

# Kindertransport



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF DIANE SAMUELS

Diane Samuels was born in Liverpool in 1960 into a Jewish family. She studied at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, and then studied drama at the University of London. Prior to becoming a full-time writer, she was a drama teacher at secondary schools in London and also worked as an education officer at the Unicorn Theatre for children. She is a book reviewer for *The Guardian* and has lectured at universities throughout England. Her play *Kindertransport* was first produced by Soho Theatre Company in 1993 and has since been translated into many languages. The play also won the Verity Bargate and Meyer-Whitworth Awards. Samuels has written a number of other plays, including *The True Life Fiction of Mata Hari* and *Cinderella's Daughter*. She also writes plays for BBC radio and has written plays for younger audiences. Samuels has lived in London since the early 1990s.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Kindertransport (“children’s transport”) was a rescue effort of predominantly Jewish children from Nazi-occupied countries to the United Kingdom in the months leading up to the start of World War II. Over the course of approximately nine months starting in late 1938, the UK took in around 10,000 children from Germany (where the play’s protagonist, Evelyn, is from), Austria, and Czechoslovakia, among other Nazi-occupied territories. The British government waived visa immigration requirements for Jewish children—but not adults—which meant that many Jewish refugee children who participated in the program were separated from their parents and were often the only members of their family to survive the war. In the U.K., children were placed in foster homes and hostels and on farms. Like Evelyn, many children endured trauma as a result of being separated from their parents at such a young age. Often, children were too young to understand the gravity of the war and the ongoing Nazi persecution of Jewish people, and so they were kept in the dark about the nature of their travels and how long they’d be separated from their parents. They also had to endure the culture shock of living in a new country where nobody spoke their language. After the war ended, Kindertransport children struggled to locate and reunite with their families, and many learned that their parents had not survived the war.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

In addition to *Kindertransport*, Diane Samuels has also written

*The True Life Fiction of Mata Hari* (2001), a play about Margaretha Geertruida MacLeod, a Dutch exotic dancer and courtesan who was executed by firing squad after she was convicted of being a spy for Germany during World War I. *3 Sisters on Hope Street* (2008), which Samuels co-wrote with Tracy-Ann Oberman, is a retelling of Chekhov’s play [The Three Sisters](#) that takes place in post-World War II Liverpool and reimagines the play’s titular sisters as three English Jewish women. *Kindertransport* takes place during and after World War II and the Holocaust. The play tells the story of Evelyn, a young German Jewish girl who was a Kindertransport child, and examines the unresolved trauma that her displacement caused her. Other notable plays about the Holocaust include Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett’s [The Diary of Anne Frank](#) (1956), which was based on the diary that Anne Frank kept while in hiding from the Nazis in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. *Leopoldstadt* by British playwright Tom Stoppard was first performed in 2020 and follows a wealthy Jewish family who flees Vienna to escape Nazi persecution and extermination of Jewish people in the first half of the 20th century. *Leopoldstadt* concludes some years after World War II as the few surviving members of a family reunite and come to terms with their trauma and their grief over their murdered loved ones. The novel *Austerlitz* by German writer W. G. Sebald tells the story of a Kindertransport refugee child who came to Britain as an infant. The book follows his life in the aftermath of the war and his journey of coming to terms with his roots.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Kindertransport*
- **When Written:** Early 1990s
- **Where Written:** London, England
- **When Published:** 1993
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Drama
- **Setting:** A storage room in Evelyn’s house outside London
- **Climax:** In a memory (or possibly only in Evelyn’s imagination), young Evelyn confronts Helga about the hurt that Helga’s abandonment caused her.
- **Antagonist:** The Ratcatcher

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Der Rattenfänger.** In *Kindertransport*, protagonist Evelyn fixates on the mythic Rattenfänger, or the German equivalent of the Pied Piper. The legend was first referenced in the Middle Ages and has since been passed down as folklore and in the writings of the Brothers Grimm.

**Case Study.** Diane Samuels interviewed many children who participated in the Kindertransport program as part of her research. Though Evelyn, the play's protagonist, is not a real person, many of the things she experiences throughout the play happened to real people who participated in the program.



## PLOT SUMMARY

*Kindertransport* takes place in a dusty **storage room** in Evelyn's house outside London, with Evelyn's memories of her childhood before, during, and after World War II interspersed throughout the play's main action, which takes place in the present day.

The play opens with one of Evelyn's childhood memories, back when her name was Eva Schlesinger. In 1939, Eva sits with her mother Helga in a dusty storage room. Eva is reading a children's book called *Der Rattenfänger* when Helga interrupts her, insisting that Eva sew a button onto her coat in preparation for her upcoming journey to England. Helga has recently made the painful decision to send nine-year-old Eva to England to live with a family of strangers—Eva's family is Jewish, and removing Eva from Nazi-controlled Germany is Eva's best chance at surviving the war. Helga gives Eva a pair of shoes to wear on her journey, explaining that she got the cobbler to hide priceless family **jewelry** inside the shoes' hollow heels. She makes Eva promise to meet other Jewish people in England and to be good for her English foster family. Eva agrees, though she doesn't understand why she's being sent away in the first place.

In the play's present day, Evelyn and her daughter Faith walk into the same storage room. (Helga and Eva remain in the same storage room, though they do not acknowledge Evelyn and Faith and seem only to exist within Evelyn's memory.) Faith and Evelyn are here to sort through some old boxes together—Faith is in her early twenties and will be moving into her new apartment soon, and Evelyn is preparing to sell the house. Faith frets over whether she really wants to move, ultimately deciding against it—she's concerned about leaving Evelyn on her own. Evelyn scolds Faith for being flaky. Evelyn's mother Lil, who is in town visiting, enters the storage room, interrupting Faith and Evelyn's squabble.

Faith looks through one of the boxes. Amid the old papers and photos, she finds the *Ratcatcher* book that Eva was reading in the play's opening scene. In the story, the Ratcatcher (the German equivalent of the Pied Piper) entices all the children of the village of Hamlyn with his music before leading them off a cliff to their deaths, supposedly to punish villagers for being ungrateful for their blessings. Faith recognizes the story as one that Evelyn used to read to her when she was young, but she's confused that the book is in German, since she didn't think Evelyn spoke any German. The mythic Ratcatcher reappears in Evelyn's memories throughout the play, a manifestation of her

unresolved childhood trauma.

The action shifts to a flashback to Eva/Evelyn's childhood, in which Eva tearfully says goodbye to her parents at the train station. In Eva's memory, the Ratcatcher plays his music as she boards the train. Eva eventually arrives in England and is greeted by Lil, her foster mother. Eva tries to talk to Lil in German, but Lil doesn't know any German and explains that Eva will have to learn English. Though Eva misses Germany and her family, she gradually adapts to life with the Millers and assimilates to English culture. She resents Helga for "abandoning" her, and she eventually sees Lil as her true mother.

In the present, Faith sits alone in the storage room and discovers a letter that Helga sent to Eva while Eva was staying with her foster family in England. Eventually she realizes that Eva and Evelyn are the same person. Lil later confirms Faith's suspicion, though she cautions Faith not to tell Evelyn what she's learned, explaining that Evelyn just wants to put her traumatic past behind her.

Faith, feeling betrayed and hurt by Evelyn's secrecy, ignores Lil's warning and pleads with Evelyn to tell her about her past life as Eva. The confrontation greatly upsets Evelyn, who insists that her past is her own business, not Faith's. A bitter fight ensues: Faith calls Evelyn a bad mother, and eventually Evelyn kicks everyone out and locks herself in the storage room.

Lil eventually gets Evelyn to let her inside the storage room. She cautions Evelyn to be forthcoming with Faith if she wants to repair their relationship. But when Evelyn insists that she just wants to put the past behind her, Lil agrees to help her destroy all evidence of her old life. Evelyn and Lil argue about Lil's role in distancing Evelyn from her roots—Evelyn accuses Lil of being a "child-stealer."

Evelyn eventually relents and lets Faith inside the storage room. Faith is shocked to see that Lil and Evelyn have destroyed most of the old papers and photos. After Lil leaves, Evelyn relents and tells Faith some basic facts about her parents and about her childhood in Hamburg. Evelyn's father died at Auschwitz, Evelyn explains, but Helga survived and eventually reconnected with Evelyn several years after the war ended. Evelyn also offers Faith the *Rattenfänger* book, one of the few childhood effects she didn't destroy, and Faith accepts it.

The action shifts to Helga and Evelyn's tense reunion after the war. By now, Evelyn has long accepted that her family is likely dead, adopted the Millers as her new family, and denied her Jewish roots—a transformation reflected in her decision to change her name from Eva to Evelyn, an English name. Helga pleads with Evelyn to travel to New York with her and start a new life with their surviving relatives. But Evelyn refuses, unwilling to abandon her life in England.

The action shifts to a (perhaps imaginary) meeting between

Evelyn and Helga on the waterfront. Helga is about to board a ship for New York and pleads with Evelyn to join her; Evelyn again refuses. A heated argument follows: Helga condemns Evelyn for turning her back on her past and her family, while Evelyn condemns Helga for abandoning her when she needed her most.

Back in the present, Faith sees that Evelyn has been crying. She asks Evelyn what she can do to help her. Evelyn asks Faith to stay little forever and never leave. Faith says she can't do that, and Evelyn replies that there's nothing Faith can do to help her then. They finish going through the storage room, and Evelyn asks Faith if she has everything she needs. "More or less," Faith replies ambiguously.



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Evelyn** – Evelyn is an English woman in her fifties. When Evelyn was nine, her mother Helga sent her to live in England to keep her safe from Nazi persecution. Though this decision likely saved Evelyn's life, Evelyn struggles to reconcile it with her feeling that Helga abandoned her. As a child, Evelyn came to see her English foster mother, Lil, as her true mother. In time, she assimilated into English culture, ultimately denying her Jewish roots and her German family—a transformation reflected in her decision to change her name from Eva to Evelyn. As an adult, Evelyn still has nightmarish visions of the Ratcatcher, a mythical villain from a children's book that Helga would read to Eva when she was a young girl; she cleans obsessively to ward off painful memories; and she suffers frequent panic attacks. When Evelyn's daughter Faith discovers the truth about Evelyn's past, she feels betrayed and lied to. Evelyn, however, maintains that she has no obligation to share her secrets with anyone—not even her own daughter. Still, Evelyn's relationship to her personal history is complicated; though she's resolved to forget the past and move on with her life, she's also resentful of Lil for allowing—and perhaps even encouraging—her to let go of her past and her biological family.

**Lil** – Lil is Eva/Evelyn's English foster mother. In 1939, at the start of the play's earlier timeline, Lil takes in Eva, a young German Jewish girl whose parents have sent her to live in Britain during the war. Lil cares for Eva during her formative years, and Eva comes to see Lil as her true mother. After the war ends and Eva is unable to locate her birth mother, Helga, Lil adopts Eva, who has long since assimilated into English culture and no longer feels connected to her past life in Germany. Lil and Eva's relationship is complicated. Though she cared for Eva when Eva's own parents could not, she wasn't especially respectful of Eva's cultural and religious roots, at times seeming eager for Eva to replace her old life in Germany with her new

life in England. As an adult, Eva (who now goes by Evelyn) even calls Lil a "murderer," suggesting that Lil played an active role in "killing" German Jewish Eva and replacing her with English Christian Evelyn. Still, like Helga, Lil is fiercely protective of Eva/Evelyn. After Faith, Evelyn's daughter, discovers the truth about Evelyn's past and tries to press Evelyn for more answers, Lil angrily demands that Faith respect Evelyn's desire to leave her traumatic childhood behind her.

**Faith** – Faith is Evelyn's daughter and Lil's granddaughter. In the play's present, she is a college student in her early twenties. Faith is at Evelyn's house helping Evelyn sort through a **storage closet** one day when she discovers old papers and photos that reveal the unthinkable: Evelyn has been lying about her past for Faith's entire life, a fact that Lil confirms for Faith. Faith has known that Lil took in a young German Jewish girl named Eva during World War II, but now she understands that Eva and Evelyn are the same person. Faith feels hurt and betrayed by Evelyn's secrecy. She resents Evelyn for concealing the truth, denying her roots, and refusing to come to terms with her traumatic childhood. As Faith sees it, Evelyn has denied Faith her right to know about her ancestors and her Jewish roots. Faith largely refuses to accept that Evelyn needs to repress her past to live some semblance of an ordinary life. Eventually, Faith learns to be grateful for what little Evelyn is willing and able to share about her past, a sentiment Faith demonstrates when she accepts the Ratcatcher book that Evelyn offers her. Still, the play ends on an ambiguous note, suggesting that Evelyn's secrecy and unresolved trauma will continue to drive a wedge between her and her daughter.

**Eva** – Eva is Evelyn's younger self. In 1939, when Eva is nine years old, her parents send her to live in England during the war for her safety. There, she meets her foster mother, Lil, who cares for her during her formative years. At first, Eva misses her birth mother Helga and her old life in Germany. But as time passes and Eva assimilates into English culture, she comes to see Lil as her true mother; eventually, Eva denies her Jewish roots and her old life altogether, letting Lil adopt her and taking an English name, Evelyn. One element of Eva's past that does stay with her through the years is a German children's book Helga used to read to her, *Der Rattenfänger* (The Ratcatcher), and Eva lives in fear that the story's eponymous, mythical villain will capture her and take her away from her new life and loved ones. After the war, Helga eventually finds Eva and tries to rekindle their relationship, but Eva no longer sees Helga as her mother or herself as Jewish, and she has no interest in leaving England and Lil behind to start a new life with Helga in New York. Though Helga's impossible decision to send Eva away very likely saved Eva's life, Eva can't help but resent her mother for abandoning her.

**Helga** – Helga is a German Jewish woman. In 1939, at the start of the play's earlier timeline, Helga sends her young daughter Eva to live in England. Though it pains Helga to send Eva away,

her impossible decision likely saves Eva's life. Helga loses touch with Eva after Helga and Eva's father are sent to Nazi concentration camps. She finally manages to reconnect with Eva several years after the war ends. But by then, Eva—who has since changed her name to Evelyn, an English name—has long since accepted that her family is likely dead, has assimilated into English culture, and denied her Jewish roots. She also now sees Lil Miller, her foster mother, as her true mother. Helga is initially somewhat understanding of Eva's transformation, acknowledging that people will do whatever they have to do to survive—after all, the war forced Helga herself to go through with the unthinkable act of sending her daughter to live with complete strangers. Still, Helga is shocked when Eva refuses to leave behind the Millers and her life in England to start a new life with Helga and their other surviving family members in New York. Helga immigrates to New York on her own and never sees Evelyn again.

**Ratcatcher** – The Ratcatcher (*Rattenfänger*) is a mythical character—the German equivalent of the Pied Piper. He's the villain of a children's book that Helga reads to young Eva. In the story, the Ratcatcher leads the children of Hamlyn off a cliff to their deaths to punish villagers for taking their blessings for granted. The story has a huge impact on young Eva, who seems to interpret her relocation to England as a child as punishment for her ingratitude. Eva's imagination transforms the various authority figures she encounters throughout her journey and early years in England into the ratcatcher, suggesting how deeply Eva's traumatic displacement has affected her psychology—she lives in constant fear that a malevolent force will once more rip her away from her home and her loved ones. Though as an adult Eva (who now goes by Evelyn) denies her roots and destroys most artifacts from her past, she keeps the Ratcatcher book, symbolizing her unresolved childhood trauma.

**The Postman** – The postman delivers Eva a package from family while she's living in England. Noting that the package is from Germany, the postman frog-marches like a Nazi and makes a Hitler moustache using his index finger, not understanding how his display bothers Eva. When the postman turns to leave, he calls out "Heil Hitler!" and commands Eva to follow suit, which she does. This interaction foreshadows Eva's eventual denial of her Jewish roots, her family, and her old life in Germany.

**The Station Guard** – Eva is at a Manchester train station waiting for her parents, who promised they would secure their visas and reunite with Eva in England, when a station guard approaches her. Observing Eva's German accent, the guard speculates that Eva might be a spy and might have apprehended her had Lil not come to retrieve Eva in time.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**The Nazi Border Official** – The Nazi border official harasses

young Eva when she's on the train traveling to her new home in England. Eva's imagination transforms the official (and most other authority figures) into the Ratcatcher, a mythical villain from a children's book Helga used to read to Eva.

**The English Organizer** – The English organizer approaches Eva when she first arrives at the train station in England. He interrogates her in English and is visibly annoyed when Eva responds in German, the only language she understands.



## 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.



### TRAUMA, MEMORY, AND THE PAST

In 1939, Eva is a young Jewish girl living in Hamburg with her parents, Helga and Werner Schlesingers. But when the rise of Nazism puts the Schlesingers and other Jewish people in grave danger, Helga makes the difficult decision to send Eva to live with a family in England in an effort to save Eva's life. Helga's decision was based on a desire to spare her daughter the trauma, suffering, and likely death she'd experience if she remained in Germany. While Helga succeeded in saving Eva's life—Eva survives the war and goes on to have a daughter of her own—she couldn't prevent her from enduring a lifetime of pain and suffering. Being separated from her family, her culture, and all the familiar comforts of home was extremely traumatic for Eva (who later changes her name to Evelyn), and she continues to struggle with that unresolved trauma well into middle age. As an adult, Evelyn cleans incessantly to avoid thinking about the past; she suffers panic attacks and, according to her daughter, Faith, "can't go on a train without hyper-ventilating." Evelyn is also tormented by horrific visions of the Ratcatcher (the German equivalent of the Pied Piper), the villain of a storybook Helga used to read to her in Germany. Even as an adult, Evelyn fears that the Ratcatcher will capture her and take her away from the new life she's created in the aftermath of unimaginable hardship and loss. In the story, the Ratcatcher leads a town's children off a cliff as retaliation against the town for taking their blessings for granted; Evelyn's lingering fear of the Ratcatcher therefore suggests that she continues to blame herself and her ingratitude for the traumatic pain and loss she's endured throughout her life. *Kindertransport* thus demonstrates the lasting effects of unresolved trauma on a person's quality of life, particularly when that trauma occurred in childhood. Ultimately, the play suggests that unresolved trauma can affect a person for the rest of their life—and that repressing it, as

Evelyn does, only offers temporary relief.



## PARENTHOOD

*Kindertransport* follows the story of Helga Schlesinger, a Jewish woman from Hamburg who makes the painful decision to send her nine-year-old daughter, Eva, to England, hoping to spare Eva the grim fate that would await many Jewish people who had no means to escape Nazi-occupied Germany. After Helga sends Eva away, the responsibility of caring for Eva falls to Lil Miller, an English woman who lives in Manchester—and a complete stranger to Eva and the Schlesingers. Though at first Lil is merely Eva’s caregiver, in time, she begins to see Eva as her daughter; Eva, in turn, begins to see Lil as her true mother. After the war ends and Helga fails to reconnect with Eva, Eva accepts the likelihood of Helga’s death and the unlikelihood of ever seeing her again. Years later, Helga eventually does locate Eva. Overjoyed at finally being reunited with her daughter, Helga begins the process of rekindling their relationship and starting a new life together. But Eva has no interest in this. Having been out of contact for so many years, Eva now sees Helga as a stranger. Though Lil might not be related to Eva by blood, it was she who raised Eva and gave her the support and comfort that Helga could not. As Eva sees it, Helga stopped being her mother the day Helga “abandoned” her—even if it was Helga’s abandonment that ultimately saved Eva’s life. *Kindertransport* thus suggests that a parent’s obligation to protect their child and do what’s best for them is sometimes at odds with what’s best for their own relationship with their child.



## TRUTH AND SECRECY

When Faith, a young woman in her 20s, finds some old papers and photos in a **storage closet** at her mother Evelyn’s house in London, she’s shocked to discover that Evelyn has been keeping a major secret from Faith: Evelyn is really Eva, a Jewish refugee child from Germany whom Lil (Faith’s grandmother) took in when Eva was nine years old. Faith considers Evelyn’s secret a major betrayal, claiming that she had a right to know about her heritage and that it was selfish of Evelyn to keep the details of her past to herself, regardless of how painful they are for her to dwell on. From Faith’s perspective, people have the right to know the truth, especially if it affects them—and therefore people who already know the truth have a moral obligation to share the truth with others.

The play poses complicated questions about to whom we owe the truth. Keeping secrets can seriously harm a person’s loved ones—Evelyn’s secrecy about her past, for instance, prevents her daughter Faith from knowing the truth about her roots and having a relationship with any of her relatives; and because of this, Evelyn’s secrecy seriously damages her relationship with her daughter. On the other hand, Evelyn’s secret childhood

trauma has harmed her at least as much as—and likely much more than—her secrecy has harmed Faith. Put differently, Evelyn seems to think that the secret-keeper’s welfare matters more than their obligation to share the truth with others. Ultimately, then, the play’s message remains murky about whether a person’s right to know the truth should take priority over a person’s right to secrecy. Instead, it suggests that truthfulness and secrecy both have the potential to cause hurt, and so people should think carefully about what truths need to be known and what secrets are better laid to rest.



## DISPLACEMENT AND IDENTITY

When nine-year-old Eva’s mother, Helga, sends Eva to England for her safety, Eva struggles to maintain her cultural, familial, and religious roots. Though Eva misses Germany, she comes to see her English foster mother Lil Miller as family and becomes increasingly British during the wartime years she spends in England. Eva eventually loses touch with her parents, who were themselves uprooted from their home and sent to concentration camps during the Holocaust. Unable to find out anything about her family after the war ends, Eva decides that they must have died. She lets the Millers adopt her and changes her name from Eva, her great grandmother’s name, to Evelyn, an English name, effectively denying her Jewish roots. “The older I get the less of myself I become,” adult Evelyn later remarks to Lil, implying that time has gradually destroyed the person Evelyn was when she first came to England.

Years after the war ends—and long after Eva has given up hope of ever finding her long-lost family—Eva finally reconnects with Helga. Helga is overjoyed to see her daughter for the first time in a decade and assumes that Evelyn will accompany her to New York, where she hopes to make a new life with their other surviving family members. But the situation is more complicated for Evelyn. Over the long years of their separation, Eva completely severed herself from her biological family and her former, pre-war identity, and it’s extremely painful for her to reclaim an identity and family she laid to rest so many years ago. “I wish you had died,” Eva tells her mother, implying that it’s less difficult to accept the tragedy of Helga’s death than it is to try to become a person she no longer considers herself to be. Ultimately, Eva decides against accompanying Helga to New York, instead choosing to remain with the Millers, whom she now considers her true and only family, and she never speaks to Helga again. The tragedy of Evelyn’s life demonstrates how significantly place, culture, and history contribute to a person’s sense of identity, as well as the devastating effects of forced displacement and cultural alienation.



## SACRIFICE AND SURVIVAL

*Kindertransport* takes place in the present day and during World War II. The play examines the painful sacrifices that its main characters make in order to survive. In the play's earlier timeline, in 1939, a German Jewish woman named Helga sends her young daughter Eva away to live in England, an impossible decision that ultimately saves Eva's life—but has devastating effects on Eva's relationship with Helga, who Eva feels abandoned her, even if that abandonment was what allowed Eva to survive the war. (Eva's parents were both sent to Auschwitz, where Eva's father perished.) Though it crushes Helga to leave her daughter, it was a sacrifice she needed to make to ensure Eva's survival; indeed, as Helga tells Eva during their emotionally wrought reunion many years later, "We have all done bad things in the last years that we regret. That is how we survive."

In England, Lil Miller takes Eva in and cares for her in ways that Helga no longer can. As the years pass, Eva gradually distances herself from her past, denying her roots and repressing memories of her "old" family in order to survive the pain of their abandonment. In time, she assimilates into English culture, becoming a naturalized citizen and adopting the English name of Evelyn. In Evelyn's mind, denying her past is the only way she can muster the strength to move forward and have a functional adult life. When Helga finds Eva after the war, the sacrifices that both women have made for Eva's survival come painfully into focus. Though sending Eva away very likely saved Eva's life, it caused irreparable damage to Eva's relationship with Helga. After spending so many years apart, Evelyn now considers Lil Miller her mother, and she has no interest in rekindling the relationship she and Helga had before the war. *Kindertransport* suggests that people must sometimes make painful sacrifices in order to survive,—even it means hurting others or making decisions they will later come to regret.

described children as "jewels" in which "old ones invest [their] future." Following her grandfather's example, Helga is sending Eva away to England so that she might survive the war and so continue the family legacy in the likely event that Helga and the others who remain in Germany will perish. The jewelry, then, represents Helga's hopes for Eva's future as well as Eva's responsibility to honor her family's memory.

But as the war drags on, Eva assimilates into English culture, loses touch with Helga, and accepts her foster mother Lil as her new, true mother. Eva struggles to locate Helga after the war ends and eventually assumes that Helga has died and resolves to move forward with her life and deny Helga's existence altogether. As this happens, the jewelry takes on new meaning for Eva. At one point, she pleads with Lil to help her sell it, explaining that the watch's constant ticking is driving her crazy. This illustrates the jewelry's transformed symbolism. Now, not only does the jewelry represent Evelyn's ties to her family, but it also is nagging reminder of her failure to honor their memory—to ensure that Helga did not make her "investment," so to speak, in vain.



## THE STORAGE ROOM

The storage room in Evelyn/Eva's house, where the action of the play takes place, symbolizes Evelyn's consciousness. *Kindertransport* has two timelines: one begins in 1939 and follows Eva's childhood, and the second takes place in the present day and examines how Evelyn's childhood has shaped (and continues to shape) her life and her psychology. The play's present-day timeline kicks off as Evelyn and her daughter Faith are going through a storage room in Evelyn's house. The room is filled with old objects—including artifacts from Evelyn's childhood. As the present-day timeline plays out, Evelyn is conflicted about whether she should destroy or keep these old artifacts, symbolizing her struggle to repress her childhood trauma or confront painful memories head-on. Though Evelyn outwardly insists that all she wants is to put the past behind her, the play's stage directions suggest otherwise.

Frequently, the play's stage directions call for characters from the past timeline (Evelyn's younger self, Eva; and Eva's mother, Helga) to be onstage alongside characters from the present timeline (Evelyn, Faith, and Lil). But characters from one timeline never acknowledge or interact with characters from the other timeline. Instead, their simultaneous presence onstage represents Evelyn's struggle to come to terms with her unresolved childhood trauma. Whenever characters from the past appear in the storage room, then, they exist as visual representations of Evelyn's memories as she tries to comprehend the trauma that defined her childhood—trauma she has learned to repress, or at least not discuss with others. As an enclosed space that's filled with relics of Evelyn's past, the storage room is an apt symbol of her consciousness, in



## SYMBOLS

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



## JEWELRY

Eva/Evelyn's family jewelry symbolizes her relationship to her past. It also represents the conflict between her obligation to honor their past and her right to shape her future on her own terms. Before Helga Schlesinger sends her young daughter Eva to England to escape the Nazi persecution (and eventual extermination) of Jewish people during World War II, she shows Eva how she had the cobbler hide the Schlesinger family jewelry, including a gold pocket watch and a Star of David chain, in the hollowed-out heel of Eva's shoe. Helga tells Eva that Helga's grandfather

particular her inner battle to repress or confront the unresolved trauma of her past. And the simultaneous presence of characters from the play's past and present timelines suggests that despite Evelyn's claims to the contrary, her past is nearly always on her mind.



## GLASSES

The glasses in Evelyn/Eva's **storage room** represent Evelyn's unresolved trauma and her denial of the past. The play's present-day timeline opens and closes with Evelyn and her daughter Faith in a storage room in Evelyn's house. Things seem tense between the mother and daughter, and when Faith asks Evelyn if Evelyn is upset with her, Evelyn mostly ignores Faith and instead fixates on polishing an old glass, redirecting her attention on a mundane task rather than suffer pain and emotional discomfort. Later comments that Faith makes to her grandmother, Lil, suggest that this is a habit of Evelyn's: she turns to cleaning whenever someone confronts her with a difficult subject matter she doesn't want to address, in particular her traumatic childhood.

But glasses also represent the limitations of repressing or denying the past. Early in the play, Evelyn picks up a chipped glass and remarks, "A chipped glass is ruined forever." Evelyn's cryptic remark seems mostly directed toward herself—she's suggesting that the suffering she endured as a child has damaged her permanently, just like the chipped glass is beyond repair. But her observation also gestures toward her flawed method of coping with her unresolved trauma: denying it altogether. Just as no amount of polishing will restore the glass to its original, unbroken state, neither will Evelyn's avoidance of her past alleviate the pain it caused her.

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### Explanation and Analysis

At the beginning of *Kindertransport*, young Eva sits with her mother Helga and, per Helga's instructions, sews a button onto her coat in preparation for Eva's upcoming journey to England. Eva will be staying with an English family for the duration of World War II as part of the Kindertransport program, a refugee effort that transported Jewish children from Nazi-occupied territories to (predominantly) the UK for their safety.

It's unclear how much information Helga has given Eva regarding the nature and duration of Eva's journey to the UK. Often, Kindertransport children were too young to understand their plight, and so their parents kept them in the dark about why they were sending them away or for how long they'd be separated from their parents. Eva's innocence about why Helga is sending her away helps the audience understand Eva's youth and naivete. And recognizing how young Eva is when she's separated from her family in turn helps the audience grasp what a traumatic experience the separation will be for Eva.

Finally, this early exchange between Helga and Eva also introduces two of the play's central themes: the lengths a parent will go "to protect their child," and how trying circumstances like war force people to make sacrifices to survive. Here, the play shows how antisemitism (and, later, the mass-extinction of Jewish people in Nazi death camps) forces Helga to make the painful and extremely unideal decision to "protect" her daughter by leaving her in the care of total strangers.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Nick Hern Books edition of *Kindertransport* published in 2013.

### Act 1, Scene 1 Quotes

●● HELGA. Of course they would send them away if they had places. Any good parent would do that.

EVA. Why?

HELGA. Because any good parent would want to protect their child.

**Related Characters:** Eva, Helga (speaker), Evelyn

**Related Themes:**    

●● EVELYN. A chipped glass is ruined forever.

**Related Characters:** Evelyn (speaker), Faith, Eva, Helga

**Related Themes:**     

**Related Symbols:**  

**Page Number:** 10

### Explanation and Analysis

Evelyn and her daughter Faith are in Evelyn's storage room going through boxes of old household odds and ends because Faith will be moving out soon, and Evelyn plans to sell the house after Faith moves out. They get into a minor argument when Faith suddenly changes her mind about

moving—apparently, this is something Faith has done before due to her reluctance to leave Evelyn on her own.


But instead of addressing Faith’s anxieties directly and having a productive conversation, Evelyn does what Faith accuses her of doing all the time: she mostly ignores Faith’s concerns, focusing instead on organizing and polishing the various dishware she’s unboxed. Then she picks up a chipped glass and makes the following observation: “A chipped glass is ruined forever.” Though Evelyn’s remark is mysterious to Faith (and to audiences) at this early point in the play, Evelyn is alluding to how her traumatic child has irrevocably scarred her.

The audience will later learn that Evelyn was separated—and subsequently became estranged—from her German Jewish family when they sent her to England to live with a foster family for her safety during World War II. Evelyn’s mother, Helga, was the only member of Evelyn’s immediate family to survive the war. To deal with the pain of feeling like her mother abandoned her by sending her away, Evelyn learned to repress her childhood memories and deny her roots—so much so that not even Faith knows the truth about Evelyn’s past. In this cryptic remark, Evelyn acknowledges (at least indirectly) that despite her efforts to deny her past, the trauma she experienced as a young child continues to affect her as an adult.

●● HELGA. My grandfather used to wear a black hat and coat. ‘You are my children. You are my jewels.’ He told me. ‘We old ones invest our future in you.’

**Related Characters:** Helga (speaker), Evelyn , Eva

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 13

### Explanation and Analysis

Young Eva and Helga are preparing Eva for her upcoming journey to England, where she’ll stay with a foster family for the duration of the war as part of the Kindertransport refugee program. Though Kindertransport children weren’t allowed to take valuables with them, Helga shows Eva how she hired the cobbler to hide family jewelry in the hollowed-out heel of one of Eva’s shoes. After showing Eva this secret, Helga educates Eva on the deeper symbolism of the jewelry, explaining how Helga’s grandfather would call his

grandchildren his “jewels.” When he talks of “invest[ing his] future in” his so-called jewels, he’s speaking to the value of protecting the welfare of one’s children. But he’s also alluding to how valuable it is for children to know the worth of their elders’ sacrifices and to honor those who’ve invested so much in their futures accordingly.

Eva is too young (and later will be too traumatized) to understand the sacrifice that Helga made in sending Eva away. But Helga was, in fact, making good on her grandfather’s advice, making the difficult decision to abandon her child in order to invest in Eva’s future. Indeed, were it not for Helga’s sacrifice to send Eva abroad, it’s unlikely that Eva would have survived the war. This moment, in which Helga alludes to the importance of protecting one’s children and the value of honoring one’s past, establishes the Schlesinger family jewels as a symbol of Eva’s roots, what older generations owe to their children, and what their children owe to them in return.

●● LIL. You’ve made a mess, haven’t you?

FAITH. Only laying them out.


LIL. You’ll make your mum even worse.

FAITH. Gran, there’s no harm meant.

LIL. There’s harm caused all the same.

**Related Characters:** Lil, Faith (speaker), Evelyn , Eva

**Related Themes:**     

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 14

### Explanation and Analysis

Following a minor argument, Evelyn leaves the storage room while Faith continues to go through old boxes of things, most of which Evelyn believes belongs to Evelyn. As Faith digs through the contents of the storage boxes, Lil enters the room and accuses Faith of having “made a mess,” something that will only make Evelyn “even worse.”

This conversation between Lil and Faith foreshadows a shocking truth that Faith will soon discover about Evelyn’s past: Evelyn was a German Jewish child named Eva who came to live with Lil her family as a refugee child through the Kindertransport rescue effort. Faith and Lil’s conversation also foreshadows the impact that learning of Faith’s discovery—and revisiting her past herself—will have



on Evelyn. Though Faith hasn't intended to hurt her mother, her initial ignorance about the ramifications of her snooping and about Evelyn's past end up doing just that.

Furthermore, at this early point in the play, Faith has yet to realize that her curiosity about her and Evelyn's relatives—and her own hurt feelings over Evelyn's secrecy—doesn't take priority over Evelyn's self-protective desire to keep her unresolved childhood trauma suppressed and to cope with it in whatever way she sees fit. Thus, this dialogue between Lil and Faith also demonstrates how sheltered Faith is at this point. Though Faith will initially see Evelyn's secrecy as an act of deception and betrayal, the audience (and eventually Faith herself, though to a lesser extent) will come to see how Evelyn chose to suppress the details of her traumatic childhood to protect Faith as much as herself. Ultimately, though, Evelyn's choice has hurt both herself and Faith.

☞ RATCATCHER. I will search you out whoever wherever you are.

**Related Characters:** Ratcatcher (speaker), Evelyn, Faith, Eva, Helga

**Related Themes:**     

**Page Number:** 16

### Explanation and Analysis

This quote happens as Helga and Faith simultaneously (but in separate timelines—Faith exists in the play's present, and Helga exists in the past) read aloud from Eva/Evelyn's old *Rattenfänger* book. The story is about the Ratcatcher (the Pied Piper), a mythical figure who leads a village's children off a cliff to their deaths to get back at the village's adults for taking their blessings for granted. Young Eva read the book often when she was little. After Helga sends Eva away to England where Eva will be safe during the war, Eva begins to think she sees the Ratcatcher everywhere she goes, symbolizing her irrational fear that her seeming banishment to England is punishment for being ungrateful for her family and her home.

Even when Eva grows up (and takes the name Evelyn), images of the Ratcatcher continue to haunt her thoughts, and this reflects how her childhood trauma continues to affect her well into adulthood. The Ratcatcher's language in this quote reflects this as well: he promises to find Eva/Evelyn "whoever wherever" she goes. This suggests that despite her efforts to start a new life and her decision to

take a new name, Evelyn's past and her unresolved trauma—and her guilt over leaving her family behind in Germany—will continue to haunt her.

## Act 1, Scene 2 Quotes

☞ LIL (*gesturing*). Over. Finished. Done. Goodbye. Yes. That's the word. Goodbye.

**Related Characters:** Lil (speaker), Evelyn, Eva, Helga

**Related Themes:**     

**Page Number:** 27

### Explanation and Analysis

Lil, Eva's English foster mother, speaks these words at the train station when she first meets Eva. To Eva's horror and shock, one of the first things Lil does is remove the Star of David label from Eva's coat—in Nazi-occupied Germany, Eva was required to wear the label to identify her as Jewish. Lil's action is complicated and has ambiguous implications. On the one hand, Lil possibly thinks it's an act of kindness to remove the label from Eva's coat. In removing the label, Lil is effectively telling Eva that in England, she'll no longer be persecuted and humiliated as she and other Jewish people were in Nazi-occupied Germany. In this sense, readers may view Lil's action as an attempt to comfort and reassure Eva and, in so doing, alleviate some of the trauma she's endured.

On the other hand, though, in removing the Star of David from Eva's coat, Lil is also symbolically taking away Eva's Jewish identity—and by extension, her connection to her family and her roots. Whether consciously or unconsciously, she's urging Eva to say "Goodbye" to her old life and identity—something Eva eventually does in a practical sense as she assimilates in English culture and changes her name to the English name Evelyn. Well into adulthood, Evelyn struggles to come to terms with her decision to estrange herself from her birth mother, Helga, the only member of her family who survived the war. This estrangement was a step she felt was necessary to move forward in life and leave her traumatic childhood behind her. In this sense, then, Lil's symbolic call for Eva to be "Done" with her past in fact contributes to Eva's trauma and confusion.

●● LIL. It was a long time ago.

FAITH. This is unbelievable.

LIL. You really shouldn't have looked.

FAITH. I've asked you both so many times about her real family.

LIL. Aren't I real now?

**Related Characters:** Lil, Faith (speaker), Evelyn, Eva, Helga

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 32-33

### Explanation and Analysis

This is Lil and Faith's exchange after Faith discovers the truth about her mother, Evelyn's, past: Evelyn came to live with Lil as a Jewish refugee child from Germany. Faith is taken aback not only by what she learns but also by Lil's response to her discovery. Lil seems to suggest that what happens to Evelyn doesn't matter anymore because it happened "a long time ago"—that time is enough to dull old memories and heal old wounds. Furthermore, when she claims that she is "real now," she implies that time and distance were the driving forces that allowed her to replace Helga as Evelyn's "real" mother.

Faith, however, doesn't accept Lil's logic. She feels betrayed by Lil and Evelyn's decision to conceal the truth of Evelyn's childhood, the circumstances that led Lil to adopt her, and the biological family she left behind in Germany. Faith, unlike Lil and Evelyn, doesn't accept that time makes things matter any less. And as the story unfolds and the audience sees the extent to which Evelyn's unresolved childhood trauma continue to haunt her despite her efforts to repress it, it becomes clear that Faith is correct: time and willful forgetting don't always heal old wounds.

●● LIL. She just wanted to put the past behind her. It was for the best.

FAITH. Whose best?

LIL. Hers.

FAITH. What about mine?

LIL. Don't be so bloody selfish.

FAITH. Don't you think that this affects me?

LIL. It affects her more.

**Related Characters:** Lil, Faith (speaker), Evelyn, Eva, Helga

**Related Themes:**     

**Page Number:** 33

### Explanation and Analysis

In this exchange between Lil and Faith, Lil explains why she and Evelyn chose not to tell Faith the truth about Evelyn's past. According to Lil, Evelyn "just wanted to put the past behind her." Abandoning her family in Germany was a traumatic experience for Evelyn, and her guilt over that is something that would haunt her for the rest of her days had she chosen not to deny her past altogether. Therefore, it was "for the best" that Evelyn chose to pretend her past never existed in the first place.

But Faith can't accept this logic. Instead, she implies that Evelyn has no right to deny her past. Evelyn's past, Faith suggest, doesn't affect only Evelyn—it affects Faith, too. In not telling Faith the truth, Evelyn and Lil denied Faith the opportunity to know who she is and where her ancestors came from and the immense hardships they endured. But Lil suggests that Faith is wrong: while she doesn't deny that Evelyn's past matters to Faith, she claims that it matters "more" to Evelyn since she's the one who lived it. The trauma of Evelyn's past as a refugee child is something that Evelyn, not Faith, bore the direct burden of. And because of this, it's up to Evelyn to decide how she wants to reckon with that past, even if her decision to repress the past is at odds with Faith's desire to confront it.

●● LIL. Don't hide behind the German. It won't protect you and you know it.

**Related Characters:** Lil (speaker), Evelyn, Eva

**Related Themes:**     

**Page Number:** 37

### Explanation and Analysis

In the play's World War II timeline, Eva has been living with Lil for some time now. Though she's learned some English and gradually getting used to her new life in England, she still falls back on speaking German in times of emotional duress. In the middle of an argument with Lil, Eva cries out, "Ich muss sie befreien," or "I have to get them out," referring to her parents, who are still in Nazi-occupied Germany (and likely cannot leave at this point, though Eva is too young to understand this).


Regardless of Lil's inability to understand what Eva is saying in German, her response to Eva's obvious distress is thoughtless and uncaring. It also suggests that she views Eva's lingering attachment to Germany as an unhealthy coping mechanism rather than an understandable response to being torn away from the only home, culture, and family she's ever known. Eva will gradually assimilate into English culture and choose to leave her past behind her, even going so far as to estrange herself from her mother, her only surviving family member, and adopt the English name Evelyn.

But this scene shows how that choice might not have been entirely of Evelyn's own making. In fact, denying her roots was a supposed choice Evelyn made after years of Lil encouraging her to do just that. In this way, the scene helps establish the complicated foundation of Lil and Evelyn's relationship. Though Lil took Evelyn in and cared for her when Evelyn's own parents could not, she also encouraged—and even demanded—young Eva to deny her roots, a choice that will haunt her well into adulthood.

●● EVELYN. I promise. I won't let him. I'll do everything I can to stop him. You'll see. You're with me now. He can't touch me. Do you understand? I'm here. You're being looked after. I won't go away. I'll make it all disappear. I'll get rid of him. He won't take you anywhere ever again.

**Related Characters:** Evelyn (speaker), Faith, Eva, Ratcatcher

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 46

### Explanation and Analysis

Act One, Scene Two closes with Evelyn alone in the storage room following an intense fight with Faith, who just discovered that Evelyn has been lying to her about her past for her entire life and lashed out at Evelyn in response. Faith's discovery resurfaces memories that Evelyn has tried to suppress since childhood. Confronting painful memories causes Evelyn to regress into her younger self.

In response to these resurfaced memories, Evelyn engages in an imagined conversation with Eva, her younger self. Here, Evelyn tries to convince her terrified younger self that she (they) haven't done anything wrong, and that the Ratcatcher—the mythic villain who haunted Eva's child and

came to symbolize her internalized guilt over having left her family behind in Germany—won't catch them and take them away. But Evelyn's efforts to comfort and reassure her younger self fall flat, since she can hardly convince herself that these things are true—that she's done nothing wrong and that she's safe and nobody will come to take her away. This passage thus illustrates how the past has stayed with Evelyn despite her efforts to suppress and will it out of existence.

### Act 2, Scene 1 Quotes

●● POSTMAN. Thank you for the lesson in saluting (*He salutes.*) Heil Hitler!

EVA watches.

POSTMAN. Do it back. Heil Hitler!

EVA. Heil Hitler!

**Related Characters:** Eva, The Postman (speaker), Evelyn, Lil, Helga

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 50

### Explanation and Analysis


Young Eva is living with Lil in England when the English postman delivers a passage to Eva from her mother, Helga, back in Germany. Noticing the package's German postmark, the postman goes on an ignorant tangent about Germany, German culture, and Hitler. As he turns to leave, he jokingly salutes and calls out "Heil Hitler"—and then orders Eva to do the same, which she does.

Eva's salute is perhaps little more than the learned habit of a fearful child to submit to an adult authority figure for fear of punishment. But it also shows how Eva has become more assimilated into English culture and more willing to turn her back on her Jewish heritage. Earlier in her stay in England, Eva might have resisted the postman's demand to salute the authoritarian leader who seeks to eliminate Eva and all Jewish people. But the longer Eva stays in England, lives with Lil, and is subjected to explicit and implicit expressions of antisemitism, the more pressure she feels to deny her roots and her old identity, a denial she illustrates when she salutes Hitler on command.

●● EVELYN. The whitewash has been stripped away and underneath is pure filth.

**Related Characters:** Evelyn (speaker), Lil, Faith

**Related Themes:**     

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 55

### Explanation and Analysis

Evelyn and Lil are in the storage room together going through Evelyn's old things when Lil confronts Evelyn about her stubborn reaction to Faith learning about her Evelyn's past, arguing that Evelyn is only making matters worse. Evelyn offers this quotation, seemingly a self-critical comment about her internalized sense of self-hatred and shame about her past, in response. After Evelyn came to live with Lil in England, she gradually assimilated into English culture. To cope with the trauma of being separated from her biological family—something that Evelyn, as a young child, came to see as her biological family abandoning her—she learned to deny her past and even developed an internalized hatred toward her Jewish roots. It's the resurfacing of her former self as well as her learned self-hatred that Evelyn is referring to in this passage.

After Faith “strip[s] away” the protective shield of denial that Evelyn has spent decades constructing, all that's left, Evelyn suggests, “is pure filth.” Unlike Faith, who believes that coming to terms with her past and tending to old wounds is what's best for Evelyn—and for Faith herself—Evelyn is still suffering from the lasting effects of her unresolved childhood trauma. The denial she developed to cope with that trauma disconnects her from a relationship to the past and her own sense of self.

●● LIL. Should've realised. Shouldn't have made you go.

**Related Characters:** Lil (speaker), Evelyn, Eva, Helga

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 58

### Explanation and Analysis

World War II has officially begun, and Lil—along with many other English parents—has decided to relocate Eva to the countryside, where she'll be safe from German bombs. But at the train station, Eva remembers the last time a parental figure (her birth mother, Helga) sent her away and begins to panic. Here, Lil consoles the terrified child and apologizes


for putting her through something she should've known would be triggering for her. Though Lil has repeatedly demonstrated a lack of sensitivity toward the trauma of Eva's separation from her parents, culture, and home, here Lil proves that she understands how Eva's history has affected her emotionally.

This moment is also instrumental in Eva's eventual decision to turn her back on her old life (including Helga) and embrace her new life in England and Lil as her mother. In Eva's young mind, Helga abandoned her when she forced Eva to relocate to England, even if she made that painful decision to save Eva's life. Lil, on the other hand, doesn't abandon Eva in her moment of need, even if letting Eva stay in England potentially puts her life at risk.

●● LIL. Did I start the war? Am I Hitler?  
EVELYN. You might as well have been.

**Related Characters:** Evelyn, Lil (speaker), Faith, Eva, Helga

**Related Themes:**     

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 61

### Explanation and Analysis

Faith's recent discovery of the truth of Evelyn's past resurfaces old wounds that Lil and Evelyn have kept buried since Evelyn's adolescence. Now, alone in the storage room, Evelyn and Lil hash out one of the central conflicts of their relationship: the role that Lil played in Evelyn's choice to deny her biological family and her past. As their argument heats up, an exasperated Lil suggests that Evelyn thinks she's as evil and complicit in Evelyn's trauma as Hitler—an insult that Evelyn seconds.

This scene gives insight into the complexity of Evelyn's (and Lil's) unresolved trauma. Evelyn's response to Lil here confirms that although Evelyn feels considerable self-hatred for her decision to deny her past, she feels as much hatred toward Lil for Lil's role in Evelyn's assimilation into English culture and eventual denial of her German roots altogether. Hitler's Nazi regime carried out a genocide against Jewish people. In comparing Lil to Hitler, Evelyn is suggesting that Lil was wrong to encourage Evelyn to assimilate into English culture and should have done more to ensure that young Evelyn remembered her parents and her Jewish roots. She implies that Lil symbolically killed Eve

Schlesinger, the young girl Evelyn was prior to the war and her relocation to England.

●● LIL. I saved you.

EVELYN. Part of me is dead because of you.

LIL. Nothing you say will make me walk out that door.


EVELYN. Murderer.

LIL. I kept you alive. More than alive.

EVELYN. Child-stealer.

**Related Characters:** Evelyn, Lil (speaker), Faith, Eva, Helga

**Related Themes:**     

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 61-62

### Explanation and Analysis

Lil and Evelyn are alone in the storage room. Faith's recent discovery of the truth of Evelyn's past resurfaces old wounds that Lil and Evelyn have kept buried since Evelyn's adolescence. Now, they spar over one of the central (and mostly unspoken, up to this point) conflicts of their mother-daughter relationship: how Lil's influence contributed to Evelyn's decision to deny her Jewish roots, her biological family, and her past as a whole.

Lil claims that she "saved" Evelyn, yet Evelyn's response of calling Lil a "murderer" and a "child-stealer" suggests that this is only true in the literal sense: though Lil's decision to become Evelyn's foster mother might have saved Evelyn's life, Evelyn's relocation caused her to drift apart from her biological family and their Jewish religion, a shift that Lil seems to have actively encouraged (she'd scold young Evelyn for speaking German, for instance).


This passage also demonstrates Lil's seeming belief that she is Evelyn's only real parent, since she—unlike Helga, Evelyn's biological mother—was the one who was physically there for young Evelyn and performed the day-to-day responsibilities of raising Evelyn. Of course, Lil's stance is oversimplified at best and petty at worst. As Jewish people living in Nazi-occupied Germany, Evelyn's parents were severely limited in their ability to protect and care for their daughter, and Helga's decision to send young Eva to England to be raised by strangers, though undeniably traumatic for both mother and daughter, was the only way she could even attempt to ensure Eva's safety and survival.

As Evelyn grows up, she comes to see Helga's choice not as a necessary sacrifice but as a cruel act of abandonment, and this passage suggests that she didn't come to this perspective on her own—rather, it was a belief that Lil may have encouraged her to adopt.

●● EVA. I'm fed up of hiding the watch under my socks to stop hearing the ticking at night.

**Related Characters:** Lil, Eva (speaker), Evelyn, Faith, Helga

**Related Themes:**     

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 70

### Explanation and Analysis

After World War II has ended, Eva approaches Lil about how much she thinks Eva's family jewelry is worth, as she's interested in selling it. Eva has had no luck locating her parents thus far (though Helga is, in fact, alive) and seems to have given up hope of ever finding them. She demonstrates her resignation in her willingness to part with the once-prized family jewels that Helga gave her to smuggle into England for safekeeping. When Eva claims to be "fed up of hiding the watch under [her] socks to stop hearing the ticking at night," she's literally referring to her annoyance at the watch's audible ticking sound. But Eva's desire to no longer hear the watch's ticking has a second, symbolic meaning as well. It also conveys her wish to leave her past behind her, symbolically stifling both the lingering trauma of being separated from her biological family—and the guilt she feels about making this decision.

Though Eva will deny her roots in order to cope with these difficult feelings (eventually adopting the English name Evelyn in a further attempt to sever her future from her past), she continues to suffer the consequences of her decision well into adulthood. Eva might think that muffling the watch's ticking underneath her socks or selling the jewelry will rid her of her guilt, but the reality is that her guilt will stick with her long after she makes quick money off her family heirlooms.

●● FAITH. Did they die for you to forget?

EVELYN. Why are you being so cruel?

FAITH. Destroying these was crueller.

EVELYN. Do you think I don't know that.

FAITH. Why did you do it then?

EVELYN. Because – and I don't expect you to begin to understand this – it helps me? It gives me something I can do in the face of it all.

**Related Characters:** Evelyn , Faith (speaker), Lil, Eva, Helga

**Related Themes:**     

**Page Number:** 73

### Explanation and Analysis

Faith has recently discovered that Evelyn has hidden the truth about her traumatic childhood. (Evelyn was formerly a German Jewish girl named Eva who became estranged from her surviving biological family after they sent her to live with an English family for her safety during World War II.) Now, Faith angrily confronts Evelyn about her decision to deny her roots and reject her family. Faith criticizes Evelyn's rejection of her family, most of whom perished in the Holocaust. If Evelyn's ancestors can't even live on in Evelyn's memory, Faith seems to argue, then they died in vain.

But, as Evelyn's response to Faith implies, Faith's interrogation and criticism of Evelyn is thoughtless and "cruel." Evelyn suggests that Faith hasn't stopped to consider that while Evelyn's denial of her family might be "cruel," Evelyn was only doing what she needed to do to survive. Evelyn's traumatic childhood required her to choose between the lesser of two evils: she could either "cruel[ly]" forget her family and live with the guilt of that decision, or she could choose to remember them, which would force her to relive the pain of their abandonment and the uncertainty of whether she'd even get to see them again after the war ended. Faith's interrogation of Evelyn, then, is "cruel" because it forces Evelyn to relive the impossible decision she made years ago out of self-preservation—and the guilt that has continued to haunt her ever since.

●● EVELYN. Well, blood is all I have left. Gallons and gallons of the freezing stuff stuck in my veins. One prick, Faith, and I might bleed forever.

**Related Characters:** Evelyn (speaker), Faith

**Related Themes:**     

**Page Number:** 73

### Explanation and Analysis

Faith has just discovered the truth about her mother Evelyn's past as a Kindertransport child. Feeling betrayed by Evelyn's secrecy, Faith lashes out at her mother for lying about her past and denying Faith the opportunity to know her roots and possibly even reconnect with her long-lost relatives. In response to what she regards as cruelty on Faith's part, Evelyn asks if Faith intends to "draw blood," or hurt her. Evelyn then explains that "blood is all [she has] left." In other words, shared "blood" is the only remaining connection she has to the biological family she rejected many years ago in order to cope with the trauma of her separation from them.

When Evelyn describes that blood as "freezing stuff stuck in [her] veins," she's referring to her decision to leave her family and all the pain she associates with them in the past. Whatever warmth and caring she once had for her biological family, she implies, has long frozen over or gone dormant. When Evelyn claims that a single "prick" could make her "bleed forever," she's metaphorically suggesting that confronting the reality of her childhood trauma would cause far more pain—more bleeding—than she can handle. Though Faith might find Evelyn's rejection of her past and her family cold, this metaphorical self-freezing is something Evelyn needed to do to survive in the aftermath of great psychological strife.

●● HELGA. Never mind it. We have all done bad things in the last years that we regret. That is how we survive.

**Related Characters:** Helga (speaker), Evelyn , Lil, Eva, Helga

**Related Themes:**     

**Page Number:** 76

### Explanation and Analysis

In a flashback, Evelyn recalls her reunion with her biological mother, Helga, which occurred some years after the war's end. Helga is shocked at her daughter's assimilation into English culture and her unwillingness to leave her adopted home behind to start a new life with Helga in the U.S. To add insult to injury, Helga's daughter informs her that she's changed her name from Eva—an inherited family name—to

the English name Evelyn. Helga decides to set her hurt feelings aside, however, instead acknowledging how everyone has “done bad things in the last years”—it’s “how we survive.”

Helga is directly responding to Eva’s announcement about changing her name, becoming a naturalized English citizen, and letting the Millers (her English foster family) adopt her. But she’s also implicitly referencing the “bad thing” the war forced her to do and which she now “regret[s]”: sending Eva to England for her safety and effectively abandoning her. This quotation thus reinforces the lasting consequences of the impossible decision that Helga had to make years ago to ensure Eva’s survival.

On the one hand, Helga implies that her circumstances gave her no choice but to abandon Eva, however much she continues to “regret” that decision. But she also seems to acknowledge that Eva’s own circumstances forced her to make the similarly impossible decision to deny her past, forget her biological family, and adopt the Millers as her new family. Just as Helga abandoned Eva so that Eva could “survive” in a physical sense, Eva’s decision to change her name and deny her past stems from her need to “survive” the emotional toll of Helga’s abandonment.

## Act 2, Scene 2 Quotes

☞ EVELYN. Don’t hanker after the past. It’s done.

FAITH. It’s still a part of our lives.

EVELYN. It is an abyss.

FAITH. Before, all I knew was a blank space. Now, it’s beginning to fill up. I have a background, a context.

**Related Characters:** Evelyn, Faith (speaker), Helga, Ratcatcher

**Related Themes:**     

**Page Number:** 80

### Explanation and Analysis

Evelyn reveals to Faith that Evelyn’s biological mother, Helga, in fact survived the Holocaust and was even still alive when Faith was born. Faith feels upset that Evelyn kept her biological family’s existence a secret from Faith and, in so doing, prevented Faith from knowing her “background” and forming a “context” for her life—she implies that knowing who her relatives were would’ve made her life fuller and more meaningful.

But Evelyn’s sense of the past contrasts sharply with Faith’s. Evelyn’s metaphorical description of the past as “an abyss” recalls a moment from the very beginning of the play in which, in a flashback to Evelyn’s past as Eva, prior to her relocation to England. Young Eva was reading her *Rattenfänger* book and asked her mother, Helga, what an abyss was, referencing the cliff off which the titular Ratcatcher leads the village children to make their parents pay for their sins and ingratitude. Recalling this childhood memory underscores all the negative associations Evelyn has with her past. Whereas Faith thinks learning about the past could make her life fuller and more meaningful, Evelyn sees the past only for its emptiness. For her, the past merely “is an abyss,” a vast chasm that imbues her life with despair and guilt.

☞ EVELYN. I was baptized when I was eighteen. I was cleansed that day. Purified.

**Related Characters:** Evelyn (speaker), Faith, Helga

**Related Themes:**     

**Page Number:** 81

### Explanation and Analysis


Faith has recently discovered the truth about her mother, Evelyn’s, secret past (Evelyn was born into a German Jewish family but came to England as a Kindertransport child in 1939), and she wonders how her recent revelation impacts her own identity. After Faith asks Evelyn if Evelyn—and, by extension, Faith—is Jewish, Evelyn responds with this disparaging remark about being “cleansed” of her Jewish identity when she was baptized.

Evelyn’s words implicitly relate to her mother Helga’s observation that people sometimes need to do bad things in order to survive. Helga, for instance, sent young Eva away to England to give her a greater chance of surviving the war. And as Evelyn’s derisive remarks here suggest, she reacted to Helga’s seeming abandonment with badness of her own. In suggesting that she was “cleansed” and “Purified” when she converted from Judaism to Christianity, Evelyn demonstrates how she learned to internalize the antisemitism that necessitated her relocation to England in the first place.

☞ EVELYN. Is it so wrong to want a decent, ordinary life?

**Related Characters:** Evelyn (speaker), Faith

**Related Themes:**     

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 81

### Explanation and Analysis

Faith stubbornly refuses to accept Evelyn's denial of her past and her Jewish roots, which Faith has just found out about while going through old boxes in Evelyn's storage room. In response, Evelyn asks Faith, "Is it so wrong to want a decent, ordinary life?" Evelyn's question considers whether Evelyn's obligation to remember her deceased family members, most of whom died in the Holocaust, outweighs her desire to live as functional and "ordinary" a life as possible in the aftermath of unspeakable trauma and suffering.

In a broader sense, Evelyn is asking whether the past is more important than the present and the future. Without a doubt, Evelyn's past has shaped the person she's become—the trauma she experienced as a young child continues to haunt her even as she denies its very existence. But in light of this, is Evelyn really obligated to consciously relive her past traumas for the sake of honoring her deceased relatives? Evelyn can't reverse the tragedy and suffering that dominated her childhood and destroyed her biological family, but she can control how she relates to that past as an adult. This quotation gives further insight into Evelyn's decision to deny her past: in a sense, denying her past allows her to regain the agency that the war took away from her as a young child.

●● EVELYN. They're just books. You might not want them . . .


FAITH (*taking the books*). Of course I want them.

EVELYN. One is the storybook and the other is for some Jewish festival.

FAITH. Thank you.

**Related Characters:** Evelyn , Faith (speaker), Eva, Ratcatcher

**Related Themes:**     

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 82

### Explanation and Analysis

Toward the end of the play, Faith and Evelyn are alone in Evelyn's storage room together. Evelyn and Lil have already destroyed most artifacts from Evelyn's past as Eva Schlesinger. But Evelyn surprises Faith here when she hands her two books: the *Rattenfänger* children's book and the Haggadah, a Jewish text recited on the first two nights of the Jewish Passover. These are, apparently, the only two items from Evelyn's childhood that she chose not to destroy.

Though Evelyn claims to have forgotten all about her past, the fact that she saved these two books in particular offers evidence to the contrary—through the play, the *Rattenfänger* book has symbolized the trauma of young Evelyn's/Eva's separation from her family, and the Haggadah represents her connection to her former Jewish faith.

In offering these artifacts from her past to Faith, however nonchalantly (suggesting that they're "just books"), Evelyn shows that she's willing to meet Faith halfway, allowing Faith to connection with the past while also honoring the boundaries she needs to uphold in order to function. Evelyn's peace offering isn't perfect—she's not offering to reconnect with her estranged ancestors, for instance—but it perhaps suggests that she might still have the capacity to heal from her unresolved childhood trauma and eventually even reclaim her past.

●● HELGA. I wish you had lived.

EVELYN. I did my best.

HELGA. Hitler started the job and you finished it. You cut off my fingers and pulled out my hair one strand at a time.

EVELYN. You were the Ratcatcher. Those were his eyes, his face . . .

**Related Characters:** Evelyn , Helga (speaker), Lil, Ratcatcher

**Related Themes:**     

**Page Number:** 85

### Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, present-day Evelyn seems to imagine a hypothetical confrontation between herself and her biological mother, Helga, just before Helga departs for the U.S. after World War II. (It's not clear whether the exchange actually took place. It could simply be a fantasy of Evelyn's that represents her unresolved trauma over being



separated from her family and her later choice to estrange herself from her family and deny her past.)

Regardless, this (possibly imagined) dialogue between Evelyn and Helga mirrors an earlier moment in the play—one that actually *does* take place—in which Evelyn compares Lil to Hitler for the role she played in encouraging Evelyn to deny her past and her Jewish faith. When Helga claims that “Hitler started the job and [Evelyn] finished it,” she’s suggesting that in rejecting her Jewish fate, Evelyn has accomplished Hitler and the Nazi regime’s goal of exterminating Europe’s Jewish population. Though Evelyn survived the war, the loss of faith and self she has endured in the process represents a symbolic loss of life.

Of course, if readers interpret this exchange as something that Evelyn has merely imagined, it takes on an extra layer of meaning. When Evelyn imagines Helga comparing her to Hitler, she’s really comparing *herself* to Hitler and thereby demonstrating that she blames herself as much as Lil for her loss of faith and her rejection of the past.

Finally, this quotation closes with Evelyn claiming that Helga “w[as] the Ratcatcher,” an accusation that conveys the lingering sense of abandonment she feels toward Helga, even so many years later.

●● EVELYN. Take them.


FAITH *picks up the box of toys.*

Have you got everything you need now?

FAITH. More or less.

**Related Characters:** Evelyn, Faith (speaker), Eva

**Related Themes:**     

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 87

### Explanation and Analysis

During their final interaction at the end of the play, Faith and Evelyn are alone in Evelyn’s storage room together, and Faith asks one last time if Evelyn is willing to revisit her past, arguing that the two of them can support each other through the process. When Evelyn declines, Faith asks Evelyn if she can take a box of her old toys with her. Though Evelyn initially protests—she’d like to keep some things of Faith’s childhood things in her home—she eventually gives in to Faith’s request and lets her take the box with her.

On the one hand, Faith’s request could be harmless—she could genuinely just want to keep her childhood things with her for sentimental reasons. On the other hand, readers may interpret her request as retaliation against Evelyn for refusing to let Faith in on her traumatic childhood. If Evelyn isn’t willing to grant Faith’s request to learn more about Evelyn’s past as Eva Schlesinger, Faith’s final request seems to suggest, then Faith won’t allow Evelyn to dwell on or take comfort in Faith’s childhood, either. In a sense, then, this final exchange shows that Evelyn’s inability to let Faith into her life and learn about her childhood will continue to create tension in their mother-daughter relationship.

But these closing lines of dialogue are also rather ambiguous and open to interpretation. Faith’s response that she “More or less” has “everything [she] need[s] now” suggests that at least on some level, she’s willing to meet Evelyn where she is. Put differently, she’s accepted that Evelyn—at least for now—won’t be able to give her the answers about the past that she so craves. She accepts that Evelyn’s past trauma is Evelyn’s to endure and to choose to share or withhold.



## 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.

## ACT 1, SCENE 1

In 1939, Eva sits on the floor of a dusty **storage room** reading a children's book called *Der Rattenfänger*. She asks her mother, Helga, what "abyss" means. Helga describes an abyss as "a deep and terrible chasm." Then Helga asks Eva to sew her buttons onto her coat. Eva doesn't want to sew and pleads with Helga to let her do it later. Helga reminds her, "There's no 'later' left," so Eva relents.

Suddenly, there's the sound of keys jangling in the door lock. Evelyn and Faith enter the **storage room**, and the story picks up in the present day. (Helga and Eva from the earlier timeline remain in the storage room, but the present-day characters do not acknowledge them.) Evelyn tells Faith that most things in the room are "junk." She asks Faith if she wants anything. Faith says no, but Evelyn insists she take some cookware and dishes anyway. Faith mentions that her dad sent her some money. Evelyn thinks she should save it, but Faith says her dad wouldn't mind her spending it. She plans to buy things of her own with it, though she says her mom (Evelyn) does have good taste.

Faith is preparing to move into a new apartment, but now she wonders if she really wants to move—she doesn't like leaving Evelyn on her own. Evelyn ignores her and examines a damaged **glass**, polishing it frantically. Faith asks if Evelyn is mad at her. Evelyn assures her she's not, but she continues to polish the glass.

Back in the past, Eva asks Helga why Karla and Heinrich aren't going on one of the trains with her. Helga says, "Their parents couldn't get them places." Eva explains that Karla claimed her parents didn't want to send her away, but Helga says that's ridiculous: any good parent would want to protect their children if they could—and sending them away is the only way to do that. Helga promises that she'll miss Eva and write to her all the time—and that they'll bring her back as soon as they can.

*The play begins ambiguously, and yet between young Eva's talk of an "abyss" and Helga's cryptic remark that there's no "later" left, the audience can discern a bleak undertone to this opening scene. It's yet unclear why it's so important for Eva to sew buttons onto her coat, but whatever the specific reason, it seems that Helga is pressing the issue to protect her young daughter in some way.*



*The story's past and present timelines both play out inside the same storage room, which alerts the audience to the possibility that the room has some deeper symbolism. It may have something to do with memory, as memories are, of course, events of the past that a person carries with them, just as Evelyn keeps physical artifacts of the past inside a storage room. Furthermore, that the storage room seems to belong to Evelyn suggests that the 1939 timeline that plays out inside the room may be Evelyn's memory—and that the young girl, Eva, who features in that timeline might even be Evelyn as a young child.*



*Faith's reticence to move introduces the theme of displacement and the hardship that comes with it. Faith's predicament also builds tension, prompting the audience to wonder why she's so anxious about leaving Evelyn alone in the first place.*



*Helga's remark to Eva establishes the idea that a parent's primary obligation to their child is to protect them—even if doing so requires them to make great sacrifices. Indeed, this seems to be Helga's present situation: for whatever reason, she feels that sending Eva away is the only way she can protect her. It's not yet clear why this is so, but given that this scene takes place in Germany in 1939—the year that World War II began—the audience can guess that Helga is sending Eva away to shield her from the violence of war.*



The scene returns to Evelyn and Faith in the **storage room**. Faith pleads with Evelyn to stop polishing, but Evelyn ignores her. Faith decides she doesn't want to move after all, at least not until she's finished college. She says Evelyn should tell her real estate agent she's no longer selling the house. Evelyn thinks Faith is being ridiculous and tells Faith she can't change her mind again. Then she picks up a chipped **glass**. When Faith asks her why she's taking it, she explains, "A chipped glass is ruined forever."

*Evelyn seems too focused on her polishing for it to be just about cleanliness. Instead, it seems like she's cleaning to avoid engaging with Faith—and Faith's exasperation with Evelyn's cleaning suggests that this is something that happens often. This dynamic, and Evelyn's cryptic comment about that the "chipped glass is ruined forever" both suggest that Evelyn is dealing with some personal, emotional issues that she doesn't feel comfortable addressing in her daughter's presence. From this scene alone, it's clear that Evelyn and Faith's relationship is fraught, perhaps in part due to Evelyn's apparent secrecy and unwillingness to broach serious matters with Faith.*



Back in the past, Helga reminds Eva to try to meet other Jewish people while she's living in England. Eva says she will. Helga inspects Eva's case, noting that it's too full. (In the present, Faith pulls a toy train out of one of the boxes in the **storage room** and sings a song about a runaway train.) Helga pulls Eva's mouth organ out of the case and tells Eva she can't take it with her—she's only allowed to leave Germany with clothes, not any valuables she could possibly sell. Eva apologizes—but she sneaks the mouth organ back into the case when Helga isn't looking. (In the present, Faith continues to remove different objects from the various boxes and examine them, including some dolls.)

*This passage gives additional insight into the reason for Eva's journey. Knowing that Eva and her family are Jewish, the audience may surmise that Helga is sending her young daughter away to protect her from Hitler's Nazi regime. Adolph Hitler became chancellor of Germany in 1933 and transformed German democracy over the next year. When then-president Hindenburg died in 1934, Hitler declared himself Führer of Germany and, from then on, operated as the country's dictator. Finally, the play's stage directions call for characters from the present-day timeline to be onstage while the past timeline plays out (a formal choice that recurs throughout the play), which reinforces the past's influence on the present.*



Helga tells Eva to hold her shoe to her ear. Eva does so and hears ticking. Helga tells her she had the cobbler hide her **gold watch** in the shoe's heel; the other shoe contains her jewelry, including a chain with a Star of David. She tells Eva the jewelry is a traveling gift. Eva thanks and hugs Helga.

*That Helga arranges for Eva to take these precious family heirlooms—and, notably, the Star of David chain—on her journey conveys her desire that Eva maintain her connection to her family, heritage, and religion, even while she's temporarily living apart from them.*



In the present, Lil enters the **storage room**, and Faith apologizes for ruining the start of Lil's visit. She asks where Evelyn has gone. Lil says Evelyn is cleaning all the house's windows. Then Faith gestures toward the toys she removed from the various boxes, noting that she's surprised that Evelyn kept them all these years. Lil accuses her of making a mess, which will just "make [her] mum even worse," even if Faith doesn't intend to hurt her.

*Evelyn's unceasing, obsessive cleaning suggests that there's something on her mind. Lil's remark that Faith removing all the old toys and things from the boxes will only "make [Evelyn] even worse" suggests that old memories and artifacts from the past are what trigger Evelyn's anxiety.*



In the past, Eva plays a song for Helga on the mouth organ. Helga applauds and then tells Eva it's time for bed. In response to Eva's protests, Helga offers to tell her a bedtime story; Eva requests that Helga read her the children's book, *The Ratcatcher*. (In the present, Faith discovers the book, written in German: *Der Rattenfänger*.) Helga says she doesn't want to read that story, but Eva insists.

Simultaneously, Faith (in the present) and Helga (in the past) read the book. The story takes place in Hamlyn, a little town where everyone is happy and counts their blessings, especially after the Ratcatcher led the rats away—everyone but one “wicked” and “ungrateful” person who “[does] not count,” Mr. Ingratitude. Then the Ratcatcher appears as a shadow, vowing to find and punish the person who “has forgotten their blessings[.]” The shadow grows arms and legs and sharp teeth and transforms into the Ratcatcher.

As Helga continues with the story, a train whistle blows, and Eva, dressed in a coat emblazoned with her number (3362), enters a train station. In the story, the Ratcatcher can't find Mr. Ingratitude and instead vows to take away all of Hamlyn's happiness to “make up for the lost blessings.” The Ratcatcher begins to play his music as Eva boards the train. She tearfully calls out to her parents who are on the platform outside Eva's carriage window, but she can't hear them over the train whistle. At the same time, the Ratcatcher music, which resembles a common children's play tune, sounds throughout the train. Eva sings along with lyrics about travelling to England.

A Nazi border official approaches Eva and curtly tells her to turn around her label so her number is visible. Eva quietly apologizes. He warns her to memorize her number; without it, she might “forget who [she is]” and could also be removed from the train. Then he goes through her case. He finds the mouth organ and tells Eva it's illegal to take valuables over the border, though he ultimately lets her keep the instrument. He then forces her to hand him what little money she has. Before leaving, he offers her a candy, which Eva immediately throws away the minute he leaves.

Eva is overjoyed when the train finally reaches the border; she's glad to leave “stupid Hitler” behind her. The train travels further, and eventually Eva feasts on cakes, sweets, and lemonade—a nice Dutch lady said the children could have as much as they want. Eventually, Eva arrives in England.

The *Ratcatcher* book's presence in both timelines suggests its symbolic resonance—and that the passage of time hasn't dulled that significance. It also offers further proof to the audience that Eva is Evelyn's former self.



The *Ratcatcher* myth is synonymous with the Pied Piper. The moral of the story is that people who aren't grateful for their blessings will be punished, and this foregrounds guilt and shame as thematically important to *Kindertransport*. Since the book belongs to Eva/Evelyn, the audience may assume she's the one dealing with unresolved guilt and shame, though it's not yet clear why this is so.



The play's structural choice for Helga to continue reading while Eva (in the same 1939 timeline) boards a train solidifies the story's symbolism and helps to establish the story's significance to Eva/Evelyn in particular. Eva seems to feel that Helga is sending her away to England not to protect her but to punish her for being ungrateful. As a young child, it's difficult for Eva to comprehend that Helga's choice hurts Helga as much as it hurts Eva—but that it's necessary for Helga to fulfill her parental obligation to protect Eva at all costs, even if it's painful for them both.



The Nazi border official's advice to Eva can be interpreted both literally and figuratively. Literally, he's telling her not to lose her label, or else she might not be able to connect with whomever is supposed to take care of her in England. Figuratively, his advice suggests that if Eva removes her number—which identifies her as Jewish—she might “forget” the person she was back in Germany, who was defined by her relationship to her family there and by their shared Jewish faith. This latter interpretation conveys the possible negative consequences of Eva's dislocation: beyond mere homesickness, Eva's journey might also result in a crisis of identity.



In expressing her happiness to escape “stupid Hitler,” Eva implicitly conveys her allegiance to her Jewish faith, which in Germany would have made her a target of Hitler and the Nazi regime.



Meanwhile, Helga (in the past) and Faith (in the present) resume the Ratcatcher story, picking up as the Ratcatcher uses his music to lure Hamlyn's children to the edge of the cliff; the children fall off the cliff into "the abyss" and perish. The town renames the street where the children were last seen and forbid music from being played there. In the present, Faith plays a sad tune on the mouth organ.

*Despite Eva's initial glee at leaving Germany, Act One, Scene One's ends with a sense of foreboding. The story seems to suggest that Eva's journey will end tragically—like that of the children who fall off a cliff and into an "abyss"—and not happily, like that of a lucky refugee child who escapes to safety.*



## ACT 1, SCENE 2

In the present, Faith sits down alone in the **storage room** and reads a letter she's found in one of the boxes—it's dated March 6, 1941. In the past, Eva takes off her coat and listens to a train announcement in English. Faith reads the letter, presumably written by Helga, and Eva responds to it aloud. Eva talks of "eating the bread of freedom even if it does taste like sponge buttered with greasy salt." Helga notes that she's chosen to write in English, knowing it must now be Eva's "best language." Meanwhile, Eva talks of being lucky "to have escaped." Though she misses Germany, she admits that it was fun to "go[] on the red bus." Helga says she hopes Eva is behaving for the Millers and doing well.

*The letter that Faith finds is from 1941, years into Eva's stay in England. The letter suggests that although Eva has, by this point, lived in England long enough to learn the language, it's still early enough in her stay that she's homesick and missing her family. When she describes "the bread of freedom" as taste[ing] like sponge buttered with greasy salt," she's suggesting that although she's happy to be safe in England, her sadness at not being with her family undermines that happiness. Still, her mention of riding "the red bus"—a reference to the iconic double-decker public transport buses in the UK—shows that she's gradually adjusting to life in England.*



Back in the past, an English organizer enters and approaches Eva, who is now at the train station. He tells Eva that her English family seems to be running late. The English organizer speaks to Eva in English, but Eva, who speaks German, can hardly understand him. Eva cries for Mutti (Helga) and Vati as the English organizer looks on, visibly annoyed. Eventually the English organizer leaves. Eva sits down and tries to remove the **pocket watch and jewelry** from her shoe, but she can't.

*Eva tries to remove the pocket watch and jewelry—precious heirlooms that symbolize her heritage and her ties to her family back in Germany— from her heel in order to comfort herself. Her failure to access these items and get comfort from them, however, symbolizes how Eva's physical separation from her family harms her—even if that separation is what ultimately saves her life.*



Eventually Lil arrives and apologizes to Eva for being late. She introduces herself as Lil Miller. When Eva responds in German, Lil says Eva will have to learn English, as Lil doesn't know any German. Then she removes the Star of David from Eva's jacket, explaining that Eva doesn't need it anymore. She tells Eva it's time they get back to Manchester and starts to light a cigarette. Eva is at first horrified—Mutti (Helga) told her smoking is a disgusting and unhealthy habit—but Lil says she enjoys smoking. Eva has a change of heart and begs Lil to let her try one. Lil relents and lets Eva take a drag.

*This moment confirms Lil's relationship to Eva/Evelyn: she's her English foster mother. When Lil removes the Star of David from Eva's jacket, she symbolically encourages Eva to distance herself from her Jewish faith. This foreshadows that Lil may play a significant role in Eva's gradual move away from her old identity and way of life and her eventual assimilation into English culture. Eva's desire to smoke—a habit that Helga finds repulsive—further illustrates Eva's allegiances shifting away from her biological family and toward Lil and Eva's adopted home of England.*



Lil tells Eva to stay put and then runs off to do something. Eva suddenly panics, begging "Frau Lil" not to abandon her. Lil returns not long after, a slice of cake in hand, and tells Eva to have some cake and stop worrying.

*Eva's intense fear at briefly losing sight of Lil reveals how traumatic being separated from her family has been for her—she's terrified of being abandoned again.*



In the present, Lil offers Faith some tea; Faith declines and instead asks about Evelyn's cleaning, dryly asking if Evelyn has taken out the vacuum yet. Lil scolds Faith and tells her to leave Evelyn alone.

Faith, undeterred, shows Lil the *Rattenfänger* book she found in the **storage room**. She's confused—Evelyn used to tell Faith this story, but this book is in German, and Evelyn doesn't speak German. Faith asks if the book belonged to Eva, the young Jewish girl who stayed with Lil during the war—and if so, she wonders why Evelyn has the girl's belongings. Lil freezes, then asks Faith how she knows about Eva. Faith explains that she pieced it together from reading some of the letters and other things she found in the boxes. Lil gets angry and tells Faith to stop talking about Eva.

Faith eventually gets Lil to admit the truth: Eva is Evelyn, Faith's mother. Faith continues to ask Lil questions about Eva. Eventually, Lil admits that Evelyn was nine when she came to live with Lil, not just a few days old, as Lil has repeatedly claimed. Lil also says that Evelyn's parents died during the war. Faith asks why she kept Evelyn's life a secret, and Lil explains that Evelyn "wanted to put the past behind her." Faith thinks this wasn't for *her* best, though—Evelyn's past affects her, too. Lil says it affects Evelyn more and calls Faith "selfish."

Back in the past, Lil asks Eva if she liked the sandwiches Lil gave her for lunch. Eva explains that the sandwiches have ham in them, which Eva can't eat due to religious reasons. Lil says that Eva shouldn't worry about that, since "we needn't keep to the old laws anymore." She says that Jews are just "Hanging on to the past" by following these laws.

Eva asks Lil to help with Eva's parents. Lil explains that they have to get sponsors and jobs figured out first in order to get their entrance into the U.K. approved. Eva says that Vati is a banker, but Lil explains that he'll only be able to get work as a servant. Eva is shocked and upset by this, but Lil doesn't think it's a big deal.

*Lil offering Faith some tea in the play's present-day timeline mirrors the previous moment from the World War II timeline, in which Lil offers Eva some cake. Once more, the play's structure shows how the past bleeds into the present.*



*Faith's confusion makes clear that she's been completely left in the dark about Evelyn's past—she hasn't known that Evelyn could even speak German, much less that she came to England as a German Jewish refugee child. Lil's angry response to Faith's discovery further confirms that Evelyn's past is something that was supposed to remain secret. It seems that Evelyn has chosen to repress her painful child as a coping mechanism, though how effective a strategy this has turned out to be remains unclear at this point.*



*Lil confirms what the audience (and Faith) likely have already guessed: Eva is Evelyn's younger self. And Lil's next major reveal—that Evelyn's parents died during the war—helps explain Evelyn's apparent choice "to put the past behind her" and conceal the details of her traumatic childhood from Faith. Lil's observation that Faith is being "selfish" to want the truth from Evelyn raises the question of whether Evelyn owes her daughter honesty—or whether her personal trauma is hers alone to manage.*



*The audience may interpret Lil's criticism of "the old laws" multiple ways. A more generous interpretation is that Lil is just trying to help Eva adjust to her new life in England. A more critical interpretation is that Lil is being insensitive to how difficult being away from her family, religion, and home is for Eva—and is making Eva's dislocation to England even more difficult by encouraging her stop "Hanging on to the past."*



*Lil's nonchalance toward Eva's parents' limited opportunities for work gives insight into her attitude toward Eva's parents—and Eva's relationship with her parents—as a whole. She doesn't seem especially sympathetic to the suffering and persecution they experience and seems to want Eva to stop dwelling on it too. While it's true that Lil is doing a good and selfless thing by caring for Eva when Eva's own parents cannot, she's rather selfish in her disregard for Eva's relationship with her parents and old way of life.*



In the present, Lil and Faith continue to discuss Eva/Evelyn. Lil says that Evelyn had to deal with a lot, like losing her parents. She warns Faith not to tell Evelyn that Lil told her about Evelyn's real past. She also reveals that Evelyn changed her birthday to January 7—the day Lil picked her up from the train station—on her 16th birthday, the same day she changed her name.

Back in the past, Eva comes home late from her English lesson, and Lil scolds Eva for lying about where she's been. Speaking in German, Eva tries to defend herself, but Lil accuses her of "hid[ing] behind German." Finally, Eva admits to knocking on the doors of rich people's houses and asking them if they had any work for her parents. All of them said no—just as Lil told Eva they would. Lil yells at Eva for disobeying her and humiliating her by acting "like some begging little orphan." Scared, Eva begs Lil not to put her on the streets. Lil softens a bit and promises Eva that she'd never do that.

In the present, Faith asks Lil if Faith's dad knows about Evelyn's past. Lil says no, but Faith is doubtful. Evelyn enters the room to see what's going on. Lil says they got distracted. Things are awkward for a bit as Evelyn looks at the dolls and other old things Faith has removed from the boxes. Faith asks how she's supposed to stand here and pretend that everything is normal when it's not—then she shows Evelyn the Ratcatcher book and demands that Evelyn tell her about Eva Schlesinger. Evelyn orders Faith to put the Ratcatcher book away. She asks Lil why Faith is invading her "privacy," but Faith doesn't think she's done anything wrong.

Evelyn says everyone needs to agree to let the past be the past. In fact, she should've thrown out most of these old papers and photos ages ago. Faith asks to keep them instead—she'd like to know more about Evelyn and Evelyn's parents. But Evelyn says that's none of Faith's business. Evelyn stands to leave, and Lil pleads with her not to leave things this way. Faith gets in front of the door to stop Evelyn from leaving. She accuses Evelyn of walking out or cleaning obsessively every time Faith even mildly disagrees with her. And Evelyn can't get on a train or pass a policeman or traffic controller without panicking.

*The audience may interpret Lil's plea for Faith not to bring up the past with Evelyn as protective: she wants to protect Evelyn against Faith's reopening old wounds. The details she shares about Evelyn changing her name and birthdate also reveal the extent to which Evelyn has chosen to rewrite her life's story and deny her past.*



*When Lil criticizes Eva for "hid[ing] behind German," it gives further insight into the active role Lil played in Eva/Evelyn's decision to deny her past. It seems that it's not only that the trauma of her relocation to England and then the subsequent deaths of her family that compelled Eva to want a fresh start—Lil also seems to have made pointed efforts to rid Eva of her German identity. In this scene, for instance, she insinuates that speaking German is a shameful, naughty thing for Eva to do.*



*On the one hand, the audience may interpret Evelyn's stern reaction to Faith's discovery as shock—after all, she's been keeping her past a secret from Faith for decades, and now everything has come undone all at once. On the other hand, her comment about Faith invading her "privacy" complicates things, as it insinuates that Evelyn's history is hers alone, even though as Evelyn's daughter Faith shares some of that history—at least indirectly, through their shared blood.*



*Evelyn and Faith are at odds because each feels betrayed by the other, Evelyn by Faith's prying and Faith by Evelyn's secrecy. But they're also at odds about their attitudes toward the past. Evelyn feels that she has the right to pick and choose what aspects of her past are relevant to the person she is today, whereas Faith seems to think everything that has happened—regardless of how painful or undesirable it was—factors into who a person becomes. And if the audience takes Faith's comments about Evelyn's panic attacks at face value, then Faith's approach to the path seems more correct than Evelyn's: though Evelyn wants to put things behind her, her behavior suggests that her unresolved childhood trauma continues to affect her as an adult.*



All these years, Faith explains, she thought it was her own fault that Evelyn was so unhappy, and now she realizes it's more complicated than that. Faith also tells Evelyn that Evelyn and all her lies are why Faith had such an unhappy childhood. She calls Evelyn "a terrible mother."

Suddenly, the Ratcatcher's pipe music begins to play, and young Eva says that the Ratcatcher is coming. Adult Evelyn begs young Eva to stop—the Ratcatcher isn't coming, and they're both safe. She tells young Eva that she's a good girl and has done nothing wrong. Evelyn promises that she'll do everything she can to make him go away. She won't let him take Eva away ever again.

## ACT 2, SCENE 1

Evelyn is in the **storage room**, an ashtray full of cigarette butts before her. Helga sits near her, holding the *Rattenfänger* book, and Eva sits beside her. Helga calls Eva "my **jewels**," explaining that everyone dies, "but jewels never fade or perish." Children, Helga explains, are jewels—they're "how we cheat death."

In the present, Faith knocks on the locked **storage room** door and begs Evelyn to open it. Evelyn says no. Faith tries to apologize for everything she said earlier, but Evelyn still won't come out.

Back in the past, a postman marching like a Nazi and pantomiming a Hitler moustache hands Eva a package from Germany. Eva doesn't find the postman's Nazi impersonation funny. The postman says that Hitler has done a lot of good things for Eva's country. Eva says he hasn't done anything nice for her parents. The postman turns to leave, then he says "Heil Hitler!" and orders Eva to do the same. She does.

*Faith's accusation that Evelyn is "a terrible mother" likely upsets and perplexes Evelyn in ways Faith can't possibly understand. Evelyn's own mother, Helga, wasn't there for Evelyn/Eva in her formative years, even if sending Eva away was Helga's way of protecting Eva in the only way she could back then. Evelyn, by contrast, has been there for Faith.*



*The mythic figure of the Ratcatcher seems to embody Eva/Evelyn's unresolved childhood trauma, entering her consciousness during moments of great emotional strife. In this surreal moment, Evelyn consoles her younger self, assuring her that they've done nothing wrong and that the Ratcatcher won't be able to find and hurt them anymore. This seems to represent Evelyn's lingering fear that she did something bad to deserve her banishment (or what her younger self perceived as banishment) to England.*



*The presence of WWII-era Helga and Eva in the storage room (which represents the inside of Evelyn's mind) alongside present-day Evelyn shows that Evelyn is thinking about her past, despite outwardly claiming to reject it. Specifically, Evelyn seems to feel guilt over how her denial of the past prevents her family from "cheat[ing] death," or living on in memory.*



*When Faith begs for Evelyn to let her inside the storage room (which represents Evelyn's consciousness), she's symbolically asking Evelyn to let her in on Evelyn's inner struggles—and, perhaps, to take comfort in sharing the difficult thoughts and feelings that presently plague her.*



*Though the audience may at least partly attribute Eva's salute to a child's fear of upsetting an adult authority figure, the ease with which she gives a Nazi salute shows that she's slowly starting to betray her biological family and their Jewish faith, if only to survive and gain acceptance in her new home.*





Eva unwraps the parcel. The *Rattenfänger* book is inside. It's from Helga, thanking Eva for the jobs and permits. Eva and Helga converse (though the conversation seems to be imaginary and based on the things Helga sent Eva, not a conversation that actually occurs between them). Helga tells Eva to promise to celebrate seder night. Eva says Mrs. Miller (Lil) probably wouldn't do a seder—she'd find it "silly." Helga says it's important for them to tell the story of their ancestors, who escaped from slavery in Egypt. Eva replies that when the Egyptians tried to follow the Hebrews, they drowned in the Red Sea—and deserved it. Eva wonders if she'll be led into the Red Sea and drown, too.

*This moment further illustrates Eva's waning connection to her biological family and their Jewish roots. Seemingly following Lil's lead, she's begun to see the religious beliefs and rituals Helga values as superstitious and outdated. It seems that the more Eva starts to accept Lil's values and way of life, the more she rejects Helga's. Eva's fear that she'll be led into the Red Sea and drowned like the Egyptians who pursued the Hebrews shows that she feels guilty about her shifting loyalties—she thinks she deserves God's punishment as much as the Egyptians who enslaved her ancestors.*



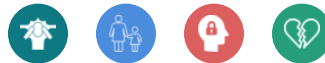
Back in the present, Lil knocks on the door to the **storage room** and begs Evelyn to let her in. Evelyn says no. When Lil threatens to call the fire department to break down the door, Evelyn finally relents and opens it. Lil is shocked to find the place in shambles. She also thought Evelyn had quit smoking. Evelyn says she did quit smoking.

*Evelyn will let someone into the storage room, which represents her mind, but only after Lil threatens her. This symbolizes how Evelyn's childhood trauma has made her become guarded. It's darkly humorous that Evelyn confirms that she quit smoking while holding a cigarette. This obvious contradiction illustrates how greatly her resurfaced past is upsetting her.*



Lil tells Evelyn that Faith didn't mean anything she said—she's probably just upset about her dad leaving and is using Evelyn as a scapegoat. Evelyn asks Lil if she's a terrible mother. Lil promises she isn't usually—but she is being one now. She tells Evelyn that she shouldn't keep the past secret from Faith. Evelyn says Faith will never understand and that she'll always blame Evelyn. Lil promises Evelyn that she's done nothing wrong.

*When Lil tells Evelyn she's being a bad mother now, she's suggesting that keeping the past from Faith and punishing Faith for wanting to talk about it will only further damage their relationship. The audience may interpret Lil's assurance that Evelyn hasn't done anything wrong beside this as Lil's effort to protect Evelyn from Evelyn's self-hatred. She's trying to assuage Evelyn's internalized guilt and shame over her fraught relationship to the past.*



Back in the past, Lil drops Eva off at the train station. Eva carries a gas mask box and a suitcase. Eva asks Lil why she has to leave, and Lil explains that all the children must—the war could start anytime now. Eva says she saw someone on the platform, waiting to catch her. Lil promises Eva that nobody's there. She tells Eva that it's for the best that Eva leaves. Eva worries she'll never come back. Lil says it's her "job" to protect Eva, and sending Eva away is how Eva will stay safe. Eva says she'd rather stay with Lil and get bombed. Lil promises to visit Eva on the weekend.

*In this scene, Lil is sending Eva away to the countryside where she'll be safer from bombs, which many British families living in urban areas did during the war. Once more, the play shows the lengths to which parents will go to protect their children, and the painful sacrifices war and other adverse circumstances face parents in particular to make. The situation is particularly traumatic for Eva, however, since she's been through it before.*



The train whistle blows again, and the train begins to move. Eva shrieks about someone “tak[ing] us over the edge,” and then she starts to cough and choke. (In the present, Evelyn starts to cough.) Eva jumps off the train, rolls onto the platform, and lies still. Lil scolds her. She asks Lil if she’s “in the abyss” and if the Ratcatcher is gone. Lil promises that nobody will get Eva. Then she apologizes—she should’ve known that going away “isn’t what [Eva] need[s] most.”

*Evelyn’s coughing (likely from the cigarettes she’s smoking in the present) mirrors WWII-era Eva’s coughing (seemingly from the train’s exhaust or from panic). Once more, the play’s structural choice to carry out its two timelines simultaneously shows that the past and the present are linked. Though Evelyn tries to deny her past, it stays with her, nonetheless. It’s a big moment for Eva when Lil agrees not to force Eva to leave—this is what Helga, who did send Eva away, could not do. This could be a major turning point for Eva: it could be when she decisively chooses to reject Helga (who, in a sense, abandoned her for her own good) and accept Lil (who stays by her side).*



In the present, Lil tells Evelyn she should’ve known Faith would find the old papers one day. Evelyn says Faith shouldn’t have gone looking through her things. Lil says that it wasn’t enough to hide them—Evelyn needed “to get rid.” Evelyn says she can’t get rid of the papers—what if someone wants to send her away? Lil promises that nobody can do that now. She offers to help Evelyn get rid of the papers.

*As a grown woman, Evelyn should know that nobody—and especially not the fantastical Ratcatcher—is trying to take her away. Nonetheless, she still seems to fear the possibility, and her regressive fear shows how she’s still the same hurting and hurt young girl she was so many years before. Perhaps this is why she saved the old papers: she knew denying her past wouldn’t work forever, and eventually she’d have to come to terms with the trauma that altered the course of her life.*



Evelyn asks Lil why Lil wants her to destroy everything. Lil says it’s what Evelyn wants. Evelyn agrees, but when Lil starts to rip a paper, Evelyn says the papers are hers to rip, not Lil’s. Lil says that Evelyn is being silly. Evelyn accuses Lil of taking “too much” of her and forcing Evelyn to “betray” Helga. Lil disagrees. She supported Evelyn “when it count[ed],” which is what mothers do. Besides, Evelyn doesn’t have anybody else anymore. Evelyn says that’s what Lil always wanted. This upsets Lil—it’s not as though she started the war herself. Plus, she chose to take Evelyn in—she didn’t have to do that. Evelyn replies, “Part of me is dead because of you.” She calls Lil a “child-stealer.”

*Evelyn’s own desire to deny her childhood trauma makes sense, but Evelyn is skeptical of Lil’s motive for wanting Evelyn’s past gone. When she accuses Lil of taking “too much” of her and forcing her to “betray” Helga, she’s suggesting that perhaps denying her roots wasn’t a coping mechanism she came up with on her own—perhaps she arrived there with the help of Lil’s influence. Though Lil cared for her when Helga could not, Evelyn resents Lil for not caring about Evelyn’s ties to her roots and perhaps even for encouraging Evelyn to cut ties with her family.*



Lil says what’s done is done. She asks what Evelyn wants to do now, and Evelyn replies by tearing up all the old letters. Lil joins her, and the two of them destroy everything in the boxes.

*Lil’s dismissive remark about the past offers additional evidence that Evelyn’s denial of her past—and her unwillingness to broach other uncomfortable subjects—is something she learned from Lil. And this further explains the seeming resentment Evelyn feels toward Lil.*



Back in the past, a station guard approaches Eva and asks if she's waiting for someone. Eva says she's waiting for her parents. She says that Mrs. Miller (Lil), the woman who looks after her, has just gone to the cloakroom and will be back soon. The guard says that Eva's parents probably won't be coming. Suddenly suspicious, the guard asks Eva's nationality.

*This could be another big moment in Eva's emotional move away from her biological parents and toward Lil and her new life in England. If the war has already begun, it's unlikely that Eva's parents will arrive at the station like Eva—who is still too young to grasp the full reality of the situation—seems to expect they will. And when they don't arrive, it may seem to her that they're abandoning her once more (though, of course, the circumstances the war has created leave them with little choice in the matter).*



Just then, Lil emerges and barks at the guard to leave Eva alone. The guard demands to know if Eva is a foreigner. Lil explains that Eva's parents are still in Germany. Eva thinks that maybe her parents managed to get to London, but Lil tells Eva they probably haven't—and that they're probably not coming. Eva says they promised to get her, but Lil explains that "War breaks promises." She says they can go to church to pray for them. Eva wonders aloud if she'll ever see her parents again. Then she removes her **jewelry**, including the chain with the Star of David on it. She tells Lil she doesn't want them anymore.

*Lil shows up when Helga does not. Of course, Helga's absence doesn't reflect a lack of love for Eva—as Lil explains, "war breaks promises," limiting Helga's ability to protect Eva in person. Nevertheless, to Eva, who is too young to fully comprehend what's going on, Helga's absence stings as a second abandonment. When she removes her jewelry, then, she's symbolically denying Helga and the rest of her family after they've "abandoned" her a second time.*



Back in the present, Lil picks up the *Rattenfänger* book and starts to tear out a page. She says it's "in German" and has "Horrible pictures." Evelyn grabs the book from Lil and tells her she can't destroy a book. When Lil motions toward the Haggadah, Evelyn says Lil can't destroy that either. Then Evelyn places both books aside. Next, Evelyn picks up the mouth organ, though she doesn't recognize it. She places it beside the books. Then she and Lil continue to destroy the papers. Evelyn tells Lil she was right—she should've destroyed these things a long time ago and spared everyone the hurt. She's "made a good life," and she should be grateful for it.

*Lil seems more eager than Evelyn to destroy every last relic from Evelyn's past life as Eva. Interpreted generously, Lil's actions could be seen as her attempt to stop Evelyn from reopening old wounds and experiencing more hurt. Interpreted more critically, however, Lil's eagerness could be evidence that Evelyn's idea to reject her past wasn't all her idea in the first place—instead, she may have arrived at that decision by following Lil's example. And given all the guilt and regret Evelyn seems to feel about this choice, perhaps Lil's influence has harmed Evelyn more than it's protected her.*



Lil agrees but says Evelyn needs to make things right with Faith. Evelyn argues that all children leave their parents—and then "they never come back." Lil counters that she and Evelyn are close, but Evelyn says she and Lil are different. Lil argues that Faith is more like Evelyn than Evelyn thinks. Evelyn doesn't think this is a good thing.

*Evelyn's remark that children leave their parents and "never come back" conveys the guilt she feels over her denial of her past and her biological parents. She seems to insinuate that she had some choice in leaving her parents behind in Germany and surviving the war without them. This, of course, is patently untrue: Eva was just a blameless child when Helga sent her to England. The audience might wonder, then, if there's more to Evelyn's past than she's yet to reveal. Is it perhaps true that some of her family did survive, and that she, in fact, chose not to reconnect with them?*



Evelyn says she “always knew” Faith would leave. She thinks “the German woman” must have known Evelyn would leave, too. Lil asks if Evelyn is referring to her “first mother” (Helga)—she thought Evelyn had forgotten all about her. Evelyn says she has.

*The impersonal language that Evelyn uses to describe Helga (“the German woman”) reveals her efforts to distance Helga and from that part of her life in general. Of course, she seems to do so at Lil’s urging, at least to some degree—Lil seems to expect or want Evelyn to forget her “first mother.”*



Back in the past, Lil and Eva are in a movie theater when a newsreel about the liberation of Belsen appears on the screen. Lil hurriedly tries to shield Eva’s eyes. She thinks they should have warned audiences before showing such disturbing images. Eva tells Lil she’s 15 now and no longer a child. Eva pauses. Then she comments on the soldiers in the newsreel—they were covering their noses and mouths with handkerchiefs. She wonders if that would be enough to cover up the smell of all the bodies. Eva asks if she and Lil can still see the main movie. Lil says they can if Eva wants to. Eva says she would, but then she wonders if that’s wrong of her. Lil says she’s not really in the mood anymore, but they go back into the theater anyway.

*Belsen, or Bergen-Belsen, was a Nazi concentration camp in northern Germany. British troops liberated it in April 1945, by which point around 70,000 prisoners had died there. When Lil shields Eva’s eyes, she’s likely trying to protect her from hurt—it’s possible that Eva’s parents perished there. But Eva’s remark about the smell of all dead (or sickly) bodies suggests that she’s willing to confront painful realities head on. Increasingly, it seems that Lil, in her efforts to shield Eva from pain, actually ended up hurting Eva even more, denying her the opportunity to develop healthy coping mechanisms to deal with the trauma of her parents’ likely deaths (and the survivors’ guilt that Eva later seems to develop in the aftermath).*



Sometime later, Eva presents Helga’s **jewelry** to Lil and asks her how much she thinks it’s worth because she’s thinking of selling it. Lil asks Eva why she’s given up searching for her parents. “It isn’t over till you know for sure,” Lil says. Still, she admits that she “want[s] to keep” Eva and take care of her. “Somebody has to,” she tells Eva.

*When Eva says she wants to sell Helga’s cherished jewelry, she’s symbolically laying Helga—and her relationship with Helga—to rest. Though it might seem cruel and cold for Eva to stop searching for her parents before confirming that they are, in fact, dead, it’s what she’s decided (perhaps with some help from Lil) she must do to move forward with her life. Though Lil lightly encourages Eva to continue searching for her parents, she’s at least equally enthusiastic “to keep” Eva as her own and take over for Eva’s parents.*



Back in the present, Faith pleads with Evelyn and Lil to let her inside the **storage room**. Evelyn finally relents and nods at Lil to open the door. Faith enters the closet and is shocked to see all the destroyed papers and photos. Evelyn explains that she’s “put an end to the trouble” because that’s the only way she can move on. Faith can’t believe it; didn’t Evelyn’s mother (Helga) leave these things to Eva for safekeeping? And shouldn’t Evelyn have passed them down to Faith? Evelyn replies that the papers were hers and she can do whatever she wants with them. Though Evelyn knows what she did was “cruel,” she did what she had to do to survive.

*Evelyn implicitly equates her decision to get rid of the family artifacts with Helga’s decision to send Eva away during the war. Though both choices are cruel in the abstract, they make sense in the context of war: both women were simply doing what they needed to do to survive, specifically to ensure Eva/Evelyn’s survival. This scene shows how complicated Evelyn’s perception of her past and her relationship with Helga are. While Evelyn continues to resent what she perceives as Helga’s abandonment on some level, she also understands that Helga did so out of love.*



Evelyn finally relents and decides to tell Faith what little about her parents she can remember. Her father's name was Werner Schlesinger, and her mother's name was Helga. The family was Jewish and lived in Hamburg. Evelyn thinks she probably loved them quite a bit. She remembers that the house was filled with books. One of them was about a scary, rat-like man (the Ratcatcher). Then Evelyn says that her parents died in Auschwitz. Her father was gassed shortly after they arrived. Evelyn pauses and then stutters and trails off as she explains that her mother wasn't gassed. Helga enters, looking older and "transformed."

In a flashback to the past, Helga and Eva are in a hotel room together. Helga remarks how much Eva has changed. Eva explains that her name is Evelyn now—she wanted an English name. This upsets Helga; Eva was the name of Eva's great-grandmother. Eva tells Helga that she'd given up trying to find Helga—she assumed Helga and Werner had died. Helga apologizes that it took so long but says she always promised to return for Eva, and now she has. She reminds Eva that she's Eva's mother. Eva says it's too late; the Millers adopted her, and she's a naturalized English citizen now.

Helga tells Eva she understands—everyone does "bad things"—it's "how we survive." It's like how Helga sent Eva away so she'd survive the war. Now, Helga tells Eva, they're going to go to New York to live with Eva's Onkel Klaus. He'll help them start over. Eva tells Helga that she has a family in England. Helga disagrees that the Millers are Eva's family, but Eva says she likes it in England and won't be leaving.

## ACT 2, SCENE 2

The shredded papers are no longer in the **storage room**. Helga stands in the corner holding a suitcase. Faith watches Evelyn polish a **glass**. Lil enters and says she'll be leaving now but will be back for dinner. Despite Faith's protests, Evelyn insists on taking Lil to the train station tomorrow. Lil exits.

*Evelyn offers Faith basic details about her past, seemingly taking Lil's advice and compromising with Faith as much as she's able at this point. Evelyn at first claims that Helga died at Auschwitz, but then she stutters and clarifies that she wasn't gassed. Her faltering suggests that there's more to Helga's fate than Evelyn is letting on. Indeed, Helga's subsequent entrance suggests that perhaps she survived the war after all—and that there are other reasons she's not in Evelyn's life.*



*Suddenly, Evelyn's rejection of the past becomes far more complicated, as this scene establishes that she chose to continue denying her past—even after she had confirmed that Helga was indeed alive and wanting to reenter her life. In adopting the English name Evelyn and letting the Millers adopt her, Evelyn makes clear that the pain of her and Helga's shared past is too great to overcome. She'd rather continue to live as though Helga had died than reintroduce Helga into her life and have to confront the lingering pain of their separation.*



*When Helga claims that the war forces everyone to do "bad things" to "survive," she's referring to Evelyn/Eva's choice to turn her back on her family and assimilate into English culture. But she's also referring to her own choice to send Eva away in the first place. Eva's decision not to accompany Helga to New York suggests that she's not as willing to forgive and move on as Helga is—she still doesn't forgive Helga for the "bad thing[]" Helga did in sending her away.*



*The empty storage room symbolizes Evelyn's empty consciousness: she's wiped all thoughts of her past from her mind. However, the fact that she's once more fixating on polishing a glass—an action that mirrors her first appearance in the play—suggests that she hasn't actually made any emotional progress toward reconciling with the past and that her childhood trauma will continue to haunt her, if only subconsciously.*



Faith and Evelyn continue to look through the boxes. Finally, Faith asks Evelyn if Lil knows that Helga survived. Evelyn says no—if she had, she'd have given Evelyn back to Helga “like a borrowed package.” Faith asks if Evelyn saw Helga again after she left. Evelyn says no, though she was still living by the time Faith was born. Faith accuses Evelyn of preventing her from knowing her grandmother. Evelyn says she did her best with Faith and that the past is “an abyss” that should stay in the past. Faith disagrees, suggesting that it gives “a background, a context.”

*Helga's initial “abandonment” of Evelyn/Eva affects Evelyn's ability to trust the unconditional nature of a parent's love. She believes that she's discardable, as easy to give away as “a borrowed package.” Evelyn's description of the past as “an abyss” alludes to the Ratcatcher story, in which the Ratcatcher leads the village children off a cliff and into a deep abyss. Her allusion to the story here suggests that she still regards her separation from her parents—Helga's decision to “abandon” her during the war—as punishment. In a broader sense, it also reflects her negative associations with her childhood. Faith, who has not endured the trauma Evelyn has, doesn't attach a negative connotation to the past—she thinks that filling the hollow “abyss” of the past with “a background, a context” can make life more good and meaningful.*



Faith asks Evelyn if she (Faith) is Jewish. Evelyn tells Faith no—she's been baptized. But Faith argues that the Nazis would have considered her Jewish. Evelyn tells Faith she shouldn't “let people who hate you tell you what you are.” She says that the day she turned 18 and was baptized, she felt “cleansed” and “purified.” She says that England accepted her after Germany rejected her, and now this is where she belongs and who she is.

*Evelyn's advice not to “let people who hate you tell you what you are” is rather ironic. Though she has rejected the Nazis' stance that her Jewish identity defines her completely, she seems to have internalized their ideological stance that that Jewish identity is a deficiency and worthy of hatred. Evelyn's hatred and rejection of her Jewish faith further illustrates how significantly her childhood dislocation and cultural alienation shaped her sense of self.*



Faith and Evelyn continue to go through the boxes. Evelyn pulls out the *Rattenfänger* book and the Haggadah book and hands them to Faith, describing them impassively as a “storybook” and a book “for some Jewish festival.” She says Faith can have them if she wants; Faith does. Then Evelyn picks up the mouth organ, though she doesn't recognize it. Faith takes this too.

*The fact that Evelyn kept the Rattenfänger book and the Haggadah book shows that she's not as ready to reject her past as she outwardly suggests. Though she gives them to Faith with a distinct nonchalance, the fact that she gives them to her at all suggests that perhaps healing and resolve are still possible for Evelyn.*



Back in the past, Eva meets Helga at the waterfront. Helga tries to convince Eva to change her mind and come with her to New York, but Eva insists that she can't leave. Helga accuses Eva of being “cold” and distant. She says that though she “lost” Eva's father when she watched him being sent to the showers to die, she “did not lose [her]self.” But Eva has. She tells Eva to come be with her when she's found herself again. She hugs Eva, who remains stiff.

*Helga describes two kinds of loss: the physical loss of life that Eva's father experienced when he was murdered at a Nazi concentration camp, and the metaphorical loss of self and soul that Eva experienced when she turned her back on her family and denied her past. Helga seems to suggest that her husband and Eva are equally lost to her. And perhaps her loss of Eva is especially painful because it's something Eva chose to do—unlike her father, whose life was taken from him.*



Eva becomes Evelyn and tells Helga she wishes Helga had died; Helga says she wishes Eva had lived. “Hitler started the job and you finished it,” she tells Evelyn. Evelyn says she did what she had to do. She says that Helga should have never sent Eva away—nobody made her, and yet she chose to do it anyway. She thinks the only thing “more cruel” than that is returning and then “punishing [Evelyn] for surviving on [her] own.” Evelyn sobs.

Back in the present, Faith sees that Evelyn has been crying. She asks what Evelyn needs, and Evelyn tells her she wants Faith to stay little forever and never leave. Faith says she can’t do that. She also says she’s going to get in touch with her relatives—and that they’ll probably want to know Evelyn too. Evelyn says she and Faith have nothing in common with those people and that Faith is just making trouble for herself.

Faith asks Evelyn if she can have her box of childhood toys. Evelyn says she’d like something of Faith’s when she was little, but Faith insists that she wants the toys. Evelyn says okay. She asks Faith if she has everything she needs. “More or less,” replies Faith.

*When Eva becomes Evelyn—that is, when the actor who plays Evelyn replaces the actor who plays Eva onstage—it suggests that this latter exchange between mother and daughter might not have really happened. Instead, it’s a hypothetical interaction that Evelyn is imagining as an adult. In it, Evelyn simultaneously expresses contempt for herself for denying her past, family, and Jewish faith (when “Helga” compares Evelyn to Hitler, it’s really Evelyn calling herself Hitler). On the other hand, Evelyn also examines how Helga hurt her by sending her away as a child and forcing her to suffer alone—and then “punishing [her] for surviving on [her] own.” Essentially, Evelyn is saying that rejecting her faith and family was something she had to do in order to cope with her separation from them. It’s arguably unfair of Helga to criticize Evelyn’s survival instinct, then, since Helga is the one who made it necessary for Evelyn to make it on her own in the first place.*



*Evelyn begs Faith not to leave in a desperate attempt stop the cycle of hurt and abandonment from repeating itself. But Evelyn’s unreasonable request is merely another attempt to avoid confronting the unresolved trauma that has created Evelyn’s fear of abandonment in the first place. Even if Evelyn could magically ensure that Faith stays little and by her side forever, it wouldn’t change the past.*



*Faith’s instance on taking her box of childhood things reads as a defiant statement to Evelyn: if Evelyn won’t give Faith access to her past, then Faith won’t give Evelyn access to hers. The play ends on an ambiguous note: Faith’s curt acknowledgment that Evelyn has “more or less” given her everything she needs suggests that Faith has accepted that Evelyn will never be as forthcoming about the past as Faith would like her to be. But it also suggests that Evelyn’s secrecy may continue to drive mother and daughter apart.*





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