The Door in the Wall

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF H. G. WELLS

The son of domestic servants, H. G. Wells cultivated a love of reading while bedridden after an injury when he was seven years old. He began his professional life as a science teacher, and his first published work was a biology textbook. His 1895 debut novel, *The Time Machine*, was an immediate hit, and the first of what he called his "scientific romances," which also include *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, *The Invisible Man*, and *The War of the Worlds*. Though he is best known for his science fiction, he was interested in many genres and also wrote a number of short stories, biographies, and histories. Wells was married two times, and had a number of mistresses throughout his life, including English author Rebecca West. In the later years of his life, he turned his focus to social commentary and championed socialist causes, unsuccessfully running for Parliament as a Labour Party candidate in both 1922 and 1923. Before his death in 1946, his declining health contributed to the pessimism of his later fiction which predicted a hopeless future for humanity.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Wells wrote during the development of English literary modernism in the early twentieth century, though he is not traditionally considered a modernist. The transition of this period from Victorian strictness into modernism's conscious break with tradition parallels Wallace's movement from his strict upbringing into the freedom and expression of the garden. Wallace's practical ideals, instilled in him by his old-fashioned father, are very much Victorian ideals of utilitarian dedication to duty over desire. Following Queen Victoria's death in 1901, Britain was eager to shake off the conservative structures of the past and embrace new outlooks on culture and politics. In the "Door in the Wall," Wallace is a political figure in a time of great political change in Britain: in 1906, the Liberals took a significant majority in Parliament, formed the Labour Party, and created a welfare program. Characteristic of this generation was a form of British liberal optimism, emerging also from disillusionment with the attitudes of the Victorian era: the belief that science has so improved the quality of life that there is little left to discover. Wells was a supporter of this optimism at the time of writing "The Door in the Wall."

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

"The Door in the Wall" is not the first time Wells explored the idea of a young man who finds and loses a magical world. His 1901 short story "Mr. Skelmersdale in Fairyland," like "The Door in the Wall," is the tale of a regretful man unable to return to Fairy Land, and explores similar themes of a lost golden past and the conflict of ambition and contentment. Stories of doors to magical worlds—known as portal fantasies—are popular in children's literature such as C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, The Witch, And the Wardrobe* and Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*. A modern portal fantasy series, *Wayward Children* by Seanan McGuire, tells the story of children like young Wallace, who experience a traumatic return to their real lives after experiencing a fantasy world and seek to find their doors again. As a pioneer of the science fiction genre, Wells inspired a number of authors, such as post-war author Arthur C. Clarke, and American science fiction legends Ray Bradbury, Isaac Asimov, and Ursula K. Le Guin. James Hilton's *Lost Horizon*, the protagonist of which seeks to return to the peace of Shangri-La, also takes inspiration from "The Door in the Wall."

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Door in the Wall
- **When Written:** 1906
- **Where Written:** England
- **When Published:** The story was first published in the *Daily Chronicle* in 1906 and then reprinted in *The Country of the Blind and Other Stories* and *The Door in the Wall and Other Stories* in 1911.
- **Literary Period:** Proto-Modernism
- **Genre:** Short story, science fiction, fantasy
- **Setting:** London
- **Climax:** Wallace falls to his death in a railway construction site
- **Antagonist:** Both Wallace's ambition, which keeps him from the door in the wall, and the door itself which distracts him from fully engaging with his life.
- **Point of View:** First person through the narrator Redmond

EXTRA CREDIT

International fame. Wells became so well-known as an author and intellectual that he was able to meet with a number of world leaders to discuss policy throughout his life. He met Vladimir Lenin while in Russia in 1920, visited U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1934, and interviewed Joseph Stalin in the Soviet Union in the same year.

The Father of Science Fiction. Wells is considered one of the founders of science fiction. He is also sometimes called "The Father of Futurism" because of his correct predictions of advancements and inventions not yet created when he wrote

them. Some of these predictions include the automatic door, wireless communication, plane travel, space travel, and a uranium-based weapon similar to the atomic bomb.

PLOT SUMMARY

"The Door in the Wall" is narrated by a man named Redmond who considers the fantastical story of **the door in the wall**, told him by his ordinarily reserved friend Lionel Wallace. One evening at dinner, Wallace confesses the reason for his long-standing distraction from work and relationships. Redmond is unsure of whether the story itself is true, but he is convinced that Wallace believes it.

When Wallace was five years old, he came across a green door set in a white wall that seemed to call to him while walking the streets of London. He knew that the door would be unlocked but hesitated to enter because he felt his strict father would be angry with him if he did. In a burst of emotion, he rushed through the door and found an otherworldly garden that filled him with immediate peace and happiness.

The garden is difficult for Wallace to describe, and he admits that he may have altered some of its details in his mind over the years, but he emphasizes the feelings it gave him: exhilaration, lightness, goodness, and well-being. In the garden, he met two tame panthers and a beautiful girl who led him by the hand to other children who played games with him. Eventually, a somber woman took him into a room and showed him a book that contained the story of his past. When it reached the page with Wallace standing outside the green door, however, and Wallace urged the woman to go on, he found himself once again on the London sidewalk where he had been before going through the door. Wallace felt deeply sad at being ejected from the garden. He also attempted to tell his father what he saw, but his father punished him for lying and forbid him from speaking of the garden.

Years later, on his way to school, Wallace accidentally encountered the door again. He felt the same draw to go through it, but passed it by in order to get to school on time. He made the mistake of telling another boy about the door but was unable to find it when pressured into leading his schoolmates there, and was mocked mercilessly by the other schoolboys. He saw the door again on his way to receive a scholarship from Oxford, and, again, chose to pass it by. For years, the door appeared to him only while he was on his way to important meetings, and he never went in.

Now middle-aged and a successful politician, Wallace is nonetheless dissatisfied with his life. He swore to himself that if he saw the door again, he would go through. However, it has appeared to him three times in the past year—during an important vote, on his way to his father's deathbed, and in the middle of a promotion—and he has passed it by every time.

Depressed and regretful, Wallace tells Redmond that he has missed his chance to return through the door. He wanders the streets at night searching for the door.

Redmond reveals that three months after that conversation, Wallace was killed by a fall into a pit in a railway construction site. The pit was just inside a door in a makeshift fence surrounding the pit, which had been left unlocked by mistake. Redmond considers how, in the electric lights, the door must have looked like Wallace's green door. It seems to Redmond that, regardless of whether the green door was ever real or just some kind of hallucination, some might think the door betrayed Wallace in the end. But Redmond wonders, whether Wallace—a dreamer and a man of vision—would have seen it that way.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Lionel Wallace – The protagonist of "The Door in the Wall," Lionel Wallace is a successful politician. He is distracted from his career, however, by his preoccupation with **the door in the wall**, which he explains to Redmond, the narrator, one night after dinner. As a child, Wallace discovered a green door in a white wall which led to a magical **garden** where he experienced happiness, peace, and human connection. Young Wallace is desperate to return to the garden but is forbidden from speaking about it by his strict father, who believes he is too imaginative. The garden appears to Wallace again one day on his way to school, but he passes it by in order to keep his perfect punctuality record. Wallace learns that the door is not always in the same place and that he cannot bring others to it; when he is pressured by his schoolfellows to lead them to the door, he is unable to find it. Over the years, the door appears to Wallace only when he is on the way to important events for his education, career, or life. Every time he sees the door, despite felling a desire to go inside, he chooses the practicalities of everyday life over the otherworldly garden. By the time of his conversation with Redmond, he bitterly regrets these choices, having concluded that the success he so desperately sought and has now achieved in his career is ultimately meaningless. Wallace is distraught by his belief that he will never be able to return to the garden; he neglects his work by day and wanders the streets in grief by night. Ultimately, Wallace dies by falling into a pit at a construction site. Redmond realizes that Wallace thought a door in the fence was the door to the garden, and went through, falling to his death. Redmond finishes the story by stating that some people might think that the door in the wall betrayed Wallace and led him to his death. But Redmond comments that Wallace, a dreamer and a man of vision, would not think the same, implying that perhaps Wallace, even if it led to his death in this world, may have found his way back to the garden after all.

Redmond – Redmond, the narrator of "The Door in the Wall," is the practical and sympathetic friend of the main character Lionel Wallace. No slacker himself, Redmond nonetheless makes clear that Wallace has far surpassed him in terms of career success. While sharing a private dinner one night, Wallace reveals to Redmond the story of **the door in the wall** which leads to a magic **garden**. Redmond is a trusting and careful listener. It is only the morning after the conversation that he thinks to question his immediate belief in Wallace's story, though he ultimately comes to believe, at least, that Wallace himself fully believes the story. Redmond is later dismayed when Wallace's dead body is found in a railway shaft behind a door in a wall, and realizes that Wallace went through a door in the fence around the construction, thinking it was the door in the wall, and fell to his death. Though never certain whether the door in the wall was itself real or some kind of hallucination, Redmond comes to believe that Wallace himself wouldn't have thought of himself as being "tricked" or "betrayed" by the door, that instead Wallace was the type of special person to experience something miraculous.

Wallace's Father – A stern, remote, and career-focused lawyer, Wallace's father expected great things of Wallace from a young age. When Wallace was five years old, he found **the door in the wall** and told his father about his experience, but Wallace's father thrashed him for telling lies. Wallace describes his father, who punishes him for his imaginative nature, as "old school." In later years, Wallace pursues a prestigious education and career path, as his father wanted for him, and receives his father's rare praise. At the end of his father's life, Wallace encounters the door, but chooses to be at his deathbed rather than take the opportunity to enter the garden.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Carnaby – An older boy at the school that Wallace and Redmond attend. He is a bully, and particularly cruel to Wallace after Wallace reveals his story about seeing the door in the wall but then can't find it to show the other boys.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

REALITY, FANTASY, DREAMS, AND VISIONS

In H. G. Wells' "The Door in the Wall," the narrator Redmond relates the story of his friend Lionel Wallace's encounters with **a green door in a white wall**, and the fantastical garden of otherworldly peace, beauty, and happiness that lies behind the door. Wallace first comes upon the door and garden at five years old. The door then appears to him multiple times over the course of his life, but in each case, for various reasons, he doesn't go through it. Over time, though, he becomes increasingly regretful about his repeated choices to not return to the garden. A few months after his conversation with Redmond, he is found dead, having fallen into a deep hole after apparently mistaking a door to a railway construction site for the door to the magic garden. In the world of the story, it's never made clear whether Wallace's fantastical door and garden was real—a real magical entrance to a real magical garden—or merely a dream, hallucination, or product of a powerful imagination. While the story initially sets up this question of the reality of the door and garden as key, the fact that the story never answers the question suggests that the story's actual concerns rest elsewhere, and that in fact such a binary true/false view misunderstands the nature of these "dreamers, these men of vision" who experience visions such as the garden, and their potential impact on the "real" world.

"The Door in the Wall" immediately establishes the question of the truth of Wallace's story as being key. Before the narrator, Redmond, explains the content of Wallace's story in any way, he raises the question of its believability. Redmond then goes into great detail about why he initially believed it, came to doubt it, and then ultimately concluded that, while he wasn't sure what to believe, he believed that Wallace himself believed the story he was telling to be true. Redmond comments that "the reader must judge for himself." By casting the reader as the judge of this question, the narrator implies that answering this question—getting to the truth—will be the thrust of the story. Throughout the story, details provided can then be seen as supporting or casting doubt on the story about the door in the wall. For instance, the fact that Wallace's memories of the garden from his childhood visit are somewhat hazy, or that Wallace speculates that in thinking about the garden after first visiting it he may have inadvertently changed details, or that no one else—neither his father nor other kids at school—ever believes him when he tells them of the garden, all seem to suggest that the garden may be imaginary. At the same time, the fact that Wallace is immensely successful—he was a star in school and now is about to become a government cabinet minister—implies that what he describes can be generally taken with confidence as being accurate and true.

In its final section, though, the story takes a turn. Redmond reveals that shortly after Wallace told him about the door in the wall, Wallace was found dead, a result of stepping through a temporary door in the boarded fence around a construction site and falling to his death in a dark pit. Initially it seems as if this outcome will answer the question posed at the beginning of the story. If Wallace would do something so silly as to get himself killed by mistaking a wall in a construction fence for his

magical door, and then fall to his death in a dark pit, surely his entire vision of the garden must have been little more than a hallucination. And that hallucination, moreover, led Wallace first to a deep regret about choosing his successful life over the promise of the garden, and then to his death. Some version of this story might in the end suggest that the inability to realize what is and isn't fantasy is ultimately self-destructive. And, in fact, Redmond himself says that "there are times when I believe that Wallace was no more than the victim of… a rare but not unprecedented type of hallucination." Yet Redmond doesn't stop there, and instead notes that "I am more than half-convinced that he had, in truth, an abnormal gift… that in the guise of wall and door offered him an outlet… into another and altogether more beautiful world." And then Redmond contests that this "outlet" betrayed Wallace in the end. Redmond argues that while "we see our world fair and common" such that we only see the boarded-up fence and the dark pit, that, in contrast, "these dreamers, these men of vision" such as Wallace might see things entirely differently. In this way, after at first charging the reader with serving as a judge of the truth of Wallace's story, Redmond now pulls the rug out from under the reader's feet and suggests that whether the door or garden are "real" is beside the point, and that focusing on that question misunderstands a deeper truth within Wallace's experiences that transcends whether or not the door or garden are "real."

By connecting Wallace with "dreamers" and "men of vision," Redmond implicitly connects Wallace to prophets, shamans, or other past visionaries. Through this connection, Redmond suggests that Wallace's door and garden are similar to the spiritual visions of these past dreamers—it should not be taken as a coincidence, for instance, that Wallace's garden bears a resemblance to the biblical Garden of Eden. This is not to say that the story is suggesting that Wallace definitively experienced a vision of heaven. Rather, the story seems instead to imply that the mystery it originally describes—is the door real or not—is unknowable, is a realm not of logic but of faith. And, further, that it is within this unknowability and faith that the power of such visions—and of the visionaries who have them and as a result of having them no longer fit in the normal world—reside.

AMBITION AND MATERIAL SUCCESS VS CONTENTMENT AND JOY

H. G. Wells' "The Door in the Wall" relates the story of Lionel Wallace, who, throughout his life, was precocious and successful. He learned to speak at a young age, was responsible beyond his years, excelled first in school and then in his career, and by the age of thirty-nine was about to move into the upper echelons of government. He is successful in a way that would make anyone—including Redmond, the narrator of the story—envious and amazed. Yet Wallace's childhood memories of the magic garden he encountered beyond **the green door** make him aware of a different possibility in life that stands in opposition to material or competitive success. In his brief time in the garden, he experiences peace, contentment, purely collaborative play (as opposed to competition), and human connection. After that first encounter with the door, every subsequent time Wallace comes upon it occurs during a critical moment that could affect his success in normal life, which leads him to choose not to open it. In consistently setting the contentment of the garden against Wallace's pursuit of success in the world, the story implies that contentment and success stand in opposition to and are irreconcilable with each other.

Expectations of great material success are placed on Wallace from a young age, first by his father and later by himself. The achievement of success in school and his career, however, does not bring him contentment or real joy. From the outset of the story, Wells establishes Wallace as a highly competent and "extremely successful" person. When he applies himself, he excels in school and achieves increasingly important positions of power in the government. He exceeds his goals and receives his stern father's praise. However, when distracted by the reverie of his past contentment in the garden, Wallace fails to achieve the material success he is otherwise capable of. For instance, after the door appears to him in his school days and he passes it by in order to preserve his perfect attendance record for punctuality, he later becomes despondent and receives bad reports for two terms. Similarly, after passing the door by in order to continue an important conversation to advance his career, he later neglects his work. Even the thought of the contentment of the garden reduces his ambition and prevents him from achieving material success. In addition, when Wallace does apply himself and achieve his goals, as he reveals to Redmond, his extraordinary accomplishments do not bring him joy. He is "sorrowful and bitter," engaging in work he finds "toilsome" and unrewarding. His labors and his repeated rejection of the door have made him an impressive and prominent politician, but his lack of satisfaction with his life—as well as his deep despair compared with to the comfortable freedom of his early childhood—implies that ambition cannot coexist with joy.

Wells presents the garden and its perfect contentment as the natural opposite of Wallace's competitive world of grades, accomplishments, and government positions. One of Wallace's first perceptions of the door as a child is that his father—"who gave him little attention and expected great things of him"—would be angry with him if he went through it, portraying the door as the enemy of his father's pragmatic worldview of the importance of career accomplishment and material success. When Wallace does go through the door, the very air of the garden on the other side makes Wallace forget the "discipline and obedience of home." Just as Wallace struggles to achieve material success while occupied with thinking about

the garden in his real life, he is unable to conceive of ambition while inside the garden. The joy of the garden is all-consuming—ambition cannot exist within it.

The story constantly amplifies the tension between the contentment offered by the garden and the promise of success in the "real world" such that there is no middle ground: the choice for one always involves giving up the other entirely. Wallace describes himself as both "passionately" desiring the garden and feeling a "gravitational pull" towards the opportunities for success afforded by work and school. The force of these two opposing desires creates the primary conflict of Wallace's life, which he is never able to resolve. After his first encounter with the door as a child, the door only appears to Wallace during important life moments that will materially affect his success, such as when he is rushing to be on time to school or is in the middle of a key meeting. Similarly, it is impossible for him to locate the door during quiet times. He is not given the option to both experience the contentment of the garden and maintain the success of his illustrious career, implying that the combination of contentment and success is not possible at all. The door presents itself only as an exchange, and one that Wallace understands as a permanent one: if he goes into the garden, he will "go and never return," trading his ambitious life for a content one. And, near the end of the story, he becomes certain that having chosen not to go into the garden on each occasion when he's had the chance, he'll now never get the chance again.

At the beginning of his career, when he had experienced only a little success, Wallace valued ambition and success far more, understanding them to be things "that merited sacrifice." Near the end of his life, though, having actually experienced power and success, he wonders whether achieving his ambitions was indeed worth the sacrifice of a life with contentment. After repeatedly choosing to pass the door by and attempting to find joy in a life of prominence and political success, he comes to believe that success, the thing he has sought all his life and finally achieved, is "vulgar, tawdry, irksome," and ultimately unworthy of its necessary sacrifice of contentment. The pursuit of success is indeed a sacrifice, as is the pursuit of contentment. For Wallace, and perhaps, the story implies, for everyone, to have one is to sacrifice the other.

THE LOST GOLDEN PAST

"The Door in the Wall" tells the story of a man, Wallace, who in his long-ago youth stepped through a magical **door** and experienced a brief, hazy moment of golden perfection—love, harmony, and pure connection. The story never makes clear if that moment was or was not imaginary, but in some sense it hardly matters. What matters instead is that Wallace consistently has the *feeling* that he can go back to that time—the door appears to him at times in his life—but he is never in fact quite able to step back through the door. His current life and concerns always intervene, whether the need to get to school, or visit his father's death bed, or continue an important meeting for his career. In this way the garden functions for Wallace like a kind of "lost golden past"—an idealized vision of a better, purer, more innocent, and yet inaccessible time that both defines Wallace's life but also isolates him from the meaning, people, and even reality of his current life.

The garden, emblematic of the golden past, is ultimately inaccessible to Wallace despite the door's repeated appearance in his life. The door is present and visible, yet always just out of reach. The garden, a place of "peace," "delight," "beauty," and "kindness," is a brief refuge for Wallace from his dull and joyless childhood. The possibility of a return to it continues to act as a sustaining dream for him throughout boyhood and adult life. Its repeated appearance during important moments revives his longing for the golden past of the garden. However, the garden is consistently inaccessible to Wallace after the first time due to the obligations and demands of his present adult life. For example, the last time he encounters the door, he chooses to continue a conversation important to furthering his career rather than entering and returning to the idyllic childhood dream-world of the garden. In addition, when Wallace does attempt to enter what he thinks is the door to the garden and return to the lost golden past, he ends up falling to his death in a deep pit in a railway construction site. While the story leaves open the possibility that Wallace, in death, actually does find the garden again, what's just as clear is that while he's alive, the idealized past is unattainable, and his belief in its accessibility only destroys the opportunities of his present.

Wallace's proximity to the lost golden past of the garden—in his mind and memory and in his sightings of the door—alienates him from adult life and adult relationships. Wallace's longing for the idealized and innocent golden past prevents him from fully experiencing and enjoying the realities of his life. Though immensely successful, he fails to find satisfaction in his career and personal life. His preoccupation with his lost golden past also damages his relationships and isolates him from others. For example, his father and schoolfellows both punish him for his belief in the garden. In addition, his distraction and lack of interest in his life has harmed at least one failed romantic relationship. Redmond, the narrator, recalls that a woman who once loved Wallace spoke of his "detachment" from the world and his forgetfulness of other people. The lost golden past, in the form of the garden and its door which haunt Wallace through his life, prevents him from connecting emotionally with his life. He clings to an inaccessible ideal—perfect happiness with perfectly loving friends in the garden—rather than devoting himself to the lesser connections of his real life, adult relationships, and a satisfactory career. Finally, the golden past isolates Wallace because his perception of reality is different from that shared by others like Redmond. Though the story

leaves the actual existence of the door open to interpretation, it is possible that it is only a dream or hallucination, in which case Wallace's connection to his lost past separates him from his very reality.

Wallace, while seeking advancement in his career, is at the same time constantly looking back. He is prevented from entering the door to the lost golden past of the garden because of his pursuit of success. However, he is also prevented from entering the door because, as the story implies, though it might *feel* imminently accessible, Wallace cannot actually *live* in the past. Seen in this light, the garden acts for Wallace as a coping mechanism for the disappointing realities of the present: one that is both a comforting dream and a harmful delusion. The more Wallace interacts with the world, as he does early in his career, vain and vulgar though it might be, the brighter that real world appears. It is only when he sinks into the reverie of the golden past that the present looks so dull. The "Door in the Wall" captures the way that such nostalgia for a lost past—a past that, being past, may in fact be entirely imaginary—can provide a person with both a sense of meaning, but also define or warp that person's present. The fact that the "lost golden past" of the story is a garden from which Wallace was evicted and then can't return also clearly evokes the Garden of Eden, and in so doing the story can also be read as portraying the way that a religion or ideology can be animated by the idea of a "lost golden past," which offers meaning but also creates tension with the world of the present.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE DOOR IN THE WALL

The door in the wall symbolizes an alternative path to Wallace's career-focused and successful but ultimately discontented life. The door first appears to Wallace early in his life, as he is being shaped by his father's old-fashioned plans for him. That first time, he is able to step through the door and experience an alternative childhood of love, play, and collaboration different from his father's rules and expectations of success. When he is even just a bit older, however, in his school days, his obligations and aspirations prevent him from taking the alternative path to the garden of peace and contentment. Instead, he chooses to ignore the door in favor of getting to school on time, the rigor of academics, and the pressures of competing with his classmates.

The door then appears to him multiple times during important career moments in Wallace's life, offering him a choice between the path he is on and another path which leads him away from material success but into happiness and contentment. He knows, when it appears, that the door is unlocked and that the people in the garden are waiting for him and glad to see him. The possibility of that alternative life haunts him throughout his scholastic and political career, but he never chooses to take the final step and open the door that would cut him off from his career. He feels a draw to the door, but he is also drawn by responsibility, expectations, and his own ambition towards his political career. In this way, the door also comes to symbolize the incompatibility of life in this world—a life of striving for success—and the life of perfect contentment beyond the door. One or the other may be possible, the story seems to say, but no one can have both at once.

Upon reaching middle age, however, he feels that he has over and over again made the wrong choice and taken the wrong path. At the end of the story, he so longs for that alternative path that he mistakes another door—one leading to his death—for the door in the wall which he believes would have led to his fulfillment. The story never answers the ultimate question of whether that quest for fulfillment led to Wallace's awful and ridiculous death in a pit, or if in stepping through that final door and to his death he in fact did escape his material life and regained the perfect contentment of the garden. By withholding that answer, the story turns the door into a symbol for the unknowability of whether some kind of heaven exists—an acknowledgement that the only way to learn that answer is to die.

THE GARDEN

The garden in "The Door in the Wall" symbolizes a place of perfect contentment and peace, an escape from the competition and vanity of everyday life. The garden, lush and expansive, full of flowers, tame animals, and kind friends, is a dream-like world, in which Wallace feels that lightness and happiness exist in the very air he breathes. He discovers the garden behind the **door in the wall** when he is only five years old, and experiences a feeling like homecoming—contentment, belonging, and joy—for the first time in his life. There, happily playing with other children, Wallace forgets the outside world, the strictness of his father, and the loneliness of his life.

When a woman in the garden shows him a book containing pictures of his life, however, and he wishes to turn the page past his present moment—a metaphorical indication of his focus towards the future—he finds himself shut out of the garden. In this way, the garden acts for Wallace as a perfect moment of childhood, now forever lost to him. In addition, the garden is set up as being entirely at odds with any ambition or even a desire to know what happens in the future. The garden is a heaven of sorts, but as a heaven it is entirely static, outside of time or progress, and as such incompatible with the material world.

Wallace's loss of the perfect garden also evokes the Garden of Eden; Wallace transgresses by thoughtlessly seeking knowledge from the picture book and is banished, unable to return. To live in the Garden of Eden is to retain the innocence of childhood. Wallace's early advancement, his ability to speak from a young age, and the ambition instilled in him by his father make him incompatible with the perfect peace of the garden. The garden's resemblance to the Garden of Eden implies that Wallace, ambitious and quick to grow up, can visit the garden, but can't stay or, in later years, return. His own priorities, his desire for success and achievement, prevent him from reaching the garden. As long as Wallace is ambitious, he cannot have perfect peace. The garden therefore becomes a symbol of the lost world of true contentment which Wallace is banished from by age, by transgression, or by his own choices.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Modern Library edition of *Selected Stories of H. G. Wells* published in 2004.

Part 1 Quotes

"Then very haltingly at first, but afterwards more easily, he began to tell of the thing that was hidden in his life, the haunting memory of a beauty and a happiness that filled his heart with insatiable longings, that made all the interests and spectacle of worldly life seem dull and tedious and vain to him.

Related Characters: Redmond (speaker), Lionel Wallace

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 284

Explanation and Analysis

This passage comes early in the story, as Redmond begins to convey Wallace's account of the door in the wall and the garden behind it. Wallace has great difficulty describing his account to Redmond, both because he was previously misbelieved and ridiculed for talking about the garden and because his experience of the garden is so rooted in inexpressible emotion and sensation.

This passage introduces the garden as a "golden past," an indelible perfect moment from that past that is now lost to Wallace. Wallace describes his memory of the garden as "haunting." Though the garden is a memory of loveliness and happiness, the very fact that it exists only as a memory negatively impacts Wallace's daily life. Wallace's memory of the garden both helps and harms; it consoles him in his "dull and tedious" present life, but it is also what makes his life *seem* "dull and tedious."

This passage also introduces the tension in the story between Wallace's interest in the "spectacle" of the real world and his desire to return to the perfect peace of the garden. Here at the very beginning of Wallace's story, before he has recounted his long history with the door in the wall, he implies the way that his experiences during this memory from the past inform his final understanding that the real world is "dull and tedious and vain."

"As his memory of that childish experience ran, he did at the very first sight of that door experience a peculiar emotion, an attraction, a desire to get to the door and open it and walk in. And at the same time he had the clearest conviction that either it was unwise or it was wrong of him— he could not tell which—to yield to this attraction. He insisted upon it as a curious thing that he knew from the very beginning—unless memory has played him the queerest trick— that the door was unfastened, and that he could go in as he chose. (…) And it was very clear in his mind, too, though why it should be so was never explained, that his father would be very angry if he went in through that door.

Related Characters: Redmond (speaker), Lionel Wallace

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 285-286

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is Redmond's secondhand account of the first time Wallace ever saw the door in the wall: he was five years old and walked past it on a London street. Redmond notes here that it is a "childish experience." Such a young child, Redmond implies, might easily have invented or altered the events of his afternoon in the garden. Similarly, as Wallace himself admits, it took place long ago, and Wallace's memory of it may have shifted in the long years since. Redmond's reminder that the experience is a childish one is a piece of evidence that might impact the decision Redmond asks the reader to make about whether the door in the wall is real.

The young Wallace's desire to enter the door that he knows to be open to him is in conflict with his innate understanding

that it would be somehow wrong of him to enter. Here, already, though he does not know what lies beyond the door, Wallace's childhood curiosity and strong desire is contrasted with the self-discipline demanded of him by his father. He perceives giving in to strong emotion as either "unwise" or "wrong," an understanding that follows him throughout his life as he chooses the practical realities of life over his intense desire to return to the emotionally-fulfilling world of the garden. Even this first instant of encountering the door in the wall, the story establishes the door and the garden behind it as being incompatible with the demands of the everyday world as embodied by Wallace's father. To choose one, even the five-year-old Wallace understands, is to deny the other.

> It was very difficult for Wallace to give me his full sense of that garden into which he came.
>
> (…) In the instant of coming into it one was exquisitely glad—as only in rare moments, and when one is young and joyful one can be glad in this world.

Related Characters: Redmond (speaker), Lionel Wallace

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 286

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Wallace begins to describe the garden to Redmond. Just as Wallace has difficulty giving in to strong emotion, he has similar difficulty expressing it. To describe only the visible attributes of the garden would not be enough to accurately convey Wallace's memory. It is a fundamentally emotional experience—the garden isn't just magical or amazing, it makes him feel instantly glad and fulfilled. It is an immediate and profound change from the street outside the door, and Wallace describes it as such.

In the garden, Wallace experiences emotions that he associates with being "young" and "joyful," two things that, at the time when he is telling this story to Redmond, he is not. He has aged and saddened. For him, then, the garden offers a return to what he can no longer have: the absolute joy and overwhelming emotion of childhood and the ability to feel content with his life.

Wallace's difficulty in describing the garden correctly to Redmond is once again presented in the story in such a way as to highlight the tension between reality and fantasy: it might be taken as an indicator to Redmond and to the reader that Wallace is attempting to convey either a genuinely otherworldly and therefore inexpressible experience, or that he is now haunted by a vague childhood dream, barely remembered.

> But— it's odd—there's a gap in my memory. I don't remember the games we played. I never remembered. Afterwards, as a child, I spent long hours trying, even with tears, to recall the form of that happiness. I wanted to play it all over again— in my nursery—by myself. No! All I remember is the happiness and two dear playfellows who were most with me…

Related Characters: Lionel Wallace (speaker), Redmond

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 288

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Wallace again admits to having imperfect memories of the garden: a strong indicator of the tension between reality and fantasy in the story. Wallace's inability to remember something so simple as a game, even minutes after playing it, discredits him as a storyteller. Earlier in the story, Redmond urged the reader to be the judge of the truth of Wallace's story, and this passage reveals that his story is, if not incorrect, incomplete. The acknowledged lack of detail in Wallace's description of the garden gives it a distinctly dreamlike quality, as though he might actually be recounting a fantasy rather than a memory.

The games Wallace played, like the garden itself, are representative of the "golden past" of this perfect childhood time, which is now lost to him. He cannot take the games, or the sort of collaborative non-competitive fellowship they represent, out of the garden and into the real world. Instead, in the outside world, he has only a shadow of the experience of the garden: vague memories of feelings, but no way to replicate them, such that he now yearns for the half-remembered experience.

In this passage, Wallace also reveals himself to be an isolated child. Even if he could have remembered the games he played in the garden after he left it, he would not have been able to play them. In his lonely nursery, he had no

playmates, and therefore the collaborative games of the garden were even further out of his reach. The games he played in the garden, and the full force of the feelings they brought him, are incompatible with Wallace's life in the outside world—they can't exist there at all. The fact of Wallace's childhood loneliness might be read as further indicating that the garden was nothing more than a personal fantasy of his, a cure invented by a little boy to find companionship. Yet, at the same time, the garden might instead be seen as offering a heaven of fellowship and love in conflict with the lonely actuality of the real world.

> Poor little wretch I was!—brought back to this grey world again! As I realised the fulness of what had happened to me, I gave way to quite ungovernable grief. And the shame and humiliation of that public weeping and my disgraceful home-coming remain with me still.

Related Characters: Lionel Wallace (speaker), Wallace's Father, Redmond

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 289

Explanation and Analysis

This passage, set just after Wallace is sent out of the garden, emphasizes his disappointment in the real world now that he can compare it to the beauty and contentment he experienced in the garden. Wallace's brief time in the garden causes him to reorient his entire worldview upon his return to the London street; he understands everything in comparison to the garden, and everything looks "grey." Not only is London gloomy and overcast to look at, but it is also emotionally lacking compared to the garden: dull, uninteresting, and melancholy. This is the moment for Wallace in which the garden becomes an inaccessible golden past.

Wallace is not just disappointed to have left the garden, he is inconsolable. A return to his real world is not simply the end to an adventure, but, rather, the beginning of life-long mourning. Wallace indicates to Redmond that, even as young as he was, he had a sense of "the fulness" of what the loss of the garden would mean. He had found a paradise much like the Garden of Eden, and its loss is both permanent and devastating. Like Adam and Eve, he no longer simply exists in the world outside the garden. Instead, he exists in that "dull" real world knowing that there is a different, brighter, better world.

This passage also introduces Wallace's persistent fear of "shame and humiliation," instilled in him by his father, which follows him throughout his life. As a five-year-old experiencing the devastating loss of the garden, his humiliation at crying publicly is so consuming that he now vividly remembers it as an adult speaking to Redmond.

Wallace has the ability to recollect his emotions with far greater accuracy than he is able to remember facts and details. As a result, his descriptions of his childhood take on a quality of unreality, once again raising the question of how much of his story is true and how much is his own fantasy.

Part 2 Quotes

> I suppose my second experience with the green door marks the world of difference there is between the busy life of a schoolboy and the infinite leisure of a child. Anyhow, this second time I didn't for a moment think of going in straight away. You see—for one thing, my mind was full of the idea of getting to school in time— set on not breaking my record for punctuality. I must surely have felt some little desire at least to try the door—yes, I must have felt that... But I seem to remember the attraction of the door mainly as another obstacle to my overmastering determination to get to school.

Related Characters: Lionel Wallace (speaker), Redmond

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 291

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the older Wallace reflects on his second time finding the door in the wall when he was now teenager at school. Even in the relatively short time from early childhood to his school years, he has undergone a notable transition which he describes as living in a different "world" altogether. He has moved from a world of "infinite leisure" to a "busy" one. In early childhood, nothing stops him from entering the door. By his school days, however, he has obligations and worldly desires which prevent him. His responsibilities have such a strong hold over his life and his mind that he does not even think of taking the time to go through the door when he sees it.

In this passage, the story suggests that Wallace cannot go back to the garden without relinquishing the

responsibilities of his everyday life and returning to the aimless world of a child. He cannot step through the door because it is part of his past, gone and inaccessible to him in his present circumstances; even if his responsibilities are as small as arriving to school on time, they are still important to him.

This passage makes clear that Wallace cannot both engage with his real life to the fullest amount—keep a perfect punctuation record and pay attention in school—while also stopping to go through the door. There is a conflict in timing, but also a conflict in attention. Wallace cannot muster enough attention to have anything other than a "little" desire for the door; his mind is too "full" of getting to school. The door is not only something Wallace has no time for; it is also something antagonistic to his real life, something that attempts to lure him away from his obligations. It is an "obstacle" to his engagement with his real life, no matter how much he longs for it. And his real life, in turn, is an obstacle to going through the door.

Part 3 Quotes

"If 1 had stopped,' I thought, 'I should have missed my scholarship, I should have missed Oxford— muddled all the fine career before me! I begin to see things better!' I fell musing deeply, but I did not doubt then this career of mine was a thing that merited sacrifice.

Related Characters: Lionel Wallace (speaker), Wallace's Father

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 294

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Wallace is describing his early professional life: the time of his life when he is most invested in the value of his real-world life—in particular, his career—rather than the dream-like perfection of the garden. He sees the door in the wall on his way to Oxford, which is one of the preeminent universities in England, and chooses not to stop for it. Once again, Wallace realizes, to choose to stop for the garden is to miss opportunities in his real life. Either way, to choose one path is to "sacrifice" the other.

At this point in his life, Wallace is pleased with the decision he made to pass the door by because he sees his scholarship to Oxford and the career path it promises as exciting and valuable. So long as his excitement about his real-world prospects drives his ambition towards achieving real-world goals, he does not require the contentment of the garden to make his life meaningful. Important, though, is Wallace's word choice in revealing that he did not "then" doubt his decision to sacrifice the garden for his career. In this way, as he tells the story, the older Wallace indicates that later he will come to see success in the real world as less exciting or valuable and will therefore feel differently about the sacrifice.

"If ever that door offers itself to me again, I swore, I will go in, out of this dust and heat, out of this dry glitter of vanity, out of these toilsome futilities. I will go and never return. This time I will stay... I swore it, and when the time came—I didn't go.

Related Characters: Lionel Wallace (speaker), Redmond

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 295

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Wallace tells Redmond of his present dissatisfaction with his reality as it compares to his memory of the garden. He has an impressive career for his age—he is poised to become an important member of the government, and more still to accomplish in government. Yet now that he has reached such a pinnacle of success, he is disillusioned with the world; it no longer has the same shine it did during his early professional life.

Though Wallace displays disgust towards the vanities of the world, the fact that he still doesn't go through the door shows that he is still driven by his ambition and his desire for material success. These things, impossible in the garden of perfect peace with no competition, prevent him from taking the final step through the door. To go and never return, as Wallace swears he will do, implies peace and happiness, but also an existence lacking in discipline, work, and ambition: the things Wallace has pursued all his life. This passage again emphasizes the mutual exclusivity of both the ambition of the real world and the happiness of the garden: he could have one, but never both.

Wallace explains to Redmond that he could not bring himself to leave his world behind, even though he desired the peace of the garden. Representative of the lost golden

past, the garden is inaccessible to Wallace partly because of his disillusionment. Wallace, ambitious and tired, is too deeply connected to the real world. He has obligations and desires which prevent him from entering the door: he has, in a sense, *himself* become incompatible with the garden. Though he longs for the garden, he is unable to divorce himself from his material life enough to return to the freedom and innocence of his childhood that the garden emblemizes.

Part 4 Quotes

❝ And then did the pale electric lights near the station cheat the rough planking into a semblance of white? Did that fatal unfastened door awaken some memory?

Was there, after all, ever any green door in the wall at all?

Related Characters: Redmond (speaker), Lionel Wallace

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 298

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Redmond recounts the instance of Wallace's death, possibly caused by his inability to distinguish correctly between reality and fantasy. In a series of questions, Redmond suggests that Wallace mistook the reality of a gate in a temporary fence around a dangerous construction site for the fantasy of the door in the wall. This passage seems to indicate that Wallace was wrong and that there was never any door in the wall at all—that because Wallace was unable to distinguish this "fatal" door from the door in the wall, he may also have been unable to distinguish a childhood dream from a real memory of the garden.

By mentioning Wallace's "memory," Redmond invokes the many times in Wallace's story when his memory failed him: when Wallace was unable to recollect details and admitted to mixing dream with memory. Imperfect memory is all that remains of the garden for Wallace. The garden is lost to him, like the golden past of his early childhood.

The similarity of the construction site door to the door in the wall also indicates that there are likely many green doors in white walls around London, and that Wallace may have mistaken many different ones for his magical door throughout his life. To open the door and to step through would be to break the illusion, and, once again, Wallace's death due to walking through the door seems to prove this idea.

One last time, Redmond presents the question of whether the door in the wall was real as an important one to the story. However, even in doing so, he reveals it to be unanswerable and, for that reason, less important than he initially made it seem. He does not know whether it was real—no one alive does. The outcome—Wallace's death—is the same either way.

❝ There you touch the inmost mystery of these dreamers, these men of vision and the imagination. We see our world fair and common, the hoarding and the pit. By our daylight standard he walked out of security into darkness, danger, and death.

But did he see like that?

Related Characters: Redmond (speaker), Lionel Wallace

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 298

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, which ends "The Door in the Wall," Redmond moves away from his initial question of whether the door in the wall was real. Redmond, instead, suggests that the question is ultimately unimportant, as is the question of whether the door, in eventually leading Wallace to his death, betrayed him. Instead, Redmond invites his reader to look at the situation a different way: to consider that there are certain people, "dreamers" and "men of vision" like Wallace, who are fundamentally different from others.

Redmond suggests that ordinary people might ask questions like the ones he asked—was the door real, and, if so, did it betray Wallace—but that the extraordinary dreamers would not think to do so. They would not see the danger in Wallace's fatal pursuit of the door in the wall, but rather the opportunity to do the impossible and return to the lost golden past. Redmond suggests that, if given an informed choice of the danger, Wallace would have made the same decision again.

In this way, Redmond concludes 'The Door in the Wall" by characterizing the story Wallace told him and the circumstances of his death as unknowable to people like Redmond and the reader. Only Wallace saw the door in the

wall and the garden, and only Wallace could describe how he felt to see the door that led to the construction site. Granted access to some miraculous knowledge Redmond can never know, Redmond implies that, while Wallace certainly fell to his death in that pit, perhaps in doing so he did see something more, that he did escape this material world for the garden, whether or not it was a "real" garden or a fantasy of his mind.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PART 1

The narrator of the story, Redmond, explains that three months ago his friend Lionel Wallace told him the story of **the door in the wall**. At the time, just after a private dinner and in the glow of the table light, Redmond believed it entirely. But the morning after the conversation, Redmond feels differently. He is surprised that an earnest and serious man like Wallace was able to tell a fantastical story so convincingly. As he drinks his morning tea, Redmond finds himself trying to explain how Wallace's "impossible reminiscences" could have felt so real the night before, and comes upon the explanation that the story in some way conveyed an experience that was not describable in any other way.

Redmond's narration indicates to the reader that one of the primary focuses of the story will be the question of whether Wallace's story is true. Redmond's own admitted uncertainty about its truth introduces a tension between reality and fantasy. The story continually plays with this tension, such as the way that Redmond's initial characterization of Wallace as a serious and practical person, not prone to pranks or fancies, suggests that his story should also be taken seriously. Meanwhile, note that Redmond does not at this point mention why he is thinking of Wallace this particular morning three months after their dinner, suggesting that there may be a reason he has not yet revealed to the reader.

Now, though, Redmond says, that whatever he thought that morning, he no longer doubts. He believes that Wallace fully believed his story to be true. Redmond is less sure whether the story was actually true and Wallace experienced some great privilege or whether instead Wallace was "the victim of some fantastic dream." Even the facts of Wallace's death do not completely clarify it for him. Redmond says that readers must make that judgment for themselves.

By placing the question of whether the door in the wall is real or not onto the reader, Wells initially indicates that the question is an important one to the story. And it places the reader as a kind of "judge" about what is real or fantastical. At this point in the story, Redmond—despite his own inner conflict about this question—presents the question as an answerable one with two available options—that Wallace is either right or hallucinating.

Redmond can't recall exactly how they began to speak about **the door in the wall**, but he believes it emerged from his criticism of Wallace's unreliability in supporting a political matter. To defend himself, Wallace haltingly reveals to Redmond that he has a preoccupation; that he is haunted by something. Wallace then begins to tell Redmond that he suffers from a memory of a memory of beauty and happiness that fills him with longing and makes his everyday life look vain and dull.

Here, Redmond introduces the central conflict between ambition and contentment which plagues Wallace throughout his life. Wallace is unable to focus on his political career and devote energy and attention to it because he is preoccupied by the memory of perfect happiness. He cannot balance the two—the memory of happiness, now lost to him, blocks him not only from performing as expected in his career and everyday life but from even seeing any value in those things.

Once Wallace mentions his distraction, Redmond realizes that he can see it visibly in Wallace's face. He also recalls that a woman who had once loved Wallace had mentioned that distraction as well: how he seems to forget you and suddenly lose interest.

Redmond reveals that Wallace's preoccupation with his memory of happiness—what might be described as a "lost golden past"—invades all corners of his life. It impacts not only his career, but also his personal relationships. Wallace's longing defines him to such a degree that it is visible in his behavior and on his face.

When Wallace does maintain his interest, however, he is extremely successful in his career—far more successful than Redmond. He similarly surpassed Redmond—who wasn't a bad student himself—when they were in school together at St. Athelstan's College. Redmond also remembers that it was at school that he first heard a mention of the **door in the wall**, which Wallace then told him about that night during dinner.

Redmond's narration reveals that—despite Wallace's as-yet-unexplained preoccupation—Wallace has the capacity for incredible ambition and material success. In this way, Wallace becomes a kind of "battleground" for two opposing forces: the allure of success and importance in the everyday world on the one hand, and the desire for profound happiness and spiritual fulfillment on the other. That Redmond recalls the door in the wall being associated with Wallace all the way back in his school days makes clear that this tension in Wallace has long existed, and also serves to heighten the general mystery in the story about just what the door in the wall is.,

Redmond now relates Wallace's story. Wallace was a precocious and practical child. His mother died when he was two, and his father was stern and distant but expected great things of him. One day, when he is about five and wandering the streets of London, He notices a **green door set in a white wall**. Certain it will be unlocked, he feels a strong compulsion to open it. Yet, at the same time, it is clear in his mind that if were to go through the door it would make his father angry if he did. He walks past the door and goes to the shops down the street, where he looks through their wares. But then he turns in a burst of emotion and runs through the door before he can change his mind.

Wallace, as Redmond did in the story's introduction, emphasizes Wallace's loneliness, practicality, and early success. These various traits continue to play with the tension around the reality of the door in the wall. Is it a real thing that the young Wallace encounters, or is it a hallucination of a lonely boy looking for contentment and connection that he can't get at home with his mother dead and his father strict and distant? Even as a young child, he senses the tension between the spiritual fulfillment offered on the other side of the door and material success. In this case, he knows somehow that the door is open to him: the path to a carefree, golden childhood. Still, his fearful adherence to his father's priorities—ambition and self-control—lead him to initially pass the door by. It is the strong, uncontrollable emotions of childhood, contrasted with his father's rules and his own practicality, which then sends him through the door.

Wallace finds himself in a **garden**. The garden's air was intoxicating, and breathing it gave a feeling of lightness and goodness. Everything in it was beautiful, and it filled him the sort of profound joy one can only feel "when one is young and … can be glad in this world." The garden is enchanted. He sees two panthers and feels no fear as one of them rubs softly against him. Flowers and hills and blue skies stretch into the distance, with London nowhere to be seen. He forgets the "discipline and obedience of home" as well as doubt and fear and the "intimate realities of this life."

The adult Wallace, who is telling this story about his life, emphasizes the feeling of the garden and how it is emblematic of perfect happiness and the golden, indescribable quality of childhood. As the young Wallace is still a child himself, he has few responsibilities to leave behind in his entry into the garden. The garden is a peaceful haven, untouched by reality; London disappears, as do Wallace's worries. In the garden, surrounded by magic and beauty, Wallace is unable to even think about a different world, let alone one as different from the garden as his father's house with its rules and discipline.

Then a tall, beautiful girl comes up to Wallace, and, smiling, takes him by the hand. He has a deep feeling of everything being right and full of a happiness that had somehow been missed before. The girl spoke to him of pleasant things, though he couldn't ever remember what she had said.

Wallace's descriptions of the garden continue to portray it as a perfect place of innocent love and beauty, but they also indicate a certain dreamlike quality in their lack of detail. For the first time, the adult Wallace admits that his memory of the garden is less than perfect, indicating to the reader and to Redmond that they should perhaps question whether Wallace is remember something real or imagined.

Eventually, the girl leads Wallace to some playmates his own age, which is meaningful to him because he is a very lonely boy. With these friends he played wonderful, collaborative games, though the adult Wallace comments to Redmond that he could never remember what games they played. Later, when he was alone in his nursery, he wanted to play the games again, but could only cry as he did he could not remember them.

Wallace's time in the garden is characterized by collaboration and unconditional kindness; the games involve no winning, no "success," which would be incompatible with the garden's perfect joy. Once again, the adult Wallace admits both his imperfect memory of the garden through his inability to remember the games he played in it. That inability—resulting from the fact that he is alone in his nursery and can't actually remember the games, implies that the perfect happiness of the garden cannot exist outside. The reference to the young Wallace back alone in his nursery also foreshadows the fact that his time in the garden will come to an end, and that he will regret it.

After some time playing with his new playmates, a grave woman with dark hair and a pale face appears and leads him away. Wallace's two playmates are upset to see him go and halt their game to beg him to come back soon. The woman takes Wallace to a room where she shows him a book about his life. It contains pictures of realities from his past: his mother, his father, his nursery, and, finally, it shows a picture of Wallace himself standing in the street outside **the door in the wall**, just about to enter. Wallace wants to see more of the book, but the grave woman initially resists doing so. When he insists, she kisses his forehead and turns the page. Wallace sees the lonely street in London: not a picture in the book, but his actual harsh reality.

Wallace's departure from the game very briefly interrupts the perfect happiness of the garden, indicating to him his importance to his playmates and the real connection he has made with them. The picture book blurs the line between reality and fantasy; in this magical fantasy world of the garden, the picture book shows reality. The book, besides Wallace himself, is the only time the real world invades the magical world of the garden. Also note that the book explicitly shows the passing of time, and that it is when Wallace shows interest in his own future hat he is kicked out of the garden. The implication is that the garden is incompatible with progress, with change, and therefore with someone who is interested in what will happen next to him. Wallace's interest in his future is an expression of interest in whether he will be successful in the material world, and that interest is incompatible with staying in the garden.

The garden is gone, as is the grave woman whom Wallace had been with a moment before. He cannot return to the playmates who had called out to him to return. He begins to cry, frightened, distraught, and ashamed of weeping publicly at his age. An old gentleman sees him crying in the street and, assuming that he is lost, finds a policeman to take him home.

Wallace's return to the London street is a shocking transition for him and a shocking tonal change for the reader, thrust from the bright loveliness of the garden to the harsh emptiness of the real world. Wallace's return to reality is the moment in which the garden becomes for him the lost golden past, beautiful and inaccessible. For the first time, Wallace understands the inadequacy of his world, knowledge which will haunt him for the rest of his life. This is, as well, the first time Wallace tells Redmond about his shame, an emotion which will influence his actions in life almost as much as his ambition.

Wallace interrupts his story to say that he has tried to describe **the garden** — which haunts him still — to Redmond as clearly as he is able. But he admits that he can convey nothing of the indescribable sense of the garden: the strange dream-like quality, the unreality, and the difference from common experience. Still, he says, he has given a true account of what happened to him. And if it really was a dream, it was both extraordinary and during the day.

Wallace attempts to convey both the reality and unreality of the garden to Redmond: an impossible task. The garden's unreality and its indescribable peacefulness are both what make it desirable to Wallace and what make it impossible for him to convey accurately to Redmond. It seems important to Wallace that Redmond believe him, but even he can't dismiss the possibility that the entire experience might have been a dream. Given that, Wallace makes clear that it is more important for Redmond to understand that the garden, real or imagined, has had a concrete and lasting impact on Wallace's life. Though he characterizes the garden as a place of goodness and light, Wallace considers the lingering effects of its memory in a more negative light: it "haunts" him.

After returning home, the young Wallace is questioned by his father, his nurse, and his aunt. He attempts to tell them about **the garden**, but his father does not believe him, and gives him his first thrashing for telling lies. His aunt punishes him for his persistence. Everyone in the house is forbidden from listening to Wallace's stories. His father is "old-school" and, concluding that Wallace is too imaginative, takes away his fairy-tale books.

After Wallace's interactions with others in the garden, full of kindness, this meeting with his father is jarring. It emphasizes a disconnect between the strangers in the garden who cared for Wallace and his own family who mistrust and coldly discipline him. Now that the garden is lost to Wallace, so is the rest of his childhood: he is forced by his father to put away his childish things and with it much of his joy and the expression of his vibrant inner life. The loss of the garden is tied to a loss of freedom, imagination, and childhood. And his father sees anything but discipline as antithetical to the success he craves for his son.

At night, the young Wallace cries into his pillow and prays to God to make him dream of the garden. He thought so intensely about the garden that, he now admits to Redmond, he might have changed or added to some of his memories of **the garden**. The adult Wallace comments to Redmond that everything he has described is an effort to reconstruct fragmentary memories of a very young boy.

Now that Wallace has experienced unconditional love and perfect happiness, the real world is not only lacking, but painful to live in. Once again, though, Wallace indicates that his memory of the garden is imperfect, contributing to the tension between reality and fantasies, and drawing the reader back to Redmond's initial question of the reality of the garden.

Under Redmond's questioning, Wallace then says that as a young boy he didn't seek to find the door again, probably because he was not permitted to wander as he had previously. He believes there was even a time when he forgot the garden altogether, and notes that he didn't attempt to reach the garden again until he was at school, when Redmond already knew him. He then asks if, when Redmond knew him as a kid, whether he showed any signs of "having a secret dream."

For Wallace, the loss of the garden means restriction: restriction of movement, restriction of imagination, and restriction into the specific career-focused young adulthood his father demands of him. Wallace's forgetfulness about the garden, however, indicates that he was able, as he is also in later life, to focus on and live successfully in the everyday world. While as an adult he accomplishes this focus through his own interest and willpower, as a child it is enforced upon him by his father and household. He is not permitted to search for the garden or interact with it at all except in the privacy of his own mind. In asking Redmond about whether he showed signs of "having a secret dream," Wallace seems to be seeking confirmation to himself about his relationship to the garden as a schoolboy and whether that tension between the real world and the garden, between success and contentment, were evident in him. It also implies that, now as an adult, Wallace knows that he does show negative signs of having a "secret dream," which Redmond himself has already noted is visible in Wallace's face.

PART 2

Wallace asks Redmond if, during their school days, he ever played a game with Wallace called North-West Passage, but Redmond never did. Wallace explains that the game was of the sort that every imaginative kid played. In this game, the goal was to leave for school ten minutes early going in the wrong direction, and then to find a new route and still arrive on time through unfamiliar streets. Wallace recalls that one day while playing North-West Passage he got lost and thought he would be late to school.

It is noteworthy that, even as a schoolboy, Wallace enjoys inventing opportunities for work and ambition, even if the competition is only against himself. Wallace plays a game that challenges him and requires curiosity, persistence, and exploration: the qualities that led him to enter the door in the wall in the first place. However, the game becomes a source of anxiety for Wallace when it seems that he might actually lose. Wallace enjoys the ambition of the game, but with that ambition comes the risk of unhappiness.

Wallace desperately rushes down a street that he fears is a dead end, but finds a passage through it and begins to hope he might not end up being late after all. He passes a row of inexplicably familiar shops and then comes across a long white wall with **a green door**: the door to the enchanted **garden.** Wallace realizes with a jolt that the garden, which he had come to think was just a dream, was actually real.

Wallace realizes where he is only when he sees the door itself. He does not immediately connect the surrounding shops to his experience in the garden, again indicating his imperfect memory of his first encounter with the door. His immediate reaction to seeing the door in his waking life is surprise. Wallace himself had come to believe that the door was just a childhood fantasy of his—a fact that makes the reader grapple anew with whether the door that Wallace sees now is in fact real or a fantasy.

The adult Wallace interrupts the story at this moment to comment that his second experience with the door shows the difference between the concerns of a young child and those of a busy schoolboy. Wallace says that he didn't even consider going through the door. He tells Redmond that he must have felt at least *some* draw to go through the door, but that he experienced this draw primarily as another obstacle to his desire to get to school and preserve his record for punctuality. That isn't to say he wasn't greatly excited by his discovery of the door, and his mind was full of the door as he ran on and got to school on time, but he never tried to enter it. The adult Wallace looks at Redmond thoughtfully, and then adds that of course he didn't know the door wasn't going to still be there later.

Wallace identifies the differences between his first and second encounters with the door as related to age and responsibility. In his first, very young encounter, he had no obligations preventing him from stepping through the door—only the knowledge of his father's disapproval. As a schoolboy, however, his responsibilities at school take precedence for him over the garden, absolutely preventing him from entering the door that morning. In fact, his obligations consume him so much that he doesn't even consider it. The door is not only incompatible with Wallace's school schedule—it is an "obstacle" to it, actively luring him away from his ambitions and obligations. The adult Wallace further makes clear here that, as a schoolboy, he did not yet understand that there was a tension between the garden and the real world— that to choose school is to leave behind the happiness of the garden. Unaware of the opposition of ambition and happiness, the young Wallace is able to go to school believing that he can have both: that he can fulfill his responsibilities and return later to find the happiness of the garden waiting for him.

At school that day, Wallace is fidgety and inattentive, thinking of the strange and wonderful people he would see again soon when he returned to where he had seen the door in the wall. He is certain that the people in the garden will be glad to see him. He imagines **the garden** as a nice place he can go to take breaks from the stresses of school. He does not go to the garden that day, or the next, for reasons he can't entirely explain.

Wallace's lack of attention in school reveals again the tension between the idea of the garden and the practical obligations of his life. Preoccupied with the door in the wall, he is unable to devote himself fully to his schoolwork, and instead he turns inward to live in the memory of the garden. Again, Wallace believes that he can have both his practical ambitions and the peace of the garden; he imagines treating the garden as a place for a break from his real life, where he can come and go as he pleases. In his memory, it is an idyllic place, a golden past of perfect companionship. He feels sure—as he did when he first saw the door and knew it would be unlocked—that his friends wait for him and love him still.

Yet Wallace is so preoccupied by thoughts of **the garden** that he is unable to keep it to himself. Even though he has the feeling he shouldn't, he tells another boy about **the garden** as they walk home from school.

In telling another boy about the garden, Wallace risks being called a liar, as he was when he was first told his father about the door in the wall. However, with his new surety that the door in the wall and the garden are real, he now reveals the secret again. He didn't speak of the garden to friends at school when he thought it was only a dream, but once it becomes a concrete reality for him, he finds himself unable to stop thinking—and talking—about it.

This boy quickly tells Wallace's secret, and the next day Wallace finds himself surrounded by six bigger boys at school, who tease him but also want to hear more about the **garden**. Wallace is both flattered by the attention from these older boys and disgusted and ashamed with himself for having revealed what he considers a sacred secret. One of the boys, Carnaby, makes a crass joke about the tall girl Wallace met in the garden.

The boys are skeptical of Wallace's story, and, like Redmond, interested in the question of whether or not the door in the wall is real. Wallace both enjoys the sudden social status he has gained in the notice of the older boys, and is haunted by the shame of sharing the secret of his golden past—a space meant to be untouchable and innocent, now marred by the attention and crudeness of the other boys.

When Carnaby calls Wallace a liar, Wallace swears that his story is true. To prove himself, he claims that he knows where to find **the green door** and can lead all the boys there. Carnaby tells Wallace that if he doesn't, he'll suffer for it.

It is important to Wallace that his audience believe his story. He talks about the door in the wall three times: to his father, to his schoolmates, and to Redmond. Only in Redmond does he find a listener who believes him at the time of the telling without proof. With the schoolboys, he must offer evidence that the door in the wall is real and not just a lie or a childish fantasy.

Wallace leads the way to **the garden**, nervous, flushed, and teary-eyed. He again feels misery and shame for having shared a special secret with his threatening schoolmates. And, in the end, Wallace can't find **the green door**, though he tried both then with the boys and later on his own. The boys mock Wallace, and Carnaby in particular makes his life miserable.

In this instance, as always, Wallace is unable to provide concrete proof of the garden to anyone else; when he tries to share it, it exists only in Wallace's memory and the faith of his listener. Wallace's desire to merge the two worlds of the garden and his school by talking about the garden and finding it again later lead him only to more shame: both for sullying his idyllic golden past of the garden with the sneers of his schoolmates and for the ridicule he receives for his "lie." His desire for success in this social situation, like in his racing-to-school-game and in his academic career, makes him already incompatible with the leisurely garden, where the very idea of advancement is foreign.

Wallace cries himself to sleep that night: not over his schoolmates' mockery, but because he now realized that he would not be able to return to **the garden** with his old playmates and the friendly women. He continues to look for **the door** throughout his school days but is never able to find it, and suffers from the belief that if he had not told anyone, he would have been able to find it again. For two terms, he slacks off in school and gets bad grades, until Redmond beats him in math and he devotes his attention to "the grind" again.

At this point, Wallace has begun to understand that the door in the wall exists in tension with the "real" world. It is not available to him in times of leisure; rather, to guarantee his entry into the garden, he must take the opportunity as soon as he sees it, despite his conflicting obligations. His belief that he could have found the door again if he had not told anyone further highlights the tension between reality and fantasy. In talking about the garden, he attempts to make it concrete and verifiable, two things that the dreamlike and elusive garden can never be. Just as he cannot bring certain features of the garden out into the real world, he cannot bring the real world—either his schoolmates or the rules of concrete reality—into the garden. Once again, Wallace's preoccupation with the garden prevents him from full and concentrated attention in his real life. His grades suffer because of his melancholy over his second loss of the garden, and it is not until his material ambitions again motivate him that he can refocus on his real life.

PART 3

The adult Wallace, staring into the fire, pauses a moment. Then he carries on with his story, telling Redmond that he didn't see **the door in the wall** again until he was seventeen. It appears to him for the third time as he is smoking a cigarette and driving to Paddington Station on his way to Oxford University to receive a scholarship. Wallace remarks to Redmond that at that time he must have thought himself quite "a man of the world."

The door in the wall appears to Wallace for the third time as he is—once again—on his way to an obligation, this one significantly more important than the last when he was just rushing to get to school on time. Wallace is entering the adult world and pursuing an education that will lead him to an impressive career. Oxford is one of the premier universities in England, and a launchpad of success. Wallace wishes to be "a man of the world"—his ambition to make a mark on the world drives him. As such, he must necessarily engage in that world—the real world of education and jobs, and not the peaceful world of the garden.

Wallace catches just a glimpse of **the door** as he leans out of the cab to smoke. It appears suddenly, and with it comes the sense of precious and still attainable things. Wallace is too stunned to stop the cab until it had already turned a corner and the door is out of sight. He experiences a strange moment where his purpose is divided between continuing on to Oxford and returning to the door.

Spotting the door, Wallace is torn, drawn both by the opportunities of the real world and the reattainment of the blissful memories of the golden past of the garden. He feels that, if he makes the step into the door, the golden past is not quite lost to him yet. To do so, however, he would need to go backwards: physically backwards, since his cab has already passed the door, and metaphorically backwards, to return to his more innocent past.

Wallace taps the roof of the cab and checks his watch. The driver asks, "yes sir!" Wallace, unable to speak clearly, decides to continue on to Oxford. He says "nothing," and tells the driver to keep on, since there isn't much time. The driver goes on.

This time as Wallace makes his choice to not go through the door, he understands that the door will not always be there. His choice is not just to leave the door for later; he is choosing Oxford definitively over the door. Note that Wallace attempts to reconcile his two desires for ambition and peace by checking the time. Wallace recognizes that there is a choice to be made: he can go on to Oxford or he can stop for the door, but he lacks time to do both. Wallace is interested in the future, in making his appointment on time, and in looking ahead to his scholarship and his future career. The garden, incompatible with ambition and change, is incompatible also with someone so invested in the future and the possibility of success.

Wallace gets his scholarship. The night after he learns he got the scholarship, he sits in his little study in his father's house and smokes a cigar. He can still hear his father's rare praise in his ears. He remembers **the door in the wall** and thinks to himself: if he'd stopped to enter it, he would have missed his scholarship and Oxford and the impressive career before him. He reasons that he has made the right choice and correctly arranged his priorities. At the time, the adult Wallace comments to Redmond, he doesn't doubt that his future career is something that merits sacrifice.

Wallace has made his choice: he would rather be a man of the world than a child in the blissful magic garden. Here, Wallace displays his full understanding that the choice of the real-world means giving up the garden entirely, and vice versa—he knows that he couldn't have had it both ways, and that if he had chosen the garden, he would have entirely missed this opportunity to begin his career. His success in winning his scholarship proves to him that he has made the correct decision: that ambition is worth more than peace, and that he has made the correct sacrifice. Even if he can only find perfect *contentment in the garden, he can find meaning and value in the real world through success, impacting the world, and earning the praise of his father. Yet the adult Wallace's interjection makes clear that the younger Wallace's ideas only work if it is in fact true that a career merits sacrifice, and the implication from the older Wallace's comment is that he has come to think otherwise.*

The friends and atmosphere of **the garden** are dear to Wallace but seem remote. He sees new opportunities in the real world, and a new door opening: that of his career.

With the material success of the world so close to Wallace in the form of his scholarship and his bright future career, the happiness of the garden seems distant. The real world and the garden continue to exist in an inverse relationship. The garden is an idyllic memory, but one that does not harmonize with the bright urgency of Wallace's real world.

The adult Wallace pauses again to stare into the fire. In the light reflected on Wallace's face, Redmond sees a flicker of stubborn strength before it disappears again. Wallace muses to Redmond that he has served his career and done much hard work, but he has still dreamt of **the garden** a thousand times and glimpsed **the door** four more times.

The adult Wallace reveals to Redmond that, while he has made great accomplishments and had the career he so longed for when he gave up the door for his scholarship, his desire for the garden has never left him entirely. That Wallace is there to tell Redmond that he has seen the door four more times suggests that each of those times he has always chosen the real world over actually going through the door, but the way that Wallace stares into the dire and the way his strength "disappears" while speaking to Redmond suggests that he is no longer happy with those choices to put his career above the garden's peace and contentment.

Wallace notes that, for a while in his youth, the world was so bright and interesting and full of meaning that **the garden** seemed soft and remote by comparison. Who, he asks, wants to pet panthers while on the way to dinner with attractive and important people? He finished college and returned to London a man of immense promise, and he believes he has done something to achieve that promise, and yet he has also experienced disappointments.

As a young man with his career on the rise Wallace is caught up in the values of that career. He has little attention to spare for the garden, and characterizes the garden as childish and less exciting than the opportunities available to a young working professional. Wallace is consumed by ambition, and, as he reveals, he accomplished much, but, as his reference to disappointments reveals, neither his ambition nor success protect him from discontentment.

Wallace tells Redmond that he has been in love twice. Once, while on the way to meet one of those women, he takes a shortcut through an unfrequented street and happens upon **the door in the wall**. He finds it odd that the door is there, since he'd thought it was in Campden Hill. But he passes it by, intent on reaching his date, who, he knew, doubted whether he would actually show up. The older Wallace remarks to Redmond that the door had no appeal to him that afternoon.

Once again, the pressing obligations of Wallace's real life keep him from even considering entering the door in the wall. He has obligations and desires which tether him to his life and prevent him from feeling more than vague curiosity about the door. Wallace is unable to both invest himself fully in the real world and desire the garden as wholeheartedly as he did when he was a child; at this point in his life, the real world occupies him too fully.

Then, though, Wallace notes that he did have an impulse to open **the door**. He is certain, as before, that it would open for him. But he thinks that to enter the door might delay him on his way to this meeting which was also a test of his honor. Afterward, he tells Redmond, he regretted his focus on punctuality and thought that he might have at least looked into **the garden** and waved to the panthers. By then, however, he knew that he would not find the door again by going to actively look for it, and he was sorry to have missed it.

Every time Wallace encounters the door, he has the sense that it will open to him; in this way, he always feels that his lost golden past is still reclaimable. If he gives up his material attachments, he can return to it. Yet, his dedication to punctuality—related to his ambition and his investment in his real life—prevents him from even stopping to glimpse the garden. After the urgency of the meeting is gone and punctuality is maintained, however, the allure of the lost golden past returns for Wallace. It is in the headlong rush of the moment that Wallace's real-world life now holds his attention. In quieter moments, he has now begun to prefer the idea of the garden to the fruits of his career.

Wallace explains to Redmond that years of hard work passed before he saw **the door** again, and that it is only recently that it has appeared to him. With its reappearance, Wallace has experienced a sort of "tarnish" covering the world around him. He begins to think it would be a bitter thing to never see the door again. Wallace is not sure why he feels this way. He thinks it might be overwork, or perhaps it is a result of soon turning forty years old. Regardless, Wallace explains that the "keen brightness" that makes hard work easy now eludes him just when he most needs to devote himself to work during new political developments.

With the return of the door to Wallace's life comes the reminder of the peace and contentment of the garden—contentment lacking in his career-driven life. The reminder of the garden makes Wallace's life duller in comparison, particularly now that the immediacy and brightness of his early career has passed. As Wallace has grown into middle age and actually had success, the implication is that the actual experience of success is not as sweet as it seemed like it would be when he was younger. Though there is still the excitement of new political developments in his career, his attention—which he can only devote fully to either his life or the garden—turns inexorably to the garden. The sight of the door in the wall is now the only thing that fills Wallace's life with meaning—yet this means that the door now leeches meaning from every other part of Wallace's life.

Wallace reveals that he now finds life toilsome and its rewards cheap. He longs for **the garden**. He tells Redmond that he's seen "it" three times. Redmond, shocked, asks if he means the garden. Wallace clarifies that he means **the door**. He's seen it three times, but hasn't gone in. Wallace leans over the table towards Redmond and tells him with immense sorrow that, though he swore to himself that if he ever saw the door again he would escape the vanity and futility of his present life, he instead saw the door three times in the last year and each time he didn't go inside.

Wallace is torn by his two opposing desires for material success and contentment. The possibility of perfect happiness in the garden, theoretically within his reach, haunts his real life, which tires and dissatisfies him. Still, he cannot bring himself to take the final step through the door and relinquish that life for the garden. At this point in the story, Wallace understands going through the door in the wall to mean a complete and permanent life change; if he goes to the garden, he doesn't plan to return. To choose to step through the door is to leave behind his life for good, along with all his ambition and success. The fact that he yearns to go through the door and seems to hate his material life, but still doesn't go through the door suggests that he is, in a sense, addicted to success and the material life.

The first time Wallace sees **the door** again is on the night of an important vote, during which the Government won by a majority of three. No one on Wallace's side of the vote expects the debate to end so quickly. Wallace is dining with a fellow politician, Hotchkiss, and his cousin when they are called in for the vote. While rushing to the vote in a motorcar, they pass the door in the wall. It is distorted in the lamplight, but unmistakable. Wallace cries out, "My God!" Hotchkiss asks him "what?" but Wallace tells him it is nothing, and they carry on. When he arrives, Wallace tells a fellow politician that he has made a great sacrifice to be there. Still, he doesn't see how he could have done anything other than what he did that night.

The door only appears to Wallace when he has a pressing obligation, forcing him to choose one option—his career or the garden—and give the other up entirely. He cannot commit partially to the garden. Once again, Wallace sees his political career as something worthy of sacrifice. But this time, unlike when he passed the door by for Oxford, he sees it as a painful sacrifice. It's noteworthy that Wallace again calls the door "nothing," as he did on the way to Oxford, rather than explain his outburst. Wallace does not allow the door in the wall to have a real and identifiable presence in his political life, especially after his failure to convince either his father or his schoolmates of its reality.

The next time Wallace sees **the door** is as he is rushing to his father's deathbed. Wallace remarks to Redmond that then, like the first time, the "claims of life" were more important than the door. The third time Wallace sees the door, however, was different. It happened a week before Wallace's dinner with Redmond. Wallace was walking with two men named Gurker and Ralphs one evening, discussing the possibility of Wallace taking an important position in the Ministry. Wallace says that he might as well tell Redmond about the conversation—it isn't a secret; though Redmond also shouldn't tell people about it—and thanks Redmond for his congratulations on the position.

This time, the door appears to Wallace during a personal obligation rather than a career event that affects his material success. Still, Wallace's father, who demanded his focus and discipline, is emblematic of all Wallace's drive and career ambition. To stop for the door in the wall rather than be at his father's deathbed is to not only abandon his father but also to reject all his father's values of work and achievement. At this point, Wallace reveals that he has achieved incredible success in his career—an important government position at a young age. His repeated rejection of the door and the garden has led him to the success his father wanted for him and the material rewards of his hard work.

Wallace's position is a delicate one during the conversation. He plans to keep his conversation light until Ralphs leaves, at which point he might become suddenly frank with Gurker. As they walk, Wallace notices **the door in the wall** ahead of them down the road. They walk right past it as they talk.

At this, the most important moment of Wallace's career, the door in the wall appears, offering him the usual choice: to stop and go through, or to move forward in his life.

Wallace, passing within twenty inches of **the door**, wonders what might happen if he excuses himself, says goodnight, and enters **the garden**. Nervous and giddy about his conversation with Gurker, he imagines his companions would think him mad. He pictures the headlines from the next morning: 'Amazing disappearance of prominent politician!' That weighs on his decision, as do a thousand petty considerations.

Wallace cannot let go of the real world enough to approach the door. He does not consider what awaits him beyond it, but what he would be leaving behind should he go through it. Once again, Wallace's shame also motivates him as much as his ambition does. He worries about what others would think if he disappeared into the door. He recognizes these concerns about maintaining his reputation as being petty, yet they still influence his decision to leave the door behind.

Wallace interrupts his story to turn to Redmond and say, "Here I am!" He says that he has rejected **the door** to peace and happiness, though it offered itself to him three times, and he believes that chance is now gone. When Redmond asks how he knows the door is gone, Wallace claims that he simply knows. All he has now is the career he built for himself.

At this point, the time of his conversation with Redmond, Wallace understands the golden past of the garden to now be completely lost to him. He has been given opportunities for perfect peace and he has rejected them—for what he now considers to be vain, frivolous reasons—in favor of the real world. Wallace understands his own choices, his preoccupation with success and his fear of embarrassment, to be antithetical to the rewards of the garden. Just as he used to "know" the door would open for him, he now understands it to be forever closed. Because of his behavior, he believes that the garden, loving and collaborative, no longer considers him worthy—or perhaps capable—of entry.

Wallace knows others see him as having success, but he calls it a vulgar, irksome thing. He shows Redmond a walnut, tells him "if that was my success…" and crushes it in his fist. He confides that the loss of the garden is crushing him. He reveals that he has done no work but what is extremely urgent. He, a Cabinet Minister, is filled with regret and he wanders at night, alone, grieving for the **door** and **the garden**.

Once, Wallace understood the door in the wall as an obstacle to his pursuit of success and accomplishment. Now, however, he understands the pursuit of success as an obstacle to what really matters to him: a return to the peace of the garden. All his success, which he sacrificed so much to achieve, he now sees as being completely worthless—he would destroy it and make the opposite choice, if he could. Yet, he was given three recent opportunities to choose the garden, and it is only when he believes the choice has been taken from him that he understands his true priorities. Wallace is left with regret, so all-consuming that he cannot focus on his real life and the pressing obligations of his impressive new position. He cannot live both in the garden and his real life; he is likewise unable to live in his grief for the garden and still devote himself meaningfully to his career. He made the choice to remain in his real life, yet the garden still draws him away from it. In this way, he has lost his connection to his real life without gaining the rewards of the garden.

PART 4

Redmond notes that he can still remember Wallace's pallid and somber face, his words, and his tones from that after-dinner conversation. Meanwhile, the newspaper from the previous evening rests on Redmond's sofa, containing the notice of Wallace's death. At lunch, the club talked of nothing else. Wallace's body was found the previous day in a deep pit that was part of a construction project for the extension of the railway. The construction site was blocked off from the public by a temporary boarded fence, accessible to workmen by a small doorway. The door had been left unlocked by mistake and Wallace had gone through it.

At this point, Redmond reveals why he is thinking of Wallace now, three months after their after-dinner conversation about the door in the wall. During that conversation, Wallace told Redmond that he wandered alone at night, grieving for the garden. It seems as though Wallace's wandering—and his grief for the garden—led him to his death. Not only that, but as described here it is a rather ridiculous death, mistaking a temporary door in a construction fence for a magic door to a magic garden, and falling to death in a construction pit. At this point, it seems as if Wallace's obsession with the garden has betrayed him to a pathetic death.

Redmond is consumed with questions, with the riddle of what happened. He pictures Wallace walking the streets at night, wrapped up in his thoughts. Redmond wonders: did the electric lights of the station make the rough planking of the construction fence look white? Redmond wonders further: was there any door in the wall at all? Did the makeshift door in the fence awaken some memory in Wallace's memory? Then he asks a bigger question: was there ever actually any door in the wall at all? He is unsure. He has reported Wallace's story as it was told to him.

Redmond returns again to his initial question of the reality of the door in the wall. It is clear to him that Wallace must have mistaken the door in the construction site for the magic door leading to the garden. This mistake seems to suggest that Wallace might have been mistaken other times, as well, and that the door in the wall might have been many different doors over the course of his life and the garden itself might indeed have simply been a dream. Redmond does not know; there is no true answer.

Redmond comments that there are times when he believes that Wallace was just the victim of a delusion or hallucination that led to an accident. Still, that is not his deepest belief. Redmond admits that others may think that he is superstitious and foolish, but he is more than half-convinced that Wallace had an abnormal gift. He believes that **the door** really did—in some way Redmond can't understand—offer Wallace passage to a more beautiful world.

Despite the evidence that Wallace was fatally unable to distinguish fantasy from reality, Redmond admits that he believes the door in the wall was, in some sense, real. Redmond understands that others might think him foolish for his belief, or, like Wallace, unable to properly separate reality and fantasy. Still, he understands the question of the door's reality not as one of evidence, but one of belief; Redmond has faith that Wallace had access to something beyond Redmond's own understanding.

It may seem that, either way, **the door** betrayed Wallace in the end. But, Redmond asks, did it betray him? He notes that this question touches upon the mystery of dreamers and men of visions. Ordinary people see the common world: the planks of the temporary fence and the pit behind it. By the standards of ordinary people, Wallace walked into danger and death. But, Redmond asks, did Wallace see it like that?

An ordinary person might hear this story and think that, either way, Wallace dies because of his belief in the door. However, Redmond argues, people with access to some otherwise inaccessible reality or vision—such as access to a golden past—would see the situation differently because they see the entire world differently. Redmond classifies Wallace as one of these people: dreamers and visionaries who are fundamentally different from the rest of the world. Redmond, then, set up the question of the reality of the door in order to brush it aside. Here he attests that the question of the reality of the door in the wall is ultimately beside the point. Instead, Redmond argues that there is an unknowable truth to Wallace's experiences, and that truth surpasses whether or not the door is real. While Wallace certainly stepped through that gate in the construction fence and fell to his death in a pit, Redmond raises the possibility here that in doing so, whether within his own mind or in some sort of heavenly reality, he did find his way back to the garden. And it is worth noting that like any such visionaries who ascend to some higher plane, Wallace has left behind himself a prophet to tell his story and bridge the gap between his garden and the real world: Redmond. Redmond then tells Wallace's story, and leaves it up to the reader whether or not to have faith.

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