

Cloudstreet



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF TOM WINTON

Tim Winton was born in the suburbs of Perth, the Australian city where *Cloudstreet* takes place. Denise, his wife, was a student nurse who helped him recover from a car accident when he was 18. Winton wrote his first novel, *An Open Swimmer*, while he was studying at university. His early books saw some success, but his career as an author didn't truly take off until the publication of *Cloudstreet* in 1991. His fiction has earned several literary awards, including the Miles Franklin Award and the Man Booker Prize for Fiction. Winton is also a strong advocate for environmental conservation, supporting organizations such as the Australian Marine Conservation Society and the Environment Defender's Office. His passion for protecting the environment manifests itself in his writing, which often features detailed and realistic depictions of Australian landscapes and wildlife. To this day, Winton is considered one of Australia's best known and most beloved authors, and his upbringing in Perth makes him uniquely qualified to write about the ordinary and extraordinary aspects of life in that region of the country. He still lives in Perth with his wife.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The first stretch of the novel takes place in the 1940s, towards the end of World War II. World War II officially began in September of 1939, when Hitler invaded Poland and, days later, the UK and France declared war on Germany. Australia joined and fought with the Allied powers at this time; Australian soldiers fought mostly in Europe, North Africa, and the Pacific. The war was the first time in Australia's post-colonial history that it came under direct attack by a foreign power, mostly by the Kingdom of Japan. The war ended in 1945 following the Allied invasion of Germany in Europe and, several months later, Japan's surrender in the days after the U.S. dropped the first atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Following the war's end in the novel, Oriel starts working at the local Anzac club to help her maintain a sense of patriotic pride. ANZAC stands for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, a group that has been honored annually since their engagement in World War I. As the 1960s arrive later in the novel, news of the Cuban Missile Crisis also rattles the denizens of Cloudstreet. Also called the October Crisis of 1962, the Cuban Missile Crisis refers to a period of 35 days in which it seemed frighteningly likely that the Cold War between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. would escalate into a full-scale nuclear war.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Several of Winton's other novels deal with similar themes and locations, with many of them also taking place in Western Australia, an area with which Winton is intimately familiar. The setting of *Dirt Music*, for example, is a harsh region of Western Australia that poses a physical threat to the characters to explore the conflict between nature and humanity. While most of the conflict in *Cloudstreet* is interpersonal, the characters' lives are constantly drawn back to the all-encompassing river, which is a powerful source of both hope and tragedy. A similar focus on the importance of the natural world also appears in Winton's 1997 novel *Blueback*, which examines humanity's relationship with the sea. *Cloudstreet* also exhibits elements of magic realism, a genre that seamlessly blends the ordinary and the fantastical together to heighten its storytelling. One example of a magic realist novel with thematic similarities to *Cloudstreet* is *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez. The classic novel follows several generations of the Buendía family, who also experiences supernatural events that are treated as fairly commonplace. In both works, magic realism allows the author to enhance the emotional impact of the narrative through bizarre and surreal imagery, blurring the lines between history and myth to give a new perspective on the mundanity of everyday life.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Cloudstreet*
- **When Written:** 1991
- **Where Written:** Western Australia
- **When Published:** May 1991
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Drama, Magical Realism
- **Setting:** Western Australia, 1940s–1960s
- **Climax:** Rose gives birth to her baby in Cloudstreet's library.
- **Antagonist:** There is no traditional antagonist, but many characters have interpersonal conflicts with each other over the course of the novel.
- **Point of View:** Third Person (later revealed to be First Person, narrated by Fish)

EXTRA CREDIT

Personal Experience. Perth, the city where most of the novel takes place, is where Tim Winton was born and raised. His personal experience with the area allowed him to add plenty of realistic details to his descriptions. He lives in Perth with his wife Denise to this day.

Like A Light Shining. Quick Lamb's few weeks of strange glowing might be a pun on the word "lambent," which means glowing or radiant. It might also be a callback to an early moment in the second chapter, where the Lambs are described as clearly God-fearing people because of "the way they set up a light in the darkness." Fish Lamb also briefly glows like moonlight towards the end of the novel.



PLOT SUMMARY

Sam Pickles awakens one morning on the small island where he works, and he feels the "Shifty Shadow" lurking. This is how he refers to strange sensations that he'll occasionally feel when some sort of major shift in luck is about to occur; usually, it's bad luck. Before he even starts his work day, his glove gets caught in the cogs of a machine, causing him to lose all of the fingers on his right hand. His wife Dolly eventually shows up at the hospital to visit him, and their children also show up: Rose, Ted, and Chub. After recovering, Sam returns home to the Eurythmic, a pub where the Pickles family has been living ever since Sam gambled away everything he owned. The pub is owned by Sam's brother Joel, whose luck seems much more reliable than Sam's. In the following weeks and months, Dolly can barely stand to look at her husband. Joel eventually gets Sam to go out and try living one-handed, encouraging him not to give up. The two of them go fishing on a beach one night, only for Joel to die of a heart attack.

Meanwhile, in another town, the Lamb family heads to the riverside to go prawn fishing. Staunch Christians Oriel and Lester Lamb have all six of their children in tow: three boys (Quick, Fish, and Lon) and three girls (Hattie, Elaine, and Red). As Oriel, the girls, and baby Lon stay on the beach and stoke the campfire, Lester, Quick, and Fish walk out into the **river** with a large net. It isn't long before Fish is somehow pulled under the water so quickly that it takes a few moments for his father and brother to notice he's submerged. Fish begins to drown, as he's stuck under the net, and they can't get it off him. After they drag him to shore and remove the net, Oriel tries to pummel the water out of her son's body, praying aloud and demanding that God bring Fish back. To everyone's delighted shock, Fish awakens. The Lambs drive him back into town to announce that a miracle has occurred, but Quick can tell that Fish isn't the same as before. Fish is alive, but now he's mentally impaired, with none of his original wit, cleverness, or personality.

In his last will and testament, Joel left Sam 2,000 pounds, as well as a large old house in Perth, where Joel had planned to retire. A proviso in Joel's will prevents the house from being sold for the next 20 years, so the Pickles family moves to the house at Number One, Cloud Street. It's very old and enormous, so it takes the Pickles family a while to adjust. Much to his family's furious annoyance, Sam gambles his 2,000 pounds away almost immediately. To secure an income, Sam

decides to rent out half of the house to another family. Rose hates the idea, but it's already too late. Sam splits the backyard in half with a shoddy tin fence before welcoming the Lamb family into their home. The Lambs decided to move after realizing that Fish's resurrection hadn't been much of a miracle after all. They felt compelled to leave town because they no longer felt welcome, and they needed a fresh start.

The two families keep their distance from each other as the weeks and months wear on. Sam continues gambling at the racetrack with limited success, and Rose can't decide whether to love him or hate him. Rose does hate Dolly, however, who's been going out to pubs and getting drunk even more than usual. Fish's brain damage has affected the Lamb family deeply; Lester and Quick blame themselves for the accident, and Fish doesn't even seem able to perceive Oriel or acknowledge her existence at all. Fish behaves in a slow and childlike way, and it's often painful for his family to watch. Nonetheless, they carry on. Oriel opens a general goods shop in the front of the house, which eventually comes to be known simply as **Cloudstreet**, along with the rest of the house. But her bustling attitude hides her self-doubt and uncertainty, and Lester shares these feelings. Ever since Fish's accident, the Lambs have all but lost their faith in God, figuring that everything might be determined by random chance instead of a higher power with a plan.

Over the years, life goes on at Cloudstreet. Rose begins to develop an eating disorder. Quick still feels guilty over what happened to Fish, and he pins newspaper photos of miserable and suffering people on his wall, to remind himself of how lucky he is to be a survivor. One day, after Lester and Sam win a good deal of money at the horse races, the Lamb family visits the riverside to relax. Quick and Fish attempt to row home by themselves in a boat that Lester bought on impulse. This proves more difficult than expected, but in the dead of night the river and the world around them seem to turn into a sea of stars, as if they're rowing through outer space. Fish is delighted, while Quick assumes he must be dreaming. At dawn, Lester is relieved to find the two of them sleeping in the boat, which ran aground near Cloudstreet. Soon afterwards, Oriel sets up a tent in the backyard and starts sleeping there every night, feeling unwelcome in the house and strangely alienated from her family.

Quick has trouble in school as his guilt and sadness threaten to overwhelm him. One night, he visits his mother at her second job at the Anzac club and tells her that he's running away from home. The Lambs are saddened at his departure, but they carry on with their lives. Hattie Lamb starts seeing a young man named Geoffrey Birch, whom she plans to marry. Oriel successfully defeats her shop's only competition in the neighborhood, Mr. G. M. Clay, only to guiltily discover that he's also left town and left his wife and children behind. Desperate to feel that she's doing the right thing, she opens her home to a lonely widow named Beryl Lee. Meanwhile, Rose Pickles finds a

job at Bairds department store, where she works at a switchboard. She begins to eat again and becomes healthier, imagining a more independent life far away from her family and the strange old house. Fish continues his childlike behavior well into his teenage years, though he's more subdued without Quick around.

Several years after he ran away from home, Quick now lives on his own as a young adult, working as a kangaroo hunter. As he hunts one night in a wheat field, a kick from a dying kangaroo knocks him out and sees a vision of Fish calling out to him and inviting Quick to follow. The man who hired Quick finds him lying in the field the next morning, and the man's daughter Lucy tends to Quick's wounds that night and seduces him. The two of them have a brief and unsuccessful relationship before Quick leaves town. He senses more and more signs and omens that seem to be calling him back home to Cloudstreet, but he runs from them. Eventually, while he's working for his relative Earl, he starts glowing brightly, and Earl's wife strongly suggests that they take him to Cloudstreet. By coincidence, they bring Quick home on the day of Hattie's wedding to Geoffrey. Quick gradually stops glowing a week or two after returning to Cloudstreet.

A few more years go by. Beryl Lee decides to become a nun and leaves Cloudstreet to live at a convent, after admitting to Lester Lamb that she has feelings for him. Ted Pickles goes to live with a girl he got pregnant. Quick tries to adjust to life at Cloudstreet, but still feels uneasy and aimless. Rose meets a man named Toby Raven, who seems charming and cultured, and the two of them start dating. But after a few months, their relationship falls apart, and Rose finds herself crying by the river. Quick and Fish happen to pass by her in their fishing boat, and Quick offers to give her a ride. After Fish falls asleep in the boat, Quick and Rose start talking and quickly realize that they're in love. They announce their intentions to marry each other the very next day, shocking both their families. The wedding takes place a few weeks later. After their honeymoon, Quick and Rose decide to start having a new house built for them, as Rose doesn't like old places like Cloudstreet. They decide to live in a small flat until their house is finished. Quick becomes a constable and Rose soon becomes pregnant.

Quick and Rose soon run into serious complications. Sam senses the Shifty Shadow again one morning, and his intuition proves correct: in one day, Dolly falls down the stairs and breaks her leg, Ted has a fatal heart attack in a sauna, and Rose has a miscarriage. Rose becomes cold and withdrawn in the months following the miscarriage, falling back into her old undereating habits. Sam and Lester eventually convince her to visit Dolly, who's been dangerously drunk and emotional ever since Ted's death. During their conversation Dolly reveals that she was born of incest, and that her hatred of her own sisters has made her distrust other women. Rose and Dolly's relationship improves after this conversation.

A sadistic killer begins murdering innocent people all throughout Perth at night, seemingly at random. Quick is rattled by his and the police force's inability to stop the killer, and he and Rose move back into Cloudstreet to feel safer. They move into the old library room, which seems to be haunted. Rose becomes pregnant again. After several more gruesome murders, the killer is finally captured on the same day that Rose gives birth to her child, Harry. Quick is forced to realize that the killer is a man, just like him, when he finds the body of killer's drowned son in the river. He tells Rose about his realization, and she comforts him and suggests that they go on a vacation. They soon make plans to drive to nowhere in particular for their vacation, and it's assumed that they'll finally move into their new house when they return.

Oriel arranges a massive dinner for both the Lambs and the Pickleses, wanting to hold onto Quick for one more night before he leaves her again. But during their short vacation (on which Rose and Quick reluctantly bring Fish), the couple discuss their future. Rose admits that, to her own surprise, she wants to keep living at Cloudstreet, as it truly feels like home to her now. Quick agrees, and they rush home the next morning to announce the news to the entire enormous household. Sam was considering selling the house, as 20 years have almost passed at this point, but he decides not to; as it turns out, everyone feels at home at Cloudstreet. To celebrate Quick and Rose staying, the Lambs and the Pickleses enjoy a large and loud picnic by the river, united as if they're one huge family now. But suddenly, a delighted Fish plunges into the river before Quick can stop him. Fish seems to become more than a person as he drowns, seeing the whole history of the two families playing out in his mind in the moment before he dies. For that one moment, he's become a man and reconnected with his former self, and he's one with the river he always longed for.

With Fish gone, Oriel feels that she can finally move on. She and Dolly dismantle Oriel's tent, indicating that she'll be sleeping in the big old house at Number One, Cloudstreet from now on.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Oriel Lamb – Oriel is the matriarch of the massive Lamb family. She's Lester Lamb's wife and Quick, Fish, Lon, Hattie, Red, and Elaine's mother. Throughout the novel, Oriel is the tireless engine that keeps the household afloat, throwing herself into her work and compelling her family to follow her lead. She's the driving force behind **Cloudstreet's** shop, and while several characters call her bossy, it doesn't upset her to agree with them. Oriel takes pride in her work ethic as well as her strong sense of morality and duty, whether to God, her country, her family, or even herself. However, beneath her stern exterior, Oriel is a secretly lonely and uncertain person, wracked with

feelings of inadequacy and survivor's guilt from her traumatic childhood. When Oriel was a girl, a fire destroyed her home and killed everyone in her family except her father, whom she had to care for herself after the incident. This gave her a strong sense of self-reliance, but when her son Fish nearly drowns and comes back with brain damage, now unable to perceive her, she loses much of her confidence, and even her faith in God is shaken. Oriel re-examines her faith and her place in the world during her 20 years at Cloudstreet. However, her development is mostly internal, as she rarely shows vulnerability in front of her family. She views all of life as a war to be waged, and she constantly fights back against the idea that people can't change what fate has given them. Oriel is determined to do things properly and this makes the people around her insecure in themselves, but her bustling pace and harsh attitude are tempered by her deep love for her family, the one thing she feels powerless to change.

Lester Lamb – Lester is Oriel's husband and the father of Quick, Fish, Lon, Hattie, Red, and Elaine. At various times in his life before the events of the novel, Lester was a constable, a military man, a musician, and a vaudeville performer. Like his wife, Lester was a deeply religious Christian until his son Fish drowned and came back to life with his mind permanently impaired. This disappointing “miracle” causes Lester and his wife to lose their faith in God, as both of them dearly miss the clever and lovable boy Fish used to be. Regardless, Lester strives more than anyone else to continue loving Fish despite the boy's condition, reprimanding the other Lamb children when they don't treat Fish with respect. Inwardly, Lester still finds Fish's childlike behavior painful to watch at times, but Lester's development as a character is driven by his desire to find something to believe in, whether it's God or just common decency. Lester gains a new sense of religious faith by the end of the novel, but he admits to Quick that his ongoing perseverance is fueled entirely by love for his family, and their love for him in return. These bonds are eventually expanded to include the Pickles family as well, and he's glad for the extra company. Although he feels outshone by his wife, Lester is a constant source of love, humor, and dependable friendship for the denizens of **Cloudstreet**.

Fish Lamb – Samson Lamb (nicknamed Samsonfish or just Fish, “for his wit and alertness”) is the second oldest son of Oriel and Lester Lamb, and Quick, Lon, Hattie, Red, and Elaine's brother. Fish was a clever and lovable prankster before he drowned on a fishing trip with his family, only to come back to life with his mind impaired and his original personality wiped out. Due to this accident, he has a slow and childlike mind even into adulthood, and his erratic behavior constantly reminds the Lambs of their guilt for not saving him. Despite (or maybe because of) his mental condition, Fish is more aware of supernatural occurrences than any other character. He can see the hateful ghosts in the library, he seems to understand the

talking pig in the backyard, and he has a spiritual connection with his beloved brother Quick. All of this supports the implication that Fish has gained a deeper understanding of reality, even though he's unable to communicate it in a way his family understands. True to his name, he's constantly drawn to the water that made him lose himself in the first place, though he often equates the water with the stars. Fish remains a central figure in the Lambs' lives throughout the novel, tethering them to the trauma of their past and reminding them of what they've lost. When he drowns again at the end of the novel, he gives the Lambs a chance to finally move on, as he transcends and gains a full understanding of life. At this point, the novel also reveals that Fish is the narrator.

Quick Lamb – Mason Lamb (nicknamed Quick because he's “as unquick as his father”) is the eldest son of Oriel and Lester Lamb, and Fish, Lon, Hattie, Red, and Elaine's brother. Quick is a gloomy and serious boy for much of the novel, especially after his brother Fish drowns during a fishing trip and comes back to life mentally impaired. Like his father, Quick blames himself for the accident, and he often feels guilt and self-loathing for letting Fish take the fall instead of himself. Quick finds photos of miserable people in the newspaper and pins them to his wall as a constant reminder that he's one of the lucky ones, and eventually his guilt and sadness drive him to run away from home. Quick is defined by his relationship with Fish more than anything, but he has plenty of pursuits and developments of his own, such as his eventual, unexpected marriage to Rose Pickles. Their happy relationship is only made possible after Quick returns home, realizing that he can't run from his family issues and must face them instead. Quick is straightforward and honest, and he believes in fighting evil, which inspires him to become a constable. During his young adult life, he develops a new perspective of the world that's more realistic and harsher in some ways, but it ultimately lets him make peace with himself, his past, and his family.

Rose Pickles – Rose is Sam and Dolly Pickles's eldest child and their only daughter. Ted and Chub are her brothers, though she doesn't share much of a bond with them and she usually prefers reading or schoolwork to their company. Rose's opinion of Sam is constantly shifting from love to hatred to something in between, as she has mixed feelings about his gambling habits and his attitude towards life. She has a much more negative relationship with Dolly, who complicated Rose's childhood with her constant drinking and adultery. Because of this often-adversarial family situation, Rose is determined to become independent and move far away from **Cloudstreet**. Similar to Oriel, Rose believes that it's each person's responsibility to improve themselves and make their life better, a philosophy which puts her at odds with Sam's reliance on luck and instinct. But despite her efforts to cut family ties and become independent, Rose falls in love with Quick Lamb and finds herself drawn back to Cloudstreet and its two united families.

Her marriage to Quick is largely built on the fact that he needs her, emphasizing the strength of her character even as she decides to stay with her family. Her childhood experiences have made her feel like she's grown up too quickly, and her maturity is put to the test throughout the novel, as she often feels she has to fend for herself. Rose's journey is one of self-discovery, as she learns to see her mother in a new light and realizes that complete independence isn't what she really wanted.

Sam Pickles – Sam is Dolly's husband and the father of Rose, Ted, and Chub. After losing his right hand and his brother Joel in quick succession, Sam has no choice but to move the Pickles family into the large old house on Cloud Street that Joel had left him in the event of his death. After gambling away the money Joel left him, he rents out half of the house to the Lamb family as a source of income. Sam has a firm belief in the power of luck, despite his frequent and financially disastrous losing streaks when it comes to his gambling. He often senses a strange feeling in the air and a tingling in the stump of his right hand, detecting the presence of what he calls the "Shifty Shadow." This sensation always indicates a major shift in the fortunes of Sam and the people around him, for good or ill. But Sam can only detect luck, not control it, and he insists that he's always at the mercy of fate, while still believing that his luck will change for the better. This attitude creates tension with his wife and daughter, who are often disappointed and angered by how much money he wastes by gambling at the racetrack. Many characters reflect on the power of random chance in their lives, but Sam is the most deeply connected to luck, and the most accepting of its ever-shifting nature. Sam often feels deeply ashamed of himself despite his belief in luck, but over the course of the novel, he learns to appreciate how lucky he is already, even without winning a fortune at the races.

Dolly Pickles – Dolly is Sam's wife and the mother of Rose, Ted, and Chub. She's an alcoholic who constantly struggles with the pain of her past and her longing to travel and experience a more exciting lifestyle. As the years go by, she feels more and more strongly that her best days are behind her, and the onset of her old age drives her to drink more than ever. Her relationship with Sam becomes more strained after he loses his hand, and she often dates other men despite still loving him. Her daughter Rose despises her for drinking and robbing her of her childhood, as a young Rose would often have to carry her drunken mother back home from bars and pubs. Dolly grows to resent Rose as well, but the two of them eventually come to an understanding after Dolly reveals that she comes from an incestuous relationship that brought about her distrust of other women (her sister is also her mother). Dolly's behavior becomes much less extreme after making peace with Rose, though she still drinks often and keeps her coarse and bitter sense of humor, which she mostly uses to entertain herself. Although Dolly resents Oriel for making her feel like an inadequate mother in comparison for most of the novel, she

gradually comes to embrace Oriel and the rest of the Lamb family, confirming Rose's belief that people can change. Dolly is a tragic figure, but she is often comical as well.

Hattie Lamb – Hattie is Oriel and Lester Lamb's eldest daughter. She seems to grow up much more quickly than her sisters, and she becomes the marbles champion of the neighborhood. She's overjoyed to marry a dull but pleasant young man named Geoffrey Birch, and their wedding coincidentally occurs on the same day that Quick returns home after years of living on his own. Hattie is the only Lamb to permanently move away from **Cloudstreet** during the novel, as she goes to live with her new husband after their wedding.

Elaine Lamb – Elaine is one of Oriel and Lester Lamb's three daughters. Throughout the novel, Elaine is consistently glum and lonely, always pining for a husband of her own. She becomes jealous when Hattie is the first Lamb daughter to marry, and Elaine always seems to be engaged to someone, but never married herself. This situation doesn't change over the course of the novel, and Elaine's yearnings are portrayed as a bit melodramatic.

Red Lamb – Red is one of Oriel and Lester Lamb's three daughters. She's the self-proclaimed tomboy of the family, enjoying her reputation as rougher and more "boyish" than her sisters. As a young adult, she becomes a nurse, and she enjoys teasing her squeamish sister Elaine with graphic descriptions of what she sees at her job.

Lon Lamb – Lon is Oriel and Lester Lamb's youngest son. He's an infant at the beginning of the novel, but as he reaches childhood, he considers his mentally impaired brother Fish to be the baby of the family, despite Lon being the younger of the two. Over the years, Lon grows to become a rude and lazy young man who's annoyed by Fish's childlike behavior. Lon marries a girl named Pansy shortly after getting her pregnant, and the two of them and their baby live rather unhappily at **Cloudstreet**.

Ted Pickles – Ted is one of Sam and Dolly's two sons. He grows up without interacting with his sister Rose very much, and he eventually moves away from **Cloudstreet** to live with a young woman after getting her pregnant. Dolly can't help but feel jealous of Ted's youth as he develops a very active romantic life. One morning, when Sam feels a sense of extreme bad luck approaching, Ted dies of heart failure in a sauna after pushing himself too hard to become a jockey. Dolly bitterly mourns his passing, and she later admits to Rose that Ted was her favorite child.

Chub Pickles – Chub is one of Sam and Dolly Pickles's sons. During childhood, he behaves much like his brother Ted, getting into trouble and failing to get along very well with his sister Rose. Even into adulthood, Chub mostly keeps to himself, and tends to react somewhat apathetically to even the most surprising news.

Beryl Lee – Beryl is a lonely widow who lost her husband in World War II. She confides in Oriel at the Anzac club, saying that she sensed Oriel was a Christian woman. Moved by Beryl's story and wanting to feel useful, Oriel opens her home to Beryl, who lives there and works in Oriel's shop for several years. Despite her grief, Beryl is kind, reserved, and principled, though she eventually finds herself too tortured by her romantic attraction to Lester Lamb to remain at **Cloudstreet**. She decides to become a nun, as she considers it a new "marriage" to the church. The Lamb family has one last dinner with Beryl before she leaves, letting her know that she was appreciated and that she'll be missed.

Toby Raven – Rose Pickles meets Toby Raven over the phone at work, and she finds him instantly charming and exciting. Toby appears to be an interesting and cultured gentleman, intimidating Rose but appealing to her desire for a bigger and grander lifestyle. However, it soon becomes clear that Toby and Rose aren't meant for each other. Toby writes gossip columns for a living, but poetry is his passion—though Rose dislikes his poems and she doubts anyone would pay for them. When it seems that Toby has finally had his poetry recognized by the literary establishment, he mocks Rose's family in a desperate attempt to seem like he's the man everyone thinks he is. Toby serves as Rose's first major sign that a dazzling, cultured life away from her family isn't everything she imagines it to be.

Lucy Wentworth – Lucy Wentworth is the daughter of one of Quick Lamb's employers, during the period when Quick lives on his own as a kangaroo hunter. Lucy immediately flirts with Quick and gropes him as he recovers from his injuries in the Wentworth farmhouse. Through her seduction, she marks Quick's entry into a more adult world, and she gives him his first romantic and sexual experiences. However, their relationship (which is mostly physical) is short-lived, as they ultimately don't have much in common. Years later, when Quick encounters Lucy again at her new florist shop in Perth, he's grateful that she doesn't recognize him.

Earl Blunt – Earl is Lester Lamb's cousin. He lives on a farm in Margaret River with his wife, and the two of them are stern and humorless, hardened by the intense difficulties of the Great Depression. Quick lives with Earl for about a year after running away from **Cloudstreet** and ending his kangaroo hunting days. Earl's dry, strict, and overly serious attitude makes Quick wonder if his own family could have ended up like Earl, had they stayed on their own farm in Margaret River instead of moving to Cloudstreet. Earl and his wife eventually take Quick back to Cloudstreet after Quick inexplicably starts glowing.

Joel Pickles – Joel is Sam Pickles's brother, who seems much luckier than Sam until his sudden, fatal heart attack while fishing on the beach. Joel owns the pub that the Pickles family inhabits at the beginning of the novel; he bought the pub and the house on Cloud Street with the money he won from betting on a horse named Eurythmic. After Joel's death, the Pickles

family discovers that Joel left the house on Cloud Street to Sam, along with a solid sum of money. In addition to his generosity, Joel also seems to have an understanding of his brother's behavior, as he ensures **Cloudstreet** can't be sold for 20 years after his death, knowing that Sam would sell it and gamble away the money if he could. Sam often says that Joel is an example of a truly lucky person, in contrast to himself.

G. M. Clay – G. M. Clay is a World War II veteran and the owner of a shop near **Cloudstreet**. He becomes Oriel's competition for a brief period, and Oriel is determined to make her own shop more popular, as she disapproves of Clay's use of his military service as an advertisement for his shop. She eventually runs him out of business by perfecting a vanilla ice cream recipe and selling the treat during the summer. But Oriel becomes racked with guilt when she realizes that she's caused Clay to leave town and abandon his wife alone with the children. Before he leaves, Clay also takes out his anger on Dolly, who had been secretly dating him for some time.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Geoffrey Birch – Geoffrey Birch is a dull but polite young man who marries Hattie Lamb. While the rest of the Lamb family doesn't seem very impressed with him on the whole, Hattie adores him, and the two of them seem to live happily together after their wedding.



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.



CHANCE, CHOICE, AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Cloudstreet follows two families, the Lambs and the Pickleses, as they move into number one, Cloudstreet and live the next 20 years there. Throughout the novel, there's a constant tension between what happens by chance and what happens as a result of a conscious choice. Both of these forces affect the characters' lives, and it's difficult to say which is stronger. But more importantly, the tension between luck and choice highlights the characters' differing beliefs about personal responsibility. For example, Sam Pickles believes strongly in the power of luck and fate, taking after his water-diviner father by listening to his intuition and heeding the "Shifty Shadow" that seems to warn him of dramatic shifts in his fortune. Because of his belief in luck, Sam holds the view that people's lives are largely steered by the whims of fate, and that no one is ultimately in perfect control of who they are or

what path their life takes. His daughter Rose, on the other hand, doesn't share this belief; indeed, she sees Sam's way of thinking as a convenient excuse for both of her parents to dodge their responsibilities and explain their failures. Rose argues that anyone can change if they choose to, a sentiment echoed by Oriel Lamb's proactive views on life.

This tension is largely what distinguishes the more judgmental and high-strung characters like Rose and Oriel from the rest; they believe that everyone is responsible for making their own luck. But even Oriel has her doubts, as she watches the spinning knife and wonders if everyone really is powerless against the whims of random chance. However, both chance and choice often serve as sources of hope for the characters. Sam remains confident that his bad luck will change, while Rose and Oriel find courage by believing in their own competence instead.



FAMILY VS. INDEPENDENCE

As the Lamb and Pickles children come of age, many of them try to strike out on their own and leave their families behind them, though with limited success. For instance, while Hattie ends up living happily with Geoffrey Birch away from Cloudstreet, she's the only exception to the repeating pattern of an independent life coming to a swift end—Ted Pickles dies suddenly a few years after leaving his family. And while Quick and Rose are both desperate to leave Cloudstreet behind at various points in their lives, they both end up returning to live there, as if it was always inevitable. Notably, they both return willingly, illustrating that their family ties no longer feel like chains holding them back. Through various characters' failed attempts to leave, *Cloudstreet* portrays family ties as strong and important—important enough to override a person's desire for independence, and strong enough to help people overcome seemingly insurmountable differences with other family members.

Cloudstreet portrays family ties as things that are supernaturally strong and powerful. Years after Quick runs away from home at 16, his old life begins calling to him through visions and signs, eventually culminating in him physically glowing like a light bulb until he's reunited with the other Lambs. Rose also can't ignore the pull back to Cloudstreet, as she begins to lose too much weight again and becomes miserable in her independent life away from her family. These extreme reactions and supernatural events aren't portrayed as coercive or malicious events that steer the characters back into a house that they hate. Instead, these moments are manifestations of their true desires: the novel suggests that Quick and Rose feel the call to return to Cloudstreet because independence wasn't what they really wanted. Indeed, family, togetherness, and unity win out in the end when the Lamb and Pickles families decide that they should no longer be

independent from each other and merge into one united clan.



TRAUMA AND GUILT

Both the Lambs and the Pickleses are haunted by their traumas and persistent feelings of guilt and remorse. By showing the characters reckoning with their pasts over the years, *Cloudstreet* illustrates not only how trauma and guilt can affect people their entire lives, but also that healing can occur when people connect with others and make an effort to move forward. All of the Lambs have been traumatized by Fish almost drowning, and most of them share the guilt for letting his once-clever mind fade away beneath the water. Fish becomes a constant, living reminder of the trauma of that night, and the crushing guilt the other Lambs feel for losing him. And yet, it's framed as a positive thing when, more than 20 years later, Quick isn't able to protect Fish from falling into the river again—the river “swallows” Fish, and this is framed as a positive, healing event, rather than another tragedy that compounds the Lamb family's pain. In letting him go, the novel implies, they're able to move on.

Ultimately, both families begin to heal from their traumas and move past their guilt when they recognize similar flaws in one another and join together, creating something new as when Quick and Rose marry, creating their own new nuclear family unit. The most literal manifestation of lingering trauma in the novel is the pair of ghosts that the library, but even these miserable spirits are released and unbound from the house when Rose gives birth to her and Quick's baby in the same room. Likewise, the ghosts of the families' painful pasts are banished as new life and fresh hope for the future enters their lives.



RELIGION AND THE SUPERNATURAL

Whether it's fate, a higher power, or something unexplainable, both families in *Cloudstreet* can sense that their lives are touched by something greater than themselves. But far from being a foreign or alien influence, the supernatural elements in the novel only add more depth and color to the everyday, human experiences the characters encounter. The Lamb family's religious faith is shaken and all but destroyed by the disappointing “miracle” of Fish's resurrection, which leaves him mentally impaired for the rest of his life. The Lambs struggle with their fading Christian faith throughout the novel, as the seemingly supernatural events that occasionally happen around them never seem any more useful than the pig in their backyard that inexplicably speaks in tongues.

But eventually, Lester and Oriel come around to a new version of their faith that's been shaped by their experiences at Cloudstreet and informed by love and respect for their fellow human beings. In this way, their religious belief becomes less

about expecting God to intervene on their behalf and more about living a life that they consider godly on principle. The novel's other supernatural events reflect this idea. The ghosts, visions, and strange occurrences that the families experience are mostly there to guide the characters towards what they already know to be true; magic never solves their problems, even if luck plays a role. The supernatural elements provide surreal, metaphorical imagery, but they're also portrayed as real, tangible events, such as Quick's glowing or the house's haunted library. These bizarre events are as real as every other part of the characters' lives, seamlessly woven into the ordinary events to steer the Lambs and the Pickleses toward better, more fulfilling lives.



SHARED HUMANITY

Countless arguments and disagreements divide the residents of number one, Cloudstreet over the years, and the members of each family constantly struggle to relate to one other. But gradually, they come to accept the common humanity that they share, even across families that initially seemed wildly different in terms of their morals and priorities. Cloudstreet doesn't deny the existence of good and evil, or absolve any character of their responsibilities just because being human is difficult. Instead, the novel portrays a realistic but sympathetic view of humanity, where anyone and everyone has the potential to grow cold and malicious—or become good and loving.

One example of a shared human connection comes towards the end of the novel, when Dolly and her daughter Rose make amends after Dolly explains her traumatic upbringing. Importantly, this doesn't completely excuse Dolly's careless behavior over the years, and her relationship with her daughter remains complicated. But after sharing this moment of vulnerability, both Dolly and Rose find the space to reconcile, with the shared understanding that they've both endured hardships that have shaped them for better or worse. After this, Rose can no longer treat her mother as an evil, alien entity to be scorned and dismissed; she must accept that Dolly is just as human as she is. Quick has a similar but much more intense revelation when he fails to save a boy from drowning, only to discover that the boy was the son of the depraved serial killer Quick and the local police department had been tracking down. One reason Quick became a police officer was to fight evil, but it shocks him to discover that the serial killer, the vilest person he knows, is a human being and hadn't always been a monster. In fact, after realizing this, Quick can imagine *himself* having become just as depraved and evil as the killer if things had gone differently in his own life. He still knows that evil exists, but it startles him to learn that evil comes from the choices people make and the circumstances that shape them, rather than being innate.



SYMBOLS

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



CLOUDSTREET

Cloudstreet, the novel's setting, symbolizes both the messiness and the healing power of family relationships. Much like the two families themselves, the house at Number One, Cloudstreet is haunted by its sordid history. While the house's ghosts are the most literal examples, the similarities between the families and their shared home don't end there. Cloudstreet is described as a place it's possible to get lost in, and the house being essentially split in half makes it an even more absurd and bewildering place to live. The size and odd structure of the house reflect the constant chaos present in the lives of its many inhabitants. The house is also old and falling apart at the edges, echoing the feelings that characters like Dolly and Lester have about themselves as the years wear on. But ultimately, despite its quirks and flaws, the house becomes a symbol of the two families merging into one unit and helping each other heal the wounds of the past. This is shown most explicitly when Cloudstreet's ghosts are finally banished and put to rest when Rose gives birth in the house. In this moment, the arrival of new life transforms Cloudstreet from a place of grief into a place of hope. The marriage of Quick and Rose and the birth of their child unites the Lambs and Pickleses, and it isn't long before the arbitrary barriers between the families are removed. Cloudstreet has changed for the better by the end of the novel, just as the families have. Over the 20 years of the novel, the enormous house is a constant reflection of the enormous family living inside it: strange and sorrowful and ridiculous, but also grand in its own way and full of fresh hope.



THE RIVER

Rivers, a mysterious and ever-present element of the characters' lives, symbolize life, death, and all the unknowns that surround them. The river is especially meaningful to the Lamb family, who suffered the loss of Fish Lamb's clever mind when he nearly drowned in a river at the beginning of the novel. As the Lambs blame God for this tragedy, the river could also symbolize the whims of a higher power who gives and takes away without offering a satisfying explanation as to why. This is reflected in the constantly shifting nature of the river, as it seems to both help and harm the families at Cloudstreet at various points in their lives. The river claims Fish's sharp mind and eventually his life, and the son of the serial killer also drowns in the river towards the end of the novel. At the same time, however, Quick's worldview is ultimately changed for the better after he finds out that the

serial killer had a son, and Quick might have never married Rose if he hadn't encountered her one night while rowing on the river with Fish. Quick and Fish also shared the strange experience of the river becoming a starry sky earlier in the novel, demonstrating the mysterious and beautiful potential the river holds along with its dangers. Even when the river takes Fish's life at the end of the novel, his death is portrayed as more of a relief or an inevitability than a tragedy. The river gives Fish his mind back and offers him a glimpse of enlightenment in his final moments, and his death also lets Oriel make peace with herself and move back into Cloudstreet at last. The river literally and figuratively surrounds the family for their whole lives, carrying them through the strangeness of life and reminding them that everything comes to an end, only to begin anew.



THE SPINNING KNIFE

Random forces of good and bad luck seem to affect the lives of the Lamb family more than anything else, and the spinning knife symbolizes this randomness most clearly. While Lester and his children enjoy spinning a knife on their kitchen table and asking it questions as an amusing game, it also serves as a constant reminder of their apparent lack of control over their own lives and destinies. It's fitting that Fish is the character who plays with the knife most often, as his mental state was changed drastically and permanently by an accident that seemed to happen for no reason at all. Both Lester and Oriel can't help but wonder if the entire world is at the mercy of luck and fate as they watch the knife spin and stop where it may. This is a stark contrast to their previous, more religious worldview, which reassured them that everything happens for a reason. But ever since Fish nearly drowned and lost his former personality forever, the Lambs have a much harder time believing that their lives are governed by anything other than the random whims of fate. Throughout the novel, the Lamb family members spin the knife again and again, trying to work through the family's ongoing uncertainties about what chance has in store for them. Even as the Lambs jokingly tell themselves that "the knife never lies," they're tempted to seriously believe that acts of God are either completely random or too mysterious to be fully understood.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Picador edition of *Cloudstreet* published in 2013.



Chapter 1 Quotes

Some people are lucky, she heard him say. Joel, he's lucky. Got a good business. His hayburners win. See, I got me ole man's blood. Dead unlucky.

Rose yawned. Until your luck changes.

Luck don't change, love. It moves.

Related Characters: Rose Pickles, Sam Pickles (speaker), Joel Pickles

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis


As he adjusts to his subdued new life after losing his right hand at work, Sam discusses the nature of luck with his daughter Rose. He blames the accident on the terrible luck he apparently inherited from his father, while comparing himself to his brother Joel, who has always seemed much luckier by comparison. Ironically, this moment foreshadows Joel's unexpected heart attack a short time later—an unfortunate event for both Joel and Sam, who's been relying on his brother for a place to live. This illustrates how Sam's intuition about luck is both highly sensitive and not always perfect. While Sam is skilled at sensing the "Shifty Shadow" (his name for a shift in luck), he doesn't fully understand it and can't consistently predict the future.


Meanwhile, Rose's role in the conversation sheds some light on her attitude about luck, which contrasts with that of her father. While Sam is convinced that his luck will never fundamentally change, Rose assumes that everyone has moments of good and bad luck, including Sam. Sam believes that even if his luck improves, it won't have changed, but simply "moved" temporarily, implying that he can't change who he is or how the universe treats him. Rose's laid-back response to her father is an early indication of her belief that everyone's fate is ultimately in their hands. In Rose's view, everyone is an independent person, and bad luck isn't something that can run in the family.

Chapter 2 Quotes

Fish will remember. All his life and all his next life he'll remember this dark, cool plunge where sound and light and shape are gone, where something rushes him from afar, where, openmouthed, openfisted, he drinks in river, whales it in with complete surprise.

Related Characters: Fish Lamb

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis



Fish Lamb nearly drowns during a prawn-fishing outing one night with his family. This is the inciting incident of the Lamb family's troubles, and this night will haunt each of them—including Fish himself—for the rest of the novel. The family's lingering guilt and trauma stems from their inability to save Fish in this moment, as they're unable to extract him from beneath the fishing net keeping him below the surface of the water. Fish's drowning is also the first instance of rivers playing a major role in the lives of the Lamb family. Quick Lamb in particular feels that he's being drawn inexorably to rivers, over and over again, after this unfortunate night.


The constant presence of rivers becomes an inescapable reminder of the family's trauma, along with Fish himself, whose clever mind is washed away by this incident. It's also notable that the narration mentions that Fish will remember drowning in "his next life," foreshadowing the transcendent moment Fish has at the end of the novel, when he sees and remembers everything that happened to the two families. That moment is echoed by this one, as both describe Fish as "drinking" the river. Drowning also makes an impression on Fish for the rest of his mortal life, and his fascination with water serves as yet another reminder to the Lambs of their failure to save him. The guilt created by this incident becomes the foundation of many of the novel's conflicts and personal struggles.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☝☝ It's just them in this vast indoors and though there's a war on and people are coming home with bits of them removed, and though families are still getting telegrams and waiting by the wireless, women walking buggered and beaten looking with infants in the parks, the Pickleses can't help but feel that all that is incidental. They have no money and this great continent of a house doesn't belong to them. They're lost.

Related Characters: Rose Pickles, Sam Pickles, Dolly Pickles, Ted Pickles, Chub Pickles

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 41-42

Explanation and Analysis


The Pickles family find themselves feeling out of place in their large new home on Cloud Street, left to them in the will of the late Joel Pickles. On top of being freshly uprooted from their former home, the family is also bewildered by how enormous and strange the house is. Their feeling of alienation is shown in how they react to the people and events around them. Even World War II isn't enough to distract them from the lonely strangeness of their circumstances. The country reels with its own worries and traumas, but the Pickles family is too focused on their personal lives to feel concerned about larger events.

This attitude is highlighted by the house being described as a "continent." To the Pickleses, Cloudstreet seems big and complicated enough to be a country or world of its own—a foreign land where they still feel unwelcome. But their discomfort isn't only caused by the house itself. The family also feels out of step with each other, as resentment brews over Sam's crippling accident, which indirectly caused them to pack up and move to Cloudstreet in the first place. The Pickles family isn't a cohesive unit at this point, making it even more difficult to adjust to their new life in a house that's far too big for them.

☝☝ She wondered if it wasn't really the way things were, everything just happening by chance in this sorry world. That knife spinning. She thought about her poor dead brother and the ashes and bones of her mother and sister, of Fish, the farm and every other bad turn that led to this night in a strange street and a makeshift kitchen.

Related Characters: Oriel Lamb, Fish Lamb

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 58

Explanation and Analysis

Shortly after moving into the house on Cloud Street with the Pickleses, the Lamb family spins a knife on the kitchen table one night and asks it questions as a fun fortune-telling game. But despite her family's laughter, Oriel can't help but attach a deeper meaning to the spinning knife. This brief



moment of reflection expands greatly on Oriel as a character, giving glimpses into her traumatic past and her more cynical worldview that she's been developing ever since her son Fish nearly drowned. After all the tragedy she's faced, Oriel is forced to face the possibility that everything in life is based on luck, rather than some grand plan.

This is the first appearance of the spinning knife, a symbol that appears throughout the novel as a constant reminder of the presence of luck in the families' lives. Oriel's thoughts about random chance in this moment contrast sharply with her previous worldview. While she had believed that everything happens for a reason, she's dealt with too many traumas and misfortunes to maintain that belief wholeheartedly. Oriel once again becomes a staunch defender of choice and responsibility later in the novel, so this is a low moment in her development as a character. Her thoughts about the spinning knife give her added depth by showcasing her hidden doubts and fears about being at the mercy of fate.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☝☝ The war's over, he knows, but he picks up sadness like he's got a radar for it. The whole world's trying to get back to peace but somewhere, always somewhere there's craters and rubble and still the lists and the stories coming home as though it'll never let itself be over. There's families still on this street who've lost men, and while they remember the war will still be on.

Related Characters: Quick Lamb

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 96



Explanation and Analysis

After World War II ends and the country celebrates, Quick Lamb still dwells on the destruction and suffering left in the wake of the conflict. Quick's "sadness radar" is a manifestation of his own lingering trauma, as well as his empathy and compassion for people he's never met. It's possible that the former fuels the latter, as Quick is still haunted by his brother Fish nearly drowning and losing his old personality. This traumatic experience makes Quick more receptive to the suffering of others, eventually compelling him to post photos and news clippings of miserable and unfortunate people on his bedroom wall.

The strongest parallel between Quick's trauma and the trauma of World War II is the mention of memories keeping the war on. Just as the losses of the war keep it fresh in the minds of the country's citizens, Quick's vivid memories of the incident with Fish keep the pain and guilt alive. As long as Quick remembers Fish drowning, it's still happening. As the memory of that night plays over and over in his mind, Quick struggles to find an outlet for his feelings and finds himself drawn to the horrors of World War II to compensate. This establishes the starting point for Quick's journey as a character, which sees him face his trauma and learn to heal from it over the years.

☝☝ I only believe in one thing, Les, Sam solemnly uttered. Hairy Hand of God, otherwise known as Lady Luck. Our Lady, if she's shinin that lamp on ya, she'll give you what you want. There's two other things people say are worth believin in—the Labor Party and God, but they're a bit on the iffy side for my money. The ALP and the Big Fella, well they always got what I call a tendency to try an give ya what they think ya need. And what a bloke needs most is to get what he wants most. Ya with me?

Related Characters: Sam Pickles (speaker), Lester Lamb

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 109

Explanation and Analysis


Sam Pickles explains his philosophy about luck to Lester Lamb as the two of them enjoy a day of gambling at the racetrack. This speech expands on Sam's beliefs and attitudes, showcasing his all-or-nothing approach to life. Notably, he erases any distinction between wants and needs, dismissing the idea that there's a more responsible or proper way to live. His belief in Lady Luck borders on religious, as he holds luck in higher esteem than any gods or other authorities. Despite his constant strings of bad luck, Sam believes he knows what's best for him, and feels certain that he can intuitively sense when luck is on his side.


This philosophy is at odds with that of Lester, who—until recently—had a strong faith in God and a belief that everything happens for a reason, not simply by chance. But now, as Lester is still reeling from the near-drowning of his son Fish, he's much more amenable to Sam's way of thinking. Now that such a senseless tragedy has struck the Lamb family, Lester is more willing than ever to believe that everything comes down to luck, and that he should simply

try to enjoy himself. While Sam and Lester dip in and out of their friendship throughout the novel, this moment establishes a strong initial connection between them, as they find common ground over the seeming randomness of life.

●● The sky, packed with stars, rests just above his head, and when Quick looks over the side he sees the river is full of sky as well. There's stars and swirl and space down there and it's not water anymore—it doesn't even feel wet. Quick stabs his fingers in. There's nothing there. There's no lights ashore now. No, there's no shore at all, not that he can see. There's only sky out there, above and below, everywhere to be seen. Except for Fish's giggling, there's no sound at all.

Related Characters: Fish Lamb, Quick Lamb

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 123

Explanation and Analysis

Several hours into their ill-advised journey home down the river in a boat one night, Quick and Fish Lamb share a dreamlike experience as the waters around them become an infinite night sky. Ever since he nearly drowned, Fish has often seemed to see things that others couldn't perceive, but this marks the first time that another person catches a glimpse of his world. While Quick doesn't understand what's happening, this supernatural experience lets him connect with his brother like never before, realizing that maybe there's more to Fish's strange behavior than his brain damage. For the first time, Quick sees the world through Fish's eyes.

The imagery of this moment also highlights the mysterious and supernatural elements of the river, which is a constant fixture in the lives of the Lamb family. As the water melts away into an expanse of outer space, the river shows its true form: a boundless, infinite realm that's equally capable of inspiring wonder and fear. Floating through this bizarre world is a spiritual experience that Quick forgets and then remembers years later, making him wonder about the strange events that seem to follow his family. Many of these events involve the river, a rushing force that took Fish's mind but gives the two brothers a glimpse of infinity on their long ride home. Like life itself, this moment on the transforming river isn't just a dream, and can never be fully

understood.

Chapter 5 Quotes

●● He wondered what he'd done to turn Quick away. He secretly hoped for an end to it like the return of the son in the story and it made him wonder if he wasn't still half believing. Those Bible stories and words weren't the kind you forgot. It was like they'd happened to you all along, that they were your own memories. You didn't always know what they meant, but you did know how they felt.

Related Characters: Lester Lamb, Quick Lamb

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 164-165



Explanation and Analysis

Lester Lamb reflects on his son Quick running away from home. Just as with Fish's drowning, Lester is inclined to blame himself for losing another of his children. He also returns to another old habit: relating his experiences to a Bible story—in this case, the story of the Prodigal Son. His inner monologue makes it clear that he doesn't invite this comparison on purpose. Instead, he can't help but see his situation through the lens of a Bible story, despite his ongoing lack of faith in God. This moment floats the possibility that Lester could regain some of his lost faith, if only to give himself comfort as he watches his family recede from him.

Lester's thoughts also clarify his relationship with religion. Even if he doesn't always understand what the stories mean, they still offer a way to put his experiences into context and give him emotional strength in trying times. The stories show Lester a version of reality where everything happens for a reason—where his son will return and all will be made right again. This helps Lester to deal with his guilt for feeling like he drove Quick away, and it gives insights into Lester's values. Family is consistently the most important thing in Lester's life, and his memories of Bible stories indicate that he's reaching for the past and grasping for a version of the Lamb family that's more united and whole.

Well the Shadow was on him, the Hairy Hand of God, and he knew that being a man was the saddest, most useless thing that could happen to someone. To be alive, to be feeling, to be conscious. It was the cruelest bloody joke. In the dark, night after night, he raised his mangled fist to the sky and said things that frightened him.

Related Characters: Sam Pickles

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 176


Explanation and Analysis

Sam curses his lot in life after he finds out that his wife Dolly is cheating on him. He's also been on a losing streak at the races, and has recently argued with his daughter Rose over her unhealthy eating habits. All in all, Sam feels as though his life is falling apart, and his harsh thoughts in this moment show that he's losing patience with himself and his reliance on luck. His growing hatred of being alive nearly leads him to suicide later on, and this inner monologue builds up to that extreme moment.

This low point in Sam's life makes him more sympathetic, as the consequences of his gambling catch up with him and drive him to furious desperation. The image of Sam shaking his "mangled fist" is a reminder of the trauma he experiences every day—the trauma that led him to this point. While losing his hand was an accident, he still feels ashamed for letting it happen, especially as he considers himself an expert on luck. When everything comes crashing down around him, Sam has to face the possibility that random chance is an unreliable or even cruel force in his life.

The blade turns and turns, slow, slower and Lester thinks—is this all there is to it? Just chance, luck, the spin of the knife? Isn't there a pattern at all; a plan?

Related Characters: Lester Lamb

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 181

Explanation and Analysis

Fish Lamb once again spins a knife on the dinner table and makes a game out of asking it questions, while Lester

watches it spin and wonders about the nature of luck. Like his wife Oriel, Lester has been less inclined to believe in a grand design or plan to life ever since Fish nearly drowned. Instead, he wonders if nothing happens for a reason—if everything is decided randomly, like a knife spinning and stopping wherever it may. Here, the spinning knife shows up again to remind the Lambs of the seemingly random forces that have altered their lives beyond recognition.



The spinning knife also serves as a thematic connection between the Lambs and the Pickleses. Both families often feel as if they're at the mercy of luck. Sam's gambling is a major (and inconsistent) source of income for the Pickles family, while the Lambs are still haunted by the random accident that took Fish Lamb's former personality away from them. To some extent, every person living in Cloudstreet has the experience of being carried by the whims of fate without having a say in where they're going. For Lester Lamb in this moment, it's hard to imagine that there's any rhyme or reason to any of it, other than chance, physics, and probability.

Rose. People are... who they are.

Then they should change! People should do things for themselves, not wait for everyone else to change things for em! You can't beat your luck, love.

No, you have to be your luck. There's nothin else, there's just you.

Related Characters: Rose Pickles, Sam Pickles (speaker), Dolly Pickles

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 185

Explanation and Analysis



Sam and Rose have an intense discussion after Rose happens upon Sam in the bathroom, contemplating suicide. The conversation leads them to the subject of Dolly, whom Sam still loves despite her infidelity. His insistence that Dolly can't change who she is clashes starkly with Rose's beliefs about choice and responsibility, highlighting the differences in their worldviews. Sam is always quick to blame his problems on luck, while Rose holds everyone—her mother, in this case—responsible for their actions. The fundamental disagreement between Sam and Rose is one of control, and how much influence a person has over the direction of their life.


Rose's reluctance to accept Sam's beliefs about luck also reflects how she wants to become independent and free from her family. If bad luck is something she can inherit from her father, then the shadow of her family will always follow her and never let her live freely. But if she can become her own luck, she can live how she wants without having to feel shame about her bizarre mess of a family. These thoughts compel Rose to believe in choice and personal responsibility, while Sam is more likely to bitterly accept that everything is beyond his control, as he's already missed his chances in life. However, this moment also illustrates how Rose and Sam still care deeply for one another despite their disagreements, implying that maybe their family bonds are more important than the particulars of their beliefs.

Chapter 6 Quotes

☝ He knows he's not crazy, he's convinced of it, and he's right. But he's not firing on all six, that's for sure, because as he lies there, buckled and ready to stop breathing at any moment, he knows he can't decide how he feels—enlightened or endangered, happy or sad, old or young, Quick or Lamb.

Related Characters: Quick Lamb

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 241

Explanation and Analysis

Several years after running away from home, Quick Lamb reckons with the strange events he's experienced recently, all of which seem to be drawing him back home to Cloudstreet. Just as before, when he shared a supernatural experience on the river with Fish, Quick can tell he isn't just imagining what's happening to him, which means he can't ignore it. This marks a turning point in his development as a character, as he considers the possibility that it simply isn't his destiny to leave his family behind. For the past few years, he's been trying his hand at an independent life, with varying degrees of success. But now, as the universe itself seems to be telling him to return to Cloudstreet, he's forced to face what he's been trying to forget.

This turning point manifests itself as an inner conflict for Quick. The repeated "this or that" phrases emphasize Quick's confusion and indecision at this moment of difficult change. It's difficult for him to gauge how he feels about the apparent inevitability of returning home after all this time.


However, the most significant conflict listed here is "Quick or Lamb." Quick can't decide if he's fully his own independent person, or if he'll always just be another member of the Lamb family. Ironically, "Quick" itself is a playful nickname given to him by the Lambs, implying that even at his most independent, Quick will always carry some form of connection to his family.

Chapter 7 Quotes

☝ Oriel reared with sudden passion: No you don't. You know about boats. You can't steer if you're not goin faster than the current. If you're not under your own steam then yer just debris, stuff floatin. We're not frightened animals, Lester, just waitin with some dumb thoughtless patience for the tide to turn. I'm not spendin my livin breathin life quietly takin the good with the bad. I'm not standin for the bad; bad people, bad luck, bad ways, not even bad breath. We make good, Lester. We make war on the bad and don't surrender.

Related Characters: Oriel Lamb (speaker), Lester Lamb

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 254

Explanation and Analysis



Soon after their son Quick finally returns home, Lester and Oriel Lamb discuss how their lives are going. When Lester suggests that they take the good with the bad, Oriel makes a sudden and surprising speech, rejecting his passive attitude. Oriel's speech encapsulates her beliefs and shows how her life at Cloudstreet has affected her so far. Above all, she expresses her belief in the power of choice and personal responsibility, as opposed to the reliance on hope and luck that defines other characters, such as Sam Pickles. Her passion and anger reveal her desperate determination to avoid being carried passively by the currents of life, as well as her fear of losing anything more than she's already lost.


Like most of the other characters, Oriel has experienced great tragedy and loss. But unlike many of the others, she holds herself responsible for what's happened to her, if only to reassure herself that she'll do better next time. Notably, in this speech, she acknowledges the possibility that bad luck exists, but she nonetheless vows to "make war" on it, promising to take an active role in her life, no matter the circumstances. This echoes Rose Pickles' earlier sentiments about becoming one's own luck, highlighting the surprising

similarities between two characters who are often subtly at odds with each other. Unlike her husband, Oriel sees life as a constant battle to be waged, and her speech in this moment clarifies her beliefs, perhaps even to herself.

●● He'd spent years arresting people for things both mild and maniacal. He'd been to war and lived a Depression on the land, been a father and a husband, and this week, even an adulterer, but it counted for nothing because here he was with Beryl Lee on the end of his bed beggin the question: why was it that he didn't know a thing about the underlying nature of people, the shadows and shifts, the hungers and hopes that caused them to do the things they did?

Related Characters: Lester Lamb, Beryl Lee

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 291

Explanation and Analysis

When Beryl Lee, a friend of the Lamb family, tells Lester that she's leaving Cloudstreet, Lester finds himself bewildered at her decision. He's been unable to deduce that Beryl has feelings for him, so her behavior has confused and frustrated him up to this point. As he reflects on all his life experiences, he realizes that none of it has prepared him to answer fundamental questions about human nature and the reasons behind people's actions. His frustration ultimately stems from the fact that the trauma of living through a war and the Great Depression doesn't seem to have a purpose. If his hardships didn't teach him anything important, why did he have to go through them?

This moment echoes Lester's earlier thoughts about the spinning knife and the seemingly random nature of life. The difficult experiences in Lester's life don't seem to have happened for any particular reason, or even to teach him a lesson. Instead, they simply happened to him because they happened, and in this moment he's just as conflicted and confused as anyone else. Feeling that human nature eludes him makes him feel alienated from Beryl Lee, but at the same time, his confusion connects him to the people around him as they share in his ignorance. Beryl has also been conflicted lately, and nearly everyone else in Cloudstreet has internal struggles and unanswerable questions of their own. In a roundabout way, confronting Beryl helps Lester realize that he isn't the only one who doesn't know what's



going on.


●● The strong are here to look after the weak, son, and the weak are here to teach the strong.

What are we here to teach you, mum?

Too early to say.

Related Characters: Oriel Lamb, Quick Lamb (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 299

Explanation and Analysis



During their evening of prawn fishing on the river, Oriel and Quick have a surprisingly frank conversation about life and their place in the world. After cheerfully admitting to being bossy, Oriel expresses this vaguely Christian sentiment, implicitly calling herself one of the "strong" people whose duty it is to "look after the weak." Their entire conversation is tinged with irony and laughter, but Oriel's statement here rings true to her beliefs about her life's purpose. As far as Oriel is concerned, taking care of her family is what she was born to do.



However, Oriel also admits that she has much to learn from the "weak" people in her life, and is unsure of exactly what she's meant to learn. It's possible that she's already begun the process of learning by living at Cloudstreet, managing her own family and interacting with the much more chaotic Pickles family. But the ultimate point of Oriel's exchange with her son in this moment is to construct a narrative that makes sense of a chaotic and random world. If Oriel believes that she exists to look after her family and to learn lessons from them, then all is right with the world, even when everything goes wrong. If responsibilities and hard lessons are part of her life's narrative, then everything is unfolding as it should. Quick shares in the comfort of this idea with his mother, wryly accepting his own place in the world as well.

Chapter 8 Quotes

☞ How you longed, how you stared at me those thundery nights when we all tossed and the house refused to sleep. It's gone for you now, but for me the water backs into itself, comes around, joins up in the great, wide, vibrating space where everything that was and will be still is. For me, for all of us sooner or later, all of it will always be. And some of you will be forever watching me on the landing.

Related Characters: Fish Lamb (speaker), Rose Pickles, Toby Raven

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 321

Explanation and Analysis

As Rose kisses her new boyfriend Toby Raven in his car one night, Fish Lamb, the omniscient narrator, watches and remembers Rose's childhood crush on Fish. Fish's mention of joining water is a reference to the river, which swallows him and claims his life at the end of the novel, but not before giving him a glimpse of infinity and showing him every moment in time, including Rose kissing Toby Raven. In the river, time isn't chronological; everything seems to happen at once, continuously. But despite the strange, supernatural nature of Fish's spiritual transcendence, this moment makes it clear that Fish is still himself as he recounts the story of the two families. His omniscience hasn't changed his willingness to dwell wistfully on the past.

Fish watches Rose become more independent from her family back at Cloudstreet, but his timeless insight lets him know that she'll never fully escape who she is and where she comes from. This is expressed through Fish's reminder about Rose watching Fish at night when they were younger. Her feelings for Fish never developed beyond a childhood crush, but some part of her is still that young girl watching him. In the same vein, she'll always be connected to Cloudstreet and to her family, no matter how she tries to run from them. Rose is desperate to distance herself from Cloudstreet at this point in her life, but Fish knows that everything will join together in time.

☞ Every important thing that happened to him, it seemed, had to do with a river. It was insistent, quietly forceful like the force of his own blood. Sometimes he thought of it as the land's blood: it roiled with life and living. But at other moments, when a dead sheep floated past, when the water was pink with storm mud, when jellyfish blew up against the beaches in great stinking piles, Quick wondered if it was the land's sewer. The city had begun to pile up over it as the old buildings went and the ugly towers grew. But it resisted, all the same, having life, giving life, reflecting it.

Related Characters: Fish Lamb, Quick Lamb

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 332

Explanation and Analysis


Quick takes up fishing on the river as he tries to adjust to living at Cloudstreet again. His thoughts about the river are conflicting and strange, giving it an ever-shifting, almost mystical quality. This passage highlights how the river is viewed as an all-powerful but ultimately unknowable entity, giving and taking away like a god or higher power. On one hand, the river provides food, leisure, and beauty, but it can just as easily look disgusting and cruelly wash everything away. Quick still can't help but associate the river with Fish's incident years ago, but it's notable that in this moment, he strongly associates the river not just with death, but with life.


By reflecting on the shifting, mysterious nature of the river, Quick gains a deeper understanding of life itself, and how life and death are tied together. If the river reflects life, then life is sure to have vile and unpleasant moments, just as the river can swell with mud and dead animals at times. The river isn't malicious for doing this; these things simply happen as part of the river's existence. This realization helps to develop the characters' understanding of life and what to expect from any higher powers that might be watching. The river seems to treat everyone and everything impartially, leaving it up to people to decide how they choose to live by its ever-changing waters.

Chapter 9 Quotes

☝ She felt the Shadow in her, this dark eating thing inside, like an anger, and sensed that it'd always be with her. But Quick would hold her up beyond reason, even when it went into stupid-mindedness. It wasn't just the fact that she knew he could do it for her that made her love him. It was her certainty that he would.

Related Characters: Quick Lamb, Rose Pickles

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 396



Explanation and Analysis

After enduring a miscarriage and countless other hardships, Rose finally begins taking care of herself properly and enjoying her life with Quick. At this point in her development, Rose starts to heal from her trauma not by running from it, but by accepting that it will “always be with her.” The mention of a “Shadow” is a possible reference to the Shifty Shadow, her father’s term for the arrival of bad luck. She acknowledges that she’ll always carry the baggage of her strange family with her—memories of Dolly’s drunkenness, and maybe even some of Sam’s misfortune. But it’s her acceptance of this Shadow that allows her to heal and move on.

Quick also plays a major role in Rose’s recovery and growth as a character. Despite her overwhelming desire to distance herself from her family and the old house earlier in the novel, it’s ultimately someone from Cloudstreet who becomes her husband and “holds her up beyond reason.” Their relationship is largely built on a shared understanding of trauma and loss, which allows both of them to relate to the other’s experiences and bond over what they’ve been through. Rose’s confidence in this moment demonstrates her unwavering faith in Quick—a faith that’s only been strengthened by the difficulties they’ve shared.

☝ I’m behind the mirror and in different spaces, I’m long gone and long here but there’s nothing I can do to stop this. Every time it happens, on and on in memory, I flinch as that brow flinches with the cool barrel suddenly upon it. The sound goes on and on and matter flies like the constellations through the great gaps in the heavens, and I haven’t stopped it again.

Related Characters: Fish Lamb (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 403

Explanation and Analysis

As the serial killer claims another victim, the omniscient and omnipresent Fish Lamb watches in horror, unable to stop the murder from happening. Like all the narration, this passage is spoken by the version of Fish who’s drowned in the river at the end of the novel and transcended to a state of being where he can see everything happening across time all at once. But despite his apparently powerful and all-knowing position, Fish emphasizes his powerlessness in this situation. He can see everything unfold over and over again, but his role is only to observe, and to report what he sees to the reader.

This has broader implications for the themes of the novel, specifically its approach to the supernatural and higher powers. As the narrator, Fish has transcended mortal reality and has reached a sort of enlightenment, but even he is still bound by the imperfections and limitations that come with being human. Fish’s inability to stop the serial killer reinforces the idea that supernatural forces can’t magically solve the problems inherent to life. Even an omniscient narrator is traumatized by what he sees, and feels guilt over not being able to intervene. Humans are still humans, whether they’ve reached a transcendent understanding or not.

☝ They’re gonna come looking for him. The police, the screaming, hurting family, the whole defeated city. You have to be a winner. Even the short and ugly and deformed, they have to win sometimes. He’s winning, beating them all. A little truckdriving bloke with no schooling, he’s killing them in their beds and they’re losing at last.

Related Characters: Sam Pickles

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 411

Explanation and Analysis

The serial killer revels in his murders, feeling as though he’s truly “winning” for the first time in his life. His twisted glee over his killings makes him into a dark reflection of a surprising character: Sam Pickles. Like the murderer, Sam


often feels like a failure or a loser, and has even been “deformed” ever since he lost the fingers of his right hand. Through his gambling and exercising his intuition, Sam is desperate to feel like he’s winning despite the odds being massively stacked against him. The serial killer takes this same desire to the extreme, turning it into a vengeful and violent obsession with the feeling of winning.

This parallel makes the serial killer into a startling reminder of what a character like Sam could become if circumstances were different and if everything was pushed to its limits. It also echoes Quick Lamb’s revelations later in the novel, which focus on the uncomfortable similarities between “normal” people and depraved criminals like the serial killer. Nearly every character in the novel deals with some hardship or another, as this is part of being human. But this exploration of the serial killer’s motives implies that any person could become like him, if their hardships become too much to bear.

☞ The room goes quiet. The spirits on the wall are fading, fading, finally being forced on their way to oblivion, free of the house, freeing the house, leaving a warm, clean sweet space among the living, among the good and hopeful.

Related Characters: Quick Lamb, Rose Pickles

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 425

Explanation and Analysis

When Rose gives birth in what was formerly Cloudstreet’s library, the miserable ghosts that have been haunting the house for over 20 years are put to rest at last. The arrival of new life literally and figuratively banishes the lingering trauma from the old house, leaving room for a fresh start and a brighter future. While the house’s ghosts haven’t played a major role in the lives of the characters, they’ve nonetheless been a constant, negative presence over the years. Nearly everyone has been able to sense the sordid history of Cloudstreet, personified by the angry spirits haunting the library. But even the ghosts themselves benefit from this event, as they’re described as being “free of the house,” just as they’re freeing it for its living inhabitants.


This moment is also the culmination of the two families gradually merging into one unit. The birth of Rose’s child marks the first time that practically every member of both


the Lamb family and the Pickles family is gathered to experience something meaningful together. While the families won’t be completely united until the end of the novel, this moment brings them one enormous step closer to becoming one huge family. The house itself seems to breathe a sigh of relief as new life and hope makes old traumas less powerful. Rose’s miscarriage earlier in the novel will remain a dark stain in her past, but the pain of that memory will fade as quickly as the house’s spirits as she begins her new life, surrounded by family.

Chapter 10 Quotes

☞☞ Rose remembered the way she took command of a situation in a dozen crises—when Dolly was sick, when she herself was hurt, and she couldn’t think why the very strength of that woman’s actions felt so unforgivable. Her kindness was scalding, her protection acidic. Maybe it’s just me, thought Rose, maybe I can’t take it from her because my mother never gave it to me. What a proud bitch I am. But dammit, why does she always have to be right and the one who’s strong and the one who makes it straight, the one people come to? Why do I still dislike her, because she’s so totally trustworthy?

Related Characters: Rose Pickles (speaker), Oriel Lamb, Dolly Pickles

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 433

Explanation and Analysis



As she continues living at Cloudstreet with Quick and her new baby, Rose wonders why she still resents Oriel Lamb. While these two characters have several similarities in terms of their beliefs and attitudes about life, some tension remains between them, at least from Rose’s point of view. Rose’s speculation concerning her feelings about her own mother demonstrate that she’s still affected by Dolly’s actions during Rose’s childhood. But notably, this also shows that Rose is more willing to face her own feelings about her mother than before, as she accepts that maybe her experiences are making her treat Oriel unfairly. Rose’s examinations of her own feelings highlight her growth as a character, even as she still struggles to get along with Oriel.

Rose’s thoughts here also echo a moment earlier in the novel, when Oriel cleaned the entire Pickles half of the house after helping Dolly recover from a bout of alcohol-

induced sickness. Rose had furiously resented Oriel upon finding their side of the house had been tidied up, as Oriel's strength of character seemed to put the Pickles family to shame. And in this moment, just as before, she resents Oriel for being *too* present, where her own mother wasn't present enough. Regardless, Rose does her best to analyze these conflicting feelings, rather than letting them fester and grow inside her like before. Her willingness to examine her feelings is a sign that she's no longer trying to dismiss or ignore Cloudstreet. She wants to understand it, and maybe even stay there permanently.

☞ But it's not us and them anymore. It's us and us and us. It's always us. That's what they never tell you. Geez, Rose, I just want to do right. But there's no monsters, only people like us. Funny, but it hurts.

Related Characters: Quick Lamb (speaker), Rose Pickles

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 445

Explanation and Analysis

Quick explains his revelations to Rose after he finds out that the serial killer he's been trying to capture for weeks has a son who drowned in the river. Finding the body of a child in the river had already reminded Quick of Fish's incident, but finding out that the boy was the son of the serial killer truly shook Quick to his core. Quick's explanation in this moment is a sign that he's been deeply changed by his realization. In his youth, he fantasized about fighting the evil in the world, which eventually led to his career as a police officer. But at this point, he's forced to admit that the real world is more complicated than a struggle between good versus evil, even if there are depraved people like the serial killer.

Quick is only able to reach this point by comparing his own life to that of the killer. He wonders what he might have done if his brother Fish had drowned in the river that night all those years ago, and whether circumstance is all that prevents him from becoming a murderer himself. Ultimately, this makes Quick realize that everyone, including the killer, is a human being. This doesn't excuse the killer's actions or make them less terrible, but it does shed light on what can drive a person to do terrible things in the first place. People like the serial killer aren't simply evil; trauma drove them there. This moment of clarity marks the completion of Quick's development in the novel, as he gains a better understanding of humanity and the suffering he's been


obsessing over for years.

☞ Don't you want to be independent?

Quick, I don't even know what it means anymore. If it means being alone, I won't want it. If I'm gonna be independent do you think I need a husband? And a kid? And a mother and father, and inlaws and friends and neighbors? When I want to be independent I retire. I go skinny and puke. You've seen me like that. I just begin to disappear. But I want to live, I want to be with people, Quick. I want to battle it out. I don't want our new house. I want the life we have.

Related Characters: Quick Lamb, Rose Pickles (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 464

Explanation and Analysis

One night during their road trip, Quick and Rose talk about their future and what Rose wants out of life. They had planned to move into their new house after returning from their trip, but at this point, Rose admits she still wants the two of them to live at Cloudstreet with everyone else. This is the final major turning point in Rose's development, as her lifelong desire to escape from her family has fully transformed into a longing to live with them indefinitely. Her admission also puts the theme of family versus independence to rest, with family winning out. Despite spending her childhood yearning to leave Cloudstreet behind and never look back, she renounces complete independence as an unhealthy ideal, and finally accepts that she belongs with her family.



This moment is the culmination of all of Rose's experiences throughout the novel—experiences that have changed her for the better, or maybe just made her clearly see what was already there. She always cared about her family, even if that care often manifested itself as anger or frustration. She might have never come to this realization if it hadn't been for Quick's love for her, and their marriage is ultimately what unites the families of Cloudstreet and helps Rose to see the value in living there. Her journey has been one of self-discovery, and of learning that the only real life for her is one that she shares with the massive, strange family in the massive, strange house she's called home for 20 years so far. Rose no longer needs to feel different from her family; she

feels much more comfortable simply being one of them.

●● I'm a man for that long, I feel my manhood, I recognize myself whole and human, know my story for just that long, long enough to see how we've come, how we've all battled in the same corridor that time makes for us, and I'm Fish Lamb for those seconds it takes to die, as long as it takes to drink the river, as long as it took to tell you all this, and then my walls are tipping and I burst into the moon, sun and stars of who I really am. Being Fish Lamb. Perfectly. Always. Everyplace. Me.

Related Characters: Fish Lamb (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 469-470

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of the novel, Fish Lamb drowns in the river during a picnic where the Lamb and Pickles families are gathered to celebrate Quick and Rose staying at Cloudstreet. This is, of course, a reflection of what happens

to Fish at the beginning of the novel, except this time he fully drowns and the river takes his life. While this is a tragic end to a joyful scene, Fish's narration at the end of his story reveals that his death gives him a kind of transcendence, and establishes him beyond a doubt as the narrator of the entire novel. He's been fascinated by water ever since the incident that gave him brain damage, and now the river gives him supernatural awareness of everything and spiritual wholeness as it claims his life.

Fish's drowning is also a poetic ending to the novel's themes of trauma and guilt. Fish returned to life in his brain-damaged state at the beginning of the novel because his mother Oriel refused to let him die, but afterwards his life became a shadow of its former self and a constant reminder of the incident. Now, with Fish having drowned in the river after all, it almost feels fated to have happened, allowing the Lamb family to finally move on from their guilt over failing to save him. The river took Fish's mind, but now it gives him more awareness of his humanity than ever. Likewise, the river takes Fish's life, but this gives his family the opportunity to carry on with their lives. Oriel packing up her tent and moving back into Cloudstreet in the final passage is a sure sign that Fish's death ironically helps her find peace with herself at last. One final time, the river gives and takes away.



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.

PROLOGUE

A large group of people has a picnic by a **river**. They seem happy and well-fed, enjoying one another's company like one enormous family. An outside observer might think that they've been this close and carefree for many years. One man wanders away from the group and walks excitedly down the jetty to stare at the shimmering surface of the water. He's always loved the water, and now he's on the verge of submerging himself in the river and reaching some sort of enlightenment, or even transcendence.

At this point, it's unclear who these people are or when this picnic is taking place. The specifics become clear later on, but this moment introduces the central theme of family, the ever-present symbol of the river, and the possibility of spiritual or supernatural events. The enormous family is vaguely described but clearly happy together, and the man in the river is somehow seeing beyond what ordinary people can see. These images give the reader a brief glimpse into the ideas that the novel will explore.



CHAPTER 1

In 1940s Australia, a girl named Rose Pickles gets the feeling that something terrible is about to happen. Her brothers, Ted and Chub, are playing on the seashore at sunset, and she calls for them to come inside. She doesn't think she can take any more bad luck, as her family has already lost their home in the past year and they now live in a pub owned by her uncle Joel. But she nonetheless feels like an unfortunate event is imminent, and she recalls how her father is usually the one who feels dark premonitions like this. She looks out at the darkening sea and wonders if he's getting a bad feeling as well.

Rose's foreboding in this moment is the first mention of the strange luck that seems to hang over the Pickles family. This is also an early sign that Rose feels deeply connected to her family and to her father especially, even when he's miles away. Their apparent ability to sense bad luck is a central part of their connection to each other, and their differing views on luck create conflict later in the novel.



The following morning, Rose's father, Sam Pickles, wakes up in his dormitory hut and feels what he calls "the Shifty Shadow of God" lurking. This shadow is how he visualizes the arrival of good or bad luck, which he can feel in his body like instinct or a sixth sense. Usually when he senses the Shifty Shadow, he knows better than to get out of bed until he feels that it's passed him by. But today, he assumes that the strange luck belongs to someone else, and he goes about his morning as usual. He works on an island where he and his coworkers mine guano for phosphate.

This first mention of the "Shifty Shadow" confirms Rose's suspicions that her father might be sensing the arrival of bad luck. It also implies that this ability is more than just superstition; both Sam and Rose had the same bad feeling at nearly the same time, after all. Regardless of how accurate Sam's premonitions are, this scene establishes him as a character who's deeply connected to luck and reliant on it.



Sam dwells on how he somehow noticed the smell of his long-dead father Merv after waking up this morning. Merv was a water diviner, finding water sources using nothing but a simple dowsing rod. He also gambled on horses, and this is one pastime that Sam still holds onto. While he never became a jockey like his father wanted him to be, Sam still gambles and pays close attention to the Shifty Shadow, constantly on the lookout for signs of his luck changing. Despite this, he's been on a losing streak for a while, and his current job on the island is a consequence of recently losing everything he owned through gambling.

As he starts the work day, Sam reflects on how depressing and sometimes hellish this island is. He tries to ignore the whining voice of his coworker Nobby, who makes the dull work duller with his unpleasant attitude. Sam starts a winch to summon an empty barge, staring into the water and fantasizing about fishing and relaxing instead. These thoughts distract him long enough for the winch cable to catch his glove and drag his fingers into the crushing cogs. Sam screams as he loses his hand entirely; his fingers fall to the deck before his eyes.

Sam is flown away on a Catalina plane, where two men play cards on his chest and tell him not to worry. After he's taken to the hospital, Rose rushes home to the pub from school to fetch her mother, Dolly Pickles. Rose hears no reply when she knocks on Dolly's door, but she hears a gasp from the other side. Behind the closed door, Dolly is having sex with the Catalina pilot who brought her husband back and broke the bad news. Not knowing what she's hearing and forcing herself to toughen up, Rose rushes off to the hospital without fetching her mother or her brothers. She tells herself that they can find their own way.

Dolly Pickles attracts some attention from strangers on her way to the hospital; she relishes the fact that everyone in town has always considered her to be a beautiful woman. Her mood darkens when she reaches Sam in the hospital and sees that he's lost his right hand: his working hand. Rose snaps at her mother and brothers for their callous attitude about the incident, and she stays by Sam's bedside after everyone else leaves. She reflects on how she loves her father despite his foolish decisions and terrible luck, but she's still discouraged by how everything in their lives seems to be falling apart at the seams.

Sam's memories of his father provide more context for Sam's connection to luck. The fact that Merv made his living as a water diviner hints at the possibility that he might have possessed a genuinely supernatural gift that he passed on to Sam. On the other hand, neither Merv nor Sam became wealthy through their gift of intuition. This implies that their ability to sense luck is either inconsistent or imaginary. Either way, Sam makes no attempt to escape from his father's legacy, accepting that relying on luck is his lot in life.



The accident in this moment is the turning point in Sam's life, as the loss of his fingers will define his development for the rest of the novel. The trauma of this event will continue to haunt him and will indirectly set many of the novel's important events in motion. Ironically, Sam's gruesome accident also proves his premonition correct; the Shifty Shadow of bad luck was lurking this morning after all. He might never have lost his fingers if he had listened to his intuition and stayed in bed.



While the moment with Sam and the men in the plane is played for laughs, their game of cards is yet another reminder of the constant presence of luck in Sam's life. Even in this time of crisis, games of random chance are present and seemingly indifferent to his trauma. Meanwhile, the first appearance of Dolly immediately establishes that she's desperate for independence from her husband. Her infidelity in this early scene also sets a starting point for her character development and foreshadows potential conflict later on.



Dolly gets more characterization in these moments, highlighting the contrast between her behavior with and without Sam around. This indicates that she cares more about how she's perceived by other men than by her own husband, whom she sees as a failure in this moment especially. The accident puts additional strain on their already faltering relationship, setting up future conflict. In contrast, Rose doesn't try to run away from what's happened, opting to support her father at his lowest moment. She feels more adult as a result, and this affects her development later on.



Everyone in the pub talks about the incredible bad luck the Pickles family seems to experience. The only lucky person in the family seems to be Sam's brother Joel, who bought the pub and named it after Eurythmic, the racehorse he had very successfully gambled on years ago. Meanwhile, Sam glumly recovers in the hospital and tries to come to terms with his missing hand. One day, he receives a package from his coworkers, containing a jar with his severed fingers in it, labeled: "Sam's Pickles." Sam laughs at the sight, equally amused and miserable.

Dolly continues to see the Catalina pilot until Sam finally comes home from the hospital. She keeps herself busy to distract herself from the sight of her newly disabled husband, and she starts to resent the disbelieving looks that the locals give her. Sam doesn't receive any worker's compensation, so the Pickles don't make any money. Dolly helps around the pub to let Joel know she's grateful for him letting them live there. Rose tries to comfort her father, but Sam is set on the idea that he'll always be unlucky, just like his father.

Eventually, with some urging from Joel, Sam decides to start getting outside and trying to carry on with his life despite his dismemberment. He figures that fishing is a good place to start, and he gradually learns to use a fishing pole with one hand. He and Joel fish by the sea one evening and Sam feels the Shifty Shadow lurking again. He assumes that the strange luck has its sights on Joel, who's always had good fortune, so Sam lets himself relax and enjoy the evening. But after reeling in a massive fish in a moment of childlike excitement, Joel has a sudden heart attack and dies on the sand before Sam's eyes. Without Joel around to let them live in the pub, Sam knows that the Pickles will now be broke and homeless.

CHAPTER 2

One night, in another town, the Lamb family rides to the **river** in their truck on their way to go prawn fishing. Oriel and Lester Lamb have six children: three boys named Mason, Samson, and Lon; and three girls named Hattie, Red, and Elaine. Mason is eleven years old and everyone calls him Quick, because he's "as unquick as his father." Samson is a bit younger, and everyone calls him Samsonfish or just Fish, because he's witty and alert. Fish is considered much sharper and smarter than Quick, but everyone—including Quick—seems to love him. The Lambs (mostly Lester and Oriel) are deeply religious Christians.

The Pickles family being known for their strange luck implies that it isn't just their imagination. Luck—for better or worse—seems to affect them in more extreme ways than usual, as if good or bad luck is something that can be inherited. Sam relies on the good luck of his brother Joel to have a place to live, reinforcing the idea that strange luck runs in the family and that Sam must always rely on it. Sam's laughter in the hospital highlights both his sorrow over the accident and his desperate attempts to maintain a positive outlook.



Dolly's reaction to the locals is another indication that she cares deeply about her reputation, which she feels has been ruined by Sam's accident. Notably, she never seems to consider how Sam himself is dealing with his trauma, instead focusing solely on how it affects her. While Dolly willfully avoids her husband to spare herself from sharing in his pain, Rose shows more empathy towards Sam. While this shows that Rose is more willing to embrace her family and its problems, she's still reluctant to accept the idea that her fate is decided by random chance and the Pickles blood in her veins.



At this second tragic turning point in his life, Sam's misinterpretation of the Shifty Shadow once again surprises him. It's clear that he can accurately sense the arrival of a shift in luck, but this ability ironically never seems to do him any good. Another layer of irony comes with the fact that Joel was considered the lucky member of the Pickles family, but now he's suffered an unfortunate and seemingly random demise. This second accident only compounds Sam's trauma and guilt over losing his fingers, as Joel might not have died if it hadn't been for Sam's initial accident.



The initial description of the Lamb family tells the reader most of the crucial information about them. While this first impression focuses on their serious piety, their behavior and their nicknames for Mason and Samson reveal that the Lambs also have a more jovial and lighthearted side. Even at this point, when the family is at its most cohesive and religious, the Lambs still come across as a wild and chaotic bunch. Nonetheless, the Lambs' Christianity remains an important factor in their lives for the rest of the novel.



While Oriel, the girls, and young Lon stay on the beach, Lester, Quick, and Fish walk a large net out into the **river** and gather prawns. Oriel darns clothes on the beach, not minding her family's poverty as much as her husband does. She's proud of her family despite their lack of wealth, and she never lets old material go to waste. The boys bring their first netful back to the beach, where they separate the prawns from the other fish and junk they've caught. They head back out with the net to catch more, but as they walk into the deeper waters, Oriel sees something that startles her. She calls out to Lester in alarm.

Oriel's attitude about the Lambs' poverty gives the first glimpses into her personality and views on life. In an ironic but arguably pious fashion, she wears her lack of wealth as a badge of honor. She prides herself on her ability to make ends meet and take care of her family without the need for excessive wealth. This is also an early indication of her deep love for her family, who she depends on just as much as they depend on her. The symbol of the river makes its first appearance to the Lamb family in this chapter, seeming peaceful at first but quickly causing a crisis.



Out in the **river**, Fish has somehow been pulled down into the water without making a sound. When Lester hears his wife calling for him, he turns around so quickly that he drops the lantern he's holding into the water, leaving the three of them in semidarkness. Fish is trapped under the net and drowning, unable to come up for air. In a panic, Lester and Quick try desperately to pull the net up and get it off of Fish, but it's no use. Eventually, they pull the net all the way back to the shore. They drag Fish onto the beach, with him still tangled in the net.

Fish's drowning is a major turning point in the lives of the entire Lamb family. Their fear and panic in this moment reflect their sudden lack of control over the situation: a potential source of lingering trauma in the future. Lester and Quick's inability to pull Fish up to the surface fills them with a lasting guilt, as they assume the worst and blame themselves for not saving him.



Oriel immediately kneels down and starts pounding Fish's chest to get the water out of him, despite everyone assuming that he must be dead. She prays aloud while she tries beating the life back into her son, imploring God to bring him back. Lester joins his wife in desperate prayer as their other children watch in silence. In his semiconsciousness between life and death, Fish feels like his soul is being pulled away from him. He hurries towards an opening in the darkness all around him, but then he starts moving backwards into the shadows again. He feels ashamed and afraid, like his entire being is turning to filth. In his head, he screams.

At this critical moment, the Lambs' faith in God is suddenly and unexpectedly put to the test. But Oriel's desperate prayer as she pounds her son's chest isn't just a plea; it's a demand. If a higher power had planned for Fish to die in this moment, Oriel isn't willing to entertain the possibility, instead trying to impose her will on reality to save her son. This sheds more light on Oriel's relationship with religion, as she believes it's ultimately her responsibility to take care of her family regardless of divine intervention. Fish's traumatic near-death experience is an indication that Oriel is violently forcing him back to life when death might have given him peace.



Fish coughs up water and seems to be alive. The noise of the Lambs' joyful shouting drowns out the miserable, disappointed groan that Fish lets out as he awakens. The Lambs immediately drive Fish into town, wild and ecstatic after the miracle they've just witnessed. People watch as Lester knocks on the doors of the local church, eager to announce the good news to anyone and everyone who will listen. But as he sits back in the truck bed with his sisters and holds his resurrected brother, Quick knows that Fish is no longer fully himself. Something crucial has been lost, and Fish will never be the same.

The Lambs shouting over Fish's miserable groan is a perfect representation of their misunderstanding of the "miracle" that's just occurred. In this moment, the family takes Fish's resurrection as a sign that God is on their side. They feel vindicated as their faith seems to be proven worthwhile. But tragically, Fish's condition after he comes back to life seems to indicate that the Lambs are celebrating more than they should be. Fish's return might not be a miracle, but a traumatic event that will drastically change the course of the Lambs' lives.



CHAPTER 3

Many years ago, a very **large house** was owned by a wealthy widow. The only frequent visitor to the house was an Anglican priest, who was determined to see the goodness in the widow's heart despite her callous nature. He suggested that she open her house to native young women, and she took his advice. She kept several girls in her house and taught them manners and etiquette that she considered important. But the girls had been taken from their families and were miserable, and eventually one of them took her own life by drinking ant poison. After the widow found the girl's body in the library, she dismissed the rest of the girls from the house. A week later, the widow's heart stopped while she played the piano in the library, and her nose hit the middle C key as she slumped forward, dead.

The widow's **enormous house** sat empty and abandoned for years, until Sam's brother Joel bought the property with some of the money he'd won from gambling, thinking that he could retire there someday. In his last will and testament, Joel left the house to Sam, along with 2,000 pounds. According to the will, Joel's pub is to be sold at once, but the house cannot be resold for the next 20 years. The house is in the city of Perth, on Cloud Street, and now it's the only place the Pickles family can move into.

After leaving the pub and the town of Geraldton behind, the Pickles arrive at **Number One, Cloud Street**. It's a massive old place, with enough room for 20 or more people to live in relative comfort. But despite its size and sense of faded grandeur, it feels somewhat unnerving and needs a lot of work to start feeling like a home. They get the house clean enough to live in within a day, and it isn't long before furniture from the pub starts arriving. As the family tries to get comfortable in the musty old place, Rose resolves to make the room with the piano into a library, but she soon changes her mind as she finds the windowless room to be too stuffy and unsettling. She puts the books in her own room instead.

Eventually, the check for the 2,000 pounds arrives in the mail, but Sam almost immediately loses it all on gambling, as he believes that the Shifty Shadow is on his side now. Dolly is furious with him for making the family poor again, and she's still struggling to come to terms with his injury. She often wanders out to the nearby train station and watches the strangers go about their unknown business, jealous of their seemingly happy and exciting lives. As the whole world seems to move and go on adventures around her, Dolly feels trapped in her own life with Sam. Both of them sadly remember happier days between them, and the entire Pickles family feels lost and out of place in their new home.

This bit of backstory marks the first appearance of the house on Cloud Street where most of the novel takes place. The house's sordid history gives it an aura of foreboding before any of the main characters even arrive there, as it's implied that the house (or at least the library) could be haunted by the two women who died there. This history also continues the ongoing theme of tragic death (or near-death, in Fish's case) that hangs over the opening chapters of the novel. The trauma experienced in the house years ago echoes the trauma that the Lamb and Pickles families have recently experienced.



Joel's last will and testament gives the Pickles family one final bit of Joel's good luck in the form of a place to live. The will's stipulations about the house not being sellable for 20 years reveals how well Joel knew his brother, as Sam would have been likely to sell the house immediately and gamble away the money otherwise. Even after Joel's untimely death, the Pickles family still finds themselves in debt to Joel and his nearly-perfect luck.



The age and size of their new home makes the Pickles family immediately feel alienated and out of place. Not only are they suddenly and unexpectedly living in a new town, but they're also forced to try getting comfortable in a house that seems far too big for them. This contributes to the house becoming almost a character of its own—a symbol of how strange, disorganized, and bewildering the family's lives have become. Rose's odd sense of discomfort in the library once again hints at the possibility that the room is haunted.



Dolly's lonely people-watching highlights her desperate desire to feel independent from her family, and especially from Sam. Despite not being a gambler herself, Dolly feels forced to rely on random luck just as much as her husband, as he's the family's only source of income as well as the source of all of their financial worries. She remains furious with Sam not only for the accident that took his fingers, but for gambling all of the family's money away again and again. Now more than ever, she longs to escape from Sam and live a life free of family obligations.



One day, after coming home from school with her brothers, Rose finds her father in the backyard, working with a stranger to erect a tin fence that splits the yard in half. She also finds that the door to her room has been locked, and all of her things have been moved to a different room. Many of the other rooms on the same side of the house have been locked, and Rose soon discovers that her father has decided to rent out half of the house to another family, as a means of income. Rose confronts Sam as he finishes building a second privy on the other side of the yard. He keeps a chipper attitude about their new soon-to-be tenants, but she can't forgive him for doing this.

The Lamb family piles into their truck and heads for Perth, feeling as though they can no longer live in their hometown of Margaret River. The "miracle" of Fish's return hasn't been what they expected, and everyone in the town seems to treat them with pity or scorn. No one waves to them as they leave, and they don't wave back; the Lambs feel unwelcome here, and it's time for them to move on. The incident with Fish has even shaken their faith in God. Fish isn't the same, and their disappointment has taken a heavy toll.

The Lambs arrive at **Number One, Cloud Street**. Lester awkwardly introduces himself to Dolly at the front door, and it isn't long before all eight of the Lambs are piling into their half of the massive house. Lester promises that they'll pay the rent, and he mentions that they aren't religious. The Pickles children have various reactions to the Lamb children as they move in under Oriel's strict supervision. Ted mentions that Fish seems like a slow kid. But that night, as a thunderstorm rages outside, Rose catches a glimpse of Fish watching the rain by the window, and she thinks he's beautiful.

Despite her empathy towards Sam so far, Rose begins to share in her mother's hatred of Sam at this point. Rose had already begun to resent her dependence on her unreliable family, but having to share their new home with another family is more than she can bear. Beyond her annoyance over the decision to allow tenants, she also begins to hate Sam for putting himself in this position and needing extra income in the first place. Rose still loves her father, but at this point, she finds it increasingly difficult to feel sorry for him as before. She begins to blame Sam's failings not on bad luck, but on bad decisions.



At this point, one of the Lamb family's defining features at the beginning of the novel—their Christianity—has been almost entirely taken from them. This sets up the inner conflict that they'll face over the years, as they struggle with their trauma of losing the Fish they knew, and their guilt over failing to save him. These negative emotions have overpowered their faith, emphasizing their feeling of being directionless. By leaving their hometown, the Lambs are symbolically leaving many of their old ways of life and belief systems behind.



With the Lamb and Pickles families under one roof, the parallels between their traumatic experiences become clearer than ever. Both families feel lost and directionless, and both have ended up in this enormous house that seems just as strange and cluttered as their lives have become. Lester mentioning that the Lambs aren't religious marks a sharp contrast to how they were described before, confirming that Fish's accident has drastically shifted their worldview. Meanwhile, Rose's unexpected attraction to Fish opens her mind to the possibility that sharing the house with another family might not be so bad.



The Pickles family and the Lamb family try to get used to living under the same roof over the next few weeks. Each family lives on one side of the **house**, and the hall in the middle is considered neutral territory: a “no man’s land.” The two families largely try to ignore each other, but tension occasionally builds between them. There’s only one bathroom to share among the twelve of them, and Dolly begins to resent Oriel for seeming bossy and constantly working. Oriel has her children help her start a vegetable garden in their side of the yard. This standoffishness continues, as the Pickleses feel like their home has been invaded.

Just before dinner one night, the Lambs spin a **knife** on the table and ask it who’s doing the washing tonight, who’s the smartest, who’ll be married first, and so on. Whoever it points to when it stops spinning is the knife’s answer, and Lester and the children joke that “the knife never lies.” After this game, Oriel asks Lester to say Grace and bless their food, but Lester is flippant on the subject of God, thanking his wife for the meal instead. Later that night, Lester suggests the idea of opening a shop of their own in the front room of the house, as there isn’t another general store nearby. Oriel is skeptical at first, but Lester spins the knife again to decide whether or not they’ll try it. Oriel wonders if everything is based on luck, as if the whole world is like a spinning knife game.

The Lambs soon open a shop in the front room. Dolly comes down to see them set it up, and it’s difficult for her to hide her resentment about the Lambs’ work ethic and Oriel’s bossiness. Oriel always seems to know the proper way of doing things, and Dolly feels insecure in comparison, as if she’s constantly being judged. The entire Pickles family begins to fade into the background of the household as the Lambs’ shop quickly grows in popularity. Oriel keeps her children working in the shop constantly. They sell food and general goods, and it isn’t long before the shop is common knowledge in the neighborhood. Eventually, “**Cloudstreet**” becomes the common name for the shop and the house in general.

As the two families adjust to living together, the theme of family vs. independence becomes more complicated. While each family relies on its own members in daily life, both the Pickles and the Lambs go out of their way to stay independent from each other, rather than melding into one bigger family. This is represented most clearly by the physical divide between either side of the house, but it also manifests in Dolly’s resentment of Oriel. While Oriel doesn’t show disdain towards Dolly in return, it’s clear that Oriel prides herself on being an industrious and responsible Lamb, rather than a comparatively lazy member of the Pickles family. This divide sparks a quiet conflict between the families that’s almost always bubbling just below the surface.



The spinning knife game marks the first time that the theme of chance has affected the lives of the Lamb family, rather than the Pickles. As Oriel wonders whether everything is decided by luck, she considers the worldview that Sam Pickles has held for his entire life, creating a thematic link between the two families. This new focus on random chance comes at the expense of the Lambs’ religious faith, which is shown to be greatly diminished in this moment. Whether jokingly or not, the Lambs have become more willing to trust the whims of fate than the God they once strongly believed in.



Once again, the two families at Cloudstreet deepen the dividing lines between them, each striving for independence from the other. However, with the opening of the shop in the front room, the Lambs become much more distinct from the Pickles family, setting themselves apart in a way that only worsens the Pickles’ resentment of them. This reinforces the house’s status as a symbol of the strange and chaotic lives the families lead, as it becomes two different places in one. Despite their similar experiences with loss and misfortune, the families of Cloudstreet are determined to stay distinct from each other, whether out of spite, pride, or both.



During this period, Quick Lamb struggles with guilt and regret, feeling that it should have been him instead of Fish who almost drowned. He still blames himself for the incident, and Fish's behavior depresses Quick. Fish had been funny, clever, and lovable, but now he's slow, distant, and childlike despite his age; his near-death experience has taken most of his original intelligence and personality away from him. Quick finds pictures of prisoners of war and other miserable people in the newspaper and hangs them on his bedroom wall as a constant reminder that he's the lucky one; he survived with his mind intact, unlike his brother. At night, the people from the pictures fly off the wall and dance over Quick's bed while he sleeps.

As Quick struggles with his self-hatred, the Lamb girls find themselves excited to live in the city instead of the country. They enjoy the feeling of living in a large house with landings and banisters, and they quickly become recognizable by everyone in the neighborhood. With their distinct hairstyles and dresses made by Oriel from scrap material, their popularity grows as people see them working in the shop. Hattie seems to grow up quickly, Elaine tries to look mature around boys, and Red lets herself become the boyish rascal of the family now that Fish no longer fills that role. All three of them enjoy talking to the boys who visit the shop.

One night, Oriel and Lester lie in bed and reflect sadly on Fish's condition, Quick's depressed mood, and their own loss of faith. Lester wonders if Quick blames himself for what happened to Fish, and Oriel admits that she blames Quick, Lester, and God. But she nonetheless tries to give Fish a happy life despite knowing that he'll have the mind of a child his whole life; she balks at the idea that she could live a despondent, inactive life like Dolly Pickles. Lester knows that there have been times when he's thought it would have been better for Fish to die than to live his whole life as a child. But he also knows that he can't meddle with life, as life and death is all there is.

Fish's behavior implies that his "miraculous" survival after nearly drowning might be a curse rather than a blessing. His death would probably have been just as traumatic for his family to deal with, and Quick would likely still feel guilty for letting his brother die. But because Fish is still alive and present in the Lambs' daily lives, his deteriorated mental state is a constant reminder of their failure to fully save him. Fish has become a living manifestation of Quick's trauma, never letting him let go of survivor's guilt. Rather than trying to fight these feelings, Quick leans into them instead, through the photos and news clippings on his wall. The images coming to life at night could be a figment of his imagination, or possibly a supernatural occurrence. This ambiguity is an early example of the blurred lines between reality and the supernatural throughout the novel.



Even as the Lamb girls grow older and become more independent, it's notable that they're still easily identifiable as Lambs by their clothes and hairstyles. This subtly maintains the conflict between family and independence, though the Lamb girls don't seem desperate to escape from their family as other characters are. Instead, characters like Red struggle to find a unique niche for themselves within the family structure. Each of the girls aims to become a distinct and independent person, but still only within the context of being Lambs as well.



At this point, Oriel and Lester openly address what's made them lose their faith. While their weakened Christianity has been a major shift, Oriel demonstrates that she still holds fast to her principles in spite of everything that's happened. Even without her faith, she still finds it important to work hard and remain responsible to herself and her family, in contrast to Dolly's more apathetic approach to life. In this moment, both Oriel and Lester seem to face the trauma that's shaped their new lives, and reluctantly accept that there's probably nothing they could have done to change the outcome.



Despite their general distrust of doctors, Lester and Oriel take Fish to a doctor to have him examined, hoping to shed some light on his condition. The doctor seems a bit confused as he examines Fish and asks him questions. He asks Oriel questions about how long Fish was underwater, insisting that Fish's behavior isn't normal for a child who's experienced what Fish has been through. Oriel becomes angry at the implication that she's lying to the doctor, and she storms out of the room with her son when the doctor suggests the possibility of putting Fish in a "specialized home" where he could receive psychiatric help. On her way out, Oriel insists that there's no home more specialized than her own.

Some time later, Lester hurries home to announce the good news to the rest of the Lamb family: World War II has ended in Europe. His children joke around about it and remind him that the fighting's not over yet, and Lester is bemused by their attitude. Meanwhile, Fish's development is still stunted, and it's clear that he's forgotten almost everything he had learned before the accident. He seems to remember everyone in his family except for Oriel, as he often looks right through her and hardly ever acknowledges her existence. Even young Lon considers Fish to be the baby of the family, and Fish often has childlike screaming episodes. Fish loves **spinning the knife** and the sound of **the river**, and Rose still finds him beautiful.

During a slow work day, the Lambs sit around the kitchen table while Oriel darns socks, and Quick asks Oriel what she was doing during World War I. She answers that she waited for a child to come home from the war, clarifying that she practically raised her stepmother's children. The "child" she was waiting for was her stepbrother, who didn't survive the conflict. She tells Quick that she loved her father, and she knows that he loved her. She recalls a time when he killed the last pig on his farm and used its bladder to help heal her blisters after she'd been burned in a bushfire. Lester also recalls his memories of the old war days, when he was a musician.

On Quick's 12th birthday, Lester makes him a cake and spells Quick's name on it in icing. As they sit around the table about to dig into it, Oriel rushes in and tells them that a lady in the shop wants a cake urgently, and she'll pay a quid for it. Lester says they don't have one, but Oriel grabs the birthday cake, removes the candles, wipes Quick's name off, and rushes back to the shop with it. The incident makes everyone laugh, starting with a quiet giggle but quickly building to an uncontrollable pitch.

Oriel's reaction to the doctor's suggestions creates a deeper divide between Oriel's family and everyone else. Rather than take the advice of a stranger she distrusts, Oriel defensively insists that she always knows what's best for her own family. It's possible that her extreme reaction is caused in part by the trauma of letting Fish lose his mind, and her determination to prove she's fit to raise her son regardless. By rejecting outside help, Oriel aims to absolve herself of the guilt associated with the accident by taking full responsibility for Fish.



Fish continues to serve as a living, breathing symbol of the Lamb family's trauma, guilt, and regret. Oriel is especially affected as Fish seems to forget her completely, making her feel more and more responsible for his childlike state of mind. She feels almost as if she's being punished for bringing him back to consciousness, as she's forced to live with a son who's not the same boy he was before. Fish's love of the river and the spinning knife constantly reinforces his family's regrets about the accident, reminding them of the water that claimed his mind and the seemingly random events that brought this about. The Lamb children's relaxed attitude about the end of World War II might be a result of their living with constant trauma and stress regardless of any distant conflict.



This is one of the first glimpses into Oriel's backstory, revealing how family bonds have always been deeply important to her. It also highlights the fact that she's been a caretaker for a very long time, even while she was too young to be a mother. Additionally, Oriel's story hints at the trauma she's endured in her past, long before the more recent trauma of Fish's accident. Oriel revisits her memories of the bushfire in greater detail later on, but in this moment, it becomes clear that Oriel has always faced hardships, loss, and heavy responsibility with the same steely determination she has now.



The Lambs sharing in this ridiculous situation shows that they're still willing to laugh at themselves despite their unfortunate circumstances. While it's only a brief moment of silliness, it demonstrates that the family still has plenty of their lighthearted spirit intact after Fish's accident. For a moment, the Lambs embrace the absurdity of their lives and choose to laugh at it together.



The Lamb family carries on with their lives at **Cloudstreet**. Lester joins the army band as a tuba player, and since Tokyo is being bombed, Quick is sure that the war is almost over. As Christmas approaches, Hattie and Elaine finish school and grow old enough to earn a wage. Quick performs poorly at school, as he's distracted and misses the days when being Fish's brother meant something back in their hometown. People paid attention to Quick back then, but now he feels unimportant and doesn't know how to feel when he gets home. During a conversation about happiness, Fish explains that he's sad when he "wants the water."

Meanwhile, Sam Pickles feels a change in the air and tries to read the signs of what the Shifty Shadow is trying to tell him. He reflects on the Lambs' constant hard work and respects them for it despite how their busy presence irritates him and Dolly. But he knows that he isn't cut out for a life of hard work; he considers himself to be more like his father, sensing changes in luck and fate and acting accordingly to reap the benefits of his own intuition. He tells himself that his time will come, trying to find reassurance in the fact that letting the Lambs live at **Cloudstreet** was a gamble that has paid off.

Dolly finds herself feeling bitter and angry as winter comes. With **the house** unusually quiet, she walks around in the backyard and teases Oriel over the tin fence, enjoying a bit of mischief. That night in their bedroom, Sam and Dolly reminisce about their past together, missing their more romantic days as Dolly observes that they aren't even that old yet. After Sam falls asleep, Dolly walks out to the nearby railway tracks and thinks about her more distant past, reflecting vaguely on how she loved her father even though he wasn't really her father. She feels that no one can really control the direction their life takes.

That same night, people far away "turn to shadows and powder in an instant," and the war is over. Rose awakens to the sound of bells the next morning as everyone in the house and the neighborhood joyously celebrates the end of the war. Ted bursts into her room and breaks the good news. Amid the raucous celebrations, she dances with strangers in the hallway and takes a handful of humbugs from Quick. Fish **spins the knife** on the front porch and exclaims with glee when it stops spinning to point at him.

Cloudstreet begins to feel like home for the Lambs as the days go by, and the huge, bewildering house gradually becomes a more wholesome symbol of togetherness. Nonetheless, Quick's homesickness shows that there's still an underlying sense of unease in the family. He begins to realize that his popularity back in his hometown was based on his association with Fish, rather than anything Quick did as an individual. While Quick was more than happy to associate with his family back then, Fish's behavior nowadays makes Quick wonder if becoming more independent would be better, or even possible.



By embracing his reliance on luck and random chance, Sam continues to distinguish himself from the hardworking Lamb family. But ironically, Sam's feeling of independence from the Lambs is influenced heavily by family connections of his own. He only owns Cloudstreet because of the generosity of his brother Joel, and Sam's belief in his luck stems from his father. He dismisses the insecurities brought about by the Lambs by reminding himself that they're just another stroke of luck for him.



Dolly and Sam sharing in their regrets in this moment is one of the first instances of these two characters interacting in a positive way. Their mutual nostalgic sadness brings them together for a brief moment, reminding the reader that the two of them loved each other deeply not too long ago. Despite her frustration over Sam's reliance on gambling, Dolly admits to herself that everything might be based on random chance, from the luckiest windfalls to the personal tragedies that haunt her past. Dolly's moment of reflection reveals a surprising similarity to Oriel, who also wonders if senseless luck determines everything in life.



The end of World War II marks the first time that the Lamb and Pickles families come together and mingle in celebration. Such a momentous occasion allows the families to briefly forget their differences. The presence of strangers in the hall emphasizes the unity not only of Cloudstreet's families, but of the entire country on this day. The presence of the spinning knife during the celebration hints at more unpredictable events to come, and implies that maybe even the war itself was settled by a metaphorical roll of the dice.



CHAPTER 4

Riding on the wave of positive energy brought about by the nationwide celebrations, Sam Pickles heads out to seek his fortune, feeling that luck will surely be on his side this time. He disappears from **Cloudstreet** for a couple of days. This begins to worry Rose, who doesn't like the idea of being stuck with her angry mother for much longer. But one day after school, Rose comes home to find her father sitting at the bottom of the stairs and grinning. He tells her that he's gotten a job at the mint; he gambled with a union boss and put the boss in so much debt that the man had to give Sam a job. Sam tells Rose and Dolly about the job over dinner, and Rose finds it easier to imagine loving her father and living happily here.

For the next few months, Sam makes frequent visits to the racetrack and bets on a horse named Blackbutt, who seems to almost always win or at least place highly. Sam often comes home with his pockets full of money, the Pickles family is excited at this change of fortune, and Sam even buys gifts for his children like it's an early Christmas. Even Dolly warms up to him, though she still often sits alone in the dark after they have sex. Sam also wins a pet bird named Stan in a bet. Stan can say a few phrases in his ridiculous screeching voice, which both annoys and entertains the residents of **Cloudstreet** and their neighbors.

Meanwhile, Quick Lamb continues to struggle with his gloomy misery, which he always seems to pick up from people around him like radar. Despite the war being over, he still finds news clippings describing unfortunate people and he keeps putting pictures of them up on his wall. He even feels sorry for the poor kids he knows at school, such as Wogga McBride and his little brother Darren. They only pretend to eat sandwiches at lunch, possibly to avoid the embarrassment of everyone knowing they don't really have any food. Quick watches them and offers them some of his own food when he can, though he keeps his distance and doesn't quite become friends with the two of them.

Quick continues to watch the McBride boys and speculate about what their lives must be like. He rarely sees them laugh until he watches them from a distance one evening as they run and play with a dog by the train tracks. Quick finds himself wanting to join in their fun as he enjoys the sound of their laughter, but the sight quickly becomes a nightmare as a train approaches and Wogga McBride stumbles into the speeding engine. The train crushes him before their eyes, and screaming fills the air. Panicked men emerge from the train as Darren McBride screams in openmouthed horror. Quick rushes home, climbs under the covers of his bed, and tries to hold his ears shut. Fish watches him, uncomprehending.

Sam's new job represents one of the first times that his luck seems to have changed for the better. Naturally, Rose is much more willing to entertain the idea of accepting her father when he's succeeding. This reinforces the idea that everything in Sam's life, including his family's opinion of him, comes down to random chance. This also marks the beginning of heightened tensions between Rose and Dolly, as Rose begins to favor her father over her mother more than ever. Her shift in attitude is possibly due to Sam making an effort to take his life into his own hands, in his own strange way.



As Sam's sudden streak of good luck continues, his family rallies around him and feels more unified than before. Once again, Sam's relationships are defined by his luck more than anything else, but he doesn't see this as a downside. Instead, he interprets his winning streak as confirmation of his odd philosophy on life. His bad luck—past and future—is much easier to tolerate when he can rely on good fortune as well. From Dolly's reaction, it's clear she doesn't quite feel the same way.



Quick's "sadness radar" becomes more intense as he continues to struggle with his guilt and trauma over Fish's accident. But rather than withdrawing into himself, Quick projects his inner turmoil onto the world around him. His constant search for people who share in a similar misery is a sign that he wants to make a connection with another person to lessen the weight of his own burdens. But Quick's inability to become friends with the McBride siblings reveals that he's not ready to fully form a connection or share his grief just yet.



This incident compounds Quick's trauma by introducing a new disaster the moment he thinks about opening up to someone. By watching this horrific tragedy unfold, Quick learns (however incorrectly) that any attempt to make his life better or heal from his trauma will only result in more trauma. This reinforces his growing belief that the world is full of misery, and gives him an excuse to retreat further into himself and his grief, rather than sharing it with others.



Quick becomes withdrawn and despondent, hardly ever wanting to get out of bed after what he saw. His father Lester often sits on the edge of his bed and tries to ask him about what's bothering him, to no avail. Eventually, Lester finds out what might be the matter. One day, he brings in a newspaper clipping about Wogga McBride's gruesome death, and he tells Quick that the funeral is tomorrow. He tells Quick to attend despite Quick's protests, and Lester angrily reminds Quick that the two of them owe Fish a debt for letting him almost drown. Fish has been worried about Quick's behavior lately, and Lester insists that Quick owes Fish some happiness. Showing up to the funeral would be a sign that Quick is willing to get out of his room and start living again. That night, Quick awakens to see the newspaper images fly off the walls and dance over his bed. Terrified, he runs into Fish and Lon's room and sleeps in Fish's bed.

Oriel wakes up the next morning to find that Lester has gotten up before her and left the house early, which seems very unusual. She lets her mind wander to the subject of men in general, and then to her father. She thinks about the bushfire that destroyed her childhood home and killed her mother and sisters, leaving only Oriel and her father alive. She remembers how she practically had to nurse his mental health herself, as the tragedy very nearly broke him. Oriel worked and fought hard to rebuild their lives and save her own father from fading away. She knows that Lester must be doing something he's not supposed to this morning, but she decides to wait for him. She doesn't have the patience to deal with men today.

During the previous night, Sam had reached out to Lester as the two of them stood on their respective sides of the backyard. They talked to each other somewhat awkwardly at first, but soon became friendly with each other. Their conversation led them to the subject of luck, and Sam insisted that he was on a winning streak, offering to show Lester what he means. Rose hears them leave as they walk towards the truck at dawn. She knows that whatever her father is doing is bound to be foolish, but she goes back to bed and resolves not to tell on him.

Quick's behavior is a result of the fresh trauma he experienced, which compels him to avoid the world around him for fear that it will only make him more miserable. On the other hand, Lester gives Quick another chance to open up and connect with others by reminding him of how Fish needs him. The divide between Quick and his father in this moment reinforces the theme of family vs. independence, as the two of them are desperate to deal with their grief in two different ways: connection and isolation. The appearance of the ghostly newspaper images is a sign that their presence might be supernatural, or at least a figment of Quick's anxious imagination. At this point, whether the ghosts are real or not is irrelevant to Quick's experience of them.



With more of Oriel's backstory revealed, it becomes clear that Fish's accident was far from the first life-altering trauma she's experienced. Her memory of tending to her father's mental health after the fire is a stark contrast to her earlier conversation with Quick, when she mentioned how her father had nursed her wounds. In reality, Oriel took care of her parental figure far more than he took care of her. This fact explains where Oriel's strong sense of responsibility comes from. In her opinion, she's only a member of the family insofar as she can independently take care of everyone else.



This moment is one of the few early points of contact between the Lamb and Pickles families. Sam and Lester's easy friendship reveals that the two families might not be so different after all, but there's still an underlying tension to their conversation. Rose's concerns aren't without cause, but her decision not to tell anyone about her father and Lester's meeting reveals that she isn't too worried, nonetheless. It's notable that Sam and Lester initially bond over a discussion of luck, a strong common thread between the two families.



Sam and Lester go to the racetrack, where they enjoy themselves and become closer friends. At first, Lester has misgivings about the idea of drinking and gambling, and he feels guilty about putting so much of his family's money at risk. He feels almost like a thief. But Sam eventually gets him to loosen up, explaining how the two of them will bet on the horse Blackbutt and insisting that the Shifty Shadow will see them through. He explains that he believes in luck much more than God or any man-made institutions, as luck gives a man what he wants, which is what he really needs. The two of them get drunk and Lester finds himself beyond thrilled as he watches the close race unfold. He lets go of his cares and feels as though anything is possible here. Sure enough, Blackbutt wins the race.

Tension slowly builds back at **Cloudstreet**, where Oriel shoos Quick out of bed and downstairs. Fish is delighted to finally see Quick out of his room, but Quick keeps himself busy as he wonders where his father is. The day wears on and Lester doesn't return; Oriel grows more and more tense. Meanwhile, Rose tries unsuccessfully to fetch her mother from the pub where she's been drinking. But Dolly would much rather stay and get more drunk than go with her daughter. Rose is left to sit outside and seethe as she waits, hating Dolly and her own life more every moment. The bar patrons make Rose uncomfortable, and she wanders angrily to King's Park to wait this out and bring her mother home later.

Cloudstreet is quiet when Sam and Lester finally return that night. Rose has already brought home Dolly, who's asleep on the bed. Rose shoots an angry glare at her father as he enters, and he sheepishly draws himself a bath. On the Lamb side of the house, Lester shows everyone his prize money at the quiet kitchen table, but Oriel quickly tells him to put it in the till, as "money has no place at the dinner table." Despite the tension that's been building in the house all day, no one shouts or erupts in anger, and the day's unusual events are put to bed silently.

The next morning, Quick notices that Lester is in a cheerful mood. Lester tells the family that they should all come with him to relax for a day on the beach at Fremantle, as he's eager to use yesterday's windfall to have a fun day out. Oriel agrees to come along with everyone else, despite her quietly judgmental attitude about the whole business. The Lambs ride out to the **riverside** to enjoy themselves, and Quick feels relieved that his father is in a better mood now. They spend the day at the beach as planned, though Oriel is still dubious about Lester's gambling and newfound friendship with Sam.

At this point, the Lambs' and Pickles' shared experiences with luck come to a head, as Sam and Lester forge an unlikely bond over gambling. Sam's insistence that luck is more reliable than God or the government allows Lester to glimpse a new kind of life that isn't soured by his disappointment with religion. While Lester still hesitates to fully accept Sam's philosophy, their day at the races begins to change Lester's attitude about what to expect from life. The two of them don't speak openly about their experiences with terrible luck, but their bonding over gambling connects them much more deeply than before, without either of them needing to discuss specifics.



This is far from the first time Rose has tried to bring a drunk Dolly home from the pub, but this time in particular is the tipping point for Rose. After enduring the trauma of being raised by an alcoholic for years, Rose begins to give up on her family at this point. Her anger towards Dolly—and to a lesser extent, Sam—builds upon her growing desire for independence and self-sufficiency. The conflict between this desire and family obligations will define her development as a character from here on. Rather than facing her trauma head-on by confronting her family, Rose would rather run from it and become her own person.



While there aren't any dramatic confrontations during this night, the underlying tension in both families reveals their discomfort about the two families mingling. Both Rose and Oriel consider the men's behavior irresponsible, even if they did win money at the races. The fact that Sam and Lester went to the races at all is the problem, at least in Rose and Oriel's opinion. Ironically, the men's guilt in this moment means they might as well have lost at the races instead; the outcome at home would be the same either way.



Lester's insistence that the Lamb family enjoy a fun day at the beach serves two purposes for him. First, it helps him deal with his guilt about gambling with Sam yesterday. His family can hardly stay angry with him if he treats them to a day's vacation with his winnings, after all. Secondly, this outing is Lester's attempt to try out Sam's more carefree lifestyle. Despite Oriel's skepticism, Lester still feels connected to Sam since their day at the races and wants to share in his happy-go-lucky philosophy, if only to see if it works for him, too. However, the presence of the river, which has been established as an ambivalent symbol, implies that things might not go as well as he hopes.



That afternoon, Lester buys a boat on impulse. It isn't long before everyone realizes that the boat is far too big to fit in the bed of their truck. Lester suggests that Quick should row it all the way up the **river** to bring it home, and Oriel simply walks to truck and climbs in, slamming the door behind her. All of the children balk at Lester's idea, but Quick finds himself wanting to defend his father from the disbelieving look Hattie is giving him. Quick agrees to row the boat home on the condition that Fish comes with him, and Lester reluctantly agrees. The two boys set off down the river in the afternoon sun, passing by wharfs and under bridges. Quick is secretly afraid of being out here practically on his own, but Fish is delighted simply to watch the river.

Back at **Cloudstreet**, Oriel angrily washes dishes in the kitchen and almost contemplates murder, furious with Lester for all the foolish decisions he's made in the past couple of days. Nervously, Lester begins to sing a tune behind her, only for her to turn around and throw a gravy boat at him in a moment of fury. Lester has the wind knocked out of him as he falls to the floor, and Oriel asks him if her life has really been that useless. Still winded, Lester is unable to reply, but his struggling doesn't give Oriel the satisfaction she was hoping for. Quick continues rowing up the **river** as the sun sets, starting to seriously doubt if the two of them can make it. Quick and Fish start to share the rowing to conserve Quick's energy.

Lester drives out in the truck in the early evening to look for Quick and Fish, but to no avail. He looks out into the dark water and figures that they could be anywhere, out there in the night with no idea which direction to go. He curses himself and cries on the sand by the **river**, knowing that this is all his fault and promising to stop gambling and no longer be such a fool. He revisits the memory of Fish almost drowning beneath the net on that awful night, and he wishes he had learned his lesson about rivers. He feels panic rising in him, hoping desperately that the river won't take two of his sons this time.

Out on the **river** in the middle of the night, an exhausted Quick stops rowing as Fish lies curled up at his feet. They start singing to keep themselves awake, and it isn't long before Fish stands up and laughs madly holding out his arms and staring out of the boat gleefully. When Quick looks over the side of the boat, he sees that the river is full of stars. It's not just reflecting the stars above; it looks as though the boat is drifting through outer space. Quick can't feel any water below them and knows this must be a dream, despite him feeling very much awake. Fish refers to the sky as the water, still seeming overjoyed.

Quick's sudden willingness to defend Lester's irresponsible choices is a sign that Quick is slowly becoming more willing to connect with his family, or at least to empathize with them. His insistence on bringing Fish with him reveals that Quick agrees with Lester's earlier speech about the Lambs owing Fish after the accident. Despite what's happened to Fish, Quick still wants to believe that Fish can have a happy life, even if Quick himself can't. Quick is still becoming more withdrawn, but this moment is a brief exception to that trend.



After seeing what Lester has done and what Quick is becoming, Oriel can't help but wonder if she's failed in her responsibilities as a wife and a mother. Despite the constant pressure she puts on the other Lambs, she feels that they're slipping away from her, and her angry outburst in this moment is the culmination of these feelings rising inside her for a long time. She's tried to make the Lambs just as responsible as she is, but from her point of view, they've already given up and surrendered to the whims of luck. Meanwhile, Quick's nervousness is fueled in part by the fact that he and Fish are on the river again, an image that will always summon the trauma of the accident into Quick's mind.



This is the turning point in the changes that Lester has experienced during this chapter. His experiment of trying out Sam's lifestyle has clearly failed, and his guilt over gambling weakens his newfound connection to Sam. Lester discovers that he can't trust luck in the same way that Sam does—not if it puts his family in jeopardy. Recalling the trauma of Fish's accident makes his guilt even harder to bear, but he can't blame luck this time; he can only blame himself.



In this strange moment, Quick finally glimpses the world as Fish sees it. Fish has been almost unintelligible to the other Lambs since his accident gave him brain damage, but at this point, he gives Quick a chance to connect with him and understand him more than ever. The fact that their trip through the stars definitely isn't a dream implies that there's something truly supernatural going on, and that Fish is somehow attuned to it. While Quick doesn't attempt to explain this moment to himself or anyone else, he's presented with the possibility that Fish's condition opens his eyes to things beyond the ordinary world.



The two of them continue floating through this strange sea of stars for a while until they suddenly find themselves on the dark **river** again, just like before. Fish starts sobbing, disappointed that “the water” is gone. Quick holds his brother and once again feels despair over the once-clever Fish now acting like such a child. They drift off to sleep. Lester finds them at dawn, with the boat having run aground in the shallows at Nedlands. He’s overjoyed to find them, hardly able to speak as he lets out a cry of relief and dances on the sand. When they come home singing in the truck later that morning, Oriel feels as though they’re foreigners, related to her by blood but lost to her forever. But she still holds them close, relieved that they’re all safe.

On Guy Fawkes night, Oriel invites Dolly and the rest of the Pickles family to join the Lambs in their half of the backyard to celebrate with them. Everyone enjoys themselves as they light crackers and socialize with each other, regardless of which family they come from. Rose feels especially happy as she gets along with the Lamb children and enjoys the cheerful noise of it all. But when Lester sets fire to their Guy Fawkes effigy made of flourbags, Fish starts crying and tells him not to “burn the man.” Everyone laughs at first, but as the effigy burns and falls apart, Fish cries louder and more sincerely. Oriel takes Fish inside and the party becomes awkwardly silent.

Quick drags the crying Fish up the stairs, feeling pretty miserable himself. He keeps telling Fish that it’s not a real man they’re burning, but this doesn’t do anything to calm Fish down. Oriel tells Quick to leave him be, but Quick senses none of the usual conviction in her voice. Quick brings Fish into the musty, windowless room and lets him sit at the piano. Quick leaves Fish to pound on the keys and sees his mother crying on the landing with her head against the banister. The subdued party continues for a bit before everyone heads to bed. Everyone can hear the middle C key from the piano pounding all through the night, but no one speaks of it.

Over the holidays, Rose keeps things on her desk organized despite having no school, and imagines what it’s like to have her own house to maintain. She feels that she’s already almost a fully grown woman, especially as she’s taught herself to cook for herself and her brothers—Dolly is always too drunk to cook and Sam often gets home from work late. Rose and her brothers play around a bit, but she still looks down on them and thinks it’s inevitable that they act like fools, as they’re only boys. Sam begins losing at the racetrack again, Dolly continues to be absent from the house, and Rose is discouraged by the family’s luck seeming to take a downturn.

Quick’s sorrow over Fish crying is a sign that Quick has already started to forget or ignore the supernatural event he’s just witnessed. Even after sharing an unexplainable experience with his brother, Quick still misses the Fish he knew and grew up with. Ultimately, the mystery of Fish’s new, heightened senses doesn’t outweigh the grief Quick still feels over Fish’s accident. Meanwhile, Oriel’s continued feeling of isolation from her family reflects her obsession with responsibility. Because of her unwavering efforts to take control of her life, she’s become so independent that she no longer feels a connection to the family she’s sworn to protect.



The brief celebration shared by the Lamb and Pickles families is a glimpse of what their lives could be if they set aside their differences and joined together as one unit. Unfortunately, Fish’s interruption cuts their good time short, making them once again aware of the divide between the families. Fish’s crying represents the lingering trauma shared by both families. Even at the happiest of times, their trauma is always present, reminding them of the past and preventing them from moving forward together.



Fish’s extreme reaction to the burning man is yet another reminder of his accident. He constantly talks about how much he loves the water and wants to return to it, and this might explain his aversion to fire. This reminder of trauma affects Oriel especially strongly during Guy Fawkes Night, as she’s forced to accept that Fish is more distant from her than anyone else. The pounding of middle C represents trauma’s continued presence throughout the night, but it also confirms that the ghost of the house’s previous owner (whose face hit the same piano key when she died) truly is haunting Cloudstreet.



During this period, Rose develops and intensifies her desire to become independent from her family. Her opinions about luck and responsibility also begin to diverge from those of her father, as she relies less on him and more on herself. As she sees it, luck is unpredictable and unreliable, while becoming independent would allow her to make her own way in life and decide what happens to her. Like Quick, she grows distant from her family as she feels that they bring her down and tie her to the past.



Drunk and exhausted, Dolly walks along the railway tracks one night and wishes she could fall asleep on the rails and sleep as the whole mess of a world disappears around her. She once again flashes back to memories of her childhood, and her father who wasn't really her father. She pictures one of her sisters wearing an engagement ring, and Dolly remembers hating her. She wonders why she didn't spit in her eye when she had the chance, and she passes out. Rose finds her soon after and takes her home, where Dolly vomits for hours and Oriel tries to help. After Dolly finally passes out again, Oriel decides to thoroughly clean the entire Pickles side of the **house**. Rose is furious and ashamed when she finds everything cleaned up by someone else's mother.

Life at **Cloudstreet** seems to speed up to a feverish pace as summer arrives, and several things happen in quick succession just before Christmas. The girls are all coming of age, and even Ted has his first kiss on the beach. Hattie becomes the marbles champion of the neighborhood, and Red still proudly considers herself the tomboy of the family. As he comes back home from a successful fishing trip, Quick notices that Rose might have feelings for Fish. Oriel buys a tent and keeps a closer eye on the family's finances. Sam wins a pig in a pub raffle and donates it to the Lambs to express his thanks for them helping his wife, but Dolly herself decides never to speak to Oriel again.

One day, Fish is left alone with the new pig in the backyard. The pig talks to Fish and he understands it, hearing it ask him to spray it with a hose and create a mud puddle for it to roll around in. Fish giggles and grants the pig's request, and when Lester comes outside to stop Fish from wasting water, he also hears the pig speak. Unlike Fish, Lester can't understand the creature, but it still sounds like it's talking, almost speaking in tongues. He fetches Oriel and tells her that the pig talks. It fails to do so in her presence, and she resolves to get rid of the pig, as she doesn't want a gambling prize on her property. Lester insists that they keep it, since Fish has grown attached to it, but Oriel remains steadfast.

On a tip from Sam, Lester buys a horse with the intention of setting up a delivery cart for the shop. He imagines himself riding around the neighborhood selling and delivering the family's wares, more excited by the social possibilities than the business side of things. But not long after he loads up the cart with food and rides off, the horse goes wild and rushes down the streets at an incredible speed. Lester tumbles out of the cart and follows the trail of fallen food that the out-of-control cart has left in its wake. When he finds the horse and cart at last, he sells them and sheepishly gives the whole thing up.

While the details of Dolly's past are still vague at this point, it's clear that she has trauma of her own that drives her to drink. Like her daughter, Dolly herself desperately wanted to become independent from a family she hated. But by dealing with her bitter memories through alcohol, she's only passing on her trauma to the next generation, making Rose hate Dolly just as much as Dolly hated her own family. Meanwhile, Rose begins to share in Dolly's resentment of Oriel after Oriel cleans the Pickles side of the house. Both Rose and Dolly feel insecure about Oriel's helpfulness, as the implication is that they're weak people who need her help.



As the children grow older and pursue their own interests and romance, they all start becoming more independent from their families. At this point, however, they still very much belong to Cloudstreet, and none of them are striving for independence as deliberately as Rose. There are also a few more points of contact between the two families during these days, but any meaningful connection is stifled by the ongoing resentment Dolly holds for Oriel. Regardless, Rose's crush on Fish hints at potential connections to be made in the future.



The talking pig is yet another ironic "miracle" in the lives of the Lamb family. While strange things often seem to happen to them, none of these supernatural events ever do them any good. While a talking pig is technically miraculous, it's just another reminder that exceptional events are random, impartial, and seemingly useless at best. Oriel's reluctance to keep the pig reflects her determination to ignore the strange luck that follows them, and her scorn for the pig might be why it doesn't speak to her.



This incident is another indication that Sam might be a bad influence on Lester, however unintentionally. While Sam practically makes his living from his wild ideas and all-or-nothing gambling schemes, Lester seems fated to live a more straightforward and honest life. His failed venture also highlights how he doesn't match up to Oriel's extreme level of competence and business skills, a fact he admits to himself.



When Lester returns home, he finds Oriel silently setting up her tent in the Lamb half of the backyard. Quick lets him know that she isn't happy, but that the pig has somehow gotten away with staying in the yard for the time being. On New Year's Day of 1949, Oriel Lamb moves furniture and other essentials into the tent, where she's decided to start sleeping every night from now on. Everyone in the neighborhood watches her move out to the tent and speculates about why she's doing it. Oriel wonders why herself. She isn't sure if it's because Fish has forgotten her, because of the **house's** claustrophobia, or some other reason. But one way or another, Oriel feels like the house itself doesn't want her living inside it.

Moving out into the tent is a major turning point for Oriel—a quiet admission of the growing divide between her and the other Lambs. While she still lives at Cloudstreet and takes care of her family, living in the tent is a symbolic gesture of independence, mostly for her own benefit. By moving out, she signals to everyone that she doesn't feel welcome in the house, and that she needs space to process her trauma. It's possible that the ghosts haunting Cloudstreet are one reason for her discomfort, but even the spirits are only another manifestation of the inner turmoil that keeps Oriel awake at night.



CHAPTER 5

A few years have passed and Quick, now 16 years old, is still struggling in school. He continues to lag behind and doesn't feel he has the patience to properly catch up, as he spends much of his free time out on the river or practicing shooting instead of studying. However, he tends to get along with one of his teachers, Mr. Krasnostein, who gently criticizes Quick's essay about Japan and gives him research materials concerning the horrors of Hiroshima and the Holocaust. Krasnostein reveals that he's Jewish himself, and he's replaced by another teacher before Quick sees him again. Quick is haunted by the images and descriptions Krasnostein gave him, recognizing them not just as unfortunate, but as signs of true evil. He resolves to quit school altogether.

Mr. Krasnostein inadvertently feeds into Quick's depressive episodes by giving him more information about the horrors of World War II. But even as Quick struggles to manage his feelings about the atrocities he studies, he still compares his own experiences to those of the unfortunate people he learns about. While this makes him care more about his studies and feel more connected to the world around him, it also drives him deeper into self-hatred and amplifies his trauma. Mr. Krasnostein's well-meaning help might have backfired in this moment, but it still gives Quick a more realistic and empathetic view of the world in the long term.



Meanwhile, Rose has also turned 16 and has begun to struggle with an eating disorder. While she still prepares meals for the family very consistently, she gets sick whenever she eats more than a very small amount of food at a time. As a result, she's becoming thinner and gaunt, which worries both of her parents and even disturbs Quick, as her thinness reminds him of the images of starving people in concentration camps. However, Rose takes spiteful pleasure in making Dolly angry over her appearance, and she takes every opportunity to pour alcohol she finds down the drain to spite her mother.

Rose's eating disorder is likely caused by her high stress levels as well as her unyielding determination to distance herself from the people around her. As she tries to become more independent from her family, she ironically begins to lose herself, both emotionally and physically. The trauma of being raised by an alcoholic mother is also partially to blame, but Rose fights back against these feelings as she deliberately offends Dolly. By doing this, Rose is attacking her problems rather than trying to understand them, which doesn't seem to be resolving her trauma or her eating disorder any time soon.



Lester Lamb has started to work at the Anzac Club, where he plays music and tells jokes on stage for an audience of military men and veterans. Oriel also works in the club's kitchen while her husband performs, and the two of them take pride in supporting their country and feeling patriotic. During one of these work nights, Quick shows up at the club kitchen to tell Oriel that he's running away from home. Afraid of losing her son, Oriel discourages the idea as much as she can while she works, but the bustling job prevents her from making a scene.

Like Rose, Quick feels trapped by his family and unable to let go of the past. His promise to run away reveals that he's finally willing to make a drastic decision to lessen his pain, but it's notable that he tells Oriel he's leaving at all. He could have simply run away from home without giving notice, so his admission to Oriel implies that he still cares about his family enough to let them know he's leaving.



Quick goes back home and then leaves **Cloudstreet**, running down the stairs with his bag and accidentally hitting Rose with it in his rush to get out. He hears the piano apparently pounding out noise on its own. The Lambs arrive shortly after Quick's flight from the house, and Oriel tends to Rose's wound from getting hit by Quick's bag. Both of them weep on the floor, and it becomes clear that Quick has officially run away from home. Fish visits the pig in the backyard the following day, but it doesn't seem talkative. He misses Quick and wishes Quick had told Fish he was leaving.

Despite his slight hesitation, Quick's action at this point confirms that he's truly desperate to become independent from Cloudstreet and his family. The piano pounding itself as he leaves gives the impression that he's escaping from a madhouse in search of a more peaceful life. By doing this, however, he hurts everyone he leaves behind. Quick accidentally injuring Rose echoes how he's hurting Fish and Oriel by disappearing from their lives. Quick runs away to escape from the pain of his trauma, but this attempt only increases Oriel's pain, as she's left to guiltily consider what she did wrong.



Trying to distract herself and refocus her efforts after losing Quick, Oriel resolves to wipe out her general store's local competition. She visits the nearby shop owned by G. M. Clay, who advertises his military service on a sign in front of his store. Oriel finds this tactic distasteful. She imagines all the difficulties of her own life that she could list on a sign outside her own door, if she were to be so shameless. She steps inside and buys some eggs, asking Mr. Clay about his service—and realizes with some embarrassment that he isn't just pretending to be a veteran. He asks her about her husband's battalion, and she quickly steps out after telling him that Lester's only service during World War II was in the band. She hears Clay's wife laughing in the back of the shop as she furiously leaves.

Oriel takes offense at G. M. Clay's attitude because his attitude towards life seems to invalidate her own struggles and hardships. While Oriel keeps her trauma mostly to herself, G. M. Clay proudly displays his decorated military service, making Lester's role in the military look unimportant in comparison. Oriel believes that everyone endures hardships, but that no one should expect pity or special treatment for their trauma. She resents Mr. Clay because he's wearing his past on his sleeve, whereas Oriel is deliberately quiet about her dark memories.



Angry and emboldened more than ever, Oriel pushes Lester and her children to work harder in the shop. She reminds herself that "the good are fierce," and she holds herself to that standard as she ramps up the shop's productivity. She even plans to develop an original ice cream recipe that's sure to run G. M. Clay out of business in the summer. Lester keeps up with his wife's increasing demands, but he still has quiet moments of sorrow to himself, when he thinks about how Quick has run away and that Fish has been upset ever since. He remembers a vague memory of his own father carrying him across a creek at night, and he recalls the Bible story of the prodigal son, hoping that it'll come true in his own life and that Quick will come home someday.

As Oriel throws herself into her work to distract from her guilt and defeat a competitor, Lester goes in the opposite direction. He faces his guilt about Quick head-on, and his recollection of the Bible story reveals that he still holds onto some of his Christian beliefs, even if he's lost his faith. He might not think the story of the prodigal son (in which a wayward son is welcomed home by a forgiving father) holds a specifically religious meaning, but he hopes that the spirit of it rings true in some other way. Oriel and Lester's different approaches highlight how they process their guilt. While Oriel takes an active role as she tries to fix things, Lester can only wait and hope, wondering if he can ever really leave the past behind him.



Dolly feels and sees herself getting older, becoming increasingly bitter and harsh as she loses her youthful good looks. She begins to hate her daughter Rose, both because Rose is wasting away from malnutrition and because she's still young and does much more of the housework. Dolly lets this resentment grow within her as she makes constant visits to the pub and meets new men in the city. She begins having sex with a man who turns out to be G. M. Clay from the shop down the street. They enjoy each other's company for a while, but eventually Clay begins complaining about how Oriel is practically driving him out of business. Dolly admits she can't evict Oriel, as the Pickles family still relies on the Lambs for rent money, but this only makes her resent Oriel more.

The basic wage goes up by a quid, but Sam still doesn't make much money at the mint and he hasn't been winning at the races for the past few months. He still sneaks the occasional coin or two out of work by hiding them in his mouth as he's frisked at the door, and he considers his recent run of bad luck a down payment on his future winnings. One day, after stepping off his train, a woman confronts Sam at the station, telling him to try to control his wife. The woman is G. M. Clay's wife, and she lets Sam know that Dolly is cheating on him. Sam brushes her off furiously as he heads home, but by the time he gets there, the anger in him has turned into a numbness. It's as if he'd always known this would happen.

Rose still finds herself attracted to Fish Lamb, despite his disability and childlike demeanor. She watches him pound grimly on the piano keys in the library one day, but she feels a dark, sick sensation wash over her as he stops playing, and she rushes out of the unsettling room. Down in the kitchen, she finds her father Sam. He brings up the subject of her malnutrition, saying that she looks like a corpse lately. The two of them argue as he tries to get her to eat everything on her plate. Sam becomes furious and Rose tries to finish the meal, but she quickly runs out to the backyard to vomit. Oriel sees her and offers to bring her to a doctor, to Rose's embarrassment. As Oriel prepares the truck to take her to the hospital, Rose runs off, feeling pathetic.

The underlying reason why Dolly starts hating Rose is because Rose is becoming an independent young woman, despite her declining health. This reminds Dolly of her own quickly fading youth, and the opportunities she feels she missed long ago. The two of them have more in common than they'd admit, as both of them are desperate to escape from Cloudstreet and live free lives of their own. Both of them continue to isolate from the people around them for this reason, letting their resentments grow and fester inside them.



Despite Sam's positive attitude about his bad luck being a "down payment" on future good luck, he still finds it difficult to face one misfortune after another. This reaches a tipping point when he learns that Dolly is cheating on him. At times like these, he's forced to question his philosophy of relying on the whims of luck alone, as Dolly's infidelity isn't as easy to dismiss as an unlucky roll of the dice. In this case, Sam faces the possibility that the problems in his life might be his own fault, and not just the result of bad luck.



After getting knocked off balance by sensing the library's ghosts, Rose is more stressed than usual and primed to argue with her father, who's also suddenly been put on edge. Their argument surprises both of them, but in some ways, it's long overdue. Rose's mental health crisis and Dolly's infidelity have both been worsening for some time, and now these conflicts are finally bubbling to the surface. As Rose and Dolly both go out of their way to become more independent, Sam can't help but feel abandoned by everyone around him, causing him to lash out. Even when she's ill, Rose still struggles against accepting help from either family in the house, still desperate to distance herself from them.



Sam carries on miserably, sensing that everyone in his family is either judging him or against him. He starts to feel that to be a man or simply to be alive is the cruelest joke, and he curses his terrible luck. One morning, Dolly and Rose get into an argument about how Rose might need to quit school because they can no longer afford it. Rose enjoys school and has dreams of becoming well-educated and traveling the world, and she reminds Dolly that Rose herself is already the one who cooks and cleans, so it's unfair to expect her to get a job as well. Sam enters and breaks up the argument, threatening to throw Dolly out onto the street if she lays a finger on Rose.

Lester struggles to coax Fish into going outside and becoming active again, as Fish is still upset about Quick running away. Fish tells Lester that he wants to go out on the **water** with Quick again, and he says that they saw the stars. Lester tells him that Quick is gone, but he tries to comfort Fish. He asks him basic questions about the family, but Fish still can't remember Oriel. Fish says the **house** is sad, and that he can hear it talking. Lester takes him downstairs to the kitchen to **spin the knife**, asking it who will be the one to see Quick come home first. The knife points to Fish, and Lester wonders if it's really just sheer luck that makes things happen. Maybe the knife really does never lie.

Sam sits on the edge of the bathtub with a razor in his hands, wondering if he's too cowardly to strike back at G. M. Clay for having an affair with Dolly. But he realizes that what he's feeling is loss, not anger. He still loves his wife, and the pain is becoming too much. Rose finds him in the bathroom, realizing that he almost made a suicide attempt. Sam sobs and opens up to her about what he's going through, and Rose tells him she doesn't hate him; she only feels sorry for him for still loving Dolly. Sam tells her that people are who they are, but Rose retorts that maybe people should change. Sam tells Rose that she's going places, and she fantasizes about moving far away from **Cloudstreet**.

That summer, Oriel and the rest of the Lambs successfully run G. M. Clay out of business with their own original vanilla ice cream recipe. The entire neighborhood goes wild for it, and everyone is disappointed when Oriel finally discontinues the ice cream in January. Oriel heads down to Mr. Clay's shop to offer him a settlement, but she only finds Mrs. Clay there. She angrily lets Oriel know that G. M. Clay has left the city permanently without her, all because of Oriel stealing all his business. Startled by this news, Oriel offers to let Mrs. Clay and her children stay at **Cloudstreet**, but Mrs. Clay furiously turns the offer down and tells Oriel to go to hell.

The conflicts in the Pickles family continue to escalate, with Sam caught in the middle. He feels responsible for driving his family away from him, adding an extra layer of tragedy to his character. He doesn't take much credit for his successes, attributing them to luck instead. But when his life is falling apart, he can't help but feel responsible, even if it does boil down to bad luck. Meanwhile, Rose's fixation on becoming independent backfires as Dolly tries to put more and more responsibilities on Rose's shoulders. Rose's reaction highlights how she still relies on her family for some things, even as she fantasizes about leaving them behind forever.



Fish once again implies that he can sense the supernatural goings-on in the house, though Lester assumes this is just part of Fish's childlike behavior. His mention of the house being sad reflects the turmoil that's shaken both families lately. The house's ghosts are symbolic of the past traumas that fuel the family's present-day conflicts, and only Fish can perceive them clearly, though he can't fully communicate this to others. Lester's reflections on the spinning knife echo Oriel's thoughts about it earlier in the novel, drawing parallels between how they're each dealing with loss. At this point, Lester is more willing than Oriel to believe that luck decides everything.



Rose and Sam's reconciliation comes more easily in this extreme situation, where it's clear that Sam has truly been driven to the brink. Rose can't help but empathize with him as she sees him nearly commit suicide, but their bonding over the harshness of life has its limits. Rose finally puts her beliefs about personal responsibility into words, emphasizing the importance of self-determination over luck. This feeds into her ever-growing desire to become independent and leave Cloudstreet. Despite their disagreements, Rose and Sam reaffirm their love for each other in this moment of crisis, sharing the weight of life's struggles for now.



After realizing that this isn't the victory she'd hoped for, Oriel faces the reality of what she's done to the Clay family. Her efforts to run G. M. Clay out of business had been her attempt to escape from her difficult feelings, but now it's backfired in a way that makes her guilt unavoidable. This surprise turns a mirror back on Oriel, making her see the harm she's caused and the insult of offering help to her victim.



Feeling a wave of shame and remorse wash over her, Oriel weeps on her way home, wondering if this is what happens to a person when she loses a son. She considers it a sin to have broken the Clay family like that, and she promises herself to send food parcels to them every day. Looking outside, Rose is startled to notice Oriel crying “like a person,” and it’s hard to watch as Fish ignores his mother. Exhausted from all these emotions, Rose goes down to the kitchen and starts looking for jobs in the newspaper until Dolly shows up. Dolly had been missing last night, and now she stumbles into the house, bleeding.

Dolly quietly tends to her wounds, which G. M. Clay inflicted before he left town. Rose gives her some ice, cautiously glad that an argument hasn’t broken out between them yet. Dolly says that she wishes Rose hadn’t grown up to hate her. She also insists that people can’t always do everything they want, even if they know it’s the right thing. Rose doesn’t show much sympathy, and Dolly brushes off her daughter’s questions about whether Dolly had hated her own mother. Dolly tells Rose that hating her won’t do her any good, but Rose yells back, telling her mother that hating her is the best part of being alive.

At Lester’s insistence, the Lambs once again visit the **riverside** to go fishing and enjoy themselves for an afternoon. Lester intends to cheer up his wife on the trip, but Oriel remains quiet and withdrawn as she tends to the fire on the beach and watches her husband and children play in the water. She remembers how many important memories in her life, good and bad, are connected to a river. She keeps Fish tied to a tree so that he won’t wander off or drown. But a mysterious inner voice speaks to Fish, telling him that his time will come and saying that “everything will live where the river goes.”

Rose gets a job at Bairds department store, surprised at her own ability to communicate and stay sharp. Her boss, Mrs. Tisborn, assigns her to the switchboard, where she learns to take customers’ calls and connect them to the department that they’re looking for. Rose enjoys the thrill of heading into the bustling heart of the city every day, and she quickly befriends three other girls who work at the switchboard: Darleen, Merle, and Alma. They’re mischievous, crass, and love to gossip among themselves, and Rose enjoys their company despite the fact that they remind her a bit of Dolly. Rose is proud to be earning a salary, she begins to put on some weight, and she feels like she’s becoming her own woman at last.

After living in denial for a few months, Oriel sees herself clearly now, and she doesn’t like what she sees. Her promise to send food to the Clays reveals that she’s still dealing with her guilt in the same way as before: by taking immediate action and putting all the responsibility on herself. Seeing Oriel crying allows Rose to humanize her neighbor for a moment, reminding her that everyone is going through a hard time, even the woman who seems perfectly put-together.



Rose clashes with her other parent on the subject of personal responsibility, but unlike with Lester, this argument doesn’t end in a truce. This is because Rose finds it more difficult to forgive her mother, who directly caused much of Rose’s trauma growing up. Dolly, meanwhile, hints at the intensity of her own past traumas by refusing to speak about them. Much like Oriel trying to run G. M. Clay out of business, Rose turns her mother into a villain that must be defeated before there can be peace, rather than trying to understand Dolly’s point of view. To Rose, becoming independent from her mother and spiting her is her only choice.



The river once again shows up to remind the Lambs of all they’ve lost, and how rivers are a strange throughline in their lives. It’s notable that all of the Lambs’ holidays take place by the river, reinforcing the idea that even during their most carefree times, their trauma and the memory of Fish’s accident will always be present. It’s unclear who or what is speaking to Fish in the narration at this point, but it seems to promise some kind of spiritual transcendence, adding another layer of mystery to the river.



After confronting both of her parents with varying degrees of success, Rose finally begins to achieve the independence she’s been aiming for. The bustling city where she works symbolizes the alluring possibilities of the outside world—a world separate from Cloudstreet and her struggling family. While she hasn’t run away from home like Quick, Rose nonetheless experiences what an independent life might be like when she’s fully grown. But her coworkers reminding her of Dolly is a sign that she’s still thinking about Cloudstreet, even while living the life she wants to live.



A young man named Geoffrey Birch visits **Cloudstreet** to see Hattie, his girlfriend. Red is disgusted by the idea of their union, while Elaine is sad and jealous, as she wants a husband herself and knows that she'll miss Hattie if she gets married and moves out. But Hattie and Geoffrey seem to love each other dearly; he laughs at her jokes, and she's always overjoyed to have him around. Lester starts setting aside some money for their potential wedding.

As Lester and Oriel work at the Anzac Club one night, a sad-looking woman approaches Oriel and asks her if she believes in Hell. Oriel senses that this woman is a lonely widow, and she tells the woman this. The woman, Beryl Lee, tells Oriel that her husband was killed in the war, and that she figured Oriel was a Christian woman she could confide in. The two of them embrace and cry as people watch them. That night, Oriel flashes back to what she considers her own Hell: the memory of that night when her childhood home burned down and the blaze killed most of her family, leaving her with survivor's guilt.

Oriel awakens from her troubled sleep and instinctively checks everyone's rooms to reassure herself that they're alright. She reflects on how she hates to be a survivor, remembering the fire and her stepbrother who never came home from the first World War. She recalls how she's had to force herself to be strong ever since the fire, unable to make choices even when it came to her choice of husband. But she also knows she had truly fallen in love with Lester, as she watches him sleep and sorts through her grim thoughts. Despite all the pain, she's proud of how she's made her home into a fortress and a shelter for all who need it. It occurs to her that maybe she could let Beryl from the Anzac Club live with them.

Life at **Cloudstreet** goes on as autumn and winter roll around. Ted Pickles begins having sex with more and more young women, to the anger of his jealous mother and the relative indifference of the other Pickleses. Beryl Lee moves into the Lamb half of the house and starts working in the shop, as Oriel predicts Hattie won't be living at Cloudstreet for much longer. A postcard from Quick arrives one day to reassure the Lambs that he's alright, but no one speaks of it. Lester starts to feel old age creeping up on him, and Geoffrey proposes to a delighted Hattie. Sam is happy to see that Rose is eating and gaining a healthy amount of weight again.

Hattie's boyfriend is a sign that the children of Cloudstreet are truly beginning to grow up and become their own people. Unlike Rose and Quick, who both long for complete independence, Hattie is approaching adulthood at a more moderate pace. This also marks a bright spot in what has been a gloomy and unsteady time for the residents of Cloudstreet. Despite the families' struggles, life goes on.



By bonding with a stranger, Oriel demonstrates that she's still a Christian in many ways despite her loss of faith. But instead of using her religion as an excuse to expect miracles, she's now using it as a point of connection between herself and a person in need. Oriel and Beryl share the weight of their traumas to relieve each other's pain, but Oriel's dream that night is a sign that she's still haunted by the past no matter how much she shares it with another.



As much as Oriel wants to believe in the power of choice and personal responsibility, this moment of introspection reveals that she never truly thought she had a choice. Ironically, her proud status as a protector and caretaker was foisted on her from a young age, giving her no choice but to take care of the people around her—even her own father. Her resolve to be a good person might be nothing but a random fluke, but her pride and determination imply that this might be the life she would have chosen for herself regardless. Her trauma shaped who she is, but she nonetheless believes that trauma and weakness are worth fighting.



Once again, the household tries to move on as the children grow into their own independent people. Even when life at Cloudstreet is going well, there are always complications and minor everyday dramas, adding to the realism of the family's lives. Notably, Rose and Hattie both seem to achieve a healthy balance between family obligations and independence during these months, all while continuing to live at Cloudstreet.



That winter is fairly uneventful until a large man shows up at the front door, furiously letting Sam know that Ted has gotten the man's daughter pregnant and now Ted is obligated to marry her. The man advances threateningly, but Lester steps out of a doorway brandishing a large meat cleaver, unintentionally scaring the man away. Sam laughs and thanks Lester for his accidental help, and Lester says he was only chopping ham bones for soup when he heard the commotion. Sam offers Lester free rent for a week and jokingly tells him to never have kids.

In the kitchen one night, Lester once again recalls the memory of riding on his father's shoulders as they trudged through the **river** on a dark night, long ago. Fish enters the kitchen and Lester draws basic cooking ingredients for Fish to identify, as a game. Lester soon gives Fish a bath, careful to keep the water level low so that Fish won't drown himself. Fish wants to hear a story and Lester obliges, struggling to come up with something but eventually telling a story about Fish riding on Quick's shoulders as Quick walks through dark water. Fish finishes the story himself, saying that they end up in "the Big Country," where people are waiting for them. He smiles blissfully at a bemused Lester.

CHAPTER 6

Quick lies in the shade of a tree in the midst of a vast wheat field. He throws a bone to Bill, his dog, and teases him, **spinning a knife** on the back of a skillet to decide who's doing the dishes after breakfast. Quick's living on his own out in the country now, and he's making money by hunting and killing kangaroos, which seem to be overrunning certain areas of the country and eating crops. Today, he demonstrates the skill he's built up over the years, shooting several kangaroos out in the wheat fields with relative ease. He cuts off their tails with a machete and throws the tails into the back of his truck, letting the farmer who hired him do what he wants with the bodies.

Quick notices that he missed one of the kangaroos, which seems to be lying and thrashing in the midst of the tall wheat nearby. He walks towards it and prepares to finish the creature off, but then it kicks him in the chest and sends him falling to the ground. Quick can only see stars above him and hears his dog whining and the kangaroo dying, and he slips into unconsciousness. It's dark when Quick awakens and he knows that his truck is out of power, as the headlights are out.

Ted getting a girl pregnant is a sign of just how much he's grown since the beginning of the novel, while still retaining much of his immaturity. As much as he tries to live independently away from Cloudstreet, he'll still have to rely on his family to handle the situation he's caused. Sam and Lester's incident shows that the two of them are still on good terms, despite not spending time with each other anymore. Their good-humored conversation once again highlights the similarities between two families who insist on being distinct from each other.



Lester's memory of his father reinforces the constant presence of rivers in the lives of the Lamb family. It begins to seem like everything is connected, and Fish's odd comments only support this idea. His talk about the river and the "Big Country" could just be childlike rambling, but it's implied to be much more. Fish can't exactly express it to others, but it's becoming clearer that his accident gave him awareness of a spiritual world beyond anyone's understanding.



It's notable that the first time Quick is shown away from his family back at Cloudstreet, he's playing a game he learned from them: spinning a knife and asking it questions. This indicates right away that despite his new lifestyle of independence, Quick still thinks about his family, or at least maintains some emotional connection with them. It's also a sign that he might return to Cloudstreet, or that he can't escape his past no matter where he goes.



It's possible that this encounter with the kangaroo is symbolic of what Quick is about to experience in regard to his trauma. By leaving Cloudstreet and living on his own, he hoped to let the past die and move on. But now, years later, he'll find out that the past isn't dead. His trauma isn't gone, and he's surprised by its return, as unexpected as a kick from a kangaroo.



Suddenly, Quick sees his brother Fish sitting in an empty crate of oranges and somehow flying above him, rowing in his floating makeshift boat. Fish floats over the wheat as if it's water and holds out a hand to Quick, beckoning him to join him. Quick hesitates, as this is a more grown-up version of the Fish he remembers, but he still has to try not to sob as Fish asks if he loves him. Quick insists that he can't go with Fish because he can't move, but he also asks Fish if he's going home. Fish answers that he's going to the Big Country. He pulls Quick's whining dog into the crate and rows away, leaving Quick alone in darkness.

Old Wentworth, the farmer who had hired Quick, finds him lying in the wheat that afternoon and tells him he's lucky he was found, as he could have easily died otherwise. Quick passes out again and wakes up at night in Wentworth's house, knowing that Wentworth is a strict employer who's sure to cut his pay for this, but he feels grateful to be alive all the same. The next time he wakes up, he sees Wentworth's daughter Lucy tending to his aching body by rubbing it with goanna oil. She flirts with him and tells him about her plan to open a florist shop in Perth, an idea she'd apparently come up with just a few minutes ago. She puts her hands in his boxers as she massages his body, and Quick doesn't feel like objecting. When she leaves, he feels vaguely guilty.

In the following summer months, Quick continues his work hunting kangaroos and protecting people's crops, missing his dog but earning good money. He also continues to see Lucy Wentworth, though their relationship is mostly sexual and Quick doesn't think about her much during the day. One night during his work, he thinks he hears a kangaroo approaching through the wheat, but when he lights up the area, he sees that it's a man running towards him. As the man approaches, Quick realizes that the man is himself; this other version of Quick runs past and into the night. This happens again from time to time, and Quick wonders if he's delirious.

Quick drives Lucy around the countryside in his truck with no particular destination in mind. The two of them get into an argument, as Lucy is annoyed at Quick's withdrawn attitude and Quick is getting tired of Lucy's constant teasing. Quick pulls the car over as they tentatively make peace, and Quick steps out to relieve himself by the side of the road. He hears a car coming around the bend and tries to hurry so he won't be seen, even as Lucy prods and teases him more. She starts stripping and is nearly naked when the car comes around the bend and catches them both looking very compromised in its headlights. As it turns out, the car belongs to a shire clerk.

Like the strange boat ride with Fish earlier in the novel, Quick's vision in the field is implied to not be a dream, but a real supernatural event. The Fish who calls out to him isn't the Fish Quick would remember from when he left Cloudstreet; it's an adult Fish, as if he really is visiting Quick in the present. It could still just be a hallucination, but the lines between dream and reality are blurred, and the vision deeply affects Quick all the same. It forces him to face his guilt over leaving Fish and the rest of his family, reminding him where he comes from and who he used to be.



Quick's unexpected intimacy with Lucy Wentworth places him firmly in the adult world, far from his childhood and adolescence at Cloudstreet. Lucy is framed as an alluring figure for Quick, tempting him away from his visions of his past and calling him back into his carefree, independent life. However, Quick's guilt afterwards reveals an inner conflict. There's no particular reason he should feel guilty in this situation, but the experience feels like a betrayal to him. As hard as he tried to get away from Cloudstreet, a part of him still feels more loyal to his old home than to anything the outside world can offer him.



Once again, the edges of reality blur to give Quick an unsettling vision that seems to be a warning. Whether it's a hallucination or not, Quick takes the vision of his other self seriously, wondering what it could mean. This is the second time in a row that the universe itself seems to be trying to tell him something. His independent life away from Cloudstreet might have given him peace for a few years, but it's becoming increasingly clear that something is drawing him back to face his past and his family.



At this point, Quick gives up any pretense that his relationship with Lucy had been anything but sexual. His distant thoughtfulness following his visions puts him at odds with Lucy's snappy and impatient attitude, and it quickly becomes clear that the two of them weren't meant to be. It's largely Quick's guilt about the incident by the side of the road that compels him to leave town afterwards. Just as before, Lucy shows him a way of life that makes him feel wrong.



It isn't long before the entire town is buzzing with gossip about what Quick and Lucy were apparently caught doing. Pleased with herself, Lucy begins negotiating for her florist's shop first thing in the morning, while her mother wonders how she could ever show her face in town again. Quick packs up his truck and leaves within an hour, fleeing from the whole mess and knowing that the harvest will begin soon, meaning there'd be no more work for him anyway. He drives without knowing where he's going until he spots a Black man in a pinstripe suit by the side of the road, hoping to hitch a ride. Without really thinking much about it, Quick pulls over and lets the man in.

As he drives the man towards the city, Quick is almost tempted to tell the stranger his entire story, just to get it off his chest. They eat and drink together, and Quick feels strangely relaxed and comforted, asking about the man's business and getting vague answers in return. Quick asks the man where to drop him off, and the man tells him to follow the railway line. He starts to sweat as the streets start to look familiar. He sees **Cloudstreet** in the distance and quickly asks where the man wants to be let out. The man points to the house and Quick drops him off at the corner. After getting out, the man asks Quick if he's coming, but Quick just laughs nervously and speeds away in his truck.

Quick keeps driving until he ends up back at his original hometown of Margaret River, where he's hired as a truck driver by his father's cousin Earl Blunt. Earl and his wife are tough and humorless people, hardened by the Great Depression, and Quick wonders if this was what the Lambs themselves could have become if they had stayed on their farm instead of moving to Perth. But Earl pays Quick well for his truck-driving work, and Quick tries to forget his old life and focus on making a living. However, he still holds onto his old habit of cutting out photos of unfortunate people from the newspaper and sticking them to his wall, and they still dance around him at night.

Quick works for Earl for a year, telling himself that he's recovering but secretly feeling lost, miserable, and homesick. But he continues to throw himself into his work and refuses to think about his past. He keeps an orderly schedule and drives the truck around constantly, whether for work or simply to lose himself. One winter night, the truck's brakes fail on a downward slope as it approaches a railway crossing— as a train approaches. With an old Bible verse running through his head, Quick just barely manages to swerve the truck into a pile of dirt by the tracks. After digging it out and driving it back, he tells Earl what happened and Earl gives Quick a week off work, taking it out of his paycheck.

Quick and Lucy's reactions to the gossip about them highlights their differing attitudes towards family and independence. While Lucy happily takes advantage of the situation to arrange for a more independent lifestyle, Quick still feels lost and directionless without a family around to anchor him. His life at Cloudstreet was giving him grief, but his guilt and the visions are beginning to make him realize that running away from home might have been a rash decision nonetheless.



Quick's various reactions to the strange man throughout the trip highlight Quick's conflicting feelings about the possibility of returning home to Cloudstreet. He feels comfortable and at ease with the man for most of the journey, but Quick only gets nervous when they approach Cloudstreet itself. This implies that Quick knows deep down that he might belong at Cloudstreet after all, but that he's unwilling to actually return or think about it consciously. The man asking Quick if he's coming with him confirms that the man is some sort of supernatural presence urging Quick to return home, or at least an elaborate hallucination.



This observation about how the Lambs could have ended up like the Blunts foreshadows a later revelation Quick has about how trauma shapes people. Even his own trauma has already caught up with him, as he falls back into his newspaper clipping habit and fixates on misery yet again. The images dancing around his bed are another connection to his past and the supernatural forces apparently following him. Despite trying his best to stay independent and ignore these signs pointing him back to Cloudstreet, he's already living with a family member again, and is living a very similar life to the one he had before.



In the moments before Quick nearly crashes into the speeding train, he echoes his father Lester in an interesting way. Neither of them are particularly religious anymore, but both of them automatically think of appropriate Bible verses in times of stress, without meaning to. Earlier, Lester thought of the prodigal son as he hoped that Quick would return, and now Quick is mentally reciting Bible verses in what could have been his final moments. Years after Quick became independent and left his family behind, he still has more in common with the other Lambs than he realizes.



Quick spends most of his free week cleaning and fixing up Earl's old boat, and towards the end of the week he sets out with it to go fishing on the **river**. He can't help but remember the night that Fish almost drowned as he walks down the same beach, but he tries to ignore the thought. After trying to relax out on the water for a bit, he casts a line and immediately feels a tug. He pulls up the fish and finds that it's two fish, one biting the tail of the other. He lowers his hook into the water again and gets another immediate catch, with somehow more fish this time. The silver-scaled fish multiply each time, practically jumping into the boat on their own and almost filling it completely.

Eventually, Quick tries to be sensible despite the impossibility of what's happening. He starts rowing for the shore with his boat brimming with fish, and he spots a Black man seemingly walking on the water. As Quick reaches the shallows, all of the fish cough up blood and the boat sinks along with the fish. The Black man is on the shore when Quick reaches it, and the man seems to be holding back a laugh. Quick ignores him and walks past, but he keeps catching inexplicable glimpses of the Black man on his long drive home.

As Quick tries to sleep that night, his head is swimming with visions of his family and of the unfortunate victims from the pictures on his wall. The trip home from the **river** seemed to take three hours, despite it only being a 30-minute drive. He doesn't feel like he's going insane, but he knows that something feels off, making him unsure how to feel. Quick calls out in the night, and Fish seems to somehow hear it all the way in **Cloudstreet**. Fish lets out a terrible cry himself, waking the entire house.

In the morning, Earl and his wife find that Quick is glowing like a light bulb, and he seems unable to stop crying. They give him food and water and do what they can to get rid of the bizarre condition, but Quick continues to glow even brighter, against all reason. After deciding that a doctor is out of the question, Earl's wife demands that they bring Quick to Perth, insisting that he "needs his own." They take Quick into their truck (along with some pigs in the bed, to be delivered later) and set off for **Cloudstreet**. Earl warns that Oriel will probably be angry with them, but his wife tells him that it doesn't matter; there's no other choice.

Once again, Quick's circumstances happen to lead him back to a river, reminding him of the accident that still haunts him years later. But trying to banish his trauma from his mind no longer works, as yet another supernatural event inevitably reminds him of Fish—the brother he left behind. Another miracle happens to a Lamb, but only to remind him of who he is and what's truly important to him. Ironically, the river now gives Quick a bounty of fish—more than he could ever need—where it had once taken Fish from him. This adds another layer to the symbol of the river, making it not just a source of death and tragedy, but also of revelations and gifts.



The fishes' bloody demise reminds Quick that the river can take away just as easily as it can give. Meanwhile, the reappearance of the mysterious Black man from before signals that whatever spiritual entity is following Quick has doubled its efforts. The supernatural forces calling Quick home are finally refusing to let him continue living this way. Instead, he must once again face what happened all those years ago and return to his family. The Black man's held-back laughter suggests to Quick just how futile it is to try avoiding his fate.



At this point, all the spiritual forces conspiring to bring Quick home converge and force him to face the truth. The fact that Fish can hear Quick cry out confirms that these aren't just hallucinations. In this moment, any possibility of Quick staying away from Cloudstreet gives way to an overwhelming sense of inevitability. He can no longer run from his trauma or his family, as those visions of himself were running. In this moment, he knows he must become Quick Lamb again.



Despite the interference of supernatural forces making Quick glow and giving him visions, returning to Cloudstreet is ultimately what Quick wants. The supernatural elements in this situation aren't coercing Quick to go somewhere he despises. Rather, they're only showing him what he's been trying to block out of his mind: he wants to return to Cloudstreet, and he quite possibly belongs there. It may be difficult to face Fish again and return to what he ran away from, but Quick knows deep down that there's really no avoiding it. As Earl's wife says, he needs his own.



CHAPTER 7

Earl and his wife bring Quick Lamb home to **Cloudstreet** on the morning of Hattie's wedding. Before they arrive, everyone bustles frantically about the house to get ready for the big event, while Fish laughs nonstop and keeps saying Quick's name. Lester and Oriel answer the front door to find Earl on their doorstep; he lets them know that he's brought Quick home. Oriel immediately rushes out and pulls open the truck door to see her son, who's sleeping and still glowing. Oriel stoically dismisses Lester's overjoyed comments, admitting that she's happy Quick has returned but maintaining her rushed pace as she tries to focus on one thing at a time.

Hattie's wedding takes place at an Anglican church, and Hattie comments on how it doesn't seem like a "proper" church, with its fancy stained-glass windows and décor. Oriel feels strangely lonely during the ceremony, but she cries and hugs her daughter afterwards, saying that she's losing children. Geoffrey Birch reminds Oriel that she's gained a son, and she vaguely agrees. Oriel tells the other Lambs to behave themselves at the feast, and as Earl and his wife drive off with their pigs still in tow, Lester comments that they're "not bad for a pair of relatives." Oriel says that they'll see them in heaven, and the family feels a quiet sense of happiness wash over them.

Quick Lamb continues to glow for a week as his family tries to nurse him back to health. He's cool to the touch, he drinks water but doesn't eat anything, and his skin seems to have a slight iridescent sheen to it. Four days after he comes home, Lester and Oriel sit on the back porch and talk to each other like they haven't for years. They talk about Quick, and Lester wishes he knew what to believe in. He tells Oriel that she's gotten mean, and he wonders if the war did that to her. She tells him that everything is war, explaining how she refuses to let the currents of life carry her where they may. She's determined to fight back against fate and improve things, and she considers life to be a constant battle for something better.

Oriel tells Lester that she doesn't feel like a winner, despite her fighting spirit. Lester reminds her that she lives in a huge **house**, runs a shop, and commands great respect from her family and the community, but Oriel dismisses these accomplishments as "worldly things." Lester asks her why she still lives in the tent, and Oriel asks him why Quick glows, or why the house itself seems to act so strangely. She doesn't attempt to explain the strange goings-on in her life, including her own behavior.

Quick's return on the day of Hattie's wedding is a significant coincidence, as it means the household will have lost and gained a member all at once. While Hattie prepares to move away with Geoffrey Birch after the wedding—becoming more independent from her family—Quick comes back from his independent life to rejoin his family at last. Oriel's stoic reaction to Quick's return speaks volumes about her conflicting feelings on this morning. She's likely just as overjoyed as Lester is to see Quick again, but as always, she considers it her responsibility to keep a level head and focus on the task at hand. She isn't letting herself celebrate yet precisely because she knows how excited she is.



The Lambs' comments about the fancy church harken back to their more religious days, illustrating how they still hold onto some of their beliefs and attitudes about how a church should look. Oriel's distant interaction with Geoffrey Birch implies that in her mind, the son she's gained today is Quick, not Geoffrey. Overall, the wedding is a bright moment of unity for the Lamb family, as they share in the joy of Hattie's marriage and, implicitly, Quick's return. The remark about seeing relatives in heaven shows that Oriel is still willing to express religious ideas, whether she means them literally or not. In this moment, the specifics of her beliefs are secondary to her joy.



In this conversation with Lester, Oriel defines her worldview in clear and uncompromising terms. She puts herself entirely at odds with people like Sam Pickles, who seem content to drift through life and let fate and luck carry them where it may. Instead, she sees everything as a battle that can be won—a choice that can be made. Even if the trauma of her past was something that happened by chance, she views it as just another obstacle to overcome. This speech is the culmination of all of her development over the years living at Cloudstreet.



Oriel's mention of "worldly things" reveals that she still has some remnants of Christian faith left in her. Her dismissal of her accomplishments is also a sign that they don't ultimately make her happy or bring her peace. Instead, she's left wondering about the bizarre and seemingly supernatural events that affect her life. In a world full of mystery, it's difficult for her to feel like she ever has full control over anything, even herself.



Oriel explains how she's always felt she doesn't belong anywhere; she considers her own mind to be her only country, and she admits she can't replace it with a real nation. She feels that she's lost control of her mind since Fish almost drowned, and she tells Lester she doesn't believe in love; she's simply stuck with it. Laughing quietly to herself, she tells Lester that she'd live in the tent at all hours if she could, so that she could carry on fighting the real war of ideas and beliefs within her mind. Quick Lamb gradually stops glowing after a week, and he sleeps for 32 hours straight as Fish and a mysterious pale woman take turns keeping watch.

A week after the wedding, Sam Pickles comes home bloodied and bruised. He explains to Dolly that he owes quite a bit of money to a man from the union, and that he's most likely in deep trouble. They hear a knock on the door. Sam grabs a fireplace poker and approaches the door cautiously, thinking it's the man who's come to collect his debt by force. Instead, it's Lester at the door. Lester asks Sam about the trouble he's in and offers to help him lie low, telling him to bring some blankets out to the truck. Rose watches the two of them leave, figuring her father must be in some bad trouble.

Lester drives Sam out into a dry and quiet stretch of country, and their conversation gradually becomes tense. Sam initially hesitates to reveal how much he owes, but Lester eventually gets the truth out of him. Several months ago, the union paid off Sam's debt to the bookies at the racetrack: 200 quid in total, which Sam still owes to the union. Sam explains that they'd accept the payment in full and leave him alone afterwards, and Lester tersely promises to pay off the debt collectors when they arrive, telling Sam to lie low in the beachside shack he's brought him to. Sam asks what Lester's getting out of this, and Lester angrily answers that he's doing it to keep thugs away from his family. He leaves Sam in the shack with basic supplies and a revolver, just in case.

Here, Oriel expands her war metaphor to include her own mind as well. It's possible that her experience with running G. M. Clay out of business forced her to realize that the only battle that really matters is the one in her head. Oriel's war is one of choices, morals, and consequences, rather than fighting external threats. Ultimately, she's fighting the trauma that's made her feel a loss of control. The ghosts in the library continue to represent this trauma, which affects the entire family, but haunts Oriel most of all.



It's notable that Lester offers to help Sam lie low before he even knows the details of what happened. This indicates that Lester is still willing to go out of his way to help others, even when he has plenty of problems of his own. Lester explains his motives before long, but it's still possible that he isn't being entirely honest and just wants to get Sam out of trouble because the two of them are friends.



Sam's reliance on luck once again backfires, but this time, he has a friend to break his fall. Despite his frustration with Sam, Lester is still making a significant effort to help. His excuse about keeping thugs away from his family might only be part of the reason Lester is going out of his way to take care of Sam's debt. Although the house and its families are still divided, Lester treats Sam like a family member in this situation. Thus Lester's anger with Sam is exactly what makes his offer to help so powerful; it shows that in some ways, Lester considers the Pickles to be a second family.



Red Lamb reflects on how she likes Beryl Lee but still feels a bit sorry for her. She notices Beryl gradually getting paler like fading wallpaper, and she assumes that Beryl's quiet and subdued moods are a result of not having a man of her own anymore. Red thinks Beryl doesn't know how lucky she is to not be tied down by a husband. No one has explained to Quick who Beryl Lee is, but he often notices her sitting on the end of his bed and staring at him in the morning. One morning he thinks he feels her sitting there, but he realizes it's Oriel this time. They awkwardly catch up with each other, and Oriel asks what he saw that compelled him to come home. Quick admits he saw himself running.

Lon Lamb, now a young man and a plumber's apprentice, is in a foul mood as he comes downstairs for breakfast and listens to Fish spinning bowls on the table for fun. Lester tells Lon to stop griping about the noise, but Lon calls Fish a monster who should be "put away." Fury rises in Lester, but Fish cries out, telling Lester not to hit him and Lon. Oriel steps in and breaks up the scene, with Quick following close behind her. As Lon sulkily leaves for work, Quick catches up with Fish and his other siblings, and their joking around like old times makes even Oriel crack a smile. After checking on the pig who still lives in the backyard, Quick runs into Beryl Lee, who awkwardly introduces herself and says she's heard a lot about him.

Lester walks into the Pickles kitchen and lets Dolly know that Sam is lying low and safe. He tells her to send the debt collectors to him if they come calling, telling her there won't be a fight and that he could pay off the debt with his own family's savings. Flirting, Dolly asks him if he's really only doing this to buy his family's safety. Without his input, she sits on his lap and kisses him, rubbing her hands all over him. He gives into it for a few moments as they caress each other, but he's angry with her and himself when it's over. Dolly tells him he'd been waiting years for that, and he leaves in a huff, telling her not to use this against him.

Now that he's finally conscious and level-headed again, Quick has the space to process the bizarre events that led him back home. Like his mother, Quick seems to be accepting supernatural occurrences as a given, choosing not to question how they happen or what causes them. Instead, what's important to him is the message that his strange visions gave him; it's less about the "how" and more about the "why." After these experiences, Quick is no longer running from his family or trying to become completely independent. He might not know exactly why the universe led him back to Cloudstreet, but he implicitly accepts that he's meant to be there. Meanwhile, Red's thoughts about Beryl Lee reveal that Red wants independence not just from her own family, but from traditional family structures like marriage in general.



Quick's happy reunion with Fish and the other Lamb siblings is a sign that Quick truly is meant to be at Cloudstreet at this point in his life. All of his struggles and visions have paid off, as he becomes happier and makes the Lambs happy just by being present again. Despite this, Lester's anger towards Lon implies that the traumatic wounds of Fish's accident are still fresh in Lester's mind. However, his angry response to Lon calling Fish a monster demonstrates that Lester still loves Fish and supports Fish's right to live a happy life in his childlike state.



This incident highlights the fact that Dolly is still fundamentally unhappy with Sam as her husband, even so many years after his accident. Sam's latest gambling troubles have only made this worse, and her infidelity is her way of escaping from a marriage she feels trapped in. Lester almost surrenders to the same impulse, as Oriel has been aloof and emotionally distant from him for years. But ultimately, Lester can't escape from his marriage in the same way that Dolly can, as his guilt prevents him from betraying Oriel.



In the beachside shack, Sam feels his stump tingle and knows that the Shifty Shadow is about; he can feel it stronger than ever, and he feels sure his luck is about to take a turn for the better. He hears a car approach and prepares the revolver, but it's only Lester at the door. He tells Sam that he's brought the money, and Sam tells him he has a plan. Sam doesn't want to just turn in the money to the debt collectors; he wants to gamble with it at the two-up game later, as he seems to know for sure his luck will hold fast. Lester is exasperated at this idea, but he knows he's going to hand over the money anyway, and he'd feel too guilty to tell Sam no after what happened with Dolly.

As they set up the shop that morning, Beryl and Elaine talk about Lester's absence, which Beryl noticed by looking into his room earlier. Elaine is afraid she might end up like Beryl herself one day, depressingly lonely but still dependent on others. Quick lies in bed with Fish pressed up against him and tries not to feel embarrassed, as he feels as though Fish has forgiven him for running away. Fish mentions that Lester left, and he says that "everyone goes." Before long, Rose looks outside and notices Lester arriving in the truck, without Sam. Dolly meets him on the front porch and he tells her that they're all probably going to be in deep trouble by the end of tonight. Dolly remarks that people like him aren't used to being in trouble.

Lester goes to bed with the curtains closed and sleeps until noon. He doesn't get out of bed when he wakes up, as he's still reeling from how he got into this mess and gave Sam all that money. He listens to the noises downstairs in the kitchen and thinks to himself that he misses having children; he wishes he could still mess around with them and make them laugh. Quick soon lets himself into Lester's room and asks if he's alright. The two of them have a subdued but friendly conversation. Lester admits he lent a lot of money to Sam and is afraid Oriel already knows, and he tells Quick about his recurring dream where his father carries him over dark, rushing water.

Quick runs into Beryl as he leaves the room, and she tells him she'll go in to see if Lester needs anything. Lester is nearly undressed as Beryl enters, and he quickly covers himself and irritably asks what she wants. He's always respected her and her hard work, but he wonders why she's stayed at **Cloudstreet** for so long. Beryl tells Lester that she knows about what happened between him and Dolly. Lester furiously tries to deny that Beryl knows anything about it, but it's no use. He tells Beryl that he's broke if she intends to blackmail him, but Beryl simply wants him to stop seeing Dolly, as Dolly's a "low woman" and Oriel deserves better from him. Lester says that's fair enough and agrees before dismissing her.

Two different factors create dramatic tension in this moment: Sam's all-or-nothing gamble, and Lester's secret concerning himself and Dolly. Normally, Lester would be more inclined to push Sam towards a more responsible decision, but Lester's sense of guilt once again compels him to act differently. Lester's willingness to let Sam gamble with the debt money is also a sign that Lester is still looking for something to believe in. It's true that Sam's luck has held strong once or twice before, but ultimately, remorse over the encounter with Dolly is the main reason Lester gives Sam free rein with the money.



Oddly, Beryl Lee represents the conflicting themes of both family and independence in this moment. While Beryl is surrounded by people she relies on, she's also separate from them, in her own lonely world. Her casual mention of peeking into Lester's room indicates that she's keeping an eye on him, possibly for suspicious reasons. Meanwhile, Dolly's remarks to Lester are laced with bitterness, as she teases him for having morals in a world that doesn't seem fair anyway.



In this moment, there's nothing standing between Lester and his growing sense of guilt. Between the incident with Dolly and the money he gave to Sam, he feels as though he's let everyone down, including himself. His nostalgic reflections on making his children laugh only make him feel worse in the present, highlighting his sense of failure. His conversation with Quick lightens his burden somewhat, as they bond over the difficulty of comparing themselves to Oriel. Sharing their pain and bewilderment with each other seems to make both of them feel a bit better, reinforcing the theme of shared humanity.



While Lester has been letting his guilt fester inside him, this is the first time that someone else has made him answer for what happened with Dolly. His anger at Beryl indicates that he still hasn't made peace with what happened, but he nonetheless accepts her advice. This confirms that he isn't planning on surrendering to Dolly's advances again. With that event behind him, he can at least diminish his guilt and begin to forgive himself.



Oriel watches Beryl by the window and wonders why Beryl has been growing so pale and withdrawn lately. It seems like Beryl might fade completely if she keeps this up, and Oriel guesses Beryl still longs for a man's company. Oriel swears she can see the trees and the sky through Beryl, as if she's nearly transparent. She tells Beryl to take a break, but Beryl insists she's fine. Meanwhile, Sam wanders happily around Kings Park with the roll of money in his pocket, still feeling lucky and cheerfully anticipating the two-up game tonight.

Beryl enters Lester's room once again and lets him know that she's leaving **Cloudstreet** for good tonight. Confused and bewildered by all the day's strange events, Lester asks her why, and she tells him she has feelings too. He assumes she has feelings for Quick, but she admits she's actually been attracted to Lester all this time. It's become too much for her, and she's decided to move to a convent and become a nun. She had been watching Quick because she wanted to ask him questions about religious subjects; she assumes he saw some things after she saw him glowing. Beryl tells Lester that she loves the church and, in a way, she's getting married again, keeping promises to it just as Lester keeps his promises to Oriel.

Oriel wishes Beryl the best and tells her that she'll always be welcome at **Cloudstreet**. The Lambs have a huge dinner with her before she leaves, and Lester gives a toast to Beryl, telling her how grateful they've been for her help and how they've come to consider her part of the family. Beryl gives her blessing before Lester drives her away. When he returns, Oriel surprises everyone by telling them she's going prawn fishing, despite the cold weather and prawns being out of season. Everyone says they're too busy to go with her, but she eventually convinces Quick to tag along. He mutters about this being silly, and Oriel tells him that if everyone else in the house can be silly all day, surely she's allowed to be silly for one night.

Out on a boat in the cool, dark water of the **river**, Oriel and Quick talk about the guilt that they share over Fish's condition. Quick becomes angry at his mother's questions and assumptions about how he feels, and he's surprised and a little frightened at her sudden openness. The two of them discuss the matter like adults, as they never really have before. Oriel knows that Quick blames himself for failing to save Fish, and she insists that she knows what survivor's guilt feels like. She asks Quick what's wrong with her, and she wonders if she's been a bad mother.

Beryl becoming semi-transparent is another example of the blurred lines between reality and the supernatural. This is a feature of many works of magical realism, where strange and supernatural events are framed as commonplace, blending seamlessly into the narrative. In this case, Beryl's loneliness and trauma aren't just making her pale and withdrawn; they're literally causing her to fade away. This imagery makes Beryl's struggle stand out more, and supports the possibility that Sam's lucky feelings might have real consequences.



Despite being surrounded by people who appreciate her, Beryl reveals that she doesn't feel she belongs in the community of Cloudstreet. But rather than living a lonely, independent life on her own, she's choosing to join a new family. The community of the church might give her the comfort she needs to move past the trauma of losing her husband, while keeping her away from the guilt she feels about her attraction to Lester, or any other man. Beryl's choice introduces Lester to the idea that a person can find happiness and inner peace in religion, even after a great tragedy.



The Lamb family's toast to Beryl Lee is a sign that they're willing to expand the definition of family to include people who aren't related by blood, but by shared values and friendship. With Oriel in such a strange mood, it's difficult for Quick to resist the chance to reconnect with her after all these years. Now that he's accepted the fact that he'll always be a Lamb, he's eager to spend time with his mother and find out what she's thinking. Significantly, this is also the first time Oriel herself has suggested going to the river. This is a sign that she might finally be willing to let herself relax, at least for a short while.



This conversation gives both Quick and Oriel the opportunity to share the weight of their trauma with each other. Oriel's openness indicates that—just like Quick—she's tired of running and hiding from the issues that have been gnawing at her for years. In this moment, she's ready to face reality, and assumes that Quick will tell her the truth. While Quick is uncomfortable with this idea at first, he soon becomes just as candid as his mother. Both of them find that talking openly about their guilt is frightening, but also refreshing.



Quick admits that Oriel doesn't have enough fun, and that she's bossy because she always seems to know the correct way of doing things. She laughs and agrees with him, apparently glad that he sees things the same way she does. She tells him that the strong are here to look after the weak, and the weak are here to teach the strong. Quick asks what the other Lambs are here to teach her, but she admits it's too early to say for sure. After Oriel dodges Quick's question about what she'd do if she were rich, hundreds and hundreds of prawns suddenly leap into the nets. Astonished and amused by their luck, Oriel and Quick have to use most of their clothes to serve as extra bags for all the prawns they haul home.

At the two-up game, the pennies fly into the air and Sam holds his breath, feeling like the only sober man in the room. He wins back the two hundred pounds he put up and quite a bit more, and even someone who hated him would have been touched by the sight of his ecstatic joy as he gets this incredible lucky break. When he comes home with his pockets full of cash, it feels like he, Dolly, and Rose are fresh new people for a moment. Oriel invites the Pickleses over to the Lambs' kitchen to share the prawn feast, and Sam winks at Lester, reassuring him that the gamble paid off. Meanwhile, in the library, Fish talks to a ghostly shadow girl until Quick calls him down.

CHAPTER 8

A twenty-four-year-old Rose Pickles gets home to **Cloudstreet** after another night of dancing at the Embassy. She finds it thrilling to dance with and talk to the young men of the city, but she always ends up coming home alone anyway. She can hardly imagine herself admitting to a potential boyfriend that her family lives in half of this big old house. She falls asleep to the sound of someone crying; it seems someone's always crying in the house at some time or another. She's come into her own as a woman at this point, though she still has trouble thinking of herself as an adult. She continues to work at the switchboard at Bairds and enjoys harmless mischief with Darleen, Merle, and Alma.

Rather than being surprised or offended by what Quick tells her, Oriel is amused to discover that her family views her in the same way she views herself. This prompts her to double down on her philosophy of staying both humble and proud, as she embraces her role as the Lambs' caretaker. Her comment about the weak and the strong reinforces this idea, and she seems happy to count herself among the strong, even if it makes for a difficult life. The sudden arrival of prawns is yet another supernatural event that reflects the family's emotional state. The river took Fish's mind and traumatized the Lambs, but now it's giving a miraculous bounty back to them as they face their past openly and honestly.



This moment of unbridled joy shared between the two families of Cloudstreet marks a sharp departure from the tension and division that have defined the house for years. Everyone's luck seems to smile on them at once, especially Sam's. The bounty brought about by the families' luck brings them together and reminds them that they're not so different from each other. This is the first time since Guy Fawkes Night that both families have mingled to enjoy each other's company. However, just like on that night, a sense of lingering trauma remains in the background. The presence of the ghosts at this happy moment foreshadows that there are still disturbances and difficulties in the families' future.



At this point, Rose has mostly achieved the independent lifestyle she's been craving for years, though there are still some complications. While she spends less and less time with her family and more time meeting young men in the city, her hesitation to bring those men to Cloudstreet reveals an underlying discomfort with herself. She hasn't struck a balance between family life and independent life; rather, these two sides of her are in constant conflict. Her enjoyment of her new life is diminished only by the idea that her home is still the strange old house on Cloud Street that reminds her of a past she wants to forget.



Rose finds that she's much sharper and more confident when talking to customers through her headset, and she uses this to her advantage to arrange meetings with young gentlemen who call the department store and take an interest in her. She tells them to meet her at a large pillar on a specific street; this way, she can walk by in the crowd, size them up anonymously, and keep walking if she doesn't like the looks of them. She has limited success in dating, and she finds herself disappointed in the "perfect gentlemen" who take her to the movies. But even if she can't keep up with the wild romantic antics of her coworkers, she's still grateful that she isn't at **Cloudstreet** most of the time and gets to enjoy movies and dancing.

One day, Rose receives a call from a man whose resonant voice excites her in a new way. She flirts and messes around with him, redirecting his call to several different departments after he insists that he's waiting on a very late order of Earl Gray tea to arrive. But he plays along and calls her back after she hangs up on him, asking her if she wants to meet somewhere and telling her she seems like a smart girl. She tells him to meet her at the same place where she meets the other gentlemen, by the pillar. Rose's coworkers tease her about all this, but her boss steps in and tries to keep them all on task.

After work, Rose sees him waiting for her by the pillar and her immediate impression is that he's a very distinctive and impressive-looking young man, quite different from the men she's dated so far. She's almost too nervous to approach him, but when she manages to introduce herself, he makes a very forward compliment about her appearance and she feels her heart swell with excitement. The two of them go out to lunch and chat, and the young man, Toby Raven, tries to guess facts about Rose and her life but only gets a few of them correct. Rose, meanwhile, guesses that Toby is a reporter. They arrange a date for Friday.

On Friday night, Toby takes Rose to an exclusive restaurant called Maria's for their date. The place seems to be brimming with people speaking many different languages, and all of them seem to know Toby, who apparently comes here often. Rose feels overwhelmed and intimidated by all this, worried that she might be out of her depth and telling Toby that the two of them aren't the same. Toby smiles and tries to keep her confidence up, telling her that her earlier guess was correct: he's a journalist. They're both delighted to learn that the other one reads, but Rose doesn't remember the authors of her favorite stories when he asks. Toby lists several high-profile authors as Rose tries to make herself comfortable.

Rose's lifestyle reflects the path she wants her life to follow at this stage of her development. She's determined to leave her family and all of its baggage behind her, becoming a person who isn't associated with Cloudstreet any more than she has to be. Her interest in romance reveals that she might be interested in starting a family of her own, but at this point, she wants her new family and her old family to be separate and independent from each other. In some ways, Rose is trying to move on with her life, but in others, she's running from people who care about her.



This encounter is a sign of how far Rose has come since her childhood days at Cloudstreet. Now that she's living independently for the most part, she's free to enjoy new possibilities, romantic or otherwise. Similar to Lucy Wentworth and Quick, this date represents Rose's introduction into a more adult world.



Toby's incorrect guesses about Rose's life are hints that his first impressions of her might be wrong. But this minor disconnect doesn't discourage Rose, and her correct guess about Toby Raven's line of work suggests that she's more insightful than he is. Despite how much Toby intimidates Rose, she seems to have a clearer understanding of the situation so far. This highlights how Rose is beginning to thrive in her independent lifestyle, though it's notable that she's still excited by the idea of forming a new connection with someone who would probably make her more dependent on him if they established a life together.



While Rose and Toby bond over their shared love of literature, it's worth noting their different approaches to the subject. Toby listing high-profile authors as his favorites makes him come across as educated and sophisticated, which seems to be his intention. Everything Toby does during his date is an attempt to build himself up and make himself seem cultured. Rose, meanwhile, only remembers the stories themselves, as knowing the authors wouldn't be much use to her. What seems like a point of connection between Toby and Rose ironically brings their differences into focus. Nonetheless, Rose remains excited to experience this independent lifestyle, even if it means she has to engage with Toby on his level.



After dinner, Toby drives Rose around town, and she's too full of wine to feel too worried about his reckless driving habits. They look out over the dark **river** in his car, and Toby calls Perth one of the strangest towns in the world, as it's nothing but a small town that's ambitious enough to want to become a city. Rose is dazzled by his talk in spite of herself, and she thinks of her own life as mundane and simple compared to the glamorous things he talks about. They kiss in his car and later have sex in his flat, and Rose is ecstatic. After the slightly disappointing sex, Rose almost feels that she wants to cry in the sad silence, but she finds herself feeling grateful instead.

Rose feels sure that she's in love with Toby by the time summer rolls around. During their months together, he takes her to dances and sophisticated gatherings, but Rose figures that it's mostly Toby's family name that earns him admission to these events. She goes out of her way to avoid meeting him at **Cloudstreet**, as she still wants to keep her bizarre home and family a secret from him. Toby writes poetry that seems like awful nonsense to Rose, and his mood darkens when publishers turn down his work. The two of them enjoy reading together, and Toby reads quite a bit about sex, despite his performance in bed never meeting his own high expectations. While he has his flaws and doesn't appreciate her speaking up much when they're among his artistic friends, she feels she loves him all the same.

In the autumn, Rose discovers that Toby is writing a book of his poetry. She starts typing it out for him, doubting if anyone will really buy and read the kind of esoteric poetry that he's writing. One evening, she tells him that he's not a poet and she's not a typist, suggesting that they go out to the football game and reminding him of what he said to her about foolish ambitions. He laughs condescendingly at the idea, and Rose heads home. Things become quiet between the two of them for a few days, and she feels disconnected from the girls at work, who still lovingly tease her about Toby's highbrow pursuits.

Rose struggles to fall asleep, as she's experiencing a bad period and hears a girl crying in the **house**. She knows that no one who lives in the house anymore is young enough to cry in a voice like that, but she shrugs it off. Dolly walks in and shows Rose a postcard from Ted, telling her that he lives in South Australia and has married the girl he got pregnant. Rose reflects on how she's an aunt now, and Dolly comes to terms with the fact that she's a grandmother. She cries and tells her daughter she's old, and Rose absently comforts her.

As Toby tells Rose about how strange Perth is, he might be projecting his own insecurities onto the town. Toby is an unimportant journalist by his own admission, but he has grand literary ambitions that dazzle Rose. This makes him seem similar to his own disparaging description of Perth, but Rose is too enamored to notice. From her point of view, his ambitions are noble ones, as this is what the outside world is supposed to be like. While Toby intimidates Rose, she's excited by the challenge of becoming independent and sharing in his lofty goals. However, her impulse to cry after they have sex is a sign that there might be trouble ahead in their relationship.



During these months, the first cracks begin to show in Rose's perfect mental image of Toby Raven. While the two of them grow closer and continue to share in their love of reading, their attitudes about literature continue to diverge. Rose seems to read because she enjoys the stories, while Toby's reading appears to be more of a status symbol, or a means to an end. He reads and writes to make money, to impress his friends, or to be better in bed, but never simply for the love of reading. Despite this, Rose shows maturity by staying patient with Toby, believing that their differences are an inevitable part of forming a relationship. She's still determined to live an independent life where she decides for herself if Toby is right for her.



At this point, Rose's independent spirit begins to clash with Toby's preconceived notions about her. She isn't ashamed to let herself relax and unwind at a football game, but Toby considers this beneath her, putting the two of them at odds once again. After this, Rose has to reflect on what it really means to be independent, as it seems she'd have to change aspects of herself to please Toby. His strange and esoteric poetry is another indication of the deeper disconnect between him and Rose.



The young girl crying in the house is another sign that Cloudstreet is haunted, although these strange occurrences are usually only background noise to the preoccupied families. Meanwhile, Dolly still misses her youth and resents Rose for this reason, but things seem to have calmed down between Dolly and Rose lately. This isn't because they've made peace with each other, necessarily, but simply because they're going through the motions of family obligations as Rose becomes increasingly distant from the goings-on at Cloudstreet.



Rose wakes up in the evening to the sound of Sam knocking on her door, telling her that a young man's here to see her. She discovers that it's Toby; he found her by asking the other girls on the switchboard where she lives. He excitedly explains that one of his poems has been accepted, and that he's been invited to the editor's house for a party tonight. Rose congratulates him but still hurls plenty of sarcasm his way. All the same, she agrees to come along, and the two of them arrive at the Dalkeith mansion that night. Toby explains that the gathering is swarming with university people and others from what he calls the "usual literary establishment."

At the lavish gathering, Toby spots a group of men huddled together and rushes forward to join them. Rose does her best not to seem flustered, but she already feels uncomfortable and ready to leave. After some discussion among the men, it quickly becomes clear to Rose and Toby that there's been some mistake; they contacted the wrong Toby, his poem was never accepted, and he isn't actually meant to be here. Nonetheless, Toby desperately pretends to be who they think he is, following their suggestions by telling them he's planning on writing a comical piece about a woman who lives in a tent, and a famous writer and a shopgirl. He begs Rose to tell them about his idea as she storms out of the mansion and walks down to the dark river.

During the past few months, Quick hasn't known what to do with himself now that he's back home. He feels that **Cloudstreet** itself wants him to stay there, but it's hard for him to imagine why. In the summer, Quick finds the same old boat that Lester bought—the one that Quick and Fish tried to row all the way home in. While out on the river at night, it suddenly occurs to him that he could catch fish to sell in the shop for a living. Oriel likes the idea, and the job makes Quick feel more useful, though not necessarily satisfied with his place in the world.

Fish often asks to accompany Quick on his fishing trips, but Oriel still doesn't like Fish being too near the water. Fish reminds Quick of the time their boat sailed among the stars, and Quick realizes that he had somehow let himself forget that memory until now. He pretends not to remember, but he reflects on how he and maybe his whole family often ignore or accept the strange occurrences that happen around them. Disappointed that he can't tag along, Fish often messes around in the backyard instead, and Quick hears him talking to the pig.

It's possible that Rose only agrees to attend the party with Toby because she still wants to get away from her family at Cloudstreet. As much as Toby has irritated her lately, Rose would still rather spend time with him than with her mother. Additionally, the party also seems to confirm that Toby has talent and potential, which Rose was beginning to doubt. This party gives Rose the opportunity to give Toby another chance and believe that she can still be happy with him.



This dramatic tipping point ends Toby and Rose's relationship once and for all. From his desperate attempts to turn the details of Rose's life into a comical story, it becomes clear that Toby only cares about impressing powerful people. He'll do anything to climb the social ladder—even mock Rose in front of the party's guests for his own gain. Ironically, this reveals that Toby was depending on Rose far more than she depended on him. She had looked up to him as the herald of her new life away from Cloudstreet, but now her pursuit of independence has left her alone and disappointed.



It's been some time since Quick has accepted that his place is at Cloudstreet, but he still hasn't figured out what exactly all of those visions and signs were trying to tell him. He knows he needs his family and vice versa, but it still isn't clear to him where he fits into the picture. While he's given up on complete independence at this point, he's still searching for a specific purpose within the family he belongs to.



Oriel's reluctance to allow Fish near the water implies that the pain of his accident is still fresh in her mind after all these years. On the other side of the spectrum, Quick forgetting about what happened during his childhood boat ride with Fish is a sign that weird and supernatural events are woven seamlessly into the Lambs' lives at this point. Like his mother, Quick doesn't attempt to question what these events might mean. From the sea of stars to Quick's glowing to the talking pig, strangeness is simply a fact of life now.



Lester accompanies Quick on the **river** some nights, and Quick is grateful that his father is much quieter out on the water than he is in the house. One night, Lester once again reminisces about the recurring dream he has, about his father and the rushing water. Quick interrupts and tells him the dream isn't true, but Lester tearfully defends himself, telling Quick he knows it happened, even if it's just a dream. Lester admits that all he's really wanted is to be loved—by Oriel, by his family, and even by God. He feels outdone by Oriel, but he's unambitious anyway; he only wants to be a good man. Quick agrees, but Lester points out that it's all too easy to be a good man out on the river, where there are no other people to answer to.

Quick continues his fishing work throughout the year, and one night he finally decides to let Fish come with him. He stipulates that Fish is tied to his seat in the boat and wears a makeshift belt of buoys, just in case he falls in the water. Out on the dark **river**, Quick idly asks Fish what they're going to do with themselves. Quick asks Fish if he's happy, and Fish says yes, but he seems to know that Quick is generally unhappy. Fish admires the water, seeming almost entranced by it, and Quick asks if Fish remembers the day he drowned. Their one-sided conversation is cut short when Quick hears someone crying on the bank nearby.

The crying person turns out to be Rose, who's just fled from the mansion party and from Toby Raven. Rose blows her nose and wonders aloud to Quick if **Cloudstreet** will ever leave either of them alone. Quick offers to give her a ride, and she says it doesn't matter where they go. She tries to compose herself but ends up sobbing heavily and uncontrollably as Quick rows on. Eventually she falls asleep. When she wakes up, they're still on the **river** at night, though Fish has fallen asleep under his seat. Quick and Rose make small talk and drink a bit, as Rose doesn't seem eager to talk about what just happened to her.

Rose asks Quick what happened to Fish to make him the way he is. Quick sighs and doesn't answer, and Rose hates herself for offending him. She apologizes but seems to offend him again when she asks Quick what he's like. He eventually answers that he feels a bit lost, but he wonders why she asked the question. She was only wondering, and she thinks it's strange that she never got to know him after living under the same roof for so many years. Rose reminds him of the time he accidentally hit her with a bag when he ran away from home, and Quick casually remarks that she's grown up to be good-looking. Rose blushes a bit at this, taken aback by how simply and offhandedly he said it.

This conversation mirrors Quick's time with Oriel on the river earlier in the novel. Once again, parent and son are talking openly about their struggles and insecurities, but Lester shows his feelings even more openly than Oriel did. Lester's insistence that his dream really happened—even if it was only a dream—contributes to the theme of supernatural elements seamlessly blending into reality. Just like Lester's Bible stories, his dream of his father means the world to him even if it isn't true in a literal sense. His remark about being a good man also adds a new layer to the conflict between family and independence. He implies that morality can only meaningfully exist in a community, not just in the mind of an individual. In Lester's view, being a good person boils down to being a human among other humans.



History repeats itself once again as Quick and Fish row across the river. Their presence here foreshadows that something significant might be about to take place, for good or ill. Even as an adult, Quick still feels guilty about letting Fish drown, especially now that Fish is also fully grown and still living with his brain damage from the accident. On the other hand, Fish sensing Quick's misery indicates that Fish is still somewhat in tune with his brother's feelings, even though Fish's overall awareness has been stunted.



The coincidence of Quick and Fish showing up on the river at this particular moment is what prompts Rose to wonder if Cloudstreet will ever leave her alone. Similar to how Quick was drawn back home by signs and visions, Rose feels that Cloudstreet somehow wants her back. Her sobbing is an admission that her attempts to live a completely independent life have failed. Rose can't help but feel despair at the idea that she can never truly escape Cloudstreet or her family, as the outside world seems to reject her.



Rose's reactions to Quick are telling, implying that she cares more about his opinion of her than she'd like to admit. She feels guilty for asking him about Fish, and flustered by his remarks about her appearance. Both of these reactions hint that Rose could be developing romantic feelings for Quick, despite her childhood crush on Fish. Meanwhile, Quick is harder to read, as his emotions seem more conflicted at this point. His refusal to answer Rose's question about Fish reveals how the trauma of Fish's accident still hurts Quick years later.



Quick and Rose get to know each other better as they chat. Quick tells Rose that everyone loved Fish before the accident, and Rose can sense the painful and sincere feeling behind his words. She doesn't feel like going home when he asks her about it, so they end up fishing together instead. They work in silence for about an hour, and Rose feels strangely happy despite her anger and despair just a little while ago. She watches Quick work and admires his stoic expression. She asks him about his expression, then suddenly asks if he thinks they'd make a good married couple. Quick throws the beer bottle into the water in angry surprise and they argue a bit over her hypothetical question, but he ends up smiling at her before she asks him once again to answer the question.

Later that night, with Fish asleep in his room, Quick and Rose stumble into **Cloudstreet's** dark library together, brimming with breathy excitement. As they kiss and touch each other, Quick tells her they've gone mad, and that they'll be embarrassed afterwards. Rose tells him that they'll be something else entirely afterwards. They passionately have sex in view of no one but the library's two ghosts who watch invisibly, startled by this display of the living and the young. Quick and Rose are ecstatic. They don't dress and leave the library until daylight, when they're already eager to announce their love to their families.

Oriel doesn't seem to have much to say when Quick tells her he intends to marry Rose Pickles. She simply tells him to light the stove inside and dismisses him. Sam, on the other hand, laughs so loudly at Rose's admission that Quick can hear him from the backyard. Quick tells Lester the news as the two of them unload last night's fish from the truck, and Lester collapses on the floor in surprise. Red congratulates Quick and tells him he doesn't deserve Rose, while Elaine looks angry and jealous as usual. Oriel storms in and tells everyone to be sensible about the news, but she breaks down into tears before long. Rose feels a steely, invincible determination as she breaks the news to her parents, not allowing Dolly's bitter pessimism to put a damper on what she's feeling.

This sudden, romantic shift in the conversation highlights the strange headspace that both Quick and Rose are experiencing at this point. Rather than dwelling on her inability to become fully independent, Rose instead throws herself in the opposite direction by asking Quick about marriage. After all, if independence can't make her happy, maybe starting a family can. She regrets bringing up Quick's trauma, but at the same time, she wonders if sharing their struggles will make it easier for both of them. The suddenness of her question reflects her persistent desire to make her life better as quickly as possible, especially in the wake of the Toby Raven disaster.



Rose's suggestion that this experience will change them turns out to be correct, at least in the short term. By joining together in sudden and unexpected passion, Quick and Rose both discover that their place in the world is simply with each other. Although this revelation doesn't solve all their problems, it does begin to change them for the better. Their first night together is a stark contrast to Quick and Rose's experiences with Lucy Wentworth and Toby Raven, respectively. While their previous romances made them feel uncertain and alienated, it's clear that Quick and Rose have an immediate connection far stronger than anything they've experienced before. The library's ghosts also provide contrast, getting pushed to the sidelines as new love makes old traumas momentarily less important.



It's significant that Quick and Rose aren't trying to keep their love a secret. Not too long ago, Quick or Rose might have tried to distance their romantic affairs from their families, like when Rose tried to keep Toby Raven away from Cloudstreet. But at this point, both of them have given up on complete independence and recognized that their families finding out is both important and inevitable. Oriel is likely weeping over the news because she feels she's going to lose Quick again. Dolly, meanwhile, jealously retains her resentment of Rose at this happy turning point in Rose's youth.



The wedding is held six weeks later. Fish holds the rings as Quick nervously waits for Rose's arrival in the chapel. But after Rose appears with the priest and walks down the aisle, Fish starts bobbing and dancing around as he makes a noise somewhere between singing and speech. The congregation watches silently until he collapses happily to the floor. At the raucous afterparty later on, Quick and Rose watch in astonishment as Oriel approaches Dolly and offers to dance with her. From the look on Oriel's face, "something massive has been summoned" within her to compel her to do this. The two women turn and spin together with surprising grace, and many of the drunk onlookers weep. Fish sleeps outside in the truck the whole time.

The union of Quick and Rose is what compels Oriel to finally swallow her pride and dance with Dolly. While she's gone out of her way to distinguish herself from Dolly and the Pickles family over the years, Oriel now recognizes that the two families can no longer avoid each other. Their dancing represents the possibility that the Lambs and Pickles can make peace with each other and maybe even become one enormous family, though both women still struggle to come to terms with this idea.



CHAPTER 9

Cloudstreet is quiet for days after the wedding, except for the noise of construction workers digging in the street outside to install new water pipes. On the way back from their honeymoon, Quick and Rose discuss their plans for the immediate future. Rose insists she wants a new house of their own that no one's ever lived in, as she's tired of old houses. Quick points out that they'll need a lot more money, and he resolves to find a job or two. Despite Rose's protests, he has his sights set on becoming a policeman. He thinks about all the unfortunate people in photos on his wall, and he likes the idea of fighting evil.

Quick and Rose's plans indicate that they're both beginning to fall back into old habits despite their new lease on life. Rose still wants to leave Cloudstreet and avoid old houses in general, as she holds onto her desire for independence and freedom from her family. Quick, meanwhile, continues to dwell on the newspaper clippings he hung on his wall when he was a child. This reveals that he's still struggling with his own personal trauma and feels an urge to fight the injustices of the world to put his own inner world at peace.



Quick and Rose sign up for a place at the State Housing center, but they choose to live in a small flat until they've saved enough money and until their new house has been built. The flat is behind a house owned by a woman named Mrs. Manners. Rose doesn't like how old the flat is, but they're usually too busy to spend much time there anyway. Rose continues working at Bairds, while Quick makes deliveries in the truck as he trains to become a constable. Rose and the Lambs attend Quick's graduation ceremony and watch with pride as he officially becomes an officer of the law. Afterwards, Rose lets Quick know that she's pregnant.

As they become more independent from their families back at Cloudstreet, Quick and Rose try to adjust to the self-sufficient life they've imagined for themselves. While the other members of the Lamb and Pickles families are sometimes present for important events such as Quick's graduation ceremony, the couple makes an effort to distance themselves from their families and pasts. Rose's pregnancy seems to be a sure sign that the two of them are establishing themselves as an independent couple at last.



Quick soon realizes that his career as a police officer isn't as exciting as he'd expected it to be. He doesn't encounter any violent or serious crime on the streets, and he guiltily starts to wish that some real evil would come along so that he could stop it. Instead, he merely patrols the uneventful streets and handles minor tasks, feeling more like a boy scout than a constable. Rose keeps working at Bairds, even during her pregnancy. As they're both so busy, the two of them are eager to reach a point where they can see each other more often. Quick imagines all their future together, and Rose is still keen on having their own house.

Echoing his mother's attempts to run G. M. Clay out of business, Quick is eager for some external threat to appear in his life. This would allow him to take out his lingering trauma and frustrations on something outside of himself, rather than looking inward to find peace. Quick's urge to fight evil is just one of many complications that arise at this point in Quick and Rose's development. As they strive to become fully independent, they're facing the new difficulties that the adult world has to offer.



Sam wakes up one morning and feels an intense tingling in his stump, knowing for certain that the Shifty Shadow is lurking. He learned his lesson from last time and doesn't get out of bed, feeling that this round of bad luck is stronger than any he can remember. Later that morning, Dolly falls down a flight of stairs and breaks her leg. Oriel is out in her tent, staring at the names of three of her children who were stillborn or miscarriages, which she's written in her Bible. She hurries to the house when she hears Dolly's screams, and Dolly has her broken leg plastered at the hospital.

That same day, a small man in a sauna somewhere falls over and dies of heart failure. Meanwhile, Fish pounds on the piano keys in the library, but no matter which keys he presses, the piano only emits a loud, booming middle C, over and over again. He has an angry outburst and throws the stool at a pair of hateful ghosts. He tells them he hates them, and that this is his house. This gives the dark spirits a moment of pause after Fish leaves the room, but the droning middle C noise continues all the same.

That night, Quick rushes home on his police bike, as Rose seems to be having a miscarriage. He quickly asks Mrs. Manners for help and stops his neighbor's car so he can use it to rush Rose to the hospital. After the miscarriage, Rose wakes up in the hospital to see Sam and Quick in the room with her. Sam bears even more bad news: Ted died of heart failure today in the sauna, after pushing himself too hard. Rose has an oddly calm reaction to this news and to the fact of her own miscarriage. She steels herself and tries to keep a strong attitude, as she doesn't want Quick or her father to know how much she's hurting. Back at **Cloudstreet**, Dolly is devastated by the news of Ted's death, and the shadows in the library dance.

In the months following Ted's death and the miscarriage, Rose becomes more gaunt, tired, and withdrawn, despite Quick's attempts to comfort her. She keeps working at Bairds until she becomes too tired and listless to make it through a workday anymore. Quick wonders if he's the one who's bringing all this misfortune on the people around him. Lester visits him at the police station one night and shows him a massive fish he'd just caught. Lester tells Quick that **Cloudstreet** has become unusually quiet, and he shows him two silver coins that he found in the fish. They're both from the year Fish was born, and he plans to give them to Fish as a gift. Before leaving, he tells Quick to take care of Rose.

Sam once again proves that his instinct for detecting bad luck is extremely accurate, though as usual, it doesn't seem to do him much good. It's notable that Sam's ability to sense bad luck doesn't allow him to stop it, only to see it coming. This feeds into the idea that Sam's ability is some cosmic joke, though he's mostly made peace with it at this point. The names in Oriel's Bible only appear briefly, but they shed more light on the traumas and tragedies that have shaped Oriel into the guilt-ridden and protective woman she is today.



These ominous events are further proof of Sam's ability to sense the arrival of bad luck. The piano only emitting middle C represents how trauma can restrict a person and prevent them from changing or moving on. No matter how Fish tries to play a new song, he can only play an echo of the house's previous owner dying at the keyboard. Likewise, the residents of Cloudstreet are constantly held back by their own past traumas, making it difficult for them to find fresh, new ways to live.



Rose's miscarriage and the news of Ted's death are the final, tragic results of this sudden surge of terrible luck. Rose behaves much like Oriel in the face of the miscarriage, an event that was foreshadowed by Oriel's Bible earlier that morning. Rose's calm reaction to her miscarriage is a sign that she's already dealing with her trauma in an unhealthy way, blocking out her emotions rather than sharing them with those around her. On the other hand, Dolly's more extreme reaction to Ted's death lets her face her emotions head-on, though it doesn't make them any less painful.



As Rose's unhealthy coping mechanisms begin to catch up with her, Quick also starts sliding into a depressive mood. Like his mother, he's wracked with survivor's guilt, blaming himself for the suffering of those around him. In the midst of this difficult time, Lester's conversation with Quick represents the presence of family calling out to Quick and Rose, reminding them that complete independence might be making them weaker. The miraculous coins are another reminder that the mysterious forces of fate watching over the families haven't given up on them yet.



Sam continues working at the mint and losing most of his money to gambling as usual, but he feels strangely reassured by his losing streaks, as he knows and accepts that his chaotic life is governed by the whims of luck. Dolly is almost never home anymore, but he doesn't have the heart to get angry with her. One morning, while looking for his lost hat before heading out for work, he finds Fish in the library. Fish is wearing nothing but Sam's hat and a pair of silver coins fashioned into a necklace, and he's banging his fists into the wall and crying out. Sam is even more terrified when he catches a glimpse of a pale, severe old woman watching him, but she soon disappears. Fish tells Sam that "she won't let him play," and Sam fetches Elaine to try and calm her brother down.

As her physical and mental health deteriorates, Rose falls back into her old habit of vomiting up most of the food she tries to eat, and she can feel herself becoming cold and bitter. She's surprised to see Sam show up at the flat one day, and she's angry to learn that he's here to enlist her help in finding Dolly, who's been missing for a few days. Rose refuses, reminding her father of how Dolly robbed her of her childhood, as Rose constantly had to drag Dolly back home from pubs and clean her up. Sam fights back and tells Rose not to be needlessly cruel to a woman whose life is already practically over. He reminds Rose that she's young and still has her whole life ahead of her, and he describes the pain of losing his family in his own old age.

Lying miserably in her bed later, Rose flashes back to noises she heard behind the door of her mother's room, way back when they lived in Joel's pub. She realizes with disgust that Dolly had been having sex with the pilot that had brought Sam back home after the accident that claimed his hand. As she regrets recalling this memory, Quick rushes in and brings her to a taxi. Rose asks if he's bringing her to the hospital. He says he probably should, but he explains that they're going to **Cloudstreet**, as Dolly has been found and taken there. Someone told Sam about it and Sam contacted Quick, who assumed Rose would want to come along and see her mother.

Sam's attitude about his waves of good and bad luck demonstrates that he's beginning to make peace with his place in the universe. While Oriel fights the current every day to control her life as much as possible, Sam finds equal contentment in letting fate and chance carry him wherever it will. This way, he can assure himself that whatever happens to him was meant to happen. This sense of peace is rattled by his encounter with Fish, who reminds him that there are still lingering traumas that must be faced before Cloudstreet can ever truly be at rest.



Despite her new home and more independent life with Quick, Rose is clearly regressing back to her healthier teenage years. Isolation is partly the cause of this, but she balks at Sam's attempts to reconnect with her, still convinced that independence from her family is what will save her. In this moment, Rose is unwilling to forgive Dolly for the trauma she caused, and refuses to even see things from Dolly's point of view. Despite the progress she made earlier, Rose is ironically kept in the past by ignoring the past and pushing it away.



Rose's sudden recollection of this distant memory only intensifies her hatred of Dolly. This primes Rose to continue avoiding her mother at all costs, making Quick's timing particularly unfortunate. From Rose's point of view, that childhood memory confirms her suspicions about Dolly being a terrible person. Rose feels more justified than ever in her hatred of Dolly, blaming Dolly for all of the trauma that Rose experienced growing up.



As Dolly's drunk yelling echoes through **Cloudstreet**, Rose furiously tells Quick that she doesn't want to go through with this. Rose insists that she's her own woman now and she doesn't want anything to do with Dolly anymore. Quick awkwardly tries to change her mind, telling her that Dolly wants her. After Quick leaves, Dolly sees Rose enter the room through a haze of hallucinations. After Dolly's episode wears off, Rose angrily confronts her about the childhood innocence she stole from her, and refuses to sympathize when Dolly asks Rose not to hate her. Nonetheless, Dolly implores Rose to visit her again tomorrow, just to talk. Lester also encourages a second visit, warning that Rose's hatred is self-destructive, and he couldn't stand to lose her.

Rose visits **Cloudstreet** the next morning and waits around the house until Dolly wakes up. Rose feels strangely timid and unprepared this time, as if most of her anger has left her. She sits by the bed as Dolly asks when Rose will be pregnant again, fantasizing about having grandchildren and spoiling them. She asks Rose if she would have cared about Ted more if he'd been a sister rather than a brother. Dolly tells Rose she's lucky to have never had sisters, and she finally shares the truth with her daughter. One of Dolly's sisters was also her mother; Dolly was born of incest. Shocked, Rose comforts her distraught mother, and the two women weep on the bed together.

Gradually, things start getting better. Rose continues to visit Dolly every day or two, and she realizes that her mother is often just cursing and nagging to entertain herself, without any real malicious intent behind it. Being able to love Dolly again and feeling love in return feels like a healing tonic for Rose, who starts eating and becoming healthy again. Quick and Rose spend more time together, and Lester gets them a car. Rose is pregnant again by Christmas, and she imagines a brighter future for them, with their own house (which is still being built) and a steady income. Their prospects look better than ever.

At **Cloudstreet** one day, Lon walks into the kitchen with a black eye and a bruised face. Oriel asks him what happened, and he tells her that another man hit him in public. Immediately suspicious, Oriel asks if he deserved it, and Lon admits that he's gotten a girl pregnant. Oriel reacts in shock, while the Lamb girls tease him. He's married to the pregnant girl, Pansy Mullet, within two weeks. At the wedding, Oriel mutters "he does" when the priest asks Lon if he takes Pansy as his lawfully wedded wife. Lon and Pansy start living in a room in Cloudstreet, and they seem miserable together.

Even with Dolly in a state of complete misery, Rose still finds it difficult to feel sympathy for her. The memory of Dolly having sex with the Catalina pilot is still fresh on Rose's mind, making her especially disinclined to see Dolly as anything other than a monster. In Rose's own desperate state, it's easy to blame Dolly for all of the trauma that's still affecting Rose and making her miserable in her life with Quick. While Rose insists on becoming her own person, completely independent from Dolly, Lester reminds her of the importance of family. His words hold even more weight as he considers Rose a member of his own family in this moment, implying that family is more than just blood relation.



Rose's second visit finally allows Rose and Dolly to reconcile. With Rose's anger gone and Dolly with nothing left to lose, they face each other more openly than before, prompting Dolly to reveal the truth about her own traumatic past. What ultimately heals both Rose and Dolly is sharing their sorrow with each other, reaching a deeper understanding by acknowledging how difficult both of their lives have been. This is a major turning point for both characters, as they realize that they can only move on together. Forgiveness doesn't erase what Dolly put Rose through, but it does allow both of them to heal and live their lives in peace.



This period of peace and happiness is a direct result of Rose's reconciliation with Dolly. Rose's health throughout the novel seems connected to her family relationships, and this is no exception. As she reconnects with Dolly, she realizes once again that she needs her family just as much as they need her. Life's hardships don't magically vanish after Rose has made peace with Dolly, but sharing her experiences with other people has made her challenges much easier to bear.



Lon is a perfect contrast to Rose at this point in the novel, as Rose becomes the best version of herself while Lon goes through immature growing pains. His attempts to live a wild and independent life ironically made him more dependent on his mother than ever. His bad decisions are mostly played for laughs, but they also highlight how the difficult cycles of mistakes and personal growth repeat over and over with each generation.



Sam, Oriel, and Quick each seem to receive an ominous premonition. Feeling something bad coming isn't unusual for Sam, but as he feels his stump tingling painfully in bed one night, he knows that whatever dark event is approaching feels like doom. Oriel, meanwhile, has a dream of the city burning. She sees people fleeing from the flames towards the **river**, but they stop at the water, afraid, and are consumed by the fire chasing them. Quick visits the new house being constructed for him and Rose, and he encounters the mysterious Black man he's seen many times before. The man tells Quick that this is not his home, and that he should go back to his real home. Quick turns to leave and the man disappears.

After a hot and muggy Christmas, a hateful and merciless killer begins stalking the streets of Perth at night, murdering innocent people seemingly at random. Another officer named Murphy brings Quick up to speed about what had happened the night before: the murderer shot a total of five people in various parts of town and killed most of them, including a sleeping child. Murphy calls it madness, but Quick thinks he's finally dealing with pure evil. Sam reads about the killings in the newspaper and figures the Shifty Shadow is hanging over the whole town now. The town becomes tense, and no one goes out at night. No one can guess at the killer's motives, or where he might strike next.

The police force increases their efforts and Quick patrols the streets at night, but they come no closer to catching the murderer. Quick and Rose's new house is practically ready for them to move in, but Rose is too afraid of the killer to move yet, knowing that she'll be on her own most of the time. Quick tries to reassure her, but the police make little progress on the case, and someone else is killed despite everyone's increased level of caution. The killer approaches Oriel's tent one night, but he's scared off by the mad squealing of the pig in the dark. During a night of patrolling, Quick encounters the strange Black man again, who tells him to go back to his real home. Quick glimpses dozens of Black men beneath the trees on his way home.

Sam, Lester, and Oriel meet in the Lambs' kitchen one morning, all of them seeming to have had the same idea at once. They agree that they should try to get Quick and Rose to live at **Cloudstreet** again, if only for a little while, so that they'll be safer from the killer. To their surprise, Quick and Rose show up of their own accord and ask to stay for a while before the parents can even put their plan into motion. Quick feels safer among family, but he and Rose sleep in the disquieting, windowless library, where Quick often sees the two ghosts hating each other in the dead of night and assumes he's hallucinating from exhaustion.

Oriel's dream is full of symbolism she's familiar with, but she's unable to guess what it might mean. It's possible that the people in her dream fearing the river and dying as a result could point towards a hesitation that needs to be overcome. This idea is supported by Quick's encounter with the Black man. While Quick and Rose are determined to stay in the city and live their new lives there, the spirit world seems to be telling them to return home to their families. And sure enough, nothing is more associated with the Lamb family than the river.



As much as Quick had hoped for a chance to fight evil, he's still shaken by what he finds in the serial killer's wake. Rather than letting Quick deal with his inner demons by fighting an external threat, the killer poses a slow and frustrating challenge that only intensifies Quick's trauma and unsettles him further. Meanwhile, Sam attributing the killings to another whim of the Shifty Shadow is consistent with his luck-based worldview. Ultimately, he believes that even the most terrible things happen for no reason beyond random chance.



Oriel's life is saved by the pig that she almost got rid of years ago, but whether this is an act of God or a whim of luck is open to interpretation. Either way, it's significant that none of the characters ever become aware of this narrow escape from death. It seems as though miracles might affect the Lamb family after all, but not in a way that they can perceive. Meanwhile, the Black man's intervention in Quick's life is much more clear-cut and unambiguous. While it's still unclear what spiritual force is communicating with Quick, it's giving him a very clear warning.



Quick and Rose arriving at Cloudstreet just as the others were about to call them is a sign that all of them have been getting similar bad feelings and premonitions lately. This supports the general trend of supernatural occurrences ramping up more than ever, possibly brought about by the murderers. While the circumstances are extreme, temporarily moving back into Cloudstreet coincidentally allows Quick and Rose to become even closer with their families again.



Oriel sits in her tent at night and knows there's only a bit of fabric between her and her potential death, but she doesn't let herself be afraid. She hears Fish sobbing and wailing inside the house, but she knows that Fish doesn't perceive her, and she feels that going inside at night would be a surrender on her part. She still feels unwelcome in the house for a reason she can't quite place. A few streets away, the murderer kills a young woman in her bed and defiles her body, taking twisted joy in fully knowing that what he's doing is depraved. He feels like he's finally "winning." He heads home to his wife and kids after pushing the girl's body into a neighbor's yard.

Oriel's reasons for staying in the tent stem from her inability to move on. Her discomfort in the house is personified by Cloudstreet's ghosts, but the main reason is Fish himself. After all, moving past her trauma is bound to be difficult when the object of her trauma is always present in the house. Meanwhile, the killer's motives strangely mirror those of Sam, but they are much more twisted. Sam similarly feels like a perpetual loser at times, and is obsessed with winning through gambling. The killer takes this attitude to the extreme, seeking violent vengeance against the society that considered him a loser in the first place. The fact that he has a family emphasizes how easily a "normal" person can be driven to the brink of sanity by misfortune.



An exhausted Quick stands by the river that morning and thinks that the town will never be the same after all this killing. He's frustrated that they can't seem to catch the murderer, only clean up after him. In spite of himself, he's looking for the Black man, desperate for some help. The town reacts furiously to the news of the latest murders. One day, Quick sees a large window into the wall of the library, finally letting some light and fresh air into the usually stuffy and sickening room. Fish sees the two ghostly women staring at the new window in horror, and he tells Rose that "the ladies won't like" her new baby. Rose and Quick assume he's talking about Dolly and Oriel. Dolly visits Sam at the train station on his way home from work.

As Quick struggles to find answers, he realizes that the town of Perth itself will be forever traumatized by the killings. Just as his family's misfortunes have left them feeling perpetually hurt and lost, now the town of Perth will be reeling from these murders for years. But these comparisons only raise more concerns about how the town will ever recover, as Quick hasn't even figured out how to deal with his small, personal traumas yet. On a lighter note, Dolly meeting Sam at the train station is a hopeful sign that she's willing to love him again. Now that she's found peace with Rose and possibly herself, she's begun to feel grateful for Sam, rather than trapped with him.



As autumn comes around, Quick and Rose are still living at **Cloudstreet**, having truly made themselves at home there again. To her surprise, Rose feels happy living there, despite it feeling like a surrender after all her plans of moving far away and having nothing to do with Cloudstreet or her family anymore. She feels safe and comfortable amid the noise and bustle of the big house, and she still enjoys spending time with Dolly. Quick seems happy as well, though he's still troubled by the police's lack of progress on the murder case. The killer soon strikes again, murdering a babysitter this time, and Quick feels himself slipping into a depressingly familiar sense of despair and hopelessness. He knows he's losing the fight against evil every day.

Rose's character arc nears its conclusion as she realizes how much she enjoys living at Cloudstreet. While she's still only staying there to feel safer from the serial killer, she has to acknowledge that she values her family's company more than ever. After years of longing to leave her family behind, independence from Dolly and the others begins to seem less and less enticing. To her surprise, sharing her life with Dolly and the others brings her joy rather than pain. Quick, on the other hand, can't seem to find peace until the killer is brought to justice. Once again, his trauma threatens to consume him despite his life improving. Like his mother, Quick fixates on his inner struggles more than anything that's happening in the external world.



The police receive a tip and successfully set a trap for the killer, catching him at last. Quick can hardly let himself believe it when Murphy breaks the news to him, as Quick had let himself believe that the killer would be giving them trouble forever. Shortly after hearing of the murderer's capture, the sergeant tells Quick to hurry home, as Rose is giving birth. On the drive to **Cloudstreet**, Murphy says it'll be in the papers, and Quick distractedly asks if he means the birth. But Murphy was talking about the murderer's capture, which turns out to be strangely disappointing for the officers who haul him to jail. They expected to feel like they defeated a monster, but the killer looks like nothing more than a small, scared, frustrated man who's no longer winning.

The fact that Quick himself didn't catch the killer adds to the realism of the situation and gives Quick room for character growth. With the killer's capture, Quick no longer has an unhealthy outlet for his trauma, and his fantasies of defeating evil are replaced by an almost mundane ending to the killing spree. Additionally, now that the murderer is behind bars, Quick can focus all of his attention on what's truly important to him: Rose. The killer being surprisingly human is the main reason why the authorities feel disappointed about his capture. It's possible that his apparent normalcy makes them uncomfortable, as they realize that the killer could have been any one of them.



Quick arrives at **Cloudstreet** as fast as he can and offers to take Rose to the hospital, but she tells everyone not to bother starting up a vehicle, as she feels like she's about to have the baby right now, in their room. Oriel hurries upstairs to help Rose give birth, and Rose has never been happier to see her. The two families and the two ghosts tensely watch while Fish sings and babbles. The birth goes off without a hitch, and Dolly is a grandmother. Quick suggests that they call the newborn boy Harry, to Rose's laughing disagreement. The two spirits fade from the house as Rose gives birth, released from their bindings forever. The house itself seems to breathe a sigh of relief as the families celebrate the birth and the town celebrates the killer's capture.

The birth of Rose's child is a major turning point not only for Rose herself, but for every inhabitant of Cloudstreet, living and dead. As the birth brings both families together, they share in the unbridled joy of the event, becoming more unified than ever. Rose's reaction to Oriel's help is a sharp contrast to Rose's resentment towards Oriel earlier in the novel. Before, Rose was insecure about Oriel's helpfulness, but now it's clear that independence from Oriel would only make things more difficult. And at last, the arrival of new life banishes the ghosts from Cloudstreet, symbolizing how both families have healed from their trauma and are ready to face the future together.



CHAPTER 10

Life goes on at **Cloudstreet**, and summer comes again. Rose spends plenty of time with the baby (Harold Samson Lamb) at the beach, and everyone in the house adores him and spoils him at every opportunity. Lon and Pansy have their baby as well, and Pansy gets pregnant again very soon afterwards, to Oriel's silent disapproval. Dolly starts inviting bingo friends over on some nights and Rose starts helping in the shop, quickly becoming attached to it. Rose still loves Oriel, but she admits to herself that Oriel's kindness and competence feels harsh. Oriel always knows the right way of doing things, and her superhuman competence and trustworthiness is exactly what makes her dislikeable in some ways. Regardless, the two of them get along better than ever.

The Lamb and Pickles families continue to grow closer over their shared love of the new baby and the happy union of Quick and Rose. While the house is still technically divided, the families no longer make efforts to distinguish themselves from each other. Their strengthening bonds reinforce the theme of shared humanity, but Rose's feelings about Oriel add a layer of complication to this happy period. Rose's reliance on Oriel is still a source of insecurity and mild resentment, but these negative feelings aren't nearly as strong as they once were. This is a sign of character growth for Rose, as she's now more honest with herself about the causes of her resentment.



Sam continues working at the mint, where he's become something of a minor celebrity among the workers after working there for so many years. His bad luck at the races carries on as always, but his coworkers have a hard time believing he's really that unlucky. They don't bother checking his pockets at the door on his way out of the mint anymore, but he still only smuggles out an occasional coin or two in his mouth. It's been almost 20 years since the Pickles first moved into **Cloudstreet**, and when 20 years are up, the house can be sold. Sam thinks about selling the place and using the money to retire somewhere nice, but he doesn't tell Dolly about the idea yet.

The killer's trial would have easily made the front page of the newspapers if not for Kennedy's assassination. Rose and Quick receive notice that their house is ready and that they need to move in soon, but they hesitate and decide to move out of **Cloudstreet** when they feel ready. Later, the two of them celebrate at the kitchen table upon hearing that the killer has been sentenced to death by hanging. Lester and Oriel get upset with Quick as they overhear this; Lester says that the killer is only a man, and Oriel insists that "an eye for an eye" is a barbaric philosophy. Quick wonders why they seem to have such sympathy for the murderer, and Lester tells him that Oriel still tries to hold onto her Christian beliefs about loving thy neighbor as thyself.

One morning, Lester dresses for a fishing trip but secretly heads to a cathedral instead. He feels a kind of homesickness as he watches the religious ceremonies, and he quietly wonders what he really believes. Quick has a brief encounter with his old girlfriend Lucy Wentworth as he visits her florist shop to buy flowers for Rose's birthday. He feels relieved that Lucy doesn't seem to recognize him. At night, Oriel still sometimes wonders why she doesn't sleep in the **house**, even after it's recently started to feel lighter and friendlier inside. She can't figure it out, but she still feels like she can't go back yet.

Sam's story begins to come full circle as his luck becomes legendary at his workplace. His coworkers' opinions about his good luck prompt the reader to reflect on where his supposedly terrible luck has landed him after all is said and done. He owns a large house with tenants, has a happy family and a steady job, and even Dolly is warming up to him again. Getting an outsider's perspective on Sam's life highlights just how lucky he's been over the years, even if most of his gambles don't pay off.



Their hesitation about leaving Cloudstreet implies that Quick and Rose might be truly happy living there after all, despite both of their desperate attempts to become independent earlier in the novel. Another indication that things have changed is Oriel and Lester's attitude about the killer's death sentence. Fish's accident made both of them much less religious, but now they're back to quoting the Bible, and passionately at that. Most importantly, they use this religious language to empathize with the killer and acknowledge his humanity despite his terrible crimes. Quick's straightforward notions of good and evil seem to be at odds with his parents' more nuanced approach to the situation, especially as they cite one part of the Bible ("love thy neighbor") while dismissing another ("an eye for an eye") as barbaric.



Lester's renewed interest in religion is likely brought about by the recent positive changes in his life. Now that his family is happier and healthier than ever, it's possible that he feels ashamed for abandoning his faith after Fish's accident. It's easier to believe in a divine plan now that things are going well, but his doubts still linger after all he's been through. The reappearance of Lucy Wentworth reminds Quick of how far he's come since he ran away from home, and even Oriel seems to be on the brink of a major breakthrough. Overall, only a few minor doubts remain to hold the families of Cloudstreet back from living happy lives.



Quick lets himself relax and take it easy during his patrols, until he spots the facedown body of a child floating on the **river**, near the shore. Two crying children have already spotted it, and Quick rushes out and hauls the boy onto dry land; it seems like the boy has been dead for an hour already. Quick tries not to cry as more officers are summoned and he looks at the boy's lifeless face, remembering the accident with Fish and wondering if this kind of thing will keep happening to him forever. Later, at the station, the sergeant lets Quick know that the boy was one of the killer's sons. Quick is deeply shaken by this news, as it forces him to imagine the killer as not just a monster, but a man with children and "old twisted hopes."

That same morning, Lon calls in sick from work. As Oriel and the other Lambs pack up the truck for the shop's deliveries for the day, Elaine hears Lon's baby crying upstairs. Oriel goes to investigate, and when she opens Lon's door, she finds Lon and Pansy having sex; their baby is crying nearby with a dirty diaper. Unfazed, Oriel orders Lon to be downstairs to help with the truck in 10 minutes. Furious, Lon stacks crates in the truck bed haphazardly, and when he refuses to redo the job properly and tells Oriel to go to hell, Oriel swats him with a plank in full view of the gathering crowd, then delivers a strong punch when he starts a fistfight with her. She tells the crowd to help Lon restack the crates properly, as payment for their entertainment.

Quick returns home to find Rose **spinning a butterknife** on her dresser. He tells her to ask the knife if it'll give him a holiday, and he admits he badly needs a break from work after today's events. He tells Rose about the boy he found, and how the murderer was just a man who had become cold and twisted. He still knows that there's good and evil in the world, but he tells Rose that there are no monsters; only people who've gone bad. Quick imagines that he could have easily become a terrible person himself if things had been any worse for him, and these revelations bring him to tears. Rose comforts him and implores him to be happy.

The police sergeant gives Quick a week off work, as Quick seems tired and burnt-out. He and Rose discuss their vacation plans, and Rose insists that they don't go fishing this time. She suggests that they should simply go driving out in the country and make it up as they go along. Meanwhile, Lester drives up to the new house that's been built for Quick and Rose. He drops to his knees and prays by the side of the empty house, trying to ignore the kookaburra in a nearby tree, whose calling sounds like mocking laughter.

The revelation of the drowned boy's identity shakes Quick to his core, making him reexamine everything he once believed about good and evil. Finding the body of the killer's son forces Quick to relive Fish's accident much more vividly than ever before. Revisiting this trauma that's so central to Quick's life inevitably makes him compare himself to the deranged serial killer he'd been trying to capture for months. Just like the officers who captured the killer, Quick must face the fact that the killer is a human being, not some alien creature of pure evil. This also makes Quick reevaluate what Oriel and Lester tried to tell him about loving his neighbor as himself.



Lon continues to be a source of comic relief during the heavier sections of the novel, but his immature behavior also creates an opportunity to flesh out Oriel's character further. Her promise to "make war" on the bad things in her life is taken to its literal extreme in this sequence, as she physically attacks her own son when he misbehaves. While Oriel proudly considers herself to be the family's caretaker, she doesn't hesitate to push back against Lon's attempts to take advantage of her generosity. In Oriel's view, taking care of her family also entails making sure that her children become just as responsible as she is, by any means necessary.



In this moment, Quick finally reckons with his revelations about the killer's humanity. The presence of the spinning knife is a reminder of the random twists of fate that can lead a kind and ordinary person down a dark and traumatic path. Quick's underlying worry is that the only thing that makes him different from the serial killer is pure luck and circumstance. After all, if Quick's trauma had been any more intense, it could have broken his mind and led him to terrible violence. These realizations about human nature give him plenty of grief, but they also improve his understanding of the world. Ultimately, this experience changes him for the better.



Rose's insistence that she and Quick don't go fishing is her way of taking care of him and helping him move on. She knows that fishing will only remind him of the accident with Fish again, and at this point, she's ready for both of them to heal and move on. Meanwhile, the kookaburra laughing at Lester represents his own remaining doubts about faith and prayer. A part of him still feels silly for believing in a higher power, but he prays nonetheless, demonstrating how much he's changed since Fish's accident.



On his way home from voting, Sam encounters a Black man standing across the street from **Cloudstreet**. Sam asks the man if he voted, but the man only smiles in response. He asks Sam if that's his house and Sam explains that he's planning on selling it, figuring that it'll be bulldozed and replaced by a newer, uglier building. The Black man warns him against selling it, telling him that places are powerful and important. The man's intense stare strangely reminds Sam a bit of his father. He asks the man again how he voted, only for the man to walk away, shaking his head.

One morning, Dolly is out of bed earlier than Sam for a change. She feeds magpies in the backyard; this has recently become a regular pastime of hers. Sam joins her in the yard and tells her he's been thinking about selling the **house**, as they'd make a lot of money from it and it's such an old place anyway. Dolly is firmly opposed to the idea, reminding him that the house was a gift from Sam's brother Joel, and that it's unlucky to turn down a gift. Sam tells Dolly she hates the house, but she admits she doesn't know about that. She tells him that it's really Oriel who's been keeping them alive and well all these years.

Oriel arranges for both families to have a huge dinner on the night before Quick and Rose leave for their vacation. Oriel knows that the two of them will be moving into their new house after they come back from their trip, and she secretly hates the thought of losing them, so she feels she deserves this one last night of seeing them. Every member of the Pickles family and the Lamb family gathers for the meal, and Lester says Grace with genuine thankfulness in his voice.

During the dinner, Oriel tells Sam she heard he's planning on selling the house. To his surprise, she says that there's nothing to be done about it if that's what he decides to do, as "it's only a house." However, she admits that she's grown attached to the old house despite its difficulties, and she feels like it isn't the same place it was before. She figures that they've all made their mark on **Cloudstreet**, and even Dolly admits that the house has a hold on them now. Sam decides to stay, and Lester raises a toast to both families and to their big old house at Number One, Cloud Street.

Once again, the mysterious Black man appears to warn the residents of Cloudstreet about events to come and point them in the right direction. While this could technically be a different man from the one Quick encountered earlier, it's heavily implied that this is the same person. The fact that he's compared to Sam's father suggests that he can be trusted, but the exact nature of the strange man and the other supernatural events is never fully explained. This maintains a sense of mystery and intrigue to the very end.



This conversation highlights Dolly's significant growth as a character ever since she reconciled with Rose. All of her old bitterness and drunkenness is gone, replaced by a new, meditative hobby and a sense of gratitude towards Oriel, whom Dolly despised for years. Dolly still has plenty of progress left to make, but her attitude during this exchange makes it clear that she's already drastically changed for the better. For once, she even gives Sam advice about luck, which only helps to emphasize how she's come to embrace what she previously hated about him.



By bringing everyone in both families together one last time, Oriel hopes to hold onto her son for as long as possible before he becomes independent again. As much as Oriel prides herself on her strength of character and protective nature, she only feels that her life is worthwhile if her family still needs her. The two families have practically merged into one at this point, and sharing a meal has become almost commonplace. Lester's genuine prayer marks the conclusion of his journey back to his faith, as this moment contrasts with his halfhearted Grace earlier in the novel.



Oriel sums up what Cloudstreet has become when she says that everyone has left their mark on it. What started as a massive, alienating house split between two very different families is now a comfortable home, where the Lambs and Pickles live as one. Ultimately, it's the merging of the families that's made Cloudstreet into a happier place to live. The families' surface-level differences divided them for years, but now they recognize the humanity common to each other, to everyone's benefit. In this moment, it's official: Cloudstreet is home.



As Quick packs the car for the trip at dawn the next morning, Fish asks him repeatedly if he can go with them on their vacation. Quick tries telling him no and brushing him off, then goes upstairs to tell Rose about it. To his surprise, Rose tells him to let Fish tag along. Quick objects and insists that Fish would cause problems for them, but Rose scolds him for being so callous towards his brother. She knows that both she and Quick will feel terrible if they don't let Fish come with them, and she wants to enjoy herself on this trip without Quick falling into one of his gloomy moods. Reluctantly, Quick agrees with her.

Quick and Rose set off on their holiday without a plan, just as they planned. With both Harry and Fish in tow, they try to figure out where to go first, eventually deciding on the small town of Southern Cross, which Quick had always been curious to see. Fish mistakes heat ripples for water as they ride through the plains. Southern Cross turns out to be a dull place, but Quick compares it to other wheat towns he lived in, and he tells Rose about his kangaroo-hunting days. Rose teases him about his Pickles-ish impulse to look for someone he knows in this town he's never visited, and they drive on to look for a place to camp for the night.

Unable to find a proper campsite, Quick and Rose find a space to make camp near some trees away from the road. They lie under the stars and Fish happily calls the stars "all the water." His face seems to glow with moonlight, but there isn't a moon in the sky to be seen. After Fish and Harry fall asleep, Rose admits to Quick that she can't imagine moving out of **Cloudstreet**. She tells him that she no longer wants to be independent, if being independent means being alone. She was once miserable around her family, but things have changed. She wants to keep living in the old house, as she feels like she belongs there. Quick admits he's been wanting to tell her the same thing for months. The two of them are brimming with happiness.

Quick wakes up in the middle of the night with pale moonlight on his face, but he soon realizes that the gentle light is actually coming from Fish himself, who's also awake and kissing Quick on the cheek. They hear a rustling in the nearby wheat, and Quick assumes it's a herd of kangaroos. Fish gasps happily as they behold a strange sight: in the wheat, countless numbers of naked children seem to rise from the earth itself and walk silently and calmly towards something in the distance. Rose and Harry watch the army of children walk by as well, but no one says anything. The walking figures swirl around them like a vortex, and eventually the four of them fall asleep again. The strange children in the wheat take all night to pass by.

This exchange makes it clear just how well Rose understands Quick at this point in their relationship. She arguably knows him better than he knows himself, as she correctly predicts how guilty he'll feel if he doesn't take Fish along. This level of understanding reveals the depth of Rose's feelings for Quick, and the intimate connection they share. Their willingness to bring Fish with them also suggests that they've changed their approach to family and independence. Unlike before, they don't try to avoid their family members, but instead go out of their way to include them in their lives.



Rose's teasing is another example of how the definition of family can go beyond blood relation. Quick's hunch that he'll randomly run into someone he knows reminds Rose of her father. In her view, this supports the idea that she and Quick are meant to be together, as they have so much in common that it often surprises them.



Fish once again compares the stars to water, and the inexplicable moonlight on his face implies that there's something supernatural at work. This serves as one last hint that Fish can perceive spiritual things that others can't, and his joy in this moment makes bringing him along worthwhile. Quick and Rose's decision to stay at Cloudstreet permanently is the culmination of their journey. For most of their lives, they wanted nothing more than to leave their families behind and start fresh lives independently. But after all they've been through, Quick and Rose finally admit to themselves that they're happier and healthier when they're sharing their experiences—good and bad—with their kin.



This strange vision allows both Quick and Rose to glimpse the world as Fish sees it. For a brief moment, all three of them experience something unexplainable—something spiritual and beyond their understanding. The children could be ghosts, angels, spirit guides, or something else entirely. Regardless of the specifics, their purpose is to hint at some greater mystery at the heart of everything the characters have experienced. Usually, only Fish can sense this deeper truth, but Quick and Rose get the chance to share this strange experience with him before slipping back into unconsciousness.



Thrilled and ecstatic, Quick and Rose drive back home to **Cloudstreet** with Harry and Fish laughing in the backseat. When they arrive, Quick jumps out of the car and surprises Elaine, who's beginning to open up the shop for the day. Quick and Rose stir up a commotion in the house as they announce to everyone that they're staying at Cloudstreet indefinitely, and Quick adds that they're having a picnic to celebrate. Oriel drops the shop shutter in surprise when she realizes that they really mean it. Sam skips work for the day and Oriel closes up the shop, immediately ordering everyone to pack up the truck so that they can have a proper picnic by the **river**.

The Lambs and the Pickleses have a loud and joyful picnic by the **riverside**, sprawled on blankets in the shade of the trees. The killer is hanged that morning, and his request to be buried next to his son is denied. The world goes on, but the two families of Cloudstreet are in their own bright and happy world that day by the river. Sam watches Lester play the accordion and feels the breeze on his face, feeling like the luckiest man in the world. They eat, laugh, dance, and sing like one enormous family, united at last.

Fish Lamb runs down the jetty, grinning and laughing like a delighted child. He leans over the edge and gazes into the water, marveling at his own reflection and the colorful shimmering on the surface. Quick cries out and runs after Fish, but he makes himself stop running before he even reaches the jetty, and he's already crying. Fish has fallen forward into the water, and the **river** swallows him whole. For a moment before he drowns, he becomes a man, and he sees the entire story of his family unfold before him. Fish Lamb transcends to become who he really is as he dies. Some time later, in a backyard that's no longer split in half by a tin fence, Dolly helps Oriel Lamb pack up her tent for good. Both of them carry it inside the big old house at **Number One, Cloud Street**.

Oriel's startled reaction to Quick and Rose's sudden return emphasizes just how overjoyed she is at the news. Normally, she's hesitant to express her happiness in the presence of her family, but in this case, she can't contain herself. Her reaction makes this moment all the more touching, as her beloved family finally becomes whole again. Even the family's responsibilities are tossed aside as Oriel herself insists on celebrating. In the conflict between family and independence, family has decisively won.



The joy of this final family gathering is tempered by the mention of the killer's death, but this grim fact doesn't diminish the celebrations. With both families finally and completely united, the troubles of the rest of the world—and the potential troubles in the families' future—don't seem to matter. Compared to the murderer, the Lambs and Pickles are surprisingly, ironically lucky. Despite all the pain and loss they've suffered, they've miraculously kept their humanity intact.



This final event is revealed to be what happened in the Prologue, and Fish reveals himself as the novel's omniscient narrator. One last time, the river gives and takes away. It claims Fish's life just as it gives him a spiritual transcendence that lets him see everything across time all at once. It's possible that Fish was somehow meant to drown in the river from the start, as his death finally allows Oriel to move on. Fish's presence was the last thing keeping her from moving back into the house and living with her family again, as it was Oriel who brought Fish back from the brink of death after the accident. Her relief is sure to be tinged with more grief and guilt over Fish's death, of course. But now that the families have joined together to support each other and share their burdens, she'll be in good company.





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