

The Power



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF NAOMI ALDERMAN

Alderman was born and raised in London in an Orthodox Jewish community. She was educated at South Hampstead High School and Oxford University. She then found her way into children's publishing before working as an editor for a law firm's publications. Alderman went on to study creative writing at the University of East Anglia before becoming a novelist. She was also a lead writer for an alternate reality game from 2004 to 2007. In 2006, she made her literary debut with the novel *Disobedience*. She published her second novel, *The Lessons*, in 2010, and her third, *The Liar's Gospel*, in 2012. Also in 2012, Alderman was selected to be mentored by Margaret Atwood through an arts initiative, resulting in her fourth novel, *The Power*, which was published in 2016. Alderman writes a monthly technology column for *The Guardian* and has received a number of literary accolades, including the Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction and the Orange Award for New Writers.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The novel responds to many aspects of the contemporary political scene worldwide, particularly concerning women's rights and sexism. First, it touches on the oppression of women in several countries, particularly Moldova, which has one of the highest rates of sex trafficking in the world. Alderman also touches on women's rights violations in Saudi Arabia, where women were allowed to vote only beginning in 2015. At the time of the book's publishing, women were not allowed to drive. As of 2019, there is still an ongoing campaign in that country against the requirement for women to obtain permission from male guardians for activities such as getting a job, travelling, or getting married. Alderman also addresses oppression in India, where substantially fewer girls are born than boys (indicating abortion of female children specifically). Additionally, Alderman investigates a number of widespread gender dynamics and forms of sexism. Among other specific examples, the book examines the ways in which women are often discriminated against institutionally, have difficulty climbing to higher offices and getting better jobs (like Margot and Kristen in the novel), and experience sexual and domestic violence that is widespread and normalized throughout the world.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Alderman is writing in a long tradition of contemporary feminist science fiction. Due to Alderman's mentoring relationship with Margaret Atwood when writing the book, *The Power* has been

most directly compared to [The Handmaid's Tale](#), which takes place in a dystopia in which a theonomy has overthrown the United States government and society is organized by Old Testament-inspired social classes, with women being subjugated and forcibly assigned to produce children. Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* provides another science fiction perspective on gender, as it follows the lives of four women living in parallel worlds who challenge each other's preexisting notions of womanhood. Ursula K. Le Guin's [The Left Hand of Darkness](#) serves as another thought experiment along the same lines, imagining a world in which society is devoid of different genders and sexes, and exploring the social hierarchies that arise from this structure. For a more classical example of a work investigating power, corruption, and gender, Shakespeare's [Macbeth](#) similarly demonstrates the corrosive nature of power and the lengths to which both men and women will go in order to achieve and keep it. Lastly, Alderman repeatedly quotes the Bible in her narrative, particularly the Book of Job.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Power
- **When Written:** 2012-2016
- **Where Written:** London, United Kingdom
- **When Published:** October 27, 2016
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Science Fiction, Speculative Fiction
- **Setting:** Multiple settings including London, Alabama, New England, Nigeria, and Bessapara (a fictional country, formerly Moldova).
- **Climax:** Allie calls on women worldwide to start a global war, prompting "the Cataclysm."
- **Antagonist:** Power
- **Point of View:** Third-person

EXTRA CREDIT

Book within a book. *The Power* is framed by letters between a character named Naomi Alderman and a man named Neil Adam Armon, who, the letters reveal, wrote the novel that makes up most of the book. Neil Adam Armon is an anagram of Naomi Alderman's name.

Science fiction fun. In addition to her literature, Alderman has also designed a science fiction running app called *Zombies, Run!*



PLOT SUMMARY

The Power is introduced with a letter: author Neil Adam Armon writes a letter to fellow author Naomi Alderman, thanking her profusely for reading his book, explaining that it is “not quite history, not quite a novel.” What follows is the novel’s text.

Two men break into fourteen-year-old Roxy’s home in London while she and Roxy’s mother are inside. Roxy tries to fight the men and discovers that she can produce an electrostatic shock using only her hands. Though she is able to hurt the men with this power, it is not enough to stop them from knocking Roxy unconscious and murdering her mother. Roxy’s father, a drug kingpin named Bernie Monke, gets revenge on the two men (though Roxy’s older brother Terry is killed in the fight), and Roxy uses her power to kill Primrose, the leader of their gang.

Twenty-one-year old Tunde, who lives in Lagos, Nigeria, has his first experience with the power when he play-wrestles with a girl he likes named Enuma, who shocks him. Tunde doesn’t understand what has happened—he is both aroused by and afraid of this shock—so he films more women as they use this power, selling the footage to various news networks around the world.

Margot, the mayor of an unnamed city in New England, is trying to learn about the power. She learns that only girls seem to have it, and that it comes from a newly developed muscle called a skein. Margot learns that her daughter, Jocelyn, has it. When Margot asks Jocelyn to shock her, the power is awakened in Margot as well. Margot holds a press conference proposing training camps where girls can learn to use their powers more safely. Daniel, the governor of the state, is furious with her for going over his head, but Margot starts getting calls in support of the idea. Within a month, the program is underway, and people also start to suggest Margot run for something more ambitious. Margot realizes how this power “is a kind of wealth”; she becomes more and more blunt with Daniel as she thinks about how easily she could kill him.

Fourteen-year-old Allie has also discovered that she has the power. Her foster father, Mr. Montgomery-Taylor, frequently beats and rapes her, and one day while this is occurring, a voice in her head compels her to kill her father using the power. Spurred again by the voice, she runs away from home and ends up in a convent in South Carolina, where she tells them her name is Eve. At the convent, Allie practices controlling her power and starts to perform a series of miracles. The first is using her power to cure a girl’s epilepsy, though the nuns in the convent don’t realize that she is using her power to do so. They believe that a divine being is speaking to her. Allie takes advantage of this belief and baptizes some of the girls under a new religion, which holds that God is a woman and which focuses on the female figures in each religion (such as Mary, rather than Jesus). One of the nuns believes that this is heresy,

and Allie kills her in the middle of the night. She and the other girls take over the convent under the new religion, and start to rewrite Scripture using only the parts that support their ideas.

Tunde travels to Moldova, the capital of human sex-trafficking, where enslaved women start to spark the power in each other and rise up to kill their oppressors. As more and more women are liberated, the President of Moldova, Viktor Moskalev, dies of what looks like a heart attack, and his wife Tatiana is appointed as the interim leader. However, a military coup is staged, and Tatiana is forced to take her half of the army to a castle in the south. Once there, she declares a new nation called Bessapara.

After Roxy kills Primrose, she has to lie low for fear of retribution. She travels to South Carolina to try to meet Eve, whose influence is growing worldwide and whose sermons Roxy has seen on the internet. Roxy has more power than anyone else Allie has ever met, and they become friends over the nine months Roxy stays there. Roxy returns to London and creates a new drug called Glitter, which enhances the strength and duration of women’s power. She uses Eve’s followers to help produce it, and gains influence with Tatiana Moskalev, who is using Glitter to fuel her army of women against the Moldovans. Meanwhile, Allie travels (as Eve) to Bessapara. She meets with Tatiana Moskalev and agrees to endorse the war, asking her followers to support Bessapara so that women can have a place where they are free from oppression.

After Moldova, Tunde next travels to Delhi, where women are also awakening the power in each other and trying to gain more rights. This time, however, one woman paralyzes Tunde with her power and tries to rape him, but other women fortunately pull her off of him. Tunde is deeply shaken by this event, and has a difficult time when a fellow journalist he dates named Nina tries to use her power in bed with him. Tunde interviews a man who goes by the alias UrbanDox, who is a supporter of men’s rights groups that have tried to orchestrate terror attacks against women. UrbanDox believes in a set of conspiracy theories mostly having to do with the idea that women will eventually only keep a few men to father children and will kill the rest.

Margot runs against Daniel for governor. During their on-air debate, he insults Margot’s daughters and she involuntarily shocks him. Voters are seemingly appalled at this violence, but election day tells a different story: people think she is strong, and Margot is elected governor. Jocelyn, meanwhile, attends the NorthStar training camps Margot has set up for girls, particularly because some days she has trouble controlling her power and some days she has none at all. Jocelyn is often made fun of and made to feel weak.

Roxy’s middle brother Ricky is raped and castrated by a group of women using their power, and she and her younger brother Darrell go to get revenge on the three girls who committed the crime. They tell her that Ricky was “asking for it.” Roxy gives

them all horrific facial scars. Roxy's stepmother Barbara thanks her for avenging Ricky, and recognizes that Roxy should be the natural inheritor of Bernie's crime ring. She gives Roxy notes concerning Bernie's business, which ultimately lead Roxy and Darrell to discover that it was Bernie who actually ordered Roxy's mother killed. Roxy and Darrell then threaten Bernie and force him to retire so that Roxy can take over the business.

Four years later, the war is still raging on in Bessapara. Tatiana Moskalev invites Margot (now a United States Senator), Eve, Roxy, and Tunde to a reception meant to drum up support for Bessapara. Before the party, Jocelyn visits Eve, who is able to cure the problems she experienced with her power. Tatiana and Margot strike a deal: Tatiana will employ the NorthStar women as a private army, and in exchange the U.S. will not interfere with some of the impending changes to Bessapara's law. Margot agrees. Later at the party, both Tunde and Eve are appalled to see Tatiana force a young man to lick up wine from the floor (and some glass shards from the broken bottle with it) after interrupting her.

Following the party, Roxy goes to a business meeting Darrell has set up. But when she arrives, she is knocked unconscious and her skein is surgically removed and implanted in Darrell: a plan carried out by Bernie. Roxy is able to escape after the surgery and runs into the forest. In the days after the party, Tunde reports on the increasingly unjust laws Bessapara is putting in place. There are now laws limiting men's travel and work without the permission of a female guardian, and if men are caught breaking the laws, they can be killed. Meanwhile, Darrell has taken over operations at the Glitter factory in Bessapara, telling the other women that Roxy is on a vacation and not revealing that he now has the power of Roxy's skein.

As Tunde travels in Bessapara, he becomes increasingly fearful of the women he meets along the road, worried that he might be killed for not having the correct papers. One day, he reads his own obituary in the news, and learns that Nina (to whom he sent many of his interviews and photographs) has stolen his materials and is publishing a book without crediting him. That evening, Tunde is forced to flee to the forest, where he witnesses a cultish ceremony in which a boy is sacrificed to a blind woman. He is then captured by this group, but he meets and befriends Roxy, who saves him from the blind woman. They walk to a refugee camp, but a gang of women soon attacks the camp. Roxy and Tunde witness the brutal rape and murder of a man, then escape the forest. That evening, they tell each other about Nina's and Darrell's crimes against them, and make love.

Meanwhile, Eve is trying to figure out how she can feel safe and allow women to be completely dominant over men. That night, Eve uses her power to manipulate the muscles in Tatiana's arm, causing Tatiana to slit her own throat with a letter opener. Eve is then elected the new leader of Bessapara.

Jocelyn, meanwhile, is stationed in Bessapara with the army of women from the NorthStar camps, and she is given suspicious

drugs in order to enhance her power that she suspects may be Glitter. Realizing that Margot and NorthStar are likely in cahoots with a drug ring, Jocelyn goes to Darrell's factory to investigate. There, Darrell uses his power for the first time to almost kill Jocelyn. The other women at the factory are aghast, realizing that he must have stolen Roxy's skein. They electrocute him and literally pull him limb from limb.

Roxy then helps Tunde escape the country and returns to the factory, where she learns the women have killed Darrell. She then meets up with Eve, who confesses her plan to spark a global war that will send society back to the Stone Age. Society can then be rebuilt in a way that assumes women have always been dominant. Roxy is horrified at this idea, and the two part ways. Eve speaks to a crowd calling upon America to support Bessapara in the war against the North Moldovans. Margot, upon learning of Jocelyn's injuries at the hands of a man, counsels the U.S. president to aid Bessapara. Like Eve, she wants to burn the society down to rebuild it. The novel's text ends with the implication that this in fact, comes to pass, with the development of a society in which women are dominant and Eve is the primary religious figure.

Naomi writes back to Neil, saying that she enjoyed the book but that she is surprised by some details: it's hard to believe in a time where there were male soldiers, or that women didn't have skeins prior to "the Cataclysm." She thinks that a society run by men would be "more kind, more gentle, more loving." Neil argues that current society is matriarchal, but that it doesn't have to be—they should be able to find a more equal balance between the genders.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Allie/Eve – Allie begins the novel as a 16-year-old girl in Alabama who lives with her foster parents, Mr. Montgomery-Taylor and Mrs. Montgomery-Taylor. Allie is frequently beaten and raped by her foster father. When Allie gains the power and is spurred on by a voice in her head, she kills her father with her power and runs away to a convent. Allie renames herself Eve and performs a series of so-called "miracles" that are really due to the fact that she can control her power exceptionally well. Again urged by the voice, she starts to teach her own religion which holds that God is a woman, and she also emphasizes the female figures in various religions. She even starts to rewrite Scripture, keeping only the parts that suit her narrative. Gradually Eve becomes a global religious icon and she supports Tatiana Moskalev and Bessapara as a new nation for women. She also befriends Roxy, whom she believes can protect the women in the convent because of her strength. By the end of the novel, Eve decides that the only way to ensure that women can maintain their power—and the only way that she herself

can feel safe—is if she sparks global war and the world bombs itself back to the Stone Age. Then she can rebuild a society in which women have always been dominant. Eve underscores Alderman’s argument about faith and religion: both are powerful forces, but they can be easily manipulated. Eve does not have true faith in the things she preaches, but she is nonetheless able to deceive others (and herself to a degree) into believing in her religion and following her. Within the novel, Neil demonstrates how Eve’s plan ultimately worked, as his manuscript includes artifacts that show Eve as a global figure and demonstrate how female figures have become much more prominent in religion.

Roxy Monke – Roxy is the daughter of a British crime boss, Bernie Monke. Roxy begins the novel at age 14. She watches two men break in to her home and murder her mother. During this event she discovers that she has an electrostatic power, and it eventually becomes clear that the sheer strength of her power is much more than that of most women. At first, Roxy is mostly preoccupied with avenging her mother. She kills Primrose, the leader of the rival gang that killed her mother, using her power. But gradually, Roxy recognizes how her ability to cause harm extends to other forms of power: she suggests to her father that they manufacture a drug that can enhance women’s power, which they eventually call Glitter. This drug then translates to economic power, but also to political power as they sell it to Tatiana Moskalev and eventually to Margot’s NorthStar army. However, Roxy’s immense success disrupts the existing power structure between her and the rest of her family. When Roxy discovers that it was actually her father Bernie who ordered her mother killed, she forces him to retire and takes over his business entirely. But Bernie is just as corrupted by power, and he is loath to cede any of it to Roxy. In turn, Bernie and Roxy’s younger brother Darrell have her skein forcibly removed and implanted in Darrell, cutting off Roxy’s power entirely. Roxy nearly dies, but without the power, she recognizes the injustice and corruption that it has caused in other women, such as Tatiana and Eve. Though Roxy and Eve had become friends along their journeys, Eve’s vision for the world ultimately prevails over Roxy’s hope for peace for the simple reason that Eve has more power.

Margot Cleary – Margot is the mayor of an unnamed city in New England. At the beginning of the book, Margot expresses frustration over the fact that she feels she is more competent than the governor of the state, Daniel Dandon. But when her daughter Jocelyn awakens the power in her, Margot feels more and more empowered to stand up to Daniel and carve her own political path. She thinks frequently about the fact that she can kill him, which puts her at ease. Without his knowledge, she proposes state-wide government programs for girls where they can learn to control their power, called the NorthStar training camps. Margot runs against Daniel for governor and beats him when she accidentally shocks him during their debate—an

action the voters believe makes her strong. Gradually, Alderman depicts Margot’s descent into corruption. She teams up with Tatiana Moskalev and provides her with girls from the NorthStar camps as a private army; later, the girls are given a black market drug called Glitter to enhance their power. At the end of the book, on the verge of global warfare, Margot (who has become a U.S. senator) tells the President of the United States that he should stand with Bessapara at any cost, knowing that the more NorthStar girls are deployed worldwide, the more money she will make as one of its founders. Ultimately she wants women to gain power even at the cost of her own daughter, as Jocelyn falls victim to Darrell while she is employed in Bessapara by NorthStar. Thus, Margot serves as an example of how the capacity for violence leads to political power, and how that power is ultimately very corrosive.

Tunde Edo – Tunde is a 21-year-old journalist from Nigeria. As the only male protagonist, Tunde becomes an outside eye on the women’s corruption. At first, he recognizes and documents the positive aspects of women gaining the power. In countries like Saudi Arabia, India, and Moldova, women who have been stripped of their rights or who are trapped in sexual slavery are finally able to start a revolution together and overcome their oppressors. But the longer Tunde remains in Moldova, the more he sees that the women have become just as corrupt and cruel as the men were. He writes about Tatiana Moskalev’s atrocities and experiences limitations on his own rights when his travel and work are restricted. He witnesses young boys being sacrificed in cultish ceremonies and men who are abused, raped, and murdered for no reason. Tunde also experiences the dread of vulnerability himself: when he is almost raped, he becomes traumatized and has a difficult time in bed with other women. When he walks down the street, he feels completely defenseless to the women who laugh at him as he passes. And at the end of the book, many of his photographs and interviews are stolen by another journalist, Nina, whom Tunde used to date and trusted to keep his materials safe. It is shocking for readers to see a man so vulnerable, and his chapters frequently force readers to recognize how these events are so shocking *because* he is a man. In this way, Alderman demonstrates how violence against women has become normalized, but the reversal of the gender roles explored in Tunde’s story reminds readers of how horrific and unjust these events truly are.

Tatiana Moskalev – Tatiana is the wife of Viktor Moskalev, the President of Moldova. After women begin to rise up against the government, it is implied that she kills Viktor with her power (though outwardly it appears that he had a heart attack). Tatiana is then appointed by the Supreme Court as the President of Moldova. Following this, a military coup forces Tatiana to flee to the south of the country, where she declares a new state called Bessapara in which women will be free. Though Tatiana’s initial goals are noble, over time she is shown to be more and more corrupted. She works with Roxy’s drug

ring in order to get Glitter for her soldiers and enhance their power; she also uses Eve's and Margot's own self-interest in order to drum up support for Bessapara. At a reception, she is shown to be cruel to men, as she forces Peter to lick up a broken bottle of wine from the floor after he interrupts her. She then shows that female rulers can be just as corrupted as men when she enacts unjust laws that mirror those of the old patriarchal regime. For example, she curtails men's freedom to drive, travel, and work without the consent of a female guardian. This quickly trickles down to the citizens of Bessapara, who rape, murder, and electrify men at will. When Eve realizes how unreliable Tatiana is, she uses her power to control the electrical impulses in Tatiana's mind and makes her slit her own throat.

Jocelyn Cleary – Jocelyn is Margot's daughter. Jocelyn has difficulties with her skein: she sometimes has so much power that she is unable to control it, but sometimes she doesn't have any power at all. These problems lead her to online internet forums for people with skein issues; it is on these forums that she communicates with Ryan, a boy with a skein. They eventually meet up and start dating. Jocelyn also starts to attend the NorthStar training camps that Margot sets up so that she can learn to control her power better. At the camps, Jocelyn is frequently made fun of for having less power than the other girls. This leads Jocelyn to want to avoid looking weak, and she accidentally kills a young man who tries to infiltrate the camp because she wants to seem powerful. Ultimately, Jocelyn meets Eve, who cures her of her skein deficiencies. Following this incident, Jocelyn has full faith in the Holy Mother and Eve's teachings. However, this belief is misguided: Jocelyn's cure eventually fades when she comes face to face with Darrell, who injures her severely using the power from Roxy's stolen skein. This emphasizes the potential harm in blind faith and in Allie's manipulations, as Allie knows that her cures are not forever but allows many of her followers to believe in them anyway.

The voice – This is a voice in Allie's head that guides her throughout much of her life, even before she gets the power. At first, Allie believes that the voice may be the voice of her mother speaking to her. When the voice counsels her to use her power to kill Mr. Montgomery-Taylor and escape to the convent, Allie begins to wonder whether the voice is in fact the voice of God. Deceiving herself into thinking that this is true, Allie starts to preach that a divine being is speaking through her and that she is a prophet. But the voice ultimately turns out to be a tool of self-deception. The voice eventually explains that it is merely trying to simplify the world for her and tell her what she wants to hear. In this way, it becomes clear that Allie does not actually have faith in the voice as a divine being, but is rather treating it as such in order to gain followers and power.

Darrell Monke – Darrell is Roxy's younger half-brother and Bernie and Barbara's youngest son. When Roxy's power grows,

Darrell starts to become intensely jealous of his sister's abilities. At first, Roxy believes that Darrell understands his place in the new world order; he seems to want to aid her in leading the business with the understanding that she is the one in charge. When Roxy ousts Bernie from his own business, however, he and Darrell team up in order to surgically remove Roxy's skein and implant it in Darrell. Thus, Darrell is corrupted by power just as much as the women who have it: any chance to take an advantage, he and Bernie try to do so—even at the potential cost of Roxy's life. Following the surgery, Darrell starts to run the Glitter factory in Roxy's stead, but the women continue to be suspicious of him. When they realize during his fight with Jocelyn that he has stolen Roxy's skein, they pull him limb from limb and kill him.

Neil Adam Armon – Neil is the fictional author of *The Power*. Neil has a series of correspondences with a fictional version of Naomi Alderman that frame his book, in which he explains that his intention is to write a book that isn't quite history and isn't quite a novel, but is the most probable explanation of the events leading up to "the Cataclysm." His concerns parallel those of many female authors in contemporary society: he doesn't want to be evaluated solely based on his gender, he wants to show the inequality between the sexes and how it infiltrates everyday life, and he wants to try to excavate history in a way that pushes against a predominant (and in this case, female-dominated) narrative. His name is an anagram of Naomi Alderman.

Naomi Alderman – Naomi is a fictionalized version of the author Naomi Alderman herself. She has several correspondences with Neil about his book, *The Power*. She gives him feedback stating that she doesn't believe some aspects of the narrative that he has crafted, such as male soldiers and police officers, or that women didn't have skeins until just before the Cataclysm. She's skeptical because those facts aren't supported by history books or the things that everyone in their society learned in school. Naomi's suggestions for Neil emphasize how, even 5,000 years after the events of the book, sexism still prevails and history, which has been written by those in power, often works to ensure the continuation of those sexist narratives.

Daniel Dandon – Daniel is the governor of an unnamed state in New England, and Margot's immediate superior. Margot is resentful of the fact that Daniel holds higher office than she does, despite the fact that she is more competent than he is. Once she gets her power, however, she often thinks of killing him and begins to be more assertive in their work together. When she decides to run against Daniel for governor, she accidentally uses her power against him in a debate. The voters then see her as strong, and she wins the election. The dynamic between the two of them emphasizes the reversal in political power between men and women: those who have a greater capacity to hurt become the ones who are allowed to lead.

Ryan – Ryan is Jocelyn’s boyfriend, and he is one of the few men who has a natural skein due to a chromosomal irregularity. He and Jocelyn meet on an online forum for people who have trouble with their skeins. Jocelyn is often made fun of for dating Ryan, as other girls believe she is so weak and strange that she wants to date an abnormal man. Jocelyn constantly grapples with the worry that Ryan only likes her because she is weak. Margot dislikes Ryan, and she shows Jocelyn what she claims are posts he wrote online arguing that all the girls with the power should be shot. This causes Jocelyn to break up with Ryan, until she realizes that Margot faked the posts and that Ryan had nothing to do with them.

UrbanDox – UrbanDox is a conspiracy theorist and a major figure among men’s rights groups. UrbanDox gives an interview with Tunde in which he confesses that he believes the women will eventually try to kill most of the men because they don’t need as many women as men to continue the human race. Tunde is deeply skeptical of UrbanDox, particularly because his manifestos are often used by male terrorist groups as motivation to carry out bombings and other terrorist acts. Towards the end of the novel, Tunde becomes especially resentful of UrbanDox because he diverts attention and causes people to focus on the extremist side of men’s rights groups and ignore the actual injustices that are befalling men in Bessapara.

Bernie Monke – Bernie is Roxy, Terry, Ricky, and Darrell’s father. Bernie is a crime boss in London, and Roxy admires him for his reputation for violence, recognizing how it protects him. Bernie loves Roxy, but when Roxy discovers that Bernie had Roxy’s mother killed and she ousts him from his business, Bernie does not hesitate to retaliate. He cooks up a plan to have Roxy’s skein removed and surgically implanted into Darrell instead, to restore the power to the men in the family. Thus, he becomes just as corrupted by power as anyone else, doing anything that he can in order to maintain the existing power structure—even if it comes at the cost of his daughter’s life.

Viktor Moskalev – Viktor is the President of Moldova and the husband of Tatiana Moskalev. After women who had been sold into sexual slavery in Moldova rise up against the men and the government of Moldova as a whole, Viktor plans to retaliate with military action. Though he loses much of his army and its supplies, he is being secretly funded by Awadi-Atif. He confesses to Tunde in an interview that he plans to bomb his own country, rather than allowing women to take control—thus emphasizing how the men will try to retain power at any costs, despite the deep inequality and horrific violence against women in the society. It’s implied that Tatiana kills Viktor with her power before he has a chance to carry out his plan, although his death appears to be a heart attack.

Enuma – Enuma is a cousin of one of Tunde’s friends, and Tunde has a crush on Enuma at the beginning of the book. He

flirts with her and play-wrestles with her one day when they are alone together. However, she playfully uses her power to stun his arm, and he becomes afraid and aroused all at once as he realizes that she could do anything to him. Though she only gives him a light kiss, he becomes ashamed and confused by what happened, which spurs him to try to discover more about the power and eventually leads to his career as a journalist covering society’s transformation.

Nina – Nina is a female journalist whom Tunde dates briefly. He shies away from her in bed when she tries to use her power on him because of the trauma he endured in Delhi. Over the course of the book, Tunde sends Nina some of his materials and photographs. After Tunde is reported dead (even though in reality he is still alive), Nina publishes all of his material under her own name, demonstrating a reversal of men historically stealing work from women or not crediting their contributions.

Mr. Montgomery-Taylor – Mr. Montgomery-Taylor is Allie’s long-term foster father and Mrs. Montgomery-Taylor’s husband. Mr. Montgomery-Taylor is abusive towards Allie and frequently rapes her. When Allie is able to control her power well enough, she kills Mr. Montgomery-Taylor as he is raping her. These crimes spur Allie to constantly want to live among women and find a sense of safety, which is what leads her to the convent and eventually her role as a religious leader. At the end of the book, Allie learns that it was actually Mrs. Montgomery-Taylor who spurred him to commit these acts of violence.

Mrs. Montgomery-Taylor – Mrs. Montgomery-Taylor is Allie’s foster mother and Mr. Montgomery-Taylor’s wife. While Allie believed that Mrs. Montgomery-Taylor was simply an idle bystander to Allie’s abuse, at the end of the novel Allie realizes that it was in fact Mrs. Montgomery-Taylor who told her husband to abuse and rape Allie. This information completely upends Allie’s understanding of her life, as she (and the voice) had tried to simplify her worldview to believe that men were bad, and women were good.

Kristen – Kirsten is one of the TV anchors in a recurring sketch in the book. At first, Kristen is given the lighter material and her colleague Tom is given the hard-hitting pieces to report. Gradually this dynamic shifts, and after Tom has a sexist outburst and is fired, he is replaced by a younger man named Matt, while Kristen becomes the lead anchor on the program. This change in their workplace underscores the larger thematic correlation between the capacity to hurt and other kinds of power; as women gain physical power, Kristen gains professional power.

Tom Hobson – Tom is one of the TV anchors in a recurring sketch in the book. At first, Tom is given the hard-hitting pieces to report, while his colleague Kristen is given the fluffier material. However, as the power becomes widespread and women gradually gain more standing in society, Kristen is given the more important pieces. This deeply angers Tom, and he has a sexist outburst that leads to him being fired and replaced by a

younger, attractive man named Matt.

Noor – Noor is a woman whom Tunde meets during his reporting in Riyadh during the women’s riots. She takes him around Riyadh, showing him how the women have become newly liberated by the power. The two also have sex during his time in Riyadh. Noor uses her power on him while they have sex, and though it hurts, it also arouses him—showing the gender role reversal of how lust, sex, and pain have all become tangled together for men.

Roxy’s mother – At the beginning of the novel, Roxy’s mom is murdered by two men in Primrose’s gang while Roxy is present. Roxy spends much of the book trying to avenge everyone who had been involved in her murder. At the end of the book, it is revealed that Bernie is actually the one who orchestrated her murder because she had been selling secrets about his business.

Barbara Monke – Barbara is Roxy’s stepmother and Bernie’s wife. Barbara dislikes Roxy because Bernie had an affair with Roxy’s mother, and she and Roxy’s mother became pregnant around the same time. But when Roxy avenges a crime that a few girls committed against Barbara’s son Ricky, Barbara recognizes that Roxy should be the inheritor of Bernie’s crime ring and gives her secret information about the business.

Detective Newland – Newland is a detective who spies on Roxy and her mother. He then sells the information to Primrose so that Primrose’s gang can kill Roxy’s mother. Later in the novel, Roxy and Darrell track down Detective Newland and discover that it was actually Bernie who had him spy on them and have Roxy’s mother killed. Roxy and Darrell then kill Newland.

Ricky Monke – Ricky is Roxy’s older half-brother, and Bernie and Barbara’s middle son. Ricky is raped and castrated by a group of three women while drunk one evening at a bar, despite his protests and attempts to scream for them to stop. This tragedy underscores the drastic power shift that the power causes, particularly as it relates to sexual encounters between men and women.

Awadi-Atif – Awadi-Atif is the new king of Saudi Arabia. He becomes the heir to the throne after the assassination of the old king, following a women’s riot in Riyadh. He flees the country and begins supporting Viktor Moskalev, then the North Moldovans in order to suppress the female paramilitary groups that are rebelling in the country.

Sister Veronica – Sister Veronica is one of the nuns in the convent where Allie stays. Sister Veronica is very skeptical of the girls’ new power, believing that it comes from the devil. She tells the other nuns that they should burn all of the girls. Allie, overhearing this, kills Sister Veronica (making it look like a heart attack).

Sister Maria Ignacia – Sister Maria Ignacia is one of the nuns in the convent where Allie stays. Allie is closest with Sister Maria

Ignacia, and it is from her that Allie is inspired to emphasize the female figures in various religions because Maria Ignacia teaches that Jesus learned love from his mother Mary.

Peter – Peter is a young man who is part of Tatiana Moskalev’s entourage after she becomes the leader of Bessapara. When he accidentally interrupts Tatiana at a party, she makes him lick up a broken bottle of wine, along with several shards of glass. Peter then warns Tunde of the impending limitations on men’s rights.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Primrose – Primrose is the leader of another gang that rivals Bernie’s. Primrose’s gang is responsible for killing Roxy’s mother, and so Bernie takes Roxy and his sons to get revenge on him. Roxy kills Primrose using her power in an act of vengeance for her mother.

Luanne – Luanne is an epileptic girl who lives in the convent with Allie. When Allie cures Luanne using her power, the nuns and other girls start to believe that a divine being is working through Allie.

Terry Monke – Terry is Roxy’s oldest half-brother, and Bernie and Barbara’s oldest son. Terry is killed when Roxy, Bernie, Ricky, and Darrell go to get revenge on Primrose for killing Roxy’s mother.

Matt – Matt is a young, attractive TV anchor who replaces Tom and takes on the lighter pieces while Kristen handles the more serious stories.

Alan – Alan is one of Margot’s advisors for her campaign, who runs debate prep with her.

Temi – Temi is Tunde’s sister.

TERMS

Skein – Skeins are the biological source of the women’s electrostatic power. Alderman describes the skein as a muscle composed of twisted strands that lie across a woman’s collarbone. It is thought that its development was biologically and genetically prompted by a substance called Guardian Angel, which was put in the water supply as a way to protect citizens from nerve gas during World War II.



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.



POWER AND VIOLENCE

The Power imagines a world in which women worldwide suddenly acquire the ability to conduct and send electricity through their hands. While this ability is an inherently neutral one, women quickly discover what becomes its primary use: to hurt others by sending them severe electrical shocks. Alderman examines the 10 years between women acquiring this power and an event called “the Cataclysm,” focusing on several primary characters: Margot, the mayor of an unnamed New England town; Roxy, the daughter of a British crime lord; Tunde, a Nigerian journalist; and Allie, a teenager from Alabama who begins her own religion. Each of these characters provides a different exploration of how “the power,” as it is simply called, shifts the power dynamic in all aspects of life. Through her portrayal of these four characters, Alderman shows how the ability to inflict violence on others imbues individuals with power, which can then expand into political, religious, and economic influence.

Before women receive this electrostatic power, Alderman establishes the baseline dynamic between men and women, which reflects contemporary society. As men generally have a greater ability to hurt, they have made and continue to uphold a patriarchal system. Alderman introduces two of her main characters with visceral examples of the ways in which men are able to hurt women. The book begins with 14-year-old Roxy trapped in a closet after two men arrive in her home wielding knives. They kill her mother and beat Roxy to unconsciousness with very little opposition, demonstrating the relative powerlessness that women have as compared to men. Allie, a teenager living in Alabama, is violated by her foster father, Mr. Montgomery-Taylor. After her foster father sees Allie trying to fend off two boys attempting to have sex with her, he calls her a whore for encouraging them, while beating and raping her. Alderman reveals that this violence has been happening for years, and each time Allie’s foster mother, Mrs. Montgomery-Taylor, willfully ignores it. Both Allie and Roxy’s stories demonstrate how the ability to hurt provides men with power—particularly the power to carry out such violence and get away with it. On a less violent note, Alderman switches gears to focus on 21-year-old Tunde, who lives in Nigeria. Tunde pursues his first relationship with a girl named Enuma, but Alderman makes a point to show how their flirtation is a performance of their gender roles. When Enuma coquettishly refuses to bring him a Coke, Tunde calls her a servant girl and play-wrestles her to the ground in order kiss her, though he “takes care not to really force her.” Even without violence, Alderman illustrates how simply having an ability to overpower someone else can be just potent as actually physically hurting them, because they are unable resist.

After establishing a portrait of these initial power dynamics, Alderman’s single change to the contemporary world reinforces how the capacity to hurt is what determines power.

The previously victimized characters, now possessing “the power,” suddenly find themselves gaining status in many aspects of their lives, and the previously dominant characters start to lose it. Tunde continues to pursue Enuma, but she flips the interaction on him. As they play-wrestle, she gives him a shock that makes him temporarily lose all feeling in his left arm. It excites him, but it also hurts him deeply and makes him feel ashamed that he doesn’t understand what is happening. Later, when he sees another woman kill a man using her power out of self-defense, “he feels the fear travel down his spine like a hot wire. He knows then what he felt by the pool: that Enuma could have killed him if she’d wanted.” Tunde’s experience hints at a new social order, in which women have more power than men, because men are becoming fearful of the pain and injury women can cause. The female characters, by contrast, start to take advantage of this ability to hurt. After Allie gains the power, she uses it to kill her abusive foster father. The power becomes explicitly interchangeable with violence for her: when she decides to run away, she thinks briefly about grabbing a knife for protection. But then she recognizes with amusement that she has no need for a knife, because she has just killed a man with her bare hands. Roxy, whose electrostatic power is stronger than almost any other woman’s, kills a man who was involved in her mother’s murder for vengeance. She also takes over her father’s crime ring instead of her brothers, proving how the ability to hurt others can translate to other kinds of power. Margot, the mayor of an unnamed city in New England, is constantly undermined by the state’s governor, Daniel, and feels certain that she will lose to him in the upcoming governor’s race. But once she gains her power, Margot speaks harshly and bluntly to Daniel in their meetings, comforted by the knowledge that she could kill him if she wanted to (even though, she assures herself, she never would). When she uses her power against Daniel in a debate on television out of anger, voters view her as strong and elect her. With this result, Margot recognizes that “the power to hurt is a kind of wealth.” Thus, violence becomes a means for gaining power in other aspects of life.

Ultimately, the power of the book’s title is manifold: it is the ability to hurt others, which the women gain on a grand scale, but it is also the secondary forms power that stem from this first ability. “The change,” as it becomes known, is a shift not only in capabilities, but also in who is dominant and who is subjugated, who has confidence and who feels shame, who can rise in status and who cannot. Alderman writes that the shape of power is a **tree**, and her book demonstrates how power branches from violence to its many other modes.



CORRUPTION

In an interview, Alderman stated that in writing *The Power*, she wished to interrogate the belief that women would make better leaders than men. As

the balance of power tips from men to women in her book, Alderman argues that this would not be the case. The book demonstrates that regardless of gender, power is an inherently corrosive and corrupting force that leads not to a desire for the betterment of society, but rather only to a desire to protect one's own status and group.

At first, the women primarily use violence in cases of self-defense and in order to escape horrific situations, as with Allie's murder of her rapist father. But as the book goes on and the women gain even more power, the power starts to corrupt their morals, and they exact violence for cruelty rather than justice. When Allie runs away, she realizes that the only way that she can truly feel safe is, as a voice in her head counsels her, "to own the place." She then travels to a convent, takes on a new name, Eve, and begins to preach a new religious message based on this new power. But when one of the nuns becomes skeptical of her new religious message, Allie kills the nun—thinking to herself that if she does not quash her enemies, she can never be safe. While religion is typically thought to foster peace and love, Allie is more motivated by the desire to eradicate anyone who doesn't support her ideas. Meanwhile, women who had been sold into sex slavery in Moldova gain power and create a new country, Bessapara. Tatiana Moskalev, the leader of this new country, starts to let the power corrupt her intentions of building a freer nation. At a party, when a young man interrupts her, she shatters a wine bottle on the floor and makes him lick up the wine (and several shards of glass). One might believe that a female ruler would be more kind and forgiving than a male ruler. But Alderman counters that idea by showing Tatiana's cruelty, brought on by her newfound power. Through government programs, Margot creates training camps for girls to learn to control their power, and subsequently forms an army of those girls. She then teams up with Tatiana Moskalev, who agrees to contract with the army in exchange for American support of Bessapara. With this support, Tatiana Moskalev is able to introduce many laws that curb men's freedoms with little international criticism. Thus, power becomes a cycle, which allows for institutional discrimination and suppression of those who might try to resist it. And Margot has become so corrupted by her desire to see the camps succeed that she ignores the injustices brought upon a group of which she is not a part.

Tunde and Roxy both endure terrible experiences at the hands of those with more power than they have—in Tunde's case, another journalist named Nina, and in Roxy's case, her brother Darrell and father Bernie. Roxy and Tunde come to the conclusion that the others hurt them simply because they had the power to do so. After Roxy learns that Bernie was actually the person who ordered her mother's death, she ousts him from his crime ring and takes over. But Bernie and Darrell refuse to allow Roxy to get away with this, and so they kidnap her and have the biological source of her power (a muscle

women develop called a skein) surgically removed in an extremely painful operation. They implant her skein into Darrell, allowing him to wield the power that she once had. Bernie and Darrell are so resistant to losing any of their power that they resort to despicable means to maintain it. Power thus corrupts even those who already have it, as they become motivated against losing power. Tunde experiences a similar injustice. While he is reporting in Bessapara, Tunde sends his materials and research for a book to another journalist named Nina, whom he had dated briefly. As conditions in Bessapara worsen for men, Tunde is forced to go into hiding and is even reported dead. Later, he reads online that Nina has taken everything he sent her and has claimed it as her own reporting. The power that Nina has gained, and her belief that Tunde could never refute her actions, allows her to steal his entire life's work without any hesitation. Towards the end of the book, Roxy and Tunde meet each other in the forest, both of them completely powerless. As they relay their stories to each other, Alderman writes this exchange: "One of them says, 'Why did they do it, Nina and Darrell?' And the other answers, 'Because they could.' That is the only answer there ever is." Thus, the novel makes it clear that it is not only that power *enables* problematic and corrupt behavior: power also *prompts* that behavior.

At the very end of the book, Alderman focuses once more on Allie in order to demonstrate how her corruption has prompted the most extreme desire: the wish to set society back five thousand years in order to rebuild it as a matriarchy. By the book's final chapters, Allie has become a revered religious figure named Mother Eve. She is so power-hungry that she deposes Tatiana Moskalev and expresses to Roxy her desire to "bomb ourselves back to the Stone Age" so that women can create a society in which they will always be dominant. She has no desire for equality and she also has no intention for progress. Rather, she (and the many women worldwide who choose to follow her) would rather set themselves back thousands of years in order to ensure the continuation of their power.

Through her various characters and their fluctuating states of power, Alderman deftly illustrates how the intense desire to retain and further that power obscures all other motivation and morality. In individuals as diverse as politicians, journalists, and even religious figures, whether men or women, power quickly results in mass corruption.



GENDER REVERSALS AND SEXISM

The Power provides a critical look at gender dynamics. At the beginning of the novel, gender relations reflect contemporary society: a patriarchy in which men are more generally dominant, which Alderman posits is due to the fact that men are more able to inflict violence, and therefore more able to gain power. But after

women start to gain the power, they turn those gender dynamics on their heads. Alderman makes a point to highlight the inequality that women lord over men in passages that feel eerily parallel to current discourse on sexism, only with the gender roles reversed. This allows readers to look with fresh eyes at contemporary society, as Alderman uses the shock of descriptions in which men are subjugated in comparison with how normalized discrimination against women has become in reality.

The frame of the book introduces the fictional author of the text, Neil Adam Armon (an anagram of Naomi Alderman), asking a fictionalized version of Naomi herself for advice about his work. This exchange of letters sets up a world in which women are the dominant gender, hinting at some of the small ways in which men (in the new world shaped by the power) face discrimination. After reading the book, Naomi responds to Neil by noting the unlikelihood of male crime gangs and police officers, and by saying that it is more likely that women provoked the violence initially. She also mentions that she's turned on by the descriptions of being locked up for sex by men, that they constitute a fantasy for many women. These casual and inappropriate dismissals are a mirror of the way in which many professional women are treated in contemporary workplaces. At the end of their exchange, Naomi recommends that Neil publish the book under a female pen name in order for it to be read more widely—another nod to how women's writing has historically been taken less seriously. All of these examples show how even the novel's frame prompts readers to reexamine inequality between genders.

Within the novel proper, the acquisition of the power starts to tip the scales from men to women, and small changes in gender dynamics ultimately give way to total reversals. This highlights for readers some of the horrors that occur in the real world, giving readers a fresh perspective on the inequalities that society has come to tolerate because they have been normalized for so long. Initially, a kind of playful violence becomes normalized and even encouraged in girls as they play and hurt each other with their powers, in much the same way that rough play is more acceptable in boys today than in girls. As fights between boys and girls break out on the playground, parents start telling their sons not to go out alone—a reversal of advice frequently given to young girls. When Margot acquires her power, she describes feeling a “constant ease.” She starts to speak “how a man speaks,” bluntly and with confidence. Society rewards her for this behavior: when she disobeys Daniel, her superior, to spearhead training programs for young girls, people start to take notice of her. They ask for meetings to see whether she is interested in running for “something a little more ambitious.” Strength and ambition begin to be valued in women, in contrast to the way they are normally more valued in men. Eventually, in Bessapara, men need permission from women to go out in public, and various

men's rights are curtailed including the freedoms to vote, own businesses, and drive cars. This seems absurd and horrific, but it has direct parallels with many freedoms that women lack in a variety of countries today.

The mirror between *The Power* and today's society becomes particularly horrifying in examples of women dominating men in brutal sexual encounters. It provides a parallel that demonstrates how sexism in today's society enables violence (often sexual violence) by men against women. As the power starts to become more widespread, posts on internet forums pop up saying that boys like to be electrified and hurt—that it is arousing to them, tying together sexuality, lust, power, and also subjugation. But rather than wielding the power responsibly, some use these findings to justify hurting and even raping men using the power. Ricky, Roxy's brother, is raped and castrated by women using their power. When Roxy seeks them out in vengeance, they say that Ricky was begging them to have sex with him and hurt him, that he was literally “asking for it.” This choice of language is particularly important, because it has historically been language that men use to justify raping women, by implying that the women gave subtle or implicit consent. It forces readers to understand that there is no way Ricky could have wanted this to happen, just as women never “ask for” rape. A final example depicts one woman raping and murdering a man in an act of war: Alderman provides a graphic description for this episode that is clearly meant to deeply disturb readers. Yet in recognizing that women are usually the victims in acts like these, readers are forced to reflect on how sexual violence against women has been normalized, and the novel asks men in particular to imagine how they might feel in a world that brutalizes them in the same way today's society brutalizes women.

Alderman's book is an eerie mirror that allows men and women to envision a world in the others' shoes. Many of the passages describing violence and rape are deeply troubling to read, particularly because depicting men as the victims of these crimes is unusual. Alderman invites that shock, calling up the parallels as a way of reminding readers that current society *should* be shocking: its inequality and sexism are brutal. Alderman leaves readers knowing that while the inequality in the book is fictional, the parallel inequality in today's society is very real.



STORIES, HISTORY, AND PERSPECTIVE

The Power is a book within a book—and its framed structure highlights the consequences of how society's stories are told. Neil, the author of the book within Alderman's novel, as well as Tunde, both reveal how important perspective can be to the creation of history. Through these characters, Alderman indicates that history and stories are yet another branch of power, because how a story is told can shape how society remembers its history and how

history, in turn, can alter how people think about the present. The book is presented as a kind of historical fiction written by Neil. It posits a version of history to show how women came to be the dominant sex in the 10 years before “the Cataclysm,” an event which occurred 5,000 years prior to the book’s creation. Through Neil’s exchanges with Naomi, Alderman demonstrates how history can be written to support what is understood in the present, not necessarily to convey the truth. Naomi writes to Neil, after reading the book, to say that she finds it hard to believe that there were mostly male soldiers in the pre-Cataclysm era, because in school they had been taught that, historically, male soldiers were very rare. Thus, to her, it makes more sense that women should provoke the war in the book. Her reaction is one example of how a predominant narrative can prevail over the truth. Naomi also notes that “A whole battalion of men in army fatigues or police uniforms really does make most people think of some kind of sexual fetish,” because men in power are treated more like a fantasy than a reality. Again, Alderman illustrates how a generally accepted stereotype can override reality. Neil argues against Naomi’s points, writing explicitly that “The way we think about our past informs what we think is possible today. He argues that many of the people shaping early “post-Cataclysm” history books (usually nuns, he notes) would have had their own agendas in writing them—that if they recopied works that said men used to be stronger than women, that “would be heresy and they’d be damned for it.” The perspective of those telling a story is equally important, as they have the power to control what people know hundreds or thousands of years in the future.

Within the narrative itself, Tunde becomes a primary documenter of the years before the Cataclysm. But when his work is stolen by a woman named Nina, Alderman argues how the ability to tell a story is an extension of power. At first, before people truly understand what the power is, Tunde records videos of women using their power as a way to help himself make sense of what is happening. When he realizes that other people are trying to understand this as well, he begins selling footage to media outlets. As he watches women fight on the beach, he thinks, “You do what you like [...] I’m the one who’s going to turn it into something. I’ll be the one who’ll tell the story.” Tunde recognizes explicitly that being able to control what people see constitutes a type of power. Tunde carefully observes revolutions in Riyadh and Delhi, supporting the women’s movements as they liberate themselves from repressive regimes. But as he reports on Tatiana Moskalev’s rise in Bessapara, he sees the impending danger of her desire to curb men’s freedoms. When he tries to sell the story to CNN and other companies, they refuse. He also discovers that he no longer has access to media sites like YouTube where he could post his own videos to try and gain media attention. Thus, his lack of ability to tell his story leads to a direct loss of power, and it also prevents him from warning others of the same fate

worldwide. Instead, Tunde sends his materials—photos, videos, and writings of interviews that he plans to turn into a book—to a fellow journalist he had been involved with named Nina. But he discovers later that Nina, thinking that he had died, has taken all of his material and published it as her own, gaining widespread acclaim. Alderman thus demonstrates how the erasure of the author can be just as harmful as an erasure of material. The success of Tunde’s book would have allowed him to provide a different perspective than a woman who has just gained power, but his subsequent work is (presumably) lost to history.

Neil also includes images in his book of historical artifacts, which date to various times within the 5,000 years between the Cataclysm and the time in which Neil lives. The way that the artifacts are presented emphasizes how society can be shaped by historical viewpoints. One image depicts a kind of monument, in which its central square portion has been completely destroyed. Based on Neil’s writing to Naomi, it is implied that this is one of many statues and monuments to male figures that were destroyed during the Cataclysm. It demonstrates how society not only creates history, but erases history to serve those in power. The book also includes two images of statues on pages 239-240—the first statue is a figure of a woman in a proud pose, and the second is a bust of a man. In the book, the two statues are labelled “Priestess Queen” and “Serving Boy.” Alderman reveals in the Acknowledgements of the book that these two drawings are based on real historical artifacts entitled “Dancing Girl” and “Priest King.” The difference in labels demonstrates how a discrepancy of perspective and intention can deeply alter how people view and judge history.

Indeed, Alderman writes directly to the reader, “Sometimes I think the whole of this book could be communicated with just this set of facts and illustrations.” As Alderman knows well, stories are crucial to how people think about history, and exploring new perspectives and trying to imagine different versions of history is a worthwhile exercise to make readers question how their own history has been examined, told, and retold.



RELIGION AND MANIPULATION

In addition to government and media, Alderman also examines how power manifests in another influential institution: religion. One of the main characters in *The Power*, Allie, escapes abuse in Alabama and travels to a convent, hoping to find safety. She feels, however, that she will never be truly safe until she is in control of the convent—and later, in control of the world. She uses her power to ignite a new religion, but her new faith is only the means to an end, instead of something she truly believes. Thus, Alderman takes a very skeptical view of religion: she acknowledges that faith can be a truly powerful thing, but shows how it is also

something that can be easily manipulated and used as a tool of deception.

Initially, Allie uses deception to craft her identity in the convent—not as a means of manipulation, but out of a need to survive. After killing her abusive foster father, Allie runs away to the convent and renames herself “Eve,” worried that she might be found by the police if she uses her real name. Using her power, Eve is then able to cure a girl who experiences seizures, though she does not tell the other women how she is able to do it. They start to believe that she is capable of making miracles, and even bring her other girls to heal. Eve begins to understand that others having faith in her is a kind of protection, because people look to her for guidance and she is thought to be a channel for a divine being. Even though she’s not religious herself, she plays into others’ ideas of her and starts to lose a sense of her life as Allie.

Now leaning into her deception, Eve starts to teach her own religious ideas. But rather than preach a new faith entirely, she borrows and twists ideas from other religions to suit the beliefs she wants to preach. Thus, Alderman implicates Eve’s religion as being solely a manipulation: she puts forth ideologies that simply uphold what people already want to believe in order to get them to follow her. After Eve starts to create seeming miracles, she tells the other girls in the convent that God is a woman. The first time that she calls God “She,” Alderman writes that to the girls, this is “very shocking. But they understand it, each of them. They have been waiting to hear this good news.” With the shift in power, they have already started to recognize the supremacy that women can have, and God as a woman represents the ultimate supremacy. Eve gradually gains power when her teachings wind up on the internet. She records a message for the masses, telling them that God is simply showing a different side of herself. She announces, “Jews: look to Miriam, not Moses, for what you can learn from her. Muslims: look to Fatima, not Muhammad. Buddhists: remember Tara, the mother of liberation. Christians: pray to Mary for your salvation.” She is not changing the religion, but simply altering the narrative around it. This principle is emphasized even further when Alderman later writes, “They’re finding Scripture that works for them, rewriting the bits that don’t.” Eve is manipulating the existing power structure in order to create one that emphasizes and upholds the newfound power of her and her followers, giving people even greater faith in her.

It is worth noting that Allie’s belief in something higher stems primarily from a voice she hears inside her own head, which she believes may be God. But Alderman eventually reveals that this voice is a form of Allie’s own self-deception, again reinforcing the argument that faith is promulgated primarily through deception. Allie reveals early on in her storyline that she hears a voice in her head that guides her and counsels her through the various hardships she has faced. Allie thinks variously that

the voice is the voice of God, or the voice of her mother, or perhaps even the voice of the devil, leading her through life. The fact that she has so little certainty in what the voice actually represents proves her faith’s insecurity and instability, and illustrates that Allie is simply relying on it because it suits her deception. At the end of the book, when Allie tries to reconcile what the voice really is, the voice confesses, “Look, I’m not even real. Or not real like you think ‘real’ means. I’m here to tell you what you want to hear.” The voice, therefore, is not a guide, but is really Allie’s own way of convincing herself that she is doing the right thing.

Ultimately, Allie/Eve decides that the only way for her and other women to feel safe is if they rebuild a society where women have always been in charge. She calls upon her followers to begin a war that will blow society back to the Stone Age, in order for it to be rebuilt as a matriarchy. Thus, the eventual purpose of the faith is not some kind of moral clarity; rather, it is to manipulate her followers so that she can accomplish her goals and maintain her power.



REVOLUTION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

As the power disrupts not only individual dynamics but also governments and countries, Alderman poses a central question of the possibilities of social change. The transition of power in the novel is rarely smooth: often men try to resist the loss of any power, or resort to old methods of suppression. Gradually the women start to recognize that gradual change, even in the direction of progress, will not allow them to gain the power that they have been lacking. Instead, Alderman argues that their only course—for better or worse—is to ignite revolution and build a new society from the ground up.

Even from the beginning, Alderman demonstrates that changes of power cannot be gradual. She provides several examples of how at even the slightest threat, men attempt to prevent women from gaining or using power. Tunde witnesses a young woman being harassed by a man in a supermarket, before the power has really been discovered or understood. She electrifies him, causing him to fall to the ground in a fit. Someone immediately says, “That girl was a witch! That is how a witch kills a man.” The reference to witchcraft calls back to historical events in which women who were viewed as a threat to the existing power structure were subjugated or killed, and so efforts toward changes in power dynamics often made little progress. Boys in Allie’s school tell her that the previous week in Nebraska, some boys killed a girl for lighting a cigarette with only her fingers. This incident shows that even the smallest gesture, when it indicates greater power, is seen as a threat and eradicated. In Moldova, the world capital of human sex-trafficking, Alderman focuses on women who have been sold into sexual slavery, locked in a basement for years, and who rise against the men enslaving them. President Viktor Moskalev

confesses to Tunde that he would rather bomb his own country to crush the paramilitary groups of women than allow them to gain power after being oppressed for so long. Thus, a gradual shift becomes impossible because those who are in danger of losing power are more interested in defending their own than in allowing for any loss of power.

Increasingly, women start to make their own revolutions, recognizing that this is the only way to institute change. In Moldova, the women who were sold into sexual slavery begin to take over towns, noting that not only were their oppressors in the wrong, but many people (policemen, landlords, postmen) knew what was happening and still did nothing. President Moskalev is killed by his wife Tatiana, and she creates a new state called Bessapara. Tunde travels to Riyadh, where riots begin when two young girls are beaten to death for practicing their powers. Hundreds of women flood the streets; the police retreat, understanding the women's strength. The women work together to free others from rooms in which they have been trapped, gathering numbers and growing. Twelve days after the first riot, the government falls and the King of Saudi Arabia is assassinated. Later, in Delhi, in "the place men come when they want a woman they can use without law or license, discard without censure," women start to rampage through the markets. Tunde is again there to report, and one of the women tells him: "The only wave that changes anything is a tsunami. You have to tear down the houses and destroy the land if you want to be sure no one will forget you." These revolutions emphasize the necessity of vast, sweeping change, because any gradual change is completely stifled.

When Allie expresses wanting to control the world, the voice counsels her at several points: "You can't get there from here." This implies that it's sometimes impossible to progress from one place in society to another: instead, it might require steps back before steps forward in order to truly change. By the end, Allie sends the world back to the Stone Age in order to reform society in a matriarchal structure, knowing that if men have the slightest chance of having power, they will still fight for it. This conclusion is even more extreme, demonstrating that sometimes even revolution is not enough: true change requires a complete rebuilding of society.

The book opens with a passage from the Book of Eve, asserting that "the shape of power is always the same; it is the shape of a tree." Alderman explains this symbol over the course of the book: a large power (like the one that women gain) branches out to smaller and smaller sources of power. But at the end of the book, Margot recognizes that no matter how many branches are cut off from a tree, the old one still stands, a metaphor for the old society. The only way to create a different power structure, she realizes suddenly, "is to blast it entirely to pieces." This expresses Alderman's conclusion on social change: the gradual search for progress is fruitless; instead, revolution is needed for true change.



SYMBOLS

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



TREE

The tree represents the way in which power functions within society, branching from one kind of influence to another. At the beginning of the novel, Neil includes an excerpt from the Book of Eve, which begins: "The shape of power is always the same; it is the shape of a tree." The book makes this argument as it demonstrates how power expands ever wider, branching from one form to another. The novel argues that the ability to hurt people is the most basic form of power, and that it can transform into political, social, or economic power, as is demonstrated by characters including Margot, Roxy, and Allie. The tree also comes to represent society and its relation to power more explicitly by the end of the novel. As the plot careens toward global warfare, both Margot and Allie grapple with how to ensure that women will always be dominant in their society. Because men have held the power for so long, Margot and Allie each recognize that men will go to extreme and violent lengths in order to retain or regain that power from the women. In one of the book's final chapters, Margot has a vision of the tree of power. She recognizes that even though power has started to branch in different directions, "the old tree still stands." The only way to change this, she sees, is to "blast it entirely to pieces"—to rid the world of the old social order completely in order to make way for a new one. Allie pursues this same path when she comes to believe that the only way to make her ideal society is to return to the Stone Age and then rebuild society from there.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Little, Brown and Company edition of *The Power* published in 2016.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☛☛ The shape of power is always the same; it is the shape of a tree. Root to tip, central trunk branching and re-branching, spreading wider in ever-thinner, searching fingers.

Related Characters: Margot Cleary, Bernie Monke, Roxy Monke, Allie/Eve, Neil Adam Armon

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

This is the first few sentences of Neil's book, which is also entitled *The Power*. Just as Alderman begins the novel as a whole with an epigraph from the Book of Samuel, Neil begins his story with an epigraph from a (fictional) religious text, the Book of Eve. This passage introduces the primary symbol of the tree. In the story, the opening words of the text take on a literal meaning: when women use the power, they create spiraling, fern-like scars that travel up their victims, and so the shape of power does become that of a tree. Yet at the same time, there is a less literal meaning to these opening lines. The electrical power that the women develop represents the large "central trunk" that is described here. But this power branches, as the novel demonstrates, into other kinds of power—some large, some small. Allie uses her power to gain religious acclaim. Roxy uses it to take over her father Bernie's crime ring and make enormous amounts of money. Margot uses it to gain political power.

Thus, the tree becomes an image depicting how the ability to hurt (which is what the power represents), ultimately bleeds into nearly all other aspects of life and defines social order on a broader scale.

Chapter 5: Margot Quotes

☝☝ Already there are parents telling their boys not to go out alone, not to stray too far. "Once you've seen it happen," says a gray-faced woman on TV. "I saw a girl in the park doing that to a boy for no reason, he was bleeding from the eyes. The eyes. Once you've seen that happen, no mom would let her boys out of her sight."

Related Characters: Margot Cleary

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 23

Explanation and Analysis

When the power is first discovered, Margot, the mayor of an unnamed city in New England, watches news reports unfold of girls and boys getting into fights on the playground. Although it is still early in the novel, the woman's concerns and advice to her son serve as a key bit of foreshadowing. It demonstrates how quickly girls have already started to normalize violence in their lives, to the point where they are attacking boys for no reason at all. When people are in

possession of power, no matter their gender, it is a corrupting force.

Yet the woman's words also call to mind parallels with today's society, where girls are often told not to go out alone because of the potential danger that might befall them. Flipping the gender in this advice strikes the ears in an odd way, because it is counter to what people consider normal. It strikes readers as unfair that boys would have to be careful and change their behavior simply because the girls are being vicious. Yet in making the language so similar to what is often said in reality, the book reminds readers that what they have normalized in today's society—that women simply have to be careful going out alone or at night—is equally unfair and shocking.

Chapter 6: Allie Quotes

☝☝ "Saw you. Saw you in the graveyard with those boys. Filthy. Little. Whore." Each word punctuated with a punch, or a slap, or a kick. She doesn't roll into a ball. She doesn't beg him to stop. She knows it only makes it go on longer. He pushes her knees apart. His hand is at his belt. He's going to show her what kind of a little whore she is. As if he hadn't shown her many times in the past.

Related Characters: Mr. Montgomery-Taylor (speaker), Mrs. Montgomery-Taylor, Allie/Eve

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

At the beginning of Allie's tale, she resists the sexual advances of two boys by using her power to scare them away. When she returns home, however, her foster father uses this scene as an excuse to rape her (although Allie explains here that he likely doesn't need this excuse). Alderman's opening scene for Allie is disturbing, but it is notably not very surprising; descriptions of sexual assault against women in fiction are so common that this scene doesn't read as particularly shocking. In contrast with the scene that Roxy and Tunde observe towards the end of the novel, in which a man is brutally raped by a woman, Allie's experience of rape demonstrates how normalized these scenes of violence against women have become in contemporary society. While the gender dynamic will eventually flip, establishing the norm is crucial to ultimately shocking readers out of their complacency, when they remember how injured they were to this passage.

In fact, the scene has become so normalized that Allie even realizes how futile it is to fight back. She does not try to stop or even remotely hinder what is happening, knowing that she has essentially no agency, no power. This connects to a later passage Alderman includes, where she explains that babies stop crying when they realize no one is coming to feed them. This is true of Allie, as well. She understands there is no use crying out, because no one with the power to stop Mr. Montgomery-Taylor is coming to help her. This episode is what spurs Allie, ultimately, to get revenge on her him and which sparks her understandable mistrust of men as a group, knowing that they all have the power to do what Mr. Montgomery-Taylor did.

Chapter 7: Allie Quotes

☞ The voice says: You heard what she said. Eve passed the apple to Adam.
Allie thinks, Maybe she was right to do it. Maybe that's what the world needed. A bit of shaking up. Something new.
The voice says: That's my girl.
Allie thinks, Are you God?
The voice says: Who do you say that I am?
Allie thinks, I know that you speak to me in my hour of need. I know that you have guided me on the true path. Tell me what to do now. Tell me.

Related Characters: The voice , Allie/Eve (speaker), Sister Veronica

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 49

Explanation and Analysis

As the girls in the convent practice their powers with each other, Sister Veronica insists that the power comes from the devil, and that they pass it to each other just as Eve passed the apple to Adam. Allie overhears her telling the other nuns that they should burn all of the girls. This exchange serves as a turning point for Allie's character. Up until this point, Allie has been lying about her identity out of the sheer need for survival. But now, Allie realizes that she can leverage the following she has gained among the other girls in order to protect herself from Sister Veronica. She also realizes that the best way to do this is through religion, recognizing that religious teachings can be a powerful method of control. Allie's thoughts on the Biblical story of Adam and Eve provide perhaps the first early example of the way in which Allie will eventually repurpose and reinterpret Scripture for her own purposes. To her, the story of Adam and Eve is not

one of sin, but instead is one of a necessary revolution, just like the one Allie herself will lead.

Additionally, the voice shows Allie how she can use Scripture to make people believe in her. The question, "Who do you say that I am?" is a reference to Jesus affirming the loyalty and faith of his followers. It is in some ways a leading answer, causing Allie to believe the voice is God even though the voice is being opaque. This allows Allie's self-deception to continue to grow. Even though Allie is uncertain about the voice's identity, her belief that she is following God allows her to think that she is doing the right thing.

Chapter 9: Tunde Quotes

☞ The camera makes him feel powerful; as if he's there but not there. You do what you like, he thinks to himself, but I'm the one who's going to turn it into something. I'll be the one who'll tell the story.

Related Characters: Tunde Edo

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 60

Explanation and Analysis

After Tunde films his first video in the market in Lagos and CNN pays him \$5,000 for it, he goes out in search of more footage of women using the power. He thinks to himself about how the camera makes him feel powerful, and this serves as another reminder from Alderman about how stories can wield a kind of power. By holding the camera, Tunde can control what to show or what not to show, and how to engage with what he sees. This is a powerful tool, as Tunde wrestles over the course of the book with whose side to sympathize with and how to portray them. While at first he often takes the side of the women who are liberating themselves from oppression, gradually he recognizes that he also needs to focus on the corruption that is coming out of the new women-led regimes. Tunde's character as a whole allows Alderman to demonstrate why perspective is important and how it can shift others' view of history.

Chapter 10: Margot Quotes

☛ Nothing that either of these men says is really of any great significance, because she could kill them in three moves before they stirred in their comfortably padded chairs.

It doesn't matter that she shouldn't, that she never would. What matters is that she could, if she wanted. The power to hurt is a kind of wealth.

She speaks quite suddenly, across Daniel, sharp like the knock at a door. "Don't waste my time with this, Daniel," she says.

Related Characters: Margot Cleary (speaker), Daniel Dandon

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 76

Explanation and Analysis

Shortly after Margot gains the power, she is in a meeting with the governor, Daniel, who is listing problem after problem that he seems unable to cope with. As Margot listens to him talk, she starts to understand how the power—the physical ability to hurt someone else—is trickling into other aspects of her life. Simply being able to overpower or kill someone gives a person a degree of freedom and superiority: a kind of wealth, as she describes. Margot takes this license to speak assertively with Daniel, knowing that she no longer has to be deferent to him if she doesn't want to be, because he doesn't have the power to hurt her. This realization is one of the catalysts that starts to flip the gender dynamic between them, as Margot grows stronger and Daniel grows weaker.

It is also notable that Margot even thinks about killing Daniel, something that she likely never would have thought without the power. This thought provides an early sign of the corruptive nature of the power. The ability allows women to do something simply because they can, and even if Margot does not end up killing anyone, many women do, who likely would not have without this power.

Chapter 11: Allie Quotes

☛ Eve says, "So I teach a new thing. This power has been given to us to lay straight our crooked thinking. It is the Mother not the Son who is the emissary of Heaven. We are to call God 'Mother.' God the Mother came to earth in the body of Mary, who gave up her child that we could live free from sin. God always said She would return to earth. And She has come back now to instruct us in her ways."

Related Characters: Allie/Eve (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 89

Explanation and Analysis

After Allie starts to create her miracles, she baptizes some of the girls from the convent in the water. When they start to spread Eve's message to the other girls in the convent, they ask Allie to explain her teachings. Allie's explanation of her religious beliefs demonstrates how she manipulates the religious beliefs of others in order to suit her own narratives. She takes the religious figures of Jesus and Mary, both of whom are already revered, and simply chooses to emphasize Mary's importance over Jesus's importance.

This change in religious teaching echoes the shifts in gender dynamics that have already begun brewing due to the power. Allie simply gives the power a religious justification; she uses ideas that already exist and reframes them to suit the narrative that women are meant to rule over men. And because this belief suits the women and gives them more status, Allie is able to gain even more followers and therefore even more power.

Chapter 13: Tunde Quotes

☛ Moldova is the world capital of human sex-trafficking. There are a thousand little towns here with staging posts in basements and apartments in condemned buildings. They trade in men, too, and in children. The girl children grow day by day until the power comes to their hands and they can teach the grown women. This thing happens again and again and again; the change has happened too fast for the men to learn the new tricks they need. It is a gift. Who is to say it does not come from God?

Related Characters: Allie/Eve, Tatiana Moskalev, Viktor Moskalev, Tunde Edo

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 102

Explanation and Analysis

Tunde travels to Moldova, where unrest has been brewing. The enslaved women are able to use their newfound power to hurt their captors. The descriptions of the power being passed from hand to hand emphasize the revolutionary nature of what is happening: only because of the scale of this power shift are the women able to escape sexual

slavery. Gaining the ability to hurt the men who are violating and selling them allows them to gain freedom and political power as well: soon after this starts to occur, President Viktor Moskalev is dead and Tatiana Moskalev is placed in power.

It is also interesting to note that the women use God to justify their actions. Even though they are not connected to Allie yet (though in time she will grow very popular in this country), they too look to religion to explain what is happening because devotion gives them a kind of religious power. This faith is instilled in everyone and causes the women to believe in the divinity of their actions. Even though their liberation is clearly a good thing, blind religious devotion and justification ultimately proves very harmful when the women become corrupted by their power.

Chapter 14: Roxy Quotes

☞ “God loves all of us,” she says, “and She wants us to know that She has changed Her garment merely. She is beyond female and male. She is beyond human understanding. But She calls your attention to that which you have forgotten. Jews: look to Miriam, not Moses, for what you can learn from her. Muslims: look to Fatima, not Muhammad. Buddhists: remember Tara, the mother of liberation. Christians: pray to Mary for your salvation.”

Related Characters: Allie/Eve (speaker), Roxy Monke

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 127

Explanation and Analysis

After Roxy and Allie save the convent together from a group of police officers, Allie records a message to go out over the footage of their deeds. Allie’s language here bears a lot of the qualities of the message that she preaches in chapter 10, in which she tells the other girls that God is a woman and they are meant to follow Mary instead of Jesus. In this speech, she communicates the same message but on a larger scale. It is again notable that Allie asks people not to give up the beliefs that they already hold, but instead simply to emphasize a different part of their existing religions. This is how Allie expertly manipulates all religions, not only Christianity, by prioritizing the female figures in each religion instead of the male ones.

While Allie’s preaching may be under the guise of being non-denominational, in reality it is less benign than Allie makes it

out to be. Allowing people to retain the freedom of their own religion is an attractive gesture, and Allie does this so that she can gain more followers. She recognizes that asking people to believe something entirely new would not be as successful, and so she merely manipulates their focus in order for her religion, and for women as a whole, to gain more power.

☞ The voice says to Allie: Remember, sweetheart, the only way you’re safe is if you own the place.

Allie says: Can I own the whole world?

The voice says, very quietly, just as it used to speak many years ago: Oh, honey. Oh, baby girl, you can’t get there from here.

Related Characters: The voice , Allie/Eve (speaker), Roxy Monke

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 133

Explanation and Analysis

When Roxy decides to leave the convent after staying there for nine months, Allie is deeply upset—particularly because she had come to rely on Roxy for a sense of security because of Roxy’s capacity for so much power. After Roxy informs Allie of her decision, the voice reminds Allie of the only way that she can feel truly safe. The language that Allie and the voice use in this exchange recurs many times throughout the book, because it plays on a few key themes. First, the voice’s advice that the only way Allie can feel safe is if she “owns the place” becomes a powerful motivation for her to gain as much power as possible. This leads her not only to try to gain more and more followers, but also to try to take over a country.

Eventually, however, Allie realizes that even these actions do not make her feel completely safe, which relates to the voice’s second statement: “you can’t get there from here.” In time, it becomes clear that the voice means that society is too entrenched in the patriarchy for women to ever feel truly safe in it, even when they have gotten the power. Men will continue to try and rebel. Instead, Allie realizes, she has to build society from the ground up so that women have always been the dominant sex: this is the most revolutionary act she can come up with. This demonstrates her deep corruption and her true motivation, as well as the depth of her fear of men and the power they have held over her in the past. She doesn’t truly believe in her preaching and she doesn’t want to better society. All she wants to do is to make sure that women can always hold the power and

remain safe, regardless of what that means for men and society as a whole.

Chapter 19: Roxy Quotes

☛ You can turn money into anything. One, two, three, presto. Turn drugs into influence with Tatiana Moskaev, President of Bessapara. Turn your ability to bring pain and fear into a factory where the authorities will turn a blind eye to whatever you're cooking up there that sends purple-tinged steam into the skies at midnight.

Related Characters: Roxy Monke (speaker), Bernie Monke, Tatiana Moskaev

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 177

Explanation and Analysis

Roxy approaches her father Bernie with the idea to create a drug that will enhance women's power. When they start to sell it, it becomes an immediate success—particularly in Bessapara, where they are building an army of women to fight off the North Moldovans.

Roxy explicitly acknowledges here one of the main themes of the novel: that the ability to hurt other people can quickly translate into many other forms of power. Because of Roxy's power, she is able to inspire fear into a factory and ensure that she and her family are free to make Glitter. Glitter then turns into money, giving Roxy both economic power in the form of money and political power in the form of influence with Bessapara's president. This argument can even widen further: none of the female characters (Roxy, Tatiana, Margot, and Allie) would have the influence that they have without the development of their electrostatic power. This ability to cause harm, then, really does define all other forms of power.

Chapter 21: Tunde Quotes

☛ The white woman—her name was Nina—had said, “Do you think you have PTSD?”

It was because she'd used her thing in bed and he'd shied away from it. Told her to stop. Started crying.

Related Characters: Tunde Edo (speaker), Nina

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 177

Explanation and Analysis

After Tunde is almost raped by a woman in Delhi, he is deeply affected by this trauma and has a difficult time in bed with other women, like this journalist, Nina. It is particularly hard for him when she uses her power, as in this description of his vulnerability when she does so.

The relationship between gender, sex, and power is one of the biggest reversals that Alderman depicts in the book. The fact that Tunde is deeply traumatized by Nina's use of the power echoes many experiences of female rape or sexual assault survivors who then relive those painful experiences during sex going forward. This story is surprising because Tunde is a man, and this kind of reaction, society generally teaches readers, is unusual for a man. The reversal helps readers understand the very real hardships of belonging to the less dominant sex. Not only do power disparities make a person more vulnerable, but when that vulnerability is taken advantage of, it only reinforces and makes one more aware of that vulnerability.

Chapter 24: Roxy Quotes

☛ Sam says, “He was *asking* for it. He begged us for it. Fucking begged us, followed us, told us what he wanted done to him. Filthy little scrote, knew just what he was looking for, couldn't get enough of it, wanted us to hurt him, would have licked up my piss if I'd asked him, that's your fucking brother. Looks like butter wouldn't melt, but he's a dirty little boy.”

Related Characters: Darrell Monke, Ricky Monke, Roxy Monke

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 177

Explanation and Analysis

After Roxy returns from the convent, she learns that a group of three girls has raped and castrated her older brother Ricky. When she and her younger brother Darrell go to get revenge on the three girls, one of them suggests that Ricky asked them to hurt him.

This graphic and explicit language, said by one of the girls who attacked Ricky, is one of the book's first big gender reversals in terms of sexual encounters. In particular, the phrase “asking for it” is quite loaded, as it is often used in today's society by men to describe women who are supposedly subtly or implicitly giving consent. This, in their

minds, surpasses the need for clear verbal consent. This incident is a shocking reversal of that stereotype, in which the women argue that Ricky was doing the same thing, despite his earlier declarations to Roxy that he kept saying he didn't want what they were doing to him. It is telling that Roxy even believes that Ricky may have wanted them to hurt him, at least a little bit, showing that even she has taken up this sexist argument. But it is clear to Roxy and readers alike that there is no way Ricky could have possibly wanted the deep and irreversible violence that they inflicted on him, forcing readers to recognize the bias that often pervades people's view of rape, and the fact that women are often doubted in their assertions that they did not give consent.

Chapter 26: Margot Quotes

☝☝ “You want to employ NorthStar girls yourself.”
 “As my private army, here and on the border.”
 It's worth a lot of money. [...] The board would be very happy to continue their association with Margot Cleary until the end of time if she could pull this off.
 “And, in exchange, you want...”
 “We are going to alter our laws a little. During this time of trouble. To prevent more traitors giving away our secrets to the North. We want you to stand by us.”

Related Characters: Tatiana Moskalev, Margot Cleary (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 249

Explanation and Analysis

Margot at this point is a United States senator who sits on several important defense and security committees. She is invited to a party held by Tatiana Moskalev, the president of Bessapara. Before the party officially begins, the two share this exchange, which touches on two key ideas that Alderman is arguing in her book. First, she demonstrates how much the electrostatic power—that is, the ability to hurt other people—has extended into other forms of power. In this case, Margot and Tatiana have both gained incredible political power that they could not have achieved otherwise, demonstrating the direct correlation between violence and power.

Second, it shows how these women have started to become corrupted, just as their male counterparts were in the past. Margot doesn't care about justice or equality, both of which fall by the wayside in Bessapara when they enact laws curtailing male freedoms. Instead, all she seems to want is

the money that will come from her involvement in the NorthStar training camps. This is part of Alderman's repudiation of the idea that women would make better leaders than men. Both of these women, who have immense political power, prove themselves to be just as self-serving and power-hungry as men have been previously.

Chapter 29: Tunde Quotes

☝☝ Thus, we institute today this law, that each man in the country must have his passport and other official documents stamped with the name of his female guardian. Her written permission will be needed for any journey he undertakes. We know that men have their tricks and we cannot allow them to band together.

Related Characters: Margot Cleary, Tatiana Moskalev, Tunde Edo

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 272

Explanation and Analysis

A few days after Tatiana Moskalev's reception in support of Bessapara, Tatiana enacts a slew of laws curtailing a variety of men's freedoms, as described here. Learning about these laws prompts outrage and shock from Tunde and the male citizens of Bessapara, but also from the readers. It is easy to recognize the injustice and sexism of the laws, particularly as Alderman then shows how these laws affect Tunde directly and prompt a deep fear in him. But what is notable is that these laws are no different from laws in a variety of real-life countries that curtail women's freedom.

In giving these laws a direct parallel in her book, Alderman forces readers to recognize the injustice and sexism in contemporary society, and also to confront how that inequality has become normalized to the point where it is only commented upon, but no one truly attempts to stop it. The laws in the book are allowed because Margot has made a deal with Tatiana Moskalev that prevents the United States from interfering in their laws. This prompts questions about what corruptive forces are at work in the real-life politics that allows such countries to maintain laws like these.

Chapter 33: Tunde Quotes

☝ When he walked past a group of women on the road—laughing and joking and making arcs against the sky—Tunde said to himself, I'm not here, I'm nothing, don't notice me, you can't see me, there's nothing here to see.

Related Characters: Tunde Edo

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 295

Explanation and Analysis

As Tunde is traveling in Bessapara, he has a growing sense of dread as he walks further north. This occurs after Tatiana Moskalev enacts laws that limit the rights of men throughout Bessapara, and Tunde feels the fear creep in; women are now legally allowed to kill him at any time.

While the circumstances are fictional, Tunde's internal monologue as he passes a group of women echoes the internal monologues of many women (which Alderman, as a woman herself, would be very familiar with) when they pass groups of men. It is not that these women have shown Tunde that they intend to be more violent; it is simply the fact that they *could* hurt him and go unpunished that makes Tunde incredibly nervous. Simply having the power to do something makes them just as frightening as actually doing it. But because the genders are reversed in Tunde's case, it allows for male readers especially to comprehend the same experiences that female readers know well. It enables them to recognize the institutional sexism that is at play Tunde's fear, and therefore gives them a glimpse of the real-life sexism women face simply in walking down the street.

Chapter 34: Roxy Quotes

☝ In the dark of the night he tells her about Nina and how she published his words and his photographs under her name. And how he knows by that that she was always waiting to take from him everything he had. And she tells him about Darrell and what was taken from her, and in that telling he knows everything; why she carries herself like this and why she's been hiding all these long weeks and why she thinks she can't go home and why she hasn't struck against Darrell at once and with great fury, as a Monke would do. She had half forgotten her own name until he reminded her of it.

One of them says, "Why did they do it, Nina and Darrell?" And the other answers, "Because they could."

Related Characters: Roxy Monke, Tunde Edo (speaker),

Darrell Monke, Nina

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 324

Explanation and Analysis

After Roxy and Tunde witness a horrific rape by a gang of women in their refugee camp, they are forced to flee and find an empty building to shelter in. Bonded by their experience, they each share the ways in which they have been deeply wronged. Tunde has had all of his materials stolen and published by Nina, while Roxy has had her skein surgically stolen from her by Darrell and Bernie.

Both of these experiences exhibit the deep corruption that is brought on by the power, or in Bernie and Darrell's case, by the fear that they will lose the power they once had. The phrase "because they could" is particularly important—it has recurred several times in the text as a way of explaining why people are committing these crimes. This exchange illustrates one of the central principles of the text: that if one has the power to do something, one will inevitably do that thing. Power not only enables people; it is a corruptive force that acts of its own accord, prompting people to violence and self-interest.

Chapter 41 Quotes

☝ "The women will die just as much as the men will if we bomb ourselves back to the Stone Age."

"And then we'll be in the Stone Age."

"Er. Yeah."

"And then there will be five thousand years of rebuilding, five thousand years where the only thing that matters is: can you hurt more, can you do more damage, can you instill fear?"

"Yeah?"

"And then the women will win."

Related Characters: Allie/Eve, Roxy Monke (speaker), Tunde Edo

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 353

Explanation and Analysis

After Roxy gets Tunde out of Bessapara, she meets up with Eve once more and shows Eve that her skein has been taken from her. Outraged, Eve admits her desire to incite global warfare so that society will be bombed back to the Stone Age, thus allowing women to rebuild a society where they

have always been dominant. Eve's plan highlights her belief that even revolution hasn't been enough to make her feel safe or feel like the women have gained enough power—she believes men will always try to take it back from them as long as they remember that such a possibility exists.

Eve exhibits her desire to take even more drastic action, despite Roxy's clear hesitation. Eve would rather set society back 5,000 years than try to find a measure of peace or equality, even if doing so means losing Roxy's friendship and killing countless innocent people. Thus, Alderman proves that female leaders can be just as corrupt as male ones: if given the chance, Eve would rather make sure that women have had just as much advantage as men have in the past. This does not create a better or more equal world, as the correspondence between Neil and Naomi shows; it is simply a different world.

Chapter 42 Quotes

☞ Look, I'm not even real. Or not real like you think "real" means. I'm here to tell you what you want to hear.

Related Characters: The voice (speaker), Mr. Montgomery-Taylor, Mrs. Montgomery-Taylor, Allie/Eve

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 353

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of the novel, Allie calls Mrs. Montgomery-Taylor for some closure about why she allowed her husband to abuse Allie so cruelly. But over the course of the phone call, Allie recognizes that it was actually Mrs. Montgomery-Taylor who told her husband to hurt Allie. This shakes her entire worldview, to the point where the voice in her head no longer feels like it can simplify the world into good and bad for her. Allie used to believe that women were inherently better than men, but now she has proof that that's not true.

This revelation about the voice's identity also indicates an idea that Alderman has been implying all along: even though at various points Allie believed the voice to be God, in reality Allie knows that the voice is just a manifestation of her own thoughts, helping to guide her. Allie has been using the voice not only for protection, but also to deceive herself and others, as she believed that it was a divine being speaking through her. But in reality, it was doing exactly the same thing that Allie was doing to her followers: manipulating facts and telling her what she wanted to

believe, in order to allow her to gain religious power and stature.

Chapter 43 Quotes

☞ There is a voice in Margot's head. It says; You can't get there from here.

She sees it all in that instant, the shape of the tree of power. Root to tip, branching and re-branching. Of course, the old tree still stands. There is only one way, and that is to blast it entirely to pieces.

Related Characters: Bernie Monke, Darrell Monke, The voice, Jocelyn Cleary, Margot Cleary

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 364

Explanation and Analysis

After Margot receives a call in which she learns that her daughter Jocelyn has been severely injured by a man with a skein (Darrell), she wonders how she could help to prevent something like this from happening again. In this passage, she has a revelation about how to make that possible. This quote explains the recurring counsel of the voice: "You can't get there from here." Up to this point, the statement's meaning has been obscured, but now Alderman makes its purpose clear. The words demonstrate the idea that it is impossible for women to achieve the same amount of security and power that men have achieved in society thus far, because men like Darrell and Bernie will always try to find ways to regain the power that they have always held. The tree becomes a metaphor for these deep roots of injustice and inequality, demonstrating how even altering some of the branches of power will not change the old patriarchal structure of society—that is, the trunk of the tree. Instead, Margot recognizes (just as Allie does) that the only way forward is to first destroy society.

It is worth noting, however, that by this point readers have already learned that the voice is a tool of self-deception and oversimplification, telling the women what they want to hear. Thus, instead of trying to find a more complex, and perhaps more equal solution, the women instead allow this voice to corrupt their motivations and destroy the world.

Chapter 47 Quotes

☞ When the historians talk of this moment they talk about “tensions” and “global instability.” They posit the “resurgence of old structures” and the “inflexibility of existing belief patterns.” Power has her ways. She acts on people, and people act on her. When does power exist? Only in the moment it is exercised. To the woman with a skein, everything looks like a fight.

UrbanDox says: Do it.

Margot says: Do it.

Awadi-Atif says: Do it.

Mother Eve says: Do it.

And can you call back the lightning? Or does it return to your hand?

Related Characters: Neil Adam Armon, Allie/Eve, Awadi-Atif, UrbanDox, Margot Cleary

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 370

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of *The Power*, Neil’s book-within-a-book, Neil gives one of his more editorial explanations of how the events he’s been describing have been viewed in history. Neil emphasizes the ways in which historians obscure people’s true intentions during this time, couching them in academic terms. Even though the book constitutes his version of the most likely narrative, one of his primary goals is to illuminate that the history books are just as biased as any work of fiction might be. History, as he goes on to explain, is written by those who have power, and the women who dominate his society are unlikely to reveal how much power influenced and drove them to the destruction of the world as they knew it. The language of “to the women with a skein, everything looks like a fight” emphasizes how having power and the capacity for violence spurs people to actually being violent.

Additionally, this moment sheds light on the symbolic importance of the fact that the women’s overall power comes from electrostatic power specifically. The final sentence, though it is a question, seems to imply that the answer is no. Power is sprawling and uncontrollable, just like lightning. It can strike and it can be directed, but it cannot truly be contained.

Chapter 50 Quotes

☞ As to whether men are naturally more peaceful and nurturing than women... that will be up to the reader to decide, I suppose. But consider this; are patriarchies peaceful because men are peaceful? Or do more peaceful societies tend to allow men to rise to the top because they place less value on the capacity for violence? Just asking the question.

Related Characters: Neil Adam Armon (speaker), Naomi Alderman

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 377

Explanation and Analysis

After Naomi has read the manuscript, she and Neil have another series of correspondences about the nature of power and gender. Naomi writes to Neil, explaining that she finds it unlikely that there were many male soldiers or police officers. She also argues that men would not have started the war leading to the Cataclysm because patriarchies are all peaceful societies. This is Neil’s response, in which he wonders whether men really are innately different from women. The irony in his statement, of course, is that readers would have exactly the reverse stereotype, as it is generally accepted that women are “more peaceful and nurturing,” not men.

But Alderman’s entire narrative has been a repudiation of this idea, that either gender is more “naturally” peaceful and nurturing—and this passage comes from Neil, who is essentially an alias for Alderman. Over the course of her book, she has argued that women are not in fact more peaceful—they can be just as corrupt and violent as men if given the chance. The only difference between the world in *The Power* and real life is who has the greater capacity to be powerful and violent. Real equality, Alderman suggests and Neil hints here, could only come from a society that actively fights against the tendency to value individuals’ capacity for violence above all else.

☞ I don’t think it’s at all a stretch to suggest that they picked works to copy that supported their viewpoint and just let the rest molder into flakes of parchment. I mean, why would they re-copy works that said that men used to be stronger and women weaker? That would be heresy, and they’d be damned for it.

This is the trouble with history. You can’t see what’s not there.

Related Characters: Neil Adam Armon (speaker), Tunde Edo, Nina, Allie/Eve, Naomi Alderman

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 379

Explanation and Analysis

As Neil and Naomi continue to argue over the fact that his narrative is not well supported by what they have learned in history classes, Neil makes a final point for why perspective in history and storytelling is so important. History books are unreliable, as they often support the narrative of those in power. In the book itself, this is made abundantly clear by the fact that Eve and the other girls in the convent completely (and successfully) rewrite scripture in order to

support their own narratives. Nina did the same thing: in stealing Tunde's material, she could use it to support the women's movement, whereas Tunde aimed to call out their injustice.

At the beginning of the book, Neil writes that *The Power* is not quite history and not quite a novel. He actively acknowledges that he has created a narrative—supported by evidence, but from a male perspective. What he is trying to get his readers to understand is that all of history is framed this way. There are facts, but they are easily manipulated (sometimes even by the simple act of including or not including them) to support whoever is making the argument. Thus, perspective is incredibly important to take into account, not only in *The Power* but in considering history and society more generally.



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

Author Neil Adam Armon writes a letter to a fellow writer named Naomi Alderman, explaining that he has finished his book and asking her to read it. He explains that the book is “not quite history, not quite a novel,” but that it represents what archeologists believe is “the most plausible narrative.” He wonders if it’s too shocking, particularly the parts about Mother Eve. He apologizes for going on and on, and thanks her profusely for sparing the time to read it.

In Naomi’s response to Neil, she writes that she’s been scanning through the pages and is “practically on the edge of [her] seat” to read the scenes with male soldiers, male police officers, and boy crime gangs. She says reading it will be a welcome relief from her own book, and concludes that she believes she’d enjoy the “world run by men” he’s been describing—that it would surely be a “kinder, more caring and [...] more sexy world than the one [they] live in.”

*Neil is an analogue for Alderman herself, as his name is an anagram hers. The dynamic explored between them shows a mirrored version of typical gender dynamics, hinting at the way in which their world is different from today’s society. Posing *The Power* as a book within a book also immediately calls attention to the importance of how a story is told.*



Naomi’s response also foreshadows the reversed power structure, as she treats male soldiers and police officers as atypical. Naomi’s assertion about a world run by men also connects to Alderman’s interrogation of the idea that a world run by women would perhaps be a gentler place—an idea which she explicitly refutes in the rest of the book.



CHAPTER 2

Neil opens his book, *The Power*, with an excerpt from the Book of Eve. It states that the shape of power is a **tree**, “root to tip, central trunk branching and rebranching.” It is the shape that lightning forms when it strikes, and this same shape, the excerpt indicates, grows within people, in nerves and blood vessels.

The excerpt continues: power travels between people in the same branching manner as the **tree**: people form villages, towns, cities, and states. There are two ways for human power to flow: the first is an order from the top down. But the second, “the more inevitable,” is that the people change, sending a new message back to the top. “When the people change, the palace cannot hold.” The excerpt concludes, “She cuppeth the lightning in her hand. She commandeth it to strike.”

The excerpt being from the Book of Eve indicates another societal mirror, as a woman has apparently become the central religious figure in the world. The passage also establishes the symbol of the tree, which becomes a metaphor for how power exists within a society. A central trunk stems to smaller branches, just as having a large ability (like the electrostatic power women gain) ultimately leads to more varied forms of power in society.



This section of the excerpt foreshadows Alderman’s argument about social change: that revolution (like the bottom up flow of power described here), not gradual adjustments, is necessary in order for society to really change. The final quoted line also indicates how Eve and her followers repurposed old ideas in Scripture to suit their own narrative, as these two lines are adaptations of the Bible passage Job 36:32.



CHAPTER 3: ROXY

Two men break into Roxy's home while she and her mother are there. It's clear the men didn't expect Roxy to be home, as one says in dismay, "the girl's here." The shorter man grabs her mother, pushing her against the fireplace; the taller one stuffs Roxy into a closet as she struggles. Roxy starts to feel a prickle in her fingertips, though she doesn't know what it is.

Roxy's mother starts screaming, and Roxy breaks out of the closet. She catches the tall man with the door and trips him onto the floor. His nose starts bleeding. The short man has a knife against her mother's neck. She tells Roxy to run. The short man kicks her mother in the stomach and turns to Roxy with the knife. As he reaches toward her, she grabs his hand and gives a "twist" in some inner muscle, "as if she'd always known how to do it." The man falls to the floor, clutching his wrist. She sees a long red scar running up his arm, patterned like a fern.

The man gets up, and Roxy tries to reach out to touch him again, but nothing happens this time. He grabs her wrists, forces her to her knees, and knocks her out as Roxy's mother begs him not to do it. When Roxy wakes, her face is pressed into the carpet and her legs are up on a chair. She is hurt, and pushes herself up slowly, starting to remember what happened. The carpet is drenched in blood. Her mother is dead, and there's a paper resting on her chest with a drawing of a primrose. Roxy is 14 years old. She's "one of the youngest, and one of the first."

CHAPTER 4: TUNDE

Twenty-one-year-old Tunde swims in the pool, watching seventeen-year-old Enuma read a magazine nearby. Enuma is visiting a cousin who is a friend of Tunde's from his photojournalism class. A group of his friends had taken a trip to the beach together, but Enuma didn't like the beach, and Tunde had pretended to have an upset stomach in order to stay home with her. As he swims, she retrieves a can of Coca-Cola from the kitchen. He calls out to her, in a "mock-lordly tone," saying, "Hey, servant girl, bring me that Coke." She smiles at him, coyly refusing.

This initial scene of violence allows Alderman to provide readers with a baseline of the dynamics between men and women in her story. They take place in and are a reflection of contemporary society, in which men largely have power over women. With this episode, she illustrates that this is largely because men are able to cause more hurt, and therefore also inspire fear.



As the struggle continues, Alderman begins to establish the power of the book's title: the ability of women to conduct electricity in their hands. This power, ultimately, will allow women to gain power globally over men because now they have acquired a greater ability to hurt. With this single change, Alderman argues how the ability to hurt and physically dominate is the capability from which all other power stems.



Like Allie's own experience with abuse a few chapters later, this act of violence will become seminal for Roxy going forward. The knowledge of what it is like to be abused by men helps to inform both characters' desire for safety, and how they view gaining power as a means to achieve that safety at nearly any cost.



Tunde's story opens on a much less violent note than Roxy's, but it too establishes an aspect of contemporary dynamics between men and women. The flirtation here is a performance of Tunde and Enuma's gender roles—with Tunde taking on the position of power, or a kind of master role, while Enuma performs that of a demure, lower-status servant.



Tunde gets out of the water. He's never had a girlfriend before—he's been waiting for someone that he really wants. He walks over to Enuma, smiling and insisting that she give the coke to him, flirting. She flirts back, declining. He play-wrestles her, taking care "not to really force her" and believing that she is enjoying their playful fight. She holds the can away from him, laughing and wriggling, saying that she will defend it with her life.

Tunde leans into Enuma and grabs for the can once more. She puts her hand to his. At first he feels as though an insect has stung him, then the feeling intensifies and he cannot move his left arm. Enuma continues to giggle. He is afraid and excited, realizing that she could do whatever she wanted to him. He is very aroused, and she kisses him softly before diving into the pool.

Tunde waits for the feeling to return to his arm. He feels excited, but also ashamed. He is afraid to ask Enuma what happened, worried that she will laugh at him again. Later, when he imagines asking his friends, he worries that they will think he is crazy, weak, or lying. He wonders if she did it on purpose—by the last day of the trip she is holding hands with another boy. In bed at night, he thinks about his "absolute vulnerability, the feeling that she could overpower him if she wanted." The thought of it continues to excite him, as "lust and power, desire and fear" are entangled in his mind.

One day, Tunde and a friend are in the supermarket when he sees a girl around age 15 get into an argument with a man around age 30. She tells him to get away from her, but the man continues to advance on her. Tunde feels a prickling in the air and immediately pulls out his phone, knowing that something is about to happen. He films the girl as a charge jumps from her hand to the man's arm. The man falls to the ground, "fitting and choking."

Tunde follows the girl with his camera as she runs away. Someone calls out, "That girl was a witch!" Tunde turns back to the man, whose eyes have rolled back and whose head is thrashing. Looking at the man cough up red mucus and cry, Tunde feels fear well up inside him. He realizes that Enuma could have killed him if she wanted. Later, he puts the video online, which incites "the Day of the Girls."

Even though this encounter does not have nearly the same kinds of violent tones as Allie's introduction, it is still an establishment of gender roles. Even if Tunde believes that he is not forcing Enuma, simply the knowledge that he can overpower her, or turn the interaction violent, makes it difficult for her to resist genuinely.



It is only when Enuma is able to hurt Tunde that she is able to flip the power dynamic between the two of them, highlighting Alderman's argument that one's capability for violence is the primary basis of one's power more generally.



Alderman begins to include parallels in some of the language surrounding gender and sex, using language that is most often used to describe women and applying it to men instead. It is more typical that women are made to feel ashamed of sex, and to experience pain as a part of their first sexual encounter—thus intermingling desire, power, lust, fear, and pain just as Tunde describes here. This parallelism allows readers, particularly men, to imagine these kinds of encounters and gain a new perspective on the power inequality between genders during sexual experiences.



As more and more women start to gain this power, Alderman carries out a thought experiment as to what might happen if power dynamics were flipped not only on an individual level (as has been explored thus far), but on a grander scale. This scene serves as another example of how the ability to cause hurt inspires fear, which is in and of itself a form of power.



Alderman introduces two other themes in this episode, one of which is the importance of stories to history itself. Because of Tunde's video, women worldwide start to realize that they have this power. Having the information, and being able to report it, is in and of itself a kind of power. Additionally, this scene shows why gradual change can be so difficult. If this woman were the only woman to have gained the power, she would quickly be seen as a threat and either locked up or possibly killed. But a global shift and an immediate, seismic change allows instead for a revolution.



CHAPTER 5: MARGOT

Margot and Daniel are having a heated argument about the video from Nigeria that Tunde filmed. Margot believes it's fake, but Daniel swears it is not: many other videos have sprung up since. Daniel insists that she close the schools, but Margot knows that she'll look like an idiot for closing the schools over something that might be fake. But she also knows that if she doesn't close them and something bad happens, Daniel will win against her in the upcoming governor's race. She agrees to close them.

Margot barely goes home over the next few days: no one knows what is going on. At first people say it is a virus, and it just looks like girls are electrocuting people. For fun, the local news brings in a few marine biologists to talk about electric eels, and two news anchors (Tom and Kristen) joke about using the girls to power Christmas tree lights.

Margot and the Mayor's office, however, take it more seriously. They get early reports of fighting on playgrounds, with mostly boys left breathless and twitching with leaf-like red scars winding up their bodies. Margot reads a report from a team in Delhi who discover a strip of muscle across the girls' collarbones which they call the organ of electricity, or the skein for its twisted strands. Buds of this muscle are even found in newborn girls; it seems like the only good science for a few days.

As she sees the power become more and more widespread, Margot thinks about her house at the lake, and how the winged ants there would live alone underground all year long, biding their time and waiting. Then, one day, when the temperature was just right, they would swarm into the air all at once, to find each other.

Parents are already telling their boys not to go out alone—one woman says on TV that she saw a girl attack a boy for no reason, leaving him bleeding from the eyes. They'd separated the boys from the girls on the fifth day when they worked out that only the girls were doing it, taking the boys to boys-only schools. But the girls cannot be separated from each other. There are injuries and accidents; teachers are afraid.

Margot's story provides yet another initial perspective on power dynamics, and how the power to hurt trickles down into other forms of power—like political power, as can be viewed in this scene. Margot, the mayor of an unnamed town, doesn't dare to go against Daniel's instructions. It is only after Margot gains the power that she recognizes her ability to defy Daniel and become more assertive.



The two anchors, Tom and Kristen, are a recurring bit that Alderman uses to show the progression of women's ascent to power. At first, Kristen is given the fluffier pieces, while Tom is given the serious news, which reflects power dynamics and how typical gender roles tend to play out.



The fact that the women's power has a biological source makes it directly comparable to men's power in contemporary society, whose biological power generally comes from greater physical strength and stature. In some ways, the novel promotes the idea that biology is destiny, because those with more biological power are the ones who are destined to rise above the others—at least in a society that doesn't actively strive for equality.



The ants become a metaphor for sweeping social change. If the ants came into the air one at a time, they would not be able to find each other. Instead, taking flight all at the same time allows them to swarm the air, find each other, and have a much more massive effect—so, too, with the women as the novel progresses.



Already Alderman demonstrates some small gender reversals: while the young girls are normalizing violence in their lives, parents are already counseling boys to be safer and more cautious when dealing with the opposite sex. In today's society, advice like the parents give is usually reserved for girls—but here the reverse is true.



Three weeks in, Margot's daughter Jocelyn is caught fighting. Margot returns home and finds Jocelyn upstairs, very upset. Margot assures her that the boy is not hurt badly. Jocelyn confesses that she's had the power for six months—though sometimes it is strong, and sometimes it is weak. Margot asks Jocelyn to show her. Jocelyn is hesitant, saying she can control it so that she won't kill Margot, but not so that it won't hurt. Margot insists.

Jocelyn shocks Margot. The pain "burrows through the bone like it's splintering apart from the inside." It spreads across her arm and throughout her body. When it hits her collarbone, she notices something stir there. She is reminded of a game she played as a child, in which she pretended she was a witch and could make a ball of light in the palm of her hand. The feeling starts to return to Margot's arm, and she realizes something else: Margot herself has burned a pattern into Jocelyn's comforter. The narration notes: "She sendeth her lightning even unto the ends of the earth."

CHAPTER 6: ALLIE

Allie sits in a graveyard and lights a cigarette with her fingertips. A boy named Kyle mentions to her that a bunch of guys killed a girl in Nebraska the previous week for using her power that way. Another boy, Hunter, jokes that she could power her father's factory. Mr. Montgomery-Taylor, who is really Allie's foster father, owns a meat-packing company.

Allie recalls visiting Mr. Montgomery-Taylor's factory: watching chickens electrocuted in a water bath before being dragged into a scalding tank. As Allie watches, she imagines freeing the chickens and watching them take their revenge on Mr. Montgomery-Taylor. But a voice in her head stops her, saying that this is not the time yet. This voice has "never led her wrong."

Not long after visiting the factory, Allie notices a spark jump from her hand at dinner. The voice counsels her to practice, and she learns intense focus and control, burning the smallest holes in a tissue or making her lamp grow brighter and dimmer. She's never heard of anyone else who can light their cigarettes this way. The voice instructs her that "there will be a day to use this."

Jocelyn's use of her power, and the fact that sometimes it is very strong and other times not, becomes a deep source of insecurity. The fact that she sometimes is unable to conduct it makes her even more susceptible to peer pressure and the corruption that befalls other women, as Alderman illustrates in later chapters, because she does not want to appear weak.



Alderman continues to drop in these adapted Bible verses: this one is an interpretation of Job 37:3. It demonstrates the results of Eve's later editing of Scripture in order to suit her own narrative. Additionally, Jocelyn's ability to wake up the power in her mother (and, more globally, the ability of younger women to wake it up in older women) is again a metaphor for the way in which revolutionary movements are often begun by young people and then spread to older generations.



Kyle's story is yet another exhibition of why it is difficult to enact change gradually: even small gestures (like a girl using her power to light a cigarette) are viewed as threats to the existing social order and must literally be killed.



Allie's desire to let the chickens free is a metaphor for her own wish for vengeance on Mr. Montgomery-Taylor, even though readers don't know what for yet. Alderman also introduces the "voice" here, which exists only in Allie's head and is part of the reason that she is able to establish a new faith later on.



The voice's guidance is part of the reason that Allie variously believes that it is the voice of her mother, the voice of God, or both. But even though the voice instructs her well, it is never clear whether it is truly a divine being or simply a part of Allie's own consciousness. Yet she uses it to justify her religious manipulations despite not knowing where it comes from.



Usually, Allie would let the boys touch her in the graveyard. Kyle starts to tug at her shirt, but she stops him, stinging him on the back of the hand. She says she's not in the mood, but the boys ignore her. Hunter comes to the other side of her, pressing her between them. He grazes her breast and comes in for a kiss, but she shocks them both. They run away angrily.

Allie returns to her home, climbing up the trellis into her bedroom window. When she arrives, Mr. Montgomery-Taylor is waiting for her in her room. Mr. Montgomery-Taylor says he saw Allie in the graveyard with "those boys." He calls her a whore and beats her. He takes off his belt and pushes her knees apart, as he has done many times before. Mrs. Montgomery-Taylor sits downstairs listening to polka on the radio, imagining that her husband might simply be giving Allie a spanking.

Years ago, the voice had first come to Allie in a moment similar to this, telling her that she would survive this. As Mr. Montgomery-Taylor rapes her, Allie asks the voice, "It's now, isn't it?" The voice replies, "You know it." She puts her fingers to his temple and jolts him. The narration notes: "She maketh a channel for the thunderbolt and setteth a path for the storm."

Mr. Montgomery-Taylor spasms and falls to the floor in fits. Allie pulls up her underwear and jeans and gives him a final shock over his heart to make sure he is really dead. She finds the small amount of money she's hidden away and a battery radio. The voice tells her to take her crucifix. When she is finished packing, she climbs out the window. She thinks about taking a knife from the kitchen for protection, but then she remembers with a laugh that she has no need for a knife at all.

Neil then includes three archeological images, approximately 500 years old and found in a dig in Sudan. They depict "the Holy Mother." They each show a veiled female figure with eyes in the palms of her hands.

Once again, Alderman establishes the existing power dynamic between genders—this time with sexual violence. Only because Allie is able to hurt the boys is she able to prevent them from assaulting her, a fact which also becomes true for her foster father shortly after.



The description of Allie's rape is yet another way that Alderman establishes the existing power dynamics. Allie's father's ability to hurt her allows him to take advantage of her in other ways. Yet it is also notable to contrast this episode with the rape of the man in the woods in a much later chapter. This violence, though disturbing, is not nearly as shocking, because readers have internalized society's normalization of violence against women.



Allie's ability to kill her father demonstrates how women are able to use their power to enact violence, and thus to regain control over their own lives. The religious phrase (this time a paraphrase of Job 28:26) also has the effect of implying a kind of divine provenance for women gaining and using this power.



In equating her power to being able to wield a knife, Allie demonstrates how much the power is already connected to violence in the women's minds. Even though the power can be used in many ways, as Allie comes to understand, the ability to create pain is the one that most directly leads to gaining other kinds of power, such as safety from aggressors.



Though at first it is unclear exactly what the timeline is in the book, gradually it is revealed that these statues (and all of the artifacts presented in the book) are created after the Cataclysm, which sent the world back to the Stone Age, as Eve planned. This allowed her and her followers to remake the world with women as the ones who have always been the dominant gender.



CHAPTER 7: ALLIE

Allie walks and hides for three months, hitchhiking and traveling north. Back in Jacksonville, Mrs. Montgomery-Taylor had found Mr. Montgomery-Taylor on Allie's floor with his pants around his ankles. She had pulled his pants up but left him on the floor, thinking that the story would be better if he'd been in Allie's room delivering the catechism. When the police arrive, she gives them a photo of Allie. They would have found her quickly if calls had not started coming in about other incidents and accidents.

Allie finds a town on the coast and sleeps there for three days on the advice of the voice. She visits the library, the church—anywhere that's warm and dry and won't throw her out. On the third day she sneaks into the aquarium. She notices something—she can sense there's another girl who can do what she can do, a power she believes that only she has. But then she realizes it's not a girl, it's a tank of eels. Allie reads a sign saying that electric eels can interfere with the electric signals in the brains of their pray, even causing them to swim straight into the eels' mouths.

The voice then directs Allie to a convent. The nuns immediately care for her, bringing her food, setting up a bed, and exclaiming excitedly when they find the crucifix in her bag. Over the next three months, many other girls are thrown out on the street for using their power, and they, too, seek refuge in the convent. Some girls are thrown out for violence; some because their parents thought they were possessed and called them witches. One had shocked a boy because he asked her to. The girls are intrigued, wondering if boys like it. They find internet forums suggesting this is the case.

One girl asks Allie's story, and she knows she can't give her real name or story. She calls herself Eve instead. Allie lies and says her parents had sent her to relatives for two weeks and when she came back, they had moved away, worried that she would hurt her two younger brothers.

Allie likes it in the convent, and wants to stay forever. There is one nun, Sister Maria Ignacia, whom Allie really likes. She has dark skin like Allie, and tells stories of how Jesus was taught love by his mother, Mary. Allie asks Sister Maria Ignacia if she can stay in the convent forever. The sister says that she would have to become a nun, and she might decide she wants other things for her life.

Mrs. Montgomery-Taylor's decision to obscure the truth highlights the power inherent in being the person who tells the story. Allie is unable to give her side of what happened, and so Mrs. Montgomery-Taylor is able to pretend that her husband was a righteous man, and that Allie is simply a murderous girl—even though she knows this is not nearly the whole truth.



The eels bear a deep connection with Allie, and foreshadow her eventual ability to be able to control people's actions and even their brain activity, to a degree. At the same time, they are a metaphor for Allie's ultimate ability to manipulate her followers, leading them to work against their own interests and destroy their own society for her purposes.



Alderman shows how, even when the girls acquire their power, the fact that they are young women and that these are isolated cases still makes it easy to oppress them. It is only when they rise on a global scale, including older women, that they are able to gain greater power. Additionally, Alderman hints again at something Tunde expressed earlier: how desire, subjugation, and power are all intertwined.



Initially, Allie doesn't change her name out of a desire to manipulate others—she does it merely to survive. But lying about her identity and her story is ultimately what allows her to manipulate others.



Sister Maria Ignacia's interpretation of how Jesus learned love sets an early example of what Allie eventually does. She manipulates the Scripture and teachings of existing religions in order to suit her own narrative, in which women have always been in control.



Allie is upset, thinking that Sister Maria Ignacia doesn't want her to stay. The voice tells Allie that if she wants to stay, the voice can fix that. Allie asks if the voice is Mary. The voice says, "if you like, my dear." The voice continues, saying that if Allie wants to stay, she'll have to "make this place [her] own."

The voice's counsel that Allie must own the place in order to feel like she belongs there becomes a primary motivation for Allie and a key insight to power. Although eventually this motivation deeply corrupts her, all she wants initially is to be able to find a place where she can feel safe.



The girls play at fighting, trying out their skills. Allie is more subtle, not wanting them to know that she's the one jumbling their brain waves or making their arms jump involuntarily. After a few months, some of the girls start to move on to other places and invite Allie to go with them. But Allie stays instead.

Allie's skill at controlling her own power becomes another means of being able to manipulate people. Physically and mentally, she is literally able to control others. Although this is a different power than physical hurt, it is still a form of domination and ends up being just as dangerous.



One day, Allie hears the nuns arguing amongst themselves. Sister Veronica insists that the girls' powers come from the devil, though Sister Maria Ignacia says that they are simply playing games. Sister Veronica notes that young girls awaken the power in older women just as Eve passed the apple to Adam. She says that they will wait for guidance from the Diocesan Council on what to do.

Sister Veronica's argument not only becomes a threat to Allie, but explicitly connects Allie (who has chosen the name Eve) to the Biblical figure of Eve. This passage foreshadows Allie's intention for global change, even if it comes at a deep cost.



Allie thinks over the Sister Veronica's words, and wonders whether it was right for Eve to pass the apple—whether it was "what the world needed." The voice commends her. Allie asks if the voice is God. The voice responds, "Who do you say that I am?" Allie doesn't fully answer, only affirming that the voice guides her in her time of need. Allie also wonders why the power would exist if God didn't intend it. The voice then tells Allie that there is a need for a prophet in the land—Allie herself.

The voice's question, "Who do you say that I am?" is yet another reference to the Bible: Matthew 16:15. In the Bible, the speaker is Jesus, asking for confirmation of faith from his followers. So, too, does the voice ask Allie to believe in it. But the fact that Allie is so constantly uncertain about the voice's true identity is emblematic of the fact that she is simply using it as an excuse to believe that she is following God, rather than possessing true faith.



CHAPTER 8: ROXY

Roxy has seen her dad Bernie (a drug kingpin) hit other men before, and she thinks about how she's always wanted the power to hurt people like he has. A year after Roxy's mother's death, Bernie tells Roxy that he and Roxy's half-brothers (Terry, Ricky, and Darrell) are ready to get revenge on Primrose for the murder. Roxy shows them what she can do—first, by giving them a dead arm, and second, by putting her hand in her stepmother Barbara's pond and electrocuting all of the fish in it. Bernie is pleased.

Even before gaining her own power, Roxy understood from her father's interactions with others that an individual's ability to hurt other people has a direct correlation with their ability to gain power. Her father is widely feared, and it is due to the ability she describes here.



Though only 15 years old, Roxy has a lot of power—more than any other girl they can find for her to practice with. And that’s why Bernie lets Roxy come along to deal with Primrose. When they leave, Ricky gives Roxy some cocaine to clear her head. Once they arrive at a warehouse where they know Primrose is going to be, Roxy watches from upstairs through a grate in the floor while her brothers and father do the job.

Roxy’s taking of cocaine foreshadows the eventual prominence of Glitter—a drug that enhances women’s power. Its creation eventually adds to the corruption of the power, as it only leads her (and others) to desire more and more power.



When Bernie and his men start to fire their guns, twenty of Primrose’s men come out and fire back. Terry is killed. Roxy watches in horror as a shot hits Bernie in the side. Realizing she can do something, Roxy electrifies the iron walkway she’s standing on, which trails down to a set of rails that some of Primrose’s men are leaning on. Three of them cry out in fits. She then electrocutes two men who chase her.

Alderman continues to explore women’s discoveries of the various ways in which their power can be used, and the various means of hurting people. Not only does anything metal become a weapon, but eventually water becomes a weapon as well, as was previously hinted at when Roxy electrocuted the fish in the pond.



Roxy watches as Primrose tries to escape. She runs after him, and catches up to him as he struggles against a locked door. She slides into him, grabbing his ankle and electrifying him several times. He screams. He realizes who Roxy’s mother is and apologizes that she saw it happen: he tells her that Newland said she wasn’t going to be home. He begs her to spare him. Roxy thinks of her mother begging, and she thinks of her father hitting other men. She puts her hand to Primrose’s temple and kills him.

Roxy’s thinking of her father in this moment provides a parallel with her thoughts at the beginning of the chapter. Just like her father, Roxy’s ability to hurt and kill inspires both fear and power. The irony, of course, is that even her father and brothers eventually fear and covet this same power, to the point where they hurt Roxy in order to gain it.



CHAPTER 9: TUNDE

Tunde gets a phone call from CNN the day after he posts the video. They give him \$5,000 in exchange for the full video. That night, he looks for more footage. The camera makes him feel powerful. He thinks, “I’ll be the one who’ll tell the story.” He films a fight between two women in the street, and a man and a woman making love as the woman arouses the man with her power. He thinks that he might want someone to do that to him, too.

Tunde’s thoughts imply that perspective, and the ability to tell a story, are yet another branch of power. The ability to control what is seen and how people see it vital. Tunde has, in fact, already affected the revolution significantly, as his initial video has sparked girls’ recognition of their abilities, which has had a profound effect on governments and societies.



CNN pays Tunde for the other videos. He is excited, thinking that he has become a real journalist—this is his history to report. He buys cheap digital cameras and researches other places where this is happening: Pakistan, Somalia, Russia. He buys a plane ticket to Riyadh, arriving on the night of the first big riot.

The fact that these kinds of revolutions are happening in so many places implies just how widespread a revolution it is. Alderman argues in this and several other chapters that gradual change will really get societies nowhere—that this kind of enormous upheaval is necessary for true change.



The riot was sparked by the death of two girls. They had been practicing their power together, and their uncle, a religious man who saw it as devilry, beat them to death. A few neighbors saw and fought back; a dozen women turned into a hundred, which turned into a thousand. The police retreat as the riot expands, but Tunde goes right to the heart of it with his camera.

When women notice Tunde, they are skeptical of having a man walk with them. He shows them that he is not carrying weapons. One of the women, Noor, insists that he take off his clothes to show them, laughing. He obliges, easygoing. Noor smiles and instructs him to come with them, taking his hand. She explains that in their country, women cannot hold hands with a man in the street, or drive. She takes him outside a shopping mall, where she sets a dozen cars aflame in the parking lot.

Tunde sees women watching from windows above, and men try to drag them from the glass. Tunde knows that “this thing is going to take the world and everything will be different and he is so glad he shouts for joy, whooping with the others among the flames.” Tunde also watches as Noor wakes up the power in an older woman, who cries tears of joy. Women liberate others being kept behind barred windows by their men, absorbing them into the crowd. One man tries to shoot at them, wounding three, but they kill him easily.

Near dawn, Noor leads Tunde to a friend’s empty apartment. She starts to undress him. They each admit that they have never done this before. Noor declares, “I am a free woman,” exhilarated. Tunde is “afraid, he is turned on; it is all bundled up together, as it is in his fantasies.” He lets her lead, and it feels good. When she loses control as she finishes, “she sends a jolt through his buttocks and across his pelvis and he barely feels the pain at all, so great is the delight.”

The government sends men in helicopters and soldiers, but the women are more numerous. Twelve days later the government falls and the king has been assassinated. By that time, Tunde is on a plane: what has happened in Riyadh is happening across the world.

Alderman continues to demonstrate that revolution can only happen with many people enacting massive change. While men have had the power for so long (and still have enough to be able to beat women to death), incidents like these incite a massive social change because so many individuals join together.



Alderman uses Noor’s descriptions to contrast and parallel with some of the laws that form in Bessapara towards the end of the book, which limit the rights of men. But while Noor’s description here feels familiar and even normal (if unjust), those later laws come across as shocking. Thus, Alderman forces readers to reflect on why readers accept this kind of injustice in today’s society.



Tunde’s happiness reflects an acknowledgement that what has previously been happening is unjust, and perhaps also implies that he believes the world would be better off if women had the power, rather than men. But Alderman later refutes this idea entirely, demonstrating that power corrupts women just as easily as it corrupts men.



Noor and Tunde’s first sexual encounter also provides parallels with typical gender relations. Alderman shows how Tunde simply accepts the fear and pain that he has to endure as a part of sex (in contrast to today’s society, where it is sometimes expected of women to simply endure that pain). But there are also parallels in that this pain is unnecessary: avoiding it simply requires a greater degree of control on the part of the person with more power to hurt, and in flipping the genders, Alderman makes readers more aware of that issue.



It is also interesting to note that the places in which women are the most oppressed are the places in which revolution happens the swiftest: the injustices are so great that sweeping change has always been necessary. The new ability is simply the catalyst to allow women to take power.



CHAPTER 10: MARGOT

Margot and Daniel are having another argument, this time in a large meeting. He expresses worry that anyone in the room could have the power; Margot retorts that they know Daniel doesn't have it, which gets a laugh. Daniel presses on, saying grown women can now do it. He announces that they're going to make government employees to get tested, because it's like walking around with a loaded gun.

On the morning news, a history professor and the anchor, Tom, discuss prehistoric images that resemble a woman with lightning coming from her hands. The professor talks about a Goddess in old Semitic texts, Anath, who was a warrior goddess who wielded lightning and bathed in the blood of her enemies. Tom says to Kristen, the other anchor: "That doesn't sound like much of a beauty regime, now, does it, Kristen?" Tom asks Kristen casually if she would tell him if she had this power. She says that she might want to keep that to herself, and "something unspoken passes between them."

Late at night, Margot drives to an unmonitored part of town and blows the electricity in the lampposts. She laughs at her ability, feeling that she now has "a sort of constant ease." Her daughter Jocelyn, on the other hand, has not had it so easy. Some days Jocelyn has a lot of power, but some days she doesn't have enough to defend herself from girls in the street. They call her nasty names, like *flat battery*, *gimp*, or *pzit* (for the sound of a woman failing to make a spark). Margot and Jocelyn practice together in the garage, and Margot is excited to share this secret with her daughter.

Margot is brought in for testing at work. She is nervous, as the test is meant to be infallible. They have used it on infants: give them an imperceptible shock, and the skein will respond automatically. The woman testing her puts the machine on, clicking through levels from one to eight. Margot controls her power and refuses to let herself discharge. She describes it like "simply not passing water when your bladder asks you to." When the test is over, Margot is relieved. She knows that there's no reason now not to put her in charge of rolling out this test.

This is yet another way in which the men in the novel attempt to maintain a sense of power. Whether this is truly a way to make sure that people don't have this controllable power, or simply a veiled way to root out more women from their department, the test is (theoretically) a way to reaffirm that men have power over women.



This segment on the news are notable for a few reasons: it again confirms that Tom is assigned the hard-hitting stuff, while Kristen is relegated to jokes about "beauty regimes." Second, it shows how society is already reinterpreting some of its history and stories to try to understand what is happening in contemporary society, which also confirms the power of stories and history in shaping how people understand themselves. And last, the wordless look between the anchors shows how even the threat of having power is in some ways as powerful as having it, because it can still prompt fear.



Jocelyn's interaction with other girls as a result of her sporadic ability foreshadows some of her later struggles in the NorthStar training camps. Even though Jocelyn tries to resist hurting and killing others, she is often driven by peer pressure and fear of looking weak, and so she later overcompensates by severely hurting a few boys they encounter. Thus, even those who try to resist corruption are sometimes forced to assert their power.



This is the first primary example of corruption within the story, as Margot refuses to disclose her power and is then able to control how the test is conducted on others. It shows the fine line between a necessary rebellion and something more sinister: Margot is justified, knowing that she isn't really a danger to others and that she would lose her job if the test were accurate. But it also shows how those in power can be easily tempted to lie in order to maintain and gain even more power.



There are strange movements on the rise now in the United States: boys dressing as girls, girls dressing as boys. Margot feels it is important to try and keep everything normal. When she meets with Daniel again, he talks about one problem after another, always implying that he's not brave enough to handle this problem but never saying it outright.

Margot thinks, with some pleasure as Daniel's mouth is "flapping open and closed like a goldfish," that she could kill Daniel right now. She knows she wouldn't—what matters is that she could. "The power to hurt is a kind of wealth," she thinks. She interrupts him suddenly, telling him not to waste her time. She suggests they work together, taking control of the situation. Daniel agrees, going quiet. Margot thinks, "That is how a man speaks."

Neil includes another archeological find: a rudimentary weapon that appears to be a glove with wires extending from it. It is approximately 1,000 years old and was discovered in a gravesite in old Westchester.

CHAPTER 11: ALLIE

A year later, Allie is still at the convent, and a series of miracles leads the girls to really take notice of her. One of the girls there, Luanne, has frequent seizures, often seizing for an hour or more. One night, during a lightning storm, Luanne starts to seize. Sister Veronica tells everyone to leave her be—that "she should not have welcomed the thing into her body"—until Allie asks if she can try to stop her from seizing. Sister Veronica agrees.

Allie kneels down next to Luanne and can feel the electric signals in her body confused and out of sync. Allie can sense that it would only take the tiniest shock in a particular area, an act that no one else can control the power well enough to achieve. She puts her finger to the base of Luanne's skull and gives a flick of power. Luanne stops convulsing and opens her eyes. She asks what happened. Another girl says, "Eve healed you."

These descriptions illustrate how people's understanding of gender has become reversed: boys are dressing like girls in order to seem more powerful; girls are dressing as boys in order to appear less threatening. People's perception of what gender means has already become jumbled.



Margot recognizes here how the power to hurt trickles down into other forms of power. It gains her political power eventually, but it also gives her the liberty to speak bluntly and the ease that comes with knowing that she could kill Daniel and that he could not stop her from doing so. This is a corrosive thought, and seeds like this become rooted even more firmly in the minds of the characters as the story goes on, even though they're initially presented as moral people.



This artifact serves as yet another confirmation of how the power is used almost immediately as a weapon, and how women also search for ways to augment their capacity to hurt even further.



This chapter serves as a turning point for Allie's character arc. Whereas before, she had been calling herself Eve and lying about her past out of a need for survival, here she begins to perpetuate lies surrounding her abilities in order to gain support and power.



Not only does Allie manipulate the stories around her, but she is literally able to manipulate the electrical signals in other people's bodies. Here she uses this power for good, but later on in the story, she uses this means of manipulation as a way to control others' actions for her own ends.



Soon they bring Allie other girls in need of healing. She is able to lay her hands on a person and find just the right place to set something right. The cures are real, though sometimes they are only temporary. And so, the girls start to believe that God is speaking to her. Allie tells them to meet her at the shore at dawn.

The girls meet Allie by the shore at dawn. They ask what they should do. Eve says, "God will show us what She wants of us." Eve's use of the word "She" is shocking to them, but they are excited by it. Eve baptizes the girls in the name of the Holy Mother. The girls' knees involuntarily buckle as they are plunged into the water, while Eve remains standing. They don't realize that Allie was really the one making their knees bend, and instead they feel that a benevolent female God is surrounding them.

The girls who were in the water spread the message to the others. Some come to Eve and ask why she calls God "She." Eve explains that God is both woman and man, and She has come to show a new side to her face. She explains that the Mother, not the Son, is the emissary of God. God came to Earth in the body of Mary, who gave up her child so that people could live free of sin. They ask, "Who are you?" She responds, "Who do you say that I am?"

More baptisms follow. The girls start to call Allie "Mother Eve," though Allie insists she is only a messenger. The nuns start to learn what is happening and have a great debate amongst themselves. Sister Maria Ignacia speaks in favor of the new beliefs, while Sister Veronica again insists that this is the Devil's doing. She announces to the other nuns that they should burn all of the girls.

One of the girls has been listening at the window, and she brings the message to Eve. The next morning, Sister Veronica is discovered dead of a heart attack. And the nuns discover that the figure on the cross has now been scored with "the fern-like markings of the power." The girls conclude that Sister Veronica witnessed a miracle and repented of her sins.

Allie's miracle is clearly explicable, but because it is due to an ability that no one else has, and which the girls don't realize Allie has, they continue to believe Allie has a kind of supernatural power.



This is the first moment in which Allie hints at her new teachings, showing how the power has given her the ability to gain religious clout as well. It is also notable that Alderman switches liberally between using the name "Allie," often when Allie is thinking about herself, and using the name "Eve," when she is preaching and speaking to the other girls. This choice shows how she is starting to deceive even herself into believing in this new persona.



Eve goes into more detail about her new beliefs, and she starts to reveal how her religious tenets are simply a manipulation of the old Christian beliefs. She takes a page from Sister Maria Ignacia as well, arguing that people should look to Mary for religious instruction, not Jesus. She again calls back to Matthew 16:15, essentially asking for belief from her potential followers that she is a prophet.



The debate between the nuns adds another kind of confirmation of how gradual change is difficult, because those who represent the old world order are often adamant about not ceding an inch of power or belief in their own systems.



Sister Veronica's death hints at the corruption of the power. Even though it is out of self-defense (Sister Veronica was threatening to kill the girls, after all), Allie uses murder in order to feel safe. The fact that she is able to make it look like an accident only adds to her deception and manipulation.



There is an air of jubilation in the building, and more girls ask for baptisms. Some of the nuns protest, but the girls strike them with their power until they run away. Eve dons a hood and gives a sermon, which the girls record on their phones. She says that women should rule over men as Mary guided Jesus, with kindness and love. She preaches that women should live together to help one another, and right the injustice in the world. She preaches that there will be a new land for women, where they can build a mighty and free nation.

The more Eve preaches, the more it becomes clear that she is largely using her religion in order to try to enact social change she supports. Having been violated by her father so long, she wants to be able to live in a world where she can rule over all men and so ensure her own safety. Alderman also proves the power in being able to have one's story recorded and heard. Without this ability, Eve would never have gained the kind of audience or followers that she eventually acquires.



One of the girls expresses concern that they will be thrown out and taken to jail by the police. Eve says God will send a soldier to ensure their salvation, and the girl will be damned for her doubt in God's hour of triumph. The girl starts crying. She is thrown out of the compound by nightfall. Back in Jacksonville, Mrs. Montgomery-Taylor watches the news and recognizes Allie's face.

The reminder of Mrs. Montgomery-Taylor's existence serves as a foreboding way to end the chapter, implying that Allie's lies will come back to haunt her. It also foreshadows the eventual revelation that it was Mrs. Montgomery-Taylor who instructed Mr. Montgomery-Taylor to rape Allie—that she was the one who always had the power over her husband and was completely corrupted by this power.



CHAPTER 12: MARGOT

Daniel and Margot are having another argument, this time about a video showing girls using their power on one another. They dedicate their actions to the Goddess, jolting each other until they bleed and faint. Demonstrations like these have sprung up all over the internet, as has a symbol like the hand of Fatima, with a palm containing an eye. Daniel says angrily that they should shoot any girls with the power, until he remembers that Margot's daughter Jocelyn has the power. Again Margot thinks about killing Daniel, and reprimands him for his words.

The repurposing of the hand of Fatima serves as another way in which Allie's religion is simply a manipulation or alteration of symbols that already exist. Additionally, this exchange demonstrates the continued shift in gender norms between Margot and Daniel. She is blunt enough to correct his offensive comment, and again bold enough to think about killing him. It's clear that she doesn't need to use her electric power in order to gain other kinds of power from its existence.



Margot then decides to hold a press conference with Jocelyn. During it, Margot explains to the Tom that Jocelyn's been having trouble with her power, that she accidentally hurt a boy because she's unable to properly control it. Margot explains that current thinking about the power is that girls should just not use it. But Margot introduces a three-point plan: set up safe spaces for girls to practice together; identify girls with good control to teach other girls; zero tolerance of usage outside of these spaces.

Although Margot's intentions are well-meaning on the surface, they belie a deeper level of corruption. She does want what's best for her daughter and other girls, but she also knows that she can gain a big political victory if she can succeed in setting up these training camps for girls—which is why she goes behind Daniel's back in order to hold this press conference.



Tom asks nervously how they will know what the girls teach each other. He says they should be trying to cure the power instead. Kristen cuts in, saying that a new study is finding that the power is caused by a change in the human genome, due to “an environmental build-up of nerve agent that was released during the Second World War.” Kristen continues, saying that she thinks this is a great idea.

Tom’s nerves point to yet another example of the slow and steady approach being ineffective for enacting change. Tom (and other men) would rather things return to normal than cede any kind of power to the women or admit that this new power might somehow be a good thing. Kristen cutting in to contradict him also foreshadows the reversal of the dynamics between her and Tom—and between women and men more generally.



Jocelyn receives an anonymous email from someone who saw her on the news. It recommends that she check out urbandoxspeaks.com to find people who are having similar trouble. The email reads, “This rabbit hole goes all the way down. Your gender bending confusion is just the start of it. We need to put men and women back where they belong.”

The internet plays a large role in the novel, and shows both the light and dark side of stories’ power. Both women (like Allie) and men (like UrbanDox, who is soon revealed to run this website) benefit from these forums, which show how easy it is to craft a narrative to suit one’s own perspective and gain traction using the internet’s wide audience.



Daniel goes to see Margot again, furious that Margot announced a state-wide program without talking to him first. He’s outraged that she wants to use public money to train “terrorist operatives to use their weapons more effectively.” Margot dismisses him, saying that they are just girls.

At first, it seems like Daniel is merely exaggerating. But this is an example of the insidiousness of stereotypes and how they can hurt even the person who holds the bias. Eventually, the girls’ power does corrupt them, and enables them to act like terrorists.



At that moment, many people are calling, emailing, and tweeting, asking how they can sign their girls up for Margot’s program. There are people who want to invest in her initiative, and use it as a model of how government and business can work together. Within a month, she’s found spots for the first test centers. Within three months, people are wondering if Margot should run for something “a little more ambitious” and set up meetings with her.

The phrasing “a little more ambitious” is key in tracking the continued slide in gender dynamics. The boldness to put forth a new idea without permission, as well as strength and ambition, begin to be valued in women, in contrast to the way they are normally more valued in men.



CHAPTER 13: TUNDE

In a dark basement in a town in rural Moldova, a 13-year-old girl brings stale bread and fish to a group of women huddled on a dirty mattress. The women have asked her for things in the past—some way to communicate with the outside world—but they think she may be deaf. But this time, she looks around, and seeing that no one is there, takes the hand of one of the women and wakes up the power in her.

Alderman establishes yet again the standard contemporary dynamic between men and women, and the ways in which men abuse and violate women. Here, their ability to gain the power is exciting, but it also forces readers to recognize that without this power shift, women in today’s society who experience the same horrors have no real means of liberation and are ignored by society.



The women wait in the dark and practice. Some of them have been held captive for so long that they never knew this power existed. They believe God has sent a miracle. One of the overseers comes to unshackle a woman who thought she was going to be a secretary in Berlin. When he does, the women descend on him and kill him. They use his keys to unlock each other's bonds, then they kill every man in the house.

Moldova is the world capital of human sex-trafficking. There are thousands of basements like this one, some with men and children. This same thing happens again and again. Tunde files a series of reports and interviews from Moldova; the women trust him because of his reports from Riyadh.

At night, Tunde writes fast and furiously. He is now planning a massive book on this sweeping tide of history: interviews and reports, accompanied by online footage. He opens the chapter on Moldova describing how the power was passed from hand to hand, then writes about the new online religion, and how it shored up support for women taking over towns.

Tunde interviews Moldovan president Viktor Moskalev five days before the government falls. Moskalev tells Tunde that they are moving to quash the rebels, but Tunde is skeptical: the paramilitary gangs have captured weapons, body armor, and ammunition. Viktor implies that he would bomb his own country in order to stop them if need be.

After the interview, Tunde waits for an embassy car to take him back to his hotel. As he waits, Tatiana Moskalev, Viktor's wife, enters the room. She shows Tunde her power, making the lights flicker on and off. Viktor doesn't know she can do it. They flirt a bit, and then she tells Tunde that the new King of Saudi Arabia, Awadi-Atif, is in exile in the north of Moldova and has been feeding Viktor money and arms. Tunde asks why Tatiana is telling him this. She says that she wants him to remember her when he becomes very successful.

Five days later, Viktor Moskalev dies of a heart attack in his sleep. The Supreme Court moves to appoint Tatiana as interim leader. Tunde notes that Tatiana wears a small gold brooch in the shape of an eye in her first public appearance. The transfer of power is interrupted by a military coup spearheaded by Viktor's Chief of Defense, who takes more than half the army. But the women freed from the basements of Moldova instinctively support Tatiana.

Gaining the power serves as a turning point for these women. Like what happened in Riyadh, having the ability to hurt their captors creates a drastic shift in power, which allows them to escape their abuse and finally retaliate for the horrors they've experienced.



Again, similarly to Riyadh, the women could not so successfully liberate themselves if they could not pass the power (and information) amongst each other: a metaphor for the necessity of sweeping revolution rather than gradual change.



Tunde's descriptions demonstrate how power can be a cycle. The ability to hurt and control others led to a new religious belief. This, in turn, inspired women to rise up and assert their own power, leading revolutions in order to control towns.



Viktor's responses to the paramilitary groups inform readers early on about the corruption of power. Viktor would rather kill Moldovan citizens than cede his power to the women. He is more concerned with maintaining his power and the status quo than with actually making society better or protecting the people he leads.



This exchange between Tatiana and Tunde, in reality, becomes very ironic. While she assumes that Tunde will become very successful, while she instead will be relatively forgotten, the opposite ends up becoming true. Tatiana leverages her power to become the leader of a new nation, while Tunde becomes almost forgotten and does not receive the recognition he deserves for his book.



The implication of the heart attack is that it was really Tatiana who killed Viktor, just as Allie killed Sister Veronica. And like Allie's, Tatiana's rise to power shows how the ability to hurt or kill others directly causes an increase in one's own power in other aspects of life.



Tatiana moves her army and weapons to a castle on the borders of Moldova. She declares a new kingdom, uniting lands from four separate countries. She calls the country Bessapara, after the ancient people who live there. Tunde records it all. He writes, “There is a scent of something in the air, a smell like rainfall after a long drought. First one person, then five, then five hundred, then villages, then cities, then states. Bud to bud and leaf to leaf. Something new is happening.”

Tunde’s writing here recalls the words in the Book of Eve at the very beginning of the novel. The tree, then, becomes a metaphor not only for the way that power branches into smaller and more varied iterations of itself, but also for the shape of revolution. The smallest parts of society are changing rapidly and all at once, so that when one steps back, the tree as a whole has also changed.



CHAPTER 14: ROXY

The girls in the convent watch another girl (Roxy, it is later revealed) wade into the ocean at high tide and send her power out. It seems to go on endlessly. The girls send word to Eve that someone has come. After Roxy killed Primrose, she had to find a place to lie low for a while. She had chosen South Carolina, thinking that she would try to find Mother Eve. Her brother Ricky had tried to set her up with a place to stay, but Roxy insisted that she didn’t need anyone to look after her.

As the characters intertwine more and more, Alderman shows how the power connects them. Allie is drawn to Roxy because of her strength, while Roxy is drawn to Allie because of her ability to get people to follow her. Each one sees how the power can be used for a greater purpose.



Allie walks down to the water, and she and Roxy introduce themselves. Allie is surprised to hear that Roxy is British. Roxy is even more surprised to realize that Allie is exactly the person she has been looking for. “It’s a miracle!” Roxy cries. They sit together, talking; Allie senses Roxy’s power and finds it is nearly infinite. Roxy jokes about the number of fish she must have killed in the water. Allie laughs, then thinks it’s been a while since she laughed “without deciding beforehand that laughing was the smart thing to do.” Allie quiets the voice in her head for a time.

Here, Allie reinforces the idea that Eve has not simply become a means for survival: taking on Eve’s persona is now an active means of deception and even self-deception. The fact that she quiets the voice is also telling: it reveals how comfortable she is with Roxy, and how much the voice is simply a means of affirming that there is a powerful protector watching over her. As Allie admits later, with Roxy she already feels safe.



Roxy explains that she wanted to come to America because she saw Eve’s videos and understood that Eve is thinking about what the power means for the future. Roxy admits that she thinks everything will change—she is most excited by the things men and women will be able to do together with the power. Allie admits that she sees things a bit differently; she has no interest in working with men.

Allie and Roxy represent two different perspectives on how to handle power. Roxy argues for a moderate approach that centers hopefully on equality, while Allie demonstrates that she has no real interest in equality. While she claims simply to care about justice for women, Alderman demonstrates how frequently power is treated as a zero-sum game, and that this constant desire for power leads to corruption and suppression of men.



The narration flashes back to Terry’s funeral. Barbara, Terry’s mother, had sobbed. Roxy had taken more cocaine. Roxy realized that she’d gotten in a bit of trouble over what she’d done, as none of the mourners knew how to talk to her, or even how to look at her.

The ability to cause violence is certainly an asset, but this episode also shows how it comes with costs. First, it puts people in more dangerous positions, as they are constantly forced to face retaliatory violence and perhaps inflict it themselves. And second, it also inspires fear to a degree that people may not actually want; here, that fear leaves Roxy isolated from her family.



At the convent, they give Roxy food and warm clothes. Eve leads a lesson in Scripture. They're finding Scripture that "works for them, rewriting the bits that don't." Eve talks about the story of Ruth, calling it the "most beautiful story of friendship in the whole of the Bible." She says that like the story, the women in the convent have each other to rely on.

That night, Allie visits Roxy in the room that they've given her. Allie admits that she has a good feeling about Roxy—that Roxy's strength will help her "save the women." Allie gets a text and explains that people keep sending the convent money, but only Sister Maria Ignacia has a bank account. Roxy offers to help Allie and set up new bank accounts for her. The next day, a man arrives with seven passports for Eve and a new set of bank accounts.

Another flashback: Roxy and Darrell are together in the garden. Darrell asks Roxy what it felt like to kill Primrose. She admits it felt good to get vengeance for her mother. Darrell says, "I wish I could do it."

Roxy and Eve talk a lot in the next few days, and Roxy makes friends with the other girls as they practice their powers together. She teaches them a trick where she throws a bottle of water in someone's face and electrifies the water as it leaves the bottle. They practice the move, laughing as they throw water.

One afternoon, Allie notices that being with Roxy quiets the voice. Roxy makes her feel safe. Allie tells Roxy some of her actual background: that she came from foster care and was passed around a lot when she was younger. Roxy listens sympathetically. Allie asks if Roxy has killed someone. When Roxy doesn't deny it, Allie admits that she's also killed. Roxy says the person "probably deserved it." Allie replies, "He did."

This episode serves as the first instance in which the girls explicitly manipulate Scripture to suit their own narratives. In the story referenced, Ruth tells her mother-in-law Naomi that she is choosing to accept the God of the Israelites—yet Eve reframes it as a story of friendship and female empowerment. Again, Alderman shows how interpretations of stories can shift to suit different purposes.



Alderman provides another example of how forms of power can branch into other forms. Allie is able to use the religious power she commands and turns it into economic power as she receives more and more money from women around the world. Similarly, Roxy's power allows her to gain other forms of capital like passports and bank accounts—in essence, new identities.



This exchange foreshadows Darrell's eventual betrayal of Roxy, overcome by his desire for the power. This demonstrates the corruptive nature of the power, even for those who don't have it.



The girls begin to normalize violence as they grow up, in the same way that rough play is often normalized for boys in the real world. This has disastrous consequences later on, however, when they take more and more pleasure in using their power on others simply for the sake of hurting them.



The fact that the voice is quieted when Allie feels safe implies that it is not actually God speaking through her, but simply a kind of defense mechanism that she relies on in order to achieve that same sense of safety. This desire has an interesting bearing on the end of Allie's arc—much later, after Roxy has lost her power, Allie feels that she must gain power globally because she feels that it is the only way she can truly be safe.



Roxy tells Allie another story: when she was seven, her piano teacher stuck his hand down her pants and told her not to tell Bernie. She did anyway, and her dad beat the man and even chopped one of his balls off. She says that after that, every time she saw the man he ran away from her. Allie says, “that sounds good.” Allie tells Roxy that one of the girls in the convent has a father in the police force, and that they’re coming to shut down the convent in a few days.

Another flashback: two weeks after Primrose’s death, Bernie has killed the rest of Primrose’s gang as well. When Roxy hears the news, she thanks her father, hugging him. He tells her the story of the night she was born, and how he was so surprised to have a girl. When he held her for the first time, she’d peed all over his pants—and that’s how he knew she would be good luck.

Twelve armed policemen approach the convent, having been told by a nun who’d escaped that the girls were threatening and violent. It’s been raining, and the girls have made the gardens a sopping mess with hoses and barrels of seawater. And so when the police approach, Eve only has to put her finger in the water from the back steps. With immense control, she deadens their arms one by one, making them drop their guns. Roxy then jolts the water, making the policemen drop to their knees.

Upstairs, one of the girls has been filming this. Eve records a message to go out over the footage, saying that she doesn’t want people to give up their beliefs. She says that God has “changed Her garment merely” and explains how people of various faiths should turn to the female figures in their respective religions and worship them rather than the male figures. Seeing this miracle, people continue sending money and offers of legal help.

After this incident, the police force is humiliated, angry, and afraid. Twenty-three days later, a girl named Mez arrives on the convent doorstep in tears. She and her mother Rachel had been coming home from the grocery store when they were stopped and roughed up by the police. When Rachel had retaliated with a bit of power, they pulled out their nightsticks and guns and beat her seven on one. Mez tells the girls that they’ve taken Rachel to the police station.

Roxy and Allie both relate to these scenes of sexual violence. This establishes again the baseline gender dynamics before the power awakens and the liberty men feel when they have physical power over women. But once women gain the power, this dynamic reverses and women feel free to sexually assault men, as is described in the next chapter with Tunde.



The genuine affection between Roxy and her father only makes their relationship’s disintegration more painful, as it results from Bernie’s inability to yield any power whatsoever. There is also irony in his story: the child that he thought would pose the least threat to him actually becomes the most threatening to him, because the power leads to such enormous societal shifts.



Even though Eve and Roxy are able to use their control in order not to hurt the police permanently, this episode has a darker underlying implication: the girls feel that they have license to break the law simply because they are able to control and hurt the police officers.



This sermon that Eve shares expands upon her ideology for the world at large. Whereas before she has been primarily adapting Christianity to suit her own religion, now she expands to other religions. Perhaps this is why Eve gains such popularity: it is not so much a desire to change the faith of the people, but simply an adjustment in the priorities of existing religions. Instead of following the primary male figures in each religion, she returns power back to the female figures.



While the girls are certainly taking advantage of the newfound freedom that their power affords them, Alderman also demonstrates how the police force abuses their power—perhaps even more than the girls in the convent do. Thus, Alderman demonstrates that power can corrupt no matter who holds it.



Sixty women go to the police station, filming everything along the way. Allie asks the policemen standing outside with rifles to let her see Rachel. When more women start to arrive in support, the police grow nervous, and agree to let Allie see Rachel. Her skull is cracked and her hair is matted with blood. At Allie's insistence, the police agree to send Rachel to the hospital. Allie returns outside, triumphant, telling the women that they have done good work. Half an hour later, Rachel is being treated and the other women have all gone home.

This incident reinforces two major themes: first, the power of numbers to effect social change. Without this kind of revolutionary protest, the police would not have been nearly as responsive and the injustice might have continued. It also touches on the power, again, of being able to broadcast one's story. Widening the reach of their message and showing the event from their perspective, Allie is able to gain even more power over the police because they are afraid of how the story will look to outside observers.



By the time Roxy has been at the convent nine months, Allie has gained followers globally and there are over six hundred women attached to the convent, to the point where they need a bigger building. Roxy, however, is ready to return home. Allie is upset that she is leaving. Roxy tells her that she has an idea about how they can continue to work together even when she's gone.

With these numbers combined with some of the religious stories that Tunde and Margot have been seeing, Alderman paints a fuller picture of just how popular Eve's message has become. Even though Eve has been preaching messages of peace and justice up to this point, the reader knows from previous chapters that some of her followers have used religion as a justification for their violent use of their power.



Allie speaks to the voice in her head for the first time in a long time. The voice says that the only way Allie can be safe is if she "own[s] the place." Allie asks if she can own the whole world. The voice replies, "You can't get there from here."

The voice's declaration that "you can't get there from here" hints at one of the novel's ultimate messages about social change. Sometimes, Alderman argues, even revolutionary change may not be enough—sometimes the world needs to be torn apart completely in order to be rebuilt, as Eve tries to do.



Neil includes an image of a device found in Thailand, about fifteen hundred years old, for learning to control one's power. The operator would hold one side of a metal pole and try to set a leaf or piece of paper on fire on the other end. The size suggests that the device is meant for 13- to 15-year-old girls.

As more and more of these fictional rudimentary devices are included in the book, readers begin to understand that these belong to an alternate version of history: one in which women have always been the dominant sex because of the power and their ability to hurt.



CHAPTER 15

This chapter includes archival documents relating to the power's origin, spread, and possible cure. The first article is a description of a short World War II propaganda film. It shows two men in lab coats treating rats with a substance they call Guardian Angel, and tells viewers that the substance will keep allied forces safe from gas attacks.

The chapter explores some of the history of the power. Neil includes these documents perhaps to counter some of the other unfounded narratives on how or why women developed this power (perhaps in direct contradiction with Eve's own theory). This choice on Neil's part prioritizes the power of research and facts.



The second article consists of notes distributed to journalists for the BBC program *The Source of Power*. The notes explain that Guardian Angel was a success, and accumulated rapidly in the water system. Research has established it as the “undoubted trigger” for the development of the power. Women seven years old or younger during World War II have skein buds on their collarbones, and those who were around thirteen years old during the Day of the Girls possess a full skein, which cannot be taken away without tremendous danger to the woman’s life.

The third article is an SMS conversation between the Home Secretary and the Prime Minister. The Home Secretary asks to delay this report—there will be crises, because there’s no cure for what has happened.

The fourth article is an online advertisement collection. The first is for the “Personal Defender”—a wrist-mounted taser. The Personal Defender was withdrawn because, when shocked, a woman often produced a large shock that bounced back to her attacker. The second ad is for a “\$5 trick” that will improve the strength and duration of the power. The third advertisement is for slip-on rubber undersocks, which theoretically would protect against shocks.

CHAPTER 16: TUNDE

After receiving the tip from Tatiana Moskalev, Tunde had found a group of men training with suits of rubber, battery packs on their backs, and electric cattle prods in their hands. With six photographs, Tunde proved that Awadi-Atif was working with the Moldovan Defense Forces and made world news.

Tunde then travels to Delhi, where riots have begun under the motorway bridges: “the place men come when they want a woman they can use without law or license, discard without censure.” The women pass the power for three years, which they believe comes from Kali (the Hindu goddess of death).

The fact that the power occurred as a result of a drug meant to protect against nerve gas highlights how people are often very bad at predicting the consequences of their actions, often at a great cost. This will also prove true as more and more women embrace the power and wake it up in each other, without thinking through the consequences of how the power can be used for corruption.



Again, Neil (and Alderman) highlight the importance of perspective and the control of information. The fact that the Home Secretary wanted to delay the report shows how the information it contained could have been used as a source of power for its readers.



The advertisements that Neil includes from around the time when the power was discovered again emphasize how fully and how quickly it became woven into the fabric of society, as well as the divide between those who wanted to use it to strengthen themselves, and those who needed protection from it.



The defense forces that Awadi-Atif builds serve as another example of the resistance the men display to the shifts of power, and why it creates the necessity for women to answer with large-scale protests, violence, and revolution.



Again, up until the development of the power, the sexual violation and oppression of women have essentially been normalized. Additionally, as Eve previously suggested, these women relate their power to religious figures, manipulating their beliefs to fit a narrative of why they have gained the power.



When the riot starts, the government sends in the army, but the women quickly learn the trick of splashing water on their attackers and electrifying it. The government then cuts off the water supply, but after three days, the sky sends an unseasonal rainstorm. Women light up the roadways, killing the soldiers suddenly.

Tunde follows the women's protests in the markets. Prior to this, women could not walk alone in the market. Now women are making a "show of force" in solidarity with those who were killed under the bridges. Tunde interviews a woman who explains: "The only wave that changes anything is a tsunami." She tells him that now the men will be the ones who should not walk out of their houses alone at night and who should be afraid.

The crowd thickens. Tunde climbs onto the roof of a building for a better view. He lands in a puddle on the roof. A woman is sitting on the roof as well; it appears to him that "there is something wrong with her." She puts her finger into the puddle of water Tunde is sitting in and shocks him. The pain is instant: he pleads with her to stop. She starts to laugh at him, and he becomes afraid. He crawls out of the water but is unable to stand up.

The woman lunges for Tunde; when he tries to kick she grabs his ankle and gives him another jolt. She wrestles with his belt and jeans, trying to pull them down. He worries that if he fights back too hard, she'll knock him unconscious and do whatever she wants to him. Just then, three other women pull the first woman off of Tunde and shock her over and over. Tunde pulls his pants back up and watches until the woman stops moving completely.

CHAPTER 17: ALLIE

The chapter is an excerpt from the online forum "Freedom of Reach." User *askedandanswered* compares two photos: one of Eve, and another from a police investigation looking for Allie, insisting that they are the same person. Another, *fisforfreedom*, argues that the photos have been doctored. A third, *AngularMerkel*, writes that it is well known that these two girls are the same but Eve has paid the police off—the user says that this has been proven by UrbanDox.

The government's actions demonstrate how the present government run by men is just as susceptible to corruption as the eventual government run by women. In response to the women's actions, they choose to starve the entire city of water rather than risk being hurt.



The interview with this woman in Delhi makes two of Alderman's arguments explicitly: first, that a "tsunami" is required to make any change. A small wave, the woman indicates, will not make a difference. The second argument is about the reversal of gender dynamics, as the woman declares that men will now be the fearful ones; men will not be able to walk alone—in contrast to how it had been.



This is the first moment in which Alderman demonstrates how the power is truly corrosive. Up to this point, only men who have perpetrated injustice against women have been harmed. But Tunde is trying to help the women, and yet this woman still hurts him. This hints at what Tunde understands later: she is trying to hurt him simply because she can.



This incident is also the first in which the gender reversal plays out through sexual assault. Now men are forced to imagine what it might be like to need both protection from women and the protection of women. It is this incident that truly forces Tunde to reckon with the fact that his fate going forward may largely be outside his own hands.



*This chapter is an exploration of the dark side of stories: how one's perspective can be used to fuel the information one consumes and therefore what one believes. It also demonstrates how the internet is a powerful tool for both forming and perpetuating one's point of view. Even though *askedandanswered* is correct, the others are just as convinced that they are in the right.*



Fisforfreedom writes that Allie killed Mr. Montgomery-Taylor on June 24, but Eve's first sermons are dated July 2—she couldn't have moved so quickly. *Riseup* suggests that Eve's followers doctored the dates on the sermons. Another user, *Manintomany*, writes that "Eve will be dead in three years"—and that he would gladly murder her himself. *AveryFalls* asks if they saw Tunde's reporting from Moldova, dreaming about joining their army. *Manintomany* responds that he would gladly join if he were younger.

Beningitis writes that the day before, he let his son look around a toy store to pick out a birthday toy. But when he came to find his son, he saw a girl with a Hand of Fatima tattoo talking to his son. His son started crying, and asked *Beningitis* if it was true that he was bad and that God wanted him to be obedient and humble. Other users chime in saying how disgusting this was, offering to find the girl and "send her a message she won't forget." Others, however, caution that *Beningitis* could be making the story up. But *UrbanDox933* ends the thread, saying: "There will be nowhere to run to. There will be no mercy."

Anonymous internet forums also provide another aspect of Alderman's discussion on corruption. Because people are given the power to be anonymous, they feel like they have license to say whatever they want. Feeling this sense of power leads to more vitriol and hate, as is true of the man who says he'd be willing to murder Eve.



The man's story indicates another gender reversal—whereas religion has, in some cases, been used to oppress women historically by implying that they are sinful (as in the Biblical story of Eve), Eve's own followers are now implying that men are sinful and meant to be humble and obedient. The thread's discussion also circles back to the point that stories and perspective can be very powerful: users even highlight the idea that this person's bias could have led him simply to make up the story to enforce his own point.



CHAPTER 18: MARGOT

Margot is doing debate prep for her upcoming debate against Daniel. With her advisor, Alan, she runs through her three-point plan to tackle the budget deficit. She easily rolls out her first two points, but when she has trouble remembering the third point, Alan asks her if she really wants it. She is adamant that she does, and finally comes up with the third point, which is investing in infrastructure. She argues that she's already confident managing large-scale projects with the NorthStar camps for girls.

Alan asks if Margot has worrying ties with private military corporations. She counters that the NorthStar Systems are a well-respected company. She argues that she would not send her own daughter to a NorthStar day camp if she didn't think they were a force for good. Jocelyn, who has entered the room unnoticed, starts applauding.

Jocelyn is doing better after two years with NorthStar. They've helped her tone down the highs, but haven't helped her lows. There are still days when she has no power at all, and they can't find a pattern to it. Margot has been quietly talking about funding some research.

Margot is another example of how power becomes self-perpetuating. After taking control and power from Daniel by creating the NorthStar camps without his permission, she hopes that people will have confidence in her to give her even more power over him.



Alderman hints at the fact that women are gaining more and more power as they learn to use it, which is an effort that Margot spearheaded. This was also made possible by the fact that people didn't know that Margot had the power, thus allowing her to quietly orchestrate an advantage for those whose powers were known. Power, Alderman implies, can be most potent when it is hidden.



This passage hints at both Margot's and Jocelyn's eventual corruption: Margot eventually abandons all principles simply in order to gain more power and prove that she can effect change. Jocelyn, on the other hand, doesn't want to appear weak in front of others and so she starts to try to prove her strength to others, even at great personal cost.



Margot takes a break, and Jocelyn unexpectedly introduces her to a boy named Ryan, who is 19—a year older than Jocelyn. Margot asks how they met, and Jocelyn answers that they met at the mall. She tells Margot that they're going upstairs to do homework together. Margot insists, quietly, that Jocelyn keep her bedroom door open. Jocelyn stiffens, but agrees.

Margot returns to her debate prep. She asks Alan what he meant by asking her if she really wanted to be governor. Alan tells Margot that she needs to be more aggressive. Margot says that she does want it, thinking of how much faster she would be able to get things done as Governor. She tells Alan that she wants it for her daughters—to help Jocelyn.

Upstairs, Jocelyn pulls the door closed to her room. She and Ryan start to kiss. She has a popping feeling in her collarbone and tries to calm herself, not wanting to hurt him. He asks to see her skein. She unbuttons her shirt for him to see the muscle along her collarbone. He pulls off his own sweater and unbuttons his shirt: he has a skein, too.

Jocelyn and Ryan did meet at a mall, but only because they had first been talking in a private chatroom online for people who have unusual skeins. Ryan has a chromosomal irregularity. It's rare for men with these irregularities to have a skein, and those who do don't talk about it often, as they are associated with weirdness. Jocelyn and Ryan start to give each other light shocks; they gasp with pleasure. Ryan lies back on the bed, "begging her to stop and begging her to carry on."

Downstairs, Margot is still thinking about the question Alan asked: why does she want to be governor? She thinks about Jocelyn and how she'd be able to help her. But, as she continues her debate prep and her charge builds up as she speaks, she knows the real reason is that she wants to knock Daniel down and to see the look on his face when he loses.

CHAPTER 19: ROXY

Eve has grown quite popular in the new state of Bessapara. Bernie has been doing business with Moldova for years: cars, cigarettes, alcohol, guns. Given these two factors, Roxy asks her father to send her there. She creates a new drug to sell called Glitter and gives it to women to try out in London. Glitter is designed to enhance their power, and it gets the women who try it very excited.

Jocelyn also knows the power of crafting a story to suit one's own narrative. Even though she tells her mother she and Ryan met at the mall, the reader will soon learn that they really met online and only "met at the mall" because they had planned to meet there.



At first, Margot believes that she is doing what she does for Jocelyn, implying a kind of selfless, motherly act. But later Margot acknowledges that her real motivation is to "wipe the smile off of Daniel's face." She wants to beat him and gain power over him, not to make a better world but simply for the sake of self-interest.



Jocelyn's fear that she might hurt Ryan if she gets too excited is another indication of the novel's gender reversals, paralleling of the stereotype of men trying not to hurt women when they are excited during sex.



There is an implication that because Ryan has a skein but is a man, people view him as weird. This demonstrates how skeins are starting to help define what makes a man and what makes a woman. Even though the power is shifting from men to women, the book indicates that the firm boundaries between genders, though very real in a social sense, don't always have clear biological underpinnings.



Even though Margot's motivation was originally pure (not unlike to Allie's), when given the power, her underlying desire actually shifts. It is not that she doesn't care for her daughters, but the desire to hold power over others becomes the most motivating factor once she has the ability to make it a reality.



Glitter plays a large role in the corruption of many of the characters over the rest of the book. Even though women already have power over men, they can't help but want even more. They enhance their powers because they can, and because Roxy and Bernie are eager to make a profit on it.



A man named Steve is picking up boxes full of hourglasses—which are really filled with drugs. But when he arrives at the gate, a woman stops him and asks to see his paperwork. He tries to make jokes, but instead she grabs his wrist and gives him a shock that makes him feel like his hand is on fire. She tells him that Roxy Monke is taking over the business. He nods. She lets him go and tells him not to sell this new batch until they instruct him to. Steve leaves with the boxes, noting that the “sand” looks slightly different—it’s all tinged with purple.

Roxy counts her money—she likes “watching her decisions turn into maths turn into power.” She’s gaining influence with Tatiana Moskalev, and she’s inspired fear into a factory so that they turn a blind eye on what they’re creating. When she returned home, she told Bernie about her idea for the drug, and it was the biggest idea he’d heard in a long time.

Additionally, because of the new churches, they’ve got 70 loyal women working on their production line who think they’re doing the work of the Almighty by bringing power to her children. The Monkes are the sole suppliers of Glitter. Roxy emails Eve the weekly profit totals, and sends her a supply of Glitter for herself. She writes, “You look after us and we’ll look after you.”

Neil includes an image depicting a mass grave of male skeletons in a recent excavation of the “Post-London Village Conglomeration.” The hands had been removed pre-mortem and the skulls had been incised with scars post-mortem.

This is another example of a direct correlation between the ability to hurt and the ability to gain power. Because this woman is able to inflict pain, she is promoted and used as an intimidator. Roxy is the same: her ability to use the power especially forcefully makes her an asset in creating fear and power for Bernie.



Roxy recognizes how the ability to hurt can translate into other forms of power: political power with the President of Bessapara; economic power in the form of money; and social capital in the form of inheriting a crime ring, as Roxy is on her way to doing.



This description illustrates how religion, manipulation, and corruption intersect. Because Allie has convinced these women that the power is the will of God, they feel that producing drugs to give women even more power is inherently good—even though their work is actually supporting organized crime.



Neil foreshadows how the power will lead to corruption and torture as the women slide from using their power to defend themselves and start using it to unnecessarily and indiscriminately torture and kill others (primarily men).



CHAPTER 20: MARGOT

Margot and Daniel meet for an on-air debate. In the first segment, Margot gives strong answers while Daniel gives competent but boring answers. But after a commercial break, Daniel comes back fighting. He gets more aggressive, while Margot is on the defensive. She starts clenching and unclenching her hands. As Daniel attacks her on a more personal note, asking if she even cares about her daughters, she can’t stop herself from giving him a small jolt to his ribcage. It staggers him. Margot realizes what she’s done and stares in shock. The moderators announce they’re taking a break.

Daniel and Margot’s debate is full of implications on how gender roles are slowly shifting. Aggressive behavior (which is normally associated with men, but is starting to be associated with women) is prioritized no matter the gender of the person who is being aggressive, but Margot assumes that as a woman, she can’t be too aggressive without losing votes. When Margot unintentionally uses violence on Daniel, she thinks this will mean the end of her chances. But while people react negatively at first, in their hearts they still do value that strength—as shown in her election win shortly afterward.



In the next few days, Margot apologizes several times. She knows what she's done is unforgivable, but she only lost control when she heard Daniel's lies about her daughters. Daniel is "statesmanlike" about the whole incident. Polls show that people are appalled by Margot, that her actions speak of poor judgement. The day of the election, it is assumed that Daniel will win. But as exit polls come back, it becomes clear that the voters lied. They believed instead that she was strong. Margot wins the Governorship.

This series of incidents demonstrates a reversal of how candidates are often viewed. Strength and ambition are usually prioritized in men, even when men use threats of violence or borderline unethical actions because people believe that this makes them tough or strong leaders. In reflecting on these same values when they belong to a woman, it forces readers to recognize and question this kind of bias.



CHAPTER 21: TUNDE

Tunde is interviewing male protestors outside a mall in Tucson, Arizona. He had gotten a tip that something was going to happen here, but it seems it might have been false. The men wave banners reading "Justice for Men" and talk to him about the inequality men are facing. Tunde thinks about all the stories he could be covering: the new female Pope in Bolivia, more unrest in Saudi Arabia, girls trying to cut their skeins out of themselves with scissors (even though more than 50 percent of the time, if a skein is severed, the person dies).

This chapter begins to depict large reversals in gender dynamics, as men start to protest over their inequality—similar to the way in which women protest in order to call attention to their own inequality in contemporary society. Even though Tunde is a man, he thinks about the more exciting things to report that concern women, and has much less interest in covering the plight of these men.



Suddenly, a bomb goes off in the distance. Tunde runs towards the thunderous sound, helping people up as he goes. The mall is on fire, and there is a pregnant woman trapped in the rubble by a concrete pillar. She is discharging her power with great force. Tunde tells her to breathe, trying to comfort her. She begs him not to leave her, and keeps sending her power into the ground. Suddenly, a fire ignites around her. Tunde picks up his camera and runs.

The irony of this attack is that while men are protesting for equality, they are still using and perpetuating violence. They, too, are using revolutionary action in order to try and maintain the current power structure—rather than ceding any power to the women or trying to create true equality.



On the local news, Kristen's face is grim as she announces that a terrorist group called Male Power has claimed responsibility. Tom tells her, however, that the men just want equality. Kristen tries to wrap up the story, but Tom cuts in, refusing. He starts to argue that there's no funding for men, and all the money is going to girls' training camps. He curses at Kristen, telling her that he knows she has the power, too. They get him out of the building before they come back from commercial—the network had cut away even before he started his rant.

Tom's outburst reveals another plot point in gender reversals and how women have been steadily gaining power. Whereas before, Tom always reported on the hard-hitting news, now Kristen is also reporting on it. The irony in Tom's declaration that the men simply want equality is that when the gender roles were reversed, many men were more than happy to perpetuate a power structure in which they had the advantage.



Tunde watches reports of the story unfold from a hospital bed in Arizona. He emails his sister, Temi, who asks if he has a girlfriend. Tunde responds that there's not much time for that. He had briefly dated another journalist named Nina for a while. She had used the power in bed, but he'd shied away from it, telling her to stop and crying.

Tunde's vulnerability in bed is yet another gender reversal in this chapter. After the events in Delhi, in which a woman had used the power to make him vulnerable to sexual assault, Tunde has a much harder time with women in bed, echoing the trauma that sexual assault survivors (who are, more often than not, women) experience and the effect that it can have on their future relationships.



An email comes in from info@urbandoxspeaks.com. The email is from UrbanDox himself, saying that he saw Tunde's reporting in Arizona and Delhi and they want him on their side—"the side of all men." Tunde agrees, thinking that it would be a good interview for his book.

Tunde is driven blindfolded to the interview. When he meets UrbanDox, he finds a white man in his mid-fifties with bleached blond hair and blue eyes. Recently, more and more people have started to read UrbanDox's blogs and use them as a manifesto for violence. UrbanDox opens the interview with a series of conspiracy theories: that the power was planned after World War II because people thought that men had screwed up the world too much. And so, he goes on, they put Guardian Angel in the water to give women the power. The endgame is to kill all of the men.

Tunde starts to argue, knowing that there have been women who've protected him the last few years. UrbanDox says that they do that to confuse him, so that he doesn't only think of women as the enemy. He asks Tunde if he's seen the numbers on domestic violence against men. Tunde has seen the numbers, and he knows the reason they are killing the men is "because they can."

UrbanDox continues, repeating that the women want to kill all of the men. When Tunde brings up the fact that women need men to carry on the human race, UrbanDox argues that women only need to keep a few genetically healthy men around in order to reproduce. UrbanDox also says that people "got slavery wrong." He says that however badly a man treats a woman, he needs her in fit enough condition to carry a child. But now, the women only need one man to have a thousand children.

UrbanDox then asks Tunde to join their movement. He says that they need laws to protect men, curfews on women, and for the government to research a cure. UrbanDox also says that the terror attacks have only gotten started—that a bunch of nuclear weapons got lost after the Cold War, and the men running the terror attacks might have some of those.

UrbanDox's desire to speak with Tunde, and for Tunde to tell the men's stories, again highlights the power of controlling a story; UrbanDox recognizes that having a strong storyteller on his side would be a meaningful asset.



UrbanDox's influence serves as another example of the way in which stories can hold a lot of power. Even though his beliefs are a string of unfounded conspiracy theories, they inspire many violent actions in those who believe his words.



UrbanDox citing numbers on domestic violence against men is a direct parallel to many women today who point out the widespread nature of domestic violence against women. Keeping this language the same and reversing the gender roles reminds readers of the way in which society has become numb to these statistics.



UrbanDox's fears play into the theme of corruption that Alderman is increasingly exploring—of women taking advantage of their power. He believes that they will become so corrupt in their desire for power over men that they won't even need to keep men around. But it is worth noting that men, too, have behaved in equally corrupt ways when they were the ones with superior physical strength.



As the book's violence continues to escalate to the point of global war, UrbanDox's encouragement of these attacks demonstrates why gradual change is so difficult: those in power will fight any small change that might allow for women's equality. Thus, large-scale revolution becomes necessary for women to achieve anything at all.



CHAPTER 22: ALLIE

Eve is on a stage in Bessapara in front of cameras and a large audience. A boy approaches named Christian, who hasn't been able to walk since he was a child. She holds Christian's hand and calls upon the Holy Mother. Allie feels the blockages in his spine with her power. She delivers three pinpricks to his spine and his muscles spring to life. He stiffly stands and takes three awkward steps, sobbing. Sometimes Allie's cure sticks, but sometimes it doesn't at all. The voice says that maybe if they had more faith, they would be cured for longer.

Eve preaches to the crowd, saying she's very happy to be in Bessapara, because the Holy Mother has told her that women should gather together. She brings up that she knows about the Goddess who has meant so much to those in Bessapara, with the eye in the palm of the hand. Eve lifts her hands to show the tattoos and the crowd explodes in cheers. She says that the Goddess is simply another way that the one God has expressed Himself. Good work, says the voice.

On her way out of the building, Allie gets a message from Sister Maria Ignacia. They've been following the online chatter about Allie, and Allie had asked Sister Maria Ignacia to make the files on her case disappear. The email confirms that with the help of an influential friend, the files have disappeared. Allie knows that the friend must have been Roxy.

Later, Allie and Tatiana Moskalev eat dinner together. They discuss the continued war, as Awadi-Atif is still funding the north Moldovans. Tatiana admits that with the new drug and the chemical weapons she has, she could easily destroy his army—but instead, she wants to humiliate his army.

Allie recognizes that if Awadi-Atif wins, it would show that the change is merely a “minor deviation from the norm.” But if he loses, it would be a sign that the women are meant to be in power. The voice tells Allie that Tatiana wants her to bless this war, expressing hesitation. Allie reminds the voice that it told her that she could only be safe if she owned the place. The voice reminds her in turn that it said she “couldn't get there from here.”

Allie continues to manipulate the facts surrounding the miracles she creates, in order to continue to gain support from followers in Bessapara. This deception enables her to maintain a great deal of power as she rises to the level of global religious icon. The explanation that the voice provides for why the cure might not stick further proves how Allie can truly manipulate any fact to support her own narrative.



Allie manipulates yet another set of religious beliefs to suit her own needs. The fact that she argues that her religion encompasses all religions allows her to gain support from a variety of followers. And in fact, the symbol of this Goddess of Bessapara is already borrowed from another religion, as it is based on the Hand of Fatima.



Allie and Roxy both use their influence to try to make sure that Allie can feel safe and protected from retribution, even at the risk of doing something illegal. Allie understands that she would likely not go to jail for her crime, but now she fears losing her influence more than anything.



Like Allie and several other characters, Tatiana has moved from wanting protection and equality to wanting absolute power over men. This is where corruption really starts to take hold in Alderman's story.



Allie is motivated by a constant sense of feeling unsafe. Due to the voice, she believes that the only way to feel safe is to “own the place,” which leads to her power-hungriness, her corruption, and her endorsement of wars. She doesn't want equality or societal progress, simply power over men.



Eve gives an on-camera interview, addressing her followers. She explains that they already know what will happen if Awadi-Atif wins this war: what has happened in Saudi Arabia and Moldova for decades. She endorses the war, saying, “This war is God’s war. With Her help, we shall have a mighty victory. With Her help, everything will be overturned.” She sends the message out to her followers.

In addition to wanting power for herself and women worldwide, Eve also uses the power that she has gained from her followers to endorse this war and to make them believe that it is just.



CHAPTER 23: MARGOT

Margot gives Jocelyn a series of reports showing that Ryan has been on extremist websites that talk about organizing terror attacks. She shows Jocelyn a post (which Margot knows is fabricated) that Ryan had written under the username *Buckyou* arguing that every girl at the NorthStar camps should be shot.

Margot’s actions also show the power of bias in telling a story. Jocelyn assumes that Margot is showing her something truthful, but in reality Margot gains a lot of power over her daughter in showing her something false.



Jocelyn sobs, believing Margot’s words. She argues that Ryan has probably changed since he wrote those things. Margot puts her arm around Jocelyn, assuring her that there will be other boys. Margot says she understands that Jocelyn liked Ryan because he understood her problems, but she says that she still thinks that they can find someone to help Jocelyn so that she can “like normal boys.” Jocelyn looks up hopefully. Margot assures her that she can be like other girls.

Jocelyn’s story demonstrates another aspect of corruption. She is so desperate to fit in and be like other girls that she is willing to do whatever it takes to achieve that power. This is, in essence, a parallel to the idea of toxic masculinity, in which men believe they have to prove their masculinity and strength in a way that ends up being harmful to themselves and others.



CHAPTER 24: ROXY

Roxy receives a message that her brother Ricky has been hurt. When she arrives at Barbara’s place, she finds Ricky with a blanket over his knees and bandages under that. Roxy’s seen this before: someone used her power to castrate him. Ricky will heal, but she knows it will be hard psychologically.

Ricky’s entire story is a parallel with the sexual violence, rape, and harm that women in contemporary society all too frequently experience at the hands of men.



Ricky tells Roxy what happened. He was drunk and out dancing with friends. Three girls approached him and started to flirt. He looks ashamed as he tells the story, worrying he should have done something differently. One gave him a blow job outside the club. When she was finished, the other girls used their power to arouse him—something that hurts a lot if a person doesn’t want it. Ricky kept saying he didn’t want it. They took turns on him, aiming to hurt him and shocking him in the throat so he couldn’t make any sound. They left him on the ground.

The specific language that Alderman uses and the specifics of Ricky’s scenario both force readers to contend with scenarios that women face in contemporary society: being blamed for being drunk or not making better choices, the shame that comes with admitting one has been raped, and the physical and psychological hurt that rape entails. All of these are shocking given the fact that conventional power dynamics have been flipped, and the scenario is meant to shock readers into recognizing that crimes like this shouldn’t become normalized for any gender.



Roxy understands why they called her and not Bernie: Bernie would hate Ricky for this. “This is not what happens to a man,” Bernie would think. Ricky describes the girls to Roxy, and she locates them easily. She calls a couple of girls to help her—using the power is easier than using guns. When she goes to leave her apartment, Darrell insists on coming, too.

Roxy and her companions find the girls in a pub, and wait until they leave. They follow the girls into a park and Roxy stuns one of them. Roxy introduces herself, saying that they met her brother Ricky in a club last night. Darrell knocks a second girl out with the butt of his gun. The third girl, Sam, tells Roxy that Ricky was “asking for it.” She tells Roxy that he wanted the girls to hurt him.

Darrell tries to hit Sam, but she’s too quick for him. She grabs his gun as he swings it at her and shocks him. His eyes roll back and he shakes. The girl threatens to kill Darrell if they come toward her. One of Roxy’s companions sneaks behind Sam and takes her out with an electric baton. She falls to the ground, blinded in one eye. Roxy scars the three girls’ faces and takes pictures to show Ricky.

Roxy returns to the house. Barbara thanks her for what she’s done, even though Roxy knows she’s never liked Roxy. As thanks, Barbara gives her three small black notebooks—information on how the business runs. She says she knows that Bernie would never leave the business to Ricky now, and that she will tell Bernie that Roxy should be its rightful heir.

Roxy stays up the rest of the night, poring over the books of contacts, which are people Bernie’s been blackmailing or bribing, or connections he’s been developing. But then a name catches her eye: Detective Newland, a cop. She remembers Primrose’s words about Roxy’s mother’s murder: “Newland said you weren’t going to be home.”

Roxy quickly finds Detective Newland on the internet; he lives in Spain. As Roxy prepares to leave for Spain, Darrell comes to thank her for what she did for Ricky, and for saving his life. He asks if there’s anything he can do to help her, and Roxy understands that he means in the business as well, now that she is inheriting it. So, she tells him about Newland, and he insists on coming too.

This passage emphasizes how Bernie and men like him are still hanging on to the old power dynamics, believing that men should be strong and not victimized, as Ricky was. But Roxy’s understanding that it is better to bring women on her jobs emphasizes that Bernie’s thinking is disconnected from the shifts that have been taking place.



Again, Alderman specifically uses language that has typically been ascribed to women—that Ricky was “asking for it.” This language seems absurd given the harm that these girls have done to Ricky, and this absurdity causes readers to reflect on why this language doesn’t carry the same sense of absurdity when applied to women.



Because Roxy and the other women don’t need weapons to hurt each other, Darrell is the one who is most powerless in this situation. This dynamic again shows how the ability to hurt can lead to power: Darrell is the one who needs to be saved, while Roxy is the one doing the saving.



Barbara’s decision to give Roxy the notes is another recognition of the fact that Roxy is the most powerful of her siblings because she can cause the most damage. This will have nearly dire consequences for Roxy as Darrell becomes jealous of the power she’s gained.



Here, Alderman demonstrates how the power to hurt can also lead to a variety of other benefits: in Roxy’s case, the power to find out who was responsible for her mother’s death and to get vengeance for that unpunished crime.



At first, it seems that Darrell understands the new social order and accepts the shifts in dynamics when he offers to help Roxy. But it becomes clear later that Darrell is just as power-hungry as his father, to the point where he would harm his own sister.



Roxy and Darrell find Newland's place. They wait in the bushes until he comes out of the house, and Darrell hits him on the head and pushes him into his swimming pool. Roxy sits at the edge of the pool, and Newland realizes who Roxy's mother was. Roxy gives Newland a hard jolt, admits she intends to kill him, and tells him she only wants to know one thing: what Primrose gave him to work with him. Newland reveals that it was actually Bernie who told him to sell the information to Primrose. Bernie wanted Roxy's mother dead. Roxy kills him, making it look like he had a heart attack. On the plane home, Roxy says she wants justice.

Back at Bernie's, Darrell points a loaded gun at him. Bernie tells Roxy that he loved Roxy's mother, but that someone paid her off to leak information about his operation, and so he had to have her killed. He apologizes to Roxy, saying he never meant for her to see it. Bernie sits there, waiting for her to kill him. But Roxy tells Bernie instead that he's going to retire. He can have a safe place somewhere, and no one will come to get revenge on her. Bernie nods, calling her a "clever girl."

CHAPTER 25: JOCELYN

At the NorthStar camp, Jocelyn has often been made fun of because of her problems with her power. The other girls also made fun of her for going out with Ryan, even after she had broken up with him. One night, she and three other girls are on watch at the camp when they find three masked men carrying baseball bats, trying to cut off power to their generator. They scramble and fight the men, until they have one of them on his knees.

Two other girls jolt the man—who is really a teenager—and ask who sent him. They tell Jocelyn to "show him [they] mean business." When she hesitates, they make fun of her for being weak. She thinks about what a normal girl would do, and she gives him a jolt in the head to teach him a lesson. But she's emotional, and she can feel as the jolt leaves her body that it's too much. His scalp "crisps under her hand." His brain is cooked. He is dead.

The revelation that it was in fact Bernie who had Roxy's mother killed serves as another example of how power corrupts a person and takes over their other priorities. Bernie (as he reveals later) prioritized the security of his business over Roxy's mother's life and Roxy's well-being. Additionally, Roxy has gained the power to get vengeance on her own father, whereas before she could never have matched his violent capabilities.



It is notable that of all of the characters, Roxy is the one who is perhaps least corrupted by power. Even though she is the strongest physically, she refuses to kill her father because she knows this will only continue a cycle of bloodshed. Yet Alderman demonstrates that this act allows for Bernie and Darrell to take the power from her anyway. Power, the family's story makes clear, is a corrosive force whether one abuses it or not.



Jocelyn's story arc emphasizes the trappings of power. The fact that Jocelyn should be able to cause violence, but often cannot or does not want to, makes her feel abnormal. Thus, the expectations of power and gender, combined with Jocelyn's frequent inability to fulfill those expectations, leave her ostracized. Through her story, Alderman makes it clear that even being part of a powerful group does not guarantee individuals' success, since power often comes with such rigid and even immoral expectations.



Jocelyn's inadvertent but extremely cruel violence is a prime example of the corrosive force of power. Even though she doesn't want to kill this boy, the other girls are egging her on and pressuring her to hurt him. Thus, even those who try to resist power end up being corrupted by it anyway.



Two of the camp leaders arrive and see the scene, shocked. Jocelyn pulls her hand from the boy's head. One of the leaders, Esther, searches the body and finds a gun. She tells Jocelyn clearly that Jocelyn must have seen that the boy was reaching for the gun and used proportionate force to stop him. She wraps the boy's fingers around the gun. The girls look at each other and agree that that's what happened.

The more Jocelyn tells the story, the easier it gets. She does an interview with Kristen and Matt, the young, attractive new anchor who has replaced Tom. Matt says it's great to know that they have young women like Jocelyn ready to defend the country. Kristen calls Jocelyn a hero.

Neil includes images of two statues: a statue of the "Priestess Queen," depicting a woman in a proud pose. She is standing on a base made from "Cataclysm Era technology" that is marked with a "Bitten Fruit" motif. The second image depicts the statue, "Serving Boy," which shows the bust of a man decorated with broken glass from a "Bitten Fruit" artifact.

This scene has echoes of Mrs. Montgomery-Taylor's staging of her husband's death in Allie's first chapter. Jocelyn has killed this boy, but she also is in control of how the story is told. This in itself becomes a kind of power, because Jocelyn is regarded as a hero rather than facing any kind of punishment for her excessive force and murder of this boy.



The storyline of the news anchors takes another turn: Tom's replacement with a young, attractive man who reports on the light pieces highlights the sexism of the original dynamics between Tom and Kristen and shows that now they've been reversed.



Alderman writes in the book's Acknowledgements that these two statues are based on real artifacts and are actually called "Priest King" and "Dancing Girl," highlighting the importance of perspective and bias in shaping stories and history. Also the "Bitten Fruit" motif—a reference to the Apple corporate logo—again hints at the fact that the present day is actually a long time ago for Neil and Naomi, and that the tale is likely counting down to this "Cataclysm."



CHAPTER 26: MARGOT

Four years later, the war in Moldova is still going on. Tatiana Moskalev holds a dinner and reception at her castle to drum up support for her side of the war. Among the guests are Margot, Roxy, Eve, and Tunde. Tunde interviews Margot, asking why she's there. Margot says that the United States takes interest when a democratically elected leader like Tatiana is ousted in a military coup. Tunde notes that Margot (now a United States Senator) has deep connections with NorthStar, which may have played a part in why she was chosen to attend the party.

When Tunde shuts off his camera, Margot warns him not to come after her. As she walks away, she wonders how no one has mentioned that Tunde is so successful because he's very handsome. She lets her mind wander and thinks that she should pick up one of her young staff members after the party.

Nine years after the power was first discovered, Alderman brings together her main characters. She demonstrates how these characters' lives (particularly the women's lives) have so drastically shifted as a result of this new ability. Without it, none of them would be where they currently are. They are the epitome of how the ability to hurt branches into different forms of power: political in Margot's case, religious in Eve's, and economic in Roxy's.



The gender reversals also start to dip into sexist stereotypes: for example, Margot believing that Tunde could only hold the job that he has because he is attractive (rather than on his intellectual merits), and her view of the junior male staffers largely as sex objects.



Margot then goes to meet Tatiana Moskalev, who is sitting on a literal throne. She has a plethora of rings, a white fur coat, and a gold dress on. They greet each other politely. Tatiana speaks about how Bessapara is the “most forward-thinking country in the world.” She elaborates that it is the only country that understands what this change really means.

Tatiana tells Margot that all Bessapara wants is to live freely to pursue their own way of life. She asks for American aid against the North. Margot tells her that she can’t promise to interfere, even though America supports Bessapara’s independence. Tatiana then asks if Bessapara can hire NorthStar girls as a private army. Margot knows this is worth a lot of money. In exchange, Tatiana asks for American support for upcoming changes to its laws, which will “prevent more traitors giving away [their] secrets to the North.” Margot agrees.

The rest of the party is boring; Margot simply fulfills her diplomatic duties. She leaves at 10:30 p.m., and on her way to the car, she bumps into Tunde again. She asks if he wants a ride, but he politely refuses. Instead, at the hotel, Margot buys a few drinks for one of the younger guys from the American embassy. She gropes him as they ride the elevator to her suite.

CHAPTER 27: ALLIE

Allie is in the castle’s chapel just before the party. Most of the paintings have been “replaced and reimagined according to the New Scripture.” There is even a picture of herself with a symbolic **tree** behind her, the eyes in the center of her hands.

Jocelyn has requested a private meeting with Eve. Jocelyn explains that she feels very lost, and starts to cry. As soon as Eve puts a hand on Jocelyn, she understands Jocelyn’s issues. Jocelyn asks if she can heal her. Eve says that all they can do is pray. As the two pray together, Allie gives a few pushes of power to Jocelyn’s system. Jocelyn gasps: her skein is “humming steadily.” She is shocked that she has been healed. She thanks Eve profusely.

Tatiana Moskalev is the most explicit example of how power is a corrupting force. People believed that she would make a better ruler than her husband and at first she was motivated by improving life for women, but she, too, falls prey to the trappings of power and wants to make sure that she can remain in power.



Tatiana also lures Margot into her scheme of corruption. Margot is motivated more by her desire to gain power and money using the NorthStar camps than by her desire to promote justice. Tatiana later goes on to curtail male freedoms, and Margot has essentially given her carte blanche to change laws in whatever way she sees fit.



Only because of the change in power dynamics is Margot given license to take these actions. And reading this kind of assault with the typical genders reversed again reminds readers of the unnerving nature of these actions.



Alderman again references how Allie has essentially rewritten religious history, overwriting Scripture and replacing old artwork with new artwork that supports her beliefs.



Allie performs another seeming miracle in the name of the Holy Mother, though of course she really uses her power rather than prayer. It leads to a powerful faith in Jocelyn, but one that is easily manipulated, as she would do nearly anything for Eve after she has been cured.



Eve goes down to the party. Tatiana is there, guarded by two young men in very tight clothing. Tatiana speaks about the cruelty done by the North Moldovans. Tatiana then tells one of the men behind her (Peter) to go get wine for her. When he returns, he accidentally interrupts a joke she is telling. Tatiana berates him: “Just like a man,” she says, “Does not know how to be silent.” She shatters the bottle on the floor and demands he lick the wine up, which he does. Allie is repulsed, but the voice tells her that if she says anything she will weaken her power.

The power truly goes to Tatiana’s head here. Not only does she constantly strive for security in her own power, but she now branches into being extremely cruel to this young man simply because she is able to. It is here that Alderman demonstrates her point that women may not necessarily be better leaders than men: anyone who holds power can be corrupted by it.



CHAPTER 28: ROXY

Roxy is bored. She’s been told that Tatiana Moskalev has a pet leopard on a chain, but so far she hasn’t found it. Roxy and Eve meet up, laughing at the memory of the waterfall. Eve suggests to Roxy that Tatiana Moskalev has “outlived her usefulness. To the Holy Mother.” Eve says that Roxy would be a good woman to take over the job, and tells her to come see her tomorrow to talk it through.

The image of the leopard, which will recur later in the chapter, emphasizes the idea that those who once had power and no longer have it (such a powerful animal that is imprisoned) can be very dangerous, as they simply desire more of that power. Eve also starts to make her motivations more clearly known to Roxy, showing that she cares more about having someone trustworthy in power than in her faith, though she still uses faith to justify her political moves and eventual murder of Tatiana Moskalev.



Roxy doesn’t stay long after that because she has a business meeting to attend to. Darrell’s set up the meeting; he’s been doing operations for her in Bessapara. She thinks that sometimes a man is better than a woman at these things: “less threatening; they’re better at diplomacy.” She drives through dark roads for 90 minutes to find the meeting place—another castle. She finds the room she’s supposed to go to, which is lined with plastic and medical equipment. Someone suddenly pulls a bag over her head; she lets off a huge blast of power, but someone hits her in the head with something, hard. She is knocked unconscious.

Roxy’s thoughts again emphasize the gender role reversals that are now fully in place, even in how people think. Men are now thought to be less threatening than women because they don’t have as much power or capacity for violence. The irony of these thoughts, of course, is that Darrell has set up a violent plan to strip Roxy of her power.



When Roxy wakes, she’s strapped to a metal table and she’s drowsy. She can tell they’re cutting into her, and she also quickly realizes that they’ve given her drugs to suppress her power. She tries to build up some power, but they up the dosage of the drugs and she can’t summon any. She can feel the knife hit her skin, and the pain is worse than anything she’s ever felt. They cut the muscle out of her, and she thinks that as much as it hurts, “the emptiness that comes after is worse.”

This scene demonstrates the inverse of the fact that the capacity for hurt directly correlates to one’s power. When Roxy is unable to use her electrostatic power, she is rendered completely vulnerable once more to whatever these men want to do to her.



Roxy’s head is in a vise, but she turns enough to see that there is a man next to her, prepped for an implantation operation: Darrell. And sitting next to him is her father, Bernie. She thinks to herself that she shouldn’t have kept a leopard as a pet. She should have known that not killing her father would also have consequences.

Roxy recognizes how power can corrupt even those who do not have it, especially people who have felt the taste of it before. Darrell and Bernie are so desperate to retake their power that they are willing to hurt their own family member in order to get it.



The surgeons start the operation on Darrell and ignore Roxy. She inconspicuously lifts herself out of the restraints to grab a few scalpels and some bandages. There is some kind of crisis with Darrell's operation: they're giving him chest compressions. While they are occupied, she rolls off the table and onto her knees. She crawls towards the door, finds her shoes, and runs out of the castle and into the forest.

The continuation of Roxy's storyline reinforces just how vulnerable she is without the power, and how she feels like neither a woman nor a man. When she later reflects on what has happened and asks herself why Bernie and Darrell did it, she comes to the conclusion that they did it simply because they were able to. Power in and of itself is again shown to be a corruptive and greedy force.



CHAPTER 29: TUNDE

Tunde goes to help the young man who had to lick up Tatiana's wine and broken glass, an incident that Tunde photographed. The young man, Peter, pulls eight glass shards out of his throat, and Tunde takes a final picture of these shards. Peter, who is only 17, is crying. Tunde writes in his notes: "At first we did not speak our hurt because it was not manly. Now we do not speak it because we are afraid and ashamed and alone without hope, each of us alone."

Alderman shifts the perspective of the scene to show the extent of Tatiana's cruelty. Tunde's notes also elaborate on the fact that even today gender expectations are harmful to men. The expectation that men should be strong leads them not to express pain—which Tunde suggests can be harmful, or even a weakness. This is another way in which power can hurt the ones who wield it.



Peter begs Tunde not to leave the country, because Tatiana is going to try to make the press leave. Peter gives him a note, on which is written "THEY'RE GOING TO TRY TO KILL US." When Tunde is back in his room, he files the story with CNN.

Peter's warning demonstrates the level of corruption that Tatiana is willing to achieve: wanting to subjugate and even kill men, simply because she now has the power to do so.



When Tunde wakes, CNN emails back saying they can't sell the story right now. He sends out three emails to other news sites, but gets back three more rejections. He then goes to YouTube, intending to post it to his channel, but it says the site is not available in this region. Tunde thinks about the young man's warning, and burns a DVD. He puts it in an envelope addressed to Nina; he's left materials with her before for safekeeping.

Tunde's sending his materials to Nina foreshadows her eventual betrayal of him. The fact that the networks are refusing to publish the story is concerning, as the ability to get the story out is in and of itself a kind of power afforded to the men who are now being subjugated and tortured. But the networks refuse to tell that story, and so the men's suffering becomes just as hidden as women's once was.



Tunde remains in the country, while most of the other reporters leave. He attends services in the new churches and finds an underground service of the old religion where the priest asks him not to forget them. He is told that the police no longer investigate the murders of men—even young boys. Tunde documents this but doesn't publish anything.

Again, the necessity of Tunde's reporting becomes clear as he documents more and more extreme injustices, like murders of young men going completely unpunished.



In Tunde's sixth week in the country, Tatiana's Minister for Justice gives a press conference. She announces that, due to men selling secrets to Bessapara's enemies, there are new laws being instated. Each man in the country must have a passport stamped with the name of a female guardian. Her written permission is required for any travel he undertakes. If he does not have a female guardian, he must report to the police station and will be imprisoned. Any man who breaks these laws—even non-citizens—will be subject to capital punishment.

There are other laws instated as well: men are not permitted to drive cars, own businesses, gather in groups larger than three without a woman present, or vote. Any woman who sees a man breaking these laws is required to discipline him immediately.

Tunde gets drinks with a few other male reporters who discuss whether to stay in the country or leave. Tunde goes up to his room and starts to pack. He turns on the TV and sees another story about domestic terrorism in Idaho. UrbanDox has successfully changed the story: these groups are now the only thing that people associate with men's rights. Tunde leaves the next morning around 4:30 a.m. He leaves the non-essentials like his suitcase and dress shoes, taking only two changes of clothes, notes, his laptop, phone, and cameras. He sets out on the road.

Neil provides an image of rock art discovered in northern France that depicts the "curbing" procedure: male genital mutilation, which is still practiced in several European countries. "Key nerve endings in the penis are burned out as the boy approaches puberty." After the procedure, it is impossible for a man to achieve an erection without skin stimulation by a woman. Many of these men will "never be able to ejaculate without pain."

CHAPTER 30: ALLIE

Eight weeks after the party, Roxy has disappeared. Allie has spoken to Darrell on video chat; he looks terrible. He's been looking constantly for her in the countryside. Allie is worried, while Tatiana is convinced that Roxy has betrayed her to North Moldova. Tatiana is unpredictable; at times she seems to trust Eve—even signing a law making her the de facto leader if Tatiana is incapacitated. But often she is violent and paranoid. Civil war is spreading around the country as a result of the new laws.

These specific laws seem both absurd and horrific in Bessapara, particularly as they are applied to men. But they parallel the laws restricting women in a variety of countries in the modern-day. Thus Alderman calls attention to the way that the world often turns a complacent blind eye to regimes that enforce sexist laws.



These laws also have direct parallels with current laws in some countries. These laws not only curtail men's freedoms, but they also make women either complicit in these corrupt statutes or criminals themselves—which makes it hard for individual women to object, even though they're in a position of power now.



Alderman suggests here how important perspective is in shaping the news and influencing broader power dynamics. When the news anchors choose to focus on male extremists and domestic terrorists, people become outraged and miss the actual injustices that are being forced upon men. Tunde, however, sets out to try to correct that.



"Curbing" serves as another parallel, this time with female genital mutilation, an atrocity which still occurs in some countries today and for no other reason than to make sex less pleasurable for women. The inequality in the book is shocking, but it is fictional. The parallel inequality occurring in the world today, however, is very real.



Each of these characters (and the world as a whole) starts to experience the real downside of their desire for power. Roxy is weak and barely alive; Tatiana is paranoid; Allie is lonely; and Darrell is dealing with illness in the aftermath of his operation. Power has corrupted them all to the point where they are unsatisfied with what they have, and their efforts to get more power have only left them less secure.



Allie misses Roxy. She prays to the Holy Mother to bring her safely home. The voice says, "I can't make any promises." Worried she has become too attached to Roxy, Allie tells herself to stop thinking about Roxy: she has to cut off this part of herself. She feels afraid and unsafe, and remembers that "the only way to be safe is to own the place."

It is appropriate that when Allie prays to the Holy Mother, the voice answers in this way. Allie has convinced herself that she has faith and that there is a God watching over her, but in reality the voice's identity has always been ambiguous, and is likely just her own mind trying to comfort her. She has manipulated herself into thinking that the voice can help her, when in reality it is merely a comfort.



One evening, Tatiana calls for Eve very late. She's been having bad dreams, and Eve comes to soothe her. Eve takes her hand, feeling the nerve endings in her brain. She gives the smallest pressure on a few neurons to soothe her. Allie figures that eventually, more people will learn how to do this; they will learn that "the ability to hurt is only the beginning."

This is the first instance in which Allie dabbles in mind control. She recognizes that to hurt someone is just a way to manipulate them, and manipulation is perhaps even more powerful than simply inspiring pain and fear.



Allie tells Tatiana, "I think you'd like to sign these papers now, wouldn't you?" Tatiana nods, drowsily, and signs papers allowing the Church to try its own cases and enforce its own statutes in the border regions. Allie tells the voice, "I'll take the country. And then I'll be safe."

Allie demonstrates once more how the ability to manipulate others (whether concerning religion or otherwise) extends her influence, this time far enough to let her control an entire country.



CHAPTER 31: DARRELL

Darrell, who is now running the factory in Roxy's stead, has just lost "three million quid" worth of Glitter because of the North Moldovan soldiers. He's furious, and tries to take control of the situation. But he's nervous around all the women that work for Roxy's drug operation. He hasn't revealed that he has a skein because he still can't fully use it, and he worries the women are not afraid enough of him.

In the absence of Darrell's ability to cause these women pain, he fears that he cannot truly claim power over them. This continues to support the idea that violence and power are deeply linked.



One of the women asks if Darrell has a guardian. Darrell tells her that Roxy is his guardian; she's just on holiday. He assures her that he's getting messages from Roxy telling him what to do. Darrell then gets a call from Bernie, who is disappointed that he hasn't found Roxy yet. Darrell tells him that it's more than likely she's dead. Bernie asks Darrell how his skein is; Darrell says the doctor has told him he'll be able to use it in a week or two. Darrell smiles: no one will be expecting him to have the power. Bernie also admits that if they can get this operation to work on Darrell, they can sell it to loads of men.

Allie worries later that she will never feel safe enough, because as long as men have experienced what it was once like to have power, they will never give up on trying to regain it. This exchange with Darrell and Bernie supports that idea as they discuss enabling other men to literally take the power away from women. This same fear ultimately leads Allie to want to rebuild society from the ground up in a way that women will always be the dominant sex, even at the cost of progress.



CHAPTER 32: JOCELYN

Margot sends Jocelyn to a psychotherapist following the trauma of the boy's death at the NorthStar camp, but Jocelyn is hesitant to tell the therapist anything because the therapist works out of an office paid for by NorthStar. Jocelyn tells the therapist about Ryan, saying that she wanted him to like her because she's strong and in control, but she worried that he liked her for different reasons—because she was weak.

Jocelyn is back in touch with Ryan. It's taken him months to convince her he didn't post on the bulletin boards. Jocelyn is upset that Margot deliberately lied to her. Ryan assures her that he doesn't think she is weak, and if she were weak, it wouldn't matter. Jocelyn thinks of ads with women showing off their long arcs of electricity, with the underlying message that if you're strong, you can get anything you want.

Jocelyn is currently stationed in the south of Bessapara. She reads accounts online on Tom Hobson's website that "she can't really believe": in the north, there are gangs of women raping and murdering men at will. She also reads an article suggesting that the real reason NorthStar is in Bessapara is to protect supplies of Glitter.

NorthStar gives Jocelyn packets of a purple-white powder "for her condition," but she doesn't need it because of Eve's cure. She prays every night, thanking the Holy Mother. Jocelyn looks at the unused packets and wonders if it could be Glitter. She texts Ryan about it. He questions whether Margot could be working with a drug cartel. Jocelyn believes that if Margot had the chance, she would do it.

On Jocelyn's day off, she decides to take a drive. She prints out a map that she pulled from Tom's website giving directions to one of the alleged drug manufacturing centers. She aims to take photographs, hoping to find something that would incriminate Margot, so that Jocelyn can finally get her mother to "let [her] go and live [her] life."

CHAPTER 33: TUNDE

Tunde makes friends along the road, through the city and satellite towns, and then towards the mountains. The laws may have changed, but it is hard to enforce them immediately. Tunde's plan is to travel for a few weeks and record what he sees, building the last chapter of the book that is waiting for him on USB sticks and notebooks he has in Nina's apartment.

Jocelyn continues to explore the idea of power being a burden when she can't meet societal expectations of what a woman is supposed to be: strong and powerful. This is a reversal of the way in which men in contemporary society are often forced to conform to those same expectations.



The ads that Jocelyn references tell a story in and of themselves: they demonstrate what society expects of young women and help perpetuate that expectation.



Tom's accounts are truthful, as Tunde and Roxy go on to witness in the next chapters, and again emphasize the necessity of stories that question an established power structure and investigate injustice.



Jocelyn demonstrates how Eve's manipulation has worked personally on her: she would do anything for the Holy Mother, despite the fact that Eve's cure has real no basis in faith.



Jocelyn recognizes Margot's corruption, and how that corruption has led to her wanting to oversee Jocelyn's decisions (including the boys she dates). This is an extension of the power and control that Margot wants to have over all aspects of her life, and a stark contrast to Margot's initial positive intentions.



Even though Tunde is putting himself in deep danger in Bessapara, he understands the necessity of his reports, since they're a crucial way of exposing the injustice of what is happening.



Tunde had heard rumors from Peter that the worst events had been happening in the mountains, because when the power first came, the men there would blind the girls with hot irons. Now men don't go there anymore. In Tunde's eighth week, he arrives in a town and tries to buy food from a bakery with a man behind the counter. But the man indicates that Tunde doesn't have the proper papers. Tunde can see scars along his arms, and the man refuses to sell him food.

Along the road, people willing to help Tunde are few and far between. Older men are the most likely, while young men are too frightened. Women are too dangerous: when he walks past a group of women, Tunde says to himself, "I'm nothing, don't notice me, you can't see me, there's nothing to see here." They call to him as he passes, using obscene and racist words. He writes in his journal about his deep fear.

In the tenth week, Tunde comes upon a dead man tied to a post in the road. He has scars all along his body. Around his neck is a sign with a single word in Russian: "slut." Tunde photographs the body with care.

That evening, Tunde becomes aware he is being followed as he walks. He sees a woman behind him making an arc between her hands. He starts to walk faster. She starts to laugh, and he runs as fast as he can: "sobbing, gulping, with the focus of an animal." He runs to a village a mile away.

Tunde desperately climbs a fire escape into an empty storeroom. Tunde decides it's time to leave Bessapara. He plugs his phone into an outlet and sends emails to Nina, Temi, and three editors he'd worked for. While he waits for a reply, he looks at the news. He sees an article by Nina about Bessapara. Then he receives a reply: "I don't find this funny. Tunde Edo was my friend. If you've hacked this account, we will find you."

Alderman demonstrates in this exchange how the dynamic between men and women has not achieved equality in Bessapara; it has merely flipped. Just as women and men were nervous about helping other women escape sexual slavery, this man feels he cannot help Tunde for fear of retribution. This chapter and the next are deep repudiations of the idea that women would create a more equal society if they had more power.



Tunde's thoughts highlight another gender reversal: just as the women in Delhi predicted, now men are the ones who are afraid to walk alone in the streets as they pass a group of women, echoing the fear that many women feel today when walking alone and passing a group of men in the street.



This is another example of a gender reversal. "Slut," in contemporary society, is a very gendered word usually applied to women. When applied to a man who is killed for a supposed crime, readers recognize that the true crime stems from people abusing a power disparity and using disproportionate violence based on a person's gender.



Tunde again experiences the visceral fear of being targeted just because he is a man. It is important that Alderman includes one male protagonist because Tunde's perspective allows readers—particularly male readers—to understand the fear that happens when one has lost all power, particularly when that is a new and shocking experience.



It is later implied that Tatiana Moskalev orchestrated a car accident to make it appear that Tunde had died, thus discrediting any future reports from him. It is yet another attempt by those in power to prevent Tunde's stories from shifting global sympathies away from Bessapara.



Tunde panics. He looks up his own name in the news. He finds his own obituary, full of backhanded praise for his work making the news simpler for a younger audience, with a few minor mistakes, and the names of five famous women he'd influenced. It reports that he died in Bessapara, involved in a car crash which left his body a charred wreck, leaving only his suitcase (the one that he'd left in the hotel room) to identify him. Tunde realizes someone had taken the suitcase and faked his death.

Tunde experiences yet another piece of sexism: the evaluation of one's work in a context that places more weight on the writing of women. His work is trivialized and the women's works are given equal weight to the works that he has written, even in his own obituary. Obituaries are another form of storytelling as they frame the story of one's life, and it is clear from the perspective of this writer that Tunde's work is not thought to be as important as the work of those of women.



Tunde flips back to Nina's story, reading that it is an extract from a longer book she'll be publishing later that year. It is his reporting, his photographs, his ideas and notes. It has been lauded as an instant classic. She has stolen it from him. Tunde lets out a sob of grief. Then he hears a woman's voice outside the door, shouting. He panics, grabs his bag, and runs onto the roof and into the forest. It is only then that he realizes he left his phone plugged into the wall.

This is a deep betrayal by Nina and demonstrates her own corruption: she steals his work simply because she is able to, in part because people now expect women to produce superior work. This is particularly upsetting following Tunde's obituary, where his work was trivialized. Here, with the only difference being that it's printed under a woman's name, his work is heralded as revolutionary. Alderman is also calling attention to the fact that many women have not had their work recognized throughout history, simply because their perspectives weren't as valued.



That night, Tunde sees a ceremony in the woods. Women have lit a fire, with men and women dancing naked. At times, a woman would push a man to the ground, mounting him and showing her power as he "urg[ed] her to hurt him again, harder, more." Tunde watches, even yearning to join them. Tunde then sees a blind woman in a scarlet robe: when she emerges, the others kneel to her. A young man is pushed forward: the "willing sacrifice that would atone for all the others." Tunde takes out his manual camera and photographs the scene. The blind woman presses her forehead to the young man's and kills him.

This woman is one of the young girls who was blinded when the power first came, as Peter described. But even though this woman has suffered a lot, this scene begs the question of how to atone for those kinds of gendered crimes. As the reader, viewing the scene through Tunde, it is appalling that the women would be just as cruel as the men were. But this is one of Alderman's main points: that power, no matter who wields it, leads to violence and corruption.



In the morning, Tunde is unsure if what he witnessed was a dream. He will have to wait until the photos are developed. Tunde decides he needs to find an internet connection to convince someone he is still alive and starts to walk south. He quickly realizes, however, that some women have been waiting for him. He runs and runs, but he trips and is soon jolted in the back of the neck. Tunde wakes in a cage in the encampment of the blind woman. Next to him stands a woman he recognizes from Tatiana's party: Roxy Monke.

Alderman demonstrates yet another aspect of how corrupted Bessapara has become. Just like the instance of sacrifice in this chapter and the incidence of rape in a later chapter, Alderman shows here how gendered power dynamics in Bessapara have become so extreme that it is now nearly impossible for men to escape it without a woman's help.



CHAPTER 34: ROXY

Roxy recognizes Tunde as well, and he starts to cry “like a child, confused and angry.” He explains that he was looking for the mountain cult. He asks what she’s doing there, noting she had disappeared and everyone thought she was dead. Roxy explains that someone tried to kill her. She jokes that she was going to be the President of the country, and now she’s here. He laughs.

Roxy and Tunde continue to talk; Roxy explains that the other women know her, and so they leave her alone. Tunde asks her to help him get out. Roxy says she doesn’t want to interfere in their business. Tunde reminds her that she can do anything: she’s Roxy Monke. He’s heard about her strength. He assures her that she can just ask them to let him out and they would do it. She’s Roxy Monke, he repeats. Roxy is flattered, and agrees.

Roxy bargains with the blind woman for Tunde. She gives them a small bag of Glitter in exchange for Tunde. Roxy walks him to a refugee camp, and they start to joke and laugh with each other along the way. At the refugee camp, people also respect Roxy, and so they leave Tunde alone. He feels “a little safe for the first time in weeks.”

Tunde interviews a few people in the camp, who say that helicopters don’t land anymore; they simply drop food and medicine and clothes. They also relay a story circulating the newspapers, which asks how many men society really needs. The article argues that men are dangerous, commit the great majority of crimes, are less intelligent, less diligent, and more likely to suffer from disease. Society doesn’t need as many men as women to have babies.

The narration flashes to Kristen and Matt, discussing the issue. She assures him that they’re not talking about great guys like him. Matt nods, saying he blames the “men’s rights people” because their extremism provokes this response, and now society has to protect itself from them. Tunde can’t believe that the country is trying to kill most of its men, but the list of crimes punishable by death is growing longer.

Tunde’s vulnerability in this moment demonstrates the vicious cycle of being a victim. When one loses power and becomes weak, it is easier to be preyed upon, and then one feels both physically and emotionally vulnerable in a way that makes one feel even weaker.



Tunde here that even just another person’s perception that one is powerful can make one feel powerful. Roxy can no longer cause pain following her skein removal, and she has no means of accessing the resources of her family. But Tunde’s confidence in Roxy makes her feel that she can do what she wants. Power, Alderman points out here, can be as much about threat and perception as it is about what one can actually do.



Just like Allie, Tunde feels the power of Roxy’s protection and experiences a sense of safety. The perception of the violence that Roxy can cause (even though it no longer exists) has the ability even to make others around her gain a sort of vicarious sense of power.



The editorial described here echoes the theories that UrbanDox spewed in Tunde’s first interview, but which Tunde did not fully consider. Coming from UrbanDox, the story felt like a conspiracy and an absurd proposition. From those in power, it is much more terrifying. Thus, those in power can manipulate which stories are given credence and how the public consumes those stories. While the editorial tries to make a logical argument, underneath it hides a much more sinister idea: mass murder.



Matt’s comments demonstrate what Tunde had already noticed in his hotel room. UrbanDox’s men’s rights group can actually be harmful, because it allows those in power to focus on extremism and deflect attention from the real injustices that are happening to men.



On their third night, an attack begins on the refugee camp. Roxy and Tunde run into the woods separately and Roxy climbs a tree. The women in the attacking gang start rounding up young men, setting fire to the tents. One woman tries to stop them from taking a curly-haired man, but she is overwhelmed easily and killed with a bolt directly through her eyes. Roxy looks away.

When Roxy looks back, one of the attackers has paralyzed the young curly-haired man and pulled off his pants. He is struggling for breath. The woman arouses him with her power and croons, as though she wants him to enjoy it. Roxy wishes she could kill them all, but she does not have her power. Instead, she watches, to be a witness.

The woman jolts the man more and more, like “a glass spike” through his genitals. She unbuttons her pants and sits on him. Every time she thrusts, she gives him a jolt to his chest. The other women record it on their phones. She touches herself, really hurting him as she does so. He is trying to push her hand away and is screaming for help. When the woman comes, she sends a huge blast through his chest. The other women roar their approval, patting her on the back as she stands, laughing and smiling. The man is dead.

The other men do not grieve—grief implies a kind of hope that someone can come and help. The men are all quiet. Roxy knows “there is no sense in what is done here this day.” More women go looking for their own men to rape. She knows the women are doing it “because they can.”

Roxy sees Tunde in a nearby tree. They are relieved to see each other. He climbs over to her, and they hide together from a woman below. The woman doesn't see them but gets closer to them, climbing in the trees and trying to set the lower branches on fire. Tunde asks Roxy to shock the woman. Roxy shakes her head with tears in her eyes. Tunde realizes that he's never actually seen Roxy use her power. He is stunned: “He hasn't imagined for years what a woman could be without this thing or how she could have it taken from her.”

This episode demonstrates the epitome of the corruption that the power has brought on. These women are so power-hungry that they have become driven purely by an instinct towards violence, even against other women who have done nothing to them.



Alderman makes explicit the women's cruelty in this moment as they start to sexually assault the young men. She demonstrates how they can get away with this simply because they are preying on the most vulnerable population: the men within the refugee camps.



This very graphic rape scene can only be intended to shock and horrify readers. Yet, it also forces readers to contend with their reactions in contrast to Allie's rape at the beginning of the novel. That example of assault was somewhat less violent—but it has also been far more normalized. It is no less traumatic for Allie, but it nonetheless elicits a different response from society. In this way, Alderman compels readers to confront this reversal of gender roles and that double standard.



This description is also tied to Allie's rape, when she knows not to scream or fight back anymore because she knows that it will do no good and will only draw out her torture. In each instance, the victims are trapped in a hopeless situation, facing a corrupt enemy and devoid of any power to fight back.



Again, power is tied with the ability to cause pain and harm. Without that ability, Roxy feels completely powerless to change what is happening around her. Additionally, this moment demonstrates how revolutionary the power has been. Only nine years after the Day of the Girls, Tunde already can't imagine what life was like prior to the power.



The woman grows closer. Tunde sees an empty metal oil drum nearby that they've been using as a rain collector. He pulls out three canisters of film and throws them into the oil drum. The sound attracts the women's attention, and they go to the oil drum. Roxy and Tunde are relieved; they drop down carefully from the trees and start to run. But when they turn back, they see in horror that there were two children in the oil drum: a boy and a girl, perhaps five or six years old. The women pull the crying children out of the drum. Roxy and Tunde cannot turn back.

Tunde and Roxy run, then walk, for hours, hand in hand. That night, they find a deserted rail station and a blanket to share. They thank each other for saving each other's lives. Tunde tells Roxy about Nina; Roxy tells Tunde about Darrell. Eventually, one of them asks: "Why did they do it, Nina and Darrell?" The other person has a simple answer: "Because they could."

Roxy and Tunde are both injured and hurt. They joke that Tunde is theoretically stronger than Roxy is now. They cannot tell "which of them is supposed to be which." They trace old scars on each other's bodies. He kisses the scar on her collarbone. They lie side by side, touching each other delicately. They make love gently before falling asleep together.

Neil illustrates another artifact: an "exceptionally complete Cataclysm Era carving," around five thousand years old. It is a kind of monument, where something has been "deliberately removed from the center," but it is impossible to know what was lost. Neil writes that carvings like it are "uniformly found in this condition." It is theorized they contained portraits, lists of local ordinances, or were simply a rectangular form of art.

CHAPTER 35

In the south, Jocelyn pulls her jeep up to a concealed exit. In the north, Tunde and Roxy wake to hear a pounding storm on the roof of their shelter. And in the west, Eve looks out at the gathering storm and asks if it's time. And "her own self says, Well, duh."

Alderman reveals, in addition to their sexual violations, the extent of the women's corruption. Far from any kind of self-defense or retribution for past crimes, the women have descended to targeting innocent children of any gender, driven simply by their desire to hurt.



Alderman demonstrates that Roxy and Tunde have come to an understanding about corruption. They recognize that power not only enables people to do bad things; it prompts people to do bad things who may not have done so otherwise. By not specifying which of the two answers the question, Alderman also emphasizes that the answer should be equally clear to anyone, regardless of gender.



This is perhaps the only model that Alderman provides for what true equality might look like. Neither one can tell which is the more powerful, and therefore they cannot tell which is supposed to be more dominant—perhaps even implying that they aren't even sure who is supposed to be which gender. Yet through the mere fact of this relationship being a clear anomaly, Alderman suggests that equality is much less common (and for most people, perhaps less intuitive) than inequality.



Although it is not completely clear, it is implied (based on Neil's writings in the final chapter) that this may be a monument that depicted male soldiers or which contained the names of male soldiers. Thus, it has likely been destroyed in order to perpetuate the narrative, after the Cataclysm, that women have always been the dominant sex. This again demonstrates the power of perspective and being the one who can control the story.



The fact that Alderman replaces "the voice" with the words "her own self"—meaning Eve's own self—gives yet another possibility on what the voice might be, and how Eve may have been crafting a self-deception in order to gain power all along.



Allie hears that an atrocity has been reported in the north: “Tatiana’s own forces, mad with power.” The voice tells Allie that she is meant for greater things, and that she can command respect from women everywhere. Allie tells the voice that the world is trying to go back to the old ways: “there are still men with money and influence who can shape things to their will.” She wonders how to stop this. The voice repeats, “You can’t get there from here. You’ll have to start again.”

It is in this moment that Alderman starts to clarify the meaning of the recurring phrase “You can’t get there from here.” This mantra that the voice repeats suggests that it is impossible for women to create a world in which they can remain in power without first creating a world in which women have always been in power. This requires not only a revolution, but a complete rebuilding of society—which Allie makes her new priority.



Late at night, Tatiana sits at her desk, writing orders for her army. Eve places a hand on Tatiana’s neck, calming her brain, but also secretly controlling her muscles. Tatiana’s hand grabs the letter opener lying on the pile of papers. Allie feels Tatiana’s muscles trying to resist, but she retains command over them. And in a swift movement, Tatiana slashes her own throat with the letter opener.

With Eve’s murder of Tatiana, she demonstrates quite clearly that she is not interested in pursuing a more just or peaceful world for all people. She simply wants women to retain power over men, and she will use whatever she can, including her religious status and power of manipulation, in order to achieve this goal.



CHAPTER 36: DARRELL

One of the women approaches Darrell, telling him there’s a soldier (Jocelyn) on one of their back paths, taking photographs. Darrell feels his skein twitch: he’s been practicing and he feels ready to use it. Bernie insists on keeping the skein a secret, but Darrell decides to go out to the gate. He can see the women watching from the windows as he approaches Jocelyn.

Even though Darrell has only just acquired a skein, he is already being corrupted by its power. Despite his father’s warnings not to use it, he feels compelled to prove his power to Jocelyn and to the other women. Simply having the power compels him to use it.



CHAPTER 37

Roxy tells Tunde that she can get him out of the country. Roxy also says that she plans to get her skein back, and then she’ll find him. Roxy makes a phone call at a payphone and then tells Tunde that a blonde woman will pick him up that evening at a provided location and drive him across the border in the car’s trunk. He understands why he can’t go with her: if she is seen to be taking care of a man, he can be used against her. They part ways with one final kiss.

Alongside the more explicit gender reversals in the book, there are also some subtler references to these reversed dynamics, particularly with the knowledge that this is a book within a book. Tunde and Roxy’s goodbye echoes that of traditional heroic endings, with the man rescuing the woman and the belief that she is essentially a weakness of his. This time, the genders are reversed, and the moment seems like it might even be a way for Neil to appeal to his own society’s gender norms.



Tunde finds the place Roxy described. He waits for ten minutes, the dread building up in him. He has a package with the rest of his footage and notebooks, and he starts to worry that they might never get seen if he ends up dying before he can make it out of the country. He writes a name and address on the package, and puts it in a post box that he hopes still works.

Tunde understands that the power of being able to tell a story can extend even beyond his life, which is why he chooses to send his materials out rather than keeping them safe with him. Additionally, in choosing to send them to UrbanDox (as is soon revealed), he hopes to guarantee that they will be published maintaining his perspective as a man, and not used or omitted by the news to maintain the power of women.



The car arrives with a blonde woman behind the wheel. She helps Tunde into the trunk of the car and gives him a bottle of water for the eight-hour journey. She tells him to trust her.

This is the last time that readers actually see Tunde, and his fate remains ambiguous. In a way, it almost becomes irrelevant given the event of the Cataclysm, which reinforces how control over writing history goes hand in hand with power more generally. Even if Tunde had survived, it is unlikely that his memory or his work would have been upheld following the Cataclysm, as Neil writes at the end of the book.



CHAPTER 38

Jocelyn is taking pictures when Darrell appears next to her. She tries to pretend she's a tourist, but she's in army fatigues. She explains, then, that she's off duty. Darrell reaches out his hand to offer to help her and then kills her radio with a jolt. Jocelyn realizes that he has a skein.

Darrell's having gained a skein only reinforces Eve's point that there will always be men who want to take the power away from women; when Eve sees Roxy in a subsequent chapter she explicitly uses Darrell as a reason to pursue the rebuilding and restructuring of society.



Darrell and Jocelyn start to circle each other as they prepare to fight. Darrell realizes that Roxy's skein has loads of power left. Jocelyn, too, has more power than she's ever had, thanks to Eve's cure. Jocelyn maneuvers defensively, avoiding his blasts. She collapses, feigning that she's hurt, so that he crouches to attack her. She quickly rolls out from under him and kicks him in the side of the head. But when she reaches out to jolt him, she cannot find her power.

The consequences of Eve's manipulation bear out here, when the cure stops working and Jocelyn can no longer find her power. Alderman makes clear that this kind of deception, and the unending faith in Eve and the Holy Mother that it gave Jocelyn, can have deadly consequences.



Darrell kicks Jocelyn in the jaw with his heel. He kicks her over and over, then pushes her head down and gives her a charge to the base of her skull. She sinks to ground. He waits until she's stopped twitching. He looks up at the women in the window, smiling.

Darrell has no need or reason to hurt Jocelyn so severely, and in fact it becomes clear that doing so has put him in danger. But just like the other characters who acquire the power, he does it because having that power prompts him to use it and expand it, and he is corrupted by its influence.



The women inside the factory are not glad to see what Darrell has done. They stare at him, then march toward him together. Darrell starts to run: he knows they know what he's done. But Jocelyn has injured one of his legs, and the women catch up to him easily. He begs them not to hurt him, apologizing for what he's done. They rip him limb from limb, shocking him and burning him. They pull the skein from his chest just before they tear his head off.

Through this gruesome scene, Alderman reinforces the difficulty of giving up power once one has achieved it. Not only is the loss of power what prompted Darrell to take Roxy's skein in the first place, but it also motivates the women here. Knowing what Darrell has done, they understand that they cannot let him live because he might inspire other men to try to take skeins from other women.



CHAPTER 39

Roxy calls Eve after she makes the call for Tunde. Eve is thrilled to hear that Roxy is alive; she says she knew that Darrell was lying. Roxy tells Eve that she is planning to retake what is hers. When she arrives at the gate of the factory, she expects a battle, but the women are overjoyed to see her. They take her back toward the cold storage fridge. Inside, on a cold table, are lumps of meat. It dawns on Roxy that this is the remains of Darrell. “What have you done?” she says.

The irony of the women taking revenge on Darrell for what he did to Roxy is that Roxy cannot then retake the power that was once hers, since the skein died with him. What’s more, it’s not clear that Roxy even wanted to kill Darrell. There is further irony in the fact that Roxy’s trauma is used to justify Eve’s war later on, despite the fact that Roxy herself only wants to make peace. Through these incidents, Alderman illustrates how power consumes everyone who can use it, even when their motivations are relatively pure.



CHAPTER 40

Roxy finds her skein among the blood and guts. She thought that she would have known if it were dead. But she didn’t know. She holds her palm to her collarbone and waits to feel something.

The fact that Roxy doesn’t mourn this loss is telling, as she becomes one of the only characters who ultimately argues for peace. Although losing her power was a traumatic experience, she has witnessed firsthand the corruption it brings and sees now that she might actually be better off without it.



CHAPTER 41

Eve meets Roxy as she gets off the train. They hug warmly, but Eve can tell something is wrong when Roxy pulls away awkwardly. Back in Eve’s apartments in the palace, she asks what happened to Roxy. Roxy admits she almost died, and shows Eve the crooked, upside down arc of the scar along Roxy’s chest. Eve takes this as a sign: she thinks it is the symbol that “God placed in the sky after the last time She destroyed the world.” It is the rainbow, inverted.

Eve’s allusion to the story of Noah and the flood serves as yet another Biblical manipulation on Eve’s part. Again, this reliance on religion does not stem from true faith, but is rather a way for Eve to support her own narratives. Eve uses this supposed sign as a justification for trying to destroy society.



Eve is amazed because Roxy is the strongest person she knows, and even she was “brought low.” Roxy tells Eve that there are bad things happening in the north, and they need to find ways to stop it. Eve agrees, saying that they have to show people Roxy’s scar and inspire them with fury. Roxy shakes her head, realizing Eve doesn’t understand what she means.

It is at this point that Roxy’s and Eve’s paths start to separate. Roxy, who has now lost her power, recognizes Eve’s corruption, whereas Eve simply wants more and more power as she sees how men refuse to cede it completely.



Eve says that they have to start a war to end all wars. Roxy reasons that if they start bombing each other, other countries will get involved. The women will suffer as much as the men and they’ll bomb themselves “back to the Stone Age.” Eve nods, saying then they will have 5,000 years of rebuilding, where the only thing that matters is “can you hurt more [...] And then the women will win.”

Eve’s plan reveals her belief that not even revolution is enough for women to be safe in society—instead, it is necessary to rebuild it entirely. She believes that power is a zero-sum game, and if the women do not take the power, they are bound to have it taken from them.



Roxy is shocked, starting to believe that Eve is crazy. Roxy admits that she knows what happened in Eve's past. Roxy says she understands and that Mr. Montgomery-Taylor deserved to die. Roxy tells her that she should look up Mrs. Montgomery-Taylor if she really wants the women to win. Eve tells Roxy, as they part, that she will always love Roxy, but that if they don't win, the men will.

Roxy starts to understand that Eve would not, in fact, create a better or more progressive society than the men have, recognizing the extent of Eve's corruption if she simply wants to destroy the world.



CHAPTER 42

Allie smokes as she calls Mrs. Montgomery-Taylor, who now runs a children's home under the New Church. The voice tells her not to make this call, but Allie doesn't listen. Mrs. Montgomery-Taylor is thrilled to hear from Allie and honored to get a telephone call from Mother Eve. She hopes that Allie sees that everything she and Mr. Montgomery-Taylor did was for Allie's own good. Allie realizes, suddenly, that Mrs. Montgomery-Taylor was the one who told Mr. Montgomery-Taylor to hurt her; Mrs. Montgomery-Taylor was the one with the power.

It is at this point that Allie is undone by her own self-deception, as she realizes that she knew all along who had truly been behind her violent abuse. Whereas before, Mrs. Montgomery-Taylor had appeared as a powerless, passive figure, Allie now understands how she was just as vicious as her husband and just as bent on making Allie feel powerless. This alters Allie's entire worldview, which has been predicated on the idea that men are inherently bad and women are inherently good.



Allie hangs up and "comes to pieces." Allie wonders how many other women are like Mrs. Montgomery-Taylor. The voice says it told her not to make the call. Allie asks the voice, finally, if it is the devil. The voice says, "Look, I'm not even real. Or not real like you think 'real' means. I'm here to tell you what you want to hear."

Allie's uncertainty about the true identity of the voice provides further proof that it has always been a tool for her own self-deception. She knows that the voice isn't God, or her mother, and the voice explicitly states that it is not real. It has only been a means for Allie to feel safe, and for her to believe that some higher power is leading her.



The voice tells Allie that it was always meant to make things simple for her. It says that everything is more complicated than it appears. It adds: "even a stone isn't the same as any other stone, so I don't know where you all think you get off labeling humans with simple words and thinking you know everything you need."

The voice's monologue here foreshadows the final passage of the novel, which is apocrypha excluded from the Book of Eve. This is where the voice actually breaks with Allie, as the voice proposes the idea that stories should not be as simple as humans try to make them. In a way, this is Alderman's affirmation that it is wrong to say women are inherently peaceful and men are inherently aggressive and power-hungry, because the world is more complicated than that.



A long time ago, the voice says, a Prophet told it that some people wanted a king. The voice explained what a king would do: make them into slaves. But they wanted a king anyway. "You people like to pretend things are simple, even at your own cost," the voice says. Allie asks if there's no right choice. The voice says that there's never been a right choice. Allie asks what she should do. The voice says that it can't make things simple for Allie anymore. Allie says, "Been nice working with you." The voice replies: "Likewise. See you on the other side."

This story is a reference to the biblical passage 1 Samuel 8, which also serves as the epigraph for the novel, in which Israel asks for a king. It foreshadows the outcome that Eve will eventually be a global leader and icon, despite the fact that she is bent on destroying society. The voice reinforces how people are easily manipulated when they want easy solutions to their problems, just as Eve has done throughout the novel.



Neil includes an image of “The Son in Agony, a minor cultic figure.” It is a partial wooden carving of Jesus’s crucifixion with the scars of the power etched across his chest.

In light of Eve’s plan to send the world back to the Stone Age and reframe the world in a way that makes women seem innately dominant, readers can begin to recognize in the artifacts that Neil includes that her plan worked. This one in particular demonstrates how drastically Eve was able to change the narrative away from male figures and towards female ones.



CHAPTER 43

Margot receives a phone call. Jocelyn has been found in the woods in Bessapara, barely alive and with extensive injuries. The man who killed her is dead already. Margot thinks about her daughter, who “gave her the lightning.” Margot thinks back on an incident that occurred when Jocelyn was three; Jocelyn had accidentally overturned a wasps’ nest. Margot had wrapped herself around Jocelyn and carried her to safety. Jocelyn didn’t have a scratch on her, but Margot had been stung seven times and hadn’t felt a thing. That was her job, she thinks.

Margot has a brief moment of clarity in which she recognizes how much she has been corrupted by the power, and how it has pulled her focus away from caring for her child. But despite this revelation, she sinks herself further into corruption by believing that the only way to move forward and to prevent other girls from being hurt is to ensure that they always have power.



Margot asks how they can prevent this from happening again. A voice in Margot’s head says, “You can’t get there from here.” Margot sees in her head the shape of the **tree** of power. It branches and re-branches, but “the old tree still stands. There is only one way, and that is to blast it entirely to pieces.”

The recurring symbol of the tree takes on a new meaning here. Margot, like Eve, understands that any remnant of the old society will prevent women from being completely dominant. The only way to ensure their power is to destroy the tree (meaning society) and rebuild it from the roots up.



CHAPTER 44

In a mailbox in rural Idaho, a man receives a package with eight rolls of film, notebooks, and USB sticks. He thinks the package might just be another piece of junk. They’ve been sent things like jockey shorts and lube, or tracking devices within homemade muffins. But then it dawns on the man that it might contain nude pictures. He decides to take the items back to UrbanDox.

Despite the fact that Tunde is not actually seen again in the narrative, his materials reappear in order to aid the men’s rights groups, demonstrating how one’s stories and impact on history can outlive a person.



CHAPTER 45

Mother Eve speaks to a crowd, calling upon America, the land where she was born, to join Bessapara in the struggle against the North. She asks them not to watch while “innocent women are slaughtered and while freedom is destroyed.” Within the convent walls, Eve warns that the apocalypse is near and only the righteous will be saved, so that she can call the world to a new order. She says that she will build an ark for them.

Eve carries out her plan as the plot veers towards global warfare. She is actively manipulating her followers to influence global politics and bring catastrophe upon the world. This connects her back to the king in 1 Samuel 8, since Eve is being upheld despite the fact that she is actively working against society’s interests as a whole.



CHAPTER 46

In the days that follow, Margot gives interviews about Jocelyn's injuries. She says that terrorism against Americans can strike anywhere, and that it is important for global enemies to know that America is strong and can retaliate.

A phone call comes shortly after saying that there is a credible threat from a male extremist group, which has posted pictures from inside the Republic of Women: the pictures taken by Tunde, whom they believe has been dead for weeks. Fueled by these images, the North is threatening to attack Bessapara.

The United States President calls Margot, asking for her advice. Margot tell him that he needs to be stronger than ever. She explains that if North Moldova is assisting and radicalizing American terrorists, they have to send a message. Unbeknownst to the president, there is a bonus in Margot's contract if NorthStar deployments top fifty thousand women. It would buy her a private island. Margot thinks, "Burn it all down."

Just like Jocelyn, Margot is corrupted by this toxic desire not to look weak, and for America not to look weak. Her perspective reinforces the implicit connection in international relations between the ability to cause violence on a global scale and the power that a country can hold.



This progression of violence shows not only the importance of the perspective of people recording history, but also how that history is then presented to the rest of the world. Rather than using the pictures to remedy the injustices in the way that Tunde might have hoped, the extremist groups only push the world even further towards global warfare.



Margot's decisions are once again based not on a true desire to help her daughter or to bring more justice into the world. Instead, she is fueled by a desire for money and vengeance, completely corrupted by the power that she has gained.



CHAPTER 47

When historians talk about this moment, they talk about "tensions" and "global instability." But it comes down to power, and how "she acts on people." Neil concludes: "When does power exist? Only in the moment it is exercised. To a woman with a skein, everything looks like a fight." The chapter ends by asking: "And can you call back the lightning? Or does it return to your hand?"

Alderman (through her male author alias) explicitly states, once again, that power is uncontrollable, to the point where seems to act on people, rather than people using it to act. Power, in a way, is uncontainable, just like lightning.



CHAPTER 48

Roxy sits with Bernie on a balcony, looking out at the ocean. Roxy tells her father that she should kill him. He agrees, saying she "can't afford to be soft." Roxy tells him she's met a man—she got him out of a country full of women trying to kill him, and she owns an underground bunker. Bernie hopefully asks about grandchildren. Roxy thinks with a smile that if she had a daughter, she'd be strong. The two have a drink before they "go down."

Roxy's ending is ambiguous—it is implied that perhaps she and her father brawl or fall off the balcony together and into the ocean. But it is notable that Roxy, who is the only female character whose power has been stripped from her, is less concerned with world domination and more concerned with closure with her father or perhaps even pursuing a relationship with Tunde. Her desire for peace on both individual and global scales again suggests that power causes corruption, and that by extension, Roxy might be better off without hers.



CHAPTER 49

Neil ends his book with “Apocrypha” excluded from the Book of Eve. It states that the shape of power is always the same: it is alive like a **tree**, but it is always growing. Its directions are “unpredictable.” It is more complex than people think it is. A human being is made by that same “organic, inconceivable, uncontrollable process that drives the unfurling leaves in season and the tiny twigs to bud and the roots to spread in tangled complications.”

The excerpt (and Neil’s book) ends with these four lines: “Even a stone is not the same as any other stone. There is no shape to anything except the shape it has. Every name we give ourselves is wrong. Our dreams are more true than our waking.”

The final few passages again reinforce the idea that power, like a tree, takes on a life of its own. It is complex and more difficult to understand than people think it is. In some ways, this passage illuminates Alderman’s project in writing the book, which is to provoke a thought experiment about how power would be exercised by women. The answer, she seems to imply, is that power would be just as corrosive and harmful as when it’s exercised by men.



This final passage echoes the final words that the voice spoke to Eve, emphasizing again that the world is much more complicated than sorting people into the categories of men and women, good and bad. The fact that it is excluded from the book of Eve demonstrates Eve’s continued desire to shape and manipulate people’s beliefs and actions—even though “her own self” once directed her to do the opposite.



CHAPTER 50

Naomi writes a letter back to Neil: first, she comments that she likes the “contortionist” version of Mother Eve, controlling the actions of others with her power. She also sees what he’s done with the character of Tunde—that there are thousands of men who likely have had similar experiences: misattributions, anonymous works assumed to be female, men helping wives with their work, or simple theft.

Naomi moves on to her questions: she writes that she doesn’t believe that there could have been as many male soldiers as Neil depicts at the start of the book. She cites that in school they were only taught about women making men fight for entertainment, and that readers will have those ideas in mind. She adds that most people think of sexual fetishes when they think of a battalion of men in army fatigues or police uniforms.

Naomi also questions the idea that women didn’t have skeins before the Cataclysm. She thinks that it must have been women who provoked the war, not men. She writes that she feels instinctively that a world run by men would be “more kind, more gentle, more loving and naturally nurturing.” She cites evolutionary psychology: men are strong worker homestead-keepers, while women, with babies to protect, are more aggressive and violent.

Alderman highlights the sexism of history as a whole in another reversal. Just as Tunde and his work fall victim to the matriarchal structure of society, so too have many women’s works been lost, misattributed or stolen over the course of history, and this point brings that idea to the fore.



The framing device that Alderman uses shows the power of stories and history over the long term. As Naomi describes, because history has focused on female soldiers in their society, and because men are sexualized more than women, it actively alters how Naomi views the true history that Neil describes in his book.



Alderman calls out the sexism in evolutionary psychology by asserting a complete reversal of the stereotypes that society generally holds: that women have evolved to be more gentle, and men more aggressive. Thus, she demonstrates how people can always find ways to support a prevailing narrative, even if it is not necessarily true.



Neil writes back, thanking Naomi for taking the time to read his work. He explains that he doesn't think much of evolutionary psychology as it relates to gender, and it will be up to the reader to decide whether men are naturally more peaceful and nurturing than women. He suggests that peaceful societies tend to allow men to rise to the top because they "place less value on the capacity for violence."

Neil also addresses Naomi's question concerning the male warriors, writing that they've found hundreds of partial or full statues of male soldiers. He also corrects her, saying that history supports the idea that women didn't have skeins before the Cataclysm. He concludes by saying that the way humans "think about our past informs what we think is possible today." But he immediately backtracks, worrying that what he's written isn't realistic.

Naomi again points out the fact that what Neil has written contradicts many history books, which are based on accounts going back thousands of years. Neil counters that all of the books from before the Cataclysm have been recopied hundreds of times, and that for two thousand years, most of the people re-copying books were nuns in convents. He believes that they could have picked works to copy that supported their viewpoints and let the rest "molder into flakes of parchment." He says that he's simply trying to figure out what those history books didn't capture.

Neil affirms that he's not trying to attack women. Naomi replies saying she knows it's not an attack. She writes simply that it is hard to see women portrayed as they are in this book. She mentions that they've talked about how much "what it means to be a woman" is bound up with strength and not feeling fear or pain. She says she's been grateful for their honest conversations when she knows that it's been difficult for him to form relationships with women.

Neil tells Naomi that she's "one of the good ones." But he writes that some of the worst crimes against men were never (in his opinion) perpetrated against women in the time before the cataclysm. Three or four thousand years ago, it was considered normal to cull nine in ten boy babies, and boys are still "curbed" in places today—that can't have happened to women, he believes. It would have made no evolutionary sense, he says, to abort female babies on a large scale or to alter their reproductive organs.

The irony in Neil's response also actively combats one of the stereotypes that prompted Alderman to write the book: the belief that a world run by women would be a more peaceful one. Alderman has argued throughout that women are just as susceptible to corruption when they are given the same power as men. Neil argues here that society's priorities would have to change to place less value on violence in order for equality to emerge.



Neil explicitly states why history and stories are so important: they can actively change people's ideas about society's possibilities. This is a bit of metacommentary as well, as Alderman provides the reader with a clear and well-conceived thought experiment on how society might change (or remain the same) with women controlling the power.



Neil provides yet another angle to the argument that history is a tool that is both borne of existing power structures and helps to reinforce them. He notes the importance of the perspective of those who are writing the history books: the nuns would have been under Eve's control. Alderman emphasizes, therefore, that history is not always reliable. It is often manipulated or codified by those in power, and thus it is important to recognize that there is always a fuller picture.



Naomi once again addresses the way that the toxicity and corruption of power hurts even those who hold power, just like the pressure that Jocelyn feels in the novel. It demonstrates that no matter a person's gender, those in a group associated with power are expected to be powerful and strong, to the point where they try to perform this strength and power in a way that is harmful to others and themselves.



Neil's assumptions become immediately ironic to readers, who recognize that these same horrors do still currently happen to women. In several countries, female genital mutilation still occurs, and female children are aborted or given up for adoption far more frequently than male children. It reminds readers that the specific inequality in the book is fictional, but the parallel inequality in society is very real.



Neil concludes his letter by saying that the world is the way it is now because of power being based on who can be more violent, but that that's not the way it has to be. He writes, "Gender is a shell game." A woman is whatever a man is not, and vice versa. But if one looks under the shells, there's nothing there.

Naomi suggests they meet up to discuss together. She assures Neil that she really is behind the book and wants it to reach the widest audience. She has one final suggestion for him: acknowledging his worry that people will only view the book in the context of his gender, and that it will only be considered "male literature," she wonders if he might consider publishing the book under a woman's name.

Neil delivers a final reinforcement of the idea that power is based on who can cause the most harm. In this passage, Alderman seems to imply that the solution to inequality is not to give women more power than men, but to stop the divisions between genders and to stop allowing violence to be a main determinant of power.



Alderman finishes her novel with a final, ironic reversal in suggesting that Neil should write under a woman's name. It spurs the realization that this is not the solution to inequality, in literature or otherwise. One should not have to perform as another gender in order to gain an equal footing. Human beings, instead, have to reevaluate biases and power structures on a broad scale in order to create a more equitable society.





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