Mexican Gothic

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF SILVIA MORENO-GARCIA

Silvia Moreno-Garcia was born and raised in Mexico, where both her parents worked for radio stations. Her family moved to Canada in 2004, where she later attended the University of British Columbia. She began her career by publishing short fiction in various magazines, and her debut novel, *Signal to Noise*, was published by Solaris Books in 2015. Her novel *Mexican Gothic* was published to critical acclaim in 2020, earning nominations for the Bram Stoker Award and the World Fantasy Award, and winning the August Derleth Award for Best Horror Novel.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Mexican Gothic focuses heavily on Mexico's history as a colonized nation. When the Spanish arrived in Mexico near the end of the 16th century, they found a wealth of mineral riches—gold and silver chief among them. The Spaniards built large mines, and by the 18th century, Mexico was one of the world's largest producers of silver. These mines required workers, of course, and the indigenous peoples of Mexico were often forced to work in the mines through various systems of disenfranchisement. The War of Independence forced the Spanish out of Mexico, but it wasn't long before other nations came to greedily extract whatever silver they could. Many British mining companies operated in Mexico in the 19th century, and though they didn't resort to slavery, working conditions could be nearly as bad as they were under Spanish rule. Finally, the Mexican Revolution in 1910 established a constitution that guaranteed the rights of workers, ending much of the unfair labor conditions.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The novel references numerous works of fiction, many of which are Gothic novels. Gothic literature developed during the Romantic period (1790-1830) through authors like Horace Walpole and Ann Radcliffe, and the genre strongly influenced writers like Charles Dickens well into the Victorian period (1832-1901). The Gothic genre typically included melodramatic narratives, dark scenery, and atmospheres of dread and mystery. *Mexican Gothic* specifically references the novels *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë and *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë. Yet, Moreno-Garcia does not simply reference these novels to build credibility—rather she invokes these novels to interrogate the colonial undertones present in the Gothic genre. The genre developed in Britain, after all, at a time when the British Empire was at the height of its power. Moreno-Garcia brings issues of colonialism to the forefront of her Gothic novel by setting her English mansion in a Mexican mining town. In this sense, *Mexican Gothic* is comparable to Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which is a prequel to *Jane Eyre* set in the Caribbean.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Mexican Gothic
- **Where Written:** Vancouver, Canada
- **When Published:** 2020
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Gothic Horror
- **Setting:** 1950s Mexico, El Triunfo
- **Climax:** Noemí, Catalina, and Francis escape from High Place.
- **Antagonist:** Howard Doyle, the gloom
- **Point of View:** Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Inspiration. The town of El Triunfo is based on the real-life town Real del Monte, which Silvia Moreno-Garcia visited a few years before writing the novel.

A Villainous Name. The name of the novel's chief antagonist, Howard Doyle, is a fusion of H.P. Lovecraft's first name and Arthur Conan Doyle's last name. Moreno-Garcia noted several stories in each author's body of work that contained racist elements, so she chose to name her villain after them.

PLOT SUMMARY

Noemí Taboada receives a summons from her father while at a lavish costume party. She cuts her date short and returns home, where her father hands her a mysterious letter from Catalina, her cousin. Catalina claims that her husband's family treats her cruelly, that she's being kept as a prisoner, and that she has been seeing ghosts. Noemí's father dismisses Catalina's claims as melodramatic but nevertheless thinks Noemí should go visit her cousin in El Triunfo. If she does, he'll finally let Noemí study anthropology in graduate school. Noemí agrees and leaves the next morning.

When Noemí arrives in El Triunfo, she finds it to be a ramshackle town. An automobile is waiting for her at the train station, and the English man driving it introduces himself as Francis Doyle, great nephew of Howard Doyle. He takes Noemí

to the Doyle estate, which everyone calls High Place. Noemí walks into the old, Victorian style home and meets a stern-looking woman named Florence Doyle, who explains that she runs High Place and that Noemí should make sure to follow the rules of the house. Florence takes Noemí to Catalina's bedroom. Surprisingly, Catalina doesn't look that sick—even though she claims she has tuberculosis. Catalina tells Noemí that she was delirious with fever when she wrote the letter, so Noemí shouldn't worry too much about it.

At dinner that night Noemí meets the ancient-looking Howard Doyle. Howard believes in a pseudoscience known as eugenics, and he quizzes Noemí about it, much to her discomfort. Noemí tries to learn more about her cousin's illness from Virgil Doyle, Catalina's husband, but he isn't very forthcoming. The next day, Francis gives Noemí a tour of the grounds, which ends at the English cemetery. The Doyles own a silver mine—which isn't in operation anymore—and many miners died from an epidemic decades ago. The English miners are all buried here, behind High Place.

The next time Noemí sees Catalina, she seems more lucid, and she secretly asks Noemí to visit a local healer named Marta Duval, who's been making her a tincture. Noemí agrees to help, and the next day she convinces Francis to drive her to town. She meets Marta at her home, and the old woman tells her that it'll take one week to prepare the tincture. But the medicine won't help, she tells Noemí, because the Doyle family is cursed. Years ago Howard's daughter, Ruth, went on a shooting spree in High Place and killed many of her family members, including her fiancé and mother. The whole place is evil, Marta believes.

While in town Noemí convinces the local physician, Dr. Camarillo, to come to High Place and examine Catalina. After his examination, he tells Noemí that he agrees with her—he doesn't think Catalina has tuberculosis, and she should probably see a psychiatrist. Noemí tells this to Virgil, but he's dismissive of the local doctor. The Doyle family has their own doctor, Dr. Cummins, and he's good enough to treat Catalina. Besides, Catalina is his wife, and he'll decide what's best for her.

Noemí and Francis begin to spend more time together. They go for walks, talk about each other's lives, and Francis shows Noemi his collection of spore prints. That night Noemí has a terrible nightmare: she sees Ruth walk through the hallway holding a rifle, find Howard's bedroom, and shoot him. Ruth then shoots and kills herself. Noemí wakes up and realizes that she has been sleep walking—something she hasn't done since she was a child.

Noemí retrieves the tincture from Marta Duval and brings it to Catalina. But immediately after swallowing some, Catalina begins to seize. When the episode passes, Dr. Cummins tells Noemí that she gave Catalina an opium tincture that could have killed her. To everyone's frustration, Noemí refuses to share where she got the tincture, since Catalina made her promise to keep it a secret.

Noemí visits Dr. Camarillo again as soon as she is able. He tells her that Marta's tincture could not have been opium—those plants don't grow around El Triunfo. Noemí's not sure what to make of this information, so she waits for an opportunity to speak with Catalina. But Florence will no longer allow them to see each other unsupervised. Catalina slips Noemí a note, which she later reads in her bedroom. The note is a page ripped from Ruth's diary. Ruth wrote about how Howard had beaten and abused her. She planned to kill him so that she could escape from High Place. Noemí is shocked by the note; contrary to what she's heard, Ruth doesn't sound crazy or possessed by evil at all. She wants to learn more about Ruth, so she goes in search of Francis.

Noemí finds Francis in his bedroom and tells him her theory: she doesn't think that the house is haunted, or that Catalina and Ruth are crazy. Rather, she thinks that there's something in the walls—some kind of chemical or toxin that makes people sick. Francis stands up abruptly and tells Noemí to stop talking. He speaks to her in Spanish, which none of the other Doyles speak, and tells her that she needs to leave High Place immediately. It isn't safe. A loud moan interrupts their conversation. Francis tells Noemí that Howard's condition is worsening, and that he needs to go and help him.

Noemí has a dream that Virgil forces himself on her while she's in the bathtub. She has nightmares almost every night, and her sleepwalking is getting worse. She feels exhausted during the day, and she's beginning to hallucinate. Noemí tells Virgil that she's ready to go back to Mexico City—she needs to get away from here and clear her head. Virgil agrees to drive her to the train station tomorrow morning. That night, the Doyles assemble in Howard's bedroom so that Noemí can bid him farewell. When she walks in, Noemí is shocked to see Howard lying on his bed naked. Virgil forces Noemí over to Howard, who grabs her head and shoves his tongue into her mouth.

Noemí experiences a series of visions that show her the history of High Place. Howard arrived here more than three hundred years ago, deathly ill. But the indigenous people fed him mushrooms from a nearby cave that healed him. Howard grew stronger, and soon he killed the indigenous people and took the land and mushrooms for himself. Noemí wakes from this vision in her bedroom, with Francis pressing a glass of water to her lips. She's angry with him, but Francis begs her to listen to him for a moment. He tells her that, a long time ago, Howard found a fungus that extends human life. That fungus now grows all over the house, like a spider's web, and it can even preserve the thoughts and memories of people who have died. They call this web the gloom, he explains. Howard uses the gloom to live forever—when his body is about to die, he transfers his consciousness to the gloom, and then from there into the body of a willing recipient. The next recipient will be Virgil, Francis says. It's important to Howard that the bloodline is kept pure, but lately the Doyle's have had trouble producing viable

offspring. That's why Howard wants Noemí to become part of the family. Noemí protests, but Francis tells her that it's too late. No one can escape from Howard.

That night, Noemí has another nightmare. A woman gives birth in a cave, then Howard grabs the child, kills it, and eats it as part of a ritual. The woman is swaddled tightly and buried alive. Noemí wakes the next day, glad to see daylight. She runs to the front door, which she finds unlocked, and flees from the house. The farther she goes, though, the more she struggles to breathe. She collapses, and Virgil comes to fetch her and brings her back to her bedroom. He throws her in the bathtub and tells her to take her clothes off, otherwise he'll hurt her. Once she's naked Virgil begins to touch her, but Francis opens the bathroom door and interrupts, much to Noemí's relief.

When Francis and Noemí are alone in the bedroom, he tells her his plan to break Noemí out of High Place. Howard's body is going to die soon, and they'll use that moment to escape through a tunnel beneath the house. Noemí makes Francis promise to help Catalina too, and he agrees. They should be able to escape in a few days, but until then Noemí has to play along with the family's wishes. Howard expects her and Francis to get married, and he's planning a ceremony for tomorrow night.

Noemí is forced to wear an ancient wedding dress to the ceremony, which takes place in Howard's bedroom. Howard reads a few verses in Latin, gives Francis and Noemí a mushroom to eat, and then sends them off to separate bedrooms. Noemí waits for Francis in her room, but instead Virgil walks in. He says that the family figured out about their escape plan. He tries to force himself on Noemí, but she pushes him over and knocks him unconscious. She then runs to Catalina's room and meets with her cousin and Francis. The three begin to leave, but they're caught in the hallway by Florence, who has a rifle. Florence leads them to Howard's room, where it's revealed that Francis—not Virgil—is going to receive Howard's consciousness. Howard begins the ritual, and Francis meekly complies.

Everyone is distracted by the ceremony, so no one notices Catalina grab a knife and walk over to Howard. She stabs him repeatedly and then tries to escape. Florence attempts to shoot Noemí, but Francis wrestles the rifle from her and shoots his mother. Noemí then takes the rifle from Francis and, like Ruth before her, shoots Howard. She then runs from the room with Catalina and Francis, toward the tunnel that Francis had planned to take them through. The tunnel leads to a cavern beneath the house—the same one that Noemí has seen in her dreams. Noemí pulls back a curtain behind the cavern's altar and finds the mummified remains of Agnes, Howard's first wife. Agnes's body serves as the epicenter of the gloom.

Virgil strolls into the chamber and reveals that he planned for all of this to happen—he wants his father to die so that he can have full control over the gloom and High Place. He's going to bring the three of them back and become the new patriarch of the family. Francis attacks Virgil, and while the two struggle, Noemí grabs a lantern and throws it at Agnes's body, igniting it in flames. With their precious fungus burning, Virgil and Francis collapse, and Catalina stabs Virgil before helping Francis and Noemí escape. They leave the cavern and run down the mountain, eventually finding refuge at Dr. Camarillo's clinic, where they wait for Noemí's father and the police to arrive.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Noemí Taboada – Noemí is a wealthy urban socialite from Mexico City who ventures to High Place to check on the welfare of her cousin, Catalina. As a woman of high society, she pays careful attention to her clothing and appearance, but Noemí is just as focused on education as she is on fashion. Though her parents would prefer it if she devoted herself to finding a suitable husband, Noemí wants to obtain a master's degree in anthropology—this at a time when it was somewhat uncommon for women to attend university. Noemí's progressive values result in multiple conflicts with the Doyle family, who believe in old-world conventions and hold that the only suitable goals for a woman is marriage and motherhood. Noemí often navigates these conflicts with flattery and flirtation—all those parties in Mexico City have taught her how to deal with arrogant, wealthy men. But when Noemí learns the truth about the horrors that have occurred at High Place she rebels against the family patriarch, Howard Doyle, with increasing feminist resolve. Her goal is not just to escape High Place, but also to end the suffering of the women around her. She refuses to leave without Catalina, for example, and burns the body of the long-abused first wife of Howard Doyle, Agnes. Thus, Noemí overcomes the sexist power structure of High Place not only by using both masculine and feminine forms of power, but also by uplifting the other women abused by the system.

Catalina – Catalina is Noemí's cousin. She married Virgil Doyle after a short engagement—her family hardly had the chance to meet Virgil before he whisked Catalina away to High Place. Catalina's parents died while she was young, and Noemí's parents became her guardians. It's to them that Catalina writes her strange letter, appealing for help. Noemí's father dismisses Catalina's letter as melodramatic, but Noemí knows something is wrong with her cousin. Indeed, for much of the novel, Catalina functions as the damsel-in-distress. She's trapped in the bedroom of an old Gothic mansion, prisoner to her brutish husband and slowly losing her mind to the fungus. Yet, Catalina defeats her easy classification as the damsel-in-distress during her and Noemí's escape from High Place. Their escape attempt is foiled by Florence, who brings the group to Howard's bedroom at gunpoint. And it's just as Howard is about to take

over Francis's body that Catalina stabs him, allowing for Francis, Noemí, and Catalina herself to resume their escape. Thus, through Noemí's assistance, Catalina is able to regain her agency and demonstrate her power against the people who have been oppressing her.

Francis – Francis is Florence's son, Howard's nephew, and Noemí's love interest. His father, Richard, died when Francis was just a boy, and Francis carries around a picture of him to remember him by. This is significant because Richard was forced to stay in High Place against his will, much like Catalina, and his suicide was a final act of rebellion against the Doyles. That Francis carries around his picture is an indicator that he is not as committed to Doyles as the other members of the family are. Without a doubt, Francis is the best proof that the Doyles' beloved pseudoscience of eugenics is deeply flawed. Though the family insists that people have a certain nature, and that it's impossible for a person to act outside their nature, Francis does just that. Despite the fact that he's been groomed to willingly receive Howard Doyle's consciousness as part of the Doyle family's ritual for immortality, Francis ultimately rejects his family's values and leaves High Place altogether.

Howard Doyle – Howard Doyle is the patriarch of the Doyle family. He's hundreds of years old; the fungus underneath High Place helped him achieve immortality through cannibalism, sacrifice, and slaughter. The first European to discover the fungus in Mexico, Howard killed the indigenous people living there and harvested the resource for himself. He then founded his family's silver mine, treating the indigenous workers brutally and knowingly infecting them with the fungus, which made them deathly ill. He justifies his actions with the pseudoscience of eugenics—which argues that certain races are inferior to others—and with his sexist belief that women's primary duty is birthing and raising children. Howard embodies the greed and oppressive ideologies that fueled colonialism; accordingly, High Place and the surrounding El Triunfo is in many ways a colony in miniature. Howard's immortality allows for these hateful ideologies to persist through generations, and Noemí's eventual triumph over him signifies a needed change in the social order of Mexico—one where the colonized have overtaken the colonizers.

Virgil – Virgil is Howard's only son, and Catalina's husband. Though he would typically inherit his family's estate after Howard's death, his father's immortality robs him of that prize. Virgil therefore secretly plots to allow his father to die, which would leave him with total authority over High Place and the gloom. Like his father, Virgil believes that white men are genetically superior and that a woman's duty is marriage and mothering. He is more suave than his father, however, and he charms Catalina into marrying him, and then he traps her in High Place. Even Noemí often succumbs to Virgil's dashing good looks—she compares him to the wealthy men she would often meet at parties in Mexico City: charming and desirous, but scornful of women who contradict him. The fact the Noemí has moments of desire for Virgil indicates a problem with societies that repress women's sexuality: it makes it difficult to differentiate between healthy and unhealthy attitudes towards sex and desire, leaving women vulnerable to manipulation by men like Virgil. In totality Virgil represents a class of men more modern than his father, those who benefited from the colonial system and carry old prejudices into the contemporary age.

Florence – Florence is Howard's niece, and Francis's mother. She is the only female villain in the novel—the only woman without a redeeming moment. When Noemí arrives at High Place, Florence strictly enforces the conventions of the home: no smoking, silence during dinner, etc. But she has not always been the cruel arbiter of domestic power. When she was young, Florence was as much a victim as any of the women in High Place; Howard raped her in order to conceive a child. His attempt at conception failed, so he sent Florence away to find a husband. She met Richard, and she dreamed that he would change her or rescue her from her family. But Richard started to slowly lose his mind when he became infected with the fungus, and Florence became convinced that it's impossible to deny one's nature. Though she's oppressed in High Place, Florence decides it's easier to live under a sexist system than to fight it. The only space she's allowed authority is in the domestic realm, and she often sternly employs that authority as a way to assert herself in a system that has eroded her autonomy.

Ruth – Ruth is Howard's niece. She died after shooting Howard, her fiancé, and her mother. Ruth fell in love with an indigenous miner named Benito, but Howard had already arranged Ruth's marriage to her cousin, and when he found out about Ruth's feelings, he beat her mercilessly. Ruth knew about Howard's immortality and his ability to control people though the gloom, and she decided that she was going to escape from High Place. This required killing Howard, but she didn't believe that there was anything wrong with that—Howard is evil. She shot Howard twice during her escape attempt, but he didn't die; he controlled Ruth through the gloom and forced her to kill herself. Thus, Ruth is a model for feminine resistance against Howard's patriarchal authority. Her attempt was not successful, but it does serve as a precedent for future women to emulate. Furthermore, Ruth's frequent directive to Noemí to open her eyes during her dreams serves as both a warning and a call to action—Noemí's own escape attempt wouldn't succeed if Ruth's actions didn't guide her.

Agnes – Agnes is Howard's first wife. Though she had no biological children, Howard chose to inscribe upon her tombstone the word *mother*—for Agnes is the mother of the gloom. The gloom—a fungal network that connects all the Doyles and keeps Howard immortal—was created through the ritual sacrifice of Agnes's body: she was buried alive, and the fungus slowly and agonizingly grew through her body. Thus,

Howard's power stems from the suffering of a single woman. His immortality began with sexist violence, and it continues by subjugating women, forcing them to reproduce, and then sacrificing the children. The system clearly benefits men, and it's thus fitting that High Place is destroyed by a woman (Noemí)—especially one who succeeds by uplifting the women around her.

Dr. Camarillo – Julio Camarillo is the local physician in El Triunfo. Though Noemí initially believes that Dr. Camarillo can properly diagnosis Catalina and get her out of High Place, she quickly learns that Dr. Camarillo is no knight in shining armor. His authority is limited to the town, outside the jurisdiction of Dr. Cummins. Though the Doyles are disdainful of Dr. Camarillo for his youth and ethnicity, he often serves as a calming presence for Noemí. Finally, unlike Dr. Cummins, Dr. Camarillo respects Marta and the remedies she creates as the village's healer, showing that modern medicine and traditional herbal remedies can coexist.

Dr. Cummins – Arthur Cummins is the Doyle family's personal doctor, and he has served them for decades. His daughter was Virgil's first wife, but she fell sick after interacting with the fungus and passed away. Dr. Cummins's willingness to sacrifice his own daughter reveals his loyalty to Howard Doyle. He shares many of Howard's racial biases, too, and was complicit in the deaths of many indigenous miners.

Noemí's Father – Noemí's father is the one who sends Noemí on her quest to rescue Catalina—though he's initially dismissive of Catalina's claims, calling her melodramatic. He clearly cares for his daughter and is more modern-minded than someone like Howard Doyle, yet his worldview still relies on a great gender divide. It's with reluctance that he agrees to send Noemí to graduate school, and he's not shy about criticizing Noemí for her unconventional personality.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Marta Duval – Marta serves her community of El Triunfo as a healer. It's her tincture that helps lessen the effects of the fungus on Noemí and Catalina, which provides credibility to a traditional medical practice that many would be tempted to dismiss as quackery (the Doyles certainly do).

TERMS

The Gloom – The gloom is a product of two components: the fungus that grows underneath High Place and the mind of **Agnes** (**Howard**'s first wife, whom he murdered for this purpose). It's a network of fungus that preserves the memories and thoughts of the people who bind with the fungus. This is how Howard is able to remain immortal: before his death, he essentially uploads his consciousness to the gloom, then downloads it to a new body after he dies. People are able to interact with the gloom while they sleep, even venturing into the thoughts and memories of people who have long since passed away. This is how **Noemí** is able to meet with **Ruth**, and how Howard can show Noemí visions from hundreds of years ago.

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.

SEXISM, FEMALE INDEPENDENCE, AND POWER

Throughout *Mexican Gothic*, the protagonist, Noemí Taboada, undermines masculine forms of authority and challenges conventions surrounding outdated gender roles. She begins the novel as a socialite in Mexico City, where the only expectation of wealthy young women is that they "devote [their] time to leisure and husband hunting." Noemí, however, is presented as somebody unwilling to simply acquiesce to such limiting expectations, which is why she dreams of pursuing a master's degree in anthropology at a time when few women had access to higher education. Similarly, her strong will and sense of self-sufficiency are on full display when she ventures to High Place to help her cousin, Catalina. She quickly learns that there's no knight in shining armor who will come and solve her—or Catalina's—problems. After all, Dr. Camarillo doesn't have the authority to change Catalina's treatment plan, and Francis (Noemí's only advocate in the household) is easily overruled by Virgil. If Noemí wants to get something done, then, she realizes that she's going to have to do it herself, which means constantly coming into conflict with the sexist power structures at play in the Doyle household.

Noemí ultimately succeeds in her struggle against the Doyles, freeing herself and Catalina from imprisonment as coerced brides in High Place. Though Ruth certainly set the precedent for female resistance, Noemí prevails because she attempts not just to escape the sexist horror of High Place (as Ruth did), but also to alleviate the suffering of the *other* women who are trapped there. She insists on freeing Catalina even though Francis, the person who initially planned their escape, didn't think it was a good idea. Furthermore, Noemí seems to be the only person who recognizes that Howard and Virgil's power over the gloom stems from the agony of a single woman: Agnes. Her suffering keeps the gloom alive, and this in and of itself is a good metaphor for the ways in which male-dominated, patriarchal power structures exploit women for their own benefit. The Doyles are instructed never to look at Agnes's

ravaged body, but Noemí upends their power by pulling back the curtain and exposing the atrocity they've committed. She sets Agnes's mummified corpse on fire, thus alleviating the woman's suffering and destroying the Doyle's sexist power structure in one fell swoop. The novel therefore values the idea of female independence while also celebrating women who try to improve not just their own lives, but those of other women, too.

NATURE VS. LOVE

The Doyles of High Place believe in eugenics, a pseudoscience with the goal of genetically improving the human species by promoting certain traits through selective breeding. It should come as no surprise to readers that this field of study has been discredited as unscientific and racially biased. The Doyles, however, believe that a person's nature is determined at birth, and that their actions in life will always be in accordance with their nature. Furthermore, they believe themselves to be genetically superior to those around them, particularly the local Mexicans. Yet, these beliefs are regularly undermined over the course of the novel. Though Virgil claims that criminals have distinctly recognizable facial characteristics, none of these eugenics experts are able to recognize Ruth's potential for violence before she begins shooting her family. Additionally, Francis's decision to side with Noemí to fight against his family, and his ability to survive outside of High Place, indicate that the Doyles' beliefs about predetermined natures are wrong, too. Surely if Francis's nature was to be a docile servant of Howard, Noemí wouldn't have been able to change that. But the book posits an alternate theory: that love overrides any predetermined, inherited, or learned behavior. Francis initially tells Noemí that the Doyles are incapable of love and that it's against their nature. And yet, when Noemí learns the truth about High Place, she asks Francis why she should trust him. He responds that he can no longer pretend everything is fine; Noemí has changed him, and he can't overlook his family's wrongdoing anymore. The novel thus implies that love is capable of remaking a person's nature into something kinder.

COLONIALISM

The Doyles are a European family who moved to Mexico for the twin purposes of mining silver and harvesting mushrooms that grow in the cave under High Place. In each case, they're reaping natural resources from the land for their own wealth and power, and they do this at the expense of the local population. Howard Doyle, the family patriarch, refers to the miners who worked for him as mulch—just as mulch is used to improve the soil so that plants may grow, Howard mercilessly abuses the locals who work in his mine so that he can grow rich from the silver that's extracted. To him the miners are an expendable resource—like mulch. No one knows how many have died under his rule, for no one has ever cared to count. Howard, with his beliefs about superior and inferior races, is a stand-in for old imperial colonizers who thrived from the theft of indigenous resources. His immortality creates a cycle of violence and bigotry that keeps old, racist ideologies alive. Though he claims that High Place has provided wealth and jobs to the people of El Triunfo, his cruel mining operation left the town dependent on the Doyle family's money. Once the mining ends, everything falls into a state of disrepair. Finally, the person who puts an end to Howard's long reign is an urban, multiracial woman with liberal and progressive ideas. Noemí's triumph at the end of the novel represents a long-awaited justice—the colonized have finally overthrown the colonizer, though the fact that at the end of the novel Noemí and Francis still fear the lingering threat of Howard Doyle underlines just how difficult it is to completely move on from the exploitative terrors of colonialism.

LIFE, DEATH, AND REBIRTH

Immortality in the novel does not come without a cost. Howard Doyle, for instance, chooses to bury his wife alive and let a powerful fungus slowly grow through her body—all because this will grant him immortality. Thus, his immortality is built from a central act of violence against a woman's body. And though Agnes's body is preserved in the chamber underneath the Doyle crypt, the Doyles are instructed never to look at it. Their continued survival requires an ignorance of their family crimes—they persist in their mansion while below them Agnes screams in agony. Furthermore, the Doyles ritually murder and ingest children in order to grow closer to the fungus that keeps them alive. It is not just that their immortality was founded on a horrifying act of violence, then, but also that violence is an inherent part of the cycle of rebirth, in which the old must consume the young in order to stay alive. What's more, the fact that old people like Howard never die ultimately prevents any change or the introduction of new ideas, and that's why High Place adheres to outdated and narrow-minded views on gender and race. The novel essentially suggests that change is a necessary part of human evolution, and Howard's cycle of rebirth prevents that. Though Howard is immortal, his world—High Place—is a crumbling, outdated mansion that lacks modern amenities like electricity and hot baths. His persistence has stunted change and progress, which necessitate the death of old ideas and conventions. In a way, then, the book suggests that change and death are fundamental parts of existence that ultimately make life worth living—after all, what's the point of having the kind of immortality Howard has, if it means living in such despicable conditions?

SYMBOLS

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

THE OUROBOROS

The ouroboros is a circular symbol meant to represent the cycle of death and rebirth, but the novel complicates this simple meaning by depicting how old, recycled ideas can be harmful to societal progress. Howard Doyle chose the ouroboros as his family's crest, and the image of a serpent eating its own tail can be found throughout High Place. It's obvious that Howard chose the symbol because his own immortality relies on cycles of death and rebirth, where infants are consumed in order to fuel the rebirth of Howard's consciousness in a new body after his current one dies. But Howard's continuous revival means that his antiquated ideology also persists. He believes in a pseudoscience known as eugenics, which concludes that certain races have superior genetic traits when compared to other races. He also believes that a woman's duty lies solely in marriage and childbirth. Howard's immortality ensures the survival of these racist, sexist, and hateful beliefs, and numerous characters in the novel suffer or die because of them. Thus, though immortality can seem desirable, the ouroboros comes to symbolize something darker: a cyclical invulnerability to change and progress that stunts new ideas and preserves old prejudices.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Del Ray edition of *Mexican Gothic* published in 2021.

Chapter 1 Quotes

Noemí, like any good socialite, shopped at the Palacio de Hierro, painted her lips with Elizabeth Arden lipstick, owned a couple of very fine furs, spoke English with remarkable ease, courtesy of the nuns at Monserrat—a private school, of course—and was expected to devote her time to the twin pursuits of leisure and husband hunting. Therefore, to her father, any pleasant activity must also involve the acquisition of a spouse. That is, she should never have fun for the sake of having fun, but only as a way to obtain a husband.

Related Characters: Noemí Taboada (speaker), Noemí's Father

Related Themes:

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

When Noemí's father summons her home from the costume party, Noemí assumes it's because he disapproves of her date, Hugo. Noemí likes Hugo because he's handsome and fun, even if he wouldn't make a suitable husband. She knows that this is a point of contention for her father, who believes that Noemí should only date men whom she would potentially marry. Her father's beliefs match the conventions of upper-class Mexican society in the 1950s, where, this quote explains, women were expected to devote their time to finding a husband, following a simple path from debutante to wife. Things like owning nice clothes, wearing makeup, and attending a girls' school are all subsidiary expectations of a young woman.

Noemí subverts society's (and her father's) expectations by seeking fun for fun's sake—she values her own experience and happiness more than she values convention. That may seem normal to a modern reader, but in this time and setting it's highly unconventional. Additionally, this quote begins to explain why Noemí is susceptible to Virgil's charm throughout the novel. Virgil is very much like Hugo: he's attractive and wealthy, even if his personality is lacking. In a society that so represses what women can do and dictates who they should be with, Noemí's decision to pursue men like Hugo is an assertion of her autonomy. To put it another way, to desire these men is unconventional and rebellious, and Noemí frequently flaunts convention as a way to establish her independence.

Chapter 2 Quotes

"You'll see it. It's all very English. Um, that's what Uncle Howard wanted, a little piece of England. He even brought European earth here."

Related Characters: Francis (speaker), Howard Doyle, Noemí Taboada

Related Themes:

Page Number: 18

Explanation and Analysis

Francis explains the history of High Place to Noemí as they drive toward the house. The Doyles are a colonial mining family. They used indigenous labor to operate their silver mine, filling their own pockets with the wealth from the mine while the town stayed in disrepair. Howard's

insistence on making his home English, even going so far as to bring over English dirt, begins to reveal his prejudice towards Mexican culture. That Howard never goes into town and forbids anyone from speaking Spanish in High Place demonstrates his refusal to participate in the local culture. Indeed, it seems that he even finds Mexican dirt too poor to walk on. This is ironic, given that the resources extracted from Mexican dirt are what made Howard and his family rich.

Chapter 3 Quotes

"What are your thoughts on the intermingling of superior and inferior types?" he asked, ignoring her discomfort.

Noemi felt the eyes of all the family members on her. Her presence was a novelty and an alteration to their patterns. An organism introduced into a sterile environment. They waited to hear what she revealed and to analyze her words. Well, let them see that she could keep her cool.

Related Characters: Howard Doyle (speaker), Noemí Taboada

Related Themes:

Page Number: 30

Explanation and Analysis

Noemí eats her first meal at High Place, and almost immediately after Howard enters the room he begins talking about eugenics. Eugenics is a now defunct science that sought to improve the human species by arranging reproduction so that the most genetically desirable traits were passed down. Racism is a consequence of such thinking, as the action of labeling some genetic traits as more worthy than others leads to the conclusion that certain races are superior to others. Howard makes his position as a white supremacist clear from the start, and it's unclear whether he's genuinely interested in what Noemí has to say or if he's just trying to rattle her. Either way, eugenics underpins many of the Doyles' thoughts and behaviors— even characters like Francis struggle to expand their thinking beyond the limited scope of eugenics. Howard is the family's patriarch, so it's significant that he's the first character to introduce eugenics in the novel. If Howard so fervently believes it, the reader can assume that he's brainwashed his descendants to believe in the science, too.

Noemí demonstrates incredible poise by maintaining a cool demeanor throughout this exchange. She knows that the Doyles are watching her, and she knows too that women are often stereotyped as overly emotional. Thus, her commitment to remain composed and her reply to Howard's question (in which she cites famous sociologists) refutes this stereotype and establishes her as an intelligent woman capable of rebuffing men in a debate.

It was the kind of thing she imagined impressing her cousin: an old house atop a hill, with mist and moonlight, like an etching out of a Gothic novel. *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*, those were Catalina's sort of books.

Related Characters: Noemí Taboada (speaker), Catalina

Related Themes:

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

Virgil tells Noemí that Catalina thinks High Place is romantic, and Noemí reflects that yes, Catalina has always liked Gothic novels. This metafictional passage draws attention to the genre of the novel. *Mexican Gothic* is, unsurprisingly, a Gothic novel. Many of the classic tropes of Gothic novels are introduced in this book's first few chapters: the old mansion on top of a hill, the damsel-in-distress, dreams/omens, the autocratic male villain, and mystery. Yet, this novel does not merely attempt to fit within the boundaries of the Gothic genre; it also seeks to challenge the limitations of these familiar tropes. In the first chapter Catalina is positioned as the damsel-in-distress, yet it's not a man that's sent to rescue her (as is typical of Gothic novels) but Noemí. From the outset, then, this novel tries to upend Gothic tropes by interrogating gender dynamics, and it continues to do so throughout.

Chapter 4 Quotes

"It's more fun driving without the hood on. It makes your hair look movie-star perfect. Also, it gives you ideas, you think better," she said, running a hand through her wavy hair jokingly. Noemi's father said she cared too much about her looks and parties to take school seriously, as if a woman could not do two things at once.

Related Characters: Noemí Taboada (speaker), Noemí's Father

Related Themes:

Page Number: 42

Explanation and Analysis

Noemí and Francis go on a walk together, and they ask each other about their personal lives and what they like to do. In this passage Noemí expresses a type of duality to her actions: she likes driving with the car hood down because it both makes her look pretty and gives her ideas. Throughout the novel Noemí pays careful attention to what she wears and the way she looks. Most men (like Noemí's father) make a sexist assumption that women who focus on their appearance cannot also focus on other things, like studies. But Noemí reveals that she does both, often at the same time. Being pretty does not mean that you can't be intelligent.

In fact, Noemí embodies both conventionally masculine and conventionally feminine forms of power. Though higher education at this time is generally restricted to men, Noemí demonstrates a capability to debate with educated men and an ability to interact with scholarly material. But she also knows how to dress well and charm men, flirting with them to get what she wants. In sum, that Noemí demonstrates both conventionally masculine and conventionally feminine forms of power reveals the prejudice inherent in assigning gender to forms of power at all.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ He reminded her of a fellow she'd danced with at a party the previous summer. They had been having fun, briskly stepping to a danzón, and then came time for the ballads. During "Some Enchanted Evening" the man held her far too tightly and tried to kiss her. She turned her head, and when she looked at him again there was pure, dark mockery across his features.

Noemí stared back at Virgil, and he stared at her with that same sort of mockery: a bitter, ugly stare.

Related Characters: Noemí Taboada (speaker), Virgil

Related Themes:

Page Number: 55

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs as Noemí discusses with Virgil the possibility of Catalina being evaluated by a psychiatric specialist. Virgil becomes irritated by Noemí's insistence, because men like him are used to women doing as they're told. As Florence has already explained, silence is the rule in this house, and what Virgil expects from Noemí is silent obedience. Noemí is unwilling to do that—she resists Virgil's authority by advocating for what she believes is best for Catalina.

The dancer stares at Noemí because he, like Virgil, thinks that women should do just as men want them to. A woman that does otherwise—who stands up for herself—is worthy of mockery. This is why Noemí often uses subversive or quiet methods of getting what she wants. While assertive men are celebrated, assertive women are ridiculed.

❝ The woman raised a gloved hand and pointed at Noemí, and she opened her mouth, but having no mouth since her face was a golden blur, no words came out.

Noemí had not felt scared. Now until now. But this, the woman attempting to speak, it made her indescribably afraid.

Related Characters: Noemí Taboada (speaker), Agnes

Related Themes:

Page Number: 56

Explanation and Analysis

On her third night, Noemí has a nightmare about the golden woman. Silence is an oppressive tool used in High Place to ensure obedience, so the fact that this horrific figure is silenced signifies that she too is somehow oppressed. It's telling that Noemí is not afraid of the creature herself; rather, what scares her is the condition of silence that's been imposed on the woman— Noemí's afraid of the horrific effects of sexist oppression, not the wronged women.

One recurring question in this novel is how to respond to oppression and trauma. Some characters, like Francis, respond by ignoring the problem—Francis has moral objections to what his family does, but he doesn't do anything to change it. Other characters, like Ruth and Noemí, fight against the oppression and work to help the victims affected by it. This nightmare shows that Noemí recognizes how terrible oppression is, positioning her as someone who's willing to work to undo it.

Chapter 7 Quotes

"These are my wives," Howard said. "Agnes passed away shortly after our arrival to this region[…] It was a long time ago. But she has not been forgotten. Her spirit lives on in High Place. And there, the one on the right, that is my second wife. Alice. She was fruitful. A woman's function is to preserve the family line. The children, well, Virgil is the only one left, but she did her duty and she did it well."

Related Characters: Howard Doyle (speaker), Agnes

Related Themes:

Page Number: 75

Explanation and Analysis

Noemí is brought to visit Howard in his bedroom, and she asks about the two oil paintings hanging over the fireplace. This passage is Howard's response. He very explicitly demonstrates his sexism by claiming that childbearing is a woman's only duty. His sexism is likely an outgrowth of his commitment to eugenics; he studies a science which argues that genetically superior people can be arranged through selective breeding, so it's unsurprising that he also thinks that women are useful only if they can breed. Eugenics, then, has two prejudiced ideologies which stem from it: both sexism and racism, each of which is clearly discernible in the history of High Place.

Strangely, there's an equivalence that can be drawn between Howard, the novel's main villain, and Noemí's own parents. Howard believes that a woman's role is to bear children, and Noemí's parents believe that a woman should spend her time trying to find a husband, not studying for graduate school. In each case a woman's value is determined externally (by a child or by a husband), and Noemí's actions throughout the novel refute these valuations. Instead, her defiance of convention can be seen as her method of asserting her own, individual value.

Chapter 8 Quotes

"I have seen the world, and in seeing it I've noticed people seem bound to their vices. Take a walk around any tenement and you'll see the same sort of faces, the same sort of expressions on those faces, and the same sort of people. You can't remove whatever taint they carry with hygiene campaigns. There are fit and unfit people."

Related Characters: Virgil (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 89

Explanation and Analysis

Virgil gives Noemí a tour of High Place's greenhouse, and the conversation turns to Howard's theories on eugenics. Virgil and his father believe that people have predetermined natures, and in the above passage Virgil explains this view. He argues that unfit people, criminals or the poor, have certain physical characteristics that are common among them. The same is true of fit people.

First, one can easily see that his argument contains a thinly disguised racist ideology. Virgil and his father are white supremacists, and though they never say that plainly, it's theories like this that make their position clear. He argues that unfit people share physical characteristics, or "taint," as he calls it. One hardly needs an imagination to guess that Virgil is referring to skin color. Second, this theory about predetermined natures is put to the test by the novel (and in the end, proven wrong). For example, if Virgil's theory was true, it would be impossible for Ruth to have been capable of murder, since the Doyles have been inbreeding to maintain their supposed genetic superiority. Or, if it was possible, then certainly Ruth would have had some physical characteristic that would have given her murderous capacity away—but none of her family members saw it coming, indicating that these theories are quite wrong.

Of course he had a point. Catalina was his wife, and he was the one who could make choices for her. Why, Mexican women couldn't even vote. What could Noemí say? What could she do in such a situation? Perhaps it would be best if her father intervened. If he came down here. A man would command more respect. But no, it was as she said: she wasn't going to back down.

Related Characters: Noemí Taboada (speaker), Virgil, Catalina

Related Themes:

Page Number: 93

Explanation and Analysis

Once again Virgil and Noemí get into an argument about Catalina's healthcare, this time in the greenhouse. Noemí recognizes that Virgil has the legal right to manage Catalina's care however he pleases. In fact, women don't

even have the legal right to vote. There's a connection between these two realizations: in each case women don't have the right to decide their own destiny (Catalina with her healthcare, women in voting). Noemí briefly entertains the idea of inviting her father down because she knows that, as a wealthy man, he'd have more social and legal authority. But Noemí has never been one to submit to convention, apparently even when it's in her favor to do so. She refuses to rely on gender inequality, instead resolving to help Catalina through her own power. The implication of the passage is that, because she's a woman, Noemí has to exert this power without respect—i.e. she'll likely face mockery and ridicule (as demonstrated in an earlier quote).

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ Catalina had told her she expected more. True romance, she said. True feelings. Her cousin had never quite lost that young-girl wonder of the world, her imagination crowded with visions of women greeting passionate lovers by moonlight[…] Noemí wondered if High Place had robbed her of her illusions, or if they were meant to be shattered all along. Marriage could hardly be like the passionate romances one read about in books.

Related Characters: Noemí Taboada (speaker), Catalina

Related Themes:

Page Number: 95

Explanation and Analysis

Noemí walks through the cemetery, which is covered by a light fog, and thinks about Gothic and romance novels. Catalina had very romantic notions about marriage, and she got these notions from the novels that she so loved. Novels primed her to expect a romance that reality could never provide, leaving Catalina disappointed and depressed. *Mexican Gothic* is a Gothic novel, and in a metafictional move, it attempts to address the very problem that Noemí is here identifying. If the problem is Gothic novels setting unrealistic expectations for romance, surely *Mexican Gothic* does not partake. The marriages in High Place feature sexism and abuse; even Francis and Noemí's romance has layers of complication. Francis momentarily betrays Noemí, and though she forgives him, at the end of the novel their relationship is left with a large amount of trauma that will require work to get through. Love in *Mexican Gothic* isn't easy or melodramatic, but it *can* change lives for the better.

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ The Doyles' silver collection was quite staggering, each shelf lined with salvers, tea sets, bowls, and candlesticks that sat dusty and dull behind glass. A lone person could not hope to tackle this whole task alone, but Noemí was determined to prove herself in front of this woman.

Related Characters: Noemí Taboada (speaker), Florence

Related Themes:

Page Number: 113

Explanation and Analysis

Noemí and Francis are in the library when Florence walks in and complains about them being idle. She challenges Noemí by asking her to polish a collection of the Doyles' silver. Florence has been an antagonist to Noemí form the first; she utilizes the small amount of domestic power that she's allowed to enforce conventions and rules, whereas Noemí is constantly bucking up against those rules. Noemí hopes to win the respect of her adversary by polishing the silver. It's noteworthy that this trial takes place within the domestic sphere—the only area where a woman can both win respect and adhere to convention.

Additionally, that Noemí polishes the silver is ironic. First because Noemí is morally repulsed by the way the Doyles treated the indigenous laborers that worked in their mine, yet here she polishes the result of their labor. Second because when Noemí is later forced to marry Francis, she'll dine with the very silver she polishes here.

❝ "When I was younger, I thought the world outside held such promise and wonders. I even went away for a bit and met a dashing young man. I thought he'd take me away, that he would change everything, change me," Florence said, her face softened for the briefest moment. "But there's no denying our natures. I was meant to live and die in High Place. Let Francis be. He's accepted his lot in this life. It's easier this way."

Related Characters: Florence (speaker), Francis

Related Themes:

Page Number: 115

Explanation and Analysis

After Noemí finishes polishing the Doyles' silver, Florence accuses her of trying to manipulate Francis. When Florence talks about her own engagement it sounds quite similar to

Noemí's earlier musings on Catalina's engagement: both women expected their relationship to be romantic and enchanting—and they were both disappointed. Florence hoped to be taken away from High Place, as if she were a maid in a tower being rescued by a knight. She didn't have the power to leave High Place on her own (because Howard had forbidden it), but she hoped that her husband would rescue her. But this reliance on a man led only to disappointment.

Additionally, in the passage Florence demonstrates a commitment to Howard's eugenics-based theories (namely that humans have predetermined natures). And yet, her commitment lacks the enthusiasm and intellectualism that Howard exhibited. It seems like long ago Florence didn't believe in determinism, but she's since stopped resisting her uncle's philosophies because it's "easier" when one gives up. Florence can thus be viewed as a woman who has given up on resisting sexism and instead chosen to live underneath it.

Chapter 13 Quotes

"When the mine was open, he would have been glad to see Catalina married to me. Back then I would have been worthy. He wouldn't have thought me inconsequential. It must still irk him, and you, to know Catalina picked me. Well, I'm no two-bit fortune hunter, I'm a Doyle. It would be good of you to remember that."

Related Characters: Virgil (speaker), Catalina

Related Themes:

Page Number: 146

Explanation and Analysis

Virgil speaks this passage of dialogue as he is reprimanding Noemí for giving Catalina the tincture that caused her to have a seizure. In it, Virgil makes an argument for his worth as a husband, and as a man. That Noemí challenges and subverts his authority makes him feel inadequate, so he tries to re-establish his superiority to Noemí. Virgil also knows that Noemí's father, a wealthy merchant in Mexico City, doesn't respect him either, and that irks him further. Virgil uses two arguments in his attempt to prove his worth. First, he claims that if the silver mine was still in operation, then everyone would respect him. This claim reveals that Virgil believes individual value is derived from wealth and authority, and that he sees the operation of his family's colonial-era mine as a time of greatness, not prejudice and cruelty. Second, Virgil argues that he has worth because of his family name. This reveals both his commitment to the past (his name is valuable because of his family's past actions) and his belief in eugenics (his name is valuable because Doyles are genetically superior people).

Chapter 14 Quotes

"It's the house," Francis murmured[…] "It wasn't made for love, the house."

"Any place is made for love," she protested.

"Not this place and not us. You look back two, three generations, as far as you can. You won't find love. We are incapable of such a thing."

His fingers curled around the intricate iron bars, and he stood there, for a second, looking at the ground, before he opened the gate for her.

Related Characters: Francis, Noemí Taboada (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 154

Explanation and Analysis

Noemí and Francis are in the cemetery, and she asks him what has made Catalina so miserable. Francis's explanation is that the house is not a place for love, and that the Doyles themselves are incapable of feeling love. This demonstrates Francis's own belief in eugenics—certainly not to the extent of Howard or Virgil, but nonetheless, whether Francis is aware or not, Howard's theories have worked their way into his mind. Just like how Virgil believes that the Doyles are genetically superior, Francis believes that the Doyles are incapable of love. The competition between nature and love characterizes Francis and Noemí's relationship, demonstrated by Francis's oscillation between remaining loyal to his family or choosing to side with Noemí. In the end, though, Francis realizes that he loves Noemí and he helps her defeat his family and escape from High Place. This suggests that love is a more powerful force than any genetic or natural inclination. Indeed, even in the above passage, Francis seems to immediately begin to contradict his assertion that he's incapable of love by holding the gate open for Noemí.

Chapter 15 Quotes

He shook his head and set the pen back on the desk. "She's no quack. Many people go to Marta for remedies, and she helps them well enough. If I thought she was endangering the health of the townsfolk I wouldn't allow it."

Related Characters: Dr. Camarillo (speaker), Dr. Cummins

Related Themes:

Page Number: 160

Explanation and Analysis

After Catalina has a seizure, Noemí goes to Dr. Camarillo to ask him about Marta. Marta is the town's healer—she uses herbal remedies to help people who can't afford medicine. Dr. Cummins argued that Marta's tincture was poison, and he called Marta a "quack." Yet, Dr. Cummins shares many of Howard's bigoted opinions, so it's likely that racism, and not medical knowledge, guided Dr. Cummins's statement. Dr. Camarillo offers a different opinion. He recognizes that Marta helps people, and he chooses to coexist with Marta rather than to work against her.

Mexican Gothic is primarily a novel concerned with the past—both its implications for the present and the ways in which the past can be reckoned with and remade into a more progressive, inclusive present. Thus, it's easy to overlook that the past has value, too. Marta's remedies are ancient, and Dr. Camarillo reminds readers that modernity does not need to change everything about the past, but rather find what's worth keeping and coexist with it.

Chapter 16 Quotes

❝ Once could conclude that this was a case of three silly, nervous women. Physicians of old would have diagnosed it as hysterics. But one thing Noemí was not was hysterical.

Related Characters: Noemí Taboada (speaker), Ruth, Catalina

Related Themes:

Page Number: 173

Explanation and Analysis

Catalina gives Noemí a letter from Ruth's diary, and though Noemí knows that something strange is happening in the house, she can't prove anything. Noemí knows that physicians used to diagnose women with any type of mental disorder or discordant behavior with the umbrella term "female hysteria," and she's actively working against that stereotype. If Noemí wrote her father and told him that she was having visions and seeing ghosts, he would likely think her hysterical—or "melodramatic," as he called Catalina in the novel's first chapter. Indeed, the issue of believing women has been a preoccupation of this novel from the beginning. Noemí sees herself, Ruth, and Catalina as a trio of women who've experienced abuse, but their stories seem ludicrous. At this point in time men hold all the power in society, so if Noemí appeals for help it must be to a man—and she fears that any man would find her hysterical. Thus, Noemí searches for a logical explanation of the things that she's experiencing, and this search nearly ends up getting her killed. While the novel does not argue that men should believe the literal interpretation of every woman's claim, it does make the point that simply dismissing women's seemingly unbelievable claims can result in them being placed in a position of even greater danger.

Chapter 17 Quotes

❝ She did not wish to blush in front of him. To turn crimson like an idiot in front of a man who wielded such meticulous hostility toward her. But she thought of his mouth on hers and his hands on her thighs, like it had been in the dream, and an electric thrill ran down her spine. That night, that dream, it had felt like desire, danger, and scandals, and all the secrets her body and her eager mind quietly coveted.

Related Characters: Noemí Taboada (speaker), Virgil

Related Themes:

Page Number: 187

Explanation and Analysis

Noemí has a nightmare in which Virgil sexually assaults her, and when she wakes up, she finds that she has sleepwalked into Virgil's bedroom. Virgil questions her about the content of her dream, and as much as she doesn't want to, Noemí becomes embarrassed. As an upper-class woman Noemí would have experienced a great amount of sexual repression—her reputation depends on maintaining the image of a chaste, pure maiden. This repression makes her ill-prepared to deal with someone like Virgil, who uses Noemí's inexperience as a way to manipulate her. Furthermore, in her sexual interactions with Virgil Noemí always feels a mixture of repulsion and desire. She's repelled (obviously) by the assault, but she also feels some desire for the perpetrator. Sexual assault can be a complicated experience for the victim, and the fact that any amount of information about sex has been withheld from Noemí in the interest of keeping her pure only serves to make these experiences more complex.

Chapter 20 Quotes

Et Verbum caro factum est.

She knew what she had not properly seen in her previous dreams, and she did not wish to see now, but there it was. The knife and the child. Noemí closed her eyes, but even behind her eyelids she saw it all, crimson and black and the child torn apart and they were *eating* him.

Related Characters: Noemí Taboada (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 217

Explanation and Analysis

After Howard spits bile down Noemí's throat, she has a vision in the gloom that depicts the Doyles' ritual murder and ingestion of infant children. The Latin phrase *Et Verbum caro factum est* translates to "the word made flesh" and refers to God becoming flesh with the birth of Jesus Christ. Howard's ritual is a perversion of the Christian ritual of communion. During communion, believers consume a piece of bread and some wine as a symbol of Christ's body and blood being broken on the cross when he was crucified. The ritual serves as a reminder that Christ died so that Christians may achieve eternal life in heaven.

There are many parallels between that ceremony and the one depicted in Noemí's nightmare, though Howard's ritual is much more horrific. Instead of eating a symbolic reminder of Christ's flesh, the Doyles consume the actual flesh of Howard's descendants. They believe that Howard is a god, so these infants are a stand-in for Christ, the son of God. This flesh grants the Doyles eternal life, but unlike the Christian ritual, it comes at the cost of consuming the young—or, symbolically speaking, the future.

Chapter 21 Quotes

"There's a cicada fungus. *Massospora cicadina*. I remember reading a journal article which discussed its appearance: the fungus sprouts along the abdomen of the cicada. It turns it into a mass of yellow powder. The journal said the cicadas, which had been so grossly infected, were still 'singing,' as their body was consumed from within. Singing, calling for a mate, half-dead. Can you imagine?" Francis said. "You're right, I do have a choice. I'm not going to end my life singing a tune, pretending everything is fine."

Related Characters: Francis (speaker), Noemí Taboada

Related Themes:

Page Number: 232

Explanation and Analysis

Francis offers to help Noemí escape from High Place, and she demands to know why she should trust him after he's betrayed her. In his response, he tells her about a fungus that kills cicadas from within, even as they continue to sing for mates. This is a metaphor for the Doyles; the fungus lives and grows in High Place, and the Doyles consume children in order to bond more closely to the fungus. The fungus does not kill them in a bodily sense; rather, Francis implies that the family's focus on the fungus (and its effect, immortality) has killed their sense of morality. The Doyles are so isolated that they're able to continue to pretend that their actions aren't morally despicable—that is, until Noemí arrives. By building a deep relationship with Francis, Noemí challenges his moral complacency. Though Francis earlier claimed that Doyles are incapable of love, it is in fact love for Noemí that spurs Francis from his complacency and motivates him to help Noemí and Catalina escape.

Noemí clacked her teeth together in fear and thought to cry too, but then she recalled the words, the mantra.

"Open your eyes," Noemí said.

And Noemí did. She opened her eyes, and the room was dark.

Related Characters: Noemí Taboada (speaker), Ruth

Related Themes:

Page Number: 234

Explanation and Analysis

As Noemí prepares for her escape, she enters the gloom and asks Ruth for advice about how to defeat Howard. The dream ends with Ruth tearing herself apart on the floor, but this time Noemí is able to wake herself from the dream by using Ruth's mantra (previously she's had to rely on Ruth's voice to awaken from her nightmares). Ruth has served as a model of feminine resistance for almost the whole novel—her prior battle with Howard established her as a woman who fought against the patriarchy. This passage is a moment of elevation for Noemí; before this she had to rely on Ruth's help, but now she's ready to take the fight to Howard herself. This is demonstrated by the internalization of Ruth's often repeated mantra: "open your eyes." The mantra is a call to action—a signal to both literally wake up

from a nightmare and to metaphorically "wake up" to the violence and prejudice that dominate life at High Place.

Chapter 23 Quotes

❝ It wasn't ugly. That wasn't what repulsed her. But it seemed to her it represented the youthful fancies of another girl, of a dead girl. Perhaps two girls. Had Virgil's first wife worn this too?

It reminded her of an abandoned snake's skin. Howard would slough off his own skin, would sink into a new body, like a blade entering warm flesh. Ouroboros.

Related Characters: Noemí Taboada (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 247

Explanation and Analysis

Florence brings Noemí an old family wedding dress shortly before Noemí is supposed to marry Francis. Though Noemí has witnessed many horrific visions, what has always inspired terror in her is seeing the effects of female oppression (like when she was horrified that the golden woman couldn't speak, for example). Thus, it's consistent with her character that when she sees this dress, which has long been used in the marriages of Doyle women, she is repulsed not by its appearance but by the history of oppression that's associated with the dress. She knows that young women have been forced to marry men against their will, only to give birth to children that are murdered or be murdered themselves. The dress is a symbol of sexism and oppression, which is why it's so significant that Noemí is wearing this dress when she later shoots Howard and escapes from High Place. Symbolically, it means that Noemí is exacting revenge for all the women that Howard has wronged, and by fleeing High Place with the dress on, she perhaps allows their spirits to rest peacefully at last.

Furthermore, this passage adds a layer of complexity to the ouroboros as a symbol. Previously the ouroboros had been a symbol for death and rebirth—namely in the context of Howard's immortality. But by comparing the dress to a snakeskin, this passage makes it explicit that women have experienced cyclical suffering as a result of Howard's immortality. The ouroboros is hence made to symbolize both Howard's immortality and its consequence: a repeating pattern of abused women.

Chapter 25 Quotes

❝ He would die, he would slide into a new body, and Francis would cease to exist. A demented cycle. Children devoured as babes, children devoured as adults. Children are but food. Food for a cruel god.

Related Characters: Noemí Taboada (speaker), Howard Doyle

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 270

Explanation and Analysis

Noemí watches in horror as Howard recites the ritual for his transmigration into Francis's body. This passage presents Howard's immortality in explicitly heinous terms. His long life is fueled by the consumption of children, and a consequence of his immortality is a lack of progress or change. High Place and its inhabitants are full of racist, sexist, and other bigoted ideas from the colonial era. Howard himself is a colonizer, and his immortal presence in High Place keeps these ideas alive and thriving. Progress necessitates the acceptance of new ideas, but Howard eats the young and doesn't allow his family to leave High Place, so there's no chance for new ideas to take root. The past survives, but at the cost of the future. It's fitting that Noemí is the person who shoots and ultimately kills Howard. In many ways she is the antithesis of the prejudiced ideas that thrive in High Place—she's a cosmopolitan woman of mixed ancestry who plans on attending graduate school.

Chapter 26 Quotes

❝ "Can you go on?"

"I think so," he said. "I'm not sure. If I faint—"

"We can stop for a minute," she offered.

"No, it's fine," he said.

"Lean on me. Come on."

"You're hurt."

"So are you."

He hesitated, but did rest a hand on her shoulder, and they walked together, with Catalina ahead of them.

Related Characters: Francis, Noemí Taboada (speaker), Catalina

Related Themes:

Page Number: 279

Explanation and Analysis

This exchange of dialogue takes place as Francis, Catalina, and Noemí walk through the tunnels beneath High Place during their escape. Earlier in the novel Noemí resolved that she would carry Francis out if she had to, and here we see her doing nearly that. *Mexican Gothic* interacts with many classic tropes of the Gothic genre, and here the novel refuses to allow either of its heroines to be rescued or classified as damsels-in-distress. Indeed, the three characters (Noemí, Catalina, and Francis) participate equally in the escape attempt, which would not have succeeded were it not for the actions of each of them, individually. Francis planned it all and saved them from Florence, Catalina interrupted the transmigration ceremony by stabbing Howard, and Noemí burned Agnes's body, immobilizing Virgil and allowing their escape. Each one of them made the escape possible, which is a much more empowering and inclusive ending than if the women were simply saved by a knight-in-shining-armor.

Chapter 27 Quotes

❝ The future, she thought, could not be predicted, and the shape of things could not be divined. To think otherwise was absurd. But they were young that morning, and they could cling to hope. Hope that the world could be remade, kinder and sweeter. So she kissed him a second time, for luck. When he looked at her again his face was filled with such an extraordinary gladness, and the third time she kissed him it was for love.

Related Characters: Noemí Taboada (speaker), Francis

Related Themes:

Page Number: 301

Explanation and Analysis

This passage closes the novel, as Noemí and Francis lay in bed together after escaping from High Place. The cycle of endless devouring and abuse has been broken—and it's been broken by love. Though Francis claimed that the Doyles were incapable of love (and Florence claimed that it was against Francis's nature to leave High Place), here he lies, kissing Noemí for love. The final message of the novel, it seems, is that love conquers prejudice and violence, if only one is willing to wake from their moral complacency and examine the world with empathy. And yet, the novel keeps itself from becoming overly romantic at the end—from using the cliché "happily ever after" ending. For it's not clear if Noemí and Francis will live happily ever after. They have an incredible amount of trauma to work through, so much so that Noemí is afraid to sleep on account of the nightmares that she may experience. Everything is not suddenly okay; there is much pain and horror to be dealt with, but, if what the novel promises is true, love may just get them through it.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

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

CHAPTER 1

There's an opulent costume party at the Tuñóns' house, and everyone plans to celebrate late into the night. These parties happen regularly enough that the chauffeurs know not to stand outside pointlessly waiting; instead, they huddle together to smoke and swap stories, or else seek out street food or nearby maids they have a crush on. After all, they know that no one will leave the party until after one in the morning.

The novel begins at an extravagant costume party in the home of a wealthy family. A description of the party is immediately juxtaposed with a description of the chauffeurs—working-class people who are expected to wait outside all night while their employers revel in opulence. There is an extreme wealth gap depicted here, and the protagonist, Noemí, will soon be introduced as part of the wealthy elite. This mirrors the wealth gap present in El Triunfo, which will later be portrayed in Chapter Two.

One couple leaves the party very early, breaking convention. Their driver cannot be found, so they must walk into the city to find a taxi. The man, Hugo Duarte, carries a papier-mâché horse head as part of his costume. The woman, Noemí, told Hugo to dress as a horse so that they could win the costume contest together, but she changed her costume at the last moment. She decided that she didn't want to dress as a jockey, but she never bothered to tell Hugo that.

Noemí is introduced as a convention-breaker. Not only does she leave the party early, but also her original costume was a jockey—an occupation that women were excluded from at this time. That Noemí doesn't tell Hugo about her costume change reveals an inconsiderate self-determinism as well.

Noemí's costume change has irritated Hugo, but she didn't choose to go out with him for his personality—or for his social status or intelligence, for that matter. Noemí wants Hugo because he is attractive; it's that simple.

Noemí demonstrates her disregard for the traditional things that a woman is supposed to look for when she chooses a man in this era. She dates Hugo simply because she wants to—quite a progressive motivation for a wealthy young woman in the 1950s.

The taxi arrives at Noemí's house. Hugo asks her for a kiss before the taxi pulls away, but Noemí refuses him. She goes inside, directly to her father's office, and enters without knocking. Her father sits at his desk, and Noemí throws herself down into a chair and loudly sighs. She doesn't like being summoned home early.

Noemí's refusal to kiss Hugo demonstrates a confident independence, as does walking into her father's office without knocking. Time and again Noemí butts up against masculine authority—something she'll continue to do throughout the novel.

Noemí assumes that her father summoned her back from the party because he found out that she was with Hugo. Her father doesn't approve of Hugo and thinks that Noemí wants to marry him. Noemi does everything that's expected of a good socialite: she shops at a fancy department store, she speaks English (thanks to an education at a private Catholic school), and she dresses well before going out, so everybody assumes that she's devoted to the twin pursuits of leisure and husband-hunting.

At this time in Mexico women had few career opportunities. A wealthy woman like Noemí would be expected to maintain a robust social life as a method of finding a husband. Whether this man is suitable, of course, is determined by the father. Thus, that Noemí dates Hugo with no intention of marrying him—and against her father's wishes—is extremely unconventional.

Noemí's father admits that he didn't summon her because of Hugo. Before he tells her the truth, however, Noemí has to swear not to repeat any of what she's about to hear—not to anyone. Noemí agrees, and her father tells her about a letter he received from Noemí's cousin, Catalina, a few weeks ago. In the letter, Catalina made wild assertions about her husband, Virgil Doyle, so Noemí's father wrote to Virgil in an attempt to get to the root of the matter.

The letter from Catalina sets the action of the novel in motion. It's telling that Noemí's father writes to Virgil in order to "get to the root of the matter". His attitude seems dismissive of Catalina's claims, revealing a bias against women.

Virgil and Noemí's father write back and forth. Virgil claims that Catalina has been behaving oddly, but she has been improving lately. Noemí's father insists that Catalina should come to Mexico City (where Noemí and her father live) and seek professional help. Virgil refuses, saying that professional help isn't necessary.

While the true state of Catalina's mind is still in doubt, it should be noted that two men are deciding her fate without her input. In contrast to Noemí, who consistently subverts male authority, Catalina is here dominated by it.

Noemí's father hands her the latest telegram from Virgil. In it, Virgil invites Noemí to visit Catalina. The train does not often run through their town, but there is one that departs from Mexico City tomorrow. Noemí's father encourages her to go. It could be that Catalina is just exaggerating, since she's always had a tendency towards the melodramatic. And after all, this is a matter best handled by a woman.

Again Noemí's father is dismissive of Catalina's claims. Though Catalina has alleged that her spouse abuses her, Noemí's father seems much more willing to believe that Catalina is exaggerating.

Noemí doesn't think it's fair for her father to label Catalina as melodramatic. She asks to see the letter that Catalina wrote. In the letter, Catalina claims that Virgil is poisoning her, that their house is sick with rot, that she's imprisoned in the house, and that she sees ghosts. She asks Noemí to come and save her, because she cannot save herself.

Noemi resists her father's easy disregard of Catalina's claims. Rather than rely on either man's version of the story, she wants to read Catalina's words for herself. In the letter Catalina makes numerous allegations of abuse—though the writing does become nonsensical as it goes on. Moreno-Garcia seems to position Catalina as a damsel in distress, a common trope in Gothic novels. The key difference here is that the damsel's savior is Noemí, another woman.

Noemí finds Catalina's letter disconcerting. She realizes that it's been a while since she's spoken to her cousin—in fact, nobody in her family has spoken to Catalina much lately. They've all assumed she's enjoying her time as a newlywed and is too busy to write. Still, Noemí recognizes that the letter is very uncharacteristic of Catalina.

Catalina withdrew from her family after her marriage to Virgil. At this point it's unclear what prompted this; it could have been the family's icy reception of Catalina's engagement, or it could be Virgil's doing. Noemí in particular has lost much of her former intimacy with her cousin.

After Noemí finishes the letter, her father confesses that he doesn't trust Virgil. He thinks that they married too quickly, without proper forethought. Noemí admits that her father has a point: Catalina was sending wedding invitations only a few weeks after meeting Virgil.

The speed of Catalina and Doyle's engagement casts some doubt on the state of their marriage. Because Catalina's parents had passed away, Noemí's father felt that he should have had more control over who Catalina married.

Noemí pleads with her father to believe Catalina. She met Virgil briefly, and remembers that he was handsome and polite, but still, she doesn't trust him. Her father responds by pointing out that Catalina, in addition to her allegations of abuse, claimed that ghosts walked through the walls of her home. That doesn't sound too credible, does it?

Though Noemí's father is certainly quick to discredit Catalina's letter, he does have a point. This is not just an issue of he-said, she-said; Catalina is seeing ghosts, suggesting that she's in some way mentally unfit.


Noemí's father reveals that Virgil's family had run out of money by the time he married Catalina. If they were to divorce, Catalina's money would go, too. Noemí's father calls Virgil a "stranger," explaining that he doesn't know what lengths Virgil is willing to go to in order to maintain access to Catalina's accounts. For all he knows, Catalina is tied to a bed and being fed gruel.

This passage suggests a financial motivation for Virgil, if there is in fact something amiss. It also reiterates how little Catalina's family knows about the man.

Noemí's father asks her to visit her cousin, assess the situation, and attempt to convince Virgil to move Catalina to Mexico City if the situation calls for it. He tells her that she needs to take the first available train to El Triunfo—which leaves Monday morning. If she does this, her father will give her permission to enroll in a master's program at National University.

One of Noemí's father's criticisms of his daughter is that she is flighty; she fails to remain committed to any singular goal. So, he suggests one for her: to go on this quest to El Triunfo and save her cousin. He believes that this is an opportunity for his daughter to grow into a more determined person.

Noemí's parents allowed her to get a bachelor's degree at Feminine University of Mexico, but they balked when she asked if she could pursue a master's degree in anthropology at the National University. Her parents saw this as a waste of time—the silly notions of a modern girl. Girls are supposed to follow a simple cycle, her mother explained, from debutante to wife. Studying further would just be a delay in the cycle—like remaining a chrysalis inside a cocoon.

At this time in Mexico, it was uncommon for a woman to obtain a higher education. As Noemí's mother explained, it was at odds with their expected path in life: young socialite to wife to mother to widow. Calling Noemí a "chrysalis" insinuates that a woman achieves perfection only with marriage and childbirth.

In disbelief, Noemí asks her father if he is serious. He affirms, explaining that he doesn't want a divorce to stain the family name, and that Catalina has already had her share of misfortune—her parents died while she was young, and early in life she had a broken engagement which caused much strife and hurt feelings. Noemí agrees to go see Catalina. She realizes that she knows very little about the place she's going or the people she'll meet there. Nonetheless, she'll show her father the dedication he wants.

The promise of an education motivates Noemí to agree to visit Catalina, which displays a small amount of selfishness despite Noemí's evident concern for her cousin. That Catalina lived with Noemí after her parents died suggests they used to be quite close.

CHAPTER 2

When Noemí was a little girl, Catalina would read fairy tales to her. In the stories, the forest was a magic and unfamiliar place—a place where Hansel and Gretel tossed breadcrumbs, or Little Red Riding Hood met a wolf. Living in Mexico City, Noemí had never seen a forest, not even when her family vacationed at her grandmother's house by the sea. So, when the train pulls into El Triunfo, the town seems especially wild to her. Deep ravines, rugged ridges, and rushing rivers loom outside the compartment window.

Noemí is out of her element in a place like El Triunfo; her only experience with nature has been in resorts while on vacation. In this regard she is similar to the Doyles, who remain in their lofty estate and hardly deign to visit the town below.

The train arrives at a deserted, ramshackle station. Noemí sees three underfed boys playing near the station, and she offers them some money to carry her suitcases. They do so gladly. There's a single automobile parked at the station, a preposterously large vehicle that makes Noemí think of swanky silent film stars from decades past. Upon closer inspection, though, she sees that the car is actually dated and quite dirty—a relic from the past.

The Doyles' car stands out; compared to the ramshackle state of the town, the car seems luxurious. Yet, upon closer inspection, the car is actually old and deteriorated. This is the first clue confirming the state of the Doyles' finances.

A fair-haired, pale man steps out of the vehicle. Noemí introduces herself and the man says that he is Francis Doyle, sent by Uncle Howard (the patriarch of the Doyle family) to pick her up. He asks many questions in quick succession, seemingly preferring not to make any statements about himself. He loads Noemí's suitcases in the car, and they drive off together.

Here it's made clear that the Doyles are white, so one can assume that their presence in El Triunfo is a result of colonialism. Additionally. Francis is shy and reserved, a stark contrast to Noemí.

Driving through El Triunfo, Noemí notes the musty odor of the dilapidated town. Sadly, the condition of the town is not unusual. Many former mining towns that operated under colonial rule saw their work come to an end after the War of Independence. One could still find finely built chapels in these places, built when money was plentiful. Now, however, the buildings are falling apart, and the town appears largely empty.

El Triunfo is a former colonial mining town. Its current state shows that these towns were not set up to be sustainable—Europeans came and extracted wealth from the land for themselves, and only invested in things like churches, which had little use when the mining came to an end.

Despite the condition of the town and the end of the mine's operation, the Doyles linger here. Francis drives the car up a narrow road, climbing higher and higher into the mountains. Fog covers the area, intensifying as they drive. Francis begins to talk about High Place, which is what the Doyles call their home. He says that it's very English, which is exactly what Uncle Howard wanted. Francis asks if Noemí can speak English, because no one at High Place can speak Spanish except for him.

Though the practice of colonialism has come to an end, the Doyles' continued presence represents its lingering effects. That they refuse to speak Spanish displays their disdain for the culture and people that have made them wealthy.

The mist continues to intensify, and Noemi wonders how safe it is to drive on these roads. Francis seems capable, though. He's shy, and Noemí generally doesn't like shy men—but who cares, it's not like she's here to make friends. She speaks to Francis with the voice that she uses at cocktail parties, the one that usually gets her far with people, and he responds exactly as she expects: with a smile.

Here Noemí demonstrates some feminine power. Her history as a socialite has taught her to use her charm to manipulate men, and it works as intended on Francis.

Noemí compares Francis to Virgil, whom she met only briefly. Her mother would have said that Francis needs iron in his diet and a good cut of meat, since he's thin and nearly speaks in whispers. Compared to him, Virgil seems much more physical. He's older than Francis, too.

Just as Noemí does not fit into the mold of a conventional woman, Francis too falls short of conventional masculinity. He's shy and thin, whereas Virgil, his cousin, is debonair and attractive.

The fog is so thick Noemí feels as though they're driving in a bowl of milk. Suddenly, they emerge into a clearing, and the house seems to leap out of the mist to greet them. It looks absolutely Victorian, terribly different than the modern houses in Mexico City. The house looms over them, and Noemí might see it as foreboding if it weren't so tired; there are missing slats in the shudders, and the porch groans under the weight of their steps. Noemí thinks the house is like the abandoned shell of a snail.

Just like the car, the condition of the house reflects the state of the Doyles' finances. They used to possess great wealth, but the end of colonialism has left them as a shell of their former selves.

Francis opens the front door. They walk in, and Noemí sees the grand mahogany staircase, the stained-glass window, and the crystal chandelier, but everything has faded and become less magnificent with age. A woman walks down the stairs and Francis introduces Noemí to her. Noemí walks forward and extends her hand in greeting, but the woman coldly turns away from her and begins walking back up the stairs.

Again the house's former brilliance is emphasized. This woman's cold reception of Noemí marks the beginning of a long conflict between them.

With her back to Noemí, the woman introduces herself as Florence, Howard Doyle's niece and Francis's mother. She explains that she runs High Place—if Noemí needs anything, she should come to her. But they do things a certain way here, and Florence expects Noemí to follow the rules. She explains that the most important rule is to remain quiet so as not to bother Mr. Doyle. Second, Florence is in charge of nursing Catalina, and she needs plenty of rest, so Noemí is not to bother her unnecessarily either. Finally, Noemí is not to wander away from the house; the region is treacherous, and it would be unsafe to venture out.

Florence epitomizes conventional feminine authority. Her power is limited to the domestic sphere, and her first rule displays her subservience to Howard, the patriarch of the family. Still, Florence is determined to exercise the little power that she has.

As they walk through the house, they pass a number of oil portraits on the walls. The faces of long dead Doyles stare at Noemí from across time. Florence stops in front of a door with a crystal knob and tells Noemí that this will be her room. She instructs Noemí that smoking inside will not be tolerated. Noemí steps inside the bedroom and first notices the ancient four-poster bed, complete with curtains that close around it, cocooning the sleeper from the world.

The Doyles seem to revere their ancestors and heritage, and the fact that the faces in the portraits are described as staring at Noemí "across time" indicates to the reader that the past is actually very present in High Place.

Francis sets Noemí's suitcases down while Florence opens a chest. She pulls out a few candles and an ugly candelabra. Florence explains that the electrical lighting in the house is 40 years old, and the small generator they have is not enough to power all the lights in the house. So, they all make do with candles and oil lamps. The boiler doesn't work very well either, so there won't be any hot showers.

The house is a relic of the past—it lacks many of the modern amenities that Noemí is accustomed to.

Noemí insists on seeing Catalina. Florence initially refuses, but Francis interjects, reminding his mother that Noemí has traveled a great distance to see her cousin. Florence seems surprised by her son's interjection, and reluctantly agrees. She leads Noemí to Catalina's bedroom, complete with the same four-poster bed and some oil paintings of England.

Florence's surprise indicates that it's very unnatural for Francis to challenge her authority. Already Noemí seems to be having an effect on him.

Catalina sits in a chair by the window. Noemí expected her to be ravaged by disease, but she doesn't look sick at all. Before leaving, Florence tells Noemí that she can have only five minutes with her cousin, after which Florence will need to give Catalina her medication. Noemí greets her cousin, and though Catalina is slow to recognize her, she smiles when she sees Noemí.

Catalina's appearance does not match her frantic letter. She wrote about ghosts and being held prisoner, but here she appears as if nothing is wrong. Noemí is immediately suspicious.

Catalina tells Noemí that she has tuberculosis—she used to have a high fever, and she was delirious when she wrote that letter. Catalina is five years older than Noemí, so when they were children, Catalina often took on a motherly role. Everyone, including Noemí, used to depend on Catalina—it's strange to see Catalina now so dependent on others. Noemí still feels uneasy, but she makes small talk with Catalina. She says that she thought Catalina would have come to visit them in Mexico City by now. Catalina responds pensively, saying that it is impossible for her to leave the house. Before Noemí can react, however, Florence walks in.

Noemí is used to seeing Catalina as an authority figure, but here she's been reduced to a position of powerlessness. She's totally dependent on others, and her admission that it's impossible for her to leave makes her seem even more helpless. At this point in the novel, Catalina seems to be a fairly typical damsel-in-distress (though that will change later).

Noemí walks back to her bedroom. Florence told her that she would fetch her for dinner at seven, so Noemí decides to unpack her suitcases. There are no light switches in her room, and she notices some mold growing on the ceiling. She rifles through her purse and grabs a cigarette. The window in her bedroom will not budge, so she takes a few puffs, blowing the smoke into her room.

Despite Florence's order, Noemí smokes in her bedroom. This minor act of resistance ends up being more crucial than it initially appears.

CHAPTER 3

Florence guides Noemí from her bedroom to the dining room downstairs. The walls are lined with cabinets crammed full of dinnerware—cups, plates, trays, and vases all bearing the stylized D of the Doyles, though all the silver looks tarnished and dull. Francis is waiting for them, and the two women sit down. A maid serves a sweet, dark wine and chicken in a creamy mushroom sauce. Noemí tries to make conversation with Francis, but Florence quickly silences them both. She explains that it's customary not to speak during dinner; they appreciate silence in the house.

The Doyles had their initial emblazoned on their silver—silver that was mined by indigenous people on Mexican land. This shows how much of their identity depends on colonial privilege. Additionally, the emphasis on silence indicates that in this house one is expected to silently adhere to convention—something that will prove difficult for Noemí.

Virgil and Howard walk into the dining room, and Howard tells Florence that tonight they can make some conversation for the sake of their guest. Howard looks ancient: wrinkles gouge his face, a few white hairs cling to his skull, and his skin is incredibly pale. When she sees him Noemí thinks he looks like an underground creature—a slug, perhaps. The one thing about him that doesn't appear bleached of color is his startling blue eyes, unimpeded by cataracts and undimmed by age. Howard sits at the head of the table, and Virgil sits on his right.

Howard makes it clear that he sets the rules in the house; he dictates when speaking is allowed. When Noemí first saw High Place she though it looked like the shell of a snail, and now, seeing Howard for the first time, she thinks that he looks like a slug. He fits his surroundings.

Noemí introduces herself to Howard, who returns the courtesy. Howard then remarks on Noemí's skin color, saying that she's much darker than Catalina. Noemí is taken aback, so Howard points at her and repeats himself. He supposes that, unlike Catalina, Noemí's skin color reflects her Indian heritage, rather than her French. Noemí explains that Catalina's mother was from France, while both her parents are from Mexico. She's irritated and asks Howard what his point is. Howard replies that he is merely making observations.

Howard's immediate impulse is to examine Noemí through the lens of his pseudo-science, eugenics. He ignores Noemí's obvious discomfort and continues to question her, revealing how little he cares about her feelings.

Howard reveals his interest in eugenics and then asks for Noemí's opinion on "the intermingling of superior and inferior types." He ignores Noemí's obvious discomfort, as does the rest of the family, who sit in silence and listen to their conversation. Luckily, Noemí has experience dealing with irritating men—they do not easily fluster her. She knows that showing any type of reaction will only embolden Howard. She retorts that she once read a paper by anthropologist Manuel Gamio, who argued that indigenous people have benefitted from harsh natural selection, and that Europeans would benefit from intermingling with them. It turns the white superior and inferior idea around, she notes.

Here Howard makes clear his belief in white supremacy, an idea that fueled many colonial undertakings. Noemí parries his racist remarks, though, showing that she's both quite intelligent and capable of dealing with arrogant men.

Howard smiles, as though he's pleased with Noemí's answer. He quotes another anthropologist, saying that there is an "aesthetic taste" that shapes natural selection—beauty attracts beauty and begets beauty. He calls Noemí an example of this, and encourages her to accept this compliment, because he does not compliment people often. Then Howard asks Francis to help him up, since he's tired and wishes to go to bed. The two leave, and silence settles over the dining room again. Soon Virgil invites Noemí to the sitting room, saying that he imagines she must have some questions for him.

Howard's version of natural selection seems especially ghoulish. Rather than being based on survival traits, Howard sees physical beauty as the main reason that species survive. At a time when men hold all the power in society, Howard's obsession with beauty (and the way that he leers at Noemí) portrays him as being predatory and creepy.

Noemí and Virgil sit on stately armchairs in a large, dusty chamber. Virgil fills two glasses with the dark, sweet wine from dinner and gives one to Noemí. This room is better illuminated than the rest of the house, so Noemí is finally able to take a good look at Virgil. She calculates how best to act. Boys her age are easy to flatter, but Virgil is older than her. She must act seriously. He has authority here, but Noemí has authority, too—she is an envoy for her father, after all.

Noemí's been in society long enough to know how best to manipulate men. Though this is a type of power, Noemí's actual authority stems only from her father, showing the limitations she's under in a patriarchal society.

The two begin conversing. Noemí explains that her father is very concerned about Catalina, which is why she came to visit. She tells Virgil that Catalina's diagnosis of tuberculosis does not explain the alarming letter that she wrote. Virgil tries to pacify Noemí by claiming that Catalina wrote the letter while her fever was at its peak, but Noemí doesn't buy it. She asks what doctor is treating Catalina and demands to meet him. Virgil acquiesces, saying that their doctor, Arthur Cummins, comes by every Thursday to see Catalina and Howard. Noemí can speak to him then.

Virgil's explanation matches Catalina's explanation. Perhaps this is because it's the truth, or maybe it means that Virgil has been coaching Catalina. Either way, Noemí believes that speaking to the doctor will reveal the truth.

The pair continue to chat in the sitting room. Virgil's tone softens, and Noemí begins to think he might not be as hostile as she first thought. They talk about the house, and Virgil comments that Catalina finds the house's reliance on candlelight romantic. This gives Noemí pause; Catalina has always loved Gothic novels, and High Place does seem like the kind of home that she would find enchanting. Perhaps her illness really was nothing more than a fever.

Noemí begins to question whether anything is truly wrong. Yet, rather than basing her doubt in a belief that Catalina is melodramatic or hysterical, Noemí's doubt is based in Catalina's passion for the Gothic.

Virgil offers to pour Noemí another glass of wine. She already feels the effects of the drink, and Virgil's hand brushes against hers as he moves to refill it. Noemí tells Virgil that she's had enough, but he insists. She notices a new vitality in his face, as if he's found something that he's interested in. Noemí, however, flatly refuses another glass, so Virgil escorts her to her bedroom so she can go to sleep.

Unlike Francis, Virgil is suave and handsome—the type of man that Noemí would typically go out with. This moment marks the beginning of some romantic tension between them.

CHAPTER 4

Noemí wakes up the next morning and breakfast is brought to her on a tray. Thank goodness—now she doesn't have to sit and eat with the whole family again. After a shower she applies her lipstick and eyeliner and then picks a fine, colorful dress to wear, hoping to defy the gloom around her. And High Place is quite gloomy: walking around the house, Noemí finds the ghostly sight of furniture covered in white sheets and draperies shut tight. Where sunlight does get in, it simply reveals how dusty everything is. She tries to find a piano, but there isn't one. Nor is there a radio or even an old gramophone.

Though her surroundings are decrepit, Noemí continues to dress as she would if she were still attending parties in Mexico City. She knows that her beauty and fine clothes are assets. Men hold the power here—charming them with her elegance is one of the few forms of power available to Noemí.

Noemí wanders into a large library lined with tall bookcases stuffed with leather-bound volumes. She looks around, but most of the books have been ravaged by mold. In the middle of the room lies a circular rug showing the image of a black serpent eating its own tail, with tiny flowers and vines all around it. Noemí finds a desk with an open eugenics research journal on top of it. The journal argues against the idea that the "half-breed mestizo" inherits the worst traits of their progenitors. Rather, the journal claims, the "mestizo" possess many inherently splendid attributes.

This is the first time Noemí notices a symbol that will appear again and again throughout High Place: the ouroboros. She doesn't yet know what the symbol means, however. The word "mestizo" refers to someone of mixed ancestry, which Noemí is. Finding this eugenics journal, then, explains Howard's fascination with Noemí's skin color.

Noemí leaves the library and heads to the kitchen. She finds the room ill lit, with narrow windows and peeling paint on the walls. Two servants, an old woman and a slightly younger man, sit on a long bench cleaning mushrooms. Noemí introduces herself to them, but they stare at her mutely. A third servant walks in and nods to Noemí but does not speak to her. Noemí wonders if someone has told the servants not to speak with her, then she steps outside through the backdoor.

The rule of silence seems to be enforced on the servants, who are expected to mutely accept the whims of their masters.

It's chilly outside the house, and Noemí regrets not wearing something warmer. Francis finds her and asks if she would like to take a tour of the grounds. He takes her towards the cemetery, through an iron gate decorated with the motif of the serpent eating its tail, the same as in the library. They find the graveyard in the middle of a dense thicket of trees; it is unkempt, a realm of weeds and tall grasses threatening to swallow the place. Noemí finds the cemetery quite melancholy, and she feels sorry for the people buried here. She begins looking at the tombstones and sees that many of the people buried here died in 1888.

The graveyard is uncared for, suggesting that the Doyles lack reverence for the dead. The ouroboros, a symbol of rebirth, further suggests that, in and of themselves, the dead have little value to the Doyles.

Francis explains that after purchasing the mine, his great uncle Howard brought English workers here to manage it. They were successful for a few years, but then an epidemic killed most of the English workers. Those are the people buried in this cemetery. Noemí asks if his great uncle then sent for more workers from England to replace the ones who died. Francis stutters while explaining that no, after the English workers died the mine began employing Mexican workers. The pair continue walking through the cemetery, and Noemí notices a large mausoleum with the name "Doyle" carved above the doorway along with the Latin phrase "Et Verbum caro factum est." Francis explains that a statue in front of the mausoleum is in the likeness of his great aunt, who died during the epidemic.

Though the mine employed both English and Mexican workers, only the English are buried in the Doyles' cemetery. This is a form of segregation and further reveals the family's prejudice. The Latin phrase inscribed on the statue translates to "the word made flesh," seemingly referring to God becoming man through the birth of Jesus Christ.

The silence of the cemetery unnerves Noemí, so she starts chatting with Francis. He asks her what kind of car she drives, and she tells him: a pretty Buick convertible. Driving with the hood down makes your hair look movie-star perfect, she jokes. Noemí's father has always said that she cares too much about her looks to take school seriously, as if a woman can't do two things at once. Francis lowers his eyes, then tells Noemí that she's very different from her cousin—she's charming. Noemí knows that Catalina used to be charming, it's only when she came to High Place that the charm seems to have left her.

Noemí embodies both traditionally masculine and traditionally feminine forms of power (and does so in different ways throughout the novel). Higher education has historically been reserved for men, but Noemí's deal with her father has given her access to that form of power. Yet, she also embraces typically feminine forms of power, like dressing up and charming or flattering men as a way to manipulate them. In sum, Noemí's utilization of both typically masculine and feminine forms of power demonstrates that assigning gender to modes of power is illogical and repressive.

The conversation turns to the Doyles. Noemí asks Francis if he envies Virgil, the heir of the family. She compares the two men: Francis is very thin and has bruises under his eyes that make her suspect a hidden ailment, while Virgil exudes strength and has bolder, more attractive features. Francis responds, saying that he doesn't envy Virgil's looks or position, he only envies the freedom that Virgil enjoys. Francis has never been further from High Place than El Triunfo, whereas Virgil has been allowed to travel.

Virgil embodies many of the qualities that society at this time values in a man. He is handsome, muscled, and the heir to a large estate. Francis is none of these things, and the fact that he isn't envious of Virgil for his money or looks reveals Francis's personality as modest. What he cares most about is freedom.

Noemí shivers, so Francis gives her his sweater. They start walking towards the house. Francis tells her more about the history of High Place. After the Revolution in 1915 the mines were flooded, and operations permanently ceased; that was the same year Virgil was born. Francis is ten years younger than Virgil, but they grew up together. There were no other children in High Place, and they were both homeschooled, so they were each other's only friends. Noemí asks why they insist on silence in High Place, and Francis tells her that Howard is very old and very sensitive to noise, and noise travels very easily in the house, despite its size.

In some ways Francis seems just as trapped at High Place as Catalina. He's never left El Triunfo, and he grew up in near isolation with Virgil.

Francis and Noemí return to the house and have lunch with Florence. The meal ends quickly—Virgil and Howard do not join them. That night while lying in bed, Noemí spots a bit of mold growing on the wallpaper. She's reminded of something she read in a book once—how microscopic fungi can act upon the dyes in paper and form arsenic gas. The most civilized Victorians killed themselves in this way. Noemí's grandfather was a chemist, and her father's business is the production of pigments and dyes, so she knows quite a bit about this. The wallpaper in her room is pink with yellow medallions running across it, though, not the green that killed Victorians.

Noemí's observations and musings echo Catalina's letter. Catalina wrote that the house was "sick with rot," and she'd drawn circles in the margins of her letter. Though Noemí dismisses this early observation about possible poisonous gas coming from the wallpaper, by the end of the novel this turns out to be more relevant than she now knows. Furthermore, she's able to make this observation only because she's been educated (she'd read about the Victorians in a book, and she'd learned about dyes from her father), showing how important education truly is.

CHAPTER 5

Noemí visits Catalina in the morning. Her cousin reminds Noemí of a drawing of Ophelia that used to hang in her house. She seems distant, but still, it's good to see Catalina, and Noemí updates her on all the gossip from Mexico City. Then Noemí asks Catalina what she spends her time doing, and her cousin responds that the house takes up most of her time. It's damp and dark, and very cold. The smile fades from Catalina's lips, and her eyes—which had been distant—suddenly fall on Noemí with renewed lucidity. She asks Noemí to do something for her in secret: visit a woman in town named Marta Duval. Marta's been making medicine for Catalina, and she needs more. Noemí tries to ask questions, but Catalina shushes her—they can hear you, she says, it's in the walls.

The reference to Ophelia, from Shakespeare's Hamlet, affirms Catalina's tragic position. Ophelia's life was dominated by the men around her, driving her to madness. Tragically. her suicide is the only time in the play that she expresses her own agency. Catalina resembles Ophelia in more ways than one: her life is dominated by Virgil, she has an illness that affects her mental acuity, and, as the reader will soon see, she appears to attempt to take her own life.

Catalina continues to whisper nonsensically: "The walls speak to me. They tell me secrets. Don't listen to them." Catalina abruptly stops speaking, just before Florence enters the room. Florence announces that Dr. Cummins has arrived—Noemí can wait downstairs for him while he examines Catalina. Noemí waits in the sitting room, and after a while the doctor strides in, accompanied by Virgil. Noemí asks the doctor about her cousin, who quickly explains that Catalina has tuberculosis, but it's nothing to worry about—she just needs plenty of rest and a good diet. He grabs his bag and prepares to leave, but Noemí stops him.

That Catalina won't express her fears in front of Florence positions her as an antagonist to Catalina. Additionally, that Florence won't allow Noemí to see Dr. Cummins examine Catalina makes it appear like she's hiding something.

Noemí insists that Catalina is acting very odd; when she was a little girl, Noemí's aunt Brigida had tuberculosis and she acted nothing like the way Catalina acts. Plus, Catalina wrote a very strange letter, and she just seems unlike herself. Doctor Cummins dismisses Noemí's concerns; tuberculosis doesn't change a person, it merely intensifies what is already there. Catalina is a very anxious, quite melancholic girl, he claims, and she has depressive tendencies. Virgil chimes in, explaining that Catalina has had great periods of melancholy since her mother died. Tuberculosis has simply made the depression worse.

Dr. Cummins confirms what Noemí has already been told: Catalina has tuberculosis. But Noemí again demonstrates her rebelliousness by refusing to mutely accept assertions from male authority figures. She challenges Dr. Cummins, and Virgil (another male authority figure) comes to his defense.

Feeling that the matter is settled, the doctor leaves. Virgil takes the doctor's seat. To Noemí, Virgil looks bloodless, like he has ice in his veins. She can't picture him showing affection towards any living thing, let alone Catalina. Did he really court her cousin? Virgil assures Noemí that Dr. Cummins is a capable physician—he's the Doyle family doctor, they trust him implicitly. Noemí again brings up the idea of taking Catalina to a physician in Mexico City, but Virgil strongly opposes this suggestion. He acknowledges that his house has fallen in grandeur, but he insists that he knows how to take care of his wife.

Noemí challenges male authority and loses, causing her to see Virgil in a new light. He no longer appears suave; instead he looks cold and uncaring. Noemí suggests moving Catalina to Mexico City, but Virgil asserts his right as Catalina's husband: he decides what happens to her.

Noemí next suggests that they find a psychiatrist to come and evaluate Catalina. Virgil laughs in her face. Where would she find a psychiatrist around here? There's a reason the family has an English doctor—El Triunfo is poor and the people are coarse and primitive. Still, Noemí insists on finding a second opinion. Virgil mocks her, "You get your way in most things, don't you, Miss Taboada?" He sneers, "Men do as you wish." Noemí is reminded of a fellow she danced with last summer; they were having fun, but the man held her too tightly and tried to kiss her. She refused him, and a look of pure, dark scorn came over his face. Virgil now stares at her with the same look.

Here Virgil reveals that he, like his father, has racist views of the indigenous people around him. His use of the word "primitive" seems especially colonial. Additionally, Virgil is not used to having his authority questioned—that it was done by a woman is particularly offensive to him. He thinks of women who challenge him as being worthy of mockery and ridicule.


Noemí asks Virgil what he means. He says that he recalls Catalina mentioning how insistent Noemí could be when she wanted a man to do her bidding. He then relents, saying that he doesn't want to fight with Noemí. She can get a second opinion—if, of course, she can find one. Virgil leaves, and Noemí feels a little pleased to have needled him. She senses that both Virgil and Doctor Cummins expected her to mutely accept their words.

Virgil eventually acquiesces, but it's becoming more apparent how little authority Noemí actually has here, despite her father's name. Virgil's anger reveals that women at High Place are meant to accept the whims of men without complaint.

That night, Noemí dreams that a golden flower sprouts from the walls in her bedroom—only it doesn't quite seem like a flower, and it has tendrils. A hundred tiny golden mushrooms sprout from the walls too. She touches them and they explode, coating her hands in golden dust. Suddenly, Noemí becomes aware of another presence in the room: a woman in a dress of yellow antique lace. Where her face ought to be, there is a golden glow, like the mushrooms on the walls. The walls start to quiver and the floorboards pulse to the same rhythm as the golden woman.

The golden woman that haunts Noemí's dream seems to be some kind of manifestation of the flowers and mushrooms, which pervade the house.

The woman raises her hand and points at Noemí. She tries to speak but has no mouth, so she cannot. Noemí wasn't afraid until this moment—something about the woman trying to speak but not being able to terrifies her. The woman makes a noise, almost like the crunching of leaves or the buzzing of insects, and Noemí tries to put her hands over her ears, but she can't—she has no hands anymore. Noemí wakes up drenched in sweat. The bedroom is dark.

Interestingly, the golden woman is missing a mouth—it's almost like the house rule about silence has been forced on her, too. Noemí is only frightened when she sees the woman attempt and then fail to speak, suggesting that silenced women (signifying oppression, perhaps) terrify Noemí.

CHAPTER 6

Noemí needs a car to get to town so she can find Marta Duval. She figures her best bet of finding her is by asking Francis, since Florence won't listen, and Virgil is irritated with her. It bothers Noemí to be thought of poorly; she wants to be liked. She thinks that, unlike men, women need to be liked or they're in trouble. A woman who is not liked is a "bitch," she thinks, and a "bitch" can hardly do anything. Anyway, Francis has been friendly enough, so Noemí sets off in search of him. She finds him in the kitchen, looking more washed out than the previous day. He smiles at her. He doesn't look bad when he smiles—though he's definitely not as good-looking as Virgil (few men are).

While assertiveness in men is thought of as a positive quality, Noemí knows that the same is not true for women. Assertive women are often thought of as "bitches"—especially by men like Virgil and Howard, whose beliefs are deeply rooted in sexist conventions. Thus, Noemí knows that she has to remain likeable. If she challenges authority, she must be quietly subversive, not outright rebellious.

Noemí tells Francis that she would like to ask him for a favor. She links her arm to his with a fluid, well-practiced motion, and the two walk together. She asks to borrow a car. Francis hesitates; he doesn't think Virgil would approve of Noemí taking a car into town. Noemí smiles and jokes with him, and finally Francis agrees. He grabs the keys and takes her to the shed, where Noemí gets in the car and drives to town. She finds a small clinic in the town square and walks inside. A very young man with a little mustache that makes him look a bit ridiculous—like a child impersonating a doctor—introduces himself as Dr. Camarillo.

Here Noemí practices the quiet subversion of authority. She knows that Virgil would disapprove of her going to town, so she flirts with Francis to get him to agree to lend her the car. If Noemí was a man, of course, this wouldn't be necessary.

Noemí and Dr. Camarillo sit and chat inside his office. She tells him that she's visiting from out of town, because her cousin has tuberculosis. Julio is astonished; tuberculosis in El Triunfo? He hasn't heard anything about it. Noemí explains that her cousin lives in High Place. She asks if the doctor could come and check on Catalina. Dr. Camarillo hesitates—he doesn't think he'd be welcome at High Place. The Doyles don't mingle with the townsfolk. Even during the epidemic, when lots of miners were sick and Dr. Cummins had his hands full, they still didn't ask the locals for any help. They must not think much of the local physicians.

Dr. Camarillo is quite a young doctor, which creates some doubt about his credibility. Still, he emphatically declares that he's never heard of someone in El Triunfo getting tuberculosis. This throws Dr. Cummins's diagnosis into question. That Dr. Cummins never asks the local physicians for help reveals that he, too, like Howard, is prejudiced against the local people.

Noemí asks what sort of epidemic it was that killed all those miners. Dr. Camarillo responds that no one ever really figured it out; patients would develop a high fever, then rant and rave, saying the oddest things. They'd convulse and even attack each other. It was all very odd. Noemí mentions that she's seen the English cemetery, adding that a lot of people must have died. Julio corrects her: that cemetery has only the English dead—many more locals died from the illness. Rumor has it that the Doyles didn't even bother to give the corpses a proper burial. They just tossed them into a pit.

Dr. Camarillo implies that there is more than one medical mystery at High Place. Not only does Catalina have a mysterious illness, but also there's a history of epidemics that plagued the miners at High Place. These epidemics were never explained, leaving one to wonder if they are connected to Catalina's illness.

Noemí presses Dr. Camarillo to visit High Place and check on Catalina. He explains that the situation is complicated: he gets money for the clinic from a contribution box at the local church, and Dr. Cummins regularly places money in the box. If he upsets Dr. Cummins by visiting Catalina, he could lose those funds. Noemí thinks quickly, trying to find a way to change Dr. Camarillo's mind. It's time to use those theatre lessons her father thought were a waste of money. She laments that she has no friends here, not a friend in the world to help her, and she quivers her lip dramatically. She pulls a handkerchief out and dabs her eyes, as if she's about to cry. Men are always so afraid of tears. Noemí's act works; Dr. Camarillo agrees to visit Catalina on Monday at noon.

Again Noemí displays a type of feminine power by manipulating a man though his fears—Dr. Camarillo doesn't want Noemí to start sobbing in his office, so he agrees to help. If Noemí were a man she might pay or order Dr. Camarillo to help, but because of her gender these options aren't available to her.

Next, Noemí goes in search of Marta Duval. A lot of the women in town visit Marta, so Noemí doesn't have too much trouble finding her house. Marta sits on her porch cracking peanuts, and when she sees Noemí she compliments her on her pretty shoes—Marta doesn't get many customers who can afford shoes like that. She invites Noemí into her house and they take seats in a small kitchen. A picture of the Sacred Heart hangs on the wall and the shelves are lined with plaster figurines of saints. Dried herbs and flowers hang from the ceiling. Noemí knows that Catalina has never been the type to seek out healers, so it's a little odd that she came here. Noemí, on the other hand, developed an interest in anthropology after reading *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic Among the Azande*.

Marta's home is immediately characterized as a feminine space. It's a place where women go to seek help from another woman. Marta also primarily serves the poor, positioning her as a charitable, feminist figure. Furthermore, it's noteworthy that Marta utilizes traditional herbal remedies and healing techniques, rather than modern medicine. It demonstrates that tradition does not necessarily mean sexist oppression (as it does in High Place)—women can find meaning and power in tradition, too.

A parrot swoops down and lands on Marta's shoulder, and she starts feeding it peanuts. Noemí gets down to business. She tells Marta that she needs more of the medicine that she made a few weeks ago for Catalina. Marta sighs, saying that no amount of tea or herbs is going to help that girl—the Doyles are cursed. Yes, there was an epidemic, but that's not where the stories end. Miss Ruth, Howard's precious daughter, shot her own family. It's a famous story in El Triunfo, but if Noemí wishes to hear it, she has to pay. A woman needs to eat, after all. Noemí agrees, she'll pay for the medicine and the story. She takes some cigarettes out of her purse and shares two with Marta, who pockets them. Marta gets an ashtray and begins her tale.

Marta posits a new theory for Catalina's illness: High Place is cursed. This marks the beginning of a struggle within Noemí between belief in the supernatural and more rational, scientific explanations as she tries to understand the events that occur at High Place.

Ruth was Howard's daughter, his darling child who wanted for nothing. She was going to marry her cousin, a man named Michael, and they ordered a beautiful dress from Paris for the occasion. But a week before the wedding, Ruth grabbed a rifle and shot her groom, her mother, her aunt, and her uncle. She shot Howard, but he survived. And she might have shot Virgil, but Florence had hidden him away in a closet during the attack. When she was done shooting, she turned the rifle around and shot herself. Most of the servants left after that. The only ones who stayed were the few that came from England.

Ruth had everything that money could buy at High Place, but still she violently murdered members of her family. While readers don't know her motivation, her actions seemingly contradict Howard's belief in eugenics. Surely someone with the most desirable genetic traits, according to Howard's way of thinking, wouldn't be capable of murdering their family.

Marta continues the story after taking another cigarette from Noemí. One day not long after the murders, Florence finally left El Triunfo, even though she'd never done so before. When she returned a few weeks later she had a new husband—a man named Richard. This new man was unlike the Doyles: he was talkative, liked to come to town and drink, and it was obvious that he didn't like High Place too much. He spoke about strange things, like ghosts and spirits and the evil eye. Soon he became shabby and thin, then he stopped coming to town at all. Finally he was found dead at the bottom of a ravine. He was only twenty-nine, and he left behind a young son: Francis.

While some members of the Doyle family never leave High Place, Florence was allowed to leave in order to find a husband. The man she chose was very different from the Doyles: he was talkative and jolly, and held none of the Doyles' prejudice towards the locals. His mental decline mirrors Catalina's, so his death is a dire omen.

Noemí agrees that this is all very tragic, but she wouldn't call it a curse. It's more like coincidence. Marta, for her part, doesn't care what Noemí calls it. She can make the remedy for Catalina, but it's going to take a week. The problem, she says, is not an illness, it's the cursed house. The only real solution is to jump on the next train out and never return. Marta told Catalina the same thing, but she didn't listen. Noemí pays Marta, and the old woman asks for another cigarette. They're not for her, they're for Saint Luke the Evangelist. The women chuckle and shake hands. Just before Noemí leaves, Marta asks if she's having trouble sleeping. She sees the dark circles under Noemí's eyes. Noemí assures her that it's just the cold air that keeps her awake. Nothing to worry about.

Despite Noemí's interest in anthropology and witchcraft, she is unwilling to believe that a curse could be responsible for Catalina's illness. Marta notices the dark circles under Noemí's eyes, and she seems to know that Noemí is experiencing nightmares of her own. This suggests that Noemí will follow a similar trajectory as Catalina.

CHAPTER 7

That evening, Noemí is once again summoned to dinner with the Doyles. Howard, however, is not present. When Noemí breaks the rule of silence during dinner, Florence chastises her. Is Noemí keen on breaking every rule in the house? Florence told her not to take the car to town, but she did anyway. Florence reiterates the rules: Noemí must consult her on matters related to the house, its people, and the things in it. And she knows that Noemí has been smoking in the bedroom—it's a filthy habit for filthy girls. Noemí is bewildered. How could Florence speak to her like that? But before she can respond, Virgil speaks. He finds it quite unacceptable for a visitor to ignore the rules of a house.

The Doyles strictly adhere to rules and conventions, so Noemí's rebellious nature angers them. Florence reasserts her authority over Noemí: she runs the house, so Noemí must ask her for permission to do things. It's noteworthy that, in a place where women have few rights, Florence refuses to help Noemí.

Noemí feels ambushed, like Virgil and Florence planned to scold her together. Poor Catalina. Noemí is strong and resilient, so she can stand up to bullies, but Catalina is gentle and obedient. Virgil and Florence could easily squash her. Noemí sips her wine in silence. Soon a servant walks in and informs everyone that Howard would like to see them, so they make their way up the stairs to his bedroom. Howard sits on a sofa swaddled in a green robe. He looks older than ever, like a mummy that's been set on display. Howard invites Noemí to sit next to him, and she does so with a polite smile.

Noemí's personality allows her to consistently fight the patriarchal system in place at the Doyles' home. But Catalina was never so assertive, and Noemí knows that she must struggle. This passage further emphasizes that Noemí is meant to be the knight-in-shining-armor in this story, here to rescue Catalina.

Two large oil portraits catch Noemí's eye. They each depict a young woman, and they look very similar. She asks Howard who they are, and he responds that they're his wives. Agnes died soon after they arrived at High Place, and Alice, her younger sister, became his second wife when she came of age. There were no suitable grooms for her, so marrying Howard was a natural choice. One could say it was preordained. Alice was very fruitful, Howard says. A woman's function is to preserve the family line, and she did her duty well. It's not scandalous, he claims, since kings used to marry their siblings and cousins all the time.

This section presents Howard's feelings about women most unambiguously. He values women by their ability to reproduce, which he sees as their only function. Furthermore, his wives seem easily replaceable, as if, in his eyes, they lacked an individual identity. Finally, his use of the word "preordained" makes it seem like his wife didn't have much of a say about getting married.

Noemí wonders if, when Alice came of age, they simply dusted off Agnes's wedding dress and gave it to her. Howard rests his hand on top of Noemí's and begins to rub her knuckles. "My beautiful darlings" he says, leering at his wives. Noemí delicately pulls her hand free and stands up, as if to take a closer look at the paintings. She did not enjoy being touched by Howard, and an unpleasant odor emanated from his robe. Howard lectures on the importance of aesthetics, quoting a criminologist who theorized that one could study men's faces in order to recognize a criminal type. Noemí looks at the women in the portraits; what did their faces say? I am happy, unhappy, indifferent, miserable—one could construct a hundred different narratives, but it wouldn't make them true.

Howard further explains his views on eugenics and aesthetics. He believes that, because of a person's genetic composition, one's personality could be discerned by studying their face. A criminal would have a recognizable criminal look, according to him. Yet, if this were true, one has to wonder why Howard didn't recognize a criminal in his daughter, Ruth.

Howard stands and moves next to Noemí. Her escape attempt was in vain; he crowds her and touches her arm. Howard drones on, and Noemí wonders why no one else is talking. Or are they talking? She hears whispers, like the buzzing of insects. The room feels stuffy, and she wishes someone would open a window. Howard asks her why she isn't married. He brushes a strand of her hair and leers at her. Noemí steadies herself on the fireplace and looks around the room. She sees Francis, and it's hard for her to imagine that Francis is related to this foul-smelling insect of a man.

Howard continues to pursue Noemí, caressing her though she clearly doesn't want him to. It's a demonstration of Howard's power: he can touch any woman he wants, and they can't do anything about it.

Suddenly, Howard steps back. He asks Noemí if Virgil has shown her the greenhouse yet. Virgil takes the cue and approaches Noemí. Howard returns to his seat on the sofa, leaving the two alone together. Virgil smiles, and Noemí welcomes the warmth after having to stomach Howard's leer. Virgil even makes fun of his father, which brings a grin to Noemí's face. He apologies for chastising Noemí about the car the other night—he was being rude. His father is old and frail, and now Catalina is ill too, so Virgil's not in the best of moods these days. Noemí is relieved to see that Virgil isn't gloomy all the time. Perhaps he's telling the truth; maybe he was more cheerful before Catalina got sick.

After Howard's creepy behavior, even Virgil can seem warm. Noemí entertains the idea that she may have judged Virgil unfairly. Indeed, for much of the novel, her judgment of Virgil teeters between good and bad, which could be a commentary on how some women are reluctant to accuse their abusers.

After their chat, Virgil leads Noemí back to the rest of the family, but Howard declares that he's tired and wants to be left alone, so they all disband. That night, Noemí has a curious nightmare. She dreams that Howard Doyle sneaks into her room. Noemí is asleep on the bed, and she cannot move although she knows that Howard is there. She feels a presence behind her, whispering to her: *open your eyes*. This is not the golden woman speaking, but rather someone who seems young. Howard looms over her and undoes the buttons on Noemí's dress. But now it isn't the old man studying her naked body, it's Virgil Doyle.

That Noemí begins to have nightmares indicates that she's following a similar course as Catalina. Her nightmare depicts a sexual assault, revealing how threatened she feels by these men who have absolute authority. The voice telling her to "open her eyes" is an encouragement to resist the patriarchy—to stand up to assault and oppression.

Open your eyes, the voice keeps saying. Noemí feels sweet, sickening desire flowing through her body. Virgil forcefully kisses her, and Noemí doesn't quite want this—not like this—and yet it's hard for her to remember why she doesn't want it. Again she hears it, *open your eyes*. This time she does wake up. She's very cold, and her bed is disheveled. And though the buttons on her dress remain fastened, it's a long time before she falls back asleep.

Noemí feels both desire and repulsion as Virgil assaults her in the dream. The mixing of these emotions characterizes her feelings towards Virgil for many chapters to come.

CHAPTER 8

Noemí waits outside High Place for Dr. Camarillo. He arrives punctually, and the two proceed to Catalina's room. Catalina initially seems in good spirits, but as the minutes tick by she becomes more and more agitated. She begins insisting that there's no reason for Dr. Camarillo to be here, and she hardly listens to the questions that he asks her. Suddenly Catalina babbles like a small child, then clutches her neck defensively. She trembles as she claims that she's too exhausted to talk—can't the two of them leave?

Catalina acts like a captive afraid of reprisal. She actively works to thwart Dr. Camarillo, who threatens to expose what could be a lie (the tuberculosis diagnosis). Catalina's strange gesture is inexplicable; it's almost like someone else is speaking through her, or maybe she's so frightened that she can hardly form coherent words.

Catalina's eyes open very wide, and her face grows terribly intense, like a possessed woman. She raves that there are people in the walls—dead people, and they speak to her sometimes. Noemí grabs Catalina's hands to comfort her. Catalina looks at her cousin, then warns her that "it" lives in the cemetery. Noemí must look for it in the cemetery. Then, just as suddenly, Catalina's face softens. Her episode appears to be over, and she apologizes. Sometimes she says things that she doesn't understand. Florence walks in with a teapot, eyeing Dr. Camarillo. In response, he collects his things and announces that he's leaving.

Catalina's outburst echoes what she wrote in her letter, suggesting that an episode of delirious fever is not the true cause of her ravings, as Catalina and Virgil have previously claimed. Significantly, both times Catalina has confessed something to Noemí (however unbelievable), Florence has entered the room right after. It's almost as if Florence is monitoring what Catalina says.

Noemí walks Dr. Camarillo back to his car and asks for his opinion of Catalina. He believes that Catalina needs psychiatric attention—her behavior is not at all typical of a person who has tuberculosis. Noemí is glad that the doctor agrees with her, but she quickly sees the difficulty in her situation: Virgil isn't going to let her take Catalina away. She feels dispirited and a little silly. What did she expect Dr. Camarillo to do? He's not a knight in shining armor or a wizard capable of reviving Catalina with a potion. She should have known better. In her gloominess, she recalls that many fairytales end in blood.

Moreno-Garcia here criticizes the fairytale knight-in-shining-armor trope. The man (Dr. Camarillo) doesn't have the power to help Noemí, no matter how good or heroic his intentions. If Noemí wants to help Catalina, she'll have to figure out how to do it herself—she'll have to be the knight, rather than rely on a man to swoop in and save the day.

After Dr. Camarillo leaves, Noemí goes back inside the house and finds Virgil standing on the staircase. He questions her, but Noemí isn't in the mood to answer him, so instead she asks him to show her the greenhouse. He agrees, and they walk there together. The greenhouse is small and neglected. The windowpanes are either dirty or broken, and mold cakes the planters. Still, a few flowers flourish. Noemí looks up and sees a stunning piece of stained-glass art: **the ouroboros**—a serpent eating its own tail. Virgil tells her that the ouroboros is the Doyle family symbol. It signifies the infinite, above and below.

Noemí knows that Virgil has all the power in this situation, so she avoids talking about Catalina. In the greenhouse Virgil explicitly states the meaning of the ouroboros: rebirth, a cycle of life and death. How this symbol connects to the Doyles, who appear to be in a steady decline since the closure of the mine, remains mysterious.

Virgil tells Noemí that his mother, Alice, designed the greenhouse. She loved it more than any other room in the house, but when she died, no one else would care for the place. Virgil was a baby when she died, so he doesn't remember her well. He knows that she died violently, though. Not that it matters—it was a long time ago. Noemí knows how Alice died: she was shot by her daughter. Surely such misery—such ugliness—cannot simply be erased. Yet Virgil seems unperturbed.

One can compare Virgil's reaction to his mother's death to Francis's reaction to his father's death. While Francis seemed bereaved, Virgil appears indifferent, as if he's detached from the past. If the ouroboros is the Doyle family crest, one has to wonder what power the past holds over the present.

Virgil asks Noemí if Howard explained his theories on superior and inferior types. According to these theories, humans have a predetermined nature. Virgil himself has traveled the world, and he's inclined to agree with his father: some people are fit, some people are not. Humans are the same as animals, and the only instinct that matters is reproduction and the propagation of humankind. His lecture sickens Noemí, and she refuses to discuss it with him. Instead, she insists that they talk about Catalina. The doctor who visited her today thinks that Catalina needs a psychiatrist, she tells Virgil. He agrees that she should see a psychiatrist, eventually. Tuberculosis is no joke, and for the moment she needs to stay in High Place and rest. But yes, eventually Virgil will get specialized psychological care for Catalina.

Virgil's views on eugenics include a kind of determinism, where a person's genetic makeup determines their actions. This allows for a hierarchy to be created in society—and the Doyles place themselves at the top. Finally, Noemí may argue with Virgil about what's best for Catalina, but ultimately Virgil makes all the decisions. He does, however, agree that Catalina can get specialized psychiatric care eventually, which is a small amount of progress.

Virgil dismisses Noemí's protestations and walks away. She chases him down, unwilling to let the discussion end. Virgil explains that Catalina's illness was worse before Noemí got here. She's been improving under the care of Dr. Cummins. Noemí again brings up Dr. Camarillo, but Virgil denigrates him. He's just a boy, hardly out of medical school, who can hardly grow a moustache. Why should Virgil listen to his opinion? He turns to leave again, but Noemí grabs his arm. She demands that he take Catalina to Mexico City. Virgil looks at her coldly, and for a second Noemí sees a fleck of gold in his icy blue eyes.

It's likely that Virgil refuses to listen to Dr. Camarillo's opinion not because he's young, but because he's not white. Additionally, the speck of gold in Virgil's eyes harkens back to Noemí's nightmares about the golden woman, but it's yet unclear how the two are related.

Though Virgil is irritated and clearly disdainful of Noemí, he maintains a civil tone. Catalina is his wife, he's the one who will decide what's best for her. He turns and leaves, and this time Noemí doesn't stop him. She's angry, mostly because he's right: Mexican women can't even vote, so how could Catalina or Noemí expect to stand up to Virgil? It would be best if a man intervened. A man would command more respect. But Noemí can't abandon Catalina. Perhaps if Virgil can't be persuaded, she could convince Howard to rule in her favor. Or at the very least, she could try to get Francis on her side. As Noemí leaves the greenhouse, she notices another **ouroboros** pattern in the tile on the floor. The infinite, above and below, just as Virgil had said.

This passage makes Noemí's position clear: legally, Virgil has the right to decide what happens to his wife. Noemí, and all women in Mexico at this time, have far fewer rights than men. In her desperation, Noemí wishes for a man's intervention—someone to come to her rescue. But as was discussed at the beginning of this chapter, no knight-in-shining-armor is coming; Noemí must save Catalina herself, despite her lack of legal authority.

CHAPTER 9

The next day Noemí ventures into the cemetery. Catalina inspired this trip; "You must look in the cemetery," she said. Catalina once told Noemí a story about the novelist Mary Shelly. Apparently, she rendezvoused with her future husband in a cemetery. Catalina always expected true romance for herself—passion in the moonlight. Noemí wonders if High Place has robbed her of that illusion, or if it was meant to be shattered all along. Marriage could hardly be the passionate romances one read about in books. Men tend to be well behaved during courtship, but after marriage, the feelings dissipate.

Noemí comments on the way that novels groom women to expect a certain kind of romance that life will never deal them. These expectations lead only to disappointment, and Noemí supposes that's what happened between Catalina and Virgil—Virgil was suave and charming during the courtship, then turned cold once they were married.

Noemí passes a small cluster of tombs. She sees something move, though she can't tell what it is because it's half hidden by the mist. She calls out to it, but it doesn't respond or move. The shape almost looks like it has a halo. Noemí remembers Catalina's words: *it lives in the cemetery*. She feels vulnerable and a little frightened. She moves away quickly, trying to retrace her steps to the house. She hears a rustling in the grass, as if something is following her. At a fork in the road, Noemí can't remember if she should go left or right. She hears a buzzing noise, almost like bees. *It lives in the cemetery*. The buzzing seems to come from the right, so Noemí decides to go left. She moves quickly in that direction, nearly bumping into Francis.

This is the first moment in the story that Noemí becomes frightened of a possible supernatural presence. It reveals her deteriorating mental state, because Catalina, too, claimed that she saw ghosts. Additionally, the buzzing noise was previously associated with the Doyles, so its current association with this presence in the graveyard connects the Doyles with the ghost. Perhaps Marta was right, and the place is cursed.

To Noemí, Francis has always seemed rather insubstantial. But now he appears perfectly solid and real. She tells him that she could kiss him, she's so happy. Francis blushes, turning as red as a pomegranate. It's a little funny to Noemí. If anyone should play the bashful maid, it should be her, not Francis, who's older and more established. Noemí tells him that she's lost, and already she's beginning to feel less afraid. She notices that he has a basket in his hands, and she asks what he's doing out here. Francis tells her that he's been collecting mushrooms—they grow all over the cemetery. Noemí jokes that he'll be eating mushrooms that have sprouted from dead things, but he admonishes her: mushrooms always grow from dead things, in a way.

Francis appears just in time to save Noemí from whatever was in the graveyard. But just as he looks heroic, he blushes like a bashful maid. Thus, Moreno-Garcia does not allow for easy gender classifications; Francis is both a masculine hero and shyly feminine. Francis is there to pick mushrooms, which he says grow from dead things. Interestingly, they are reminiscent of the ouroboros—a cycle of life and death.

Francis shows Noemí the mushrooms he has in the basket. *Cantharellus cibarius*. The Zapotec Indians used them as an anesthetic for dentistry, and the Aztecs consumed them in order to experience visions. Noemí has heard of them—Teonanácatl. The Spanish chroniclers said that they're supposed to make one drunk and lustful. Noemí knows that she's flirting with Francis; maybe she'll even kiss him before the trip is over. She's moved by Francis's passion for mushrooms. He invites her to come to the library with him sometime so he can show her his spore prints. The two continue towards High Place, and the mist gets lighter.

Francis and Noemí's relationship continues to deepen, and Noemí seems to be developing romantic feelings for him. The two are unlikely lovers, however. Noemí is a wealthy urban socialite, and Francis a reclusive and shy European from an old mining town.

Noemí mentions that she'd like to have a cigarette, and Francis tells her that his mother wishes to speak with her about that. The family insists on certain healthy habits. It's the way things have always been done at High Place. Noemí jokes that the cemetery sounds livelier than his family's household. Maybe they should stay here instead and look for some of those lust-inducing mushrooms, and if Francis gets fresh with Noemí, she won't complain. Francis stutters that his mother would say it's quite wrong to suggest something like that. Noemí thinks that he looks disgusted with her. She imagines him whispering with his mother about superior and inferior types, calling her filth. Noemí stomps her cigarette and declares that she doesn't care what Florence thinks. She calls Francis a bore and tells him she's heading back alone.

The mention of the cigarettes reinforces that the Doyle family strictly adheres to rules and convention. Noemí's flirtatious comment is quite unconventional, and this catches Francis off guard. Noemí interprets his reaction as disdain, which she already knows the rest of Francis's family must feel towards her on account of her mixed heritage.

Noemí stops a few steps later. Francis has followed her. He bends down and picks up a mushroom that she has crushed. He tells her that it's a destroying angel—a white, poisonous mushroom. Francis places the mushroom back on the ground and stands up. He understands that he must seem ridiculous to Noemí, he tells her, since he's afraid of upsetting his mother and even more afraid of upsetting Uncle Howard. Noemí realizes that the look of disgust she saw earlier wasn't meant for her; Francis was disgusted with himself. She feels awful for being angry with him, and she grabs his hand and apologizes. They hold hands for a moment, and then Francis tells Noemí that she should go back to the house—he still has more mushrooms to find.

It's unclear who the destroying angel is supposed to refer to—there seem to be two options. The first is Noemí, whose quick assumptions are often unfair to the people around her (in this case, Francis). The second is the ghostly figure that Noemí saw in the cemetery (it looked as though it had a halo over its head, linking it to the word "angel").

CHAPTER 10

Usually the maid, Mary, or Florence comes to deliver Noemí's breakfast, but this morning Francis knocks on her door, tray in hand. He's helping his mother because Howard has terrible leg pain, and Florence is very busy. He asks Noemí if she would like to meet in the library in an hour to look over the spore prints. Noemí quickly agrees, thinking it will be a great chance to ask him about driving her into town.

Francis and Noemí's relationship is deepening, and here Francis asks to share something with Noemí that he's quite passionate about. That Noemí immediately thinks of using this situation to ask Francis for a favor may seem manipulative, but she is doing this for Catalina's benefit.

Noemí gets dressed, does her hair and makeup, and then walks toward the library. The hallway leading to the library is lined with photographs decorating the walls. One photograph catches Noemí's eye; it shows a young woman about her age, with a hard-set mouth and an aggrieved look to her eyes. When Francis appears, she asks him who it is, and he tells her that it's his cousin, Ruth. Noemí has never seen the face of a killer. She recalls what Virgil said about faces reflecting people's nature, but there's nothing murderous about the woman in the photo.

This passage directly contradicts the claims of Virgil and Howard. The Doyles believe that a person's character is visible in their face—a killer would look like a killer, according to them. But when Noemí looks at the photo of Ruth she doesn't see a killer at all, just an aggrieved woman.

Noemí says she's heard about Ruth. She killed several people before killing herself. Francis points out all the people Ruth killed: her cousin Michael, her mother Alice, her aunt Dorothy, and her uncle Leland. Noemí asks Francis why she did it, but he doesn't know—he wasn't even born then. Who knows? This place could drive anyone crazy, he grumbles. He immediately apologizes. The two continue to the library to look at the spore prints.

Ruth's motivation remains a mystery, even to Francis, a member of her family. Francis's comment about High Place driving people crazy reveals his own discontentment, which will be made more plain as the novel progresses.

Francis spreads his prints on a table before Noemí. He shows her his plant pressings too. Noemí notices that Francis has beautiful handwriting, so she tells Francis that the nuns at her school would have loved him. They said they liked Noemí, but that's only because they had to. Nobody is going to declare that they hate Noemí Taboada—it would be crass. Such a thing has to be whispered in private. Francis asks Noemí how she spends her time in Mexico City. He finds her life exciting, and he tells her so, even if she thinks he's too honest. Noemí realizes that she wants Francis to like her, not just for show, but because she likes him in a way that's different than how she likes Hugo Duarte.

There's a certain inauthenticity to social gatherings in Mexico City. People have to say that they like Noemí because her father is a rich and powerful man; his shadow dominates even Noemí's personal relationships. Yet here, away from the influence of her father, Noemí is able to form a genuine connection with Francis. This authenticity makes Francis a more desirable match than someone like Hugo Duarte, who probably likes Noemí for her father's money.

Though she's having fun with Francis, Noemí is unable to get Marta Duval out of her mind. She asks Francis to drive her into town. He doesn't mind doing it, but his mother will say that she needs a chaperone. They've asked him to keep an eye on her. They think Noemí is reckless. Still, Francis agrees to help Noemí. They'll leave tomorrow at eight.

Francis's honesty with Noemí about his mother's intentions reveals that he feels closer to Noemí than to his own mother. If a conflict were to arise, there's a chance that he would side with Noemí.

The door to the library swings open and Florence walks in. Francis quickly stands up straight and shoves his hands in his pockets. Florence complains that while others may consign themselves to idleness, she must keep the house straight. Noemí asks if there is anything she can do to help—she doesn't want to be idle. Florence takes her over to a display case crammed with a staggering amount of dusty, dull silver, and asks her if she can polish them. Noemí, determined to prove herself in front of this woman, agrees. She spends hours polishing the silver, and when Florence returns, many pieces lie gleaming on the table. Florence examines the silver. She says that if Noemí wants to win her praise, it will take more. Noemí says that she's not trying to win her praise, just her respect.

This exchange is a contest between women. Florence exerts her power in the only way available to her: through domestic labor. Noemí participates in order to win Florence's respect, since she knows that Florence only respects women who adhere to convention. It's ironic that Noemí polishes the Doyles' silver, since Noemí also recognizes that the silver was obtained through cruel mistreatment of indigenous laborers.

Florence pauses to admire all of the gleaming silver. She asks Noemí if she has any idea how much silver their mine used to produce. Doyle is an important name. Noemí doesn't realize how lucky Catalina is to be part of the Doyle family. To be a Doyle is to be *someone*, Florence says. She then demands to know what Noemí was talking to Francis about. Noemí tells her that they were just talking about spore prints, nothing more. But Florence doesn't believe her. She tells Noemí not to give her son any ideas. He's content here. He doesn't need to hear about parties, music, and booze, or whatever it is Noemí does in Mexico City.

Perhaps it's the derelict condition of High Place that makes the Doyles so fervently defend the value of their name; as their wealth continues to decrease, they cling ever tighter to the past—to how important they used to be. These former colonizers have failed to modernize, so they construct their identity around the former wealth of their estate.

Florence rants on. She accuses Noemí of thinking that she has power because Howard thinks she has a pretty face. But that's not power, it's a liability. Florence looks at her reflection in a silver serving tray—it's elongated and deformed. She says that when she was young, she thought the world outside High Place held such promise. She even went out and married a dashing man. She thought he would take her away, change things. But there's no denying our natures. Florence is meant to live and die in High Place, and so is Francis. Noemí needs to leave him be.

Thus far in the novel Noemí has used her "pretty face" as a form of power (flattery, flirtation, etc.). Florence criticizes her for that because it's unconventional. Additionally, Florence here reveals her commitment to Howard's ideas about eugenics and determinism. She herself once thought that it was possible for her to leave High Place, but her hopes were crushed. She's been convinced (likely by Howard) that it's in her nature to live and die in High Place, and she extends this same doctrine to Francis.

Florence dismisses Noemí, so she heads back to her bedroom. She thinks about the fairy tales that Catalina used to narrate to her: once upon a time a prince saved a girl from a tower. She sits on the bed and thinks about enchantments that are never broken.

This is perhaps the only time in the novel that Noemí shows some empathy towards Florence. In a way, Florence fell victim to the same delusions about marriage that Catalina did when she married Virgil. When women rely on their husbands to save them, it seems that they'll only be disappointed.

CHAPTER 11

Noemí hears a heart beating so loudly that it wakes her up. She ventures carefully out of her room to find it. In the hallway she sees a woman staring back at her. It's Ruth. She wears a white dressing gown, and her hair is like a golden halo. She holds a rifle between her hands. Ruth and Noemí walk side by aide, their movements perfectly synchronized. Noemí hears the heart beating inside the walls, and the walls themselves seem to be made of flesh. Ruth opens a door, and Noemí sees a man lying on a bed. His pale body overflows with blue veins, and tumors flower on his legs, hands, and belly.

Ruth's appearance makes her seem angelic—her hair looks like a halo and she's wearing white. But she's like that mushroom, the destroying angel, because she's also holding a rifle. Noemí and Ruth are described as being "perfectly synchronized," as if one was a reflection of the other. This foreshadows events that take place later in the novel.

The man sits up and extends his arms towards Ruth, as if demanding an embrace. Ruth raises the rifle, and Noemí turns her head away. She hears the blast of the rifle, the scream of the man, and then a throaty moan. Noemí thinks the man must be dead. Ruth walks past her, back into the hallway. She turns to Noemí and says that she's not sorry. Then she presses the rifle against her chin and pulls the trigger. The suicide does not unnerve Noemí, however. She feels that this is the way things should be; she feels soothed.

Ruth's admission that she isn't sorry for shooting her family members seems merciless. Either she had a reason for shooting them that made her feel justified, or she was mentally deranged. That Noemí feels soothed by Ruth's actions seems to indicate that Ruth was justified in what she did.

But then she sees the figure standing in the hallway, watching her. It's the golden woman, with a blur of a face, rushing toward Noemí and looking ready to eat her alive. Now Noemí is terrified. A hand on her shoulder jolts her awake. It's Virgil. He's standing in the middle of the hallway in a plush velvet robe with a pattern of gold running up the fabric. He has an oil lamp in his hand. He repeats her name, smooth on his lips. He tells her that he found her sleepwalking in the hallway. Noemí feels stupid, standing there in her night gown, gawking at him.

The identity of the golden woman is still a mystery, but apparently, it isn't Ruth. Also, the woman is full of rage and continues to be an antagonistic force. That Noemí has begun to sleepwalk indicates that her mental state is continuing to decline.

Noemí hears a throaty moan, like in her dream, and it makes her jump. Virgil explains that his father is ill. He suffers from an old wound that never quite healed, and it pains him. Virgil offers his robe to Noemí. She refuses, but he places it on her shoulders anyway. He walks her back to her bedroom. His lantern casts an eerie glow, and Noemí thinks for sure that this house is haunted. When they get to her room, she finally feels at ease.

The moment when Virgil gives Noemí his robe mirrors an earlier moment between Francis and Noemí, when Francis gives her his sweater. In the earlier moment Francis obtains Noemí's consent, then gives her his sweater. In contrast, here Virgil forcefully places his robe over Noemí's shoulders. This small gesture reveals much about the two men's personalities.

Noemí lights a candle in her room and then begins to take the robe off, but Virgil stops her by placing his hand on her shoulder. He tells her that she looks very fine in his clothes. Noemí knows that the comment is inappropriate, but she finds herself unable to respond. It wasn't really that bad of a comment, and she doesn't want to start a fight over nothing. Virgil smiles and bids her goodnight, but there's an edge to his smile that isn't quite masked. Noemí thinks she sees a glimmer of gold in Virgil's blue eyes, and she turns her head abruptly and stares at the floor. Virgil dims the lamp and steps away, marching down the hallway.

Virgil quite inappropriately flirts with Noemí, the cousin of his ill wife. Yet Noemí is unable to condemn him—she doesn't want to start a fight over nothing. There's a huge power imbalance between these two characters, and Virgil uses that in order to get away with small, inappropriate gestures.

CHAPTER 12

When Noemí wakes in the morning, she feels silly for being so afraid last night. In the daylight the house hardly seems cursed or haunted. She meets with Francis, and he drives her to town. Noemí walks to Marta's house, who invites her inside. Marta gives Noemí the remedy for Catalina and tells her that one or two tablespoons will be enough. It won't solve Catalina's problems, though, because High Place is cursed. Noemí asks Marta if she knows why Ruth killed her family. Marta says that an explanation requires that she tell another story. She makes some coffee for the telling. Noemí drinks it, hoping it might help restore her appetite. She's been feeling ill lately and hasn't been very hungry.

Marta reinforces that there's a supernatural explanation for the problems at High Place. Noemí is unwilling to believe this, even though she's been sleepwalking, feeling ill, and having nightmares—just like Catalina.

When Howard Doyle reopened the mine, it was big news; people came from all over Hidalgo for the chance at a job. Where there's a mine, there's money, after all. But folks began complaining quickly—Howard Doyle treated his workers like animals. Both Howard and his brother Leland had no mercy on the Mexican mining crews. After a few years, the house was completed and the mine was operating smoothly. Howard was still hard, but he paid on time and the miners also got a small quota of silver—the partido, which is the way things have always been done.

The Doyles' mine demonstrates that while the colonial system provided jobs, the indigenous workers were often underpaid and abused. It was a racist system where the white men on top benefited by mistreating the indigenous workers whose very land was being reaped for its resources.

A few years after the first epidemic, Howard remarried, and that's when things began to turn sour. There was a second sickness, which killed a lot of workers. Then Howard decided to end the custom of the partido. There was a miner named Aurelio who convinced the other miners to go on strike: the pay was bad, they were treated terribly, and the work was dangerous. In response, Howard and a gang of trusted men went to the miner's camp with rifles and threats, but Aurelio and the others fought back. Soon after, Aurelio was found dead. He didn't die of sickness, though. People who saw the body said he looked like he died of fright: his eyes were bulging and his mouth was open like a man who'd seen the devil.

That Howard violently puts down a movement to improve working conditions and pay shows how little he values his worker's lives. He cares for profit, and not much else. Though Aurelio's death is mysterious, it was certainly no accident. The implication of his death seems to be that Howard is like the devil, but it remains to be seen how he could possibly frighten a man to death.

The mine went on, Howard remarried, and his new wife gave birth to a girl, Ruth. Years passed. Aurelio's nephew, Benito, worked in the house. Though Ruth was supposed to marry her cousin, she fell in love with Benito. When Howard found out, he nearly killed Ruth, Marta mutters. Noemí imagines Howard wrapping his fingers around the girl's slim neck, and the image is so visceral that Noemí has to close her eyes and grip the table for support.

Howard's belief in eugenics means that he carefully arranges his family's marriages, in order to maintain what he believes is his family's superb genetics. Ruth's love for Benito not only threatens this deliberate planning, but also Howard is a racist, and the prospect of an interracial marriage for his daughter is something that greatly upsets him. That he beats his daughter into submission reveals just how terrible he is.

Marta continues her story. After Howard found out, Ruth was punished. Benito vanished. Some said he ran off, others said Howard ordered him killed. Either way, Ruth was still expected to marry her cousin Michael that summer. One night before the wedding, Ruth grabbed the rifle and shot her father while he slept, because of what he'd done to her lover. But Noemí knows that Ruth didn't stop after shooting her father, she killed other relatives too. She asks Marta what the others had to do with Benito, but Marta doesn't know. Maybe Ruth thought they were guilty too, or maybe Ruth had gone mad. As she has already said, that house is cursed.

This passage begins to explain Ruth's actions. Her attempt to kill Howard seems more justified now; Howard beat her and likely killed the man she loved. But Ruth's murder of her other relatives still doesn't make sense. Marta's suggestion that Ruth was mad is one that is used to explain the actions of different women throughout the novel (such as Catalina's letter, and some of Noemí's later actions). But this explanation is doubtful—there's a long history of labeling women "hysterical" as a way to dismiss their concerns, and Moreno-Garcia seems to be commenting on that history.

Marta asks Noemí if she's ever heard of "mal de aire." They're places where the air itself is heavy because evil weighs it down. The bad air will get into the lungs of anybody who breathes it in. That's what's wrong with the Doyles, Marta says. She rises and gives Noemí a bracelet, which she says will protect her from the evil eye. Noemí takes it in order to avoid hurting Marta's feelings, but she doesn't believe that it'll do anything. She then grabs Catalina's medicine and walks back to town.

Marta's explanation of "mal de aire" seems to coincide with an earlier theory of Noemí's: that, like in the Victorian age, a dye in the wallpaper is releasing noxious fumes.

As she walks, Noemí notices that she has a rash on her wrist, so she decides to stop at the clinic. Dr. Camarillo examines the rash and finds it odd; it almost looks like Noemí came into contact with mala mujer, but the plant doesn't grow around El Triunfo. He applies some ointment and wraps her wrist in a bandage. Noemí asks the doctor if he knows what would cause a person to start sleepwalking again. It's something that she did when she was very young, but she hasn't done it in ages—until last night. Dr. Camarillo suggests that it could be anxiety, and he apologizes that he can't be more helpful. Noemí thanks him and leaves.

Mala mujer is indeed a plant, but its name translates to "bad woman," which could be a nod towards Florence, or perhaps that golden woman that Noemí sees in her dreams. That Noemí has started sleepwalking again is evidence of her declining mental state, which the doctor indicates when he suggests that it could be caused by anxiety.

Noemí stops at a small store and buys a pack of cards to play with Catalina. She sends a letter to her father at the post office and then meets Francis. Rather than go back to High Place and face Virgil and Florence's questions, Francis napped in the car while he waited for Noemí. Francis doesn't look very attractive in the sunlight—he has a small upper-lip, heavy-lidded eyes, and his eyebrows arch a little too much—but Noemí likes him nevertheless. She teases him a little and then plants a kiss on his cheek.

Francis displays his allegiance to Noemí by remaining in town so as not to arouse suspicion in Virgil and Florence. Noemí's comment that she likes Francis despite his bad looks displays her changing attitude toward men. In chapter One Noemí explained that she dated Hugo Duarte simply because he looked attractive. In contrast, here she kisses Francis in spite of his unattractiveness.

Francis asks Noemí if she finished all her errands, and she tells him that she talked to someone about High Place and the murders Ruth committed. Ruth wanted to run away with her lover, but instead she shot her whole family. It doesn't make sense—why wouldn't she just run away from High Place? Francis tells her it's not so simple, you can't just leave High Place. Noemí objects; Ruth was an adult—she could leave if she wanted to. Francis points out that Noemí is an adult woman. Can she do anything she wants, even if it upsets her family? This gives Noemí pause. Would she ever risk an outright rebellion against her family?

Though Ruth's story doesn't seem to have much bearing on Noemí's current troubles, she thinks about it again and again. This exposes Noemí's concern for other women—particularly women who've been wronged by men. Francis's explanation that Ruth was unable to leave High Place sounds similar to something that Florence said about herself: the Doyles are meant to live and die in High Place—they cannot leave.

Francis continues. He tells Noemí that his mother, Florence, tried to leave High Place, but she came back. There's no escaping it, and Ruth knew that. That's why she did it. Noemí suggests that Francis almost sounds proud of Ruth. He turns and looks at her gravely. No, he isn't proud, he says. But truth be told, he wishes that Ruth would have burned High Place to the ground.

Francis's statement here is outright rebellious, and it reveals his true attitude regarding his family. He wishes that he could leave, but he feels trapped. He empathizes with Ruth, even though she did something terrible. Finally, it's noteworthy that he can only make statements like this outside of High Place, away from his intrusive family.

CHAPTER 13

Noemí decides that she and Catalina will have a casino night, like they used to as children. She goes to Catalina's room and presents her with the deck of cards, but she seems hesitant to play. Noemí guesses that she's afraid of Florence, and teases Catalina about it. She then gives her Marta's remedy, and Catalina's eyes light up when she sees it. She thanks Noemí profusely, then digs in her drawer and pulls out a silver spoon. Catalina pours herself a teaspoon and swallows greedily, then takes another, then a third. Noemi has to grab her hand to stop her from downing a fourth.

Noemí assumes that Catalina is afraid of Florence and teases her about it. Though her assumption is correct, she misjudges just how afraid of Florence Catalina truly is. Catalina hurriedly overdoses herself with Marta's remedy, which could be a sign of how strongly she feels the effects of her illness.

Noemí chides her, reminding Catalina that Marta's instructions were to take two spoons at the most. Catalina smiles weakly and then moves to pick up the deck of cards. She suddenly stops, as if frozen in place. Noemí tries to ask her if she's alright, but she's interrupted by a loud crack, as if one of Catalina's joints has broken, and then her cousin begins convulsing. Noemí tries to catch Catalina, and they both fall to the floor. Noemí yells for help. She places the silver spoon in Catalina's mouth to bar her from biting her tongue.

Catalina seizes immediately after taking the medicine, which indicates that Marta's remedy somehow causes Catalina's seizure. The cracking sound is ominous, but it's unclear what causes it.

Noemí runs into the hallway and screams again for help. Finally Francis and Florence appear, and she tells them that Catalina is having a seizure. They all run back to the room, and Francis springs forward to hold Catalina. Florence stops Noemí, ordering her to get out. She slams the door in Noemí's face. In a few minutes Francis exits the room, walking quickly to go and fetch Dr. Cummins. Noemí wants to go with him, but Francis tells her to wait in the sitting room. He'll fetch Noemí when he returns; it won't be long.

It's strange that Florence immediately kicks Noemí out of the room—she shouldn't yet know that Noemí had anything to do with the seizure. This makes it seem like Florence is hiding something.

It's a long time before Francis comes back, and when he does, he brings Florence and Dr. Cummins with him. Noemí asks about Catalina. Dr. Cummins tells her that she's asleep and through the worst of it. Florence holds up Marta's bottle and demands to know where it came from. Noemí says it's just a sleeping tonic, and Catalina was the one who asked for it. Besides, she had already taken it before—it couldn't have been what made her sick. Dr. Cummins scolds her; is Noemí a medical professional? What does she know? He informs Noemí that what she gave her cousin was an opium tincture. A filthy tincture like this, he says, could have killed her.

Noemí has a point: if Catalina has taken the tonic before, why would it make her sick now? But Dr. Cummins is a medical professional, and Noemí is not. If he says that the tincture contained opium, what reason is there to doubt him? After all, judging by the sequence of events, it's fairly clear that the remedy caused Catalina to have a seizure.

Florence again asks where Noemí got the tincture. Catalina had told her not to tell anyone, so Noemí bites her tongue. She feels like crying, and she might, but Francis moves behind her and places his hand over hers. Florence tells Noemí that she deserves to be slapped, but just as she moves forward Virgil strolls in and asks to be alone with Noemí. Dr. Cummins immediately obeys, but Florence protests, drawing a bitter response from Virgil. Reluctantly, Florence and Francis leave the room, leaving Virgil and Noemí alone.

Francis openly comforting Noemí while his mother scolds her is akin to a small rebellion; he's siding with Noemí over his family. It's noteworthy that when Virgil walks in everyone obeys him. He's the eldest son of the family patriarch, and that gives him a lot of conventional authority.


Virgil fills his glass from a decanter and sits on the settee next to Noemí. He tells her that she should have more respect for his home. She's been constantly upsetting Catalina, and now she's brought her poison. Noemí's exasperated, and she gets up to leave, but Virgil grabs her by the wrist and pulls her down. Seeing her wince, he pulls away Noemí's sleeve and sees the bandage on her wrist. He knows Dr. Camarillo gave her the bandage, so he asks if he also gave Noemí the tincture. She demands that he let her go.

Virgil blames Noemí, telling her that if she followed rules and conventions, this wouldn't have happened. He's attempting to guilt her into being less rebellious, and it seems to be working on Noemí. Virgil grabbing Noemí's wrist is the first non-dream instance of violence between the two of them and represents an escalation in their relationship.

While still clutching Noemí's wrist, Virgil tells her that Florence was right: she deserves to be slapped. Noemí retorts that if anyone is going to be slapped, it would be Virgil. He laughs loudly at this, spilling his drink. He carelessly tosses his glass on the floor—it's his to break if he chooses, like everything in this house. Virgil berates Noemí: does she think she's the only one who cares about Catalina? He knows that Noemí's father didn't approve of their marriage; he didn't think Virgil was a good match because the mine had closed. But Virgil is a Doyle, and it would be good of Noemí to remember that.

Virgil threatens to slap Noemí, and though she retorts, they both know that Virgil has the power to hit Noemí without repercussion. High Place is soon to be his house; he can break a glass if he wants to, and he can hit Noemí if he wants to. Next Virgil reveals that Noemí's father didn't approve of his marriage to Catalina. He's taken this as an insult to his pride—like Florence, Virgil clings to the Doyle name despite the family's declining wealth and esteem.

Virgil continues to reproach Noemí. By going behind the family's back, she has acted selfishly, like a spoiled brat. And she hurt Virgil's wife. Noemí feels both anger and shame; she hates the way that Virgil is speaking to her, but she's done a foolish thing. Tears well in her eyes. Virgil's voice wavers—Noemí nearly made him a widower tonight, so she must forgive him for not being very gracious. He asks her to leave Catalina's care to Dr. Cummins from now on. There are many things that Noemí doesn't understand, but she must believe that Catalina's well-being is important to the family. He lingers at her side and then strides from the room.

Virgil's reprimand of Noemí is full of contempt, but she doesn't object because she knows that he's correct. Noemí supplied the tonic that caused Catalina's seizure, nearly killing her. Her mission is to rescue Catalina, and she's nearly done the opposite.

CHAPTER 14

Noemí sits in her room, attempting to read her book about the Azande people. She's tried to speak to Catalina twice already, but both times Florence has refused her. She feels ashamed, and her book is hardly able to distract her. She puts on the sweater Francis gave her and steps outside for a cigarette. She wants to get some distance from the house, so she follows the path that leads to the cemetery. Noemí walks among the tombstones, wishing to be lost. She was sent to fix a problem, and now she's made an even bigger mess. What would her father think?

Dr. Cummins and Florence have convinced Noemí that she's done something wrong. Noemí feels great shame for causing Catalina harm. She can't focus on reading her anthropological texts, and she wears Francis's sweater for comfort.

Noemí sees the stone statue of Agnes in front of the Doyle mausoleum. She searches for a plaque at the base of the statue and finds one hidden behind a clump of weeds. *Agnes Doyle. Mother. 1885*. That was all Howard had chosen to commemorate his first wife. It seems odd to Noemí that Doyle would build a statue of Agnes but not compose even a proper line or two about her passing. That one word, *Mother*, bothers her too. As far as Noemí knows, all of Howard's children were born of his second marriage.

Though Howard ordered a statue built for his late wife, the one-word epitaph suggests that he didn't care too deeply about it. It's as if he went through the ritual of grieving without any emotional depth—surely if he truly cared for his wife, there would be more written here. Furthermore, Noemí doesn't know of any children that Agnes had, so to whom is she a mother? This observation heightens the mystery of the Doyles' past.

Noemí sits down and absently tugs at the blades of grass. The silence is broken by Francis, who walks up to her. She thinks he looks fragile, as he often does. Only in a place like this, a gloomy cemetery, does he acquire any substance. She thinks that he'd be shattered by the noise and bustle of Mexico City. Francis tells Noemí that what happened to Catalina isn't her fault. He reveals that Catalina had taken the tincture before and had a reaction to it. Noemí asserts that Catalina would never try to kill herself—they're Catholic, it's a sin. Francis explains that he mentions it only to tell Noemí that what happened isn't her fault. Catalina is miserable at High Place, and Noemí should take her and leave immediately.

Noemí's thinking here about Francis seems to echo Florence's assertions about where Francis belongs. Even Noemí sees that Francis is better suited for High Place than the city. Francis's revelation is shocking, but it also confirms that the Doyles have been hiding things from Noemí. Even Francis, whom Noemí is beginning to have serious feelings for, didn't tell Noemí that her cousin had tried to kill herself.

But Noemí can't leave. Virgil would never let Catalina go, and Noemí's unwilling to leave without her. She would be a failure in her father's eyes, and their deal would be off the table. And she wouldn't dare leave Catalina in her current state. Noemí tells Francis she can't leave, and he responds by saying that this house is no place for her. Noemí is irritated, and accuses Francis of disliking her, but he assures her that he likes her very much. If he likes her, Noemí says, then he can prove it by giving her a ride into town tomorrow. She wants to find out what was in the tincture that Catalina drank. Francis reluctantly agrees; he's tired, they all are. Uncle Howard has been keeping them awake at night.

Francis's advice to leave High Place is delivered like a warning, but Noemí is unwilling to leave without Catalina. Francis tells Noemí that she doesn't belong in High Place, which echoes the sentiment that Noemí had about him just moments before. Each of them thinks that the other is better suited to a different environment—if they want to be together, then one of them would have to surmount this challenge.

Again Noemí feels selfish. She sees that Francis is unwell; he seems more hollowed out and has dark, purplish circles under his eyes. She imagines Francis and the others having to care for Howard's withered body late into the night. She asks Francis about Howard's old wound—what was the injury? He tells her that it's ulcers that refuse to heal, but they won't be the end of him; nothing will be the end of him.

Howard's illness takes a toll on the entire family, who have to share his burden. Francis's final words are ominous, though they seem to be spoken from tiredness and frustration, and not meant to be taken literally.

They walk back towards the house. Noemí asks Francis why Catalina is so miserable. She was so happy at her wedding. Is Virgil cruel to her? Francis mutters that it's the house. The house wasn't made for love. Look back two, three generations, as far as you can, and there's no love. The Doyles are incapable of love. He curls his fingers around the iron gate and stands motionless for a moment before stepping aside and opening the gate for Noemí.

This passage further characterizes Noemí and Francis's relationship as one that would have to defy nature in order to be successful. Yet, even as Francis says that the Doyles are incapable of love, he gallantly steps aside and holds the gate open for Noemí—a small gesture of love that signals hope for their relationship.

That night, Noemí has a curious dream. The house has metamorphosized into a forest: the carpet has become moss, vines creep along the walls, and long, thin mushrooms grow all over and glow a pale light. In the dream, she knows exactly where she ought to go—to the cemetery. But this is the time before the cemetery, when they were building a rose garden along the mountain slope. Noemí reaches a clearing and beholds a woman in labor. Several people are gathered around, and Noemí notices a little girl sitting on a chair holding a white cloth. A man sits behind her with his ringed hand on her shoulder. The ring is amber.

Noemí's dream transports her to a point in time that's far in the past—before all those English miners died, and before High Place was built. The woman's labor seems to have some kind of ritualistic significance, as a crowd of people is silently and inexpressively watching. Finally, the amber ring is significant because both Howard and Agnes (as depicted in her portrait) wore amber rings. Perhaps the ring is an heirloom, and these people are their ancestors.

The crowd is watching the woman as if she's giving a theatre performance. The pregnant woman lets out a long moan, and then the man stands up and walks over to her. He bends down and carefully lifts the child that the woman has birthed. "Death, overcome," the man says. But when he raises his arms, Noemí sees that he isn't holding a child at all: the woman has given birth to a gray, egg-shaped lump of flesh. It quivers and ruptures, sending a golden cloud of dust into the air. The man greedily breathes it in, as do the others in attendance.

The man's words indicate some kind of triumph over death, and seem to connect to the ouroboros, which further ties these people to the Doyles. The color gold continues to be a recurring visual and links this dream to the nightmarish vision of the golden woman, as well as the golden flecks that Noemí sometimes sees in Virgil's eyes.

Everyone has forgotten the woman—everyone except the girl. She approaches the exhausted figure on the ground and presses the cloth against the woman's face, holding it tight. The woman convulses, unable to breathe, but the child holds on tight. Soon the woman quivers and dies. The man repeats the same words, "Death, overcome," and then he raises his eyes and stares at Noemí. She feels incredible fear. When she wakes up, she finds herself standing at the foot of the stairs, moonlight streaming through the windows.

This scene depicts both a birth and a death, which feels cyclical, like the ouroboros. Yet, the thing that was born was not alive, so it's unclear how death has been "overcome." As has happened in previous dreams, Noemí does not become afraid until a woman suffers. Here the woman's suffocation seems to be a necessary cost for the ritual, but again the specifics remain unclear.

CHAPTER 15

Noemí knocks repeatedly at Marta's door, but the woman never answers. She rejoins Francis and the two walk back toward the town square. They meet Dr. Camarillo at the clinic, who introduces himself to Francis, saying that he used to play cards with Francis's father. Dr. Camarillo invites them in, and Noemí asks to speak with him privately. Francis obliges, waiting patiently in the sitting area.

That Francis's father used to play cards with some of the locals suggests that he was free of the bigotry that characterizes many of the Doyles. Additionally, though Francis has been tasked by his family to keep an eye on Noemí, he still gives her this private moment with Dr. Camarillo, proving his allegiance to her.

Noemí tells Dr. Camarillo about Catalina's seizure and asks him if he has heard of Marta's medicine ever causing someone to have a seizure. First, he explains that Marta often goes to Pachuca to see her daughter, and second, he answers that no, he's never heard of Marta's tonics causing such a reaction. He asks if Dr. Cummins examined Catalina, and Noemí tells him that he has—he said that an opium tincture caused the seizure, and that Marta's a quack. Dr. Camarillo shakes his head. Marta is no quack, there are many people who go to her for recipes. Furthermore, he says that it's impossible for Marta to have procured an opium tincture because the herbs required don't grow here.

Dr. Camarillo not only clears Marta of suspicion, he also throws suspicion back at Dr. Cummins by implying that he lied about the opium. Furthermore, while Dr. Cummins has been critical of local physicians and healers, Dr. Camarillo's defense of Marta demonstrates that traditional herbal remedies can coexist with modern medical science—the two don't have to be in competition with each other.

Noemí can't make heads or tails of this information. If it were true, that means the tincture isn't what caused Catalina to be sick, and Dr. Cummins lied about it. Dr. Camarillo apologizes for not being more helpful but offers to change the bandage on Noemí's wrist. When he removes the bandage, however, he sees that Noemí's skin has completely healed. The doctor is quite surprised—it should have taken a week for that rash to heal. Noemí thinks about mentioning her second episode of sleepwalking, but ultimately decides against it.

Noemí's rash has healed unnaturally quickly, which is an alarming sign when paired with her deteriorating mental state. Whatever is making Noemí sick now seems to be affecting more than just her sleep.

An hour after returning from town, Noemí is summoned to Virgil's bedroom. The first thing she notices upon entering is the large, imposing painting of Howard hanging in the room. Virgil is getting dressed behind a three-fold when Noemí walks in. He tells her that the rains will soon become torrential, making the roads extremely dangerous. She should check with him before she decides to go to town. He tells her to fetch him the robe hanging on his chair, and as Noemí hands it to Virgil, she sees that he has his shirt off. She blushes in shame, thinking that this is much too casual and immodest.

It's telling that a portrait of Howard hangs in Virgil's bedroom; even in Virgil's most personal space, Howard looms large, watching. Virgil's immodesty seems to be a calculated move, meant to unsettle Noemí for the coming conversation.

After putting the robe on, Virgil gestures toward a chair and tells Noemí to sit. She ignores the gesture and tells Virgil that she knows this is not the first time that Catalina drank the tincture and had a bad reaction. He tells her that Dr. Cummins already told her that Catalina was depressed, and Noemí didn't believe him. So why would Virgil bother telling her that her cousin is suicidal? This upsets Noemí, and she tells him that if Catalina is suicidal, then it's Virgil's fault.

By refusing to sit, Noemí demonstrates that she is still resistant to Virgil's authority—this will be a battle fought by small gestures.

Noemí regrets her words and tries to apologize, but Virgil acquiesces: Noemí's right, it is his fault. Catalina fell in love with him for the wrong reasons. He thinks that Catalina saw in him a tragic, romantic figure—a boy who lost his mother and whose fortune was evaporating. No doubt she pictured High Place as a rustic mansion that could be changed, rescued from its decay. But of course, Virgil explains, Howard would never allow anything to be changed. They all exist at his pleasure.

Virgil recognizes that Catalina had certain delusions during their courtship. While he's telling this to Noemí seemingly to alleviate some of his guilt, the fact remains that Virgil did nothing during the courtship to dispel Catalina's false ideas. This theme runs throughout the novel: men appear differently during courtship than they do during marriage.

Noemí asks Virgil if he would change anything, if he could. Virgil answers that he would make changes of a certain type, but not a change so grand that he'd become something that he's not. You can't change the essence of a thing, he says, and that was the problem with Catalina. She wanted him to be something that he wasn't—what she saw in him was never there, and this made her unhappy immediately after marriage.

Again Virgil demonstrates his commitment to eugenics. He believes that people have a certain nature, and that it's impossible for people to act outside of that nature—change is futile. This type of thinking reflects the cyclical nature of the ouroboros (a circle doesn't allow for change).


Noemí wonders why Catalina would not have returned home, but she quickly realizes the answer: her family. Everyone would have been appalled, and the newspapers would have been filled with slander, just as her father now fears. She asks Virgil why he married Catalina, and he explains that it was his father's wish to see him married. Howard wanted to know that the family line would not die out. Virgil then reveals that he was married once before, to Dr. Cummins's daughter. The marriage was arranged by Howard and was a disaster. They disliked each other, and after four miscarriages, she divorced him.

The threat of a scandal that would be generated by a divorce entraps Catalina in an unhappy marriage. In this way adherence to convention is more important than the happiness of an individual. Virgil admits that he was forced into a marriage that he didn't want by Howard, and this perhaps builds some sympathy for the character.

After the divorce Virgil took a few trips to Guadalajara and then to Mexico City. He met Catalina and liked her softness, her romantic notions. She wanted a fairy tale and he wanted to give her that. Then it all went wrong. Noemí remembers that Catalina loved to read fairy tales; Snow White with the magical kiss and the beauty who transforms the beast. Here was her fairy tale. It amounted to a stilted marriage coupled with sickness and mental tribulations.

Virgil's story about Catalina is similar to Florence's account of her own marriage. Both Florence and Catalina thought that marriage would be romantic and charming, and they were primed to think that way by things like novels and fairytales. Yet, when they were actually married, both women were quickly disappointed. Florence became cruel and devious, and Catalina became depressed.

Noemí suggests that Virgil could take Catalina somewhere else and make his own life, if it's the house that Catalina so dislikes. Virgil smirks. He can't leave High Place, and he's not allowed to have his own life. His father needs him here. He pauses before changing the topic. He apologizes to Noemí for the way he treated her last time they met. They don't need to be enemies. He promises that he'll ask Dr. Cummins to see if there are any psychiatrists in Pachuca. They shake hands amicably, then Noemí excuses herself and leaves.

Virgil, like Francis, seems to feel like he's trapped in High Place. Howard's oppression is so great that even his first-born son feels like he can't have his own life—no one in High Place can.


Noemí sees Francis avoid her and wonders if Florence scolded him for driving her to town. She seeks out Florence and finds her in the kitchen. Noemí tells her that it was her fault Francis drove her, and that she shouldn't be angry with him. Florence explains that it's important to maintain order in one's house, and in one's life. It helps to determine each person's place in the world. Frances has duties at High Place, and Noemí makes him forget them. He acts silly with Noemí; he completely forgets the person he's supposed to be. She dismisses Noemí and continues her work.

Florence's worldview relies on an organizing structure—one where every person is in their proper place, according to their nature (determined by their genetics). Thus, one can imagine that her worldview, like the colonizers she descends from, places white men on top, and indigenous people near the bottom.

CHAPTER 16

Noemí visits Catalina, but Florence no longer allows them to be alone together. Mary, the maid, chaperones the visit. Catalina asks Noemí to read her some poetry from a collection by Sor Juana. Noemí opens the book to the page Catalina requests, and there she finds a note folded between the pages. She carefully tucks the note into her pocket while Mary's back is turned. Eventually Florence arrives and tells Noemí that it's time for Catalina to rest. She hurriedly returns to her bedroom, eager to read the note.

Sor Juana is a Mexican writer and icon. Many regard her as the first published feminist of the New World, so it's appropriate that Noemí and Catalina (who are struggling against the patriarchal figure of Howard Doyle) like to read her work.

Noemí unfolds the paper and sees, written in Catalina's script, "this is proof." The paper appears to have been torn from Ruth's diary. She was hearing voices and was preparing to do something dangerous. This place may have been bearable, she wrote, were it not for *him*—"our lord and master. Our God". It's up to Ruth to save everyone. Killing Howard won't be murder, it'll be salvation. He mercilessly beat Ruth when he found out about Benito, and she swore then that she would never bear a child or do his will again.

That Ruth was hearing voices makes it seem like she was suffering from the same illness as Catalina and Noemí. Ruth records Howard's crimes and argues that killing him would be justified. She swears that she'll never listen to his will again, making her defiance into feminist vengeance.

Noemí is in disbelief; could this really be a page from Ruth's diary? Where could Catalina have found this? Catalina wrote that this was proof, but proof of what, Noemí wonders. Physicians of old would conclude that this was a case of three hysteric women. But Noemí knew that she was not hysterical. Perhaps there was a rational explanation for all of this—nothing supernatural. She wants to talk to someone about all this, so she goes in search of Francis.

At the heart of this novel is the issue of believing women, even when they make claims that seem implausible. During the beginning of the story Noemí's father dismissed Catalina's claims as melodramatic (just as many physicians used to dismiss women as hysterical). If instead Noemí's father had believed Catalina, Noemí would not be in nearly as big a mess as she is right now.

Noemí knocks on Francis's bedroom door, and he lets her in. The walls in his room are covered in colorful drawings and prints of botanical specimens. Pens, ink, and half-finished drawings cover the table. Noemí asks Francis about his artwork, but he's embarrassed and quickly changes the subject. He asks her if she plans to be involved with her father's business. Noemí responds that she sees no reason why she should be involved in the paint business—or worse, marry the heir of another paint company. She wants to do something different. Perhaps she'll become a top-notch anthropologist.

Unlike Virgil's bedroom, Francis's bedroom lacks a portrait of Howard Doyle, which is a clue that Francis dislikes Howard much more than Virgil does. Noemí's plan to distance herself from her father's business is something that Francis wishes he could do, but he feels trapped at High Place.

Noemí feels a desire to lean forward and kiss Francis, but she hesitates. It's easy to kiss someone when it doesn't matter, but a kiss with Francis would be meaningful. She asks him if he's ever thought that High Place might be haunted. He frowns and tells her that there's no such thing as ghosts. Noemí persists: what if Catalina is perfectly sane and there is a haunting in this house, but one that could be explained logically? People used to think that Victorian hatters were prone to going crazy, but really it was the materials they worked with. Mixing mercury and dye creates a vapor that affects the mind. Perhaps something similar is happening in High Place—chemicals in the paint on the walls that are making people go mad.

Noemí has strong romantic feelings for Francis, even if their relationship is complicated by their very different natures. Additionally, here Noemí proves her allegiance to women by believing seemingly absurd claims and finding the rational explanation within them.


Francis stands up suddenly and grips Noemí's hands. In Spanish he tells her not to say another word. He's never spoken to her in Spanish while in High Place before, and Noemí can't remember him ever deliberately touching her either. Francis tells her that she's clever, too clever. She needs to take his advice and leave High Place. Just because there aren't ghosts doesn't mean that the house can't be haunted. She is like his father, too fearless. And his father paid the price. Noemí knows that Francis's father fell down a ravine, and she asks if there was more to it. What really happened to him?

Francis's reaction suggests that Noemí's theory is on the mark. He switches to Spanish to prevent any of his family members from eavesdropping, since none of them speak the language. Finally, Francis fears that Noemí will end up like his father (as well as others before him, like Aurelio and Benito): dead, after trying to challenge the power structure that exists at High Place.

A moan interrupts their conversation. Francis grimaces, as if in pain, and tells Noemí that Uncle Howard is having another rough night. She attempts to console Francis, telling him that she's sorry his uncle is in such pain. "You have no idea," Francis says, "if only he would die." Noemí is shocked at the vehemence of Francis's resentment. Francis whispers that when he was small Howard used to beat him with his cane, telling Francis that he was teaching him how to be strong. In those moments, he would think that Ruth was right to shoot him. Only she couldn't finish him off. Uncle Howard is a monster, Francis says, don't trust him, or Florence, or Virgil. He rushes Noemí from the room, telling her that Florence must be on her way to fetch him by now.

Here Francis sounds almost like Ruth. He has a history of being beaten by Howard, and as a consequence he loathes the man and wishes he would die. He seems to believe that Howard possesses some kind of invulnerability; that's why Ruth couldn't kill him and why Francis hasn't tried. Francis's confessions to Noemí have been growing in intensity as the novel has progressed, and this one is the most intense: he calls his family monsters and wishes that Howard had been murdered.

CHAPTER 17

Noemí finds it difficult to fall asleep, so she decides to take a bath. She fills the tub with steaming water and steps inside. She begins to relax, thinking that it'd be nice to go on a vacation—somewhere with a beach. She'd invite Hugo Duarte. No, who was she kidding? She yearned for Francis now, not Hugo. Though a young woman her age was not supposed to know anything about desire, Noemí had experienced kisses, embraces, and certain caresses. The reason she hasn't slept with any of the men she dated has less to do with sin than with the concern that they'd talk about it with their friends, or worse, entrap her.

One of the most powerful forces in Noemí's life is scandal—the whole reason her father sent her here was to avoid a scandal, after all. She hasn't slept with any of the men she's dated for fear of generating a scandal, and as a woman, she's more vulnerable than a man to this type of public disgrace.

She continues to rest, staring at the ceiling and contemplating the mold. Then she turns her head and sees Virgil standing in the doorway. He tells her that there's no need for her to speak, no need for her to move. Noemí feels shame and anger coarse through her. She wants to yell at Virgil and slap him. But she's not able to move her hand, and she can't open her mouth either. "*They can make you think things*," a voice whispers, "*they make you do things*."

Though a voice in Noemí's head suggests that Virgil is somehow preventing Noemí from reacting, a broader observation can be made: men with power often threaten women into silence during an assault. It's telling that Noemí feels shame, even though she has nothing to be ashamed of—if people knew that Virgil saw her naked, it would likely be Noemí whose reputation was ruined by the scandal, not Virgil.

Virgil tells her to be a good girl, then leans over and kisses her. "*Open your eyes*," the voice says. Noemí wants to shove Virgil off of her, but she still can't move. Virgil kisses her neck, her chest, then runs his hand down to her thighs. Noemí isn't shivering in fear anymore—it's desire that's making her shudder. She no longer feels that Virgil is an intruder. "*Open your eyes*," hisses the voice. Noemí turns her head and the ceiling melts away—she sees a pale mushroom that looks like a snake rising through the ground, piercing an egg. She recognizes it as a specimen that she saw depicted in Francis's room: universal veil.

The voice urging Noemí to "open her eyes" seems to be on her side, but it's unclear who the voice belongs to. Noemí's strange vision of the fungus called the universal veil suggests that there's something inhibiting her senses—some sort of veil that's preventing her from fighting against Virgil.

Noemí snaps her eyes open. Water drips down her back and fingertips, and her bathrobe is not cinched. The room she is in is dark, but she sees a lamp brighten as someone adjusts it. Virgil Doyle sits in his bed, raising the lamp that was resting at his bedside. Noemí asks what's going on, and Virgil responds that she must have sleepwalked into his bedroom. Noemí manages to clumsily close her robe, and Virgil gets up to fetch her a towel. He tells her to sit down and have a sip of wine, and though Noemí wants to leave, she's in such a state of anxiousness that she obeys Virgil.

Noemí is vulnerable when sleepwalking, and now that she's walked into Virgil's bedroom with her robe open, she feels particularly ashamed and defenseless. Though the last time she was here and Virgil told her to sit she refused, now she obeys Virgil without objection.

Noemí's mind is hazy. She doesn't know what to say. She tells Virgil that he was in her dream. Virgil smiles and says that he hopes the dream was good. Noemí comes to her senses and feels repulsion in the pit of her stomach. She says his presence in her dream was an intrusion. She stands up and declares that she'll be heading back to her room now. Virgil stands too and asks Noemí what she dreamt about. Noemí tries not to blush, but the thought of his mouth on hers and his hands on her thighs sends a thrill though her body. The dream felt like desire, danger, and scandal—all those things her body and mind have quietly coveted. She blushes, and Virgil smiles. Even though it's impossible, Noemí is sure Virgil knows about her dream. She grabs Virgil's lamp and marches back to her room.

Virgil's smile and insistence on getting her to admit what the dream was about seem to indicate that he knows more than he's letting on. Noemí's feelings about Virgil are a mixture of desire and repulsion—she thinks his behavior is abhorrent, but he's attractive and seductive. Perhaps these confused feelings are the result of society's repression of women; because women are shamed for experiencing or talking about sex and desire, women like Noemí are woefully underprepared for dealing with this type of behavior. She knows that Virgil's advances were wrong and unwanted, yet she was still aroused.

CHAPTER 18

Noemí wakes up to Florence entering her room. Florence tells her that it's lunchtime and places a tray at her bedside. Noemí feels exhausted, but how could she have slept so late? She asks to see Catalina, but Florence tells her that she's already gone back to sleep. Noemí asks if she could inform her when Catalina awakens, and Florence rudely retorts that she isn't Noemí's servant and doesn't have to tell her anything. Noemí argues with her, but Florence calmly tells her that she should complain to Virgil if she has a problem. Florence leaves the room with a smile, as if she's just won a battle.

Noemí's mental state continues to decline, as evidenced by her irregular sleeping hours. Florence continues to spar with Noemí, and while Florence feels as though she's won, her power over Noemí relies on male (Virgil's) authority—it's not her own power.

Noemí grabs her sweater and heads to the library, where she absentmindedly grabs two books and heads back to her room. She begins smoking a cigarette and quickly finds herself unable to concentrate on what she's reading. Her eyes land on the corner in her room where the rose wallpaper is stained black by mold. As she stares at it, the mold starts to move. Noemí approaches the wall, mesmerized by the shifting mold. She sees colors in it as it moves: gold and yellow and amber.

Noemí's hallucination is the most severe symptom of her illness yet. The colors she sees in the hallucination are connected to her dreams: gold like the golden woman, and amber like the ring that the man was wearing.

Noemí reaches up to touch the mold. She hears a buzzing sound, as if a thousand bees were in the walls. The mold beats to the rhythm of her heart; they beat as one. She forgets that she has a cigarette in her hand, and it burns her, making her yelp. She tosses it into an ashtray. She turns and looks at the mold again, but it's perfectly still now. Noemí rushes to the bathroom, shuts the door, and splashes cold water on her face. She feels as though she's about to faint.

Noemí's having some sort of mental break. It's ominous that the mold and her heart's rhythm "beat as one," because it suggests some sort of relationship between Noemí and the mold, as if they're living symbiotically.

A loud knock makes Noemí jump. Florence enters before Noemí can reply. She demands to know why Noemí is smoking. Noemí scoffs and demands to know what's going on in this house. She wants to see Catalina—right now. She clutches Florence's arm, squeezing hard as the woman tries to push her away. Just then Virgil strolls into the room wearing the same pinstripe jacket that he had on in Noemí's dream. It unnerves Noemí; reality and fantasy are blending together.

It's interesting that, as Noemí has a mental break, smoking is what brings her back to reality (only for Noemí to be immediately scolded for smoking in the house). Breaking the rules of the house is apparently what keeps Noemí sane.

Florence tells Virgil that Noemí has been breaking the rules again, as usual. Noemí asks Virgil what he's doing here, and he tells her that he heard a scream and came to investigate. But Noemí definitely didn't yell. Or did she? She demands to see Catalina again, and Virgil nonchalantly tells her to follow him. He leads her to Catalina's room, where they find her cheerily drinking tea. Noemí isn't sure what she expected to find. The scene strikes her as artificially constructed, yet nothing seems exactly wrong.

Noemí is going through a crisis, and she expects to find Catalina doing the same. When she finds her cousin, however, Catalina seems totally fine. But Noemí remains convinced that something is wrong, even if she can't articulate exactly what.

Noemí steps out of Catalina's room, unwilling to have a conversation with her while everyone watches. Virgil follows her out and asks if Noemí is satisfied. She says that she is for now, and she tries to walk away but Virgil keeps following her. Noemí turns and tells him that she wishes to leave High Place. Can Virgil tell someone to drive her to town? The world seems to be collapsing around her, dreams bleeding into reality, and she needs some time away in order to get her head straight.

Noemí's losing the ability to tell fantasy from reality, and Virgil treats her condescendingly, as if she were hysterical.

Virgil tells her that all the rain has made the roads too treacherous, so she'll have to remain at High Place for the night. They can attempt the drive tomorrow morning. Noemí agrees, and just before she walks away, Virgil reminds her not to smoke. It disturbs the family. She tells him not to worry and then looks down at the burn mark on her hand. To her surprise, the mark is gone—her hand has completely healed.

For now Noemí is trapped in High Place, though she's been promised a ride to the train station in the morning. That the burn mark has disappeared (like the earlier rash) is troubling, but it's unclear if this is true or another of Noemí's hallucinations.

CHAPTER 19

Noemí packs her suitcases, feeling disloyal for leaving Catalina. The Doyles have planned a farewell dinner, and as Noemí walks into the dining room, she finds it elaborately decorated. The ban on conversation has been lifted, but Noemí finds it difficult to talk with anyone besides Francis. Virgil is a bully, and Florence is not much better. After the meal, Virgil announces that they'll be heading upstairs to visit Howard, who is expecting them. Noemí tries to make conversation and asks about the mine. Was the heavy rain the reason it closed? Virgil tells her that they couldn't find enough workers with the Revolution going on, and finally the mine flooded, ending operations. But that'll change soon, he says. Catalina has decided to invest in the mine. Just as a plant must find the light, the Doyles will soon find their way in the world.

Virgil's revelation that Catalina's money will reopen the mine provides the motivation behind Virgil's decision to marry Catalina. It is as Noemí's father feared: Virgil married her to take her money. Yet, there's a contradiction here: for all of Virgil's talk about genetic (and racial) superiority, he has to rely on a non-white woman's money in order to refinance his mine and help his family "find their way in the world." Surely if the Doyles actually were superior they could advance based on their own merit. Thus, this is one of a few moments in the novel where the reader can see the holes in the Doyles' eugenics-based thinking.

Virgil's revelation about the mine annoys Noemí. She wants to get this visit with Howard over with so that she can go to bed. The group proceeds to Howard's room, and Florence begins to peel back the curtains of Howard's bed. Noemí is shocked to see Howard lying there naked—his skin is terribly pale, and there are thick, pulsating boils on his leg. Virgil whispers that she must get closer, and he grabs her arm and forces her to her knees at Howard's side. The smell makes Noemí want to retch. Howard leans forward and grabs her head, pulls her in, and forces his mouth on hers. Noemí feels his tongue and saliva in her mouth, and she becomes very lightheaded.

This sexual assault mirrors the dream in which Virgil sexually assaulted Noemí—horrifically, fantasy continues to blend with reality (or perhaps predict it). Strangely, Howard's saliva induces a vision, almost like a hallucinogenic drug.

Noemí's vision goes black. She then looks around and sees that she's in a cave. There are other people too. She sees a man who resembles Howard being handed a cup and drinking deeply from it. He stumbles after he drinks. A voice in Noemí's head tells her that he's been ill for a long time, suffering from an illness that has no cure. In his desperation, he found this place. The people here didn't like him at first, but they were poor and he had a purse fat with silver. But money wasn't everything, the man knew—he was these people's natural superior, and they recognized him as such.

At this point it's unclear whether this man is Howard or an ancestor of Howard. This vision seems to be a history of the Doyles' presence in El Triunfo. Not surprisingly, the Doyles' attitude of racial superiority was present from the very beginning, affecting their earliest relationships with the indigenous people.

In the corner of the cave, Noemí sees a woman watching Doyle and an old man tending an altar. This is a holy site, but instead of candles there's fungus. The room flickers, and Noemí knows that time has passed in the vision. The man looked sickly before, but now he seems hearty, as if his vitality has been restored. He has married the woman, following the custom of her people. But Noemí feels the disgust that he has for her, even if he has a smile on his face. He knows that he needs these people. He needs to learn their secrets. Eternal life is here for the taking, and these fools just can't understand it. But this man sees the possibilities.

The indigenous people worship mushrooms, which seem to have some sort of healing property (evidenced by Doyle's recovery). Doyle initially follows the customs of the indigenous people (and even marries an indigenous woman), but he only does this so that he can learn more about the mushrooms and use them for his own benefit—his respect of their customs is an exploitative sham, maintained only until he no longer needs them.

The man knows that the woman he married will never do. But Doyle has two sisters back home, and that's the key. It's in his blood, the priest has said so already, so it will be in their blood too. Noemí's vision blurs and time passes again. She sees Doyle drown the priest, then it's all chaos and fire and smoke. Doyle killed their priest, and now he has burned all the people's possessions. As the cave fills with a suffocating amount of smoke, Doyle hauls his wife onto a boat and escapes. He finds the woman ugly, but she is pregnant—she has a purpose to serve.

Howard is a typical colonizer: he discovers indigenous people with a resource that he wants for himself, so he kills them and takes it. Additionally, the fungus has beneficial effects for Doyle because of something "in his blood," and this coincidence has certainly fueled the Doyles' eugenics-based superiority complex.

CHAPTER 20

Noemí vomits. She has never felt this sick before in her life. She hears a voice telling her to breathe. A man brings her over to her bed and presses a glass of water to her lips, and suddenly it all comes back—the horror she has been subjected to. Francis stands before her. How could Noemí ever have liked this man? He tells her that Howard has sent him here to explain the situation. He's going to tell her a story, and after he's done, she can ask any question she wants.

Though Francis has been demonstrating his allegiance to Noemí in various ways throughout the novel, this constitutes a great betrayal. Howard's assault of Noemí seemed premeditated, and Francis did nothing to warn her or prevent it.

A long time ago, Howard found a fungus that can extend human life. That fungus now runs all through the house, like a giant spider's web. It can preserve memories and thoughts, like flies caught in the web. The Doyles call this repository of ancestral memories "the gloom." Noemí chuckles. She was right—this house is haunted, and Catalina is not crazy.

In her letter Catalina had written "it's in the walls." She was right; the gloom is a place where fantasy and reality meet, and it allows the past to interact with the present (like a ghost). Francis calls it a "repository of ancestral memories," but a more accurate descriptor might be a living log of colonial sin and oppression.

Noemí asks Francis what Howard did to her. He tells her that most people who come into contact with the fungus die—that's what happened to the miners—but not everyone perishes. With some people, the fungus erodes their minds, binding them to the house. Howard did this to the servants. But the Doyles are special: the fungus bonds with them. It can even make them immortal. Howard has lived many lives; when he approaches the end of one life, he transfers his consciousness to the gloom. Then, because of the gloom, he can live again in the body of one of his children. He doesn't possess them—they actually *become* him.

Howard uses the gloom to transfer his consciousness to a new body once his current one nears death, and in this way, he's achieved immortality. Yet, he does this at the cost of his children, who are consumed when Howard takes over their body (like the ouroboros, a snake biting its own tail).

For generations the Doyle bloodline has been kept pure in order to maintain their relationship with the fungus. In this way, Howard has survived for three hundred years. Francis says that Howard is their God, and he wants Noemí to become part of the family. She protests, but Francis tells her that it's too late. The fungus won't let her leave. Ruth tried hard to escape—she shot Howard, but even that wasn't enough. He survived. But his power decreased, which is why all the workers in the mine died. Noemí asks if the workers were hypnotized. Francis tells her that they weren't, since even Howard isn't strong enough to manipulate that many people. But working so close to the fungus was dangerous for the miners, and Howard would use his power over the gloom to keep them from getting sick.

Howard has become an immortal patriarch—something very near a god. Additionally, this passage makes it clear that Howard put all the miners at risk by exposing them to the fungus. When Howard's power weakened, the miners perished in the two epidemics. Thus, Howard is clearly culpable for the deaths of hundreds of indigenous people, further characterizing him as a vicious colonizer concerned only with his own wealth.

Noemí asks about Francis's father, Richard. Francis responds that after Howard was shot, he slowly began to heal himself. It was then difficult, in recent generations, for the family to have children. When Florence came of age, Howard tried to impregnate her, but he was too old. Noemí nearly vomits—Howard forced himself on his own niece. Francis continues. The family needed children, and they needed money, too. So Howard sent Florence out to find a husband. Richard wasn't wealthy, but he had enough for the family to get by. He came to live at High Place, and Florence became pregnant and birthed Francis.

Howard needs male children in order to survive, so he rapes his niece, Florence, in an attempt to get her pregnant. That Noemí nearly vomits at this revelation is a sign that she is a character who acutely feels the pain and suffering of other women.

The idea was that Richard and Florence would have more children—more girls. But the gloom affected him. He wanted to leave but couldn't. So he threw himself down a ravine. Francis looks at Noemí. Fighting it will only make the pain worse, he tells her. But if you accept it, if you agree to become part of the family, you will be fine. Noemí yells at Francis. His family is a pack of monsters. Noemí trusted him, and he betrayed her. Francis's mouth begins to quiver, and Noemí can tell that he's about to cry. He apologizes, which only further enrages Noemí. She uses all of her strength to punch him in the face, and then she collapses on the floor.

Richard was in much the same position as Catalina, and like Catalina he attempted suicide (though he was successful, and Catalina was not). Though Francis has defended Noemí countless times throughout the novel, his advice here is a betrayal of everything Noemí's done, and of his father's legacy. That he's on the verge of tears is a sign that he does not totally believe his own advice, however.

Francis lays Noemí on the bed, and she begins to have another dream. She's in a chamber that is dark and has no windows. An altar is covered in candles. Red tapestries depicting the ouroboros hang from the ceiling. Howard Doyle stands before the altar, and next to him is the woman from the caves, who is heavily pregnant. Two blond women lie her down. Noemí realizes that she's seen this ritual before. The woman gives birth, the child cries out, then Howard grabs him. A voice in her head whispers the words "*Et Verbum caro factum est.*" Noemí knows that when she saw this scene before, she had not seen the proper truth. But here it is. Howard kills the child and eats him.

The truth of Howard's ritual is finally revealed: the Doyles practice cannibalism on infant children. The Latin phrase "Et Verbum caro factum est" means "the word made flesh" and is a Christian reference to God's word becoming flesh in Jesus. Howard's use of the phrase is a perversion of the Catholic Eucharist. He is consuming his own son in order to bind more closely with the fungus and gain eternal life.

The two women press a cloth against the mother's face and swaddle her tight before burying her alive. The voice in Noemí's head tells her that this woman's burial is necessary. The fungus would erupt from her body and weave its way into the foundations of the building. The gloom needs a mind, and Howard is no fool who's willing to offer himself in sacrifice. The gloom is alive, and at its core is the corpse of this woman.

At the core of Howard's power is the body of a wounded woman. Patriarchy, it seems, relies on the oppression and violation of women. In order for the gloom to function someone needed to be sacrificed, and Howard seems very willing to sacrifice his first wife, rather than himself.

CHAPTER 21

Noemí wakes the next day very glad to see daylight. They've left her a tray of breakfast, but she fears that it may be poisoned, so she hardly touches it. Florence comes to her room and tells Noemí that Virgil wishes to see her. She follows Florence down the hallway and down the stairs, then dashes for the front door. Surprisingly, it's unlocked. Although the mist outside is quite thick, Noemí runs blindly from the house. She loses a shoe and hears her dress rip. It quickly becomes more difficult for her to breathe, almost like a hand is squeezing her throat. She tries to keep going, but she can hardly breathe, and she collapses on the ground.

This is Noemí's answer to Francis's advice: of course she's not going to submit to her horrific fate. Quite a few characters have lamented how they aren't able to leave High Place, and here readers see proof of those lamentations: Noemí, like a fish out of water, is unable to breathe once she runs from High Place.

A man lifts her up like she weighs nothing at all. Noemí has her other shoe in her hand, and she swings it at the man's face. He grunts angrily and holds her tighter in his arms, then walks her back to the house. Noemí hardly made it a few meters before collapsing. In the light of the house she sees that it's Virgil who holds her. He brings her to her bathroom, places her in the tub, and turns the water on. He orders her to take her clothes off, reaching forward to undo one of Noemí's buttons. The shortness of breath is gone, so she slaps his hand away and yells at him. He repeats his order, this time with a threat: "Get out of those clothes before I make you."

Though Noemí has been sexually assaulted by Virgil in her nightmares, this is the first time that it happens in reality. That he attacks Noemí in a moment of vulnerability (while she's short of breath) is doubly despicable.

Noemí undoes her buttons with shaky hands. She knows that Virgil means what he threatens, so she takes her clothes off and cleans herself while he watches. He puts his hand on her thigh, and Noemí pushes herself back, curling into a ball at the back of the tub. She tells him to leave, and Virgil smiles. He asks why Noemí is suddenly so bashful—last time that wasn't the case. Just as Virgil grabs her head and moves to kiss her, Francis enters the room. Dr. Cummins is here, he says, and he's waiting to see Noemí. To her immense relief Virgil leaves the room.

Noemí knows that she's a captive here, so Virgil's power over her has grown immensely. She forces herself to endure the shame of bathing in front of him in an attempt to avoid a physical confrontation. Luckily Francis enters the room before the scene can progress much further.

Noemí is brought to the bedroom, where Dr. Cummins examines her. Noemí is fine, he says, nothing but a couple of scrapes. But if she damaged her face, Howard would have been mad. Noemí notices that Dr. Cummins looks like a Doyle, and the doctor admits that he's distantly related. He tells Noemí that she needs to eat, but she refuses. He sighs, noting that women can be so difficult. Noemí claps back by asking if his daughter was difficult, too. Noemí accuses him of giving Howard his own daughter—Virgil said that she ran away, but that's not true, is it? No one ever leaves this place. She's dead, isn't she? Did Howard kill her?

Dr. Cummins's comment reminds the reader of Howard's obsession with beauty: he doesn't care if Noemí is injured, only that her pretty face is unscathed. Additionally, though it's never confirmed, Noemí's guess about Dr. Cummins's daughter appears to be spot on. That Dr. Cummins was willing to sacrifice his own daughter reveals his sexism and loyalty to Howard.

The doctor stands up and tells Francis that he must talk some sense into Noemí. Howard will not tolerate this sort of behavior. He leaves the room. Francis grabs the tray and brings it to Noemí. He tells her in Spanish what food has been laced with fungus and what food is clean. Howard can hear through the walls, but he doesn't speak Spanish. He tells Noemí that he wants to help her. He takes out Marta's flask—they told him to get rid of it after Catalina's episode, but he didn't listen. The fungus is very sensitive to certain triggers, like this tincture, and cigarettes. Taking a little of the tincture will loosen the fungus's hold on Noemí, but if she takes too much, she'll have a seizure like Catalina.

Howard's contempt for the locals kept him from learning Spanish, and here his own bigotry is being used against him. Perhaps it was Noemí's punch that knocked some sense into Francis, or perhaps Noemí's escape attempt demonstrated that it's better to be courageous than meek in the face of oppression. Either way, Francis recommits himself to helping Noemí.

Francis continues to explain his plan. Uncle Howard is going to die soon, there's no stopping it. Once his body gives way, he'll begin the transmigration. Then he'll take possession of Virgil's body. When that happens, everyone will be distracted, and the house will be weakened. That's their chance to escape. Francis knows some tunnels that run underneath the house, so they can go that way. Noemí tells him that she won't leave without Catalina, and Francis reluctantly agrees to take her too.

Noemí, like Ruth before her, is planning to escape from Howard. While Ruth tried to escape alone, Noemí refuses to leave without Catalina, her fellow woman in captivity. She's also accepting help from Francis, so it's possible that Noemí's focus on cooperation will be what helps her to succeed where Ruth failed.

Francis tells Noemí that she needs to go along with what the family says until it's time for them to run. Noemí asks what he means, and he tells her that Howard wants Francis and Noemí to marry and have children. Noemí inquires what will happened if she says no; will Howard take control of her mind? Francis explains that no, that method of control is too coarse for Howard. He knows that people must obey him willingly, otherwise it's too exhausting. That's why Ruth was able to grab a rifle, and why the miners were able to organize a strike.

Howard is not able to directly control a person—they have to willingly submit to him. This makes Noemí's rebelliousness all the more vital, and explains how others before Noemí were able to stand up to Howard.

Noemí takes a sip of Marta's tincture. She asks Francis why she should trust him. He responds that he once read a journal about a cicada fungus. It said that the infected cicadas would still sing for mates even as the fungus consumed them from within. Noemí's right, he says: he does still have a choice, and he's unwilling to end his life singing a tune, pretending everything is fine. Noemí has changed him; he can't pretend anymore.

Francis's explanation for why he wants to help Noemí contradicts the eugenics-based philosophies that the rest of the Doyles adhere to. While people like Florence and Virgil have argued that a person's nature predicts their actions and makes them suitable only for certain environments, here Francis demonstrates that love has changed his nature—his feelings for Noemí propel him to act, despite everything he's been led to believe by his family.

Francis leaves and Noemí falls asleep. She dreams that Ruth stands at the foot of her bed. Noemí asks if Ruth can hear her, but she responds with the same phrase that she's said in Noemí's last few dreams: "I'm not sorry." Noemí reaches out and touches Ruth's shoulder. Ruth begins to sob as she tells Noemí that she has to kill Howard. He will never let her escape. That was Ruth's mistake, she didn't do it right. Noemí asks how Ruth should have done it—what did she mean? But Ruth just keeps sobbing and falls on the floor. Her body turns gray and sprouts mold, and she begins to tear at her own body. Open your eyes, Noemí tells herself. And she does; she wakes up.

Ruth serves as a sort of model for feminist resistance. Noemí has to use what she's learned from Ruth's attempt at escape for the benefit of the women that are currently trapped. Additionally, thus far in the novel when Noemí has had to snap out of her nightmarish visions, she's relied on Ruth's voice telling her to "open her eyes." That Noemí now tells herself to open her eyes signals that she's ready to begin her own act of resistance.

CHAPTER 22

Francis visits Noemí again in the morning, giving her another bit of tincture and telling her which food is safe to eat. At night, they're both summoned to speak with Virgil. He sits at a desk in his office, and when Noemí walks in, he asks her if she's willing to cooperate. Noemí tells Virgil that he has an interesting definition of "willing"; she's determined to do what she must to survive, nothing more.

Noemí pretends that she's cooperating with the Doyles' plan. Her quip at Virgil reveals that his understanding of consent is seriously warped, which is not a surprise given that he's already assaulted Noemí.

Virgil explains that Noemí must write a letter to her father. She will say that she plans to stay at High Place until Christmas, in order to be with her cousin. Come Christmas, Noemí will inform her father that she's been married and intends to live at High Place. Noemí comments that her father will be upset. Virgil tells her that she better write a convincing letter then, because she wouldn't want her father visiting and falling prey to an odd disease. Noemí is frightened, and frantically writes the letter.

Virgil needs Noemí to convince her father of an explanation for her continued absence, since he knows that her father is a powerful figure. It's easy for Virgil to take advantage of Noemí (a woman with little power), but he needs to take Noemí's father very seriously.

Once Noemí has finished, Francis asks Virgil if he's satisfied. Virgil tells him that there's still much for Noemí to do—Florence is trying to find Ruth's old wedding dress. The ceremony will be soon. Noemí asks why they're even bothering with the ceremony, and Virgil tells her that Howard is a stickler for ceremonies. But she should consider herself lucky: if Virgil was in charge, he would have Noemí tied to the bed and Francis would have sex with her tonight, without any preamble. He knows that Noemí is not as innocent as she pretends. He runs his fingers through Noemí's hair, which sends shivers down her body. A pang of hatred and desire.

That Noemí is being forced to wear Ruth's wedding dress shows how little the Doyles value individual female identity. After all, Howard has already explained that women are good only for marriage and childbirth. Additionally, Howard's commitment to ceremony derives from his stark adherence to convention. If he's over 300 years old, he's likely been doing the same ceremonies and rituals for the last few centuries.

Noemí jumps up, and Francis hurries to her side, telling Virgil to show some respect to his new bride. Virgil smiles, as if he finds Francis amusing. He compliments Francis on finally growing a pair of balls. Then Noemí and Francis leave the office and find an unused room to talk in. Noemí asks him for a weapon, a rifle or a gun. But there aren't any, not after what Ruth did.

Francis's renewed commitment to Noemí gives him the courage to stand up to Virgil, which he's never done before. Virgil's comment about "growing a pair of balls" is reminiscent of Howard beating Francis in order to "make him strong," demonstrating how the Doyles' conventional gender ideas enforce toxic masculinity.

Noemí tells Francis that she doesn't feel like herself when she's around Virgil. She doesn't understand how the gloom works, but the house can induce you to do certain things, right? She trails off, unsure how to explain her feelings to Francis. She disliked Virgil immensely, but lately he also awoke a depraved thrill in her. Virgil must be tugging at some subconscious string. Francis assures her that nothing will happen to her, at least not while he's around. But Noemí reminds him that he wasn't there when Virgil grabbed her in the bathroom. She knows that Francis's gallantry is misplaced; he wants to be her knight, but he can't be.

Because high-class women of this time are so sexually repressed, Noemí experiences a subconscious thrill around an attractive man like Virgil, even when he assaults her. Virgil is able to use the gloom to magnify this subconscious feeling, making Noemí think that she desires him. Francis wants to be Noemí's knight, but as this novel has already demonstrated, if Noemí wants to escape High Place she has to rely on her own ability—not a man's.

Noemí insists on getting a weapon, and Francis reluctantly gives her his razor. He tries to make a joke, saying that he hopes Noemí likes bearded men, because now he's not going to be able to shave. He smiles, and Noemí sees that it's genuine. Everything in High Place is gnarled and begrimed, but Francis has been able to grow bright and mindful, like a plant in the wrong flowerbed.

Noemí's analogy (comparing Francis to a bright flower growing in a filthy environment) is an apt one. He recognizes that his family is evil, and that his environment is a poisonous one. He's renouncing everything he knows—his family, his upbringing, his home—in order to help the woman he loves.

Noemí asks Francis who taught him Spanish. He tells her that it was his father. When he was younger, Francis used to dream that he'd move somewhere far away. But after his father died, he knew that he was stuck. His father had a stronger personality than he did, and if he couldn't escape, there was no way Francis could. He shows Noemí a small portrait of his father that he keeps in his jacket pocket. She asks if Richard knew about the gloom. Francis tells her no, not before he came to High Place. By the time he learned the truth it was already too late, and he eventually agreed to stay.

Francis loves and idolizes his father, so much so that he carries a portrait of him in his pocket. His father was strong and defiant, just like Noemí. So when Francis saw his father attempt and then fail to escape from High Place, Francis convinced himself that he, a much more frail man than was his father, had no chance of getting away.

Noemí then asks Francis if they will have a wedding ceremony. He says yes, it's tradition. In the old days there would be a great feast and every person attending would bring a gift of silver. Mining has always been the Doyles' trade, even in England. But in England the Doyles had been the subject of odd rumors. They came to Mexico not only to seek more silver, but also because fewer people here asked questions. Noemí asks Francis if he knows how many workers died. He answers that he doesn't know, but he's thought about it often, and his voice is thick with shame.

Before they moved to Mexico the Doyles were a mining family in England. The "odd doings" that the Doyles were suspected of is left ambiguous, but the rumors must have been sinister if the Doyles felt the need to flee the country. Francis had no part in the deaths of the miners, but the fact that he feels shame regarding his family history is an important step towards reconciliation, and is more than can be said of any of the other Doyle family members.

CHAPTER 23

Noemí is allowed to visit Catalina without supervision, now that she knows the family's secrets. Catalina seems much more lucid than normal—probably the work of Marta's tincture. In the middle of their conversation Catalina freezes. "He knows something is wrong," she says, then lies down and refuses to say anything else.

The women are finally able to meet freely now that they're both totally ensnared. Catalina's warning is ominous, foreshadowing the chaos in the coming chapters.

Francis takes Noemí to try on her wedding dress. Though the dress is clearly old and has yellowed, that's not what repulses Noemí. To her, the dress represents the youthful fancies of another girl—a dead girl. Perhaps two. It reminds her of a dead snake's skin and of an **ouroboros**. Florence forces her to put on the dress so that alterations can be made before the ceremony.

The reuse of the same wedding dress represents a cyclical trauma, like the ouroboros. For generations women have been forced to wear this dress before being subjected to various horrors, like rape, murder, or the ritualistic ingestion of their dress.

Noemí tries on the shoes and veil, too, but they don't suit her well. Florence tells her so. Noemí mocks her: if Noemí looks displeasing, perhaps they should call off the wedding? It's much too late, Florence responds. Howard's appetite has been whetted. She says that all this talk of fitness and blood is nothing more than a disguise for the common lust of all men. Howard simply wants Noemí, like a little butterfly in his collection. One more pretty girl.

Florence seems to recognize the plight of the women in this family—she knows that Howard abuses and oppresses women (she herself has been raped by Howard, after all), and she even recognizes the falsity of eugenics. Yet she still goes along with things, refusing to help Noemí. Perhaps if Noemí lacked the will to resist she would become like Florence in a decade or two.

Florence leaves and Noemí changes back into her clothes. Francis comes by a while later with her dinner and a razor wrapped in a handkerchief. A groan resounds throughout the house. Francis tells Noemí that the transmigration must take place soon. Howard's body is falling apart; it's never healed right since Ruth shot him. Then Francis reveals that he can't escape with Noemí. The fungus connects him too strongly to his family, so they would be able to track him down wherever he went. Besides, this is the only world he's ever known. He was grown like an orchid: carefully reared for a certain climate. He belongs with his family.

Once again a flower analogy is used to describe Francis. He thinks of himself as a plant suited only for a particular environment. His family raised him for a single purpose in an isolated setting, and it's clear now what a disadvantageous position that's left Francis in.

Noemí is angry with Francis—he's not an orchid. He can choose to leave. He doesn't belong here. But Francis chuckles, doesn't she get it? The tincture can sever her and Catalina's link with the fungus, but it won't work on Francis. His connection is much too strong. Unfortunately, what he's saying makes sense to Noemí. But she's not giving up yet.

Noemí recognizes that Francis has internalized some of his family's faulty philosophies, and though she can argue with him about free will, the fact remains that Marta's tincture will not effectively sever Francis's link to the house.

That night, Noemí tries to enter the gloom on her own for the first time. She lies down to sleep and continuously thinks about Ruth. Eventually she dreams. Noemí and Ruth sit in the cemetery, beneath the statue of Agnes. Ruth tells Noemí that this is a statue of mother, and she sleeps. But Noemí knows that Alice is Ruth's mother. Then Ruth says that her father is a monster who comes at night. Noemí tells her that her father can't hurt her anymore. Ruth's a ghost, and you can't hurt a ghost. "He can always hurt us," Ruth responds. "He never stops hurting us. He will never stop."

Why Agnes is called "mother" remains a mystery. That Ruth is still afraid of Howard demonstrates the cyclical nature of the trauma that he causes. Because Howard is immortal, he inflicts the same pain generation after generation, with nothing ever changing. In order for these wounds to heal, something needs to break the cycle.

Noemí asks Ruth if she knows a way for a Doyle to leave High Place and never return. Is that possible? Ruth tells her that Howard is strong. When she tried to escape, he knew something was wrong, and he sent mother, and the rest, to stop her. Perhaps someone could run away, but the compulsion to stay is in the blood. Noemí assures herself that she'll carry Francis out if she needs to, and her resolve grows firmer.

It's finally explained why Ruth shot more people than just Howard—when he knew that his life was in danger, Howard sent his family to attack Ruth. Furthermore, Noemí's declaration to carry Francis out if she needs to positions her as Francis's knight-in-shining-armor, an appealing gender reversal in a novel that showcases the oppressive gender roles.

CHAPTER 24

Noemí and Francis's wedding occurs in reverse: first comes the banquet, then comes the ceremony. All but Howard and Dr. Cummins gather in the dining room for the meal. The Doyles have laid out their oldest silver—pieces that the family must have used 400 years ago, when they reigned like masters in this part of the world. The rule of silence has been reinstated, and all but Noemí eats in silence. The scene reminds her of a picture in one of her childhood fairy tale books, when the wedding banquet is in place and an evil fairy walks into the room.

Just like Noemí's dream that depicted Howard's perverse version of a Catholic Eucharist, this wedding is equally abnormal. The banquet comes before the ceremony, and merrymaking is disallowed in favor of silence. Howard enforces convention, and the ceremonies that he insists upon are often oppressive or degrading.

After dinner, the group proceeds to Howard's bedroom for the ceremony. The old man is covered in pustules, and the room smells rotten. Francis and Noemí stand before Howard's bed. Howard begins the ceremony, but he speaks in Latin and Noemí cannot understand what he's saying. Francis kneels, and Noemí follows his lead. She thinks that this choreographed obeisance to the father has meaning: repetition, tracing the same path over and over again. Circles.

Howard has lived for centuries, performing the same ceremonies over and over again. Noemí doesn't speak Latin, so the content of the ceremony is meaningless (a consequence of its age and Howard's refusal to change anything). Instead Noemí understands that meaning comes from the fact that Howard leads the ceremony, and everyone obeys him—this adherence to old ceremonies reinforces the old, sexist power structure that exists in High Place.

Howard hands them both a mushroom and tells them to eat. They do, and then they sip some wine. Francis asks Noemí if he can kiss her, and she nods. After a quick kiss, the ceremony ends. Howard commands the others to "instruct the young people that they may be bountiful." Francis is led away by Virgil, and Noemí follows Florence back to her bedroom. Florence tells Noemí that the Doyle brides are proper girls, chaste and modest—they typically need instruction before the consummation. Noemí dismisses Florence, telling her that she can manage alone.

As opposed to Virgil and Howard, who forcefully kissed Noemí, Francis asks for her permission, demonstrating his respect for her. Howard's pronouncement at the end of the ceremony demonstrates what he thinks the only point of a union between a man and a woman is: reproduction.

Noemí feels a little lightheaded, so she lies down to wait for Francis. After a few minutes, she turns her head and sees Virgil standing next to her bed, leering at her. He grabs her arm and tells her that they know about her and Francis's plan. Noemí has Francis's razor hidden under her mattress, but she feels drunk. She asks Virgil if they poisoned her. No, Virgil sneers, but they did give her a little wedding present: the mushroom was an aphrodisiac. Francis is being reprimanded and everyone else is busy, but Virgil claims to know what Noemí wants. Life bores her—at home they're too protective. She likes a little danger, a little scandal.

Catalina's earlier warning that Howard "knows something is wrong" turns out to be accurate; they've known about the planned escape for quite some time. Now that Francis is absent, Virgil comes to the bedroom with the intention to rape Noemí. It's just as she predicted; Francis will not always be there to stop Virgil—she has to rely on herself.

Noemí knows that Virgil is right—she likes to flirt and tease and dance. All the boys are so careful around her because she is a Taboada, and once in a while she feels a desire to strike. But she also knows that this is just a part of her—it isn't all of her. Virgil persists. He knows that she fantasizes about him, he says, underneath all those layers of decorum. She slaps him, and in response he grabs her neck. The feeling of his fingers on her throat makes her gasp in ruinous delight. The mold in the corner of the room shifts and blurs; streaks of gold are visible in its center.

Noemí recognizes that she likes to flirt. She's had a sheltered, repressed upbringing as a wealthy socialite, and flirting is just another way of being unconventional—of pushing boundaries and exercising power. But just because she's flirtatious doesn't mean that she's promiscuous or immoral, as Virgil implies.

Noemí shouts for Virgil to wait. She doesn't want to ruin the dress. He'd better help her take it off. This seems to improve his mood, and Noemí manages to buy herself some time. The mold spot on the wall is dripping onto the floor, whirling with gold. Noemí feels as if something is smothering her. She's never going to get out of this house. Wanting to leave was a mistake. She now wants to be one with Virgil.

Virgil is using the gloom to manipulate Noemí's desires, coercing her to have sex with him. This must be the way that Howard controls people, too.

The dripping mold forms a puddle on the floor, and it reminds Noemí of the black bile that Howard spit down her throat. A wave of disgust overtakes her body, and she thinks of Catalina and Ruth and Agnes and the terrible things the family has done to them—things they will now do to her. She shoves Virgil with all her might, sending him crashing down against the floor. He hits his head and lies there unconscious. Noemí grabs Francis's razor and runs to fetch Catalina.

While fighting against a powerful male figure, it's the memory of the women who've been wronged that empowers Noemí to fight back. Virgil and Howard are repositories of old, colonial ideas (like eugenics). This scene implies that even when combating discriminatory ideologies of the past, it's important not to totally disregard history, but rather to use it as the basis for change in the present.


CHAPTER 25

Noemí rushes down the darkened hallway to Catalina's room. She yanks the door open and finds Catalina sitting on her bed and Mary, the maid, standing motionless, her eyes fixed on the floor. Noemí tells Catalina that they're leaving and goes to grab her hand, but Mary slams into Noemí and shoves her against the vanity. The force of the hit makes Noemí drop the razor, and she searches for a weapon as Mary chokes her. The maid speaks with a raspy, old voice—the voice of the house. "Ours," she says.

This scene helps the reader imagine why Ruth shot her family members. Howard controlled them through the gloom, just like he is controlling Mary. Thus, Noemí's escape attempt already mirrors Ruth's; though Howard is the patriarch, escape is impossible without hurting others, too.

Suddenly, Mary is yanked away by Francis. But she shoves him to the floor too, and grasps at his throat. Noemí picks up the straight razor and cuts Mary's throat. Francis hurries to Noemí and asks if she's okay. They locked Francis in his room, but he broke out and ran here as fast as he could. Noemí turns and grabs Catalina. She's unresponsive; Noemí nearly has to drag her to get her to come with them. They hurry down the hallway.

Now Francis comes to save Noemí (though he was absent when Virgil attacked her). Yet, this story refuses to be reduced to yet another man-saves-distressed-woman tale. Instead, just after Francis saves Noemí, she in turn has to save him. There's an equality between the sexes here.

Florence yells for the three of them to stop. She's pointing a rifle at Noemí. Her voice is calm, but in her cold eyes Noemí can read savage murder. Noemí drops her knife, and Florence marches the three of them to Howard's room. The old man lies in his bed, propped up by a number of pillows and wheezing heavily. Dr. Cummins tells Florence that there isn't much time—they need to begin the transmigration. Virgil may be missing, but Francis is here, and that's what matters. Noemí objects, but Florence coolly assures her that Francis is the target of the transmigration.

Once again Howard's eugenics-based theories are proven false. He argued that a person's criminality is visible in their face—that common genetic characteristics exist among all criminals. But here Noemí notices that Florence, one of the supposedly genetically superior Doyles, has "savage murder" visible in her eyes, and she's even happy to sacrifice her own son for Howard's benefit.

Francis walks meekly towards the doctor. Noemí tries to grab him, but Florence points the rifle at her and tells her to sit. Things could have been so easy, she says, but Noemí had to go and cause a ruckus. Noemí shouts that Virgil tried to rape her, but Florence just tells her to hush. Noemí then whispers to Florence: Francis is her son. How can she do this? Again Florence dismisses her. It's just a body.

Rather than fight back, Florence tells Noemí that she should have submitted to the sexism and patriarchy of High Place. Florence is a rape victim herself, and though Noemí hoped for some empathetic connection between them when she admitted that Virgil tried to rape her, Florence is cold and uncaring. Noemí's escape attempt has relied on the unification of wronged women (Ruth, Catalina, and Noemí so far), so the fact the Florence continues to resist Noemí and even sides with the sexist men makes her seem especially villainous.

Howard begins reciting a series of words in Latin. Francis is whimpering, his lips moving softly in prayer. Howard raises his hands, as if to cup Francis's head between them. Noemí recalls how he shoved his tongue down her throat. What a demented cycle, she thinks: Children devoured as babies, children devoured as adults—it's as if they're little more than food for a cruel god.

Though Francis's willing submission may seem unbelievable, Howard has taught his family to be obedient through violence and abuse. Additionally, it's made explicit here that Howard's continued survival depends on the death of children—that the past survives at the cost of the future.

Because they're all distracted by the ceremony, no one notices Catalina sneak behind the doctor and grab his scalpel. She moves toward Howard, and her expression changes to naked hatred. She stabs Howard in the eye, then again and again in the face. Howard yells. Francis, Florence, and Dr. Cummins all fall to the floor. Noemí jumps to her feet and begins to pull Francis from the room. But Florence leaps on Noemí like a wild animal, and the two crash to the ground. Noemí reaches for the gun, but Florence grabs her hand and crushes it with inhuman strength. She grabs the gun and points it at Noemí, ready to fire.

Thus far in the novel Catalina has served as the damsel-in-distress, a bride locked in a bedroom waiting for someone to save her. But here she transforms from a passive to an active character; she saves her saviors (Noemí and Francis) and makes herself instrumental to her own escape.

Francis tackles his mother off of Noemí, and the two go tumbling. The gun discharges, and for a moment Noemí doesn't know who was shot. Then Francis rolls Florence away and stands up. His eyes are bright with tears and he's shivering. He stumbles toward Noemí, shaking his head, and then Howard lets out a terrible groan. He holds out his hands, commanding Francis to approach the bed, and Noemí knows that Howard is exerting the power of the gloom on him and that Francis will not be able to resist. She realizes that Ruth didn't shoot herself—rather, Howard forced her to kill herself in a desperate act to save himself.

Francis shoots his own mother, which is perhaps a symbolic act of severance from his family. Importantly, Francis cries after the shooting, showing that he anguishes over the violence. In contrast, Florence smiled as she pointed the rifle at Noemí. Additionally, the mystery about Ruth is finally solved: Howard murdered her.

Howard slides an amber ring off of his finger and holds it up for Francis. Noemí calls his name, but so does Howard, and Francis ignores her. "*It's in the blood*," Ruth had said. Noemí raises the rifle and shoots Howard twice. Francis snaps awake, and Howard begins to convulse and shriek. Noemí grabs Francis and Catalina, and the three run from the room.

There are two competing voices trying to get Francis's attention: Noemí (representing love) and Howard (representing genetics/nature). Francis chooses love and follows Noemí, though it requires that she shoots Howard first.

CHAPTER 26

Francis leads the two women down the back stairs, then inside a walk-in pantry with a hidden door that Francis says leads to the family crypt. From the crypt they can walk down the mountain and get to town. Francis is in a lot of pain, and very out of breath, so Noemí takes the lead. The house reverberates with Howard's moans—somehow, impossibly, he's still alive. Noemí slides open the hidden door, revealing an ornate stairway decorated with yellow tiles and silver sconces shaped like snakes. On the ground and the walls Noemí notices a few mushrooms popping up between stone cracks. They seem to glow in the darkness, like stars. She knows that these are the mushrooms that Howard found in the cave all those years ago. Immortality, she realizes, is contained in these mushrooms.

In order to escape from the mansion Noemí and the others must venture to the very heart of it: the cave where Howard first discovered the mushrooms. The final confrontation will take place where everything began, preparing Noemí to either triumph over the past or succumb to it.

Francis can hardly walk, so Noemí tells him to lean on her as they walk deeper underground. They reach two massive double doors of dark wood, a silver snake biting his tail inlaid in the wood. Francis tells them that this is the chamber beneath the crypt; they must go in and then up. Francis pulls open the doors and they all walk in. The chamber is dotted with a dizzying amount of mushrooms. There's no furniture except for a table set upon a stone dais, and Noemí walks toward it. She finds the jeweled dagger that Howard used to kill children as part of his cannibalistic rituals. Francis tells her that their children are born infected with the fungus and that ingesting their flesh means ingesting the fungus; it makes the family stronger and binds them more closely to the gloom and to Howard.

Earlier in the story Noemí resolved that she would carry Francis out if she needed to. Here she's doing nearly that: Francis is hardly able to walk and leans heavily on Noemí. Once again this novel is subverting common gender tropes, this time by inverting the popular image of a man rescuing a woman by carrying her out of her captivity.

Francis winces suddenly and doubles over in pain. "She's speaking," he cries. Then Noemí becomes aware of a sound. It's the buzzing noise she's heard elsewhere, only this time it seems higher. The hum seemed to come from behind a yellow drape at the back of the dais. Noemí walks toward it and raises her hand to pull the drape down. Catalina warns her not to do it, but Noemí clutches the fabric and yanks it aside. She stares into the open, screaming maw of a mummified woman. She's naked, but mushrooms sprout from her flesh, growing up her body and clustering around her head, creating a crown—a halo of gold. She wears an amber ring, and Noemí knows that it's Agnes.

Finally the last mystery of High Place is solved—the identity of the golden woman that's been haunting Noemí's nightmares. It's Agnes, whose gruesomely marred body is here on display at the altar, reminiscent of the Virgin Mary.

The Doyles buried Agnes alive, and this is what she became. She screamed and screamed but nobody came. Nobody was supposed to come. This is the way it was supposed to be—Howard needed her to do this. The fungus needed her. The mushrooms themselves could heal, but they could not make someone immortal. Howard, with his knowledge of science and alchemy, knew that the fungus needed a human mind that could serve as a vessel for memories. Howard could then control that mind, and the gloom. So he offered up his wife. What had once been Agnes became the gloom. Francis grabs Noemí and spins her around. He tells her not to look at Agnes, saying that no one is ever supposed to look at her.

Howard's immortality necessitated the sacrifice of a female body, and it was a particularly gruesome death. Both Catalina and Francis have told Noemí not to look at the body, but Noemí remembers the charge given to her by Ruth: to open her eyes. Indeed, the Doyles avoid looking at Agnes's body as a way to blind themselves to the violence and sexism at the heart of their religion and way of life. Contrarily, Noemí's eyes are open to the crimes in the Doyles' past, and because of this she's able to break the cycle that characterizes Howard's immortality.

Virgil strolls casually into the chamber. Rather than follow them through the house, he went around and entered the chamber through the crypt. He mocks Noemí. Poor girl! Did she think she had killed him? No. Virgil planned for Noemí to fight with him and take the tincture from his pocket. He planned for her to cause mayhem and hurt Howard. He couldn't do it himself because Howard had too much control over him. He forced Ruth to kill herself, after all. That's why he needed Noemí to do it. And she did not disappoint. Now Virgil controls the gloom. When Howard dies, he'll be gone for good—no new body this time.

Virgil reveals that the escape attempt has all gone according to his plan—it was a way for Virgil to wrestle control from his father. Howard's immortality prevents Virgil from inheriting anything, like he typically would as the first-born son after his father passed away. Virgil desires change, and he'll kill his father to get it.

Noemí grabs the knife on the dais. Virgil tells her to drop it, and she feels a terrible impulse rushing through her body, pushing her to obey. Noemí says that she drank the tincture, so Virgil can't control her. But he explains that they're standing in the heart of the house, the place where the gloom is most powerful. He's in control now, and he's going to make them all do as he says. Noemí's fingers burn, and she lets the knife drop to the floor. Virgil looks around with distaste. Howard was caught in the past, he says, but he looks forward to the future. He's going to reopen the mine, bring electricity to High Place, and Noemí is going to give him many children.

Virgil says that he wants change, but really what he wants is to replace Howard. His desire to reopen the mine situates him as a colonial-style aristocrat, and his plan for Noemí reveals that he's committed to the same sexist ideas as his father. Thus, change of Virgil's kind is not actual progress, but a return to the past that continues the same cycle of violence that Howard created.

Francis interjects and tells Virgil to let the women go. Everything they do here is wrong. Virgil replies that when he has absolute control over the gloom, he'll need an ally. They can even share the women. Francis picks up the knife and threatens Virgil, but he laughs. Is Francis going to stab him over a woman? Francis charges him and the two begin fighting. Virgil is stronger than Francis, and he has the gloom on his side, so it's not long before Virgil overpowers Francis. He tells Francis that he's going to kill him by forcing him to bite off his own tongue.

Apparently women are so worthless to Virgil that he finds it ridiculous for Francis to try and stab him to save one. Virgil's method of execution is particularly fitting: silence was a rule in High Place, so Virgil's plan to kill Francis by having him bite his own tongue is a symbolic return to convention and obedience.

Noemí regains control of her body, and she runs over to the body of Agnes. It strikes her that the gloom surrounding them is actually the manifestation of all the suffering inflicted upon Agnes. The sliver of Agnes that remains is screaming in agony. She is the snake that bites its own tail. And what does she wish for? Simply to be released from this torment. "Sleepwalker," Noemí says. "Time to open your eyes." She tosses a lamp at the corpse's face, and it instantly ignites the crown of mushrooms around her head and spreads quickly down the wall.

Seeing Agnes as the ouroboros is a recharacterization of the Doyle family symbol. Rather than signifying immortality, in this view the ouroboros would signify the recurring pain and bigotry that results from Howard's continued survival. Furthermore, by burning Agnes's body Noemí is symbolically cleansing her of all the pain and suffering that she's endured—and that pain is about to be transferred to the surviving male Doyles, Howard, Virgil, and Francis.

Virgil screams and collapses on the floor, as does Francis. Noemí goes over to Francis. Virgil reaches for her, and she kicks him in the face, but he keeps coming for her, clawing for her, trying to pull himself up. Catalina picks up the knife that Francis dropped and stabs her husband in the face, piercing his eye—just like she did to Howard. Noemí picks up Francis and demands that Catalina help her. They each take one of his arms, half dragging him towards the gate.

Virgil is the second male authority figure whom Catalina has stabbed in the eye. It seems that as more women are opening their eyes to the abuse that surrounds them (this was Ruth's instruction to Noemí, and Noemí's instruction to Agnes), men are being blinded. This signifies both a transition in power and a willingness to reckon with the sexist violence that has characterized life at High Place for hundreds of years.

Noemí, Catalina, and Francis escape from the chamber and exit the mausoleum back into the open air. Francis guides them with half-lidded eyes, and the three slowly make their way down the mountain. They see that High Place is burning, and Noemí imagines Howard Doyle lying immobile in his bed, the fire consuming him inch by inch.

Howard's immortality ends where it began, which is fitting, given his choice of a family seal. In one of the earliest visions of Howard's life, Noemí saw him set fire to the homes of the indigenous people that lived in the cave before Howard claimed it as his own. Now Howard's own home burns in a fire, and he burns with it.

CHAPTER 27

Noemí sits in a small room in Dr. Camarillo's clinic, watching over Francis as he sleeps. When they reached El Triunfo they called for Marta to prepare enough tincture for the three of them. Noemi and Catalina took it well, but Francis fell into a deep sleep and hasn't woken up since. That was two days ago. Catalina checks on Noemí and tells her that she needs to get some rest too. But the truth is that Noemí isn't sleeping well. She's afraid of the nightmares she might have. She wonders what people do after witnessing the kinds of horrors that she's seen. Is it possible to slip back into normality? To pretend and go on?

Although Noemí and the others have successfully broken the cycle of violence at High Place, lingering trauma remains. Though it's possible for Noemí to pretend that everything is normal (like the cicadas that Francis mentioned), that would be contrary to Ruth's command for Noemí to open her eyes. Indeed, if Noemí wishes to move on she has to reckon with the trauma that she's experienced, not ignore it.

Catalina tells Noemí that two police officers and a magistrate from Pachuca will be arriving tomorrow, along with her father. Noemí assures Catalina that her father will help smooth things out. They haven't had a chance to get their story straight. They told Dr. Camarillo that Virgil went mad and burned High Place down, but it didn't seem like he truly believed them, even if he pretended to. Catalina leaves the room. Noemí looks down at Francis, leans in close, and whispers, "Open your eyes."

Dr. Camarillo continues to be an ally to Noemí. He doesn't believe what she says about Virgil, but he seems to understand that something terrible happened there, and he helps the women as best he can. When Noemí tells Francis to open his eyes, it's a wish both for Francis to heal and for him to reckon with the trauma he's lived through (as Noemí herself needs to do).


Francis's eyes flutter open. They smile at each other, and then Francis asks what happened to High Place. Noemí tells him that a few farmers traveled up there and saw that it had burned completely to the ground. But Francis is still worried, since some species of mushroom are resistant to fire. What if any of the fungus survived? Noemí assures him that if that's the case, they can travel up there and burn it all away. This seems to relax him, and he asks Noemí what's going to happen when her father gets here. She promises him that she's going to take him to Mexico City with her—he's going to love it.

For much of the novel Francis claimed that he wouldn't be able to survive anywhere other than High Place—that no other environment suited his nature. But here he smiles at the prospect of going to Mexico City with Noemí. He's no longer committed to his family's ideas, signaling that he's ready to move on.

Francis asks Noemí how she's feeling, and if she's having any nightmares, but it's clear that she doesn't want to talk about it. Instead, he tells her about a nightmare that he had. He dreamed that he was trapped in High Place, and it was even grander than before—the colors were vivid, and the flowers grew in the greenhouse, but they grew elsewhere too, and mushrooms were growing all over the house, and all the doors were sealed. Noemí begs him to stop. Dreams of murder would be less disquieting than the dream that Francis is describing.

Unlike a fairy tale, this novel doesn't end with a simple "happily ever after." Francis and Noemí both have trauma that they need to cope with, as Francis's nightmare reveals.

Francis asks Noemí what they'll do if the fungus isn't gone. What if it's inside him? Perhaps Noemí shouldn't stay so close to him. But she protests and climbs in bed with him. She holds him and tells him that they'll stay together forever and that he'll never be alone. She promises. Eventually, Noemí sleeps and does not dream. She wakes up and in the early morning light wonders whether the world is indeed a cursed circle—like the snake that swallows its tail. Eternal ruination and endless devouring without end. Francis wakes up and they share a kiss. The world cannot be predicted, Noemí reflects. But maybe it can be remade to be kinder and sweeter. She kisses Francis again, for love.

Noemí fears that the world may be a cycle of recurring violence and bigotry, just like High Place. But Francis's kiss reminds her that cycles can be broken; love brought Francis to conquer his prejudice and escape from High Place. The same can apply to the world—love helps people see each other as not just a "body" (as Florence saw Francis, for example), but as someone that can be empathized with, a person who deserves kindness and respect.


HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Reuss, Josh. "*Mexican Gothic*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 22 Jul 2022. Web. 22 Jul 2022.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Reuss, Josh. "*Mexican Gothic*." LitCharts LLC, July 22, 2022. Retrieved July 22, 2022. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/mexican-gothic.

To cite any of the quotes from *Mexican Gothic* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Moreno-Garcia, Silvia. Mexican Gothic. Del Ray. 2021.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Moreno-Garcia, Silvia. Mexican Gothic. New York: Del Ray. 2021.