

Purple Trees and a Will to Believe: Comprehension Questions

Chapters 5-8

Chapter 5

1. Describe the setting in paragraph one.

Paragraph one discusses Temecula Valley, Southern California's wine country where Sybille lives. It is complete with scenic rolling hills, farmhouses, an open countryside, over 40 vineyards, and plenty of jacaranda trees.

2. Why wouldn't Dad fit in at wine tastings?

Wine tastings are for classy people. Dad is low class. He has a beer belly, poor posture, and only shaves on rare occasions. He has a horrible smoker's cough and always wears baggy jeans.

3. What is one thing Sybille worries about when Dad is hungover?

Sybille worries about her father burning the house down.

4. How does Sybille describe the physical pain?

Sybille makes an inference to a beating she received on her back. The reader is left to infer that she had some open sores on her back which took a while to scab over. Sybille says the hot water from the shower burned for days, admitting there were some days she didn't even want to shower.

5. What does Sybille daydream about?

Sybille daydreams about staying in a fancy resort, similar to Carter Estate.

6. Why was Mom mad at Dad for gifting her a bottle of perfume on her birthday?

Mom was mad at Dad because after he gifted her the bottle of expensive perfume, he couldn't make the house payment.

7. What is foreclosure?

Foreclosure is when the bank takes ownership of the house.

8. Why is Sybille worried about the house going into foreclosure?

Sybille worries that if the house goes into foreclosure, she won't have anywhere to live.

9. If a vineyard were just outside Sybille's bedroom window, what would she do?

If a vineyard were just outside Sybille's bedroom window, she would take Sander and Solomon and run away from home. She says they would hide, sandwiched in between the rows and eat all the grapes they could stomach.

10. What fruit grows on the vines at a vineyard?

Grapes grow on the vines at a vineyard.

11. What does Solomon do to help him get through the pain of being hit with the small wrench in the garage?

To help himself get through the pain of being hit with the small wrench in the garage, Solomon closes his eyes and pretends he's sipping a pina colada at the Wigwam Hotel and Golf Club in Arizona.

Chapter 6

1. What happened to Grandma?

Grandma was in a car accident and broke her wrist.

2. Why is Sybille rethinking the whole 'God thing'?

Sybille begins to rethink 'God' because she worries that if anything were to happen to Grandma, there would be fewer relatives left to protect her and her brothers from their abusive father.

3. Why does Sybille worry that she won't be able to see the rest of her family in Texas, Vermont, and Maine?

Sybille worries that she won't be able to see the rest of her family in Texas, Vermont, and Maine because her father is too hungover most days to drive her and her brothers to the airport.

4. What question does Sybille ask in the darkest of hours?

In the darkest of hours, Sybille asks herself, "How much abuse can the body handle?"

5. Why does Sybille struggle with body confidence?

Sybille struggles with body confidence because she has bruises all over her body from her father's beatings.

6. How does Sybille feel when she prays to God?

Sybille does not get an immediate answer from God, so she is left to feel as though she simply 'talked to thin air' when she prayed. She admits it felt weird.

7. What idea does Sybille's brain hatch?

Sybille wonders if maybe she doesn't need to ASK God for anything; rather, she wonders if it would be possible to treat God as a friend who she can confide in since she is afraid to confide in anyone else.

8. Explain the 'one-week free trial.'

Sybille, who is still unsure about God, rationalizes 'prayer' by saying that she is 'trying God out' free of charge, for one week. She says it is not a commitment and agrees that it would be okay to 'return God' if the one-week free trial doesn't work out as she hopes it will.

9. Why is Sybille afraid to get used to the "new" Dad?

Sybille is afraid that the second she gets used to the "new" Dad, she will suffer another beating. She says she doesn't think she can bear the pain again.

10. What does Sybille wish Dad would have done to her and why?

Sybille wishes Dad would have broken her wrist or cut deeper when he struck her with the ironing chord so that he would have been forced to take her to the hospital for stitches or even a cast on her arm. She is hopeful that if anything like that were to happen, she could convince the doctor that the injury is a result of her father's abuse.

Chapter 7

1. Why does Dr. Sullivan give Sybille the creeps?

Dr. Sullivan gives Sybille the creeps because he smiles big. Big smiles remind her of her father's fake white teeth, schmoozing with all the pretty, single ladies at her mother's funeral. She also says that big smiles remind her of the shyster at the back of the bar, playing pool on a green felt table.

2. How does Sybille describe Mom?

Sybille describes Mom as beautiful — someone with a soft smile, so soft that you actually believed it was real. She also mentions Mom's thick, wavy hair and teal blue eyes.

3. What do big smiles remind Sybille of?

Big smiles remind Sybille of the shyster at the back of the bar, playing pool on a green felt table.

4. Why is Sybille wearing a scarf around her neck when she goes to visit Grandma in the hospital?

Sybille is wearing a scarf around her neck when she goes to visit Grandma in the hospital because it hides an imprint on her neck from Monday's run-in with the small wrench in the garage.

5. Why does Dr. Sullivan look at Sybille funny and how does it lead to Sybille, Sander, and Solomon's rescue from their abusive father?

Dr. Sullivan notices Sybille's body language as she attempts to loosen the tight scarf around her neck without using her hands. His observant nature causes him to excuse himself from Grandma's room, reporting his own suspicion to another staff member.

6. What does the nurse take pictures of?

The nurse takes pictures of the bruises on Sybille, Sander, and Solomon's naked bodies.

7. Where do Sybille, Sander, and Solomon spend the night?

Sybille, Sander, and Solomon spend the night in the children's ward at Temecula Valley hospital.

8. What happened to Dad?

Dad is taken into custody and is being questioned by law enforcement about the bruises that were discovered on his own children.

Chapter 8

1. How does Sybille feel about her brothers after waking up in the hospital?

Sybille is thankful to have ANY family nearby, even if they are boys, and even if they burp and fart.

2. What does Sybille find 'strange' about the hospital?

Sybille finds it strange how quiet the hospital is. She also finds it strange that the hospital applies antibiotic ointment and bandages to cuts and bruises, admitting that whenever she was beat at home with the worn leather belt, her father never treated the wound with ointment and a bandage.

3. What does Sybille think of fairytales and how does she describe the life her friends lead outside of school?

Sybille says that fairytales are not normal, and compares the life her friends live outside of school to that of a fairytale. Kelly Ann has pierced ears and her own horse, Bobbi is an only child who has blue eyes, and Star's mom takes her shopping for new clothes in spring.

4. What physical feature does Dad have that Sybille doesn't like being 'genetically stuck with?' (Example: your father has a big nose or ears that stick out and as a result, you also have those same features).

Sybille does not like being stuck with her father's muddy brown eyes.

5. What does Sybille think new clothes feel like?

Sybille thinks that new clothes must feel itchy, prior to breaking the fabric in. She also wonders if you would constantly worry about spilling strawberry milk on your new dress.

6. What question does Sybille ask at the end of chapter 8?

Sybille asks her brother, "How do you think God feels about Dad?"