***Chapter 4***

***Summary and Analysis***

***Summary:***

While unconscious on the edge of the lake, Brian dreams in detail of the moment when he found out about what he calls the "Secret." While riding his bicycle with his friend [Terry](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Hatchet/character-analysis/#Terry), he saw his mother sitting in a strange car with a man Brian didn't know. He saw her kiss the man in a romantic fashion.

Brian wakes up screaming. He doesn't know where he is. He hears birds and feels wet, but he is completely lost. After a few minutes, he remembers the plane crash. He looks at the lake: the plane has sunk and is invisible. After a while, he lies down and goes to sleep. When Brian wakes up it is night. He is sore but doesn't feel like he's broken anything. He's still wet and has trouble thinking. So he sits and waits and then watches the sun come up. As it does, swarms of mosquitos move through the air. He kills dozens, even hundreds of them, but doesn't seem to make a dent. They bite him so many times that his eyes swell. He tries covering himself with his torn jacket and his T-shirt but can't find any way to keep the insects back. Finally, when the sun is fully out, the mosquitos disappear.

With the mosquitoes gone, Brian reviews his situation. He looks at the lake and realizes that if the plane had landed differently, he would have hit rocks and been killed. He watches the activity in the lake, and recognizes that a pile of mud and sticks nearby is actually a beaver lodge. He also sees fish jumping in the lake, and is surprised by how many sounds fill the natural world. Exhausted and suspecting he is in shock, he finds a tree and sits down against it.

As Brian begins to come to, he has a memory of the day he discovered the secret. When he wakes, Brian discovers that he is in a great deal of pain. Brian moves out of the water and lies on the beach to sleep some more. When he finally wakes, he feels less sore, but now must face the fact that he is alone in the Canadian wilderness. Not only this, but Brian is suddenly attacked by thousands of mosquitoes and flies. In a short time Brian is covered in bites. When the bugs finally go away with the rising heat, he finds some shade under a tree and sleeps again.

***Analysis:***

The opening section of this chapter provides more back story on Brian's personal life and introduces a defining element of [Paulsen](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Hatchet/author/)'s novel. Both are visible in a single phrase: "the Secret." When something is important to Brian, Paulsen labels it, capitalizes it, and repeats it. It is as if these defining moments return to haunt Brian obsessively.

This chapter also shows the close link between Brian's internal state and his external state. How Brian remembers "the Secret" underscores its importance. His memories of when and where he saw his mother are precise: he can recall the time, the temperature, the date, the man's blond hair, and the "white pullover shirt" he was wearing. The only other things Brian remembers in such specific detail while he is in the wilderness will be those that are key to his survival, generate major change in him, or both. After the description of Brian's memory of seeing his mother's "Secret," he wakes up screaming. The author puts this memory in close proximity to the crash to forge a link between two traumatic events that push Brian to the limits of his endurance.

As Brian does an inventory of his body and the landscape around him, the swarming bugs introduce another recurring theme of the novel: the reality of nature does not match Brian's expectations of it. His romanticized ideas come from books, movies, and television: "All they ever showed on the naturalist shows was beautiful scenery or animals ... having a good time. Nobody ever mentioned mosquitos or flies." He can't maintain this rosy view as mosquitos fly "by the dozens, by the hundreds" into his mouth or nose, "all biting, chewing, taking from him."

These small creatures are also symbolic—Brian lives through a huge event (the crash) only to suffer from small assaults (the insects). While a few mosquito bites are irritating, hundreds are enormously painful and incapacitating, a point Paulsen drives home here.

***Analysis (Ch3-4):***

Brian crashes the plane and survives. This is an amazing feat for a kid with no previous flying experience. Brian manages to get to safety before he passes out. Now the reader must wonder if this is only the beginning of Brian’s struggles to survive.

Brian is not badly injured. He has only suffered a cut on his forehead and a great deal of soreness from the stress of the crash. However, the stress and anxiety of the crash cause him to need to sleep more than usual. For this reason, Brian sleeps away his first full day in the wilderness.

***Critical Study(Ch 1-4):***

Thirteen-year-old Brian Robeson is on his way to the tundra line of Canada to visit his father. The mode of transportation is a Cessna 406 bush plane; it is also the first plane Brian has ever flown in. He is sitting in the copilot's seat and the pilot, a man named either Jake or Jim, is taking him to his father. The plane is also transporting some drilling equipment and has on board a special survival pack, in case of an emergency.  
  
Brian does not really care too much about the pilot or the cargo, he is dealing with the ramifications of his parents recent divorce and the secret he is keeping. He knows why his mother asked for the divorce, but he cannot confide in her or his father the secret he is keeping. Instead he is angry-angry with his mother, angry with the lawyers, angry with the judge for the way his life has suddenly been turned upside down.  
  
His mother on the way to the airport has surprised Brian with the gift of a hatchet. She makes him put it on his belt and model it for her. He is embarrassed by the gift, but since it seems to mean so much to his mother, he acts as if he is excited by the present.  
  
The bush plane pilot takes pity on Brian and shows him some rudimentary flying techniques. The pilot is then silent until a little later, when he suddenly has a heart attack and is left unconscious or dead, Brian cannot tell which. All he knows is he is alone in a plane above a forest and has no one to help him.  
  
Brian is stunned by the turn of events and he is paralyzed by fear. He keeps on hoping the pilot is only asleep and not dead, but he knows the man is gone. He realizes he must keep the plane flying, so through trial and error he manages to keep the plane flying level.  
  
He also remembers the radio the pilot had tried to use to summon help when he first felt ill. The radio headset and the microphone switch are still on the pilot's body, by summoning up all his courage, Brian manages to remove both. He tries to use them to call for help, but he forgets to turn off the microphone switch, which would allow him to receive messages. As soon as he remembers, he hears a voice trying to get through to him and the person on the other end wants him to give his location, but Brian has no idea where he is. He tries to tell the person this and the fact that he has no idea of how to fly the plane, but soon he is out of radio range. The person can no longer receive Brian's messages, so he knows he is totally on his own.  
  
He devises a plan to allow the plane to run out of fuel, then put the nose down and aim for the nearest lake. He is going to try to land the plane on the edge of a lake, because that would be the clearest place for him to land.  
  
He is still trying to radio for help, but the plane runs out of gas and Brian is forced to put the nose down in order to try to land. He is so frightened he throws up as he is putting the nose down.  
  
The plane is heading down towards the earth and Brian cannot see a lake to land near. He is desperately looking for water, finally he spots a small lake to the right of where the plane is headed. He manages to steer the plane towards the lake, but the maneuver slows the plane and Brian has to compensate by pushing the wheel in to increase air speed.  
  
The plane crashes into some trees, tearing off part of the wings, the plane keeps on sliding through the trees until it hits the water of the lake. It feels to Brian as if the plane has hit concrete, he is screaming and terrified as the plane plunges into the lake. He manages to free himself from the seatbelt, so he can escape through the broken window in the front of the plane.  
  
He swims to the surface of the lake, vomiting out the water that is in his lungs. From the lake he swims to the shore line and passes out. While he is out, Brian has a memory of the day he found out about the Secret. He and his friend Terry are riding their bikes past the mall, there he sees his mother sitting in a strange station wagon talking to a strange man. She does not see Brian, but now he knows the reason for the divorce and why his life has been shattered.  
  
Brian wakes up to find he is in pain, his whole body hurts, his legs feel as if they are on fire and his forehead is swollen. He knows none of his bones are broken, but the pain in his head is almost unbearable. He falls asleep again and does not awaken until the sun is almost up. He manages to sit up against a tree, but he is attacked by mosquitoes and other insects. His face and body are swollen from the many stings he has endured and he cannot see very well, because his eyes are almost swollen shut.  
  
He is happy, though, to be alive and is trying to orient himself to the forest. He is tired and in pain, which makes him sleep a lot.  
  
Brian has endured the pain of his parents' divorce. He is keeping the secret of his mother's affair to himself. He must fend for himself, after his plane has crashed into a forest. He shows resiliency and maturity beyond his years in landing the plane and saving himself.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

[Brian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hatchet/characters/brian-robeson) is lost in the memory of the Secret: he is riding bikes with his friend [Terry](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hatchet/characters/terry) back home, when he sees his [mother](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hatchet/characters/brian-s-mother) sitting in a station wagon. Brian does not recognize the car and is about to wave to his mother when he realizes that there is a strange man sitting there with her. Brian recalls all the tiny details of this traumatic moment.

***Analysis Part 1:***

The fact that Brian thinks of the Secret in this moment indicates that he is still largely bogged down in interpreting adversity as nothing but destruction. Though he has already begun to show potential for growth, Brian is at this moment very much still a privileged city boy despairing over his parents’ divorce.

***Summary Part 2:***

Back in the present, [Brian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hatchet/characters/brian-robeson) wakes up and screams, not knowing where he is. He sobs as he remembers the crash and slowly becomes aware of birds singing. He fully comprehends for the first time that he has survived and then closes his eyes again, not waking until evening.

***Analysis Part 2:***

The trigger of the singing birds allows Brian to rediscover the basic reality of his situation, even though it is a terrifying one. In this moment, Paulsen links awareness of the natural world to an understanding of survival.

***Summary Part 3:***

When he wakes up again, [Brian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hatchet/characters/brian-robeson) relives the details of the crash and manages to crawl inland from the shore. Lying in the brush, he falls asleep again and awakens in the very early morning. His entire body hurts, in particular his head where he hit the plane’s dashboard. However, he does not think that he has any broken bones or has other serious injuries. Brian is grateful to be alive and then remembers the [pilot](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hatchet/characters/pilot)’s death again, thinking of his body submerged in the lake.

***Analysis Part 3:***

As he begins to regain full consciousness, Brian briefly experiences gratitude for his survival, but this is quickly clouded by his knowledge of the pilot’s death. Brian begins here to find some positive in his very challenging situation, but he quickly returns to focusing on the tragic elements of what happened.

***Summary Part 4:***

[Brian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hatchet/characters/brian-robeson) tries to sit up and feels that he is unable to think clearly, bouncing between reality and the feeling that perhaps he imagined the crash. As the sun begins to rise, hundreds of mosquitos swarm Brian, biting and tormenting him until the sun rises fully. Brian feels that the mosquitos are as impossible as the crash, thinking that no one ever mentions insects in books and movies about the outdoors.

***Analysis Part 4:***

Brian’s initial inability to fully believe that the crash happened exemplifies the tension he experiences between acceptance and denial. Some part of him is ready to confront the situation and grow from it, while another part remains passive and uncomprehending. But as Brian remains in this limbo, the natural world, in the form of the mosquitos, invades his reality, forcing him to accept that he is now a part of the wilderness around him whether he likes it or not.

***Summary Part 5:***

Overcome with pain from his injuries and the insect bites, [Brian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hatchet/characters/brian-robeson) looks over his surroundings, trying not to think about the [pilot](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hatchet/characters/pilot) sunken in the lake. He is overwhelmed by the green of everything around him, seeing the trees and water blend into a blur. Brian sees a rocky ridge overlooking part of the lake and realizes how lucky he was that the plane hit the water instead of the rock. Then, he second guesses himself, thinking that if he were really lucky, his parents wouldn’t have gotten divorced, and he wouldn’t have been in the plane in the first place.

***Analysis Part 5:***

Brian’s perception of nature in this moment exemplifies his initial inability to understand its complexity and value. It is just a blur at this point, rather than the nuanced system it will become. This scene also marks a return to Brian’s preoccupation with language, as he struggles to determine what the word “luck” means to him, ultimately choosing a negative interpretation of his situation by refusing to call himself “lucky.”

***Summary Part 6:***

[Brian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hatchet/characters/brian-robeson) continues to watch the lake, discovering a beaver lodge and countless jumping fish in the water. He reflects that the scenery is pretty but that he still can’t think clearly, since he is used to “the hum and whine of the city.” He thinks at first that the wilderness is silent, but then listens closer and hears a blur of thousands of sounds from the insects, birds, and other natural phenomena around him. Exhausted, Brian moves to lean against a tree and again falls asleep in the sun.

***Analysis Part 6:***

This moment offers an especially stark contrast between the urban world that Brian comes from and the natural world that he now finds himself in. Paulsen makes it clear that living in the city has left Brian unable to really appreciate or understand what he is seeing and hearing, even as he begins to acknowledge the beauty around him.