

# The Female Persuasion



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MEG WOLITZER

Meg Wolitzer was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. Her mother, Hilma Wolitzer, was a novelist, and her father, Morton Wolitzer, was a psychologist. Remaining on the East Coast, Meg attended Smith College and Brown University, where she studied creative writing. She wrote her first novel, *Sleepwalking*, while still a college undergraduate. Published in 1982, *Sleepwalking* launched Wolitzer's literary career, which has since been dedicated to exploring and excavating the depths of women's minds and lives. In 1992, her mentor and friend, the acclaimed writer-director Nora Ephron, adapted Wolitzer's 1988 novel, *This is Your Life*, into a feature film. Wolitzer's hit 2003 novel, *The Wife*, was also adapted for the screen as a 2017 film starring Glenn Close. Wolitzer currently lives in New York City and teaches in the MFA program in Creative Writing at Stony Brook Southampton, a branch of the State University of New York. She has previously taught creative writing at conferences, workshops, and universities, including the University of Iowa and Skidmore College.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The 2016 presidential election, the 2017 wildfire of the #MeToo movement, and the deep rifts and shifts in contemporary feminism provided much of the basis for the themes, motifs, and issues throughout *The Female Persuasion*. The book's opening chapter details a series of campus assaults, as well as the female victims' attempts at retaliation against their male harasser and the administration's willingness to turn a blind eye to his actions. These events seem directly tied to the tidal wave of allegations of sexual assault, verbal abuse, and misogyny that began piling up in October of 2017, as upwards of fifty women came forward to accuse movie producer Harvey Weinstein of rape, assault, and harassment over the course of his decades-long career as a powerful Hollywood executive. Just over a year earlier, similar allegations of rape and harassment from upwards of fifteen women surfaced against then-presidential candidate Donald Trump. Trump's election despite his racist, misogynist, and ableist remarks throughout his campaign created a sense of despair in many women throughout America and across the globe. At the end of the novel, set in the present day, many characters reflect on how "the big terribleness"—ostensibly a reference to Trump's election—has impacted them and those around them. Contemporary feminism has been placed under a microscope by feminists and detractors of the movement alike as the political moment, especially in the States, has grown more and

more fraught. Today, social commentators, politicians, actors, writers, and artists around the globe are questioning what it means to be a good feminist, a good activist, and a good ally for disenfranchised women, disabled people, people of color, and LGBT+ individuals around the world.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Meg Wolitzer is the author of over ten works of fiction, many of which engage with the themes found in *The Female Persuasion*, including feminism and femininity, power structures and misogyny, and families and communities. Her novels *The Wife*, *This is Your Life*, and *The Interestings*, all chart the lives of women dealing with the pressures of friendship, romance, and finding empowerment in a world which often seeks to keep women down. Gloria Steinem—the feminist icon who, it's largely speculated, served as a major inspiration for the character of Faith Frank—is the author of numerous books of criticism and social commentary, including *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions*, a book of essays whose topics range from an examination of the practice of female genital mutilation to an ode to Steinem's mother. Other seminal feminist texts that may have provided the inspiration for both Faith and Greer's books include Simon de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and Betty Friedan's second-wave feminist tome [The Feminine Mystique](#).

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Female Persuasion*
- **When Written:** 2015-2017
- **Where Written:** New York, New York
- **When Published:** 2018
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Fiction
- **Setting:** Western Massachusetts; Connecticut; Manila; Brooklyn; Chicago
- **Climax:** When Greer Kadetsky learns that Loci's highly-lauded mentorship program for disenfranchised Ecuadorian women does not exist
- **Antagonist:** Faith Frank
- **Point of View:** Third-person omniscient

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Have Faith.** Faith Frank's character has been compared to many real life feminist icons, including Gloria Steinem and Wolitzer herself. Like Steinem, Faith is a second-wave feminist who, after decades of on-the-ground activism, has found herself on the lecture circuit and working as a spokeswoman

for women's rights. Like Wolitzer, Faith was born in Brooklyn, and is a writer of feminist texts which have been read and praised the world over.



## PLOT SUMMARY

In October of 2006, Greer Kadetsky is a freshman at a small, undistinguished college in Southern Connecticut called Ryland College. She has been at school for seven weeks and has had a miserable time so far—she is jealous of her boyfriend, Cory Pinto, who is off at the much more prestigious Princeton University, and has been unsuccessful in making any friends of her own at Ryland. One evening, Greer attends a fraternity party. One of the fraternity boys, Darren Tinzler, engages Greer in a conversation, but when he makes a sexual advance, Greer rejects him, and Tinzler reacts violently. As the weeks go by, Greer hears about at least six other women who have been harassed by Darren Tinzler, and after he commits yet another assault, the university holds a disciplinary hearing. Tinzler gets off with a slap on the wrist, and Greer wants to take a stand, but the other girls are ready to move on and don't want to dwell on the injustice of the situation.

One evening, Greer's friend Zee Eisenstat invites Greer to join her at a lecture on campus—Zee's idol, the feminist writer and figurehead Faith Frank, is giving a hotly anticipated speech. Greer tags along and instantly finds herself transfixed by Faith. After the lecture, Greer approaches Faith in the restroom and begins speaking to her. Faith is warm and receptive and advises Greer to keep her head down and focus on her studies. Zee gets the chance to speak with Faith briefly, too, but despite the fact that Zee is Faith's true fan, Faith gives her business card only to Greer before leaving the restroom.

Greer takes a bus to New York City to interview for a position at Faith Frank's feminist magazine, *Bloomer*. However, when she gets to the office, she learns that the publication is about to fold. That night, Greer writes Faith an email, thanking Faith for her tireless work on behalf of women everywhere. Meanwhile, Cory, who has received a cushy consulting job, is informed that he will be working in the company's Manila office—not in New York like he anticipated.

One night, Greer she receives an email from Faith Frank thanking her for her note a few months earlier and offering her the chance to interview for a position at her new "venture." At the interview a few days later, Faith tells Greer that she is partnering with the famous venture capitalist Emmett Shrader to start a women's foundation, which will connect speakers and audiences around the country to discuss some of the most important issues facing modern feminism. She offers Greer a position at the company, and Greer happily accepts. Soon after, Zee gives Greer a letter to pass along to Faith. It details Zee's desire to work at the new foundation, Loci. Although Zee is excited by the prospect of working with her best friend, Greer

has some reservations.

Once at Loci, Greer is slightly disillusioned with the mundanity of her job, but she is excited to spend whatever time she can around the alluring Faith Frank. Greer tells Faith about Zee's letter and how Greer doesn't want to hand it over to Faith. Faith says that in the end, it's ultimately up to Greer. The next time Greer sees Zee, Greer lies and says that though Faith read the letter, there are no positions available at Loci.

Cory is on his way home from the Philippines—there has been a tragedy in his family. His mother, Benedita, accidentally ran over Cory's little brother Alby while pulling out of the driveway, crushing and killing him. Alby had been crouched on his stomach in the driveway studying his pet turtle, *Slowly*, at the time of his death. Shortly after Alby's funeral, Cory's father returns to his home country of Portugal, leaving Cory to attend to his grieving mother. As Benedita teeters on the brink of psychosis, Cory realizes that he must quit his job, stay home with his mother, and take on her job of cleaning houses. He experiments with dangerous drugs but ultimately finds himself more interested in playing his brother's old video games than getting high.

Desperate for a change from her claustrophobic hometown and boring paralegal job, Zee takes a job with Teach and Reach, an organization that places young college graduates as teachers in at-risk public schools. Zee moves to Chicago and begins teaching, but she finds it difficult to connect with her students—the problems they face are much larger than she anticipated. Zee finds herself drawn to a beautiful guidance counselor at the school, Noelle Williams, but Noelle is icy to her. One afternoon, one of Zee's students, Shara Pick, asks to go to the bathroom but does not return. Zee finds Shara on the floor of the bathroom, clutching her stomach in immense pain. It is soon clear that Shara is pregnant and is going into labor. Shara delivers her baby in the nurse's office, and after the traumatic event is over, Noelle and Zee go out to dinner together to decompress. Over the course of their meal, Noelle explains that she is frustrated by pseudo-activists like Zee who think they can swoop into poor communities and make a difference. Both women admit that they are attracted to one another, and at the end of the night, they go home together.

One night, Faith Frank reflects on the events of her life which have brought her to the point she's at now. Faith was born and raised in Brooklyn but was sheltered by her conservative parents. As she moved through college, she became more socially and politically aware, and after graduation, she and her friend Annie moved to Las Vegas to work as cocktail waitresses and explore the world. Faith explored her sexuality and slept with many men but found most encounters disappointing—all save for a brief, non-physical flirtation with a man she served at a blackjack table. While out in Las Vegas, Annie became pregnant and was forced to subject herself to a shady procedure in an unmarked building. Later that night, Faith took

her friend to the ER and was shocked and appalled by the judgmental and cruel treatment Annie received from the nurses and doctors. Faith soon moved to New York and became involved with a women's liberation group and centered her politics around securing abortion reform for women, using Annie's story as a touchstone. When Annie found out that Faith had told her story to her women's group, she became angry. She soon moved to the Midwest, married a lawyer, and eventually became an ultra-conservative pro-life senator.

Meanwhile, Faith and several of her friends started a women's magazine called *Bloomer*. While struggling to secure ad space, Faith and her editors met with three Nabisco executives, one of whom recognized Faith from Las Vegas—they had flirted once at the blackjack table. The Nabisco executive, Emmett Shrader, offered to take Faith out to dinner, and their "meeting" quickly turned into a sexual encounter. The next morning, Emmett called Faith to tell her that his wife found out about the affair, and that he would not be purchasing ad space in Faith's magazine. The magazine succeeded without Emmett's contribution, however, and Faith rose to prominence as a feminist writer, public speaker, and icon. Nearly forty years later, after *Bloomer* folded, Faith received a call from Emmett, who offered to bankroll a new venture with Faith at the head—a women's organization called Loci. Now, Faith considers how she must pass along the success, passion, and knowledge she has gained over the years to the next generation. She decides to let Greer Kadetsky deliver the keynote speech at the next summit.

At the summit, Greer prepares to deliver a speech alongside a young Ecuadorian woman, Lupe Izurieda. Once a victim of sex trafficking, Lupe was rescued by a Loci-backed initiative and placed in a Loci-sponsored mentorship program. Greer is excited to share Lupe's story, but Lupe is nervous, touchy, and emotional. The speech goes off without a hitch—Greer lauds the mentorship program, and Lupe testifies to how much it has helped her—and the audience applauds both Greer and Lupe wildly.

Back in New York, Greer meets with Kim, a former employee of ShraderCapital, Emmett Shrader's venture capital firm, which financially backs Loci. Kim reveals that the Loci mentorship program never got off the ground, and that ShraderCapital, wanting to avoid a PR scandal, continued accepting donations meant for the program. Greer is shaken by the news and immediately confronts Faith, who reacts coolly but claims that she knew nothing of the deception. She is disgusted by the hypocrisy and the incompetence at ShraderCapital but tells Greer that she plans to move forward as if nothing has happened. Greer is shocked, but Faith explains that compromise is part of her line of work. Soon after this unsettling conversation, Greer quits. Faith tells Greer that she is a hypocrite—she is quitting because she cares too much about women to work at a shady organization, but she failed to

stand up for her friend Zee when it mattered most.

Greer visits Zee, who is now a respected traumatologist working in Chicago and living with Noelle. When Greer reveals the massive lie she told her friend years ago, Zee is deeply hurt by the news, and the visit is cut short. Greer returns to her hometown to take some time for herself before looking for a job again. Greer still looks down on Cory's choice to stay in his hometown, but Greer's mother believes that Cory, who has dedicated his life to supporting his grieving mother, is actually a "big feminist."

Cory gets the chance to meet with an angel investor and pitch his idea for a game called SoulFinder—a game in which players wander the earth looking for a lost loved one, but they are often unable to complete their mission and beat the game due to the inescapable nature of grief. The investor is impressed by Cory's idea and asks him to come to New York to see an immersive theater piece which might help with game development. Cory stays on Greer's [sofa bed](#) for the weekend, but there is a palpable sense of tension between the two of them, as they do not know each other very well anymore.

A few years later, Greer attends a fancy publishing party to celebrate the fact that her own feminist text, *Outside Voices*, has been on the bestseller list for over a year. Greer, now thirty-one, is married to Cory and has a daughter named Emilia. Greer has everything she has ever wanted: a life with Cory in Brooklyn, a platform to discuss women's empowerment, and even adoring fans—her daughter's teenaged babysitter, Kay Chung, is a whip-smart radical feminist and idolizes Greer entirely. As Greer and Cory return home from the party and put their daughter to bed, Greer reflects quietly on the nature of power, realizing that just as she has replaced her beloved Faith Frank, someone will one day replace Greer herself. Considering the idea that she and her peers are busy engaged in a never-ending struggle for power, agency, and a platform, Greer thinks that Slowly the turtle might one day outlive them all.



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Greer Kadetsky** – Greer Kadetsky is the novel's intelligent, sensitive, and ambitious protagonist and Cory Pinto's girlfriend. Raised by ex-hippie parents, Greer longs for a likeminded community and believes she will find it at a prestigious university. Although she is accepted to Yale, Greer is forced to accept a full-ride scholarship from her safety school, Ryland College. After being sexually assaulted during her first week of college, Greer discovers the world of feminist thought. When her radical activist friend, Zee Eisenstat, drags Greer along to a lecture given by the feminist icon Faith Frank, Greer is transfixed by Faith and her message. After graduation, Greer is

offered a position at Faith's women's organization, Loci. Although Zee also wants a job at Loci and asks Greer to deliver a letter to Faith for her, Greer doesn't want to "share" Faith and discards the letter. However, Greer soon realizes that Loci is laden with corruption and hypocrisy. When she brings her concerns to Faith, Faith is more exhausted than enraged and urges Greer to keep quiet. When Greer quits, Faith points out Greer's own hypocrisy: she calls herself an advocate for women but refused to help her friend Zee in her time of need. Devastated but not undeterred, Greer goes on to publish her own feminist text, rekindle her relationship with Cory, and enjoy success as a feminist icon just like Faith. As the novel closes, Greer wonders dubiously about the nature of sociopolitical power, influence, and activism, wondering who will one day take the torch from her and do more for women than she has.

**Faith Frank** – Faith Frank, the novel's antagonist and Greer Kadetsky's foil, is a feminist icon, activist, and writer who got her start in the 1960s, during feminism's second wave. When the novel begins, Faith Frank is in her mid-sixties, the glory days of her feminist icon and celebrity status largely past, and is mostly travelling around on the lecture circuit, speaking at colleges and organizations and doling out feel-good platitudes that do not at all echo the radical feminism of her youth. Despite her watered-down feminism, Faith has many devoted fans, including Greer Kadetsky and Zee Eisenstat. Eventually, Faith offers Greer a job at Loci, Faith's new women's organization devoted to hosting summits and lectures on the topics of feminism and women's power. Faith and Greer quickly form a mentor-mentee relationship. However, Greer is surprised to find that the organization is somewhat ineffectual and mostly based in spectacles of feminism and activism rather than on-the-ground organizing. When Greer discovers even more corruption within the organization and confronts Faith with her concerns, Faith explains that when it comes to feminism and activism, sometimes one must take what one can get. However, when Greer angrily leaves the company, Faith is finally forced to confront the hypocrisies and failures in her own feminism.

**Cory Pinto** – Greer Kadetsky's high school sweetheart, Cory Pinto, is sensitive, family-oriented, and constantly in search of his sense of self. Although Cory and Greer had planned on attending Yale together, when Greer's financial aid paperwork falls through, the whip-smart Cory accepts an offer to study at Princeton instead, attempting to lessen the blow Greer would feel if he attended her dream college without her. Cory is a caring boyfriend who comes from a loving family—his mother, Benedita, and his father, Duarte, are Portuguese immigrants who have done all they can to give Cory and his younger brother, Alby, the best of the American dream. When a terrible accident shatters Cory's family—his mother accidentally runs over and kills the eight-year-old Alby—Cory abandons his

lucrative consulting job in order to move home. Cory's father returns to Portugal, unable to deal with the fact that his wife has killed his child, while Cory's mother experiences grief so deep, it verges on psychosis. As Cory wrestles with his own pain, he experiments with drugs and casual sex. Over time, Cory learns to process his loss in healthy, productive ways and realizes that perhaps his brother's death doesn't have to be in vain. Believing that his experience with loss can help him to connect with others who have experienced similar pain, Cory begins developing a video game called SoulFinder. He eventually moves to New York, and once he secures investors and the game takes off, he reconnects with Greer.

**Zee Eisenstat** – Zee Eisenstat is a lesbian feminist activist and is Greer's first real friend in college. Zee introduces Greer to the world of feminist thought and the work of second-wave feminist icon, Faith Frank. When Zee brings Greer to one of Faith's lectures, it is Greer—not Zee—who forms a connection with Faith and eventually secures a job at Faith's feminist startup, Loci. Zee's parents, both judges, slightly disapprove of their daughter's sexuality and encourage her to pursue a normal and straightforward career as a paralegal. Headstrong, hopeful, and idealistic, Zee decides that she wants to work for Loci like Greer, so she brings Greer a letter to give to Faith. Ultimately, Greer selfishly withholds the letter and lies to Zee, claiming that Faith read Zee's letter but can't offer her a position in the small company. Following this disappointment, Zee moves to Chicago, where she joins Teach and Reach, an organization that places young teachers in underfunded schools within at-risk neighborhoods. The trauma and pain Zee witnesses during her time at Teach and Reach frustrate her, as she is unable to truly make a difference or relate to her students' hardships. Zee comes to recognize that her identity as an activist has been more for her own satisfaction than the betterment of those around her. Zee eventually pursues a career in emergency response as a traumatologist, which allows her to directly communicate with and provide tangible, meaningful aid to those in need.

**Darren Tinzler** – A student and fraternity boy at Ryland College who sexually assaults a number of young women, including Greer Kadetsky. After the sexual assault victims bring a formal complaint to the college, Darren is given a mere slap on the wrist. The administration's weak response results in outrage from many students—especially Zee and Greer, who make shirts with Darren Tinzler's face on them to continue to spread the message of his unfair escape from punishment or consequence.

**Rob Kadetsky** – Greer's father. An ex-hippie who spends his days working odd jobs, smoking marijuana, and selling protein bars as part of an apparent pyramid scheme, Rob is bewildered by his smart, thoughtful daughter's ambitious and focused type-A personality. He and his wife, Laurel Blanken, fail to help their daughter secure the financial aid package she needs to

attend her dream college, Yale, by neglecting to complete the necessary paperwork.

**Alby Pinto** – Cory’s precocious and incredibly intelligent younger brother who is killed when he is only eight years old after his mother, Benedita, runs over him with her car while he is crouched in the driveway studying his pet turtle, **Slowly**. Alby’s death sends shockwaves of grief through the Pinto family—Alby’s father, Duarte, leaves Benedita and Cory and returns to Portugal, Benedita becomes unresponsive and borderline psychotic in her sorrow, and Cory is forced to move home in order to care for his grief-stricken mother. Though Alby is only physically present for a brief portion of the novel, the impact his death resonates deeply throughout the lives of his brother and his mother. Cory’s journey is impacted forever by the loss of his brother and his search for meaning and fulfillment in the wake of that loss.

**Benedita Pinto** – Cory Pinto’s mother, Benedita, is a kindly woman who works as a house cleaner. Her life dramatically when she runs over her youngest son, Alby, while backing her car out of the driveway. After the tragic accident, Benedita’s husband, Duarte, leaves her and returns to Portugal. Overwhelmed by her loss, Benedita becomes deeply depressed to the point of psychosis and becomes entirely reliant on Cory to support her, care for her, and pick up the pieces of her shattered life.

**Emmett Shrader** – The wealthy head of ShraderCapital, the investment firm which backs Faith Frank’s organization, Loci. It is revealed in a series of flashbacks that Faith and Emmett have known each other for several decades—they slept together when Faith and her fellow editors at *Bloomer* were trying to persuade Shrader and his partners at Nabisco to purchase ad space at the magazine. Shrader’s wife found out about the brief affair, though, and so Shrader never invested in the magazine. Years later, once *Bloomer* folds, Shrader invites Faith to his office for a meeting and offers to help her establish a women’s foundation. Though Emmett’s intentions are more or less good, his firm, ShraderCapital, becomes increasingly stingy with the resources it offers to Loci. Eventually, it is revealed that the Ecuadorian mentorship program which ShraderCapital purportedly backed on behalf of Loci never even existed. Emmett eventually dies of a heart attack while having “athletic” sex with a young woman. Although he stipulated in his will that Loci should continue, the “people upstairs” at ShraderCapital reduce Loci’s budget gradually until it becomes nothing but a “low-level speakers’ forum.”

**Noelle** – A guidance counselor at the Teach for Reach school that Zee is assigned to. At first, Noelle is condescending toward Zee. When the two of them get drinks just after witnessing Shara Pick’s labor and delivery, Noelle reveals that she is resentful of people like Zee who join Teach for Reach thinking that they will change the world, when really, they’re just making themselves feel good about contributing to a vague cause.

After airing out the tension between them, Noelle and Zee admit their attraction to one another. After spending a night together, the two women embark on a romantic relationship and remain partners for several years.

**Shara Pick** – One of Zee Eisenstat’s students at the Teach for Reach school in Chicago. Shara is a rotund, quiet girl who always wears a parka in class. One afternoon, when Shara goes to the bathroom and does not return, Zee discovers that Shara is in labor—she has been pregnant all year. Witnessing the trauma of Shara’s subsequent delivery in the nurse’s office forces Zee to confront the fact that she is perhaps in over her head with Teach for Reach and causes her to wonder what good she can really do as a cog in the machine of false activism.

**Linda Mariani** – Zee Eisenstat’s mother’s law clerk. When Zee begins travelling to the city under the guise of seeing Broadway shows in order to attend lesbian bars, she runs into Linda at one of these “watering holes.” Months later, when Linda is fired for stealing office supplies from Zee’s mother’s office, she outs Zee by telling her mother that Zee has been frequenting lesbian bars.

**Senator Annie McCauley** – A senator in Indiana who has become famous for her staunch pro-life stance. It is revealed through a flashback that Faith Frank and Annie were once friends who travelled out to Las Vegas together to explore the country. After Annie underwent a botched abortion, she was shamed by emergency room nurses and doctors and was berated for being promiscuous. Annie eventually got married and moved to the Midwest, where her politics—which had once been feminist and liberal, like Faith’s—underwent a big change.

**Lupe Izurieta** – An Ecuadorian women who has allegedly benefited from Loci’s mentorship program. Loci brings Lupe to California to give a speech at one of their summits, where Greer writes Lupe’s speech for her and speaks alongside her. Greer feels that she is giving the shy, disenfranchised Lupe a real platform. Shortly after the summit, once Lupe has already returned to Ecuador, it is revealed that no such mentorship program exists, and Loci has been accepting donations in the name of a lie. Greer is ashamed of having made Lupe stand up and speak to hundreds of women about the ways in which Loci has improved her life, when really, it’s possible that Lupe is still suffering in her home country.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Laurel Blanken** – Greer’s mother and Rob Kadetsky’s wife. An ex-hippie and a “library clown” who makes a living performing songs and magic tricks for children at local libraries, Laurel, like her husband, is unable to understand or connect to her intellectual and driven child.

**Duarte Pinto** – Cory’s father and Benedita’s husband. After Benedita inadvertently kills their son Alby, Duarte is unable to deal with his pain, grief, and rage, and returns to Portugal,

leaving Cory to fill the gap he has left behind.

**Clove Wilberson** – A student at Princeton who repeatedly attempts to seduce Cory Pinto, and eventually succeeds. He and Clove sleep together several times over the course of four years, and Cory feels extreme guilt each time since he is still dating Greer.

**Iffat Khan** – Faith Frank’s assistant at Loci.

**Lincoln Frank-Landau** – Faith Frank’s son lives across the country in Denver and has become distant, though not estranged, from his mother.

**Kim Russo** – A former employee of ShraderCapital who contacts Greer in order to confidentially inform her that Loci’s mentorship program in Ecuador does not actually exist.

**Kay Chung** – Kay is Cory and Greer’s high-school aged babysitter who cares for the couple’s daughter, Emilia, and fiercely looks up to Greer. Kay, despite her youth, is a self-described radical feminist who dreams of one day revolutionizing the movement, which she sees as outdated and insufficient in many ways.

**Kelvin Yang** – A student at Ryland with whom Zee and Greer become friendly. Greer and Kelvin have a brief flirtation and even kiss once, but Greer feels loyal to Cory and does not pursue anything further with Kelvin.

**Dog** – Kelvin’s roommate, who has an unrequited crush on Zee.

**Kristin Vells** – A girl from Greer and Cory’s hometown with whom Cory has a brief sexual relationship.

**Sabio Pereira** – Sab, Cory’s cousin, is a burnout and a bad influence. The two of them bond briefly when Cory moves home following Alby’s death, but Cory is unable to keep up with Sab’s drug use.

another’s concepts of feminism and understanding of what makes one a good female friend or mentor. Greer, Faith, and Zee struggle to be good to one another but ultimately find themselves betraying and disappointing one another, as well as complicating one another’s ideas about what it takes to be a good feminist. Wolitzer argues that generations of stifling oppression and misogyny have made female relationships deeply fraught and difficult to honor in the way they deserve to be.

Greer Kadetsky is thrust into feminism when she and several of her friends and acquaintances at Ryland College find that they have all been sexually harassed by the same boy—Darren Tinzler. Greer and her friend Zee Eisenstat, enraged that the administration is letting Darren off with nothing more than a slap on the wrist, immerse themselves in outlining their own concept of feminism. Neither seems to know much about feminism or its history, but their excitement about embracing their power as women and railing against the patriarchy is both palpable and genuine. When the legendary feminist activist Faith Frank delivers a lecture at Ryland, Zee brings Greer along, excited by the prospect of seeing her longtime feminist hero in the flesh. It is Greer, however, who is first to raise her hand to ask a question in the lecture and who connects with Faith in a women’s restroom following her speech. Later, when Greer lands a job writing speeches for Faith Frank to deliver at biannual summits organized by Faith’s new women’s foundation, Loci, Greer believes she is changing the world. However, Greer slowly realizes that these conferences amount to little more than an echo chamber for the watered-down brand of feminism Faith has adopted after years of failing to institute change as a radical. Thus, Greer comes to see that “good” feminism is not something that can be bought, sold, neatly packaged, or performed, and that the duties of female friendship and mentorship take a lifetime to understand and uphold.

A major plot point in the novel is Greer’s betrayal of Zee in order to keep Faith all to herself. Though it was Zee who first brought Greer to Faith’s lecture and Zee who encouraged Greer to find Faith in the bathroom to make a connection with her, Greer is the one who ends up serendipitously reconnecting with Faith years later and earning a job at her feminist startup, Loci. When Zee finds out about Greer’s good fortune, she asks Greer to pass along a letter she has written to Faith, expressing her longtime admiration of Faith’s work and her desire to also join Loci. Knowing what the letter contains, Greer—intoxicated by the attention she is receiving from Faith and desperate to have it all to herself—tells Faith that she has a letter from Zee addressed to her, but does not want to pass it on. She asks Faith if this makes her a bad friend or a bad feminist, but Faith insists that the choice of whether to hand the letter over is up to Greer. Greer keeps Zee’s letter to herself and continues to chase success and validation from Faith while leaving Zee to



## THEMES

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### FEMALE FRIENDSHIP AND MENTORSHIP

Meg Wolitzer’s *The Female Persuasion* is written with a parodic and often scathing eye turned toward contemporary feminism and what it means

to be a “good” feminist. Throughout the novel, being an ally toward other women—loving them, helping them, teaching them—is held up as the main tenet of “good feminism.” As the story progresses, however, the triad of women at its heart—Greer Kadetsky, her mentor Faith Frank, and her college friend Zee Eisenstat—find themselves at odds with one

figure out her own life and career. Years later, Greer has become disillusioned with Faith's willingness to turn a blind eye to the ways in which corruption amongst Loci's investors is beginning to affect the company. As a result, Greer quits her job, and Faith, feeling attacked and belittled by Greer's idealism, tells Greer that her statement-making departure from the company means nothing, and that Greer is a bad friend and a bad feminist because of her decision to withhold Zee's letter. "You make it sound like you care too much about women [...] to stay here," Faith says, "yet look at what you did all those years ago. To your best friend." Rather than respond to Faith's accusation, Greer simply flees the office, leaving Faith's harsh criticism hanging in the air. Later, Greer visits Zee in Chicago and reveals everything to her. Although a rift opens between the two women for a time, it is eventually repaired through Greer's repeated apologies and Zee's realization that she has, despite or perhaps even because of Greer's neglect, made a meaningful life for herself. Through her work in traumatology, Zee helps women directly, a goal which neither Greer nor Faith is able to accomplish.

Faith's role as a mentor is one that she inhabits rather uneasily, despite her work as a feminist activist and all of her talk about the need for women to support one another. From her very first appearance in the novel, at the lecture she gives at Ryland College, her brand of feminism comes across as trite, weary, and canned. As Faith's extensive backstory is revealed, it comes to light that her years of fighting for equal pay and women's reproductive rights have indeed drained Faith and forced her to realize that there is only so much one woman can do to accomplish her dreams of "spread[ing] the word about the plight of women everywhere." Faith has had to make compromises—moral as well as financial. Faith ultimately botches her role as a mentor to Greer, lashing out at one of her most devoted acolytes in a moment of pain, embarrassment, and shame. This uneasy conclusion to Greer and Faith's relationship reinforces Wolitzer's argument that relationships between women are often negatively impacted by the pain and trauma that women have experienced in the past.

As the female relationships at the center of the novel take root, blossom, and wither, Wolitzer depicts the realm of female friendship and mentorship as tense and difficult to navigate. The characters in the novel struggle to overcome the many ways in which society pits women against other women. The novel also highlights how these characters often hurt themselves most of all when they fail to avoid societal pressures. Wolitzer does not argue in favor of a clear or correct way forward for contemporary feminists, instead using her novel to cast a light on the more shadowy, difficult aspects of what it means to be a woman, feminist, friend, and mentor.



## FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

In *The Female Persuasion*, the main characters' families are almost all struggling with intense issues related to trauma, pain, inadequacy, and shame.

Greer Kadetsky's stoner parents find themselves bewildered and intimidated by their type-A, go-getter child. Greer seeks refuge in her boyfriend Cory Pinto's family, who provide a haven of relative stability, normalcy, and encouragement—that is, until Cory's younger brother Alby dies in a tragic accident. Zee Eisenstat's parents—both judges—have difficulty accepting their queer daughter's drives toward activism and her desire to break from the upper-middle-class lives they have modeled for her. Wolitzer depicts her characters navigating their messy family lives, grasping blindly for solutions to their feelings of inadequate parental or filial love, and often forming new families in the process, though sometimes only creating more suffering for everyone. In this novel, Wolitzer shows how her characters deal with issues banal, tragic, and in between within their families—the ones they were born into and the ones they have made for themselves—and argues that the lifelong search for security, approval, and intimacy from a family or a familial structure is both universal and inescapable.

Greer Kadetsky has grown up with two parents who are seemingly indifferent to her successes and failures. Lapsed hippies with little direction in life, Greer's mother works as a library clown who performs for local children, while Greer's father takes odd jobs as a house painter and an enthusiastic peddler of protein bars, caught in the inescapable loop of pyramid-schemes. Greer has always felt distant from her parents and retreated into books throughout her childhood as a way to cope with the loneliness she felt. When Greer applied to Yale, she asked her parents to help her fill out a series of complicated forms that would qualify her for financial aid. Later, when her acceptance arrives with a meager aid package, her parents reveal that they fudged the paperwork, daunted by the "bureaucracy" of it all and the pressures to prove themselves to an institution in which they had no faith in the first place. Greer seeks comfort, validation, and a sense of belonging elsewhere—first from Cory's family, then from Faith Frank and the Loci "family," of which Greer tries desperately to be a part. Greer is so excited by the prospect of finding a group of people with whom she fits in that she changes herself time and time again to make herself "perfect" in the eyes of her coworkers and, most importantly, Faith. Greer, a strict vegetarian since the early days of college, forces herself to eat meat in order to fit in during a weekend trip up to Faith's country house. Once Greer has compromised her identity and values in this way to secure approval from this new "family," she soon goes along with everything else demanded of her at Loci. She even considers turning a blind eye when it is revealed to her that the mentorship program which the organization purportedly established for a group of refugee women in Ecuador does not,

in fact, exist, even though Loci has been touting its success. Greer's desire to find a group of people who truly understand her backfires. All her life she conceived of what it would look and feel like to find a community of people whose intellect, social awareness, and feminist values would align with hers, but she eventually comes to find that what may at first appear to be a tight-knit, reliable group of people is often just as fractured as the strange family she left behind.

Zee Eisenstat was born Franny Eisenstat, but her rejection of her family's ideas about her and their hopes and dreams for her led her to make a new identity for herself. Zee knew she was gay from an early age and broke away from her family at every opportunity to seek out a community in New York City. This, however, led to her being "outed" against her will when one of her parents' vengeful employees revealed that she had seen Zee on multiple occasions at a lesbian bar in the Lower East Side. In college, Zee seeks to make a community for herself out of her love of feminism and activism, but she ultimately fails. When she is forced to return home after college, the drudgery of working as a paralegal—the career her parents have chosen for her—wears on her so greatly that she flees to Chicago to work for Teach and Reach, a program that places mostly white, middle-class, college-educated people in teaching positions at schools in impoverished or dangerous neighborhoods. Zee is not only unable to make a new community for herself there, but realizes, after witnessing the hardships of these students and failing utterly to relate, that she has led herself further astray than ever. However, Zee's life does eventually end in happiness (though not necessarily in the discovery of a tribe or a family) after she finds security in her partnership with her lover, Noelle, and fulfillment as a trauma worker who supports disenfranchised and demoralized victims. Through Zee's arc, Wolitzer suggests that, just like in Greer's case, the search for an idealized family or community is often futile and fruitless.

Cory Pinto's family is, at the start of the novel at least, picture-perfect. Immigrants from Portugal who have succeeded in living the American dream, Cory's parents are loving and supportive of each other and of their two "genius" children, the book-smart Cory and the hyper-curious, deeply sensitive Alby. When Cory's mother accidentally causes Alby's death by running him over with her car in the driveway (he had been lying in the grass observing his pet turtle, **Slowly**), the Pinto family's loving, peaceful foundation begins to crumble. Cory's father leaves and returns to Portugal, unable to look into the face of the woman who "killed" his child. Meanwhile, Cory's mother becomes bedridden and psychotic, describing visions of the ghost of her son in which he implores her to scratch off her skin. Cory, fresh out of college and poised for a financially successful career in consulting, leaves his dream job and returns home to care for his ailing mother. Sequestered in his childhood home and forced to take up his mother's work (cleaning houses in the neighborhood) in order to make ends

meet, Cory becomes obsessed with the idea that his younger brother is not dead but simply "lost" somewhere out there in the world, just waiting to be found. This delusion, born out of the desire to escape from his fractured family, drags Cory to his lowest point. Eventually, Cory is able to reconcile his feelings of loss and pain with the idea that his brother is truly gone. His desire to search the world for his brother, however, results in an idea for a videogame, which he is eventually able to pitch to a developer and watch come to a fruition as *SoulFinder*—a hit videogame in which players must navigate both earthly and ethereal planes in search of lost loved ones. Cory's storyline, in contrast to Greer and Zee's, suggests that sometimes the ache of the desire for a whole, idyllic family or community cannot be filled. Certain losses cannot be amended, and people can never be replaced. Cory's videogame reflects the listlessness and longing that have come to characterize his life, but unlike Zee and Greer, he does not become consumed with the hunt for a "replacement" community. Instead, he chooses to sit with his desire and work through the ways in which loss has recalibrated his understanding of himself, of family, and of the world.

Wolitzer's novel portrays fractured families and communities, as well as the obsessive, often destructive patterns of longing and searching which develop in the wake of such fractures. As Greer, Zee, and Cory grow into adulthood, they either to chase some semblance of the stability, comfort, and support that they feel was missing from their lives or learn how to live with instability and brokenness. In both outcomes, Wolitzer demonstrates the banality of the struggle to reconcile one's past traumas—often the result of a fractured family or community, which, though a deeply personal thing, is also a universal trouble. Many of her characters are troubled so deeply by what they feel is the denial of a secure, supportive, and easily-navigated familial structure, that they fail to realize that everyone around them is wrestling with that same problem.



## SOCIOPOLITICAL POWER VS. PERSONAL FORTITUDE

Political power and personal fortitude are, within the world of *The Female Persuasion*, rendered as two very different things. As Wolitzer's characters navigate young adulthood, they struggle to discern the difference between what it means to have political or social power and what it means to be personally empowered. Those with traditional power in the novel are not necessarily strong on the inside or in possession of powerful convictions, while those with the most personal fortitude often possess the least amount of power. Wolitzer charts the ebbs and flows of her characters' own personal empowerment and their perceptions of those around them who possess actual, bankable power—through finances, social capital, or political power. In



doing so, Wolitzer suggests that it is often those in positions of power who are actually the least empowered, while those without a platform are often the strongest-willed individuals whose sense of personal empowerment and strong belief system mean they have the highest potential for enacting real, meaningful change in the world.

Faith Frank is, at first, presented as a figure who is both personally empowered and politically powerful. At the start of the novel, after the long-ago success of her “feisty” tome on feminism, female empowerment, and activism (also titled *The Female Persuasion*), Faith is now on the lecture circuit, resting on the laurels of her seminal text and the success it brought her. She appears to the naïve, college-aged Greer—who is searching for a means of empowerment after a difficult first year at her second-rate college—as an eminently and effortlessly powerful individual. As the novel unfolds, however—and as both Greer and the reader grow to know Faith better—it is revealed that Faith has never truly been in a position of power. Furthermore, readers learn that Faith’s own personal sense of empowerment has dwindled as, over the years, she has become more and more jaded by her failure to find a viable, respected platform for spreading her feminist message throughout the country and the world. Thus, Faith’s “feisty” message of empowerment is revealed as a watered-down version of the real empowerment she hoped to spread throughout the country and indeed the world. Faith’s fight for abortion reform was drowned out by the voices around her, which, at the time, were mostly focused on anti-war sentiment. In response, Faith and a small group of friends, created a vessel for their ideas of empowerment, a magazine called *Bloomer*, which also began to quickly dwindle when the editors found themselves unable to sell ad space. Faith then founded Loci with the financial help of her former lover Emmett Shrader and began to settle for a version of power that was attainable. However, even as the face and voice of Loci, Faith found herself unable to spread empowerment and inspire personal fortitude in other women with the pittance of social, political, and financial power she had at the organization, which was a capitalist sham and a paragon of “feel-good feminism” and false activism all along. Over the course of the novel, Faith reckons with her legacy and the struggles she has put herself through in order to attain a position of power for herself—ideally one which she would use to ensure the empowerment of other women. She ultimately comes to understand that power is a fickle and fluid thing, and that the pursuit of power often ends in disappointment, compromise, and an uneasy peace with the limitations of what power can provide.

In the novel’s final passage, after returning home from a book party in celebration of her own feminist text, *Outside Voices*, Greer contemplates the ways in which she has “replaced” Faith by achieving her own success and voice, as well as her own social, political, and financial power as a well-known feminist

writer. Greer is powerful but does not necessarily feel the sense of personal fortitude she had always imagined herself feeling at this point in her life. As she watches her young, social-justice-oriented babysitter move through her home, Greer wonders who will one day surpass her in terms of both sociopolitical capital and personal inner strength to match it. “At Loci,” Greer thinks, “they had all talked loftily about power, creating summits around it as though it was a quantifiable thing. That would last forever. But it wouldn’t [...] Power eventually slid away. People did what they could, as powerfully as they could, until they couldn’t do it anymore.” Greer dedicated a portion of her life to attempting to quantify, wrangle, appraise, and even redistribute power, and she has now come to realize that sociopolitical power—and even personal inner fortitude—is not something that can be held in an everlasting way. Power is an ever-changing mechanism that stands to both improve and devalue its wielder, while personal empowerment, though often more “real,” can be just as difficult to cultivate and maintain.

Over the course of the novel, Greer and Faith’s search for both sociopolitical power and personal empowerment yields strange and sometimes sad results. Faith is desperate to achieve a position of power that she can use as a platform for the dissemination of radical ideas meant to fuel female empowerment and inner strength. Instead, Faith is beaten down again and again by the structures that shape society and aim to keep women down. Eventually, she succumbs to the empty grasping for power despite realizing that it will not help her reach the goals she has for herself and for women everywhere. Greer, hoping to follow in Faith’s hallowed footsteps, comes to understand that her idol and mentor’s relationship with power—and with Faith’s own personal sense of empowerment or personal fortitude—is just as fraught and uncertain as anyone else’s. Greer, who has fought more for her own personal sense of inner strength throughout the novel and has not attempted to secure political or social capital for herself, ultimately finds herself in possession of it nonetheless. She feels a little bit like a sham, and as Wolitzer closes the novel on this somewhat uneasy note, she furthers her argument that sociopolitical power is not the end-all be-all when it comes to enacting real change, spreading a true message, and making a difference in the world.



## ACTIVISM

*The Female Persuasion* is full of characters who consider themselves activists or who aspire to activism. Faith Frank is a revered crusader for women’s rights, and when she comes to speak at Greer Kadetsky and Zee Eisenstat’s college, it lights a fire in both young women’s hearts that will change the course of their lives forever. After college, however, when Greer joins Loci (Faith’s somewhat nebulous women’s organization) and Zee pursues

on-the-ground activism as a “Teach and Reach” teacher on the South Side of Chicago, both women realize that it is not enough to want to do good in the world. Wolitzer makes the timely argument that true activism—activism that serves the needs of the disenfranchised over the desires of “activists” to feel good about themselves and their contribution to the world—is, perhaps, impossible. In buffeting her argument, Wolitzer examines under a microscope (and sometimes throws under the bus) organizations that often benefit the activists and their senses of purpose more than the truly needy and downtrodden.

Faith’s desire to empower women has imbued her life with purpose since she was young, when her twin brother was allowed to go off to college, while Faith was made to attend a local school and live at home, where, under her parents’ watchful eye, her virginity would remain intact and her safety would be secured. This injustice drove Faith, once she graduated from college, to move out to Las Vegas with a friend, Annie, and rebel against the years of quietude her parents enforced. After a botched abortion endangered Annie’s life and filled her with unwarranted shame, Faith moved to New York and dedicated her life to the abortion reform and women’s liberation movements. By 2010, Faith is the head of the successful Loci—a hazy but well-intentioned organization which brings together artists, celebrities, activists, and downtrodden women from all over the world in twice-yearly “summits” meant to showcase female voices and debate the state of modern feminism. Greer Kadetsky is an employee at Loci and struggles from day one with her feelings of inadequacy and impotence within the organization as she watches the corporation bend repeatedly to the demands of its profit-minded investors, spearheaded by Faith’s former lover Emmett Shrader. Loci comes under fire for being an exclusive organization aimed only at “wealthy white people.” Later, the organization is revealed to have fraudulently claimed to have launched a mentorship program for Ecuadorian women—a program which does not, in fact, exist. Faith admits to Greer that she has “had to adjust [her] expectations about what [she can] do” for women. She reveals to Greer that one undertakes activism knowing that “for every dollar that’s donated ten cents is pocketed by some corrupt person, and another ten cents no one has any idea what happens to it.” Faith has accepted that the idealism of her youth does not translate to the real world, and that the type of activist she had hoped to be may not be possible. What remains promising, in Faith’s mind, is any sliver of real change. Faith reveals to Greer that she must “always weigh” what the costs of her attempts at activism will be against what good will actually come of them, knowing that even the greatest effort will only yield a small modicum of true good.

Zee proclaims herself an activist from early on in the novel. She constantly alludes to the activism she engaged in in high school,

and at Ryland College, she attempts to make her mark by engaging in activism against sexual assault. Zee’s self-proclaimed activism, however, is always spoken of—by herself and by others—in nebulous, ill-defined terms, and often it seems as if Zee enjoys the title of activist more than the work of activism. This half-baked approach to activism is further compounded when Zee takes a teaching job at Teach and Reach in Chicago, where she finds herself wanting to make a change in the lives of others but unable to do so. Noelle, a guidance counselor at the school, points out the futile and offensive nature of organizations that feed their participants a sense of achievement while denying those in need any real benefit. In this way, Zee’s character arc reflects that of Greer: both women hope that they can become true activists and effect real change despite working for flawed organizations where they are beholden to the shadowy power of the rich people behind them. This botched attempt at activism is more about validating and serving the people who call themselves activists than the people in need of their “activism.” The hypocrisy of this paradox is the crux of the novel’s critique of contemporary activism.

Greer’s brush with false activism is a direct result of Faith Frank’s botched activism, and her willingness to get in bed—figuratively and literally—with the shadowy ShraderCapital, the source of Loci’s finances and the puppeteer pulling the strings behind their programming, outreach, and planning. When Faith, exhausted by the many demands placed on her, asks Greer to deliver the keynote speech at one of Loci’s summits, Greer accepts, thrilled to be able to introduce to the world one Lupe Izurieta, an Ecuadorian woman who escaped a horrific past through the help of activists affiliated with Loci and is now in a mentorship program, working toward a career in textiles. Greer helps Lupe to deliver her own speech at the summit, and Greer feels warmed and self-satisfied by the good Loci is doing. Later, it is revealed that there is, in fact, no mentorship program—the program never got off the ground, but to avoid embarrassment, ShraderCapital continued to accept donations meant for the mentors and their mentees, while proliferating the idea that the program was well and truly thriving. With the truth exposed, Greer realizes that she has been an ally to false activism for years. She takes a stand and decides to leave the company, but not before Faith Frank calls into question Greer’s own hypocrisy—Greer wants to take a stand against capitalism and greed, but in Greer’s own life, she has not been a true activist or ally to the women in her immediate life and social circle. Shamed, Greer leaves the company. Several years later, when Greer publishes her own book on feminism, activism, and “leaning in”—*Outside Voices*—she finds herself receiving some of the acclaim, adoration, and activist support that her would-be mentor Faith must have enjoyed in her own prime. Greer is pleased but also put off by this fact, realizing that perhaps true activism is dictated by power—unquantifiable, untenable power—and thus impossible to ever achieve.

As Greer, Zee, and Faith struggle to obtain the title of activist, their flimsy or failed attempts at helping others and bettering the world catch up to them and force them to reckon with the pain they have caused and the self-indulgence they have exhibited. Wolitzer's novel satirizes forms of activism that require little-to-no real effort and are more focused on allowing one to simply skate through life beneath the label of "feminist" or "activist." In doing so, she criticizes the proliferation of systems and organizations that serve to boost the egos of their adherents or members who are lured by the promises of change, validation, and feel-good feminism but do not actually prioritize the disenfranchised people for whom they purport to advocate.



## SYMBOLS

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



### SLOWY THE TURTLE

Alby Pinto's slow-moving turtle—aptly named Slowy—comes to represent the slow, messy, and often life-stalling process of grief. During his short life, Alby spends hours each day studying, taking copious notes about Slowy's each and every move. Alby's dedication to his turtle actually ends up being the cause of Alby's death. While Alby is lying in the driveway and observing Slowy, Alby and Cory's mother, Benedita, backs her car over Alby and crushes him to death. After Alby's death, Cory begins caring for the turtle, revering it as one of the last remaining vestiges of Alby's short life on Earth. As Cory cares for Slowy over the years, Slowy comes to symbolize Cory's struggle to wade through the thick muck of grief. Cory, who had graduated from Princeton and taken a high-profile, high-paying job at a consulting firm in Manila, puts his whole life on hold to return home and nurse his mother through her grief and resulting insanity. At the end of the novel, Cory's girlfriend-turned-wife, Greer, realizes that the social capital and power she is enjoying now as a successful feminist writer will not last. As she considers this, she imagines how every afternoon for several years, Cory sat alone in his brother's room with only Slowy for company. She wonders if the turtle will "outlive them all," as she realizes that the power of grief, pain, and slow acceptance of one's fate is the only true power in the world.



### SOFA BEDS

In *The Female Persuasion*, sofa beds symbolize the impermanence of Greer, Zee, and Cory's post-grad lives, which are marked by transition, emphasis on the present rather than the future, and flimsy relationships. As Greer

begins her life in Brooklyn, Zee struggles to carve out a path toward activism for herself in Chicago, and Cory moves home to care for his grieving mother. All three find themselves in liminal spaces. Recurring images of sofa beds symbolize the impermanence of their post-grad lives, as well as the ways in which all three characters assure themselves and one another that the dubious or half-hearted decisions they're making now are just temporary decisions that will not dictate who they'll be in the future. When Greer hooks up with a Loci coworker, they spend entire weekends on his futon, sitting in silence on their respective laptops in between rounds of intercourse, emphasizing the flimsy, temporary nature of the relationship. In addition, while visiting Zee in Chicago, Greer confesses to betraying Zee long ago by secretly withholding Zee's letter to Faith Frank, Zee's idol and Greer's boss. Upon hearing this confession, Zee "imagine[s] telling [her partner] Noelle everything tonight in bed while Greer lay on the sleeper sofa in the living room," highlighting that Greer has only temporarily reentered Zee's life. Likewise, when Cory finally frees himself from the grief he has been lodged in since his brother's death, he pays Greer a visit in New York and sleeps on her pull-out couch. As the three friends couch-hop over the years, they move in and out of one another's lives with similar ease, unaware of the ways in which their present choices will impact how their lives ultimately unfold.



## QUOTES



Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Riverhead Books edition of *The Female Persuasion* published in 2018.

### Chapter 1 Quotes

●● Greer Kadetsky met Faith Frank in October of 2006 at Ryland College, where Faith had come to deliver the Edmund and Wilhelmina Ryland Memorial Lecture; and though that night the chapel was full of students, some of them boiling over with loudmouthed commentary, it seemed astonishing but true that out of everyone there, Greer was the one to interest Faith. Greer, a freshman then at this undistinguished school in southern Connecticut, was selectively and furiously shy. She could give answers easily, but rarely opinions. "Which makes no sense, because I am stuffed with opinions. I am a piñata of opinions," she'd said to Cory during one of their nightly Skype sessions. She'd always been a tireless student and a constant reader, but she found it impossible to speak in the wild and free ways that other people did. For most of her life it hadn't mattered, but now it did.

**Related Characters:** Greer Kadetsky (speaker), Cory Pinto,

Faith Frank

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 3

### Explanation and Analysis

The novel's very first lines set up the foundations of the relationship which will come to form its central engine: the mentor-mentee relationship between famous feminist writer and activist Faith Frank and the young, impressionable, ambitious Greer Kadetsky. Greer is immediately characterized as someone who is "stuffed with opinions" but unable to share them due to her reserved nature. Though Greer has always been quietly ambitious, the novel opens on a kind of awakening for her. "Now," Wolitzer writes, meaning now that Faith Frank has come into Greer's world, her ability not just to form but to believe in and to share her opinions is of deep importance. As the novel unfolds and Greer finds her opinions challenged and even shattered sometimes, this seed of belief in the power of her own mind will have towering significance when it comes to Greer's development and maintenance of her own personal fortitude, values, and inner strength.

●● Soon the other girls rallied and came forward, and while the college initially tried to avoid any kind of public airing, under pressure officials agreed to hold a disciplinary hearing. It took place in a biology lab in the pale, leaking light of a Friday afternoon, when everyone was already thinking about the weekend ahead. Greer, when it was her turn to speak, stood in front of a glossy black table lined with Bunsen burners, and half-whispered what Darren Tinzler had said and done to her that night at the party. She was sure she had a fever from testifying, a wild and inflamed fever. Scarlet fever, maybe.

**Related Characters:** Greer Kadetsky (speaker), Darren Tinzler

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 21

### Explanation and Analysis

During Greer's first weekend at college, she attends a fraternity party and is sexually harassed by a fraternity boy named Darren Tinzler. As her semester goes on, she hears similar stories from her fellow friends and classmates, and soon the fact of Tinzler's serial abuse is firmly established.

In this passage, Wolitzer contrasts an image of the hearings—begrudgingly conducted in a makeshift space—with the intense "fever" and desire for action it ignites within Greer. As the university carries out the bare minimum in terms of investigation and punishment, Greer recognizes that this new fire within her must be turned outwards if she is to effect any real change. Just as Greer described herself as being "stuffed with opinions," she is now filled with an "inflamed fever"—Wolitzer is charting Greer's progression as she reaches a boiling point at which a change will happen not only inside of her, but outside as well.

●● "She's probably one of those women who hates women," said Zee. "A total cunt." Then she began to sing her own version of a song from a musical that her parents used to like: "Women... women who hate women... are the cuntiest women... in the world..."

Greer said, "That's terrible! You shouldn't say *cunt*."

"Oh, come on," Zee went on. "I can say what I want. That's having agency."

"You shouldn't say *agency*," said Greer. "That's worse."

**Related Characters:** Greer Kadetsky, Zee Eisenstat (speaker)



**Page Number:** 22

### Explanation and Analysis

Zee's radical approach to feminism and activism is satirized in this passage, as Wolitzer draws lines indicating the intricacies and divides in modern feminism. One argument is that the word "cunt" is degrading to woman and should never be used, even by women themselves, and especially when referring to other women. Another argument is that using the word and reclaiming the power it has taken on is a mark of "agency" and seizing control of one's identity. Greer, however, seems exhausted by the idea that "agency" is good enough. Greer's perspective represents a third argument, which does not see agency in such simple terms as doing whatever one wants—Wolitzer is laying the groundwork for Greer's novel-length wrestling with what it means to have agency, to use one's agency, and most importantly to use it *wisely*.

Then, beside her, in the pew, Zee's arm went up too. Of course she had a real question, a political one; she probably even had follow-ups. Faith nodded her head in their direction. At first it was unclear which of them she was calling on. But then she saw Faith seem to zero in on her, specifically *her*, Greer, and Greer looked quizzically at Zee, making sure she was reading this right. Zee gave her a quick, affirmative nod, as if to say: Yes. This is yours. Zee even smiled, wanting Greer to have it.

**Related Characters:** Greer Kadetsky, Zee Eisenstat (speaker), Faith Frank

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 34

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage details the moment in which Faith Frank, during her lecture at Ryland College, calls upon Greer to ask a question. Zee has brought Greer to the lecture, excited to introduce her new friend to her longtime idol, storied feminist Faith Frank. But it is Greer, not Zee, who is called upon in this moment and offered the chance to lift up her voice. Greer, who has been quietly “stuffed with opinions” for years is at last given the opportunity to make her voice heard. Although it comes at the expense of Zee getting that same opportunity, there seems to be a tacit agreement between the two women that it is Greer's turn, seen by Zee's “quick, affirmative nod.” This moment foreshadows Greer's later choice to not return the favor. When Greer gets a job at Loci, Faith's women's organization, Zee wants to work there as well, but Greer blocks her from the opportunity.

In addition, this passage illustrates how Greer sees this situation through a selfish lens—she emphasizes that Faith “seem[ed] to zero in on her, specifically *her*, Greer.” Greer even interprets Zee's simple nod to mean, “This is yours.” In this moment, Greer seems to forget about feminism and helping women around the globe. Instead, she's focused on her own brief moment of fame. Greer's later preoccupation with her success within Loci (followed by her later, greater success after she's left the company) echoes Greer's tendency to be self-serving in her feminism.

## Chapter 5 Quotes

Greer got busy cutting a perfect cube and then spearing it. To eat meat when you hated it and when you hadn't eaten it for four years was an aberration, nearly a form of cannibalism. But also, she told herself, it was an act of love. In eating this, she was being someone Faith would want to continue to confide in and listen to and rely on; someone she would want to cook meat for [...] Goodbye, cow, she thought, picturing the distant green blur of a meadow. She swallowed hard and forced herself not to cough it up. The steak went down and stayed down.

“Yum,” Greer said.

**Related Characters:** Greer Kadetsky (speaker), Faith Frank

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 175-176

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Wolitzer illustrates how Greer is sacrificing small parts of herself in service of her mentor-mentee relationship with Faith Frank. Greer's eagerness to please Faith—even if that means sacrificing her own morals—highlights that Greer sees Faith as the one true path to activism, change, and enlightenment. As Greer chokes down a piece of meat at a weekend retreat at Faith's house in the country, she is conscious of the ways in which she is betraying her own ideals in service of Faith's nebulous mission “fight” for women. Although Greer knows she is sacrificing her own values, she seems to think she is doing so for feminism—not out of doe-eyed admiration for Faith. In addition, by equating eating meat to “nearly a form of cannibalism,” Greer unknowingly suggests that she would do anything for Faith, no matter how abhorrent. This scene contains one of the many hypocritical sacrifice of values that will dog Faith and Greer throughout their mentorship and partnership in the years to come.

## Chapter 7 Quotes

☝ “So you’re saying I should quit now?”

Noelle looked at her steadily. “No, of course I’m not saying that. You shouldn’t do that to these kids, not in the middle of the year. They crave stability. You stay, and you finish the year, and you do your best, and then you decide. Look, I’m sure you’re a fine person, and I’m sure you’re a person who is trying hard to... what do you say to yourself, ‘get involved’? I know that feeling: I have had it myself. But sometimes the way to get involved is to just live your life and be yourself with all your values intact. And by just being you, it’ll happen. Maybe not in big ways, but it’ll happen.”

**Related Characters:** Noelle, Zee Eisenstat (speaker)

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 256

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Noelle criticizes Zee for having such big aspirations to make a difference, and Zee considers her attempt at activism a failure. She moved to Chicago to take part in a program that she believed would allow her to create meaningful change in children’s lives and engage with her activist values, but instead, she is merely a cog in a machine which proliferates inequality and instability. Noelle points out to Zee how chasing activism for the sake of saying one is an activist is actually harmful and antithetical to creating opportunities for real change. Noelle’s criticism allows Zee to experience a breakthrough and understand that simply offering oneself to a cause is sometimes, unlikely as it might seem, enough.

☝ When they lay down upon the narrow mattress that Zee had purchased at a garage sale upon moving here [...] she couldn’t help but think a little bit about power: who had it right now [...] Power was hard to understand sometimes. You could not quantify it or calibrate it. You could barely see it, even when you were looking straight at it.

“That’s what everyone was talking about at the first Loci summit,” Greer had said recently on the phone when the subject came up. “The meaning and uses of power [...] Everyone who was there said that it was clear that it’s a topic we’re going to return to because no one can get enough of it. It excites everyone. Power! [...]”

To live in a world of female power—mutual power—felt like a desirable dream to Zee. Having power meant that the world was like a pasture with the gate left open, and that there was nothing stopping you, and you could run and run.

**Related Characters:** Greer Kadetsky, Zee Eisenstat (speaker), Noelle

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 261

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Zee begins a romance with Noelle Williams and thinks back to a conversation she had with Greer about power. As Zee struggles to engage with activism—and to find out what activism even means to her—during her time as a Teach and Reach instructor in Chicago, she recognizes that convoluted power mechanisms are at work behind all aspects of life as a woman. Lying on the bed with Noelle, Zee can’t tell who has the power in the situation and considers the freedom in finally having an experience of “mutual power.” The encounter opens Zee’s eyes to what a world calibrated by powerful women could look like and sees it as a utopia which she can only dream of. Although Zee has realized that she will often come up against challenges to her pursuit of power, she suggests that there is perhaps freedom in relationships with women, where these mechanisms are seen, understood, and subverted.

## Chapter 8 Quotes

☝ “I do what I can,” said Faith. “I do it for women. Not everyone agrees with the way I do it. Women in powerful positions are never safe from criticism. The kind of feminism I’ve practiced is one way to go about it. There are plenty of others, and that’s great. There are impassioned and radical young women out there, telling multiple stories. I applaud them. We need them. We need as many women fighting as possible. I learned early on from the wonderful Gloria Steinem that the world is big enough for different kinds of feminists to coexist, people who want to emphasize different aspects of the fight for equality. God knows the injustices are endless, and I am going to use whatever resources are at my disposal to fight in the way I know how.”

**Related Characters:** Faith Frank (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 129

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Faith reveals to Greer that she is working on a new venture—a women’s foundation which aims to gather

together artists, intellectuals, celebrities, and everyday women (often abused or downtrodden) in order to advance the discourse around women's rights all over the world. Faith highlights what seems to be her manifesto for the organization—she wants to “fight” for women despite the ambivalence and ignorance modern feminism faces and bring together “different kinds of feminists” to rally them around the major issues women face in order to make a real change. Although Faith's ideology seems well intentioned, it is also broad and vague, foreshadowing the inevitable hurdles, complications, and challenges Faith will face in running an organization with such a broad mission and so many moving parts.

☝ Faith thought that she didn't have to like them all, but she also recognized that they were in it together—“it” being the way it was for them. For women. The way it had been for centuries. The stuck place. She sang along with them, her voice coming out in a loud quaver. But it didn't matter that you quavered; it only mattered that you made yourself heard.

**Related Characters:** Faith Frank (speaker)

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 284

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Faith illustrates her rocky beginning in the world of feminist thought. After moving to New York City in her post-college years to immerse herself in an atmosphere of activism and revolution, Faith realizes that feminist activism is not all she thought it would be. Despite having trouble finding a community and making her voice heard, Faith begins to embrace the tension this creates between her expectations and her reality. As she begins to accept the community of women around her, she realizes that their voices are stronger together—they bring each of their unique experiences to the conversation and create a collective consciousness that will allow them to propel their movement forward in spite of the resistance they face each day.

This passage also points back to Greer's own struggles with being heard. Despite being filled with opinions, Greer is initially shy and hesitant to share her thoughts—seen by the way she “half-whispered” in the disciplinary hearing against the boy who sexually assaulted her. In this passage, Faith asserts that “it didn't matter that you quavered; it only mattered that you made yourself heard.” Perhaps Faith's

own shaky, tentative beginning in the feminist community is what draws Greer to her.

☝ In bed Emmett smiled lazily, opening his arms and enclosing her. “Come here,” he said, as if she weren't already right there. But he wanted her even closer, wanted to be inside her at once, an idea that she thought she understood in that moment, because she not only wanted him inside her, she wanted to be inside him in some way too. Maybe even to be him. She wanted to inhabit his confidence, his style, the way he walked through the world, which was so different from the way she did.

**Related Characters:** Faith Frank (speaker), Emmett Shrader

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 295

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Faith reflects on her one-night stand, years ago, with a younger Emmett Shrader. Faith considers the politics of power when it comes to sex between men and women—while Emmett wants to be physically inside of Faith, Faith wants to be inside of Emmett in a more psychological or metaphysical sense. She wants to possess the power he enjoys as a straight white man and marvels at “the way he walks through the world.” She implies that his effortless movement through the world contrasts sharply with the struggle to be seen, heard, and validated that women like Faith have to endure on a daily basis.

☝ Faith traveled easily among radical women, among housewives, among students, wanting to learn, as she said. “What do you stand for?” a very young interviewer from a student newspaper once asked her.

“I stand for women,” Faith said, but while early on this was a good enough answer, later it sometimes wouldn't be.

**Related Characters:** Faith Frank (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   



**Page Number:** 302

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Faith anticipates feminism’s changing landscape. Her comment, “I stand for women,” is a short, seemingly simple phrase loaded with large and complicated meaning. At first glance, the phrase is radical and powerful in its simplicity. It is a clear statement of Faith’s goals—to stand in solidarity with her fellow women unquestioningly, unfailingly, and no matter the circumstances. The phrase gains Faith allegiance and buzz early on in her career, but as the years go on and the demands of feminism and activism grow and change, it is no longer enough to say one stands with women. Instead, radical action is required. Just “standing” with or for women is not sufficient—as women’s issues experience a slow, unsteady, and beleaguered journey forward, Faith Frank’s easy platitudes don’t hold up very well, and she comes under fire for not doing more with her unique “brand” of power and status.

By now it was clear not only that Loci hadn’t kept up with all the galloping changes in feminism, but that the way it presented itself was also a reason for vilification. Loci was doing good business, and naturally people were writing things on Twitter like #whiteladyfeminism and #richladies, and the hashtag that for some reason irritated Faith most, #fingersandwichfeminism.

**Related Characters:** Faith Frank (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 311

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Faith highlights the pointed criticisms that Loci receives online. Faith founded Loci hoping to keep even a small extension of the *Bloomer* mission statement intact—she wanted to create a forum dedicated to the discussion of women’s issues. With Loci, however, Faith fell into a pattern of comfort and easy platitudes and has not succeeded into making Loci the radical and change-oriented public space that she intended. Faith is “irritated” by criticisms of her newest venture, perhaps feeling that even when she settles for a more palatable or accessible version of the radical activism she has long striven for in hopes of making at least some change, she comes under attack. She can’t do anything without being criticized, she realizes, and the revelation makes her even wearier.

The day after Greer Kadetsky had fallen asleep at work and then expressed her work frustrations, Faith had called a meeting in the conference room. They had all sat around the table and she listened as one by one they told her why they had originally come to Loci, and why it felt different there now. They told her about their worries that the summits were elitist, that there was a kind of feel-good feminism in the air.

“I recognize that feminism can’t only be ‘feel-bad,’” said one of the newer hires, “but there’s too much of an emphasis on how everything feels, and less on what it does.”

**Related Characters:** Faith Frank (speaker), Greer Kadetsky

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 314-315


### Explanation and Analysis

The struggle against allowing “feel-good feminism” to calibrate the goals and achievements of Loci throughout the novel is a palpable one, but it is one that Faith and Greer especially keep failing to surmount. Faith founded Loci with the goal of using the power she has accrued over the course of her career in order to bring to light in a public forum the major issues that women and contemporary feminism face. The organization, however, has become something of an echo chamber—a space in which the same ideas, complaints, and celebrations are repeated again and again until they lose all meaning and fail to advance the very discourse they are attempting to buffet. As Faith realizes this, she enlists her employees—many of whom, like Greer, are also her mentees—to help her parse out what has gone wrong and steer the conversation and aims of Loci back to their original roots.

## Chapter 9 Quotes

Greer wondered why Faith was giving her this gig. She remembered something Faith had said to the team once, early on: “Men give women the power that they themselves don’t want.” She’d meant power to run the home, to deal with the children, to make all decisions about the domestic realm. So maybe Faith, like one of those men, was giving Greer something she didn’t particularly want. Maybe Faith had no interest in giving this speech, and so that was why she was giving it to Greer—passing the power on to her in order to get rid of it.

**Related Characters:** Greer Kadetsky (speaker), Faith Frank

**Related Themes:**  



**Page Number:** 325-326

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Greer considers why Faith has given her the power and responsibility of delivering the keynote speech at one of Loci's summits. Greer and Faith's mutual preoccupation with power—acquiring it, possessing it, and disseminating it—forms a large part of the novel's thematic arc. For the entire novel, Greer has been watching as Faith uses the power of her status as an icon to fight for women's rights and women's empowerment. Greer has been in awe of Faith for years, and now, it seems, it is Greer's turn to possess some of the power that Faith has held on to for so long. The passing of the baton, however, is not a purely joyful moment for Greer—she wonders if she is only being given a small sliver of power because Faith is exhausted by wielding hers. This possibility causes Greer to reassess what she knows and believes about power and its capacity to wear one down those who hold it.

☝ Now Faith appeared like some foil-headed Martian, taking calmly about staying on at the foundation under the aegis of ShraderCapital, which had no problem pretending it was overseeing a nonexistent charity on another continent. "Maybe it's not moral to keep working for ShraderCapital," Greer said, actually lifting her chin slightly higher."

"You think this is just about them?" said Faith. "Don't you think I've had to make compromises before? My whole working life has been about compromise. I didn't have access to real money until Loci, so I'd never seen it on a big scale. But it happens. All the people who work for good causes will tell you this. For every dollar that's donated to women's health in the developing world, for instance, ten cents is pocketed by some corrupt person, and another ten cents no one has any idea what happens to it. Everyone knows, when they start out, that the donation is really only eighty cents. But everyone calls it a dollar because it's what's done."

"And that's acceptable to you?"

Faith took a second. "I always weigh it," she said. "Like with Ecuador. I'm ashamed of what happened. But those young women are free. I have to weight that too, don't I? That's what it's about, this life. The weighing."

**Related Characters:** Faith Frank, Greer Kadetsky (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 325-326

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage follows Greer's discovery that the mentorship program for disenfranchised Ecuadorian women that Greer flouted at Loci's most recent summit has never existed in the first place, despite the fact that ShraderCapital has accepting donations in support of that very program. Overwhelmed by the corruption and hypocrisy that has overrun Loci, Greer confronts Faith, hoping to rally her mentor toward a confrontation of the issues within the organization and hopefully a change. Faith, however, jaded as she is after years of struggling in the name of women's advancement, is resigned to the fact that there will always be some hypocrisy, corruption, and compromise in pursuit of one's goals, especially when one's goals are as difficult and unpopular as feminist activism. Greer's energetic high-mindedness is contrasted with Faith's exhausted pragmatism in this passage, as Faith reveals that a large part of her job is "weighing" the benefits and consequences of allowing disappointment, compromise, and corruption to take root within an organization when turning a blind eye to them might mean actually achieving even a small part of one's ultimate goal.

### Chapter 10 Quotes

☝ "These are not shy-person actions, Greer, I'm just saying. They're something else. Sneaky, maybe." Coldly, Zee added, "You really know how to act in the face of power. I've never put that together before, but it's true [...] You went to work for Faith Frank, the role model, the feminist, and I didn't. But you know what? I think there are two kinds of feminists. The famous ones, and everyone else. Everyone else, all the people who just quietly go and do what they're supposed to do, and don't get a lot of credit for it, and don't have someone out there every day telling them they're doing an awesome job. I don't have a mentor, Greer, and I've never had one. But I've had different women in my life who I like to be around [...] I don't need their approval. I don't need their permission. You want to know how often I think about the fact that I didn't get to work for Faith Frank? Almost never."

**Related Characters:** Zee Eisenstat (speaker), Faith Frank, Greer Kadetsky

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 367-368

### Explanation and Analysis



When Greer finally confesses that she intentionally failed to

pass Zee's letter along to Faith Frank all those years ago, Zee, understandably, reacts badly. Zee is hurt and confused, and as she attempts to work through what she is feeling, she comes to her own realization: that Greer has perhaps never been as shy and naïve as she purported to be but instead has been "sneakily" attempting to advance her own career and her own voice for years, even at the expense of her friends and allies. Zee and Greer have always been of two different opinions where the goals of feminism and activism are concerned, and in this passage, Zee reveals that she never needed or even truly wanted to participate in the "brand" of feminism Greer has dedicated her life to. Zee has struck out on her own and learned what activism means to her rather than following the trail of the zeitgeist, or the associated power structures, which Greer has built her world around.

## Chapter 12 Quotes

☝☝ "We were all put on this earth to row the boats we were meant to row," she said. "I work for women. That's what I do. And I am going to keep doing it. I have no idea if this Ecuador story will ever leak. If it does, it will be an embarrassment, and perhaps it will shut us down. But the bottom line is that I'm not going anywhere."

**Related Characters:** Faith Frank (speaker), Emmett Shrader

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 400

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Faith Frank confronts her onetime lover and current investor, Emmett Shrader, about the corruption and hypocrisy that has infiltrated Loci. Faith has already revealed to Greer, and thus to the reader, that she is willing to keep her mouth shut and her head down in the face of ShraderCapital's public lies about Loci's actions and initiatives. In this passage, however, Faith reveals her deeper motivation for doing so to her business partner—she knows that in order to "row the boat [she is] meant to row," she must make certain compromises. In a way, Faith reveals that her staunch commitment to the advancement of women and women's issues even in the face of almost unbearable disappointment and corruption is stronger than ever, suggesting that she is still imbued with the fierce idealism and good intent that characterized her early feminism.

☝☝ "It must be a burden to you to be the most important person to people who aren't all that important to you," he said.

"I'm not sure I agree with your interpretation. I get a lot from them too, remember."

"What do you get?" he asked. "I'm curious."

"Well, they keep me in the world," she said, and that was all she wanted to say.

**Related Characters:** Faith Frank, Emmett Shrader (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 404

### Explanation and Analysis


In this passage, Emmett Shrader, discussing the nature of Loci with Faith Frank, asks her if it's "burdensome" to be who she is—to exist every day as the icon and beacon she has made herself into over the course of her decades-long career as a feminist activist. Faith, however, reveals what the reader has on some level known all along: that the wearisome and often futile nature of her work has worn her down over the years. One of the only things keeping her on the difficult path she is on is the validation and celebration she receives from the idealistic, impressionable, ambitious young women who become her mentees, much like Greer. The adoration Faith receives does not fill the void within her left by the futility of much of her work, but it does motivate her to keep pressing on in the face of ridicule, inaction, hypocrisy, compromise, and failure.

## Chapter 14 Quotes

☝☝ He took his little kit into the bathroom while she placed sheets on the mattress of the small foldout sofa. This was an era in which sofa beds were frequently opened and unfolded; at this age people were still floating, not entirely landed, still needing places to stay the night sometimes. They were doing what they could, crashing in other places, living extemporaneously. Soon enough, the pace would pick up, the solid matter of life would kick in. Soon enough, sofa beds would stay folded.

**Related Characters:** Greer Kadetsky, Cory Pinto

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** Book Page 435

### Explanation and Analysis


In this passage, towards the novel's end, Cory visits Greer in New York. Wolitzer invokes one of the book's recurrent symbols, sofa beds, as Cory settles in for a night on Greer's couch before a big meeting in support of his video game in the city the following day. Though Greer and Cory have grown up a lot over the years and have weathered very different kinds of grief and loss, they are still stuck in a liminal space in their lives and are still waiting to feel like true adults. Though it seems as if this era of their life is never-ending, Wolitzer assures her readers that "soon enough" things will change and become more permanent. This is both a reassurance and a threat—the idea of leaving the liminal space of early adulthood, which permits idealism, hope, and change, seems desirable to the characters at this point in their lives. However, by leaving their youth behind, they will be launched into an entirely new realm in which weariness and stagnancy set in.

### Chapter 15 Quotes

☛☛ Kay wandered around, curious, excited, flipping through the different books on the shelves, finding ones that Greer hadn't lent her but which looked good, then eating from Greer's stash of cashews, swiping a couple of Greer's multivitamins from the big amber bottle on the kitchen counter, as if they might give her the energy, power, and stature that she would need, going forward. Kay went into the den and looked at the soft easy chair there, the reading lamp angled beside it. Sit in the chair, Kay, Greer thought. Lean back and close your eyes. Imagine being me. It's not so great, but imagine it anyway. At Loci, they had all talked loftily about power, creating summits around it as though it was a quantifiable thing that would last forever. But it wouldn't, and you didn't know that when you were just starting out. Greer thought of Cory sitting in his brother's bedroom, far from anything having to do with power, taking Slowy out of his box and placing him nearby on the blue carpet. Slowy blinking, moving an arm, craning his head forward. Power eventually slid away, Greer thought. People did what they could, as powerfully as they could, until they couldn't do it anymore. There wasn't much time. In the end, she thought, the turtle might outlive them all.

**Related Characters:** Greer Kadetsky (speaker), Kay Chung

**Related Themes:**    

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 454

### Explanation and Analysis

Greer, at the end of the novel, has, in a sense, achieved everything she always dreamed of—she has become a successful feminist author who has created a platform not just for herself but, hopefully, for a younger generation of feminists. Greer returns home from a big party in support of her book, *Outside Voices*, and considers her daughter's babysitter, Kay, a high school student whose radical feminist views signal hope for the progression of feminist ideology and values despite the recent "big terribleness" (ostensibly the 2016 presidential election) that has threatened those values. Greer wants to somehow impart the wisdom that power is changeable and unquantifiable, and that the struggle to locate, assert, and maintain power is a journey that tests one's personal fortitude and inner strength. Greer thinks about all the different kinds of strength, considering her now-husband Cory's strength in the face of indescribable loss, and ultimately finds herself wondering if such shows of strength wear people down beyond repair over the course of their life. Faith, Greer's longtime idol and mentor, became jaded and worn down, and though Greer hopes that this will not happen to her as well, she considers the fact that the turtle, Slowy—who symbolizes the pain and pervasiveness of grief—very well may outlast "them all."



## 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

It is October of 2006, and Greer Kadetsky is a freshman at the “undistinguished” Ryland College in Southern Connecticut. She is about to meet Faith Frank, but does not know it yet, nor does she know that out of everyone gathered at the lecture Faith will give, Greer will be the one to interest the famous Faith. Greer is a shy but opinionated young woman, and often vents to her boyfriend, Cory, about the disconnect between her beliefs and her ability to share them aloud.

Greer, looking back on this time in her life, wonders why Faith Frank “recognized and liked” her, Greer wonders if Faith, “at sixty-three a person of influence and a certain level of fame,” simply felt sorry for Greer. Regardless of what made Faith take an interest of her, Greer recalls the night she met Faith as “the thrilling beginning of everything,” and reflects on all that transpired between that beginning and the “unspeakable end” of her relationship with Faith.

Greer has been at Ryland College for seven weeks. She has spent much of that time lonely and unhappy—unable to make friends, longing for her boyfriend, Cory, who attends Princeton, and feeling distinctly out of place. One night, she sits in her dorm’s common room with a group of misfits, reflecting on how disastrous her time in school has been so far. Rather than attempt to make friends or take on new activities, Greer has spent most of her days seeking refuge in novels, which have brought her comfort in difficult times all throughout her life. Tonight, however, books are “unseductive,” and Greer feels bitter and lonely. Earlier, when she video chatted with Cory, he was on his way out to a party—Greer is disappointed that she is not going out, too.

Just at that moment, a girl walks past the common room—she has a “Joan of Arc aesthetic,” and Greer can tell that the girl is gay. The girl announces to the room of misfits that she is on her way to a few parties, and extends a blanket invite, which Greer accepts. Greer follows the girl out of the dorm and into the chilly evening. The girl introduces herself as Zee Eisenstat, and the two of them begin hopping from party to party. As they interact with many different people, Greer is anxious—she is book-smart, but her social skills are somewhat lacking. She is fearful of putting herself “out there” and revealing who she really is to people.

*These first lines of the novel are tinged with the presence of fate—the ambitious but repressed Greer is unhappy at her obscure and less-than-rigorous college, but by being in exactly the right place at the right time, her life is about to change in ways she can’t begin to anticipate.*



*Looking back on this moment many years later, Greer is still unable to discern what it was about her that Faith was drawn to. This suggests that even in the future, Greer is just as unsure about herself and her place in the world, in many ways, as she was at seventeen years old. This passage also foreshadows that Greer and Faith’s relationship will come to a dramatic and painful end one day, despite its auspicious beginnings.*



*Greer is having trouble adjusting to her new environment and making a community for herself. College is a big change for anyone, but Greer is particularly miserable and feels that she is missing out on something. Her discontent with Ryland and envy of her boyfriend, who attends the prestigious Princeton University, suggests that Greer thinks of herself as superior to her classmates and worthy of being at a “better” college.*



*Greer finally makes an effort to find a community at Ryland by bravely attending parties with a near-stranger—something that is clearly out of her comfort zone. Contrasting with Greer’s shy, bookish nature, Zee is immediately characterized as a social butterfly. Zee introduces Greer to the college social world, foreshadowing when Zee later introduces Greer to the world of social activism and feminist thought.*



At one party, which consists mainly of art students, a girl named Chloe offers to bring Zee and Greer with her to a fraternity party. The girls accept. At the frat house, Greer becomes slightly drunk and strikes up a conversation with a frat boy named Darren Tinzler. They discuss dorm life, and Greer reveals that she is unsatisfied with Ryland; she is supposed to be at Yale. Darren Tinzler moves closer and closer to Greer, and eventually sticks his hand up her shirt and squeezes her breast hard. Greer, in pain, pulls away, refusing his advance, but Darren grabs her arm and refuses to let her go. He tells Greer that she's "not that hot" anyway, and then pushes her away.

Greer is stunned, but no one around her seems to have noticed what just happened. Panicked and upset, she leaves the party and walks back to her dorm in a daze. Over the next few days, Greer tells anyone who will listen—including Cory—about what happened to her at the party. Zee urges Greer to report Darren Tinzler to the university administration. Zee is "innately, bracingly political," but Greer does not consider herself particularly political or interested in activism and is afraid to take any official action against Tinzler.

As the weeks go by, Greer hears about at least six other women who have been harassed or assaulted by Darren Tinzler, and their stories are remarkably similar to hers. One night, Darren attempts to assault a sophomore girl in the hallway of her dormitory, but she fights back. By the time campus security arrives at the scene, Tinzler is gone, but in the days following the incident, several girls begin to come forward with their stories. The college begrudgingly holds a disciplinary hearing, at which Greer testifies against Tinzler. As she does, she feels a kind of "fever" come over her, and she is enlivened by the act of speaking out about injustice.

Much to the victims' dismay, the disciplinary committee decides to allow Darren Tinzler to remain on campus as long as he completes three counseling sessions with a therapist who specializes in impulse control. Zee reasons that the head of the disciplinary committee is probably "one of those women who hates women," but Greer urges Zee not to indict another woman out of anger toward Tinzler. Anger is "hard to sustain," and though Greer tries to rally several of Tinzler's other victims toward continued action, most of them are busy, tired, and ready to move on. Ryland is not a very political place, and Greer and Zee, having no outlet for their outrage, decide to take matters into their own hands.

*In an attempt to step out of her comfort zone, Greer agrees to attend the fraternity party. Although Greer has been unhappy thus far at Ryland, she hasn't felt scared, nervous, or unsafe at college. At the frat party, however, when she is sexually assaulted by Darren Tinzler, Greer realizes that she has been flung into a strange new world, which is often unfair, unjust, and unsafe. This moment serves as a catalyst for Greer's passion for feminist activism.*



*The assault clearly rattles Greer, but at this point, the assault is more of a source of anxiety than a source of political passion. In contrast with Zee, Greer has never been particularly political. However, Greer suddenly finds herself in a situation where her lack of power—and her lack of politics—are glaringly obvious for the first time in her life.*



*Greer's own assault is her first real exposure to social injustice and the exhilaration of feminist activism. In addition, it seems that Greer is strengthened by the community of women who have also been sexually assaulted by Darren. Greer is willing to demonstrate uncharacteristic bravery and speak out publicly against Darren because it will benefit herself and an entire group of women who have been treated unjustly. As Greer's anger about the assault turns into a "fever," it becomes something productive that she knows she can use for good.*



*The university's decision reflects the ways in which society goes above and beyond to exonerate men while attempting to silence and discount women. Zee and Greer's reactions to the decision reveal their very different approaches to feminism. Greer wants to support and empower women and is frustrated when she fails to successfully encourage Tinzler's victims to get in touch with feminist action. Meanwhile, Zee understands that just because someone is a woman does not mean that they are a feminist.*



Greer and Zee order a bulk supply of t-shirts and spend a long night in their dorm's basement ironing transfers of Darren Tinzler's face—with the word "Unwanted" plastered across it—onto the shirts. The next morning, they attempt to give away the t-shirts at the dining hall, but hardly anyone wants one. Greer and Zee, however, wear their shirts all the time—they are both wearing them on the night that Faith Frank comes to Ryland to give a speech.

Zee sees an announcement for Faith's lecture in the college's weekly newspaper and encourages Greer to come along, even though Faith "represents [a] kind of outdated idea of feminism." Despite this, Zee deeply admires Faith and believes that if one of them can engage Faith in a conversation about the unjust situation with Darren Tinzler, Faith will tell them what to do.

In anticipation of the event, Greer looks Faith Frank up on the internet. Greer learns that Faith founded the feminist magazine, *Bloomer*, in the early 1970s, and though it never fared particularly well, the magazine was beloved by a small core audience of feminists. Faith also published a book of her own, a "manifesto" on feminism entitled *The Female Persuasion*, which argued that women did not have to "act tough" or "behave as badly as men" in order to appear strong and powerful. Faith's book was popular with women, and in the years since its initial publication, it has never gone out of print. Looking through photographs and videos of Faith online, Greer notes Faith's "signature look"—a pair of tall, sexy suede boots—as well as the contrast between her kind general demeanor and her quick temper in interviews.

Greer and Zee arrive at the chapel where Faith is speaking. The venue is packed, and Faith is running late due to bad weather. When Faith finally enters the building, Greer and Zee are excited by her "forceful presence." Faith's speech is concerned with the aims of feminism, and she explains the different aspects of the movement—the two main facets, she says, are individualism versus sisterhood. She urges those listening not to get caught up in individualism, or seeking their own advancement, and to rather attempt to find a way to "play a role in the great cause of women's equality." She implores the students to recognize that women need other women. She warns the students that as they dedicate themselves to sociopolitical causes, they will be met with resistance, but they should always remember that she is proud of them for "doing what matters."

*Making t-shirts seems to be Greer and Zee's final, desperate effort to sustain awareness about the injustice of Tinzler's exoneration. However, Greer and Zee are young and naïve in thinking that they can bring about real social change through homemade t-shirts, suggesting that both girls are idealistic in their approach to feminism.*



*Zee seems to idolize Faith and is certain that she will have the answers they have been seeking about how to deal with the injustice surrounding Darren Tinzler. In this way, Zee puts Faith on a pedestal, foreshadowing Greer's later adoption of this same behavior.*



*Although Greer has barely heard of Faith Frank before Zee brought her up, Greer now finds herself absorbed by learning everything she can about Faith, suggesting that Greer is beginning to idolize Faith as well. Both Greer and Zee are naïve when it comes to feminist thought and action, but Greer is especially undereducated and new to the scene. Because of this, Greer's early exposure to Faith's brand of feminism will be particularly impactful, as it will become the framework by which Greer evaluates all other modes of feminist thought.*



*The central theme of Faith's speech foreshadows a major struggle that Zee and Greer will have to work through for the rest of their lives. As the novel progresses, Greer will wrestle with her individualistic impulses despite her belief in sisterhood and community. Meanwhile, Zee is so focused on community-building that she forgets the power of individualism. Throughout the course of the novel, Zee will have to learn how to utilize her own personal strengths to further her goals of community organization and the betterment of collective spaces.*



Greer finds herself “taken in completely” and wanting more of Faith—listening to Faith speak, Greer thinks, feels similar to falling in love. When Faith opens up the discussion for questions from the audience, Greer desperately wants to ask a question but is afraid to speak up. At the last moment, as the event is about to end, both Greer and Zee raise their hand. Greer fears that whatever Zee is going to ask will be more articulate and interesting than Greer’s own question. However, when Faith calls on Greer rather than Zee, Zee urges Greer to speak up.

Greer timidly stands up and asks Faith a broad, emotional question. Greer wants to know what she and her fellow students should do about “the way it is” for women. Greer points out the t-shirts she and Zee are wearing and informs Faith of the university’s mishandling of the assault and harassment case against Darren Tinzler. Faith urges Greer to keep the conversation going, and says she is “amaze[d]” by how “alarmingly improvised” the legal process on most college campuses is. Just then, the provost stands and cuts her off, announcing that they are out of time.

As the event finishes, students rush up to Faith and surround her. Greer also wants to talk with Faith more but thinks it is hopeless. Zee and Greer resign themselves to getting a pizza and returning to their dorm, but on the way out, they see Faith heading into the ladies’ room. They decide to follow her into the bathroom and “each try to have a moment with her.”

When the girls enter the bathroom, Faith is already in a stall. Zee and Greer each head into a stall on either side of her and wait for her to emerge. When Faith approaches the sink, Greer joins her there. Faith recognizes Greer and apologizes for the way their exchange got cut off. Greer introduces herself to Faith and reveals how difficult it usually is for her to speak her mind. Greer says that in grade school, she was always told to use her “inside voice,” but she wonders if now she should start using her “outside voice.” Faith urges Greer not to beat herself up and to stay true to herself—only then will she be able to accomplish the things she cares about.

*Faith Frank jolts Greer out of her tendencies toward shyness, repression, and insecurity, echoing the way that Zee has helped Greer get out of her comfort zone socially and politically. Although Zee is the true Faith Frank fan, and the one who brought Greer to her in the first place, Zee recognizes what an important moment it is for Greer to speak out, and selflessly allows her to take the spotlight. This moment foreshadows a later reversal, when Greer chooses not to selflessly share Faith with Zee.*



*Greer wants to know what she can do about “the way it is,” meaning the way the world is riddled with misogyny and injustice toward women. The Darren Tinzler incident is Greer’s first real exposure to injustice and misogyny, and she is so rattled by it that she cannot move on from it—much to the dismay of the university administration, who want to avoid conflict and scandal, seen by the way that the provost cuts Faith off.*



*Greer and Zee didn’t exactly get what they wanted from Faith—they thought that by merely being in her presence, they would suddenly find all of the answers to their problems. However, the girls are still convinced of Faith’s power and influence, so they attempt to “have a moment with her” in the bathroom.*



*By responding to Greer’s continued inquiries and confessions with grace and empathy, Faith demonstrates her devotion to supporting young women. However, it will eventually be revealed that Faith—in order to stroke her own ego and feel relevant—needs validation from these young women as much as they crave validation from Faith.*



Greer feels that her moment with Faith is about to end, knowing that Zee will come out of her stall at any moment. Greer continues talking with Faith, confessing that she feels out of place at Ryland but had no choice but to come here—her parents, she says, “screwed up” her financial aid. Faith tells Greer that she admires her for working so hard to assert herself and find meaning in the place she’s in, even though it’s hard for her to be there. Faith takes Greer’s hands and tells her to keep her head down and focus, and Greer is moved by the gesture. At that moment, Zee comes out of the stall and begins washing her hands.

Zee compliments Faith on her lecture and begins gushing about she has “always” been a “super-fan.” Faith shakes Zee’s hand and wishes both of the girls good luck. Before leaving, she encourages Greer to move on from the sexual assault case, saying that there is “lots to be angry about well beyond the bounds of this campus.” The provost opens the bathroom door, urging Faith to join the reception in her honor. The provost leaves, and Faith laments over having to go. She once again urges Greer and Zee to devote themselves to finding new experiences, and then hands Greer one of her personal business cards.

Greer holds the card in her hand, feeling as if she has just won a lottery ticket. Greer doesn’t know what she’ll do with it, but she feels that just receiving the card is an accomplishment of sorts. Faith closes her wallet and leaves, bidding both Greer and Zee a good evening.

## CHAPTER 2

Zee’s parents have allowed her to take their Volvo to college but have instructed her not to let anyone else drive it. Ignoring their warning, Zee allows Greer to borrow the car and drive it to Princeton to visit Cory. It is February, and Zee and Greer are now very close friends—this is not the first time Greer has borrowed to car to drive to New Jersey.

At Princeton, Greer and Cory retreat to Cory’s messy dorm room and lay down on Cory’s bed. Greer asks how things are going and if Cory still feels “self-conscious” and out of place on campus. He admits that things are better, though he is still occasionally ashamed by his parents’ working-class occupations: his mother, Benedita, is a housecleaner and his father, Duarte, is an upholsterer. Cory tells Greer about a very snobby, wealthy girl he knows, whose name is Clove Wilberson, and informs Greer that she’s “lucky” to be at Ryland. Greer is offended, as the disparity between their schools is still a “sensitive” topic for her.

*Greer strings her conversation with Faith along, stalling and attempting to reveal more and more about her own life in hopes that Faith will have an answer for all of Greer’s problems. Although she knows she should give Zee a chance to speak with Faith, Greer keeps talking. Greer shows that she is desperate to get Faith’s attention and keep it all to herself, even at Zee’s expense—a behavior that will endure throughout the novel.*



*Faith clearly favors Greer over Zee, as evidenced by the way that Faith gives Greer a business card rather than giving one to each of the girls. Nonetheless, the fact that Greer was able to connect so deeply with Faith in such a short amount of time (and in a bathroom, of all places) remains tinged with a kind of magic. It seems to presage the start of a long relationship between Greer and Faith, though neither yet knows what shape it will take.*



*Greer holds the card in the hands and feels that it has imbued her life with a strange and new kind of power. It is clear that Greer now idolizes Faith just like Zee does.*



*As Zee and Greer’s friendship deepens, it seems that Zee is doing most of the emotional and physical support within the friendship. Zee is willing to do anything to help Greer, even if there’s a risk to Zee’s own happiness and well-being. This echoes the way that Zee encouraged Greer to ask her question during Faith’s lecture.*



*Although Cory is genuine in reassuring Greer that the Ivy League isn’t all it’s cracked up to be, it’s still a difficult topic for Greer to broach. She feels that Cory’s prestigious education is tipping the scales in terms of the power dynamic in their relationship, driving a wedge between them and creating a constant reminder that she is not as smart or worthy as he is.*





Though Greer is still uneasy about being at Ryland, the campus has become more welcoming as the year has gone on. Now, when she visits Cory at Princeton, she wonders what she is missing back on her own campus. She feels that the change is in large part due to Faith Frank, who encouraged Greer to discover new things and make her world “dynamic.” Greer fantasizes about writing to Faith to thank her for her words that night in the bathroom. Although Zee encourages her to use the email on the business card, Greer doesn’t think that Faith wants to be “pen pals with a freshman at a shitty college.” Greer is doing well in classes, but no amount of praise or attention from her professors at Ryland feels as good as the brief recognition she got from Faith.

Greer has been spending lots of time with Zee, but also with Kelvin Yang and his roommate Dog—two boys who live right upstairs from Greer. They go to parties together, take weekend trips to rallies in DC, and hike in nearby parks. Greer, influenced by Zee, has become a vegetarian and has taken up a volunteer position at a local women’s hotline. Greer and Zee have long conversations about feminism, sexuality, and what it means to be a woman. Zee interrogates Greer about her desires, and Greer begins investigating what it is about Cory that attracts her. Ultimately, she decides that she can’t understand the intricacies of desire, and that her love for Cory is a good enough answer.

In Cory’s bed at Princeton, Greer and Cory begin making out but are soon interrupted by Cory’s roommate. As the two of them take out books and both begin to read instead, Greer reflects on the history of her relationship with Cory, and how they have become as “tangled together and indivisible” as they are now.

Greer had an isolating childhood; her parents, longtime hippies who took odd jobs and sold protein bars to make ends meet, did not care about fitting into the community of Macopee, the small, working-class western Massachusetts town of Greer’s youth. Greer’s mother, Laurel, is a clown who performs at libraries, and her father, Rob, is a housepainter. As a young couple, the pair had led an itinerant existence living in a converted school bus on the West Coast. When they became sick of that lifestyle, they found themselves caught between “bus life” and “regular” life, resigned to normalcy but always longing for something else. Growing up, Greer often felt lonely in her disorganized house and isolated from her “uninterested” parents, so she retreated into the world of books.

*All it took was a few kind words from Faith in a public restroom for Greer to significantly change her opinion of Ryland. Those few words from Faith have inspired Greer to do more, be better, and focus on her future no matter her present circumstances, ultimately demonstrating the immense power that Faith has over Greer.*



*Besides being influenced by Faith, Greer is also deeply influenced by Zee. Greer’s newfound vegetarianism and job at a women’s hotline demonstrate that Zee’s radical political stances and thoughtful approaches to feminism, desire, and moving through the world responsibly are rubbing off on Greer. Their friendship is deeply rooted in their respective perspectives on the nature of friendship, community, and what it means to be good to other women.*



*Greer and Cory clearly want to be together—they are making a long-distance relationship work, even at a young age. As Wolitzer explores their backstory, she introduces themes of family and community.*



*Greer’s new approach to activism and feminism makes sense in light of her childhood, which always required her to take initiative not just in her own education but in her own day-to-day life. Her parents are removed and distant, caught up in their half-baked dreams and rejection of societal norms. Greer’s journey thus far in college reflects her drive to secure an education and a support system for herself.*



When Cory Pinto showed up at school in the fourth grade, Greer was excited to finally have a classmate as passionate about learning and reading as she was. Greer and Cory found themselves outpacing their classmates academically and were paced alone together in the highest reading group. However, while Greer was shy and quiet, Cory was popular and confident, and Greer felt “mowed down” by Cory as they were, over the years, constantly thrown together by virtue of their shared intelligence.

Once, when Greer visited Cory’s house to work on a project, she was overwhelmed and upset by the differences between their families—Cory’s parents hung his artwork and projects on the fridge, and his mother made Greer and Cory a fresh snack. Greer, embarrassed and feeling pitiable, finished the project hurriedly and went home—she would not return to the Pinto house for eight years.

By the time both of them were seventeen, Greer and Cory ran in different social circles and had little to do with one another, but they were still united by academics. One afternoon, while bonding over how difficult one of their tests in school had been, Greer reluctantly invited Cory over and was embarrassed when they walked into the Kadetsky kitchen to the overpowering smell of marijuana. The two of them sat in the den, discussing their parents and their lives. Cory lit a candle and burned himself on the wax—he then asked Greer to drip wax on his torso, and she obliged, surprised by how much she enjoyed the feeling of having power over Cory.

Soon after that, Cory and Greer began a romantic and sexual relationship. After a few weeks, they were spending all of their time together, sharing their insecurities about their home lives, and struggling to understand who they were becoming to one another. The two of them fought sometimes, and Greer occasionally found herself taking on the “predetermined female role” of an “emotionally fragile girl[friend].” At first she balked at the role, but she then took comfort in realizing that she was part of a “long chain of women” who had performed or inhabited that very role.

Greer loved spending time at Cory’s house because it was warm and different from her own. In addition, Cory’s bright and intelligent baby brother, three-and-a-half year-old Alby, was remarkably fun to be around. Greer and Cory both doted constantly on Alby and played with him and his pet turtle, **Slowly**.

*Greer has always perceived intelligence as a means of power. In her lonely household, reading was what gave her a sense of inner strength. When Cory arrives, however, his outward friendliness contrasts with Greer’s quiet studiousness, and she feels small and powerless once again, overshadowed and bested at her own game.*



*In her younger years, Greer envied Cory not just for his smarts, but also for the tight-knit, normal family life he had. Greer felt the imbalance of power between her and Cory, even at a young age, and removed herself from a friendship with him to avoid the sting.*



*As Cory and Greer near the end of their high school careers, they reconnect in a meaningful way, but power dynamics are still an inextricable part of their relationship. When Cory visits the Kadetsky house for the first time, Greer makes herself vulnerable to him. However, Cory willingly invites Greer to sensually drip candle wax on him, allowing her to regain power over him.*



*As Greer begins navigating her first romantic relationship, she comes to understand that power dynamics are an unavoidable aspect of heterosexuality. She often finds herself feeling blocked into a prescribed “role” as the woman in the relationship, foreshadowing her later interest in feminist thought.*



*Greer and Cory both loved Alby very much, and it seems that Alby brought an air of levity into the pair’s relationship, strengthening the bond between them.*



Back in Cory's dorm room at Princeton, Greer considers her "newly adult life," which, sparked in large part by Faith Frank, is beginning to take shape. However, Greer still finds herself "burrowing into Cory" for comfort, validation, and love.

*Despite her newfound passion for feminism and her independent life at Ryland, Greer still feels a need for Cory. Considering her own detached relationship with her parents, it seems that Greer sees Cory as her true family.*



Over the next couple of years, Greer notices that her peers begin to talk about jobs and the future rather than classes, majors, and parties. Greer does not want to get stuck hanging around Ryland College, as many recent alumni do. Instead, she harbors dreams of moving to Brooklyn with Cory and writing essays, articles, and feminist texts.

*As college continues on, Greer begins to consider more deeply what she wants for her future—her wishes involve both Cory and her newfound love of feminism, and she is able to hold both in her heart at the same time.*



Cory, meanwhile, is making plans with a few friends to develop a microfinance app after college—he excitedly tells Greer about it, and she begins to imagine their lives together. The two of them discuss their plans to move to Brooklyn, and though Greer occasionally worries that Cory will become distracted by someone beautiful, wealthy, and refined like Clove Wilberson, she feels confident that the sense of longing she and Cory feel for one another will be enough to keep them together. Throughout college, Greer has refused advances from other boys, including her friend Kelvin Yang, knowing that she and Cory are meant to be together. Greer wishes time would "hurry up" and fly by so that they can finally begin their lives together.

*Though Greer has begun dreaming a future with Cory, she still finds herself dogged by fears that Cory will shift the balance of power in their relationship, or end things entirely, due to the influence of another woman. Greer's individualistic streak, which often finds her pitting herself against other women, shines through in this passage, foreshadowing the difficulties she will have in separating her feminism from individualism.*



## CHAPTER 3

Cory had been born Duarte Jr., but after his parents moved their family from Portugal to Massachusetts, Cory picked the most American name he could think of to go by. At school, Cory constantly felt as if he had to prove himself and only felt confident and secure at home with his family. His parents praised him and his little brother, Alby, as "geniuses." Cory grew up very differently from his cousin Sabio, or Sab, who obsessed with pornography by age thirteen, and once showed Cory a picture in a magazine of a girl dripping candle wax all over a man's naked torso.

*Cory's desires and decisions are rooted in his fears of not amassing enough sociopolitical power due to his working-class, immigrant roots. The flashback to Sab's magazine explains why Cory let Greer pour candle wax on him in high school, suggesting that Cory, like Greer, is preoccupied by power dynamics.*



One afternoon, during his senior year of high school, Cory played a game with his friends that involved rating their female classmates on an attractiveness scale of 1 to 10. Cory was proud of himself for defending Greer Kadetsky, whom his classmates were ready to label as a “6,” but whom Cory insisted was a “9.” After that afternoon, Cory became borderline obsessed with Greer Kadetsky and began striking up conversations with her in an attempt to get closer to her. When Greer and Cory at last became involved in a relationship, Sab called Cory a “pussy” for refusing to look at porn with him any longer, but Cory didn’t really care. Soon, he would be leaving his whole family behind for college.

Cory and Greer planned to attend the same college. On the day that admissions decisions came out, Greer was rejected from Princeton, though she was accepted to Yale. After getting Greer’s decisions, the two of them walked back across the road to Cory’s house, where his parents were waiting with two cakes bearing the insignias of Princeton and Yale. He’d gotten into both schools with full scholarships. Cory’s parents asked Greer if she’d gotten a full ride to Yale too, but Greer confessed that in her excitement, she hadn’t checked. When she and Cory went back to her house to look, they were miserable to find out that due to Greer’s parents’ having incorrectly completed her financial aid forms, she was not offered enough money to attend. Cory pitied Greer, who was now forced to attend her safety school, Ryland, where she was awarded a full ride based on merit.

Greer and Cory parted ways tearfully at the end of the summer, and Cory headed off to Princeton. He and Greer video chatted each night and frequently travelled back and forth between campuses. Nonetheless, Cory found himself tempted by all the attention he was getting from the girls at Princeton, especially from Clove Wilberson. Now, college is nearly over, and Cory is reckoning with the several times he has cheated on Greer with Clove over the years. He blames his infidelity on having been drunk each time he slept with Clove, but he has never told Greer of his repeated betrayals of her.

Cory and the friends he has been planning on developing his app with decide that they will all need to spend a year or two in the workforce making money separately in order to fund their dream startup. Cory is soon recruited by a renowned consulting firm, and they offer him a cushy job in New York City. When Cory tells Greer the news over video chat, she is excited for him and tells him coyly that she has been thinking about what job she wants for herself. Greer excitedly tells Cory that no matter what happens in their futures, at least they’ll be together—Cory briefly wishes the video chat connection would fail and remove him from this intimate moment with Greer.

*Cory sees himself as chivalrous for having helped Greer to obtain more sociopolitical power in the eyes of his sleazy high school friends, even if that sociopolitical power is flimsy and based on attractiveness. It is clear in this passage that power dynamics are important to Cory, and that from an early age, he has felt compelled to “save” women—something that will reemerge later in the novel.*



*Though Greer and Cory have done all they can to ensure that they will travel through their lives together on even footing, an imbalance of power nonetheless comes into play as they prepare to enter college. They are different people and are perhaps destined for different things. This creates a sense of imbalance, and even jealousy, between the two of them, as they are forced to reckon with the divergent paths their lives are about to take and the different opportunities that will be available to them.*



*Cory feels a great deal of shame about not being faithful to Greer, but there is also seems to be a part of him that enjoys having a life that is separate from Greer and from the pressures and obligations of partnership. Greer and Cory had envisioned keeping their lives perfectly intertwined, but as the braids between them begin to fray, Cory finds himself continuing to untangle himself from Greer rather than attempting to solidify his relationship with her.*



*Despite the chinks and small fractures in their relationship, Cory and Greer maintain the same goal—they want to live together in Brooklyn, and finally be physically together as often, and be as emotionally close, as they were in high school. However, Cory seems to have some doubts about having a shared life with Greer, as evidenced by the way he wishes the video chat connection would fail.*



## CHAPTER 4

Greer has come down to New York City by bus to interview with Faith Frank for a position at *Bloomer*. Though she doesn't really love the magazine—it has not embraced radical politics like some of its competitors and has grown “soft”—she knows that she wants to be in Faith's presence.

When Greer rings the bell at *Bloomer's* office, no one answers. She reflects on the recent weeks leading up to this moment—after a disappointing job search, Greer finally decided to use Faith's business card and called the magazine to introduce herself. The next day, Faith's assistant had called her back and offered her an interview, noting that Faith remembered Greer. At last, the door to *Bloomer's* office building opens. Inside the office, Greer can see Faith comforting a crying woman. A nearby employee tells Greer that Amelia Bloomer, the woman for whom the magazine was named, has died, and that the magazine will be folding soon.

Faith gathers her staff around her and gives a speech, while the stunned Greer looks on. Faith congratulates her fellow editors for all their hard work and urges them to recognize that no matter what, they are all a part of “the history of women's struggle for equality.” First, she tells the women not to cry, but then she urges her employees to get all of their emotions out, so that they can go right back to work doing something new. The staff applauds Faith, and Greer, feeling “congested with disappointment,” disappears back into the hallway.

That night, Greer writes Faith an email, thanking her for her tireless work at *Bloomer* and lamenting the missed opportunity at an interview with Faith. She then forgets about the job and sends her resume out to different companies and nonprofits. One day, Cory announces disappointing news: the consulting firm that hired him, Armitage & Rist, wants him to work in their Manila office in the Philippines and are offering him more money to do so. Greer is upset and wonders if she and Cory will ever get the chance to be together in the same place. Cory tells Greer that he has to take the job, and Greer reluctantly supports him.

Greer and Zee pack up their dorm room, sad to leave college and disappointed by the lackluster lives waiting for them. Zee is moving home to Scarsdale, New York to live with her parents and train to be a paralegal. Her parents have “semi-forced” her into this plan, since Zee has no other job opportunities lined up. Zee's desire to be an activist and a community organizer seems silly to her parents, who are both judges.

*Even though Greer knows that Bloomer's politics are not as radical as the ones she aspires to, she thinks that a place beside Faith Frank is worth the sacrifice. This introduces the ways in which Greer will continue to sacrifice her own values for Faith.*



*Greer's dreams of working alongside Faith Frank seem, in this moment, utterly dashed. Greer has had a difficult time finding a path for herself that will take her through her first years out of college, and with the shuttering of Bloomer, it seems as if the most appealing avenue is off-limits.*



*Greer is completely disappointed to have missed the opportunity to work with Faith but is nonetheless galvanized by witnessing Faith speaking so generously and so enthusiastically to her employees even in the wake of a great tragedy and demoralizing news. Faith is skillful in any situation, Greer realizes, and is always there for the women she works with and supports.*



*Nothing is working out quite like Greer thought it would. She had imagined that she and Cory would both get jobs in the city and start their lives in Brooklyn right away, but now two major obstacles have cropped up—Greer's failed opportunity at Bloomer and Cory's relocation. Greer dejectedly realizes that her dreams of domestic bliss and feminist utopias will have to wait.*



*Zee finds herself having to make a large compromise, too, as she is forced to forgo her activists dreams in favor of pursuing something less exciting but more practical at the behest of her parents.*



Greer, meanwhile, heads home to Macopee and takes a job at the local roller rink while she figures out what to do next. She is no longer angry with her parents but feels disconnected from them and longs to leave home as soon as she can. As she and Cory adjust to the time difference between them, they miss one another deeply and continue to dream of the day when they'll finally live together.

Late one night, Greer receives an email from Faith Frank. Apologizing for not having written back sooner, Faith thanks Greer for her kind note and says that she is putting together a team for a "grand new venture." She can't provide more details about it but asks if Greer would like to interview for the project. Greer writes back right away and tells Faith that she is "VERY" interested in arranging an interview. Faith writes back instantaneously, telling Greer that her assistant will be in touch in the morning to schedule something. At the end of her email, Faith asks why the two of them are still awake and jokingly suggests they hit themselves over the head with frying pans to get to sleep. Greer writes back that she is too excited by the prospect of an interview to sleep at all.

Three days later, Greer returns to New York for an interview with Faith. At a midtown skyscraper, Greer meets Faith's assistant, Iffat Khan, who brings Greer into Faith's office. Faith greets Greer warmly, and Greer hands Faith a frying pan, which she has bought as a gag gift. Faith appreciates the gesture but tells Greer that she wants to "get down to business." She begins telling Greer that after *Bloomer* closed, she received a call from an old friend, Emmett Shrader, a famous venture capitalist, who made an offer to fund a women's foundation which will connect speakers and audiences and discuss "the most urgent issues concerning women today." Faith knows that there will be some backlash to the venture, since "Shrader being Shrader," has funded "questionable ventures" over the years. Though the foundation is a risk, it's one Faith wants to take.

Faith goes on to tell Greer that she does what she can in the name of women's issues. She knows that women in powerful positions are often subjected to criticism, but she also knows from her years of work as an activist that "the world is big enough for different kinds of feminists to coexist." Faith excitedly tells Greer that though the main focus of the venture will be speakers and summits, there will occasionally be room for a "special emergency project" that directly impacts the lives of women all over the world. The entire venture sounds "blurry" and vague to Greer, but she nonetheless wants the position badly.

*Greer has always felt as if she deserves to be somewhere other than where she is, and as she moves home in the wake of graduation, that feeling is only perpetuated. Cory's high-profile job in the Philippines compared to Greer's job at the local roller rink mirrors the way that Cory went to Princeton while Greer was forced to attend Ryland.*



*Greer longs for friendship and community, but there is little of it to be found in Macopee. When Faith's email arrives, Greer is ecstatic—it seems as if some of her dreams might come true after all. Greer is surprised but thrilled by the easy camaraderie in her email exchange with Faith. Greer is still so desperate to work with her idol that she agrees to an interview despite not even knowing what the "grand new venture" is about. Once again, Greer prioritizes Faith in her decision-making process.*



*Greer's gag gift is a gesture of admiration and a reference to the small inside joke they shared a few days earlier. As Faith brings Greer up to speed on her "grand new venture" she couches the story of her new foundation in a reasonable amount of doubt and worry. However, even Faith's reservations about her own undertaking do not seem to deter Greer from enthusiastically wanting to be a part of whatever Faith is up to next.*



*Even after meeting with Faith, Greer still doesn't fully understand the aims or machinations of Faith's new organization, but it doesn't matter. Greer cares more about having the chance to spend as much time as she can around her idol than whatever Faith's venture will actually do. In addition, both Greer and Faith seem less concerned with actually accomplishing their activist goals than with finding a space which appears to support them.*



Faith tells Greer that the foundation will be called Loci, and that they'll need to assemble a team quickly to get things off the ground. Emmett Shrader, she says, has already rented out an entire floor of the building for Loci's offices. Faith gestures to the ceiling and informs Greer that ShraderCapital's offices are just upstairs from them. Faith tells Greer that she is a promising individual and offers her a job. Greer excitedly accepts, and Faith warns her that much of the entry-level job will be boring at first, but there will be many opportunities to get involved in all aspects of the foundation. As Faith explains the specifics of the job, Greer is so excited that she can hardly sit still.

Two weeks later, Zee helps Greer to move into a small studio apartment in Brooklyn. The apartment is tiny and dingy, but Greer is excited to have a place all to herself. Greer gives Cory a tour of the space via video chat and excitedly tells him that one day he'll get to come visit her neighborhood. After Greer is completely moved in, it is time for Zee to go. Zee doesn't want to leave, and Greer doesn't want her to go either, so Greer offers to give Zee a key so that she can come visit any time. When Zee leaves, Greer feels lonely, but she slowly begins exploring her new neighborhood and settling into her new building.

A few nights later, Zee comes back to Brooklyn to meet Greer for a drink. Both girls are starting their new jobs the next day. Zee praises Greer for having secured such an awesome job and then reaches into her pocket to give Greer something. Greer thinks that Zee is going to give her some kind of good-luck gift, but instead Zee pulls out an envelope. Greer thinks it must hold a heartfelt letter, and she thanks Zee, but Zee informs her that the letter inside is for Faith. Zee is desperate not to be a paralegal and wants to ask Faith for a job. She asks Greer to deliver the letter directly to Faith for her—Greer is shocked and a little upset.

Zee rambles about how amazing it would be if they could both work for Faith and share in such an exciting and meaningful job. Meanwhile, Greer realizes that although she can envision herself giving the letter to Faith and recommending Zee for the job, Greer does not actually want to advocate for Zee. Greer leans the letter against her beer bottle, but it soon drops onto the surface of the bar.

*This passage cements the fact that Greer doesn't really care about the specifics of working for Faith Frank. Instead, Greer just wants to spend time in Faith's presence, learning from her and continuing to idolize her. Greer prioritizes Faith over Greer's own values and aspirations—something that will resonate throughout Greer's entire career at Loci.*



*Zee proves herself to be a steadfast and attentive friend. Though Greer has just gotten what is ostensibly Zee's dream job, Zee is not jealous—instead, she happily helps her friend to move into her new apartment and supports her as she begins a new chapter in her life. Once again, Zee selflessly supports Greer and her dreams, foreshadowing the way that Greer will soon fail to do the same.*



*When Zee returns to Brooklyn, she does so with a mission in mind. She is still not outwardly jealous of Greer, or at all cruel or even snide about Greer's having secured a career that Zee has long been dreaming of. Instead, Zee humbly asks if there is a seat for her at the proverbial table. Rather than reacting with excitement or empathy, though, Greer puts up her defenses, not wanting to share the spotlight with her friend in any way. In addition, Greer initially thinks the letter is a good-luck gift or a heartfelt letter, suggesting that Greer is used to taking rather than giving in her friendship with Zee.*



*Greer knows that she has power in this situation. Although she doesn't yet know what she'll do, the symbolic falling of the letter represents her lack of desire to help Zee deliver it to Faith.*



## CHAPTER 5

During her first few weeks at Loci, Greer proves herself to be an eager and enthusiastic employee—though she soon realizes that there are limits to what she can actually do there. Her tasks are mostly inconsequential, and Greer feels “removed from the grand venture of helping women.” Greer doesn’t feel particularly connected to her coworkers, either, who are aloof and busy with their own tasks. Cory has been texting Greer and asking her to share anecdotes from her days, but Greer doesn’t feel she has anything interesting to tell him. She feels perpetually on the outside of what’s really going on at Loci and watches longingly as Faith and the higher-ups meet in the conference room to discuss what seem to Greer like very important matters.

Greer has come to realize how seductive Faith is to everyone around her—employees included—and how this makes her a powerful figure. Faith is no visionary, but she is good at sifting through other people’s ideas and framing them in interesting ways. Faith is very private, and though no one at the company knows much about her, they all want to—especially Greer, who can hardly stop fantasizing about what Faith’s private life must be like.

One afternoon, Faith approaches Greer’s cubicle, and asks Greer to stop by her office later. Greer worries that she has displeased Faith in some way, but when Greer enters Faith’s office—with Zee’s letter tucked into a folder, as she has been waiting for a good time to give it to Faith—Faith is smiling. The two of them sit on the couch, and Faith asks Greer for her impressions of how Loci is doing. She wants to know if her grand new venture is really “grand” after all. Greer tells her that perhaps it is more of a “baby grand,” and Faith smiles at her. Greer offers a slew of suggestions, one of which is to take a look at what “newer” feminist blogs and websites are talking about. As soon as she says this, she remembers that these websites sometimes take swipes at Faith for being a “corporate feminist.”

Faith tells Greer that she’ll take a look at the blogs but reminds Greer that she is not radical and neither is Loci. As Faith and Greer’s discussion winds down, Greer feels that it has gone well and does not want to complicate things by introducing Zee’s letter, so she does not bring it up. As she walks back down the hall to her cubicle, Greer realizes that she does not want to give Zee’s letter to Faith at all. Even though Greer does not want to “share” Faith with Zee, Greer tells herself that she will give the letter to Faith tomorrow.

*Now that Greer has gotten what she always wanted—proximity to Faith Frank—she finds herself wishing that she were actually able to do more than simply exist within Faith’s orbit. She is not even one of Faith’s mentees or more trusted employees. Greer is disappointed to find that even in the mix of it all, she still feels like a shy, inconsequential outsider unable to effect any real change on behalf of girls or women.*



*For the first time, Greer understands the extent of Faith’s magnetism. Faith draws in everyone around her, and as Greer witnesses this quality in action, she wishes she could learn more about how Faith has come to possess and maintain her sense of internal power and personal fortitude.*



*Greer is pleased and honored to find that she is more valued than she thought she was—Faith wants to hear what she has to say, and just as she did that first night in the chapel back at Ryland College, she urges Greer to freely speak her mind. Greer is honest with Faith, despite knowing that some of what she has to offer might sting. In this passage, Greer reveals that she does actually care what’s going on at Loci—not just proximity to Faith—and wants to do her part to make sure that Faith’s “grand” venture actually experiences some success.*



*In this passage, Greer and Faith both demonstrate the truths of their feminism. Faith is up front about how much she can do and how much change she can actually effect. Meanwhile, Greer comes to realize that she values individualism more than sisterhood—she finds herself wanting to ensure her own success even if it means keeping Zee from achieving success, too.*





By Friday evening, Greer still hasn't delivered the letter. As the day winds down, she hears her coworkers discussing evening plans to go out together, and she feels left out and sad. As Greer sits at her cubicle feeling lonely, she hears "heavy and male" footsteps coming down the hall, and soon she sees Emmett Shrader coming toward her. She has met him once before but is still struck by his powerful demeanor. He is seventy years old with long silver hair and dresses in expensive clothes. Although this evening Emmett is dressed casually, Greer thinks there is still something "important" about him.

Emmett approaches Greer and asks her "which one" she is. Greer is excited by Shrader's presence because he is so different from men her own age—hipsters and boys who pay little attention to their appearances. Emmett asks Greer what she does at Loci, and she tells him she handles the booking—other people pick the speakers, but she is in charge of trying to get them to come. Emmett asks Greer why she's at the office so late, and she points out that he is here late too. He reveals that he and the "boss lady", Faith, have "two-person soirees" every once in a while. Emmett tells Greer that he needs the one-on-one time with Faith—without it, he says, he doesn't know what he'd do.

Greer agrees that Faith is "wonderful." Emmett asks Greer if she's a "Faith Frank groupie," and Greer demurs, telling him that she merely admires Faith. Emmett asks Greer if she thinks that Faith can do no wrong. Greer again insists that she simply admires Faith, and Emmett admits that he admires Faith, too. He reaches over and spins a hairbrush Greer has lying on her desk, and she thinks about how she has read in articles that Emmett Shrader is easily bored and restless and has a very short attention span.

Emmett asks Greer why she isn't out with all of her coworkers, and Greer self-pityingly explains that no one invited her. Emmett urges Greer to get up and follow him to the communal kitchen. There, above the coffee machine, is a sign which reads, "FRIDAY DRINKS!" and provides details regarding where to meet. Greer wonders how she missed the sign. Emmett urges Greer to go catch up with everyone else, so Greer complies and hurries out of the office.

At the bar, Greer slips into a booth with her colleagues, and they offer to get her a drink to celebrate the end of a difficult week. Greer insists that her job isn't that stressful, though she wishes it was. Her coworkers laugh at that statement and assure her that things will ramp up quickly—she needs to make herself indispensable if she wants to do more.

*Greer unexpectedly finds herself face to face with the most powerful man at the organization, Emmett Shrader. Being in his presence causes Greer to meditate, if even briefly, on what masculine power looks like when contrasted with feminine power. While Faith's power lies in her intoxicating warmth, Emmett's power centers on his large physical presence and visible displays of wealth through his clothing.*



*Emmett doesn't have to demonstrate any interest in Greer—she is a low-level employee—but nonetheless he does. Not only that, but he is rather open with her, revealing his deep attachment to Faith and admitting that he, too, for all his pomp and power, would be lost without Faith's attention and influence. In this way, despite the imbalance of power between them, Greer sees herself reflected in the formidable Emmett Shrader. However, Emmett does assert his power by dehumanizing Greer—perhaps unintentionally—when he asks "which one" she is rather than what her name is.*



*Emmett knows about Faith's "groupies," and is trying to discern whether Greer is one of them. Although Greer definitely is a "Faith Frank groupie," Greer deflects, and attempts to convince Emmett that she is just another employee at the company, with a normal level of investment in a relationship with Faith. Perhaps Greer wants Emmett to judge her based on her commitment to feminism rather than her commitment to Faith—or maybe Greer is simply being coy in front of such a powerful, possibly intimidating man.*



*Greer is both relieved and excited to realize that she was not purposefully excluded by her new office community—she was simply so busy that she failed to notice the sign in the communal space. Her interaction with Emmett leaves her feeling empowered, rather than insignificant, despite Emmett's overwhelming wealth and power. In this way, Emmett is much like Faith in that his presence is intimidating but also uplifting.*



*Greer is enthusiastic to the point of ridiculousness, showing that she is still doe-eyed about Loci, feminism, and Faith. While her colleagues find her naivete charming, they genuinely urge her to follow her passions and work harder if she wants more to do.*



As the conversation shifts to feminism and misogyny, Greer listens to her coworkers' playful banter and finds herself wishing that Zee were here with her. She remembers, with more than a twinge of shame, that she is the very reason why Zee is not here. The conversation grows excitable as Greer and her colleagues continue to drink, but it eventually flatlines, becoming "reflective and weary." As everyone prepares to leave, Faith walks in, and soon the night catches a second wind.

*Greer is saddened when she realizes that by slighting Zee (by secretly refusing to give Faith Zee's letter), Greer is in a way slighting herself. This realization highlights Greer's selfishness, as well as the way that she prioritizes individualism over sisterhood. Greer only cares about the way she has negatively impacted Zee when it begins to negatively affect Greer herself.*



Greer is amazed by the way Faith is able to "maneuver her way along the table without moving," giving each of her employees her attention for a few minutes at a time, listening to their stories and offering commentary or an amused expression. When it is Greer's turn for attention, Faith asks if Greer is making friends and finding her way at Loci. Because Greer has been drinking, she reveals to Faith that she has a friend from college who wants to come work at Loci and wants Greer to give Faith a letter on her behalf. Greer tells Faith that she doesn't want her friend to work at Loci, even though she would be a terrific asset to the organization. Greer says that she thinks that her ambition is tied to her desire to escape her parents, and she doesn't know how to reconcile it with her desire to be a good friend.

*Wolitzer purposefully sets this scene up as a kind of image out of the New Testament. Faith Frank, as the venerated Jesus figure, holds court over a long table of her disciples, benevolently paying attention to each of them and dispensing empathy and advice. When it is Greer's turn, Greer reveals more than she should, but she is surprised to find that Faith is listening to her problems with empathy rather than judgment, despite the nastiness of Greer's behavior.*



Greer asks Faith if withholding the letter, even now that she has told Faith about it, would make Greer a terrible person. Faith does not answer directly but offers either to read the letter or let the situation go and forget Greer told her anything—whatever Greer decides. Faith tells Greer that she likes the way that Greer approaches problems and compliments her for being "genuine and thoughtful," even about difficult things. Faith asks Greer if she would like to do some writing as part of her job, and Greer enthusiastically replies that she would.

*In a subversion of Greer's own expectations, Faith reacts not with scorn, but with empathy, and actually applauds Greer for being in touch with her thoughts and feelings. Faith even offers Greer more power, and Greer begins to learn that speaking up has more than its fair share of benefits. Faith's empathetic response in this passage is reflective of Faith's feel-good feminism. Instead of reprimanding Greer for chasing success at the expense of another woman (which, presumably, does not make Greer a very good feminist), Faith praises Greer for her honesty. In this moment, it seems that Faith also values individualism more than sisterhood.*



Faith reveals that Loci will be holding small, private media lunches and dinners around the city in the weeks leading up to the summit. Faith plans to invite speakers to these events and wants the speakers to be women who have experienced justice. None of these women are used to public speaking, however, and Faith wants Greer to write speeches for them. Greer is thrilled that she has found a way to make herself indispensable and feels that the evening has been a great success, even the "difficult" confession she made to Faith concerning Zee's letter.

*Greer's excitement about her newfound indispensability shows that she measures her own success not necessarily in terms of moral triumphs, but personal ones. However, even as she flirts with moral ambiguity, Greer finds herself finally able to dedicate herself to a feminist cause and do something tangible to help real women.*



By Monday, Greer has forgotten about Zee’s letter almost entirely, and Faith does not mention it. Several days later, Greer finally remembers about the letter, but she figures it is too late and decides to drop the whole thing. That night, Zee calls Greer and asks if she ever gave the letter to Faith. Greer lies and tells Zee that there are no jobs available. Zee asks if Faith said anything about the contents of the letter to Greer. Greer lies and says that she didn’t. Zee thanks Greer for trying, and Greer is relieved that even though she has lied, the whole awkward affair is over.

The next day at work, Greer finds a folder on her desk containing printouts about all of the women who are going to be giving talks at the upcoming media events. Over the next couple of months, the women, one by one, come into the office. Greer interviews them all and proves to be a great listener. The women confide their stories in her, all of which contain a “deep and grinding sense of unfairness.” Womanhood is unfair, and the world is unfair, and as these women pour their hearts out to Greer, Greer understands the gravity of her responsibility to tell these women’s stories.

After the first speaker shares her story at the first media party (reciting the speech that Greer wrote for her), Faith comes up to Greer and tells her she has “nailed it.” Greer is excited by Faith’s praise, but what thrills Greer the most is that by writing speeches for these women, Greer is helping them recognize and pursue their own sense of ambition.

As winter turns to spring, things at Loci ramp up in preparation for the first major summit. Though Greer is exhausted, she has finally gotten what she wants—she is busy and useful. Faith believes that Loci’s fate rests on the success or failure of the first summit—if things don’t go well, she thinks that ShraderCapital will cease funding. A week before the summit, Faith gathers the whole company together to make an announcement. She tells them that no matter how the summit goes, she is proud of her team, and to show them, she would like to invite them to her vacation house upstate for the weekend. She thinks that everyone needs a little downtime before the big event.

On Saturday, the whole Loci group takes the same train up to Faith’s vacation house. When they arrive, Greer is mesmerized by the beautiful house and is surprised to find that she will be sleeping in the room that used to belong to Faith’s son, Lincoln. Greer wonders what it would have been like to have Faith as a mother and to have to share Faith with the world. Greer is shaken from her reverie by a knock on the door—one of her coworkers lets her know that Faith wants everyone to gather downstairs for cocktails.

*Though Greer has to lie to her best friend, she feels little remorse about the betrayal. Instead, Greer is simply relieved that her own life has been largely un-impacted by the letter and its potential consequences. Once again, Greer acts selfishly and prioritizes herself rather than the people around her.*



*Despite her difficulty speaking up, Greer is an excellent listener. She throws herself into helping the women she is writing speeches for, demonstrating Greer’s empathy and genuine passion for feminism. Greer’s compassion toward the women but insensitivity toward Zee forces the reader to confront that there are many aspects to a person, and that a person is not necessarily a good feminist or a bad one.*



*In this passage, Greer seems more like an activist than a “Faith Frank groupie.” Although she is grateful for Faith’s praise, Greer is more excited about the advancement of women’s issues and the elevation of women’s voices.*



*Faith offers the retreat to her employees as a reward for their tireless work on her behalf. However, what should be an opportunity to rest and bond is something that Greer will soon come to see as just one more opportunity to endear herself to Faith and compete with her fellow employees for Faith’s attention and affection.*



*Even Greer’s fantasies about Faith involve a measure of unease and insecurity. In this passage, it is clear that Greer feels possessive of Faith and assumes other people feel the same way, including Faith’s son. Despite her recent strides in terms of her own empowerment and identity as an activist, Greer still seems obsessed with securing Faith’s attention and validation.*



In the kitchen, Faith asks who wants to be her sous chef as she prepares dinner. Everyone raises their hand, but Faith selects Greer, who notes that if Faith had asked her to solve a mathematical theorem, Greer would have done everything she could to deliver. Faith tells Greer to chop onions and announces that she'll be grilling steaks. Greer does not mention her vegetarianism.

As her employees discuss feminism, abortion rights, and the sociopolitical injustices facing women all over the world, Faith chimes in with tales from her early days with the women's liberation movement. She predicts that just as the political left was uninterested in women's issues in the 1960s and 1970s, politics will soon shift again toward ignorance of women's issues. Greer listens to all of this, drinking wine and chopping onions, and soon realizes that she is slightly drunk. She cannot wait to tell Cory over video chat about the feelings of fellowship and camaraderie she feels for her coworkers and for Faith. Lost in thought, Greer slices her thumb open.

Greer is mortified, but Faith quickly attends to her, applying pressure to the wound and then dressing it with ointment and gauze. Greer apologizes for making a scene, but Faith assures her that everything's fine. Faith and Greer share a quiet moment together and see a deer in the yard. They watch it until one of Faith's sudden movements startles it away.

A little while later, Faith lights up the grill. She asks if anyone has a problem eating meat and invites her employees to speak up if they do. Greer is silent, and when dinner is served, she dutifully cuts into her rare piece of steak. As everyone around her takes their first bites, they all fawn over how delicious the steaks are. Greer is self-conscious about being the only one left who hasn't yet praised Faith's meat, and so she cuts a piece of steak and spears it onto her fork. She tells herself that eating this steak is an act of love—she is making herself into someone Faith could confide in, listen to, and rely on. Greer bites into the meat, willing herself to not be sick. After swallowing, she says, "Yum."

On the train platform the next morning, Greer, who has been without cell phone service at Faith's house, turns on her phone. She is confused to see that she has missed over fifty messages—almost all of them from Cory.

*Greer demonstrates self-awareness regarding her irrepressible desire to please Faith at any cost. However, Greer does nothing to change her behavior. Instead, she sacrifices her values (in this case, her vegetarianism) in the name of impressing Faith and appearing more like the kind of person Greer believes Faith wants her to be.*



*Greer is so caught up in daydreams about Faith, that she does not realize she is literally physically harming herself. The cut on her thumb serves to shake Greer from her reverie, but it does not "wake her up" to the fact that she is hurting herself by bending over backward for Faith Frank's approval.*



*Even though Greer is in pain from her cut, she is also grateful for this moment of quiet togetherness with her idol. Once again, this suggests that Greer is willing to hurt herself to earn Faith's attention.*



*Greer's choice to eat meat for the first time in over four years and abandon her closely held values, demonstrates again just how desperately she wants Faith's approval. Greer is conscious of the decisions she is making and is willingly sacrificing her own sense of personal fortitude in pursuit of a new kind of inner strength—the strength she hopes she'll gain once she finally feels secure in Faith's affections and esteem.*



*Something terrible has happened, but Greer has been away at Faith's ignoring her real-world responsibilities. Now, leaving her mentor's house, Greer is faced with reality.*



## CHAPTER 6

Cory Pinto is at the crowded Ninoy Aquino International Airport in Manila, crying as he shuffles through the never-ending lines. Once through security, an announcement about his flight causes him to rush to his gate. He moves nimbly through the crowds, as he has not brought any luggage. When Cory left his apartment in the middle of the night, his roommates were confused and disoriented, and though they asked him what was going on, Cory was vague. When his roommates asked if someone had died, he nodded his head yes. When they asked if it was his “grandma or something,” he shook his head no.

As Cory rushes to the gate, he recalls the phone call he received just a few hours ago. When he saw his parents’ number on his screen, he was irritated that they’d forgotten the time difference or ignored it. However, when he answered the call, his father was crying and saying, in Portuguese, “your mother killed your brother.” Cory thought that his father had to be translating something wrong, but Cory’s father explained that Cory’s mother, backing out of the driveway, had run over Alby and crushed his spine. A bone broke off and entered a major artery, and now Alby was dead.

After receiving the call from his father, Cory began calling Greer, over and over, disheartened by his inability to get her to pick up the phone. He did not want to leave the news of Alby’s death on a voicemail, so he simply left messages begging her to call him back because “something really bad happened.” When he remembered, suddenly, that Greer had told him she’d be at Faith Frank’s house for the weekend, Cory became upset that Greer was busy with her “superhero” in his hour of need.

Cory dressed and called a cab, and as he rode toward the airport, he reflected on what his life in Manila has looked like over the past several months. He had been treated like a veritable celebrity—he was given a first-class flight to Manila, an apartment in a fancy building, a cleaning lady, and a large salary that allowed him to enjoy and explore all that Manila had to offer. As Cory’s cab sped toward the airport, Cory told his driver that he should feel free to crash the car because he didn’t care if he died.

*There has been a death in Cory’s family, and he is unbelievably distraught as he navigates the foreign and slightly surreal environment of the crowded airport in Manila, the capital of the Philippines. Cory is all alone on the other side of the world and clearly in the throes of grief. He is returning home empty handed, desperate only to get on the plane.*



*The depth of the awful tragedy which has struck Cory’s family is revealed in this passage. It is such an unthinkable and horrific thing that has taken place, that Cory is initially reluctant to believe the truth of what his father tells him. Now, Cory’s little brother, his pride and joy, is dead, and Cory’s life is about to change forever.*



*Cory has been supportive of Greer’s career at Loci and mentorship with Faith, but now he is jealous of Greer and slightly angry that she would prioritize a retreat with Faith over making herself available to him. Greer couldn’t have foreseen these circumstances, of course, but Cory is nonetheless feeling isolated and dejected.*



*Cory is so miserable that he literally doesn’t know how to move forward—he would rather die than face Alby’s death. Cory is being ripped away from his cushy new life by an unthinkable tragedy, and the news is such a blow that Cory does not want to be alive to deal with the fallout.*



By the time Cory arrives in Macopee, Greer is already there waiting for him, along with several friends and family members. Greer embraces Cory immediately, and he asks her what he can do to make Alby's death "not true." In his younger years, Cory was annoyed by Alby. However, as his little brother grew, Cory came to marvel at Alby's wit and intelligence, and now his grief over Alby's death is beyond measure. Greer assures Cory she will help him, though she doesn't yet know what to do or how to do it. Cory asks Greer if she has taken off work to come be with him, and then he remembers that this week is the long-awaited first Loci summit, "Women and Power." Cory feels badly for taking Greer away from the summit, but Greer reassures him that it's fine and urges him to go upstairs and see his mother.

When Cory goes upstairs, his mother, Benedita, is in bed with all the shades closed. She can barely even lift her head. Cory immediately lashes out at her, asking why she couldn't have seen Alby in the driveway. She insists that he wasn't in her rearview mirror, and that she doesn't know what happened. Cory is ashamed to have so cruelly attacked his mother and leaves the room.

At Alby's funeral, Benedita faints at the grave, and Duarte begrudgingly helps her to her feet. The two of them are not speaking. Two days after the service, Cory's father announces that he is going back to Lisbon. Cory tries to stop him, but his father insists he needs to get away. Cory's mother asks for her husband again and again, and everyone tells her that he has just gone on a short trip home. After several days, Cory calls his father and asks if he is ever coming back. Duarte tells Cory that he is staying in Portugal "for the foreseeable future."

Greer comforts Cory and tells him that he can stay with her as long as he wants—she will stay in Macopee, too, for as long as he needs her to. Cory is worried that Greer's job will be in trouble, but she insists that it'll "keep." Cory watches several clips from the summit, and when he sees Faith Frank's keynote speech, he understands why Greer is so "into" her.

One morning, Benedita comes downstairs covered in scratch marks. She tells Cory that Alby's spirit wants for her to "shed [her] skin." Cory's aunts and uncles decide that Benedita needs constant supervision, but none of them can stay in Macopee much longer, and even Greer needs to return to New York soon. Cory, then, decides to stick around his hometown and care for his mother. Though Greer tells Cory that the burden should not be falling on him, he insists on staying.

*Although Cory was initially worried (and even angry) that Greer was not answering his calls, Greer meets him at home and is there for him both physically and emotionally in his hour of need. As Cory reflects on how deeply he took Alby for granted, he doesn't think that he'll be able to forgive himself. By the same token, he feels guilty for keeping Greer from the first major moment in her career. Cory is willingly shouldering a massive amount of unnecessary guilt, foreshadowing the ways in which he will come to deal with the tragedy of his brother's death.*



*Rather than being empathetic with his mother and careful with the words he uses around her, Cory cruelly indicts her for murdering his brother and demands to know how she could have made such a grave mistake. He is immediately ashamed, but has already spoken, and now must carry this new guilt as well.*



*Cory and his mother must now deal with the departure of Cory's father, who is unable to bear his grief or his anger at his wife. Cory is left alone to deal with his mother and now must shoulder yet one more burden. Cory is so busy now picking up the pieces of his broken family that he does not have time to grieve his brother's loss himself.*



*Greer is empathetic and emotionally supportive of Cory, assuring him that her job comes second where he is concerned. As Cory investigates Greer's mentor he comes to see why Greer is so deeply affected by this magnetic woman.*



*Cory is faced with an impossible decision—abandon his mother and pursue his own life and career or cast aside everything he has worked so hard for and stay home with her. Cory chooses the latter, though Greer encourages him to reconsider—neither, however, can yet see the ways in which this decision will come to shape both of their lives in the years to come.*



Cory has not been in Alby's room since his brother's death, but now that Cory has "officially" decided to move back home, he decides to explore it. He has recently called to quit his job, shocking his employers. Alone in Alby's room, Cory examines his brother's toys, drawings, and school notebooks, constructing a "fantasy" in which Alby is still alive. In one notebook, he finds "cryptic stats," which describe "observations" of an object which Cory can't discern. When he reads one log that refers to the object waving its arm, Cory realizes that Alby's notes all refer to **Slowy**, his pet turtle.

**Slowy** is not in his box in the corner of the room, and Cory realizes with a sickening flash what Alby had been doing in the driveway on the morning of his death and why he had been so close to the ground. Cory runs outside to the driveway and finds Slowy in the grass. When he picks up the shell, it feels dry and cold, and Cory believes that the turtle has died. But slowly, the turtle wakes up and begins moving.

Cory calls his father to let him know that Alby's death had not been Benedita's fault—Alby had been lying on the ground studying **Slowy**. This news does not change Duarte's demeanor at all, though, and over the next several weeks, Duarte calls infrequently to check in on Benedita and Cory. Meanwhile, Cory begins taking care of Slowy and spends his nights sleeping in Alby's room. He makes sure his mother takes her medications and eats her meals, and occasionally, when she's up to it, he plays card games with her.

One day, a woman calls the house asking for Benedita. The woman, one of Benedita's clients, is a professor who has been out of town for a year on a sabbatical and wants her house cleaned. Cory goes in his mother's place to clean the house—the two of them need the money, and Cory is surprised that the work actually makes him feel good and useful. Every Thursday morning, he returns to the professor's house to clean, and as he does, he often thinks of his own cleaning lady back in the Philippines and how much unnecessary work he and his careless roommates created for her.

One day, Cory takes his mother to visit her sister and Cory's cousin, Sab. Cory has always avoided Sab, who is a bad influence, but now, Cory goes upstairs to his cousin's room and knocks, hoping to reconnect. Cory's cousin almost immediately offers him heroin, and Cory accepts. After Cory snorts the drugs, he throws up onto the carpet. Despite getting sick, Cory soon begins to enjoy a pleasant high in which he forgets, for the first time in a long time, all about Alby's death.

*Cory, unable to accept that his brother is really gone, attempts to immerse himself in his brother's world in order to stave off the grief. What he finds are tender records of his brother's time on earth and evidence of Alby's deep fascination with his beloved turtle, Slowy. Alby's copious notes about Slowy highlight that Alby was intelligent, bright, and inquisitive.*



*As Cory realizes the truth of how his brother died—attempting to learn more about his pet turtle—he realizes that his mother is not truly at fault. Slowy will become a symbol for the progression of Cory's grief, and as Cory finds Slowy in the yard, both the turtle and Cory's own inner pain begin to wake up.*



*Cory attempts to bring his fractured family back together, but none of his efforts have any impact at all. As Cory nurses the turtle—a stand-in for his own grief—he also bonds with his bereaved mother and begins to acknowledge that his father's departure is permanent. Cory and Benedita grapple directly with their grief, while Duarte runs away from it by fleeing to Portugal.*



*Cory is shocked when his mother's work—which he had always perceived as undesirable drudgery—actually helps him to feel as if he is doing something useful and productive. Cleaning houses helps Cory to understand his own impact on the world around him and to empathize with others. While at Princeton, Cory felt self-conscious of his parents' jobs, but now Cory realizes that there is worth in being a housekeeper.*



*Cory experiments with dangerous drugs as a way to cope with his immense grief and is surprised to find that succumbing to his bad influence of a cousin is actually a balm against his own pain. Cory's reaching out to Sab also reflects Cory's desire to be connected to his family despite the deep fractures within his own parents' marriage.*



In the morning, after sleeping for over thirteen hours, Cory is awoken by a phone call from Greer. Greer still speaks softly and carefully to Cory, skirting around his grief in a way that makes him feel pitied. Greer soon switches the subject to her own work, however, and tells Cory that she has some exciting news: Loci is planning a big multimedia event, and they need to hire a consultant. She offers to recommend Cory for the job, but he refuses.

Greer tells Cory that he's been home for months now and needs to start thinking about picking his life back up again. Cory insists that the path he's on now *is* his life, and that caring for his mother and grieving Alby's death have much more meaning than a job at a consulting firm. Greer is upset. She knows that Cory is isolating himself and points out that they were meant to figure out the world together, side by side. The call ends on an unpleasant note, and Cory returns to his household duties, caring for his mother and feeding **Slowly**.

Months after his brother's death, Cory is still overwhelmed by grief. He cannot believe that his brother is truly gone and laments how Alby has simply "evaporated" from the world. Cory begins using Alby's old notebooks to record his own observations on his grief-processing, but even this does not help. Instead of working through his emotions, Cory decides to lose himself in Alby's many video games, which he plays all day and night.

Greer arrives in Macopee for a visit. Her trips are infrequent, and Cory has noticed that when Greer is around, his mother seems even more agitated and isolated than usual. Greer has tried to convince Cory to come to New York for a visit, but Cory refuses to leave Benedita in anyone else's care. As Greer sits with Cory in his living room, she asks what's going on with him—she is on the verge of tears. Cory realizes how much he and Greer have grown apart. He feels that relationships are a luxury "for people whose lives [are] not in crisis."

Greer asks Cory what she's doing wrong—whether her calls and texts aren't enough and if he wants her to move back to Macopee to be with him. Cory does not want to burden Greer but insists that he needs to stay where he is. Greer laments how Cory has become "completely uninterested in the outside world," and urges him to see that she has begun setting up the life they always dreamed of together—the only thing missing is Cory. She begs him to come to New York, even for just a weekend, but Cory continues deflecting, insisting only that he is needed at home. Greer, agitated, suggests they get out the house for a little bit, so they head out to a local pizza place.

*Greer reaches out to give Cory a chance to rejoin the "real" world, and to even do what he wants to be doing, but Cory still feels that his place is at home, and he refuses Greer's offer of employment. Part of him, most likely, does not want to be pitied, and this contributes further to his own isolation.*



*The ambitious Greer cannot understand why Cory feels so responsible for picking up the pieces of his fractured family. More than that, Greer is lonely and upset that her boyfriend, when given the chance to finally be in the same city as her for the first time in over four years, does not want to be, and instead only wants to tend to his own grief.*



*Cory is desperate to find a way to pretend that Alby is not truly gone from the world. Cory has attempted to lose himself in work (cleaning houses), drugs, and now, immersive video games, wishing he could outrun the pain that consumes him.*



*Greer and Cory have grown apart in the months since Alby's death—Cory has purposefully been isolating himself, and Greer's inability to fully empathize with Cory's long grieving process has prevented her from connecting with him. Now, Cory does not know how to face or relate to Greer and seems to consider her one of the many burdens that have fallen on his shoulders.*



*Greer still wants to connect with Cory—she knows that what she's been doing hasn't been sufficient and wants to find a way to please and comfort him. Still, she can't help but scold him, and this agitates Cory further as he realizes that Greer can only see her own vision for what their future was supposed to hold. Once again, this paints Greer as selfish, as she is more concerned with her future with Cory than his broken life and heavy grief.*





At the restaurant, Cory and Greer are served by one of their former classmates, Kristin Vells. Kristin asks Cory if he's living at home now, as if to insinuate that for all his smarts he has turned out no better than her. As Cory and Greer eat, Cory apologizes for hurting Greer and distancing himself from her. He tells her about snorting heroin with his cousin, attempting to explain that he is in an emotional state unlike any state he has ever been in, and that he wants Greer to understand "where he is" right now. Cory urges Greer not to get caught up in pity or worry for him and instead live her life to the fullest.

*The many power dynamics at play in this scene underscore the fraught situation which Greer and Cory have found themselves in. Greer has always seen herself as better than everyone else—more hardworking, more deserving—and she saw Cory this way, too. To some degree, Cory knew he was special by virtue of his smarts. Now, as Cory finds himself living at home with his mother, he has come to accept that he is no better than anyone else from his working-class hometown. However, Greer still cannot accept this fact and clings to her prior conceptions of Cory.*



Greer, exhausted and unhappy, tells Cory that she can't continue their conversation any longer. She offers to drop him off at home before she drives up to Boston for a Loci event. Cory realizes that in Boston, Greer will find comfort, friendship, and relief in Faith Frank, and that Faith can provide Greer with the things that Cory no longer can. The two of them wrap up their meal, leave Kristin an enormous tip, and head out into the rain.

*Greer and Cory seem resigned to the fact that their relationship is over. They have hardly any common ground anymore, and Greer doesn't really need Cory—she has found another source of comfort, validation, and community.*



## CHAPTER 7

In Scarsdale, New York, Zee Eisenstat adjusts to living at home with her wealthy and successful parents, Wendy and Richard, who are both local judges. Every morning, her parents make smoothies and go for a run, and though they always invite Zee along, she cannot bring herself to join them. It is bad enough that she is "living with them once again like an oversized child," and working a job she hates.

*Zee, adjusting to life back at home, feels profoundly out of place. It is significant that Zee's parents are judges, as it emphasizes the way that Zee feels constantly judged by them. She is aware that she has not met their expectations for her, and even though she continues to try, she is only making herself more miserable.*



The only part of her job she likes is the strange camaraderie between the paralegals. As one of them, Zee is often asked to stay late at the office, and while the paralegals wait for the lawyers to finish working, they share stories from their pasts, many of which Zee finds genuinely interesting. Zee also has found a kind of freedom in her ability to express herself in the workplace—it is more casual than she thought it would be, and though her parents have always urged her to dress in a more feminine way and wear a series of hideous skirts, at the law firm, Zee is free to dress like herself.

*Zee has found some bright spots in her dark experience of returning to her childhood home to follow in her parents' footsteps. However, even the positive things about her "new" life chafe with painful memories from her childhood, and leave her feeling exposed, shameful, and sad.*



Zee has also enjoyed a chaste flirtation with another woman at work but is reluctant to bring anyone home to her parents' house—she is embarrassed to be living in her childhood bedroom, which is covered in embarrassing posters from her youth. As a young girl, Zee was passionate about animal rights activism, so pictures of endangered baby animals still line the walls of her room. She recalls joining animal activist forums under a false name as an eleven-year-old, and how her initial love of baby animals and their cuteness grew into outrage as she got older and came to understand the depth and pervasiveness of animal cruelty.

From a young age, Zee was stirred by “all kinds of social justice movements,” and she had trouble keeping up with the many causes she wanted to engage with and support. Because of her frenzied activism, Zee's grades suffered all throughout high school, and so she wound up at Ryland—a mediocre institution, but one where she could express herself and explore her activist leanings.

Now, living at home, Zee feels that she is in “a moment of flux.” She is living a life that is a kind of preamble to her real life, and she knows that just as Greer has found an exciting, engaging, and fulfilling career path, Zee will find her own path soon enough. Zee calls Greer on the phone often, and the two chat about their hopes, dreams, and frustrations. Zee is vocal about how badly she wishes she worked at Loci, but Greer is always quick to object and explain how boring and mundane much of the work at the organization is.

Zee was bummed, but not miserable, when Greer said that Faith had read Zee's letter but claimed that there were no available positions at the foundation. Lately, Zee has found herself less focused on securing a great job than satisfying her desire to “be needed or loved.”

Zee reflects on her complicated relationship with her parents, whose profession as judges often bleeds into their personal lives—they tend to judge everything around them, except, oddly enough, Zee's older brothers. The two boys have managed to escape much of their parents' judgement and discipline, while the brunt of it has fallen on Zee, who has never fit into the upper-class mold her parents have wanted her to inhabit.

*Zee has always been caught up in the tension between the desire to be herself and the desire to please her parents—activism became an outlet through which she could explore new facets of her personality and engage with the world around her despite her parents' attempt to interfere with her self-expression.*



*Zee's drives toward activism were always well-intentioned, but her scattered and frenzied need to engage with the world around her resulted in a fractured academic life. Still, Zee was okay with not pursuing a traditional path.*



*Just like Greer and Cory, Zee feels that she is in an in-between state and is attempting to understand how decisions she is making now will add up to a clear way forward. Zee does not know about Greer's betrayal and still sees her closest college friend as a source of comfort and camaraderie as they bond over their shared frustrations.*



*Zee's true desires are to feel needed and appreciated in the workplace. It seems that Zee, though selfless in her words and actions toward Greer, has somewhat of a selfish streak. She wants to pursue activism to make herself feel good.*



*Zee has always felt out of place and has always seemed to fall short of her parents' high expectations for her. Living at home, all these old hurts and disappointments are rehashed, and Zee must once again grapple with feeling like a disappointment to her parents.*



Zee was born Franny Eisenstat, named for a character from a famous novel, *Franny and Zooey*, written by J.D. Salinger—a writer whom her parents both adore and bonded over on one of their first dates. By the time she was thirteen, Franny felt disconnected from the name, which she saw as “frilly.” As her bat mitzvah approached, Franny was growing increasingly uncomfortable with the models of femininity she saw all around her—including her parents’ busy, ultra-feminine law clerk, and all of Franny’s classmates who dressed up in fancy dresses for the bat mitzvah.

At Franny’s bat mitzvah, she watched as several of her classmates made gay jokes and mocked lesbians—two of her female classmates pretended to kiss each other in front of a group of students. All the while, Franny said nothing, afraid to reveal who she truly was. During the party, she attempted to kiss one of her male classmates, but found that the experience left her feeling only “half-full,” and wondered if she would ever be fully satisfied by kissing someone.

By the time she was sixteen, Franny was more in touch with her sexuality, and in order to test the waters, she made plans to go to the city and visit a lesbian bar in the trendy East Village. While all of Franny’s friends went off to a Broadway show, Franny stole away to the Village, used a fake I.D. to get into the bar (called Ben-Her), and found herself struck by the myriad displays of femininity and female sexuality all around her.

As Franny shyly ordered a beer, she could feel herself being watched, and when she turned around, she saw her parents’ law clerk, Linda, pushing through the crowd of women toward her. Linda was excited and happy to see Franny and asked if her parents knew that she was gay—or that she was here. Franny revealed that she hadn’t come out to anyone yet, and Linda expressed sympathy and understanding.

Franny visited the bar more and more often, and she eventually experienced her first sexual encounter with a woman. After she left the bar with an eighteen-year-old named Alana, Franny admitted that it was her first time. Alana urged Franny to enjoy the feeling, focus on pleasure, and not get caught up in worrying whether the tryst would go anywhere or lead to a relationship, because it would not. Franny surrendered to the experience and finally felt herself encountering the satisfaction and “fullness” she’d always longed for.

*Zee sees Franny as almost a separate entity from herself. Growing up, Franny was torn between trying to figure out her own unconventional identity and trying to fit in with her parents’ expectations of her. In addition, Franny felt uncomfortable with the models of femininity she saw all around her, which were all largely the same with little room for difference or variation.*



*Franny felt confused and unfulfilled when she tried to alter her true identity and desires by kissing a boy. Although she knew that her friends’ ridicule of homosexuality was wrong and cruel, it pushed her into situations that left her feeling lonely, powerless, confused, and dissatisfied.*



*Franny, knowing that she couldn’t keep isolating herself and denying who she was, attempted to find a way to explore both her sexuality and independence. She found herself feeling vindicated and validated once she realized she had found a new community where she felt more like herself than she ever had before.*



*Franny was relieved to encounter a familiar face at the bar and found herself surprised by Linda’s empathy and kindness—especially since Linda had once appeared to Franny as a model of unattainable femininity.*



*As Franny explored her sexual desire for other women, she at last found herself feeling satisfied. This bolstered Franny’s sense of personal fortitude and instilled in her the certainty that she was on the path to truly discovering herself and coming into her own as an individual.*



Franny took many more trips into the city to Ben-Her over the years, but one night, during her senior year of high school, Franny arrived back in Scarsdale to find her mother waiting up for her in a bathrobe. Wendy knew what Franny had been up to, because that afternoon she'd fired her secretary, Linda, for stealing office supplies. In retaliation, Linda outed Franny to Wendy, and urged Wendy to ask Franny where she had really been going when she visited the city. Franny's mother immediately suggested that Franny go to therapy, and though her father was a little more understanding and supportive, Franny nonetheless found herself in a therapist's office once a week.

Franny was initially reluctant to open up in the sessions, but she soon came to enjoy them. One day, she confessed that she "loathed" being called Franny. Her therapist suggested she change her name, but Franny insisted that her name held sentimental value for her parents and could not be changed. Franny soon came up with the idea of going by Zooey, but when this name didn't feel right, she shortened it to Zee, enjoying the androgynous vibe it gave her.

Years later, while hunting down a book for her psychology class at Ryland, Zee came upon a book written by the therapist she went to in high school. She opened it and began to read the case studies within it, until she came upon one which described Zee's story exactly, albeit with her name changed to "Kew." The therapist described Zee as "confused about her sexuality and reluctant to accept her femaleness," and laments the "sad" nature of Zee's choice to change her name which "bore no traces of femininity." The therapist also wrote that in her sessions with Zee, she could see the "real heterosexual self that wanted to be seen" within her.

Zee only told Greer about her discovery of the unfair, cruel article, and though Zee tried to move on from the pain of it, she found herself realizing that a pattern of being betrayed by older women was emerging in her life: first Linda, now her old therapist.

*Franny experienced her first major betrayal at the hands of another woman when Linda outed her to her mother. This is also one of the first displays of the dark side of female friendship and mentorship, apart from Greer's betrayal of Zee over the letter, which is still unknown to Zee. Although Franny was sent to therapy to get in touch with herself and work through her issues, the simple camaraderie of her clandestine trips to Ben-Her had done that for her.*



*In therapy, Franny surprised herself by taking steps toward an identity that made her feel like her true self. As Zee shed her childhood name and gave herself a new one, she committed herself fully toward her individuality and her desires, strengthening her inner sense of empowerment even more.*



*This second betrayal at the hands of an older woman shocks Zee to her core—her therapy sessions had meant a lot to her and had helped her to get closer to the person she felt she was always meant to be. Once again, the dark side of female mentorship is revealed. To find out that her therapist believed all along that Zee was lying to herself is a deep injustice.*



*Zee confides in her close friend Greer, confessing to her the pain of being betrayed by an older woman whom she thought she could trust. This passage establishes Zee's fear of being betrayed yet again by a woman who is supposed to be her mentor or her friend—foreshadowing Greer's later betrayal of Zee by withholding the letter from Faith.*



Zee distracted herself from her confusion and misery by throwing herself into simultaneous affairs with two different women. When they discovered her infidelity, both relationships ended, but Zee continued to “go through women” quickly and proudly claimed her identity as a “slut.” Once, Zee found herself in bed with Dog—one of her close male friends. Dog had feelings for Zee, and though she insisted that she was not interested in exploring heterosexuality, she agreed to spend the night with him. As they fumbled around in bed, however, Zee realized that the tryst was not going to work, and she asked Dog to leave. As college continued, Zee continued to sleep with many women, but “something difficult often happened” between her and her partners for reasons she could never understand.

Now, Zee feels restless living at home and working at the law firm. By winter, she knows that she needs to go somewhere she feels “needed.” One night, one of her coworkers mentions that he has a sister who works for Teach and Reach—a nonprofit that trains recent college graduates and places them in jobs in public high schools around the country. The training session is only six weeks, and the organization is actively recruiting. Zee takes her coworker’s sister’s email and gets in touch.

Zee is frankly startled by how easy it is to get a job with Teach and Reach—when she speaks with a recruiter over the phone, the woman tells her that enthusiasm is the number one quality they are looking for in their teachers. Zee gets the job and moves to Chicago in the middle of winter. Zee’s training period is accelerated to two and a half weeks—her supervisor praises her for being a “fast learner.” Zee’s salary is tiny, so her parents are paying her rent. They disapprove of her having taken the job but recognize that there is something noble about it, and so they are supporting her as she pursues it.

Zee begins teaching history at a charter school that is part of a corporation—Learning Octagon. Zee is replacing a Teach and Reach teacher who had quit dramatically in the middle of the school day. Because of the instability that her students have experienced as the school scrambled to find a replacement, Zee expects that her first day will be chaos. Instead, she finds students who seem as if they have taken a sleeping potion—they are languid and tired, and she worries that they will be uninterested in everything she has to say. She wants her students to need her but is suddenly aware that this might not be the case.

*Rather than avoid women who have the potential to hurt her, Zee flings herself into relationships with women, luxuriating in the power that sexual pleasure and physical validation bring her. To this end, she halfheartedly pursues an encounter with one of her close male friends but ultimately decides to remain true to her identity and desires. Zee has trouble connecting with women despite her love of them, and she wonders what this will come to mean for her future as a woman in the world.*



*Zee’s desire to grasp at any opportunity that will take her away from Scarsdale mirrors Greer’s desire to do anything to get closer to Faith Frank. Both Zee and Greer are desperate to become the women they want to be and have very clear ideas about the things that will help them on their journey.*



*Zee’s most recent attempt at activism is clearly flawed, even to her. She knows on some level that two weeks of training does not adequately prepare one to be responsible for young, at-risk children. However, Zee, like her parents, is blinded by the “nobility” of her desire to be an activist and is hopeful that all the kinks will miraculously work themselves out as she adjusts to her new life.*



*On her first day, Zee must confront that her true desire is not necessarily to be an activist but simply to be indispensable. Greer and Zee are similar in this way, as they both felt a lack of acceptance in their childhoods and now want to pursue paths that will enable them to feel vital, necessary, and above all, adored.*



As the weeks go by, Zee finds herself struggling to get her students to listen to her or even to pay the minimum amount of attention to her lessons. They threaten her and fight with one another, and when Zee relays these stories to Greer, Greer urges her to quit. Zee, however, knows she can't abandon her students—they have been deprived of enough. Many of her students don't have gloves in the middle of the cold Chicago winter, and one small boy confides in Zee that he does not have a toothbrush or toothpaste.

At lunchtimes in the teachers' lounge, Zee notices a beautiful guidance counselor named Noelle Williams. Noelle never speaks to Zee at lunch and instead eats her yogurt in silence. Zee wishes she could find a way to get closer to Noelle. One day, she approaches her and strikes up a conversation, asking about how long Noelle has been in Chicago. Stiffly, Noelle tells Zee that she has been in Chicago for three years and has been working at the school since its "inception." Though Noelle answers Zee's questions about herself and the school, she is not warm or welcoming. Zee, attempting to further the conversation, asks if Noelle has any "tips" for a newcomer. Noelle dismissively says that Zee should've been given all the "tips" she needed in her training sessions. The conversation comes to an awkward end, and Noelle leaves.

One afternoon, a month into Zee's teaching position at Learning Octagon, one of Zee's students, Shara Pick, raises her hand and asks to go to the bathroom. Shara is "bumblebee-shaped" and always dressed in a heavy parka. Zee knows that Shara's parents are both meth addicts, and Zee has been careful to watch for any warning signs of abuse or drug use in the young student. Zee excuses Shara from class and continues with her lesson. After a long while, Shara still hasn't returned to class, and Zee sends another student to check on her. That student returns and informs Zee that something is wrong with Shara. Zee follows her student out into the hall.

In the bathroom, Shara is curled up on the floor, holding her stomach and complaining of pain. Zee and her student carry Shara to the nurse's office and lay her down on the bed. To comfort Shara, Zee tells her that she probably has appendicitis, but that once they get her to a doctor who can remove her appendix she'll feel better. Noelle appears in the nurse's office and asks what's going on, and Zee answers that Shara has appendicitis. Noelle dismisses Zee's diagnosis, snidely pointing out that they don't teach medicine at Teach and Reach training. Noelle unzips Shara's coat, and Noelle and Zee realize that Shara is pregnant.

*Despite Zee's questionable intentions and desire at the outset of her Teach for Reach position, she eventually finds herself wanting to truly make a change in her students' lives. Zee realizes that although she might be in over her head, she can still make a difference, so she throws herself into this attempt.*



*If Zee cannot be loved or desired by her students, she figures, perhaps she can find a way to make herself feel needed by someone her own age in a very different way. Zee wants to bond with and learn from Noelle, but Noelle is clearly uninterested. She is closed off, terse, and dismissive, and Zee senses that Noelle's dislike of her comes from her own status as a transient, newly minted Teach for Reach instructor.*



*Zee cares for her students, though their problems seem well above her pay grade. Despite her desire to benefit the lives of her students, Zee is ill-equipped to handle the very serious issues that many of them are facing. The impending situation with Shara Pick is about to test Zee's faith in herself and in her activist inclinations once and for all.*



*At first, Zee thinks that she can help Shara and that Zee knows what is best for her own student. When Noelle arrives on the scene, though, the more experienced woman takes the reins and exposes the depth and severity of what Shara Pick is going through at such a young age.*



Noelle softly asks Shara if she knew that she was going to have a baby, and Shara confesses that she did. Noelle tells Shara that she and Zee are going to help her, and in that moment, everything speeds up. The nurse calls 911, but Shara's labor is progressing rapidly, and so Noelle and Zee search on the Internet for what to do in the case of an emergency delivery. The paramedics arrive in time, however, and help Shara deliver her baby girl right there in the nurse's office.

After the stressful afternoon, Noelle and Zee head to a nearby restaurant despite their relative dislike of one another. Shara's grandmother arrived and went with Shara to the hospital, and the situation is now out of Zee and Noelle's hands. As the two women sit at the restaurant, Zee wonders aloud what will happen to Shara, and Noelle reveals that a social worker will be sent to assess the situation. Shara will be allowed to come back to school, but it will be difficult for her if she chooses to. Moreover, Noelle says, the entire faculty and staff of the school will have to reckon with how nobody managed to catch the fact that Shara was pregnant for several months.

Zee feels terrible. She can't believe she missed the fact that Shara was pregnant, though she tells Noelle that she couldn't have known, as Shara wore a parka in class. Noelle tells Zee that the parka in itself was a warning sign, and Zee should have picked up on it. Zee, sick of Noelle's snide comments and bad attitude, asks what she has done to Noelle. Noelle replies that it's not Zee she dislikes—it's Zee's idealism. She feels that Zee, and people like her at Teach for Reach and similar organizations, use the students to feel good about themselves. Zee insists that she deserves some slack from Noelle—she just joined Teach and Reach to do some good, but ever since she's come to the school, Noelle has hated her.

Noelle tells Zee that if she hated her, she wouldn't be at dinner with her. Zee says that if Noelle likes her, she has an odd way of showing it. Noelle teasingly says that she doesn't quite like Zee, either, but that Zee being able to get Noelle to like her is a more achievable goal than "saving" the students at Learning Octagon.

Zee asks Noelle why her background disqualifies her from being able to help students and make a difference. Noelle explains that when Teach and Reach began sending teachers to the Learning Octagon, Noelle and her fellow faculty and staff thought that a dedicated team of individuals would come in to help change things. Instead, they found themselves faced with a group of inexperienced, undertrained young people who were more excited by the idea of doing some good and then returning to their "normal" lives than actually trying to make a significant change in the community.

*Noelle and Zee care for Shara as best they can, but they are both unequipped to handle such a grave situation. Shara has her baby safely, though, and when the child is revealed to be a girl, Wolitzer imbues the narrative with a sense that the cycle of feminine pain and hardship only continues.*



*Zee and Noelle are practically strangers, but the seriousness and wildness of what they have just witnessed has brought them together, at least momentarily. Noelle knows that she and her fellow faculty and staff will have to do more to help their students, and she wonders how she can possibly do more for her disadvantaged kids.*



*Noelle continues to berate Zee for not being good enough at her job, but Zee is sick of reprimanded when all she is trying to do is make a difference in the community. Noelle points out the hypocrisy and insufficiency of organizations like Teach for Reach, but Zee continues to insist that she is dedicated, and that she only wants to show up for the community and the children.*



*Zee and Noelle have a pleasant, flirtatious exchange. Despite their mutual frustrations with one another, a foundation of intrigue and respect is beginning to take shape.*



*Noelle highlights the perils of activism for activism's sake, which Zee has been guilty of. Noelle reveals her own frustrations with how deeply flawed her own beloved community is and implies that the school would be better off without Teach and Reach—the students are only further demoralized by the constant influx of ignorant would-be do-gooders.*



Zee asks Noelle if she should just throw in the towel and quit. Noelle tells her that she of course shouldn't quit—she should stay and give her students some sense of stability. Noelle tells Zee to stop focusing so much on how to “get involved” and instead find a way to live her life in a truthful, honest way while honing her values and keeping them intact.

After this exchange, an “open playfulness” emerges between Zee and Noelle, and they exchange some banter about their lives and their families. After a while, the conversation circles back to Shara, and Noelle resolves to do her best to make sure that Shara does not “slip through the cracks.” Zee considers how scared Shara must have been, and Noelle notes that Zee herself seems scared now—but this time of Noelle. Zee admits teasingly that Noelle is “a little scary.” Noelle asks if Zee only thinks of her as a scary person. Zee has noticed that the conversation is now charged with a kind of electricity. Noelle asks how Zee sees her, and Zee says she doesn't understand what's going on between them. Noelle asks her if she's sure, and then Zee admits to realizing what's going on.

After the meal is over, Noelle and Zee are both slightly drunk. Noelle confesses that she purposefully continued drinking once she realized she was attracted to Zee. Both women outwardly admit their attraction to one another at this point, and they laugh together—it is laughter in the face of “unfixable” things, laughter born of a desire to connect despite the difficulty of their lives and careers.

After dinner, Noelle goes home with Zee. The women begin kissing on Zee's narrow mattress. As Zee and Noelle undress, Zee wonders who, out of the two of them, has the power in this situation, since power is hard to see, quantify, or calibrate. Zee recalls a phone conversation with Greer about one of the Loci summits, which was on the topic of power. “It excites everyone,” Greer had said then about the concept of power. Now, Zee thinks that it would be a “dream” to live in a world of female power—mutual power. She feels she has found some measure of it with Noelle. As the two women make love, Zee feels power leave the equation between them—suddenly, the concept is irrelevant as they collapse into one another after a long, difficult day.

*Noelle advises Zee not to give up in the face of dejection and to renew her well-intentioned efforts to truly make a difference. Noelle's advice highlights that there is worth in small acts—like Zee simply showing up for her students.*



*As Noelle and Zee work through their frustrations with one another—and with the fraught community they have found themselves in—a barrier breaks down between the two women, and they begin to relate to one another more openly and acknowledge the tension which has existed between the two of them for a long while now. Zee, who has longed for affection and recognition, seems to finally be finding it in an unlikely individual. Nothing specific is said, but both women tacitly admit their attraction to one another.*



*In spite of the difficulty, pain, and hardship both women face each day, they find solace and even happiness in admitting their attraction to one another, and revel in the mutual attention and the release of tension it offers them.*



*Zee wonders what it means to cast power aside altogether and dedicate oneself to the pursuit of equality and evenness in all kinds of relationships, especially those of a romantic and sexual nature. The constantly shifting power balances in many of the novel's central relationships—Zee and Greer, Greer and Faith, Greer and Cory—are, by proxy, held up to the light in this passage as Zee considers how much better the world would be if all relationships were free from the bounds and pressures of power dynamics.*





## CHAPTER 8

On a mild night in the fall of 2014, Faith Frank arrives at a Chinese massage parlor. Getting a “bracing, vigorous” massage always helps her to focus her thoughts, stay calm, and find the clarity to make good decisions. As she enters the parlor, her phone rings—it is her son, Lincoln. She answers the phone and tells Lincoln she is about to step in for a massage. He tells her to slow down, as travel is bad for her stiff neck and back. He has recently been on Loci’s website and has seen the many events and high-profile speakers coming up. Faith tells him that Emmett Shrader told them they needed to “go high-profile.” Loci’s summits now feature famous movie stars, hired psychics, complimentary manicures, and expensive food.

Faith finds the foundation’s “excesses” depressing. She believes, and has told Emmett repeatedly, that hosting rich women at conferences where they can get a mani-pedi doesn’t actually accomplish anything. Emmett, however, has told Faith that the organization needs to grow before it can engage with such issues. Faith tells Lincoln that she is occasionally allowed to take on a special project, such as a recent rescue mission to save Ecuadorian women from sex trafficking and set them up with mentors to help them rebuild their lives. Faith tells Lincoln that one of the rescued women, in fact, is going to be at the next Loci summit in Los Angeles, and that Faith is supposed to be the one to introduce her to the crowd. Lincoln advises Faith to take care of herself and not let herself get physically or emotionally exhausted.

Faith and Lincoln end their call, and Faith goes into the massage parlor and asks for a sixty-minute massage. The relaxing massage drops Faith “stupefied into a hole,” and she reflects on the path that has brought her to where she is today.

Faith was born in 1943—she and her twin brother, Philip, were born just six minutes apart. As they grew up in their tightknit Brooklyn neighborhood, Faith became studious and serious while Phillip got by on charm. The whole Frank family was very close, and Faith had a happy childhood—until one afternoon, when her parents pulled teenage Faith and her brother into the living room for a “family discussion.” Faith’s parents explained that though they are proud of their children, they worry about them. In particular, they expressed their reservations about sending Faith away to college. Faith, who had been dreaming of studying sociology or political science for years, begged her parents not to keep her at home, but they insisted that there are wonderful schools in Brooklyn. They still planned to send Faith’s twin away to school, because it would be “good for him.”

*Faith, for much of the book, has been portrayed as a powerful and somewhat unknowable figure, who has revealed her humanity and vulnerability only in small, rare moments. In this chapter, Wolitzer begins exploring Faith’s inner life and history in greater depth. In this way, Wolitzer reminds her readers that Faith is human after all, and that she is just as vulnerable as anyone else despite her sociopolitical capital.*



*Faith has qualms about the organization she has tirelessly spearheaded over the last several years. She worries about being seen as a false activist, a bad feminist, or a woman unconcerned with the plight of other women. She has had to make compromises when it comes to Loci but has thrown herself into the work nonetheless—occasionally, her son points out to her, to her own detriment. Faith and Lincoln’s conversation about the mentorship program for Ecuadorian women foreshadows one of the biggest compromises Faith will make during her career.*



*Faith’s massages provide her with a time to take a break from the chaos and endless demands of her fast-paced life as an activist.*



*The roots of Faith’s wholehearted dedication to feminist activism are revealed in this passage, as Faith looks back on a major injustice which occurred during her childhood. Though they were twins, separated only by gender, Faith and her brother were afforded vastly different opportunities. The unfairness of the arbitrary divisions between them was compounded by Faith’s studious dedication to academics contrasted against her brother’s devil-may-care attitude. Despite his indifference to academics, he was afforded the chance to attend the college of his choice, while Faith was forced to stay at home and attend a local school.*



Faith begged her older brother to back her up, but he told Faith that he wanted to “stay out of it.” That night, Faith cried herself to sleep, and she and her brother were never close again. While her brother went off to school, Faith was forced to live at home while taking classes at Brooklyn College. She dated occasionally, but her parents, obsessed with making sure that Faith remained safe—and a virgin—would wait up for her every night, and once even came to collect her from a house party. Faith remained a virgin throughout college, feeling that there was “power” in walking away from sex.

As college ended, things began to shift for Faith. Kennedy was assassinated, and she and her friend from school, Annie, became more politically minded and desirous of independence. After graduation, Faith announced to her parents that she and Annie were moving to Las Vegas to get as far away from Brooklyn as possible. Though Faith’s parents threatened to cut her off if she went, they never followed through on those threats. Still, Faith did not ask her parents for any money or help as she and Annie made their way west to Las Vegas and secured jobs as cocktail waitresses at a hotel and casino.

Faith lost her virginity at twenty-two years old to a blackjack dealer and was completely underwhelmed by the act of sex. For years after, she was disgusted by men, until one night at the casino, when she met a slender, attractive man who worked as a “low-level executive in the field of cookies and crackers,” and flirted with him while he played blackjack. The man was with a woman, though, and once she reappeared at the table, Faith drifted away from the two of them.

Over the next several months, Faith became involved with a trumpet player, and Annie took up with a comedian. One day, Annie missed her period and tearfully confided in Faith that she didn’t know what to do. The next day, Annie’s boyfriend drove her and Faith from doctor to doctor, searching for someone who would perform an abortion, but no one would. At last, Annie got the name of a secret practitioner from a friend, and Faith went with her to the prearranged meeting. The women were blindfolded, driven around, and eventually dropped off at a shady-looking building, where Annie was taken back to an exam room while Faith waited anxiously.

Later that night, Annie began bleeding heavily. Faith took her to the emergency room, where the nurses and doctors, realizing what was happening to Annie, shamed and criticized her, calling her a “harlot” and threatening to call the police on her. Two days later, after three blood transfusions, Annie was sent home with a warning from a male gynecologist who told her not to “give it up” so easily. After that incident, Annie begged Faith to return to Brooklyn, and so they did.

*Faith felt betrayed by her older brother, who had been her ally since birth. During college, Faith explored what “freedom” meant to her and found that it wasn’t necessarily letting loose and running wild. Instead, she found freedom in power—specifically the power in asserting her own agency over her body.*



*Faith, emboldened by her recent understanding of personal power and freedom, chose to set off West with one of her likeminded friends in order to see the world and push the boundaries of their lives even further. Though Faith’s parents, who wanted to keep her at home for as long as possible, resisted her decision, times were changing, and Faith wanted to change with them.*



*Faith explored her sexuality in Las Vegas, coming to understand what power dynamics between men and women looked and felt like. The brief flirtation with the “low-level executive” foreshadows events later in Faith’s life, when the man reappears in a significant way.*



*Despite Faith and Annie’s joyful and occasionally reckless explorations of their own power, femininity, and sexuality, there were still very serious consequences at the time for women who found themselves with an unwanted pregnancy. Faith’s horror at the extremes to which she and Annie must go to secure an abortion will form the basis of her politics going forward in her life and career.*



*In addition to having the anxiety of procuring a safe abortion for her friend, Faith was forced to reckon with the unfair and deeply rooted societal stigmas that prevented women from attaining the care and empathy they needed—even from medical professionals.*



Now, in interviews, when Faith is asked if there was an “aha moment” that made her into the person she is today, she deflects and says there is not. However, she realizes that there have been a series of small realizations, and that Annie’s struggle to secure a safe abortion was one of them.

In 1966, Faith and Annie were sharing a tiny apartment in Greenwich Village. They felt like two audience members who had arrived in the middle of a show. So much political protesting and social organizing was happening, and the two women had missed so much while in Las Vegas. Faith and Annie became politically involved almost right away.

Faith attended many antiwar meetings, and every time she spoke up, men interrupted her. She attempted to bring the issues she cared about—women’s liberation and abortion reform—to the forefront of these discussions, but men always silenced Faith and told her that women’s issues were not as important as the war in Vietnam. At the end of one meeting, a woman approached Faith and invited her to a women’s only meeting. Faith attended and found solace in a group of strong, beautiful, witty women who all had the same complaints about being silenced and underestimated that she herself did. As Faith shared her story—and Annie’s—with these women, they all rallied around the desire to stop letting men make their decisions. The women raised their voice in song together, celebrating that although they were in a “stuck place” a lot of the time, they were at least in it together.

After her first meeting with the women’s group, Faith returned home to her apartment and told Annie about the meeting. When Faith revealed that she had mentioned Annie’s abortion, Annie expressed her reluctance to talk about the incident and said that she never wanted to speak of it again. Though Faith and Annie remained roommates for several months after that evening, they grew apart considerably, as Faith threw herself into activism and Annie got swept up in a relationship with a law student. Eventually, Annie married the law student and moved out to the Midwest, while Faith doubled down on her presence in the women’s movement.

As Faith got more involved in the women’s movement, she began making valuable connections—one of her acquaintances, who had worked in publishing for a while, was planning on starting the magazine that would eventually become *Bloomer*. Faith was brought on board, and though the women struggled to secure funding and office space, they were “flushed with happiness” to be doing something so vital and full of potential.

*Faith credits the injustice of witnessing her friend Annie undergo a total loss of power and agency as the inspiration for much of Faith’s own feminist thought and activism.*



*Faith and Annie became swept up in the tidal wave of activism that was rocking the nation—and especially New York City—in the 1960s.*



*As Faith became entrenched in the activist scene in New York, she found herself being silenced and shut out by male voices and perspectives who had little regard for the issues facing women. Faith found refuge, though, in a women’s group, and soon found that her voice was not only heard but valued. Faith learned that she was not alone in her frustrations, and that there was a chance to make a real difference despite the societal and political powers still threatening to hold women back from their goals of equality and self-expression.*



*Faith and Annie have very divergent reactions to pain and trauma. While Faith—who is, to be fair, only a witness to trauma and not a firsthand victim—longs to use the pain she has seen as a springboard for change, Annie simply wants to shove her pain away and pretend it never happened. This dynamic mirrors Greer’s desire to continue hounding Darren Tinzler and the Ryland administration even when many of his victims simply wanted to move on with their lives. The struggles women face are age-old and constantly repetitious.*



*Faith finally found not just an outlet for her self-expression but an outlet for change in the creation of *Bloomer*. Though things were still difficult for her and her fellow editors, they were happy to be doing the work they were doing nonetheless.*



As Faith and her fellow editors at *Bloomer* struggled to get their magazine off the ground, they realized that they were going to need to sell a considerable amount of ad space. One morning, Faith and her coworkers meet with three executives from Nabisco, attempting—and failing—to relay to the men why their huge corporation should advertise in their niche women’s magazine. The men end the meeting by telling the women they’d “think about it,” but on the way out of the meeting, one of the men stops Faith and tells her that he recognizes her. He asks if they had met long ago in Las Vegas, and Faith quickly realizes that he is the man she flirted with who worked in “cookies and crackers.”

The executive, Emmett Shrader, offers to take Faith out so that they can “explore the question of ad space” further—just the two of them, one-on-one. Though Faith can tell that there is a flirtatious tone to the invitation, and knows that the man wants to sleep with her, she accepts. She resolves not to sleep with him but to let him think that she might.

That night, Faith meets Emmett at a dim club in Greenwich village. They both order drinks with paper umbrellas in them, but Emmett takes the umbrella from his and pockets it. He asks Faith to tell him her story and the story of the magazine. Faith tells him everything and he hangs on her every word. At the end of her story, Emmett tells Faith that what she and the women at *Bloomer* are doing is “essential.” Emmett, however, advises Faith that when it comes to business meetings, she—not her colleagues—should be the one doing the talking.

Emmett takes her hand and begins stroking it. Faith has been preparing for this moment but is no longer resolute in her choice to turn Emmett down. She desires him in a way, and when he asks her to go to bed with him, she does not turn him down. Faith and Emmett go back to Faith’s apartment, undress, and get into bed. As they do, Faith realizes that just as badly as Emmett wants to be inside of her, she wants to be inside of him—or maybe even to be him, inhabit him, and walk through the world the way he does.

The two have passionate, athletic sex—when they are done, however, Emmett quickly begins to dress and prepares to leave though it is past two in the morning. It dawns on Faith that Emmett is married, and she wonders if his wife was the woman that was with him in the casino years earlier. Faith also realizes that Emmett must have a child—she recalls how he pocketed his paper umbrella earlier to bring it home as a gift. Faith wants to be furious at Emmett but cannot make herself, as she feels she intuited these things all evening long and simply shoved them out of her mind’s eye.

*In this passage, Wolitzer shows Faith having to make one of her first major career compromises. The magazine she works for is forward-minded and woman-founded, but they still must capitulate to the demands of the economy and the power structures that allow certain institutions to thrive. Though they think it’s selling out to request ad money, Faith and her fellow editors know that compromises must be made in order to secure their platform, and through it, the advancement of the issues facing women.*



*Faith must now make another compromise—she must engage in a flirtation with a powerful man in order to secure the ad space that she desperately needs to continue her mission with Bloomer.*



*Emmett seems to really believe in what Faith is saying, and he wants to encourage her to shine and to reach her fullest potential. In this regard, Emmett seems to be somewhat of a feminist—foreshadowing his later financial involvement with Loci.*



*As Faith explores this new power dynamic between her and Emmett, she realizes that things are not as off-balance as they seem. Faith has a certain power over Emmett, and he has a certain power over her, but it is not just the power of sexual desire—it is the allure of inhabiting a more powerful persona and having influence, a voice, and a platform that people do not question.*



*As her encounter with Emmett ends, Faith realizes that they must now go out into the real world—where the reality of the imbalance of power between them is as stark and as fraught as ever. Emmett has a real life, a life without Faith, and he can move through that life seemingly without consequences.*



As Emmett dresses, he tells Faith that he feels something for her he has never felt before. He implies that he wants to continue seeing her, but Faith replies that she could never do that to her “sisters”—she does not betray other women. Emmett offers to call Faith tomorrow strictly about the ad space.

The next morning, however, when Emmett calls, he does not bring up the ad. Instead, he tells Faith that his wife confronted him when he returned home the previous night and asked him to tell her everything about the woman he had just been with. Emmett did, and now his wife wants to talk to Faith on the phone. Faith tells Emmett that he is “insane,” but soon she is on the phone with Emmett’s wife, who informs Faith that her husband is “not [hers] for the taking.” Faith hangs up, unable to bear hearing any more.

That afternoon at work, Faith tells her fellow editors that there is not going to be any ad money from Nabisco. The women tell her it’s not the end of the world, and that they have possibly secured an advertisement from Dr. Scholl’s. The magazine does well in the next several years, and Faith or her fellow editors frequently appear on late-night talk shows to promote their magazine and its mission. They are often ridiculed but know that it is important to get the word out about their work.

Faith outshines her fellow editors when it comes to public speaking—she is not necessarily an “ideas person,” but she has a certain unnamable magnetism that catapults her to fame. In 1975, Faith appears on a talk show opposite a famous and misogynistic novelist, who rails against “angry women’s libbers” for asking men to “pay for dinner” or “open this jar,” while claiming to want independence. When it is Faith’s turn to speak, she decides not to appear prim, or angry, or even to laugh along with the audience, who ate up the novelist’s misogynistic tirade. Instead, Faith retaliates, explaining that men are afraid to do women’s work, and this is the reason why they try to keep women from doing “men’s work.” The audience is hooked, and Faith comically announces that “from this day forward, [she] will never buy food in jars again.”

*Faith couches her refusal to continue seeing Emmett in her allegiance to feminism—she does not want to be a traitor to her beliefs in sisterhood and community.*



*Though Faith didn’t want to be a traitor to other women, she did inadvertently hurt one of her “sisters” by sleeping with Emmett. As Faith is forced to reckon with what she has done, the shame is almost too much to bear, and she cuts off the phone call with Emmett’s wife early. It seems that Faith, not Emmett, receives most of the reprimanding from Emmett’s wife, suggesting that men face fewer consequences for their actions.*



*Despite the setback with Emmett, the editors at Bloomer manage to secure ad space—and thus the perpetuation and possibly even the advancement—of their platform. It is difficult work, and society does not see feminism as useful or valuable, but Faith and her “sisters” will not stop fighting for power and recognition.*



*As Faith navigates the rocky terrain of feminist activism, she is aided by her ineffable magnetism and allure. Even in the face of blatant misogyny and cruel treatment, Faith is able to maintain her composure and likability while also advancing her platform. Faith makes herself a valuable asset to the community and brings feminism to the forefront of many discussions in this way.*



Faith's gift for public speaking makes her into a public figure, and as she travels the country and meets with radical women, housewives, and students alike, she learns from women of all backgrounds. When a young interviewer asks Faith what she stands for, she answers simply, "I stand for women." As Faith becomes increasingly famous, she writes bestselling books and appears on numerous television programs. Every now and again, she thinks of Emmett Shrader—he has started his own venture capital firm and is now a successful billionaire. Occasionally, Faith hears about a "shady project" Emmett gets involved in, but all of his mistakes appear to be "counterbalanced by good."

Meanwhile, Annie now goes by Anne McCauley and has become an outspoken conservative political figure in Indiana. She wins a Senate seat on a staunch anti-abortion stance, and every time Faith sees her old friend on television, she wishes the world knew the truth about Annie's story. Despite everything, however, Faith never tells anyone—it is not her story to share.

As Faith's career continues, she becomes aware of her status as an inspirational figure to young women everywhere and makes it her goal to support everyone she can. However, when *Bloomer* folds in 2010, Faith feels dejected and useless—until Emmett Shrader calls and asks Faith to come to his office for a meeting. When Faith sees Emmett for the first time in years, she feels nostalgic for his lost younger self and for her own lost youth. During the meeting, Emmett tells Faith of his dreams for a women's foundation—he wants to fund it and have Faith be its public face. Faith expresses concern that Emmett is taking some kind of "moral shortcut" to impress her. Emmett reassures Faith that he is not offering the foundation to her to beguile her—he just wants to do something good. Faith tells Emmett she'll consider his proposition.

The next day, Faith calls Emmett and expresses her concerns that the foundation will become a high-end lecture bureau that doesn't actually change the lives of women. She turns Emmett down, but after a long walk in the park, she decides to go to his office and continue the conversation. She tells him that if he wants her to come on board, the organization will have to have a component that allows her to "get out there and do something." Emmett agrees to the proposition, and the two strike a deal.

*As Faith's career progresses, she amasses more of the power she has always wanted to have. Meanwhile, Emmett Shrader continues to grow in power and influence as well, and as Faith keeps tabs on his career, she does so with a watchful eye and careful attention to how Emmett is choosing to use his constantly growing share of sociopolitical power. Emmett's occasional "shady project" that is "counterbalanced by good" is also significant, foreshadowing one such project that he ropes Faith and Loci into.*



*Faith and Annie's divergent paths illustrate the different effects of trauma. Faith knows she must be allegiant to the memory of her friendship with Annie, but the question of whether it makes her a "good" feminist to hide a destructive anti-feminist's backstory is called into question as the years go by and both women amass power for themselves.*



*Despite the sociopolitical power she has gained over the years, Faith is not invincible—she is easily affected by the failure of the edifices which have granted her social capital. The chance to take on a new business venture with Emmett is intriguing, but still worrisome to Faith—she is afraid that after all these years, Emmett still just wants to get her into bed. The man assures her, however, that he really does want to do some good in the world—he wants to use his own power, which is very different from Faith's, to help Faith pursue her goals.*



*Faith is weighing the pros and cons of signing on with Emmett—she knows that the foundation would give her the power to do certain things but would restrict her to others. However, it's unclear what Faith really wants from the foundation—or for women in general—as Faith simply claims to want to "get out there and do something." From the very beginning, the venture's goals are vague and half-baked.*



Now, almost five years into Loci's short life, Faith is finding it increasingly difficult to get her "special projects" off the ground. ShraderCapital is "stingy" with its funds, and additionally, Faith and the entire organization have been criticized and attacked for engaging in "#fingersandwichfeminism"—a hands-off kind of activism that doesn't actually improve women's lives. Faith understands the complaints against her, but she is heartened by how well the organization's summits are doing—even if they have become a sort of who's-who of the celebrity world and some frivolity has crept in.

Faith recalls a morning when she found Greer Kadetsky sleeping at her desk and asked her to come into her own office. Greer admitted that she missed writing speeches and the chance to actively engage with real-life women going through real-life struggles. Faith admitted to Greer that she felt in a rut, and Greer cautioned Faith against allowing the summits and events to take on an air of self-satisfaction. The following day, Faith held an office-wide meeting and offered her employees the chance to air their gripes about Loci and make suggestions for how to improve things.

Afterward, Faith approached Emmett with a new special project she had in mind—to rescue a number of women who were victims of sex trafficking in Ecuador. Faith wanted to connect the women, after their rescue, with mentors, and bring one of the young women to America to give a speech at one of Loci's summits. Emmett promised to bring Faith's idea up to his board upstairs.

In June of 2014, Faith was informed that her idea was actually going to come to fruition. She was thrilled—mentorship was "very popular" at the moment, and as all the gears began turning in support of Faith's vision, she was praised by members of the team who'd be carrying the project out as a "force for good" and an inspiration. A woman named Alejandra Sosa was chosen to head the mentorship program, and after she was formally vetted and the rescue mission had been completed successfully, the women were provided with housing that would enable them to make a fresh start.

Now, lying on the massage table, Faith is struck by the idea to turn the keynote speech over to Greer Kadetsky—to let her write it and deliver it at the summit in Los Angeles. Faith wants to give Greer the chance to finally "become her own person," and knows that giving her the chance to write two speeches—one for herself and one for the Ecuadorian woman Faith is planning to fly in for the summit—will be an incredible opportunity for Greer.

*The problems Faith knew she would face at Loci have begun to make her journey a difficult one. She understands the criticisms of the organization—as well as criticisms of her personally—but still believes that the positive things about Loci outweigh the negatives, and she is proud to be able to use her power for the advancement of women the world over.*



*Faith is cautious not to get too caught up in her own power and her own single-minded vision for Loci—especially as she realizes that some of her employees are so bored that they're falling asleep on the job. In this way, Faith demonstrates that she does care deeply about the organization and wants for it to do as much as possible for the advancement of women.*



*Faith's pet project was born of her desire to effect more results immediately, and demonstrate to herself, her employees, and the public that Loci can be a force for tangible good, and not just an echo chamber for wealthy white women.*



*Faith has done all the right things in attempting to get her mentorship program off the ground, and she is proud of her own work and excited about the new strides she and her company are going to be making in support of women's issues. It seems that Faith is kept at arm's length from her own project, however, foreshadowing events later in the novel.*



*After a long series of flashbacks, the novel returns to the present moment, with Faith getting a massage. As Faith is struck by the idea to use her power in order to lift her favorite mentee, Greer Kadetsky, up even further, Faith is also self-congratulatory. Faith delights in being able to use her power for the advancement of women—and, by proxy, the advancement of herself and her brand.*



Faith recalls supporting Greer over the years, as Greer dealt with the emotional fallout of her boyfriend's brother's death. Greer bounced back, but now, after four years, Faith thinks that Greer needs a reminder of why she joined Loci in the first place. Plus, Lincoln has a point: Faith is not as young as she used to be, and she needs to be careful about overworking herself. Faith thinks back to her first meeting with Greer at Ryland. She remembers what Greer told her about her parents and reflects on how she and Greer were both disappointed and held back by their parents in similar ways. Faith is grateful she was able to overcome her parents' having held her back and wants to encourage Greer to be able to do the same.

*Faith sees a lot of herself in Greer, and this chapter has done a lot of background work in order to demonstrate that their shared sense of disappointment in their parents is what has bonded Faith to Greer so deeply. Faith now wants Greer to succeed, seeing her potential as an activist, a feminist, and a leader. Faith is using her power to help other women accrue their own power—just what she always wanted to do with her life.*



## CHAPTER 9

It is early December, but in LA it is hot and smoggy. It is the day of the speech at the mentorship summit, and the event is packed: waiters circle through the main lobby passing out Bellinis and fancy canapes, there is a “discreet” manicure station set up, and a feminist psychic offers readings in a corner of the room. The audience is wealthy, progressive, and well dressed. Greer and the speaker from Ecuador, Lupe Izurieta, stand together off to the side, watching the hustle and bustle of the summit.

*As the summit begins, Wolitzer portrays it in a slightly unforgiving light. It is more a display of wealth and status than it is a sociopolitical investigation into the state of feminism and women's rights around the world, and as Greer and Lupe stand at the edge of it, they both feel wildly out of place.*



Greer communicates with Lupe in mediocre Spanish, asking if she wants anything to eat. Lupe is painfully shy and refuses Greer's offers of food. A tech guy comes up to the two of them and outfits them with microphones—their speech starts in fifteen minutes. Greer and Lupe are both nervous, and Greer can still hardly believe that Faith is allowing her to deliver the keynote and wonders why she entrusted it to her. Greer remembers something Faith said a long time ago: men only give women the powers and duties that they themselves don't want. Greer wonders if this is what is happening to her now, though she knows she and Faith have had many moments of mutual connection over the last four years, especially when Greer was suffering through her breakup with Cory.

*Greer is suddenly in a position of relative power at Loci—all she has wanted for the last four years. She finds herself slightly overwhelmed, and as a result, she is overtaken by impostor syndrome—the feeling that she hasn't really deserved the honor being given to her and that there must be some alternate reason that Faith has entrusted her with delivering the keynote. Greer has attained a measure of power, but her own inner personal fortitude is still wavering.*



Now, Greer and Cory speak only intermittently, and every time she goes home, she is only able to see him as a “skinny grown man who live[s] in his mother's house with a plastic-covered sofa and video games and a turtle.” Greer has had a few short-lived romantic flings over the years and has honed her “look” so that she now stands out as refined and attractive where she was once awkward and gangly. She has become better at flirting, but the most consequential “relationship” she's had in recent years was a brief romance with a man from Loci, though she realizes now that “sadness” led her to his **sofa bed** in Fort Greene.

*As Greer has matured, she has navigated the complicated world of interpersonal relationships with a slight shortage of grace. She looks down on her former boyfriend Cory for his choices, which she sees as unambitious, and has sought to rid herself of her sadness over her and Cory's estrangement through short-term connections and romances.*





Greer walks out onto the large stage, nervous and quivering. She begins her speech, thanking Faith for the opportunity to deliver the keynote and praising her for giving Greer “permission to be the person [she has] secretly long[ed] to be.” After Greer’s speech concludes, she introduces Lupe, emphasizing to the gathered crowd that Lupe is receiving help in recovering from a traumatic time in her life through Loci’s mentorship program.

Lupe stands at the podium and begins to read slowly and carefully in Spanish, while Greer translates her words into English. Lupe speaks gratefully about the mentorship program and explains that as a result of it, she is slowly learning to speak English, as well as how to use a hand loom and how to knit. The audience responds to Lupe’s speech with thunderous applause, and as Greer and Lupe return to the lobby, they are showered with praise and affection. One woman gifts Lupe with some knitting needles and a ball of wool, while another approaches Greer to discuss the meaningful nature of mentorship.

After the summit, Greer and Lupe return to their connected rooms at a nearby hotel. Greer knocks on Lupe’s door and asks Lupe in her best Spanish if she would like to go out for a celebratory dinner. Lupe does not seem to understand, however, and Greer asks if she can come inside to talk to Lupe more closely. Lupe’s room is sparse and looks “barely occupied,” and Greer wishes she could tell Lupe to spread out and make herself at home, but she does not want to put any pressure on Lupe or make her feel bad. The two of them order room service and eat it together while watching a movie on TV. Greer wishes she could talk more with Lupe and ask her what she thinks about the summit, America, and everything that has happened to her. She feels protective of Lupe, like Lupe is “hers.”

The next morning, on the flight back to New York—which is only the third plane trip that Lupe has ever been on, after the flight from Quito to New York and New York to LA—Greer notices how nervous and upset Lupe seems. Greer, seeing the gifted wool and knitting needles in Lupe’s carry-on bag, gestures to it and suggests that knitting might calm Lupe down, but Lupe simply shakes her head. A day later, Lupe returns to Ecuador, and Greer receives an email from a former employee of Shradecapital, Kim Russo—she wants to talk to Greer “in confidence,” and notes that what she has to say is important.

*Greer steps into her moment in the spotlight gracefully and gratefully, thanking Faith for all of the support she has shown her over the years and the trust she has given her now.*



*This passage demonstrates how the idea of female mentor-mentee relationships have become valuable commodities in the community. The idea of women passing their power along to other younger, less powerful women is captivating and alluring, and Greer wants to play a part in the cycle of this transfer of power. This harkens back to her earlier fascination with playing a stereotypically feminine role and thus embodying her place in the long chain of women who have come before her.*



*In this passage, Wolitzer attempts to demonstrate the perspective of someone with power attempting to hand it down to someone else. For most of the novel, she has focused mostly on young women attempting to amass power—now that Greer has some, she is in the awkward position of navigating how to share it with Lupe, and how to bolster Lupe’s own sense of personal fortitude despite the many barriers between the two women.*



*As the summit comes to a close, Greer feels happy about the way things went, but there is also the sense that something is not quite right—or at least unfinished. Things end on an odd note with Lupe, and with the email from Kim Russo, it seems as if something is brewing on the horizon.*



Greer meets Kim for coffee the following morning. Kim tells Greer that someone sent her a video of Greer's speech, and she thought that Greer was very good—but she needs to tell Greer something. After a moment, Kim informs Greer that Loci's mentor program in Ecuador is "bullshit." Greer tells Kim that she appreciates her opinion—she knows that the program seems to some like "privileged meddling." Kim tells Greer that Greer has misunderstood—the program is "bullshit" in that it doesn't exist at all.

Greer doesn't believe Kim, but Kim insists she is telling the truth. She tells Greer that "they"—Faith and Emmett—sent Greer out on stage in LA knowing that the mentorship program was a ruse, and that they should be held accountable. Greer doesn't think that what Kim is saying makes any sense and asks how she came to be in possession of this information. Kim tells Greer that she was in on the meetings at ShraderCapital when the people upstairs were planning the program. Though the rescue was real, the mentorship part of the plan never happened, and ShraderCapital just pretended that it did. Alejandra Sosa was sidelined for a new, unnamed contact in Ecuador, and that woman failed to set up the program. ShraderCapital has continued to accept donations meant for the program, afraid of the PR scandal that would surely unfold if they came forward with the truth.

Overwhelmed, Greer closes her eyes. She asks Kim how Lupe would have been able to give her speech about her mentor if what was in it hadn't been true. Kim tells Greer that someone probably wrote the speech for her. Greer, of course, realizes that she was the one to write the speech—at Faith's request. She realizes now that perhaps Lupe was not so frightened to get up and speak because of her past trauma, but because she knew that what she was essentially being told to say was a lie. She realizes that Lupe did not knit on the flight home because she never learned how—her "mentor" is a lie.

Half an hour later, when Greer gets to work, she heads straight to Faith's office and asks if they can speak in private, but Faith tells Greer that she is heading out for a hair appointment—she has a TV appearance later. She urges Greer to meet her at the salon at noon.

*The revelation that the mentorship program in Ecuador—the project which everyone at Loci is most excited about and the centerpiece of the recent summit on mentorship—is a falsehood is so shocking to Greer that she has trouble absorbing Kim's statement as the truth.*



*Greer refuses to believe that her own mentor, Faith, would have consciously sent her to the wolves by sending her out on stage to deliver a speech about a false entity. However, Greer does remember being dogged by suspicions that she was only getting to deliver the speech because Faith didn't want to. As Kim explains the details about the failure of the mentorship program, Greer struggles to keep up while also cycling through her own disappointment and desperation for answers.*



*As Greer comes to the painful and embarrassing realization that she is part of the mechanism that has perpetuated the lies about the mentorship program, she is overcome with shame and even anger. Greer was so desperate to impress her own mentor that she let down the woman who was supposed to be her own mentee—Lupe. For all her listening skills, Greer has failed to listen to the true story of a woman in actual need.*



*Greer has a pressing matter to discuss, but Faith is more concerned with readying herself for an appearance that will advance her own personal image and brand.*



When Greer arrives at the salon, she is led back to a screened VIP area, where Faith sits with her hair wrapped in foils. Greer is shocked to see Faith getting her hair dyed, and Faith herself admits that she feels guilty about dyeing her hair but is not ready to go gray yet. Faith tells Greer that they have thirty minutes to talk and urges Greer to speak her mind. Greer does not want to shatter one of her rare and special one-on-one moments with Faith but knows she must bring up the mentorship program. She tells Faith what she knows—that the program doesn't exist and never did, but that ShraderCapital has been continuing to take money from investors and donors.

Faith asks if the rescue, at least, was real, and Greer tells her that it was. Faith is disappointed and angry, and she expresses her disbelief in ShraderCapital—they often cut corners, she says, but this is unheard of. Greer feels a wash of relief as she realizes that Faith hadn't known the truth either. Faith laments how “gullible” she has been by going into business with ShraderCapital, and the two women share a moment of reflective silence. Faith breaks the moment by asking Greer what she hoped to accomplish by “rushing in” and telling her the news. Greer, confused, tells Faith that she simply wanted to tell her the truth. She asks Faith not to be angry with her, and then inquires what Faith will do in the face of this news. Faith tells her, however, that there is “no next move.”

Greer suggests breaking with ShraderCapital, but Faith points out that doing so would cut off funds completely and prevent Loci from accomplishing its mission of spreading the word about the “plight of women everywhere.” Faith knows that similar organizations to Loci have to scrounge and scrape for funds, and she does not want to have to do that. She resigns herself to having foolishly ignored her own belief that “doing good and taking money don't go together.” Greer timidly asks Faith if she is going to just accept ShraderCapital's fraud. Faith says that though she is “disgusted” by the fraudulent mentor program, she is mostly just depressed. She admits that she has had to adjust her expectations for Loci and implies that she will just keep doing so now.

Greer asks if Faith plans to just go back to work and act like nothing has happened. She has trouble reconciling this version of Faith with the Faith she first met in the Ryland Chapel all those years ago—the Faith who made her feel like she, and the work she wanted to do on behalf of women, truly mattered. Greer wonders where Lupe is and what she's doing, and she thinks sadly of her own complicity in causing Lupe more pain.

*Greer sees Faith in a stunning new light as this passage unfolds. She is unable to comprehend how her beloved mentor could have knowingly roped her into such deception, and as she watches Faith getting her hair dyed, she understands that the beauty routine is a metaphor for all the ways in which Faith Frank has disguised her “real” self from her adoring mentees, employees, and public supporters.*



*The realization that Faith did not know what was actually going on at ShraderCapital is both a relief and another blow to Greer. Although her mentor wasn't outright lying to her, Greer comes to realize that over the years, Faith has become more preoccupied with the public's perception of her than with ensuring that everything at her organization is running smoothly. However, it is clear that Faith would have rather lived in ignorance, and even now that she knows what ShraderCapital has been up to, she is not planning to take any action.*



*Faith reveals that activism always comes with a price or at least a trade-off. In the case of Loci and ShraderCapital, Faith has accepted the knowledge that while she will receive a nearly limitless amount of money and thus power to elevate awareness about the “plight” of women, there is always a dark underbelly to the goals she hopes to achieve.*



*In these passages, Greer's world is slowly beginning to crumble around her. The foundation she works for is a lie, the man who made it possible is a liar, her mentor is too weary or too fearful to speak out, and she herself is complicit in the subjugation of an innocent young woman who has been through enough trauma already.*



Greer asks once more if Faith is going to just keep working for ShraderCapital. Growing agitated, Faith explains that when one goes into charitable work, one knows that some will get skimmed off the top—corruption is inevitable. Throughout her own life, Faith has been weighing that corruption against the potential good she can do. Greer tells Faith she cannot believe that Faith wants to stay at Loci, but Faith is resolute—she does not want to start over. She apologizes to Greer for having sent her up on stage in LA to perpetuate a lie.

Faith asks Greer to keep believing in what they are doing at Loci and to help her “keep a tighter leash” on ShraderCapital upstairs. Just at that moment, Faith’s assistant appears and begins prepping Faith for a TV interview she has later that day. Greer is shocked and appalled to realize that Faith is still going to go on TV and talk up the fake mentorship program. As Greer looks around the salon at all the women “sitting patiently in their vulnerability and vanity,” she considers how Faith’s life and career have always been about weighing corruption versus good.

When Greer and Faith arrive back at Loci, Faith heads to her office, and Greer follows her. She asks, one more time, if she is really planning to discuss the mentorship program on TV later that afternoon. Faith says that she is—it was in the pre-interview package, and there is nothing she can do now. Greer suggests Faith cancel, but Faith counters that there are many other things she wants to talk about and call attention to—Loci is in need of press. Greer tells Faith that they don’t need the press to work on behalf of women. As Greer falls apart, she tells Faith that she cannot continue working at Loci and turns to leave.

As Greer heads out of Faith’s office, she realizes that everyone else is staring at her. When she reaches the door, Faith speaks up—she points out that it’s “funny” that Greer is leaving in an attempt to make a statement about how much she cares about women, when years ago, Greer stabbed Zee in the back by refusing to give her letter to Faith. Greer feels as if she is about to faint, but also wonders if Faith has a right to be angry with her. Faith had put some trust in Greer, and now Greer is abandoning her to deal with ShraderCapital on her own. Faith asks Greer what she did with the letter. Rather than answer her, or faint, Greer turns and runs.

*Faith knows that corruption and hypocrisy are unavoidable and often inevitable—this is a hard lesson to learn, and as Greer realizes that her beloved activist mentor is willing to accept such injustices, the foundation of all she believes begins to shake.*



*The questionable decisions Faith is making in these passages escalate right before Greer’s eyes. Greer is disappointed and scandalized to realize that even in the light of the knowledge of the truth about her foundation, Faith is going to remain complicit in perpetuating the lies that have kept it going rather than take a stand on behalf of the very women she is lying about protecting and mentoring.*



*Greer reaches a breaking point, at last, once she fails entirely to convince Faith that the right thing to do is to stop perpetuating ShraderCapital’s lies. Greer’s own personal fortitude shines through in this moment, as she makes the decision to abandon the organization she once believed in—and the woman who has been such a momentous influence in her life.*



*Faith is hurt, angry, and embarrassed by all that has transpired that afternoon, so she makes a last-ditch effort to lash out at her favorite mentee, Greer, whom she knows has exceeded her in terms of personal fortitude and morality. By bringing up the letter, Faith calls Greer’s true allegiance to feminism into question. Confronted with the mistakes of her past, Greer flees, hoping she can outrun the flood of shame and pain Faith has unleashed on her.*



## CHAPTER 10

Three and a half years after leaving Teach and Reach, Zee Eisenstat is now working as a crisis response counselor. When she first became interested in trauma, she took a course called *Assessing the Nature of Emergency*, and since then, she has dedicated her life to being there during “acute, terrible” moments in other people’s lives. Zee has found that the worse the crisis is, the better she can focus—she never crumples or balks in the face of trauma or pain.

Zee’s job takes her all over Chicago, as she visits people at their homes in the wake of a crisis or a shock—a suicide, a hostage situation, a bout of psychosis. Zee is “uncommonly skilled” at her job and often hears from the people or families she has helped months after her visits to them. Zee has become influential and valued in the trauma community and has even had her work cited in the *International Journal of Traumatology*. Zee is a “legitimate expert”—she runs her own trauma team and is doing a certificate program in a new post-traumatic stress management method.

One day, Greer calls, and announces that she has quit her job. She tells Zee that things with Faith ended badly, and that “a lot of shit went down.” Greer cries to Zee, telling her that for a long time she thought she was part of something “real and honest” at Loci, but has been devastated to learn that the organization is flawed and hypocritical. Zee invites Greer to come to Chicago for a little while to stay with her and Noelle, who live in a young part of town with a “significant lesbian population.” Noelle is now the principal of the Learning Octagon school, and the two of them have made a life together that feels safe and fulfilling for them both.

The next day, Greer rings the bell at Zee’s apartment, and Zee lets her in. Zee is prepared to help Greer sort through her situation in the same way that Zee helps her trauma victims. Zee sits Greer down on the couch and pours her a large of cold water—something that always helps her patients connect back to their bodies and remember that there are still tiny things they can do. Zee urges Greer to open up to her, and Greer begins telling her the “long and convoluted story” about the rescue of the Ecuadorian women and the botched mentorship program.

*Zee moved to Chicago in a misguided but well-intentioned attempt to do some good in a new community that was in need of dedicated change-makers. After failing to do all of that at Teach and Reach, Zee has tempered her community-minded thinking, examined her own individual strengths and desires, and finally found a career that allows her to help people in a true and meaningful way.*



*Zee’s arc throughout the novel has been one of taming her broad impulses toward blanket activism and finding situations in which she can actually satisfy her activist itch without being self-seeking or individualistic. Now, she has circled all the way back around to finding individual satisfaction as a result of her positive impact on her community.*



*It seemed, when Greer took the job at Loci, that she was destined for greatness just because of her proximity to Faith Frank—now, though, Greer’s star has fallen, while Zee’s has risen. Zee has achieved all the things she wanted in life—to feel fulfilled, needed, and adored, and also to do actual good in her community.*



*Zee proves herself in this passage to be caring, thoughtful, and prepared. She and Greer have maintained their friendship in the face of a large and deep imbalance of power between them, but Zee is still ready at a moment’s notice to care for and attend to her old friend. However, Zee still doesn’t know about the letter, which could cause a significant rift between the two friends.*



At the end of the story, however, Greer is still visibly tense and upset, and confesses that there is “something else” she has to tell Zee. She takes a deep breath and tells Zee that she never gave Faith the letter. Zee has trouble understanding or remembering, but Greer explains that she never gave Faith the letter that Zee wrote four years ago, asking for a job at Loci. Zee realizes that Greer was lying when she claimed that there were no positions available at the company, and Zee is taken by surprise as she realizes that Greer is a liar. She thinks of how her patients are always surprised by grief, and now she is also shocked nearly to the point of trauma.

Greer continues apologizing and laments the fact that for all her possessiveness about Loci, the foundation ultimately didn’t do anything close to the important work that Zee is doing now. Zee asks Greer why she betrayed her—after all, Zee was the one who “led [Greer] into everything,” and introduced her to who Faith Frank was. Greer confesses that she was so desperate for someone to see something special in her that she threw Zee under the bus.

Allowing Greer to sit in her own shame, Zee reflects on how she had gotten over her disappointment about not being able to join Loci four long years ago. In the time since, she has built a life for herself that she knows Faith would approve of—she does work that matters and often works one-on-one with disenfranchised or traumatized women.

Zee suddenly feels exhausted by her friendship with Greer and wishes that Greer was not staying on Zee’s **sofa bed** for the weekend. Greer takes Zee’s hands “like a desperate suitor” and apologizes again, confessing that all along, she has been “one of those women who hates women.” She admits to being a bad friend, a bad feminist, and even calls herself a cunt. Zee realizes that she should probably reassure Greer that she is none of those things and just made a stupid mistake. However, Zee finds that she does not want to comfort Greer or waste her trauma training and de-escalation techniques on her.

Instead, Zee tells Greer that she could have just confessed all those years ago that she wasn’t comfortable with Zee working there. By lying and taking advantage of Zee, Greer has simply dug up Zee’s old traumas about being betrayed by other women. Zee mourns the “unspoken agreement” between her and Greer, which had meant that they would always look out for one another, she and is sad to find that Greer does not—and never really did—have her back.

*Zee never imagined that there was any deception whatsoever when it came to the years-ago exchange of her letter for Faith. Now, though, as Greer confesses her sneaky and cruel actions, Zee is rattled by the revelation and understands firsthand—but not for the first time in her life—the traumatic sting of betrayal.*



*The ironies which have piled up between Zee and Greer are extensive and painful. Zee got Greer “into” Faith in the first place, but it was Greer who won Faith’s attention. Zee led Greer toward activism, and for a while it seemed as if Greer, not Zee, would be the more successful feminist, but that has also been reversed.*



*Though Zee is trying very hard to tell herself that working at Loci didn’t ultimately matter to her, as she reflects on her life and the paths she has taken, she still finds herself noting that she lives an existence that would make Faith proud.*



*Greer has come to realize the deficiencies in her own approaches to feminism. In search of her own sense of power and personal fortitude, she has crushed her best friend’s desires—and preyed upon Zee’s giving nature in order to further her own career. Greer is desperate for forgiveness, but Zee is so hurt that she does not even want to attempt to make Greer feel any better.*



*Greer betrayed Zee without thinking about the larger consequences. Despite knowing Zee’s history of being betrayed by other women and the pain that a new betrayal might cause her, Greer put her own desires ahead of Zee’s—and then lied for four years about her choice to have done so.*



Zee confesses that she felt jealous of Greer when Faith showed more interest in Greer in the bathroom after the lecture, because Zee had been an activist for years while Greer was at home, “reading books and having sex” with Cory. Zee confesses that early on in college, she wanted to help Greer because she thought that Greer was shy. Now, however, she has realized that Greer is not shy—just sneaky—and perfectly capable of knowing “how to act in the face of power.”

Zee tells Greer that she is perfectly happy with her life and feels confident that she is the “kind of feminist” who does what she is supposed to do to help women proudly even though she doesn’t get a lot of credit for it. Though she wishes she had had the chance to explore what it would be like to be around—and possibly be—the other “kind” of feminist, Zee tells Greer that now, she almost never thinks about Loci, Faith Frank, or how Zee missed a shot at working with Greer. Greer asks Zee to forgive her, but Zee tells Greer that she is going to need some time.

## CHAPTER 11

After promptly leaving Zee’s apartment, Greer sits in the Chicago airport, waiting for a plane. She calls her mother and confesses some of what has happened. Her mother urges her to come home, and Greer complies.

Back in Macopee, Greer accompanies her mother to one of her shows at a local library—Greer has never seen her mother perform in full regalia as a library clown before and is both shocked and relieved to find that the children gathered at the library absolutely love her mother’s performance. Greer watches her mother entertain, comfort, and act with tenderness toward the children, and feels remorse for having never taken her mother seriously.

In the car after the performance, Greer asks her mother why she never did her routine for her as a child. Laurel says that Greer was “serious” as a child, and so Laurel always assumed Greer wouldn’t have liked the act. She tells Greer that she and Greer’s father, bewildered by Greer’s intelligence and independence, always thought it would be best to stand back and let Greer carve her own path, especially when she got together with Cory. Laurel tells Greer that she always saw the two of them as “twin rocket ships,” destined for great heights.

*Zee is now forced to reckon with the choices she has made in service of helping Greer to break out of her shell. Zee thought that Greer needed help coming into her own but now realizes that Greer was always capable of navigating complicated power dynamics and making the right choices for herself. Zee feels doubly betrayed and even duped.*



*Zee reverses the power dynamic between her and Greer one final time by saying—whether or not it’s actually true—that Faith Frank has become irrelevant to her and that Zee’s own personal and professional success has freed her from the need to consider what her life would have been like at Loci. At the end of the day, Greer is the one who is suffering, while Zee has achieved all of her goals.*



*Greer, having lost the female friendship and mentorship of Greer and Zee, now turns to her mother—an unlikely source of strength and female camaraderie.*



*As Greer returns home and sees her family through new eyes, she realizes that she was so obsessed with the feeling of not fitting in with (and feeling better than) her family, that she discounted the lessons they stood to teach her, and especially the sense of mentorship her mother could have given her.*



*Greer and her mother have both had issues with communication over the course of their relationship, and thus have missed many opportunities to share in a sense of friendship, love, and community with one another.*



Laurel asks Greer what happened in New York, and Greer confesses everything. She says she was humiliated by how Faith turned on her in the end, and now Greer feels “destroyed.” She asks her mother what she should do now, and her mother advises her to use the money she has saved up to buy herself some time and take things slow. She reassures Greer that even if Greer takes some time for herself, she will never become directionless like her parents—she doesn’t have to feel rushed and can wait and see where her passions lie. Greer falls apart further, though, when she confesses her betrayal of Zee. Her mother passes her a tissue and simply assures Greer that she has time to work on things.

As Greer and Laurel pull up to the house, Greer sees Cory through the car window. She thinks that he looks different—like a “young suburban dad.” Greer is startled by how Cory appears to have fully inhabited his life in Macopee. Greer gets out of the car, goes over to Cory, and hugs him. The two of them decide to go out for pizza and catch up.

At the pizza parlor, Greer tells Cory that she quit her job but doesn’t go into any details. She asks Cory what’s new with him, and he tells her that he is still cleaning houses but has also gotten a job at a computer store in Northampton. He enjoys solving other people’s problems throughout his days, both cleaning and at the store. In addition, he has been working on creating a video game called SoulFinder, where a player tries to find the person they have lost. Cory tells Greer that Benedita is doing well, and things in the house are calm and stable. Greer asks Cory if he’s going to be home for the long run, and Cory replies, “If this isn’t the long run, I don’t know what is.”

Greer tells Cory that if he ever comes to the city, he can stay with her in Brooklyn on her **sleeper sofa**. As she and Cory part ways, she thinks about how they were once twin rocket ships, but she doesn’t say anything to him about it. Before leaving, Greer suddenly asks how **Slowy** the turtle is, and Cory replies that though there’s not really a way to know how Slowy’s doing, he seems “basically the same.”

A few days later, it is Greer’s last night in town. Her parents have eaten with her every night during her visit, sensing that their daughter does not want to be alone. Now, they ask Greer how Cory’s doing, and she tells them—rather dismissively—that he’s cleaning houses and living with his mother. Laurel points out that though she’s not the one who works at a feminist foundation, she thinks that Cory—who has given up his plans to attend to his grieving family, spends his days taking care of his mother, and cleans houses for a living—might be “kind of a big feminist.”

*Greer, having failed in her friendship with Zee and her complicated mentor-mentee relationship with Faith, now finds herself turning to her mother for guidance. Laurel’s advice is surprisingly sound—she wants Greer to focus on what is going to make her happy and repair the broken pieces of her life.*



*Greer and Cory, once “twin rocket ships” according to Laurel, have chosen vastly different paths which have ultimately isolated themselves from one another and created a perceived imbalance of power between them.*



*Even after all this time, Greer is still unable to accept or comprehend the choices that Cory has made. Although Cory is carving out a satisfying life for himself, Greer still can’t see how he is fulfilled. Instead, she continues to pity him for shouldering the burden of his family’s unthinkable loss. Greer doesn’t understand that Cory gains a sense of empowerment and stability from the life he has chosen for himself—she is only able to see all that he lost when he chose not to join her in New York.*



*In this passage, Slowy’s function as a symbol for the grieving process is reflected in the way Cory talks about the animal. It is impossible to really gauge where one is in the healing process. Just as Slowy is “basically the same” every day, Cory still feels surrounded by his grief, even though he and his mother have found some measure of healing over the years.*



*Greer’s mother points out that Cory actually shares Greer’s feminist values—and is possibly more committed to them than Greer is. He is clearly dedicated to feminism, supporting the community, and helping those who otherwise might not have any a sense of agency and empowerment. It seems that Greer is still caught up in Loci’s flashy, celebrity-endorsed brand of feminism and is unable to see how Cory, living at home and cleaning houses, could possibly fit into that world.*





## CHAPTER 12

Faith emails Emmett Shrader to invite him to her apartment, and he knows from the terse nature of the note that something is wrong. When he arrives at her fancy apartment on Riverside Drive on a Sunday evening, she immediately informs him that she is furious with him. When he asks why, she urges him to try and figure it out for himself, but Emmett cannot think of anything. Finally, Frank says the name Lupe Izurieta and asks Emmett if it sounds familiar to him. Emmett does not know what Faith is talking about. When Faith mentions Ecuador, however, the pieces click into place, and Emmett remembers Lupe as someone he has “paid a lot of money to rescue.”

Faith asks Emmett if it’s true that the mentorship program doesn’t exist. Emmett carefully replies that it was “supposed to have existed,” and asks whether that counts for anything. Faith begs Emmett to tell her what happened. Emmett shamefully admits that though a lot of discussion around the mentorship program went on at ShraderCapital, he was never fully paying attention. Emmett’s attention span is notoriously terrible, and as he sits in Faith’s apartment trying to recall what transpired in the meetings about Ecuador, he has trouble remembering the specifics regarding what went wrong.

Emmett remembers that Faith asked him to do a special project concerning sex trafficking in Ecuador, but that he handed it over to two of his associates rather than get on it himself. They developed a plan to rescue the girls and then institute a mentorship program, and Emmett was pleased with the idea. During a meeting to finalize the details of it, however, Emmett’s attention dropped off. He recalls that the order of command changed, and a new woman was brought onto the project, but she proved to be poor with follow-through. She took ShraderCapital’s money but never hired any mentors.

Emmett recalls a meeting with his advisors in which they discussed what to do with the realization that they had essentially been swindled. Donations toward the program were still coming in, but because they were legally part of a restricted gift, the donations couldn’t be used for anything else immediately. One of Emmett’s advisors suggested letting the money sit tight and simply using it for Faith’s next special project, and then urged everyone in the room to keep quiet about what they had just discussed.

*A confrontation between Faith and Emmett is long overdue. The two of them have been circling one another for nearly forty years, each knowing that the other possesses something they want or need: Emmett has the capital Faith needs to establish a platform for her goals and ideals, and Faith has the fire that Emmett so badly desires in his own life.*



*Emmett’s lame excuse for having allowed so much to fall through the cracks when it came to the mentorship program is reflective of his total ignorance of the gravity of Faith’s struggle. Faith cannot afford to tune out of her own life and make mistakes, whereas Emmett moves through his days with barely a thought to the consequences his actions might carry. Once again, this highlights the stark contrast between men and women in positions of power.*



*Though Emmett claimed to have a hazy memory of what happened to the mentorship program, it’s clear that he does remember quite a lot—and what he remembers is his total lack of interest in an important investment of time, money, energy, and resources. Emmett is not an activist and slapping his name on an activist organization has not made him into a better feminist or a better community member.*



*Emmett does recall what happened well enough—he knew that strings were being pulled and people were being urged to keep the truth under wraps. At the time, he told himself that he was doing all he could for Faith even in a bad situation by keeping the money set aside for her to use on another project.*



Emmett, with his “flealike” attention span, never followed up on what had transpired in that meeting and never told Faith what was going on. Now, Faith tells Emmett that Greer Kadetsky was contacted by a whistleblower who revealed the truth about the mentorship program, and though Emmett asks Faith to name the whistleblower, she does not. Emmett is wistful for the early days of Loci, which felt like “being young all over again”—he felt engaged with Faith and as excited by her as he had been so many years earlier.

Emmett reflects on his marriage, which had been the barrier between him and Faith back in the 1970s. His wife had always called the shots—it was her family’s money that allowed ShraderCapital to get off the ground. Though Emmett was often unfaithful to his wife, the two of them had an arrangement, and his infidelities were never of real concern to her—until Faith. His wife, realizing that this time had been different, ordered Emmett to cut off all contact with Faith, threatened by Emmett’s intellectual attraction to her. Then, to distract him, his wife placed a massive sum of money into an account in Emmett’s name and offered him the chance to start his own company.

After his wife’s phone call to Faith, Emmett did not speak to Faith for forty years. Though he had his share of affairs, he never met anyone like Faith again. Eventually, Emmett’s wife left him for another man, and Emmett conducted numerous liaisons with young women all over the country—and the world—as he traveled for business. One morning, when he saw a mention about *Bloomer*’s dissolution in the newspaper, he was motivated to call Faith Frank and make her a proposition. Faith and Emmett found themselves face-to-face for the first time in forty years after Emmett called Faith in to discuss the possibility of creating Loci. Although Faith was wary of going into business with Emmett, she agreed to come on board at Loci. ShraderCapital rehabilitated its image, and Emmett got to see Faith almost every single day, after missing her for so many years.

Now, in her apartment, Faith tells Emmett that she cannot believe that he steeped their organization in lies simply due to his short attention span. Emmett begs Faith not to ice him out. Faith tells him that she has decided what to do and warns him to listen carefully to her. She tells him that she is not going to make a “stink.” She does not want to put the foundation in danger, and she cannot afford to quit her job. She vows to pay closer attention to what is going on upstairs at ShraderCapital. She tells Emmett that she was put on Earth to work for women and will keep doing it no matter what—she is not going anywhere.

*Despite the gravity of the situation—or, perhaps, even because of it—Emmett never thought it was important enough to solve the Ecuador crisis once and for all. Emmett now longs for the simpler, earlier days of Loci, when he felt connected to Faith without the baggage of this scandal between them. Emmett’s wistfulness suggests that Loci may have always been a way for Emmett to be close to Faith—not to actually help women.*



*Emmett, in essence, started the foundation in order to get closer to Faith Frank after his own wife impeded on his chance to find happiness with Faith back in the seventies. Though Emmett was a playboy, he felt a genuine connection to Faith and wanted to pursue it further. It’s hard to say what kind of new avenues and perspectives a relationship with Faith could have opened up for Emmett—he could have become a real activist rather than simply a man with money trying to get the attention of a woman.*



*From the very beginning, Loci stood to benefit Faith and Emmett in very different ways. Faith had been “begging for scraps” for years at Bloomer—Emmett knew this intimately, as Faith had come to him forty years ago asking for ad money. By creating Loci, Faith would have enormous financial resources for her platform and her mission. At the same time, Emmett’s company would experience an influx of good press and goodwill from the public. Although they established Loci ostensibly in the name of activism, both Faith and Emmett knew that the arrangement also had enormous personal benefits.*



*Faith has already told Greer that she plans to stay at Loci. In her usual fashion, Faith has weighed the costs and benefits of her work as an activist—this time in terms of continuing on at Loci. She now tells this to Emmett but warns him that she’ll be putting a close watch on him—and on ShraderCapital—in order to ensure that they are actually helping her achieve her goals.*



Emmett is relieved. He asks Faith to confirm that no one knows anything about the mentorship program other than Greer Kadetsky and asks Faith to reassure him that Greer won't say something. Faith laments having lost Greer as an employee, as Greer was someone she had taken under her wing. She urges Emmett to take some of his own employees under his and gestures to a pile of gifts at the foot of the sofa—things that her mentees have given her over the years. She is going through the gifts and thinning out her belongings. Emmett looks through the pile, reading notes from women who look up to her, and remarks that it must be burdensome “to be the most important person to people who aren't all that important to you.” Faith, however, tells Emmett that her admirers and mentees “keep [her] in the world.”

*This passage cements the realization that Faith Frank is an activist and a mentor for many reasons—some more selfish than others. Faith loves receiving gifts and notes from former mentees and women whose lives she's touched. Her relevance has been threatened countless times over the years, and it is her fans, rather than her work, that keep her going, and keep her “in the world”—that is, Faith's fans ensure that she remains as adored and relevant as she was at the very start of her career.*



Emmett suddenly remarks that he has done everything wrong—he should have left his wife for Faith when he had the chance all those years ago. He laments all that could have been between them and despairs that Faith now thinks of him as an “awful” person. As he puts Faith's gifts and notes back into their pile, he wonders what he could possibly do to show her how he feels about her. He then realizes he has already given her something: a foundation.

*Though Emmett feels awful about how things have gone between him and Faith, he ultimately realizes that things haven't been all bad—he has given Faith one of the greatest gifts of all, an influential platform, and has done perhaps more work than anyone in service of keeping Faith “in the world.”*



## CHAPTER 13

Over the years, Cory Pinto has begun coming up with an idea for a new kind of video game. He plays a lot of video games now, and this hobby combined with the development and shifts in his feelings of grief allows an idea to take root. Cory, preoccupied with the finality of death and the inability to find or recover a lost loved one, has come to realize that sometimes, against all odds, there is a flash of those one has lost in the world around them—like in the smile or laugh of a stranger. Cory, after all this time, is still unable to accept that Alby is not somewhere out in the world, and Cory can't help feeling that he could find his brother again “if only [he] knew where to look.” This becomes the premise of his game idea.

*The idea of being kept in the world comes into play again in Cory Pinto's narrative. Just as Faith Frank relies on her mentees to keep her relevant, Cory is doing everything he can to keep his brother's memory alive and “in the world.” He is still shocked, after all these years, by the finality of death, and though he is powerless to reverse Alby's loss, he has begun to think that there are other things he can do to keep his brother “in the world” in one way or another.*



Cory has been able to move on from Alby's death in many ways—he has a stable job in Northampton at a computer store, where he helps customers every day to retrieve their lost data and bring their broken machines back to life. Through the store and his fellow employees, Cory becomes involved in the online gaming community. When he visits his friends' Northampton apartments, he often finds himself missing Greer, though he admits that now, after so many years apart, he would not know how to get through to her. Their lives have diverged too much—she is a successful New Yorker, and he lives with his mother.

*Cory's life has regained a sense of normalcy, which he thought, at the time of Alby's death, would be impossible for both him and his mother. As Cory has made new connections, however, he misses the old ones more and more—particularly Greer, for whom he still has feelings for, though now he fears that they have become much too distant to ever reconnect. Whereas Greer once felt Cory held all the power in their relationship, Cory now fears that Greer has it firmly in her possession.*



Cory finds himself calibrating his attempts at a social life against his responsibilities at home. He has not dated anyone in a while—the last woman he was with was one of his and Greer’s old classmates, Kristin Vells. When Kristin and Cory began seeing one another, Cory realized that the constructions that had kept them apart in grade school didn’t matter—he had been in the highest reading group, but the distinction hadn’t mattered and hadn’t protected him from anything. Cory and Kristin slept together almost every night for a month, until one night, while Cory and Kristin were lying naked in Cory’s room, Benedita opened the door and announced that she was constipated and needed medicine. Kristin, disgusted by the intimacy of the moment, left soon after, and she and Cory became “unspoken enemies.”

Now, Cory spends much of his time teaching himself computer repair and game design as a means of staying productive. During the day, he works at the store or cleans houses, and at night, he cooks for his mother, plays video games, and sits in Alby’s bedroom with **Slowly**. One day, one of Cory’s friends from the store asks him if he has an idea for a game—Cory’s friend has met a potential investor who wants to hear some ideas about “games as art pieces.” Cory’s friend invites him to the meeting, which is in two days, and though Cory protests that he’s not ready, his friend urges him to get something together by then.

At the meeting, Cory’s friend pitches the investor a game set in 1692 Salem. The investor doesn’t like the idea and asks Cory to share his. Cory reluctantly reveals his idea for a quest-based game whose aim is “to find the person you love who’s died.” The game, Cory says, will be very difficult, and only a certain percentage of players will ever be able to achieve their goal. He wants to call the game SoulFinder and sees it as a means for the bereaved to, on a small scale at least, meet their goal of encountering a lost loved one once more. Cory then reveals the personal inspiration behind the game, and the investor, who is familiar with grief and loss himself, loves it.

The investor notes that Cory’s idea has an immersive-theater quality and invites him to come to New York to see a production that might give him even more inspiration. Cory remembers Greer’s invitation and wonders if she would let him stay on her **sofa bed**. Cory is excited about the investor’s interest but reminds himself that an investor does not necessarily mean success—though he has come to realize that conventional success does not matter to him.

*Cory has explored power dynamics on his own over the years through his role as a housecleaner and a caretaker, as well as through his relationship with Kristin Vells. Cory and Greer once looked down on Kristin in grade school, but years later, Cory and Kristin are both stuck in their hometowns, and this erases the imbalance of power that once existed between them. Though the fling is short lived, Cory has learned something from it. Ultimately, Cory’s fling with Kristin has cemented his allegiance to his family (specifically his mother) and his own values.*



*Cory at last has an opportunity to do something big, and though he is nervous about it, there is perhaps some part of him that realizes how meaningless these grabs at power and attention have become in the face of what he has gone through all these years in the wake of his brother’s loss.*



*In the wake of his brother’s death, Cory experienced a near-total loss of power and agency. He was pulled back into the orbit of his parents’ home out of a sense of duty, and in that way, he lost more than just his brother—he lost a chunk of his life and a vision for his future. However, with the introduction of SoulFinder, it seems that the event that stripped Cory of so much power and happiness now stands to turn into something that is positive and empowering for him and other people.*



*In this passage, Cory acknowledges the ways in which his life and goals have been recalibrated by loss. Personal relationships are what matter most to him now. Success, power, and wealth—things he once dreamed of—now have little bearing on his life.*



One morning, as Cory is about to head out to clean houses, Benedita meets him in the kitchen, dressed and ready to go. She asks if she can come along—she wants to help. Cory tries not to act too surprised and brings his mother along with him to the house. As they clean, they compare tips and methods, and Cory is grateful to see his mother distracted from her grief, even for a little while.

After that day, Cory's mother wants to come along with him more often, and he realizes that she is finally beginning to heal. Cory never rushes her or pressures her, but as the weeks go by, they become a team, and cleaning houses together becomes a ritual. One day, his mother's social worker sits Cory and Benedita down together and reveals that Benedita wants more independence. Benedita tells Cory that she wants to go live with her sister—Sab's mother. Cory knows that Sab has straightened himself out over the years, too, and Cory thinks it might be a good environment for his mother after all. Benedita suggests they sell their house, and Cory realizes that the ground is shifting around him—things are changing, and he will have to readjust all over again.

Cory goes back to see his mother's social worker to process what Cory has been going through, and as they talk, he realizes how deeply he misses Greer. He has lost her, too, but in a more "ordinary" way than he has lost Alby. Cory realizes that while he can still find Greer physically, she might be a different person, and she might not love him anymore.

## CHAPTER 14

Greer, freshly unemployed, spends her days wandering Brooklyn and focusing on her first love: reading. She feels very unlike herself sitting in coffee shops all day, but because she has some money saved up, she is taking some time for herself to mourn the end of her journey with Loci—and with Faith. Greer and Zee have exchanged some emails, and things seem to be "thawing" between the two of them.

*As Cory's journey toward healing has progressed, his mother's has largely been stalled. In this passage, however, Benedita gets back on her feet for the first time in a long time. Cory once looked down on her profession as a housecleaner but has come to see the dignity in it.*



*It is clear that Cory has benefited from female mentorship. His mother has inadvertently taught him a lot over the years, and the perceived imbalance of power between them seems to have finally fallen away. However, in this passage, the scales tip once again, and suddenly it is Cory who finds himself feeling lonely, powerless, and uncertain about his own future. This points back to when Greer asked Cory if he planned to stay with his mother in the "long run." At the time, Cory was unwilling plan beyond his present circumstances, but now he must.*



*Cory is still in love with Greer, but he fears that things between them have shifted so dramatically, that they will never get back to where they once were. He considers how the power dynamics between them might have been altered, and whether they will be able to be restored to a more even keel.*



*Greer has lost two of the most important female friendships in her life and now moves through the world mostly on her own. Though reconciliation with Zee seems possible, things with Faith appear to be truly over. Without the guiding light and mentorship of Faith Frank, Greer must figure out on her own who she is and what she wants in life.*



One afternoon, Cory calls Greer and asks if her offer to let him stay on her **sofa bed** in Brooklyn is still good. He explains that one of SoulFinder's investors wants to take Cory to an immersive theatre piece, and Cory is going to be in the city for two nights. Greer tells Cory that he can stay, and when he arrives, the two of them eat takeout from a local Thai restaurant. Cory confides in Greer that because his mother has been doing better, he feels unsure of where he is needed and what he should be doing. Greer apologizes for having judged Cory for moving home, and he apologizes for having shut her out.

Cory congratulates Greer on her speech and reveals that he watched it online. Greer sadly tells him that Loci is "over," and as she begins to talk with him about it, she realizes that she is feeling grief in addition to anger. She is not grieving the job, or even Loci, but the loss of Faith Frank as an idol. She tells Cory all of this and explains that she feels she'll "never recover" from the disappointment and sadness. Cory assures her, "with authority," that she will.

Greer sets up the **sofa bed** for Cory while he brushes his teeth in the bathroom, ruminating on how she and her friends are all "living extemporaneously," waiting for the "solid matter" of their real lives to kick in. When Cory emerges from the bathroom, Greer is surprised by his pajamas, which are different from the kind of pajamas he wore when they were together. Cory lies down on the sofa, and Greer gets into her own bed across the room. The apartment is dark and quiet, and though there is a tension in the air, it breaks when Cory speaks up and thanks Greer for having him. As her eyes adjust to the dark, Greer can see Cory settling in for bed.

## CHAPTER 15

Greer Kadetsky is at a big party, discussing "the big terribleness" that has just happened to the country with a group of people from the publishing industry. In the wake of the "terribleness," celebrating has become "essential," even as most parties nowadays eventually slip into collective lamentation about the reversal of all the nation's progress and the mounting indignities that have been piling up. This particular party is being thrown in Greer's honor—her book, *Outside Voices*, has been on the bestseller list for a whole year now.

*As Greer and Cory reconnect, they are forced to process the ways in which they have let one another down over the years. They have both had to learn some hard lessons, and their senses of power and agency in their own lives have been in rapid and unending flux for a long while. Now, they apologize to one another for their small betrayals, and it seems as if a balance between them is restored.*



*Cory and Greer are at last brought back to an even playing field by their shared experiences of grief, despite the fact that the losses they are grieving are very different. They can relate to one another more deeply through their experiences of loss, and they realize that they are both struggling with the weight of disappointment and the attempt to move forward—perhaps they can be "twin rocket ships" once again.*



*This final passage of the chapter, as Cory and Greer get ready for bed, reflects the changes in their relationship. It seems that the literal darkness that envelopes them as they get ready for bed echoes the emotional darkness that consumed them in the wake of Alby's loss. However, as their eyes begin to adjust, they realize that there is hope for them to see each other clearly again after all.*



*It seems that "the big terribleness" alludes to the results of the 2016 presidential election, in which Donald Trump was elected president of the United States. Regardless of if Wollitzer intended "the big terribleness" to refer to President Trump, it is evident that the new political and social landscape is hostile toward progressive ideology.*



Though it is not the first of its kind, Greer's feminist manifesto is unique in its positive ideology and encouragement of women to speak up and use their "outside voices." Greer is thirty-one now and has been giving talks all over the country on her book tour. The book is as criticized as it is celebrated, as Greer is seen as a woman of privilege, and her book has come under fire for being for privileged woman. Nonetheless, Greer has been buoyed by the letters and emails from girls and women around the country who find the book inspirational and vital.

Greer is now married to Cory, and they have a baby named Emilia. Greer experiences intermittent moments of doubt in which she wonders whether her book—her life's work—is "a little ridiculous," but tonight, as Greer is toasted by a room full of writers, publishers, and thinkers that she admires, she is "struck" by how her book has created a platform for enhanced communication and deeper conversations among women. Greer is full of warmth and pride as she gives a speech and reads from her book while Cory and Emilia, as well as Emilia's teenage babysitter, Kay Chung, look on.

Greer thinks of Kay—she is young but radical, and though she is skeptical about the state of modern feminism, she looks up to Greer, and Greer is moved by Kay's openness about her opinions and her desire to investigate the world around her. Kay frequently asks to borrow books from Cory and Greer's library and devours the tomes Greer gives her with glee and studiousness.

Greer and Cory return to their home in a fancy neighborhood in Brooklyn. They have had an influx of cash due to the success of Greer's book, but rather than using it to renovate their home, they have been sending the money to Benedita and Greer's parents. Though SoulFinder was not a financial success, it was a critical one. Cory has not yet "landed" professionally, but it is not a problem thanks to Greer's success. At home, Greer and Cory put Emilia to bed. Greer gets a text from Zee, who is still in Chicago. The text urges Greer to call Zee; she has something to show her.

*Greer's career almost directly mirrors that of Faith. Greer has penned a manifesto that has garnered accolades and attention, but she is still criticized—often publicly—for her privileged idealism and inattention to the uglier issues facing modern feminism. It seems that Greer is getting the same kind of adoration, attention, and praise as her mentor once did, and this surely fills her with a sense of personal fortitude and sociopolitical power.*



*Greer has achieved her greatest dream—she is now a feminist writer living in Brooklyn with Cory by her side. Like Faith, Greer is excited by the chance to create a powerful platform, this time through a book rather than a foundation.*



*Greer sees much of herself in Kay. It also seems that Greer sees a similar dynamic blossoming between her and Kay that Greer once held with Faith. However, unlike the young, shy Greer who was willing to change her personality and opinions to better align with Faith, Kay has her own independent thoughts about feminism and is unafraid of expressing herself.*



*Greer and Cory, in many ways, have the lives they always dreamed of. They are not exactly the "twin rocket ships" Laurel predicted they would be, as it is clear that Greer has succeeded professionally in a way that Cory has yet to do. However, there doesn't seem to be a power struggle between them anymore.*



Greer calls Zee, and then Zee sends her a link to an internet video. The video features a man being pelted with garbage by a screaming woman, and though the woman is clearly angry, the man only laughs and goads her on. As Greer studies the video more closely, she realizes that the man is Darren Tinzler. Zee reveals that Tinzler runs a revenge porn website now and has attracted the hatred of many women whose lives have been disrupted because of his sleaziness. Zee marvels at the fact that in the video, despite the woman's anger, Tinzler cannot be "shamed or ruined." Zee and Greer sit silently on the phone and consider the injustice of it all.

Greer tells Zee that she wants to start a foundation of her own to help combat exactly this kind of cruelty and injustice. It would be different than Loci, Greer assures Zee, and even offers Zee the chance to come on board and help out. Greer thinks about Darren Tinzler, and how his horrible treatment of women makes her want to do "everything possible" to change the way it feels to be a woman. She notes that feeling "capable and safe and free" is all Faith had ever wanted for women.

Greer thinks of Faith often. Greer frequently thinks that she has seen Faith on the street, but it is never her. Greer imagines reuniting with Faith, like a lost person in SoulFinder—although in Cory's game, a player must actually go looking for the person they have lost.

Faith is now close to eighty and still works at the foundation, though three years earlier, Emmett died of a heart attack while having sex with a young woman. In his will, he stipulated that the foundation should continue, but after ShraderCapital cut Loci's budget dramatically, Loci became a shadow of its former self. Faith Frank remained in charge, however, and kept things running. Nothing ever emerged about the mentorship program, and Faith continued to dedicate herself to Loci, though in recent years, misogyny has "stormed the world in an all-out, undisguised raid."

Greer often wishes she could get in touch with Faith and send her the latest updates from her life. She wishes that she could tell Faith know about her marriage with Cory, Zee's marriage with Noelle, Emilia's birth, and Greer's own exhaustion in the face of success. Greer wonders if Faith knows anything about Greer's book and if Faith has read it. More than anything, Greer wishes she could thank Faith for all that she taught her—and thank her especially for calling her out on that last day at Loci, making it necessary for her to finally reveal the truth to Zee and begin to make amends with her.

*So many years after the despicable sexual assaults he committed at Ryland, Darren Tinzler is still targeting women. As Greer and Zee consider that some men simply can't be shamed out of their seemingly unassailable power, they feel quietly hopeless for a moment, stewing in their own anger and sense of futility.*



*Even at the heights of their respective careers, Greer and Zee understand that they still must reckon with the injustices perpetrated by a sleazy, cruel man. It would be easy for them to despair, but instead, both women seem to want to throw themselves even more fully into action and activism.*



*The motif of lost and found things recurs in this passage, as Greer considers what it means to have "lost" someone who is still physically present in the world.*



*Faith, nearing the end of her life and career, seems to be aware that her message is needed now more than ever, and that her unique social capital allows her to continue to be a voice for women even after all the compromises, sacrifices, and poor choices she has made over the course of her career.*



*Though things ended badly between Greer and Faith, there is still a part of Greer that deeply admires Faith—even after the realization that her hero was just an ordinary, flawed woman. Greer realizes that even the complicated or upsetting moments with Faith were ultimately in service of goodness and advancement. Greer's ability to now be grateful for the way Faith called her out shows that Greer has matured considerably and is able to see her past mistakes more clearly.*





Thinking about how she has, effectively, “replaced” Faith Frank, Greer begins to wonder who will replace her one day. She thinks of Kay, her daughter’s babysitter, and how curious and promising Kay is. She occasionally sees Kay staring at her and considering the furniture and objects in the house as if they hold some clue to Greer’s success that Kay might be able to imitate or possess.

Greer thinks about how at Loci, all of the conversations had been about power—as if it could be created, held, and maintained. Greer reflects on how she has come to learn that this is not so, but one can never know this when just starting out. Greer imagines Cory, back in his mother’s house in the wake of Alby’s death, sitting on the edge of his brother’s bed playing with **Slowy**. As Greer considers how power slips away over time, she wonders whether Slowy the turtle will outlive them all.

*Greer understands that the mentor-mentee relationship she had with Faith is destined to repeat itself—just as she idolized Faith as a girl, there is already someone who idolizes Greer in that same way.*



*By wondering if Slowy will outlive them all, Greer highlights that in the face of constantly shifting power dynamics and politics, the only thing that is truly constant in life is grief and loss. This implies that even as Greer rises to fame, she will always feel a deep sense of loss for Faith. However, just as Cory used his grief over Alby’s death for good (by creating SoulFinder), as can Greer.*





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