

It Ends with Us



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF COLLEEN HOOVER

Colleen Hoover was born on December 11, 1979, to Eddie Fennell and Vannoy Fite in Sulphur Springs, Texas. She was raised in nearby Saltillo, Texas. Hoover witnessed episodes of domestic violence from a young age, and her father's abuse of her mother deeply impacted Hoover in childhood. After graduating from Saltillo High School in 1998, she married husband Heath Hoover in 2000. The couple has since welcomed three sons. Hoover later obtained a degree in social work from Texas A&M – Commerce. Hoover began writing while holding diverse roles in the fields of social work and teaching. Since 2012, she has self-published several novels and book series, including *Slammed*, *Hopeless*, and *Finding Cinderella*. Many of her works have been featured on the *New York Times* Best Seller list. She published *It Ends with Us* in 2016, though it did not see broad critical or cultural acclaim until much later. The novel's sequel, *It Starts with Us*, was published in 2022. In 2015, Hoover and her family launched a signed book subscription service, The Bookworm Box, which seeks to promote a love of reading and raise charitable funds for various organizations.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Like many contemporary romance novels, *It Ends with Us* deviates from the tropes of stereotypical romance and explores love in light of the vast ramifications that domestic violence, sexism, and traumatic experiences have on its characters. Thematically rich romances like Hoover's have increased in popularity and pervasiveness in the years since the MeToo movement of the mid-2010s. This movement gained traction when allegations of abuse by film producer Harvey Weinstein went viral, spurring a cultural reckoning. Its impact continues to spread, bringing to light more long-concealed individual and societal patterns of misogyny, violence, and power imbalances. The ubiquity of social media and other technologies in the Information Age have contributed extensively to the MeToo movement's reach, giving geographically remote individuals the ability to spread information more broadly than ever before. Hoover's success as a novelist is owed in part to these same networks of communication, first in her ability to self-publish her works and later in the dissemination of *It Ends with Us* over social media platform TikTok.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

It Ends with Us follows in the footsteps of works like E. L.

James's 2011 novel, *Fifty Shades of Grey*, which gained attention for both its intensely passionate romance scenes and its willingness to cover controversial topics like BDSM and childhood trauma. *Before I Let You Go* is novel by Kelly Rimmer that unpacks similarly heavy themes. Like *It Ends with Us*, Rimmer's novel considers deep familial wounds and multi-generational relationships between mothers, daughters, and sisters. *Love and Other Words* by Christina Lauren mirrors the compelling romance found in Hoover's novels. Like Hoover, Lauren utilizes flashback to explore how young love can resonate into adulthood. After the wide success of *It Ends with Us*, Hoover published a sequel, *It Starts with Us*, in 2022. This sequel details main character Lily's life with childhood love Atlas following their reunion at the end of the *It Ends with Us*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** It Ends with Us
- **When Published:** August 2, 2016
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Romance
- **Setting:** Boston, Massachusetts
- **Climax:** After the birth of Lily and Ryle's child, Lily decides to leave Ryle to end the cycle of abuse.
- **Antagonist:** Ryle Kincaid
- **Point of View:** First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Contemporary Come Up. Though *It Ends with Us* was written and published in 2016, the novel only gained broad notice when it was featured on TikTok in a spotlight by a book-based content creator. The novel exploded in popularity in 2021, reaching #1 on the *New York Times* best sellers list in early 2022. In October 2022, Hoover published a long-awaited sequel, *It Starts with Us*.

Write What You Know. Hoover has shared that her personal experience with witnessing her father's domestic abuse against her mother inspired some of the events of *It Ends with Us*, making writing the book a difficult but meaningful experience.



PLOT SUMMARY

Lily has recently moved to Boston after finishing her master's degree in business. At this point in her life, Lily is caught somewhere between the past and the future. The opening scene finds her on a rooftop deck contemplating the eulogy she

delivered earlier that day for her father's funeral. It bothers her that she still feels overwhelming rage at her father, who was beloved by his community but abused Lily's mother behind closed doors. Lily is also still angry at herself and her mother for keeping the domestic violence a secret.

In the midst of wrestling with these complexities, Lily meets Ryle Kincaid, a neurosurgery resident who has also come to the rooftop to work through his anger. They are immediately at ease with each other, exchanging "naked truths" about themselves and sharing their deepest thoughts. Ryle explains that he wants to be the best surgeon in his field, and Lily tells Ryle that she longs to quit her job in marketing and open her own **floral** shop. Ryle tells Lily he wants to have sex with her. Though Lily finds Ryle very attractive, she explains that she doesn't have one-night stands with strangers. Ryle gets a call from the hospital and has to leave abruptly.

Six months later, Lily brings her mother to the storefront space she purchased with her inheritance money to open her shop. Later that day, Lily hires Allysa, whose enthusiasm, determination, and vision for the space win Lily over. They become fast friends. When Lily accidentally sprains her ankle in the process setting up shop, Allysa calls her brother and her husband, Marshall, who've been watching football at a nearby bar, for help. When the men arrive, Lily realizes that Allysa's brother is Ryle, the man she met on the roof.

After reconnecting at the floral shop, Lily and Ryle continue to run into each other, though they attempt to ignore their attraction to each other because of their conflicting long-term goals. With every meeting, however, their sexual tension grows. Lily tries to distract herself by reading entries from her childhood diaries, which she addressed to her hero, Ellen DeGeneres. In so doing, Lily relives parts of her childhood she hasn't thought of in many years, like specific episodes of her father's abuse. Reading her diaries also reminds Lily of her classmate, Atlas Corrigan, whom she befriended after noticing him living in the abandoned house across the ally from Lily's childhood home.

In the present, Lily and Ryle decide to give dating a chance despite their reservations. Ryle is amazed by Lily's supportiveness of his career, finding that a loving relationship adds to rather than detracts from his goals. In return, Lily finds Ryle's devotion a blissful complement to the escalating success of her business. They become enmeshed in each other's lives. Ryle wants to meet Lily's mother, so the three of them have lunch at a new restaurant in Boston, Bib's. While Ryle and Lily's mom hit it off, Lily is distracted when she recognizes their waiter as Atlas, her childhood friend. Lily lingers after her mother and Ryle leave the restaurant, and she and Atlas catch up for the first time in nine years. Lily tells him about her business and relationship with Ryle, and Atlas tells her about his time in the military and his girlfriend, Cassie. Though Lily feels a pang of jealousy when Atlas mentions his girlfriend, she

leaves the conversation feeling like she finally has some clarity on their relationship and is eager to move forward.

Still, Lily continues to reread her old journals. The entries recount how her feelings for Atlas continued to grow. Together, they endured their traumas and made plans for a happy future together in Boston. One evening, Atlas gave Lily an **open heart** he'd carved from the tree between their homes as a symbol of their connection and his feelings for her. Their blossoming love was derailed, however, when Atlas's uncle in Boston offered him a home—something Atlas couldn't turn down, though it meant he had to leave Lily behind in Maine.

Back in present-day Boston, Ryle and Lily's relationship continues to flourish—until it doesn't. They're sharing a bottle of wine one evening when Ryle accidentally burns his hand while grabbing dinner out of the oven. Lily's shocked laughter angers Ryle, and he pushes her into a cabinet. When he apologizes, all Lily can hear is the echo of all her father's apologies after hurting her mother. The episode forces Lily to re-evaluate her relationship with Ryle, and while she is horrified by his behavior, she believes he is different from her father and decides not to punish him for her father's sins. Lily forgives Ryle, but she warns him that she will leave if he hurts her again.

The next day, Lily and Ryle meet Allysa and Marshall at Bib's. They run into Atlas, as Lily feared they would, and when he sees Lily's injury and the bandage on Ryle's hand, he automatically assumes—correctly—that Ryle hurt her. Atlas follows Lily to the bathroom to check on her, and a fight nearly breaks out when Ryle finds them leaving the restroom together. After they leave Bib's, Lily explains her history with Atlas. Ryle worries that she is cheating on him, but she reassures him Atlas is only a concerned friend. The next day, Atlas visits Lily at her work and gives her his phone number, which he hides behind her phone's battery. He tells her to call him if she ever needs him one day. Later, Lily returns home to read the last entry in her journal, which recounts the night Atlas came back from Boston to visit Lily for her birthday. He explained to her on that night how she had saved his life. Atlas promised to come find her once he improved his life enough to deserve having her in it; he gave her a Boston **magnet** as a symbol of that promise.

Ryle and Lily decide to fly to Las Vegas and get married. The beginning of their marriage is happy and carefree, much like their dating life, until one evening when Ryle finds Atlas's phone number in Lily's phone. Lily wakes from another violent incident with several cuts on her face and a concussion. Unlike the last time Ryle hurt her, Lily does not cover for him after this incident. When Allysa finds out about the abuse, she supports Lily's decision to leave Ryle, but she begs Ryle to tell Lily about their brother. Lily learns that Ryle accidentally shot and killed his brother, Emerson, as a kid. This trauma has been a key driver of his passion for medicine, his fear of love, and his manic, rage-filled episodes. In light of this new information and

Ryle's promise to do better, the couple reconciles.

Another stretch of undisturbed happiness follows. Ryle buys Lily an apartment in the same building as Allysa, who is pregnant, and they all excitedly await the arrival of Allysa and Marshall's baby to arrive. On the day Allysa goes into labor, Ryle wins a two-month fellowship in Europe, and the local paper lists Lily's flower shop as one of the best new businesses in Boston. Lily and Ryle are in awe of their new niece and decide to start trying for their own baby.

But one night, Lily arrives home to find Ryle drunk and angry. Ryle explains that he read the newspaper story about Boston's best new businesses more closely and found that Atlas's restaurant is featured in it. In Atlas's interview, he explains that the name stands for "Better in Boston"—just like Lily's magnet. Ryle then decides to go through Lily's things and finds the carved heart, which is identical to the tattoo on Lily's shoulder. Reading Lily's journals further convince Ryle that Lily is harboring secret feelings for Atlas. Ryle's most violent episode follows. When Lily struggles, he headbutts her, rendering her unconscious. In an effort to deescalate the situation, Lily agrees to forgive a remorseful Ryle. Once he falls asleep, she escapes.

Lily calls Atlas, who takes her to the hospital. There, she finds out she is pregnant with Ryle's baby. While Lily decides what to do, Atlas lets her sleep in his guest room. The next day, Ryle tells her that he is going to Europe for his fellowship, giving her space for the next two months. He doesn't know about the pregnancy. Lily finds sanctuary with Atlas at first, though she is worried about what his girlfriend will think. Then, when his friends come over for a poker game, Lily discovers that Atlas made up Cassie. When Lily confronts Atlas about the lie, he tells her that he didn't want her to feel bad for him ending up alone or guilty for never coming back to him. Lily then asks Atlas why he didn't keep his promise of finding her. He admits he did come for her in college, but he saw that she was dating someone else. They agree that their feelings for each other and Lily's current situation with Ryle make things too complicated, so Lily goes back to her empty apartment. Before she leaves, Atlas tells her that if she is ever willing to fall in love again, he will be waiting.

Back home, Lily finally tells Allysa what Ryle did to her, and she also shares the news of her pregnancy. Shortly after, Ryle comes home early to try to work things out with Lily. Marshall agrees to serve as a moderator and protector while they talk. Lily is visibly pregnant when Ryle sees her. Ryle begs her to let him come home so they can raise the baby together. She tells him to leave and admits she wishes the baby wasn't his. Lily then fills her mother in about the abuse and the baby; she also admits that she still loves Ryle. Lily's mom expresses how proud she is of Lily for leaving. She tells Lily that if Ryle really loved her like he says he does, he wouldn't let Lily take him back.

As Lily's pregnancy progresses, she and Ryle form a tentative truce. Lily lets him help her out in small ways at first, and

eventually she is comfortable enough to let him stay in the apartment in case of emergencies. When their daughter is born, Ryle is by her side. Lily suggests that they name her Emerson—Emmy—in honor of Ryle's late brother. Ryle is overcome with love. When he asks Lily for an answer about the future of their marriage, Lily asks him what he would do if Emmy told him that her boyfriend hit her. Ryle, understanding the point of Lily's question, is devastated but supportive when Lily asks for a divorce. Lily hopes that this decision has broken the cycle of abuse she and her mother endured, ensuring Emmy will never suffer the way they did.

Nearly a year later, the epilogue finds Lily rushing down the street with Emmy to drop her off with Ryle. On her way, she runs into Atlas. Lily introduces him to her daughter, then they part ways. After Lily meets up with Ryle and says goodbye to Emmy, she runs back the way she came and catches up with Atlas. She tells him she's ready to be with him. They kiss, and Lily feels as if her struggle to survive is over.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Lily Bloom – Lily is the novel's protagonist. Lily's character is deeply defined by her childhood experience with domestic violence—Lily's father repeatedly abused Lily's mother. As an adult, Lily still harbors hatred toward her abusive father even after he passes away. She's also angry at her mother for never seeking help. Lily vows to live differently than her mother, never compromising her desires or safety for any man. When she meets Ryle, she feels that she has found her match in passion and drive, but his lack of interest in a serious relationship initially holds her back. Ryle re-enters Lily's life after she unwittingly hires his sister, Allysa, to work in her new **flower** shop. Ryle's desire for Lily eventually eclipses his usual distaste for committed relationships, and they begin a relationship. The romance seems perfect at first: Ryle celebrates Lily's ambition and supports her business, he has a family she's proud to be a part of, and she and Ryle are always honest with each other. However, two main issues undermine Lily's joy: the reappearance of her first love, Atlas, and Ryle's domestic violence. Lily processes her relationship with Atlas as she reads through her old journals, remembering how Atlas appeared in her life as her father's abuse of her mother worsened, giving her the true friendship and love needed. Lily's journals also influence her initial acceptance of Ryle's domestic abuse; she gives the chance to turn his behavior around because she sees he is different from her father. She initially chooses not to tell anyone about Ryle's violent episodes, believing they are over. This works for a while, and Lily tries her best to fully embrace her future with Ryle as they marry and consider starting a family together. When Ryle's abuse continues, Lily's decision to leave Ryle is initially complicated by

the unexpected news of her pregnancy. As Lily prepares for the birth of her child, she reckons with her feelings about her past, present, and future. When her daughter, Emmy, is born, Lily ultimately decides to leave Ryle for good, therefore ending the cycle of abuse and giving Emmy a chance at a better future. Ultimately, Lily reconnects with Atlas, and the novel implies that they will resume their romance.

Ryle Kincaid – Ryle is the brother of Allysa and later, the husband of Lily and father of Emmy. Ryle is a talented neurosurgeon finishing his residency in Boston when he meets Lily, who is blown away by his passion, attractiveness, wealth, and forthrightness. However, they resist dating because Ryle insists he can't be distracted by a relationship, and Lily isn't interested in casual sex. Ryle and Lily reconnect when Lily hires and grows close to Allysa. Ryle's passionate nature and desire for Lily overpower his misgivings about relationships, and they attempt to date. As they fall more deeply in love, Ryle is surprised at his capacity to stay sharp in his career while also maintaining a relationship. The perfect veneer Ryle maintains shatters one day when he pushes Lily during a drunken argument. Ryle's deep remorse initially convinces Lily to give him another chance, but his violent outbursts continue, nonetheless. Eventually, Lily learns that much of Ryle's character stems unresolved trauma related to the tragic death of his brother, Emerson, whom Ryle accidentally shot and killed. Ryle's devotion to healing people, his hesitancy to develop emotionally intimate relationships, and his inability to control his emotions are direct results of that trauma. After telling Lily about Emerson, they reconcile, Ryle's violent outbursts initially cease. They marry. But Ryle's abuse of Lily resumes after he discovers Lily's childhood journals about Atlas. Lily leaves him, but the two are forced to find a way to interact when she learns she is pregnant with his child. The pregnancy forces Ryle to reckon with his shortcomings and what they have cost him. The selfless love he feels for his daughter, and his need to protect her helps him understand why Lily cannot take him back. After their divorce, Ryle helps Lily co-parent their daughter.

Atlas Corrigan – Atlas is protagonist Lily's first love. Throughout the novel, Lily processes her memories of their time together by reading her old journal entries, which is essential to helping her make sense of her current relationship with Ryle. As teenagers, Lily and Atlas mutually support each another through their respective hardships. Lily's friendship and her insistence on providing him food, clothes, water, and shelter helps Atlas through a period of homelessness he experiences as a teenager. Initially, Atlas's shame about his life circumstances obscures his true nature; he is humble, quiet, and differential. As he grows closer to Lily, however, his thoughtfulness, intelligence, creativity, and passion for cooking shine through. Atlas also becomes protective of Lily the more he witnesses her father's abusive behavior. Lily eventually regards Atlas as the only person who truly sees and loves her

for who she is. However, the couple parts ways when Atlas moves to Boston to live with his uncle and later joins the military. Even so, Atlas promises Lily that he will find her when he thinks his life is good enough to include her in it. Atlas and Lily reconnect in adulthood when they run into each other at Bib's, the restaurant in Boston that Atlas has just opened. Atlas demonstrates his unwavering care for and protectiveness of Lily when he supports her through Ryle's abuse. Though he is violently angry at what Ryle has done, Atlas honors Lily's wishes to give her space to work things out on her own. Unlike Ryle, Atlas shows his love for Lily by trusting her and giving her space to make her own choices. Atlas and Lily reconnect at the end of the novel, after Lily has left Ryle, and it's implied that they will rekindle their romance.

Lily's Mother – Mrs. Bloom is Lily's mother. Growing up, Lily saw the effect her father's abusive behavior had on her mother, which deeply shaped the woman Lily grew to become. Lily worked to avoid manipulative men and stay strong and independent, hoping to avoid her mother's shortcomings. As an adult, Lily finds relief in the fact that her father is dead and can no longer hurt her mother, but she harbors lingering resentment toward her mother for never leaving her father or reporting his abuse. Lily's journals, which she later rereads as an adult, further reflect her childhood belief that her mother's pride, fear, and shame made her too weak to stand up to Lily's father. However, Lily's own adult experiences with domestic violence at Ryle's hand give her newfound empathy for the complexity of her parents' marriage. This empathy helps mend Lily's relationship with her mother, and she ends up seeking advice from her mother on how to handle her own abusive relationship. Her mom explains how her own abusive marriage taught her that compromising once will inevitably snowball into compromising everything. She advises Lily that the only real solution is to walk away—and that Ryle would insist that Lily leave him if he really loved Lily the way he claims. Lily's mother's support empowers Lily to make the best decision for her and her daughter, Emmy, and Lily ultimately leaves Ryle, breaking the cycle of abuse.

Allysa – Allysa is Marshall's wife, the younger sister of Ryle, sister-in-law of Lily, and later, the mother of Rylee. Allysa meets Lily when she responds to a help-wanted sign in the window of the building Lily's new **flower** shop. Allysa admits she is looking for work not for money—her husband has become very wealthy thanks to his software designs—but instead as a distraction from their struggles with infertility. Lily hires Allysa on the spot, and Allysa soon becomes Lily's most indispensable worker and best friend. Lily soon realizes that Ryle, whom she met months before on his rooftop deck, is Allysa's brother. This mutual connection to Allysa ends up drawing Ryle and Lily closer together, and they begin a relationship despite Lily's initial reservations. When Lily and Ryle choose to stay together and get married, Allysa is their biggest champion. Lily's friendship

with Allysa makes her even more excited to be a part of Ryle's family, a sentiment that deepens with the arrival of Allysa and Marshall's daughter, Rylee. Later, when Lily tells Allysa about Ryle's abuse, Allysa supports Lily. Lily also learns from Allysa that Allysa and Ryle have an older brother, Emerson, who died in childhood. Allysa pushes Ryle to tell Lily the truth about Emerson's death (Ryle accidentally shot and killed Emerson) to help Lily understand the root cause of Ryle's issues, but when Ryle's behavior continues, Allysa still supports Lily's decision to leave Ryle.

Lily's father – Mr. Bloom is Lily's father. The novel begins on the day of his funeral, at which Lily gave a eulogy effectively claiming that there was nothing good to remember about him—he abused Lily's mother (and to a lesser degree, Lily) for years, and Lily still feels angry at him because of it. Throughout high school, college, and now, her post-graduate life in Boston, Lily has remained vigilant against men like her father, refusing to continue the cycle of abuse. Initially, Lily doesn't see any resemblances between her father in Ryle, a neurosurgeon she meets after the funeral. Before they begin dating, Lily confides in Ryle about her father's abuse, and Ryle's sympathetic response reassures Lily that he is nothing like her father. As the novel unfolds and Lily re-reads many of her high school diaries, she relives the trauma her father inflicted on her and her mother, and she eventually understands that her father's insecurity, jealousy, and selfishness fueled his abusive behavior. As Lily revisits these memories, Lily's relationship with Ryle proves to have more in common with her parent's relationship than she initially thought. Lily's personal experiences with domestic violence give her a new perspective on her parents' relationship, which she ultimately realizes was far more complicated than she believed it to be.

Ellen DeGeneres – Ellen DeGeneres is a real-life comedian and television personality. As a teenager, Lily watched her talk show, *Ellen*, every day after school. Lily and Atlas bond over watching the show together. Lily addressed her childhood journal entries to DeGeneres because she saw the comedian as a safe person and friend, though she never actually sent her any letters. Journaling helped young Lily process both the violent environment of her home and her childhood romance with Atlas. In adulthood, re-reading these entries allows Lily to revisit these difficult memories, which informs her decisions about her own abusive relationship with Ryle and her rekindled friendship with Atlas. One of DeGeneres's quotes from *Finding Nemo* is "just keep swimming." The quote is particularly significant to Atlas and Lily, as they repeat it to each other in difficult moments.

Marshall – Marshall is the husband of Allysa, father of Rylee, and brother-in-law to Lily and Ryle. Marshall started as Ryle's friend in high school, but he eventually won over Allysa's affection with his carefree, goofy, and positive persona. As an adult, Marshall became unexpectedly wealthy after selling a

phone app to a technology company. Marshall's easygoing personality continues to complement Allysa's emphatic, particular nature, especially when the couple struggles with fertility issues. Lily appreciates these same characteristics after joining the family. When Marshall finds out about Ryle's abusive behavior, he protects Lily as she and Ryle work through the process of separating and ending their marriage.

Emmy Kincaid – Emmy Kincaid is the daughter of Ryle and Lily. Lily finds out she is pregnant with Emmy when she is in ER being treated for injuries Ryle inflicted on her. Lily's pregnancy forces her to decide if she will stay or leave her abusive husband for the good of her daughter. When Emmy is born, Lily and Ryle agree to co-parent and live separately. They name her after Ryle's deceased brother, Emerson.

Rylee – Rylee is Allysa and Marshall's daughter, named in honor of her uncle, Ryle. The couple, Lily, and Ryle's shared joy over Allysa's pregnancy brings them even closer together, leaving Lily ecstatic to belong to such a full, happy family. Rylee's birth inspires Lily and Ryle to start trying for their own baby.

Emerson Kincaid – Emerson Kincaid is the deceased older brother of Ryle and Allysa. After Ryle attacks Lily, Allysa urges Ryle to tell her about what happened to Emerson. Lily learns that Ryle accidentally shot and killed Emerson when they were young children. Emerson's death deeply affected Ryle; in adulthood, he suffers blackouts and episodes of violent rage. This trauma also makes Ryle hesitant to build deep relationships. Later, Ryle and Lily name their daughter Emmy in honor of Emerson.

Cassie – Cassie is the name of the girlfriend Atlas tells Lily about when they reconnect after many years apart. Though Lily is glad Atlas is happy, she is jealous when he tells her about Cassie, and this shows her that she still has feelings for Atlas. When Lily flees Ryle's abusive behavior and takes refuge at Atlas's house, she learns from Atlas's friends that Cassie never existed—Atlas lied about having a girlfriend so Lily wouldn't pity Atlas for being alone.

Lucy – Lucy is Lily's roommate at the beginning of the novel. Though the two women get along okay, Lucy's constant singing annoys Lily. Lily is relieved when Lucy moves out after getting engaged to her boyfriend, Alex. Later in the novel, Lily hires Lucy to help her in the **flower** shop.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Brad – Brad is the dishwasher at Bib's and Atlas's friend. He arrives at Atlas's house, where Lily is staying, for poker night with Darin and later Jimmy. Brad's nonchalance and empathy help Lily cope with the trauma of Ryle's abuse.

Darin – Darin is the sous chef at Bib's and Atlas's friend. Lily meets Darin, Brad, and Jimmy at the friends' weekly poker game while staying at Atlas's house. Darin responds supportively after Lily tells Atlas's friends about her abusive

relationship, and this helps her to feel more comfortable.

Jimmy – Jimmy is the valet at Bib’s and Atlas’s friend. Lily meets Jimmy, Brad, and Darin when she comes to Atlas’s house for poker night. Though his conversations with Lily are less personal, his sarcasm also helps normalize the evening for her.

The Emergency Room Nurse – The emergency room nurse conducts Lily’s medical exam when Atlas brings her to the hospital after Ryle’s final abusive episode. The nurse acts as an ally for Lily on a traumatic evening, treating Lily’s injuries while offering information about potential examinations and pressing charges.

Devin – Devin is one of Lily’s best friends; she met him at her old marketing job. Devin accompanies Lily to Allysa and Marshall’s party. Devin is gay, but he pretends to be Lily’s boyfriend to make Ryle jealous.

Mrs. Kincaid – Mrs. Kincaid is Ryle’s mother. Lily’s fondness for Ryle’s parents adds to her desire to remain a part of their family.

Dr. Kincaid – Dr. Kincaid is Ryle’s father. Lily’s fondness for Ryle’s parents adds to her desire to remain a part of their family.

Alex – Alex is the boyfriend and later, fiancé, of Lily’s roommate, Lucy.

Serena – Serena is an employee Lily hires for the **flower** shop to support their increasing sales.

times hurting Lily, too. From this experience, Lily identifies two main flaws in her parents’ relationship that she believes are responsible for their problems: that her mother married someone who didn’t truly love her, and that her mother chose to maintain the family’s status and lifestyle instead of seeking help to maintain her and her daughter’s safety. Lily hates her father for his abusive actions, but the main missteps Lily identifies and vows not to repeat in her own life place responsibility and judgement on the victim—her mother—rather than on the person perpetrating violence—her father.

Lily is shocked when she marries Ryle and finds herself in an abusive marriage like her mother before her. Like her mom, Lily’s first instinct is to preserve the reputation and career of the man she loves by lying about the source of her injuries, though doing so fills her with shame for repeating her mother’s pattern. Lily eventually flees her home when Ryle’s violent outbursts escalate, but the unexpected news that she is pregnant with his baby leaves her confused about how to proceed. Lily longs to forgive Ryle, hoping he might get better and raise their child with her. On the other hand, she worries that staying will prove that she is weak, lead to further abuse, and cause others to judge her. In this way, Lily’s experience with her own abusive marriage shows her what she was unable to recognize as a child: how complicated and isolating domestic violence can be. Lily’s new empathy for her mother allows her to have more compassion for herself, too. She fights back against her shame by confiding in the people she loves and trusts: her mother; her sister-in-law, Allysa; and her childhood love, Atlas. Lily is shocked and grateful when her community responds to her admission with support rather than judgment. The strength Lily gains through opening up to her support system allows her to overcome the shame she used to associate with victims of domestic violence. The novel thus shows how confiding in others plays a vital role in helping survivors of abuse work through their trauma and internalized shame and place blame where it really belongs—on abusers—thus breaking cycles of abuse.



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.



CYCLES OF ABUSE

It Ends with Us portrays abuse as cyclical, both individually and generationally. In its examination of the dating life and marriage of protagonist Lily and her partner, Ryle, the novel shows how a pattern of violence and forgiveness can repeat throughout a single relationship. For Lily and Ryle, this cycle begins with passionate feelings of love, belonging, and calm. However, Ryle often loses his temper, causing him to lash out violently and hurt Lily. Afterward, Ryle’s intense remorse and Lily’s longing for the version of him she loves pushes them toward reconciliation. They are happy for a time, but something inevitably sets Ryle off again, and the cycle of violence, remorse, and reconciliation continues. Lily’s parents’ relationship significantly shapes her responses these abusive episodes, showing how domestic violence can reoccur generationally. Lily’s father abused her mother repeatedly, at



NAKED TRUTHS

Ryle and Lily’s intimacy, connection, and passion in *It Ends with Us* is built upon an exchange of radical, uncensored truth. Honesty becomes a core value of Lily’s in adulthood because her early life was full of secrets and unacknowledged truths. Her mother chose to hide her father’s abusive behavior behind closed doors, implicating Lily in protecting him. As a teenager, Lily’s father’s actions and her mother’s inactions made her feel stuck in an abusive environment—until she befriends a teenage boy—Atlas—whom she finds living in the abandoned house behind her childhood home. The two bond over their individual traumas and their love of Ellen DeGeneres, to whom Lily secretly addresses all

her journal entries. Atlas and “Ellen” became the only people with whom Lily feels she can fully be herself. Life circumstances separate Lily and Atlas, though, and Lily’s diary-based correspondence with Ellen ends. When Lily meets Ryle after college, Ryle’s ability to talk openly and honestly about difficult subjects and share brutal truths about himself draws her to him.

As Lily and Ryle’s relationship deepens, the tension between truth and secrets becomes the crux of all conflict between them. When Ryle discovers that the “**Better in Boston**” magnet that Lily keeps on her fridge and the tattoo of an **open heart** on her shoulder are connected to her history with Atlas, he believes she has been keeping secrets from him maliciously. Ryle sees Lily’s secrecy as an intentional betrayal of their agreement to be truthful and uses it to justify the most intense of his abusive episodes. Ryle, of course, is not innocent of keeping things hidden. His inability to manage his emotions in a healthy way is linked to something he never wanted to share with Lily: he accidentally shot and killed his older brother, Emerson, when they were children. By the time these secrets come to light, they have already done irreversible damage to Lily and Ryle’s relationship. Ultimately, it’s Lily’s ability to exchange naked truths with herself that leads to resolution in the novel. She accepts that she’s both stuck in an abusive situation and deeply in love with Ryle. Her ability to acknowledge these truths allows her to honor her love for Ryle while also moving on for her daughter’s sake, and this new balance is solidified by her decision to name their daughter Emmy after Emerson. Lily’s journey throughout the novel shows that truth is not the sharing of *every* thought and past experience with others. Instead, truth is the essential practice of being honest with your loved ones and *yourself* about your limitations and motivations.



GOOD AND EVIL

It Ends with Us is the story of Lily’s journey to understand how to navigate a world in which no one is fully good or evil. When Lily and Ryle first meet on the roof, they begin exchanging “naked truths,” offering each other radically honest answers to challenging questions. Lily explains that her late father, whose funeral she just attended, abused her mother throughout Lily’s childhood. Her father always followed his violent episodes with periods of affection toward his wife and daughter, and Lily admits that she feels like a bad person for having longed for those moments of reconciliation as a child. But Ryle tells Lily that no one is all good or all bad. While he says this to encourage Lily, his words foreshadow the complications that will arise between Ryle and Lily when they later begin a romantic relationship. In childhood, Lily learned to process the trauma of her father’s abusive behavior by simplifying her perception of him: he hurt her mother, so he was evil. When Ryle is repeatedly violent to Lily,

however, she finds that this same tactic doesn’t work. Though she can’t excuse his behavior, she also loves him too much to cut him out entirely. When she unexpectedly becomes pregnant with Ryle’s baby, it is Lily’s drive to give her daughter the best life possible that eventually persuades Lily to leave Ryle—but also to let him co-parent their daughter. In so doing, Lily can give Emmy a chance to see the good side of Ryle while shielding her from the bad. Lily learns that ignoring the bad and taking only the good in someone can perpetuate violent and abusive behavior. At the same time, though, ignoring everything good about a person because they are imperfect also limits the possibility for growth and redemption.



CHOSEN FAMILY

In *It Ends with Us*, the trauma of growing up in an abusive household deeply affects Lily’s perception of her worth and her sense of belonging. For this reason, she is overjoyed when Ryle’s family embraces her with open arms. In Ryle, Lily finds more than a husband: she finds a best friend in Allysa, Ryle’s supportive younger sister; a brother in Marshall, Allysa’s carefree husband; and loving parents in Ryle’s mom and dad, Mrs. and Dr. Kincaid. When Ryle’s violence against Lily begins to escalate, this sense of belonging only ensnares her more in her relationship with him and the life they are building together. For much of the novel, Lily vacillates between staying and leaving, not only because she truly loves Ryle, but also because she feels that leaving for her own well-being may also mean leaving the love she has found in his family. However, Lily is surprised to find that Allysa and Marshall support her decision to leave Ryle—and that their support is integral to her ability to set boundaries and rebuild her life as she navigates leaving her abusive marriage. And at the end of the novel, the birth of Lily and Ryle’s daughter, Emmy, nullifies Lily’s concern that divorcing Ryle may separate her from her new family. In fact, it is love of that family—and most importantly, its newest member, Emmy—that gives Lily the strength to leave. Lily learns that love, in truest form, does not trap you, but keep you afloat in hard times and propel you toward a brighter future—and that a person’s chosen family should consist of people who offer you that kind of love.



SYMBOLS

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



OPEN HEART

The carved wooden heart that Atlas makes for Lily when they are teenagers symbolizes the significant role that Lily and Atlas have played in each other’s lives. As a teenager, Lily is terrorized by Lily’s father’s abuse of Lily’s

mother, and Atlas is left homeless and squatting in the abandoned building behind Lily's home after his mother kicked him out. Lily and Atlas bond over these traumas, taking refuge in each other's company to help navigate their hardships, and a passionate romance blooms from this bond. One night, Atlas brings Lily a heart, open at the top, which he carved for her as a present. Atlas's gift is symbolically significant in two ways. First, the open top and hollow center of the heart reflects the way that Lily and Atlas, two people whose emotional wounds have caused them to feel isolated and shut down, open each other up to love through their serendipitous friendship and eventual romance. Second, the heart is carved from wood Atlas takes from the oak tree behind Lily's house. One afternoon, while sitting with Lily by her **garden**, Atlas grows reflective as they discuss how plants that are not cared for shrivel, just like neglected children. Lily, understanding that Atlas is talking about himself, uses the oak tree to explain how some plants thrive without any care at all, doggedly surviving where they sprout. By carving Lily a heart from the wood of that same tree, Atlas's gift symbolizes the way Lily's words have encouraged him. It also shows how their relationship is particularly meaningful because they both understand what it means to grow despite coming from trying environments.

After Lily and Atlas part ways when Atlas moves to Boston to live with his uncle, Lily gets a tattoo of an open heart in the place on her collarbone that Atlas always used to kiss her. The tattoo is a testament to the experiences and relationship that the carved wooden heart symbolizes, with the permanency of that mark adding another layer of meaning. The tattoo's permanence reflects how Lily's childhood and her relationship with Atlas are memories she will always carry; it a visual symbol of the things that made Lily who she is as an adult—a person that Ryle, Lily's eventual husband, loves. However, when Ryle goes through Lily's things and discovers the wooden heart's significance, he becomes unhinged. Finding out that elements of Lily he loved are tied her intimate relationship with another man incites Ryle's jealousy and violence. Lily's tattoo is effectively a symbol of her past, so when Ryle bites into it during his most abusive episode to disfigure or even remove it—his exact intention is unclear—he demonstrates that he doesn't want to learn about or respect the whole truth of who Lily is; he only wants to see the parts of her that include him, showing exactly how selfish and unhealthy his love for his is.



LILY'S BETTER IN BOSTON MAGNET

The Better in Boston magnet is a dual symbol of the Lily's and Atlas's past and future. In high school, they bond over their struggle to survive toxic living situations, and they spend a lot of time together imagining the future and thinking things will be easier and happier then. They imagine the future taking place in Boston because Atlas has fond memories of living there as a child. Atlas repeatedly promises

Lily that "everything is better in Boston," and they dream of living there together. When Atlas leaves for Boston much earlier than expected to live with his uncle, he gives Lily a magnet bearing the same phrase to remind her of their bond and their shared dream of the future. He promises to find her once he has made something of himself. Though they go their separate ways and Lily, as an adult, believes she has long since let go of Atlas, she keeps the magnet on her fridge. For Lily, the magnet memorializes the lost love that made her strive for a better future. The magnet's presence on Lily's refrigerator also symbolizes the way she has maintained the small, quiet hope that she might reunite with Atlas one day. Whenever she sees it, she thinks of Atlas, keeping his memory ever-present. For Atlas's part, the decision he made as an adult to name his new restaurant Bib's—Better in Boston—mirrors the same lingering hope that he will find Lily again.

That the magnet symbolizes this relationship is not lost on Ryle, either. When he reads the newspaper article that features Lily's floral shop as a top new Boston business, he sees that Atlas's business has made the top of the same list. Atlas reveals the meaning of the acronymic title in his interview with the newspaper, and Ryle connects Atlas's explanation to the magnet Lily keeps on her fridge. When Ryle reads Lily's old journals, he confirms his worst fears. Ryle's reaction to this information underscores the magnet's symbolism. Ryle takes Lily's choice to keep the magnet not only as mark of her and Atlas's past bond or a tenuous hope for the future, but also as a confirmation that they have an active, hidden relationship. Regardless of what is true and what is mere assumption on Ryle's part, nothing justifies Ryle's alcohol-fueled response—attacking Lily and attempting to overwhelm any remaining ties to Atlas with force—and it ultimately spells the end for him and Lily. Indirectly, then, the magnet—and the good, healthy relationship it symbolizes—contribute to Lily's ultimate decision to break the cycle of abuse and leave Ryle.



PLANTS

In the novel, Lily's relationship with plants symbolizes her capacity to overcome the violence of her childhood. As a child, Lily kept a small garden plot of mostly vegetables in her parent's backyard. Plants in this context symbolize hope, endurance, and sustenance because gardening was Lily's main physical and emotional escape from Lily's father's abusive behavior. Though as an adult Lily doesn't have the outdoor space to continue this practice, her decision to open floral shop fills the same role her garden once did. Like gardening, the nature of her work as a small business owner embodies her determination, creativity, and desire to spark joy in others.

Lily's floral shop also symbolizes another victory over her father's abuse. Six months after his death, Lily uses her

inheritance from his estate to start her business. She worries that it may fail and prove correct her father's assessment that she is a failure—but she leaves her prestigious marketing job to pursue her dream anyway. Her business flourishes just as her backyard garden once did. Ryle's presence in Lily's life as she takes this leap of faith helps influence the type of business she builds, ultimately contributing to her success. When Lily is brainstorming the type of florist she wants to be, Ryle's assertion that nobody is fully good or bad echoes in her mind. She decides to embody this ethos in her work, highlighting in her bouquets the bold, dark side of flowers.

Understanding this duality of human character also becomes essential in Lily's personal life. As she navigates Ryle's increasingly abusive behavior, she wants to believe that Ryle can change so that they can build the happy domestic life they dream of having. This life includes building their home together in the apartment that Ryle buys for her, which has garden beds that would allow her to grow once more. But when Lily finds out she's pregnant, her desire to build a good life for her child becomes more important than what she thought she needed. Lily's decision to decorate a plant-themed nursery for her baby rather than creating the garden she originally wanted shows the redirection of her priorities at the end of the novel. In the end, Lily's desire to move forward and provide a safe, happy life for her daughter trumps chasing the dreams she once had with Ryle.

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

This passage, in which Lily and Ryle have their first conversation after meeting on a rooftop, demonstrates the way that their relationship starts, from the very beginning, with brutal honesty. While many people hide their darker side in order to present others with a likable but one-dimensional impression of their personality, Ryle and Lily agree to share who they really are with each other before they even truly know each other.

This conversation establishes Lily and Ryle as complex characters with complicated histories and regrets. Interestingly, Ryle's admission that he feels broken doesn't drive Lily away. In fact, it's Ryle's transparency about his own feelings that assuages Lily's initial hesitation to share a naked truth of her own. The depth and earnestness that Lily and Ryle demonstrate as they delve into their pasts—especially the ugly parts that continue to haunt them and make them feel guilty—add an intensity to their relationship that often doesn't develop in people's first meeting.

“My father was abusive. [...] Sometimes he would buy me stuff because he knew I hated it when they fought. When I was a kid, I found myself looking forward to the nights they would fight. Because I knew if he hit her, the two weeks that followed would be great. [...] When I got older I realized that not doing something about it made me just as guilty. I spent most of my life hating him for being such a bad person, but I'm not so sure I'm much better. Maybe we're both bad people.”

Ryle looks over at me with a thoughtful expression. “Lily,” he says pointedly. “There is no such thing as *bad people*. We're all just people who do bad things.”

I open my mouth to respond, but his words strike me silent.

Related Characters: Lily Bloom, Ryle Kincaid (speaker), Lily's Mother, Lily's father

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 16-17

Explanation and Analysis

The naked truth that Lily shares with Ryle when they first meet is a story about her father's abuse of her mother and Lily's complicated role within that dynamic. This is the first



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Atria edition of *It Ends with Us* published in 2016.

Chapter 1 Quotes

“I feel like everyone fakes who they really are, when deep down we're all equal amounts of screwed up. Some of us are just better at hiding than others.”



[...] “I don't think it's being a little guarded is a negative thing,” I say. “Naked truths aren't always pretty.”

He stares at me for a moment. “*Naked truths*,” he repeats. “I like that. [...] Tell me a naked truth, Lily.”

“Pertaining to what?”

He shrugs. “I don't know. Something you aren't proud of. Something that will make me feel a little less screwed up on the inside.”

Related Characters: Lily Bloom, Ryle Kincaid (speaker)

Related Themes:  

mention of the pattern of abuse Lily witnessed as a child and will later experience herself in adulthood. Lily's history with abuse becomes increasingly salient the longer she knows Ryle and his behavior begins to resemble her father's.

That Lily is willing to share this story with Ryle, a stranger, is also significant because it represents one way she rebels against the way she was raised. Her family kept her father's violent streak a secret to protect the family image, so Lily's decision to be honest with Ryle about the abuse, especially because her admission has to do with her own culpability, is *truly* a defiant act.

Because sharing about her family history is in itself revolutionary for Lily, Ryle's response to her admission—to neither condemn her father nor (to a lesser extent) herself—hits her as an entirely new thought: good and evil are a spectrum rather than a boundary. According to Ryle's worldview, a history of doing bad things doesn't necessarily make someone a fundamentally bad person, it's just part of their personal history. Lily's perspective shifts in response to Ryle's comment. Later on, Lily's altered view of morality will play a large part in Lily's response to Ryle's abusive behavior.

Chapter 2 Quotes


☝☝ I open the shoebox on my lap and pull out the contents. On the very top is a small wooden, hollow heart. I run my fingers over it and remember the night I was given this heart. As soon as the memory begins to sink in, I set it aside. Nostalgia is a funny thing.

I move a few old letters and newspaper clippings aside. Beneath all of it, I find what I was hoping was inside these boxes. And also sort of hoping *wasn't*.

My Ellen Diaries.

Related Characters: Lily Bloom (speaker), Atlas Corrigan, Lily's father, Ellen DeGeneres

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

Lily combs through a shoebox of mementos she's kept from her teenage years. Among these mementos is the symbolic open heart that Atlas carved for her and Lily's old journals, which contain entries that Lily addressed to her television hero, Ellen DeGeneres. The introduction of these items

establishes Ellen's and Atlas's significant roles in Lily's childhood: the heart symbolizes that emotional weight of that period, while Lily's diaries narrate the full story.

It is significant that Lily seeks out these memories directly after meeting Ryle and after her father's death. The aftermath of her father's funeral and the "naked truths" that Lily shared with Ryle compel Lily to reflect on her childhood. In particular, Lily's initial conversation with Ryle inspires her to reread her diaries for the first time, and in them, she finds an account of formative teenage experiences.


As a high schooler, Lily's one-sided correspondence with Ellen and her friendship with Atlas were the only times in which she told anyone the truth of her home life. In turn, Atlas shared his own troubled history with Lily, and their vulnerability with each other bonded them instantly. Lily's profound connection with Ryle mirrors this, as it the connection emerged through sharing with him the lasting effects of her father's abuse. The similarities between men in Lily's past and present make the contents of her journal even more relevant to Lily's story and character development.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☝☝ "Someone once told me that there is no such thing as bad people. We're all just people who sometimes do bad things. That stuck with me, because it's so true. We've all got a little bit of good and evil in us. I want to make that our theme. Instead of painting the walls a putrid sweet color, we paint them dark purple with black accents. And instead of only putting out the usual pastel displays of flowers in boring crystal vases that make people think about life, we go edgy. Brave and bold."

Related Characters: Lily Bloom (speaker), Ryle Kincaid, Allysa

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 46

Explanation and Analysis

As Lily and Allysa discuss the type of floral shop Lily intends to open, Lily's earlier conversation with Ryle about good and evil people comes to her mind once more. Her response to Allysa—that she wants to replace people's cheery associations with flowers with darker ones—demonstrates the ways in which Ryle has already embedded himself in Lily's worldview.

Lily's willingness to openly embrace darkness in her business shows that Lily is starting to reject the worldviews and habits her family instilled in her as a child. As a child, Lily had to silently endure the pain her father's abusive streak caused her in order to maintain an outward appearance of beauty and happiness; as an adult, Lily understands how openly sharing and even harnessing the harsher realities of human experience draws people in and honors the complexity of people and relationships.

This passage also demonstrates the shifting symbolism of plants in Lily's life. Her love for plants began in childhood when she would garden to escape her father's rampages. Thus, her the flower shop she opens as an adult symbolizes her ability to endure hardship. It is also significant that Lily's business is built using the inheritance she receives after her father's death. She knows that opening a small business is a risky endeavor that could lead to failure—and it's also something her father would *never* have approved of. Her boldness in following her dream, especially using her late father's wealth and the expertise she developed by gardening as a coping mechanism, is yet another way in which Lily triumphs over her past.

Chapter 8 Quotes

☝☝ *"We're just alike," he said, [...] "Plants and humans. Plants need to be loved the right way in order to survive. So do humans. We rely on our parents from birth to love us enough to keep us alive. And if our parents show us the right kind of love, we turn out as better humans overall. But if we're neglected..."*

[...] I pointed at the row of trees that lined the fence to left of the yard. "You see that tree over there? [...] It grew on its own," I said. "Most plants do need a lot of care to survive. But some things, like trees, are strong enough to do it by just relying on themselves and no one else."

Related Characters: Lily Bloom, Atlas Corrigan (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 106

Explanation and Analysis

This excerpt from Lily's high school diaries recounts an important conversation she and Atlas had as they were developing their friendship. Atlas, seeing how Lily's garden thrives under her care is struck by how his mother's failure to nurture him has left him feeling stunted. In response, Lily

uses a tree in her backyard as an analogy for how parental behavior does not predetermine children's success later in life.

Interestingly, Lily notes that trees often survive on their own with no help at all. This comment honors the resilience that Lily sees in her new friend, but it also fails to acknowledge the benefits of companionship outside of giving and receiving care. Trees may pull nutrients from the soil and stand tall on the depth of their own roots without the help of a gardener, but trees growing together have different merits: interlocking roots that help strengthen their hold to the ground, the ability to shade each other from harsh sun and maintain moisture levels, or the simple beauty of their contrasting leaves. The same is true of Lily and Atlas's relationship. Their bond deepens not only due to the similar ways their parents have wounded them and their shared determination to succeed in spite of this, but also—and more importantly—because of the way their mutual support for each other deeply improves both their lives.

This tree is also notable because Atlas later takes a branch from it in order to carve the heart token he later gifts Lily. The conversation that this passage outlines imbues Atlas's present with the history of his and Lily's unique connection, their shared ability to survive, and the way their relationship inspired them to seek out better futures in which they can thrive.

Chapter 10 Quotes

☝☝ *"I will say...I kind of wish this could have happened a year ago."*

I wince at his words, trying not to let them penetrate [...]

I didn't expect to feel this much hurt after seeing him.

But it's good. This happened for a reason. My heart needed closure so I can give it to Ryle, but maybe I couldn't do that until this happened.

Related Characters: Lily Bloom, Atlas Corrigan (speaker), Ryle Kincaid, Cassie

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 137

Explanation and Analysis

While the novel up to this point largely speaks to Lily's

acceptance of her painful family history, her professional growth, and her blooming relationship with Ryle, this passage reflects the complicated emotions that surface when she sees Atlas for the first time since high school.

Running into Atlas evokes even more emotion in Lily because it occurs in tandem with Lily rereading the teenage journals in which he stars. Both seeing Atlas and reliving her memories of him in written form pull Lily back to the past while she is trying to build a future with Ryle. Lily's internal conflict over hearing Atlas has a girlfriend shows that she is torn between the future she wants and the past she hasn't fully healed from.

Atlas's truthful admission that he wishes they had run into each other a year ago also suggests his ongoing hope that he and Lily would reunite, which only makes Lily feel worse, though she chooses to suppress her long-held hope for the same thing because she is happily attached to Ryle.

conviction that she could never tolerate abuse by her own partner.

The staunch belief contrasts with the more nuanced view Lily gains by the end of the novel. As a teenager, Lily judged her mother for perceived unwillingness to defend herself against Lily's father. But the abuse that Lily experiences as an adult leads her to view her mother in a more sympathetic light.

That Atlas was an active witness to this part of Lily's past—a part that her parents ensured no one knew about—gives him an unmatched understanding of Lily. Until Lily meets Ryle and begins exchanging radical truths about her past, Atlas was the only one who saw the complex, ugly pieces of Lily's childhood. This knowledge allows Atlas to provide a special kind of support when Ryle becomes violent toward Lily, but it also becomes a source of conflict between Lily and Ryle.

Chapter 11 Quotes

💬 “Mom, he was trying to rape you!”

[...] “It’s not like that, Lily. We’re married, and sometimes marriage is just...you’re too young to understand it.”

It got really quiet for a minute, and I said. “I hope to hell I never do.”

[...] *When she finished crying, I looked around the room and Atlas had left [...] She never did say anything about him being there. Not one thing. I waited for her to tell me I was grounded, but she never did. I realized that maybe she didn’t acknowledge it because that’s what she does. Things that hurt her just get swept under the rug, never to be brought up again.”*

Related Characters: Lily Bloom, Lily’s Mother (speaker), Ryle Kincaid, Atlas Corrigan, Lily’s father

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 156

Explanation and Analysis

This excerpt, taken from another entry in Lily’s teenage journals, depicts one of the most severe episodes of violent behavior that Lily’s father directed at Lily’s mother. Lily interprets her mother’s inaction to this violence as a willful decision to ignore and even conceal Lily’s father’s abuse. Lily’s mom’s avoidance of conflict in the face of her abusive relationship is so extreme that she even overlooks Atlas’s presence in her teenage daughter’s room entirely. This memory illuminates Lily’s long-held disbelief and resulting judgment toward her mother’s response, as well as Lily’s

Chapter 12 Quotes

💬 I run inside the store and grab the steampunk flowers and run them back to their car. Her face lights up when I hand them to her.


“I’m happy you’re pregnant but that’s not why I’m giving you these flowers. I just want you to have them. Because you’re my best friend.”

Allysa squeezes me and whispers in my ear. “I hope he marries you someday. We’ll be even better sisters.”

She climbs inside the car and they leave, and I just stand there watching them because I don’t know that I’ve ever had a friend like her in my whole life. Maybe it’s the wine. I don’t know, but I love today.

Related Characters: Lily Bloom, Allysa, Rylee (speaker), Ryle Kincaid

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 167

Explanation and Analysis

This passage shows how Lily’s friendship with Allysa deepens alongside Lily’s deepening romance with Ryle. At the beginning of this day, Allysa envied the moody, strange bouquet of steampunk flowers Lily arranged. Allysa demonstrates her understanding and affection for Lily in her appreciation of Lily’s bouquet, her support of Lily’s

artistic vision, and her understanding and affection for Lily. When she announces to Ryle and Lily at dinner later that day that she and Marshall are pregnant, instant love and anticipation for this new life brings joy to all four of them. The significance of this life event reveals to Lily exactly how important not only Ryle but also his family have become to her. Allysa's support of Lily in both Lily's relationship with her brother and in business is instrumental to Lily's happiness and success. Lily sees this, and it prompts her to give Allysa the flowers as a token of her appreciation for their friendship. Their bond ultimately intensifies Lily's entanglement with Ryle. Later in the novel, when Ryle turns abusive, Lily's friendship with Allysa factors into Lily's decision to stay with or leave him. Lily's strong ties to Ryle's family make her more willing to forgive him out of fear that she will lose the sustaining bonds she has developed with Allysa, and later, with Allysa's daughter, Rylee.



Chapter 13 Quotes

☝☝ “You don't put pressure on me to be something I'm incapable of being. You accept me exactly how I am.”

I smile. “Well, in fairness, you're a little different from when I first met you. You aren't so anti-girlfriend anymore.”

“That's because you make it easy,” he says, sliding a hand inside the back of my shirt. “It's easy being with you. I can still have the career I've always wanted, but you make it ten times better with the way you support me. When I'm with you, I feel like I get to have my cake and eat it, too.”

Related Characters: Lily Bloom, Ryle Kincaid (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 173

Explanation and Analysis

Just as Lily has grown immensely both professionally and personally throughout the novel, Ryle's comment in this passage demonstrates the ways in which having Lily in his life have changed him, too. To be with her, he pushed himself beyond his comfort level, and he shares that he is earnestly happy as a result of this—far more than he ever expected to be.

Lily's appreciation of the ways Ryle has grown and compromised only adds to her desire to build a future with him. Ryle's willingness to change early on in their relationship also fuels Lily's decision to give him another chance when he becomes unexpectedly violent toward her. She tallies his efforts as evidence of his goodness and the

ways in which he differs from her father.

However, Ryle's wording is telling in this conversation, foreshadowing some of the behavior he later adopts. His assertion that Lily hasn't put pressure on him, that she has made their relationship easy, and that he gets to both have and eat his cake subtly reveals a selfishness to his love. He speaks to his own experience and self-satisfaction without considering Lily's feelings, celebrating the easy, pleasant parts of romantic love. When things get harder, as they inevitably do in any real relationship, he is unprepared, lashes out, and physically abuses her.

Chapter 14 Quotes

☝☝ I start shaking my head, wanting the last fifteen seconds to go away. *Fifteen seconds*. That's all it takes to completely change everything about a person.



Fifteen seconds that we'll never get back.

He pulls me against him and starts kissing the top of my head. “I'm so sorry. I just...I burned my hand. I panicked. You were laughing and...I'm so sorry, it all happened so fast. I didn't mean to push you, Lily, I'm sorry.”

I don't hear Ryle's voice this time. All I hear is my father's voice [...]

I just want him away from me. I use every ounce of strength I have in both my hands and legs and I force him *the fuck* away from me.

Related Characters: Ryle Kincaid (speaker), Lily Bloom, Lily's Mother, Lily's father

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 186

Explanation and Analysis

This passage recounts Lily's visceral reaction to Ryle's first abusive episode. While there is some indication of Ryle's penchant to express anger violently at beginning of the novel—mainly in the way he attacked the chair on the rooftop patio the night he and Lily met—it is only in this scene that Lily truly understands his potential to inflict violence on her.

This is the moment that Lily realizes that Ryle's behavior mirrors the abusive behavior Lily's father exhibited toward her mother—despite Lily's long-held confidence that she would never let someone treat her that way. The suddenness of this turn in Ryle is unfathomable to Lily; her

whole perception of him shifts in an instant.



Ryle immediately tries to reconcile with her. However, Lily's personal history with abuse has transported her to her memories of her father's post-attack apologies. Ryle talks, she doesn't hear the man she loves. She hears the empty reparations of the father she hated. Her reaction to this is unconscious and powerful—she wants nothing to do with Ryle in this moment and pushes him away as unflinchingly as she always promised to do if anyone hurt her like her mother had been hurt.

☝☝ *He's not like my father. He can't be. He's nothing like that uncaring bastard.*

We're both upset and kissing and confused and sad. I've never felt anything like this moment—so ugly and painful. But somehow the only thing that eases the hurt just caused by this man is this man [...]

I'm hurting so much on the inside, yet my body craves his apology in the form of his mouth and hands on me. I want to lash out at him and react like I wish my mother would have reacted when my father hurt her, but deep down I want to believe that it really was an accident.

Related Characters: Lily Bloom, Ryle Kincaid, Lily's Mother, Lily's father

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 188

Explanation and Analysis

This excerpt further depicts Lily's response to Ryle, which shifts as time passes. Despite Lily's initial reaction to cut off Ryle completely and instantly, Ryle's insistent apology and loving regret finally breaks through her anger. In this passage, Lily's reaction becomes more complex. She struggles to make sense of the fact that Ryle has hurt her and that he is still the person she loves.

In order to move forward and be with Ryle, Lily must break this new association of him with her father. She can only forgive Ryle if she believes he is not another version of the man she hated. For most of her life, Lily has viewed her father as a villain. Ryle's overt remorse—a kind of naked truth, a core value of their relationship—seems to prove that he is unlike her father; she can't write him off in the simplistic fashion she did her father. She also recalls her and Ryle's conversation that no one is fully good nor bad once more.

Lily also acknowledges that this is a feeling—this complex, contradictory combination of hurt and love—that she has never experienced. This passage makes clear that living through an episode of abuse is very different from observing one. Lily decides to give Ryle another chance, though she promises she will leave if the abuse happens again. What Lily doesn't yet see is that in forgiving Ryle, she is perpetuating the same pattern she witnessed between her parents.

Chapter 16 Quotes

☝☝ "I wanted to apologize for saying that you sounded like your mother. That was hurtful. And I'm sorry."

I don't know why I always feel like crying when I'm around him. When I think about him. When I read about him. It's like my emotions are still tethered to him somehow and I can't figure out how to cut the strings [...]

He writes something down on the sticky note and then proceeds to pull my phone apart. He slips the case off and puts the sticky note between the case and the phone, then slides the cover back over it [...]

"It's my cell phone number. Keep it hidden there in case you ever need it."

I wince at the gesture. The *unnecessary* gesture. "I won't need it." "I hope not."

Related Characters: Lily Bloom, Atlas Corrigan (speaker), Ryle Kincaid, Lily's Mother

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 206

Explanation and Analysis

This scene takes place the day after Atlas's encounter with Lily and Ryle at Bib's, during which Atlas sees Lily's injuries and accurately guesses they are a result of domestic violence. Atlas's reaction was immediate and protective. He was critical of Lily's attempt to cover for Ryle, and he reminded her that covering up abuse had been Lily's mother's tactic. Atlas comes to Lily's work the next day to apologize for this comparison—but also to offer his help if Lily ever needs it.

Atlas's reaction is a result of the close nature of his and Lily's relationship as teenagers. Atlas was the first person with whom Lily exchanged brutal honesty, setting the stage

for the type of bond that Lily builds with Ryle years later. Now, despite the amount of time that has past, Atlas still cares for Lily enough to speak truth to her and care for her, even when it makes her uncomfortable. Atlas's deep understanding of Lily and her family history means he also understands that telling her she sounded like her mother—defensive and in denial of the real abuse in her relationship—was hurtful to Lily. He apologizes for this while still upholding his promise to be there for her as he used to be.

Lily doesn't want to believe that she is like her mother in the same way she doesn't want to believe that things with Ryle will actually escalate to a level that requires Atlas's help. She is committed to holding Ryle's goodness above the evil behavior he exhibited in his outburst. Still, she doesn't remove Atlas's note from her phone, suggesting she understands the need for this kind of safety net.

someone most compelled him to hold on. In getting to know Lily more intimately, he gained even more hope for a future than he could have imagined before they met.

Lily's friendship with Atlas likewise developed into genuine love the more time they spent together. Her care for him reached a new level of poignancy when she learned exactly how dire his outlook had become before they met. Learning how much she meant to him bolsters her own feelings of self-worth.

This passage also reveals Atlas's habit of kissing Lily's collar bone, illuminating the reason she chose that spot for her tattoo. To commemorate Atlas's impact on her life after he leaves, she tattoos a heart in the style of the carved one he made her. Just as his affection made her value that part of her body, Atlas's role in her life increased her self-love after a lifetime of insecurity that her unstable family life created within her.

Chapter 17 Quotes

☛☛ *He said the first night he went to that old house, he wasn't there because he needed a place to stay.*

He went there to kill himself [...]



"I hope you never know what it's like to feel that lonely, Lily," he said [...]


"You saved my life, Lily," he said to me. "And you weren't even trying."

He leaned forward and kissed that spot between my shoulder and my neck that he always kisses. I liked that he did it again. I don't like much about my body, but that spot on my collarbone has become my favorite part of me.

He took my hands in his and told me he was leaving sooner than he planned for the military, but that he couldn't leave without telling me thank you.

Related Characters: Atlas Corrigan (speaker), Lily Bloom

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 212

Explanation and Analysis

This quote from Lily's journal further explores the deep bond that developed between Lily and Atlas when they were teenagers. In it, Lily recounts how Atlas explained that Lily had appeared in his life when his will to live was all but gone; seeing her in the window as the moment he needed

☛☛ *He told me he'd bet gone for four years and that the last thing that he wanted for me was to be a sixteen-year-old not living my life because of a boyfriend I never got to see or hear from [...]*

"I'm going to make a promise to you," he said. "When my life is good enough for you to be a part of it, I'll come find you."

[...] I opened the bag and pulled out the best present I'd ever received. It was a magnet that said "Boston" on the top. At the bottom in tiny letters, it said "Where everything is better." I told him I would keep it forever, and every time I look at it I'll think of him.

Related Characters: Atlas Corrigan (speaker), Lily Bloom

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 213

Explanation and Analysis

This scene is especially significant because it recounts Lily and Atlas's last interaction before reuniting as adults in Boston. The beginning of the journal entry illuminates the history of Lily and Atlas's bond, but this later portion examines their future. While Atlas's move to live with his uncle signals the end of the particular intensity, proximity, and frequency of connection that they had developed, Atlas's news about leaving for the military soon solidifies that distance and shift indefinitely.

Lily, knowing what Atlas has been through and being committed to Atlas's happiness, takes this permanent shift

in their relationship in stride despite how much the thought of their separation devastates her. In addition, Lily and Atlas's characteristic truthfulness continues to shine through in the way they talk frankly about the future, knowing that they hope to be together, even if they can't count on it.

Instead, Lily honors the rareness of their love and holds onto the gift of the magnet as a small but powerful wish of what might be. Even after the two part ways and Lily begins to fall for Ryle, the magnet stays on her fridge. In the present, Lily seems to view the magnet, like her tattoo, as a mere symbol of the past. When Atlas re-enters her life and old feelings of sadness at their separation arise, it is clear the original meaning of the magnet, even on a subconscious level, has endured.

Chapter 19 Quotes

☝☝ He holds up my phone and just looks at me like I should know what's happening. When I shake my head in confusion, he holds up a piece of paper. "Funny thing," he says, setting my phone on the coffee table in front of him. "I dropped your phone by accident. Cover pops off. I find this number hidden in the back of it."

Oh, God.

No, no, no.



He crumbles the number in his fist. "I thought, *Huh. That's weird. Lily doesn't hide things from me* [...]. He chunks my phone clear across the room and it crashes against the wall, shattering to the floor.


There's a three-second pause where I think this could go one of two ways.

He's going to leave me.

Or he's going to hurt me.

Related Characters: Ryle Kincaid (speaker), Lily Bloom, Atlas Corrigan

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 229

Explanation and Analysis

This passage reveals a fundamental mistrust between Ryle and Lily that will continue to undermine their relationship throughout the novel. In keeping Atlas's number in her phone, it is clear that Lily's faith in Ryle—the radical honesty

and trust they developed—is already broken, despite her attempt to forgive him. She didn't feel like she could trust him enough to get rid of the number or tell him about Atlas's offer of help. Ryle's reaction to finding out about the hidden number confirms Lily's lingering fear that Ryle will hurt her again.

In turn, Ryle's inability to remain calm in the face of his discovery shows he doesn't trust Lily to be faithful or honest with him. Honesty is an essential value at the foundation of the couples' relationship, so the breaking of that trust sends Ryle into a rage.

This passage also continues to model the cycle of abuse that Ryle and Lily have become entangled in. Lily chose to accept Ryle's repentant response after the first instance of abuse and agrees to marry him. Yet underlying issues—lack of trust and communication on Ryle's part—still exist, so the trigger of those insecurities starts the pattern over again.

Chapter 20 Quotes

☝☝ "I *shot* him, Lily. My best friend. My big brother. I was only six years old. I didn't even know I was holding a real gun."

[...] "I was trying to put everything back inside his head. I thought I could fix him, Lily."

[...] "Allysa wanted me to tell you all of this because since that happened, there are things I can't control. I get angry. I black out. I've been in therapy since I was six years old. But it's not my excuse. It is my reality...I don't remember the moment I pushed you. But I know I did...You're my *wife*. I'm supposed to be the one who protects you from the monsters. I'm not supposed to *be* one."

[...] It breaks me. It rips me apart from the inside out. All my heart wants to do is wrap tightly around his.

Related Characters: Ryle Kincaid (speaker), Lily Bloom, Allysa, Emerson Kincaid

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 246

Explanation and Analysis

This excerpt occurs when Allysa, after hearing about Ryle's recent abusive episode, convinces him to share with Lily a difficult truth about his childhood. This conversation provides significant context to the complexities that drive Ryle's character. His brother's death—and the trauma Ryle experienced by inadvertently causing it—greatly impacts the relationship he has with Lily. His intense personality, his

blackouts in moments of emotional distress, and his drive to become the best neurosurgeon in his field are all linked to this same pivotal event in his life.

Lily's love for Ryle, despite the way he hurts her, leads her to feel his pain deeply when he shares this truth with her. This new information also draws on Lily's recently adopted belief that not everyone who does bad things is bad. Now that Ryle has shared about his brother, Lily believes that his violent outbursts are the result of Ryle's childhood trauma—not his evil character. Her empathy for the horror of Ryle's history strengthens her belief in his goodness and ultimately diminishes her own resolve at leaving him for his behavior.

Lily also feels that Allysya's role in encouraging Ryle to share about their childhood trauma shows that Allysya views her as a member of the family. In turn, Lily's affection for and trust in Allysya makes her more willing to withhold her decision long enough to hear Ryle out at Allysya's insistence. To be clear, while Ryle's childhood trauma creates some empathy for his character, it does not excuse his regular abuse of Lily. Still, this passage shows how knowing that this tragedy not only affects the man she loves but also the whole family she now gladly claims as her own counteracts Lily's instinct to flee the abuse in the way she once assumed she would.

Explanation and Analysis

This excerpt encapsulates Lily's internal processing after speaking with Ryle about his childhood trauma. Though learning about Ryle's accidental killing of Emerson when they were kids evokes compassion and patience in Lily, this passage shows that she continues to wrestle with her decision to stay with him after he abuses her again. Even in the face of Lily's ongoing doubts, her love for Ryle pushes her to reason away her worries and justify the additional chance she gives him. This internal back and forth is a key part of the cycle of abuse in which Lily is caught.

This passage also shows how Lily continues to compare her relationship with Ryle to her parents' marriage. Despite the ways that Lily has grown since childhood, she still views her father as fundamentally bad person and her mother as a fundamentally enabling person. Because Lily sees herself and Ryle as more complex and nuanced than she sees her parents, she continues to believe that her judgments about her father's evilness and her mother's complacency don't apply to her relationship. Instead, the internal dialogue that this quote reflects shows how Lily chooses to let this mismatched juxtaposition outweigh her gut instinct that she is in a dangerous relationship.

Chapter 21 Quotes

☝☝ It's been almost a mother since the incident on the stairs. Even with everything Ryle told me about his childhood, the forgiveness was still hard to come by.



I know Ryle has a temper. I saw it the first night we met, before we ever even spoke a word to each other. I saw it that awful night in my kitchen. I saw it when he found the phone number in my phone case.

But I also see the difference between Ryle and my father.

Ryle is compassionate. He does things my father never would have done. He donates to charity, he cares about other people, he puts me before everything [...]

I am a strong woman. I've been around abusive situations my whole life. I will never become my mother, I believe that a hundred percent. And Ryle will never become my father.

Related Characters: Lily Bloom, Ryle Kincaid, Lily's Mother, Lily's father

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 245

Chapter 23 Quotes

☝☝ His arm comes around my waist from behind. He slides a hand up my stomach and takes a firm hold of one of my breasts. His other hand feathers my shoulder as he moves the hair away from my neck.

I squeeze my eyes shut, just as fingers begin to trace across my skin, up to my shoulder. He slowly runs his finger over the heart and a shudder runs through my whole body. His lip meets my skin, right over the tattoo, and then he sinks his teeth into me so hard, I scream [...]

He's really angry now. "He's in *everything*. The magnet on the fridge. The journal in the box I found in our closet. The fucking *tattoo* on your body that used to be my favorite goddamn *part of you!*"

Related Characters: Ryle Kincaid (speaker), Lily Bloom, Atlas Corrigan

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 264

Explanation and Analysis

This scene occurs after Ryle pieces together the meaning of Lily's tattoo and the Better in Boston magnet. In her box of childhood mementos, he discovers her journals and the carved heart, which Ryle feels confirms his suspicions about Lily's infidelity. In this passage, he confronts her after getting drunk and ruminating on his fears.

Throughout the novel, Ryle's inexcusable abusive episodes seem to happen in response to Lily being dishonest, especially regarding her history and relationship with Atlas. Because earnestness helped deepen their early bond, it has become one of Ryle and Lily's biggest shared tenets. The perceived loss of that trust fully destabilizes Ryle; he jumps immediately to conclusions about his wife's feelings at the smallest suggestion.

While Lily gives him multiple second chances and tries to ease his fears about her having another man in her life, Ryle treats the discovery of these emblems of her past as proof positive that she had betrayed him from the beginning—as if she can only be fully his if all the past is erased from her life. By biting into Lily's tattoo, which he references as his favorite part of her body, Ryle appears to be attempting to reclaim Lily's body as his own.

Ultimately, Ryle's reaction to this new information has nothing to do with Lily's actions or feelings—he knows nothing certain about the current state of her heart or mind. Instead, his response only underscores his own insecurity, trauma, and territorial perception of his wife.

☹️ I wipe the tears from my eyes and then begin dialing Atlas's number.

I hate myself more in this moment that I ever have in my entire life.

I hate myself, because the day Ryle found Atlas's number in my phone, I lied and said I had forgotten it was there.


I hate myself, because the day Atlas placed his number in my phone, I opened it and looked at it.


I hate myself, because deep down inside, I knew there was a chance that I might one day need it. *So I memorized.*

"Hello?...Lily?"

[...] *I hate myself, because he knows the tears are mine.*

Related Characters: Atlas Corrigan (speaker), Lily Bloom, Ryle Kincaid, Lily's Mother, Lily's father

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 268

Explanation and Analysis

Despite Lily's efforts to make things work and forgive Ryle, this passage shows that her initial instinct was more accurate; she memorized Atlas's number because her past gives her a deep understanding that abusive people rarely demonstrate abusive behavior once. As her parents showed her, abuse tends to repeat itself.

Calling Atlas for help is less an indication that Lily still loves him than it that she trusts him—and no longer trusts Ryle. Lily's anger at herself isn't rooted in her feeling of responsibility for her husband's abusive behavior, but rather because her love for Ryle prevented her from listening to her gut instinct. Lily is ashamed that she didn't put a stop to this pattern earlier; she blames herself instead of placing the full blame on her abuser—where it belongs.

The self-loathing that results from these thoughts is mainly linked to Lily's internalized judgment of how her mother handled her father's abusive behavior. Up to this point, Lily has stayed with Ryle despite former incidents because she was convinced that they were nothing like her father or her mother. She has always seen her parents' dynamic as black and white, so the shades of grey she sees in her own relationship foil her ability to see the overlap between them.

Regardless of the internal back-and-forth Lily is actively contending with as she reacts to Ryle's most recent abusive episode, that Atlas instantly recognizes the gravity of the situation when he hears Lily's voice over the phone confirms for Lily that she is repeating the predictable pattern she felt her mother perpetuated in her own marriage.

Chapter 25 Quotes

☹️ *I don't even know where to start. I know you don't know anything about my current life or my husband, Ryle. But there's this thing we do where one of us says "naked truth," and then we're forced to be brutally honest and say what we're really thinking. So...naked truth.*



Brace yourself.

I am in love with a man who physically hurts me. Of all people, I have no idea how I let myself get to this point.

There were many times growing up I wondered what was going through my mother's head in the days after my father had hurt her [...]

I hate that I can empathize with her now.

Related Characters: Lily Bloom (speaker), Ryle Kincaid, Lily's Mother, Lily's father, Ellen DeGeneres

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 281

Explanation and Analysis

In this excerpt, Lily begins to process the painful and life-altering choice before her—whether to stay with her husband and hope his violence desists—or leave him. Ryle's betrayal unmoors Lily so completely that she reaches out to her oldest, most neutral confidant: Ellen DeGeneres. Before she met Atlas and (eventually) Ryle, Lily's high school journal entries, which were addressed to Ellen, had been her main refuge and space to process complex emotions. Finding herself in a similarly confusing moment, Lily once more writes to Ellen in effort to process her trauma.

Ultimately, Lily chooses to write to Ellen because she offers a safe space for Lily to truly reckon with herself. While Lily and Ryle exchanged naked truths throughout their relationship, this journal entry marks one of the first moments that Lily is brutally honest with herself without consideration for the needs and desires of others. Though Lily addresses the letter to Ellen, she is in truth addressing herself and being honest with herself about Ryle's abuse.

This is also Lily's first time acknowledging that she is in fact like her mother. Since Ryle's initial violent outburst, Lily has rationalized staying with him by pointing out the differences she sees between herself and her mother, or between Ryle and her father. Now, Lily sees that the cycle of abuse in her parents' marriage is indeed repeating in her own life.

☛☛ *People on the outside of situations like these often wonder why the woman goes back to the abuser. I read somewhere once that 85 percent of women return to abusive situations. That was before I realized I was in one, and when I heard that statistic, I thought it was because the women were stupid.*

[...] I love my husband, Ellen [...] Preventing your heart from forgiving someone you love is actually a hell of a lot harder than simply forgiving them [...]

The things I've thought about women like me are now what others would think of me if they knew my current situation [...]

I'm sad that those are the first thoughts that run through our minds when someone is abused. Shouldn't there be more distaste in our mouths for abusers than for those who continue to love their abusers?

Related Characters: Lily Bloom (speaker), Ryle Kincaid, Lily's Mother, Lily's father, Ellen DeGeneres

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 283

Explanation and Analysis

Lily continues to process her new perspective as she writes to Ellen in this passage. She realizes that no one can fully understand the complexities of others' relationships, just as she couldn't understand her mother's experience, even when they were living under the same roof. Despite witnessing her mother's abuse, Lily still finds herself in an abusive relationship. Love, she argues, is more persuasive than almost anything she could have imagined.

This passage illustrates how Lily's perspective about abuse—in particular, her mother's abuse—changes as she realizes that she is in an abusive relationship. Instead of being angry at her mom for not reaching out for help or at herself for not ending the relationship with the man she loved more than anyone else, Lily asks why the harshest criticism isn't directed at actual abusers like her father or Ryle. After spending all this time trying to hold Ryle's good and evil behavior in tension, Lily realizes she's had no such empathy for her mother, herself, or other people whose intimate partners have victimized them.

In Lily's self-reckoning, she finds that ultimately it is not the differences between herself and her mother that will be her salvation—it's their similarities that will give her the strength to move forward.

Chapter 28 Quotes

☛☛ "Why did you never come back for me?"



[...] "Why did you lie about having a girlfriend?"


He rubs a hand over his face and I can already see the regret before I even hear it in his voice. "I said that because...you looked happy that night. When I saw you telling him goodbye, it hurt like hell, but at the same time I was relieved that you seemed to be in a really good place. I didn't want you to worry about me. And I don't know...maybe I was a little jealous. I don't know, Lily. I regretted lying to you as soon as I did it."

[...] I instantly start thinking about the what-ifs. *What if he would have been honest with me? Told me how he'd felt? Where would we be now?*

I want to ask him why he did it. Why he didn't fight for me.

Related Characters: Lily Bloom, Atlas Corrigan (speaker), Ryle Kincaid, Cassie

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 304

Explanation and Analysis

This conversation with between Lily and Atlas occurs after Lily discovers that he lied about having a girlfriend (Cassie). Lily's confusion about this news unleashes a deeper hurt she has long carried, and she at last confronts Atlas about how he didn't keep the promise her made to her as a teenager that he would come back for her when he was a stable adult.



On one hand, Lily's anger is a result of her deep love for Atlas; she acknowledges early in the novel that a part of her always wondered about him. On the other hand, this hurt becomes more nuanced as Lily considers how she may have avoided all the pain her relationship with Ryle has brought her if Atlas had only been honest with her or come to find her earlier.


This passage also significantly develops Atlas's character. For most of the novel, he is a purely positive figure who offers Lily help and understanding whenever she may need. However, Atlas's dishonesty and failure to communicate show that he, like everyone else, is not perfect. He lied to Lily both out of jealousy and to protect himself from her pity. In doing so, he sent her life on a different path. Like all people, Lily realizes, Atlas contains both good and bad.

☝ “I know this is the last thing you need to hear right now. But I have to say it because I've walked away from you too many times without saying what I really want to say.”

He pulls back to look down at me and when he sees my tears, he brings his hands up to my cheeks. “In the future...if by some miracle you ever find yourself in the position to fall in love again...fall in love with me.”

Related Characters: Atlas Corrigan (speaker), Lily Bloom

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 309

Explanation and Analysis

This request from Atlas occurs at the end of his and Lily's conversation about how and why he lied to her about being in a relationship. Atlas implores Lily to choose him if she ever reaches a point where she is ready to love again.

Atlas's appeal to Lily in this scene shows his dynamic growth as a character. It is apparent that despite his missteps along the way, Atlas has continued to hold onto he and Lily's teenage hope of reuniting, even after it seemed that there was no longer a chance it could happen. While his inability to see himself as deserving of Lily's love previously kept Atlas from being transparent with her, he has learned from experience that withholding his true feelings can be just as damaging. Though it seems that they have missed out on the life they hoped to have together, Atlas takes the chance to share his ultimate naked truth: he wants to be with Lily.

The Better in Boston magnet encapsulates a long-held dream of a life together. This magnet, gifted to Lily by Atlas on their last night together, originally symbolized the way things would be better for them both when they grew up. Lily's decision to keep the magnet on her fridge—a constant reminder of the boy she once loved—signifies that Lily, in her own way, has held onto the same hope.

Chapter 29 Quotes

☝☝ “My brother *loves* you, Lily. He loves you so much. You have changed his entire life and have made him someone that I never thought he could be. As his sister, I wish more than anything that you find a way to forgive him. But as your best friend, I have to tell you that if you take him back, I will never speak to you again.”

It takes a moment for her words to register, but when they do, I start sobbing.

She starts sobbing.

She wraps her arms around me and we cry over the mutual love we have for Ryle. We cry over how much we hate him right now.

Related Characters: Allysya (speaker), Lily Bloom, Ryle Kincaid

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 315

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Allysya reacts to the news of Ryle's abusive behavior. After avoiding Allysya and other people in her life

for months after Ryle's last attack, Lily finally comes to confide in Allysa. Allysa's response shows her true loyalty, love, and friendship for Lily; her reaction is affirming in two distinct ways. First, she acknowledges all the growth she has observed in her brother because of Lily. Allysa sees the pureness of their love and the reasons Lily has struggled to fully cut him off. Allysa's role as Ryle's sister allows her to understand the contradictory emotions that have left Lily feeling isolated. Just as it is possible for someone to horrifically hurt others while still having goodness within them, it is also possible for people—even the ones that have been hurt—to keep loving people who hurt others.

However, Allysa secondarily supports Lily when she firmly states that goodness and love will never cancel out Ryle's abusive outbursts. Allysa empowers Lily to leave Ryle and promises to be there for her. Her response shows that she cares for Lily's safety more than her brother's feelings, keeping up appearances, or keeping the peace. She condemns Ryle for his actions, admitting that she hates him for what he has done—even if she will always love him. In this way, Allysa demonstrates a healthier way to have empathy for complicated people while still holding them accountable. In Allysa's resounding support of her friend, she also assuages Lily's fear of losing her chosen family if she leaves Ryle.

Chapter 30 Quotes

☝☝ His hand wraps in my hair and in an instant, I'm transferred back to that night.

I'm in the kitchen, and his hand is tugging my hair so hard it hurts.

He brushes the hair from my face and in an instant, I'm transferred back to that night.

I'm standing in the doorway, and his hand is trailing across my shoulder, right before he bites into me with all the strength in his jaw.

His forehead rests gently against mine and in an instant, I'm transferred back to that night.


I'm on this same bed beneath him when he slams his head against mine so hard I have to get six stitches.

My body becomes unresponsive to his [...]

When he pulls back and looks down on me, I don't even have to say anything. Our eyes, locked together, speak more naked truths than our mouths ever have.

Related Characters: Lily Bloom, Ryle Kincaid

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 325

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Lily and Ryle talk through what has happened since their separation. This passage demonstrates both how easily the cycle of abuse can continue and how deeply abuse can scar victims. Despite the painful conversation, they find themselves swept up in passion. For Lily, Ryle's affection, the depth of his regret, and her desire for her baby to have a father prove extremely persuasive; forgiving him is still compelling—even though Lily is confident that staying with Ryle means perpetuating his abusive pattern.

Yet Lily finds that her body hasn't forgotten what Ryle has done to her, even if she logically and emotionally wants to stay him. Her involuntary recoil from his touch shows that some enduring hurts have the power to shift a relationship forever. Though Lily can appreciate that there is goodness in Ryle despite the evil he has done to her, this goodness isn't enough to make Lily change her mind and return to Ryle.

Chapter 32 Quotes

☝☝ She grabs my hands and holds them while I cry. "Don't be like me, Lily. I know that you believe that he loves you, and I'm sure that he does. But he's not loving you the right way. He doesn't love you the way you deserve to be loved. If Ryle truly loves you, he wouldn't allow you to take him back. He would make the decision to leave you himself so that he knows for a fact he can never hurt you again. That's the kind of love a woman deserves, Lily."

[...] I thought I would have to defend myself to her when I came over here. Not once did I think I would come over here and learn from her. I should know better. I thought my mother was weak in the past, but she's actually one of the strongest women I know.

Related Characters: Lily's Mother (speaker), Lily Bloom, Ryle Kincaid

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 335

Explanation and Analysis

In this excerpt, Lily visits her mother and fills her in on all that has happened with Ryle. Their conversation not only puts Lily's judgment of her mother and misunderstanding of

abusive dynamics as a teenager on display; it also underscores the value of earnestly reckoning with difficult emotions.

Because society often places undue shame on victims of domestic violence and Lily didn't want to expose herself to that kind of criticism, Ryle's abuse initially isolates her. After she leaves him, however, she gains the space to reckon with her feelings. Knowing her own mind and honoring her needs is the most important kind of truth telling Lily does, but it also opens her up to accept help from her loved ones.

Through this conversation and many others that Lily has while processing the potential end of her marriage, the idea of naked truths persists. Years of resentment for the way her mother navigated her father's abuse has kept Lily from being able to talk to her mother about her experience. Now that Lily has experienced those same things, however, she has gained new appreciation for the strength it took to survive her father's abuse. Lily honors this newfound empathy for her mother by vulnerably sharing the truth about Ryle, which allows her mother to show up for Lily in a way she couldn't when Lily was a teenager. In doing so, Lily not only gains the support she needs, but she gives her mother the opportunity to redeem herself for her inability to stand up to Lily's father when she was in the same position.



Chapter 33 Quotes


☛ I decided to go with a nature theme. The bedding set is tan and green with pictures of plants and trees all over it. It matches the curtains and will eventually match a mural I plan to paint on the wall at some point [...]

As I stare back at him, I think about how easy it is for humans to make judgements when we're standing on the outside of a situation. I spent years judging my mother's situation.

It's easy when we're on the outside to believe that we would walk away without a second thought if a person mistreated us. It's easy to say we couldn't continue to love someone who mistreats us when we aren't the ones feeling the love of that person.

Related Characters: Lily Bloom, Ryle Kincaid, Emmy Kincaid

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 340

Explanation and Analysis

As the baby's due date gets closer, Lily tries to figure out what her life should look like moving forward in both a material and spiritual sense. Plants are an important symbol throughout the novel. This passage shows how Lily's changing relationship to plants mirrors the way her worldviews and sense of self transform as she matures.

As a teenager, Lily grew vegetables in a patch behind her parents' house. At that time, her garden served as a small but powerful space where she could retreat from her father's violent outbursts; her garden, like the vegetables she grew in it, helped sustain her through a bleak time in her life.

Later in adulthood, Lily builds a floral design business while simultaneously falling in love with Ryle. As her business grows increasingly successful, her personal life similarly blossoms. She and Ryle eventually marry, and he buys them an apartment with the space for Lily to build the garden she always wanted. In this era of Lily's life, plants function as an emblem of her coming into her own as an adult, demonstrating her joy, creativity, success, and dreams of a fulfilling life with her new husband.

After Ryle's behavior turns abusive and Lily leaves him while pregnant with her baby, everything she once hoped for seems impossible. She struggles to determine how to move forward, but she ultimately decides to proceed in the way that is best for her baby. Lily understands that her primary responsibility is now supporting her daughter, loving her, and ensuring her safety. The plant theme Lily uses in her daughter's nursery demonstrates that though she will mourn the life she'd planned on having, she knows that that grief is worth it for her baby, who is now the most important thing she will ever nurture and help grow.

Chapter 35 Quotes

☝☝ *“He held me down while I begged him to stop. But he swears he’ll never do it again. What should I do, Daddy?”*

He’s kissing her forehead, over and over, tears spilling down his face.

“What would you say to her, Ryle? Tell me. I need to know what you would say to our daughter if the man she loves with all her heart ever hurts her.”

A sob breaks from his check. He leans toward me and wraps an arm around me. “I would beg her to leave him...I would tell her that she is worth so much more. And I would *beg* her not to go back, no matter how much he loves her.”

[...] We hold each other. We hold our daughter. And as hard as this choice is, we break the pattern before the pattern breaks us.

Related Characters: Lily Bloom, Ryle Kincaid (speaker), Emmy Kincaid

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 359

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Ryle and Lily exchange the ultimate naked truth. Overwhelmed with love for her daughter, Lily makes the decision to leave her husband permanently. Lily navigates this conversation by drawing on the wisdom that she has gained in her months of reckoning and mourning, bolstered by the insight her mother, friends, and chosen family have offered her.

Though she doesn’t need Ryle to agree with her choice to leave him, that Lily wants him to understand why they can’t be together shows that she still believes that there is goodness within him. She observes in him the same selfless love for Emmy that she feels, so she deftly uses that unconditional care to illustrate their situation. Ryle is so horrified by the idea of harm coming to Emmy—the same harm he inflicted on Lily—that he can hardly hear Lily make the comparison. But in Ryle’s revulsion, Lily is able to call upon what is good in Ryle.

Just as Lily had to learn to be brutally honest with herself in order to decide what was best for herself and her daughter, she implores Ryle to contend with the difficult reality of the situation and be honest with himself for the sake of their newborn daughter. Ultimately, they understand, though it is painful, that breaking this cycle is bigger than their romantic love; it’s essential for their daughter’s well-being.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

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

CHAPTER 1

Lily sits on the ledge of a twelve-story building's roof. She doesn't think about suicide, but she does consider death. Earlier that day she attended her father's funeral and delivered a memorable eulogy before abruptly flying home. She suspects her mother won't talk to her for the next year. Unlike eulogies that famous people give for beloved figures, Lily doesn't believe that many people will remember her speech. Her father was well known in their community, however, as the mayor and an accomplished real estate agent in their town.

Lily feels like an embarrassing misfit compared to her successful father. She imagines that people remember her as a girl with haphazard red hair who once, to her family's shame, dated a homeless guy. Lily had been eager to leave town after the funeral, hopping on the earliest plane she could find back to her home in Boston. Upon landing, she went to the first tall building she saw, knowing it would offer more quiet, fresh air, and removal than her three-story building, which has no rooftop space and an annoying roommate who sings in the common space. Now, as Lily sits on the roof of the tall building, the beauty of the night sky eclipses Lily's feelings about her father's death, her embarrassing eulogy, and her singing roommate.

Suddenly, a man (Ryle) arrives on the roof, slamming the door behind him and disturbing Lily's calm refuge. His presence makes Lily wary of staying, but she doesn't want to leave yet. The man's silhouette shows he's tall and broad-shouldered. Lily can see that he's having a vulnerable moment as he holds his head in his hands and takes deep, audible breaths. He doesn't see her, and Lily doesn't try to catch his attention. His emotions escalate; he kicks viciously at a chair. The chair moves with each blow but is undamaged, making Lily suspect it's made from marine-grade polymer. Lily envies the outlet he has for his anger. She used to **garden** when she was stressed, but she doesn't have the space for in now that she lives in the city.

That the novel opens with Lily sitting on the edge of a tall building, considering the idea of suicide, gives the novel an immediate sense of poignancy, if not danger. Her decision to find a high rooftop upon landing back in Boston symbolizes her desire for perspective on the day's events. Lily's father's death and her botched eulogy have made her deeply consider her life, her past, and her relationships. Her thoughts on the matter are tinged with resentment; her mother appears easy to upset, and Lily's seems to feel she is living in the shadow of her father's reputation.



The disparity between Lily's success and her father's success bothers her, and she is aware that her reputation in her hometown does not reflect well upon her—especially because of her romantic history. For these reasons, Lily has a troubled relationship to her past. Because her hometown embodies that past, she leaves town as soon as the funeral is over. Though she flees those bad memories geographically, she finds that emotionally, they have followed her home. She finds this rooftop not only because it is a fitting setting for her thoughtful mood, but also because it is one place she knows she can be alone to think.



At first, the arrival of this man seems to be the exact opposite of what Lily needs in the moment, as he has impeded on her solitude. But his agitated state allows Lily to forget her troubled thoughts for a moment. The man clearly has a temper, but Lily admires this instead of fearing him. Though Lily enjoyed gardening as an outlet in her past, her admiration for this stranger's coping tactic suggests that she wishes she responded differently to stressors as a child. However, the man's violent outburst, even if only directed at a chair, demonstrates his capacity for losing control over himself and perhaps foreshadows later conflicts in the novel.



Lily watches the man (Ryle) as his anger ebbs. She observes his large bicep muscles, which bulge against his t-shirt. He smokes a joint, only noticing her as he exhales. She can see him studying her from where he stands ten feet away, but she can't tell what he is thinking. When he asks her name, his voice stirs a feeling in the depths of her stomach. Once she tells him her name, he begs her to get down from the ledge, thinking she was considering hurting herself. She reassures him that she's safe and comfortable.

When Lily refuses to give in to the man's (Ryle) efforts to coax her off the ledge, he tells her that he's seen enough death that day and that she's ruining his high. This compels her to climb down off the edge, and as she does, she sees he's not only attractive, but older, well-groomed, and obviously wealthy. He is wearing a designer t-shirt and has an expression that makes her think people usually feed his ego. He stands to join her against the ledge and offers her a hit of his marijuana. She declines but takes notice of the way his voice continues to affect her, almost like a drug in its own right.

Lily asks the man (Ryle) why he was kicking the chair. He doesn't answer; instead, he studies her with his intensely dark eyes. She asks if he is upset over a woman. He responds that he wishes his problems were that small. He asks her where she lives in this building. Lily admits she doesn't live there but rather in a small three-story building near an insurance building visible from their vantage point. He asks if she's there to see her boyfriend, but she admits that she only came for the quiet of the roof patio, which she found on an internet map.

They agree to sit silently, but the man (Ryle) quickly interrupts to tell Lily that a man fell off the roof recently. She asks if it was intentional, but the man doesn't know. He explains that the fallen man had come to the roof to take pictures, and he hopes the fallen man at least got the shot he wanted before he died. Lily asks him if he is always so forthright, and he admits that he usually isn't. That this stranger has confided in Lily makes Lily feel special.

As the stranger notices Lily observing him, they have two very different reactions. Lily finds him attractive and appreciates his irreverent behavior. He, on the other hand, sees her seat on the roof ledge and believes she is poised to jump. Lily holds her ground despite the man's attempts to get her down—she shows herself to be someone who knows her own mind and limits and does not easily bend to the will of others.



Though the stranger's pleas don't get Lily to move, when he explains that he's already dealt with too much death today, she agrees to climb down. Lily is strong-willed, but she is also compassionate. It is clear that she and the man have some commonality in the difficult days they have had and their separate decisions to come to the same roof to process. Lily, at least, feels this connection instantaneously. He smokes marijuana despite his age, social status, and appearance; Lily is intrigued by the way this defies her expectations.



Lily continues to probe the stranger about his earlier outburst, but her guesses are incorrect—he continues to surprise her. He, and whatever is bothering him, are more complex than she initially thinks. The man similarly underestimates the reason Lily has come to the rooftop, and she charms him, as well. It's also important to note that the man lives in such an expensive building, which makes his wealth apparent. This, in comparison to Lily's lower social status, informs their initial dynamic and impressions of the man.



Despite both Lily and the stranger coming to the roof to be alone with their thoughts, they are too drawn to each other to sit quietly together. By sharing the story of the man who fell from the roof, the stranger shows that he is not afraid of discussing difficult topics, and Lily finds this refreshing. He admits that he isn't often that candid, so the fact that he's being candid with Lily suggests that he's as drawn to her as she is to him.



Lily and the man discuss how neither is a Boston native. He moved for his neurosurgery residency and to be near his sister, who owns the top floor of the building thanks to her husband's tech money. They continue to talk and exchange names. The man is named Ryle Kincaid, which Lily thinks is a great name. Lily reveals her full name is Lily Blossom Bloom, which bothers her, especially since she wants to open a **flower** shop but feels her name is too on the nose. She also tells him that she has a master's in business, so her plan feels like a downgrade. Ryle affirms her dream but understands her frustration over her name, commenting that her parents must be "real assholes." Lily replies that her father just died.

Ryle doesn't believe Lily at first. When he asks if she was close with her father, she responds that their relationship was complex—often, she hated him as a person. Ryle tells her he likes her honesty, and they both express a desire that people were more transparent; more often than not, people pretend to be happier and more settled than they really are. Lily tells Ryle that she understands some people's desire to put on appearances, as the "naked truth" isn't often attractive.

Ryle asks Lily to share a naked truth with him—something she's ashamed of. She studies the contours of his face under the night sky, and she senses he needs to talk with her right now. Lily tells Ryle that her father abused her mother. After each incident, he'd always be extra attentive and loving to her mom to make up for his violence. He would reward Lily with pleasantness and gifts, too. She has always been embarrassed by the way she looked forward to this. She worries that she's a bad person for it, just like her father. Ryle tells her that there are no evil people, only people who do evil things.

Lily asks Ryle to contribute his own truth. Ryle hesitates, but he eventually tells her that he saw a five-year-old boy die at work this evening. The boy's younger brother had accidentally shot him. Lily is overwhelmed by Ryle's admission. Ryle explains that he disagreed with his coworkers' sympathy for the boys' parents; Ryle thinks they should suffer for leaving a gun accessible. Instead, Ryle feels sympathy for the younger brother whose life will be forever ruined by this mistake. Lily asks if he ever gets used to seeing death every day, and he says that slowly he has.

As Ryle shares more about himself, Lily becomes even more interested. His career shows that on top of his good looks and wealth, he is smart and driven. Lily, in contrast, is conflicted about how to proceed in her career. She hesitates to pursue her dream of opening a flower shop for fear of both failure and that her floral name will make it seem trite. Ryle's responding boldness in assessing her parents based on Lily's name opens the door for deeper conversation about Lily's father and his death.



In bringing up her father's death and her complicated relationship with him, Lily is matching Ryle's candid truth-telling—so much so that he hesitates to believe she is serious. Both are attracted to the truth they are able to share with each other, especially because most people withhold the dark parts of themselves to maintain a desirable, nice image. Lily and Ryle, in contrast, find desire in the naked truths they share with each other.



When Ryle asks Lily directly to tell her something that's not only difficult—but also embarrassing—it challenges their brutally honest dynamic. Lily's agreement to do so is motivated in part by Ryle's apparent need to talk, her attraction to him, and her own preoccupation with processing her father's death. Lily's truth is significant in two key ways. First, it solidifies that she, like Ryle, values brutal honesty. But the content of Lily's confession is also significant. Her truth introduces her childhood experience of domestic violence (and so helps explain the unconventional eulogy she delivered at her father's funeral)—and her ongoing shame at her reaction to it. In turn, Ryle affirms Lily's bravery by asserting that no one is fully evil, which becomes one of the novel's central themes.



Ryle's story about the little boy explains his earlier outburst, though his capacity for violence remains concerning. Ryle's judgment of the parents and empathy for the brother who accidentally shot the gun is understandable, but it's also a bit extreme—might Ryle have personal reasons for being so emotionally invested in the incident?



Ryle asks for another naked truth from Lily. She explains that when her mother asked her to give her father's eulogy, Lily told her that she would cry too much to speak. Really, Lily didn't want to write a eulogy because she had no respect for her father. But she gave in to her mother's urging anyway. Lily tells Ryle that when she gave her speech earlier that day, she stood up in front of the crowd and said she would list five great things about him. Instead, she stood silently until her uncle ushered her off stage. She simply had nothing nice to say about him. In retrospect, she feels bad about her decision, but Ryle is impressed with her boldness.

When Lily begs Ryle to share another truth so that she doesn't feel like a terrible person, he tells her that he wants to have sex with her. Lily is shocked into silence. Ryle tells her that he thinks she's beautiful, and if she is interested in a one-night stand, he'd take her downstairs. She tells him she is not into casual sex. Ryle tells her it's her turn to share a truth then, but Lily is still reeling from his bluntness.

Lily regains her composure and tells Ryle that the first person she had sex with was homeless. Ryle immediately wants to know more. Lily explains that his name was Atlas, and he squatted in the abandoned house behind hers in the small Maine town where she grew up. They became friends; only she knew he lived there. Eventually, her father found out and beat Atlas. Lily stops talking, no longer wanting to talk about the subject.

Ryle shares that he finds marriage revolting. Though he is almost thirty, he has no interest in finding a wife or having children; his only desire is to be the top neurosurgeon in his field. Despite his mother's desire for him to have a family, he feels his high standards would be unfair to impose on others. Lily thinks it is admirable to admit he's too selfish to be a father. He explains that he indulges in one-night stands to meet his needs since he doesn't want to be in a relationship with anyone. This way, love never becomes a burden.

The unflattering eulogy given at her father's funeral expresses the depth of her hatred for him. After witnessing years of his abuse toward her mother, Lily views her father as a fundamentally evil man. Lily's mother's insistence that Lily give the eulogy in the first place reflects that she chose to stand by her husband in spite of his violent behavior. Her mother hardly reacts, however, when Lily gives her non-eulogy, which Lily sees as yet another example of her mother's denial about her abusive marriage. While Lily has complicated feelings about her parents and her own role in their turbulent household, Ryle focuses on how much courage it took for Lily to share her truth at the funeral.



The palpable chemistry between Ryle and Lily escalates when he tells her he wants to have sex with her. While Lily is attracted to Ryle and is interested in his offer, she stands her ground on not being interested in detached sexual relationships.



This moment is significant because it introduces Lily's relationship with Atlas. What happened between Lily and Atlas isn't yet clear, but the fact that Lily seems unwilling to say much about him suggests that there's more to the story. This scene also suggests that while Lily values honesty, there are some subjects that remain too painful for her to talk about. In addition, Lily's father's attack of Atlas further explains why Lily harbors so much hatred toward her father.



Ryle's disinterest in marriage seems to be as strong as Lily's desire for true romantic love. Ryle is more driven by his desire for professional renown and personal perfection. While this doesn't align with Lily's goals, she appreciates Ryle's continued honesty. Because Lily's childhood was so tumultuous, she understands that becoming a parent isn't something people should take lightly—and that not everyone should be a parent.



Lily admits that she's always on the search for the perfect man, and she's always disappointed when men don't meet her standards. Ryle suggests she try his method: casual sex. Lily tells him that she couldn't have sex with anyone she doesn't see a future with. The intensity of Ryle's gaze makes her wish this wasn't the case. He drags her chair up against his own. He lays his hand on her stomach and asks how physical she'd be willing to get. She says she isn't sure, enjoying the feeling as he runs his hands up under her shirt. His phone rings suddenly.

Ryle is called into the hospital for work. Before he leaves, he takes a picture of Lily with his phone. He tells her he hopes that she'll pursue her dreams and open a flower shop. She can tell he is disappointed about needing to leave. As he walks away, Lily is surprised at how much she was able to connect to someone so different from her. She finds that she is now sad to be alone on the rooftop when before it was all she wanted.

Ryle's attempt to convince Lily to have sex with him despite their opposing relationship plans is ineffective. Like Ryle, Lily is acutely self-aware and unwilling to bend to his will. While the two begin to discuss a compromise, it is fitting that work calls Ryle away—he's already explained that his career will always come first in his life.



Despite Ryle's assertion about his priorities, it is clear that there is a small part of him who may want something more than just sex and success. That part of him snaps the photo of Lily to memorialize their meeting. Lily's attraction to Ryle (and Ryle's encouraging her to pursue her business dreams) overshadows her initial preoccupation with her past and with her grief. Instead of the past, she is now looking toward the future. Like the photograph Ryle takes of Lily, the impression he leaves on her will be something she carries with her.



CHAPTER 2

The next morning, Lily sits in the living room as her roommate Lucy runs around getting ready for work. Lucy tells Lily she is lucky to have bereavement time off, but Lily sarcastically reminds her it's because her father is dead. The women have very little in common aside from age and similar names. Other than Lucy's constant need to sing, Lily finds Lucy to be a passable roommate. At the very least, Lucy is clean and often out of the house.

Lily is surprised when her mother calls. The two make small talk, then Lily's mom tells her not to be embarrassed about freezing up at the eulogy. Lily thinks her mother is simply choosing to ignore the hatred that drove Lily's non-speech. Her mother has always ignored things that make her uncomfortable, choosing to pretend all is well. Though Lily considers forcing her mother to talk about what really happened, she instead chooses to go along with it. Lily's mom has to go attend to details of her father's estate, so they say goodbye.

Lily's awkward interactions with Lucy in this scene highlight the disconnect between them. That Lily lives with someone she doesn't much like also suggests that she doesn't have any strong or sustaining friendships.



Lily feels her intent to shame her father was shockingly apparent to everyone, so her mother's suggestion that she just froze out of nervousness seems like an act of denial on her mother's part. This only reaffirms Lily's belief that her mother has intentionally ignored and even covered up her father's violent behavior. Though Lily certainly holds her father responsible for the harm he did to her and her mother, she continues to blame and judge her mother for the way she failed to handle the situation.



After hanging up with her mother, Lily goes through a shoe box of memories. First, she pulls out a carved wooden **heart**, which she puts down when it causes a rush of emotion. Next, she finds her diaries, all of which are filled with entries written to comedian Ellen DeGeneres. Lily used to watch her talk show every day after school. She never sent any of the letters to her, but it made her feel better to be writing to someone instead of to herself. Since her father's death, Lily finds herself immersed in memories from her childhood. In reading her journals now, she hopes she can find a way to forgive her father for his abuse, though she fears the memories will only stir her anger again.

The first letter to Ellen explains the night Lily met Atlas. While shuffling cards in bed, which Lily used to do when she used to do when she couldn't sleep, she saw a light in the abandoned house behind hers. She couldn't see anything else in the dark, but in the morning, she noticed a boy sneaking out of the house. He and Lily took the same bus to school that morning. After school, she saw him go back to the condemned house. She worried about why he was staying there but didn't want to say anything to her mother yet.

Lily's next entry is from two days later. She writes that she continued to see the boy coming and going from the house and learned that he was a senior named Atlas Corrigan. Lily's friend told her that Atlas had a reputation for smelling bad, and Lily wanted to come to his defense because she knew he didn't have access to running water. Lily went out to her vegetable **garden** after school that day and noticed that some of her radishes were missing. She thought Atlas may have taken them because he was hungry, so she left a bag of food for him on the porch of the abandoned house. He didn't come out, but when Lily returned to her room, she looked out the window and saw that the food was gone.

The entry from the following day recounts Lily's first conversation with Atlas. Lily and Atlas were standing alone at the bus stop, and Atlas thanked Lily. She was unable to respond because his voice affected her so deeply. On the way home, he sat in the open seat next to Lily on the bus. She felt shy having a boy so close. Sitting in silence, she noticed that he did smell a little. His clothes were ratty and too small for him. He asked if she told anyone. When he looked at her she was surprised at how blue his eyes were. She responded that she didn't, then she asked why he didn't live with his parents. Atlas tells her they don't want him.

Lily turns to her childhood mementos to process her lingering resentment of her father. It's not clear why the carved heart inspires such emotion in Lily, but it's clear that the item is important to her, so it's worth keeping in mind as the plot unfolds. Lily's teenage habit of writing to Ellen DeGeneres, whom she felt was her only confidant, reaffirms the importance of opening up to others—even if the person on the receiving end is only hypothetical. As is often the case when unpacking trauma, the initial rush of emotions that arise when Lily unpacks the box overwhelms her.



In the same way that meeting Ryle steals Lily's attention away from the pain of processing her father's death, Lily's first encounter with Atlas pulls her out of a melancholy moment. She was unable to sleep because her parents were fighting, but catching sight of a classmate who seemed to be in dire straits drew her attention away from her own problems. Lily's reticence to tell her parents, especially her mother, shows that she learned to distrust her parents early on.



Lily's impulse to reject her friend's judgment and protect Atlas, who she's seen but not yet met, stems from her well-hidden home life. Her friends only see the successful, perfect image that her family presents to the world, but teenage Lily understands that she has more in common with someone like Atlas than with her friends, who all come from happy families. This entry also introduces Lily's garden, which seems to symbolize refuge and sustenance. Lily's garden is a literal escape from the violence in her home, but it also symbolically sustains her spirit when things seem hopeless. In taking food from the garden, Lily's sacred space also sustains Atlas.



Instead of refusing to acknowledge Lily's help out of shame, Atlas thanks her the next morning. When Lily asks why he sleeps in the abandoned house, he responds with the brutal truth. Though Lily doesn't offer any of her own truths in return, Atlas's candor ultimately opens the door to their eventual friendship. This scene also reveals another similarity between Atlas and Ryle: Lily is instantly attracted both characters.



After they got off the bus later that day, Atlas walked with Lily to her yard instead of sneaking around back. He asked when her parents would get home. Lily told him that if he's fast, he could take a shower in her bathroom before they got back. She could tell that he was embarrassed, though he followed her inside anyway. As he showered, she grabbed some of her father's clothes and extra food for him to take home. When Atlas emerged, Lily was shocked by how attractive he looked with clean hair and a shave. The two introduced themselves, and Atlas' smile stuns Lily.

On his way out the back door, Atlas stopped to look in Lily's bedroom. She was embarrassed by how immature it must look to him. Before he left, he thanked her for not "disparaging" him. She was surprised by his vocabulary, which along with his handsomeness and good manners seemed to conflict with the fact that he was homeless. She wondered how someone like him could end up with nowhere to live. At the end of Lily's diary entry about this encounter, Lily writes about needing to find out what happened to Atlas.

Back in the present, Lily shuts her diary when she hears her phone ring. Her mother is calling again. When she answers, her mom asks what Lily thinks about her moving to Boston. When Lily does not answer, her mother assures her it's just an idea. Lily doesn't want her mother to live so close for fear that she'll need to constantly keep her company. Lily remembers how relieved the news of her father's cancer made her feel; she knew he couldn't hurt her mother anymore. With his death, Lily imagined she'd be finally free from worrying about her mom, but the idea of her moving to Boston disrupts that freedom.

CHAPTER 3

Six months later, Lily is showing her mother the storefront she bought for her flower shop using her inheritance from her father. Her mother is not as enthusiastic as Lily hoped she'd be. Lily asks if her mother thinks she's crazy, and her mother tells her it all depends on what happens. Her mother argues that in business, if you make a daring decision and succeed, people think you're a visionary—but if you fail, people think you're a fool. Her mother encourages her to be "brave and bold," which Lily says she will do. Lily's mother has been living in the outskirts of Boston where she bought a small house. Lily wants to plant a **garden** there, but she knows she doesn't visit enough to care for it. Lily wonders if her mother is lonely, even though her father was never very good company.

Though Lily defended Atlas when her friend complained about his odor, she's still surprised to find that Atlas, when groomed, is very handsome. Lily's surprise embarrasses her because it shows that she, like her friend, has internalized biases about status and outward appearance.



The same surprise that Lily felt at seeing Atlas shaved and showered recurs when he uses a sophisticated word. But Lily's misjudgments turn to curiosity as she wonders how Atlas came to be homeless. Ultimately, she finds, Atlas's situation is not so different from her own dysfunctional homelife. Both she and Atlas are victims of circumstances beyond their control—of who parents have failed to care for them properly.



Reading through her journals does not help address Lily's remaining feelings of resentment toward her mother or her anger toward her late father; instead, she relives all those complex feelings. As a child, Lily's mother's failure to stand up to her father placed undue adult responsibilities on Lily; on some level, she felt responsible for caring for her mother. Now that her father is dead and Lily is an adult making her way in this new city, the last thing she wants is to feel she must care for her mother again. However, Lily is unable to be upfront with her mother because she has never shared uncomfortable truths with her before.



As a child, Lily gardened to escape her father's abusive episodes; the flower shop she opens as an adult is a variation on this childhood coping mechanism. Lily doesn't have the ability to grow a garden now, but her business is an act of defiance against her father, who would never have approved of such a risky decision. That the money from his estate is funding her enterprise makes this victory over his memory even more poignant. This scene also further develops Lily's mother's character. When she cautions Lily about failure and how people might judge her for it, she reveals her own timidity and passivity. Still, though Lily's mother may have much self-doubt, she wants her daughter to have a better life than she's had.



As the women discuss Lily's last day at her marketing firm and what needs to be done to clean up the messy building, a woman walks in. She is impeccably dressed, and Lily worries that the dusty space will ruin the woman's white pants. The woman introduces herself as Allysa, explaining that she saw a help-wanted sign in the window. Lily's mother leaves, and Lily explains that it's the old owner's sign. She says she is planning on opening a floral shop and won't be ready to hire anyone for a while. She also internally suspects that, based on Allysa's expensive clothing, she may not be interested in a minimum wage job anyway.

Allysa bursts with enthusiasm about the **flowers**. She studies the space and says she thinks it's promising. When Allysa asks Lily about décor, Lily says that she's not sure what her plans are. Allysa says interior design is her favorite thing, and she'd be willing to help Lily out for free. She doesn't actually need a job, but she wanted something to ease her boredom. Allysa points to different things in the room that she thinks they could repurpose. Allysa's enthusiasm and creativity intrigue Lily, so she agrees to hire her, though she insists on paying her. Lily says she can start tomorrow, but Allysa wants to dive in now because her brother and husband are at a bar down the street.

After two hours of cleaning and categorizing things, Lily feels that Allysa may become her best friend. The women talk as they rest. Allysa asks Lily about her goal for the space, and Lily tells her that she only wants it to be successful. Allysa pushes her to think more about her vision, and Lily explains that she wants her business to be risky and innovative. After some brainstorming, Lily decides that she wants to defy expectations about **flowers**, selling bouquets that are dark, avant-garde, and stir complex emotions. Lily explains that someone once told her people can be both bad and good, and she wants her flowers to represent the darker side of that balance.

With renewed energy and excitement, Lily and Allysa start moving things around to make room for a desk to help Lily continue planning. Lily ends up falling off a stack of crates and twisting her ankle. Allysa calls her husband, Marshall, to ask him to bring ice. Marshall is drunk, so Allysa asks to speak to her brother. He is also drunk, but he agrees to her request. Before long, the men show up, and Allysa ushers them inside. They are confused about her being in a rundown building, and she explains to them that she now works here.

Lily's first impression of Allysa is similar to her first impression of Ryle. The contrast between Allysa's white, stylish clothing and the dirty storefront make her seem out of place there. Though Lily knows that outward appearances can be deceiving, she still makes assumptions about Allysa based on how she's dressed. This further develops the idea that people aren't fully bad or good—they can be complex and contradictory.



Allysa disproves many of Lily's initial assumptions about her. While Allysa is wealthy and has no need to work, she is adamant about wanting to work. Allysa not only shares Lily's passion for plants and flowers, but she also has design skills that complement Lily's business acumen. The ease with which the women connect is especially important given Lily's lack of friends at the beginning of the novel.



Allysa and Lily's brainstorming mirrors Lily and Ryle's first meeting, suggesting that perhaps these characters are connected in some way. Since her initial conversation with Ryle, Lily has come to embrace that that good and bad exist in all people and things. In addition, she has decided the darker side is something she wants to showcase, and in a way, celebrate. This is a significant shift from the black-and-white thinking she demonstrated on the rooftop. In order to implement this concept into her floral arrangements, Lily will need to harness the darker aspects of her own character—a prospect that seems to excite rather than scare her. This suggests that Lily is learning to be more honest about difficult subjects not only with others, but also with herself.



After only two hours of Allysa and Lily knowing each other, Allysa calls on her family to help Lily, which suggests the novel's themes of chosen family and the importance of forming loving, supportive relationships.



Lily sees Marshall first and is surprised to find he is wearing a onesie. Allysa explains that a nearby bar offers free beer on gamedays to people in onesies. Lily then sees another man in a onesie, and she realizes she knows him. To her surprise, Ryle is Allysa's brother. Though Lily has continued to think of him, she doubted she'd ever see him again. Ryle is equally surprised to see her, but the two pretend they have never met when Allysa introduces them.

Ryle crouches down to look at Lily's injured ankle. Allysa and Marshall leave the room to find a container for the ice. As Ryle examines Lily's foot, he asks her about the building. He is thrilled when Lily explains that she's making her dream of a floral shop called Lily Bloom's a reality. He sits in a chair and pulls her foot onto his lap, brushing her skin softly while they talk. He admits he's had more than a few beers. They joke about his onesie. Ryle tells her that she looks even more beautiful in the daylight.

Lily asks if she can share another naked truth. When Ryle agrees, she tells him that she considered trying to find him on the roof again. He tells her that he still wants to have sex with her. Allysa and Marshall walk in then, overhearing Ryle's comment. Allysa is horrified by her brother's behavior, especially since it's directed at her new boss. She tries to apologize to Lily on his behalf, but Lily waves her off. She says she admires people who speak their mind.

Ryle encourages Lily to test how much weight she can put on her foot. She is able to walk to the table across the room, so Ryle tells her it is only a sprain. He wraps it and tells her to rest it for the next week. Lily is worried because she has so much work to do. Marshall and Allysa leave to go get waters for everyone after Lily promises not to fire Allysa if Ryle says something inappropriate again.

Part of the draw of Allysa and Ryle's family for Lily is the levity they bring to her life. She's not used to humor, as her own family maintained a stoic demeanor. So, the arrival of two drunk men dressed in onesies doesn't horrify Lily—it delights her. When Lily and Ryle recognize each other, it is noteworthy that they pretend to be strangers, as this conflicts with their supposed, mutual belief in brutal honesty.



Despite Ryle and Lily's choice to hide their first meeting from Allysa and Marshall, their romantic chemistry is as strong as ever. Ryle seems genuinely overjoyed to find that Lily has overcome her fears and is building her dream business. Ryle recognizes his own professional drive and passion in Lily, which only makes him more attracted to her.



Once the initial shock at seeing each other abates, Lily and Ryle slip back into exchanging naked truths. In doing so, they acknowledge to each other (but also to themselves) that their differing romantic goals have not discouraged their interest in each other. Lily slips back into the pretense of she and Ryle being strangers when Allysa enters the room because she does not want to complicate her new friendship with Allysa yet; it's clear that the women's relationship is already important to Lily.



Allysa is out of the loop, so she remains horrified by her brother's actions and confused by Lily's nonchalance. Allysa's reactions suggest she is fully aware of her brother's typical behavior with women. She doesn't want him to impact her friendship with Lily, suggesting Allysa has come to mutually value Lily in a short period of time.



As Ryle finishes attending to Lily's injury, he asks her if he knows that Allysa has never had a real job before. Lily tells him that she already knows and doesn't care. She also tells him that she had no idea he and Allysa were related, fearing he might suspect that she arranged the whole thing to see him again. They remind each other that they want different things in life, but the attraction between them makes this difficult to focus on. Lily offers another truth. She tells Ryle that she wants him, but she asks if he can stop flirting with her, so she isn't tempted to give in to him. In return, Ryle tells her that he hopes they never see each other again because he is also too tempted by her.

Allysa and Marshall come back, and Lily tells them everything is fine— she'll just need to keep weight off her foot for the next few days. Allysa offers to keep working on the shop while Lily rests. They help Lily to her car. Allysa tells Ryle to drive Lily home, but he responds that she'll be just fine. As Ryle walks away, Allysa apologizes again for her brother's behavior. The women exchange goodbyes. When Lily drives away, she can see Ryle watching her in her rearview. She suspects that despite their conversation, she will end up seeing him again.

Ryle's brotherly jab at Allysa's lack of work history and Lily's immediate defense of Allysa further demonstrates the instant strength of the women's friendship. Though Ryle and Lily clearly want each other in their lives, they show self-awareness and rationality by choosing to avoid each other moving forward; neither seems able to control themselves in the other's presence. This is another kind of honesty that they share. Together, they weigh the logic of their needs against the draw of their emotional connection.



Ryle's decision to walk home shows that, for now, logic outweighs passion in his and Lily's relationship. However, Lily's suspicion that she and Ryle's story is not over showcases the strength of her intuition—and perhaps a deeper self-awareness. Again, Allysa is out of the loop, but her need to apologize for Ryle suggests two things: first, that she is used to cleaning up after her brother; second, that she wants to keep Lily in her life.



CHAPTER 4

Lily tries to get Lucy to help her upstairs when she arrives home, but Lucy doesn't answer her phone. When Lily gets to their apartment, she finds Lucy on the phone with her boyfriend, Alex. Annoyed, she retreats to her room for privacy. As she settles in, Lily is surprised at how glad she is that her mother is nearby to help her. She realizes how angry she has always been at her mom for putting up with her father's abuse. Those feelings have slowly evaporated toward her mother, but her hate for her father is still strong. Lily thinks of all the people he hurt, which reminds her of Atlas. She goes to the closet to grab her journals.

In the first entry, Lily told Ellen that she had gotten Atlas hooked on watching Ellen's show, too: the day after Lily had let him shower at her place, he joined her on the bus again. He gave her a present in thanks—garden tools he found in the garage of the vacant house—and she was thrilled. She asked him if he could hold onto them until after school, and he nodded in response. Atlas asked Lily how old she was, and Lily noticed he was disappointed by her answer: fifteen.

Lucy's behavior instantly annoys Lily, especially coming right after the connection and joy Lily experienced with Allysa. Without the excitement of new people in her life to distract her, Lily's injury starts to make her feel vulnerable—and this vulnerability makes her think of her parents. It seems that Lily has been so preoccupied with setting up her new business these past few months that she's had little time to dwell on other matters. Now, with nothing else to distract her, she returns to her journals and the hard work of confronting her past.



Atlas is self-conscious about being homeless, but he has a keen sense of pride, even as a teenager. He returns Lily's help in any way possible, wanting her actions to be an act of mutual friendship and not condescending charity. Atlas's question about Lily's age here also indicates his romantic interest in her, which his disappointment upon learning she is underage reaffirms.



Atlas had changed the subject, offering to help her in the **garden** whenever she needed. Lily asked him if he wanted to watch Ellen's show after school with her instead, and he agreed to join her. When they got to her house, she told him he'd have to sneak out the back door if her parents get home earlier than expected. They watched TV and ate a snack Lily made, and Lily appreciated that he laughed at all the right parts of the show.

In another entry, Lily writes that she and Atlas came to regularly watch Ellen's show together. Lily felt that Atlas liked Ellen as much as she did, but she was still too embarrassed to tell him that she wrote to Ellen every day. Lily told Ellen in her letter that she continued to help Atlas with food and showers. He constantly apologized, feeling burdensome, but Lily admitted that she liked getting to spend her time with him. Lily also divulged that her father had come home drunk and late that evening, and she worried that he might get violent again. She expressed her anger at her mother for staying with him; she couldn't understand why her mother didn't leave. Lily closed the letter by saying that she could hear her father yelling, so she went downstairs hoping her presence would prevent him from getting physical.

The final entry Lily rereads is from the same night and describes what happened after Lily went downstairs. Her father had already been hitting her mother when Lily got there, and he only stopped once Lily entered the room. When Lily tried to help her mother, Lily's mother rejected Lily and told her it was not a big deal. Upset, Lily ran to Atlas's house. Seeing that she had been crying, Atlas held her until she calmed down. She was surprised at how much better she felt without him even talking. When Lily saw the light in her room turn on, she knew her mom was looking for her. She walked home, realizing that Atlas could see straight into her bedroom all this time. She wondered, kind of hopefully, if he had seen her undressed.

In the present, adult Lily finishes reading her diary and feels her pain medication taking effect. She notices that reading about her parents stokes her anger, while reading about Atlas only makes her sad. Instead, she tries to think about Ryle, only to discover that this doesn't make her feel much better. Finally, Lily thinks about Allysa, feeling thankful for her serendipitous help. She is happy that she has a new friend, knowing that she'll need the support as she tries to turn her dream business into a real one.

Lily seems more interested in Atlas's company than his help. As an only child in an abusive household, the idea of having a friend to watch TV with means far more to Lily than Atlas's labor. Despite the awkward circumstances of their initial bond, Lily and Atlas laugh at the same parts of the show, which is significant to teenage Lily.



This entry showcases the role that Lily takes on during this period of her life, both in her relationship with Atlas and within her household. With Atlas, she builds a mutual bond and routine that sustains both of them through difficult circumstances. With her parents, Lily feels a responsibility to interfere in times of conflict. This feeling seems to be less a response father's violence than it is a response to her mother's failure to leave her father. In the absence of her mother's agency, Lily learns to step in to keep the peace—or at least try to.



What adds insult to injury for Lily is that when she does step in to help her mother, her mother doubles down on her insistence that nothing was happening. Atlas then steps in to comfort Lily, who is left feeling even more powerless and alone. Though Lily doesn't express it explicitly, this seems to be the moment Atlas officially becomes her confidant and solace after years of her parents failing to do so. This emotional intimacy with Atlas sparks in Lily a desire for another kind of intimacy: romance.



Lily returns to the present and scans her mind for a distraction from the pain her past causes her. Because her dynamic with Ryle is troubled by their conflicting needs and desires, it proves unhelpful. Instead, it is the simple, joyful connection she made earlier that day with Allysa that bolsters her spirits. Lily knows her main priority is her business at this point, and Allysa promises to be not only a friend but an essential element of her professional success.



CHAPTER 5

When Lily's ankle is healed enough, she goes to the floral shop to check on Allysa. She is shocked at how much progress Allysa had made in her absence: the whole storefront is spotless, the things they deemed trash are gone, and everything else is organized. Together the women pick out paint colors and plan the opening date for the store. Lily keeps working after Allysa leaves, going home exhausted. She feels too tired to answer a knock at her door, but she gets up because Lucy is gone for the day.

Lily finds Ryle standing outside her door. Breathlessly, he explains that he knocked on 29 doors in the building before finally finding hers. Lily lets him inside. As he walks around, she is annoyed at how good he looks in his scrubs. He tells her he has another naked truth for her, and Lily waits patiently for him to continue. Ryle explains that instead of focusing on his work, all he can think about is Lily. He tells her that these are the two most important months of his residency, so he begs her to have sex with him so he can focus again.

Lily asks Ryle if he's gotten any sleep, and he admits he just got off a 48-hour shift. He asks her to have sex with him again, but Lily tells him no. She's incredulous that he came all this way and knocked on every door to find her. Ryle keeps trying to convince her to be with him, just once. He gets down on his knees to plead with her, promising that he'll never bother her again. Lily relents, but she tells Ryle he needs to wait for her to shower and get ready. They agree it will only be a one-time thing. Lily thinks it's ultimately the way he looks in his scrubs that convinced her.

Lily takes her time in the bathroom after freaking out about her decision. She showers and blow dries her hair while trying to calm her nerves and convince herself she can be the type of person who has casual sex. But when she opens her door, she finds Ryle deeply asleep on her bed. She can't wake him, so she crawls into bed beside him. Before turning out the light, she takes a picture of herself on his phone, so he knows exactly what he missed by falling asleep.

Thought Lily initially doubted Allysa's work ethic based on her appearance, Allysa's willingness to take on extra work as Lily heals disproves those judgments. Additionally, upon Lily's return, she finds that her easy bond with Allysa is genuine; they're instantly close confidants and coworkers as soon as they are reunited.



Ryle's naked truth is that his passion has become more powerful than his logic, so much so that he knocked on nearly every door in Lily's building to find her. Ryle still doesn't want to change to be with Lily, however: his priority remains his career, and his desire to have sex with Lily so that he's no longer distracted is fully in service of his work. Lily, by contrast, better balances passion and logic. Her attraction to Ryle is as keen as ever, but she is able to listen to him while staying in control of her impulses.



Although it's against Lily's better judgment, Ryle wears her down with his insistence. Lily has expressed that what she truly wants is love, but instead, the way Ryle makes her feel desired persuades her to be with him. Ryle's ability to sway Lily displayed in this scene is relatively harmless, but it becomes a much more dangerous power later in the novel.



The feeling of confidence that Ryle's desire has instilled in Lily ebbs when she is alone in the bathroom getting ready. Without his direct influence, she begins to doubt her ability to bend to his pattern of casual sex. When she comes out to find him asleep, she sees him for the first time in a truly vulnerable state, which only deepens her attraction to him. In many ways, by falling asleep and sharing the same bed, Ryle has inadvertently bent to Lily's romantic desires rather than his purely sexual ones.



In the morning, Lily can feel Ryle caressing her arm before she opens her eyes. He runs his fingers over the tattoo of an open **heart** on her shoulder. She feels him kiss it. He wakes her and apologizes for falling asleep. Ryle kisses her forehead, then he tells her he has to leave for work. He apologizes again and promises her he'll never bother her again. Lily tries to pretend she isn't disappointed by this. They wish each other luck in accomplishing their dreams, then Ryle leaves. As she lies in bed, Lily tries to convince herself that she's too busy building her business to fall in love anyway.

Though Ryle hoped coming to Lily for sex would relieve him of his obsessive thoughts about her, he instead finds himself more emotionally ensnared. That Ryle notices the heart tattoo on Lily's shoulder suggests that the tattoo is important, so it's worth keeping in mind as the plot unfolds. Regardless of the tattoo's specific significance, that Ryle runs his fingers over Lily's "heart" suggests that he is communing with a vulnerable part of Lily. The two agree to part ways again, but they both seem to be more entangled after this intimate experience than they yet know.



CHAPTER 6

Lily has counted 53 days since Ryle left her apartment. Since then, she's devoted all her time, thoughts, and energy into preparing the floral shop for opening. On the morning of their soft opening, Allysa and Lily wait for their first customer. They are both surprised when the first person to walk through the door is Ryle. The space astounds him. He purchases a display of purple lilies. Allysa asks if they're for a girl, and Ryle confirms that they are—but not one, he says ironically, that he can't stop thinking about. Allysa doesn't pick up on his sarcasm or the fact he's talking about Lily.

Ryle and Lily are able to avoid each other for almost two months before Ryle's passion gets the better of him once more. A pattern is solidifying; Lily is able to honor their rational agreements despite her feelings, while Ryle's strong emotions prevent him from thinking about their situation logically.



Allysa asks Ryle to write a note and give an address to deliver the flowers to. While he's writing, the three discuss Allysa's upcoming birthday party on Friday. Allysa wonders aloud if Ryle will bring this girl to the party, and he tells her that he won't. He asks Lily if she's going. Her answer is noncommittal. Allysa playfully threatens to quit if she doesn't come, so Lily agrees she'll be there. When Ryle pays for his flowers, he tells Lily she'll have to frame her first dollar. She is angry that it will be from him. Ryle congratulates Lily again before leaving.

Lily, remaining firm in what she wants, tries to keep her distance even when Ryle slyly tempts her and inserts himself into her life. Lily's friendship with Allysa impacts her resolve, as well. Allysa has continued to become an important part of Lily's life, and she doesn't want to compromise their relationship by playing games with her brother—even more so because Allysa is still fully unaware of Ryle and Lily's history.



Allysa checks the tag to see who this girl is, because her brother has never been romantic like this before. On the card, she reads aloud what Ryle has written: "make it stop." On the back of the card, she sees that he has written the address of the floral shop. Allysa thinks that he has made a mistake, but Lily understands that the flowers are for her. She takes them into her office to hold on to while Allysa calls her brother to find out where he really wanted them delivered.

Lily is clear about her desire for a true relationship, but Ryle will neither leave her alone nor give her what she wants. Even in his pursuit of Lily, Ryle's motivations are selfish. Ryle's note underscores this; his emotions and desperate need to feel better consume him. He expresses this without considering the difficult position in which his words put Lily, who has to deal with her own complex feelings for him and maintain her calm in front of Allysa.



CHAPTER 7

Lily attends Allysa's birthday party with her old work friend, Devin. Devin is gay, but when Lily confides in him about Ryle, he offers to pretend to be her boyfriend to make Ryle jealous. Allysa lets them in, dragging them to where Marshall and Ryle are standing. Devin introduces himself as Lily's partner, but no one is convinced by his over-the-top performance. Allysa pulls Lily away to the kitchen where they can speak privately. Lily compliments her apartment, and Allysa tells her that she didn't marry Marshall for money; he was broke when they fell in love.

Devin joins them in the kitchen to let Allysa know that Marshall is looking for her. After she leaves, Devin tells Lily that he met Ryle. When he heard that Devin was Lily's date, Ryle stared daggers at him. As they talk, Devin sees that Lily is truly nervous about seeing Ryle. He asks her if she really likes Ryle, and she admits that she does. She just doesn't want to. The two go back to the party, and Lily hangs back while Devin handles most of the socializing. In the living room, she notices people discussing a photograph on the wall.

The photo is large and blurry. While Lily tries to determine what it is, Ryle joins her. He seems angry that she brought Devin. Lily responds that she was just trying to help him move on—to make it stop. Ryle finishes his champagne and throws the glass in the trash can; it shatters. Only after he leaves does Lily realize the photo is the picture Ryle took of her on the night they met. Lily's anger grows when she thinks about how he hanged a picture of her on the living room wall of the apartment he shares with Allysa, bought her flowers, and treated her rudely for bringing a date when the two of them haven't even kissed.

Lily goes up to the roof to find fresh air. She ignores the other people from the party who are sitting there. Before she can calm down, Ryle appears again, telling the others to go back downstairs. Lily closes her dress over her cleavage when Ryle checks her out. Sensing that she's upset, he asks her for a truth. Lily's anger explodes, and she demands to know what he really wants. He tells her that he wants her, even though he wishes he didn't. Lily tells him that the idea of a one-night stand with him makes her even sadder now that she knows him. Their relationship is just too loaded for casual sex now. She asks him to leave her alone, because his flirting makes her feel worse, not better.

Though Lily doesn't want to encourage Ryle's unfair behavior, her love for Allysa prompts her to come to the party anyway. This evening is a significant step in their friendship, as it seems to be the first time they see each other outside of work. Lily brings her friend Devin as a support and buffer, but he also accompanies her to make Ryle feel jealous. While Lily is trying to honor her and Ryle's decision not to get involved with each other, Devin's role shows that her desire for Ryle is beginning to influence some of her actions.



Alone with Devin, Lily vocalizes her complicated feelings for Ryle for the first time. In the kitchen, she admits how deeply she likes him not only to herself but also to her friend. Ryle's frosty reception of Devin suggests that he seems to be losing any control over his own urges. His glare also hints at Ryle's darker side, which Lily witnessed briefly on the rooftop the night they met.



Ryle's dark mood escalates; when he smashes the champagne glass, it demonstrates his capacity for violence. When Lily finally recognizes herself in the photograph, it's the final straw for Lily. All the ways that Ryle has been unfair to her or put her in an uncomfortable position crystallize into an overwhelming anger; she is no longer willing to tolerate Ryle's manipulation.



Ryle asks Lily to share a truth with him, but in reality, she has been honest throughout the time they've known each other—honest with herself about her deeper needs, and honest with Ryle about her unwillingness to compromise those needs. Ryle's unpredictable moods, on the other hand, are a direct result of his inability to be honest with himself and act accordingly. Like Lily, Ryle has feelings he doesn't want to have, but unlike Lily, he has been unable to suppress them. Because he can't control himself, Lily wisely sets a firm boundary.



When Ryle doesn't respond, Lily returns to the party. She tells Devin that she is ready to go. As Lily is saying goodbye to Allysa, Ryle bursts into the room and makes his way toward her. Lily doesn't know what he's planning to do. She freezes in place. When he reaches her, Ryle lifts her into his arms. He tells Devin that he needs to borrow her, and he steps aside. Everyone, including Allysa, stares with confusion as Ryle carries Lily off to his bedroom.

When they get to Ryle's room, he puts Lily down. She screams at him and tries to leave, but he pins her wrists against the door. He kisses her, and Lily stops protesting. She reminds herself she doesn't want a one-night stand. She regains enough composure to tell him to stop. He asks her if he can tell her his naked truth now, and Lily allows him to. Ryle explains that he had the picture of her framed the morning after they met on the roof. He came to her apartment and bought her flowers for the same reason he hung up her photo; he can't stop thinking about her.

Ryle tells Lily he understands that his attention is hurtful to her, but it causes him pain, too. He explains that he finally realized that his feelings are rooted in his desire to become the person she needs him to be. He just doesn't know how to do it. Ryle asks her how he can prove that he really wants to be with her, and Lily tells him that he can prove it by not having sex with her. Ryle agrees, and the two decide to sleep platonically in the same bed.

In the morning, Lily wanders to the kitchen to make coffee. Allysa comes in, hungover from the party. While the coffee brews, Lily asks how the house is cleaned up already. Allysa says they hire people to do everything. Finally, they break the ice about Ryle. Lily explains to Allysa that she met her brother well before the day she sprained her ankle, and their connection has only grown since then. Allysa says she's fine with it, but Lily picks up on some sadness in her voice. Lily presses her, but as Allysa begins to elaborate, Ryle walks into the kitchen.

Ryle, having overheard a portion of their conversation, urges Allysa to continue what she was planning to say. Allysa proceeds with some hesitation, expressing her fear that Lily and Ryle's relationship will end poorly, ultimately impacting her friendship with Lily. Ryle pours his coffee into the sink angrily, then he tells Allysa that he wishes she had more trust in him. He leaves. Lily follows him, and they sit together on the couch. Ryle tells her that he won't be able to see her for a few days because he has an important surgery to study for. Lily responds that she'll be busy preparing for the grand opening anyway. They kiss, then he gets ready for work.

In this passage, Lily experiences a moment where Ryle is fully unpredictable. It is unclear to Lily whether Ryle acts out of anger or love, perhaps because Ryle is unsure himself.



Lily's reactions to Ryle's use of force is a muddle of conflicting emotion and thoughts. Her body responds positively while her mind fumes. She wants to kiss him, but she has already spoken her truth and meant it. Ryle, on the other hand, has more to say. The finality of her words on the roof forced him to reckon with himself. His actions are not intentionally manipulative or selfish; instead, they are a direct result of his confusion.



This moment shows that self-doubt drives Ryle's hesitation to attempt a real relationship with Lily. The only thing he and Lily can do is to be vulnerable with each other—a kind of truth-telling that they must demonstrate with their actions, not just with their words, or "naked truths."



In this scene, Lily gains a fuller understanding of Allysa, Marshal, and Ryle's lifestyle. Her friends are wealthy enough to hire help for all aspects of life. Such comfort and ease is compelling to Lily, who has never experienced it. Allysa's reticence about Lily and Ryle dating also suggests that Ryle is concealing deeper truths about his past that Lily has not yet seen.



This conversation helps characterize Allysa and Ryle's relationship as siblings. Allysa's hesitation is not only rooted in concern for Lily, but also in her understanding of her brother's flaws. Ryle's angry response ultimately underscores Allysa's worry. Though his feelings for Lily may be earnest, it's likely that his inability to control his darker moods will continue to be an issue. For now, though, the couple seems to be balancing their priorities—their work and each other—exceedingly well despite their initial worries.



CHAPTER 8

A few days later, Lily arrives home to find Lucy in tears. She tells Lily they need to talk. Lucy explains that she and Alex are getting married, and she wants to break her lease to move in with him. She expects Lily to be furious, but Lily is secretly thrilled to have her own space. Now that she and Ryle are trying to make things work, privacy is even more important to her. Lucy leaves to tell Alex the good news.

Lily hasn't heard from Ryle since they agreed to try dating. Instead of breaking and being the first one to reach out, Lily looks through her diary to distract herself. In the letter she reads, Lily wrote about the day she asked Atlas where his name came from. He didn't know, so Lily wondered aloud if he could ask his mother; Atlas told her that wasn't possible any longer. Lily realized that she knew nothing about his family. She was still too afraid to ask. Mostly, her were overwhelmed by her concern for his safety as winter approached. The days were growing colder.

Lily's next letter to Ellen describes how she and Atlas had dug up the **garden** in anticipation of the coming snow. After finishing their work, Atlas had asked her what made her want to garden. His interest in her passions made her realize that she'd never had a friend like him. Her parents didn't let her have people over in case her father lost his temper, and she had never slept over at a friend's house either. Though Atlas was the closest friend she had ever had, how little they actually knew about each other bothered Lily.

Lily responded to Atlas, explaining that her grandmother had sparked her desire to grow things. What had held her interest, however, was the way plants grow or die in direct response to how well they are cared for. Atlas replied that plants and humans are the same that way. Kids who have loving parents thrive, while kids whose parents neglect them wither and end up homeless. The sadness in his words hurt Lily. Longing to make him feel better, she pointed out an oak tree nearby, explaining that some plants like trees survive on their own against all odds.

Now that Lily's life is filled with people she cares about—mainly her friendship with Allysa and her new relationship with Ryle—her long-held annoyance with Lucy lessens. While news of Lucy's engagement might have aggravated Lily's feelings earlier in the novel, her own happiness makes it easier to be happy for Lucy.



When things with work and Ryle are good, Lily doesn't go delving into her past. It is only when she is bored or stressed that she returns to her diaries. This diary shows how Atlas and Lily's friendship began to blossom. The stage they are at in the entry Lily is reading parallels the stage she and Ryle have reached in the present. In both her past and present relationships, Lily has grown to care deeply for the other person while still knowing that there is a significant amount she doesn't yet know about them.



Lily's journals further demonstrate how her past relationship mirrors her current relationship. Just as Atlas took an interest in teenage Lily's hobbies, Ryle supports Lily's career dreams. Lily's reflection in her diary about not being able to form intimate friendships because her parents never let her have people over helps explain why her close bond with Allysa as an adult is so meaningful to her.



Lily's interest in gardening illustrates her nurturing, inquisitive nature. Lily's plants help her to understand that care leads to thriving—meanwhile neglect leads to withering. Atlas understands immediately the implied metaphor in Lily's discussion of caring for plants; he too feels that his parents denying him love has contributed to his current struggles. Teenage Lily has a clearer picture of who Atlas is, and she reflects that image back to him: she sees him as a survivor who is strong even though he didn't get the care he deserves. This comparison imbues the tree with significance for both Lily and Atlas, which is worth noting as their story continues to unfold.



Atlas was encouraged by Lily's comparison, and he responded that she and he were just the same, too. He got up to leave, but Lily told him he should shower because the compost he helped her with had manure in it. At the mention of manure, the two got into a compost fight. Atlas rubbed Lily's arms with the manure, and she was surprised at how deeply it turned her on. When he finally showered, Lily was left to wonder what he meant by saying they were the same.

In the present, Lily moves on to the next entry in her diary. In it, she recounted for Ellen an altercation that happened between her parents earlier that day. Her mother parked in her father's garage spot to unload groceries while it was snowing. When he came home to find her there, his anger flared. Lily walked out to help her mom carry things in and was shocked to find him choking her. She tried to pull her father off her mother. He threw Lily off, knocking her head against the concrete before drove away. Her mother apologized to Lily even though she did nothing wrong. She also asked Lily to lie and say she slipped when they got to the hospital. Lily had hoped that her mother would leave her father now that he hurt her too. Instead, Lily became convinced that nothing would change her mother's mind.

The morning after, Lily had tried to hide her stitched up forehead from Atlas. When their hands touched on the bus, Lily felt how cold he was. She had forgotten to take him blankets the night before, distracted by her father. Lily tried to warm Atlas's hands up on the bus, growing more upset that her father's episode prevented her from ensuring Atlas would be okay in the snowstorm. He didn't notice Lily's forehead until their ride home. Atlas didn't believe her when she said she fell. Instead, he showed her the cigarette burns on his arms to explain he knew what abuse looked like. When they had gotten to their neighborhood, Atlas walked home angrily before she could give him the blankets.

Later that night, Lily had waited until her parents fell asleep to sneak next door with blankets for Atlas. She had been surprised to find the abandoned house somehow colder than the outdoors. Lily insisted Atlas come home with her. From her spot on the bed and his on the pallet she made for him on the floor, the two talked about how Atlas ended up homeless. His mother's new husband had kicked him out, and after a friend moved away, he didn't have anywhere to stay. He had six months until he planned to join the Marines, so he was just trying to survive until then.

Teenage Atlas and Lily have the ability to effectively support and encourage each other because they've both endured trauma from their parents. While those experiences have made them both more mature than they should need to be, their manure fight shows that they can also bring out each other's playful side. Their ability to connect in these ways continues to deepen their bond, but this entry shows that a romantic connection is also developing.



This journal entry recounts one of the only instances in which Lily's father directed his abuse at Lily. That Lily's mother asks her to lie is significant in two ways. At the time, it showed Lily that her mother was never going to stand up to Lily's father, even if he is endangering Lily. This entry thus reveals how Lily's lingering resentment toward her mother came to be. It also explains why, as an adult, being transparent and truthful matter how painful this may be—is important to Lily in her close relationships. As a child, she had to cover for her father against her own self-interest, and she has no intention of continuing that pattern in her present.



Lily's and Atlas's issues escalated the night before, and so they each need each other in different ways the next day. Lily tries to hide her injury because she has spent her whole life trying to cover up her father's abusive episodes at her mother's request, and she is more concerned with caring for Atlas's needs than her own because she's grown used to taking care of her mother. Atlas, however, sees the truth without needing Lily to tell him because of his own history with abuse—and because of his attentiveness to Lily.



As terrible as Lily's run-in with her father was, the commonality it seems to have opened the door for Lily and Atlas to share their most painful truths, and in doing so, they become equals. This journal shows how Lily and Atlas's relationship increasingly becomes one of reciprocal care, and as they grow to trust each other, they reveal even more of themselves to each other.

Lily had asked Atlas why he didn't get help, but he explained that he was over 18. This limited his options. There were no nearby shelters, and his mother couldn't get in trouble since he was a legal adult. So far, he'd been unable to find a job. Atlas's situation gave Lily a new perspective on the realities of homelessness. She also became enraged at the selfishness of rich people like her father. He refused to help others because he believed it was their fault for being poor.

Even though Lily and Atlas both have a difficult home life, they suffer different consequences. Lily, being younger and coming from a home with higher social status, has privileges that Atlas lacks. Knowing and caring for Atlas puts this into perspective for Lily in a way that alters her view of wealth and status permanently.



CHAPTER 9

Back in the present, Lily finds herself overwhelmed by her journal entries and the memories that they stir. She feels renewed sympathy for both Atlas and her mother. Lily grabs her phone to call her mother, but texts from Ryle asking if she's awake distract her. She responds and finds that he's on his way over already. He is clearly exhausted when he arrives. He tells Lily that he just finished an 18-hour surgery and admits he's too tired to have sex. Still, he wants to sleep next to her. As he dozes, Lily massages his hands and his back. When she finishes, he tells her that she may be the best part of his life.

For the first time, Lily's old journals not only remind her of the past but also spur her to act in the present. As she reads through the troubled events of her childhood, the experience and distance she has gained in the intervening years have started to loosen her long-held judgment of her mother. Before Lily can act on her impulse to express this to her mom, however, Ryle distracts her—as is often the case. Ryle's admission that Lily is becoming increasingly central in his life shows that she is affecting him as much as he is affecting her.



The kiss that follows is not gentle at all. Ryle is revived by Lily's attention, and the two decide they can no longer wait to have sex. Lily is surprised at how good Ryle makes her feel, and she gets lost in the sensations he causes. For a moment, she feels so much pleasure that she worries she may pass out. When they are finished, they are too tired and happy to move. Ryle groans and tells Lily that he is worried he will become addicted to her.

The intimacy and pleasure of being with Ryle distracts Lily from every other part of her life: her exhaustion, processing the past, and concern for the future. That Lily and Ryle find sex with each other addictive suggests that Lily's feelings for Ryle are beginning to complicate her ability to assess her relationship logically.



CHAPTER 10

One day at the floral shop, Lily asks Allysa if she and Marshall donate to charity. Allysa responds that they do, and Lily's affection for Allysa grows. Lily explains she doesn't have a ton of money, but she wants to start a charity eventually. Allysa encourages Lily to focus on the grand opening first. Lily, still reflective, asks Allysa why she wants to work here when she doesn't need to. Allysa admits that she has been trying to get pregnant for years but hasn't had any luck. Working at the flower shop has been an excellent distraction. Allysa finishes arranging the bouquet in her hands, giving it to Lily.

Lily's time re-reading her journals reminds her of her values as well as where and why they originated. This prompts her conversation with Allysa. As she and Allysa get closer, their easy friendship develops into one where they discuss their values, their deepest pains, and their hopes for the future. As they talk, Allysa is making a bouquet for Lily from Ryle, demonstrating just another way her and Lily's friendship is becoming wrapped up in Lily's relationship with Ryle.



The bouquet is from Ryle. In the card, he's written that he is having "withdrawals" from her. Back in her office, Lily texts him thank you. He asks to take her to dinner. When she tells him that she has dinner plans with her mother, Ryle asks if he can join. Lily is ecstatic at his enthusiasm. It is even more surprising, given his early claims of commitment-phobia. When Lily shows Allysa the text, she can't believe it either. She tells Lily that Ryle has never met anyone's parents before. For a moment, Lily worries he's only trying to please her, but she believes his willingness to sacrifice her may be a good sign. Allysa is less positive, which bothers her.

Ryle meets Lily at work, and they share a passionate greeting before heading to the restaurant. When they arrive, both Lily and her mother are astounded by the beauty of the dining space. Lily's mother is surprised when Lily introduces Ryle, who identifies himself as Allysa's brother. He leaves for the bathroom, giving Lily's mother the opportunity to ask Lily all about him. As Lily gushes about Ryle, a waiter arrives to ask for drink orders. Lily freezes when she sees him. Her mother is confused, but just before Lily can explain that the waiter looks like Atlas Corrigan, Ryle returns.

Ryle asks what's wrong as Lily reels from the encounter. Eventually, she changes the subject by telling her mother about Ryle's recent surgery. As the two begin talking, Lily excuses herself. She is taking deep breaths in the hallway when the waiter approaches. She wasn't wrong; it's Atlas, though he looks far older and healthier. The two catch up about their lives in Boston, which makes Lily recall a conversation they once had about living there. Atlas tells her about his time in the military, and Lily tells him about her floral shop. Atlas is happy but unsurprised by her success. They agree to connect later, then Lily returns to her table.

Lily is able to sit in relative silence, considering her reunion with Atlas, while her mother asks Ryle questions. Ryle handles them with ease. Everyone agrees that the restaurant is amazing, but Lily tries to minimize how good it is in hopes they don't have to return. She doesn't want to run into Atlas again. Ryle and Lily enjoy some time alone as he waits for his rideshare to arrive. They are both busy still, but they agree that the limited time they have outside of their successful careers is all the more special.

Though things have been going well between Lily and Ryle, Lily is shocked at how quickly Ryle has shifted from wanting a causal relationship to committing. Lily has concerns about this change, but her deep-seated desire for love proves more powerful than her doubts. Allysa's skepticism nags at Lily, however, making Lily's attempt to ignore her gut instincts more difficult.



Although Lily's past still complicates her relationship with her mother, her mother's approval of Ryle bolsters Lily's excitement about their romance. However, just as things seem to be coming together for Lily and Ryle—aside from a few lingering doubts—the reappearance of Atlas disrupts Lily's present happiness. The past, which she has become immersed in by rereading her journals, collides with the new life Lily has been working hard to build.



This passage provides the first description of Atlas aside from his appearances as a teenager in Lily's journals. Atlas's support of Lily appears to be intact as he celebrates her new business. Atlas also seems to have set out to do what he planned by joining the military, where he made something of himself—a significant accomplishment, given the lack of resources he had as a kid. The novel implies a contrast between Lily and Ryle's thriving careers and Atlas's job as a waiter, however, which is reminiscent of the class disparity between Lily and Atlas in high school.



Instead of telling her mother and Ryle Atlas, Lily remains silent and even attempts to dissuade them from returning to the restaurant. Lily mentioned Atlas to Ryle in their first conversation on the roof, and Lily's mother knew Atlas as a teenager, but Lily still chooses not to tell them about running into him—suggesting there is something she's yet to reveal about their history. Once they leave, Lily and Ryle's conversation serves as a much-needed affirmation of their relationship and a distraction from the past.



As Ryle's ride drives away, Lily stands alone on the sidewalk. She notices suddenly that Atlas is leaning against her car. She is startled, and he apologizes for scaring her. He asks her about Ryle, and Lily tells him that they met a year ago. Atlas tells her that he's been seeing someone named Cassie for about a year as well. Lily feels sick when she hears this. As Atlas walks away, he admits that he wishes they'd run into each other a year ago. Lily drives home, trying to reconcile her growing love for Ryle with her complicated emotions after seeing Atlas.

That Lily feels sick after talking to Atlas further suggests pieces of their history that she hasn't yet shared. Lily consciously decides not to worry about her physical reaction to seeing Atlas after all this time and hearing about his girlfriend, though his comment about wishing they'd reunited sooner bothers her. Instead, she chooses to view it as a part of processing the past so that she can let it go and proceed with her future.



CHAPTER 11

Later in bed, Lily realizes that she's nearing the end of her diary entries to Ellen. She hesitates to finish them, but she wonders if doing so after seeing Atlas will give her the closure she needs. In the first entry Lily reads, she had written about a quote Ellen's character had in the movie *Finding Nemo*: "just keep swimming." Those lines had increased in importance to Lily after recent events; Atlas had gotten really sick, making it difficult for her to carry on.

*As Lily considers reading the last of her journals, it becomes clear that her intense feelings after reuniting with Atlas are rooted in the difficult, painful aspects of their history that Lily can't yet bring herself to confront. The entry she reads now explains how Atlas and Lily's situation grew more dire that winter. Lily's fear for Atlas's well-being prompted her to call on her other main source of comfort—Ellen, who plays Dory in *Finding Nemo*, a movie about two fish who persevere through trying, dangerous circumstances. That Lily references Dory's line about continuing on despite obstacles and doubts speaks to Lily and Atlas's determination to survive their own trying circumstances.*



Atlas continued to sleep on Lily's floor during the snowy weather, so she noticed as soon as he climbed in the window the night before that he was in bad shape. Though Atlas tried to encourage her, Lily's concern only escalated when he started throwing up in her trash can. Though his repeated vomiting grossed her out, Lily laid next to him and cared for him all night. In the morning, he went home while Lily pretended to be sick so she could take care of him. Lily's mother called her out of school and went to work, allowing Lily to bring Atlas back over. She cared for him, and they cuddled on the couch. He kissed her on the shoulder in thanks. Together they watched *Finding Nemo*, and they held hands when Ellen's character said they had to continue swimming forward. Lily felt like he was telling her that was what they needed to do, too.

Lily feels powerless to help Atlas in any concrete way as he suffers his sickness, but she gives him what she was able to: her company and care. The movie they watch together will become a larger touchstone in their relationship—something they reference to acknowledge the weight of their circumstances and offer encouragement to push forward anyway. Atlas's kiss on Lily's shoulder is also significant: recall how Ryle kisses Lily on a heart tattoo she has on her shoulder. It seems that there's a connection between the tattoo and Atlas, though Ryle doesn't know what this significance is.



In Lily's next diary entry, she expresses concern about how often she thinks about and worries for Atlas. The night before she wrote this letter, he slept in her bed because she put his blankets in the laundry. Atlas then told her that he'd gotten in touch with his uncle, who agreed to house him in Boston once he's back in town from a work trip. Lily was leveled by the idea of Atlas leaving, though she was also happy he'd have a home. Atlas admitted that he didn't want to leave either, touching her lips as he spoke. He thanked her and kissed her on the forehead. He kissed her on the lips too, and Lily had been overcome by the feelings in her body. They kept kissing instead of talking more about Boston.

The letter following Atlas and Lily's kiss is dated a week later. In it, she explains to Ellen that lately after school, Atlas would shower, then they would make out until her parents got home. They stopped watching her show. Lily wrote how comfortable she had become around Atlas as they'd explored each other. She wondered how people can focus on anything when they have this much excitement in their lives. At the end of the journal entry, Lily mentioned that they still hadn't discussed his possible move to Boston.

The next entry describes how Atlas kissed Lily on the bus—the first time they did so in public. Lily's friend noticed and made a disparaging comment on how gross Atlas was. Lily was infuriated by her judgment. Sitting on the bus, she told Atlas that he was her favorite person, and he told her she was his too. When they got off the bus, Lily flipped the other girl off. The power was off when they returned home, so Atlas used the gas stove to make cookies. Lily's father came home early before they were finished. Lily pretended she had made them when her father asked about them.

Lily writes that she waited to try the cookies until Atlas climbed into her window later that night. As they ate them, he presented her with a gift: a small hollowed out **heart** carved from wood. Atlas explained that he had carved it from the oak tree she'd pointed out earlier in the year. Looking at the heart, Lily was unsure if the love she felt was for it or for Atlas. She threw herself on top of him in thanks. At the back of her mind, Lily wondered if this was a goodbye gift. She admitted to Ellen that she needed to talk to him about it, but she didn't want to ruin the moment. In Lily's next entry, she explained that Atlas was really going to Boston, but she couldn't talk about it yet.

As Lily's care for Atlas deepened into something more consequential, the power of that change scared her. The sadness Lily experienced when hearing Atlas might leave town reveals how strong her attachment to him grew. Atlas's kisses told her that he also felt more than he had yet expressed. Their connection may have shifted into romance, but the foundation of their bond went far beyond any clichés of childhood love; they helped each other survive.



The contents of this journal entry once again align with aspects of Lily's adult life. Lily's inability to focus on anything after beginning a romantic relationship with Atlas, for example, mirrors the way Ryle functions as a distraction from everything for Lily as an adult. From her first relationship, Lily seems to have used love as an escape from the difficulties in her life.



Lily's confrontation of her prejudiced former friend shows how her allegiance to Atlas has become her top priority. When Lily's father nearly walks in on Lily and Atlas while they're making cookies illustrates how the more time Lily and Atlas spend together, the more they risk Lily's parents discovering their relationship. Still, that this doesn't dissuade them from spending time together shows that their relationship has become a stronger motivator than even Lily's fear of her father.



The heart Atlas carves for Lily reflects all the complexities and depth of their relationship. The source of the wood references their earlier conversation about surviving despite their parents' neglect. The heart shape reflects Atlas's love for Lily. Its top demonstrates how their love comes from their ability to confide openly with each other and how it might give them hope for a new, more open future. That same heart, which adult Lily keeps in her keepsake box as a relic of their time together and tattoos on her shoulder, comes to symbolize the transformative role that Atlas played in her life.



Lily's next letter to Ellen isn't about Boston; instead, she recounts her father's most recent abuse of her mother. Lily explained that her father usually hit her mother where no one could see, but the night before, he had left damage that her mother couldn't hide. When they came home from a social event, Lily heard him hitting her. Atlas was in bed next to her, and he tried to keep her from going downstairs in fear she might get hurt too. When Lily finally convinced Atlas to let her go, she found her father choking and trying to rape her mother. Her mother saw her and begged her father to be quiet.

Lily already saw what was going on, however, and she went into the kitchen to get a knife. Before Lily could get to her father, Atlas grabbed her and took her back upstairs. She lashed out at him in anger, but he wouldn't let her go downstairs again. Atlas told her they should call the police, but Lily's mother came into the room before they could. Lily told her mother they'd call for help. She begged them not to. She told Lily that Lily couldn't understand how complicated adult relationships are. Atlas had left while Lily cried with her mother. Her mom never mentioned seeing Atlas, choosing to ignore it—like everything else.

The next entry Lily reads is from the day that Atlas left for Boston. She explains in the letter to Ellen that their last night had been fraught. Atlas had been hesitant to leave Lily alone in her house, but she knew he needed to go so he could have a home. He told her about Boston, saying "everything is better" in Boston except for the fact that she won't be there. Lily told him she may move there someday. Atlas made her agree to find him if she ever came to Boston. Then they kissed goodbye.

Back in the present, Lily can't read anymore. There's one last journal entry, but it is too hard for her to read. She reminds herself that Atlas is happy now, and that part of her life is over. She sees a text from Ryle containing a naked truth; he tells her that he was worried a relationship would be burdensome, but instead it makes all the other parts of his life feel even more worth it. Lily also sees a text from her mother. It reads that she wishes she could be more like Lily. Lily screenshots both messages so she can remember them forever.

Lily's father's abuse in this scene is different than it's been before. His violence escalates to such a degree that Lily can no longer ignore it—not even her relationship with Atlas can distract her from it. For Atlas's part, his restraint and later release of Lily reveals that he's torn between wanting to protect the most important person in the world to him and letting her try to protect her mother. Though Lily goes down to protect her mom, her mother tries to end the assault not for herself, but to protect Lily from getting involved.



Lily's decision to grab a knife reveals that her anger at her father and the need to step in for her mother now take precedence over rationality or safety; it's only at this point that Atlas takes the situation out of Lily's hands. In this scene, Lily sees her father in absolute, black-and-white terms. He tried to rape her mother, and she wants to hold him accountable—she knows her mother won't let that happen, so in many ways, Lily unfairly blames her mother for her father's violence. Because Lily was livid at her mother for letting any of this happen, she interpreted her mother's failure to acknowledge Atlas when she came upstairs as yet another instance of denial. Regardless of whether or not this is true, Lily's conclusion at the time shows exactly how weak she believed her mother to be.



Lily's sadness at Atlas leaving seems rooted in how much she'll miss him, but Atlas's hesitancy is driven by his fear of leaving Lily alone after the events of the night before. Since Lily's father's abuse is not something Atlas feels he could save Lily from, he instead gives her what he can: hope in the future they might find together. The idea that they may discover better things in Boston after surviving this period—and that they promise to find each other—has clearly influenced the trajectory of Lily's life. Though she eventually chooses to build her adult life in Boston, Atlas never finds her—she inadvertently found him.



Atlas's failure to keep his promise, it seems, is the source of the sickness Lily felt when they saw each other at the restaurant. Reading the account of those unkept promises stops her in her tracks until, once again, Ryle distracts her from confronting her past. Seeking affirmation both from Ryle and from her mother brings Lily back to the joy she felt at the beginning of the day, before she saw Atlas and felt that the world was falling into place. She chooses to forget the future with Atlas that never amounted to anything and embrace the future coming into focus with Ryle.



CHAPTER 12

It is grand opening day at the flower shop, and Lily finds that she is happier than she has ever been now that she gets to work so creatively. They are so busy all day that Allysa can't stop telling Lily that they need to hire more employees. Ryle shows up at the end of the day and is proud when he hears what a hit the business is already. He helps them clean up after their busy day. After, Marshall arrives with onesies for all of them so they can get free beer at the bar while watching the game.

At the bar, Marshall keeps trying to get Allysa to order a beer, but she won't. Eventually, she announces to them all that she can't drink because she's finally pregnant. As Marshall shouts the news to the whole bar, Lily notices Ryle getting emotional. After, Lily asks Allysa to tell her how she and Marshall met. She explains that before they fell in love, Marshall had always just been Ryle's annoying friend. One day there was a party, and Allysa was livid when she found Marshall with another girl. It made her realize how she really felt. When Marshall came to see why she was going crazy, she admitted that she liked him. They've been together ever since.

Ryle reminds them that when he walked in on Marshall and Allysa kissing, they had locked him out of the room. He had been so angry that Marshall, who was 18 at the time, was making out with his 17-year-old sister. Lily comments on how close Allysa and Ryle are in age, and Allysa responds that her mother had three kids in three years. Lily is confused, and Ryle explains that they had an older brother who died in childhood. After an awkward silence, the night continues without issue. Lily has more fun with them than she can remember having, and at the end of the night she tells Allysa she's her best friend. Allysa admits that she hopes Ryle will marry Lily so they can be sisters.

Back at home, the couple runs into Lucy, who is packing for her move. Ryle introduces himself as Lily's boyfriend for the first time, and Lily is overjoyed. They agree that they no longer want their relationship to be a trial run—they want it to be the real deal. Ryle notices a **Boston magnet** on Lily's fridge. Then they head off to the bedroom, where Ryle tells Lily not to move. He kisses down her body, and she feels that she has had the best day of her life.

Lily's decision to embrace the future seems to be working; even on the first day, business is booming, and Ryle's pride in her accomplishments only makes that victory sweeter. Lily feels that she has found all the fulfillment she needs in both her professional and personal life.



It's not just her relationship with Ryle that makes Lily feel such satisfaction with her present life; having Allysa and Marshall in her life also plays a role. And learning of Allysa's pregnancy only amplifies the joy she feels at becoming a part of this family. Ryle's emotional response to the pregnancy news holds extra significant for Lily because Ryle had been opposed to children when they first met, just as he had been opposed to serious relationships and marriage.



Though the four of them continue to bond and celebrate over drinks, this mention of Ryle and Allysa's late older brother shows Lily how much she still doesn't know about Ryle. The nature of their brother's death isn't revealed, but the weight of its impact is palpable. Allysa's comment about Lily becoming her sister if she marries Ryle affirms for Lily that her chosen family has fully accepted her as one of their own.



The excitement of Allysa's pregnancy, Lily and Allysa's shared love for each other, and Lily's happiness at Ryle calling himself her boyfriend all feed Lily's hopes for the future. The appearance of the Boston magnet is juxtaposed against that hope, however, suggesting that it has a special significance to Lily.



CHAPTER 13

Soon after, Ryle comes to the shop after closing to meet Lily. Lily reflects that she is pleased with how both her business and her relationship are going. She feels this even more deeply when Ryle arrives in his scrubs. He tells her he will nap on her couch while she finishes up, but instead she finds him watching her. He tells her he worries he likes her too much and doesn't want to scare her off. He asks if he works too much, but Lily admits that she finds his commitment to his work sexy. Ryle tells her that he loves how she accepts him for who he is.

Lily joins Ryle on the couch, and he listens to her heart with his stethoscope. He kisses her, trying to get her heart rate to climb. He continues to playfully check her heart rate while they have sex. The cuddle on the couch after, and Ryle gets a call from his mother. Lily asks more about his parents. He tells her his mother is fierce and religious yet loving. His father is also a doctor—a psychiatrist. Ryle tells Lily he may need to come with him on his next trip to visit them in London because his mother is eager to meet her. He plays the voicemail she left. In it, his mother checks to make sure he hasn't ruined things with Lily. Lily asks about Ryle's brother, and he tells her that his name was Emerson.

Lily continues to appreciate the direction her life is taking. During Ryle's initial conversation with Lily on the roof, he was adamant that his prioritization of work was incompatible with any true romantic future. While he still worries that he will be proven right, Lily continually shows him that his drive and intelligence are what she most loves about him.



Ryle and Lily's sexual connection remains as powerful as it was at the beginning of their relationship. Their emotional bond and sex life are deeply intertwined; this is intensely fulfilling for them when their relationship is healthy, but it may have the potential to turn problematic should future conflict arrive—as it inevitably does in any relationship. The couple's conversation about Ryle's parents and brother reveals more about his upbringing, characterizing his family as one that is loving, yet stern with high standards. Learning these things about Ryle amounts to another step Lily is taking toward full immersion into his life.



CHAPTER 14

Ryle calls Lily and tells her that he's taken the next day off. He asks how she feels about him bringing over wine and having a night of drunken fun. Excited at this prospect, Lily tells him she'll be cooking dinner for him totally naked except for an apron. When he arrives, Lily is putting a casserole in the oven. Ryle shares that he gets to participate in a very rare surgery in a few days: separating conjoined twins at the head. The two of them celebrate with expensive wine and sex.

Later that night, Ryle gets out of the shower to find Lily on the phone with her mom. Lily tells her mother that she needs to help Ryle study. She also explains that they're taking Marshall and Allysa out for dinner the following night, so she'll call back after. Lily's mom wants to know where they are going to dinner. Ryle overhears this and tells Lily's mom they are going back to Bib's, the restaurant where Lily ran into Atlas. Lily tries to discourage Ryle from going there, but he is insistent that Allysa wants to try it.

To celebrate how well everything is going for them in work and in love, Lily and Ryle allow themselves to get lost in alcohol and each other. Ryle's inability to control or understand himself defined the tumult of the first months they knew each other; in contrast, their successful first months of dating seems to be the product of honesty and restraint. Their decision to loosen self-control with alcohol thus opens the door for new conflicts to arise.



Ryle's mention of the restaurant at which Lily saw Atlas shatters the ease Lily has felt all evening. She has another opportunity to be straightforward with Ryle about her run-in with Atlas, but instead, she attempts to convince Ryle not to go there through indirect means that conceal her history with Atlas. Despite all the hope Lily feels about Ryle, her unwillingness to be honest with him—something very important to both of them—suggests the existence of some doubt or disfunction that Lily isn't able to admit to herself or to Ryle.



The mention of food reminds Lily of the casserole, which has begun to burn in the oven. In a panic, Ryle grabs at the pan with his bare hands, burning them. He drops the dish, and it shatters on the floor. The shock of the moment and many glasses of wine cause Lily to laugh in reaction. Ryle runs his burned hands under the faucet. Lily tries to stop her laughter, but she can't until she sees Ryle's face. He is livid, and before she knows it, she's on the floor.

It takes Lily seconds to realize that Ryle has shoved her, causing her to fall. She hit her temple on the cabinet on the way down. Lily feels everything inside of her break as the reality of Ryle's violence sinks in. He yells at her, telling her it's not funny. When he sees what he's done, he tries to apologize and comfort her. All Lily can think about are the past 15 seconds, which she feels have shifted her whole world. While Ryle tries to explain his outburst, Lily just hears the same excuses her father gave.

Lily lashes out at Ryle, trying to push him away from her. He falls into the broken glass from the casserole dish. When he lifts his hands, Lily sees they have been cut. She panics, remembering his important surgery, but he tells her he only cares about her and the cut on her forehead. He asks if she is okay. She admits that she's not. She can't believe he'd push her. Ryle apologizes again, begging her not to hate him.

Lily considers it significant that Ryle is now prioritizing her over his hands, which she feels is significant. She doesn't want to believe he is like her father, but she is extremely overwhelmed by everything that has happened. He kisses her as he carries her to the bedroom. Despite the fact that Ryle caused her pain, kissing him seems to be the only thing that makes her feel better. She gives in when he tries to have sex with her in apology, though she feels mad at herself for reacting the way her mother used to. She reminds herself that Ryle's sincere regret makes him nothing like her father. As they have sex, she feels herself forgiving Ryle more fully.

Lily's serendipitous encounter with Atlas, the confusing feelings it brought up, and her choice to keep it a secret from Ryle aren't, it seems, the couple's only issue. The abandon with which the couple celebrated that night catches up to them in a comedy of errors that turns, ultimately, to tragedy. Neither Ryle nor Lily is in control of their reactions, although Ryle's loss of restraint proves far more dangerous than Lily's.



Ryle's flash of abusive behavior is so much in conflict with Lily's experience of his character that her mind takes a long time to catch up to the physical pain her body is already experiencing. When they finally do align, Lily's mind returns to her strongest association with violence: her father. Despite Ryle's immediate attempts to reconcile, he has done the type of damage that can't be reversed, especially given the trauma of Lily's childhood.



Lily applies the way she perceives her father—as a fully bad person—onto Ryle. This comparison is the root of her impulse to push Ryle. She is shocked out of this by the blood that wells on his hands when he catches himself on the glass; her love for and drive to care for him overpowers her hatred for her father,



It is Lily's affection for Ryle that initially halts her instinct to compare Ryle to her father, but Ryle's remorse and care, neither of which her father ever exhibited—is what continues to separate them in her mind. The sexual intimacy that bonds the couple proves to be both a blessing and a curse in light of tonight's abusive episode. Ryle's touch is both what hurt Lily and what makes Lily feel better. The main problem with this in Lily's mind is that it makes her feel like her mother, whose enabling behavior she has vowed never to repeat.



Afterward, Lily tries to make sense of what happened while Ryle continues to comfort her. She feels that neither of them was their true self in the moment when she laughed at him, or when he pushed her. She goes to the bathroom. She is shocked by all the blood in her hair and on her skin from his cut hands. Lily brings out her first aid kit to attend to Ryle's injuries, and he brings her a bag of ice for hers. He holds the ice to her eye as she cleans up his hands. He tells her that he wishes he could undo what he did. Lily acknowledges that what he did was awful, but she understands he's truly sorry. She warns him that if he ever does that again, however, she will leave him immediately.

Ryle promises that he is nothing like Lily's father. Lily responds that she knows, but she doesn't even want to have to compare them ever again. Ryle tells her she is the most important thing to him. He instructs her to keep icing her eye while he returns to the kitchen to clean up his mess. When he comes back, Lily sees his regret and feels that he deserves a second chance. He tells her that he is in love with her, and she tells him that she loves him too.

CHAPTER 15

The next day, Lily meets Ryle, Allysa, and Marshall at Bib's. Allysa immediately notices Lily's eye; Ryle told her that Lily had slipped on oil and hit her head. Lily doesn't know what to think about Ryle lying about the injury that he actually caused, but she plays along. Dinner goes according to plan otherwise, and the group finishes the evening with dessert. When dessert arrives, the waiter tells them that the chef would like to congratulate Allysa on her pregnancy. When Lily looks up, she sees that the man is motioning to Atlas. Lily asks if he's the chef, confused, and the waiter explains that Atlas steps into all roles as needed.

Atlas immediately notices Lily's eye and the injury to Ryle's hand, correctly guessing at what happened. He walks away, clearly angry, without saying anything. Lily excuses herself to go to the bathroom. She takes deep breaths to calm down, but when she tries to leave the door pushes toward her. Atlas steps in. He asks her what happened and doesn't believe her when she assures him it is nothing. She tells him it was only an accident. He begs her to leave Ryle. Lily tries to explain that Ryle isn't like that, and Atlas responds that she sounds just like her mother. When Lily tells him he is making her uncomfortable, Atlas steps aside so she can leave.

In this situation, Lily feels that there is a reciprocity that she never saw in her parents' marriage. They have both been hurt; they both try to care for one another in the aftermath. Ryle did hurt her, and she certainly holds him responsible for his actions, but Lily also holds herself responsible for somehow instigating his abuse. Neither of them, she reasons, is fully good or bad in this scenario. While Lily may be giving Ryle the benefit of the doubt because she sees his remorse, there is one truth she is unequivocal about—if he abuses her again, his apology will mean nothing, and she will leave him for good.



Now that the heat of the moment is in the past, Ryle understands how damaging his behavior was in light of Lily's personal history with abuse. His remorse is motivated by earnest regret and true care for her, as many abusers' apologies are. Lily, swayed by Ryle's assertion of her importance and his love for her, forgives him. With that reconciliation, the cycle of abuse comes nearly full circle.



Though Lily believed and still believes that Ryle is sorry, his willingness to lie and protect his reputation in front of his family feels uncomfortably reminiscent of her father's behavior. Ryle feels regret, it seems, but she wants none of the accountability that goes along with his actions. To Lily's horror, she finds herself laughing along with his story—something she used to judge her mother for doing. This scene also reveals the true nature of Atlas's job at Bib's; as the chef and owner of the restaurant, he has become far more successful than Lily than he initially let on.



While Atlas's status in life may have improved, his ability to identify signs of abuse and his drive to protect Lily remain as strong as ever. Atlas demonstrates that he understands Lily better than anyone by seeing through her when no one else does. When Lily won't tell him the truth, he compares her to her mother in an attempt to shock her out of her lie. Being like her mother has always been Lily's worst fear—which Atlas is well aware of—and it wounds Lily so deeply because part of her already believes it's true.



Ryle sees them as they exit the bathroom. He is livid and asks Lily what is going on. Atlas heads back to the kitchen at first, but he changes his mind. He turns to confront Ryle, threatening him if he ever hurts her again. Lily yells for Atlas to let Ryle go, addressing him by name. Ryle notices the familiarity between them. He remembers Atlas's name from their first meeting on the roof, and he asks Lily if this is the guy she had sex with out of pity. The two men start fighting and only stop when two waiters step in. Atlas tells Ryle to get out of his restaurant.

Ryle and Atlas leave in opposite directions before Lily can explain the situation to either of them. Lily runs after Ryle and tells Allysa that she'll explain in the morning. Outside, Ryle grabs the keys from Lily's hand. On the way home, he won't let her speak. She tries to get him to listen once they arrive home, but he yells that he never wanted a relationship or the stress that goes along with it in the first place. Lily retorts that he should leave then if she's such a burden. He tells her that's not what he wants.

Ryle demands naked truths from Lily. He asks if she knew Atlas worked there, and she tells him that's why she didn't want to go back. Ryle also wants to know if she told him about their fight. Lily explains that Atlas only made an assumption and came to the bathroom to check on her. She tells Ryle that she and Atlas both suffered abuse as kids, which is why Atlas feels so protective of her. Ryle tells her that she has to tell him if she wants to end their relationship before he ends up getting more hurt. Lily assures him that she wants to be with him only.

CHAPTER 16

After Lily explains the situation to Allysa the next morning, Allysa is only upset that she can't keep going to Atlas's restaurant. While the women talk, Ryle checks in with Lily, telling her that he is halfway through his surgery and in good shape. She is relieved. Lily then checks her email and finds a message from a newspaper that wants to write an article on her florist shop. Allysa pops into Lily's office to let her know that Atlas showed up and is waiting in front.

As a teenager, Atlas never got a chance to stand up to Lily's father, so he takes this opportunity to do so with Ryle. Ryle curbs his physical anger at Lily's request, but he is still committed to hurting Atlas—so he does so with his words, attempting to undermine what Atlas meant to Lily when they were kids. In the same way that Atlas hit Lily where it most hurt (her mother) Ryle finds Atlas's weak spot: Lily.



When things are going well with Lily, Ryle is patient and attentive. However, as soon as miscommunication or doubt creeps in, Ryle turns cold and unresponsive. He seems to forget all the things he has loved about being with Lily, throwing his distaste for relationships—something he took back months ago—in her face. To Lily's credit, she calls his bluff, which breaks Ryle out of his rage.



Lily realizes that she didn't tell Ryle the whole truth, and she uses this opportunity to honor the exchange of honesty that is the foundation of their relationship. She recounts the role Atlas played in her life not only to appease Ryle, but also because she wants him to understand that part of her of history. Ryle's response indicates that his violent reaction to seeing Atlas and Lily comes from his fear that she will leave him or be unfaithful to him. This once again hints at a possessiveness and mistrust that underlies Ryle's love for Lily.



Lily fills Allysa in, but only part of the way. She still doesn't tell Allysa that Ryle shoved her; she is still concealing things to protect him—against her better judgement. In this scene, the email request to interview Lily shows exactly how successful her business has become, an achievement that is unfortunately Ryle's violence overshadows.



Lily brings Atlas back to her office, and he compliments her store. He places a gift on her desk, which he tells her he bought three years prior and tells her to open later. Atlas tells Lily he has come to apologize. She tells him that it was only a misunderstanding; Ryle is a good guy. Atlas clarifies that he won't apologize for protecting her. Instead, he's sorry about comparing her to her mother. He finds a pen and writes his number on a sticky note, which he hides behind the battery in her phone in case she needs to get a hold of him in an emergency. Lily assures him she won't need it.

Before Atlas leaves, Lily stops him to explain that Ryle's comment about her pitying him wasn't based on anything she said to him. Atlas assures her that he knows that's not what happened between them when they were in Maine. After he leaves, Lily opens the present. In the bag, she finds a copy of Ellen DeGeneres's autobiography. On the inside cover, she sees a personalized signature from Ellen to Lily telling her to "just keep swimming." Lily is overcome with emotion.

CHAPTER 17

When Lily gets home, she sees that Ryle won't be coming over that night because he wants to monitor his patients after a successful surgery. Lily settles down for a quiet evening. She tries to read a book and relax, but she can't stop thinking about Atlas. Finally, she pulls out her diary and flips to the final entry, ready to be done with the past at last. Lily wrote the entry six months after the last time she saw Atlas. He came back after moving to celebrate Lily's sixteenth birthday with her.

Lily wrote to Ellen that her birthday was the best and then the worst day of her life. She was excited to see Atlas after months of missing him. When he crawled through her window, she could tell that he had put on weight and was in a better headspace than she had ever seen him. They talked for hours. Atlas told her that he had something to tell her. He explained that he had planned to kill himself the night he found the abandoned house. Before he could, he spotted her across the street in the window. He told Lily that she had saved his life, then he kissed the spot on her shoulder he favored.

Atlas's apology addresses only the effect he had on Lily—not on Ryle. Atlas stands by his motivation—protecting Lily—and doubles down by providing his contact information for her to use if she needs it. Whether or not Atlas's concerns about Ryle are correct, it is curious that Lily's reassurances don't faze him. Atlas seems to trust his own judgment above Lily's and is determined to do what he believes is best for her—even if she doesn't agree. While his desire to protect her is admirable, on some level, it challenges Lily's ability to make decisions about her own life.



The gift Atlas leaves sends two main messages to Lily. The first thing it communicates is that despite yesterday's chaos, and despite all the years that have passed, he is still the Atlas she knew in high school. He still shares their love of Ellen, and he will still encourage her to keep surviving whatever comes her way. The other message the gift conveys has to do with the fact that he got it three years ago. Even before their paths happened to collide, it shows that Lily has remained on Atlas's mind.



Again, Lily finds herself in a quiet moment with no one to distract her from her thoughts, which revolve around Atlas. Lily wants so badly to move on from the past, but she feels the only way to do so is to confront it directly. Now that Atlas has re-entered her life, she is ready to remember how he left it all those years ago in hopes it will help her make sense of her present situation.



Lily's relief at seeing that Atlas is healthy demonstrates that her care for his wellbeing clearly trumps her sadness at missing him. Lily is shocked to learn that before she even knew Atlas existed or tried to help him, her existence had given him renewed hope when he was in utter despair. His love for her is not about what she can do for him; he loves her for existing just as she is. Again, Atlas kisses the part of Lily's shoulder that will later bear a tattoo in the shape of the heart he carved her. It is his kisses that first imbue that spot with significance, but his lips are not the last ones that leave a mark there.



Atlas also told Lily the night of her birthday that he was able to join the military earlier than he previously thought he could, but he had to see her first. Because he'd be gone for years, he didn't want her to wait for him. He promised he would find her if his life improved enough for him to deserve her. Lily promised in return that if he didn't find her, she'd come find him. Atlas responded that she could always find him in Boston, "where everything is better." In the entry, Lily implies that they had sex.

After, they laid on her bed together, and Atlas told her that he loved her. Lily knew that he wasn't only telling her that he was in love with her; he loved her in a more elemental way. Lily reflected in her diary that people are like waves of different magnitudes that come and go like tides. Bigger waves leave more evidence on the sand. When Atlas told her he loved her, Lily understood that he was saying that she had been a massive wave that had shifted his beach forever. Atlas then gave her a birthday present: a **Boston magnet** that said, "Where everything is better."

Lily's father ruined her birthday when he barged into her room after hearing her talking to someone. He went after Atlas with a baseball bat, breaking bones with each swing. When the police arrived, Atlas was so bloody that Lily could hardly recognize him. She hadn't seen him since that night. In town, people had continued to gossip about that night, believing her father was a hero for saving Lily from a homeless guy. At the end of her letter, Lily told Ellen that she needed to stop writing for a while because she reminds Lily too much of Atlas.

There is no follow up in the journal after this letter—Lily never wrote to Ellen again. Atlas never spoke to her after that night, either, though she knew he'd survived and joined the military. Sitting in her room, Lily remembers missing him all through college, eventually realizing that he wasn't a "full circle" kind of love, but one that came and went like the tide. After, she tattooed an open **heart** on her shoulder where he used to kiss her. When Lily saw Atlas at Bib's, it brought back her unresolved feelings. It made her realize that she would always love him, because he was a big wave for her, too. But that tide has retreated, and she has been swept away on Ryle's tidal wave instead.

While Atlas told Lily he saved her just by existing, his promise indicates that he didn't think he deserved to be loved in return for the same reason. He seemed to see himself as inferior to Lily. Because Atlas believed Boston was a place where things are better, he hoped that would be a place where he could improve himself enough to deserve Lily. For Lily and Atlas, Boston has been an idealized future realm where it would be possible to meet on equal footing, unburdened by their childhood hardships. Lily's insistence that she would come for Atlas either way shows she truly didn't care about Atlas improving himself at all; she wanted him the way he was then.



The "Better in Boston" magnet comes to signify Lily and Atlas's whole notion of the future, one where they are happy and successful and, most importantly, together. By never getting rid of the magnet, adult Lily never fully lets go of the hope it symbolizes—even after she falls in love with another man. Regardless of what the teenagers hoped would happen or what does happen in the future, they agreed that loving each other changed both of them irrevocably.



Though Atlas was already committed to leaving for the military, Lily's father steals their meaningful last moments from them. Like always, he faced no consequences for the harm he has caused others.



This journal entry at last clarifies why Lily has carried so much regret and hurt over Atlas into adulthood. In part, she was wracked with guilt for the horrible role her father played in the violent ending of their relationship. Perhaps more painful for Lily, however, is the fact that Atlas never kept his promise to find her. Her tattoo served as a way to commemorate the great love they had for each other, honoring it even if it never returned to her. What Lily never anticipated was that Atlas would return to her—but only after she'd chosen someone else.



CHAPTER 18

As Ryle and Lily head to Allysa's apartment to see Ryle's mother, Lily gets increasingly nervous. Ryle has almost entirely moved in with Lily since they started dating. Lily worries that she will ask her questions about the Bible or thinks she is immoral for living with Ryle outside of marriage. Lily's fears are unfounded, though; Mrs. and Dr. Kincaid pull Lily into a hug as soon as she meets them. Lily is happy to find that they are funny, kind, and normal people.

After Ryle's parents leave, Lily sits in bed with Allysa trying to feel Allysa's baby kicking. The two women are bursting with excitement over the baby, who is due in just under three months. Allysa tells Lily that she can't wait for Lily and Ryle to have a baby, too. Lily isn't sure if Ryle will ever want children, but Allysa argues that if he changed his mind about relationships, he will likely change it about kids, too. Allysa asks Lily if she'd accept a proposal from Ryle. Lily responds that she would marry him right now, unaware that he has come into the room and overheard her. Then Lily and Ryle decide that they want to fly to Las Vegas with their families and get married immediately.

CHAPTER 19

Six weeks later, Lily's mom is still mourning the fact that Lily and Ryle didn't want to have a big wedding. Lily asks if she'll forgive her once they have kids, and her mom says she will. Lily recalls the conversation she and Ryle had on the flight to Vegas. They made sure they agreed on all the important things: possibly having kids, keeping separate checking accounts, donating to charity, always voting, and never going vegan. Lily hears the door opening and hangs up with her mother. Ryle comes to the couch to greet her, and they have sex.

While Lily is in the shower getting ready for dinner with Allysa and Marshall, she hears a loud crashing noise. As she gets out of the shower, she hears another. Ryle won't respond to her calls, and when she runs into the room, she sees that he's knocked over the nightstand. The expression on Ryle's face is unintelligible, which scares Lily. He holds up her broken phone and the piece of paper that Atlas had hidden in it. Ryle had called the number while Lily was showering and gotten Atlas's voicemail. He storms out. Lily catches up to him in the stairwell, where he grabs her and shoves her. Lily loses consciousness.

Having finally confronted the ugliest parts of her past, Lily proceeds into her future trying her best to feel unburdened. Meeting Ryle's parents seems like a final obstacle in pursuing her future with Ryle. Lily is terrified they won't accept her because she knows from experience how parents can break a relationship that once seemed unbreakable. Her fears are unfounded; Ryle's parents accept Lily with the same enthusiasm with which Allysa and Marshall accepted her. They make her feel like she belongs, which is a feeling her own family never gave her.



Lily basks in the joy of the family she has started to become a part of. The recent conflicts with Ryle make Lily hesitant to believe that he will want all the same things as her, especially children. Allysa's earlier doubts, in contrast, seem erased; she is confident that loving Lily has changed her brother in ways she couldn't have imagined. Allysa's affirmation, paired with Ryle's enthusiastic, pushes the worry out of Lily's mind. For better or worse, she and Ryle choose to leave behind their old doubts and marry: the ultimate reconciliation.



Lily and Ryle's push to make sure their values and plans are aligned highlights the healthy rationality that Lily brings to their relationship. In this way, she balances out Ryle's penchant to get swept away in emotional whims. Their conversation on the way to their wedding allows them to share all the naked truths they can think of, and Lily enters into their marriage more confident than ever.



The uncertain nature of Ryle's facial expression isn't what truly frightens Lily. She is scared because Ryle's smile reminds her of what she does know for certain: Ryle is capable of hurting her without warning. Lily already told Ryle why she and Atlas have a protective bond, which explains the number in her phone. But Ryle's insecurity pushes him to assume that Lily has betrayed him. Ryle lets his emotional response overtake his self-control, and he lashes out at Lily.



Lily regains consciousness and finds that her head hurts badly. Ryle tells her to stay still. She sees that she is in their bedroom now, and she recalls the events of the last few minutes. She realizes that Ryle has pushed her yet again. Lily struggles away from him. He does not try to apologize or comfort her like the last time. Lily accuses him of shoving her down the stairs, and Ryle insists that she fell—and that she's a liar. He throws the paper with Atlas's number in her direction before leaving. Lying in bed, Lily feels like the last five minutes have destroyed her entirely.

Ryle returns ten minutes later, and Lily is conflicted with feelings of hatred, fear, and sympathy for her husband. He falls at her feet and begs her to reassure him that nothing is happening between her and Atlas. He tells her he loves her and the idea of her with Atlas is torturing him. Lily tells Ryle about the day Atlas visited her at the shop and that she forgot the number was even there. She tells Ryle that he overreacted without even talking to her, and now she wants him to leave immediately. Ryle repeats that she fell down the stairs, but Lily insists he get out. He hesitates, so she screams and throws pillows at him until he goes. She slides the deadbolt of the door in place behind him.

CHAPTER 20

The next morning, Lily gets up early to go to the store to get a phone to replace the one Ryle destroyed. When she leaves the apartment, she finds Ryle asleep in the doorway. He wakes up and starts apologizing. She ignores him, but he follows her to the car. He begs her to talk to him; she drives away without saying a word. When Lily finally gets to work after getting her phone, she finds Ryle sitting there with Allysa, who is holding his hands. Allysa is horrified when she sees Lily's face. She turns back to Ryle and insists that he has to tell Lily the truth. She asks Lily in turn to hear him out, even if she can't forgive him.

Lily agrees to meet Ryle back at home. When he arrives, he asks her if she remembers the patient told her about the night they met and how angry he was. She tells him she remembers it was a little boy who was shot by his younger brother. Ryle reminds her that he also said that the shooting would ruin the living brother's life. He knew that, he explains, because it's exactly how his older brother Emerson died—Ryle accidentally shot him. Allysa had been there too, and no one could hear them calling for help. While they waited, Ryle had been trying to fix the damage he had done, not realizing it was futile. It was that experience that compelled him to train as a neurosurgeon.

Ryle's abuse of Lily has escalated, both in the physical damage done to her and in his coldness in the aftermath. Notably, Ryle isn't repentant like he was after the first assault. His love for Lily still compels him to treat her injuries, but he refuses to admit that he had any hand in them. It is unclear if Ryle really believes that Lily's fall was an accident; he doesn't seem to care either way. Whether she fell or he pushed her, on some level, he believes it was justified because of her dishonesty.



The shift in Ryle's demeanor has nothing to do with penitence. He is not overcome because of the hurt he caused Lily; he breaks down and pleads with her on his own behalf, afraid she no longer loves him. Despite the selfishness Ryle exhibits, Lily wavers at his vulnerability and declarations of love. Though he abused her, she is the one who ends up trying to justify her actions and assuage his concerns. Once Ryle calms down, however, Lily sticks to her earlier promise and kicks him out of the apartment.



Ryle does his best to show Lily he is sorry, but she succeeds in hardening herself to his attempts at reconciliation—until Allysa steps in. Allysa, who has become Lily's best friend, has the power to break through Lily's resolve. To Allysa's credit, she doesn't try to convince Lily to stay with Ryle against her better judgment. For the love of her brother, however, she wants Lily to understand the full picture—the whole brutal truth underlying Ryle's anger.



Though nothing justifies abusive behavior, this new information does help to contextualize Ryle's violence. Many of his main characteristics prove to be linked to his brother's death, including his emotional instability and his nearly compulsive professional drive. This piece of Ryle's history illuminates his and Allysa's relationship as well; their shared trauma bonded them closely. Allysa possesses keen empathy for her brother because of the accident, but she is also aware of how his role in his brother's death damaged him in ways he can never heal from.



Despite her anger at Ryle, Lily can't help but comfort him. Ryle explains that he's not trying to excuse his behavior; he only wants to give her the reason he sometimes blacks out when he is angry and does things he doesn't mean to. Ryle cries while Lily holds him. He apologizes again for hurting her, and the self-hatred Lily hears in his voice wounds her. She is torn. She promised herself she'd never be like her mother and let the person she loves abuse her. She hates that Ryle's story makes her want to justify his behavior. Lily goes to the bathroom so she can have space to think.

In the bathroom, Lily realizes that Ryle's guilt and trauma compel her to forgive him. Lily is afraid of repeating her mother's choices, but she tells herself that Ryle isn't like her father in most ways. She no longer wants to compare them, especially since Ryle is trying to get better. When she goes back out to talk to him, she reminds him of the other thing he said that night; no one is fully good or bad. She assures him that he isn't all bad because he messed up, but he does need to figure out how to ask for help and space when his emotions flair. They agree to stay together.

CHAPTER 21

Almost a month later, Lily is at the floral shop closing up for the night. Allysa has left for maternity leave while she waits for the baby to arrive. Lily has hired her old roommate Lucy and a new employee, Serena. Alone in her office, Lily considers all the differences she sees between Ryle and her father. Sometimes she has to reassure herself that she made the right decision in forgiving Ryle, but she is convinced that she will never turn into her mother, nor Ryle into her father.

The week before, they'd gotten into another fight. Ryle applied for a three-month post-residency course in Cambridge, and after that, he was considering taking a position in Minnesota at the best neurological hospital in the country. Lily had pushed back on Minnesota, wanting to stay close to her mother, support Allysa and the baby, and keep her store running. The flight escalated when Ryle broke a vase in frustration. Instead of going further, however, he decided to leave for a couple hours to calm down. He returned when his emotions were under control, and they mutually decided to stay in Boston.

Ryle's emotions after sharing with Lily may be earnest, but that doesn't mean they are fair. The magnitude of his confession—and his pain—completely overshadow what Lily has experienced at his hand; she is compelled to comfort him when she is the one who most deserves comfort. Lily has the self-awareness to see this happening. She knows that even though she has empathy for Ryle's truth, she must stand up for herself. But she also feels the burden his pain wearing at her resolve.



Ultimately, staying together requires selflessness on Lily's part. She loves Ryle, so she works to hold a nuanced view of her husband where both good and bad can exist within him. In order to keep loving Ryle, she lets go of her justified anger at him and tries to separate her childhood trauma from her present situation. On top of shifting her own perspective, she also agrees to help Ryle learn to cope with his unpredictable emotions. Ryle, on the other hand, is not making these kinds of sacrifices for Lily. He isn't bending over backward to empathize with her. He doesn't silence his own trauma in order to help Lily deal with hers. Though Lily is the victim, she ends up putting in the majority of the effort it will take for them to make things work.



Lily chose to stay with Ryle, but it seems even a month later she is haunted by a feeling in her gut that she is repeating her parent's abusive cycle in her own marriage. Logically, however, she is able to overcome her doubts by assessing all the ways she differs from her mother and Ryle differs from her father.



Part of what encourages Lily about her decision to forgive Ryle is the progress she sees him making. His violent impulses are clearly still present, but—with her help—he is attempting to recognize them and act before he hurts Lily. Mention of Allysa and the baby also serves as a reminder that Lily's relationship with Ryle is intertwined with her friendship with Allysa. Having Allysa in her life is not the main reason that Lily stays with Ryle, but it does hold significant sway.



Lily drives to Allysa's after receiving a text asking for help picking out furniture. On the door of the apartment, she finds a note telling her to go to an apartment on the floor below. When she knocks on the door, she is confused to find Ryle there. At first, she thinks he may have been hiding a second apartment this whole time. He explains that he signed the paperwork to buy it this morning so they can have more space and be closer to their new niece. Lily is shocked into silence by how huge and nice the space is. Ryle is afraid she's mad at him, but she reassures him that it's perfect, even if he should have included her in the decision.

As they tour the apartment, Lily is overwhelmed with excitement about how beautiful the apartment is. As a bonus, she now gets to be closer to Allysa. When Ryle shows her the patio where she can start a **garden**, she falls fully in love with their new home. Lily asks how they can afford it, and Ryle reminds her that he makes plenty of money as neurosurgeon. Soon, Allysa and Marshall come downstairs to celebrate, and the four of them eat Chinese food while planning how they'll decorate the space.

CHAPTER 22

A week has passed since Ryle and Lily moved into their new apartment. Allysa is three days past her due date. Lily feels incredibly lucky to have a beautiful home, a thriving business, a loving husband, and a new family in Allysa, Marshall, and the baby. Lily's joy only increases when Ryle arrives home with three pieces of good news. The first is a newspaper, which shows that Lily Bloom's floral shop has been voted third for best new businesses in Boston. His second bit of news is that he was selected for the Cambridge trip. The two of them celebrate with a kiss. Lily asks what the third thing is, and Ryle nonchalantly responds that Allysa went into labor.

Later, Marshall comes out to the hospital waiting room where Lily and Ryle are sitting to tell them that he has a daughter. They join Allysa and the new baby in their room, and Ryle holds his new niece. Allysa tells him that they named her Rylee after her uncle. Lily feels her love for Ryle grow even deeper as he holds Rylee. Ryle tells Lily they should make their own. When Ryle says he needs to go home to get some rest, Lily elects to stay behind to spend more time with Allysa and Rylee. Ryle tells her that they can get started on making a baby when she gets home.

Though Ryle's decision to buy the apartment without her input concerns Lily initially, she takes the gesture—and the way it will improve their lives—as a sign that they are continuing to move in the right direction. What Lily wants most is a comfortable, loving life with her husband, her best friend, and her new niece; these are the things that make working through Ryle's abusive episodes worth it to Lily, and she believes this new apartment will help facilitate those things.



In the apartment, Lily sees the life she has dreamed of coming together, a life that wouldn't be possible without Ryle. To build this life with him, she must take all of him, in good times and in bad. The garden she plans to plant at their new home symbolizes the way Lily hopes their efforts to understand and support each other will prove fruitful in the long run.



This period of peace and joy following Ryle's last violent attack seems to be holding out. With the addition of the good news Ryle delivers about their careers and the baby, it seems as though the chance Lily took on Ryle is paying off. This follows the pattern that abuse often takes; after reconciliation, there is a period of equilibrium before the abuse recurs. Unfortunately, the catalyst for an abusive episode is often impossible to anticipate, as is the case for Lily.



Allysa and Marshall name their daughter Rylee in honor of Ryle, showing Allysa's close bond with her brother and her recognition of the ways she has seen him grow. Lily sees this improvement as well, especially when Ryle admires his new niece. When he says he wants to have a baby too, this seems to confirm both the good Lily sees growing in her husband and the alignment of their future hopes.



CHAPTER 23

Lily heads home from the hospital a few hours later. The lights are off in the apartment, but Lily turns them on so she can make some food before joining Ryle in bed. But when the lights flip on, she sees that Ryle has been waiting for her in the dark kitchen. He is smirking at her, and she sees that he's been drinking scotch. She gets excited at the prospect of the wild sex she thinks is coming. Lily notices that Ryle is holding her **Boston magnet**. He asks her where she got it, and she tells him she doesn't remember.

Ryle walks over to her without responding. He kisses Lily and lifts her up onto the counter. He is rough with her as they continue to kiss. Ryle pauses and asks Lily for a naked truth. She agrees. As he touches her sexually, he asks again where she got the **Boston magnet**. At the repeated question, Lily starts to get worried. He is still touching her, and he is starting to pull aggressively at her hair. Lily complains that he's hurting her. He moves his hand to her throat and begins kissing her again. When he pulls away and looks down at her with longing, she feels she may have overreacted.

Leaning against the refrigerator, Ryle asks Lily if she's read the newspaper article about new businesses in Boston. She hasn't, so he asks her to read it aloud. Lily is confused. She asks if he really wants her to read it now, and he tells her to remove her clothes first. Ryle instructs her to read the final paragraphs of the article. Lily reads that the upcoming business voted best in Boston is Bib's—Atlas's restaurant. In the story, Atlas is interviewed. He explains that Bib's stands for "Better in Boston." Lily thinks about the **magnet** Ryle had been holding, but he tells her to keep reading. Atlas told the reporter that the name was in honor of a woman who had been—and still is—incredibly meaningful to him.

Lily stops reading. She leaves the kitchen, but Ryle follows her into the bedroom. She sees that he has gone through all her memory boxes, leaving her journals strewn about their room. Lily realizes that Ryle must have read her Ellen diaries. Ryle comes up behind her and grabs her by the waist and then the breast. He moves her hair so he can look at the **heart** tattoo on her shoulder. He bites into it aggressively, and Lily cries out in pain. She begs him to walk away and calm down, but he doesn't listen.

Because Lily has been so content with the way her and Ryle's relationship has been going, she doesn't initially pick up on the glaring warnings in Ryle's behavior. The alcohol he's been drinking and the look on his face denote that he is in an unhinged state, but Lily still believes this has to do with their plans to make a baby. Her guard has come down in all the excitement of the day. It isn't until Ryle starts asking questions about the magnet, a symbol of Atlas that has lingered on her fridge, that her concern flares.



As is the case with many abusive relationships, the shift from the highest high to lowest low can occur suddenly. Sex, something that has always improved Ryle and Lily's relationship, is suddenly weaponized by Ryle. Instead of the pleasure Lily associates with physical intimacy, she feels fear. She is struck by how the sexual vulnerability that leads to close connection with a safe person is flipped into something ugly and terrifying when you feel unsafe. Because Ryle shifts in and out of affection and aggression, however, Lily is utterly unsure whether she is safe or not.



Like sex, truth can be used to build or break emotional connection; Ryle seems to be taking the couple's typical exchange of naked truths and using it to enact damage. He intertwines the vulnerability of truth-telling and sex in the way he asks Lily to take off her clothes before reading the article that has infuriated him, as if he is trying to dismantle her power as he works up to his next episode. As she reads, Lily is learning for the first time what Bib's means and how Atlas feels about her. At the same time, she realizes that Ryle has already put the pieces together, which means she is truly in danger.



Lily tries to remove herself from the situation, but in the bedroom, she discovers that the situation is worse than she imagined. Ryle has gone through her childhood mementos; he has laid bare her teenage thoughts without giving her the opportunity to provide context for them or comment about how her feelings have changed in the intervening years. As Ryle sinks his teeth into Lily's heart tattoo, he is symbolically attacking Lily's past and trying to leave his own mark. This is another example of the dangerous possessiveness Ryle feels toward Lily.



Ryle throws Lily on the bed. He tells her that he can see reminders of Atlas everywhere: the journals, the **magnet**, the **heart** tattooed on her shoulder. Lily pleads with him again to leave until he's no longer angry. Ryle pins her to the bed and assures her that he isn't angry; he tells her he just has to do a better job of showing how much he loves her. Lily is reminded of how her father would force himself on her mother. Ryle kisses her to silence her screams, and before he can go any further, Lily bites his tongue. He headbutts her in response. She loses consciousness.

Lily wakes up in pain and covered in blood. Ryle is still on top of her. He apologizes profusely, but he doesn't get off her. He tells her that he loves her, and she can tell he is panicked. Ryle, with his anger dissipated, understands that he has ruined any chance at happiness with Lily. She assuages him in an effort to keep him calm, assuring him that everything will be okay. She tells him that she understands he was only angry. He kisses her, and she loses consciousness again.

When Lily stirs again, she sees Ryle is no longer lying fully on top of her. Only his arm and head are resting on her. Before she tries to move, she takes stock of her injuries and tries to remember where her keys and phone are. Her head is in excruciating pain. Lily slides slowly out from under Ryle's grasp. Once free, she tries to stop herself from crying, afraid it will wake him. The gash that Ryle's head left on her brow has flooded her eyes with blood. She can't find her keys, so she opens her phone. Lily isn't ready to call the police. She feels that she can't bother Allysa, who is still in the hospital, and she doesn't want to cause her mother pain by telling her what happened.

Lily dials Atlas's number. She had lied to Ryle when he found it—in reality, she had looked at it immediately and memorized the number. As she calls him, she realizes that she knew all along that she would need it. When Atlas picks up, Lily begins to cry. He immediately knows it's her. She asks for help, and she can hear him leaving over the phone. She texts him the address and begs him not to knock. While she waits for Atlas to come, Lily gets dressed. She slouches by the door until he arrives.

Atlas hugs Lily when she opens the door. He wants to confront Ryle, but Lily asks him to take her away instead. Atlas is torn between rage for Ryle and care for Lily, but he decides to help Lily down to the car. Atlas has to carry her when she feels faint. Lily knows that she needs to go to the hospital, but she asks Atlas to take her to any hospital other than the one where Ryle works. Though she feels a deep hatred for him, she also hates herself for trying to protect his career in spite of what he's done to her.

Ryle holds Lily to a standard he doesn't hold himself, interpreting her diary, tattoo, magnet, and carved heart as evidence of both deceit and active betrayal. Lily may not have shared all aspects of her history with him, but Ryle also withheld the truth of his brother's death—a far more impactful, grave truth—until Allysa forced him to tell her. Ryle doesn't rape Lily to show her he loves her, so she forgets about Atlas—it's another way for him to assert his claim over her.



Though Ryle's has come out of his rage and alcohol-induced stupor, he is still trying to manipulate Lily. Instead of violence and sex, he hopes his sadness and regret will bend her to his will. Lily's response is motivated solely by her drive to survive. She forgives him only to ward off further injury and keep him calm until she is strong enough to flee.



Largely, Lily is operating absent of emotion; her only imperative is to get away from her abuser. Lily is torn between needing help and not wanting to cause anyone else pain. It is significant that like her mother before her, Lily doesn't want to call the police or drag anyone else into her marital conflict. Lily has always judged her mother for this type of behavior, but Lily's personal experience of abuse has given her new insight into her mother's situation.



Lily's memorization of Atlas's number suggests that despite her commitment to making things work with Ryle, a part of her—the part that grew up in an abusive household—knew that another attack was inevitable. In the same way, she knew that she could trust Atlas to show up for her, regardless of the time or situation.



Rather than act of his anger, Atlas sacrifices his impulse in order to take care of Lily; his love for her takes precedence over his desire for vengeance. It is notable that Lily directs Atlas to any hospital but Ryle's, prioritizing his career over her needs. She is self-aware that she is repeating her mother's behavior and resents herself for it. In this way, Lily is beginning to see how love can be a more powerful motivator than she imagined.



CHAPTER 24

At the hospital, Atlas watches the nurse attending to Lily. Lily notices the nurse's expression as she stitches her cut and cleans the bite mark on her **heart** tattoo. The nurse asks Atlas to leave so that she can ask Lily confidential questions, but Lily assures her it wasn't Atlas who hurt her. The nurse lets him stay. She asks Lily if she was raped, explaining that there is an exam they will conduct, if so. Lily tells her that she wasn't and doesn't want the exam. Atlas encourages her to do it, but Lily refuses. A doctor comes in to tell her that he wants to run a CT scan in case she has a concussion, but he won't because she's pregnant. Lily breaks into sobs, blaming herself. She declines further care and asks to leave. In the car, she reminds herself to "just keep swimming."

Atlas takes Lily back to his place, a house in the suburbs of Boston. As the drive through the neighborhood, Lily wonders about his girlfriend, Cassie, and what she will think about him bringing Lily home. She worries that Cassie will want to know why she didn't leave Ryle earlier, the same way Lily wondered why her mother stayed with her father. Lily wishes that people blamed the correct people: abusive men. When they arrive, Lily is relieved that there is no other car parked in front of the house or in the garage.

Lily is in awe of Atlas's home. The teal color of the kitchen reminds her of a tropical ocean, and she thinks to herself that Atlas kept swimming after he left Maine and didn't stop until he reached the Caribbean. Lily asks him if he lives alone, and he nods. Atlas makes the bed in the spare room for Lily while she showers. In the bathroom, she vomits from the trauma of the night. When she emerges, she sees that Atlas left her a pair of his pajamas. She cries herself to sleep.

Lily chooses to forgo a rape exam for multiple reasons: her compulsion to protect Ryle, her own confusion about what happened, and her aversion to undergoing any more invasive, traumatic interaction that day. Lily's experience demonstrates how many difficult decisions survivors of domestic violence are forced to make, none of which are without complications. Those outside these situations, like the ER nurse in this novel, may disagree with the choices a survivor makes for themselves, but only survivors know their own needs and experience. The biggest complication of all for Lily—and that which will define how she navigates her situation for the rest of the novel—is the news that she is pregnant with Ryle's baby.



Prior to Ryle's latest attack, Lily didn't think of their relationship as abusive or of herself as a victim. After the previous night, however, her perception of herself and her marriage shifts. Now that Lily sees herself as a survivor of abuse, she begins to worry about all the judgments people have against women in situations like hers. She is keenly aware of these criticisms because she harbored them against her own mother. Lily's personal experience reframes her understanding of her parents' marriage, and she realizes that she has thought of her mother far more critically than she ever did her father, whom she simply wrote off as a lost cause.



Lily has come to associate Atlas with the sea in multiple ways: in their shared encouragement to keep swimming through hardships, as well as in her vision of him as a wave that rocked and realigned her shores. She is not surprised, then, to find that his house is decorated in the relaxing shades of the ocean. Atlas continues to be a calming force in her life, but not even the comfort of her friend can erase what Ryle has done to her.



CHAPTER 25

The next morning, Lily wakes to the smell of toast. For a moment, she is confused and thinks Ryle made it for her. Then she remembers what happened. She gets out of bed, and she sees that the chair in her room is facing the bed and contains a blanket. She realizes Atlas must have slept in the chair so he could watch over her. In the kitchen, she finds him making her a large breakfast. The food is delicious. Lily asks Atlas where he learned to cook, and he tells her he learned some in the Marines and some when he was a kid and forced to fend for himself. Atlas asks if she remembers the cookies he made her. Lily admits they are the best cookies she ever had.

As they talk about Atlas's time in the military, Lily remembers the way Ryle made her read the article about the restaurant aloud the night before. Atlas notices her withdrawing emotionally. He tells her he needs to go into work for just a few hours, then he makes her promise not to go home. Lily agrees to stay, and Atlas says he will bring her lunch when he returns. He writes a note that contains his phone number, work address, alarm code, and a reminder that she needs to keep swimming, too.

To process the events of last night, Lily decides to write a letter to Ellen for the first time in years. At first, she apologizes to Ellen for not writing back after Atlas left. Lily tells her all about her life. She writes about her father's death, her business, and her life in Boston. She explains that she married someone other than Atlas. Lily describes her and Ryle's tradition of sharing naked truths, then Lily tells Ellen her current truth; she admits that she loves a man who abuses her.

After what happened between her mother and father, Lily tells Ellen that she never thought she'd end up in the same place. Now, she has more empathy for her mother. Lily acknowledges that the situation is more complex than she could have imagined. More than anger at Ryle, Lily feels grief over losing the person she thought he would be. Unlike grief over a true death, Lily's grief is cut through with hatred. Lily expresses her frustration at her need to try to explain Ryle's actions away and to place some blame on herself. She wonders if they can make things work if only they can stop keeping secrets. She knows that her mother probably said the same things to herself about Lily's father.

Lily is used to Ryle being her source of comfort and distraction. Though she is thankful the Atlas has stepped in to provide the support she needs, he does not make the loss of her trust in Ryle any less devastating. The circumstances that brought Lily to Atlas's house aside, one bright part of Lily's time there is becoming better acquainted with her old friend and hearing more of what happened to him after they parted ways.



The fact that Atlas was a motivating factor in Ryle's abusive episode, however, complicates things for Lily; being with Atlas now, on some level, triggers memories for Lily. Because Atlas is perceptive—or at least well-attuned to Lily's mannerisms—he understands that she needs space. He wants to stay with her, but instead, he gives her what she needs.



In losing Ryle, Lily has lost her main confidant. The nature of Ryle's rampage complicates Lily's ability to confide in Atlas, as well. Lily is also hesitant to involve Ryle's sister because she's just had a baby, and she doesn't want to call her mother because of her mother's own trauma. Effectively, Ryle's actions have isolated Lily entirely, so Lily turns to the person she confided in when she felt isolated as a teenager: Ellen. Because Ellen is, in many ways, a projection of Lily's own conscious, when Lily shares her naked truth with Ellen, in a way, she's finally being honest with herself about her marriage.



Lily astutely reflects that grief from losing a relationship is rarely rooted in the loss of one's partner alone. It also spoils memories of the past, disrupts the present, and obliterates the future one planned to have. Her drive to justify Ryle's behavior is not due solely to a lack of self-awareness; instead, she knows that permanently leaving him will create more trauma in her life. Though Lily is still unsure how to proceed, she knows one thing for certain: she can relate to her mother in a way she never could have before.



Unlike her mother, Lily tells Ellen that she knows she has options. She has her own money, access to resources, and a support system. Lily's child hasn't grown used to having a father, so leaving won't feel like a loss to them like it would have to Lily. The pregnancy still eats at Lily. It is hard for her to accept that she made a child with a man who has hurt her. She worries that she'll be harming her future child whether she decides to leave Ryle or make it work with him.

Lily admits to Ellen that she used to judge other women in abusive relationships. She thought they stayed out of stupidity or weakness, but now that she's one of them, she realizes that many women stay because they still love their abusers. Lily writes that she still loves Ryle. It's so much harder than she thought to fight her urge to forgive someone she loves so much. She considers the wedding vows she made to Ryle: for better or worse. Lily wonders if she should honor them after everything that has happened. She decides she's no longer beholden to them.

CHAPTER 26

As Lily lies in the guest bedroom bed at Atlas's house that afternoon, she feels like she is on a raft bobbing in the sea, battered by larger waves of emotions. When she remembers she's pregnant, her anger at Ryle quickly overtakes her love for the baby. Though she is exhausted, she forces herself to shower. Atlas has already returned from work, but Lily feigned sleep to avoid talking to him. Lily feels guilty for turning to the very man whom Ryle feared she would leave him for. Still, anywhere else she'd go would be somewhere Ryle would look for her or see charged to her credit card. Lily checks her phone. She clears all the messages from Ryle without looking at them. She gets emotional over a message from Allysa asking her to stop by after work.

Lily wanders into the kitchen, where she finds Atlas sending work emails. Atlas cooks her dinner while she looks at the shows recorded to his television. She finds and puts on an episode of *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*. Together, she and Atlas watch Ellen for hours, just like they used to, with Atlas holding her supportively. Lily is surprised that she can still laugh. Eventually, the circumstances catch up to her. She apologizes to Atlas for getting angry at him when he tried to help her after Ryle's first violent outburst. Lily tells Atlas he was right; Atlas tells Lily that he never wanted to be right. Atlas kisses her on the head.

Lily also acknowledges that, as terrible as her situation is, she has many privileges that other survivors—including her mother—do not. Even with those resources, her pregnancy puts her in an impossible situation. She is now responsible not only for her wellbeing, but also her baby's wellbeing. Any decision she makes on their behalf will impact the rest of their life, just as her mother's choices have impacted Lily.



Lily's personal experience with abuse has given her a new sense of empathy for other survivors who choose to stay. One factor that convinces her to stay is her love for Ryle. Though that love is laced with pain, Lily finally has the true love she always wanted; she can hardly bear the idea of giving it up. Love, it seems, is not unlike sex or truth; the power it possesses to build people up can just as easily tear them back down.



Lily continues to wrestle with her choice, finding herself barely able to stay afloat. She doesn't even have the energy to interact with Atlas, who she knows would do anything for her. Though Lily will have to decide how she wants to proceed, including what she will tell Allysa, this scene shows how vital emotional, social, and physical rest are in times of hardship. In order to gain the strength she needs to make those hard choices, she must first let herself heal.



Almost everything about Lily's present life—her business, her home, even Allysa—feels triggering because they are all connected to Ryle. Lily turns instead to the childhood sources of comfort that predate Ryle: journaling, watching Ellen, and laughing with Atlas. After she gains some distance from her present worries, she has the energy to clear the air with Atlas about how she rejected his earlier attempts to help her. This forthright conversation helps restore their close bond.



Though she is glad to have Atlas, Lily wonders if she could have avoided all her problems with Ryle if she had let go of her past with Atlas and all the keepsakes she saved. She realizes that is just another excuse she is making on Ryle's behalf. Still, some part of her is mad at Atlas for never finding her after promising he would. Lily tells him she's going to bed. When he tells her he'll be gone for work most of the next day and asks if she'll still be there when he gets home, Lily assumes he's asking her to leave. She tells him she can find a hotel. Atlas clarifies that he'd prefer that she stay, and Lily believes him. Her feelings for him may be confusing, but she knows she is glad to have him back in her life.

CHAPTER 27

The next day, Lily goes into the shop to get some work done. She's terrified that Ryle will be waiting for her. He is nowhere to be found physically, but the building is filled with memories of him. She makes it through most of the morning without hearing from him. When she speaks to Allysa on the phone, she can tell that Allysa doesn't know about their fight. Right before Lily gets ready to leave for the afternoon, Ryle appears. Her body boils with anger and fear, but Ryle only places his keys to the apartment on the counter and tells Lily that he's getting on a plane to England for his Cambridge program. Before he leaves, he tells her that she can go home. He promises he'll give the space she needs.

Lily notices that Ryle doesn't say he's sorry, as if he realizes it's useless at this point. As he walks out the door, Lily stops him. She tells him that if he had just asked her for a naked truth when he read the journals, they'd still be together. Because he didn't come to her before blowing up, they'll both have to deal with his choices forever. When Ryle tries to respond, she tells him to leave. Though he is torn, he goes. Lily locks the door behind him, then she crumples to the floor. She knows she'll have to tell him about the baby soon.

CHAPTER 28

Lily chooses not to go home after work, fearing she may run into Allysa and have to explain what's happening. She goes back to Atlas's instead. That evening, she gets a text from Allysa begging her to visit. Lily lies and tells her that she's in the hospital getting stitches after banging her head at the shop. Allysa offers to have Marshall join her since Ryle is gone. Lily realizes that Ryle told Allysa he was leaving without sharing the whole truth, so Lily knows she has until Ryle gets back in three months to come clean to her. She cringes at this thought; she feels that she's hiding the truth from people just like her mother. Lily tells Allysa that she'll come by the next day.

Lily can't feel close to Atlas for long without her mind turning back to Ryle. She concludes that her speculation about erasing Atlas from her life earlier is just another twinge of unwarranted guilt, but she does realize that she held onto her Atlas memorabilia for a reason she couldn't acknowledge before. Being with him and leaning on him for support again brings up her unresolved feelings about the promise he didn't keep.



Lily's day of rest provides her with the bravery to return to her life—even though that will likely mean facing Ryle and others. First, Lily speaks with Allysa; it is both a relief and sign of cowardice that Ryle hasn't told his sister about what he has done to Lily. This allows Lily to share her experience on her own terms, but it is also another instance of Ryle shirking the consequences of his actions. Ryle appears, but only long enough to explain that he is relinquishing the apartment to her and leaving the country. He may not address what he did, but he does at last give Lily the space she needs to process.



While Lily may be relieved that Ryle has nothing left to say and isn't trying to manipulate her with apologies, she realizes she hasn't said all the things that she needed to say. Lily speaks without an agenda—she doesn't want to push him further away nor help him understand his wrongdoing so they can reconcile—she merely wants to share her truth with him; it is a powerful affirmation of her agency and self-awareness.



Though Lily worries that lying about her injuries to Allysa mirrors her mother's behavior, in this case, Lily's lack of transparency is an example of self-love. Sharing with others invites comment and judgment, and Lily is not yet ready for the input of people who haven't had her experiences. This time, Lily lies not to protect her abuser, but to protect her privacy and processing space; thus, withholding the truth is another way in which Lily reclaims her power.



A car pulls up that isn't Atlas's. Whoever it is knocks at the door and rings the bell simultaneously. Lily is worried it may be Ryle or Atlas's girlfriend, Cassie. She tries to catch a glimpse of the person, but she can't see them. Lily texts Atlas while two men begin yelling for him through the door. With the chain still securing the door, she cracks it to speak with them. They ask who she is, and she gives her name. She is hesitant to tell these strangers that Atlas isn't home. Atlas calls her back and explains that they are his friends who came for a poker night that he forgot to cancel. He tells her he'll call them and tell them to go home.

Now that she knows that she's safe, Lily lets the two men in. They introduce themselves as Darin and Brad. As they settle in, they ask if she can play poker. Lily tells them she used to all the time in college. They ask her about her head, and she is surprised to find herself telling them everything. Lily describes the attack, how Atlas helped her, and that discovered she was pregnant in the hospital. Darin is stunned into silence. Brad, however, nonchalantly recommends a product that will help with the scarring. This actually makes Lily feel better, as if Brad normalized the situation for her.

Brad tells Lily that their friend bailed on them for poker, so she should join the game instead. Lily agrees. She shuffles the cards for them. Another man named Jimmy arrives, and Brad brings him up to speed on what happened to Lily. The four of them play a few hands waiting for Atlas to come home. When he arrives, he pulls her aside to ask if she wants them out, but Lily assures him that the distraction is helpful. Atlas brushes Lily's hand affectionately as they talk. Though Lily knows he does it to comfort her, she notices it sparks desire in her.

Back at the poker table, Atlas's friends ask how he and Lily met. Atlas tells them that she rescued him when they were children. Brad points out that Atlas is returning the favor now. Atlas is confused, but Brad reassures him that Lily told him the whole story. Brad tells Lily that in his experience, things always get better. Darin jokes that Brad has never been pregnant or abused by his husband. Atlas is furious. Lily tells him to calm down. She asks how the three men met Atlas, and she learns that Brad is the dishwasher, Darin is the sous chef, and Jimmy is the valet at the restaurant.

Lily's initial worry that Cassie may be at the door is another indication that Lily still has unprocessed feelings for Atlas—they are just overshadowed by her more immediate concerns about her safety. Her reaction to the men knocking at the door reveals how Ryle's abuse has not only destroyed her ability to trust him—it's also impacted her ability to trust others.



This scene introduces the first people in Atlas's life other than Lily. While many people would find this response inappropriate or abrasive, Lily appreciates that Brad respects her enough to treat her like a person rather than a victim. Brad's words also imply that just as her scars will physically heal—even better for the medication he recommends—she will emotionally heal as well.



Both the normalcy of playing poker and talking to people outside her typical circle brighten Lily's outlook considerably. For the first time in days, she isn't worried about her safety, the decisions she needs to make, or how the people important to her will react to her news. Because Lily is not distracted by her trauma for once, she has the emotional and mental space to notice Atlas's touch and, more importantly, her reaction to it.



Atlas's friends prove to be shrewd observers of the human condition. Though they've not experienced Lily's specific circumstances, it is clear that their own difficulties have given them wisdom, patience, and humor that Lily desperately needs. Lily's openness with Brad, Darin, and Jimmy also shows Atlas that, even without him, Lily can fend for herself and will be okay.



They all keep playing until Atlas's phone rings. He leaves to answer it, and Lily suspects that he's talking to Cassie. Eager for more information about her, Lily asks if Cassie has ever attended poker night. The men tell her they've never heard of someone named Cassie, nor has Atlas mentioned having a girlfriend. When Atlas comes back, Jimmy asks who Cassie is, and Atlas admits that Cassie doesn't exist. Atlas tells his friends it's time to go. They say goodbye to Lily before reminding Atlas that they'll see him next week for poker.

Lily can't stop thinking about the fact that Atlas lied about Cassie when they first ran into each other. She wonders if he lied to her because he never wanted to be with her in the first place, and a fake girlfriend was just an easy excuse. Lily also considers that if Atlas had been honest, she may have chosen to be with him instead of Ryle—and the events of the last few months would never have happened. Lily tries to leave, but Atlas stops her.

With tears in her eyes, Lily confronts Atlas. She asks the real reason he never came back to find her. Atlas admits that he did. When she was in college, he came home from his first tour with the Marines to see her. When he got to her school, he saw that she was happy with her friends and another guy, and he didn't want to complicate her life. Lily tries to remember who her boyfriend at the time had been, but she can't. He was nowhere near as special as Atlas has always been. Instead of talking with Lily, Atlas went back to the Marines to try to improve his life even more.

Lily is angry and wracked with images of what could have happened if Atlas had only spoken with her. She worries that Atlas never felt the way about her that she felt about him. Lily asks him why he lied about Cassie. Atlas tells her that she seemed so happy with Ryle and that he didn't want to mess it up. Also, he was jealous. Atlas's admission overwhelms Lily, so she decides to go home. There, she will be able to process what happened with Ryle without the added complication of her feelings toward Atlas.

Lily's preoccupation with Cassie proves to be completely unnecessary—she never existed. Learning that Atlas had lied about having a girlfriend this whole time fundamentally shifts his and Lily's dynamic. Throughout their friendship, Lily always trusted Atlas to be honest, but now she sees that he contains bad in him as well. The intent behind Atlas helping Lily is now unclear, and his actions carry a different weight.



Atlas's lie, combined with the nagging hurt of him never coming to find Lily as an adult, leads Lily to believe that Atlas had been purposely pushing her away. If that is true, then his desire to help feels like pity. The other option—that Atlas was trying to avoid complicating her new relationship with Ryle—is just as upsetting to Lily because it is another instance of how the existence or absence of honesty can shift the course of one's life.



Lily finally asks Atlas what has actually been bothering her since way before Ryle entered her life or they ran into each other at Bib's: why their future plans never came to fruition. His explanation breaks Lily's heart almost more than if he'd just forgotten about her. He showed up, but he incorrectly assumed that he could not measure up to the inconsequential man in her life at the time. It seems that the same lack of self-esteem that compelled Atlas to improve himself before finding Lily led him to walk away from her without even trying to talk to her.



Lily's anger at this news is fully justified; though Atlas thought he was freeing Lily to live her life, he was actually undermining her agency by not giving her a chance to decide. He took her choice away from her by not speaking to her in college, and he took it away again by claiming he had a girlfriend that day outside Bib's. The nature of Atlas's betrayal is wholly different from Ryle's abuse, but Lily cannot handle them both at once.



Atlas is sad that she is leaving, but he drives her home and walks her upstairs. When they get to the door, Atlas realizes that Lily is terrified. He offers to check the apartment for her. Once he's turned on all the lights and confirmed it's safe, she comes in. Atlas is hesitant to leave. Lily tells him that she can't figure out how to salvage her life while he's in it trying to fix things for her. Before he leaves, Atlas tells her that he will be there if she ever needs him. He asks her only to call if it's an emergency, because he can't just be her friend. Lily knows he's right.

After Lily and Atlas say goodbye, Lily hears a knock at the door. She knows it's him. When she opens the door, he wraps his arms around her and kisses her face. Lily begins to cry. He tells her that he knows the timing is awful, but he doesn't want to lose another chance to tell her how he feels. Atlas asks that if she ever wants to find love again, that she finds it with him. He tells her she is still his favorite person. He leaves without a response. Finally alone, Lily reels from the two heartbreaks she's experienced in the past two days.

CHAPTER 29

Six weeks later, Lily is visiting with Allysa and Rylee. Allysa tells her that she misses her and is considering coming back to work a couple days a week. Lily is surprised that Allysa misses her; she comes over every evening. Allysa admits she really misses getting out of the house, and Marshall can take over caring for Rylee now and then. They laugh. Since Ryle left, Lily finds that the only times she's truly happy are when she spends time with them. No one except for Lily, Ryle, and Atlas know what happened that night.

Lily hasn't told anyone about her pregnancy, either. The doctors told her that she was 12 weeks pregnant when she found out. Now that she's 18 weeks into her pregnancy, she's worried that her belly is showing, though she can hide it pretty well beneath large clothing. Lily is eager to tell someone, but she doesn't feel like it would be right to tell anyone before she tells Ryle. She is committed to waiting until he returns in six weeks to share the news.

Even in conflict, Atlas wants to help Lily, and Lily in turn knows she needs Atlas's support to feel comfortable returning to her home. Once she feels safe and Atlas makes sure she knows she can always count on him, they agree it's time to part ways. They both set healthy boundaries that are driven by self-awareness of their needs and limitations.



Atlas seems to have learned from his former mistakes. Though the timing is worse than ever, he tells Lily what he really wants: Lily, but on her own terms. Acknowledging that the timing is off breaks Lily's heart, but her decision to part ways with Atlas shows that she is learning to do what is best for herself. In their final goodbye, it is apparent that their unconditional love for each other—the kind that comes simply from being glad someone exists, even in all their complexities—is untarnished by this conflict.



Lily hasn't been ready to talk to Allysa about her and Ryle's separation yet, in part because she fears she will lose her best friend since she is siblings with her abuser. For the time being, Lily decides to exist in a happy medium between considering her future and enjoying the present time she has with her sister-in-law and new niece. Though Allysa doesn't know it, Lily is gaining strength from the happiness and support of her presence alone.



In many ways, the baby's arrival functions a deadline for many of the decisions Lily has to make. It is noteworthy that despite the damage Ryle has done, Lily still feels he deserves to know first; perhaps Lily is willing to consider his feelings because the baby is a living memory of the love they shared.



Allysa asks Lily if she's ready for Ryle to come home. Lily says yes, trying to emote as little as possible. Allysa wonders if Ryle has adjusted to the subway in Cambridge, and Lily responds that he has. Allysa hands Rylee to Marshall and drags Lily into her bedroom. Allysa explains that there is no subway in Cambridge. She demands that Lily tell her what's going on, because she knows that Lily and Ryle aren't talking. Lily breaks down and tells Allysa everything that has transpired since the night Rylee was born.

The two women cry together. When Allysa catches her breath, she tells Lily that she knows how much Ryle loves her and has grown because of her presence in his life. Allysa admits that as Ryle's sister, she wants Lily to take him back. However, she insists that as Lily's best friend, she forbids her from doing so. They hold each other, processing their grief and anger. Lily tells Allysa that Allysa is her best friend. Once they've calmed down, Allysa's excitement over Lily's pregnancy wins out over her sadness. Allysa forces her to try on a maternity shirt. When she sees herself in the mirror, Lily realizes that she really can't hide her bump anymore. Marshall walks in, and Allysa swears him to secrecy. He promises not to tell anyone. Together, Lily and Allysa begin planning a baby shower. Lily finally feels true joy about her baby.

CHAPTER 30

Two weeks have passed since Lily told Allysa about her pregnancy. Lily reflects on how nice it is to be so close to her best friend, even if it is weird to live in the home that she and Ryle shared before everything fell to pieces. She sleeps in the guest room instead of their bedroom now. Lily still hasn't told her mother about the baby, and she's not sure if she can hide her stomach for another three weeks until Ryle returns. She wonders if she'll just need to call him to tell him; that way, she can stop avoiding her mother.

As Lily unlocks her door, someone pulls it open from the inside: it's Ryle. Lily's belly is obvious in her maternity shirt, so she can't even try to hide it. She is lost in a flurry of conflicting emotions: fear, anger, longing. Ryle's intense feelings are also apparent by the look on his face. Lily stays frozen waiting to see what he will do. Ryle can tell she's afraid, so he points to Marshall, who is sitting on the couch. Ryle explains that he asked Marshall to be there so she would feel more comfortable. Lily decides it's safe enough for her to come in.

Allysa's suspicion that Lily and Ryle weren't talking demonstrates how attuned she has become to her best friend. She sees through Lily's attempts to conceal her problems and opens up a space for her to confide in her. Though Lily had been afraid to tell Allysa what her brother did to her, Allysa proves to be exactly the support Lily needed.



Confiding in Allysa (and Allysa's nuanced response) lifts much of the weight from Lily's shoulders; Ryle's abuse is no longer isolating her fully from others. In telling Lily she sees all the good in Ryle that has come from Lily's presence, Allysa honors the earnest love Lily and Ryle share. However, she affirms that Lily deserves better than Ryle can give her—and Ryle deserves to suffer the consequences of his actions. As the family celebrates Lily's pregnancy together, she is relieved to find that her chosen family is intact, even if she and Ryle's relationship is falling apart.



The relief, encouragement, and joy that confiding in Allysa gave Lily convinces her it is time to fill her mother in on what's going on in her life. Still, the small part of her that still feels loyal to Ryle—or at least doesn't want to cut him out entirely—causes her to hesitate since he doesn't know about the baby.



Ryle's unexpected arrival forces Lily to confront her issues earlier than she planned. Lily's conflicted reaction to seeing Ryle again demonstrates the complex emotional state she's been in the past few months, but her predominant feelings are uncertainty and fear. The presence of Marshall—a core member of Lily's main support system—calms her nerves; she knows she can trust him to protect her.



As Ryle and Lily head toward the bedroom for privacy, Ryle asks Marshall to come if he hears any yelling. Lily tries to imagine what it must feel like to not have control over yourself. Her sympathy for Ryle vanishes when she remembers how Ryle's violence is responsible for their current estrangement. In the bedroom, he asks to touch her stomach. She agrees. As he lays his hand on her belly, she realizes that you can't simply stop feeling love for someone just because they hurt you. The love that existed before the hurt is intrinsically bound to the pain felt after.

Ryle falls to his knees and embraces Lily's stomach. He kisses it. Despite her anger, Lily appreciates the love that he so apparently feels for their child. As he holds her around the waist, she feels conflicted. She wants to scream at him and call the police as much as she wants to forgive him and care for the wounded child in him. A portion of her wants to have never met Ryle. He releases her, and they sit down on the bed together.

They agree to share naked truths. Ryle tells Lily he doesn't know where to begin, so she suggests he apologize. Ryle assures her that she has no idea what the last two months have been like for him after attacking her. Lily is livid. She tells him that actually, he is the one with no clue how she has felt since he left. She screams that he didn't have to fear for his life or get nauseous remembering what the person he loved did to him. Ryle tries to interrupt, but Lily keeps yelling. She acknowledges that she kept pieces of her past from him, but nothing she did excuses his behavior. Lily tells him that even if she did have an affair, he'd still have no excuse for hurting her.

Ryle continues to sit silently as Lily cries. He lies next to her on the bed. Eventually, he tells her that he knows there is nothing he can do to make it right. Ryle explains that he knew as soon as it happened that he'd lost her. He had planned to come there to say goodbye before taking the job in Minnesota, but he can't do it now that he knows about the baby. Ryle tells Lily he loves her and begs her to let him be in his baby's life. He asks for her help.

They kiss, and Lily is angry to find how much she still wants him. When Ryle puts his hands in her hair, she freezes. Images from the night he attacked her swim in her head. Ryle realizes she is no longer responding. Staring into her eyes, he understands. He lets Lily go and heads for the door. Before he leaves, Lily tells him that she wishes he wasn't the baby's father. His expression as he walks away makes Lily feel as cruel as her father had been.

Ryle also seems to understand that Marshall's allegiance is to Lily, even though they've been friends since high school. In light of his abhorrent behavior, Ryle's family has come together to surround and support Lily as she heals, even if it means distancing themselves from Ryle. The lingering love Lily feels for Ryle is especially present as they consider the baby that they made together in better times.



In Ryle's affection for their unborn baby, Lily sees all the best parts of Ryle—the parts she can't help but love. The coexistence of that kind of love with the hatred Ryle's abuse has stirred in Lily is almost too much for her to bear, but she knows that these paradoxical emotions are neither right nor wrong; they both matter simply because they are how she feels.



Earlier in Ryle and Lily's relationship, they used naked truths to come back to each other in times of conflict. What Lily hears in Ryle's naked truths now, however, only confirms her anger. His apologies and explanations underscore his selfishness; he talks about his pain since he left but makes no effort to acknowledge the inexcusable pain he's caused Lily. She can't sympathize with him any longer.



Even if Lily wants to harden her heart toward Ryle, her love for him makes her sympathize with him against all logic. Even if his love for her is selfish, hers is selfless; she feels his pain and desire almost as acutely as she feels her own. He longs to be good for her and the baby, and she wants to believe he can be, too.



The love that Lily has for Ryle is so strong that it is almost enough to overcome the damage he's caused. However, Lily's visceral reaction to his touch shows that some things simply can't be undone. Beyond her emotions and even her logic, her body alerts her to the brutal reality—she can't accept him back. Though her comment about regretting Ryle being her child's father is earnest, Lily's lingering love still makes it impossible to hurt him without feeling pain herself.



CHAPTER 31

Two days after seeing Ryle, Lily decides she can no longer keep the pregnancy from her mom. Lily texts her and asks if she can visit the next day. She also asks if she can make lasagna. Lily receives a text, but it's from Allysa instead of her mother. Allysa invites Lily to dinner, promising that Ryle won't be there. Lily agrees. After they eat, Lily asks Marshall and Allysa questions about raising Rylee. She knows she'll need to learn more before the baby comes. Lily offers to watch Rylee for them, and they immediately accept.

Marshall gives Rylee a bottle while Lily and Allysa talk. Lily is shocked at how many things Allysa packs for Rylee's sleepover with her. As Allysa fills the diaper bag, Lily feels her baby kick for the first time. Allysa puts her hand on Lily's belly but can't feel anything yet. Lily feels a wave of sadness that Ryle isn't here. Allysa, noticing Lily's sorrow, tells her that even though things aren't the way they thought they'd be, becoming a mother is going to be the best thing Lily has ever experienced. She promises her that she'll do an amazing job.

Lily's urgency to talk to her mother and the nature of her questions for Marshall and Allysa show that she is ready to embrace this new responsibility fully. Prior to her confrontation with Ryle, she had been in a liminal state that hardly felt real. Now that Ryle knows and the time for her to make her decision is approaching, she knows she must start thinking concretely about the future.



Just as Lily feels she's beginning to adjust to the idea of life without Ryle, her composure breaks once more. Often in mourning, big milestones disrupt people's ability to manage daily grief; for Lily, the baby's kick is one such milestone. The way Allysa steps in to help Lily through this swell of heartache shows how vital support systems can be in navigating grief and surviving abuse.



CHAPTER 32

Lily is excited to tell her mother about her pregnancy, but she is scared to explain everything that happened with Ryle. Lily is uncertain how her mother will react, given how much she loves Ryle. If she tries to convince Lily to forgive him, Lily doesn't know if she'll be able to push back. Usually, Lily's anger toward her husband strengthens her. On other days, her longing for him is so intense that her resolve falters. She hopes that after confiding in her mother, her mother may be able to help her on the days she doesn't feel strong.

When Lily arrives at her mother's house, she's surprised to hear that she has her own news to share with Lily. She tells her that she has started seeing someone. Lily wants to congratulate her, but she is worried her mother is seeing another man like her father. Her mom promises that he is a good person, and Lily believes her. She tells her mother that she's excited to meet him, and her mom responds that he could come over to join them if Lily wants. Lily explains that tonight may not be the best night.

Because Lily is dealing with such complex and conflicting emotions—while dealing with pregnancy hormones no less—she understands that her resolve to leave Ryle is fragile. She is working to undo the isolation that Ryle's abuse caused and gain as much support as she can, though she knows that sharing her truth can also open her up to criticism that might undermine her conviction.



It is significant that Lily's mother has found love once more. Because Lily continues to compare herself to her mother—sometimes to ill and other times positive effect—her mother's ability to heal from her own abuse models how Lily herself can recover from her current situation.



Lily takes off the jacket hiding her belly. Her mother is thrilled, though she comments that she is shocked at how soon Lily got pregnant. Lily responds that it was shocking to her, too. Her mom notices that she does not seem happy and asks what's going on. Lily cries, and then she tells her mother the truth about the abuse. She confides in her mother all her fears about the baby and the decision she has to make about Ryle. Lily's mother asks Lily if she wants to stay with Ryle, and Lily says honestly that she doesn't know. Her mother tells her she understands, but she encourages Lily to know her limit and not push past it.

Lily's mother explains that when she was first married, she thought she would never let anyone hurt her. Yet over the years, as Lily's father's abuse escalated, she pushed further and further beyond what she thought she'd never allow. Before she knew it, she was too far past any hard limit she could stick to. There was always a logical reason to forgive him. She begs Lily not to do what she did, no matter how much she and Ryle may love each other. If Ryle loved her selflessly, her mother argues, he'll let her go.

Lily understands that she's been wrong about her mother—her mother was never weak. Lily tells her mother that she admires her for her strength. In response, Lily's mother asks if Lily remembers the eulogy she gave for her father. Lily nods. Her mom tells her that she always knew the pause at the end was intentional. She knew Lily stopped talking because she couldn't say anything complimentary about her father, and it made her so proud. She thanks Lily for standing up for her and encourages her to stand up for herself now, too.

CHAPTER 33

Lily's baby shower happens three months later. After it is over, Marshall helps her carry all her presents down to the apartment. While they are cleaning up, Ryle comes home. Lily hasn't seen him since the day he found out she was pregnant. He offers to grab the bag of presents from her, and she lets him. Lily cleans the kitchen nervously while Ryle unpacks things for her in the baby's room. He comes out to ask Lily if she would like him to assemble the crib. Lily says yes.

As Ryle works on the crib, Lily finds herself overcome by how good he looks. Despite everything, a large part of her still wants him. It would be easier, she admits to herself, if she could just forgive him. Lily reminds herself what her mother said about Ryle not letting Lily take him back if he really loved her or their child. Lily walks down the hallway to find the crib assembled. Ryle stares into it, and she wonders if he is mourning the fact he won't ever get to live in the same place as his child.

Unlike anyone else Lily has confided in, Lily's mother pauses after Lily is done sharing to ask Lily what she wants. To other people, the choice seems obvious. However, Lily's mother knows as a survivor of domestic abuse that neither leaving nor staying is easy or foolproof. Either way, there is significant potential for further hurt. Instead of pushing her one way or the other, Lily's mother simply challenges her daughter to decide what she wants and honor that decision.



Lily's mother's explanation of how abuse unfolded in her own marriage shows what happens when you know your own mind by don't stick firmly to your convictions. Compromising yourself little by little over a lifetime can amount to a full loss of identity. A true, selfless love would never require a loved one to betray their own selfhood; it is clear to Lily that staying with Ryle would require this kind of sacrifice.



Lily learns that confiding in others invites them to reciprocate, and that is how true understanding develops between people. In talking to her mother more openly than ever before, Lily sees that her assumptions and judgments about her mom were incorrect. She had always seen Lily's strength even if she didn't communicate it, and now Lily is able to see her mother's strength, too.



Time and space have neither weakened Lily's resolve nor dulled her memory of Ryle's violence. In fact, the distance she has maintained from Ryle has solidified her confidence in herself. Because Lily is beginning to trust her own strength and know her own mind, she is willing to interact with Ryle once more.



Even though Lily has grown tremendously since she last saw Ryle, she still feels something for him—on some level, she knows she always will. Seeing his sadness as he looks at their child's crib, Lily also understands that their grief is something they now share, just as they once shared their love.



Lily enters the room, and Ryle watches her as she turns on the mobile over the crib. She thinks about how much simpler relationships look to the people outside them. Lily judged her mother for not sticking up for herself, but now she understands that it's hard to reject someone who hurts you occasionally but supports you most of the time. Ryle senses Lily's thoughtfulness and tries to reach out. She steps away from him, feeling that she has shown him enough kindness for the day. When he leaves, she agonizes over Ryle's pain. Though it's rooted in his mistakes, she can't help but have sympathy for the man she still loves.

Once more, Lily's thoughts about the intricacies of human relationships reveal how her pain has made her more compassionate and open-minded. Having empathy for others also teaches her to have more empathy for herself. Instead of feeling guilt for the love she harbors for Ryle, she understands that she doesn't love him despite his badness— she loves him for his goodness. She can love what is good in him, but she must not let that love cause her to overlook what is bad, either.



CHAPTER 34

Another two weeks pass, and Lily is happy with the progress she's made on the nursery, which she has decorated with plants. She asks Allysa and her mother to come see. When neither of them is available, she decides to text Ryle to see if he'd like to look. He responds immediately that he's heading down. Lily tells him about the mural she painted as they head to the room, and she can tell that he's nervous about her doing everyone alone. Lily reminds herself that she's more than capable. Ryle sees the nursery and is amazed. He tells Lily that he can see she's been thriving, though his voice sounds sad.

Lily's relationship with plants has shifted throughout the novel, mirroring how her priorities have also shifted. As a child, her garden was a function of her will to survive. As a woman newly in love, her floral business and her plans to plant garden in her and Ryle's apartment mirrored her hope for a successful, happy future. Now, the plants decorating her baby's nursery show how she's directing her energy toward making sure her child flourishes. Part of Lily sees that having a father in their life will help her baby thrive, which is why she reaches out to include Ryle in this moment.



Lily asks Ryle if he's open to exchanging naked truths. Ryle is relieved and asks if they can finally discuss what will happen between them. Lily tells Ryle to speak first. Ryle explains that he isn't sure what she is comfortable with. While he wants to give her all the space she needs, he also wants the chance to be a good father and husband. Lily tells him that she wants him to be in the baby's life, too, but she isn't sure she can trust his temper. Ryle immediately responds that the baby would be safe with him, but Lily counters that he didn't think he would ever hurt her, either. She tells him she won't prevent him from having a relationship with the baby, but he needs to work to rebuild her trust.

Before allowing Ryle to participate in their child's life, Lily needs to know where Ryle is at emotionally. They share their truths just as they have always done. Lily doesn't accept Ryle's assurances that he is a safe person; she already has plenty of evidence to the contrary. However, she wants to believe him for her baby's sake, which makes her willing to provide him opportunities to prove his trustworthiness.



Ryle agrees that he will honor her boundaries and proceed in the way she sees best. Lily can tell there is something else on his mind, so she encourages him to be honest. Ryle asks what will happen between the two of them. Lily responds honestly that she isn't sure. She tells Ryle that she doesn't want to lead him on, but she feels she should wait until after giving birth in order to make the most objective choice. He thanks her for being willing to talk to him and have him over. They embrace for a long time. Lily asks Ryle to promise that he won't try to convince her to take him back or make any moves until after the baby arrives. He promises.

While both Lily and Ryle are still experiencing fear, doubt, and pain over their circumstances, they make an agreement to allow space—within well-defined boundaries—to let that pain heal. Lily is certain about her decision to try to keep Ryle in the baby's life, but she is not certain at all about keeping him in her own life. Lily has seen how distance has allowed her to understand herself better, so she decides to give herself more time to decide.



CHAPTER 35

Lily wakes up smelling toast. Her due date is only two days away. Because her doctor put her on bed rest, she has allowed Ryle to stay in the apartment to help her. While nothing is happening between the two of them, Lily is relieved that most of the awkwardness between them has lifted. Ryle leaves for work, and Lily settles onto the couch to eat her breakfast in front of the TV. Her phone rings. She is annoyed when she realizes it's all the way on the kitchen counter.

When Lily stands to answer her cell, her water breaks. Still, she picks up the call, which is from Lucy. She has some work question, which Lily answers. Lily calls Ryle once she hangs up with Lucy. While he drives back to get her, she packs her hospital bag and takes a shower. Ryle enters the bathroom to check on her. Lily's towel is too small to cover her whole body, so Ryle catches a glimpse of her naked body. He tells her she looks beautiful. Lily lets him touch her bare belly.

The tender moment between Lily and Ryle passes when Lily has a painful contraction. Ryle carries her to the car. Labor is progressing quickly, and by the time they get to the hospital, the baby is almost there. Their daughter is born before they get a chance to tell anyone that Lily's labor had started. Lily feels overwhelming love for her daughter. All she and Ryle can manage to do is stare at her. When he asks what they should name her, Lily suggests they name her Emmy, after Ryle's brother, Emerson. As Ryle holds Emerson, Lily can see how much Ryle loves her already. Only then is she able to decide what will happen now.

Lily considers all the most amazing things about Ryle: his drive, intelligence, humor, and compassion. She knows that her father shared some of those traits, too. But her hatred for her father always outweighed her love for him. Lily doesn't want that to happen between Ryle and his daughter. She tells Ryle she wants a divorce. He panics and asks for another chance. Lily asks him what he would say to a grown-up Emmy if she told him that her partner struck her, shoved her down the stairs, or tried to rape her.

The smell of toast calls back to the morning Lily woke in Atlas's house after the night Ryle knocked her unconscious. The contrast between that morning and this one is extreme; Ryle has rebuilt enough trust to stay in Lily's apartment to support her at the end of her pregnancy. He has continued to respect her boundaries, and she in turn has let him participate more closely as the baby approaches.



The trust they have developed is such that Lily doesn't push Ryle away during the vulnerable moment her towel slips. They have both grown enough in their separation that they are able to share a true moment of intimacy—and pure love for their baby—without the past rearing its head.



Ryle's expression while he holds Emmy reflects back to Lily the selfless love she feels for her daughter. And Ryle's love for their baby is more encouraging to Lily than anything else he has done. In naming their daughter Emmy after Ryle's late brother (who tragically died at Ryle's hand), Lily is giving Ryle a gift. She is declaring that she believes in Ryle's potential for redemption from his past, that she sees his goodness—goodness that is part of the daughter they created.



The only way that Lily sees to preserve that goodness in Ryle—not just for him or her, but for their daughter—is not to allow any more opportunities for what is evil in him to overshadow what is good. It is that love and goodness that Lily calls upon when explaining her decision to Ryle. The directness of Lily's question is painful for Ryle, but that pain helps him realize his own truth in the way Lily's pain allowed her to understand hers.



Ryle can't argue against Lily's point. Instead, he kisses Emmy's head. Lily asks him to answer because she needs to hear him say it. Ryle responds that he would never let Emmy stay with someone who hurt her even once, no matter how much they said they loved her. Ryle and Lily cry and hold their daughter. Lily knows that in the last 15 minutes, Ryle has both gained a daughter and lost a wife. In the last 15 minutes, they have both been broken and healed. Lily's decision ends the generational abuse that she and her mother suffered. Lily is positive that she has made the right choice for Emmy, even though it hurts both her and Ryle. Together, they mourn their lost love and celebrate breaking the cycle.

When Ryle admits that his selfless love for Emmy would cause him to beg her to leave if someone ever hurt her, he finally affirms Lily's decision to divorce; he understands having selfless love for his wife means letting her go. This decision is painful for both Lily and Ryle, but they make it anyway in hopes it will save their daughter from ever feeling that same hurt.



EPILOGUE

Eleven months later, Lily is pushing Emmy down the street on her way to Ryle's. Three months after Ryle's birth, Lily moved out of the apartment she and Ryle had lived in together. Now she lives walking distance from both work and the building where Ryle, Allysa, Marshall, and Rylee still live. She is happy that she is able to spend so much time there, too, and that Emmy gets to know her family. Lily is late meeting Ryle and quickens her pace. She is surprised when she hears someone call her name.

Despite the anguish Lily experienced throughout the novel, the epilogue shows how her decision to love herself and her daughter first, hold Ryle accountable, and be vulnerable with the people she loves has paid off. Her chosen family is intact, her daughter is healthy, and she and Ryle are successfully co-parenting. Lily is well on her way to healing.



When Lily sees blue eyes, she knows it's Atlas. He is thrilled when he sees the baby. Atlas tells Lily how beautiful Emmy is and how good Lily looks, too. Lily assesses Atlas, noticing how handsome he's become. Lily gets another text from Ryle. She explains to Atlas that it's Ryle's day to care for Emmy, and Atlas is relieved to hear that Lily and Ryle are no longer together. Atlas tells Lily that he's late, too—he opened a new restaurant in the neighborhood. Lily promises to bring her mother to the restaurant soon, and then she and Atlas part ways.

When Lily and Atlas run into each other on the sidewalk, their lives are completely different from when they said goodbye at Lily's old apartment. Lily, in many ways, has found her way to wholeness through her own inner strength and the support of her loved ones. The self-doubt that undermined Atlas's ability to pursue Lily has passed; he continues to succeed in his business and seems genuinely happy.



Lily drops Emmy off with Ryle. They share a pleasant exchange about her playpen and scheduling. Ryle is confused when Lily heads back down the street instead toward her store. She tells him that she will see him tonight when she picks Emmy up. Lily takes off at full speed while calling Atlas's name repeatedly. Finally, he hears her and turns around. When he sees Lily, he starts walking toward her. Lily explains that she wants to tell him Emmy's middle name: Dory. Atlas breaks into a smile when he realizes she's named after Ellen DeGeneres's character in *Finding Nemo*.

Seeing Ryle doesn't distract Lily from her feelings for Atlas as it once would have. Instead, it confirms for her both how fully she has healed and what—or who—she really wants now that she's ready. When Lily catches up to Atlas and tells her Emmy's middle name, Atlas understands that Lily has given her the name Dory to honor him; he understands that her sharing this fact is a declaration of love.



Lily isn't sure how to proceed. They stand awkwardly for a moment before Atlas pulls her into a firm embrace. He kisses her head as traffic streams past them. Finally, Atlas tells her that he is sure his life is good enough to include her in it. Lily freezes in fear for a moment, feeling like a child again. After a moment, she responds. She asks if he donates to charity, wants kids, and plans to stay in Boston. Atlas responds yes to all her questions. Lily tells him that she feels ready, too. They hold each other. As Atlas kisses the spot on Lily's shoulder he always loved, where her **heart** tattoo is. He tells her that she doesn't have to swim anymore because they've made it to shore.

For the first time since they were teenagers, the timing works out for Lily and Atlas. The timing is right not by happenstance or chance, but because both Lily and Atlas worked hard to heal from their traumas. Each found their way to their own truth and fought for their own happiness, and in doing so, they are able to find each other again. Their bond is no longer based on pure survival; they are able to simply love each other well, reveling in the other person for exactly who they are.





HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Richardson, Maddie. "It Ends with Us." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 4 Jan 2023. Web. 4 Jan 2023.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Richardson, Maddie. "It Ends with Us." LitCharts LLC, January 4, 2023. Retrieved January 4, 2023. <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/it-ends-with-us>.

To cite any of the quotes from *It Ends with Us* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Hoover, Colleen. *It Ends with Us*. Atria. 2016.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Hoover, Colleen. *It Ends with Us*. New York: Atria. 2016.