the first time in years. Though she knows she has some hard conversations with both Dad and Noah ahead of her, she feels like she is finally making peace with herself and taking control of her life. Halfway home, though, she receives a text from Heather—the text states that Noah is “very drunk” and is planning on jumping Dead Man’s Dive—the only cliff in Lost Cove more perilous than Devil’s Drop.

As Jude arrives at the cliffs, she has a bad feeling, and worries that her decision to come clean and turn things around has come too late. The moon is high, and kids from all over Lost Cove are out in droves having bonfires and picnics. She looks around for someone she knows—the only people she spots are members of Zephyr’s crew, and though she’s nervous to approach them without the armor of her hoodie and beanie, she goes up to Fry and asks him where Noah is. A voice behind her—Zephyr’s—tells her that Noah took off.

As Jude turns around and faces Zephyr for the first time in years, she is reminded of the afternoon of Dianna’s death—the afternoon she lost her virginity to Zephyr on this very beach. The act felt like “the biggest mistake of [Jude’s] life,” and as she rushed home afterward, all she could think of was how badly she needed her mother. When she walked in the door of the house, however, she was greeted with the terrible news. Jude has, for years, felt as if she has been unable to get the horrible feeling of that afternoon off of her.

Jude asks if Noah went home, but Zephyr points up to a bluff that is at least twice the height even of Dead Man’s Drop and says that Noah and some friends went up there. Jude scrambles through the crowd and heads up the cliff—Zephyr follows her though she doesn’t want him to, determined to help her find her way up.

As they climb the bluff, Zephyr reminds Jude of a favor she asked him long ago—to look out for Noah. Jude wheels around, furious, and shouts at him that she was “too young” to sleep with him, and he knew it. Jude spits at Zephyr and warns him to never do that to another young girl again. Jude turns around again and continues heading up the bluff, doubling her pace.

In this passage, both Guillermo and Jude at last understand that sometimes the only way to save a relationship is to drastically alter it and make room for something new.



Jude is not in hiding anymore—she has confronted her inner demons and realized that the only way to move forward is to deliberately repair the mistakes of the past while detaching from the debilitating guilt associated with them. A new development, though, threatens her ability to make good on her new resolutions—and her brother’s life.



Just as Jude regrets having wasted the time she had with Dianna, she now worries that she has wasted the opportunity to make things right with Noah and her father, and has allowed her whole family’s feelings of guilt and hatred to fester too long.



Though Jude is determined to move forward, there is one last thing from her past she needs to deal with—her own pain and suffering on the afternoon of her mother’s death, and the feelings of guilt it later inspired in her.



As Jude realizes just how much danger Noah is in, she blindly leaps at the chance to save him, ignoring even her own limitations as she chases after her brother.



In this brief scene, Jude refuses to allow Zephyr to have any power over her any more—but at the same time tries to point out to him the fact that he took advantage of her, and that even his promise to look after Noah cannot right that wrong.



As Jude reaches the top of the hill, she hears an odd chanting: a group of kids are saying *Sweetwine* over and over again. Jude and Zephyr push through the crowd and see Noah standing ten feet from the cliff's edge, an empty liquor bottle at his feet. Jude rushes forward and grabs Noah—the crowd boos as the show is interrupted. Noah tells Jude that he wasn't going to jump, and Jude tearfully says she doesn't believe him. After just a moment, Noah admits that Jude is right—he is “totally gonna jump.” Noah pushes Jude down and spins away from her, dashing towards the edge. Jude's head hits the ground, and she blacks out.

When Jude wakes up, she wonders if she is hallucinating—the first thing she sees is Oscar lying on top of Noah, whom he tackled before the latter could reach the edge. Jude is confused as Noah and Oscar, recognizing one another, exchange a fist-bump. Oscar chides Noah—whom he calls “Picasso”—for following in his footsteps, but Noah drunkenly insists that he isn't himself.

As Jude and Noah talk at and over one another, Oscar realizes they are brother and sister, and is charmed by the revelation. Oscar observes that Jude looks cold, and says he'd offer her his jacket—but “someone” stole it. Jude warns Oscar not to flirt with her. Oscar apologizes, sincerely, but Jude can barely process it at the moment. She flatly thanks Oscar for saving Noah, and as Noah and Oscar begin catching up, Jude can't help but smile. She wonders if Oscar's apology really was genuine—and what it would mean if it is.

Jude prods Noah to thank Oscar for saving his life, but Noah insists that it's Mom who saves him every time he jumps from the cliffs. Oscar warns Noah that drunk cliff-diving is certain death, and urges him to “live [his] life rather than risk it” over and over again. Noah replies that when Mom saves him during his jumps is “the only time she forgives [him]”—Jude wonders what Noah did that needs forgiving. Jude comforts Noah, telling him that everything is going to be okay—Noah responds that things are about to get worse, but Jude just doesn't know it yet. Jude feels a chill in her bones.

Oscar helps Noah up and begins walking him and Jude home. On the way, Jude and Oscar's hands brush a few times, and Jude wonders if they're doing it on purpose. Oscar reveals that he was at the cliffs hoping to have his first drink in nearly a year, depressed after his fight with Guillermo earlier—when Jude pushed through the crowd towards Noah, she knocked the drink out of his hand. Oscar tells Jude that it was she who saved *his* life tonight. As they continue towards the house, Jude holds Oscar's hand in hers.

Jude has been so afraid of losing Noah over the last several years—and in this passage, she sees that her greatest fears are about to be realized. Noah, unlike Jude, has not yet come up with a healthy way to disentangle himself from his grief and his intense regret.



The novel's many threads of chance connections and unlikely coincidences begin to come together as Jude, Noah, and Oscar are all at the same place at the same time.



Jude has put so many walls up when it comes to Oscar, and has always suspected the worst of him. In this moment, as he attempts to really level with her and sincerely apologize, she wonders whether she has been too hard on him—and whether everyone deserves a second chance.



In this passage, Jude realizes that Noah's belief in the supernatural—namely, in Mom's interference in both of their lives—is just as intense as hers is.



The novel's motif of fate, destiny, and unlikely connections continues in this passage as Jude realizes that she and Oscar were somehow fated to be on that cliff together tonight—so that he could save Noah, and so that she could save Oscar.



Later that evening, Jude sits at her desk finishing up the studies for Mom's sculpture in preparation for showing them to Guillermo tomorrow. Noah is sleeping, and Oscar has gone home. She is so elated by her feelings of love for Oscar that she wishes she had someone alive to tell. After finishing her sketch, Jude, unable to sleep, pulls out a couple of notebooks she stole from Guillermo's library and leafs through them. She reads another draft of a love letter to "Dearest," in which he asks the woman to marry him.

Soon there is a tap on the window—Jude asks if it is Oscar, and when she hears his voice in response, she quickly ruffles her hair, puts on some lipstick, and pulls on a dress. When she goes to the window, Oscar is stunned by how beautiful Jude looks. He tells her that, halfway home, he remembered he had something important to tell her. When she asks what it is, he leans through the window and kisses her.

In a flash of realization, Jude realizes that Oscar is the guy from all of Noah's drawings—the dream-guy whose likeness once hung on the wall of her room. She pulls away from Oscar and tells him that once, years ago, she "gave up practically the whole world" for him. As the two continue kissing, Jude grows tense, worried that a sexual experience with Oscar will remind her of her terrible one with Zephyr—but when she opens her eyes and looks into his face, she feels only love and trust.

Oscar comes into Jude's bedroom and begins poking around. As he looks at old pictures of Jude surfing—and cliff-diving herself—he asks her about the person she used to be, and they reflect on how the deaths of both their mothers changed them.

Oscar admits that he is terrified of Jude—the depth of their emotional connection is something new and frightening. She has the power, he knows, to "devastate" him—even so, Oscar can't help himself. He assures her that nothing happened with Brooke, and that his decision to go out with her was one made in fear after his deep conversation with Jude earlier that day. He worried that once Jude saw the "real" him, she'd run away, but Jude insists that it only made her want to get closer to Oscar.

As the two begin kissing again, Jude remarks that she feels they are "split-aparts"—ancient creatures whose souls resided in one body, but were split apart and made to roam the earth in search of their other half. Oscar asks Jude, in earnest, to embark on a relationship with him. Jude happily agrees, but tells Oscar that even if they're split-aparts, she wants to have her own soul.

Jude is beginning to realize that perhaps her dependence on superstition and the world of the dead has hindered her ability to be fully present in the world of the living. As she considers her very intense feelings of love—and ruminates on Guillermo's, as well—she realizes she must make a change.



Jude wants to look beautiful for Oscar, and show him the truth of who she can be—she is done hiding her feelings and her true appearance behind a layer of disguise.



As Jude recognizes the strange, unlikely, but seemingly fated coincidence of Oscar being the guy in the painting she was so drawn to all those years ago, she feels that her intense connection to Oscar is justified—and that things, with him, will be different than the sham relationships she's known in the past.



Jude and Oscar have yet another frank conversation about how their grief has transformed them, and what that means for their relationship with one another.



Oscar, like Jude and Noah, is frightened of the possibility of total vulnerability. Nevertheless, as he realizes that Jude is interested, genuinely, in knowing and loving all of him, he allows himself to feel the depths of his true emotions.



This passage shows that though Jude is enticed by the idea of an intense, codependent romantic relationship, she has learned enough from the codependency she and Noah once shared to carve out space for her own independence.



As Oscar continues looking around Jude's room, he picks up a photograph of her with Noah and her parents. As he studies the photograph, Oscar's face falls. Jude assumes that Oscar has realized that she and Noah are twins, and that she's only sixteen. Jude tells Oscar that she wanted to tell him the truth about her age, but was waiting for the right time—she is desperate to keep him from leaving. Oscar, though, says something about Guillermo, and practically dives out the window. Jude is confused and worried—she studies the photograph, in which her mother and father are smiling at each other “like they have the best secret.”

Though Jude believes that the photograph has startled Oscar because it allowed him to realize that Jude is younger than he thought she was, readers know that it has startled him because he has realized, at last, that Jude is Dianna's daughter.



CHAPTER 7

Noah is at home, mixing paints in the sink, searching for the perfect angry color. Just about an hour ago, his mother left the house—as she started her car's engine, Noah ran out to the drive way and shouted that he hated her. In response, Dianna mouthed *I love you* and drove off—to go tell Dad she wanted a divorce.

Noah is furious with Dianna, and lashed out in anger earlier just as he did with Brian. Noah doesn't yet understand the devastating consequences his words will have in both relationships.



The phone rings, and Noah answers it—a man with a gruff voice asks if he's reached the residence of Dianna Sweetwine, and if he can speak with Noah's father. Noah explains that his father doesn't live here. Noah asks who is speaking—but somehow already knows it's the police, and **imagines a self-portrait**: *The Boy Inside the Boy Stops Breathing*. Though Noah hasn't been told yet what's going on, somehow he has a feeling there's been an accident. He begs the officer to tell him what's going on, but the officer will only speak to Benjamin, and asks Noah for his cell phone number. The officer hangs up to call Benjamin.

When circumstances get dire, Noah retreats into the “invisible museum.” Though he hasn't been “there” recently, when the phone call from the police comes in, Noah realizes that something is deeply wrong, and instantly retreats to the place within him that feels safe and navigable in order to make sense of what's happening.



Noah, feeling anxious, looks over to Brian's house, and wishes Brian were up on the roof. He paces through the house until he hears a car in the driveway—it is Dad, who is being tailed by a police officer. Noah **imagines another self-portrait**: *Boy Careens Off World*. As Benjamin comes inside, he is weeping, and holds Noah in an embrace as he repeats, over and over again, “I'm so sorry.” Noah pulls away from his father, looks him in the eye, and tells him that Dianna was on the way over to the hotel to ask him to come home—to ask him to be a family again. Benjamin is shocked. Noah adds that before Dianna left, she said that Benjamin was the love of her life.

Noah, in this passage, attempts to safeguard Benjamin from the deep feelings of grief, pain, and anger that Noah himself feels towards Dianna. At the same time, Noah is climbing into the invisible museum and trying to distance himself from the reality of what's happening to their family.



The day after the funeral, Noah leaves his house—still full of mourning family and friends—and heads down to Day Street, to the sculptor’s studio. He waits on the sidewalk until Guillermo comes out of the warehouse—when the man catches sight of Noah, he remarks how much he looks like Dianna. As the sculptor approaches, Noah begins wailing and crying, and Guillermo envelops him in an embrace. Noah is strangely comforted and wishes he could live in this man’s arms forever—he feels as if his mother is inside of the sculptor, telling him how to comfort Noah.

In the midst of all his emotions, Noah is struck by a new thought: if it weren’t for this man, he realizes, Dianna would still be alive. Noah wriggles from the man’s embrace and tells him, to his face, that Dianna’s death is his fault. He tells Guillermo that Dianna told Noah she didn’t love Guillermo and wasn’t going to marry him. As Noah turns and walks away, he feels himself entering the crawlspace deep inside his soul and shutting the hatch.

CHAPTER 8

The next morning, Jude arrives at Day Street with her sketchbook and presents Guillermo with the studies of her mother. As Guillermo flips through the drawings, he tenderly traces them with his fingers. He asks Jude if Dianna was her mother, and Jude admits that she was. Guillermo closes Jude’s sketchbook and says that he can’t help her after all. He says that it’s been distracting having her in the studio, and urges her to leave immediately. Jude is confused—and is even more confused when both Oscar and Noah burst into the studio. As the four of them look at one another with fear, Jude begs someone to tell her what’s going on.

Noah points at Guillermo and states that he killed Dianna. Oscar protests, asserting that no man has ever loved a woman as deeply as Guillermo loved Dianna. Jude is disoriented as she absorbs the information, and realizes it wasn’t her age that freaked Oscar out the night before—it was the photograph of Dianna. She also realizes that the first time she ever saw Guillermo—the day she came to his studio to find him in a drunken rage—was the anniversary of her mother’s death. Dianna, she realizes, is Dearest.

Noah finds an unlikely source of solace and comfort in Guillermo—the man his mother loved deeply. They come together in their shared grief, and Noah experiences a rare moment of total vulnerability with another person.



Rather than surrendering to pain and vulnerability, Noah chooses to get angry—and remain angry—as a way of safeguarding himself from feeling the unbearable depths of his emotions.



Everyone but Jude is in on the enormous secret that threatens to shatter the unlikely but perhaps fated connections that have developed over the course of the novel. As the moment of truth approaches, Jude doesn’t try to run away from whatever frightening information is about to come to light, but instead chooses to embrace it.



As all of Noah’s resentments come to a head, Jude is forced to put together the pieces of a puzzle she never wanted to solve—although many of the clues were in front of her all along.



Jude asks Noah to explain—Noah tearfully confesses that Dianna was on her way to ask Dad for a divorce when she died, and that Dianna was planning on marrying Guillermo. As Jude looks at Guillermo, she can sense joy seeping out of him, and realizes that her mother is the female figure in so many of Guillermo’s works—Dianna and Guillermo were split-aparts themselves. It is all too much for Jude, and she staggers out of the studio and into the street.

Jude at last understands why her father has been so preoccupied all these years, and why Noah’s grief after Dianna’s death was so intense. She is angry with Noah—but also realizes that he was just trying to protect what was left of their family. Jude hears footsteps behind her, and realizes Noah is following her. He begins explaining that for years he has felt intense guilt, and has believed that he himself was actually responsible for Dianna’s death—his witnessing her affair brought her to a decision point, and if it hadn’t been for Noah’s meddling, she might not have been in the car that day. Noah also confesses that he told Dianna he hated her just before he left, and then breaks down in tears. Jude allows herself to surrender to her grief as well, and she and Noah hold one another in the street as they weep.

As Jude and Noah make their way home through the woods, Jude realizes that Grandma’s last aphorism from the **bible**—“A broken heart is an open heart”—was right after all. Noah and Jude talk more than they have in years, and Noah confesses to Jude that he and Brian were in love, and that Dianna caught them together. Noah regrets ruining Brian’s life—but Jude tells him what she’s found on the internet about Brian’s successful baseball career.

Jude admits that she has something to tell Noah, too, and at last comes clean about destroying his application. Rather than being angry, though, Noah is ecstatic—all along, he thought that he was rejected based on the subpar nature of his art. Over the years, though, he tells Jude, he has come to realize that other people’s approval didn’t matter. He joyfully tells Jude he has something to show her, and leads her through the woods towards an abandoned construction site.

Though Jude is full of anger and confusion, she also has some empathy for Guillermo—who was not only forced to witness the death of his “split-apart,” but came to believe that the intensity of their love was unrequited.



Jude and Noah have spent much of the novel in self-imposed isolation from one another, denying the truth of their emotions or keeping secrets from each other as a way of staving off pain, disappointment, and insecurity. They have reached a point, though, where their many secrets can no longer hold. They have been forced to this moment in many ways, but now that it is here, they choose to embrace it, and one another.



Noah and Jude have been afraid of admitting the depths of their guilt or seeking solace in one another, but as they come together in brokenness, they are at last able to understand all the things they have kept from one another and repair the miscommunications that have marred their relationship.



Just as Guillermo was actually happy to learn that Noah had lied, and that Dianna really had loved him all along, Noah is relieved to learn that he wasn’t rejected from CSA on the basis of his talent but because of a miscommunication.



At the site, there is a mural painted on a cement crumbling wall—there are images of her and Noah, of Brian, of Mom and Guillermo at the Wooden Bird, of Dad, of Heather, and Guillermo’s stone giants. Noah has been remaking the world all along. Jude takes out her phone and begins snapping pictures, telling Noah that he’ll for sure get into CSA now—she reveals she’s planning on giving up her spot for him. Noah tells her, though, that he doesn’t want to go to CSA—he would rather make art for himself, on his own terms. He doesn’t want to study art—he wants to revel in its magic.

Noah promises Jude he isn’t mad at her, and the two of them, ecstatic to at least have the truth all out in the open, rush home through the woods. As they skip through the forest, they play **rock-paper-scissors**, and are thrilled to realize that they can really play now—unlike in their younger days, they pick different symbols each time. Pausing in a clearing to sit down, Noah reflects on how his desire to impress Dianna hurt his relationship with Jude. Jude asks Noah if Heather knows that he’s gay, and he says that she does. Jude remarks upon how normal Noah has gotten—and how weird she herself has become. She wonders aloud if perhaps that’s just what being alive is—“accumulating these new selves all the time.”

As Jude thinks about her mother, she finds herself torn between two thoughts: she is thrilled that her mother was able to find true happiness with Guillermo, but miserable and angry that her happiness was Dad’s unhappiness. At the same time, Jude wonders if that’s what love is: whether it “does as it undoes.” Jude tells Noah that they have to get home—and that he has to tell Dad the truth. They run home and, as they emerge together out of the woods, see Benjamin in the yard. He is thrilled to see the two of them running and playing together—but when he sees the look on Noah’s face, he asks what Noah needs to tell him.

Later that evening, Noah and Dad make dinner. Noah and Jude have made an agreement—she is going to stop relying so much on Grandma’s **bible**, and he is going to stop cliff-diving. Jude plans on making paper flying women out of pieces of Grandma’s bible, and wants to call the piece “The History of Luck.”

Noah’s intense artistry has always been a part of him, but when it put him in competition with Jude, he began hating the very thing that once brought him such joy. Since Jude’s acceptance to CSA, Noah has been able to reevaluate his relationship with art and remake it in full—he now works only for himself, and has no desire to use art as a way of one-upping his sister.



As Noah and Jude play rock-paper-scissors once more, they are using the game as a kind of test to see how far they’ve come. Their codependency once defined them and hindered their ability to form their own identities—but now, they have spent enough time apart that they’ve been able to come into their own and understand how to have a healthy relationship with enough distance in it to allow them each the space to grow.



Jude is developing an adult, nuanced view of love and responsibility. She understands that though Dianna’s happiness brought a measure of pain into her family’s life, her mother deserved to be happy, too—Jude is learning that not everything is as black-and-white as it seems, and that in love, just as in art, there must always be room for mistakes and second chances.



Jude formally renounces her attachment to the “bible” of supernatural wisdom—but honors the role it has had in her life and the things it has taught her about luck, chance, and destiny.



Jude reveals that after Noah told Dad the truth, Dad received the news calmly. He seemed almost grateful for things to at last, after so many years, make sense. Now, Dad tells the kids he has an idea—he wants for them to move to a houseboat. He feels the three of them need an adventure together as a family. Noah points out the corniness—and the beauty—of the three of them all living together on an “ark.” Benjamin has found a houseboat for sale, and its name is *The Mystery*—when she was alive, Dianna was always telling Benjamin to “Embrace the mystery,” and now he wants to.

Jude asks to help cook, and she begins slicing a pepper when there is a knock at the door—and Oscar walks in. As Jude jumps nearly out of her skin, she is reminded of the time Brian walked into the kitchen and spooked—and excited—Noah all those years ago. Jude introduces Oscar to Benjamin using his full name, Oscar Ralph, and then Oscar asks if he can talk to Jude alone. Dad and Noah dissolve into laughter—they point out that Jude has, at last, finally found Ralph.

Jude follows Oscar out to the backyard, where they sit down together. He begins telling Jude that he knew Dianna well—she was around when Oscar was at his worst, and saw him in some unflattering lights. Nevertheless, she was always kind to him—moreover, Dianna aspired to paint, and often used Oscar as a model. Oscar and Dianna used to sit together in the church near Guillermo’s and talk—she would go “on and on about her twins.” Oscar tells Jude that he knows so much about her—and is trying to reconcile the Jude Dianna described with the “CJ” Oscar has grown to know over the last couple weeks.

Oscar reveals that Dianna always thought Oscar and Jude were kindred spirits—but that she wouldn’t allow them to meet until Oscar had been sober for three years and Jude was at least twenty-five years old. What Oscar is trying to say to Jude, he admits, is that he doesn’t believe it’s “their time” yet—he worries that he is too old for her, and too close to the traumas of his past.

Oscar tells Jude that he wants to be great friends with her, and promises to wait for her until she’s of legal age—and sure that she wants to be with him. Jude is miserable—she begs Oscar not to turn his back on what “might be the love story of [their] lives” and “denying all the forces that have conspired to bring [them] together.” As Jude says these words, she feels both her mother and grandmother’s spirits inside of her. Oscar surrenders and kisses Jude, admitting that he’s crazy about her and agreeing that they shouldn’t waste any more time. As the two embrace, Jude’s neighbor parrot squawks again: “Where the hell is Ralph?”

The symbolic decision to move onto a houseboat reflects the way God, in the Bible, “remade the world” by flooding it. Terrible things have befallen the Sweetwine family—but the events which have caused them so much grief and pain are now actually allowing them to remake their family, understand one another on new terms, and come together even stronger than before.



The strange connections, seemingly fated meetings, and unlikely coincidences swirling around the Sweetwine family continue to pile up.



The fact that Oscar knew her mother—and had a friendship with her—endears him to Jude even more. Jude understands how much her mother loved her—even though Jude was insecure about their relationship—and is able to see herself the way her mother saw her at last.



Oscar doesn’t want to hurt Jude, and is afraid of his own capacity to make mistakes and derail important relationships.



Jude wants Oscar to stop allowing grief, guilt, and fear to rule his life. She has abandoned those things, and is ready to commit to a relationship free of judgement, anxiety, or shame—she encourages Oscar to meet her in the middle, and, sensing Jude’s confidence and honesty, he does.



The next day, Jude and Noah approach Guillermo's studio. Jude reflects on her feelings about Guillermo—she has gone back and forth the last couple days between hating him entirely and wondering what it would have been like to have him as a stepfather. Jude is still confused about her feelings, but decides that “maybe some people are just meant to be in the same story.”

As Jude and Noah walk into the warehouse, Jude is shocked by how clean everything is—as they stand together in front of the painting on the wall of Guillermo and Dianna entwined in an embrace, Guillermo emerges from the next room and tells them that Dianna herself painted it. Noah wonders aloud why Dianna never shared her aspirations with him or Jude, and Guillermo says that she was scared—just like Jude was scared to show anyone her sand women. Guillermo reveals that it was he who sent Jude's pictures to CSA—Dianna had planned on doing it once she found the photos on Noah's camera, but he beat her to it.

As Jude looks around the studio, she realizes that all of the coincidences and collisions have perhaps not been so random—Dianna wanted Guillermo in her children's lives and them in his, knowing that they are, “each one of [them is] for the other, a key to a door that otherwise would've remained locked forever.”

Guillermo sets Noah up with canvases and paint, and then goes to check on Jude, who is working in the yard. Guillermo tells Jude that while Noah looks more like Dianna, Jude is Dianna—neither woman was ever afraid of him. Guillermo tells Jude that though he'd like to keep working with her, he understands if she doesn't want to anymore. Jude admits, though, that being around Guillermo has made her feel better about things. Guillermo speculates that maybe Dianna's ghost kept breaking Jude's clay so that she'd come find a stone carver. Jude wonders who—or what—pulls the strings of destiny.

Two weeks later, Jude and Benjamin arrive back at the house after a swim in the ocean. As Jude looks across the street at the woods, she sees Brian and Noah emerging from the forest hand in hand—last week, Noah finally got a response to his LostConnections post. As Benjamin and Jude smile at Noah and Brian, a ladybug lands on Jude's hand, and she makes a wish.

Jude doesn't hate Guillermo for coming between her parents—she understands that perhaps he was “meant to be” connected to her and Noah all along, and that a relationship she once perceived as a betrayal has actually allowed her family to grow closer together.



Even more unlikely connections and strange twists of fate are revealed. Jude, Guillermo, Noah, and Dianna were all connected before they even knew one another—and the impact they have had on one another's lives, often unbeknownst to the others, has been significant.



Jude's beliefs in the supernatural have evolved. She no longer believes in potions, herbs, and bad luck—but has come to understand that there is perhaps a divine order to the universe, and an underlying web of destiny and fate which allows important connections to be made.



Though resentment and secrecy threatened to destroy Jude and Guillermo's relationship, in this passage, they come together in their mutual love and respect for the woman Dianna was—and the ways in which she allowed them to find one another at the moment they needed each other most.



The novel ends on a note of hope and joyfulness. Everyone has grown, changed, shed their grief, and learned to accept the truth of who they really are—and who the people they love the most have become.





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