The Beast in the Jungle

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF HENRY JAMES

Henry James was born to a lecturer and social theorist, and he was the second oldest of five children. Throughout James's childhood, his family moved back and forth between New York, Rhode Island, Paris, and Geneva. He and his brothers received somewhat haphazard schooling as a result of this constant movement. The James family later settled in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where Henry enrolled at Harvard Law School, though he soon quit. He began to publish stories during the Civil War, and he also began contributing to magazines and journals like The Nation at this time. In 1874 he settled in Italy to write a novel, and then he moved to Europe more permanently in 1875. He first lived in Paris, where he met authors like Gustave Flaubert and Emile Zola, and then to London. James's stories and novels began to reach international success, especially following the publication of *The Portrait of a Lady* in 1880. James never married, and was certainly attracted to men, although his homosexuality remained hidden from nearly everyone in his life. In the first few years of the twentieth century, James's "late period," he published three novels that cemented his legacy: *The Wings of the Dove*, *The Ambassadors*, and *The Golden Bowl*. After returning to New York in 1905, he began to heavily revise a number of his works and to write literary introductions to them, which are considered exemplary essays in their own right. But despite his critical acclaim, approval from the general public continued to elude him, and he began to be deeply depressed. He recovered and returned to England, living to see the outbreak of World War I, and died in London.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Beast in the Jungle is thought to be partly inspired by Henry James's own life. Like his protagonist, John Marcher, James never married, sparking speculation about his neuroses surrounding sex. Even if the novella has no direct relation to James's biography, its themes of lost love and repression were personal to James; James once wrote about the "essential loneliness of [his] life," a loneliness John Marcher voluntarily chooses in *The Beast in the Jungle*. Many have speculated about James's sexuality, as he was attracted to men during his lifetime. Bearing this in mind, *The Beast in the Jungle* can be read as a story about a closeted gay man, and many critics, including Eve Sedgwick, have pointed to John Marcher's final realization as a realization about his sexuality as well as about his wasted life. However, the novella is also thought to have been inspired by James's (potentially romantic) relationship with longtime friend and novelist Constance Fenimore Woolson, who died prior to James, much like *The Beast in the Jungle*'s May Bartram.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Henry James's body of work—which includes novels, novellas, short stories, and plays—lies between literary realism and literary modernism. Like many modernist authors, James's work—including *The Beast in the Jungle*—focused on internal psychological conflict more than external events, and his most famous works, including *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), focus on individual journeys. James's style was influential during the modernist period, as James heavily influenced modernist authors like Edith Wharton and Virginia Woolf, who would popularize the stream-of-consciousness narrative. James himself was inspired by realist authors like George Eliot, Ivan Turgenev, Gustave Flaubert and Honoré de Balzac, though James's own work tended toward the experimental. James often juxtaposed American ideals of freedom with European convention, and while *The Beast in the Jungle* strays from this tradition, its themes of alienation, isolation, and missed opportunities are reminiscent of James's larger body of work and can be found in novels like *The Ambassadors* (1903). James was also famous for his character's ambiguous motivations and varied levels of understanding, and *The Beast in the Jungle*'s protagonist, John Marcher, is no exception, as James conceals Marcher's repressed emotions from the reader.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Beast in the Jungle
- **Where Written:** Rye, Sussex
- **When Published:** February 26, 1903
- **Literary Period:** Realism and modernism
- **Genre:** Novella
- **Setting:** London
- **Climax:** May Bartram hints at her love for John Marcher and he doesn't pick up on her hints.
- **Antagonist:** John Marcher's perceived fate serves as the novella's primary antagonist, but Marcher himself is also an antagonist, since his own passivity causes his doom
- **Point of View:** Third person

EXTRA CREDIT

Early Ambitions. When James was 19 years old, he enrolled at Harvard Law School before dropping out to pursue a career in literature.

Today's Beast. The final episode of the 2019 Netflix series "The Haunting of Bly Manor" is named after *The Beast in the Jungle*, though the series itself was inspired by James's novella *The Turn of the Screw*.

PLOT SUMMARY

John Marcher is visiting an estate with a group of friends. When he separates from the group, he runs into May Bartram. Marcher had recognized May earlier in the day, certain that he'd met her in the past. He can tell that she's a dependent in the house, maybe the owner's relative. Marcher and May end up alone in a room, where May tells him that they met in Naples 10 years ago. In Naples, Marcher told her something significant, which he now doesn't remember. To jog his memory, she asks him whether "it" has ever happened. Marcher is shocked: she's the only person he ever shared his secret with. Apparently, he told May that he's always felt destined for a rare fate.

Marcher tells her that his fate hasn't happened yet. It won't be an achievement, but it *will* be life-altering. May wonders whether his fate is to fall in love, but Marcher has been in love, and it wasn't earth-shattering. He invites May to wait for his fate with him. She asks if he's afraid, and he doesn't know. She then agrees to wait with him.

In the next year, May's great-aunt, with whom she was living, dies and leaves May enough money to buy a London home. This means that she and Marcher can spend time together. Marcher enjoys the fact that May knows his secret. He's always considered himself selfless, as he chose not to burden anyone with the knowledge of his fate. As a result, he's honed polite manners to blend in. Now, he's being selfish by spending time with May. Still, he maintains boundaries; even though he could marry her to normalize their relationship, he won't do so. His fate is his alone, a crouching "**beast** in the jungle" of his life, and a woman shouldn't be involved.

At first, Marcher avoids discussing his fate with May. However, when he alludes to it, she responds eagerly, and he realizes that she might take his fate more seriously than he does. He thinks she likes him because he's unique, and because she alone knows why. Even better, she can view him from an outsider's perspective and evaluate how the figurative "mask" he wears in public is different from his authentic self.

They grow old, and Marcher's fate becomes May's focus. But it turns out that she's also keeping secrets, even from Marcher, who doesn't notice. In society, the two of them speak openly about Marcher's fate, since everyone is too stupid to know what they're discussing. May often remarks that luckily, their relationship *seems* normal, as men like to spend time with "dull" women. Marcher agrees, but he wonders how *May* can appear normal to others, and he worries that he's selfish to involve her in his life. She asks if he's afraid of his fate now, and he says no. May thinks that if he *is* afraid, he's grown used to fear. Marcher wonders if this makes him brave, and May agrees that it might. Suddenly, Marcher realizes that May knows what his fate is and that she's afraid to tell him. She says that he'll never find out.

The two move on from their conversation, and Marcher tries to be selfless with May by taking more of an interest in her life. One day, he again asks her what it is that makes *her* look normal, since she makes *him* look normal. She admits that society gossips about her, but her only concern is helping Marcher to blend in. Marcher begins to worry that he'll lose May someday—in fact, maybe losing her *is* his fate. Not long after, May tells Marcher that she has a blood disorder. He worries that she'll die before seeing his fate happen. He again wonders if watching May die will be his fate, even though this fate would be anticlimactic—in fact, he'd consider it a failure. He even worries that his fate isn't coming at all. This horrifies him; he'd rather have an awful fate than fail entirely.

One day, Marcher goes to visit May and notes that she looks distant. He confronts her at last: she knows what his fate is. He's afraid of not knowing and afraid that she's abandoning him. She admits that she has an idea about what his fate is and that this fate would be the worst one she can imagine, but she hasn't abandoned him. In fact, she reassures him that he won't suffer. He's relieved, but when she remains tense, he wonders if he's right that no fate is coming at all. She assures him that his fate *is* coming. She walks toward him and waits expectantly, then backs away. She asks if he understands his fate now, but he doesn't. Claiming to feel ill, she sends him away. He asks her what happened, and she says he should be asking what was *going* to happen.

May won't let Marcher visit her the next day. Eventually, she tells him that his fate has already happened, and he'll never know what it was. May begs him not to try to figure it out, and he wonders if she's dying because of his fate.

May dies soon after. Marcher is frustrated that no one knows how important she was to him, since any explanation he could give about their relationship would mean revealing the beast. He toys with the idea of sharing his secret publicly, as his fate has passed, but he decides against it because he doesn't know what his fate *was*. May told him not to guess, but he decides to find out anyway. Marcher travels for a year, but he finds the world dull, since no one knows what he's been through and lost. He visits May's grave when he returns, reassured by the fact that May understood him. He no longer wonders what his fate was, and he visits May's grave often, as being there makes him feel alive.

A year passes, and one day, Marcher encounters a mourner at the cemetery, grieving at another grave. The two men come face-to-face, and Marcher recognizes that the man is intentionally demonstrating his profound sorrow to Marcher.

Maybe he wants sympathy or maybe he wants to prove that his grief is greater than Marcher's. Marcher wonders whom the man mourns so deeply, and he realizes that he's jealous—Marcher never felt that way about anyone. Suddenly, Marcher realizes that waiting for his fate *was* his fate. As a result, he was doomed to never experience anything at all, especially love. May had offered him a way out the day he confronted her, but he didn't understand her then. Now, he knows that the way to avoid his fate would have been to love May the way that she clearly loved him. The "beast" emerged when she walked up to him, expecting him to guess his fate, and he ignored her hints.

Marcher tries to feel the full weight of his pain now, but he can't do so, which makes him realize how much damage he's done to himself by repressing his emotions. He imagines the beast jumping out at him, and he falls down onto the tomb.

CHARACTERS

John Marcher – John Marcher is a seemingly ordinary member of the British upper class and a close friend of May Bartram. But while Marcher appears polite and unremarkable, he has a secret: he believes he's destined for a life-altering fate, which he refers to as a "crouching **beast** in the jungle" of his life. As a result, he avoids connecting with anyone around him and believes this makes him selfless, since he's trying not to "burden" anyone with his secret. But at the start of the novella, Marcher learns that about ten years earlier, he told May Bartram (then a stranger) his secret, though he can't remember doing so now. For all his claims to selflessness, Marcher is happy that May knows about his "beast" and has agreed to wait for its approach with him. As the years go by and their friendship continues, he has to remind himself that she's an individual with a life of her own. In fact, Marcher often acts selfishly around May. For instance, he won't marry May, likely out of a fear that he'll someday lose her, despite the fact that marriage would normalize their relationship in society's eyes. Even Marcher's fear of losing May is selfish, as he values her mostly because she validates his fate, even claiming that he's courageous for living with it. And when May tells Marcher that she's dying, Marcher is grieved not solely because May will suffer but because she won't be around to witness his fate. Worse, Marcher fears that his fate isn't coming at all, which he would consider a failure—he'd rather have an awful fate than no fate. However, Marcher later discovers that May knows what his fate is and that it's already happened without Marcher's knowledge. After May's death, Marcher encounters a mourner at the cemetery whose passionate grief causes him to realize that his fate was to never experience any passion, specifically love. He also realizes that May loved him, and that the "beast" emerged when he failed to reciprocate her feelings. In the end, Marcher is disturbed by his fate but not fundamentally altered: when he tries to feel the pain of his loss, he can't fully do so, since he's spent so long repressing his feelings and isolating himself.

May Bartram – May Bartram begins the novella as a dependent in her great-aunt's estate and later becomes a close friend of John Marcher. Ten years before the start of the novella, when Marcher and May were strangers to one another, they had met in Italy and Marcher had told her his secret, something that no one else knows: Marcher believes that he's destined for a rare, life-altering fate, which he refers to as an approaching "**beast**." When May and Marcher reunite, May agrees to wait for Marcher's fate alongside him, and she's able to effectively do so after her great-aunt dies and leaves her enough money to purchase her own London home. Though May's interest in Marcher's fate benefits Marcher, since May lessens Marcher's self-imposed isolation and takes him seriously, May is genuinely interested and invested in the "beast," and she and Marcher often speculate about what it will end up being. In fact, May is so invested that she often puts Marcher's needs above her own; she's the topic of society gossip due to the fact that she and Marcher are unmarried, but her primary concern is making Marcher appear normal. However, May has secrets of her own, and near the end of the novella, Marcher suspects that May knows what his fate will be and is hiding it from him. May eventually learns that she'll soon die of a blood disorder, but before she dies, she allows Marcher to guess at what his fate will be. When he can't do so, she grows cold and distant and tells him that his fate has already come to pass. As a final act of kindness to Marcher, she forbids him from trying to find out what his fate was, since he never has to know. After May dies, Marcher realizes both that May loved him and that his fate was to die without experiencing anything, including love. May was trying to bear the burden of Marcher's fate alone, proving her selflessness and devotion to her friend, but she ultimately didn't succeed.

The Mourner – After May Bartram dies, John Marcher habitually visits her grave and one day encounters a strange mourner at the cemetery, who is grieving for some unknown person. Marcher and the mourner, a middle-aged man, make eye contact with one another, and the mourner visibly demonstrates his deep grief to Marcher with a glance. It's not clear why he does so, though Marcher speculates that the mourner might have previously seen Marcher at the cemetery and either wants sympathy or wants to prove that his own grief is deeper than Marcher's. This short moment of contact and connection makes Marcher envious, as he realizes that he never felt as passionate about anyone as the mourner clearly feels about his lost loved one. Marcher then realizes that his fate—which he spent the novella stressing about—is to live a life without love or passion. The mourner therefore hints at the kind of emotional and fulfilled person Marcher could have been if he hadn't spent his life repressing his emotions and

anticipating a distant fate.

THEMES

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FATE AND FAILURE

In *The Beast in the Jungle*, protagonist John Marcher believes he's destined for a mysterious fate that will alter his life—though he isn't sure exactly what will happen, or if this fate will be positive or negative. While he keeps his belief in his fate a secret, he later remembers that, years earlier, he told a woman named May Bartram about it. After Marcher reconnects with May at a luncheon, the two of them spend years waiting for his fate together—but as the years go on without incident, Marcher begins to worry that there is no "**beast**" at all. If there is no fate awaiting him, he believes it would mean that he'd failed, since he centered his life around a fate that wasn't coming. But May eventually dies, and Marcher realizes that he *did* have a fate: to live a life without passion or love—May loved Marcher, but Marcher didn't let himself grow close to anyone because of his belief in the "beast." With this tragic realization, the novella suggests that it's better to live a quiet, happy, and fulfilled life than to waste time anticipating some great fate. The only real failure is an unlived life.

In the beginning of the novella, Marcher believes that something incredibly important is fated to happen to him, so he allows anticipation to rule his life. Most notably, Marcher's anticipation of his fate makes him emotionally detached from other people. Although he has a social life and a government job, he goes through life mimicking acceptable human behavior instead of being himself or feeling his emotions, all in an effort to keep his fate a secret from others. While Marcher doesn't think his fate will be a great achievement, he still believes that *having* a rare fate makes him unique, and he derides the "stupid[ity]" of others around him. Because Marcher secretly feels that others are inferior to him, he takes extra care to have good manners and act politely in society. His belief in his fate therefore limits his ability to connect with others and ensures that he's always putting on a false image in public. Eventually, Marcher *is* able to connect with May, since he told her his secret in Naples 10 years ago (an encounter he later forgot). However, because he believes that his fate is meant for him alone, he dismisses the possibility of marrying May, even though he enjoys her company and feels that she alone can understand him. Because Marcher doesn't want to involve a woman in his fate—both because a woman could get hurt and because his fate is meant to be a solitary adventure—Marcher avoids taking the logical next step in his relationship with May and marrying her, all because he believes that the "beast" is waiting in the wings.

Years later, after Marcher learns that May will soon die of a blood disorder, he worries that there's no great fate for her to witness after all—and that as a result, Marcher's life is a failure. Marcher would actually prefer an awful fate to no fate at all: he would be fine with going bankrupt or even being hanged, because at least these fates would mean that he didn't waste his life believing in a "beast" that doesn't exist. In fact, Marcher wants a fate that's proportional to the years he spent anticipating it—so a truly gruesome fate would seem fitting. For Marcher, a simple, quiet life without a huge catastrophe would be a failure. Worse, Marcher worries that if there is no "beast," May will have been waiting for his fate with him for no reason. May has devoted most of her time to discussing Marcher's fate and dealing with society's comments about her odd relationship with Marcher, since the two of them are unmarried and yet spend most of their time together. Marcher worries that their relationship won't have meant anything if there's no huge event for May to witness before her death. In other words, he worries that his life will be a failure both because there might not be a "beast" and because his and May's relationship (which centered around the "beast") may not have meant anything.

But at the end of the novella, Marcher realizes that waiting for his fate *was* his fate. If he failed in life, he failed not because there was no beast, but because he allowed the beast to prevent him from living his life to the fullest. Before May died, she told Marcher that she knew what his fate was and that his fate had already occurred. Later, Marcher realizes that she was referring to the fact that nothing had ever happened or would ever happen to him. He spent his whole life waiting for his "doom," but his doom ended up being the act of anticipation itself, since that anticipation kept him from connecting with others or doing anything memorable. Marcher's anticipation of his fate also prevented him from deepening his connection with May. When Marcher thought there was no beast, he worried that May never benefitted from their relationship. But after May dies, Marcher realizes that the reason she never benefitted is that he never chose to love her—he was too focused on himself. He also realizes that *she* loved *him* and tried to save him from his fate by hinting at her romantic feelings. The "beast" emerged when he failed to grasp her hints, which would have led to a loving relationship. Marcher spent his life anticipating a great fate and then worrying that he'd be a failure if there was no fate. In this way, Marcher's fixation on his fate ultimately *becomes* his fate. Marcher believed that having no fate would mean that he failed in life, but his only failure was his inability to live a happy, fulfilled life with May.

UNDERSTANDING AND CONNECTION

John Marcher believes that he's unique, as he's convinced that he's fated to experience a life-altering event. Because he assumes that no one can understand him, he hides his authentic self in public. However, he eventually learns that he revealed his secret long ago to a woman named May Bartram. Marcher continues to believe in his own uniqueness, but he also likes that May knows his secret; in fact, he sometimes wishes that everyone could. Then, at the end of the novella, Marcher encounters a grieving man and, through him, recognizes his own repressed emotions. The two of them understand each other, which means that Marcher's experience hasn't been unique. Marcher's desire to be understood, and the fact that he *was* understood (both by May and by the man), ironically proves that his life wasn't unique at all. In fact, many human experiences are universal—and yearning for connection with others, as Marcher does, is a natural part of life.

Before Marcher encounters May, he believes that no one can understand him. Because his fate is disturbing and potentially dangerous, he avoids sharing it with anyone, since knowing his fate would burden or endanger them. Marcher assumes that no one can understand his experience, so he keeps his feelings secret. Since Marcher is trying to avoid connecting with anyone, he has to avoid *appearing* as unique as he *feels*. He cultivates polite manners and wears a figurative "mask" in public, distancing himself from others by hiding his authentic self. Although Marcher thinks his life is unique, he has to hide any sign of uniqueness, which ensures that no one will get close enough to him to understand him.

But it turns out that Marcher *did* want at least one person to understand him. After a run-in with May Bartram at her great-aunt's estate, Marcher learns that 10 years earlier, he told May about his fate. Interestingly, Marcher has no memory of telling her and can't explain why he did so, let alone why he forgot. The fact that he repressed this memory suggests that his divulgence was an unplanned impulse, one he maybe regretted. However, Marcher ends up enjoying the fact that May knows about his fate, which suggests that he does *want* someone to understand him. Marcher is able to be himself around May, and when he's with her, he feels "spared" from his lonely burden. Still, Marcher continues to believe that his experience is so unique that it has to be hidden. Part of the reason he appreciates May is that even though she knows the truth, she sees him from an outsider's perspective and can evaluate how effective his "mask" is. Even better, she affirms Marcher's uniqueness by taking his fate seriously and waiting for it alongside him.

Later, readers learn that Marcher's impulse to tell May his secret may have revealed his innermost desire: even though he thinks outsiders can't understand him, he wishes that they *could*. As Marcher and May are guarding his secret, they still speak openly about Marcher's fate, assuming that no one can understand what they're saying. It's possible that Marcher believes his secret is best hidden in the open, but it's also possible that he subconsciously wishes someone would hear and understand his secret. Alternatively, he might speak openly to confirm his fear that no one *can* understand him, even if he wants them to. After May dies of a blood disorder, Marcher wishes that he could tell everyone the true nature of his friendship with May. Since he and May are unmarried, no one understands the depth of his grief. In fact, Marcher even considers telling everyone his secret. He ultimately doesn't, but his hesitation suggests that he wasn't content with having only May understand him—he wants to be understood by everyone, even though he doesn't think that's possible.

Eventually, Marcher learns that his experience was never unique—both because he wanted to be understood by and connect with others (the same as anyone else would) and because he *was* understood. After May dies, Marcher realizes that she understood him better than he understood himself. May knew that Marcher's fate was to die without experiencing love, and she also knew that he was capable of loving her, an emotion that he'd repressed. Not only did May understand Marcher, but she shared at least part of his experience, since she waited for his fate alongside him. This means that Marcher's experience wasn't unique, and that May understood Marcher even better than he understood himself. While Marcher is mourning at May's grave, he encounters another mourner. With a glance, the mourner shows his grief to Marcher, possibly because he recognizes Marcher's sorrow and wants to prove that his is deeper. The encounter proves both that Marcher's desire to be understood is universal—the man wants a witness to his grief—and that Marcher *can* be understood, even by a stranger. The man recognizes that Marcher is grieving and might even recognize that Marcher never fully loved the woman he grieves, which is why the man wants to prove *his* devotion. Marcher's experience isn't unique, even if his fate is; the mourner understands Marcher instantly, and both Marcher and the mourner clearly crave connection with others.

Marcher's desire for connection proves that he's just like everyone else. Wanting to connect with others is a common human experience—one that Marcher, May, and the mourner all share. Although Marcher's fate might be unique and unnatural, his trajectory throughout the novella is anything but: he believes that others can't understand him, he wants to be understood, and finally, he realizes that he *is* understood. Marcher believed strongly in his own uniqueness, but his innermost desires were standard, understandable, and even universal.

LOVE AND LOSS

John Marcher has spent his whole life believing that he's fated for something significant. His friend May Bartram suggests that this fate could be love—she believes love is exciting and world-altering, just as Marcher believes that his fate will be. But May is secretly in love with Marcher, and throughout the novella, her love is quiet and selfless rather than dramatic and life-altering. Marcher, on the other hand, refuses to deepen his relationship with May or commit to her through marriage, seemingly because he's afraid of either of them getting hurt. Eventually, it's revealed that Marcher's fate is to never experience real love or passion. With this ending, the novella suggests that love isn't defined by wild passion, as May initially professes—instead, love means being vulnerable enough to care for someone and accept that losing them is inevitable. Meanwhile, a fear of being vulnerable can prevent a person from experiencing love at all.

At first, Marcher and May have opposite ideas about love: May believes that love is meaningful enough to be Marcher's life-altering fate, while Marcher thinks that it's too mundane to be his fate. When Marcher tells May about his belief that he's fated for something great, May immediately assumes that his fate is love, because Marcher believes that his fate will change his life substantially. May thinks that love fits the bill, since it's a kind of "cataclysm." Marcher disagrees with May's assessment, since he believes that he's been in love before, and the experience was relatively dispassionate. It was fun and occasionally "miserable," but it wasn't earth-shattering, and it didn't change Marcher's life. Like May, Marcher believes he knows what love is, though his definition is the opposite of hers.

However, the way May expresses her love for Marcher implies that the two of them are wrong about what love is. The novella suggests that being in love means supporting the other person and being vulnerable with them—the way May loves Marcher—which isn't what either one of them initially believes love is. Though May claims love is passionate and earth-shattering, she expresses her love for Marcher with quiet sacrifice. After she meets him, May gives up her relationships with others in order to support Marcher as he waits for his fate. May and Marcher are unmarried and yet spend most of their time together, which leads people to gossip about May. Marcher can escape this scrutiny, presumably because he's judged less harshly as a man, but May can never appear "ordinary" due to the odd nature of their relationship. Because May is invested in Marcher's fate and because—as readers later learn—she loves Marcher, May quietly accepts her alienation and maintains their unconventional relationship. Later, May realizes what Marcher's mysterious fate is and keeps it a secret from Marcher himself, even though it means she can never be happy. As Marcher later discovers, May deduces that Marcher's fate is to live without ever having experienced anything meaningful, specifically love. She chooses not to tell him this because it would make him unhappy, even though not telling him also makes *her* unhappy, since she loves Marcher and wants him to love her back.

In the end, Marcher realizes that his own fear of loving selflessly and vulnerably is what fated him to miss out on experiencing love at all. Marcher's initial assumption that love is dull and dispassionate stems from his inability to allow himself to care for others—likely because he's afraid that he'll lose them. Before meeting May, Marcher never discussed his fate with others, and after he meets May, he never considers marrying her because that would mean bringing a woman into his (possibly violent) fate. Later, Marcher even wonders whether May's death *is* his fate. Marcher believes that his guardedness and self-imposed isolation is selfless, since no one has to be burdened with his fate. But his fixation on May's death suggests that the reason he avoids getting close to anyone—or loving them—is that he's afraid of losing the people he loves.

Near the novella's end, Marcher learns that May will soon die of a blood disorder, and he's deeply grieved. However, he's selfishly upset because May will die without knowing Marcher's fate and because he'll have to live without May; he's less concerned with May's suffering. But after May dies, Marcher realizes that May loved Marcher "for himself" without any selfishness, and that she made quiet sacrifices for his benefit. Marcher realizes that his fate—the fate that May hid from him—was to live a life without love in it. For Marcher, real love would have been neither earth-shattering nor dispassionate. Instead, it would have meant bearing the burden of knowing and loving May, as she did for him, even though he'd eventually lose her.

COURAGE VS. COWARDICE

John Marcher believes that a great—and possibly violent—fate awaits him, and he refers to this fate as the "**beast** in the jungle." Because Marcher accepts his mysterious fate and stoically awaits it, he doesn't know whether or not he's afraid of it—and later, his friend May Bartram helps Marcher see that even if he *is* afraid, he's able to live with that fear, which is a kind of "courage." But although Marcher doesn't know what his fate is, his belief in it is familiar to him, and living with that belief is a passive and easy process. Eventually, Marcher learns that his fate was not something he ever prepared for: he's doomed to never experience real passion or emotion. By demonstrating that Marcher's stoic, preparative "courage" served no purpose, the novella suggests that *real* courage means facing the unknown, including unknown feelings.

At first, both May and Marcher believe that Marcher is brave for stoically awaiting his fate, even though he might be afraid. Marcher initially doesn't know whether he's afraid of his fate or

not, although May often asks him if he is. Marcher can never answer her; after all, he doesn't know what his fate is, which means he doesn't know what he would be afraid *of*. If he can't "name it," he can't identify his feelings about it. It's possible that he's afraid, but he awaits his fate without complaint. Later, May guesses that even if Marcher *is* afraid, he's learned to live with "danger" for so long that he's become "indifferent" to it. In other words, Marcher can easily ignore any fears about his fate because he's learned to stifle them and is even used to them. Marcher wonders whether this makes him a "man of courage," and May agrees that it might. Both Marcher and May believe that Marcher is courageous for waiting out his fate—even though he doesn't know what that fate is, doesn't know whether or not he should be afraid of it, and has only succeeded in stifling his feelings about it.

In his later years, Marcher admits that he's afraid of not knowing his fate, since it might be "more monstrous" than he initially thought. While he has finally admitted his fear, he still thinks that this fear is something he can passively live with. In other words, imagining a "more monstrous" version of the fate he's already prepared for doesn't change how Marcher responds. Marcher is still anticipating and living with his fear, something he and May both consider courageous. However, because this fear is familiar to Marcher, Marcher can't be truly courageous, since his response to fear has been to passively accept it. Crucially, "the beast" is still an abstract hypothetical, and Marcher isn't actually *facing* anything. He has acclimated to his fate, but his courage hasn't been tested—both because he's comfortable with what he thinks his fate will be and because no actual beast has emerged.

Eventually, Marcher and May both prove themselves to be cowardly, as they're unable to act on the things that truly frighten them. Most notably, May never tells Marcher that she loves him. It's possible that May doesn't want to interfere unnecessarily in Marcher's fate, since she secretly deduces that Marcher is doomed to never experience true passion or love. However, she does hint at her own feelings a handful of times, which means that she *wants* Marcher to know that she loves him—she just isn't willing to tell him directly, likely because she's afraid. In this instance, courage wouldn't mean stifling or acclimating to fear, but rather acting in spite of it. And in this way, May's choice to stifle and hide her feelings is a kind of cowardice.

Similarly, Marcher never acts on any of his emotions or feelings because he's preparing to face his one big fear (the "beast"). This means that he never questions his own feelings toward May, possibly out of fear that he'll lose her—he worries that his fate could be violent, and because of this, he chooses not to bring a woman into his life. In the end, Marcher learns what May already knew: that his fate was actually to live a life without love. As such, he realizes that the only way to avoid that fate would have been to embark on a loving life with May.

In the end, Marcher's "courage" was cowardice, since he never conquered his real fears and instead spent his life preparing to face the familiar unknown (the "beast") rather than the truly frightening unknown (love and emotion). Real courage—both for May and Marcher—would have meant diving into a relationship despite their fears. Instead, Marcher and May stifle those fears, and though Marcher believes that doing so is courageous, the novella suggests that it's cowardice to avoid fear altogether.

SYMBOLS

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

THE BEAST

The Beast in the Jungle's protagonist, John Marcher, believes that he's destined for some rare and maybe terrible fate, which he refers to as a crouching "beast in the jungle." This "beast" represents Marcher's fate, though Marcher doesn't know what that fate will be. While the image of a beast suggests carnage and destruction, Marcher doesn't necessarily think his fate will be violent. The beast might not "spring" at Marcher with ill intent, but it *will* spring at some point. The fact that Marcher imagines his fate as something akin to a beast suggests that he believes that meeting his fate will be an unmissable event; if a beast attacks, one would be expected to notice it. Because he knows the beast stalks his every move, Marcher avoids getting close to anyone in order to keep his fate a secret and, likely, in order to avoid losing anyone to the beast. The only person who knows about his fate is his close friend May Bartram, with whom he shared his secret years ago.

As Marcher grows older, he worries that there is no "beast" at all, and that he's wasted his life anticipating some great fate. Notably, Marcher would rather his fate be violent and bloody than nothing at all—this would align neatly with his violent image of the beast. But after May dies, Marcher learns that she knew what the beast was and was trying to spare him from it. May loved Marcher and guessed that his fate was to live a life without passion or emotion—during a climactic conversation, she tried to hint at her feelings for Marcher, hoping that he'd reciprocate. Marcher realizes that the beast emerged when he failed to grasp her hints. In this way, the beast did represent Marcher's fate, but that fate was his anticipation itself, as he threw away his chance at happiness due to the imagined beast. After this realization, Marcher imagines the beast jumping out at him one final time, but in this instance, the image of the beast is ironic—there is no violent and bloody fate in store for Marcher and encountering the "beast" was a passive experience that he didn't even notice at the time.

MAY'S TOMB

After May Bartram dies, John Marcher frequently visits her tomb in a cemetery near London. Despite the fact that May's tomb contains *her* corpse and is marked with *her* name, it ends up representing Marcher's lost life with May. Strangely, Marcher claims to be attached to the tomb because it contains all that's left of his own life, not May's. Because May was the only person who knew Marcher's secret and understood Marcher, he feels that her tomb represents his past happiness and positive experiences. When he visits the tomb, he doesn't feel sad but rather "alive" again, able to bask in good memories.

While visiting May's tomb, Marcher learns that the terrible fate he's been awaiting his whole life was to live without experiencing anything, specifically love. He falls down onto the tomb in shock and horror, but true grief isn't a possibility for him, because he's spent so long repressing his emotions. The tomb represents the life he could have had with May and chose to forgo—Marcher will never feel "alive" again, because his last chance at any real experience or emotion rests in the tomb alongside May.

With this ending, Marcher's self-centered view of the tomb makes sense. Marcher's egotism and belief in his own uniqueness kept him from deepening his bond with May, and his egotism is what led him to believe that May's tomb represented his own past life. In reality, it represents the life he and May could have had together, had his belief in his fate not gotten in the way.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Dover Thrift Editions edition of *The Beast in the Jungle and Other Stories* published in 1993.

Chapter 1 Quotes

There came in fact a moment when Marcher felt a positive pang. It was vain to pretend she was an old friend, for all the communities were wanting, in spite of which it was as an old friend that he saw she would have suited him. He had new ones enough—was surrounded with them for instance on the stage of the other house; as a new one he probably wouldn't have so much as noticed her. He would have liked to invent something, get her to make-believe with him that some passage of a romantic or critical kind *had* originally occurred. He was really almost reaching out in imagination—as against time—for something that would do, and saying to himself that if it didn't come this sketch of a fresh start would show for quite awkwardly bungled. They would separate, and now for no second or no third chance. They would have tried and not succeeded.

Related Characters: May Bartram, John Marcher

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 36-37

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs during Marcher's conversation with May after their luncheon at Weatherend, May's great-aunt's estate. Marcher and May have just reencountered each other after first meeting 10 years ago in Naples, and Marcher is frustrated by the fact that they don't have much to say to each other now, since they didn't have any exciting or romantic adventures in Naples that they can reminisce about.

This passage demonstrates how isolated Marcher is and how much he wants both to connect with others and to *have* connected with them at some previous moment. Marcher wants to "invent" a shared history with May—possibly a "romantic" one—not only because he wants to have something to discuss with May in the present, but because he wants someone to have known him in some significant way in the past. Readers later learn that although Marcher has friends (like the friends he mentions here), he maintains a careful distance from those friends and avoids getting close to anyone due to his belief that he's destined for a rare and maybe terrible fate. Marcher doesn't want to burden anyone with knowledge of his fate, so his isolation is by choice, but he's clearly lonely. He doesn't just want a "new friend" who would know him only on the surface, but an "old friend" who would presumably understand him on a deeper level. His mention that he wouldn't have noticed May had she been one of his new friends could be a reference to

May's lower social status, but it's also likely that Marcher doesn't really notice *any* of his new friends, since he's consciously keeping himself separate from them.

Eventually, Marcher finds out that May *is* an old friend of sorts, one who did share a "critical" encounter with him, since he apparently told her his secret in Naples and later forgot he did so. This fact suggests that Marcher's loneliness in this passage and his desire to share meaningful "communities" with others is a longstanding one and is the reason he told May his secret all those years ago.

Finally, Marcher's desperation to make something of his encounter with May is interesting, as he frames the possibility of losing their connection as a kind of failure, or a lack of "success." Later in the novella, Marcher will worry that he has no fate at all and that he has failed, and at the end of the novella, he'll learn that his fate was to live a life without love or passion, which is the ultimate failure. Marcher's fixation on failure begins here, but he fundamentally misunderstands what it means to fail, since in this passage, he's willing to lie and invent a shared connection rather than genuinely forge one.

❝ "Well, say to wait for—to have to meet, to face, to see suddenly break out in my life; possibly destroying all further consciousness, possibly annihilating me; possibly, on the other hand, only altering everything, striking at the root of all my world and leaving me to the consequences, however they shape themselves."

She took this in, but the light in her eyes continued for him not to be that of mockery. "Isn't what you describe perhaps but the expectation—or at any rate the sense of danger, familiar to so many people—of falling in love?"

[…]

"The only thing is," he went on, "that I think if it had been that I should by this time know."

"Do you mean because you've *been* in love?" And then as he but looked at her in silence: "You've been in love, and it hasn't meant such a cataclysm, hasn't proved the great affair?"

"Here I am, you see. It hasn't been overwhelming."

"Then it hasn't been love," said May Bartram.

Related Characters: May Bartram, John Marcher (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 39-40

Explanation and Analysis

This quotation is a conversation between Marcher and May after Marcher learns that he told May about his fate 10 years ago. Marcher is describing his idea about his fate to May, because although he doesn't know what his fate will be, he has a general sense of the havoc it will wreak on his life.

This passage sets up Marcher and May's opposing ideas about what love is. Marcher believes that he's been in love before and, because the sensation wasn't as "overwhelming" as he believes his fate will be, then love can't be his ultimate fate. On the other hand, May thinks that love fits in with the fate Marcher describes, which will "annihilate" him and act as a kind of "cataclysm." She believes that if Marcher's love affair wasn't overwhelming or life-shattering, then it wasn't love at all.

Readers will later learn that both Marcher and May are wrong. In this passage, May views love as a passionate, wild affair. But she eventually falls in love with Marcher and keeps her feelings secret from him, quietly giving up her relationships with others in order to spend time with him. May's love for Marcher isn't "cataclysmic" at all, and instead it takes the form of silent sacrifice. Meanwhile, Marcher eventually discovers that his fate was to live without experiencing any real passion, including love. The only way he could have escaped this fate would have been to love May selflessly and vulnerably, the way that she loved him. In other words, Marcher was wrong to believe that love is dull and dispassionate, and May was wrong to believe that it's always wild and earth-shattering.

May was also wrong that love was Marcher's ultimate fate—in fact, his real fate was exactly the opposite. In the end, Marcher's realization that he was never able to love is the thing that "annihilat[es]" him.

Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ The real form it should have taken on the basis that stood out large was the form of their marrying. But the devil in this was that the very basis itself put marrying out of the question. His conviction, his apprehension, his obsession, in short, wasn't a privilege he could invite a woman to share; and that consequence of it was precisely what was the matter with him. Something or other lay in wait for him, amid the twists and the turns of the months and the years, like a crouching Beast in the Jungle. It signified little whether the crouching Beast were destined to slay him or to be slain. The definite point was the inevitable spring of the creature; and the definite lesson from that was that a man of feeling didn't cause himself to be accompanied by a lady on a tiger-hunt.

Related Characters: May Bartram, John Marcher

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 43-44

Explanation and Analysis

This passage takes place as Marcher and May's friendship progresses. They have an odd relationship, since they spend most of their time together while May waits for Marcher's fate alongside him. Marrying May would normalize their relationship in society's eyes and allow May to spend time with Marcher without anyone gossiping about her, but in this passage, Marcher discusses why he can't marry May.

Marcher's refusal to marry May is a seemingly selfish one, since he knows that he *should* marry her—he's asking her to devote her life to his fate, but he won't repay her by legitimizing their relationship. And yet Marcher frames his refusal selflessly, claiming that as a "man of feeling," he can't burden a woman with his "obsession" and "apprehension." Though he calls his fate a "privilege," its consequences could be deadly, and even if Marcher wants to marry May, he can't in good conscience do so.

However, Marcher's real reason for refusal might not be entirely selfless. This passage introduces the symbol of the beast, which represents Marcher's fate in his mind. He doesn't know what his fate is, so he imagines it as a violent creature that could attack at any moment. His fixation on this potential violence suggests that Marcher fears losing May to the beast if he and May married, as this loss would emotionally impact him (the "man of feeling"). Crucially, he would only be emotionally impacted by the beast's attack if his and May's relationship turned romantic—after all, May is already deeply involved in Marcher's life now, but Marcher doesn't seem to fear for her safety as his friend. He would fear for her safety if they were emotionally intimate as husband and wife, which suggests that he's selfishly afraid of getting too close to her and subsequently losing her.

Notably, Marcher doesn't even seem to consider love as a reason for marrying or not marrying May. If they married, it would serve a practical purpose (legitimizing their relationship), and Marcher's inability to marry May has nothing to do with how he feels about her. Later on in the novel, readers learn that May always loved Marcher and that Marcher's "beast" was to never experience real love. Ironically, Marcher's decision to forgo loving May in favor of waiting for the beast (which he subconsciously decides to do in this passage) ends up *being* the beast.

> Above all she was in the secret of the difference between the forms he went through—those of his little office under Government, those of caring for his modest patrimony, for his library, for his garden in the country, for the people in London whose invitations he accepted and repaid—and the detachment that reigned beneath them and that made of all behaviour, all that could in the least be called behaviour, a long act of dissimulation. What it had come to was that he wore a mask painted with the social simper, out of the eye-holes of which there looked eyes of an expression not in the least matching the other features. This the stupid world, even after years, had never more than half discovered. It was only May Bartram who had, and she achieved, by an art indescribable, the feat of at once—or perhaps it was only alternately—meeting the eyes from in front and mingling her own vision, as from over his shoulder, with their peep through the apertures.

Related Characters: May Bartram, John Marcher

Related Themes:

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

This passage takes place as May and Marcher's relationship progresses. It suggests that May, who knows Marcher's secret, is the only person who truly understands Marcher, since his public persona is an act.

Marcher has chosen to isolate himself, since he believes that no one could understand his experience. Because he believes he's destined for a rare fate, he's always hiding his authentic self—apparently, even while doing pretty mundane tasks like caring for his garden. However, this passage suggests that his self-imposed isolation might frustrate him. Despite the fact that his "detachment" is carefully cultivated and his "mask" honed to perfection, Marcher seems to wish that others could see through him the way that May does. His derision for those around him proves this, as he refers to his peers as "stupid" and suggests that they had "years" to discover his secret.

Again, Marcher has hidden his secret carefully, but it seems that he wants someone to understand him, even though he's given them no way to do so. Marcher might not realize that he wants to be understood, but he doesn't necessarily enjoy his separation from those around him. The fact that he believes he's better than those around him (again suggested by his use of the word "stupid") might just be a way to cope with this separation.

Notably, May isn't just someone who understands Marcher from an outsider's perspective. In this passage, she views

him from both the outside *and* the inside, watching him from afar and experiencing life with her eyes "peep[ing]" out from behind his own mask—possibly at the same time. In other words, she's both part of the public that observes him and part of his private life experiences. This is an extreme emotional intimacy, and the fact that Marcher seems to enjoy it again suggests that he wants to be understood on a deep level, despite his claims to the contrary. It also proves that his experiences aren't as unique as he thinks they are, since May is a part of his inner life.

❝ Oh he understood what she meant! "For the thing to happen that never does happen? For the Beast to jump out? No, I'm just where I was about it. It isn't a matter as to which I can *choose*, I can decide for a change. It isn't one as to which there *can* be a change. It's in the lap of the gods. One's in the hands of one's law—there one is. As to the form the law will take, the way it will operate, that's its own affair."

Related Characters: John Marcher (speaker), May Bartram

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

This quotation, spoken by Marcher, takes place during a conversation between Marcher and May on May's birthday. May wonders whether Marcher is frustrated by his fate, and Marcher responds indifferently, saying that his fate is out of his hands.

Throughout the novella, Marcher describes his fate as burdensome and even upsetting. Marcher's casual tone in this passage reveals that he doesn't only think of his fate as a burden—in fact, anticipating his fate seems to be a relief. If Marcher's fate is entirely out of his hands—if he can't "decide" anything, and if the "gods" will decide everything for him—then Marcher bears no responsibility for his own life. All he can do is anticipate his fate. He can't even *consider* "chang[ing]" it, and he has no control over the "law" that will dictate his future.

Marcher's laissez-faire attitude seems to be a bit of a cop-out, and indeed, readers later learn that his anticipation of his fate *was* his fate. In other words, Marcher spent so long waiting for his fate to happen that he didn't allow himself to experience anything else, and this lack of experience is the "beast" that "jump[s] out" at him. If Marcher had spent any time trying to change his fate, or at least trying to figure out its "form," he might never have encountered the beast at all.

It's likely that Marcher was afraid to take responsibility for his own life, which would have put him in a vulnerable position. Claiming that his future was out of his hands allowed him to avoid making difficult decisions, but in a way, Marcher's decision was *not* to decide anything, and this choice has grave consequences.

❝ "What I see, as I make it out, is that you've achieved something almost unprecedented in the way of getting used to danger. Living with it so long and so closely you've lost your sense of it; you know it's there, but you're indifferent, and you cease even, as of old, to have to whistle in the dark. Considering what the danger is," May Bartram wound up, "I'm bound to say I don't think your attitude could well be surpassed."

John Marcher faintly smiled. "It's heroic?"

"Certainly—call it that."

It was what he would have liked indeed to call it. "I *am* then a man of courage?"

"That's what you were to show me."

He still, however, wondered. "But doesn't the man of courage know what he's afraid of—or not afraid of? I don't know *that*, you see. I don't focus it. I can't name it. I only know I'm exposed."

"Yes, but exposed—how shall I say?—so directly. So intimately. That's surely enough."

Related Characters: John Marcher, May Bartram (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 48-49

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is a conversation between Marcher and May in May's home. May has asked Marcher whether he's now afraid of his impending fate (something she's asked him before) and he claims that he's not, although he's somewhat unsure about whether or not he's afraid.

This passage sets up May and Marcher's definition of "courage." On the surface, May seems to think that it's brave to acclimate to potential danger. Even if Marcher doesn't know what his fate is or what he's "afraid [...] or not afraid of," he's apparently brave for just feeling constantly that he's in danger and growing used to that feeling. He's so brave that it doesn't feel like bravery, because the danger is a

constant fixture in his life. In fact, he doesn't even have to "whistle in the dark," or pretend the danger isn't there, since he's so used to the presence of his upcoming doom.

That said, Marcher might be misinterpreting what May is saying. Marcher takes May's points to mean that he's "heroic" and a "man of courage" for getting used to his fate, but May responds tepidly, saying that Marcher can "call" his behavior heroism and that he's the one trying to tell her about his courage, not the other way around. In other words, she might not necessarily refer to Marcher's behavior as bravery or courage—he's the one assigning those labels to it.

Later in the novella, readers learn that May spent her whole life loving Marcher and that Marcher's fate is to live a life without love in it. His "indifferent" courage ends up being pointless and even cowardly, since it prevented him from taking a genuinely courageous risk by loving May. At this point in the novella, May already has her suspicions about Marcher's fate. It's entirely possible that she knows that Marcher's brand of courage is actually cowardice, since he's avoiding feeling anything. In this case, her comment that Marcher's "attitude" can't be "surpassed" by anyone could be read as a negative one—she might be implying that Marcher's feelings are uniquely repressed, which is exactly what he later discovers.

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ When the day came, as come it had to, that his friend confessed to him her fear of a deep disorder in her blood, he felt somehow the shadow of a change and the chill of a shock. He immediately began to imagine aggravations and disasters, and above all to think of her peril as the direct menace for himself of personal privation. This indeed gave him one of those partial recoveries of equanimity that were agreeable to him—it showed him that what was still first in his mind was the loss she herself might suffer. "What if she should have to die before knowing, before seeing—?"

Related Characters: May Bartram, John Marcher

Related Themes:

Page Number: 52

Explanation and Analysis

This passage takes place after May reveals to Marcher that she'll soon die. The two of them are old now, and Marcher has noticed that May seems to be ill—this passage confirms his observation. Marcher immediately worries that May will die without seeing his fate happen, which he believes would be an enormous blow to her, since she's been waiting for his fate for years.

Above all else, this passage demonstrates Marcher's deep selfishness and inability to truly empathize or connect with others—even with someone like May, whom he cares about. However, Marcher doesn't seem to believe that he's selfish. Even though his immediate reaction to her news is selfish fear—he imagines that *he* has deprived May by forcing her to wait for his fate with him, and that her illness is the "menace," or consequence, of that deprivation—he believes that because he's worried about May missing out on seeing his fate, he's actually selfless. But he's not concerned with May's suffering or with May's feelings. Instead, he's concerned that he might have to feel guilty for wasting May's time, which is undeniably self-centered.

The average person's reaction to hearing that someone they care about is dying is likely grief. Throughout the novella, Marcher has avoided getting too close with anyone, including May, likely out of a fear that he'll lose them. Even though his reaction in this passage is selfish, it demonstrates that he's succeeded in distancing himself from others, since he doesn't immediately appear grieved. Later in the novella, Marcher will learn that his fate was to live without experiencing passion or love, which would require him to act selflessly and to be vulnerable with someone else. This passage hints at that fate, since Marcher seems unable to selflessly consider what May's death means, or even to emotionally react to it.

❝ When the possibilities themselves had accordingly turned stale, when the secret of the gods had grown faint, had perhaps even quite evaporated, that, and that only, was failure. It wouldn't have been failure to be bankrupt, dishonoured, pilloried, hanged; it was failure not to be anything. And so, in the dark valley into which his path had taken its unlooked-for twist, he wondered not a little as he groped. He didn't care what awful crash might overtake him, with what ignominy or what monstrosity he might yet be associated—since he wasn't after all too utterly old to suffer—if it would only be decently proportionate to the posture he had kept, all his life, in the threatened presence of it. He had but one desire left—that he shouldn't have been "sold."

Related Characters: John Marcher

Related Themes:

Page Number: 54

Explanation and Analysis

This passage takes place after Marcher learns that May will soon die of a blood disorder. At first, he's concerned that May's death will be his ultimate fate. However, he then becomes suspicious that his fate isn't coming at all, and that maybe he's spent all this time waiting for nothing.

Because Marcher has constructed his life around his impending fate, avoiding relationships with others because he's always expecting something major to happen, the greatest "failure" would be for nothing to happen at all (and for Marcher to look like a fool as a result). Marcher has stated many times throughout the novella that his fate isn't necessarily going to be violent or even bad, but in this passage, it seems that he *is* expecting a violent or at least gruesome fate, because only this would be "proportionate" to all the time he's spent waiting for his fate. That means that a "crash" or personal tragedy—like bankruptcy or execution—would seem fitting to Marcher, and his "suffer[ing]" would make sense to him.

Interestingly, this idea of "proportion" establishes Marcher's waiting period as its own kind of suffering, since he wants his fate to make him "suffer" in order to justify his anticipation. Marcher has previously described his fate as upsetting, but generally, he seems to find it thrilling and seems to enjoy debating with May about what it might be. Now, he's more honest about the negative impact his fate has had on him, describing it as a "threatened presence."

This framing of anticipation as suffering foreshadows Marcher's actual fate, as readers later learn that Marcher is doomed to live without experiencing anything. He spent all his time anticipating his fate, so that anticipation became his fate, since that he left no space in his life for any other experience. In this passage, Marcher doesn't know his fate yet, and he's wrong that no fate is coming. But he seems to subconsciously sense that the ultimate "suffer[ing]" isn't a lack of any fate but the time spent waiting for his fate.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ "You admitted it months ago, when I spoke of it to you as of something you were afraid I should find out. Your answer was that I couldn't, that I wouldn't, and I don't pretend I have. But you had something therefore in mind, and I see now how it must have been, how it still is, the possibility that, of all possibilities, has settled itself for you as the worst. This," he went on, "is why I appeal to you. I'm only afraid of ignorance to-day—I'm not afraid of knowledge."

Related Characters: John Marcher (speaker), May Bartram

Related Themes:

Page Number: 56-57

Explanation and Analysis

This passage takes place during Marcher's encounter with May at her house in London. Marcher accuses May of knowing what his fate is, and he believes that whatever it is, it must be the worst fate imaginable, which is why she's keeping it from him.

Marcher and May have previously spoken about Marcher's fear or lack thereof. May has asked Marcher many times whether or not he's afraid of his fate, and he typically denies it. Once, she told him that he's learned to live with his fate and his fear, which is a kind of bravery. Here, Marcher claims that he *is* afraid, but only of not knowing his fate. He seems to suggest that if he knew his fate, he wouldn't be afraid anymore, even though his fate is presumably the worst one May can think of.

To Marcher, "courage" means acclimating to fear, so it makes sense that he feels he needs to know his fate—if he knows his fate or at least how bad that fate will be, he can grow used to the idea, which he's done before. At the same time, Marcher's acclimation to his fear is hardly bravery, since all he's doing is growing comfortable with the idea of his fate and stifling his fear. He never actually has to *face* any real fear, and as readers later learn, his actual fate is to never experience anything, including love. His insistence that he's not afraid of knowing his fate is therefore pointless, and it only demonstrates that he represses the real sources of his fear—for instance, he's afraid of connecting with others, because he might lose them to his fate.

[…] they continued for some minutes silent, her face shining at him, her contact imponderably pressing, and his stare all kind but all expectant. The end, none the less, was that what he had expected failed to come to him. Something else took place instead, which seemed to consist at first in the mere closing of her eyes. She gave way at the same instant to a slow fine shudder, and though he remained staring—though he stared in fact but the harder—turned off and regained her chair. It was the end of what she had been intending, but it left him thinking only of that.

"Well, you don't say—?"

She had touched in her passage a bell near the chimney and had sunk back strangely pale. "I'm afraid I'm too ill."

[…]

"What then has happened?"

She was once more, with her companion's help, on her feet, and, feeling withdrawal imposed on him, he had blankly found his hat and gloves and had reached the door. Yet he waited for her answer. "What *was* to," she said.

Related Characters: May Bartram, John Marcher (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 59-60

Explanation and Analysis

This passage takes place during Marcher's second-to-last encounter with May at her London home. May is close to death, and Marcher has accused her of knowing his fate and keeping that fate a secret from him. He's mainly worried that his fate isn't coming at all, but she reassures him that it is, and then she walks up to him and stands before him. When he fails to say or do anything, she tells him that she's feeling ill and calls for her maid, and he remains confused about what just happened.

Marcher and May are having two entirely different experiences in this passage, and they both seem to think that the other person is in control of their encounter. Marcher is expecting May to tell him what his fate is, or to indicate that fate in some tangible way. He asks her whether or not she's going to "say" what his fate is, then seems confused by her change in mood. On the other hand, May seems to expect something from Marcher. He doesn't say anything as they look at one another, but she seems to sense something that makes her "clos[e] […] her eyes" and turn away from him. Clearly, she wanted something out of the encounter that she didn't get, and although Marcher seems to think that she "intend[ed]" to pull away from him, it seems more likely that she realized the encounter *wasn't* going the way she intended at all.

The meaning of May's final words to Marcher is clear only in retrospect. Readers later learn that Marcher's fate—which May apparently pieced together—was to live a life without any passion or love in it. That means that during their silent encounter, May was hoping Marcher would realize either his fate or that he loved May and act on that love, which would spare him from his fate. This is the thing that "*was* to" happen and didn't, and May's sadness (emphasized by her paleness and sudden illness) makes sense only in this context.

Marcher's passivity in this passage is in line with his character, as he has stated before that he's always waiting for his fate to happen and believes his fate is entirely out of his hands. Here, May seems to suggest that this doesn't have to be the case. Marcher believes he has no choices in life because of his fate, but in this passage, he actively chooses passivity as he waits for May to tell him what his fate is, not realizing that he can learn his fate only by acting in opposition to it (by kissing, embracing, or opening up to May in some way).

Chapter 5 Quotes

What could the thing that was to happen to him be, after all, but just this thing that had began to happen? Her dying, her death, his consequent solitude—that was what he had figured as the Beast in the Jungle, that was what had been in the lap of the gods. He had had her word for it as he left her—what else on earth could she have meant? It wasn't a thing of a monstrous order; not a fate rare and distinguished; not a stroke of fortune that overwhelmed and immortalised; it had only the stamp of the common doom. But poor Marcher at this hour judged the common doom sufficient. It would serve his turn, and even as the consummation of infinite waiting he would bend his pride to accept it. […] He had lived by her aid, and to leave her behind would be cruelly, damnably to miss her. What could be more overwhelming than that?

Related Characters: May Bartram, John Marcher

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 60-61

Explanation and Analysis

This passage takes place after Marcher's second-to-last

encounter with May. May, who will soon die of a blood disorder, has just told Marcher that whatever his fate is, he won't suffer because of it. But Marcher thinks that she's lying to spare his feelings. He's suspected before that May's death will be his ultimate fate, and while this would be an anticlimactic ending to his saga, he now thinks that it's the only thing that makes sense.

Throughout the novella, Marcher has isolated himself from other people because he believed that his fate was different from everyone else's. He's now disappointed by the thought that May's death is his fate, because the death of a loved one is something that happens to everyone; that's what makes it a "common doom." But Marcher has been afraid that no fate is coming for him at all, hence why he's willing to accept a "common doom" despite his "pride." That said, Marcher still distances himself from his grief even as he acknowledges that this grief would be "overwhelming." He's upset not only because he'll lose May but because he'll have to live in "solitude" after she dies, since she's spent her whole life "aid[ing]" him. Even though he comes close to acknowledging his deep affection for May, his selfishness still wins out, as he thinks primarily about how her absence will negatively affect him rather than about what her presence means to him now.

Marcher's use of the word "overwhelming" is significant. Earlier in the novel, May wondered whether Marcher's fate might be to fall in love. Marcher claimed that he'd been in love before, and because it wasn't "overwhelming," it couldn't be his fate. May argued in turn that if his love affair wasn't "overwhelming," it wasn't love at all. Now, Marcher's assertion that missing May would be "overwhelming" hints at his repressed love for her.

Later in the novella, Marcher realizes that his fate is to live without really loving anyone, which suggests just how effective this repression was—even though he thought losing May would be "overwhelming," he was never able to act on or even acknowledge the love he might have felt, so he'll never experience a really "overwhelming" love.

> "It *has* touched you," she went on. "It has done its office. It has made you all its own."

"So utterly without my knowing it?"

"So utterly without your knowing it." His hand, as he leaned to her, was on the arm of her chair, and, dimly smiling always now, she placed her own on it. "It's enough if *I* know it."

"Oh!" he confusedly breathed, as she herself of late so often had done.

"What I long ago said is true. You'll never know now, and I think you ought to be content. You've *had* it," said May Bartram.

"But had what?"

"Why what was to have marked you out. The proof of your law. It has acted. I'm too glad," she then bravely added, "to have been able to see what it's *not*."

Related Characters: John Marcher, May Bartram (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 61-62

Explanation and Analysis

This conversation between May and Marcher is their final encounter prior to May's death. In their previous encounter, May told Marcher that his fate was still to come. In this encounter, she tells him that his fate has already happened, and that he'll never know what it was.

Earlier in the novella, May told Marcher that his fate could be falling in love, since love is earth-shattering and passionate. But as readers later learn, May spent years loving Marcher and never shared her feelings with him. Instead, she expressed her love through quiet sacrifice, which she hints at in this passage. May now knows that Marcher's fate is to live a life without love or passion in it, and she keeps that knowledge from him, telling him that because "[she] know[s]" his fate, he doesn't have to know. There's no real reason that Marcher should "never know" his fate, except that May has decided to keep his fate a secret to spare him from pain, and she has done so out of love for him.

May's assertion that she's happy to know what Marcher's fate *isn't* is ambiguous, but in this context, it seems to refer to the fact that she now knows that Marcher's fate has nothing to do with reciprocating her love (which she might have previously thought, since she once assumed Marcher's fate was to fall in love). This would certainly be a "brave" thing to come to terms with, since May is sacrificing her own chance at happiness in order to spare Marcher from knowing his fate.

Of course, May's unwillingness to tell Marcher what his fate was is also a kind of cowardice, since telling him would mean opening up to him about her own feelings. Throughout the novella, Marcher and May have gone back and forth about what it means to be brave, and though May's sacrifice is denoted as bravery here, she's not facing her real fears.

> There were moments as the weeks went by when he would have liked, by some almost aggressive act, to take his stand on the intimacy of his loss, in order that it might be questioned and his retort, to the relief of his spirit, so recorded; but the moments of an irritation more helpless followed fast on these, the moments during which, turning things over with a good conscience but with a bare horizon, he found himself wondering if he oughtn't to have begun, so to speak, further back.
>
> [...]
>
> He couldn't have made known she was watching him, for that would have published the superstition of the Beast. This was what closed his mouth now—now that the Jungle had been thrashed to vacancy and that the Beast had stolen away. It sounded too foolish and too flat.

Related Characters: May Bartram, John Marcher

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 64-65

Explanation and Analysis

This passage takes place after May's death. As May's health worsened, her relatives began to show up, hoping that she'd leave them money, and after her death, Marcher is angry that these random relatives have more of a claim to May than he does (since he and May were unmarried). He attends May's funeral and is distressed that he's treated as just another mourner, when he knew May better than anyone.

Marcher is facing the consequences of his own actions here. He refused to consider marrying May because he didn't want to risk losing anyone to the "beast." Now, he's lost May anyway, and he can't speak openly about that loss because no one understands what they were to each other.

Since Marcher's refusal to marry May was closely tied to his fear of the beast, his desire to "take his stand on the intimacy of his loss" is also a desire to share the secret about the beast openly, which would allow him to connect with others around him. This is an idea he then explicitly toys with and seems to seriously consider, since the beast is supposedly gone, which makes secrecy unnecessary. Previously, he never told anyone about how intimate his friendship with May was. Now, even though he wants to share that intimacy (and by extension his secret), he doesn't do so because the story would sound "foolish" to an outsider. In other words, Marcher wants to be understood by others the way he was understood by May, but he still feels like he *can't* be understood. This feels like an oversight: after all, *May* understood Marcher, which suggests that his feelings and experience might be comprehensible to others after all.

Marcher's worry that he should have "begun [...] further back" is somewhat ambiguous. He seems to mean that he should have publicly shared his relationship with May prior to now; his "irritation" seems to stem from the fact that anything he says or does has come too late, since May is dead. This foreshadows Marcher's ultimate fate, which is to live without experiencing anything, including love. It will always be too late for Marcher to say or do anything, which he seems to sense here.

Chapter 6 Quotes

> That had become for him, and more intensely with time and distance, his one witness of a past glory.
>
> [...]
>
> What it all amounted to, oddly enough, was that in his finally so simplified world this garden of death gave him the few square feet of earth on which he could still most live. It was as if, being nothing anywhere else for any one, nothing even for himself, he were just everything here, and if not for a crowd of witnesses or indeed for any witness but John Marcher, then by clear right of the register that he could scan like an open page. The open page was the tomb of his friend, and there were the facts of the past, there the truth of his life, there the backward reaches in which he could lose himself.

Related Characters: May Bartram, John Marcher

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 67-68

Explanation and Analysis

This passage takes place after May's death and after

Marcher travels to Asia. When he returns, he becomes fixated on May's tomb and visits it often, as he thinks it's the last reminder of his life prior to May's death and prior to his fate, which apparently happened without his knowledge.

Marcher clearly misses May, but although he acknowledges that her tomb is "the tomb of [a] friend," he seems to view the tomb as a representation of his own life. It's where his "past glory" lives, and while the tomb is presumably marked with May's name, the "truth of his life" is the thing that rests there (according to Marcher). This strangely self-centered view of May's tomb fits in with Marcher's selfishness throughout the novella, as he always has trouble seeing May as an individual with a life outside of his own.

But interestingly, Marcher seems to have no life of *his* own without May. He is "nothing" alone and wants to "lose himself" in her tomb, and it's only by remembering May that he can remember his past happiness and feel alive again. In Marcher's mind, May's death was a kind of death for him as well, since she was the only person who knew his secret. Around anyone else—including the "crowd of witnesses" he imagines here—he's an entirely different person. Marcher always wanted to avoid connecting with other people, but this passage suggests that he was only happy when he connected with May. Even if he supposedly wanted to avoid connection, that's not what he subconsciously needed, which is why he's unhappy now. Meanwhile, the fact that he can only feel like himself when he's around May demonstrates that his experiences weren't as unique as he feels that they were.

Later, readers learn that Marcher's fate was to live a life without love in it. May's tomb takes on a different meaning in this context and comes to represent the life Marcher could have had with May. Ironically, Marcher's selfishness is the thing that kept him from having that happy life, since he believed he was unique and thus wanted to avoid deepening his connection with May. Now, May's tomb physically separates Marcher from both her and the life they might have had together. In the end, the novella suggests that *this* tragedy is the "truth of [Marcher's] life," rather than whatever Marcher imagines in this passage.

> This brought him close, and his pace, was slow, so that—and all the more as there was a kind of hunger in his look—the two men were for a minute directly confronted. Marcher knew him at once for one of the deeply stricken—a perception so sharp that nothing else in the picture comparatively lived, neither his dress, his age, nor his presumable character and class; nothing lived but the deep ravage of the features that he showed. He *showed* them—that was the point; he was moved, as he passed, by some impulse that was either a signal for sympathy or, more possibly, a challenge to an opposed sorrow. He might already have been aware of our friend, might at some previous hour have noticed in him the smooth habit of the scene, with which the state of his own senses so scantly consorted, and might thereby have been stirred as by an overt discord. [...] What had the man *had*, to make him by the loss of it so bleed and yet live?

Related Characters: May Bartram, The Mourner, John Marcher

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 69

Explanation and Analysis

This passage takes place about a year after May's death. Marcher frequently visits her tomb at the cemetery, and one day, he encounters another mourner there, a man visiting a different grave. The man heads toward the exit, and as he does so, he passes directly by Marcher.

Throughout the novella, Marcher has avoided connecting with others because he assumed that no one could understand his experiences. The encounter between Marcher and the mourner is a split-second one, but they immediately connect with and understand one another. Right away, Marcher understands that the mourner is "deeply stricken." Marcher *should* notice the surface-level details about the man—like his age and clothes and class—but instead, he understands the man on a far deeper level and is so struck by his grief that he doesn't notice anything else.

Meanwhile, the mourner seems to understand that Marcher never fully allowed himself to love May, which is why he wants to "challenge" Marcher's grief now by proving that his own is deeper. This encounter firmly disproves Marcher's belief that he can't be understood. This man doesn't know Marcher, yet he immediately senses Marcher's repression, even if he doesn't know the cause of it, which is why he's "stirred" to demonstrate his own raw grief.

Marcher is perplexed by the man's grief, as he wonders what the man could have "had" that makes him so upset now and yet willing to keep on living. Directly after this encounter, Marcher will realize that his fate was to never experience anything, especially love. The man therefore represents the life Marcher could have had if he'd allowed himself to feel something for May. Marcher would then grieve the way the man does, because he would have "had" a real experience worth mourning.

> The escape would have been to love her; then, *then* he would have lived.
>
> [...]
>
> The Beast had lurked indeed, and the Beast, at its hour, had sprung; it had sprung in that twilight of the cold April when, pale, ill, wasted, but all beautiful, and perhaps even then recoverable, she had risen from her chair to stand before him and let him imaginably guess. It had sprung as he didn't guess; it had sprung as she hopelessly turned from him, and the mark, by the time he left her, had fallen where it *was* to fall.

Related Characters: May Bartram, John Marcher

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 70-71

Explanation and Analysis

This passage takes place after Marcher's encounter with the other mourner at the cemetery. Marcher realizes that his fate is to live without experiencing anything, including love. Because of this, the anticipation of his fate ends up being his fate, since he never made room in his life for any other experience. Marcher also realizes that when May walked up to him and just stared at him, she was actually waiting for him to guess his fate and act in opposition to it, presumably by reciprocating *her* love for *him*.

Marcher always imagined the beast as a violent creature, and he always imagined that his final encounter with the beast would be an active one, where the beast would either slay him or he'd slay the beast (figuratively speaking). Now, he realizes that his fate was his own passivity. The beast did attack him, but their encounter was one-sided, since Marcher didn't even know his fate was happening as it happened. Marcher suggests that May was "recoverable" at the time—in other words, she might have lived if Marcher had reciprocated her feelings. When he failed to do so, her death was a sure thing, and because loving her was his one shot at having a genuine experience, his fate was also sealed. Marcher always believed he didn't have a choice in his fate, but this passage suggests that he might have, if he'd only been brave enough to pick up on May's hints.

Near the end of the novella, May spoke about Marcher's fate as a thing that "was to" happen, which clued Marcher into the fact that she knew what his fate was. His use of the same phrasing now ("where it *was* to fall") aligns him with May—now, he knows what his fate was, and he knows that it can no longer be changed.

Marcher always avoided deepening his relationship with May because he didn't want to endanger her or allow her to confront the beast alongside him—this is why he chose not to marry her, even though they spent all of their time together. Marcher now realizes that, ironically, deepening his relationship with May by loving her is the only thing that would have spared him. He avoided loving May because of the beast, but that lack of love is what enabled the beast's attack.

> Through them, none the less, he tried to fix it and hold it; he kept it there before him so that he might feel the pain. That at least, belated and bitter, had something of the taste of life. But the bitterness suddenly sickened him, and it was as if, horribly, he saw, in the truth, in the cruelty of his image, what had been appointed and done. He saw the Jungle of his life and saw the lurking Beast; then, while he looked, perceived it, as by a stir of the air, rise, huge and hideous, for the leap that was to settle him. His eyes darkened—it was close; and, instinctively turning, in his hallucination, to avoid it, he flung himself, face down, on the tomb.

Related Characters: John Marcher

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 71

Explanation and Analysis

This passage takes place at the end of the novella, after Marcher has encountered another mourner near May's tomb and realizes that his fate was to live a life without experiencing anything, particularly love. Marcher tries to feel the full weight of his horror upon learning this information, but he can't even feel that.

Marcher is trying—at the last minute—to have a "belated" life experience, which in this case means feeling the pain that comes from realizing his fate. The fact that he *can't* feel this pain makes him realize just how much he's repressed his feelings for his whole life—he can't even feel the weight of that repression. All he can feel is his *lack* of feeling, which registers as "bitterness," since he was jealous of the mourner's ability to grieve his lost loved one. If he was ever able to change his circumstances, he can no longer do so.

Notably, Marcher always imagined that his encounter with the beast—whatever the beast ended up being—would be an active confrontation. He then discovers that this wasn't the case, because the beast "sprung" when he failed to pick up on and reciprocate May's love for him. But in this passage, he "hallucinat[es]" the active confrontation he always expected, the confrontation that will "settle" (or kill) him.

Marcher knows that the beast has already come and gone, and that their *actual* encounter was a passive one—Marcher didn't even know it was happening at the time. The fact that he imagines a different encounter now reads as ironic, particularly because *this* confrontation ends with Marcher falling down on May's tomb. Previously, Marcher believed that this tomb represented his past life. Now, it's clear that the tomb represents the life Marcher could have had with May, because Marcher's salvation was only possible while May was alive and is impossible now that she's dead. He falls down on the tomb to "avoid" the beast, but the tomb *is* a manifestation of the beast, since the real "beast" is Marcher's lost potential life. Marcher imagines a violent creature, but his actual doom is anything but violent.

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

John Marcher arrives at a grand estate for lunch. He's there with a group of friends, one he easily blends into. After eating lunch, the group disperses around the estate (called Weatherend), in order to view the antiques on display. Marcher watches his friends admire their surroundings and imagines that some of them hope to acquire the estate's objects or the estate itself, since their behavior is similar to the behavior of potential buyers before a sale. But unlike his friends, Marcher is overwhelmed by so much history and art. He separates from the group, not to gawk at objects but just to get away.

This passage establishes John Marcher as an isolated character. Even when he's with his friends, he's part of the crowd rather than an active member of the group, and he seems to immediately want to get away from everyone. In fact, he apparently dislikes his friends' motivations for visiting Weatherend and considers himself different from them. But Marcher presumably came to Weatherend to socialize, so his desire to escape is confusing, and his motivations are paradoxical: Marcher wants to isolate himself from others, but at the same time, he chooses to blend in with those around him. This tension will recur throughout the novella as Marcher's reasons for isolating himself become clearer.

Marcher's separation from his friends leads him to encounter May Bartram. While the group ate lunch earlier in the day, May's presence had begun to bother Marcher in a pleasant way, because he vaguely recognized her from somewhere and saw her presence as a "continuation" of something that must have begun earlier. Marcher could tell that May recognized him, too, but she wouldn't give any sign of recognition unless he approached her first. Marcher now thinks that their first meeting, whenever it happened, must have been unimportant, but it made an impression on him. He assumes that May is a dependent in the estate, possibly a poor relative of the owner. It might be that she works as a guide for her keep.

Once again, Marcher's motivations are contradictory. On the one hand, he believes he's different from those around him and avoids socializing with the people he considers his friends. On the other, he's excited by the idea that he met May at some point in the past, which suggests that he does *crave connection from others. Marcher seems to be a keen observer of human nature, and he immediately guesses May's social position* and *her feelings toward him. This suggests that Marcher's isolation isn't the result of an inability to pick up on social cues—in fact, his ability to read people's responses to him seems cultivated, perhaps a skill he has honed as part of his insistence on feeling separate from others. This passage also establishes that Marcher is in a higher social class than May, since he's a guest at Weatherend and she's only a dependent of the estate.*

Now, May approaches Marcher. She's a good-looking woman, but Marcher's two guesses about her were correct, as she *is* a dependent in the house and she *does* remember him. The two of them come face-to-face in an empty room, almost as though they planned to meet there. It's a lucky encounter, since there are few empty rooms in the house. As May approaches Marcher, he can tell that she's willing to act like he's any other guest and guide him around as her job requires. But the moment she speaks, Marcher recognizes her. He tells her that he remembers meeting her in Rome years ago, and she's surprised that he remembers.

May and Marcher's encounter here seems to have been fated to happen, since unlikely circumstances made it possible, including Marcher's presence at Weatherend and the absence of his friends in this particular room. This is the novella's first hint that fate plays a role in Marcher's life—and in meeting May. This passage also suggests that whatever May's interaction with Marcher was years ago, it was more significant than Marcher initially assumed—otherwise, May would casually bring up the fact that they've met before. Her grave attitude toward Marcher and her willingness to act like she doesn't remember him suggests that they shared some unique experience.

To Marcher's amusement, May tells him that he got the details of their meeting wrong: they met in Naples almost 10 years ago, she was with different relatives than he remembered, he was with a different set of friends, and the thunderstorm he claims to recall happened in a different location. Marcher is delighted by her corrections, even though they're at his expense. But once she's finished, he's disappointed that they don't have much left to say to each other. They shared their whole history in moments, and the past (which happened when May was 20 and Marcher was 25) doesn't provide much fodder for conversation.

Again, May and Marcher's first meeting in Naples must have been significant, since May remembers even small details about it. The fact that Marcher doesn't *remember these details seems out-of-character, because even though Marcher doesn't seem to care much about other people, he* does *observe people and situations carefully. The fact that Marcher doesn't remember any of the circumstances of his trip, including who he was with, suggests that most parts of his life aren't worth remembering in his estimation—and yet he* does *remember May. The novella seems to suggest that whatever this Naples encounter was, it was out of the ordinary for Marcher. Marcher's contradictory desires recur here, because he seems to want to connect with May on a deeper level than just small talk, even though he's shown little interest in connecting with anyone.*

Marcher wishes that their history had been more exciting—he could have rescued May from a boat accident or robbery or maybe helped her through illness. Their current encounter is a boring one, but they drag it out, verbally questioning why they haven't encountered each other since. Neither one of them wants to admit that their reunion is a "failure" in terms of excitement, and Marcher is saddened—he can't pretend this situation is more interesting than it is, and he can't pretend May is an old friend, since they barely know each other. That said, he wishes she *were* an old friend, since he mostly has new ones, like the ones currently at Weatherend. If he were a *new* friend of May's, he probably wouldn't have even noticed her.

Marcher's suggestion that he wouldn't recognize May as a new friend might be a reference to her lower social status, but it's more likely that all of Marcher's friends are indistinct to him, since he isolates himself from them. The fact that Marcher wants an old *friend suggests that he wants to connect with someone on a deeper level than he has connected with his current friends. Strangely, he doesn't seem to think this deeper connection is something he and May can work toward together; he needs to have a* past *connection with May in order to feel connected to her now. This suggests that Marcher doesn't feel that he has the ability to connect with someone in the present, which is a strange sense of powerlessness for someone in his social position. Indeed, Marcher doesn't seem to feel that he has control over his circumstances at all, an idea that will recur throughout the novella. Finally, Marcher's belief that his encounter with May would be a "failure" if it's not exciting suggests that he thinks his life has to be thrilling to be successful.*


Marcher wants to pretend that he and May have a romantic, exciting past, and he's about to invent a fake memory to share with her. But May speaks first, and Marcher can tell she's been holding back saying something that would change the nature of their encounter and make it exciting. She says that during a boat ride in Sorrento, Marcher told her something that she thinks of often; she wonders if he remembers what it was. Marcher doesn't, and he can tell that she's not referring to a romantic encounter or proposal. He says that he remembers Sorrento, but not what he said.

Again, Marcher doesn't want to connect with people in the present, so he's willing to pretend that he and May have a shared history in order to feel connected to her. Marcher isn't willing to put work into building a relationship with someone, but he's desperate to feel close to May, which begs the question of why he's isolated himself from his friends—clearly, this isolation is unsatisfying. This passage confirms that the encounter between Marcher and May was out of the ordinary. Moreover, it wasn't out of the ordinary in a normal *way—for instance, a romantic encounter would be out of the ordinary but within normal social bounds, while this seems to be on another level. Marcher's immediate dismissal of a romantic past with May hints that their relationship will be a platonic one, which becomes significant later on.*


May says that she doesn't think that Marcher *does* remember Sorrento, and she wavers on enlightening him—if Marcher changed over the course of 10 years and has forgotten the person he was, that might be for the best. But Marcher says that if May hasn't forgotten who Marcher was, he shouldn't get to, either. He wants to know what he said rather than live in ignorance. Besides, maybe he's still the "ass" he used to be. But May argues that if Marcher *were* the same person, he'd remember their encounter. Still, she doesn't think he was an "ass." She then tells him that the thing he told her was about himself, and when he just stares, she asks whether "it" has ever happened.

This passage suggests that Marcher is someone who would rather know painful truths than live in comfortable ignorance. He will maintain this trait throughout the novella, and at the moment, it seems like a kind of bravery: Marcher is willing to hear negative things about his past self, even though he might not like what he hears. Marcher also seems like someone who's willing to share May's burden here—he claims to want to know the truth about their encounter primarily because she's *had to know it all along. However, this doesn't quite ring true, and it seems more likely that Marcher is just trying to convince May to share her story so they can have an exciting encounter. Throughout the novella, Marcher will continue to claim that he's selfless while acting selfishly, demonstrating his own lack of self-awareness. In contrast, May seems genuinely selfless here, as she clearly wants to spare Marcher from any painful reminders of his past.*

Picking up on what May is referring to, Marcher is shocked that he told her about it. She says that what he told her is the reason she never forgot him, and she again asks if the thing he talked about has ever happened. After getting over his shock, he finds that he's happy—she's the only person who knows his secret, and she's apparently known for years, although he forgot that he told her. He tells her she's the only person who knows, and she reassures him that she's never repeated his secret and never will. She's so genuine that he's not worried she'll make fun of him. She's clearly sympathetic, and he's never felt sympathy from anyone.

Marcher is getting exactly what he wants in this passage: May apparently already knows his greatest secret, which means he doesn't have to share anything with her in order for her to understand him on a deep level. Again, Marcher clearly wants to be understood by others but, for whatever reason, feels like he can't be. Because Marcher has only ever told May his secret, it's strange that he doesn't remember their Naples encounter. Readers begin to get the sense that Marcher is not only isolated but also emotionally repressed, as he avoids any genuine encounters with others (hence why no one has sympathized with him before). It's possible that he repressed his encounter with May because he regretted sharing his secret at the time. The fact that he doesn't seem to regret it now suggests, perhaps, that he's lonelier than he once was—again hinting that his self-imposed isolation isn't what he really wants.

May asks if Marcher still feels the way he felt 10 years ago. He can't get over the fact that she knows—he's felt alone for years, but apparently he wasn't alone. In fact, *she's* been alone, since she kept his secret and took him seriously. Meanwhile, he repaid her by forgetting their meeting. He asks exactly what he said in Sorrento, and she says he told her that from an early age, he'd felt destined for some great, maybe terrible fate. Even back then, she felt that she understood what he meant, a thought that makes him happy.

Marcher claims to have always felt alone, but the only person who knows his secret understood it immediately (even though it's quite an odd thing to say). It's possible that May is just unique, but it's also possible that others are equally capable of understanding Marcher—he's just never put them to the test by sharing his secret. This passage confirms that fate plays a role in Marcher's life, or at least that he believes that it does. Marcher's secret sounds a little nonsensical, but because May takes it so seriously, readers are asked to as well. Finally, this passage establishes that Marcher and May are on unequal footing in their newly-established relationship: already, she's done something for him (kept his secret) and he's done nothing for her.

May assumes that Marcher's reaction means that his fate hasn't happened yet, and he confirms that it hasn't. He tells her that it's not going to be a great achievement, and it won't necessarily be bad, either. However, it *will* alter his life and change him fundamentally. May wonders whether the event he describes might be falling in love—that's her immediate instinct, though she didn't bring it up in Sorrento. But while Marcher has had the same thought, he dismisses the possibility, because he's been in love and it wasn't life-changing. May says that, in that case, he wasn't really in love, but Marcher believes that he was. His affair was "pleasant" and sometimes "miserable," but not strange and unusual, as he believes his fate will be.

This passage introduces Marcher and May's ideas about what love is, which play important roles in the novella. Their ideas about love are diametrically opposed: Marcher thinks that love isn't significant or unusual enough to be his fate, while May thinks that love is dramatic and life-altering, as Marcher believes that his fate will be. While Marcher claims to have been in love before, it's not clear whether May's definition of love comes from experience or whether she's just guessing at what love would feel like for her. The novella will continue to explore what love actually *is, since Marcher and May don't come to a consensus here, and it's not clear which one of them is correct (or whether either of them are).*

May wonders if Marcher wants a unique fate that no one else has had, but Marcher argues that it doesn't matter what he *wants*; he's haunted by the "apprehension" of his fate no matter what. It's not necessarily going to be violent, and in fact, it will appear natural to him. It'll seem strange to outsiders like May, though, since she now knows his secret.

May's observation that Marcher seems to want a unique fate explains why he's isolated himself from everyone else: clearly, Marcher thinks that he's different from other people and that they would find his fate "strange." Marcher's isolation is therefore at least partly a product of his egotism—he can't connect with others because he thinks he's better than or at least different from them (something the novella hinted at earlier as Marcher observed his friends' admiration of the antiques). This passage also confirms that Marcher doesn't think he has any control over his circumstances. All he can do is anticipate his fate, and his desires don't factor into what it'll be.

Marcher invites May to "watch" for his fate alongside him, and she asks twice if he's afraid. He doesn't answer and instead asks if she thinks he's insane, but she says that she understands him and believes him. She asks for a third time if he's afraid, and he wonders if he claimed to be afraid in Naples. She says that he didn't, and he responds that in that case, he doesn't know if he's afraid yet. She can observe him and tell him if he's afraid while she waits with him. The two of them start to leave the room, and May agrees to watch for Marcher's fate with him.

The fact that Marcher doesn't know whether or not he's afraid of his fate suggests that his definition of courage might be different from other people's. Clearly, to Marcher, courage is not about confronting his fears, because he doesn't even know whether or not he's afraid. At the same time, the fact that he doesn't know his own feelings about his fate is further proof that Marcher has repressed his emotions. This passage also establishes a tension between Marcher's egotism and his desire to be understood by May. Marcher thinks his fate is unique, but he wants May to wait for that fate with him, which would make his fate partly hers as well.

CHAPTER 2

May's knowledge of Marcher's secret establishes a bond between the two of them. In the year after their encounter at Weatherend, May's great-aunt (with whom May had been living after the death of her own mother) dies, leaving left enough money in her will to enable May to buy a small London house. Prior to this purchase, May and Marcher had seen each other only when her great-aunt came to London or when Marcher hung out with the group of friends that he'd accompanied to Weatherend.

In previous passages, Marcher claimed to have no control over his circumstances and to be ruled by his fate. This passage establishes a contrast between his feelings of powerlessness in the face of his fate and May's powerlessness in society. Prior to her great-aunt's death, May had no financial independence, and even now that she is *independent, that independence only makes her more available to Marcher. May is always dependent on other people—previously, she was dependent on the fortune of her great-aunt, and now she's dependent on Marcher's fate, since she's agreed to wait for it with him. Marcher might feel powerless, but as a wealthy man, he's always had more power than May, and he controls their relationship now.*

As their friendship progresses, Marcher and May go to museums together in London and speak about Italy. However, they're no longer trying to live in the past, since Marcher's secret gives them enough momentum to talk about new things together. Marcher realizes how lucky he is to have found a "treasure" he buried—the "treasure" being May's knowledge of his secret. Because he feels lucky, he doesn't think much about why he forgot about their Naples encounter.

Despite the fact that he wants to feel connected to May, Marcher can't see her as a person. Instead, he objectifies her by comparing her to buried treasure, suggesting that her friendship is only worthwhile if it has value to Marcher. Meanwhile, Marcher doesn't consider how he *can be a good friend to May, a pattern that will recur. The novella never specifies why Marcher forgot the Naples encounter, but his repression of that memory—and his unwillingness to examine why he might have repressed it—sets the tone for him to repress other emotions and self-knowledge as the story unfolds. While Marcher told May that he has no control over his fate, his attitude about his isolated circumstances has changed over time, which suggests that he might subconsciously* want *to alter his life and/or fate. He just believes that he can't, possibly because it's easier to believe this than to make difficult choices.*

Marcher never planned to tell anyone about his secret, because people would only have made fun of him. But for some reason, maybe due to a "mysterious fate," he had told the right person years ago. He knows May is the right person to have told because he doesn't feel wrong about her knowing his secret. She's sympathetic and takes him seriously, and because he feels so happy that she knows his secret, he sometimes has to consciously remind himself that she's an individual with a life of her own.

Marcher attributes his Naples encounter with May to fate, which illustrates his belief in his own powerlessness. He doesn't consider the possibility that he might have wanted to make a friend in Naples and might have made a judgment call about May's trustworthiness on his own. It makes sense that Marcher doesn't want to believe that he might have had control over his circumstances in Naples, because that would mean that he has control over them now, and he seems to be used to (and might even prefer) surrendering to fate. This passage explicitly confirms Marcher's egotism, as he has trouble viewing May as anything but an extension of himself. This egotism makes it hard to believe that Marcher was worried others would make fun of him—once again, it seems clear that he thinks he's special and that he kept his secret at least partly for this reason.

For years, Marcher has considered himself selfless, since he never told anyone his secret. If he had, they would have been burdened by knowing a "haunted man." He has been *tempted* to reveal his secret, if only to hear people say they're "unsettled" by it—he's been unsettled for years, after all. But he hasn't said anything, and instead of tormenting other people, he's honed faultlessly polite manners and considers himself selfless. Now, he feels slightly selfish around May, since she knows his secret. But because he doesn't *want* to be selfish, he'll let May determine the boundaries of their relationship. Admittedly, he takes the relationship itself for granted, but he can hardly be blamed for that—their conversation at Weatherend was a clear turning point.

Marcher has given multiple reasons for his isolation: first, he claimed that he didn't want people to make fun of him. Now, he claims he didn't want to "burden" them. This contradiction, along with Marcher's self-congratulatory attitude, should lead readers to doubt his claim of selflessness. In fact, since May doesn't seem to feel burdened or even "unsettled," Marcher's isolation may be unnecessary and therefore not selfless at all. Marcher's assumption that other people wouldn't want to know his secret may have begun a detrimental cycle: because Marcher doesn't act like himself in public, he ensures that no one can understand him, which in turn confirms his belief in his uniqueness. It's possible that May will break this cycle by forcing Marcher to see that he can *be understood by others, but for now, Marcher continues to believe he's a singular person (and that May exists to validate him).*

Marcher *should* marry May—that would be the logical progression of their strange relationship. But Marcher's fate is his alone. He considers this fate to be a "crouching **beast** in the jungle" of his life, and regardless of whether he's supposed to destroy the beast or it's supposed to destroy him, the beast will inevitably emerge. Marcher has always felt that a "man of feeling" shouldn't allow a woman to be part of his fate.

This passage introduces the symbol of the beast, which represents how Marcher thinks of his fate. The fact that Marcher has conceptualized his fate as a violent creature he can fight demonstrates that he thinks that his fate will be an active event. Meanwhile, Marcher's reason for not wanting to marry May is ambiguous. On the one hand, it seems like the product of his egotism, as he wants his fate to belong to him alone. On the other hand, it's possible that he doesn't want to lose May to the beast—his reference to being a "man of feeling" implies that he's frightened of the emotional impact this would have on him. He notably doesn't consider love to be a reason to marry (or not marry) May. Marcher already stated that he doesn't think love will factor into his fate, but now it's clear that he doesn't think love will factor into the rest of his life, either. Marcher's choice is selfish: Marcher wants May to spend her life with him, but he won't legitimize their relationship via marriage.


In the beginning of their friendship, neither Marcher nor May alludes to Marcher's secret. Marcher is trying to prove that he isn't obsessed with his fate and doesn't need to constantly discuss it, though it is always a part of him. Still, he doesn't want to be grave and grim, so in order to seem casual, he makes a joke in a letter to May, saying that maybe the great event he was waiting for was her purchase of her London home. She says that she wouldn't be satisfied with such a silly fate after so much anticipation, and her reply makes Marcher realize that she might believe more strongly in his uniqueness than he does.

Despite Marcher's claims to selflessness, he seems more concerned with appearing *like a good friend to May than actually being one. After all, he demonstrates a false casualness instead of taking an interest in May's life (as he claimed to want to do). However, May will apparently* not *alter Marcher's belief in his own uniqueness, and in fact, she actually confirms his uniqueness here. This seems contradictory, as the fact that May understands Marcher's fate proves that he isn't as alien as he believes he is, and the fact that May is part of his secret now means that his self-imposed isolation isn't unique anymore, either. But May seems more than willing to fulfill Marcher's expectations of her, which again demonstrates that their relationship is an unequal one.*

Slowly, Marcher grows aware that although he and May rarely name Marcher's fate, instead referring to it as the "real truth [...] about him," May is always thinking about it and evaluating his life. Maybe she was just indulgent of him before, but she fully believes him now. Marcher finds it easiest to believe that May likes him because he's a little bit crazy and because she can act as his amused "keeper," since she doesn't have any other family or obligations. Everyone else thinks he's odd, but she alone knows why, which puts her in a position to help Marcher conceal his secret.

Interestingly, Marcher imagines that May wants to spend time with him because knowing why he's unique makes her *feel unique. This may be true, or Marcher may be projecting his belief in his own uniqueness onto May Beyond Marcher's guesses, the novella doesn't yet specify why May is devoting a significant amount of her time to Marcher (and apparently thinking about him in her downtime) or why she likes him. May's reasons for latching onto Marcher become clearer as the novella progresses, but Marcher's perspective is limited for now.*

In fact, May treats Marcher's secret like it's her own. Even better, she can view him from an outsider's perspective and evaluate him as no one else can. Specifically, she can look at all the things he does and doesn't do because of his secret and see where he can make changes in his life. Unlike anyone else, May can see the "detachment" that underlies Marcher's various personas: his persona in his government office, his persona in his garden and in the countryside, and his persona in London society. He's always masking his thoughts around others—his insides don't match his outsides, and the world has always been too stupid to realize that. Only May can see him both from the outside *and* from the inside.

Again, the fact that May adopts and internalizes Marcher's secret proves that he isn't totally unique—May is having the same experience as him now, even if the beast is his fate, not hers. Neither May nor Marcher seem to realize this, however, because May's job is still to help Marcher further his isolation, which only heightens his belief that he's special. But again, this is a self-fulfilling prophecy; Marcher might call his friends and acquaintances "stupid" for not seeing the real him, but his "detachment" is what prevents them from doing so. No one can get close to Marcher if he's faking various personas in public. Meanwhile, the one person he isn't faking in front of does *understand him, which implies that perhaps everyone else could, too.*

Marcher and May grow old together, and his secret becomes her whole world. But like Marcher, May is also detached and keeping secrets—especially from Marcher. He doesn't notice, the same way he doesn't notice many things that don't involve him. Besides, it's almost expected that she'll sacrifice things for him. As they spend time together in London, they often speak publicly about Marcher's fate, even though they could be overheard. In their view, society is stupid, which allows them to speak openly.

Once again, Marcher doesn't see May as an individual, and his perception of her is limited. Meanwhile, May is in the same position that Marcher was once in, as she's detached from everyone—Marcher can now share his feelings with May, but May is hiding things. Notably, the fact that she wants to hide her secrets from Marcher specifically hints that they may be about him. It's surprising that Marcher and May speak openly about Marcher's fate, especially given how much he values secrecy. It's possible that he really thinks no one will understand them, but given his earlier desire to be understood by someone, it's also possible that he hopes someone overhears and does *understand. This would allow him to feel connected to another person without having to take control of his life and open up to a stranger.*

May often makes the remark that their friendship is what causes Marcher to appear normal. On her birthday one year, he visits May and brings her a small present, which he always does, partly to prove that he's not entirely selfish (even better, he always pays more than he thinks he should for it). This particular year, May says that their friendship makes Marcher appear like everyone else, since men often spend time with "dull women." In other words, May's presence is what keeps Marcher's secret from being discovered.

Marcher is again more concerned with appearing *selfless than actually* being *selfless, as proven by his interest in how his gift will make him look and his apparent disinterest in whether May would actually like it. But once again, May seems willing to belittle herself for Marcher's benefit, this time by suggesting that her purpose is to make him look a certain way. Both Marcher and May have a distorted view of friendship—more than likely, "normal" men spend time with female friends because they like being around them. Marcher and May's friendship is much more transactional and much less reciprocal.*

Amused, Marcher asks what keeps May appearing normal, something he claims to think about often. He even wonders whether their friendship is a fair one, since it takes up so much of May's time. But May argues that she *wants* to think about and wait for Marcher's fate, because it's interesting to her. Marcher wonders if her investment in his fate has been repaid, and she assumes that he's asking because he feels like *his* investment in his fate hasn't been. But Marcher says that his fate is out of his hands and inevitable.

Marcher claims to care about whether his friendship with May is fair to her, but the fact that he hasn't broached the subject of marriage proves that this isn't actually a concern of his—if it were, he might rethink their relationship. That said, May does claim to be happy with their arrangement, and again, it's not entirely clear why—Marcher's fate might be abstractly interesting, but May has spent a long time anticipating something that hasn't happened yet. Meanwhile, Marcher again demonstrates that he believes his circumstances are out of his control. It's slowly becoming obvious that this is a way for Marcher to avoid making any big decisions or changing his life in any significant way (for instance, by marrying May).

May agrees that everyone's fates are inevitable, but Marcher's fate was supposed to be unique. Marcher picks up on her use of the past tense: does she think that nothing is going to happen now? But she says that it's the opposite: she knows more than ever that some fate is coming. Marcher gets up from his seat and paces around her drawing-room, which he's deeply familiar with after all these years. When he paces back in front of her, she asks if he's grown afraid. He remembers that she asked him that at Weatherend and they haven't discussed it since, almost as though they're afraid that the answer is "yes"—they wouldn't know what to do in that case.

May continues to validate Marcher's belief in his own uniqueness, despite the fact that her presence in his life means her fate will be at least related to his (since she'll be around when Marcher's fate happens). Even more significantly, the fact that May would feel afraid if Marcher felt afraid is further proof that Marcher's experience is a shared one—his emotions, if he stopped repressing them, would transfer to May. The novella doesn't make it clear why May is now certain that Marcher's fate is inevitable. This may have something to do with the secrets she's keeping from Marcher.

May admits that, from time to time, she's thought that Marcher was afraid. Marcher is suddenly overwhelmed by the thought of his fate, which seems to peek through the eyes of the **beast**. The room seems filled solely with suspense, which feels like a kind of void; he can't even be afraid now, which he tells May. May argues that Marcher has lived with danger for so long that he's "indifferent" to it. Marcher asks if this makes him heroic, and May says that he can claim that if he wants.

Marcher and May's definition of heroism is unusual. May claims that it's brave to stifle one's fears and accept a grim fate, but this doesn't seem to be a conventional idea of courage at all—normally, courage involves confronting *fear, and all Marcher has done is grow comfortable with fear. Meanwhile, even Marcher's actual fears are abstract; he imagines the beast when he thinks about his fate, but the beast is just a placeholder for the type of event he thinks his fate will be. However, it's worth noting that Marcher is the one who attaches the label of "heroism" to his indifference. It's possible that May has a different definition of bravery and is just going along with Marcher's ideas, as usual.*

Marcher then asks if he's a "man of courage," and May agrees that that's what he seems to be. But Marcher thinks that courageous men know what they're afraid or not afraid of, and he doesn't, since his fate is a mystery to him. However, May says that Marcher is close enough to danger to qualify as courageous. Besides, they're not done watching for his fate—or at least, Marcher isn't. Marcher picks up on May's implication that *she's* done watching for Marcher's fate, and he can tell that she's hiding something from him.

Again, Marcher's definition of courage is unusual. While he admits that he doesn't know what the beast is, he also implies that if he did *know, he could then decide whether or not he's courageous. This still doesn't fit in with a more traditional definition of courage, which involves not just passively evaluating one's feelings but actually facing fears. Once again, Marcher is the one to attach labels like "courage" to his behavior, and May seems to be indulging him more than agreeing—something Marcher immediately picks up on. Notably, Marcher couldn't tell that May was keeping secrets from him before, but now that those secrets involve him and his fate, he's clued in. That points again to his narcissism.*

In fact, Marcher accuses May of knowing what his fate will be and being too afraid to tell him because it's so awful. She looks almost as though he's crossed a line, which seems to prove Marcher right. She then tells him that he'll "never find out."

This passage sets up the conflict that will drive the novella: May knows something about Marcher's fate and she's keeping that knowledge secret. That said, their interaction here is pretty opaque. It's not clear what May knows about Marcher's fate or why she won't tell Marcher, but if she really is afraid, then her platitudes to Marcher about his bravery ring especially false. Clearly, she doesn't think he should know the truth for whatever reason, maybe because he can't handle knowing. Alternatively, she might be too cowardly to tell him. Her reasons for keeping this secret will become clearer later on, though Marcher is only guessing at them now.

CHAPTER 3

The conversation between Marcher and May on May's birthday ends up being a turning point. At first, the only thing it does is make Marcher more determined to be selfless with May, so he invites her out to events like the opera. After one of these outings, he repeats his question from her birthday, asking what keeps her appearing normal. May admits that she's gossiped about in society, but she still thinks her friendship with Marcher makes her look normal, too. Besides, her main concern is helping Marcher "pass" for an ordinary person. He asks how he can repay her for that kindness, and after a pause, she says that he can repay her by simply doing what he's doing.

Marcher continues to act selfishly in an attempt to be selfless—taking May out to the opera definitely isn't the most selfless thing he could do. In fact, he might actually be making her life harder by hanging out with her publicly, as May implies here that their relationship is the subject of gossip. It's safe to assume that this gossip centers around the fact that Marcher and May are unmarried and spend all their time together—May might want *to believe that she seems "normal," but she also confirms that she's not treated that way. Apparently, a single man can spend time with a woman, but not vice versa. If Marcher married May, he would be genuinely selfless, but he doesn't consider that possibility. Once again, May's motivations for devoting her life to Marcher—and, as readers see here, making sacrifices for him—are unclear, but she clearly enjoys his (one-sided) friendship.*

The two of them continue on without mentioning their conversation on May's birthday. Marcher is almost afraid to confront May about her knowledge of his fate, though he's now convinced that she doesn't know anything more than he does—even though being a woman makes her intuitive. For the first time, Marcher begins to worry that he'll lose May in an accident someday, though this loss still wouldn't be the fate he's waiting for. Lately, he's become even more dependent on her and he's noticed that her health is failing. In fact, all his concerns mixed together make him begin to wonder whether his fate is soon approaching.

Marcher might have decided that May doesn't know what his fate is, but his fear of asking her about it suggests that he's not being honest with himself—if he really believed that May didn't know his fate, he wouldn't be afraid to discuss it. Marcher has already claimed to be courageous, but this seems like cowardice, further muddying Marcher and May's already-contradictory definition of bravery. Marcher once again demonstrates that he's not as selfless as he'd like to believe he is, as he seems concerned about May only because he depends on her. Yet he doesn't truly value their friendship, because he doesn't think that May's death could be his fate—in other words, her death wouldn't be life-shattering for him.

One day, May tells Marcher that she's afraid she has a blood disorder. Marcher immediately thinks that this is a personal loss for May, since she won't get to see what his fate ends up being. He's happy that this is his first thought, since the fact that he's worried about May proves he's still a selfless person. And if May does know what his fate is, that makes it even worse that she won't live to see it. May can no longer leave the house, so Marcher goes to visit her. One day, he notices that she's much older than he remembered, which means that he's old, too. This realization shocks him, as does the fact that *her* old age is the thing that made him think of his own.

This passage is intentionally tongue-in-cheek and meant to underscore Marcher's egotism. Marcher believes he's selfless because his first thought is that May won't experience his fate with him, but that means his first thought is still centered around his *future, not May's suffering. However, the reason Marcher believes that he immediately thought of May before himself is because he (at least subconsciously) considers his fate to be partly May's as well, or at least hers to witness. Marcher believes he's unique, but once again, he and May are having the same experience. This is highlighted by the fact that Marcher only realizes his own age by noticing May's.*

After this incident, Marcher continues to have revelations, and it feels almost like they've been held back until the end of his life. For instance, he starts to wonder if maybe his fate *is* to see May die after all. Still, while he admires May greatly, he still thinks this fate would be anticlimactic. He would even consider it a failure, since he's been waiting for a very different kind of fate.

This passage is an expansion of the conversation Marcher and May had at Weatherend, during which they touched on both love and failure. At the time, May believed that Marcher's fate might be to fall in love, and Marcher thought that love wasn't dramatic enough to be his fate. In this passage, it becomes clear that Marcher doesn't think that any *emotional upheaval will factor into his fate. And as he did during the Weatherend conversation, Marcher demonstrates that his idea of success is a thrilling life, and anything less is failure.*

As May grows sicker, Marcher begins to worry that May might have been waiting for his great fate in vain. He thinks that May's demise can only mean one thing: it's too late for Marcher's fate to happen. He's never allowed himself to worry about this before, since he assumed he had time. Now, there's no time left—he's not young anymore. But if there's no fate, he'll have failed. Marcher wouldn't have considered other, terrible fates to be a failure—for instance, bankruptcy or death. In fact, his fate should be proportionate to the time he spent anticipating it, so suffering would make sense. All he wants is to not have been waiting for nothing.

Once again, Marcher (unintentionally) proves that his experience isn't a unique one, as he assumes that his fate won't come after May dies—thus confirming that she's part of his fate and is having the same experience as him. Marcher also expands on his ideas about failure. Not only does he think a mundane life is a failure, but he thinks that horrific fates would make him successful. By normal logic, bankruptcy is *failure. But Marcher's logic is backwards, as he thinks that bankruptcy would make him successful, solely because it would prove that his fate is real. Again, it makes sense that Marcher is frightened by the possibility that no fate is coming—he's spent his life conveniently believing he had no control over his circumstances, and if that proved false, he would have to re-evaluate all his choices.*

CHAPTER 4

That April, Marcher goes to visit May. For the first time, she's sitting without the fire on, and Marcher feels like she looks cold and distant. In fact, she looks like an "impenetrable" sphinx or an artificial lily, drooping but preserved. Usually, the house is carefully tended to, but now it looks like everything has been put away—it seems to Marcher that May's work is done, which makes him feel abandoned. If her job for all these years was to wait for his fate, she *must* know his fate now, as he suspected earlier. After all, she no longer seems occupied. He's been growing anxious about his fate, which he never was before.

Marcher continues to view May not as a person but as an extension of his own issues. He used to see May as a confidante, and he now sees her both as inanimate decoration and as a sphinx, a mythical creature that demands that travelers solve its riddles, usually in exchange for safe passage. In other words, May's entire personality is still centered around Marcher's fate (in Marcher's eyes), but now she's an obstacle—like a sphinx—rather than an ally, since she knows things that he doesn't. Marcher claimed only a few pages earlier to be primarily concerned about May, but now it's clear that he's still concerned about himself, since he views her imminent death as a betrayal.

Marcher doesn't want to ask May what she knows about his fate in case he makes everything worse, so he talks around the subject instead, asking May what she thinks the worst possible fate would be. They've talked about this before, but May says that she couldn't possibly choose. Marcher says there are some fates he's thought of that he's never mentioned, because they were too awful. Marcher notices that May's eyes are the same as they were when she was younger, and they flicker as the two of them speak.

Because Marcher and May are trying not to bring up Marcher's real fate, and because it's not clear what May knows, this passage is vague. It's not clear to readers why May won't speculate about the worst fate (maybe because that's the one she thinks Marcher will experience) or what unspeakably awful fate Marcher is referring to. However, because he previously seemed unafraid of death or bankruptcy, it seems likely that the worst fate for Marcher would be having no fate at all.

Marcher says that the two of them imagined lots of different fates for him, often taking those fates to the extreme. He notices that he's speaking about his fate as if it already happened—he wishes that were true. May seems to question Marcher's assertion that the two of them confronted most of Marcher's possible fates. She finally agrees that he's right but then says that some of their fears are things they've never spoken about. Marcher says that he could face the worst possible fate if he knew what it was, but he no longer has the power to imagine such awful things. However, he knows that May *has* imagined the worst possible fate, and he confronts her by saying that she knows something he doesn't.

Yet again, Marcher suggests that his experience waiting for his fate is heroic in some way, because he has lived with imagining awful fates. And again, May is skeptical of this assessment, implying that her definition of courage differs from Marcher's—in fact, May suggests that Marcher hasn't even imagined all of his possible fates. This implies that there are things worse than death or bankruptcy, which are both fears that Marcher is now used to. Marcher once again believes that if he knew his fate, he could confront it, but this isn't true—acclimating to one's fears isn't the same as actually confronting them. In fact, some imagined fates wouldn't even require confrontation. For instance, if Marcher died suddenly, that wouldn't demand bravery.

May denies knowing anything, but Marcher reminds her of their conversation on her birthday. Now, he sees that whatever his fate is, it must be the worst one imaginable. He's asking May what it is now because he's afraid of not knowing. He can sense that May is done with him and is abandoning him to his fate. Stiffly, May tells Marcher that the fate she's keeping from him *would* be the worst, most monstrous thing imaginable—but it's just her idea, still unconfirmed. She denies abandoning Marcher.

This is the first time Marcher has openly admitted to being afraid, but again, he believes that knowledge about his fate would make him unafraid, which runs counter to the normal definition of courage: confronting the things you're afraid of. And again, Marcher views May as just an extension of himself rather than an individual, and he treats her death as though it's a personal affront to him. This passage confirms that May doesn't want to speculate about the worst possible fate because Marcher's fate is the worst, assuming that May is right about what it is.

May stands and walks toward Marcher, something she rarely does these days due to her illness. Though he has lots of questions for her, he starts by asking if he will "consciously suffer" due to his fate. She says he won't, and he's confused: why is his fate the worst fate imaginable if he's not going to suffer? That seems to be the best-case scenario. She questions this, wondering if Marcher can truly imagine no better fate, and she seems to be talking about something specific.

Marcher's attitude about his fate is contradictory, since he previously wanted to suffer. The fact that he won't suffer seems to corroborate Marcher's earlier fear that his fate is no fate at all—of all the fates that have been floated as possibilities, this seems like the one that would guarantee zero suffering. May's comment to Marcher is ambiguous, because she's suggesting that a life without suffering isn't the best outcome. It's possible that, like Marcher, she believes that he'd be a failure if he didn't suffer. But it's also possible that May is speaking generally and implying that a good fate sometimes involves suffering, too—therefore, a life without suffering isn't always good.

Marcher gasps, believing he understands what she's talking about and what she's always thought his fate was. But May says that the fate she imagines for Marcher isn't the same one she imagined previously (on her birthday). Marcher had assumed that his fate was to not have a fate at all, but she denies this: Marcher's fate *is* real, and it's still to come. It's not too late. Over the course of their conversation, May has moved closer to Marcher, maybe to underscore the things she's saying. She has to hold onto her shelf to keep upright, and Marcher can tell that there's something else she wants to say or give to him, and he can also tell that she's been telling the truth.

This passage confirms that when May questioned whether or not Marcher could imagine a better fate than one without suffering, she wasn't *hinting that his fate would be to have no fate, meaning she might have been saying that a good fate demands suffering. Additionally, readers might interpret May's comment that her opinion about Marcher's fate has changed to mean that she once thought Marcher* wouldn't *have a fate and now thinks that he* will *(as Marcher assumes). But the novella doesn't state this, and it's possible that May has had two ideas about Marcher's fate, both distinct from Marcher's idea. After all, she's always viewed his fate differently than him—remember that she once thought his fate would be love.*

They keep staring at each other. Marcher expects May to say something, but she just shudders instead. He continues to stare, but she turns away and returns to her seat. He asks why she isn't telling him what his fate is, but she says she's too sick and calls for her maid. He almost wonders whether she's going to die before she can tell him, but he stops himself before he can say this out loud. Still, she seems to know what he was about to say. She asks if he now knows what his fate is, and as the maid arrives, Marcher impatiently says that he still doesn't know anything.

The novella intentionally leaves this passage vague, as Marcher has no idea what has just occurred between him and May. Her moving towards him, however, hints that perhaps she was trying subtly to initiate physical contact, and that perhaps this has to do with his fate. In his confusion, Marcher again confirms his selfishness, as he's concerned about not learning his fate rather than about May's health. It seems clear that May had hoped Marcher would guess his fate from their eye contact, and that she hoped he'd do something during their encounter that he didn't do. Interestingly, this makes May a lot like Marcher—she wants to connect with him, but she's unable to make that connection herself. She may have a reason for this, but it also might be cowardice on her part.

May exclaims out loud, and the maid asks if she's in pain, which May denies. Marcher asks what just happened. As the maid leads May away, May corrects Marcher: he should be asking "what *was* to" happen.

This passage confirms that May expected something to happen during her encounter with Marcher, and that her expectation didn't pan out. The full meaning of her words will become clear as the novella progresses, but for now, readers are left in the dark.

CHAPTER 5

Marcher tries to visit May the next day, but for the first time, she can't—or won't—see him. Marcher begins to doubt all the things May told him earlier; maybe she was lying to spare his feelings. After all, what could the **beast** possibly be besides her death and the loneliness that will follow it? Admittedly, it's not a rare or great fate but rather an ordinary one. Still, it's enough for Marcher. After everything he and May shared together, what could be worse than missing her?

Marcher previously dismissed the idea that May's death was his fate. Now, he's willing to admit that it might be. This is a touching realization, but it's marred by Marcher's previous desire to suffer in order to prove that his fate was real. If May's death is Marcher's fate, then he'll suffer after all. Once again, Marcher is making May's life (and death) all about him. This passage also suggests that Marcher is starting to realize that he's not necessarily different from other people: if his fate is to lose May, he'd be just like everyone who's lost a loved one. The fact that he doesn't reject this possibility outright is a significant character shift.

After a week of ignoring Marcher, May allows him to visit her. He can tell that she wants to lessen his panic before she dies, so she brings up the topic of his fate herself, saying that he misunderstood her earlier: his fate has already happened. Marcher asks if that means there was a name and date for it, and she says that there might not be a name, but it did happen on a specific date. It didn't pass Marcher by, but he wasn't aware that it was happening. In fact, his ignorance is the very thing that makes it a strange fate.

Because readers are experiencing the novella from Marcher's perspective, May's words are still unclear, and she's intentionally ambiguous here. During her last visit with Marcher, May said that his fate was still to come; now, she's saying that it already happened. It's possible that Marcher's fate occurred over the last week, but it's likely that his fate happened during his moment of eye contact with May. This would explain why she was upset at the time, and it would explain why she claims Marcher didn't notice his fate happening as it happened. But May also implies that Marcher's ignorance is part of his fate, so maybe May was trying to prevent *Marcher's fate during their encounter. This would explain why she didn't want to say what his fate was—maybe she didn't want to interfere in it. But the novella leaves all of these questions unanswered for now, inviting readers to speculate alongside Marcher.*

Marcher might not know what his fate is, but May knows it. He should be happy: he has proof that he wasn't waiting in vain. For her part, May is glad that she now knows what his fate *wasn't*. Marcher wonders if that means that his fate could have been worse, and she hesitates before reminding him of all the fears they once shared about his fate. He's surprised, since this implies that his fate was something they never thought to be afraid of. May reminds him that they never imagined they'd be discussing it after it had already happened. But to Marcher, it doesn't seem like anything *did* happen.

This passage confirms that despite what Marcher claims to do for May, she gives more to Marcher than he gives to her, as she states here that she's bearing a burden on his behalf. May's comment that she knows what Marcher's fate wasn't *is ambiguous, but it's worth noting that this is the second time May has suggested that Marcher's fate involves an absence: in the last passage, she told Marcher that his ignorance about his fate is what makes that fate unique. Now, she implies that his fate is what rules out another fate. Finally, this passage confirms that Marcher believes courage means acclimating to various fears as opposed to facing the unknown.*

May presses on with her point, saying that before, Marcher's fate was always upcoming. Now, it's in the past. Marcher says that he preferred when his fate was *going* to happen, since its absence will correspond with May's imminent death. Suddenly, Marcher feels that this is the last time he'll ever stand in front of her. He tells her that he believes what she's saying, but to him, nothing feels like it's over since he didn't experience anything. How can his fate be something he hasn't felt himself?

Marcher's implication that he'd prefer to keep waiting for his fate if it meant May could stay alive is another significant character shift. Marcher has designed his life to avoid getting to know other people in a genuine way, effectively prioritizing his fate over human connection. Now, he's suggesting that he'd be willing to prioritize May over his fate. Marcher's self-imposed isolation never seemed to satisfy him, but he explicitly confirms that dissatisfaction here. That being said, it's possible that he might feel differently if he knew what his fate was—part of his frustration and grief is centered around the fact that his fate passed him by.

May says that Marcher misunderstands again: his fate is to suffer without being aware of that suffering. He says that he's currently suffering anyway due to his ignorance about his fate, and May sharply tells him to stop. As she does so, Marcher can almost see something pass across his eyes, and it gives him an idea. May insists that Marcher shouldn't try to find out what his fate was, because he doesn't need to know. Marcher's idea returns to him, and he wonders whether his fate is the thing May is dying from. She tells him that she'd stay alive for him if she could, but she can't. Their visit comes to an end.

Earlier, May's motivations for keeping Marcher's fate from him were uncertain. The novella now confirms that she's trying to stop Marcher from "suffering" unnecessarily, again demonstrating her selflessness (especially in contrast with Marcher's constant selfishness). Apparently, May thinks that Marcher can't do anything about his fate now, since it's already happened—this is different from the scene of eye contact, when his fate was still upcoming and she wanted him to guess it. It's not clear how May's death could be related to Marcher's fate, but if it is *connected, then Marcher's fate must have had something to do with May.*

This meeting ends up being their last one, because May won't allow Marcher to visit as she gets sicker. Instead, random relatives visit her, hoping that she'll leave them money. Marcher is frustrated that these relatives have more of a claim to May than he does. Unfortunately, no one recognizes how important she was to him, since they had no formal tie to one another. After May dies, there's a small crowd at her funeral, but even so, Marcher is treated as a random visitor rather than the deeply grieved mourner he is. As the weeks go on, he almost wants to do something that will prove how important May was to him. Sometimes, he wonders if he should have done something like that earlier.

Obviously, the reason no one notices Marcher's deep grief is that he never married May. His frustration here is the consequence of his own actions, as he wanted to remain a bachelor and to allow May to make him seem like a "normal" man spending time with a "dull" woman. He seems to regret that decision now, as he wonders whether he should have done something to prove May's importance to him earlier, and the only thing he could *have done then was marry her. Earlier, the secrecy Marcher and May shared seemed logical. Now, it only makes Marcher more isolated from those around him (since he can't grieve with anyone) and more frustrated than ever with that isolation.*

Marcher wonders what he could have done to formalize his relationship with May while she was alive, since any explanation would have given away his secret. This is why he doesn't tell anyone about their strange relationship now, even though the **beast** is gone. The whole story would sound "foolish." And even if he were to tell anyone about the beast—the way he told May—it would only be for the sake of telling someone. At the moment, Marcher feels like he is wandering through an empty jungle, keeping an eye out for a beast that's already attacked and wondering where it once hid. Finally, he accepts that whatever his fate was, it's already happened.

This passage marks another character shift, because for the first time, Marcher toys with the idea of telling the public his secret and ending his isolation. Admittedly, he only considers doing so because his fate has come and gone—and he also quickly dismisses the idea, so it's not a huge *shift in character. Moreover, he dismisses it because he once again believes that other people wouldn't understand his unique experience, even though he's already grappled with the possibility that it* wasn't *unique, and even though May understood it from the start. Still, the fact that Marcher wants to connect with others the way he connected with May is significant. But while Marcher claims to accept that his fate is over, he continues to imagine it as a violent beast, implying that he's still anticipating an attack—as are readers, since it's still not clear what Marcher's fate was.*

Even though May forbade him from guessing what his fate was, Marcher feels that his fate was stolen away from him and he wants to get it back. As a result, he has to figure out what his fate was, or else he'll give up on life altogether. With this resolution, he decides to travel, hoping he'll come up with some answers. Before he leaves, he visits May's **tomb** to say goodbye but finds himself staring at it instead, hoping that the secret of his fate will emerge from the tomb. He imagines the tomb as May's face, and he imagines that she doesn't recognize him.

Marcher's desperation to figure out what his fate was reads as selfish—even though May is gone, Marcher is still ignoring her wishes and invalidating the sacrifice she made for him (after all, she refused to tell him his fate for his own good). This passage also introduces the symbol of May's tomb, which will come to represent lost possibilities for Marcher. But for now, Marcher seems to view the tomb as a representation of his own lost fate. Even though he imagines the tomb as an embodiment of May, he still sees that embodiment as a personal torment to him, again alluding to his self-centered view of May. But the fact that he imagines that May doesn't recognize him also hints at how isolated Marcher feels, since the one person who understood him is gone.

CHAPTER 6

Marcher travels for a year, visiting Asia. However, all he can think about is how boring the world is after what he's been through. Now, he's entirely ordinary, so everything in the world seems ordinary, too. He can't stop thinking about May's **tomb**, which is all that's left of the person he once was and the fate he once had. He visits that tomb immediately after returning from Asia. He's now had a change of heart and has accepted his dull life, but he still wants to return to his old self, which he thinks he can do by seeing May's tomb.

Despite the fact that Marcher doesn't know what his fate was, and despite the fact that he previously came to terms with its possible mundanity, he still considers himself better than or different from other people, which is why the world bores him. Once again, Marcher knows that May's tomb holds her *body, but he sees it as representative of* his *past life. This is both logical (since she's the only one who knew his secret) and deeply self-centered, as it proves once again that Marcher sees May as just an extension of himself.*

Marcher is happy when he sees the **tomb** again, since May knew and understood him. Her tomb no longer seems blank and cold but rather inviting. Marcher isn't expecting answers about his fate from the tomb anymore, but he returns to it monthly and just being in the cemetery comforts him. In fact, he weirdly feels alive only when he's near May's grave. Her tomb marks everything Marcher used to be, and he reminisces on the past while he visits it. He even imagines that his younger self is strolling in the cemetery with the past as a companion while May watches the two of them. Marcher is content to know that he did have a life at one point, and he's living in the past now.

Again, Marcher isn't happy to be around the tomb because it helps him remember May. Instead, he's happy to be around the tomb because in his mind, it represents the person he used to be (although the tomb will take on a broader meaning). This is self-centered, but it also confirms that Marcher isn't as unique as he thinks he is. If his former self can only exist with May, that means he and May shared the same experiences. This passage is also a callback to Marcher's encounter with May at Weatherend, in which he was eager to find past experiences they could reminisce on. Here, Marcher is still more eager to fixate on the past than he is to forge new connections.

The year passes, and Marcher might have kept living this way forever, but a random incident changes things—later, Marcher will think that, even if the incident had never occurred, everything still would have changed. One fall day, Marcher notices another mourner at the cemetery, a middle-aged man staring at a fresh grave. Marcher is feeling particularly sad as he rests by May's grave, and all he wants is to lay down on her **tomb**, since he has nothing to stay awake for now.

Much like Marcher and May's meeting at Weatherend, Marcher's encounter with the mourner seems to have been fated to happen, at least in Marcher's mind. Marcher still assumes fate plays a role in his life, even though he knows his own fate has come and gone, which demonstrates his continued unwillingness to take charge of his own circumstances. Once again, Marcher's self-imposed isolation seems unsatisfying to him. He's choosing to spend all his time at the cemetery and live in the past, but it still makes him sad.

At that moment, the other mourner walks past Marcher to reach the cemetery gates, and because he's walking slowly, the two of them come face-to-face. Marcher can tell immediately that the man is deeply grieved, and also that he's deliberately showing Marcher that grief. He might want sympathy. Alternatively, he might have noticed Marcher at the cemetery earlier, appearing casual by May's grave, and he might want to prove that he grieves more deeply than Marcher.

The encounter between Marcher and the mourner is a rebuke to Marcher's philosophy, as he's spent his life assuming that no one could understand him. Yet with only a glance, Marcher and the mourner understand each other intimately. Marcher understands that the mourner is grieving, and the mourner understands that Marcher doesn't grieve May as deeply as he grieves his own loved one. Clearly, Marcher can *be understood by people other than May. In fact, the mourner might understand Marcher better than Marcher understands himself—because of their encounter, Marcher is about to discover some emotions he's repressed.*

As the mourner leaves the cemetery, Marcher realizes that he's jealous of the mourner. He wonders what the mourner lost that makes him grieve so deeply. Marcher has never felt any passion that would make him grieve like that. This thought gives way to a huge realization. Marcher missed this realization before because he's spent all this time viewing his life and his grief from an outsider's perspective rather than looking within and mourning May "for herself." The encounter with the mourner had been a random accident, but Marcher can't forget it, because he now sees how empty his life has been.

This passage confirms that the mourner was right: he does *grieve more deeply than Marcher. Again, this demonstrates that Marcher can be understood by other people, because the mourner immediately inferred this fact about Marcher, and Marcher didn't even know it himself. Marcher now realizes that his own self-centered nature prevented him from grieving May as the mourner grieves his loved one (readers saw this when Marcher viewed May's tomb as a representation of his own past life). Marcher also realizes that his isolation never allowed him to self-reflect. Throughout the novella, it was clear that Marcher was repressing his feelings—now, those feelings are coming to the surface. Much like Marcher's fate was the thing that ruled out another fate (according to May), the mourner exists to demonstrate the emotional, loving person that Marcher* isn't.


Marcher now realizes that May was the fate he missed out on. More specifically, his fate was to be someone who experienced and felt nothing, and May had known it all along. Marcher spent so long anticipating his fate, but it turns out that anticipation *was* his fate. May had once offered him a way out, but all he could do at the time was stare at her.

This passage recontextualizes Marcher's final encounters with May. May said that she at first thought Marcher's fate was one thing and then believed it was another. One reading of this is that she initially stuck with her theory that Marcher's fate was to fall in love, then realized that his fate was the opposite. Her eye contact with him was an attempt to get him to feel something for her, and he sealed his fate when he wasn't able to. Because he let life pass him by, his fate was to spend time waiting for an event that never came. This is distinct from having no fate at all, since Marcher's fate was to anticipate *an event instead of connecting with others.*


Marcher now knows that the only way he could've escaped his fate was to love May, because that would have been a genuine life experience. May loved Marcher "for himself," but he was always too selfish to see her as an individual. He now remembers their second-to-last interaction, and he realizes that the **beast** emerged when she rose from her chair, walked toward him, and let him guess at what his fate was. At the time, she might have even recovered from her illness. The beast then sprung at him the moment he failed to guess, which sealed his fate. Even though his fate was real, Marcher failed in a very different way, and May never wanted him to know it.

This passage continues to recontextualize the novella, as Marcher now realizes that May loved him. Interestingly, this means that both Marcher and May's definitions of love were wrong. May's love wasn't earth-shattering; instead, she loved Marcher quietly and made sacrifices for him. Marcher could never do the same for her, as he was unable to truly connect with her for fear of the beast. It's still not clear why May didn't want to tell Marcher about his fate and why she let him guess, especially since the novella implies that if she and Marcher had loved each other, May might have recovered her health. It's possible that, like Marcher, May was too frightened to confront the unknown. Marcher always imagined that the beast would be an active event, but it's now obvious that his image of the beast was wrong: Marcher's encounter with the beast was passive. Marcher also imagined that having no fate would be a failure, but the real failure was his inability to live a life with someone he could have loved. Finally, Marcher believed that he had no control over his circumstances, but this passage implies otherwise: if Marcher had guessed his fate, he could have changed it.

Marcher tries to feel the full weight of his pain and horror, since this would at least be a life experience. But he feels bitterness instead, which makes him realize what he's done to himself by repressing his feelings. Now, he can see the jungle in front of him and he can see the **beast**. He imagines it creeping closer to him, giant and ugly, ready to pounce and end him once and for all. Although he's only hallucinating, Marcher turns to avoid the beast and falls down onto May's **tomb**.

This is the first time Marcher tries to change his circumstances—if he can feel grief, that would mean his fate wasn't fixed. But apparently, it's too late to make emotional changes, which is presumably why May wanted to stop Marcher from discovering his fate. Marcher's hallucination of the beast is bizarre, since he knows that the beast was a passive event, nothing like a predator lunging at him. His determination to force a confrontation with the beast in his own head ultimately backfires. Because Marcher has come to terms with his own egotism, May's tomb represents not Marcher's former life but the life they could have shared together. The fact that he falls down on the tomb to avoid the beast is therefore ironic, because the tomb is another manifestation of the beast—it shows Marcher everything he's lost.

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