

The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF SUZANNE COLLINS

Suzanne Collins is the youngest of four children. Her father was an Air Force officer, so the family moved often but generally stayed in the eastern United States. (In *Ballad's* acknowledgments, Collins credits her father with both introducing her to military strategy and to Enlightenment-era political theory.) She received a bachelor's degree from Indiana University Bloomington; she double majored in theater and telecommunications. Several years later, she completed a Master of Fine Arts in dramatic writing from New York University. In 1991, she began to write for children's television shows on Nickelodeon and for Scholastic Entertainment. In 2003, she published her first novel, *Gregor the Overlander*, and went on to publish four more novels in what's now known as the *Underland Chronicles*. While the *Underland Chronicles* were popular, Collins rose to fame after publishing [The Hunger Games](#) in 2008. [The Hunger Games](#) spent more than 60 weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list, and Collins followed the novel with two more over the next two years, [Catching Fire](#) and [Mockingjay](#). She adapted [The Hunger Games](#) for film herself. [The Hunger Games](#) helped make Collins a household name. She was named one of *Time* magazine's most influential people of 2010 and two years later, she became the bestselling Kindle author of all time. Between [Mockingjay](#) in 2010 and *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* in 2020, Collins published one other book, *Year of the Jungle*. She's married and has two children.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

While Suzanne Collins got the idea for the original *Hunger Games* series from flipping back and forth between TV coverage of the Iraq War and reality TV shows, she went further back in time for inspiration for *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*. She cites the Reconstruction-era American South, as well as Europe in the years after World War II, as time periods that influenced the novel. The Reconstruction era (roughly 1863-1877) saw the United States government attempt to put the country back together and give formerly enslaved Black people equal rights and protections after the devastating American Civil War. However, historians tend to characterize Reconstruction as a massive failure, as the government and the military failed to protect many Black people and supporters of civil rights from violence and murder—and many civil rights gains during this period were lost in the following decades. The Ku Klux Klan was also formed during this period. The influence of post-World War II Europe can be felt most in *Ballad* in the descriptions of rubble in the

Capitol's streets. In places that were heavily bombed during World War II, such as London, rubble remained in the streets for years. Today, there are even some places, such as Christ Church on Newgate Street, that have been left as ruins to remind people how devastating the Blitz was. The *Hunger Games* themselves are inspired by Roman gladiator fights—and many characters' names in the novel, including Coriolanus's, come from historical figures from the Roman Empire. *Ballad* also deals heavily with Enlightenment-era political philosophy, specifically with John Locke's theory of *tabula rasa*—in short, Locke proposed that people are born as blank slates and that people's experiences shape them into who they ultimately become. This theory would suggest that Coriolanus becomes the villain readers remember from [The Hunger Games](#) trilogy because of his experiences during the war, his experience of mentoring Lucy Gray, and his failed romance with (and eventual hatred of) her. Dr. Gaul is the character who most often repeats these Enlightenment theories; much of what she says to Coriolanus about human nature draws directly from these philosophers.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes is a prequel to Collins's *Hunger Games* trilogy ([The Hunger Games](#), [Catching Fire](#), and [Mockingjay](#)); it gives backstory on the original trilogy's main antagonist—President Coriolanus Snow—and explains how the *Hunger Games* (a nationally televised sporting event pitting poor children against each other in a fight to the death) came to be. *Ballad* offers a deep dive into Enlightenment-era political theory. The epigraphs include quotations from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's [The Social Contract](#), John Locke's [Second Treatise of Government](#), and Thomas Hobbes's [Leviathan](#). All three Enlightenment-era works explore human nature and how government functions; the content of many of Coriolanus's conversations with Dr. Gaul about human nature draw from these three texts. Mary Shelley's [Frankenstein](#) also appears in the novel's epigraph. As a villain's origin story, *Ballad* bears some resemblance to the sixth *Harry Potter* novel, [Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince](#); in it, Harry and Professor Dumbledore explore how the villain Voldemort transformed from a poor orphan boy to the villain he is in the novels' present. Other novels that feature villains from other works as protagonists include Madeline Miller's [Circe](#), [Grendel](#) by John Gardner, and *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* by Gregory Maguire. The novel also references a poem by William Wordsworth called "Lucy Gray."

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes
- **When Written:** 2019
- **Where Written:** Sandy Hook, Connecticut
- **When Published:** 2020
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Young Adult Novel; Dystopian Fiction
- **Setting:** The Capitol; District 12
- **Climax:** Coriolanus shoots at Lucy Gray
- **Antagonist:** Hunger, the rebels, and Dean Highbottom. Coriolanus thinks Dr. Gaul is an antagonist for a while, but she becomes his mentor.
- **Point of View:** Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Roman Origins. The name Panem has Roman origins. It's part of the phrase "*panem et circenses*," which translates to "bread and circuses"—which is, in a way, an encapsulation of what the Hunger Games is.

Wasn't Me. Collins spent about a decade writing for children's television shows before becoming a writer, and one of her most famous projects was writing the Canadian show *Little Bear*. She's sometimes mistakenly listed as the writer for the source books, which were actually written by Else Holmelund Minark and illustrated by Maurice Sendak of *Where the Wild Things Are* fame.



PLOT SUMMARY

Eighteen-year-old Coriolanus Snow knows he has to make a good showing as a mentor in this year's Hunger Games, a televised gladiator-style fight to the death among 24 children from Panem's districts. It's supposed to punish the districts for rebelling against the Capitol years ago and instigating a devastating war. Coriolanus's parents died and the family lost its munitions empire during the war, so he needs to do well in the Games and win a cash prize that will pay his tuition at the University in the fall. But Coriolanus ends up stuck with the female tribute from the poorest district, District 12. As he watches District 12's reaping on television, though, he wonders if his tribute, Lucy Gray Baird, is actually a fighter—she puts a **snake** down the mayor's daughter's dress and sings a compelling song. Dean Highbottom, a morphling addict who hates Coriolanus for some unknown reason, taunts Coriolanus about his assignment.

Coriolanus and his older cousin, Tigris, decide Coriolanus has to earn Lucy Gray's trust, so he meets her at the train platform with a **rose** from Grandma'am's rooftop rose garden. Things don't go according to plan: Coriolanus ends up riding in a cage on the back of a truck, which dumps Coriolanus and the 24

tributes into the monkey house at the zoo. He gets in trouble for this. Over the next several days, Coriolanus and the other 23 mentors have regular classes with Dr. Gaul, the Head Gamemaker. At the same time, the mentors realize the Capitol isn't feeding the tributes. Coriolanus and a classmate named Sejanus start bringing the tributes food. Sejanus is originally from District Two, but his father Strabo Plinth is a munitions magnate and bought the family's life in the Capitol. Sejanus's tribute, Marcus, is a former classmate of his from District Two, and he won't accept Sejanus's offers. Coriolanus dislikes Sejanus, but as they spend more time together, others assume Coriolanus and Sejanus are best friends.

On the day that Dr. Gaul assigns the mentors a group proposal for how to make the Games more interesting, a mentor named Arachne teases her tribute with food—and the tribute slits Arachne's throat. Peacekeepers shoot the tribute. Coriolanus's classmates are too distraught to work on the assignment, so Coriolanus does it himself. The next day, Dr. Gaul calls Coriolanus and Clemensia (the other person who was supposed to write the proposal) to her lab at the Citadel to discuss the proposal. Clemensia and Coriolanus lie that they both worked on it. Dr. Gaul asks them to fetch their proposal from a tank of technicolor snakes—who, she explains as Clemensia reaches in, will bite people whose scent they're unfamiliar with. The snakes bite Clemensia, landing her in the hospital for days.

Coriolanus is charged with singing Panem's national **anthem** at Arachne's funeral. As part of the funeral procession, the body of the tribute who killed Arachne is hung from a crane and paraded down the street. Over the next few days, the mentors meet with their tributes to prep them for TV interviews. One afternoon, the mentors and tributes tour the Games arena, an old sporting stadium. While they're walking around, bombs go off. Lucy Gray saves Coriolanus from a burning beam. The mentors who survive (two die) are taken to the hospital; a vet tends to the injured tributes. Several more tributes die in the blast or right after—and Marcus escapes.

Only a few tributes are willing to participate in the TV interview after this. Coriolanus and Lucy Gray decide that she should sing. She sings a haunting, beautiful love song—but Coriolanus is extremely jealous, since it's not about him. Dr. Gaul has put several of Coriolanus's proposals into practice, such as betting and allowing spectators to pay for food for the tributes. The night before the games start, Coriolanus gives Lucy Gray his mother's **compact**, which she plans to fill with rat poison. They kiss passionately.

Finally, the Games begin. After the tributes are released into the arena, the camera pans to where Marcus—still alive—hangs from his wrists. Another tribute kills him. That night, Coriolanus gets home from watching the Games at school to find Ma Plinth, Sejanus's mother, at his apartment. Sejanus is missing. But when she turns to the Snows' television, she sees Sejanus's

silhouette on the screen. Dr. Gaul summons Coriolanus and Mrs. Plinth to the arena, where she forces Coriolanus to sneak in and get Sejanus out. Sejanus doesn't want to leave (he'd like to make a statement about how wrong the Games are), but he agrees to follow Coriolanus. Coriolanus and Sejanus barely make it out alive as tributes pursue them—and Coriolanus ends up murdering a tribute named Bobbin. Later, Dr. Gaul insists that what Coriolanus experienced in the arena is humanity in its true form—humans are naturally violent.

When Coriolanus returns to Dr. Gaul's lab a few days later, he suspects that she's going to dump her technicolor snakes into the arena. Wanting to protect Lucy Gray, Coriolanus drops a handkerchief she used into the snakes' tank so they'll be familiar with her scent. Sure enough, the snakes kill several tributes—but not Lucy Gray. After several days, more tributes die. Jessup succumbs to rabies, and Lucy Gray poisons a few with rat poison. She ultimately wins. Coriolanus is ecstatic until Dean Highbottom presents him with his mother's compact and the handkerchief from the snake tank—evidence that he cheated. He forces Coriolanus to sign up for the Peacekeepers.

Coriolanus asks to serve in District 12, hoping he'll be able to find Lucy Gray. A week later, Sejanus arrives in 12. Strabo agreed to pay for a new gym and a new lab for Dr. Gaul in exchange for letting Sejanus graduate and join the Peacekeepers, rather than be charged for his antics during the Games. Sejanus also insisted Coriolanus be allowed to graduate. This is great for Coriolanus: with a diploma, he can train to be an officer and become a military commander, like his father Crassus Snow.

Over the next week, Coriolanus and Sejanus attend the hanging of a local rebel who bombed the mines. Coriolanus is disturbed when the jabberjays (some of Dr. Gaul's creations, birds who can record human speech and were used as surveillance devices during the war) and **mockingjays** (jabberjays' offspring with mockingbirds, who can only sing) turn the dead man's last words into a macabre song. The following night, Coriolanus, Sejanus, and their bunkmates go to the local bar, the Hob, to see Lucy Gray and her band, the Covey, perform. Coriolanus only reveals himself to Lucy Gray at the end of the show—but before they can embrace, a drunk young man named Billy Taupe shows up. He's clearly Lucy Gray's former lover, and with him is his new girlfriend Mayfair, the mayor's daughter. As the lights go out, a brawl breaks out.

The next day, Coriolanus and Sejanus visit the Covey. Coriolanus and Lucy Gray kiss and share how things have been since they last spoke. When they return to the house, though, they find Sejanus talking with Billy Taupe in the yard. Billy Taupe is drawing a map and giving directions. Over the next several weeks, Sejanus becomes increasingly despondent—he wants to make life better in the districts, not shoot the people who live there. Coriolanus discovers Sejanus has a stash of cash and is possibly buying weapons for rebels.

Coriolanus and Sejanus spend several afternoons helping scientists from Dr. Gaul's lab trap jabberjays and mockingjays for study. Coriolanus learns how to record with the jabberjays and, when he's assigned to care for the birds, enjoys playing with them. One afternoon, as Coriolanus is getting the jabberjays ready to go to the Capitol, Sejanus shares that he's planning to escape with the rebels. Coriolanus sneakily records Sejanus with a jabberjay; hopefully, Dr. Gaul will hear it.

In the middle of the Covey's show at the Hob the next weekend, Coriolanus follows Sejanus when Sejanus slips into the garage behind the Hob. There, Coriolanus and Lucy Gray—who follows Coriolanus—discover Sejanus, Billy Taupe, and a rebel named Spruce with a bag of weapons, plotting their escape. Mayfair appears and threatens to tell, so Coriolanus shoots her. Spruce shoots Billy Taupe.

A few days later, officers arrest Sejanus for treason, but not for his involvement in Billy Taupe and Mayfair's murders. Coriolanus attends Sejanus's hanging, expecting any day to face execution himself—he's certain someone will discover he shot Mayfair, especially when Spruce dies in the base medical clinic of mysterious injuries. When the Covey plays at Commander Hoff's birthday celebration several days later, Coriolanus and Lucy Gray have a chance to talk. Mayor Lipp believes Lucy Gray killed Mayfair and is threatening her, so she and Coriolanus decide to run away together. She sings a song called "The Hanging Tree" about the rebel's hanging, as well as one about a lover who's "pure as the driven snow"—clearly, Coriolanus.

The morning Coriolanus plans to leave with Lucy Gray, Commander Hoff informs him that he passed the officer test and will leave for an elite training program the next day. Coriolanus still goes to meet Lucy Gray. But as they travel, he realizes that trying to survive is depressing, and he hates nature. When he discovers Spruce's cache of guns—including the gun Coriolanus used to kill Mayfair—Coriolanus decides to destroy the weapon and return to base. But first, he has to talk to Lucy Gray, since she knows too much and could damage his reputation. Lucy Gray now knows that Coriolanus is responsible for Sejanus's death, so she runs into the woods. Coriolanus hunts her. He walks right into a trap she set and gets bitten by a snake. He then fires into the woods when he hears her sing. Coriolanus doesn't know if he hit her, but he decides it doesn't matter. He sinks the weapons in a lake, returns to the base, and leaves the next day. The hovercraft takes him to the Capitol, where Dr. Gaul informs him that his stint in 12 was just a vacation. He'll study under her at the University.

Several months later, Coriolanus now goes by his last name, Snow. Strabo Plinth has named him the heir to his munitions empire, which will save the Snows' reputation. Snow doesn't know what happened to Lucy Gray and doesn't care. On his way home one night, he stops at Dean Highbottom's office with Sejanus's box of personal effects from his Peacekeeping days.

Snow throws away some of Sejanus's medications, including a bottle of morphling, into Dean Highbottom's trash. Highbottom reveals why he hates Coriolanus: he and Crassus Snow were friends as students, and Crassus was the one who wrote down Highbottom's drunken idea—the Hunger Games—and submitted the proposal to Dr. Gaul. Crassus cared about his grade, not human life or decency. This is also why Highbottom turned to morphling; it helps him cope with the fact that he's credited with such a cruel idea. Coriolanus is unperturbed. He poisoned the morphling bottle now in Highbottom's trash with rat poison. When Highbottom inevitably takes the poisoned morphling, he'll have to admit that Snow always wins.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Coriolanus Snow – The novel's 18-year-old protagonist, Coriolanus comes from a wealthy Capitol family. However, his father, Crassus Snow, lost his munitions empire in the war with the rebels and died, along with Coriolanus's mother. Coriolanus has been living with his grandmother, the Grandma'am, and his older cousin Tigris ever since. The war made an impression on Coriolanus: he's still angry with the rebels for destroying his family and the Capitol. Coriolanus plans to pay his tuition to the prestigious University with the prize money he believes he'll win as a mentor in the Hunger Games, but this goal seems out of reach when Coriolanus gets the female tribute from District 12, Lucy Gray Baird. Though Coriolanus doesn't see Lucy Gray as a real contender, he does utilize her charisma to win over crowds, making her the fan favorite. Coriolanus also falls in love with Lucy Gray—though his love for her is based on his desire to possess and control her. Coriolanus shows that he cares more about his grades, his reputation, and his family than anything else. He cheats during the Games, which allows Lucy Gray to win, but Coriolanus isn't sorry he cheated—just that he got caught. Throughout the Games, Coriolanus begins to see Dr. Gaul as a mentor. She encourages him to see that the Capitol and the Hunger Games exist to maintain control. He also comes to agree with her that humans are naturally violent, especially after she sends him into the arena and he feels forced to kill a tribute, Bobbin. Though Coriolanus tries to keep his romance with Lucy Gray alive during his stint in District 12 as a Peacekeeper (his punishment for cheating), he can't bring himself to give up the opportunity to train as an officer and become a military commander. Coriolanus gives up any chance to be good by alerting Dr. Gaul to the fact that Sejanus is conspiring with rebels, leading to Sejanus's execution. He then tries to shoot Lucy Gray so she can't damage his reputation. Coriolanus ultimately returns to the Capitol to study under Dr. Gaul. The novel closes with him poisoning Dean Highbottom, who hates Coriolanus because he believes, with apparent justification, that Coriolanus is as morally bankrupt as his father

was.

Sejanus Plinth – Sejanus is one of Coriolanus's classmates and a mentor in the Hunger Games. Coriolanus and many of his classmates treat Sejanus coldly, as Sejanus isn't Capitol-born. Rather, his father, a munitions magnate from District Two, bought his way into Capitol high society. Sejanus resents his father and hates the Capitol; like his mother, Ma, he still feels connected to District Two and considers the district home. Coriolanus gets drawn into Sejanus's orbit when, during the reaping, Sejanus shares that his tribute from District Two, Marcus, is a former classmate. From this moment on, Coriolanus begins saving Sejanus from danger or embarrassment on many occasions. He takes on the role of Sejanus's mentor, encouraging Sejanus to remain loyal to the Capitol and not step too far out of line in protesting the Games. However, Sejanus remains convinced that the Games are wrong, and he goes so far as to enter the arena on the first night. He expects the tributes to kill him and believes this will make a statement to the Capitol that the Games are inhumane. Sejanus ultimately agrees to leave the arena with Coriolanus and is unsuccessful in sending the message he intended. His actions, however, get him in trouble with the Capitol. Though Sejanus resents his father's money, Strabo buys Sejanus's way out of trouble and allows him to join the Peacekeepers. Sejanus goes into the Peacekeepers with characteristic optimism—he wants to train as a medic and help people. But when Sejanus learns he can't be a medic if there's no war, he instead falls in with rebels in District 12, helps plot an escape, and purchases guns for the rebel forces. He outright ignores Coriolanus's attempts to keep him out of trouble—but Coriolanus does end up double-crossing Sejanus. He records Sejanus's admission that he's helping the rebels with a jabberjay, and Dr. Gaul eventually hears the message. Sejanus is ultimately executed for treason.

Lucy Gray Baird – Lucy Gray is the female tribute from District 12. Lucy Gray proves herself to be a cutthroat performer when, at the reaping, she slips a **snake** down a girl's dress and then sings a song onstage. She loves color—she usually wears a dress of rainbow ruffles—and often uses bird imagery when she speaks. As Coriolanus gets to know her, he learns that she's an orphan. She's a member of the Covey, a traveling band of musicians and performers that's now permanently based in District 12. With this information, Coriolanus presents Lucy Gray as a tribute not from District 12, but as a person who's more like people in the Capitol. This campaign is successful; Lucy Gray becomes the fan favorite. She and Coriolanus fall in love in the week before the Games, sharing a passionate kiss—and Coriolanus gives her his mother's **compact**, both as a token of his affection and so she can sneak rat poison into the arena. Throughout the Games, Lucy Gray mostly stays hidden. She kills several people with rat poison and one person with one of the neon snakes Dr. Gaul drops in the arena. After she

wins the Games, the Capitol sends her home, where she rejoins the Covey. She and Coriolanus attempt to keep their romance alive while Coriolanus is stationed there, but this becomes complicated. Many of Lucy Gray's songs are about a former lover, Billy Taupe, whom she now hates but who is still in her life. However, when Lucy Gray starts to fear that the mayor (who incorrectly believes Lucy Gray killed his daughter) is going to hurt her, Lucy Gray and Coriolanus decide to run away. Lucy Gray prizes trust and friendship, so when she infers that Coriolanus is responsible for Sejanus's death, she tries to run away. She sets a trap for Coriolanus that results in him being bitten by a snake. After this, Coriolanus shoots at her. He isn't sure if he hits her, but he ultimately decides he doesn't care. Though Lucy Gray mysteriously disappears after this, several songs she wrote persist—they appear 64 years later in the *Hunger Games* trilogy.

Dr. Volumnia Gaul – Dr. Gaul is the elderly Head Gamemaker. She's also in charge of the science lab that produces muttations, or modified animals intended to be used as weapons or for other military-adjacent purposes. She normally teaches at the University, but since she's the Head Gamemaker, she leads classes for the 24 Academy mentors. Coriolanus dislikes and fears her from the beginning, as she seems to have little (if any) regard for the lives of other people or animals (when she appears, she's often tormenting an animal). She encourages the mentors to come up with ways to boost viewership for the Games, as well as propose ways to increase engagement. As Coriolanus first gets to know Dr. Gaul, he fears her. This is mostly because Dr. Gaul devises a test for Coriolanus and Clemensia, which will gauge whether they're lying about whether Clemensia was involved in coming up with a proposal. The test results in venomous **snakes** biting Clemensia, and it puts her in the hospital for about a week—and Dr. Gaul barely seems to care for her wellbeing. But though Coriolanus fears that Dr. Gaul is out to hurt him, too, he begins to suspect that she's trying to mentor and guide him instead. In her capacity as Coriolanus's mentor, she teaches him that humans are naturally violent, and that the Hunger Games demonstrates what would happen if humans didn't have a government. She encourages Coriolanus to think about what the purpose of a government is, and Coriolanus decides—with her approval—that governments should control. He eventually realizes that she uses children in the Hunger Games because seeing children murder each other, rather than adults, seems to support her belief that humans are naturally violent.

Dean Casca Highbottom – Dean Highbottom is the dean of students at the Academy. He's also credited with inventing the Hunger Games. But while he holds these prestigious roles and distinctions, Highbottom is also a known morphling addict, which students—namely Coriolanus—make fun of him for behind his back. Perplexingly for Coriolanus, Dean Highbottom seems to hate him for seemingly no reason. Highbottom also

expresses sentiments throughout the Hunger Games that suggest he doesn't see children from the districts as lesser than their Capitol counterparts—for instance, he suggests that what sets Capitol and district kids apart is their access to dental care; and when Lucy Gray wins, he surreptitiously gives her a handful of cash and apologizes—and he perhaps doesn't support the Games at all. Coriolanus also suspects that Dr. Gaul is somehow controlling Highbottom, since Highbottom never seems happy to be sitting in on her sessions with the mentors. Dean Highbottom is all too happy, in Coriolanus's opinion, to accuse him of cheating in the Games and send him to join the Peacekeepers. Throughout the novel, Coriolanus hears from Pluribus Bell that Dean Highbottom and his father were friends when they were students, an assertion that makes no sense to Coriolanus given how much Dean Highbottom hates him. But upon Coriolanus's return to the Capitol, he learns the truth: Highbottom and Crassus Snow were best friends, but Highbottom never forgave Crassus for writing down his drunken ideas that eventually became the Hunger Games and submitting the proposal to their professor, Dr. Gaul. He hated Crassus because Crassus cared more about his grades than about people's lives, an accusation that Highbottom also throws at Coriolanus. Coriolanus, however, isn't perturbed, as he poisons a bottle of morphling that he throws away in Highbottom's office trash can.

Tigris Snow – Tigris is Coriolanus's cousin. She's a few years older than Coriolanus and has been living with him and the Grandma'am since the war, when she was also orphaned. Tigris is kind, caring, and intelligent. Tigris has always taken it upon herself to look out for Coriolanus. This meant that she learned to cook as a young child during the war—but she also implies that at several points, she's turned to sex work to make ends meet. Her dream has always been to work in fashion, which she's doing in the novel's present. Though she's supposedly working as an apprentice, Coriolanus suggests that her employer treats her more as a grunt, making her do unsavory or dirty tasks rather than teaching her how to make clothes. Despite this, Tigris is resourceful and excels at upcycling old garments—she manages to transform one of Crassus Snow's stained old shirts into a gorgeous, classy garment for Coriolanus to wear to the reaping. As the Hunger Games approach and begin, Tigris becomes increasingly skeptical of the Games and of Coriolanus's involvement in them. Particularly as she develops sympathy for Lucy Gray—and later, after she realizes Dr. Gaul forced Coriolanus into the arena, putting him in danger—she expresses that the Games are wrong and not fair to any of the children involved, mentors or tributes.

The Grandma'am – The Grandma'am is Coriolanus and Tigris's grandmother. Tigris dubbed her "the Grandma'am" long ago, as other familiar names for a grandparent didn't seem to fit such an imperious woman. The Grandma'am has been caring for

Tigris and Coriolanus for more than a decade, since both were orphaned during the war with the rebels. The Grandma'am did everything in her power to care for them during the war, including bartering for lima beans, which fed the family for years. During the war, she also began playing an old recording of Panem's **anthem** and singing along with it in the morning. Though she still does this into the present, the Grandma'am has begun to decline in terms of her health and mental acuity. She's unable to cope with the fact that the Snow family is, in the present, extremely poor and at risk of losing their lavish penthouse apartment—and every bad thing that happens to the family makes her even more disoriented. The only thing that keeps her grounded is her rooftop **rose** garden, which she's been tending since before the war started. She often sends Coriolanus to special occasions with one of her colorful roses pinned to his shirt or lapel. In the epilogue, the Grandma'am is doing better now that she has the Plinths' money to help support her lifestyle; she thinks of Ma Plinth as a new maid.

Crassus Snow – Crassus Snow is Coriolanus's deceased father. Before the war, he was a munitions magnate whose business was based in District 13. He lost everything in the war, when nuclear bombs flattened 13 and destroyed the factories. Crassus joined the military and became a great commander, but he died when a rebel sniper shot him. Coriolanus was a young child at the time. All Coriolanus has left of his father is his **compass**, and he seldom thinks fondly of his Crassus—his father always made him feel afraid and inadequate. In the leadup to the Hunger Games, Coriolanus starts to get snippets of information about his father: apparently, he was best friends with Casca Highbottom, the current Dean at the Academy. Coriolanus can't figure out how Dean Highbottom could've been his father's best friend, yet hate Coriolanus so openly. Only after Coriolanus returns from District 12 does he learn the truth: Crassus was the one to write down Highbottom's drunken ramblings and turn them into a proposal to be presented to their professor, Dr. Gaul. That proposal was for the Hunger Games. Dean Highbottom sees Crassus as morally corrupt, as he cared about his grade far more than he cared about the cruelty and carnage the Hunger Games would bring. Coriolanus, however, isn't bothered by this revelation—by this point, he has chosen to follow in his father's footsteps and prioritize his grades and his success over anything else.

Coriolanus's Mother – Coriolanus's mother died in childbirth right after the rebels bombed the Capitol at the beginning of the war. She made Coriolanus feel safe and loved. To hold onto this feeling, Coriolanus keeps her **rose**-engraved and rose-scented powder **compact** to sniff when he wants to feel close to her. Though he thinks of her fondly, others—like Dean Highbottom—suggest she was naïve and silly. Eventually, though, Coriolanus decides to follow in his father's footsteps, rather than become the kind of person his mother would be proud of.

Strabo Plinth – Strabo Plinth is a munitions magnate from District Two. With the fortune he amassed during the war (after the Snows' munitions operation in District 13 was obliterated), he brought his wife, Ma Plinth, and son, Sejanus, to the Capitol. He bought their life in the Capitol—he funded the Academy's reconstruction, and over the course of the novel, he writes checks to fund a new gym and a new lab for Dr. Gaul. Strabo and Sejanus are often at odds, since Strabo is obsessed with appearances and has no issue paying for the family's spot in the Capitol's inner circle, while Sejanus maintains that this is morally wrong. Coriolanus considers using Strabo's interest in prestige and reputation to his advantage by blackmailing the man, but this ends up being unnecessary. Strabo is either unable or isn't given the chance to buy Sejanus out of charges of treason in District 12, which result in Sejanus's execution. Once Coriolanus returns to the Capitol, Strabo effectively adopts him—he needs an heir. Though Coriolanus finds Strabo intimidating, he comes to appreciate Strabo for the things, namely money, that he can provide the Snow family.

Mrs. Plinth "Ma" – Ma is Sejanus's mother and Strabo Plinth's wife. She's a stout, plain woman who, according to Coriolanus, will never look like she belongs in the Capitol; she looks out of place in a designer dress at a pre-Hunger Games event and doesn't understand or practice upper-class manners. She also remains emotionally attached to her original home, District Two, and doesn't enjoy living in the Capitol. Because of this, Coriolanus finds Ma tiring and ridiculous. However, he does have to admit that she's a fantastic cook and baker; she can often be found in her kitchen creating all sorts of meals and sweets, and she provides the Snows with several packages of food to thank Coriolanus for helping Sejanus. Once Coriolanus and Sejanus join the Peacekeepers in District 12, she also regularly sends packages of sweets, which the boys share with their bunkmates and use to trade for liquor at the Hob. Ma and Sejanus are extremely close and devoted to each other—Sejanus's last word before he hangs is "Ma!"

Jessup Diggs – Jessup is the male tribute from District 12; Lysistrata is his mentor. Because of his stout stature and his obvious strength, Jessup is an unexpected favorite to win the Hunger Games. He's quiet, though he and Lucy Gray befriend each other, and he is eventually willing to speak with Lysistrata. In the week before the Hunger Games start, as the Capitol refuses to feed the tributes, Jessup loses much of his strength and his health. Lysistrata comes to respect him deeply, especially after he shields her when the bombs explode during the mentors' and tributes' tour of the arena. Because of this, during interviews, she consistently insists that Jessup is a human, just like viewers in the Capitol. During his time in the Capitol zoo, a raccoon bites Jessup in the neck. Initially, he grows slowly (but unexplainably) odd, but near the end of the Hunger Games, it becomes clear he contracted rabies from the raccoon. Lysistrata helps kill him and save Lucy Gray by sending

in water bottles that terrify him (rabies makes victims fear water). During her interview after his death, Lysistrata tells Lepidus that Jessup was loyal—and loyal like a person, not like a dog as Lepidus suggests.

Marcus – Marcus is the male tribute from District Two. Sejanus is his mentor, though this isn't a good thing for either of them: the two were classmates when Sejanus still lived in District Two, and Marcus openly resents and distrusts his mentor. Despite this, Marcus is a favorite to win the Games, as he's tall and burly. However, the possibility of him winning disappears when bombs explode during the mentors' and tributes' tour of the arena, and Marcus takes the opportunity to escape. Marcus is later captured and is in the arena with the rest of the tributes for the start of the Hunger Games, but Dr. Gaul has hung him from a tall structure by his wrists. This is supposed to send a message to the districts to not cross the Capitol. Lamina kills Marcus soon after the Games start in what's portrayed as a mercy killing. Dr. Gaul and the other Gamemakers' inhumane treatment of Marcus is what inspires Sejanus to enter the arena, purposefully putting himself in danger of being killed by the tributes to make a point.

Pluribus Bell – Pluribus is an old friend of the Snow family. He and his partner used to run a nightclub, but since the war, Pluribus has been making his living selling black market items. During the war, this tended to be food—he provided the Grandma'am with 30 bags of lima beans—but as the Capitol recovers, Pluribus deals more and more in luxury goods. He's one of the only non-family people who knows that the Snows are extremely poor in the novel's present. Coriolanus regularly runs into Pluribus over the course of the Hunger Games and usually, Coriolanus enjoys seeing him. However, he starts to resent Pluribus somewhat as Pluribus expresses interest in trying to reopen the club after the Hunger Games are over, possibly with Lucy Gray as a performer if she survives. Pluribus adores Lucy Gray and, in addition to lending Lucy Gray a guitar to use during her television interview, he later sends the Covey a box of various instrument strings free of charge. At various points throughout the novel, Pluribus drops tidbits of information about Crassus Snow and Casca Highbottom that confuse Coriolanus: he insists they were friends and “rascals,” and the two often spent time at Pluribus's nightclub.

Clemensia Dovecote – Clemensia is one of Coriolanus's close friends and a mentor in the Hunger Games. Her tribute is Reaper. She dislikes the tributes and refuses to see them as real people; she finds Reaper's name “creepy” and horribly ironic, given that his name is called in his district's reaping. She's supposed to work with Coriolanus and Arachne on a Hunger Games proposal for Dr. Gaul, but Clemensia is too distraught to work on the proposal after Arachne's death. The following day, when Clemensia and Coriolanus meet with Dr. Gaul about the proposal that Coriolanus wrote and submitted, they lie that Clemensia helped. However, her lie comes out when she

reaches into Dr. Gaul's tank of neon **snakes** to retrieve the pages of the proposal, as the snakes will bite anyone whose scent they're unfamiliar with. The venomous snakebites cause Clemensia to be hospitalized for about a week. They also cause the whites of her eyes to turn yellow and colorful snakeskin to appear across her chest. But even more disturbingly, Coriolanus believes that the snake venom changes Clemensia's personality—she comes out of her time in the hospital unusually touchy, and she treats Reaper cruelly. Though she has food and water stocked up for him, she refuses to send him any until he does something to show her he deserves the gifts. When she finally does send him food and water, Reaper refuses to consume any of it—he doesn't trust her.

Lysistrata Vickers – Lysistrata is one of Coriolanus's friends. She mentors Jessup from District 12, so she and Coriolanus (whose tribute, Lucy Gray, is also from District 12) end up spending more time together than usual. Lysistrata is quiet, intelligent, and honorable. Over the course of her mentoring relationship with Jessup, Lysistrata truly comes to see him as human and ultimately comes to question whether the Hunger Games should exist at all. When it becomes clear that Jessup contracted rabies, Lysistrata helps kill him and save Lucy Gray by sending him bottles of water (rabies makes victims fear water). In her interview after Jessup's death, she continues to insist that Jessup was a human deserving of compassion, just like people who live in the Capitol. She also stands firm and insists that Jessup contracted rabies in the Capitol and didn't bring it from the districts. Her father is the official doctor for President Ravinstill, so Lysistrata is versed in medicine and Coriolanus sees no reason to doubt her assessment.

Arachne Crane – Arachne is one of Coriolanus's classmates and the mentor to Brandy, the girl from District 10. Coriolanus thinks of Arachne as being like a sister, as the two grew up together in the Capitol and have spent a lot of time together over the years. However, this doesn't mean Coriolanus likes her. Arachne is loud, brash, selfish, and explosive, all qualities Coriolanus detests. She dies before the Hunger Games start when she waves a sandwich at Brandy but refuses to hand the sandwich over. Brandy steals Arachne's knife and slits Arachne's throat. Dr. Gaul uses Arachne's funeral as an opportunity to make a statement about the Capitol's power: she hangs Brandy's body from a crane mounted to a truck, and it is part of the funerary procession. Because of their perceived closeness, Coriolanus sings the **anthem** at her funeral.

Bobbin – Bobbin is the male tribute from District Eight; Juno Phipps is his mentor. He's a small boy who initially doesn't attract much attention—until his interview, when he details all the ways he could kill someone with a sewing needle. Bobbin ends up being one of the first tributes to die in the arena, but Coriolanus, rather than another tribute, kills him. Bobbin jumps and tries to kill Coriolanus when Coriolanus enters the arena to save Sejanus, and Coriolanus feels he has no choice but to

defend himself. Though Coriolanus tells himself he killed Bobbin out of self-defense and it wasn't actually murder, killing Bobbin is transformative for Coriolanus. It shows him he's capable of killing, and Dr. Gaul uses it as proof that humans are naturally violent.

Lucky Flickerman – Lucky Flickerman is a weatherman with the Capitol News Network, but Dr. Gaul taps him to host the 10th Annual Hunger Games. Lucky struggles in the role, often with humorously terrible results: since the Games have never had a television host before, Lucky has to figure out how the Games should be hosted, and he often turns to magic tricks or other silly antics to fill the time. He even brings his pet parrot to set and talks for the parrot when it refuses to speak on command. Despite his disastrous performance, Dr. Gaul suggests that Lucky will be back in the future to host the Games again.

Lepidus Malmsey – Lepidus is a young reporter with the Capitol News who's assigned to cover the Hunger Games. He's the first to interview Lucy Gray and Coriolanus, and he's later assigned to cover the mentors in the Academy's auditorium. Like many in the Capitol, Lepidus doesn't view the tributes as being fully human; he once likens Jessup to a "loyal dog."

Brandy – Brandy is the female tribute from District 10. Arachne is her mentor. Brandy doesn't survive to the start of the games, as she slits Arachne's throat when Arachne taunts her with food and Peacekeepers shoot her. To send a message that such behavior won't be tolerated from the districts, Dr. Gaul arranges for Brandy's body to hang from a crane mounted to a truck and parades her body as part of Arachne's funeral procession.

Festus Creed – Festus is one of Coriolanus's classmates, a good friend, and Coral's mentor during the Hunger Games. Coriolanus describes Festus as upstanding and solid. Festus gives Coriolanus the idea to propose introducing betting to the Hunger Games when he comments that he cares more about dogs he bets on in dogfights than he does about the tributes. He regularly uses dogfighting analogies when he speaks during classes.

Persephone Price – Persephone is one of Coriolanus's classmates; she's assigned to mentor Mizzen during the Hunger Games. Though Persephone is gorgeous and nice, Coriolanus avoids her—he once witnessed her father, Nero Price, saw the leg off of a maid who'd died. It's unclear if Persephone knows she engaged in cannibalism, but Coriolanus judges and avoids her for this crime.

Pollo and Didi Ring – Pollo and Didi are twin classmates of Coriolanus's; they're assigned the tributes from District 6. Coriolanus enjoys the twins, as they're bright, polite, and aren't afraid to dress alike and broadcast that they're twins. However, the twins and their tributes die when rebel bombs explode while the mentors and tributes are touring the Games arena.

Since Coriolanus is in the hospital during their funeral, his hologram sings Panem's **anthem** during the proceedings.

Dr. Wane – Dr. Wane is a doctor at one of the Capitol hospitals; he oversees care for Coriolanus, Clemensia, Gaius, and the other mentors hurt during the bombing of the arena. Coriolanus distrusts him because he believes Dr. Wane is in cahoots with Dr. Gaul and might hurt him, as Dr. Gaul hurt Clemensia. This, however, is never confirmed.

Reaper – Reaper is the male tribute from District 11. He's odd from the beginning: he apologizes to his fellow tributes before the Games start for killing them, and he promises to avenge their deaths later. During the Games, Reaper makes a habit of dragging the bodies of the dead tributes into a line and covering them with bits of Panem's flag. His mentor, Clemensia, refuses to send him food or water for most of the Games—but when he does come across food or water, he refuses it and instead drinks out of puddles. Lucy Gray poisons one of his puddles with rat poison and kills him because he supposedly contracted rabies from Jessup. He's the last tribute to die in the Games.

Mayor Lipp – Mayor Lipp is the mayor of District 12. He has one daughter, Mayfair. At the reaping, he hits Lucy Gray across the face after Lucy Gray puts a **snake** down Mayfair's dress. He continues to torment and threaten Lucy Gray once Lucy Gray returns after the games, especially after Mayfair is murdered—he believes (incorrectly) that Lucy Gray murdered her. His threats cause Lucy Gray to decide to run away.

Mayfair Lipp – Mayfair Lipp is Mayor Lipp's daughter. She's generally disliked in District 12, as her father allows her to run wild. After she began seeing Billy Taupe romantically while Billy Taupe was still seeing Lucy Gray, she somehow made it so her father would pull Lucy Gray's name in the reaping, turning Mayfair into an antagonist. While Coriolanus is stationed in District 12 as a Peacekeeper, he shoots Mayfair one night; she overheard Coriolanus, Sejanus, and several rebels talking about escaping with weapons. Her murder haunts Coriolanus, but only because he believes he's going to be executed as punishment. This doesn't happen, as Coriolanus finds and destroys the gun he used to shoot her.

Maude Ivory – Maude Ivory is the youngest member of the Covey in District 12. She's a cousin to Lucy Gray and Barb Azure and, like them, she's an orphan. However, Maude Ivory is one of the brightest, most engaging members of the band. She regularly opens the shows and introduces the band, and she's usually the one to lead call-and-response songs or singalongs during the shows. According to Lucy Gray, Maude Ivory has a knack for memorizing songs, even after only hearing them once. Maude Ivory is extremely trusting—she doesn't seem to recognize at all that Coriolanus might be trouble. She's also very loyal to the Covey and is the angriest and most vocal when Billy Taupe refuses to leave Lucy Gray alone.

Billy Taupe – Billy Taupe is a former member of the Covey and Lucy Gray’s former lover. Coriolanus describes him as being ruled by big, powerful emotions and sees him as a rival. Billy Taupe was kicked out of the Covey after the reaping; prior to the reaping, he’d begun dating Mayfair Lipp, the mayor’s daughter, and when Mayfair and Lucy Gray found out about each other, Lucy Gray’s name was called in the reaping. Though Lucy Gray says she wants nothing to do with him, Billy Taupe tries often to convince the Covey to take him back. Coriolanus also discovers that Billy Taupe is involved in the rebel cause and is even getting information from Sejanus. During an altercation one night, a rebel named Spruce shoots Billy Taupe.

Arlo Chance – Arlo Chance is a rebel in District 12. Coriolanus and Sejanus are ordered to attend his hanging—Arlo planted a bomb in a coal mine, killing three people. Arlo was involved with a young woman named Lil (the novel never reveals how exactly they’re connected) and when he sees Lil pushing through the crowd to him as he stands on the gallows, he yells for her to run—a haunting cry that the jabberjays and **mockingjays** pick up and turn into a song. Lucy Gray also uses Arlo’s last words as inspiration for a song she writes called “The Hanging Tree.”

Bug – Bug is one of Coriolanus’s bunkmates and a fellow Peacekeeper in District 12. He’s a kind, quiet boy from the districts. He comes from a district where children help in fruit orchards, so when Dr. Kay brings a group of scientists to District 12 to capture jabberjays and **mockingjays**, Bug proves adept at climbing trees to set traps. Though he helps Coriolanus care for the birds in the makeshift aviary back at the base, he doesn’t think playing with the jabberjays is ethical.

Dr. Kay – Dr. Kay is an assistant scientist in Dr. Gaul’s lab. She’s older and wears bright pink reading glasses. Coriolanus runs into her in the lab during the Hunger Games, but he doesn’t meet her until a month later, in District 12. Dr. Kay reveals that years ago, she ran the Capitol’s jabberjay program. She clearly loves her birds and wants what’s best for them, even if the jabberjays were a failure as surveillance devices.

Spruce – Spruce is a rebel in District 12 and Lil’s brother. He, Billy Taupe, and Sejanus conspire to run away with Lil and weapons, but things don’t go according to plan: in an altercation, Spruce kills Billy Taupe while Coriolanus kills Mayfair Lipp. Spruce dies under uncertain circumstances after being brought to the Peacekeepers’ hospital with injuries.

Commander Hoff – Commander Hoff runs the Peacekeepers’ base in District 12. Coriolanus doesn’t see much of him, but Hoff seems to enjoy playing mean jokes on Peacekeepers: he sends armed guards to fetch Coriolanus before he tells Coriolanus about his stellar officer test results, which seems designed to make Coriolanus fearful and anxious. He’s replaced not long after Coriolanus returns to the Capitol.

Lil – Lil is a District 12 resident and is somehow related to or involved with Arlo Chance; the novel never reveals how they’re

connected. After she screams during Arlo’s hanging—and Arlo’s last words are telling her to run—the Peacekeepers arrest her and plan to hang her. Her brother, Spruce, attempts to free her with Sejanus’s help, but the Peacekeepers hang Sejanus for treason along with Lil.

Livia Cardew – Livia is one of Coriolanus’s classmates. She’s assigned the District One boy and, to Coriolanus’s disgust, she openly gloats about it—District One tributes are usually favored to win. She pouts later when her tribute dies during the bomb explosions in the arena. Though Coriolanus detests her, he ultimately decides he should marry her or someone like her: he’ll never be able to fall in love with her, which means he’ll be able to better look out for himself.

Lamina – Lamina is the female tribute from District Seven; Pup Harrington is her mentor. She sets herself apart early in the Games by climbing the structure Marcus is hanging from and killing him as a mercy killing. She remains on the structure, high above the ground, for several days until other tributes kill her.

Gaius Breen – Gaius Breen is one of Coriolanus’s classmates and a mentor in the Hunger Games. He loses both legs in the arena bombing and dies several days into the Hunger Games of his injuries. As punishment for his death, Dr. Gaul releases her neon **snakes** into the arena with the tributes.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Pup Harrington – Pup is one of Coriolanus’s classmates and mentors Wovey during the Hunger Games. He’s a loud and obnoxious boy who’s constantly picking food out of his braces. He resents having to mentor Wovey and isn’t a good loser when Wovey ultimately dies.

Nero Price – Nero Price is a wealthy man in the Capitol and Persephone’s father. As a child during the war, Coriolanus witnessed Nero hack the leg off of a maid who died in the street of the cold, presumably to feed his family.

Wovey – Wovey is the female tribute from District Eight; Hilarius Heavensbee is her mentor. Wovey is tiny and sickly; nobody expects her to last long. She dies in the Hunger Games when she comes across an almost-empty water bottle that Lucy Gray poisoned with rat poison.

Beanpole – Beanpole is a Capitol boy who joins the Peacekeepers in District 12 at the same time Coriolanus does. He’s tall and thin—hence his nickname (his real name is Junius)—and he’s terrible at drills. When Sejanus joins the Peacekeepers, he helps Beanpole with his drills.

Smiley – Smiley is one of Coriolanus’s bunkmates and a fellow Peacekeeper in District 12. He’s adept at bartering and has a friend who’s a nurse at the base’s clinic, so he funnels a lot of gossip from her to his bunkmates.

Tam Amber – Tam Amber plays mandolin in the Covey. He’s a quiet boy whom older Covey members found in a box as an

infant.

Clerk Carmine – Clerk Carmine is the fiddle player in the Covey. He’s also Billy Taupe’s brother, but he’s loyal to the Covey rather than to his brother.

Barb Azure – Barb Azure is the bass player in the Covey.

Vipsania Sickle – Vipsania is one of Coriolanus’s classmates and the mentor for Treech from District Two. Coriolanus dislikes her.

Hilarius Heavensbee – Hilarius is one of Coriolanus’s classmates and mentors Wovey in the Games. He has an entitled attitude, and his family is extremely wealthy. Coriolanus dislikes him.

Coral – Coral is the female tribute from District Four; Festus is her mentor.

Domitia Whimsiwick – Domitia is Tanner’s mentor.

Io Jasper – Io is a classmate of Coriolanus’s, and she’s Circ’s mentor in the Hunger Games.

Circ – Circ is District Three’s male tribute to the Hunger Games. Io Jasper is his mentor.

Urban Canville – Urban is Teslee’s mentor in the Hunger Games and one of Coriolanus’s classmates. Coriolanus finds him entitled and insufferable.

Treech – Treech is the male tribute from District Seven. Vipsania is his mentor. He’s one of the final tributes in the ring; Lucy Gray kills him with one of Dr. Gaul’s neon **snakes**.

Felix Ravinstill – Felix is Dill’s mentor in the Hunger Games. He’s also the president’s son, so Coriolanus suspects Felix receives special treatment.

Juno Phipps – Juno Phipps is Bobbin’s mentor in the Hunger Games.

Mizzen – Mizzen is the male tribute from District Seven. Persephone Price is his mentor.

Tanner – Tanner is the male tribute from District 10. His mentor is Domitia Whimsiwick.

Dill – Dill is the female tribute from District 11; Felix Ravinstill is her mentor. Though she’s small, she’s menacing when Coriolanus ends up trapped in the cage with the tributes.

Iphigenia Moss – Iphigenia is Sol’s mentor in the Hunger Games. When Sol is killed, Iphigenia can’t remember her name.

Sol – Sol is the female tribute from District 5; Iphigenia is her mentor.

Professor Crispus Demigloss – Professor Demigloss teaches history at the Academy.

Professor Agrippa Sickle – Professor Sickle is the physical education professor at the Academy.

Professor Satyria Click – Satyria is a professor at the Academy and Coriolanus’s mentor. She’s often tipsy, though Coriolanus

appreciates her advice and guidance.

President Ravinstill – President Ravinstill is the president of Panem.

Cookie – Cookie is the Peacekeeper cook at the District 12 base.

Teslee A tribute from District Three.

TERMS

Avox – Avoxes are tongueless servants who work in the Capitol.

Communicuff – Communicuffs are devices mentors get to use during the Hunger Games. They’re communication devices, worn on the wrist like a watch, that display a tribute’s store of food and water. Mentors use them to send food and water into the arena for their tributes.

Gamemaker – Gamemakers are the Capitol people tasked with facilitating the Hunger Games, coming up with the Games’ rules, and editing footage for television. **Dr. Gaul** is in charge of other Gamemakers as the Head Gamemaker.

Jabberjay – Jabberjays are some of **Dr. Gaul**’s muttations. They’re birds that were originally intended as surveillance devices during the war with the rebels; using a remote, a person can tell jabberjays to record human speech and then replay it. The jabberjay project ended up being a failure, as rebels figured out what the birds were. Through breeding with local mockingbirds since they were released into the wild at the end of the war, the jabberjays have fathered a whole new species: the **mockingjays**.

Morphling – Morphling is a medication that dulls people’s experiences of pain and extreme emotions, both good and bad. It’s used medicinally, but it’s also prone to abuse—**Dean Highbottom** is a known morphling addict.

Mutt/Muttation – The creatures **Dr. Gaul** modifies in her lab are called mutts or muttations. Muttations can be animals, humans, or a combination of parts from both. They are, for the most part, designed to be weapons.

Panem – The novel’s setting, Panem is a country that encompasses all of North America. The wealthy ruling class lives in a city known as the Capitol, and the rest of the country is divided into 13 districts (many of which are impoverished). District 13, though, is uninhabitable after a nuclear explosion leveled it during the war with the rebels.

Peacekeeper – Peacekeepers are Panem’s military and police force.

Reaping – The reaping is the ceremony where the 12 districts draw names to choose their two tributes for the Hunger Games. Televised nationally, it takes place in public in each district, and all residents of a district are required to attend.

Tribute – Tributes are the children who compete in the Hunger

Games. Each district sends two tributes, one male and one female.



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.



PROPAGANDA, SPECTACLE, AND MORALITY

In the futuristic North American country of Panem, the 10th Annual Hunger Games—a televised sporting event designed to punish the 12 districts for rebelling against the Capitol, in which children from the districts (known as tributes) are placed in an old sporting arena to fight to the death—is shaping up to be the first of its kind. Despite Panem's reliance on a state-sanctioned television channel that constantly plays on TVs all over the Capitol and in every resident's home, few people actually want to watch underfed district children (whom the Capitol frames as subhuman) murder each other. But this year, the Gamemakers (designers of the Games) have decided to try to liven things up by having 24 promising graduating students from the prestigious Academy mentor the tributes and come up with new ideas to boost engagement. One of these mentors is the novel's protagonist, 18-year-old Coriolanus Snow. Coriolanus and his tribute, District 12's Lucy Gray, participate in events meant to humanize the tributes (such as television interviews), while at the same time, Coriolanus comes up with ideas that dehumanize the tributes (such as a betting system). Through Coriolanus's efforts, the novel shows that propaganda and spectacle, at least in this context, can be disturbingly effective at obscuring questions of morality and making something as barbaric as the Hunger Games seem just and necessary.

Propaganda, broadly speaking, allows a government to show citizens how to think and feel about something. In the case of the Hunger Games, the Capitol uses propaganda to cast the districts and their tributes as subhuman and barely worthy of consideration. When it comes to the districts (whom the government blames for starting the devastating war that ended about 10 years before the novel begins), casting all the people who live there as subhuman is how Panem justifies the cruel and inhumane ways they treat the people who live in the districts—and not just with the Hunger Games. If the people who live in the districts aren't as human as those in the Capitol and pose a threat to Capitol dwellers, the government reasons, it only makes sense that they should receive less food, subpar medical care, and little or no education. Panem uses a variety of

tactics to show that the districts and the people who live there are subhuman. Most obvious is the fact that in the Capitol, most people use the derogatory term “district” to refer to the people who live there (so Lucy Gray isn't a *person* from District 12, she's a *district*). Rationing or cutting off the districts' access to food, medical care, and education, meanwhile, ensures that the people from the districts are often extremely poor, malnourished, and uneducated. And Capitol folk are encouraged to see the districts' plight as their own fault—it's their fault for rebelling during the war that they're poor, not Panem's fault for denying them food.

However, the Head Gamemaker, Dr. Gaul, recognizes that the best way to increase the Games' viewership is to turn it into a spectacle and let viewers feel like they have a stake in the outcome—something that also, conveniently for her and Panem, dehumanizes the tributes further. The tributes' television interviews, for instance, mainly cast the tributes as curiosities by showcasing skills that seem disgusting or exotic to wealthy Capitol residents (such as Tanner's intimate knowledge of butchering practices, or Bobbin being able to kill someone with a sewing needle). To the pampered, wealthy Capitol residents, this makes the tributes interesting but not necessarily sympathetic people. Betting mostly dehumanizes the tributes, but it encourages viewers to put money on the tribute who looks the biggest and strongest, much like a person would bet on the biggest, strongest horse to win a race. Indeed, Festus, the mentor who initially floats the idea of betting, brings betting up as it pertains to dog fights—in other words, the betting reduces the tributes to animals who are judged on their physical attributes. With the introduction of betting, viewers feel like they have a stake in who wins—and tune in to watch the Games, thereby also exposing themselves to more propaganda.

The propaganda and spectacle, the novel shows, allows Panem to shift the conversation away from questions of morality—and indeed, questions of why the Games exist at all. Specifically, the way Panem obscures moral questions is clearest in Coriolanus's proposal to allow viewers to send tributes food and water. Viewers who send food and water to their favorite tribute feel like they have a stake in the Games—but this also discourages them from questioning why the Capitol isn't feeding the tributes, and why food essentially becomes a tool for control. Though the novel never introduces any people who send food to tributes, the implication is that they send food because they want their preferred tribute to win, not because they believe the tributes need food and water because they're people who need to survive. Broadly speaking, turning the Games into a spectacle does much the same thing, on a grander scale, as letting viewers send food and water does. If people have money invested in a tribute, see tributes as entertainers, and know it falls to them to keep their tribute fed and in contention, this successfully distracts people from questioning why the Games

exist, whether they're moral and appropriate, and how Gamemakers treat and care for the tributes. In turn, this dehumanizes the tributes even further—which continues to support Panem's insistence that tributes, and all people who live in the districts, aren't people. Instead, they're curiosities, entertainment, and disposable. And ultimately, Panem insists, they deserve to be forced to fight to the death in the Hunger Games.



CHILDREN

When 18-year-old Coriolanus Snow learns he's going to be a mentor to a tribute for the 10th Annual Hunger Games, his only goal is to win. But as he and his tribute, Lucy Gray Baird from District 12, get to know each other—both before and after the Games—Coriolanus learns some uncomfortable things. Despite growing up in wildly different circumstances (the Snows are a wealthy Capitol family, while Lucy Gray's family were traveling performers), they both experienced a great deal of loss, fear, and hunger as children who grew up during Panem's war with rebel forces, which ended about 10 years before the novel begins. As a result of the war, Coriolanus and Lucy Gray were also forced to grow up before they were ready, as this was necessary for survival. Though Coriolanus's self-involved nature means he doesn't fully grasp the implications of what he learns from Lucy Gray, what he and Lucy Gray reveal paints a disturbing message: that Panem might make a show of supporting its bright future leaders by showcasing student mentors in the Games, but on the whole it has done a poor job of taking care of the country's children, both Capitol and district (to say nothing of how district children are brutalized during the Hunger Games). Through Panem's cruel and cynical abuse of Capitol and district children, the novel suggests that a society's treatment of its children reveals what its true values are, regardless of what it proclaims.

At first, Coriolanus believes that Capitol children represent Panem's future and should be protected and helped no matter the cost, but that district children are subhuman and deserve to die in the Hunger Games. Coriolanus sees the opportunity to mentor a tribute in the Hunger Games as proof that Panem cares about him and wants to see him succeed—it is, he believes, his ticket to becoming another great Snow, like his father Crassus was. And while Coriolanus is extremely self-centered, he also suggests that his classmates are entitled to the same kind of care and support from the government. They're all from wealthy Capitol families, so Coriolanus's thinking goes, and thus they should all be treated like bright, valuable future leaders. District children, on the other hand, are thought of among Capitol folk as subhuman—and accordingly, they deserve to live in poverty, go hungry, and die in the Games. This is because the Capitol believes that everyone who lives in the districts—even if they were children,

or weren't even born during the war—is responsible for the war and should continue to be punished. So while the Capitol casts its children as the bright future leaders of the country, it insists, at the same time, that district children must continue to pay for their parents' perceived transgressions with their lives.

Through Lucy Gray and Coriolanus's stories, however, the novel shows that the Capitol children actually suffer alongside district children, albeit in different ways—children of all classes suffer in Panem. As Coriolanus and Lucy Gray get to know each other, Lucy Gray shares that her parents died, her father presumably when a Peacekeeper shot him. Coriolanus shares her feelings of loss, as his father also died during the war. But Lucy Gray also suggests that the Hunger Games were a terrible, dehumanizing experience, where she had to do things she'd never consider under other circumstances (such as killing people with rat poison). She suggests that this robbed her of her childhood once again, just as the war did years ago. Coriolanus doesn't find Lucy Gray's story as compelling as his own discoveries over the course of the Hunger Games. Coriolanus begins to realize that being from a wealthy Capitol family doesn't afford him as much privilege as he once thought. As he remembers the war while doing an assignment for Dr. Gaul, he remembers how cold and hungry he was and how adults took food from him. The government, he realizes, didn't actually do much to take care of the Capitol's children during the war. Dr. Gaul shows Coriolanus that she—a face of the government—still doesn't think much of most Capitol children. It's inconsequential to her when Clemensia is bitten by Dr. Gaul's venomous **snakes**—indeed, Dr. Gaul sees it as something Clemensia deserved. She also has no reservations about sending Coriolanus into the arena to rescue Sejanus, something that puts him in danger of being killed by tributes. Most disturbingly for Coriolanus, Dr. Gaul presents it as a good learning experience that Coriolanus felt he had to murder a tribute named Bobbin in the arena. For Coriolanus, this seems like a betrayal of the student-teacher relationship; it makes him feel like he can't trust any of the adults in his life to care for him.

Ultimately, the novel suggests that Panem doesn't care about its children, whether district or Capitol—children are primarily tools and examples to frighten Panem's residents into falling in line. By the end of the novel, Coriolanus understands two major reasons why the Hunger Games features children as tributes. First, children do represent hope for the future, so for the districts, seeing their children sacrificed and murdered in such a brutal way impresses upon them how powerful and heartless the Capitol is. But moreover, putting children in a situation where they're forced to murder each other proves Dr. Gaul's belief that humans are naturally violent. If she can get kids to kill each other on national television, she reasons, how could anyone think otherwise? Similarly, the many Capitol kids who die or are injured over the course of the Games—including Clemensia, Coriolanus, and Sejanus—show the kids themselves,

as well as those kids' families, that they must fall into line or they, like the district children, will be punished or disposed of. Hurting, intimidating, and killing children, *Ballad* suggests, is one of the easiest ways to hurt a whole community and maintain control over a population.



GOVERNMENT AND POWER

As 18-year-old Coriolanus finds himself in contact more and more often with the Head Gamemaker Dr. Gaul, he's introduced to some ideas developed by prominent Enlightenment-era political theorists like Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Locke. Though she never mentions these men by name, Dr. Gaul nevertheless encourages Coriolanus to consider some of the same ideas that they did, such as what the purpose of government is, what humanity's true nature is, and what happens when there is no government to guide human behavior. However, over the course of the novel, Coriolanus sees many of these lofty ideals corrupted and used to justify the horrific abuse of some of Panem's citizens, such as through the Hunger Games. So while readers may recognize some ideas—such as the idea that a government should protect all of a country's citizens—as ideas many democratic governments hold dear in the real world today, *Ballad* shows how easy it is to corrupt these ideals and use them to create and then justify a government whose only goal is to consolidate and hold onto power.

The Enlightenment idea that guides Dr. Gaul's thinking the most is the idea that humans are naturally evil and violent, and that they all desire power. At first, Coriolanus has a hard time believing this. He doesn't see himself as an evil person; rather, in his estimation, he's just trying to get by with the resources he has. Coriolanus also fully supports the Capitol's goal of subjugating the districts and the people who live there, and so he doesn't see the way they treat the districts as anything to get upset about. (This, of course, is part of how Panem maintains power—Capitol folk, like Coriolanus, benefit from and are powerful within the system, so they see no reason to change anything.) But Coriolanus has to accept that, at the very least, some people are truly evil, particularly as he watches Dr. Gaul torment animals, perform body modifications on Avoxes (tongueless servants), and do cruel things to both Capitol and district children, such as let her venomous **snakes** loose to bite them. In Dr. Gaul's mind, the Hunger Games—a gladiator-style fight to the death between 24 children from the districts—proves her belief that humans are naturally violent. She reasons that if children can be put in a situation where they're willing to murder each other on national television, humans obviously are innately evil and violent. Coriolanus comes to believe Dr. Gaul is right when he's stationed in District 12 with the Peacekeepers and gets caught up in a brawl at the Hob, the local bar. In the dark, when everyone is anonymous, the poor District 12 miners—people who showed

the Peacekeepers deference when the lights were on—suddenly have no problem fighting back. This impresses upon Coriolanus that it doesn't take much for people to tap into their violent tendencies.

The way to deal with these naturally violent humans, Dr. Gaul proposes, is by creating a government capable of controlling them and their impulses. And by using abusive measures of control like the Hunger Games, Panem's government justifies and sustains its corrupt power. Government, Coriolanus and his classmates understand, exists to place limits on what behavior is acceptable among citizens—for instance, mandating that things like theft and murder are illegal—and to protect citizens from abuse. This concept is commonly known as “the social contract,” and it states that people give up some of their rights in exchange for the state's protection. However, Coriolanus and his classmates' understanding of the social contract is somewhat warped and points to how corrupt Panem's government is, as the government in Panem actively abuses citizens—namely, those tributes who are forced to participate in the Hunger Games. Essentially, what Dr. Gaul proposes (and what Coriolanus comes to agree with) is that people are naturally violent and need government—but while government keeps the lower classes from behaving violently or fighting back, the people in the ruling class (those who make up the government) are able to behave violently with few, if any, checks on their power. So the Hunger Games in Panem are, more than anything, a show of Panem's power. Through the Hunger Games, Panem demonstrates to the districts that the people who live there are disposable pawns that Panem can use to flaunt its power. By forcing the tributes to engage in the violence inherent to the Hunger Games, Panem justifies its own existence: if the people from the districts will behave in this way, Panem proposes, those people obviously need to be controlled by the government.



HUMAN NATURE

As a prequel to the *Hunger Games* trilogy focusing on the original trilogy's main villain, President Coriolanus Snow, *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* is naturally interested in showing how Coriolanus—who's 18 in the novel—starts to become the elderly villain readers are familiar with. But *Ballad* is also interested more broadly in exploring how people—not just major villains—become who they are, and whether humanity as a whole is naturally evil (and learns to be good), or naturally good (and learns to be evil). Though *Ballad* never comes to a firm conclusion on whether people are naturally good or naturally evil, it does suggest that all people—good, bad, and in-between—are products of their upbringing and experiences, rather than born one way or another.

While the novel presents adults as more or less stuck in their ways, it portrays children as blank slates—they have the

capacity to grow up to be anything, and it's their upbringing that steers them toward good or evil. For instance, Coriolanus observes that Dr. Gaul, the Head Gamemaker who also runs a lab that creates dangerous mutations (modified animals intended for military use), is pretty set in her ways as an evil person. Whenever Coriolanus encounters her, she's tormenting an animal—and she also often torments, abuses, or frightens her young students as well. She sees no issue with allowing Clemensia to suffer venomous snakebites that land her in the hospital for a week, and it seems second nature to her to come up with horrific ways to torture the tributes (such as hanging Marcus by his wrists in the arena as punishment for trying to run away). Other adults in Coriolanus's life, from his grandmother to his other teachers, seem similarly good, bad, or somewhere in between—or, at least, Coriolanus seldom, if ever, observes that they have the capacity to change their ways. Children, on the other hand, do have the capacity to learn new ways of thinking, Coriolanus realizes. As he spends time at the zoo with Lucy Gray and the other tributes, for instance, he realizes that it's only the Capitol's children who are willing to approach the bars of the monkey house to give the tributes food. The children, unlike their parents, are willing to take the leap and trust that the tributes are indeed people, just like they are—despite what they've been told by their parents and Panem's propaganda campaign designed to dehumanize the tributes.

The idea that the things children and young people experience form who they become as adults helps explain why Coriolanus ultimately becomes the sinister villain from [The Hunger Games](#). Coriolanus's early years were overshadowed by Panem's war with the rebels. Because of the war, he was often hungry and afraid—as bombs constantly fell on the city, he witnessed neighbors engaging in cannibalism, and he was also orphaned. Thus, Coriolanus's experiences as a child during the war taught him to prize his own comfort (he never wants to be hungry again) and his safety (so he agrees that the Capitol is right to continue punishing the districts through rationing food supplies and putting on the Hunger Games). In short, the war showed Coriolanus that he could—and really, should—only look out for himself, because he's the only person he can rely on to keep himself safe, fed, and in control. And this belief that he can only count on himself influences his behavior in the Hunger Games. Coriolanus is hesitant to trust Lucy Gray, having never trusted anyone like her before—but the fact that he does briefly put his trust in her suggests that in the novel's present, Coriolanus is still a child and, therefore, still has the capacity for goodness.

Dr. Gaul, however, ensures that Coriolanus's positive experiences with Lucy Gray are far outweighed by experiences that continue to show him he can only rely on himself. She sends him into the arena at one point to rescue Sejanus, putting Coriolanus in a position where he has no choice but to defend

himself against a tribute bent on killing him—and Coriolanus brutally murders the tribute. With Dr. Gaul's guidance, Coriolanus comes to see that all people are brutal, violent, and dangerous, and therefore it's best if he prioritizes his own success over anyone else's wellbeing. This belief culminates in Coriolanus betraying his friend Sejanus; turning on Lucy Gray, possibly killing her; and even poisoning the Academy's dean, Dean Highbottom. While Coriolanus's brief romance with Lucy Gray offered hope that he'd be able to change his ways and become a moral person, his experiences throughout the novel teach him that the only way he'll ever get ahead is by prioritizing himself—and getting rid of anyone who tries to get in his way.



TRUST AND LOYALTY

The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes explores how trusting and loyal relationships form and function within the specific circumstances of postwar

Panem. Throughout the first two sections of the novel (which detail the week before the 10th Annual Hunger Games—a gladiator-style sporting event where poor children from the districts fight to the death—and then the Games themselves), the Gamemakers (people who design the Hunger Games) and Capitol leaders institute a program so that promising Capitol students can mentor tributes, suggesting that they see loyalty as a compelling phenomenon. The idea is that the trusting relationships formed under these circumstances will encourage viewers to actually tune into the games by introducing an emotional element for Capitol citizens. In the novel's third part, after the Games end and the story shifts to Coriolanus's stint in District 12 as a new Peacekeeper, Coriolanus has to think more deeply about trust and loyalty as he embarks on a romance with his winning tribute from the Games, the singer Lucy Gray Baird. Throughout the novel, at least as it pertains to Coriolanus's life and experience, *Ballad* positions trust as a tool that's nice to have, rather than as a necessity for a healthy relationship. And in light of Coriolanus's selfish goals (which mainly consist of helping the Capitol maintain its power over the districts), the novel suggests that trust and loyalty are less powerful motivators than money, fear, and power.

At first, Coriolanus and his classmates see getting their tributes to trust them as a way to get viewers to tune into the Games and boost their own reputations. The mentorship program itself—and the broader push to make the Games interesting for viewers—indicates that at least when the trust is between mentors and tributes (where there's a huge power difference), trust is something that adds interest but isn't strictly necessary. This is best evidenced by Coriolanus telling Sejanus that it doesn't matter whether his tribute Marcus, a former classmate from District Two, will talk to or trust Sejanus. Marcus is so big and burly that he's a favorite to win anyway, even if he won't speak to Sejanus. In Coriolanus's mind, trust is unnecessary in

this situation: both Sejanus and Marcus will benefit when Marcus inevitably wins the Games. Coriolanus, meanwhile, ends up with the female tribute from District 12, Lucy Gray Baird. Because female tributes—let alone those from District 12—never win the Games, Coriolanus initially uses the trusting relationship he forms with Lucy Gray to help cement her status among viewers as a compelling young girl who shouldn't be in the Games at all, and his own status as a powerful and gracious young man. Even when Lucy Gray and Coriolanus fall in love, her trust in him really just serves to make her and Coriolanus sympathetic to viewers.

In District 12, Coriolanus starts to see that trust is an important element of a healthy relationship. As he and Lucy Gray rekindle their romance, Lucy Gray shares that to her, the most important thing in a relationship—before love, even—is trust. Because Coriolanus so desperately wants to impress Lucy Gray, he considers this idea and tries to show her how much he trusts her (and how much she should trust him), such as by sneaking off base to see her, defending her against her former partner Billy Taupe, and writing to a friend in the Capitol to try to get her band, the Covey, more strings for their instruments. Their trusting relationship deepens when Lucy Gray witnesses Coriolanus murder the mayor's daughter, Mayfair Lipp, to try to protect himself, Sejanus, and Lucy Gray from being discovered to be associated with rebels in the area. Coriolanus feels as though Lucy Gray is the only person he can trust, which culminates in his choice to run away with her (he believes that if he stays, he'll inevitably be executed for murdering Mayfair). Their trust in each other, the novel suggests, is strong enough to make running away into the wilderness and inviting the government to label them as rebels seem like a good idea.

However, Coriolanus is ultimately too self-involved to be in a truly trusting relationship. Trust, for him, is something he can abuse to manipulate people—and better his own status along the way. Coriolanus is, throughout the novel, unable to move beyond his belief that as a young man from a wealthy Capitol family, he deserves wealth, power, prestige, and whatever else he wants. And this belief causes him to abuse people's trust. First, he betrays Sejanus by using a jabberjay to record Sejanus's admission that he's conspiring with rebels to run away, knowing Dr. Gaul will hear it and take action. Sejanus erroneously believed he could trust Coriolanus to keep his secret—but for Coriolanus, it's more important to make sure *he* won't get in trouble, and to support the Capitol's aims, than it is to protect his friend's secrets. Coriolanus also betrays Lucy Gray's trust. Lucy Gray first realizes she can't trust Coriolanus when she puts it together that he's the one who ratted out Sejanus—and to her, this is an unforgivable offense. Knowing that she doesn't trust him anymore and is the only person still alive who knows he murdered Mayfair, Coriolanus realizes he can't trust Lucy Gray: she's the last thing standing between him

and a career as a powerful military commander. So he doesn't hesitate to betray her by shooting at her in the woods and possibly killing her.

Though Coriolanus is the character who most often betrays others' trust, the novel is filled with instances where people betray each other, put each other in danger, or don't uphold their end of a deal. With this, *Ballad* paints a picture of a world where Coriolanus's behavior might seem evil to readers—but his world is one where trust, if it exists at all, is a tool to help a person get ahead, and nothing more than that.



SYMBOLS

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



ROSES

Roses symbolize the Snow family and the family's attempts to still look the part of wealthy Capitol folk. The Grandma'am, Coriolanus's grandmother, continues to grow roses on the roof of the family's apartment. She continued to care for the roses all through the war with the rebels, demonstrating the family's desire to hold onto any luxuries they could. Having those luxuries on display, after all, is what helps the family maintain the facade that they're still as wealthy as they once were.

Coriolanus regularly wears one of the Grandma'am's roses pinned to his shirt or jacket during the Hunger Games, as the rose significantly dresses up his outfits—which, if Coriolanus isn't wearing his school uniform, aren't as expensive or luxurious as he'd prefer, given that the family can't afford new clothing. The roses, then, read as a last-ditch attempt by the Snow family to preserve the impression among their peers that they're still wealthy and powerful.

It's also worth noting how the roses' symbolism works within the context of the original *Hunger Games* trilogy. In *Ballad*, when Coriolanus is still a young man with the potential to grow into a kind, compassionate person, he wears and gives colorful roses, which symbolize his humanity. But in the original trilogy, as the evil President Snow, Coriolanus uses exclusively white roses—symbolizing his moral bankruptcy as an adult.



THE COMPACT AND POWDER

Coriolanus's relationship to his mother's compact represents his journey of trying—and ultimately failing—to be a good, kind person. Though Coriolanus is selfish and only interested in bettering his position from the novel's beginning, his habit of sniffing his mother's **rose**-scented powder in her rose-engraved compact humanizes him. It suggests he appreciates sweet, nice things and could be more

like his mother, who was kind and a music lover. The rose scent and engraving also emotionally connect Coriolanus to his family.

Coriolanus starts to give up on this when he separates the powder disk from the compact. He gives the compact to Lucy Gray so she can fill it with rat poison, take it into the Hunger Games arena, and poison her opponents. Though Coriolanus frames this as a kind thing he's doing for Lucy Gray (as it will help her achieve victory in the ring), the fact remains that he's corrupting the compact, something that's beautiful, for terrible means. But the fact that he still holds onto the powder disk and sniffs it to feel close to his mother suggests that he hasn't totally given up on being a good person yet.

In the novel's final chapters, when Coriolanus makes an ill-fated attempt to run away with Lucy Gray, Coriolanus takes the final step in his journey of becoming a villain. When he realizes he can destroy the gun he used to murder Mayfair and then go about his life with the Peacekeepers without facing consequences, Coriolanus turns on Lucy Gray. He shoots at her in the woods, which represents a major shift from only hours before, when he was in love with her and wanted to run away with her. And after sinking the gun in a lake and heading back to base in the pouring rain, the powder disk from the compact (which was in Coriolanus's pocket) has turned to paste and is totally unsalvageable. Later, when Coriolanus retrieves the empty compact from Dean Highbottom, Coriolanus is like the empty compact himself: from a moral perspective, he's empty and beyond salvaging.



MOCKINGJAYS

Mockingjays symbolize different things to different people: to Coriolanus, the birds symbolize the Capitol's failure to control everything in the districts; to Lucy Gray and other district folk, the mockingjays are symbols of resistance and hope.

Mockingjays are a hybrid species of bird that emerged after Dr. Gaul's lab released their jabberjays (programmable birds that can record what they hear and were used to spy on rebels) after the war ended. The idea was that the entirely male flock would die—but instead, they bred with indigenous mockingbirds, creating mockingjays. Mockingjays can't be programmed to record like their fathers, but they do still mimic what they hear and turn what they hear into music. Coriolanus sees this as failure on the Capitol's part because things with the birds didn't go according to plan, and Coriolanus hates nothing more than something that didn't go according to plan. He also hates the birds because he finds their strange music so unsettling; the birds create haunting songs out of, at one point, a man's last words before he hangs, clearly without understanding the significance of what they're mimicking. This is somewhat ironic, as Coriolanus and many other people in the

Capitol parrot all sorts of state propaganda without really thinking about it—and yet, Coriolanus only takes offense at this practice when birds outside of the Capitol's control do it.

The fact that Coriolanus can't control the birds is, in part, what makes mockingjays symbols of hope and resistance for the district residents. Where Coriolanus sees the birds as a gross mistake and as nature run amok, Lucy Gray and others in District 12 seem to treat the birds as an unlikely bright spot in an extremely dark turn of events (the rebels losing the war, and the Capitol subsequently exerting total control over the districts). The mockingjays are proof that the Capitol can't control everything—and they're also proof that, just as the mockingjays' song emerges from one of the Capitol's attempts to control the population, better times and a successful rebellion could also come in time.



SNAKES

Snakes represent the danger that lurks everywhere in Panem, even in unexpected places. Lucy Gray initially establishes herself as a surprisingly cutthroat competitor in the Hunger Games when her name is called in the reaping. Instead of heading straight to the stage, Lucy Gray slips a snake down Mayfair Lipp's dress—Mayfair is responsible for Lucy Gray's name being called in the first place. As the Games progress, Lucy Gray continues to use snakes, such as Dr. Gaul's technicolor snakes, to kill and ultimately win the games. And a month later, at the end of Coriolanus's stint as a Peacekeeper in District 12 and as their romance falls apart, Lucy Gray sets a trap for Coriolanus that results in him getting bitten by a snake. By befriending and using snakes to achieve her goals in a way that seems somewhat out of character for a kind, loving musician, Lucy Gray demonstrates that in Panem, it's not a good idea to trust anyone based on how they look—anyone could be just as cutthroat as Lucy Gray is.

Coriolanus also came to the same conclusion earlier in the novel, when he and Clemensia meet with Dr. Gaul in her lab with the technicolor snakes. Dr. Gaul creates a situation where the snakes bite Clemensia, leaving Clemensia seriously ill and in the hospital for days—something Coriolanus sees as evidence that he can't trust Dr. Gaul. She may be a teacher and someone that, in theory, students should be able to trust, but in reality, she's more than willing to maim students if it suits her aims.

More specifically, though, snakes also represent the danger Coriolanus himself poses to others. When he reaches his hand into Dr. Gaul's snake tank, the snakes treat him like he's one of them, which aligns him with snakes early on in the novel. He later encourages Lucy Gray to use poison against the other Hunger Games tributes and eventually poisons Dean Highbottom, using poison in much the same way that snakes' venom poisons their victims. And at one point Lucy Gray says that she loves many things she doesn't trust—like snakes.

Though Lucy Gray does seem to genuinely love Coriolanus, she ultimately learns that he, like a snake, is untrustworthy.



THE COMPASS

The compass symbolizes Coriolanus's final choice to prioritize amassing power and prestige over his relationships and to follow in his father's footsteps. Coriolanus takes the compass, which once belonged to his father Crassus Snow, to District 12 with him when he's stationed there with the Peacekeepers. Coriolanus doesn't think much of it, but when he and Lucy Gray decide to run away together, Coriolanus takes the compass and believes it'll come in handy as a navigation device. However, running away together doesn't go as planned—Lucy Gray realizes Coriolanus is responsible for Sejanus's execution, runs from Coriolanus, and sets traps for him in the woods. Their brief trip culminates in Coriolanus possibly shooting Lucy Gray and then swimming into a lake to sink a bag of weapons, which includes the gun he used to kill Mayfair. After his swim, Coriolanus's other effects (his mother's **rose**-scented **powder** and some family photos) are destroyed. All that survives the swim is the compass. And after this experience, Coriolanus decides he'll never fall in love again; instead, he'll seek power and connections through any means necessary—even if that means shooting his former lover. The compass surviving the ordeal shows Coriolanus that the only way to survive is to emulate his father. This starts him on the path to becoming the cruel leader readers are familiar with in the Hunger Games trilogy, which takes place 64 years after the events of *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*.



PANEM'S ANTHEM

Panem's anthem shows how successful the country's propaganda machine is, as the country's ideals, as celebrated in the anthem, don't match up at all with how the country treats a majority of its citizens. During a mentor meeting with Dr. Gaul, Sejanus points out that the anthem promises that Panem will take care of every person who lives in the country—and yet, the very existence of the Hunger Games means that at least 24 citizens, and those citizens' families, are being directly harmed by the government. Sejanus, though, is the only character in the novel to ever point out that the anthem's ideals don't match up with the country's actions. And this is, in a way, by design—the Capitol doesn't encourage anyone, especially Capitol dwellers, to think critically about how the government functions or even to consider those who live in the districts worthy of respect and care. This is best evidenced by Coriolanus's personal relationship to the anthem. He hears it daily, since the Grandma'am begins every day by playing an old recording of the anthem and singing along. This is a patriotic exercise for her, and it's resulted in Coriolanus learning every word. But the

anthem has, for him, simply become background—its contents aren't something he ever thinks about, even as he sees firsthand that Panem horrifically abuses district children every year. Put simply, the anthem illustrates how successful Panem has been at expressing lofty, idealistic goals, and then doing the exact opposite of what they proclaim, by turning the expression of those ideals into meaningless background noise.





QUOTES


Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Scholastic Books edition of *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* published in 2020.

Chapter 3 Quotes

●● Coriolanus thought about his grandmother's roses, which were still prized in the Capitol. The old woman nurtured them arduously in the roof garden that came with the penthouse, both out of doors and in a small solar greenhouse. She parceled out her flowers like diamonds, though, so it had taken a good bit of persuasion to get this beauty. "I need to make a connection with her. As you always say, your roses open any doors." It was a testament to how worried his grandmother was about their situation that she had allowed it.

Related Characters: Coriolanus Snow (speaker), The Grandma'am, Lucy Gray Baird, Tigris Snow

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 38

Explanation and Analysis

Coriolanus is standing on the train platform, waiting to greet his tribute Lucy Gray with one of his grandmother's roses when Lucy Gray arrives in the Capitol. This establishes the roses as a symbol of the Snow family. Just as the Grandma'am "arduously" nurtures her roses in the rooftop garden, Coriolanus similarly strives to improve the family's standing and hide that the Snows are currently extremely poor. Both the Grandma'am and Coriolanus are, essentially, trying to make something from nothing, whether that's a beautiful flower or an imposing reputation for the family.

This passage also shows more generally how important it is to the Snows to be a Capitol family with a reputation for wealth and power. It's unsettling for Tigris, Coriolanus, and the Grandma'am to keep up the charade that everything is

fine when everything isn't—the family barely has enough to eat and can barely scrape together appropriate clothes for the various fancy events Coriolanus will need to attend in the coming week to celebrate the Hunger Games. So the Grandma'am being willing to give up one of her precious roses to make this happen only highlights how unsettled she is by the family's current plight.

Finally, Coriolanus also portrays a trusting relationship with Lucy Gray as something that's nice to have and compelling, but not a necessity. And interestingly, to him, Lucy Gray's trust is something he can buy. This, more than anything, reflects how Coriolanus sees everything as a transaction. No matter what he wants, whether it's a particular tribute, romance, or money, Coriolanus believes anything—including emotional intimacy and trust—can be purchased or coerced.

☛ By now the smell of the car, musty and heavy with manure, had reached Coriolanus. They were transporting the tributes in livestock cars, and not very clean ones at that. He wondered if they had been fed and let out for fresh air, or just locked in after their reappings. Accustomed as he was to viewing the tributes on-screen, he had not prepared himself properly for this encounter in the flesh, and a wave of pity and revulsion swept through him. They really were creatures out of another world. A hopeless, brutish world.

Related Characters: Coriolanus Snow

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 41

Explanation and Analysis

When the train transporting the tributes finally pulls into the Capitol station, Coriolanus is shocked to discover that the tributes are being transported in unsanitary livestock cars. The tributes have just started to unload, and this marks the first time Coriolanus has ever seen tributes close-up and in person.

Though the Games haven't been as much of a spectacle during their previous nine iterations, Coriolanus seems to come into this situation with the expectation that the tributes are, generally speaking, treated better than this—and also that the tributes themselves look worse than he expected. If anything, this speaks to the Capitol television station's ability to make the Games look better onscreen than they do in real life. This is an early clue that the Games themselves are even more ruthless, cruel, and

horrible than they appear onscreen. That's saying something, given that the entire premise of the Hunger Games is that the tributes are locked in an arena to fight to the death on live television.

Coriolanus's reaction to seeing the tributes in person does several things. First, it suggests that even if he can't quite articulate it, he does believe that the tributes deserve basic human decency. They should have food, they should have fresh air, and they shouldn't be treated like animals. But on the other hand, Coriolanus also feels revulsion. Part of this stems from the fact that as a Capitol kid, Coriolanus has been raised to believe that the tributes are an entirely different breed of human—and an inferior one at that. He's been raised to believe that they're not as civilized or evolved as Capitol people, and therefore, he believes they deserve his pity and should naturally repulse him.

Finally, ending this passage with the phrase "A hopeless, brutish world" brings to mind one of Susan Collins's inspirational texts, Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*. In it, he writes that life without government is "nasty, brutish, and short." Interestingly, Coriolanus seems to equate the tributes' lives in the district with Hobbes's "nasty, brutish, and short" state—even though the districts do have a government, the Capitol. This suggests that the Capitol isn't doing what it's supposed to as a government. Rather than lifting people out of horrible lives, it's condemning some citizens to horrible lives based solely on where in the country they live.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☛ Now he was trapped and on display, for the first time appreciating the animals' inability to hide. Children had begun to chatter excitedly and point at his school uniform, drawing the attention of the adults. Faces were filling all the available space between the bars. But the real horror was a pair of cameras positioned at either end of the visitors.

Capitol News. With their omnipresent coverage and their saucy slogan, "*If you didn't see it here, it didn't happen.*"

Oh, it was happening. To him. Now.

Related Characters: Coriolanus Snow, Lucy Gray Baird, Dr. Volumnia Gaul

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 48

Explanation and Analysis

Coriolanus accompanied the tributes from the train to their

“lodgings”—which, he’s horrified to discover, is the monkey house at the Capitol Zoo. Bringing the tributes to the zoo underscores how badly Panem wants to portray the tributes as subhuman. Housing them in the zoo equates them with animals—and further, denying them any privacy also denies them any dignity.

Though Coriolanus insists he appreciates how zoo animals feel, he interestingly feels no empathy or compassion for the tributes with him in the monkey house. Rather, his selfish nature means that his only thought is for himself and the havoc this is going to wreak on the Snow family’s reputation—something that he believes is inescapable, given that he’s also going to wind up on live national television.

What Coriolanus has to say about Capitol News explains first how Panem’s propaganda machine works and then shows how the Capitol is pushing the Hunger Games to become a spectacle. The network’s slogan, “If you didn’t see it here, it didn’t happen,” underpins many events that happen later in the novel. For instance, when Coriolanus murders a tribute in the arena, it does technically end up getting recorded. But Dr. Gaul darkens the video that viewers see, so nobody sees it. Because of this, Coriolanus is able to walk away from the murder, since technically, nobody saw him murder the tribute. This then encourages readers to realize that what shows up on Capitol television isn’t necessarily true, even if it’s live television. Rather, what makes it into people’s televisions is probably either contrived, scripted, or somehow altered. Meanwhile, broadcasting the tributes’ arrival in the Capitol on national television (in addition to gathering this live crowd at the zoo) is an attempt to drum up interest and give more Hunger Games coverage than just the Games themselves. It’s a way for the news to get people invested in the tributes long before they start killing each other—which is, as much as anything, a bid to get viewers invested in the Games.

Chapter 5 Quotes

●● A self-important little girl marched up beside them and pointed to a sign on the pillar at the edge of the enclosure. “It says, ‘Please don’t feed the animals.’”

“They’re not animals, though,” said Sejanus. “They’re kids, like you and me.”

“They’re not like me!” the little girl protested. “They’re district. That’s why they belong in a cage!”

Related Characters: Sejanus Plinth (speaker), Coriolanus Snow, Lucy Gray Baird

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 64

Explanation and Analysis

Coriolanus has just returned to the zoo to visit Lucy Gray; he discovers Sejanus there, attempting to give the tributes food (the Capitol hasn’t fed them in days) and fending off a little girl who’s insistent that the tributes aren’t people.

Though, on the whole, the novel portrays children as better able than adults to learn and internalize new ways of thinking about things, this little girl essentially sets a baseline. She shows readers exactly how kids in the Capitol are taught to think of kids from the district: as animals, and not at all like Capitol kids. This is one way that the Capitol manages to justify the Hunger Games. It’s unthinkable to many in the Capitol that their own children should ever be asked to murder each other on national television; it’s essential to dehumanize the district children involved so that adults in the Capitol will continue to support the Games. And the girl saying that the kids from the districts belong in cages also shows how vehemently kids in the Capitol are taught to hate and look down on their district counterparts. Not only are the district kids inferior; they are, the girl implies, naturally criminals who deserve to be locked up simply because of where they come from.

The little girl also shows how the Capitol dehumanizes people who live in the districts with the language it uses. Her saying that the kids “are district” portrays the word “district” as almost a slur of sorts. Further, being called “district” like this doesn’t leave any room for saying something like “people in the districts” or “a person from the districts,” which, by using the words “people” and “person,” highlight that the subject in question is indeed a person.

Chapter 6 Quotes

●● “Who cares about these kids one way or another?”

“Possibly their families,” said Sejanus.

“You mean a handful of nobodies in the districts. So what?” Arachne boomed. “Why should the rest of us care which one of them wins?”

Livia looked pointedly at Sejanus. “I know I don’t.”

“I get more excited over a dogfight,” admitted Festus. “Especially if I’m betting on it.”

“So you’d like it if we gave odds to the tributes?” Coriolanus joked. “That would make you tune in?”

Related Characters: Arachne Crane, Sejanus Plinth, Livia Cardew, Festus Creed, Coriolanus Snow (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

Coriolanus and his fellow mentors are in a mentor meeting, discussing how to make the Hunger Games more of a spectacle and increase viewership.

The problem, as Coriolanus and his classmates discover, is that nobody cares about the tributes. This is because they don't see the tributes as actual humans—a sign of how successful the Capitol has been at dehumanizing the people who live in the districts and the tributes, and then teaching its residents to do the same. It's telling that Festus admits that he cares more for fighting dogs than he does for fellow human beings who are going to be forced to fight to the death in the Capitol Arena in only a few days from now. So the mentors have a huge challenge: how do they make the tributes human enough for Capitol folk to sympathize with so people watch the Games?

The answer, they start to realize, is not to humanize the tributes, but dehumanize the tributes in a new way. Giving the tributes odds and creating a betting system will encourage people to get invested in the Games by putting money on their tribute of choice. This will also encourage viewers to judge tributes based on their physical attributes, something that will further dehumanize the tributes.

This conversation about how to increase viewership notably doesn't include any question about whether the Hunger Games should take place at all, and whether the Games are moral and appropriate. This is by design: by focusing the conversation on how to drum up viewers and get people to invest, the Capitol also sidesteps these difficult conversations questioning the morality of the Games in general. If people are more invested in "their" tribute winning, they're far less likely to question if the Games should happen at all.


“Hardly rebels. Some of them were two years old when the war ended. The oldest were eight. And now that the war's over, they're just citizens of Panem, aren't they? Same as us? Isn't that what the anthem says the Capitol does? 'You give us light. You reunite'? It's supposed to be everyone's government, right?”

“That's the general idea. Go on,” Dr. Gaul encouraged him.

“Well, then it should protect everyone,” said Sejanus. “That's its number-one job! And I don't see how making them fight to the death achieves that.”

Related Characters: Sejanus Plinth, Dr. Volumnia Gaul (speaker), Marcus

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 92

Explanation and Analysis

During a mentor meeting with Dr. Gaul and Dean Highbottom, Sejanus speaks out against the Hunger Games and insists the Games are immoral and inappropriate—and go against what Panem purports to stand for in its anthem.

As he confronts Dr. Gaul, Sejanus starts to question what the purpose of a government is. He insists that the purpose of a government is to protect people and help them live fulfilling lives. He also suggests that everyone should have a voice in the government (or at least be invested in the government), and that all citizens should be considered equal in the government's eyes. These are all Enlightenment ideas put forth by several Enlightenment-era political philosophers; these ideas guide many democratic governments in the real world today.

Within the context of the novel, though, and within the context of postwar Panem, Sejanus's ideas of what government should be read as idealistic at best and traitorous at worse. The Capitol has done everything in its power to portray people who live in the districts as second-class citizens, people who are barely people. And, it reasons, they then don't deserve to be protected by the government as much as those who live in the Capitol do. This reveals a system in which the government protects one group of people (Capitol folks) at the expense of others (those who live in the districts). This also explains how Panem justifies the system: the districts are responsible for starting the war and turning it into the bloody affair it was; per Panem's logic, they thus deserve to be punished.

When Sejanus brings up Panem's anthem, it shows how effective the government's quest to create this two-tiered


system has been. For most people—notably, Coriolanus—the anthem has become background noise, and it's not something he questions anymore. The system is working for him, so therefore everything is fine. Asking bigger, tougher questions about what his government is doing, and why, just isn't something that concerns him. In this way, Panem also encourages people to be selfish.

Chapter 8 Quotes

☝ It was like the Hunger Games. Only they weren't district kids. The Capitol was supposed to protect them. He thought of Sejanus telling Dr. Gaul it was the government's job to protect everybody, even the people in the districts, but he still wasn't sure how to square that with the fact that they'd been such recent enemies. But certainly the child of a Snow should be a top priority. He could be dead if Clemensia had written the proposal instead of him. He buried his head in his hands, confused, angry, and most of all afraid. Afraid of Dr. Gaul. Afraid of the Capitol. Afraid of everything. If the people who were supposed to protect you played so fast and loose with your life...then how did you survive? Not by trusting them, that's for sure.

Related Characters: Coriolanus Snow, Sejanus Plinth, Dr. Volumnia Gaul, Arachne Crane, Clemensia Dovecote

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 116

Explanation and Analysis

Coriolanus has just witnessed Dr. Gaul letting her venomous technicolor snakes bite Clemensia, a punishment for lying that she worked on a Hunger Games proposal with Coriolanus. This is extremely upsetting for Coriolanus, as it's one of the first true indicators he gets that he's in danger in Panem, just like the tributes and people in the districts are.

In the first few lines of this passage, Coriolanus shows that he's perfectly okay with the government's class system. It benefits him, after all. Because he's from the Capitol, Coriolanus believes that the government will protect him from harm. Later, he also suggests that he went into this experience with Dr. Gaul and Clemensia believing that the adults in his life, such as teachers and politicians, should (and do) care about him and want to protect him. So his beginning state, he reveals, is a trusting one. He trusts

adults to care for him, and he's complacent with how things function in Panem more broadly. Interestingly, though, he also shows here that he's in a place where, with some convincing, he *could* come around to seeing people who live in the districts as worthy of protection, too (just not as much as wealthy Capitol families). He's in a formative state, where his experiences are going to have a lot of power to dictate how he views things as an adult—and how he decides to conduct himself going forward.


Seeing Dr. Gaul not care that Clemensia might die, however, forces Coriolanus to reconsider these notions. Clearly, he reasons, the government doesn't actually care about protecting him and his fellow wealthy classmates if Dr. Gaul is willing to let poisonous snakes bite Clemensia. He now realizes he can't trust his teachers to care for him, and he can't trust the government to look out for him and force his teachers to care for him. Rather, the only person Coriolanus can rely on to keep him safe is himself. And this new understanding is what leads him, later in the novel, to cheat in the Hunger Games, rat out Sejanus in District 12, and even shoot at and possibly kill Lucy Gray.

Chapter 9 Quotes

☝ “My condolences on the loss of your friend,” the dean said. “And on your student. It's a difficult day for all of us. But the procession was very moving,” Coriolanus replied. “Did you think so? I found it excessive and in poor taste,” said Dean Highbottom. Taken by surprise, Coriolanus let out a short laugh before he recovered and tried to look shocked. The dean dropped his gaze to Coriolanus's blue rosebud. “It's amazing, how little things change. After all the killing. After all the agonized promises to remember the cost. After all of that, I can't distinguish the bud from the blossom.”

Related Characters: Coriolanus Snow, Dean Casca Highbottom (speaker), Arachne Crane, Brandy

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 131

Explanation and Analysis

Following Arachne's funeral procession (Arachne's tribute, Brandy, slit Arachne's throat when Arachne teased her with a sandwich), Coriolanus has a confusing conversation with Dean Highbottom, who seems to be taunting Coriolanus. Coriolanus shows straight out just how much of a

chameleon he is; he's willing to say whatever he thinks he needs to in order to get ahead. He understands how important it is to parrot the appropriate lines, no matter how he actually feels on the matter. For example, not too long before this, he thought that this was a lot of fanfare for inconsequential Arachne, but now he shows that he's more than willing to give people what he thinks they want to hear, if it will help him. He believes Dean Highbottom is fully aligned with the government, so he expects Dean Highbottom to want to hear that the funeral was perfect and moving—even if, in reality, it wasn't.

It's important to keep in mind here that despite his perceived alignment with the government and with the Hunger Games, Dean Highbottom actually regrets coming up with the idea for the Games and doesn't think they should happen. This is, presumably, why he taunts Coriolanus like this—he seems unable to voice his true opinions about things elsewhere, but Coriolanus, as a student, is relatively nonthreatening and won't question why Dean Highbottom is suggesting that the funeral was terrible.


Dean Highbottom implies that the Hunger Games are an ineffective way to keep the memory of the war alive and to punish the districts. When he says that he “can't distinguish the bud from the blossom,” he implies that nothing has changed in the last 10 years since the war ended—the proverbial bud hasn't blossomed yet, in other words. With this, Dean Highbottom situates Panem and the Hunger Games in a transitional state. With all the changes happening to the Hunger Games this year, there's a possibility that the Games could become something that will effectively keep the memory of the war alive—or, of course, the opposite is also possible.

Chapter 12 Quotes

☝☝ His girl. His. Here in the Capitol, it was a given that Lucy Gray belonged to him, as if she'd had no life before her name was called out at the reaping. Even that sanctimonious Sejanus believed she was something he could trade for. If that wasn't ownership, what was? With her song, Lucy Gray had repudiated all of that by featuring a life that had nothing to do with him, and a great deal to do with someone else. Someone she referred to as “lover,” no less.

Related Characters: Coriolanus Snow, Lucy Gray Baird

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 172

Explanation and Analysis




Following Lucy Gray's television interview (in which she sang a song that mentioned a former lover who isn't currently in her good graces), Coriolanus is upset and jealous. On the surface, Coriolanus is upset because he's begun developing feelings for Lucy Gray, and the song makes it clear that she's had a romantic partner before—one who wasn't Coriolanus. So Coriolanus is struggling with his own immature, inexperienced emotions as he navigates romance for the first time.

However, the power differential between Coriolanus and Lucy Gray complicates this, as Coriolanus is in a position where he believes he owns Lucy Gray. This is problematic for a number of reasons, not least that Coriolanus doesn't want to acknowledge that Lucy Gray had a life before she belonged to him. The mentorship program, this starts to show, isn't setting Coriolanus up for success: it's putting him in this position where he's supposed to become emotionally close with his tribute (though not necessarily fall in love with her), but where Coriolanus still has all the power in whatever relationship comes out of that. This is why he remarks that even “sanctimonious Sejanus” thought he could trade for Lucy Gray and own her himself. Sejanus is the only mentor who actually sees the tributes as fellow humans—and yet even he understands that within this situation, he has so much more power than the tributes.

What Coriolanus's difficult emotions come down to is, in part, the fact that his supposed ownership of Lucy Gray seems to disappear when, in her song, Lucy Gray insists that she's a full human with a life and a home that existed long before she came to the Capitol. Her song humanizes her, whereas Coriolanus's perceived ownership of her dehumanizes her. It suits Coriolanus's purposes—romantic and otherwise—to feel like he owns Lucy Gray, so even though he can appreciate that her song is going to make her a popular tribute, he nevertheless feels like her song is eroding his ability to control her.

What had mattered then, what mattered still, was living without that fear. So he added a paragraph about his deep relief on winning the war, and the grim satisfaction of seeing the Capitol's enemies, who'd treated him so cruelly, who'd cost his family so much, brought to their knees. Hobbled. Impotent. Unable to hurt him anymore. He'd loved the unfamiliar sense of safety that their defeat had brought. The security that could only come with power. The ability to control things. Yes, that was what he'd loved best of all.

Related Characters: Coriolanus Snow, Dr. Volumnia Gaul

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 180

Explanation and Analysis

Dr. Gaul has assigned Coriolanus and the other mentors to write about everything they love about war. The bulk of Coriolanus's essay is about how much he loved parades and his victory garden, but now he's writing his closing paragraph, which takes a decidedly different tone.

As Coriolanus writes about how important it is to live without fear, he's unwittingly repeating another idea from Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes proposes that people without government live in a constant state of conflict, which he terms "war"; people in a constant state of war, he proposes, constantly live in fear. This is more or less what Coriolanus writes here. The end of the war—and the Capitol's ascension to power—ended a period of fear and war (as Hobbes defines it), ushering in a period where Coriolanus feels safe and powerful in contrast.

As Coriolanus writes about this, he shows readers what influenced him to become the villain he becomes in the *Hunger Games* trilogy, which take place 64 years after *Ballad*. Coriolanus may have qualms about the Hunger Games, but in general, he supports the Capitol's chokehold over the districts and the abuses that take place to keep the Capitol in power. He never wants to be hungry and afraid again, and to him, the best way to ensure he'll never be hungry and afraid again is to stay in power. So it's in his best interest to support the Capitol and help it achieve his aims—which is, put simply, to continue to stay in power and subjugate the districts. This selfish desire is what causes Coriolanus to prioritize himself again and again, what causes him to rat out his friends and Lucy Gray to get ahead, and what ultimately leads him to decide that kindness is a quality he has no time to cultivate or care about. All of these experiences push Coriolanus to become the villain readers are familiar with from the original trilogy.

Chapter 13 Quotes

But Lucy Gray was his tribute, headed into the arena. And even if the circumstances were different, she'd still be a girl from the districts, or at least not the Capitol. A second-class citizen. Human, but bestial. Smart, perhaps, but not evolved. Part of a shapeless mass of unfortunate, barbaric creatures that hovered on the periphery of his consciousness.

Related Characters: Coriolanus Snow, Lucy Gray Baird, Tigris Snow

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 194

Explanation and Analysis

Coriolanus is talking with Tigris and thinking about how he kissed Lucy Gray goodbye on the lips earlier. He's admitted he's falling in love with her, but he's very conflicted about what this means.

First, it's important to note that Coriolanus's way of looking at Lucy Gray as a romantic partner is fundamentally flawed. He sees her as something to possess rather than as a person in charge of her own life. But it's also impossible to ignore that falling in love with her has started to change Coriolanus's thinking. Indeed, as he tells himself all the reasons a relationship wouldn't work between them, his tone implies that he's trying to talk himself into fully believing all of this.

But it's still impossible to ignore the substance of what Coriolanus says here, which is that Lucy Gray is essentially subhuman because she's from District 12. She's "bestial," unevolved, and is part of a group of people who barely register in Coriolanus's mind unless they have to for some reason.

This reveals how effective the Capitol's attempts to dehumanize people from the districts have been. Love is traditionally an equalizer; it's a common trope in fiction that love will help a couple overcome all obstacles and all differences. Though Coriolanus seems to think that it'd be nice if that were true, in his experience, it isn't—because he believes what the Capitol wants him to believe about people in the districts.

“But surely, you’re not comparing our children to theirs?” asked Lucky. “One look tells you ours are a superior breed.”

“One look tells you ours have had more food, nicer clothing, and better dental care,” said Dean Highbottom. “Assuming anything more, a physical, mental, or especially a moral superiority, would be a mistake. That sort of hubris almost finished us off in the war.”

Related Characters: Lucky Flickerman, Dean Casca Highbottom (speaker), Coriolanus Snow, Lucy Gray Baird

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 199

Explanation and Analysis

During the pre-show television interview with Dean Highbottom and the mentors on the morning of the Hunger Games, Dean Highbottom makes a claim that shocks Coriolanus: that kids from the districts are no different from Capitol kids, save that Capitol kids are better cared for.

Lucky’s incredulous response in the beginning of this passage shows just how radical an idea this is. And Lucky believes that Capitol kids are naturally better than those from the districts because the Capitol has been so successful at encouraging people to believe that district folk are subhuman, unevolved, and therefore deserve to live in poverty. As such, Lucky has clearly never thought critically about why differences exist between Capitol and district kids; to him (and presumably to many people in the Capitol), it’s just an obvious truth that Capitol kids are better.

Dean Highbottom’s suggestion is radical, given that so many people in the Capitol believe Capitol kids are naturally better than district kids. Indeed, he even underhandedly implicates the Capitol in what he says. Mentioning that the district kids haven’t had enough food, proper clothing, or dental care indirectly calls out the Capitol—which has created a situation where the districts, by design, don’t have access to enough in the way of food, clothes, or medical care. This reveals that the entire class structure is something that the Capitol has fought to put in place and then to make it look natural and normal.

All the other characters go on to brush Dean Highbottom off, but his final warning—that to pretend district kids are subhuman will bring about the end of the Capitol—is, perhaps, one of the most important things he says. He essentially warns the Capitol that if they want to believe that the people who live in the districts are lesser, they’re setting themselves up to not be prepared for when those

people inevitably rebel. This passage thus helps draw connections between *Ballad* and the original *Hunger Games* trilogy—it takes another six decades, but eventually, the rebellion that Dean Highbottom sees coming at this point does come to pass.

“My cousin said to remember this isn’t of our making. That we’re still children, too.”

“That doesn’t help, somehow. Being used like this,” said Lysistrata sadly. “Especially when three of us are dead.”

Used? Coriolanus had not thought of being a mentor as anything but an honor. A way to serve the Capitol and perhaps gain a little glory. But she had a point. If the cause wasn’t honorable, how could it be an honor to participate in it? He felt confused, then manipulated, then undefended. As if he were more a tribute than a mentor.

Related Characters: Coriolanus Snow, Lysistrata Vickers (speaker), Dr. Volumnia Gaul

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 202

Explanation and Analysis

Just prior to the start of the Hunger Games, Coriolanus and Lysistrata discuss how horrified they are by the Hunger Games, especially now that they’re mentoring two of the tributes. For Coriolanus, it’s initially easy to get over his discomfort by reminding himself that this isn’t his responsibility. As Tigris said earlier, Coriolanus and the other mentors are just kids—and they don’t have much of a choice in whether to participate. Therefore, in Coriolanus’s mind, it’s not worth thinking about it too hard.

Lysistrata, however, causes Coriolanus to rethink this by suggesting that the mentors are being used. She resents her forced complicity with the Hunger Games in a way that, up to this point, Coriolanus hasn’t. So having to consider that maybe he is being used is a lot for Coriolanus to take in. He notes that prior to this conversation, he’s seen his mentorship program as a way to support the Capitol (which betrays that he actually thinks the Hunger Games are just fine) and better himself (which reflects his selfish nature). As he internalizes Lysistrata’s words, though, Coriolanus starts to feel powerless and out of control—and as though he can’t trust the adults in his life to protect him or steer him in the right direction. All of this comes together to make him feel powerless—like a tribute. In this way, though the novel makes it clear that tributes and people in the districts

suffer in different and worse ways than Capitol people do, it nevertheless makes it clear that all children in Panem do suffer in some way or another.

Chapter 15 Quotes

☝☝ Another student, or even the Coriolanus of a couple of weeks ago, would have protested this situation. Insisted on calling a parent or guardian. Pleaded. But after the snake attack on Clemensia, the aftermath of the bombing, and Marcus's torture, he knew it would be pointless. If Dr. Gaul decided he was to go into the Capitol Arena, that's where he would go, even if his prize was not at stake. He was just like the subjects of her other experiments, students or tributes, of no more consequence than the Avoxes in the cages. Powerless to object.

Related Characters: Coriolanus Snow, Dr. Volumnia Gaul, Sejanus Plinth, Marcus, Clemensia Dovecote

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 229

Explanation and Analysis

Dr. Gaul has just told Coriolanus that he'll be sneaking into the Capitol arena to get Sejanus out, something that both she and Coriolanus know will be dangerous. Coriolanus is first struck with the realization that he's changed a lot over the last week or so, since he was first assigned his tribute Lucy Gray. In the last week, he's come to realize that he's not as powerful as he once thought he was. It's this realization of how things have changed that makes him feel most vulnerable.

The biggest thing that Coriolanus has realized in the last week is that he can't trust his teachers to look out for him anymore, especially not Dr. Gaul. After seeing how cruel and unfeeling Dr. Gaul can be when it comes to kids (he mentions her letting snakes bite Clemensia and her willingness to torture the tribute Marcus), Coriolanus realizes he's not all that different. With this, the novel shows that while district children and Capitol children suffer in different ways, they all suffer in Panem. The adults are in no way willing to look out for them and help them happily mature into adults.



But even as Coriolanus feels exposed and powerless, he also keeps his goal in mind. He's doing this and not making a fuss because he wants to win a prize that will pay his tuition to the University next fall. So even though Coriolanus insists that he'd do whatever Dr. Gaul told him to do, part of the reason he feels this way is because his main goal is to

improve the Snow family's situation by getting an education at the prestigious University. His success is more important to him than how he gets there—even if it means he feels as powerless as an Avox or one of Dr. Gaul's other test subjects.

Chapter 16 Quotes

☝☝ “What happened in the arena? That's humanity undressed. The tributes. And you, too. How quickly civilization disappears. All your fine manners, education, family background, everything you pride yourself on, stripped away in the blink of an eye, revealing everything you actually are. A boy with a club who beats another boy to death. That's mankind in its natural state.”

Related Characters: Dr. Volumnia Gaul (speaker), Coriolanus Snow, Bobbin

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 243

Explanation and Analysis

Coriolanus is receiving medical treatment from Dr. Gaul, not long after coming out of the arena from rescuing Sejanus. He's just killed a tribute named Bobbin in self-defense, and he's extremely upset that Dr. Gaul put him in a situation where he had to kill someone.

Here, Dr. Gaul explains her views on humanity's true nature. Humans, she suggests, are naturally violent. It doesn't take much, in her estimation, for people to tap into their violent tendencies and “beat[] another boy to death.” All it takes is getting rid of “civilization,” which she defines as Coriolanus's “fine manners,” education, and his family name. She insists that underneath all that, Coriolanus is violent and more than willing to kill, if the need arises.

Interestingly, saying this shows that Dr. Gaul does believe that at the core, district kids and Capitol kids are the same. This is why, she suggests, she was able to put Coriolanus in a situation where he had to fight for his life just like the tributes. The only difference between Coriolanus and the tributes is the fact that the tributes are more often forced into this situation, whereas this was a one-time deal for Coriolanus.

Coriolanus resents Dr. Gaul for insisting humans are violent at first, but this ultimately shapes his worldview and helps him justify his later violence. It's a hard lesson now, fresh off of his first murder, but as time goes on, Coriolanus finds that

accepting that humans are violent makes it easier for him to be violent and cruel. He's just leaning into his true nature as a human, after all.

“So, if I'm a vicious animal, then who are you? You're the teacher who sent her student to beat another boy to death!”

Related Characters: Coriolanus Snow (speaker), Dr. Volumnia Gaul, Bobbin

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 244

Explanation and Analysis

While receiving treatment from Dr. Gaul for the injuries Coriolanus sustained in the arena rescuing Sejanus, Coriolanus accuses her of putting him in a situation where he had no choice but to murder a tribute named Bobbin (who attempted to kill Coriolanus in the arena).

Dr. Gaul has just told Coriolanus about her belief that humans are naturally violent; this is why Coriolanus sarcastically refers to himself as a “vicious animal.” His tone suggests that he's not actually the one at fault here. This isn't out of character for Coriolanus, who doesn't want to take responsibility for anything bad that happens to him or any questionable actions he takes. He believes that because he's a Snow and is wealthy and influential, he shouldn't have to take responsibility for his actions.

Most important here, though, is that Coriolanus also expresses betrayal. He feels betrayed that a teacher—someone he believed he should've been able to trust to care for him and keep him safe—seemingly orchestrated a situation where Coriolanus had to take another boy's life to survive. He frames this as an unforgivable offense, and it's one that shakes Coriolanus's trust in the adults around him.

Chapter 23 Quotes

“Human speech had vanished, and what remained was a musical chorus of Arlo and Lil's exchange.

“Mockingjays,” grumbled a soldier in front of him. “Stinking mutts.”

Coriolanus remembered talking to Lucy Gray before the interview.

“Well, you know what they say. The show's not over until the mockingjay sings.”

“The mockingjay? Really, I think you're just making these things up.”



“Not that one. A mockingjay's a bona fide bird.”


“And it sings in your show?”

“Not my show, sweetheart. Yours. The Capitol's anyway.”

This must be what she'd meant. The Capitol's show was the hanging. The mockingjay was some sort of bona fide bird. [...] Coriolanus felt sure he'd spotted his first mockingjay, and he disliked the thing on sight.

Related Characters: Coriolanus Snow, Lucy Gray Baird (speaker), Arlo Chance, Lil

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 352

Explanation and Analysis

Coriolanus is at the hanging of District 12 rebel Arlo Chance; Arlo has just died, and mockingjays and jabberjays have begun to mimic his dying words, turning it into a song. His remembered conversation with Lucy Gray took place before her pre-Hunger Games television interview.

Things start to fall into place for Coriolanus here, as he finally figures out what a mockingjay is. The mockingjays are unsettling to Coriolanus for two reasons. First, the mockingjays are mutts (they're the offspring of jabberjays—birds that Dr. Gaul created in her lab—and native mockingbirds)—but they're not mutts that Dr. Gaul planned for. Rather, they happened spontaneously and unexpectedly, something that goes against everything Coriolanus holds dear. He prefers when things go exactly to plan, especially when that plan is either his or the Capitol's. So the mockingjays are horribly subversive in his eyes. Second, Coriolanus also resents that the mockingjays create a song out of Arlo and Lil's words. The birds clearly don't understand the significance of what they're mimicking; they just mimic whatever they hear and turn it into music. This unthinking mimicry doesn't go over well with Coriolanus

because he understands how macabre it is that they're turning a dying man's words into something beautiful. (Ironically, though, Coriolanus only hates the mockingjays for this reason because he can't control them; Coriolanus himself repeats all manner of Capitol talking points without thinking about it, just as the mockingjays unthinkingly repeat whatever they hear.)

It's also possible that Coriolanus dislikes the mockingjays because of what Lucy Gray said about them singing in "the Capitol's show." The way she frames this suggests that in many ways, the mockingjays—a symbol of rebellion and resistance—have the last word in Capitol shows of power. Unsurprisingly, this doesn't go over well with Coriolanus, who believes the Capitol should hold all the power and have the last word.

Chapter 25 Quotes

☝☝ "I believe I said you could fight for the tributes, meaning you might be able to procure more humane conditions for them," Coriolanus corrected him.

"Humane conditions!" Sejanus burst out. "They're being forced to murder each other!"

Related Characters: Coriolanus Snow, Sejanus Plinth (speaker), Lucy Gray Baird, Billy Taupe

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 397

Explanation and Analysis

After Coriolanus catches Sejanus conspiring with Billy Taupe, a District 12 rebel, the boys argue. Coriolanus told Sejanus that he'd be better able to fight for the tributes by leaving the arena after he snuck in during the Hunger Games, hoping to make a point.

Recall that Coriolanus manipulated Sejanus to get him out of the arena. Coriolanus detests Sejanus's desire to do the right thing, and Coriolanus is incapable of understanding how and why Sejanus empathizes with people from the districts (whom Coriolanus sees as subhuman). So Coriolanus never actually intended to encourage Sejanus to help the districts; his only goal in telling Sejanus this was to get Sejanus out—as that was the only way that Coriolanus was going to get out of the arena, too, and be able to win a prize to pay for his university education. And this, in turn, reveals how little Coriolanus cares about the tributes' welfare. Their welfare is something he can dangle in front of

Sejanus so Coriolanus can get his way, not anything he thinks he should actually get upset over.

The simple fact that Coriolanus encourages Sejanus to fight for "more humane conditions" for the tributes speaks to how successful the Capitol has been at discouraging people from asking questions about the Hunger Games, such as why they exist and whether they're ethical. Focusing on the tributes' welfare in the leadup to the games is, as Sejanus points out, pretty pointless when the tributes are going to be forced to murder each other days after they arrive in the Capitol. But ethical questions like this just don't concern Coriolanus, who knows he will benefit from the Hunger Games and therefore sees no reason to change the system entirely. Encouraging Sejanus to fight for better welfare, in his mind, is a way to make it look like he's doing something and is supportive of the tributes—without actually having to do anything that would jeopardize his privileged position.

☝☝ *It reminded me of my stint in the arena. It's one thing to speak of humans' essential nature theoretically, another to consider it when a fist is smashing into your mouth. Only this time I felt more prepared. I'm not as convinced that we are all as inherently violent as you say, but it takes very little to bring the beast to the surface, at least under the cover of darkness. I wonder how many of those miners would have thrown a punch if the Capitol could have seen their faces?*

Related Characters: Coriolanus Snow (speaker), Dr. Volumnia Gaul

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 400

Explanation and Analysis

Coriolanus has recently learned that Dr. Gaul isn't really all that upset with him for cheating in the Hunger Games, so he's writing her a letter. The letter is supposed to be an essay on chaos, control, and contract, which Dr. Gaul assigned Coriolanus to write during the Hunger Games.

It's significant that Coriolanus is writing to Dr. Gaul at all. This shows that despite fearing her and thinking that she's cruel and heartless, Coriolanus is nevertheless starting to trust her. This is in part because he seems to instinctively know that she's extremely powerful within the government, and by aligning himself with her, Coriolanus will be able to get ahead. This reflects his selfish nature: if aligning himself with someone will help him, it doesn't matter how horrible that person is. To Coriolanus, it's worth it.

Being in District 12 is giving Coriolanus the opportunity to think about some of the things Dr. Gaul spoke to him about—and see them play out in real life, not in the contrived setting of the Hunger Games. Now, he’s starting to agree with Dr. Gaul that humans are naturally violent, even if he’s not convinced that they’re as violent as Dr. Gaul thinks they are. Interestingly, Coriolanus also touches on the fact that people, in his experience, are far more willing to be violent and defend themselves when they’re anonymous. This shows Coriolanus how he can go on to acquire power: by instituting surveillance systems. (Constant surveillance plays a huge role in *The Hunger Games*.)

shows that he doesn’t trust Lucy Gray as much as he thinks he does (and, perhaps, truly wants to trust her). His whole world is so focused on achieving control over everything that it’s inconceivable to him that he might not have all the power in their relationship. Saying that it’d almost be better if she was locked up in the Capitol also shows that Coriolanus doesn’t think much is wrong with the way the Capitol treats tributes. He presumably wouldn’t say such a thing if he were in love with a girl from the Capitol instead of Lucy Gray; it’s her status as a person from the districts that makes it okay in his mind to think this about her. So Coriolanus shows here how willing he is to use his power and his status to get what he wants—he’s too selfish, and too focused on power, to have a balanced romantic relationship with anyone.

Chapter 26 Quotes

☝☝ It seemed a waste to be on guard, where clearly nothing ever happened, when he could be holding her in his arms. He felt trapped here on base, while she could freely roam the night. In some ways, it had been better to have her locked up in the Capitol, where he always had a general idea of what she was doing.

☝☝ Free to speak his mind? Of course, he did. Well, within reason. He didn’t go around shooting his mouth off about every little thing. What did she mean? She meant what he thought about the Capitol. And the Hunger Games. And the districts. The truth was, most of what the Capitol did, he supported, and the rest rarely concerned him. But if it came to it, he’d speak out. Wouldn’t he? Against the Capitol? Like Sejanus had? Even if it meant repercussions? He didn’t know, but he felt on the defensive.

Related Characters: Coriolanus Snow, Lucy Gray Baird

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 418

Explanation and Analysis

Coriolanus is on guard duty for the first time. He’s bored to death and would much rather be with Lucy Gray, as they’ve begun to rekindle their romance in the last week or so.

At the moment, Coriolanus is overwhelmed by his feelings for Lucy Gray. This is the first time he’s been in love, so these emotions are all new for him—and they show that he’s growing up, coming of age, and gaining important experience that will guide him going forward. His inability to focus on the task at hand, though, does highlight his youth and immaturity. In his present situation, he seems unable to grasp that simply being on guard creates a show of force—something that’s very important to the Capitol and the Peacekeepers in District 12.

But while Coriolanus may legitimately be in love with Lucy Gray, he shows here that he doesn’t have a good understanding of healthy power dynamics within romantic relationships. He very much does not want Lucy Gray to have agency. It’s extremely upsetting for him to not know where she is, what she’s doing, or who she’s with. This

Related Characters: Coriolanus Snow, Lucy Gray Baird, Sejanus Plinth

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 421

Explanation and Analysis

Backstage before one of the Covey’s shows, Coriolanus and Lucy Gray are arguing. She’s just asked him if he feels like he’s free to speak his mind, a question that annoys Coriolanus.

Coriolanus’s thought process here illustrates the mental gymnastics he has to do in order to survive and even thrive in Panem. He’s said multiple times that he doesn’t feel safe speaking his mind—and time and again, Coriolanus has thought one thing and said something totally different (as when he thought Arachne’s funeral was terrible, but he told Dean Highbottom he found it moving and appropriate). At this point, Coriolanus doesn’t have the power to be able to speak out against the government. He’s too busy trying to improve his reputation and become a part of the government to speak out, anyway.

And this is really the crux of this passage. Coriolanus is a wealthy Capitol kid who dreams of a powerful role in the Capitol's government. It's not in his best interest to speak out against that government when he wants to be president one day. And because he benefits from the way the government currently functions, he doesn't have any reason to speak out. The Hunger Games, while cruel and dehumanizing for the tributes and their districts, are a way for Coriolanus to get ahead; the districts' subjugation only helps him consolidate power; and Coriolanus doesn't see a problem with the country's power imbalances as long as he's the one with more power. So he's caught here because he wants to impress Lucy Gray, and he knows she won't be pleased if he were to actually speak his mind and tell her the truth—that he doesn't care about the same things she does. In this way, too, Coriolanus doesn't feel free to speak his mind. He knows it'll only alienate her.

Chapter 29 Quotes

☝☝ *Everyone's born as clean as a whistle—
As fresh as a daisy
And not a bit crazy.
Staying that way's a hard row for hoeing—
As rough as a briar,
Like walking through fire.*

Related Characters: Lucy Gray Baird (speaker), Coriolanus Snow, Dr. Volumnia Gaul

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 479

Explanation and Analysis

Lucy Gray is singing a brand-new song during her performance on the Peacekeepers' base for Commander Hoff's birthday. Coriolanus knows she wrote the song for and about him.

Coriolanus fixates a lot on later lines in the song (such as where Lucy Gray says he's "pure as the driven snow"), but this, her first verse, is more thematically interesting. This is because in the first verse, she presents a view of humanity that directly contradicts Dr. Gaul's view, which is that humans are naturally violent, and it doesn't take much to bring people's violent tendencies to the surface. In her song, Lucy Gray proposes the opposite: that people are "born as clean as a whistle," suggesting that people are born good. When she sings that "Staying that way's a hard row for hoeing," she's saying that people's experiences can start to

push them toward being less good. It's people's jobs, she suggests, to do whatever they can to stay as good as possible, remaining in touch with their naturally good dispositions.


So while Dr. Gaul would suggest that Coriolanus was always destined to be the evil villain readers are familiar with from *The Hunger Games*, Lucy Gray would instead say that Coriolanus was born with the capacity to be good. Rather than becoming evil, and rather than that persona being who Coriolanus was always going to be, Coriolanus's experiences instead gradually turn him toward evil, corrupting a naturally good interior.

Chapter 30 Quotes

☝☝ Many fluttered into the sky, but the song had spread, and the woods were alive with it. "Lucy Gray! Lucy Gray!" Furious, he turned this way and that and finally blasted the woods in a full circle, going around and around until his bullets were spent. He collapsed on the ground, dizzy and nauseous, as the woods exploded, every bird of every kind screaming its head off while the mockingjays continued their rendition of "The Hanging Tree." Nature gone mad. Genes gone bad. Chaos.

Related Characters: Coriolanus Snow (speaker), Lucy Gray Baird, Sejanus Plinth

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 504

Explanation and Analysis

Coriolanus is hunting Lucy Gray in the woods. She's just revealed her position by singing a bit of her song "The Hanging Tree," which shows Coriolanus that she knows he's responsible for Sejanus's execution. Coriolanus has also been bitten by a snake he believes Lucy Gray planted, which is why he feels so ill.

In this passage, the mockingjays emerge even more clearly as symbols for resistance and rebellion. They pick up Lucy Gray's song (which, not coincidentally, becomes a rallying cry for the resistance movement in *The Hunger Games* trilogy), which creates such a ruckus that Lucy Gray is able to escape Coriolanus. So the mockingjays, even though they came from the Capitol in a way (since they're the offspring of Capitol-created jabberjays and native mockingbirds), nevertheless unwittingly conspire to help Lucy Gray and the



rebel cause more broadly. They also push Coriolanus almost to the brink of madness when he decides to spend all his bullets shooting at them—a sign that Coriolanus, and the Capitol, are perhaps focused on the wrong things when it comes to stamping out the resistance movement.


Coriolanus shooting at the birds suggests that he's far more concerned with getting rid of symbols of the resistance than actually diminishing the resistance movement's power altogether.

When Coriolanus then thinks of this as “nature gone mad” and as “chaos,” it shows just how badly he craves power and control. The natural world and what happens there—such as the creation of the mockingjays in the first place—isn't something that Coriolanus can control. He's a city kid through and through, so nature is offensive to him for a variety of reasons. It's hard to survive there, it's dirty, there's no power or wealth to strive for, and most importantly, he can't just intimidate the birds into being quiet. So this, in a way, foreshadows Coriolanus's return the following day to the Capitol. He's never meant to spend much time in the natural world, as his goal is to control as much as he can.

●● He went to the bathroom and emptied his pockets. The lake water had reduced his mother's rose-scented powder to a nasty paste, and he threw the whole thing in the trash. The photos stuck together and shredded when he tried to separate them, so they went the way of the powder. Only the compass had survived the outing.

Related Characters: Coriolanus Snow, Sejanus Plinth, Coriolanus's Mother, Crassus Snow

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 506

Explanation and Analysis

Coriolanus has just returned to the Peacekeepers' base after his ill-fated attempt to run away with Lucy Gray. He sank the rifle he used to murder Mayfair in the lake, which is why he's soaked.



The state of the contents of Coriolanus's pockets symbolize exactly how and why Coriolanus goes on to become a terrible villain. Throughout the novel, his mother's powder compact has been a humanizing link to the past, making Coriolanus seem relatable and even sympathetic. But now

that it's turned into such a nasty paste and he has to throw it out, Coriolanus also throws out any hopes of becoming a good person—like his mother was. Having to discard the photos also suggests that Coriolanus's ties to his family aren't particularly strong. His investment in the family name might be strong, but getting rid of the family photos indicates that the people themselves hold little meaning for him anymore. Finally, the fact that the compass survived (which belonged to Coriolanus's father, Crassus) shows that Coriolanus is now going to follow in his father's footsteps. Crassus was known for being frightening, intimidating, and powerful—and that's exactly what Coriolanus goes on to be.

Epilogue Quotes

●● “Because we credit them with innocence. And if even the most innocent among us turn to killers in the Hunger Games, what does that say? That our essential nature is violent,” Snow explained.

Related Characters: Coriolanus Snow (speaker), Dean Casca Highbottom, Dr. Volumnia Gaul

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 515

Explanation and Analysis

Coriolanus has stopped at Dean Highbottom's office to retrieve his mother's compact and torment the dean one more time, in this case by showing that he supports Dr. Gaul (whom Dean Highbottom detests because of her role in the Hunger Games).

First, it's important to recognize that while Coriolanus does seem to truly believe what he's saying here, it's also possible that he's parroting Dr. Gaul's words because he knows they're going to upset Dean Highbottom. Coriolanus cares about himself most of all and wants nothing more than to get ahead and punish his enemies, so it's very possible that he's just pulling out all the things that he knows will rattle his enemy.

Assuming Coriolanus is telling the truth and believes what he's saying, this shows that his experiences in District 12 have totally shifted Coriolanus's worldview. Earlier in the novel, as he was first getting to know Dr. Gaul, Coriolanus didn't believe her claim that people are naturally violent. But after seeing the miners fight back and seeing himself turn into a ruthless hunter willing to kill Lucy Gray to get ahead, Coriolanus realizes that Dr. Gaul is probably right: people *are* naturally violent. With this realization, he also

understands why it's so essential that the Hunger Games uses children and forces them to kill each other. Children represent the future—and forcing them to kill each other not only shows the districts that they have no bright future,

but warns them that *any* future will necessarily be violent and painful.



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

Though the cabbage soup Coriolanus is making disgusts him, he knows he must eat it—it won't do if his stomach rumbles during the reaping. Nobody can know that his family, once one of the most powerful in the Capitol, is now "as poor as district scum." As he cooks, Coriolanus worries about his shirt. His cousin Tigris found the old shirt in the back of Coriolanus's deceased father's wardrobe to fix up, but she and the shirt are gone now. She doesn't have anything to trade for something better except her body, the thought of which makes Coriolanus sick.

Coriolanus's grandmother begins her morning routine of playing the recording of the Capitol **Anthem**, "Gem of Panem," and singing along. She's been doing this daily for a decade—and she's a terrible singer. Coriolanus wonders whether more furniture would muffle the sound, but there's no way for his family to afford more furniture. Like most apartments in the Capitol, the Snows' was damaged during rebel attacks, and the family had to burn many books and wood carvings during the siege. Other families have begun to recover, but not the Snows. Coriolanus wonders how long he can keep up this charade.

Coriolanus wonders whether he can call in sick if Tigris doesn't return with the shirt. He digs through the fridge to find more ingredients for his soup and discovers a pot of terrible-looking shredded potatoes. Sighing, Coriolanus remembers how Avoxes, tongueless workers, used to collect trash—before people stopped throwing things away out of necessity. These days, waste—and prosperity—are starting to come back, though.

As Coriolanus's grandmother hits the final notes of the **anthem**, Coriolanus sighs. She keeps talking about how Coriolanus is going to be president one day, but she hasn't been mentally with it for years now. Coriolanus pokes at his soup and realizes he can't skip the reaping. His communications professor, Satyria Click, has arranged for him to get one of the 24 Hunger Games mentorships—and if he doesn't go, he might lose out on the mentorship and the cash prizes that will pay for his university education.

Introducing Coriolanus like this—worrying about his shirt, and insisting that no one can know how poor his family is—makes it clear that his chief concern is keeping up appearances. He also reveals how little he thinks of the poor people who live in the districts (describing them as "scum"). Though he insists there should be a lot of difference between the wealthy Snows and poor district folk, in reality, his description of his family situation suggests there isn't much difference these days.



While Coriolanus explains that his grandmother has been singing the anthem daily for a decade, he makes it seem like he barely notices the words of the song anymore. This is just an annoying morning routine; the meaning of the anthem isn't important to him. And as Coriolanus describes the attacks and sieges, he implies that the war hurt everyone in the Capitol. But the Snows just haven't been lucky, unlike some of their neighbors.



It seems to grate on Coriolanus that life used to be more comfortable—and arguably is getting better—but that his family is getting left behind these days. In his mind, since his family is still doing poorly, it's just making things more difficult that he now has to somehow pretend that his family is doing better, too.



To Coriolanus, his grandmother is living in an era long gone. This seems especially true as she sings the anthem, which talks about a Panem that sounds way more prosperous than it actually is in the present. In this current Panem, becoming president no longer seems attainable, though Coriolanus recognizes he has a chance to better himself by doing well as a mentor in the Hunger Games.



Tigris comes in through the front door, interrupting Coriolanus's thoughts. She excitedly offers him a garment bag. Inside is a classy, cream-colored shirt with black velvet cuffs and collar and gold and ebony cubes for buttons. Coriolanus happily says, "Snow lands on top," the saying that emotionally got them through the war. Tigris explains how she spent the entirety of the last 24 hours updating the shirt and then dumps the potatoes from the fridge (her source for ironing starch) into the soup.

Noticing the time, Coriolanus gulps down some soup and changes into his school uniform pants, almost too-small boots, and the dress shirt. He isn't very tall, but *most* of his peers aren't tall—growing up during wartime stunted everyone's growth. Then, Coriolanus parades into the living room to show Tigris how he looks. Tigris squeals and calls in their grandmother, whom they call Grandma'am. Grandma'am appears with a fresh red **rose** from her rooftop garden and offers it to Coriolanus to pin to his shirt. A thorn punctures his finger, causing him to bleed, but Tigris quickly trims up the rose and pins it to Coriolanus's shirt. Then, Coriolanus heads down the apartment building's stairs and out into the city.

The apartment building is on the Corso, which was once a grand avenue. Coriolanus remembers when it was grand, but though the streets are clear these days, there's still rubble from the bombings on the sidewalk. Sometimes, Coriolanus wonders if the debris on the street is there to remind people of how horrible the war was. It's essential that nobody forget the war, which is why the Hunger Games exists. "Forgetting could lead to complacency."

Coriolanus slows as he reaches Scholars Road so he's not too sweaty—but it's also July Fourth and scorching hot, so that's a bit of a lost cause. He approaches the Academy, the finest secondary school in the Capitol. Fortunately, it's tuition-free and provides lunch, supplies, and uniforms. Coriolanus tries to look dignified as he climbs the grand staircase. If he does well as a mentor to one of the Hunger Games tributes, he'll win a prize that should cover tuition at the University. Mentors are new this year. Pairing bright Academy seniors with tributes is supposed to pique interest and get people to watch the Games, which most people avoid—all the Games consist of is dumping tributes into an old amphitheater with weapons so they can murder each other.

Like Coriolanus, Tigris seems to believe that members of the Snow family must look the part of wealthy, upper-crust Capitol folk, even if the family's reality is something entirely different. It's a sign of how much Tigris cares that her cousin looks good that she used potatoes—a coveted source of food, it seems—for ironing starch rather than eating.



Again, Coriolanus makes it clear that while his family is perhaps unusual in that they haven't begun to recover after the war, in every other way, they experienced almost the exact same thing as everyone else. But still, Coriolanus cleans up well. The rose symbolizes how hard the Snow family is trying to look wealthy and prestigious. Coriolanus's bleeding finger hints that this may be an unsuccessful and dangerous endeavor, though, even if it looks convincingly beautiful for the time being.



It doesn't seem here like Coriolanus is sharing his own words or thoughts with readers; insisting that no one should forget because it would breed complacency sounds more like propaganda, not the thoughts of an 18-year-old. But it's a mark of how successful that propaganda is that Coriolanus presents these thoughts as his own.



The date, July fourth, stands out—it suggests that Panem has now taken the place of the United States, and now Independence Day is celebrated very differently. Noting that the Academy provides so much for its students suggests that Coriolanus might not be the only one who needs to win a prize to attend the University; it seems like many people probably need the help from the school. And Coriolanus's way of describing the Hunger Games suggests that viewers these days see it as something terrible and almost shameful.



Coriolanus heads for Heavensbee Hall and accepts a goblet of posca (watery wine), but only drinks enough to cover his cabbage breath. Knowing he has to be charming since he doesn't have any money, Coriolanus greets friends and teachers as he moves toward Satyria. Coriolanus is annoyed when the gym teacher, Agrippa Sickle, heads his way, followed by her aide Sejanus Plinth. Sejanus is dressed beautifully; his father was a District Two munitions manufacturer who bought the Plinth family's life in the Capitol, mostly by funding the Academy's reconstruction after the war. Coriolanus hates "climbers" like the Plinths, and he especially hates the Plinths since the Snow family was in the munitions business too. But their business was in District 13, which was nuked and is no longer habitable. Coriolanus has ignored Sejanus since Sejanus first appeared on the playground.

Professor Sickle greets Satyria and compliments Coriolanus's shirt, which she recognizes as being Coriolanus's father's. As the professors chat, Sejanus sighs to Coriolanus that his family is moving closer to the school—the Capitol is going to start taxing properties in the city, and many people won't be able to afford their homes. Privately, Coriolanus panics: his family won't be able to afford the apartment on Tigris's meager salary. But a bell rings, signaling that the reaping is about to begin.

Dean Casca Highbottom, the man who created the Hunger Games, will oversee the mentor program. As usual, he's clearly on a drug called morphling, so he slurs as he reads the assignments. As Dean Highbottom goes down the list, Coriolanus begins to worry: he hoped for a tribute from Districts One, Two, Four, or 11, as tributes from those districts tend to win. Coriolanus gets the final assignment: the girl from District 12.

CHAPTER 2

Getting the District 12 girl is a huge slap in the face. District 12 kids usually die first. Coriolanus wonders if this assignment has to do with the fact that he jokingly calls Dean Highbottom "High-as-a-Kite-Bottom"—or if this means the Snow family is no longer powerful. Trying to control his emotions, Coriolanus turns to Sejanus. But Sejanus looks miserable, even though he got the coveted District Two boy. Sejanus chokes out that he's from District Two. Clearly, he still sympathizes with the districts.

Coriolanus's classism shines through here. He believes he must preserve his own family's fortune and reputation as much as possible, and he doesn't feel that anyone else—like the Plinths—should be able to buy their way into the Capitol's high society circle. But hating the Plinths is also personal, as they're profiting in the same line of business as the Snow family once did. This also drives home how devastating the war was for everyone, including the wealthy. By ignoring Sejanus (rather than, say, bullying him), Coriolanus can show Sejanus he's unwelcome—while also making himself look good, since he's not overtly being mean to Sejanus.



Sejanus doesn't seem thrilled with the prospect of moving closer to the school, which suggests he might not be comfortable with being so wealthy. This would put him in opposition to Coriolanus, as he resents the same things Coriolanus wants. Coriolanus has bigger things to worry about, though, since his family isn't wealthy right now. He might find himself homeless if it's true the city is instituting new taxes.



The way Coriolanus talks about Dean Highbottom suggests that the dean is something of a joke amongst the students because of his drug use. Coriolanus, however, never shows any curiosity as to why a man in such a powerful position—the creator of the Hunger Games—has turned to drugs. This is something the novel will revisit later, but here, it reflects Coriolanus's self-centeredness.



Again, Coriolanus is self-centered, so it only makes sense to him that Dean Highbottom is somehow punishing him for the rude nickname. Either way, as far as Coriolanus is concerned, this means his life is over, since he won't make a good showing as a mentor. For Sejanus, though, getting the District Two boy seems just as terrible—but for him, it's because he still has an emotional connection to his home and feels for the people who live there.



A screen at the front of the auditorium shows the seal of Panem and the **anthem** blares. Coriolanus is the only one of his classmates who knows all the words. The president, President Ravinstill, recites from the Treaty of Treason, which established the Hunger Games as a war reparation. Then, the footage cuts to District 12. On a makeshift stage, the mayor, Mayor Lipp, pulls a slip from a burlap sack and announces that District 12's girl tribute is Lucy Gray Baird. The camera turns to focus on a curly-haired girl in a dress of rainbow ruffles. Lucy Gray gets up, heads to her left, and then seems to drop something green down another girl's collar—and the girl shrieks. Coriolanus is entranced, since his tribute clearly knows how to attract attention.

Mayor Lipp races for the girl, who's his daughter, Mayfair. As he reaches Mayfair, a green **snake** flies out of her dress. Lucy Gray, meanwhile, takes the stage and barely seems to notice. Coriolanus wonders if she's unstable as one of his classmates suggests that Lucy Gray is like a circus performer. When Mayor Lipp returns to the stage, he strikes Lucy Gray in the face. Peacekeepers haul him off the stage, and the camera focuses on Lucy Gray. She's wearing makeup—an odd choice, especially since makeup is barely available these days—and looks ready to cry. Sejanus mutters that someone probably rigged the reaping, and Lucy Gray's name probably wasn't on the slip.

Lucy Gray's demeanor suddenly changes when a child in the crowd starts to sing. She smiles, grabs the mic, and picks up the song. Lucy Gray is clearly a born performer, and the Peacekeepers let her sing and swish across the stage. At the end of her song, the Peacekeepers who took the mayor away return and take the mic from her. Then, Mayor Lipp draws the District 12 boy, Jessup Diggs. The camera cuts to the reappings in the next districts, but Coriolanus only pretends to pay attention. He knows Lucy Gray is a gift—if only he can get the audience to root for her.

Finally, the reaping is over and it's lunchtime. Coriolanus forces himself not to rush for the buffet; he's been hungry his entire life. During the war, the rebels starved the Capitol, and many Capitol citizens turned into monsters. Coriolanus once saw a neighbor, Nero Price, hack a leg off of a maid who had died in the street. Grandma'am had fed her two orphaned grandchildren by bartering with Pluribus Bell, who once owned a nightclub and turned to trading on the black market. From him, Grandma'am bought 30 bags of lima beans, which fed the family of three for years.

Over the last decade of listening to the Grandma'am sing the anthem every morning, Coriolanus has clearly learned the words—though again, he doesn't think critically about what they mean. Getting some history about the Hunger Games, specifically that it's a war reparation, shows that the districts lost the war—and that the Capitol feels it's essential that the districts never forget that fact. Lucy Gray stands out from others in District 12 because of her colorful dress and her showmanship. She might be more than Coriolanus expected her to be.



There's clearly something going on between Mayor Lipp, Mayfair, and Lucy Gray that readers and Coriolanus know nothing about. Though Coriolanus doesn't realize it (he's focusing too much on Lucy Gray's dress and showmanship), this makes it clear that Lucy Gray is a person, and that she had a life before her name was called in the reaping. If Sejanus is right about the reaping being rigged, this would suggest that corruption is running rampant in District 12, if not all of Panem.



Lucy Gray demonstrates that if she can create enough of a spectacle with a song, she can cover up the fact that she just put a snake down another girl's dress. Panem on the whole seems to realize the same thing: if it can turn the Hunger Games into a spectacle, people won't notice as much that it's forcing kids to fight to the death. Coriolanus is aligned with the Capitol, so he picks up on how important it is to create a spectacle.



Again, the fact that Coriolanus has spent his entire life hungry shows that the war affected everyone, not just the working classes in Panem. Rather, it turned everyone into either a monster (as it did Nero Price) or a hero (as with Grandma'am, bartering for the lima beans). But the trick, Coriolanus suggests, is to look like the war didn't affect him. He can't allow his scars to show, and he should never act like he has less than he needs.



Coriolanus fills his plate and then goes to get dessert. They're serving apple pie today, a rarity. But as Coriolanus studies the slices, Dean Highbottom thrusts an enormous piece at him and then asks what Coriolanus plans to do after graduation, especially if Coriolanus doesn't win a prize. Dean Highbottom scoffs when Coriolanus says his family would pay the tuition and insists he knows that the Snows are broke. Coriolanus wanders back to his table, regretting ever giving Dean Highbottom a nickname. Coriolanus knows he has to fix things with the dean or he won't be able to afford school. If he can't go to school, there aren't any other options—he'll be a nobody.

Coriolanus is the sort of person who feels most comfortable with a plan—he can execute a plan, but being without one makes him anxious. Dean Highbottom essentially threatens to destroy Coriolanus's plans here by insinuating that if he has his way, Coriolanus won't get a prize and won't be able to attend school. This, of course, raises the question of why Dean Highbottom has it out for Coriolanus. But it also shows how limited Coriolanus's idea of success is—he has to go to school, or he'll be a failure. There's no other alternative.



CHAPTER 3

Coriolanus is the only person on the train platform; he's been waiting for hours for Lucy Gray Baird to arrive. He has a **rose** to offer her, which was Tigris's idea. As he waits, Coriolanus wonders how his family will deal with the tax and remembers his conversation with Tigris last night. The cousins decided Coriolanus must win Lucy Gray over by making her feel valuable, hence the rose. Coriolanus sweats in the sun and decides that Lucy Gray is intimidating—she dropped a **snake** down a girl's dress. She might even try to kill him. But Coriolanus has to try to get her to cooperate. Yesterday, he learned that each mentor-tribute team will have a five-minute interview slot. Lucy Gray has to stand out.

The way that Coriolanus and Tigris frame Coriolanus's strategy (making Lucy Gray feel valuable) betrays that they don't really see her as valuable. Making her feel that way is going to help them, but they don't actually regard Lucy Gray as anything other than a curiosity and as Coriolanus's ticket to success. Because of what Lucy Gray did with the snake during the reaping, Coriolanus doesn't see her as trustworthy. This establishes snakes as a symbol of distrust and dysfunctionality in Panem.



After another hour, the train finally appears in the tunnel. The sound of its horn stirs up memories in Coriolanus: his father, Crassus Snow, was a military commander and required his family to meet him at the train station—until rebels killed him. Coriolanus was always terrified of his father, and he still feels afraid standing on the train platform. Finally, the train pulls up and stops. The cars aren't passenger cars—they're cargo cars. To Coriolanus's surprise, there are people inside. After about a half-hour, Peacekeepers saunter over, open the first car's door, and shout for everyone inside to move. Barefoot children, clad in rags and burlap, appear in the door, hacking and coughing. The Peacekeepers roughly yank them down.

In many ways, Coriolanus is still living in the past—and he acts and speaks as though he was genuinely traumatized by what he experienced during the war. This shows again that the war hurt everyone in Panem, even one of the wealthiest families in the country. Back in the present, though, Coriolanus is confronted with the fact that Panem clearly doesn't see the tributes as children. Transporting them in cargo cars denies them their humanity. And it's clear the kids are sick—another indictment of how Panem treats its less fortunate citizens.



Coriolanus is used to seeing the tributes on TV, but the stench of the dirty livestock cars is unexpected. He's repulsed. The Peacekeeper moves to the second car and first Jessup, then Lucy Gray Baird, climb out. As the Peacekeepers shout at the other tributes in the car, Coriolanus approaches Lucy Gray, welcomes her to the Capitol, and offers her the **rose**. She takes a petal and puts it in her mouth, explaining that as a kid, she bathed in rose petals and buttermilk. Coriolanus introduces himself as her mentor and admits he probably shouldn't be on the platform. Lucy Gray calls him a "rebel," and Coriolanus doesn't know what to think—this is an insult in the Capitol, but she seems to mean it as a compliment.

Seeing the tributes in person like this is a shocking experience for Coriolanus. He has to confront how poorly his country treats the tributes, who seem poor, underfed, and not at all in control of what's happening to them. When Lucy Gray offers that she bathed in rose petals as a child, it suggests that even if she's not a wealthy Capitol girl, she, like Coriolanus, comes from some degree of wealth and prestige. She might not be so different from Coriolanus in this regard, even if she's a tribute now.



Coriolanus says his job is to take care of Lucy Gray as the Peacekeepers toss two small children onto the platform, breaking the girl's tooth. Lucy Gray saunters away, wishing Coriolanus luck. Sensing that he's losing his chance, Coriolanus asks the Peacekeeper if he can accompany the tributes to their lodgings. The drunk Peacekeeper assents. Seeing Lucy Gray watching him, Coriolanus takes a deep breath and climbs into the truck, which is a cage on wheels. As the truck moves off, Coriolanus realizes he's made a mistake: the tributes are grubby and smelly, and they seem ready to attack.

The Peacekeepers clearly don't care about the tributes, given the way they throw the kids around with no regard for their safety or emotional wellbeing. But the Peacekeeper doesn't seem to care about taking care of Coriolanus, either, since Coriolanus perceives that the tributes mean to do him harm. Coriolanus, though, shows how little he thinks of the tributes when he describes them as "grubby" and "smelly" as though it's the kids' fault; it doesn't seem like the tributes have had the option to be anything but smelly after traveling in a livestock car.



The boy from District 11 taunts Coriolanus and tries to strangle him, but Coriolanus knees the boy in the crotch. The boy then asks the other tributes to help him kill Coriolanus—but Lucy Gray asks them not to, since Coriolanus is her mentor. Coriolanus explains that each tribute will get a mentor as the truck pulls up to a dead end. He's not sure where they are—but then, the truck backs into a dimly lit building. The cage tips, dropping Coriolanus and the tributes 20 feet down into what turns out to be the monkey house at the zoo. Capitol children on the other side of the bars gawk at Coriolanus and the tributes.

Stepping into the cage with the tributes was a way for Coriolanus to show the tributes he's like them and he empathizes, but in reality, the kids don't see Coriolanus as someone who can empathize with them. He's a Capitol kid, with way more privilege than these kids have ever had. And winding up in the zoo with the tributes shows Coriolanus in no uncertain terms how the Capitol thinks of the tributes. To the Capitol, tributes are animals to be gawked at, not people to care for.



CHAPTER 4

Coriolanus has never felt so exposed—and he's never empathized more with the trapped zoo animals. He feels even worse when he notices the Capitol News cameras; their slogan is "If you didn't see it here, it didn't happen." Knowing it'll look worse if he panics, Coriolanus tries to look bored. But he sweats as the tributes circle and taunt him. Lucy Gray rescues him when she says, "Own it." Casually, Coriolanus puts his **rose** behind her ear and offers her his hand so he can introduce her to people. He leads her toward the bars, to a gaggle of children, and asks if they'd like to meet her. Lucy Gray makes her way along the fence, shaking several children's hands and complimenting them. The crowd seems to love her.

Capitol News's slogan introduces an important idea: that through its broadcast, it shows people what's real and what's truthful. Anything that doesn't appear on TV, essentially, didn't happen or isn't true—so going forward, it's important to pay attention to what ends up on TV and what doesn't. In this situation, though, Coriolanus and Lucy Gray figure out how to work with this idea by turning this mishap into a performance. The truth, of course, is that Coriolanus is terrified and shouldn't be here. But with careful acting, he can project the opposite and start to rehab the Snows' image.



Lucy Gray seems surprised when she straightens up and finds herself face to face with a camera. The accompanying reporter introduces himself as Lepidus Malmsey. As Lepidus asks questions, Lucy Gray explains that she's not really District 12; she's a Covey, a musician, and the Covey used to travel everywhere. Peacekeepers just forced them to stay in District 12. Lucy Gray says the dress was her mother's—but her mother is dead. Then, she draws Lepidus's attention to Coriolanus. Coriolanus says he takes his job of introducing his tribute to the Capitol seriously, though his teachers didn't give him permission to be here.

Though Lucy Gray doesn't say so outright, she makes it clear that Peacekeepers (who, as soldiers for the Capitol, stand in for the Capitol here) are to blame for the fact that she's technically from District 12 at all. The Capitol, she suggests, has created division where there didn't used to be any. It's possible to see the mentor program as a halfhearted attempt to remedy this, as it will seem, at least, like the mentors will get to know their tributes and discover that they're not so different.



Just then, doors open in the back of the monkey house and Peacekeepers head straight for Coriolanus. Coriolanus tells the camera to come visit Lucy Gray Baird at the zoo, kisses her hand, and then follows the Peacekeepers out. As soon as the doors close behind them, a Peacekeeper snarls that Coriolanus wasn't supposed to be there. The Peacekeepers transport Coriolanus across town to the Academy. On the various TVs on the streets, Coriolanus sees snatches of Lucy Gray—and he knows they did well. He's feeling good by the time they reach the Academy and the Peacekeepers escort him to the biology lab. On the door is the list of mentors and their tributes, which makes Coriolanus feel like an afterthought.

A guard ushers Coriolanus in. Dean Highbottom is in the lab with a small old woman. The old woman is poking a stick at a caged rabbit, which has been modified and now has the jaw strength of a pit bull. This is Dr. Volumnia Gaul, the Head Gamemaker. She's frightened Coriolanus for years as she habitually tortures animals in front of students. Laughing, Dr. Gaul recites a children's rhyme of sorts about Coriolanus and his tribute falling in a zoo cage. She encourages Coriolanus to finish the rhyme—and when he does, she says he could be a Gamemaker one day. This seems like a boring, no-skills job, but Coriolanus modestly treats this as a compliment.

Dr. Gaul asks why Coriolanus got in the cage. Coriolanus says it's all part of getting people to watch the Games. Dean Highbottom seems skeptical that Coriolanus truly understands why they have to keep the Games alive. At the Dean's prodding, Coriolanus says they have to keep the memory of the war alive because people love children. But remembering how he almost starved during the war, Coriolanus amends this and says people *sometimes* love children. Dean Highbottom tells Dr. Gaul this is a "failed experiment," but Dr. Gaul insists it's only a failure if no one watches the Games. She excuses herself to visit her "mutts"; her reptiles are doing well. Before Coriolanus can follow her, Dean Highbottom says Coriolanus will receive a demerit for being reckless—three demerits, and he'll be expelled. Dean Highbottom drops morphling on his tongue.

The Peacekeepers clearly aren't a monolith; the drunk Peacekeeper who let Coriolanus accompany the tributes in the truck cage wasn't doing what he was supposed to do, per this Peacekeeper. This is a reminder that groups in general aren't monoliths and are, instead, made up of different people with different perspectives and motives. As Coriolanus sees himself on TV, he confirms that he has a knack for manipulating situations to suit him.



Dr. Gaul is a frightening figure: she speaks in warped nursery rhymes, which make her seem less frightening. But she also tortures animals and is the Head Gamemaker, which means that she's the one responsible for what happens during the Hunger Games. Coriolanus understandably wants to tread carefully around her, as she seems more than capable of lashing out at him for any reason or no reason.



Interestingly, Highbottom seems to be advocating against the Games, which makes little sense at this point. Saying they (or, perhaps, the mentorship program) are a "failed experiment" suggests that they're already not doing what Highbottom, the Games' architect, intended them to do. This, of course, raises the question of what he intended the Games to do. As Coriolanus talks about the Games, he reveals what Capitol children have been told to think and believe about them. And he's starting to see that while in theory, Panem loves its children, in reality, the country has done little to protect children—Capitol or district.



CHAPTER 5

Coriolanus is shocked; his academic record is spotless. Dean Highbottom tells him to go, and Coriolanus does. Later that evening, Coriolanus heads for the zoo. He happily remembers visiting the zoo as a child, but now, most of the cages are empty—many animals were eaten during the war. All that's left are rats and raccoons. As Coriolanus approaches the monkey cage, he finds Sejanus trying to coax tributes to take a proffered sandwich. Coriolanus approaches and Sejanus says the tributes unsurprisingly don't trust him. A little girl steps up and reminds Sejanus that he shouldn't feed the animals. Sejanus argues that the tributes are kids, like them, but the little girl says the tributes are district and belong in a cage.

Ignoring the girl, Sejanus asks Coriolanus for help. Coriolanus doesn't want to get in trouble again, and he doesn't want Sejanus to get more attention than him. But, deciding he's safe and Dr. Gaul is on his side, Coriolanus takes sandwiches and plums, heads to a flat rock, and spreads out his handkerchief like he's having a picnic. Lucy Gray sits down, accepts a sandwich, and encourages Coriolanus to join her. Then, Lucy Gray tells Jessup to accept a sandwich. After Jessup takes his, the other tributes rush Sejanus for theirs—all except Marcus, the District Two boy.

The news cameras approach Coriolanus and Lucy Gray. Lepidus asks about Sejanus and asks why Sejanus is bringing sandwiches; doesn't the Capitol feed the tributes? Lucy Gray says she hasn't eaten since before the reaping, and then she asks viewers to bring any food to share to the tributes. Lepidus seems uncomfortable as he scurries away.

Coriolanus suggests that Lucy Gray sing again, but she asks what Coriolanus gets out of mentoring her. Coriolanus is embarrassed; this is the first time he's acknowledged that Lucy Gray is going to die. He's always thought of her as more of a fighting dog than a person, even though Lucy Gray is a person. Sighing, Coriolanus says Lucy Gray doesn't have to sing, but a performance might get her more food. He admits he doesn't have extra food at home. They smile over having eaten some terrible things to get by during the war, and then Coriolanus turns to leave. But he stops when Lucy Gray starts to sing a song about a train. In it, she asks a lover to build her a mansion and write her a letter.

The zoo might not have many animals now to amuse the Capitol's children, but the girl who reprimands Sejanus shows that Capitol kids have been raised to think of the tributes as animals. This girl clearly doesn't see the tributes as people who don't belong in a cage, being gawked at. Sejanus's attempt to feed the tributes suggests not just that he cares, but that the Capitol isn't feeding the tributes. So even as the Capitol brings the kids here to entertain them, it continues to neglect and starve them.



Notice that once again, Coriolanus's real motive here is to attract more positive attention than Sejanus. For him, this isn't about making sure fellow human beings get the food they need to survive—it's about helping himself. So acknowledging the tributes' humanity is convenient for him, not something he does all the time. This establishes Coriolanus as selfish and superior.



Keep in mind that Lepidus works for the state-sanctioned television network; he seems to fear that it won't go over well if he facilitates people finding out that the Capitol is mistreating the tributes so badly. He, like Coriolanus, has to look out for himself. Doing the right thing is secondary to bettering his position.



It seems like a positive step that Coriolanus realizes here that he hasn't thought of Lucy Gray as truly human up until this point, and that this isn't how he should be thinking about her. But he's also torn: Lucy Gray is a person, but Coriolanus is invested in her only because he wants her to win the Hunger Games. He acknowledges her humanity a bit more as they share how hungry they were during the war. And Lucy Gray then thanks Coriolanus with what he wanted: a song.



Coriolanus is transfixed; the song is a lot like one Coriolanus's mother used to sing to him. He keeps a picture of his mother on his nightstand and still sniffs his mother's **compact**, which contains **rose**-scented powder. She died in childbirth a few months into the war; Coriolanus's father died months later. Coriolanus wonders if Lucy Gray lost her mother to rebels, too, and thinks about how Lucy Gray separates herself from District 12 by saying she's Covey.

Through her singing, Lucy Gray starts to connect Coriolanus with happy memories of his mother. The aside that he still sniffs the powder in her compact speaks to how much he still misses his mother. And the compact—a frivolous thing of beauty—suggests that Coriolanus is interested in beautiful things, not just power.



Sejanus interrupts Coriolanus's thoughts by thanking him. He reveals that he can't help imagining himself as a tribute as bales of hay roll down a chute into the monkey house. Sejanus says if he was in District Two still, he'd be in the reaping. Then, he says his tribute, Marcus, was a classmate and hates him. Sejanus laments that Marcus would rather starve than take food from him. Coriolanus insists Marcus will still win—so Sejanus offers to trade tributes. Coriolanus knows this is how he could win. But, he realizes, winning with Marcus wouldn't take brains or skill. Winning with Lucy Gray would be historic, and she's already won the audience over. Coriolanus also realizes that Lucy Gray is one thing he has that Sejanus wants. He refuses Sejanus's offer.

Sejanus clearly doesn't care about winning. Doing the right thing is far more important to him, and Coriolanus realizes this. But Coriolanus doesn't admire this in Sejanus, necessarily. Rather, he sees Sejanus as a person who will be easy to manipulate and use to make himself look better. So Coriolanus is still interested in winning. But now, he realizes that his win will be even sweeter if he not only wins with a long-shot tribute, but also gets to lord his power over someone like Sejanus, whom Coriolanus doesn't like.



CHAPTER 6

Coriolanus allows himself to enjoy Sejanus's disappointment for a moment, but then reminds Sejanus to think of his father or the Academy's rules. Sejanus blurts that the Hunger Games are driving him crazy; it's wrong to put kids in an arena so they can kill each other. They should protect children, but they're not. Coriolanus agrees it's "not pretty," but Sejanus says it's evil and he has to get out of it. Coriolanus is disturbed, but Sejanus says he won't give Marcus to anyone else. Both boys head home.

It seems to have never occurred to Coriolanus to voice (or even think) what Sejanus has to say about the Hunger Games. For Coriolanus, the Hunger Games are good and just—and it's silly to question the morality of the Games. They're war reparations, so to Coriolanus (who's bought into the idea that Panem must punish the districts for their role in the war) the Games are necessary.



Grandma'am hates that Coriolanus had a picnic with Lucy Gray—it suggests that Coriolanus and Lucy Gray are equals, and to Grandma'am, there are no similarities between Capitol people and "districts." She notes that Crassus Snow said that "those people only dr[i]nk water because it d[oesn't] rain blood," and she insists Lucy Gray is manipulative. Coriolanus doesn't argue and heads for bed. He fingers his mother's powder **compact** and sniffs the **rose** smell, thinking maybe it's best he has his father's eyes.

Grandma'am is very interested in symbolism, particularly the symbolism of people's actions. She knows very well that picnicking with Lucy Gray makes it seem like Coriolanus believes they're both human, something that she believes isn't true. And notice how she uses "districts" like a slur here to refer to the people who live there. This further dehumanizes them.



Coriolanus wakes in the morning to find Tigris baking bread pudding; there's enough to take some to Lucy Gray. The cousins discuss that the tributes look so young, and that it's disturbing to see them in a cage. Coriolanus reminds Tigris that he has to mentor Lucy Gray so he can help the family and then leaves for the Academy. There, his classmates—except for Livia Cardew—congratulate him for feeding tributes last night. After homeroom, Satyria warns Coriolanus to be careful. The “brats” could've killed him, and he has to be good after getting a demerit. Coriolanus shares that Sejanus offered to trade tributes and suggests he could blackmail Strabo Plinth with that information, which makes Satyria laugh.

The history professor, Professor Demigloss, leads the mentors in a brainstorming session to figure out how to get people to watch the Hunger Games. Sejanus quips that watching isn't the right thing to do, but Coriolanus's friend Festus Creed suggests they punish people for *not* watching. Clemensia notes that the problem is that people avoid watching because the Games are “sickening,” which Sejanus agrees with. He adds that only “twisted” people would make kids kill each other, and people want to believe that human beings are better than that. Coriolanus notes that they all watched worse during the war, but Arachne Crane argues that they cared about that—but nobody cares about the tributes. Festus and Coriolanus suggest people would care if they could bet on the tributes.

After lunch, the mentors have an initial meeting with their tributes to fill out a questionnaire. Coriolanus and his classmates walk onto a balcony in Heavensbee Hall. Below, there are 24 tables with folding chairs, labeled with a district and the sex of the tribute. Peacekeepers usher the tributes in and shackle them to concrete weights. Some of the tributes eye their mentors high above them until Professor Sickle sends the mentors down to their tributes. Coriolanus doesn't like seeing Lucy Gray in chains, though she smiles at him. He tries to get a Peacekeeper to unlock her, but the man won't.

Coriolanus and Lucy Gray discuss her bruise and the issue of getting food. He offers her Tigris's bread pudding, which almost makes Lucy Gray cry. Then, Coriolanus starts to go through the questionnaire with her. Lucy Gray explains that her family is all dead; all she has is the Covey. She says she isn't married—but if Coriolanus is asking, they could make it work. Coriolanus blushes and changes the subject. Lucy Gray explains she's part of a band; fortunately, the Covey got to keep their instruments when they were rounded up. She notes that Sejanus is having trouble; Coriolanus looks over to see Marcus ignoring both Sejanus and the roast beef meal on the table. Other tributes are crying.

Even if Coriolanus isn't willing or able to say that the Hunger Games are wrong, he can't ignore that the Games are disturbing and, to put it mildly, aren't the best way to do war reparations. But this is as far as Coriolanus can go, since he does support the Capitol's mission. Again, it's telling how Satyria speaks about the tributes; calling them “brats” diminishes them and makes them seem both less human and less civilized. And when she laughs at Coriolanus's suggestion to blackmail Strabo Plinth, it further suggests that blackmail and corruption are normal, expected, and even funny in Panem.



Notably, the only person willing to suggest openly that the Games are wrong (Sejanus) is both very wealthy and an outsider (recall that Sejanus is from District Two). His wealth means that he's less likely to be punished for saying these things, while being from District Two means the tributes are more human to him than they are to the other Capitol kids. This discussion reveals that to make the Games more interesting to viewers, the mentors or Gamemakers will have to come up with how to get people to care. As Sejanus has made clear, the tributes are people—but nobody in the Capitol sees them as human.



The symbolism here is telling: while the tributes are on the floor, shackled to concrete weights, the mentors—the cream of the crop at the Academy—are high above them, looking down. This illuminates the power imbalance between the mentors and tributes: the mentors have all the power, while the tributes have no choice but to go along with whatever their mentors say.



As Lucy Gray tells Coriolanus about her family, it becomes clear that both she and Coriolanus experienced a great deal of loss as a result of the war. They're both orphans, and they've both had to turn elsewhere (to music and to education, respectively) to try to get by. Lucy Gray's willingness to speak to Coriolanus stands out compared to the other tributes. This does seem like a personality trait; Lucy Gray is just willing to talk. But this also speaks to the way Coriolanus makes her feel like a person who matters.



With five minutes to go, Coriolanus tells Lucy Gray that they'll have a TV appearance later and she should sing. Lucy Gray isn't sure there's a point, but Coriolanus says people love her singing. He shares that her valley song reminded him of his mother, and he admits that both his parents are dead. They discuss their deceased parents and then, Coriolanus pulls the conversation back to the interview. Lucy Gray refuses to sing, so Coriolanus lets himself just talk to Lucy Gray for the rest of their time. When the timer goes off, Lucy Gray gives Coriolanus back the handkerchief he gave her yesterday.

The mentors head for the biology lab. Clemensia laments that her tribute wouldn't tell her anything but his name, Reaper. Arachne says her tribute only spoke about butchering and suggests she could make up a more exciting backstory for her. Dr. Gaul is in the biology lab with her mutation rabbit, along with Dean Highbottom. Dr. Gaul offers some rhymes, gathers the questionnaires, and flips through them. She asks the other mentors why they couldn't fill theirs out like Coriolanus did. Coriolanus notes that "his girl" is a talker, but no one can see the point in speaking up. Sejanus says there is no point for the tributes.

At Dr. Gaul's prodding, Sejanus says he fed the tributes because he doesn't think they should torture them. He insists the tributes aren't really rebels, since they were young kids when the war ended. In theory, Sejanus says, they're citizens of Panem, just like the people in the Capitol. He doesn't see how the government is doing its job of protecting all the people if the Hunger Games exists. Dr. Gaul observes that Sejanus doesn't support the Games, so Sejanus suggests she find a new mentor. She refuses, saying that the Games need empathy—they need everyone to be just as invested in the tributes as Sejanus is. She suggests they allow people to send food to tributes in the arena, and Festus brings up the idea of betting. Dr. Gaul tells the students to write her a proposal—if they have good ideas, she might use them.

Coriolanus sighs—he hates group projects. He, Arachne, and Clemensia decide to meet up later, after they visit their tributes at the zoo. Coriolanus has dinner at home and then takes a cup of soup to the zoo for Lucy Gray. His twin classmates Didi and Pollo Ring let Coriolanus have his flat rock. Lucy Gray joins Coriolanus immediately and says the tributes have gotten some food, but not much. People seem afraid to get close. Coriolanus waves over a young boy with a potato and helps the boy give it to Lucy Gray. Other kids give her vegetables, and Pluribus Bell gives her a can of milk. Other tributes snag spots by the bars and children run up to give them food. Some tributes perform by doing flips or juggling.

Coriolanus doesn't seem to have many (or any) close friends, aside from Tigris. So it seems like a big thing here when he's willing to tell Lucy Gray about being orphaned. This allows them to connect on more equal footing. But there's still a power imbalance: Coriolanus is still trying to pressure Lucy Gray to sing, something that, to his credit, will probably help her get food. But it also reads as selfish and as though he's not truly listening to what she wants.



Coriolanus has his faults, but unlike his classmates, he takes a genuine interest in Lucy Gray, which incentivizes her to trust him and tell him things. Arachne and Clemensia, on the other hand, treat their tributes with scorn and as though the tributes are horrifying curiosities, not real people. And Sejanus is right: for the tributes, there's little incentive to speaking up. All but one of the tributes are going to die in the Hunger Games anyway—and why would they want to spend their last days speaking to someone who, like Arachne, thinks their lives are ridiculous and boring?



Here, Sejanus essentially insists that Panem isn't doing its job as a government by putting on the Hunger Games. The government, Sejanus suggests, should protect all citizens, even those who live in the districts—but instead, Panem is going out of its way to torture these children. But then, notice how Dr. Gaul sidesteps having to engage Sejanus on this issue. She suggests that his protest is making the Games more interesting and proposes letting spectators send tributes food. This, notably, means that the onus to feed the tributes shifts to viewers rather than Panem, further absolving Panem of any responsibility to care for the tributes.



Even though the little girl yesterday told Sejanus that the tributes aren't people, today the kids at the zoo seem open to considering that the girl was wrong. They want to help the tributes and make sure they get fed—but this takes courage, since they've been told the tributes aren't people. But encouraging them to come close and feed the tributes shows the kids that the tributes aren't so different after all. And the fact that it's mostly children who are willing to do this also suggests that children are more easily able to change their thinking and learn than adults are.



Mentors show up with food as Coriolanus and Lucy Gray watch. The two discuss Sejanus and Marcus, and wish they'd met under different circumstances. The atmosphere becomes festive as the District Six tributes dance. Coriolanus thinks this is fantastic and tells Lucy Gray they need to work on her popularity, since that's how she'll be fed in the arena. He watches Arachne slice cheese and make a sandwich for her District 10 tribute. But Arachne teases the girl, offering and withdrawing the sandwich. Finally, the tribute snatches Arachne's knife and slits Arachne's throat.

CHAPTER 7

Blood pours out of Arachne's neck. Coriolanus wants to recoil like everyone else, but at Lucy Gray's urging, he runs for Arachne and calls for a medic. The District 10 girl grabs the sandwich as Peacekeepers shoot her multiple times. The crowd panics and runs, trampling some people. Arachne dies in Coriolanus's arms and Coriolanus experiences flashbacks to the rebel invasion when he was a child. Lucy Gray vomits as medics take Arachne away. Coriolanus notices Sejanus kneeling by the dead tribute, sprinkling something over her body. Peacekeepers usher Festus, Coriolanus, and Sejanus out of the zoo. Coriolanus can't believe it—Arachne was like family to him. Clemensia joins the group and they all walk home.

After walking Clemensia home, Coriolanus remembers Dr. Gaul's assignment. Clemensia figures Dr. Gaul won't expect them to turn anything in—and Clemensia couldn't work on anything now, anyway. Coriolanus decides to write a proposal, just in case. He gets home, comforts Grandma'am—who's distraught about Arachne—and then showers, trying to get the sound of Arachne's burbling blood out of his head. To clear his mind, he works on the proposal. He proposes that sponsors can purchase food, which will be delivered to tributes by drone. He suggests a panel to vet the food and a panel for betting. Proceeds will make the games almost free for Panem to put on.

When Coriolanus finishes the proposal, he walks it to the Citadel, where he figures Dr. Gaul has her office. Peacekeepers promise to get it to her desk. As Coriolanus walks home, screens on the streets start to air footage of Arachne's death. Fortunately, Coriolanus looks heroic in the footage; his fear isn't obvious. After a brief breakfast at home, Coriolanus returns to the Academy. His classmates treat him as the "chief mourner" for Arachne, and he lets people think he and Arachne were better friends than they were. At the all-school assembly, Satyria, rather than Dean Highbottom, speaks about Arachne. Other teachers and staff praise Arachne and announce that Arachne's funeral will be tomorrow. They release the students; classes will convene after lunch.

Though the performances help promote the Hunger Games more broadly, Coriolanus also realizes it creates more competition for Lucy Gray. Now she has to compete against dancers and jugglers, rather than against silent, underfed children. And notice that as Coriolanus watches Arachne and her tribute, he doesn't mention the tribute's name. This reflects how subhuman the tribute is to Coriolanus—she's not human enough to deserve a name.



Arachne's death makes it clear that the tributes are hungry to the point of being desperate. It also becomes clearer just how traumatizing the war was for Coriolanus—any violence, any strife causes him to experience flashbacks that make it difficult to perform tasks. But notice that Coriolanus, Clemensia, and Festus are upset only about Arachne, not about how her tribute was also brutally murdered. This reflects how little they think of the tributes. They think only of themselves—the tributes are tools, not people, in their eyes.



Planning the programs to facilitate food deliveries and betting is, for Coriolanus, a way to deal with his grief and the trauma of seeing Arachne die. And while plenty of people turn to their work to deal with grief, what's interesting here is that Coriolanus essentially proposes new ways to dehumanize the tributes to avoid having to deal with his emotions. Betting turns the tributes into little better than fighting animals, while the food delivery system again puts the responsibility to feed the tributes on viewers, not Panem.



It's interesting that Coriolanus is most concerned with how he looks in the footage of Arachne's death. This shows how much he prioritizes appearances over everything else—it's more important that he look good than it is to acknowledge how terrible Arachne's death is. Seeing this footage on the streets also shows how fully Panem relies on its state-sanctioned television station to broadcast a specific message. Making sure this sort of thing shows everywhere in the country is part of how they disseminate propaganda—and make sure everyone believes the same thing.



The mentors' first class is a meeting with Professor Demigloss. The professor starts by passing out an updated sheet listing the mentors and their tributes—now, the tributes' names are listed, rather than just their genders. Coriolanus crosses the District 10 girl off the list, but he can't bring himself to cross off Arachne's name. Ten minutes into class, Coriolanus and Clemensia are summoned to the Citadel, presumably to meet with Dr. Gaul. Clemensia is upset Coriolanus put the proposal together without her, just after Arachne died. But Coriolanus gives her an overview of his proposal and says he didn't put anyone's name on it, since it's a class project. He promises to cover for Clemensia if Dr. Gaul asks too many questions.

As they walk, Coriolanus and Clemensia wonder whether the city will even hold the Hunger Games. They finally reach the Citadel, go through security, and head 25 floors underground to the laboratory. Coriolanus cautiously leads Clemensia through the cages of horrifying creatures until a man leads them to Dr. Gaul, who's next to a tank containing hundreds of neon **snakes**. Clemensia and Coriolanus lie that the whole class talked about the proposal and then wrote it up; Clemensia said she printed it. Dr. Gaul says she "just wanted to make sure [they]'d both had [their] hands on it." Neither of them brought another copy, so Clemensia asks to discuss using the copy Coriolanus left for Dr. Gaul.

Dr. Gaul laughs that her assistant used the proposal as bedding in the **snakes'** cage and asks Coriolanus and Clemensia to fetch the papers. This feels like a test, but Coriolanus reaches his hand in and gently slides one paper out from under the snakes. As Clemensia reaches in for the second sheet, Dr. Gaul says the snakes can't see or hear well, but their sense of smell is fantastic—and these snakes will ignore people who smell familiar and attack those who don't. Suddenly, six of the snakes bite Clemensia.

CHAPTER 8

Clemensia shrieks and shakes the **snakes** off her hand. Her hand oozes technicolor pus. Lab techs rush in, inject Clemensia with black fluid, and then whisk her away on a stretcher. When Coriolanus starts to follow, Dr. Gaul tells him to stay. She says it's hard to say whether Clemensia will survive and says he obviously wrote the proposal alone. Dr. Gaul threatens to "cut him off" if Coriolanus lies again, and then she compliments his proposal. Too afraid to sound excited, Coriolanus just agrees. Laughing, Dr. Gaul sends him away. As he hurries through the lab, he finds cages filled with Avoxes with grafted animal parts. Finally, a woman in pink glasses ushers Coriolanus to the elevators.

Again, Coriolanus shows where his priorities are when he crosses "the District 10 girl" off, but won't cross off Arachne. And not listing the girl's name also shows how little he thinks of her; to him, she's just a murderous tribute. Coriolanus is only willing to humanize those who are wealthy and live in the Capitol, like him. As Coriolanus and Clemensia chat about the proposal, it also becomes clear that Coriolanus has no issue with lying to protect people he loves and cares about. While this suggests he's not particularly honest, it also shows how loyal he is to his friends and classmates (as opposed to showing loyalty to Panem by being honest with Dr. Gaul).



Coriolanus and Clemensia might not think highly of the tributes' lives, but they do imply that Arachne's death is a steep cost—and that, perhaps, if Panem values its Capitol citizens' lives, it shouldn't hold the Hunger Games. Keep in mind that they've been raised to value their own lives over those of the tributes, so this view makes sense and is, in this context, surprisingly humane. They don't want anyone they care about to die.



Especially on the heels of Coriolanus and Clemensia suggesting that the Games shouldn't happen for the mentors' safety, it's a huge shock when Dr. Gaul seems to create this situation where the snakes bite Clemensia. Clearly, Dr. Gaul doesn't value her students' lives or safety if she's going to put Clemensia in danger like this.



Dr. Gaul shows shockingly little remorse for what happened to Clemensia, which speaks to how little she thinks of humanity in general—whether those people are Capitol folk or tributes. She looks even more heartless when Coriolanus notices the modified Avoxes. But interestingly, Coriolanus implies that he is excited to get a compliment from Dr. Gaul; he's just too afraid to show it. This shows that he, on some level, admires her. And she might become a role model for him, which starts to show how he might start down the path to evil.



Coriolanus makes it out of the Citadel and around the corner before he has to sit on the curb. What happened to Arachne and now Clemensia feels like the Hunger Games—but Capitol kids aren't supposed to get hurt. He wants to tell Dr. Gaul the government should protect *all* of them, especially a Snow, but he's afraid of her. Coriolanus wonders if it'll be his fault if Clemensia dies. Deciding she's probably at the hospital, he runs for the nearest one. He hears Clemensia screaming the moment he gets inside. Coriolanus realizes he looks terrible when the nurse gives him packets of nutritional crackers and a sugary drink. The drink helps, but the doctor won't let Coriolanus see Clemensia. She'll be hospitalized for a while. As Clemensia's parents arrive, Coriolanus leaves. He can't go home or to school after having possibly killed Clemensia.

The only person Coriolanus wants to talk to is Lucy Gray; she's clever and won't repeat anything. Peacekeepers at the zoo gates contact Dr. Gaul and get permission to let Coriolanus in. Rats and raccoons are everywhere, and Coriolanus notices containers of white powder—rat poison. The Peacekeeper explains that the rats are too smart to eat it.

The tributes are shackled in their cage, and at first Coriolanus can't find Lucy Gray. But then Jessup nudges a pile beside him and Lucy Gray sits up. She unsteadily drags her chains toward Coriolanus. Coriolanus realizes she probably hasn't eaten in days, since she vomited up so much food when Arachne died. When she's close enough, Lucy Gray explains to Coriolanus that she and Jessup are taking turns sleeping, since the rats here keep biting them. Something bit Jessup the first night, but it was furrrier than a rat. Coriolanus apologizes for everything and suggests he should quit. Lucy Gray begs him not to leave and almost faints from weakness.

Coriolanus crouches close to Lucy Gray and decides not to tell her about Clemensia and the **snakes**. He offers her the nutritional crackers, and she immediately finishes one packet. Then she explains she's saving the second packet for Jessup, who's her ally now. Coriolanus promises to get her more food and shares that people will be able to send food into the arena. Hearing this, Lucy Gray suggests that she should sing during her interview so people will want to help her. She wishes she had a guitar, so Coriolanus agrees to try to find her one. The Peacekeeper says it's time to go as Lucy Gray pulls herself up. She says it's wonderful that Coriolanus treats her like she matters when no one else does. Coriolanus insists Lucy Gray *does* matter.

Coriolanus has grown up believing that, as a wealthy Capitol kid, the government is always going to protect him. In his mind, it's normal and natural that the tributes and Avoxes are tortured and dehumanized—but it's very disturbing to realize that Dr. Gaul, a huge force in the government, doesn't seem to care much for kids like Coriolanus. This is also a big moment for Coriolanus because it shows how hypocritical his views of government are. When he thinks that the government should protect all of them, especially a Snow, it shows that he doesn't take "all" to mean everyone in Panem. "All," to him, means wealthy people, and he doesn't recognize the hypocrisy here.



Seeing all the rats and raccoons running through the zoo shows again how inhumane it is to house the tributes at the zoo. It would never fly for Capitol folk to live in such close quarters with rodents—but the tributes, to people in the Capitol, aren't human, so Capitol folk don't see the issue.



Lucy Gray makes it clear just how horrific living in the zoo is: she's not only living in a zoo cage, but she constantly has to fend off rodents who are just as hungry as she is. This is appalling for Coriolanus, as he's never seen people treated so poorly before. (When things were bad during the war, he had the rebels to blame—it wasn't like he was hungry because people he loved and trusted were starving him.) But Lucy Gray insists Coriolanus can't back out because of shame; he has to stay in the Games so that he can advocate for better treatment for the tributes.



As Lucy Gray gets weaker, her priorities start to shift. Earlier, it seemed a point of pride to refuse to sing and retain control of her voice. But now that she's so hungry and knows she has to win over the crowds if she wants to eat, she feels she has no choice but to give in and do what Coriolanus wants her to do. This suggests that the interviews are probably going to dehumanize the tributes more than humanize them by forcing them to come up with ways to appeal to the audience. And though Coriolanus insists Lucy Gray matters here, it's debatable whether he really believes it—remember that her success is his success too, so it's in his best interest to make her feel special and worthy.



Coriolanus is so exhausted he can't think straight. On his way home, he bumps into Persephone Price, daughter of cannibal Nero Price. Persephone talks on about Arachne as Coriolanus tries to control his fear of Persephone. She's beautiful, but he can't get past the fact that she ate the maid's leg. Remembering the dead maid, Coriolanus wonders how long Lucy Gray will last without food. If she doesn't eat, she'll die before the Hunger Games start.

In this passage, Coriolanus starts to think that the tributes are almost more human than his Capitol neighbors—if the tributes have ever engaged in cannibalism, he at least doesn't know about it. But again, his main concern seems to be getting Lucy Gray to the Games so she can win, not making sure she's fed because she's a person and needs food.



CHAPTER 9

Grandma'am sends Coriolanus to bed as soon as he gets home. He wakes up later to Tigris and some noodle soup. Tigris shares that Satyria has been calling for him, and Coriolanus asks if she's calling about Clemensia. He shares the entire story with Tigris, who's horrified. She suggests that Coriolanus avoid Dr. Gaul as much as possible. Once Coriolanus eats, he picks up Satyria's next call. She just wants him to sing the **anthem** at Arachne's funeral tomorrow. Once Coriolanus agrees, Satyria asks how Lucy Gray is. Coriolanus says Lucy Gray—and the other tributes—are terrible, since the Capitol isn't feeding them. Satyria promises to try to fix this.

Prior to the start of the Games, both Tigris and Coriolanus saw Coriolanus's mentorship as a way to get ahead. But now, they can't ignore that being a mentor is putting Coriolanus in danger, just as the tributes are put in danger during the Games. No children, they're coming to realize, are safe in Panem, though poor district children and Capitol children suffer in different ways. Satyria asking about Lucy Gray suggests that she, too, is starting to humanize the tributes.



In the morning, Grandma'am wakes Coriolanus up at dawn so she can coach him through the **anthem**. When she deems him ready, she pins a **rosebud** to his uniform jacket and sends him to the Academy. Coriolanus ends up sitting in the front row, near President Ravinstill. Coriolanus has never sung publicly, so he's nervous. He looks around at the funeral banners and such, thinking it's way too much for someone as insignificant as Arachne—especially when most war heroes didn't get much recognition.

Though Coriolanus presumably leaves home prepared to sing the anthem, there's no indicator he's thought about what the words mean and how hypocritical they might be. The anthem is, for him, background noise. His observation about the mismatch between Arachne's importance and the pomp in the funeral suggests that Coriolanus doesn't see the point of this funeral: to make Arachne more significant than she was, so Panem can turn her into a martyr and vilify the tributes even more.



Finally, at 9:00 a.m., Coriolanus walks to the podium. Accompanied by a tinny instrumental recording, he begins the **anthem**. He sails through the song, which isn't challenging, and sits to applause. Then, President Ravinstill takes the podium and says that Arachne was a victim of the rebel war. As drums beat, the funeral procession comes around the corner. Behind Peacekeepers comes a flatbed truck with a crane on it—and the District 10 girl's body hangs from the crane. The other tributes are shackled to the truck bed. This, Coriolanus knows, will remind the districts that they won't win. Arachne's coffin comes after another battalion of Peacekeepers.

Arachne might not have been particularly important in life. But in death, she becomes a symbol of all the terrible things the Capitol folk have suffered during the war. Put simply, the funeral—which is no doubt televised—is a publicity stunt, not a way to honor Arachne. Hanging the dead tribute's body shows viewers in the districts what happens when they cross the Capitol, while the shackled living tributes send the message that district folk will never be anything but prisoners in this system.



Dr. Gaul speaks next and seems unusually sane and intelligent. She promises that Arachne won't have died in vain—the Capitol will fight back, and the Hunger Games will be dedicated to her memory. Coriolanus thinks this is ridiculous, but he stays quiet. As the crowd starts to disperse, Coriolanus turns to find Dean Highbottom staring at him. They exchange condolences and Coriolanus praises the procession. To his surprise, Dean Highbottom says it was “excessive and in poor taste.” Straightening Coriolanus's **rose**, he remarks that nothing has changed, even if people insist they have to remember the cost. He tells Coriolanus not to be late for lunch, since there's pie.

Fortunately, Dean Highbottom wasn't lying about the pie. Coriolanus fills his plate and chooses the biggest slice he can find, though he feels like his self-control is eroding. He notices Sejanus not eating and, since throwing food away is a crime now, encourages Sejanus to eat. Near the end of the meal, Satyria tells the students that the Hunger Games are still on—and the mentors are supposed to take the tributes to tour the arena later, to show the districts the Capitol isn't weak or afraid. Nobody looks excited, but nobody is willing to speak up, either. Believing that Dr. Gaul probably wants an excuse to torture a tribute publicly, Coriolanus takes Sejanus's uneaten food in a napkin. This isn't allowed, but Lucy Gray needs food.

Vans drive the mentors across town to the Capitol Arena. It used to be a state-of-the-art amphitheater for events, but the rebels bombed it. The field is full of bomb craters and there's rubble everywhere. During the Hunger Games, tributes are locked inside with weapons. Afterwards, Capitol workers remove the bodies and weapons but do no other cleanup. Professor Sickle ushers students out of vans and into a line with their tributes. Coriolanus and Lucy Gray are next to Jessup and Lysistrata. Reaper, Clemensia's tribute, glowers at the ground. Lysistrata offers Jessup medicine for his neck.

Peacekeepers open the lobby doors and lead the mentors and tributes through the lobby. They stop at turnstiles that require Capitol tokens. Coriolanus realizes this was the entrance for poor people; the Snows had a private box at the top of the arena. Peacekeepers feed tokens in as the kids go through the turnstiles; the turnstiles say, “Enjoy the show!” in a cheerful voice as each person passes through. Coriolanus goes through and realizes he can't get back out this entrance, which doesn't help his anxiety.

Keep in mind that while Coriolanus sees Dr. Gaul as maniacal and unhinged, all signs point to her being very intelligent and conniving (and, of course, evil). As the Head Gamemaker, she's the mastermind behind the Games and this funeral procession, and she understands the symbolism of what she's doing. Dean Highbottom's reaction to the procession is interesting, given that he came up with the Games—he makes it seem like he doesn't support treating tributes like this. And Coriolanus shows how willing he is to fall into line and follow rules when he insists the funeral was moving, even if he thought it was excessive.



Again, it becomes clear that the Capitol is very concerned with symbolism and projecting an image that will make them seem strong and in control. It's no matter to them that the mentors might actually be in danger walking around the arena with the tributes—the point is to look strong and unafraid, preferably on national television. Seeing how vulnerable he is, Coriolanus decides Dr. Gaul is his adversary. Stealing the food for Lucy Gray is a way for Coriolanus to get back at the government for treating his life so casually.



Holding the Hunger Games in an arena that the rebels bombed is convenient—there's no reason to keep it nice anyway—but it also creates an image that puts blame for all this on the districts. Recall that the Hunger Games is a war reparation; forcing the tributes to die in an arena that rebels bombed creates the impression that the tributes are dying in the rubble that their own families might have helped create during the war.



The turnstiles drive home that for Panem, this tour of the arena is just a show. This is how they show citizens that they're in control and the rebels won't win; it's not for the benefit of the tributes or mentors at all. And being forced to participate in this show is anxiety-inducing for Coriolanus, as he's used to being in charge and watching other people be forced into this sort of thing.



Peacekeepers lead the mentors and tributes through a dark passageway. Coriolanus takes the opportunity to slip the fried chicken to Lucy Gray, and she takes his hand in the dark. They let go before they reach the arena. Coriolanus saw the circus a few times as a kid and he's watched the Games on TV, but being on the field is a whole new experience. The field is huge. Coriolanus rearranges his face to look unimpressed. He didn't expect this visit to feel so sad as he joins the other mentors on a walk around the perimeter of the field. Circus performers used to take this route. Coriolanus starts to look around for anything that might help Lucy Gray. If she can get into the stands, she'd have a chance.

Lucy Gray whispers that before the tributes' participation in the funeral procession this morning, they got food. A few kids passed out last night, so they've had breakfast and dinner. They discuss Coriolanus's performance at the funeral, and Lucy Gray compliments his voice. When she says that most people here think she's "lower than a **snake's** belly," Coriolanus laughs at her "colorful" expressions. Coriolanus laughs again—and then everything explodes.

CHAPTER 10

Coriolanus has experience with bombs; they're terrifying. He rolls, flattens onto his belly, and tries not to panic as bombs go off around the arena. He goes into "bomb time," his and Tigris's name for the surreal experience of waiting for the bombs to stop. During the war, the Capitol's bomb surveillance system was spotty, so people usually didn't have time to get to their shelters. Coriolanus, Tigris, and Grandma'am would hide under their marble dining table. As Coriolanus remembers this, he realizes the bombs were *planted* here, not dropped. He smells smoke too and sees Lucy Gray coughing. Coriolanus shouts for her to cover her face.

After a short break in the explosions, another bomb goes off and burning debris falls into the arena. A beam lands across Coriolanus's back. The beam is on fire, but it's too heavy for him to move. He yells for help as his hair starts to burn. Coriolanus notices Lucy Gray standing, moving away, but then she moves the beam and limps with Coriolanus to the middle of the arena. Once he recovers from his coughing fit, he sees that Lucy Gray's hands are burnt. The smoke clears, revealing that the bombs had been planted all around the arena. There's a hole in one wall, which reveals the street; Coriolanus sees two people running away.

Again, Coriolanus is right on the nose when he remembers the circus as he and Lucy Gray circle the arena. The Hunger Games are a circus in their own right—a circus designed to distract the population and keep the war alive in people's minds. It's also hard to ignore here that Coriolanus is just a kid who, perhaps, has never had to confront the magnitude and the suffering of the Hunger Games. Feeling so small and sad mirrors how out of control he feels (since he's a pawn for the media, too) and how much empathy he's developing for Lucy Gray.



Snakes, because of how dangerous they can be (and because of the serpent in the Bible, who tempts Eve to eat from the Tree of Knowledge) are generally considered sinister creatures. With this expression, Lucy Gray gets at the fact that people in the Capitol think she's subhuman and dangerous. Notably, too, Dr. Gaul clearly cares for her neon snakes better than she cares for the tributes, proving Lucy Gray's point.



Again, it's impossible to ignore how traumatized Coriolanus still is by what happened during the war. And he also reveals another way that the government failed to protect him and all Capitol citizens—the spotty bomb surveillance no doubt meant that people died deaths that otherwise would've been preventable. But Coriolanus still instinctively puts his wealth front and center, when he talks about hiding under a solid marble table—a clear sign of his family's affluence. Further, though Coriolanus instantly blames the rebels for the bombs, Dr. Gaul has shown that she has little regard for Capitol kids' lives. The novel never confirms who planted the bombs—and it's possible that Dr. Gaul put them there to make a point and create more spectacle.



War and violence, this passage suggests, are forces that equalize people. In the arena, amidst the bombs, Lucy Gray and Coriolanus are equally likely to be hurt—their economic or social differences won't protect them in this situation. When Lucy Gray chooses to help Coriolanus rather than run, it shows how much she sees him as a person who deserves care, compassion, and protection. She's sacrificing her freedom—and her hands, judging by the burns—to rescue him.



Medics run toward Coriolanus and Lucy Gray. Coriolanus assures Lucy Gray she'll be helped as the medics lift him onto a stretcher—but instead, a Peacekeeper hits her with a rifle and forces her to her stomach. An ambulance takes Coriolanus to the hospital, where doctors annoy him all through the night. Coriolanus finally wakes up on Sunday afternoon with Tigris and Grandma'am leaning over him. He says that Lucy Gray saved his life. Tigris believes this; Grandma'am does not.

Tigris shares details from the last few days and Coriolanus realizes the entire Capitol is on edge. Rebels obviously set the bombs, but when? And from where? They could've been placed months or days before, and there's no way to tell how the bombs were triggered. The District Six tributes died, as did Pollo and Didi Ring. Two of Coriolanus's classmates are in the hospital in critical condition. Coriolanus asks about Lysistrata, who'd been right behind him. Grandma'am says she's fine, but she's obviously looking for attention: she insists her District 12 tribute protected her. Coriolanus is skeptical; Lysistrata isn't at all like Arachne. Tigris suggests that maybe District 12 people aren't so bad.

Coriolanus asks if Lucy Gray is okay. Tigris says she's not on the list of dead tributes: in addition to the District Six tributes, the District One tributes were shot, the female District Two tribute died in a fall, and Marcus escaped. Grandma'am suggests the tributes see the arena as a symbol, like the rebels did during the war. And unfortunately, Capitol News ended up airing 20 seconds of coverage after the bombs exploded. Though Tigris points out that most people in the districts don't watch Hunger Games coverage, Grandma'am insists this is "just the kind of story that catches fire."

The doctor Coriolanus spoke to days ago about Clemensia introduces himself as Dr. Wane. Dr. Wane sends Tigris and Grandma'am home and then tells Coriolanus he can go home in a few days. Coriolanus asks about Lucy Gray's injuries. Dr. Wane doesn't know about them, but he does know they got a vet out to care for the tributes. Coriolanus sleeps for the next day. He enjoys the hospital food and catches up on the news. Dr. Gaul definitely got a makeover for the Hunger Games.

Coriolanus might be starting to see Lucy Gray as a person just like him, but powerful people in charge don't share this view. Clearly, both Coriolanus and Lucy Gray need medical attention. But while Coriolanus gets help immediately, no questions asked, Lucy Gray is treated like a criminal responsible for the bombing instead of like the victim she is.



The bombs' very existence challenges Panem's belief that the Capitol is all-powerful and is in control (assuming that the rebels really are responsible for the bombs, rather than Dr. Gaul). Clearly, the rebel movement is still alive and well—and able to hit the Capitol hard. Coriolanus hasn't felt so vulnerable like this in a long time, so this feels like a very unwelcome blast from the past for him. The Grandma'am shows how set she is in her beliefs when she insists that Jessup couldn't have possibly protected Lysistrata. But the tributes are indeed people capable of stepping up—she's just incapable of seeing that.



Note here that as Tigris lists the dead tributes, she doesn't list their names. This further dehumanizes them—aside from on the mentor/tribute lists, these tributes' names haven't appeared at all in the novel. Grandma'am shows that she understands the power of Panem's propaganda machine. And airing what was essentially a rebel victory, she believes, is dangerous. Her saying that this story will "catch fire" is a nod to the second novel in the original trilogy, [Catching Fire](#).



Having a vet provide medical care for the tributes is yet another way the Capitol dehumanizes them. Giving them an animal doctor, however skillful that animal doctor might be, sends a very clear message: the tributes aren't people. This is another place where the differences between how Capitol and district kids suffer is very clear.



Festus visits that afternoon and says the twins' funeral will be tomorrow. Satyria and Sejanus visit too, and then Tigris stops in. She strokes Coriolanus's head until he falls asleep. Coriolanus wakes early on Tuesday morning. He figures it's a nurse waking him, but it's Clemensia. The whites of her eyes are yellow and she's twitchy. Clemensia asks why no one has come to see her and if people think she's dead. She says she has to get out; Dr. Gaul is going to kill her. Coriolanus says the snakebites are making her imagine things, but Clemensia opens her hospital gown to reveal rainbow scales. She shrieks that it's spreading. Nurses arrive to carry Clemensia away.

Coriolanus spends the night wondering if Clemensia is going to end up in Dr. Gaul's lab. It's unclear why Clemensia's parents haven't seen her, or why no one knows what happened. Is Tigris in danger because she knows? Suddenly, the hospital seems like an "insidious trap." Dr. Wane appears at dawn and asks if Clemensia scared Coriolanus. He explains that the venom is causing "unusual" side effects, and that her parents think she has a contagious flu. But Coriolanus can visit her in a few days.

Soon after this, Dr. Wane removes Coriolanus's morphling drip. This makes him feel even more suspicious and upset. He watches the funeral broadcast from bed. The organizers use a hologram of Coriolanus's **anthem** performance from Arachne's funeral. In the last few days, the two District Nine tributes died from their injuries, as nobody would let the vet admit the tributes to the hospital. Horses carry the dead bodies in the parade—and the three tributes who tried to escape are dragged behind the horses. Then, two caged trucks carry the living tributes. Coriolanus wishes he was a child again.

Dr. Wane releases Coriolanus after lunch. Coriolanus gets home to one of Sejanus's Ma's casseroles, but he can't sleep that night. He can't help but wonder how Lucy Gray is doing. Coriolanus also wonders if there's footage somewhere of her rescuing him—and of him clinging to her skirt in fear. If there is, it hasn't made it onto TV yet. He fishes out his mother's **compact**, but the scent isn't enough to calm him. Coriolanus paces all night. Early in the morning, Tigris reminds him that he and Lucy Gray are both powerless children. After a few hours of sleep, Coriolanus wakes to a call from Satyria encouraging him to come to school. Mentors will meet with tributes today to plan their interviews, which will now be voluntary.

Clemensia's state is horrifying—it shows Coriolanus how little Dr. Gaul cares about her students, since she caused this to happen to Clemensia. And it also starts to look like Dr. Gaul and the hospital are purposefully isolating Clemensia to hide what happened, which indicates that they'd like to keep this a secret. They don't want it to be known that they're willing to torture their own kids. When Coriolanus suggests the bites are feeding Clemensia's paranoia, he helps the government cover up what happened.



Coriolanus might have played along by telling Clemensia it was all in her head, but now things are starting to look fishier. It's especially concerning when Dr. Wane insists that they're saying Clemensia has the flu—they clearly don't want people to know the truth.



At 18, Coriolanus is in an in-between state between child and adult. He realizes that because he's very close to being an adult, he has no choice but to engage with the horror of having his friends and classmates (to say nothing of the tributes) die around him in this terrible way. He believes that if he were an innocent child, he'd be able to better ignore the horrors of what's happening—or, at least, the implication of what's happening.



Coriolanus seems to fear the possible footage of Lucy Gray rescuing him, and particularly of him looking weak in the moment. Again, this shows how obsessed he is with appearances—he believes he has to look the part of a wealthy Snow all the time and can't show weakness. That footage would also inconveniently make Lucy Gray look kind, compassionate, and brave, which isn't how the Capitol wants to portray kids from the district. So even if it's true that Lucy Gray is those things, it's not in Coriolanus's best interest to allow others to see that.



Later, as Coriolanus stands on the balcony, he thinks of the dead tributes. Those who are still alive look terrible. Lucy Gray coughs and looks unwell, but her hands have healed. Coriolanus offers her a sandwich and thanks her for saving his life. Coriolanus can't ignore that she did save him. But he realizes he owes her now, and he owes her more than a sandwich and cookies. He says he hopes he can repay her. Impatiently, Lucy Gray says he can repay her by believing she can win.

The mentors enter the hall from the balcony again, another opportunity to demonstrate their power over the tributes. Coriolanus realizes that he can't continue to diminish Lucy Gray. She is a person, she is brave, and she is kind—and most importantly, she deserves to survive. All the tributes, of course, deserve to survive, so the fact that this is such a huge revelation is a sign of how successful Panem has been at shifting the conversation away from questioning the Games's morality.



CHAPTER 11

Coriolanus realizes Lucy Gray is right: he hasn't thought of her as a winner, and he should be trying to save her life. They turn to coming up with a strategy. Lucy Gray notes that if she can stay alive for a few more days, she might win by default—there are only 14 tributes left, and Marcus. They decide that it'll be best for Lucy Gray to run away and hide once in the arena so that Coriolanus can get her food. Then, they discuss the interview. Lucy Gray is excited to sing.

Because of how neglectfully the Capitol treats the tributes, the tributes' real adversary is arguably the Capitol. But again, this doesn't really come up in conversation. Coriolanus and Lucy Gray skip right past this and onto strategizing. This shows how successfully Panem has shifted conversations about the Hunger Games, as the bad guys in this conversation aren't the government leaders.



When the meeting ends, the mentors head for the biology lab. Dean Highbottom takes roll as Dr. Gaul drops carrots into the mutant rabbit's cage. She starts by grilling Sejanus on where Marcus might be (the official story is that he's trapped underground and will be caught soon). Sejanus spits that Marcus is probably dead, or will be soon, once Dr. Gaul gets her hands on him. She'll probably drag his body through the streets. When Dr. Gaul insists that's her right, Sejanus snaps. He says she has no right to take people's lives and freedoms, and he tries to leave the room. The door is locked, and after a tense standoff, Coriolanus invites Sejanus to sit next to him. Coriolanus regrets his offer immediately when Dean Highbottom gives him a funny look.

It's hard to say for sure, but it's possible that on some level, Coriolanus agrees with Sejanus. Getting to know Lucy Gray has shown him how poorly the Capitol treats district children, and tributes in particular. However, it's also interesting that Sejanus is, for the most part, the only person willing to call Dr. Gaul out. This is no doubt a dangerous venture for him, since Dr. Gaul clearly doesn't care about her students (recall what happened to Clemensia). Sejanus speaks up because he's an outsider, someone born in the districts. But it's also safe for him to speak up because his family is so rich.



Dr. Gaul tells the class that they'll win the war with their heads, not their hearts. When Livia and Lysistrata argue that the war is over and the killing should stop, Festus notes it doesn't seem like it will ever be over. Dr. Gaul asks what their strategy should be if they can't win the war. Coriolanus knows the answer: control the war forever so the Capitol has the upper hand. Sejanus deems this immoral, and Dr. Gaul taunts Dean Highbottom. Coriolanus wonders if Highbottom is like the rabbit. Cheerfully, Dr. Gaul asks the students to write an essay on everything good about war.

Livia, Lysistrata, and Festus all make it seem like the constant fighting is exhausting. But this, it seems, is the point. Dr. Gaul appears to be suggesting that it's in Panem's best interest to keep the war alive (so, as Coriolanus suggests, they can win). If people are too exhausted because of the constant violence, they're probably also too tired to ask questions about why the war is even happening. This gives Panem and the Capitol even more cover to keep doing what they're doing.



After class, Sejanus tells Coriolanus to stop rescuing him and suggests that Dr. Gaul is “evil” and should be stopped. He laments that he wants to go back to District Two. Coriolanus warns Sejanus not to run off and then asks if the Plinth family has a guitar. He spends the rest of the afternoon trying to track down a guitar for Lucy Gray. Finally, Coriolanus visits Pluribus Bell. As they chat, Pluribus says he’d love to reopen his club and have girls like Lucy Gray sing. He’s happy to lend Coriolanus a beautiful guitar. When Coriolanus promises to be a regular patron if Pluribus reopens the club, Pluribus chuckles that Coriolanus will be like Crassus—who used to be the last one in the club every night with “that rascal Casca Highbottom.” This shocks Coriolanus.

Coriolanus takes the guitar home and can’t stop thinking about what Pluribus said about his father and Dean Highbottom. Even if Crassus and Highbottom were friends once, Highbottom clearly hates Coriolanus. But Coriolanus has no chance to ask Pluribus, as he spends the next days prepping Lucy Gray for the interview. Tigris offers to clean Lucy Gray’s dress and sends a bar of soap. Lucy Gray spends the days eating and playing music.

The interviews are aired live from the Academy auditorium. The weatherman and amateur magician Lucky Flickerman hosts and welcomes viewers. He introduces the food sponsorship and gambling programs, performs a few magic tricks, and then invites the first tribute on. The first tributes and mentors try to give memorable performances. Lucy Gray and Coriolanus wait backstage. Her lips are the same bright pink as the **roses** in her hair and on Coriolanus’s lapel, a sign of who Lucy Gray belongs to. She notes that “the show’s not over until the **mockingjay** sings,” a phrase Coriolanus doesn’t understand. Then, she steps onstage, introduces herself, and starts to sing.

Coriolanus has never heard this song before. Lucy Gray sings about falling in love, falling on hard times with her lover, and trying to make a “living by her charms” while her lover used all their money. The lover drops Lucy Gray, so Lucy Gray reminds him of who she is to him: the one he trusted, and now she’s going to die. She says she’s “the bet that [he] lost in the reaping” and asks what he’s going to do when she’s dead. When she finishes, the audience explodes. Coriolanus knows this will get her sponsors—but he’s jealous.

Sejanus might be wealthy, but he’s also miserable—wealth isn’t going to make him feel any better about being forced to participate in something as horrific as the Hunger Games. But again, Sejanus seems to be one of the only ones who’s entertaining this line of thought; Coriolanus, in contrast, is fully committed to making the best of his mentoring opportunity. It’s in Coriolanus’s best interest to play along, though. As he understands it, doing well is the only way to achieve prestige and wealth—things he wants. This goal also discourages him from questioning things the way Sejanus does.



Coriolanus realizes he doesn’t have the whole story of what happened between Dean Highbottom and his father, but now he at least knows that there’s a reason, however mysterious, that Dean Highbottom dislikes him. More importantly for Coriolanus, though, is focusing on the task at hand: getting Lucy Gray ready for the interview, which will hopefully help her chances of winning.



The interviews are a major part of the Gamemakers’ quest to get more people to watch the Games. Through the interviews, tributes are forced to play along and sell themselves to viewers as worthy candidates—something that dehumanizes them. Lucy Gray is further dehumanized when Coriolanus makes it clear that he believes she belongs to him. But she also seems to gain the upper hand when she deploys this mysterious phrase that Coriolanus doesn’t understand.



In Coriolanus’s mind, this song is both a blessing and a curse. It’s a blessing because it’s clearly a hit with audiences, so it’ll help boost Lucy Gray’s chances of winning the Games. But it’s also a curse because Coriolanus has to confront that Lucy Gray perhaps did have a lover in District 12—something that asserts her humanity and her agency. And since Coriolanus thinks she belongs to him, this challenges his authority over her.



CHAPTER 12

Since the reaping, Lucy Gray has been Coriolanus's property. But her song contradicts this by showing she had a life *before* the reaping, and Coriolanus doesn't like that someone else loved her before he met her. Lucy Gray bows and lets Coriolanus lead her offstage. She explains that she's probably going to die in the Games, and this song tied up "loose ends" in District 12. The Covey, she says, will get the song's message; her cousin Maude Ivory will no doubt memorize the song after only hearing it once. Peacekeepers come to escort Lucy Gray away. Coriolanus is annoyed; he's the star and Lucy Gray belongs to him, no matter what she says. He resents it when Pluribus gushes that if Lucy Gray survives, he wants her to sing in his club.

Sejanus approaches Coriolanus with a woman who can only be his Ma on his arm; she looks out of place at this fancy event. Coriolanus thanks Ma for the casserole, and Ma says Coriolanus can count on her if he needs anything. Coriolanus is aghast when Ma starts to cry. Later, Tigris and Coriolanus walk home together and discuss the night's events. Coriolanus tries to hide his jealousy as he wonders what Lucy Gray meant by "living by her charms." Tigris notes that Lucy Gray lost her parents and probably had to do lots of things to survive. Tigris implies that during the war, she did things she's not proud of. This shocks Coriolanus. He wonders what Tigris did, but he decides he doesn't want to know.

Coriolanus and Tigris enter the apartment building's lobby to discover that, for the first time in years, the elevator is working. At first they're ecstatic, but then they wonder if the managers are fixing things in preparation for selling apartments, now that there are new taxes. But the conversation ends when they enter the apartment and Grandma'am, who watched the interviews on TV, says that Lucy Gray is "a sad, trashy little thing" "but oddly appealing." Coriolanus figures if Lucy Gray can win Grandma'am over, he shouldn't worry about her past.

Coriolanus's privilege means that for much of his life, he's been able to identify what he wants and take it. Lucy Gray defies all that through this song. It allows her to show that she is human and is just as capable of making choices as Coriolanus is. And as she describes how the song will go over with the Covey, she also impresses upon Coriolanus that she's left behind a chosen family in District 12. She doesn't exist in a vacuum; rather, she's a person with hopes and dreams that she's giving up because she's been forced to participate in the Games.



In this passage, Coriolanus's snobbery shines through. Ma doesn't know how to act at such a fancy event—crying, judging by Coriolanus's reaction, is wholly inappropriate. And Coriolanus's first reaction is to scorn her for this, showing how elitist he is. In discussing Lucy Gray, though, Tigris encourages Coriolanus to understand that everyone had to do what they needed to do to survive—even someone like Tigris, who's from a powerful family. It's unsettling for Coriolanus to realize that these two very different women in his life might have both had to turn to sex work to make ends meet during the war.



It's perhaps surprising that Coriolanus decides Lucy Gray has "won over" Grandma'am after Grandma'am says this. Calling Lucy Gray "trashy" is extremely rude and derogatory. Notably, this term also takes aim at Lucy Gray's financial situation—something that Lucy Gray has no control over. Lucy Gray's poverty is also a product of the government's stranglehold on the districts, but Grandma'am doesn't acknowledge this. Again, Panem has successfully shifted the conversation and the blame away from the terrible things they do to the districts.



Coriolanus sits down to write his essay for Dr. Gaul. He and Tigris discuss how Coriolanus loved the parades when he was little. And Tigris recalls how, after Crassus Snow died, soldiers delivered a basket with food, including a turkey, to the apartment. Tigris cooked the bird and Pluribus came for dinner. Coriolanus remembers his rooftop victory garden and writes his essay on “these childish delights.” But it doesn’t seem right. He adds a paragraph about his relief that the war is over; he doesn’t have to be afraid anymore. The enemies can’t hurt him anymore, and he says there’s security in having power and control.

The following morning, Coriolanus attends a mentor meeting. He imagines who his classmates would’ve been had the war not happened, and he feels guilty when he thinks of Clemensia. He hasn’t visited her because he doesn’t want to see how bad she’s gotten—and he’s afraid Dr. Gaul will kidnap him if he goes to the hospital.

To start the meeting, Dr. Gaul and Dean Highbottom review the performances from last night. According to Lucky Flickerman, Tanner and Jessup are the favorites to win, but Lucy Gray has more food gifts than anyone else. The lesson, Coriolanus’s classmates say, is that people love a long shot, love good songs, and are fools. At this, Dr. Gaul asks students to read parts of their essays. Many mentors write romantically about the war and how it bound soldiers together. But Coriolanus doesn’t share this view. He has no desire to be a soldier, thinks the Capitol’s “noble ideas” are a bit silly, and thinks that the parades seem like a waste. He just wants control.

Coriolanus reads his story about the turkey when it’s his turn, and then Dr. Gaul calls on Sejanus. Sejanus says all he loved about the war was that he lived at home still—and the war hasn’t fixed anything. He asks Dr. Gaul what she loved, and she says she loves that it proved her right. Dean Highbottom says it’s lunchtime before anyone can ask her to clarify. Coriolanus didn’t bring lunch and there’s no food provided, so he sits on the steps and listens to Festus and Hilarius Heavensbee discuss strategies for their female tributes. Hilarius whines; his girl, Wovey, has “zero personality” and his family is embarrassed.

The bulk of Coriolanus’s essay is essentially about finding happiness in difficult times, which is a helpful thing to be able to do when one is living through a devastating war. But he also seems to realize that this isn’t what Dr. Gaul wants: she seems to think war is fantastic, and she probably won’t be won over by an anecdote about a victory garden. Interestingly, though, even as Coriolanus writes about feeling better now that he has security and control, he still lives in a constant state of fear—his power isn’t as absolute as he’d like to think.



Coriolanus’s fears of Dr. Gaul do seem legitimate, as she clearly doesn’t care about her students’ wellbeing. But by not visiting Clemensia or even getting a message to her, Coriolanus sends her the message that he doesn’t care about her—and perhaps sides with Dr. Gaul.



Coriolanus starts to show his dark side here when he dismisses the very real bonds that soldiers can form during conflicts (which may be meaningful, but also aren’t a good reason to go to war in the first place). Essentially, he proposes that he doesn’t care much about going to the trouble of making war seem noble and necessary. Rather, he only cares about the end result: having control. This also shows how selfish he is.



Coriolanus and Sejanus say much the same thing about what they liked about the war: being home, surrounded by family, and being safe and cared for. Sejanus felt that way in District Two, but he doesn’t seem to have felt that way since arriving in the Capitol. Dr. Gaul also becomes more mysterious as she insists she loved the war because she was right about it; this is something the novel will return to later. Hilarius complaining about Wovey betrays his selfishness and entitlement. He doesn’t see Wovey as a person. Rather, he sees her as an embarrassing punishment who isn’t going to elevate his reputation.



After lunch, Satyria takes the mentors to the news station so they can see how things work behind the scenes. The Gamemakers' offices are shabby and to Coriolanus, it's disappointing. Gamemakers test drones, which will deliver the food gifts in the arena, and Lucky Flickerman is excited to host the Games. The mentors will have time to comment tomorrow morning when the Games start. Coriolanus will be one of the first to go, which excites him—until Lucky says they want to talk to him before Lucy Gray dies. Suddenly, Coriolanus has to confront the fact that Lucy Gray is going to die, and it's useless to be jealous of her old boyfriend.

That night, Coriolanus decides he'd like to give Lucy Gray a special gift. He can't think of anything that would help her defend herself. Over supper, Tigris packs a gift basket with food and a **rose** for Lucy Gray. Coriolanus carries it to Heavensbee Hall. It reminds him of the family mausoleum tonight. He gives the box to Lucy Gray. She says she'd share with Jessup, but he isn't eating and is acting weird. They all are, though; Reaper has apologized to everyone for having to kill them. Jessup spat in his eye for that. Coriolanus shares that Lucy Gray has more food than anyone else and tells her to hide in the stands as soon as she can. If she can stay hidden and alive, she can win.

Lucy Gray sobs that she's afraid and doesn't want to die. Coriolanus tells her that she does matter to him, as a person and a friend. He admits that he was jealous after her ballad and doesn't want to lose her. He says they can win, but he knows he has to make a grand gesture. Coriolanus pulls out his mother's **compact** and says it's a loan. Lucy Gray takes the compact and asks if there used to be powder inside. Coriolanus says there was—but he thought Lucy Gray might want to bring some of her own.

CHAPTER 13

Lucy Gray understands immediately, but she sniffs the **compact** and says it still smells wonderful, like **roses**. She agrees to take the compact. She and Coriolanus chat about the arena until their time is up. When they stand, Lucy Gray grabs Coriolanus's shirt and says she's going to think of him in the arena. Then, she kisses him. Coriolanus finally understands what people talk about when they talk about love. Peacekeepers usher Lucy Gray away as Coriolanus wonders if he broke a rule by suggesting she fill the compact with rat poison. It's not like she can easily poison everyone and win; it'll take skill and luck.

Coriolanus finds himself caught between knowing that the Games will boost his prestige—and knowing that Lucy Gray, whom he genuinely cares about, is probably going to die. With this, he starts to feel more like a pawn and, in a way, like the tributes. Nobody here seems to care that he has a goal and is trying to win. Rather, they want to leverage him to sell their version of the Hunger Games.



Here, the rose in Lucy Gray's basket symbolizes not just the Snows' attempts to look wealthy, but Coriolanus's desire to help Lucy Gray survive and feel like she's a person, not just a pawn. From her descriptions, it's clear that things are tense between the tributes. They've all gotten to know each other over the past few days, and in only a few hours, they're all going to have to kill each other. So the tributes have learned to humanize each other, only to have to turn around and prioritize themselves exclusively.



Coriolanus has taken the powder out of his mother's compact and only gives Lucy Gray the shell—the important part, the wonderfully scented powder, is still with Coriolanus. So he's still holding onto this connection to his mother, even as he gives the compact away. This also makes him seem more human to Lucy Gray, since she knows his mother is dead and empathizes with him.



Note that Lucy Gray is the one to instigate the kiss. With this, she again shows that she's a person, too, who's in charge of her own thoughts and actions. In this situation, though, this doesn't bother Coriolanus. Instead, it's exciting, and it introduces him to a whole new world of romance. Technically, Coriolanus is probably cheating by encouraging Lucy Gray to take rat poison into the arena. But he desperately wants to win, so it's a risk he's willing to take.



That night, Coriolanus shares with Tigris that he and Lucy Gray kissed. Coriolanus can barely explain himself; he has almost no experience with girls (getting close to someone would mean letting them see his home, which he can't do). But the fact remains that Lucy Gray is his tribute—and a girl from the districts, who's "human, but bestial." Lucy Gray has to be an exception to that rule.

In the morning, Coriolanus eats and walks to the Capitol News studio. He tries to look cool and unruffled, but Dean Highbottom tests him by deeming Coriolanus's kiss with Lucy Gray "touching." Dr. Gaul notes that unfortunately, Lucy Gray won't survive the day. Coriolanus hates them and tells them "it's not over until the **mockingjay** sings." Before they can make him explain, someone announces that the vet couldn't save the District 5 boy; he died in the night. Coriolanus pulls out his mentor/tribute list and crosses the pair off. Now, Lucy Gray only has 13 competitors. As Coriolanus stores the list in his bookbag, he discovers a handkerchief that Lucy Gray used to dry her eyes. He keeps it as a talisman.

The seven mentors whose tributes participated in the interviews get to appear on the pre-show. Lucky Flickerman lets Coriolanus talk longer than the others, since Coriolanus has new material to share. Coriolanus talks about the Covey and tries to make the case that Lucy Gray and the Covey aren't District 12 at all—in fact, they're almost Capitol. Lysistrata looks annoyed; in her interview she insists Jessup and Lucy Gray are devoted to each other.

Dean Highbottom speaks next about the mentorship program. He notes that the mentors have learned to respect and appreciate their tributes and that the district children are strong, smart, and courageous. Lucky is surprised Highbottom is comparing the "superior" Capitol children to those of the districts, but Highbottom quips that the only difference is that Capitol kids have better dental care.

The interview over, the mentors head back to the Academy in vans. Coriolanus puzzles over Dean Highbottom's radical suggestion that the districts are just poor, not lesser. He wonders whether he's presenting Lucy Gray as better than district because it'll help her win—or because he has a crush on her. As Coriolanus prepares to enter the auditorium, Dean Highbottom murmurs in his ear that he might want to steer Sejanus toward a seat near the doors. Highbottom turns away to dose himself with morphling and Lysistrata rushes up, angry that Coriolanus is destroying her strategy with Jessup.

Coriolanus may have enjoyed his kiss with Lucy Gray, but the way he thinks about her here shows that he doesn't believe she's as human as he is. Describing her as "bestial" betrays that he sees all people from the districts as lesser and animalistic. He might believe on some level that Lucy Gray is different, but he still looks down on district folk in general.



As the start of the Hunger Games approaches, Coriolanus becomes increasingly competitive—and less interested in empathizing with other tributes or their mentors. Recall that he couldn't cross Arachne off when she died; now, he's crossing people off without even sharing their names. His willingness to repeat Lucy Gray's odd phrase shows how upset Coriolanus is with the Gamemakers and the government in general. He doesn't understand the phrase, but he does understand it's probably an insult to these powerful people.



Coriolanus realizes that if he wants to win, he needs to make Lucy Gray seem human to viewers. Lysistrata understands the same thing; she's betting on the fact that people will be drawn in by the supposed romance between Lucy Gray and Jessup. But again, this also turns the tributes into one-dimensional caricatures, thereby dehumanizing them anyway.



For whatever reason, Dean Highbottom doesn't seem to support the Games—and he's powerful enough that he can say this sort of thing on national television and get away with it. This shows that Panem hasn't universally embraced the Hunger Games as a necessity; there are still dissenters among the powerful.



Highbottom is a hard person for Coriolanus to understand, since he seems so sympathetic toward the district kids and so hateful toward Coriolanus. But he's still unpredictable, as his warning to sit Sejanus by the door seems sinister and asks readers to question what Highbottom knows that viewers don't. Even if Coriolanus hates Highbottom, Highbottom is also encouraging Coriolanus to think about some difficult questions. He may be a better role model than Coriolanus gives him credit for.



Just then, Satyria calls for all the mentors to come get their badges and communicuffs. As Coriolanus follows her, people congratulate him and the mood seems celebratory—it's a bit disturbing, given how somber this occasion usually is. At a table, a Gamemaker distributes badges and communicuffs, which will allow the mentors to select food items and send them to their tributes. Coriolanus shows Lysistrata Lucy Gray's list of food on his communicuff and promises to help Jessup. Lysistrata apologizes for snapping and says she's just upset because the Games seem revolting. She feels like the mentors are being used. Coriolanus hasn't considered this before; he thought being a mentor was an honor. But now he feels a bit like a tribute.

Lysistrata and Coriolanus find seats in the back of the special mentor section in the auditorium—they don't want cameras in their faces when their tributes die. On the giant screen, Lucky Flickerman is introducing the districts. Suddenly, Coriolanus notices Clemensia getting her communicuff and heading for him. She still looks ill and twitchy as she thanks Coriolanus for visiting and contacting her parents. Lysistrata says that everyone knew where Clemensia was; the doctors wouldn't let her visit because Clemensia's flu was so contagious. Coriolanus runs with this lie, but Clemensia huffs away. Coriolanus notices Sejanus and calls for him to sit next to him.

Just then, the **anthem** begins to play (Coriolanus is still the only classmate who can sing it). Then, Lucky announces the start of the 10th Hunger Games. The screen shows the tributes positioned in a circle in the arena, Panem's flag flying in the stands. The camera zooms to a pair of tall steel poles with a crossbeam across the top. Marcus, still alive, hangs from the crossbeam by his wrists.

CHAPTER 14

Coriolanus is disgusted, but he can't look away. This represents a new level of violence; the Capitol has always let the tributes kill each other. This is Dr. Gaul's doing. Heavensbee Hall suddenly doesn't feel like a party. Sejanus leaps up, throws a chair into the screen, and runs away, calling everyone "monsters." Onscreen, the gong sounds and the tributes race into the arena's tunnels. Jessup, Tanner, Coral, and Reaper grab weapons first. Lucky encourages viewers to bet on their tribute of choice and cuts back to the arena. Now, Marcus is the only tribute in sight. Coriolanus refuses Lysistrata's suggestion that he go after Sejanus. He hates that people think he and Sejanus are friends; this will only cause trouble.

The festive atmosphere is a mark of how successful Dr. Gaul's quest to make the Games a spectator sport has been. The fact that Coriolanus finds this disturbing indicates that, on some level, he does know the Hunger Games are wrong. But because it's in his best interest to play along, he ignores this pang of conscience and throws himself into figuring out how to win the Games. Lysistrata seems to be going through much the same thought process, but she takes it a step further by suggesting the mentor program itself is also inhumane. All the children involved in the Games, she suggests, are being used and abused for entertainment purposes.



Coriolanus might be lying about trying to visit Clemensia, but Lysistrata clearly isn't. Dr. Gaul is no doubt behind the lie that Clemensia had a contagious flu. It's in her best interest to not own up to what she did to Clemensia. People are generally okay with her torturing district kids in the Hunger Games, but people would probably be upset if they knew she was putting wealthy Capitol kids in danger by letting her snakes bite them. In order to stay in power, she has to make it seem like she cares about Capitol kids.



Once again, Dr. Gaul and the Gamemakers rely heavily on symbolism as the Games open. The anthem situates this as a patriotic event, as does the flag. This suggests that the Hunger Games are something exciting and worth supporting, deflecting attention away from the violence. Hanging Marcus like this, though, shows how powerful the Capitol is—and how cruel Dr. Gaul is willing to be.



Though Coriolanus is horrified by what he sees on the screen, he and his classmates (aside from Sejanus) know how important it is to pretend to be okay with this. Going along with torturing Marcus—and by extension, going along with whatever the government says is correct—is how these kids are one day going to obtain powerful positions themselves. So while Sejanus is doing the morally better thing by standing up and rejecting this abuse, he's also putting himself in danger since he's openly defying the government. This is also why Coriolanus refuses to go after Sejanus; he recognizes the danger in what Sejanus does.



A half-hour later, Lamina, Pup's District Seven tribute, creeps in front of the barricade erected where the bombs opened the arena to the street. Lamina chooses an ax and a knife from the pile of weapons and then climbs the steel poles where Marcus hangs. She looks at home on the beam on the top. Then, she says something to Marcus. He responds, and Lamina then kills him with her ax. Pup happily screeches that Lamina is "his girl," and she got the first killing of the games. His communicuff pings—people have bought Lamina food—and Pup then sends Lamina a water bottle. It takes 15 minutes and the first bottle breaks, but a drone successfully delivers a bottle to Lamina.

Lamina stays on top of the beam while Reaper prowls in the stands. Lucky struggles to make hosting interesting; the Games have never had a host before. Lepidus arrives in the hall to interview Pup live, but the morning is boring. After lunch, not much happens. Lamina eats some bread and then ties herself to the beam and sleeps. Capitol News shows footage of the plaza in front of the arena, where there are two dogs dressed as Lucy Gray and Jessup. Coriolanus's communicuff pings, signaling more food.

Early in the evening, Lucky interviews Dr. Gaul. Dr. Gaul insists that since most of the tributes died before the Games started, they're actually at the same place they were last year in terms of tribute deaths. She also notes that because of the bombing, tributes have lots of places to hide. But they'll show themselves soon so they can get food. Then, she suggests that Lucky pull her half-rabbit, half-pit bull mutt out of a hat. After this, the other spectators in the hall leave, but the mentors stay on through the evening. Coriolanus enjoys dinner and strategizes with Lysistrata about getting their tributes food.

When the mentors return to their seats after dinner, the screen shows District Three's tributes Circ and Teslee creeping around the arena. District Three is the technology district, and the kids poke at the fallen drones that brought Lamina her food and water. They poke at the drones until they light up, and they take them back to the tunnels when they see someone else emerge. It's Reaper, carrying Dill. Dill looks tiny, and red spittle is coming from her mouth. Lysistrata says it looks like Dill has tuberculosis as Reaper lays the girl in the sunshine and heads back to the tunnels. Clemensia says she's not sending Reaper anything; he didn't do anything to deserve it. Felix, Dill's mentor, sends her water. But Dill doesn't acknowledge it and Treech from District Seven takes the water. Dill dies at sunset.

Without knowing what was said between Lamina and Marcus, it's impossible to tell, but Lamina killing him appears to be more of a mercy killing than anything else. And yet, Pup celebrates Lamina as though she's a bloodthirsty fighter, not someone who compassionately put Marcus out of his misery. This shows how effectively Dr. Gaul has warped how people see ethics in the Hunger Games. There's no such thing as mercy or compassion—the kids in the arena are framed as murderous monsters.



It's clear that the Games are in new territory this year, with the mentoring program and a host. The fact that what's actually going on in the arena is so boring helps explain why so few people want to watch: when kids aren't horrifically murdering each other, there's nothing to see. It's going to take more changes before the Hunger Games are the spectacle Dr. Gaul wants.



Dr. Gaul makes the point that the Games are also different this year because, for the first time, the tributes have places to hide—this will naturally prolong the Games, as it'll take time for the tributes to all find each other. And again, there's symbolism here: the arena is like this because of the rebel bombs, so Dr. Gaul can essentially blame this year's drawn-out Hunger Games on the rebels, rather than take responsibility herself.



Through the way that Lamina killed Marcus, and the way that Reaper carries Dill into the arena so gently, the novel starts to create the impression that the tributes in the district are kinder and more compassionate than those watching them—who aren't killing people, but who desperately want to see the kids in the arena kill each other. The district kids clearly aren't as morally bankrupt as people like the Grandma'am suggest they are; rather, in these difficult circumstances, they seem to take the moral high ground despite everything else.



Not long after, Lucky signs off—it's dark and there's nothing to see in the arena. The mentors shake hands with Felix and head home. Coriolanus knows that Lucy Gray has a chance if she can just outlive the sick tributes. He also wonders if she's thinking of him. As he steps into the apartment, his dreams of showering and going to sleep are dashed. Grandma'am and Tigris are in the kitchen with Ma, who's crying and apologizing. Ma explains that Sejanus is missing. Coriolanus suggests he was upset about seeing Marcus and went to cool off. Grandma'am, annoyed at having to entertain someone like Ma at this hour, implies that Ma should return home in case Sejanus is there. Sejanus agrees to walk her to her car. But on the TV, he and Ma watch as a male figure steps into the arena. It's Sejanus.

CHAPTER 15

Coriolanus is confused and horrified. On screen, Sejanus tries to arrange Marcus's limbs and then sprinkles something over the body. Ma explains Sejanus is sprinkling breadcrumbs so Marcus has food on his journey in the afterlife; it's a District Two custom. Coriolanus is embarrassed on her behalf. The districts are "primitive people" with "primitive customs." Just then, the phone rings. Coriolanus answers. It's Dr. Gaul, and she wants to know what Coriolanus's friend is doing. Coriolanus hates that people think he and Sejanus are friends. In the background of the call, Coriolanus hears Dr. Gaul telling someone to make the screen as dark as possible. Then, to Coriolanus, Dr. Gaul says to come to the arena with Ma. If he doesn't hurry, Coriolanus will get another demerit—and he won't win a prize.

Coriolanus hangs up and sees that the image on the TV is now dark. He tells Ma they must go to the arena, so they run down to her car and the Avox drives quickly to the arena. Ma shares that her family arrived in the Capitol at night, and Sejanus tried to calm her down. Coriolanus responds noncommittally; her story doesn't matter to him. Ma says that coming to the Capitol was Strabo's way of keeping Sejanus out of the Games. They discuss how to get Sejanus out of the arena, and Ma says he'll have to believe it's the right thing to do. Coriolanus finds Sejanus's interest in doing the right thing insufferable.

The car pulls up at the arena, and Coriolanus leads Ma to a news van with Dr. Gaul, Dean Highbottom, and Peacekeepers around it. Though Dr. Gaul asks Coriolanus for ideas on how to get Sejanus out, she rejects his ideas and insists Coriolanus will have to sneak in and get Sejanus. It's the only way to protect him from the tributes, who will no doubt try to kill him. Peacekeepers fit Coriolanus with a bulletproof vest and give him a bottle of pepper spray and a device that will create a blinding flash of light. Coriolanus knows he has no choice but to play along; there's no fighting Dr. Gaul.

Coriolanus is so obsessed with winning that it never occurs to him to question how it is that the Capitol can allow children to become as ill as Dill was. To him, it's a good thing that Dill was so sick, since it neatly gets rid of her. This also causes Coriolanus to dehumanize Dill and see her illness not as a condemnation of the Capitol, but as a boon for him. It's a sign of Grandma'am and Coriolanus's privilege that they're not more sympathetic to Ma. Given Sejanus's outburst earlier, he could be in danger from Dr. Gaul—but instead, they're just mad that they can't happily ignore other people's trouble.



The fact that Sejanus still observes this District Two custom highlights how connected he is to his birthplace. Customs like this are ways for people to show respect for the dead—but to Coriolanus, this is ridiculous. In his mind, Marcus may have died a brutal death, but he still deserves to be dead and definitely doesn't need food in the afterlife. And things get even worse for Coriolanus when Dr. Gaul refers to Sejanus as his friend. Coriolanus knows his success depends on not associating with district folk like Sejanus, so this is grating and represents a roadblock to the successful future he so desperately wants.



Coriolanus doesn't think much of it at this point, but the Gamemakers darkening the screen shows how much power Dr. Gaul and her crew have to manipulate how the Hunger Games look to viewers. They do things like darken the screen to broadcast the kind of Hunger Games they want people to see. And in this case, darkening the screen hides the fact that some people disagree with the Games. Hiding this is important: if other dissidents think they're the only one to object, they won't be able to organize and protest.



Given the advanced technology Dr. Gaul seems to have access to, it seems like a stretch that sending Coriolanus in to fetch Sejanus is the only way to get this task done. So sending Coriolanus in seems like a test and a way for Dr. Gaul to lord her power over her student, showing Coriolanus how powerless he is to fight back and stand up for himself. In this sense, he's almost as helpless as the tributes are; his wealth isn't of much help in this instance.



Peacekeepers usher Coriolanus to the main entrance, which the bombs mostly destroyed. They move through the lobby to the turnstiles, which Sejanus got through with a token. A Peacekeeper notes that they worry about people sneaking out, not in, during the Games. Coriolanus accepts his token and the Peacekeeper shows him how he'll get back out by climbing through barbed wire—and the Peacekeeper implies that if Coriolanus doesn't return *with* Sejanus, they won't let him out. Sweating, Coriolanus goes through the turnstile and walks toward the back side of the barricade he's seen on TV. It's barely a barricade; it just blocks the view of the street.

Coriolanus peers into the arena at Sejanus. Aside from Lamina, and Marcus's body, the arena looks deserted. Coriolanus tiptoes across the field. Sejanus laughs quietly when he sees Coriolanus. The two stare at Marcus's body and Sejanus implies that he entered the arena so the tributes could kill him. Coriolanus says Ma is waiting for Sejanus outside, but Sejanus humorlessly says Strabo isn't out there. Strabo will wait until Sejanus is dead and then try to buy Coriolanus to compensate him for trying to help. Privately, Coriolanus isn't opposed to being bought, but he encourages Sejanus to leave the arena with him.

Sejanus insists there's nothing left to do but die. He only changes his mind when Coriolanus shares that Dr. Gaul and Dean Highbottom won't show his death on TV. Coriolanus encourages Sejanus to leave the arena so he can fight for the tributes and stand up to Dr. Gaul. He can hear the tributes closing in. Sejanus agrees—but refuses to leave Marcus's body. Coriolanus grabs Marcus's feet and, with Sejanus, drags the body toward the barricade. Coriolanus trips, but as soon as he's up, Bobbin rushes at Coriolanus with a knife.

CHAPTER 16

Bobbin slices into Coriolanus's arm, throwing Coriolanus back into a pile of rubble. Coriolanus grabs a two-by-four and clubs Bobbin again and again. Sejanus shouts for Coriolanus to leave Marcus and run—they can hear more tributes coming for them. The boys race around the barricade as Coral, Mizzen, and Tanner run after them. Coriolanus runs right into a concrete slab, and he feels concussed. Sejanus leads Coriolanus to the turnstiles. The Peacekeepers don't protect Sejanus and Coriolanus as the tributes throw bricks and weapons at the boys. But a Peacekeeper opens the barbed wire, and the boys slide through just as Tanner slices Sejanus's leg.

Entering through this particular entrance unsettles Coriolanus in part because, as he observed earlier, this was where poor people used to enter the arena. So going in here makes Coriolanus feel just as poor and powerless as the tributes—which, in many ways, he is. The Peacekeeper also seems to enjoy having this much power over Coriolanus; he seems unconcerned and unsympathetic to the fact that Coriolanus has every right to be afraid of going in here.



Sejanus believes he's doing something noble and dramatic by entering the arena so tributes will kill him. In his mind, this is the best way to stand up for what he believes: that the Hunger Games are wrong. But Coriolanus is too entrenched in the system to be very sympathetic. He wants money so badly that the prospect of Strabo Plinth buying his silence seems appealing. But Coriolanus still has to get Sejanus out of the arena before he can even consider something like that.



Sejanus may be righteous and noble, but he also doesn't grasp how much control Dr. Gaul has over what happens and what people will see on television. So this throws a wrench in his plans, since dying in the arena won't have the impact he hoped it would. And ultimately, the desire to survive wins out over his desire to make a statement. Both Sejanus and Coriolanus find themselves powerless as the tributes descend on them—their status won't help them here.



In this situation, Coriolanus steps into the role of another tribute. When faced with possibly losing his life, he feels he has no choice but to turn to violence—and kill another person to defend himself. This shows him that he's truly on his own as he tries to survive in his world. And when the Peacekeepers don't try to protect him and Sejanus, it makes that even clearer. Coriolanus has grown up believing that, as a Capitol kid, he'll be protected—but clearly, he was wrong.



Coriolanus spits angrily at the Peacekeepers and almost falls over. The Peacekeepers march him outside and deposit him near the news van. Dr. Gaul and Dean Highbottom ignore Coriolanus and Sejanus; finally, an ambulance appears to take the boys to the Citadel. Coriolanus is terrified, but it turns out that there's a small medical clinic inside the lab. Medics stitch up his cuts and give him an IV with fluids and drugs. Coriolanus feels trapped, especially when Peacekeepers take Sejanus away. Finally, Dr. Gaul enters Coriolanus's cubicle and takes his pulse. She explains she started as an obstetrician, but the job wasn't for her. Coriolanus can see why.

Dr. Gaul explains that she hated parents wanting assurances about their children's future. She couldn't know what kids would experience—she'd never have predicted Crassus Snow's son would end up in the Capitol Arena. She asks what the arena was like, and Coriolanus says it was terrifying. Then she asks what he thought of the tributes and points out they had nothing to gain by killing him. Coriolanus admits he underestimated how much the tributes hate the Capitol—and now, he wants them dead. Dr. Gaul confirms that Coriolanus killed Bobbin and deems it a “transformative experience” for Coriolanus. Coriolanus tells himself he didn't murder Bobbin; it was self-defense.

Dr. Gaul admits she wanted Coriolanus to get a taste of what it's like to fear death. She says that in the arena, people become who they truly are: boys willing to beat each other to death. This, she insists, is “mankind in its natural state.” Coriolanus protests that he wouldn't have killed anyone if Dr. Gaul hadn't put him in the arena, but Dr. Gaul says Coriolanus still made a choice. Now, he has to figure out what human beings are, since his answer will dictate what kind of government they need. Coriolanus is disturbed.

Coriolanus accuses Dr. Gaul of abusing her power as a teacher by making him kill Bobbin, but she ignores this and says that Coriolanus's essay on war was terrible. She asks him to write another essay on what happens without control. Coriolanus says chaos happens, but Dr. Gaul asks him to elaborate—what's it like being without laws or government? She sends him away and he leaves the Citadel. Outside, the Plinths' Avox is there to take Coriolanus home. The Avox leaves Coriolanus at his apartment with food.

Dr. Gaul and Dean Highbottom's non-reaction to the boys coming out of the arena further shows that they don't care about Coriolanus and Sejanus's lives. They care about putting on the best show they can—one that doesn't show that Capitol kids are in danger, just like the tributes. Being taken to the Citadel only increases Coriolanus's fear, as he's in a vulnerable state and then finds himself in Dr. Gaul's lab. While it makes sense why Dr. Gaul would be a terrible obstetrician (she clearly doesn't care about other people's lives at all), the shift to running the muttation program makes sense. She wants to create new life, but on her twisted, cruel terms.



Dr. Gaul might play fast and loose with Coriolanus's life, but the way she speaks to him here suggests that she doesn't actually want him to die. She wants him to learn things—such as that, to her, the tributes deserve to die because they're so violent and hateful. It is, of course, ironic that Coriolanus doesn't grasp why the tributes want him dead: he, as a Capitol kid, has everything while they have nothing. So this experience just shows Coriolanus that he has to go out of his way to hold onto power, as that's the only way the districts will stay under control.



Dr. Gaul is sharing Enlightenment political philosophy here; in [Leviathan](#), Thomas Hobbes proposed that people are naturally violent and need a central government in order to live harmoniously in society. To Dr. Gaul, the Hunger Games seem to be a way to recreate Hobbes's violent “state of nature” in a controlled environment, thereby justifying the Capitol's existence.



Coriolanus is far less worried about political theory than he is about the fact that a teacher—a person he thought he could trust—put him in danger. He realizes here that he can't trust anybody. But again, Dr. Gaul shows that this was all a lesson for Coriolanus. Now that he's experienced the terror of being in the arena, he'll understand how necessary the Capitol is—and go out of his way to support it.



Tigris is waiting up for Coriolanus, but he refuses to tell her everything until morning. Seeing his bloody cuts, Tigris laments Lucy Gray's plight. Coriolanus realizes he's glad he killed Bobbin—Bobbin won't kill Lucy Gray now. Coriolanus collapses in bed and wakes to Grandma'am singing the **anthem**. He showers, inspects his stitches, and decides to tell people he had a bike accident. Tigris gives him tokens so he can take the trolley, as well as egg-and-sausage rolls from Ma.

At the auditorium, Coriolanus feels bad when he sees Juno Phipps, Bobbin's mentor. She doesn't know yet that Bobbin is dead. The mentors take their seats, sing the **anthem** at eight, and then Lucky welcomes everyone to day two. Cameras pan to Marcus's body. Bobbin's is nearby and is nearly unrecognizable. Coriolanus sweats and wants to leave—but he reminds himself he's not Sejanus. The cameras cut back to Lucky, who celebrates since they've hit the halfway mark; 12 tributes are dead. Lepidus interviews Juno, who insists Bobbin died under suspicious circumstances and demands to see footage. With horror, Coriolanus realizes footage *does* exist—there's a record of him killing Bobbin.

Lucky says he has a surprise for the 12 remaining mentors. He leaps across his studio to where Sejanus and Strabo Plinth are sitting. Sejanus reveals that his family is establishing the Plinth Prize, which will give a full ride to the University to the winning mentor. After some celebration, the cameras cut back to the arena. Coriolanus realizes Sejanus was right: Strabo is trying to cover up Sejanus's "outrageous" behavior with money. Will Strabo try to buy Coriolanus's silence about Sejanus's trip into the arena? Coriolanus tells himself to focus on helping Lucy Gray.

Not much happens in the arena all morning; Coral and Mizzen collect food and water, but the other tributes stay hidden. After lunch, the mentors learn that only those with living tributes will sit on the mentor dais. Coriolanus dislikes this—Clemensia still seems angry with him. He struggles to stay awake until late afternoon, when the District Five girl emerges and Mizzen, Coral, and Tanner hunt her down and kill her. Lepidus interviews her mentor, Iphigenia, who can't remember whether the girl's name was Sol or Sal. Coriolanus reminds himself there are only 10 tributes to go until he wins the Plinth Prize.

Later in the evening, Lucy Gray races out of a tunnel alone. Jessup staggers out behind her, looking hurt. But soon, it becomes clear he's sick. He swipes at the sun. Lucy Gray can't have poisoned him—but then, Coriolanus sees him start to foam at the mouth.

Coriolanus may be better able to empathize with Lucy Gray now after experiencing what it's like to be in the arena. But he's still focused on winning. Unlike Sejanus, he sees no reason to actually try to get the Games to stop—the reward for winning is, to Coriolanus, too huge to pass up. The anthem continues to be background noise for Coriolanus, too, rather than something he thinks about critically.



Coriolanus doesn't see Sejanus as anyone to admire or aspire to be like; he's far too concerned with getting ahead to want to shut down the Games over this kind of violence. This concern with getting ahead causes Coriolanus to overlook the violence—even the horrific violence he committed. Instead, he starts to believe that the violence is both normal and necessary. This doesn't mean, though, that it's not disturbing. He doesn't want anyone to know he killed Bobbin, showing Coriolanus's humanity is still intact.



Strabo is an interesting character. Recall that Sejanus said his father bought the family's life in the Capitol to keep Sejanus out of District Two's reaping—but here Strabo is, further incentivizing the Hunger Games for other Capitol families. Through this, he highlights the idea that within the Capitol, it's impossible to trust anyone but oneself. Looking out for others, as Sejanus tries to do, will inevitably be punished.



The quick and matter-of-fact way that Coriolanus describes Sol's death betrays how little he cares about her—to him, she's just another obstacle between him and winning the Plinth Prize. The fact that even Sol's mentor Iphigenia can't remember Sol's name suggests that the mentorship program hasn't been very successful at encouraging the mentors to humanize their tributes.



Jessup's mysterious illness drives home that the tributes don't just have to fear each other in the arena. They also have to protect themselves from the Capitol's neglect, which results in the tributes' illnesses and deaths from starvation.



CHAPTER 17

Lysistrata murmurs that Jessup has rabies. Rabies returned in the Capitol during the war, when people weren't vaccinating their pets. Lysistrata suggests it was probably a zoo raccoon that bit him in the neck. In the auditorium, students are terrified. Some mutter that he brought rabies from the districts and will infect the Capitol. Coriolanus watches Jessup pursue Lucy Gray, who climbs into the stands and goes to a concession stand. Coriolanus orders water for Lucy Gray as Jessup starts to climb after her. His coordination is poor, and Coriolanus hopes he dies soon.

The drone flies in with the bottle of water—but as it flies over Jessup, Jessup swings at it with a board. The bottle cracks and Jessup becomes even more agitated. Coriolanus remembers that rabies makes victims fear water. Lysistrata orders him bottle after bottle of water, insisting she wants Lucy Gray to win if Jessup doesn't. As Jessup corners Lucy Gray, the drones fly in with water. They release the bottles over his head—and Jessup panics. He trips and falls out of the stands into the arena. He lands in a spot with good audio; viewers hear his bones crack. Lucy Gray picks her way down to Jessup and tells him it's safe to sleep. She strokes his hair until he dies.

Lucy Gray drinks several bottles of water, pours a bottle over Jessup's face, and closes his eyes with a handkerchief. She scoops up the food parcels Lysistrata sends and then runs into a tunnel, just as Reaper enters the arena. In the auditorium, Lepidus interviews Lysistrata, who firmly insists Jessup was bitten by a Capitol raccoon. Lepidus claws at himself; a raccoon touched his equipment. Finally, though, he asks for Lysistrata's thoughts. Lysistrata insists Jessup was a protector—and not a protective dog, like Lepidus suggests.

For the rest of the evening, Lucky does a rundown of the tributes and their mentors. He introduces Lucy Gray as the most popular tribute, and Coriolanus crosses Jessup and Lysistrata off his mentor sheet. The rest of the evening is uneventful, so Coriolanus heads home. Grandma'am is already asleep. Coriolanus tells Tigris he wants to tell her about his time in the arena—but he's afraid it'll put her in danger. She insists she already knows what happened by looking at the damage to his clothes. She can tell some of the blood on his shirt isn't his. Coriolanus says he had no choice. Then, Tigris reveals that they got the tax bill today. They'll lose their home.

The students muttering that Jessup brought rabies from the districts mirrors a common (and bigoted) argument against immigrants: that they're unclean and carry diseases, and therefore shouldn't be allowed into a given country. As Lysistrata notes that Jessup contracted rabies in the Capitol, she shows how misguided this view is. It's a view that dehumanizes Jessup—and conveniently means that those in the Capitol won't have to grapple with the reality that the Capitol is a dangerous place to live.



As when other tributes have died horrific deaths, Jessup's death makes Lucy Gray seem far kinder and more compassionate than anyone watching and not actively involved in his death. Unlike spectators, Lucy Gray tries to ease Jessup's passing, rather than torture him or dehumanize him. Lysistrata establishes herself as a compassionate person after this, especially after she suggested earlier that the mentors are being used in the Games.



Capitol folk, like Lepidus, don't want to deal with the uncomfortable possibility that the Capitol isn't a clean, safe place to live. If they believe that Jessup was bitten in the Capitol, it suggests that they are, perhaps, just as vulnerable to being bitten as he was—something that, in turn, dilutes their power somewhat. In her final interview, Lysistrata tries to portray Jessup as truly human. In her case, the mentoring program was successful.



As Coriolanus crosses Jessup and Lysistrata off his mentor sheet without another thought, it shows how cold and unfeeling the Hunger Games have made him. It was emotional to cross off Arachne—but now, crossing Lysistrata off represents one step closer to the Plinth Prize. Nevertheless, Coriolanus lives in a constant state of fear. He knows telling the truth and admitting he was in danger is risky, which is why he doesn't want to tell Tigris the truth.



CHAPTER 18

Coriolanus can no longer ignore that his family is going to lose its home—and its identity. They have six weeks to come up with the money, and it's going to be impossible. They must also avoid eviction, so they'll have to move. But Tigris tells Coriolanus he has to finish the Hunger Games first and win a prize.

Coriolanus sleeps poorly, and in the morning, he takes the trolley to school. He realizes that the Plinths might loan him money—or pay him to stay silent about Sejanus.

At the Academy, nobody wants to talk about the Games except for Hilarius. Hilarius wonders if his tribute, Wovey, is dead in a tunnel somewhere, since she hasn't shown herself. Lucky starts the morning by having Lepidus interview Coriolanus about Jessup's rabies scare. Coriolanus praises Lysistrata's quick thinking and notes that Lucy Gray is loyal and brave—like a Capitol girl, not a district. His communicuff pings with new sponsor gifts. Pup interrupts the interview by sending Lamina, who's still on her beam, breakfast. Coriolanus considers blackmailing the Plinths.

Then, Reaper emerges from the barricade to speak to Lamina. Coriolanus notices that Lamina is badly sunburnt. The tributes barter and then seem to come to an agreement. Reaper climbs the flagpole and hacks through Panem's flag until it falls. The audience is aghast; this demands punishment. Clemensia tells Lepidus that this is “stupid,” and she'll feed Reaper when he earns it. The students in the hall watch as Lamina drops food down to Reaper and Reaper tosses the flag up—it will protect Lamina from the sun. Reaper runs away as Coral, Mizzen, and Tanner appear in the stands and ask for food.

The cameras cut to Lucky in the studio, who's trying to get his pet parrot to speak. The parrot won't speak, but Dean Highbottom notes that the bombing created an entirely new arena—and the addition of the drones means the audience is basically in the arena with the tributes. The rest of the morning is boring, but after lunch, Coral, Mizzen, and Tanner approach Lamina. Coral and Mizzen each climb a post. Pup grows increasingly agitated as Coral and Mizzen reach the top. Tanner throws tridents to his allies—and though Lamina seems to break Mizzen's knee, Coral kills Lamina. Coral helps Mizzen down—and then stabs Tanner in the back. Domitia, Tanner's mentor, tells Lepidus that she's learned to be careful who you trust.

In Coriolanus's mind, the Snows' penthouse apartment is a symbol of the family's wealth and prestige. Losing it would mean giving up the Snows' reputation as a powerful Capitol family. And this is the most important concern to Coriolanus. So the Hunger Games becomes even less about helping Lucy Gray survive because she's a person—it's now totally about winning so Coriolanus can remain wealthy and powerful.



Hilarius complaining like this shows again how little he thinks of his tribute. He demonstrates no recognition that Wovey is a little girl trying to survive—to him, she's just a disappointing embarrassment. Coriolanus, on the other hand, tries to humanize Lucy Gray in his interview with Lepidus. But even as he does this, his goal is still to win, not to actually help Lucy Gray. Through humanizing her, he only turns her into a more compelling caricature for viewers.



Recall that Sejanus pointed out that while Panem purports to protect and support all its residents (as through the anthem), in reality, it's not doing that—instead, it murders district kids through the Hunger Games. So Reaper understandably doesn't feel any loyalty to Panem's flag, which to him is a symbol of the country's hypocrisy and classism. Instead, he's going to use it in a way that's most useful for him: as a bargaining chip.



What Dean Highbottom says about the effects of the bombing shows that the Gamemakers have unwittingly stumbled upon how to make the Games more interesting: changing up the arena to encourage different behavior from the tributes. (In the original trilogy, part of the “fun” of the Games is the new arena every year.) Domitia articulates one of the novel's central ideas: that in Panem, it's actually the norm to not be able to trust anyone. In a society where everyone is encouraged to look out for only themselves, anyone is a potential enemy.



The remaining eight mentors rearrange their chairs and spend the afternoon watching Lucky try to get his parrot to talk. Coriolanus talks to Lepidus whenever he can, which results in more food gifts for Lucy Gray. Finally, Reaper emerges from the tunnels. He arranges the dead tributes (except for Jessup) in a line and then drapes a piece of the flag over the bodies. He puts on the rest of Lamina's flag piece like a cape. Clemensia still refuses to feed Reaper.

When Satyria releases the mentors for the night, Coriolanus heads to the Citadel to get his stitches checked. When Dr. Gaul appears, she reveals that Gaius Breen died of complications from the bombing; Coriolanus should keep this a secret and prepare something to say to Lepidus. Dr. Gaul says there will be repercussions and then Coriolanus leaves, thinking about the paper he owes Dr. Gaul. At the elevator, though, he encounters lab assistants with the tank of neon **snakes**. Coriolanus has a bad feeling about this. Will the snakes end up in the arena? Coriolanus realizes he has a handkerchief Lucy Gray used in his bag. He casually drops it in the snake tank.

CHAPTER 19

Coriolanus hurries through the Capitol, feeling like he did something terrible. He tells himself he doesn't want the **snakes** to kill Lucy Gray—but he also wants to win the Plinth Prize, and apparently he's willing to cheat to win. As he deliberates, Coriolanus realizes he's been kind of cheating for a while. He can argue that it was just decent to sneak dining hall food for Lucy Gray, but now he wonders what else he's capable of. He vows to be honest going forward.

Coriolanus realizes he's near the Plinths' apartment, so he decides to pop in. Their wealth is obvious in their lavish furnishings. Ma greets Coriolanus in the front hall and since Sejanus is in bed (he's experiencing a breakdown), she invites Coriolanus to join her in the kitchen for tea. He tries not to judge her for doing something as low class as serving a guest in the kitchen, but he thoroughly enjoys his huge piece of blackberry pie. As Coriolanus eats, he observes what seems like a shrine to District Two. He finds this pitiful. Ma joins Coriolanus at the table and they discuss how poorly Sejanus fits in in the Capitol. But Strabo, she says, is convinced this is for the best.

Using pieces of Panem's flag to cover the bodies makes quite the statement: Reaper is willing to symbolically destroy Panem to protect those Panem wishes to destroy. Clemensia's unwillingness to send Reaper food or water highlights her hatred of her tribute: he's symbolically destroying everything that will help Clemensia get ahead.



As yet another mentor dies, it's starting to seem more and more like the mentors are at risk in the Hunger Games in somewhat the same way that the tributes are. It certainly does seem like Dr. Gaul is planning something and is roping Coriolanus in by asking him to prepare something for an interview. Knowing how cruel Dr. Gaul is, Coriolanus knows it'd be a mistake to underestimate her—and her lack of regard for the tributes in the arena.



Coriolanus's mental gymnastics here are another sign of how successfully Panem has warped the conversation about the Hunger Games. Saving Lucy Gray's life is, to readers, the clear right thing to do—but instead, Coriolanus can only focus on the fact that he's cheated. This is a big deal to him not because he necessarily prizes honesty, but because if he's found out, he might not win.



Coriolanus, of course, fails to refrain from judging Ma—his disdain is palpable as he follows her into the kitchen. Through his observations about her and how "pitiful" she is, he shows what he prioritizes: wealth, and the Capitol, over all else. It doesn't even seem to register with him that Sejanus is in trouble, and as his mother, Ma is worried for her son. He also doesn't seem to grasp that Strabo seems to be trying to do the best he can to keep his family safe, as he's too busy resenting the Plinths' wealth.



An Avox maid signals to Ma that Strabo would like to see Coriolanus, so Coriolanus follows the maid to Strabo's library. Strabo looks out of place and sad in his velvet smoking jacket, but he still gives Coriolanus a look that Coriolanus remembers Crassus giving him. Strabo says that while Coriolanus looks like Crassus, he's not like Crassus at all—Crassus wouldn't have saved Sejanus from the arena. Maybe, he suggests, Coriolanus is more like his mother, who was "the very definition of a lady." With prodding, Coriolanus says he's like his mother in that they both love music (a stretch) and they both believe they shouldn't take good fortune for granted. Coriolanus isn't sure what he means by this, but Strabo accepts it. Strabo thanks Coriolanus again for saving Sejanus and then dismisses Coriolanus.

Once at home, Coriolanus sits down to write his essay for Dr. Gaul on chaos, control, and contract—what happens if no one is in control of humanity. Coriolanus thinks of how quickly the arena transformed him from prey into a predator. What would it be like if everyone was like that? If survival was people's only concern? There are no laws in that scenario, and Coriolanus knows that this is where "the social contract" (the agreement not to kill or rob each other) comes in. But that requires laws, power, and control—which only the Capitol should have. This written, Coriolanus crawls into bed.

Coriolanus wakes up to the **anthem** in the morning and eats some of Ma's breakfast foods on the trolley to school. The mentors now have assigned seating, and the only change in the arena is that Jessup's body is with the other bodies. Nothing happens until midmorning, when Wovey, skeletal and ill, appears in a tunnel. Hilarius sends her water and food—but Wovey is in too much of a daze to do much but drink from one bottle. She sits back and goes still. Coriolanus wonders if Lucy Gray poisoned Wovey as Hilarius leaves the mentor dais. Around lunchtime, Reaper inspects Wovey's face and carries her to the dead tributes. Coriolanus believes Reaper suspects Wovey didn't die of hunger.

Coriolanus wishes Lucy Gray would appear so he could send her more food and water—to eat, and to poison for others. Mizzen and Coral eventually eat the food that Wovey didn't. Coriolanus, though, can't stomach the lima bean soup lunch served to the mentors. Festus eats Coriolanus's portion and then they return to the auditorium. Nothing happens in the arena that afternoon. At one point, Lucky interviews Dr. Gaul—and Dr. Gaul is holding Lucky's parrot, who's clearly upset, in a cage. Dr. Gaul announces Gaius Breen's death and says that to punish their "rebel enemies," she has "something special" for the kids in the arena. The camera cuts to the arena.

Coriolanus's first glimpse of Strabo paints a picture of a man who might not be so different from Sejanus. He doesn't seem to fit into the world of the Capitol, but unlike his son, he's trying to make an effort. As Strabo discusses Crassus and Coriolanus's mother, it becomes clear that Coriolanus—and Strabo, for that matter—would like to be more like his mother than he actually is. This represents Coriolanus trying to tap into a kinder, gentler side of himself, one that his mother embodied. And it helps humanize Strabo, too, that he says these kind things about Coriolanus's mother.



Through this essay, Coriolanus is doing exactly what Dr. Gaul wants him to do: considering these Enlightenment ideas and using them to ultimately justify the Capitol's existence. Though the novel never fully answers what humans are like when there are no laws—the Hunger Games are contrived, not an actual natural state of humanity—through this exercise, Dr. Gaul encourages Coriolanus to decide that humans are naturally violent. Therefore, according to this line of thinking, they deserve to be subjugated.



Once again, Coriolanus expresses no interest in the anthem's lyrics—it's background noise, rather than something to engage with thoughtfully. Though at this point it's impossible to know for sure if Lucy Gray poisoned Wovey, the fact still remains that Wovey wasn't strong or nourished enough to survive long. And this is the Capitol's fault for not feeding her when she lived in her district, and then when she was directly in their care as a tribute.



After so many years eating lima beans thanks to Grandma'am's bartering with Pluribus, Coriolanus can't bring himself to eat the food that reminds him of that terrible time. This starts to show that it is, perhaps, unnecessary to continually host the Hunger Games—people who lived through the war, like Coriolanus, won't quickly forget what it was like to be afraid and hungry. Dr. Gaul looks even more menacing as she holds Lucky's beloved pet.



A drone flies into the arena and drops the **snake** tank in the middle. Treech, Teslee, Circ, and Reaper are in the arena and watch with interest—until the snakes race in all directions. Clemensia leaps up and screams; Coriolanus holds her and tells her she’s okay. The tributes in the arena run, but the snakes attack Circ and kill him. Teslee tries to climb a pole, sobbing in terror. Dr. Gaul explains that the snakes are mutations designed to hunt humans. Mizzen and Coral race out of tunnels; snakes kill Coral while Mizzen manages to climb another pole. Then, mics pick up Lucy Gray singing, “la la la.” She walks backward out of a tunnel, snakes following her happily. Other snakes slither toward her as she sits. The snakes slither onto her rainbow skirts.

There’s no indication that in prior Hunger Games, tributes have had to contend with anything in the arena but each other. Dropping the snakes in is not only a way to punish the tributes, the rebels, and the districts; it’s also a way for Dr. Gaul to create drama and increase viewership. And though Dr. Gaul clearly didn’t plan for it, Lucy Gray singing to the snakes creates yet more drama and intrigue—as nobody but Coriolanus knows why the snakes behave this way. Dropping the snakes also impresses upon the tributes that they can’t trust the Capitol to play by previously established rules—Dr. Gaul might upend things at any time.



CHAPTER 20

Coriolanus isn’t sure why the **snakes** are behaving like this, and he never told Lucy Gray about Clemensia and the snakes. Maybe Lucy Gray’s song is keeping them from killing her. Finally, Lucy Gray starts in on the lyrics. The song sounds old; she talks about someone heading for “the sweet old hereafter.” Coriolanus tries to parse the meaning of the song as the snakes huddle around Lucy Gray, and the other tributes climb to a safe height. The speaker in the song agrees to follow someone to heaven when they’ve finished their business on earth. When Lucy Gray finishes, she hums, which soothes the snakes.

Lucy Gray’s song seems to be about accepting her death—but only after she’s finished with whatever she’s up to on earth. The song, in this way, is a form of protest: Lucy Gray isn’t going to give up until she’s done with the Hunger Games. Coriolanus dislikes this sort of critical thinking exercise, though, so rather than figuring this out, he’s just confused. The song, to him, is a convenient tool to keep the snakes from killing her, nothing more.



Dr. Gaul’s face is stony as the auditorium erupts in applause for Lucy Gray. She suggests the audience remember Gaius Breen, so Lepidus interviews Coriolanus and his classmates. Coriolanus is the only one able to connect Gaius’s death to the **snakes**, telling Lepidus that “when hit, we hit back twice as hard.” Everyone but the remaining five mentors heads home after dinner, and Coriolanus knows he has to focus on winning the Plinth Prize. It starts to rain in the arena as Coriolanus and the mentors settle in; they plan to sleep in Heavensbee Hall tonight.

Dr. Gaul is clearly trying to draw Coriolanus into her orbit and her way of thinking. When he frames the snakes as retaliation for Gaius Breen’s death, he also ignores the fact that he was just as horrified as everyone else to see the snakes drop into the arena. He knows dropping the snakes on the tributes was cruel and inhumane, but he knows he can’t say that and get away with it. To survive, he has to step into line.



Coriolanus decides he must make up with Clemensia. As their classmates sleep, they discuss her snakeskin (which is going away) and Coriolanus apologizes for abandoning Clemensia. They make up, share a cheese tart from Ma, and share soap in the morning. As the rest of the students file in, the screen shows sunrise in the arena. It’s not raining now, and most of the **snakes** died in the night. Clemensia and Vipsania send food to Treech and Reaper, but Reaper drinks from a puddle instead and then moves Coral and Circ’s bodies to lie with the others. When Mizzen mimes eating, Persephone orders food for him.

Reaper, perhaps unsurprisingly, doesn’t trust Clemensia—after all, she wouldn’t send him food or water when he really needed it earlier, so why would he start now? Especially after the snakes were dropped in the arena, the tributes know they can’t trust anyone on the outside, perhaps even their mentors, to take care of them. They’re alone in the arena.



Teslee appears with one of the drones she picked up. From a spot under Mizzen, Teslee launches the drone into the air; it's tied to her wrist. Mizzen accepts his first package of bread from a drone—but the drone returns to him instead of either falling or leaving the arena. More drones arrive to drop food and then remain to circle Mizzen. Urban, amused, says Teslee hacked the drones so they don't leave Mizzen alone. Pursued by drones, Mizzen falls off his perch and snaps his neck. Teslee looks thrilled—until Treech leaps out and splits her skull. Urban stalks off the stage, while Persephone allows Lepidus to interview her. Coriolanus, Clemensia, and Vipsania—the final three mentors—arrange their chairs in a line.

On the screen, Lucky lights sparklers to celebrate the final three tributes and ends up lighting his curtains on fire. The cameras cut back to the arena, where Lucy Gray is still hiding. When Lepidus approaches Coriolanus for an interview, Coriolanus continues to insist that Lucy Gray isn't really district. In the arena, Reaper moves unsteadily as he adds Teslee and Mizzen's bodies to the line of dead. He drinks from a puddle before sitting in the stands. Several hours later, Lucy Gray emerges and rinses an old water bottle in Reaper's puddle. Coriolanus sends her food and water, which she collects. Then she checks the bodies, clearly trying to figure out who's alive. Lepidus, interviewing Coriolanus, jokes that they should put it on the scoreboard. Coriolanus says that's a great idea.

Suddenly, Lucy Gray drops her provisions. Treech leaps out and catches her wrist with his ax. But Lucy Gray leaps into his arms—and a hot pink **snake** bites him in the neck. He dies. Vipsania leaves the dais and Clemensia and Coriolanus sit next to each other. In the arena, Lucy Gray spreads out her food like a picnic and Coriolanus lets himself imagine winning the Plinth Prize and “keeping” Lucy Gray. It seems like if Lucy Gray can hide away and let Reaper die of hunger, she could win. Hearing the chatter around him, he realizes this is the first year that spectators care about who wins.

Lucy Gray spends the afternoon in the arena, watching Reaper. Suddenly, Lucy Gray walks to Treech's body and starts to drag him to the line of dead tributes. Reaper seems to suddenly come to as he runs over, scaring Lucy Gray away, and finishes the job. But then, as he turns away, Lucy Gray starts to taunt him. She runs from her tunnel, pulls the flag off the bodies, and runs away. Coriolanus realizes that Lucy Gray is trying to make Reaper overheat in the hot sun. Finally, Reaper staggers to his puddle and drinks. He vomits, crawls to the line of bodies, and dies. Nobody moves for a half-hour, when Lucy Gray checks Reaper's pulse and closes his eyelids.

The drones not only provide the tributes with food. In Teslee's case, they also provide her with a weapon. This unexpectedly makes the Games more exciting for spectators, too, furthering Dr. Gaul's goal of increasing viewership and getting people invested in the Games. But Teslee's murder immediately after she kills Mizzen drives home that nothing is guaranteed in the arena, and the tributes can't trust each other at all. It's in their best interests to play along and attack each other—it's the only way out of the arena alive.



Throughout the novel's first two sections, it's shown again and again that plenty of ideas start out as jokes—such as betting, and here, the scoreboard—but end up being used to dehumanize the tributes. Putting tributes' deaths on a scoreboard would trivialize them, in much the same way that Coriolanus crossing mentor/tribute pairs off his list trivializes those deaths. Lucky's sparkler celebration also adds to the sense that these tributes' deaths don't actually matter to any Capitol viewers—they're entertainment.



The fact that Lucy Gray is able to use Dr. Gaul's snake to kill Treech suggests that she might be able to beat Dr. Gaul at her own game. At the very least, Lucy Gray can use Dr. Gaul's weapons for her own purposes—and, like Dr. Gaul, she might not be trustworthy. Pay attention to the language Coriolanus uses: he wants to “keep” Lucy Gray. He still believes he owns her and has every right to her, if she wins. Her win doesn't reflect on her, in other words: it's Coriolanus's win, and she's his prize.



Lucy Gray's victory—and Reaper's death—demonstrates more than anything the payoff of trust. Because Lucy Gray trusted Coriolanus to take care of her and send her the things she needed, she had the food and water she needed to survive. Reaper, though, was more vulnerable than he might have been otherwise because he didn't trust Clemensia—not that he had any reason to, given how she treated him and spoke about him earlier in the Games. Trust, this suggests, is both valuable and extremely dangerous.



Lucky announces that Lucy Gray and Coriolanus won the 10th Hunger Games. The auditorium erupts as everyone cheers and celebrates Coriolanus. Coriolanus allows himself several glasses of posca before Satyria sends him to the biology lab. Coriolanus is ecstatic—until he enters the lab to find not Dr. Gaul, but Dean Highbottom. On a table is an Academy napkin, a handkerchief, and Coriolanus’s mother’s **compact**. Five minutes later, Coriolanus signs up to be a Peacekeeper.

Notice that while Lucy Gray won the Hunger Games, Coriolanus is the one being celebrated. This shows clearly where the Capitol’s loyalty and interest lie: with their own, not with district children they believe are subhuman. Coriolanus has to confront the consequences of cheating when Dean Highbottom presents him with evidence that Coriolanus didn’t win honestly. Becoming a Peacekeeper dashes Coriolanus’s hopes of attending the University and becoming powerful.



CHAPTER 21

Coriolanus is in a stifling train car, struggling to sleep as the train moves through District Nine. He recalls that the Peacekeepers’ recruiting officer seemed not to know who he was—and didn’t make a fuss when Coriolanus asked to be assigned to District 12. Then, Coriolanus thinks through his meeting with Dean Highbottom. Highbottom accused Coriolanus of stealing the napkin from the Academy. Tapping the **compact**, he called Coriolanus’s mother “vapid” and naïve, and Lucy Gray the exact opposite (but she’ll be sent home). Highbottom didn’t believe Coriolanus didn’t know about the rat poison. Then, he noted that the handkerchief had Crassus Snow’s initials embroidered on it. He told Coriolanus to join the Peacekeepers, and Coriolanus desperately asked why Highbottom hates him when Highbottom and his father were friends. Soberly, Highbottom said he and Crassus *were* friends, but Crassus deserves to be dead—though he’s alive in Coriolanus.

Coriolanus is too miserable to notice, but he’s learning important things as he joins the Peacekeepers—namely, that none of them watch the Hunger Games, despite Dr. Gaul’s campaign to popularize the event. Had the Peacekeeper at the office watched the Games, they would’ve known who Coriolanus was and had more questions for him. Then, Coriolanus learns some interesting things about his family through his conversation with Dean Highbottom. Clearly, Highbottom doesn’t share Strabo Plinth’s assessment of Coriolanus’s mother as “the epitome of a lady,” though it’s impossible to know whose assessment is more correct. Then, what he says about Crassus and Coriolanus suggests that he sees Crassus as evil—and Coriolanus too.



After stopping at the Citadel to try to see Dr. Gaul, Coriolanus did as he was told. As soon as he got home, he told Tigris and Grandma’am everything, including that he’d leave tomorrow. Coriolanus knew he’d never see Grandma’am again; Peacekeepers serve for 20 years. Tigris helped him fill a small box with mementos, insisted the Hunger Games are “unnatural” and “vicious,” and helped Coriolanus put together a disguise to walk to the recruiting center. Within a few hours, Coriolanus had his hair buzzed, signed his forms, and accepted his packet of assigned items. He joined his fellow recruits on the train.

Tigris isn’t aware that Dr. Gaul seemed to take Coriolanus under her wing. But interestingly, in describing the Hunger Games as “unnatural,” she contradicts what Dr. Gaul said: that the Hunger Games represent humanity in its natural state. Tigris, therefore, suggests that humans aren’t as evil as Dr. Gaul thinks they are. But again, Coriolanus is too concerned with what’s happening to him to pick up on any of this.



Now, Coriolanus wonders if his friends know what happened to him. By September, they'll forget him. He wonders what will happen to Lucy Gray; will she return to District 12? Coriolanus tries not to cry. A day later, he stumbles onto the platform in 12. It's so hot and humid that after the short walk to the base, Coriolanus's socks are soaked. He and a recruit named Junius find their bunks. Soon, their bunkmates, Smiley and Bug, lead the newcomers to the mess hall. The food is surprisingly edible—and Coriolanus realizes he'll never go hungry.

By the time the meal is over, Smiley has given Coriolanus and Junius nicknames: Gent and Beanpole, respectively. Coriolanus loves having a nickname—it distances him from his disgrace. Fortunately, nobody knows who he is, as there's only one TV on base and reception is poor. As Coriolanus gets to know his bunkmates, he's shocked that they're mostly district. Smiley insists Peacekeeping is a good job—and he notes that he's not policing "his own people," as he's from Eight.

The next day, Coriolanus drills with the other recruits. This, and washing dishes, is all he does for days—though he does think about Lucy Gray. When Coriolanus gets his first day off, he plans to go to town and ask about her. On Saturday night, Coriolanus has free time, so he goes to his bunk to read a letter from Tigris. Tigris writes that rumors are flying about Coriolanus. The apartment is going on the market and Pluribus will take Tigris and Grandma'am in until they find a place. Grandma'am is also losing touch with reality. Coriolanus feels terrible—his family is becoming insignificant, and he'll never be president. In 20 years, he and his friends and family members will be nothing. Coriolanus decides the only thing to do is die now—but Sejanus Plinth appears in his doorway.

CHAPTER 22

Coriolanus launches himself at Sejanus and hugs him. Sejanus looks like he's lost weight, but he also looks much happier. He explains that the Academy was going to expel him, but Strabo promised a gym in exchange for Sejanus getting to graduate. Sejanus insisted that Coriolanus graduate too, and he pulls out Coriolanus's diploma. With the diploma, Coriolanus can become an officer. The boys discuss that Dean Highbottom's vendetta against Coriolanus is wearing on people—and Sejanus reveals that most people pity Coriolanus and love that he fell in love with Lucy Gray. Sejanus encourages Coriolanus to see this as his life beginning, especially if Lucy Gray is around. He promises to help Coriolanus find Lucy Gray and insists he's going to make the world better here.

It's hard to tell if Coriolanus is right or just being dramatic here. But if he is right that his friends will forget him in a month, this highlights how cutthroat the social scene is in the Capitol, as his absence will certainly make way for someone else to take his place. The Peacekeepers start to not look so bad when Coriolanus realizes that while serving, he won't be hungry—the government takes better care of its soldiers than its children, he's finding.



Being assigned to the Peacekeepers may be a slap in the face, but the Peacekeepers also allow Coriolanus to reinvent himself since nobody knows who he is. But again, this is a sign that Dr. Gaul hasn't been successful at popularizing the Hunger Games. What Smiley says about not policing "his own people" suggests that there are major divisions between the districts, not just between districts and the Capitol. Nobody in Panem is willing to trust anyone else.



Though Coriolanus is settling into life as a Peacekeeper, he's still connected to his family and the life he left behind in the Capitol—he's a Capitol kid through and through. Hearing that his family is going to lose their home is a huge blow, as that's what Coriolanus worked so hard to protect during the Hunger Games. But still, notice that Coriolanus isn't upset with being homeless, necessarily. Rather, he's upset about the implications: that his family is poor, insignificant, and no longer powerful in the Capitol. Put another way, he cares more about status than his family's physical wellbeing, a mark of his privilege.



Sejanus never fit in in the Capitol, so it makes sense that he's happier now that he's out of the city. The fact that Strabo was able to buy Sejanus's way out of trouble with a gym speaks to the Plinth family's immense wealth, which of course contrasts greatly with the Snow family being near poverty. Sejanus implies that Dean Highbottom might not be as powerful as Coriolanus thinks he is, if people are so annoyed with him for targeting Coriolanus. In turn, this suggests that Coriolanus's fate may change—especially if so many are rooting for him.



As Coriolanus helps Sejanus make his bed, Sejanus shares Capitol news. The Hunger Games weren't mentioned once they ended, though Dr. Gaul is insistent they continue. Lucky will probably host again next year, and betting is here to stay. Coriolanus insists that Dr. Gaul enjoys torturing animals and people, and she seems to think *all* people are that brutal—the Hunger Games, she believes, proves this. Soon after, Beanpole comes in, followed soon after by Smiley and Bug. Smiley has news that there's going to be a band at the Hob, the local bar, on Saturday—and a “Lucy somebody” is singing.

Over the next few days, Coriolanus seems to come back to life. Sejanus knows where he came from, and clearly Strabo and Ma care about Coriolanus. With Sejanus and a few others, there are enough recruits to form a squad of 20. Coriolanus and Sejanus immediately stand out, as they've had training like this before. Coriolanus finds he likes shooting a gun, and Sejanus is a natural marksman. Life has its ups and downs: the recruits won't be paid until they've been in service a month, which means Coriolanus can't pay for a ticket to see Lucy Gray. But Ma's box of treats arrives, and Smiley suggests they trade some for admission on Saturday. Coriolanus also begins studying for the officer candidate test.

On Friday morning, things are tense. Apparently, a month earlier, a Peacekeeper and two mine bosses died in an explosion. The man responsible has been apprehended, and he'll hang this afternoon in front of mine workers. Later, Commander Hoff, the base commander, tells Coriolanus and Sejanus to go to the hanging. At noon, they're given guns and get on a truck that carries them around the district's perimeter. Most of the houses are decrepit, without running water, and children look hungry. Coriolanus has been broke most of his life, but this kind of poverty is hard to believe. He blames them for being poor, but Sejanus notes that the Capitol pours money into industries in the districts, not the people.

The truck finally stops at the edge of a wood, where nooses hang from a huge tree over a platform with trapdoors. When a recruit asks, the major says they're hanging “some malcontent” named Arlo. The Peacekeepers arrange themselves around the platform. Coriolanus watches people fill the field, all of them covered in coal soot. Then, three vehicles drive up with Mayor Lipp and his family, Commander Hoff and other officers, and finally guards and the prisoner. Coriolanus watches out of the corner of his eye as Peacekeepers put the noose around Arlo's neck, read his crimes, and a drumbeat starts. But then, a woman shrieks and Arlo says, “Run, Lil! Run! Ru—” The trapdoor drops Arlo and he dies instantly. But Arlo's last words repeat over and over.

As Coriolanus confides in Sejanus about what Dr. Gaul told him, he's trying to build up some camaraderie with Sejanus. He positions the two of them as being against the Capitol and, specifically, against Dr. Gaul. But it's also important to remember that Coriolanus generally supports the Capitol (when it's not banishing him to the Peacekeepers, at least). Sejanus doesn't, so this may come back to haunt Sejanus as time goes on.



Coriolanus may be a loner most of the time, but being stuck out in District 12 has shown him that friends can be important and useful. Sejanus may be annoying at times, but he's also able to empathize with Coriolanus in a way that none of the other district-born Peacekeepers can. Given Coriolanus's love of power and control, it's perhaps not surprising that he enjoys having a gun so much. Possessing a gun makes him powerful, and it also makes Coriolanus feel bigger and better than the district people he's policing.



It's no surprise that Coriolanus and Sejanus have been asked to go to the hanging. As Capitol kids, they have a leg up on the other recruits when it comes to Peacekeeper training. So even if they don't have to do anything, they already look powerful and intimidating, since they've been encouraged to look that way since they were small kids. The fact that Coriolanus blames the district people for being poor speaks to how successful the Capitol has been at blaming the districts' poverty on the districts. Sejanus is right: the district people are poor because the Capitol rations their food, not because they've done anything wrong.



Referring to Arlo as “some malcontent” shows how little thought the Peacekeepers give to the District 12 residents. Rebels aren't taken seriously anymore, at least behind closed doors. But it's still essential that the Peacekeepers make a show of taking them seriously, hence this hanging with so much fanfare and requiring the miners to attend. This is intended to discourage other rebels from acting out by making it clear that there are terrible consequences for trying to fight the Capitol.



CHAPTER 23

Coriolanus shivers as “Run! Run, Lil! Ru—” echoes around him. He realizes what’s speaking are jabberjays, like he saw in Dr. Gaul’s lab. The refrain changes and becomes musical as Peacekeepers haul Lil away. A soldier in front of Coriolanus mutters “**Mockingjays**, stinking mutts,” making Coriolanus recall Lucy Gray saying, “the show’s not over until the mockingjay sings” in the Capitol’s “show.” The show, Coriolanus realizes, was the hanging—and he hates the mockingjays. He follows the Peacekeepers back to the truck. On the drive, the major explains that mockingjays are offspring of jabberjays and mockingbirds. Coriolanus wonders if he could suggest shooting mockingjays as part of target practice.

Sejanus gloomily says he didn’t think this through, but he refuses to elaborate. He disappears as soon as they get back to base. Coriolanus finds a letter from Pluribus on his bunk. Near the end, Pluribus writes that Crassus and Dean Highbottom’s friendship dissolved near the end because of something Highbottom said was supposed to be a joke; Crassus insisted he was doing Highbottom a favor. Highbottom refused to explain anything to Pluribus and just said “like moths to a flame.” Coriolanus decides Highbottom is absurdly petty.

Later, Coriolanus gets Sejanus to admit that he’s upset because helping to kill people in the districts doesn’t seem much different than killing them in the Hunger Games. He explains he signed up so he could be a medic and help people. Coriolanus is annoyed, but he privately thinks it’s hilarious that the son of a munitions giant is a pacifist. The commander won’t recommend Sejanus for medic training because Sejanus is too good with a gun—he tried to hide that he’s had mandatory weekly target practice his whole life, but everyone else is terrible. Sejanus continues to mope, but Coriolanus tells him to stop being self-indulgent—that’s how he ended up in the arena.

The next day passes without incident. After dinner, excitement ramps up as the news circulates that Lucy Gray will be singing at the Hob that night. Coriolanus heads off the base with his bunkmates. He’s looking forward to hopefully kissing Lucy Gray. At the Hob, Smiley trades some of Ma’s cookies for a quart of moonshine, and Coriolanus learns spectators don’t pay for tickets until after the show. Coriolanus and his bunkmates choose crates to sit on and sit halfway back, where Lucy Gray won’t notice him immediately. At dusk, someone turns on some makeshift stage lights and sets up a microphone.

Things are starting to click for Coriolanus. He now realizes that the mockingjays are real—and he immediately dislikes them. Interestingly, Coriolanus seems to hate the birds in part because they mimic Arlo’s last words without knowing what they mean. This is ironic, as Coriolanus has repeated all manner of Capitol talking points over the course of the novel without really thinking about them. But he only cares about it and takes offense to it when something the Capitol can’t control—like a mockingjay—does it.



Sejanus is clearly having a hard time, though it’s not entirely clear why at this point, since he won’t open up to Coriolanus. The letter from Pluribus suggests that for Crassus and Highbottom, they were drawn to something “like moths to a flame.” But what exactly they were drawn to is also a mystery. For Coriolanus, it’s just proof that Highbottom hates him for no good reason.



Coriolanus is so annoyed with Sejanus because, unlike Sejanus, he sees no reason to take issue with how the Capitol treats people from the districts. Coriolanus truly believes they’re subhuman, so in his mind, Sejanus is trying to help a lost cause. This also illustrates how effective the Capitol’s campaign to shift the conversation away from ethics has been. Coriolanus’s only concern is looking out for himself (though he doesn’t want Sejanus to get in too much trouble), not whether his government is just and doing the right thing.



Coriolanus doesn’t want to cause a scene at the Hob by staging an elaborate reunion with Lucy Gray. But it also reads as somewhat voyeuristic of him to take this seat where he knows she can’t see him. It shifts the power to him—Lucy Gray doesn’t know she’s performing for him, and he’s far more powerful than she is. Also notice that as Coriolanus thinks about reuniting with her, he doesn’t leave any room for Lucy Gray to want nothing to do with him. Her perspective doesn’t matter so much to him.



Soon after, a little girl steps out and, to cheers, introduces herself as Maude Ivory. She introduces the Covey: Tam Amber on mandolin, Clerk Carmine on fiddle, Barb Azure on bass, and then Lucy Gray Baird. Lucy Gray spins onto the stage with her guitar. She makes the audience laugh and accepts a bottle of moonshine from a Peacekeeper. Then, she breaks into an upbeat song. Coriolanus is shocked: she's so happy and so beautiful, which makes him jealous since she's "his girl." The Covey plays all sorts of songs. The ones "from another time," with complicated harmonies, unsettle Coriolanus. Lucy Gray ends by singing the song she sang at the reaping.

The show over, Maude Ivory fetches a basket and weaves through the audience, accepting payment for the show. Coriolanus and his bunkmates only have a few coins, so he gives the girl Ma's popcorn balls. He watches Maude Ivory run to Lucy Gray onstage and point to him. Lucy Gray looks confused and then grins. She agrees to play one more song, the one she sang from the zoo about a train and wanting to see her true love (Coriolanus knows that's him). As the song ends, he decides to kiss her as soon as they get close. The Covey bow and Coriolanus moves toward Lucy Gray—but then, a drunk young man and Mayfair, the mayor's daughter, push through the crowd. This must be the lover from Lucy Gray's songs.

CHAPTER 24

Maude Ivory puts herself between Lucy Gray and the man, whom she calls Billy Taupe. She tells him to get away and to take his "weasel girl" with him. Barb Azure insists the band is fine without him, but Billy Taupe still tries to convince Clerk Carmine (who looks like he might be a brother) to come with him. A Peacekeeper puts a hand on Billy Taupe's arm—and Billy Taupe shoves him. The lights go out and chaos erupts. A fist punches Coriolanus's jaw, and he flashes on Dr. Gaul saying, "That's mankind in its natural state. That's humanity undressed." Coriolanus is part of that "naked humanity." Coriolanus heads out front, where the Peacekeepers decide not to respond to the brawl. Coriolanus finds it unsettling that the miners fought back.

Lucy Gray never appears out front, though Peacekeepers march Mayfair Lipp out of the Hob. Sejanus, Coriolanus, and four others are tasked with walking her home. Without a weapon, Coriolanus feels vulnerable. He remembers Grandma'am saying that district people drink water because it doesn't rain blood. Eventually, the party reaches a sorry excuse for a mansion and Mayfair slips inside. The officers decide not to tell her parents she was out—Mayor Lipp will no doubt lecture them.

Coriolanus's jealousy in this moment emerges for the same reasons he got jealous after Lucy Gray sang during her interview. It's clear that she has a life here, a following, and is attractive to everyone—which, combined, dilutes Coriolanus's power over her. Put another way, she obviously doesn't need him to protect her here; she can fend for herself. And Coriolanus justifies their relationship to himself by casting himself as her protector, as it gives him power within the relationship.



Everything seems like it's going so well for Coriolanus until this drunk young man appears. This establishes the young man as Coriolanus's rival for Lucy Gray's affections. Lucy Gray seems genuinely happy to see Coriolanus, which suggests that she trusts him and doesn't see him as a double agent. She sees in him a capacity to be good and to sympathize with district folks. However, keep in mind that Coriolanus isn't actually sympathetic, judging by how he thinks of and treats Sejanus.



Coriolanus witnesses true familial loyalty as he watches the members of the Covey turn Billy Taupe away. If Lucy Gray's songs are to be believed, Billy Taupe is the man who betrayed her, and the band has chosen to support Lucy Gray over Billy Taupe in the aftermath. Then, as the brawl breaks out, Coriolanus thinks back to his impromptu lessons with Dr. Gaul. Humans, he's starting to see, might be naturally violent—at least when they're anonymous and on a level playing field with their oppressors (the Peacekeepers are unarmed and just as blind as the miners in the dark).



Coriolanus continues to prioritize power and control over anything else. He seems to now believe that district people would drink blood (which is really just a coded way of saying they're naturally violent) and that he can't possibly trust them. The power dynamics in the district also start to get a little muddy here, given that the Peacekeepers seem to give Mayor Lipp a wide berth and not want to cross him.



On the way back to the base, Coriolanus notices Billy Taupe, bloody and scowling, against a wall. Coriolanus doesn't tell his fellows, as he doesn't know if the Covey might object to Peacekeepers dealing with Billy Taupe. He figures, though, that Lucy Gray was referring to his relationship with Mayfair in the song she sang in the interview—and that's why the Covey wants nothing to do with him. As Coriolanus and Sejanus walk on, they discuss whether they'll ever see their homes again. Coriolanus privately thinks that he and Sejanus both need a war to achieve their dreams of becoming an officer and a medic.

As Coriolanus washes his face back at the base, he thinks through seeing Lucy Gray again. He hates Billy Taupe for spoiling the reunion, but he also believes that the Covey rejecting Billy Taupe “confirm[s] that Lucy Gray belong[s] to him.” The following morning, Coriolanus learns that the higher-ups have decided soldiers can't leave the base alone; the Hob might become off-limits, too. Coriolanus is distraught, since this means he can't see Lucy Gray. He doesn't want her to try to visit him here, even if that's allowed; he doesn't want to encourage rumors that he's a rebel sympathizer. Sejanus reveals that he figured out last night where Lucy Gray lives. He'd be happy to accompany Coriolanus there.

Coriolanus tells his bunkmates he and Sejanus are going to trade chewing gum for letter paper and talks Cookie into letting him take some ice as a gift. Then, he and Sejanus head for town. Sejanus uses his gum to pay a woman for bread and directions to the Seam, the part of town where Lucy Gray lives. Coriolanus and Sejanus wander along roads lined with shacks. Coriolanus is ready to give up, but then they see trees ahead and hear Maude Ivory singing. They find Maude Ivory on a makeshift stoop, cracking nuts.

Maude Ivory runs inside and fetches Barb Azure, who says that Lucy Gray is in the meadow. Maude Ivory grabs Coriolanus's hand and leads the way. She shares that she saw Coriolanus on TV, but only once—they only get static or “special” broadcasts, and the news is “boring.” Coriolanus realizes Dr. Gaul won't be able to engage viewers for the Hunger Games if people don't have televisions that work properly. Then, Maude Ivory explains that Billy Taupe is Clerk Carmine's brother. The Covey girls are all Baird cousins, and the Covey found Tam Amber in a box as an infant. She notices Coriolanus's ice and reveals that their freezer is broken—ice is a treat, like “flowers in wintertime.” Coriolanus tells the girl about Grandma'am's rooftop **rose** garden, and then they reach the meadow.

For the moment, Coriolanus seems to be more loyal to Lucy Gray than he is to the Peacekeepers—he seems to imply that the Peacekeepers would like to apprehend Billy Taupe if they knew where he was. This shows that Coriolanus is calculating and constantly trying to figure out what he should do to get ahead and ingratiate himself with people. Through his conversation with Sejanus, Coriolanus also starts to see that war could have a purpose: to help him get ahead.



Problematically, Coriolanus doesn't seem to accept that Lucy Gray and the Covey could reject Billy Taupe just because Billy Taupe did something unforgivable to Lucy Gray. She can't exist on her own; Coriolanus implies that she must always have a man in her life. For now, he believes that man is him. Then, Coriolanus once again goes into his reputation-preserving mode. It's more important to him to not associate too much with the rebels, hence needing to leave the base to see Lucy Gray.



Keep in mind that as a Capitol kid, Coriolanus hasn't had to work very hard for many things. His family may be poor, but he's still been able to attend a prestigious school, and he has the weight of his family name to propel him forward. So it's perhaps not surprising that the hot walk to the Seam almost finishes him—this is the hardest he's had to work for something he wants.



Though Coriolanus expects to be with the Peacekeepers for the next 20 years, his mind is still very much back with Dr. Gaul in the Capitol. He's still mulling over all the things she said to him. And the way he frames his realization that nobody watches the Games also shows how invested Coriolanus is in keeping the Games alive. Even though he's seen firsthand how horrific they are, he's still committed to Dr. Gaul's vision of turning them into a beloved sporting event. As Maude Ivory and Coriolanus discuss the ice, it becomes clear just how difficult life is in District 12—the most basic staples are considered luxuries.



Lucy Gray is in the meadow with Shamus, their goat. When Sejanus suggests he and Maude Ivory head back to the house to eat the bread, the girl agrees. Coriolanus nervously walks through the tall grass, listening to Lucy Gray sing a song about a “hanging tree”—it’s about Arlo’s death. She notices him when he steps on a stick and she jumps, terrified. She explains that she still acts like she’s in the arena. Then, Coriolanus embraces Lucy Gray, and she kisses him. They sit on a rock, bite a hole in the plastic bag of ice, and Lucy Gray tells Coriolanus about her experience in the arena. Coriolanus talks about going into the arena to kill Sejanus and admits he killed Bobbin; Lucy Gray admits she killed Wovey, Treech, and Reaper (whom she insists had rabies like Jessup).

Coriolanus tells Lucy Gray about Dr. Gaul’s lab, her **snakes**, Clemensia, and dropping the handkerchief into the snake tank. That, he says, is why he’s here as a Peacekeeper. Lucy Gray suggests they each owe the other their lives, and that they’re meant to be together. Shamus interrupts the couple’s kiss by nibbling Coriolanus’s collar, so Lucy Gray finishes off the ice and picks up her guitar. She asks if Pluribus might sell her some strings; she still has money from Dean Highbottom. He gave her cash and apologized. This shocks Coriolanus.

Lucy Gray leads Coriolanus into the house, which has a sleeping area in the loft, a rudimentary kitchen, a TV, and only chairs and a table for furniture. Maude Ivory runs for Lucy Gray as soon as they step in and says that “he’s making trouble again.” Billy Taupe is in the front yard with Sejanus, drawing in the dirt and talking. Coriolanus doesn’t see a problem until Barb Azure says ominously that Billy Taupe seems to be drawing directions. Coriolanus insists on going out with Lucy Gray; she belongs to him, after all, and he wants Billy Taupe to see. Billy Taupe wipes away his drawing as soon as Coriolanus walks up—but Coriolanus saw it was a map of the base.

CHAPTER 25

Sejanus jumps up guiltily, but he shakes Billy Taupe’s hand. He leaves for the house. Lucy Gray tells Billy Taupe to leave, but he implies that Lucy Gray is telling the Covey lies about how and why he’s with Mayfair to make herself look better. Coriolanus steps up and tells Billy Taupe to leave, and finally, Billy Taupe does. Lucy Gray spits that Billy Taupe is a liar—she flirts with people because it’s her job, but she hasn’t turned to sex work. But Billy Taupe holds her to a different standard. She explains that she sent Billy Taupe to Mayor Lipp’s house to earn money giving Mayfair piano lessons, and not long after, the mayor called her name in the reaping.

The novel starts to associate Lucy Gray with the mockingjays through this song she writes about Arlo’s hanging—she, like the mockingjays, turns a horrific event into something beautiful. It’s clear that Lucy Gray has been traumatized by her experience in the Hunger Games. But Coriolanus is, she believes, the person who got her through it, so they’re able to connect over the trauma they both experienced. Admitting that they both killed also levels the playing field—they’re both capable of murder, despite their other differences.



Lucy Gray seems to see Coriolanus’s appearance in District 12 as a sign and as a good thing. This is an early indicator that their relationship might not go well—in contrast, Coriolanus sees Peacekeeping as a punishment, not an opportunity to be with the girl he loves. It’s a shock to hear that Dean Highbottom gave Lucy Gray money. Highbottom’s actions again suggest he’s not sold on the Hunger Games, despite inventing them.



Coriolanus seems relatively secure when it comes to his rivalry with Billy Taupe until the possibility that he’s giving Sejanus directions comes up. While Coriolanus might feel secure in his relationship with Lucy Gray, he knows that if Sejanus and Billy Taupe are working together, this might put Coriolanus’s life at risk (it could be considered treason). And again, Coriolanus still thinks of Lucy Gray as his. She’s something to possess, not a person with agency whom he must respect.



Billy Gray seems just as concerned with his reputation as Coriolanus is, given that he accuses Lucy Gray of ruining his reputation among the Covey. But this passage shows that damaging others’ reputations can be one of the most effective ways to gain control over another person. This is, after all, why Coriolanus worked so hard previously to save the Snow name and not let Dean Highbottom ruin his reputation.



Coriolanus and Lucy Gray return to the house, where Sejanus is helping Maude Ivory milk Shamus outside. Inside, Barb Azure grabs a pan of chilled milk from the refrigerator while Clerk Carmine fetches a contraption he says is a butter churn. It's almost impossible to make butter with Shamus's milk, but they keep trying for Maude Ivory's sake. Coriolanus realizes he's never thought of where butter comes from. As Coriolanus and Sejanus eat with the Covey, the Covey discuss where they used to travel, including up north where the Capitol doesn't have control. Coriolanus knows the Capitol controls "the known world" now; that place doesn't exist anymore.

The Covey are playing for a wedding this afternoon, so Coriolanus and Sejanus get ready to leave. They agree to meet the Covey in the shed they use as a backstage area before the next show at the Hob and head off. As the boys walk, Sejanus hesitantly admits that Billy Taupe and other people in District 12 are just trying to check in on Lil, who's imprisoned at the base. Coriolanus is enraged. They argue about what it means to fight for the tributes, and Sejanus insists it's no big deal to check in on Lil. Coriolanus accuses Sejanus of not thinking and of trusting people he shouldn't, like Billy Taupe. Billy Taupe must have a stake in this, and who knows what he wants?

Sejanus stammers that Billy Taupe was asking for a friend, and Coriolanus notes that the friend is probably Arlo's friend—and the rebels can't win. Sejanus points out that the rebels are desperate; they can't survive in 12 like this forever. But Coriolanus can only think of how the war devastated his own life, and he insists this is all the rebels' fault for starting the war in the first place. As Sejanus slumps onto a wall, Coriolanus tells him things will improve out here if people stop blowing up the mines. He says Sejanus hasn't quite committed treason yet, but Sejanus says Dr. Gaul thinks he has. She didn't want to let him join the Peacekeepers and insisted that unlike Coriolanus, who'd just cheated, he'd engaged in "a treasonous act of rebel support." Strabo wrote her a check for a new lab.

When Coriolanus and Sejanus get back to the base, Coriolanus can't stop thinking that Dr. Gaul doesn't think he's horrible. She singled him out during the Games, and maybe Coriolanus should write to her. He decides to finish his assignment on chaos, control, and contract. He describes the tension between the citizens here and Peacekeepers, and the brawl at the Hob. Coriolanus insists he's not convinced people are as violent as Dr. Gaul thinks they are, but it doesn't take much to make people violent. And how many District 12 miners would've fought in the Hob had the Capitol been able to identify them? When he's finished, he mails the letter immediately.

Seeing the butter churn forces Coriolanus to confront his privilege. In the Capitol, food just appears in front of him (or it doesn't)—he never has to consider where any of it comes from. Though Coriolanus privately insists that the Capitol controls "the known world," it's worth questioning if this is actually true. The Capitol says all sorts of things that aren't true, such as that the people who live in the districts aren't real people. It's entirely possible that saying they control everything is just a way to make it seem like they're more powerful than they are.



Because Sejanus sees the people in District 12 as people, he totally understands why Billy Taupe wants to check in on Lil. Their relationship is unclear, but it's not abnormal for people to want to check on those they love or care about. But Coriolanus comes from a different perspective. He's selfish, for one, so he realizes that empathizing with the rebels is going to erode his status among the Peacekeepers and possibly get him in trouble.



Again, Sejanus understands that the rebels are people too, no matter what they did in the war. Coriolanus, though, is selfish to the point where he implies that he's starting to truly believe in the Hunger Games' mission: to punish the districts forever for their role in the war. So while Peacekeeping is making Sejanus even more empathetic and ethical, it's having the exact opposite effect on Coriolanus. Sejanus's insight about Strabo's ability to buy Sejanus's safety shows again how corrupt life is in the Capitol. Enough money can silence anyone, or buy anyone's safety.



As Coriolanus starts to feel more invested in the Capitol's aims, he finds that he's starting to trust Dr. Gaul. She might pose a threat, but Coriolanus also knows that she's the one who is, perhaps, the most invested in keeping the Capitol in power and punishing the districts. Coriolanus is also finding that he's learning a lot in District 12, and he now thinks Dr. Gaul has the right idea about human nature. At least when people have anonymity, they're willing to lash out and hurt people they wouldn't otherwise.



After dinner, Sejanus helps Coriolanus study for the officer test. Sejanus isn't interested in taking it, but he agrees to think about it when Coriolanus suggests it might enable him to train as a doctor. Coriolanus signs up for the test on Monday morning and then discovers that he'll be on guard duty for the first time today. He also discovers that the recruits are going to practice shooting the **mockingjays**, per Coriolanus's suggestion. But first, the Capitol wants the recruits to help a team of Dr. Gaul's scientists trap about 100 jabberjays and mockingjays. Coriolanus is certain the scientists will recognize and hate him. Sejanus insists Dr. Gaul won't be around.

Sejanus turns out to be right. The recruits hop out of a truck at the hanging tree. Coriolanus doesn't recognize the scientists except for the woman with the pink glasses, whom another scientist introduces as Dr. Kay. In a friendly manner, she lays out their plan to divide into groups to bait traps and retrieve the birds in a few days. Coriolanus ends up in a group with Bug, who worked in orchards as a kid. Thankfully, Dr. Kay ignores Coriolanus. Tuesday proceeds as usual and then, on Wednesday, Coriolanus sits the officer test in the afternoon. He feels great afterward; he loves taking tests. Maybe he'll become a military commander like Crassus Snow.

Coriolanus's test finishes too late for him to help the scientists with the birds, so he decides to get his bunk's mail. Ma sent him more boxes of sweets and a letter, thanking him for looking out for Sejanus. Coriolanus is suddenly annoyed at how much work he has to do to keep Sejanus in line. He doesn't think Sejanus wants to change; Sejanus will always feel compelled to help district rebels. Here, Sejanus's behavior feels more dangerous, since Sejanus could end up dead if he's caught.

Impulsively, Coriolanus opens Sejanus's locker and digs through Sejanus's box of personal items. There are some mementos, pills and morphling, and a class photo with Sejanus and Marcus in it. At the bottom is Sejanus's framed diploma. Flipping it over, Coriolanus discovers thousands of dollars in cash hidden in the back. What could Sejanus possibly do with this money? Information? Silence? Bribes? Coriolanus quickly puts Sejanus's box back as the rest of his bunkmates return and dig into Ma's treats. Sejanus agrees they'd be broke if Ma didn't keep sending sweets. Coriolanus knows he can't trust Sejanus to tell the truth.

Coriolanus seems to have a knack for coming up with ideas that please his superiors, whether he's in the Capitol mentoring in the Hunger Games or Peacekeeping in the districts. This shows how fully he believes in the Capitol's goals, as his ideas overwhelmingly support the Capitol's desire to amass and hold onto power. Coming into contact with Dr. Gaul's scientists again threatens to jeopardize the reputation Coriolanus has built for himself with the Peacekeepers, as she knows he cheated.



Again, things are starting to look up for Coriolanus. It's a relief when none of the scientists seem to recognize him, and taking the officer test reminds him of how successful he was back home. This starts to open Coriolanus's eyes to what his life could be like—he could, he realizes, follow in his father's footsteps. This is an interesting realization, particularly since Coriolanus has said before that he was afraid of his father. It seems he no longer thinks that's something to worry about.



Coriolanus feels like he has to babysit Sejanus in order to keep both of them safe—Coriolanus could get into trouble, too, since he knows what Sejanus is up to. It's also grating for Coriolanus that Sejanus doesn't seem to care much that he's putting himself in danger. But where Sejanus prioritizes doing the right thing, even if it kills him, Coriolanus prizes his life and his success.



Coriolanus has never really trusted Sejanus anyway, so it's perhaps not surprising for him to find proof that Sejanus might be working against everything Coriolanus believes in. But interestingly, finding that Sejanus is hiding money suggests that Sejanus might be more like his own father than he'd like to admit. He understands what money can do, and he's not above buying the things he wants. Where he and Coriolanus differ, then, is in their aims and in what they think is right.



CHAPTER 26

Sejanus asks Coriolanus about the officer test and insists Coriolanus “deserves” to pass. He’s so “duplicitous.” Later, after dinner, Coriolanus has his first hour of guard duty at an air hangar. The old Peacekeeper he’s paired with goes to sleep, so Coriolanus has nothing to do but think of Lucy Gray. He’d much rather be with her than on guard duty. It was really nice at the Capitol, where Coriolanus always knew where she was. Who knows, Billy Taupe could be trying to win her back right now. Coriolanus spends the next few days thinking of her.

On Friday, Coriolanus is almost relieved to be working with the birds. After the truck drops the recruits at the hanging tree, Coriolanus finds himself in a group with Bug and Dr. Kay. Dr. Kay knows exactly who Coriolanus is and asks how he’s liking the districts. Coriolanus admits he’s learning more here now than he did during school. Dr. Kay shares that she was in 12 during the war and headed the jabberjay project. This makes Coriolanus feel better; the jabberjays were a major failure. Coriolanus engages Dr. Kay in conversation about the birds. She says, lovingly, that the jabberjays, all of which are male, did surprisingly well in the wild.

After Bug brings a caged jabberjay down from a tree and runs back up another tree with an empty trap, Dr. Kay shows Coriolanus how the birds work. Pulling out a small device with buttons, she says that now, the bird is in neutral—he can say what he likes. Then, she puts him on record mode and the bird goes silent. Dr. Kay puts the bird back on neutral and presses a third button—and the bird regurgitates the conversation Coriolanus and Dr. Kay just had. Dr. Kay says that in theory, the birds are the perfect surveillance device: they’re undetectable, unlike a microphone, and if rebels catch and kill one, it looks like just a bird. Dr. Kay says the rebels probably figured out what the birds were because the Capitol didn’t cover their tracks well enough. Or there was a spy on base.

Dr. Kay explains that they can’t use the birds’ homing device to call them back because the transmission system has been disabled. She also laughs that she’s not sure how the birds will behave now that they’ve “gone native.” Then, she says that after being released on neutral, they created **mockingjays** with the local mockingbirds. Dr. Kay notes that the mockingjays can’t speak at all, but they can mimic music better than mockingbirds. She asks Coriolanus to sing, so he sings a few bars of Panem’s **anthem**. A mockingjay immediately replicates the melody, others pick it up, and soon they sing in harmony.

In this passage, Coriolanus shows how self-centered he is. It’s inconceivable to him that Sejanus—who seems genuinely nice—might actually want Coriolanus to be happy. And thinking that it was great when Lucy Gray was locked up at the Capitol demonstrates Coriolanus’s desire for control. His relationship with Lucy Gray shouldn’t, he believes, be one of equals. Rather, he should have all the power and the ability to control her every move.



Coriolanus is happiest when he’s the most successful person in a given situation. So it’s comforting to be around Dr. Kay, since she’s responsible for such a major failure in the jabberjays. It makes Coriolanus cheating in the Hunger Games seem less meaningful in comparison. But Dr. Kay also gives Coriolanus an opportunity to suck up to her and try to get in her good graces—probably with the intention of Dr. Kay returning to the Capitol and saying nice things about Coriolanus to Dr. Gaul.



The fact that district-born Bug seems to be doing the bulk of the work here shows that even in the Peacekeepers, where people from the districts and the Capitol are supposedly on equal footing, this isn’t actually true. Coriolanus is getting an important lesson on the jabberjays and isn’t doing much, while Bug is doing the difficult work of climbing and carrying the traps. For Coriolanus, this outing is more of a lesson in military surveillance techniques—his schooling hasn’t ended, despite his being in the Peacekeepers.



Interestingly, Dr. Kay doesn’t seem fazed at all by the fact that she might not be able to control her creations. She takes a more relaxed view than Coriolanus, who desperately wants to control everything he possibly can. The fact that Coriolanus sings the anthem rather than any other song speaks to how much a part of him the song is. Its background and the words don’t mean anything to him anymore; he produces the song in an automatic, rote fashion.



Without thinking, Coriolanus says they should kill all the **mockingjays**. To try to cover up this misstep (Dr. Kay is shocked), Coriolanus suggests they'll push out native species. But Dr. Kay says if they can't reproduce with each other, they'll die out anyway; otherwise, one more songbird in the world won't hurt. Coriolanus agrees the birds are harmless, but he hates them and distrusts "their spontaneous creation." By the end of the day, the group has caught 30 jabberjays and no mockingjays.

Back at the base, Coriolanus and Bug help unload the birds into an old hangar and agree to care for the birds. A few days later, on Saturday afternoon, Coriolanus and Bug clean the jabberjays' cages and help scientists run them through drills. Quietly, Bug suggests the birds would be happier left alone in the woods, but Coriolanus isn't convinced. The birds might hate 12 as much as he does.

That evening, as everyone prepares to go to the Hob, Coriolanus realizes he'll have to bring Sejanus backstage if he wants to see Lucy Gray—but will Sejanus then collaborate with rebels backstage? Regardless, Coriolanus and Sejanus head around the bar to what turns out to be a large garage. The Covey are inside and Maude Ivory runs over immediately. She accepts popcorn balls from Coriolanus and, with Sejanus, goes to show the band her treats. Coriolanus kisses and sits down with Lucy Gray.

When Lucy Gray says that she has no idea who owns the garage and that the Covey will "just perch here until they shoo [them] off," Coriolanus thinks that she always uses bird imagery. He tells her about working with the jabberjays, but this makes her sad—she thinks it's torture to control their voices. Coriolanus insists there's no human equivalent, and Lucy Gray asks if he feels free to say what he thinks. Coriolanus knows she's asking about the Hunger Games and the Capitol, but he says he believes people should speak their minds. Lucy Gray says her daddy thought the same—and he died because of that. Knowing a Peacekeeper probably killed her daddy, Coriolanus spits that a rebel sniper killed his father.

Also unlike Coriolanus, Dr. Kay believes it's a good thing to put beautiful things in the world, like the mockingjays. (Unlike Coriolanus, she believes the mockingjays are beautiful.) Coriolanus resents the mockingjays so much because he can't control them. They're not only more musical than he'll ever be, he also can't entirely control what they do with whatever they pick up and turn into a song.



Coriolanus empathizes with the jabberjays because he sees himself in them. Like the jabberjays, he was a government pawn who's now been banished to District 12. He's unable to see the birds as living creatures with their own thoughts and feelings, which is how Bug sees them.



Keeping Sejanus out of trouble is wearing on Coriolanus. He wants nothing more than to see Lucy Gray in peace, but that's not possible given how intent Sejanus is on helping the rebels. And note that as Coriolanus worries that Sejanus will get into trouble with rebels backstage, he inadvertently shows that he doesn't trust the Covey—he lumps them in with the rebels.



Bringing up the jabberjays is an attempt to connect with Lucy Gray by engaging her in a subject she likes: birds. But Lucy Gray makes it clear, much to Coriolanus's consternation, that she doesn't agree with him on how the birds should be treated—or on how the Capitol treats the districts. Lucy Gray is right that few people, if any, in Panem are able to say what they want without consequences. Even Coriolanus regularly modifies what he says to look better to others.



It's time for the Covey to go on, so Coriolanus swallows his anger. He agrees to join the Covey for a hike to the lake with Sejanus tomorrow and then follows Sejanus back to their bunkmates. Coriolanus decides to get drunk, since he can't see Lucy Gray after the show. He feels happier and friendlier as the night wears on. At one point, Maude Ivory is onstage with Lucy Gray and says they're going to sing Lucy Gray's namesake ballad, which was written by "some man named Wordsworth." As Maude Ivory sings the ballad, Coriolanus tries to parse the meaning. The song is about a little girl who lives on the mountain and dies after she gets lost in the snow—and then becomes a ghost. Coriolanus hates "ridiculous" ghost stories and thinks it's terrible. He turns to ask Sejanus about the song, but Sejanus is gone.

Just as setting the reaping on July Fourth established that Panem exists in a future North America, singing a ballad by "some man named Wordsworth" situates Panem as a future iteration of the real world. Wordsworth was a famous Romantic poet; his poems are popular and widely taught. Coriolanus engages with the poem thinking he's going to learn more about Lucy Gray, but he finds it disappointing. However, this is in part because Coriolanus is so self-centered and struggles to think imaginatively about things. The poem's Lucy Gray turning into a ghost, however, is ominous foreshadowing for the living Lucy Gray.



CHAPTER 27

Coriolanus has no idea when Sejanus slipped off. Is he out "conspiring with the rebels" right now? Just then, though, Sejanus comes back inside, insisting the liquor makes him have to pee. Coriolanus says nothing—but white liquor doesn't make people pee like that. Sejanus is lying. The next morning, Sejanus is the only one able to eat breakfast, more proof he didn't drink at all last night. But Coriolanus invites him to the lake with the Covey anyway. On their walk to the Seam, Coriolanus wonders what Sejanus is up to, and what Sejanus plans to do with that money.

Again, Sejanus possibly "conspiring with rebels" is so much of an issue for Coriolanus partly because people believe they're friends—and will suspect Coriolanus as well. Coriolanus cares about his reputation first and foremost, and Sejanus is jeopardizing everything Coriolanus has been working for by possibly getting involved with the rebel cause.



Lucy Gray greets Coriolanus warmly, despite their tiff last night, and the Covey—aside from Barb Azure—lead the way into the woods. Coriolanus still hates the woods, especially without a weapon. He makes himself a walking stick, but no one else seems concerned. After a while, Maude Ivory complains that her shoes are hurting her feet. Sejanus offers to carry her. Maude Ivory sings—and the **mockingjays** pick up the song. Coriolanus hates it.

Coriolanus hates the woods because he can't control them or the animals in them—and he craves power and control most of all. He hates the mockingjays for the same reason. Though he could choose a different song that he'd rather hear them sing, he doesn't want them to have the agency to choose what they sing.



A bit later, Coriolanus takes over carrying Maude Ivory. She wants to know what he thought of Lucy Gray's song—and where he thinks the girl went. Relieved that there isn't one interpretation of the song that he just didn't get, Coriolanus engages in debate with the Covey about that Lucy Gray's whereabouts. The debate ends when they reach the lake. Everyone strips to their underwear and dives in. From the middle of the lake, Coriolanus can see small houses, one of which is concrete. A bit later, to prepare for a lunch of fresh fish, Maude Ivory and Sejanus go to pick berries. Lucy Gray warns her away from the rocks, where the **snakes** live; Maude Ivory explains that Lucy Gray loves snakes and will hold them.

Getting to engage in a debate about Wordsworth's Lucy Gray makes Coriolanus feel better about his lacking critical thinking skills. It also allows him to feel closer to the Covey by engaging in a spirited debate about the poem. Swimming in the lake, which Coriolanus enjoys, also brings them all closer together, as does sharing a meal as though they're equals. Coriolanus isn't acting like a Peacekeeper while he's hanging out with the Covey. Rather, he's their friend.



Coriolanus helps Lucy Gray start a fire. As it flickers to life, Lucy Gray apologizes for last night. Coriolanus apologizes too, but he says that he agrees with the Capitol. People are forgetting the war too fast, and the Capitol exists to keep things under control. Without it, people would be animals killing each other, like in the Hunger Games. The Capitol keeps people safe. Lucy Gray says that in exchange for her supposed safety, she and the Covey have had to give up traveling, singing what they want, and they're always at risk of being killed. She suggests freedom is more important than the Capitol's protection. Then, she says that Coriolanus is like her—he wants to make choices for himself. Coriolanus insists they would be dead if it weren't for the Capitol. Lucy Gray insists that people would be—and have been—just fine without it.

Clerk Carmine interrupts Coriolanus and Lucy Gray's discussion by bringing her a katniss plant, which Lucy Gray explains is a wild potato. Tam Amber guts a few fish and Lucy Gray cooks them. The group also feasts on blackberries and Ma's sugar cookies, which Sejanus brought. After lunch, Maude Ivory explains that each member of the Covey's first name comes from a ballad, and their second name is a color. It seems strange to Coriolanus, but Maude Ivory suggests that Coriolanus's full name—Coriolanus Snow—sounds like a Covey name too.

Lucy Gray convinces Maude Ivory to lie down and take a nap in exchange for a song. The lullaby helps Coriolanus to appreciate nature for the first time. He wonders if love conquers everything, and what life might be like living off the land with Lucy Gray. But his happiness disappears when the **mockingjays** pick up the song—and the Covey expresses approval for the birds. Coriolanus hates the birds, and he's disturbed that Capitol technology is being co-opted and running wild out here.

Later, while the others swim again, Lucy Gray brings up Billy Taupe. She tells Coriolanus she doesn't miss him and explains that somehow, her name was called in the reaping after she and Mayfair found out that Billy Taupe was trying to see them both. However, Lucy Gray suggests she feels bad for Mayfair and understands why Billy Taupe chose her. She admits Billy Taupe is trying to woo her again—he wants to meet at the hanging tree (where they used to spend time together) and run north, to where there might be free people. But Lucy Gray says she can't trust him. Coriolanus is jealous, but he just responds with, "trust is important." Lucy Gray says she doesn't trust a lot of things she loves, like **snakes**. But she does trust Coriolanus.

Here, Coriolanus starts to articulate some of Dr. Gaul's ideas for Lucy Gray. He believes that the Capitol keeps things safe and stops people from killing each other because, as a wealthy Capitol kid, Coriolanus isn't really at risk in Panem. It doesn't occur to him that the Capitol facilitates the Hunger Games and in doing so, it actively puts some of its citizens in danger. Lucy Gray sees the hypocrisy here, since she's been the Capitol's target before. She remembers how things were before the war, and she sees those times as preferable. In her mind, no government (specifically, no Capitol) is better than a government that subjugates her like the Capitol does.



Maude Ivory's comment about Coriolanus's name being like a Covey name suggests again that Coriolanus does have the capacity to be good. If he so chose, he could live like the Covey and give up his life in the Capitol, an environment which seems to be steering him toward evil. Clerk Carmine's katniss plant is a nod to Katniss, the protagonist of [The Hunger Games](#).



In this passage, Coriolanus shows that he's in a transitional state. He's going to have to make a choice soon about the kind of person he wants to be—whether he wants to be someone Lucy Gray would love, or whether he wants to look out for himself. Though appreciating nature suggests he might choose the first path, his hatred of the mockingjays seems stronger—and points to him ultimately choosing himself and the Capitol.



Lucy Gray implies that Billy Taupe and Mayfair somehow conspired to have her name drawn in the reaping. Sejanus suggested as much earlier in the novel. If this is true, it would mean that corruption runs rampant in Panem, even at the local level. Once again, Coriolanus hides what he actually thinks in favor of telling Lucy Gray what he believes she wants to hear. It's interesting that she says she trusts him, especially since the novel has drawn connections between Coriolanus and untrustworthy snakes in the past.



As Maude Ivory wakes up, Coriolanus stewes. He's jealous as he thinks of the song Lucy Gray was writing when he met her in the meadow; it was about the hanging tree. Why is she writing about a place she used to go with Billy Taupe? Later, on the hike back, Maude Ivory tells Coriolanus they don't see Billy Taupe anymore. This is concerning, as it means Lucy Gray is keeping secrets from the Covey. Maude Ivory also says to keep Sejanus away from Billy Taupe.

Sejanus, Maude Ivory, and Tam Amber head into town while the rest of the group collects apples. When Coriolanus, Lucy Gray, and Clerk Carmine get back to the house, Barb Azure says the first group is at the Hob. Coriolanus leaves immediately to fetch Sejanus—they can't be alone, as Peacekeepers. At the Hob, Coriolanus sees Sejanus at a woman's weapons counter. He insists he's buying a pocketknife later, when he gets paid, but Coriolanus stalks out of the Hob. They walk back to the base in silence until they're close, and then Coriolanus tells Sejanus that he's like a brother, and he's here to help. Sejanus tears up, says he trusts Coriolanus, and they hug.

Fortunately, the next few days are busy, so Sejanus is constantly supervised. When Coriolanus joins the group catching **mockingjays** again, Dr. Kay says it's time to pull out the mist nets. They erect the nearly invisible nets on Tuesday and, when the nets catch birds, remove them immediately. Coriolanus's bird screams and bites him, so he carries cages instead. But Coriolanus has come to enjoy the jabberjays and the scientists allow him to play with the birds. Coriolanus enjoys making them sing the **anthem**—but though it's satisfying to hear the mockingjays pick up the tune, he hates when they sing. In general, he hates how musical his life has become between the birds and the Covey. Maybe he's not like his mother.

By Wednesday, Dr. Kay has enough birds to be happy. Coriolanus and Bug prepare the birds for their trip to the Capitol. Coriolanus gets through the **mockingjays** and has just started on the jabberjays when Sejanus leaps into the hangar with news that Ma sent another package of sweets. Then, Sejanus's mood shifts, and he says he needs to tell Coriolanus something Coriolanus won't approve of. Instead of trying to stop Sejanus from talking, Coriolanus casually puts the cover on a jabberjay's cage and presses the "record" button on a jabberjay remote.

Though Lucy Gray insists she trusts Coriolanus, Coriolanus doesn't trust her. He believes she's lying to him and is perhaps cheating on him with Billy Taupe. Coriolanus may feel this way because his dream would be to have total control over Lucy Gray. It's hard for him to accept that she has agency and can make her own choices. It means he has to trust her.



Sejanus's behavior in this passage is more proof for Coriolanus that Sejanus has no intention of changing his ways and falling into line. Sejanus is, perhaps, working with a weapons dealer—and is doing so behind Coriolanus's back. It's duplicitous of Coriolanus to say that Sejanus is like a brother and that he wants to help. Coriolanus wants to look out for himself, and for now, that means keeping Sejanus in line—but he doesn't appear particularly interested in helping Sejanus for Sejanus's sake.



The novel aligns Lucy Gray and the Covey with birds; recall Coriolanus's observation that Lucy Gray regularly uses bird imagery. When the mockingjay bites Coriolanus, it suggests that Coriolanus won't get on as well with the Covey and Lucy Gray as he'd like to. Coriolanus as much as confirms this when he wonders if he's not like his mother. His mother seems like a person Lucy Gray would've liked—and by deciding he doesn't want to be like his mother, it reads like Coriolanus saying he's no longer as interested in impressing Lucy Gray.



Coriolanus obviously intends to record whatever Sejanus tells him—and Sejanus believes they're speaking in confidence. This shows that Coriolanus's loyalty is to the Capitol and to himself, not to his friends or the rebel cause. Ratting out Sejanus for whatever Sejanus is going to say might help Coriolanus get ahead, and that seems to be a bigger draw than helping Sejanus ever was.



CHAPTER 28

Quickly, emotionally, Sejanus says some rebels are leaving District 12 and will let Sejanus come if he helps with Lil. The Capitol plans to hang her. Sejanus plans to drug some guards with Ma's treats and get Lil out. Then they'll slip through the fence and run north with the rebels. Nobody will get hurt. Sejanus says he had to tell Coriolanus since they're so close and that he'll let his parents know where he went. At this, Coriolanus presses the "neutral" button on the remote. The jabberjay sings as Bug returns to the hangar to take the bird to the hovercraft.

While Bug is outside again, Coriolanus points out all the ways Sejanus's plan might fail. Sejanus notes that the fence is loose behind the generator. Either way, though, he says they're going to arrest him at some point. Sejanus insists he can't be a Peacekeeper in good conscience, and he'll live well out there since he's a good shot. This tells Coriolanus that the rebels have guns. Sejanus continues; living in the wilderness will be better than living in the Capitol, where people can control him. Sejanus leaves not long after.

Coriolanus continues to prep the jabberjays, but he half wants to erase the recording of Sejanus on the jabberjay already in the hovercraft. He can't rat Sejanus out; nobody would believe him, and he'd be labeled a snitch if anyone did. Dr. Gaul will know Coriolanus made the recording. She'll probably call Strabo Plinth and Sejanus will be shipped home. It'll all be fine. Coriolanus feels good about his choice—but he wakes up in the middle of the night, terrified and worried for Sejanus. Dr. Gaul might not even play the jabberjay's recording. Sejanus won't die. But this concerns Coriolanus even more, because now Coriolanus knows about the escape plan. Coriolanus stays up all night, worrying about himself and Sejanus and fuming that the districts don't understand how necessary the Capitol is. He also knows that Lucy Gray would hate him if she found out what he did.

With the scientists back in the Capitol, Coriolanus's routine is back to normal. It's dull, and he can't help but think he should be starting at the University soon. On Friday, Coriolanus gets a letter full of bad news from Tigris: they've gotten two offers on the apartment, but the visitors are stressing Grandma'am out. The threat of losing her beloved **roses**—"the very symbol of the Snow dynasty"—is making her even less coherent. By Saturday, Coriolanus is so angry about everything that he's ready to fight Sejanus for ruining his life.

The fact that Sejanus is willing to risk his life to run away with the rebels drives home just how unhappy he is with his life in the Capitol and as a Peacekeeper aligned with the Capitol. He wanted to help people, not be complicit in their dehumanization. For Coriolanus, it doesn't seem like a big deal to record his friend like this. This again shows where Coriolanus's loyalties lie: with the Capitol.



For Sejanus, living an ethical life and doing things he feels good about are extremely important. And he knows that this makes him a target: the Capitol desperately doesn't want people like Sejanus to have any power, so he'll find himself in danger the moment anyone in charge discovers how he feels. This is ominous, as Coriolanus has essentially just alerted the Capitol to what Sejanus is planning via the jabberjay.



Coriolanus is trying desperately to justify his actions to himself. He knows that ratting out Sejanus is wrong, and he knows there's a chance that Strabo won't be able to swoop in and save his son this time. Recall that Dr. Gaul wanted to punish Sejanus earlier for his antics during the Games; since she'll presumably be the first one to hear what Sejanus is planning, this doesn't bode well for Sejanus. Interestingly, though, Coriolanus's circling thoughts come back to how this is going to affect him. He's self-centered and cares about his own wellbeing more than Sejanus's. To him, this means supporting the Capitol.



Referring to the roses as "the very symbol of the Snow dynasty" makes the roses' symbolism clear. Losing the roses would mean that the Snows would lose everything that helped them look the part of wealthy Capitol folk, even though they're currently as poor as "district scum." And Coriolanus is still loyal to his family, so Sejanus starts to look like a villain to him, since Sejanus is jeopardizing Coriolanus's success.



Smiley, Bug, and Beanpole are excited to head to the Hob. Coriolanus is less excited, but he follows along with Sejanus. Coriolanus makes sure to sit next to Sejanus—and sure enough, an hour into the show, Sejanus heads for the door. Coriolanus follows as Lucy Gray sings a sad song about her lover drinking up all their money. It sounds like another song about Billy Taupe, which just angers Coriolanus more. Coriolanus saved her life, after all, not Billy Taupe.

Coriolanus follows Sejanus to the garage where the Covey hangs out before their shows. The Covey are all onstage. Coriolanus sees the woman Sejanus spoke to at the Hob coming out of the garage with cash. Then, Coriolanus peeks into the doorway. He can see Sejanus and Billy Taupe examining a bag of guns. Then, Coriolanus feels a gun in his ribs just as Lucy Gray throws her hands onto his shoulders. She stops laughing as the gunman ushers them inside. Sejanus tells the gunman, Spruce, that they're with him. Coriolanus figures Spruce is Lil's brother.

Spruce seems suspicious, but Billy Taupe reminds him that Lucy Gray is "his girl" who's coming north with them. Lucy Gray and Coriolanus lie that Coriolanus is dating Barb Azure and finally, Spruce drops his gun. Coriolanus studies the weapons when, suddenly, Mayfair Lipp reveals herself. She's been hiding in the corner. Billy Taupe tells her to go home, but Spruce invites her to join them. Instead, Mayfair backs away and asks Lucy Gray how she "enjoyed the Capitol." Coriolanus knows if Mayfair talks, he's dead. Spruce lifts a gun to shoot her, but Billy Taupe knocks it away—and Coriolanus grabs it and shoots her. He shoves Lucy Gray out the door to go back onstage, but Billy Taupe insists if he's hanging, Lucy Gray is hanging with him. Spruce shoots Billy Taupe in the chest. Lucy Gray finally leaves.

Spruce packs up the weapons and tells Coriolanus and Sejanus that he's keeping this to himself. Coriolanus agrees to do the same. Spruce suggests Coriolanus come with them—someone is going to die for this. He leaves, and Coriolanus pulls Sejanus out after. Coriolanus knows his DNA is on the gun; he doesn't want a repeat of the handkerchief debacle from the Hunger Games. Coriolanus pulls Sejanus into the Hob and they retake their seats. The Covey play for a while longer and finally leave the stage. Coriolanus and Sejanus heft Beanpole, who's blacked out, up and are on their way out of town when they hear Maude Ivory scream.

Coriolanus is so angry because nothing seems to be going to plan. He can execute plans—but he struggles to go with the flow when things don't go his way. It's a slap in the face when Lucy Gray continues to sing songs about Billy Taupe, too. But Coriolanus doesn't consider that those songs are probably easy money for the Covey—they're already successful, known songs, and writing music takes time and energy. Instead, Coriolanus just makes Lucy Gray's choice of music about him.



Now, Coriolanus has real proof that Sejanus is conspiring with rebels—but Coriolanus is in a very vulnerable position, which tends to make him angry and reactive. This interaction probably isn't going to end well. However, Sejanus makes it clear that he (erroneously) trusts Coriolanus by assuring Spruce this is fine—a mark of how successful Coriolanus is at fooling people.



In this situation, Lucy Gray realizes it's best to lie to protect herself—lying, the novel suggests, is a natural reaction under this kind of pressure. Mayfair as much as confirms that she's responsible for sending Lucy Gray to the Hunger Games. But notably, Coriolanus doesn't care that Mayfair put Lucy Gray, his supposed love, in danger. Rather, he's afraid that she's going to ruin his life by telling someone that he's also been conspiring with rebels. And Coriolanus reasons that it's better to look out for himself than face the consequences of his actions, so he kills her without a second thought.



Spruce implies that the only way to survive, as people who have committed murder, is to leave. And Coriolanus, fresh off the cheating accusations from the Hunger Games, realizes that the stakes are extremely high here. The Peacekeepers aren't like school, where Coriolanus and Sejanus were simply kicked out and made to join the Peacekeepers. Rather, Spruce suggests that the Capitol will deal with Peacekeepers who behave inappropriately the same way they dealt with Arlo: by hanging them.



Back at the base, Coriolanus and Sejanus decide they left the Hob to pee; Lucy Gray won't tell anyone. Tomorrow, they'll be hungover and spend the day on base. Sejanus is so upset he's incoherent, so Coriolanus tells him to pull himself together. That night, Coriolanus realizes he's killed for the second time—and unlike when he killed Bobbin, this wasn't self-defense. It kind of was; if Mayfair had told anyone what she saw, Coriolanus and everyone he loves would die. He'd shoot her again, so he feels good about his choice.

Over breakfast the next morning, Smiley shares that the bodies were brought to the base clinic last night and says that the Peacekeepers are certain Mayfair and “the musician” were killed by someone local, given the murder weapons. This makes Coriolanus feel much better, though he realizes Lucy Gray could still be in trouble since she used to be with Billy Taupe. But he reasons it'd be hard to prove her guilty. This makes him feel even closer to her.

The commander locks the base down for the day. As Coriolanus and Sejanus clean their boots, Sejanus admits he hasn't heard whether he's still escaping next weekend during the commander's birthday party. He's worried what will happen if they arrest someone innocent for the murders. Coriolanus thinks that'd be great, but he stays quiet. Over the next few days, the base loses interest in the murders. Mayor Lipp pitches a fit, but nobody is sympathetic. So by Tuesday, Coriolanus is feeling fantastic. He receives a box from Pluribus with strings for Lucy Gray and looks forward to giving them to her.

As Coriolanus heads for the clinic for some powder, though, an ambulance pulls up—and Spruce comes out of it on a stretcher. Neither Coriolanus nor Sejanus can figure out what happened, but the next morning, a nurse tells Smiley that Spruce died. At lunch, military police arrest Sejanus. Smiley, Beanpole, Bug, and Coriolanus confront the sergeant during target practice and insist Sejanus wasn't involved in the murders—but the sergeant says Sejanus was arrested for something else. Coriolanus realizes Dr. Gaul must've listened to his jabberjay.

Over the next two days, Coriolanus tries to tell himself that everything will be fine. Strabo Plinth will come rescue Sejanus—but this also isn't school, and the young Peacekeepers aren't kids. Coriolanus sends a note to Ma suggesting Strabo check in on his son. But before Coriolanus can mail the note, the commander calls everyone on base to the auditorium to tell them that Sejanus will be hanged for treason in the afternoon. Coriolanus is ordered to attend the hanging. Coriolanus can barely dress himself and accept his rifle. People avoid him, knowing he was friends with Sejanus.

Coriolanus doesn't consistently trust Lucy Gray—but here, he believes he can trust her to stay quiet (after all, she's at risk too if someone finds out who killed Mayfair and Billy Taupe). Coriolanus's inner monologue shows that he's becoming more comfortable with killing—especially when it suits his purposes to take someone else's life.



Lucy Gray could be in trouble because of her association with Billy Taupe, but also because she's a local. Coriolanus doesn't realize this, though, because he's so self-centered. That this experience makes him feel closer to Lucy Gray shows that Coriolanus feels connected to people when they seem just as at risk as he feels he is; he doesn't really care about others for their own sake.



For Sejanus, ethical questions are front and center once again. He knows exactly who killed Mayfair and Billy Taupe—and while his loyalty to Coriolanus means he's unlikely to rat his friend out, he also doesn't want someone innocent to die for the murders. But this doesn't matter to Coriolanus. He doesn't see the locals as people, so it doesn't bother him that someone he doesn't care about might take the fall.



Things quickly start to go downhill for Coriolanus and Sejanus. Coriolanus now has to face up to the consequences of sending the jabberjay to Dr. Gaul. But he's also unwilling to own up to the fact that he's responsible for Sejanus's arrest, as he knows his bunkmates will see him as a traitor if he admits what he did. Once again, he's looking out for himself and is willing to say whatever he needs to in order to stay in power.



Though Coriolanus and Sejanus have, for the most part, still thought of themselves as kids after joining the Peacekeepers, Coriolanus now has to face the fact that they're not children. They're adults and will be tried as such, whether they like it or not. Forcing Coriolanus to attend Sejanus's hanging is, for Coriolanus, extremely emotional—he's the one who landed Sejanus here, after all.



At the hanging tree, Coriolanus stands in his squad. The crowd is unusually large and volatile, but Coriolanus understands why when Sejanus and Lil emerge from a Peacekeeper van. Lil and Sejanus look like small “innocent children” as Peacekeepers haul them to the gallows. Coriolanus meets Sejanus’s eyes and can only see a frightened little boy. Coriolanus unexpectedly meets Lucy Gray’s eyes in the crowd. He closes his eyes, but he still hears the trapdoors and Sejanus’s cries. The jabberjays echo his last words: “Ma! Ma! Ma! Ma! Ma!”

The novel makes the case that for all intents and purposes, Sejanus and Lil are “innocent children,” despite their ages. This is reinforced when Sejanus’s last words are yelling for his mother, like a small child would. Again, this shows that Panem is willing to sacrifice its children, no matter where they come from, in order to achieve its aims. Any dissent has to be stamped out—even if the dissenter is Strabo Plinth’s son.



CHAPTER 29

Coriolanus can barely function for the rest of the day. He sits on Beanpole’s bunk in his underwear, wondering if he should give himself up—assuming Sejanus didn’t rat him out. In any case, the weapons are still in District 12, since Spruce didn’t run away. And Coriolanus burns with shame, since he killed Sejanus. He knows he didn’t have a choice. He figures that Sejanus would’ve died in the arena—really, Coriolanus prolonged his life. But Sejanus was too set in his ways, and that led to his death. Coriolanus opens Sejanus’s box of personal effects and bites into cookies in the box. But the memory of Sejanus’s last cries flash in Coriolanus’s mind, and he vomits the cookie back up.

It becomes increasingly clear that Coriolanus didn’t trust Sejanus at all when he starts to fear that Sejanus told someone Coriolanus was involved in the murder. Coriolanus, though, doesn’t really trust anyone but himself, which is why he has so few close relationships. And, true to form, Coriolanus tells himself whatever he needs to in order to make himself feel like he’s doing the right thing. He’s going to get ahead if he can maintain his reputation and status, so he just needs to find a way to tamp down his emotions. And Coriolanus gets lucky here—the cookie he vomits back up is probably the poisoned cookie Sejanus planned to poison Lil’s guards with.



Coriolanus sobs for his friends and family. He doesn’t want to die at the hanging tree, where the jabberjays will repeat his last words and the **mockingjays** will turn it into a song. Then, he calms himself and decides he has to face his death like a man. He takes Sejanus’s money stash and puts the wad of bills in an envelope addressed to Tigris. Coriolanus decides to sneak off the base on Sunday and give Lucy Gray his own orange scarf as a parting gift.

Coriolanus implies that it’d be terrible to die at the hanging tree mostly because he doesn’t want something as important as his own death trivialized by being turned into music. This reflects his belief in his own importance, and it highlights his hatred for the mockingjays again. Sending Tigris Sejanus’s money shows that Coriolanus may struggle with other relationships, but he is unwaveringly loyal to his family still.



Over dinner, Coriolanus tells Bug, Beanpole, and Smiley about the hanging. Coriolanus sleeps well that night and joins in on drills in the morning. Then, after lunch, Commander Hoff’s aide requests Coriolanus to follow him. Coriolanus is relieved, but wishes he’d brought his mother’s **powder**. Coriolanus sinks into the commander’s chair and is surprised when Commander Hoff offers his condolences for Sejanus. Hoff explains that Dr. Gaul sends praise for Coriolanus’s choice to send the jabberjay. Coriolanus pretends to not know how Sejanus might be connected to the murders or that Sejanus bought the rebels guns. Commander Hoff says he’s going to keep Coriolanus’s role in Sejanus’s death private for Coriolanus’s sake—but Coriolanus should know he did a real service for his country.

Coriolanus enters Commander Hoff’s office believing that he’s going to be arrested and die. His desire for his mother’s powder reinforces that Coriolanus still wants to be a good person and appreciate beautiful, comforting things. But receiving praise for bringing about Sejanus’s death starts to tip Coriolanus toward choosing a different path. Coriolanus is learning that if he looks out for himself (and the Capitol; to him, the two are one and the same), he’s going to be praised, and he’s going to get ahead. So actually being loyal to people starts to look like less of a good idea to him.



Coriolanus has a fantastic afternoon shooting **mockingjays** as target practice. Later in the evening, the mess hall serves an elegant meal in honor of Commander Hoff's birthday. Then, the Peacekeepers gather in the gym for whisky and music—the Covey are going to play. Coriolanus grabs the strings from Pluribus and his orange scarf, believing this is his last chance to see Lucy Gray. After a bit, Maude Ivory scampers onto the stage to lead everyone in singing for Commander Hoff. Afterward Lucy Gray appears in her rainbow dress from the Games. Coriolanus is certain it's for his benefit and he feels a rush of love—it's "the two of them against the world."

Coriolanus happily watches the Covey play for a while. Then, the band leaves Lucy Gray alone onstage. She begins a new song that starts, "Everyone's born as clean as a whistle." She sings that the dark and frightening world tries to make people bad—and that's why she needs her lover, who's "pure as the driven snow." The song is clearly for Coriolanus. He's ecstatic. Lucy Gray obviously thinks he's a good person and "the hero of her life." She also mentions trusting him. When the song ends, Coriolanus is too moved to clap. Seeing Lucy Gray go backstage into the locker rooms, leaving the rest of the band onstage, Coriolanus hurries to join her.

Lucy Gray falls into Coriolanus's arms as soon as he taps on the door. He avoids mentioning his role in Sejanus's death and suggests that Spruce outed Sejanus. She thanks him for killing Mayfair—but then says that Mayor Lipp won't leave her alone, as he's sure Lucy Gray killed Mayfair and Billy Taupe. He's been threatening her and the Covey, so Lucy Gray is going to run north. Coriolanus insists on going with her; it's only a matter of time before they discover he killed Mayfair. They decide to meet at dawn. Coriolanus gives her the strings and the scarf before running back to the party.

Coriolanus is excited—he's going to live with Lucy Gray, and he'll be able to act however he wants. It seems mad to run away, but then again, why shouldn't he? Coriolanus realizes he doesn't know where to meet her until Lucy Gray starts to sing her song about the hanging tree—that's where they'll meet. He doesn't like that she and Billy Taupe hung out there, but it's probably a safe spot. He tries to parse the meaning of the lyrics and finally realizes the speaker is Billy Taupe. He's inviting Lucy Gray to hang with him if she wouldn't run away with him. Hopefully this is the last Billy Taupe song.

Receiving the praise from Dr. Gaul and Commander Hoff means that Coriolanus suspects he's not going to face consequences for killing Mayfair. And in this high, excited state, Coriolanus feels more warmly toward Lucy Gray. Where not too long ago he was suspicious of her, now he believes (with no evidence) that she's doing things just for him, to show him her love. This belief just reflects Coriolanus's hope for his future—it's unsurprising he's so happy, given that he believes he's going to get away with murder.



In her song, Lucy Gray proposes a view of human nature that contradicts Dr. Gaul's. While Dr. Gaul insisted people are naturally evil, Lucy Gray proposes people are born good and either stay good or become bad based on what happens to them. But Coriolanus misses this. Instead, he focuses on the fact that Lucy Gray loves and trusts him, and seems to think he's a good person. He doesn't consider, for instance, that per her logic, he could still make choices that would designate him as bad in her eyes.



Given how happy Coriolanus is and how close he feels to Lucy Gray, it makes sense that he'd avoid mentioning his role in Sejanus's death. He knows Lucy Gray would be distraught and feel betrayed, and it's nothing to him to lie to her. It helps him, after all; their romance won't survive if she knows he killed Sejanus. It's a sign of how in love and carried away Coriolanus is that he decides to go away with Lucy Gray—Coriolanus hates nature, for one, and his dreams of success and wealth don't exactly line up with roughing it in the wilderness.



It's thrilling for Coriolanus to consider what life is going to be like without the threat of the Capitol coming down on him. His excitement at being close to Lucy Gray makes him feel like this is going to be a grand adventure—but again, Coriolanus hates the wilderness, so it seems likely this isn't going to end well. It's an indicator of how upbeat Coriolanus is, though, when he decides to not get upset about "The Hanging Tree" being about Billy Taupe—this is an unusually generous view for Coriolanus.



The Covey finish their set and Coriolanus joins his bunkmates in bed. At dawn, Coriolanus gets up, puts his mother's **powder** and his father's **compass** in his pockets with some family photos, and slips out. He eats breakfast and then, just as he steps outside, armed guards tell him to go to the commander's office. Coriolanus is terrified and considers running, but the guards escort him to Commander Hoff's office. There, Commander Hoff congratulates Coriolanus—Coriolanus will leave for officers' school tomorrow.

As Coriolanus fills his pockets, he shows what's most important to him when he's not focusing on wealth and prestige: family. It's unclear why Commander Hoff sends armed guards to fetch Coriolanus, but it seems likely that Hoff just wants to psych Coriolanus out and make him stressed before giving him the news. This only confirms Coriolanus's suspicions that he can't trust people—and that they're all looking out for themselves.



CHAPTER 30

Commander Hoff says that Coriolanus is the youngest person to pass the test, and his scores are high enough that he'll participate in an elite program. Coriolanus knows this is his ticket back into Capitol society, but his DNA is on a murder weapon. He shakes hands with the commander and then, not caring if anyone catches him, he walks to the generator and slips through the fence. It's too early for anyone to be awake, so he walks to the hanging tree alone. Lucy Gray is hiding behind the tree when Coriolanus gets there, his scarf around her hair. She shows him her store of supplies and says the Covey will be fine. Really, it's a good thing she's leaving—Commander Hoff asked her not to sing "The Hanging Tree" anymore, since it's "too rebellious."

With the news that he can participate in an elite officer training program, Coriolanus finds himself caught between two options. He can stick with the Peacekeepers and risk them finding out he killed Mayfair and then execute him, or he can run away and avoid being hanged. It's a sign of how much he loves Lucy Gray, and of how afraid he is of dying, that Coriolanus chooses to run away. The fact that Commander Hoff has banned "The Hanging Tree" shows that someone, at least, is paying attention to songs' lyrics. But unlike with Panem's anthem, which spouts ideas the Capitol agrees with, Commander Hoff feels the need to censor Lucy Gray's song, which suggests death is a valid alternative to living under the Capitol's thumb.



Coriolanus realizes that Lucy Gray doesn't have her guitar. She tries to make light of it and insists she won't need it—she's not convinced there are people in the north. Coriolanus realizes he's not the only one leaving behind his dreams. He agrees to make a detour to the lake first. As they hike, they talk about what they will and won't miss. Coriolanus insists he won't miss people since most of them are terrible, but Lucy Gray insists people aren't so bad if you leave them alone. She insists people are naturally good, and it's everyone's job to stay good. Lucy Gray says she doesn't want to have to kill more people. Coriolanus agrees and insists killing three was too many.

In this moment, Coriolanus suddenly starts to feel more empathetic toward Lucy Gray. He realizes she's a lot like him, which is a huge step for him, given how selfish he's been throughout the novel. Once again, Lucy Gray proposes that people are born good and that their experiences either keep them good or turn them bad. This is also what she proposed in her song about Coriolanus. And Lucy Gray shows that she defines "staying good" as not killing people, which puts Coriolanus at a disadvantage. He's killed recently, if he counts Sejanus.



Coriolanus makes them walking sticks—and then, Lucy Gray asks who the third person is that he killed. Coriolanus panics; he can't tell her he killed Sejanus. He jokes that he killed himself so he could come with her. They walk for a while longer and discuss when people will start looking for them. It feels oddly like this is just a fun outing—but Coriolanus can't avoid that soon, they'll be in the wilderness. He doesn't know how they'll survive without wealth, fame, or power to aspire to. Is it enough to try to survive?

Minutes into their shared life together, Coriolanus is already lying to Lucy Gray. This doesn't bode well for their relationship. Coriolanus feels like he can't be honest with her, though, or this will all fall apart. Running away represents Coriolanus having to give up everything he's ever valued. Now, he has to consider for the first time what life is for, if not for gaining power in the government.



At the lake, Lucy Gray makes fishing poles so they can eat before continuing. Coriolanus hates digging for worms, and he hates the oppressive clouds that roll in. He thinks this would be easier if he wasn't "such an exceptional person," but society is losing out because he's leaving. As it starts to rain, Lucy Gray leads him into the cement house to cook the fish. It's dry and there's wood in there. It'd be nice to stay, but Coriolanus knows that wouldn't be safe. He can't stop thinking about the Snow penthouse as rain blows through the door. When Coriolanus closes the door, he finds the bag of weapons from the night of the murder hidden behind it.

Lucy Gray insists they don't need to take the guns, but she pulls out a knife and insists on going out into the storm to dig up some katniss. Once she's gone, Coriolanus cradles the gun he used to kill Mayfair. If he can destroy it, he can go back to his life—but Lucy Gray is a complication. He figures she'll be upset if he backs out, but she loves him and she'll live. And he hates the wilderness so much, he can't possibly live out there.

It's taking Lucy Gray a long time to dig up the katniss. Coriolanus flashes on Billy Taupe accusing Lucy Gray of "playing" the Covey, and remembers how she killed Wovey, Treech, and Reaper. The rifle is loaded, so Coriolanus hikes out to where he thinks the katniss grows. He calls for Lucy Gray, but she's nowhere to be found. She's hiding, but why? She must've figured out he killed Sejanus, and she probably fears Coriolanus will kill her. This is ridiculous; Coriolanus is armed and that's scary, but he just needs her to "see sense." Coriolanus slings the gun onto his back, knowing he has to talk to her. She could still ruin his life, as she knows about Mayfair. At the very least, she'll ruin his reputation if it gets out he cheated in the Hunger Games.

Coriolanus heads into the woods and begins to track Lucy Gray. He knows he's scaring her, and she must be heartbroken. He catches sight of the orange scarf and reaches for it—when suddenly, a **snake** strikes him. She clearly planted the snake; Coriolanus now sympathizes with Billy Taupe. The wound hurts, but he still feels fine. He pulls his rifle into his arms and marvels that this has become his and Lucy Gray's "own private Hunger Games." Coriolanus tracks her deeper into the woods. He realizes she probably went back to the lake to get a gun.

Coriolanus's self-centeredness here is almost funny. Learning that he was accepted into the elite officer program has gone to his head, making Coriolanus feel even more "exceptional" than he already did. And his supposed exceptionality seems, to him, totally wasted in the wilderness, where it's rainy, dirty, and he has to do things like dig for worms. Coriolanus reads even more like a spoiled Capitol kid in this passage. And it seems like his life might again change when he discovers the murder weapon.



As he's done so many times before, Coriolanus tells himself what he needs to hear in order to feel good about his decision. Backing out on running away with Lucy Gray will no doubt go over poorly, but to Coriolanus's credit, he does imply that he trusts her in this passage. In particular, he trusts her not to tell the truth that he murdered Mayfair.



It's impossible to know exactly what Lucy Gray is up to, but Coriolanus seems correct in his suspicions that she knows he killed Sejanus and no longer trusts him. And as Lucy Gray's trust erodes in Coriolanus, Coriolanus also stops trusting her—this is why he goes out with the gun to find her. And though he admits he knows he's being scary, he can't bring himself to put the gun down and approach her like an equal. This is because he doesn't see her as an equal. She's a girl from the districts, and she has the power to ruin his life—so Coriolanus believes drastic measures are okay.



Again, it's impossible to know whether Lucy Gray actually planted the snake; the close third-person narration makes it clear that this is just Coriolanus's read of the situation. If she didn't plant it, this reflects Coriolanus's paranoia. If she did, this shows that he underestimated her and she's more powerful than he ever expected her to be. This is why he decides she probably went back for a gun—he now sees her as ruthless and violent, just like him.



Coriolanus hears Lucy Gray to his right and fires in her direction. He only hits **mockingjays**. He calls out to Lucy Gray and she responds by singing the first verse of “The Hanging Tree.” Coriolanus gets it—she knows about Sejanus—but as he steps toward her, the mockingjays pick up the melody. He fires toward Lucy Gray’s voice and then shoots at the birds, who are still singing. It’s utter chaos. Coriolanus knows he has to get out—his arm is tingling. He stumbles to the lake, sinks the weapons in the middle of it, and heads back to the base. It’s pouring, which will wash away any evidence that he was here.

Coriolanus uses Crassus Snow’s **compass** to navigate back to District 12. Back at the base, a doctor examines his snakebite and says it wasn’t a poisonous **snake**. Coriolanus should be fine. In the bathroom at his bunk, Coriolanus discovers that the rain turned his mother’s **powder** into paste and caused his family photos to stick together. He throws them all away but keeps the compass, the only item that survived. After a shower, Coriolanus packs his bag and slips Sejanus’s box into it. He’ll mail it to Ma—hopefully she’ll keep sending him sweets.

In the morning, Coriolanus gets on a hovercraft headed for District Two. It’s fantastic with its plush seats and beverage selection. He falls asleep wondering what happened to Lucy Gray and wakes up in the Capitol. The attendant shoos him off; she has orders to leave him here. A Peacekeeper drives Coriolanus to the Citadel—Coriolanus is certain he’s going to be implicated for the murders. Instead, he follows instructions to go to Dr. Gaul’s lab. Dr. Gaul hands him a bowl of pink rodents and asks him how his studies went in 12. It’s as though he never left and is still her student. Then, she asks if he still believes the Hunger Games are just to punish the districts. Coriolanus says they’re “part of the eternal war,” and they let the Capitol control the war and win.

Then, Coriolanus says the Hunger Games remind people of who they are: “creatures who need the Capitol to survive.” He points out that nobody in the district watches, so it’s kind of a waste. Dr. Gaul says that’s great this year, since she had to erase the Hunger Games—there’s only one copy in the vault. This makes Coriolanus feel better. People will forget Lucy Gray. Dr. Gaul says Lucky Flickerman and betting will stay, and Coriolanus says they have to make viewing mandatory. Chuckling, Dr. Gaul says Coriolanus had a fantastic summer vacation—she always intended to bring him back. He’s going to study under her at the University starting Thursday.

This chaotic scene sets the stage for future conflicts between the Capitol and the districts. Coriolanus will continue to lash out indiscriminately, and people from the districts will continue to sing, resist, and anger the Capitol. And it’s a mark of how low Coriolanus has fallen that he’s willing to shoot and possibly kill Lucy Gray. But Coriolanus still gets what he wanted out of the situation: with the murder weapon on the bottom of the lake, he’ll never have to answer for murdering Mayfair.



As Coriolanus unloads his pockets, he symbolically chooses his new path. Discarding his mother’s powder and his family photos symbolizes him putting aside his family and his potential to be a good person. When the compass survives and gets Coriolanus back to base, it shows him that if he follows in his father’s footsteps, he’ll get ahead. This will mean becoming a frightening figure—but this no longer bothers Coriolanus as it once did.



Things are looking up for Coriolanus, first when he gets a taste of luxury on the hovercraft and then when Dr. Gaul treats him like he’s still a student. But just as when Commander Hoff stressed Coriolanus out before telling him about his officer test scores, Dr. Gaul makes no attempts to assure Coriolanus that everything will be okay. She forces him to infer and trust that he’s back in her good graces. After being a Peacekeeper, Coriolanus now has a new view of the Hunger Games. The Games are a way for the Capitol to stay in control—and as a person who wants nothing but control, this is right up Coriolanus’s alley.



In this passage, Coriolanus aligns himself fully with Dr. Gaul. He now believes that she’s right, and people need an overbearing government and an endless stream of propaganda to keep them in line. Being in 12 didn’t help Coriolanus develop empathy; rather, it did the exact opposite. But again, this suits Coriolanus. He’s now made the shift to being a villain, and empathy doesn’t concern him anymore. Studying with Dr. Gaul will help him become powerful, so that’s obviously what he’s going to do.



EPILOGUE

It's October. Snow is now wildly popular after his stint with the Peacekeepers. He's been taking honors classes on military strategy with Dr. Gaul, and he has an internship with the Gamemakers. They've taken Coriolanus's suggestions to give food to everyone in the winning tribute's district, and a house to the winning tribute. This will increase engagement and yield better "performers."

Snow strokes his soft leather satchel, which was a gift from the Plinths. After he returned, Strabo Plinth asked to work something out. He bought the Snow apartment and the one underneath for his family. Ma helps with Grandma'am, and Strabo pays for everything. Coriolanus is now the Plinths' heir, and Coriolanus can almost forget that Strabo is district.

It would've been Sejanus's 19th birthday tonight. Snow has invited Festus and Lysistrata for dinner, and he plans to give Ma and Strabo Sejanus's box of personal effects. But before he can head home, Coriolanus heads for the Academy and knocks on Dean Highbottom's office door. He asks the dean for his mother's **compact**, which Highbottom hands over. Then, Coriolanus pulls out Sejanus's box, replaces the diploma in the frame with a photo of the Plinth family, and swipes Sejanus's medicine bottles into the trash.

Dean Highbottom asks if Snow grew a heart in the districts, but Snow says he got one during the Hunger Games—which were Highbottom's idea. But Highbottom explains that he and Crassus Snow came up with the idea for the games. Dr. Gaul had assigned them to create a punishment for an enemy that would never let that enemy forget their crimes. Highbottom came up with it one night while he was drunk—and the next morning, he discovered that Crassus had given the paper to Dr. Gaul for the grade. Highbottom has never forgiven him.

Snow notes that Crassus is dead, but Dean Highbottom points out that Dr. Gaul is still staging the Hunger Games. He started taking morphling when she first proposed putting the Hunger Games in practice and he hasn't stopped. Coriolanus notes that the Games support how Dr. Gaul feels about humanity. She uses children because they're innocent, and when children become killers, it proves that humans are naturally violent. Then, Dean Highbottom asks how Lucy Gray felt about Coriolanus leaving 12. Coriolanus says they were both sad, but he has to get home—he's overseeing the delivery of a new living room set.

Note that Coriolanus is now going by his last name, something that makes him seem powerful and mysterious. His suggestions for the Hunger Games continue to dehumanize the tributes and incentivize the Games. This all encourages people to get involved, rather than question whether the Games are ethical in the first place.



Coriolanus still clearly detests Strabo Plinth because he's from District Two. He's willing to use the man because it's convenient, but Coriolanus is so beyond seeing Strabo as a person or someone to actually get to know. Strabo is a tool, not a person, which is in line with how Coriolanus sees all district folk.



As Coriolanus describes the dinner in Sejanus's honor, it again looks like this whole event is just for show, not actually to honor Sejanus. Coriolanus knows he has to impress the people who are giving him money, and this is an easy way to do it. It also seems like Coriolanus's trip to Dean Highbottom's office is just for show. Accepting the empty compact symbolizes Coriolanus's moral bankruptcy at this point in the novel.



Finally, Dean Highbottom reveals why he hates Coriolanus so much. Crassus, it seems, was much like Coriolanus in that he was willing to do anything, no matter how unethical, if it meant he got ahead. With this, Dean Highbottom starts to look like a man who, like so many, has the capacity to come up with some terrible ideas. But unlike Coriolanus and Crassus, he'd like to actually help people. For the most part, though, he's powerless to do so next to the Capitol.



In order to deal with the guilt and the trauma of being the person who invented a system that dehumanizes so many, Dean Highbottom turns to drugs. This doesn't even seem to register for Coriolanus, though—even if Highbottom doesn't support the Hunger Games, Coriolanus does. He seems to be actively trying to rile up Highbottom by noting that the Games prove that humans are naturally violent. Children represent a hope for the future—and if they'll kill people on national television, the future is, he implies, going to be violent.



Snow doesn't want to talk about Lucy Gray with anyone; nobody knows where she went and according to a letter from Smiley, people think Mayor Lipp killed her. Smiley also wrote that there's a new commander, and he's outlawed shows at the Hob, since music causes trouble. Snow agrees. Lucy Gray in real life is now like the Lucy Gray in the song—a ghost. But she can never harm him again. Coriolanus knows now it wouldn't have worked out. He's recently decided to marry Livia Cardew, since he'll never love her. He imagines them years from now, as president and first lady, still running the Hunger Games. People will think he's evil—but humanity should thank him, since he'll be the one ensuring humanity's survival.

As Coriolanus walks home past Pluribus's nightclub, he smiles. Last week, he picked up a pinch of rat poison in the nearby alley and painstakingly put it into Sejanus's morphling bottle. Dean Highbottom will never suspect the bottle now in his trash can. As Dean Highbottom dies, hopefully he'll realize that "Snow lands on top."

Lucy Gray may have become a ghost, but this doesn't mean she's gone—her music plays a huge role in [The Hunger Games](#). The fact that Coriolanus doesn't care what happened to her, just that she can't hurt him, shows again how morally bankrupt he is. His only aims are to become powerful and seize as much control as he possibly can. If the consequence of this is that people think he's evil, so be it. At this point, he thinks that keeping the Hunger Games alive is the only way to keep civilization going. This is an indicator of how much he's bought Dr. Gaul's way of looking at humanity and the world.



The novel's chilling ending shows that after murdering three, possibly four people (if he killed Lucy Gray), Coriolanus no longer feels any remorse, and he doesn't value human life—aside from his own. With this, he's tipped over into the realm of true evil. Presumably, he'll continue down this path for the next 64 years—until this novel's story reaches the beginning of [The Hunger Games](#).





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