

# **I Never Promised You a Rose Garden Book Notes**

**I Never Promised You a Rose Garden by Joanne  
Greenberg**

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## Author/Context

Joanne Greenberg was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1932. She graduated from American University in Colorado and then went to the University of London, England. Greenberg writes as a hobby, and she was a sixth-grade teacher's aide by profession.

Greenberg is the author of the novels *The Monday Voices*, *The King's Persons*, *In This Sign*, and *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*, as well as a collection of stories titled *Summering*. Most of her work has been published under the pseudonym Hannah Green.

J. Mitchell Morse said that "Joanne Greenberg is a charming writer, who writes about our current social problems without being doctrinaire or propagandistic or stuffy. Not many writers can do that. It is so difficult, in fact, that most of our best writers don't try. They leave life to the hacks."

*I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*, her account of a teenage girl's struggle against mental illness, is her best-known novel, and several of her other works also deal with the troubles that beset the handicapped. The protagonist of *The Monday Voices* is a man who works for the Department of Rehabilitation and assists the physically handicapped in finding work. *In This Sign* centers on a deaf couple and the problems that they encounter over the span of almost fifty years.

Greenberg received the Harry and Ethel Daroff Memorial Fiction Award as well as the Jewish Book Council of America award in 1963.

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Rev. of *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* by Joanne Greenberg. *The New Republic* February 13, 1971. pp. 135 in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Phyllis Carmel Mendelson and Dedria Bryfonski, Editors. Detroit: Gale Research, Inc., 1977.

# Plot Summary

*I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* is a story about 16-year-old Deborah Blau and her quest for mental health. She has been schizophrenic since her early childhood, but it was only when she slit her wrists that her parents decided to admit her to a mental hospital for treatment.

Once Deborah is a patient at the hospital, she begins intense daily therapy to try to sort out the illusions of the Kingdom of Yr, her alternate reality, and the real world. For three years Deborah fights against the fear of losing her realm of escape, and she and her therapist, Dr. Fried, try to sort through the symptoms of Deborah's illness to get at the root of the problem.

As a child, Deborah was a victim of anti-Semitism at school and at the summer camp to which her parents sent her. In addition to that, she was traumatized by an early childhood surgery that caused her intense physical and emotional pain despite the doctors' promises that it wouldn't hurt at all.

Deborah uses the inner strength that she and Dr. Fried discover among the sickness within her to combat the anger and fear that she feels toward the world. Despite several setbacks in her treatment and moments of sheer desperation, Deborah finally realizes that she belongs to the world of reality and she can live in it happily, if not without some work. She wants to live, and with this new life, she finds that she has formed friendships in the ward.

Deborah realizes that life is not easy or fair, and that sometimes the only way to know that you're living is if you are fighting. But she decides that she'd rather be fighting and alive than resigned to a world that exists only in her mind.

# Major Characters

**Jacob Blau:** Jacob is Deborah's father. He is a Polish immigrant who works hard as an accountant to provide for his family. He has a hard time dealing with Deborah's illness because he thinks it means that he failed her somehow as a parent. Their relationship is one of surface images. As long as Deborah seems fine on the surface, Jacob is happy, but Deborah feels that he doesn't understand her at all. He is quick-tempered and often seems as if he would rather hide from the ugly truth and hope it goes away instead of dealing with it headon the way that his wife does.

**Esther Blau:** Esther is Deborah's mother. Esther loves Deborah and wants her to get well ; it is because of Esther's firmness in their decision to send Deborah to the hospital that Jacob doesn't bring Deborah home as he wishes. Esther had known for a while that there was something wrong with Deborah which all her mothering and trying to smooth over the rough spots in Deborah's life couldn't possibly fix. She is ironically relieved by Deborah's suicide attempt because it proves that Deborah needs help, and so now she can be sent somewhere to get that help and have a chance at recovery.

**Deborah Blau:** Deborah Blau is a 16-year-old Jewish girl suffering from extreme mental illness. Her schizophrenia is the result of years of loneliness and misunderstanding all covered over by the need to pretend that everything is fine to please everyone else. After three years of intense therapy in a mental hospital, she begins to come back to the world and decides to give living in reality a try.

**Dr. Fried (Furii):** Dr. Fried is a German woman esteemed in the field of psychology. She works at the hospital where Deborah is admitted, and she becomes Deborah's doctor. Further into their treatment, Deborah nicknames Dr. Fried Furii because of the fiery power of her insight.

**Suzy Blau:** Suzy is Deborah's younger sister. Deborah carries great guilt about her younger sister because she imagines that she tried to kill Suzy when she was a baby. This false memory is a fantasy that Deborah created as a five-year-old from the feelings of anger she felt toward the new baby. While Deborah's in the hospital, Suzy still feels as if her parents are giving Deborah more attention because they are constantly arguing or worrying about her.

**Grandfather (Pop):** Deborah's over-bearing grandfather on her mother's side is an immigrant from Latvia. He came to America to make a fortune and scorn all those who had ever looked down on his poverty. Once he became rich, he bought a huge house and created this appearance of gentility and breeding in his daughters. Image and vengeance are important to him, and he sees Deborah, his first grandchild, as the way to show the entire world the greatness of his family. He dotes on her and refuses to believe that she is ill until her parents commit her to the hospital.

## Minor Characters

**Anterrabae:** Anterrabae is one of the gods of Yr, and he is eternally falling through darkness. His hair and fingertips are fire and as he falls, the flame tips of his hair curl in the wind. Deborah realizes that she created this god based on the image of Milton's Satan in an illustration she saw in *Paradise Lost*.

**Lactamaeon:** He is the black god of Yr who rides a black horse. He is usually the sarcastic voice.

**Censor:** The Censor is another part of the reality that Deborah has created for herself. The Censor began as a way to protect Yr from being revealed to the world, but eventually he became a facet of both the world and of Yr. The Censor took over control of all that Deborah said and became a dictator.

**The Collect:** The Collect are a group of voices and images that Deborah has amassed from reality over the years and lumped into one large, critical group that exists in Yr. The Collect taunt Deborah with her own self-critical thoughts, but it isn't until she's been in therapy for three years that she realizes that the only power they have over her is that which she gives them with her own self-hate and criticism.

**Hobbs:** He is an intern on the Disturbed ward; the patients see that he fears them because he knows that they are not so far removed from his own state of mind. They taunt him and when he kills himself, they are jealous that he has escaped life while they have not.

**Carla:** Carla is a patient on the Disturbed ward, and she and Deborah become friends. Carla is crazy because her mother killed herself and her brother and Carla was wounded, but lived. She and Deborah bond during their time as patients and they help each other as much as they can through the battles of their own insanity.

**Doris Rivera:** Doris Rivera was mythical to Deborah because she was a patient who got well enough to go out into the world. Hearing about Doris terrifies the D ward so much that they either have to be put in cold packs or isolation rooms because the thought of the real world is so frightening. When Doris returns to the ward, Deborah asks her why she came back and if the world was just too hard.

**Ellis:** He replaces Hobbs as an attendant on the Disturbed ward after Hobbs commits suicide. The patients see that Ellis is not only afraid of them, but he also is a religious fanatic, and he despises them. They call him Hobbs' Leviathan to torment him until McPherson asks Deb to stop giving the new guy a hard time.

**Sylvia:** Sylvia is a woman on the Disturbed ward who doesn't usually speak. Her biggest connection to Deborah is that they were both left in cold packs in the same room for a whole night, and Sylvia spoke kindly to Deborah until the attendants came to remove them from the packs.



**McPherson:** McPherson is one of the few attendants on the Disturbed ward who is unafraid of the patients. He treats them well and makes them feel like his equals rather than looking down on them for their illness; therefore, when he asks Deborah to be nice to Ellis, she does it.

**Miss Coral:** Miss Coral is an incredibly violent old woman who comes to the D ward. While she's there, she teaches Deborah the fragments of Greek and Latin that she can remember, and in this way, the two become friends.

**Dr. Royson:** He is the doctor Deborah sees in Dr. Fried's absence. Deborah doesn't like Royson because he is too cold and is more worried about being right than about helping her get well.

**Dr. Halle:** He is a kind doctor who becomes the D ward administrator. Deborah likes him because he doesn't brush off the patients.

**Carmen:** Carmen is a patient on B ward whose father removes her from the hospital instead of letting her stay and get help. Carmen commits suicide shortly after she leaves, and Deborah is sad because she knows that if Carmen had stayed, she could have gotten better. Seeing what happened to Carmen makes Deborah grateful that her parents let her stay in the hospital.



## Objects/Places

**Kingdom of Yr:** This is an alternate reality that Deborah has created for herself so that she can escape what she views as the anarchy of the world. Deborah used to slip in and out of Yr when she was younger, but as she grew older, it increasingly became the place where she spent most of her time. This is where she goes to remove herself from the threats of the world.

**The Pit:** The Pit is a part of the kingdom of Yr that Deborah created as a punishment. In the Pit there is no meaning, will or feeling. It is a void, and coming out of the Pit is frightening because Deborah's need for meaning comes back before the meaning of things itself returns.

**Tumor:** This tumor became the first mark of what Deborah saw as her difference from other people. The tumor was in her uterus, and so having an operation in such a personal part of her body at such a young age made her feel dirty. The pain of the surgeries to remove the tumor was a very traumatic experience for her because the doctors lied to her about the pain. To punish herself for being deceived, Deborah carried the pain of the tumor with her throughout her life. The phantom tumor caused her excruciating pain until her therapy showed her that she didn't have to punish herself for being wronged.

**Summer Camp:** Deborah went to the summer camp for three years before her parents learned how anti-Semitic it was. Deborah was an outsider there because of her religion, and even the counselors went out of their way to make her feel unwelcome. It was at this camp that she first found Yr as a place to disappear and find some companionship.

**Disturbed Ward:** The Disturbed Ward of the hospital is where the sickest women are sent because they are a threat to themselves or others.

**Cold Pack:** The cold pack is a way to subdue the mental patients whenever they're violent or having a breakdown. The patient is stripped and rolled in wet sheets, then strapped to a bed with restraints. A cold pack is put under the neck and a hot water bottle rests under the feet, and patients are left there for four hours to help them calm down.

**Volcano:** Deborah feels her sickness inside of her as a volcano that is going to erupt. The symptoms of her illness are all ways of hiding the volcano and keeping some semblance of sanity.

# Quotes

Quote 1: "From freedom Deborah Blau smashed headlong into the collision of the two worlds. As always before it was a weirdly silent shattering. In the world where she was most alive, the sun split in the sky, the earth erupted, her body was torn to pieces, her teeth and bones crazed and broken to fragments. In the other place, where the ghosts and shadows lived, a car turned into a side drive and down a road to where an old red-brick building stood." Part 1, Chapter 1, Pg. 12

Quote 2: "Januce" Part 1, Chapter 3, Pg. 20

Quote 3: "one day [she] was walking home from school and Lactamaeon came to her and said, 'Three changes and Their Mirrors, and then Death.'" Part 1, Chapter 8, Pg. 58

Quote 4: "Deborah, watching, saw what would be to her forever after the symbol of the impotence of all mental patients: the blow again, calm and accurate and merciless, and the spitting back again and again." Part 2, Chapter 13, Pg. 100

Quote 5: "I never promised you a rose garden. I never promised you perfect justice . . . and I never promised you peace of happiness. My help is so that you can be free to fight for all of those things. The only reality I offer is challenge, and being well is being free to accept it or not at whatever level you are capable. I never promise lies, and the rose-garden world of perfection is a lie . . . and a bore, too!" Part 2, Chapter 13, Pg. 103

Quote 6: "nganon" Part 2, Chapter 17, Pg. 142

Quote 7: "not sicker. Not sicker at all." Part 3, Chapter 21, Pg. 182

Quote 8: "her presence was making them struggle with Maybes. Suddenly she realized that she was a Doris Rivera, a living symbol of hope and failure and the terror they all felt of their own resiliency and hers, reeling punch-drunk from beating after beating, yet, at the secret bell, up again for more." Part 3, Chapter 29, Pg. 250

# Topic Tracking: Deceit

## Chapter 3

Deceit 1: Deborah's effort to hide Yr from everyone around her is a form of deceit. Much of the deceit that she mentions throughout the story has been contrived to fool her, but this deception is one that she created to protect her fantasy world.

Deceit 2: Deborah is relieved that Dr. Fried will acknowledge the sickness that holds Deborah in its grasp. For years Deborah has had to hear people tell her that there is nothing wrong with her despite the fact that she knows that there is a problem. She is expected to lie and pretend that everything is fine and normal when she knows that it's not.

## Chapter 4

Deceit 3: Deborah's parents lie to her younger sister about where Deborah is. Little white lies of this sort occur throughout the book, and Esther is usually responsible for them. We don't really see how her white lies affected Deborah, but it is interesting to notice Deborah's hatred for deception and the frequency with which her mother manipulates the family with her lies.

## Chapter 5

Deceit 4: Dr. Fried warns Esther not to deceive Deborah because the mentally ill are especially sensitive to lies, and Deborah is no exception. Part of the reason that Deborah escapes to Yr is to evade the deception of the world.

## Chapter 6

Deceit 5: Deborah's doctors lied to her about the painful surgery she underwent to remove a tumor from her uterus when she was five years old. Deborah carried with her both the pain of the operation and then lies; she created these lies in the form of pains from the phantom tumor that she was convinced she still carried inside her.

## Chapter 7

Deceit 6: Even on the B ward there was some level of pretense about mental health, but on the D ward, Deborah was pleased to find that no one was self-conscious about his insanity.

## Chapter 10

Deceit 7: Esther knowingly deceives Jacob concerning Deborah's condition at the hospital because she doesn't want him to worry. She also doesn't want him to take Deborah away from the hospital.



## **Chapter 12**

Deceit 8: Deborah was expected to be the salvation of the family, and she had always been told that she was some great, special person. This inflated expectation for greatness could never be achieved, and when other kids mistreated Deborah, it conflicted with what her family had always told her. They had created a false self-image for her, and when she couldn't live up to who and what she was supposed to be, she thought something was wrong with her.

## **Chapter 16**

Deceit 9: Deborah becomes afraid that Furii will deceive her because Deborah has trusted her with so much. Deborah is used to being let down by the world, so the idea that Furii, a representative of the world, will keep Deborah's confidence is difficult for Deborah to believe. This fear of deception is part of what makes the trust factor so important in a doctor-patient relationship.

## **Chapter 29**

Deceit 10: The last deceit that Deborah tears away is one that she has created for herself. When she realizes that Anterrabae was not her own original creation, she understands that all of Yr was a compilation of ideas not unique to her own mind. With this admission that it wasn't entirely her world, she was able to let it go and cast off the Earth for good.



# Topic Tracking: Fear

## Chapter 1

Fear 1: Esther and Jacob are afraid that they might be making a mistake in leaving Deborah at a mental hospital because the idea is so cruel. But they also know that she needs help, and they don't have many other alternatives. Their fear and Deborah's own fear play a large part in the story.

## Chapter 2

Fear 2: Most of the problems that Deborah faces are rooted in her fear of the world. Her fear of deception, rejection, and loneliness are all parts of the mental illness that she fights. At this point of the story, Deborah is afraid of what will happen if she reveals the secrets of Yr to anyone. Yr is where she hides from what hurts or scares her, and if she opens that world to anyone else, it may destroy it. What will happen to her if her refuge is annihilated?

## Chapter 3

Fear 3: Deborah hears the voices of the Collect telling her that she'll be crazy forever and that she'll never be able to leave the hospital. The Collect is the sound of her own fear echoing through her brain.

## Chapter 4

Fear 4: Deborah's own fear isn't all that threatens her recovery. Deborah doesn't want to see Jacob because she knows that he is afraid of the hospital. She knows that being there is good for her because they acknowledge her illness, so she doesn't have to pretend to be well when she's not. But if Jacob sees her, he might not let her stay there anymore, and so she refuses to see him when her mother comes to visit.

## Chapter 9

Fear 5: The entire Disturbed ward is terrified by the story of Doris Rivera, the patient who made it back out into the real world. The idea that they might one day have to face the world outside of the hospital sends many of them into fits and breakdowns because they are so sick that the thought of life in reality is terrifying.

## Chapter 11

Fear 6: Hobbs' fear of the similarity between himself and the women of the Disturbed ward finally drives him to commit suicide. Ellis comes to replace Hobbs, and the same fear is visible in his eyes. His fear stems from the fact that the only thing that separates him from the women of the ward is the key that he carries to unlock the ward door.

## Chapter 18



Fear 7: Deborah is afraid that her poisoned essence will infect Carla, and because she cares for Carla, Deborah has to protect her friend from the poison. Because of this concern, she withdraws from Carla for a while.

### **Chapter 21**

Fear 8: Deborah is afraid that if she gives in completely to her anger, she could hurt someone. So her great tantrum is partly the anger that has been building up in her over a lifetime, but it's also partly caused by her fear that she can't control that great anger. But what she doesn't realize is that she is controlling it in some way.

### **Chapter 22**

Fear 9: Deborah's fear of the outside world lessens slightly when she realizes that she is going to live. She isn't hiding from it anymore. Now she's embracing life and working at her own recovery.

### **Chapter 26**

Fear 10: Deborah is afraid of the love and kindness that her parents have shown her by letting her stay in the hospital where she can get help. The reason that these emotions scare her is because she expects deception and betrayal from the world; it scares her to find that such wonderful things exist in the same world that holds lying doctors and hateful children.



# Topic Tracking: Friendship

## Chapter 5

Friendship 1: Esther talks about how Deborah had a difficult time making friends as a child, so Esther would try to butter up the popular girls and get them to like Deborah.

## Chapter 6

Friendship 2: Deborah was a lonely child, and that loneliness is what drove her to create an alternate reality to escape the cruel solitude of the world in which she lived. Friendship is a very fragile thing with Deborah because it's been such a rarity in her life.

## Chapter 7

Friendship 3: Lee offers friendship to Deborah when Deborah is moved up to the D ward for the first time. Deborah admires Lee's courage to be kind to someone she doesn't know, but friendship is so new to Deborah that she doesn't even know how to thank Lee for it.

## Chapter 8

Friendship 4: It was easy for Deborah to recede into Yr because she felt as if she belonged there, whereas there was no other place she belonged because she had no friends. So even in the midst of a crowd of people her age, Yr was more attractive because she knew that she was welcomed there.

## Chapter 9

Friendship 5: Deborah feels the first rays of friendship when Carla has the chance to hurt her and doesn't. Deborah isn't sure how to feel about this unexpected kindness because she's not used to having friends.

## Chapter 10

Friendship 6: Carla and Deborah are becoming pals by breaking the rules together. Their common enemy -- the rules of the D ward -- unites them in their plan to have fun despite the rules.

## Chapter 15

Friendship 7: Deborah and Carla have become friends during their time together on D ward, so when Carla is moved down to B ward, Deborah is sad. To avoid the pain of loss, she retreats to Yr and tries to remove all the feelings of kindness and friendship she felt for Carla because she believes that her friend is gone forever.

## Chapter 16



Friendship 8: While Deborah and Sylvia are packed in the same room, Sylvia talks with Deborah until the attendants come to unwrap them. Given that Sylvia doesn't usually talk, Deborah feels privileged to be the person to whom Sylvia. Such a confidence is like a gift of friendship, and Deborah is grateful for it.

### **Chapter 17**

Friendship 9: Deborah made a friend at summer camp, and it was another girl who was just as sick as she. At the time, the illness scared Deborah because she had not yet been allowed to acknowledge her condition. Her fear made her isolate herself from the one friend she had made there.

### **Chapter 23**

Friendship 10: Deborah helps calm Carla without even realizing what she's doing. Such an act of thoughtless friendship surprises Deborah, but it also makes her proud of herself.

### **Chapter 27**

Friendship 11: Deborah shares her dream about Carla's creativity, and it makes Carla happy. Deborah realizes that she has the power to help her friend, and she is learning what it means to be a friend to someone.



# Chapter 1

Jacob Blau and his wife, Esther, are taking their teenage daughter to a mental hospital. As they travel to the hospital, Deborah drifts between reality, which seems a dream to her, and her own world, the Kingdom of Yr. In this kingdom she has created her own gods and rulers. Anterrabae, the Falling God, who is eternally falling. He has fire in his hair and fingertips, and he comforts Deborah by allowing her to fall with him in the darkness. There is also Lactamaeon, the black god who rides a black horse. Although Deborah's doctor advised the Blaus to seek a hospital for their daughter, Jacob isn't sure that this is the best idea. Esther insists that they must do as the doctor instructed and at least give the hospital a try. Meanwhile, Deborah sits in the backseat of the car as they turn into the driveway of the mental hospital.

*"From freedom Deborah Blau smashed headlong into the collision of the two worlds. As always before it was a weirdly silent shattering. In the world where she was most alive, the sun split in the sky, the earth erupted, her body was torn to pieces, her teeth and bones crazed and broken to fragments. In the other place, where the ghosts and shadows lived, a car turned into a side drive and down a road to where an old red-brick building stood."* Part 1, Chapter 1, Pg. 12

Topic Tracking: Fear 1

## Chapter 2

Jacob and Esther make up a story for the members of their family who cannot handle the truth of Deborah's illness. Esther is actually relieved that Deborah tried to slit her wrists because it finally uncovers her sickness, which Esther suspected for a while. Now that Deborah is getting help, she hopes that the uneasiness and worry that has hung over their family will dissipate.

Dr. Fried, a German psychologist, agrees to treat Deborah in the hope that she can help the girl recover enough to enjoy the life that lies ahead of her.

At the hospital Deborah is interviewed by an admitting doctor, and she defies the Yri Censor by answering the doctor's questions honestly. The doctor's questions and her own answers make Deborah afraid, and she recedes into Yr again.

Topic Tracking: Fear 2

## Chapter 3

On the ward at the hospital, Deborah could sometimes look out onto the real world from Yr. This brought to mind the moment that revealed the first hints of Deborah's illness. Deborah had written the name "Januce" Part 1, Chapter 3, Pg. 20 on the heading of her paper at school. She had taken the name Januce in Yr because she was looking out on the world and also on Yr simultaneously, and so she felt like the two-faced Greek god. When Deborah's teacher had asked her about the name, she lied to hide the world she'd created in her mind. After that, a Censor was created to guard the secrets of Yr from the earthly world and its members. Deborah knew then that the tiniest slip of the tongue could shatter the kingdom, and so the Censor was put in place to protect Yr. But over time the Censor began to intrude upon the earthly world and monitor Deborah's speech and actions there as well.

Topic Tracking: Deceit 1

In Deborah's simple life on the ward she can exist in and out of reality. When she sees the other women on the B ward of the hospital, she wonders if anyone ever really gets well and leaves the hospital. In her mind, she can hear the Collect screaming at her that she'll always be crazy and she'll stay in the hospital forever.

Topic Tracking: Fear 3

Deborah meets Dr. Fried and they have their first session. Dr. Fried tells Deborah that she believes that if they work very hard together, Deborah will get well. To ease Deborah's fear, the doctor also explains that she will not pull away any of the symptoms of Deborah's illness until the girl is ready to let go of them. Deborah is relieved that someone finally acknowledges that she is really sick instead of telling her that there's nothing wrong with her when she knows that there really is a problem.

Topic Tracking: Deceit 2

## Chapter 4

They tell Suzy, Deborah's younger sister, that Deborah is at a convalescent school. Esther's father disagrees with putting Deborah into a mental hospital because he sees so much of himself in the girl's acid wit and stubbornness that he can't accept the idea that she might be ill. She is his favorite granddaughter. Eventually, however, Esther's parents come to accept Jacob and Esther's decision to get help for their daughter, but only after Esther's sister -- the family favorite -- suggests that maybe Deborah is ill.

Topic Tracking: Deception 3

Jacob and Esther want to visit Deborah, so they write to the hospital. When Dr. Fried asks Deborah if she'd like to see her parents, Deborah withdraws. She eventually agrees to see her mother, but she doesn't want to see Jacob. She doesn't explain that she doesn't want to see him because she knows that his fear might overcome him and he might take her away from the hospital where she's finally getting help.

Topic Tracking: Fear 4

After answering the doctor, Deborah falls away into the Pit in Yr where she exists without thought, feeling, or will. Nothing exists in the Pit, not even meaning. When she's in the Pit, she is unaware of the world outside of the void she's in, and coming out of this state is frightening and disorienting for her.

Jacob is hurt that Deborah won't see him, but he insists on driving Esther to the hospital anyway.

## Chapter 5

When Esther comes to visit Deborah, she meets and talks with Dr. Fried. In an attempt to illuminate Deborah's past, Esther tells the doctor about her own life and the family's situation. She explains that her father, Pop's, immigration to America has affected the entire family. He came to America to get rich and make his family a dynasty, and so his expectations for his children and their children dominated their lives. Pop set all his hopes on Deborah because she was his first grandchild, and she was blonde. He expected her to show the world that he was a success.

But when Deborah was five years old, they learned that she wasn't as perfect as they expected her to be. She had a tumor that had to be removed. After two surgeries and great pain for the little girl, the tumor was gone.

When Deborah was a little older they sent her to a summer camp. It wasn't until she'd been to the camp for three summers that they discovered that the camp was highly anti-Semitic. Deborah also had trouble in school because she didn't make friends easily. To help her daughter out, Esther took the popular girls to the zoo. She would invite the teachers that Deborah had trouble with to tea. Esther did all she could to smooth out the rough spots of Deborah's life, but the girl was still alone.

Topic Tracking: Friendship 1

Esther can't figure out what she and Jacob did wrong to make their daughter sick. Dr. Fried assures her that no one caused Deborah's illness, but she also warns the mother not to lie to Deborah because deceit is intolerable to the mentally ill, Deborah especially.

Topic Tracking: Deceit 4

Deborah still won't see Jacob, so he spies on Esther and their daughter while they're at the movies.

## Chapter 6

Dr. Fried asks Deborah about the tumor and the surgery. Deborah recounts the memories of the way that the doctors lied to her about the pain of the surgery, promising that it wouldn't hurt when it was actually excruciating. She also remembers the shame of having something wrong with her in such a private part of her body. The tumor made her feel dirty and diseased. As self-inflicted punishment for being wrongly made and then deceived by the doctors, Deborah felt the pain of tumor long after it was removed. Dr. Fried was indignant for the child that Deborah had been, and Deborah was surprised that she cared enough to be angry with the lying doctors.

Topic Tracking: Deceit 5

During the discussion, Deborah let a Yri word slip, and in a panic, she slipped away into the Pit out of fear that she'd have to tell its secrets to the doctor.

During their next session, Deborah struggles back from Yr to tell Dr. Fried about school and the summer camp where she was an outsider from the beginning because she was Jewish. Her isolation had caused Yr's creation, but she didn't tell the doctor that.

Topic Tracking: Friendship 2

That night on the ward, Deborah cut her arm with the ragged lid of a tin can. She was moved up to the Disturbed ward.

## Chapter 7

On the Disturbed ward, Lee, another patient there, comforts Deborah by speaking to her. Deborah realizes that it takes great courage for Lee to reach out of her own illness to speak to Deborah, but Deborah doesn't know how to thank her for it. Deborah also notices that the D ward is more comfortable for her because up there everyone is crazy, and there's no need to pretend that they aren't. Even on the B ward she was on before, there was some pretense of sanity, but on D ward the women get in fights with the attendants and throw beds and act as crazy as they really are.

Topic Tracking: Deceit 6

Topic Tracking: Friendship 3

When Deborah shows Dr. Fried the cut on her arm, Dr. Fried isn't frightened by it the way that most people are when sickness manifests itself in self-mutilation. In return for the doctor's understanding, Deborah tells her about Yr and its secret language. Deborah explains that Yr was created to fill the void of loneliness that Deborah lived in at school and at camp. Then she explains how Yr became not only a place of refuge for her, but also a place of punishment. She says that the cruelty that Yr could exert on her proved that it was as real as the world. Dr. Fried doesn't judge her for her secrets, and when Deborah leaves the appointment that day, she is surprised to see that the world has not ended.

That night, however, the nonexistent tumor flares up and she descends into the Pit. When she wakes, she is in a cold pack, which is a method that mental hospitals used to help patients calm down. Deborah is surprised to find that when she emerged from the Pit while in the pack, there is no pain and she feels better.

## Chapter 8

Jacob and Esther get the monthly letter from the hospital reporting Deborah's move to the Disturbed ward. Worried, she writes to Dr. Fried, and Dr. Fried warns them not to let their fear interfere with Deborah's treatment.

At Deborah's session, Dr. Fried points out the trend that whenever Deborah reveals one of her secrets to the doctor, she escapes to Yr in fear. Deborah sees the doctor's point, and so she explains that "one day [she] was walking home from school and Lactamaeon came to her and said, '*Three changes and Their Mirrors, and then Death.*'"

Part 1, Chapter 8, Pg. 58

Deborah had figured out what the changes and their mirrors were, and she explains to Dr. Fried that the first change was the nightmare that she had before her first surgery as a five-year-old. Her dream had told her that she would be as strong and healthy as the red flower in the pot on the windowsill. Beyond the window, the sky turned from blue to gray and a rock thrown from outside the window broke the flower pot. The red flower lay among the broken pieces of pottery with its roots exposed. The mirror of that change came when she was older. She was walking home as a teenager and she saw a broken flower pot lying on the sidewalk with its red flower spilled amid the pottery fragments.

The second change was when she was at camp for the first time and she told on a girl who had said that she couldn't walk with them because she was a Jew. Because Deborah didn't know the girls very well, she got their names confused and told on the wrong girl. That night at the campfire, a counselor had warned the campers about the girl who told lies and used her religion as a way to make people feel sorry for her. After that, Deborah was an outcast at the camp, and Yr came to her to replace the friendship she lacked. The mirror of that change came years later when she was in a crowded car with people her own age and she'd heard Anterrabae calling to her to join the world she belonged to. She made them stop the car and let her out so that she could go find where she really belonged.

Topic Tracking: Friendship 4

The third change had been when her family moved to an apartment in Chicago. Her mother expected the change to be for the best, but Deborah's illness grew worse in the city. The mirror of the change was when Deborah had been walking home from a doctor's appointment only to realize that she'd lost a day. She was running from something unknown and a police officer stopped her to see if she was okay. She'd known that the changes and their mirrors had come, and so she was at peace because she knew that death was nearby. That was the night she'd tried to slit her wrists and been caught by her mother.

After Deborah's explanation, Dr. Fried points out that Deborah has found somewhere other than Yr to belong now that her sickness has been acknowledged. In her illness, Deborah has found a group to belong to on the D ward.



Hobbs is a new intern on the ward, and the women harass him constantly because they can see his fear. They can tell that he is one of them who hasn't been locked up yet, and so they torment him.

## Chapter 9

Deborah and Dr. Fried try to talk about what was going on in the world during the times that Deborah spent in Yr, but Deborah couldn't remember anything but darkness. Deborah had been interested in sketching when she was younger, and she was a promising artist. She shares a memory with the doctor about a time when one of her drawings fell out of her sketchbook amid a group of other children. When a little boy tried to get her to claim the piece, she refused it. She accuses the children of forcing her to deny her work, and Dr. Fried points out that that was only the way she saw it and not really the way that it happened.

Deborah draws a picture for Dr. Fried during her appointment, and Dr. Fried tells her that creative strength that is strong enough to grow even through such a sickness is a healthy thing.

Carla, a B ward patient is moved up to D ward. When she and Deborah talk about how long they've been in the hospital, Carla mentions Doris Rivera. Doris was a patient that Carla had known, and Doris had gotten well enough to leave the hospital and go out into the world. Those who overhear the conversation are as frightened by the thought of going out into the world as Deborah is. That night many of the women on the ward are either put into packs or isolation. Deborah feels the descent into the Pit coming on and asks an attendant to put her in a pack. When she wakes up, Carla is bundled up in a pack in the same room. Carla says that she thinks the ward went crazy that night because of Doris Rivera and the idea of the real world. Deborah says something cruel to Carla to deny the truth that Carla unearthed. After a few minutes, Deborah feels bad for hurting Carla, and so she apologizes, which is a difficult thing for Deborah to do. When Carla forgives her, Deborah realizes that she is more afraid of the fact that Carla could've hurt her and chose not to than she is of Doris Rivera and the world outside the hospital.

Topic Tracking: Fear 5

Topic Tracking: Friendship 5

## Chapter 10

When Jacob finds out that Deborah is on the Disturbed ward, it bothers him, but Esther placates him for a while longer, and Suzy is angry because even when Deborah's not present, she's still holding her parents' full attention. Esther goes to visit the hospital, hoping to see Deborah, but she isn't allowed to. When she gets home, she lies to Jacob to make him feel better. He insists that the next time she goes to the hospital, he's going with her and he's going to see Deborah.

Topic Tracking: Deceit 7

Meanwhile Deborah and Carla plan a scheme for Deborah to get forbidden paper and a pencil to sketch Carla's portrait. Uniting against the ward attendants to break the rules gives them companionship and camaraderie that they both need.

Topic Tracking: Friendship 6

In a session, Deborah goes on and on to Dr. Fried about the poisonous of her essence, of the substance that makes her who she is. Deborah claims that it infects others with her madness, and she fears that she has destroyed Suzy with it. Deborah admits that when her younger sister was born, Deborah hated her. She even went so far as to try to throw her out the window, but her mother caught her. Nothing else was ever said about the incident in her family, but Deborah knows that Suzy is going to be sick, too, because of her contact with Deborah. Deborah explains that the sickness is a volcano burning inside and the symptoms of the sickness are what camouflages the illness itself.

## Chapter 11

Hobbs commits suicide, and the patients on the Disturbed ward envy his escape from the torment of life. His replacement, Ellis, is just as afraid as Hobbs had been, and so the patients prod at his fear as well. While the women are talking about Ellis, Sylvia speaks. Sylvia usually just stands in the hallway and drools, so when she speaks, everyone stops in surprise. Lee goes to the nurses' station to tell them to call Sylvia's doctor because she spoke. Deborah admires Lee's willingness to step out of herself where she's safe and help another patient on the ward, but at the same time, that idea of dealing with reality for the sake of someone else frightens Deborah. She tries to flee to Yr, but Anterrabae won't let her because she has made a favorable connection with earth. When she wakes up from the Pit in a cold pack she hears Anterrabae warn her not to favor earth too much or she will lose Yr.

Topic Tracking: Fear 6

McPherson, an attendant who actually treats the patients with kindness and respect, senses the storm that's brewing between Ellis and the women of the ward. To prevent an explosion, he asks Deborah to be nice to Ellis. This request makes her feel like his equal, and she's proud of that, so she complies.

## Chapter 12

Dr. Fried brings up Deborah's volcano metaphor for her illness and uses it to show Deborah that she created Yr as a symptom of her sickness. The discussion leads to talking about Pop's pretentious expectations for Deborah. He always told her that she was special, and he expected her to be his vengeance against the shame of his early poverty. Her cleverness and sarcasm might have fooled the adults who knew her, but the kids her age weren't impressed. She was ostracized for her religion, and she realized that the specialness that her grandfather always said she had was also the difference that alienated her from other children.

Topic Tracking: Deceit 8

Deborah is descending into the Pit and she describes the gray bars that block her vision when she is enduring the punishment. There is someone in white that offers her food that she doesn't eat and there is a lonely coldness, too. Dr. Fried connects the description with the time during Deborah's childhood when her mother went away after miscarrying twins. She left Deborah with a nurse, and that is the memory that Deborah carries with her along with a feeling of abandonment. Dwelling on the memory for so long has given it greater emphasis than similar memories have for other people. Deborah is relieved to find the source of the partial-blindness of the Pit. Dr. Fried is so happy at her progress, that she touches Deborah on the arm, and it frightens the girl. Deborah looks down at her arm where Dr. Fried touched it and imagines that the hand of all that insight and power has burned her.

## Chapter 13

After that session, Deborah bounces back and forth between reality and Yr. Anterrabae warns her that her substance is poisonous to all earth-ones, and Deborah wants to die because of her own vileness. She wakes in a cold pack and Helene, a violent patient, is in a pack next to Deborah's. When Ellis comes in to check their vital signs, Helene resists, and so he hits her repeatedly in the face while Helene can only spit back at him. "Deborah, watching, saw what would be to her forever after the symbol of the impotence of all mental patients: the blow again, calm and accurate and merciless, and the spitting back again and again." Part 2, Chapter 13, Pg. 100

Deborah feels obligated to tell the ward administrator what happened to Helene despite how vulnerable it makes her. When she tells him, he just brushes her off, so she tells Furi, her nickname for Dr. Fried since the woman's touch had burned her arm. Furi promises to look into it, but doesn't promise any results. Deborah gets mad at the injustice, and Furi says:

*"I never promised you a rose garden. I never promised you perfect justice . . . and I never promised you peace of happiness. My help is so that you can be free to fight for all of those things. The only reality I offer is challenge, and being well is being free to accept it or not at whatever level you are capable. I never promise lies, and the rose-garden world of perfection is a lie . . . and a bore, too!"* Part 2, Chapter 13, Pg. 103

## Chapter 14

Jacob and Esther come to visit and insist on seeing Deborah. The girl is withdrawn and disheveled, and the changes in her frighten her parents because they don't know when or if she will ever get better.

After meeting with her parents, Deborah talks to Furii about her father and how he has never understood her. He also always warned her overzealously about lustful men to the point that he made her uncomfortable. Furii suggests that maybe his warnings have to do with his own desires, and this makes sense to Deborah. This awkwardness in their relationship combined with misunderstandings and beatings over trivial things make her fearful of him. She keeps her distance from him.

Looking at the fear in Jacob in light of Furii's explanation, Deborah had a break-through. Her fears of her father had grown with time and emphasis just like the memory of her mother leaving had also grown into some huge shadow. After the break-through, Deborah begins to retreat to Yr, and Furii promises that if they continue their work together to show Deborah what real mental health is, Deborah will be able to make her own choice between the world or Yr.

On the ward, Miss Coral arrives. When Deborah learns that the old woman is educated, Deborah asks Miss Coral to teach her Greek and Latin. Miss Coral agrees to teach what little she remembers.

## Chapter 15

Deborah studies the languages that Miss Coral can teach her, but when Deborah realizes that knowing all the facts in the world doesn't make her any less crazy, she withdraws from the world of the ward for three months. Her nightmares wake her up screaming, so she is moved to the back of the ward with the other restless sleepers. Only when she is able to send one of her roommates back to bed very matter-of-factly does she begin to realize her own strength. She soon rejoins the ward by leaving her room, and Miss Coral and Carla are happy to see her. But when Carla tells Deborah that she's moving down to B ward, Deborah realizes that friendship with Carla has made her vulnerable to the pain of separation. Deborah retreats to Yr to avoid the pain of saying goodbye to her friend. Then when Miss Coral tells Deborah that she has no more to teach, Deborah is saddened. But the final twist of the knife is when Miss Coral tells her that Ellis can teach her if she wishes to learn more. With that news, the tumor begins to throb.

Topic Tracking: Friendship 7



## Chapter 16

Deborah tells Furiu another secret. Deborah admits that she was a captured Japanese soldier during World War II. That was an explanation for her otherness at the time because Deborah was the enemy, and although she was Japanese, no one ever recognized her.

That night Deborah feels a breakdown coming on and asks for help. When she wakes up in the pack, Sylvia is in the room with her. They stay in the pack for so long that Deborah is in pain, and Sylvia talks to her until the attendants come to unwrap them.

Topic Tracking: Friendship 8

Deborah realizes that the last of the deceptions hasn't happened yet, and so she knows that Furiu will be the deceiver because Deborah has revealed so many of her secrets to Furiu. In her next session, she tells Furiu that she knows it's coming. Furiu promises to prove her trustworthiness, but the only proof she can offer is time.

Topic Tracking: Deceit 9

## Chapter 17

Doris Rivera comes back to the ward, and Deborah is disappointed that her myth has relapsed to madness. Deborah wants to know why Doris had to come back, but she never gets her answer.

Deborah hurts her ankle and has to go to a medical hospital where people stare at her because they know she is a mental patient. When Deborah tells Furi about the way they treated her, Furi warns that she will have to get used to that and try to help people on the outside understand mental illness. Deborah insists that she can't help them because she can only infect them with her poisonous "nganon" Part 2, Chapter 17, Pg. 142. This same essence that infects healthy people also attracts people who are suffering like she is. She tells Furi of a girl at the camp where she was ostracized. That girl was an outcast, also, and she and Deborah took comfort in each other. Deborah ended their friendship when the girl asked her to beat her with a belt. Deborah was frightened by the outright admittance of illness, but she knows that if the same thing happened to her on the ward, she wouldn't be frightened. The relief of knowing that she is crazy is a great comfort when people told her for so long that there was nothing wrong with her.

Topic Tracking: Friendship 9

After Deborah tells Furi this story, they talk about the contradiction of Deborah's helplessness and her all-powerful nganon. Slowly Furi is leading Deborah to look at the world outside of her and the alternate reality she has created.

## Chapter 18

Spring comes and Carla returns to D ward. She tells Deborah that she just tried too much at once this time, and Deborah can't help but wonder why people keep standing up only to get knocked back down by the world again. Deborah also worries that her nganon might poison Carla, so she withdraws and waits for the final deception and death.

Topic Tracking: Fear 7

Furii warns Deborah that she will be gone for three months for vacation, and Deborah will see Dr. Royson while Furii is gone. Deborah feels doomed.

## Chapter 19

Deborah tries to get everything resolved before Furi leaves; she even moves down to the B ward, but there is too much work to be done to finish it all before Furi's vacation. Then when Deborah meets Dr. Royson, he is too stiff and cold to be of much help to her. Deborah begins to stew on the inside and she decides to light a backfire to keep the volcano inside her from erupting. She burns the inside of her elbow with cigarettes, and she's sent back to D ward. After four days in a cold pack, she returns to her old bed on the Disturbed ward, but she doesn't understand what made her snap out of the blackness of the Pit. Then the idea comes to her that perhaps Yr only gives her as much as she can handle. While she ponders the idea, she prepares for another backfire.

## Chapter 20

Deborah begins to burn herself repeatedly without any of the ward attendants noticing. Just when they are going to move her back down to B ward, a place where she could burn herself to death before getting caught, she shows Dr. Halle, the new and kind D ward administrator the new burns. Confused at how she has prevented her perfect suicide, Deborah falls into the Pit again.

When she wakes from the pack, Furi is back. Deborah is ashamed at her condition, and she tells Furi of the self-loathing that has taken over. Furi blames part of the regression on Deborah's anger that Furi left. They set up an appointment for the next day.

Esther comes to the hospital and learns about the burns. She is shocked, but her hopelessness is lessened when Dr. Fried explains that she wouldn't be working with Deborah if she didn't see the chance of recovery.

## Chapter 21

Deborah's volcano finally erupts. She has violent fit that includes writing a Yri word for "anger" on the bathroom wall in blood from her cut finger. She thrashes and screams Yri and English mixed while they restrain her in a cold pack. When she talks with Furi about the fit, Furi points out that her tantrum had been anger, but had also been fear that she couldn't control that anger. Yet she had found a way to control it by placing herself where she wouldn't hurt anyone else and also exploding on a night when the nurse on duty was one that was compassionate and kind. Even in her sickness and fear, Deborah had found some control for her anger.

Topic Tracking: Fear 8

The next day she overhears a nurse say that Deborah seems crazier now than when she arrived on the ward. Furi asks her if she believes that's true, and after some thought, Deborah says, "not sicker. Not sicker at all." Part 3, Chapter 21, Pg. 182

## Chapter 22

Deborah notices that the ward attendants seem nicer to her, and Furii points out that her mask of anger and indifference has fallen away since the great volcano explosion. Now Deborah knows when the anger is coming on, and she asks for a pack ahead of time. She feels better although she is packed at least once a day.

One night in the bathroom, all the voices of earth and Yr are silent as she looks out the window. She begins to see color and realizes for the first time that she is going to live.

Topic Tracking: Fear 9

After this epiphany, she and Furii work to dismantle the fantasies of Deborah's make-believe world. They dissect the fantasy that Deborah was a Japanese soldier and reduce it to Deborah's feeling of foreignness and violence. It also has a connection to anger and martyrdom, both of which are manifestations of her loneliness at camp and at school. These aspects of the fantasy are also an apt description of Pop, her domineering grandfather.

## Chapter 23

Deborah is improving steadily and moves down to B ward where she is Carla's roommate. Carla came back for a rest from the world, and she and Deborah enjoy each other's company. Deborah begins to see the beauty in the world and realizes that if she is going to live, then she must be of the same substance as people of the world. That means that she cannot taint anyone with her poisonous essence, and she is relieved.

She and Furi discuss the impossibility of her attempt to kill Suzy. Deborah is relieved to remember that, while she wanted to kill her sister in the way that all small children jealously want to kill the rival for their parents' attention, she never made any attempt on Suzy's life.

At dinner Deborah notices that Carla's hands are trembling, and without thinking, Deborah reaches out to hold Carla's hands. The impulsive act of kindness suggests to Deborah that she might even be a good person, which is a thought that has never occurred to her before.

Topic Tracking: Friendship 10

As much as Deborah likes the world, she still wants Yr to be available to her, but she thinks that it has gone away.



## Chapter 24

Deborah dreams that a fist holds three pieces of coal and as it applies pressure, the coals get hotter and hotter. Deborah feels as if she is one of coals. Just when she thinks the pressure of the fist will make her burst, the fist opens to reveal three diamonds. A voice tells her that this will be her.

## Chapter 25

Deborah goes home for a visit, but all the people and conversation are overwhelming for her when compared with life at the hospital. Amidst all that placating, Deborah wishes that Yr -- the kingdom of beauty that existed before the punishment and brutality took over -- still existed.

## Chapter 26

Carmen is a new patient on B ward, and Carla and Deborah befriend her. On Sunday, when Carmen's father comes to visit, Deborah and Carla go for a walk outside. Enjoying their freedom, they walk farther than they are allowed to, and as they return to the hospital, two attendants try to escort them in. Too happy in their freedom, Deborah and Carla escape back outside and run away. They return later that night after their adventure. They are separated and sent to the ward administrator, but luckily for them, Dr. Halle is filling in for the absent ward administrator. When they tell him about their adventure, he seems happy that they've found friendship in the hospital, and he does not punish them for breaking the rules.

They want to tell Carmen what happened, but they find out that her father took her away. Deborah realizes how lucky she is that her parents let her stay although she showed no signs of what they would see as improvement. Her gratitude overwhelms her, and their love and kindness scares her.

Topic Tracking: Fear 10

## Chapter 27

Deborah learns that Carmen has committed suicide, and she's angry because she thinks that Carmen could have gotten better. Deborah realizes that living means fighting. If she acknowledges the sickness and fights against it, that is living.

Carla takes another go at the world outside, and Deborah decides that it's time for her to take the leap as well. She moves into a boarding house and joins a church choir and a sewing group, but she still feels isolated in the small town where the hospital is located. She talks to Furi about how she can look back on her past and see more light than she could when she first arrived at the hospital. Now she can see some of what was happening in the world around her while she was hiding in Yr. And the more she looks at the gods of Yr, the more she sees that their beauty is the beautiful part of who she is. In the same way, the hatred and criticism of the Collect are her own harsh criticisms of herself.

Deborah talks about how whenever she talks about her art, Carla seems closed off. Then Deborah has a dream that she discovers the bone of Carla's creativity. When she shares that dream with Carla, her friend cries and is happy because she's never had a creative outlet, but she's always wanted one. Deborah sees that she has taken her talent for granted until then, and now she has helped her friend. She is becoming part of the world.

Topic Tracking: Friendship 11

## Chapter 28

Deborah is unable to get a job because she didn't graduate from high school. The idea of three more years in a high school at 19-years-old causes anxiety to build so that when a social worker at the hospital tells her about the equivalency exams, her relief is so sudden and so frightening, that Deborah is readmitted to the Disturbed ward.

Once she's back, she tries to burn herself, but she can't do it because she can feel the pain now. She is happy to know that burning is painful because it means that she is well enough to feel things.

Deborah explains to Furii that Yr is no longer the predictable world that it once was. Now earth is more predictable, and she had created Yr to escape the anarchy of earth in the first place. Now it seems that the two worlds have switched places.

Deborah prepares to leave the ward and take the equivalency exam preparation course as soon as possible. She's going back out to try again.

## Chapter 29

Deborah, with much hard work, passes her equivalency exams with a high enough score to apply to college. She is proud when she calls to tell her parents, but her father's pathetic pride in her accomplishment reminds her that other people accomplish this task with ease. She walks to the town high school and sees the younger people still there after school, and she is reminded again of her otherness. She sees a young couple and thinks that she'll never have that.

She makes it to the hospital and gets packed on the D ward. At dinner, another patient throws her dish at Deborah, and then Deborah realizes that :

*"her presence was making them struggle with Maybes. Suddenly she realized that she was a Doris Rivera, a living symbol of hope and failure and the terror they all felt of their own resiliency and hers, reeling punch-drunk from beating after beating, yet, at the secret bell, up again for more."* Part 3, Chapter 29, Pg. 250

The last of Yr's holds on Deborah fades away when she remembers that Anterrabae, her Falling God was an image that she'd found in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Even that image had been a projection of some earthly thing into her make-believe kingdom. Deborah decides then to let Yr go and give her full commitment to surviving in the world.

Topic Tracking: Deceit 10