

# The Silent Patient



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ALEX MICHAELIDES

Michaelides was born in Cyprus to a British mother and a Greek Cypriot father; he was raised at the height of the conflict known as the Cyprus Problem, in which the Turkish government occupied the northern part of Cyprus. After high school, Michaelides moved to the United Kingdom, where he got a masters in English literature from Cambridge University. He also studied psychology for several years, even working in a ward for troubled teenagers. After obtaining an M.A. in screenwriting at the American Film Institute in Los Angeles, Michaelides embarked on a career as a screenwriter. In his mid-30s, frustrated with the logistical hurdles of a film production process, Michaelides switched gears, writing and publishing *The Silent Patient* as his debut novel. *The Silent Patient* spent more than a year on the New York Times bestseller list and has been optioned for film by Plan B and Annapurna Pictures. In 2021, Michaelides followed up with *The Maidens*, about a professor of Greek tragedy who is accused of killing his students.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Budget cuts loom over the Grove, the fictional psych ward at the center of *The Silent Patient*—and indeed, the 2008 banking crisis led to a wide variety of cuts across the British National Health Service. But because the novel focuses more on internal states than external circumstances, it is also important to note the history of psychology that is woven throughout the text. Several of the book’s epigraphs come from Sigmund Freud, the father of modern psychology whose early 20th century theories have since been largely discredited; like Michaelides, Freud (inventor of “the Oedipus complex”) often relies on Greek tragedy to make sense of the human mind. *The Silent Patient* also references Wilfred Bion, a British psychoanalyst who pioneered the theory of early childhood “containment,” and Donald Winnicott, an Englishman who focused largely on object relations.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

*The Silent Patient* makes direct reference to [Alcestis](#), a tragic play by the ancient Greek dramatist Euripides, and Michaelides cites Shakespeare as another formal influence (especially when it comes to using weather as a metaphor). But in terms of structure, the novel is most indebted to mysteries and thrillers by writers like Ruth Rendell, Henry James, and especially Agatha Christie. Michaelides names the Christie novels *Five*

*Little Pigs* and *And Then There Were None* as providing two of his favorite twists in all of literature; there is also a definite similarity between Theo Faber in *The Silent Patient* and Roger Ackroyd in Christie’s [The Murder of Roger Ackroyd](#), both of whom narrate their stories without revealing their own culpability.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Silent Patient
- **When Written:** 2013–2017
- **Where Written:** London, England
- **When Published:** 2019
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Psychological Thriller, Mystery
- **Setting:** The Grove, a London psych ward; various locations in London, Cambridge, and Surrey, England
- **Climax:** Therapist Theo helps his patient Alicia make sense of the man who, many years ago, kept following her—before revealing that he himself was that man.
- **Antagonist:** Theo Faber
- **Point of View:** Theo Faber is the story’s first-person narrator, though his account is intercut with excerpts from Alicia Berenson’s diary.

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Uma Epiphany.** While Michaelides was writing *The Silent Patient*, he was also on the set of *The Con is On*, a movie he had co-written that featured Uma Thurman and Sofia Vergara. One day, when Michaelides was chatting with Uma Thurman about the plot of his new book, the movie star asked him what the character of Alicia did for a living. Michaelides admitted that he didn’t know—so Thurman suggested Alicia should be a painter, an insight that would prove crucial for the rest of Michaelides’s plotting.

**Diving into Diaries.** Michaelides always knew that he would write Theo’s part of the book first, and then add Alicia’s diaries in at the end. But to get into the headspace of his troubled protagonist, Michaelides literally retraced her steps—and used his phone to record voice memos of what he imagined might be Alicia’s observations. Then, he split the diary entries up and divided them throughout the novel, ensuring that Alicia’s perspective was completely distinct from Theo’s.



## PLOT SUMMARY

Theo Faber, a respected psychotherapist, describes a

sensational murder from six years earlier. Late one August night, Alicia Berenson, a renowned painter, shot her husband Gabriel five times in the face. After the murder, Alicia was tried, found guilty, and institutionalized at the Grove, a psychiatric ward. Through it all, she never said a word—earning herself the nickname “the silent patient.” Her only comment is a self-portrait entitled **Alcestis**.

After a period of intense media attention, most people lose interest in the case. But Theo is so drawn to Alicia that he leaves his job to work at the Grove, taking her on as a patient. At the Grove, Theo connects with Lazarus Diomedes, the head of psychiatry, with nurse Yuri, and with fellow therapist Indira. But he spars with Christian, an old colleague who prefers to prescribe medication rather than talk through issues.

As Theo begins to treat Alicia, he reflects on his own troubled childhood. Theo had an abusive father and an ineffectual mother; his only happy memory from childhood is of playing in the **snow** by himself. Though he was able to get out of his home and go to college, Theo was so haunted by his father’s mistreatment that he tried to kill himself. Fortunately, after a failed suicide attempt, Theo found solace in his therapist Ruth, whose warmth and wisdom inspired him to become a therapist himself.

In the present, Theo digs into Alicia’s file, learning about her relationships in and outside of the Grove. He discovers she was in a violent altercation with a woman named Elif, one of the ward’s most fearsome patients. He also introduces himself to Alicia’s former gallerist Jean-Felix Martin. Though Theo realizes he is obsessing over Alicia, he feels that he is powerless to stop himself from going deeper: “his fate was already decided—like in a Greek tragedy.”

Meanwhile, in a series of diary entries from the summer of the murder, Alicia describes her relationship with Gabriel. She loves him so much that it scares her—she even wants to paint him as Jesus Christ. Alicia is also haunted by memories of her mother’s suicide.

Theo reflects on his relationship with his wife Kathy, a lovely, energetic actress. One night, however, Kathy accidentally leaves her laptop open—and Theo discovers she has been having an affair. Theo visits his old therapist Ruth, who encourages him to leave Kathy, but Theo ignores her advice. Instead, he focuses more on work, promising Alicia that he wants to help her “see clearly.” Suddenly, in a fit of rage, she attacks him.

Despite the attack, Theo only tries to get closer to Alicia. To learn more about her, he goes to meet Gabriel’s brother Max Berenson and his receptionist-turned-wife, Tanya. Whereas Gabriel was handsome and charismatic, Max is unattractive and frightening. Max tells Theo that Alicia has a long history of mental illness: after her father died, she had tried to kill herself. When Theo calls Max to follow up, Max complains to

Diomedes.

The novel returns to Alicia’s diary entries. She reveals that Gabriel keeps a gun in their house, a topic of much conflict between the couple. Even more shockingly, Alicia reveals that Max is secretly in love with her—on multiple occasions, he has forcibly assaulted her, kissing and groping her while Gabriel is in the next room.

Theo then travels to Alicia’s childhood home, where he meets her adoring younger cousin Paul and her angry, morbidly obese Aunt Lydia. Lydia has always hated Alicia, and Theo finds himself overcome with pity and disgust for the whole family.

Theo visits Jean-Felix, Alicia’s gallerist, and studies several of Alicia’s paintings. Jean-Felix insists that Alicia’s silence is her message, and he urges Theo to read a copy of Euripides’s **Alcestis**, the play on which Alicia’s self-portrait is based. In the play, Alcestis’s husband Admetus asks his wife to sacrifice her life for his own. Though Alcestis is eventually revived and brought back to earth, she never speaks again.

Through diary entries, Alicia reveals that, in the weeks leading up to the murder, Paul had asked to borrow money—he had a serious gambling problem, and he was in debt. And just a few days before Gabriel’s death, Alicia had severed her professional relationship with Jean-Felix, much to his despair.

In the present, Jean-Felix suggests that Theo should allow Alicia to paint as a way to express her feelings; Theo thinks this is a wonderful idea. Back at home, Theo follows Kathy, but he is unable to catch her in the act of betrayal. His only moment of relief comes when Alicia, still refusing to speak, gives Theo her diary to read.

In the diary, Alicia explains that she has started to notice a man following her and watching the house. She tells Gabriel, but he dismisses her, claiming either that the man is Jean-Felix or that she is hallucinating things. Alicia also tells her narcissistic neighbor, Barbie Hellman. Gabriel, fearing that Alicia is going insane, forces her to see a therapist friend of his: Dr. West. Dr. West prescribes Alicia more pills, but she secretly refuses to take them.

Theo connects the dots—Dr. West is Christian West, his colleague. Theo confronts Christian with his knowledge, assuring Alicia that he is trying to protect her. Alicia finishes her picture, which depicts the Grove on fire. In the painting, Theo and Alicia stand in the doorway, and it is unclear whether Theo is rescuing Alicia or throwing her into the flames.

After work, Theo follows Kathy to a park, and this time, he sees her with a man. He listens to them have sex in the woods, and he resolves to kill the man. But after following the man home, Theo decides that he is not a murderer—instead, he will have to do something “cleverer.” As he continues to spy, he notices that Kathy’s lover has an adoring wife of his own.

Theo returns to Alicia’s childhood home, where he learns a

disturbing story: after her mother died, Alicia's father Vernon told her he wished Alicia had been killed instead. Theo feels that he has unlocked the key to Alicia's psyche—and sure enough, she soon starts speaking, telling him her life story. However, when she describes the night of the murder, Theo is convinced she is lying. The next morning, Alicia is hospitalized, having been found comatose. Diomedes thinks she has overdosed, but Theo suspects murder. The police arrive, and Theo reveals that he thinks Christian is the culprit.

Theo returns to Kathy's lover's house, and he sees the man's wife again. Theo then breaks into the house, and the wife turns around, revealing herself to be Alicia Berenson. Readers discover that Theo has willfully manipulated the timelines of the novel: Kathy's affair with Gabriel happened years ago, before the murder, and Theo has been the man watching Alicia all along.

In a final diary entry, written just before sinking into a coma, Alicia tells the entire truth of what happened with Theo. He had entered the house, taken Gabriel's gun, and told Gabriel to choose whether to die or whether to sacrifice Alicia. Gabriel chose his own life over Alicia's—and though Theo left before enacting any violence, Alicia, horrified at the betrayal, then shot her husband five times.

In the present day, Theo and Kathy have moved to Surrey, outside of London; Kathy is depressed, and the two almost never speak to each other anymore. Chief Inspector Allen, the man in charge of Alicia's case, arrives at Theo's house. The inspector reveals that Alicia has written a final diary entry, one which almost certainly incriminates Theo. In the closing scene, Theo tries to catch snowflakes on his tongue as Inspector Allen reads the entry aloud.

director Diomedes warns, “your feelings are bound up with hers like a tangled ball of wool.” Ultimately, however, Theo's ability to recognize his transgressions does not prevent them: he feels that from the moment he met Alicia, his “fate was already decided—like in a Greek tragedy.” In addition to reflecting the tragic form of the novel, Theo also embodies *The Silent Patient's* fascination with dishonesty. Though he is the narrator, Theo does not always play fair with his readers; instead, he manipulates timelines, casts unnecessary suspicion, and conceals crucial facts.

**Alicia Berenson** – Nearly every other character in the novel is in some way connected to Alicia Berenson. She is wife to Gabriel and sister-in-law to Max; she is Vernon and Eva Rose's daughter, Lydia Rose's niece, and Paul Rose's older cousin; and she has complicated, one-sided friendships with her gallerist Jean-Felix Martin and her neighbor Barbie Hellman. But perhaps Alicia's most important, most complex bond is with her therapist Theo Faber, who shows an almost obsessive desire to understand Alicia's inner secrets and motivations. Once famous as a talented painter of photo-realistic art, Alicia gains worldwide notoriety when she shoots Gabriel in the face five times, seemingly without any motivation. In the years following the murder, Alicia falls completely silent, communicating only through a self-portrait titled **Alcestis**, after the ancient Greek tragedy by Euripides. Alicia's silence reflects her lifelong sense of betrayal: first her father and then Gabriel tell her that they are willing to sacrifice her life for someone else's, and each of these exchanges feels to Alicia like a kind of “psychic murder.” But though Alicia is in great pain, she is also incredibly sharp, possessed of a keen intellect and a great deal of willpower. That strength is especially evident in her relationship with Theo—after recognizing Theo from her life before the murder, Alicia is able to hold him off and condemn him for his crimes, all from behind the walls of a psychiatric ward.

**Gabriel Berenson** – Gabriel Berenson is Alicia's husband, Max's younger brother, and Kathy Faber's secret lover. As a professional fashion photographer, Gabriel lives a glamorous, artistic life; like many of the people around him, Alicia finds herself almost irresistibly drawn to him. But in addition to his harmful affair, Gabriel conceals a secret, second self. He keeps a gun in the house, which makes Alicia feel as if she is “living with a stranger,” and he values his own life above all else, as is evident in his willingness to sacrifice Alicia to save himself. Ultimately, both Theo and Alicia believe that Gabriel's treatment of his wife is of a piece with the abuse Alicia suffered at the hands of her father, Vernon Rose.

**Kathy Faber** – Kathy Faber is Theo's wife. Having met when they were both dating other people, Kathy and Theo fell in “love at first sight”; Theo is enchanted by Kathy's warmth and laughter, and he feels that she is teaching him a kind of happiness he had never known before. However, Kathy betrays Theo with Gabriel, having a passionate affair behind her



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Theo Faber** – Theo Faber, the first-person narrator of *The Silent Patient*, is a skilled psychotherapist. Having been raised by an abusive father, Theo finds solace in talk therapy; he so idolizes Ruth, his psychologist, that he trains to follow in her footsteps. Though Ruth allows him to find a brief period of happiness, in which he meets and marries his wife Kathy, Theo soon falls back into his old patterns, torturing himself with obsession and self-loathing. After becoming intrigued by the scandalous story of Alicia Berenson's murder, Theo gets a job in the psych ward where Alicia resides, hoping to gain insight into this unreadable public figure. In his effort to understand Alicia, Theo transgresses both professional and personal boundaries, reaching out to Alicia's former friends (like Jean-Felix Martin) and family members (like Max Berenson). Indeed, Theo's empathy for Alicia extends to such a degree that his colleagues begin to worry for him: “you're in deep with Alicia,” clinic

husband's back. Theo often feels (in an opinion backed up by his therapist Ruth) that Kathy's status as a professional actor makes her more skilled at "pretending" in daily life.

Fascinatingly, Kathy's trajectory throughout the novel illustrates the complicated dichotomy between silence and speech: while Kathy begins as one of the most talkative, open characters, by the end of the story, she is almost totally silent, wrapped up in a quiet depression of her own.

**Max Berenson** – Max Berenson is Alicia's lawyer, Tanya's boss and husband, and Gabriel's adopted older brother. While Gabriel is handsome and effortlessly charming, Max is physically unattractive, traditional, and somewhat frightening. Max claims to be straightforward and law-abiding, but in fact, his protestations that he "loathed" Alicia cover up his lust for her; on more than one occasion, he tries to sexually assault her while Gabriel is in the next room. Though Max offers Theo some help in his investigation, pointing him towards Dr. West and providing insight into Alicia's relationship with Gabriel, he is also one of the first characters to publicly call Theo out for transgressing professional boundaries.

**Jean-Felix Martin** – Jean-Felix is Alicia's gallerist—and her oldest friend. In the weeks leading up to Gabriel's murder, however, Alicia tries to cut ties with Jean-Felix, explaining that she feels that he is using her for her artistic reputation; Jean-Felix refuses to hear this, instead blaming Gabriel for driving a wedge between them. Years later, when Theo is trying to understand what happened, Jean-Felix proves to be a key source of information: he was the one who introduced Alicia to Euripides's play **Alcestis**, and he is the one who suggests to Theo that Alicia should be allowed to paint while at the Grove. But despite his helpfulness, Theo deeply distrusts Jean-Felix, feeling that he is too self-involved to be a real friend to Alicia.

**Paul Rose** – Paul Rose is Alicia's younger cousin, Lydia's son, and Vernon's nephew. Though as a young boy he adored Alicia, in recent years, Paul has lost touch with his cousin—the only time he reaches out to her is when he needs money, having fallen into debt because of a gambling problem. Lydia Rose's lifelong manipulation of her son has kept Paul fairly homebound, leaving him without friends or the semblance of an adult life; both Alicia and Theo continually note that Paul is "stunted." Though Paul seems frightening at first, Theo eventually comes to realize that he is harmless and sad, occupied only with his gambling and his innocent crush on Tanya Berenson.

**Lydia Rose** – Lydia Rose is Alicia's aunt, Paul's father, and Vernon's sister. Lydia is physically fearsome and very overweight; her weight becomes a subject of caricature in Alicia's painting, and the resulting artwork drives a deep wedge between aunt and niece. But Lydia and Alicia have never been close, in part because Lydia is an angry and manipulative woman and in part because she believes that Alicia is an ungrateful "bitch." In the novel, Lydia is shown to be emotionally

abusive to her son Paul, making him attend to her every whim and thus stunting his growth.

**Vernon Rose** – Vernon Rose is Alicia's father and Lydia Rose's brother. Vernon was deeply devoted to his wife Eva, Alicia's mother—and when Eva killed herself, Vernon told Alicia that he wished she had died instead. To both Alicia and Theo, Vernon's cruelty is a kind of "psychic infanticide"; Theo sees a direct line between Vernon's emotional abuse and Alicia's later murder of Gabriel. For the rest of her life, Alicia openly "hates" her father, so much so that after his death she experiences a kind of psychotic break. Vernon embodies Theo's belief that "we are shared and completed by unseen, unremembered forces; namely, our parents."

**Eva Rose** – Eva Rose is Alicia's mother and Vernon Rose's wife. Always troubled (and often dependent on alcohol), Alicia killed herself when she was 32 years old by driving into a brick wall—with a young Alicia in the passenger seat. Though Alicia has some happy memories of her mother, she also fears that she has inherited Eva's instability—and sometimes wonders if her mother meant to kill them both in the car wreck, instead of just herself.

**Ruth** – Ruth is Theo's long-time therapist, whom he met in college. Ruth helps Theo work through his traumatic upbringing, shedding the tears Theo cannot when he describes his father's abusive behavior. Years after their therapeutic relationship has ended, Ruth remains a resource—and a friend—to Theo; after he learns that Kathy has cheated on him, he seeks out Ruth's advice (though he ultimately ignores her suggestion to end things with Kathy). Above all else, Ruth emphasizes the value of honesty in both a therapist and a partner. Ruth also teaches Theo how to empathize with his patients without blurring the lines: "you must be receptive to your patient's feelings," she instructs, "but you must not hold onto them—they are not yours." In accordance with the tragic form of the novel, Ruth often acts as a voice of dramatic irony—her advice might save Theo, if only he would take it.

**Lazarus Diomedes** – Professor Diomedes is the head of psychology at the Grove, which means he also acts as supervisor to Theo, Christian, Indira, and Yuri. Diomedes is known for his slightly unconventional embrace of group therapy, a costly approach that puts the Grove in constant danger of being shut down. Diomedes often finds himself at odds with the Grove's manager Stephanie, but for the most part, he acts as a peacekeeper between the various therapists and patients at the ward. He is an especially important mentor to Theo: he encourages him to embrace his **cigarette**-smoking ("we're all a little bit crazy"), and also cautions Theo against confusing his own feelings with Alicia's. Because Diomedes is Greek, Theo turns to him for help with interpreting the Greek tragedy **Alcestis**.

**Christian West** – Christian is one of the therapists at the



Grove; he also worked with Theo in his previous job at the Broadmoor clinic. Christian often antagonizes Theo, implying that his relationship with Alicia is inappropriate (“borderlines are seductive,” he likes to say) and emphasizing medication over talk therapy. Ultimately, Christian is revealed to be the mysterious Dr. West, Gabriel’s psychiatrist friend who treated Alicia in the weeks leading up to the murder. In one of the many examples of dishonesty throughout the text, Christian conceals this fact—and that lie, combined with his standoffish demeanor, makes it easy for Theo to frame him for the attempted murder of Alicia.

**Indira Sharma** – Indira Sharma is one of the therapists at the Grove. She is the person who interviews Theo for his new job, and as such, she often acts as an informal mentor and guide. Indira supports Theo’s dogged focus on helping Alicia, and she helps Theo push back against Christian’s more medication-based approach.

**Yuri** – Yuri, an immigrant from Latvia, is the kindly head nurse at the Grove. He is particularly fond of Alicia, and he tends to act as a go-between for Alicia and Theo. Yuri is one of the first people to urge Theo against his obsession with Alicia, warning that Theo should “go home to Kathy, who loves you...and leave Alicia alone.” Despite Yuri’s lovely demeanor, however, he also reflects the novel’s focus on the gap between presentation and reality—towards the end of the story, Theo notices that Yuri is working with Elif to deal drugs in the ward.

**Elif** – Elif is one of the patients at the Grove. She is a physically imposing, erratic woman; Theo quickly learns that she has been placed in the Grove for suffocating both her sister and her mother to death. She has a particularly tense relationship with Alicia, whom she constantly taunts, especially about her closeness with Theo. After defacing one of Alicia’s paintings by writing the word “slut” over it, Elif is attacked by Alicia, who stabs her in the eye with a paintbrush. Elif exemplifies Theo’s theory that childhood trauma informs adult behavior: “Elif made you feel repulsion and hatred,” he explains, “because that was how her mother had made her feel.”

**Barbie Hellman** – Barbie Hellman is a wealthy American divorcee. She lives next door to Alicia and Gabriel Berenson at the time of the murder, and she is the one who hears gunshots and calls the police. Though Alicia cannot stand Barbie’s endless, self-absorbed chatter, she does confide in Barbie that she fears a mysterious man is following her. Later, Barbie uses this information to claim that she and Alicia were close confidantes. Theo sees Barbie as the ultimate narcissist, a stark contrast to his own, more empathetic method of relating to others.

**Tanya Berenson** – Tanya Berenson is Max Berenson’s receptionist and wife; they met when she started working in his office and married in the aftermath of Gabriel’s tragic death. Theo notices that Tanya is “afraid” of Max, in part because she seems to be aware of his strong feelings for Alicia. Tanya is

pretty, sweet, and nervous, and her demure demeanor makes her an object of affection for Alicia’s cousin Paul Rose.

**Stephanie Clarke** – Stephanie Clarke is the manager of the Grove, who arrives a few months before Theo does. Diomedes distrusts Stephanie, believing her to be “in league” with the wealthy Trust that helps to fund the Grove. But though Stephanie is stern and rigid in her methods, over time, she reveals her primary focus to be the patients’ safety and health. She is responsible for much of the increased security at the Grove.

**Rowena Hart** – Rowena Hart is the art therapist at the Grove. Though she is technically one of Alicia’s therapists, she resents her, in part because she is jealous of Alicia’s superior skill as a painter. Theo thinks of her as a “plumber,” or a therapist without any real skill: all she does is prod patients for information without offering insight or solace.

**Chief Inspector Steven Allen** – Chief Inspector Steven Allen is the detective in charge of solving the attempted murder of Alicia Berenson. Though he initially suspects Christian West of the crime, after he reads Alicia’s diary, Inspector Allen shifts his attention to Theo. In the closing scene of *The Silent Patient*, Allen arrives at Theo’s house, presumably to arrest him.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Julien McMahon** – Julien McMahon is the head of the wealthy Trust that helps to fund and manage the Grove. At the end of the novel, he offers Theo a job running a brand-new psychiatric facility.



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



### EMPATHY, IDENTIFICATION, AND BOUNDARIES

Over and over again in Alex Michaelides’s thriller *The Silent Patient*, Theo Faber—the book’s first-person narrator and a trainee psychotherapist—insists that the goal of his job is to feel his patients’ pain for them. He recalls his own beloved therapist, Ruth, shedding the tears he himself was unable to as a young boy; later, in his own practice, he takes on his patients’ mystifying rage or thumping headaches. And while he prides himself on his ability to feel other people’s pain, he is consistently disdainful of his friends’ and colleagues’ self-involvement, of their narcissistic monologues and thoughtless behavior. Empathy, Theo suggests, is the essential ingredient of

any meaningful relationship, therapeutic or otherwise; to fail to see others' perspectives is to fail to care for them.

But when Theo takes on the troubled Alicia Berenson as his patient, he becomes far too obsessive about entering her mind—about trying to absorb her emotional state as his own. Theo's determination to empathize with Alicia is so obvious that one fellow therapist warns him he is "over-identifying." And indeed, by the end of the novel, Theo will feel unable to distinguish himself from Alicia. Whether it's "crashing through every last boundary between therapist and patient" or entering her marital home because it reminds him of his own, Theo transgresses every personal and professional line between himself and Alicia. Thus even as *The Silent Patient* calls for empathy, it also calls for distance—because if identifying with someone's pain can be healing, blurring the boundaries between self and other can only do harm.



### TRAGEDY AND DESTINY

Much of the plot of Alex Michaelides's book *The Silent Patient* revolves around the play "**Alceste**," a Greek tragedy by Euripides. But even as the novel references the plot of that specific play, it also embraces the form of Greek tragedy, in which a talented person falls to their doom through a combination of hubris (over-confidence) and destiny. As a psychotherapist, Theo spends much of his time trying to understand the links between adult behavior and youthful trauma, suggesting that his patients' futures are often predetermined by the events of their past. Similarly, Greek tragedies emphasize the inevitability of pain and suffering; famous characters like Oedipus and Antigone are predestined for horrible ends, unable to alter the sad fate in front of them. And as Theo embarks on his own tragic journey, his obsession with a patient named Alicia Berenson, he begins to explicitly link his behavior to the behavior of a tragic hero. For example, when he calls Alicia's family and friends, in violation of standard therapeutic practice, Theo knows that what he is doing is wrong—"but even then it was too late to stop. My fate was already decided—like in a Greek tragedy." On the one hand, then, *The Silent Patient* bills itself as a "psychological detective story," in which therapists try to unlock their patients' minds just as police officers might survey a crime scene. But on the other hand, the novel finds a formal link between therapy and Greek tragedy, as therapists work to uncover the childhood circumstances that determine their patients' destinies.



### HONESTY VS. DECEPTION

"Choosing a lover is a lot like choosing a therapist," advises **Ruth**, one of the many psychologists in Alex Michaelides's thriller *The Silent Patient*. "We need to ask ourselves, is this someone who will be honest with me, [...] admit making mistakes, and not promise the impossible?" But

despite the high value Ruth—and the rest of the novel's therapists—place on honesty, nearly every character in the narrative is a liar. Kathy is cheating on her husband Theo, the book's narrator; Yuri, the kindly head nurse of the psych ward where the novel is set, sells drugs to patients; Max, a well-respected lawyer, secretly assaults his brother's wife. And in each case, the betrayal has disastrous, sometimes literally fatal consequences.

Whether it is in the bedroom or the therapy room, *The Silent Patient* demonstrates the need for real honesty as a vital part of human safety and security. But despite the focus on honesty, deception is built in to both the story's content and its form. For as Theo, a therapist, walks readers through his first-person perspective on the events of the psych ward, he is also obscuring the truth of his own circumstances. More than adding intrigue, then, the novel's final twist allows readers to experience the kind of betrayal the characters have been struggling with all along. And in upending its readers' expectations, *The Silent Patient* forces its audience to search for clues like any good detective (or therapist)—to pry open the gaps between professed honesty and practiced deception.



### CHILDHOOD TRAUMA

Theo Faber, a psychotherapist and the first-person narrator of Alex Michaelides's book *The Silent Patient*, believes that pain and rage originate "in the land before memory, in the world of early childhood, with abuse and mistreatment"; thus, to solve the mystery of an adult's psyche, Theo opines, one must retrace their history. It is unsurprising, then, that when Theo decides to help a troubled painter named Alicia Berenson, the first thing he writes down on his notepad is the word "CHILDHOOD." Over the course of the narrative, Theo revisits Alicia's childhood home—"the roots of her adult life," he reflects upon arrival, "were buried here"—and obsesses over her relationships with her parents.

But while Theo pries into the details of his patient's childhood, he also struggles to break free from his own youthful traumas. As a young boy, Theo's father made him feel worthless; as an adult, he seeks out the same feeling, choosing a wife (Kathy) who makes him believe he is "useless, ugly, worthless, nothing." And even in smaller ways, Theo's childhood patterns repeat themselves: the book begins with a young Theo catching **snowflakes** on his tongue, and it ends with the adult Theo trying desperately to do the same. Ultimately, through both Theo and Alicia, *The Silent Patient* shows the importance that childhood trauma and joy play in adult life—and the impossibility of ever fully shedding one's past.



### SILENCE VS. "THE TALKING CURE"

Alicia Berenson, the titular silent patient of Alex Michaelides's novel *The Silent Patient*, never speaks;

for six years after the murder of her beloved husband Gabriel (which she may or may not have committed), Alicia is entirely mute, communicating only through the occasional painting or act of violence. For a therapist like narrator Theo Faber, Alicia's lack of communication is an almost impossible challenge to solve—without speech, how can therapy, which Theo calls the “the talking cure,” ever work? More than that, as someone who himself had been healed through talking about past traumas, Theo sees silence as the ultimate barrier to mental peace and safety.

But fascinatingly, Alicia's own trajectory through therapy complicates this simple dichotomy. Alicia is an artist, and her artwork often communicates her contradictory feelings just as clearly as any speech would; as her gallerist and friend Jean-Felix puts it, Alicia's “refusal to comment” is her real message. And when Alicia does finally speak, with a voice “like a creaking gate,” the story she tells Theo is quickly revealed to be a lie. Indeed, by the end of the novel, Theo feels that “the talking cure itself” has failed—and the book's readers have come to be suspicious of all speech, from Alicia's falsified therapy monologue to the very words on the page in front of them. For even as *The Silent Patient* affirms the value of therapy, it also emphasizes that silence can be its own form of communication—and that there are some forms of pain that can never be fully captured by language.



## SYMBOLS

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



### ALCESTIS

*Alcestis*, Alicia Berenson's self-portrait based on Euripides's play of the same name, symbolizes the great pain that can result from betrayal—and the impossibility of putting that pain into words. In the play, an ancient Greek tragedy, Alcestis's husband Admetus willingly sacrifices her life to protect his own. Alcestis is ultimately able to return from the underworld, but when she revives, her anger and hurt are so great that she never speaks again. In the novel, Alicia sees a production of the tragic play a few days before her husband Gabriel offers up her life to spare himself; in the aftermath of that cruelty, Alicia kills Gabriel and remains completely silent for more than six years following his death. Her only comment is the *Alcestis*, in which she depicts herself with mouth silently open, brush in hand.

Paradoxically, though, while Alicia uses *Alcestis* as a model for her own self-imposed muteness, she also uses the play as a method of communication. Jean-Felix Martin, Alicia's friend and gallerist, argues that “it's a painting about silence”; read the play the painting is based on, he suggests to Alicia's therapist Theo,

and “then you'll understand.” Thus even as Alicia turns to Euripides's *Alcestis* for a lesson in silence, her own painting is a way of letting people “understand” her, showing them the reasoning—the unbearable betrayal—behind her lack of speech.



### SNOW

In Alex Michaelides's novel *The Silent Patient*, **snow** symbolizes the great difficulty of finding peace and happiness after childhood trauma. At the beginning of the novel, narrator Theo Faber describes a fleeting moment of joy amidst his father's abuse—while his father was away and his mother was asleep, Theo snuck outside during a snowstorm, holding his hands out to catch falling snowflakes. “Somehow grasping at vanishing snowflakes is like grasping at happiness,” Theo reflects, “an act of possession that instantly gives way to nothing.”

In interviews, Michaelides has admitted to being inspired by the way William Shakespeare uses weather to communicate interior life and emotion (particularly with the storms in *King Lear*). So, it is only fitting that snow plays a similar function throughout the novel. When Theo arrives at the Grove to serve as Alicia Berenson's therapist, his colleagues constantly predict snow, which never comes. But after the depth of Theo's criminality has been discovered, the snow begins to fall—and the story ends as he catches a snowflake, watches it disappear, and goes “to catch another one.” Given what snow meant to Theo in childhood, the absence of snow throughout his time at the Grove shows how hard it is for him to find the moments of joy he so desperately craves. And by ending with Theo's repeated attempts to catch snow, this melting, ephemeral substance, the novel hints that Theo's quest for happiness might be hopeless after all.



### CIGARETTES

The entire profession of talk therapy is built around the idea that there are clear lines of separation between patients and their therapists—but in *The Silent Patient*, **cigarettes** (and cigars) demonstrate how those lines can be blurred. When Theo Faber, a well-respected psychotherapist, first shows up for his new job at the psych ward known as the Grove, he is anxious to conceal his smoking habit: “psychotherapists tend to view smoking as an unresolved addiction,” he explains. But just a few weeks into the job, Theo learns that his boss, Professor Lazarus Diomedes, also smokes, justifying the habit by saying that “we're all a little bit crazy in this place.” And towards the end of the narrative, Theo smokes a cigarette with his patient Alicia, causing him to reflect that they were “crashing through every last boundary between therapist and patient.” The persistence of cigarette smoking throughout the story suggests that everyone has bad habits

and dirty secrets—no amount of training can erect a clear barrier between those who claim to help and those who need to be helped.





## QUOTES


Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Celadon Books edition of *The Silent Patient* published in 2021.

### Part 1, Chapter 2 Quotes

☞ I'm getting ahead of myself. I must start at the beginning and let events speak for themselves. I mustn't color them, twist them, or tell any lies. I'll proceed step by step, slowly and cautiously. But where to begin? I should introduce myself, but perhaps not quite yet; after all, I am not the hero of this tale. It is Alicia Berenson's story, so I must begin with her—and the "Alcestis."

**Related Characters:** Theo Faber (speaker), Alicia Berenson

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 9

#### Explanation and Analysis

For the first several chapters of *The Silent Patient*, first-person narrator Theo does not name or "introduce" himself; instead, he lays out the facts of Alicia Berenson's famed murder, trying—and failing—to stop himself from editorializing. Theo defends his decision to keep himself in the background, explaining that he is "not the hero" of the story, despite being the one who tells it. In this rare moment of direct address, then, Theo is doing his best to take himself out of the narrative: he will "let events speak for themselves," and he will remain unbiased, not "color[ing]" the facts so as to be completely honest.

In a story so much about truthfulness (or the lack thereof), it would at first glance seem gratifying to have such a reliable narrator. But there is something strange about Theo's rush to identify himself as such: why does he feel the need to talk to readers so directly, promising them that he will not "tell any lies"? Midway through the novel, it will become clear that this is just as much Theo's story as it is Alicia's; by the end of the book, Theo has to confess that much of his narrative has been a deception. So by promising honesty in this early moment, Theo is doing the exact opposite, throwing his readers off the trail—while Alex Michaelides, the novel's author, is perhaps already giving his audience


clues that they should question their guide through the story.

### Part 1, Chapter 3 Quotes

☞ There was a heavy snowstorm that night. My mother went to bed and I pretended to sleep, then I snuck out to the garden and stood under the falling snow. I held my hands outstretched, catching snowflakes, watching them vanish on my fingertips. It felt joyous and frustrating and spoke to some truth I couldn't express; my vocabulary was too limited, my words too loose a net in which to catch it. Somehow grasping at vanishing snowflakes is like grasping at happiness: an act of possession that instantly gives way to nothing. It reminded me that there was a world outside this house: a world of vastness and unimaginable beauty; a world that, for now, remained out of my reach. That memory has repeatedly returned to me over the years.

**Related Characters:** Theo Faber (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 15

#### Explanation and Analysis

Having grown up in an abusive household, with a father who was violent and a mother who was powerless to stop him, Theo had very few moments of peace and quiet. But as he sneaks out into the snowstorm, young Theo begins to imagine the possibilities beyond the limited, painful life within his home. When Theo says that snow represents "happiness," it is because the falling snow makes him think that he can change his future—his troubled childhood might not necessarily need to dictate a troubled adulthood. In *The Silent Patient*, which borrows heavily from the ancient Greek idea that certain people are destined for tragedies beyond their control, Theo's sense of agency in this moment is a rare gift.

At the same time, however, snow is an inherently ethereal substance—it is beautiful in part because it melts, vanishing just days or even moments after it appears. So the fact that Theo compares snow to "grasping at happiness" shows that, for him, happiness is probably never going to be a permanent state; instead, it will remain momentary, as ephemeral as falling snow.

Finally, it is worth noting that in trying to catch snowflakes,



Theo feels that he is accessing “some truth” he is unable to express with the “vocabulary” of any language. Throughout the novel, Theo insists on the value and validity of therapy as “the talking cure”: only by speaking through their traumas out loud, he believes, can patients really heal from them. But here, in his most “joyous” moment, Theo has to admit that sometimes feelings are like snowflakes—words can only ever “catch” a part of an emotional truth.



☝ As I talked, I found that no matter how distressing the details I related, I could feel nothing. I was disconnected from my emotions, like a hand severed from a wrist. I talked about painful memories and suicidal impulses—but couldn’t feel them.

I would, however, occasionally look up at Ruth’s face. To my surprise, tears would be collecting in her eyes as she listened. This may seem hard to grasp, but those tears were not hers.

They were mine.

At the time I didn’t understand. But that’s how therapy works. A patient delegates his unacceptable feelings to his therapist; and she holds everything he is afraid to feel, and she feels it for him. Then, ever so slowly, she feeds his feelings back to him. As Ruth fed mine back to me.

**Related Characters:** Theo Faber (speaker), Ruth

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 17

### Explanation and Analysis

Ruth, intervening in Theo’s life at a time when he was suicidally depressed, becomes a role model for Theo. Seeing his own tears in Ruth’s eyes—feeling that a therapist was able to take on the visceral, embodied experience of his pain—allowed Theo to process the childhood traumas he had worked so hard to distance himself from. Through Ruth, in a process sometimes known in psychology as “transference,” Theo’s previously “unacceptable” anger and hurt could be made manageable, evened out, in someone else’s mind and body.

The most important detail in this passage, however, is the fact that Ruth “feeds [the] feelings back” to Theo. She does not hold onto his pain; she does not claim it as her own. By setting Ruth as an example of a great therapist so early on, the book emphasizes that this final step in the process—in which the therapist once again erects boundaries—is a necessary part of therapeutic practice. Therefore, when Theo fails to shake himself free of Alicia’s feelings later on, it

is the first sign that he has stepped outside the dictates of therapy.

## Part 1, Chapter 8 Quotes

☝ I wrote down another word: CHILDHOOD. If I was to make sense of Gabriel’s murder, I needed to understand not only the events of the night Alicia killed him, but also the events of the distant past. The seeds of what happened in those few minutes when she shot her husband were probably sewn years earlier. Murderous rage, homicidal rage, is not born in the present. It originates in the land before memory, in the world of early childhood, with abuse and mistreatment, which builds up a charge over the years, until it explodes often at the wrong target. I needed to find out how her childhood had shaped her, and if Alicia couldn’t or wouldn’t tell me, I had to find someone who would. [...]

As I look back, this is my first professional transgression in dealing with Alicia—setting an unfortunate precedent for what followed. I should have stopped there. But even then it was too late to stop. In many ways my fate was already decided—like in a Greek tragedy.

**Related Characters:** Theo Faber (speaker), Alicia Berenson

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 39

### Explanation and Analysis

As Theo sorts through Alicia’s case files, he is frustrated that very little is known about her childhood. Theo feels that the events of the “present,” though they might help in a traditional mystery, are insufficient when it comes to a psychological puzzle; as he knows from his own life, a person’s interior thoughts and perspectives are shaped “in the world of early childhood,” in their relationships with their parents. By focusing so much on Alicia’s youth, Theo flips the script of a classic whodunit novel. Not only does he not have any questions about who the murderer is, but he also feels that the murder victim himself is almost irrelevant—that Gabriel is the “wrong target,” and that Alicia is actually expressing her anger at abuse from her childhood.

In other words, Theo almost feels as if Alicia were destined, based on her experiences in “the land before memory,” to commit such a violent crime. In that sense, Theo looks at therapy as operating along the same lines as Greek tragedy; in both cases, a person is marked at an early age for doom, and in both cases, “fate” seems to trump free will. And

though Alicia never explicitly articulates it, her fondness for the tragic Greek play *Alcestis* suggests that she shares this view.

It is therefore especially fascinating that, even as Theo views Alicia's life in terms of predestination, he feels that he, too, is living "in a Greek tragedy." While he acknowledges his transgression in reaching out to Alicia's relatives, Theo feels that he is powerless to stop it—that, because of luck and destiny and his own childhood trauma, it is "already too late." So just as Alicia hurtled towards her murder of Gabriel, Theo now hurtles to his own, not-yet-known, tragedy—and as they so often will throughout the novel, patient and therapist move in parallel.

stray to Alicia. In part, this reflects the obsessiveness, the lack of boundaries, that is beginning to define Theo's treatment of Alicia more generally. As the two central women in his life, both are objects of fascination; whether or not this fascination is sexual in Alicia's case is an open, and vital, question. But there is also a way in which Theo defines Kathy in opposition to Alicia. In addition to the contrasting adjectives he lists, Theo sees Kathy as his future—while Alicia reminds him of his childhood. And whereas Kathy's endless "color" and "laughter" can distract Theo, Alicia's "silence" only narrows his focus, pulling him back into the pain that Kathy seems to provide an escape from.

## Part 1, Chapter 10 Quotes

☝☝ God hadn't abandoned me during my childhood when I had felt so alone and so scared—He had been keeping Kathy hidden up his sleeve, waiting to produce her, like a deft magician.

I felt such humility and gratitude for every second we spent together. I was aware how lucky, how incredibly fortunate I was to have such love, how rare it was, and how others weren't so lucky. Most of my patients weren't loved. Alicia Berenson wasn't.

It's hard to imagine two women more different than Kathy and Alicia. Kathy makes me think of light, warmth, color, and laughter. When I think of Alicia, I think only of depth, of darkness, of sadness.

Of silence.

**Related Characters:** Theo Faber (speaker), Alicia Berenson, Kathy Faber

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 51

### Explanation and Analysis

At his wedding to Kathy, the playful, talkative woman of his dreams, Theo reflects on the fact that his marriage seems like the antidote to all of his childhood pain. On the one hand, then, Theo's joy at the altar shows that Kathy is inextricable from his earlier feeling of not being loved: he feels that Kathy is proof that God has not "abandoned him," and he celebrates that now, at last, he can distinguish himself from his unloved patients.

But it is also noteworthy that, even as he recounts the happiest moment of his life with Kathy, Theo's thoughts


## Part 2, Chapter 1 Quotes

☝☝ Then I walked home, back up the hill, slowly, step by step. It seemed much steeper now. It took forever in the sweltering heat. For some reason I couldn't stop thinking about the homeless man. Apart from pity, there was another feeling, unnamable somehow—a kind of fear. I pictured him as a baby in his mother's arms. Did she ever imagine her baby would end up crazy, dirty and stinking, huddled on the pavement, muttering obscenities? [...]

Tears collected in my eyes as I walked up the hill. I wasn't crying for my mother—or myself—or even that poor homeless man. I was crying for all of us. There's so much pain everywhere, and we just close our eyes to it. The truth is we're all scared. We're terrified of each other. I'm terrified of myself—and of my mother in me. Is her madness in my blood? Is it? Am I going to—  
No. Stop. Stop—

I'm not writing about that. I'm not.

**Related Characters:** Alicia Berenson (speaker), Gabriel Berenson, Eva Rose

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 59

### Explanation and Analysis

In this diary entry, Alicia's encounter with an ailing, cursing, unhoused man causes her to reflect on the process by which innocent children can wind up "huddled on the pavement." Though she does not have any of the therapeutic language that Theo knows so well, Alicia nevertheless seems to recognize that a baby's relationships with its parents—in this instance, its "mother"—creates a template for the rest of that baby's life. Even when they try not to, parents can endow their children with "pain" in their

circumstances (nurture) and “madness” in their blood (nature).

Alicia’s sense that she has little to no agency once more links to the novel’s reliance on Greek tragedy. Instead of feeling that she can decide whether or not to do something, Alicia wonders “am I going to,” as if she has no choice in the matter. And even on a formal level, the multitude of em-dashes in Alicia’s diary entries (here and elsewhere) demonstrate her profound sense that the future is charging ahead of her, outside of her control.

Lastly, it is worth noting that though this diary entry is written several weeks before the murder—and thus before Alicia elected to be completely silent—she is already struggling to “name” the complex feelings that overtake her. As readers work to understand Alicia’s silence, therefore, it is worth noting that it might just be that she does not know what words could ever suffice for her inexpressible emotional state. Or, maybe, Alicia chooses not to speak because she is afraid of what will come out—just as here, she chooses to “not writ[e]” about the possibilities that scare her the most.

## Part 2, Chapter 2 Quotes

☛ [Diomedes] pulled out a little box from his desk, sliding off the cover to reveal a row of cigars. He offered me one. I shook my head.



“You don’t smoke?” He seemed surprised. “You look like a smoker to me.”


“No, no. Only the occasional cigarette—just now and then...I’m trying to quit.”

“Good, good for you.” He opened the window. “You know that joke, about why you can’t be a therapist and smoke? Because it means you’re still fucked up.” He laughed and popped one of the cigars into his mouth. “I think we’re all a bit crazy in this place. You know that sign they used to have in offices? ‘You don’t need to be mad to work here, but it helps?’”

Diomedes laughed again. He lit the cigar and puffed on it, blowing the smoke outside. I watched him enviously.

**Related Characters:** Theo Faber, Lazarus Diomedes (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 67

## Explanation and Analysis

Though Theo is a frequent smoker, since arriving at the Grove, he has endeavored to keep that habit a secret; he worries that his colleagues will think “any decent therapist should have worked through” a nicotine addiction. But Diomedes smokes publicly, signaling that he embraces his own struggles or shortcomings. “We’re all a bit crazy,” he explains to Theo, urging his younger mentee to acknowledge that there is not always so clear a gap between troubled patients and the therapists who treat them. As a sort of father figure (and counterpart to Ruth), Diomedes wants Theo to talk about his pain instead of hiding from it, even as Theo is primarily concerned with putting his most professional foot forward.

In addition to blurring the boundary between patients and doctors, this exchange is notable for what it implies about honesty—and deception. Despite his claim, at the very beginning of the novel, to be a straightforward and reliable narrator, Theo hides his own complications from the people around him. But, as the Sigmund Freud epigraph at the beginning of Part 1 explained, “no mortal can keep a secret. If his lips are silent, he chatters with his fingertips.” So though Theo tries to hide his cigarette habit—and, by extension, all of his interior darkness—he still “look[s] like a smoker” to the people around him.

## Part 2, Chapter 4 Quotes

☛ As we sat there in silence, my head started to throb at the temples. The beginnings of a headache. A telltale symptom. I thought of Ruth, who used to say, “In order to be a good therapist, you must be receptive to your patients’ feelings—but you must not hold on to them—they are not yours—they do not belong to you.” In other words, this thump, thump, thumping in my head wasn’t my pain; it belonged to Alicia. And this sudden wave of sadness—this desire to die, die, die—did not belong to me either. It was hers, all hers. I sat there, feeling it for her, my head pounding, my stomach churning, for what seemed like hours. Eventually, the fifty minutes were up.

**Related Characters:** Theo Faber (speaker), Alicia Berenson, Ruth

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 76

## Explanation and Analysis

In Theo’s first few sessions with Alicia, neither one of them speaks, as Theo waits for his patient to reveal herself

through body language and other non-verbal clues. But although no words are said, Theo finds himself experiencing the other side of his talk therapy with Ruth; just as Ruth once shed his tears, Theo now feels Alicia's pain in his own body, her despair a physical "thump, thump, thumping" in his brain.

In this early session, it would seem that Theo—despite the personal costs it has for him—is doing exactly what an excellent therapist should do, observing Alicia's pain and "feeling it for her." He tries to separate himself from the feelings, even as they penetrate his body ("it was hers," he reminds himself, "all hers"). The only sign that Theo is not completely abiding by Ruth's instructions is that the quotation ends with Theo realizing "the fifty minutes were up." The session is over, but Theo's head still pounds and his stomach still churns. And without the use of language, how can he possibly "feed" these feelings back to Alicia, as Ruth used to do for him?



## Part 2, Chapter 7 Quotes

●● Idiot, I thought to myself. You idiot. What was I doing? I pushed her too far, too hard, too soon. It was horribly unprofessional, not to mention totally fucking inept. It revealed far more about my state of mind than hers.

But that's what Alicia did for you. Her silence was like a mirror—reflecting yourself back at you.

And it was often an ugly sight.

**Related Characters:** Theo Faber (speaker), Alicia Berenson

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 94

### Explanation and Analysis

A few sessions into his therapy with Alicia, soon after she has attacked him, Theo pressures her to admit that a part of her "hated" Gabriel—in much the same way that he sometimes "hates" Kathy. When Alicia remains silent, Theo gets more and more intense, to the point that Alicia finally leaves the room in tears. In addition to feeling unprofessional and beating himself up in a semi-unhinged way ("idiot," "you idiot"), Theo feels cognizant of the fact that he has let too much of himself show in the therapy room. In other words, in trying his best to get inside Alicia's head, Theo's empathy has become a form of narcissism; he has taken on the role of patient, discovering more about his "state of mind than hers." Though Theo's empathic tendencies seem to be diametrically opposed to any sort of

self-obsession, this exchange shows that, the more he relates to Alicia, the more his efforts to help her become, in fact, solipsistic efforts to help himself.

The other interesting thing in this passage is the idea that Alicia's silence can be a "mirror," opening Theo's eyes to the "ugly" things that other people in his life fail to articulate. Therapists like Christian, Diomedes, and, to some extent, Theo himself, initially juxtapose Alicia's refusal to speak with therapy as "the talking cure." But Alicia proves that silence can be just as meaningful—just as communicative—as speech.

## Part 2, Chapter 9 Quotes

●● She was right. I have been groping for the right words to express that murky feeling of betrayal inside, the horrible hollow ache, and to hear Ruth say it—"the pain of not being loved"—I saw how it pervaded my entire consciousness and was at once the story of my past, present, and future. This wasn't just about Kathy; it was about my father, and my childhood feelings of abandonment; my grief for everything I never had and, in my heart, still believed I never would have. Ruth was saying that was why I chose Kathy. What better way for me to prove that my father was correct—that I'm worthless and unlovable—than by pursuing someone who will never love me? I buried my head in my hands. "So all this was inevitable? That's what you're saying—I set myself up for this?"

**Related Characters:** Theo Faber (speaker), Ruth , Kathy Faber

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 102

### Explanation and Analysis

After Theo learns of Kathy's affair, he finds solace in Ruth, who urges him to end things with Kathy and find a more stable, more honest life partner. In this painful moment, Theo comes to terms with the fact that the worthlessness he feels around Kathy is an extension of the self-loathing that his father used to provoke.

This passage is important mostly because it connects Theo's belief that people are formed in childhood—that "past, present, and future" are inextricably linked—to the structure of a Greek tragedy. In ancient drama, and in Theo's conception of modern psychology, particular people seem doomed from the start: in Greek plays, fate sets in, while in Theo's brand of therapy, certain traits or childhood feelings can make adult tragedies "inevitable." Moreover,



Theo here embraces the idea that he might have a fatal flaw (“I set myself up for this”), which is another trope of Greek tragedy.

Lastly, it is useful to pick up on the way in which Ruth helps Theo find “the right words.” From Theo’s non-verbal behavior—from his facial expressions, his emotionless tone, and the very fact of his late-night appearance—Ruth is able to accurately articulate the complex feelings Theo cannot yet name. This kind of word-finding is exactly what Theo hopes to be able to do for his own “silent patient.”

## Part 2, Chapter 10 Quotes

☹️ Leaving Kathy would be like tearing off a limb. I simply wasn’t prepared to mutilate myself like that. No matter what Ruth said. Ruth wasn’t infallible. Kathy was not my father; I wasn’t condemned to repeat the past. I could change the future. Kathy and I were happy before; we could be again. One day she might confess it all to me, tell me about it, and I would forgive her. We would work through this.

I would not let Kathy go. Instead I would say nothing. I would pretend I had never read those emails. Somehow, I’d forget. I’d bury it. I had no choice but to go on. I refuse to give into this; I refuse to breakdown and fall apart.

After all, I wasn’t just responsible for myself. What about the patients in my care? Certain people depended on me. I couldn’t let them down.

**Related Characters:** Theo Faber (speaker), Kathy Faber, Ruth

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 107

### Explanation and Analysis

When Theo leaves Ruth’s office, he firmly shares his therapist’s conviction that it is time to break things off with Kathy. But over the course of the next few days, Theo begins to doubt his mentor’s prediction—just as Greek tragic heroes from Oedipus to Agamemnon have doubted the prophecies that might have saved their lives. So while the novel seems to affirm the tragic idea that people are “condemned to repeat the past,” Theo ignores that truism, “refus[ing]” to accept the basic principle of both drama and psychology. Instead, he insists that he can “change the future”—a particular kind of hubris, or over-confidence, that is the defining trait of many tragic heroes.

That hubris is also evident in his belief that people “depend” on him: as a therapist, Theo has a worryingly strong savior

complex, believing that he alone can “care” for his damaged patients. And fascinatingly, his patients—relying on him, confiding in him—give him the sense of communication and trust that is lacking in his relationship with Kathy, who seems unlikely to ever actually “confess” her sins.

## Part 2, Chapter 13 Quotes

☹️ I saw myself when very young, sitting under the branches of the willow tree in our garden in Cambridge. I’d spend hours hiding there. I may not have been a happy child, but during the time I spent under the willow tree, I felt a similar contentment to lying here with Gabriel. And now it was as if the past and the present were coexisting simultaneously in one perfect moment. I wanted that moment to last forever. Gabriel fell asleep, and I sketched him, trying to capture the dappled sunlight on his face. I did a better job with his eyes this time. It was easier because they were closed—but at least I got their shape right. He looked like a little boy, curled up asleep and breathing gently, crumbs around his mouth.

**Related Characters:** Alicia Berenson (speaker), Gabriel Berenson

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 126

### Explanation and Analysis

On the day of her 33rd birthday, Alicia and Gabriel celebrate with a picnic, lounging in a rare moment of relaxed, sunny bliss. On a sensory level, the moment conjures up a similar memory from Alicia’s childhood—and for the first time, Alicia is able to think of her past not for its pain but for its fleeting traces of “contentment.”

First of all, then, this passage in Alicia’s diary entry affirms just how constantly childhood experiences influence adults’ psyches: “the past and the present” start to blur, and both Alicia and Gabriel return to some inner-child version of themselves (Alicia becomes “very young,” while Gabriel looks like “a little boy,” innocent and sleepy). But more than that, Alicia’s joy in this moment suggests that just as painful adult experiences can trigger unexpressed childhood pain, healthy adult experiences can help rewire one’s narrative of their life. Similarly to how Theo felt when he first met Kathy, it seems that Alicia’s lovely experience here might heal her in a more substantial, lasting way, changing her future by reframing her past.



Finally, it is interesting to note that seeing Gabriel as “a little boy” allows Alicia to better capture his eyes, the very

feature she had earlier struggled to paint. That fact suggests that there is a great deal of similarity between therapy and painting: Theo cannot fully help Alicia until he understands her childhood, and Alicia cannot fully paint Gabriel until she understands his.

## Part 2, Chapter 15 Quotes

☝☝ This was the house where Alicia had been born. It was where she spent the first eighteen years of her life. Within these walls her personality had been formed: the roots of her adult life, all causes and subsequent choices, were buried here. Sometimes it's hard to grasp why the answers to the present lie in the past. A simple analogy might be helpful: a leading psychiatrist in the field of sexual abuse once told me she had, in thirty years of extensive work with pedophiles, never met one who hadn't himself been abused as a child. This doesn't mean that all abused children go on to become abusers, but it is impossible for someone who is not abused to become an abuser. No one is born evil. As Winnicott put it, "A baby cannot hate the mother, without the mother first hating the baby." As babies, we are innocent sponges, blank slates with only the most basic needs present: to eat, shit, love, and be loved. But something goes wrong, depending on the circumstances into which we are born, and the house in which we grow up. A tormented, abused child can never take revenge in reality, as she's powerless and defenseless, but she can and must harbor vengeful fantasies in her imagination. Rage, like fear, is reactive. Something bad happened to Alicia, probably early in her childhood, to provoke the murderous impulses that emerged all those years later.

**Related Characters:** Theo Faber (speaker), Alicia Berenson

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 131

### Explanation and Analysis

Against the will of all of his colleagues, Theo continues to approach Alicia's life as a mystery, tracking down her family and obsessing over her experience as a child. In this passage, as he approaches the Rose family home in Cambridge, Theo again reflects that Alicia's murder—rather than being an act of "evil"—must be rooted within her past traumas; if no one becomes sexually abusive without being abused themselves, then no one feels murderous rage without having been "tormented" by a similar kind of anger. In other words, by adopting the theories of British child psychologist Donald Winnicott, Theo is able to see Alicia not as a perpetrator but as a victim, an "innocent."

There are two other important ideas in this passage. First, it is interesting (especially given the Freudian epigraphs about how all secrets come to light) that Theo keeps using words like "buried" and "emerged"—all the secret, private darkness that a house can contain must eventually burst into public view. And second, this section brings up the question of nature vs. nurture. Theo insists that "no one is born evil" (a sentiment that he will later go back on); he is certain that babies enter the world as pure vessels. This view would contrast with Christian's more biological approach to the mind. Christian might insist that babies are not "blank slates," regardless of the kind of care they receive, because they enter the world having inherited certain genes or brain chemistries. This debate will remain an open question—and a high-stakes one—throughout the novel.

## Part 2, Chapter 20 Quotes

☝☝ It was just as beautiful and mysterious as I remembered it. Alicia naked in the studio, in front of a blank canvas, painting with a blood red paint brush. I studied Alicia's expression. Again it defied interpretation. I frowned.



"She's impossible to read."


"That's the point—it is a refusal to comment. It's a painting about silence."

"I'm not sure I understand what you mean."

"Well, at the heart of all art lies a mystery. Alicia's silence is her secret—her mystery, in the religious sense. That's why she named it [Alcestis](#). Have you read it? By Euripides." [Jean-Felix] gave me a curious look. "Read it. Then you'll understand."

**Related Characters:** Theo Faber, Jean-Felix Martin (speaker), Alicia Berenson

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 151

### Explanation and Analysis

As Theo continues to stake out Alicia's family and friends, he gets to know her gallerist (and longtime collaborator) Jean-Felix Martin. Though Theo often disagrees with Jean-Felix's subjective opinions on art—especially because Jean-Felix tends to aestheticize pictures that are clear tokens of Alicia's pain—this explanation proves helpful. Previously, Theo has understood Alicia's silence as her refusal (or inability) to communicate. But now, Jean-Felix allows him to see that such a refusal can itself be a message—that even if

Alicia does not “comment,” she can still make a forceful “point” with her art.

Moreover, Jean-Felix points Theo to the Euripides play Alicia references in her painting’s title, suggesting that if Theo reads the ancient tragedy *Alcestis* he will be able to “understand” his subject at last. And just as this literary allusion is a way for Theo to understand Alicia, it is also a way for readers to deepen their appreciation of the novel; where Theo picks up a copy of the play, a curious reader might do the same, finding new, less explicit parallels between the two pieces of literature. In this sense, Theo’s relationship with Euripides’s *Alcestis* is a kind of meta-textual comment on understanding: how do we make sense of people, or books, with only limited information to go on? How can references and allusions—alongside family and friends—provide clues to someone’s inner life?

is within professional bounds. But even more than that, Christian’s point that Theo is “overidentifying” with Alicia is an accurate one. Theo has lost the ability to distinguish between who is the therapist and who is “the patient”; he has taken on Alicia’s pain, as evidenced by his stomach-churning headaches, but he has forgotten to give it back.

The last thing to note here is that Theo claims to be giving Alicia “what she needs” (while Christian assumes that Theo is just being manipulated by his mysterious, “seductive” patient). But neither Christian nor Theo has any evidence to back up their claims—after all, how can they understand Alicia’s wants or needs if she never vocalizes them? Alicia’s silence leaves room for interpretation, and while that adds to her intrigue, it also allows others to misrepresent her, claiming understanding—or identification—that they have no basis to claim.

## Part 2, Chapter 26 Quotes

☝☝ Christian gave me a doubtful look. “Be careful, mate.”

“Thanks for the warning. But it’s rather unnecessary.”

“I’m just saying. Borderlines are seductive. That’s what’s going on here. I don’t think you fully get that.”



“She’s not going to seduce me, Christian.”

He laughed. “I think she already has. You’re giving her just what she wants.”

“I’m giving her what she needs. There’s a difference.”

“How do you know what she needs? You’re overidentifying with her. It’s obvious. She’s the patient, you know—not you.”

**Related Characters:** Christian West, Theo Faber (speaker), Alicia Berenson

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 174

### Explanation and Analysis

Christian and Theo have sparred for weeks about Alicia’s care, especially because Christian wants to medicate her while Theo prefers a talk-based approach. But in this scene in the Grove’s lunchroom, the tension comes to a head, as Christian implicitly accuses Theo of being “seduc[ed]” by Alicia. Now, the conversation has shifted from a professional debate over methods, as Christian hints that Theo is transgressing boundaries sexually and emotionally.

Though Theo and Alicia have not yet had any romantic contact, it’s hard to argue that Theo’s obsession with her (and his strange habit of comparing her with his wife Kathy)

## Part 2, Chapter 30 Quotes

☝☝ I had a sudden image of myself as a child. A little boy close to bursting with anxiety, holding in all my tears, all my pain; pacing endlessly, restless, scared; alone with the fears of my crazy father. No one to tell. No one who listened. Alicia must have felt similarly desperate, or she’d never have confided in Barbie.

I shivered—and sensed a pair of eyes on the back of my head.

I spun around—but no one was there. I was alone. The street was empty, shadowy, and silent.

**Related Characters:** Theo Faber (speaker), Alicia Berenson

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 191

### Explanation and Analysis

After learning that Alicia has been followed by a strange man—and that she has confessed this fact to her despicable neighbor, Barbie Hellman—Theo tries to imagine his way into Alicia’s mental state. But in this critical moment, the ever-narrowing barrier between Alicia and Theo completely collapses. Instead of understanding something novel about Alicia’s childhood or Alicia’s feelings, Theo thinks of himself a “a little boy,” picturing his own father instead of Vernon Rose, his own house instead of Alicia’s ugly Victorian. He even makes assumptions about Alicia and Barbie’s friendship that directly contradict Barbie’s depiction of it—despite having no evidence, other than his personal gut instinct, to back up his beliefs.



In this moment (and for the rest of the novel), then,

Christian's accusation that Theo is "overidentifying" with Alicia becomes patently true. What is especially frightening here is that, only a few minutes after learning that Alicia has been followed, Theo "sense[s] a pair of eyes" watching him. In other words, Theo feels so entangled with Alicia that he understands her experiences to be his own; if she is being followed, so is he. This over-identification is an extreme form of empathy, blurring the line between self and other, between empathy and narcissism. And without any separation between himself and Alicia, Theo is unable to heal either one of them.

### Part 3, Chapter 1 Quotes

☝☝ Gabriel keeps asking me how I'm doing—if I'm okay. I can tell he's worried, despite me insisting I'm fine. My acting doesn't seem to be convincing him anymore. I need to try harder. I pretend to be focused on work all day, whereas in fact work couldn't be further from my mind. I've lost any connection with it, any impetus to finish the paintings. As I write this, I can't honestly say I think I'll paint again. Not until all this is behind me, anyway.

**Related Characters:** Alicia Berenson (speaker), Gabriel Berenson

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 221

#### Explanation and Analysis

In this extended, nail-biting diary entry, Alicia explains the toll the mysterious man (always waiting, always watching) has started to take on her. Beyond adding a great deal of anxiety to an already anxious life, the man has taken away Alicia's ability to communicate. On the one hand, she isolates herself from Gabriel, unwilling—or unable—to express the truth of her emotions. And even more upsettingly, Alicia has lost all "impetus" to paint, her most faithful and complex method of communication. In some sense, then, even before the murder and her subsequent arrival at the Grove, Alicia has been silenced—not by choice, but by the fear of this mysterious presence.

It is also worth paying attention to Alicia's focus on "acting," on the way she plays "pretend" with Gabriel as she tries to convince him that she's okay. Throughout *The Silent Patient*, Theo has drawn parallels between Alicia and Kathy, and between his marriage and his patient's marriage. But in self-identifying as an actress, Alicia makes the connection explicit—and demonstrates that dishonesty often comes not from a desire to hurt, but from a sense of being hurt oneself.

### Part 4, Chapter 5 Quotes

☝☝ I knew I should hide. I was exposed and in plain sight—if Kathy turned around, she'd be sure to see me. But I couldn't move. I was transfixed, staring at a Medusa, turned to stone.

Eventually they stopped kissing and walked into the park, arm in arm. I followed. It was disorienting. From behind, from a distance, the man didn't look dissimilar to me—for a few seconds I had a confused, out-of-body experience, convinced I was watching myself walking in the park with Kathy.

**Related Characters:** Theo Faber (speaker), Kathy Faber

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 242

#### Explanation and Analysis

Having finally been able to follow Kathy long enough to encounter her lover, Theo is surprised by his reaction—instead of instinctively disliking the man, he is "transfixed" by him; instead of noting their differences, Theo notes their "similar[ities]." In a skillful structural move, then, author Alex Michaelides is suggesting that the lack of boundary-setting between Theo and Alicia has now oozed into other elements of Theo's life. Theo therefore seems to empathize with the very man he should most despise (later revealed to be Gabriel): "I was watching myself," he explains, picturing himself as both Kathy's lover and her betrayed. On a character note, this quote signals that Theo is just as unwell (or even as deluded) as the people he claims to treat; on a thematic note, Theo's "out-of-body" experience shows that, without clear boundaries between oneself and others, empathy can very quickly become narcissism.

There are two other vital details in this short passage. First, in yet another parallel between Theo's life and Alicia's, Alicia gains a stalker at the same moment in the narrative that Theo starts to become one—and indeed, readers will later learn that these stalkers are one and the same. Moreover, just as Theo's obsession with honesty often conflicts with his day-to-day practice of deceit, here, his desire to bring everything into the open battles with his own desire to "hide."

And lastly, the reference to Medusa—a famous Greek demigod who turns all who look on her to stone—once more brings home the tragic ramifications of this moment. Theo cannot choose whether to "move" or to stay, just as he feels that nearly every decision in the novel has been out of his hands. Instead, like any tragic hero, Theo feels that he is at the mercy of whatever his destiny has in store.



## Part 4, Chapter 8 Quotes

☞ “[Vernon] was a mean bastard. The only person he ever cared about was Auntie Eva. I suppose that’s why he said it.”



“Said what?” I was losing patience. “I don’t understand what you’re saying to me. What exactly happened?”

“Vernon was going on about how much he loved Eva—how he couldn’t live without her. ‘My girl, he kept saying, ‘my poor girl, my Eva...Why did she have to die? Why did it have to be her? Why didn’t Alicia die instead?’”

[...] “And Alicia whispered something to me—I’ll never forget it. ‘He killed me,’ she said. ‘Dad just—killed me.’”

I stared at Paul, speechless. A chorus of bells started ringing in my head, clanging, chiming, reverberating. This is what I’ve been looking for. I’d found it, the missing piece of the jigsaw, at last.

**Related Characters:** Theo Faber, Paul Rose (speaker), Alicia Berenson, Vernon Rose, Eva Rose

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 255

**Explanation and Analysis**

When Theo, now impossibly deep in his quest to understand Alicia, climbs up to the roof of her childhood home, Paul reveals “the missing piece” of Alicia’s psyche. As the novel has gone on, the correspondence between Alicia and the fictional Alcestis has become more and more of a one-to-one parallel; now, Theo realizes that just as Alcestis died and came back to life, Alicia felt “killed” by her father’s degree of cruelty and disregard. And just as Alcestis is sacrificed by her husband Admetus, Vernon Rose expresses a strikingly similar desire for his daughter to symbolically give up her own life so that his wife Eva might return.

In addition to clarifying Theo’s own process, this moment gives readers a great deal of insight into Alicia. On the one hand, she has spent her entire adult life feeling that at least a part of her is in some sense murdered; like Theo, she understands that there exist childhood traumas far too painful to ever “forget.” But on the other hand, Alicia’s ability to name her sense of having been “killed”—what Theo will later refer to as “psychic murder”—suggests that she might not need as much help with articulating her feelings as previously thought. And if that is the case, it poses a more frightening possibility: does naming a problem always dissolve it? Or can people like Alicia and Theo, brilliant enough to understand and speak about their painful patterns, nevertheless continue to repeat them?

## Part 4, Chapter 11 Quotes

☞ “What do you want to talk about?” I asked.

“I don’t know. Nothing. I just want to talk.”

So we talked. We talked about Lydia and Paul, and about her mother, and the summer she died. We talked about Alicia’s childhood—and mine. I told her about my father, and growing up in that house; she seemed curious to know as much as possible about my past and what had shaped me and made me who I am.

I remember thinking, There’s no going back now. We were crashing through every last boundary between therapist and patient. Soon it would be impossible to tell who was who.

**Related Characters:** Theo Faber, Alicia Berenson (speaker), Paul Rose, Lydia Rose, Eva Rose

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 265

**Explanation and Analysis**

After countless sessions spent trying to get to Alicia to speak (and after months of research, art therapy, and obsession), Theo finally gets his fascinating “silent patient” to open up. But instead of giving Alicia the floor, the two have a long, winding conversation, one more suited to intimate personal relationships than to therapeutic ones. In fact, there is no small similarity between this moment of almost confessional “talk” and the moment Theo shares with Kathy at the beginning of their romance.

This is also the moment where Theo and Alicia fully erase “every last boundary between therapy and patient.” Now, Theo begins to realize that he needs Alicia every bit as much as she needs him; just as he wants to help her understand her childhood, he hopes that she will help him understand his own youth. And Alicia, too, seems to recognize that shift: she dictates what they will talk about, and she seems just as willing to ask questions as she is to answer them.

Finally, it is worth picking up one more time just how prevalent the language of fate is in the way Theo talks about Alicia. “There’s no going back now,” he thinks—though he has said something similar at almost every juncture of their relationship. Rather than fighting his own worst impulses, Theo almost uses the idea of destiny as a cover for his own bad behavior, excusing himself to his readers even as he horrifies them.

## Part 4, Chapter 21 Quotes

☞ I watched his wife through the windows. As I watched, I felt increasingly sure I had to do something to help her. She was me, and I was her: we were two innocent victims, deceived and betrayed. She believed this man loved her—but he didn't.

Perhaps I was wrong, assuming she knew nothing about the affair? Perhaps she did know. Perhaps they enjoyed a sexually open relationship and she was equally promiscuous? But somehow I didn't think so. She looked innocent, as I had once looked. It was my duty to enlighten her. I could reveal the truth about the man she was living with, whose bed she shared. I had no choice. I had to help her.

**Related Characters:** Theo Faber (speaker), Alicia Berenson, Gabriel Berenson, Kathy Faber

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 303

**Explanation and Analysis**

In this passage, written just seconds before Theo reveals himself to readers as the man who has been following Alicia, he explains that his “over-identification” with Alicia (to use Christian’s language) began long before Theo arrived at the Grove. Instead, bonded by the shared betrayal of Gabriel’s affair with Kathy, Theo feels certain that “she was me, and I was her.” In one sense, this reveals Theo’s entire therapeutic project with Alicia to be completely doomed from the start: how could he ever “feed” her feelings back to her when he believes that they are fundamentally a single entity? But in another sense, Theo’s deranged narration suggests the dangers of telling any individual that they are emotionally intelligent enough to enter someone else’s mind. In other words, it is perhaps because he trained for years as a therapist that Theo feels so (over-)confident in his ability to “help” Alicia. Thus even as Michaelides embraces many therapeutic principles—even thanking his own therapist in the acknowledgements—he also embeds a critique of therapy in his characterization of Theo.

These climactic paragraphs also represent a convergence of many of the book’s major themes. Theo now confuses childhood “innocence” with honesty; he cannot see that, while he is in some ways in a victim position, he is also lying to Kathy and everyone else around him. And finally, Theo—at the peak of this most dramatic, most life-altering decision—still refuses to claim any agency (“I had no choice,” he protests). Instead, filled with the hubris of a professional “help[er],” he continues to use tragic destiny as an excuse for his actions.

## Part 5, Chapter 1 Quotes

☞ I wish I could say I struck a blow for the defeated—that I was standing up for the betrayed and brokenhearted—that Gabriel had a tyrant’s eyes, my father’s eyes. But I’m past lying now. The truth is Gabriel had my eyes, suddenly—and I had his. Somewhere along the way we had swapped places.

I saw it now. I would never be safe. Never be loved. All my hopes, dashed—all my dreams, shattered—leaving nothing, nothing. My father was right—I didn’t deserve to live. I was—nothing. That’s what Gabriel did to me.

That’s the truth. I didn’t kill Gabriel. He killed me.

All I did was pull the trigger.

**Related Characters:** Alicia Berenson (speaker), Gabriel Berenson, Vernon Rose

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 311

**Explanation and Analysis**

Held at gunpoint by Theo, and forced to choose between preserving his own life or sacrificing Alicia’s, Gabriel ultimately opts to save himself. In this broken-hearted diary entry, her last one in the entire novel, Alicia explains how Gabriel’s betrayal motivated her to kill him. By literally choosing his life over her own, Gabriel repeats almost exactly the trauma Alicia had suffered at the hands of her father; like Vernon, Gabriel made it clear that Alicia’s life was unimportant to him, and like Vernon, Gabriel had committed a form of (what Theo calls) “psychic murder.” No wonder Alicia feels that her husband has “killed” her—the exact same words she uses to describe Vernon’s sentiment that Alicia should have died in place of her mother. In this climactic scene, readers realize how Alicia’s childhood, her marriage, and the plot of Euripides’s *Alcestis* all converge on this same, tragic ending.

And just as Alicia can no longer distinguish between past and present, she can also no longer distinguish between herself and others. Like Theo’s love for her, her love for Gabriel—her obsession with him—causes her to condense her own identity with his. And like Theo’s, that identification (or “over-identification”) has bloody, life-ending consequences.

Lastly, it is good to focus in on the formal way Michaelides distinguishes between Alicia’s diaries and Theo’s narrative. In particular, Alicia’s use of em-dashes in this moment suggests just how out of control she feels; whereas Theo expresses that he has no agency, that sense of wildness is a more embodied, perhaps more honest, experience for Alicia.

## Part 5, Chapter 2 Quotes

☝☝ If you were cynical, you might say I revisited the scene of the crime, so to speak, to cover my tracks. That's not true. Even though I knew the risk of such an endeavor, the real possibility that I might get caught, that it might end in disaster, I had no choice—because of who I am.

I am a psychotherapist, remember. Alicia needed help—and only I knew how to help her.

**Related Characters:** Theo Faber (speaker), Alicia Berenson

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 314

**Explanation and Analysis**

As Theo tries to explain to his readers why he felt the need to return to Alicia at the Grove, potentially incriminating himself in the process, he tries to persuade his audience that he was motivated by generosity rather than selfishness. Theo feels that he must heal Alicia; implicitly, he is suggesting that as someone present at the scene of the crime, he is better positioned to understand “the silent patient” than any other therapist could be.

This sense that Theo alone can help—“only I knew how,” he boasts—is also a classic example of hubris, the kind of overconfidence (especially common among Greek tragic heroes) that then leads to overreach. But because Theo is a therapist, even though he cannot totally see past his own sense of hubris, he does know that his actions are putting him on the path towards “disaster.” Unfortunately, though, rather than accepting that he could change himself, Theo embraces the tragic outlook that he has “no choice”: he is destined, he believes, to whatever comes of his relationship with Alicia. And by embracing destiny rather than human agency, Theo nullifies the therapy he claims so deeply to believe in—after all, what is the point of understanding oneself if that understanding doesn't lead to change?

## Part 5, Chapter 3 Quotes

☝☝ Even worse than the shock or repulsion, or possibly even fear, in Ruth's eyes as I told her this would be the look of sadness, disappointment, and self-reproach. Because not only had I let her down, I knew she would be thinking she had let me down—and not just me, but the talking cure itself. For no therapist ever had a better shot at it than Ruth—she had years to work with someone who was damaged, yes, but so young, just a boy, and so willing to change, to get better, to heal. Yet, despite hundreds of hours of psychotherapy, talking and listening and analyzing, she was unable to save his soul. Perhaps I was wrong. Perhaps some of us are simply born evil, and despite our best efforts we remain that way.

**Related Characters:** Theo Faber (speaker), Ruth

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 320

**Explanation and Analysis**

As *The Silent Patient* comes to a close, Theo reflects on just how far he has fallen: instead of the sympathetic, damaged man he was when he met Ruth, he has become a supervillain of sorts, lying to his loved ones and inflicting harm on a great number of people (Alicia, Gabriel, Christian, Elif, to name just a few). The depth of Theo's depravity forces him to amend his earlier comment—while originally, he subscribed to Donald Winnicott's belief that “no one is born evil,” he now feels that “perhaps some of us are.”

Winnicott believes fully in nurture over nature as the shaping force of a human's personality (in contrast to someone like Christian, who has always emphasized biology). So Theo's shift in mindset suggests that he no longer has faith in the ability of some people to heal others through words, attention, and care. It follows, then, that he feels that his tragic end would be a great disappointment to Ruth. Despite her best efforts, Theo's “soul” remains damaged; despite her attempts to unwind the painful threads of his childhood, Theo continues to repeat his familial patterns.



Finally, this passage is interesting because of what it suggests about “the talking cure.” At the beginning of the novel, Alicia's titular silence seems like the most challenging thing about her case. But now, Theo despairs that “talking” and “listening” are enough to ever heal someone. Instead, he fully embraces an ancient concept of destiny: from the moment someone is born, he suggests now, their fate is decided. So in this new, pessimistic outlook, no one's “efforts” can truly transform the future.


●● I felt strangely calm as I sat in the chair by the window. [Inspector Allen] cleared his throat and began. “Theo just left. I am alone. I’m writing this as fast as I can...”

As I listened, I looked up at the white clouds drifting past. Finally, they had opened—it had started to snow—snowflakes were falling outside. I opened the window and reached out my hand. I caught a snowflake. I watched it disappear, vanish on my fingertip. I smiled.

And I went to catch another one.

**Related Characters:** Theo Faber, Alicia Berenson, Chief Inspector Steven Allen (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 323

### Explanation and Analysis

Inspector Allen, having found Alicia’s final diary entry wedged into one of her paintings, knows exactly what Theo has done; there is no way, in other words, that Theo can

escape his punishment now. In a nicely ironic twist, the novel thus ends with “the silent patient’s” words read aloud, condemning the very man who tried over and over again to speak for her—to his colleagues, to her family, and even to readers.

Even more symbolically important, however, is Theo’s attempt to catch the snowflakes that have finally begun to fall. At the very beginning of the book, Theo reflects on the happiest moment from his childhood, explaining that “grasping at snowflakes is like grasping at happiness: an act of possession that instantly gives way to nothing.” For his entire time at the Grove, Theo has patiently waited for it to snow, but despite ominous clouds, no snow has ever come. So the fact that snow now arrives, just as Theo is being condemned, suggests two things. On the one hand, Theo may be experiencing the relief of no longer being trapped in a lie. But on the other hand, the snowflakes continue to “disappear,” and even though Theo keeps trying to catch them, he will never—by virtue of how ephemeral a snowflake is—be able to hold onto snow for long. The same is true of his “happiness:” despite all his work in therapy, his determination to change, the book ends with adult Theo just as miserable and trapped as he was as a little boy.





## 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.

## PROLOGUE

The book begins with a quote from **Alcestis**, a play by the ancient Greek writer Euripides: “Why does she not speak?” It then jumps to the first entry in Alicia Berenson’s diary, where she explains why she has decided to keep such a journal in the first place. Her husband Gabriel is concerned for her mental health, and he has given her the diary in the hope that it will help her find some peace.

Alicia admits that she is mostly writing in the diary in an attempt to please Gabriel. Currently, she is sitting in the kitchen while Gabriel cooks. Alicia admires her beloved’s elegance, reflecting that, “I love him so totally, completely, sometimes it threatens to overwhelm me.” But before she can write down her more obsessive thoughts, Alicia cuts herself off, vowing that the diary will only contain happy ideas and inspirations.

*Right away, the novel introduces a contrast between speech and silence. Alcestis, the tragic heroine who will prove to be an important allusion throughout the story, is known for her baffling muteness—the central question of both this novel and Euripides’s play is “Why does she not speak?” But when readers first meet Alicia, she is urgently trying to tell them something, scribbling in her diary to ensure she leaves a record behind.*



*This prologue, like many of the chapters in the novel, ends with a moment of foreshadowing: what are the darker thoughts that Alicia does not want to write down? Such foreshadowing is a characteristic of Greek tragedy—which is important, given that Theo often explicitly frames his life in tragic terms.*



## PART 1, CHAPTER 1

The epigraph to Part 1 is a Sigmund Freud quote about how nobody can keep a secret. But there is nothing secretive about the chapter’s opening line: “Alicia Berenson was thirty-three years old when she killed her husband.” Both Alicia and Gabriel were artists—Alicia painted, and Gabriel took photos of “semi-naked women.” The first-person narrator, who has yet to identify himself, remarks that he thinks Alicia is a more talented artist than her husband.

Gabriel’s murder happened 6 years ago, when he was 44. The murder occurred on August 25th, the hottest day of an unusually hot summer in London. Gabriel had spent the day shooting a cover for *Vogue* magazine; not much is known about what Alicia had been doing. On the night of the murder, Gabriel arrived home at 11 p.m. At 11:30, the Berensons’ next-door neighbor Barbie Hellman heard gunshots and called the police.

*Like the prologue, the first chapter makes ample use of juxtaposition. The epigraph, from famed psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, suggests that secrecy and deception will be major issues in the book. But the reveal, right off the bat, that Alicia is her husband’s murderer, complicates things—mysteries normally hinge on a whodunit, but there is no question about who the culprit is here.*



*These are the facts of the case, but though this is the sort of information police officers might rely on, very little is clear about either Alicia or Gabriel’s motivations. This kind of evidentiary detective work is diametrically opposed to the kind of therapeutic searching that will happen later in the story.*



When the officers arrived, Alicia was frozen in shock. A gun was on the floor nearby, and Gabriel had been shot multiple times in the face. There was blood everywhere, some of it Gabriel's, and some of it Alicia's—she had slit her wrists. When the officers tried to rush her to the hospital, Alicia did her best to fight them off; only after great struggle were the officers able to bring Alicia to safety.

From the day of the murder on, Alicia never spoke again. Her silence made the case a matter of great public interest, which only increased when she began painting again. In just a few short days, she had completed a haunting self-portrait titled **Alcestis**.

## PART 1, CHAPTER 2

The narrator resolves to begin at the beginning, explaining the facts without editorializing. He describes Alicia's **Alcestis**: it is a picture of Alicia painting, naked, her brush red with paint or blood. In the painting, Alicia looks out at the viewer, her mouth open—but she is mute. The painting's title is an allusion to a Greek myth, in which Alcestis volunteers to give her life for her husband Admetus.

While the trial was still ongoing, Alicia's gallerist Jean-Felix Martin made the controversial decision to exhibit the painting. The narrator explains that he often went to the gallery while the painting was still on exhibit. But while he felt sympathetic to Alicia, most of the other viewers saw her only as a "cold-blooded bitch." After all, Alicia had been found alone with the body; her fingerprints were the only fingerprints on the gun. There was no doubt that Alicia had committed the crime—the only question was why.

At trial, Alicia's lawyers put in a plea of diminished responsibility, citing her long history of mental health problems. The judge was especially convinced by Professor Lazarus Diomedes, director of a psychological unit known as the Grove, who argued that Alicia's silence was proof of her insanity. Ultimately, the judge ordered Alicia to be housed at the Grove under Diomedes's care.

*Alicia is suicidal—and not only does she want to end her life, but she wants to do it so badly that she actually fights against the officers who have come to help her. Symbolically, the fact that Gabriel's blood mixes with Alicia's blood suggest that both spouses have been deeply wounded by this crime.*



*Alicia's silence is a mirror to Alcestis's ("Why does she not speak?"). But despite her muteness, Alicia is trying to communicate, using her non-verbal art-making—her painting—to give viewers clues to her mental state.*



*In a story so concerned with secrecy, the narrator—who still has yet to identify himself—makes a point of framing himself as trustworthy. He also offers readers insight into Alicia's allusion: "Alcestis" is a painting about silence, but it is also a painting about betrayal (as Admetus betrays Alcestis by sacrificing her).*



*Here, the novel makes its formal trick clearer: rather than asking who has committed the crime, as a standard mystery might, this story asks why the crime has been committed. Author Michaelides often describes the book as a "psychological detective story" for this very reason—it is not about gathering evidence against Alicia so much as it is about unpacking her troubled mind.*



*Alicia had already tried to kill herself; to Diomedes, her silence is further proof of her lack of a will to live. For Diomedes (and for the judge), then, Alicia's crime reflects a troubled mental state, not a rational person trying to get ahead.*



If Alicia had been faking her silence, wouldn't she have started speaking after the trial? But instead, she remained silent for years, and the public quickly lost interest in the whole thing. However, the (still unnamed) narrator remained fascinated by Alicia's case. As a forensic psychotherapist, he was able to apply for a job at the Grove, in the hopes of taking Alicia's care into his own hands. "Something about Alicia's story resonated with me personally," he admits; "I felt a profound empathy with her right from the start."

*Any case that involves a famous artist murdering her famous photographer husband would draw public interest. But there is a stark difference between the general public's view of the case and the narrator's approach to it. Whereas most people are repulsed by Alicia, the narrator identifies with her, feeling "profound empathy" with this complete stranger. That level of identification suggests that maybe the narrator is not as unbiased as he claims to be.*



## PART 1, CHAPTER 3

Theo Faber, the narrator, introduces himself. He is 42 years old, and in his own words, "I became a psychotherapist because I was fucked up." He explains that increasingly, psychologists have realized just how much people—from infancy—are shaped by their relationships with their parents.

*Now, it makes sense why the early chapters have dwelt so much on the question of motivation (the "why"): Theo is a psychotherapist, and it is his job to understand the logic behind his patients' behavior. For Theo, the "why" of adult action is often located in childhood trauma—at least, that is certainly how he experiences it in his own life.*



Theo had a terrible relationship with his father, who was angry, erratic, and physically abusive. He found little solace from his mother, who would always write off his father as being "completely mad." As an adult, Theo believes that his father probably was suffering from some undiagnosed mental disorder.

*Theo's searching sense of empathy is evident even in the way he describes his father. Though his dad was an incredibly damaging figure, Theo can look back at him with some measure of pity, acknowledging that he probably struggled with some untreated mental illness.*



The only moments of happiness in Theo's childhood were the moments when his father was away. One winter, for example, when his dad was on a business trip, he and his mom made a snowman that looked just like his father. Later that night, Theo snuck out into the **snowstorm**, catching the snowflakes on his tongue. "Grasping at vanishing snowflakes is like grasping at happiness," Theo comments. "An act of possession that instantly gives way to nothing."

*Snow will become an important symbol in the story. On the one hand, Theo's memories of the snowstorm contrast with the hot summer in which Alicia killed her husband. But on the other hand, snow—melting and impermanent—represents the difficulty of "grasping at happiness," especially for someone as deeply traumatized as Theo.*



Theo felt that the only way to survive was to escape from his father, which he did by going to university. But once there, he realized that he had internalized all of his father's hatred and abuse. At one point, he became so depressed that he tried to kill himself. But when the suicide attempt failed, Theo realized that he actually wanted to live—he just needed help.

*If Theo instinctively feels a sense of empathy with Alicia, it now becomes clear that they each have experience with suicidal tendencies. But unlike Alicia, Theo sought out help instead of refusing it.*



That help came from Ruth, a therapist that Theo found through the university. As Theo would recount, without emotion, the traumatic details of his childhood, he would look up and see tears in Ruth's eyes. Gradually, Theo realized that the tears in Ruth's eyes actually belonged to him. "That's how therapy works," Theo notes. "A patient delegates his unacceptable feelings to the therapist; and she holds everything he is afraid to feel, and feels it for him. Then, ever so slowly, she feeds his feelings back to him."

Over several years with Ruth, Theo began to reach a new level of inner peace and happiness. Feeling that therapy had saved his life, Theo resolved to become a therapist himself. Training wasn't easy: the first time Theo went to a psychiatric unit, a patient immediately defecated right in front of him, shocking him. But over time, Theo grew accustomed to the intensity of such spaces. "You become increasingly comfortable with madness," he writes, "and not just the madness of others, but your own."

At his interview at the Grove, however, Theo does not give any of this more personal backstory. Instead, Theo responds to his interviewer—a kindly therapist named Indira Sharma—by emphasizing the amount of training he has gone through. He is offered the job, and one month later, Theo arrives for work at the Grove.

## PART 1, CHAPTER 4

Theo shows up for work on a wintry day, when the sky is "heavy with **snow** that had yet to fall." To calm his nerves, Theo covertly smokes a **cigarette**; the habit is frowned upon in psychotherapy. He is apprehensive for a reason: some of his colleagues at Broadmoor, his previous clinic, had warned Theo that clinical director Diomedes is an unconventional man, and that working at the Grove could be "career suicide." Theo has not told anyone about his desire to work with Alicia, as he does not think anyone will understand.

The Grove occupies an ugly, red, Victorian building in the middle of a hospital complex. When Theo arrives, he is greeted by Yuri, a tall nurse from Latvia. He also meets Stephanie Clarke, the manager of the Grove. Stephanie emphasizes safety above all else; Yuri explains that since she joined the Grove a few months ago, the clinic's security measures have intensified greatly.

*Ruth is the single most important, positive influence in Theo's life, and this essential moment forms the basis of his own therapeutic practice. Ruth felt Theo's feelings "for him," allowing him to recognize emotions he was not yet ready to embrace. Later, he will do that for his own patients, holding all their "unacceptable feelings" as his own. But unlike Ruth, Theo does not always know how to let go of his patients' feelings—the final, most essential part of the therapeutic process.*



*In several ways, this passage shows that the line between patient and therapist is not always as defined as it would seem. Theo became a healer because he needed to be healed; even after being trained and certified, he still feels that he has his "own madness" to contend with.*



*Yet while Theo is forthcoming with readers about his sense of closeness to his patients, he does not reveal any of that to his future colleagues. Already, then, there is a slight sense that Theo might not be straightforward or honest as he presents himself to be.*



*Theo's less-than-truthful approach is particularly evident in his desire to hide his cigarettes: rather than owning up to the fact that he, too, is imperfect, he works to conceal that from his co-workers. The other important thing to note here is the appearance of snow—Theo associates snow with happiness, and there is a sense of promise in the fact that the sky is "heavy" with it. But the snow is not coming, suggesting that his happiness will have to wait.*



*In addition to setting up some tension between Stephanie and the rest of the staff at the Grove, this focus on security is another kind of foreshadowing: there are dangerous patients within these walls, ones who could pose real safety risks.*





Theo goes through a series of metal detectors, and Yuri reminds him that no sharp objects or lighters are allowed. As soon as he is in the hospital, Theo asks to be taken to Community, the daily meeting in which all of the Grove's patients gather to check in. Yuri is surprised by Theo's enthusiasm, but he leads him to the meeting, past dilapidated walls and the smell of mildew.

*Talk therapy is a giant part of life at the Grove, and Community—a group meeting that really just functions as a place for patients to air out whatever is on their minds—is a prime example. Even more than Theo, Diomedes believes that therapy is called the “talking cure” for a reason; to these therapists, silence is the single most challenging obstacle to healing.*



## PART 1, CHAPTER 5

In Community, all the patients, about 30 in total, are drinking tea or coffee. Diomedes holds this meeting as “an attempt to involve the patients in their own treatment,” though Theo notes that Diomedes likes group therapy in part because he is “happiest with an audience.” Theo quickly assesses that Diomedes is handsome, youthful for someone in his 60s, and very devoted to his work.

*Even though Alicia is widely thought to have committed the horrible murder, no person is completely safe from suspicion; she could have had an accomplice, or someone could have framed her for the crime. To that end, it is important to pay attention to each new character's quirks: Diomedes likes “an audience,” suggesting there is something performative or self-involved about his behavior.*



Theo recognizes the other therapists. There is Indira, who interviewed him, and Christian, a former colleague from Broadmoor. Theo and Christian have never gotten along. Theo searches the crowd for Alicia, but he does not see her...until he realizes that she is directly in front of him, making herself “invisible.”

*Christian is another character to treat with suspicion: why did he and Theo spar at a previous job? But more importantly, why is Theo—who ostensibly should be focused on all of the patients at his new job—so single-mindedly concentrated on Alicia?*



Alicia is in terrible shape. She was once beautiful, but now her hair is matted and unclear; she is highly drugged on risperidone, which causes saliva to constantly drip from her mouth. Before Theo can take in more details, Diomedes pushes him to introduce himself.

*Later, several of the therapists will describe Alicia as “seductive,” so her beauty—or lack of it—is a key detail. Risperidone is an antipsychotic drug that aims to treat bipolar and schizophrenia.*



Suddenly, a Turkish woman named Elif charges into the room, throwing what looks like spears into the center of the circle. Theo realizes that Elif is actually throwing pool cues; she is mad that the cues are broken and have yet to be repaired. Diomedes asks Theo to lead the session, and Theo encourages Elif to come to Community on time. Across the circle, Christian jokes that Theo himself was late.

*Theo demonstrates his skill as a therapist here: even in the face of Elif's sudden violence, he is able to remain calm, pushing her to talk. Despite Theo's professionalism, however, Christian seems more interested in renewing their grudge, suggesting that the tension runs deep for both men.*



Theo and Indira are able to work together to shift the conversation, inviting Elif to discuss the difficulties of anger management. But Theo's mind is elsewhere. He can't stop thinking about how the once-dazzling Alicia has become a “broken shell.” Determined to take Alicia on as a patient, Theo reflects that, “Alicia was lost. She was missing. And I would stop at nothing to find her.”

*By ending the chapter with this determined message (“I would stop at nothing”), Theo again positions himself as a tragic hero: he feels that he is destined to help Alicia, and so he is destined for whatever the consequences of that help might be.*



## PART 1, CHAPTER 6

When Theo enters Diomedes's office, he is surprised to find that there are musical instruments of all kinds strewn about the space. Diomedes explains that music is his passion, and that he runs a kind of music therapy for both patients and students. Diomedes also tells Theo that he was the "deciding voice" at Theo's interview—he believes that Theo is very talented, and that he could one day take over the Grove.

At the same time, though, Diomedes is worried the Grove will be shut down, as it is anything but cost-effective. He confides in Theo that the Trust that funds the clinic is ready to close it, and he believes that Stephanie is "in league with them."

Theo changes the subject, asking Diomedes about Alicia's care since she has arrived at the Grove. Diomedes admits that he tried and failed to treat Alicia, eventually giving up when her silence persisted. Theo hints that he would like to treat her, and Diomedes warns that Alicia is a "silent siren," tempting therapists as a difficult case and then dashing all their hopes. Nevertheless, he encourages Theo to set up a meeting with Alicia, via Yuri.

*Theo's promise as a therapist, implied in the deft way he handled Elif, is now confirmed. This passage also elaborates on Diomedes's eccentricity: he is a jack-of-all-trades musician, and he is forthcoming about information that might be better kept private.*



*Like Yuri, Diomedes seems to distrust Stephanie's more practical approach to care. The Grove's impending shutdown reflects the financial reality of the British healthcare system post-2008, but it also raises the stakes of all of the therapists' work—if they don't get tangible results, they are likely to lose their jobs.*



*Theo might have a particular "resonance" with Alicia, but something about her silence—her illegibility—is tempting to all therapists. And when Diomedes (who is Greek, like author Michaelides) describes Alicia as a "siren," he is further linking the patients at the Grove to the characters in ancient Greek mythology.*



## PART 1, CHAPTER 7

Theo nervously waits in the sparse therapy room for Alicia to arrive. To pass the time, he looks out at the courtyard, where patients are forced to spend 30 minutes of outside time each day. From the window, Theo sees Yuri approach Alicia with Theo's request for a meeting. To Theo's surprise, Alicia follows Yuri up the stairs.

Once Alicia arrives, Theo asks Yuri to leave the room—which is against Grove protocol. Yuri is upset, but he agrees. Now one-on-one, Theo tells Alicia that he has known about her for a while, and that he is an admirer of her work. Alicia does not respond, and Theo tries to channel his old therapist Ruth.

*Theo's nervousness about the therapy session is perhaps unusual: though it makes sense that he would fret about doing a good job, his level of anxiety feels perhaps misplaced, given that it will be Alicia's emotions (and not his) on the table.*



*Theo's emphasis on getting Alicia alone not only puts him in physical danger (the exact kind that Stephanie wants to prevent), but it also hints that there is something secretive in their conversations, something he would rather not have his colleagues overhear.*



Theo feels that to help Alicia, he will have to help her make sense of the parts of her mind she has hidden from herself. He is determined to understand this patient even if she does not speak, through non-verbal clues. So though it makes him sad, Theo does what Ruth would have done: sit in silence.

*In this passage, the novel begins to create a critical link between the structure of Greek tragedy and the structure of therapy. In each case, the protagonist or patient is burdened with some past trauma or fatal flaw, one which they often do not know they possess (think, for example, of Oedipus marrying his mother). As the therapist, Theo sees it as his job to bring this secret out into the open—and thus to prevent tragedy.*



## PART 1, CHAPTER 8

Theo returns to his freezing cold office, where the broken radiator makes him sympathize with Elif's frustration over the pool cues. Reluctantly, he looks at Diomedes's case notes on Alicia. The notes reveal little, except that Alicia had tried to harm herself many times after she first arrived. Eventually, she stopped trying to hurt or kill herself and grew distant instead, isolating herself from the rest of the patients.

*Just as the facts of the murder—the time, the number of shots—left Theo with little clarity, he is frustrated by the nuts-and-bolts information in Diomedes's notes on Alicia.*



Only one moment sticks out to Theo in the files: soon after she was admitted, Alicia had violently attacked Elif, without clear motivation. Theo decides he will ask Elif about what really happened that day.

*For the most part, Alicia's violence seems directed against herself, as evidenced by the multiple suicide attempts. The only exceptions are her murder of Gabriel and her attack on Elif—so what kind of provocation makes Alicia turn her anger outwards instead of inwards?*



As he prepares to dive deeper, Theo takes out a notepad and organizes his thoughts. He knows that the **Alcestis** painting will be a crucial clue. But he also writes down the word "childhood." Theo is convinced that Alicia's murderous rage towards her husband has roots in her youth; such rage, he believes, "originates in the land before memory [...] with abuse and mistreatment, which builds up a charge over the years, until it explodes—often at the wrong target."

*The **Alcestis** reflects both Alicia's silence and her sense of betrayal. But if the painting is Alicia's attempt to identify her own feelings, Theo believes that she might be confused about where her pain comes from. In other words, rather than drawing a straight line between childhood trauma and adult behavior, Theo aims to untangle what can often be a messier connection.*



To understand Alicia's childhood, Theo wants to talk to the people close to her. Her nearest relative is an aunt named Lydia Rose; Alicia's mother Eva had died in a car crash while Alicia had been in the car. The only other contact in her file is Max Berenson, Gabriel's brother and Alicia's lawyer. Theo decides to call his office.

*Already, the death of Alicia's mother at such a young age suggests one possible cause of Alicia's adult struggles (both because Alicia might have inherited her mother's suicidal tendencies and because she might be traumatized by her mother's death).*



In retrospect, Theo understands that trying to contact all these people was already crossing a professional boundary. “But even then it was too late to stop,” he admits. “My fate was already decided—like in a Greek tragedy.” The receptionist at Gabriel’s brother’s office answers and informs Theo that Max will be away all week. Theo then tries Lydia Rose, but as soon as she learns who he is, she tells him to “fuck off” and hangs up the phone.

*Both Max and Lydia’s responses reveal that Alicia is a polarizing figure: though she may be a gifted artist, she has complex relationships with even her closest family members. More vital, though, is Theo’s outright comparison to Greek tragedy. Like many Greek heroes, he feels that he has no real choice about any of his actions—and like many Greek plays, *The Silent Patient* is structured so that audiences feel as if they cannot prevent impending doom.*



## PART 1, CHAPTER 9

After work, Yuri offers to take Theo out for a pint; Theo is hesitant to go, but he decides it will be useful to ask Yuri about Alicia. Yuri boasts that he has a better relationship with Alicia than anyone in the hospital, even Diomedes.

*In addition to flagging, once again, Theo’s obsessiveness about Alicia, this exchange reveals that Yuri feels similarly connected to (or possessive of) her.*



Yuri asks Theo if he is married, and Theo explains that he is. Yuri recounts his own failed marriage: he had a Latvian wife, but soon after they moved to England, he fell in love with another woman in the neighborhood. Yuri used to stand outside the woman’s door and watch her, captivated by her beauty. Eventually, Yuri’s feelings of love for this other woman were so strong—despite being unreciprocated—that he left his wife.

*Thus far, the novel has focused mostly on parental betrayal. But here, Yuri’s confused feelings lead him to betray his wife; though he knows it is wrong (and to some degree pointless), he cannot stop fixating on another woman. Note the motif of a man watching through a window—it will become important later.*



Yuri feels that Alicia will similarly need to “face the truth” about her marriage if she is going to talk. He asks Theo about his own wife, and Theo replies that her name is Kathy. Yuri advises Theo to “go home to your wife. Go home to Kathy, who loves you...and leave Alicia behind.”

*Why has Theo not previously revealed that he has a wife? Is he concealing something from readers, or is he already so consumed by his work that he doesn’t think to mention her? And why does Yuri feel the need to compare Kathy and Alicia, as if both women are equally competing for Theo’s attention and attraction?*



## PART 1, CHAPTER 10

Theo goes to meet Kathy at a café with her friends; all of them, Kathy included, are actresses. When Theo shows up, Kathy is telling the story of how they met: both of them were seeing other people at the time, and their respective partners had organized a double date. Despite this obstacle, however, Kathy confesses that she and Theo fell in “love at first sight.” Theo privately remembers how much lust he felt for Kathy that first night.

*Structurally, there is something interesting about the way Kathy is introduced: as soon as Yuri mentions her, Theo goes to meet her, almost as if she has been willed into presence by Yuri’s comment. Also, the first two things readers learn about Kathy suggest that she is not always honest: she is an actress by trade, and she is unfaithful in her personal life.*



Theo's girlfriend at the time had gone home, upset that Theo was unwilling to join her; Kathy and her boyfriend had had a fight, and he had left in a huff. Soon enough, Theo and Kathy were drinking and flirting. Kathy kept calling herself crazy, but Theo feels that she is "the least crazy person [he has] ever known." He is consistently impressed by her confidence and vitality.

That night, Kathy and Theo made love for hours on end. Kathy scoffed that she had already forgotten the man she'd come to the bar with. The next morning, Theo called his then-girlfriend to end things—though it was a brutal call, he felt it was "the only honest action to take."

On their first date, Kathy had brought Theo to the sweltering, tropical greenhouses at Kew Gardens. In the warm light, Theo felt as if he was waking up for the first time: Kathy "was my invitation to life," he sighs. Kathy made Theo feel brave and virile; they had sex all the time, but he also felt that this was his first true experience of love.

That December, Kathy moved in with Theo, and soon after he proposed marriage to her. After Kathy said yes, Theo brought her to Surrey, to meet his parents for the first time. His father was cold and hostile, insulting Theo and disappearing for large swaths of time; his mother was depressed and unsteady on her feet. Theo was dismayed, but as they left, Kathy hugged him and whispered, "I understand it all. I love you so much more now."

The pair got married in April, without Theo's parents. At the altar, Theo privately thanked God for bringing Kathy into his life—here was his chance to feel the love he had never felt from his parents. In the present, he reflects on the difference between Kathy ("light, warmth, color, and laughter") and Alicia ("depth," "darkness," "sadness," "silence").

## PART 2, CHAPTER 1

The Part 2 epigraph is another quote from Sigmund Freud: "unexpressed emotions will never die. They are buried alive, and will come forth later, in uglier ways." Like Part 1, Part 2 also begins with an excerpt from Alicia's diary, written about a month before the murder happened.

*Unlike Alicia, with whom Theo feels intense similarity, Kathy is attractive because she is everything Theo is not. And while Alicia is known for her silence, it is clear even in these first moments that Kathy is endlessly chatty, filling her life and Theo's with sound.*



*As he has done several times already, Theo reminds readers that he prioritizes "honest[y]" above almost everything else; rather than betray his then-girlfriend, he comes clean to her, telling her the painful truth that he has fallen for someone else.*



*Whereas Theo's childhood made him seek out death, Kathy seems to break him out of his personal history, as he craves "life" for the first time. Moreover, Kathy's association with warmth—both metaphorical and literal—presents a completely opposite kind of happiness than the snowy childhood memory Theo cherishes.*



*Actors, like psychotherapists, are deeply concerned with understanding why humans behave in certain ways. Kathy's claim that she "understand[s] it all" thus suggests that despite their differences, she and Theo have one big thing in common: a belief that childhood experiences are essential to understanding grown-up people.*



*Now, the implicit distinction between Alicia and Kathy is made explicit. But again, why does Theo associate these two women in his mind—and why does the book begin not with his wife, who should be the central woman in his life, but with his patient?*



*Though much of Freud's theory has since been discredited or debated, Theo certainly shares the psychoanalyst's belief that everything "buried" will "come forth later," often in more harmful or violent ways.*





Alicia complains of the heat (“each day is hotter than the last”) and wishes for rain. The hot summer also makes her think about the summer her mother Eva Rose died. She recalls her mother as “flimsy and delicate,” always dressed in colorful clothing and dancing and smelling of vodka. It strikes Alicia that she is now older than her mother ever was.

On her way to the park, Alicia sees a small bird that has fallen. The bird is motionless, and she turns it over to examine it. She is horrified to discover that the underside of the bird is covered in maggots.

In the next entry, Alicia describes her habit of going to a nearby café to sit and sketch or take notes. Their home does not have air-conditioning, but the café does. Alicia is struggling in the heat, so she buys an electric fan for the house. Alicia appreciates the cool air, but even with the help of the fan, she feels it is too hot to work—and she begins falling behind in her painting.

Alicia has been working on a picture of Jesus on the cross, but she realizes that inadvertently, she has painted Jesus as Gabriel: “it’s *his* face, [...] *his* body.” Alicia explains that she never knows what she is painting going into it, and though the unknown scares her, she also feels she must “surrender” to it. She decides to ask Gabriel if he will sit for the painting so she can more accurately capture him.

The following day—in a new entry—Alicia recounts visiting Camden Market, where she has not been in years. Gabriel complains that the place has become a “sanitized tourist trap,” but Alicia thinks the change is more in Gabriel’s mind than in reality. She is overwhelmed by a wave of sudden desire for her husband: when they have sex, she craves something that’s “bigger than me, bigger than us, beyond words—something holy.”

Alicia sees a homeless man who is sick and cursing. She pictures him as a baby and thinks of his mother: “did she ever imagine her baby would end up crazy, dirty and stinking?” Alicia’s mind then drifts to her own mother, who killed herself by driving into a brick wall while Alicia was in the passenger seat. Sometimes, though, Alicia feels that she was the intended victim of her mother Eva’s car crash—that it was more murder than suicide.

*The loss of Eva is constantly on Alicia’s mind; there is even a sense that she might feel guilty about outliving her mother (which perhaps helps to explain her own suicide attempts later). There is also a similarity between Alicia’s “delicate” mother and Theo’s wobbly one.*



*Symbolically, this bird is a reminder that appearances are not always indicative: what seems lovely and alive might actually be death-ridden and horrific.*



*Alex Michaelides, the novel’s author, has explained that he often uses weather to signify something about his characters’ mental states—so here, the heat shows how Alicia is overwhelmed and exhausted. In another interesting parallel, Alicia is determined to get cool, just as Theo was determined to catch snowflakes (as a child).*



*Theo has already admitted to a certain degree of obsession with Alicia, but now, Alicia’s own obsessiveness comes to the fore. Her desire to paint her way through these intense feelings also shows that she uses her artwork as a method of communication and clarity—as a method of therapy, one could say.*



*As will become increasingly apparent, Alicia often finds that her feelings for Gabriel are “bigger than words.” Gabriel’s reflections on Camden Market affirm just how much reality is created by the mind—even for people who do not suffer from mental illness.*



*This critical passage shows Alicia grappling with the question of how innocent children become troubled, struggling adults. Though she does not state it outright, she hints at the fact that parenting—in this case, specifically motherhood—can damage a baby as much as it can help it. There is also a link to the [Alcestis](#) painting here: just as Admetus sacrifices his wife, Eva might have been trying to sacrifice her daughter.*



Alicia begins to cry: “there’s so much pain everywhere, and we just close our eyes to it.” She wonders if she will follow Eva’s path to insanity. But she cuts herself off before she can finish the thought.

Two days later, in another entry, Alicia and Gabriel have settled on a date night. Gabriel is romantic at heart, but he tries to cover it up by being unsentimental. He suggests that they go to their favorite nearby Italian restaurant, Augusto’s. After dinner, Alicia and Gabriel have sex, and she asks if he will sit for her Jesus painting.

Gabriel is reluctant—he fears that others will think it is a comment on their marriage—but he eventually agrees. Alicia reflects that in many ways, Gabriel saved her from herself: he encouraged her to keep painting when she wanted to quit, and he helped her quit her druggie circle of friends. Alicia vows that their marriage is “until death do us part.”

The next day, Alicia writes one more entry, focusing on her time painting Gabriel. She is struggling with the painting: she cannot catch the sparkle in Gabriel’s eyes, the very thing that attracted her to him in the first place. Eventually, they take a break and have sex, but Alicia still finds herself haunted by the “lifeless eyes” in the painting.

## PART 2, CHAPTER 2

Theo goes to Diomedes’s office and requests that Alicia’s medication (16 milligrams of risperidone) be reduced. Diomedes explains that Christian is the head of Alicia’s care team, so Theo should talk to him, but Theo wants Diomedes to make the call. Diomedes picks up on the hostility between Theo and Christian and wonders what their relationship at Broadmoor was like.

Diomedes warns that taking Alicia off her medicine could make her suicidal again, but Theo is persistent. As the meeting winds down, Diomedes offers Theo a **cigar**, to Theo’s surprise. “I think we’re all a bit crazy in this place,” Diomedes says, chuckling and smoking.

*Whereas Ruth and Theo intentionally work to empathize, Alicia feels a lack of empathy—as if everyone around her closes their eyes to other people’s pain.*



*For the first time, readers get a sense of Alicia and Gabriel’s relationship, which seems peaceful. But can Alicia be trusted? Is Gabriel really a romantic at heart, or does she just see him that way because she idolizes him so much?*



*Gabriel’s hesitancy seems to come in part because Alicia actually does view him as a kind of Jesus figure, putting him on an impossible pedestal. Alicia’s mention of “death” here also foreshadows the death that, from the very first pages, readers know is bound to happen.*



*If Theo is desperate to unlock his patients’ minds, Alicia seems to have a similar desire as a painter—she wants to accurately capture Gabriel, which means understanding him in a way she might not actually be capable of. The word “lifeless,” like the mention of “death,” is meant to raise the stakes, a reminder of the murderous place this marriage ends up.*



*Having been treated by Ruth, Theo is firmly of the mind that therapy should be a “talking cure.” But Christian, responsible for Alicia’s high doses of medication, seems to believe that a silent, tranquilized patient is best. Perhaps this difference is at the root of the past tension between the two men, which has still never been fully explained.*



*While Theo worked to hide his use of cigarettes, Diomedes is more comfortable admitting that the doctor-patient boundary is not always so firm. Instead, he acknowledges that everyone is a “bit crazy”: the important thing, he seems to suggest, is to own up to one’s one imperfections.*



## PART 2, CHAPTER 3

A few hours later, Theo runs into Indira in the halls; she jokes that the place is like a maze, and brings him to the “goldfish bowl,” the glass station where all the nurses work. As Indira makes a cup of tea, Theo notes that the “goldfish bowl” is the hub of the entire hospital. Indira also gives Theo a slice of walnut cake and encourages him to share it with his patients, putting them in a better mood.

Christian walks into the “goldfish bowl,” and he and Theo share a tense exchange; Christian predicts that the Grove is about to be shut down. Theo has heard that Christian got married and had a baby, and he wonders what kind of father this serious, irritating man is.

Elif comes into the station and begins hammering on the glass, asking to have her medication reduced. Christian tells her they will talk about it at another time. After Elif leaves, Christian informs Theo that Elif committed double murder, suffocating her mother and sister in their sleep.

Christian then angrily accuses Theo of going behind his back to change Alicia’s medication, insisting that Alicia is “borderline” and needs to be on a high dose. Indira pushes back, saying such general terms are not helpful. Indira expresses her gratitude that Theo is now taking care of Alicia, while Christian is skeptical that therapeutic progress can happen if the patient won’t talk.

## PART 2, CHAPTER 4

At Theo’s next therapy session with Alicia, she is already clearer, having started to take less of her medication. He wants to talk, but he is determined to remain silent and build trust. A few minutes in, Theo develops a headache, and he realizes that he has begun to take on Alicia’s pain. He recalls Ruth’s words: “you must be receptive to your patients’ feelings—but you must not hold onto them—they are not yours.”

*Unlike Christian, Indira views therapy as a fundamentally social practice—her use of walnut cake to cheer her patients up suggests that her sessions are cozy and friendly.*



*By thinking about Christian’s child, Theo (probably inadvertently) calls attention to the fact that he does not have a child of his own. In a line of work so fascinated by childhood, what does it mean to raise a kid—and what does it mean to remain childless?*



*This exchange between Christian and Elif affirms several of the main dynamics at the Grove. First, Christian is often the primary medicator, preferring biology over sociology. And second, Stephanie is right to care about security: lots of these patients are very high risk.*



*Whereas Theo emphasizes personal narrative as the key to his patients’ psyches, Christian believes in broader diagnoses like “borderline.” And though Indira has Theo’s back, Christian makes a good point: how do you practice the “talking cure” on somebody who refuses to speak?*



*First, Alicia’s improvement implies that Theo’s talking-based method is more useful than Christian’s medication-based one. Second, and more importantly, Ruth’s advice here proves a template for the entire novel. She urges Theo to empathize with his patients—but she also reminds him to draw a boundary between where his patients end and he begins. It is Theo’s failure to listen to this advice in its totality that will, like a great Greek hero, ultimately doom him.*



After 50 minutes, Theo's time with Alicia is up. He tries once more to get Alicia to speak: "I want to help you see clearly." But she says nothing, though Theo believes her eyes communicate that she thinks he is a liar and a fraud. Just as Theo realizes how clear-headed Alicia's gaze is, she pounces on him with "monstrous" vigor, trying to strangle him. Theo presses his attack alarm, and four nurses (including Yuri) come to hold Alicia down.

*Something about these seven words ("I want to help you see clearly") is what sets Alicia off, communicating in the only way she is able to—through violent attack. But what about these words makes Alicia feel that Theo is a fraud? Does something suggest that he wants to harm her instead of help?*



## PART 2, CHAPTER 5

As Yuri tends to Theo's wounds, he warns him that Diomedes will not be pleased. Theo surveys the damage—scratches and black bruises around his neck, where Alicia had tried to strangle him—and then he heads into Diomedes's office. Indira, Christian, and Stephanie are also there. Stephanie is angry that Theo was alone with Alicia, against hospital protocol.

*Though the Grove is ostensibly designed to help its patients, Diomedes also has ulterior motives—particularly when it comes to ensuring that the facility is impressive enough to retain its funding.*



Theo believes that Alicia's attack was an attempt at communicating, but Christian dismisses this, arguing that she was merely "off her meds and out of her mind." Theo notes that Christian is a psychiatrist, meaning he emphasizes medicinal, biological cures over talk therapy.

*Earlier in the novel, Theo has explained that what makes him a therapist is "the training." Now, the difference between his talk-based training and Christian's prescription-based training comes to the fore.*



Stephanie wants Theo to stop therapy, but Indira, Diomedes, and Theo all believe that Alicia's attack is actually a sign of progress. Over Stephanie's protests, Diomedes pulls rank, giving Theo six weeks to continue trying to help Alicia. Christian tells Theo that he's just wasting his time, but Christian's disdain only increases Theo's determination.

*The battle lines are drawn: Diomedes, Theo, Indira, and Yuri favor a complex path towards wellness, whereas Stephanie and Christian favor a more scientific approach. On a structural level, the limited timeline heightens the stakes for Theo's treatment, causing him to push more than he might otherwise.*



## PART 2, CHAPTER 6

Theo gets home and turns on the light. It takes him a second to adjust to the new furniture: "new colors, reds and yellows where once there had been black and white." Kathy is not home, which is evident because the apartment is so quiet (Kathy is always watching TV or talking on the phone or running lines). Theo surmises that she is probably at rehearsal for a production of *Othello*; the show has been time-consuming, and recently she's been coming home later and later.

*While Alicia is the titular "silent patient," Kathy is a swirl of volume. In addition to Kathy's strange absence, the fact that she is performing *Othello*—Shakespeare's famous drama about betrayal—suggests that some sort of deception might be at play.*



Theo uses Kathy's absence to smoke marijuana, a habit he first developed in college. Ruth had never discouraged this habit, noting that it was a kind of containment for Theo. Containment is what a mother does for a baby: while the baby cries and panics, unsure of the new world they have entered, the mother holds them and shows them how to be calm. If marijuana made Theo feel that same sense of safety, Ruth felt he should continue smoking it until he no longer needed to.

At first, when Theo met Kathy, his love for her replaced the drug. But at a party for one of Kathy's friends, Theo had been offered (and accepted) a joint. Though he never confessed it to Kathy, Theo began smoking regularly again, especially after she took a week-long trip to New York City.

Alone in his apartment, Theo rolls a joint and smokes it quickly. He gets very high, and while reaching for the TV remote, he accidentally knocks over Kathy's laptop. There, on the screen, Theo sees a series of emails between Kathy and someone with the screen name BADBOY22. The emails reveal that Kathy has been having an affair. Some of the emails are intensely sexual, whereas others are more emotional. Theo reads until he feels sober—and then he runs to the bathroom to throw up.

## PART 2, CHAPTER 7

In his next therapy session with Alicia, Theo assures her that despite her attack, he is “not easily intimidated.” Alicia still says nothing, and Theo wonders if he's made a mistake. So he tries a different tactic, defining himself as a “relational therapist.” He explains that just by sitting with Alicia, he is showing her “a great deal” about himself, from the color of his socks to his mannerisms.

Theo points to his wedding ring, telling Alicia that he has been married for nine years to Kathy. He admits that though he loves Kathy dearly, he also sometimes hates her. Theo pushes Alicia to admit that a part of her hated Gabriel, but she vehemently shakes her head no. Instead, she pounds on the door until Yuri lets her out of the therapy room. Theo stewes, realizing that Alicia's silence is “like a mirror—reflecting yourself back at you. And it was often an ugly sight.”

*Whereas Theo mostly dwells on the ways parents can harm their children, “containment” is a means by which parents can set their babies up for success and self-regulation. In the absence of such parental help, Ruth encourages Theo to find alternative methods of “containing” himself—even if those methods involve a drug like marijuana.*



*Symbolically, Theo's smoking of joints links to his smoking of cigarettes; both are habits that he tries to conceal, and both hint that Theo is less honest than he seems. Also, Theo's return to the drug might suggest that his marriage with Kathy is not as happy or satisfying (on his end, at least) as it once was.*



*Kathy has been cheating on Theo—and while that shocks Theo, it is also consistent with the brief characterization readers have received (as in, she met Theo while cheating on her previous boyfriend). Interestingly, the psychological impact of Kathy's email has physiological effects, as Theo has to literally run to vomit.*



*Theo now consciously begins to break down the barrier between therapist and patient, suggesting to Alicia that they have more in common—and are in more similar circumstances—than she might realize. His claim to reveal himself further bolsters his self-presentation as an honest, open book of a man.*



*For the most part, Theo has kept his work separate from his marriage. But now, the impact of Kathy's betrayal makes its way into the therapy room, as he starts to view Alicia's situation as a parallel for his own anger and “hate.” Even though she is silent, then, Alicia's ability to be a “mirror” is a form of communication, causing Theo to see his own life in new ways.*





## PART 2, CHAPTER 8

For the next couple days, Theo avoids Kathy; he is “in shock” from the betrayal, a shock he tries to deal with by smoking more. While high, he shatters a wine glass, cutting himself badly. The only thing he can think to do to feel better is call Kathy, but that no longer feels like an option. In a moment of panic, all Theo’s old self-loathing comes rushing back: he tells himself that he is ugly, “worthless,” and unlovable.

Obsessively, Theo begins going over his relationship with Kathy, recalling both strange fights and unexplained absences, but also affectionate moments between the two of them. He thinks about his dislike for her friends, but also knows that “nothing could have prevented our union: from the moment I saw Kathy, my fate was written.”

As Theo wonders whether or not he should confront Kathy, he realizes that he has inadvertently walked to Ruth’s house. Despite the late hour, she opens the door, taking in Theo’s distress and his bandaged finger. Concerned, Ruth invites him inside.

## PART 2, CHAPTER 9

Once inside, Theo asks Ruth for a drink, and she pours him a glass of sherry. Theo wonders if it is inappropriate for Ruth to drink with an old patient, but she softly tells him that now he is “just a friend.” Theo tells Ruth everything that has happened. She offers him tissues, but he finds himself unable to cry.

Theo had been seeing Ruth when he met Kathy; Ruth had urged him to choose a partner who would always be honest and direct with him. Before Theo and Kathy had gotten married, they’d made a pact never to lie to each other. When Ruth wonders what went wrong, Theo says that he feels like Kathy was bored—she was missing “fireworks” in their relationship.

Ruth counters that such passion is not actually a sign of love; “real love,” she argues, “is very quiet, very still.” Ruth feels that Theo has been a loving partner to Kathy, even if Kathy does not always see his patience and reliability as love. But Ruth feels that Kathy is probably a deeply selfish person, incapable of returning the love that Theo gives her.

*Though Kathy is in every way temperamentally different from Theo’s father, the lasting trauma of his childhood—in which he felt unloved—inflects his current romantic relationship. And again, psychic pain has physical consequences, as Theo is now literally bleeding from his emotional hurt.*



*Theo now wonders what parts of his relationship with Kathy are tied up in her lies. But it doesn’t matter—like famous heroes Oedipus or Antigone or Alcestis herself, Theo feels that his tragic “fate” has been “written” for him, and he is only a passive player in his own destiny.*



*Again, Theo paints himself as lacking agency: instead of deciding to walk to Ruth’s door, he believes that he has been brought there by some fate, a power outside of himself.*



*Ruth might be blurring boundaries here—drinking with Theo, referring to him as a “friend”—but in this case, such an overstep seems like the healthiest thing to do. Once again, Ruth is allowing Theo a way to feel the feelings, shed the tears, he cannot yet handle.*



*As the voice of wisdom in the novel, Ruth’s insistence on honesty is critical: in both personal and professional relationships, she argues that being direct is the key to security and peace. But nearly no one in the story is honest with anyone else, which means Ruth’s advice carries a measure of tragic irony; more than the characters, the readers understand just how far off Ruth’s words are from reality.*



*When Theo thinks about his childhood, he is easily able to recognize that part of his pain comes from his family’s inability to be consistent with him. In his romantic relationship, however, Theo buys into Kathy’s more dramatic, perhaps more toxic, view of love.*



Though Theo does not want to admit it, Ruth also sees Kathy as part of a larger pattern: like his parents, Kathy is emotionally unavailable. Against his will, Theo comes to see that Ruth is right—by marrying Kathy, Theo was trying to prove to himself that he really is unlovable, just as his father always said.

In no uncertain terms, Ruth tells Theo that he needs to break the pattern and leave Kathy. Ruth shows Theo to the door, and she hugs him on the way out. Theo is overcome with emotion, but he does not cry. On the bus ride home, he pictures Kathy and feels himself drawn to her beautiful skin and eyes. But he is resolved: “I had to go home and confront Kathy,” he vows. “I had to leave her.”

## PART 2, CHAPTER 10

When Theo gets home, Kathy is sitting on the couch, texting. Theo tries to find the words to confront her, but he struggles and goes “mute.” Instead, Kathy confronts him, telling him she has discovered his weed and expressing that she feels like she doesn’t know him at all. Theo is overcome with a desire to hurt Kathy, but instead he suggests they go to bed. Once Kathy is asleep, Theo begins to cry, acknowledging that his wife is now a stranger to him.

The next morning, Kathy goes to work, and Theo takes a scalding hot shower. In the shower, he decides to defy Ruth’s advice: rather than leaving Kathy, he will try and forget that he ever learned of the affair. “I wasn’t condemned to repeat the past,” Theo assures himself. “I could change the future.”

## PART 2, CHAPTER 11

With Yuri’s help, Theo seeks out Elif, intending to ask her about what happened with Alicia. Up close, Elif is even scarier than Theo thought: she is a big presence, and her eyes show a lot of mental disturbance. Elif hears voices, and Theo asks what the voices are saying to her. According to Elif, the voices are warning her that Theo “ain’t safe [...] watch out.”

*This exchange is another place where therapy and Greek tragedy overlap: many therapists, like ancient dramatists, rely on the idea of a harmful pattern that repeats itself for years. And in both cases, people are victims of these patterns just as much as they are free, self-determining agents.*



*Because Ruth has shown herself to be so knowing, her sternness here is an important structural inflection point (one that might be familiar to readers of Greek tragedy): if Theo takes her advice, he will avoid doom. But if he fails to do so, he will almost certainly meet his own destruction.*



*The use of the word “mute” is particularly telling here—in a moment of violent rage, Theo, like Alicia, finds that he can only resort to silence. And unfortunately, he cannot follow through on Ruth’s advice if he cannot even find the language to end things with Kathy.*



*One of the defining traits of Greek tragedy is hubris: the protagonist believes that he is able to change his destiny or overcome the impossible, and so he acts against the advice of those who love him best. Here, readers should understand that Theo is acting with hubris—and that in believing, wrongly, that he is capable of “chang[ing] the future,” he catalyzes his own doom.*



*In their first real meeting, Theo and Elif have mirror-image reactions to each other; each feels the other is unsafe. Elif’s instinctive distrust of Theo is an important sign that he might not be as reliable a narrator (or therapist) as he claims.*



Theo suggests that he and Elif can play pool together, sharing a single cue, but she ferociously tells him to leave her cue alone. He then broaches the subject of Alicia, asking Elif to explain what caused the fight. Elif reveals that just before Alicia attacked her, she had asked Alicia if Gabriel “deserved it.” Theo shudders, surmising that Elif seeks to repulse people because her mother had made her feel repulsive as a young child.

*As he does for himself and Alicia, Theo sees in Elif how childhood pain can be refracted and twisted into damaging adult behavior. Rather than seeking the love she never found from her mother, Elif works to make other people feel the same hurt she felt as a young girl.*



To Theo’s surprise, he gets a call from Max Berenson, who asks if something is wrong with Alicia. Theo asks if he can talk to Max in person, and Max reluctantly agrees that Theo can come over to his office at 7 o’clock the next day.

*Even though Alicia has very complicated relationships with the people from her life before the Grove, Max’s concern shows that he does really care about his sister-in-law, no matter what crimes she has committed.*



## PART 2, CHAPTER 12

Both Max Berenson and his receptionist have a cold. Max is initially hesitant to see Theo, fearing that he might be a journalist; Theo assures him he is not. As Max talks, Theo notes his office (wooden, traditional), and his appearance. Whereas Gabriel was handsome, Max is balding and unattractive. Max sees Theo looking at a picture of Gabriel on his desk, and he explains that while Gabriel was their parents’ biological child, Max was adopted.

*Max is not a therapist, but he still is quick to link his differences with Gabriel to a childhood circumstance: namely that he was adopted (a fact he seems insecure about), while Gabriel was not.*



Max tells Theo that he and Gabriel were close, but Gabriel “took center stage,” while Max was “overshadowed by him.” Theo tries to turn the topic of conversation to Alicia, but Max grows cold. Max gives rote answers to Theo’s questions, asserting that when he went to dinner with Gabriel and Alicia the night before the murder, the couple seemed completely normal. Max also advises Theo to talk to Jean-Felix, Alicia’s gallerist.

*Max’s initial presentation of himself—of a loving brother, so completely devoted to Gabriel that he would defend his murderous wife—is at odds with the resentment that he expresses here. It is also worth noting that now, for the first time, someone other than Alicia comments on Gabriel’s many charms, affirming that Gabriel really was as magnetic as his wife believed.*



After robotically insisting that he likes Alicia, Max confesses the truth: “I hated her...I loathed her.” He believes that Alicia robbed Gabriel of all his kindness and passion. Theo senses that Max is in real pain, and he wonders aloud how Max was able to defend Alicia in court given his feelings about her. Max explains that “it’s what Gabriel would have wanted.”

*On the one hand, Max’s words make sense; of course, he would hate the woman who killed his brother. But in keeping with the thriller form of the novel, it is always possible that someone else could be implicated in Alicia’s crimes. Was Max really on Alicia’s side as her lawyer, or was he trying to frame her...or cover up something himself?*



Finally, Max tells Theo that Alicia would often have violent mood swings, breaking things and threatening to kill Gabriel. As the meeting comes to a close, Max also tells Theo that Alicia tried to kill herself after her father died—several years before the murder. Max shoos Theo away, explaining that he and Tanya—the receptionist—have recently gotten married. They have theater tickets for later that night.

On his way out, Tanya stops Theo and quietly whispers that he should talk to Paul Rose, Alicia’s cousin. “Ask him about Alicia and the night after the accident,” Tanya says. But before she can finish her sentence, she is interrupted by Max. Theo notes that Tanya is afraid of Max, and he wonders why that is.

*Alicia’s suicidal tendencies are not new—but why is there no record of that past attempt in the notes Diomedes has given Theo? On a formal level, Max’s reveal that he is married to Tanya shows that Michaelides is teaching his readers to look for clues in the most seemingly mundane sentences; a “family cold,” mentioned offhand in the beginning of the chapter, then allows readers to predict Max’s revelation that he is married to Tanya.*



*Clearly, there is something Max does not want Theo to find out, fueling suspicion that he is not totally innocent or impartial. By ending the chapter in this way, the book foreshadows that Alicia’s friends and family are more sinister than they first appear.*



## PART 2, CHAPTER 13

In a July 22nd diary entry, Alicia fumes about the fact that Gabriel keeps a gun in their house. The night before, Alicia had gone for a walk and noticed two little boys playing; suddenly, tears were streaming down her face. Alicia wants to have a child, but she is scared that she is “not to be trusted” with children—“not with my mother’s blood running through my veins.”

After her walk, Alicia returned home already in a bad mood, and things only got worse once she noticed Gabriel cleaning his gun. Though he claims the gun has sentimental value (it belonged to his father), Alicia also sees the weapon as a testament to Gabriel’s “aggressive side.” Whenever she sees that part of him, Alicia begins to feel that “it’s like living with a stranger.” Gabriel and Alicia did not resolve their fight until the next morning, when they had sex and apologized to each other. Alicia allowed Gabriel to keep the gun.

The next day, Alicia is writing in her diary in the air-conditioned café. She expresses a strong desire to “disappear,” especially because Gabriel has arranged for the two of them to have dinner with Max, even though he knows Alicia can’t stand him. The cool café is about to close, and Alicia knows it is time for her to visit with Max—whom she dreads.

*If Theo believes that childhood trauma can impact adults’ social behavior, Alicia thinks in even more biological terms: her mother was a dangerous woman, and Alicia fears that such danger is literally in her “blood.” Theo, like Alicia, is similarly childless—could he, too, be afraid of what runs in his “veins”?*



*Alicia’s sense that Gabriel is a “stranger” parallels Theo’s sentiment about Kathy, which he has expressed only a few chapters earlier. The introduction of Gabriel’s gun, which is known to be the murder weapon, reflects a classic trope of tragic structure: as the famous Russian playwright Anton Chekhov would say, “if in the first act you have hung a pistol on the wall, then in the following one it should be fired.”*



*Once more, Alicia’s desire to seek out the cool hints at her troubled mental state—and links to Theo’s love of snow. And though she does not disappear in this moment, she will later successfully become “invisible” at the Grove.*



Alicia returns to the café the following day, July 24th, where she summarizes the night before in her diary. She recalls Max showing up to the house in shorts, sweating profusely and refusing to make eye contact. He made a big deal out of not having been invited to the house for a while, which annoyed both Alicia and Gabriel. After a while, Alicia retreated to the kitchen, but Max followed her to grab another beer.

Once they were alone, Alicia told Max that she was going to tell Gabriel about what Max did to her the last time they saw each other. Max claimed he was drunk and doesn't remember, but Alicia accused him of assaulting her, kissing and touching her against her will. At first Max denied it, but then he confessed his love for Alicia, forcibly kissing her again. When he rammed his tongue down her throat, Alicia panicked and bit down on it, drawing Max's blood.

Max warned Alicia not to say anything to Gabriel and returned to the dinner table. Max then spent the entire dinner staring at Alicia. Alicia could not eat anything for the remainder of the evening, as she kept feeling the taste of Max's blood. She reflects how different the two brothers are. After Max left, Gabriel complains that Alicia should have made more of an effort. She claimed that she was just distracted by the thought of all her unfinished work.

July 26th is Alicia's birthday: now, she is 33. This is a monumental age for Alicia because her mother Eva died at 32 ("I will grow older and older—but she won't"). In the morning, Gabriel presented Alicia with 33 red roses, pricking his fingers on one of the thorns: "a bloodred teardrop." After breakfast, the couple went to the park and had a picnic, lounging in the heat.

As Alicia lay there, she recalled a similar memory from her childhood, sunbathing under a willow tree in Cambridge—"it was as if the past and the present were coexisting simultaneously in one perfect moment." Alicia sketched Gabriel, and then they returned home. After having sex, Gabriel proposed having children, and Alicia joyously agreed. After he fell asleep, she snuck out to write down her feelings, trying her best to capture the happy moment.

*Max's inability to meet Alicia's eyes is a sure sign that he is hiding something. And his sweaty, awkward disposition could not be more different from Gabriel's easy, handsome appeal.*



*So Max does not "loathe" Alicia, as he claims—instead, he resents her for not returning his attraction. Symbolically, Alicia's decision to bite Max's tongue resurfaces the question of speech and silence. By wounding Max in this way, Alicia is temporarily denying him speech—the same thing she will later deny herself.*



*Max is the first person in the novel to tell Alicia to stay quiet—and for the first time, silence comes across not as an act of protest but as an act of secret-keeping. So is Alicia's silence now a result of her intense emotions, or is there something about the murder she does not want (or is afraid) to reveal?*



*Again, Alicia measures every step of her life in terms of her mother's. And just as the heat adds to Alicia's constant mental stress, her sense of having outlived her mother becomes another daily burden as soon as she turns 33, heightening her already potent feelings of distress.*



*The novel has frequently shown how childhood trauma can impact one's adulthood. But in this lovely moment, a peaceful "present" allows Alicia to access the happier, more "perfect" moments from her past. So just as harmful childhood experiences can create pain in adult life, happy adult experiences can help rewire some childhood memories (as Theo initially experienced with Kathy).*





## PART 2, CHAPTER 14

Theo is confused about why Alicia's earlier suicide attempt is nowhere in her files. He calls Max, who impatiently explains that Gabriel hired a private doctor for Alicia instead of bringing her to the hospital, hoping to keep the entire thing quiet. Theo also asks about Gabriel's will: was Alicia the main beneficiary? Max reveals that Gabriel actually left most of his estate to Max. Since Gabriel's death, his pictures have become astronomically more valuable.

After lunch, Diomedes calls Theo into his office. Max has called the Grove to complain about Theo's investigations, and Diomedes is frustrated that Theo is acting unprofessionally. This isn't a "detective story," Diomedes tells Theo; the point is to be present with Alicia, not to look for clues. Theo promises that he will not do any more investigative work.

*Max is becoming an increasingly suspicious character: whereas Alicia had no motive (financial or otherwise) to shoot her husband, Max has gotten rich off of Gabriel's death. Besides, with Gabriel out of the picture, Max could more easily gain access to Alicia, his illicit love.*



*Diomedes's advice is at odds with the form of the novel, which (according to author Michaelides) is "a psychological detective story." But while Diomedes feels that Theo should just focus on helping Alicia, giving her comfort the best he knows how, Theo is more interested in solving the mystery of her psyche.*



## PART 2, CHAPTER 15

That afternoon, Theo travels to Cambridge to visit Alicia's cousin Paul Rose. He arrives at an ugly Victorian house, sequestered by itself on a riverbank. Theo muses that Alicia's childhood home is a crucial key to her adult life: all of her future choices and experiences can be explained by what happened here. "No one is born evil," but very young people cannot take revenge, so when they are mistreated, they hold onto that anger, unleashing it at a later date. That suppressed rage, Theo believes, is why Alicia killed Gabriel.

Theo notices a large willow tree, and he pictures Alicia as a child, playing underneath the branches. All of a sudden, Theo is overcome with a sense of unease, as if he is being watched. He notices an old woman in the window, with a mean, ugly face. And then, before he understands what is happening, he feels himself be hit in the head from behind.

*At the end of the last chapter, Theo has promised that he will stop looking for clues; now, he arrives at Paul's house to do more searching. So just as any hubristic, tragic hero might, Theo is ignoring Diomedes's sound advice to continue down his fateful path. It is therefore only fitting that arriving at Alicia's home makes Theo reflect on destiny: "no one is born evil," but something has happened to both him and Alicia to make them engage in this kind of destructive (or self-destructive) behavior.*



*Just two chapters ago, in her diary entry, Alicia recalled playing underneath this very tree—and now Theo, without having read the diary, pictures her there. Even when Theo is not aware, therefore, the two characters are becoming more and more closely aligned in their perceptions and ways of making sense of the world.*



## PART 2, CHAPTER 16

When Theo comes to, he notices Paul Rose, young and tall and holding a baseball bat. Paul explains that he attacked Theo because he assumed Theo was a burglar. After Theo was out, however, Paul went through his stuff, and he realized who Theo really is: a psychotherapist, come to ask about Alicia. Though Theo is still in a great deal of pain, Paul leads him into the stinking, decrepit house.

*This mix-up reveals two things. First, Paul is deeply distrustful, just as others in Alicia's orbit (like Max) have been. And second, though Theo presents himself as reputable in his own narrative, he reads as suspicious to many of those around him.*



While Paul makes Theo a drink, claiming it will soothe his head, Theo begins to pry about Paul's relationship to his cousin. Paul explains that though he and Alicia grew up in the same house, they have lost touch, which he blames on Gabriel's possessiveness. In fact, the last time they saw each other was soon after Alicia's father, Vernon Rose, hanged himself. Before Theo can find out more, the conversation is interrupted by a banging on the wall—Lydia Rose wants to speak.

*Alicia's mother killed herself, but now, it becomes clear that Alicia's father also died by suicide—no wonder Alicia worries about what she has inherited from her parents. Moreover, Gabriel's possessiveness, combined with his passion for her father's gun, suggests that he may not be as tender as Alicia makes him out to be.*



## PART 2, CHAPTER 17

With dread, Theo climbs the steps to Lydia's room. The first thing he notices is that she is obese, nearly crushing the bed she lays on. Everything in the bedroom is old and tattered, including a scarred cat near Lydia's feet. At first, Lydia panics, thinking Theo is a journalist, but Paul reassures her that he is not. Lydia relaxes just enough to declare that Alicia is "a little bitch. She always was, even as a child."

*Lydia is not written as a sympathetic character, so her hatred of Alicia may well be unwarranted. But it does show, one more time, that everyone in the novel links adulthood to youth (Lydia resented Alicia "even as a child").*



When Theo is surprised, Lydia explains that her anger stems from Alicia's decision to paint an unflattering picture of her. Lydia also feels that she took care of Alicia after her mother Eva died, and that Alicia never repaid her for that favor. Shaken by the memory, Lydia gets upset, and Paul urges Theo to go home.

*Two major themes from Alicia's life surface here. Her painting, though it is wordless, is always a form of communication—in this case, she uses it to get revenge on Lydia. And second, Lydia's transactional view of her relationship with Alicia further hints at the scale of the trauma Alicia has been through; no adult in her life, not even her aunt, was truly there for her.*



As he travels back to London, Theo decides that the whole experience has been a waste. Lydia is clearly deranged, and he feels strongly that Alicia must have been running away from her. He also pities Paul, forced to live his life as an overgrown child, always in service to his bullying mother.

*Paul's stunted growth is a distorted mirror image of what could have happened to Alicia (or to Theo): unable to get away from his horrific childhood, Paul is doomed to repeat it forever, living out his life as a little kid in an adult's body.*



## PART 2, CHAPTER 18

When Theo arrives home, Kathy is out. He tries to access her email again, but she has been careful to log out. For a moment, Theo wonders if he made it all up: was he just high? Is Kathy just getting in character to play Desdemona in *Othello*? Though their married life has continued on more or less as normal, Theo is now consumed by anxiety. He obsesses over whether Kathy loves her paramour—will she leave Theo for him?

*For the first time, the novel makes explicit the link between one person's dishonesty and another person's crumbling mental state. Kathy is lying, but Theo internalizes her deceit as his own insanity, questioning himself instead of forcing himself to believe that his beloved could hurt him. Also important: Shakespeare's *Othello* is a story about a jealous man named Othello who, prodded by a scheming underling, starts to suspect his (innocent) wife Desdemona of adultery.*



Kathy notices that something is wrong, but Theo waves her off. He asks about rehearsals, and Kathy mentions that the play's director, Tony, has had some good ideas recently. Theo wonders if Tony is the person Kathy is sleeping with; she idolizes him, and she has always been reluctant to introduce him to Theo. Kathy goes to take a bath, and Theo tries to check her email again, to no avail. When she returns, Kathy announces that a friend is visiting, and she is going to meet her. Theo sees his chance—he will follow Kathy and catch her in the act.

*Every relationship or action in Kathy's life is now cause for suspicion: is she lying about how she spends her time at work? Is her friend actually a friend, or is she sneaking out to meet her lover? Theo's obsessiveness, which readers have already seen in his relationship with Alicia, now invades his marriage, bending reality as he panics about Kathy's actions.*



## PART 2, CHAPTER 19

When Theo enters Alicia's gallery, it is empty and cold, no longer packed as it was when the **Alcestis** was being displayed. Theo introduces himself to the gallerist, Jean-Felix Martin, explaining that Max Berenson suggested the two should meet. Jean-Felix promises to answer Theo's questions, making it clear that he does not think highly of Max.

*Symbolically, the empty gallery shows how little care Alicia has actually received from the public: though everyone was fascinated by her work in the immediate aftermath of the murder, only Theo remains invested in her over the long term.*



Jean-Felix tells Theo that he and Alicia were friends from art school; when her paintings became successful, Jean-Felix opened up the gallery, and their professional relationship blossomed. Jean-Felix has always resented Gabriel, feeling that he was self-involved and dismissive.

*Paul Rose viewed Gabriel as possessive, and now, Jean-Felix paints him as cold and unkind. Maybe Alicia's murder was motivated by a crueler side of Gabriel not revealed in the press (or in Alicia's diaries, as of yet).*



The day before the murder, Jean-Felix let himself into Alicia's house (a fact that surprises Theo); she was behind on her work for the gallery's exhibition, and Jean-Felix wanted to see how things were going. Though he does not think there was anything off about Alicia's mental state, Jean-Felix notes that Theo is behaving more like a "detective" than a therapist. Jean-Felix offers to show Theo some of Alicia's paintings.

*If Jean-Felix describes Gabriel as suspicious, however, he cannot make himself out to be totally innocent—he is too invested in Alicia, too willing to enter her private space, and too ready to profit off her art. And at the same time, Theo is also crossing some boundaries, which Jean-Felix names here: despite Diomedes's advice to do the contrary, Theo continues to treat Alicia as a mystery to be solved, not primarily as a patient.*



## PART 2, CHAPTER 20

Jean-Felix takes Theo to a storage room and unwraps several of Alicia's paintings. The first depicts the car crash that killed Eva Rose: her mother's spirit, shown in yellow and red, rises from the debris. Jean-Felix thinks the picture is "joyous," whereas Theo sees it as unsettling.

*In addition to reaffirming the profound impact Eva's suicide had on her daughter, Jean-Felix's debate with Theo hints at the difficulty of communicating via art. Though Alicia sends messages through her paintings, those messages are inherently open to interpretation—and sometimes, interpretations conflict.*



The next painting is of Gabriel as Jesus—with a rifle strapped across his midsection. And the third painting is of Lydia Rose. Theo notes that this picture is “cruel”: it shows Lydia as a giant woman on a tiny bed, her fat spilling everywhere. But Jean-Felix finds it “lovely.”

At last, Jean-Felix shows Theo the **Alcestis**. Theo feels that the painting is impossible to interpret, and Jean-Felix argues that that is the point: Alicia’s entire message is her silence. To better understand, Jean-Felix encourages Theo to read the play **Alcestis** by Euripides. Looking closer, Theo notices that the bowl of apples in the background is covered with maggots. Jean-Felix sighs that the painting is beautiful, while Theo thinks that it only shows Alicia’s pain.

Theo asks about Alicia’s suicide attempt, and Jean-Felix explains that she had always hated her father; when he killed himself, it set her completely off. Theo wants to know more, but Jean-Felix accepts a call from someone he refers to as “baby.” Theo begins to dislike Jean-Felix, but he cannot pin his finger on why.

Before he leaves, Theo asks Jean-Felix if he has ever heard about the doctor Alicia saw after her suicide attempt; Jean-Felix says he has not. As a parting gift of sorts, he encourages Theo to give Alicia paints and paintbrushes: “that’s the only way she’ll talk to you. Through her art.” Theo wonders if Jean-Felix is in love with Alicia, but then quickly comes to understand that what Jean-Felix wants is the art, not the woman behind it.

## PART 2, CHAPTER 21

Theo buys a copy of Euripides’s **Alcestis** and reads it on the Tube ride home. In the play, a man named Admetus is condemned to death, but the gods tell him he will be saved if he can find someone to die in his place. Admetus asks both his parents to die for him, but they refuse—only his wife Alcestis agrees to make this sacrifice.

*These two paintings reveal that Alicia often uses her artwork as a method of critique. The painting of Lydia mocks and demonizes the older woman, Alicia’s way of getting revenge at last. And the picture of Gabriel as Jesus, holding the gun Alicia hated, suggests that a measure of resentment is embedded in her worship of him.*



*This rich exchange contains lots of vital details. First, Jean-Felix introduces the crucial suggestion that Alicia’s silence is itself a method of communication—in her silence, she articulates protest and pain in a way she might not be able to with words. Second, the maggots here link to the maggots Alicia saw on the underside of the bird, when she felt that there was darkness and rot under even the happiest things. And third, Jean-Felix’s comment that this painting is “beautiful” further suggests that he is somehow exploiting Alicia’s pain (and the whole scandal around the murder).*



*The more Theo learns about Alicia, the more he realizes that everyone in her childhood was a figure of torment: Lydia was demanding, Eva was suicidal (and perhaps murderous), and Vernon’s not-yet-known behavior was perhaps most damaging of all.*



*Though Jean-Felix is clearly a compromised friend, motivated by lust, jealousy, and ambition more than true care, he also understands just how much Alicia’s art is her way of interacting with the world—communicating even through her silence.*



*As Theo dives deeper into Euripides’s tragic play, he realizes that the play is about betrayal: Admetus willingly gives up his wife’s life to save his own, even though Alcestis’s sacrifice proves her incredible strength and generosity.*



At the end of the play, Heracles brings **Alcestis** back from the dead, reviving her. But when she returns to Admetus, Alcestis refuses to speak anything at all. (“My wife stands here,” Alcestis moans, “but why does she not speak?”) The tragic play ends with Alcestis still mute, and Theo reflects that this story provides a crucial clue to Alicia’s mental state.

*Alcestis’s silence is a direct response to her husband’s betrayal—by remaining silent, Alcestis is able to avoid revealing if she is hurt or angry or simply relieved to have returned to Earth. As Theo notes, the link between Alicia and Alcestis (they even have similar-sounding names) perhaps implies that Alicia’s silence, too, is in response to a betrayal.*



## PART 2, CHAPTER 22

It’s August 2nd, and Alicia has just received a phone call from Paul Rose; though he won’t give details, he tells her that he needs help. Not wanting to say more over the phone, he drives from Cambridge to London. When he arrives, Alicia notices how terrible he looks. Paul confesses that he’s been gambling, and that he’s been losing a great deal of money.

*Like Alicia’s, it seems that Paul’s experience in the Rose household has led him to self-destructive behavior as an adult. And given that Paul spends most of his time trapped in the house with Lydia, it makes sense that he would seek solace and escape on the floor of a casino.*



Unable to resist Paul’s pathetic pleading, Alicia agrees to write him a check for 2,000 pounds—though when he takes the check, he is disappointed in the amount, as he claims to need 20,000 pounds. Paul leaves and Gabriel returns. When Alicia explains the afternoon, Gabriel is frustrated, reflecting that Alicia has no obligation to support Paul. But Alicia feels guilty that Paul is “still trapped” in their family home, “still eight years old.”

*Paul seems to want to use his cousin more than he wants to actually support her (which aligns him with the similarly exploitative Jean-Felix). But even though Alicia notices this dynamic, she feels a kind of survivor’s guilt at having made it out of her childhood home—while Paul has not been so lucky.*



The next day, Alicia is working on her Gabriel-as-Jesus painting when Jean-Felix lets himself into her studio. He applies pressure on her to paint more in time for the exhibition, and Alicia tries to keep her frustration to herself. Though they are old friends, Alicia has always felt that Jean-Felix harbors feelings for her. And at the same time, she resents his self-involvement, feeling as if he never asks her any questions or expresses care about her beyond her art.

*Alicia seems to spend much of her time catering to (and being exploited by) the men in her life, whether it is Jean-Felix pressuring her for art or Paul Rose pressuring her for money. But also, this passage is notable because it shows once again just how much Theo’s perception (of Jean-Felix as a schmoozy manipulator) aligns with Alicia’s.*



Unable to mask her anger, Alicia tells Jean-Felix that he needs to give her advance notice before he shows up in her studio. He is hurt, but Alicia can’t stop herself—after months of deliberation, she tells Jean-Felix she no longer wants him to be her gallerist. Jean-Felix blames Gabriel, but Alicia assures him that she’s been planning to break from the gallery “for a while.” This upsets Jean-Felix: “you’ve been acting for me?” he asks.

*Jean-Felix’s accusation—that Alicia has just been “acting”—creates an interesting parallel between Alicia and Theo’s wife Kathy, an actual actress. Though Alicia’s diaries often present the author as a victim, is it possible that Alicia is, like Kathy, actually deceptive and dishonest?*





Before he goes, Jean-Felix asks Alicia to come to a play with him that Friday: Euripides's **Alcestis**. Alicia agrees, not wanting to anger Jean-Felix further, and he leaves. Alicia tells Gabriel what happened, and Gabriel admits that he never liked Jean-Felix. Privately, Alicia wonders if Jean-Felix cares about her artworks more than he cares about her as a person. Either way, she is unable to deny that she is "afraid of him."

*In addition to providing the origin story for Alicia's knowledge of **Alcestis**, this chapter-ending passage foreshadows the murder to come. At this point, the narrative is overflowing with fearful men: Gabriel and his gun, Max's imposing presence, Paul Rose and his gambling problem, and now the all-too-persistent Jean-Felix.*



## PART 2, CHAPTER 23

Theo goes to meet Diomedes in his office. Diomedes practices his harp, and he predicts that it will **snow** later that night; Theo thinks the clouds look more like rain clouds. After some small talk, Theo presents Diomedes with a copy of the play **Alcestis**. He hopes that Diomedes, being Greek, might have some insight into how the play relates to Alicia's case.

*The contrast between Theo and Diomedes is a stark one: while the former is single-minded and obsessive, Diomedes actively works to diversify his pursuits. It is also good to notice that snow, so deeply associated with Theo's happiness, hangs in the air—but Theo is skeptical that either the snow, or his moment of joy, will arrive.*



Theo does not understand why **Alcestis** is silent in the end. Diomedes explains that she is overcome with emotion—"have you ever been betrayed?" he asks Theo. In other words, Diomedes believes that when Alcestis returns from the dead, she is filled with murderous rage at her husband's betrayal.

*More than just diagnosing Alicia's silence as a reaction to betrayal, Diomedes unwittingly forces Theo to link Alicia's trauma to his own: Theo has been "betrayed," by Kathy, and that betrayal is still fresh. For the first time, Theo begins to understand Alicia's present as intersecting with his own, as he begins to see their parallel rage in a new light.*



As Theo ponders this analysis, he makes one more request: in order to bring Alicia "back to life" (like **Alcestis**), should they not give her access to paint, the one thing that allows her to express herself? Diomedes tells Theo that Alicia can paint if her art therapist, Rowena Hart, agrees to it—but he predicts that Rowena will be staunchly opposed.

*In suggesting that Alicia needs to be brought "back to life," Theo also suggests that she has been metaphorically killed. This idea of symbolic or psychic murder will become essential to Theo's therapeutic practice as he spends more time with Alicia.*



## PART 2, CHAPTER 24

Rowena says that letting Alicia paint is a "great idea," though she is confident Alicia will refuse ("Alicia's the least responsive, most uncommunicative bitch I ever worked with"). Rowena is frustrated that Alicia never participates in art therapy, though Theo thinks this is probably because Rowena is not a very good therapist; just a "plumber," to use Ruth's terminology. Sick of the subject, Rowena signs off, and Theo assesses that she is jealous of Alicia's skill.

*Throughout the novel, both women and men frequently use the word "bitch" to describe Alicia, hinting that there is an undercurrent of sexism in people's perception of her. On a different note, this exchange reveals Theo's judgment about other kinds of therapists: while he feels that he is able to enter and transform Alicia's mind, someone like Rowena is merely a "plumber," trying to unclog Alicia's outlook instead of deeply understanding it.*



## PART 2, CHAPTER 25

In their next therapy session, Theo tells Alicia that he visited her gallery—and that Jean-Felix showed him some of her paintings. At first, Alicia seems interested by this fact, but she is unresponsive when Theo praises the artwork. She perks up when Theo wonders about why she did not include herself in the painting of her mother Eva's car crash. "In fact," Theo reminds Alicia, "there was also a little girl in that car. A girl whose feelings of loss I suspect were neither validated nor fully experienced."

Feeling that Alicia is challenging him to continue, Theo pulls out his copy of Euripides's **Alcestis**. He tries, unsuccessfully, to have Alicia articulate the connection between herself and the mythical heroine. Just before the session ends, Theo offers Alicia the opportunity to paint. Her eyes light up, becoming "the eyes of a child, wide and innocent." For the first time, she smiles.

*Though Theo's detective work is certainly an overstep, he now begins to reap the benefits, reflecting Alicia's troubled childhood back to her in a way that clearly connects. And again, the idea that the car crash might have symbolically killed Alicia links her to the character of Alcestis—and helps explain the way that childhood death and "loss" continue to express themselves as she grows up.*



*In Alicia's happiest moments with Gabriel, she pictured herself as a child, reflecting that the "past and present were coexisting simultaneously." So while childhood pain can cause adult damage, conversely, adult happiness—like the kind brought about, for Alicia, by painting—can release the joyful, "innocent" feelings of childhood.*



## PART 2, CHAPTER 26

Theo visits the canteen, which is warm from the radiators and bustling with activity. He notices Elif sitting at a table with several other tough-looking patients, while Alicia sits alone, barely eating, at the back. Theo also chooses to sit alone and nibble on the mediocre food. To his surprise, a few minutes into lunch, Christian sits down next to him.

Christian confronts Theo about his plan to get Alicia painting again, having heard the news through the Grove's grapevine. Christian warns Theo that "borderlines are seductive," and when Theo protests, Christian asserts that "you're overidentifying with her [...] She's the patient, you know—not you." Theo gets up from the table in a huff, but Christian's words haunt him for the rest of the afternoon. Though he tries to convince himself that he is behaving professionally, Theo admits (in retrospect) that "it was already too late."

*Both Theo and Alicia are sitting alone, further amplifying the parallels between them. Their primary point of contact in the Grove, it would seem, is each other.*



*This critical passage makes three crucial things clear. First, if there has been some hint of parallel between Kathy and Alicia, now the potential romance between Theo and Alicia comes to the fore (she is "seductive," a "siren," as Diomedes would say). Second, Christian reframes Theo's sense of his own empathy as "overidentifying": unlike Ruth, Theo is "hold[ing] onto" his patient's feelings, struggling to separate them from his own. And third, Theo's reflection that it was "already too late" furthers his sense that he is destined for doom—like Alcestis, or any hero in another Greek tragedy.*



Theo calls Jean-Felix, wondering where Alicia's materials have been stored. Jean-Felix confesses that he has been holding onto them. He agrees to bring Alicia's paints and paintbrushes to the Grove if Theo will let him see the finished paintings. But Theo notes that for some reason, Jean-Felix seems hesitant to come to the hospital himself; for some reason, he does not want to face Alicia.

*Jean-Felix is looking more and more suspicious with each passing day, as he seems determined to squeeze every last bit of profit and fame from Alicia's work. And if he could let himself into Alicia's house at any time, as Theo has realized earlier in the book, who's to say he didn't do so on the day of the murder?*



## PART 2, CHAPTER 27

Before work, Theo asks Kathy what time she is planning to meet her friend, and she tells him that they are rendezvousing at 7:00 p.m. That night, at a quarter to 7:00, Theo makes his way to Kathy's rehearsal space, hiding himself so as to spy. When Kathy doesn't exit through the front door, Theo enters the rehearsal hall, and he hears her on the phone with someone.

Kathy hangs up and leaves the rehearsal hall, heading to Charing Cross Road and then to the corner of Lexington Street. Theo orders a beer at a pub across the way, giving himself a nice vantage point to watch Kathy. He imagines that a passerby is Kathy's lover, but the two do not interact. Finally, Kathy's friend shows up—Theo recognizes her, and he realizes that Kathy has been telling the truth about her plans. "I ought to have been grateful," he thinks. "But I wasn't. I was disappointed."

*Instead of taking Ruth's advice, distancing himself from Kathy and starting anew, Theo embarks down a dangerous, obsessive path. Though there have been hints that he is not quite as healed as he claims to be, readers can now clearly see just how potentially frightening their narrator is.*



*Theo's "disappoint[ment]" at not catching Kathy in the act is important for several reasons. On the one hand, Theo wants to visibly see Kathy's betrayal because he—like the titular character of Shakespeare's [Othello](#)—wants to affirm his own suspicions (instead of wondering if he is crazy). But perhaps less obviously, by following Kathy in this way, he is creating a link between his sense of betrayal and the betrayal Alicia recognizes in [Alcestis](#)—and thus bringing himself closer to his favorite patient.*



## PART 2, CHAPTER 28

Yuri sets up a makeshift art studio for Alicia in the room next to the nurses' station. He and Theo have become friends, and before Yuri leaves Theo alone with Alicia, he gives him a sort of good luck wink. Excitedly, Alicia examines the paints and paintbrushes, entering a sort of "reverie." At last, she touches the brush to the canvas, adding red stroke after red stroke. He also notices that Alicia is looking over at him every so often, "as if she was studying me."

A few days later, the painting is complete. It is a photo-realistic depiction of the Grove on fire. Two figures emerge from the burning building: Theo and Alicia. Theo is carrying Alicia in his arms while the fire licks at their heels. Theo does not know if the painting depicts him as "rescuing Alicia—or about to throw her into the flames."

*Thus far, even as Theo has crossed boundary after boundary, Alicia has mostly remained firmly in the role of patient (besides when Theo talked about "hating" his wife). Now, though, the dynamic begins to flip: Alicia is "studying" Theo, trying to understand him through her artistic lens even as he tries to analyze her through his own therapeutic one.*



*Because Alicia refuses to speak, her painting presents an interpretive challenge to Theo: is she thanking him or condemning him? And what to make of the idea that she is in his arms, which suggests an intimate (or romantic, or even sexual) component to their relationship?*



## PART 2, CHAPTER 29

A blonde woman in her mid-60s, decked out in perfume and plastic surgery, is complaining to Stephanie that she has been waiting in the Grove's reception area. Theo recognizes the woman as Barbie Hellman, Alicia's neighbor who heard the gunshots on the night of the murder. Theo assesses that Barbie is spoiled and wealthy, and he feels a pang of sympathy for Stephanie.

*If Theo prides himself on a great deal of empathy, he has no patience for self-involvement: and Barbie, with her money and her plastic surgery, is almost a comical stereotype of a narcissistic woman. Moreover, since Barbie and dishonest, self-involved Kathy are the only Americans in the story, there is now a repeated, light-hearted critique of Americans throughout the novel.*



Hoping to relieve the tension, Theo introduces himself to Barbie as Alicia's therapist. Immediately, Barbie explains that she and Alicia were "best friends"; though she has been in the U.S. visiting family, she frequently visits Alicia at the Grove. After threatening to scream, Barbie gets her way: Yuri brings her back to see Alicia.

Alicia shows no sign of emotion at seeing Barbie, though Barbie immediately launches into a long monologue about her family and friends. Barbie prepares to leave, but before she does so, she tells Theo that she was one of Alicia's closest confidantes ("she told me things you wouldn't believe"). Theo wants to know more, but Barbie refuses to tell him in the hospital, instead inviting him over to her house for drinks that evening.

## PART 2, CHAPTER 30

Barbie lives in a gigantic house, a token of her divorce settlement with her investment banker ex-husband. The home is overwhelming, filled to the brim with plants and knick-knacks; though each thing is expensive on its own, crowded together, it all looks cheap. "It suggested a disordered inner world," Theo notes, "it made me think of chaos, clutter, greed—insatiable hunger." He wonders how Barbie's childhood went.

Barbie offers Theo a drink, but he refuses, so she pours herself a giant glass of red wine. Theo then begins to ask his questions: did Alicia ever mention seeing a doctor? Barbie doesn't know of a doctor, and instead, she launches into a long tangent about her own doctor, a dietician of sorts. Theo reflects that she is "entirely narcissistic," and he imagines that Alicia probably experienced this same difficulty of getting a word in edgewise.

Barbie does have something useful to offer, however. Having seen Alicia just a few hours before the murder, she is convinced of her friend's innocence. Moreover, she asserts to Theo that there had been a mysterious man watching Alicia for quite some time. Alicia had shared her fears with Barbie, even sending her a blurry picture of the man standing outside the house.

*By now, anyone who claims to have an easily-defined connection to Alicia—whether it is Jean-Felix pretending to adore her or Max Berenson pretending to hate her—has been shown to be lying. And based on Alicia's quiet, anxious temperament in her diaries, it is unlikely that she and Barbie were nearly as close as Barbie says.*



*Whereas Theo sees Alicia's silence as an invitation to interpret her inner life, Barbie only seizes on Alicia's lack of response as an opportunity to monologue about herself. It is hard to trust, then, that Barbie was actually a meaningful confidante for Alicia.*



*Perhaps because of his time with the mute Alicia, Theo is skilled at understanding someone's "inner world" from the way they externally present themselves. Even in passing, he feels that Barbie's "disordered" state could probably be linked back to something unpleasant or chaotic in her childhood.*



*Theo really is annoyed by Barbie's narcissism—but at the same time, by emphasizing over and over again how self-involved she is, Theo is implying to readers that he is the exact opposite. In other words, this is a moment to focus on whether Theo is a reliable narrator; is Barbie really so awful, or is he just trying to make himself look good by comparison?*



*This is the first time anyone has mentioned a mysterious man, who will become a key figure in the rest of the book. Indeed, Alicia was frightened by many men: Jean-Felix, Paul, and Max, to name a few. But could it also be Yuri, who told Theo early on that he once waited outside a neighborhood woman's window for weeks on end?*



Alicia was reluctant to tell Gabriel at first, fearing that he wouldn't believe her—and indeed, when she finally worked up the nerve, Gabriel dismissed her. A few days later, Alicia had come to Barbie, asking her to forget the whole thing. And though Barbie had shown the picture to the police in the days after the murder, they had been similarly uninterested in investigating.

As Theo makes his way back home, he reflects on what Barbie has told him. He is certain that Alicia never felt close to Barbie, so this man must have scared her badly to make her want comfort from a woman she couldn't stand. Suddenly, Theo thinks back to his childhood: “a little boy close to bursting with anxiety, holding in all my terrors [...] no one to tell. No one who'd listen.” He thinks that “Alicia must have felt similarly desperate.” For a brief moment, he wonders if someone is watching him—but no one is there.

## PART 2, CHAPTER 31

The next morning, Theo arrives at the Grove and hears a woman screaming. He worries that Alicia has been hurt. But in fact it is Elif, bleeding from her eye. Quickly, Theo realizes that Alicia has stabbed her with a paintbrush. And when he turns to see Alicia, she is completely still, motionless, like in the self-portrait **Alcestis**. For the first time, Theo begins to feel afraid of her.

## PART 2, CHAPTER 32

Wanting to understand what happened to provoke Alicia, Theo and Yuri head to the makeshift studio. The whole thing immediately becomes clear: Elif has vandalized Alicia's painting of the burning building, writing the word “SLUT” across the image.

Theo visits Elif in the emergency ward, where she tells him to “fuck off.” When Theo makes it clear that he is not trying to blame Elif, Elif owns up to defacing the painting. But she did more than that: she tells Theo that she knows he is “soft” on Alicia, and she taunted Alicia with this information (“Theo and Alicia, sitting in a tree”). Elif begins to laugh “a horrible, shrieking laugh.” Theo begins to wonder if Alicia really is completely insane.

*Even before the murder, it seems, no one had taken Alicia's private thoughts seriously—not even Gabriel, who should have been the most attentive of all. This lack of belief is in part a symptom of sexism, but it also adds new weight to Theo's therapy sessions: for all his flaws, he is the first person to really try to listen to Alicia, to give her pain its due.*



*Christian was probably right that Theo has begun to “overidentify” with Alicia. He imagines her perceptions of Barbie alongside his own; he pictures her childhood as akin to his experience as a scared “little boy.” And indeed, his sense of identification is so strong that as soon as he learns Alicia was being watched, he assumes the same must be true for him.*



*There is great symbolic weight in the fact that Alicia commits violence with a paintbrush. In addition to being a vehicle of communication, Alicia's art is also a way she expresses her rage—punishing Lydia, her mother, and Gabriel with her disdainful portraits. Is the **Alcestis**, then, a kind of self-harm, in which she attacks herself the same way she goes after Elif or Lydia or her other subjects?*



*If Alicia is usually restrained and reserved at the Grove, the one thing that sets her off is her art being destroyed.*



*Christian is not the only one to notice that the close connection between Theo and Alicia feels inappropriate. Here, Elif suggests that Theo is sexually interested in Alicia, further blurring the line between therapist and patient (and further linking Theo's relationship to Alicia to his bond with Kathy).*





## PART 2, CHAPTER 33

Stephanie leads a meeting in Diomedes's office. She is angry that Alicia has been allowed to paint, and she insists that Alicia now be put in seclusion for the safety of the other patients. Theo protests that putting Alicia in seclusion is "barbaric"—"we need to keep talking to her. We need to understand"—but Stephanie is firm. Much to Theo's chagrin, Christian backs Stephanie up on every point.

Christian blames Theo for Alicia's attack, and though Diomedes is kinder, he agrees that they have tried to do "too much, too soon." Though Theo and Indra both insist that over-medicating Alicia is not the solution, Diomedes is worried that one more violent incident will ensure that the Grove is shut down. Theo begs to be allowed to continue with his therapy, but Diomedes gives him a final answer—no.

*Theo's faith in talking makes sense, given that he feels Ruth's "talking cure" approach to therapy saved his life—but how does "talking" to Alicia, "the silent patient," help?*



*Diomedes has always been on Theo's side, aiding him in his quest to understand Alicia and protecting him when tension with Christian comes to the fore. That even Diomedes feels Theo needs to stop is telling: to everyone on the outside, it is clear that Theo's work with Alicia hurts both patient and therapist more than it helps.*



## PART 2, CHAPTER 34

That night, instead of **snow**, there is a thunderstorm. Before Theo leaves the Grove, he has one final session with Alicia. He expresses his sympathy that she is in seclusion, but he also tells her he wishes she had tried harder in their therapy. Wordlessly, Alicia hands Theo her diary, which is chaotic and filled with doodles. Filled with excitement, Theo prepares to read it.

*This short chapter is packed with symbolic meaning. Alicia's decision to give Theo her diary can be seen as an extension of her choice to paint: though she cannot open her mouth to speak, she will continue to find other ways to communicate. But while the diary hand-off might seem to be good news, the continued absence of snow is foreboding: since snow is associated with Theo's attempts to find happiness, the fact that thunder comes instead suggests that nothing good is in store.*



## PART 3, CHAPTER 1

The two epigraphs before this chapter are both about diaries and confessions. One is a Jean-Paul Sartre quote on "the danger of keeping a diary"; Sartre feels that writing in such a journal causes the writer to exaggerate or "stretch the truth." The other quote is from Shakespeare's *A Winter's Tale*: "though I am not naturally honest, I am sometimes so by chance."

*These two epigraphs, both from playwrights, argue that human beings do not always intend to reveal their darkest thoughts. But just as the Freud quote at the beginning pointed out, people betray themselves inadvertently, often communicating the things they try most desperately to hide.*



On August 8th, Alicia notices a man standing outside her house. She does not understand the man's motivations, nor can she make out his features. She tries to paint, but finds herself distracted by the sense of the man's presence.

*This man is clearly the man that Barbie talked about to Theo—so though she is self-involved, Barbie does not seem to be a total liar.*



On August 10th, Alicia goes to the play **Alcestis** with Jean-Felix, against her husband's wishes. Jean-Felix suggests they get a drink beforehand, and Alicia sees him sitting at the bar, filled with rage. He brings up all of their old memories, but Alicia feels frustrated by these "rehearsed little reminiscences." She is firm in her decision to break from the gallery.

*If Theo has trained in psychology for years, Alicia is almost as naturally perceptive: she sees through Jean-Felix's attempts at guilt-tripping her, frustrated with his "rehearsed" performance of friendship. It's worth noting how many characters are "acting": Jean-Felix and Alicia each feel the other is lying, while Kathy actually acts for a living.*



Fortunately, Alicia loves the play, which has been restaged in a contemporary suburb of Athens. She finds herself moved to tears by the idea that **Alcestis** literally comes back from the dead, though she cannot quite articulate what about that trajectory is so powerful. But instead of allowing Alicia to focus on the play, Jean-Felix leaves her with a vague warning about Gabriel, telling her she is "too trusting." Unsettled, Alicia gets home late and wakes Gabriel up so they can have sex.

*The tragedy of **Alcestis** again parallels the form of the novel, as Jean-Felix ominously hints that Alicia should not "trust" her beloved husband. More importantly, Theo has earlier reflected that Alicia, still alive, nevertheless metaphorically identifies with Alcestis's death. Now, Alicia confirms that link, once again proving how much the therapist and patient are of the same mind.*



The next day, Alicia sees the man again, wearing a cap and sunglasses. She wonders if he is a burglar, and then, strangely, she wonders if he is a painter, too. Alicia almost calls Gabriel, but then decides she does not want to bother him with her stress. She begins to think that the man is not watching the house—maybe he is watching her, instead.

*In addition to showcasing Alicia's lack of comfort with Gabriel, the idea that the man might be a painter—just like Alicia—suggests that she is beginning to identify with this seeming stalker. It also mirrors the moment in which Theo, watching Alicia paint, can't tell who is "studying" who.*



On August 13th, the man appears again, and Alicia finally shares her anxieties with Gabriel. He wonders if the man is Jean-Felix, and privately, Alicia wonders the same thing. Gabriel claims he believes Alicia, but she feels that he is only humoring her; he seems convinced that she is imagining the whole thing. This makes Alicia angry.

*Gabriel's insistence that Alicia is imagining is antithetical to the empathy Theo shows her in therapy. And this refusal to listen to her (what might, in popular discourse, be known as "gaslighting") causes Alicia to express real anger at her husband for the first time.*



The following morning, Alicia looks for the man, but he is gone. However, when she goes for a walk in a nearby park, she notices that the man has followed her. She panics, telling him that if he is Jean-Felix, he should go away; she also tries to take a picture, though she realizes the photo hasn't captured anything meaningful. When she gets home, the man is standing in front of the house.

*The photo that Alicia takes at the park seems to be the photo that she then shows Barbie. Alicia is a painter, so it makes sense that she would want to visually capture this frightening man—and her failure to do so is understandably frustrating.*



Barbie Hellman comes over, and even though Alicia detests her, she confesses her fear about the man. Barbie encourages Alicia to go to the police, believing that the man is either a burglar or a rapist. When Barbie asks if Alicia has told Gabriel about the whole thing, she lies and says no. At 4:00 a.m. that night, Alicia hears a noise. She thinks it is the man, and Gabriel, who has gotten home late from work, is frustrated. When Alicia goes to check, no man is outside.

*Alicia's perception of Barbie once again lines up with Theo's. And though there are many candidates for the man outside the window (Jean-Felix, Max, Paul, or even Yuri), in this moment, Alicia seems to confuse the man at the window with Gabriel himself. Admetus was responsible for Alcestis's death; is it possible that Gabriel is similarly a real, flesh-and-blood threat to his wife?*



On August 15th, Gabriel sits Alicia down and begs her to go see a doctor; he thinks she is hallucinating the whole thing. Alicia feels intense rage, and she wants to tell Gabriel that she is anything but crazy. Instead, she calmly agrees to see Dr. West, a therapist, and she visits his office the next morning.

Alicia knows that Dr. West and Gabriel are close friends, which surprises her, given that Gabriel is so warm and Dr. West is so cold. When Alicia tells him about the man, the doctor reminds her that “we’ve been here before”—after her father’s death, Alicia became deeply paranoid and was convinced that she was being spied on or followed. Whereas Alicia admits that she was sick after her father’s death, she is certain that this man is real. But Dr. West refuses to believe her.

Dr. West prescribes Alicia some pills, which she does not want to take. To encourage her, Dr. West hints that Gabriel might leave her if she does not accept treatment. Terrified of losing her beloved, Alicia agrees to take the pills. Gabriel is thrilled, telling her that “we’ll get through this,” but Alicia knows that she will have to get through this alone. She regrets telling anybody, and she resolves to tell Barbie to forget the whole thing.

When they get home, Gabriel holds out the pills to Alicia; she resents that he is treating her like a child. As soon as Gabriel turns his back, Alicia spits the pills out, in part because she remembers how over-medicated she was the first time she saw Dr. West. “I’m not going to risk that again,” she vows, “I need to be prepared.”

On August 17th, Alicia admits to hiding her diary, as she does not want Gabriel to discover it. The diary increasingly feels like her only source of solace. On August 21st, Alicia admits that she has stopped going outside, out of a desire to track the man’s movements. On August 22nd, Alicia moves Gabriel’s gun to a more easily accessible location.

*Presumably, Dr. West is the therapist that Max mentioned Alicia seeing. Alicia’s feelings of rage are a precursor to the angry murder a few days away, while her hesitance to go to therapy even before the scandal perhaps explains her initial desire to attack Theo.*



*Theo is not the first therapist in Alicia’s life to cross boundaries—because he is a friend of Gabriel’s doing a favor, Dr. West seems more loyal to Alicia’s husband than to Alicia herself. It is also important to note that Dr. West, like almost everyone in Alicia’s life, is a man—and that none of these men (with the exception of Theo) seem to believe even her most credible pleas for help, reflecting the widespread sexism around her. It is with good reason, then, that Michaelides has expressed that his novel has a place in a larger #MeToo conversation.*



*Like Christian and Stephanie, Dr. West favors a medicinal approach to therapy over a talk-based approach. Interestingly, then, Alicia’s silence seems to have begun in part before the murder ever happened: fearing medication, she withdraws from Gabriel and Barbie, resolving to solve all her problems herself.*



*Alicia’s refusal to be treated like a child is especially fraught given how troubled her childhood was. Theo has always theorized that Alicia was taking out childhood anger on Gabriel—and if Gabriel is making her flash back to her youth, Theo’s theory seems even more likely to be right.*



*Alicia hid her diary from Gabriel, but she gave it to Theo, suggesting that she trusts Theo more than her husband; Theo can understand her in a way Gabriel cannot. And just as Theo has compared Kathy to Alicia, readers now must compare Theo to Gabriel. Structurally, Alicia’s rapid-fire diary entries (and her focus on the gun) foreshadow the more dramatic, more violent murder that is now only three days away.*



The next day, Alicia begins to fret that she will never work again. Gabriel keeps checking in, but his concern is not making Alicia feel any better. Worse still, Gabriel announces that that night, they will go out to dinner with Max and Tanya. Alicia begins to fear that the man outside the window is Max, and she decides to confront him at dinner that night.

Going back into the outside world is overwhelming for Alicia. Everything feels different: even Augusto's, their regular spot, no longer feels comforting and safe. At dinner, Max is all over Tanya, as if he is trying to make Alicia jealous. But both Alicia and Tanya notice the obsessive way that Max is staring at his brother's wife. When they are alone, Alicia accuses Max of following her, but he is genuinely livid and confused. Alicia slaps Max, only to realize that Tanya has seen the whole thing.

On August 25th, Alicia hears a sound coming from outside. Gradually, the sound gets closer and closer; someone is trying the windows and the doors. Alicia calls Gabriel, but he doesn't answer his phone. With dread, Alicia realizes that the man has gotten inside the house.

## PART 4, CHAPTER 1

Part 4 begins with a quote from Alice Miller: "the aim of therapy is not to correct the past, but to enable the patient to confront his own history, and grieve over it." In his office, while rain pours down around him, Theo reflects on what he has read in Alicia's diary.

Theo wonders about who the man is, and whether or not Alicia ever discovered his identity. He also decides to find out more about the mysterious Dr. West—who had never been mentioned in the press, nor had he testified at Alicia's trial. Theo walks down the hall and sees the sign on Christian's door: Dr. C. West. Putting the dots together, Theo enters Christian's office.

*At first, it seemed that Alicia was only hiding a few parts of her life from Gabriel. But as she starts to spend her days consumed by fear of the watching man, it is clear just how little Gabriel knows about the woman he sleeps next to. This lack of marital communication is then mirrored in Theo's relationship with Kathy.*



*Despite Alicia's suspicions, Max's reaction makes it clear that he is not the man outside the window—and neither is Jean-Felix, given that he didn't reveal himself when Alicia called his name at the park. That leaves Paul Rose, Yuri, and potentially even Gabriel as suspects.*



*August 25th is the day of the murder—and now, Alicia's stalker is trying to get inside. For the first time, it seems that Barbie Hellman might have been right: maybe Alicia really is innocent, and this mysterious man is responsible for Gabriel's death.*



*Theo's obsession with childhood—much like Alicia's interest in Greek tragedy—is all about the relationship between the past (one's "history") and the future. And along the same lines, Alicia's decision to give Theo her diary can be seen as a step towards doing what Alice Miller suggests: acknowledging what came before in the hope that what comes next can be better.*



*As Dr. West, Christian was seeing Alicia before he came to the Grove, a fact that automatically makes Theo suspicious; could he be the mysterious man outside the window? Christian's desire to medicate Alicia also now becomes more sinister. Maybe he was trying to dull her consciousness so she wouldn't recognize him, or maybe he was nefariously drugging her both before and after she came to the Grove.*



## PART 4, CHAPTER 2

Theo interrupts Christian as he is eating take-out sushi, and Christian accuses him of being rude. But Theo has a trump card: Alicia's diary. Almost immediately, it is clear that Christian is the very same Dr. West in the diary—and that he has kept this secret from the Grove.

Christian explains that he treated Alicia unofficially, as a favor to his friend Gabriel. Theo also finds out that Christian would get paid in cash for these sessions (and possibly more), not declaring the income. Theo agrees to keep Christian's secret from Diomedes, saving Christian his job—as long as Christian shares everything he knows about Alicia.

*Part 1 of the novel began with an epigraph from Freud about how difficult it is for someone to keep a secret. In Part 4, Christian's misdeeds come to light, suggesting that the tragic, penultimate section of the book will also be a revelatory one, in which everything that is hidden comes to the fore.*



*At least in this moment, it seems that Christian's secret was a financial one rather than an interpersonal one; if Christian really was just trying to evade taxes, it is unlikely he stalked Alicia or murdered Gabriel.*



## PART 4, CHAPTER 3

Christian immediately launches into a diagnosis ("she was highly paranoid, delusional—psychotic"), but Theo is more interested in the facts. Christian believes that the man outside the window was merely a delusion—especially because, soon after her father's death, Alicia became convinced that a harmless old neighbor was spying on her.

Theo wants to find out more about Alicia's relationship with her father, but Christian is cynical. Though he admits Alicia attempted suicide, he writes it off as "narcissistic" behavior, a pathetic ploy to get Gabriel to notice her. Christian calls Alicia a "total bitch," and Theo is done. Instead, he tells Christian that he plans to ask Alicia directly for answers, which shocks Christian—how can Alicia answer if she won't speak?

*As always, Christian resorts to scientific terms and biological or medicinal solutions. But Theo does not trust anyone's analysis of Alicia but his own—even though Christian reveals that in fact, Alicia has long suspected (without basis) that someone is spying on her, making it more likely that she really was hallucinating this new stalker.*



*Christian's dismissal of Alicia is rife with sexism, as he labels her fear self-involvement and calls her a "total bitch." At the same time, Gabriel's use of the word "narcissist" is telling: this is a word Theo uses whenever he wants to discredit someone. Are accusations of narcissism always valid? Or is this a (male) therapist's way of dismissing someone (a female) with a potentially meaningful point?*



## PART 4, CHAPTER 4

Yuri helps Theo arrange a private meeting with Alicia in the art room. In the meeting, Theo brings up that he recognizes Christian as Dr. West, but Alicia doesn't respond. Theo assures Alicia that he is on her side, and that he will continue to investigate on her behalf. Alicia remains silent.

*Just as her paintings invite multiple interpretations, Alicia's refusal to speak allows Theo to imagine her response to what he tells her. So though he feels that they are closely connected, it is also possible that he is merely conjecturing, "hearing" in her silence whatever he fancies.*





## PART 4, CHAPTER 5

“Kathy was getting careless,” Theo laments. She starts taking walks, and when Theo tries to join, she makes excuses for why she wants to be alone. One day, he follows her to the park, where he sees a tall man kiss and grope Kathy. Theo thinks that Kathy’s lover looks just like him: “I had a confused, out-of-body experience, convinced I was watching myself walking in the park with Kathy.”

The man and Kathy go into the woods together, and soon enough, Theo hears Kathy’s familiar moans. As he listens to her climax, he imagines himself as his father; without a doubt, his dad would have killed the man. But Theo just walks out of the woods, going around and around in panicked circles.

*If Theo is “over-identifying” with Alicia, he now seems to entirely lose his sense of where he ends and others begin. In this fascinating passage, therefore, Theo imagines Kathy’s lover as another version of himself; he is “out-of-body,” jealous but also strangely, almost frighteningly, empathetic with the man who is responsible for his pain.*



*Ruth predicted that Theo’s relationship to Kathy was somehow linked to his relationship with his father, and now, Theo instinctively links Kathy’s sexual betrayal to his father’s violent abuse.*



## PART 4, CHAPTER 6

Theo visits the gallery alone, taking in the **Alcestis** by himself. To his shock, he notices that the shadows of the painting actually join together to form a man—the man outside the window. Jean-Felix walks in on Theo, annoyed at the intrusion. Theo intentionally provokes Jean-Felix, bringing up the fact that he knows Alicia wished to leave the gallery. Theo wonders how Jean-Felix will react to this news.

Theo then calls Paul Rose, and the two agree to meet at a pub near Paul’s house (so as not to disturb an already-angry Lydia). Finally, Theo calls Max Berenson, telling him about the diary and revealing what Alicia had written about Max’s feelings for her. Theo wonders what all these men will do now—and he reflects that it would be “dangerous” to underestimate Max.

*Alicia’s art is a form of communication, but her message winds up being different depending on who interprets her work—and how closely they look. With the new information from Alicia’s diary, Theo is able to approach the painting from a new light, seeing it as an expression of Alicia’s innocence rather than an explanation of her guilt. Maybe the man in the shadows is to blame for Gabriel’s death, and Alicia is a victim after all, not a villain.*



*Just as Alicia is trying to understand the identity of the masked man, Theo’s decision to provoke Max, Paul, and Jean-Felix seems like an attempt to find out which one of them has been stalking Alicia. Once again, Theo’s trajectory and Alicia’s seem to operate in exact parallel.*



## PART 4, CHAPTER 7

As Theo approaches Cambridge, the temperature drops. He goes to meet Paul in a seedy pub known as The White Bear—in the small space, Paul looks extra giant. The two men sit down, and Theo immediately points out the discrepancies between Paul’s account and Alicia’s diary. First of all, Paul claimed he hadn’t seen his cousin in years, whereas the diary suggests they saw each other just a few weeks before the murder.

*Like Jean-Felix and Max, Paul is anything but honest; though Alicia seems to strive to tell the truth, her life is consumed by deceitful men. On a smaller (but no less vital) note, the cold temperature suggests that there might be snow...but as always, snow—and the childhood joy it represents—evades Theo.*



Paul tells Theo that he asked Alicia for money, but he denies she gave him any, and Theo wonders why Paul would lie about this. Theo then circles around to the topic of Alicia's father, Vernon Rose. Paul explains that he was never the same after Eva Rose died. "Neither was Alicia"; both father and daughter shared the same paranoid and anxieties. Finally, Theo brings up Tanya's suggestion that Paul might have useful information. Theo realizes Paul has a crush on Tanya, and Paul agrees to take Theo to the Rose family roof, one of Alicia's favorite childhood spots.

*Increasingly, this murder (which initially seemed like a crime of passion) appears to have been committed for financial ends: either Max wanted to inherit Gabriel's estate, Jean-Felix wanted access to Alicia's paintings, or Paul wanted money to pay off his gambling debts. This exchange also shows that, in addition to inheriting some of her mother's suicidal tendencies, Alicia also shared some of her father's mental illness.*



## PART 4, CHAPTER 8

Theo and Paul climb a rickety ladder to get to the roof; it is freezing cold, and Theo fears that Paul might try to hurt him. When they get to the roof of the Rose home, Paul explains that this was one of his and Alicia's favorite spots when they were children (Paul 7, Alicia 10). Paul points out the jasmine plant: though it is not currently flowering, it was in full bloom the day Alicia's mother Eva died.

*By literally retracing Alicia's steps, Theo is trying to access her embodied experience. As he takes in the sensory details of her childhood (the scent of jasmine, the trembling, rickety steps), Theo is taking his desire to empathize to his patient to new, even more worrisome lengths.*



Paul tells Theo the story of when Vernon, Alicia's father, "killed Alicia." Theo is flabbergasted by this turn of phrase, so Paul elaborates: after Eva died in the wreck, Vernon was distraught. "Why did it have to be her?" he wondered. "Why didn't Alicia die instead?" Alicia, so completely hurt by those words, told Paul that "he killed me [...] Dad just—killed me." Theo feels like he finally has found the missing piece of the puzzle of Alicia's psyche.

*Alicia's reflection that her father (metaphorically) "killed" her is the missing piece of the puzzle. It is worth paying attention to the neatness of this psychological narrative: as in a Greek tragedy, where characters' lives are specifically structured to reflect ancient ideas of destiny and fate, Theo feels that Alicia's present has an almost one-to-one correspondence with her past.*



Now, Theo understands the link to **Alcestis**: "just as Admetus had physically condemned Alcestis to die, so had Vernon Rose psychically condemned his daughter to death." Theo feels that he can draw a clear line from the rage and trauma Alicia must have felt as a child to her violent murder of Gabriel. "Without possibly even knowing why," Alicia had displaced her feelings about Vernon Rose to her beloved husband.

*Admetus sent his wife Alcestis to her actual death, and Alicia's father made her feel that her life was worthless to him. In both cases, Alicia and Alcestis were harmed by the very person most responsible for loving and protecting them. No wonder, then, that Alicia struggled to embrace Gabriel as a loving, trustworthy figure—if her father had betrayed her so cruelly, how could anyone ever be safe?*



## PART 4, CHAPTER 9

In their next session, Theo tells Alicia what Paul has revealed to him. He affirms her feelings: "what your father said is tantamount to psychic murder," he assures her. "He *killed* you." For the first time, Alicia is completely engaged and responsive with her eyes. But Theo emphasizes that unless she can start talking, this will be the last time they see each other. So in a voice "like a creaking gate that needed oiling," Alicia begins to speak.

*In this landmark exchange, Theo's deep understanding of Alicia's childhood trauma makes her feel the trust she needs to speak. But while this moment is triumphant, it also reflects the many boundaries that Theo has transgressed. Moreover, Alicia speaks only because Theo echoes her exact words (specifically the word "killed") back to her. Does Alicia want to communicate, or does she just want to have her own ideas affirmed?*



## PART 4, CHAPTER 10

Theo tells Diomedes about his accomplishment: Alicia has finally spoken. Shocked and gratified, Diomedes wants to put Alicia in front of the Trust so that she can demonstrate the Grove's progress. But Theo urges patience, and Diomedes agrees—causing Theo to feel like “a son congratulated by his father.” At their next session, Alicia tells Theo everything, and he does his best to faithfully transcribe it all.

*Theo's need for Diomedes's approval once more shows just how damaged Theo is from his own childhood. It is hardly a coincidence that at the same moment he reflects on Vernon Rose's mistreatment of his daughter, Theo feels an extra need for a “father” figure.*



## PART 4, CHAPTER 11

Theo pushes Alicia to try and explain her silence. At first, she claims that she has nothing to say—after the murder, she tried to speak, but nothing would come out. Alicia then tells Theo that she is willing to talk only because she feels that he believes her about the man: “I want you to understand,” she explains. Alicia then informs Theo that the man inside her house was not actually the anonymous man at the window; it was Jean-Felix, come to talk about the exhibition.

*Alicia's desire to speak so that Theo can “understand” marks a stark departure from her normal mode of being, both at the Grove and before. It also affirms Ruth's talking cure method: rather than being medicated away from her pain, Alicia seeks someone who can really grasp what she is going through.*



As the session progresses, the topic of conversation widens. Theo and Alicia talk about their childhoods, and specifically about their abusive fathers. Theo acknowledges that he and Alicia are swapping roles, confusing the boundaries between who is a therapist and who is a patient. “Soon it would be impossible to tell who was who.”

*Just a few chapters earlier, Theo could not distinguish between himself and the lover at Kathy's side. Now, he feels that he and Alicia are switching places and melding together; he cannot tell “who was who,” which of them is the helper and which of them is in dire need of help.*



## PART 4, CHAPTER 12

The following day, Alicia is more reserved as she works up to the topic of Gabriel's death. Alicia was in her studio, trying and failing to paint; Gabriel called to let her know he was going to be home late. All of a sudden, Alicia noticed with a fright that the man from outside the house was standing behind her, reflected in her studio mirror.

*Structurally, Alicia's description of the day leading up to the murder parallels the beginning of the book, in which Theo did his best to reconstruct the facts of the case. But the facts Alicia tells are radically different, shifting the blame from herself to the masked man. Was the public misled—or is Alicia lying now?*



The man forced Alicia to walk from her studio to the house. She tried to escape, but he tackled her, saying that he would kill her if she moved. Before Alicia finishes the story, she asks Theo to share a **cigarette** with her. When he is surprised that she knows about his smoking habit, she explains that she can smell it on him. The pair moves outside to the courtyard of the Grove.

*In the novel, cigarettes have often symbolized that therapists are less healed—less distinguishable from their patients—than they would like to pretend. Now, Alicia's desire to smoke with Theo suggests that in order to fully trust him, she will need to ensure that they are equals, not therapist and patient. And beyond that, her admission that she can smell cigarettes on Theo shows that she has sensed his damage long before this moment (indeed, perhaps that is why she has opened up to him).*



## PART 4, CHAPTER 13

Theo wonders whether or not it is appropriate to share a **cigarette** with Alicia. He reflects on Christian's comment ("borderlines are seductive"), and he notes the sharp intelligence behind Alicia's eyes. Eventually, Theo decides to smoke with her, and Alicia continues with her story.

Alicia begins to describe her encounter with the man: while he drank one of Gabriel's beers, she was still as a statue, preparing herself to fight back. When she moved towards Gabriel's gun, the man informed her that he had moved it—and points the gun at Alicia. Alicia explains that though she felt confident the man would kill her, she was also aware that he might toy with her for hours, until Gabriel returned home. Unfortunately, Gabriel called to say that he was going to be even more delayed. Overhearing this, the man had a new, sadistic idea: he grabbed some wire from Alicia's canvases and tied Alicia up with it.

Alicia tells Theo that she wished the man had killed her then and there. Theo is suddenly overcome with an urge to kiss and hold Alicia. "I feel that you need to be taken care of," he tells her; "I find myself wanting to take care of you." Alicia simply replies that that is not what she wants from Theo, and then she walks back inside.

## PART 4, CHAPTER 14

When Theo re-enters the therapy room, Alicia is sitting in his chair—though normally he would have pushed back on this, he is well aware that she has the upper hand in their relationship. Alicia begins to describe the fear she felt while tied up with wire: she recalls feeling terror "like fire." The man asked Alicia questions while she waited for Gabriel to come home. At exactly 11 p.m., his car rolled into the driveway.

As soon as Gabriel approached, the man swung Alicia around, telling her he would shoot Gabriel in the head if she made any sound. The man then used the gun to knock Gabriel out, tying him up and shooting Gabriel six times in the face. He left without saying a word.

*Like Alicia, Theo knows that sharing a cigarette will render them equals in a way that is not fully professional. But sharing a cigarette is also an intimate, even a flirtatious gesture; is Alicia trying to actually, sexually "seduce" Theo?*



*The man is completely at home in Alicia's house, to the point that he knows that Alicia has recently moved Gabriel's gun to a new spot. This sense of ease suggests either that the man is Gabriel in disguise, or that he has spent so much time studying the house that he knows it as if it was his own; just as Theo and Alicia's boundaries are blurring, the walls of a house no longer seem to have any definition or meaning. Heartbreakingly, by tying Alicia up with materials from her art studio, the man weaponizes her source of comfort—her artwork—against her.*



*In addition to transgressing the final, most vital barrier between patient and therapist, Theo's sexual attraction to Alicia is also tinged with something more parental: he wants to "take care" of her as Vernon and Eva never did.*



*Just a few pages earlier, Theo admitted that he could no longer tell "who was who" in his professional relationship with Alicia. Now, having effectively confessed his sexual feelings for her, Theo returns to his office to find Alicia sitting in the chair—she has taken control, and she will now set the terms of their engagement (as she maybe always has).*



*Perhaps more interesting than Alicia's shocking, likely untrue claim to innocence is her reflection that the invader asked her questions. Was it Gabriel in disguise, trying to find out his wife's true feelings? Was it Max, using his lawyerly skills to cross-examine Alicia? Or was it Christian, a therapist accustomed to asking questions of his patients?*



## PART 4, CHAPTER 15

Theo doesn't "believe a word" of Alicia's story. The facts don't line up: Gabriel was only shot five times, and Alicia was found untied, for example. But Alicia doesn't want to say anything else. Instead, she tells Theo that there is one more detail to the story, but she will tell him tomorrow, when she has had time to recover.

Theo speaks to Diomedes, admitting he needs some supervision in figuring out Alicia's case. Theo shares that he is deeply invested in—and frustrated by—Alicia. Indeed, Theo often leaves their sessions with a splitting headache. Diomedes is understanding, and he offers to share a **cigarette** with Theo.

Diomedes believes that Alicia's entire encounter with the man is an elaborate fantasy; he is much less sympathetic to her than Theo is. "You're in deep with Alicia," Diomedes cautions, "and your feelings are bound up with hers like a tangled ball of wool." Diomedes also feels that Alicia has been "performing" for Theo, offering him an image of a damsel in distress that will make him want to be her savior.

Diomedes theorizes that Alicia and the man are "one and the same"; she cannot face what she has done, so "she splits, dissociates, fantasizes." He encourages Theo to force Alicia to face the truth. Theo vows that he will do so tomorrow—and Diomedes implies that tomorrow is Theo's final chance.

## PART 4, CHAPTER 16

Theo follows Kathy once again, and once again, she meets her lover. But this time, rather than walking away, Theo decides to follow the man home. As he fantasizes about killing the man, Theo trails him from one bus to another. At last, the man disembarks and turns off onto a quiet, tree-lined street. Theo, still in pursuit, grabs a nearby rock and plans to bring it down on Kathy's lover's head.

Before he can do so, however, a group of party-goers spills onto the street, cutting Theo off from the man. Ahead of him on the street, Theo notices the man go into a lit kitchen. There, he shares dinner and a bottle of wine with a woman who has cooked for him. Theo is filled with rage, but he resolves not to kill the man. Instead, he will "do something cleverer than that."

*Greek tragedy often makes use of foreshadowing, patterns, and repetition, and this novel is no different: the facts of the case at the beginning were insufficient, and the facts Alicia presents now are (at least in Theo's mind) equally faulty.*



*Earlier, Theo acknowledged that a headache was a sign that he was successfully taking on Alicia's pain. But now the headache has grown too strong, proving again (as does the return of the cigarette symbolism) that Theo is perhaps over-identifying with his patient.*



*Diomedes makes two crucial points in this passage. First, in kinder language, he affirms Christian's point that Theo has lost a sense of separation between himself and Alicia; instead, the two have become "a tangled ball of wool." Second, Diomedes echoes the idea—first expressed by Jean-Felix—that Alicia is an actress, playing a part much as Kathy might do for work.*



*Just as Theo cannot distinguish between himself and Alicia, Diomedes feels that Alicia might not be able to distinguish between the reality of herself (which includes the murder) and her "fantasy" of herself. In both cases, Theo and Alicia struggle to understand their boundaries and borders as individuals.*



*Theo's marriage has now more directly begun to parallel Alicia's; like his patient, he starts to fantasize about murder. And similarly, even as Alicia recovers from being stalked, Theo now turns into a stalker himself—as if their therapy sessions were a how-to book rather than a cautionary tale.*



*As in ancient tragic plays, Theo's literally life-or-death decision to harm Kathy's lover is interrupted by a twist of fate (in this case, a party ending). Painfully, Theo also sees that there are two betrayals in this man's affair with Kathy, as (like Theo) the man has a spouse that he is lying to.*





## PART 4, CHAPTER 17

The next morning, Theo plans to “have it out with Alicia.” But when he arrives at the Grove, he learns that she has overdosed on pills; Yuri knows that there is lots of dealing going on in the ward. Theo blames himself, while Christian frets about the rest of the patients’ wellbeing. Strangely, Diomedes is nowhere to be found—even though Yuri had seen him in the hallway earlier that morning.

While the rest of the therapists return to the daily business of the Grove, Theo sits alone with Alicia. As he looks more closely at her, he notices something on the inside of her wrist. Alicia has been injected with a hypodermic needle, meaning this is not a suicide attempt but an attempted murder.

*Diomedes's absence at this crucial moment (especially when he was seen earlier in the day) casts suspicion on him—could he be the masked man, in some way responsible for Gabriel's death? After all, he tried to convince Theo that Alicia was imagining the man, which could be a ploy to protect himself. And if the stalker was questioning Alicia like a therapist, isn't it possible that it was Diomedes all along?*



*Theo's realization implies that maybe Alicia's silence was less about sending a message than it was about self-protection. In other words, maybe she was silencing herself by choice so that no one else could do it through violence.*



## PART 4, CHAPTER 18

Half an hour later, Diomedes arrives, claiming to have been in a meeting with the Trust. He summons Theo and Stephanie to his office, and Theo is worried he will be scapegoated, fired to clear the Grove’s name. Instead, Stephanie—emphasizing patient safety above reputation—places the blame on Yuri. Apparently, Christian saw Yuri leave the medicine cabinet unlocked, giving Alicia the perfect opportunity to get her hands on some hydrocodone.

Diomedes tries to argue that no one is at fault: “when someone wants to die [...] it’s often impossible to prevent it.” But Theo has his own theory, bringing up his sense that it was attempted murder. Moreover, Theo reveals that Christian was treating Alicia before she came to the Grove—if she were to talk, he could lose his job and his entire reputation. That’s enough evidence for Diomedes, and he suggests that it’s time to call the police.

*As the story rushes to its climax, the “psychological detective story” (focused not on identifying the murderer but on understanding them) starts to become more like a whodunit mystery. Critically, Yuri told Theo early on that he watched a woman through the window; he also had an unusually close relationship with Alicia. Maybe the woman Yuri had a crush on and Alicia are one and the same.*



*Diomedes, who has previously linked his Greek heritage to an innate understanding of how tragedy works, now embraces the idea that certain losses are “impossible” to avoid. But Theo is determined to place the blame on Christian—which doesn't totally make sense, given that several days have elapsed since Theo first learned of Christian's prior involvement with Alicia. Just as Theo earlier tested Paul, Max, and Jean-Felix, this accusation seems like it could be another test.*



## PART 4, CHAPTER 19

“From then on,” Theo writes, “things moved fast.” Led by Chief Inspector Steven Allen, the police arrive at once, asking Theo to make an official statement. As he prepares to do so, he is shocked to notice Yuri dealing drugs to Elif in the fishbowl. And strangely, Jean-Felix has arrived and has been waiting for hours. Theo does not know what to make of any of this new information.

*The pacing of the novel picks up—the chapters get shorter, and each plot point gets less focus—mirroring the “fast” pace of the investigation. The realization that Yuri is dealing drugs further adds to the sense that no one is who they seem, and that Yuri in particular might be guiltier than he was on first glance.*



## PART 4, CHAPTER 20

Theo goes outside to smoke a **cigarette**, but he is interrupted by Max Berenson and Tanya. Max, having heard the news about Alicia, is violently angry; Tanya has to restrain him so that he does not punch Theo. “My poor Alicia, my girl,” Max cries, threatening Theo. Tanya looks on in dismay, and Theo walks away.

*Max is no longer able to conceal his feelings in front of Tanya; as Freud said, the truth always comes out. At the same time, however, Max’s real grief suggests that he is probably not behind the attempted murder of Alicia Berenson.*



## PART 4, CHAPTER 21

Theo walks all the way back to Kathy’s lover’s house. Again, he sees the man’s wife in the window: “she looked innocent,” he thinks, “as I had once looked.” Over the next few days, he keeps coming back, buying some things across the street and watching the woman through the window.

*A few days earlier, Theo identified with Kathy’s lover—but soon after, he begins to see himself in Kathy’s lover’s wife. Fascinatingly, the word “innocent” (which Theo has earlier used to describe Alicia) depicts both Theo and this mysterious woman as children, helpless, youthful victims of their dishonest partners.*



One day, without knowing fully why, Theo slips into the little summerhouse at the back of the property. When the woman notices him, he slips on a black balaclava and gloves. In the mirror, the woman spots Theo—he is holding a knife. “This was the first time I came face-to-face with Alicia Berenson,” Theo reveals. “The rest, as they say, is history.”

*In this shocking climax, it becomes clear that Kathy’s lover was Gabriel, and that Theo was the masked man all along—he was the one asking Alicia questions, and he was the one who broke into her house on the day Gabriel died. By capping his wild reveal with a stock phrase (“the rest [...] is history”), Theo tries to blame destiny, taking narrative agency away from himself—when in fact he made every decision to continue to stay in Alicia’s life, before and after the murder.*



## PART 5, CHAPTER 1

The final section begins with a quote from the Bible: “If I justify myself, mine own mouth will condemn me.” The novel then jumps forward to Alicia’s most recent diary entry, dated February 23rd. She explains how she recognized Theo as the masked man—“the same smell of **cigarettes**,” the same phrase (“I want to help you see clearly”).

*Even as Alicia’s stalker, Theo claimed to be her therapist, arguing that he wanted to help her; seen through this light, Theo’s desire to understand (to “see clearly”) is terrifying and abusive. Furthermore, it is telling that cigarette smoke—which Theo has long identified as a symbol of his own failures as a therapist—becomes a giveaway to Alicia.*



As soon as Alicia recognized Theo, she had tried to kill him. But she had failed, and after the failure, doubt set in; was she just imagining all of it? Once she told a falsified story of Gabriel’s death, however, Alicia was sure that Theo was the man who had been watching her. And so she was not surprised when, a few minutes earlier, he had come in with a needle and injected her. Already, Alicia can feel herself losing consciousness, so she has to write this diary entry quickly.

*The psychological idea of “splitting” (as mentioned by Theo and Diomedes earlier in the novel) dictates that a person, having committed terrible acts, often struggles to reconcile those acts with the good parts of themselves. By accusing Christian of his attempted murder, Theo was perhaps trying to punish the “split”-off side of himself; why else would he tell anyone that Alicia had been injected?*



Theo really had tied Alicia up, and he really had threatened to kill Gabriel. While they both waited for Gabriel, Theo had asked Alicia whether or not Gabriel loved her. When she replied that he did, Theo was skeptical: “we’ll see.” Alicia feels that Theo is not quite human, that he is pure evil.

When Gabriel finally returns, Theo lectures him: “I’m a married man. So I know what it’s like to love someone. And I know what it’s like to be let down.” Gabriel does not understand, so Theo gives him a choice—“either you die,” Theo tells him, “or Alicia does. You decide.” Theo counts down from 10, while Alicia pleads for Gabriel to spare her life. But at the end of the 10 seconds, Gabriel softly admits it: “I don’t want to die.”

Alicia smells jasmine, as she feels every cell in her body die and give out. Theo explains that Gabriel was having an affair with Kathy, and then he shoots the gun into the ceiling. Before he leaves, he unties Alicia’s wrists and softly kisses her on the cheek.

Gabriel begs Alicia to untie him, to forgive him, to talk to him. But Alicia stays silent—“Gabriel had sentenced me to death. The dead don’t talk.” In the present day, Alicia wishes that Gabriel had become her father in her mind, a tyrant. But “the truth is Gabriel had my eyes, suddenly—and I had his.” Alicia picks up the gun. “I didn’t kill Gabriel,” she explains. “He killed me. All I did was pull the trigger.”

## PART 5, CHAPTER 2

On Stephanie’s orders, Indira and Theo are cleaning out Alicia’s room at the Grove; it is unlikely she will ever wake up. Theo sorts through Alicia’s belongings, hoping to clear away any incriminating evidence. He also notices some sketches, quick and brilliant. One of the sketches is of Indira. Theo admires the picture of Indira, reflecting how much he hates the painting Alicia did of the two of them in a burning building.

*But though Theo preaches that each person is complex, comprised of good and evil, Alicia sees Theo less as a complicated human and more as a demonic figure. His questions about Gabriel in Alicia’s house parallel his questions in the therapy room at the Grove—and while Theo claims he wants to help, Alicia only feels tortured.*



*Gabriel’s decision to sacrifice Alicia’s life in place of his own directly parallels the plot of [Alcestis](#), in which Admetus sacrifices his wife’s life to protect himself. On the one hand, Theo should have understood the allusion all along, suggesting that he was directly lying to (or at least misleading) readers. But on the other hand, Theo’s statement that he “knows what it’s like” to be betrayed shows, again, just how unable he is to separate his own feelings from Alicia’s.*



*When Theo went to visit Paul at Alicia’s childhood home, he took in the jasmine—the very smell that Alicia experienced when Vernon metaphorically “killed” her. So just as Theo predicted, Alicia feels that Gabriel’s betrayal is a direct repeat of her father’s: two versions of Admetus, sacrificing the same, silent Alcestis.*



*Greek tragedies end in death; in [Alcestis](#), the Greek tragedy at the heart of this novel, the titular character is murdered midway through the tragedy, and though she goes on living, she never really revives. Alicia experiences something similar here—though she technically murders Gabriel, emotionally, she feels that he has already killed her off. And most importantly, this passage shows the truth behind Alicia’s silence: by not speaking, Alicia is communicating her symbolic death to the rest of the world, showing them the emotional truth that she already knows.*



*Once again, Alicia uses her painting to communicate the feelings she does not want to give voice to. By creating such a flattering portrait of Indira, then, Alicia shows that there was one therapist she actually did think fondly of. It is probably not a coincidence that, given how much men dismissed Alicia, she really only trusted the one woman in the clinic.*



Theo makes it clear that he did not intend for Alicia to kill Gabriel; he merely wanted to “awaken” her to the reality of her marriage, as he had been “awakened.” He had been unaware of Alicia’s personal history when he pointed the gun at Gabriel. So after the murder, Theo became obsessed with Alicia—he wanted to know her past, to understand why she had resorted to such violence. And what better way to learn than through a job at the Grove?

In fact, Theo really did believe that he was the only one who “knew how to help her.” And in Cambridge, he had understood the psychological link between Vernon Rose’s behavior and Alicia’s rage at Gabriel. But once Theo realized Alicia knew his true identity, his life and career were in jeopardy. So he injected Alicia with morphine (the “hardest thing” he had ever done), and blamed Christian for the whole thing.

Indira has finished packing up the room. Frantically, Theo realizes that he has been distracted and has failed to find the diary. Without it, there is no evidence to convict Christian—but Theo has no clue where it is, no matter how hard he searches.

## PART 5, CHAPTER 3

Julien McMahon, the head of the trust, sits Theo down and tells him that Diomedes has resigned. To Theo’s surprise, however, Julien has a job offer for him: the hospital is starting a new psychiatric center, and Theo seems like the perfect person to run it. Theo is elated by the prospect—now he will have a chance to help people just as Ruth helped him.

Theo explains that last year, he and Kathy moved to Surrey, back into his childhood home. They had wanted a garden and extra space, but almost 12 months later, they have yet to unpack their boxes or decorate. Instead, Kathy has started working less and eating more, watching TV all the time. A doctor suggested putting her on antidepressants, but Theo was opposed to it; Theo urged Kathy to go to talk therapy, but “Kathy doesn’t want to talk.”

*Now that readers know the full truth, Theo tries to justify his actions—but rather than making himself seem empathetic, he ultimately reveals his obsession with Alicia to be more self-involved (more “narcissistic”) than anyone could have imagined.*



*The timelines, deliberately twisted for much of the book, have been straightened out. At last, readers can see that Theo has stayed with Alicia for six full years following her betrayal; in other words, he has flouted Ruth’s advice completely. Instead, Theo has tried to use Alicia to make sense of his relationship with Kathy, seeking professional validation where he no longer finds romantic comfort.*



*As the book hurtles towards its final, tragic end, Michaelides injects a great deal of tragic irony into the plot: readers know that Alicia has condemned Theo in her diary, but Theo is not yet clued into that fact.*



*The fact that Theo will succeed professionally even as the Grove crumbles around him further demonstrates the self-involvement of his desire to treat the famous “silent patient.”*



*As Michaelides himself notes, by the end of the novel, Alicia and Kathy have “swapped roles”: Alicia speaks, while Kathy—once known for her endless chatter—falls silent. In a classic example of a tragic twist, Theo has gone to near-murderous lengths to save his marriage with Kathy—but the marriage has collapsed anyway, as the two partners fall into their own private miseries.*



When Theo gets home, he tells her that a patient of his has overdosed—but even when he mentions the name Alicia Berenson, Kathy seems totally unfazed. Theo feels that they both “do a lot of pretending these days,” hiding their true circumstances and feelings from each other. He wants to confess to Ruth, but he feels that he is no longer able to talk to her: “I was altogether a different creature now, guiltier, less capable of honesty.” He feels that he has failed not only Ruth but the entire practice of therapy, “the talking cure.”

The doorbell rings, and it is Chief Inspector Allen, who happens to be in the neighborhood. Kathy is confused, so Theo suggests she run upstairs and take her bath. While Theo makes Inspector Allen a cup of tea, the police officer discusses Jean-Felix Martin, who has recently dropped off all of Alicia’s paintings. Hidden in the back of the painting of the burning building, Inspector Allen reveals, was the diary. He pulls it out of his coat pocket, and Theo’s hands begin to tremble.

Inspector Allen begins to read words Theo has never read before—the final entry in Alicia’s diary, from February 23rd. Theo realizes that the Inspector did not just happen to “be in the neighborhood.” Theo asks the Inspector to read the entire entry, and as he does, it begins to **snow**. Theo reaches his hand out to catch a snowflake. The first flake melts on his finger, and he goes “to catch another one.”

*At first, it seemed that Theo was honest while Kathy (and by extension Gabriel) were lying, “acting” out a part for their respective spouses. But by the end of the novel, everyone still alive is “pretending.” Without honesty, Theo seems to admit here, “the talking cure” means nothing; if one is not telling the truth, then therapy is really acting, playing a part rather than untangling a problem.*



*By hiding her diary in her painting—and by revealing the reality of Theo’s crimes in her diary—Alicia, “the silent patient,” proves herself to be a master communicator. And symbolically, Alicia’s decision to link her diary to her art shows that she is first and foremost a visual thinker, getting her message across not on Theo’s therapeutic terms but on her own artistic ones.*



*Now that Theo’s crimes are known, he will almost certainly face jailtime; his life will collapse completely. It is touching, then, that Theo spends this last second of freedom trying to catch snow, the very thing he associated in boyhood with happiness and escape. On the one hand, Theo’s desire for the snow reflects just how much his adult behavior has been shaped by his childhood pain. But more tragically, the melting snow signifies that despite his best efforts, Theo will never find real happiness; instead, he will always be trying, and failing, to “catch” it.*







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