***Hatchet***

***Chapter 7***

***Summary:***

* Brian wakes up suddenly, yelling for his mother, wracked by horrible, excruciating stomach pain. Don't judge him, guys—everyone wants their mom when they're feeling sick, right?
* He crawls out the doorway of his shelter and vomits onto the sand. He crawls farther down toward the water and vomits some more. For the next hour or so, he vomits and has terrible diarrhea. (Don't say we didn't warn you.)
* Finally, he's able to crawl back into his shelter. He can't sleep, though—he's thinking about his mother sitting in the car with the strange man. He saw his mother kissing the man, and this is the secret that he hasn't been able to tell his father about, the secret that led to the divorce.
* Finally, exhausted, Brian falls asleep.
* When he wakes up again, Brian's a little disoriented. He hears the whine of the mosquitoes and smells his own vomit, reminding him of where he is. Not exactly an ideal wake-up call.
* He thinks his stomach trouble must have been the result of eating too many of the berries. He crawls out of the shelter and uses sticks to try to clean the mess in the sand. Then he goes down to the lake to wash his hands and drink some water.
* His own reflection in the lake frightens him—he's covered with dirt, his face is swollen and lumpy, and his hair is matted. He feels sorry for himself, and cries miserably for a few minutes. At least he doesn't vomit or scream, right?
* Finally, he goes back to the shelter and eats a few of the berries (he calls them "gut cherries" now, because of how they affected his stomach). He's careful not to eat too many, and to choose the ones that seem to be the most ripe, taking time to wash them in the lake first. Afterward, he sorts the remaining berries into piles, separating the ripe ones from the others, and covering both piles with grass to keep the bugs off.
* Tonight, he thinks, he can eat some more of the gut cherries, but meanwhile, he needs to try to find better berries. He'll go looking, and be careful to come home to his shelter before nightfall.
* Walking alongside the lakeshore, he passes the gut cherry bushes and finds a clearing a little bit farther along. The clearing is full of raspberry bushes, and Brian eats his fill, then starts picking more to load into his windbreaker-bag.
* Suddenly Brian hears a slight noise behind him, and he turns to find a huge black bear standing less than twenty feet away from him. Gulp.
* It stands on its hind legs, studying him. Then it lowers itself onto all four legs, eats some berries, and goes on its way.
* Without even knowing what he's doing, Brian finds himself running back toward his shelter. After running about fifty yards, he stops. The bear wasn't interested in eating him, he tells himself, and he needs more of the raspberries.
* Slowly he convinces himself to go back and pick more, although he's more cautious on the way back. Good call.
* At about noon it starts to rain, and Brian takes his windbreaker full of raspberries and goes back to his shelter. He's more or less comfortable, even a bit cozy as the rain pours down outside.
* That evening he thinks again about the bear, and he takes his hatchet out of his belt and puts it by his head before he goes to sleep.

***Brief Summary:***

Brian wakes up screaming for his mother. He's in incredible pain: he's never felt anything this intense. He throws up and has violent diarrhea that continues for an hour, until he is weak and exhausted. When he crawls back to the shelter, he again thinks about the time when he saw his mother at the mall kissing a man he didn't recognize. Brian never told his father what he saw, and he believes his father "still did not know about it." Brian eventually falls asleep and wakes after the sun is up, cleaning the mess from his sickness as best he can. He goes down to the lake to get a drink and sees his swollen, bloody, and dirty face reflected in the water. Feeling sorry for himself, he sits down and cries. Then he drinks more water, has a few berries, and resumes his search for food. He realizes that he has been in the wilderness for three days and finds himself calling his shelter "home."

Nearby, Brian discovers some raspberry bushes. He eats some of the berries, but does not gorge himself this time. He picks more and puts them in his jacket for later. As he turns to go, he is terrified to see a bear and doesn't know how to respond. Fortunately, the bear eats some raspberries and leaves. Brian runs back to the shelter, where he can think calmly. He decides the bear only wanted berries, since it could have caught him if it wanted to. Brian returns cautiously to the raspberry bushes, where he picks more berries, then returns to the shelter just as it starts to rain. Happy to be dry inside, he eats more berries, drinks their juice, and thoroughly enjoys them. Eventually, he goes to sleep.

***Brief Analysis:***

Brian is used to turning to his parents in times of trouble. Now his mother literally is not there to help, and in remembering "the Secret" he realizes he had lost her support even before his plane crashed. By juxtaposing this memory with Brian's sickness, [Paulsen](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Hatchet/author/) suggests "the Secret" makes Brian as sick as the berries he ate. He must find a way to rid himself of it, as he does the berries.

The character's frightening encounter with the bear further develops the interrelated themes of nature and survival. Brian's expectation that the bear will try to harm him does not match the reality of the wilderness. The bear is just trying to survive, as he is. Its behavior is "something to understand," he thinks, "not something to run away from." Brian is learning that fear and flight aren't always the best response. Nor is the wilderness always an enemy—although it's certainly not a friend either.

Brian is also learning to consider an experience from another perspective, even an animal's, an important skill for wilderness survival. As the chapter traces his arc from pain, illness, and fear to his contentment with the most basic food and shelter, readers begin to feel he might indeed be able to survive.

Critical Study:

Awakened in the middle of the night from a dream about his mother, Brian becomes violently ill from the many berries he has eaten the previous day. He has a flashback in which the image of his mother kissing the man with the short blond hair recurs to him with horrible clarity. Falling back asleep, Brian awakes in the morning, walks down to the lake, and he sees his reflection in the water. Finding his injuries and worn face repulsive, he gives in to his tears and cries in self-pity. His stomach was aching with hunger, and he ate more of the bitter red berries, this time making certain to avoid eating too many. In search of other food he comes upon a raspberry patch, where he spots a bear and stiffens with fear, but soon realizes that the bear does not intend to harm him. Picking many raspberries, he eats some and saves many more for later. With the bear in mind, he keeps his hatchet close by his side and falls asleep.

Critical Analysis (Ch 4-7):

Chapter 4 begins with [Brian](https://www.gradesaver.com/hatchet/study-guide/character-list#brian) at last recounting the details of the Secret. He had been bike riding with his friend [Terry](https://www.gradesaver.com/hatchet/study-guide/character-list#terry), and they took a route past the mall on the way back. Near the mall, Brian spotted his mother sitting in a station wagon he did not recognize, beside a strange man he also had never seen before. Though he had witnessed many more occurrences of the Secret later, this one stands out in his mind the clearest.

Brian opens his eyes at last; he is at the edge of the lake, his feet in the water, in an excruciating amount of pain. He pulls himself out of the water and falls unconscious again, waking up eventually around dawn. He is still in pain, but after a quick assessment decides that nothing is broken. He realizes how lucky he is to be alive, and thinks of the pilot dead in the lake. He fluctuates between reality and imagination, not sure whether what just happened was real or not.

As the sun comes all the way up, suddenly hordes of mosquitoes swarm around him. He inhales them, coughs them up, cannot get away from them, and sits and suffers their bites until the sun is fully up and the mosquitoes disappear. Hurting even more now, he gets up to survey the area. The lake is shaped like an L, with a rocky ridge running alongside of it. He spots fish and beavers in the lake. However, he is still exhausted, so he falls asleep again, this time against a tree.

When he wakes up, he realizes that he is extremely thirsty. He does not know for sure whether the lake water is safe to drink. He decides to drink it anyway, but drinks far too much and gets sick. He thinks again about where he is and everything he knows. He assumes that planes will soon fly overhead, searching for him, and convinces himself that it will happen before long—that is, before he remembers how far he must have gone off course. In deciding his next move, he thinks about an English teacher he once had, Perpich, who always insisted on thinking positive and getting motivated. He assesses the things he has: his hatchet, his clothing, and his watch.

Brian thinks about making a shelter, but realizes that he needs to find food first in order to have the energy to do that. He thinks about wilderness television shows, and goes in search of a berry bush, all while thinking about home and how much he wishes he were there. He finds one surrounded by a cluster of birds, and, unable to believe it could be that easy, eats bunches of them. They are bitter and have pits, but he is so hungry that he cannot stop himself. After eating berries and bringing some back, he drags wood to the lake to build a wall to prop against a scooped out, sideways bowl in the rock ledge and make a shelter. With shelter and food found, he goes to sleep.

But he wakes in the middle of the night with his gut twisting, and the berries he ate make him so sick for more than an hour. Slightly delirious, he tries to go back to sleep and thinks of a memory of his mother kissing the strange man in the station wagon. He wakes again in the morning, feeling better but weak, and eats some more of the "gut cherries," as he has decided to call them. Sure that there must be better berries somewhere, he goes in search and finds some raspberry bushes.

As he is eating them, a black bear appears, eating as well. Brian slowly backs away towards the lake and his shelter, and the bear does not pursue him. Eventually Brian works up the courage to go back and gather more raspberries, and comforts himself with the knowledge that if the bear had wanted to hurt him, it would have. Instead, it had just gone about its own business.

These next few chapters detail Brian's first few days alone in the wilderness, attempting to find his way around and deal with what has occurred. These chapters are a combination of waking and sleeping, reality and imagination, as Brian's subconscious tries to make sense of the situation. The first days are the worst, but each day slowly gets better as Brian gets oriented in his new surroundings.

Over the course of the novel, Brian's skill and resourcefulness will certainly be important to his survival. But Brian himself recognizes that there is also an element of luck involved in the fact that he is still alive. He notes that if the plane had gone down at a different angle, he would have been dead. He is lucky in finding food to eat and a place to stay sheltered. It is a combination of luck and skill that keeps Brian Robeson alive, and his acknowledgement of this randomness allows him to keep a firm grasp on reality and keep moving forward, because he does not know how he might get lucky next.

Right now, Brian is in a transition period from the old, pre-crash Brian to the new Brian. He has not yet shed the mindset of his old life, and this is evident through his constant thoughts about the Secret. Holding this secret about his mother cheating on his father has taken a huge toll on him, and has played such a huge role in shaping the person he was before the crash. Now, Brian will slowly learn to shed this preoccupation with the Secret and focus on himself and his survival.

In this transition, the nature of the challenges Brian faces will change. Dealing with the Secret was a hugely emotional challenge for Brian, one that messed with his mind, his focus, and his certainty about his and his family's place in life. Now, here in the forest, he will face a different set of challenges. These are no less difficult, but they are much simpler. Now he has to focus on extremely basic needs like food, safety, and shelter. In the wilderness, Brian will be challenged in a new way, a nice respite from the emotional toll that the Secret has taken on him.

In beginning his quest for survival, Brian takes inspiration from a new influential figure in his life: his English teacher, Perpich. This is important because Perpich's teachings are the thing that motivates Brian to stop feeling sorry for himself and to start getting motivated to solve the problems at hand. Brian also thinks back to discussions with his friend Terry and various wilderness television-shows he has watched, drawing from widely different aspects of his life to find a way to survive. This is another example of his quick thinking and resourcefulness.

The scene with the bear is notable because it marks the beginning of Brian's becoming harmonious with nature. Because people like Brian live outside of nature, they often dismiss nature's creatures as being vicious and dangerous. Now, though, Brian is no longer an outsider—he is becoming part of the forest, and is thus beginning to understand the way nature synchronizes, and how all of its creatures live parallel lives with interests that are actually quite similar. The bear acknowledges Brian but does not attack him, thus accepting him as a part of this small slice of the natural world. Brian has been welcomed.

Significance(Ch5-7):

Brian has woken up from his nap with a thirst he had never experienced before. He feels as if he will die if he does not drink large amounts of water immediately. The lake sits tantalizingly before him, but he doesn't know if it is safe to drink the water. He reasons that he swallowed it as he swam to shore and he didn't become ill, so he can drink it now. He starts by telling himself he will only drink a little of the water, but by the time he is done drinking, he has drunk enough to make him sick.  
  
He is able, after throwing up the water, to take stock of his situation for the first time. He realizes he has no idea where he is, but he also knows search parties will be looking for him. Brian feels he will be found within a few days, which is good, because he is hungry and has no means of obtaining food.  
  
He thinks about his English teacher, Mr. Perpich, who was always telling the students to "stay positive and stay on top of things". He tries to stay positive about his situation and act, by taking stock of what he has with him, it isn't much, some money, his clothes, and his hatchet. The hatchet is still attached to his belt, a little rusty, but still there ready to be of use to him.  
  
He realizes the pilot inadvertently threw the plane off course when he was in the throes of the heart attack. He is also thinking about how to fend off the wild animals, which live in the forest. He decides he needs to build a shelter for himself.  
  
Brian remembers a time he and his friend, Terry, had gone into a part of the city near a park, which had been left to grow like a forest. The two boys talked about how they would survive if they were ever stranded alone. The one thing they agreed upon was it would be necessary to build a lean-to. Brian decides to implement this plan, but he is so weak with hunger it is almost impossible for him to walk, let alone chop wood and build a shelter. He spies a stone ridge, which has on its north side a scooped out area with a ledge above it, inside the area is tall enough for him to almost stand completely up and the floor is sandy. He decides this would be a better shelter than a lean-to because it is water proof.  
  
After resting a bit, because he is weak from hunger and the effects of the crash, Brian determines he needs to find food. He remembers hearing somewhere, that forests contain bushes with berries on them. He doesn't want to go into the woods too far, for fear of becoming lost, so he looks around him and spots an area that contains bushes. He sees birds flying in amongst the bushes as they eat the berries on them. Using the birds as guides he finds the bushes and gorges himself on the berries they carry. He doesn't care that the berries are tart and have pits, he eats them all. Once he is done eating he picks about four pounds of the berries to keep in his shelter.  
  
He returns to the shelter, which he now thinks of as his home, and decides to enclose the front of it by weaving dead branches together to form a wall. He is experiencing some stomach discomfort from eating all the berries, but he eventually finishes his wall and is satisfied by what he has accomplished. He then lays down and eventually falls asleep.  
  
Brian awakes in the middle of the night crying for his mother. He is in agony from the berries he has consumed earlier in the day. He has diarrhea and vomiting, which lasts for over an hour and after it subsides he tries to fall asleep.  
  
He instead lies in his shelter remembering watching his mother kiss the other man. He remembers the shame of it and how his father still doesn't know about the Secret.  
  
The next day he walks to the lake to clean himself up and sees his reflection in the water. He is surprised and filled with self-pity at the sight of his bitten, bloody, and swollen face. He cries about it and later decides he needs to find food for his rumbling stomach.  
  
He eats some of the gut berries, as he now calls them, and then goes in search of other food. He finds some raspberries and is filled with joy. While eating them he hears a noise and turns to see a bear standing looking at him. Brian is terrified and cannot move, which is a good thing, because the bear takes a look at him, decides he is not a threat, and goes back to eating the raspberries.  
  
Finally, Brian starts to run away from the bear, only to stop, because he realizes if the bear wanted to hurt him, he would have done so right away. He returns to the raspberries and picks some to bring back to his shelter. He returns to the shelter just as it begins to rain and with his hatchet beside him for protection, Brian falls asleep.  
  
Brian has learned to cope with the panic of not knowing where he is and when he will be rescued. He also, through trial and error, discovers how to eat berries in a way that will not make him sick. He has an encounter with a bear, which causes him to think of his hatchet as a weapon and not a tool. Brian is also trying to come to terms with his mother's affair and the effects it has had on his life and family.

***Summary and Analysis Part by Part***

***Summary Part 1:***

[Brian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hatchet/characters/brian-robeson) wakes up in terrible pain in the middle of the night, screaming for his [mother](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hatchet/characters/brian-s-mother). He feels that the berries he ate are tearing his stomach apart, and he throws up in the sand outside his shelter before finally crawling back inside. He relives the memory of seeing his mother in the station wagon, this time thinking of her kissing the man in the car. Tormented by the Secret, he eventually falls asleep again.

***Analysis Part 1:***

The physical pain of Brian’s illness quickly transports him back to the passive, despairing mindset that he showed at the start of the book. This demonstrates that though Brian now senses the potential for growth through adversity, he has not yet matured enough to let go of his simplistic view of his parents’ divorce. The hidden danger of the berries also underscores the complexity of the natural world and Brian’s need to understand it much better.

***Summary Part 2:***

[Brian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hatchet/characters/brian-robeson) awakens early, again swarmed by mosquitos. He does his best to tidy up his camp and, while drinking from the lake, sees his reflection in the water. Brian thinks how ugly he looks and is overcome by misery at how alone and battered he is. He cries “self-pity tears, wasted tears” for several minutes before being distracted by his hunger and deciding that he must eat again.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Although Brian’s self-pity is understandable in such an extreme situation, Paulsen nonetheless characterizes his tears as “wasted,” highlighting the idea that Brian cannot truly accomplish anything useful until he stops feeling sorry for himself.

***Summary Part 3:***

[Brian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hatchet/characters/brian-robeson) chooses some of the riper berries, which he now calls gut cherries, and carefully washes and eats them, deciding to get rid of the less ripe ones. He decides that he can still eat them if need be but that he wants to find better berries as well. Planning his route, Brian thinks about returning home later and realizes that he has thought of the shelter as home. Looking at it, he decides that it’s not such a bad place and resolves to call it home from now on.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Despite his despair moments earlier, Brian’s survival instinct quickly wins out, showing how essential his drive to sustain himself in the wilderness is. By calling his shelter “home,” Brian again uses language to shape his reality, giving himself a sense of belonging without actually changing anything but the words he uses.

***Summary Part 4:***

[Brian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hatchet/characters/brian-robeson) explores farther along the lake and discovers a clearing full of raspberry bushes. Brian is delighted to find that they are sweet and ripe, and he eats until he is full, careful not to push his stomach too much. He starts to pick more and is feeling happy about his situation when he turns around and sees a black bear.

***Analysis Part 4:***

Discovering a sustainable, safe source of food is a significant milestone in Brian’s mastery of his circumstances. Here, his ability to take action brings meaningful rewards.

Summary Part 5:

[Brian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hatchet/characters/brian-robeson) is frozen with fear and watches as the large, beautiful bear studies him with curiosity. The bear calmly continues eating raspberries and then leaves the clearing. As soon as it is gone, Brian runs back toward the shelter in terror. However, he stops halfway, reflecting that the bear was only curious about him and in fact did not try to hurt him. Brian convinces himself to believe that the bear does not mean him harm and resolves to go back and pick more berries.

Analysis Part 5:

Right when Brian is rewarded for his proactive search for food, the natural world again reasserts its power. However, this time that power is not frightening or painful; rather, the bear is beautiful and leaves Brian in peace. Again, connection to nature forces itself upon Brian, balancing out his independent approach to survival.

Summary Part 6:

[Brian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hatchet/characters/brian-robeson) picks raspberries for the rest of the morning without seeing the bear again and then returns to his shelter when it starts to rain in the afternoon. He discovers that the raspberry juice is seeping through his windbreaker and drinks it happily, realizing that the pain in his body has greatly decreased since the crash. Brian thinks back on the bear, wondering whether it was as surprised as he was, and finds himself thinking about something other than himself for the first time since the crash. Just in case other dangerous animals appear, he places his [hatchet](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hatchet/symbols/hatchet) by his head when he goes to sleep.

Analysis Part 6:

Contemplating the bear, Brian finds himself drawn out of his own selfish concerns for the first time since the crash. This shift coincides with his first moment of real pleasure as he enjoys the juice of the raspberries. This moment hints at the necessity of connecting with forces outside oneself; while an independent mindset allows Brian to survive, it is only connecting with the other creatures around him that brings him a sense of actually thriving.

Quotations

Quotation 1:

He could do nothing, think nothing. His tongue, stained with berry juice, stuck to the roof of his mouth and he stared at the bear. It was black, with a cinnamon-colored nose, not twenty feet from him and big. No, huge. It was all black fur and huge. He had seen one in the zoo in the city once, a black bear, but it had been from India or somewhere. This one was wild, and much bigger than the one in the zoo and it was right there.

Right there. (7.38-39)

Explanation 1:

Brian encounters a large wild animal for the first time and is (understandably) overwhelmed and frightened. Not to mention disappointed—he was hoping for Bigfoot. Like so many of his other experiences in the woods, this one is totally different from anything he's known in his past life.

Quotation 2:

It was still very early, only just past true dawn, and the water was so calm he could see his reflection. It frightened him—the face was cut and bleeding, swollen and lumpy, the hair all matted, and on his forehead a cut had healed but left the hair stuck with blood and scab. His eyes were slits in the bites and he was—somehow—covered with dirt. He slapped the water with his hand to destroy the mirror.

Ugly, he thought. Very, very ugly. (7.13-14)

Explanation:

This is Brian's first glimpse of himself after the plane crash, and he reacts with anger and fear. Brian's physical changes are just a beginning—wait until he gets a load of the emotional and mental changes still to come.

Quotation 3:

Outside the rain poured down, but Brian lay back, drinking syrup from the berries, dry and with the pain almost all gone, the stiffness also gone, his belly full and a good taste in his mouth.

For the first time since the crash he was not thinking of himself, of his own life. Brian was wondering if the bear was as surprised as he to find another being in the berries. (7.55-56)

Explanation 3:

This scene is a little hint of what's to come for Brian. He's already changed a bit from the boy we first met, a boy totally absorbed by thoughts of his difficult family situation. Here we see him beginning to look outward, toward the world around him. Well, toward bears, at least.