

**OLYMPIADS SCHOOL/GRADE 8 ENGLISH/HANDOUT 19**

Read the chapter summaries (derived from shmoop.com) and respond to the discussion questions that follow the excerpts.

**“Last Trick”**

*Tally feels like the oldest ugly in her dorm and is all alone, now that she has fought with Shay. She has to wait for one whole week before the surgery.*

*Shay shows up with equipment for one last big trick: they are going to run away to the hidden town (the Smoke) where David lives. However, Tally does not want to go to a town where everyone is an ugly.*

*Thus, before leaving, Shay gives Tally some instructions on how to find the town; but they are in a code that only Tally should be able to understand.*

**Excerpt**

It was strange, but Tally couldn't help feeling sad. She knew she'd miss the view from this window.

She'd spent the last four years looking out at New Pretty Town, wanting nothing more than to cross the river and not come back. That's probably what had tempted her through the window so many times, learning every trick she could to sneak closer to the new pretties, to spy on the life she would eventually have.

But now that the operation was only a week away, time seemed to be moving too fast. Sometimes, Tally wished that they could do the operation gradually. Get her squinty eyes fixed first, then her lips, and cross the river in stages. Just so she wouldn't have to look out the window one last time and know she'd never see this view again.

Without Shay around, things felt incomplete, and she'd spent even more time here, sitting on her bed and staring at New Pretty Town.

Of course, there wasn't much else to do these days. Everyone in the dorm was younger than Tally now, and she'd already taught all of her best tricks to the next class. She'd watched every movie her wallscreen knew about ten times, all the way back to some old black-and-white ones in an English she could barely understand. There was no one to go to concerts with, and dorm sports were boring to watch now that she didn't know anyone on the teams. All the other uglies looked at her enviously, but no one saw much point in making friends. Probably it was better to get the operation over with all at once. Half the time, she wished the doctors would just kidnap her in the middle of the night and do it. She could imagine a lot worse things than waking up pretty one morning. They said at school that they could make the operation work on fifteen-year-olds now. Waiting until sixteen was just a stupid old tradition.

But it was a tradition nobody questioned, except the occasional ugly. So Tally had a week to go, alone, waiting.

Shay hadn't talked to her since their big fight. Tally had tried to write a ping, but working it all out on-screen just made her angry again. And it didn't make much sense to sort it out now. Once they were both pretty, there wouldn't be anything to fight about anymore. And even if Shay still hated her, there was always Peris and all their old friends, waiting across the river for her with their big eyes and wonderful smiles.

Still, Tally spent a lot of time wondering what Shay was going to look like pretty, her skin-and-bones body all filled out, her already full lips perfected, and the ragged fingernails gone forever. They'd probably make her eyes a more intense shade of green. Or maybe one of the newer colors—violet, silver, or gold.

"Hey, Squint!"

Tally jumped at the whisper. She peered into the darkness and saw a form scuttling toward her across the roof tiles. A smile broke onto her face. "Shay!"

The silhouette paused for a moment.

Tally didn't even bother to whisper. "Don't just stand there. Come in, stupid!"

Shay crawled into the window, laughing, as Tally gathered her into a hug, warm and joyful and solid. They stepped back, still holding each other's hands. For a moment, Shay's ugly face looked perfect.

"It's so great to see you."

"You too, Tally."

"I missed you. I wanted to—I'm so sorry about—"

"No," Shay interrupted. "You were right. You made me think. I was going to write you, but it was all . . ." She sighed.

Tally nodded, squeezing Shay's hands. "Yeah. It sucked."

1. Describe Tally's thoughts and feelings before Shay's visit.

---



---



---



---

### "Operation"

*On the day of her operation, Tally feels some dread because she is still all alone, and she knows that the surgery is invasive and extensive.*

*Tally is also feeling down because she couldn't convince Shay to stay.*

*A middle pretty drops Tally off at the hospital. After waiting for a long time, someone comes to tell Tally that there is a problem. This strange-looking man tells Tally to come with him.*

## Excerpt

The big hospital was on the bottom end of New Pretty Town. It was where everyone went for serious operations: littlies, uglies, even late pretties from way out in Crumblyville coming in for life-extension treatments.

The river was sparkling under a cloudless sky, and Tally allowed herself to be swept away by the beauty of New Pretty Town. Even without the nighttime lights and fireworks, the city's surfaces shone with glass and metal, the unlikely spindles of party towers casting thin shadows across the island. It was so much more vibrant than the Rusty Ruins, Tally suddenly saw. Not as dark and mysterious, perhaps, but more alive.

It was time to stop sulking about Shay. Life was going to be one big party from now on, full of beautiful people. Like Tally Youngblood.

The hovercar descended onto one of the red Xs on the hospital roof, and Tally's driver escorted her inside, taking her to a waiting room. An orderly looked up Tally's name, flashed her eye again, and told her to wait.

"You'll be okay?" the driver asked.

She looked up into his clear, soft eyes, wanting him to stay. But asking him to wait with her didn't seem very mature. "No, I'm fine. Thanks." He smiled and went away.

No one else was in the waiting room. Tally settled back and counted the tiles on the ceiling. As she waited, the conversations with Shay in her head came back again, but they weren't so troubling here. It was too late for second thoughts now.

Tally wished there was a window to look out onto New Pretty Town. She was so close now. She imagined tomorrow night, her first night pretty, dressed in new and wonderful clothes (her dorm uniforms all shoved down the recycler), looking out from the top of the highest party tower she could find. She would watch as lights-out fell across the river, bedtime for Uglyville, and know that she still had all night with Peris and her new friends, all the beautiful people she would meet.

She sighed.

Sixteen years. Finally.

Nothing happened for a long hour. Tally drummed her fingers, wondering if they always kept uglies waiting this long.

Then the man came.

He looked strange, unlike any pretty Tally had ever seen. He was definitely of middle age, but whoever had done his operation had botched it. He was beautiful, without a doubt, but it was a terrible beauty.

Instead of wise and confident, the man looked cold, commanding, intimidating, like some regal animal of prey. When he walked up, Tally started to ask what was going on, but a glance from him silenced her.

She had never met an adult who affected her this way. She always felt respect when face-to-face with a middle or late pretty. But in the presence of this cruelly beautiful man, respect was saturated with fear.

The man said, "There's a problem with your operation. Come with me."

She went.



# 1. Who is this “cruelly beautiful man”?

## “Special Circumstances”

*The scary-looking pretty brings Tally to the strange Special Circumstances complex, where there are more intimidating pretties. Here, Tally meets Dr. Cable, who wants to manipulate Tally into giving him some information...*

## Excerpt

First Dr. Cable asked her a lot of questions. “You didn’t know Shay long, did you?”

“No. Just this summer. We were in different dorms.”

“And you didn’t know any of her friends?”

“No. They were all older than her. They’d already turned.”

“Like your friend Peris?”

Tally swallowed. How much did this woman know about her? “Yeah. Like Peris and me.”

“But Shay’s friends didn’t wind up pretty, did they?”

Tally took a slow breath, remembering her promise to Shay. She didn’t want to lie, though. Dr. Cable would know if she did, Tally was sure. She was in enough trouble already. “Why wouldn’t they?”

“Did she tell you about her friends?”

“We didn’t talk about stuff like that. We just hung out. Because . . . it hurt being alone. We were just into playing tricks.”

“Did you know she’d been in a gang?”

Tally looked up into Dr. Cable’s eyes. They were almost as big as a normal pretty’s, but they angled upward like a wolf’s.

“A gang? How do you mean?”

“Tally, did you and Shay ever go to the Rusty Ruins?”

“Everyone does.”

“But did you ever *sneak out* to the ruins?”

“Yeah. A lot of people do.”

“Did you ever meet anyone there?”

Tally bit her lip. “What’s Special Circumstances?”

“Tally.” The edge in her voice was suddenly sharp as a razor blade.

“If you tell me what Special Circumstances is, I’ll answer you.”

Dr. Cable sat back. She folded her hands and nodded. “This city is a paradise, Tally. It feeds you, educates you, keeps you safe. It makes you pretty.”

Tally couldn’t help looking up hopefully at this.

“And our city can stand a great deal of freedom, Tally. It gives youngsters room to play tricks, to develop their creativity and independence. But occasionally bad things come from *outside* the city.”

Dr. Cable narrowed her eyes, her face becoming even more like a predator’s. “We exist in equilibrium with our environment, Tally, purifying the water that we put back in the river, recycling the biomass, and using only power drawn from our

own solar footprint. But sometimes we can't purify what we take in from the outside. Sometimes there are threats from the environment that must be faced."

She smiled. "Sometimes there are Special Circumstances."

"So, you guys are like minders, but for the whole city."

Dr. Cable nodded. "Other cities sometimes pose a challenge. And sometimes those few people who live outside the cities can make trouble."

Tally's eyes widened. *Outside* the cities? Shay had been telling the truth—places like the Smoke really existed.

"It's your turn to answer my question, Tally. Did you ever meet anyone in the ruins? Someone not from this city? Not from any city?"

Tally grinned. "No. I never did."

Dr. Cable frowned, her eyes darting downward for a second, checking something. When they returned to Tally, they had grown even colder. Tally smiled again, certain now that Dr. Cable knew when she was telling the truth. The room must be reading her heartbeat, her sweat, her pupil dilation. But Tally couldn't tell what she didn't know.

The razor blade slid back into the woman's voice. "Don't play games with me, Tally. Your friend Shay will never thank you for it, because you'll never see her again."

The thrill of her small victory disappeared, and Tally felt her smile fade.

"Six of her friends disappeared, Tally, all at once. None of them has ever been found. Another two who were meant to join them chose not to throw their lives away, however, and we discovered a little about what had happened to the others. They didn't run away on their own. They were tempted by someone from outside, someone who wanted to steal our cleverest little uglies. We realized that this was a special circumstance."

One word sent ice down Tally's spine. Had Shay really been *stolen*? What did Shay or any ugly really know about the Smoke?

"We've been watching Shay since then, hoping she might lead us to her friends."

"So why didn't you . . .," Tally blurted out. "You know, *stop* her!"

"Because of you, Tally."

"Me?"

Dr. Cable's voice softened. "We thought she had made a friend, a reason to stay here in the city. We thought she'd be okay."

Tally could only close her eyes and shake her head.

"But then Shay disappeared," Dr. Cable continued. "She turned out to be trickier than her friends. You taught her well."

"I did?" Tally cried. "I don't know any more tricks than most uglies."

"You underestimate yourself," Dr. Cable said.

Tally turned away from the vulpine eyes, shut out the razor-blade voice. This was *not* her fault. She had decided to stay here in the city, after all. She wanted to become pretty. She'd even tried to convince Shay.

But failed.

"It's not my fault."

"Help us, Tally."

"Help you what?"

"Find her. Find them all."

She took a deep breath. "What if they don't want to be found?"

"What if they do? What if they were lied to?"

Tally tried to remember Shay's face that last night, how hopeful she had been. She'd wanted to leave the city as much as Tally wanted to be pretty. However stupid the choice seemed, Shay had made it with her eyes open, and had respected Tally's choice to stay.

Tally looked up at Dr. Cable's cruel beauty, at the puke-yellow-brown of the walls. She remembered all the tricks Special Circumstances had played on her today—how they'd kept her waiting for an hour in the hospital, waiting and thinking she would soon be pretty, the brutal flight here, and all the cruel faces in the halls—and she decided. "I can't help you," Tally said. "I made a promise."

Dr. Cable bared her teeth. This time, it wasn't even a mockery of a smile. The woman became nothing but a monster, vengeful and inhuman. "Then I'll make you a promise too, Tally Youngblood. Until you do help us, to the very best of your ability, you will never be pretty."

Dr. Cable turned away.

"You can die ugly, for all I care."

The door opened. The scary man was outside, where he'd been waiting all along.

1. What does Dr. Cable want to find out? What tactics does he use to manipulate Tally?

---



---



---



---



---

## “Ugly for Life”

*Instead of being made pretty, Tally is brought back to her dorm.*

*At this point, Tally feels good having Shay's note about how to find the town.*

*Tally's parents, Ellie and Sol, come to comfort her and offer her “advice.”*

### Excerpt

Her parents came by about an hour later.

Ellie swept in first, gathering Tally into a hug that emptied her lungs and lifted her feet off the ground. “Tally, my poor baby!”

“Now don’t injure the girl, Ellie. She’s had a tough day.”

Even without oxygen, it felt good inside the crushing embrace. Ellie always smelled just right, like a mom, and Tally always felt like a little in her arms. Released after what was probably a solid minute, but still too soon, Tally stepped back, hoping that she wouldn’t cry again. She looked at her parents sheepishly, wondering what they must be thinking. She felt like a total failure. “I didn’t know you guys were coming.”

“Of course we came,” Ellie said.

Sol shook his head. “I’ve never heard of anything like this happening. It’s ridiculous. And we’ll get to the bottom of it, don’t you worry!”

Tally felt a weight lift from her shoulders. Finally there was someone else on her side. Her father’s middle-pretty eyes twinkled with calm certainty. There was no question that he would sort everything out.

“What did they tell you?” Tally asked.

Sol gestured, and Tally sat down on the bed. Ellie settled beside her while he paced back and forth across the small room.

“Well, they told us about this Shay girl. Sounds like she’s a lot of trouble.”

“Sol!” Ellie interrupted. “The poor girl’s missing.”

“Sounds like she wants to be missing.”

Her mother pursed her lips in silence.

“It’s not her fault, Sol,” Tally said. “She just didn’t want to turn pretty.”

“So, she’s an independent thinker. Fine. But she should have had better sense than to drag someone else down with her.”

“She didn’t drag me anywhere. I’m right here.” Tally looked out the window at the familiar view of New Pretty Town. “Where I’ll be forever, apparently.”

“Now, now,” Ellie said. “They said that once you’ve helped them find this Shay girl, everything should go ahead as normal.”

“It won’t make any difference if the operation happens a few days late. It’ll be a great story when you’re old.” Sol chuckled.

Tally bit her lip. “I don’t think I can help them.”

“Well, you just do your best,” Ellie said.

“But I can’t. I mean, I promised Shay that I wouldn’t tell anyone her plans.”

They were silent for a moment.



1. How does the novel portray Tally's parents? Do they feel like real parents, in your opinion?

---

---

---

---

---

---