

Meeting: Nov 08, 2011 — 7:30 pm @ Dianne's

321 pages – 5 Chapters:

**Presents** p1 – 50 pages – 4 days.

- Jack turns five (on a Saturday) and receives a 'surprise' present—a drawing of him asleep— from his Ma which they decide he should tack up on the back of Wardrobe
- Old Nick visits on the second night (Sunday night) and brings Jack blue jeans
- Jack and Ma fight three times – On Tuesday morning Jack wakes up to find that Nick has brought him a remote-control jeep as a birthday present. Tuesday night Jack goes to bed with the remote and activates the Jeep from inside the wardrobe which falls off the shelf over the bed and smashes into Old Nick who then leaves angry.

**Unlying** p51 – 50 pages – 8 days.

- On Wednesday morning Jack apologizes about making the Jeep fall down but learns that the real problem is that he scared Old Nick who thought it was 'Ma' attacking him.
- Jack sees a TV ad for pills his Ma takes and learns from her that "What we see on TV is...it's pictures of real things." Jack wants his Ma to explain but she can't find the words.
- On Thursday Ma is Gone, "here but not really here" and Jack fend for himself.
- On Friday they do their regular routine and while Jack is sleeping the trash is taken away by Old Nick.
- On Saturday night Old Nick comes and tells Ma she doesn't appreciate "how good you've got it here."
- On Sunday Ma's bad tooth falls out. That night she learns that Old Nick lost his job six months ago and he asks her where she thinks the "money's going to keep coming from."
- In the night Jack sneaks out of the wardrobe while Old Nick is still there. Old Nick wakes up and sees Jack which causes Ma to scream at Old Nick to "get away from him." Old Nick leaves.
- On Monday morning the electricity is off. Jack pesters Ma with questions about her conversation with Old Nick. Ma explains that the power is off because she angered Old Nick with her screaming and now he is punishing them.
- On Tuesday Ma tells Jack about her life before Room, about her family. She explains she couldn't tell him before because he was too small to understand so she was "sort of lying to [him] then but now what she is doing is the opposite of lying. **"It's like unlying."**
- On Wednesday Ma tells Jack how Old Nick stole her by tricking her into his truck with a story about his dog having a fit and then by giving her bad medicine that put her to sleep until she woke up in Room. She tells him about all her efforts to break out and how they all failed and how she tried to hurt Old Nick but was overpowered by him. She tells Jack about Old Nick's warning that if she ever tried to hurt him again he would go away and she would get "hungrier and hungrier until [she] died." Just when her story ends and Jack is figuring out the extent of their current predicament—"She's telling me that we're going"— the power comes back on.

**Dying** p99 – 50 pages – 3 days

- On Thursday life sort of returns to normal except Jack is struggling with the idea of things being "real" and Ma goes back to bed for a bit..."She's not much fun today."
- She's lying in bed thinking. Jack makes his pillowcase into a backpack "for going outside when we get rescued." They discuss getting rescued and Ma says "Nobody's going to rescue us." And that they have to get out by themselves. Jack comes up with the idea of "a cunning truck" like what he did to Ma and she thinks about this and

Meeting: Nov 08, 2011 — 7:30 pm @ Dianne's

- comes up with the idea of pretending Jack is ill and needs to go to the hospital. (It's April today...)
- They work out a plan 'like on "Dora" – *Sick, Truck, Hospital, Police, Save Ma* and they practice it so Jack knows what to do at every stage. That night Ma tells Old Nick that Jack is sick and he stays away.
  - On Friday morning Jack and Ma discuss the difference between what Jack is feeling—scared and what he is going to be doing which is be brave—scaredybrave or scave. They write a note because Jack is afraid he won't be able to talk to outside people.
  - Old Nick isn't convinced by Plan A —Jack being sick— so Ma comes up with Plan B.
  - On Saturday Ma tells Jack about Plan B —that now he has to pretend that he's dead and she will wrap his body up in Rug
  - They practice how Jack can wriggle out of the Rug even though it will be tied around him—"you're the banana"
  - ...p135 to p155: —*Dead, Truck, Wriggle Out, Jump, Run, Somebody, Note, Police, Blowtorch*
  - *Dead, Truck, Wriggle Out, Jump out late, Get caught by Old Nick but not before being bitten by the dog, Somebody phones the police, Old Nick drops Jack, Police, Shotgun*

**After** p157 – 100 pages – 7 days

- Police station, clinic...
- Day 1 = Easter Sunday (April ?) –
  - o p181 Ma —“**Can I please hold on to my medications instead of the nurses doling them out like I'm a sick person?**” **Is Ma contemplating suicide right from the beginning of her liberation?**
  - o Jack meets his grandma
- Day 2 = Monday —time to go outside – toys – meeting with lawyer Morris
- Day 3 = Tuesday — outside again – Jack meets his Uncle Paul and Aunt Deana and his Stepgrandpa Leo to be called 'Steppa'
- Day 4 = Jack and Ma play on the computer and receives the gift of an ipod from her brother Paul. Ma tells Jack that she feels she keeps messing up, “I know you need me to be your ma but I'm having to remember how to be me as well at the same time and it's ...: p221
- Day 5 = Thursday – Ma and Jack go in the Clinic's van to the dentist – Jack's real grandfather comes to visit but doesn't want to meet Jack “I can't be in the same room. It makes me shudder.” P226
- Ma is interviewed by the vultures:
  - o In response to whether giving birth to Jack was “the hardest thing you've ever done” Ma says: “The best thing...for me, see, Jack was everything. I was alive again, I mattered. **So after than I was polite.**” ... It was all about keeping Jack safe. P233
  - o Then: “Now, figuring out how to raise him all on your own, without books or professionals or even relatives, that must have been terribly difficult.’...She shrugs. “I think what babies want is mostly to have their mothers right there. No, I was just afraid Jack would get ill—and me too, he needed me to be OK.
  - o “You breastfed him. In fact, this may startle some of our viewers, I understand you still do?”...Ma laughs. The woman stares at her. “In this whole story, that's the shocking detail?”
  - o “There you and your baby were, condemned to solitary confinement—...Ma shakes here head. “Neither of us was ever alone for a minute....Well, yes. But

Meeting: Nov 08, 2011 — 7:30 pm @ Dianne's

it takes a village to raise a child, as they say in Africa..." "If you've got a village. But if you don't, then maybe it just takes two people." p233-234

- 'Jack's nobody's son but mine.' "That's so true, in a very real sense," says the woman. "I was just wondering whether, in your view, the genetic, the biological relationship—" "There was no relationship." She's talking through her teeth. "And you never found that looking at Jack painfully reminded you of his origins?" Ma's eyes go even tighter. "He reminds me of nothing but himself." P234-235
  - Your experiences have given you, ah, enormous empathy with the suffering children of the world."..."Not just children," say Ma. "People are locked up in all sorts of ways." P236
  - "You must feel an almost pathological need—understandably—to stand guard between your son and the world." "Yeah, it's called being a mother." Ma nearly snarls it. -236
  - Final question: ...Did you ever consider asking your captor to take Jack away?" "Away?" "To leave him outside a hospital, say, so he could be adopted. As you yourself were, very happily, I believe." I can see Ma swallow. "Why would I have done that?" "Well, so he could be free." "Free away from me?" "It would have been a sacrifice, of course—the ultimate sacrifice—but if Jack could have had a normal, happy childhood with a loving family?" "He had me." Ma says it one word at a time. "He had a childhood with me, whether you'd call it normal or not." "But you knew what he was missing," say the woman. "Every day he needed a wider world, and the only one you could give him got narrower. ...p237
- Day 6 = Friday - "When I wake up in the morning Ma's Gone." — Jack meets his younger cousin Bronwyn —Ma overdoses on all her pills

**Living** p251 – 70 pages

- Day 7 – Jack leaves the clinic and goes to stay "in the house with the hammock" despite Dr. Clay wanting him to stay "for *continuity* and "but Grandma shouted that he wasn't allowed to keep me like a prisoner when I do have a family." p253
- Jack sleeps on a blow-up mattress next to his Grandma and Steppa.
- Day 8 – Ma is stable. Jack says good-bye to his Grandpa. Grandma takes Jack to the playground
- Day 9 –Jack learns the layout and rules of Grandma's house. He learns that Ma has "Turned the corner" and that the police can go in Room. Jack lies in the hammock in the back yard after being stung by a bee. Jack talks to Ma on the phone. Jack makes dinner with Steppa.
- Day 10 – Jack is learning to ride a bike. Dr. Clay visits. He overhears his Grandma and Dr. Clay discussing "*an acceptable standard of care.*" P275
- Day 11 – Jack and Granma go to the playground before breakfast so there'll be no other kids there. Granma's book club comes to her house. Grandma learns that Jack's photo is "all over the internet." Jack plays LEGO with Steppa. Jack has a bath with his Grandma.

Meeting: Nov 08, 2011 — 7:30 pm @ Dianne's

- Day 12 (Saturday April 17) — Jack cuts his ponytail off. 1 week at Grandpa and Steppa's house. 1 week in the clinic before that = 2 weeks "in the world" p284
- Day 13 – Rug is delivered to Grandma's house and Jeep etc.— G & S take Jack to the beach to see the sea – Jack talks to Ma on the phone and tells her all about what he's learning – Ma comes home to Grandma's and she and Jack go to live in the Independent Living Residential Facility apartment
- Day 14 – 'Jack's Room' and 'Ma's Room' — Jack loses Ma's tooth.
- Day 15 – "I've been in the world three weeks and a half, I still never know what's going to hurt." P309 – Jack and Ma go out for a walk to look around the area around the Independent Living
- Day 16 – Jack plays soccer with Paul while Ma has coffee with her friends
- May Day — Jack asks to go back to visit Room with Ma and she arranges for Officer Oh to take them there. They enter through Old Nick's house which has "the hugest TV I ever saw." P317 – Jack sees Room from the outside for the first time —"Good-bye Room..." **It's like a crater, a hole where something happened. Then we go out the door." P321**

Meeting: Nov 08, 2011 — 7:30 pm @ Dianne's

**Themes:**

**1. Mothering**

- Then: "Now, figuring out how to raise him all on your own, without books or professionals or even relatives, that must have been terribly difficult." ... She shrugs. "I think what babies want is mostly to have their mothers right there. No, I was just afraid Jack would get ill—and me too, he needed me to be OK."
- "You breastfed him. In fact, this may startle some of our viewers, I understand you still do?" ... Ma laughs. The woman stares at her. "In this whole story, that's the shocking detail?"
- "There you and your baby were, condemned to solitary confinement—... Ma shakes here head. "Neither of us was ever alone for a minute.... Well, yes. But it takes a village to raise a child, as they say in Africa..." "If you've got a village. But if you don't, then maybe it just takes two people."
- (Jack) "Also everywhere I'm looking at kids, adults mostly don't seem to like them, not even the parents do. ... They take photos of them... but they don't want to actually play with them, they'd rather drink coffee talking to other adults. Sometimes there's a small kid crying and the Ma of it doesn't even hear." P287

**2. Nature vs. Nurture** – "Jack's nobody's son but mine." "That's so true, in a very real sense," says the woman. "I was just wondering whether, in your view, the genetic, the biological relationship—" "There was no relationship." She's talking through her teeth. "And you never found that looking at Jack painfully reminded you of his origins?" Ma's eyes go even tighter. "He reminds me of nothing but himself." P234-235

As unique individuals we are all 'orphans' who thrive on being nurtured by others and on being nurturers of others and of ourselves.

**3. Christianity** – "I know you taught him to pray to Jesus. Was your faith very important to you? ... It was ... part of what I had to pass on to him."

- The sun is the face of God.

**4. Perversity** – Without nurture — He looks human but there's nothing inside.... You know your heart, Jack?... No, but your feeling bit, where you're sad or scared or laughing or stuff?... Well he hasn't got one. ... A feeling bit... What does he have instead? She shrugs. "Just a gap... Like a crater? But that's a hole where something happened. What happened?" p112

– Like there's this experiment with baby monkeys, a scientist took them away from their mothers and kept each one all alone in a crate—and you know what, they didn't grow up right. ... they got bigger but they were weird, from not getting cuddles. ... Sick in their heads. Biting themselves and stuff. See if their mothers were there, they'd have cuddled the baby monkeys, but because the milk just came from pipes, they—It turns out they needed the love as much as the milk. P221

Arguably, Old Nick remains a minor character. He is the embodiment of evil. I think the reader's experience of Nick is to hate his behaviour but not him.

**5. Reading and storytelling** – Like *Unbroken*, storytelling saves the characters by connecting them to the outside world, by connecting them to each other, by teaching them patterns of life-saving behaviour.

**6. Play** – Like storytelling

**7. Art** – Like storytelling

**8. The power of TV** – a story telling device but problematic —turns your brains to mush—and Ma knows this. — except that it has also taught Jack to read, to identify things in the outside, to learn stories...

Why does it turn your brains to mush? We watch each other rather than connect for real.  
P196 —re the fish in the reception area of the Clinic: “These ones were born here, actually, right in this tank.” It’s the Pilar woman. ... Why are they here?... For us all to look at, I guess. Aren’t they pretty?  
“Come on, Jack,” says Ma, “I’m sure she’s got work to do.”

P232 The woman TV interviewer says to Ma “Believe me... we’re just trying to help you tell your story to the world... So. You found yourself pregnant for the second time, in the hellhole where you’d now eked out two years of your precious youth ... p232

Contrast TV news storytelling—putting words into interviewee’s mouths— with its distortion of reality, its lack of civility, intrusive, uncaring questioning, and lack of with respect for subject’s privacy and dignity.

P280 — “Such horrors, in the news every day, sometimes I just feel like staying in bed with the drapes closed.” ... I remember saying to Bill seven years back,

Jack sees himself on TV on the first night and later overhears a discussion about him and Ma: “We’re all Jack, in a sense... Obviously... The inner child, trapped in our personal Room one oh one ... But then perversely, on release, finding ourselves alone in a crowd... Reeling from the sensory overload of modernity... Post-modernity. [A woman panelist says] But surely, at a symbolic level, Jack’s the child sacrifice cemented into the foundations to placate the spirits... I would have thought the more relevant archetype here is Perseus—born to a walled-up virgin, set adrift in a wooden box, the victim who returns as hero... Of course Kaspar Hauser famously claimed he’d been happy in his dungeon, but perhaps he really meant that 19<sup>th</sup> century German society was just a bigger dungeon.” “At least Jack had TV.” Another man laughs. “Culture as a shadow on the wall of Plato’s cave.” Grandma comes in and switches it right off, scowling. “It was about me,” I tell her. “Those guys spent too much time at college.” “Ma says I have to go to college.” Grandma’s eyes roll. “All in good time...” p293-4

**9. Growing Up/Staying Connected** — Dr Clay says to Ma... You have to change to survive. Noreen looks up. “Don’t forget, you’d have changed anyway. Moving into your twenties, having a child—you wouldn’t have stayed the same.” P314

**The voice: Jack's story told by Jack**

My child  
Such trouble I have.  
And you sleep, your heart is placid;  
You dream in the joyless wood;  
In the night nailed in bronze, in the blue dark you lie still and shine. — Simonides (c.556-468BCE), "Danae"

P200 "Intense interest from a number of networks," Morris is saying, "you might consider doing a book, down the road..." Ma's mouth isn't friendly. "You think we should sell ourselves before somebody else does."

**Story telling connects the dots** — Jack asks Ma while in the police car if there are more persons like Old Nick in the world and she replies... "Yeah. But the tricky thing is, there's far more people in the middle. ... Somewhere between good and bad... Bits of both stuck together." The dots on the window join up into little rivers. P317

**Jack is Perseus** who was cast into the sea in a wooden chest with his mother Danae. The greek lyric poet Simonides writes a poem based on Danae's fearful prayer made while floating in the darkness. Since Jack's voice is the narrative voice of the story Jack is also Simonides — famous for his colourful life as "one of the wisest of men, as a greedy miser, as inventor of a system of [mnemonics](#) and also of some letters of the [Greek alphabet](#)." Accounts of his life include fanciful elements yet he had a real influence on the sophistic enlightenment of the [classical era](#). His fame as a poet rests largely on his ability to present basic human situations with affecting simplicity. Simonides championed a tolerant, humanistic outlook that celebrated ordinary goodness, and recognized the immense pressures that life places on human beings. His only lyric poem that survived intact— :

For a man it's certainly hard to be truly good — perfect in hands, feet, and mind, built without a single flaw; only a god could have that prize; but a mere man, there's just no way he can help being bad when some overwhelming disaster knocks him down. Any man's good when life treats him well, and bad when it treats him badly, and the best of us are the ones the gods love most.

But for me that saying of Pittacus doesn't ring true either (even if he was a smart man): he says "being good is hard." For me, a man's good enough as long as he's not lawless, and if he has the common sense of right and wrong that does a city good — a decent guy. I certainly won't find fault with a man like that. After all, there's an endless supply of stupid fools. The way I see it, if there's no great shame in it, it's all right.

So I'm not going to throw away my short allotment of life on a futile, silly hope, searching for something there simply cannot be, a completely blameless man — not among us mortals who must win our bread from the broad earth. (Of course, If I do happen to come across one, I'll be sure to let you know.) So long as he doesn't willfully do wrong, I give my praise and love to any man. But not even the gods can resist necessity.

**Perseus**

Perseus ([Greek](#): Περσεύς), <sup>[note 1]</sup> the [legendary](#) founder of [Mycenae](#) and of the [Perseid dynasty](#) of [Danaans](#) there, was the first of the mythic heroes of [Greek mythology](#) whose exploits in defeating

Meeting: Nov 08, 2011 — 7:30 pm @ Dianne's

various archaic monsters provided the [founding myths](#) of the [Twelve Olympians](#). Perseus was the Greek hero who **killed the Gorgon Medusa, and claimed Andromeda**, having rescued her from a sea monster sent by [Poseidon](#) in retribution for Queen [Cassiopeia](#) declaring herself more beautiful than the sea nymphs.

Origin at Argos

Perseus was **the son of Zeus and Danaë**, who by her very name, was the archetype of all the Danaans.<sup>[4]</sup> She was the only child of Acrisius, King of Argos. Disappointed by his lack of luck in having a son, Acrisius consulted the oracle at Delphi, who warned him that he would one day be killed by his daughter's son. Danaë was childless and to keep her so, he imprisoned her in a bronze chamber open to the sky in the courtyard of his palace.<sup>[5]</sup> This mytheme is also connected to Ares, Oenopion, Eurystheus, etc. Zeus came to her in the form of a shower of gold, and impregnated her.<sup>[6]</sup> Soon after, their child was born; Perseus — "Perseus Eurymedon,<sup>[7]</sup> for his mother gave him this name as well" (Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonautica* IV).

Fearful for his future but unwilling to provoke the wrath of the gods by killing Zeus's offspring and his own daughter, **Acrisius cast the two into the sea in a wooden chest.**<sup>[8]</sup> **Danaë's fearful prayer made while afloat in the darkness has been expressed by the poet Simonides of Ceos.** Mother and child washed ashore on the island of Seriphos, where they were taken in by the fisherman Dictys ("fishing net"), who raised the boy to manhood. The brother of Dictys was Polydectes ("he who receives/welcomes many"), the king of the island.

**Jack is Simonides of Ceos** ([Ancient Greek](#): Σιμωνίδης ὁ Κεῖος) (c. 556 BC-468 BC) was a Greek [lyric poet](#), born at [Ioulis](#) on [Kea](#). The scholars of [Hellenistic Alexandria](#) included him in the canonical list of [nine lyric poets](#), along with [Bacchylides](#) (his nephew) and [Pindar](#) (reputedly a bitter rival). Both Bacchylides and Pindar benefited from his innovative approach to lyric poetry and he was more involved than either of them in the major events and personalities of their times.<sup>[3]</sup> His fame owes much to traditional accounts of his colourful life, as one of the wisest of men, as a greedy miser, as an inventor of a system of [mnemonics](#) and also of some letters of the [Greek alphabet](#) (ω, η, ξ, ψ).<sup>[4]</sup> Such accounts include fanciful elements yet he had a real influence on the sophistic enlightenment of the [classical era](#).<sup>[5]</sup> His fame as a poet rests largely on his ability to present basic human situations with affecting simplicity.<sup>[1]</sup> In the words of the Roman rhetorician [Quintilian](#):

*"Simonides has a simple style, but he can be commended for the aptness of his language and for a certain charm; his chief merit, however, lies in the power to excite pity, so much so that some prefer him in this respect to all other writers of the genre."<sup>[6]</sup>*

Simonides championed a tolerant, humanistic outlook that celebrated ordinary goodness, and recognized the immense pressures that life places on human beings.<sup>[7]</sup> His rival, [Pindar](#), who identified closely with the aristocratic world and its heroic ethic, never composed anything as thoughtful or sympathetic as the following poem of Simonides (fr. 542), quoted in Plato's dialogue, the [Protagoras](#), and reconstructed here according to a recent interpretation, making it the only lyric poem of Simonides that survives intact:<sup>[7] [nb.1]</sup>

*For a man it's certainly hard to be truly good — perfect in hands, feet, and mind, built without a single flaw; only a god could have that prize; but a mere man, there's just no way he can help being bad when some overwhelming disaster knocks him down. Any man's good when life treats him well, and bad when it treats him badly, and the best of us are the ones the gods love most. But for me that saying of Pittacus doesn't ring true either (even if he was a smart man): he says "being good is hard." For me, a man's good enough as long as he's not lawless, and if he has the common sense of right and wrong that does a city good — a decent guy. I certainly won't find fault with a man like that. After all, there's an endless supply of stupid fools. The way I see it, if there's no great shame in it, it's all right.*



Meeting: Nov 08, 2011 — 7:30 pm @ Dianne's

*So I'm not going to throw away my short allotment of life on a futile, silly hope, searching for something there simply cannot be, a completely blameless man — not among us mortals who must win our bread from the broad earth. (Of course, If I do happen to come across one, I'll be sure to let you know.) So long as he doesn't willfully do wrong, I give my praise and love to any man. But not even the gods can resist necessity.*

...and symbolically Jack is Samson: Would you like a haircut? Asks Ma. No...I don't want to lose my strong. Your what? My muscles, like Samson in the story. That makes her laugh. P223

...and like Kasper Hauser Jack comes into the outside world with a note.

...and Jack is bitten on the hand by a dog named "Raja" which is an Indian term for a monarch, or princely ruler of the Kshatriya varna.

This overlay of symbolism reinforces the qualities that we see displayed by Jack through his storytelling —his specialness, his power, his potential for greatness.