

Uglies



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF SCOTT WESTERFELD

Westerfeld is the youngest of three children. As a young person, his family moved around the U.S. for his father's job—his father was a computer programmer and worked on the Apollo missions, for Boeing, and on submarines. After receiving his bachelor's degree from Vassar, Westerfeld worked in a variety of different jobs: a factory worker making lead soldiers, a software designer, a textbook editor, and a ghostwriter. He published his first novel in 1997, but it wasn't until he published *Evolution's Darling* in 2000 that his books began to attract attention and win major awards. In 2004 he began writing for young adults and got his big break a year later with *Uglies*. Westerfeld is very active online and on social media with his fans of the *Uglies* series and of the *Leviathan* series in particular. He and his wife split time between New York and Australia.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The *Uglies* series was inspired by the increasing availability of plastic surgery (especially for young people), as well as the increase in surveillance that Westerfeld sees young people experiencing. The earliest mention of what would be considered plastic surgery today appears in the Edwin Smith Papyrus, a medical text dating to between 3000 and 2500 B.C. Though people have been repairing bodies for millennia, elective surgery wasn't much of a possibility until the mid to late 19th century, thanks to the development of anesthesia and antibiotics. Today, medical associations differentiate between plastic surgery (which is reconstructive and corrects impairments like cleft palates or traumatic injuries) and cosmetic surgery (which is elective and includes procedures like breast augmentation, facelifts, and liposuction); it's cosmetic surgery that Westerfeld takes issue with in *Uglies*. In the 10 years prior to *Uglies*' publication, cosmetic procedures on patients younger than 18 increased dramatically, from around 14,000 procedures in 1996 to 333,000 procedures in 2005. In interviews and essays, Westerfeld has also taken issue with the increasing interest in policing teens' whereabouts and behavior, specifically as parents' ability (or potential ability) to track teens through their phones, cars, and even dental implants have made headlines.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Westerfeld has suggested that *Uglies*, and other dystopian teen novels like it, are part of an understandable response to the increased surveillance and nonsensical rules teens today are

subject to, both at school and at home. He proposes that these novels engage with the idea of authority in two distinct ways that, in most cases, appear in these novels in tandem: they take that idea of control to a [1984](#)-style extreme, and/or they do away with rules altogether and focus on the natural world. *Uglies*, along with novels like Suzanne Collins's *Hunger Games* series and Lois Lowry's *Giver* quartet, do both: they all feature overbearing governments as well as explore the idea that the natural world is what will give their young protagonists the tools and skills they need to survive. *Uglies* was inspired by two short stories: "Liking What You See: A Documentary" by Ted Chiang, and Charles Beaumont's "The Beautiful People." In the fictional, documentary-style interviews that make up "Liking What You See," Chiang presents a private boarding school where students' ability to see beauty is turned off. Meanwhile, in "The Beautiful People," Beaumont develops a world more like that of *Uglies*, in which people are required to change their appearance to fit in. Westerfeld wrote three more books in the *Uglies* series (*Pretties*, *Specials*, and *Extras*) in the two years after *Uglies* was published, and in 2018 he began writing four more that take place in the same universe a few decades after Tally's story ends. He also collaborated with three other artists and writers on a graphic novel called *Shay's Story*, which tells the same story as *Uglies* from Shay's point of view.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Uglies*
- **When Written:** 2004
- **Where Written:** Unknown
- **When Published:** 2005
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Young Adult Novel; Dystopian Fiction
- **Setting:** An unnamed society in North America, several hundred years in the future
- **Climax:** Tally and David break into Special Circumstances and discover that Shay has undergone pretty surgery and that Az is dead.
- **Antagonist:** Dr. Cable and Special Circumstances
- **Point of View:** Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Say No to Winter. In talking about his living arrangements, Westerfeld insists that he and his wife are "bisummeral"—that is, they travel between New York and Australia so they can avoid "the deadly scourge of winter."

NaNoWriMo. Westerfeld has been closely involved with the organization National Novel Writing Month, which provides support and resources for writers to commit to writing a novel in the month of November. In addition to sitting on NaNoWriMo's Writers' Board, participating as a writer, and giving one of their yearly pep talks, Westerfeld's novel *Afterworlds* is about a young author whose novel from NaNoWriMo gets published.



PLOT SUMMARY

15-year-old Tally stares morosely at the sunset, which is the pink color of cat vomit. Nothing has looked beautiful since Tally's best friend, Peris, underwent his pretty operation a few months ago. When it's dark, Tally sneaks across the bridge from Uglyville, where she and other uglies live, to New Pretty Town, where all the pretties live. Pretty people have big eyes and lips and perfectly symmetrical faces. Tally can't wait until she's pretty too. When she finds Peris, he's not happy to see her. He points out that the scar on his palm from their blood pact to always stick together is gone (he got new skin with the surgery) and he takes Tally to the roof so she can jump off the building using a bungee jacket. Peris makes Tally promise not to get into too much trouble before she has her surgery. Back near the river, Tally meets an ugly girl named Shay waiting to go back across to Uglyville.

Shay and Tally become fast friends. Shay teaches Tally to ride a **hoverboard**, and unlike most uglies, Shay insists that they use their real names instead of rude nicknames about their features. The girls discover that their birthday is on the same day, meaning they'll get their pretty surgery at the same time. One afternoon, Tally shows Shay her morphos (composites of what Tally could look like as a pretty). Shay has never made a morpho before, but she grudgingly lets Tally make one of her. She refuses to listen to Tally when Tally points out that pretty surgery is the only way to create a fair society. Not long after, Shay convinces Tally to take a night ride to the Rusty Ruins, the remains of a Rusty city. At the ruins, Shay leads Tally to what she calls a **roller coaster** and tells Tally that they can hoverboard on it. Then, Shay rides to the top of a building and lights a sparkler. She confirms that it's a signal—she's looking for a boy named David, who's an ugly but doesn't live in the city. A little while later, Tally and Shay fight about the merits of becoming pretty. Shay remains firm that they've been programmed to think they're ugly, while Tally accuses Shay of not wanting to grow up. The girls don't talk until a week before their birthday. Shay sneaks into Tally's dorm and says she's going to meet David in a place called the Smoke, where people never receive pretty surgery. Tally refuses to go with Shay because she desperately wants to be pretty. Before Shay leaves, she swears Tally to secrecy and gives her handwritten, coded directions in case Tally decides she wants to follow.

On Tally's 16th birthday, she waits at the hospital for an hour until a middle pretty who looks cruel and scary fetches her. He takes Tally to a group of squat buildings and introduces her to a cruel woman named Dr. Cable. Dr. Cable wants to know about Shay and the Smoke, and she explains that this place is called Special Circumstances. Special Circumstances acts as a hidden police force, and it's imperative that they crack down on people who live outside of cities because those people want to steal uglies away. Tally shares that she's never met anyone from outside the cities and she insists she can't help, but Dr. Cable says that Tally won't become pretty until she complies. Tally returns to her dorm in Uglyville. Soon, her parents, Sol and Ellie, visit. Ellie insists that Tally has no choice but to cooperate with Special Circumstances, and for the first time, Tally doesn't find her parents comforting. For the next few days, Tally hoverboards by night and sleeps by day. One morning, she returns to her room to find Peris. He insists that Tally give Shay up so that Tally can keep her promise to always stick with him. Relieved but upset, Tally sends a message to Dr. Cable.

Tally tells Dr. Cable everything she knows about David and the Smoke, but she doesn't know any more than Special Circumstances does. Dr. Cable gives Tally survival supplies and a heart-shaped pendant that contains a tracking device, and she insists that Tally must go to the Smoke and relay her location. Tally starts her journey that night, following Shay's coded poem. She rides the roller coaster in the Rusty Ruins, finds train tracks that lead to the sea, and crosses chasms at the coast. She follows a river upstream and decides to bathe in it. The water is exhilarating, but a huge, scary flying machine flies past and startles Tally. The following day, Tally reaches fields of white flowers. Tally sleeps, but wakes up to discover that the field is on fire. Pretties wearing masks rescue her and take her into a helicopter. One pretty, Tonk, explains that they burn the flowers, which are **white tiger orchids**, because the Rusties made them invasive. The orchids are so successful that they crowd out and kill everything—and eventually create a wasteland. They drop Tally off at a hill, and the next morning, Shay and two other Smokies arrive. One of them, a slightly older ugly boy, is David. He checks Tally for tracking devices, pulls one off her hoverboard, and then leads the group back to the Smoke.

Life in the Smoke is shocking: the Smokies burn wood and cut down trees, and none of them are pretties. Tally is extremely disturbed when Shay introduces her to the Boss, a 40-year-old ugly who runs the library. He's so wrinkly and decrepit that Tally can barely look at him. Shay introduces Tally to the Boss's collection of Rusty-era magazines, which have pictures of ugly people flaunting their disgustingly flawed bodies. That afternoon, Tally joins David and Shay as they work on pulling up train tracks: they need the metal to create paths for their hoverboards. David leads Tally up the tracks to show her a caved-in tunnel. There, he explains that he's not a runaway—he

was born in the Smoke. His parents are doctors who ran away from the city and reversed their operations. Tally is caught between wishing she contacted Dr. Cable when she had the chance and wondering if she should never contact Dr. Cable. She understands now that this is David's home, and it'd be horrendous if she destroyed it.

Tally spends several weeks in the Smoke. Shay notices Tally's pendant and suggests that Tally got a boyfriend in the week before her birthday, and Tally doesn't correct her. Tally enjoys life in the Smoke. She gets used to the wood, the different bodies, and the hard work. One morning, as they hoverboard to the train tracks, David gifts Tally a pair of gloves he made. At work that day, Tally encounters a boy named Croy who lets Tally know that he suspects she's a spy—and Tally's day gets even worse when at lunch, Shay cries that Tally is "stealing" David. Tally agrees to talk to David, so when he asks her to step outside that night, Tally agrees. Rather than tell the truth, Tally clams up when David says he admires her for her loyalty to Shay. Tally feels attracted to David, something she didn't think was possible since David is ugly. David says that he's aware Tally isn't sold on life in the Smoke, but he asks that she meet his parents before she leaves.

David leads Tally to his parents' house and introduces his mom, Maddy, and his dad, Az. They share with Tally that when they were young surgeons, they conducted research about how to make the pretty operation safer. Az discovered that a side effect of the anesthesia was brain lesions—but as they pursued their research, they discovered that while most pretties had the lesions, people with jobs that required them to make decisions didn't. As doctors, Maddy and Az didn't have them. David says that pretty people are placid and uninteresting because the lesions change how they think. Maddy says that Special Circumstances stepped in before she and Az could come up with a cure on their own, but they know there is a cure since all pretties start their pretty lives with lesions. This makes Tally understand the importance of the Smoke. On their walk home, David tells Tally that he thinks she's beautiful. Tally is shocked—she didn't think it was possible to be attracted to an ugly person. However, she and David share a kiss, and it feels meaningful and real. Suddenly exhilarated, Tally throws Dr. Cable's pendant in the fire. She decides she's going to stay in the Smoke and accept any fallout for stealing David from Shay.

The next morning, Tally wakes up to discover Special Circumstances raiding the Smoke. She sneaks out, but because she's barefoot, the Boss doesn't let her try to smuggle a duffel bag full of Rusty magazines out of the Smoke. A Special catches Tally and throws her in the rabbit pen with other Smokies. Right after Shay arrives in the pen, Specials scan Tally's eye, identify her, and take her to Dr. Cable. Dr. Cable is annoyed that Tally took so long, explains that the pendant would've activated if it'd been damaged, and asks where the pendant is. Tally says she hid it on a roof, so Dr. Cable sends a Special out with Tally to

fetch it. Tally tricks the Special into cutting her handcuffs and letting her get close to a hoverboard, which allows Tally to escape. She hoverboards barefoot to the railroad cave, where she finds David. They hide all night, and the next morning they discover that the Specials burned the Smoke. They then visit Maddy and Az's house and discover that they're gone. Impossibly guilty, Tally insists they must rescue everyone. She decides that she'll tell David the truth after she's made things better.

David raids his parents' cache of survival equipment, and the next night, he and Tally set out. They travel by night for two weeks. Then, they sneak into the city and look down into the Special Services compound. Tally explains to David that they can't hoverboard over the fence and they can't touch the ground—both are sensors—but they *can* steal bungee jackets and jump onto a roof. After they steal jackets and return to the ruins, they discover three uglies—Sussy, An, and Dex—looking for David. The uglies agree to help Tally and David with their trick. The next night, when Tally and David see the uglies' diversion—they send up a message that says "THE SMOKE LIVES" over New Pretty Town—they jump into the Special Services compound, break into the biggest building, and sneak into the elevator shaft. On the bottom floor, they're shocked to discover Dr. Cable and Shay, who's now pretty. However, they have the element of surprise on their side—David hits Dr. Cable over the head and knocks her out. While David frees the other captive Smokies, Shay thanks Tally for getting her back to the city. She loves being pretty. Tally is distraught. Maddy leads the charge out of the building and when David asks where Az is, Maddy reveals that he's dead.

The next day, the Smokies and Shay convene at the Rusty Ruins. Maddy and David reveal that Maddy stole the information she needs to develop a cure. For 20 days, she works while Tally and the other Smokies spread the news that the pretty operation changes people's brains. Finally, Maddy sits Shay down and asks her to take the pills. Shay refuses—she's happy, loves being pretty, and has no interest in experiencing jealousy or paranoia. Tally is incensed, but Maddy refuses to let Tally sneak Shay the pills. Maddy insists that doing so would make them as bad as the city government that performed the operation on Shay without her permission. David also states that Az died because he was the victim of Dr. Cable's experimental procedure to alter people's memories. When Maddy reiterates that they need a *willing* test subject, Tally offers herself up. She tells David the truth—that she was a spy and gave away the Smoke—and says that she'll go to the city, receive her operation, and return to test the pills. Maddy agrees, but she makes Tally put her consent in writing before she and Shay return to the city.

Tally is conflicted. She wants to return Shay to the person she knows Shay wanted to be, but she also knows that that version of Shay will hate her for betraying the Smoke. When Tally and

Shay come across a warden, Tally introduces herself and says she wants to be pretty.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Tally Youngblood – The protagonist of the novel. Tally is a 15-year-old ugly who looks forward to her birthday, at which point she (like all 16-year-olds in her society) will receive an operation that makes her pretty. Without her friend Peris, who's already pretty, Tally has no one to hang out with—but one night, after Tally sneaks out to visit Peris, she meets Shay, who has the same birthday. Though Shay teaches Tally to **hoverboard**, which Tally loves, Shay also doesn't want to receive pretty surgery. Tally fully believes that it's impossible for ugly people to be attractive and successful, so she thinks this is nonsense. Despite this, Tally loves Shay and all the things that Shay shows her, including how to hoverboard in nature. But Tally's desire to be pretty is so strong that she refuses to accompany Shay when Shay decides to run away to a civilization in the wilderness called the Smoke. Tally doesn't receive her operation on her birthday, as a Special named Dr. Cable blackmails Tally into helping her track down the Smoke by withholding her pretty surgery. Though Tally wants to honor Shay's choice, she also feels like she has to remain loyal to Peris—and so must help Dr. Cable, or she won't be able to follow through on her promise to stick with him and become pretty. In the Smoke, Tally learns many things that challenge how she thinks about the world. While she grew up believing that humans shouldn't exist in nature, she feels competent in the natural world. Here, she develops a crush on an ugly named David, something she didn't think was possible. When David's mother, Maddy (a former surgeon), tells Tally that pretties develop brain lesions that change the way they think, Tally destroys the tracking device from Dr. Cable, which (unbeknownst to Tally) alerts Special Circumstances. The Specials destroy the Smoke and capture most of the Smokies, and Tally, overcome with guilt, feels as though the only way to atone for her treachery is to rescue everyone with David's help. Though Tally and David are successful, Tally knows that it's her fault that David's father, Az, dies, and that Shay becomes pretty against her will. In order to help Shay, Tally returns to the city to become pretty so that she can test Maddy's experimental pill, which will cure Tally's lesions.

Shay – A young ugly whom Tally meets one night while sneaking out, as they both try to sneak back across the river to Uglyville. Shay has the same birthday as Tally, and since they're both the youngest of their friends (and therefore they're alone in Uglyville as all their friends have already undergone pretty surgery), the girls quickly form a strong bond. Shay is an avid **hoverboarder** and teaches Tally to ride. Shay has almost perfect lips and sleek black hair, but she's far too skinny.

However, Shay doesn't want to undergo pretty surgery and she makes a point to act and speak in ways that show Tally that Shay thinks they're both beautiful just the way they are. Shay's insistence on maintaining her individuality leads to a number of fights with Tally, and culminates in Shay leaving the city for the Smoke without Tally. Though Shay is hurt, she respects Tally's desire to be pretty. Once Tally arrives in the Smoke on a secret mission to bring Shay back, she's delighted to see that Shay seems very happy, and that Shay is possibly in a relationship with an ugly named David. Shay forgives Tally for not initially coming with her and she makes a point to help Tally acclimate to life in the Smoke. Though Tally is floored by Shay's kindness, she also notices that Shay doesn't want to acknowledge the possibility that Tally is a spy. Shay is understandably hurt when, a few weeks later, David effectively professes his love for Tally. It's clear that Shay's feelings for David are real, but David suggests that Shay is too flighty and immature for him. Shay is the only one to connect that Tally is working with Special Circumstances betrayed the Smoke, and the Specials forcibly turn Shay pretty to stop her from resisting. As a pretty, Shay is an entirely different person: she loves parties, hot showers, and brushing her hair. While she once lived for hoverboarding and exploring the world around her, pretty Shay is content to live where she's supposed to and act how she's supposed to. Because of this, Shay refuses Maddy's experimental pills that would cure Shay's brain lesions and put Shay back in control of her mind.

David – David functions as the Smoke's ringleader and figurehead, though he's not the one who started the civilization—his parents, Maddy and Az, did. However, because Maddy and Az are old enough to scare young uglies who have never seen adult uglies, David is the one tasked with traveling to the cities and bringing in new recruits. He's 18 years old, and though he's an ugly, he exudes a confidence that Tally has never seen before. This confidence makes him kind of handsome, despite having scars, being too strong for pretty standards, and having an asymmetrical face. At first, Shay is in love with David and it's possible that David reciprocated Shay's feelings at some point, but he quickly falls in love with Tally. Tally is attractive to David because David is mature, and in turn he prizes maturity and sensible, clear thinking in others. He understands that the Smoke is more than just an extended camping trip—it's a way of life for those who commit to living there, and he doesn't have much time or patience for people who struggle to grasp this. To Tally's horror, David wears a leather jacket and leather shoes, something she initially finds disturbing. She begins to see that it suits David, however, when she learns that the Smokies only kill invasive species. When David ascertains that Tally isn't sure she wants to stay in the Smoke, he takes her to meet his parents, and they tell Tally the truth about pretty surgery. David believes it's imperative that people who can handle the information have it and are able to make decisions for themselves. When, later that night, he

insists that he finds Tally beautiful, Tally decides to stay in the Smoke but inadvertently alerts Special Circumstances to where she is. The Specials raid and destroy the Smoke, but David is prepared to handle such a disaster. David is overcome with grief when he discovers that Az died from a medical experiment, and his grief and sense of betrayal deepens when Tally finally admits that she inadvertently betrayed the Smoke. David disappears at the end of the novel and it's left ambiguous as to whether he forgives Tally or not.

Dr. Cable – The antagonist of the novel. She's a Special who works for Special Circumstances, a secret police force of sorts that monitors uglies' antics within the city and also tries to infiltrate the Smoke. Though Dr. Cable is inarguably beautiful, she looks cruel and terrible to Tally: she's too tall, too strong, has flat gray eyes, and seems incapable of flashing a genuine smile. As Dr. Cable's primary goal is to infiltrate and put an end to the Smoke, she's willing to blackmail young people like Tally into helping her; Dr. Cable is a cunning individual who understands how to manipulate others' desires and fears to get what she wants, so it doesn't take long for Dr. Cable to convince Tally to help out Special Circumstances. Interestingly, however, Dr. Cable suggests that Tally *did* have a legitimate choice in whether or not to help, suggesting that as a Special who's fully in control of her mind (she doesn't have the brain lesions most pretties do), Dr. Cable may have a greater awareness of how society works than an ugly like Tally does. However, without the perks and features of her office that allow Dr. Cable to detect when people are lying, she is susceptible to being tricked: Tally is able to trick Dr. Cable into letting Tally go outside, which allows Tally to escape and eventually rescue her friends from Dr. Cable at Special Circumstances. Dr. Cable is a fundamentally unethical person. She forces Shay to undergo pretty surgery to stop Shay from fighting, and she also subjects Az to a medical experiment that kills him. Her goal was to keep Maddy and Az from talking about the brain lesions that result from the pretty operation, so she attempted a procedure that would alter Az's memory. Her overarching goal, in other words, is to do anything necessary to preserve life in the city as it is and stamp out anything different, individualistic, or that might complicate how life in the city is "supposed" to be.

Maddy – David's mom and Az's wife. As a young pretty, Maddy was a cosmetic surgeon and sat on the "Pretty Committee," the group that decides what pretty looks like. Along with her husband, fellow surgeon Az, she began to look into the lesions that Az discovered on brain scans of pretties. Together, they discovered that the lesions change how people think and turn them into pliant and yielding individuals, though people who work in professions where they have to make quick decisions—such as doctors—don't have the lesions. This, they realize, means that the lesions are curable. Special Circumstances threatens Maddy and Az before the doctors make much headway on a cure, so they run away and start the

Smoke. Maddy is a sharp and businesslike woman, but she's tender and gentle too. Special Circumstances ultimately kidnaps her along with Az and the rest of the Smokies when they raid the Smoke. When Tally and David reconnect with her in the city, Maddy focuses all her energy on helping the Smokies escape Special Circumstances so that doesn't have to attend to her own grief or share the truth with David—that Az died from a medical experiment while imprisoned in Special Circumstances. Despite not having a fully stocked lab to work with, Maddy uses information on Dr. Cable's tablet to develop a cure for the lesions. However, she refuses to give them to Shay (who becomes pretty) without Shay's permission. A fundamentally ethical person, Maddy suggests that she already violated the Hippocratic oath once when she learned she was complicit in changing people's brains without consent, and she refuses to do so again. During this conversation, Tally also senses that Maddy blames her for Az's death.

Peris – Tally's best childhood friend who turned pretty a few months before the novel begins. He and Tally knew they'd be friends from the moment they met and they even made a blood promise to stick together and become pretty together. Their bond is strong enough that Tally primarily yearns to become pretty so she can be with Peris again. When Tally finds Peris at a party, however, Peris seems very different: he's not happy to see Tally, for one, and he accuses her of being childish and naïve. He's gorgeous, however, and so he's able to make Tally feel warm and compliant. This is also how Peris is able to talk Tally into cooperating with Special Circumstances to bring Shay back to Uglyville. After this point, Peris doesn't appear in the novel again, but Tally still thinks about him often as she gradually comes to understand what, exactly, the pretty surgery entails. It's easy for her to see that pretty Peris has little in common with the Peris she once knew. Ugly Peris mocked pretties for their conformity and would've happily lived in the Smoke, but as a pretty, he wastes no time in joining the endless parties in New Pretty Town and seems derisive of the activities he and Tally once did together.

Az – David's dad and Maddy's husband. Az and David look a lot alike, something that shocks Tally at first, since pretty surgery tends to eliminate physical quirks that get passed down among family members. Az and his wife, Maddy, founded the Smoke and had David after they fled the city. Prior to that, Az was a cosmetic surgeon who researched how to make the pretty operation safer. He was the first to discover the brain lesions that most pretties have after surgery and, with Maddy's help, uncovered that the lesions change the way pretties think—but also that Special Circumstances has the ability to cure the lesions, since no Specials or doctors have them. Az believes that it's extremely important for people to be able to make their own choices about who they want to be and how they grow up, which is why he and Maddy allow young people who grow disillusioned with life in the Smoke to leave without a fight.

Near the end of the novel, Az dies from a forced medical experiment while in custody at Special Circumstances.

Croy – One of Shay’s older friends who escapes to the Smoke not long before Tally and Shay meet. According to Tally, Croy is wildly unattractive and really needs to undergo pretty surgery. However, as Tally gets to know Croy, she learns that he is generous, loyal, and honorable. Croy is a skeptical person, though, and he vocalizes his suspicion that Tally is a spy. When it seems during the Special Circumstances raid that Tally didn’t actually betray them, Croy demonstrates his honorable and generous nature by convincing about 20 Smokies to leave their shoes for Tally, who’s barefoot. Though Croy is understandably hurt when he learns the truth about Tally, he still treats her with respect. A skilled **hoverboarder**, Maddy tasks Croy with throwing off Special Circumstances when the group escapes from the city.

The Boss – The librarian at the Smoke. He’s about 40 and, in Tally’s eyes, is unspeakably ugly: he has milky eyes, saggy skin, shuffles around, and his hands are claw-like. Tally notes that the Boss handles his books surprisingly gracefully despite being so seemingly old and decrepit. The Boss is fanatical about preserving his collection, especially magazines from the Rusty era. The Boss conspires with Tally to save a duffel bag full of magazines when Special Circumstances raids the Smoke, but though he manages to hide the magazines, a Special kills him.

Sol – Tally’s father. Sol is a middle pretty who, most of the time, exudes wisdom and competence, and he insists that it’s important for individuals to think only about themselves and doing what’s right—Tally’s desire to protect Shay is, in his mind, immature and silly. Later, as Tally learns more about pretty surgery, she begins to understand that both of her parents probably behave the way they do because that’s how they’re programmed to think: the brain lesions caused by the operation make them incurious and accepting of whatever the government says is correct.

Ellie – Tally’s mother. Ellie is a middle pretty and to Tally, seems like the perfect mom. She encourages Tally to work with Special Circumstances and seems to genuinely believe that Shay is in danger. Later, as Tally learns more about pretty surgery, she begins to understand that both of her parents probably behave the way they do because that’s how they’re programmed to think: the brain lesions caused by the operation make them incurious and accepting of whatever the government says is correct.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Tonk – A young pretty ranger from another city who works on the helicopter. He tells Tally about the **white tiger orchids**.

Sussy – An ugly who wants to run away but, along with An and Dex, ends up helping David and Tally by causing mischief to distract Special Circumstances.

An – An ugly who wants to run away but, along with Sussy and Dex, ends up helping David and Tally by causing mischief to distract Special Circumstances.

Dex – An ugly who wants to run away but, along with An and Sussy, ends up helping David and Tally by causing mischief to distract Special Circumstances.

Astrix – One of Shay’s friends who ran away to the Smoke a few months before Shay does.

Ryde – One of Shay’s friends who ran away to the Smoke before Shay did.

Jenks – The helicopter pilot who takes Tally to the rendezvous point for the Smoke.

TERMS

Little – A child under the age of 12 who has yet to become an ugly.

Morpho – Digital avatars that uglies make of themselves to model what they might look like after pretty surgery.

Pretty – People who have received their pretty surgery, which, at age 16, transforms them from an ugly into a highly attractive person according to evolutionary science. Younger pretties are known as “new pretties,” while middle-aged pretties are called “middle pretties” and the elderly are known as “late pretties” (or by the slang term “crumbles”).

Rusties – Rusties refers to the era (and that era’s culture and people) that preceded **Tally’s**; the name comes from the fact that this civilization built most of their buildings out of metal. The Rusties are loosely based on mid-2000s culture and society: they were similarly dependent on oil, abused the environment, and stayed ugly forever, and so experienced racism and appearance-based prejudice. Tally’s society regards the Rusties as selfish and unintelligent, as people in the present believe that the Rusties knew they were headed for destruction but did nothing to save themselves or the planet.

The Smoke/Smokies – The hidden settlement in the wilderness where uglies go to escape from having to get pretty surgery. The term for someone who lives in the Smoke is a “Smokey.”

Special – A pretty who works for Special Circumstances. Specials are beautiful, but in a cruel and menacing way. They’re a little taller than normal pretties, have flat gray eyes, and can move extremely fast.

Ugly – A teenager between the ages of 12 and 15 who hasn’t yet received their pretty surgery (though in the Smoke, **Tally** also uses “ugly” to refer to everyone there who hasn’t undergone surgery, including adults). Uglies are heavily policed, looked down upon in society, and raised to look forward to the pretty surgery that all uglies undergo when they turn 16. It’s common among uglies to give each other looks-based

nicknames like “Nose” or “Squint” which mock physical features that are “ugly” according to the government-promoted beauty standard.



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.



CONFORMITY VS. INDIVIDUALITY

Uglies plunges the reader into a futuristic, seemingly utopian world in which one's physical appearance at birth doesn't matter—at age 16, all

teens, who are known as “uglies,” undergo extensive plastic surgery that turns them into “pretties.” Fifteen-year-old Tally looks forward to her operation so that she can join her best friend, Peris, in New Pretty Town across the river and enjoy the endless party that is life as a “new pretty.” This is what Tally has spent her whole life waiting for: a chance to finally be gorgeous and happy, just like all of the other pretties. However, when Tally's new friend Shay runs away to a mysterious place called the Smoke so that she doesn't have to receive the operation, Tally (under threat of not being allowed to become pretty herself) grudgingly agrees to cooperate with a government agency known as Special Circumstances to retrieve Shay. As Tally's journey unfolds, she's forced to confront the fact that becoming a pretty means conforming to societal standards she didn't even know existed and that, upon closer inspection, make conforming look significantly less attractive. Through this realization, *Uglies* makes the case that although at first glance conformity may appear ideal while individuality appears risky and undesirable, in actuality the opposite is true: conforming deprives a person of who they truly are, something the novel portrays as irreparably damaging and even dangerous.

Tally's government goes to great lengths to make it seem as though conforming is truly the only option. All young people are raised to look forward to their 16th birthday and their pretty surgery, which many see as the first day of their real lives—being ugly is considered a purgatory of sorts, and not truly living. Everyone is taught to desire life as a pretty, in which one is happy, parties nonstop, and is treated kindly and reverently by everyone else. In Tally's society, then, conforming to the required pretty surgery is the only accepted path to achieving a good life. There are, as far as Tally knows, no other options—while there are rumors that some people are refused their operations, these stories are unproven and possibly just hearsay. Conformity, then, is equated with happiness. This idea gains traction in Tally's world in part because of the way uglies—that is, the only people who are told that they're not

cute or pretty—are treated. Uglies arrive in Uglyville at age 12, after they graduate from being an adorable little (a child). Uglies are the only group in Tally's world that cannot move freely between the different parts of the greater city—the only time they can legally leave Uglyville is if they go to their parents' house in the suburbs. Out in public, pretties visibly recoil away from uglies. Uglies like Tally are essentially told that their individuality is horrific, and are the ones who are most heavily policed—in comparison, conformity looks like paradise.

At first, Tally is horrified and bewildered when her friend Shay says that she's serious about not wanting to undergo the pretty operation. However, when Tally agrees to cooperate with Special Circumstances and follows Shay to the Smoke a few weeks after Shay disappears, it only takes a few days before Tally starts to suspect that there's something to be said for individuality. Though part of this has to do with living in a culture that outright rejects the idea of “pretty” on principle (as well as her budding romance with David, the young leader of the group), Tally begins to learn how truly dangerous conformity can be when David takes Tally to visit his parents, Maddy and Az, former cosmetic surgeons from Tally's city. As doctors and researchers (Maddy was part of the “Pretty Committee,” the global group that conducts research and decides what constitutes pretty each year), Maddy and Az got an intimate look at how pretty surgery works. Disturbingly, Maddy discovered that after surgery, most pretties had lesions on their brain that she suspects makes pretties pliant and happy—but individuals who worked in professions where they had to think on their feet and make decisions, such as surgeons and the government agents in Special Circumstances, didn't have them. What Maddy and Az essentially discovered, and what begins to truly change Tally's mind about becoming pretty, is that all pretties seem happy for a reason—but that reason isn't because they finally fit in. Rather, the government has altered their brains to make them happy and deprive them of all independent thought. This major revelation brings about all manner of other revelations regarding independence for Tally. Though as an ugly she was one of the more independent kids who liked doing “tricks” (sneaking out and playing pranks) and thought that habit made her edgy and cool, Maddy notes that many uglies who grow up to work in thinking professions and lose their lesions are the ones who started life as tricksters. She believes it's possible that the fact that uglies can get away with tricks at all in their overbearing, surveillance-heavy society is because tricks are a test—tricks may be framed as acting out and misbehaving, but those uglies who do tricks might be doing exactly what's expected of them.

With this, *Uglies* presents a world in which even the little bit of individuality uglies can achieve may not actually be individuality at all, but part of a greater system of surveillance, control, and brainwashed conformity. Given this, Tally comes to the novel's most important conclusion: while conforming to the status quo

may look like happiness, it's actually something quite sinister that deprives people of the ability to understand who they are and the culture they inhabit. Genuine individuality, meanwhile, not only gives people control over their lives, but gives them the tools to ask important questions—and, hopefully, to change their culture for the better.



BEAUTY, SCIENCE, AND INFLUENCE

In school, uglies learn that during the time of the Rusties (the people who lived on Earth prior to Tally's society), everyone stayed ugly their entire life—and because of this, experienced racism and discrimination based on their looks. Tally's society seeks to remedy this by scientifically deducing what makes a person physically beautiful, and making everyone look like that by forcing them to undergo “pretty” surgery as teenagers. Through what Tally and her friends learn in school about beauty, as well as the discoveries Tally makes about what's possible as an ugly in the Smoke (the hidden settlement where uglies attempt to escape their surgeries), *Uglies* poses a compelling question: how much of the way people think about beauty is evolutionary, and how much of it is cultural? Though the novel overwhelmingly shows that beauty is cultural more than anything else, the government's creation and promotion of this idea of scientific beauty in the novel suggests that it's shockingly easy to justify anything using scientific language, and through doing so, use it to control the population and influence how they think.

When the reader first meets Tally, she's been distraught for the several months since her best friend, Peris, celebrated his 16th birthday and became pretty. As Tally dwells on her own ugliness, she describes in detail what exactly “pretty” means to her society: pretty people have big eyes and big lips (which tell potential mates that they're “young and vulnerable,” as well as harmless and in need of protection), clear skin and perfectly symmetrical faces (which convey health and an absence of congenital diseases), and a specific body height and amount of fat (which signals health and fertility). Put together, all of these qualities create people so beautiful that they awe everyone who's still ugly and not used to seeing such attractive people. Importantly, all of these things that make people beautiful are, as far as Tally is concerned, biological and evolutionary necessities. In Tally's understanding, it's impossible to be desirable to a potential partner if one doesn't have all of these things. This idea permeates Tally's culture entirely, and it results in young uglies coming up with all manner of rude nicknames for each other like “Nose” or “Skinny” that draw attention to the way that uglies are considered imperfect and unattractive. The language people in Tally's society use to talk about beauty (having divisions between uglies and pretties, for one, as well as the prevalence of appearance-based nicknames) drives home just how entrenched this singular conception of

beauty is in Tally's culture—and she later discovers that this is by design. The combination of the very language used to talk about beauty and the “scientific” basis for her culture makes it not just the way things are, but the way things are *supposed* to be, according to science.

Tally begins to question the truth of all of this when, out in the Smoke, she meets the camp's ringleader, David. David has grown up in the Smoke, performing hard physical labor for his entire life, and he's a little too old to receive pretty surgery. His body reflects the way he grew up: he has callused hands from shoveling, “too much” muscle from performing hard work, and scars from various injuries. Given everything Tally has learned in school and picked up from her culture, David should never interest a potential partner due to not being perfectly engineered to be scientifically attractive. However, Tally is surprised to find that she is attracted to David. He's kind and smart, and he moves through the woods with a grace and ease that not even new pretties (who are engineered to move in a specific way) can emulate. Similarly, as their romance grows and deepens, David announces that he thinks Tally is beautiful. Tally's supposedly too-thin lips, “squinty” eyes, and frizzy hair don't negatively affect how David sees her, and they don't make her a fundamentally unattractive person.

Tally's discoveries seem at first to only suggest that natural beauty is just as valid and real as the surgically optimized beauty of the pretties. But the novel also goes to great lengths to show how Tally's perception of David changes as she learns more about the culture in the Smoke. She gradually becomes more accepting of David's callused hands, for instance, as their meaning starts to change: while they once made her think of a difficult life and of a person who probably made mistakes that could be dangerous (she's been told that people want partners who are “too clever” to hurt themselves), as she comes to appreciate the hard work it takes to keep the Smoke running, the calluses instead signal that David is someone who's caring, dedicated, and strong. This makes it very clear that while unadulterated uglies can indeed be just as attractive as the pretties, being able to believe in the truth of this means that the culture itself has to shift to be more accepting of a different standard of beauty, as well as of a different way of life with different values.

Tally's discovery that so-called ugly people can be just as attractive as the pretties coincides more broadly with a growing distrust in the government organizations that decide what “pretty” means. Tally becomes gradually disillusioned with everything she's been taught about how her world works, what's true, and what's not—including about the supposed advantages of being pretty. While *Uglies* doesn't fully resolve these issues (the book is the first in a series), it nevertheless makes the point that what people consider beautiful stems from a combination of nature and nurture that nevertheless leans toward nurture—and that what a society suggests is

scientific, true, and inarguable may very well contain a kernel of truth, but may also not speak to the whole story.



THE NATURAL WORLD, HISTORY, AND GROWING UP

For uglies in Uglyville, having their operation to become pretty and moving to New Pretty Town is the agreed-upon definition of growing up. This trajectory also follows the broader arc of civilization in *Uglies*: after a horrifying manmade disaster, the few survivors of the Rusties (the civilization on Earth prior to Tally's society) built the cities and developed the society that Tally inhabits several hundred years later—and her society is one that, in her opinion, doesn't abuse nature like the Rusties once did. However, as Tally moves into the natural world herself through her journey to the Smoke, she learns things about the Rusties—and her own society—that muddy her belief in her society's superiority, especially when it comes to what it means to grow up. By drawing out clear parallels and comparisons between Tally's civilization, the Rusties' civilization, and the untamed natural world, *Uglies* is able to show that growing up doesn't just mean undergoing surgery and moving to a new part of town. Rather, growing up entails expanding one's horizons to learn about the wider world and other cultures, as well as accepting that civilization may not hold all the answers.

Tally's teachers portray the Rusties in a consistently negative light—she mentions at several points that her teachers never missed an opportunity to denigrate their predecessors. Tally's society sees the Rusties (a society based on mid-2000s America) as wildly unintelligent, greedy, and ugly. It's considered horrific that the Rusties killed trees and animals until a fiery disaster stopped this destruction by burning most of the Rusties and their cities. The Rusties' world was also one in which racism and discrimination based on people's looks was common, and as far as young people in the novel's present are concerned, the Rusties knew they were headed for destruction and did nothing to try to save themselves. Tally's society, meanwhile, seeks to fix these perceived flaws, most notably by carrying out the pretty surgeries so that discrimination based on looks simply doesn't exist. However, this isn't the only way they seek to distance themselves from the Rusties. Rather than use wood or animal products, everything people eat is soy-based, and all technology and things that run on electricity are solar-powered. Everything discarded is recycled immediately, and people are better able to make use of space by building vertically via "hoverstruts," or magnetically-powered poles that thrust buildings high into the air. Furthermore, people seldom venture into the natural world—it is, after all, not meant for humans. Why, Tally asks, would anyone want to spend time in nature (save for a few childhood camping trips) where they have to work so hard to survive, when instead they can have all their needs met in the cities? At first, the answer seems obvious

to Tally: no one would.

However, Tally eventually begins to rethink her answer, especially when she sees the difference between David, who was raised entirely in the Smoke (the secret settlement of uglies who don't want to become pretty), and other uglies from the city like Tally. As Tally begins to lean into and enjoy the hard work necessary to live in the Smoke, she realizes that she has purpose for the first time in her life. As a worker, she's part of a larger effort to make life better for everyone—whereas pretties don't have to do anything but party. Eventually, life as a pretty begins to seem small and meaningless, especially once Tally also learns about the personality-altering brain lesions that come with the pretty operation. Becoming pretty, she starts to understand, means moving into a lifelong childish state of dependence in which one never fully comes of age.

The natural world itself also gives Tally lots to think about in terms of how she thinks about being pretty and adult. Tally has grown up believing that in order to be an adult, she must undergo the pretty operation and change how she looks—but the natural world begins to push back on this idea. The environment doesn't need an operation to be beautiful; it just *is*. As this understanding takes hold, Tally begins to apply this idea to herself and gradually comes to believe in the Smoke's mission: to give uglies the choice of whether to undergo the operation or not, and to teach people to focus on who they naturally are, rather than on who their city wants them to be.

While the natural world gives Tally a place in which to grow and think, possibly more important to her own coming of age are the things she learns about the Rusties and how they met their downfall. David and his mother, Maddy, explain that the Rusties all died because their society was too dependent on oil, and a new bacteria infected all their oil and caused it to explode. While this clearly speaks to the Rusties' dangerous dependence on oil (as well as their love of flammable building materials), Tally also learns that the Rusties used wind and solar energy—they may have made some bad choices, but they weren't entirely bad people and even made some good choices. In learning this, Tally is forced to confront that her current society may be making different mistakes than the Rusties did, but they're not flawless either. They may run on solar power, for instance, but they still alter the brains of their young people without consent to make them more pliant and unquestioning. Through this, Tally begins to view her current society as an adult version of the Rusties, the Rusties as an adult version of the pre-Rusties (presumably, Indigenous peoples), and the natural world as a fountain of undeveloped, beautiful potential that the novel suggests is akin to that of young people. Maturity and coming of age, the novel shows, happen as individuals or societies make choices about who they want to be, based on what they see of the present and learn of the past—and some of those choices will, inevitably, be mistakes.



FRIENDSHIP AND LOYALTY

Tally wastes no time in sharing with the reader that she wants so badly to become pretty because of a blood pact she made with her best friend, Peris. At some point when they were kids, they vowed to always stick by each other and become pretty together—they have matching, self-inflicted scars on their palms to remind them of this. However, Tally's thinking about her loyalty to Peris (and about becoming pretty in general) begins to change when she meets a new friend, Shay, who doesn't want to undergo pretty surgery at all. As Tally's loyalties gradually shift, the novel overwhelmingly suggests that in order to be properly and effectively loyal to a person, one must dedicate themselves to helping their friends become the person they want to be—not who others deem they should be.

At first, Tally believes that her pact with Peris will help them both be the people they're supposed to be (indeed, they both use almost that exact language to talk about becoming pretty). Pretty is, as far as they're concerned, not just their only choice—it's an inarguably positive thing. Tally's belief in this is so strong that when she does become friends with Shay, she ignores clear signals that Shay isn't entirely sold on being pretty. When they make morphos (digital models of what they'll look like after the pretty operation) of Shay together, Shay is clearly disturbed by her hypothetical face's perfect symmetry, high cheekbones, and big eyes. Instead, she suggests that she'd rather have an asymmetrical face and look unique, rather than like every other pretty. At this point in the novel, Shay believes it's her job to convince Shay that she's wrong about becoming pretty so that she, Shay, and Peris can all party together and be who they're supposed to be in New Pretty Town. This is also one of the reasons why Tally breaks her promise to keep Shay's secret that she's running away and helps Special Circumstances find her and the Smoke—on some level, Tally believes that Shay, and the other uglies who have escaped there, are in need of saving.

Though Tally tries hard to make herself believe she's doing Shay and the other runaway uglies a favor by cooperating with Special Circumstances, Tally knows and admits outright that she's doing it as much for herself (so that she can receive her pretty operation, which the Special Circumstances agent Dr. Cable insists she'll never get if she doesn't cooperate) as she is for Shay. In other words, Tally agrees to become a spy and betray her friend in part because of selfish reasons. However, Tally's selfishness reads more as a very purposeful product of her society than an innate character flaw. Pretties are given everything they want and never have to think about how their actions or desires might negatively affect other people, so it follows that Tally simply has never been encouraged to think much about the human consequences of her actions. Tally has been raised in a society that puts forth prettiness as one's only goal in life—so given this indoctrination, it's entirely

understandable that going against what Shay wants for her life (especially when it seems so uncouth and undesirable anyway) seems like a fair and expected trade. Once in the Smoke, Tally has second thoughts as soon as she sees how happy Shay is and how committed everyone else at the settlement is to the Smoke's purpose. This suddenly makes Tally's selfishness seem way out of line, and it culminates in her choice to burn the locket-shaped tracking device that Dr. Cable gave her. It doesn't entirely destroy Tally's chances at becoming pretty, since she could still return to the city, but it does give Shay the opportunity to make her own choice—and if Shay chooses to stay, it allows Tally to honor Shay's unconventional path.

Though Tally thinks this is the end of her struggles, burning the locket alerts Special Circumstances (unbeknownst to Tally) and leads them right to the Smoke. This results in the capture of most of the residents and, eventually, to Shay undergoing the pretty operation against her will. Tally is then understandably shocked when, two weeks after the attack, she and David (who both escaped the raid) make it back to Special Circumstances headquarters to rescue their friends and discover that Shay is extremely happy as a pretty—and wants Tally to join her. This poses a major ethical dilemma for Tally: she knows that Shay is now the exact thing she never wanted to be, but Shay outright refuses to take the experimental pill that David's mother, Maddy, develops—which, hopefully, has the power to destroy the lesions in Shay's brain that make her conform. To make matters even more complicated for Tally, she also knows that as far as ugly Shay was concerned, Tally romantically “stole” David from her. Pretty Shay doesn't care about David anymore, but Tally also suspects that if Shay's lesions were to disappear, Shay would once again care and would be justifiably angry at Tally for betraying her and the others in the Smoke, and for stealing David's affections.

While as the first of a series, *Uglies* doesn't fully resolve these questions of what it means to be a loyal friend, Tally does come to the conclusion that even though she believes Shay was duped and forced into becoming a pretty, it's still unethical and disloyal to sneak her the pills. Instead, Tally decides to give herself over to the authorities, allow them to perform the pretty operation, and then take the experimental pills herself, all with the hope of convincing Shay to do the same. With this, the novel proposes that in order to be a truly loyal friend, a person cannot violate their friends' autonomy—but they can set an example of what it means to be true to oneself in the hope of helping their friends do the same.



SYMBOLS

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



WHITE TIGER ORCHIDS

The white orchids that Tally encounters on her journey to the Smoke symbolize the overbearing, conformist culture in which Tally lives. The rangers Tonk and Jenks share that in the Rusty era, someone began to cultivate the then-rare plant to sell, not realizing that this would turn the orchids into invasive weeds that crowd out everything else—including the trees that house hummingbirds, which spread the orchids' seeds and thereby enable the flowers to reproduce. These invasive orchids, the rangers explains, create a monoculture, or an ecosystem in which one species has pushed out everything else—and in which everything will die as a result. This, Tally realizes, is a small-scale representation of her own society: while her culture may look shiny and beautiful from the outside, it's also doing its best to do exactly what the orchids are doing by forcing people to undergo pretty surgeries and thereby stamp out any possibility of diversity in thought or looks. This, she knows, which will eventually lead to the society's downfall. When Tally learns about the brain lesions that transform uglies into pretties—artificially happy, pliant, unthinking people—this monoculture begins to look increasingly sinister, and makes diversity look more and more like it's something worth fighting for.



HOVERBOARDS

Hoverboards represent independence and growing up. They're a skateboard-like toy beloved by littlies that function in much the same way that tricycles do in the reader's world (that is, as an early introduction to independence and autonomy before one is legally able to drive a car). However, for those who continue hoverboarding throughout their teen years, the hoverboards can take this idea of independence even further. As Tally becomes proficient on a hoverboard, she notes that she stops thinking it as just a toy: her board becomes something symbolic of adulthood that's worthy of her respect and reverence. This speaks to the idea that while hoverboards may be intended to help turn very young children into teens—and nothing more—if one is willing to take this a step further and recognize how useful they can be, hoverboards can be the things that offer teens freedom far beyond what the government wants them to think is possible. The government's disapproval of hoverboards takes this idea of independence even further: Dr. Cable grouses that "miscreants" inevitably possess hoverboards, and it's no coincidence that those "miscreants" are teens like Shay, Croy, and David who don't buy into the idea that being pretty should be one's life goal and who want to live outside of the cities' jurisdiction. They are the cities' most independent and freethinking individuals, and their hoverboards signify their unwillingness to conform.



THE ROLLER COASTER

For Tally, the roller coaster in the Rusty Ruins becomes a symbol of her coming of age. It throws into sharp relief all that she doesn't know about the Rusties, and becomes undeniable proof that what she believed to be true about the Rusties doesn't tell the whole story. It's shocking for Tally when Shay explains that the roller coaster was for having fun; Tally never realized that the Rusties had *any* fun. In this way, the roller coaster becomes the catalyst for Tally's coming of age and intellectual growth, as it forces her to humanize the Rusties and question what her own society has told her about their predecessors, two things that the novel suggests are essential to maturation.





QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Simon Peulse edition of *Uglies* published in 2011.

Best Friends Forever Quotes

☞ There was a certain kind of beauty, a prettiness that everyone could see. Big eyes and full lips like a kid's; smooth, clear skin; symmetrical features; and a thousand other little clues. Somewhere in the backs of their minds, people were always looking for these markers. No one could help seeing them, no matter how they were brought up. A million years of evolution had made it part of the human brain.

Related Characters: Peris, Tally Youngblood

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

When Tally first comes face to face with her best friend, Peris, at a party in New Pretty Town, she explains to the reader what makes a pretty person beautiful. Importantly, Tally presents as fact that what she describes is attractive to everyone, no matter what—it's part of the way humans biologically work and experience attraction. The novel goes on to show that this isn't actually entirely true, so it's worth digging into why Tally presents this as inarguable fact: she's been socially conditioned to believe it. In Tally's society, she's right—it's impossible to think of an "ugly," a person who hasn't yet received the operation that makes them pretty in this specific way, as beautiful. This, however, is an example of society and culture shaping the way that Tally thinks about beauty—not a reflection of human biology.

It's also significant that Tally describes some of the pretty

features as childlike. Eventually, after Tally learns that the operation puts lesions on pretties' brains that change the way they think, she connects that pretties look childlike by design—they look childlike because, in many ways, they *are* childlike. Most pretties are incapable of thinking for themselves or making their own decisions, and instead they allow the government to dictate their life path and make all their decisions for them. By insisting that it's a good thing to look childlike, Tally's government effectively keeps itself in power by keeping its population vulnerable and naïve.

Facing the Future Quotes

☝ “You know,” Shay said, “I read that the real Cleopatra wasn't even that great-looking. She seduced everyone with how clever she was.”

“Yeah, right. And you've seen a picture of her?”


“They didn't have cameras back then, Squint.”

“Duh. So how do you know she was ugly?”

“Because that's what historians wrote at the time.”

Tally shrugged. “She was probably a classic pretty and they didn't even know it. Back then, they had weird ideas about beauty. They didn't know about biology.”

Related Characters: Tally Youngblood, Shay (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 39

Explanation and Analysis

Tally shows Shay one of her morphos, a composite photo that shows what Tally could look like after her pretty surgery, and Tally suggests that she looks a lot like Cleopatra. This comparison causes the girls to argue about whether or not the historical Cleopatra was actually beautiful. There's not a lot of evidence about what the historical Cleopatra looked like, but it's inarguable that Cleopatra was one of the most influential people of her time—and historical records do show that she was a skilled statesperson and military strategist. Given this, it's likely that Shay is correct: regardless of what Cleopatra actually looked like, her historical importance stems from what she accomplished in her lifetime. Her looks mattered much less than Tally would like to think.

Tally's response, though she intends for it to silence Shay and shut her down, actually pokes holes in Tally's own argument. Tally consistently parrots what her government

tells her is true about attraction (that it's impossible to be attracted to an ugly person, that ugly people can't be successful, and that attraction as she describes it is biologically impossible to ignore). Here, however, Tally suggests that in Cleopatra's time, people were actually able to be powerful even if they were ugly, as attractiveness is a cultural construct—and the things that make people attractive or unattractive have changed over time.

☝ “Yeah, and people killed each other over stuff like having different skin color.” Tally shook her head. No matter how many times they repeated it at school, she'd never really quite believed that one. “So what if people look more alike now? It's the only way to make people equal.”

Related Characters: Tally Youngblood (speaker), Shay

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

During an argument about the merits of becoming pretty, Tally reminds Shay of how horrible things were before people developed the pretty operation. The way that Tally frames her argument shows that she believes it's worth it to sacrifice some individuality if it means that everyone is able to live happily and safely, without having to fear discrimination based on their looks. By bringing this up, Tally implies that her society has solved all the issues that the Rusty civilization of the past experienced with a single invention (the operation). Though eventually, the novel shows in no uncertain terms that the operation actually has significant negative consequences, it's still worth considering that at least in theory, Tally is right—if everyone looked the same, appearance-based hate crimes like she describes wouldn't exist. However, when Tally does learn the truth about the operation and the brain lesions it causes, she must confront the possibility that her society isn't as perfect as she might think. Regardless, her conviction here illustrates how fully she's bought into the idea that her society is right—and everything the Rusties ever did, said, or thought was inarguably wrong.


Rapids Quotes

☝ “I didn't know these things weighed so much.”

“Yeah, this is what a board weighs when it's not hovering. Out here, you find out that the city fools you about how things really work.”

Related Characters: Shay, Tally Youngblood (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

During their journey to the Rusty Ruins, Shay leads Tally through an area that doesn't have metal in the ground, meaning that they must carry their hoverboards (which are magnetic and require metal to function). For the first time in Tally's life, she learns how heavy the board is when it's not hovering, which introduces Tally to the idea that the city is a carefully and strategically constructed place where residents never have to learn the truth about anything or face consequences for their actions. For instance, people can move around using hoverboards and jump off of buildings safely using bungee jackets (which rely on the same magnetic technology). Everyone becomes pretty so that they never have to experience hardship—but living in the city also means that they never get the opportunity to learn how the world actually works. Shay implies that this is a very negative and undesirable thing: it's detrimental to grow up and live in a world where people are coddled and naïve. Rather, she implies that it's far more important to venture out in the world and begin to make discoveries and decisions for oneself, which she and Tally do by running away to the Smoke.

The Rusty Ruins Quotes

☝☝ On school trips, the teachers always made the Rusties out to be so stupid. You almost couldn't believe people lived like this, burning trees to clear land, burning oil for heat and power, setting the atmosphere on fire with their weapons. But in the moonlight she could imagine people scrambling over flaming cars to escape the crumbling city, panicking in their flight from this untenable pile of metal and stone.

Related Characters: Shay, Tally Youngblood

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 60

Explanation and Analysis

Seeing the Rusty Ruins (the remains of a Rusty-era city not far outside of Tally's city) at night forces Tally to confront the fact that no matter what her teachers might say about

the Rusties, they were people just like she is. Tally's society tends to dehumanize the Rusties in order to perpetuate their own superiority and reassure themselves that they, in the present, are doing everything right. Tally's society believes that its standards of equality, care for its citizens, and general intelligence make them more advanced than the Rusties. However, buying into this necessitates making the Rusties seem less human. The Rusties' lack of knowledge about the consequences of their actions (like relying upon nonrenewable resources) makes them seem more like children who don't understand how the world works, while in comparison, Tally's society looks mature and adult. Seeing that the Rusties were indeed human, then, is the first step in Tally's journey as she begins to realize that her society isn't all it's cracked up to be. While it may have solved some of the Rusties' problems, it engages in a number of other horrible and unethical practices—one of which is dehumanizing the Rusties and turning them into the butt of every joke.

Fight Quotes

☝☝ “You can't change it by wishing, or by telling yourself that you're pretty. That's why they invented the operation.”

“But it's a trick, Tally. You've only seen pretty faces your whole life. Your parents, your teachers, everyone over sixteen. But you weren't *born* expecting that kind of beauty in everyone, all the time. You just got programmed into thinking anything else is ugly.”

“It's not programming, it's just a natural reaction. And more important than that, it's fair.”

Related Characters: Shay, Tally Youngblood (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 79

Explanation and Analysis

Tally and Shay again argue over the merits of the pretty operation and about whether or not what their government says about being pretty is true. Shay believes that people in their society only think pretty people are beautiful because they've been trained to do so. Their lack of exposure to people who look any different means that no one has ever seen that there are other options for how people can or should look, and so it follows that for most people in Tally and Shay's world, pretty seems like the only way to be beautiful.

Tally, however, presents the opposite view: she suggests that beauty is something biological (that it's nature, not nurture) and that the pretty operation is necessary to make things equal in their society. Tally's reaction, most importantly, shows that she doesn't want to think about the greater implications of how her society works. She's disinterested in considering why her government might want everyone to look the same. Part of this stems from Tally's own selfishness: she wants so badly to be pretty that it's very uncomfortable for her to even entertain the possibility that being pretty isn't something she should strive for. Because of this, though, Tally ends up being a poor friend to Shay, as she refuses to respect Shay's desire to stay an ugly.

“Look, Skinny, I'm with you,” Tally said sharply. “Doing tricks is great! Okay? Breaking the rules is fun! But eventually you've got to do something besides being a clever little ugly.”
“Like being a vapid, boring pretty?”

“No, like being an adult. Did you ever think that when you're pretty you might not *need* to play tricks and mess things up? Maybe just being ugly is why uglies always fight and pick on one another, because they aren't happy with who they are. Well, I want to be happy, and looking like a real person is the first step.”

Related Characters: Shay, Tally Youngblood (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 80

Explanation and Analysis


As Tally and Shay continue their fight about prettiness, they begin to argue about what it really means to grow up in their society. Tally positions pretty surgery as a person's defining coming-of-age moment. Nothing else, in her mind, matters as a person grows up and matures, and it's just an ugly's lot in life to be unhappy and not a “real person.” Though in a sense, Tally is right (after all, many uglies spend their time playing tricks and breaking rules because they're not happy with who they are), she misses that her society works very hard to convince uglies that they're not okay—and in fact, are less than human—because of what they look like. For Tally, the only way to fix this is to become pretty so that no one will tease her anymore about her looks. Being pretty means that people will take Tally seriously, respect her, and give her opportunities that she'll never have as an ugly.

Spagbol Quotes

“Mountains rose up on her right, tall enough that snow capped their tops even in the early autumn chill. Tally had always thought of the city as huge, a whole world in itself, but the scale of everything out here was so much grander. And so beautiful. She could see why people used to live out in nature, even if there weren't any party towers or mansions. Or even dorms.”

Related Characters: Tally Youngblood

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 147

Explanation and Analysis



Over the course of Tally's journey to the Smoke, a civilization of uglies in the wilderness, she regularly comments on how beautiful the natural world is. As she comes to appreciate the natural world's beauty, she also begins to understand why people before her, including the Rusties, chose to live in nature. The natural world is able to make Tally feel whole and competent in a way she's never experienced, which she alludes to when she suggests that she's starting to rethink how she conceptualizes the cities. Even though the city makes Tally feel small and cared for while she's in it, she's starting to understand that the city itself is small and meaningless when compared to the majesty and grandeur of the natural world. The natural world commands respect and reverence, while the city demands obedience without making it seem like that's the case—and so the natural world also gives Tally the opportunity to learn to trust herself and her abilities. Out here, without the constraining effects of dorms or party towers, Tally can come of age and figure out who she is as an independent adult.

The Side You Despise Quotes

“The flying machine had been just like what Tally imagined when her teachers had described Rusty contraptions: a portable tornado crashing along, destroying everything in its path. [...]”

But the Rusties had been gone a long time. Who would be stupid enough to rebuild their insane machines?”

Related Characters: Jenks, Tonk, Tally Youngblood

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 160

Explanation and Analysis

After a helicopter does a fly-by and startles Tally, Tally thinks about what she learned in school about helicopters and wonders who would think helicopters are useful. Tally is so horrified, in part, because she's never been asked to think of the Rusties as real people. To her, they're just a violent and stupid civilization who came before hers, and their technology reflects this. This attitude shows that Tally has never been asked to think about why the Rusties came up with the technology they did—it's never occurred to her that helicopters are maneuverable in a different and sometimes more useful way than airplanes, or that the Rusties may have had reasonable uses for helicopters at all. In Tally's mind, as per the education she's received in school, nothing the Rusties did was practical.


Because Tally holds these prejudices against the Rusties and everything pertaining to them, it's unfathomable to her that any of her contemporaries would see the Rusties in a different way than she does. Tally is able to maintain this attitude in part because all the cities in her world are isolated from one another, and her city seemingly doesn't use helicopters at all. Therefore, Tally seems to think that no one else should either—and anyone who does is somehow uncivilized.

Bug Eyes Quotes

☝☝ Tally sat back, shaking her head, coughing once more. The flowers were so beautiful, so delicate and unthreatening, but they choked everything around them.

Related Characters: Tonk, Tally Youngblood

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 174

Explanation and Analysis

In the helicopter, one of the rangers, Tonk, teaches Tally that the beautiful white tiger orchids that cover the area below them are actually invasive weeds—to the point that they kill everything else and eventually, create an environment in which they can't even survive. Broadly speaking, the orchids are a monoculture that corresponds to the cities in Tally's

society and the way that they seek to choke out any diversity or difference in opinion whatsoever. Importantly, however, the cities are beautiful like the flowers are, but their beauty doesn't mean that they're not dangerous. Essentially, Tally begins to learn here that she shouldn't actually judge people or things based on how they look. Even though her city looks like a paradise to her right now, like a field of beautiful orchids, the government is actually engaging in activity that will destroy it and everything else. The same goes for the pretties: they may look beautiful, but the lesions in their brains turn them into dangerously compliant people. And because they're so compliant, Tally's government is able to continue behaving like the orchids and exerting their own power with no one to challenge them.

Lies Quotes

☝☝ The boy smiled again. He was an ugly, but he had a nice smile. And his face held a kind of confidence that Tally had never seen in an ugly before. Maybe he was a few years older than she was. Tally had never watched anyone mature naturally past age sixteen. She wondered how much of being ugly was just an awkward age.

Related Characters: Shay, David, Tally Youngblood

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 181

Explanation and Analysis

The first time Tally meets David, she immediately feels that there's something attractive about him even though he's an ugly, which raises a number of questions for Tally in regards to what her government has told her is true about beauty and attraction. This is the first time that Tally even thinks to wonder if being an ugly—that is, being between the ages of 12 and 15—is just a normal, awkward phase of development. Importantly, if Tally does decide to accept that this phase of development is just awkward (and really is just a phase), it would invalidate everything Tally's society has ever told her about what it means to be beautiful. It would mean that people don't need surgery to be beautiful; instead, they simply need to be allowed to finish going through puberty and maturing on their own.

Tally also picks up on David's confidence, which is a product of his life spent in the Smoke being more or less self-sufficient. Aside from being able to rely on his parents, David has never had a government or another person to provide everything for him—in the Smoke, people have to



figure out how to survive and work with the group to ensure everyone's survival. This confidence that Tally notices is shorthand for adulthood and maturity—something that in the city, where even adults have their every need taken care of by city infrastructure, Tally has never seen before.

The Model Quotes

☛ “So this is what people looked like before the first pretty? How could anyone stand to open their eyes?”

“Yeah. It's scary at first. But the weird thing is, if you keep looking at them, you kind of get used to it.”

Related Characters: Shay, Tally Youngblood (speaker), The Boss

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 189

Explanation and Analysis

While they wait for the Boss in the Smoke's library, Shay shows Tally magazines from the Rusty era, which contain pictures of “ugly” Rusties flaunting their supposed flaws. Through looking at the pictures, Tally receives proof that beauty is a matter of culture: these people are able to “open their eyes” and look at themselves every day because in their culture, there are a variety of ways in which people can be beautiful. People can have different skin tones, be different heights, and draw attention to different features—and someone, somewhere, is going to find them beautiful.

Shay's comment that she's getting used to the different bodies makes it clear that while beauty may be cultural, it's very possible to change the culture. At this point, Shay has only been in the Smoke for two weeks and these people in the magazines already look more normal to her, which suggests that these shifts in perspective can happen relatively quickly if people have access to tools and materials that allow them to see that these different ways of thinking about beauty are possible. And by sharing this with Tally, Shay can also help Tally come to similar conclusions, thereby helping Tally understand why she should honor Shay's choice to reject pretty surgery and come to the Smoke.

Heartthrob Quotes

☛ “Maybe they're just worried because we're kids. You know?”

“That's the problem with the cities, Tally. Everyone's a kid, pampered and dependent and pretty. Just like they say in school: Big-eyed means vulnerable. Well, like you once told me, you have to grow up sometime.”

Related Characters: Shay, Tally Youngblood (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 216

Explanation and Analysis



During a conversation in which Shay and Tally discuss Tally's choice to come to the Smoke and Shay's own reasons for coming, Shay insists that in the city, everyone is essentially a child. At this point, having seen how life can work in the Smoke, Shay recognizes that pretties look childlike and vulnerable on purpose—it's because they *are* childlike and need the city to keep them healthy and alive. Pretties can't make it out on their own because the brain lesions caused by the operation rob them of their capacity to really think for themselves and develop the confidence that Tally sees in David and the other Smokies. Shay has come to believe that growing up doesn't mean receiving an operation and becoming attractive—rather, it means developing confidence and figuring out what kind of an individual a person wants to be. As such, Shay conceptualizes her flight to the Smoke, where she can learn to be independent, as her coming-of-age moment.

Notably, the tenor of this conversation is very different from Tally and Shay's previous arguments about beauty or running away. Both girls are clearly developing a sense of empathy for each other, as well as a deeper understanding of how the other thinks. Through this, they can strengthen their friendship by becoming more accepting and loyal friends.

Suspicion Quotes

☛ The physical beauty of the Smoke also cleared her mind of worries. Every day seemed to change the mountain, the sky, and the surrounding valleys, making them spectacular in a completely new way. Nature, at least, didn't need an operation to be beautiful. It just was.

Related Characters: Shay, David, Tally Youngblood

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 219

Explanation and Analysis

As Tally settles into life in the Smoke, she focuses on the fact that the natural world doesn't need an operation to be pretty. As a whole, the novel implies that the natural world is symbolic of youth and young people: like nature, the novel suggests, young people are full of potential and beauty, if only they're willing to recognize it. This begins to suggest that the practice of performing pretty operations on 16-year-olds is a matter of culture, not nature. Those young people receive their operations simply because that's the societal expectation— they have no choice but to go along with it, given that becoming pretty is the only way to become an adult in the cities. The fact that Tally's mind clears when she thinks about how beautiful the world around her is suggests that accepting her own natural beauty as fact is something that will help Tally find peace with herself.

Bravery Quotes

☝☝ Then Tally trembled inside, realizing what the feeling was. It was the same warmth she'd felt talking to Peris after his operation, or when teachers looked at her with approval. It was not a feeling she'd ever gotten from an ugly before. Without large, perfectly shaped eyes, their faces couldn't make you feel that way. But the moonlight and the setting, or maybe just the words he was saying, had somehow turned David into a pretty. Just for a moment.

Related Characters: Peris, David, Tally Youngblood

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 236-37

Explanation and Analysis

As Tally and David talk, Tally feels what she identifies as attraction for David. This isn't something Tally believed was possible before this point, as Tally's society teaches that people cannot be beautiful and arouse these kinds of emotions in other people unless they've undergone the pretty operation. Even if this just happens for a moment, it begins to challenge Tally's core beliefs about how the world works. Clearly, since David can make Tally feel warm and admired, it's not true that only pretties can have that kind of an effect on people. As Tally begins to make these connections and question what she thought was true, it

signals that she is gradually coming of age. This suggests that a major part of growing up is questioning what one has always assumed to be true, thereby developing a sense of independence and individuality. Doing this will help Tally develop the skills she needs to make it in the world and fight back against her city's oppressive standards.

Pretty Minds Quotes

☝☝ Tally remembered crossing the river to New Pretty Town, watching them have their endless fun. She and Peris used to boast they'd never wind up so idiotic, so shallow. But when she'd seen him... "Becoming pretty doesn't just change the way you look," she said.

"No," David said. "It changes the way you think."

Related Characters: David, Tally Youngblood (speaker), Peris, Az, Maddy

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 254

Explanation and Analysis

After learning about the brain lesions that change how pretties think, Tally thinks back on Peris's transformation and sees that Maddy and Az are correct about the negative effects of the surgery. Making this connection is one of the most important realizations that catapults Tally forward into greater maturity, if not adulthood. It shows her that pretties aren't actually in control of their minds and thoughts the way that uglies are—they think the way the government makes them think and cannot form real opinions of their own. In short, the operation and the lesions deprive pretties of their individuality, not just in terms of their looks but in terms of their thoughts too.

This is especially hard for Tally to accept given how close she and Peris were prior to Peris's operation. He is a kind of a test subject, in effect, through which Tally can see that Maddy and Az aren't lying to her about what the operation does to people's brains. Tally's love for Peris, then, means that if she chooses, she has even more impetus to fight for the Smoke and against the cities that require such terrible surgeries and that want to see the Smoke disappear.

Burning Bridges Quotes

☝☝ For that matter, shallow and self-centered was how brand-new pretties were supposed to be. As an ugly, Peris had made fun of them—but he hadn't waited a moment to join in the fun. No one ever did. So how could you tell how much was the operation and how much was just people going along with the way things had always been?

Only by making a whole new world, which is just what Maddy and Az had begun to do.

Related Characters: Peris, Az, Maddy, David, Tally Youngblood

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 258

Explanation and Analysis

Tally continues to think through all the evidence that suggests Maddy and Az are telling the truth about how the brain lesions pretties acquire during surgery change the way they think. Tally sees that in important ways, Peris isn't the same person now that he's a pretty. While he used to be individualistic and intent on remaining that way, now he goes along with the crowd and does what he's supposed to do. This, Tally begins to realize, means that Peris isn't really himself anymore.

However, it's commendable that Tally allows for the possibility that Peris is going along with what new pretties are "supposed" to do because of peer pressure. It's expected that new pretties will party, get drunk, and be self-centered, as they're surrounded by a bunch of people who are all engaging in these thoughts and behaviors. Given this, it's not out of line to think that Peris would want to fit in. But, on the other hand, this is arguably just a different kind of conformity.

Tally also maturely recognizes that the only way to figure out what exactly is going on is by testing what happens when people grow up and reach adulthood without pretty surgery and the lesions it causes. The Smoke provides a control group of sorts for this scientific experiment, and if Maddy and Az are able to keep it going successfully, they should eventually be able to answer these questions.

☝☝ "That's not what's important to me. What's inside you matters a lot more."

"But *first* you see my face. You react to symmetry, skin tone, the shape of my eyes. And you decide what's inside me, based on all your reactions. You're programmed to!"

"I'm not programmed. I didn't grow up in a city."

"It's not just culture, it's evolution!"

Related Characters: David, Tally Youngblood (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 263

Explanation and Analysis



Following their conversation with Maddy and Az, David tells Tally that she's beautiful. This is understandably shocking for Tally—for her entire life, people have told her that her only goal should be to muddle through miserably until she reaches age 16, at which point all her troubles will disappear when she undergoes her pretty operation. Most importantly, Tally is supposed to be miserable and think that she's unspeakably ugly until her operation. That David tells her she's beautiful when she's already 16 and still ugly means that Tally has to confront the possibility that everything she thought she knew about beauty is incorrect. She ascertains that David isn't lying or messing with her—he's genuinely attracted to her, and not necessarily because of the way she looks.

In his responses, David makes it clear how important it is to consider the role of culture in conversations about beauty. Because he hasn't grown up in a city, he hasn't received the "programming" that insists only people who look a certain way are beautiful. Growing up in the Smoke, David has been around different body types and unconventional looks for his entire life—and so Tally looks normal (if not more attractive than normal) to him. While this all comes naturally David, Tally still has to work at reprogramming her own brain and rethinking what she believes is true. In other words, if Tally wants to be able to reciprocate David's feelings, she'll have to decide that he's right.

The Rabbit Pen Quotes

☝☝ She scanned the captives, looking for Shay and David. The familiar faces in the crowd were haggard, dirty, crumpled by shock and defeat, but Tally realized that she no longer thought of them as ugly. It was the cold expressions of the Specials, beautiful though they were, that seemed horrific to her now.

Related Characters: David, Shay, Tally Youngblood

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 286

Explanation and Analysis

When Special Circumstances infiltrates the Smoke, Tally is somewhat shocked to realize that her fellow Smokies are the ones who look normal, whereas the Specials who have undergone pretty surgery look hideous to her. This is a major turning point for Tally, as it shows that she has been able to shift her thinking to believe that all different sorts of bodies can be beautiful. In her mind, it's no longer true that surgically pretty people are the only ones worthy of love and affection; while they may still be beautiful in her opinion, they don't have a monopoly on beauty.

What Tally really zeroes in on, though, is the Specials' expressions and the intent behind them: they're doing everything in their power to stamp out diversity and difference by trying to destroy the one place where people are allowed to be who they want to be. What Tally objects to is their fear of difference as much as to their appearance, as this attitude signals their hatred of the individuality Tally has come to value during her time in the Smoke.

to think of the Rusties as primitive, unintelligent, and mentally unstable people. She's been encouraged to not think of them as her ancestors, and instead to mentally distance herself from them in as many ways as possible. By teaching Tally these things about the Rusties, David helps Tally develop a sense of empathy and compassion for all sorts of people who are different than she is, not just for the Rusties. Tally is able to take what she learns and understand that the Smokies use more Rusty technology than the cities use (they build with wood and cook on fires, for instance), yet that doesn't make the Smokies unhinged and evil people by association. Like Tally, the Smokies hoverboard and covet survival items from the city. Learning these things about the Rusties helps Tally better understand her own society and where she came from, and thus come to a more comprehensive and mature perspective about the wider world.

●● It was hard to think of the Rusties as actual people, rather than as just an idiotic, dangerous, and sometimes comic force of history. But there were human beings down there, whatever was left of them after a couple of hundred years, still sitting in their blackened cars, as if still trying to escape their fate.

The Oil Plague Quotes


●● "They carried electricity from a wind farm to one of the old cities."


Tally frowned. "I didn't know the Rusties used wind power."

"They weren't all crazy. Just most of them." He shrugged.

"You've got to remember, we're mostly descended from the Rusties, and we're still using their basic technology. *Some* of them must have had the right idea."

Related Characters: Tally Youngblood, David (speaker)

Related Themes:  


Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 326

Explanation and Analysis

When Tally and David reach a desert and David points out old power lines that they can use to hoverboard across, Tally is shocked to learn that the Rusties used wind power. This again shows that throughout Tally's life, she has been taught

Related Characters: David, Tally Youngblood

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 330

Explanation and Analysis

In a Rusty city, Tally begins to understand that all of the burned-out cars down below contained—and maybe still contain—the remains of real people who lived and who died tragically. This isn't something Tally could've felt a few months ago, when the Rusties were simply the "idiotic" and "dangerous" force of history that her school system teaches. Tally's school seeks to dehumanize the Rusties, as doing so allows them to instill a sense of superiority in all students. Students like Tally are thus able to grow up believing that they live in the best society the planet has ever seen—and the Rusties' relatively unsophisticated way of life provides evidence for why this is true. Humanizing them, however, means that Tally also has to look closely at what's not quite right with her own society. It's significant that Tally can only make this leap after she learns about the brain lesions that result from the pretty surgery and the system of information control that her government engages in, as these are things that introduce her to the ways in which her

society isn't perfect. Essentially, through learning about the Rusties, Tally develops the cognitive tools she needs to think critically about her own society.

Familiar Sights Quotes

☝☝ David nodded. "It's kind of creepy how well preserved it is. Of all the ruins I've seen, it looks the most recent."

"They sprayed it with something to keep it up for school trips." And that was her city in a nutshell, Tally realized. Nothing left to itself. Everything turned into a bribe, a warning, or a lesson.

Related Characters: Tally Youngblood, David (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 334

Explanation and Analysis

When Tally and David finally reach the Rusty Ruins, Tally understands exactly why her city has preserved the ruins—and it's not just for purely fact-based, historical reasons. Instead, it's to act as a warning and to make it clear that stepping outside of the safety of the city is dangerous, undesirable, and ultimately unsustainable. As Tally begins to make these connections about her city, her commitment to fighting for individuality and people's right to choose how they look and how they want to grow up deepens. Because she can identify the ways in which her city trains people to think a certain way, she's able to interrogate and question them. In other words, these systems are no longer background noise that are just facts of life. As Tally considers these things, she continues to come of age—now that she can humanize the Rusties more than her city ever intended her to, she's better able to extend that empathy to others. Through this, Tally can also be a better friend and help others figure out who and what they want to be as they grow up.

Getaway Quotes

☝☝ "Yeah, I know what you mean. But that was all ugly stuff. Crazy love and jealousy and needing to rebel against the city. Every kid's like that. But you grow up, you know?"

"You grew up because of an operation? Doesn't that strike you as weird?"

Related Characters: Tally Youngblood, Shay (speaker), David

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 376

Explanation and Analysis

As Tally and Shay (who's now a pretty) escape Special Circumstances and head for their meeting point, Shay insists she's not mad at Tally for "stealing" David or betraying the Smoke because she's grown-up now and doesn't care about that sort of thing anymore. As far as Tally is concerned, these are the lesions in Shay's brain talking and not actually her friend—as an ugly, Shay was distraught about both of Tally's transgressions. This massive shift in Shay gives Tally even more proof of how the operation changes people.

Tally does demonstrate her growing maturity here, however, by asking Shay difficult questions. She's not outright telling Shay she's wrong; she's genuinely trying to understand what Shay thinks and why. This stands in sharp contrast to the way the girls fought at the beginning of the novel, when Tally was unable to conceive of the possibility that Shay might not want to receive the operation and dismissed everything Shay had to say about it. Now, Tally is trying to be a better friend by trying to guide Shay toward coming to some of these conclusions herself, thereby helping Shay return to the kind of person she wanted to be prior to the surgery.

Hippocratic Oath Quotes

☝☝ "Why did we even have to ask? *They* didn't get her permission when they did this to her!"

"That's the difference between us and them," Maddy said. "After Az and I found out what the operation really meant, we realized we'd been party to something horrible. People had their minds changed without their knowledge. As doctors, we took an ancient oath never to do anything like that."

Related Characters: Maddy, Tally Youngblood (speaker), Dr. Cable, Az, David, Shay

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 393-94

Explanation and Analysis

When Maddy refuses to give Shay the pills that might cure her brain lesions without Shay's permission, Tally is distraught—but Maddy tries to make Tally understand how unethical it'd be to do this. Though she doesn't frame this in

terms of friendship, Maddy's point nevertheless applies to friendship as well as medicine: it's extremely important to respect others' choices in regards to what they do with their bodies. Friends—or doctors—shouldn't make choices for other people without consulting the person in question. That Tally still wants to slip Shay the pills after all she's learned about respecting others' autonomy shows that she hasn't yet fully internalized what she's learned about being a good friend. While Tally seemed generally okay letting Shay

go to the Smoke and even came around to Shay's way of thinking, it's much harder now that Tally sees that Shay isn't in control of her own mind in the same way she once was. Maddy wants Tally to understand that it doesn't matter if this doesn't make sense to her, or seems like the wrong thing to do—she still cannot force her beliefs upon Shay, especially when doing so could have such major consequences for Shay.



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.

NEW PRETTY TOWN

Tally stares morosely at the sunset, which is the pink color of cat vomit. Nothing has looked beautiful to her since her best friend, Peris, turned pretty about three months ago. Tally watches the party towers light up across the river in New Pretty Town and can hear laughter. When the sky is finally dark, Tally takes off her interface ring, shoves a portable heater into her bed, and sneaks out the window. She imagines Peris sneaking along behind her, thrilled to spend the night spying on the “new pretties.” Tally fingers the scar on her right palm as she approaches the old bridge, which is so old that it holds up its own weight without the help of hoverstruts. The bridge can’t talk, but to Tally it seems wise and knowing. Tally sneaks across to New Pretty Town.

Peris has only sent Tally one note since he became pretty, and Tally figured out that he lives in the middle of New Pretty Town. Tally has the map memorized but she knows she’ll get lost if she makes a wrong turn. And, without her interface ring, she’s invisible to vehicles and could easily be hit. Tally reminds herself that she’s an ugly and therefore worth nothing in New Pretty Town, but she hopes Peris won’t see it that way. As she slips into a dark pleasure garden, she vows not to worry about what might happen if she gets caught. A pretty couple passes, momentarily filling Tally with warmth. She finally emerges in the center of town. Tally touches her high forehead, thin lips, and frizzy hair—qualities that make her a conspicuous ugly. She hopes that talking to Peris will satisfy her until she turns pretty.

Tally watches the traffic, touches the scar on her right palm, and steps forward. She leaps back when she hears an earsplitting sound, but it turns out to be a house-size drum machine trying to draw pretties into starting a parade. The machine spits masks out the back, so Tally waits until it moves farther down the block and then snatches one: it’s a pig, the same pink color as the sunset.

Tally’s word choice when she describes the sunset reflects her bad mood. This sets up the ongoing motif of the natural world functioning as a reflection of Tally’s emotions and thoughts throughout the novel. However, Tally doesn’t think about New Pretty Town in these negative terms—instead, this place reminds her of Peris and the good times they shared. This suggests that friendship—and her friendship with Peris in particular—is a major motivator for Tally, and that she’ll go to great lengths in order to be with her friends.



The fact that Peris became “pretty” suggests that he was once an “ugly” like Tally but underwent some kind of process—likely surgery—that made him physically attractive. Further, the fact that pretties and uglies are geographically divided from each other suggests that such surgeries are commonplace in Tally and Peris’s society. On another note, Peris hasn’t been openly communicating with Tally, which suggests that Tally’s loyalty and love might be misplaced. When Tally describes herself as ugly, it makes it clear that she harbors a deep sense of self-loathing because of the way she looks. Given the way that Tally’s society divides itself up into pretties and uglies, it’s likely that this self-loathing is exactly what she’s supposed to experience.



Tally’s association between herself, the pig, and the “cat vomit”-colored sunset reinforces how ugly Tally thinks she is. The pig mask may be a good disguise, but it also doesn’t make her look any “prettier.” This suggests that changing one’s appearance may be useful at times, but it doesn’t guarantee happiness.



BEST FRIENDS FOREVER

Tally finally finds her target: Garbo Mansion. It sits between two party towers, which each rest on elevator-size columns. Tally forces herself to watch as someone hurtles off of one of the towers; the guy's bungee jacket catches him before he hits the ground and then deposits him gently onto the grass. Tally shivers and thinks that the bungee jackets use the same kind of lifters as the hoverstruts, the columns that hold up the party towers. She thinks that if all the technology stopped working, everything in New Pretty Town will tumble. Hurriedly, Tally pushes into Garbo Mansion, which is where the new pretties live in dorms without rules. Everyone is dressed up in ball gowns and coattails, and many of them laugh at Tally's pig mask.

Tally moves through Garbo Mansion, looking for Peris and trying to not get too distracted by the pretty faces or the growing sense that she doesn't belong. Tally feels uglier by the second and wonders if she'll even recognize Peris—she's only seen him once since his operation, when he was still swollen in the hospital. Tally reassures herself that pretties don't look exactly the same. From the floor below, Tally hears people giggling that there's an improperly dressed pig at their party, so she keeps running. A group of pretties starts to chase Tally, and Tally mask struggles to keep the mask on her sweaty face. She races into an elevator and tells it to go to the ground floor, but it doesn't listen since Tally isn't wearing her interface ring.

Tally flattens herself against the wall of the elevator. She can see the pretties in the mirror and knows that if they look, they can see her too. A pretty boy sneakily steps into the elevator: it's Peris. Tally hisses that it's her, and Peris quickly tells the elevator doors to close. When they close, Tally pulls off her mask and looks at Peris's gorgeous face. She thinks of what they say in school: over the years, people have evolved to see pretty faces as ideal. Pretty people have big eyes and lips which signal that they're young, harmless, and in need of protection—and subconsciously, pretty people make others think that their children will be healthy. It's biology and it's impossible to ignore.

Tally's descriptions of Garbo Mansion, party towers, and hoverstruts introduce the reader to the technology that dominates her world. Tally's observation of what might happen if the technology stopped working is important, as it shows that she recognizes her society's total dependence on hover technology. She recognizes, in other words, that her society isn't invincible. Though she doesn't take this idea further here, it will become important as Tally begins to more broadly question the practices of her society.



Here, Tally directly references the operation that turns people from uglies into pretties. Given that Peris was seemingly unrecognizable after this procedure, it seems that the surgery is extremely extensive and taxing on an individual. That Tally has to tell herself that pretties don't all look the same suggests that it's quite possible she's wrong (and knows it)—but she's trying to make herself feel better about her prospects of finding Peris. Tally is clearly very concerned about how much Peris might have changed since becoming a pretty, and telling herself that he'll still be recognizable is a way for Tally to reassure herself that her friendship with Peris will remain the same.



In Tally's culture, being pretty as she defines it here is the ideal that's reinforced by evolutionary science. There's no indication that Tally believes anyone can be attractive as an ugly, so of course she's going to buy into the idea that pretty people are superior. In this society, if people want to experience the romance, fun, and success that people seem to enjoy in New Pretty Town, they must conform and become pretty themselves.



Peris takes in Tally's muddy clothes and asks what she's doing here. Tally sputters and holds out her scarred palm, but Peris uses Tally's nickname, Squint, and asks if she couldn't have waited. Peris holds out his own palm, which is smooth and conveys that he doesn't have to work and that he's too smart to hurt himself. Tally points out that Peris's scar is gone, and Peris replies that all his skin is new. He remarks that Tally that she's still such a child. Angrily, Tally says that they didn't change out Peris's blood and reminds him that they shared that. With a smile, Peris says that in three months they can laugh about this—but Tally has to promise not to do stupid things that might get her in trouble. Tally promises, feeling like a little.

Peris takes the elevator to the roof and tells Tally to jump off using a bungee jacket. Tally hugs Peris, getting him muddy, but Peris sighs and sends Tally away. Tally realizes that she can't access the bungee jackets unless there's an emergency. As two suspicious pretties approach her, Tally presses the emergency button, setting off a siren. She slides into the harness and runs for the edge of the roof. The harness light turns green and Tally wonders if it will work since she's not wearing an interface ring. She leaps.

SHAY

The jacket catches Tally just before she hits the ground. She somersaults for a moment and then realizes that she pushed off hard enough to cause herself to bounce in the direction of the gardens. Finally, the jacket sets her down. Tally runs into the garden, ignoring the firefighting hovercars zooming toward Garbo Mansion. She hopes she doesn't get caught and starts to feel stupid. Tally should've realized that Peris wouldn't have his scar: the operation gives new pretties entirely new skin. Tally wonders if she ruined Peris's fresh start as well as her own chances at being Peris's friend once she's pretty. She vows to follow through on her promise and not get caught.

Tally sees a safety warden. The warden is a handsome middle pretty, and she must be looking for Tally. Tally considers giving herself up to the warden since middle pretties are wise and know what to do, but instead Tally sneaks away through the brush. Near the river, Tally sees a dark form and freezes, thinking it's a warden. Tally and the figure stand stock still for minutes, and Tally finally decides to give herself up. She apologizes, but the figure isn't a warden: she's a young ugly named Shay. Shay explains that she's been hiding for an hour, waiting to sneak back across the river. Tally explains that there are so many hovercars and wardens because of her antics and tells Shay her story.

Peris's erased scar and all-new skin implies that becoming pretty is as much a process of erasing the past as it is a process of changing one's appearance. Given that the pretty surgery seems to be a rite of passage, this suggests that becoming an adult requires emotional sacrifices such as leaving one's friends behind and getting rid of these markers of friendship. One would think that this would be just as difficult for Peris, so his nonchalance is a bit concerning. His behavior suggests there's more to becoming pretty than just looking beautiful: pretties also experience a shift in perspective.



Even though Peris helps Tally out, his dismissive attitude implies that their friendship may be more important to Tally than it is to Peris. By extension, this suggests that as people come of age and become pretty in Tally's society, something shifts in the way that they think of their friendships.



It's telling that Tally thinks mostly about how any consequences might affect her after she's pretty. Tally obviously idealizes pretties in general—her first concern is for Peris, not herself—and doesn't value her own life and experiences because she's an ugly. More broadly, this shows that in Tally's society, pretties receive all the attention and concern. This is why Tally vows to follow through and become a pretty—she wants to join Peris and experience all the opportunities that life as a pretty seemingly offers.



The way that Tally describes not just this middle pretty, but all middle pretties, is telling. In Tally's mind, there isn't much difference from one middle pretty to the next: they're all wise and know how to navigate the world. It's possible that this just reflects Tally's innocence and naïveté as a 15-year-old, but it could also point to a disturbing degree of conformity among middle pretties.



Shay bites at one of her fingernails—a habit that the pretty operation cures—and asks if Tally was here to see a friend or a boyfriend. Shay explains that she's the youngest of her friends and she sneaks over to spy on the new pretties. Tally says that she said hello to a friend but that it didn't go well. Shay compliments Tally's trickiness and then asks that Tally let her join next time so that Shay can have fun too. Tally agrees. Shay asks Tally where her **hoverboard** is. Tally is shocked—all flying things have minders to keep users in bounds, but Shay says she tricked hers. Tally leads Shay to the bridge instead, and assures her that this one won't tattle.

The beginning of Tally and Shay's friendship shows that such bonds are based on a mutual desire to act out and have fun—but this particular friendship is also based on the fact that both Tally and Shay have things to teach each other. Having such wildly different skillsets and information will likely allow Tally and Shay to practice the important skill of respecting each other for their differences, not just enjoying what they have in common.



WIPE OUT

Tally falls off her **hoverboard** and remembers to relax like Shay told her to. The crash bracelets around Tally's wrists spin her in circles before setting her down. Tally brushes off Shay's compliment that Tally is getting better and is confused when Shay uses a word, "**roller coaster**," that Tally doesn't know. With a sigh, Tally steps back onto her board and checks her belly sensor, which tells the board where her center of gravity is. As Tally continues to ride, her board will learn her movements. Tally snaps her fingers and leans forward to start the board while Shay cruises above and behind Tally. Shay yells pointers as Tally makes a loop through the park and then heads for the slalom flags. Tally almost falls, but she rights herself.

Shay teaching Tally to hoverboard reinforces the idea that friendship is best when friends can teach each other different things. Hoverboards are a way for young people in Tally's world to get around independently before they have access to hovercars—in this way, they function much like bikes or skateboards do in the reader's world. As Tally learns to ride, she's developing independence as well as deepening her connection to Shay.



As Tally turns with delight to tell Shay she did it, she falls. Tally and Shay laugh, and Shay calls Tally "Squint" and tells her to not celebrate like that. Tally has learned in the last week that Shay only uses ugly nicknames as put-downs, so they mostly call each other by their real names. It's nice—other than Shay, only a few teachers and Tally's parents, Sol and Ellie, call her Tally. The girls sink into the grass and Tally starts to say that she hasn't felt this good since Peris left, but she doesn't say his name. Shay says she feels great too, and they realize they have the same birthday. Tally excitedly says they'll turn pretty together and don't have to worry about one of them abandoning the other, but Shay stops smiling.

The way that Shay uses ugly nicknames suggests that they mean something different to her than they do to Tally. Tally implies that most of the time, they all but replace a person's real name (and, in that sense, come to define their identity), while for Shay, they're a way to reprimand someone and make them feel bad. Since the nicknames draw from the ways in which the uglies are supposedly ugly, Shay's usage suggests that she might not want to focus all the time on her "negative" qualities. She demonstrates, through her language choices, a kinder way of being.



Shay says she wouldn't abandon Tally anyway, but Tally points out that new pretties never visit or write. Shay says *she'd* visit, and Tally makes the promise too. Shay shrugs and points out that Tally isn't the first person to make that promise. Tally watches the sky and tries to remember how Peris looked before his operation. Shay wonders why pretties never come back to visit, and Tally replies that it's because the uglies are so ugly.

Tally's assertion that new pretties don't write begs the question of why this is. Though Tally suggests that it's because uglies are too ugly and New Pretty Town has too much to offer, it's worth considering that it may be because uglies exist in a sort of purgatory between childhood innocence and the seeming perfection of life as a pretty. The pretties' reluctance to associate with uglies suggesting that part of being pretty is being selfish and exclusionary.



FACING THE FUTURE

In Tally's dorm room, she shows Shay some morphos on her wallscreen. Option two is sleek and catlike, and Tally agrees with Shay that it's probably not legal. Tally's next morpho is pretty standard. Shay says Tally looks generic in this version, but Tally points out that she looks like Cleopatra. Shay notes that she's read Cleopatra wasn't actually beautiful— she was just clever. Tally suggests that Cleopatra was probably a “classic pretty,” but that people had weird ideas about beauty back then and didn't know about biology. Tally asks Shay to share some of her morphos and she is shocked when Shay says that she never made any. Everyone, even littlies, make morphos, but Shay says she'd rather go **hoverboarding**. She points out that the doctors do what they want anyway, so morphos are pointless.

Finally, Shay agrees to make a morpho and lets the wallscreen scan her face. A second later, two faces appear on the screen: one looks wild and one looks like she's daydreaming. The faces represent versions of Shay that are symmetrical, rather than asymmetrical like all uglies' faces. Shay insists she'd rather have a face with different sides but agrees to go with the wild looking one. The software takes over and makes Shay's eyes bigger, gives her bigger cheekbones, and defines her jaw. Tally whistles in approval, but Shay groans that she looks like every other pretty. Tally gives the morpho hair, tweaks the eyebrows, and then pulls Shay's olive skin lighter, toward the average.

Shay tells Tally to stop but Shay refuses to run the software herself. She says she wants to go **hoverboarding** and that she thinks her face is already “right.” Tally rolls her eyes and says it's great for an ugly. With a scowl, Shay accuses Tally of not being able to stand her normal face and says that making themselves feel ugly isn't fun. Tally groans—she doesn't understand why Shay is so weird about the operation. She points out that when everyone was ugly, everyone judged people on their appearances and people killed each other over their skin color. Tally says that the operation is the only way to make people equal, but Shay suggests that they just make people smarter and asks if they can go hoverboarding. Tally agrees but asks Shay if she doesn't think the morpho is beautiful. Shay says it's just a committee's idea of her.

There's not a lot of evidence about what Cleopatra actually looked like, but there is plenty of evidence to suggest that Cleopatra was very smart and powerful, lending credence to Shay's assessment of her. That Tally brushes this off by saying that people didn't know about biology in Cleopatra's day reflects Tally's belief in her own society's superiority. It also suggests that Tally doesn't believe a person can become so powerful based on anything other than their appearance. In other words, Tally has fully bought into the system that says everyone must undergo pretty surgery to grow up and achieve happiness and success.



From Shay's unenthusiastic reactions to the morphos, it's clear that she's uninterested in changing her physical appearance. Shay's asides—that she'd rather have an asymmetrical face and that her morpho looks like all the other pretties—makes it even clearer that she's not sold on becoming pretty. This situates Shay as an independent and freethinking individual— someone who's far more interested in making her own way than she is in doing what she's told.



Shay shows an impressive degree of maturity when she insists that the morpho software is designed to make uglies feel awful about themselves. Tally, however, doesn't seem to grasp that she's making herself feel worse by making morphos, which points to how fully she's bought into her society's messaging about beauty. When Shay comments that the morpho is a committee's idea of her, it indicates that she desperately wants to make her own choices about how she looks and how she lives her life—unlike Tally, Shay sees the conformity of becoming pretty as a bad thing.



PRETTY BORING

Tally and Shay let the breeze carry them along as they **hoverboard** at the treetop level at the edge of town. From there, they can see New Pretty Town behind them as well as the greenbelt, which separates the new pretties from the older pretties in the suburbs. Shay says that Tally is ready for a night ride outside the city. Tally replies that there's nothing out there, but Shay says there are trees, mountains, and the Rusty Ruins, which are the remains of an old city full of too many unintelligent, ugly people. Tally refuses and is shocked when Shay says she's been before. Shay says there's nothing out there to catch them, and it's easy to get out of town using the river.

Shay says she's been wanting to show Tally the ruins since Tally told her daring story of crashing the party, and Tally regrets not telling the whole truth—now, Shay seems to think she's a daredevil. Tally suggests they wait the few months until their operations, but Shay insists that being pretty and being required to have fun is boring; this is their last chance to be themselves. Tally says that they can still do stuff like this after they “turn,” but Shay points out that pretties never do. Tally suggests that maybe this is because partying is better than tricks, but Shay thinks that people just don't seem interested after the gruesome operation. Her description makes Tally flinch. Shay pulls off her interface ring and promises to show Tally a **roller coaster**.

Shay says that she wants to do something *she* thinks is fun, before they have to do what everyone else thinks is fun for the rest of their lives. Tally wants to tell Shay that she already feels like Tally's best friend and that **hoverboarding** is the coolest thing she's ever learned. Tally agrees to go, and Shay swoops in beside Tally to hug her.

RAPIDS

Tally sneaks out of her room and thinks that New Pretty Town looks farther away than ever. She quietly says that she'll see Peris soon and then looks back at her dorm building. She thinks the shadows are so perfect that it almost makes it seem like uglies are *supposed* to sneak out. Tally heads for the dam and meets Shay. Shay insists that her method of tricking the safety governor so the **hoverboard** won't tattle will work, and she assures Tally that nobody's after them. Tally apologizes for sounding wimpy and then admits that she didn't want to go because Peris made her promise to not take risks, on the off chance that Tally gets in so much trouble that they won't make her pretty. However, Tally admits she's never heard of that happening.

The way that Tally describes the Rusty Ruins indicates that she thinks very little of societies that preceded hers, especially when combined with her comments about Cleopatra in the previous chapter. Shay's desire to sneak out of the city again points to her independent, curious nature, which contrasts sharply with Tally's hesitance to go. Tally seemingly doesn't see any reason to test boundaries, whereas Shay is naturally rebellious.



Again, the way that Shay and Tally talk about what pretties do and don't do raises many questions about what life as a pretty is like. Judging by what Tally saw in New Pretty Town—heavy drinking and jumping off of buildings for fun—there is some risk and rebellion involved in being a new pretty. However, it's likely that this is just the illusion of risk, since it happens in New Pretty Town where hover technology seems to keep people safe. Outside the city, however, the lack of safety features means the risks are real.



By teaching Tally to hoverboard, Shay has given her an important tool that will help Tally hang onto her independence and her individuality. In doing so, Shay has done one of the most important things friends can do for each other: help them be who they want to be.



Tally's suspicion that uglies are supposed to sneak out is important, as it shows that she's beginning to question the environment she's grown up in—something the novel suggests is a major part of coming of age. In this moment, Tally is trying to be loyal to both Shay and to Peris. However, it's worth considering that each of them represent a different version of growing up: Shay has implied that she wants to forge her own path, while Peris, as a pretty, represents conformity.



Shay asks if Peris made Tally promise so she wouldn't bother him anymore and assures Tally that it's fine if she doesn't want to go. Tally can't answer but she agrees to go. Ten minutes later, Tally and Shay hit the rapids, which are surrounded on either side by ancient trees like Tally has never seen before. Gradually, Tally gets used to it. Shay stops and points back toward where they came from. The sight of the bright city makes Tally gasp, and she agrees that this is better than sneaking around in New Pretty Town. Shay is thrilled and says she's wanted to come for a while, but not alone. Tally shudders, thinking that the wilderness is no place for human beings.

Shay says that from here, they'll walk until they reach a vein of iron a half kilometer away. Noting Tally's confusion, Shay reminds her that their **hoverboards** work with magnetic levitation, so they need to find metal in order to ride. In town there's a steel grid everywhere, but in the wilderness they need to be careful. After a few minutes, Tally comments that her board is very heavy without magnets to lighten it. Shay says that the wilderness has shown her how the city fools people as to how things really work. A few minutes later, Shay says they should feel the vein of iron in their crash bracelets and they hop on their boards again. Tally asks how they can ride over the river, and Shay says that rivers bring minerals up from inside the earth and then points down to the Rusty Ruins.

THE RUSTY RUINS

Tally and Shay ride high above the ground through the Rusty Ruins, which are the hulking metal frames of buildings. They can see that people tried to escape whatever destroyed the city, and Tally remembers that the cars here couldn't hover. Shay assures Tally that they'll be able to keep **hoverboarding**—the Rusties loved to waste metal. Thinking about school again, Tally remembers that the Rusties didn't use hoverstruts; all the buildings are crude, massive, and huge. The Rusties worked in factories, and the ruins here are bigger than the biggest Uglyville dorm. At night, the ruins feel more real to Tally. Her teachers always made the Rusties seem unbelievably stupid for burning trees and oil. Now, Tally can imagine people panicking and trying to escape the city.

Shay's question about Peris's intentions is a good one, and it shows that she's also questioning the structure and the environment in which she's grown up. Meanwhile, Tally's insistence that humans don't belong in the wilderness speaks to how much Tally's society has cut itself off from the natural world. Tally has never been able to see the city from far away—that is, she's never been able to get any distance from the place she calls home. Getting this new look gives her a new perspective on her home, something that will also help her mature.



Learning the truth about how heavy her hoverboard is means that for the first time, Tally has to confront how contrived everything is in the city. It's designed to make life easy and comfortable—people don't have to work too hard or worry too much. Out in the wilderness, however, people have to pay attention to their surroundings, be aware of possible danger lurking around them, and understand how the world works. This, the novel suggests, helps people come of age, while remaining in the city keeps them in a childlike, dependent state.



The Rusties are based off of mid-2000s Americans, so the basics of this dead city will likely be familiar to readers. This allows the reader to understand just how far Tally's society has come in terms of technology—that is, how much humanity has developed since people worked in factories and technology like hoverstruts would've seemed fantastical. Tally's society is, in this sense, a kind of adult version of the Rusty society, as it's a more developed and advanced iteration of human civilization. Spending time in the Rusty Ruins allows Tally to learn about her past, which gives her additional perspective that she needs in order to adopt a more mature outlook on the world.



Shay says she wants to show Tally something and leads her away from the maintained part of the ruins. They finally reach a metal wavy thing that Shay says is a **roller coaster**. A roller coaster, Shay explains, is for having fun, which shocks Tally—she’s never considered that the Rusties did anything but work in their factories and try to escape when their civilization met its end. Shay suggests that they **hoverboard** on the roller coaster and then tells Tally that doing so is dangerous unless she goes really fast. The ride is fantastic, and near the end, Shay warns Tally to speed up. At the top, Tally’s board drops—part of the track is missing. She screams, but almost instantly her board returns to her and she hits the other side of the break. At the end, Tally screams at Shay, but Shay insists that it’s more fun to not know the track is broken.

Tally sits down, shaking, and Shay apologizes. Shay explains that nobody told her about the gap the first time, and she was angry at first but then thought it was cool. Tally calms down and asks who showed Shay the **roller coaster**. Shay says that older friends did, and suggests that uglies have been coming here and figuring out tricks for a long time—but they all turn pretty in the end. Tally says that’s a happy ending and asks how Shay knows this is called a roller coaster. Shay says there’s a guy who knows lots of things, but he’s not pretty. She makes Tally promise to never tell anyone about what she’s going to reveal, and Tally holds up her scarred hand to swear. Shay says she wants Tally to meet someone, but he’s not in town.

This is an important moment for Tally, as it’s the first time she starts to humanize the Rusties. By humanizing them, Tally will be better able to see the ways in which her society and the Rusty society aren’t so different. In turn, this will likely lead Tally to important lessons about both societies and in her personal life, and to make informed choices with others’ mistakes in mind. The break in the roller coaster track is a symbol for adulthood in general—there are always surprises like this in the real world, but Tally won’t encounter them in the artificial childhood that is life in the city.



Tally’s gesture of holding up her scarred hand to swear her secrecy reminds the reader that Tally is still loyal to Peris, even if she’s now spending her time with Shay. Further, Tally’s loyalty to Peris filters how she thinks about everyone else—as long as Peris is at the forefront of her mind, she’ll likely still think favorably about pretties like him. By contrast, it seems that Shay isn’t thrilled that all these misbehaving uglies became pretty. This, once again, is a clue that Shay doesn’t want to become pretty herself—she’s content being independent and has no interest in conforming to how her society thinks she’s supposed to look or think.



WAITING FOR DAVID

Back at the heart of the ruins, Tally anxiously follows Shay into the tallest building and then up to the roof. From there, Tally can see the ocean. Shay pulls out a safety sparkler and holds it as it glows, and then confirms that it was a signal. A chill creeps down Tally’s spine and she asks who they’re meeting. Shay says his name is David, which sounds like a made-up name to Tally. Shay explains that he lives far away but he comes around sometimes. Tally pulls her jacket tight, realizing how cold and late it probably is. Tally sees that the moon is setting, which she remembers from astronomy means that it’s past midnight. Out here, things about nature Tally learned in school seem more useful.

Tally has clearly received a cursory education in how to exist in the natural world but she doesn’t act as though it’s something her school ever intended her to actually use. This suggests that even though Tally’s society recycles everything and prides itself on its efficiency, there are places where things don’t necessarily make sense and don’t serve an obvious purpose. This points to the possibility that Tally’s society isn’t as perfect as she thinks it is.



Tally hopes that David won't show up; she's heard that in other cities, people do weird things like speak other languages or wait until they're 18 to turn pretty. Tally suggests they head home, and after a minute, Shay agrees. Tally thanks Shay for bringing her along and introducing her to all these cool things, but she says that one more new thing might kill her. Shay swears Tally to secrecy again about David. As they start back, Tally notes Shay's disappointment that David didn't show up. She wonders if David is real or just an urban legend. This time, carrying the **hoverboard** doesn't seem so difficult. Tally has always thought of the board as a toy, but now it seems solid and potentially dangerous. She thinks that Shay is right: the city makes everything feel fake and unreal. Tally looks back and sees a flicker but she decides not to tell Shay.

The way that Tally talks about the “weird” things that go on in other cities drives home just how insulated she is in her city. Further, she's only heard about this sort of thing, possibly through rumors—if she'd learned about other cities at school, it seems as though she'd have a better understanding of what happens elsewhere and why. With this in mind, there may be reasons why Tally's city doesn't encourage any real communication with or knowledge of other places. Meanwhile, Tally's realization that her board is a useful tool and not a toy shows that she's beginning to grow up and value her independence.



FIGHT

Tally and Shay watch the dorky new 12-year-old uglies file in. Tally tries to remember what it was like being 12. She remembers that everything seemed big. The new uglies stick together and look simultaneously awed and terrified. Summer ends in two weeks, which means that all of Tally's age group will be gone and the next group will start school. Shay asks if their plan is really going to work, and Tally assures her that the stolen bungee jacket will work even if there's no real emergency. Shay sighs and pulls on an oversize basketball jersey over the jacket, and Tally remarks that Shay looks good, like she's gained weight. When Shay scowls, Tally thinks of how Shay sometimes says she doesn't care about getting the operation. Tally points out that this scheme they're planning was Shay's idea.

Being able to think back to how she felt at age 12 is a useful and admirable exercise, as it allows Tally to develop a sense of empathy for these young uglies. Meanwhile, mentioning in passing that Shay sometimes talks about not wanting the operation shows that Tally isn't taking Shay seriously. For Tally, becoming pretty is only one way to grow up, so it's unthinkable that Shay would actually mean something like this. In this way, Tally isn't being a great friend, as she's not fully supporting what Shay wants to do with her life.



Shay and Tally hide on the top floor of the library, waiting for the uglies to quiet down in the work area below. Shay draws big eyebrows on her face as Tally pulls on a brown wig and a big plastic nose. With these disguises on, the girls pretend to loudly fight over a book which attracts the uglies' attention. Tally hits Shay with the book, sending her flying over the railing, and the uglies scream as Shay bounces. Both Shay and Tally race for the door and meet back at the dorm, thrilled by their own antics. Shay compliments Tally's fake nose, but Tally pulls it off and says it's no use being uglier than usual. Sharply, Shay says that Tally isn't ugly, but Tally says they're both ugly. She points out that Shay's eyebrows don't match at all, and Shay falls silent.

For Tally, it's not a big deal to point out all of her and her friends' imperfections. She doesn't mean to be insulting when she points out that Shay's eyebrows don't match—she's just parroting what she's heard all her life about what makes someone beautiful. This, of course, doesn't change the fact that Shay is still obviously hurt by Tally's comment. Notably, Shay also isn't using “ugly” to mean what Tally means. Shay has already shifted to believe that she's beautiful the way she is, so she means “ugly” in an aesthetic and emotional sense, whereas Tally uses the word to describe an entire phase of life. In this way, it's clear that Tally feels she is entirely defined by ugliness, whereas Shay sees ugliness as just one of many characteristics an individual can possess.



The girls change to go swimming. They splash into the river and Shay says she's serious: Tally's nose and eyes aren't ugly. Tally says that according to biology, she is ugly. Shay asks if Tally really believes there's only one way to look, but Tally insists that there's nothing to believe—pretties look wonderful, and they don't really all look the same. Tally insists that the pretties don't look like freaks, even as Shay suggests that the uglies are the normal ones. Shay mentions David again, which annoys Tally. She's not sure David is real, but Shay seems obsessed with him. Shay points out that Tally has been programmed to thinking non-pretty people are ugly—she wasn't *born* thinking that. Tally argues that the pretty operation makes things fair so that nobody loses.

Shay points out that some people *do* lose, and Tally shudders at the thought of the uglies-for-life, people for whom the operation doesn't work. Tally assures Shay that the operation will work for her, but Shay says that she's sick of the city and doesn't want to party all day. She insists that pretties don't have any imagination to sneak around and have fun. Tally snaps that doing tricks and breaking rules is fun, but that eventually they have to become more than clever uglies: they have to become adults. Tally suggests that uglies fight because they're ugly and unhappy, and she declares that she's going to look like a real person so that she can be happy. Tally accuses Shay of being afraid to grow up, and Shay swims away.

LAST TRICK

With her operation only a week away, Tally can't help feeling sad even though she's spent four years impatiently waiting to become pretty. Tally and Shay haven't spoken since their fight in the river, so Tally has spent most of the last week staring at New Pretty Town. She reasons that once she and Shay are pretty, they won't have anything to fight about anymore—and even if Shay hates her, Tally will have Peris. Suddenly, Tally hears Shay whisper to her from the roof and Tally invites Shay into her room. They hug, and for an instant, Shay's ugly face looks perfect. They apologize and Tally suggests that they do a major trick tonight. She notices that Shay is dressed all in black and has a knapsack; Shay says she has a plan.

Again, Shay demonstrates that she's already questioning what their government tells them is scientific and true, something that points to her maturity and her expanded perspective. This shines through especially when Shay suggests that Tally has been programmed. With this, she insists that beauty is about culture more than it is about biology—that is, finding so-called "pretty" people beautiful is something that's socially conditioned rather than naturally ingrained in a person. Tally's response, however, begins to explain why her society has pretty people in the first place: it's supposed to create a utopia where everyone is equal.



Tally's retort makes it clear that she believes pretties are happy solely because they look like everyone else—in other words, she believes that unhappiness stems from difference, and that difference is an intrinsic part of being a teenager. Conspicuously, she doesn't express any possibility that the uglies are unhappy simply because they're teenagers and are still developing. Importantly, unhappiness not something that would normally be cured with plastic surgery, so this implies that there's more to the surgery than just changing one's appearance.



When Tally says that Shay's face looks pretty for an instant, it's an important indicator that everything Tally has learned about beauty might not be correct. Clearly, it's possible to think someone is beautiful, even if they haven't undergone surgery, but it's significant that it happens in this moment when Tally is thrilled to see a beloved friend. This suggests that seeing beauty is as much a matter of loving someone as it is about looks, a notion that seems to totally contradict the way the girls' society frames beauty.



Shay dumps her knapsack onto the bed and points to her position-finder, firestarter, water purifier, and two sleeping bags. Tally asks if they're going to the sea, but Shay says they're going farther. Tally points out that their operations are in six days, which Shay ignores; Shay dumps out dehydrated food, enough for two people for two weeks or one person for four weeks. Shay says it won't take that long to get to where David lives, where they don't separate uglies from pretties and where nobody has to get the operation. Shay says that there, they can choose to grow up however they want. Tally says this is crazy, but Shay says that she has another secret: some of her older friends ran away. Shay was supposed to go, too, but she chickened out.

Shay says that after meeting Tally, she didn't feel alone anymore and felt safer going back to the ruins. She admits that she met David a few days ago in the ruins and asks Tally to come with her now. Tally insists this is crazy and asks where it is they're going. Shay says it's called the Smoke, and they'll get there on **hoverboards**. Tally asks if people live like the Rusties in the Smoke and insists it's wrong to live in nature, but Shay says they have technology. Tally assumes that everyone is ugly there, but Shay says that means that *no one's* ugly. Tally feels horrible. Shay spits that she should've told Tally earlier so she had time to get used to the idea, but Tally remains firm: she wants to become pretty.

Shay insists that she wants to become who *she* wants to be, not who a committee thinks she should be. Tally says that Shay can't beat evolution by being smart or interesting and declares that she's not going. A bit later, the two girls say goodbye by the dam. Shay swears Tally to secrecy again and then gives Tally a piece of paper—Tally is shocked that Shay learned to write by hand. Shay explains that they're directions, in code, in case Tally wants to follow. She hops onto her **hoverboard** and Tally imagines Shay growing old and ruined. She says she wishes she could see Shay pretty, and Shay soars away.

Shay understands that the only way to hold onto her individuality is to completely reject the version of adulthood that her city presents. It's understandable that Tally is shocked, as thus far she hasn't taken Shay seriously when Shay has expressed interest in forging her own path. This speaks to how successfully Tally's city has been able to manipulate its young people's minds—it may fail in a few cases (as with Shay and her older friends), but for most people, what Shay is proposing seems ridiculous. Given the way that Tally equates becoming pretty with adulthood, she also likely thinks that Shay is trying to be a child forever.



Tally's ignorance of how other people live shines through here: it's unthinkable to her that people can live closer to nature and still make use of technology. It also sheds more light on how she thinks about the Rusties. For Tally, the Rusties are unintelligent, murderous, and almost sub-human—in her mind, her society is inarguably superior. This sense of superiority is why Tally holds firm that she wants to become pretty. Following Shay would deprive Tally of everything she's ever wanted—and Tally has never had any reason to not be selfish.



Again, Tally makes it abundantly clear that she doesn't think anyone can be successful if they're not physically beautiful according to her society's standards. This reflects how fully she's bought into her government's insistence that one specific type of beauty is the only thing people should strive for. Tally's parting words to Shay also reinforce this—and show that Tally is more interested in making Shay conform to what Tally thinks is correct than anything else.



OPERATION

Tally waits alone for the hovercar. She'll see her parents, Peris, and other friends tomorrow. A new young ugly approaches Tally and asks why she looks so sad. Tally thinks about what Shay said about the operation and wonders if she should tell the young ugly about how later today, the bones of Tally's face will be replaced with plastic, her teeth will be replaced with strong ceramic, and her skin will be sanded off. People say none of it hurts except the skin, which feels like a sunburn. Tally briefly thinks that Shay's right—it *does* seem like a lot to go through. She wishes people were evolved enough to treat ugly people well, and she wishes she'd tried harder to convince Shay to stay. She tells the ugly that a sunburn is worth a lifetime of being gorgeous.

The hospital hovercar arrives and the middle pretty driver steps out. He radiates confidence and reminds Tally so much of Sol that she almost calls him her father's name. Tally picks up her half-full duffel bag, which is only as full as it is to hide Shay's note. The hovercar takes her to the major hospital, where everyone goes for serious operations. Tally gazes at New Pretty Town and feels like it's more vibrant than the Rusty Ruins. She vows to stop thinking about Shay as the driver checks her in and leaves. Tally waits for an hour, thinking about her first night in New Pretty Town. Then, a middle-aged man arrives. He's a pretty but he looks terrible and cruel. He tells Tally that there's a problem with her operation and asks her to come with him. Afraid, Tally follows.

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

The pretty man flies his hovercar aggressively, and for the first time in Tally's life, she feels airsick. They head across Uglyville and into a complex of squat, ugly buildings. The man leads Tally through the halls, which are filled with cold, too-tall, predatory people who look just like the man. Tally wonders if these people look like this on purpose, and wonders if she's going to look like this too. The man stops at a door. It opens and he points for her to go in. She asks him to say please, but all he says is, "Inside."

In Tally's understanding, her society developed the pretty operation to do away with discrimination and racism. Her wish that people were evolved enough to not be discriminatory shows that she has the capacity to understand Shay's point of view, especially when confronted with the reality of what's going to happen to her later. However, note that Tally tells the ugly the operation is worth it to be gorgeous—it's not worth it to be kind. This shows again that Tally's society doesn't encourage people to be empathetic, only physically attractive.



The very existence of this man who is pretty but somehow terrible instantly challenges Tally's view of her world: it shows her that there's more to her society than she ever thought possible, as clearly, not all pretty people are good or happy. The man's unusual appearance also indicates that while conformity may be a feature of growing up and coming of age in Tally's society, there are different ways to conform.



Though it seems acceptable in Tally's society for new pretties to be rude to uglies, Tally isn't used to adults being rude to her. That there are adults who act this way continues to shake her belief in the goodness of her society. These cruel individuals are proof not just that everyone isn't the same, but that some people are purposefully mean and intimidating.



Inside is a cruel-looking woman who introduces herself as Dr. Cable. Dr. Cable says that Tally has a problem and asks Tally to call her Dr. Cable, which shocks Tally—Tally has never called anyone by their last name. Tally asks what's going on, and Dr. Cable replies that this is about Shay. Tally insists she doesn't know where Shay is and asks what this place is. Dr. Cable says this is Special Circumstances and starts in on a series of questions about when Tally met Shay and if they ever talked about Shay's other friends. Tally insists they didn't, and she and Shay just hung out and played tricks. Dr. Cable asks if Tally knew that Shay was in a gang, and then asks if they'd ever gone to the Rusty Ruins. Tally insists that lots of people sneak out to the ruins.

When Dr. Cable asks if they ever met anyone at the ruins, Tally asks what Special Circumstances is and agrees to answer Dr. Cable's question if Dr. Cable answers hers. Dr. Cable explains that their city is a paradise and can withstand just enough freedom to allow young uglies to play tricks. It exists in equilibrium with the environment, but they can't always purify things that come in from outside. Tally asks if the Special Circumstances are like minders but for the whole city, and Dr. Cable agrees that they are. She says that sometimes, the few people who live outside of cities make trouble. Tally is shocked to learn that the Smoke probably *does* exist, and with a grin, says truthfully that she never met anyone from outside the cities.

Dr. Cable seems to check that Tally is telling the truth, and her voice gets even icier. She tells Tally that she'll never see Shay again and explains that six of Shay's friends disappeared at once and two others chose not to go. Those two confessed that someone from outside tempted them and stole them. Tally asks why Special Circumstances didn't stop Shay, if Shay was stolen. Dr. Cable says they hoped that Tally would be enough to keep Shay in the city, but they were wrong. Dr. Cable asks Tally for help finding Shay. Tally remembers how Shay seemed convinced that she wanted to leave and thinks that Shay knew what she was getting into. Tally refuses to help and says she can't break her promise, but Dr. Cable says that Tally won't become pretty until she helps.

Insisting that Tally not use her first name is one way that Dr. Cable enforces a degree of distance between herself and Tally. Dr. Cable clearly doesn't want Tally to think of them as equals—this way, Dr. Cable can more effectively assert her authority. Dr. Cable's questions about Shay indicate that there's a lot Tally didn't know about Shay's life before they met, which suggests that Tally wasn't especially curious about her friend. In this sense, though it ends up being a good thing that Tally can't answer these questions, it also drives home that she wasn't a great friend to Shay.



Dr. Cable effectively confirms that the city is set up so that uglies are able to play tricks and get away with them. In other words, Tally isn't actually all that tricky or clever—she's just following along with what the government expects her and other unhappy uglies to do. In effect, even this little bit of independence and individuality that Tally thinks she has is just an illusion. This also suggests that other things—such as prettiness or adulthood—may also be illusions.



With someone to fight against, Tally shows that she can actually be a good and loyal friend. This shows that she understands how important it is to respect Shay's choices, even if they don't make a lot of sense to Tally. However, Dr. Cable's threat means that Tally is going to have to weigh her own desires against Shay's. Given that Tally's world isn't one that promotes selflessness (she mentions at several points that pretties get whatever they want), it's likely that Tally will also behave selfishly.



UGLY FOR LIFE

When Tally gets back to her dorm, she discovers that they'd already cleaned out her room and reset it. She sits, too surprised to cry, and thinks that everything is gone. This all feels like a cruel trick. She pulls Shay's note out of the bag and reads it, looking for clues. It's a poem and it mentions a long, flat **roller coaster**, a "side" that Tally despises, and flowers with "fire-bug eyes." None of it makes any sense, but Tally thinks that after meeting Dr. Cable, Shay's paranoia and David's desire to keep his camp a secret make more sense. Tally realizes that Dr. Cable probably wanted the note but missed it. This means that Tally kept Shay's secret, that Tally has a bargaining chip, and that Special Circumstances makes mistakes.

The other uglies return to the dorm before lunchtime. Some of them giggle outside Tally's door and Tally wonders if they're laughing at her. She realizes she hasn't eaten since lunch the day before in preparation for the operation, but she waits until lunch is over and heads upstairs to get leftover food. On the roof, she finds that someone left her a sealed plate with her name on it. The sight of it makes Tally cry, but she holds her tears in until she gets back to her room. About an hour later, Tally's parents, Ellie and Sol, arrive. Ellie wraps Tally in a crushing hug, making Tally feel young and cared for. Sol vows that they'll get to the bottom of this. His eyes twinkle, and Tally is sure her father will make things right.

Sol and Ellie say that they heard about Shay; Sol suggests that Shay's a lot of trouble, but Ellie reminds him that Shay is missing. Sol grouches that Shay shouldn't have dragged Tally down with her. Tally tries to defend Shay, but Ellie points out that everything will be okay once Tally finds Shay. Tally says she isn't sure she can help Special Circumstances because she promised to keep Shay's secret. Sol and Ellie are quiet for a moment, but then Sol says that part of being an ugly is thinking everything is exciting and important—but then growing up. Ellie asks Tally to consider Shay's safety. Tally thinks that this makes sense, but thinking of Dr. Cable makes Tally wince.

Discovering her room like this reinforces that in Tally's society, young people aren't really thought of as individuals. Instead, they simply move through the system like cattle, with little regard for their belongings or wellbeing. As Tally begins to understand the reasoning behind David and Shay's paranoia, she starts to become a better friend, as her own experience of being denied and devalued by her society allows her to develop a newfound sense empathy—even for David, whom she's never met.



There's little to suggest that Uglyville is a supportive, kind environment, so these uglies probably are laughing at Tally. Given the way that Tally talks about how uglies treat each other, it seems like a cutthroat environment in which teasing is to be expected—and since Tally has just done something way out of the norm, she's an easy target. Tally's descriptions of her parents, when considered alongside her descriptions of other middle pretties, also suggests that Ellie and Sol aren't really all that individualistic—they're like every other middle pretty couple and they just happen to be Tally's parents.



Sol shows here that he prioritizes conforming to the way things should be over anything else. He doesn't exhibit any empathy for Shay, and neither he nor Ellie are swayed by Tally's insistence that she has to remain loyal to her friend. They confirm here that growing up means abandoning one's friends and thinking selfishly about oneself. On a grander scale, this suggests that Tally's society isn't at all communal—it's every person for themselves.



Tally starts to explain what the people at Special Circumstances look like, but Sol laughs and says that old people know all about them and that the Specials are just doing their jobs. Tally looks at Sol and for the first time, sees something other than wisdom and confidence. He seems to laugh off Special Circumstances too easily and it seems like he knows nothing about where Shay went. Tally wonders if most people don't want to know. She remembers learning about the Rusties but she realizes now that her teachers never mentioned people living outside cities today. Tally announces that she'll need to think about it, which surprises her parents, and then she asks to come home. Even more surprised, Ellie and Sol refuse. Ellie tells Tally she has no choice but to help Special Circumstances.

In this instant, Tally begins to suspect that growing up might not be all it's cracked up to be. Sol shows her that being a grown up means not being curious, afraid, or loyal to one's friends; possessing these qualities marks someone as a child. He also seems very trusting of his government—which in this instance reads as potentially misplaced trust, given that the government clearly has no issue blackmailing teenagers like Tally into doing their dirty work. Ellie's insistence that Tally has no choice but to cooperate also suggests that people in Tally's society don't view life as a series of choices—there's only one correct path.



PERIS

Tally hides in her room during the day, peering into her mirror. She feels like now, she really knows what it means to be ugly. Her hair seems frizzier, zits erupt, and her small eyes look angry. At night, she sneaks out and rides her new **hoverboard**, which is tricked to function at night like Shay taught her. The fourth night after her birthday, Tally races along through the greenbelt. She realizes that she's almost as good as Shay and continues to ride until just before dawn, hoping to tire herself out so she can sleep all day. When she crawls back into her room, Peris is sitting by her window. Tally quickly sprays medicinal spray on her scratched face and hands and explains that she was hoverboarding.

Hoverboarding at night is a way for Tally to feel independent and in control; it's something she can practice and feel good at, which helps to counteract her grief and confusion. Now that Tally has passed her 16th birthday, she also thinks she looks even uglier. She's not accustomed to seeing so-called uglies who are older than 15, so being 16 and ugly feels especially wrong to her. This reinforces that Tally doesn't think she has choices in life. She has one job—to become pretty—and being prevented from fulfilling that role has sent her into a tailspin.



Confused, Tally asks how long Peris has been here. He says that he came the moment he figured out where Tally was. Tally turns away, thinking she didn't expect Peris to want to see her now. The thought of what Paris must think she looks like overwhelms Tally, and she collapses in tears. Peris gently brushes her hair and asks her about **hoverboarding** and her current trick—that is, the fact that she's not pretty yet. He says his friends are fascinated, especially since it's rumored that Special Circumstances is involved. Peris's eyes widen when Tally says it's true. Peris tells Tally that once she's pretty, she'll be able to get into all the parties, and he asks her to bring him along.

Tally feels so ashamed and disgusted with herself because that's how she's grown up thinking about uglies. Given what she's been conditioned to believe, Peris shouldn't think she's worth his time if she looks like this. In Tally's mind, Peris shouldn't be kind to her, nor should he be trying to associate with her at all. However, Peris's presence suggests that turning pretty hasn't entirely compromised his loyalty to his friend.



Tally interjects that she can't, because they want her to tattle on a friend. Peris insists that if it's just for a trick, she should tattle, but Tally insists she made Shay a promise. Hurt, Peris reminds Tally that she promised him something too. Slowly, Tally looks into Peris's eyes, knowing that his beautiful face will destroy her resolve—but now, she has an excuse to break her promise to Shay. She tells Peris she'll be in New Pretty Town as soon as possible. They hug and Peris excuses himself after kissing Tally's cheeks. Tally knows that her doubts will resurface if she waits, so she immediately sends Dr. Cable a message agreeing to cooperate. Tally falls back onto the bed as Dr. Cable's reply arrives: a car will pick Tally up in 20 minutes. Tally tries to nap but she can't.

In the past, Tally has talked about how important tricks were to her and Peris. It's concerning that he's so dismissive of this "trick," as it implies that he no longer thinks that the entire basis of his friendship with Tally is worthwhile anymore. Some of this may have to do with jealousy—it's understandable that he'd feel hurt, since Tally seems to be prioritizing her friendship with Shay—but it also suggests that Peris and Tally are operating in entirely different realms at this point.



INFILTRATOR

Tally is so exhausted that the cruel pretties look even stranger. She tries to forget why she's at Special Circumstances and notes that Dr. Cable looks alert and refreshed. Dr. Cable asks if Tally is going to answer their questions honestly now, and Tally snorts that she has no choice. With a smile, Dr. Cable says they always have choices and then begins her questioning. Tally tells Dr. Cable that Shay talked about running away with David, a person Dr. Cable has heard about. Tally mentions the Smoke and pulls out Shay's cryptic directions; instead of looking at them, Dr. Cable pulls out a digital copy she made during Tally's last visit. Tally glares at Dr. Cable and spits that she doesn't know anything. Tally just wants to be pretty and vows to herself not to cry.

Again, Tally's belief that she doesn't have a choice is a product of her society. She's been raised to think that going against the status quo is impossible. Because of this, Dr. Cable's insistence that they do have choices stands out. This suggests that as a member of Special Circumstances, Dr. Cable may have more choices than Tally does and possibly even more choices than other pretties do. She may also recognize that if uglies like Tally ask questions, they'll discover that they, too, have lots of choices. This is supported by Shay's actions, as she made a choice that Tally didn't think was possible.



Dr. Cable says that Special Circumstances doesn't understand the note. Her eyes narrow when Tally says she doesn't get it either, and Dr. Cable pulls out a small briefcase filled with survival items like what Shay had. Tally says that Shay also had a **hoverboard** and enough dehydrated food to feed two people for two weeks. Dr. Cable grouches that all "miscreants" have hoverboards. She begins to pack a knapsack and tells Tally that Tally will be going to the Smoke, since she's the one who can follow the directions. Dr. Cable says that they've seen all of this before and they haven't been able to find the Smoke, but Tally should be able to do it.

Dr. Cable's annoyance with hoverboards and the people who use them reinforces the symbolism of the boards. The people who have hoverboards are independent and free thinkers, and therefore, they're not the kind of people who fall easily into line and accept whatever the government tells them as fact. Tally doesn't necessarily want to be one of these free thinkers, but it's telling that she's learning to hoverboard. This suggests that curiosity is something anyone can learn.



Dr. Cable pulls out a heart pendant as Tally holds back tears. Dr. Cable opens the pendant and shows Tally that it's an eye scanner: it will alert Special Circumstances to Tally's whereabouts and allow them to raid the Smoke. Tally wonders how many uglies they've tried to get to spy for them and insists she can't do this, not least because she's never spent a night outside the city. She begins to sob as Dr. Cable says that they'll find someone else if Tally won't do it—then, Tally will be ugly forever. Tally insists she needs to think, but Dr. Cable says that Tally must go now and say she left before her birthday. She calls an image of Tally's puffy face onto her wallscreen and when she says Tally will look like this forever, Tally agrees to cooperate.

Wondering how many others Special Circumstances has tried to blackmail shows that Tally is starting to understand how unimportant she is as an individual. Dr. Cable probably doesn't care whether Tally ever becomes pretty or not—even if Tally won't help her, she will, at some point, come across another tricky ugly who's desperate enough to comply. The way that Dr. Cable coerces Tally into cooperating illustrates the success of the government's messaging—it's wildly uncomfortable for Tally to accept that sometimes it's normal for people to look sad.



LEAVING

Tally leaves at midnight. She finds a long-range **hoverboard** that Dr. Cable left for her under the dam. Tally rides as fast as she can, simultaneously nervous and happy that the board seems to not have a speed limit—she knows she has to make up for lost time. Tally realizes that this particular board is definitely not a toy: it learns her movements quickly and has metal detectors to guide her path. As Tally takes one final look at the city, she vows not to think about the possibility that Shay shouldn't have trusted David. Tally hikes to the Rusty Ruins and finds the **roller coaster**, where she tries to decipher what “Take the coaster straight past the gap” must mean.

Perhaps unwittingly, Dr. Cable has given Tally a hoverboard that will help Tally achieve an even greater level of independence, as this board allows her to more easily make decisions. Even more importantly, this is the hoverboard Tally takes into the wilderness. The novel overwhelmingly positions the raw, untamed natural world as something akin to the potential of young people, so it follows that Tally will begin to see her own potential as she moves through the wilderness.



Tally takes the **roller coaster** at top speed, and before the turn after the gap, Tally continues straight, looking for “one that's long and flat.” This makes no sense; she doesn't know if she's looking for a gap or more roller coaster tracks, but straight tracks seem silly. Tally continues through the ruins until she discovers what seems like a very large, flat, and straight roller coaster. In one direction it leads toward the sea. Since the next line of the directions mentions the sea, Tally goes that way. She thinks that if everything's going to be this easy, this trip will be great.

Readers will probably deduce that Tally finds train tracks to follow. That Tally clearly has no idea what train tracks are shows again how disconnected she is from her culture's past. This also offers more explanation for how the cities in the novel's present are able to be so isolated. Without trade between cities (either of goods or of ideas), it's far easier to enforce isolation.



SPAGBOL

That night, Tally makes good time. She passes through several Rusty cities filled with burned-out cars. In one town, she discovers that the flat **roller coaster** was for moving items between towns. Near dawn, Tally reaches the sea and thinks of the next clue: “Cold is the sea and watch for breaks.” She rides faster as she remembers camping at the sea with Sol and Ellie. Suddenly, Tally comes to a gap with a bridge, but the bridge doesn’t span the entire gap. She tries to brake, but she and the hoverboard go over the edge anyway. Tally falls slowly at first as the board loses its connection, but then spreads her jacket to make a sail. It makes her light enough that the board rises and settles back on the tracks. Shaking, Tally returns to solid ground, sits, and remembers that in the wild, mistakes bring consequences.

Hungry, Tally pulls out her water purifier and empties the full muck-trap. She pulls out a food packet labeled “SpagBol,” unwraps it, and dumps it into the purifier. As her meal cooks, she watches the sunrise with awe: she’s never seen one from outside the city, and its colors are spectacular. After eating, Tally consults Shay’s note again, which says to “make the worst mistake” at what she assumes is the second chasm. Tally carefully rides inland to where the first chasm ends and back to the tracks on the other side, entirely in awe of the natural world’s beauty. She understands why people used to live in nature but she also wishes she could take a bath. Tally reaches the second break in an hour. It’s too wide to jump, and she thinks that everything would be a mistake now so she decides to sleep.

Tally unfolds her **hoverboard** so it can charge in the sun, pulls out her sleeping bag, and realizes she didn’t put on a sunblock patch at dawn. Annoyed, Tally feels even uglier. She can’t sleep and so decides to eat more. She pulls out the packets and realizes that all 41 of them are SpagBol. Exhausted, Tally sarcastically thanks Dr. Cable and falls asleep.

Tally’s tumble over the edge reinforces for her that the artificial environment of the city protects her from all sorts of consequences. Out in nature, on the other hand, she has to be alert and make her own decisions. This continues to suggest that people who live in the cities live in a perpetual childlike state: they’re dependent on the city for everything, and the city protects them from all manner of injuries and bad decisions. As Tally grapples with having to make her own choices for the first time, she gets a taste of what it’s like to be a truly independent adult.



Though Tally doesn’t make the connection yet, it’s important to keep in mind that the natural landscape doesn’t need an operation to be beautiful; it just is. Since the natural world symbolically corresponds to youth, it follows that Tally and other young people don’t need extensive plastic surgery to be beautiful either. This natural beauty, however, is more dangerous and is somewhat unpredictable, unlike the contrived, safe beauty of both the city and of the pretties. When Tally starts to understand why people once lived in nature, she also humanizes the Rusties and makes discoveries about her culture’s past.



What Tally describes as ugliness is a reflection of what she’s been through in the last 24 hours. If she chooses to think of it this way, it’s possible to see that her sunburn and windswept hair tell a story—one that others might be eager to hear.



THE WORST MISTAKE

Tally dreams that she's **hoverboarding** and plummets off the cliff into the ocean. She wakes up at sunset, gathers her things, and then tries to wipe as much dew and spray off the board as she can with her coat sleeve. The board's light is yellow when she's done, so she decides to eat while it dries. She squeezes water from her sleeve and wipes water off the board until she has just enough to make SpagBol. Tally ponders what the worst mistake would be. She decides that she must be able to make it down the cliff on her board, but almost as soon as she starts down, the metal detector lights go out and Tally falls. Her crash bracelets catch her just before she hits the bottom and she realizes that the metal in the river saved her. Tally heads upriver.

The clue says to head upriver for four days and then to "take the side [Tally] despise[s]." By the third day, Tally decides she must try to bathe. She digs packets of soap out of her bag, strips off her clothes, and stands at the edge of the river. Tally realizes that she's never been naked outdoors before. It feels like the whole world belongs to her. After some deliberating, she leaps into the freezing river and whoops with excitement. She scrubs herself quickly, but as she starts to wade out, she hears something big coming.

THE SIDE YOU DESPISE

Tally hears thunder coming from the sky and crouches low as a huge flying machine approaches from the mountains. When it reaches the river, it turns and the wind from its huge blades sends most of Tally's supplies flying. After the thing leaves for the sea, Tally creeps out, finds her clothes, and assesses the damage. She finds that she only lost two SpagBol packets, but her sleeping bag is shredded. The **hoverboard** is ready to go, so Tally folds it up, packs her things, and heads off. As Tally travels, she thinks that the flying machine looked a lot like a Rusty flying contraption she learned about in school but she can't think of why anyone would rebuild "insane" Rusty machines.

Late that night, the river splits in two. It's only been three days, but Tally wonders if her **hoverboard** is fast enough to make up a day of time. She tries to figure out which direction she'd despise. Neither direction looks like the obvious choice, but Tally remembers that when she and Shay made morphos, Tally noted that she hates her right side. She decides to take a right and remembers Shay saying that symmetry is silly. Tally realizes that that conversation was the first time Shay talked about wanting to stay ugly. If Tally had noticed, she could've done more to convince Shay, and they might both be partying as pretties now.

Again, Tally learns that the natural world is dangerous and unpredictable—but it can pull through and save her if she knows where to look. She survives this ordeal in part because she has help deciphering the landscape, which suggests that for people living outside the cities, it's important to exist as part of a community and help others. This contrasts greatly to how life works in the cities, as there, every pretty can get what they want without having to worry about how their actions affect others.



This sense of freedom is something that Tally would never get in Uglyville, which begins to make the case that if Tally values her freedom and independence, she'll have to look outside the city. Having such a fun and exciting experience, meanwhile, continues to make life outside the city look better and better, as experiences like this don't exist within city limits.



Again, Tally demonstrates her prejudice when she can't think of why a Rusty flying machine might be useful. It's worth considering that later in the novel, Tally implies that even hovercars use the grid that exists in the city (which doesn't exist out in the wilderness). This makes it much easier to see why someone would want to rebuild what seems to be a helicopter: it means that the pilot can travel outside the city without having to construct a grid.



Tally begins to see that she wasn't a good friend to Shay: she didn't take Shay seriously or even listen closely to what Shay was saying, and that's likely part of the reason why Shay left in the first place. However, Tally still prioritizes conformity over being a good friend. A good friend, per the novel, validates and supports others' desires; Tally, on the other hand, believes that she must convince Shay to conform regardless of what Shay really wants, because becoming pretty is what's best for her.



By sunrise, Tally is convinced she chose correctly. She climbs into the mountains and sees thick fields of white flowers. The next line of the directions says to “look in the flowers for fire-bug eyes,” so Tally gets off her hoverboard to inspect the flowers. Tally notices a small bird putting its beak in the flowers. She sees nothing that looks like “fire-bug eyes,” so she continues up the hills. After a while, Tally starts to see bare stretches of earth. By noon, the river is getting smaller, so Tally decides to camp. She looks around for flying machines and wonders what the people inside would do with her if they found her. Tally unfolds the **hoverboard** only a little bit, hikes to the top of the hill so she can see, and goes to sleep. When she wakes up, everything is on fire.

Tally's suspicion of the people in the flying machines makes sense given how isolated all the cities appear to be. She views people from other cities with distrust and prejudice, especially since these foreigners don't seem to share Tally's disdain for the Rusties. This does, however, suggest that whoever's using the helicopters is more connected to their history. In turn, this would imply that they might have a more nuanced outlook on life and the wider world than Tally does.



FIRESTORM

Tally hears roaring in her dream and then wakes up to the smell of smoke. She sees a wall of flames, grabs her knapsack, and races down the hill. When Tally catches a glimpse of sunlight, she realizes she went the wrong direction. She races around the hill, searching for the river and her **hoverboard**. Her face blisters and her feet sting, but she finds and hops onto the hoverboard. Tally rides over the river carefully, as her grippy shoes are ruined and can't keep her on the board. Suddenly, Tally hears the flying machine again and sees that its wind makes the fire grow. She watches with horror as a spurt of flame shoots from the machine: these people are trying to start and spread the fire. Tally catches a glimpse of the person piloting the contraption. They look inhuman.

The fire proves once again that consequences are much more dire in the natural world—Tally could very easily die. That Tally runs right into the fire shows how little she knows about this kind of situation. Someone aware of the danger posed by being in the middle of a wildfire likely wouldn't run to it; Tally only does because this is so far outside of her lived experience. That the people are intentionally starting the fires also makes them look less human to Tally, since their behavior aligns with the Rusties (who, according to Tally, abused the natural world).



The machine's wind knocks Tally off her **hoverboard**, blows it away, and sends Tally crashing into the deep middle of the river. She relaxes for a moment and then she struggles to the surface, thrilled when her hoverboard returns to her. Terror grips Tally, however, when she sees the machine land and figures jump from it, heading for her. One calls for Tally to wait, and a masked figure tries to drag Tally off the board. Tally fights and tumbles into the river, but she is pulled out again. She pauses when she sees that the masks the people wear look like bug eyes.

When Tally begins to connect that these people might be the “fire bug eyes” from Shay's clue, it shows that Shay's directions may also help Tally develop a sense of community that expands far outside of the city. Now, Tally will have the opportunity to get to know people from other places, an experience that wouldn't be available to her in the city. With this, Tally has the potential to broaden her perspective, make friends, and gather information that hasn't been filtered through her government.



BUG EYES

The masked people haul Tally to the flying machine, lay her out next to it, and one takes off his mask. Tally is surprised that he's a new pretty, and he shoves a mask over Tally's face. Tally breathes gratefully and asks for her **hoverboard**. The pretty says it's on the helicopter, asks Tally's name, and then helps her in. Another pretty woman in the helicopter takes her mask off, and Jenks, the pilot, asks if Tally is okay. The helicopter rises and Tally asks what they're doing and why. The young male pretty, Tonk, tells Tally that they're saving the world. These pretties are from a city Tally hasn't heard of, and they explain that they use the Rusty helicopters because they don't require a grid.

Then, Tonk says that they start fires because of the **white tiger orchids**. In Rusty times, these flowers were rare and expensive, but then a Rusty manipulated their genes and made them grow more easily. Tonk says the orchid soon turned into an ultimate weed, killing everything else—including trees in which the only hummingbirds that feed on orchids nest. Tally notes that there are no trees, and Tonk explains that this is a monoculture: everything's the same, there's nothing to help the orchids pollinate, the orchids die, and they leave a wasteland behind. The rangers have been trying to stop them for 300 years, and only fire works. Tally shakes her head, thinking of how dangerous the beautiful flowers are.

Tonk asks if Tally is going to the Smoke and he explains that the rangers help the Smokies out. Tonk says they'll take Tally to the usual spot. A while later, the helicopter touches down and Tonk says that if Tally changes her mind, she can volunteer to become a ranger. Tally grabs her **hoverboard**, crouches as the helicopter takes off, and looks around at the **orchids** in every direction. The sight chills her. When the rangers are gone, Tally notices a tall, flowerless hill that must be the "bald head" where Shay's note said to wait. At the top, Tally thinks that all she has to do now is convince the Smokies that she's genuine. She half hopes the pendant from Special Circumstances broke on her journey, but she knows that in order to get back home and become pretty, she must betray Shay.

This is the first time that Tally has ever met someone from another city. It's telling that she's so surprised that Tonk is a pretty—even though Tally knows on some level that all cities perform pretty operations, she never expected that any of them might also rely on Rusty technology. As she learns more about these pretties, she'll also learn more about how people can integrate history into their present.



The way that Tonk describes the orchids offers one way to look at the society in which Tally lives. Like the orchids, Tally's city tries to crush or push out anything that doesn't conform to their ideal of beauty—and eventually, Tonk suggests, this will lead to the city's downfall, which is importantly something that the city will bring about all on its own. In other words, it's not the Smoke that threatens the city—it's the city's own attempts to stifle diversity, independence, and free thought.



Even after all Tally has learned during the course of her journey, her goal is still to go home and be pretty. At this point, she's torn in regards to how she should proceed. She wants to honor Shay's choices, but on some level, Tally still believes that the only way to be an adult is to undergo the pretty operation and become like everyone else. In this sense, Tally likely feels as though she's saving Shay and the others in the Smoke by betraying them.



LIES

Hours after dawn, Tally sees four people carrying **hoverboards** hiking toward her. They all wear white hats that would render them invisible if they crouched. When Tally recognizes Shay, she races down, and the girls happily embrace. Shay says that no one thought the helicopter could be for Tally. Tally insists that Shay's note was obscure and that she had a hard time, especially with the rangers. The boy in the group says that Tally has a bug, takes her board, and pulls off a stabilizing fin. Shay says that there are always trackers on boards, and the boy assures Tally it's fine—they stick the trackers on migratory birds to throw off Special Circumstances. He scans Tally with his device, declares her clean, and then Shay introduces him as David. He's a slightly older ugly, but he has a nice smile and looks confident. Tally wonders how much of ugliness is an awkward phase.

Another ugly, Croy, asks Tally what she brought. Tally thinks that Croy definitely needs the operation as he gleefully discovers her SpagBol. Tally tells him he can have it, but Shay pulls Tally's bag away and tells Tally she needs to keep her things to trade, a foreign concept to Tally. Tally notices David's hand on Shay's shoulder as they hike through the **orchids** to the beginning of the trees. Tally asks how they stop the flowers from spreading, and David explains that the old growth forest does. Shay adds that it has enough species to keep out the weeds, while David continues that the rest of the land used to be farms. Tally soon sees why the orchids can't grow in the forest: it's almost impassable.

Shay assures Tally that they have a ways to go before they reach the Smoke. Tally's feet chafe in the shoes the rangers gave her, but she realizes they're better for hiking. She wonders how one gets new shoes in the Smoke and notices that David's shoes look handmade and crude, though he moves gracefully. Tally reminds herself that it doesn't matter how one gets shoes in the Smoke—she's going home to become pretty. When they reach a stream, David checks again for bugs. Shay apologizes for fighting with Tally, and Tally, to Shay's surprise, lies that she changed her mind. She truthfully says that she knew she wouldn't see Shay again if she didn't come. They ride higher into the mountain, follow a vein of iron, and then look down on the Smoke.

Now that Tally has met someone a few years older than 16 who's still ugly, she has the opportunity to see firsthand what happens when young people age naturally. It's especially important that she keys in on David's confidence: David is confident because he inhabits the natural world, where he has to make choices for himself—all of which have potentially dangerous consequences. In other words, he's not a coddled city kid—he's self-sufficient. With this in mind, Tally wondering if ugliness is just an awkward phase shows that she is beginning to question the truth of the "science" behind beauty.



Tally is still very prejudiced and believes that pretty people are superior, even as she admits that there's something attractive about David. Meanwhile, the diverse forest's ability to keep back the orchids again shows the importance of diversity. The forest is only able to keep back the orchids because it houses a variety of species, which, working together, are strong enough to overcome the monoculture. This is symbolic of the potential for diversity among people to overcome the conformity of prettiness: if Tally doesn't betray the diverse and independent Smoke, it might be able to keep the cities' influence at bay.



Tally is starting to battle her curiosity: she is a naturally inquisitive person who wants to know how things work but she's grown up in an environment that didn't encourage curiosity about things like making shoes or handwriting. Even if Tally knows she's lying, her responses to Shay make it clear that Tally knows how to act the part of a good, supportive friend. Shay's apology also shows that in an isolated community like this, it's important to apologize and make things right—the survival of the group depends on trust and teamwork.



THE MODEL

In the Smoke, there are open fires, garden plots, and squat wooden buildings. Lots of things are made of wood, and Tally realizes with horror that the Smokies have been cutting down trees. She expresses her dismay to Shay, but Shay assures her that the pre-Rusties lived like this and that Tally will get used to it. Shay happily explains that there's a **hoverboard** path in places—she's been working on that project. They follow a painted orange path down to the library to meet the Boss, who Shay explains isn't really in charge of anything but the library. Tally notices that the library contains only books on paper. Shay leads Tally to the center of the room, where the Boss, a horrifically old ugly, shouts at someone on the phone. He's wrinkled, veined, and shuffles. When he waves them away, Shay giggles that he's 40.

Tally is horrified by the Boss and that anyone would want to look so saggy. Shay, however, pulls out a handful of what she calls magazines. She points and giggles at the many different faces and bodies, all of which have wrong and ugly proportions. None of them seem ashamed of their “deformities,” so Tally asks who the “freaks” are. Shay says they're famous people—celebrities, artists, and politicians. They look strange at first, Shay admits, but she gets used to it if she keeps looking at the photos. One page has a picture of a skeletally thin woman wearing lacy underwear. Shay says she's a model, and Tally realizes the woman has a disease her teachers told her about, in which girls starved themselves to get skinny and sometimes died. Now, uglies eat to excess before their operation, knowing they'll be beautiful soon.

Shay walks away to talk to the Boss and Tally notices that Shay is still too skinny. Tally realizes that now is her chance to call Dr. Cable. She thinks that these people might be having fun camping, but they've forgotten that the Rusties were insane, starved themselves, and cut down trees. Tally opens the locket, but she snaps it shut when Shay returns. Shay coyly asks what the locket is about. When Tally says that someone gave it to her, Shay rolls her eyes and says that she thought Tally was waiting for Peris. Tally decides to tell Shay the truth—but before she can, the Boss shuffles over, reprimands Tally and Shay for looking at the magazines without gloves, and announces that Tally must be here for a work assignment.

Tally's initial horror stems from experiencing culture shock, or the sense of disorientation people experience when they find themselves in a place that's very different from their home. The wood dwellings tell Tally that here, people are barbarians and don't care about honoring nature, as she believes people in the cities do. Additionally, her reaction to the Boss is a different kind of culture shock: the way that Tally describes him sounds like a description of a much older person. But, given that Tally has also never seen a 40-year-old without surgery, it makes sense that an average middle-aged person would look incredibly old to her.



Again, Tally's confusion as to why the people in magazines aren't ashamed of their “deformities” speaks to the way that her city has trained her to view physical differences as wrong. Though the novel generally pushes readers to see that diversity is a good thing, the mention of the “disease” (presumably, anorexia) shows that there were still issues with the Rusty society. It's clear, then, that neither version of human civilization is perfect: Tally's society may have solved eating disorders, but it's still missing several positive aspects of the Rusty society.



Tally's fixation on Shay's weight is a product of growing up in a society where she's encouraged to constantly—and openly—point out her peers' supposed flaws. This is arguably a major flaw with Tally's society, as it encourages people to speak poorly about themselves and each other. When Tally reminds herself of how insane the Rusties were, it shows that she may be open to considering that they weren't entirely deranged—but in this instance, to justify betraying her friend, she must make herself believe that the Rusties never did anything right.



WORK

The Smokies all eat lunch together at long tables that were clearly cut from tree centers. This disturbs Tally, so she's happy when Shay and David take her outside to the cooking fire. Shay's friends, Astrix, Ryde, and Croy join them. They look authoritative, like middle pretties, and they talk about their work projects over lunch. The food is hearty and heavier than Tally has ever eaten. Tally shares news about the city, and then Astrix asks about Tally's journey. At first, Tally says that the journey was easy—but then, seeing everyone's rapt faces when she mentions meeting the rangers, Tally elaborates on her story. She loves feeling like the center of attention and is glad she didn't activate the pendant.

David asks how it felt to wait alone in the **orchids** for days, but Tally says she didn't know they were superweeds. David frowns at Shay and says that her code almost got Tally killed, then shares that typically nobody makes the trip alone. Tally insists that she was fine and had enough SpagBol. David gently touches Tally's face and says he's glad she made it—but just then, the bell rings, signaling the return to work. Shay tells Tally about railroads as they **hoverboard** up a river. They're headed for tracks that don't go anywhere useful, so they'll be pulling up the metal to create hoverpaths in the Smoke. Tally realizes how far she's traveled and comments that everything is big. Shay says that from inside the city, it's impossible to tell how small it is and how small everyone feels there.

Tally nods, but she thinks of people cutting down trees and killing animals. The thoughts are disturbing, but the view is still stunning. Tally starts to think that the skyline of New Pretty Town *isn't* the most beautiful thing. They finally reach the tracks. They're overgrown, so Shay pulls out a tool she calls a powerjack. She demonstrates how to use it to pry up the railroad ties, and seeing Tally's wide eyes, hands Tally another powerjack. It's heavy, but Tally jams it under another tie and turns the handle. The jack shudders as it frees the rail halfway. Grinning, Tally tells Shay that they need to finish the job.

DAVID

A few hours later, there's a pile of railroad ties and a pile of metal rail segments that each take six people to carry back. Tally's hands are raw and blistered. Tally admits to David that she just noticed them, which makes him laugh. He says that hard work is a good distraction and invites Tally to travel up the tracks to scout for another spot. As they ride, Tally notes that all of David's clothes are handmade out of leather. With horror, she wonders if he's really wearing dead animals. They reach a wall of solid rock and David explains that the Rusties loved straight lines; this used to be a tunnel that has since collapsed.

Telling her story to the Smokies is a way for Tally to feel like she's a part of the group and earn social capital. This makes her seem cool and interesting, and it'll help the Smokies accept her as one of her own. When Tally again notices how authoritative and confident everyone is, it suggests that these qualities are a product of living outside of the cities. While the cities give residents everything they want and need, out here, people have to develop competence and resolve in order to survive.



Shay again suggests that the cities can easily manipulate how people interpret things. The cities are able to make people feel as though they're safe, secure, and that there's nothing else they'd ever need—but from their vantage points in the wilderness, both Tally and Shay can see that the city also discourages people from being curious about how big the world is. Stepping out into the wilderness, then, helps both Tally and Shay come of age by introducing them to the scope of their world, as well as to a different way of life.



Tally instantly latches onto the idea that hard work can be satisfying and even fun. This isn't something she ever would've gotten to experience in the city; she says at multiple points that new pretties only party and have fun. This hard work also allows her to serve the community of people in the Smoke, which begins to teach Tally about a different type of loyalty. In the Smoke, helping with work is a way to be loyal to the group.



Though David may joke at the Rusties' expense about straight lines, it's worth considering the ways in which Tally's society does similar things. Rather than creating a culture that can withstand some degree of diversity or difference, Tally's culture manipulates people to look the same as everyone else. Like this tunnel, it's possible that someday a society held up by this kind of conformity will also collapse.



David admits that he's worried the boulders will collapse if they mess with the rails. He invites Tally to follow him as he climbs up and behind the boulders, onto the rocks just inside the tunnel. Inside, he pulls out a flashlight and points it down at the track. David says that he thinks the tunnel could open if they move the right boulder, but Tally suggests that the boulders could also crush them. David laughs and says he thought she'd say that—he can tell that she's struggling with being in the Smoke. Tally agrees that she is, which David says is good. He explains that lots of kids think the Smoke is fun and games, and fail to understand how serious it is.

David suggests that the cities are like boulders in that they seem solid but they might collapse if they're poked just right. Tally understands—she knows now that the Smoke is threatening to people like Dr. Cable. She asks why the cities care about the Smoke. David deliberates and then says he feels he can trust Tally. He admits that he was born here. His parents were doctors but ran away from the city. Tally is shocked and confused, but David explains that his parents ran away when they were middle pretties and then reversed their operations. Tally gags at the thought of doing surgery in the wilderness and David apologizes. David's confession complicates things. Tally understands that the Smoke isn't just a hideout for runaways; it's a real city and David's home.

HEARTTHROB

At dinner, Tally tells the story of hiding from the rangers in the river. Astrix asks why they didn't pick Tally up, but David interjects that the rangers don't pick up runaways anywhere but in the **orchids**. Picking someone up elsewhere could mean they're picking up a spy. Tally talks about how the helicopter shredded her sleeping bag and catches herself just in time to keep her story straight—she says it was warm enough to not be a problem. David suggests that Tally trade for a new one soon. Shay offers to take Tally to the trading post. The old ugly running it isn't as scary as the Boss, and Tally finds herself fascinated with the items made in the Smoke. She trades for a city-made sleeping bag and a handmade sweater.

David is clearly a thoughtful and perceptive person: he wants to introduce Tally to all aspects of life in the Smoke and show her that life shouldn't be treated frivolously. He also picks up on Tally's newfound awareness that in nature, actions have consequences. This suggests that in some important ways, Tally isn't as much like the other city kids as one might think. This isn't just rebellion for her—the stakes are much higher.



Learning that David was born in the Smoke helps Tally understand that this isn't just an extended camping trip: people live in the Smoke and call it home, just like Tally lived in the city. As she makes this connection, her empathy for David and the other Smokies grows, which gives Tally more to think about in terms of friendship and loyalty. It's one thing to spoil a friend's camping trip—it's another to rip them away from their home.



David is clearly aware that Special Circumstances is trying to infiltrate the Smoke, which demonstrates his understanding of how the world works. This is something that Tally is just now learning, and will likely help her grow and mature. As she learns more about all the ways in which the cities and the Smoke are connected, she's going to have an easier time figuring out where she fits into all of this—and through doing so, she'll be able to decide what kind of adult she wants to be.



Shay asks what Tally was going to say in the library, before the Boss interrupted them. Tally freezes up and wonders if Dr. Cable would take pity on her if she returned to the city in a month without activating the locket. Tired of lying, Tally says she hasn't shared everything. Shay says she knows: Tally broke her promise to keep the Smoke a secret and she told whomever gave her the necklace. Shay giggles and says that Tally must've left a copy of the directions with her "heartthrob." Shocked, Tally says this is partly right, but she's even more shocked when Shay says it's okay—she broke the same rule when she left directions for Tally. People like David are still suspicious of Tally, but things will be fine once they get to know her.

Tally wishes she'd activated the pendant when she arrived, as now she knows that she's not just betraying Shay. She's betraying hundreds of people. Shay says she can't wait until Tally's love arrives as Tally wonders if she could go volunteer with the rangers and become pretty that way. Shay admits that everyone here is too paranoid, but Tally suggests they're right to worry. Shay laughs about Special Circumstances and says that people who want to live differently should be able to. Out here, they can grow up. Shay asks if Tally feels guilty that she told someone about the Smoke, and Tally starts to cry and feels like a traitor. Shay hugs Tally, and Tally feels awful for accepting Shay's kindness. Tally is half glad she came but she knows she has to decide whether to betray Shay and David.

SUSPICION

Tally falls into the Smoke's routine after a few days. For once in her life, she sleeps easily thanks to the hard work. She doesn't know what she's going to do but she decides to put it out of her mind. This proves easy, as life in the Smoke is intense. Tally feels stronger than ever and she loves working on the railroads. David teaches her how to repair her clothes, and the natural landscape is spectacular without any kind of alternation like a pretty operation. One morning, David rides up beside Tally as they **hoverboard** to the railroad tracks. Tally knows now that David's jacket is real leather, but that the Smokies only kill foreign or invasive species. David says that he has a gift for Tally: he offers her leather gloves. This is major—gifts are rare in the Smoke. Tally thanks him and says that the gloves have history, unlike everything in the city.

Though Shay's insistence that she knows what's up with Tally is positive in, that it keeps Tally from having to admit that she betrayed her friend, Shay is also not being a very good friend in this moment. Not letting Tally tell her story in her own words means that Shay doesn't have to grapple with a truth she might not like—that Tally is a spy. However, Shay isn't doing this to be malicious. Instead, it reads again as a product of the way that Shay was raised—like Tally, she hasn't learned how to think about others.



When Tally thinks that she wishes she'd activated the pendant earlier, she's essentially saying that she wishes she'd done it when she was still innocent. In Tally's short time in the Smoke, she's already become more of an adult who's aware of the consequences, and now she has to face the truth: cooperating with Dr. Cable won't actually help Shay or David. Tally's desire to be a child, however, indicates that she's uncomfortable with growing up out in the wilderness—growing up in the city, on the other hand, would allow her to maintain some level of innocence and protection.



As the weeks wear on, Tally begins to see just how unhealthy life was in the city. Finally, she can sleep and she feels like she has a purpose, which the novel implies she never would've experienced in the city. Further, spending time in the Smoke helps Tally rethink some of her preconceived notions about how things should be. Leather seems more palatable, for instance, when she learns that it only comes from invasive species. She also begins to see the value of old things like the gloves. The gloves are, in some ways, the exact opposite of pretties: they convey history, while pretties' looks are a way to escape from history and prevent the natural aging process.



At the tracks, David announces that they have to use vibrasaws to cut through vegetation. Croy and Tally ask about the trees, and David shrugs that they can take the scrub trees back to the Smoke to burn. Tally looks to Shay, hoping she'll support leaving the trees, but Shay looks carefully neutral. Croy and Astrix continue to push back on cutting down the trees, and finally, David agrees that they'll only cut into the ones they have to. The saws cut easily through everything *but* the trees, and Croy, Tally's work partner, stands a ways back. Tally cuts through a root and then Croy begins to ask Tally how much SpagBol she traded for her sweater and her sleeping bag. He assures Tally he wouldn't really have taken all her stuff when she first arrived.

They move along to the next section, and as Croy cuts, he does the math out loud for how many SpagBols Tally would've had left if it took her nine days to get here. Tally struggles to come up with math that makes sense and then says that she has to share a secret: she exaggerated her story to make it more interesting. Croy doesn't seem to believe her, though he says that he does. At lunch, the crew sits down at their worksite. Tally sits next to Shay and says they need to talk. Shay says they don't need to talk about "him," and they realize they're talking about different guys—Shay is very confused when Tally mentions Croy's theory.

Tally notices that Shay has been crying. Shay holds out her hand to Tally's to prove that they're the same size, and Tally sees that Shay's hands are in worse shape. Tally tries to defend David and give Shay the gloves, but Shay insists she doesn't want them. She says that David doesn't talk to her about important things anymore, and asks if Tally has told David about whomever gave her the pendant. Tally sighs that maybe David has seen the pendant and doesn't care, or that this is all in Shay's head, but Tally can see that Shay's right—David showed Tally the cave and shared the secret about his parents. On one level, Tally hopes that Shay isn't overreacting. Shay asks Tally to tell David the truth, and Tally promises she will. Shay looks hopeful.

Though Tally doesn't offer any more assessments of Croy's physical appearance, she genuinely seems to enjoy working with him. It's likely that after Tally's few weeks in the Smoke, she understands that Croy isn't any less valuable because he's less attractive. In other words, she's likely learning to value him for his humor, his kindness, and the help that he can offer the group. These are all things that don't matter much in the cities, which drives home the idea that life in the Smoke is the exact opposite of life in the city.



Croy's suspicion means that Tally may have to tell the truth sooner rather than later, as it's likely he's not the only one who suspects her of lying. Out in the Smoke, people have to be skeptical to survive, and this isn't a quality Croy would likely possess if he were still in the city. This again suggests that no society is perfect—after all, undue suspicion isn't a great thing to feel all the time, as it can damage a community's sense of trust.



Even if Tally doesn't want to admit it, she is clearly developing romantic feelings for David, which means that Tally has to think even harder about how to be a good friend to Shay. Now, Tally isn't just going to potentially betray Shay to the government—she may also "steal" the person Shay has a crush on. This begins to complicate what loyalty means for Tally, especially considering the fact that David's feelings matter as much as both of the girls' feelings do. Because of this, it may not be possible for Tally to make Shay as happy as she'd like to.



BRAVERY

Tally eats dinner alone. After a day spent cutting trees, the wood tables don't seem as horrendous, and the brutality of the rabbit stew suits her mood. Tally hasn't spoken to Shay or Croy since lunch, and Dr. Cable's pendant seems to get heavier and tighter around her neck. She fears that it's only a matter of time before everyone knows she's a spy and she feels awful for coming between David and Shay. Tally feels like one of the **orchids**, choking everything else around her. David sits down with Tally, apologizes, and says he could guess why Tally didn't wear the gloves after eating with Shay. He asks her to follow him so they can talk, and Tally, remembering her promise to Shay, agrees.

David leads Tally to a ridge where they can look down on the Smoke. Tally notices how gracefully David moves: he's even more graceful than pretties. They stare out over the **orchids** on the other side of the ridge, and David says that Tally is the first runaway to arrive alone—he usually brings them in. Tally thinks that David seems to take things more seriously than even middle pretties do. David continues that his mother used to bring people in, but now she's too old. Remembering that old uglies become infirm, Tally asks how old David's mother is. With a laugh, David says she's still fit, but uglies trust people closer to their own age. Tally remembers her reaction to the Boss and marvels at how normal different faces seem now, after just a few weeks.

David compliments Tally for her bravery in coming to the Smoke all by herself and specifically for leaving home. He says he could never leave the Smoke knowing he'd never come back, and he admires and trusts Tally because she came just because Shay asked her to. Tally feels worse and worse. David says he was angry with Shay at first because he thought Tally was a wasted risk, being a city kid all alone, but he affectionately recalls how happy Tally looked when she ran down the hill to Shay. David encourages Tally to not listen to Croy's suspicions, and then asks knowingly if Tally doesn't plan to stay in the Smoke, since she just came to check on Shay.

Though Tally may feel like an orchid, an oppressive and threatening presence to those around her, it's also worth considering that there's still a lot of diversity around her. Even if Tally is complicating Shay and David's romantic potential, it's likely that the diversity of the Smoke is enough to keep this hiccup from doing too much long-term damage. Tally's feelings about the wood tables and the stew, meanwhile, show that the culture in the Smoke is beginning to agree with her.



To readers, Tally's concern over David's mother's age is likely humorous—Tally still doesn't quite understand that middle-aged and even elderly people can be fit and able. Despite this, however, she is starting to adjust to the culture in the Smoke and the idea that people can—and should—look different from one another. This begins to show that beauty has more to do with culture than it does with biology. Tally's clear attraction to David also demonstrates this, as Tally wouldn't be drawn to him if her city was right about uglies being universally unattractive.



David makes it very clear that people, including Tally, have choices about whether or not they remain in the Smoke. In this sense, David is one of the most loyal friends in the novel, as this seems like something he's known since he was a very young child. This suggests that growing up in a natural environment like the Smoke helps people become more empathetic and understanding of others' choices, even if they don't seem to make much sense.



David's words make Tally feel warm, but then she trembles—this warmth isn't something she's ever felt from an ugly before, since ugly faces can't have that effect. Somehow, David seems pretty for a moment. Tally doesn't think she deserves David's admiration and says that Shay probably wishes she'd never talked about the Smoke. David says that Shay changes her mind a lot. Tally looks closely at David, still feeling warm. She takes note of all his faults but feels as though his face looks genuinely pretty. David says that Shay really likes him, but that she's not serious like Tally is. Tally grabs her pendant nervously, but David acts unconcerned. He asks Tally if she'll meet his parents.

Clearly, the love triangle forming here has a lot to do with David's shifting emotions, which suggests that Shay is actually the one being a bit selfish by implying that Tally somehow stole David from her. The warm feeling Tally experiences when she looks at David makes it clear that she reciprocates his crush. More importantly, though, it also drives home that Tally's beliefs about pretties, beauty, and attraction is wrong—she can, and does, feel attraction for an “ugly” person.



THE SECRET

David leads Tally down the far ridge. Tally struggles to keep up and organize her thoughts. When they can see the light of a window, David shouts a greeting. His parents greet David, draw him into a hug, and greet Tally. Tally isn't sure how to act, since uglies seldom meet other people's parents in the city. She's also shocked when she sees that David and his dad look very similar. This makes David's parents laugh, and David's dad reminds Tally of how genetics work: families pass on physical traits, all of which disappear with the operation. David's parents introduce themselves as Maddy and Az, and they all sit down. Looking around at their cozy home filled with impractical, decorative objects, Tally thinks that David might not have grown up all that differently from the way she did.

Tally's uncertainty about how to deal with David's parents shows that in addition to separating uglies from pretties, Tally's city also divides people up by age and life stage. Even within a city, there are few opportunities for people to expand their perspective and meet people different from them. Despite this, Tally is also able to recognize that Maddy and Az aren't entirely unfamiliar. People, the novel suggests, aren't all that different from each other regardless of who they are or where they come from—some things are more or less the same, despite cultural differences.



Tally comments on how familiar everything feels, and Maddy explains that they came from Tally's city and might have turned Tally pretty had they stayed. They discuss Tally's solo journey to the Smoke using Shay's directions, and when Maddy and Az say they haven't heard of Shay, Tally wonders what the relationship between David and Shay was really like before she arrived. The conversation turns to what Tally knows about Maddy and Az, which is almost nothing. David tells Az that Tally might go back to the city, but he thinks she should know before returning. Tally is amazed that David and his parents communicate like equals, and she asks what she should know. David and his parents argue over whether to tell Tally the secret of why Maddy and Az ran away—Maddy says the secret is dangerous, and David tells Tally that it's the truth about what it means to be pretty.

Maddy and Az's reactions to hearing about Shay suggest that Shay may have exaggerated the degree to which David reciprocated her affections. While this is been understandable (David probably represented freedom to Shay, which she clearly thought was attractive), it also means that Tally may have some room to adjust how she deals with her own feelings for David. That Maddy and Az know a secret about being pretty confirms that there's more to being prettiness than just looking a certain way—especially if it was bad enough to make two doctors run away.



PRETTY MINDS

Az and Maddy explain that they were cosmetic surgeons. When they met, Maddy had just been named to the Pretty Committee, the global group that decides what pretty means. Az says that at that time, he was researching how to make the operation safer. Tally is disturbed to hear that people still die from the operation. Az explains that he found complications from the anesthetic: lesions in the brain. Maddy says that she started investigating and she discovered that almost everyone had the lesions, that the lesions weren't cancerous, and that they were always in the same place. Only pretties had them, meaning they definitely came from the operation.

Tally asks if they discovered what caused them. With a sigh, Maddy says that they kind of did. They looked at all the pretties who didn't have lesions and found that they were all professionals like firefighters, politicians, doctors, and Specials. Maddy confirms that she and Az don't have lesions and says that if they had them, they wouldn't be here. David clarifies that the lesions are a part of the operation, and Maddy adds that the lesions disappear in some or are cured in others who have to face conflicts and danger in their jobs. Tally asks about rangers and remembers how sure they'd looked, and how different they were from the new pretties she and Peris made fun of.

Tally thinks of meeting Peris at Garbo Mansion and remembers that he seemed distant and disconnected. She thinks that the old Peris would've enjoyed the Smoke, but the new Peris probably wouldn't. Tally asks what the lesions do. David, Maddy, and Az explain that they have ideas, but Special Circumstances forced Maddy and Az to stop researching, which is why they ran away. Tally turns to David and asks what he thinks. He asks her to recall that the Rusties were war-hungry and almost destroyed the world, which convinced people to build the cities and retreat from nature. Now, he says, everyone is happy because everyone looks the same. He suggests it's not complicated: people stopped fighting once they became pretty, and now just a few people run things. Tally and David say together that becoming pretty changes how a person thinks.

Discovering that people still die from the pretty operation shows Tally that there's already more to the surgery than she thought—and that young people like her aren't informed of all the risks, as medical ethics might suggest they should be. However, it's worth keeping in mind that there's really no point for the government to talk about risks if nobody has a choice in whether to receive the operation or not. This begins to cast the government in a decidedly sinister light.



The revelation that the lesions are a feature of the operation, not a mistake, shows Tally that there's definitely a lot wrong with her government. Though the novel doesn't entirely answer why Tally's government would do this, it likely has to do with the fact that those who have the lesions are easier to control and manipulate. As Tally thinks of the new pretties, she begins to realize that they did lose something when they had their operation: their ability to make their own choices.



At this point, Peris becomes a case study of how the operation changes a person. Because Tally knew Peris so well, she's able to easily track how he changed after surgery and see that Maddy and Az are telling the truth. When David mentions the Rusties, he then asks Tally to think about this in a much broader context. The Rusties may have had their problems, but Tally's society "fixed" those problems by creating a society of unthinking, childlike people who can't make decisions or be independent. The lesions force those people to conform and give up any sense of individual thought.



BURNING BRIDGES

Tally, David, Maddy, and Az stay up late talking about the Smoke. Finally, Tally asks how Az and Maddy changed back into uglies. Az explains that pretties' faces are sculpted with "smart plastic," and how by using a pill made from a chemical that softens the plastic, they were able to make the plastic in their bodies dissolve. The pretties still have all the non-cosmetic benefits of the operation, like good teeth and perfect vision. Tally asks Maddy and Az why they felt the need to be ugly, since they were doctors and didn't have the brain lesions. Maddy answers that they wanted to form a community of people without lesions, so they needed to look trustworthy. Tally asks if they made a pill to cure the lesions, but Maddy says that Special Circumstances stepped in before they figured anything out. They know there's a cure, though, because pretties with challenging jobs don't have the lesions.

When Tally asks if Maddy and Az realized they were changing when they became doctors, Maddy shares that it felt more like growing up. Az notes that it seemed like their colleagues were different, but historically speaking, most people are "sheep" and so pretties with lesions really aren't too different from the Rusties—they're just more manageable. Tally remembers how Sol and Ellie seem simultaneously sure and clueless, just like how parents are supposed to be. She also thinks that new pretties are supposed to be shallow and self-centered, and she remembers that Peris once mocked the new pretties but he wasted no time joining them. Tally realizes that the only way to figure out how much the operation really does is to create a new world, like the Smoke.

Tally wonders if the lesions or the pretty operation came first. Then, David and Tally leave Maddy and Az's house. As David and Tally hike, David says he couldn't stand Tally returning to the city without knowing the truth. He says that some uglies return without knowing what it all means. When Tally seems surprised by this, David says that if they tell people the truth about the pretty surgery, the cities will find out and try harder to discover the Smoke. Tally wonders how many other people Special Circumstances have blackmailed into infiltrating the Smoke. She wants to tell David the truth, but she can't figure out how and doesn't feel brave enough. David compliments Tally on how well she did with the information and how seriously she takes the Smoke. This, he says, is what makes Tally beautiful.

Maddy and Az's differentiation between the cosmetic and non-cosmetic effects of the surgery is important. They imply that the aspects of the surgery that help people live better, healthier lives—like perfect vision and teeth that are impervious to cavities—aren't an issue. It's also possible to make the case that the cosmetic elements of the operation aren't the problem, since the real issue is that the operation makes people think in a certain way in addition to looking a certain way. Maddy and Az suggest that forcing people to conform in this way is an unforgivable offense, but it's one that the government keeps committing so that they can hang onto power.



As doctors without lesions, Maddy and Az were arguably some of the only people in the city who were truly grown-up. This shows Tally that if she, too, wants to grow up in a meaningful way, she can't return to the city and undergo pretty surgery. Instead, she must remain a part of this new world, where she'll be able to think for herself and help others do the same. Doing so will allow her to be true to herself, as well as to be a good friend to Shay and David.



Again, Tally suddenly has to face the fact that she's probably one of many young people whom Special Circumstances has tried to coerce into helping them. To them, Tally isn't not an individual: they don't care what she thinks, what she wants, or whom she loves. When Tally is no longer helpful to the Specials, she'll be discarded and join the masses as a pretty. This helps Tally understand that her government doesn't think that anyone is particularly special or worth celebrating.



Tally is shocked and lists all of her facial features that are ugly. David runs his finger over her cheek, and even though the finger is callused, it feels soft. He says the worst thing the cities do is convince people they're ugly. Tally points out that everyone's ugly, but won't say if she thinks David is. She begins to talk about the science of beauty, but she asks if David really thinks she's beautiful, more beautiful than Shay. Quietly, David admits that he does. Tally feels awful and thinks of growing up in a culture where all uglies insult each other because everyone is equally ugly. This doesn't feel fair. Tally and David argue over whether beauty is cultural or evolutionary, and then David surprises Tally by saying he was attracted to her initially because of the scratches on her face— these imperfections signaled to him that Tally had a good story to tell.

Tally steps up on a stone so she's at David's eye level, asks again if he thinks she's beautiful, and then surprises herself by saying that she'd be sad if they did the operation on him. They kiss, and though kisses between uglies normally don't count, this feels real to Tally. David touches Tally's pendant and Tally pulls away, sure of what to do. She leads him back to the Smoke, feeling warm and sure, and throws the pendant into the fire. Tally assures David that no one's coming for her. She knows that she'll have to face Shay tomorrow, but she feels free knowing that Dr. Cable won't ruin the Smoke. Crying, Tally walks to her bunkhouse. David kisses her and says he's going for a walk. Tally falls asleep instantly and awakes to screams: Special Circumstances is in the Smoke.

INVASION

Tally realizes she's alone in the bunkhouse. A window shatters and she can hear a struggle outside. When she opens the door, she sees a Special Circumstances hovercar that looks like a cross between a normal hovercar and a helicopter. Tally tells herself this has nothing to do with her and she runs through the melee. The cruel pretties move through the Smoke with superhuman speed, binding all of the Smokies and leaving them on the ground. Tally moves toward the Smokies fighting near the mess hall, where she can smell breakfast. She realizes that she slept through the meal and that Special Services waited until all the Smokies were in one place to invade. The Specials don't try to fight the group—they wait until uglies try to run away and then grab them. Tally sizes up a Special standing between her and the forest.

Tally's internal struggle over whether David's crush is fair or not shows one of the positive aspects of her society. Though it still prioritizes looks, in a best-case scenario, it doesn't do so in a way that holds people back because they're not conventionally attractive. However, it's also possible that in a place like the Smoke, where everyone is "ugly," looks wouldn't hold anyone back there either. Without years of cultural baggage influencing how they interpret beauty, it's possible for a place like the Smoke to simply decide that everyone is beautiful in their own way.



Though Tally doesn't elaborate, it's likely that kisses between uglies "don't count" because they're not considered real people yet. When this one feels like it counts, then, it shows that Tally is starting to come into herself and value herself for who she is as a whole, "ugly" person. Destroying the pendant, meanwhile, is something Tally seems to think of as a gesture of support for Shay. Even if Tally accepts and reciprocates David's affections, she still essentially agrees to respect Shay's choice to come to the Smoke by destroying the chance that Special Circumstances will follow.



The hybrid hovercar that Special Circumstances uses is another shock for Tally, as it makes it clear that even her own city draws on Rusty technology when it's convenient. This drives home how many secrets her city keeps about how it actually functions. As Tally learns these things about the lesions, Special Circumstances, and even the technology they use, it helps her form a more nuanced understanding of how her world works. With this understanding, Tally will be more prepared to function as an adult.



The Boss creeps up behind Tally, and they watch the Special. He suggests they both run for it and then shows Tally the two things he keeps in case of emergency: ground habanero pepper and a duffel bag of Rusty magazines. He asks Tally which she wants. She chooses the duffel bag, but the Boss realizes that Tally doesn't have any shoes and gives her the pepper instead. She pauses for a moment, thinks of never seeing David again, and then races for the Special. The Special trips Tally and handcuffs her. As Tally reaches for the pepper, the Special prepares to leap for the Boss. Tally kicks at the container, which opens into the Special's face. The Special lets out an inhuman, as Tally runs for the forest. She tries to hide, but a Special finds and captures her.

The Boss understands that in order to preserve what they have in the Smoke, it's necessary to maintain the Smokies' connection to the past by taking care of the magazines. The magazines act as proof that once, people were proud of their diverse bodies—even if their society was flawed in a variety of other ways, they nevertheless celebrated their physical differences to some degree. It's also telling that Tally doesn't comment on how decrepit the Boss is here, which suggests that she's getting used to how he looks.



THE RABBIT PEN

The Special leads Tally to the rabbit pen, which contains 40 handcuffed Smokies. He throws Tally down roughly, and another Smokey helps Tally to sit up. Croy scoots closer and says he was wrong about Tally, since she resisted. Croy admits that he thought Tally conveniently escaped when she didn't show up for breakfast, but Tally shares that she was out with David. Croy admits he hasn't seen David, Shay, or the Boss. Tally says that she and the Boss made a run for it, and Croy comments on Tally's bare feet. They watch as Specials sort uglies into groups so they can go to their respective cities. As Tally looks around, she realizes that after being here for a few weeks, it's the *Specials* who look horrific, not the uglies.

Now, Tally truly believes that beauty is a matter of culture. While she's always thought that the Specials looked strange and awful, she sees now that this has as much to do with their uniform prettiness as anything else. Having made this leap, Tally can now go on and fight genuinely for diversity on behalf of the Smoke. Croy's (albeit misguided) willingness to apologize for suspecting Tally shows how close-knit the Smoke is—people must be willing to forgive if they're going to survive.



Tally sees two Specials throw Shay into the pen. Shay croaks a greeting to Croy and then accuses Tally of betraying the Smoke. Croy tries to defend Tally, but Shay insists that Tally is to blame. A Special comes to the corner with an eye reader. They haul Croy away and Tally tries to tell herself that she couldn't have done this. Tally tells Shay that she and David were just talking last night as a Special scans her eye. The Special confirms Tally's name and then lifts her to go see Dr. Cable. The Special releases Tally's hands, comforts her, and praises Tally for her good work.

The Special's praise makes it clear to everyone watching that Tally did betray the Smokies. This means that Tally now has to deal with the consequences of breaking Shay's trust, even if she did so unwittingly. Tally must understand that in this case, her intentions are much less important than the real-world consequences of her actions.



IN CASE OF DAMAGE

The Specials take Tally to the library, where Dr. Cable greets her with an odd smile. Tally decides to play along and tells Dr. Cable that she tried to run so that the already suspicious Smokies wouldn't know it was her. Dr. Cable leans back and asks how long Tally has been here. Tally coughs, trying to buy herself time, and says that she hasn't been in the Smoke long. The Smokies suspect her because it took her so long, and she almost fell off a cliff. Dr. Cable says that if the pendant was damaged, it would've alerted Special Circumstances automatically. She asks where the pendant is. Tally lies that she hid it after she activated it, since the Smokies are able to detect bugs. Dr. Cable asks a Special to accompany Tally to fetch the pendant. They cuff Tally so she looks like a resistor.

Tally leads the Special toward the trading post. She tells him the necklace is on the roof, and the Special swings up easily. When he can't find it, Tally tells him where it is using made-up roof parts and she offers to show the confused Special where it is. He pulls her up and warns her to leave the **hoverboards** alone. Tally sees that hers is far away—but Croy's is close, charged, and mostly ready to go. She exaggerates how hard it is to balance handcuffed and then allows herself to slip. The Special rescues Tally, letting himself fall to save her. While he's on the ground, Tally kicks Croy's board closed. After the Special gets back on the roof, Tally wobbles again. When the Special cuts her handcuffs, Tally snaps her fingers. The hoverboard comes to her, knocking the Special off the roof, and Tally zooms away.

RUN

Tally has never **hoverboarded** barefoot before and she struggles to stay on. She also realizes that she's not wearing crash bracelets and she can hear hovercars behind her. Tally heads for the railroad tracks, reaches the river, and crouches down to try to hide in the trees, wondering where David is. One of the hovercars seems to spot Tally, so Tally leaps over to the iron vein, which doesn't follow a straight line, giving her an advantage. The hovercars shoot past Tally twice as she makes switchbacks, and then they slow down, seemingly following Tally using her body heat. Tally thinks of the cave that David showed her, which would hide her body heat. The hovercars lose her for a moment as she shoots down the tracks and then squeezes into the cave. Tally says aloud that she's dead, and someone answers her.

By lying to Dr. Cable, Tally can begin to atone for her misdeed and try to protect her new friends in the Smoke. Her choice to lie makes it clear that Tally is fully committed to working for the Smoke, as she's come around entirely to their way of thinking. Dr. Cable, unlike Tally, is at a bit of a disadvantage out here in a more naturalistic setting. She doesn't have the tools she had in her office in the city to detect Tally's lies, which means that Tally has more wiggle room to manipulate Dr. Cable. Relying too heavily on the city, in other words, has made it harder for Dr. Cable to function in other environments.



Tally recognizes that even out in the natural world, the Specials function a lot like the city does—they're able to step in and lessen the consequences of mistakes like falling off of the roof. That Tally is able to manipulate this shows that she's becoming more comfortable in a variety of different environments. She's learning to use the unique qualities of each setting to her advantage, which speaks to her newfound maturity.



Without the crash bracelets, the consequences of making a mistake on the hoverboard are serious—if Tally falls, she'll be injured or killed. As Tally rides without shoes or crash bracelets, she essentially sheds the last few bits of the city that kept her artificially safe, which is an important part of her coming-of-age. Even though hoverboards are manmade objects, it's not necessary for Tally to shed hers in order to grow up and become independent, since the hoverboard is essentially a tool that enables Tally to think and act for herself.



AMAZING

It's David. Tally pulls him to her and shakes her head when he asks if there's anyone with her. They hear the hovercars overhead, and Tally hopes she hasn't betrayed David too. They sit quietly for hours and then discuss what happened. David says he was watching the sunrise when Special Circumstances arrived, and Tally says that she cut her handcuffs and was able to steal a **hoverboard**. David praises her, and Tally can't believe she's lying—she wishes she'd told the truth so the Smokies could've attached the pendant to a migratory bird bound for South America. Now, Tally feels like she can't tell the truth or she'll lose David, in addition to Shay, Peris, and the Smoke. Tally vows to herself to tell David the truth *after* she's made things better.

Tally reassures David that they'll rescue everyone. David is skeptical, but Tally says she's been to Special Circumstances. She lies that she got caught sneaking into New Pretty Town on the night she met Shay, and says that the Specials tried to intimidate her. David says this makes sense—Tally has always seemed to know how dangerous life is in the Smoke, and she seems to understand what the cities are like. David asks if Tally really wants to go back and rescue everyone, and Tally says she has to. She cries and turns away when David tries to kiss her.

RUIN

David and Tally leave the cave the next morning. Tally is thirsty and cold after spending the night without shoes or a coat. David suggests they kill a rabbit back at the Smoke, and then they ride double on David's **hoverboard**. They smell the Smoke before they get there and discover that everything is burned. They stop high on the mountain and Tally convinces David that they need to watch and wait in case there are Specials there. She assures him that they'll look for Maddy and Az after they make sure the Smoke is clear. After an hour, they head down. Nobody is there, but they discover that about 20 Smokies ditched their shoes so that Tally could use one of the pairs. She chooses some and tries to hide her guilt over the fact that the people she betrayed are helping her.

Tally and David continue their tour of the Smoke and discover the library burning with the books still in it. David bitterly says that the Specials don't want anyone to know what things were like before the operation, so they can make the uglies hate themselves. Tally suggests that the Boss might have made it out with his magazines. She finds the duffel bag, still full of magazines, and then finds the Boss: he's dead, with his head turned at a horrific angle. Tally stumbles back out of the forest and tells David what she found; David says they have to go to his parents' house.

Even though it's understandable why Tally wants to delay telling David the truth, choosing to wait is still a somewhat selfish choice. It means that Tally is able to continue her relationship with David without having to face the consequences of cooperating with Special Circumstances, something that allows her to continue on in a bit of a childish state. However, the fact that Tally recognizes how she could've fixed this at the beginning offers hope that she won't make this mistake again in the future.



What Tally doesn't seem to realize is that by waiting, she's going to make the truth even harder for David to hear when she does share. This is, again, a product of her youth, innocence, and desire for things to be easy and neat. It's uncomfortable for her to face that she's done something horrific, and so she's doing everything in her power to simply ignore it.



The Smokies' offering of shoes illustrates how close-knit and loyal they are to the people they love. This is so difficult for Tally because she doesn't feel she deserves kindness like this after betraying them. Having to grapple with these thoughts impresses upon Tally that being an adult out in the wild, without the pretty operation, is much more difficult than she ever thought it would be. She has to make more decisions and cope with more challenges than she ever thought possible—and indeed, far more than what's possible as a pretty in the city.



David understands that Special Circumstances doesn't want anyone to know how things were before their current society. It's in their best interest to erase anything that might complicate or add to their insistence that the Rusties were just crazy and horrible—and the Boss's magazines, for instance, paint a more nuanced picture than Special Circumstances wants to admit.



MADDY AND AZ

As Tally and David ride over the ridge, Tally tells him that the Boss only died because he fought back. David says that his parents would fight too. The first chance David gets, he leaps off and races to the house. Tally unfolds the **hoverboard** to charge and then follows. Soon, she smells smoke and they see the house, charred. Tally goes inside, but finds no evidence of bodies. She steps back outside to announce her findings, and David tours the house. When he comes out, he tries to cut Tally's handcuffs off with a long knife, which barely mars the plastic handcuffs. Tally has no idea how the Special severed them. She suggests it's special plastic but insists she cut the cuffs on a sharp rock. David is confused: Az's knife is high-tech and should cut through anything.

David says his parents didn't escape—Az would've taken this knife if they had. He looks less panicked and he confirms that Tally still wants to go after everyone. David leads her to a cave near the house filled with survival equipment. He admits that he's imagined this moment so many times and he starts to wonder what would've happened if he'd been home, but Tally points out that he'd be in custody. They rummage through a bag of instant food for dinner.

THE OIL PLAGUE

At sunset, Tally and David leave. They each ride two **hoverboards** sandwiched together, both of which carry bags. They embark on a 10-day route to Tally's city by hoverboard, which will be much less direct than the path Tally took to the Smoke. Around midnight of the first night, they reach the edge of a desert next to the **orchids**. David points to towers that used to be connected to steel cables. He says they used to carry electricity from a wind farm to a Rusty city. Tally frowns—she didn't know the Rusties used wind power. David shrugs and says that they weren't all crazy, and today the Smokies still use some of the same technologies.

Tally has never seen a desert before. She asks if this is the Mojave, the only desert she knows of. David says this desert is unnatural—it's where the **orchid** first took over. It might come back to life in a thousand years, but if people haven't found a way to stop the orchids, the process will repeat. They reach a Rusty city around daybreak and decide to camp in a factory building. As they make food, Tally looks out the window at the burned-out cars below. She says that the Rusties seemed intent on survival, as the cars in every city seem to be trying to leave. David says that some of them made it, but not in cars.

Seeing Maddy and Az's burnt home drives home for Tally that her actions have consequences. Because of her close relationship with David, she gets a front row seat to the kind of grief people can experience when they're separated from their families like this—and hopefully, seeing his emotional reaction will encourage her to make better choices if she's faced with a situation like this again. Now, she understands that her dishonesty doesn't just hurt her—it has wide-ranging consequences for the people she loves.



Here, Tally encourages David to not entertain thoughts of being a hero. Having seen the Specials, Tally understands what she and David can and can't do, and she knows that David couldn't have fought them successfully. Now, she can use what she knows about the Specials to protect David, thereby behaving more loyally going forward.



Learning that the Rusties used wind power shows Tally yet again that the Rusties weren't unintelligent, crazy, or subhuman individuals. They were people trying to make their world a better place—they just weren't successful. Because David lives more like the Rusties did, it's easier for him to see that he's a descendent of the Rusties and that they have a lot in common. Coming from the cities, this is something that Tally has been able to ignore.



David's explanation of this manmade desert shows the consequences of monocultures, whether they exist in the natural world or in human civilization. He essentially suggests that a culture that's too homogenous will never be able to truly flourish—and will never be able to learn from its mistakes. The Smoke, then, represents a culture that takes these lessons to heart and does everything possible to repeat the errors people like the Rusties made in the past.



Tally says that in school, the teachers never really said how the Rusties' world ended, just that their mistakes kept adding up. David shares that the Boss had books about it: a bacterium infected the oil that the Rusties utilized, causing it to explode. The bacteria spread, infecting all the cars, airplanes, and oil wells. He says the cars below were probably infected, and Tally asks why the people didn't walk. She shivers. It's hard to think of the Rusties as real people and not just stupid, dangerous creatures. She wonders out loud why her teachers didn't mention this, since they loved making the Rusties sound pathetic. David suggests that the teachers didn't want anyone to realize that every society has a weakness and will collapse if that one thing disappears. Tally insists that their society can't disappear given its renewability and sustainability, but David suggests that the weakness could be an idea rather than a physical resource.

When David mentions that every society has a weakness, it hearkens back to when Tally noted that New Pretty Town would collapse if all the hover technology stopped working. Even if she's not entirely ready to accept that her society has weaknesses, on some level she knows it does. Though their weaknesses might not make them as vulnerable as oil dependency made the Rusties, it would still be easy to topple Tally's society by dismantling either at the physical technology or at the ideas that hold her society together. Tally is already starting to do this by accepting that ugly people can be beautiful and deserving of love, contrary to the notions her government promotes.



FAMILIAR SIGHTS

Tally and David follow a river for three days until they reach the sea and then turn south. It feels like they're the only people alive. Tally roasts a rabbit on a fire she builds herself. After a few days on the coast, dark clouds appear on the ocean and finally come ashore as a hurricane. David and Tally spend three days huddled in a tent, fascinated by the storm. When the storm gets boring, they talk. They end up having a "terrible fight," and when David returns from cooling off outside, he insists their journey is taking too long. Tally assures him that it takes time to perform the pretty operation right. David shudders and asks what'll happen if they do it wrong. The storm ends overnight, and the world seems transformed into a beautiful place. They finally reach the Rusty Ruins.

The cursory explanation of Tally and David's journey draws attention to the natural world. As they travel, they must confront the magnitude and the beauty of the land around them—and understand that as humans, the land is far more powerful than they'll ever be. Tally continues to embrace her Rusty roots as she cooks a rabbit and builds a fire, which allows her to gain additional understanding of where she comes from.



The ruins seem smaller than they did when Tally last saw them. They discuss how creepy and well-preserved the ruins are, and Tally explains that the city sprays them to preserve them for school trips. She realized that's a perfect encapsulation of her city: everything must be a bribe, a warning, or a lesson. They hide their things in a decrepit building and then Tally leads the way down the river. David assures her that after they rescue Shay, Shay will forgive Tally, but Tally isn't so sure. When they catch sight of the city, Tally feels a feeling worse than homesickness. The skyline used to excite her, but now it seems like a vacant shell. As Tally leads David to Special Circumstances, she thinks that she's lost her home.

Before, when Tally was so afraid of the natural world and of the Rusties, the Rusty Ruins looked huge and unknowable. But now that Tally has matured and is more at ease in nature, she understands that the ruins have stories to tell—and they're not all stories of stupidity and doom. All of Tally's observations about her city show that she's now aware of how those in power gain and maintain their power. She understands now that being a new pretty means giving up one's individuality, and so New Pretty Town looks sinister, not exciting.



Tally and David ride to the greenbelt, and Tally reminds David that there's a grid everywhere—they can ride wherever they want to. When they pass the hospital, Tally remembers being denied her pretty operation. As they leave the greenbelt, a part of Tally expects her interface ring to warn her that she's out of bounds. Though she wore it for 16 years, she can't stand the idea of being monitored all the time. Tally and David sneak through the middle pretty suburbs and reach the transport ring. Tally assures David that there's no one there—the trucks are automatic—and they head up the hill. From the top, they can see Special Circumstances below. Tally explains that the fence around it is actually a sensor wire, so they can't fly in. They realize they can *jump* in using bungee jackets.

ACCOMPLICES

Tally says that if they hurry, they can drop by the Uglyville art school and steal bungee jackets. David looks nervous and admits that he's never seen this many people before. They **hoverboard** quickly back to Uglyville and when they reach the art school, Tally discovers that it's almost too easy to sneak into the basement through a window. Two months ago, this would've seemed daring. Now, Tally realizes that tricks are just a way for uglies to blow off steam until their rebelliousness disappears with the operation. She completes her theft in less than a minute, which wows David. They catch sight of the ruins as the sky starts to lighten and they decide to strike tomorrow night. David asks about the Specials and where they'll be. Tally suggests there will only be a few around at night but she knows that even one Special will be too many.

Tally suddenly feels exhausted and scared. This rescue isn't just a trick—it's serious and dangerous, and Tally knows that the Smokies may be imprisoned elsewhere. She says she wishes they had help, and David stops her and points: they see a safety sparkler at the ruins. David suggests they wait—the uglies must be looking for him. He says that the rumors about him will continue forever, even if he stops coming around. When they hear the uglies, David startles them by pointing the flashlight up at his face. They're shocked to discover that David is real and they introduce themselves as Sussy, An, and Dex. They smile when they learn that an older friend of theirs actually did make it to the Smoke.

As Tally and David move through the city, Tally has to face the memories she has of living here and fit them into how she now knows her city operates. Now, she's able to see that it's a good thing she didn't get the operation, and she begins to see the value of being able to go where she wants without having the government tracking her every move. In short, as Tally begins to combine her past and her present in her mind, she's able to use these new conclusions to support her decision to stand up against her city.



While it's important to recognize that Tally's youthful tricks did prepare her for life in the Smoke, she's also correct that the tricks are expected of young uglies and aren't actually as rebellious as she once thought. In the grand scheme of things, those tricks don't even matter much, since pretties' lesions dissolve their desire to be tricky in the first place. This also shows that whether a person is a young ugly or a mature pretty, they're conforming to the government's expectations.



Learning that these young uglies also have a connection to the Smoke shows Tally that the network of people who believe in preserving diversity and a more natural way of life is much larger than she ever thought. While the Smoke may have expressed this through its design, this meeting reassures Tally that Shay wasn't alone in wanting to go to the Smoke. This also offers hope that if Tally is able to recruit these young uglies to her cause, she may have a much larger support network to rely upon.



An says that she wants to see the Smoke too, but Tally says she can't right now. Tally knows that if she tells the truth, it'll seem far-fetched and eventually benefit Dr. Cable, so instead she says that the Smoke moves around and is scattered right now. She explains that they're not here recruiting; they're here to do a trick and they might need help. Tally thinks of what will attract Dr. Cable's attention and says they need sparklers. She tells the uglies they'll need to get into New Pretty Town and she is thrilled to introduce them to her silent bridge.

If Tally admits that the Smoke is gone, it'll give Dr. Cable the satisfaction of knowing that young people might stop looking for it. It's also important to note that the Smoke doesn't have to physically exist to be a potent and dangerous idea. Just as the idea of one kind of beauty gives people power in the city, the idea of a place where uglies can be beautiful could be what gives young uglies the strength to resist.



OVER THE EDGE

Tally sleeps all day in the Rusty Ruins and then wakes up at dusk. David packs knapsacks and then they each ride two **hoverboards**. At the hill overlooking Special Circumstances, they stop and look back toward New Pretty Town. David asks if Tally thinks that An, Sussy, and Dex will really help them. Tally says they will—tricks are all uglies live for. David says their willingness makes him feel like even if they fail tonight, the Smoke will rise again. Tally and David kiss, and then David points to New Pretty Town. They see lights rise and arrange themselves into words to read, "THE SMOKE LIVES." Three Special Circumstances hovercars leave the compound, so Tally and David check their bungee jackets, turn off their crash bracelets so their boards won't follow, and race their hoverboards to the top of the hill.

Even if Tally chose the message of "THE SMOKE LIVES" just to attract Dr. Cable's attention, the Smoke does live on in important ways—Tally and David are still fighting to rescue their loved ones, and young people like An, Sussy, and Dex are still willing to fight for their right to grow up on their own terms. The way that Tally and David plan to use their technology shows that between the two of them, they have enough knowledge to effectively navigate urban and wild terrain. By independently problem-solving in this way, both of them exhibit far more maturity and competence than the adults in Tally's society do.



At the top of the jump, Tally's **hoverboard** falls away, and she meets David's eyes as they start to fall. Tally's bungee jacket only catches her a split second before she hits the ground. Tally bounces and spins, and when she realizes she's going to overshoot her target roof, she flails and catches a rain gutter. Satisfied that Tally is safe, the bungee jacket stops lifting her. Tally discovers that she's too heavy with her knapsack to pull herself onto the roof. David pulls her up, and with delight, Tally sees that they managed not to set off alarms.

Even if Tally's ugly tricks may have been something her government expected and didn't think much about, they nevertheless prepared her to be successful here. She understands how bungee jackets work, how to manipulate her crash bracelets and hoverboard, and how her city sets up alarms. This indicates that seemingly frivolous activities like tricks can be worthwhile—if only someone like Tally is cunning and motivated enough to apply those skills elsewhere.



INSIDE

Tally looks around. She suggests they glue the hovercar door closed, so David does so with nanotech glue. Then, Tally uses a powerjack to open the elevator doors. She can tell that the elevator is a long way down, but she leaps into the shaft and manages to bounce without hitting the sides. As Tally starts to whistle for David, she hears a cruel pretty's voice and the elevator drops. When it stops, Tally whistles for David. She shushes him and then they use the powerjack to open elevator doors above them, but the tool makes way too much noise. They crawl into the hallway and read the doors labeled as operating theaters and imaging rooms. They enter the operating theater, which is empty.

It doesn't seem as though any of the Specials in this building know that Tally and David are here yet, which confirms Tally's early suspicion: even Special Circumstances can make mistakes. It's clear that they never expected anyone to try to infiltrate this building, and so while they do have some security, it's not entirely impassable. This shows Tally that if she's going to continue fighting against Special Circumstances, she must maintain her individuality and do what they don't expect if she hopes to be successful.



Tally and David walk past the morgue and then decide to head down. They figure the next floor is the bottom floor, and it has interrogation rooms and a “disorientation room.” David tries to open one room with the powerjack, but they give up and move on. Suddenly, Tally hears Dr. Cable. A door slides open and Dr. Cable walks out. Tally catches Dr. Cable’s attention, surprising her, and David hits Dr. Cable on the head with the powerjack. Tally hears another voice and turns: it belongs to a tall, elegant woman. The woman is Shay, and Shay is pretty.

Seeing that Shay is pretty tells Tally that she failed in what she set out to do—that is, to support Shay in her decision to escape the pretty operation. In this sense, Tally has failed miserably as a friend. The way that Tally describes Shay shows how wildly different Shay is now—though Tally thought that Shay’s face was lovely before, now Shay is “elegant.” She isn’t the Shay that Tally knew, and given what Tally knows about pretties’ brain lesions, Shay is likely no longer an independent individual.



RESCUE

Shay is thrilled to see Tally. She condescendingly says that Tally’s still a troublemaker and then points to where the other Smokies are locked up. David runs to free the others while Shay beams at Tally. Tally asks Shay what they did to her and asks if anyone else is pretty. Shay says that she’s the only one because she made the most trouble and put up the worst fight, but she’s relieved to be pretty. Shay says she’s only here because Dr. Cable wanted her to talk to the Smokies; Shay lives in New Pretty Town now, and just came from a party. Tally realizes that Shay is drunk. Shay asks how Tally and David are doing and apologizes for being a pain. Tally feels like this is just the lesions talking.

The fact that Shay is reasonably okay helping Tally and David free their friends suggests that the brain lesions don’t entirely shift someone’s thinking. Shay isn’t a total automaton—she’s not calling for other Specials or accusing Tally of being a traitor. This provides some nuance to Tally’s understanding of what the lesions do, because in important ways, Shay is still Shay despite her new appearance and interest in partying.



Shay says that Tally did her a favor getting her out of the Smoke; she loves hot showers. Tally starts to cry as she remembers how much Shay wanted to live on her own terms and keep her own face. She apologizes for betraying Shay, and Shay promises to keep it a secret that Tally betrayed the Smoke. Dr. Cable’s tablet blinks as a call comes in. Tally shoves it at Shay to answer the call. Shay talks for a moment and then sends Tally to help David; she insists that she’s happy to help do something exciting, even if she’s pretty. Maddy and another Smokey are already free, so Tally frees Croy. Maddy says that this is everyone and that they need to go. She says they can’t help Az.

Shay shows here that even though she’s a pretty, she, too, can be a good friend—she’s not going to spill Tally’s secret and ruin things for the Smokies. Though this could be because Shay senses it’ll be more dramatic for the truth to come out later, it’s also possible that in some ways, the lesions can actually improve how someone treats their friends. Now that Tally knows about the lesions, she’ll be able to observe Shay’s behavior to come to more nuanced conclusions about what, exactly, pretty surgery does.



Maddy leads everyone to the elevator, dragging Shay by the wrist. She yells that they need Dr. Cable, so Tally and Croy drag Dr. Cable by the wrists in order to scan her eye at the elevator. Maddy steals Dr. Cable’s interface ring, smashes the tablet against the wall, and tells the elevator to go to the roof. She asks what the escape plan is and then assigns Tally to ride with Shay while Maddy rides with David, Croy goes go alone, and the other two ride together. Tally activates her crash bracelets to call the **hoverboards**. David begs for Maddy to try to cure Az, but Maddy softly tells him that Az is dead.

When Maddy so forcefully steps in and takes control of the situation, she reminds everyone that she’s the real adult in the room despite the teenage Smokies’ advanced maturity. Meanwhile, learning that Az is dead makes it clearer to Tally what she did by conspiring with Special Circumstances: she’s partially responsible for Az’s death, and now she sees that being a thinking, feeling, individualistic adult can have life-or-death consequences.



GETAWAY

Maddy asks for a knife, and Tally gives her one. Maddy cuts a piece from her jumpsuit. On the roof, they can hear sirens and see the **hoverboards** coming. David looks dazed, so Tally catches him and offers her condolences. She tells him they need to run right now, but he can't respond—the sound of the hovercar door trying to open against the nanotech glue is too loud. Maddy locks the elevator and tells David to glue the other hatches shut, and then Tally races for the boards. As she Tally hits the ground, Croy points to approaching Specials. Tally rides both boards at once, evades the Specials, and rides to the roof. Maddy gives her a piece of the jumpsuit with a tracking device in it to drop somewhere, and Tally pulls Shay on the boards with her.

Shay remarks that she doesn't have crash bracelets and teeters dangerously. Tally asks Shay if she remembers how to ride, but Shay says she's just rusty and that she has had too much to drink. Tally realizes that if Shay falls now, she'll die just like Az. Tally wonders how Az died and she asks Shay to not let go if she falls—Tally is still wearing crash bracelets and a bungee jacket, so they might survive. Tally wonders if Special Circumstance will alert the wardens for help. She wonders if the wardens and if regular government even knows what the Specials have done to the Smoke or Az. Tally drops the tracking device into the river and then heads upstream, to where there's a cave hidden by a waterfall. She has no idea what they're going to do next.

Shay asks if Tally thinks it's true that Az is dead; she saw him a few days ago and he was fine. Tally isn't sure. Shay shouts that she's remembering how to ride and assures Tally that she remembers everything from before her operation. Tally points out that Shay hated her because she stole David and betrayed the Smoke. Thoughtfully, Shay says that that was just ugly stuff and kid stuff, but she's grown up now. Tally asks if Shay doesn't find it weird that she grew up because of the pretty operation, but Shay said she grew up when she realized that it's good to be home—and that the Smoke is a crazy idea. Tally confirms that Shay fought getting the operation and asks if Shay realized these things before or after the operation.

The different qualities that Maddy, Tally, and David bring to the table allow them to better escape the Specials. This speaks to the power of individuality, as well as of community. When people work together toward a common goal and use a variety of different knowledge, they're able to do things that otherwise wouldn't be possible—such as evade the Specials. The Specials, meanwhile, work as a group, but they seem more like automatons than freethinking individuals—and in this case, that hinders their efforts.



Though the novel doesn't answer Tally's question about what the rest of the government knows, her recognition that this might be about a network of censorship and control shows that going forward, she'll have to contend with the possibility that there's more to this than just her fight. It sets Tally up to consider more broadly how her society functions and controls information, while this novel (the first in a series) focuses more on simply introducing Tally to more pressing information and ideas.



It's telling that Shay characterizes her very real and legitimate pain as kid stuff that doesn't matter anymore. This shows why the uglies as a whole are treated so poorly in Tally's city: their emotions, according to those older and "prettier" than them, don't matter. Tally's questions about when Shay decided these things force Shay to confront that while she may be happy now, becoming pretty isn't what she really wanted. By doing this, Tally likely thinks she's being a loyal friend, as she's reminding Shay of who she truly wanted to be.



Tally checks her position-finder and thinks of how difficult this night will be for the Specials—they'll be chasing four **hoverboards**, four trackers, and all of Dex, Sussy, and An's friends. At a calm part of the river, Shay asks why Tally wants Shay to hate her. Tally says she doesn't, she just feels bad for betraying Shay. Shay points out that the Smoke wasn't going to last forever anyway. Tally says that she didn't mean to betray them, and that stealing David from Shay was just an accident. Tally trails off; she can't understand how Shay doesn't understand that the operation changed her. Shay asks about Tally's relationship with David, and Tally cries as she apologizes for ruining Shay's dreams. Shay says she's not sorry about anything, and Tally thinks of the lesions. She knows they're making Shay forgive her.

Even if Shay might be right that the Smoke wasn't going to last forever, it doesn't mean that Tally shouldn't feel remorse for what she did. It's only through experiencing this guilt will Tally be able to understand the importance of being loyal, kind, and empathetic. Tally's understanding that this night will be difficult, even for the Specials, shows how underprepared the Specials are to deal with an uprising like this—they're not used to people acting like autonomous individuals, and they don't know how to handle it.



NIGHT ALONE

Tally and Shay reach the cave first, and Croy hurtles in a moment later. He groans that he lost the Specials but he doesn't know where everyone else is. He says he went all the way around the greenbelt, and the Specials kept getting him confused with the other uglies riding there. Croy also shares that Maddy and David went to the ruins to be alone for a while, which makes Tally's stomach drop. Tally suggests that she hike to the ruins to comfort David, but Croy says that Maddy instructed them to stay put. Astrix and Ryde arrive a bit later, thrilled by their victory. Tally tries to celebrate with them, but she can't. She can only think of David. Shay falls asleep quickly, and Tally curls up next to her, trying to forget how Shay's mind has changed.

All the uglies riding in the greenbelt and annoying the Specials drives home that the Smoke isn't dead at all—there's still a huge community of people willing to make life difficult for those in charge. These people are Tally's hope for the future, as they're the ones who are still in control of their own minds and are still capable of learning that there are other ways of thinking about beauty. Tally's desire to be with David shows how loyal she is and reinforces for her that it's possible to love someone who's "ugly" according to society's standards.



Tally smells food when she wakes up and she hears Croy trying to placate Shay, who wants a shower. Even though Shay is bedraggled, she's still stunning. Astrix and Ryde can't stop looking at her, and nobody tries to make Shay stop complaining. After dusk, Tally and Croy check for Specials and then lead everyone to the ruins. Shay announces once that she wants to go home, but it doesn't occur to her to try to leave by herself. Tally doesn't know what they're going to do with Shay, but she knows they can't leave her like this. Tally also knows that Shay will hate her again as soon as she's cured, but she can't decide if it's worse to have a friend with brain damage or one that hates her.

That nobody tries to make Shay stop complaining illustrates that pretties are, for the most part, allowed to be selfish and can expect to get whatever they want. This explains a lot of Tally's selfishness earlier in the novel—she grew up expecting to be just like this, and so she didn't bother trying to cultivate empathy and kindness within herself. As Tally considers what might happen once Shay is cured, she's forced to again confront the consequences of her betrayal—in this case, being true to Shay means accepting that Shay will probably hate her.



They reach the Rusty Ruins after midnight. David stands outside the hiding spot, looking exhausted. He and Tally embrace and kiss, and he greets Shay. David, unlike the others, doesn't seem to see Shay's beauty. Turning to Tally, David shares that they got Dr. Cable's tablet to work, and that it has all the notes about turning pretties into Specials. It even includes how the brain lesions work. David says that with this, Maddy might be able to find a cure for Shay.

It's likely that David has only seen a few pretties in his lifetime, so his non-reaction to Shay is important. It suggests that Tally, Astrix, and Ryde's stunned reactions to her are learned, not biological—if they were biological, David would react the same way. He simply hasn't learned that he's supposed to fawn over pretty people.



HIPPOCRATIC OATH

The group stays at the edge of the Rusty Ruins. They occasionally see hovercars looking for them, but hiding is easy. Tally sees uglies waving sparklers from midnight until sunrise. Tally, Croy, Astrix, and Ryde meet the uglies and show them the Boss's magazines and Tally's unbreakable handcuffs, which prove that Special Circumstances exists. Maddy decides that they can't keep the brain lesions a secret anymore, so the Smokies share the truth about pretty surgery too. Some uglies seem to believe the story. Maddy locks herself away to work on a cure for the brain lesions and she is especially cool toward Tally. Shay stays and only ever seems annoyed, not bitter. After 20 days, Maddy finds the cure.

Maddy sits Shay down and tells her that during her operation, they did something to her brain. Shay insists that she's happy and likes how she looks, while the uglies are jealous and paranoid. When Maddy asks why Shay hasn't returned to the city, Shay says that she feels bad about getting Tally to go to the Smoke in the first place, and she figures that Tally will grow up and return to the city with her. Maddy assures Shay that the pills will let her decide how she wants to look. Shay is upset that they want to mess with her brain and then says that the Smokies are the crazy ones, not her. She says she's trying to help them by making them understand, but she looks confused when Maddy asks if she's "helping" like she helped Dr. Cable.

Shay says that the Specials are psycho, but if they all turn pretty, the Specials won't mess with them anymore. As pretties, they won't make trouble and they'll be happy. Maddy confirms that Shay won't take the pills willingly. Shay laughs, points out that there's a chance things will go wrong, and says that she has no interest in being jealous and self-important. She suggests that Maddy and Dr. Cable are alike in that they both think they need to change the world. Maddy gets up to leave, which shocks Tally. Maddy explains that they can't give experimental pills to unwilling subjects, but Tally points out that Shay has the lesions, so she isn't full aware anyway. Maddy leads Tally onto the roof and says that they can't sneak the pills to Shay. David notes that Shay is happy and can make her own decisions.

The Boss's magazines allow the remaining Smokies to introduce uglies to a way of life they probably didn't know even existed. While uglies learn in school that the Rusties remained ugly forever, they typically never hear that the Rusties were happy and had fun, as learning those things would require them to humanize their predecessors. By introducing these young uglies to this idea, Tally and her friends are able to plant seeds in the mind of the uglies and show them that it is possible to be an "ugly" and also be happy—as well as beautiful.



Shay's responses show that even though her brain may be compromised, she has a firm grasp of what the uglies have that she doesn't: the ability to experience negative emotions like jealousy and fear. While Shay suggests that these emotions are universally bad and nobody should experience them, it's important to remember that these are part of a normal range of human emotions. Experiencing jealousy is part of being human, and Shay is missing out by not experiencing it.



Though Tally previously acted as though she understood the importance of respecting Shay's autonomy, it's a hard lesson to learn here. David is correct: Shay does seem to be happy, and it's extremely unethical to make the decision to medicate her without her consent. Because of this, Tally has to learn that she can't just respect her friend's autonomy when Shay seems to be all there. She must also accept Shay's choices when they seem wrong and as though they're coming from a questionable place. Essentially, Maddy and David suggests that people always have the right to their own bodies—even if what they want to do doesn't make sense to others.



When Tally notes that the doctors didn't get permission to change Shay's brain the first time, Maddy says that they have to be different—as a doctor, she took an oath to never do unethical things like that. Maddy says that if they knew it'd work, they could give it to Shay, but as it stands, they need a willing test subject. Tally argues that they have to change Shay back, but Maddy says that Az died because Dr. Cable thought like that. David explains that Dr. Cable was concerned that Maddy and Az would talk about the lesions after their operation, so she experimented with ways to erase memories and Az never came back. If they snuck Shay the pills, Shay would be right about Maddy being like Dr. Cable. Feeling responsible for Shay's brain damage, Tally offers herself as a willing test subject.

Learning about how Az died introduces Tally to the consequences of trying to control others' thoughts. Now, being a loyal friend means that Tally must take matters into her own hands with Maddy and David's help. Dr. Cable is clearly cast as an evil person, and it's imperative that Tally not give into the draw of reacting in kind. In this sense, individuality and being in control of her own mind might be difficult, but it gives Tally more freedom than she ever thought possible—both to dictate her own path as well as to help others.



CONFESSIONS

Tally says that she'll willingly go back to the city, get caught, and receive the pretty operation. In a few weeks, Maddy and David can fetch her and test the pills that cure the brain lesions. David is distraught, but Tally insists it'll be easy. He asks what they're supposed to do if the Specials change her memory, but Maddy says they won't since they didn't bother doing so with Shay. Maddy reasons that Dr. Cable won't hurt Tally, and Tally reiterates that she has to do this because she's the reason Shay is pretty right now.

Offering herself up as the test subject is one of the most mature and loyal things Tally could ever do. By doing this, she also has to trust in the loyalty of her friends, as she has to believe that they'll actually sneak in and get her back out of the city. This shows how far Tally has come: she not only wants to keep her mind, but she's willing to risk her life to help others do the same.



Tally admits that she came to the Smoke to betray Shay and she tells David everything. She says she didn't mean to call Special Circumstances, but she's the reason Shay is pretty and Az is dead. Maddy confirms Tally's story and says that Shay confirmed it for her. David angrily asks for the pills so he can give them to Shay, but Maddy refuses to let him become a monster by violating Shay's wishes in this way. David races away, and Maddy says that Tally needs to go to the city tonight. Tally thanks Maddy for letting her tell David herself, but she realizes that Maddy blames her for Az's death.

Maddy blaming Tally for Az's death is another consequence that Tally will have to live with for the rest of her life. Though it's possible that David will forgive her (and for that matter, it's possible that Maddy will too), Tally has to understand that as long as her friends have control of their own minds and experience a full range of emotions, they have every right to be upset with her and blame her for their sorrows.



DOWN THE RIVER

Maddy suggests that Tally put her consent in writing, so Tally asks Shay to write it since Tally never learned penmanship. David is still gone when Tally is done, and she realizes that no matter what, David won't forget what she did. Tally believes that if he comes to get her, this means he'll have forgiven her. Shay begs to come with Tally, and Tally deliberates. She figures that it won't be hard to catch Shay again, and Shay says that it's her fault that Tally isn't pretty already. Tally finally agrees. They take a **hoverboard** together back to the city, accompanied by Croy so he can take their hoverboard back. Croy says nothing until they reach the greenbelt. He asks how Special Circumstances made Tally betray them, and Tally answers that they withheld the pretty operation.

Croy thanks Tally for rescuing him and then heads back up the river. Tally and Shay walk toward Uglyville and Shay chatters about how popular she already is because of her criminal record, but she says they'll have to tone down their story to make it more believable. Tally thinks of her letter and wonders if she'll believe the truth when she returns as a pretty. She also wonders how David will look to her after she's a pretty, and if she'll still remember that people can be beautiful without surgery. Tally wonders if the brain lesions won't develop if she makes a point to miss David. A warden's hovercar passes overhead and stops. The middle pretty looks confused to see a pretty with an ugly. Tally, happy to be causing trouble up until the end, introduces herself and asks to be made pretty.

Now that Tally has undergone such a dramatic transformation, it seems silly and selfish to admit that she betrayed the Smoke for something as superficial as the pretty surgery. This allows Tally to see just how far she's come over the course of the last few months: she now understands how important it is to be loyal, as well as the importance of gathering lots of different information before making decisions. It's also possible that this is as intellectually mature as Tally will ever be—the pills, after all, might not work, and she may never be able to be so reflective and self-aware ever again.



Even if Shay has integrated fully into the New Pretty Town's party scene, it's telling that she's so popular because of her criminal record. This suggests that even though the pretties don't engage in such activity themselves, they still idealize those who do. However, they also despise those so-called criminals for their ugliness. Until Tally's society begins to break down these divisions between pretties and uglies, as well as give everyone the opportunity to choose how they want their future to proceed, it will continue to promote harmful ideas about beauty, worth, and conformity.





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