I'm the King of the Castle

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF SUSAN HILL

Susan Hill was born in Scarborough, a town that serves as the setting for several of her novels. She studied at the local Catholic girl's school, and at the age of sixteen, she and her family moved to Coventry, a much larger city. During her teen years, she penned a novel titled *The Enclosure*, which was published the same year that she began studying at King's College in London. Beginning in the late 1960s, Hill wrote a series of acclaimed novels, including *I'm the King of the Castle* (1970), *The Bird of Night* (1972) and *Strange Meeting* (1974). Hill's numerous novels have addressed an impressive number of subjects, including war, crime, and childhood; however, her most popular novels are ghost stories or works of crime fiction. Her novella *The Woman in Black* (1983) was adapted into a famous stage play that has played in London's West End for more than twenty years. Hill married the Shakespeare scholar Stanley Wells in 1975. She resides in the United Kingdom.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

I'm the King of the Castle doesn't allude to specific historical events. Like many Gothic novels, it seems to exist in a timeless, self-contained world. However, it's worth examining the history of English property and the English class system in analyzing Hill's novel. In the first chapter of the book, Hill informs readers that the Hoopers' manor house, Warings, is relatively new: no more than a few generations old. This would suggest that the Hooper family consolidated its fortunes in the early 19th century. During this era, the British countryside was undergoing monumental changes. In the first half of the 19th century, under the infamous enclosure system, working-class families were evicted from their ancestral lands as wealthier landowners consolidated what had previously been common land for their own benefit. The result was that hundreds of thousands of working-class English families had to migrate to large cities to support themselves. In addition to catalyzing the Industrial Revolution and the shift from a feudalist system to capitalism, the "emptying out" of the English countryside in the 19th century paved the way for rich landowners to physically isolate themselves from the working class on large estates much like the Hoopers' family property in *I'm the King of the Castle*. For more on the history of the English countryside in the 19th century, readers might consult the chapters on England in *Building European Society: Occupational Change and Social Mobility in Europe* by Andrew Miles and David Vincent.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The novel to which *I'm the King of the Castle* is most frequently compared is William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954). Like Hill's novel, *Lord of the Flies* is narrated from the point of view of children, but it's far from a "children's book." Instead, both Hill and Golding portray children as violent, psychologically complex, and capable of committing profoundly evil acts. In doing so, both authors use the conceit of a story about children to comment on the inherent darkness of human nature. It's also important to situate Hill's novel within the Gothic tradition. Gothic fiction, highly popular in England the 18th and 19th centuries, is usually characterized by an atmosphere of fear, morbidity, and gloom. The first Gothic novel in English is often said to have been Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), but there are numerous examples from the 19th century: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), and Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) are often considered works of Gothic fiction. The Gothic also had a rich tradition during the 20th century, including in regions outside of England, such as the American South. William Faulkner's short story "*A Rose for Emily*" and Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* are two of the most famous 20th century works of fiction by American Southerners to include Gothic elements.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** I'm the King of the Castle
- **When Written:** 1969
- **Where Written:** Stratford-on-Avon and London, England
- **When Published:** 1970
- **Literary Period:** Neo-gothic
- **Genre:** Psychological horror
- **Setting:** Warings Manor in the village of Derne in the English countryside
- **Climax:** Charles Kingshaw drowns himself
- **Antagonist:** Edmund Hooper
- **Point of View:** Third person limited, moving between several different characters' viewpoints (primarily Charles's and Edmund's)

EXTRA CREDIT

"No, but I've seen the movie …" Several of Hill's books have been adapted for the screen. One of the most successful of these was the French film *Je suis le seigneur du château*, a loose adaptation of *I'm the King of the Castle*.

Susan lately. In 2013, Susan Hill left her long-time husband,

Stanley Wells, and began dating Barbara Machin, a younger television producer. The story, while perhaps not particularly remarkable, nevertheless provided some tabloid fodder in the U.K., where Hill is one of the most famous popular writers.

PLOT SUMMARY

Following the death of his father, a man named Joseph Hooper moves back into his father's home, a large English mansion called **Warings**. Joseph has an eleven-year-old son, Edmund Hooper, and his wife, Ellen Hooper, died six years ago. At first, Edmund is lonely and bored at Warings, which he considers a dull, ugly place. He's fascinated by the **Red Room**, a room of the house that contains the Hoopers' vast collection of moths.

Joseph, lonely after the death of his wife, arranges for a woman named Helena Kingshaw to come to Warings to serve as his "informal housekeeper." Helena brings her eleven-year-old son, Charles Kingshaw, with her. Charles and Edmund immediately dislike each other. Edmund mocks Charles for being from a working-class family. He also learns that Charles's father has died, and criticizes Charles's father for not supporting his wife and child. Around Joseph and Helena, Edmund is sweet to Charles. But in secret, Edmund plays nasty tricks on Charles. Recognizing that Charles is frightened of **birds**, Edmund places a stuffed crow in Charles's bed at night, making Charles so frightened that he can barely move. Edmund also locks Charles in the Red Room, knowing that Charles is scared of moths.

While Helena and Joseph become closer with each other, Charles plans to sneak away from Warings forever. He packs supplies, including food and a flashlight, and waits for an opportunity to run away into the woods surrounding the manor. Edmund realizes what Charles is planning to do, and assures Charles that he'll follow him wherever he goes. One day, Helena and Joseph leave to explore London together, and Charles seizes the opportunity to run away. He goes into the woods, conquering his anxieties. But while he's exploring, he realizes that Edmund has followed him there.

In the woods, Edmund is frightened of the dark trees and mysterious animals. Even though Charles is more confident and less frightened than Edmund, Edmund continues to bully Charles. He tells Charles that, very soon, Helena and Joseph are going to be married. Charles realizes that, even in the woods, Edmund is still in charge. Charles goes off by himself to look for a way out of the wood, and when he returns, he finds Edmund floating face down in a **stream**. Charles saves Edmund's life. The next morning, men come and rescue Edmund and Charles, after searching for them for hours.

Back at Warings, Edmund tells Joseph and Helena that Charles pushed him into the stream. Charles is furious, but Helena believes Edmund's story. She scolds Charles for running away from home, and Charles becomes so angry with her that he refuses to tell her the full truth about what happened.

A few days later, Edmund torments Charles by locking him in a shed. Charles knows that soon he'll be sent to the same boarding school that Edmund attends. Edmund is popular, and he promises to use his power to make Charles's life a living hell. Charles becomes increasingly overwhelmed by Edmund's sadistic bullying.

Joseph and Helena continue to get closer. One day they drive Edmund and Charles out to visit an old **castle** in the countryside. Charles climbs to the top of the castle, and Edmund chases after him. At the top, Edmund becomes so afraid of heights that he loses his balance and falls, breaking several bones. Doctors rush Edmund to the hospital; once again, Helena seems to blame Charles for Edmund's accident, even though Charles had wanted to help Edmund maintain his balance.

In the following weeks, Charles tries to enjoy his time apart from Edmund. He makes a new friend, a working-class kid named Anthony Fielding, who seems far more comfortable and self-assured than Charles could ever be. Fielding tells Charles not to be so frightened of Edmund, and reminds him that Edmund can't actually "do" anything to him. Helena spends lots of time visiting Edmund in the hospital, which Charles resents greatly. Finally, Joseph works up the courage to ask Helena to marry him.

Edmund returns to Warings, where he's forced to spend all his time in bed. Helena forces Charles to spend time with Edmund, even though Edmund continues to scare Charles and bully him in different ways. Edmund likes that Helena is spending so much time with him, even though he doesn't particularly like Helena. Charles occasionally steals away from Warings to spend time with Fielding, his only friend. Eventually, Helena finds out about Fielding, and invites him to come to tea with Edmund at Warings. This enrages Charles, since he thinks he's losing his only friend and, moreover, his "only secret." Around the same time, Joseph and Helena announce that they're getting married, meaning that Charles and Edmund will become brothers.

At Warings, Fielding is calm and collected as Edmund tries to scare him. Charles becomes frustrated when he realizes that Edmund treats Fielding differently than he treats Charles. He becomes so upset that he stubbornly refuses to spend more time with either Fielding or Edmund.

On the night before Charles and Edmund are set to leave for boarding school together, Charles wakes up and sneaks away from Warings. Furious with Helena, Edmund, and himself, he returns to the only place where he's ever felt completely comfortable—the woods. There, he finds the stream where he saved Edmund's life, and drowns himself. The next day, men find his body.

When Edmund learns about Charles's drowning, he feels

triumphant, since he believes that in some way, he caused Charles's death. Helena embraces Edmund, and he smells her perfume.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Charles Kingshaw – Charles Kingshaw is one of the two main characters in *I'm the King of the Castle*, along with Edmund Hooper. He has also been described as one of the most psychologically accurate child characters in all of English literature. Charles comes to **Warings** with his mother, Helena Kingshaw, shortly after the novel begins. At Warings, Charles is at first lonely and then frightened of Edmund Hooper. Edmund plays nasty tricks on Charles, exploiting Charles's fear of **birds** and dead animals and leaving him in a nearly constant state of terror while at Warings. Like Edmund, Charles is capable of feeling deep hatred, but, unlike Edmund, Charles doesn't seem to have the capacity or the desire to do harm to others. As a result, he spends the novel locked in a power struggle with Edmund, but never manages to get the upper hand. In the few instances when Charles does humiliate Edmund or assert his own power, Charles is unable to make anything of his advantage, and ultimately remains subservient to, frightened of, and in some ways dependent upon, Edmund. To illustrate Charles's frightened state of mind, Hill frequently shows him running through a list in his mind of all the negative possible outcomes of a scenario, no matter how unlikely. This ultimately proves to be Charles's greatest weakness: he allows himself to be overcome with fear, to the point where he's too paralyzed to fight back. Charles's ability to frighten *himself* is perhaps clearest at the end of the novel, when a simple note from Edmund that reads "Something will happen to you" is enough to give Charles nightmares and, ultimately, drive him to commit suicide.

Edmund Hooper – Edmund Hooper is, along with Charles Kingshaw, one of the two central characters in *I'm the King of the Castle*. Though Edmund is only eleven years old for most of the novel, he's spiteful, greedy, and sadistic—possessed of a capacity for pure evil, it seems, which sets him apart from the two other children in the novel. Edmund's evil arguably stems from his relationship to his property: because he is the heir of **Warings** (the Hoopers' manor), he believes that he has the right to inflict pain and suffering on Charles Kingshaw, whom he sees as an irritating outsider who has no right to live at Warings. Edmund is obsessed with death and the macabre, as evidenced by his fascination with stuffed **birds** and his family's collection of **moths**. He also has a tremendous talent for lying convincingly, which he often does with the goal of getting Charles in trouble. Edmund embodies a strange mixture of adult-like cunning and manipulation with purely childish behavior and impulses—for example, he wets his pants because he's afraid of heights. It is this combination of precocity and immaturity—a preternatural talent for evil, paired with some embarrassing habits that many boys of eleven have outgrown already—that makes Edmund such a monstrous character. (It's also worth noting the ironic contrast between Edmund's aristocratic sense of entitlement and his surname, which, in English tradition, is associated with barrel-makers—in other words, humble, working class people.)

Joseph Hooper – Joseph Hooper is the father of Edmund Hooper: a middle-aged father who, by his own admission, is dull, talentless, and unremarkable in almost every way. Although Hooper is a relatively minor character in the book, he's one of only three adult characters (the others are Alice Boland and Helena Kingshaw) whose private thoughts Hill reveals to readers. In comparison with his child, Edmund Hooper, Joseph seems surprisingly simple-minded in his thinking: he seems to have made peace with his own mediocrity rather than trying to better himself. Joseph's motivations in the novel are simple: he wants to do a good job of raising his son, Edmund, but fails to recognize what a manipulative child he is and therefore fails to understand him. More importantly, though, Joseph wants a romantic companion after the premature death of his wife. Hill implies that this is the reason Joseph sends for a new housekeeper (Helena Kingshaw)—the event that sets the plot of the novel in motion.

Helena Kingshaw – Helena Kingshaw is the mother of Charles Kingshaw. A middle-aged woman's who has lost her husband, Helena moves to **Warings** in part to find work and in part with the hope of finding a wealthy husband in Joseph Hooper. In many ways, Helena is the most ambiguous character in the novel. Her son, Charles, regards her as a negligent parent because she barely pays attention to him and often seems to favor Edmund Hooper over her own son. It is often unclear if Helena is actually as negligent as Charles portrays her, or if this is only Charles's impression of his mother, seen from his childish perspective. At times, however, Hill gives readers access to Helena's inner thoughts; at these times, it often *does* appear that Helena neglects her child, prioritizing her own financial security over Charles's happiness. More strongly than any of the other characters, Helena is conscious of and attracted to the Hoopers' wealth and their family estate. She's eager to marry a wealthy man who can support her (and her child), and she's willing to overlook certain things in order to ensure that this happens.

Anthony Fielding – Anthony Fielding first appears late in the novel, but he's one of the most important people in Charles Kingshaw's life. The child of a working-class family, Anthony is calm, self-possessed, and matter-of-fact about everything, even when other boys try to intimidate him. While he shares the same social class as Charles, Anthony is mature and fearless where Charles is frequently paranoid or unsure of himself.

Anthony gives Charles some valuable advice about self-reliance, assuring Charles that Edmund Hooper, while he may be intimidating, will not bring physical harm to Charles. As wise as this advice is, it does nothing to make Charles feel better: Edmund has already gotten inside Charles's head. Anthony can't understand it, but Charles is unable to control the fear he feels for Edmund.

Ellen Hooper – Ellen Hooper is the deceased wife of Joseph Hooper. She dies some six years before the novel begins, and Hill says very little about her. The absence of detail about Helen makes for an interesting contrast with the abundance of detail about Charles Kingshaw's deceased father, whose influence is still strongly felt at **Warings**, his old home.

Mrs. Alice Boland – Alice Boland is the housekeeper and caretaker of **Warings**, and the only person who lives at Warings from the very beginning of the novel to the very end (Edmund Hooper and Joseph Hooper only move there after Edmund's grandfather's death). Even so, Boland is a minor character in the book. The fact that Joseph hires another maid for Warings when he already has a perfectly suitable one suggests that Joseph isn't interested in a maid—rather, he is looking for a wife.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Joseph Hooper Sr. – The elder Joseph Hooper (Joseph Hooper's father) is described as having been an ambitious merchant who recognized the importance of advancing his social status, and believed that he could do so by building an imposing manor house, even if doing so involved selling all his other assets.

Turville – A child who Charles Kingshaw knew when he was five, and who dared Charles to jump into a pool.

Devereux – A wealthy school friend of Charles Kingshaw.

Fenwick – A boy who Charles Kingshaw knows from school. Charles tries to befriend Fenwick, only to be angrily rebuffed with the words, "Shut up, stupid."

Crawford – A student who bullies Charles Kingshaw during his time at school.

Enid Tyson – A long-time friend of Helena Kingshaw's.

Lesage – A prefect at Charles Kingshaw's boarding school, who makes him sit down on the floor.

Broughton-Smith – A boy who Charles Kingshaw knows from school, and who teases Charles for coming from a working-class family.

Miss Mellitt – A frightening old woman who lives in the hotel where Charles Kingshaw and Helena Kingshaw stay during their time in London.

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.

PROPERTY AND CLASS

Susan Hill's novel *I'm the King of the Castle* is a meditation on the effects of having property, as seen from the perspective of two eleven-year-old children. Edmund is the son of Joseph Hooper, the owner of **Warings**, a large English country manor. Charles, on the other hand, is the son of Helena Kingshaw, a working-class maid whom Joseph hires to work at Warings. In spite of their young age, both Edmund and Charles are highly attuned to the differences between their families: Edmund knows he's richer than Charles, and he never lets Charles forget it. By exploring the relationship between Edmund and Charles, Hill makes a nuanced distinction between property (the literal, material things that Edmund and his family own) and class (the more abstract sense of superiority that Edmund possesses, which gives him great power over Joseph).

As a direct result of his family's property, Edmund feels an overwhelming sense of power and entitlement. Because he's richer than Charles, and "owns" Warings (in the sense that he'll inherit it one day), he feels he has the license to boss Charles around and treat him however he wants. The first time Edmund ever meets Charles, he immediately feels superior to his working-class guest. It's clear to Edmund that Warings is the source of his family's power and that Charles is socially inferior to him because he "has nowhere." Edmund mocks Charles for living in a flat (i.e., apartment) and being unable to afford tuition at boarding school, among other attributes that signal his family's status as lower class. Edmund's point is childish but brutally clear: he has more than Charles, and that makes him more powerful than Charles.

Although the root of Edmund's power over Charles is his family's property, Edmund doesn't seem to derive power from his property in any concrete way. For instance, there is never a point in the novel when Edmund threatens to kick Charles out of Warings—Edmund is just a kid, after all, and could never do such a thing. Likewise, Charles continues to feel subservient to Edmund even *after* he becomes a member of the Hooper family, suggesting that class consists of something more than just the property one owns or one's family ties.

The significance of property and class in the relationship between Edmund, Charles becomes clearer, perhaps, when Charles asks Edmund why Edmund had locked him in the shed. Edmund sneers and replies, "because I felt like it." The

implication is that Edmund, because of the confidence and sense of superiority that he derives from his class, feels that he can treat Charles however he wants with impunity—and it soon becomes clear that he's right. By portraying Charles and Edmund's interactions in this way, the novel suggests that the value of property is not solely monetary. Rather, property is valuable because it allows people to assert their power over others psychologically. Put differently, property gives people a general, intimidating air of superiority and sense of power. In this way, Hill makes a crucial distinction between property—the literal, physical Warings manor—and class—the abstract, psychological advantage that people often enjoy over others as a result of *having* property.

Even when Charles sneaks into the wood surrounding Warings and Edmund follows him, Edmund succeeds in maintaining his position of power over Charles. However, away from home, Edmund becomes noticeably less confident, having left behind the source of his power—his family's property. In the woods, Edmund can no longer point to Warings as a constant reminder of his superiority to Charles. Conversely, Charles is stronger and more resourceful than Edmund, meaning that he has more literal, physical power. And yet, Edmund continues to hold the same psychological advantage over Charles. Even when Edmund is frightened, weak, and sickly, he can make Charles obey him because he has already done such an effective job of conditioning Charles to fear and respect him. In this way, even when Edmund and Charles wander away from Warings, the dynamics of class follow them. In other words, Edmund knows how to press his class advantage over Charles even when he has lost his property advantage.

It is perhaps because Charles feels hopeless that he will ever be seen or treated as Edmund's equal that he eventually commits suicide. Even after he is given all the same advantages as Edmund—the same house, family, education, and clothes—he can still feel the oppressive weight of Edmund's class-based sense of superiority pressing down on him. Property is material, while class is psychological—and, Charles ultimately concludes, inescapable. Unable to get out from under Edmund's thumb, he ends his life.

CHILDHOOD

I'm the King of the Castle is a book about children, but it's not exactly a children's book. Like another disturbing work about young people, William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, the novel paints a dark picture of human nature, suggesting that children—contrary to the way in which they're often portrayed—are born with the capacity for cruelty, destruction, and evil. Hill's novel revolves around two young characters, Edmund Hooper and Charles Kingshaw, whose minds (particularly Charles's) she explores with detailed psychological realism. By emphasizing their frustration, anger, and sadistic behavior, Hill suggests that both boys are capable of doing awful things.

Through Hill's portrayal of the thought processes of the two main characters, she shows that the dependence of children on their parents often gives them a sense of entitlement—in other words, they feel that they deserve certain things, not just from their parents but from the world at large. Children often have a keen sense for when they've been treated unfairly, and they're forever comparing what they receive to what other children receive. For example, when Charles Kingshaw moves to **Warings** with his mother, Helena Kingshaw, he notices almost right away that he and Edmund Hooper aren't treated equally. Confused and frightened, he clings to the logic of fairness. Charles feels that he is entitled to as much love and attention as Edmund receives. Therefore, when his mother pays more attention to Edmund than to him, or when Edmund steals one of Charles's **models**, Charles is quick to cry foul, because he perceives other people's behavior as being unfair. But of course, Charles isn't alone in feeling this strong sense of entitlement. Edmund—both because he's a particularly nasty child, and because he is accustomed to getting whatever he wants—feels that he's entitled to treat Charles cruelly and effectively make him his servant. Charles and Edmund's needs frequently come into conflict with one another. Charles wants a room to himself, and the freedom to play and be happy, while Edmund, who is much greedier, believes he alone is entitled to all of Warings, meaning that he's unwilling to allow Charles even his tiny amount of independence and pleasure. When Charles and Edmund's needs clash, Edmund quite often emerges the victor, causing Charles to grow frustrated and even fantasize about killing Edmund.

By portraying the entitlement, greed, and frustration of these two very different children, Hill raises the question of whether children are innately good. The novels shows children as being capable of both good and bad behavior and having both good and bad thoughts. Both characters seem to have an innate sense of right and wrong, but they also both have destructive and even murderous tendencies. Over the course of the book, Edmund bullies Charles in various horrific ways. He preys on Charles's fears of **birds** and dead animals, waging a full-scale psychological war on his nervous guest. He seems to have an almost preternatural instinct for what will scare Charles most. And because he seems to have almost no sense of compassion, he never hesitates to hurt Charles. Charles is a more complex character, whose thoughts and emotions Hill studies in greater detail. There are many times when Charles has the opportunity to hurt Edmund without fear of punishment. On many of these occasions, he does the right thing by helping Edmund instead of hurting him—and even saves Edmund's life by pulling him out of a stream. At other points in the book, Charles contemplates pushing Edmund off a high staircase and wishes, over and over again, that Edmund would die. It's crucial to recognize that Charles feels a strong instinct to help Edmund *and* a strong

instinct to hurt him. Charles acts morally, but Hill makes it clear that he's possessed of destructive capabilities. By depicting Charles in this way, Hill offers a portrait of childhood that is dark but not necessarily cynical. She recognizes that children sometimes want to do good, and she also recognizes that this instinct sometimes swallowed up by another, darker instinct. Edmund is an example of a child with almost no good in him. Charles, by contrast, is a much more nuanced character: because he hesitates to give in to evil or destructive impulses, he often finds himself under Edmund's control. At the end of the novel, he finally gives his destructive instincts an outlet, but he does so by drowning himself.

Hill's depiction of childhood is in many ways astonishingly accurate, and yet in other ways seems incomplete. Even though the novel is about two children, it never touches upon the wildness, goofiness, or whimsical sense of carelessness and fun that virtually all kids—no matter how miserable—experience at some point. Nor does the novel delve into the small acts of kindness and gentleness that children are capable of. Perhaps Hill omits these positive attributes, so often found in stories about children, in order to emphasize a larger point. In her book, children are deeply conflicted and possessed of inner demons. Adults, by comparison, are portrayed as being surprisingly naïve, with simplistic desires and ways of thinking about the world. By portraying adults in the way children are usually portrayed in books, and vice versa, Hill refutes the cliché that children are either simple or purely "good." On the contrary, she suggests that children, because of the intensity of their emotions and the depths of their self-interest, are capable of being even more wicked than adults.

FEAR AND PSYCHOLOGICAL MANIPULATION

I'm the King of the Castle is full of frightening moments for its characters. The main character, Charles Kingshaw, spends most of the novel in a frightening new place, **Warings** manor, while the other main character, Edmund Hooper, torments him with nasty pranks designed to confuse and terrify him. Even as Charles becomes more familiar with life at Warings, he continues to be consumed by fear, almost as if his emotions have a life of their own. Edmund knows how to exploit these fears, and by doing so he keeps Charles under his control. In this way, the novel suggests that the most insidious power often comes from psychological manipulation, not physical force.

Fear is often an irrational and uncontrollable emotion—so it can be particularly difficult for a child to overcome it. Unable to master his fear, Charles tries to simply endure it. Throughout the book, Charles can't prevent his own mind from racing through all the dangerous possibilities surrounding the things he fears. The list of concrete *things* that frighten Charles doesn't seem like much—a tree, a stuffed bird, a moth—but in each case, the novel shows how Charles's own imagination blows these things out of proportion, transforming them into nightmares. Elsewhere in the novel, Edmund's mind runs wild in a similar manner. While climbing up an old English castle, he becomes so anxious about the possibility of falling that he gets dizzy and falls. Edmund doesn't feel afraid because he *is* falling. Rather, he falls because he's *afraid*—an excellent metaphor for the way fear often originates in the mind, rather than in an inherently "fearsome" thing or experience. Perhaps the best example of this principle arrives at the end of the novel, when Charles receives a note from Edmund, which simply says, "Something will happen to you." Even though the note itself is extremely vague and open-ended, Charles, against his own will, allows the note to terrify him. He imagines various horrific scenarios—far more horrific than anything Edmund himself would ever do to him. Eventually, Charles drowns himself—making a self-fulfilling prophecy of Edmund's note.

Edmund gets frightened just as easily as Charles does, if not more so. But where Charles allows his imagination to run wild, Edmund is able to muster enough confidence and self-control to suppress his fears when he isn't being directly confronted with them. In part, he's able to do so because he's more comfortable in his position at Warings than Charles is—the very experience of living at Warings isn't new and frightening for him in the way it is for Charles. But Hill also suggests that Edmund is simply a more confident, aggressive child than Charles—and he knows how to exploit Charles's imagination. Charles, even when he understands exactly what Edmund is trying to do, is powerless to prevent himself from feeling afraid. This becomes especially clear when Edmund and Charles go into the wood together. Edmund is more frightened than Charles, but he's nevertheless able to intimidate and maintain control over Charles, as he does in the rest of the novel, by exploiting Charles's debilitating fears. It's crucial to notice that Edmund doesn't assert his power over Charles with physical force. By wielding fear as a psychological weapon rather than using physical force, Edmund very effectively manipulates Charles. It could even be argued that the central conflict in *I'm the King of the Castle* isn't between Charles and Edmund—it's between Charles and his own fears. In the end, Charles's subconscious fears consume him. Overwhelmed by Edmund's manipulation, but unable to control his irrational fears, Charles takes the only option he feels is left to him: suicide.

IMPRISONMENT AND ESCAPE

I'm the King of the Castle examines different kinds of physical and psychological imprisonment. **Warings**, the large English manor house to which Charles Kingshaw and Helena Kingshaw move, could be considered a prison: it's large, bleak, isolated from the rest of the world, and controlled by people who enforce rigid hierarchies. By this logic, Charles Kingshaw can be seen as a prisoner: he's trapped

in a lonely, miserable place, where his only companion is the cruel and sadistic Edmund Hooper, who torments Charles on a daily basis. Overwhelmed, Charles attempts to escape from the house, packing supplies and sneaking away in the early hours of the morning. This is not simply to escape his mistreatment, but it's also to prove his own power after being told consistently that he is fully dependent on the Hoopers' generosity. Understood in this way, Edmund isn't just trying to escape because he's unhappy; he wants to prove to himself that he can survive on his own, without the Hoopers' help. But his escape from Warings is a crushing failure. Just as he's about to leave the house and run into the woods, Charles becomes consumed by anxiety, remembering almost every negative thing that's ever happened to him. It's as if the house itself is trying to prevent his escape and pull him back into its clutches. Sure enough, it's not long before Edmund has tracked down Charles in the wood. And less than a day later, adults have arrived to take them both—prisoner and guard—back to Warings.

Charles's attempt to escape from Warings suggests a second, arguably more dangerous kind of imprisonment: psychological imprisonment. Throughout the book, Edmund "gets into [Charles'] head," succeeding in frightening him in various sadistic ways. Eventually, Charles reaches the point where he feels Edmund watching him even when he's on his own. Charles *isn't* physically imprisoned in Warings, but he seems psychologically bound to the oppressive dynamic of the house: he becomes incapable of imagining a world without Warings, Edmund, and the debilitating fear that traps him even more profoundly than the house's physical isolation. Even while Edmund and Charles are in the wood together, physically removed from Warings and all it represents, Charles finds himself following Edmund's commands with unthinking obedience. Charles behaves this way in part because, Hill writes, he's always been an unusually obedient kid, taking other kids up on their orders and dares. But perhaps more importantly, Charles obeys Edmund because he sees Edmund as the only source of truth in his disorienting new life at Waring. This becomes particularly clear when Edmund calmly tells Charles that their parents will be getting married soon—a prophecy that comes true before the novel's end. Both before and after this incident, Charles dislikes much of what Edmund tells him, but it never occurs to him to question any of it. In other words, Edmund's power over Charles lies, at least in part, in his seeming to know more than Charles. At one point, Edmund claims that he is a popular, powerful boy at boarding school—a bold claim for which he offers no evidence—but instead of questioning Edmund, Charles believes his tormentor instantly, and begins to grow more frightened both of boarding school and of Edmund in general. The scene captures the essence of the psychological nature of Charles's imprisonment: too frightened and confused to work out the truth for himself, he remains psychologically dependent on Edmund, in effect seeing the world exactly the way Edmund wants him to see it.

Ultimately, because he feels both physically and psychologically "trapped," Charles stages the only sort of escape he feels is left to him by taking his own life.

NATURE

Throughout the novel, Hill depicts nature in two opposing ways: in its wild forms, and as dead, controlled, or otherwise "tamed." Hang Wood (the forest that surrounds **Warings)**, is an example of "wild nature," while the Hooper family's vast moth collection, which has been carefully preserved, arranged, and classified, is the defining example of "tamed nature." Charles Kingshaw, the novel's main character, is strongly associated with nature in its wild and unrestrained forms. Edmund Hooper, the novel's second main character, is strongly associated with tamed nature.

The oppositional relationship between these two different ways of thinking about nature parallels the antagonistic relationship between Charles Kingshaw and Edmund Hooper, and reveals important things about both characters. Edmund's fascination with tamed nature is representative of his desire to control everything around him. On his first night at Warings, Edmund studies the family's moth collection, familiarizing himself with these emblems of tamed nature at the same time that he's adjusting to his new status as heir to Warings. For Edmund, the moths are a symbol of his family's power and prestige (the moth collection is one of the world's greatest), inseparable from his own sense of social superiority to other people. Elsewhere in the book, Edmund is shown to be fascinated with stuffed crows, the circus, and other emblems of nature that has been tamed or controlled, reflecting his own desire to exert control over the world. When he's exposed to the natural world itself, however, he becomes almost petrified with fear. In the wood, for instance, Edmund has no easy way of asserting his authority or controlling his surroundings. Trees, wild animals, rushing water, and the "boom" of thunder act as constant reminders of his own powerlessness and insignificance. Almost exactly the opposite is true of Charles. The one time in the novel when he's shown to be completely at ease is when he's walking through the wood by himself. The surreal sights and overwhelming sounds of the natural world are comforting to him for exactly the reason they're so unnerving for Edmund: they remind him that he's far from Warings, and therefore unconstrained by the unacknowledged caste system that dominates his life and his relationship with Edmund. More generally, Charles seems to like nature because he can be alone—far from bullies, his mother, and all the other people who make him feel anxious. Unsurprisingly, Charles is frightened by emblems of nature under control: stuffed birds, animals at the circus, and the moths in the Hoopers' collection all make him physically ill. These sights seem to remind him of his own feeling of being trapped in a society dominated by an oppressive class structure: at Warings, for instance, he feels as

helpless and imprisoned as a bug in a glass case.

In short, Charles's and Edmund's comfort and symbolic association with different states of nature mirror the basic difference between them: Charles craves freedom while Edmund craves power. But, like every other relationship in the book (Edmund and Charles, Joseph and Helena), the relationship between wild nature and tamed nature is set off balance or corrupted by Edmund's influence. Throughout the novel, but particularly toward the end, Edmund ruins Charles's otherwise positive relationship with the natural world. On several occasions, Charles becomes nauseated with the natural world in its free, live form—for example, when he's attacked by a crow and when he hears an owl hooting. It's as if Edmund has poisoned the one happy, fruitful part of Charles's life: his affinity for nature. As the novel proceeds, and Edmund's control over Charles's thoughts and feelings becomes more and more powerful, Charles's nausea with all nature becomes more pronounced, culminating in the ambiguous manner of his suicide. Consumed, Charles returns to the wood, the only place in the novel where he's been shown to feel completely comfortable. There, he drowns himself in a stream. It's important to notice the irony: the wood, a symbol of living nature and wilderness, has become the site of Charles's death. The suggestion is that Edmund, by indirectly but undeniably causing Charles's death, has turned Charles himself—once associated with nature in its wild forms—into a symbol of "nature tamed," just like the collection of dead moths or the stuffed crow. And so Charles's suicide represents a symbolic victory: Edmund triumphs over Charles, death triumphs over life, and tamed nature triumphs over wild nature.

SYMBOLS

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

WARINGS

Warings is the large manor house where Joseph Hooper and his son Edmund Hooper live. Early in the novel, Charles Kingshaw moves to Warings with his mother, Helena Kingshaw. There is a long tradition of macabre, mysterious English novels about big manor houses in the country, known as Gothic fiction. In many Gothic novels, the manor house functions almost like a character in the story—seeming to have its own personality and its own feelings about the characters who live there. Throughout the novel, Hill presents Warings as being antagonistic to Charles: at times, it seems to glare down on him, pushing him away, and on other occasions, Hill describes it as trapping him within its dark, mysterious rooms. While Charles is frightened of Warings, to Edmund Hooper, the heir of Warings, the manor represents safety and security. Warings symbolizes the English class system itself, in which certain children grow up to inherit vast properties and great wealth from their parents, while other children don't.

MOTHS

The Hooper family owns a vast collection of dead moths, which have been preserved, classified, and arranged in glass display cases. Edmund Hooper seems to enjoy looking through this collection, but Charles Kingshaw finds it utterly terrifying. As Hill describes them, moths are important symbols of the natural world, albeit a natural world that has been brought under the control of human beings. It's no coincidence that Edmund finds the moths fascinating: Edmund is obsessed with the idea of asserting his power over others, and the sight of thousands of moths in their cases seems to appeal to his love for control. That Charles, on the other hand, is shown to be repulsed by the dead moths symbolizes his love of nature in its wild and unrestrained form—and his dread of the control Edmund wields over him.

THE RED ROOM

The Hoopers keep their **moth** collection in a room called the Red Room. This is one of the most overt allusions to the English Gothic tradition: in many Gothic novels, there's a mysterious room that only a few characters are allowed to enter (*Jane Eyre* is the classic example—and in fact, there's a Red Room in *Jane Eyre*, too). Although Edmund finds the Red Room fairly ordinary, Charles is intimidated by it. Therefore, from Charles's perspective, the Red Room symbolizes the austerity, mystery, and eeriness of **Warings** itself.

CROWS

Charles Kingshaw is terrified of crows: at one point, he's attacked by a large crow, and later, Edmund Hooper leaves a large stuffed crow in his bed, frightening him to the point where he can barely move. Traditionally, crows are associated with the English countryside, so Charles's fear of crows could symbolize his anxiety at having to abandon his old home and live at **Warings**. More generally, birds symbolize the constant sense of fear and anxiety that Charles feels during his time at Warings.

WATER

At different points in the novel, Charles Kingshaw is attracted to but also repulsed by large bodies of water. He feels comfortable swimming in a stream in the middle of the wood, but he's terrified by an ordinary swimming pool.

For Hill, water seems to be a symbol for the natural world itself. Nature can be "tamed" (as suggested by the swimming pool), or it can be allowed to "run free" (as suggested by the wild, flowing stream in the woods). Charles, with his affinity for nature in its wild and unrestrained form, is naturally more attracted to wild, unpredictable bodies of water, such as the stream in the wood. His fear of the swimming pool, conversely, is like his fear of the **moth** collection at **Warings**—since both represent, for him, the subjugation and control of nature, which he associates with his own oppression by Edmund.

LEYDELL CASTLE

One day, Joseph Hooper drives Edmund Hooper and Charles Kingshaw to a local tourist attraction, Leydell Castle. Children come from across the country to play at the ruins of this authentic medieval castle, and Joseph believes that he's giving Edmund and Charles a fun way to spend the day. The reality, however, is much more disturbing. Charles and Edmund engage in a subtle battle of wills, in which both try to assert their superiority over the other by climbing to the top of the castle. Thus, Leydell Castle symbolizes the boys' struggle for power, which is fundamentally rooted not only in Edmund's abuse of Charles, but in the class-based hierarchy that exists between them. The two boys compete for everything—Warings, toys, their parents' love, and, here, a castle. Unbeknownst to Joseph, the boys' struggle is brutal, and ultimately even deadly.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Books edition of *I'm the King of the Castle* published in 1977.

Chapter 1 Quotes

It was an ordinary house, he thought, an ugly house, nothing to boast of. But the idea that it was *his*, the idea of a family history, pleased him.

Related Characters: Edmund Hooper

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 10

Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter One, readers are introduced to the Hooper family. The Hoopers live in a large country mansion called Warings, the only piece of land they still own. Warings is large and imposing, in the style of other big, gloomy English manor houses. But from the perspective of the young Edmund Hooper, one of the two protagonists of Hill's novel, Warings is nothing special. Edmund doesn't particularly like the house, but he's interested in the idea of owning such a place. Put another way, Edmund Hooper is proud of his house, not because the house is intrinsically valuable—rather, because owning the house gives him an enviable social status. Right away, then, Hill makes an important difference between property (the literal, physical *stuff* that people own) and class (the abstract feeling of power, status, and superiority that property can engender).

It's notable that, even at the age of eleven, Edmund is capable of understanding the abstract power that owning a manor house brings him, as it suggests an awareness beyond his years. For the time being, however, he has nobody over whom he can assert this power. That will change after he meets Charles Kingshaw, the gentler, poorer boy who Edmund bullies.

He stretched out his hand, put his finger under the head of the pin and slid it up, out of the thick, striped body. At once, the whole moth, already years dead, disintegrated, collapsing into a soft, formless heap of dark dust.

Related Characters: Edmund Hooper

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

At the close of Chapter One, Edmund Hooper sneaks through Warings late at night. He goes to the most mysterious room in the house, the Red Room. Inside, he finds his family's vast collection of moths and butterflies, probably the most valuable thing in the entire manor. Edmund opens one of the moth displays and touches a dead, preserved moth—which promptly disintegrates into dust.

This scene is symbolically complex: to begin with, Edmund is fascinated by the dead moth, reflecting his general fascination with dead animals and the control of nature in general. Second, notice that Edmund is "killing" that which is already dead, an apt metaphor for his fondness for pointless destruction and brutality. Finally, it's worth touching on the

trope of the "forbidden room" in the Gothic novel, a genre to which Hill's book pays homage. In many Gothic novels, such as *Jane Eyre*, there's a mysterious room in the house, which the main character is prohibited from entering and only explores toward the end of the novel. The characters' exploration of this mysterious room often symbolizes their growing awareness of the house's history and, more abstractly, their coming-of-age. But in this novel, quite oddly, Edmund discovers what's in the mysterious room almost right away. For readers familiar with the tropes of Gothic fiction, Hill's message is clear: this will not be a book about a character's journey to enlightenment. Rather, the central mystery of the story will be the psychology of the characters themselves.

Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ Hooper said nothing. He threw the photograph down into the suitcase and walked back to the window. Kingshaw knew that he had won, but he did not *feel* the winner; Hooper had conceded him nothing.

Related Characters: Edmund Hooper, Charles Kingshaw

Related Themes:

Page Number: 20

Explanation and Analysis

In their first encounter, Charles Kingshaw and Edmund Hooper establish the pattern that they'll repeat throughout the remainder of the book. Edmund Hooper, the heir to Warings, is naturally more comfortable than his poorer, gentler, less experienced guest. Charles has come to Warings with his mother, who's working as Joseph Hooper's servant. Charles is very intimidated, both by the house and by Edmund. Edmund knows this, and tries to assert his power over Charles. He makes fun of Charles for being too poor to own a house, and for having a mother who works for a living. At several points, including the one described in this passage, Charles senses that he has won the argument. But despite winning small battles, Charles keeps losing the war because Edmund never allows him to *feel* like a winner. Charles is conscious of Edmund's overpowering self-confidence and general air of superiority—and he senses that nothing he says or does will make Edmund feel like a loser.

The important point here is that between Charles and Edmund, winning or losing is a state of mind, not a concrete reality. Edmund wins even when he loses, because he *believes* that he's a winner, and superior to Charles in every way. Just the opposite is true for Charles; even when he has a big advantage over Edmund, he feels subservient, and seems to believe Edmund's claims of superiority.

❝ Perhaps I should strike him, Joseph Hooper thought, for speaking to me in that way, perhaps it is very foolish to let him get the upper hand, to allow such insolence. I do not like his supercilious expression. I should assert myself. But he knew that he would not. He deliberated too long, and then it could not be done.

Related Characters: Edmund Hooper, Joseph Hooper

Related Themes:

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Hill offers readers a window into Joseph Hooper's mind. This comes as quite a surprise: for the most part, the novel is written from the perspectives of either Charles Kingshaw or Edmund Hooper. Here, however, Hill writes from Joseph's point of view. Joseph's thought processes seem rather dull and simplistic in comparison to those of Charles and Edmund. He's so weak and cautious that he's even a little frightened of asserting his power over his own child. In many ways, it could be argued, Joseph is a lot like Charles Kingshaw: he's too passive to be truly powerful. Joseph and Charles have this in common—they're both frightened of Edmund. From a narrative standpoint, this passage is especially important because it shows why Charles and Edmund are left alone so often: Joseph is too shy and nervous to tell them what to do. As a result, Edmund essentially has a "free reign" over Charles at Warings.

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ He imagined the furry body of the moth against the pads of Hooper's fingers. He was ashamed of being so afraid, and could not help it, he only wanted to get out, to stop having to see the terrible moths. Hooper watched him. There was a moment when they both stood, quite still, waiting. Then, Hooper whipped around and pushed past Kingshaw without warning he was out of the door, turning the key sharply in the lock. After a moment, his footsteps went away down the hall. A door closed somewhere.

Related Characters: Edmund Hooper, Charles Kingshaw

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 41

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Edmund shows Charles the Red Room. Charles is, somewhat irrationally, upset by the sight of so many dead, preserved moths. He finds them disgusting, and can't help but imagine the horrible texture of their bodies. Edmund, knowing that Charles is uncomfortable with the moths, runs out of the Red Room and locks the door, leaving Charles to suffer there alone.

The passage is notable for a couple reasons. First, notice that Charles doesn't become truly frightened until he starts *imagining* the textures and shapes of the moths. Here, as in the rest of the book, he's a victim of his own imagination running wild with his fears and unconscious associations. Second, the passage emphasizes one of the principle themes of the book: Charles's intense aversion to anything that symbolizes the control or domination of nature, which he feels mirrors his own subjugation at Warings. Just as the moths are stuck under the glass of their display cases, Charles feels imprisoned in the Red Room. Charles is a prisoner—at first literally, and later psychologically—of Edmund's conniving.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ They were gratified with one another, and with this new arrangement of their lives, and so it was easy to say, 'How well the boys have settled down together! How nice to see them enjoying themselves! How good it is for them not to be alone!' For they talked at length about their children, knowing nothing of the truth.

Related Characters: Joseph Hooper, Helena Kingshaw, Edmund Hooper, Charles Kingshaw

Related Themes:

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

Chapter Four ends in a darkly ironic fashion. While Charles and Edmund have been fighting and plotting each other's misery, Helena and Joseph have been falling in love. Joseph has summoned Helena to come to Warings in large part because he wants a new wife. Helena, for her part, seems to enjoy living with Joseph, and seems to look forward to spending the rest of her life with him. Helena and Joseph take keen pleasure in the "knowledge" that their children are getting along—even though the truth is that they hate each other. Like a great many frightening novels about children, then, Hill's book proceeds from the premise that adults don't know anything about what's going in their children's lives. Charles's fate is to be tormented by Edmund while his mother remains blissfully ignorant of the truth.

Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ Very deliberately, Kingshaw inserted his forefingers under the string, and pulled the satchel off his back. He untied his anorak from it, and spread it out on the ground, and then sat down. Hooper stood above him, his eyes flicking about nervously, his face as pale as his limbs in the dim light.

Related Characters: Edmund Hooper, Charles Kingshaw

Related Themes:

Page Number: 81

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Charles has escaped from Warings and gone to live in the woods surrounding the manor house. To his dismay, however, Edmund chases after him. When they're in the woods, Charles discovers that the dynamic with Edmund has changed. Away from Warings, Edmund is no longer the "leader." On the contrary, he's frightened and childish, meaning that Charles has the opportunity to seize control and order Edmund to follow him. In this passage, Charles appears to be savoring the realization that he has all the power now. He unpacks his bag and settles in with the full awareness that Edmund is terrified of the mysterious forest and loud storm. Finally, Charles believes he's in charge, and he intends to enjoy every second of it.

Chapter 7 Quotes

Hooper sighed. 'Look, when you're breathing, you're alive aren't you? Everything is. And when you stop breathing, your heart stops, and then you're dead.'
Kingshaw hesitated, worried about it, uncertain how to argue.
Hooper's eyes opened very wide. 'I suppose you don't believe all that guff about souls and ghosts and everything, do you?'
'Not ghosts...'
'When you're dead you're dead, you're finished.'
'No.'
'Look . . . you can see.' Hooper poked his finger at the rabbit' Its head flopped heavily sideways.
'It's dead' he said.
Kingshaw stared at it miserably. He could not think clearly. What Hooper said must be true, and yet he knew that it was not true.

Related Characters: Edmund Hooper, Charles Kingshaw (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 88

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Charles and Edmund continue to battle for power. In the forest surrounding Warings, the two boys look for food and shelter. Charles is much more confident and physically capable than Edmund in the forest. And yet Edmund tries to reassert his power over Charles by scaring him. He talks about the dead animals scattered throughout the wood, and points to a dead rabbit. Confidently, he tells Charles that dead animals don't mean anything—a statement that Charles immediately denies, though he can't prove why Edmund is wrong.

The passage perfectly captures the difference between the two characters' views of nature. Charles is attracted to nature in its living forms, and he's repelled by the concept of dead animals (just as he's repelled by the sight of dead moths or macabre stuffed crows). Edmund, for his part, is eerily attracted to dead animals, since he sees them as mere playthings, and reminders of his own power. By the same token, Edmund is frightened by nature in its unrestrained, wild forms, because it makes him feel powerless.

Kingshaw knew that he was the loser. His momentary burst of exultation, and his feeling of superiority over Hooper counted for nothing, they were always short-lived. It was really only a question of which of them walked in front, for a while. Kingshaw was used to lacking any confidence in himself, to knowing that he could do nothing very well. Until now, he had not much cared he'd got by. Now, he cared, his pride had risen, he could no longer be docile about himself. Everything was unfair.

Related Characters: Edmund Hooper, Charles Kingshaw

Related Themes:

Page Number: 98

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Charles Kingshaw begins to give up—not just now, but for good. In the woods near Warings, he believes that he'll be able to assert his power over Edmund Hooper. But he quickly finds that Edmund isn't going to give up so easily. Edmund takes great pains to scare Charles, reminding him of the moths and other eerie creatures of the forest. To his great frustration, Charles realizes that Edmund is succeeding in frightening him, implicitly suggesting that Edmund continues to wield great power over him, even when they're far from Warings. Charles begins to conclude that Edmund will always be his leader—and that he'll never be able to conquer his own fears, meaning that Edmund will always be able to manipulate him. In this way, the passage is an unfortunate example of how Charles tends to dig his own grave. He gives up too soon and too easily, concluding that Edmund will always be in control—a statement that turns out to be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Chapter 8 Quotes

He hated his mother more than anybody, more even than Hooper, now. He had a terrible twisted-up feeling in his belly, because of it. Now, Hooper knew. 'There are things I see that you don't.'
There wasn't anything he could do. Except get away. It was his father's fault, really, because his dying had been the start of it all, the not having enough money, and living in other people's houses.

Related Characters: Edmund Hooper, Charles Kingshaw (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 113

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Charles learns from Edmund that Joseph and Helena, their parents, are going to be married soon. Edmund never really explains how he "knows" this, and it's likely that he's just guessing. But he says so with such finality and confidence that Charles senses that Edmund is telling the truth. Sure enough, Edmund later turns out to be right.

The passage reveals that Charles is beginning to hate his mother, his father, and his own identity as the child of a working-class family. This is exactly what Edmund wants. Edmund loves reminding Charles of his social inferiority, and in this scene he has a breakthrough: he finally gets Charles to *believe* that he's inferior because his family is poorer. Second, and on a similar note, Charles finally begins to trust Edmund. For the rest of the novel, Charles never questions anything Edmund says. Even when Edmund says something hurtful, without any proof, it never occurs to Charles to question his tormentor. As far as he's concerned, Edmund is the voice of fate: terrifying, sadistic, but never, ever wrong.

Oh, don't, don't . . . Mummy! Mummy! Mummy! . . .'His voice rose suddenly to a scream, and he sat up, still asleep, drumming his legs. His eyes were screwed tight shut. 'Mummy! Mummy! Mummy! . . .'

Related Characters: Edmund Hooper (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 117

Explanation and Analysis

In this perplexing passage, Charles and Edmund are still stranded in the middle of the wood near Warings. Late at night, Edmund wakes up, screaming for his mother. This is interesting, because Edmund has previously bullied Charles for having lost his father. It never occurs to Charles to retaliate by bullying Edmund for having a dead mother. But now, it's painfully obvious that Edmund misses his mother—he even has nightmares in which he cries out for her. The passage is important because it reminds readers of Edmund's humanity, as well as the fact that Charles *could* bully Edmund if he wanted to do so. By revealing his vulnerability as he sleeps, Edmund gives Charles plenty of ammunition: it would be so easy for Charles to call Edmund a "baby" and mock him for wanting his "mummy." But because Charles is not by nature a nasty kid, he doesn't try to be cruel to Edmund. On the contrary, he watches over Edmund in his moment of need.

Chapter 10 Quotes

'I want an aspirin. My head hurts again.'
'You shall have one, dear.' Mrs Helena Kingshaw jumped up. I shall not make a favourite of my own child, she thought, especially when all the blame for this lies with him.

Related Characters: Helena Kingshaw, Edmund Hooper (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 131

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Charles and Edmund are back at Hooper after a search party has found them in the woods and escorted them home. Back at Warings, however, Edmund immediately begins tormenting Charles all over again. This time, he claims that Charles pushed him into the stream, when in fact Charles saved his life. Edmund isn't the least bit grateful to Charles. Seemingly without a moral compass, he resumes bullying Charles without feeling the slightest obligation to be kinder to Charles or show his gratitude in any way.

The passage is especially disturbing because it shows the way that Helena reacts to Edmund's claims. Instead of listening closely to what Charles, her own son, says, Helena chooses to believe Edmund. She tells herself that she's going to treat her two children equally, and seems to justify her behavior in this way. But the reality is that Helena *is* favoring one child over the other in believing Edmund over Charles. This is at least partly because she's trying to ingratiate herself with Joseph Hooper, Edmund's father, and doesn't want to risk being fired for calling Edmund a liar.

Chapter 11 Quotes

Last year, someone had been strangled to death twenty miles away. Hooper had told him that. Twenty miles wasn't far. He imagined tramps and murderers, and the cowman at Barr Farm, with bad teeth and hands like raw red meat. Anybody might have been hanging about behind the shed, and locked him in. Later, they might come back.

Related Characters: Edmund Hooper, Charles Kingshaw

Related Themes:

Page Number: 138

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Edmund has trapped Charles inside a dark shed (echoing the way he trapped Charles inside the Red Room in an earlier chapter). Edmund's prisoner once again, Charles allows his imagination to run wild with his fears. He thinks about the all the horrible things that have happened in the area lately—for example, people being strangled. He becomes consumed with fear that something similar will happen to him. It never seems to occur to Charles that Edmund told him about the strangling in order to frighten him. Charles is too scared to think clearly or critically. He can't control his own emotions, making him a prisoner of his own fears.

The passage sets the pattern for the second half of the novel. Edmund's torments become increasingly abstract and open-ended. Instead of taking a risk by attacking Charles or even locking him in a room, Edmund begins to use more subtle ways of waging devastating psychological war on Charles.

> 'I'm Head of Dorm for next term.'
>
> Kingshaw went cold. He knew that it was sure to be true, and that it would be the worst of all things that were coming. Hooper had power now, here. He would have power there, too, then.

Related Characters: Edmund Hooper (speaker), Charles Kingshaw

Related Themes:

Page Number: 143

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Edmund's control over Charles becomes painfully clear. Edmund has just locked Charles in a shed for an indeterminate amount of time—long enough to rattle Charles and make him vomit, at any rate. Now, Edmund further torments Charles by telling him that they'll be going to boarding school together next year. There, Edmund promises to make life miserable for Charles. He claims to be Head of Dorm (i.e., a prefect), and to have lots of friends, meaning that he'll be able to hurt Charles in various ways physical and psychological.

Charles is understandably terrified by Edmund's threats. But it's notable that Charles never seems to consider the possibility that Edmund is lying or exaggerating. For all readers know, Edmund could be an unpopular boy at school. In all, the passage adds an interesting dimension to Charles and Edmund's relationship. In a sense, Charles *allows* Edmund to frighten him, because he never once questions Edmund. As far as Charles is concerned, Edmund is always right.

Chapter 12 Quotes

> I am the King, I am the King, there is nothing I can't ask him for, nothing he won't promise me, nothing I can't do to him. Up here, I'm the King.
>
> But he had learned enough, over the past few weeks, to know that any power he acquired would only be temporary. Like the thunderstorm in the wood, and the time when Hooper had fallen into the water and bashed his head, and then when he had had the nightmares. As soon as the situation had changed, everything went back to what Kingshaw had come to think of as normal.

Related Characters: Charles Kingshaw (speaker), Edmund Hooper

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 153

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene—the source for the title of the book—Charles and Edmund go to Leydell Castle, an authentic English castle in the countryside. Though the boys travel with their parents, they're allowed to explore the castle on their own. Charles, who's stronger and more physically confident than Edmund, is able to climb to the top of the castle without much effort. Looking down on the world, Charles is overwhelmed (and a little frightened) by his own power. He feels strong, self-assured, and virtually invincible. And yet there's a part of him that recognizes the truth: as great as he's feeling right now, he'll go back to feeling frightened and lonely as soon as he returns to Warings. The passage illustrates what an effective job Edmund has done of conditioning Charles to accept his own inferiority. Charles has reached the point where, even when he triumphs over Edmund, he accepts that his triumph will be short-lived. As in his first encounter with Edmund, he feels like a loser even when he has won.

Chapter 14 Quotes

But he did not think it likely that he could ever be believed, nothing could change, because he had meant what he thought and said about Hooper, and still meant it. It was only being afraid of this empty church, and of the white marble warrior lying on his tombstone in the side chapel, that made him kneel down and tell lies. It was no good. He had wanted Hooper to be dead, because then things would have been better. His punishment was that Hooper was not dead, that everything was the same, and the thought of that was worse than anything. He acknowledged that he feared Hooper more than he feared anything in the world.

Related Characters: Charles Kingshaw (speaker), Edmund Hooper

Related Themes:

Page Number: 173

Explanation and Analysis

This scene sums up Hill's view of childhood. After Edmund falls and goes to the hospital with a broken leg, Charles is consumed with a mixture of guilt, self-loathing, and wishful thinking. He wants Edmund dead, but he also wants Edmund to be all right. To sort of his emotions, he wanders into a church, where he tries to pray to God. In his despair, he tries to communicate to God that he's sorry for wanting Edmund to die. But at the same time, he realizes the truth: he's not sorry at all. At the most fundamental level, he wants Edmund to die, even though he knows he's "wrong" to feel this way.

In many books about children, children are portrayed as fundamentally good and decent. Hill takes a darker view of childhood; she believes that children (even seemingly innocent, gentle children like Charles) are capable of wicked thoughts and deeds. Most children are capable of controlling these thoughts and instincts and behaving themselves—but they do so because they're afraid of the consequences, not because they're innocent or virtuous. Other children, such as Edmund, have no such moral compass—and, as Hill has already shown, behave cruelly without a shred of guilt.

Kingshaw thought, he knows everybody and they know him. He lives here, and I live here, now, but I don't know anyone or anything, except Mrs Boland and the woman at the post office. Hooper doesn't know anybody, either, we might as well be on the moon. He thought of Warings, surrounded by the high hedge, dark and inaccessible. All the time, this other boy had been watching, aware of him.

Related Characters: Edmund Hooper, Anthony Fielding, Charles Kingshaw (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 175

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Charles makes a new friend, a working-class boy named Anthony Fielding. The dirt underneath his fingernails and his tanned face are meant to be a dead giveaway for his class background. Meeting Fielding is an important event for Edmund: for the entire novel, he's been interacting with one and only one child, Edmund. But now, he realizes that there are other kids he could be spending his time with. Fielding is gentler and more likeable than Charles, and he never tries to bully Charles in any way. Furthermore, Charles's experiences with Fielding remind him that there's a vast world beyond Warings—he's not "trapped" at the manor house, as he'd previously felt himself to be. In short, Anthony Fielding represents hope, and the possibility of escape: escape from Warings, escape from Edmund, and escape from Charles's own unconscious fears and anxieties.

Kingshaw nodded, numb before this battery of experience, bewildered by so many sights and smells and terrible truths, but still willing to be led by Fielding, to be shown everything at once.

Related Characters: Anthony Fielding, Charles Kingshaw

Related Themes:

Page Number: 178

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Charles has just witnessed what is, to his mind, a pretty disturbing sight: the birth of a calf. Charles has gone to a farm, accompanied by Anthony Fielding, a local boy. Fielding is nicer and more cheerful than Edmund, Charles's usual playmate. He doesn't try to intimidate Charles in any way. Instead, he's very frank and upfront

about what he's saying and doing—there's no manipulation of any kind.

The surprising result is that Charles, in contrast with his behavior around Edmund, doesn't get overly frightened. He's "weirded out," but he's certainly not paralyzed with fear, as he was when Edmund showed him the moth collection (to name only one example). Hill's point seems to be that Charles isn't frightened by specific objects so much as he is frightened by Edmund's psychological manipulation. Because Fielding doesn't try to spook Charles in any way, Charles is free to witness the animals and grotesque sights of the farm without any real anxiety.

Chapter 15 Quotes

His terror of Crawford had been absolute. Afterwards, he had not dared to tell anyone. Hooper wasn't like Crawford, the things he did were different, his threats were in many ways worse. His reign was one of terror, Crawford's had been one of simple brutality.

Related Characters: Crawford, Edmund Hooper, Charles Kingshaw

Related Themes:

Page Number: 188-189

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Charles contrasts Edmund's bullying with the bullying he endured from Crawford, a boarding school classmate who would beat up Charles almost every day. While Crawford was frightening to Charles, Charles believes that Edmund is even more frightening. However, Edmund never uses physical force to intimidate Charles; instead, he uses psychological manipulation, intimidating Charles by exploiting Charles's secret fears of moths and birds, as well as Charles's insecurities about his financial standing and his dead father. The message is plain: Edmund's power stems from his psychological manipulation, not his use of physical force. Charles is even shown to be physically more capable than Edmund: when they're out in the wood, for example, Charles is clearly more competent than Edmund. Nevertheless, Edmund's psychological manipulation is so skillful that he is able to keep Charles under his thumb.

Chapter 16 Quotes

No, I don't know, nothing is really settled, Enid. I have not quite made up my mind about the future.' For she was anxious that Mr Hooper should hear her, anxious for him to know that she retained her pride. If there were any decisions to be made, then, he should be the one . . .

Related Characters: Helena Kingshaw (speaker), Joseph Hooper

Related Themes:

Page Number: 200

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Helena is on the phone with one of her old friends. She tells the friend, loudly, that she hasn't made up her mind what to do in the future. She's not even sure if she'll stay at Warings. Helena makes sure that she speaks loudly enough that Joseph can hear her.

Helena is behaving like this in order to assert her own pride and, moreover, to assert her own power. Helena is submissive to Joseph is many different senses—and above all, she's his social inferior, since she's a working-class woman. And yet Helena does have some power over Joseph. She can control what he does by threatening to withhold her consent to marry him (and that's exactly what she does in this scene). Although this is a small measure of (mostly symbolic) power, Helena is nonetheless able to assert herself and communicate the message that Joseph must be the one to propose marriage. She'll marry him, but she won't beg him to spend the rest of his life with her. In short, Helena carves out a small amount of freedom for herself, even though she's locked in an asymmetric relationship with a richer, more powerful man. Her son Charles, by contrast, lacks such a strategic approach to his power struggle with Edmund.

Now, Mr Hooper sat and thought about Mrs Helena Kingshaw, in this house, in the room upstairs, thought of the pleasure of her company, the pride and satisfaction it gave him to see how relieved she was to be here. And there was the way that she looked at him, he recognized something of his own need, there was something . . . He undressed. He thought with excitement that a physical marriage to Mrs Kingshaw would not be like what he had had with Ellen, for Mrs Kingshaw would answer to him, without the niceties and the restraints, she would bridge the gap between fantasy and life.

Related Characters: Ellen Hooper, Joseph Hooper, Helena Kingshaw

Related Themes:

Page Number: 203-204

Explanation and Analysis

This is one of the only passages in which Hill writes about Joseph's understanding of marriage, and of sexuality. From Joseph's perspective, sex is both attractive and repellent. He's attracted to Helena in her short dresses, but he resents the power she has over him. Hill gives readers reason to believe that Joseph is clueless when it comes to romance—he seems to have been alienated from his wife, even though they had a child together. But furthermore, Hill suggests that for Joseph, control and coercion are a source of pleasure—much as it seems they are for Edmund. Joseph doesn't just want to marry again—he wants a wife who'll do whatever he says. He wants someone like Helena, who is so overcome with gratitude to him for taking her in and taking care of her child that she'll do anything to repay him. In short, Joseph seems to enjoy the submissiveness that Helena shows him in a way that is similar to, albeit more sexual than, the way Edmund takes pleasure in Charles's submissiveness.

❝ From the doorway, watching them, Kingshaw thought, Hooper believes him, he isn't going to make him open the case and put his hand on one, he isn't going to make him prove it, he just believes him. That's the way Fielding is, that's the way you should be, It had been different with him. Hooper had known, from the very first moment he had looked into Fielding's face, that it would all be easy, that he would always be able to make him afraid. Why, thought Kingshaw, why? His eyes suddenly pricked with tears, at the unfairness of it. WHY?

Related Characters: Anthony Fielding, Edmund Hooper, Charles Kingshaw

Related Themes:

Page Number: 213

Explanation and Analysis

In this painful passage, Charles once again surrenders too early. Anthony Fielding, his friend, has come to Warings for tea. There, Edmund takes Anthony on a tour of the house, very similar to the one that Edmund gave Charles months ago. On the tour, Edmund shows Fielding a moth in the Red Room. But instead of trying to frighten Fielding, Edmund just shows Fielding the moth and then moves on to the next room.

This seemingly trivial incident is maddening to Charles. Charles decides that Edmund treats Fielding differently than he treated Charles because Edmund knows that he can't frighten Fielding, but he'll always be able to frighten Charles. In other words, Edmund is purposefully emphasizing that Charles is alone in his fear, driving a wedge between Charles and Fielding. Charles becomes so furious that he begins to cry. The knowledge that he's different than other boys (and more susceptible to intimidation) is crushing.

This is a perfect example of how Charles responds to a seemingly small provocation from Edmund (to the point where Edmund arguably didn't realize how greatly his behavior would upset Charles). Because Charles becomes so upset, he refuses to spend any more time either with Edmund or with Fielding. Instead of sticking around and trying to maintain his friendship with Fielding, he throws in the towel, isolating himself from other people.

Chapter 17 Quotes

❝ 'Something will happen to you, Kingshaw.'
The letters were printed in thick, black felt pen, and underlined again and again. In spite of the fear that had gone on and on for so long, it was suddenly worse again now, as he read Hooper's message, it darted through like a fresh toothache, and he screwed up the paper and sent it as far away from him as he could across the room, and then flung himself into his bed, pushing his face under the covers and trembling.
The nightmares began.

Related Characters: Edmund Hooper, Charles Kingshaw

Related Themes:

Page Number: 220-221

Explanation and Analysis

At the beginning of Chapter 17, Charles receives a sinister note from Edmund. The note simply says that "something" will "happen" to Charles at some point in the future. It's open-ended, to say the least—no information about what will happen, or when, just a vague intimation that Charles's life will change, presumably for the worse. Peculiarly, however, Edmund's open-ended threat is more frightening than any specific threat could ever be. Charles has already

been shown to have an active imagination. Thus, when he's presented with Edmund's note, his mind projects possibilities far more terrifying than anything Edmund would ever do. Edmund has a sinister knack for provoking Charles's anxiety and worry—in a sense, he turns Charles's own deepest fears against him. Ultimately, the novel seems to define Edmund's power in precisely this way: he controls Charles by using psychological manipulation rather than physical force.

> For a second, he hesitated, part of his mind starting to come awake. And then he thought of everything, of what else would happen, he thought of the things Hooper had done and what he was going to do, of the new school and the wedding of his mother. He began to splash and stumble forwards, into the middle of the stream, where the water was deepest. When it had reached up to his thighs, he lay down slowly and put his face full into it and breathed in a long, careful breath.

Related Characters: Helena Kingshaw, Edmund Hooper, Charles Kingshaw

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 222

Explanation and Analysis

In this wrenching moment, Charles gives up for good. He has tried to defend himself from Edmund's bullying using a mixture of physical force, feigned confidence, and persuasion. But nothing has worked—Edmund has continued to bully him day after day. Now, Charles believes, Edmund is about to escalate his cruelty: the two boys are headed to boarding school, and Charles believes that Edmund (who claims to be the head of his dorm) will use his influence to hurt Charles further. Unable to bear such a possibility, Charles returns to the wood surrounding Warings and drowns himself in the stream where, just a few weeks ago, he rescued Edmund.

Charles's suicide can be interpreted in many different ways. It's important to notice that Charles returns to the wood, the only place in the novel where he's shown to be completely comfortable in his own skin. Throughout the novel, on a symbolic level, Charles has been associated with nature in its wild, unrestrained forms. But here, at the novel's close, he makes the wilderness around Warings the site of his death, suggesting that Edmund has succeeded in crushing what was wild and free in Charles: his innocent spirit.

It's equally important to notice that Charles's suicide echoes the manner of Edmund's accident in the forest earlier in the novel. Edmund slipped and fell into the stream—an accident for which he blamed Charles. Throughout the novel, Charles has been shown to identify with Edmund, even though he's deeply frightened of Edmund. Thus, it is eerily appropriate that Charles kills himself by, in a sense, imitating Edmund. Charles often seems to play the part of a little brother—what Edmund does, he imitates in a clumsy, awkward fashion. When Edmund calls him a baby, Charles retaliates by calling Edmund a baby. When Edmund boasts that he owns everything in sight, Charles responds with similar, a less confident boast about what *he* owns. And here, at the novel's end, Charles imitates Edmund one final time, jumping into the stream where Edmund once slipped and fell.

Finally, it's important to keep in mind that in some ways Charles seems to have sealed his own fate, here and throughout the novel. He gives up too easily, allowing Edmund's confidence and bold claims to frighten him. He never once questions Edmund's claims of being a popular boy or head of his dorm at school, and he never really tries to convince his mother that Edmund is a bully. There's a strong masochistic streak in Charles, and here his masochistic tendencies give way to a sudden suicidal impulse.

> When he saw Kingshaw's body, upside down in the water, Hooper thought suddenly, *it was because of me, I did that, it was because of me*, and a spurt of triumph went through him.

Related Characters: Edmund Hooper, Charles Kingshaw

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 222-223

Explanation and Analysis

In the final paragraphs of the novel, Edmund emerges triumphant. He has fought with Charles throughout the book, asserting his superior power and class whenever he can. It has been unclear what, precisely, Edmund wants from Charles: does he want Charles to leave, or to stay and be

submissive? There are moments when Edmund stresses that he wants Charles out of Warings, but there are far more moments suggesting that he enjoys having Charles around to bully.

These possibilities come to a surprising conclusion here, when Edmund learns that Charles has finally "left" Warings for good. Edmund senses that he's responsible for Charles's death in some way—and he's right. Edmund has manipulated Charles to the point where Charles could no longer tell reality from nightmare, resulting in his suicide.

One might have predicted that Charles's suicide would be enraging or dismaying for Edmund since he has nobody left to bully now. But, as the ending of the novel makes clear, Edmund has lost a "brother" but gained a "mother." Helena has already resolved to treat Edmund like her own son—and now, it would seem, Edmund has essentially *replaced* Charles in her eyes. Hill is effectively suggesting that Edmund's plan all along had been to get Charles out of the picture so that he could win back what he once lost: a mother of his own.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

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

CHAPTER 1

The novel begins, "Three months ago, his grandmother died, and then they had moved to this house."

The novel begins with a discussion of how a house is passed from one generation to the next. Right away, property is a key theme.

A man named Joseph Hooper goes to visit his dying father and takes his young son, Edmund Hooper. The boy's visit is quick and not particularly emotional. Joseph reminds Edmund that he's the heir to his grandfather's fortune. Edmund can only think about his grandfather's pale white skin.

At this stage in the novel, Edmund is unconcerned with property or inheritance—a naïve young child, he's more struck by the gruesome sight of his dying relative.

After Edmund's grandfather dies, Joseph moves into the house with Edmund. He tells Edmund that he won't be able to spend much time around the house, adding that it's hard to support a child "without a woman beside me."

Joseph is a lonely, middle-aged man, and not a particularly good father. His life is curiously empty: he doesn't seem to feel a close bond with his child, and, since he doesn't have a wife, he is without a companion or even a close friend.

Joseph instructs Edmund never to go into the **Red Room**, explaining that there are lots of old, valuable things inside. When Edmund suggests that they explore the room, Joseph's hand hesitates over a small drawer. But then, Joseph suggests that Edmund play cricket instead of looking through the house. When Edmund points out that he doesn't have anyone to play cricket with, Joseph points out that Edmund may have "a new friend" soon. Now Edmund is sure he knows "where to find the key" to the Red Room.

This novel pays homage to many of the famous English Gothic novels of the 19th century, in which there's often a big, mysterious house with a room that is off-limits to the main character. In this case, the forbidden room is the Red Room. The passage also foreshadows the arrival of Charles Kingshaw, the second main character of the novel, when Joseph tells Edmund he'll have a friend soon.

Joseph thinks that Edmund is a lot like Ellen Hooper, Joseph's wife, who died six years ago. Their marriage was unhappy.

Hill says very little about Joseph's relationship with Ellen, but gives the impression that even when Joseph's wife was alive, he was lonely and unhappy. Edmund seems lonely, too, because he must grow up without a mother or an affectionate father.

The Hoopers' house, which Joseph has now inherited from his father, is called **Warings**, and it was built by Edmund's great-grandfather, meaning that "it was not very old." Back in those days, the Hoopers were a wealthy landowning family. Now, however, the surrounding village is much smaller, and most of their land was sold to fund the construction of the manor. "But," Joseph thinks, "there was still Warings."

This is the only part of the book in which Hill discusses the Hoopers' family's history. Notably, the Hoopers are not from "old money." The fact that they've had property for just over a century suggests that they only cemented their social position with a manor (a sure symbol of status) a few generations ago. Hill even suggests that the building of Warings was a folly: it cemented the family's social status but also reduced their actual wealth (since they had to sell off all their land).

Joseph's ancestor, an ambitious man of the same name (we'll call him Joseph Hooper Sr.), had poured all his money into **Warings**. He succeeded, with the result that he had to sell all his other land to afford his new house. Joseph tells Edmund that Edmund should be proud of his family history, but Edmund doesn't see why. From his perspective, the house is perfectly ordinary, and even rather ugly.

Joseph Hooper Sr. seems to have been an ambitious upper-middle-class man who wanted to be respected by others, and believed that a nice house was the best way to win that respect. Notice that Joseph doesn't recognize the importance of having a big house at all, because he focuses on the house itself rather than what a large house can bring to its owners—like prestige and the image of success.

The house is tall and made of dark red bricks. It's surrounded by yew trees, which Joseph Hooper Sr. selected because they were the longest-living trees. Inside, the house has lots of oak doors and staircases, and very little about it has changed since it was built.

The house is designed to be a lasting monument to the Hooper family's glory. However, while the house itself hasn't changed, the village surrounding it has—and now, ironically, there's almost nobody left to recognize the Hoopers' glory.

Joseph grew up in **Warings**, and hated it. He's now fifty-one years old, and he's proud to be a Hooper and the owner of a large manor house. He knows, deep down, that he's a dull, "ineffectual man," and Warings gives him a sense of "both importance and support."

Like his own son, Joseph despised Warings as a child, but he has come to believe that owning property affords him status and respect. However, Joseph knows he hasn't done anything to deserve such an impressive house, and that if it were not for his inheritance, he could never have earned it for himself because he lacks his father's ambition.

Edmund has chosen to sleep in a small, dark room at the back of the house, a choice that surprises his father. One night, just before dawn, Edmund wakes up and sees moonlight shining down on the yew trees. He climbs down the staircase, confident that he won't run into his father or Mrs. Boland, their housekeeper. He finds the drawer he noticed earlier and opens it. Inside, he finds a long, red key.

Edmund doesn't seem interested in any of the obvious advantages of living in a big house—like having a big bedroom. Instead, he's more interested in learning about the house's mysteries and exploring its various rooms.

Edmund uses the key to enter the **Red Room**. Inside, he finds shelves of books, mostly "bound volumes of the *Banker's Journal*." He knows that the room was designed as a library, even though nobody ever used it for this purpose. Instead, Edmund's grandfather began using the Red Room to house his collection of **moths** and butterflies. The room is full of display cases containing the dead insects. Joseph has shown Edmund the collection before, but Joseph privately believes that he should be able to sell it for a large amount of money.

In many English books about big country houses, the main character doesn't find a way of sneaking into the "secret room" until the end of the book (for example, Jane Eyre doesn't learn what's in the attic until her story is almost done). The fact that Edmund learns what's in the Red Room before the end of the first chapter suggests that this book is different from its Gothic predecessors. That is, the Red Room is not the story's central mystery. Rather, in many ways Edmund himself will emerge as the book's great mystery.

Joseph remembers his own father, Joseph Hooper Sr, taking him to the **Red Room** to see the butterfly collection. Joseph's father once told him, "I am an international authority … let me see you make a name for yourself." Even then, Joseph knew he would never be able to do so. However, Joseph tells Edmund that it was a "splendid thing" that Edmund's grandfather was so famous. Deep down, Joseph senses that he has failed to "ingratiate himself with Edmund," even more than Joseph's own father had failed to ingratiate himself with Joseph.

The novel moves back and forth between various characters' perspectives: in this part of the chapter, for instance, Hill discusses both Joseph and Edmund's thoughts at length. By emphasizing Joseph's alienation from Edmund, yet also exploring Edmund's inner thoughts in immense detail, the novel creates a frustrated, "paralyzed" tone. The characters are so trapped in their own heads that they can't understand what other people are thinking and feeling.

Late at night, Edmund walks through the **Red Room**, looking at the **moths** in their cases. He knows that there is a small key, kept inside a Bible in the Red Room, which unlocks the cases. He also notices stuffed foxes and weasels, which look exceptionally dusty. Edmund comes to a case at the end of the room. Using the key, he opens the case, revealing a "Death's Head Hawk Moth." Edmund touches the moth with his finger, and immediately, the moth, "already years dead," collapses into dust.

The chapter ends with the macabre image of Edmund destroying an already-dead animal. The image foreshadows Edmund's eerie, almost preternatural talent for destruction. It's as if not even Edmund understands how or why he has destroyed the moth—he just does it. The passage also shows Edmund learning his way around Warings and becoming more confident in his new, gloomy home.

CHAPTER 2

Joseph Hooper announces to Edmund that people are coming to **Warings**, meaning that Edmund may finally have a friend to play with. The friend, Charles Kingshaw, is eleven years old, just like Edmund. Charles's mother, Helena Kingshaw, has come to Warings, supposedly, to serve as Joseph's "informal housekeeper." She is thirty-seven, and she, too, is widowed.

Right away, the novel suggests that there's a sexual dimension to the relationship between Helena Kingshaw and Joseph Hooper, since both adults are newly single. Here, Hill is also referencing a rich tradition in English literature, in which working-class women who come to a mysterious manor house end up marrying the taciturn master of the house.

As Edmund prepares to meet Charles and Helena, he realizes that he remembers nothing about his own mother. He also decides, "nobody should come here," since **Warings** belongs to him. That afternoon, when the Kingshaws arrive, Edmund locks his door and refuses to meet them. He molds a strip of dark red plasticine (i.e., clay), which he's using to make a model.

Edmund is uncomfortable with the idea of another child at Warings, because he sees Warings as his own property. Edmund's greed and possessiveness precludes him from being friendly to Charles. Notice that Edmund, who previously thought of Warings as an ugly, useless place, has suddenly become possessive of his home, precisely because *another boy is now living there.*

When Helena Kingshaw arrives at **Warings** with her son Charles, her first impression of Joseph is that he's been alone for too long. Joseph calls for Edmund. Edmund, who can see the Kingshaws from his window, writes something on a piece of paper, attaches it to a piece of plasticine, and drops it from the window. Charles picks it up and sees that it says, "I didn't want you to come here." Frightened, Charles stuffs the message into his pocket without showing anyone.

The novel is bookended by two threatening messages that Edmund sends to Charles. Even before Charles meets Edmund, he learns to fear Edmund: instead of thinking of the note as childish (as an adult might be inclined to do), Charles takes it very seriously and begins to become anxious.

A short while later, Edmund stands alone with Charles in Charles's new room. He asks Charles, "Why have you come here?" Charles blushes. Edmund starts to realize the importance of owning a house, telling Charles, "We live here, it is ours … Kingshaw has nowhere." He claims, falsely, that Charles's room is the room where Edmund's grandfather died recently. Edmund also boasts that one day, the house will belong to him, and asks Charles where he used to live. Charles explains that he used to live in a flat (i.e., apartment) in London. When Edmund asks Charles why his father didn't buy a real house, Charles becomes hurt and says, "My father's dead."

In this important section, Edmund finally sees the value his father sees in owning a large house and property: it allows him to assert his power over others. Edmund seems uninterested in Warings itself, but he uses Warings as a way of asserting dominance over Charles. Even though both Charles and Edmund have dead parents, Edmund to bullies Charles about his dead parent, but Charles doesn't respond in kind. From the outset, the boys' relationship is defined by their different class statuses.

Edmund asks Charles about his father, and Charles explains that his father was a pilot who fought in the Battle of Britain. Edmund is skeptical. Charles shows him an old photograph of his father, a "bald, cadaverous man." Somehow, Charles senses that he has "won" his conversation with Edmund, and yet he doesn't feel like the winner.

This passage establishes a key theme of the novel: Charles quite often gets the better of Edmund (if only in a childish way), but he never knows how to claim *his victory. He lacks the confidence and self-assuredness that Edmund seems to enjoy as a result of being heir to Warings. As a result, Charles feels like the loser even when he wins.*

Edmund asks Charles where he went to school, and Charles tells him about his school in Wales. Then, abruptly, Charles says, "You needn't think I wanted to come, anyway." He then orders Edmund to shut the window, adding, "it's my window now." Edmund raises his fists, and a "brief and wordless" fight breaks out. A moment later, Charles is nursing a bloody nose.

Almost right away, the two boys fight over their ownership of Warings. Edmund sees Charles as a threat to his ownership of the house, and that's the reason why he attacks Charles.

A moment later, the fight ends. Edmund orders Charles, who now has a bloody nose, to leave him alone. Charles insists that Edmund's father told him to spend time with Edmund. Edmund continues to ask Charles about his school, insisting that Charles's mother could never have afforded to pay for a good boarding school if she couldn't afford a house. Edmund looks at Charles coldly, sensing that he has won.

This is the only scene in the book in which Charles and Edmund have a physical fight. However, their fight is brief and painless compared with the verbal war that follows. Edmund asks probing questions that allude to Charles's financial status. It's only after this second verbal battle that Edmund emerges the victor. This sets the tone for the rest of Hill's novel, in which the deadliest fights are fought with words, not fists.

Charles, his heart beating fast, is unsettled: he has never encountered anything like Edmund's hostility or self-possession before. He wants to communicate to Edmund that he'll do anything Edmund wants, but he doesn't know how to put this into words.

Charles isn't a fighter: he doesn't like Edmund's bullying or his aggressive tone, and wishes there could be peace between them. But it seems from the outset that peace will not be possible because Edmund wants to punish Charles for coming to Warings.

Edmund, who has a large bruise on his cheekbone, looks coldly at Charles. He says, "You still needn't think you're wanted here" and then walks out. Alone, Charles feels ashamed. He is also frightened by the idea that Edmund's grandfather died in this room. It never occurs to him that Edmund was lying. Nevertheless, he goes to the window and thinks, "It is my window, now."

Hill presents the results of the boys' fistfight in a cleverly disorienting way. She first notes Charles's injury, only mentioning Edmund's bruise a few paragraphs later. In this way, she suggests that the fight (both the physical fight and verbal one that followed) left more of an impression on Charles than on Edmund. Edmund doesn't let anything deter him from chipping away at Charles's confidence. And yet Charles still believes that he has some right to live at Warings. He's not ready to surrender yet.

A few days later, Joseph notices that Edmund is sitting alone in his room. Joseph suggests that Edmund go play with Charles instead. Edmund doesn't reply. He's busy making a color-coded diagram of the Battle of Waterloo on a large sheet of paper.

Both children build models and make diagrams throughout the book. This may symbolize their desire to understand the world and assert their power over it. The militaristic nature of Edmund's diagram (which depicts a famous 19th century battle) also suggests Edmund's bellicose, aggressive personality.

Joseph orders Edmund to go play with Charles. Edmund stares at his father and thinks that he looks very old and thin. Joseph privately thinks that he'd have an easier time reasoning with Edmund if Edmund were a few years older. He tells Edmund that he's being rude to Charles by ignoring him. Joseph also considers striking Edmund for his rudeness, but relents when he realizes that he's already considered it for a split-second too long. Joseph realizes that his wife was much better at raising a child than he is. He blames his wife for not leaving "a set of rules for him to follow" when she died. He leaves, and Edmund continues working on his map.

In this painful passage, it's clear that Edmund is stronger, more confident, and in some ways smarter than his father. Joseph is too weak and indecisive to take control over Edmund. And the result, of course, is that Joseph essentially gives Edmund "free reign," doing nothing to stop his son from treating Charles rudely.

A short while later, Edmund comes downstairs and orders Charles to follow him. Charles refuses, but then his mother walks in and encourages him to follow Edmund. Edmund leads Charles through the house, showing him different rooms and leading him up the old stone staircase. Charles follows, thinking that he'd prefer to be alone by a stream or in a wood. Suddenly, he stops and sits down on the staircase. Edmund orders him to follow, but Charles ignores him. Frustrated, Edmund begins walking down the staircase, very carefully. It occurs to Charles that it would be very easy for him to push Edmund off the staircase, but this thought terrifies him. He continues sitting on the staircase, alone.

Throughout the chapter, Edmund has been the more aggressive of the two children. And yet the chapter ends by alluding to Charles's potential for violent behavior. Charles is quieter and humbler than Edmund, and yet Hill suggests that he has the same capacity for destruction. As Hill sees it, children aren't inherently good: rather, they seem to have the same potential for evil behavior as adults.

CHAPTER 3

About two miles west of **Warings**, there is a large wood, Hang Wood. To the east there's the small village of Derne. After a week, Charles feels that he knows this area well, because he's studied it carefully on a map. However, he has never explored it himself.

Charles seems more interested in exploring the natural world surrounding Warings than learning more about Warings itself, which he seems to associate with Edmund's torments.

One day, Charles walks away from Waring to explore the wood. Walking through the fields is uncomfortable but still better than spending time with Edmund. Though he senses that he should go back, he wants to prove to himself that "he could get by, somehow, alone in this place."

Charles is desperate to get away from Edmund. More broadly, he wants to show that he's strong enough to survive on his own—he wants to prove to himself that he can leave Warings (and Edmund) any time he wants.

Charles walks through the field while, high over his head, **crows** circle. The crows are large, and Charles can see that their mouths are bright red. In spite of himself, he's frightened of the birds. His foot gets caught in a rut, and he falls over, bleeding and sobbing. A massive crow swoops down and lands on his back. Charles screams, and the bird flies away. Suddenly, Charles looks back at the house and sees Edmund staring at him from his window.

Edmund seems to have an almost supernatural grasp for what torments Charles most: here, for example, he happens to be watching the attack and therefore understands that Charles is afraid of the crows. The passage is also a good example of a trope from Gothic novels, wherein the manor house seems to have a mind of its own: here, Warings almost seems to be pulling Charles back.

Charles hesitates and the turns back to the house. There, he finds Edmund, who tells him, "You were scared. You were running away." He mocks Charles for being frightened of a **crow**, and Charles bites his wrist. Edmund recoils, but then becomes calm again. He smiles and dares Charles to go into the wood.

Edmund knows that he has just gotten some valuable information that he can use against Charles at any time: he has found out that crows frighten Charles. But Edmund's words are ambiguous, suggesting that Charles is also afraid of Warings more generally, and may have been running away from not only the crows, but from Edmund and the manor.

Charles remembers being five years old and going with his father to a swimming pool. At the pool, a boy named Turville made fun of him for being afraid of the **water**. Charles was frightened by the water's "glassy, artificial blueness." Turville dared him to jump in the water, and Charles did so, feeling sick. Even Charles's father laughed at him for the way he dove into the water, over and over again, never getting any less afraid. Charles realizes that he has no choice but to go into the wood: he has always taken people up on their dares.

Importantly, Charles isn't scared of the water itself—he's scared of the artificiality of the pool. In general, Charles is often shown to be frightened of excessive artificiality and control. The memory of the pool also emphasizes Charles's servility: instead of standing up for himself, he's willing to endure pain simply to obey others' commands. Charles has a masochistic streak that only gets stronger throughout the novel.

Edmund walks out of Charles's room, slamming the door behind him. He's charmed by "having Kingshaw here, thinking of things to do to him." He goes up into the attic of the house, where he finds a box. He removes a "thing" from the box, wraps it in an old shirt, and leaves the attic.

Edmund is beginning to enjoy his new position of power over Charles. He's a sadistic child who takes pleasure in thinking of new ways of tormenting Charles. Hill suggests that this type of behavior may even come naturally to children.

Charles wakes up late at night, still thinking about Edmund. It occurs to him that Edmund isn't used to being a bully yet—he's just learning. And yet Edmund is inventive in the ways he tortures Charles. He glances at the clock, and suddenly sees something on his bed. It's an old, stuffed **crow**. Charles forces himself not to scream. He knows Edmund wants him to be afraid. He stays still, frightened of touching the ugly bird. Charles wakes up early in the morning, and sees that the crow is still sitting on his bed. He wants to get rid of the crow, but doesn't want to touch it. He decides that he'll have to leave it there, night after night, until Mrs. Boland removes it. But that night, when he returns to his room, the crow is gone.

For the time being, Charles has enough self-control to prevent himself from screaming. Even though he knows that Edmund placed the crow there to frighten him, he's still genuinely frightened—his knowledge of why *the crow is there has no impact on his sense of shock. As an aside, it's worth keeping in mind that Joseph already has a perfectly good housekeeper, Mrs. Boland, which makes it clearer that he has hired Helena to be his girlfriend, not his housekeeper.*

Edmund returns the **crow** to the attic. He knows that Charles must have woken up and seen the crow but didn't scream. At breakfast, Charles finds a toy in the cereal box, and Edmund makes a show of allowing Charles to use the toy, smiling sweetly. Charles looks at Edmund with hatred, but Joseph believes that the two boys are getting along well.

Even though Charles didn't cry out in the night, Edmund still manages to get the upper hand—in the sense that, somehow, he's certain that he has succeeded in frightening Charles, even though he heard no scream. And at the breakfast table, he is completely in control, expertly tricking Joseph into thinking that he and Charles are friends. His own confidence allows him to continue defeating Charles.

Later that day, Edmund offers to show Charles the **Red Room**. Charles doesn't want to go into the room, but instead of saying "no" he only shrugs. That evening, Edmund fetches the key to the Red Room, opens the door, and leads Charles inside, telling him that there's a huge collection of **moths** within. Charles doesn't like the sight of dead moths and he hesitates. Edmund makes fun of Charles and calls him a baby. Then, suddenly, he runs out of the room and locks Charles inside.

Edmund uses his knowledge of Warings to torture Charles. Here, for example, he traps Charles in the Red Room. For the time being, Edmund seems invincible: with his superior confidence and knowledge of the house, he causes Charles new fear and pain every day.

Charles tries to open a window and sneak out of the room, splitting his thumbnail doing so. He doesn't dare look around the room at the "stiff, animal bodies." In the end, he's unable to open the windows because they're too old. He tells himself that he must not shout for help, or else Edmund will have won. Sitting by himself, Charles realizes that it's important for him to stand up to Edmund, even if he doesn't tell anyone about it. Eventually, he shouts for help, and his mother, along with Joseph Hooper, let him out of the **Red Room**. Charles just says, "I got locked in," and runs off to his room, where he feels violently sick. The next day, when Joseph questions Edmund about what happened, Edmund feigns innocence, saying, "He's stupid. Why didn't he shout, then? I didn't know he was in there, I never know what Kingshaw does."

The passage symbolizes Charles's overall frustration and claustrophobia at Warings. Charles is a prisoner—literally, since he can't get out of the Red Room, and figuratively, since he can't escape Edmund's torments. But Charles sabotages his own chances of bettering his situation. In this passage, he's so humbled by his battles with Edmund that he doesn't complain about Edmund to either Helena or Joseph; he just goes to his room. Again, Edmund is careful to maintain the appearance of innocence, suggesting a knack for careful deception that is well beyond that of most children.

Charles tells himself that his torture will end someday. He remembers going to school at the age of seven. Unlike many of the other new students, he didn't cry as he said goodbye to his mother. During his time at school, he enjoyed reading books, and the other students accepted him for who he was. He wrote to his mother that he was enjoying school, and prayed that he'd be able to stay at school forever.

Charles becomes nostalgic for his old life at boarding school. Whether or not he was actually as happy at school as he remembers being, he wants to go back—a common response for children who are thrust into new environments. The passage also foreshadows Charles's conflicted relationship with his mother.

CHAPTER 4

One day, while Edmund is visiting London with Joseph, Charles finds "the room." This room of the house is small and seems to serve no "particular function of its own." It contains, among other things, an armless chair, a table with a drawer, and a big glass cabinet containing dozens of old female dolls. Everything in the room seems to have been "dumped here arbitrarily."

Charles is attracted to the least ordered, most chaotic room in Warings, perhaps because it seems easier to hide there from Edmund. The room symbolizes the arbitrariness of his own presence at Warings.

That day, Charles begins building a model of a ship. He enjoys being alone, since other people can be cruel. He thinks about the postcard he's received from a boy named Devereux, who lives in Norfolk, explaining that he's been sailing lately. Charles wishes he could be with his friend—but instead, he and his mother have moved to **Warings**. He thinks with embarrassment of something his mother told him after his father died: "You are all I have left now."

Charles appears to have friends from his boarding school, who keep in touch even while they're far away. Charles clearly longs to be with his friends (note the juxtaposition of his sad little model and Devereux's mention of an actual sailboat). Charles seems to blame his mother for tearing him away from his old life. This isn't particularly fair, however, since Helena moved to Warings to find work so she could support her child, not just herself.

Charles has never hated anyone before, but now he realizes that he hates Edmund. He's frightened of his hatred, and wishes the feeling would disappear. But he knows that the feeling will never go away—not as long as he shares the house with Edmund.

Charles is a young kid, but he's capable of feeling intense hatred for others. While Charles doesn't seem as cruel by nature as Edmund, he certainly has some violent instincts—or perhaps Edmund is teaching him how to hate.

Meanwhile, on a train back from London, Joseph asks Edmund about his friendship with Charles. Edmund replies, "I can't help it if he locks himself up, can I?" Joseph asks Edmund what Charles does alone in his room, and Edmund shrugs.

Edmund continues to keep his father in the dark about what's really happening between him and Charles—and Joseph, being a weak parent, doesn't know how to get more information.

The next passage, in quotations, is about a "hulking beast" with a scaly, muddy hide that seeks "blood and death."

This passage—an excerpt from a comic book Edmund is reading—is presented without any context, showing how the novel swerves back and forth between the characters' limited perspective and a third-person omniscient perspective. The description of the beast not only fits in with the overall themes of fear and nature in the book, but it also follows immediately after a description of Edmund, as if to create an association between the monstrous child and the bloodthirsty beast.

On the train, Joseph muses that he should talk to Charles's mother, and posits that Charles is shy. Edmund shrugs again and resumes reading his comic book, about a "Marsh Monster." Privately, Edmund is angry that Charles has been able to avoid him lately. In spite of himself, he respects Charles for not screaming at the stuffed **crow**.

Edmund claims that he doesn't care about Charles at all, but in fact he depends upon Charles: like all bullies, he needs to feel his victim's fear in order to feel completely secure. Edmund's consumption of gruesome comic books, alluded to in this passage, might suggest where he gets some of his more sadistic ideas.

Joseph suggests that Edmund take Charles on an "expedition" beyond the house. This makes Joseph think of his own childhood, during which he was almost never allowed beyond the garden. He notices how pale his son is, and realizes that they're alike in this way.

Whenever this novel depicts things from Joseph's perspective, the tone is dull and lifeless. Joseph seems so passive: he's decided that it's hopeless to try to change Edmund, and instead he just satisfies himself with superficial observations about his son.

Back at **Warings**, Charles goes to bed early and makes "plans." He tells himself, "it won't go on forever." For the next few days, he continues planning. He retreats to the doll room to prepare "the things," knowing that what he's about to do will surprise others and make them take him seriously.

Charles is planning something, but Hill doesn't reveal what it is right away. Rather than continuing to passively accept Edmund's abuse, it seems Charles is preparing to stand up for himself.

One morning soon after, Joseph greets Charles and shows him some games that he has found. Joseph suggests that Charles and Edmund should play them together. Helena Kingshaw, who's listening, exclaims, "What a good idea!" and Joseph feels "more than ever satisfied" with her.

Hill doesn't say why, exactly, Joseph is "satisfied" with Helena, but she implies that it's because Helena supports his idea, showing that she's interested in Charles and Edmund getting along (and, by extension, their two families coming together).

Charles and Edmund sit inside on a rainy day, holding the board games. Charles half-wonders if they'll become friends, but then he remembers what he has planned to do. As he thinks about this, his mind is "blank with fear." The two boys begin to play draughts (a popular English board game). At one point, Helena Kingshaw walks into the room and cheerfully offers them milk, which the boys accept, saying "thank you" and nothing else.

The passage emphasizes the divide between what the two boys are actually doing and what their parents think they're doing. From Helena's perspective, the boys are having an innocent game, while in reality, there's a subtle battle of wills taking place between Charles and Edmund.

After lunch, Charles goes upstairs to the doll room, carrying a small bag. He finds Edmund waiting outside. Edmund demands to know where the key to the room is, and adds, "This is my house." Charles insists that there's nothing in the room—a statement which makes Edmund even more curious about what's inside. Charles hesitates, and then pulls out the key to the room. He might as well show Edmund what he's been working on, he decides.

Edmund's feelings of ownership over Warings continue to surface in their disagreements, suggesting that the conflict between them is based, at least in part, in their different class backgrounds. Here, Charles again seems too willing to give in to Edmund's demands rather than stand up to Edmund and conceal his plans for longer.

Inside the room, Edmund looks around. He asks Charles what he has in his bag. He snatches the bag from Charles and finds matches and other "things." Edmund accuses Charles of being a thief, reminding him that he, Edmund, owns everything in the house. Then, suddenly, Edmund realizes what Charles has been working on. He whistles and says, "Cunning!" and then begins to laugh.

Hill still doesn't reveal what Charles has been planning. She continues using intentionally vague words like "things," with the result that, even after Edmund finds out about Charles's plan, readers are still in the dark.

Edmund threatens to tell his father what Charles has been working on. But Charles points out that, since "I haven't said anything," Edmund has no way of telling on him. Edmund realizes that Charles is right. He studies the "things" once more and then says, "I shall come with you."

Edmund's parting words to Charles suggest that Charles is trying to go somewhere—and, most likely, he plans to run away from home, since that's something he has tried to do previously. The fact that Edmund plans to follow Charles wherever he goes further emphasizes the point that Edmund, contrary to what he has said in the past, wants to be around Charles—even is the purpose is so that he can bully Charles. The distinction between Edmund's desire for companionship and his desire to torture Charles seems not to exist.

For the next week, Charles thinks over his conversation with Edmund. He's been working on this plan for a while, but now Edmund says that he'll follow. The idea of Edmund taunting him while he's enacting his plan is "the worst thing he could imagine. Even worse than going away alone."

Charles clearly plans on running away from Warings., unable to stand it there any longer because of Edmund. Therefore, running away from Warings with Edmund would defeat the purpose of running away.

Meanwhile, Joseph feels "like a new man." He plans to host cocktail parties. He also tells Helena Kingshaw, "You have given me new strength. I no longer feel so much alone." Together, they plan a Sunday morning cocktail party, and they rejoice that their children are getting along.

The chapter ends on an ironic note: while their children are at each other's throats, Joseph and Helena are getting closer, and perhaps even falling in love. They naively believe that children are innocent and gentle—an idea that could not be more at odds with Hill's depiction of the boys.

CHAPTER 5

One day, Helena Kingshaw excitedly tells Charles that she's going to London with Joseph for a day. Charles recognizes that this is his chance. Helena is a little remorseful that she isn't taking Charles with her, but she tells herself, as she chooses her clothes, that she should think of herself more.

Helena prioritizes her own interests over those of her child. While there's intrinsically nothing wrong with looking out for one's own interests, Helena is allowing herself to become seduced by Joseph's wealth and power—even though one of her reasons for coming to Warings was to take better care of her child.

Charles decides that he'll leave at dawn. He's sure that nobody will even check in his room—however, he knows that his mother probably will come into his room to check on him that night. Nevertheless, this will give him plenty of time. He counts his money—money that friends and family have given him for holidays and birthdays—and finds that he has seven pounds.

Charles believes that he's leaving Warings forever, and he has packed accordingly. Seven pounds was actually a decent amount of money in the 1960s, meaning that Charles could get pretty far from Warings if he knew how to take care of himself.

Meanwhile, Joseph asks Helena to keep him company in the sitting room while he builds a fire.

The chapter cuts back and forth between the two adults' flirtations and their children's antagonism, creating a contrast between the simple and placid lives of the adults and the tumultuous, miserable inner lives of their children—playing with typical depictions of the lives of adults and children.

Charles sets his alarm clock for 5:30 am. He has packed some food in an old school satchel, and he has enough money to buy more. He also packs string, a torch (i.e., flashlight), bandages, and a penknife.

Charles plans his journey with enormous care. He takes his escape from Warings seriously, even if it may seem slightly ridiculous from an adult's perspective.

Charles wakes up at 4 am, feeling very afraid. He knows that he should think of his plan as a fun adventure, but he can't help thinking of scenarios that would require him to stay home that day.

Even though he's trying to escape from Warings, it seems there's a part of Charles that wants to stay, or that knows his escape is too daring to attempt.

Charles get out of bed and sneaks outside, past the yew trees. He turns around and takes a look at **Warings**, and the house looks like an old, ugly face. The weather is very cold as he walks through the fields. He remembers walking here before and being menaced by the **crow**. But he continues walking.

Warings is almost like a character in the novel, as suggested by its striking, anthropomorphic "face." In spite of Edmund's bullying, Charles is actually a brave boy, overcoming his fears in order to get away from the house and his torturer.

Charles nears the woods outside **Warings**. He remembers how Edmund dared him to come here—and this dare, he knows, "had been the start of it all." By the time he comes to the edge of the wood, the sun has risen. He imagines his mother, and Joseph Hooper, who have probably just gotten up to leave for London.

It's interesting that even when Charles runs away from Edmund, he is, in a sense, doing Edmund's bidding by following through on a dare. Try as he might, Charles can't quite break free from Edmund's influence. Even when he's far away from Warings, he continues obeying and thinking about his tormentor. This marks a turning point in the novel, after which Edmund's bullying becomes increasingly psychological and abstract.

As he stands on the edge of the wood, Charles feels proud of himself for packing his satchel and leaving the house. At school, he was the kind of boy who other boys would forget about—he wasn't particularly good or bad at anything. But then, he notices a wart on the back of his finger. This frightens him, because his classmates have told him stories about how doctors treat warts with hot needles. One of Charles's classmates, whose name was Broughton-Smith, had so many warts on his body that he had to go to the doctor. Afterwards, he had horrible brownish marks all over his body. Somebody suggested that the only way to get rid of warts is to wish them on someone else. Charles half-wonders if Broughton-Smith has passed on the warts to him.

This is another passage in which Hill's portrayal of child psychology rings true: as he prepares to abandon Warings, Charles's mind fills with irrational worry. It's as if his own subconscious is telling him not to leave Warings, distracting him with various unrelated anxieties. The passage also shows that Edmund's spitefulness toward Charles has begun to make Charles paranoid that everyone is out to get him—as he worries that a wart on his finger is there because another boy wished it on him.

Charles jumps over the ditch that surrounds the wood. He closes his eyes and takes a dozen steps forward. When he opens his eyes, he's inside Hang Wood.

Charles overcomes his anxieties and walks into the woods, representing his determination to leave behind the oppression of his life at Warings.

CHAPTER 6

Charles walks through the wood, and finds that he likes it. It's isolated from the rest of the world, and it's so sunny that everything looks harmless. He notices a rabbit running by. He eats a slice of bread and butter that he has packed for himself.

Although Charles had been terrified to enter the wood, he finds almost immediately that he likes being here. His anxiety and paranoia have disappeared: he doesn't feel that he has to be looking over his shoulder for Edmund. More generally, he seems to be attracted to the freedom and fluidity of the natural world.

Suddenly, Charles hears a strange sound, perhaps the sound of an animal. He peers into the distance, and the sound gets louder—it sounds like laughter. Then, he sees Edmund Hooper standing by a tree. Somehow, Edmund has managed to follow him into the wood.

Edmund has followed Charles into the forest without being seen or heard—just one of the many times in the book when Edmund seems almost supernatural in his ability to torment Charles.

Charles asks Edmund how he knew to follow him this morning, and Edmund jeers that it was obvious Charles would try to leave today. Charles notices that Edmund is carrying his own bag, and realizes that Edmund was telling the truth—he wanted to leave with Charles after all. Edmund demands to know where Charles is going, but Charles refuses to say. He asks why Edmund wants to leave, and Edmund doesn't say anything—he just smiles.

Charles seems not to know where he's going (and perhaps his childish plan is just to stay in the wood forever). Edmund doesn't say why he has pursued Charles, but based on what Hill has already shown, he does so because he needs Charles around: he likes having someone to belittle and bully.

Charles begins walking, and Edmund follows. Charles wonders what Edmund will try to do to him, but then realizes that he himself could do anything to Edmund—since, now that they're in the wood, they're equals.

Charles is so used to being tormented by Edmund that it takes him a minute to realize that Edmund has no real power anymore, now that they have left Warings. This suggests that the root of Edmund's power of Charles is his right to the property at Warings.

The two boys walk through the wood, getting sweaty and tired. They hear a sudden sound. Charles notices that Edmund is sweating, and realizes, "there is blood and water inside him." He's reassured, in a way, by Edmund's presence. Charles peers past the bushes and sees the source of the sound—it's a deer. Edmund admits that he's never seen a deer before, and Charles realizes that he has "outdone" Edmund. He tells Edmund, "I thought you were supposed to know everything about everything."

Though Charles has fled Warings to get away from Edmund, he's oddly comforted by Edmund's presence. Instinctively, he seems to want another child with him in this strange new place, even if the child is a bully. Charles continues to get the upper hand over Edmund in this new terrain, relishing the fact that Edmund seems to know less about the forest than Charles does.

The deer moves away, and Edmund follows it. Charles follows Edmund, furious that Edmund has taken over the "expedition." He realizes that, on some level, he's glad to have Edmund here, even if he's angry with himself for acknowledging Edmund's leadership.

Once again, Charles—in spite of himself—submits to Edmund. Charles has a tendency to overthink his relationship with Edmund: instead of just seizing power, he allows himself to grow anxious or insecure Meanwhile, Edmund seizes authority without a thought. Charles's hesitation is similar to the way that Joseph hesitated to hit Edmund in a previous chapter.

The two boys follow the deer. Suddenly, Edmund stops and asks what's going on. Charles hears fear in Edmund's voice, and realizes that he's leader again. Edmund cries that they're lost, but Charles shoots back, "Oh, shut up." Then, suddenly, they hear the sound of two jays flying away, followed by the rumble of thunder.

Charles and Edmund are locked in a battle of wills. But unlike at Warings, where Edmund had the clear advantage, the two boys appear to be on an equal footing (and in some ways Charles seems to have the advantage). Edmund's sense of unease in the wilderness is symbolic of his upper-class background which, in contrast to Charles, has made him sheltered.

CHAPTER 7

Edmund and Charles, together in the wood, decide that they'll have to seek shelter from the impending storm. Charles notices that Edmund has become quiet and shaky, and he senses that Edmund is scared. Charles doesn't feel sorry for Edmund, but he doesn't want to leave Edmund either. This means that he'll have to "take charge."

As a storm begins, Charles feels more secure than Edmund. He seems poised to assert his power over Edmund, forcing Edmund for the first time to obey him.

Charles removes his anorak (i.e., parka) from his bag and calmly tells Edmund to follow. He finds a thick patch of bushes and crawls underneath, telling Edmund that they'll be safe and dry here. The boys crouch under the bushes for what feels like a long time. Eventually, the rain subsides, and the sun comes out. Charles emerges from the bushes and hears the sound of rushing **water**—it must be a stream. He thinks that Edmund will follow him from now on because of their experience with the storm. But then, Edmund orders Charles to follow *him* to the stream, adding, "I'm leader." Charles follows.

Even after Charles asserts his authority, Edmund is able to snatch the role of leader back from him, without a second's thought. Edmund refuses to play by the rules: instead of submitting to Charles, he just waits for the next opportunity to take control. Charles instinctively obeys Edmund, even though he could easily leave Edmund behind (which, it had seemed, is what he wanted to do all along). Therefore, on some level it seems Edmund bullies Charles because Charles allows Edmund to bully him.

As the boys walk, Charles notices a dead rabbit. Edmund asks Charles if he's ever seen a dead animal or person before, and Charles says he hasn't. Edmund says he saw his grandfather dead, and orders Charles to ignore the rabbit, saying "dead things … don't matter." Charles insists that dead things *do* matter, but doesn't know how to prove it. He notices a horrible, red wound on the rabbit, and throws it away, into the distance. Edmund sneers, and Charles senses that Edmund has "paid [him] back for his own terror during the storm."

Charles, who has been strongly associated with nature imagery, is more sympathetic to dead creatures—and therefore more frightened of them—than the cold, callous Edmund. Charles feels that Edmund has "gotten even" with him. Charles seems unable to protect himself against Edmund's careful exploitation of his fears and weaknesses.

The boys walk toward the stream, and Edmund slips on the wet ground, sliding downhill. Charles walks after him. Edmund gets up, claiming that he's found the stream and that he isn't hurt at all. He says that they should follow the stream, since streams always lead out of woods—something Charles doesn't really believe. Charles realizes that he doesn't have to follow Edmund at all: eventually, Edmund is going to go home, but Charles is determined not to go back to **Warings**. Edmund threatens to leave Charles alone in the wood unless he comes along. Charles knows that Edmund would never do this, because he was frightened in the storm. But he follows Edmund, anyway.

Charles remembers, after having forgotten for a while, that he doesn't have to do whatever Edmund says. However, Charles immediately falls back into the pattern of obeying Edmund. It seems Charles has to remind himself constantly that Edmund isn't his boss. Again and again, his first instinct is to follow Edmund and follow Edmund's orders.

As the boys walk by the stream, the wood gets darker. Eventually, Edmund stops and, his voice shaking, says that he's tired of walking, and that he doesn't like the dark wood. Charles calls Edmund a baby. He doesn't like the dark wood either, but he refuses to admit it.

Charles tries to bully Edmund in the same way that Edmund has bullied him. He recognizes an opportunity to create an advantage for himself, since the boys are in mutually unfamiliar terrain for the first time.

Abruptly, Edmund removes his clothes and announces that he's going to swim in the stream. Charles realizes, once again, that Edmund treats the expedition through the woods as a game, nothing more. Charles begins to feel strong and grown-up, as if he can do anything. He removes his clothes and jumps into the **water**.

Even though Charles is sometimes overly obedient and subservient, he's more mature than Edmund in many ways. Whereas Edmund feels uncomfortable while he's away from home, Charles seems to savor the independence that comes with leaving Warings: he feels invincible.

After a long while, the boys are still swimming, but the sun is going down. Edmund cries out that he has hurt his toenail. Charles offers to get an adhesive bandage from his satchel, and Edmund accepts. As Charles leaves the **water**, Edmund says that Charles looks like a puppet.

Even when Edmund finds himself in a subservient position to Charles—and Charles offers his help—Edmund continues bullying Charles, as if he's afraid of losing his power.

Charles rummages through his bag and suggests that he and Edmund build a fire. He explains how to gather stones to build a hearth, and as he talks he begins to enjoy explaining things to Edmund, who suddenly seems like a "stupid baby."

Here, Charles is at the height of his power over Edmund: alone in the woods, he's more confident and capable than his pale, cloistered tormentor—whose wealth has made him helpless in such an environment.

Edmund walks toward Charles and tells Charles not to get cocky, since he can tell that Charles is still frightened of him. Edmund whispers that **moths** will come out at night. In spite of himself, Charles becomes afraid. He tells himself that Edmund "can't do anything. It's only things he says," but nonetheless remains frightened. Charles wishes he could use Edmund's fear against him, just as Edmund is using Charles's fear against *him*. But he doesn't know how; he just knows "he was the loser."

Edmund senses that Charles is feeling confident, and so he tries his best to cut Charles down to size, reminding Charles of his secret fears. Charles is put in a frustrating position: he understands what Edmund is doing, but can't stop Edmund from doing it. Again, Charles can't seem to recognize that his sense of inferiority has given rise to a self-perpetuating drama in which he's the loser because he feels *like the loser.*

Edmund asks where they are, and Charles replies that they must still be in Hang Wood. Edmund denies this—they've probably walked into Barnard's Forest, which is much larger and harder to navigate. Edmund realizes that "they'll never find us" and begins to scream and pound his fists on the ground. He begins to cry, even after Charles yells, "Shut up!" Eventually, Charles resumes building the hearth out of stones.

Edmund is a frightening character because he alternates between moments of deep cruelty and moments of utter immaturity. At times, he seems more like a wicked grown-up than an eleven-year-old boy, but at other times, he's clearly still a little kid.

Charles remembers the string he packed, and tells Edmund that he's leaving to see how far they are from the edge of the forest. He explains that he'll tie string to a tree and unwind it, adding, "Someone did that once in history and they got away from a bull." Edmund tells him not to leave, but then says, "You needn't think I care if you get lost."

Edmund clearly does *care about Charles getting lost, since he's terrified of being alone in the wood. When he mentions "a bull," Charles is alluding to the legend of Theseus, who, with the help of a thread, was able to find his way through a vast labyrinth and kill the Minotaur, a half-human, half-bull creature. The allusion suggests that Charles himself is imprisoned in a psychological labyrinth that Edmund has created.*

Charles unravels the string, walking into the distance. He notices a rabbit and wonders if he could kill it with his penknife. He catches the animal, but when he sees its small, bloodshot eyes, he realizes that he can't kill it, adding, "It would have been easier for him to kill Hooper."

Even when Hill depicts Charles behaving in a peaceful manner (i.e., choosing not to kill a rabbit), she does so in a way that suggests Charles's capacity for a much deadlier act of violence (killing Edmund Hooper, a human being).

Charles considers walking away from Edmund for good, without even using the string. He's confident that he could survive on his own in the wood, using his penknife. Yet he feels responsible for Edmund. He begins to retrace his path, getting closer to Edmund. By the time he returns, Edmund appears to be fishing in the stream. But as Charles approaches, he sees that Edmund is lying face down in the **water**. Charles pulls Edmund out of the water and drags him ashore. He tries rubbing Edmund's back. Eventually Edmund regains consciousness, and begins to vomit and spew water out of his nostrils. While Edmund recovers, Charles builds a fire. Edmund moans, "My head hurts," and Charles replies, "Well, you bashed it on a stone that's why."

Charles despises Edmund, but he instinctively refuses to leave Edmund alone and vulnerable in the forest. One could argue that Charles does so because he feels an innate sense of compassion for Edmund. However, it's possible that he stays with Edmund out of a learned sense of obedience to his abuser. In either case, one thing is clear: Charles saves Edmund's life in this scene.

Charles rummages through Edmund's satchel and finds a cup and three white tablets, which he assumes must be aspirins. He fills the cup with **water** from the stream and then balances it over the fire. Meanwhile, Edmund asks Charles what he found, and Charles, not wanting to cause Edmund to panic again, claims that he's not sure. Edmund insist that Charles is lying—he must have found the way out of the forest. He tells Charles not to sneak away—"If you do, I'll kill you." Charles calmly replies, "You won't. I haven't found a way out, if you want to know, I've got no idea where we are, so."

Even though Charles has just done Edmund the greatest favor he could possibly do—saving Edmund's life—Edmund continues to be nasty to Charles. Charles has become oddly calm as a result of his heroic deed, however: he feels mature and independent, as if he is an adult and Edmund is just an annoying child.

CHAPTER 8

Alone in the forest, Charles and Edmund notice that it's getting dark. Edmund accuses Charles of having "nits" and adds that his father will buy him an expensive watch for Christmas.

Edmund continues to bully Charles and imply that he's inferior because of his class background, even though Charles saved his life. Talk about ungrateful.

Charles has caught a fish to eat: he pulls it out of the **water** and, rather than kill it with his penknife, lets die slowly on the grass. As the fish writhes on the grass, Edmund accuses Charles of letting him die—had he not gone off to explore, Edmund might not have bashed his head. He also accuses Charles of being a bully for not killing the fish straightaway with his penknife.

Again, Charles hesitates to kill a living creature—and yet, in a way, he does kill the fish, arguably in a much crueler way. The scene is something of a metaphor for Charles and Edmund's differing personalities: Edmund, the sadist, wants to kill the fish right away. Charles is capable of violence, too, but he goes about it in a calmer, more reluctant way.

Charles cooks the fish by piercing it on a stick. The fish tastes bad—Edmund spits it out, but Charles eats a little. Edmund complains that Charles is supposed to be taking care of him while he's injured, and Charles calls Edmund a baby. It is now completely dark, except for the light of the fire.

Charles tries to assert his power over Edmund by bullying Edmund—and yet, paradoxically, Edmund behaves exactly like a helpless child. Once again, Edmund refuses to play by the rules: instead of being grateful to Charles for saving his life, he continues lashing out at his savior.

Edmund mocks Charles for having a mother who kisses him goodnight. Charles points out that Edmund doesn't even have a mother, but Edmund shoots back, "I wouldn't want one" and adds, "Fathers are better." Charles raises the stick he's used to cook the fish, and Edmund quickly says, "You better not try to hit me." Charles throws the stick in the fire.

Desperate to assert himself again, Edmund tries to exploit another one of Charles's weaknesses: his lack of a father. Edmund is clearly scared of Charles's physical strength. Instead of using force, Edmund prefers to bully Charles with words. For his part, Charles doesn't attempt to bully Edmund for lacking a mother, even though this would be extremely easy.

Edmund asks Charles, "Has your mother gone after a lot of people … the way she's gone after my father?" Charles immediately regrets not hitting Edmund with the stick. Edmund, gloating, tells Charles that Charles's mother, Helena, has come to **Warings** to marry Joseph. Charles begins to despise his mother. Then he remembers that this is all his "father's fault." Even while Charles was in school, Charles didn't have enough money, since his father was dead. He was a G.B.B, a "Governor's Bequest Boy," and everyone knew it. He wishes his mother was dead instead of his father.

Edmund succeeds in "getting through" to Charles. As before, he does so by emphasizing Charles's inferior social status, something Charles has been aware of for most of his life (since he's attended an expensive boarding school on scholarship). He also bullies Charles by claiming that Joseph and Helena are getting married. This isn't the first time that Edmund seems to be observant beyond his years. Instead of directing his anger at Edmund, Charles directs it at his own mother, which only allows Edmund to bully him further.

Later that night, Edmund is fast asleep. Charles has given him his anorak as a pillow. Charles feels "protective" toward Edmund. He also decides that Edmund's comments about his mother don't matter—Edmund is just a nuisance. Then, in the distance, Charles begins to hear the sound of foxes howling. Then, he sees an owl fly overhead. As the owl hoots, he wishes he could hide his head under a blanket. He feels "cold and dead," and wants to cry.

After saving Edmund's life, Charles wants to believe that he can just ignore Edmund from now on. Charles wants to be mature and independent, and wishes he could dismiss Edmund instead of letting Edmund get under his skin. But the hoot of the owl at the end of the passage is a reminder that Charles isn't as confident or brave as he wishes he could be—and this suggests that Edmund will continue to be able to torment him.

When Charles wakes up, it's still dark. He hears Edmund crying out in his sleep: he says, "Mummy! Mummy! Mummy!" Charles wakes up Edmund and tells him to take another aspirin. As Charles goes to fetch some **water** from the stream, Edmund wails that he feels hot.

This is one of the few passages in the novel in which Hill suggests that Edmund misses his mother. Even though he's better at hiding it than Charles, Edmund is sad and lonely as a result of losing a parent.

Edmund swallows the last aspirin. Charles tells him that they'll have to stay in place if Edmund is still sick tomorrow. Edmund suggests that his father may call the police to search for them in the forest. He adds that Charles will be in trouble when the police find them, since "It's your fault." Edmund claims he'll tell the police that Charles made him leave **Warings**. Suddenly, Edmund cries, "I want to go home." Charles calls him a "great blubbering baby." Edmund begs Charles, "Don't go away."

Here, again, Charles seems to have the upper hand. Edmund is completely dependent on him, and knows it—that's why he begs Charles to stay with him in the wood. However much Charles may resent Edmund, he also seems to care for him enough to look after him when he's helpless and sick, suggesting that Charles has an innate sense of morality that Edmund simply lacks.

Charles feels a sudden urge to press his advantage. He bellows, "Shut up, Hooper … I'll bash your head in." Charles straddles Edmund and threatens to hit him if he says anything else. Edmund begins to cry. Charles hesitates, climbs off of Edmund, and then apologizes. He knows he's giving up his advantage, but he also knows now that he has an "inner strength" that Edmund lacks. He tells Edmund not to worry, and he tries not to think about "what would happen if nobody did come for them."

The chapter seems to end with Charles as the victorious one. He's saved Edmund's life and guided Edmund through the forest. In a way, Charles has accomplished exactly what he set out to accomplish: he's proved to himself that he can get by without anyone's help (even if only for a day). But there are some clouds on the horizon. Either Charles and Edmund will remain in the forest, where sooner or later they're going to starve, or they'll have to go back to Warings, where Edmund still enjoys unlimited power over Charles.

CHAPTER 9

Late the next morning, Charles and Edmund wake up, and Charles notices that Edmund has a nasty greenish bruise on his head. Charles surveys the forest and finds it beautiful in the light of day. He goes for a swim, telling Edmund not to join him, since he might have caught a cold from yesterday.

When Charles wakes up the next morning, he savors the beauty of the wood. Even though he's frightened by the owls and night noises of the wood, he seems to be far more comfortable and confident here than he is at Warings, because here Edmund doesn't exert the same control over him.

As Charles wades into the **water**, he hears the bark of a dog. His first reaction is to think, "I don't want them to find us. Not now. This is all right." Living in the forest is exactly what Charles had wanted. But then, he wonders if life at **Warings** will be different from now on. Suddenly, there's a shout, and a man comes into view, his head blocking the sunlight.

Charles is just getting used to his "new life" in the wood: he thinks that he can survive on his own and live in peace with Edmund (though of course if he were to live in the wood for a little longer, he'd probably see how naïve he was to think that he could survive on his own). But now, he's going to be dragged back to Warings, where Edmund has always bullied him in the past. Charles's disappointment is aptly symbolized by the image of a man blocking out the sun: adults are dragging him away from nature and back to a life of fear.

CHAPTER 10

Back at **Warings**, Edmund claims that Charles punched him and pushed him into the **water**. Helena Kingshaw believes Edmund and becomes very angry with Charles. Charles denies the story, but Helena says that Edmund would have no reason to lie. Charlie thinks to himself that he hates his mother and Edmund equally.

What's even more shocking than the speed with which Edmund lies about Charles's behavior is the speed with which Helena believes Edmund. As the novel goes on to show, Helena immediately takes Edmund's side in part because she's loyal to Joseph and doesn't want to antagonize him in any way.

Helena sends Charles to his room as punishment, even as Charles continues to insist that he didn't hurt Edmund. Joseph, who's been sitting quietly in the room, suggests that Charles and Edmund play draughts, but Charles cries, "Oh, rot!" Helena, appalled, orders to Charles to apologize to Edmund, his "special friend," and demands that Charles go to his room. Privately, Helena thinks, "I shall not make a favorite of my own child … especially when all the blame for this lies with him."

Charles is understandably furious that he's being blamed for hurting Edmund when, in reality, he saved Edmund's life. What's mysterious, however, is why he doesn't try to tell Helena the truth. Helena tells herself that she's not going to "play favorites," but it's also clear that she has believed Edmund's story from the beginning, suggesting that she is actually playing favorites with Edmund.

As Charles leaves to go upstairs, Edmund makes a "babyish face" and accuses Charles of being a bully. Charles realizes that there won't be "any kind of truce between them." He shouts that Edmund was a baby in the forest, and couldn't control himself during the storm. When nobody is looking, Edmund kicks Charles, hard, but Charles doesn't flinch—he just walks upstairs. As he shuts his door, he can hear his mother's voice, apologizing to Joseph and Edmund.

Regrettably, a furious Charles calls Edmund a baby at exactly the wrong time: when he's in front of Joseph and Helena. This behavior seems to confirm Edmund's accusations, making Charles look culpable.

Alone in his room, Charles realizes how exhausted he is. He thinks about his mother and realizes that she and Joseph Hooper now have the same "expression in their eyes." A short while later, Helena comes into the room to "have a little talk" with Charles. She tells Charles that he should be sorry for hurting Edmund, especially since Joseph is "quite fond of you."

Charles begins to sense that Joseph and Helena are growing closer to one another: evidently, he remembers what Edmund told him in the forest about their parents getting married.

Helena asks Charles why he ran off into the woods. He shrugs and wishes that she would just go. Helena asks Charles to tell her whatever is on his mind, but Charles replies, "I'm all *right*." He stresses that he hates Edmund. Helena seems confused, asking "Whatever can poor Edmund have done to you?" Charles thinks, 'He could never begin to tell her. Did not want to." He wishes she would go away.

Charles's only chance of getting the truth out is to be honest with his mother. But he's already so upset with his mother for taking Edmund's side that he refuses to open up to her, meaning that he sabotages himself once more.

Helena begins to say that she has something important to tell Charles. But then she thinks better of it, and falls silent. She only says, "I have made up my mind." She kisses Charles good night, and her necklace touches "coldly against his face." Alone in his room, Charles thinks, "They will be getting married." This means that he and Edmund will be brothers.

The "important" thing Helena is going to tell Charles is presumably something about her relationship with Joseph—a relationship which is alienating her from her son. Hill symbolizes the widening emotional distance between Helena and Charles with the image of her cold, hard necklace touching his skin.

CHAPTER 11

Charles sits at the breakfast table with his mother and Joseph. As he sits, he thinks, "He will have to be my father." Suddenly, Joseph gives Charles some news: Charles will be going to school with Edmund from now on.

The information Helena was going to tell Charles the previous night turns out to be the news about Charles's schooling (which would suggest that Joseph is getting closer with Helena, and might marry her soon).

In the following days, Charles tries his best to avoid Edmund. He wanders around the house, trying to stay as far as possible from Edmund. One day, he hides in a small shed in the garden outside **Warings**. While he's looking around, he hears the shed door lock. At first, he assumes it's Edmund playing a trick on him. But then he begins thinking of "tramps and murderers," and all the other people who might mean him harm. He imagines being choked, stabbed, or hit with an axe.

Charles allows his mind to run wild, and here, he envisions all the horrible things that could happen to him if he's locked in the shed for a long time. In a way, Charles's greatest enemy is his own fear, which he frequently allows to seize control of his imagination.

As he sits in the dark, Charles thinks about going to school with Edmund, and suddenly he hears a truck driving by the shed. He pounds on the door of the shed until his knuckles bleed, but nobody opens the door. Suddenly, he vomits. After what feels like hours, he falls asleep.

Charles is willing to endure great pain because of his fear and desperation to escape—and this fact foreshadows the novel's shocking ending.

Charles dreams about a Punch and Judy puppet show. He sits on the beach with his school friend Devereux, while the puppets murmur, "Kingshaw" again and again. Suddenly, Charles wakes up, and realizes that somebody is saying his name—it's Edmund.

Edmund's voice provides the "link" between Charles's dreams and his waking life. In that sense, Edmund has become a voice in Charles's own head, and already seems to know Charles's innermost secrets and fears. Puppet shows featuring the characters Punch and Judy were popular among children in the 19th and early 20th century, and were known for being particularly violent.

Edmund teases Charles for sitting alone in the dark. He brags that he has the key to the shed. Furious, Charles calls Edmund a bastard and asks why Edmund has locked him up. Edmund says, "I put you in here just because I felt like it." He adds that Charles will be placed in Edmund's dorm at school, where Edmund is Head of Dorm. Charles is sure that Edmund is telling the truth. Furthermore, Edmund claims to have lots of friends at school. Edmund promises Charles that he'll tell everyone that Charles is a baby. He claims that the students cut up dead **moths** in science class, and Charles becomes so frightened and furious that he threatens to kill Edmund. He breaks down, crying, and when he looks up, Edmund is gone.

Edmund fills Charles's head with visions of bullying at boarding school. It's strange that Charles immediately believes Edmund's claims of being a prefect and a popular student (whereas it's easy to imagine that Edmund is exaggerating or lying outright). In a word, Charles allows Edmund to tell him what is and isn't true, and in this way he all but allows Edmund to control his thoughts.

A moment later, Edmund opens the shed door and shouts, "It's lunchtime and we're late." Slowly, numbly, Charles gets up and walks back to the house. Inside, Edmund merrily tells Helena, "We were being bandits."

Charles is too frightened and dejected (and too angry with his mother) to tell her that Edmund bullies him. Edmund, meanwhile, ensures that the adults perceive him as an innocent, fun-loving kid.

CHAPTER 12

Helena Kingshaw contemplates the trips she's about to take with Joseph, Charles, and Edmund. Joseph will drive them all in his car. Joseph has told Helena to rest and relax. Helena enjoys "being treated in that way by Mr. Hooper."

Helena is just as subservient to Joseph as Charles is to Edmund. But whereas Charles struggles with Edmund for control, Helena enjoys her relationship with Joseph, because Joseph showers her with gifts and attention. It's for this reason that Helena is sometimes not attentive enough to Charles's needs.

In the car, Charles stares out the window. He, Edmund, Joseph, and Helena are driving to **Leydell Castle**. Joseph boasts about having packed guidebooks—he has become more confident as a result of having "grown used to having a woman about him again." The previous evening, he told Helena that he'll treat Charles as well as he treats his own son.

Joseph has begun to think of Helena and Charles as his own wife and son. Though Joseph claims he'll treat Charles the same as Edmund, the promise rings hollow in light of how little the adults understand about the boys' relationship—and how deeply unequal it is.

At the **castle**, Edmund asks Charles what he's going to do. Charles says he's going to climb up the castle, and Edmund tells Charles he'll fall off and die. After succeeding in climbing to the top, he yells down to Edmund, "I'm king of the castle!" Edmund says that Charles should come down, or else he'll probably fall and crack his head open. Charles dares Edmund to climb up, but Edmund coolly replies, "I can come up if I want to." He walks toward a flight of stairs, and Charles loses sight of him. Charles stares down at the surrounding countryside. As he does, he feels strangely depressed. He tries to tell himself that he's higher than anyone else, but then realizes, "No, that was not true."

The scene mirrors Edmund and Charles's earlier interactions in the wood: away from Warings, Charles seems to have more physical power and bravery than Edmund, and yet Edmund remains an intimidating, somewhat sinister presence. The saying, "I'm king of the castle!", after which Hill's book is title, seems to refer to a childish game. But, as Hill shows, this "game" reflects a deadly battle of wills between the two boys. Both Charles and Edmund want to be "king," in the sense that they want to assert their power over each other. However, because Charles is a gentler boy, he tends to feel that he's losing even when he seems to have bested Edmund (as in this situation).

Edmund appears—he has climbed up to the top of the **castle**. Charles announces that he's climbing down. Then, he realizes that Edmund's face is pale—he's terrified. Charles says, "You shouldn't have bloody well come up here," surprising Edmund, who is usually the one who swears. Forcefully, Charles orders Edmund to take his hands off the wall. Reluctantly, with his eyes closed, Edmund does so, even though he's frightened of falling. Edmund pees his pants, and it occurs to Charles that he could kill Edmund right now. He tells himself, "I'm the King." And yet he knows that whatever power he has here is strictly temporary: he's the King of the Castle, but only for now.

For once, Charles seems to be asserting his power over Edmund. He knows that he's more powerful here at the top of the castle (as evidenced by Edmund's obvious fear of heights). And yet Charles's consuming sense of power is tempered by his realization that, eventually, he'll have to go back to Warings, where Edmund will bully him. Charles gives up too easily. He lacks Edmund's reckless confidence and sense of superiority, and that's why Edmund is able to intimidate him.

Charles decides to guide Edmund back down to the ground. He doesn't want to frighten Edmund. Charles reaches out his hand; Edmund flinches, steps back, and falls.

Edmund is so frightened—both of falling and of Charles, who is only trying to help—that he flinches and falls. Seemingly, he can't believe that Charles would want to help him. Here, Hill suggests that for Edmund, just as for Charles, fear itself is the greatest enemy.

CHAPTER 13

Charles watches Edmund fall, as if in slow motion. They're only as high up as they might be on the roof of **Warings**, but the fall seems to take a long time. After that, time seems to speed up: a "man in uniform" arrives, and Charles feels as if Helena and Joseph are ignoring him completely. Edmund is lifted into an ambulance.

Charles is understandably disoriented by his experience: he tried to help Edmund, only to watch Edmund fall and hurt himself. Helena and Joseph seem to be angry with Charles or even blame him for the fall. But it's unclear if this is the case or just the way Charles perceives things.

Charles is sure that Edmund is dead—and he's sure that it's his fault. He decided against pushing Edmund, but he certainly *thought* about pushing Edmund. Furthermore, Charles knows that, from a distance, what happened would have *looked* like a push.

This isn't the first time Charles has contemplated pushing Edmund. But on both occasions, he's refrained from doing anything to Edmund—an innate sense of right and wrong keeps him honest. Ironically, even though Charles has tried to help Edmund again and again, Helena and Joseph think he has tried to hurt Edmund—and now, it would seem, they're about to think so once again.

Charles goes back to **Warings** with Joseph and Helena. In the car, he remembers being eight years old at his former school. A prefect named Lesage used to send him on useless errands. Once, Lesage made Charles lie down on the floor and close his eyes. Charles did so. When he opened his eyes, Lesage was still standing over him, and told him to go to class. The incident disturbed Charles.

Lesage resembles Edmund in many ways: he seems to delight in exercising control over Charles, and he seems to assert this control through words rather than physical force. It might be argued that Lesage was sexually abusing Charles in some way, but Hill doesn't say clearly either way.

Helena doesn't speak to Charles in the car. Suddenly, Charles says, "I didn't push him. I didn't touch him at all." Helena says, "It was very, very silly to go up there at all, Charles. But we won't talk about any of it, now." Charles is desperate to convince his mother of what happened. But as he tries to explain, Helena says, "I am a little ashamed that you were not sensible enough to realize what might happen." Charles says that Edmund is a baby and frightened of heights.

Even though Charles is trying to prove his innocence, he winds up making himself sound guiltier. Helena seems to have made up her mind already. As before, she thinks that she's treating both children equally when, in reality, she's neglecting her own son's side of the story, refusing even to hear what he has to say.

Back at the house, Helena tells Charles that she's going to the hospital and that Mrs. Boland will be taking care of him. She hugs Charles and says, "Promise me you will never, never do anything so silly again." She leaves, and Charles, sitting alone, whispers, "Hooper is dead now" to himself.

Charles tries and fails to explain himself to his mother. Even though he tries to explain that he was helping Edmund, he seemingly wanted Edmund to fall and die, so that Edmund would no longer bully him.

Night falls, and Helena and Joseph still haven't come back from the hospital. Charles and Alice Boland watch television together. The film playing on television shows a blind man walking down the road. Then, it shows another man, walking quietly behind him, getting closer and closer. Suddenly, there's a screaming sound from the television. Charles thinks about how, soon, he'll be going to school without Edmund, since he thinks Edmund is probably dead.

Charles is cautiously optimistic: he thinks that his life will get better now that Edmund is out of the picture—perhaps he'll be able to enjoy himself at school now. But the passage, with its ominous description of a horror film on the TV, seems to foreshadow further pain and terror for Charles.

Alice Boland tells Charles that it's time to go to bed. She notices that Charles's face is "peaky." She hasn't been able to "figure him out," but she suspects that he likes being around Joseph Hooper, since he doesn't have a father of his own.

This is the only time in the novel when Hill writes from Alice Boland's perspective. Alice is rather simplistic in her assumptions about Charles—she has no idea what's really going on with him.

Alone in his room, Charles thinks about how he won't have to avoid Edmund from now on. He'll have the entire house to himself—and in fact, he'll be the King of the Castle. He falls asleep and has vivid dreams.

Charles is a gentler, kinder boy than Edmund, but his thoughts are just as dark and aggressive. Even if he would never act on his instincts, he wants Edmund dead and, furthermore, wants Edmund's property for himself.

Around midnight, Joseph and Helena drive home from the hospital. Joseph tells Helena that he couldn't have "managed" without her. Helena says, "If only it had not been for Charles," but Joseph replies, "I will not have that … There is to be no blame."

Helena clearly blames Charles for Edmund's accident, even though she's refused to listen to Charles's side of the story. She seems overly eager to please Joseph, and therefore doesn't blame Edmund for his own accident.

Charles dreams about a hand clawing at him. He runs away from the hand, toward a distant light. Suddenly, a huge, winged creature swoops down on him. He turns and sees a pack of **crows**, puppets, and ambulance men chasing him. He wakes up in the middle of the night, sobbing, and decides to go to his mother. Outside his bedroom, he begins to cry noisily. Joseph and Helena rush up the stairs toward him. They dry his tears and give him a hot drink. Charles tries to explain, "It's because [Edmund's] dead." Helena explains that Edmund isn't dead.

Even after Charles thinks that he's "won," he continues to have bad dreams in which he's consumed by his fears—fears that Edmund has drummed in to him. Charles is trapped in a no-win situation: whether or not Edmund is in the house, Charles is unable to escape the effects of his abuse psychologically. For Charles, the only thing scarier than Edmund alive is Edmund dead.

Helena and Joseph take Charles back to bed and wish him goodnight. He falls asleep, and when he wakes up it's still dark. He whispers, "Hooper isn't dead" again and again.

Charles feels conflicted: he wants Edmund dead, but he also wants Edmund alive. The latter desire is typical of both his moral compass and his masochistic personality: as we've seen, he tends to do what other people tell him to do and in some ways seems to want to be bossed around.

CHAPTER 14

A few days later, Helena tells Charles that she'll be going back to the hospital. Mrs. Boland will take care of Charles again. Charles works on a jigsaw puzzle and acknowledges his mother's statements will a simple "Yes" or "All right." Helena suggests that Charles visit Edmund tomorrow, but Charles says "I'm not going."

Charles has given up on trying to convince his mother of the truth about Edmund's fall. In this way, his situation becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy: Helena never learns what happened largely because Charles accepts that she's never going to understand *what happened.*

Alone, Charles thinks about a boy named Fenwick. The two of them went to school around the same time, and Charles wanted to be friends with Fenwick, even though Fenwick ignored him. But one day, Fenwick slipped and fell down a hill, cutting himself badly. Charles said that he'd go get the Matron, even though Fenwick told him, "Shut up … don't be stupid." Charles followed Fenwick into the Matron's office, and the Matron didn't tell him to leave, assuming that he was Fenwick's friend. While Fenwick rested, Charles asked him if he was hurt, but Fenwick just said, "Shut up, stupid."

In the past, Charles's attempts to make friends have been unsuccessful. He wants to be Fenwick's buddy, but he just winds up annoying Fenwick—in part because he is caring, a trait which other boys see as a sign of weakness. This partly explains why Charles so often seems lonely and isolated: he's never had a lot of friends, and when he's alone, his imagination runs wild.

Helena suggests that Charles buy Edmund a "little present" with his pocket money. Charles refuses and says, "I hate Hooper. He's a baby and a bully and I hate him." He adds that he wishes Edmund had died in the fall.

Charles keeps digging his own grave. Instead of trying to communicate the truth to Helena, he gives up and engages in childish-sounding mockery, confirming what Helena initially suspected: that Charles was somehow responsible for Edmund's fall.

Charles spends most of the week alone, making a model of a fort. Mrs. Boland brings him drinks and meals, and in general "it was all right."

Charles is fairly happy, but his happiness is tempered by his awareness that Edmund is going to come home soon.

Helena tells herself that Charles is saying unpleasant things about Edmund because he's shocked. She forces herself not to worry. Joseph advises her to remain calm, and adds, "You should make time for yourself and for your own interests and pleasures, apart from those of your son." Helena aims to treat Edmund like her own son.

As before, Helena claims that she's trying to treat Edmund and Charles equally, when in effect she gravitates toward Edmund and away from her biological child. The further implication is that Helena is behaving in this way partly to ingratiate herself with Joseph so that she can become his wife.

Charles completes the jigsaw puzzle he's been working on, and then breaks it up into pieces. The puzzle came from Edmund's room, and so he's careful to return it to its proper place. He's sure that Edmund will know that he used the jigsaw puzzle. Then, Charles goes outside, where he takes a stick and beats "the heads off the tall plants of cow parsley." He wishes things could always be like this, and tries not to think of "anything terrible that was to come."

Charles senses that Edmund will be coming home soon, and he tries to distract himself with aggressive, dreamily destructive behavior. Hill suggests that Edmund's spitefulness and violence have begun to influence Charles to behave similarly.

In the hospital, Edmund, who has a broken leg, plays board games with Helena. He's pleased that Helena comes to visit him every day, since it means she'd rather be with him than with her own son. However, he doesn't like Helena very much.

As before, Edmund seems to have a highly adult understanding of the politics behind his relationship with Helena. He's interested in using Helena to assert his power over Charles, rather than actually enjoying his time with her.

Charles wanders through the area outside **Warings**, and comes to a church. Inside, on the red carpet by the altar rail, he prays to God, saying, "I did mean it, only now I don't mean it, I want to take it back and never to have thought and said it … I am trying to be sorry." But Charles also senses that he "still meant it." He's only praying for forgiveness because he's afraid of the dark, empty church. He fears Edmund, he decides, more than he fears anything.

This passage epitomizes Hill's view of childhood. Charles wants to be a good child, but he can't deny that he has some innate, aggressive instincts. In other words, he sincerely wants Edmund to be hurt. Perhaps much the same could be said for children in general: they may or may not want to be good, but they're possessed of the potential *for destruction.*

Suddenly, a voice says, "What's the matter with you?" A boy with a "small, brown face" insists that Charles isn't allowed to go past the altar rail. He asks if Charles lives with the Hoopers, and says that he's seen Charles drive by in a green car. The boy asks Charles if he wants to see the turkeys that "came this morning." Charles says that he does. As they walk out of the church, Charles notices that the boy's fingernails are very dirty.

Right away, Hill portrays the boy as being rougher and more working-class than Edmund—in other words, he has a lot more in common with Charles than with Edmund. The boy's friendly offer to show Charles the turkeys provides a contrast to Edmund's attempts to intimidate Charles with the stuffed crow.

A van drives by, and the boy nods to the man inside. It occurs to Charles that this boy has been watching him the entire time he's been at **Warings**. Charles and Edmund have been "on the moon" while, all along, there's been a whole world outside of their fraught dynamic.

Spending time with another child makes Charles feel less imprisoned. He realizes that maybe Edmund doesn't have as much psychological power over him as he'd thought if he can get away from Warings and spend time with other people whenever he wants.

The boy challenges Charles to a mock-naval battle. He shows Charles how to break the heads off of some old plantains, and the two boys throw the plantain heads back and forth. The boy introduces himself as Fielding. He runs down the road and shouts for Charles to follow him. Fielding explains that there's a cow giving birth to a calf in the barn near Fielding's house. He asks if Charles wants to see. Charles looks uncomfortable and Fielding says, "You needn't, if you don't like it." Charles realizes that Edmund would have teased him and called him a baby. Charles says, "I'm all right," and the two boys enter the barn.

Fielding is the opposite of Edmund. Where Edmund shows Charles his property and possessions with the intention of intimidating Charles, Fielding shows Charles around his farm in an effort to be friendly and engaging. He allows Charles to make his own decisions rather than pressuring him to compete for dominance.

Charles witnesses the calf's birth. He feels sick, but he also tells himself that he *won't* be sick, and that he's not afraid. He also notices that Fielding is "sitting back on his heels." Fielding then takes Charles to see the turkeys in the barn, and explains that his family always kills the turkeys at Christmas. He offers to show Charles his hamster, and Charles agrees, overwhelmed by this "battery of experience" but still willing to see everything.

The passage underscores Hill's point that fear is a product of intimidation and anticipation, and not the product of objects being innately "fearsome." When Edmund shows Charles moths, for example, he uses physiological manipulation to strike fear into Charles's heart. But when Fielding shows Charles equally unusual things, he doesn't try to manipulate Charles in any way, and as a result Charles is slightly grossed out but not particularly frightened.

Fielding introduces Charles to his mother, and asks his mother if Charles can stay for dinner—she smiles and says that he can. Charles thinks, "This is how you ought to be." Fielding offers to let Charles ride his bike back to **Warings** to ask Mrs. Boland if he, Charles, can stay for dinner at the Fieldings' house. Charles rides back to Warings, where he finds Helena. Helena tells him that Edmund is coming home tomorrow.

Charles is clearly comparing Fielding's mother to his own: he wants a parent who treats him with kindness and hospitality. But the happy day comes to an abrupt close when he learns that Edmund is coming home soon. The question becomes: will Charles's new friendship help him overcome his fear of Edmund?

Later that day, Charles is with Fielding. Charles explains how he ran away into Hang Wood. Fielding is impressed that Charles went into the wood by himself, and adds that even his older brother wouldn't have done so. Charles explains that Edmund Hooper met him there, and Fielding asks Charles if he's frightened of Edmund—Charles hesitates and then says, "yes." Fielding points out that Edmund can't "*do* anything to Charles." Charles knows Fielding is right, but he can't make Fielding see the "terribleness" of living with Edmund. Fielding invites Charles to spend more time with him, adding, "You oughtn't to let everybody boss you around so much." Charles begins to think about school, and wonders if he'll be able to tell the students about how Edmund peed his pants. He thinks to himself, "Fielding is mine, this is all mine."

Fielding celebrates Charles for his bravery instead of minimizing it, as Edmund has tried to do. Charles knows that Fielding is absolutely right—Edmund doesn't have any real power over him—but he still can't stop himself from feeling afraid of Edmund. Charles seems to be beginning to give in to the same desire for power and control that characterizes Edmund when he says that Fielding is his. *This only reiterates Hill's point that children aren't inherently good—even seemingly gentle children like Charles still have selfish, power-hungry instincts.*

The next day, Edmund does not come home, because he has a fever. Charles spends the day with Fielding. He imitates the way Fielding sucks a straw, noting, "He must look and talk like Fielding, he must *be* like Fielding."

Charles wants to get over his fear of Edmund, and thinks that he can do so by imitating Fielding, a confident boy who seemingly isn't frightened of anything.

CHAPTER 15

Edmund returns to **Warings**, where he must spend his time in bed. Helena tells Charles that he should spend time with Edmund, but Charles refuses. Helena tells herself that Charles is just going through a phase and that "that was the way boys behaved."

Helena again fails to understand what's going on with her son. She can't recognize how frightened Charles is of Edmund, and how desperately he wants to be free of Edmund's psychological bullying.

In the following days, Edmund tells Charles that the doctors told him he could have died from the fall. He also brags about the gifts that Helena gave him during his time in the hospital. Charles is jealous. This surprises Charles, since "in truth [Charles] did not care very much about [his mother]."

Charles suddenly seems interested in competing with Edmund for his mother's attention, even though he doesn't particularly like his mother (something he hasn't said directly until now). As Charles becomes more competitive with Edmund, it would seem, he becomes more and more like *Edmund.*

Edmund tells Charles that he blames him for the fall. They argue about Edmund's fall many times. Edmund tells Charles, "Something will happen to you. Because it was your fault and I told them, it's what they believe." Charles tries to remember Fielding's advice, but in spite of himself he waits for punishment, dreading what might happen to him.

Charles knows that he should ignore Edmund's bullying, but he can't help himself: his fears of Edmund have a life of their own, and in a sense they're uncontrollable. And so, even when Edmund says something as open-ended as "something will happen to you," Charles becomes terrified.

Charles remembers the time a boy named Crawford beat him up. He can remember the feeling of Crawford's fists hitting his face and belly. Edmund is even more frightening than Crawford, because he controls Charles through terror, not violence.

Part of Charles's torment comes from the fact that he knows exactly what Edmund is trying to do to him, and yet is powerless to stop it. He knows that he should just try to ignore Edmund's psychological manipulations, yet finds himself unable to do so.

Charles tries to sneak out of the house to find Fielding, but Helena catches him. Charles claims he's going to buy ice cream, and she sighs and tells him to go—in the meantime, she claims, she's going to check on Edmund.

By sneaking away from his prison-like existence at Warings, Charles tries to free himself from the psychological prison in which Edmund has trapped him.

Feeling caught in his lie, Charles goes to buy ice cream. As he buys the ice cream, he remembers the previous night, when Edmund told him that Joseph would be paying for Charles's school uniform. Charles remembers Helena telling him that she's made great sacrifices to send him to school. So he knows that Edmund is right: he could only afford to go back to school with Joseph's help.

Another reason that Charles finds it so hard to ignore Edmund's psychological torments is that he senses that Edmund is right: for example, Edmund is correct to say that Charles is dependent on Joseph's generosity. In this way, Edmund's power over Charles stems from his family's wealth, and, moreover, from Edmund's ability to use this wealth to make Charles aware of his weakness and subservience.

Suddenly, Charles sees Fielding, sitting in a big van. Fielding explains that he and his father are driving the newborn calves to the market. His father explains, dispassionately, that the calves will be made into veal. Charles wants to learn about the calves, but he's also frightened of the "sounds and fears and smells." And so the van drives away, and he goes back to **Warings**.

Charles's fear of Edmund poisons his relationship with Fielding. Before, he witnessed some disgusting and unnerving things (a calf being born, for example) but didn't feel afraid. Now that Edmund is back, however, Charles allows himself to become consumed by fear to a greater degree, and declines Fielding's invitation as a result.

Back at **Warings**, Edmund tells Charles that he knows about Fielding—Helena told him. He adds, "Your mother tells me lots of things about you." Charles begins to cry—he's lost his only secret.

Edmund uses his close relationship with Helena to learn more about Charles, reinforcing the frightening illusion that he's all-knowing and all-powerful.

Downstairs, Helena shortens the hems on her clothes, thinking, "I am going to look younger."

Helena is totally unaware of the psychological warfare between Charles and Edmund—she's so wrapped up in her own plans that she neglects her son.

A short while later, Joseph takes Charles and Edmund by train into London to pick up school uniforms. As they sit together, Joseph thinks that Charles is much easier to deal with than his own son—there's nothing strange about him. He thinks of Helena and remembers, "life had taught him not to make impetuous decisions."

Ironically, Joseph seems to like Charles a lot more than he likes his own son. But Charles is completely and tragically unaware of this fact. He thinks that he's outnumbered at Warings, when in reality he has an ally in Joseph.

In London, Joseph points out the various sights, and Charles privately thinks that he doesn't like being here with Joseph. In the department store, while he's waiting to get his uniform, he contemplates running out of the store and disappearing into London. But then he decides that "there was no more hope for him."

Here again, Charles digs his own grave. Instead of building up a relationship with Joseph, who secretly likes him, he gives up and surrenders to the hopelessness that Edmund's bullying has engendered in him. Whereas before he had the courage to run away, he now seems to have lost such hope for a different life.

Back at **Warings**, Edmund plays with the model fort that Charles built. Furious, Charles complains that Joseph gave his model to Edmund. As Charles yells, Joseph strikes him on the cheek. Helena sends Charles upstairs to his room. The passage ends, "He did not look at her."

As in previous chapters, Charles acts childishly in response to Edmund's bad behavior, and is punished for it, while Edmund gets off scot free. The deliberately ambiguous words "He did not look at her" could refer either to Joseph refusing to look at Helena after striking her child, or Charles refusing to make eye contact with his mother—similar to the way he's previously become angry with her after she refuses to stand up for him.

Upstairs, Charles kicks open Edmund's room and demands that Edmund give back the model. Instead, Edmund laughs and throws the model across the room, breaking it. As Charles bends over the model, he hears Helena tell him, "I think that you should be very, very ashamed of yourself."

As before, Helena takes Edmund's side and punishes her own son rather than making an effort to learn the full truth about what happened. She claims she's trying to be fair but in reality she's playing favorites with Edmund, adding to Charles's feeling of isolation.

CHAPTER 16

Helena has been lonely ever since she's gotten to **Warings**. But she hasn't allowed herself to acknowledge her loneliness; instead, she tells herself that Joseph has been "so very kind" to let her stay there.

Helena is clearly eager to remarry Joseph, and for this reason she overlooks any problems with her time at Warings.

One day, Helena gets a call from an old friend, Enid Tyson. As she talks with Enid, Helena remembers the world "outside this house and this village," a world in which she was quite happy, and had nothing to do with Joseph Hooper. Joseph listens to Helena talk on the phone with Enid, and feels resentful: Helena's been here for two months, and he doesn't know anything about her past or her old friends.

Helena's conversation with Enid is reminiscent of Charles's friendship with Fielding—both serve as reminders that Warings, and the people who live there, are insignificant in the grand scheme of things. Joseph seems to enjoy asserting his power over Helena (even if he does so to a lesser degree than his son does over Charles). He likes the feeling that he controls every aspect of Helena's life, and therefore resents it when Helena shows him she has a life outside of Warings.

As Helena talks on the phone, she says, in order that Joseph will hear her, "I have not quite made up my mind about the future." By saying this, Helena hopes to make it clear that she has "retained her pride"—and that Joseph, not she, must be the one to make the decision.

This is the rare scene in which Helena seems to assert her own (limited) kind of power over Joseph. She presents herself as being self-sufficient and proud, meaning that she'd never beg Joseph to marry her—Joseph will have to be the one to ask. Of course, Helena is financially dependent on Joseph. However, unlike her son, Helena doesn't allow herself to become overly intimidated by this fact.

Charles hears his mother on the phone. He's not quite sure what she means by "the future." He wonders if he and his mother will live somewhere else. He remembers living in a hotel for a brief time in London. Broughton-Smith found out about the hotel and teased him for living there.

Charles doesn't really grasp what Helena is trying to do: he's so desperate to escape Warings that he wants to believe that he and his mother will move away, even if this could mean more hotel-living—and more bullying and mockery.

Charles remembers Miss Mellitt, an old woman who lived in the hotel. Late at night, he often feared that Mellitt would come into his room. He had nightmares about her, too. Suddenly, Charles realizes something—the smell of the dolls in the cabinet of the upstairs room is very similar to the smell of Miss Mellitt.

As the novel moves on, Charles continues to develop new fears. Edmund's manipulation is so subtle and powerful that Charles becomes less and less confortable at Warings, the opposite of what one might expect to happen. Even the dolls in the room upstairs—the only place in Warings Charles felt safe—begin to remind him of his fears.

Meanwhile, Joseph listens to Helena telling her friend, "I have not quite made up my mind about the future." He decides that something is wrong: Helena doesn't like living at **Warings**. He thinks about all the times he's looked at Helena in her skirts and felt "disturbed." This reminds him of his marriage. He and his wife slept in separate beds. Afterwards, he would go to London and stare at young women walking down the street and feel tempted. His new marriage, he decides, will be very different: this time, Helena will "answer to him, without the niceties and the restraints." Joseph goes to bed, telling himself, "Tomorrow."

Even though he's supposed to be the mature adult in the story, Joseph seems naïve and peculiarly childish when it comes to women, and in particular what to do about Helena. Joseph seems to want to marry Helena because he wants a sexual partner, but Hill also suggests that Joseph takes a kind of pleasure simply in asserting his power over Helena. Just as Edmund despises Charles most when he tries to be kind and helpful, Joseph seems to resent Helena in the moments he finds her most attractive.

A few days later, Charles feels anxious. Joseph is driving Charles and Edmund away from **Warings**, and Helena assures them that they're in for a "lovely treat." Charles thinks that he already knows what the secret is—he's always known.

Charles senses that his mother is about to announce her engagement to Joseph, just as Edmund has told him weeks before.

A few days earlier, Edmund announced that he knew something Charles didn't know. Gleefully, he told Charles that Joseph was going to be Charles's stepfather, since he was going to marry Helena very soon. Charles told Edmund to go away. Edmund said that he didn't want Helena or Charles at **Warings**. Charles realizes that Edmund is genuinely angry—he doesn't want other people in his house. This makes Charles feel calm, since it reminds him that Edmund doesn't have any control over what happens.

Charles gets a sudden reminder that Edmund, for all his apparent confidence, is just as powerless as Charles is. Neither one of them can do anything to control their parents' behavior. Indeed, Edmund's only real advantage over Charles is his access to information—his superior knowledge of Warings, for example, or his prediction that his father will remarry.

Joseph drives Helena and the boys out to a "muddy field." Charles, sensing what the surprise will be, becomes very afraid. Helena merrily says that Charles "used to be a bit frightened. But of course all that is quite forgotten."

Helena is so clueless that she doesn't realize her son is living in a near-constant state of fear.

Charles can see that Joseph has driven them to a circus. They sit very close to the front of the ring, so that Charles can see the enormous captive animals and hear their terrible "braying." He thinks, "I can't get out." Privately, Joseph is bored by the circus, and thinks, "It is just for the sake of the boys." He notices the female acrobats, and touches Helena's "silken knees." Just then, Charles vomits.

Charles isn't nauseated with the animals themselves so much as their captivity. Indeed, he seems to think of himself as one of the animals: trapped in an enclosed space and forced to do other people's bidding. Ironically, Joseph thinks that the circus would be a pleasant treat for Charles, when really it's just the opposite.

A few days later, Helena tells Charles that she's spoken to Fielding's mother and invited her son, whose full name is Anthony Fielding, to tea. Charles doesn't want this to happen, saying, "He's *my* friend." Helena insists that tea with Anthony will be fun for everyone.

Charles's relationship with Fielding has already been described as oddly possessive: he thinks of Fielding as "belonging" to him. Now, he's being forced to share Fielding with Edmund—so, naturally, he resents having to do so.

Charles wonders what tea with Fielding will be like. He decides that Edmund won't be able to frighten or embarrass Fielding, since Fielding is "invulnerable."

Charles correctly assumes that Edmund is going to try to intimidate Fielding, just as he intimidated Charles.

Joseph and Helena talk about their wedding—they plan to marry in September, just before Charles and Edmund go off to school together.

Joseph and Helena are, indeed, getting married, just as Edmund predicted they would.

During Fielding's visit to **Warings**, Edmund offers to show Fielding inside the **Red Room**, and adds that Charles is very scared of what's inside. In the Red Room, Fielding is delighted by the **moths**. Edmund says, "Dare you *touch* one?" and Fielding replies, "Yes. They're only dead things. They can't hurt you." But Edmund doesn't make Fielding touch a moth. Charles realizes that Edmund is treating Fielding differently, because Edmund can sense that Fielding will never be afraid. In the same instant, Charles realizes that Edmund will always be able to make *him* afraid. He begins to weep.

Charles had hoped that Fielding's visit to Warings would strengthen their friendship. But because of Edmund's skillful manipulation, Charles begins to feel as alienated from Fielding as he does from Edmund. He wants to be like Fielding (and has tried to be), but knows that he can't—Edmund will always be able to frighten him.

A few days ago, Joseph and Helena were talking about what to do with the moth collection. Joseph suggested selling the collection, but Helena argued, within earshot of Charles, that they should keep the **moths**, since the boys might one day want them. In this moment, Charles thought that his mother's behavior had "less to do with him than with anyone in the whole world." He wished that his mother could be "his" once again.

Helena continues to behave obliviously, since she's unaware that Charles would like nothing better than to be rid of the moths. Charles feels isolated from his mother, but his young mind takes this emotion to its extreme. Notice, once again, that Charles doesn't seem to feel love for his mother, but only a strong possessiveness, modeled off of Edmund's.

Back in the **Red Room**, Edmund suggests that Fielding come look at his "battle plans." Fielding asks Charles if he wants to. Then, Edmund suggests that they all go into the attic, adding that Charles is frightened. Charles threatens to punch Edmund, and Fielding seems surprised with Charles. Charles doesn't go to the attic, and so Fielding refuses to go, too.

For the time being, Fielding remains loyal to Charles, refusing to do anything Charles doesn't agree to do. And yet there are signs that he's moving further away from Charles—he can't seem to understand why Charles reacts so violently to Edmund's offer to explore the attic.

Edmund tells Fielding not to pay attention to Charles. He tells Fielding that he wants to show Fielding something private. Fielding hesitates and then suggests that they go to his house, where there's a new tractor. Charles and Edmund follow Fielding out of the house. Charles walks slowly, thinking that he just wants to be alone, and that he doesn't care about Fielding anymore. Fielding is confused by Charles's behavior—he's only used to be people who act like him, calm and easy-going. Edmund assures Fielding that Charles is only "sulking." Reluctantly, Fielding walks ahead, leading Edmund after him.

Here, Charles again makes the mistake of giving up too early. Because of Edmund's bullying, Charles feels alienated from everyone, even Fielding and Helena. He just wants to be by himself, and his means that he pushes Fielding away. This in turn causes Fielding to become closer with Edmund. In short, Charles believes that Edmund has emerged victorious already, and this belief causes *Edmund to emerge victorious.*

Charles goes into Edmund's bedroom, where a battle chart is mounted on an easel. The chart shows different battle regiments. Charles rolls up the chart and carries it downstairs. Outside, he tears up the paper into tiny pieces. Then, he produces a match, which he first packed for his journey into Hang Wood, and burns the chart.

Charles at first responds to Edmund's cruelty with a small but disturbing act of aggression. He won't hurt Edmund, but instead he attacks Edmund's property, burning the chart with a match. At first the match represented a means of escaping from Warings—now, it has become a tool of pointless destruction. The message is clear: Charles has given up on escaping from Warings, or Edmund, for good.

In five days, Charles thinks, he and Edmund will go to their new school. But this, he decides, isn't worth thinking about.

The future looks dark for Charles. He's terrified of going to school with Edmund, since he's convinced that Edmund will only torment him there further.

CHAPTER 17

Warings is full of suitcases: Charles and Edmund are almost ready to leave for school. Edmund looks at Charles all day, but Charles avoids eye contact and says nothing.

Charles is so frightened of Edmund, and going to school with Edmund, that even a look from Edmund upsets him.

When Edmund came back from Fielding's farm, he didn't say anything about his chart disappearing. This unnerved Charles—Charles had expected Edmund to be angry and complain to his father. As the days went on, Charles was even tempted to confront Edmund and admit what he'd done.

Charles wants a confrontation with Edmund, but instead Edmund ignores him. This only unnerves Charles further, and makes him increasingly uneasy—since he has failed to get the reaction he wanted, making him feel powerless.

Late at night, only a few hours before he's supposed to leave for school, Charles wakes up. He hears the sound of paper scraping on the ground. He notices a note slipped under his door: "Something will happen to you, Kingshaw." Charles reads the note and then gets back in bed. Then, "the nightmares began."

Edmund leaves a note for Charles, echoing his earlier threat. The note is vague (almost comically so, as if Edmund is too lazy to come up with an actual threat). And yet this vagueness actually makes the note more terrifying to Charles. Charles's imagination runs wild with the threat, releasing a flood of uncontrollable fears that he has developed during his time at Warings.

Charles wakes up very early. He gets out of bed and walks outside to the field. As he approaches the wood, he begins to get excited, remembering, "this was his place." He walks deeper and deeper into the wood, repeating to himself, "This is all right."

In the depths of his fear and anxiety, Charles goes to the one place where he truly feels comfortable: the wood. Here, far away from Warings, he feels confident and capable in a way that he never does around Edmund.

That morning, Helena wakes up, happy that her son is about to leave for school. Meanwhile, Charles arrives at the clearing in the wood by the stream, where the stones from the fire are still piled. He removes his clothes, puts his head underwater, and "breathed in a long, careful breath."

Helena has no idea that her son is on the verge of ending his life. After what feels like years of torture from Edmund (even though it's no more than a couple months), Charles can't take it anymore: he escapes from Edmund in the only way he feels he has left by taking his own life. Charles's suicide also recalls the manner in which he found Edmund floating in the stream. This suggests his identification with Edmund and, by extension, his irrational sense of guilt despite having only the best intentions. Finally, Charles's suicide reflects his affinity for nature in its living, breathing forms. Ironically, though, "living, breathing" nature becomes the site for Charles's death.

A short while later, Edmund finds Charles. As soon as it was discovered that Charles was missing, Edmund knew where to look for him. As Edmund sees Charles's body in the **water**, he thinks, "It was because of me." He feels triumphant.

The ultimate horror of the book is that Edmund, unlike Charles, feels no guilt whatsoever. He believes that he's superior to Charles and thinks of Charles as a nuisance, fit only to be bullied. Edmund, it would seem, is a force of pure malevolence: totally void of "childish innocence," he savors and celebrates Charles's death.

Helena puts her arm around Edmund and tells him that everything is all right. Edmund smells Helena's "perfumey smell" and listens to "the sound of the men, splashing through the **water**."

The novel ends with the suggestion that Helena will marry Joseph and treat Edmund like her own son. Hill gives no indication that Helena feels much sadness for her child's death. It's almost as if Charles's worst nightmare has come true: he doesn't matter at all, Helena doesn't care about him, and she loves Edmund more than she loves her own boy. In this way, the book comes to an appallingly bleak, even nihilistic ending.

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