

Chapter 5

The chapter opens with the narrator reflecting on the tragic death of his daughter, Natalie, whom he accidentally ran over with his car in 1994. He recounts the harrowing details of the incident, including the moment he realized what had happened and the ensuing screams of his wife, Helena. The narrator's guilt is palpable as he admits to his culpability and the irreversible consequences of his actions. He also recalls the strained relationship with his neighbor, George Hawkins, who witnessed the accident and reacted with anger. The narrator's inability to pretend innocence or shift blame underscores the depth of his remorse.

The narrator delves into the emotional aftermath of Natalie's death, particularly the disintegration of his marriage to Helena. He acknowledges that Helena's grief was compounded by her belief that he loved their daughter less, a perception he admits was accurate. His jealousy over Helena's obsession with Natalie further strained their relationship. While Helena never explicitly accused him of intentional harm, the narrator senses her unspoken resentment. He reflects on the unfairness of their shared loss, recognizing that Helena would have preferred Natalie's survival over his own, a sentiment he finds understandable yet painful.

The narrator describes the practical and emotional changes following the tragedy, including their move from a family home in Lathbury Road to a Georgian house in St. John Street. The new residence, suited to a solitary life, symbolizes the irreparable rift between him and Helena. Though they occasionally shared physical intimacy, their emotional distance remained insurmountable. Helena's decision to occupy a separate room signified her refusal to entertain the possibility of another child, a silent indictment of the narrator's role in Natalie's death. The narrator's acceptance of their fractured relationship highlights his resignation to a life marked by guilt and isolation.

The chapter concludes with a detailed description of the narrator's current living space, which reflects his academic and solitary lifestyle. The meticulously arranged rooms, devoid of familial touches, reveal his preference for order and self-sufficiency. The absence of personal mementos or inherited items underscores his detachment from the past. The narrator's surroundings mirror his internal state—controlled, solitary, and defined by his professional identity rather than personal connections. The chapter paints a poignant picture of a man haunted by loss, whose life has become a carefully curated but emotionally barren existence.

