Fever 1793

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF LAURIE HALSE ANDERSON

Laurie Halse is the daughter of the Rev. Frank A. Halse, Jr., and Joyce Holcomb Halse. She grew up in Potsdam, New York, along with her younger sister, and attended high school outside of Syracuse. She has enjoyed writing since second grade. As a teenager, Halse spent a year living in Denmark as an exchange student. She graduated from Georgetown University in 1984. Early in her career, she worked at the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. She began writing children's and young adult novels in the 1990s. Halse had two daughters, Stephanie and Meredith, with her first husband, Greg Anderson. Since 2004, she has been married to her childhood sweetheart, Scot Larrabee. Anderson is best known for her award-winning 1999 novel, *Speak*, which features a teenage girl who is dealing with the aftermath of a sexual assault. In addition to *Fever 1793*, she has authored a trilogy of young adult historical novels called *Seeds of America*. Her awards include the American Library Association's Margaret A. Edwards Award and the Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Philadelphia's yellow fever epidemic killed nearly 5,000 people between August and November, 1793—nearly 10% of the city's population. Twenty thousand people fled the city during this time, including many prominent citizens and government officials (Philadelphia was the temporary United States capital at this time and also the third largest U.S. city). The epidemic was made more perilous by inadequate medical knowledge—doctors didn't know the origins of the disease (it's transmitted by mosquitoes) or how best to treat it. Mayor Matthew Clarkson remained in Philadelphia for the duration of the epidemic and organized a committee to deal with the crisis. This included the transformation of Bush Hill into an emergency hospital and the deployment of the Free African Society, whose members agreed to nurse needy citizens—it was thought that people of African descent couldn't catch yellow fever, but this was quickly proven untrue. This didn't stop them from heroic efforts, feeding people, burying victims, and caring for orphans—as Society leaders Richard Allen and Absalom Jones wrote afterward, "Our services were the production of real sensibility—we sought not fee nor reward."

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Jim Murphy's book *An American Plague: The True and Terrifying Story of the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793* is a young adult nonfiction title that draws on firsthand accounts and explores the fever's historical context, sharing *Fever 1793*'s emphasis on the lifesaving efforts of the Free Africans. *Sophia's War: A Tale of the Revolution*, by Avi, is another young adult historical novel featuring a teenage girl who must use her wits to survive perilous times, in this case as a spy during the War for Independence. Laurie Halse Anderson has also written the young adult *Seeds of America* Trilogy: *Chains*, *Forge*, and *Seeds*, which tell the story of two teenaged runaway slaves who fight for survival during the Revolutionary War.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Fever 1793*
- **When Written:** 2000
- **Where Written:** New York, United States
- **When Published:** 2000
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Young adult historical fiction
- **Setting:** Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- **Climax:** Mattie's mother returns home
- **Antagonist:** Yellow fever
- **Point of View:** First person

EXTRA CREDIT

Cutting-Edge Coffee. Not unlike today, the coffeehouses of 1790s Philadelphia were trendy establishments. In the earlier 1700s, coffeehouses were mere commercial endeavors, but by Mattie Cook's day, coffeehouses functioned more like inns, restaurants, or social gathering spaces. Female proprietors weren't unheard of, either—at least three were known in Philadelphia in the 18th century.

Feverish Fiction. Likely the first fictional treatment of the yellow fever epidemic was a novel titled *Arthur Mervyn; or, Memoirs of the Year 1793*, published in 1799 by Philadelphia native Charles Brockden Brown.

PLOT SUMMARY

In August, 1793, 14-year-old Matilda "Mattie" Cook is awakened by her mother, Lucille Cook, scolding her for sleeping late. Mattie is needed immediately to help in their coffeehouse, since their serving girl, Polly, is late for work. Mattie would rather daydream about escaping Philadelphia, much like Blanchard's hot-air **balloon** which flew earlier that year, but she reluctantly complies. Eliza, the coffeehouse cook and

Mattie's closest confidant, serves her a generous breakfast but quickly shoos her outside to tend the garden. Mattie continues to daydream about her crush, Nathaniel Benson, and about running her own businesses someday, but she's interrupted by Mother again—this time with the news that Polly has died suddenly of a fever.

Mattie takes over Polly's duties in the coffeehouse, hearing her beloved Grandfather debate with customers about rumors of a yellow fever outbreak in the city. A couple of weeks later, many have died from the fever, but Grandfather argues that it's nothing to be concerned about. One day, a neighborhood aristocrat, Pernilla Ogilvie, invites Mattie and Lucille to tea. Mattie hates Pernilla's snobby daughters, Colette and Jeannine, and doesn't share Lucille's desire that she marry a rich Ogilvie son, but she reluctantly goes along. Just as Jeannine is picking a fight with Mattie by insulting the Cook Coffeehouse, Colette abruptly collapses from yellow fever.

Soon, Philadelphia comes to a standstill because of the fever, with many wealthier families fleeing to the countryside. Even President Washington and other prominent statesmen are vacating the city. Grandfather continues to argue that the fever rumors are alarmist, but one day, as he and Mattie return from running errands, they see Lucille being dropped off in front of the coffeehouse—she's gravely ill.

Mattie spends a horrifying night tending to her feverish mother, who begs her to leave so that she won't get sick. Mattie fears losing Lucille and regrets their past arguments; she believes she's failed to learn from Lucille's stoic strength. The next day a doctor diagnoses Lucille with yellow fever and bleeds her as a remedy. Grandfather agrees that he and Mattie should flee to the country while Eliza stays to care for Lucille. They hitch a ride with a farmer and his family. When they're just 10 miles outside of Philadelphia, however, their wagon is stopped by guards and a doctor, and Grandfather is barred from passing through the outlying towns because of his suspicious cough. He and Mattie find themselves abandoned in the countryside without provisions.

When Mattie realizes that her sickly grandfather expects her to take charge, she's frightened, but she soon remembers how to locate water and forage for berries to keep them alive. She even fashions a makeshift net and almost succeeds in catching fish. When she ventures to nearby farms in search of better food, however, she soon grows disoriented and succumbs to fever herself. Later, she wakes up and discovers that she's recovering in the hospital; a nurse named Mrs. Flagg informs her that Grandfather has carried her there. The revitalized hospital, called Bush Hill, is staffed by French doctors who are more familiar with yellow fever and reject the American doctors' blood-letting remedies.

After Mattie recovers, she and Grandfather get a wagon ride home. They find Philadelphia nearly deserted, with corpses in the streets, businesses abandoned, and thieves preying on the vulnerable. Even the coffeehouse has been broken into, and there's no sign of Lucille, whom they hope has recovered and fled. Grandfather looks weak and unwell, so Mattie urges him to rest while she cobbles together meager meals from the neglected garden. It's too dangerous to venture into the city in search of food.

On their second night in the house, Mattie is awakened by thieves coming in through the open windows. When they find and restrain Mattie, the commotion wakes Grandfather, who confronts the men with his rifle. When one of the thieves brutally attacks Grandfather, Mattie seizes Grandfather's sword and wounds the man, chasing him from the house. When she returns, she finds Grandfather fading rapidly. He praises her bravery before he dies. Mattie is devastated to find herself truly alone.

The next morning, a man passes the house with a cart of dead bodies, and Mattie helps him push Grandfather's corpse to the city's burial ground. Mattie refuses to see Grandfather's body tossed into a common grave without ceremony, and she leads the assembled gravediggers in reciting a Psalm. Then Mattie aimlessly wanders the streets of Philadelphia until she comes upon an abandoned orphan girl, Nell. Before she knows what she's doing, she's embracing Nell and carrying her around the city in search of help. Someone tells her to seek out the Free African Society volunteers, and before long, Mattie is tearfully reunited with Eliza, who's been nursing fever victims all over the city.

Eliza assures Mattie that Lucille survived the fever and went to the country in search of her. Eliza takes Mattie and Nell home to her brother Joseph's house, where Mattie tends to Nell and Joseph's twin sons, Robert and William. Mattie soon talks herself into taking Nell to the orphan house, but when she gets there, the staff is overwhelmed with children whose parents have died from the fever. She happily takes Nell back home. She continues staying in Joseph's house and assisting Eliza in caring for Philadelphia's fever victims.

One night, Mattie and Eliza come home to find Joseph weeping over the twins and Nell, who have all fallen ill with the fever. Mattie takes charge and decides to move the children to the coffeehouse, where there's cooler, fresher air. She and Eliza exhaust themselves in caring for the stricken children. Just as Mattie collapses in the garden in near despair, the season's first frost hits, signaling an end to the epidemic. Soon the children's fevers break, and farmers begin to return to the market with food. Joseph joyfully reunites with his sons.

As life transitions back to normal, Mattie begins spending more time with Nathaniel Benson and reaches an "understanding" with him (an informal engagement), despite her family's earlier disapproval. She also invites Eliza to share the coffeehouse business with her, and the twins and Nell move in for good. The reopened coffeehouse quickly thrives, and Mattie is filled with good ideas for future expansion. However, she feels empty,

missing Mother.

When President Washington returns to Philadelphia, his entourage is trailed by the wagons and carriages of those who'd fled the city. Among these, at last, is Mother, brought home by her friend Mrs. Ludington. Lucille and Mattie embrace tearfully, and Mattie is shocked by her mother's frailty. Mrs. Ludington explains that when Lucille arrived in the countryside and discovered that Mattie was not there, she frantically went in search of Mattie and fell deathly ill. She miraculously recovered and is under strict orders to "live a life of leisure" from now on. Grieving the drastic change in her mother, Mattie realizes she is truly in charge now.

Weeks later, on a chilly December morning, Mattie wakes before anyone else in the coffeehouse has stirred. In contrast to the beginning of the novel, she lets her mother sleep and quietly prepares the coffeehouse for another workday. Thinking of the epidemic and remembering those she's lost, Mattie nevertheless looks forward to a hopeful future.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Matilda "Mattie" Cook – Mattie lives with her mother, Lucille Cook, who runs a Philadelphia coffeehouse. She also lives with her grandfather, Captain William Farnsworth Cook, a Revolutionary War veteran. Mattie feels trapped there and longs for freedom. At the beginning of the book, she enjoys sleeping in and tries to shirk strenuous chores. Mattie dislikes her mother's frequent scolding and believes that Lucille sees her as lazy and disobedient. She often daydreams of opening an entire city block's worth of businesses, including a dry goods store, a restaurant, and an apothecary. After Lucille gets yellow fever, Mattie and Grandfather flee to the countryside, but Mattie is forced to fend for them both when Grandfather develops heart trouble. Then, she nearly dies from yellow fever herself. Later, back in Philadelphia, Mattie is left alone when Grandfather dies and Mother has not yet returned from Mrs. Ludington's. She grows more independent as she survives on her own, taking in an orphan, Nell, and assisting Eliza with relief work. After the epidemic, Mattie reopens the coffeehouse, taking on Eliza as her partner. She also has "an understanding" (an unofficial engagement) with her longtime crush, Nathaniel Benson, that they will spend their lives together. By the time Mother returns, weak and needing Mattie's support, Mattie has become a strong, hard-working businesswoman with high hopes for her future.

Lucille Cook ("Mother") – Lucille runs the Cook Coffeehouse in Philadelphia with the assistance of Mattie and Eliza. Lucille grew up in a wealthy family during the Revolutionary War and eloped with Mattie's father, a carpenter; she was disowned as a result. Lucille was widowed after her husband fell off a ladder when Mattie was four. She invited Grandfather, her late husband's father, to live with them at that time. She is demanding of Mattie and often talks about how much more obedient and hardworking she was during her own childhood, which annoys Mattie. Desperate to provide for Mattie by arranging a marriage, she takes Mattie to a disastrous tea at Pernilla Ogilvie's house. Not long after, Lucille becomes desperately ill with yellow fever. After she recovers, she goes to Mrs. Ludington's farm in the country, then nearly dies again during a desperate search for Mattie. When Lucille returns to Philadelphia at the end of the novel, she is severely weakened by her suffering and must lean on Mattie for survival.

Captain William Farnsworth Cook ("Grandfather") – Captain Cook is Lucille's father-in-law and Mattie's grandfather. He joined the household after his son, Mattie's father, died ten years ago. William Cook was a lifelong army officer who served in the Pennsylvania Fifth Regiment under General George Washington during the Revolutionary War. He is stout and loves tall tales and gossip; he is a fixture in the coffeehouse each day. He dotes on Mattie. From the time Mattie is a little girl, he teaches her "old soldiers' tricks" and even how to handle a sword. He has a pet parrot named King George. Grandfather is skeptical about the yellow fever epidemic and develops heart trouble when he and Mattie finally flee Philadelphia for the countryside. Mattie defends him with his battle sword when thieves break into the coffeehouse, and he dies soon after; his last words express pride in Mattie's strength and cleverness.

Eliza – Eliza is the coffeehouse cook. She was born a slave in Virginia and moved to Philadelphia after her husband purchased her freedom. Before she could purchase her husband's freedom in turn, he was killed by a runaway horse. Eliza is Mattie's closest confidant. She indulges Mattie with good food and affection, but also pushes her to work hard when it's necessary. She is steadfast in a crisis and works long hours as a volunteer for the Free African Society during the epidemic. Eliza lives with her widowed brother, Joseph, and her nephews, Robert and William. After Mattie invites Eliza to become her business partner at the coffeehouse, Eliza and her nephews move in with Mattie.

Nathaniel Benson – Nathaniel is Mattie's longtime crush. Though Mattie's family dismisses him as a good-for-nothing scamp, he shows promise as an apprentice to the Peales, a family of talented painters. He and Mattie watched the **balloon** sail together, and he sends her a painting of flowers when they're separated during the epidemic. Mattie and Nathaniel have "an understanding" (an unofficial engagement) by the end of the novel.

Father – Mattie's father, Lucille's husband, and William Farnsworth Cook's son isn't named in the book. Lucille eloped with him at 17, although her family disapproved of her marrying a carpenter. He built the coffeehouse but died of a broken neck weeks after it opened, when Mattie was only four.

Mattie remembers her mother being gentler and happier when Father was alive.

Nell – Nell is an abandoned orphan girl, no more than a toddler, whom Mattie finds and keeps during the epidemic. Nell quickly bonds with Mattie. Though Mother Smith urges Mattie to take Nell to the orphan house, Mattie decides to keep her. Nell comes to live at the reopened coffeehouse with Mattie, Mother, and Eliza's family.

Mother Smith – Mother Smith is a very old African American woman who volunteers with the Free African Society. She watches Joseph's twins while Eliza is nursing fever victims. Though she criticizes Mattie's housekeeping skills and urges her to surrender Nell to the orphanage, she comes to respect Mattie and encourages Eliza to accept Mattie's partnership offer.

Mrs. Pernilla Ogilvie – Mrs. Ogilvie is a well-to-do neighbor who invites Lucille and Mattie to tea. She and Lucille seem to know one another from Lucille's wealthier upbringing. She speaks disdainfully of the city's poor and refugees whose illness has caused her gala ball to be canceled. She also looks down on "tradespeople" like the Cooks.

Dr. Benjamin Rush – Dr. Rush was a revered doctor and also a signer of the Declaration of Independence. Though Dr. Rush advocated for many cutting-edge practices, his fever remedies—consisting of blood-letting and purgative medicines—were behind the times and may have been harmful. Dr. Rush invites the Free African Society to nurse fever victims throughout Philadelphia.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Joseph – Joseph is Eliza's brother. He works as a cooper (a barrel-maker) and is widowed during the epidemic. He has twin sons, Robert and William. Joseph is a tender-hearted father who dotes on the twins and on Nell.

Robert and William (the twins) – Robert and William are Joseph's sons and Eliza's nephews. Though their age isn't specified, they are toddlers about Nell's age. Mattie helps Eliza nurse them back to health from yellow fever, and they later join Mattie's household along with Eliza.

Mrs. Ludington – Mrs. Ludington is Lucille Cook's good friend. She lives in the countryside on a pig farm, where Lucille takes shelter during the epidemic. She brings Lucille back to Philadelphia after President Washington returns.

Colette Ogilvie – Colette is Pernilla Ogilvie's older daughter. She collapses from the fever during tea with Lucille and Mattie. Though she's supposedly engaged to someone else, she reveals that she's secretly married to her French tutor and refuses to leave fever-stricken Philadelphia without him.

Jeannine Ogilvie – Jeannine is Pernilla Ogilvie's younger daughter, around 16. She quietly taunts Mattie when Mattie and Lucille come for tea, and later she openly taunts the coffeehouse as a "filthy tavern" and "grog shop." Mattie despises her.

Mr. Andrew Brown – Mr. Brown is the owner of the *Federal Gazette* print shop and a friend of Mattie's grandfather. During the epidemic, his paper is the only one that continues printing, ensuring that notices from the mayor and physicians can be published.

Mr. Carris – Mr. Carris, an exporter and a good friend of Grandfather, frequents the coffeehouse.

Polly Logan – Polly works as a serving girl at Cook Coffeehouse. She was a childhood friend of Mattie's. She dies suddenly of yellow fever at the beginning of the novel.

Mr. Rowley – Mr. Rowley is not a real physician, but he prescribes medicines to the sick and eagerly collects his fees. He tells Mattie and Grandfather that Lucille does not have yellow fever and that Dr. Rush is being alarmist by diagnosing so many with the fever.

Dr. Kerr – Dr. Kerr is an educated Scottish doctor whom Eliza brings to examine Lucille when she falls ill. He diagnoses her correctly with yellow fever but prescribes bleeding, the useless treatment favored by Dr. Rush.

Dr. Deveze – Dr. Deveze is a French doctor whom Stephen Girard appoints as the physician of the Bush Hill hospital. He rejects Dr. Rush's remedies, especially blood-letting, and treats Mattie and other yellow fever victims more effectively with fluids, rest, and fresh air.

Mrs. Bridget Flagg – Mrs. Flagg is a kindly, talkative nurse who works at Bush Hill during the epidemic. She faithfully nurses Mattie and updates her on developments in Philadelphia while Mattie is recovering. She enjoys Grandfather's teasing attentions, and he promises to take her to a ball someday.

Mr. Stephen Girard – Mr. Girard (a historical figure) is a wealthy Frenchman whom Philadelphia's mayor appoints to transform the chaotic fever hospital at Bush Hill into a healthy, modern hospital. He appoints Dr. Deveze as the physician at Bush Hill.

Reverend Richard Allen – Rev. Allen (a historical figure) is a leader of the Free African Society and oversees the Society's volunteer relief efforts during the epidemic. Eliza speaks of him often.

President George Washington – President Washington frequents Philadelphia because it is the temporary capital of the United States. When Washington returns to Philadelphia at the end of the book, it's a signal that the epidemic is truly over. Captain William Farnsworth Cook served under him in the Revolutionary War.

Farmer – The unnamed farmer gives Grandfather and Mattie a ride out of Philadelphia on his rickety wagon, but dumps them on the roadside after a doctor, fearing Grandfather's

symptoms, tries to stop the group from passing through an outlying town.

Mrs. Bowles – Mrs. Bowles is a kindly Quaker woman who runs Philadelphia's orphan house. When she rides into the city with Mattie and Grandfather after Mattie's recovery, she encourages Mattie to look for a way to help others.

Mr. and Mrs. Epler – Mr. and Mrs. Epler, a farming couple from Germany, sell chickens and eggs in Philadelphia's open-air market. Mattie observes that Mr. Epler is "egg-shaped" and that Mrs. Epler "flutters" like a chicken. They are kind and generous to Mattie.

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.

FREEDOM AND INDEPENDENCE

In *Fever 1793*, 14-year-old Matilda ("Mattie") Cook faces the devastation of Philadelphia's yellow fever epidemic. Mattie has dreamed of the day she can escape her work in the family coffeehouse, and especially her demanding mother, Lucille Cook. When the epidemic forces her to fend for herself, however, Mattie learns that "freedom" isn't quite what she had pictured, and she ultimately achieves independence by saving the family business and providing for her mother. Through Mattie's fight for survival and renewed appreciation for her family, Anderson shows that independence requires hard work and transformation, not mere escape, and that independence is often built on familial bonds, not by severing them.

At first, Mattie longs to grow up and escape her family's demands and expectations. The novel opens with Mattie's mother lecturing her about laziness and responsibility while Mattie daydreams about a different life: "A few blocks south […] Blanchard had flown that remarkable **balloon** […] a yellow silk bubble escaping the earth. I vowed to do that one day, slip free of the ropes that held me." Mattie imagines freedom as something like the famous hot-air balloon that had sailed from Philadelphia earlier that year—when she "slips free," she will be disconnected from the unwanted ties of family and obligation.

Mattie also resents being regarded as a child and having to do what the rest of the household, including her mother's employee, Eliza, tells her: "Little Mattie, indeed. I was big enough to be ordered around like an unpaid servant […] Big enough to plan for the day when I would no longer live here […] [Someday] [n]o one would call me little Mattie. They would call me 'Ma'am.'" Mattie feels the tension between being young enough to be subject to her family, yet old enough to have her own opinions about her future; as a result, she imagines that freedom entails being able to do exactly as she wishes.

The yellow fever epidemic forces Mattie to take charge in ways she never expected in her daydreams, thus forcing her to reframe her notions of independence as the ability to freely step up and help others, rather than to run from responsibility. When Mattie and her grandfather (a Revolutionary War veteran) find themselves lost on the outskirts of the fever-stricken city, Mattie's sick grandfather defers to her for the first time: "'We must form our battle plans, both for this skirmish and the rest of the war.' I waited for his advice. It did not come. That scared me more than anything. He was waiting for me to decide what to do." Used to being directed, Mattie must draw on her skills and intelligence in order to find food and shelter for them both. Her first independent steps, it turns out, are about ensuring the wellbeing of others, not about fulfilling her own wishes.

After Mattie and her grandfather survive and return home, robbers break in and threaten their lives. Without waiting for her grandfather to come to their defense, Mattie takes the initiative to drive the intruders off: "I picked up [Grandfather's] sword, holding it with two hands. […] I swung the sword and gashed the thief's shoulder. He howled and rolled to the side, grasping at the bloody wound." As fighting for survival has forced Mattie to learn more about her own strength, her view of independence has correspondingly shifted. She no longer frets about others' expectations of her or yearns for an unfettered freedom, but instinctively uses her strength to protect those she loves.

After her grandfather dies, Mattie realizes how lonely independence can be: "There could be no running from this. Hiding from death was not like hiding from Mother when she wanted me to scrub kettles, or ignoring [the cat] when he begged for food. I was the only one left." Technically, Mattie is now free to do as she wishes, but this "freedom" is much different from her idealized daydream. Fending for herself is a burden, not a joy.

The experience of taking charge prepares Mattie to stay in Philadelphia, take over the family business, and provide for her remaining family—a form of independence she never envisioned. When Mattie considers what will become of her if she's orphaned, she figures she can always get a job as a maid. Catching her reflection in a window, however, she's reminded of her mother and quickly reconsiders: "A scullery maid? Ridiculous. […] I could read, write, and figure numbers faster than most. I was not afraid of hard work. I would set my own course." Mattie still wants to determine her own path, but in contrast to the restless, untested girl at the beginning of the story, she is now confident in her abilities. However, she has come to see her strengths as tied to her family identity, not as a means of breaking free from it.

When adults speculate that Mattie should sell the family coffeehouse, Mattie stands up for herself: "Everyone thought they knew what was right for me. It was just like listening to Mother and Grandfather making the decisions while I stood to the side [...] This would not do. It was time to bring out the plan that had hatched days earlier when I saw my face in the window. 'I'm not selling,' I said loudly." Again, Mattie's assertion of independence is now an embrace of her family inheritance and a desire to sustain it—which wouldn't have been the case if she hadn't gained independence through fighting for her family's survival.

When Mattie is reunited with her mother, she finds Lucille Cook much different after having barely survived yellow fever: "Her hands lay in her lap, withered and limp. I had never seen her hands stay still before [...] I had a sudden sense of what was to come and I blinked away the tears." In a stark reversal from the beginning of the book, Mattie must now care for her weakened mother and run the coffeehouse herself. While Mattie's realization of independence looks much different from freely sailing away like a balloon, as she'd once imagined, Anderson shows that it's more genuine, because Mattie has learned to use her abilities to care for those she loves.

MOTHERS, DAUGHTERS, AND FAMILIAL LOVE

Fever 1793 is a mother-daughter story. Mattie, 14, resents her mother, Lucille, as a scolding and meddlesome taskmaster. She fails to appreciate her mother's struggles to support her family and secure Mattie's future. When yellow fever hits, Lucille is stricken with the disease and disappears to an unknown location in the countryside; the central mystery of the novel is whether Lucille has survived and will reunite with Mattie. Though absent from the central part of the book, memories of Lucille's strength inspire Mattie as she struggles to survive and gathers an improvised "family" of fellow survivors. By framing the novel with Mattie's relatively childish view of Lucille and, later, her more mature perceptions, Anderson demonstrates that mother-daughter relationships in any setting involve conflict, and she suggests that daughters come to empathize with their mothers through maturing and fighting their own battles.

At the beginning of the story, Mattie's relationship with her mother is conflicted. Mattie sees her mother as the person who runs her life—and not in the way that Mattie would prefer: "When Mother allowed herself a still moment by the fire on winter nights, I could sometimes see the face she wore when Father was alive. [...] But no longer. Life was a battle, and Mother a tired and bitter captain. The captain I had to obey." Though Mattie understands that her mother has faced "battles," Mattie has never been "embattled" herself, so she can't fully sympathize with her mother.

Mattie is furious when her mother drags her to tea at the upper-class Ogilvie home, hoping for a possible match for Mattie with one of the wealthy sons: "We did not belong here. I did not belong here. Mother may have grown up with carriages and gowns, but I had not." Rather than appreciating her mother's burden to provide for Mattie, Mattie just sees this unwanted courtship ritual in terms of conflict between herself and her mother—she and her mother are different in an unbridgeable way, she believes.

Mattie also sees herself through the lens of her conflict with her mother. She imagines that her mother sees her as an unwanted failure: "I disgusted Mother. She knew I was weak. I bet she wanted sons. Instead she got a backward, lazy girl child." While there's no evidence in the story that this perception is true, it shows how Mattie interprets her mother's sometimes heavy-handed efforts to guide and protect her as a struggling single parent.

Mattie becomes the head of her household, in effect, after she and her mother are separated during the epidemic. The separation forces her to better appreciate her mother and, as she forms family bonds with other survivors, to realize some of the strains and sacrifices of holding a family together. As Lucille nears death (so Mattie thinks) from yellow fever, Mattie grieves her failures to fully appreciate and learn from her mother: "Tears threatened again. I sniffed and tried to control my face. No one could ever tell what Mother thought or felt by looking at her. [...] There were so many things she had tried to teach me, but I didn't listen." Faced with the prospect of losing Lucille, Mattie is painfully aware of all she has failed to learn from her mother, and will now never have the opportunity to learn.

Mattie finds a lethal diagnosis to be incompatible with her perception of Lucille: "Mother [...] had given birth to me in the morning and cooked supper for ten that night. She survived the British occupation while my father fought with Washington's troops. Mother would beat back illness with a broom." Mattie newly appreciates Lucille's strengths when she sees her languishing with yellow fever. When her mother disappears to the countryside, this reminder of Lucille's formidable presence sustains Mattie and lets her maintain hope that she's still alive, even though they don't know each other's whereabouts for the duration of the epidemic.

Mattie fights for Nell, an abandoned orphan, and Robert and William, nephews of coffeehouse employee Eliza, even though it's unclear how they'll survive together in the aftermath of the fever. After Mattie successfully nurses them all back to health, collapsing in exhaustion before all is over, she offers Eliza a partnership in the coffeehouse and effectively starts a new household, folding Eliza's whole family into her life there. Mattie's battles on behalf of the children echo the strengths she's internalized from her mother, though she doesn't entirely recognize this in herself.

When Mattie and her mother are reunited, their roles are

reversed in a way that's sorrowful but ultimately reconciling for them. Though she's recovered from the fever, Lucille is permanently weakened and newly reliant on Mattie for support, both physically and emotionally. Mattie tells her, "'Please don't cry. Everything is better now. I'm home, you're home. You don't have to worry anymore.' I drew up a chair next to her, and she leaned against my shoulder. I cradled her head in my arms until her sobs quieted." Mattie's support of her mother is unprecedented, but she accepts the role unhesitatingly, made stronger and more empathetic from her own trials during their separation.

Mattie also takes over the coffeehouse and supports her mother financially. The end of the book finds Mattie waking early and letting her mother sleep late, in contrast to a combative scene between the two of them at the beginning, when Mattie complained about being scolded out of bed by Lucille. Though Mattie is upset by the change in her mother's wellbeing, their long separation has both deepened Mattie's love for her and strengthened her to care for Lucille as, she now realizes, Lucille has unfailingly done for her.

Mattie and Lucille have a great deal in common. A war survivor who was widowed when Mattie was only four, Lucille has worked hard to run a business and provide for Mattie; she is independent, determined, and brave. As Mattie struggles to survive the epidemic, her similarities to her mother are evident, and they are highlighted all the more strongly when Lucille comes to occupy a more daughter-like role in Mattie's revitalized coffeehouse. Though it's hinted that Lucille won't survive for many more years, Anderson allows their relationship to come full circle in a deft and sensitive way, highlighting the notion that although mother-daughter relationships are inevitably conflicted, it is possible to find common ground through maturation and appreciation of each other's efforts.

DISASTER AND HUMAN NATURE

In *Fever 1793*, Mattie Cook observes, "Yellow fever was wrestling the life out of Philadelphia, infecting the cobblestones, the trees, the nature of the people." Throughout the book, Anderson highlights the varied reactions and decisions of many ordinary Philadelphians in order to show how crisis reveals the hidden potential of human hearts. Sometimes that potential is shockingly selfish and even destructive, while other times, the love displayed is remarkably noble and even creative in its efforts to unite people. Through this exploration of human motives, Anderson argues that when catastrophic events occur, all people have a choice to either indulge their worst tendencies or rise above them.

The yellow fever epidemic brings out the worst in some people, highlighting the ability of stressful crises to bring about prejudice and self-serving behavior. Some white Philadelphians blame Santo Domingan refugees and Philadelphia's poor for the yellow fever outbreak. As an aristocratic neighbor complains, "Those filthy refugees and creatures who live in the crowded hovels by the river, they're always sick with something. But it is a gross injustice that my gala should suffer because the lower class falls ill." This quote is an example of a selfish, prejudiced mindset that scapegoats groups deemed undesirable by society. Thus the epidemic lays bare dehumanizing attitudes that have already been present under people's polite exterior.

When Mattie and her grandfather hitch a ride to the countryside with another fleeing family, the group is questioned about their fever exposure, and the other family abandons them out of fear: "'They aren't my family,' the farmer said […] 'They was walking and we picked them up.' 'He's lying!' I shouted. 'I don't have no fever,' the farmer continued. 'My wife and baby are healthy. Let me just drive through so I can get to Bethlehem by nightfall.'" Though the farmer understandably wants to protect his family, his fear prompts him to leave Mattie and her grandfather on the roadside without provisions—an example of how disaster can bring out self-serving panic in otherwise decent people.

After she's recovered from a bout of fever and is returning home, Mattie is warned, "The streets of Philadelphia are more dangerous than your darkest nightmare. Fever victims lay in the gutters, thieves and wild men lurk on every corner […] If you are determined to return home with your grandfather, then you must stay there until the fever abates." The fever has altered the temperament of the city itself, as Mattie further discovers when her house is broken into—some take advantage of the devastation in order to prey on the vulnerable.

The epidemic brings out the very best in others, however, even encouraging people to cross the boundaries of prejudice and selfishness. One of the novel's shining examples of human kindness is the Free African Society, a benevolent organization run by and for freed slaves. The Society goes out of its way to provide food and nursing to any fever-stricken household in the city, as Mattie's friend Eliza explains: "Rev. Allen said this was a chance for black people to show we are every bit as good and important and useful as white people. The Society organized folks to visit the sick, to care for them and bury them if they died […] The Africans of Philadelphia have cared for thousands of people without taking notice of color." In light of the emergency, the Free African volunteers don't limit themselves to their usual beneficiaries, but implicitly serve even those who might reject them in everyday life—an example of how a crisis can summon people to exemplary acts.

Similarly, when Mattie cares for an orphaned little girl, Nell, a volunteer nurse named Mother Smith warns her, "Don't love her […] She's not yours. You can't keep her. You had any sense, you'd take her right down to the orphan house tomorrow and hand her over." Though Mattie goes as far as to carry Nell to the orphanage, convincing herself that it's the reasonable choice,

her love for Nell changes her mind at the last moment. She then forms an unconventional family including Nell, Eliza, and Eliza's nephews, showing that it's not only possible to make loving choices in the midst of disaster, but that disaster sometimes creates the opportunity to break down conventional boundaries, in a way that ordinary life doesn't do so readily.

When the epidemic has passed, Mattie observes both positive and negative developments in the aftermath. On one hand, the return of the city's wealthier residents, who fled to the country and avoided the worst, makes her feel as though some people are "dancing on a grave with no thought to the suffering they had escaped." On the other hand, the establishment of better hospitals and the heroic efforts of benevolent societies have a lasting impact on the city's disadvantaged. Like any historic event, the epidemic reveals persistent human blind spots, as well as the potential for communities to be better than they were before.

INGENUITY, AMBITION, AND SURVIVAL

At the beginning of *Fever 1793*, Mattie Cook daydreams about her business ambitions: "I wanted to own an entire city block—a proper restaurant, an apothecary, maybe a school, or a hatter's shop. Grandfather said I was a Daughter of Liberty, a real American girl." The yellow fever epidemic disrupts all such dreams, making even ordinary survival seem an unlikely achievement. However, Mattie still puts her ambition and ingenuity to work, proving herself adaptable and thereby surviving the fever, even helping others survive. A similar adaptability saves the day on a broader scale, helping Philadelphia doctors conquer the outbreak. By showcasing Mattie and the doctors' "American" traits of ingenuity and ambition in this way, Anderson suggests that characteristics like these, especially when directed toward the good of others and society at large, can help struggling people come together, survive, and thrive.

When the epidemic turns ordinary life upside down, adaptability proves to be a potentially lifesaving trait, both for Mattie and for the Philadelphia medical establishment. From childhood, Mattie has been taught "old soldier's tricks" and basic survival skills by her veteran grandfather. She uses some of these to enable her weakened grandfather to survive when they're abandoned in the Pennsylvania countryside—"Find a willow tree and you'll soon find water nearby [...] Raspberry bushes mean rabbits are about"—but she also has to improvise off of these basic skills using the objects she has at hand. For example, she uses her petticoat as a fishing net. Rather than relying on a strict application of what she's been taught, Mattie creatively builds off her grandfather's lessons in order to serve the pressing needs of the moment.

The medical establishment in the city of Philadelphia also has to adapt to the ravages of the fever. When Mattie emerges from her fever and hears she's at Bush Hill—known as one of Philadelphia's worst hospitals—she learns from a nurse that "Bush Hill is now a respectable place [...] Mr. Stephen Girard, Lord bless his name, has taken over and turned this into a right proper hospital. All them thieving scoundrels have been driven off." The emergency transformation of Bush Hill is an example of forward-thinking ingenuity that saves countless lives.

Similarly, Philadelphia doctors were divided between those who practiced more traditional methods of bleeding in order to cure fevers, like American Dr. Benjamin Rush, and those French doctors who, acquainted with yellow fever from the jungles of the West Indies, pushed to treat the suffering through fluids, fresh air, and rest. "You'll hear folks say that Dr. Rush is a hero for saving folks with his purges and blood letting. But I've seen different. It's these French doctors here that know how to cure the fever. I don't care if Dr. Rush did sign the Declaration of Independence," Nurse Flagg explains to Mattie (who later uses this information to spare Eliza's nephews from potentially fatal bleeding). Ingenuity and adaptability are vital in a crisis, on personal, institutional, and societal levels.

Mattie summons untried physical and emotional strength to undertake unprecedented tasks, putting others' needs before her own. For example, Mattie assists in her own grandfather's burial and funeral because there is no one else available for the tasks. When the weight of her grandfather's remains is too much, the man pushing the cart of corpses "looked me up and down once, then moved to the side. [...] Together we pushed the cart to the burial ground." When there's a shortage of ministers at the makeshift graveyard, Mattie takes charge of the situation by leading the assembled workers in prayer. Though she is just a 14-year-old girl, Mattie's courageous initiative, spurred by love, seems to cut through whatever doubts others have about her.

Later, although Mattie is still recovering from yellow fever and literally dreams of bountiful food, she puts her comfort and wellbeing second to the children for whom she's helping to care, as when she makes sure that most of the limited food supply goes to them: "The stew in the kettle was made for four, not six [...] I poured half of [my portion] back. 'I don't need all of this, Eliza. The boys should eat so they don't take sick.'" Though she'd shirked work and happily indulged herself at the beginning of the story, Mattie adapts to her changed circumstances by putting others first.

Although Mattie has always had a creative, ambitious outlook, she adapts her dreams to immediate needs created by the epidemic. Even as a young girl, Mattie has notable business acumen and longs to someday expand on her mother's plans for the coffeehouse: "'First we should buy another coffee urn, to serve customers with more haste," I said [...] And we could have an upstairs meeting room for the gentlemen [...] And we could reserve space to sell paintings, and combs, and fripperies from France.'" She especially longs to prove herself by achieving even more than her mother did, but she has not yet been forced to

develop the motivation and adaptability necessary to achieve those dreams.

After the epidemic has passed, Mattie doesn't give up on her more fanciful dreams or her desire to impress her mother, but she is most concerned about her loved ones' wellbeing. She combines her love for Eliza with her good business sense in order to find a mutually beneficial solution for the coffeehouse, telling Eliza: "My partner has to be someone I can trust. Someone who knows how to run a coffeehouse and isn't afraid to give me a kick in the backside every now and then [...] I'm sharing it with you. It's the right thing to do, and it's good business." Mattie's kindhearted adaptability, combined with her natural ambition, allows her to provide greater security for Eliza and her family while realizing some of her dreams for the coffeehouse.

Anderson also shows examples of people who "adapt" in unhealthy and injurious ways; for example, some merchants, even pharmacists, charge outrageous prices during the epidemic, taking advantage of people's desperation. However, she portrays Mattie as the inverse of this—a kind of archetypal early American girl who is brave, forward-looking, and balancing her own desires with neighborly concern. By showcasing this type of courage and intelligence in the protagonist of the novel, as well as the other heroic characters, Anderson shows that ingenuity and adaptability are crucial to surviving difficult obstacles and even large-scale crises.

SYMBOLS

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

YELLOW BALLOON

In January, 1793, a French aeronaut named Jean Pierre Blanchard launched the first hot-air balloon to be flown in the United States, taking off from Philadelphia and landing 15 miles away in New Jersey. Most of Philadelphia's population witnessed the takeoff, and Mattie vividly remembers the event. In Mattie's mind, Blanchard's balloon—"a yellow silk bubble escaping the earth"—symbolizes freedom, particularly an escape from her home, where she feels as if she's trapped and treated like a child. She, too, longs to "slip free of the ropes that held me," longing to travel to France and start her own businesses, away from the expectations and demands of her family. As she's swept up in the yellow fever epidemic, however, Mattie's perspective on freedom changes—she learns that true independence requires the maturity to help those in need, adapting to circumstances as necessary. At the end of the novel, Mattie is the proprietor of the revitalized Cook Coffeehouse, caring for and supporting her frail mother, a fever survivor. As she watches the sun rise one morning ("a giant balloon filled with prayers and hopes and promise"), she looks forward to fulfilling her dreams as a businesswoman, but remaining tethered to her family by the obligations of love—a new kind of freedom.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Simon & Schuster edition of *Fever 1793* published in 2002.

Chapter 1 Quotes

A few blocks south lay the Walnut Street Prison, where Blanchard had flown that remarkable balloon. From the prison's courtyard it rose, a yellow silk bubble escaping the earth. I vowed to do that one day, slip free of the ropes that held me. Nathaniel Benson had heard me say it, but he did not laugh. He understood. Perhaps I would see him at the docks, sketching a ship or sea gulls. It had been a long time since we talked.

Related Characters: Matilda "Mattie" Cook (speaker), Lucille Cook ("Mother"), Nathaniel Benson

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

In January, 1793, a French aeronaut named Jean Pierre Blanchard flew the first hot-air balloon in the United States, taking off from Philadelphia, conducting scientific experiments in flight, and landing 15 miles away, in New Jersey. Blanchard's balloon brought Philadelphia to a standstill, as people gathered to witness Blanchard's attempt. Mattie witnessed this marvel in the company of Nathaniel Benson, a young man of whom she's fond. Later that year, feeling downtrodden by her mother's scolding and expectations, Mattie recalls the yellow balloon as a symbol of her desire for freedom and independence. She envisions freedom as being as simple as the balloon's escape from the earth. By the end of the novel, Mattie will learn that gaining independence is actually more complicated than balloon flight, requiring personal hardship and loss. Only by struggling for survival will she gain the strength and maturity to be truly independent. For now, Mattie can only picture freedom as liberation from her mother's ever-looming demands and desires for her.

Chapter 2 Quotes

Like most blacks in Philadelphia, Eliza was free. She said Philadelphia was the best city for freed slaves or freeborn Africans. The Quakers here didn't hold with slavery and tried hard to convince others that slavery was against God's will. Black people were treated different than white people, that was plain to see, but Eliza said nobody could tell her what to do or where to go, and no one would ever, ever beat her again.

Related Characters: Matilda "Mattie" Cook (speaker), Eliza

Related Themes:

Page Number: 8

Explanation and Analysis

Anderson's introduction of Eliza's character allows her to present some of the historical context surrounding slavery and African Americans in Philadelphia. In 1780, Pennsylvania's General Assembly had passed an Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery, the first such act to be adopted within a democracy. The act provided that slaves could no longer be imported to Pennsylvania and that any children born to enslaved people were free. Those who were already enslaved before the Act, however, remained enslaved for the rest of their lives. So while there were fewer slaves in Pennsylvania than in other parts of the young United States, and while Philadelphia would have been a haven for those who, like Eliza, were born in states with no such laws, the institution of slavery was still very much a factor in Pennsylvania society. The Quakers, or Society of Friends—a group of pacifistic Protestants who had settled heavily in Pennsylvania since colonial days—had developed a strong anti-slavery stance before the American Revolution, and their cultural influence was especially felt in Philadelphia.

If I was going to work as hard as a mule, it might as well be for my own benefit. I was going to travel to France and bring back fabric and combs and jewelry that the ladies of Philadelphia would swoon over. And that was just for the dry goods store. I wanted to own an entire city block—a proper restaurant, an apothecary, maybe a school, or a hatter's shop. Grandfather said I was a Daughter of Liberty, a real American girl. I could steer my own ship. No one would call me little Mattie. They would call me "Ma'am."

Related Characters: Matilda "Mattie" Cook (speaker), Lucille Cook ("Mother"), Captain William Farnsworth Cook ("Grandfather")

Related Themes:

Page Number: 12

Explanation and Analysis

Mattie assists her mother in the bustling Cook Coffeehouse, which has supported their household ever since Mattie's father died a decade earlier. An independent-minded and creative girl, Mattie resents being at her mother's disposal and has her own ideas about how the coffeehouse should be run. She even dreams of opening multiple businesses of her own one day—an example of Mattie's yearning for freedom, something she initially associates with escape from the Cook household. She also resents being seen as "little" by the rest of her family and sees her business plans as the ticket to respect from her loved ones and society at large. However, Mattie's aspirations also suggest that her mother has set an enterprising example for Mattie, even if she doesn't yet realize how much she and Lucille have in common. Also, Grandfather's fond description of Mattie as a "real American girl" suggests that resourcefulness and initiative were seen as valuable attributes in the early Republic, even for women. The Daughters of Liberty were a society of colonial American women who, 30 years before the story takes place, had boycotted British tea, produced homespun textiles, and supported the Revolutionary War effort in other ways. Grandfather is proud to see Mattie as part of this heritage—again suggesting that, despite her restlessness, Mattie's very ambitions have been nurtured and encouraged by her family.

Chapter 7 Quotes

"The only people left in Philadelphia seem to be shopkeepers and wharf rats. Robert has an appointment with the mayor this very day to insist that he put an end to the rumors of yellow fever."

"I heard a man died of the fever in the middle of the street, and three black crows flew out of his mouth," said Jeannine.

"Don't be vile, Jeannine," snapped her mother. "Those filthy refugees and creatures who live in the crowded hovels by the river, they're always sick with something. But it is a gross injustice that my gala should suffer because the lower class falls ill. Don't you agree, Lucille?"

Related Characters: Jeannine Ogilvie, Mrs. Pernilla Ogilvie (speaker), Matilda "Mattie" Cook, Lucille Cook ("Mother")

Related Themes:

Page Number: 50

Explanation and Analysis

Before the fever strikes their household, Mother drags a reluctant Mattie to tea at the Ogilvie house, hoping to lay the groundwork for a match between Mattie and one of the wealthy Ogilvie sons. Mrs. Ogilvie's remarks about the fever outbreak exemplify the way that catastrophe can reveal selfish, prejudiced outlooks and behavior. Upon hearing rumors of the fever, many of Philadelphia's wealthier citizens have vacated the city, spoiling Mrs. Ogilvie's plans for a gala ball. Mrs. Ogilvie seems not to care about the truth of the rumors, so much as she's upset that only "undesirable" populations remain in the city—people she'd never invite to her ball. She further attributes the outbreak to "filthy refugees" and inhabitants of poorer neighborhoods. Again, she shows no concern for those directly affected, only for the fact that the exodus of the upper class has ruined her social plans. Although Anderson injects a comical note in the Ogilvie scene—Pernilla and her daughters are almost too obliviously self-absorbed to seem real—she makes a serious point about people's tendency to overlook suffering until it impacts them personally. In fact, a short time later, Colette, the older Ogilvie daughter, collapses from the fever herself, proving that it's not just a lower-class sickness (though Colette ultimately survives).

Chapter 9 Quotes

"It is not yellow fever," he said.

Grandfather sighed in relief.

"But Dr. Rush says yellow fever is spreading everywhere," Eliza said.

"Dr. Rush likes to alarm people," Mr. Rowley replied. "There is a great debate about this pestilence. Yesterday a physician I shall not name diagnosed yellow fever in an elderly woman. Her family threw her into the street. She died, but she didn't have yellow fever. It was all a mistake. I use the diagnosis sparingly. And I assure you, there is no fever in this house."

Related Characters: Eliza, Mr. Rowley (speaker), Lucille Cook ("Mother"), Captain William Farnsworth Cook ("Grandfather")

Related Themes:

Page Number: 65

Explanation and Analysis

When Lucille falls ill, Grandfather brings Mr. Rowley—who is not a real physician—to examine her. Mr. Rowley's refusal to diagnose yellow fever (which Lucille does in fact have) is symbolic of the unsettled nature of the Philadelphia medical establishment at this time. Not everyone who purported to be able to treat disease was in fact a medical doctor; and among those who were, inconsistent methods and uneven knowledge (particularly regarding the spread of disease) led to haphazard outcomes when disaster struck. Mr. Rowley argues that the yellow fever scare is alarmist and is even resulting in needless deaths. Ironically, he blames Dr. Rush, whose yellow fever diagnoses were actually correct, but who also contributed to many deaths with his preference for the draining of blood as a treatment technique. "Bleeding" didn't actually rid people's bodies of the fever; only rest, fresh air, and fluids could do that, as French doctors argued (too late for some). Getting sick in the 1790s was a tremendously risky affair, and one's recovery might depend on the particular doctor one was able to access.

"I'm here, Mother," I whispered. "Be still."

She shook her head from side to side on the pillow.

Tears threatened again. I sniffed and tried to control my face. No one could ever tell what Mother thought or felt by looking at her. This was a useful trait. I needed to learn how to do it. There were so many things she had tried to teach me, but I didn't listen. I leaned over to kiss her forehead. A tear slipped out before I could stop it.

Related Characters: Matilda "Mattie" Cook (speaker), Lucille Cook ("Mother")

Related Themes:

Page Number: 68

Explanation and Analysis

When Lucille is brought home, having been stricken with yellow fever, Mattie must nurse her mother for the first time—a position that makes her feel as if the world has been turned upside down. The situation forces her to reflect on her mother's many strengths—Lucille had served a huge dinner the same day she gave birth to Mattie, for example, and survived the British occupation during the Revolutionary War. And as a widow, she has been known for her stoicism, even in hardship. Seeing her mother weak and helpless, Mattie now struggles against tears, wishing she knew how to conceal her emotions like Lucille. Now that she

might lose her mother, Mattie realizes how many of Lucille's lessons she's failed to internalize. What Mattie doesn't consider, however, is that she's much more like her mother than she assumes. Just because she's never seen her mother's tears doesn't mean that her mother hasn't felt deep grief and fear—and just because Mattie sheds her tears openly, it doesn't mean that she lacks her mother's strength. As the story goes on, it becomes more and more evident that Mattie embodies her mother's courage and determination far more than she gives herself credit for. And only by surviving hardships herself—like having to nurse and protect her loved ones—does Mattie's empathy for her mother deepen, displacing the tension between the two of them early in the book.

Chapter 11 Quotes

"There," he sighed. "That's better. It's time to review your soldiering lessons."

I groaned. From my crawling days. Grandfather had taught me all the tricks of the American and the British armies, and quite a few from the French. Again and again and again. It would do no good to argue. I was his captive.

"A soldier needs three things to fight," he continued. He held up three fingers and waited for my response.

"One, a sturdy pair of boots," I said. "Two, a full belly. Three, a decent night's sleep."

Related Characters: Captain William Farnsworth Cook ("Grandfather"), Matilda "Mattie" Cook

Related Themes:

Page Number: 79

Explanation and Analysis

When Grandfather and Mattie flee fever-stricken Philadelphia, Grandfather quizzes Mattie on the "soldiering" lessons he's sought to instill in Mattie ever since she was a little girl. Besides being a heartwarming example of Grandfather's affection for Mattie—and his readiness to teach her skills that most would have considered to be suited to boys, not girls—the drill also suggests that, suspecting what's to come, he's preparing Mattie to think in survival terms. Mattie won't literally need boots in order to go into battle, but she *will* have to fight for food and shelter for herself and Grandfather in the days ahead. Although Mattie rolls her eyes, her lifelong training in "soldiering" serves her well when Grandfather falls sick and can't tell her how to fend for the two of them. This exchange also marks a shift in their relationship—though she's now the "captive" of her Captain grandfather, Mattie will soon be the acknowledged "Captain" of the pair as she fights for their lives.

"Nonsense," Grandfather said. "There's nothing wrong. . . ." He broke off coughing again. I stared in horror, first at Grandfather, then at the doctor.

"You must help him," I cried. "If he is sick, you must help him."

The farmer grabbed me under the arms, pulled me from the wagon, and threw me onto the road. He and the doctor lifted Grandfather and deposited him beside me. King George squawked and circled above the commotion.

"They aren't my family," the farmer said as he motioned for his wife to climb aboard. "They only rode in back the last mile or so. They was walking and we picked them up."

"He's lying!" I shouted [...] I stared, mouth open, as the wagon disappeared into a cloud of dust. Our food, our clothing—gone. This couldn't be happening.

Related Characters: Captain William Farnsworth Cook ("Grandfather"), Farmer, Matilda "Mattie" Cook

Related Themes:

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

Fleeing Philadelphia, Mattie and her grandfather rely on the kindness of strangers—a farmer and his young family. However, that generosity turns to self-serving aggression when the group encounters armed horsemen and a doctor guarding access to the outlying town of Pembroke. The doctor notices Grandfather's recurrent cough and won't let him and Mattie pass through their community. In response, the farmer unceremoniously dumps Grandfather and Mattie by the roadside, lies that he was only exposed to them for a short time, and drives off with their possessions, leaving the two stranded and helpless. This quote exemplifies the variety of reactions that people show in response to the pressures of catastrophe. On one hand, people often risk their own wellbeing to help strangers, as the farmer initially did; on the other hand, fear for oneself and one's loved ones can readily change kindness to hostility, as people trample on others in their haste to protect themselves. This scene is a turning point for Mattie, as she'll be forced not only to fend for herself, but to help Grandfather survive as well.

Chapter 12 Quotes

"I am concerned for your future," he said. "We must form our battle plans, both for this skirmish and the rest of the war."

I waited for his advice. It did not come. That scared me more than anything. He was waiting for me to decide what to do.

"We'll move camp tomorrow," I finally said.

He nodded. "Whatever you say, Captain."

Related Characters: Matilda "Mattie" Cook (speaker), Captain William Farnsworth Cook ("Grandfather")

Related Themes:

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

Having just been stranded in the Pennsylvania countryside, Mattie and Grandfather try to figure out their next steps. Mattie has found some water and berries for a rudimentary supper, but now they face a night in the open without proper shelter or provisions. At first, Grandfather's words—"battle plan," "skirmish," "war"—sound like an extension of the playful "soldiering lessons" they'd just gone over during the wagon journey. However, Grandfather is concerned about something more serious—Mattie's literal survival, not just of this particular setback, but of the epidemic overall. He suspects that he is dying. Mattie is frightened when she realizes Grandfather is waiting for her to create the "battle plan." He expects her to replace him as "Captain" of their shared struggle, a role reversal that won't be undone for the rest of the story. Thus this quote represents a major turning point for Mattie, and all she can do is decide the next concrete step in their journey—a contrast to her earlier daydreaming about the future, which was disconnected from the reality immediately before her.

Chapter 13 Quotes

My wet petticoat swayed in the breeze. It would have to do.

I tried to rip open the seam with my teeth, but the tiny stitches that Mother had sewed would not yield. Another fish wiggled to the top of the water to gulp down a water bug.

If I had sewn the skirt, it would have been easy to tear apart. Instead, I would have to use it whole. I pulled the drawstring at the waist tightly until I could barely poke my thumb through the opening. I would hold open the hem and pray an unusually stupid fish would swim into the trap.

"I bet no soldier ever thought of this one," I said, wading back in the water with my improvised net.

Related Characters: Matilda "Mattie" Cook (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 90

Explanation and Analysis

Abandoned in the Pennsylvania countryside with her sickly grandfather, Mattie has to find food in order for the two of them to survive. After cooling down in a stream, Mattie has to brainstorm to use her petticoat as a fishing net. Although her plan is unsuccessful (mainly because of an untimely dive by her grandfather's parrot), it shows the ingenuity that Mattie will display numerous times during the epidemic. Her grandfather taught Mattie some basic survival skills as a little girl, but it's Mattie's creativity and even humor that allows her to build on those skills, using the materials at hand. While Mattie's right that no Revolutionary solider is likely to have tried such a method, this also suggests that young girls are just as capable as soldiers of fighting for survival, and can even contribute unique insights of their own. Finally, despite Mattie's recurring doubts that her mother could be proud of a "weak" and "lazy" girl like her, her improvisation shows that she's much more enterprising and capable than she gives herself credit for.

Chapter 14 Quotes

The city had turned a mansion on Bush Hill into a hospital for fever victims. According to the gossips, Bush Hill was one step away from Hell, filled with dead bodies and criminals who preyed on the weak. It was a place to stay away from, not a place where a young girl should lay about and sip broth, even if her grandfather was mooning over her nurse.

Mrs. Flagg lifted a mug of cool tea to my mouth. "You listen to me. This here Bush Hill is not the same Bush Hill of last week. Mr. Stephen Girard, Lord bless his name, has taken over and turned this into a right proper hospital. All them thieving scoundrels have been driven off. You're lucky you were brought here. We have doctors, nurses, medicine, food— everything a fever victim needs. And we have enough problems without you running off the ward."

Related Characters: Mrs. Bridget Flagg (speaker), Mr. Stephen Girard, Matilda "Mattie" Cook

Related Themes:

Page Number: 101

Explanation and Analysis

When Mattie emerges from the yellow fever delirium, she's told that she is at Bush Hill—a place she's heard only the worst things about—and immediately wants to flee. Bush Hill was a large estate outside the Philadelphia city limits. In September, 1793, after the yellow fever outbreak, a mayoral committee examined the fever hospital that had been established there and found conditions disorganized and unsafe. Quickly, French merchant Stephen Girard and others volunteered to transform Bush Hill into a functional hospital and haven for fever victims, bringing in beds, creating a convalescent area in the barn, hiring additional nursing staff, and pumping clean spring water into the facility. He also ensured that just one doctor, French yellow fever expert Dr. Deveze (who treats Mattie in the story) would have access to patients—having found that the divergent opinions of city doctors was just adding to the chaos. While the treatments at Bush Hill weren't a miracle cure—many patients still died of the fever there, as elsewhere in the city—the conditions there were far more humane and conducive to recovery. Though Mattie recovers from the fever here, it's only a temporary respite before she's forced to battle the epidemic on others' behalf back in Philadelphia.

"You'll hear folks say that Dr. Rush is a hero for saving folks with his purges and blood letting. But I've seen different. It's these French doctors here that know how to cure the fever. I don't care if Dr. Rush did sign the Declaration of Independence. I wouldn't let him and his knives near me."

I shivered as I remembered the blood Dr. Kerr had drained from Mother. Maybe Grandfather should return to the house and bring her here. What if Dr. Kerr bled her too much?

Related Characters: Mrs. Bridget Flagg (speaker), Lucille Cook ("Mother"), Dr. Kerr, Dr. Benjamin Rush, Matilda "Mattie" Cook

Related Themes:

Page Number: 103

Explanation and Analysis

As Mattie recovers from yellow fever at Bush Hill, she is chilled to hear her nurse, Mrs. Flagg, criticizing the methods of one of Philadelphia's most famous doctors, Benjamin Rush. Dr. Rush was no quack—in many ways, he was a progressive figure for his time. He was particularly lauded for his pathbreaking approaches to treating the mentally ill, for instance. He was also active in supporting the American Revolution and signed the Declaration of Independence. However, while his preference for the long-established practice of draining blood from his patients was entirely in step with his time, this technique, along with prescribing purgative medicines such as mercury, may have actually weakened patients and contributed to their deaths. In contrast, French doctor Jean Deveze, who treats Mattie, favored rest and fresh air, as well as plenty of fluids. To this day, the latter approach is more effective in treating yellow fever. The doctor who treated Mattie's mother was of Dr. Rush's school of thought. Though Lucille survived the bleeding, she may have lived in spite of it, not because of it.

Chapter 17 Quotes

I fumbled with the tread of the hollow stair, then threw it to the side and lifted out the metal box. I opened the lid. It was still there, pence and shillings. Thank heaven for that.

I returned the box to its hiding place. It could be worse, I thought. The house is still standing. We're alive. Mother and Eliza must be somewhere safe, I had to believe that. The fever would soon be over, and our lives would return to normal. I just had to stay clever and strong and find something to eat.

A tear surprised me by rolling down my cheek. "None of that, Mattie girl," I whispered to myself as I scrubbed the tear away. "This is not the time to be childish."

Related Characters: Matilda "Mattie" Cook (speaker), Lucille Cook ("Mother"), Captain William Farnsworth Cook ("Grandfather"), Eliza

Related Themes:

Page Number: 125

Explanation and Analysis

When Mattie and Grandfather return to their house in Philadelphia, they're greeted by one of the worst social outcomes of the yellow fever—the thieving and looting which some survivors resorted to when others fled the city. The coffeehouse has been thrown into disarray and some of their possessions stolen. However, Mattie finds that their savings have remained hidden. Here, Mattie takes stock of the situation. On one hand, she and Grandfather have survived. On the other hand, Mother is missing, and there is barely any food to be found in the city. Mattie realizes that, though she's survived the fever itself, her fight is just beginning—living in epidemic-ravaged Philadelphia is going to demand all of her grit and resourcefulness. As elsewhere,

Mattie is moved to tears by the weight of this responsibility. However, through Mattie's tenacity, Anderson portrays strength and courage as compatible with deep grief and sadness. Mattie's regard for Grandfather's survival also shows how much stronger and more independent she's become within a few short weeks. In August, she'd longed to flee her family; now, however, independence is inseparable from her desire to protect her family.

Chapter 19 Quotes

❝ I held my breath and waited for the earth to stop spinning. The sun need not rise again. There was no reason for the rivers to flow. Birds would never sing.

The sound came straight from my heart, as sharp as the point of a sword. I shrieked to the heavens and pounded the floor with rage. "Nonono! Don't take him! Nonono!"

I picked up the sword and attacked a chair as if it were Death itself. When the chair was a pile of firewood and the sword dull, I fell to my knees by the side of my grandfather's body.

Related Characters: Matilda "Mattie" Cook (speaker), Captain William Farnsworth Cook ("Grandfather")

Related Themes:

Page Number: 147

Explanation and Analysis

After Mattie drives off intruders using Grandfather's Revolutionary War sword, she returns to find that the altercation has proven too much for him, and he dies after professing his pride in her strength and cleverness. This is the lowest point in the story for Mattie. Her mother is somewhere in the Pennsylvania countryside, unable to communicate with Mattie, if she's alive at all. After surviving yellow fever and fighting to find food and keep the two of them safe, now Mattie is deprived of the man she's always counted on to love and support her. This is a turning point for Mattie's independence; though she has been learning to rely on her own strength and make her own decisions since the outbreak began, she no longer has anyone to back her up or help her choose her course in life. If it weren't for Grandfather's death, on the other hand, Mattie wouldn't be forced to venture into the city and find Eliza—finding Nell and joining the Free African volunteers in the process. Mattie's staggering grief and rage show just how disorienting Grandfather's death is, as she struggles to absorb the changes in her life and begins to get her bearings.

Chapter 20 Quotes

❝ I stared at the grave diggers. They took off their caps and bowed their heads. Movement in the park stopped, as those watching laid down their shovels and bowed their heads. The book opened to the familiar words. I swallowed, cleared my throat, and began to read loudly, so that all could hear.

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want..." The men around me moved their lips and then gave voice. Our voices rose together as one, proclaiming faith, joining in grief. At the end of the reading, some crossed themselves, others wiped their eyes. I stood straight and tall.

Related Characters: Matilda "Mattie" Cook (speaker), Captain William Farnsworth Cook ("Grandfather")

Related Themes:

Page Number: 154

Explanation and Analysis

After Mattie's grandfather dies, he's transported to the area of Philadelphia known as the Potter's Field, an emergency burial ground that's been dug since the outbreak of yellow fever. There have been so many sudden deaths that separate burial services can't be conducted, and there are no ministers to spare. Mattie is horrified when the gravediggers prepare to toss Grandfather's body into an unmarked grave without a word. She yells at one of the gravediggers until he stops and someone offers her a battered Psalter, then waits until everyone has stopped shoveling to listen. As Mattie leads the assembled gravediggers in the familiar Psalm 23, her newfound toughness and independence are on full display. Her boldness breaks through the men's numb detachment, and the prayer for her grandfather symbolically includes all those who have died tragically with no one to publicly mourn them. It's a moment of strength for Mattie, and also a recognition of human dignity in the midst of terrible circumstances that make little allowance for humanity. Through this scene, Anderson shows that recognition of individual human dignity is always important, even when people are numbed into insensitivity by the scale of a disaster.

Chapter 22 Quotes

Rev. Allen said this was a chance for black people to show we are every bit as good and important and useful as white people. The Society organized folks to visit the sick, to care for them and bury them if they died [...] The Africans of Philadelphia have cared for thousands of people without taking notice of color. If only the doctors had been right, we could look to these days of suffering as days of hope.

Related Characters: Eliza (speaker), Reverend Richard Allen, Matilda "Mattie" Cook

Related Themes:

Page Number: 176

Explanation and Analysis

After Mattie and Eliza are reunited, Eliza describes her volunteer work with the Free African Society. The Free African Society was a benevolent organization that was originally formed by and for freed slaves in Philadelphia. When yellow fever broke out, Dr. Benjamin Rush asked the Free Africans to help care for the sick. At first, many had mistakenly believed that people of African descent couldn't get yellow fever. This turned out to be tragically false (hence Eliza's remark about "days of suffering"), and many black people did sicken and die during the epidemic. However, under the leadership of Reverend Allen, the Society persisted in their thankless work. Reverend Allen reasoned that the Society's involvement would not only demonstrate the African American community's investment in Philadelphia, but also show that the city's African Americans were vital to its survival. In 1794, the year after the epidemic, Richard Allen formed the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the first independent black denomination in the United States. While some later wrote libelous comments about the Free Africans' work—such as claiming that they demanded payment for their services—Philadelphia's mayor jumped to defend their sacrificial efforts publicly.

Chapter 23 Quotes

"Don't love her," warned Mother Smith.

"Pardon me?"

"I said, don't you fall in love with that baby girl. She's not yours. You can't keep her. You had any sense, you'd take her right down to the orphan house tomorrow and hand her over. Don't look back [...] She stays with you, you feed her, wash her, sing to her, mother her, then give her away. How's that going to make her feel? You're the cruel one."

Related Characters: Matilda "Mattie" Cook, Mother Smith (speaker), Nell

Related Themes:

Page Number: 180

Explanation and Analysis

After Mattie unofficially adopts Nell, an orphaned girl abandoned during the epidemic, Mother Smith warns Mattie not to become too attached. It would be much more compassionate, she explains, to surrender Nell to the orphan house before she and Mattie are too closely bonded. It's important to note that Mother Smith's advice isn't rooted in cruelty. As a Free African Society volunteer—and a former slave herself—Mother Smith has no doubt witnessed terrible suffering, including the consequences of bonds too quickly broken by separation. It could also be argued that Mattie's choice to keep Nell is reckless. After all, she can't know for sure whether she'll be in a position to support herself after the epidemic, much less bring up Nell. But Mattie's choice is also a turning point in her own growth, as she happily limits her own freedom in order to devote herself to Nell's care. It also allows her to empathize more deeply with her own mother's struggles to provide for her. Mother Smith's warning sums up the gravity of such choices, made necessary by the ravages of yellow fever.

Chapter 26 Quotes

If Mother was dead, I'd have to sell the coffeehouse, or have the orphan's court sell it for me. I'd get work as a scullery maid, or move into the orphanage and do laundry.

I looked past the apple seller to the haberdasher's window behind him. My face looked back at me from the thick glass. [...] The shape of my face looked for all the world like Mother's, her nose, her mouth.

But my eyes were my own. I blinked.

A scullery maid? Ridiculous. I was Matilda Cook, daughter of Lucille, granddaughter of Captain William Farnsworth Cook, of the Pennsylvania Fifth Regiment. I could read, write, and figure numbers faster than most. I was not afraid of hard work.

I would set my own course.

Related Characters: Matilda "Mattie" Cook (speaker), Lucille Cook ("Mother"), Captain William Farnsworth Cook ("Grandfather")

Related Themes:

Page Number: 215

Explanation and Analysis

Even after the epidemic passes, some of Mattie's most difficult choices are still ahead of her. Until she knows her mother's fate, she isn't sure what will become of her future. However, her glance at her reflection reminds her of a few things. For one thing, she is very like her mother—a fact from which she would have recoiled not too long ago, but which now reminds of her of her inherent strength. For another thing, it reminds her of her own strengths, which have been revealed and refined by the struggles of recent months. Mattie has learned that she's resourceful and brave, and she no longer shrinks from responsibility, as she did when her mother and Eliza nagged her to finish her chores. Building on what her grandfather and mother have passed down to her, Mattie is more than capable of determining her own future. Mattie's epiphany isn't meant as an insult to those who do menial labor, but as a full recognition of her self-worth—something she's struggled with until now.

Chapter 29 Quotes

❝ "I'm fine. I'm fine. Shh. Please don't cry. Everything is better now. I'm home, you're home. You don't have to worry anymore." I drew up a chair next to her, and she leaned against my shoulder. I cradled her head in my arms until her sobs quieted [...] Her hands lay in her lap, withered and limp. I had never seen her hands stay still before.

Related Characters: Matilda "Mattie" Cook (speaker), Lucille Cook ("Mother")

Related Themes:

Page Number: 238

Explanation and Analysis

When Mattie's mother finally returns home from the countryside, she is a shell of her former self. Mattie is shocked to find Lucille gray and frail from the fever and the stress of separation from her family. When they have the chance to talk over recent events privately, Lucille collapses in tears—something the aloof woman of early chapters would never have done. When Mattie comforts her mother, it shows that they've fully reconciled from their conflicted relationship before the epidemic. Even more than that, it shows how dramatically their roles have changed. Lucille is no longer capable of running the coffeehouse, so Mattie will have to support her in every way—financially, emotionally, and physically. Lucille's limp, unmoving hands further illustrate just how much the fever took from her; as a businesswoman and single parent, her hands had never lacked for something to do. This scene shows that Mattie's longing for independence has been fulfilled, but it's come at a cost. Moreover, she's learned that independence is about helping those who can't help themselves, not just fulfilling one's own desires.

Epiloque Quotes

❝ Early morning was the only time I felt as if there were ghosts nearby, memories of the weeks of fear. That's when I found myself listening for Polly's giggle or Grandfather's voice. Sometimes they felt so close. Close enough to tell me I should stop dawdling and get to work.

I smiled as the mist faded. The yellow sun rose, a giant balloon filled with prayers and hopes and promise. I stood and shook the idleness out of my skirts.

Day was begun.

Related Characters: Matilda "Mattie" Cook (speaker), Captain William Farnsworth Cook ("Grandfather"), Polly Logan

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 243

Explanation and Analysis

The novel is framed by two early morning scenes. At the beginning of the book, Mattie lingers in bed, reluctant to start her work in the coffeehouse. At the end, she's the first one up, letting her mother sleep, watching the sunrise, and enjoying the last moments of stillness before another busy day in the coffeehouse. These closing lines of the book sum up Mattie's dramatic transformation over the course of the novel. She's gained strength and independence, but she's suffered terribly and lost loved ones in the process. She's realizing some of her dreams for the coffeehouse, but this is partly because her mother, suffering permanent effects of yellow fever, is no longer able to run it. Most of all, this quote shows how disaster can refine one's character—Mattie is a much more capable, resilient, responsible, and compassionate person than the slightly self-indulgent teenager she was just a few months earlier. The rising sun reminds her of Blanchard's hot-air balloon—except that, instead of symbolizing her longing to

flee her home and family, the sight reminds her of her ambition to build on the family legacy that's been lovingly passed down to her.

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: AUGUST 16TH, 1793

Matilda "Mattie" Cook wakes to the sound of a mosquito whining in one ear and her mother, Lucille Cook, "screeching" in the other: "Rouse yourself this instant!" Her mother opens the shutters in Mattie's small room above the family coffeehouse. She continues shaking Mattie out of bed, saying that Polly, their servant, is late, and there is much work to do.

From the beginning of the novel, Mattie and her mother have a combative relationship, as Mattie likens her mother to the nuisance of a mosquito. Mattie is not very industrious and would much rather sleep than fulfill her obligations to her family.

Already sweating, Mattie observes that it's going to be another hot August day. As her mother goes down the stairs, Mattie hears her muttering about how much harder she worked when she was Mattie's age. Mattie is used to hearing that her mother was "a perfect girl," "utterly unlike me."

The oppressive heat, soon to be a significant factor in the plot, hovers over the story from the beginning. Both Mattie and her mother see a strong contrast between their respective characters—Mattie sees herself as unable to live up to her mother's example and expectations, heightening the tension between them.

Mattie snuggles into her pillow again, hoping to "float back to sleep, drifting like Blanchard's giant **yellow balloon**." However, when a mosquito bites her on the forehead, she leaps out of bed and cracks her head on the low, sloped ceiling. Grudgingly, she starts getting ready for work.

Mattie fondly remembers the successful sailing of America's first hot-air balloon, a major Philadelphia event earlier in 1793. However, a mosquito jars her from bed, hinting at the urgency of the mosquito-borne fever to come. The impending disaster won't let her remain lazy and self-indulgent.

Mattie picks up a dead mouse that her cat, Silas, has just attacked. When she goes to the window, she brightens at the sights and sounds of Philadelphia's early morning bustle. She can see the roof of the State House, where Congress meets. On a clear day, she can see the Delaware River waterfront, her favorite place in the city.

In 1793, Philadelphia served as the temporary United States capital, while Washington, D.C., was in the process of construction. The bustle of the populous young city contrasts with the barren conditions it will face after the epidemic takes hold.

A few blocks south is the spot where Blanchard had sailed his **balloon** earlier that year. Someday, Mattie wants to escape like that balloon, "slip free of the ropes that held me." Nathaniel Benson understands her feelings. Mattie hopes she might see him sketching at the docks later. But for now, she flings the dead mouse into the garden below and hurries downstairs to Mother.

In January of 1793, Blanchard, a French aeronaut, had launched the United States's first successful hot-air balloon flight. For Mattie, Blanchard's balloon symbolizes the independence she hopes to find someday—which she envisions primarily as freedom from Mother.

CHAPTER 2: AUGUST 16TH, 1793

As soon as Mattie enters the kitchen, Mother resumes lecturing her about oversleeping. Mattie, trying not to listen, sits down in the spacious kitchen. Her family is just herself, Mother, and Grandfather, plus their employee, Eliza; together, they run the Cook Coffeehouse. Mattie's father, a carpenter, had built their home and business after the War ended in 1783, when Mattie was only four. Now that President Washington lives just two blocks away, business has picked up.

Mother is hard on Mattie, and Mattie has grown accustomed to blocking out the unwanted lectures—suggesting a lack of mutual understanding and trust at this point in their relationship. Her family's business benefits from the booming conditions in the temporary capital.

Mattie's father had fallen off a ladder and died of a broken neck soon after the coffeehouse opened. At that point, Mattie's Grandfather, Lucille's father-in-law, joined the household. A coffeehouse is considered to be "a respectable business" for a widow. Mother won't serve spirits, but she allows card-playing and gambling as long as it's kept out of her sight. Gentlemen, merchants, and politicians fill the front room each day to enjoy coffee and sweets. Mattie knows her father would be proud of their success, and she wonders what he would have thought of her.

Mother has struggled to support her family after her husband's death. This would be a significant hardship for a widow in the late 18th century; such women wouldn't have had very many options before them, yet Lucille has thrived. Even though she resents her mother's expectations, Mattie does have a sense of ownership and pride in her family's success and has benefited from her mother's enterprising example of persistence and survival.

Eliza interrupts and offers Mattie breakfast; Mattie, as usual, is starving. Eliza's fine cooking is a key to the coffeehouse's success. If it weren't for that, the Cooks would be in trouble: Mother's family disowned her when she eloped with Mattie's father at 17.

Eliza acts as a mediating influence between Mattie and her mother. Lucille didn't have a harmonious relationship with her own parents, and her elopement suggests that she exercised her own willfulness and independence while young.

Like most black people in Philadelphia, Eliza is free. Eliza says that Philadelphia is the best city for freed slaves. This is partly because of the Quaker influence. Mattie sees that black people are treated differently than white people. Eliza had been born a slave in Virginia. Her husband purchased her freedom after they were married; then Eliza moved to Philadelphia so she could earn money to do the same for him. When Mattie was eight, Eliza learned that her husband had been killed by a runaway horse.

Quakers, a Protestant Christian group that were especially prominent in the early history of Pennsylvania, were active in the slavery abolition movement. Although Pennsylvania had enacted gradual emancipation soon after American independence, slaves would have still been present there, and slavery is very much a living memory for many. Mattie is aware of lingering racism in her city and society.

Both Lucille and Eliza "supped sorrow with a big spoon," but while Eliza eventually smiled again, Mother "turned sour." Mattie considers Eliza to be her best friend. Eliza is good at keeping secrets and telling stories. Today she gives Mattie a bowl of oatmeal with a hidden lump of sugar.

As widows, Lucille and Eliza have past tragedy in common. In Mattie's eyes, her mother is the less resilient of the two. She bonds more easily with Eliza, who shows her kindness and occasional indulgence.

Mattie asks why Polly is late. She speculates that Polly is hanging around her crush, Matthew, the blacksmith's son. Eliza suggests that Polly might be sick—there are rumors of sickness near the river. Mother says that "serving girls don't get sick" and storms off to search for Polly, ordering Mattie to tend the garden in her absence. First, though, Eliza gives Mattie more food. Mattie lingers in the kitchen, enjoying the smells of Eliza's gingerbread baking, until Eliza shoos her outside, calling her "little Mattie"—a nickname Mattie resents.

Mattie hears a rumor of sickness for the first time, but she doesn't think much of it, assuming Polly is loitering with her sweetheart. Even though Mattie enjoys a special bond with Eliza, even Eliza treats her like a child sometimes and gives her orders, which rankles Mattie; she longs to set her own agenda.

Outside, the garden is drought-stricken and drooping. Mattie fills the bucket while thinking, "Little Mattie, indeed." She daydreams about traveling to France someday, bringing back fabrics and jewelry to sell. She hopes to own "an entire city block" someday—a dry goods store, a restaurant, and an apothecary, just for starters. Grandfather tells Mattie she is "a Daughter of Liberty, a real American girl." Mattie looks forward to "[steering] her own ship" and being called "Ma'am." To her annoyance, Mattie notices she's just watered a row of weeds instead of potatoes.

The summer heat is taking a toll on the natural environment as well as the people. Mattie does what's asked of her, but she's distracted by thoughts of her considerable ambitions. Her grandfather is proud of her ingenuity (the Daughters of Liberty were a group of women who protested the British and assisted the Revolutionary War effort), suggesting that Mattie's ambitions enjoyed an unusual amount of encouragement even though she's a young girl at a time when boys would have had more freedoms.

Mother returns. She has spoken with Mistress Logan, Polly's mother. Mistress Logan kept repeating, "[Polly] sewed by candlelight after dinner." Then Polly collapsed. Mattie drops the bucket in shock as Mother tells her, "Matilda, Polly's dead."

Mattie's daydreams are forcibly interrupted by immediate crisis. The fever has abruptly struck down someone she cares about—suggesting that the epidemic will have an even more devastating effect on Mattie's life going forward.

CHAPTER 3: AUGUST 16TH, 1793

Mattie is in disbelief over Polly's death. She remembers playing dolls with Polly when they were girls and singing songs together while they churned butter. Mattie and Mother go inside and tell Eliza what happened. Mother says it's strange that Polly, a robust girl, sickened and died so quickly. She tells Mattie they can be grateful that Polly didn't suffer long. She feels Mattie's forehead and asks her how she's feeling, fretting that the heat isn't healthy.

Polly's sudden death rocks Mattie and, given Polly's previous good health, this death foreshadows how merciless the fever will be. Mother, sensing this, immediately worries about Mattie, showing how much Mattie is always at the forefront of her mind.

When Mattie wants to take food to the Logans and attend Polly's funeral, Mother refuses. Mattie calls her mother "horrid," and Mother demands an apology. Mattie notices how "pinch-faced and harsh" her mother looks and she remembers the days, back when Father was alive, that Mother was laughing and gentle. But now Mother is "a tired and bitter captain" whom Mattie must obey. Mattie apologizes for her words.

Mother fears fever exposure for Mattie, but all Mattie can see is that her mother isn't letting her do what she wants, which fans her resentment once again. She knows Mother has had a difficult time supporting her alone, but her sympathy is still secondary to her bitterness at having to obey.

CHAPTER 4: AUGUST 16TH, 1793

That afternoon, the coffeehouse is filled with lively customers. Mother won't meet Mattie's eye as Mattie circulates with a tray of gingerbread. Grandfather calls Mattie over. He's sitting beneath the cage of King George, his scraggly green parrot. Mattie's grandfather, Captain William Farnsworth Cook, is a veteran of the War for Independence, a lifelong army officer who served under General Washington. He has tried to give Mattie some military training as well, but he "always sweetened it with candy."

Things are still tense between Mother and Mattie. Meanwhile, Mattie's colorful, devoted grandfather is introduced. His love for Mattie is evident in his effort to pass on his soldiering knowledge to her, an unconventional heirloom that shows he's always been concerned about her long-term survival.

Grandfather sits with two government officials, a lawyer and an exporter, Mr. Carris. Mattie blushes indignantly when old Mr. Carris calls her "little Mattie," and the men joke about finding her a husband. The conversation shifts to the "noxious fumes" in the waterfront district. Mattie resists tears as she wonders if that's what killed Polly. Another customer weighs in, arguing that the Santo Domingan refugees near the wharf are spreading the fever. A doctor disagrees, saying that a well-known citizen has just died of yellow fever. The words "yellow fever" silence the whole crowd.

Mattie chafes under the men's view of her as "little" and their expectations about her future marriage; she wants to prove herself and determine her own path. When discussion turns to the fever, some people scapegoat strangers for introducing the sickness to Philadelphia—a common human tendency in disaster. All are fearful of what yellow fever portends—it's a deadly viral disease whose causes weren't understood at the time, and which still has no direct cure.

Someone objects to this scaremongering, but the doctor points out that some people are beginning to send their families to the country, "to healthful air." Grandfather changes the subject to politics, and everyone begins arguing about Thomas Jefferson. Mattie returns to serving and cleaning and later helps figure out the accounts, a task Mother entrusts to her. Soon she's exhausted, marveling at all the work Polly did each day.

Grandfather seems to question the seriousness of the outbreak, or at least wishes to avoid the discussion. Mattie is too busy with the coffeehouse tasks to worry much. Even though Mother often scolds Mattie, the fact that she entrusts the finances to Mattie shows that she thinks quite highly of Mattie's abilities.

CHAPTER 5: AUGUST 24TH, 1793

A week later, 64 people have died in Philadelphia, but no one is sure of the cause. Mattie is so busy cleaning and serving in the coffeehouse that she has little time to mourn Polly. One day, Mattie jumps at the chance to run to the market. Grandfather talks Mother into letting Mattie go, arguing that they can't rearrange their lives for a fever. Mother gives Mattie strict instructions not to wander off or loiter in front of the Peale house. Mattie blushes and makes a quick escape.

The fever begins to spread, but life mostly goes on as normal. Mother worries, while Grandfather continues to underestimate the gravity of the developing situation. Mother is also aware of Mattie's crush on Nathaniel, who's apprenticed at the Peale house.

Mattie enjoys the sights, sounds, and smells of the open-air market, quickly forgetting the items on Mother's list. She chats with some German farmers, "egg-shaped" Mr. Epler and "fluttering" Mrs. Epler. Mrs. Epler tells Mattie that the fever is a sign from God and tells Mattie that as long as she keeps going to church, she'll be spared. Mattie buys eggs from them and moves on to get cabbages, lemons, and apples.

The lively atmosphere of the market contrasts with its vacancy later in the novel. Mattie hears one common interpretation of the epidemic—that it's a judgment from God upon the unfaithful.

Suddenly someone grabs Mattie's basket. She whirls around and faces Nathaniel Benson. Mattie can't help admiring him; he looks more like a man than a boy. She sometimes walks past the Peales' house, where Nathaniel works long hours as an apprentice. Whenever Nathaniel strolls past the coffeehouse, Mother won't let Mattie see him, dismissing him as a scamp without a future. He and Mattie watched the **balloon** together earlier this year.

Nathaniel is closely connected to Mattie's longing for independence in the future; the symbol of the balloon, elsewhere an emblem of freedom, reinforces this connection. Mother's dismissal of Nathaniel echoes her own parents' rejection of her marriage to a carpenter, suggesting that maternal conflict tends to recur across the generations over surprisingly similar issues.

Mattie tries to stay prim and composed. She manages to grab her basket back when she tricks Nathaniel by saying that his shoe buckle is missing. Nathaniel has the day off and asks Mattie to come fishing with him. Mattie is tempted, though she isn't sure what to make of Nathaniel's smile. She figures as long as she "[fishes] like a lady," it will be fine.

Mattie and Nathaniel have mutual feelings for one another. Mattie is conflicted drawn by contradictory desires and obligations: her interest in Nathaniel, her family's expectations, and her desire to conform to "ladylike" behavior.

They're interrupted by the tolling of the Christ Church bell. The butcher explains that the bell tolls for a fever victim's death, ringing once for each year of the person's life. Nathaniel counts the bell tolling 21 times. They talk about Polly, and Mattie starts to cry. Nathaniel's hand on her shoulder comforts her. Mattie excuses herself to return to the coffeehouse, telling Nathaniel, "Good luck with your paints." As she goes, she cringes at her words, feeling like a "ninny."

In another example of the epidemic breaking into everyday life, Mattie's and Nathaniel's playful conversation is derailed by the bell tolling yet another death. This brings back the reality of Polly's death. Still, Mattie's grief doesn't totally displace her embarrassment at her social awkwardness.

CHAPTER 6: AUGUST 30TH, 1793

A week later, the heat is still relentless. Mattie washes clothes and wishes for frost. Grandfather prefers the warmth, saying the thought of frost makes his bones ache. When Mattie recalls skating with the Peales last winter, Grandfather mentions a rumor of Nathaniel's "improper" behavior toward her in the market. Mattie protests that Nathaniel was a gentleman. Grandfather grumbles that Nathaniel won't amount to much as a painter's apprentice.

Mattie's longing for frost foreshadows the much greater longing she'll feel after she falls victim to the epidemic. Grandfather doesn't think much of Nathaniel's prospects as a painter, even though his own son was a craftsman before he died. This suggests that painting wasn't yet regarded as a particularly respectable ambition in the young republic. However, the Peale family—a real, historical family—was to become famous for their portrait-painting.

Mattie refuses to discuss Nathaniel any further, and Grandfather agreeably helps her hang the washing. When Eliza comes by, Grandfather jokes that Mattie's mother has reduced "the hero of Trenton and Germantown [...] to a simple errand boy" by sending him out for coffee beans. He adds that sometimes he'd rather face the British than Lucille. They all watch as Mattie's cat, Silas, chases a squirrel and jumps onto Mattie's clean laundry, causing the clotheshorse to collapse. Eliza and Grandfather laugh.

Despite his grumbling and his self-importance (Trenton and Germantown were both pivotal Revolutionary War battles), Grandfather is a humorous, good-natured man. At this point in the story, everyday life continues as normal, and daily routines are disrupted by nothing more threatening than a wayward cat—in contrast to the far scarier threats to come.

By the time Mattie re-washes the linens, it's time for the midday meal. Grandfather is discussing the windfall caused by the fever—customers are avoiding establishments by the river and flocking to the Cook Coffeehouse instead. Grandfather thinks they should open a regular store. Mattie has her own ideas. She thinks they should buy another coffee urn, expand into the adjacent lot, and open a meeting room. They could even sell paintings and "fripperies" from France.

Grandfather still views the fever as a positive development for the family business, as it's mostly served to send new business their way. Mattie is even more ambitious. Though she's only 14, she's obviously watched her mother's business closely and observed what's likely to bring in more customers. She shows an aptitude for thinking outside the usual boxes.

Mother says talk of expansion is pointless; only fear of the fever is driving customers their way. Grandfather points out that this happens every August. This year it's because of "those cursed refugees" from Barbados. Mother is unconvinced; the fever, and the increased profits, will pass. Mattie silently agrees with Grandfather, wondering how much their neighbor, Watson, would sell his lot for.

Even Grandfather has a negative attitude toward outsiders, as his comments about the refugees show. None of them grasp just how consequential this particular fever will be for their family or for Philadelphia as a whole.

A messenger comes to the door. Grandfather brings a note from Pernilla Ogilvie, which Mother hastily snatches. Pernilla has invited them for afternoon tea, which Lucille calls "the best news in weeks." Mattie is reluctant; the Ogilvies are snobs, including their "young Edward," whom Mother is eyeing as a potential match for Mattie. Grandfather, hoping for a quiet afternoon free of Lucille, coaxes Mattie to think of the chores she'll escape and the pastries she'll eat at the Ogilvies'. Mattie, irritated that both Grandfather and Mother have won, relents with a dull "Huzzah."

Though Mattie just sees Mother's marital ambitions for her as intrusive and unwelcome, Lucille feels the pressure to secure a strong future for her daughter. Mindful of her own widowed status and her estrangement from her family because of her elopement, she wants something better for Mattie.

Mother unearths an "unfashionable" post-War gown from the depths of her trunk. Then she lets the seams out of Mattie's only fancy gown. Mattie whimpers and sulks as Eliza brushes her hair. Mother says that with Mattie's manners, it could take years to find her a suitable husband. When Eliza laces Mattie into her clothes, Mattie sees spots and can barely breathe. Grandfather says see looks "like a china doll"; Mattie retorts that she "will break just as easily."

The Ogilvies are in a higher social class than the Cooks, and trying to pass as suitable company for them takes considerable effort. Again, Mattie resents the necessity and sees her mother's efforts as an affront to her own desire for independence.

CHAPTER 7: AUGUST 30TH, 1793

When Mattie and Mother arrive at the Ogilvie mansion, Mattie is gasping for breath because of her tight clothes. As Mother straightens Mattie's bodice and cleans dirt off her face, she promises they won't stay long. She tells Mattie that she might become a beauty after all, and that she just wants the best for her. Mattie is surprised by her gentle tone. Mother changes the subject by complaining about her dusty hem, remembering the days when her family rode to tea in a "lovely carriage."

The day's high fashion required girls and women to wear tightly structured garments that were likely neither comfortable nor healthy; Mattie's gasping reaction is realistic, especially given the simpler workday outfits to which she is accustomed. Even though Lucille has succeeded in making an independent life, she feels conflicted as she recalls her more privileged upbringing, when many things came easier.

A maid lets them in to a gleaming, expensively decorated drawing room that's almost the size of the coffeehouse. Pernilla Ogilvie "sail[s] across the room like a man-of-war" in her layers of petticoats and greets Lucille effusively. Mother notices Pernilla's pristine, fashionable gown compared to her own coffee-stained one. Lucille introduces Mattie, whom Pernilla calls "poor little Matilda," remarking that her father "would have gone far if he had been educated." Mother grits her teeth.

Though it's not made explicit, Lucille and Pernilla may have been friends in Lucille's wealthier youth. The contrast between the two women's dresses, and Pernilla's pointed comment about Lucille's late husband, show how much has changed since then.


The Ogilvie daughters, Colette and Jeannine, enter the room wearing matching gowns and curled hair. Colette looks pale and exhausted. While Mrs. Ogilvie chats about the girls' French lessons (the French ambassador is a friend of the family), Mattie struggles to reach the plate of bite-sized cakes without splitting a seam on her tight dress. Jeannine intentionally passes the cakes in the opposite direction.

The Ogilvie daughters, with their coordinated high style and French lessons, live a very different kind of existence than Mattie does. French language and style is all the rage in early America (reflected in Mattie's own desire to travel to France), spurred in part by France's support during the American Revolution.

Mrs. Ogilvie chatters on about the large number of families who are leaving Philadelphia because of the fever—everyone but "shopkeepers and wharf rats." She goes on to claim that "those filthy refugees and creatures who live in the crowded hovels by the river" are to blame, and it's a "gross injustice" that their sickness is disrupting her plans for a gala ball. Meanwhile, Jeannine sticks her tongue out at Mattie, and the Ogilvies' dog nips Mattie's shoe.

Mrs. Ogilvie shares the view of some wealthier Philadelphians that refugees and the poor are responsible for the spread of sickness. Her disgust is particularly shallow—she cares more about the cancellation of her party than about the suffering and death of the afflicted.

Mother asks Pernilla if the Ogilvie sons are still in town. Mattie is embarrassed, wondering why her mother doesn't just hang a sign around her neck that reads, "Available—foul-mouthed daughter." When the conversation turns to Colette's recent engagement, Colette just complains of the heat. As Mattie watches Jeannine eat the last cake with deliberate slowness, she hisses "Mother," thinking that while Mother grew up with carriages and gowns, Mattie didn't, and she longs to slap Jeannine or shake her dog.

Mattie feels humiliated by the transparency of her mother's matchmaking efforts. Perhaps Lucille's lack of subtlety shows how driven she is to secure Mattie's future—or that she refuses to play by the delicate social rules of the aristocratic circles she's left behind. All Mattie knows is that her mother can relate to this world, but Mattie can never belong there and she refuses to pretend.

Lucille presses ahead, asking if any of the Ogilvie sons are interested in business. Mrs. Ogilvie says that "trade" wouldn't be appropriate for someone of their background. At this, Jeannine flings down her fan and tells her mother to stop being "thick-headed"; Mrs. Cook obviously wants her to consider one of the boys as a match for Mattie, and "their filthy little tavern is part of the deal." At this, Mattie jumps up, the seams in her dress ripping loudly. When Jeannine continues taunting their "grog shop," Lucille rises in defense, too.

While Mrs. Ogilvie's remarks about class difference are an underhanded insult, Jeannine's outright rudeness shows how indelicate she is. A grog shop is, according to the novel, "where criminals and the other dregs of society gathered to drink whiskey and fight"—a plain affront to the Cooks' efforts to run a well-respected establishment. This accusation is a bridge too far for both Mattie and Lucille.

The confrontation is interrupted by Colette getting to her feet, panting heavily, and upsetting the cream pitcher. She whispers, "I'm burning," before crumpling to the floor in a faint. When Mother feels Colette's forehead, she says it must be the fever.

Again, the relatively petty concerns of daily life are shockingly disrupted by the fever. Proving wrong Mrs. Ogilvie's words moments before, the fever clearly affects those of all classes, regardless of its origins.

CHAPTER 8: SEPTEMBER 2ND, 1793

After Colette Ogilvie's collapse, the atmosphere in Philadelphia changes: the bells toll without stopping, a cannon is blasted to purify the air, and mosquitoes buzz constantly. Business declines at the coffeehouse because many wealthier families are fleeing to the country. Everyone is worried and grumpy, even Eliza, who muses that there are ugly days ahead. Grandfather, on the other hand, thinks that people just lack gumption these days. Eliza heads to a meeting of the Free African Society while Mattie and Grandfather run errands.

The fever begins to impact people's daily lives to a more noticeable degree—the signs and effects of disease are now impossible to ignore. Still underestimating the situation, Grandfather maintains that people are simply weaker than in his day. The Free African Society was a benevolent organization run by and for Philadelphia's freed slaves; its activities will feature later in the story.

Grandfather and Mattie go to Andrew Brown's print shop. Grandfather complains to Mr. Brown that he "didn't run from the redcoats, and [...] won't run from a dockside miasma." Mr. Carris is also there, and he warns that caution is warranted. He reads a list of advice from the College of Physicians, advising the populace to avoid the sick, to mark the homes of the sick, to bury the dead, and to keep clean, among other things. The bell tolling must also stop.

Grandfather, nostalgic for the hardships of his soldier days, continues to downplay the severity of the outbreak. However, specific recommendations are being circulated to the public to limit the spread of the disease.

They've heard that several hundred have died of the fever, and that a thousand might die by the end. Even Grandfather pauses at this number, but he says he doesn't believe this exaggeration. Even Jefferson and Washington are expected to leave town soon, Mr. Carris points out. Mattie counts out the days until the October frosts, which always kill the fever. She figures that even working on the pig farm of their family friends, the Ludingtons, would be better than the fever.

Though Grandfather continues to question the projected numbers, these estimates actually fall far short of the ultimate fatalities: closer to 5,000 are believed to have died. The exodus of government leaders would have been a further blow to the city's morale.

As Grandfather and Mattie walk home from the print shop, they follow a limping man in rags who's pushing a cart. A limp arm flops over the side. Grandfather calls to the man that this is no place for the dead. Suddenly Mattie runs ahead, her eyes filling with tears. The man turns and looks at them, then dumps a body out of his wheelbarrow onto the street. "Mother!" Mattie screams.

The presence of the disease in their part of the city demonstrates that the epidemic has now spread well beyond the waterfront distinct. Grandfather is still of the mindset that they can remain untouched by it. But when Mattie recognizes the arm dangling from the cart, the proximity of the disease is brought home to them both in a visceral way.

CHAPTER 9: SEPTEMBER 2ND, 1793

Grandfather determines that Mother is alive. He gets Mattie to help him carry her into the coffeehouse. Eliza screams and drops a pitcher when she sees Lucille. Grandfather says that she has simply been overcome by the heat. Lucille revives after they tuck her into bed. She's shivering. She tells Mattie to go downstairs and make herself useful. Mattie feels that with mother sleeping during the day, "something was desperately wrong."

Grandfather remains in denial as to the urgency of Lucille's condition. Lucille, however, clearly suspects the truth and wants Mattie out of the way. Seeing her mother at rest unnerves Mattie; it's unnatural for Lucille to be overcome by anything. Her helpless state signals a coming reversal in their relationship.

The afternoon is disastrous, with leaking coffee, burned biscuits, and quarrelsome customers. At the end of the day, Grandfather brings in Mr. Rowley. Eliza tells Mattie that Mr. Rowley isn't "a proper physician, but he sees sick folk and prescribes medicines." According to Reverend Allen at the Free African Society, all of the real physicians are working near the waterfront, where "bodies are piling up like firewood."

The appearance of Mr. Rowley—whom Eliza hints is more of a quack than a real doctor—shows how desperate the situation in the city is becoming; reputable doctors are few and far between, which is all the worse for those who are desperate for a reliable diagnosis and treatment. Eliza, with her connections at the Society, is better informed than Grandfather, who is still reluctant to accept the truth of what's happening.

Grandfather introduces Mr. Rowley, who's experienced in "treating female complaints." Mattie is skeptical, as he looks dirty and smells of rum, but she follows them all into the bedroom. Mr. Rowley examines Mother, who remains asleep. Finally, he pronounces that Mother's illness is not yellow fever. Famous doctors like Mr. Rush, he claims, are being alarmist. The "pestilence" is a matter of fervent debate; people are being thrown out by their families over mistaken yellow fever diagnoses, so Mr. Rowley himself uses the diagnosis sparingly. Grandfather feels vindicated. Mr. Rowley prescribes some treatments and collects his fee.

Mr. Rowley pronounces a questionable diagnosis. He claims that the famous doctor, Benjamin Rush (a historical figure), is leading people astray and causing needless panic. This accusation indicates how disorganized and inconsistent the Philadelphia medical establishment is. In any case, Mr. Rowley seems more interested in being paid than in ensuring an accurate diagnosis.

Mattie doesn't want to help Eliza give Mother a bath—it feels "upside down and backside front"—but it's necessary. Every four hours, they have to wake Lucille and drag her into a hot bath. Lucille weeps and calls Mattie's father's name. When they put her back to bed with fresh linens, she shivers until her teeth rattle. That night, Grandfather sleeps at Mr. Carris's house, and Eliza must go home to her brother's family. She kisses Mattie and promises to try to bring a doctor in the morning.

Mattie copes with an uncomfortable situation, as she'll have to do many times in the coming weeks. Caring for her mother feels like a particularly unnatural reversal, one that prefigures the coming change in their relationship.

Mattie locks herself in the darkened house. When she checks on Mother, she wonders, "Had [Mother] ever enjoyed anything? […] Perhaps death would be a release." As Lucille moans in her sleep, Mattie tries to control her tears. She reflects that no one can ever tell Mother's feelings just by looking at her; Mattie needs to master this skill. "There were so many things she had tried to teach me," she thinks, "but I didn't listen."

Alone with Mother, Mattie gets a first taste of the independence she's yearned for—but it's not like she imagined. She admires Lucille's strength and grieves her own failure to appreciate and learn from her mother. She's beginning to better grasp how much Lucille has struggled over the years and what survival has cost her.

Mattie prays some Psalms for deliverance and then dozes off next to Mother's bed. The next thing she knows, Mother is violently vomiting blood, her eyes rolled back in her head. Mattie jumps up, screaming for Eliza. But Mattie is alone. She forces herself to soothe Mother and sponge her face. Mother vomits again and raggedly begs Mattie to leave her. Mattie, sobbing, tries to offer her mother another bath and clean linens, but Lucille weakly throws the Psalm book at Mattie's head and croaks at her to go away.

Again, Mattie is forced to summon courage in the midst of horror in order to care for her mother. She instinctively wants to lean on the other adults in her life, but she has no one to rely on but herself. Compounding the terror, Mother resists Mattie out of her fear that Mattie will sicken as well.

CHAPTER 10: SEPTEMBER 6TH, 1793

The next morning, Eliza shakes Mattie awake. She's brought Dr. Kerr, an educated Scottish doctor, to examine Mother. Dr. Kerr examines Lucille and growls that Rowley is a "damned fool" and an "imposter." Lucille undoubtedly has yellow fever. Mattie can't breathe. "Mother," she thinks, "wouldn't allow it [...] Mother would beat back illness with a broom."

Mother finally gets a correct diagnosis from a real physician. However, it's completely unfathomable to Mattie—she imagines her mother to be more powerful than any disease.

Dr. Kerr says that Lucille must be bled; Dr. Rush has proven that this is the only way a yellow fever patient can be saved—the bleeding drains "the poison" from her body. Mattie feels faint as Dr. Kerr hands her a basin. They have to fill a second basin, and Mattie "clenched [her] jaw and stood firm." Dr. Kerr ultimately takes 10 ounces of blood. He also leaves jalap and calomel to help purge Lucille's system.

Draining blood from the sick, as well as using purgatives like jalap (a root) and calomel (a mineral), were standard methods of treatment at the time, but they were based on an inaccurate understanding of the source and spread of disease. These treatments were likely doing nothing to heal Lucille (and were more likely weakening her).

Lucille stirs and wakes to see Mattie. She points at Mattie and whispers, "Out!" before beginning to cough. Dr. Kerr leads Mattie downstairs, assuring Mattie that Lucille is a strong woman. Downstairs, he tells Grandfather that Mattie must be sent out of the city. Mattie stamps in frustration, wanting to stay and help, but Dr. Kerr says that the city is turning mad, and that no other towns will accept a fever victim. Trying to smile, Grandfather tells Mattie that they'll "make it an adventure."

As traumatic as her mother's illness has been for Mattie, her stubbornness, loyalty, and courage show through in her determination to remain behind and help. Leaving Philadelphia will pose its own obstacles, as outlying towns are beginning to block potential fever victims from passing through and spreading the epidemic.

Despite Mattie's protests, Grandfather heads off to find a coach to get them out of town. Eliza, too, is resolute. As she starts packing a basket of food for their journey, she hands Mattie a package that's been left for her. It's a painting of a vase filled with bright, delicate flowers. Enclosed is a note from Nathaniel Benson, explaining that Master Peale is closing up his family and assistants inside the house until the sickness passes. He tells Mattie to take care and promises that someday they'll watch **balloons** together again.

Nathaniel thinks of Mattie in crisis, showing his love for her, but he's effectively sealed away for the time being—showing he won't be significant in the primary action and that Mattie really will be facing the epidemic on her own. The mention of Blanchard's balloon, a symbol of the promise of freedom for Mattie, has a bittersweet note, since they can't know if they'll survive the disaster to see any future, much less a future together.

The next morning, a horse and wagon arrive, both looking ready to collapse. A farmer sits in the wagon with his wife and child; Grandfather is in back. Eliza hugs Mattie goodbye and makes her promise to stay out of town until two hard frosts have passed. Mattie is tearful in her thanks, but Eliza says that by staying behind to help, she's doing nothing more than Lucille would have done in her place. Grandfather dresses in his regimental jacket and sword for the trip, carrying King George the parrot on his shoulder. He salutes and offers his arm to Mattie. They board the wagon, and the farmer drives away from the coffeehouse.

Grandfather comes to Mattie's rescue and, with a playful note of irony, even dons the outfit for the role—perhaps showing a lingering inability to face the full scale of the disaster, but also a desire to cushion the experience for his beloved granddaughter. It's an example of another way that human beings respond to crisis—showing love through humor. There's a melancholy aspect to this scene, too, as it will prove to be one of Grandfather's last "battles" in life, one that even a Revolutionary veteran is powerless to defeat.

CHAPTER 11: SEPTEMBER 7TH, 1793

It takes an hour for the tired horse to draw them along the rutted roads and reach the outskirts of Philadelphia. Grandfather has a coughing fit, and when the farmer warns that he'll have no fever victims in his wagon, Mattie snaps at him to mind his horse. Grandfather remarks that Mattie sounds like her mother, "ordering menfolk around." Mattie retorts that "some menfolk need ordering," and Grandfather agrees.

Mattie shows her fiercely protective, independent streak when she snaps at the nervous farmer. Grandfather finds Mattie's attitude endearing and observes her likeness to Lucille—a similarity that Mattie would have heartily rejected at the beginning of the story, but she's softening to it now.

Grandfather tells Mattie that they should enjoy their trip to the country, and that this is a good time to review her "soldiering lessons." Mattie groans but complies. Since she was a baby, Grandfather has "taught me all the tricks of the American and the British armies, and quite a few from the French." He asks Mattie to name the three things necessary for a soldier to fight. Mattie lists "a sturdy pair of boots," "a full belly," and "a decent night's sleep." Soon after, both she and Grandfather are lulled asleep.

Grandfather tries to further distract and comfort Mattie by reviving a childhood game—soldiering lessons. It's likely more than a game, however, since Grandfather is also reminding Mattie of the survival tricks he's instilled in her since she was a small girl, suspecting she might have need of those skills before long.

Mattie wakes to find that the wagon has stopped. Four armed horsemen are blocking their path. They inquire about the group's destination. The farmer explains that they're dropping Mattie and Grandfather off in Gwynedd before going on to Bethlehem. The man tells them that a doctor will need to take a look at them all; if they're not sick, they can pass through the nearby town of Pembroke.

Some outlying towns wouldn't allow fever victims, or those fleeing the fever, to settle in or even pass through their limits, fearful of the epidemic's spread. This measure, an understandable caution, nevertheless created further obstacles for the vulnerable and afflicted.

Mattie struggles to awaken Grandfather, and when he finally rouses, he's taken with a coughing fit. The doctor says he's infected with disease and must be taken back to the city. Grandfather protests, but can't control his coughing. The farmer grabs Mattie and throws her onto the road. He and the doctor place Grandfather beside her. The farmer claims that they've only picked up the two of them within the last hour. Mattie yells that he's lying. But the doctor consents, and the horsemen allow the farmer and his family to drive through town.

Cruelly, the farmer doesn't just decline to drive Mattie and her grandfather any further, but also forcibly ejects them both from his wagon. He also lies about them, claiming that his fever exposure has been minimal and that they haven't journeyed a long way together. This exemplifies the selfishness that people sometimes resort to when in crisis; the desire to protect one's own banishes all else.

Mattie and her grandfather are left on the roadside without their food and clothing. The doctor urges them to walk back to Philadelphia for treatment. One of the horsemen explains that they must take care of their own. Mattie has never seen Grandfather look so angry as he replies, "And I shall look after mine."

Mattie and Grandfather are in a helpless, vulnerable position. They'll have to walk at least 10 miles to find sympathy and help. Contrary to Grandfather's determined words, it's Mattie who will be burdened with much of the "looking after."

CHAPTER 12: SEPTEMBER 8TH, 1793

Before they've walked very far, Grandfather is overcome with chills. He suggests that they rest under a chestnut tree. Mattie fashions a makeshift pillow for Grandfather, and he falls asleep before he can give further directions. Mattie, trying not to cry, assesses their situation. They're 10 miles outside the city, with no food or water. She needs to get water first. She takes Grandfather's canteen from his belt and kisses him goodbye.

Grandfather, clearly sicker than he's let on, quickly leaves Mattie to figure out what's next. Though frightened, Mattie masters her emotions and recalls her "soldiering lessons," taking one independent step at a time. She's discovering that independence involves rising to the occasion and helping those she loves, not indulging in daydreams.

Mattie walks up a hill and looks along the horizon. Recalling an "old soldier's trick," she locates a willow tree and knows she'll find water nearby. Then she finds some raspberry bushes and picks a bunch for their supper, reminding herself that raspberry bushes mean that rabbits will be nearby. She figures that Grandfather can snare a rabbit, which she'll cook over a fire. They'll regain their strength and head back to the city, where Mattie will care for Grandfather and Mother. She decides that her plan is perfect.

Mattie uses Grandfather's survival lessons to find food and water for them. Her triumph shows her success in being independent, but also her naïveté—her "perfect plan" will require still greater courage and ingenuity. Independence isn't a one-time attainment, but a process of growth and struggle.

Running back with her overskirt filled with raspberries, Mattie shouts to Grandfather that she has a plan. His eyes are bloodshot but not yellow, which encourages Mattie. He is relieved by a long drink of water. As they share the berries, Mattie tells him her plan. After sunset, they'll move to a cooler spot by the water. Grandfather finally responds by saying, "I'm a fool." Mattie's mother was right all along, he tells her. General Washington had always told him he was stubborn.

Mattie shares her plans, rising to the occasion, as Grandfather humbly admits that his grasp on the truth of the epidemic has been faulty all along. His humility is a further demonstration of his trust in Mattie, and another example of the many different responses that crisis draws out of people. Disaster shows what people are made of.

Grandfather goes on, "I am concerned for your future [...] We must form our battle plans." Mattie waits in silence for further advice, but none comes. She's frightened, realizing Grandfather is waiting for her to decide what to do. Finally she says they will move camp tomorrow. "Whatever you say, Captain," Grandfather replies.

Grandfather has shifted the burden of decision-making to Mattie—a watershed moment in their relationship and for Mattie personally. She will no longer take direction solely from her family, but will draw on her own resources—what they've taught her—to "captain" her own future, and care for others, too.

CHAPTER 13: SEPTEMBER 10TH, 1793

When Mattie awakens the next morning, she heads to the nearby stream to replenish their water, King George flying along after her. Mattie thinks of Mother and wishes she'd been strong like Eliza instead of crying while caring for her. She figures her mother sees her as weak, "a backward, lazy girl child." She cheers herself by reasoning that they'll find a carriage ride back to Philadelphia later that day.

Mattie imagines that her mother's attitudes toward her—criticizing her, sending her into the country instead of accepting her care—are rooted in disdain. Lucille, she thinks, doesn't believe she's strong or mature enough to handle the responsibilities thrust upon them by the epidemic. This assumption stiffens her resolve to prove herself.

Leaving her petticoat drying in the sun, Mattie cools herself in the stream. When she hears fish leaping, she has the idea to use her petticoat as a net. She pulls the drawstring as tightly closed as possible and holds the hem open, hoping "an unusually stupid fish" will swim into it. She spends a long time uncomfortably poised in the icy stream, waiting. Just when a fish appears ready to enter the net, King George swoops over her head and topples her into the water. Mattie emerges from the water, shouting at the parrot.

Mattie not only exercises independence in seeking food for herself and Grandfather, but takes an ingenious approach—creatively building off of the skills she's been taught and using the materials at hand. This adaptability belies her view of herself as weak and lazy.

Mattie can't waste more time fishing. She gets some more water and berries and hurries back to Grandfather. He's shivering and almost too weary to speak. Mattie wonders how to make a fire with no flint and tinder at hand. Grandfather tells her to find a farm and pay for a meal and some blankets. Reluctantly, Mattie heads off in the midday heat.

Unfortunately, the fishing isn't successful, and Grandfather is suffering. Mattie must now find the courage to hunt for their provisions another way.

Mattie encounters one farmer, but he runs inside and locks the door, shouting that he can't help if she has the fever. Mattie keeps stumbling along, hungry, wondering if the world has gone mad. At one point, she steps on a rotted pear and looks up to find a tree laden with the fruit. She grabs as many as she can carry and hurries back toward Grandfather.

People are hiding from any possible fever carriers out of fear. Mattie feels as if the epidemic has caused basic, neighborly kindness to disappear; ordinary social bonds can no longer be taken for granted.

At some point, the pears grow terribly heavy. Mattie is breathing heavily and imagines that she hears whispering voices. Suddenly she thinks that she's not walking on a dirt road, but "slipping across the frozen river," and the sun is a snowball. Her teeth are chattering. She thinks she sees Grandfather's figure in the distance, but she can't call to him or remember why she's carrying heavy rocks. Soon, there's just blackness.

Suddenly, it becomes evident that Mattie is terribly sick, which gives a sufferer's inside perspective on the fever for the first time in the book. It's a frightening one—Mattie's chills and fever distort her perceptions and memory, and it's unclear how she will survive.

CHAPTER 14: SEPTEMBER 12TH-20TH, 1793

Mattie hears someone saying, "Is she dead? […] I've got to take the bodies to the pit." Mattie opens her eyes and sees an old woman bending over her with a candle, a man in the shadows. She's cold and hears moaning on either side of her.

Mattie has survived her feverish collapse, but whether she'll remain alive is uncertain. It's clear that she must be close to death.

Mattie drifts back into feverish dreams. In the dreams, she cries to a rushing crowd of people, "What am I supposed to do?" She sees troops of soldiers marching and Grandfather, in a bloody shirt, ordering soldiers to fire in her direction. She jerks awake, trying to separate dream from reality. Around her are the familiar smells of yellow fever.

Though she's delirious, Mattie's dreams reveal her deepest fears—namely, that she'll prove unable to handle the crisis and will fail Grandfather, causing even him to turn on her.

Mattie watches as two French-speaking orderlies carry her neighbor, a dead woman, away and then bring the mattress back, empty. The next time she wakes, she observes that she's in a massive room with expensive carpets, furniture, and chandeliers. A woman says, "You've beat the Grim Reaper, you have, lassie." The woman, a nurse, introduces herself as Mrs. Flagg.

Mattie is surrounded by the dead in some kind of makeshift hospital. However, it looks as if she's turned a corner toward survival.

Mrs. Flagg helps Mattie sit up and explains that Grandfather has been waiting for her this whole time. She offers Mattie a bowl of broth, but Mattie pushes it away, wanting to know how she got here. Mrs. Flagg explains that Grandfather doesn't have yellow fever; his heart was acting up in the heat. But he is strong and carried Mattie all this way. Mattie relaxes, figuring that if Grandfather is well enough to "tell exaggerated stories," then he must be fine.

Grandfather is known as a teller of tall tales, so Mattie doesn't take Mrs. Flagg's report literally. But because it's never revealed otherwise, it can be assumed that Grandfather did, in fact, carry Mattie to the hospital, through heat and his own infirmity—showing his immense love for her.

After Mattie finishes her broth, Grandfather appears, having "never looked so handsome or brave" as he does to Mattie now. He kisses Mattie and tells her she looks well enough to be out of bed. He also flirts with Mrs. Flagg, telling her that Bridget is "a melodious name for a beautiful lady." Mattie rolls her eyes while Mrs. Flagg giggles.

Mattie and Grandfather are reunited, and after what they've been through together, Mattie feels fonder of him than ever. Mrs. Flagg also enjoys the attentions of the dashing war veteran.

Mattie still has questions. When Mrs. Flagg explains that they are at Bush Hill, Mattie starts struggling out of bed, asking Grandfather to take her away from this "dangerous place." Mrs. Flagg tucks her in firmly, explaining that Bush Hill "is now a respectable place." Previously rumored to be "one step away from Hell," filled with criminals, now Bush Hill has been transformed by Mr. Stephen Girard into "a right proper hospital," and all the "scoundrels" have been driven off.

Mattie can't rest until she can make sense of her circumstances—an aspect of her independent personality. And when she hears she's at Bush Hill—previously a chaotic nightmare of a hospital—she's ready to bolt. But the epidemic has prompted Philadelphians to undertake an emergency transformation of the place, showing how communities can rise to the occasion under pressure.

Mr. Stephen Girard is a wealthy Frenchman, a merchant, importer, and banker. Mrs. Flagg explains that he made repairs to the mansion and brought in a French doctor, staff, and supplies. Mrs. Flagg also explains that it's the French doctors who really know how to cure the fever, not Dr. Rush with his bleeding techniques.

Stephen Girard is a real historical figure. He led a committee, appointed by Philadelphia's mayor, in rapidly changing the Bush Hill estate into a safer, more functional hospital. Also, he intentionally staffed the hospital with French medical workers who'd had experience of yellow fever before, especially in the West Indies.

Grandfather further explains that they've been away from home for five days, and that when he checked on the coffeehouse, it was locked up tight. He assumes that Lucille has gone to her friends, the Ludingtons, to recover, and he's sent a letter to inquire. Mattie drifts off to sleep again.

Lucille's exact whereabouts remain a mystery, but Mattie is satisfied that she and her loved ones are safe and sufficiently accounted for at the moment.

CHAPTER 15: SEPTEMBER 22ND, 1793

Mattie spends a few more days recovering at Bush Hill, surrounded by nurses, doctors, and volunteers from the Free African Society. She hears many whispered stories of those who've heroically helped the sick, those who fled, wealthy and famous people who've fallen sick, and people who lost their sanity from sickness or grief. Mattie hears nothing of Nathaniel, Eliza, or her mother.

The Free African Society, of which Eliza is a member, heroically nursed many Philadelphians throughout the crisis. Mattie's time of recovery at Bush Hill gives her the opportunity to hear many different examples of human reactions to the epidemic; it's touched everyone, no matter their class or circumstances.

One her 10th day at Bush Hill, Mattie is visited by the French doctor, Dr. Deveze. He checks Mattie's eyes, tongue, and pulse and says that she will live. He is pleased to hear that she has a big appetite. When Mrs. Flagg brings her dinner, Mattie can't stop asking her questions about what comes next.

Dr. Deveze, too, is a genuine historical figure. Stephen Girard, concerned about the varying skill levels and conflicting diagnoses offered by local doctors, took care to appoint a single physician at Bush Hill who, he believed, knew what he was doing.

Mattie is well enough to be moved to the barn, which is breezy, clean, and cool. She is relieved to be around other recovering patients instead of with the dying. Grandfather checks in on Mattie often when he isn't delivering food or helping on a committee that's raising money for the sick. Mattie knows that this work reminds him of the War and makes him feel useful again. Mattie has little to do except stay in bed wondering about Nathaniel and Mother. The stronger she gets, the more questions she has.

Mattie is restless to find her loved ones and be active again, but the extensive period of convalescence would be realistic for a recovering fever patient. Grandfather, meanwhile, channels his soldiering instincts into helping others.


When Mattie is well enough to get out of bed, a clerk approaches and says they've been unable to locate her mother. They can't turn a child into the streets, he says, so Mattie will be taken to the orphan house. Mrs. Flagg intervenes and finds Grandfather. Grandfather is indignant at the suggestion that Mattie would be better off in the orphan house than under his care. The man finally relents, but Grandfather has a violent coughing fit. When he recovers, he tells Mrs. Flagg that he isn't going to die before he has a chance to take her to a ball one day. Mrs. Flagg giggles once again.

The epidemic created many orphans, and the city struggled to keep up with their needs. Although Grandfather is still here to care for Mattie, it's hinted that their roles will soon be reversed once again and that perhaps he won't be around for long, despite his capable, cheerful demeanor.


CHAPTER 16: SEPTEMBER 24TH, 1793

The next day, Grandfather salutes a tearful Mrs. Flagg as he and Mattie depart in a wagon filled with fever orphans. Grandfather sits up front with the driver while Mattie sits in back with the children and a Quaker woman named Mrs. Bowles. Mrs. Bowles is older than Mother and has kind eyes and laughter lines. As she soothes a crying child, she questions Mattie, adding that these "trying times [...] bring out the best and worst in the people around us."

Just as they were in the antislavery movement, Pennsylvania's Quakers were disproportionately active in humanitarian efforts like those created by the epidemic. Mrs. Bowles also has a realistic outlook on the fever's effects on people—it showcases both the best and worst in human nature.

When Mrs. Bowles learns that Mattie is 14, almost 15, she asks if Mattie has considered doing something to help, now that she's recovered. Mattie wonders aloud how she can help, as she's just a girl. She immediately wants to pinch herself, thinking, "The first time anyone treats me like a woman and I respond like an infant." Mrs. Bowles assures Mattie than she would be of use in the orphan house, and she would be safe and fed there.

Mattie is at an awkward point—she's still technically a child, yet she's approaching adulthood, and the crisis has forced her to shoulder more mature responsibilities than she otherwise would. This is reflected in her conflicted response to Mrs. Bowles's offer. She's also not used to being seen as capable in an adult's eyes, which throws her off guard.

Mattie explains that she and Grandfather will take care of one another. Mrs. Bowles says that if Mattie is determined to remain with him at home, then she mustn't leave their house—"the streets of Philadelphia are more dangerous than your darkest nightmare," with lurking thieves and little food. When Mrs. Bowles explains that Susannah, one of the orphans who's not too much younger than Mattie, will eventually get work as a scullery maid, Mattie thinks that she will never take such a job. Instead, she dreams of running the coffeehouse and seeing Mother's face when she returns home—"she would exclaim how clean and well run [it] was."

Mrs. Bowles tells Mattie something of the way Philadelphia has deteriorated in light of the social crisis spawned by the epidemic—an example of the way that disaster can transform communities for the worse. Even now, newly recovered from the fever, impressing Mother is still at the top of Mattie's mind, showing how much she wants Lucille to take her seriously. She hopes the crisis will give her the opportunity to prove herself in the coffeehouse.

Mattie emerges from her daydream, realizing that they're passing through "a dying city." Businesses are closed, weeping is heard, and yellow rags mark the homes of the sick and dying. Mattie is horrified when they pass the body of a young man, his clothes stained and his eyes yellow, who has just died. She can't understand the drastic change in Philadelphia—yellow fever is "infecting the cobblestones, the trees, the nature of the people." They see a line of carts moving toward the Potter's Field, where most of the dead are being unceremoniously buried. They stop at the orphan house. Mrs. Bowles waves goodbye, telling Mattie, "Whatever you do, take care."

As often happens in the story, Mattie is jolted from her daydream by harsh reality—her city is no longer familiar to her. Everything about its barren, apocalyptic appearance shows how yellow fever has challenged the soul of the community. Before she indulges in dreams of revamping the coffeehouse, it's clear that Mattie will face an uphill struggle just to survive.

CHAPTER 17: SEPTEMBER 24TH, 1793

Mattie and Grandfather reach the coffeehouse at midday. The open front door has a yellow scrap tied to it. Mattie hurries inside and finds the front room a mess: furniture is thrown about, items are missing, and King George's bird cage is smashed. The kitchen has also been ransacked. Mattie comforts Grandfather, pointing out that it's not his fault; someone broke through the window.

The coffeehouse has all the marks of the fever—the yellow scrap warning others that the sickness has struck here, and the chaos suggesting that thieves have taken advantage of the situation. The violation of their home and business underscores the sense of the world being turned upside down by the epidemic.

Mattie urges her grandfather to rest; his face is red, and he's rubbing his left arm. She assesses the situation. Their food and some of their valuables have been taken, but the strongbox is still safely hidden beneath a hollow stair. They're alive, and the house is still standing. Mattie "just had to stay clever and strong and find something to eat." She rubs the threatening tears away.

Grandfather is not well—Mattie immediately sees this and takes charge, showing that, even after her illness, she hasn't surrendered her sense of responsibility and desire to protect her loved ones. The burden on her is heavy, and she knows it will call upon all her resources, but her tears don't weaken her resolve.

Grandfather's arms shake as he tries to hang his sword in its place over the mantle, so Mattie helps him. She playfully orders him to his "bedroll" for a rest, and he salutes her as "General Mattie." Mattie goes outside to find food before tackling the mess in the kitchen, but she discovers that the garden has been devoured by insects and choked with weeds. After taking Grandfather some cold water, Mattie labors in the garden for an hour, coming up with two handfuls of green beans, some stunted squash, and some sour cherries for her efforts.

Grandfather's and Mattie's soldiering motif reinforces their bond and helps them face their strained circumstances with a dash of humor. At the same time, when Mattie hangs Grandfather's sword, there's a sense that his role as protector of the house is being transferred to her. This is further reinforced when she takes responsibility for finding food for them.

Even as Mattie sits over her unsatisfactory meal, she remembers that there are "still rules, even if Mother isn't here to enforce them." She makes Silas the cat eat on the floor, and she remembers to pray before eating. At first, she prays that God will punish the thieves who wrecked their home, but finally she just asks that God "deal with them as you see fit." She asks God to watch over Mother, Eliza, Grandfather, and Nathaniel.

Mattie instinctively occupies her mother's role at the table, despite the longstanding conflict between them. This shows the strength of their bond, as well as the fact that, for all her complaints about her mother's strictness, Mattie has internalized the way Lucille runs their home and respects it. In her prayer, she also tries not to be excessively harsh on those who've resorted to thieving, understanding that the crisis has pushed many to extremes.

CHAPTER 18: SEPTEMBER 25TH, 1793

The next morning, Mattie is awakened by the cat. She is cheered by the knowledge that she and Grandfather have now survived one day and one night on her watch. She realizes how bad she feels, looks, and smells, so she decides to take a bath. She heats water over the fire, fills the tub, and locks herself into the kitchen. Mattie normally bathes once a month or before a special occasion. She luxuriates in this special occasion.

Mattie feels responsible for their survival and is proud of how she's handled it so far. Bathing was much less frequent in the 18th century than it is now—doubtless one factor in the epidemic. However, the spread of disease was not understood by even the most advanced doctors at the time.

Mattie scrubs herself until the bathwater is brown. When she's finally clean, she dries herself in front of the fire and considers her clothing options. The rest of her clothes are lost somewhere in the Pennsylvania countryside. She finds clothes in Mother's trunk that fit surprisingly well. She twirls around the room, enjoying the sensation of wearing something other than dirty homespun.

By literally wearing her mother's clothes, Mattie realizes how much she's grown symbolically as well as physically; she is capable of occupying her mother's place in more ways than one.

Mattie wakes Grandfather and then busies herself making a soup out of the sad-looking beans and turnip she's found in the garden. It turns out little better than "warm water with weeds in it." But Grandfather refuses to venture beyond the house for better food; it's dangerous, and besides, Lucille might come back. That afternoon Mattie salvages half a dozen potatoes from the struggling garden, and she dances with joy. They are finally able to eat enough supper to ease the pain in their stomachs.

Starvation was certainly a threat during the epidemic, as home gardens had gone untended, and country farmers were afraid to venture into the fever-stricken city to sell the wares upon which urban households depended. It's been shown how much Mattie enjoys good food, so her adaptation to meager, unappetizing rations further illustrates her flexibility in crisis.

That night, Mattie is exhausted from all the work, but Grandfather is snoring too loudly for her to sleep. She makes herself a pallet downstairs and opens the shutters to cool down the room. She feels satisfied with her efforts to manage on her own. She reads a Bible passage, imagining the day when she will own a whole library of her own, and then blows out her candle.

Mattie has successfully gotten Grandfather and herself through two days of survival. She has leisure enough to savor this fact and daydream a little of future luxuries. However, this peaceful moment won't last for long.

CHAPTER 19: SEPTEMBER 26TH, 1793

Mattie is dreaming of a juicy roast beef when, suddenly, she's snapped awake by the sound of a footstep by the window. She hears a strange voice say, "What was that?" A second voice urges the first to hurry up. Mattie sees a tall, thin man standing in the moonlight, and he's soon joined through the window by a shorter one. She realizes she's no longer dreaming and that the men are thieves. She wonders what to do. If she screams, Grandfather will wake up, and the men might attack them both. And who could she run to for help?

By leaving the shutters open to cool the house, Mattie has left them vulnerable to thieves again. When she realizes this, however, her first thought is not for her own preservation, but for Grandfather's—again this shows just how much she's internalized her role as his caretaker and "captain" of the household.

Mattie watches in horror and anger as the men paw through her family's things, speculating about the value of a chess set her Grandfather won from a ship's captain. One of them even lifts down Grandfather's sword and laughs that it's worthless; every man in America drags around a rusty sword and tells tall tales about his exploits in the War. Mattie glares but holds steady, even as the man playfully weaves around the room, brandishing the sword. But when the sword comes toward Mattie's neck in the darkness, she screams, "No!" and collides with the man as she bolts toward the kitchen.

The men's presumption and joking are an insult to the family's identity and hard work. However, Mattie isn't prepared to risk her life even for beloved material possessions, and she gives away her presence by accident.

The men pursue Mattie out the kitchen door toward the gate. One of them catches up with her and yanks her back into the house. He ties her wrists together and says that Mattie can tell them where the silver and money are hidden. When Mattie spits at him, he slaps her. The other man protests, and before the two men finish their argument about what to do next, they hear a thump upstairs. Mattie wishes she hadn't screamed—she needs to protect Grandfather and get these men out of the house.

Mattie maintains her self-possession even when she's caught, and it's clear that at least one of the men is prepared to do her harm. Her first thought is still for Grandfather's protection.

Mattie tries to convince the men that the noise was just her cat. The tall man thinks she's hiding something and hits her again, demanding to know where the money is. Suddenly, Grandfather appears in the doorway with his rifle, shouting, "Get away from my granddaughter!" He warns the hesitating men that he'll count to three. Mattie knows that means he's not fooling around. Mattie sees how hard Grandfather is breathing and urges him to put the gun down.

Despite Mattie's reluctance to expose him to danger, Grandfather gets another chance at heroism. Even now, Mattie is concerned for his wellbeing before her own.

Grandfather finishes counting to three. Then several things happen at once—the gun fires as the tall man leaps aside (the first man has fled out the window); the blast knocks Grandfather against the door frame, giving the man the chance to jump on Grandfather and punch him in the face. Mattie kicks the man but is sent sprawling. With her bound hands, she grabs Grandfather's sword—"Grandfather had taught me a bit about swordplay along with his other army lessons," she recalls. When the man strikes Grandfather's head against the floor, Mattie screams and gashes the man's shoulder with the sword. He howls and rolls aside.

Grandfather's attempt at heroism has proven to be a bit too much for him, and the more violent of the two men quickly takes advantage. Mattie gets another chance to use the fighting skills her grandfather lovingly taught her—more literally than she likely ever imagined. When she sees Grandfather truly in peril, she doesn't hesitate to strike out in his defense, even while her hands are still bound, and the man could easily overpower her if she fails.

When the man looks at Mattie in disbelief, she raises the sword again and runs at him, "screaming the kinds of words that would have raised every hair on my mother's head." He scrambles out the window, and Mattie chases him for a block before realizing that Grandfather needs her at home. When she returns, she finds him sitting up. "Always knew you had it in you," he says hoarsely, smiling at Mattie.

The uncouth language that Mother has criticized proves to be an asset in crisis. Realizing Mattie means business, the thief is scared off for good. Grandfather, meanwhile, is proud of Mattie's standing up for the two of them; he sees that his "soldiering lessons" have prepared her to fend for herself well.

Mattie starts to go for water, but Grandfather stops her. He's struggling to keep his eyes open. He takes her hand and says, "I'm sorry, Mattie […] I'm leaving you alone." Mattie shakes her head mutely, then is unable to hold back a torrent of words and tears, begging Grandfather not to die. He just whispers, "Strong […] Beautiful. Clever. My sweet Mattie." A moment later, he's dead.

The exertion of recent weeks and the thief's violence have finally proven too much for Grandfather. Before he dies, he praises the strength and ingenuity she's used throughout the crisis. His nurturing and belief in her are vindicated, bringing him comfort in his last moments.

Mattie feels as though the world has stopped. She shrieks and pounds the floor with rage. She picks up the sword again and "attacks a chair as if it were Death itself." When the chair is splintered, she kneels by Grandfather's body, which is growing cold, and tries to arrange his limbs with greater dignity. Feeling like "a baby girl just learning to walk," she wonders what she should do next.

Mattie reaches her lowest moment and finally vents her emotions. Though she's taken initiative and learned about her own strength recently, she's truly alone now, in a way she's never been before. It makes her feel like a helpless, wobbling infant.

Mattie gently closes Grandfather's eyes and tries to remember funerals she's seen. She finds some of their finest napkins and uses them to bind Grandfather's jaw closed. She decides he should be buried in his nightshirt, smiling when she remembers him describing death as "the eternal sleep." She covers him with a linen tablecloth, leaving his kindly face uncovered. Then she kneels beside him and gives way to tears for "the finest man I had ever known."

Even at this low moment, Mattie is quick to draw on her knowledge and the resources at hand to continue serving her grandfather, even in death. It's only after she's done this that she allows herself to grieve freely.

CHAPTER 20: SEPTEMBER 27TH, 1793

The next morning, Mattie is awakened by a hoarse voice echoing off the houses: "Bring out your dead!" A man in tattered rags is pushing a cart, laden with two corpses, down the street. Mattie's stomach clenches as she remembers Grandfather. She throws up as the details come back to her—yet "there could be no running from this [...] I was the only one left." Crying won't solve anything, and burial can't be delayed in this heat—Mattie learned that at Bush Hill.

During the epidemic, there were so many dead that the bodies were pushed on handcarts to a mass graveyard. Though it's horrifying, a shaken Mattie quickly faces reality—she has to provide for Grandfather's quick burial. Nobody else will.

Mattie runs to catch up with the cart before it disappears. A few minutes later, Grandfather's body is loaded onto it. The man pushing the cart gives Mattie time to fetch her grandmother's portrait and tuck it under Grandfather's arm for the journey. When Mattie sees that the man is having trouble managing Grandfather's weight, she taps him on the shoulder. He appraises Mattie quickly and silently moves aside to let her help.

The epidemic forces people into unlikely cooperation. The haggard man with the cart shows both the humaneness to accommodate Mattie and the humility to accept a young girl's help.

Mattie reflects that her grandfather's funeral procession ought to have been "loud and long, crowded with friends," but the streets are silent and empty. A splinter pierces Mattie's palm, and she cries again, realizing anew that Grandfather is gone.

The sad reality of Grandfather's journey to the graveyard is out of keeping with his colorful personality and valorous war service. Mattie's quickness to tears, though different from her stoic mother's response to hardship, is shown to be a valid way of coping with grief; it doesn't stop Mattie from doing what's necessary.

The burial square is busy—30 or 40 men are digging graves. Two men wrap Grandfather in a large cloth and rapidly sew it shut, then prepare to "fling it into the open grave." Suddenly, Mattie shouts, "Stop!" Everyone turns to look at her. She says that Grandfather shouldn't just be tossed into the grave—you can't bury someone without prayers.

Mattie is horrified by the impersonal detachment at the graveyard—something forced upon the gravediggers by the relentless flow of bodies. But Mattie doesn't just accept circumstances as she finds them; she speaks up.

A man speaks up softly, explaining that there are too many dead for separate funerals to be conducted. A minister will come later to pray for everyone. Though a "spiteful voice" hisses in Mattie's head to "shut up," she finds herself shoving the man and then seizing his shirt in her blistered hands. She tells him that he won't bury "Captain William Farnsworth Cook, of the Pennsylvanian Fifth Regiment" without a prayer.

Though Mattie still struggles with self-doubt, her love for her grandfather pushes her past it. She refuses to watch him be tossed into a mass grave without any ceremony. Her protest is not just for her grandfather, but for the thousands of others who face a similar fate.

Suddenly, the man who'd pushed the burial cart speaks up: "The lass is right." He withdraws a slim psalter from his pocket and asks Mattie if she can read. Mattie takes the worn book from him and stares at the crowd of grave diggers until they remove their caps and lay down their shovels. She finds the words "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want," and begins to read in a clear voice. Soon other voices join in, some men wiping their eyes by the end. Mattie thanks them, returns the book, and walks away.

In unlikely solidarity, the silent man with the cart speaks in her support. The forcefulness of Mattie's love and determination moves others to respond, too. She reads Psalm 23, one of the Bible's best known and loved passages. Her leadership in this moment—conducting her grandfather's funeral—shows her ability to confront an unprecedented situation with courage and grace.

Mattie wanders the deserted streets, wondering what to do. Should she find her way to the Ludingtons, her mother's friends, in the country? The orphan house? Helping at Bush Hill would remind her too much of Grandfather. Perhaps she should buy some food at the market and then hide at home until the frost hits—after all, "No one had a duty to me, and I had no claim on anyone else." Faint with hunger, Mattie heads for the market, but finds its stalls abandoned. There are no sellers to be seen—only rats.

Now that Grandfather is dead, Mattie has no one to turn to and nowhere to go. There is no one to care for her and no one for her to protect. She considers keeping it that way—just hiding away and hanging on to survival until the crisis has passed.

"Take inventory, check the pack and powder," Mattie tells herself. She's alone, there's no food, and the streets are unsafe. She figures the best thing to do is walk home, where at least she's safe. But when she passes the offices of the *Federal Gazette*, she's eager for a friendly face. She steps inside to greet Mr. Brown and finds him looking aged. He tells Mattie he has no time for social calls.

Mattie falls back on her grandfather's soldiering language as she assesses her situation. Even at this low point, her instinct is to evaluate her circumstances and determine the best course of action—showing how much she's grown in her independence.

Mattie asks Mr. Brown if she can place an advertisement in the *Gazette* inquiring about her mother. Mr. Brown replies that he'd like nothing better than to fulfill that request, but that the *Gazette* is the last paper in Philadelphia that's still printing, and he is reduced to printing on half-sheets. He wants to flee the city, but he must stay to print physician's notices and orders from the mayor. Mr. Brown buries his face in his hands.

Mattie has the clever instinct to advertise to try to find her mother, but, like all Philadelphia institutions, the newspaper is strained by the necessities of the epidemic. Mr. Brown has had to adapt his editorial model accordingly.

When Mattie prompts Mr. Brown, he finally looks up and says that, at the beginning of August, Philadelphia was the largest American city, with a population of 40,000. Now more than half the population has fled, and more than 3,000 are dead. Those who remain are beginning to starve, since few farmers dare to enter the city, and those who do are charging exorbitant prices. He tells Mattie to go home and pray for frost. Mattie decides not to tell him about Grandfather. She leaves the print shop.

The use of Mr. Brown's character is a clever way of taking stock of the epidemic and supplying context at this point in the story; a newspaper printer would likely be aware of the relevant facts and statistics. And the situation is truly dire.

On the street, Mattie is suddenly stopped by an older woman with a cane, scowling, with a cloth over her face, demanding what business Mattie has there. When Mattie inquires after some neighbors and explains that she recently recovered from the fever at Bush Hill, the woman screams at her to leave and knocks her into the dirt with her cane. Mattie stumbles numbly onward.

The woman's surprising hostility and violence provides another example of the epidemic's transformation of attitudes. People who, under normal circumstances, might be pleasant neighbors act cruelly under the pressures of fear and grief.

Mattie continues to wander the streets, recalling painful memories and wondering vaguely about death. Then she snaps herself out of it: "Grandfather would not be proud if he saw me acting so spineless. I needed to captain myself." Suddenly, she nearly trips over a broken doll in the street. As she picks it up, she hears whimpering through a doorway. When Mattie looks inside, she finds a small girl sucking her thumb, her hair tangled and her bare feet dirty. Mattie asks her if the doll belongs to her. "Broken," the little girl says. Mattie asks if the girl's parents are there. "Mama's broken too," the little girl answers.

Mattie begins to sink into self-absorbed morbidity. However, memories of Grandfather recall her to a survivor's frame of mind. And just at this moment, another needy person appears in Mattie's path—stirring up the brave, compassionate parts of her character just as she's tempted to hide from the world around her.

CHAPTER 21: SEPTEMBER 27TH, 1793

Tiny Nell's mother is dead, her body still in the house. Before she quite realizes what she's doing, Mattie is cradling the little girl. None of the neighbors can take in another child. Someone suggests looking for Reverend Allen's group—the Free African Society. The Society's meeting place will be a long walk, but not as far as the orphan house or the coffeehouse. She picks up Nell and starts walking.

Mattie sees Nell as an abandoned, helpless girl much like herself, prompting her to comfort the orphan and help her as best she can under the circumstances. Rather than losing herself in grief, Mattie makes the choice to come to the aid of someone who's even more vulnerable than she is.

Eventually, Mattie sees two black women walking ahead of her, ignoring the drunken taunts of some men nearby. The taller of the two women looks familiar. Suddenly Mattie screams, "Eliza!" and starts running, with Nell clinging to her for dear life. One of the drunken men intercepts Mattie, inviting her for a "dance," but Nell bites the man's hand, then resumes sucking her thumb. "Glad you're on my side," Mattie tells Nell as she keeps running.

Mattie finally has a hope of reconnecting with Eliza and no longer being so alone. The drunken men are a reminder of the unscrupulous people who still lurk in the city, looking to take advantage of the vulnerable. Evidently, even little Nell has a sharp survival instinct in common with Mattie.

Mattie has lost sight of the two women. Nell is getting heavy. She speaks to a tired-looking woman who's hanging out her laundry. The woman directs her into a nearby house. Mattie goes inside and talks to a young man who's desperately fanning his wife. His children are gnawing rolls. The man explains that the rolls were delivered by "Saints. Angels […] from the Free African Society," and that Mattie's Eliza might be one of them. Mattie runs back to the street and, thinking of no other solution, cups her hands around her mouth and shouts, "Eliza!" until the name echoes off the buildings. Soon a faint voice responds, and before long, Eliza emerges from a door. Mattie runs into her arms.

Mattie's pursuit of the women, and the man's description of them, gives insight into just how greatly the members of the Free African Society were in demand during the epidemic. The members bravely provided food and nursing care to victims all over the city and also cared for the dead, a standout example of compassionate service during the crisis. At last, Mattie finds Eliza and feels the relief of connection with someone who's like family to her.

CHAPTER 22: SEPTEMBER 27TH, 1793

In Eliza's embrace, Mattie is overcome with grief about Mother, Grandfather, and all her suffering. Eliza tells Mattie it's getting dark, and they'll talk about everything later. She gives Nell a roll and offers to carry the child, but Nell clings to Mattie's neck. Soon they reach the home of her brother, Joseph, a cooper. Before they go upstairs, Mattie has to know her mother's fate. Eliza assures her that Lucille survived the fever and intended to follow Mattie to the Ludingtons' farm. Mattie wants to find her at once, but Eliza tells Mattie, "you can only climb one mountain at a time." They should eat supper first.

After battling to survive and finding herself alone, Mattie finally has a chance to grieve openly. Meanwhile, Nell is already forming a bond with Mattie. Mattie also gets some confirmation of her mother's whereabouts, but Eliza wisely reminds Mattie of what she's already learned—that crisis must be encountered one step at a time.

Eliza leads Mattie and Nell into Joseph's small, tidy rooms above the cooperage. She explains that Joseph's wife died last week, and Joseph is still in bed, weak and grieving. His twin boys, Robert and William, haven't taken ill. She hugs the boys and introduces Mattie and Nell. Then a tiny, aged woman enters the room, leaning on a cane, and pokes Mattie's arm, demanding to know who she is. When Eliza explains Mattie's and Nell's appearance, the woman snorts, "So you've got to feed them, too?" Mattie says she doesn't intend to take anything from Eliza, but the woman says she can't leave without food, then promises to return tomorrow. Eliza explains that the woman is Mother Smith, of the Free African Society, who's watching Joseph's boys while Eliza volunteers.

Mattie is welcomed into a different family setting for the time being, although this family, too, is grief-stricken—a reminder that the yellow fever epidemic spread across all classes and demographics, with devastating effect. Though Mother Smith is frank and forthright about their own distressed circumstances, that doesn't stop her from insisting that Mattie receive hospitality.

Eliza ladles stew for Mattie, but Mattie pours half of her serving back, saying that the boys need it more than she does. Mattie watches the three children eat and starts to form a plan, but she puts it aside, knowing she needs to "deal with each hour as it came, one step at a time." Once the children are in bed, Eliza settles Mattie in a chair with a mug of lemonade and demands the full story. Mattie fills in all the details of her adventure with Grandfather, her own illness, and Grandfather's death. She cries, believing she did everything wrong and that Grandfather's death is somehow her fault. Eliza reassures her.

Mattie's readiness to go without food shows how much she's grown from the relatively spoiled girl at the beginning of the story. Also, her quickness to set aside her newfound "plan" for the time being shows that she's less inclined to indulge in daydreams, having learned the importance of facing up to the crisis at hand. She's still burdened with grief, and more apt to criticize her perceived failures than to recognize how much she's achieved in recent weeks.

Eliza watches Nell sleeping and tells Mattie that both she and Nell should probably go to the orphan house. Mattie begs Eliza to believe that she's not a little girl anymore and can take care of herself. Eliza says they'll discuss it in the morning. Mattie helps her mend Robert's and William's clothes while Eliza fills her in on her work with the Free African Society.

In contrast to the beginning of the book, when Mattie mostly thought about her own dreams and desires, now her view of freedom and maturity is tied to caring for someone more helpless than herself.

Dr. Benjamin Rush had written to the Free African Society a few weeks ago, asking for help. The doctor believed that Africans could not get yellow fever. Although this turned out to be untrue, Reverend Allen believed that this was an opportunity "for black people to show we are every bit as good and important and useful as white people." The Society began organizing to visit and care for the sick. Proudly, Eliza acknowledges that the Society "has done a remarkable job [...caring] for thousands of people without taking notice of color." However, black people have gotten sick, too.

The Reverend Richard Allen had been born a slave in Philadelphia in 1760, before gradual emancipation was enacted. He bought his own freedom and later became the first bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. With Absalom Jones, a fellow ex-slave and the first ordained African American Episcopal priest, he founded the Free Africans and directed the benevolent organization in contributing to its broader community during the epidemic, at great cost to its members.

After a silence, Mattie asks Eliza, "Are we going to die?" Eliza retorts that she can't die; she has too much work to do. She counsels Mattie not to despair. All they have to do is find a way to survive until the frost comes.

Eliza is not being naïve; obviously, they could very well die. But her point is that such questions don't help. The only thing they can do is keep fighting to survive, one step at a time, until relief comes. Anything else is a potentially paralyzing speculation.

CHAPTER 23: SEPTEMBER 28TH, 1793

The next morning, Mattie wakes to find that Nell has wet the bed they're sharing. She scrubs Nell's and the twins' bedding in the courtyard while the children solemnly watch. By the time she's washed the children, as well, Eliza has left for her Society duties, and Mother Smith has arrived to help. She criticizes Mattie's cleaning, stitching, and childcare skills, prompting Mattie to think that her mother and Mother Smith "would have gotten along famously." Mattie partially burns the stew and skips supper to make sure the children get enough.

Mattie helps care for Eliza's nephews and Nell. Even though her efforts are found wanting by Mother Smith—who reminds her of her own picky mother—she reacts differently than she would have a couple of months ago. She doesn't talk back, sulk, or take refuge in daydreams of escape. She just keeps trying, and she even forgoes her own supper to make sure the children are provided for.

As Mother Smith is leaving that night, she sees Mattie patting a sleeping Nell and warns, "Don't love her [...] She's not yours. You can't keep her." It's cruel, she says, to act like a mother to Nell and then turn her over to the orphan house. Mattie lies awake thinking about her words. She alternates between protesting and agreeing with Mother Smith that she's being selfish.

Mother Smith has much more experience than Mattie does in caring for the needy, and her warning is well meant. Mattie might not be equipped to care for a small child, and delaying the inevitable might indeed be selfish. Such painful choices faced many people in the aftermath of epidemic; even if someone's heart was willing, it didn't necessarily mean they were prepared to offer the resources needed.

Early the next morning, Mattie talks to Eliza about Nell. She agrees with Mother Smith that she has to think about Nell's future. If Lucille is alive, she won't want another child to raise. And if she isn't, what will Mattie do then? It's only fair to take Nell to the orphan house. Eliza agrees that, if this is Mattie's decision, she shouldn't delay. They should take Nell at once.

Eliza respects Mattie's ability to make this decision, offering only her support. This shows that Eliza acknowledges Mattie's growth and greater independence, even as she doesn't downplay the difficult odds Mattie and Nell will face either way.

As Eliza, Nell, and Mattie walk to the orphan house, Mattie tries to distract herself from heartbreak, telling herself that she's doing the right thing for Nell; but it's to no avail. When they arrive at the orphan house, the door is answered by a desperate-looking woman with three screaming children attached to her. Mattie has to shout to make herself heard. The woman asks if anyone else is available to take the girl; they are overwhelmed with fever orphans right now, and the orphanage "has become the house of last resort."

Mattie finds that it's very difficult to get the heart and reason to fully align. She already has maternal (or sisterly) feelings toward Nell that can't simply be quashed. Again, she inevitably sees herself in Nell's plight. As it turns out, however, outside circumstances might have decided things for Mattie—Nell is far from the only child orphaned or abandoned.

Mattie looks into Nell's trusting eyes and "[wants] to dance." She thanks the woman and dashes down the steps with Nell before the woman can change her mind. She tells Eliza that Nell needs someone who can comb her hair and tell her stories. Eliza agrees that they are all better off together.

In contrast to the beginning of the story, independence for Mattie looks like taking on the heavy burden of caring for a small child when she's not yet an adult herself. Fighting for survival sometimes involves resolving the tension between head and heart and forging a path when it doesn't seem reasonable.

They pass the Ogilvie mansion, and Eliza tells Nell a story she's heard about Colette Ogilvie. Colette almost died from the fever, but on her supposed deathbed, she'd revealed that she had recently eloped with her French tutor, while her mother had believed she was engaged to someone else. Colette refused to leave town until her husband was allowed to join them. Mattie laughs uproariously as Eliza tells the story.

Mattie finds some comic relief in hearing what happened after Colette Ogilvie's infamous collapse. The anecdote illustrates that mother-daughter conflict is common in all kinds of households, and that the epidemic has brought many buried tensions to the forefront.

As they're walking down the street, Mattie notices that daisies are floating through the air. She looks up and sees someone pushing flowers through a cracked-open window. She realizes it's Mr. Peale's house. After the window closes, she sees a tall, lean shadow moving and smiles at the memory of Nathaniel—"He was alive and still sending me flowers."

Mattie is further heartened by an apparent secret message from Nathaniel, who's quarantined at the Peale house. She has reason to hope that life might regain some normalcy after the epidemic passes.

Joseph and Eliza agree that Mattie shouldn't return to the coffeehouse to live alone. Joseph is now strong enough to care for the children during the day, so Eliza recruits Mattie to join her in her Society relief work.

Mattie has regained a measure of family life after the loss of her grandfather and her separation from her mother. And, unlike when the Quaker Mrs. Bowles first invited her to help, Mattie now feels free to focus her energies on serving others in need.

CHAPTER 24: OCTOBER 1ST, 1793

Mattie is unprepared for the heartache among the sick. Dying strangers at Bush Hill were sad; a dying mother surrounded by her children leaves Mattie in tears. But Mattie faithfully accompanies Eliza from dawn to dark. The heat and the fever persist, and Philadelphia is awash with rumors. When she hears the rumors, Eliza just shakes her head and tells Mattie they have work to do.

Even though Mattie has endured her own heartache and witnessed many deaths, her relief work exposes her to one tragedy after another. Eliza continues to navigate through the inevitable rumors, which can't be helped, by focusing on what can.

One day Eliza is infuriated by the unjust prices charged by Mr. Barrett, the apothecary. She says that pharmacists and coffin makers are the only ones benefiting from the epidemic. They go on to tend to several suffering families. Mattie stays by Eliza's side all day, prompting Eliza to raise her eyebrow and say, "Never knew you to look for extra work."

Inevitably, some people attempt to profit off of others' suffering. Eliza notices the changes in Mattie; whereas Mattie once loved to sleep in and had to be prodded to do her work, now she seeks out opportunities to do more.

When the two return to the cooperage, eager for supper, they find the house dark and silent. They discover Joseph sitting before the fire with his face in his hands; he's weeping. The twins are panting on the bed; Nell is feverish, too. Seeing their condition, even Eliza is shaken. Mattie thinks about what to do. Her attention is drawn to the window, and she realizes that the children need fresher air. She tells Eliza, "We'll take them to the coffeehouse."

The children finally succumb to the fever, too. This time, even unshakeable Eliza is stunned. But Mattie doesn't wait for anyone else's guidance or direction. She recognizes what's needed and makes a decision, using the one thing she has to her name—the coffeehouse.

CHAPTER 25: OCTOBER 14TH, 1793

Mother Smith sends a mule cart to the cooperage, and Mattie and Eliza pack the twins and Nell securely inside. Mattie "asked my heart to be hard," knowing she can't be helpful if she falls apart. Mother Smith supports Joseph as they watch the cart drive off into the darkened city.

Mattie's hardening heart is reminiscent of Lucille. She is learning that sometimes being strong for someone else requires an emotional toughness that looks unfeeling from the outside. As she cares for Nell and the boys, she's gaining empathy for her own mother.

At the coffeehouse, Mattie and Eliza wrestle the mattress inside and settle the children in the cooler front room. As Eliza prays, Mattie paces. She stubs her toe against an object in the dark and discovers it's Nathaniel's flower painting. She presses the painting against her cheek and wills Nathaniel to stay safely inside.

Though Mattie is certainly afraid, Nathaniel's painting steadies Mattie with reminders of happier times and the promise of better in the future.

Eliza wakes Mattie up a short time later, anxious about the children's condition. Mattie reassures her: "We can do this. I know exactly what you're going to tell me to do. Stoke the fire and prepare to wash more dirty sheets." Caring for the children is uniquely difficult, though. As soon as one twin is made comfortable, the other jolts awake, screaming. Nell has nightmares and doesn't recognize Mattie. One day blends into the next as they try desperately to cool the children's feverish bodies, bathing and fanning them constantly. They run low on food and medicines, and the purgative remedies have little effect.

Once again, Mattie doesn't need direction in order to care for the children. She's now experienced in tending fever victims, and she can predict their needs and even tell Eliza what they should do. Nevertheless, the children's plight is especially poignant—in some respects the hardest they've faced—both because of Mattie's and Eliza's love for them and because of their shortage of resources.

As the children's condition worsens, Eliza frets that they should be bled. Mattie argues that even though Dr. Rush swears by the bleeding remedy, the French doctors reject it, and she survived without it. Others, like Joseph, have survived in spite of having been bled, not because of it. Surely, she argues, the insights of French West Indian doctors are most valuable—they have much more experience with yellow fever. Finally, Eliza agrees.

Mattie draws on the knowledge she's gained about yellow fever in order to talk Eliza out of a potentially dangerous course. This shows Mattie's openness to newer ideas as well as the confidence she's gained in weighing options and making decisions recently.

The children's urgent needs end their discussion. After a wearisome night, Mattie goes outside for water, struggling to keep her eyes open and fearful that the suffering is never going to end. She tries to draw the bucket up from the well, but lacks the strength even for this. She stares at the bedraggled garden, thinking of her younger self planting the bean seeds so long ago. She remembers Blanchard's **yellow balloon** and wonders what became of her former hopes. Finally, she lays down in the garden and falls asleep.

Despite her newfound confidence, Mattie is nearing the end of her capacities. Her younger self, including her hopeful memories like Blanchard's balloon that promised Mattie an unfettered future, now seems distant and naïve. Exhausted, she just can't press on.

CHAPTER 26: OCTOBER 23RD, 1793

Mattie is awakened from her garden nap by Silas the cat slapping her cheek and kneading her stomach with his paws. When she opens her eyes, Mattie sees that "an early winter quill had etched an icy pattern over the garden." She is shivering, and not from a fever. It's frost. She tells Silas she must be dreaming, but as she inhales the brittle air and sees the sparkling yard, she realizes it's real. She calls for Eliza, who stumbles into the yard in alarm. When Eliza realizes what's happened, they jump up and down for joy. Their fatigue vanished, Mattie and Eliza haul the mattress with the children outside so that they can cool down in the frosty air.

Mattie awakens to a different world—the longed-for frost has arrived. It's suitably foreign- and beautiful-looking after the relentlessly hot summer—a dream come true and an unmistakable sign of real hope. They can truly celebrate for the first time since the epidemic began.

At midday, Joseph sends a messenger bearing food, including eggs, bread, and beef. Farmers are already returning to the city market. Mattie and Eliza slowly savor the food. Later, Mattie is awakened from a nap to find Eliza pushing furniture outside. It's likely to frost again tonight, and she wants to expose all the furniture to the cold to destroy the pestilence. Mattie thinks it's silly, but she helps Eliza. The children's fevers have broken, and they sleep and eat readily.

Life rapidly begins to regain some normalcy, with ample food, the possibility of sleep, and a turning-point for the sick children. While Eliza's treatment of the furniture is probably unnecessary, it certainly won't hurt, and it further shows what a critical, life-saving development the frost is.

The next morning Joseph visits. He immediately embraces all three children, and Mattie and Eliza weep. Joseph brings handmade toys for each child. He thanks Eliza and Mattie for saving his boys. The three sit contentedly on the porch drinking cider. Joseph suggests that Mattie search for news of her mother in the reopened market. Mattie asks Eliza for permission, and Eliza reminds her that she doesn't need it. Mattie can choose for herself.

Happy reunions continue. Mattie is now free to turn her thoughts to her mother's welfare—and she also realizes that she's mature enough to make her own decisions about that. After the maturing experiences of the last few months, she no longer has to come and go on other people's orders.

The market is overflowing with news and cheer. Mattie wanders to the Eplers' stall, and they give her two fat hens and some eggs for free, promising to ask around for news of Lucille. Mattie also buys produce and candy and continues to wander, wondering what she should do next. If it turns out that Mother is dead, she'll have to sell the coffeehouse and become a scullery maid.

Now that life is returning to normal, Mattie is free to think about possibilities for the future. Whereas she'd once thought of independence as unfettered freedom, like a sailing balloon, now she realizes that it comes with heavy burdens.

Mattie happens to catch her reflection in the haberdasher's window, and when she looks into her own eyes, she suddenly changes her mind: "I was Matilda Cook, daughter of Lucille, granddaughter of Captain William Farnsworth Cook [...] I would set my own course."

Seeing her reflection turns Mattie's thoughts to her own identity and abilities. Significantly, she no longer thinks of herself as disconnected from her loved ones; rather, her self-image and future hopes are tied up with those who've helped make her who she is. The crisis has helped her see this.

Someone touches Mattie's elbow, and her heart jumps. It's Nathaniel. Mattie blushes and tries to collect her thoughts. Nathaniel offers to walk her home. Mattie's self-consciousness fades as they walk and talk. Nathaniel survived the epidemic by staying quarantined in Mr. Peale's house. They talk about how everything seems to have changed. Nathaniel jokes that Mattie's mother will be home soon and will try to marry Mattie off to a lawyer. Mattie says she won't let her.

Mattie and Nathaniel reconnect at last. Mattie now has greater confidence as they talk, and she's also confident that if Lucille were to object to them as a couple, Mattie would be capable of asserting herself.

CHAPTER 27: OCTOBER 30TH, 1793

Over the next week, Nathaniel calls frequently, and their walks take him and Mattie farther and farther afield. Meanwhile, hundreds of people return to Philadelphia. Mattie wishes she could tell the well-fed returnees "to hush. It felt like they were dancing on a grave," compared to the gaunt, pale survivors. Eliza tells Mattie not to be bitter, but Mattie finds it hard.

Even as things return to normal, Mattie and the other fever survivors can't easily forget the crisis or its lasting effects. By contrast, those who escaped the epidemic aren't burdened by such memories, and Mattie is rankled by their carefree attitudes.

Eliza suggests giving a small thanksgiving feast with Joseph and the twins. Mother Smith and Nathaniel come, too. Even Mother Smith admires Mattie's feast. Later, Joseph asks Mattie if she has decided on a price for the coffeehouse. He takes for granted that Mattie will need the dowry money, and that Eliza must find a new job. Listening to Joseph, Eliza, and Nathaniel argue about her prospects, Mattie decides this won't do—"it was just like listening to Mother and Grandfather making the decisions while I stood to the side."

This gathering of survivors has a family atmosphere. Like Lucille welcoming her father-in-law and Eliza into the household, Mattie, too, has a knack for gathering fellow survivors around her, showing she's watched and learned a lot from her mother. However, just like her relatives, Mattie's new family members think they know what's best for her, and she's been through too much to submit to that.

"I'm not selling," Mattie announces loudly. Everyone falls silent. Mattie explains that she's reopening the coffeehouse tomorrow, and that she's taking on a partner—someone whom she can trust and who can keep her on the right path. She tells Eliza she wants her to be that partner. Eliza tells Mattie that she doesn't have the money to buy a partnership from her. Mattie explains that she doesn't want Eliza's money; she wants to share the business with her. This way, the twins and Nell can stay at the coffeehouse as well.

Mattie finally announces the plan she'd hatched earlier but had kept to herself during the height of the crisis: to re-launch the coffeehouse in such a way that Eliza, her family, and Nell can be supported, too. This shows Mattie's precocious but hard-won independence, as well as the business sense she's inherited from her mother. Mattie still has her coffeehouse dreams, but she's now channeled them toward sustaining the family business and benefiting others, not just herself.

When Eliza is hesitant, Mother Smith finally bangs her cane on the floor and insists that Eliza will take the partnership. She and Joseph encourage them to have the partnership written up legally so that people won't talk. Eliza looks around the table and finally accepts. She and Mattie hug.

Mother Smith and Joseph are concerned that everything be legally transparent so that people can't make racially motivated criticisms of Eliza's new position. For Mattie, sharing the business with Eliza is just a confirmation of the special position Eliza holds in her life.

There's a knock at the door. A messenger has brought a sack of coffee beans for "the proprietor of Cook's." Mattie smooths her skirt and formally accepts the sample beans. When she gets back, Nathaniel teasingly imitates her. Mattie points out that she'd better act the part of a business owner, but she can't help laughing.

Mattie is not yet 15 years old, and for all her newfound maturity, being the proprietor of a coffeehouse necessarily involves a certain amount of acting. Still, Mattie is good-natured about it, showing she's come a long way from her indignation over being called "little Mattie."

CHAPTER 28: NOVEMBER 10TH, 1793

Three days later, every chair in the coffeehouse is filled, and "the air [is] thick again with arguments, tobacco smoke, and the smell of fresh coffee and cakes." Mattie circulates with free samples of apple cake. She's full of ideas, too—they could deliver small cakes to the State House with handbills advertising the coffeehouse, for example. Nathaniel offers to paint a sign for the front of the store. As he leaves for his work at Peale's, Eliza concedes that Nathaniel is "useful, for a painter."

It doesn't take long for the coffeehouse to revive, showing the city's readiness to get back to normal. Mattie immediately puts some of her new ideas in motion, showing her creativity and ambition. And Nathaniel is winning even Eliza's heart by showing himself to have a practical side. He's here to stay and shows his steadfast support of Mattie.

After her next round of refilling coffee cups, Mattie surveys the room and admires Nathaniel's bright paintings. Next spring, she might buy the adjacent lot so that she can expand. Everything is going well, and yet "I felt hollow." She has lost so much. Before she can dwell on memories, however, Nathaniel bursts into the coffeehouse again and reports that President Washington has returned and is coming down the street. Everyone pushes their way out the door to see for themselves.

Though Mattie is excited about her plans going forward, she also recognizes that the tragedies of the epidemic will never leave her. Success and independence can't make up for human loss.

Nathaniel and Mattie watch the President riding down the street, an assurance that the fever is truly over. Mattie spontaneously kisses Nathaniel's cheek. As people drift back toward the coffeehouse, Nathaniel notices a "scraggly parade of wagons and carriages" trailing the president's entourage. One carriage pulls up to the coffeehouse. The driver and a woman are helping a frail, gray-haired woman out of the carriage. When the woman raises her face, Mattie sees that Mother has come home.

President Washington's reappearance in the temporary capital assures everyone that it's safe to live here once again—hence those who waited for this signal before reentering Philadelphia. Among these is Mother—looking very different from the strong, stoic woman at the beginning of the story.

CHAPTER 29: NOVEMBER 10TH, 1793

Mattie dashes into her mother's arms. Lucille feels "like a frail bird." At last she breaks away from Mattie and introduces her friend, Mrs. Ludington. Mattie, Mrs. Ludington, and Nathaniel escort her into the coffeehouse. As they do so, the customers fall silent, and each man stands out of respect for Lucille. Eliza comes from the kitchen, crying, to embrace Lucille. She pours coffee for them all and leaves them in the kitchen to catch up.

Lucille's reappearance is moving for everyone, especially because the epidemic has clearly taken a toll on her. Even though the family is reunited, there's immediately a sense that things will never be quite as they were before.

Mrs. Ludington explains that Lucille is still recovering from the fever; the doctors say it's a miracle she survived. When she came to the Ludington farm and realized Mattie was missing, Lucille was "frantic," taking one of their horses to search for Mattie herself. The Ludingtons found her beside the road two days later, near death. Her heart was damaged by the exertion; the doctor has instructed her to "live a life of leisure." Mrs. Ludington wants her to sell the coffeehouse and move to the country.

The yellow fever exacted a double toll on Lucille. After surviving the first time, she nearly died from exposure and stress in her desperate search for Mattie. If it could possibly be doubted, this underlines Lucille's deep love for Mattie, despite her restrained and sometimes prickly exterior. While Mattie was gaining strength and independence during the epidemic, Lucille used up her strength in her search for Mattie—resulting, ultimately, in a loss of independence.

After Mrs. Ludington leaves, Mattie tells Lucille about Grandfather's death. At last, Mother's eyes well with tears as she tells Mattie how desperately she searched for her. Mattie hushes her and cradles her mother's head on her shoulder, assuring her that she no longer has to worry. As she continues to tell her mother the details of her survival, she marvels at the stillness of her mother's hands. She "had a sudden sense of what was to come and [...] blinked away the tears."

For the first time, Mattie comforts and supports Mother, not the other way around. This is a clear picture of the role reversal that's occurred between the two of them and brings their relationship, once so combative, full circle. Even as Mattie accepts this new reality, she grieves. With her newfound independence comes the pain of losing the strong, independent mother who helped make her who she is.

EPILOGUE: DECEMBER 11TH, 1793

Mattie awakens to the sound of Silas pouncing on a mouse. It's an icy winter morning, but Mattie knows that "no one else is going to get the house stirring." She hurriedly gets dressed, careful not to wake Nell. In the next bed, Mother is still sleeping. Mattie lets her rest—she'd coughed late into the night. Across the hall, Eliza, Robert, and William are still sleeping, too.

In a stark contrast to the beginning of the book, Mattie is the first one up—and she's happy to be so. Instead of Mother scolding Mattie to get out of bed, Mattie gladly grants Mother some extra rest. And the household has expanded with the addition of the three small children—suggesting that the coffeehouse will potentially outlive even Mattie's ambitions.

Mattie starts the fire in the kitchen, makes coffee for everyone, and sets the table. She spends a few solitary moments on the front stoop, watching the lamplighter extinguish the lamps. There's no sign of the terror Philadelphia has endured. Yet in these early mornings, Mattie sometimes "[listens] for Polly's giggle or Grandfather's voice."

On the surface, life in Philadelphia has gotten back to normal, but those who survived the epidemic will never forget it. The very fact that Mattie is the one preparing the coffeehouse for the new day shows how drastically things have changed within just a few months.

Mattie smiles as the sun rises—"a giant **balloon** filled with prayers and hopes and promise." She stands and "[shakes] the idleness out of" her skirts, ready for the new day.

Mattie hasn't forgotten the hopeful dreams that she has always associated with Blanchard's hot-air balloon. Now, however, she no longer yearns to escape her responsibilities like a balloon sailing into oblivion. Instead, her hopes are anchored to her love for her family and her obligations to them. Her dreams and ambitions have been enriched and broadened by her survival story, not crushed.

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