

Never Let Me Go



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF KAZUO ISHIGURO

Born in Japan but raised primarily in the UK (where his father worked as an oceanographic scientist), Kazuo Ishiguro was a student at the University of Kent, and later earned a master's degree in creative writing at the University of East Anglia. Ishiguro achieved global renown for his novel [The Remains of the Day](#), which won the Booker Prize in 1989. Many of Ishiguro's works are characterized by "dramatic irony," wherein the reader knows more about the narrator's life than the narrator does. This device has a long literary history, and is used to particular effect in *Never Let Me Go*, as the reader learns about the novel's alternate universe through Kathy's description of her life. Ishiguro is still writing today and resides in London.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Ishiguro wrote the novel at the beginning of the 21st-century, during a fast-moving period of development in the biological and medical sciences. In the 1990s, scientists in the western world began work on cloning—the first "clone" ever created was a sheep named Dolly—and these advancements have also operated on the cellular level. One point of contention in the United States was the development of "stem-cell research," or a set of scientific techniques that "farm" undifferentiated cells in order to shape them, and use them, for medical purposes. Thus, stem cells could be taken from an undeveloped zygote and used (at least theoretically) to generate cellular materials for the organs of fully-grown adults. These developments precipitated a great deal of discussion—among the general public, in government, and at universities—regarding humankind's moral obligation to cellular life. *Never Let Me Go* presumes a more complex and widespread system of organ-farming—the clones really are human beings, but their lives exist solely to create and "caretake" organs for "real" humans—and Ishiguro allows these biological and ethical ideas to play out in the background, while a very human story of love, loss, and maturation occurs in the foreground. Ishiguro's choice to make the novel primarily about human lives—and the way all human must deal with their particular fates—is an especially deft move, which allows the scientific facts of the novel to seem even more real and persuasive.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Ishiguro's work might first be understood in the context of his other novels, including his most notable, [The Remains of the Day](#).

In that book, a narrating protagonist, a butler named Stevens, describes his life after the death of his master. Ishiguro demonstrates throughout an ability to channel the voice of this butler—a man who does not seem to comprehend his friend Miss Kenton's affection for him—and by the end of the work, the reader has gained a sharper understanding of that character's emotional state. *Never Let Me Go* operates similarly, on a technical level, as Kathy H. reveals to the reader the facts of "clone life" in England, and the harsh reality of her predetermined fate. *Never Let Me Go* also contains elements recognizable to readers of 20th-century fiction, especially novels of "dystopias," or future environments characterized by brutal political realities. In this way, *Never Let Me Go* shares the "novelistic DNA" of such works as George Orwell's [1984](#) and Aldous Huxley's *A Brave New World*, both of which deal with the difficulties of life under repressive, all-knowing regimes, capable of determining the small details of humans' lives. The notion of specially-reared children in a controlled environment also echoes Lois Lowry's [The Giver](#), a 1993 young-adult novel about a boy who "receives" and retains the "memories" that have been sapped from large portions of society. Though Ishiguro's novel is notable within the dystopian genre in that his oppressed characters never seek, or even consider, rebelling against the status quo.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Never Let Me Go*
- **When Written:** 2004
- **Where Written:** London, England
- **When Published:** 2005
- **Literary Period:** the 21st-century novel
- **Genre:** bildungsroman; science fiction; speculative fiction
- **Setting:** Various locations in England, in the 1990s
- **Climax:** Miss Emily reveals to Tommy and Kathy that there is not, nor has there ever been, a "deferral" available for clone couples who are "truly in love."
- **Point of View:** first-person

EXTRA CREDIT

Film version. In 2010, a film of *Never Let Me Go* was released, with performances by Carey Mulligan (Kathy), Keira Knightley (Ruth), and Andrew Garfield (Tommy). The adaptation received mixed reviews.



PLOT SUMMARY

Never Let Me Go—set in England in the 1990s—is narrated by Kathy H., a former student at **Hailsham**, and now a “carer” who helps “donors” recuperate after they give away their organs. The novel opens at Hailsham, an idyllic community flanked by football fields and filled with students and kind “guardians,” like Miss Geraldine, Miss Lucy, and Miss Emily (Emily is also the headmistress). Kathy becomes close friends with Ruth and Tommy—the former the head of a clique of fellow students; the latter a rather strange boy given to temper tantrums. Art classes are very important at Hailsham, and Tommy is chastised by his fellow students for rarely placing works of art in the special Gallery selected by Madame, whom the students believe to be the head of school. During their time at Hailsham, the students room with one another, submit art to Exchanges (which other students then receive), and buy small items at periodic Sales occurring on the school grounds. Kathy buys a **cassette tape** by a woman named Judy Bridgewater, which contains a song entitled “Never Let Me Go.” This song stirs up strong emotions in Kathy, and one day, she is “caught” by Madame, while in her dorm, dancing slowly to the music, and holding an imaginary child in her arms. Kathy notices that this dancing causes Madame to cry, and she is initially confused by this, although she realizes later that she cannot have children, and that perhaps Madame and the other guardians feel sorry for the students for this reason.

As the students grow at Hailsham, they learn that they are clones, and that they will leave Hailsham and soon begin “training” as “carers” and then as “donors.” Donors give their organs away, one by one, for the benefit of non-cloned humans, and “carers” help the donors during these difficult surgeries. Miss Lucy, another of the guardians at Hailsham, tells Tommy when he is young that his art-class exercises do not really matter, and she tells the assembled Hailsham students, when they are older, that they must prepare for the harsh realities of their caring and donating lives. But the students are already aware of their fates—they seem to accept them with eerie placidity—and they are shocked to learn, later, that Miss Lucy has left the Hailsham faculty abruptly. Miss Lucy disagrees strongly with the “abstract” methods—i.e. learning to give away art the way they will eventually give away their organs—that the school uses to inform the clone students of their fates.

Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth—the latter two having become a couple in their last year at Hailsham—leave the school and begin a residency at the Cottages, where they read, pursue romantic relationships, and socialize further, before leaving for their training as carers and donors. The three friends, and Chrissie and Rodney, older Cottage students, take a trip to Norfolk one weekend, because Rodney believes he has seen a “possible” clone parent for Ruth there. The trip is a bitter one, however. The “possible” is not in fact Ruth’s original, and Ruth

becomes angry and informs the group of what they already know—that their clone originals are taken from the “lowest rungs” of society. But Kathy and Tommy, in a second-hand store in Norfolk, stumble upon a copy of the Judge Bridgewater cassette that Kathy believed to have lost forever at Hailsham. Although it isn’t the same exact cassette, Kathy wonders if there isn’t some truth to the students’ long-held idea that Norfolk is a “lost corner” of England, where people go to find things they have misplaced elsewhere.

Kathy realizes that she is in love with Tommy, but Tommy and Ruth continue their relationship, even after Ruth belittles Tommy for his new drawings of “small animals.” Tommy informs Kathy that he is making the drawings in the hopes of having art to submit to Madame’s Gallery, since he has a new theory: Hailsham students may apply for a deferral of their caring and donating duty if they can prove they are in loving relationships, and they do this by showing Madame that their art “matches” the art of their loved one.

Ruth finds the idea ridiculous, however, and Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy later leave the Cottages to begin work as carers. After many years, Kathy becomes a carer for Ruth, and Ruth, Tommy, and Kathy go on an outing to see an abandoned boat in a far-off English field. During this trip, Ruth apologizes to Tommy and Kathy for “keeping them apart,” and urges Kathy to become Tommy’s carer, so that the two of them might then apply to Madame for a deferral. Ruth gives Kathy and Tommy Madame’s address and then dies after her second donation.

Kathy and Tommy become lovers and, after a while, visit Madame in a seaside town, where they have a conversation with her and Miss Emily about the “truth” of Hailsham. Miss Emily reveals that Hailsham was an attempt to reform England’s treatment of clones, but that Hailsham has now been shut down due to lack of funding. Miss Emily also tells them that the deferral for loved ones never really existed, although this idea has long been a rumor among students.

On their trip back to Tommy’s treatment center, Tommy gets out of the car and has another temper tantrum in a field, because he is deeply frustrated at his inability to live with Kathy as a loving couple. Tommy later dies after his fourth donation, and Kathy transitions into her job as a donor. At the end of the novel, though she rues the loss of Ruth and Tommy, and misses Hailsham, Kathy notes that she will always have memories of these people and places—which she does not worry about losing, since they remain vivid to her.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Kathy H. – The novel’s narrator and protagonist, Kathy H. was a student at **Hailsham** and a friend of Ruth’s and Tommy’s. While at Hailsham, Kathy slowly realizes the truth of her

fate—that she is a clone created expressly to eventually donate her organs to other “real” people, and that her “job” is to work as a carer for other clones who have donated some of her organs and then as a donor of her own organs. Kathy also deals with the more typical problems of an adolescent, including friendship, sexual relationships, and questions of life’s purpose. Kathy has a particular attachment to a **cassette tape** called *Songs After Dark*, performed by an artist named Judy Bridgewater, and containing her favorite song, “Never Let Me Go.” At the close of the novel, Kathy serves as a carer for Ruth and then for Tommy, who becomes her lover. She then turns to her mandated work as an organ donor.

Ruth – One of Kathy’s best friends, Ruth is a complex and often difficult person. Her pride is her greatest weakness, and she often pretends to know about things of which she has no actual knowledge. Ruth dates Tommy at **Hailsham** and later, at the Cottages, only to regret, while serving as a donor, that she “kept Kathy and Tommy apart.” Ruth then gives Tommy the information to find Madame, former head of Hailsham, so that Kathy and Tommy can request a “deferral” from donation and to live together as a couple.

Tommy – Kathy and Ruth’s friend at **Hailsham**, Tommy is known there for his temper tantrums, his lack of creative skills, and his “dullness.” Tommy dates Ruth though he is in love with Kathy, and by the end of the novel, it is revealed that Tommy, more than the others, has perceived the difficult realities of the life of a clone from a young age. Kathy serves as Tommy’s carer until his fourth donation, after which Tommy passes away.

Miss Lucy – A guardian at **Hailsham**, Miss Lucy is known for her discomfort with the “abstract” teaching methods at the school. Lucy believes the other guardians tend to hide or smooth over the realities of a clone’s life—that clones must become carers and donors, and have no other choice. Miss Lucy tells the students some of these awkward truths, but later leaves Hailsham abruptly.

Miss Emily – The head of school at **Hailsham**, Miss Emily is mostly feared by the students—she is rather strict but helpful, and is known for making long speeches imploring to students to remain healthy. Miss Emily later speaks with Tommy and Kathy and reveals several truths about Hailsham: that it was an “experiment” in reform, conducted by those who felt clones deserved “humane” treatment; that Madame, long thought to be Miss Emily’s boss at Hailsham, was in fact co-founder of the school and a reformer herself; and that Hailsham closed because of lack of funds. Miss Emily seems both stern and caring in this final sequence—understanding of the difficulties of clone life, but resigned to the fact that society does not care to treat clones with even the meager dignity provided by Hailsham anymore.

Madame – Long thought to be Miss Emily’s superior and the “real” head of **Hailsham**, Madame is revealed to be co-founder

of Hailsham with Miss Emily. Madame reveals to Tommy and Kathy that she has long cared about clone rights, and that she believes the new world, in which clones serve as “organ farms” for “normal” people, is a “cruel” one. Madame regrets that she cannot do more to help Tommy and Kathy change their fate.

Chrissie – Rodney’s girlfriend, Chrissie did not go to **Hailsham** but feels that Hailsham students are “preferred” by the government, and that they might be granted deferrals of up to three years (before they become carers and donors) in order to live with loved ones. Chrissie and Rodney befriend Ruth, Tommy, and Kathy at the Cottages and drive with them to Norfolk, to try to find Ruth’s “clone parent.”

Moira – Another friend of Kathy’s at **Hailsham**, Moira attempts to befriend Kathy more closely after Ruth kicks both out of the “secret guard” defending Miss Geraldine. But Kathy takes Ruth’s side, telling Moira not to make fun of the secret guard, since it really is helping to keep Miss Geraldine safe.

Henry – A boy Kathy likes late in her time at **Hailsham**, Henry seems surprised when Kathy offers to have sex with him, and equally surprised when Kathy makes several excuses as to why she is then unable to sleep with Henry. Kathy wonders, while “courting” Henry, if she doesn’t also have feelings for Tommy, who is dating Ruth.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Miss Geraldine – A notably kind guardian at **Hailsham**, Miss Geraldine is noted for her indulgence of Tommy’s art, even though Tommy is a poor art student. Ruth founds a “secret society” designed to protect Miss Geraldine from an imaginary kidnapping.

Rodney – Chrissie’s boyfriend, Rodney is also concerned with the possibility of receiving a deferral in order to live with Chrissie before beginning work as a carer. Rodney and Chrissie are unable to get deferrals, however, and Kathy learns from Miss Emily that this deferral process never really existed.

Laura – A jovial student at **Hailsham**, Laura sees Kathy later on, as both are working as carers. Laura finds the work of caring to be difficult, and tells Kathy that Hailsham is closing, although neither knows why this is happening at the time.

Keffers – The maintenance man at the Cottages, Keffers is a gruff individual, but treats the students with a kind of quiet kindness when they need items for their houses or when they prepare to leave and begin their training.

Mr. Rogers – A guardian at Hailsham.

Martin – A man who lived with the others at The Cottages and went on to become a carer.

Miss Eileen – A guardian at Hailsham.



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.



MATURATION AND "GROWING UP"

Never Let Me Go is an example of a "bildungsroman," or a novel of one person's education. In this case, Kathy H., the narrator and protagonist, details her

education at **Hailsham** and "the Cottages," and then her career as a "carer." The novel is characterized by Kathy H.'s disappointments, anxieties, and moments of happiness as she gets older, and becomes closer with her two friends Tommy and Ruth. Kathy and the other characters recall life at Hailsham with great fondness. As young people at "school" there, Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth are mostly free to make art, speak to one another, and take a schedule of relatively undemanding courses. Of course, Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth learn that their lives at Hailsham are not exactly carefree—they cannot really leave the campus, and their guardians' job is to look after them *and* to make sure that they do not get into trouble or "harm their bodies."

Gradually, Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth learn that they are clones, and that, when they grow older, they will serve as organ donors for the rest of the population. But this fact—so gruesome-seeming to the reader, and to the outside world—is conveyed delicately to the Hailsham students. Even when Miss Lucy tells the assembled students in her class that they cannot make plans for their future—that their lives are entirely predetermined—the students are no so much shocked as they are embarrassed and confused, since Miss Lucy's outburst is so unlike the typical behavior of the guardians. In a way, then, the novel's enormous revelation from the reader's perspective—that the students at Hailsham are clones forced to farm out their organs—is *not* the students' greatest revelation. Indeed, the students undergo the kinds of personal developments and changes that all teenagers and new adults undergo, despite the fact that their end is predetermined.

Different characters mature in different ways. Ruth does not really abandon her anger, self-absorption, and desire to appear "in the know," although she does weaken over time, and her relationship with Kathy becomes more intimate. Ruth does recognize that Kathy and Tommy are in love, however, and after at first thwarting their relationship eventually does her best to bring them together, telling Kathy she ought to be Tommy's carer. Tommy, on the other hand, loses his youthful impetuosity and tendency toward "temper tantrums." Although he remains somewhat naïve and less witty than Ruth and Kathy, he cares a

great deal for Kathy, and the two have a small amount of time together before Tommy's final donation. Kathy becomes a skilled carer, which allows her to continue in this role far longer than her peers. In particular, she uses her "care" relationship with Tommy and Ruth as a way of reconnecting with them, even as other students from Hailsham drift away from their youthful acquaintances. Kathy experiences tinges of sadness after Ruth and Tommy die, but accept her next role as a donor.



INDIVIDUAL GOALS VS. SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS

Some of the novel's more poignant moments involve the conflict between characters' individual goals and the social world governing those characters. The novel's clones make plans for their futures as though they might be allowed to live their own, fulfilling lives—even as they know, in the back of their minds, that these plans are either impossible or highly improbable. Ruth wants, above all, to have a "normal" office job; only Kathy seems to realize that this idea of an office work-life is derived from an advertisement Ruth has seen, since Ruth has no first-hand experience of finding such a job. Kathy, for her part, worries that her libido is "unnaturally strong," and that perhaps her "original," or clone parent, was a part of society's "lower strata," and therefore passed along to Kathy a host of sexual urges and desires.

The novel's stark, underlying reality, however, is that the students at **Hailsham** *have* no future—their lives are utterly predetermined, and there is nothing they can "choose," in terms of personal life or career, once they leave for the Cottages. The only allowable jobs are carer, followed by donor. That is, neither Kathy nor Tommy nor Ruth is able to change his or her fate—they all become carers and then donors. But Ishiguro seems to contend that, within this rigid framework, the clones *can* maintain a humanity, a loving outlook towards others, and a modicum of personal freedom. This freedom tends to be symbolized most strongly by the **Judy Bridgewater tape** of the song "Never Let Me Go," to which Kathy listens constantly, and which Tommy and Ruth "find" again in Norfolk. Kathy knows that the song stirs in her the kinds of emotions—of love and human attachment to a child—that Kathy can never experience. But it is simply the feeling of *wanting* these attachments that allows Kathy to feel human and complete, and to live a life that is satisfying to her.

A second, and perhaps more bracing point, relates to *all* humans, not just to the novel's clones. Ishiguro implies that, even as "normal" humans make choices about marriage, children, education, and career, our lives have a beginning, middle, and end, and there is nothing we can do to avert our ultimate fate—our death. When Kathy comes to terms with the contours of her life, and her constrained choices, she does so not really as a clone, but as a human being—someone who is aware that her life is small, brief, and filled with uncontrollable

obstacles. Yet despite all this, life is more than worth living, and filled with the kinds of joys, large and small, that Kathy discusses in the novel.



LOSING AND FINDING

One of the characteristics of the novel's structure is a pattern of losing and finding, both of people and objects. The primary place both of losing and finding is Norfolk, the seaside town in a "lost corner" of England, as explained in a geography class by the guardians to the students of **Hailsham**. Although this is primarily meant to imply that Norfolk isn't easily accessible by motorway, Ruth, Tommy, and Kathy interpret it to mean, more whimsically, that Norfolk is the place in England to which all lost things are sent to be collected. When Kathy finds that her **Judy Bridgewater tape** has been taken from her footlocker, she wonders if it might not have "found" its way to Norfolk—even though she knows this is highly unlikely. Much later, at the Cottages, when Chrissie, Rodney, Ruth, Tommy, and Kathy decide to take a trip to Norfolk—and after the group realizes that Ruth has not in fact found her "possible"—Tommy and Kathy go off to a second-hand store, and *do* in fact find a copy of this tape.

More than the magic of Norfolk, which Kathy realizes to be a fantasy, this moment with Tommy forms a bond that allows them to "find" each other much later in the novel, as Ruth's health falters and she recommends that Kathy serve as Tommy's carer. Couples in the novel, too, are deeply concerned that they will lose one another once they are assigned as carers and then forced to be donors. Chrissie and Rodney bring up the idea that perhaps a postponement is possible for Hailsham students, although Tommy, Ruth and Kathy have never heard of such a thing. And Tommy does his best to work on his "animals" so that his donations, or art projects, might "match up" with those of the love of his life—whom he initially believes to be Ruth, but then realizes is Kathy. Finally, two larger, more abstract concepts are "lost"—Hailsham, and the notion of the characters' innocence more broadly.

Hailsham is closed in the middle of the novel, after Kathy and her friends have left and moved on to the Cottages and their lives as carers and donors. Although Kathy does not know, at first, why Hailsham is closed, it is later revealed that Hailsham was an "experiment" in a certain kind of compassionate, school-like environment for clones. The shuttering of Hailsham, therefore, represents English society losing its sense of the humanity of clones. Tommy and Kathy, on hearing this, are struck with a double-layered sadness: they know that Hailsham is not coming back, and that no "postponements" are possible for clones; and they realize what Hailsham actually was, a holding-area for clones until they were old enough to serve as carers and donors. But despite losing these stories and rationalizations, which had made their lives more bearable, Kathy finds that her memories and joys at Hailsham remain real

and true, that the lie of the place did not alter the truth and humanity of her experience there.



LIFE, DEATH, AND HUMANITY

Although the clones have different biological "beginnings" from other human beings in England—who are glimpsed only fleetingly in the novel, with the exception of the staff at **Hailsham**—they live lives notable for their fundamentally "human" qualities. That is, Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy must learn to live with one another, cope with romantic failures and excitements, and confront the realities of their own deaths. Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy and the other clones are remarkably passive regarding acceptance of their fates—that they must donate their organs and then "complete."

At first, Ishiguro appears to play with the reader's expectations about this gruesome form of social donation: he reveals information about the donations slowly, and clearly intends for the impersonality of this system to shock. But, as the novel goes on, Ishiguro makes a more masterful and exciting point—that, in fact, the shock we feel at the definitiveness of the clones' fate, and their willingness to go along with it, ought to cause us to think about our own lives, the constraints we accept in them, and the inevitability of our own demise. This "second shock," then, shows us that perhaps our own fates are not so different from the clones'. Although we have a greater variety of choices in our lives, we also must die, and as we approach death, we have about as much choice as do the clones; whether we "accept" our deaths or not, we will eventually die.

What is most shocking, too, is the willingness of "normal" members of English society to hold the clones at arm's length. Although the reader begins to recognize that Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy are just like us, the novel's "normal humans" insist on dismantling institutions like Hailsham, and the notion of "postponements" and other human facets of clone life are revealed to be baseless rumors. Much of Kathy's adult life has been a lonely one, driving around the country's highways and checking in on the donors for whom she cares. The irony here, then, is complex. Kathy's loneliness is not so dissimilar from the loneliness of any normal human professional. But because UK society has decided the clones are fundamentally different from them, they tightly circumscribe the life-possibilities of the clones. At the same time, however, the reader sees, in the clones' transition from student to carer to donor, similar emotions to "normal" growing up, normal romantic life, normal professional development.

The reader, in this way, feels fully prepared to acknowledge the humanity of the main characters, even as society of the novel pushes them to the margins. Kathy is nevertheless able to salvage, from this, a life of genuine human connections and experiences. Although she owns little and has no family, she *does* have her deep and abiding friendships with Tommy and

Ruth, which give her great comfort, even as she approaches her time as a donor.



LOVING, CARING, AND DONATION

Perhaps the most important theme in the novel is that of love, care, and donation. “Care” and “donation” might be interpreted each in two ways.

In the first, technical definition, care is that which a carer provides to a donor—the kind of human interaction a donor needs when facing the pain of organ donation. And “donation” refers either to the giving away of organs or, earlier, at **Hailsham**, to the giving away of art—which, Kathy realizes, is a process of education for the clones, so that the guardians are constantly reminding the young clones of their duties to “give away” and “give selflessly” as a precursor to their enforced obligation to give up their organs.

In particular, art is considered a “representation” of the students, a “part of them.” Thus, the donation of art conditions the students to the necessity of “giving away a part of themselves.” From a young age, then, Kathy acknowledges that the clones have been educated to find the “donation of a part of themselves” to be integral to their lives. Kathy also admits that she knew, intuitively, even in youth, that this made the students at Hailsham special, different from the rest of (non-cloned) society. Because of the centrality of art-class and the donation of art to other students, Hailsham students are trained to believe that their eventual donation of organs is a continuation of this spirit of giving. Similarly, the act of caring for their donors, in the position of carer, is considered a kind of social obligation, just as giving and appreciating the art of their fellow-students was a facet of life at Hailsham.

But, of course, care and donation have broader definitions as well. Kathy truly does care for Tommy and for Ruth, and her “caring” for them means not just fulfilling her job’s duties, but rather, it implies a genuine connection, and an attempt to mend the rifts of the past. Kathy and Tommy give their bodies, their time, and their trust to one another; Ruth’s primary act of generosity is to acknowledge that she has always come between Kathy and Tommy’s relationship. Kathy realizes that she loves Tommy—that she always has—and that this love, and this bond also with Ruth, are the things that make life worthwhile.

Kathy also has a genuine love and reverence for Hailsham, the place that made them all feel safe as youths. Although Kathy understands that she cannot have a normal, non-clone life—a life symbolized by the song “Never Let Me Go,” which Kathy imagines to involve a mother talking to her child—Kathy nevertheless constructs a meaningful life based on loving, caring interactions with Ruth and Tommy. Only in giving herself to them, and accepting the things they have given to her, does Kathy come to realize the emotional “realness” of her otherwise circumscribed existence.



SYMBOLS

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



THE JUDY BRIDGEWATER TAPE

During one of the “sales” at **Hailsham**, Kathy finds a cassette tape called *Songs After Dark*, performed by an artist named Judy Bridgewater. Kathy becomes enamored of the tape, in particular of a song called “Never Let Me Go,” which Kathy interprets to be about a young mother and her child. But Kathy “loses” the tape at Hailsham, only to find another copy with Tommy while in Norfolk, some years later. Earlier, back at Hailsham, Kathy dances to this song one day, cradling an imaginary child to her chest, when Madame walks by and sees her. Kathy notices that Madame is crying when she spots Kathy; Kathy later thinks this might have something to do with the fact that Hailsham students, being clones, are incapable of having children. But Kathy, in later discussion with Madame, learns why this scene caused Madame to cry: Madame believed that Kathy enjoyed the song’s depiction of a “kinder world,” as compared to the cruel world into which Kathy will soon be thrust. The Bridgewater tape therefore symbolizes many of the characters’ attitudes toward life before and after Hailsham. For Kathy, the Bridgewater tape embodies her innocence at Hailsham, and her desire for physical and emotional connection with other people—with lovers, with children. For Tommy, the tape also embodies this long lost emotional connection—Tommy wants desperately for Kathy to find the tape again in Norfolk. For Ruth, the tape symbolizes a secret connection between Tommy and Kathy—a connection with which Ruth can have no part. And for Madame, the tape recalls the cruelty of the world for clones whom she has tried to protect but whose lives are defined entirely by their cruel purpose as organ donors for “real” people.



HAILSHAM

The school where Kathy, Ruth, Tommy are educated—and where they learn slowly of their status as clones and their coming jobs as carers and donors—Hailsham is, at first, a paradise and refuge for the students. But as Kathy and the others grow older, they realize that Hailsham is simply a well-groomed way-station for them—a place where they are protected (so they will be healthy organ-donors) and gently nurtured to be predisposed toward accepting their organ-donor purpose. Once they reach the Cottages, the Hailsham students already begin to realize that their bond is dissolving, even as others, who didn’t go to Hailsham (like Chrissie and Rodney) view a Hailsham education as a sign of special privilege among clones. Kathy later learns, from her friend Laura, that Hailsham is closing, and Madame

and Miss Emily inform Tommy and Kathy at the end of the novel that Hailsham was a social experiment in more humane conditions for clones. But public favor has turned against these institutions, and so Hailsham loses its funding. This means that Kathy has not only lost her connection to some of her Hailsham friends; she has lost the physical reality of the school itself. At the close of the novel, however, after Tommy's and Ruth's deaths, Kathy realizes that her memories of Hailsham will never deteriorate, and that the bond she shared there with her friends was a real and powerful one.

desire to question some of the rules she lives by—and that society places on her and the other donors.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☞ Well . . . The thing is, it might sound strange. It did to me at first. What she said was that if I didn't want to be creative, if I really didn't feel like it, that was perfectly all right. Nothing wrong with it, she said.

Related Characters: Tommy (speaker), Kathy H., Miss Lucy

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 23

Explanation and Analysis

At this point in the novel, Tommy has developed a willingness to discuss some of his more complex emotional states and problems with Kathy. Tommy's conversation with Miss Lucy—in which Lucy argues that Tommy doesn't have to be creative at Hailsham, despite an institutional emphasis on art classes—is one instance of an emotionally thorny and confusing episode.

What is especially odd about the conversation between Lucy and Tommy is the fact that, as revealed later, Tommy really is creative. He is a talented cartoonist, and his "animals," as he and Kathy call them, are intricately modeled and imaginative representations of his inner life. What Lucy appears to be telling Tommy, in a halting manner, is that Tommy, Kathy, and the other students have lives that are set out for them in advance. They do not have before them the kinds of choices that others must make as they mature. In some sense, this makes Hailsham a prep school that prepares its students for non-life—for organ donation and eventual death. It also means that Hailsham "classes" are, in a sense, just filler until the realities of the students' fates set in.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☞ The gallery Tommy and I were discussing was something we'd all of us grown up with. Everyone talked about it as though it existed, though in truth none of us knew for sure that it did.

Related Characters: Tommy (speaker), Kathy H.



QUOTES


Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *Never Let Me Go* published in 2006.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☞ So I reached forward and put a hand on his arm. Afterwards, the others thought he'd meant to do it, but I was pretty sure it was unintentional. His arms were still flailing about, and he wasn't to know I was about to put out my hand. Anyway, as he threw up his arm, he knocked my hand aside and hit the side of my face.

Related Characters: Kathy H. (speaker), Tommy

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

Tommy's "wild furies" are one of his defining features as a character. In the beginning of his time at Hailsham, these furies are viewed—by students and those in positions of authority—as part of his immature state. Tommy, by the administrators' logic, is an aberration, a student who needs to be normalized to behave more quietly like the other Hailsham students.

Kathy, however, seems to understand that Tommy's anguish runs deeper. Tommy, in this instance, is not just mad that he has ruined his shirt, or that he has been made a fool of in the schoolyard. Kathy senses that Tommy's fits are in some way involuntary (particularly in their physical manifestations), and that he is actually upset by the constraints of the school itself—even if Tommy himself does not understand why Hailsham is such a hard place for him to live and study. This behavior of Tommy's, his willingness to test, without exactly knowing why, the norms of his life, will induce in Kathy a

Related Themes:**Related Symbols:****Page Number:** 31**Explanation and Analysis**

The Gallery is an example of a persistent and convincing rumor that is maintained among the students of Hailsham. It claims that the Headmaster of the school selects the students' best art to adorn a Gallery, one that is then, presumably, shown to others in some capacity—although the students are not allowed to leave Hailsham, and therefore do not know exactly where this Gallery could be.

This passage is important for several reasons. It demonstrates the Hailsham students' desire to learn about the world beyond the school's walls. The myth of the Gallery generates among the students a real interest in creative work, not just for self-expression but for a way to become, in a sense, "famous," an exhibited artist showing work to others. It also shows the way that stories of the outside world are generated within Hailsham, and how they attempt to explain what is ultimately beyond the donors' control. The students' lives, even after Hailsham, are circumscribed by their institutionally-determined role as people who will give organs to non-clones. But the students also live a kind of gentle fantasy, in which their art *might* be shown to the world, and their creative efforts might be praised alongside those of non-cloned individuals.

☝ If she doesn't like us, why does she want our work? Why doesn't she just leave us alone? Who asks her to come here anyway?

Related Characters: Laura (speaker), Madame**Related Themes:****Related Symbols:****Page Number:** 35-36**Explanation and Analysis**

Laura, a minor character in the story and one of Kathy's friends, approaches the Madame to ask about the Gallery. What surprises Laura—and Kathy, Ruth, and the others—is the utter "repulsion" they see on the Madame's face. Laura and the others have always had a sense that they are marked, or "other"—that they are students in a "special"

school. But they do not quite understand what makes them special, even if they are told from an early age that they are clones, and that they will donate their organs to others.

The episode with the Madame thus makes clear for the first time that non-clones are deeply afraid of the clone students, even as they run their lives with precision and a degree of humanity, treating them to a boarding-school-like environment. Laura, Kathy, and Ruth feel like humans—they think, they emote, they wonder about their futures. Indeed, they *are* human, but the prejudice of non-clones against them keeps them separate and dehumanized, with no chance to change their own fates.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☝ I accepted the invisible rein she was holding out, and then we were off, riding up and down the fence, sometimes cantering, sometimes at a gallop. I'd been correct in my decision to tell Ruth I didn't have any horses of my own, because after a while with Bramble, she let me try her various other horses one by one, shouting all sorts of instructions about how to handle each animal's foibles.

Related Characters: Kathy H. (speaker), Ruth**Related Themes:****Related Symbols:****Page Number:** 47**Explanation and Analysis**

Kathy's relationship with Ruth is one of the central relationships in the novel. Kathy finds in Ruth someone she can talk to—but Ruth for a long time acts superior to Kathy, as though she knows things about Hailsham Kathy doesn't know. Ruth, to Kathy, appears to be someone whose future is not necessarily marked out in advance. For Kathy this is intoxicating. Ruth's imagination, like Tommy's, is different from that of the run-of-the-mill Hailsham student.

Ruth's horse-riding, as an imaginary activity, is indicative of her view of life. Ruth pretends that she can "grow up" the way other people (non-clones) do. Like them, Ruth believes she might have a future where she achieves wealth or fame, or has a family. Ruth's relationship with Tommy, once it develops, has in it a kind of seriousness that, to Kathy, appears more mature and separate from other sexual dalliances that are common at Hailsham. Thus, in "extending the reins" to Kathy in this scene, Ruth both opens the possibility of friendship and pairs with it a slight feeling of


superiority—as though she is deigning to speak to Kathy despite Kathy's relative immaturity.

Chapter 5 Quotes

☝☝ When it came down to it, though, I don't recall our taking many practical steps towards defending Miss Geraldine; our activities always revolved around gathering more and more evidence concerning the plot itself.

Related Characters: Kathy H. (speaker), Miss Geraldine, Ruth

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

Ruth's earlier fantasy of riding imaginary horses on the Hailsham grounds is a prelude to some of her more involved fantasies. The "plot" against Miss Geraldine is Ruth's idea. The other girls follow it, including Kathy, although, as Kathy here notes, they do so not because they think the plot is actually true. Instead, they want to appease Ruth, who is more or less the leader of their group. They want to show her they are "cool" and capable of thinking "outside the box" of normal Hailsham students.


The idea that Miss Geraldine might be kidnapped points to a larger threat of violence, which creeps in as the novel goes on. For the clones at Hailsham will, in fact, be subjected to terrible, painful procedures as they age—their organs will be harvested until they expire. Their fate is the stuff of science fiction horror. That is the primary dramatic irony of the book—that the students fantasize about a world of mythical and violent behavior, yet they themselves will be subject to institutional violence as they mature.

Chapter 6 Quotes

☝☝ It's not good that I smoked. It wasn't good for me so I stopped it. But what you must understand is that for you, all of you, it's much, much worse to smoke than it ever was for me. You've been told about it. You're students. You're . . . *special*.

Related Characters: Miss Lucy (speaker), Ruth, Tommy, Kathy H.

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 68

Explanation and Analysis

Miss Lucy clearly wants to speak as forthrightly as possible to the students of Hailsham. She does not want to sugarcoat their futures. But Miss Lucy also most operate within the institutional structures of Hailsham—she cannot just yell out to the students, at least not at this point, what their violent fate must be.

This passage is an example of Lucy splitting the difference, doing her best to be honest to the students without jeopardizing her own position within the Hailsham structure. Smoking is not permitted for any of the Hailsham students because their health is paramount—it is, in fact, their primary contribution to society. Their organs must be as "pristine" as possible, which is why, before they even reach early middle age, the students begin donating to others who might need them. Lucy thus does not disrupt the established order of Hailsham—she is still invested in making sure the students don't smoke. But she hopes to explain the policy in more detail as a way of relating more directly and honestly to the student population, whom she clearly cares about.

☝☝ I froze in shock. Then within a second or two, I began to feel a new kind of alarm, because I could see there was something strange about the situation. The door was almost half open . . . but Madame hadn't nearly come up to the threshold. She was out in the corridor, standing very still . . . And the odd thing was she was crying. It might even have been one of her sobs that had come through the song to jerk me out of me dream.

Related Characters: Kathy H. (speaker), Madame

Related Themes:     

Related Symbols:   

Page Number: 71

Explanation and Analysis

This is one of the most important passages in the novel. Kathy believes that the song "Never Let Me Go" is about a mother who does not wish to "let go" of her child, and by

dancing to herself in her room, miming this song, Kathy is participating in a fantasy of motherly love. Kathy, like some other Hailsham students, expresses a dim and abstract desire to have a family. She wonders what it would be like to care for someone in that way, to maintain that form of "normal" human connection she has witnessed in representations (film and book) of life outside the school's gates.


What Kathy does not quite realize, however, is what Madame knows all too well: Kathy can never have a family. She is condemned to a life in which she must "care" for others by giving of herself in the most serious and sustained way. Kathy's donation of organs is a kind of selflessness beyond anything conceivable for a non-clone. And though the reader is slowly putting together the nature of Kathy's sacrifice, it is Madame's teary understanding of Kathy's humanity, in this scene, that sets the stage for further revelations later on in the novel.

Chapter 7 Quotes

☝☝ The problem, as I see it, is that you've been told and not told. You've been told, but none of you really understand, and I dare say, some people are quite happy to leave it that way. But I'm not. If you're going to have decent lives, then you've got to know and know properly. . . . Your lives are set out for you. You'll become adults . . . and before you're even middle-aged, you'll start to donate your vital organs. That's what each of you was created to do.

Related Characters: Miss Lucy (speaker), Kathy H., Ruth, Tommy

Related Themes:     

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 81

Explanation and Analysis

This is another very important passage in the novel, and a scene in which Miss Lucy's relationship to the students changes somewhat. Before, Lucy has been content in maintaining Hailsham policy while also engaging with the students more directly and openly, telling them that they are special, that their lives will be determined by rules that don't necessarily apply for non-clones. Lucy has not, till this point, used the term "clone," but she nevertheless feels that the "special" status of Hailsham students must be addressed and explained to them.


What changes in this section is the directness with which Lucy addresses the students. She has overhead some of them discussing possible careers they might like to entertain in later life, and some of them, just before Lucy begins to speak, have said they would like to be actors. This, for Lucy, is simply too much, and she has to speak. She notes that any career other than organ donation, or caring for other donors, is utterly impossible for Hailsham students. Here the reader learns just how serious and unchangeable the fate of Hailshamites is—they have no choice regarding their future, and their lives are wholly predetermined.

Chapter 8 Quotes

☝☝ And you didn't want to do it in the fields even when it was warm enough, because you'd almost certainly discover afterwards you'd had an audience watching from the house passing round binoculars. In other words, for all the talk of sex being beautiful, we had the distinct impression we'd be in trouble if the guardians caught us at it.

Related Characters: Kathy H. (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 95

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Kathy note the ambivalence Hailsham seems to have toward sexual activity among its students. On the one hand, Hailsham students are, for reasons that are not explained, sterile—they cannot bear children of their own. This means that sexual activity will not have any pregnancy consequences, and that, therefore, the school seems not to mind too much that the students are having sex. Indeed, the school argues that students should be healthy and enjoy their bodies. It is implied that sex might somehow be better for them, and might lead to better organ health and improved donations later on.

But the school also doesn't really make it possible for the students to have sex. There might be several intertwining reasons for this—a kind of prudishness, or a feeling that sex between clones is something that non-clones find repellent or wrong. At any rate, Kathy understands that sex is neither prohibited nor explicitly a part of school life—and it is this relatively consequence-less quality of sex that makes the act feel less romantic, less a part of human maturation, than it might be for non-clones.


Chapter 9 Quotes

☞ Don't you realize, we won't be here together like this much longer?

I do realize that, Kath. That's exactly why I can't rush back into it with Ruth. We've got to think about the next move really carefully . . . Like you say, Kath. We're going to be leaving here soon. It's not like a game any more. We've got to think carefully.

Related Characters: Kathy H., Tommy (speaker), Ruth

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 110

Explanation and Analysis

One of the threads running throughout the novel is the love triangle between Tommy, Ruth, and Kathy. Ruth, who in many ways presents herself as someone who "knows the ropes" and is mature and world-wise, snags Tommy early on. They date for some time, and though their relationship seems largely happy, they break up toward the end of their time at Hailsham.

But Ruth quickly realizes that she wants Tommy back, and she enlists Kathy to help her do this. Kathy talks to Tommy, and when Tommy says he is weighing his options in getting back with Ruth, Kathy also seems to demonstrate real concern for Tommy, although she never tells him outright that she has romantic feelings for him.

Kathy's inability to assert herself quite so strongly as Ruth is therefore a refrain in the novel. Ruth, in Kathy's eyes, gets "what she wants." Kathy is more passive, she tends to listen, to offer advice when asked—but she has a harder time maintaining a romance, or even identifying to herself what she wants. The reader often has the feeling that he or she knows more than Kathy about Kathy's own emotional state.

Chapter 10 Quotes

☞ For the first weeks after we arrived, she [Ruth] made a big deal of it, always putting her arm around Tommy . . . it wasn't long before Ruth realized the way she'd been carrying on with Tommy was all wrong for the Cottages, and she set about changing how they did things in front of people.

Related Characters: Kathy H. (speaker), Ruth, Tommy

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 120

Explanation and Analysis

What Kathy notes here, without offering her own opinion on the matter, is Ruth's ability to adapt her behavior quickly to her surroundings. Ruth is concerned, perhaps excessively so, with what other people think of her—she is always trying to seem "in the know," prepared for whatever the world will throw at her. Ruth enjoys showing Kathy that she, Ruth, acts like a grownup, while Kathy tends to follow behind, passively waiting for others to show her the way.

Thus Ruth felt at Hailsham that one demonstrated one's relationship status by openly embracing a partner in front of others—showing her possession of Tommy. When Ruth realizes that this is "uncool," that "the veterans" at the Cottages do not demonstrate their love in this way, she demurs, and instead touches Tommy in front of others in a more subtle or sly manner.

Kathy, for her part, announces these changes to the reader, sensing what they might tell him or her about Ruth. But Kathy refrains from saying too much on top of this—she does not blame Ruth openly for being so quick to court the favor of those around her. Only much later will Kathy speak with Ruth more honestly about the ways Ruth makes Kathy feel.

☞ Come to think of it, I suppose you haven't been *that* slow making friends with at least *some* of the veterans.

Related Characters: Ruth (speaker), Kathy H.

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 125

Explanation and Analysis

This is one of Ruth's crueler statements—indeed, the depths of Ruth's cruelty toward Kathy are found when the two of them are at the Cottages together. Ruth is here implying that Kathy has slept with a good deal of the men in the Cottages—and even that Kathy has a "problem" with her sexuality, that she cannot control her urges.

Ruth, by contrast, makes it seem like she easily and effortlessly maintains total fidelity to Tommy. Ruth implies that Kathy's behavior with some of the men in the Cottages has marked her as a promiscuous person. And in saying it in this way, sideways rather than directly, Ruth also implies that many people at the Cottages know about this—that Ruth is somehow doing Kathy a "favor" by telling her what


others are supposedly whispering about Kathy's sexual exploits.

Chapter 11 Quotes

☝ You were different. I remember. You were never embarrassed about your collection and you kept it. I wish now I'd done that too.

Related Characters: Ruth (speaker), Kathy H.

Related Themes:     

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 131

Explanation and Analysis

This is a moment that occurs before Ruth's comment about Kathy's sex life at the Cottages, but that Kathy relates to the reader only after the other conversation. Ruth, because of her desire to seem mature, gets rid of her "collection" of gifts and other objects from Hailsham. She does not want to be tethered to memories of that place, the way that Kathy and perhaps Tommy do. Ruth looks only forward, into a future where she wonders whether she can't escape the life prescribed to her as a donor.


This passage also sheds light on Kathy's relationship to her own past and future. Kathy loves Hailsham—she thinks of it fondly, and when Hailsham closes later in the novel, Kathy mourns its loss even though she knows she can never go back there. Hailsham represents a time of companionship and learning—even though her "preparation" was to be a clone donor, and not for any other worldly future. But Kathy also has a sense of her own future that is in line with the one prepared for her at Hailsham. Kathy wants to be a caretaker—she looks forward to helping other people.

Chapter 12 Quotes

☝ The point about Chrissie—and this applied to a lot of the veterans—was that for all her slightly patronizing manner towards us when we'd first arrived, she was awestruck about our being from Hailsham. It took me a long time to realize this.

Related Characters: Kathy H. (speaker), Chrissie

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 141

Explanation and Analysis

Kathy informs the reader that the "Hailsham" name carries a great deal of weight, especially among those who were not educated there. It has a pedigree—it is a school unlike other academies where donors are prepared for their jobs.

Kathy does not tell the reader how she was selected for Hailsham, or how that process works—which donors are assigned to which schools as young children. But she does convey just how special Hailsham is to her. What one learns in this passage, then, is that others feel the Hailsham "mystique" as strongly as Kathy herself does.

Later in the novel, however, Hailsham will be revealed to be just one method of socializing young donors—and it gains its "pedigree" because of how comfortable and progressive it is compared to other clone schools. Other methods are not so developed, and many are even quite barbaric. Instead of resembling prep schools, other donor academies are more like prisons or barracks, where donors are fed and housed but not enriched culturally.

Chapter 13 Quotes

☝ You know, Ruth, we might be coming here in a few years' time to visit *you*. Working in a nice office. I don't see how anyone could stop us visiting you then.

Related Characters: Chrissie (speaker), Ruth

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 151

Explanation and Analysis

This passage relates to the concept of a "possible," or the person upon whom a clone donor was modeled and therefore "produced." The trip to Norfolk is both a vacation and a journey to see if Ruth's possible might, in fact, be there. Chrissie, Rodney, Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth travel all that way in order to try and glimpse a world they have always hoped to be possible—a world in which they, as donors, are related to others who lead normal lives in the world.

What is less clear, in this passage, is just what Chrissie and Ruth actually believe about the possible. If, say, they were to stumble upon a person who resembles Ruth—would they talk to her? Would Ruth be able to live the life that the

possible was also living? Although the donors perhaps sense that these ideas are fantastical and impossible, they are nevertheless invested in seeking out answers—as much for their own entertainment and desperate hope as anything else.

Chapter 14 Quotes

☝☝ We all know it. We're modeled from *trash*. Junkies, prostitutes, winos, tramps. Convicts, maybe, just so long as they aren't psychos. That's what we come from. We all know it, so why don't we say it?

Related Characters: Ruth (speaker), Kathy H., Tommy, Chrissie

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 166

Explanation and Analysis

Up till this point, Ruth has spoken to others as though she were not constrained by the cultural expectations of donors. For example, Ruth has made it seem that she might be able to work in an office, like her "possible." She has also asked some of the other couples at the Cottages whether it is in fact possible for donor couples who are in love to ask for a deferral of their donation duties, so that they might have more time together. All these utterances combined make it seem that Ruth really believes she has a life outside the predetermined course for all donors.


Here, however, Ruth blurts out what she really thinks. Ruth is aware not only that her clone life is unchangeable, but she knows, too, that she and the others are probably cloned from "undesirable" personages in society—that clones are at the absolute bottom of the social ladder, that they are used only to make sure that other, "normal" people can live. Ruth is devastated by this information, which is why she goes to such great lengths to make it seem that she is not concerned with it at all.

Chapter 15 Quotes

☝☝ Well . . . I really wanted to find it [the cassette tape] for you. And when it looked in the end like it wasn't going to turn up, I just said to myself, one day I'll go to Norfolk, and I'll find it there for her.
The lost corner of England! And here we are!

Related Characters: Tommy, Kathy H. (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 169

Explanation and Analysis

This joke between Tommy and Kathy about the "lost corner of England" is one that unites them. Tommy genuinely wishes to find another version of the Judy Bridgewater tape of "Never Let Me Go" for Kathy. He seems even to think that the version he finds in Norfolk will be the very same version that Kathy lost. Even though Kathy knows better, she is delighted to share in this caper with Tommy.

Tommy and Kathy's friendship is defined by this sort of reciprocal care and shared hopes. While Tommy is with Ruth, Kathy remains a good friend to them both, even making sure the couple gets back together before leaving Hailsham for the Cottages. Kathy's behavior toward Tommy and Ruth is thus an elaboration of her own selflessness. She is willing to put her friendship with each of them ahead of her underlying desire to be with Tommy in a romantic way.

Chapter 16 Quotes

☝☝ God, Tommy, these must take so much concentration. I'm surprised you can see well enough in here to do all this tiny stuff. I wonder what Madame would say if she saw these. I suppose I'll have to get a lot better before *she* gets to see any of it.

Related Characters: Kathy H., Tommy (speaker), Madame

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 187

Explanation and Analysis

Kathy deeply enjoys seeing Tommy's work. She believes that the animals Tommy creates are a genuine and eccentric expression of Tommy's creativity, and she believes that Tommy really has a chance, in showing the animals to the "powers that be" (namely the Madame), to prove that the clones are worthy of at least some input into the course of their lives. In other words, Kathy likes the animals because they are an expression of what makes Tommy Tommy. And she likes, too, that the animals might be a way of convincing people in positions of power that clone creativity is akin to "normal" non-clone creativity.

Ruth, for her part, will use Kathy's initial response to

Tommy's animals—a kind of quiet awe and surprise—and warp it, to make it seem that Kathy believes Tommy's work to be crude and upsettingly strange. In other words, Ruth will distort Kathy's feelings toward Tommy for her own ends. Ruth does this later on because she is threatened by Kathy and Tommy's intimacy—because she worries that Tommy really loves Kathy, and not her.

Chapter 17 Quotes

☝ Well, Kathy, what you have to realize is that Tommy doesn't see you like that. He really, really likes you, he thinks you're really great. But I know he doesn't see you like, you know, a proper girlfriend. Besides, you know how Tommy is. He can be fussy . . . Tommy doesn't like girls who've been with . . . well, you know, with this person and that.

Related Characters: Ruth (speaker), Tommy, Kathy H.

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 200-201

Explanation and Analysis

This is another instance of Ruth's cruelty toward and manipulation of Kathy. Ruth makes this point about Tommy's lack of affection for Kathy because Ruth senses that Kathy and Tommy do in fact have a real intimacy. The two get along very well, they speak confidentially to one another, and Tommy has shown Kathy the nature of his artistic work—something that Ruth perhaps feels is too intimate to be shown to anyone other than herself.


Ruth thus combines several threads she has used before against Kathy. She argues that Kathy has been too promiscuous previously, and that this is something Tommy "wouldn't like." She makes it seem, too, that Tommy has always considered Kathy to be nothing more than a friend—a person in whom he can confide, but not an object of romantic interest. And Ruth makes it seem that only she is a "proper girlfriend" for Tommy—that she is the only person who can treat Tommy the way a boyfriend ought to be treated.

Chapter 18 Quotes

☝ It was that exchange, when we finally mentioned the closing of Hailsham, that suddenly brought us close again, and we hugged, quite spontaneously, not so much to comfort one another, but as a way of affirming Hailsham, the fact that it was still there in both of our memories.

Related Characters: Kathy H. (speaker), Laura

Related Themes:     

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 211

Explanation and Analysis

Laura and Kathy, unlike Ruth, are attracted to Hailsham as a place and as an idea. For them Hailsham has been a source of real comfort. It was one of the highlights of Kathy's life—a time when she was surrounded by good friends and genuine companionship. Kathy takes great pains to point out to the reader that, after Hailsham, life for donors becomes increasingly isolated, until the donor has only one meaningful relationship remaining—that of the donor and the caretaker, who will also become a donor in due time.

Laura and Kathy therefore reconnect because they are happy to see each other. But, more importantly, they are happy to remind each other of a time they both shared, a time when they were embedded in a meaningful and sustained community. This is exactly what each of them, and many of the others donors, have been lacking since leaving Hailsham several years before.

Chapter 19 Quotes

☝ I'd like you to forgive me, but I don't expect you to. Anyway, that's not the half of it, not even a small bit of it, actually. The main thing is, I kept you and Tommy apart. That was the worst thing I did. . . . What I want is for you to put it right. Put right what I messed up for you.

Related Characters: Ruth (speaker), Kathy H., Tommy

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 232

Explanation and Analysis

This outburst of Ruth's, which is designed as an apology to Kathy and to Tommy, is very similar to Ruth's outburst of several years before, when Ruth argues that they all know they are cloned from "undesirable" personages in society. In this case, Ruth again wishes to clear her conscience of something that has been weighing on her for some time, and that she has been trying to keep repressed or secret.

The primary difference, however, has to do with Ruth's relationship to other people. In her first outburst, Ruth


argued against the existence of her own "possible" because she was so exasperated by her own lack of opportunity in the world. Her outburst was thus not so much directed toward others but toward her own despair. In this latter instance, however, Ruth realizes that her behaviors of the past have influenced the possibility of a relationship between Kathy and Tommy. Ruth wishes, in this case, to atone for something she has done wrong—to make it right while Kathy and Tommy are still alive and able to spend time together.

Chapter 21 Quotes

☛ Poor creatures. What did we do to you? With all our schemes and plans?

Related Characters: Madame (speaker), Kathy H., Tommy

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 254

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Madame wonders aloud whether Hailsham was, after all, a good thing. The initial idea of Hailsham, as she goes on to explain, was to help clones to feel like members of society, to make sure they had hobbies, friends, and fond memories—before becoming donors and caretakers. The idea undergirding the Hailsham system was thus a fundamentally humanist and benevolent one, even if the reality that that system supported was inhumane.


But as the Madame and Miss Emily go on to explain, the Hailsham system was something like a Band-Aid over a disturbed and upsetting system, wherein humans were used and "mined" to keep others alive. The enrichment that Hailsham therefore afforded the young donors came to seem, to many, like an ever-greater cruelty. Because, of course, neither Tommy nor Kathy could actually live the kind of "normal" life that was, in some sense, modeled for them at Hailsham. The Madame therefore reveals the ambivalence built into the institution of Hailsham: a desire to ready clones for their jobs without necessarily explaining directly what those jobs would be—to build up their hopes and dreams and then crush them.

Chapter 22 Quotes

☛ I was thinking about back then, at Hailsham, when you used to go bonkers like that, and we couldn't understand it. We couldn't understand how you could ever get like that. . . . I was thinking maybe the reason you used to get like that was because at some level you always *knew*. . . . That's a funny idea. Maybe I did know, somewhere deep down. Something the rest of you didn't.

Related Characters: Kathy H., Tommy (speaker)

Related Themes:     

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 275

Explanation and Analysis

Kathy realizes at the end of the text just how deep and intuitive Tommy's sense of himself has always been. Tommy has known, and been frustrated by, the total impossibility of a "normal" life for the clones. Tommy knew this, and harbored this frustration, even in his early days at Hailsham, when he used to get angry when others would make fun of him. Tommy saw what was at the end of the road, beyond the Hailsham gates, and he saw this far more clearly than anyone else.


Kathy, too, has sensed that clone life did not really fit in with the mirage of a more normal life that was made apparent to the clones at Hailsham. But Kathy was not so openly angry about this. Instead, Kathy's tone throughout the book has been one of wistfulness, a nostalgia touched with sadness but never completely angry. This feeling of the loveliness of the past, and the fact that the past can never be reclaimed, is something that knits Tommy and Kathy together by the novel's end.

Chapter 23 Quotes

☛ . . . and if I waited long enough, a tiny figure would appear on the horizon across the field, and gradually get larger until I'd see it was Tommy, and he'd wave, maybe even call. . . . and though the tears rolled down my face, I wasn't sobbing. . . . I just waited a bit, then turned back to the car, to drive off to wherever it was I was supposed to be.

Related Characters: Kathy H. (speaker), Tommy

Related Themes:     

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 288

Explanation and Analysis

This is one of the most affecting and beautiful passages in the novel. What becomes painfully clear, by the end, is the depth of Kathy's love for Tommy. Their romance has been, and remains, impossible. Each must die, and before that, each must care for another donor. Their lives cannot be changed. Their love, powerful as it is, cannot alter their

circumstances.

But this does not mean that Kathy and Tommy cannot love each other. That is one of the deep and affirming lessons of "Never Let Me Go." Tommy and Kathy remain attached to one another even after Tommy's death, because Kathy tries as hard as she can to remember her friend and lover as he was, to place him in her mind among the beautiful fields of Hailsham. It is a great sadness that this past cannot extend indefinitely into the future. But the past really did happen—it was real. And Kathy insists on this reality until the end of her own life.



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

The novel is set in an alternate version of England, in the 1990s, and the narrator is Kathy H., a former student at the **Hailsham** school. Kathy now works as a “carer,” although the details of her job she does not share immediately with the reader. Kathy has been a carer for twelve years, and though she doesn’t want to “brag” about her abilities in her job, she notes that this is a far longer tenure as carer than others are granted by the government. Kathy notes that her “donors,” or the people she cares for, tend to do well, even after “their third of fourth donation.” But Kathy does not explain to the reader what exactly these terms mean.

Kathy notes that she enjoys thinking about **Hailsham**, and she often tries to choose the people she cares for (something that is only granted to skilled carers like Kathy; other are assigned their donors) so that her donors have gone to Hailsham school. Kathy served as a carer for Ruth, whom she mentions had been a friend of hers at Hailsham, though the two have had a falling out. Kathy mentions another, unnamed donor whom she cares for, who enjoys hearing stories of Hailsham, because it is known as an idyllic place—far better than this unnamed donor’s hometown. Kathy enjoys talking to this donor about Hailsham whenever they meet, and considers herself “lucky” to have gone there.

Kathy often thinks about **Hailsham** when she drives around the English countryside, visiting her donors. In particular, a certain kind pavilion she sees often reminds her of Hailsham, a school which, according to her hints and descriptions, appears to have been shut down since she left. Kathy remembers a story involving a pavilion near Hailsham’s athletic area: she is standing there with her female friends, including Ruth, and they are looking out at one of the football fields, where a boy named Tommy is playing. Tommy is wearing his “special blue polo shirt,” which he has recently bought in a school sale, and Kathy wonders if Tommy won’t get it dirty playing.

One of the great ironies of this early part of the novel is the small pride Kathy takes in her abilities as a carer—and her overwhelming modesty in all things, as will become apparent as the novel progresses. After watching Kathy’s interaction with Ruth and Tommy over time, the reader would find it difficult to think of Kathy as anything other than a very grounded, very thoughtful human being.



Kathy’s focus on Hailsham highlights its importance to her. That Ruth was her friend there implies it was a school of some sort. The unnamed donor establishes that Hailsham was unique, a special place. Through all this, Ishiguro channels an entire sub-genre of fiction writing—the “novel of education,” or the “campus novel,” but in this case, the twist has to do with the nature of the students’ lives—the reality of their jobs as carers and donors—and how that both does and does not change what Hailsham is and means to them.



The novel is constructed throughout as a series of flashbacks of various points in the past—it is a novel of looking back from one stage of life to earlier ones. Kathy is narrating from “the present day,” some time in the 1990s in England; and at that particular moment, she has just finished her career as a carer and is about to embark on her new career as a donor. Tommy is also here established as being important to Kathy.



The other girls begin laughing, as they realize the boys with whom Tommy is preparing to play are ready to turn a practical joke on Tommy. Tommy is a gifted athlete, but he has a terrible temper; the group of boys has decided, when selecting teams, to pick Tommy last, even though he is the most skilled player. When Tommy realizes he has been picked last, he flies into a rage on the field, stamping around on the mud as the other players laugh and run off to another part of the school grounds. Tommy stands alone, raging wildly, getting himself muddy in the process, as the girls (excluding Kathy) laugh at him from the nearby pavilion.

Tommy then walks by, on his way back to his room, and Kathy intercepts him, telling him that he's gotten his favorite polo shirt dirty. Tommy, instead of thanking Kathy for her concern, continues raging, telling her the shirt is "none of her business." In his wild fury, Tommy swings his arm around and grazes Kathy on the side of the head. Kathy isn't hurt, but the other girls "gasp" at Tommy's impulsiveness. Kathy walks back to the girls, where Ruth consoles her, saying that Kathy has managed to calm Tommy down somewhat.

Tommy appears to have very little control of his body when he flies into a tantrum—his flailing here will come back at the end of the novel, when he expresses his final frustration at the fact that he and his fellow clones have no ultimate control as to the direction of their lives. Kathy's lack of laughter at Tommy suggests again her connection to him, and perhaps the seeds of what make her such a skilled carer—she has no interest in harming the dignity of another.



Tommy's relationship with Kathy will be one of the novel's central concerns. Here, at first, Tommy views Kathy as a relatively well-meaning, but somewhat strange and shy, member of Ruth's set of friends. The emphasis on staying clean, and not being impulsive, and minor physical harm (Tommy grazing Kathy's head) is a bit odd. Later it will be clear that these are concerns that have been nurtured in these children in order to protect their bodies—since their sole purpose, as clones, is to eventually donate their organs to others.



CHAPTER 2

Kathy tells the reader that, several days later, Tommy came up to her—in a line for "medical checkups," which occur weekly for **Hailsham** students—to apologize for accidentally hitting her, and for being rude when she expressed concern about his shirt. Kathy tells the reader, also, that at this point she, Tommy, and Ruth were all around thirteen years old. Although Kathy is "mildly embarrassed" by Tommy's public apology in the checkup line, she continues worrying, to herself, about Tommy, who is often the butt of pranks in the school. Many Hailsham students seem to resent Tommy because he is not "creative," because he does not generate much art in art class, and because he rarely puts the art he does make in the Spring Exchange, where students go around selecting art made by their fellow students.

One night, in their large bunk-bed room, Kathy begins talking to the other girls about Tommy and her concerns for his wellbeing. Ruth agrees that the other boys are cruel to Tommy, but says that Tommy himself can change his attitude, and, for example, can begin contributing art to the "donation" exchanges. Kathy then flashes forward to some of her conversations with Ruth, when Ruth is a donor and Kathy her carer. Ruth remembers that a lot of the art created for the exchanges was very good; Ruth and Kathy also note that, apart from the exchanges and the "sales," there was "no other way for Hailsham students to accumulate personal possessions."

More clues here about the students' status as clones who will have to eventually donate their organs, and about the students' own lack of knowledge about what awaits them. The medical check-ups are to ensure the students remain healthy so they will eventually be able to donate. The focus on being creative and giving away art is a way to condition the students to accept their giving away of their organs as a means of "creating life" in others. Meanwhile, the students continue on with their lives like normal people.



The Exchanges and the Sales are the students' only interaction with the world of commerce. As detailed here, the Exchanges conditions the students to be predisposed toward "giving" and "donating" from a young age, and the Sales offer a chance to buy things produced outside Hailsham—although, as is revealed later, these are mostly things that people in the outside world didn't want, or perhaps have chosen to get rid of (as at a second-hand store).



Kathy flashes forward again, this time to her period of caring for Tommy, who she reveals was also one of her donors. Tommy and Kathy discussed a meeting of art class with a kind guardian (the term for **Hailsham** instructors) named Miss Geraldine, who took a particular liking to Tommy. Tommy's art for that class was "intentionally childish," because Tommy was embarrassed by his lack of talent for painting, but Miss Geraldine continued to praise it, even though others in the class resented Tommy for this preferential treatment.

Another of Ishiguro's clever and concealed methods for showing the "otherness" of Hailsham students. The classes at the school do not seem to include the "hard sciences" or the humanities so much as a series of sections focusing on creative expression. Creativity, too, is a way for the students to "give" of themselves and share with others. At the same time, as Miss Emily later tells Kathy and Tommy, these art classes were conceived by the creators of Hailsham as a way for the student clones to show their humanity to the rest of the (non-clone) world.



Kathy then remembers how Tommy's temper tantrums slowly began to disappear, even though his art, around age 13, never really improved. Kathy flashes back to one day, when she was standing in a lunch-line several months after Tommy's tantrum over football selection. Kathy sees Tommy in line and the two begin talking; Kathy mentions that Tommy has been less visibly upset recently, and she asks him why. Tommy replies that he has "grown up," and also mentions that he's had a conversation with Miss Lucy, another of the school's guardians, who told him that "creativity" isn't necessarily the most important thing for the students, and if Tommy isn't creative, this isn't a big problem. This gives Tommy more confidence—although Kathy is shocked by Tommy's admission, since creativity is made to be such a big part of their **Hailsham** education. Tommy tells Kathy he will give her more information when they can talk in private, later that day.

Thus it is extremely shocking to Kathy that Tommy would mention his creativity was no longer of primary concern. It is doubly shocking that this information comes from Miss Lucy, one of the guardians (or teachers) at the school, and someone in whom the students place a great amount of trust. At Hailsham, creativity and personal health and hygiene are unshakeable pillars of the institution—to hear a guardian say otherwise is to contravene almost everything the students have learned, since they were old enough to remember. Thus Tommy and Kathy worry about talking more in public, and must continue their conversation farther away from the other students.



CHAPTER 3

Kathy remembers her meeting with Tommy later that day, near the school's pond, which allows them a certain amount of privacy. Kathy prods Tommy for information about his conversation with Miss Lucy, whom the students find to be a sympathetic guardian, though not so overtly nice as Miss Geraldine. Tommy says that Miss Lucy called him into her office one day and told him that, although art is important, Tommy can't help it if he's not creative—and he shouldn't worry about it. Miss Lucy also seemed, as Tommy relates to Kathy, to be angry while talking to Tommy—not at Tommy, but at the system of **Hailsham** itself. Miss Lucy also mentions to Tommy that Hailsham ought to be "teaching the students more" about their futures.

The other guardians, including Miss Geraldine, have less trouble interacting with students and upholding the principles of the school, but Miss Lucy reveals—through her frustrations and cryptic comments about Hailsham—that the students have very limited, tightly circumscribed futures awaiting them. Miss Lucy believes, furthermore, that Hailsham ought to be honest with the students about just how bleak and difficult their adult lives will be. Suddenly the comforts of Hailsham take on a bit of a sinister edge, as if they are being used not just to protect the students but to blind them.



Kathy hears Tommy and grows more excited and interested in his comments, as they appear to prompt her to consider some other “puzzling” things she’s seen around the school recently. Notably, Kathy asks Tommy why “Madame” (a very businesslike woman, whom they believe to be the superintendent of **Hailsham**, though she only visits every so often) always takes away certain samples of their art every so often. Tommy replies that this art goes to “the Gallery,” but Kathy finds this explanation, which is often given at the school, to be insufficient.

Kathy then fast forwards to the present, and tells the reader a little about the Gallery. Every so often, the Madame would come to **Hailsham**, and the students assumed that, when she did so, she would take with her certain prime examples of their art, made in art class—poems, paintings, sculptures. The art did in fact disappear, but the students never learned where the art went, or what it was for. The students only knew that to be selected for this Gallery was a great honor—although they never really spoke openly about it.

Kathy then flashes back to another striking scene in her time at **Hailsham**—a scene that, like her conversation with Tommy about creativity, seemed to point to something interesting about their lives. The girls were all lying awake in their dorm, talking as usual, and Ruth mentioned that she thinks Madame is afraid of the Hailsham students. Kathy and the other girls wonder if this can be true, and they decide to make a plan to find out. The girls wait for evidence of Madame’s car, and when they see it one day, they hurriedly gather together and decide to walk by Madame in one of the school’s courtyards.

The girls see Madame, and gathering in a line, they walk toward her, saying hello. The girls—especially Kathy and Ruth—notice that, as they approach Madame, Madame becomes extremely nervous, as though she were worried they would touch her. The girls then walk past Madame and are quite “shaken” by the experience. Laura, one of the girls known for her humor, asks painfully why Madame “wants their art,” if she finds the students at **Hailsham** repulsive. And Kathy thinks to herself that she and the other girls began to see, in that incident, that their lives outside Hailsham would be separate from those of other people—that they had been marked off for a different kind of life.

The Gallery’s existence is never proved till the end of the novel—and is, at that point, revealed to be something rather different from what the Hailsham students initially imagine. But Madame does in fact come to Hailsham periodically to pick up pieces of art—and her very “intrusion” into the world of the school on a regular basis causes the students to believe she has a very important position in the Hailsham hierarchy.



In order to make students feel better about having their art taken away, Miss Emily emphasizes just how wonderful it is to be chosen for the Gallery. This is important, since art is a unit of exchange at Hailsham, and having a piece of art taken for the Gallery means a student will have fewer pieces to trade at the Exchange. The giving away of something that does not in any way benefit the students—to donate something—is thus emphasized.



The notion that Madame might be afraid of the students is hard for the students to believe—yet they also seem to sense, even at this relatively young age, that they are different from people “outside” Hailsham, and different even from the guardians who are charged to take care of them. The girls approach Madame, in part, as a way of testing this theory, while also pretending that their hijinks are just that—a game, and not at all serious.



One of the defining moments in Kathy and Ruth’s lives. Madame’s almost physical fear of being near the students produces a palpable feeling of inferiority among the girls. Only much later, when Kathy and Tommy meet with Miss Emily and Madame, will they learn that Madame’s repulsion is shared by many of the guardians, including Miss Emily. And, furthermore, this repulsion is in fact the reason why the “reformers” who built Hailsham wanted to treat the students kindly—in order to prove that the clones, too, are human beings. They built Hailsham as a way to combat their own revulsion of the clones.



CHAPTER 4

Kathy briefly details an event at **Hailsham**, dating from around the time she was ten, which she calls “the Tokens controversy.” She remarks that, even at that early age, students began getting more acquisitive when it regarded their own things—they wanted to build “collections” of small objects, the only things they were allowed to own at school. These objects were traded for at the sale and the exchange. But because some students had their work taken away by Madame, supposedly for inclusion in the Gallery, before the work could be exchanged to another student, a group of angry students, including a boy named Rory, went to Miss Emily, the headmistress of the school, and demanded tokens in exchange for this work given to Madame.

Kathy was surprised to learn that Miss Emily was willing to give these students a small number of tokens in compensation for their work. But Miss Emily also noted that having art selected by Madame was “a great honor.” When Kathy and some other students bring up the Tokens later, in a class with Miss Lucy, they find that Miss Lucy wants to discuss the matter with them. But Miss Lucy feels she can only say that Madame takes their art away “for a very good reason,” and that, sooner or later, this reason will be explained to the Hailsham students. This ends the Tokens controversy, as the students no longer feel comfortable discussing it.

Kathy also describes, briefly, the sales, which, unlike the exchanges, were held at **Hailsham** so that students could “buy” (with tokens given by the guardians) objects from “the outside world.” These objects tended to be mundane—scissors, old shirts—but the students clamored over them, and occasionally the guardians would have to “shut down” sales that descended into fighting. On these occasions, Miss Emily would give long speeches to the students of Hailsham, telling them that they are special, and that they ought to behave better and be worthy of their “privilege.” Kathy also notes that, at the time, everyone was scared of Miss Emily, but very few understood what she was saying during these speeches; they tended to be very abstract, and Miss Emily never really explained exactly what made Hailsham more special than other schools.

One of the first indications that the students at Hailsham have trouble with some of the school’s rules. Here, the students challenge the notion of “Exchanges”, and appear to assert their individual rights. But it will become clear, as the novel progresses, that Hailsham students are willing to push the rules only so far—to ask for small guarantees, such as a deferral of donation, rather than a full-blown revolution against their chosen fates. The placidity of the students regarding this fate is one of the novel’s central questions.



Lucy understands the purpose of the art that Madame collects—the art is used as proof of the humanity of Hailsham students, and is, presumably, presented to others in the outside world skeptical of clones’ humanity and therefore rights. Although Lucy’s own politics aren’t exactly clear—and the novel’s political backdrop is indeed mostly hidden from the reader—Lucy does believe that the students should know as much about their fates as possible—that they should be prepared for what is in store for them in their lives.



Miss Emily, as compared to Miss Lucy, has a more abstract approach to informing the students of their obligations. Here, in her “speeches” regarding order and organization during the Sales, Miss Emily seems to be instilling in the students the idea that they ought to follow the rules, and be calm and obedient throughout their lives. As Miss Emily (rightly) believes, this idea of order and obligation will encourage the students to become rule-abiding carers and donors. It is insinuated, however, that this kind of gentle socialization—which in another context might be called “brainwashing”—is not fair to the students, or perhaps treats them with less honesty than they deserve.



Kathy also recalls becoming friends with Ruth. At first, when they were very young, around age “5 or 6,” the two had very little interaction, but a few years later, Ruth asked Kathy one day if Kathy would like to “ride horses” with her. Ruth said she had two horses, one named Thunder, and another, quieter one named Bramble. Kathy agreed to ride these (invisible) horses with Ruth, and the two went to one of the playing fields and pretended to ride for a long time together. After this, the two became friends, and Ruth told Kathy that she could enter into the group of girls who were “protecting” Miss Geraldine. Kathy leaves this story till the next chapter.

In some ways Kathy and Ruth's make believe here is representative of their entire lives—their entire existence within Hailsham is a kind of make-believe, as are the lives they hope to have. It is all just imaginary, as they will end up being carers and then donors, and the organ donations they make will end up killing them. That Ruth is the initiator of this play also signals that she wants this normal world that she is kept apart of more than the other clones. But it's also important to note that this fantasy play is also perfectly normal, it's what kids do, and so the clones are both not like other humans and just like other humans at the same time.



CHAPTER 5

Kathy states that, around age 7, for about “nine months,” Ruth encouraged the other girls to believe that there was a kidnapping plot against Miss Geraldine, long considered the nicest of the guardians. Ruth had different theories for who could be “behind” the plot, but the group alternately thought that two other guardians, Miss Eileen and Mr. Rogers, were in charge, and that somehow also the woods surrounding **Hailsham** were to be the location of the kidnapping. But Kathy also notes that, after a time, the other girls seemed all to realize that the “fantasy” was of Ruth’s own doing—the girls simply liked being together, and “tried to keep the fantasy going as long as possible.”

Some of the students' games seem to point to a darker, more violent environment surrounding them. Here, the idea that someone wants to “kidnap” Miss Geraldine appears innocent enough, at first, but in fact taps into some of the students' basic fears about their world. The woods around the school, for example, are a prime place for worry—and here, as above, the students recognize that the world outside Hailsham is not a kind one, and that, perhaps, their lives are more contained, or at least more “regimented,” than those of other people.



Kathy uses another example to illustrate Ruth’s willingness to persist in fantasy. Ruth always pretended to the other girls that she was a whiz at chess, and so, when Kathy saved up tokens to buy a chess set, she thought Ruth could teach her the game. but when the two sat down to play—after Ruth putting off their meeting for some time—it became clear that Ruth didn’t know the rules, and that she had been lying about her chess knowledge. Kathy got up and left Ruth after this, making Ruth angry, and Kathy later found that she had been kicked out of Miss Geraldine’s “secret guard” by Ruth.

Ruth's tendency toward pretense—the fact that she often claims to know about things she does not, in fact, know—can lead the group into trouble. Later on, for example, in Norfolk, Ruth's supposed knowledge of “couples' deferrals” encourages Chrissie and Rodney to pursue the idea, even though Ruth has not heard anything about a deferral at Hailsham. Ruth seems to be the clone who most desperately wants “more” from life, and she isn't above being unkind or untruthful to feel like it is a possibility for her.



One day, after being kicked out, Kathy ran into Moira, another girl who had been asked to “leave” the secret guard. When Moira commented on how silly the idea of the kidnapping plot was, however, Kathy became enraged, saying that she knew herself the plot was real, and that Moira didn’t know what she was talking about. Moira, confused, walked away, and Kathy still, to the present day, wonders why she rushed to Ruth’s defense, even though Kathy knew the guard to be a silly game, and even after Ruth had “snubbed” her.

Kathy's confusion about why she was loyal to Ruth suggests both her native loyalty to her friends regardless of their behavior, but also suggests that perhaps what she was loyal to was the idea of the possible kidnapping rather than to Ruth herself. That ridiculous story gave meaning to their lives, gave them purpose. To give it up is to give up that purpose.



Kathy also recalls a moment where she tried to trap Ruth in one of her exaggerations. Ruth came to class one day with a new pencil case, and made it seem to the other students, without saying it directly, that the case had been a gift from Miss Geraldine. Kathy, however, realized that no guardian would “bend the rules” to give a student a special gift, and she realized that Ruth probably got the case from a sale. Kathy therefore found Ruth one day, later on, and implied that she (Kathy) had seen the log from the previous sale—although she hadn’t even looked—to judge if this made Ruth nervous.

Ruth, in fact, did respond with alarm—realizing that Kathy would have been able to know, from the log, that Ruth simply bought the case—but Kathy, realizing her pettiness in “bluffing” and making Ruth feel bad, tries to correct the situation by pretending to Ruth that she “saw nothing interesting” in the logs. Despite this effort, however, Ruth walks away from Kathy, clearly upset that her little lie about the case has been discovered.

CHAPTER 6

Kathy immediately feels guilty about hurting Ruth’s feelings and exposing her lie. In the weeks following this incident, then, she does everything she can to make Ruth feel that Miss Geraldine *does* in fact treat her specially. Kathy makes comments around the other girls indicating that Ruth is Geraldine’s favorite, and also lets Ruth go first into a doorway, in order to allow Ruth to walk alongside Geraldine for a time. One day, in art class with Mr. Rogers, Kathy even hints to another student, Midge, that the pencil case did in fact come from a secret source—a guardian—and that she, Kathy, cannot divulge that information to Midge. Ruth appreciates all of Kathy’s efforts, and the two become closer friends.

Kathy notes that Ruth had a chance to repay these kindnesses, when Ruth attempts to find Kathy’s “lost tape.” But before explaining this, Kathy describes to the reader how the students thought of Norfolk, a region in the southeast of England. During geography lessons, Miss Emily once described Norfolk to the assembled students as “something of a lost corner of England.” Although Miss Emily meant that Norfolk was not easily accessible by highway, and was therefore somewhat separate from the other counties, the students, including Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy, took this to mean that Norfolk was in fact a place in England where all lost items migrated and were stored.

Kathy is honest with herself about the ways in which she chafed at Ruth’s “authority” in their friendship. Kathy’s honesty about her own motivations is one of her hallmark qualities—and it makes her initial statement in the novel (that she is “too proud” of her skills as a carer) seem all the more implausible. Kathy is, in fact, quite modest and enlightened as to her own shortcomings. This, in contrast to Ruth, who seems not to understand the ways in which she manipulates those around her.



Kathy is far from perfect—she can be petty and is often frustrated, especially as a young girl—but her ability to recognize her shortcomings allows her to mature rapidly at Hailsham and afterward, in the Cottages. Ruth has her moment of maturation far later, however, only after she has begun her own career as a donor.



Kathy’s guilt, and her desire to make up for the hurt she has caused Ruth, lead her to initiate a series of subtle actions designed to make Ruth appear special. Kathy is particularly gifted at reading small changes in the emotional states of other people. This ability allows Kathy to become a highly qualified, indeed an exceptional carer. Unsurprisingly, Ruth is far less adept as a carer—as she later tells Kathy and Tommy—likely because Ruth is self-focused and has a harder time understanding her classmates and fellow clones.



Another notable feature of some of the Hailsham students—most notably Kathy and Tommy—is their ability to create fully-realized fantasies regarding the world around them. Sometimes these fantasies lead to disappointment—for example, when many students come to believe that a “couples’ deferral” is possible. But other fantasies, like the one concerning Norfolk and the “lost corner,” makes their lives richer and more rewarding. The shared fantasy of the “lost corner” also helps to bring Kathy and Tommy closer together as friends.



Kathy wonders, now, while telling this story whether they really believed in this “lost and found” quality of Norfolk, or whether it was pretend even then. Kathy concludes, after talking to Ruth and Tommy as their carers, that they did in fact believe in Norfolk, but only “for a time,” and that later, when they went there as adolescents, they in fact knew that Norfolk had only a symbolic, and not a literal, value for them as a special place.

But Kathy notes that she has gone off on a tangent, and describes her lost tape. The tape is called *Songs After Dark* and was put out by a singer named **Judy Bridgewater**, released first in 1956, although Kathy had a “cassette version.” Kathy bought the tape at a sale, and found it to be of special value not only because she liked the music and the cover art—which displayed Judy Bridgewater in a dress—but because Bridgewater was smoking in the picture, and smoking was expressly banned at **Hailsham**. Kathy goes off on another tangent, noting that the rule against smoking was a hard-and-fast one. Miss Lucy, one day explaining the rule to the students (Kathy was around 11 years old), tried to explain that Hailsham students were “different” from the rest of the population, and that smoking would harm their bodies and make their jobs more difficult. But no students prodded Lucy to explain further, and Kathy notes that the issue was dropped at this vague explanation.

Kathy returns to describing the tape, and one song in particular that she loved on it, called “**Never Let Me Go**.” Kathy imagines this song to be about “a woman who cannot have babies,” but who does miraculously manage to have one. The song, Kathy believes, is a love letter to this young baby, and Kathy used to mime holding a child to her chest while singing it to herself, taking great comfort in its music and lyrics.

One day, Kathy notes, she was doing exactly this—playing the song loudly, and dancing along, as though cradling a child to her chest—when Madame walked past her open door. Kathy was mortified, and noticed that Madame was watching her dance with tears in her eyes. Kathy didn’t understand why Madame didn’t discipline her—instead, Madame simply walked away, sobbing to herself.

Kathy also notes that these fantasies are complex: the Hailsham students are not deluding themselves completely. As in other parts of the novel, the students at Hailsham appear to sense that their lives are tightly circumscribed, if not exactly the reason why. But in order to make these lives liveable and human, they engage in a series of shared stories about the world—stories that sustain their friendships even as they begin work as carers and donors.



An immensely important sequence in the novel. First, Kathy introduces the Judy Bridgewater tape, which will become an important object for her—both in her “accidental” meeting with Madame, who sees Kathy dancing to the tape, and in her friendship with Tommy. Kathy also identifies just how important student health was for the guardians at Hailsham. Although, as young people, Hailsham students were strongly encouraged to be healthy, this rule becomes perhaps the number one requirement of all students as they reach their teenage years. This is because, as teens, Hailsham students encounter more and more potentially dangerous activities—like adult relationships, smoking, and drinking, and their society’s primary concern about them is that they be healthy enough to donate helpful organs later in life.



Another important idea regarding the tape. Although Kathy understands, later, what the song’s lyrics actually refer to, she also identifies just how important this idea of a mother and daughter was to her younger self. Kathy’s desire to nurture and care for those around her—as a mother cares for a child—runs throughout her adult life, and again connects her to the normal human impulses the fulfillment of which are denied to her.



A scene of great importance in the novel. Already poignant during her Hailsham days, this encounter will become doubly important when Madame and Kathy speak years later. For Kathy will realize the extent to which Madame did sympathize with the Hailsham students—even as Madame appeared terrified of actually talking to those students.



Years later, when they were adolescents, Kathy told Tommy, and only Tommy, this story, and said at the time that she knew, at that point, that she and other students couldn't have children. Kathy wondered whether Madame sympathized with her for this reason, and Tommy seemed to agree—but Kathy also noted that Madame would have no way of knowing that Kathy was dancing with a little invisible child, instead of interpreting the song the way it ought to have been—as a love letter between a woman and a lover who has left her. Tommy responds only that “Madame can read minds,” and the two laugh at the incident as teens, even though they are “unsettled” by it.

A few weeks after the “Madame incident,” Kathy continues telling the reader, the tape “disappeared” from Kathy's collection. Kathy wondered whether this disappearance had to do with Madame's sadness, or perhaps with the cover depicting a cigarette. In any event, Kathy came to believe, after several weeks, that the tape was gone forever. One day, Ruth came up to her, saying she had also looked high and low for the tape and couldn't find it, but that she had found a replacement tape at a sale, one Kathy might like, although Ruth knew very little about different types of music. The tape was called *Twenty Classic Dance Tunes*, and although it sounded “nothing like” the **Bridgewater** tape, Kathy tells the reader that she still owns it, and that it's “one of her most precious possessions.”

CHAPTER 7

Kathy remarks to the reader that, in some way, she consider her conversation with Tommy by the pond, when they were thirteen, to be the “marker” between eras at **Hailsham**. Before this time was a “golden period” when the worries of the world did not intrude, but afterward, Kathy and the other students began to realize that their lives were predetermined, and that their time after Hailsham would not be so idyllic as it was there. In particular, Kathy notes a conversation some students had with Miss Lucy in class one day, when Lucy seemed to acknowledge that, perhaps at other “schools” like Hailsham, electric fences were used to keep students in. The other students joke about the fences, but Miss Lucy seems to be referring to real-world events when she says the electric fences can cause “terrible accidents.”

The first acknowledgment in the novel that the students at Hailsham are biologically different from those outside the school, and from those who care for them (the guardians). Ishiguro is incredibly deft at placing small details of the clones' biological reality in the novel, while also leaving large portions of the “science” of cloning unexplained, in the background of the novel. The reader never learns, for example, just why the clones are inevitably infertile, and how exactly the clones are produced from their “originals.”



An indication of the extent to which student activities at the school are monitored. Kathy has no idea whether the disappearance of the tape is really an accident, the result of student theft, or, most likely, a product of the guardians' scrutiny. Perhaps the image of Bridgewater smoking on the cover of the tape is enough to sway the guardians and cause them to take it away. But the emotional content of the tape—the idea that the tape can be an object of such care and devotion, on Kathy's part—might also give the guardians reason to fear. The guardians might not want Kathy to get her hopes up—that a world of parental and romantic love is in store for her, when in fact Kathy will have no children and will never be allowed to marry.



Like the discussion of the school's woods earlier in the novel, this remark of Lucy's, regarding the possibility of an electric fence, points to the world outside Hailsham. Specifically, it makes Hailsham and that world seem entirely at odds. Ruth, Kathy, and Tommy aren't students at an elite boarding or prep school—they are something like prisoners, even if they are kept in a pleasant environment. The guardians might more accurately be called guards. And they will remain prisoners for the rest of their lives—even though they technically have some freedom of movement—their future is determined.



Kathy states that Miss Lucy always seemed “a little different from the other guardians,” and a conversation between Lucy and a class of students, including Kathy, in the pavilion later on seemed to prove this point. The class is gathered there to avoid the rain, and Miss Lucy is the only guardian watching them; some of the students are discussing their dream jobs after **Hailsham**, and one says he’d like to move to America to pursue an acting career. But Lucy stops him before he can go any further, and tells the assembled students she has some things to say to them.

Lucy tells the students that none of them will be going to America, none will have acting careers: she tells them that, instead, their lives have one purpose, which is that their bodies will be used for the harvesting of organs, which they will donate until they die. The students do not revolt when Lucy speaks—they seem only puzzled that she is telling them this information with such emotion, since, technically, all the students at **Hailsham**, by age thirteen, understand their fates. Lucy then stops speaking after “revealing” this information, and tells the group they can go out and play in the fields.

Kathy and Tommy discuss this even much later, when Kathy is Tommy’s carer, and Tommy offers a theory for how **Hailsham** prepared its students for their fates. Tommy believes that Hailsham very carefully calibrated the revelation of information regarding the donation procedures, so that, in the back of their minds, the students always knew what was going to happen to them—perhaps even before they were of an age that would enable them to understand this information. This meant that Miss Lucy’s outburst could only remind the students of information with which they had already become comfortable.

Kathy also recalls how Miss Emily began talking to the students about sex—which, for the students, meant no possibility of babies (the students are all sterile). Miss Emily stressed that it was important that no student get an STD from another, but she also noted that sex between students was an acceptable activity, fundamentally different from sex between “normal” people, because for those people, babies were a very real possibility. In all, Kathy recalls that many conversations with the teenaged students at **Hailsham** revolved around health and wellbeing, with an eye to keeping them ready for their eventual donations.

The beginning of an immensely important sequence in the novel. Lucy feels she can no longer pretend that Hailsham students are just like “normal” students, and that their futures resemble normal “human” futures. To Lucy, it is far more humane for Hailsham guardians to refer in detail to the students’ actual futures, rather than to obscure their jobs under abstract talk of “giving” and “rule-following.”



In a novel like The Hunger Games, at this point the students would rebel and seek freedom. But Ishiguro is after something different in this novel. The students hear the news of their lack of freedom and rather than revolt they just kind of accept it, because they’ve always sort of known it, and prefer to avoid thinking about it. In this way, the students come to be an extreme representation of all people: after all, everyone is going to die eventually, everyone’s freedom is constrained in that way, and most people live their ordinary lives by just not thinking about that aspect of their future. And so the clones learn that they are clones, and then just go on living.



Tommy shows a large amount of self-knowledge, and a great deal of astuteness regarding the educational system at Hailsham. The other students, who consider Tommy a bit “slow,” don’t catch on to Hailsham’s strategies for some time; but Tommy knows that Hailsham wanted to educate a group of willing clones, who had no qualms donating their organs, as efficiently and humanely as possible. Lucy’s ideas—that the clones ought to know more about their lives, in more detail—interrupted this Hailsham plan, and therefore Lucy’s contract with Hailsham was terminated.



The idea of human sexuality without even the slightest possibility of pregnancy is handled elegantly by Ishiguro, who at once allows sex to become somewhat trivialized among Hailsham students, and who also acknowledges the intricacies and mysteries of sexuality for young people. Even though the guardians know that sex among clones shouldn’t be taboo, since clones can’t have children, they nevertheless have trouble encouraging wanton sexual relationships between students.



Kathy remembers a particular story, again involving Tommy, who cuts his elbow in a small accident and goes to the **Hailsham** infirmary to have it bandaged. Afterward, some of the other male students tell him that he must keep his elbow straight at all times until the wound heals, since otherwise his elbow could “unzip” and seriously injure him, harming his long-term health. Tommy, conscientious about doing as the guardians tell him and protecting his health, keeps his arm straight for days, even asking Kathy to splint it straight for him. But Tommy eventually finds out that the others have been making fun of him, and though he does not have a tantrum, the phrase “unzipping an organ” becomes slang among the **Hailsham** teens for “donation.”

As the chapter ends, Kathy recalls that Tommy asked her, during the later period of his donation, why the students didn’t think more about Miss Lucy, who risked a great deal to tell the students more information about their futures than the other guards would. Kathy admits she does not know why she didn’t think about Miss Lucy more, during her time at **Hailsham**.

CHAPTER 8

Kathy notes that, during the year in which she turned 16 (her final year at **Hailsham**), things became “mixed up” and confused. Some of this she attributes to the fact that they were going to leave school soon, and their careers as carers and donors were not far off. Other parts, however, she attributes to their being teenagers, and now knowing too much about the world or themselves. Kathy tells that reader that, one day that year, she walked into a room and saw Miss Lucy furiously scribbling out what appeared to be a student’s handwriting, on numerous sheets of paper. Lucy did not stop when Kathy came in, and Kathy wondered, later, what Lucy could have been trying to black out (although she never actually learns).

Kathy mentions that other students begin having very obvious sex lives, and that **Hailsham** rules seemed rather ambiguous as regarded sex. Ruth and Tommy had become an “item,” although their relationship was somewhat tumultuous, and Tommy appeared more withdrawn than he had in years—almost as sullen as he was when he was throwing temper tantrums. Kathy resolved that she herself would begin having sex, and picked a boy, Henry, as her intended “mate,” not because she liked him, but because she might “practice with him.” Kathy also wondered how exactly the other students were having so much sex, since they couldn’t go into the other sex’s dorms, and since they had very little free time to be alone. Kathy wonders whether Hailsham students at the time weren’t exaggerating the nature of their sex lives to seem “cool.”

Here “unzipping” is another indication of the methods Hailsham students use to cope with the horrors and difficulties of their future careers. It seems that, as adulthood approaches, the attitude of the clones toward their fates becomes resigned, slightly ironic, and mostly lighthearted. But this attitude belies a deeper anxiety about sickness and death, as evidenced by Ruth later in the novel—in which she suffers from two “bad donations,” and becomes so physically weak she can barely perform even the simplest of tasks.



Once again, Tommy demonstrates his ability to empathize with others. In this case, Tommy sees from Miss Lucy’s perspective, and recognizes how difficult it must have been for her to educate a group of young people who essentially have only one possible future—and a cruel, brutal future at that.



Miss Lucy’s furious scribbling is never explained—Kathy does not find out what Lucy has been trying to cover over with her pencil marks. But Kathy does understand, at this point, that Miss Lucy is seriously disturbed as to the mission of the school—and Lucy is increasingly distant from her fellow guardians, who she believes to be too “abstract” in their dealings with students. Kathy’s belief that life at Hailsham grew more complicated at this time stems in part from her observation of Miss Lucy’s struggles.



Kathy’s behavior with Henry is a window into the many facets of her personality. On the one hand, Kathy is curious about sex, as all young people are, and wants to satisfy those urges with someone she trusts. Kathy also knows that sex, at Hailsham, can be separated from love and commitment, and she is eager to “improve” her sexual abilities so that she can later make love “properly” with someone she really likes. And Kathy is also, on occasion, a bit forward and socially awkward. This combination of traits—the kind of complexity that makes for a very human and realistic character—also prevents Kathy from consummating her friendship with Henry.



CHAPTER 9

Kathy recalls how she went about “courting” Henry: she told him once, when they were alone, that she wanted to have sex with him, but then, when she kept running into him later, she told him several times that she couldn’t have sex “at that moment,” that they’d have to wait. Henry seemed OK with this then, but Kathy wonders, at the time of her narration, whether Henry wasn’t completely confused by Kathy’s behavior. Kathy also realizes, now, that she delayed having sex with Henry because she had feelings for Tommy—whom Ruth had recently broken up with, after six months together.

Several weeks later, however, Ruth expressed to Kathy, around the beginning of their last summer at Hailsham, that she had made a mistake with Tommy, and that she wanted to get back together with him. Ruth asked Kathy whether she could talk “sense” into Tommy and convince him to take Ruth back—Kathy is hurt by this, since she also has feelings for Tommy, but she also wants to help her friend Ruth, and she is pleased to hear that Tommy trusts her (Kathy) so much. Kathy agrees to talk to Tommy and try to convince him to get back with Ruth.

Kathy runs into Tommy, and the two begin talking about Ruth outside, near the playing fields. But Tommy appears distracted, and when Kathy asks what the matter is, beyond his failed relationship, Tommy replies that he had another strange interaction with Miss Lucy, several days before. Tommy ran into her in the hallway, and the two began to talk in a secluded corner of the school. There, Miss Lucy told Tommy that she had made a mistake, years earlier, in telling Tommy that his creativity didn’t matter—that it *did* in fact matter, “and not just as evidence, but for Tommy himself.” Tommy and Kathy are both perplexed by these final words—they do not see how their art could be used as “evidence,” and they wonder what kind of value it would have for themselves, or for someone like Miss Lucy, who has now seemed inexplicably distraught at the school for months.

Kathy, like anyone, is capable of self-delusion, but is also wise to her own motivations after the fact. Here, Kathy knows that she is beginning to fall for Tommy, even as she recognizes that a relationship with Tommy would not really work, because Tommy is dating a close friend of Kathy’s. Henry is a perfect foil to Tommy: whereas Kathy is already close to Tommy, she has no relationship with Henry to speak of—and their physical romance fizzles before it can even start.



Kathy’s motivations for talking to Tommy on Ruth’s behalf are not immediately clear. Kathy’s loyalty to Ruth is significant—and perhaps this is a replay of Kathy’s previous interaction with Moira, in which Kathy defends Ruth even though Ruth has spurned Kathy’s affections. Here, Kathy still tries to curry favor with Ruth, despite the fact that this “favor” flies in the face of Kathy’s own desire—to pursue a romantic relationship with Tommy.



This appears to be another change in Lucy’s demeanor—and one that’s harder for the reader to track. What is possible is that someone in the Hailsham administration “spoke to” Lucy about her “outburst” with the students, perhaps reminding Lucy that her primary job at the school is to protect and care for the clones. But Lucy might also be trying, here, to connect with Tommy on a more personal level—and to be sure that he knows he ought to produce art, be creative, and live a full life because he too is a human being, capable of these kinds of enjoyment.



Nevertheless, Kathy brings the subject back to Tommy and Ruth, and Tommy agrees to consider getting back together with his old girlfriend. But in the following days, Kathy is startled to learn that Miss Lucy has left **Hailsham** and won't be coming back. Kathy wonders why this could be, and runs off to see Tommy—who has a “dead” look in his eyes, and appears devastated by Miss Lucy's departure. Ruth, who is less concerned that Miss Lucy is leaving, tells Kathy not long after that she and Tommy are in fact reconciled, and she thanks Kathy warmly for her help in “talking to Tommy.” Kathy says that Ruth was “very pleased” with her for the remainder of their time at Hailsham, which soon comes to an end that summer.

Ruth's response in this section is very telling. Ruth seems not to care very much about Miss Lucy—she is far more concerned with her own fate and relationship with Tommy. Over the course of the novel, Ruth's selfishness remains a complex but constant phenomenon. Ruth cares about Kathy and Tommy, to be sure, but Ruth also has trouble speaking honestly with her own friends. And Ruth's self-consciousness, and desire to appear wiser than she actually is, continues to get her into trouble, even after the students leave Hailsham for the Cottages.



CHAPTER 10

Kathy begins Part 2 by reminiscing about her essay, which is the final assignment given to **Hailsham** students when they leave at the end of their age-16 year. Kathy chose to write on the Victorian novel, and though her essay didn't really count for anything—it was never graded or even submitted—it was designed to occupy the students' minds during their two-year stay at the Cottages, where Kathy, Ruth, Tommy, and several others from Hailsham are sent. The Cottages, like several other communities around the UK, are designed to house smaller groups of students from many schools, not just Hailsham, and to prepare them for their lives as carers and donors. Kathy reflects also on the older students who had already been at the Cottages one year, when Kathy and her friends arrived—they are called “the veterans,” and seem startlingly mature compared to Kathy's cohort.

Although Kathy appears to understand that the essay is merely something to pacify former Hailsham students, and to occupy their time, she also has developed a real interest in Victorian literature, and wishes to expand her knowledge on the subject. This is more or less indicative of Kathy's demeanor generally: although she knows that she will live her life as a carer and donor, she nevertheless delights in life's small pleasures, in her visit to the boat with Tommy and Ruth, in her walks around small seaside towns. In a way Kathy's life is both controlled and meaningless, and entirely hers and meaningful at the same time. The essay is a kind of trick, but it is also enjoyable and interesting to her. Kathy makes meaning within the constraints of the life she has, just like everyone else.



Kathy also describe Keffers, the grumpy maintenance man who cares for the Cottages, stoking wood for the huts and the main, old farmhouse, and complaining to himself that the students do not do a good job keeping up their living quarters. Kathy states that, when she and her friends first arrived at the Cottages, they were terrified of their freedom, the lack of guardians, and the new world beyond **Hailsham** they were meant to inhabit. Kathy also states that, although their time at the Cottages become quite idyllic—something like a collegiate atmosphere of free discussion, sex, and companionship—there remained an underlying anxiety about the upcoming stages in their lives, when they would begin their appointed jobs.

If Hailsham is the clones' equivalent of high school, then the Cottages are most similar to college. There, the clones have the kinds of freedom one might expect of a 16 to 20-year-old. The Cottages are less structured than Hailsham, and the students become more aware of the outside world, and of their place in it. The few skills they learn while at the Cottages have immediately to do with their soon-to-be jobs. Driving, for example, is a fun diversion at the Cottages, but will also be useful to the carers as they travel between treatment centers, visiting donors.



Kathy notices that Ruth has made certain adjustments to her behavior since arriving at the Cottages. For one, although she and Tommy have only just restarted their relationship, the other “veteran” couples, including a pair named Chrissie and Rodney, welcome Ruth as “one of their own.” Ruth begins imitating some of the mannerisms of the older couples, including a certain way of touching their boyfriends gently in order to say goodbye—a method Ruth believes to be mature and cool, but which Kathy finds affected. Kathy also realizes that Ruth has begun to fudge knowledge of all the books she’s supposedly “read.” Ruth views reading as a kind of competition, and an indicator of maturity, even though Kathy knows Ruth hasn’t had enough time at the Cottages to pore over long novels like *War and Peace*.

One day, Kathy is reading and Ruth approaches her, telling her the plot of Kathy’s novel (George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda*). Kathy becomes angry at Ruth’s affectation, and, in a fit of spite, asks Ruth why Ruth has begun taking on the mannerisms of the older couples, and why Ruth occasionally ditches Tommy to hang out with veterans like Chrissie and Rodney. Ruth fires back, however, that Kathy need not try to maintain the old social order of **Hailsham**, and that Kathy ought to “grow up” and enjoy the life of the Cottages more. Ruth also implies, as a parting shot, that Kathy has been promiscuous with some of the older veteran boys at the Cottages, while Ruth, for her part, has remained true to Tommy.

CHAPTER 11

Kathy notes that Ruth’s comment stung her particularly, because during their initial months at the Cottages, Ruth and Kathy had continued to have private chats in their rooms, over steaming cups of tea, the way they used to at **Hailsham**. During one of these chats, Kathy had asked Ruth if Ruth ever got “urges” to have sex with someone—very powerful urges, that seemed to come from a strong biological need. Kathy feels like these urges mean something is wrong with her—and instead of agreeing with her, Ruth says that she’s “in a couple” and “can always have sex with Tommy.” In fact, Ruth says that Kathy’s urges are a little “weird.”

Once again, Kathy demonstrates her astute knowledge of interpersonal relations. Kathy sees that Ruth, more than Tommy, is eager to show how “mature” and “grown up” she is at the Cottages. This means emulating those who have been at the Cottages before. What Ruth does not realize—but Kathy does—is that these gestures of maturity are in fact taken from television, magazine ads, and other forms of pop culture—since the clones have no real family life to speak of. Ruth is, in a sense, imitating a version of “real life” that she can never have.



Another of the running difficulties in Kathy and Ruth’s relationship is Ruth’s continued insinuation that Kathy’s sexual desires are somehow improper, strange, or exceptional. Kathy’s libido—the subject of a great deal of her consternation—is probably no “worse” than Ruth’s (as Ruth later admits), but because Ruth is dating Tommy, she may feel superior to Kathy and in a position to criticize her sexual choices, or she may be trying to ensure that Kathy won’t ever come between Ruth and Tommy.



Kathy’s relationship with Ruth retains some of the intimacies of their time at Hailsham, even though there is a new distance between them—caused, in part, by their growing older, but also by Ruth’s continued (and often pained) relationship with Tommy, and Kathy’s unrequited interest in him. Ruth appears to know, deep down, that Kathy cares for Tommy; thus her barbs, implying that Kathy is promiscuous, are especially hurtful for her friend.



Kathy has several “one-nighters” with boys at the Cottages. Although sex is more “grown-up” there, Kathy realizes, when Ruth makes her scathing remark during the *Daniel Deronda* conversation, that sex remains a taboo topic—or that Kathy is being shamed for her perceived promiscuity. Kathy writes, during the period of the novel’s narration, that, at the time, Ruth appeared to be doing her best to mature quickly, to lead the other **Hailsham** students into maturity. Kathy also notes that Ruth told her, much later, that she never held onto her collected objects from Hailsham, but instead threw them away, since she saw no need for them once she reached the Cottages. Kathy finds this lack of nostalgia quite strange but typical of Ruth.

Later on that autumn, Kathy discovers a cache of pornographic magazines at the Cottages—the joke there is that a former Cottage student, named Steve, had an enormous supply, and they remain for others to peruse. One day, Kathy takes a stack into an abandoned boiler room and leafs through them out of curiosity. Tommy chances inside and, seeing Kathy doing this, wonders why she is looking at the magazines so closely. Kathy says it’s only out of curiosity, but Tommy senses that Kathy has some deeper reason for doing so, which she doesn’t explain.

CHAPTER 12

Later on, during the first winter of their time at the Cottages, Ruth pulls Kathy aside and tells her, excitedly, that Chrissie and Rodney might have spotted a “possible” for Ruth while the two of them were on a short trip to the Norfolk coast. Kathy tells the reader that a “possible” is the slang word for a potential “clone parent” for one of the clones—meaning, in other words, the potential model from which the cloned DNA was originally taken. Kathy says that finding a possible was a much chatted about idea during the time at the Cottages—perhaps because they wished to see what their future lives would be like, even though they did not know exactly how the cloning process worked, and in what way they’d resemble their “clone parent.”

Ironically, it is Ruth who will become a primary means of “reconnecting” with the past, at the close of the novel, when Ruth encourages Kathy to serve as Tommy’s carer, so that the two can attempt to receive a deferral from Madame. Ruth’s desire to move beyond Hailsham while at the Cottages, to grow up quickly, and to pretend she is more mature than she is all cause her to throw away or disregard reminders of their school days. But Ruth seems to regret this disregard of the past later on, when she is sick and serving as a donor. While Ruth spends her life seeking something “more”, Kathy finds meaning and purpose within her life.



Once again, Tommy’s intuitions are strong—he seems to grasp that Kathy feels there is something “wrong” with her sexuality or her body—that her desires for sex are unnatural or more intense than others around her. But Tommy, in his kindness, does not really push Kathy to explain herself or the presence of the magazines. Only later will Tommy figure out exactly why Kathy is so interested in her body—because Kathy wonders, like all the other clones, who her “original” or clone parent might be.



The clones are alone in the world, without pasts or uncertain futures. The idea of a “possible” is exciting because it offers a glimpse at both of these things: the “possible” is both a kind of parent and also offers the clone a glimpse of a vicariously lived life. Of course, even here the clones are acting on legends passed among themselves, as they don’t even know whether the cloning process would produce identical likenesses.



Kathy is “skeptical” about this possible idea, however, because Chrissie and Rodney noted that they saw the possible in a glass-fronted office in the Norfolk town—and this office conforms closely to the “dream future” Ruth had been talking about at the Cottages for several weeks. Kathy fills in the story of Ruth’s dream future, telling the reader that, one day, the two of them were on a walk, and Ruth spotted a magazine advertisement frozen on the ground, showing a happy group of people working in a glass-walled office. Ruth noted that that job seemed like a marvelous way to spend one’s life, and Kathy began to notice Ruth describing her dream—taken largely from the imagery of the ad—around the Cottages. Chrissie and Rodney heard Ruth talk about this dream, and so, when the possible was said by the two of them work at a similar office, Kathy wondered whether Chrissie and Rodney weren’t just performing Ruth’s dream for her.

Nevertheless, Chrissie, Rodney, Ruth, Tommy, and Kathy decide to take a day-long fieldtrip to Norfolk in order to track down Ruth’s possible. Kathy notes, before they depart, that at that time, Chrissie and Rodney seemed especially interested in the three of them (Tommy, Ruth, and Kathy), because they were from **Hailsham**, and because they seemed to think that Hailsham students received special treatment, fundamentally different from that given to the other clones. Kathy wonders if Ruth wasn’t trying, during her time at the Cottages, to encourage this idea that Hailsham students somehow had preferred status compared to other Cottagers.

CHAPTER 13

Early one morning that winter, the five of them pile into a borrowed car and set off for Norfolk. Rodney drives, and Chrissie is seated up front, with Ruth in the middle of the back bench seat. Kathy tells the reader that Ruth spends much of the drive talking to the couple in the front, leaving Tommy and Kathy staring out their respective windows—but when Kathy asks Ruth if she’d like to switch seats, to let Kathy and Tommy talk, Ruth becomes enraged and sullen during the remainder of the ride.

An instance of Ruth’s ideas about her own life, and her desperate willingness to appear more “in the know” than her fellow Hailsham students and Cottage residents. Ruth believes she exists in a world of real sophistication, and that she knows about things about which she never really could be educated. For Ruth, working in an office is the epitome of a “normal” adult lifestyle—it involves relationships with coworkers, a life outside small institutional confines, and a kind of freedom that is alien to the clones. But only Kathy seems to realize that Ruth’s ideas of this “sophistication” are drawn simply from ads—from stylized images of adult life. This is one of the great sadnesses of Ruth’s pride—that it is founded on such a small glimpse of the real world.



Chrissie and Rodney have their own reasons for wanting to become friends with Ruth, and for wanting to take the trip to Norfolk to search for the possible. For both of them, and for others at the Cottages, Hailsham students possess a certain glamor due to the caring treatment they received while there, and other clones seem to think that the Hailsham clones might continue to get better treatment in the future. Thus, if there is any hope of deferral, or of special treatment for clones, it must originate with Hailsham students—the most special among them. Of course, as it turns out, there are no such special opportunities for Hailsham students, but that others believe there might be points to the way that all communities make up hierarchies based on their sense of the world.



Ruth’s desire to appear “grown up” even makes itself known during the car ride. This particular ride in many ways foreshadows the long trip Tommy, Ruth, and Kathy take later on, to see the dilapidated boat in the forest, when Tommy and Ruth are both donors. There, however, Tommy and Kathy feel comfortable confronting Ruth’s pride and vanity in the car—whereas here, as their younger selves, Tommy and Kathy are mostly quiet.



The group then finds a café in Norfolk for lunch. There, Chrissie and Rodney reveal what they have spent months talking about with each other—the possibility of a “deferral” of caring duties for **Hailsham** couples who can “prove that they’re properly in love.” Ruth nods heatedly in assent, as though she knew all about this possibility from Hailsham, but Kathy and Tommy are confused, and Kathy realizes that Ruth is pretending to know about this supposed special Hailsham privilege. Tommy, however, soon speaks up and says to the table that he has no idea what Ruth is talking about, that no such deferral was ever mentioned at Hailsham. At this, Ruth snaps at Tommy, implying he was too slow for complex conversation at Hailsham, and the group soon ends their lunch and drives into town to look for Ruth’s double.

Tommy’s perceived lack of guile and intelligence occasionally serve him well—sometimes he is able to speak the truth in small ways, without others around him (save for Kathy) really understanding what he’s saying. Here, Tommy indicates what the reader has sensed all along: that the idea of a deferral is only a rumor, one that Ruth has bought into totally; and that deferrals were never mentioned at all among Hailsham students. Ruth, in her desire to bend the world to her liking, is so willing to make Chrissie and Rodney happy that she pretends to have heard about deferrals, even though no news of them ever reached Hailsham.



CHAPTER 14

Kathy tells the reader that the tension didn’t really dissipate as the day in Norfolk went on. The group goes into a Woolworth’s so that Chrissie and Rodney can stock up on cheap birthday cards (they claim they’re always useful to have around), and there, Kathy overhears Ruth telling the couple that, at **Hailsham**, people knew about the “deferral” rumor but didn’t say much about it. Kathy pretends not to have heard Ruth lying about the deferral business, but Ruth knows that Kathy has heard her.

Another small, poignant moment. It is unclear what a “birthday” might mean for a clone—based on how clones are actually created—but Chrissie and Rodney nevertheless think it’s important to stock up on birthday cards in order to surprise their clone friends. Ishiguro sprinkles these tiny moments of sad realization—that clones want normal lives but cannot have them—throughout. And yet, even as they “play” at having normal lives beyond their reach, the clones still do have lives that are meaningful and human—the clones may not have birthdays, but the love and friendship behind the cards are real.



The group walks around Norfolk, with Rodney leading the way, trying to find the office where Ruth’s possible works. Finally, Rodney finds the place, and the office somewhat resembles the magazine ad from which Ruth derived her dream future. The group spots the woman inside and decides she does look a lot like Ruth. But soon the other workers in the office notice the five standing outside, and wave at them; the group giggles and begins walking away.

To the clones, and especially to Ruth, Chrissie, and Rodney, “normal” human life is so inherently “real” and interesting, that it is pleasurable simply to watch normal people going about their daily business. To anyone else in Norfolk, it would be immensely bizarre to stand outside an office and watch a few people talking to one another.



The group loiters down the street for a time, then Tommy spots Ruth’s possible walking away down the High Street, and the group decides to follow her for a moment. The woman ducks into a small art gallery, and the group follows, getting a closer look at her, before the woman eventually leaves, and the group is left back, looking at the art (which they hadn’t intended to buy) and talking to the kind elderly gallerist. After a time, the group walks outside, and at this point, Kathy notices a distinct change has come over them, since on further inspection, they realize that the woman looks very little like Ruth, and isn’t her possible after all.

An instance of a real-life art gallery. Ishiguro makes an intriguing parallel here: that the art gallery the Hailsham students submit to exists distinctly from the real world, in which art is bought and sold, and created by “normal” un-cloned humans. Funnily, the Hailsham students seem to have very little to say about the paintings in this real-life gallery, as they are too concerned with their own embarrassment over the “possible” debacle—the fact that this is not Ruth’s clone parent after all.



Outside the gallery, Tommy tries to lighten the mood, saying it was only “a bit of fun,” but Ruth is enraged at the whole thing—though she says that now, all along, she thought it was a stupid idea. Chrissie and Rodney try to “comfort” Ruth, and Kathy notices that the couple are “relieved” that Ruth’s possible wasn’t actually found—since, Kathy thinks, that would have given Ruth more hope that her dream future was possible, and Rodney and Chrissie would have been jealous of this outcome. Ruth also yells out that they all know who their real “clone parents” are—prostitutes, criminals, and others drawn from the dregs of society into the cloning program. This is the first time this information is mentioned, although the other characters seem to know implicitly that it’s true. The others fall silent as Ruth tells them that no “office worker” could therefore be a possible for them.

Rodney and Chrissie nevertheless try to cheer Ruth up by inviting her and the rest of the group to go visit Martin, a friend of theirs from the Cottages who now works as a carer in Norfolk. Rodney and Chrissie say Martin is a really funny guy, and that Ruth would like him; Ruth agrees to go, but Kathy says she’ll stay behind and meet up with the group when they drive home, since they aren’t supposed to visit working carers, and since Kathy also wants some time to herself. Tommy volunteers to walk with Kathy, and Ruth, Chrissie, and Rodney as they go to hang out with Martin.

CHAPTER 15

After the other three leave, Tommy tells Kathy that he never cared much about the “possible” idea, since he figures it doesn’t really matter who they’re modeled on—it’s not as though they’re actually like their “clone parent.” Kathy is quiet for a moment, and Tommy tells her that, in Woolworth’s, he was looking for a present for her. Kathy seems pleased, and asks what present it could be—Tommy responds that it’s the tape Kathy lost at **Hailsham** (Tommy learned long ago from Ruth that the tape was missing). Tommy tells her he couldn’t find it primarily because he couldn’t remember its title, and Kathy reminds him that the artist’s name is **Judy Bridgewater**.

The two decide to “rummage around” for the tape in Norfolk, since, after all, they joke together that it’s the “lost corner” of England. They come upon a second-hand shop and, sure enough, Kathy discovers the tape among a box of other used, old cassettes. She understands that this isn’t the actual lost tape from **Hailsham**, and Tommy is upset with himself that he didn’t spot it first, but he nevertheless offers to buy it for her, and Kathy is deeply pleased at the pleasant hour she and Tommy have been able to spend together.

To Tommy, there could never be very much value in understanding the “normal” human who “gave birth” to a clone. Tommy seems to have accepted, from the beginning, the fact that clones at Hailsham and beyond have a different life set out for them. This doesn’t mean he is always happy about it—in fact, his tantrums as a young boy might be seen as a response to the close confines of his clone life—but he knows that Ruth can never learn anything about herself from seeing her clone parent. Tommy, like Kathy, seems content to make meaning and find happiness within the narrower bounds of a clone’s predetermined life.



The first real indication that perhaps Tommy would rather spend time with Kathy than with Ruth. For a long time now, in the novel, Tommy and Kathy have seemed more simpatico than Tommy and Ruth—but Ruth exerts a significant pull on Tommy’s attention, and Kathy finds that Ruth does a good job of making Tommy feel that he must preserve their relationship, rather than deepen his friendship with Kathy.



Ruth was not the only one looking for Kathy’s tape. Here, the reader learns several things, not the least of which being that Ruth was genuinely concerned about Kathy’s happiness, and wanted to find the tape in order to repay Kathy for her previous kindness (concerning Miss Geraldine’s affections). Tommy, in his typically loveable and slightly feckless way, leads Kathy coincidentally to the place where her new tape can be found, but does not actually find the tape in the stacks—Kathy does that.



Kathy sees how delightful this coincidence is. The only way this could be more perfect would be if the metaphor were actually true—if Norfolk were in fact a “lost corner” where actual lost things reappeared. Instead, the Bridgewater tape here is a clone, a double, a copy of the original—just as good for Kathy’s purposes, but not quite the same, and not holding the entire sentimental value with which Kathy had viewed the original.



As they are walking outside the shop, and waiting for the others, Tommy tells Ruth that he has another theory about **Hailsham**, one he's been thinking about since they left. Tommy fears that the Gallery was used as a way of selecting art samples from each of the students, as a means of determining what those students were "really like in their souls." Tommy believes that these gallery art projects are then used to determine if members of a romantic couple have similar art, and therefore similar souls—in other words, as a means of determining whether the couple is "really in love" and thus worthy of a deferral.

Kathy listens to Tommy's theory in a kind of stunned silence, and thinks also, unrelatedly, of her own small dance to the song "**Never Let Me Go**," which caused Madame to cry. But Kathy refocuses and listens to Tommy again, as he goes on: Tommy says that he's worried he and Ruth won't be able to get a deferral, since Tommy never got any art into the gallery. For this reason, Tommy has been working on new art—a series of "small animals," with almost robotic or mechanical features, which he hopes will show that he is in fact creative, and that he and Ruth might have souls that "match up."

Kathy tells Tommy that his idea is interesting, but appears too flummoxed by the enormity of his theory to offer any coherent response. As the two wait near the car for the rest of the group, Tommy also tells Kathy he's realized why Kathy was looking through the old pornographic magazines—Kath was searching for her own "possible." Kathy knew, and Tommy realized, that her clone original was probably also from the "dregs of society," and Kathy explains to Tommy that her strong sexual urges make her believe that perhaps a sex worker or pornographic actress was her original, and "passed along" this desire for sex to Kathy.

But Tommy tells Kathy that this is a silly idea, and anyway, if it were true, it wouldn't matter, since Kathy's personality does not "derive" from that of her original. Just as they are wrapping up this conversation, the rest of the group comes back, overjoyed from their laughing good time with Martin, and on the ride back, Ruth makes a special effort to include Kathy and Tommy in conversation. Kathy notably doesn't tell the rest of the car about the **Bridgewater tape** Tommy bought for her, since Kathy doesn't want to "spoil the moment" of happiness they all have together.

A very important section in the novel. As it will later turn out, Tommy's theory is not so wildly off—though he misunderstands the ultimate reason for the Gallery, and presumes it must have something to do with the rumor of deferral. This is another incredibly poignant and sad realization—for Tommy, we learn, has always regretted his lack of creativity, and wants to do whatever he can to remedy it, in order to make life better for himself and possibly for Ruth.



The nature of Tommy's artwork is very interesting, and the reader only hears of it in small snatches, from Kathy's perspective. Kathy never appears completely taken with the animals—she finds them strange and disconcerting, very much "unlike" the other art that was common in Hailsham at the time. But Kathy also seems to respect Tommy's initiative, and his willingness to devote long stretches of time to this project.



Another very important moment. Tommy finally understands what Kathy was doing—she, like Ruth, has internalized the idea that the clones come only from people society cares nothing for. Thus the clones are copies of "normal" humans whose bodies and contributions to society are greatly devalued. What, Kathy feels, can a clone have to offer, if they are merely a doubled version of a person who didn't seem to matter very much in the first place in the eyes of society?



The Bridgewater tape assumes a new symbolic dimension after Kathy and Tommy locate the copy of it in Norfolk. Before, it was a private way for Kathy to commune with herself, and with the idea of a family life beyond Hailsham. But now the tape has been invested with her friendship with Tommy, with their closeness and intimacy. This, it seems, is another reason why Kathy can't share the news of the tape immediately with the rest of the car.



CHAPTER 16

Kathy notes that, after the Norfolk trip, the group experiences a certain kind of tension, and people don't really speak about Ruth's possible, or about the possibility of "deferral" much—perhaps because Norfolk itself was a strange and troubling experience. One day, in late spring of their first year at the Cottages, Tommy does show Kathy his drawings of small creatures—which have parts that look like metal or wire—and Kathy is surprised by their intricacy, though she also finds them strange. Kathy wonders how "Madame would feel about them," and Tommy notes that he'll "have to work on them more" before he can offer them up for the Gallery.

Kathy also notices that her relationship with Ruth has once again grown strained. Ruth begins to pretend that she can't remember things about **Hailsham**—even though Kathy knows that Ruth shares her associations about the guardians and parts of the campus—perhaps because Ruth now considers those memories "immature." One day, when Kathy and Ruth are discussing one of Kathy's brief romantic flings, Ruth stumbles upon Kathy's new copy of the **Bridgewater tape**, and when Kathy tells Ruth that she and Tommy found it together in Norfolk, Ruth seems slightly miffed and suspicious, although they don't fight about it then. Ruth also brings up the subject of Tommy's drawings, and Kathy jokes a little with Ruth about their subject-matter, without saying that she also finds them interesting.

Soon thereafter, Kathy runs into Ruth and Tommy around the Cottages—the two of them are having a heated discussion, and Kathy feels she's intruding, but Ruth calls Kathy over, telling her that Tommy has introduced his "Gallery theory" to her. Ruth seems upset and dismissive, and when Tommy tries to explain that he's making his small creatures so that he and Ruth can perhaps have their art compared, and their deferral granted, Ruth mercilessly mocks him in front of Kathy. Kathy is stunned and silent, and soon Ruth lets out that Kathy, too, finds the animals "a complete hoot."

Though this is not strictly true—Ruth has warped Kathy's comments about the drawings from their previous conversation—Kathy knows that there is nothing she can do now to convince Tommy that this is a lie. Kathy is desperately angry at Ruth for her bitter retort and meanness to Tommy, and terribly sad that Tommy will undergo this pain, indirectly on her own behalf. Kathy storms back to her own hut, "leaving the two of them" to their conversation, and not knowing what else to do to repair her friendships and convince Tommy that she does, in fact, find his artistic projects worthwhile.

Another quality of the clones' lives—and of many of Ishiguro's characters, not just these—is their occasional inability to say exactly what's on their minds. Kathy directs a great deal of energy toward investigating her personal experiences, but even she has trouble explaining why, at certain moments, the former Hailsham students simply stopped speaking to one another, or decided to ignore the looming facts of their lives. Perhaps the disappointment following the Norfolk trip, and Ruth's incorrect "possible," was simply too great to speak of.



One wonders, here, whether Ruth has attempted to get Kathy to speak about Tommy's animals on purpose, in order to "trap" her into saying something about them that could be perceived as uncharitable or unkind. Ruth's vanity and self-importance remain throughout the novel, even as she grows older and more frail. Even when Ruth tells Tommy and Kathy that she wronged them, and that she wants the two of them to be together, you sense in her an overwhelming difficulty to being so genuine and honest. With that said, Ruth is not a bad person—mere a complex character, one whose flaws are perhaps more apparent than are Tommy's and Kathy's.



An important confrontation. After this point, the novel turns very quickly into adulthood. Indeed, one could view this moment as the definitive end of their childhood and youth—of the life represented by Hailsham and the Cottages. After this, Kathy will have to work hard, years later, to repair her relationship with Tommy, and Ruth and Tommy will never really recover—they will split soon after leaving the Cottages.



Kathy, who is normally so collected and understanding of other people's motivations, is genuinely hurt here—perhaps she suffers no greater hurt in the novel, other than the period following Ruth's and Tommy's death. Ruth has dealt a terrible blow to Kathy's relationship with Tommy. For although Kathy does not entirely understand Tommy's art, she nevertheless thinks it is noble and important that Tommy continue to work on it. Kathy finds it difficult, in the moment, to express this in front of Tommy and Ruth, however.



CHAPTER 17

Kathy realizes that, after this conversation with Ruth and Tommy, and its abrupt ending, it will be difficult to patch things over and continue friends as it was before. Time continues at the Cottages, and before long, it's the spring and then summer of their second year. Kathy is one of the few **Hailsham** students still to be working on her Victorian novel essay—she knows that the essay doesn't matter, but worries that, if she doesn't continue working on it, the bond that cemented the Hailsham students together, and to a sense of shared past, will be "broken."

Kathy also has a conversation with Ruth, several weeks after the confrontation in the field with Tommy. Kathy learns that Ruth has apologized to Tommy for making fun of his animal drawings. Ruth goes on to say, however, that though she and Tommy are probably splitting up, Tommy "doesn't see Kathy" as a potential girlfriend, primarily because Kathy has been indiscriminate in the boys she's slept with. Kathy, though shocked by this bald-faced and hurtful statement, remains quiet, and even "thanks" Ruth for her honesty.

At the end of this conversation, Kathy makes a comment about the rhubarb patches at **Hailsham**—a reference she assumes Ruth will understand—but when Ruth "only vaguely" remembers what Kathy is talking about, Kathy responds "sharply," implying that Ruth is pretended to be "beyond" their time together at Hailsham. The two quickly end their conversation on somewhat strained terms, and several days later, Kathy decides abruptly to leave the Cottages and begin her job as a carer, without discussing the matter with Ruth and Tommy.

CHAPTER 18

Kathy recounts the start of her life as a carer. She says that the long hours, the "solitude," and the difficulty of dealing with people's donations makes the job a tough one—but Kathy has shown an aptitude for it. Kathy runs into Laura after several years on the job—one of her acquaintances from **Hailsham**, who was always cracking a joke—at a treatment center, where Laura is also working as a carer. Kathy notices that Laura is no longer so carefree, and indeed, Laura talks for a long time about the difficulties of her job, before she mentions Ruth, whom neither Kathy nor Laura has seen for some time. Ruth is already a donor, and her first donation has gone "poorly."

Kathy now realizes, full on, what the essay means to Hailsham students now at the Cottages. More than something to occupy themselves, it is a "link" to Hailsham and to the bond they shared as young people. Kathy understands now that their lives as carers and donors will be difficult and lonely ones—and that the Cottages soon will come to an end, leaving only a tightly-controlled professional life afterward (which is, again, in some ways different only in the extremity of its degree from what faces most "normal" people after they leave college and enter the workforce).



An even more devastating conversation with Ruth. This is perhaps Ruth's lowest and cruelest moment. Ruth seems intent on making Kathy believe that she has no chance with Tommy. Perhaps Ruth senses, even at this point, that Tommy and Kathy are growing closer together, and that, inevitably, they will begin a relationship. Or perhaps Ruth wishes to upset Kathy even more, after their other difficult conversation outside, about Tommy's "animals."



Kathy, for her part, has decided that she will have no more of what amounts to bullying by Ruth. When Kathy asks to leave the Cottages a bit early, she realizes how tenuous the Cottages were, compared to Hailsham—it is easy to leave, and indeed the clones are essentially encouraged to do so after they have prepared themselves for the working world. Kathy's desire to become a carer now seems to be the intended purpose of the Cottages.



One of the most remarkable aspects of her new life as a carer is the amount of time Kathy must spend alone. One may look at the novel itself as a record of Kathy's stories and experiences, compiled as a way of combating this loneliness. Even Kathy's interaction with Laura, a close friend from Hailsham, feels difficult and somehow "distant" when they meet as carers—perhaps because caring requires such draining emotional investment.



Laura suggests that, since Kathy is allowed to choose her donors now, Kathy should volunteer to be Ruth's carers. But Kathy says that might not be a good idea. Laura also mentions the fact that **Hailsham** is closing—a piece of information Kathy heard several weeks before. Kathy does not know what to think of this news—she is shocked by it—but she finds an apt metaphor for her feeling when, one day, she watches a clown holding a fistful of bright balloons. Kathy worries that one balloon might be “let go and fly away,” and she wonders whether that isn't similar to the feeling of the Hailsham students now in the world, with Hailsham gone. The thing that once bound them together will soon no longer exist.

Because of this feeling about the balloons, Kathy decides that, though it might be difficult, she ought to try to be Ruth's carer. She volunteers for the position and begins meeting with Ruth at a treatment center in Dover. At first, their meetings are somewhat tense, and the two of them have difficulty reconnecting with one another. Ruth seems uncomfortable with the idea that she needs so much help—her health is frail after only one donation—and that Kathy is the one providing aid.

Then, “out of the blue,” Ruth mentions one session that there is an abandoned boat that has run aground several hours away, and that one can visit the boat—it's not blocked off from the surrounding marshes. The rumor of the boat has been going around the treatment centers, and Ruth is in the mood for a break from the monotony of the hospital. Kathy, hesitant and first, finally agrees to take Ruth in her (Kathy's) car to see the boat, and after a brief conversation regarding Tommy, who is also working as a donor now, Kathy and Ruth decide to pick him up and take him along as well.

CHAPTER 19

Ruth and Kathy drive several days later to Kingsfield, to pick up Tommy at his treatment center—a run-down place, with a dilapidated concrete “square” at its center, where patients mill about and talk a little. Ruth and Kathy spot Tommy, and Ruth and Tommy have a rather heartfelt, if stilted, hello; Tommy then kisses Kathy politely on the cheek, and the three set off to see the boat.

The closing of Hailsham will be another important factor in the final part of the book. Hailsham was, as Kathy acknowledges, more than just a school—it was, for her and Tommy and Ruth, a way of life, a refuge, and a place of comfort. With Hailsham gone, and having made the transition into a life of caring and then donating, Kathy realizes how much of their childhood innocence has disappeared. Kathy's transition from childhood to adulthood, and from innocence to its loss, parallels the maturation of “normal” adults, but with the twists and difficulties of clone life in addition.



Ruth has trouble working as a donor, although the reasons for this are never fully explained. Ruth's health in the previous parts of the novel has never been an issue, but perhaps Ruth's body simply cannot bear the shock of having some of its organs removed. Only the heartiest of clones can still feel strong after the second donation.



Ruth's desire to see the boat is probably twofold. On the one hand, life in the center is excruciatingly boring, and she wants any excuse to leave. And second, she wants to “get away” with Tommy and Kathy, for reasons that will soon become clear—she wants to have a conversation with them about “bringing them together” and having them ask Madame for a deferral. But for this, Ruth wants to get out of the treatment center and onto the open road.



Ruth and Tommy, as it turns out, have not had occasion to see each other for a long time since leaving the Cottages, as they were placed in different areas for caring, and are now in different treatment centers. Both seem calmer around one another, perhaps because of the trials they have endured after their respective donations.



Ruth talks on and on, in the car-ride to the boat, about a particular woman at her treatment center, but Kathy and Tommy finally complain to her—saying they don't understand the point of her story—and Ruth seems shocked by their honesty, and stops talking. The three reach the boat and get out of the car; Tommy makes his way under a wire fence with relative ease, despite the fact that he has had two donations already, but Ruth is frail enough that she can barely make it under the wire. The three walk out on the marshy ground, and spot the beached boat, which they all find beautiful. Tommy wonders aloud if the decrepit boat looks the way **Hailsham** looks now, although Ruth dismisses this notion abruptly.

Ruth, Tommy, and Kathy begin talking about people they knew. Chrissie has completed, or died, during her second donation, although Rodney seems to have taken the news well (they are now broken up, and Rodney is also a donor). Tommy mentions that he is a better donor than he was carer, and Ruth characteristically notes that donating is more important than caring—it's what the clones are "supposed to do." Kathy takes this barb in stride, however, noting that caring is also important, but Ruth tries to team up with Tommy and make it seem that Kathy does not understand the difficulties of their position. Tommy, for his part, remains neutral, and muses that sometimes people survive difficult donations they thought they wouldn't make it through.

The three get back into the car, and though their conversation at the boat was a difficult one, Kathy feels they are now able "to talk more freely." They spot an ad that resembles the ad Ruth once saw on the ground—of the office on which she based her dream future. Tommy recognizes the ad as similar, too, to the office in Norfolk where they tried to find Ruth's double. But Ruth pretends she has difficulty remembering these things, and that she didn't really care about the office that much. Tommy and Kathy press her, however, saying that she often talked about the office, and that Ruth should have "pushed her case" with the Madame, and tried to see if she could delay her caring and donation in order to try an office job.

But Ruth counters that this wouldn't have been possible—she wouldn't have even known how to petition—and, suddenly, Ruth also begs Kathy to forgive her. Kathy is surprised by the change in Ruth's tone, and she wonders what else Ruth is going to say. With Tommy still listening, Ruth admits to Kathy in the car that she "lied" to Kathy about her "urges," and that Ruth also experienced strong sexual desires, causing her to cheat on Tommy "at least three times" at the Cottages. Tommy hears this news impassively, and Ruth continues, saying that it was awful of her to "have kept Tommy and Kathy apart."

Seeing the dilapidated boat is an important moment for the three friends. The boat seems to symbolize several things: something that is left behind; a large thing that is now hidden, but which can be uncovered with a certain amount of effort. Ruth wants to go back to the past, that which she has "left behind," and to uncover a few things she has done. She wants to try to put the past right—and this means being honest with Tommy and Kathy about their possible future together. Thus the boat seems a stand-in for the entire conversation Ruth wishes to have.



Another of the book's small debates, which seems to crop up throughout, is the idea of donating being the "higher" or more important job, and of caring being the lesser. Of course, Kathy is loath to feel this way, since she has devoted a great deal of her life to caring, and she is a good one—perhaps this explains her little speech at the beginning of the novel, where she mentions how good of a carer she is. Donating, on the other hand, is the ultimate "goal" of a clone's life—and, of course, Tommy and Ruth want recognition for all the suffering they have endured in that job.



Ruth, despite all her honesty, still has trouble admitting the silliness of her "dream job" and of her youthful fantasies while at the Cottages. It seems unlikely that Ruth has totally forgotten this time—rather, it is more likely she simply is embarrassed by it, and doesn't wish to relive the things she said to Tommy and Kathy back then, about working in an office. Ruth redoubles and tries to convince Tommy and Kathy that they must work together to find a deferral, while they are still alive—this is one of the novel's most poignant and emotionally fraught scenes.



Perhaps it is surprising that Tommy does not react more strongly to the news that Ruth cheated on him several times while at the Cottages. There are several explanations for this: maybe Tommy already knew; maybe, as a donor, he is more willing to let the past slide; or maybe he, too, cheated on Ruth. In any event, Tommy accepts this news passively, much as the clones accept a good deal of the news regarding their difficult adult lives.



Kathy begins to “sob” as Ruth goes on, saying that Tommy and Kathy ought to be together, and that the two of them should try to get a deferral, since they are clearly in love, and have been for some time. Kathy continues sobbing, and Tommy simply stares straight ahead—so overcome by the events that he cannot respond. Ruth suddenly gives Tommy a sheet of paper on which she’s written Madame’s address—Ruth admits that finding it took a lot of work, but she knew it was important for Kathy and Tommy to have, if they were to try for a deferral.

Kathy stops crying and realizes that she must drop off Tommy in Kingsfield and then Ruth in Dover. The three drive back quietly, and when Tommy leaves the car in Kingsfield, he “smiles and waves” to the two of them. Kathy then takes Ruth back, and for several more weeks, Kathy cares for Ruth, and Ruth tries to convince Kathy to become Tommy’s carer, although this idea makes Kathy feel nervous and “tense.” Soon after Ruth’s second donation, however, her health takes a turn, and Kathy watches her condition deteriorate. As Ruth is dying, Kathy sits beside her, and though Ruth is barely conscious, Kathy promises “to be Tommy’s carer.” Kathy isn’t sure that Ruth has heard, but at this moment, Kathy realizes that caring for Tommy is exactly the thing she wants.

CHAPTER 20

One year after the trip to see the boat, Kathy does become Tommy’s carer. Tommy has now had three donations, and his condition is stable, though he is weaker. Kathy begins visiting him regularly in Kingsfield, and the two talk, read together, and even begin having sex—in part because, Kathy thinks, if they are to get a deferral, they’ll need to demonstrate that level of “physical intimacy.” Kathy says the sex with Tommy is good, although there is also a creeping sadness to it, perhaps because Tommy recognizes that, if they had begun having sex before, Tommy would be in better health. Sometimes Tommy comments on his weakness, which makes Kathy sad, and she tries to change the subject to enjoy the time they do have together.

They generally avoid the subject of speaking to Madame, and one day, Tommy asks Kathy to look again at some of the new animals he’s been drawing. Kathy sees them and experiences a “flood of emotions”—she is grateful that Tommy has decided to share them with her again—but wonders, too, if the new drawings aren’t more “labored” than the previous ones, as though Tommy were trying to impress his audience (namely, Madame) with the idea of his artistic achievement.

The reader does not find out the kind of work Ruth had to do in order to gain access to this address. Presumably, it required a lot of talking to people, and a good deal of sneaking around at her treatment center. This, like her previous search for Kathy’s lost tape, shows Ruth’s soft side, and her ability to get things done if she truly puts her mind to them.



Ruth dies relatively quickly. She was, by her own admission, not a good carer, and she was not much as a donor either. Perhaps Ruth never really came to terms with the horrors of her life after the Cottages—with the strictness of her profession, or the difficult things asked of her as a carer and as a donor. Or perhaps her body was simply not up for the abuse it had to take, after several organ donations. Tommy, for his part, seems stronger physically, better able to donate—but he too was a poor carer, although he is a good and patient friend to Kathy.



Another extremely sad moment in the novel. The idea that Tommy and Kathy could have been having sex in the prime of their youth is a terrible one to bear, now that Tommy is so physically infirm. This, too, mimics something that “normal” people might experience, if they knew each other in their younger lives but were not able to come together until they were older. In many ways, then, Kathy is not just lamenting her personal situation, but is also upset about the passage of time—the way it has worn on their bodies.



Kathy’s perception here is incredibly keen. She notices that Tommy has been doing everything he can to make animals that Madame might like. Of course, Tommy has no idea what Madame desires—nor does he even know if Madame is still accepting art for the Gallery. Nor does he know if the Gallery still exists, or even existed . . . Whether Tommy’s goal is at all achievable is extremely questionable, but the work he put in regardless gives meaning to his life.



But Kathy insists to the reader that, despite all the emotional complexities of this time, Kathy enjoyed her romance with Tommy. One day, Kathy returns to Kingsfield after a week away—she still has to care for her other donors in other places—and tells Tommy that, because she was near the place listed as Madame’s address, she parked outside Madame’s house and did in fact see Madame going inside. Kathy and Tommy discuss what this means, and they decide to talk to Madame as soon as they can, taking some of the animal pictures with them, to attempt to ask, once and for all, for a romantic deferral.

CHAPTER 21

Tommy and Kathy have a hard time getting to the seaside town where Madame lives—Tommy has to run several tests before they can go—but they finally reach the town, and soon they spot Madame walking back to her house. Tommy and Kathy decide to follow behind her at a safe distance, and when they reach the gate of her house, they introduce themselves, saying that they are former **Hailsham** students who want to talk to her, and who don’t want trouble. Although Madame seems shocked at first—and draws back from them as she did long ago, at Hailsham, as though she were scared—she soon relaxes and welcomes them inside.

Tommy and Kathy sit in a dark room and look at the decorations while Madame goes upstairs to prepare for their talk. Tommy points out a picture of **Hailsham**, but it’s a view of the school Kathy does not recognize, and Tommy urges her, saying that she couldn’t possibly have forgotten that particular view, “near the pond.” Madame finally comes down and invites Kathy to tell her why they are here to see her.

Kathy, excited, begins her speech, but finds that her ideas are “garbled,” even though she has practiced this speech in her head for some time. But finally Kathy tells Madame everything—that they are there to ask about a romantic deferral because they are “deeply in love.” Madame finally interjects, asking how they know they are deeply in love, and begins crying a small amount. Tommy joins in, talking about their art and the gallery, and the idea that the art was used by Madame to track their inner souls and to pair off potential “matches” who were in love enough to warrant deferral.

It turns out that Ruth’s information is correct—meaning that she has truly done Tommy and Kathy a service, allowing them to find a way to talk to Madame in person. Again, it is not clear how Ruth managed to get this information, and Kathy later realizes that, perhaps, it was better Ruth did not survive to go along—since the news Madame and Miss Emily share is so devastating to Tommy and Kathy.



Madame’s response to seeing Tommy and Kathy—apparently she recognizes them, even though she has gotten to know many clones—is not dissimilar from her response to the girls at Hailsham many years before. As Emily later relates, even the thought of touching or coming near a clone is difficult for a “normal” person. Here, Ishiguro taps into a fear that seems very “real” and plausible to the reader—the idea that clones might somehow be not quite human, or strange to see, touch, and be near. Or perhaps that fear stems from the fact that the normal humans feel shame for how they have treated clones.



The tables are turned—Kathy sees that she, too, has forgotten certain moments of her Hailsham life, even though Tommy remembers them. Kathy, of course, often chastised Ruth, when she was alive, about failing to remember certain “indelible” things about Hailsham.



Madame is struck by this—by the idea that the clones are soulful and “human” enough to want to fall in love, to believe they are in love, to form genuine human relationships. For Madame, all along, has believed that clones are fully human, and that they deserve fully human treatment even as their professional lives—which are immensely difficult—are laid out before them. Tommy’s statement cheers Madame a great deal.



Madame seems to find this idea about the gallery ingenious, even as she indicates, in her surprise, that this was not the purpose of the gallery at all. Madame keeps saying, to no one in particular, if she should “proceed” in her explanations, and finally, Kathy realizes that Madame is addressing a fourth person, enshrouded in the darkness, whom Madame wheels out to speak to Kathy and Tommy—it’s Miss Emily, the former head of **Hailsham**. Madame defers to Miss Emily, and says “it’s she Kathy and Tommy wish to talk to.”

The revelation that Miss Emily is in fact the real headmistress of Hailsham, and that Madame wasn't secretly in charge—isn't actually so large a revelation perhaps as Ishiguro might have liked. But Emily's emergence at the end of the novel allows for certain loose ends to be tied up, even if more questions about Hailsham's background, and about the political situation in England surrounding cloning, are left unanswered.



CHAPTER 22

Miss Emily begins speaking to Kathy and Tommy, telling them that Madame, or “Marie-Claude” as she calls her, is now somewhat disillusioned with the idea of **Hailsham**—that Madame now wonders whether the school “did any good at all.” But Miss Emily, who created the school, always believed in its mission, which she details slowly for Kathy and Tommy. Emily first notes that school like Hailsham did not exist for decades after the development of clones, because, once organ donation and cloning technologies were created, people preferred to think that “their donated organs simply came from nowhere.” The idea was prevalent, before Hailsham, that clones were not people and should not be treated as such. Hailsham, and a small number of other institutions like it, were started in the 1960s as a reform movement designed to show that clones could be raised in humane conditions and accorded human dignity, even if clone and organ programs continued operating.

Miss Emily here gives more of the political background that, at this point, the reader has probably craved for some time. This section answers a few broad questions but opens many more. Why did cloning follow the second World War, and what technology preceded its development? Why was cloning invented in England, and does it exist in other countries, like the United States? How did the British public become comfortable with cloning, even after they saw that clones grew up to be real human adults, and that organs were being taken from these people? And how did the reform movement gain political traction, allowing public funds to be allocated to places like Hailsham, for the “humane” treatment of clones?



Emily then addresses the rumor of deferral and of the gallery. Although the deferral rumor is not true and “never was”—though many students have heard of it over time, and Emily and Madame believe that the rumor springs up organically among different classes of students—the gallery rumor “is” true, to an extent. The gallery is the house in which they speak at this moment—Emily and Madame, who appear to live in a domestic partnership, have been collecting the art for years. When Tommy asks why—since the art is not used to determine whether people are truly in love—Emily responds that the art was used to show that clones “*had souls at all*,” since so many in post-war England believed, as above, that clones were “sub-human.”

Emily and Madame here note that the Gallery, far from being used solely to exhibit art, was intended to show something not about art but about the clones themselves—that they possessed the full human range of faculties, that they could think for themselves and produce something using their own natural creativity. What is so shocking about this, of course, is that we, as the reader, have seen Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth as full human beings—and only now see that others questioned their “human-ness” because they are in fact clones.



But Emily notes that all this came to an end once the Morningdale Scandal struck. Kathy asks what this scandal was, and Emily responds that, in Scotland, a rogue scientist named Morningdale began experimenting on clones whose attributes could be “selected” when the clone was created. These clones cause people to fear that Morningdale could create something like a “super-race” of clones. This caused an uproar across the country, and made it more difficult to argue for the ethical treatment of those clones that already existed. This negative tide caused financial support for institutions like **Hailsham** to “dry up,” and by the 1990s, Hailsham and other places like it had run out of money, and were forced to close.

Miss Emily says, however, that she now must go, since her assistant is arranging for the sale of a piece of furniture. Tommy and Kathy say that this is all difficult and disappointing news to hear, and that for them it’s not an exercise—“it’s their lives.” Emily and Madame seem to understand this, and apologize that there’s nothing else they can do—that Kathy and Tommy must simply “let their lives run their course.”

When Tommy brings up Miss Lucy, Emily dimly remembers her, and states that Lucy opposed the way that the school elided over certain facts of clone life until the clones were older. Emily goes on to defend her firing of Lucy, saying that things were better the way they went at **Hailsham**, and that Lucy’s method would have been no better for the clones in the long run. When Kathy complains that Madame always found the clones “repulsive,” Emily defends her, saying Madame “gave her life” for the clones, and that she (Emily) was also “repulsed” by the students—it took all her efforts to repress her distaste for them, even as she wanted dearly to help them—since cloning seemed unnatural to all non-cloned humans, no matter how sympathetic they were.

Emily says, however, that she “really must go” outside, and so Kathy and Tommy walk out and watch Emily’s assistant help Emily into her car. Madame and Kathy have a final conversation, in which Kathy reminds Madame about their chance meeting while Kathy was listening to “**Never Let Me Go**.” Madame recalls the incident. She marvels that Kathy remembers so vividly, and that Kathy seemed even then to understand what was going through Madame’s mind as she wept while watching Kathy dance.

The “Morningdale” scandal is Ishiguro’s way of showing why Hailsham had to be shut down. Perhaps this scandal is a bit shadowy and simple-seeming—one could envision other scenarios, in which Hailsham simply languished due to lack of funds, since money was allocated to other places and at other times (surely this has happened in other fields in the post-war period in the US and the UK). But Ishiguro here preferred to show the fear that had gathered among the English regarding cloning, even as they came to depend on clone organs for their own health.



What’s so poignant about this advice is the fact that, as Madame urges, everyone’s life must “run its course” after a certain juncture. Ishiguro wants to underline the amount that fate, chance, and destiny commingle in all human lives. Perhaps we are not “meant” to do what we do—perhaps we have more choices than the clones—but, at a certain point, all humans must come to terms with one unchangeable fact—that their lives will one day end.



This point—that Emily and Madame, despite their desire to help the clones, always continued fearing them—seems especially human, plausible, and true. Cloning would produce an eerie effect in society, a group of people who have some traits in common with their clone originals, but who are not children of those originals, and who are used solely for instrumental purposes, for the harvesting of organs. It would perhaps require a supernatural humanity to be able to relate immediately to a clone as one would to a normal human. Yet that is what Madame and Emily wanted to try to do.



But despite Emily and Madame’s best efforts, and all the work they have put in, they also recognize that clones have the rules of their lives set, and that they cannot change those rules—no one can, short of some major alteration in the government of England and in clones’ rights. This fatalism is damning to Tommy and Kathy and is of course not true. The clones could be allowed to live out their lives in peace—but the people of England still want their donated clone organs.



Kathy explains her fantasy regarding the child in her arms, and Madame counters that, although she didn't necessarily she that version of the fantasy, she (Madame) nevertheless detected that Kathy was trying to cling to an "old kind world" with her slow dance, a world that no longer existed—and that the song seemed to reference. Madame wept because she knew that the clones would be flung into a crueler world—one that is better for some (recipients of the organs) but far worse, indeed unthinkable for others (the clones themselves). This is what made her weep. At this, Madame calls Tommy and Kathy "poor creatures," gets choked up again, and touches Kathy on the cheek, saying "she wishes she could help. But now they are by themselves." Madame then goes back inside, and Kathy and Tommy return to Kingsfield.

On the drive back, Kathy notes that the two of them spoke little. But soon, after it gets dark and they are on back roads, Tommy asks Kathy to stop the car near a cow-field. Tommy gets out into the dark, and then Kathy hears "three screams." She rushes into the field to find Tommy having one of his tantrums, just like he did when he was in **Hailsham**. Kathy this time manages to grab hold of Tommy and calm him down, and Tommy apologizes for his outburst, and gets back into the car covered in mud from his flailing and kicking.

But this time, Kathy's response to Tommy and his tantrum is different. Kathy tells Tommy that, "back at **Hailsham**," when Tommy would have tantrums, perhaps it wasn't because he was immature, but because "he knew something that the other students didn't" about the unfairness of the world into which they would soon be released. Although Tommy protests for a moment, saying that his tantrums are only an indication of him "being an idiot," he relents somewhat, acknowledging that perhaps, "deep down," he "knew something the rest of you didn't."

CHAPTER 23

Kathy notes that things between herself and Tommy become strained after the meeting with Emily and Madame, perhaps because they know there is no more deferral—that the animals no longer matter. Tommy also notes that he is soon approaching his fourth donation, and that this donation is often the one at which donors, even hearty ones, complete.

Madame shows that the interaction with Kathy, while Kathy was dancing alone, was just as important to her as it was to Kathy. This is an important and touching moment in the novel, and one that Ishiguro orchestrates well. For Madame alone understands just how cruel and difficult the outside world is for the clones, and indeed for all humans. She helped create Hailsham to make this world seem a little less cruel, to give clones some comfort, but ultimately to allow continue to clones along their life-path toward donation. And the complexity of this moral situation reduced Madame to tears.



Tommy's final outburst is in many ways the emotional center of the novel. He knows there is nothing he can do now—his animals and the hopes of deferral were all he had to keep going. His relationship with Kathy, like the rest of his life, must now "run its course," he rails against the world, against all external pressures, forcing him to continue on a life-path he has not been allowed to choose for himself.



A major revelation, although perhaps the reader has sensed this for some time. Tommy's anger, but his ability, also, to accept his fate as a clone, to understand why seeing a "possible" is of no importance—all these things point to his ultimate maturity and self-knowledge. Ruth did not have this knowledge—she could not "get over herself"—and as a consequence, Ruth pushed away those that were closest to her.



It is perhaps striking that donors can even make it to the fourth donation at all. Ishiguro does not explain which organs are taken first—but if the donors give away one kidney here, and perhaps other peripheral organs in later donations, they could conceivably make it to a fourth—a morbid and bitter notion.



One day, when Kathy is visiting and tending to Tommy, the two go outside for a walk, and Tommy tells her that he thinks he should get a new carer for this part of his donating life. Kathy becomes very upset, and says that Ruth wanted her to be Tommy's carer till the end, but Tommy counters that Kathy should not care for him during this "difficult part," and that if Kathy were a donor herself, she would understand why Tommy wants to go through this final donation alone.

Tommy notes that "he and Kathy have loved each other all their lives," but that, at this point, they are like two people in a river, and the "current is so strong, it's pushing them apart." Kathy is reminded of "holding Tommy in the cow-field," and though she recognizes that she loves Tommy and does not want to say goodbye to him, she understands why he wants to complete on his own, and spare Kathy this part of his life. Kathy agrees to find Tommy a new carer.

Tommy and Kathy have their last several meetings, and at their last one, they talk briefly about Ruth, wondering if Ruth would have liked to have known everything Tommy and Kathy found out, about **Hailsham** and their own lives, from Emily and Madame. But Tommy notes that Ruth "wanted to believe in things," and that, therefore, it's probably better that she completed before she knew that deferral was impossible, that Tommy and Kathy could not have extra time together, and that her plan for allowing them to be happy together didn't really work in the end.

Kathy tells herself that her emotions about Ruth are more complicated. She, too, is partly glad Ruth was spared this knowledge. She also feels that there is a "mean-spirited" part of her that wishes Ruth knew that Tommy and Kathy couldn't get a deferral—perhaps so Ruth could feel even worse for "keeping them apart for so long." But mostly Kathy recognizes that, because Ruth died before knowing the truth about **Hailsham**, there's "a line with Tommy and Kathy on one side and Ruth on the other," and that division between them upsets Kathy more than anything else.

Kathy says a final goodbye to Tommy, but since they have been saying "goodbye" to each other for a long time now, the end is difficult but not excruciating. Kathy goes on with her life, and hears after months that Tommy completed after his fourth donation. She remarks to herself that, though she has "lost Tommy and Ruth and **Hailsham**," she still has memories of these places, and she can keep these memories with her, and fight the decay of these memories, during her time as a donor, which is set to begin shortly.

Tommy also has a degree of self-knowledge that allows him to understand that he wants to be alone, away from Kathy, when he undergoes the difficulties of the final donation. He will be in a severely weakened state, and he feels that he and Kathy have had their time together—that nothing, now, can keep them a couple, and that Tommy would rather spare Kathy this last, brutal and wrenching moment.



Kathy realizes that she truly loves Tommy, and that Tommy truly loves her. Despite all the other tragedies and misfortunes of the novel, this remains an important fact—Ishiguro allows the novel, despite all its other trappings of drama and technology, to remain a love story between two young people.



Tommy understands Ruth far better than Ruth ever understood herself. He knows that, for Ruth, it was more important to continue deluding herself, to make herself feel that, perhaps, one day, she might elude the fate that was closing in on all of them. Ruth seemed to understand, when she became a donor, that there was no escaping this fate—but she still relied on the idea that a deferral for Tommy and Kathy was possible.



Kathy's honesty here is very important in the novel. Kathy is not a perfect narrator nor a perfect person—she has petty jealousies and angers and fears like anyone else. But her poise in coping with and acknowledging these lesser parts of her character are commendable. She knows that Ruth wronged her, and that she will always be, in part, mad at Ruth. But she also knows that Ruth did her best, and was a good friend to her and Tommy before she died.



What Kathy is saying here is that despite the constrictions imposed on her life, she still had a life—a deeply human life—to remember and cherish. Hailsham may have been a bit of a sham and a failure at that, but it was still a place of love and comfort for her. Her relationships with Ruth and Tommy may not have been perfect, but they still contained love.



Kathy also tells the reader that she allowed herself an “indulgence” after hearing of Tommy’s death. She drove back to Norfolk, and saw nearby a long stretch of trees designed to break the wind coming off the water. In the trees were bits of trash that had been blown off the sea—and Kathy believes that the trees, like Norfolk in general, are part of the apparatus that “finds” things that are lost. Kathy then imagines that Tommy might also come out of the water and stand before her, “perhaps wave at her.” This memory of Tommy causes her to cry, but she maintains her composure, noting that she did not “sob,” before “driving off to wherever it was I was supposed to be.” The novel ends.

A terrific, and terrifically sad, image at the close of the book. It is important to note that, even in this romantic and lovely scene, Ishiguro has chosen to compare Tommy, in Kathy’s mind, to trash—the trash that is left behind on the shore, and that blows into and is caught in the trees. But in this trash Kathy chooses not to see the bad—the refuse—but the good, the idea that even things people have left behind will be captured and held by some part of nature. Kathy will continue to endure her life as it becomes even more difficult, as the constrictions it places on her become even more tight and inescapable, and all the while she will hold Tommy and Ruth close to her, in her heart and mind.





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