

# Tomorrow, When the War Began



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JOHN MARSDEN

Marsden was born in Victoria, Australia, but spent most of his early life living in the rural town of Devonport, Tasmania, an island off Australia's south coast. When Marsden was 10, he moved to Sydney and went to the King's School, Parramatta, a highly respected boarding school for boys. From King's School, Marsden enrolled at Sydney University, where he studied law and the arts. He soon dropped out due to little academic interest and struggled with his mental health for some time. Marsden suffered from severe depression and even became suicidal, and he was admitted to an inpatient psychiatric hospital. In his 20s, Marsden worked numerous odd jobs, all of which were unsatisfying, until he began teaching in 1978. Marsden worked as an English teacher at Geelong Grammar School's Timbertop, a prominent boarding school in Victoria, where he wrote his first young adult novel, *So Much to Tell You*, in 1987. Marsden hoped to spark his students' interest in reading with the novel, and it proved to be a huge success, both critically and commercially. *So Much to Tell You* went on to win Book of the Year by the Children's Book Council of Australia, and Marsden continued to write. He published *Letters from the Inside* in 1991, which won the Fanfare Horn Book Best Book award, and he followed it up with *Take My Word for It* in 1992, which was shortlisted for the Children's Book of the Year Award for Older Readers by the Children's Book Council of Australia. In 1993, Marsden began the Tomorrow series and published *Tomorrow, When the War Began*, which proved to be his biggest success yet. The Tomorrow series is largely considered to be one of the most successful series written in all of Australia's literary history and has won numerous awards and prizes. Marsden is the author of over 40 books and has sold millions of copies around the world; however, since 2005 he has backed off writing and returned to teaching. Marsden opened an alternative school, Candlebark, in Victoria, where he currently serves as principal. He later opened a secondary school focused solely on the arts, the Alice Miller School, also in Victoria.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

*Tomorrow, When the War Began* is set in an unspecified modern time in Australia, and as such does not directly engage with any particular historical events. That is not to say that the book has no relation to history, however. Marsden himself has said that he was inspired to write the book after seeing Australian teenagers paying their respects to the efforts of past generations at an ANZAC day parade—an Australian and New

Zealand annual day of remembrance for all Australians and New Zealanders who served and suffered in wars, conflicts, or peacekeeping operations. Marsden found himself wondering how modern teenagers—who were often maligned at the time as being lazy, drug-addicted, and so on—might react to finding themselves in the midst of a similar conflict. He felt that the modern youth would similarly respond with courage, responsibility, and heroism, and depicted just that in his novel.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

*Tomorrow, When the War Began* is the first of seven novels in John Marsden's young adult Tomorrow series. The series documents an unknown foreign power's invasion of Australia and chronicles the experiences of Ellie, a local teenager, and her young friends during the war. Additional titles in the series include *The Dead of the Night*, *A Killing Frost*, and the final Tomorrow book, *The Night is for Hunting*. Marsden followed up the Tomorrow series with a trilogy called The Ellie Chronicles, including *While I Live*, *Incurable*, and *Circle of Flight*, which focus solely on Ellie and her experiences healing after the war is finally over. Other Australian young adult novels that also deal with issues of war and survival include the Once series by Morris Gleitzman, including *Once*, *Then*, *Now*, *After*, *Soon*, and *Maybe*. Gleitzman's novels follow Felix, a young Jewish boy from Poland, who tries to find his missing parents during World War II. Much of *Tomorrow, When the War Began* takes place in the remote Australian bush, a setting that is explored both physically and thematically in several Australian novels, including *Thirst* by Lizzie Wilcock, Jeannie Gunn's *We of the Never-Never*, and *I, the Aboriginal* by Douglas Lockwood.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Tomorrow, When the War Began*
- **When Written:** 1993
- **Where Written:** Victoria, Australia
- **When Published:** 1993
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary Australian Literature
- **Genre:** Young Adult Novel
- **Setting:** A fictional town in Australia
- **Climax:** Ellie, the protagonist, blows up a petrol tanker and destroys the bridge that serves as a major highway for the invading foreign army, weakening the army's stronghold in the region.
- **Antagonist:** The foreign invading army
- **Point of View:** First Person

## EXTRA CREDIT

**The Silver Screen.** In 2011, *Tomorrow, When the War Began* was made into a movie by Australian screenwriter and director, Stuart Beattie. The film debuted at number one in both Australia and New Zealand, and it was Australia's highest grossing domestic film that year.

**Odd Jobs.** Before Marsden began teaching in 1978, he struggled to find the right job. He worked a series of odd jobs, including an assistant at a mortuary, a pizza deliveryman, and a security guard at a sideshow.



## PLOT SUMMARY

Teenaged friends Corrie and Ellie want to go on a five-day camping trip to “Hell”—the ultra-remote wilderness near their rural Australian town. After finally convincing their parents to let them go, they embark on the trip, along with their friends Homer, Lee, Kevin, Robyn, and Fiona. They will miss the Commemoration Day Show, an annual livestock festival in town, but none of them mind too much, since all Commemoration Day Shows are the same.

After a few days in Hell, strange things begin to happen. One night, Ellie wakes to several jets flying overhead, and the next morning, Robyn says that she saw hundreds of planes during the night. They begin to think that their secret camping spot isn't so secret after all.

When the friends get back to Ellie's house, they're shocked to find that her dogs are dead outside, and her parents are nowhere to be found. The power is also out and the phone lines are down. The group quickly goes to Homer's house and finds it in much the same condition: completely empty but completely untouched. It's like everyone left to go to the Commemoration Day Show and never came back. Ellie suddenly remembers the planes they heard flying overhead in Hell—and the fact that the planes didn't have lights, which means that they were intentionally flying into town under the cover of darkness. The friends decide that the only logical explanation is that their town has been invaded and war is afoot.

The friends check on each of their houses. At Corrie's house, they find a fax sitting in the fax machine, which her dad must have sent before the power and phone lines went out. In the message, he explains that he doesn't know what's going on. Some people are saying that it's all just “Army manoeuvres,” but he urges Corrie to hide out in the wilderness.

After checking on Robyn's house on the edge of town, the friends decide to split up and set a time to meet back up later. Fiona and Homer will check on Fiona's house, while Robyn and Lee will go to Lee's parent's place. Meanwhile, Ellie, Corrie, and Kevin go to the Showground—the only part of the town that's not plunged in darkness—and quickly realize that all of the

town's residents are being held there.

When shots ring out, Ellie realizes that she, Corrie, and Kevin are the target. But as the friends run away—with soldiers in hot pursuit—Corrie trips over a lawnmower and injures herself. Thinking quickly, Ellie and Kevin light the lawnmower on fire; it blows up just as the soldiers are closing in on them. Ellie can't believe that she has probably just killed three people, but Homer tells her she didn't have a choice. This is war, he says, and “normal rules don't apply.”

The group (minus Robyn and Lee) pause to rest at Corrie's house. But when a helicopter circles the house, the friends hurry to a nearby shed, worried that they are being hunted by the invading army. Suddenly, a jet appears and fires two rockets at Corrie's house. One is a direct hit, exploding the house on contact, and the other hits the steep hillside behind the shed where they are hiding—they don't know if the second rocket was aimed at the shed or not. Homer suggests that he and Ellie go into town at dark and look for Robyn and Lee, while the others prepare to evade the enemy army by escaping back into Hell.

After sunset, Ellie and Homer find Robyn hiding in her house with her dad's rifle, and she tells them that Lee has been shot. He's alive, but he's at his parents' place where patrol is heavy, and he can't walk. After hatching a plan, they steal a bulldozer from the local garage and proceed to rescue Lee, who's in rough shape. Along the way, Ellie runs over an enemy Jeep and knows that she's just killed even more people. Homer's friend Chris joins the group, and they head for Hell.

As the group camps out in the wilderness, they learn from a radio broadcast that the war is aimed at “reducing imbalances within the region.” Robyn explains that the war is about equality: many surrounding countries are poor, but Australia does nothing to help. She doesn't agree with the war, but she can understand it. It is possible to be both right and wrong, Robyn says, but she thinks both sides are wrong in this case.

In the midst of all the chaos, Ellie grapples with her romantic feelings for both Lee and Homer. She likes Lee because he's smart and intriguing, but Homer is handsome, and she loves his new take-charge attitude. Homer likes Fiona, though, which complicates things.

One day, Ellie stumbles upon a hut, which she realizes belonged to the Hermit—the notorious murderer who was rumored to have lived in Hell. She brings Lee back with her to investigate. They uncover a coroner's report, which claims that the Hermit's wife and infant son had been burned in a fire and shot in the head. The report says they were either burned in a fire first, and the Hermit shot them to spare their suffering in the absence of medical care, or, he shot them first and then tried to burn them to cover up the evidence. There is no definitive proof either way, but Lee also finds a letter from the Hermit's mother-in-law, and it expresses her support of him. She says

she is glad that the jury found him innocent, even if the judge didn't. Later, Ellie thinks about Hell and the reasons that the Hermit felt he had to hide here. Hell isn't a place, she decides, but is instead something people carry with them.

With each passing day, the group gathers more information about the invasion by spying on the enemy soldiers and the Showground. They learn that everyone in the town is being held at the Showground, and the soldiers are treating them humanely. The soldiers are looking to have a "clean invasion" so that they don't draw the negative attention of the United Nations or the Red Cross. The friends know that they have three choices: they can hide out in Hell and see what happens, they can try to help their parents escape from the Showgrounds, or they can try to fight back against the enemy somehow. They all agree on the latter.

Resolved to fight back against the invaders, the friends decide to blow up a bridge, which is how enemy soldiers and vehicles access the area. Homer and Lee go down to the cattle farm near the bridge and start a stampede to create a diversion, while Ellie and Fiona drive a stolen gasoline tanker under the bridge and set the tanker on fire, dodging bullets all the while. The girls flee the scene, and it's implied that the tanker explodes, destroying the bridge with it.

The girls meet up with Homer and Lee and head to Ellie's house in town, where they are surprised to find the others standing over Corrie by the back shed. Corrie has been shot in the back, Kevin says, and they have to take her to the hospital, which is still functioning in town. Homer says they will have to drop Corrie at the hospital and run, but Kevin refuses—Corrie is his girlfriend, and he won't abandon her. He loads her into the car and drives off, and the rest of the friends return to Hell. Their story isn't over, Ellie writes, and they don't know what will happen next. All she knows is that they must stick together so they don't end up like the Hermit.



## CHARACTERS

**Ellie** – Homer and Corrie's best friend, Lee's crush, and the protagonist of *Tomorrow, When the War Began*. Ellie organizes the original camping trip to **Hell** before the war, and she convinces all her friends to skip the Commemoration Day Show, which subsequently saves them from being captured when the foreign power invades Australia. Ellie is young, around 15, and she must convince her parents to let her spend five days camping in the bush with boys. Despite her young age, Ellie is trustworthy and mature. She diligently follows the rules her parents outline for the camping trip, and they even trust her to take the family Land Rover, despite the fact that Ellie doesn't have a license. And though Ellie is somewhat naive and inexperienced because of her age, she proves incredibly capable when the war breaks out. Like Homer and the others,

the character of Ellie proves that young people are capable of profound change and maturity, especially in times of hardship and stress. Ellie is brave, and she even kills to protect herself and her friends, though this results in a deep moral struggle. Ellie knows that killing is wrong, but she acts out of love, just like the Hermit did. Ellie's decision to kill and her resulting moral struggle underscore Marsden's primary argument that traditional notions of good and evil don't exist during war. Ellie is forced to kill to save herself and friends, which Marsden argues does not make Ellie evil. In a similar vein, Ellie's character also illustrates that good and bad aren't as clear cut as one may think. Ellie does a bad thing for good reason, which further complicates traditional notions of good and bad. Like Homer, Ellie is full of surprises. She is the best driver among her friends and she easily jumps behind the wheel of heavy equipment and large trucks. Her skills save their lives more than once, and they also prove that there is more to Ellie than meets the eye, an important lesson that each of the characters learn throughout the course of the novel.

**Homer** – Ellie's close friend, Fiona's crush, and a member of the original group who goes camping in **Hell** before the war. Homer lives just down the street from Ellie, and since Ellie doesn't have a brother, and Homer doesn't have a sister, they fill this void in each other's lives. Homer and Ellie's close relationship highlights Marsden's argument that friends can be like family, but this closeness also complicates their relationship. Ellie is jealous when it becomes clear that Homer has a crush on Fiona, and when Fiona reciprocates these feelings, Ellie feels like she is losing her friend and her brother. Ellie confuses this jealousy with romantic love, and while she eventually recognizes her mistake, it still causes her considerable stress in the meantime. Homer is described as a troublemaker, and he has little direction or responsibility in life before the war. Homer's friends know him as kind of a screw up, and they don't expect much from him. However, as soon as the war breaks out, Homer emerges as the unofficial leader of their group. Ellie describes Homer's transformation into a responsible adult as one of the greatest surprises of her life, which speaks to just how much Homer changes during the war. Homer's ability to step up and lead the group underscores Marsden's claim that young people are capable of profound change and maturity, especially in times of great stress. Homer is often the voice of reason in their group, and they each look to him for guidance. It is Homer's suggestion to hide out in Hell after the war breaks out, and it is his plan to steal the petrol tanker and blow up the bridge. Homer's plan to blow up the bridge effectively eliminates one of the main highways used by the invading soldiers, thereby slowing their progress in taking over the country. Overall, Homer proves that one person can make a big difference in war, and, like many of the other characters, he also proves that there is often more to someone than meets the eye.

**Lee** – Ellie's crush and a member of the original group who goes

camping in **Hell** before the war begins. Corrie is surprised when Ellie wants to invite Lee on their camping trip, since he isn't really one of their close friends, but Ellie wants an excuse to spend more time with him. Lee and his family live above their restaurant—Lee's mom and dad are from Vietnam and Thailand, respectively, and their restaurant serves Asian cuisine. Lee is quiet and shy, and his Asian heritage makes him feel like an outsider in Ellie's group of friends. Lee is different from Ellie and the other rural kids, and instead of working on a farm or raising livestock, he takes piano and violin lessons. When Ellie and Lee are just getting to know each other, Ellie is surprised to discover that Lee shares her affinity for horror movies, which seems at odds with his quiet ways and love for classical music. Lee is multilayered and complicated, and he teaches Ellie there is often more to people than meets the eye, which proves to be an important lesson for many of the characters as they grow throughout the novel. Like Fiona, Lee is a bit sheltered and privileged compared to the others, but he still grows and matures during the war. Lee is willing to step out of his comfort zone, and when he is shot in the leg by the enemy soldiers, he shows incredible strength and bravery. Lee is in considerable physical pain for most of the novel, but he still participates and contributes to the group effort, even if that means doing less physical work, like making a rationed list of their food. Lee also falls in love with Ellie during the course of the war, which underscores Marsden's argument that love and life go on, even in the face of war and imminent danger.

**Fiona** – One of Ellie's friends and a member of the original group who goes camping together in **Hell** before the war breaks out. Fiona is not a rural kid like Ellie or Homer, and she lives in the suburbs with her lawyer parents. Compared to Ellie and the other rural kids, Fiona lives an incredibly pampered life. She is beautiful and delicate, and Ellie and the others think she is "perfect." Fiona's life of privilege means that she is rather sheltered, but she still manages to adapt to the stress of the war and mature like the rest of the group. In many ways, Fiona grows more than any of them, as she initially doubts her ability to perform under the pressure of the war or be as capable as the other kids. However, at the climax of the book when Ellie and Fiona steal a petrol tanker and blow up the bridge used by the enemy soldiers as a prime route of access in and out of the country, Fiona proves to be invaluable to the group. Fiona snaps Ellie out of a trance when Ellie is frozen in fear under the bridge, and she gives Ellie the motivation to keep moving when Ellie feels most like giving up. As Ellie makes her way across the open field after rigging the tanker to explode, she is repeatedly shot at by the enemy soldiers, but Fiona's presence in the nearby tree line gives Ellie the strength to keep running. Ellie is motivated by her friendship with Fiona and the love she feels for her, which underscores the importance of love and friendship within the novel. Fiona's relationship with Homer also underscores the importance of love, and it further suggests that love and emotions can't be ignored. Fiona falls in

love with Homer in midst of the foreign invasion, which proves that love and life go on, even during the obvious stress and upheaval of war.

**The Hermit / Bertram Christie** – A man who local Australian legend claims lived alone in the remote bush that Ellie and her friends know as **Hell**. According to legend, the Hermit killed his wife and family in cold blood, and he retreated to the bush when the district rejected him and his evil act. However, when Ellie and the others hide out in Hell after the war breaks out, Ellie finds the Hermit's hut, and his personal papers suggest another story entirely. The papers Ellie and Lee find in the hut imply that the Hermit killed his family because they had been badly burned in a fire, and their remote location in the bush meant that getting medical attention in time was impossible. The Hermit's family was dying and suffering, so he killed them out of love to put them out of their misery. The Hermit's story proves that it is possible to do evil acts—or acts that are traditionally seen as evil—out of love, and he makes Ellie examine morality in an entirely different light. Because of the Hermit, Ellie learns that Hell isn't just a biblical place—it can also be a type of self-imposed punishment. The Hermit would have been in Hell wherever he was, just as Ellie is in Hell wherever she goes because the war has forced her to kill and carry that emotional and moral burden with her. The Hermit also underscores the limitations of storytelling, especially legends, and highlights the importance of leaving a written record. Without the records found in the Hermit's hut, Ellie and the others wouldn't know the truth about his story, which fuels the group's desire to record their own story.

**Robyn** – Ellie's friend and a member of the original group who goes camping in **Hell** prior to the war. Robyn is described as the responsible one in their group of friends. She does well in school and is dedicated to church and always doing the right thing, but even Robyn grows confused over right and wrong as the war takes over their lives. Robyn's conflicted feelings over what is morally right and morally wrong underscores Marsden's primary argument that traditional notions of right and wrong don't apply during war. For example, Robyn knows that war and killing are morally wrong, but she sympathizes with the enemy soldiers' reasons for invading the country. The soldiers invade Australia because of inequality within the region—Australia is a wealthy country, but many surrounding countries are poor and suffering, and Australia has done nothing to help. In this way, Robyn views Australia as partially responsible for the invasion, and the invading soldiers as partially justified in their efforts. This conflict view of morality implies that right and wrong isn't always clear cut, and as Robyn grows and matures during the war, she becomes increasingly aware of this. Robyn grows and matures in other ways as well, and she becomes one of the unofficial leaders of their group during the war. The others look to Robyn for guidance and sound decision making, and she proves herself able to rise

above her own fears when she takes care of Lee's bullet wound despite her fear of blood and needles.

**Kevin** – A member of Ellie's group of friends and Corrie's boyfriend. Kevin doesn't want to go camping in **Hell** in the first place and would rather stay home and go to the Commemoration Day Show, but he agrees to go anyway for Corrie, which underscores Kevin's love for her. Kevin is the oldest one in their group of friends—somewhere around 16—and he is described as an average farm kid. Kevin is a big guy, and the others see him as kind of a brute, but Corrie swears he is actually quite sensitive and caring. Corrie's claim that Kevin is a sensitive guy despite his burly demeanor suggests that people are more complex than they initially seem, a lesson that the young group of friends learn in particular as they mature throughout the course of the novel. Kevin is closely involved in Ellie's plan to blow up the lawnmower and kill the invading soldiers, and, like Ellie, Kevin clearly has a difficult time with the moral implications of his actions. However, Kevin proves himself to be an inherently good person despite the morally questionable actions the war has forced him into, and he refuses to leave Corrie after she is shot by the enemy soldiers. Kevin is fiercely loyal and dedicated to Corrie, and he doesn't leave her, even when it poses a threat to his own safety.

**Corrie** – Ellie's closest friend, Kevin's girlfriend, and a member of the original group who goes camping in **Hell** prior to the war. Ellie and Corrie have been best friends for their entire lives, and since Ellie doesn't have a sister, Corrie fills this void for her. Ellie and Corrie's close relationship underscores Marsden's primary argument of the importance of friendship, and their connection further proves that friends can be just like family. At the end of the novel, Corrie is shot in the back by enemy soldiers, and it is unclear whether she will live or die. Homer suggests that they drop Corrie at the hospital and run, so that they are not all captured saving her, but Kevin refuses. Kevin takes Corrie to the hospital and refuses to leave her side, despite the obvious threat to his own safety, which is evidence of the deep love and loyalty he clearly feels for her. Corrie also represents the loss of innocence in Marsden's novel. The war teaches her that she was never really safe, even though she believed she was, which marks the point when Corrie stops being a child and becomes an adult.

**Chris** – One of Ellie's friends. Ellie and the others invite Chris on their initial camping trip to **Hell**, but he isn't able to go because his parents are going overseas, and he has to stay home and housesit. After the foreign power invades Australia, Chris hides in a tree in his backyard and manages to avoid capture, and he meets up with his friends when Homer suggests they go to Chris's house and steal his parents' car. Like the others, Chris is immature and inexperienced when the war breaks out, and he even falls asleep during his first watch and endangers all their lives. However, Chris grows like the rest of

the group, and by the end of the novel, he is transformed into an adult who handles the stress of the war with maturity and wisdom.

**Mr. Clement** – A local dentist in the fictional town where Ellie and the others live in rural Australia. Mr. Clement and his family also manage to evade the invading soldiers that take over Australia, and he isn't happy when Robyn forces him out of hiding to help Lee after Lee is shot by enemy soldiers. Mr. Clement teaches Robyn how to care for Lee's wound and inject him with much needed painkillers and antibiotics, and even though Robyn hates blood and needles, she rises to the challenge. Thanks to Mr. Clement, Robyn is able to further grow and mature beyond her years, which again proves that young people are capable of profound change and maturity, especially in extreme circumstances, such as war.



## 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.



### WAR, LAW, AND MORALITY

As the title suggests, war is central in John Marsden's *Tomorrow, When the War Began*. After a group of Australian teenagers return from a camping trip in the bush to find their small town invaded and taken over by an unknown foreign power, they fear it is the beginning of World War Three. The small group of seven, including Ellie and her best friend, Corrie, find their houses abandoned and their families missing, and they have no idea who is responsible or why. The young friends don't know their enemy, but they are determined to survive, and they are prepared to do whatever it takes. As Ellie and her friends retreat into the bush, breaking laws and even killing to get away, they question the morality of their choices; and after they discover the war is aimed at "reducing imbalances within the region," they question both the morality of war and the very society that produced it. *Tomorrow, When the War Began* explores the moral implications of war and the difficult choices one must make to survive, ultimately suggesting that traditional notions of right and wrong do not exist in war.

Ellie is forced to do many illegal things throughout the course of the war that leave her questioning her own morality and ethics, which illustrates Marsden's argument that war blurs the line between right and wrong. When enemy soldiers chase Ellie and her friends through a residential neighborhood, firing rifles at them, Ellie rigs a bomb out of a lawnmower and kills two people. Afterward, Ellie can't come to terms with what she has

done. She feels her life is “permanently damaged” and fears she will “never be normal again.” In breaking such a fundamental law, Ellie questions what it says about her own morality. After Lee, a member of Ellie’s group, is shot and they must get him to safety, Ellie runs right over a jeep full of soldiers while driving a piece of heavy equipment. The large truck, similar to a bulldozer, nearly flattens the jeep, killing two soldiers inside. Ellie is again responsible for taking human life, which further complicates her feelings of morality. Throughout the novel, Ellie commits many crimes, including “stealing, driving without a licence, wilful damage, assault, manslaughter, or murder maybe, going through a stop sign, driving without lights, breaking and entering,” and a whole host of lesser offenses. Each of these laws, however, are broken in the name of survival, and while Marsden does not suggest that this excuses them, he does imply that it is an important consideration.

The line between right and wrong is further blurred by the war itself, which begins due to social inequality, creating sympathy for the enemy and complicating traditional notions of ethics and morality. When Kevin, another member of the group, asks what it means to “reduce imbalance in the region,” Robyn, another group member, explains it has to do with equality and neighboring countries who have nothing despite the relative wealth of Australia. “You can’t blame them for resenting it, and we haven’t done much to reduce any imbalances,” Robyn says, “just sat on our fat backsides, enjoyed our money and felt smug.” In this way, Australia is partially responsible for the invasion, making the war seem less unethical. While Robyn’s view on the war isn’t initially popular with her friends, she explains that right and wrong aren’t always clearly defined. “There doesn’t have to be a right side and a wrong side. Both sides can be right, or both sides can be wrong,” she says, further complicating notions of morality and traditional ideas of right and wrong. According to Homer, “normal rules don’t apply” during war. “These people have invaded our land [and] locked up our families,” Homer argues, adding, “They’re the ones who tore up the rule book, not us.” Thus, anything Ellie and her friends must do to meet this force is expected and excused.

As the war continues, Ellie grows unsure of what is exactly right and what is exactly wrong. “Human laws, moral laws, religious laws, they seemed artificial and basic, almost childlike,” Ellie says. She is guided by a “sense” within herself, “often not much more than a striving—to find the right thing to do,” and she must follow that sense. Ellie isn’t sure if it is “instinct, conscience, [or] imagination” but, during the war at least, it is how she tests the boundaries of her ethics and morality.



### FAMILY, FRIENDSHIP, AND LOVE

Family and friendship are motivating factors for all of the characters in *Tomorrow, When the War Began*.

When Ellie and her friends return from their week-long camping trip in the bush, they are devastated to find their

families have been taken captive during some type of invasion. Ellie and her friends must know if their families are safe, and they are willing to do anything in order to find them. As the war unfolds and the young group searches for their families, they become more dependent on each other and their friendships. In addition to the lifelong connection between Ellie and her best friend, Corrie, romantic relationships blossom between the friends as well and new-found love is realized. The group of friends rely on one another to survive, and they are even willing to kill to keep their close-knit group together. In the absence of family, friendship is family, and it is all Ellie and the others have to keep them going in a world they no longer recognize. Through the portrayal of friendship in *Tomorrow, When the War Began*, Marsden ultimately argues the value of love and implies that friendship can be just as crucial—and as tricky to navigate—as family ties.

The importance of family and friends is well established in the novel, which identifies love as a motivating force, especially during the uncertainty of war. Like Ellie and her all friends, Fiona desperately wants to find her family after the war breaks out. “If I could get my family and friends back, healthy, I’d let these people have the stupid houses and cars and things. I’d go and live with my parents in a cardboard box at the tip and be happy,” she says. Fiona doesn’t care about the outcome of the war, as long as she is reunited with her family and friends. After Lee is shot by enemy soldiers and Ellie and her friends must find a way to escape, Ellie is filled with an intense fear that is rooted in love. “Love for my friends,” Ellie explains afterward, adding, “I didn’t want to let them down. If I did, they would die.” While Ellie is undoubtedly afraid for herself, it is the lives of her friends she is most worried about. At the climax of the novel, when Ellie and Fiona blow up the petrol tanker to slow down the enemy soldiers, Ellie is nearly shot as she flees the scene. As Ellie runs for the safety of Fiona concealed in the bushes, she is “reeled in” by their “friendship, love, whatever you want to call it.” The love Ellie feels for Fiona gives her strength to keep running, even when it seems she can’t go on.

Despite the closeness between Ellie and her friends, their friendships are complicated by several disagreements and arguments along the way, which implies that love and relationships aren’t always easy. Ellie and her friends bicker about trivial things, like Ellie’s bossiness, Homer’s tricks and pranks, and Fiona’s aversion to work and labor. Most of their fights, however, are “really stupid,” as Ellie supposes most fights are, and aren’t enough to seriously threaten their connection. Corrie and Homer get into an argument when they are deciding what to take with them into the bush to escape the war. Corrie wants to take family photo albums and her mother’s diaries, but Homer argues they can afford only the necessities, such as food, extra clothing, and blankets. This argument, like the others, blows over, but it also reflects the inherent importance of family—and how Homer and the other group

members are standing in as Corrie's family right now. The group's most serious argument occurs after Lee and Robyn fail to return to the bush, and Ellie and the others fear the worst. Homer insists they must separate into two groups to look for them, but Corrie is reluctant. She begs for them to think of another way, but Homer won't concede. He wins the argument by claiming they must get Lee and Robyn back by any means necessary, which again underscores the importance of their friendship and connection.

By the end of the novel, Ellie and the others are certain that their families are being kept safe by the enemy soldiers, but there is no way to get to them without surrendering, and there is no end to the war in sight. Without her family, Ellie finds strength in the love she shares with her friends. "We've got to stick together," Ellie says, "that's all I know. We all drive each other crazy at times, but I don't want to end up here alone." Their future and that of their country is uncertain, but, Marsden thus implies, it is their friendship and shared love that will sustain them.



### COMING OF AGE, TRANSFORMATION, AND THE LOSS OF INNOCENCE

At its core, John Marsden's *Tomorrow, When the War Began* is a coming-of-age story. Ellie and her friends are just high school students when an unknown foreign power invades their native Australia, and even though they aren't yet old enough to legally drive, they must face the invading power alone in the bush—without their parents. As Ellie and her friends evade the encroaching enemy soldiers, they are constantly reminded of their childhood, which, though only weeks earlier, feels like a lifetime ago. When Ellie and Corrie hide in an old treehouse near Ellie's property, they are both stuck by past memories of the treehouse, "holding tea parties, organising [their] dolls' social lives, playing school, spying on the shearers, pretending [they] were prisoners trapped there." Now, instead of playing make believe, they are in danger of becoming actual prisoners. The war means the inevitable loss of innocence for Ellie and her friends, and they must grow up fast. Through the change and growth of the characters in *Tomorrow, When the War Began*, Marsden effectively argues that young people are capable of maturity and profound transformation, especially when prompted by something as serious as war.

The war robs Ellie and her friends of their childhood innocence and forces them into adult situations, which underscores their naivety and inexperience but also highlights their growth and maturity. When the war begins, Ellie and her friends are young and naive. "Invasions only happen in other countries, and on TV," Corrie says to Ellie. "Even if we survive this I know I'll never feel safe again." For Corrie, childhood is the illusion of safety. Now that illusion is gone, and so is Corrie's childhood. Ellie agrees with Corrie's assessment about the illusion of safety. It

isn't like they believed in Santa Claus, Ellie says, but they did believe they were safe from any real danger. Ellie claims such safety was a "big fantasy," and now that they know it isn't true, "it's bye-bye innocence. It's been nice knowing you, but you're gone now." For Ellie and Corrie, the war means looking at the world in an entirely different way. Because of the war, Ellie must stop "being an innocent rural teenager" and become a completely different person, "a more complicated and capable person, a force to be reckoned with even, not just a polite obedient kid." Ellie is becoming an adult, and a proficient one at that.

Ellie and Corrie are not the only characters to grow and mature—each of their friends undergo profound transformations as well, which suggests that they are equally touched by the effects of the war. Throughout the course of the novel, Homer is transformed from an immature prankster to a serious guy, one who can be counted on to plan intricate attacks on the invading enemy soldiers. "He's changed so much, don't you think?" Fiona says to Ellie about Homer. Since the war, he is nothing like the teenager they remember. Similarly, Robyn, who has always been afraid of shots and blood, steps up and takes care of Lee after he is shot by the enemy soldiers, changing his dressings and even injecting him with antibiotics and painkillers. "Robyn!" Ellie cries, "You faint when people even mention injections!" Because of the war, Robyn is forced to grow up, and she courageously accepts the challenge. While each of the characters grow and mature, it is perhaps Fiona who changes most profoundly. Fiona is transformed from a pampered rich kid into an independent young woman, and she is the one who strikes the match that ignites the tanker truck at the novel's climax, putting some much needed space between her friends and the advancing soldiers. At the beginning of the novel, Fiona fears she won't be able to live without her parents, but by the end, she is a major reason why her friends survive.

Ellie and her friends realize that all of their childhood "games were imitations of adult rituals and adult lives," and it is time they stop "playing." For Ellie especially, this is a difficult prospect. "I was shocked that it could have all gone so quickly, sad at how much I'd lost, and a little frightened about what had happened to me and how I'd fill the future hours," Ellie says. Despite this fear, however, Ellie and her friends manage to confront the war with maturity and wisdom, leaving behind their childhood selves forever.



### WRITING AND STORYTELLING

While they are certainly lesser themes within Marsden's novel, writing and storytelling are nevertheless important aspects of *Tomorrow, When the War Began*. The story is told through Ellie, an Australian teenager nominated by her friends to record their experiences after their country is invaded by an unknown foreign power. Ellie is the best writer among her friends, and they elect her as

Australia's Poet Laureate when they fear their small group of eight is all that remains of their country. Their story is important, Ellie and her friends contend, and it ought to be told. Storytelling also comes into play with the legend of the Hermit who once lived in **Hell**, the remote bush where Ellie and her friends hide out from the invading soldiers. According to local legend, the Hermit was a violent murderer who killed his wife and infant son in cold blood; however, the evidence Ellie and her friends find in the Hermit's bush hut suggests otherwise. Through *Tomorrow, When the War Began*, Marsden highlights the advantages and limitations of storytelling and ultimately argues that preserving one's story is important, both personally and for posterity.

When the novel opens, Ellie explains that her friends have nominated her to write their story, immediately introducing the importance of storytelling within the novel. Recording their story is important to Ellie and her friends. "It's terribly, terribly important," Ellie writes, adding, "Recording what we've done, in words, on paper, it's got to be our way of telling ourselves that we mean something, that we matter." Preserving their story means that their hardships during the war haven't been for nothing. Furthermore, Ellie and her friends believe that their efforts in the war have made a difference. "I don't know how big a difference," Ellie writes, "but a difference. Writing it down means we might be remembered." Ellie and her friends just might be the last free Australians left, and their experiences are important to future generations. "None of us wants to end up as a pile of dead white bones, unnoticed, unknown, and worst of all, with no one knowing or appreciating the risks we've run," Ellie continues. By the end of the novel, there is no guarantee that Ellie and her friends will survive the war, and without preserving their story, it will be like they never existed in the first place.

Despite the importance the novel places on writing and storytelling, they aren't perfect forms of preserving the past, which underscores the fundamental limitations of storytelling. While Ellie and her friends are hiding out in Hell, they discover the Hermit's old hut and some of his personal effects, including a letter that implies he was actually innocent in the murder of his wife and son. Without the letter, Ellie and her friends would have known nothing about the Hermit, "except the rumors, which really told [them] so little." In the case of the Hermit, local legends and stories are largely wrong, illustrating the problems inherent to storytelling. In a similar vein, after Ellie and her friends hear a rare news report about the war, Homer suggests they each write down what they remember and compare notes. When they share their notes ten minutes later, it is "amazing how different the versions [are]." They are only able to agree on the important details, like the fact that the war is not on a global scale and seems to be limited to Australia. Despite living the experience firsthand and having access to the same kinds of information, their accounts are wholly different. Both the

Hermit and Ellie's friends' experiences with recording and storytelling prove that details big and small can be left out of stories and other historical records and accounts, which again underscores storytelling's limits.

By the end of the novel, Ellie and her friends' story is not yet over. There is no end to the war in sight, and they have no idea what the future holds. Still, Ellie and her friends are determined to share their story. "It's a big thing to leave a record," Ellie writes, "to be remembered," and they are hoping, at the very least, that their story survives.



## SYMBOLS

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



### HELL

Hell is the remote Australian bush where Ellie and her friends go camping in *Tomorrow, When the War Began*, and it is symbolic of guilt and morality in John Marsden's novel. Hell is a wild bit of nature up a treacherous rocky mountain, and Ellie and the others doubt anyone has ever been there. Except, of course, for the Hermit, the reclusive man who lived there years ago after allegedly killing his wife and infant son. When Ellie and her friends return from their camping trip to find their country invaded by an unknown foreign power, they decide to go right back to Hell, where they can be safe and hide from the army patrols searching the town and houses.

Hell's landscape is beautiful, but after Ellie kills several soldiers trying to save herself and her friends, Hell becomes her self-imposed punishment and prison. Ellie deeply struggles with the legally and morally questionable things she has been forced to do during the war, and she thinks often about the Hermit. She finds his hut and his personal papers and discovers that he likely wasn't guilty of killing his family after all, but he was still run out of town and made to live alone in the bush. Ellie decides that Hell isn't really a place, but is instead other people. Hell would have followed the Hermit wherever he went, just like Ellie's guilt and Hell will follow her, too. By the end of the novel, Ellie realizes that Hell isn't just "a place where bad people go"—Hell is also being alone without your loved ones around to comfort you, just like the Hermit.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Scholastic edition of *Tomorrow, When the War Began* published in 2006.



## Chapter 1 Quotes

“ I don’t know if I’ll be able to do this. I might as well say so now. I know why they chose me, because I’m meant to be the best writer, but there’s a bit more to it than just being able to write. There’s a few little things can get in the way. Little things like feelings, emotions.

**Related Characters:** Ellie (speaker), Lee, Corrie

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 1


**Explanation and Analysis**

At the very beginning of *Tomorrow, When the War Began*, Ellie’s group of friends nominate her to write down their story, immediately establishing the importance of writing and storytelling within the novel. Little is known about Ellie or her story at this point, but it is clear that her story is important enough to write down, and that it should be remembered by future generations. This underscores the importance of keeping physical records and preserving stories for posterity, which is a thread that runs throughout the novel.

This quote also establishes the importance of emotions within the story, and the profound effects of love and friendship. Ellie’s task of penning the group’s story is complicated by “feelings” and “emotions,” which refers to Ellie’s love for both her family and her friends. Ellie’s story is difficult to tell because it involves the capture of her parents in the war, which she finds particularly difficult to talk about. Ellie is young—around 15—and she struggles with the idea of life without her parents. Ellie’s story also involves painful memories of Lee’s shooting by enemy soldiers, and Ellie never does find out if her best friend, Corrie, survives her own shooting. Indeed, Ellie’s story is exceedingly difficult to tell, and the love and subsequent worry she has for her friends and family makes rehashing that story even more difficult.

“ Well, I’d better stop biting my tongue and start biting the bullet. There’s only one way to do this and that’s to tell it in order, chronological order. I know writing it down is important to us. That’s why we all got so excited when Robyn suggested it. It’s terribly, terribly important. Recording what we’ve done, in words, on paper, it’s got to be our way of telling ourselves that we mean something, that we matter. That the things we’ve done have made a difference. I don’t know how big a difference, but a difference. Writing it down means we might be remembered. And by God that matters to us. None of us wants to end up as a pile of dead white bones, unnoticed, unknown, and worst of all, with no one knowing or appreciating the risks we’ve run.

**Related Characters:** Ellie (speaker), Robyn

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 2

**Explanation and Analysis**

This quote, which also occurs at the very beginning of the novel, foreshadows the upcoming war and the extreme situation Ellie and her friends will soon be forced into. Ellie’s language, that she must “stop biting [her] tongue and start biting the bullet,” hints at the violence of the war and the bullets Ellie and the others will be forced to outrun and avoid. The fact that Ellie and the others consider their story “terribly, terribly important” reflects just how serious their story is, and it suggests that what they have endured is a very big deal.

Ellie and her friends are all heroes during the war, even if they are too modest to admit it, and their efforts prove that even one person can make a difference during war. To Ellie and the others, if their story is remembered and their efforts are appreciated, then all of their struggles and pain will not have been in vain. This reflects the power of storytelling—another key theme in the novel—and it gives Ellie and her friends the strength to keep going, since both the war and their story are still unfolding as the novel draws to a close.

Finally we came to an agreement, and it wasn't too bad, considering. We could take the Land Rover but I was the only one allowed to drive it, even though Kevin had his P's and I didn't. But Dad knows I'm a good driver. We could go to the top of Tailor's Stitch. We could invite the boys but we had to have more people: at least six and up to eight. That was because Mum and Dad thought there was less chance of an orgy if there were more people. Not that they'd admit that was the reason—they said it was to do with safety—but I know them too well.

And yes. I've written that "o" in "know" carefully—I wouldn't want it to be confused with an "e."

**Related Characters:** Ellie (speaker), Kevin

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 5-6

### Explanation and Analysis

This quote, which occurs when Ellie's parents finally allow her to go camping for five days in the bush with boys, underscores just how young Ellie and her friends are—a detail that makes the maturity they each display during the war even more significant. Ellie's parents allow her to take the family Land Rover camping even though Ellie isn't old enough to legally drive. Kevin has "his P's," which means Kevin has a provisional driver's license, but Ellie doesn't. One must be 17 to drive legally in Australia where Ellie and the others live, and one must be a minimum of 15 years and nine months to obtain a provisional driver's license. This suggests that Kevin is the oldest and is at least 15 years and nine months, but Ellie and the others are younger. This detail about driver's licenses is a small one, but it serves to remind readers that Ellie and her friends are essentially children, making it all the more impactful when they're forced to take on very adult roles in the war.

Ellie's parent's concern that there will be "an orgy" on the camping trip also provides some insight as to Ellie's age, as it suggests that Ellie and the others are too young to be alone for an extended period of time with the opposite sex—or at least too young for their parents to fully trust them in this situation. Ellie's parents may trust her with the family car, but in their eyes she is still too young to handle adult relationships and sex, which is implied by the word "orgy."

Notably, Ellie makes an obvious effort to speak about her parents in the present tense, as if she is trying to convince herself that they are still alive. This draws attention to the fact that Ellie is essentially writing their story down in real-time, but it also refers to the fact that Ellie's parents have been captured by the invading soldiers during the war, and


Ellie has no idea whether they are dead or alive. Throughout the novel, the themes of love and war often coexist, as Ellie grapples with crushes and navigates romantic relationships while war rages on in the background. Even though it seems like romance should be the last thing on Ellie's mind, her preoccupation with Lee (and, briefly, Homer) points to the idea that love can't be stifled and will bubble up even in the most unlikely of times.

## Chapter 2 Quotes

It was about half past two when we got to the top. Fi had ridden the last couple of k's, but we were all relieved to get out of the Landie and stretch our bones. We came out on the south side of a knoll near Mt Martin. That was the end of the vehicle track: from then on it was shanks's pony. But for the time being we wandered around and admired the view. On one side you could see the ocean: beautiful Cobbler's Bay, one of my favourite places, and according to Dad one of the world's great natural harbours, used only by the occasional fishing boat or cruising yacht. It was too far from the city for anything else. We could see a couple of ships there this time though; one looked like a large trawler maybe.

**Related Characters:** Ellie (speaker), Fiona

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 18

### Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs when Ellie and the others go up to Tailor's Stitch for their camping trip in Hell, and it provides the first indication that something is amiss. Cobbler's Bay, the remote harbor that Ellie and the others can see from their vantage point at the top of Tailor's Stitch, should be empty. The harbor is too remote, and it isn't usually used by boats, especially large boats, like the trawler, or commercial fishing vessel, that Ellie sees in the harbor now. Ellie doesn't know it yet, but the boat she sees is likely not a trawler, but some type of military vessel belonging to the invading army.



Everything about this passage underscores the remoteness of Tailor's Stitch and Cobbler's Bay, which further suggests that the harbor should be empty. It has taken Ellie hours to make her way up the treacherous road of Tailor's Stitch in a Land Rover, and the ride even causes Fiona to become car sick, which is why she doesn't ride in the car until the last couple of kilometers. At this point, Tailor's Stitch is no longer


accessible by car, and Ellie and the others must go “shank’s pony,” a popular idiomatic expression in Australia that means one can only get to where they are going by walking. They are completely isolated, and there is no reason why there should be ships in the harbor, which definitely points to the approaching trouble of the war.

## Chapter 4 Quotes

☛ Suddenly the loud buzzing became a roar. I couldn’t believe how quickly it changed. It was probably because of the high walls of rock that surrounded our campsite. And like black bats screaming out of the sky, blotting out the stars, a V-shaped line of jets raced overhead, very low overhead. Then another, then another, till six lines in all had stormed through the sky above me. Their noise, their speed, their darkness frightened me. I realised that I was crouching, as though being beaten. I stood up. It seemed that they were gone. The noise faded quickly, till I could no longer hear it. But something remained. The air didn’t seem as clear, as pure. There was a new atmosphere. The sweetness had gone; the sweet burning coldness had been replaced by a new humidity. I could smell the jet fuel. We’d thought that we were among the first humans to invade this basin, but humans had invaded everything, everywhere. They didn’t have to walk into a place to invade it. Even Hell was not immune.

**Related Characters:** Ellie (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 38-39

### Explanation and Analysis

This quote, which occurs while Ellie and the others are camping in Hell before the war begins, foreshadows the impending war. Just like the ships in Cobbler’s Bay, the planes that fly overhead while Ellie is camping are a sign of the beginning of the war, but Ellie doesn’t yet piece this together. The jets flying overhead are obviously fighter jets. They are “like black bats screaming out of the sky,” and they block out the stars and any other light source. The planes themselves also have no lights and are flying under the cover of night, which further proves their malicious intent, but Ellie doesn’t notice this at first either.


Even though Ellie doesn’t immediately realize that the planes are indicative of war, she is still inexplicably and instinctively frightened by them. She reflexively crouches as

the planes fly over, “as though being beaten,” and she is obviously intimidated by their speed and numbers. Furthermore, the jets taint the air and leave a residue that cancels out the “sweetness” of the night and replaces it with a “burning coldness.” Ellie might not realize exactly what the planes signify when they fly overhead, but she senses that they are threatening, and their presence over Hell teaches her that she isn’t as safe and isolated as she thinks she is.

☛ I went for a walk back up the track, to the last of Satan’s Steps. The sun had already warmed the great granite wall and I leaned against it with my eyes half shut, thinking about our hike, and the path and the man who’d built it, and this place called Hell. “Why did people call it Hell?” I wondered. All those cliffs and rocks, and that vegetation, it did look wild. But wild wasn’t Hell. Wild was fascinating, difficult, wonderful. No place was Hell, no place could be Hell. It’s the people calling it Hell, that’s the only thing that made it so. People just sticking names on places, so that no one could see those places properly any more. Every time they looked at them or thought about them the first thing they saw was a huge big sign saying “Housing Commission” or “private school” or “church” or “mosque” or “synagogue.” They stopped looking once they saw those signs.

**Related Characters:** Ellie (speaker), Fiona, Homer, The Hermit / Bertram Christie

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 43-44

### Explanation and Analysis

This quote, which occurs on the last day of Ellie’s camping trip in Hell, sheds valuable light on Ellie’s moral struggle once the war begins, and it also sheds light on the novel’s other characters. When Ellie refers to the man who built the path in Hell, she is referring to the Hermit, who escaped to the bush after being rejected in town for murdering his wife and infant son. Presumably, the locals refer to the remote bush where the Hermit lived as Hell because it served as his self-imposed punishment for killing his family.

However, as the novel unfolds, Ellie comes to the conclusion that Hell can never be a place because the Hermit carries his own personal Hell with him wherever he goes, just as Ellie does after she is forced to kill during the war. Still, Marsden implies that Ellie is not an inherently evil person because she must kill during the war, just as he implies the

Hermit was not an inherently evil man for making the ultimate sacrifice and killing his family out of love. (Evidence that Ellie unearths in the Hermit's hut suggests that his wife and child were severely burned in a fire, with no access to medical care, and he shot them to put them out of their misery.) Like the Hermit, a big reason why Ellie feels evil is because other people have decided that her actions are the epitome of evil, despite the circumstances. Ellie's experiences, however, prove this isn't true. This quote also underscores how there is more to all of the characters, especially Homer and Fiona, than the labels other people have stuck on them. Homer is more than just a troublemaker, and Fiona is more than just a pampered rich girl, but once they are stuck with these labels, people have a hard time seeing past them.

## Chapter 6 Quotes

☝ The rational thing to do would have been to leave her and rush into the house, because I knew that nothing so awful could have happened to the dogs unless something more awful had happened to my parents. But I had already stopped thinking rationally. I slipped Millie's chain off and the old dog staggered to her feet, then collapsed forward onto her front knees. I decided, brutally, that I couldn't spend any more time with her. I'd helped her enough.

**Related Characters:** Ellie (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 56

### Explanation and Analysis

After the war begins, Ellie and the others return home from camping to find their parents missing and their dogs dead. This quote marks the first moment that Ellie definitively knows that something incredibly bad has happened, and it also underscores Ellie's young age and her relative inexperience and inability to effectively handle stressful situations on her own. Ellie knows that it isn't rational to spend too much time with the dogs, but she openly admits that she has "stopped thinking rationally," which proves that Ellie isn't initially equipped to handle the stress of the war.

Ellie instantly knows that something awful has happened to her parents—they would never leave the dogs unattended to suffer and die unless something equally bad has happened to them—but she seems unable to fully process this. Ellie is only 15 and still greatly relies on her parents, and she seems incapable of conceiving of life without them

and their guidance. Of course, Ellie is able to survive without her parents, and she is capable of making difficult adult decisions, like abandoning her dog when she isn't able to help her. Ellie might be initially unable to emotionally handle the stress of the war and life without her parents, but the war forces her to grow up quickly, and that growth starts with Ellie's decision to abandon Millie.

☝ Robyn took over. "We've got to think, guys. I know we all want to rush off, but this is one time we can't afford to give in to feelings. There could be a lot at stake here. Lives even. We've got to assume that something really bad is happening, something quite evil. If we're wrong, then we can laugh about it later, but we've got to assume that they're not down the pub or gone on a holiday."

**Related Characters:** Robyn (speaker), Fiona, Kevin, Corrie, Lee, Homer, Ellie

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 63-64

### Explanation and Analysis

As Ellie and the others return from their camping trip and discover that something awful has happened, Robyn naturally takes over and assumes control of their group. She is the voice of reason, and she reminds them that it isn't smart to "give in to feelings" and let their emotions get the better of them. Their group is young and inexperienced, and prone to letting their emotions take over, but Robyn has the maturity to recognize this and encourage more sound decision making.

Like Ellie, Robyn knows that something bad has happened to Ellie parents, and that something bad has likely happened to her own parents as well; however, Robyn finds to the strength to voice this more completely before Ellie does, which reflects Robyn's strength and wisdom beyond her years. Robyn's ability to fully face the uncertainty of their circumstances and her willingness to accept that something awful has likely happened to their parents underscores Marsden's primary argument that young people are capable of profound growth and maturity, especially under stressful circumstances like war.

“Maybe all my mother’s stories made me think of it before you guys. And like Robyn said before, if we’re wrong,” he was struggling to get the words out, his face twisting like someone having a stroke, “if we’re wrong you can laugh as long and loud as you want. But for now, for now, let’s say it’s true. Let’s say we’ve been invaded. I think there might be a war.”

**Related Characters:** Lee (speaker), Fiona, Kevin, Corrie, Ellie, Homer, Robyn

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 68

### Explanation and Analysis



Here, Lee floats the idea that a war has likely broken out while the friends were away on their camping trip. Like Robyn, Lee appears as the voice of reason and wise beyond his young years. Lee’s mother likes to tell him farfetched stories, and it is these stories that help him to discern what is actually going on, which again points to the importance of storytelling within the novel.

Even though Lee knows deep down that a war has broken out, he still has a hard time actually saying the words with full conviction. Lee is obviously terrified by the prospect of war, especially of facing that war without their parents, but he still rises above his fear to help lead his friends and ensure their safety. To Lee, it is much better to err on the side of caution and assume there is a war, and laugh about it later if he proves to be wrong.

## Chapter 7 Quotes

“The image I’ll always remember from Corrie’s place is of Corrie standing alone in the middle of the sitting room, tears streaming down her face. Then Kevin came in from checking the bedrooms, saw her, and moving quickly to her took her in his arms and held her close. They just stood there for quite a few minutes. I liked Kevin a lot for that.”

**Related Characters:** Ellie (speaker), Kevin, Corrie

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 71

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage, which occurs after Ellie and the others go to Corrie’s house and find her parents missing as well, highlights the love Corrie has for her parents, in addition to the love the group of friends has for each other. Ellie will

always remember the image of Corrie weeping in her living room because Corrie is Ellie’s best friend. In fact, Corrie is more than Ellie’s friend—she is like Ellie’s sister—and Ellie is clearly affected by the sight of Corrie in so much emotional pain.

Like Ellie and the others, Corrie is young and still dependent on her parents for support and guidance. Corrie obviously loves her family, but her complete sadness here also likely reflects her fear at the idea of navigating life alone without her parents. Kevin’s immediate attempt to console Corrie also reflects the love he has for her. Kevin is Corrie’s boyfriend, and he proves throughout the book time and time again that Corrie’s comfort and safety means more to him than his own. Ellie appreciates Kevin’s move to comfort Corrie because it proves that they are not alone, and that they can rely on each other like family, especially in their parents’ absence.

## Chapter 8 Quotes

“I couldn’t look at anyone, just down at the table, at the piece of muesli box that I was screwing up and twisting and spinning around in my fingers. It was hard for me to believe that I, plain old Ellie, nothing special about me, middle of the road in every way, had probably just killed three people. It was too big a thing for me to get my mind around. When I thought of it baldly like that: killed three people, I was so filled with horror. I felt that my life was permanently damaged, that I could never be normal again, that the rest of my life would just be a shell.”

**Related Characters:** Ellie (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 95



### Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs after Ellie rigs the lawnmower to explode and potentially kills three of the enemy soldiers, and it is important because it underscores Ellie’s guilt and the moral implications of killing. The war forces Ellie to kill, and she does it to save herself and her friends, but Ellie still worries what her actions say about her morality. Ellie can’t bring herself to look her friends in the face after she kills the soldiers, and she absentmindedly destroys a cereal box to just avoid looking at them. Ellie can’t believe somebody as ordinary as herself has been forced to take such extreme measures just to protect herself and the people around her. Killing the soldiers is “too big a thing for [Ellie] to get [her]

mind around,” with further reflects Ellie’s young age and her inability to navigate such grownup problems, like war and murder. The fact that Ellie has been forced to take the life of another fills her “horror,” and it makes her feel like she is “permanently damaged.” Ellie considers murder the absolute epitome of evil, and now that Ellie has committed murder herself, she feels like she is evil as well. Of course, Marsden ultimately implies that Ellie isn’t evil just because of the difficult decisions she is forced to make during the war, and as Ellie matures and grows, she eventually comes to understand this more nuanced picture of morality as well. Ellie’s life is fundamentally changed when she kills the soldiers, but not because her actions prove she is fundamentally bad. Ellie learns through her actions that good people are capable of evil acts, and that traditional notions of good and evil do not exist in war.

☛ Homer was becoming more surprising with every passing hour. It was getting hard to remember that this fast-thinking guy, who’d just spent fifteen minutes getting us laughing and talking and feeling good again, wasn’t even trusted to hand out the books at school.

**Related Characters:** Ellie (speaker), Homer

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 104

### Explanation and Analysis



Here, Ellie details the ways in which Homer begins to prove himself a valuable member of their group, further suggesting that young people are capable of maturity and wisdom. Prior to the war, Homer is an irresponsible prankster who doesn’t take life seriously. Homer is constantly in trouble at home and school before the war, and he is completely unreliable. Homer can’t even be trusted to properly hand out school books, much less lead his scared group of young friends through a war.

However, the war proves that Homer *is* trustworthy, and it forces him to grow up fast and realize his responsibilities in life. Homer is a big reason why Ellie is able to overcome her guilt and fear after killing the soldiers with the lawnmower bomb, and he gets Ellie and the others to see that morality in war isn’t simply the difference between good and bad. Homer is “fast-thinking,” and he comes up with most of the plans that enable them to keep safe and avoid capture by the invading soldiers, which is a stark contrast to the guy Ellie and the others know—the one who can’t be trusted to do anything.

## Chapter 9 Quotes

☛ I realised to my disbelief that it had been only about twenty hours since we’d emerged from the bush into this new world. Lives can be changed that quickly. In some ways we should have been used to change. We’d seen a bit of it ourselves. This treehouse, for instance. Corrie and I had spent many hours under its shady roof, holding tea parties, organising our dolls’ social lives, playing school, spying on the shearers, pretending we were prisoners trapped there. All our games were imitations of adult rituals and adult lives, although we didn’t realise it then of course.

**Related Characters:** Ellie (speaker), Corrie

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 105-106



### Explanation and Analysis

This quote, which occurs the day after Ellie and the others come in from the bush and discover a war has broken out, underscores the fact that Ellie and the others are still just kids, who, not so long ago, were playing dolls and holding tea parties. Ellie is keeping watch for approaching soldiers in the old treehouse she and Corrie used to play games in, making the treehouse a stark reminder that Ellie and the others are being forced to grow up and mature way beyond their years.

This passage also underscores the profound effects of war, and how quickly war can throw one’s life into complete chaos. Their lives have changed so completely and quickly, Ellie has not had the chance to process it. Ironically, Ellie remembers playing in the treehouse, pretending she was a trapped prisoner. Now, Ellie’s parents are prisoners of war, and Ellie is frequently in danger of becoming a prisoner herself. As Ellie says, these “games were imitations of adult rituals and adult lives, although [they] didn’t realise it then of course.” What was once just a game is now real life, and Ellie and her friends must rise to the occasion.

☛ “They seemed such innocent days. You know, when we got to high school and stuff, I used to look back and smile and think ‘God, was I ever innocent!’ Santa Claus and tooth fairies and thinking that Mum stuck your paintings on the fridge because they were masterpieces. But I’ve learnt something now. Corrie, we were still innocent. Right up to yesterday. We didn’t believe in Santa Claus but we believed in other fantasies. You said it. You said the big one. We believed we were safe. That was the big fantasy. Now we know we’re not, and like you said, we’ll never feel safe again, and so it’s bye-bye innocence. It’s been nice knowing you, but you’re gone now.”

**Related Characters:** Ellie (speaker), Corrie

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 107

### Explanation and Analysis


In this passage, Ellie and Corrie are sitting in their old treehouse, keeping watch for enemy soldiers and reminiscing about the past. This passage underscores the fact that Ellie and Corrie aren't kids anymore and further highlights their fall from innocence and transformation into adults. Before the war, Ellie and Corrie were "innocent." They weren't exactly kids, and as Ellie says, and it isn't like they believed in Santa Claus or the tooth fairy, but they at least believed that they were safe. However, the war proves that they were never really safe to begin with, and this chilling realization marks the moment when they both grow up. Like the tooth fairy and Santa Claus, their safety was an illusion, a "fantasy" that is only really believed by little kids. Now that Ellie and Corrie know better, they can never feel truly safe again. Without this false sense of security, Ellie and Corrie's childhood is over, and they are officially adults.

## Chapter 13 Quotes

☝☝ "What does it mean 'reducing imbalances within the region?'" Kevin asked.

"I guess he's talking about sharing things more equally," Robyn said. "We've got all this land and all these resources, and yet there's countries a crow's spit away that have people packed in like battery hens. You can't blame them for resenting it, and we haven't done much to reduce any imbalances, just sat on our fat backsides, enjoyed our money and felt smug."

**Related Characters:** Robyn, Kevin (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 170

### Explanation and Analysis

Here, Kevin and Robyn hear a news broadcast on the shortwave radio that claims the war is aimed at "reducing imbalances within the region," a moment that finally reveals the reason for the war. This quote also underscores the complicated nature of good and bad within the novel, especially during war. The fact that the foreign power invades Australia because of social inequality and injustice makes Australia appear partly to blame for the invasion, and

it also makes the invading power appear partly justified in their actions, which complicates traditional notions of good and bad.

Marsden argues that traditional notions of good and bad do not exist during war, and the "imbalances" that lead to the war are further proof of this. The way Robyn describes it, smaller surrounding countries are considerably poorer than Australia, and Australia does nothing to help or right this imbalance. In this way, Robyn implies that Australia *should* right this wrong, and the fact that they don't is unethical. Prior to this passage, Australia appears as an unwitting victim to a foreign invasion, but Robyn suggests it was Australia's own actions—or in this case, their inaction—that directly led to the war, further complicating traditional notions of right and wrong.

☝☝ "It's just not right," said Kevin stubbornly.

"Maybe not. But neither's your way of looking at it. There doesn't have to be a right side and a wrong side. Both sides can be right, or both sides can be wrong. I think both countries are in the wrong this time."

"So does that mean you're not going to fight them?" Kevin asked, still looking for a fight himself.

Robyn sighed. "I don't know. I already have, haven't I? I was right there with Ellie when we smashed our way through Wirrawee. I guess I'll keep fighting them, for the sake of my family. But after the war, if there is such a time as after the war. I'll work damn hard to change things. I don't care if I spend the rest of my life doing it."

**Related Characters:** Ellie, Robyn, Kevin (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 171

### Explanation and Analysis

This quote, which occurs when Ellie and the others discover the cause behind the war, further underscores Marsden's central argument that traditional notions of right and wrong don't exist during war. Kevin claims that the war is "just not right," even though they know that the war was caused by inequality and is aimed at righting this social wrong. The fact that the invading power was wronged in the first place, which led directly to the war, complicates Kevin's understanding of right and wrong, but he still "stubbornly" refuses to see the war in this complex way.

Robyn is confused as well, but she appreciates that both

Australia and the invading power hold some level of responsibility for the war. Australia is not completely innocent in the whole affair, and while Kevin might be able to pretend that they are innocent, Robyn can't. She doesn't want to fight, and she knows deep down that it is wrong, but she does it anyway to save her life and spare her family. In participating in the war, Robyn is both right and wrong, but she recognizes the conflicted nature of the war, and vows to change things after the war is over. This points to Ellie's belief that the only difference between right and wrong is believing that one is automatically right, regardless of its effect on other people. Like Ellie, Robyn is constantly afraid that she is doing the wrong thing, just like she is here, which further suggests Robyn is not innately wrong, even though she struggles with the right thing to do.

love to spare their suffering. The Hermit's family had been badly burned in a fire and were dying, alone and in pain, miles away from medical attention. In this way, Ellie doesn't know if the Hermit's actions were "an act of great love, or an act of great evil," yet she decides it makes very little difference.


The Hermit was destined to suffer because his Hell was not a literal place, but the self-imposed punishment he forced himself to live through, which could have occurred anywhere. This is very similar to Ellie's moral dilemma. As Ellie has been forced to kill during the war, she, too, carries Hell with her as a form of her guilt and self-imposed punishment for breaking such a fundamental moral law. It doesn't matter to Ellie that she only killed because she had to save her life and her friends' lives in the midst of war—Ellie is still a killer, and she will carry that Hell with her wherever she goes.


## Chapter 16 Quotes

☝☝ Only humans knew about Hell; they were the experts on it. I remembered wondering if humans were Hell. The Hermit for instance; whatever had happened that terrible Christmas Eve, whether he'd committed an act of great love, or an act of great evil... But that was the whole problem, that as a human being he could have done either and he could have done both. Other creatures didn't have this problem. They just did what they did. I didn't know if the Hermit was a saint or a devil, but once he'd fired those two shots it seemed that he and the people round him had sent him into Hell. They sent him there and he sent himself there. He didn't have to trek all the way across to these mountains into this wild basin of heat and rock and bush. He carried Hell with him, as we all did, like a little load on our backs that we hardly noticed most of the time, or like a huge great hump of suffering that bent us over with its weight.

☝☝ I too had blood on my hands, like the Hermit, and just as I couldn't tell whether his actions were good or bad, so too I couldn't tell what mine were. Had I killed out of love of my friends, as part of a noble crusade to rescue friends and family and keep our land free? Or had I killed because I valued my life above that of others? Would it be OK for me to kill a dozen others to keep myself alive? A hundred? A thousand? At what point did I condemn myself to Hell, if I hadn't already done so? The Bible just said "Thou shalt not kill," then told hundreds of stories of people killing each other and becoming heroes, like David with Goliath. That didn't help me much.

**Related Characters:** Ellie (speaker), The Hermit / Bertram Christie

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 


**Page Number:** 215-216

### Explanation and Analysis

When Ellie learns the true story behind the Hermit, she begins to grapple with her own moral dilemma and her thoughts about Hell and morality. Ellie considers Hell to be a uniquely human creation, and the Hermit is a prime example of this. The Hermit killed his own wife and infant son on Christmas Eve, but it is implied he killed them out of

**Related Characters:** Ellie (speaker), The Hermit / Bertram Christie

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 216

### Explanation and Analysis


Like the Hermit, Ellie considers herself a murderer. She has "blood on [her] hands," and, like the Hermit, the reasons why she killed don't really matter. The Hermit likely killed his family out of love to spare them suffering and pain, but Ellie can't decide if his actions represent good or bad. Similarly, Ellie kills to save herself and her friends, whom she loves and cares for deeply, and she can't tell if her own actions are good or bad.



Furthermore, Ellie implies that if she killed to save her friends and family, that would be more acceptable than killing to save her own life; however, Ellie can't definitively say what reasons exactly she killed for, and she refuses to let herself off the hook. There must be a limit to how many people Ellie can kill to protect herself and others, and she has already killed four people by the end of the book. To Ellie, killing makes her a hypocrite, just like the Bible is hypocritical in that same respect. Ellie finds it impossible to believe that her actions can be either entirely good or bad, which further underscores Marsden's argument that traditional notions of right and wrong do not exist during war.

☝ All I could think of to do was to trust to instinct. That was all I had really. Human laws, moral laws, religious laws, they seemed artificial and basic, almost childlike. I had a sense within me—often not much more than a striving—to find the right thing to do, and I had to have faith in that sense. Call it anything—instinct, conscience, imagination—but what it felt like was a constant testing of everything I did against some kind of boundaries within me; checking, checking, all the time.

**Related Characters:** Ellie (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 217

### Explanation and Analysis

In trying to survive the war and evade capture by the invading soldiers, Ellie is breaking laws left and right. She has broken “human laws,” as she has been driving without a license, and she has even stolen cars and food. Ellie has broken moral and religious laws as well, because she has been forced to kill to survive. The extreme nature of war makes normal laws seem “artificial and basic,” and they don't at all apply to Ellie's experiences during the war.



Because normal laws and notions of right and wrong no longer apply to Ellie's circumstances, she must develop different laws and ways to ensure her morality and ethics. Clearly, Ellie won't be able to avoid killing, stealing, and other more serious crimes if she wants to survive, so she must redefine how she evaluates her morals and ethics. Ellie


trusts her “instinct, conscience, [and] imagination” to assess her morals, and she must constantly be “checking, checking, all the time” so she doesn't completely lose her morality all together, which Marsden implies is a distinct possibility in war.

## Epilogue Quotes

☝ We've got to stick together, that's all I know. We all drive each other crazy at times, but I don't want to end up here alone, like the Hermit. Then this really would be Hell. Humans do such terrible things to each other that sometimes my brain tells me they must be evil. But my heart still isn't convinced. I just hope we can survive.

**Related Characters:** Ellie (speaker), The Hermit / Bertram Christie, Chris, Robyn, Fiona, Lee, Homer

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 284

### Explanation and Analysis

This quote, which occurs at the very end of *Tomorrow, When the War Began*, underscores the importance of love and friendship within the novel. *Tomorrow, When the War Began* is the first book in a series of seven, so Ellie's story and her hardships are just beginning. There is no end in sight to the war by the close of the book, and Ellie and the others aren't any closer to finding their parents. Friendship is all Ellie and the others have, and without it, they are sure to end up alone and miserable, just like the Hermit.

To Ellie, the type of loneliness that the Hermit endured is her idea of Hell, not the self-imposed punishment both Ellie and the Hermit force upon themselves. Ellie's friends are more important to her than anything in the world, and in her parents' absence, they fill the void that her family left. In this way, Marsden implies that friends can be just as important as family, and they are what will keep Ellie from being completely miserable. Ellie's heart isn't convinced that humans are basically evil because of the wonderful people she calls her friends, and now her family.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

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

## CHAPTER 1

It's been 30 minutes since Robyn suggested they write everything down, and it's been 29 minutes since they all decided Ellie should be the one to write it. Ellie is generally considered to be the best writer among the group, so it seemed an easy choice. Chris isn't a bad writer either, Ellie notes, and he did seem a bit hurt that he wasn't chosen. Ellie sits down by the creek, a narrow yet deep waterway, and procrastinates. Ellie is procrastinating because she doesn't want to write their story.

It isn't that Ellie doesn't want to tell their story—it's just that writing it all down won't be easy. "Feelings" and "emotions" are sure to get in the way, Ellie says. Telling their story is "terribly, terribly important" to them, and it's the only way to prove that what they've done matters. By writing it all down, they will be remembered. If no one knows about the difference they've made, then no one will appreciate all the risks Ellie and the others have taken. Ellie considers writing their story with a formal tone, kind of like a history book, but she decides against it. That isn't who they are.

Their story begins with Ellie and Corrie deciding to go bush camping for a few days. They camp out a lot, usually with Fiona and Robyn, but never with boys. Things are changing, though, and they are all growing up. Ellie says she will ask her dad if they can take her family's Land Rover, and Corrie suggests they invite Kevin and Homer. Ellie likes the idea but worries that her parents won't agree. They both decide it's worth it to at least ask, and they agree to go up Tailor's Stitch, a mountain range that extends from Mt. Martin to Wombegonoo. It won't be an easy drive, but the Land Rover will make it, and the views are beautiful.

*The specifics of Ellie's story are not initially revealed to the reader, but since the story is significant enough to write down and make a permanent record of, readers can infer that the story is important. The fact that Ellie notices Chris's disappointment suggests that Ellie is empathetic and kind, which begins to point to her inherent goodness and morality. Ellie's procrastination implies their story is difficult to tell—if their story was optimistic or happy, she'd perhaps have fewer hesitations to put pen to paper.*



*The fact that Ellie and the others aren't formal or sophisticated, like a history book, hints at their young age, as does Ellie's difficulty in processing the "feelings" and "emotions" that complicate their story. "Feelings" and "emotions" connote love, an emotion that can be difficult for young people to navigate. Ellie's description of the terrible importance of their story and their desire to be remembered for their risks suggests that Ellie's story isn't just important—it is a very big deal.*



*While the setting of Marsden's novel is fictional, Mt. Martin is based on Mount Howitt, a well-known mountain in Alpine National Park in Victoria, Australia. Tailor's Stitch is a description of Cross Cut Saw, part of the Mount Howitt range, a detail that is likely not lost on Australian readers. Ellie's concern that her parents won't allow her to go camping with boys suggests that she is young—too young, perhaps, to be unsupervised with boys.*



Taylor's Stitch terminates in **Hell**, a remote bush full of boulders and feral animals. Hell is completely wild and untouched by human hands, and it has several steep cliffs known as Satan's Steps. According to local legend, Hell was the home of the Hermit, an "ex-murderer" who allegedly killed his wife and infant son. Ellie, however, has a hard time believing there is any truth to the story. If the Hermit really murdered his family, he likely would have been hanged like all the other murderers during that time.

*Like Taylor's Stitch, Satan's Steps represent a real place in Victoria. Mount Howitt is known for similar rock formations called Devils Staircase. Referring to the remote bush as Hell suggests that it is harsh and unforgiving and not a pleasant place, and since it was the home of the Hermit, it appears dangerous and sinister by extension. The Hermit's identity as an "ex-murderer" is confusing and suggests that for whatever reason, the Hermit was no longer considered a murderer; however, he was still punished by living in Hell. Ellie's disbelief in the Hermit's story underscores one of Marsden's primary arguments—stories are not always believable, nor are they always true.*



First, Ellie must convince her parents to let her go camping in **Hell** with boys. Initially, Ellie's parents are not so sure it's a good idea. They recommend inviting a few more girls and going camping near the river instead. Ellie's mother assures her it will still be "fun," but since Ellie's mother's idea of fun is canning preserves for the local fair, Ellie isn't convinced. Ellie interrupts her story, explaining that it feels odd to talk this way, especially after so much has happened, but she has promised to be honest.

*Again, it is clear that Ellie isn't old enough to be unsupervised with boys, which further points to her young age. It isn't that Ellie isn't trustworthy—her parents trust her to be away several days with her girlfriends—but spending time with boys is another matter. Ellie's comment that her mother's idea of "fun" doesn't match her own is a bit snarky, and Ellie clearly feels bad about it. This suggests that something bad has since happened to Ellie's mother, and Ellie feels guilty for giving her a hard time when she isn't there to defend herself. Ellie's guilt also reflects the love she has for her mother—if she wasn't important in Ellie's life, Ellie wouldn't care that she insulted her. Lastly, Ellie obviously wants her story to be as accurate as possible, which can also be seen as a testament to the story's importance.*



Ellie's parents finally agree to the camping trip in **Hell**, but they make Ellie promise that she will be the only one driving their Land Rover. Kevin has his provisional driver's license, but Ellie really is the better driver. Boys will be allowed, too, Ellie's parents say, but there must be at least six people total, and eight is better. Ellie's parents believe there will be less chances of "an orgy" if there are more of them, but they don't say this. They say they want more people for "safety" reasons. "I know them too well," Ellie writes, careful to write "know" and not "knew."

*Ellie makes a concerted effort to speak of her parents in the present tense, as if she is trying to convince herself they aren't dead. This, too, implies that something terrible has happened to Ellie's parents, which also hints to the seriousness of their story. This passage also suggests that Ellie is not a legal driver. One must be 17 in Australia to legally drive, and one must be at least 15 years and nine months to obtain a provisional license. Thus, with the exception of Kevin, Ellie and her friends are likely under 16 years old. Ellie's parents' secret worry of "an orgy" also points to Ellie's adolescence. Ellie and her friends are growing up and becoming interested in sex, but Ellie's parents know they aren't old enough to handle such relationships.*



Ellie's parents all make her promise that no one will bring any alcohol or cigarettes on the camping trip, and Ellie agrees. Ellie decides to also invite Chris, bringing their number officially to eight. But Chris's parents are going overseas, and he has to stay home and watch the house. Next, Ellie goes to Homer's house to invite him. Homer doesn't so much ask his parents if he can go; he just tells them he is going. Homer's brother is the only one to protest. Homer will miss the Commemoration Day Show, which means his brother will be stuck grooming the bulls. Homer says his brother is more than capable of handling the bulls and goes to pack.

Corrie calls and tells Ellie that she has invited Kevin. Kevin would rather go to the Commemoration Day Show, but he agreed to go camping for Corrie. Next, Ellie calls Fiona, but her parents say they want to think about it. Going camping in **Hell** for nearly a week with boys is a big deal. Ellie hangs up the phone and goes downstairs. Her mother is watching a newscast, something about how high defense is on the Government's agenda, and Ellie is glad to be getting out of town for a while. Next, Ellie calls Lee, and he agrees that camping sounds better than the Show. Corrie was surprised when Ellie said she wanted to invite Lee. He doesn't really hang out with them, and he is kind of a serious guy.

Ellie calls Robyn next, who is really excited about camping in **Hell**, but she worries her parents won't allow it. "What's the worst thing that could happen?" Ellie asks Robyn's father. The next day, Robyn's parents finally agree to let her go, although Ellie can't understand what their problem is. Robyn is the most trustworthy person Ellie knows. Robyn is shy and kind of serious, and she's good at school and is always going to church. Later, Ellie goes shopping in town with her mom, where they run into Fiona and her mom. Ellie's mom talks Fiona's mom into letting Fiona go camping, and their number is officially up to seven.

Fiona is beautiful and elegant, and to Ellie, she is "the perfect person." Ellie's mom always says Fiona has "fine features," and she looks like she has never done a hard day's work in her life. Fiona's parents are lawyers, and besides Lee, she is the only one in their group who lives in town. Kevin is an average country boy, and he is also Corrie's boyfriend. He is a big guy, and his ego is even bigger, but Corrie insists he is sensitive and caring. Ellie isn't so sure. Lee lives above his parent's restaurant. Lee's dad is Thai and his mom is Vietnamese, and they serve Asian food that is pretty good.

*Ellie's promise to avoid alcohol and cigarettes again points to her young age. She isn't yet an adult, and she isn't legally allowed to smoke or drink. This abstinence—to substances and the sex Ellie's parents refer to above—suggests that morality and doing the right thing are important to Ellie and her parents. Homer, on the other hand, doesn't seem to care what his parents think—and they appear to have given up trying—which suggests Homer is a bit of a troublemaker and resistant to authority.*



*The fact that Kevin is willing to miss the Commemoration Day Show—obviously a big deal in town—just for Corrie suggests that Kevin and Corrie have a relationship that goes beyond friendship; or, at least, that Kevin wants to have a relationship more than friendship. On another note, there is a clear connection between the newscast and Ellie's desire to get out of town, which suggests that newscasts about national defense and the Government's agenda are commonplace. Such newscasts imply there is some sort of tension within the government and with other countries, since they are concerned with defense issues. This passage also suggests Ellie is interested in Lee romantically. He obviously isn't a close friend, yet Ellie wants to invite him camping.*



*Ellie's question as to "the worst thing that could happen" is a sort of harbinger for the upcoming war. Marsden seems to suggest that the "worst thing" is to go camping and come home to a foreign invasion and your family missing—which, as readers are about to find out, is exactly what happens. Ellie's description of Robyn establishes Robyn as the morally superior member of their group. Robyn is religious, kind, and studious, all of which point to Robyn's high moral standards.*



*Ellie's description of Fiona as "perfect" with "fine features" establishes Fiona as the resident "pretty girl" in their group. And, since Fiona's parents are lawyers, Ellie implies Fiona is rich and also quite pampered. Corrie's insistence that Kevin is sensitive and caring despite his brutish appearance implies there is more to people than meets the eye—one of the lessons that Ellie and the others learn in particular during their coming-of-age transformation.*



Homer lives near Ellie, and they have grown up together. Homer is a prankster, and a little bit wild, and he is always getting into trouble. For instance, he often breaks windows at school and steals the workmen's ladder when they climb up to the roof.

Again, Homer is portrayed as a troublemaker, and it is clear that he does not have the same moral standards as someone like Robyn, who would never break windows and harass workmen. Furthermore, Homer's pranks are quite dangerous, which suggests he is also very brave.



Robyn, Fiona, Lee, Homer, and Kevin are the "Famous Five," and with Corrie and Ellie, they make the "Secret Seven." Although, Ellie says, there isn't much they can relate to anymore in books like those. "We've all had to rewrite the scripts of our lives the last few weeks," Ellie writes. They have learned so much, and they have discovered "what's important, what matters—what really matters."

The "Famous Five" and the "Secret Seven" refers to two series of children's novels, *The Famous Five series* and *The Secret Seven series*, by English writer Enid Blyton. These references underscore the friendship between Ellie and the others, but they also reflect the importance of writing and storytelling within Marsden's novel. Ellie's comment that they've had to "rewrite the scripts of [their] lives" implies that Ellie and her friends have been through something major that has changed them profoundly and taught them "what really matters."



## CHAPTER 2

Ellie plans to leave for **Hell** by 8:00 a.m., and by 10:30 a.m., the Land Rover is packed and the group is making their way up Tailor's Stitch. The road is full of mud slides and small water crossings, and by 2:30 p.m., the group is at the top of the mountain. They can see Cobbler's Bay off to one side, which, except for an occasional fishing boat, is usually empty. Ellie's dad says Cobbler's Bay is the best natural harbor in the world, but since it's so remote, it's barely used. Today, a pair of large ships float in the distance, and one looks like it may be a commercial fishing boat. On the other side of the sharp mountain of Tailor's Stitch is Hell. The group stands staring, intimidated by the difficult terrain.

Ellie and the others get a late start and leave two and a half hours after they initially planned, which makes them appear disorganized and also points to their young age and inexperience. It takes Ellie and the others four hours to drive partway to Hell, a remoteness that lends to the ominous nature of the bush, and the intimidation Ellie and the others feel as they look down on Hell further imbues the area with type of fear and foreboding. It is highly unusual for there to be any ships in the remote Cobbler's Bay, which suggests something out of the ordinary is happening.



Ellie tells the group about the Hermit, a supposed "ex-murderer," and Robyn asks how anyone can be an "ex-murderer." Either you're a murderer, she says, or you're not. They unload the Land Rover and marvel at the size of Fiona's bag. Ellie asks Fiona what is in her bag, and Fiona says "clothes and stuff." Ellie asks her to be more specific, and Fiona ticks off a laundry list of items, including jumpers and a dressing gown. Ellie organizes a committee of six to repack Fiona's bag—excluding Fiona—and explains they must also get food into their packs. And it is a long walk into **Hell**.

This is the second time Ellie refers to the Hermit as an "ex-murderer." This time, Robyn comments on how strange this term is, which suggests the Hermit really isn't a murderer at all. The contents of Fiona's bag again suggests that she is pampered and a bit naive. There is no way she will need jumpers and dressing gowns in the bush, but she packs them anyway—instead of food. At this point, Fiona isn't responsible enough to pack her own bag.



They plan on camping for five days, but Ellie says they can probably come back to the Land Rover if they need to get more supplies. They set out with their packs at 5:00 p.m., and they each carry three water bottles. They are hoping to find a water source in **Hell**. Ellie walks along with Lee, talking about horror movies, of which Lee is an expert. This detail surprises Ellie—she always associates Lee with the piano and violin, which seem at odds with horror movies. They climb down Satan’s Steps, where they find a beautiful stream and, to everyone’s surprise, a bridge.

*Ellie’s surprise that Lee—whose association with classical music makes him appear uptight—is interested in horror movies again suggests there is more to people than what actually meets the eye. Marsden frequently draws attention to this lesson, which Ellie and the others learn as they grow and mature over the course of the novel.*



## CHAPTER 3

The path to the bridge is overgrown and covered in twigs and leaves. The bridge itself is clearly old, but it is well built out of uniform round logs. The group immediately decides the stories about the Hermit must be true. Who else could have built such a bridge? He must have lived on wild animals, like possums and wombats, Ellie says, and perhaps he had a vegetable garden. Ellie remembers a guy in town who once found a homemade walking stick in the bush near Wombegonoo. Ellie now thinks it must have been the Hermit’s, although she never really believed the story.

*Ellie’s continued disbelief in the Hermit again suggests that stories and legends aren’t always believable or even remotely true, which underscores the limitations of storytelling. There are local legends in Victoria about an actual hermit who lived in the remote bush surrounding Mount Howitt during the 1970s and 1980s, and a hiker named Scott Vickers-Willis found a homemade walking stick in the Mount Howitt bush in 1986.*



The path leads them downhill, through a dense growth of green and brown bushes. Fiona comments how nice it is for **Hell**, and Robyn wonders if they are the only ones to ever set eyes on it, except for the Hermit, of course. The path opens to a clearing about the size of a hockey field, and they decide to build camp. The clearing isn’t far from the creek—where Ellie sits now as she writes—and Kevin begins to gather wood for a fire. Lee and Ellie are tasked with making dinner, and they decide on two-minute noodles. Fiona asks what two-minute noodles are, and the others are shocked she has never had them. Her parents only eat healthy food, Fiona says. Ellie shakes her head. Sometimes Fiona really is too perfect.

*Ellie constantly interrupts her story throughout the novel, which draws attention to the fact that she is writing their story in real-time. Fiona’s observation that Hell is a pretty nice place is certainly ironic, and it suggests that, like people, there is more to Hell than meets the eye. Fiona again appears sheltered and pampered given that she has never eaten two-minute noodles, a staple food similar to ramen noodles, and it is examples like this that make her transformation later in the novel all the more significant.*



## CHAPTER 4

The next day, Ellie and the others wake at about 11:00 a.m. and do pretty much nothing but sit around and eat. They had forgotten to put away a bag of cookies the night before, and some wild animal clearly ate them. By late afternoon, Corrie and Kevin are kissing on Kevin’s sleeping bag, and Fiona and Ellie wade in the creek. Lee sits reading [All Quiet on the Western Front](#), and Robyn listens quietly to her Walkman. Homer is off somewhere, panning for gold or climbing trees.

*Ellie and the others aren’t exactly motivated—they just sit around eating junk food—which makes them look like a bunch of lazy teenagers. However, Lee’s book, [All Quiet on the Western Front](#), a novel about the mental and physical stress of World War I by German novelist Erich Maria Remarque, foreshadows the war and obvious change in lifestyle that awaits Ellie and the others.*



That evening, Homer drops to his sleeping bag, exhausted. He comments about how great **Hell** is and then jumps off the sleeping bag like a rocket. A snake has crawled in, and the bag is moving. Everyone stops what they are doing and gathers around the bag. Kevin suggests they weigh the bag down with rocks and drop it in the creek, but Ellie is worried the snake might bite through the bag. They decide it is best to stand on one side and try to flush the snake into the bush.

Robyn and Kevin grab heavy sticks and begin to gently lift the bag. It is “perfect teamwork,” until the sticks get too far apart. Robyn loses her grip for just a minute, which is all it takes, and the snake, now incredibly agitated, shoots out of the sleeping bag. Kevin stands paralyzed with fear. Ellie tries to think rational thoughts, but her brain tells her to panic. She runs, not caring about the others. Robyn runs, too, and Fiona jumps in the creek. Corrie has taken refuge, smartly, by the fire, and Homer is nowhere to be found.

Corrie points in the direction the snake went. She says Homer went in the opposite direction, and they all agree that was smart. Ellie asks Fiona why she is standing in the water, and Fiona says to get away from the snake, of course. Ellie informs Fiona that snakes can swim, and Fiona stands in the water, shocked. By 9:30 p.m. that night, almost everyone is sleeping, except for Fiona and Homer, who sit together by the fire.

Sometime in the night, Ellie wakes and has to go to the bathroom. She doesn't want to move, but she forces herself from her warm sleeping bag. Alone in the darkness, Ellie hears a sound in the distance. It is mechanical, like a hum. She decides it sounds like some kind of airplane, and then the noise gets louder. Suddenly, lines of airplanes pierce the quiet night sky, six lines in all, containing several planes. Ellie stands up, not realizing that she had dropped to the ground when the planes flew overhead. Afterwards, the night air feels contaminated, and the unmistakable smell of jet fuel permeates the area. Maybe **Hell** isn't so remote, Ellie thinks.

Ellie goes back to her sleeping bag, and a groggy Fiona asks what all the noise is. Ellie tells her about the planes, and Fi says they are probably coming back from Commemoration Day. They always do demonstrations and flyovers during the celebration. Ellie decides Fiona is right and goes back to sleep. The next day, Robyn asks if anyone else heard the planes. There were hundreds, she says. Ellie tells them about the six lines she saw, and says it must have been a different lot from what Robyn saw. Lee comments that it is probably World War III. Australia could have been invaded, and they would never know in **Hell**.

*While Homer's response to the snake in his sleeping bag is quite comical, the snake is still a very serious matter. Snake bites can be fatal and require immediate medical attention—and the group is deep in the bush, far from the hospital. Still, Ellie and the others are relatively calm. They approach the situation rationally, which reflects their growing maturity.*



*The description of Robyn and Kevin's efforts as “perfect teamwork” again reflects a rational and calm approach to trouble, but it doesn't take long for it all to unravel, which points to their young age and general inexperience. When it counts the most, the friends panic and scatter, with little to no consideration for each other. This, too, makes their future transformation into rational young adults all the more powerful and significant.*



*Fiona and Homer sitting together alone in front of the fire suggests they are interested in one another and hints at the possibility of love. Fiona's belief that she is safe from the snake in the water again underscores her inexperience and naivety having grown up in the suburbs.*



*Ellie doesn't think that anyone has ever been to Hell, but the planes prove that isn't true. The planes, like the ships in Cobbler's Bay, suggest something is going on. Scores of jets don't normally fly over the bush at night—or at all, for that matter. Lines of jet planes connote military operations, and that they're flying in the cover of night suggests war. The fact that Ellie instinctively drops to the ground when the planes fly over implies that she immediately—if subconsciously—grasps that the planes are threatening and powerful.*



*Lee's comment that it is World War III is clearly meant to be sarcastic, but there is some truth to his words. They are completely isolated in Hell, and they wouldn't know if something awful happened back home. This conversation also speaks to the group's inexperience and naivety, because it is highly unlikely that any local festival would involve hundreds of jets. The cost would be too great, and it would involve too much man power. The planes are definitely not part of a friendly demonstration, but Ellie and the others don't realize this.*



Fiona comments that if anyone wanted to invade them, Commemoration Day would be the perfect time. Kevin says he would do it on Christmas, in the early afternoon when everyone has gone back to sleep. Later, Ellie finds Homer alone by the creek, panning for gold. He asks her what she thinks of Fiona. Ellie tells Homer that she loves Fiona, even if she is perfect. Homer agrees that “Fi” does seem perfect and comments that she probably thinks he isn’t good enough for her. Ellie isn’t sure; she has never talked to Fi about Homer. Ellie is secretly blown away—she can’t believe Homer is actually romantically interested in Fi.

*Again, Fiona’s comment that Commemoration Day would be the perfect time to invade the country is ironic. Readers can infer that Australia has been invaded, as evidenced by the hundreds of planes that flew overhead the night before and the title of the book. On another note, Ellie is surprised that Homer is interested in Fiona because they are so different: Fiona is a wealthy girl from the suburbs, and Homer is a rural farm kid. Homer worries that Fiona won’t like him because, compared to her, Homer is poor and rough around the edges.*



Ellie looks around and wonders why everyone calls this place **Hell**. It is wild, for sure, but is it really like Hell? She decides it isn’t. It is merely Hell because people call it Hell. Kind of like Homer, Ellie thinks. People say he’s no good, so everyone thinks he’s no good. Animals don’t just accept things so easily. They use their intelligence and instinct and decide things for themselves. Hell doesn’t have anything to do with a place. It is people, Ellie decides. People are Hell.

*Here, Ellie is beginning to show maturity. She is thinking for herself and not blindly accepting what other people tell her. This moment marks Ellie’s first consideration of Hell and what it means. Hell and Homer aren’t considered bad because they are inherently bad; instead, people have imposed those labels on them and then assumed those labels to be true. This realization will become important later in the novel when Ellie begins to struggle with the moral implications of the war.*



## CHAPTER 5

Each day gets lazier than the last. Ellie and the others keep saying they are going for a long hike, but they never actually do it. They just lay around and eat. Ellie and Corrie go for a few walks—nothing too far—and talk about their future and traveling overseas. They want to go to Indonesia, Thailand, China, India, and then Egypt. Corrie wants to go to Africa, but Ellie wants to go to Europe. Corrie has always wanted to be a nurse and go where the people need her most, and Ellie admires her for that. Ellie just wants to make money.

*The portrayal of Ellie and the others as lazy teenagers continues, sharply contrasting with the flurry of activity that’s likely happening back home. Ellie and Corrie’s talk lends valuable insight into their characters. Corrie, evident by her desire to be a nurse, is caring and thinks first and foremost about other people, which implies a high moral standing. Ellie, on the other hand, appears quite selfish. She wants to make money, not help others.*



On the last day in **Hell**, food is running short, but no one wants to walk back to the Land Rover for more. They decide to make do with the remaining snacks, even though they are out of all the staples. Homer keeps staring at Fiona, but she refuses to talk to Ellie about him. Instead, Fiona pretends that she doesn’t notice Homer’s attention. Ellie is surprised that the group has only had a few small arguments over the last five days, like Kevin giving Fiona a hard time for disappearing when there is work to do, or Corrie getting mad at Homer for some stupid prank. Robyn even told Ellie she was bossy, which hurt Ellie’s feelings just a bit.

*Ellie and her friends have a close connection, but they still have fights and disagreements. These arguments suggests that friendship, which is undoubtedly important and wonderful, is not always easy. Additionally, such arguments lend further insight into the characters. Fiona’s disappearance during work reflects her pampered nature, Homer’s pranks on Corrie underscore his playfulness, and Ellie clearly likes to be in control.*





Their dumbest fight, which Ellie supposes all fights are, was when they couldn't agree on which color car was the least conspicuous. On their last night, they played True Confessions, and Robyn confessed that **Hell** was the best place ever. She made them all promise to come back and to keep their spot a secret, so it isn't overrun with people looking for a good campsite. They swore they would look for the Hermit's hut next time and went to bed. Ellie, couldn't sleep, just like the last few nights. She has been struck by "some kind of strange anxiety."

It is 11:00 a.m. by the time the group sets off for the Land Rover. They put out the fire, bid **Hell** farewell, and begin the long and difficult walk up Tailor's Stitch. Homer walks close to Fiona, and Ellie wonders if maybe Fiona actually likes him—stranger things have happened. Their packs are considerably lighter, minus all the food, but the hike is still tough. They stop for a break on Wombegonoo, but not for too long, because no one brought any extra water. After a 40 minute hike, they finally reach the Land Rover and fall against it with relief. They immediately go for the water and tear into the extra food.

Ellie thinks about a story she heard about prisoners of war being grateful for any scrap of food, but then two days after their release, they complained about chicken soup instead of tomato. That's how this group is—"and still is," Ellie writes. Ellie remembers an ice cream cone she had thrown away from the freezer at home because it was freezer burned. Ellie wishes she had that ice cream now, but she supposes she would throw it out again after being home for a few hours.

No one is in any real hurry to get home, except for Ellie, but she thinks about how Robyn called her bossy and keeps her mouth shut. By midafternoon, everyone is ready to leave, and they pile into the Land Rover. The drive down Tailor's Stitch is just as slow going as it was on the way up, and Ellie is getting more and more impatient. As they bounce down the path, they notice six different fires burning in the distance, two of them quite big. It is too early for fire season, but no one really thinks much of it.

*Ellie's "strange anxiety" and sleeplessness serves as a bit of foreshadowing. Readers can infer from the title of Marsden's book that a war is indeed coming, even if Ellie and the others don't yet realize this. Ellie's anxiousness is like a premonition—she can sense that something isn't right, and it is affecting her sleep and making her uncomfortable.*



*The fact that Ellie and the others don't bring any extra water on their hike back to the Land Rover again reflects their young age and irresponsibility. Likely, they don't want to carry the heavy water back up the steep incline, making their bags considerably heavier. Hiking any distance in the Australian bush without water isn't a good idea; dehydration can occur quickly and without warning, and it can be life threatening.*



*Ellie's interruption to the story and her comparison of her friends to prisoners of war is another moment of foreshadowing. Ellie's story implies that the group will again be in a situation in which food is in short supply, which suggests something out of the ordinary is about to happen.*



*The fires burning in the distance again suggest that something out of the ordinary—and something quite serious, since two of the fires are large—is happening in town. Ellie's growing impatience and anxiety implies this as well. Ellie knows something isn't right, she just doesn't know what. This passage also underscores how difficult friendship can be. It has been hours since Robyn called Ellie bossy, but it is still affecting Ellie.*



When they reach the river, there is a vote to stop and swim, much to Ellie's dismay. She swims for only a few minutes, and then Lee sits down next to her and asks why she seems to be upset. Ellie says she doesn't know but thinks that she just wants to get home. Lee admits that he feels the same way, and Ellie is surprised, given that he doesn't seem upset at all. Ellie wonders if she is just feeling guilty. She left her dad with an awful lot of work by skipping out on the Show, and Lee says he always feels that way when he leaves his parents at the restaurant. The others finally get out of the river. Robyn and Fiona are last, and Homer watches Fiona as she goes back to the Land Rover. They are about 30 minutes from home.

*Even though Ellie and Lee are just teenagers, they still have major responsibilities. It is clear that Ellie helps her father significantly on their livestock farm, and Lee helps his parents at the family restaurant. Ellie and Lee's guilt at leaving their parents alone with so much work again underscores their inherent goodness and morality. They are both good kids, even though they can be lazy and selfish at times. Lee is clearly feeling anxious just like Ellie, which again suggests something out of the ordinary has happened.*



## CHAPTER 6

When Ellie pulls the Land Rover up to her house, the dogs are all dead. Their chains are pulled tight, and there is blood around their necks. Their water bucket is overturned and empty. Ellie runs around back to Millie, the old dog who is separated from the younger ones. Millie looks rough, but she's alive, and Ellie takes her chain off. Millie stands but immediately falls. Ellie yells to Corrie to take care of the dog and runs inside. Corrie passes the dog off to Kevin and follows Ellie.

*The dead dogs are clear evidence that something is terribly wrong. The blood around their necks suggests they were left on their chains and were pulling violently to get away. Likely, Ellie's parents would never leave the dogs chained without water or food, so readers can infer that Ellie's parents aren't able to care for the dogs—and haven't been for some time.*



Inside, the house is silent and empty. It should be loud and busy at this time of day, Ellie thinks. Her mother should be cooking and watching the news, but there is nothing and no one. Corrie picks up the phone meaning to call Homer's house down the street, but there is no dial tone. The others come into the kitchen, followed by Kevin carrying Millie. Homer goes to the cold room to get something for Millie to eat, but he comes back empty handed. The power is out, Homer says, and everything in the cold room has gone bad.

*The fact that the power and phone lines are out suggests that whatever is going on is not just limited to Ellie's home or family. No phones and no power is indicative of a widespread problem, and one of towering significance.*



Fiona asks what is going on, and Corrie says that maybe Ellie's grandmother got sick. Irritated, Ellie yells that her parents wouldn't cut the power and phones and let the dogs die for a sick grandmother. Soon, there is a complete breakdown in communication, and the entire group is yelling at each other. Kevin says it was probably a UFO, and Ellie suggests they get into the Land Rover and go to Homer's. Lee asks if Ellie has a radio, and she says she does. She had tried to turn on the radio in the Land Rover but got only static. Ellie assumed it was due to the high mountains of Tailor's Stitch.

*Likely, Ellie wasn't able to get a radio station in the Land Rover because the radio stations have been cut as well, not because of the high mountains, which is another indication that something is very wrong. The spontaneous bickering that erupts is again proof of their young age and inexperience. They are confused and scared, and instead of thinking rationally, they begin to fight with each other under the stress.*



Ellie grabs her radio and spins the tuning dial. Only static. She tries again. Nothing. They all get in the Land Rover and head to Homer's. When they get there, it is silent and still. Ellie drives through the cattle grid and hits the horn, just as she always does, but Lee tells her to stop. She parks and Homer jumps out, yelling for his mom and dad. The rest of them get out of the car and follow. Homer is in the backyard, trying to milk the family cow, which is obviously uncomfortable. He asks Ellie to take over, but she doesn't know how to milk. Ellie's dad keeps bulls, not milking cows.

Inside, Kevin asks if he can take the Land Rover and go to the rest of their houses, but Ellie says no. Her dad said she was the only one who is supposed to drive the Land Rover. Robyn interrupts. They must be smart, she says. It is obvious their parents haven't gone on a holiday, and they have to assume that something really terrible has happened. The group again breaks down and begins to shout and argue. Fiona stands quietly chewing her nails. Lee quiets the group and urges them to listen to Robyn, who says going around to seven different houses might not be a good idea. They have to formulate a plan.

Robyn continues. There is no sign of anyone leaving quickly or unexpectedly. It appears as if they all went to the Commemoration Day Show and never returned. Ellie asks Homer if there is any way he can tell if his parents came back or not. Ellie's father planned to show his prize bulls but would never sell them. She didn't think to look, but if the bulls are gone, then her parents never came back from the Show. Homer says his mom enters a needlepoint into the Show's competition each year, and then hangs it on the wall when she gets home. She makes a big deal out of hanging the needlepoint, Homer says, even if she doesn't win. He runs into the next room and comes back. No needlepoint. His parents never came home from the Show.

Lee reminds them of the hundreds of planes flying over **Hell**, and Ellie suddenly remembers the planes didn't have lights. She hadn't noticed it at the time, but now it is so obvious to her. The planes had certainly been dark. Lee speaks up again and asks if they remember what he said about Commemoration Day being the perfect time for an invasion. "Let's say we've been invaded," Lee says, "I think there might be a war."

*The fact that Homer goes directly to the cow underscores his sense of responsibility. Homer might be young, but he still knows what needs to be done. It is obvious that no one has been around for days, which means the cow hasn't been milked. Cows that aren't milked can become engorged and infected, and then eventually stop producing milk all together—a very bad thing for a farm that keeps milk cows.*



*Despite the stress of the situation and the arguments that keep breaking out, both Ellie and Robyn show maturity and responsibility. Ellie doesn't even know where her dad is—or if he is coming back—but she still obeys his rules concerning the Land Rover. Robyn proves to be the only voice of sound reason and tries to approach the situation logically. Unlike the others, she doesn't let her emotions carry her away.*



*Ellie and the others are quickly discovering that whatever has happened to their families likely occurred during the Commemoration Day Show, just like Fiona's comment in Hell that Commemoration Day would be the perfect time to invade the country and start a war. Nearly everyone in town goes to the Commemoration Day Show, which means they were all in one place and more easily taken over by the invading power.*



*This is the first time Ellie and the others actually admit to themselves that their country has likely been invaded and is at war. The planes obviously entered the country in stealth mode and didn't want to be discovered, which means they didn't enter with good intentions.*



## CHAPTER 7

Kevin's house is much like Ellie and Homer's—dead dogs, dead birds in cages, and dead lambs. Kevin's corgi is locked in the laundry room with food and water, however, and he is very happy to see Kevin. They stop to talk in the kitchen. Bicycles will be a much quicker form of transportation and quieter than a car, Robyn suggests, and she asks if they know anyone who doesn't go to the Show every year. Finding someone who stayed behind is their best bet for some answers. Lee doesn't think his parents would have gone. They never do, he says.

The group goes to leave, but Kevin insists on bringing his dog. He can't bear to leave him alone again. They all agree but warn Kevin they might have to abandon the dog later. Kevin agrees and climbs on a bike with the dog. They ride to Corrie's house, and when Ellie finds Corrie standing in the middle of her empty living room with tears pouring down her face, Ellie knows she will never get the image out of her head.

Robyn encourages them to stop and eat. They don't know when they will next get the chance, she says, and they will need their strength. They choke down sandwiches, and Ellie thinks about town, where danger seems a real possibility. Corrie is the last one who lives in the country, where it seems relatively safe, and Robyn's house is just on the edge of town. As they leave, Ellie notices a piece of paper in the fax machine and hands it to Corrie. It is a note from Corrie's dad. Something has happened, Corrie's dad writes, but he doesn't know what. Some people are saying it is just "Army manoeuvres," but he warns Corrie to stay safe and go to the bush and hide.

Corrie and Ellie hold each other and cry. But, Ellie interrupts, they haven't cried since. They grab Corrie's bike from the shed and head in the direction of town. As they move closer, Robyn and Lee ride ahead and check intersections before waving the rest of the group through. They ride in complete silence and find Robyn's house empty like the others. When they leave Robyn's, it is nearly 1:30 a.m. They look to town from the top of the hill, which is in total darkness, except for the Showground. Ellie knows they must make it to Lee and Fiona's. It wouldn't be fair not to check on their parents, too, even though they are sure they won't find them.

*The fact that Kevin's corgi is safe and sound inside the house again suggests that something happened at the Show. Kevin's parents obviously weren't taken from home. If they had been, the dog likely would not have been taken care of in such a way and would be dead like the dogs left outside on chains. The amount of death they are initially faced with harkens to the obvious death involved in war. Robyn is again the voice of reason and shows maturity beyond her age.*



*Corrie is clearly scared. Something awful has happened to her family, and her despair underscores the love that she obviously feels for them. The fact that they may have to abandon the dog later suggests that they may have to make some tough decisions, which will likely be difficult for a group of young teenagers.*



*Robyn continues to show wisdom beyond her years by insisting they all stop to eat. If not for Robyn, they would likely leave without eating, but she forces them to slow down. This extra time allows them a chance to think and eventually notice the fax sitting in the machine. Corrie's dad's mention of "Army manoeuvres" implies the takeover is some kind of military operation, which directly points to war, just as Lee has already suggested.*



*Ellie's embrace of Corrie reflects their love and friendship, and their tears reflect their fear for their families, whom they clearly love very much. Ellie's interruption to say that they haven't cried since this moment suggests they have grown and toughed up since the start of the war. As Ellie is telling their story, she is looking back on their experience, and this puts her in the unique position to assess their behavior and consider what it means.*



Homer says that they should split up. They need to be out of town before the sun comes up, he warns, and they are running out of time. Plus, Homer continues, if only a few of them are caught by whoever is doing this, it is much better than all of them. Homer offers to go with Fiona to her house; he has always wanted to see the inside of one of the rich houses on the hill, and now is the perfect chance. Robyn agrees it is best to split up and suggests they all put on dark clothes and meet back on the hill at 3:00. Fiona asks what they do if everyone doesn't come back and suggests they wait until 3:30. If everyone doesn't make it back by then, they will come back for them once it gets dark again.

Robyn and Lee decide to go check Lee's house, and Ellie, Kevin, and Corrie head towards the Showground to look around. The Showground is on the other side of town, but Ellie is glad to be moving again. As Ellie walks, she thinks of her parents. Their lives are so unaffected by the outside world. She has seen news coverage of wars, but they all seemed so far away. The only thing from the outside world that managed to affect Ellie's family was cattle prices. Ellie won't allow herself to think that her parents are dead, but she does imagine them being held against their will. Her father is probably furious and completely disinterested in the language and culture of his captors. Ellie's mother, of course, is probably keeping everyone calm.

Kevin breaks Ellie's thoughts and tells her to keep up. Time is running out, and they still have to make it back to Robyn's. The Showgrounds are in plain sight, and they begin to move closer. For the first time, Ellie knows what it means to be brave. Up to now, it has all felt like a game, but now Ellie must force herself to sneak up to a nearby tree. As Ellie makes it to the first tree, she feels a surge of courage and jumps from tree to tree, Kevin and Corrie close behind. Ellie suddenly feels like an adult, not some kid playing in the bush.

Near the Showground, Ellie can see guards holding rifles. The grounds are still set up for the Show, and games, rides, and food tents are erected everywhere. The parking lot is full of cars, and Ellie thinks about all the dogs who were probably left in the cars. She hopes someone let them out, at least. They watch the Showground for a few minutes, and Ellie sees one of her old teachers exit a tent and go into a portable toilet. This is where they are holding everyone, Ellie thinks. As they approach the last tree, gunshots ring out into the air. Kevin tells them to run, and they all take off.

*Homer obviously volunteers to go with Fiona because he has a crush on her, but he does want to see how the other half lives. Homer is incredibly self-conscious about the differences in his and Fiona's lifestyles, and he worries Fiona doesn't like him because of these differences. Seeing Fiona's house up close will give Homer a better sense of what he is up against in finally winning Fiona's love. Homer, Robyn, and Fiona each display wisdom and maturity here. They don't want to split up, but they know it is best.*



*Ellie's thoughts about her parents reflect the love she has for them, as does her worry that they are dead. This fear, as well as her belief that war is something that happens elsewhere, reflects her young age and naivety. Ellie can't imagine a life without her parents taking care of her, and her sheltered life at home does not involve the worry of war. Up to now, Ellie has considered her parents and their life in rural Australia the whole world, but she is quickly learning this isn't the case.*



*The extreme circumstances of the war force Ellie to immediately grow up, and being this close to the action has pushed this reality into overdrive. Ellie knows that she isn't safe, and that there is real danger at the Showground. War isn't a game, and Marsden implies that in such situations, young people are capable of near instant maturity.*



*The image of men with rifles against the backdrop of the festival is a striking contrast. The tents and rides connote childhood games and levity, but the presence of the armed soldiers connote brutality and war. Ellie's concern that dogs were left in hot cars to die again underscores her inherent goodness and morality. Ellie's teacher doesn't appear to be hurt, and this is a good sign for the other prisoners; however, soldiers clearly aren't afraid to kill, evident by the ensuing gunfire.*



As she runs next to Kevin and Corrie with bullets whizzing by, Ellie suddenly feels as if they are a family. They run down a residential street, and Kevin leads them into a backyard, which is enclosed with old buildings lining the back. They are trapped, Ellie thinks, as Corrie stops and rubs her leg. She ran into something, Corrie says, and Kevin tells her it was a lawnmower—he almost hit it, too. Terror strikes Ellie, and she looks around. She starts mumbling about the mower and petrol and immediately begins to look for matches or a cigarette lighter. Ellie finds a car in a nearby garage and locates a book of matches.

Ellie goes back to Corrie and Kevin and asks where the lawnmower is. They fan out, looking for the mower, and can hear the soldiers getting closer, speaking a language they don't recognize. They finally find the mower, and Kevin removes the gas cap. Then he takes off his shirt and soaks it in the tank, leaving a trail of fuel away from the mower and up a brick wall. The soldiers are gaining, and Ellie can hear their footsteps on the gravel. They hide in the darkness until the soldiers come up on the mower, and Ellie strikes a match.

The match doesn't light, and Kevin mouths for Ellie to strike another one. She does, and it flames, but Ellie drops it too quickly. Luckily, the fuel ignites anyway, and a loud whooshing sound fills the air. Kevin drags Ellie behind the brick wall just as the mower explodes, shrapnel and flames flying everywhere. Kevin yells for them to run, and they head in the direction of Robyn's house.

By the time Kevin, Ellie, and Corrie make it back to the hill by Robyn's house, Fiona and Homer are already there, but there is no sign of Robyn and Lee. They wait until 3:35 and then reluctantly climb on the bikes. They can't wait any longer, so they peddle out of town "like bats out of **Hell**."

## CHAPTER 8

They get to Corrie's just before the sun comes up. Every muscle in Ellie's body hurts, and as she peddles the bike, she sings random songs in her head. She can't bring herself to think about the lawnmower and the soldiers. Ellie can't wrap her head around the fact that she probably just killed three people and that Robyn and Lee are missing, so she keeps singing. At some point, Ellie realizes she is singing out loud, which is the only sound. No one speaks, and the decision to go to Corrie's seems to have been made silently.

*Ellie's sudden feeling that Kevin and Corrie are her family reflects the love she has for them, but it also suggests that in the absence of family, friends become family. At this point, all Ellie has are her friends, and they fill the void left by her missing family. Ellie is obviously scared when she realizes they are trapped, but she immediately jumps into action and formulates a plan on the spot, which again suggests she is quickly maturing.*



*The fact that Ellie and the others don't recognize what language the soldiers are speaking suggests they are foreign, which means Australia has been invaded by an outside power and is not affected by a civil war. Kevin springs into action, too, and he seems to know what Ellie has planned without speaking. This type of performance under pressure implies that, like Ellie, Kevin is maturing on the spot as well.*



*Ellie is terrified as she strikes the match, and she can barely do what is expected of her. This implies that even though Ellie is rising to the challenge of the war, she is still in a situation that no teenager could ever be prepared for.*



*They linger until 3:35, despite their previous plan to leave at 3:30 sharp, which reflects their reluctance to leave their friends behind. Marsden's language and the description of the kids peddling "like bats out of Hell," is ironic; They have just come from Hell, and readers can infer that they will probably go back, especially given Corrie's dad's warning to go to the bush.*



*The group makes the decision to go to Corrie's silently, which underscores the clear connection of their friendship. They are in sync with one another, and they can anticipate each other's movements and thoughts. Ellie clearly can't emotionally handle the stress of being forced to kill in order to survive. Such violence would be difficult for anyone, but as a young teenager, Ellie is particularly struggling.*



Ellie pulls up to Corrie's porch and sits staring. For how long, she doesn't know, but Homer gently guides her into the house. Inside, Corrie makes coffee, and Fiona sits staring. Homer wanders around, gathering food and silverware. The kitchen feels empty without Lee and Robyn, but they slowly begin talking, and they are soon all talking over one another. Homer stands up and throws a glass mug against the fireplace, shattering it. "Greek custom," he says, telling them to speak one at a time.

Ellie takes a deep breath and tells Homer and Fiona what she saw at the Showground with Corrie and Kevin. As she gets to the part about the lawnmower and the soldiers, Ellie begins to have trouble. She just can't believe she has killed people. She feels "permanently damaged," like she will "never be normal again." The soldiers exist in a weird place in Ellie's mind. She never saw their faces and knows nothing about them—if they have families or if they are good people—so they don't seem quite real to her. Still, Ellie feels "guilty and ashamed."

As Ellie tells the lawnmower story, she nervously shreds a cereal box. Homer puts his hand on Ellie's, calming her, and Corrie stands behind her, placing her arms around Ellie. Fiona sits stunned, unable to believe what she is hearing. Kevin stands alone and quiet. Homer tells them all not to feel bad. "This is war now," he says, "and normal rules don't apply." As soon as those people invaded their country, Homer contends, they "tore up the rule book." Now, whatever they have to do is fair game. Ellie thanks Homer; his words really do help.

Ellie asks Homer what happened on the way to Fiona's, and Homer says it wasn't as exciting as their experience. They did see some overturned police cruisers and ambulances, and the shops in town have clearly been looted. And blood, Fiona says, lots of blood. But no bodies. In town, Fi heard a noise, so they snuck into a public men's room. They hid in the janitor's closet in the back, and three soldiers came in to use the bathroom. Thankfully, they never checked the janitor's closet. They spoke a language neither of them recognized, and while they don't know what language it was, Homer says it definitely wasn't Greek.

*Homer and his family are Greek, although he was born in Australia, and he frequently mentions his heritage. Ellie's episode of silently standing outside of Corrie's house suggests that Ellie is still having trouble processing the fact that she has likely just killed 3 people. She checks out for a moment, but Homer's gentle guidance reflects his innate goodness and love for his friend.*



*Ellie is obviously struggling with the moral implications of killing the soldiers. Her feelings of being "permanently damaged" and her fear that she won't be "normal again" implies that she can't go back to the basic good person she was before. She can never be an "ex-murderer," like the Hermit. Ellie is "guilty and ashamed" because she believes killing others is wrong, and now she fears she is a bad person.*



*Homer and Corrie's love for Ellie is clear, and they seem to give her the strength she needs to tell her story. Kevin presumably stands alone and quiet because he was intricately involved in blowing up the lawnmower and killing the soldiers, and he is struggling with the morality of his actions, just like Ellie. Homer's comment that "normal rules don't apply" during war implies that traditional ideas of morality and right and wrong don't exist during war, when difficult decisions must be made to survive.*



*Again, since Homer and Fiona don't recognize the language the soldiers speak, readers can infer that the invading force is not a bunch of disgruntled Australians and is definitely coming from a foreign country. The overturned police cars, ambulances, and blood all suggest that the takeover was not a peaceful one, and that it involved violence and possibly even death. The invasion was also organized and powerful, since it led to such widespread destruction and societal breakdown.*



Once Homer and Fiona arrived at Fiona's, Fiona saw a few people in the park nearby. Homer didn't see them, but Fi swore they weren't soldiers and yelled to them. The people stopped and talked amongst themselves and then ran away. Fi's house was empty just like the rest, but, Homer says, he is sure they are all okay. They are being held at the Showground or somewhere else, and will be released when all of this over. On their way back to Robyn's house to meet the others, they passed a house that had obviously been blown up. They hoped to see Robyn and Lee on the way, but they didn't.

Homer says that he and Fiona heard the gunshots from the Showground, and they saw the fireworks display from the lawnmower. When his story is finished, he suggests they sleep. It isn't likely that anyone will search all the houses in the district today, and they will probably start in town. Ellie agrees but suggests they plan an escape route just in case. Corrie says they should sleep in the gardening shed, that way someone can sit watch in the treehouse outside. Homer agrees, and then he says they should clean up the house so there isn't any evidence that they were ever there. Ellie looks at Homer and can't believe how he is changing. He hardly seems like the kid they all know, the one who can never be trusted.

## CHAPTER 9

Fiona wakes Ellie at 11:00 a.m. just like they planned, but Ellie has a hard time waking up. As she climbs up to the treehouse to take her watch, she feels groggy and slow. Ellie wakes slowly sitting in the treehouse, and thinks that it has been less than 24 hours since they came in from **Hell** and found their lives rearranged. Life can change in an instant, Ellie thinks, remembering all the hours she and Corrie spent playing dolls and other childhood games in the treehouse. One day they just stopped playing, and Ellie tried to pick it up again months later, but it wasn't the same. Ellie can't believe how quickly she has lost everything, and, as she mourns, she is scared for the future.

Ellie hears a sound from below, and Corrie climbs the ladder. Corrie can't sleep, so she figured she would come and sit with Ellie. Corrie wonders out loud about their parents and hopes they are safe at the Showground, but she can't stop thinking about World War II and Kampuchea. Then she thinks about the soldiers shooting at them and the sounds of their screams when the lawnmower exploded, and her brain overloads. War is something that happens on TV, Corrie says, and even if they manage to live, she says that she will never feel safe again.

*The presence of people in the park who are not soldiers implies that there are others who have not yet been captured by the invading power, which suggests the soldiers may be short on manpower, since they have not yet had the chance to secure the entire town. Homer's optimism reflects his innocence and love for his family—he doesn't want to believe that something bad has happened to them, even though the blown up house near Fiona's suggests the soldiers are dangerous and not afraid to kill.*



*The sound decisions that the group makes in this passage suggests that all of them are growing up and maturing under the stress of the war—and especially Homer. Homer's suggestion that they sleep is reasonable and deliberate, and he is clearly thinking about the soldiers and possible danger. Ellie and Corrie's suggestion for an escape route and a place to keep watch also displays rational and responsible thought. They are clearly thinking ahead, since they are worried about the soldiers finding evidence of them, and this is further evidence that they are all growing into adults.*



*Though Ellie is remembering a much more distant past here in thinking of her childhood and playing dolls, the treehouse is a stark reminder that Ellie and the others were really just kids a matter of hours ago. The war is forcing them to grow up quickly and in profound ways. Instead of playing dolls and make believe, Ellie and the others are evading enemy soldiers and blowing up people with bombs made from gasoline. They have to grow up if they want to survive, and Ellie and they others rise to the challenge even though they are scared, and this reflects Marsden's argument that young people are capable of maturity and wisdom in the midst of stressful situations.*



*Corrie's realization that they weren't safe like she had believed marks her fall from innocence. Corrie now understands the world is a dangerous place, and this realization rockets her into adulthood. Kampuchea is a reference to the Cambodian government that perpetrated a genocide on its own people during the Cold War. World War II and the violence of communism during the Cold War seemed so removed from Corrie's life, but she now realizes such things could happen anywhere—a very adult realization.*





Corrie asks Ellie if she thinks the soldiers will come, but Ellie agrees with Homer. There is no way they can search the whole district right away, and they probably have some time. Ellie says they likely came in through Cobbler's Bay, which gives them access to all of Australia. Their town is too small to be any real target, so they are probably just here for access to Cobbler's Bay. "You children come down from that tree right now!" Homer yells playfully from below and climbs the ladder.

Corrie, Ellie, and Homer sit in the treehouse talking and suddenly hear the sound of planes in the distance. An Australian plane comes into view, and Homer begins to celebrate; however, Corrie points to three foreign planes in hot pursuit. Not great odds, Homer says with disappointment and hopes the pilot survives. Later, inside Corrie's house, they eat a late lunch and talk about Robyn and Lee. Homer hasn't spoken in a while, and the rest of them stare at him, waiting for him to lead them. He begins to talk naturally, not seeming to notice they are all waiting for him.

Homer says it might not be such a good idea to stick together. They like being together and feel better that way, but they have to get tough. He suggests that two of them go into town and look for Robyn and Lee. If they don't find them by midnight, they should go scope out Lee's house—maybe they are injured and hiding there. Kevin stops Homer. He didn't think Homer believed in friendship anymore, but here he is suggesting they split up and risk their lives to find Robyn and Lee. It isn't just friendship, Homer says. A group of seven is stronger than a group of five.

Kevin asks what the remaining three do while the other two are looking for Lee and Robyn, and Homer says they should load anything they can find into Corrie's Toyota and then move on to Kevin's and Ellie's and do the same. He instructs them to get the Land Rover and fill it with supplies—food, gas, clothing, rifles, and tools of every kind—and be ready to go. Kevin asks where they are going. "To **Hell**," Homer says.

They spend the next hour making a list of everything they should take, including Ellie's teddy bear, Alvin. Much of what they packed for their camping trip is still in the Land Rover, but they will need more food and clothing, soap, toothpaste, pens, paper, books, a radio, batteries, tampons, playing cards—everything. When someone suggests family photos, and Corrie says she wants to take her mom's diaries, Homer stops them. This is war, he reminds them, and they can't afford to take stuff like that. Homer's comment sparks an argument, and Fiona stops the bickering by suggesting they bury everything of value in the garden. That way, they can get it later.

*Ellie's explanation to Corrie about the soldiers and their reasons for invading their small town again suggests that Ellie is maturing. She is looking at their situation rationally and then planning accordingly. Homer's playful call from below, however, reminds them that they are in fact still kids, and that the stress of the war is forcing them to act like adults*



*Homer is slowly emerging as one of the unofficial leaders of their group, which is ironic given his reputation for being an irresponsible troublemaker. This transformation suggests that Homer is maturing, and that perhaps he has been slightly misunderstood from the start. Meanwhile, the Australian plane implies that the government is fighting back against the foreign invaders, but the three-to-one ratio bleakly suggests they are losing.*



*Homer is thinking rationally here, even ignoring his obvious emotions, and this again reflects his profound personal growth. It isn't that Robyn and Lee aren't important to Homer on an emotional level, but he is also thinking of them on a practical level. Their chances of survival increase with their numbers, and they are certainly better off with Lee and Robyn than without them.*



*Homer is completely in charge here, which again highlights his rapid growth over the last 24 hours. They are running to Hell to hide out from the invading soldiers, but the name Hell has important implications, especially since Ellie and Kevin are struggling with their decision to kill the soldiers. In participating in this conflict, Ellie and Kevin are entering into a kind of moral agony or personal Hell.*



*Ellie's insistence that she bring her teddy bear to Hell again speaks to her young age and immaturity. They are forced to grow up and meet the war with maturity beyond their years, but they are really just kids. Their desire to bring family photos and heirlooms into the bush, possibly saving them from destruction by the invading soldiers, reflects the importance of family within the novel. However, because of the war, they are forced to make difficult decisions, even about their families, which Homer does here.*



Kevin comes into the room with two rifles and a shotgun. They will have .22 Hornet, a .410, and Ellie's dad's .303, too, but very little ammunition. Suddenly, another plane can be heard in the distance. It is a helicopter, Corrie says, and Homer yells for them to stay away from the windows. They should have someone on watch, he says and orders them all to different corners of the house, giving them a 360 degree view of the surrounding area.

As Ellie hides behind the curtains, she notices Kevin's corgi wandering around outside. Ellie is terrified. Whoever is in the helicopter is sure to notice a healthy dog walking around. She considers calling the dog but stops. The helicopter moves closer, and Ellie holds herself flat against the wall, sliding out of the room and back to Homer. She can't see any soldiers, Ellie says, but the dog is outside. The dog will probably make them suspicious, Homer guesses. He says they have been stupid, and they can't afford to make such mistakes again. Ellie goes back to the window and tries to count the soldiers in the helicopter.

The helicopter hovers outside, making no attempt to land, but Homer suggests they make a plan just in case. If the helicopter lands, they can run in the opposite direction and make their way into the bush, or they can surrender. Ellie says she really doesn't want to die and suggests they surrender. Everyone agrees and goes back to watching. Kevin says the soldiers are looking right at him, but he doesn't think they can see him. Suddenly, the helicopter gains altitude and flies away. Homer springs into action and orders them about. They can't make any more mistakes, he says.

Homer begins talking and tells them to interrupt only if they disagree with something. They don't have time for conversation, he says. They must abandon the dogs, Homer begins. They can't keep the dogs, and they will only slow the group down. They will leave as much food and water as they can, but that is all they can do. And the milking cow outside, Homer tells Corrie, has an infection that is gangrenous. She is sure to die, and they can't let her suffer. They will have to shoot her. Lastly, they can't take the Toyota. It is out in the open, and the soldiers probably saw it and will notice if it is gone.

*The group makes a mistake in not having someone stand watch, which again points to their inexperience and young age. Still, Homer immediately snaps into action and orders the others to different rooms to get a better view of their surroundings—proof that Homer is still growing despite their mistakes.*



*The mistake made in leaving Kevin's corgi outside again points to the group's inexperience and young age. They are just kids—not soldiers or adults with more life experience—and they are completely out of their element. Yet Homer is determined to learn from their mistakes, a quality which underscores his obvious maturity and capabilities beyond his young age.*



*Again, Homer is completely in charge, and he lays out their options clearly so they can make an informed decision, another quality that suggests he is maturing and growing. Their decision to surrender instead of risking death seems like a reasonable one. They can assume from Ellie's sighting of her former schoolteacher at the Showground that prisoners are not being harmed—as long as they don't pose a threat.*



*Here, Homer proves he is able to make the difficult decisions that go along with being an adult. Abandoning the dogs and killing the cow won't be easy, especially with the stress they are already under, but it is necessary to ensure their survival. Homer is also thinking ahead and considering what the soldiers will think and do even after the group escapes to Hell, which again illustrates how capable he really is, especially under pressure.*



Homer suggests they ride the bikes to Kevin's and get Kevin's dad's Ford, and then move on to the Land Rover. They will go to **Hell** tonight, but first, Homer thinks that he and Ellie should go into town and look for Lee and Robyn. Homer tells Kevin, Corrie, and Fiona to leave a car hidden at Ellie's and leave another at the top of Tailor's Stitch. They can walk into Hell from there. For now, Homer is scared that the helicopter is coming back, and he suggests they run. They can come back after dark for supplies. He picks up the rifle and looks at Corrie, but she doesn't take it. Homer goes out to the barn alone, followed by the sound of a single rifle shot.

Ellie and the others go out to the garden shed, and Homer follows, just as a fighter jet rips through the sky. It is flying deliberately, like it is on a mission, and Ellie notices two missiles fixed to the bottom. Suddenly, two rockets shoot from the plane, and Corrie's house explodes in a ball of fire. The second rocket hits the mountain behind the garden shed, barely missing them. Corrie falls to the floor, sobbing and flopping around like a fish. Ellie grabs a bucket of water and dumps it on Corrie, and she stops moving but sits quietly sobbing. They all wait. Corrie doesn't move, and they each silently agree to wait until she does.

## CHAPTER 10

As Ellie and Homer head out to look for Robyn and Lee, Ellie is looking forward to spending time alone with this new Homer, whoever he is. While they were camping, Ellie was growing interested in Lee, but a day of separation has her looking at Homer. Ellie laughs to herself. They are in the middle of a war, and she is thinking about boys. As they get closer to town, Homer grows serious, and by the time they near Robyn's house, Ellie is tense. They check the hill but see no sign of Lee or Robyn, so they decide to go to Robyn's house.

At the top of the hill, nothing much has changed in town. The Showground is still lit up, and the hospital looks operational, too. Outside Robyn's house, Homer swears he sees movement inside. Ellie worries they are about to be ambushed, but they have to find out if Lee and Robyn are in the house. They creep to the door, and Ellie opens it, the door screeching with every inch. She feels sick to her stomach and can hear Homer behind her. A scraping sound comes from the next room, like furniture sliding on the floor. Ellie drops down, crawling across the carpet, and Homer does the same.

*Corrie clearly can't bring herself to kill the cow, which is what is implied when Homer lifts the rifle. Homer doesn't object or complain when it becomes clear that he must kill cow. Homer is learning that being an adult is more than just making difficult decisions—being an adult is also about seeing those same difficult decisions through to the end.*



*The fighter jet is another reminder that they are not playing a game, and that the soldiers are willing to kill in order to take over the country. Presumably, the second missile is meant to strike the shed where they are hiding; the jet simply misses the mark, thereby sparing their lives. As a teenager, Corrie isn't equipped to handle such stress, and she begins to break down. The group's silent decision to wait with Corrie, even though they might be in danger, underscores their friendship and love for each other.*



*Ellie's romantic thoughts about Lee and Homer suggest that even during times of great stress and war, love is still an important part of life and can't be ignored. This passage also speaks to the profound change Homer is going through. Ellie knows him better than anyone—they have lived their entire lives as neighbors and friends—and even Ellie doesn't recognize this new, mature version of him.*



*The fact that the hospital looks to be open and operation suggests that the soldiers are allowing the prisoners to seek medical attention, which also implies the soldiers aren't looking to kill anyone—as long as they don't pose a threat to the invasion, that is. Ellie and Homer go into the house even though they don't know it is safe, which is a testament to their friendship with Lee and Robyn. In entering the house, Ellie and Homer put their lives on the line for their friends.*



Ellie and Homer crawl behind a chair, just as they hear the sound of a rifle being cocked back. Ellie's mind springs into action. The soldiers from last night had automatic weapons, she recalls, but the rifle sound now is clearly a single-shot. Ellie remembers that Robyn's dad hunts with a single-shot rifle and decides to take a chance. "Robyn!" Ellie yells from behind the chair. "Ellie," Robyn says and faints.

Ellie and Homer splash water on Robyn's face until she wakes up. They immediately ask about Lee. Robyn tells them that Lee has been shot. He's okay, but the wound is big and takes up most of his calf. Lee is hiding at his parent's restaurant, but they can't get there now. The town is crawling with soldiers. Lee's parents were nowhere to be found when they got there, and the apartment upstairs was trashed. Lee isn't taking it well, Robyn adds.

While Robyn and Lee were sneaking around town before Lee was shot, they found Mr. Clement, the local dentist, hiding inside an insurance agency with his family. He wasn't too happy that they noticed him. He had been watching them and hoped they wouldn't find him. Mr. Clement didn't feel like talking, but he still told them a few things. Everyone is being held at the Showground, he said, and there are two kinds of soldiers: professionals and conscripts. The professionals are efficient and, surprisingly, not cruel. However, the conscripts are another story and can get pretty mean.

Robyn says there aren't enough soldiers to search house to house, and they avoid trouble when possible. If they suspect trouble in a house, they blow it up instead of risking a shoot-out. Robyn and Lee were running when they suddenly heard gunshots. They didn't know where the shots were coming from, but they knew the bullets were meant for them. Robyn ran into a building, not realizing that Lee had been shot, until he came limping behind her.

Robyn glosses over the story, but this is Ellie's favorite part and exactly why it is important that they write down their story, Ellie says. Robyn was a total hero. She broke a window and carried Lee out on her back, kind of like those mothers who can lift cars when their kids are in danger. She carried Lee all the way to the restaurant, and then she went and forced Mr. Clement to come and help. Mr. Clement cleaned the wound and stitched it up. He even left needles, antibiotics, and pain killers and showed Robyn how to inject Lee. Ellie can't believe it. Robyn hates needles.

*Like Ellie, Robyn appears ready to kill to ensure her survival, but she clearly doesn't know she is aiming at Ellie and Homer. Ellie's quick thinking is another sign of her growing maturity—she enters into each situation deliberately and with much thought.*



*Like everyone else, Lee deeply loves his parents and fears for their safety, which is evidence of the importance of family within the novel. Lee's gunshot wound is also a chilling reminder that the war isn't just a game—it's a real conflict with real consequences—and it proves that any one of them can be shot and even killed at any moment.*



*Just as the operational hospital suggests, the professional soldiers—the people who represent the invading country and military—don't necessarily want to hurt anyone. Their intention seems to be to take over Australia with as little loss of life as possible, which suggests a more humane approach to war.*



*Presumably, the helicopter did see Ellie and the others hiding in Corrie's house, which is why they blew it up. Clearly, the soldiers try to avoid hurting people when possible, but they will kill if they are threatened, evidenced by their attack on Corrie's house and the shots taken at Lee and Robyn as they ran through town.*



*Robyn is obviously being modest, but saving Lee required exactly the kind of risks Ellie talked about in the beginning of the novel. Ellie claims it is important for other people to know what they have done, and Robyn's heroics are a prime example of this. Robyn risks her life to save Lee, and her effort is nothing short of amazing, which again proves that Robyn is also growing and maturing.*



The bad news is that Lee can't really walk, and the stitches won't come out for a week—Mr. Clement taught Robyn how to take out stitches, too. They decide they need some kind of vehicle and begin to brainstorm. They list off anything they can fit Lee into: shopping cars, strollers, and wheelbarrows, and then someone suggests a forklift truck. Ellie suggests a bulldozer, and Robyn reminds them of the big shovel trucks at the city depot. Homer takes charge immediately. Ellie can drive, he says, and they will wait with Lee and put him in the shovel. Robyn looks at Homer in disbelief and asks if he has been taking drugs. Ellie suggests they hide a second car down by the cemetery and they immediately get moving.

*Robyn looks at Homer in disbelief and asks if he is taking drugs because she can't believe the transformation that has taken place in him. Robyn knows Homer as a troublemaker and a prankster who is never serious, not the guy standing in front of her willing to take charge and brainstorm elaborate plans and escape routes. This again proves that the war is forcing Homer to grow up, and he is no longer the irresponsible kid he used to be.*



## CHAPTER 11

Ellie looks at her watch. It is 3:08. She synchronized her watch with Homer and Robyn's, just like in the movies. She pulls the strap tight on her safety helmet, which she found at the depot while snooping around for keys. She grabs six other helmets and throws them in the truck. The big truck rumbles as Ellie pushes in the clutch and slides it in gear. The engine stalls. There just isn't time to get used to the truck, Ellie thinks.

*The mention that Ellie and the others synchronized their watches like in the movies again underscores their young age and inexperience, as Ellie still relates what is happening to something imaginary like the movies. Still, Ellie's ability to drive big trucks and heavy equipment underscores just how capable she really is despite her young age.*



Ellie turns on the truck's lights, even though she thinks it is a bad idea. Homer said it will confuse the soldiers and make them think it is one of their own vehicles. Ellie makes her way down the street, and Lee and Robyn come into view. Lee looks pale, and Robyn is nervously scanning the street. Ellie brings the shovel down low, and Robyn helps Lee inside. Robyn climbs in the truck, and Ellie yells for her to put on a helmet just as bullets begin to hit.

*Ellie stops to grab the helmets and insists that Robyn puts one on when she gets in the truck, which again illustrates that Ellie is acting responsibly and trying to keep everyone as safe as possible. Ellie deeply cares about her friends, and this love is reflected in her constant concern for their physical safety.*



Ellie puts the truck in gear, praying it doesn't stall, and tears down the road. A vehicle is coming up on their side, a Jeep by the looks of it, and Ellie steers the truck to the side. She hits the Jeep just right, running it completely over. Ellie looks in the mirror and can see bodies in the mangled car, which looks like a giant boulder has been dropped on it. Ellie suddenly remembers that she hadn't raised the shovel and wonders if Lee is okay.

*Ellie has likely just killed the people in the Jeep, but her first thought is Lee's safety, which again reflects the deep love Ellie has for her friends—especially Lee, who Ellie secretly has a crush on. Ellie thinks fast and does what she must to save her life and the lives of her friends, which again suggests she is growing up and is no longer a kid.*



Robyn can see flashes from rifles behind them, and Ellie yells for her to hold on. Ellie hits the brakes, sending the car behind them directly into their bumper. The small car hits and skids, rolling to the side of the road. There are more gunshots, and Ellie hits the gas. The tires have been shot out, and she eases the truck to a stop, blocking the road like they planned. Ellie doesn't see Homer and feels sick to her stomach, then he finally pulls up in a BMW.

*Ellie again thinks fast in hitting the break, and she seems prepared to kill the soldiers in the car behind them if she must in order to get away. Ellie's stomach hurts when Homer isn't immediately there, which suggests she expects Homer to screw up and leave them hanging; however, Homer comes through, proving his new responsible nature.*



As they help Lee into the BMW, Homer says he figured they would escape in style. Robyn tells Ellie that she has blood all over her face and shoulders, but Ellie doesn't think it is a big deal. They were bouncing around a lot in the truck, and she probably just hit her head. Robyn and Ellie ask Homer what they should do now. They can't very well just drive to Ellie's and lead the soldiers back to **Hell** and their friends. Homer has already thought of that and suggests they stop off at Chris's house. His parents have a Mercury, and Homer knows where the keys are.

Ten minutes later, they arrive at Chris's house, and Ellie sinks the BMW in the nearby dam. She wipes the blood from her face and briefly thinks about what she has just done. Robyn and Homer cheer as the BMW sinks, and Chris emerges from the bushes. He's been hiding in a tree since Commemoration Day, and he is more than happy to go with them to wherever they are going. They quickly catch up, and Chris tells them that the soldiers appear nervous and stick together, but they have gotten braver in the last day or so. They climb into Chris's parents' Mercury, and Ellie and Lee fill Chris in while Homer and Robyn sleep.

## CHAPTER 12

They finally get back to Ellie's and find that looters have stripped the place. Corrie, Kevin, and Fiona have been there, too, and they obviously gathered the things on the list. They left a note on the refrigerator that reads: "Gone where the bad people go. See you there!" Ellie laughs and erases the message. Homer and Robyn are looking at Lee's wound, and he assures them it is much better than yesterday. They have a whole day before they can go into **Hell**, according to their plan, so they decide to get some sleep. Chris isn't tired—he's been sleeping a lot the last few days—so he agrees to keep watch.

Ellie sleeps, but she doesn't dream about soldiers and bullets—although, she interjects, she certainly dreams of all that stuff now. Ellie dreams of her dad at the barbecue, and Corrie stopping to play at eight years old. She dreams of Lee, and when she opens her eyes, it is midday and very hot. Ellie turns and notices Lee watching her. She becomes self-conscious and begins to babble. Lee says they have no idea how widespread the war is. They could literally be in the middle of World War III. He puts his arm around Ellie, and she tells him that she dreamed of him. He asks what they were doing in the dream, and Ellie says pretty much what they are doing now. Lee says he is glad Ellie's dream came true, and she agrees.

*Here, Ellie and Robyn instantly look to Homer for guidance, which implies they trust him in his new role as the unofficial leader of their group. Ellie, too, is focused on the task at hand and doesn't even seem to notice that she has what could be a serious wound. Ellie is so focused on protecting her friends and evading the soldiers that she doesn't realize she has been injured.*



*Homer and Robyn fall asleep so quickly because they are finally allowing themselves to relax now that they are out of immediate danger, which reflects just how much stress they are under because of the war. Ellie's snap decision to sink the BMW in the dam again proves that she is thinking rationally about the future. They don't want to leave any kind of trail that the soldiers will later be able to piece together. The fact that the soldiers are nervous and seem inexperienced suggests that the invading country is not a particularly strong one, and that they lack training and perhaps the proper supplies.*



*The message that says they have "gone where the bad people go," meaning Hell, is clearly meant to be a joke, but it also suggests that Ellie and the others are bad, too, and this mirrors Ellie's obvious moral dilemma. She has twice been forced to kill to keep herself and her friends alive, and Ellie worries that such actions mean she is "bad," just as the message jokingly says. When Ellie erases the message she again shows her maturity and sound thinking, as she takes no chances that their hiding spot will be found by the soldiers.*



*Ellie again interrupts her story and draws attention to the fact that she is essentially writing it in real-time. Ellie is looking back on her experiences, and since she admits that she now dreams of soldiers and bullets, the war has obviously changed her life in a very profound way. Her dreams here reflect the deep love Ellie obviously has for her father, and the fear and pain she feels in potentially losing him forever. Notably, Ellie also dreams about Corrie (her lifelong best friend) and Lee (her crush), which implies both Lee and Corrie are like family to Ellie.*



Ellie decides she better check on Chris and gets up to leave. When she finds Chris, he is sleeping, and Ellie is instantly furious. She hauls off and kicks him, which surprises even Ellie. He could have gotten them all killed, Ellie screams. Then, Ellie goes into sort of late shock. She can't remember anything from the course of the afternoon, and when it is time to leave for **Hell**, Homer refuses to let her drive. Ellie protests, reminding them what her dad said, but she eventually gives up and goes to the back of the Land Rover to sleep.

When they get to **Hell**, Ellie somehow manages to hike and climbs in a tent next to Corrie, who is elated to see her. Ellie sleeps for three whole days, waking only to eat and go to the bathroom. She dreams of demons and bullets and of killing everyone, and when she wakes, it is a beautiful day. Robyn makes her something to eat, and after breakfast, Ellie feels like she might be able deal with things again.

## CHAPTER 13

Corrie has a routine of checking her father's radio every day but gets nothing but static. One night, while sitting next to Ellie, Corrie asks her what the other dials on the radio are for. Ellie doesn't know what she is talking about and asks to see the radio. Corrie's father told her to stay on either PO or FM, and even though the radio is labeled in French, Ellie figures out that it is a shortwave radio. Corrie asks what that means, and Ellie tells her they can get stations from all over the world on the shortwave frequency. Ellie calls the others over, and even though the batteries are nearly dead, she begins to spin the dial.

Foreign stations begin to come through the radio, and Ellie stops on a program in English. The voice coming from the radio reports that America is hesitant to get involved, but all prisoners are being held in "humanitarian conditions," and the Red Cross will be allowed to inspect the camps. Homer tells them each to grab pens and paper and record what they hear. After a few minutes, they compare notes and are shocked at how different they all are. The only thing they can definitively agree on is that the war seems to be contained to Australia. It isn't World War III—at least not yet.

*Ellie appears to be having a sort of mental breakdown here. Chris's irresponsibility in falling asleep reflects his immaturity, but it also reminds Ellie of how close they are to dying or being captured by the soldiers. One mistake is all it will take to end their efforts, and Ellie collapses under the mental weight of such a reality, which she is ill-equipped to handle at 15 years old.*



*Ellie's dreams are more like nightmares, and they reflect Ellie's current fears and her obvious moral dilemma. Ellie is clearly worried she is also going to Hell in a religious and moral sense as punishment for murdering the soldiers, and her dreams of demons and murder reflect this.*



*Corrie's ignorance of how to properly use her father's radio reflects her young age and inexperience, and she doesn't even think to ask someone else about the radio until the batteries are nearly dead. Ellie, on the other hand, again proves herself to be wise beyond her years in deducing the radio is actually a shortwave, which will give them access to valuable outside information about the war.*



*"Humanitarian conditions" again implies that the invading power doesn't necessarily want to hurt anyone—though they will if they have to. The Red Cross often inspects camps during times of war to insure civilians aren't being mistreated or killed, and it seems that the invading power doesn't want any trouble or accusations of war crimes. Homer's suggestion that they write down what they hear and the resulting differences underscores the limitations of storytelling, as each of their experiences are different, even of the very same thing.*



Americans never like getting involved, Ellie says, thinking about Woodrow Wilson and isolationism. The radio said that the war is aimed at “reducing imbalances within the region,” and Kevin asks what that means. Robyn says it probably has to do with equality. Lots of countries near Australia are incredibly poor, and Australia does nothing to right the imbalance. Kevin doesn’t understand—Robyn sounds like she doesn’t really care that they have been invaded, and she’s supposed to be religious. Robyn says she *does* mind, and she doesn’t know any religion that excuses theft and murder. She simply understands why they did it. She tells Kevin to imagine he has nothing and then consider his options.

Kevin still doesn’t agree. Invading another country is wrong, he says. Robyn agrees, but it is possible to be both right and wrong at the same time, and it seems like all the countries are in the wrong now. Homer says it is time they decide what they are going to do—they can either stay in **Hell** and hide, or they can go out there and do something. Some of the soldiers he saw in town were younger than they are, and he is sure they can make difference. Fiona suggests they find out more about the Showground and their families, and Kevin goes on about how he hates the invading soldiers. He wants to drop a nuclear bomb on them.

Fiona, Robyn, and Corrie think going to town to fight is an unnecessary risk, but Kevin is ready to go, and Lee says he would go, too, if he could. Homer is ready to fight, too, just like his grandfather did in the civil war. Homer suggests they send two groups of two into town for reconnaissance, and the rest of them can fortify basecamp in **Hell**. They have to get serious about sustainability and start hunting for food. Corrie suggests bringing some chickens and goats in, and Homer agrees. Ellie looks at Homer. He is thinking about the “long term,” Ellie says, and Homer confirms he is. “The really long term,” he says.

They decide that Robyn and Chris will be one team, and Kevin and Corrie the other. They are to work separately but keep in contact, and they are to only gather information. Ellie stays in **Hell** with Fiona, Lee, and Homer and is excited thinking of the upcoming days. She has feelings for both Lee and Homer, although Homer’s clear crush on Fiona is a problem. Ellie feels bad that she is thinking about boys during a war, but she won’t let her heart be controlled by her conscience. She lets her mind go and is excited by the possibilities.

*Since the start of the United States, isolationism—a form of neutrality concerning the domestic affairs of other nations—has been practiced, most famously by President Woodrow Wilson during World War I. Official United States policy is to not get involved with the affairs of other nations, unless said affairs disrupt trade, U.S. national security, or present a humanitarian crisis. This policy is exactly why the invading power doesn’t want trouble with the Red Cross—mistreating civilians means the U.S. will likely get involved.*



*The fact that the war is being fought to “reduce imbalances within the region” suggests that the invading power isn’t entirely wrong in their decision to wage war—or, at least, that their decision to wage war is somewhat justified. In this way, Marsden explores whether war can ever be considered ethical or moral, for any reason, even one as valid as inequality and social justice. Robyn recognizes this incredibly adult and nuanced moral dilemma, which again reflects her growth and maturity.*



*Homer’s plans for the “long term” again underscore how reasonable and responsible he is becoming under the stress of the war. He plans their movements in a military fashion, involving reconnaissance and the fortification of basecamp. Ellie seems surprised by how intricate Homer’s plans are, which anticipate the war lasting for a very, very long time. Ellie might be growing and maturing along with Homer, but she isn’t fully appreciating the gravity of their situation quite like Homer is.*



*Ellie’s secret thoughts of love and her simultaneous crushes on Homer and Lee suggests that love and life carries on, even during war. Ellie can’t escape her thoughts and emotions, so she surrenders to them, which gives her a much needed reprieve from the stress of the war. Additionally, the group’s plan to gather information and nothing else again suggests they are maturing, as their plan takes minimal risks to ensure safety.*





## CHAPTER 14

On Monday morning, hundreds of foreign planes rip across the sky, followed by a handful of Australian jets. The group has just returned from Ellie's house, where they grabbed more supplies, and a Bible for Robyn. They even went to a neighbor's house and took more food, and they found some seeds for planting, too. They grabbed six chickens and some wire fencing and headed back to **Hell**. Now, Ellie sits talking with Lee.

Ellie decides to take a walk in the creek and finds a narrow tunnel. She walks through the tunnel and finds a field of roses on the other side. What are roses doing in **Hell**? Ellie wonders, and then she notices the hut. The door is nearly covered with vegetation, but it is definitely a hut. She approaches the door and rips the vines away. What if the Hermit is still inside, Ellie thinks, dead on the floor? She goes inside and looks around.

Ellie's eyes adjust to the dark, and she can see shelves and a tea kettle. There is an old chest, so Ellie opens it, but it is mostly filled with old papers. She looks around a bit more and decides to head back to camp. By the time Ellie gets back, Homer is worried and asks where she has been. Ellie tells Homer that she found the Hermit's hut and will soon give them all a guided tour.

## CHAPTER 15

Ellie and Fiona plant a small vegetable garden, and Lee, still not very mobile, makes a rationed list of their food. Everyone one has been short tempered with each other, except for Homer and Fiona, and it has been a long day. Fiona asks Ellie what she should do about Homer. Ellie asks if she likes him, and Fiona admits that she does. Fiona asks Ellie what she would do if she was in her position, and Ellie thinks that she kind of is. However, Ellie realizes that her attraction to Homer is purely physical. With Lee, Ellie is interested in his minds and thoughts.

That night, with Fiona sleeping next to her, Ellie thinks about her parents. She doesn't know if she makes herself feel worse by thinking about them, but it's her way of keeping them alive. They all get up with the sun—a new habit that has come with their move to **Hell**—and decide the day's work. They will work most of the morning and then go out in search of more supplies when it gets dark. During lunch, Lee asks Ellie if she will take him to the Hermit's hut. Ellie agrees, and by 2:00, they are on their way.

*It is ironic that Ellie stops to grab a Bible during the same trip she also steals food, chickens, and other supplies before going back to a place called Hell. Clearly, Ellie and the others must steal to survive, but it is still stealing, and it obviously weighs on their minds, just as murder and other violent acts do.*



*Roses don't naturally grow so deep in the bush, which means that someone has planted them. The roses and the hut lend some evidence to the story of the Hermit, and Ellie is instantly convinced she has found his hut. Her irrational fear that the Hermit is dead inside again reflects her age and naivety.*



*Of course, Ellie's search of the Hermit's hut is rather fruitless, as she doesn't find anything remarkable. However, the hut does prove that the Hermit existed and definitely lived alone in Hell, which Ellie was hesitant to believe until now.*



*Each of their assigned tasks reflects the group's growing maturity and their reasonable and sound decisions. They are planning ahead and approaching their food supply in a deliberate and responsible way, which also suggests they are growing up and becoming adults—especially in light of their last trip to Hell, when they quickly ate all their food and had to starve the final day of their trip.*



*Unlike the last trip to Hell, in which all of the friends lounged about lazily and let the days pass without incident, the group is now driven and purposeful.*



Ellie and Lee make it to the Hermit's hut and only stop to rest once. They talk as they walk, and Ellie admits that she does like Lee, but she has concerns. What if they start to spend time together and it doesn't work out? They will both still have to live in **Hell** regardless, and she doesn't want there to be tension between them. Lee says he loves Ellie for her mind, and Ellie stops at the word "love." They step into the hut, and Lee immediately begins looking around, finding a metal box in a rotting windowsill.

Inside the box are papers and pictures, and a war medal awarded to Bertram Christie, which Ellie and Lee decide must be the Hermit's name. There are newspaper clippings about the murder of Bertram's family, but the details are quite vague. There are also formal documents, one written by the local coroner, which claims Bertram's wife and child were killed on December 24 by Bertram himself. There had been a fire, and the bodies were badly burned. According to the coroner, the Hermit either killed them with a single shot to the head *after* they were burned because they couldn't get to medical care so far in the bush and he wanted to end their suffering; or, the report says, the Hermit killed them and then lit the fire to cover his crimes. Either way, Bertram Hubert definitely killed his wife and son.

## CHAPTER 16

There are two more pieces of paper inside the metal box, and one is a letter from the Hermit's mother-in-law. She writes that she has always defended Bertram and believes his account of the night her daughter and grandson died. She is thankful that the jury found Bertram innocent, regardless of what the judge said. It is a shame that Bertram feels that he must leave the district, she writes, but he will always be welcome in her home. The second piece of paper is a poem: "In this life of froth and bubble, / Two things sank like stone, / Kindness in another's trouble, / Courage in your own."

Lee puts the papers back in the box and drops it into the rotting windowsill. They begin walking back, and when Ellie turns around and sees Lee in the water behind her, she stops and kisses him. After a moment, Lee begins to kiss back, and they stand there passionately holding each other. Ellie says that she doesn't want to end up like the Hermit, and they head back to the campsite. When they arrive, Homer and Fiona sit closely, and it is clear that something has happened between them romantically.

*Here, Ellie and Lee grapple with their feelings for one another, which are complicated by the backdrop of war and their very real fight for survival. That they're even flirting with the possibility of a relationship at a time like this suggests that it's impossible to fully ignore one's feelings, even in the midst of extreme circumstances.*



*The formal documents that Ellie and Lee find in the windowsill of the Hermit's hut underscore the limitations of storytelling, especially local legends and gossip. The story that Ellie and the others know about the Hermit doesn't include the details of what actually happened, and even the newspaper's account is vague and incomplete. The documents in the box imply that the Hermit didn't kill his family in cold blood at all, and that he killed them as an act of mercy to spare them pain at the end of life—an act which reflects a deep love for his family and willingness to sacrifice on their behalf.*



*The support of the Hermit's mother-in-law, in addition to the jury's acquittal, suggests that the Hermit is not guilty of murder in a traditional sense, and that he likely only killed his family to spare them suffering, as the coroner's report suggests. This passage also implies that the judge—the personification of the law—made no distinction between the reasons why the Hermit may have killed them. According to the judge, the Hermit is a murderer, period. The poem, in addition to again reflecting the importance of writing in the novel, reflects the Hermit's miserable existence alone in the bush. He was rejected by society and saw little kindness, and he was punished (by himself and informally by society) for his courage in sparing his family further pain.*



*Ellie is afraid she will end up like the Hermit because like him, Ellie is in a self-imposed Hell. Ellie worries about the moral implications of what she has done in killing to survive, and she thinks she is evil because of it. Ellie also fears being alone like the Hermit, which only serves to fuel her attraction and feelings for Lee.*



Later, Fiona talks in private with Ellie. Fiona says that Homer is self-conscious about Fiona's parents being lawyers and having money and a big house, and Ellie is surprised that Fi is just now figuring this out. Their lifestyles are very different, Ellie reminds her. As darkness falls, Ellie, Fiona, and Homer get ready to go up Satan's Steps. Ellie feels an unexpected happiness. She is with her friends, and they are doing alright, all things considered. The Hermit's hut has made her appreciate what she still has, and she decides to enjoy it for a bit.

Up at the entrance to **Hell**, Ellie, Fiona, and Homer set out to better conceal the Land Rover in case anyone should come up the mountain. They find a good spot, some distance from where they were parked. The new spot adds a considerable amount of time to their hike into Hell, but they decide it is worth it. Plus, it is already far, so a bit more makes little difference. Fiona and Homer plan to stay at the Land Rover; Chris, Robyn, Corrie, and Kevin are expected back at around 4:00. Ellie doesn't want to leave Lee alone at the campsite, so she decides to go back into Hell alone.

The moon is bright when Ellie begins her hike into **Hell**, and "dead wood gleams like bones" ahead of her. She thinks that she should be scared, but she isn't. Australia is her country, and she won't be afraid. Ellie wants to get back to Lee and stay in Hell forever. She remembers how she thought about Hell and the people who named it. Only people, like the Hermit, can know about Hell. She doesn't know if the Hermit committed an act of love or an evil act—as a human he could have done either or both—but either way, he was certainly sent to Hell, by himself and the district. The Hermit "carried Hell with him," as all people do, Ellie thinks.

Ellie has killed, just like the Hermit, but she doesn't know if she killed out of love for her friends or value for her own life. Like the Hermit, she has "condemned [herself] to **Hell**" either way. All laws, Ellie thinks, seem "artificial and basic," whether they're human, moral, or religious laws. She decides to follow the "sense within [her]," her "instinct, conscience, imagination," or whatever it is called. She decides the difference between herself and truly evil people is that evil people believe wholeheartedly that they are right. Ellie lacks confidence and is riddled with guilt and doubt, which she considers a good sign for her morality.

*Fiona is late in figuring out Homer's self-doubt, which further reflects Fiona's naivety and her growth into a more aware and informed adult. Prior to the war, Fiona assumed everyone lived like her, and she rarely thought of others, but she is learning otherwise and growing because of it. Ellie's unexpected happiness underscores the importance of love and friendship, especially during dark times like war.*



*Their efforts to better conceal the Land Rover and their willingness to add time to their already long walk again reflects the group's sound and reasonable decisions, which again reflects their growth. Presumably, Fiona and Homer want to stay at the Land Rover and wait for the others so they can steal some time alone together, and this same desire undoubtedly plays into Ellie's decision to go back to the campsite to Lee.*



*Marsden's language here reflects Ellie's obvious fear that she will ultimately be killed in the war, and her fear that her family is already dead. Ellie's deep thoughts about Hell and the Hermit mirrors her own moral dilemma. She suggests that people—even good people—are capable of both good and bad acts, a lesson she is quickly learning as she grows in the war. Ellie knows that Hell can't be just a place, because she carries her guilt and self-imposed Hell with her wherever she goes, like the Hermit presumably did as well.*



*Ellie is technically a murderer, just like the Hermit, and like the judge in the Hermit's case, Ellie doesn't make a distinction between the reasons why she killed. However, Ellie refuses to believe she is evil because of this, which reflects her growth and ability to navigate complex ideas. Marsden argues that normal notions of morality don't exist during war, and Ellie is realizing this now. She trusts her "instincts" to guide her morals and actions, not predetermined laws, which, the reasons for the war prove, may in themselves be lacking and unjust.*



## CHAPTER 17

Ellie is relieved when Corrie, Kevin, Robyn, and Chris return from town. They didn't tell Homer and Fiona much on the way into **Hell**, since they don't want to tell the story twice. The minute they sit down for breakfast, Robyn begins talking. She is sort of their unofficial leader, and she is certainly running things now. Ellie sits holding Lee's hand, and Fiona sits between Homer's legs. Kevin has his head in Corrie's lap, and Ellie thinks that if they can fix up Robyn and Chris, they will all be "Perfect Partners."

Chris has "souvenired" a pack of cigarettes and couple bottles of wine, and Ellie thinks about how far "souveniring" can really go. She considers her thoughts from the night before. If they were going to ignore official laws, shouldn't they at least set some for themselves? She has broken so many laws already, and Ellie is okay with that, but she isn't sure about stealing cigarettes and liquor, which aren't exactly necessities. Ellie decides to stop thinking about her morals for a while and looks to Robyn.

Robyn explains that they didn't see their parents, but they know their families are safe at the Showground. They have plenty of food and are being treated well. They are eating the livestock that was entered into the Show—some of the best in the country—so their meat supply is obviously very good. They even bake fresh bread every morning. The soldiers have begun to send out work parties—teams of eight or ten prisoners with a few soldiers—to go around and clean up town and make the houses habitable again. They are even assigned to help at the hospital, which is still functioning, especially since Ellie has been keeping them so busy.

Ellie asks Robyn what she means by such a comment, and Robyn says she means nothing. Ellie pushes a bit more, and Robyn finally talks. Of the three soldiers Ellie hit with the lawnmower bomb, two died; and two soldiers were also killed when Ellie ran their Jeep over with the big shovel truck. Robyn says it is no surprise—Ellie must have known she killed them—and continues with her story.

*In wishing they were all "Perfect Partners," Ellie is again focused on love, which further suggests love can't be avoided, even during war. In Homer's absence, Robyn steps up to the plate to lead the others, which reflects Robyn's own growth and maturity. Like Homer, Robyn is proving herself more than capable under the stress of the war.*



*Chris has "souvenired" cigarettes and wine, which is to say he has stolen them, and Ellie obviously has a moral objection to such behavior. Ellie struggles greatly with the laws she has broken, but she ultimately accepts them because they were necessary for their survival. Chris's "souveniring" is needless (not to mention illegal on several levels), which is where Ellie clearly draws the line.*



*Robyn's implication here is that Ellie keeps killing people, which is keeping the hospital busy in town. Robyn's comment is clearly meant to be a joke, but it suggests that she is having difficulty accepting the moral implications of Ellie's actions as well. They act as a group, and what one does, they all do—kind of like Chris and his "souveniring" of cigarettes and wine. This not only reflects their moral dilemma but also underscores the connection they share as friends, and now a family.*



*Up until this point, Ellie didn't know for sure that she was a murderer, she just suspected as much, but now she—and the others—know it for sure. Robyn tries to downplay this fact by making a joke, but even she is looking at Ellie differently now that they know definitively that she has killed people.*



Robyn says that there are a few groups out there running around, kind of like they are, evading the soldiers and attacking patrols when possible, but town is mostly under control now. Soon, the United Nations and the Red Cross will be snooping around, and the soldiers are looking to enact a “clean invasion,” so they are treating people well. They went to Robyn’s old music teacher’s house to hide (Robyn knew where the key was), and a man Robyn recognized from the post office came in. She approached him, and he told her what he knew while he worked. They are supposed to be cleaning out the houses and securing any valuables. The soldiers plan to colonize the entire country.

Kevin talked to another woman, who let him in on more information, and then they moved on to another house. Robyn was hiding under a bed when a woman entered the room, and Robyn stuck her head out, not bothering to stand as they talked. The woman said one of the others told her about teenagers running around, and she expected to see them. The woman worked as she spoke and told Robyn that she was hiding family heirlooms when she found them, although she wasn’t sure it really mattered. Suddenly, boots entered the room, and a man asked the woman who she was talking to. She said herself, and Robyn was nearly caught but managed to hide behind the bed.

Kevin suddenly speaks up. What if they are the only free Australians left? They might be all that is left of the country. In that case, Chris says, he wants to be Police Commissioner. They decide to make Homer the Minister of Defense, and Lee is Pensioner of the Year. Fiona is the Attorney General, and Robyn, who wants to be Minister for Health, is given Archbishop. Corrie offers to be the Minister for Kevin, and Ellie is made the Poet Laureate, which she is rather proud of.

## CHAPTER 18

As everyone tries to relax after the trip to town, Homer speaks up. The way he sees it, they all have three choices. One, they can stay in **Hell**, hide out, and do nothing. There is no shame in that, he says. After all, they owe it their parents and each other to stay alive. Second, they can go to the Showground and try to get their parents out. But that, Homer says, is seriously dangerous—their weapons are like cap guns compared to the soldiers. Or, Homer concludes, they can “do something else to help the good guys,” which, he adds, is them, in case anyone is confused about that.

*Again, the invading soldiers are trying to take over Australia without violating any laws or rules of war imposed by the United Nations, the Red Cross, or the United States. The term “clean invasion” implies that war and invasion can be approached morally and within reason, but Marsden ultimately argues otherwise. The fact that the soldiers are looking to colonize the entire country suggests that they want to take over completely, and that they will be there for a very long time.*



*The fact that Robyn was nearly caught when she hid under the bed is another example of her bravery and the risks they have taken to avoid capture and find out about their families. Hiding in the houses when they know soldiers will be near is an incredible risk, but they do it to find out information about their families. Furthermore, the woman’s attempt to hide family heirlooms from the soldiers also underscores the importance of family within the novel. The woman will likely be punished if she is caught hiding the heirlooms, but she does it anyway to protect them and the families they represent.*



*Ellie’s nomination as the Poet Laureate of Australia again underscores the importance of writing within the novel. Homer is the Minister of Defense because of his obvious capabilities and leadership skills, and Robyn wants to be Minister for Health (not Corrie, even though she has always wanted to be a nurse) because she has enjoyed taking care of Lee. The others, however, nominate Robyn as Archbishop because she is religious.*



*Homer’s reference to their group as the “good guys” and his implication that it might not be initially clear that he is talking about them again points to their moral dilemma. They have been forced to do awful things to survive, and they question if such actions mean they are morally compromised. Homer argues that it doesn’t—they are still the “good guys” regardless of what the war has forced them to do.*



Robyn isn't sure what to do. She doesn't know what is right or wrong anymore, but she is pretty sure she can't just sit and do nothing. They say the war is a "clean invasion," but Robyn thinks all wars are dirty and evil. It wasn't "clean" when they blew up Corrie's house, and it isn't "clean" to kill people, Robyn just hopes they don't have to do too much more that is "filthy and foul and rotten." Fiona speaks up next. She really just wants to go to the Hermit's hut and hide until the war is over. She doesn't feel brave like the rest of them, and she is worried that when push comes to shove, she will fold under the pressure.

Ellie gets the impression that Chris will agree to do whatever the rest of them do, and Lee says he would fight if he could. Ellie feels like Fiona; she doesn't know if she can rise to the challenge. She thinks about the bullets, and the lawnmower, and the shovel truck and doesn't know if she can handle all of that again. Still, she thinks they should do something, mostly because, like Robyn, she can't stand the thought of doing nothing.

The group begins to brainstorm ideas, and they decide the road to Cobbler's Bay is their best bet. That is where much of the action seems to be localized, except, of course, for the Showground. They agree to leave the next night, and Ellie takes a walk alone, without Lee. She climbs down Satan's Steps and watches as a dragonfly lands and eats a mosquito. The dragonfly finishes eating and flies away. That is how it is in nature, Ellie thinks. Nothing is "evil" or "vicious," it is just nature. "Yes," Ellie thinks, "evil is a human invention."

## CHAPTER 19

At midnight, Ellie hides in a culvert with Lee. They are on the edge of the highway and have made a very big mistake. Robyn and the others have already moved on, and Fiona and Homer are somewhere behind them. Ellie and Lee watch nervously as 10 soldiers come their way. Ellie hopes that Homer and Fiona don't come running out of the bush and marvels at how efficient the soldiers are in their marching. They must be the professionals Mr. Clement told them about.

The soldiers pass Ellie and Lee without incident, and Ellie finally relaxes. They lay low for another hour, but only one convoy passes. Happy with their reconnaissance, they decide to wait for Homer and Fiona. When they arrive, Homer says he wants to go to the Heron, the local river that runs from Cobbler's Bay into town. There is a long wooden bridge over the Heron. It is old and rickety, and is mostly a tourist attraction, but it is bustling with activity now. They can see soldiers moving about and convoys stop and check in with men with clipboards. The bridge is definitely the weakest part of the highway.

*Robyn's conflicted feelings further suggest that traditional notions of right and wrong don't apply during war. It has already been established that Robyn is quite religious, and she knows the traditional notions of right and wrong better than anyone. Robyn, however, is confused, too, and this further reflects the moral dilemma they have all been thrust into because of the war. Robyn's mention of the "clean invasion" again implies that war can never be ethical or moral, regardless of the reasons behind it.*



*Ellie and Fiona specifically worry that they won't have the courage to fight once they are put to the test. Ellie has already proved otherwise, but Fiona isn't sure that she has grown and matured quite like the others. In many ways, Fiona is still a scared kid, and she doesn't think she will make it if things get serious in town.*



*The dragonfly and Ellie's thoughts of "evil" as "a human invention" harken to her thoughts of Hell and her moral struggles with killing. Ellie isn't "evil" because she has been forced to kill; she feels evil because others have told her that killing is the epitome of evil. Ellie's circumstances mean she must look beyond blanket assumptions such as this, which further reflects her growing maturity.*



*Ellie and Lee's mistake is not explained in detail, but it is implied that they didn't look out for patrols as closely as they should have, and they have endangered the whole group because of it. This mistake underscores just how present danger is, but it also highlights that they are still young and prone to occasional irresponsibility.*



*Homer is obviously devising some sort of plan that involves the bridge, which is why he wants to go out of their way to check it out. The bridge is old, and it is the weakest part of the highway, which makes it a logical place to attack for maximum effect on the invading soldiers. The bridge is clearly an important route from Cobbler's Bay to the rest of the country. If Homer and the others can cripple the bridge, they will be able to slow the soldiers' advance.*



By four in the morning, the group makes it back to their hideout, where they sleep until midafternoon. “Let’s blow it up,” Homer says, smiling, once they are all awake. Ellie is game and asks how he plans to do it. Homer has been thinking about Ellie and the lawnmower, and what they really need is a big lawnmower. A petrol tanker, Homer says. It is simple—they will steal a fuel truck from the local distributor, provided Ellie thinks she can drive it. She is sure she can, it won’t be much different from the equipment on the farm.

Homer has also been thinking about the cattle farm near the bridge. If they can get the cattle to stampede, it will create a diversion, giving Ellie time to get the truck below the bridge. Then, she will leave a trail of fuel and, when she is at a safe distance, light a match. Fiona asks how they get the cattle to stampede, and Lee asks how he is supposed to get away—he can’t very well run. Homer has already thought of that. They will steal motorbikes and make a clean getaway, and getting the cattle to stampede won’t be a problem. Homer has lots of experience mustering herds of cattle.

Homer says that he will handle the cattle with Lee, but it is up to Fiona and Ellie to steal the truck and blow it up. Fiona is a bit nervous, and so is Ellie, but Ellie thinks it is a good plan. If they are successful, Lee says smiling, he will finally be proud of himself again.

## CHAPTER 20

The local fuel distributorship is just six blocks away, and Ellie and Fiona find it easily enough, but they are nervous and keep bickering. Ellie wonders what they will be like when the action really starts. In all honesty, she is kind of nervous having to work with Fiona. Ellie is scared, but Fi is *really* scared, and at least Ellie is used to working outdoors around trucks. Fi is used to ballet lessons. Sure, Fi is better than she was, Ellie admits, and she respects Fi for it, but Ellie is still apprehensive.

It is quiet at the distributor, so Ellie and Fiona stop to rest and call Homer and Lee on the walkie-talkie. Fiona tells Homer that they have made it, and there is plenty of what they need. Homer says they are set on their end, too. Fiona says goodbye, but she tells Homer that she loves him first. Homer is silent for a minute, and then he tells Fiona that he loves her, too.

*Homer’s smile implies that his mischievous nature is shining through, even though he has matured greatly. In Homer’s former life before the war—in which he was a childish troublemaker—he loved to blow things up. Homer is secretly enjoying the idea of blowing up the bridge, which implies that there is a large part of him that is still a kid, despite his obvious maturity.*



*Homer’s plan is intricate and multilayered, and it shows a great deal of rational thought and effort, which also underscores Homer’s growing maturity and his seemingly natural ability to lead them. The others look to him to solve their problems, and he anticipates their needs. Homer’s plan proves he is no longer a child, and that the war has fueled his transformation into an adult.*



*Both Fiona and Ellie fear that they may be the weak link in the plan, and they are about to be put to the test. Still, Ellie knows Homer’s plan is the right thing to do, even if she is scared, which proves Ellie’s maturity as well. Ellie perseveres, even in the face of fear.*



*Ellie is clearly worried that Fiona’s inexperience will get them captured or killed, which again reflects their young age. Ellie’s life on her father’s livestock farm means that she has experience with heavy equipment, but Fiona—the daughter of rich lawyers from the suburbs—has no experience in anything of the sort.*



*The friends are careful not to give any information about their location or plan over the walkie-talkie in case they are overheard, which again highlights their careful rational thought and maturity. Fiona’s admission that she loves Homer again suggests that love and emotion can’t be avoided, even during war.*



Ellie and Fiona slide between the gates that block the parking lot of the fuel distributorship and make their way to the front office. They can see the keys hanging on a pegboard behind the desk. Ellie hands Fiona a rock. She smiles and rifles it through the window. Ellie reaches in, unlocks the door, and opens it. The keys are clearly labeled, so they grab a handful and head to the parking lot. They select an old truck, that way the moon won't shine off new chrome and paint. They climb to the tanker and check it out. It is nearly full of fuel.

Ellie and Fiona get into the truck, and Ellie starts it up. No brakes, she says. They will have to find a different one. They try several others, but Ellie can't get any of the breaks to work. She says they will just have to take the first one and risk it. They climb in and Ellie starts the engine again. She pulls out of the parking spot and suddenly realizes the truck has air brakes and she needed to wait for some pressure to build up. She is irritated with her mistake and drives in the direction of the gates. She breaks through on the second try and coasts down the street, toward the bridge.

Fiona suggests that she walk ahead and wave Ellie through the intersections, just in case patrols are coming from the other direction. She asks Ellie if she really thinks they can pull this off, and Ellie says she does, or at least she hopes they can. Fiona waves her through the first intersection, and then she turns around and frantically mouths the word: "Patrol." Ellie parks the truck in the street and gets out. She quickly climbs a tree, and Fiona follows. Ellie thinks about her dad and how he said that people hardly ever look up. The patrol marches by and never once looks up. They walk right by the petrol tanker, presumably thinking that it has been parked there since the invasion.

Fiona and Ellie wait to make sure there is enough distance between them and the patrol unit, and then they call Homer and Lee. They have been held up, the girls say, but they are back on track now. Fiona waves Ellie through two more intersections, and Ellie turns off the engine, intending to coast the rest of the way. Suddenly, she realizes her mistake; she doesn't have brakes now. Ellie tires to start the truck again, but it stalls. She tries again, and when the engine catches, she jerks the wheel and nearly jackknives. She turns the engine off again, this time pulling the emergency break to stop, and wonders why she didn't do that in the first place.

*Ellie's choice of an old truck instead of a shiny new one again suggests that she is constantly thinking and approaching each situation rationally, like an adult rather than a child. However, they seem to enjoy breaking the window—especially Fiona, who has likely never done anything so destructive—which suggests they are still children at heart, even though the war has forced them to grow up so fast.*



*Ellie's mistake in forgetting about the air brakes again highlights her young age and inexperience. Ellie has some experience driving big trucks, but she certainly isn't an expert, and her mistake here reflects this. Ellie is also very scared, which is likely distracting and making her feel rushed.*



*Fiona's suggestion that she move up ahead and assess the area for patrols reflects her sound decision making and growth. Like Homer, Fiona is constantly looking ahead for potential trouble. The sudden patrol is a reminder of the imminent danger they are in; however, the patrol's failure to notice the tanker suggests that the soldiers are inexperienced, too, and are probably not the professional soldiers Mr. Clement told them about.*



*Ellie's mistakes are further evidence of her inexperience. She is jumpy and not thinking clearly, even though she obviously knows what to do, evidenced by the fact that she ultimately pulls the emergency brake. Still, the girls can't be swayed in their determination to pull off their plan. Even after the scare with the patrol and Ellie nearly crashing the truck, they are still willing to go through with it, which again reflects their growing maturity.*





Fiona jumps in the truck and asks what happened, and Ellie answers that she just “failed [her] driving test.” They call Homer and Lee on the walkie-talkie again and make the last of their plans. Then, Fiona and Ellie climb to the top of the tanker, loosen the caps on the tanks. They drench a length of rope in the gasoline, leaving only one end dry. They tie the rope to the top of the tanker and wait.

*Ellie, however, still seems worried that she will ultimately fail, and this is reflected in her comment that she “failed [her] driving test.” Ellie clearly worries that she won’t have what it takes to succeed, but she perseveres in the face of this fear, which shows incredible maturity and courage on Ellie’s part.*



## CHAPTER 21

Ellie and Fiona wait and talk to pass the time. Fiona is completely in love with Homer, and she can’t stop talking about him. They still seem such an odd couple to Ellie, but she also knows there is so much more to both Fiona and Homer than meets the eye. Fiona is perfect, but she is also fierce, and Homer is the biggest surprise of Ellie’s life. Fiona admits that Homer finally kissed her just the other night. Fiona was afraid that he would never do it, and Ellie is secretly ashamed of how far she has already gone with Lee.

*Ellie and Fiona’s talk about boys again suggests that there is no escaping love and emotions, even during the stress of war. Ellie’s discovery that there is more to Fiona and Homer than meets the eye further underscores how much Ellie has grown, as she is able to look at people more deeply and form her own opinions, rather than simply holding the opinions of others. However, Ellie’s shame that she has gone too far with Lee too early implies that she is still very much concerned with the opinions of others and her own morality.*



Fiona says that she wants to learn all about farming so she can help Homer when they get married one day. Ellie admits that she loves Lee, too, and she silently realizes why she has been so jealous of Fiona and Homer. Homer is like Ellie’s brother—she doesn’t have a brother, and Homer doesn’t have a sister, so they are pretty much it for each other. Now, Ellie feels like she is losing him to Fiona. The hours drag on, but no convoy comes over the bridge. Homer wants to wait for a convoy so there would be more confusion, but they have only seen sentries for the last couple of hours.

*Ellie’s realization that she is jealous of Fiona and Homer’s relationship because she feels like she is losing her brother highlights how friendship can fill the role of family in one’s life. Ellie doesn’t have any siblings, which means she relies on Homer even more than she otherwise might. Fiona’s feelings for Homer also suggests a deeper connection, since she dreams of marrying him and starting a life together as a family.*



Suddenly, the sentries begin to urgently move to one end of the bridge. Something is happening, Ellie says. It is the cattle, she calls to Fiona and takes off running toward the truck. Fiona follows, and they both jump in. Ellie starts the truck and grinds it into gear, running down the slight hill, until the truck is resting just below the bridge. They get out, and over 100 prime Hereford cattle thunder over their heads. Ellie just stands there, frozen, and Fi yells for her to get moving. Ellie snaps into action just as Fiona begins to run to the tree line. The run is what Ellie is afraid of; it is completely exposed.

*Surprisingly, it is Fiona who proves to be braver than Ellie when the action starts. Ellie does well until she gets out of the truck and is frozen under the bridge at the sound of the cattle charging above her. Fiona must yell at Ellie to snap her out of her trance, which undoubtedly saves them and gets Ellie moving. Even though Ellie is initially worried about Fiona, Fiona is quickly proving how much she has matured and how valuable she is to the group.*



Ellie runs to the tanker and grabs the rope, which all seems to be happening in slow motion. With the rope in hand, Ellie runs for the tree line. She hears the sound of a motorcycle starting up, and then bullets begin to whiz past her. The tree line seems impossibly far away, and then Fiona appears, yelling for Ellie to hurry up. At the sight of Fiona, their “friendship, love, whatever you want to call it,” catches Ellie and “reels [her] in.” Ellie crashes into the tree line and runs to the motorcycle just as Fiona lights a match. The clearing lights up, and Fiona turns around, smiling. Ellie wonders if Fiona is really a secret pyromaniac, and they take off on the motorbikes.

*Ellie is given strength to keep running when she needs it most by the sight of Fiona and the implication of their friendship and love. Ellie shouldn't make it—she is running through an open field with trained marksmen shooting at her—but she is fueled by her love for Fiona, which proves the motivating power of love and its importance within the novel. Like Homer, Fiona smiles at the thought of blowing up the bridge, which reflects her childish nature, even though she has been forced to grow up so quickly.*



## CHAPTER 22

Ellie and Fiona meet Homer and Lee in a nearby gully. As usual, they all start talking at once, and then they settle down and tell their stories. Homer says their side of things started out good but quickly went south. They could only find one cattle prod, and then no convoy came. Stampeding the cattle anyway was always an option, but they worried a convoy might come up behind them. Plus, the walkie-talkie stopped working, and they had no way to tell Ellie and Fiona that the plan had changed. In the end, Homer and Lee decided just to go for it and see what happened.

*The group is overtaken by excitement and all talk at once, which again reflects their young age and immaturity. However, Homer and Lee's quick thinking and ability to still perform despite their entire plan unraveling proves that the war has forced them to mature beyond their years. Additionally, their confidence that Ellie and Fiona could adapt to a sudden change in plans proves the girls have matured as well.*



It is dark by the time Fiona, Ellie, Homer, and Lee get on the road again. They decide to take to motorbikes to Ellie's, where the Land Rover is hidden. Plus, Ellie wants to get some more supplies from her dad's shed. When they pull up to the shed on Ellie's property, they are surprised to see the others outside. Kevin, Chris, and Robyn are standing around Corrie, who doesn't move to get up. Ellie turns off the bike, and Kevin tells her that Corrie has been shot in the back, and they have to get her to the hospital in town.

*Kevin, Chris, Robyn, and Corrie are obviously supposed to be in Hell, which is why Ellie is so surprised to see them. Ellie, Fiona, Lee, and Homer are enjoying a bit of a natural high after successfully blowing up the bridge, but Corrie's injury is a stark reminder of the obvious danger they all face on account of the war.*



Ellie can't believe what she is hearing. If Homer is like Ellie's brother, Corrie is definitely her sister. There is a small amount of pink, frothy blood coming from Corrie's mouth, and her eyes are closed. Homer says that he knows it sounds bad, but they will have to drop Corrie at the hospital and run, but Kevin refuses. Corrie is his girlfriend, and he won't dump her anywhere. They all agree that Kevin should take Corrie to the hospital in the Mercury and leave the Land Rover behind. Ellie tells Kevin and Corrie that she loves them before they leave, and then she watches the car disappear down the road. The others stand behind her. “Let's go home,” Homer says, “to **Hell.**”

*Ellie's special connection to Corrie again proves that friends can fill the role of family in one's life. Ellie doesn't have a sister either, and Corrie has always filled that void, now Ellie is faced with losing her. The pink, frothy blood around Corrie's mouth suggests that the bullet has hit her lung, which isn't a good sign. Homer's suggestion to leave Corrie at the hospital and run is certainly reasonable given the circumstances, but Kevin's refusal to abandon Corrie reflects his loyalty and dedication to her, which also suggests Kevin has matured during the war as well.*



## EPILOGUE

Ellie isn't sure where their story begins, but she knows that it isn't over yet. It has been over a week since Kevin drove off with Corrie, and Ellie tries not to think about what might have happened. Maybe Corrie died, or maybe they never got to the hospital. Ellie doesn't know. Their story is finally up to date now, and Ellie hopes the others are happy with it. She keeps thinking about how important leaving a record is. Take the Hermit, for example. If they hadn't found the records in his hut, they would only know the legends about him, which really told them nothing.

Ellie doesn't know how long they will be in **Hell**. They have chickens, and they planted a garden. They even have a few ferrets, which are what Kevin and Corrie were getting the night Corrie was shot. They never even knew the soldiers were there until Corrie was shot, and then Kevin ran with her in his arms all the way to Ellie's house. Ellie thinks of "loyalty, courage, and goodness," and wonders if they are "human inventions," too, like evil and Hell.

Ellie looks around at Homer, Robyn, Chris, Fiona, and Lee, and she knows they must all stay together. They fight and drive each other nuts, but Ellie doesn't want to be alone and live like the Hermit. That would really be **Hell**, Ellie thinks. Ellie's heart won't let her believe that people are basically evil, regardless of what her brain says. Ellie just hopes that they can survive.

*This passage again reflects the importance of storytelling, but it also highlights its limitations. Local legends proved insufficient in fully telling the Hermit's story, and Ellie doesn't want the same to happen to them. In leaving a permanent record, others will know the sacrifices they have made and the risks they have taken. That way, if Corrie is dead, her death won't have been in vain.*



*Kevin's obvious inherent goodness and his bravery in responding to Corrie proves, to Ellie at least, that people can be both good and bad. Kevin was certainly involved in killing the soldiers with the lawnmower, but that does not make Kevin evil. Ellie has learned that evil, as she formally understood it, is a catchall phrase people use to respond to acts that make them uncomfortable. Ellie has also learned that such blanket assumptions of good and evil do not apply in war, which is a very grown-up realization and more proof of Ellie's growing maturity.*



*Ellie's desire to keep their group together again underscores the importance of love and friendship in the novel. Ellie mentions in the beginning that the war has taught them what really matters, and what really matters is their friendship and the love that they feel for one another. The war obviously isn't over, and they don't know much about their parents, but Ellie implies that as long as they have friendship and love, there is still hope for survival and a better future.*





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