

# **Milkshake**

**The Tragic Story of the Catastrophic Fall of Versailles, Indiana**

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Humanities B

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# 1

## VERSAILLES, INDIANA

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This story is about chaos. Yes, the same kind of chaos you've seen at family dinners when someone's drunk uncle brings up sensitive political topics. This chaos refers to the mind-boggling disorder and unpredictability of our modern realities. It had never occurred to the townsfolk that Ollie, the young milkman, who graciously delivered the town of Versailles, Indiana, with daily supplies of quart-sized milk, would one day be the catalyst for an inevitable shift towards chaos in the once-quiet town.

Oliver Wilfred Montgomery, better known as "Ollie," was the unofficial mayor of Versailles. Every day, he traversed the streets in an aging, rusty, motorized milk cart, bottles clinking behind him as he whistled to Tchaikovsky's *The Queen of Spades*. As a child, Ollie became ever-obsessed with Russian symphony and opera. In his trouser pockets, he would carry a wooden metronome, walking, breathing, and speaking tick by tick. He lived simply, orderly, and had a deeply fervent passion for cow's milk. That's why he decided to become a milkman, where he could neatly pack each glass in its wooden shelf, making deliveries at the same minute each day. It was a repetitive, mindless task, but the friendly milkman was unbothered, living within a seemingly inescapable rhythmic order. Delivery after delivery, clink by clink.

Versailles had everything Ollie needed. An ill-selected, yet steady supply of books, a reliable and accessible source of milk, and the only people he had ever known. It was on the

cracking asphalt roads of Versailles where Ollie left his rusting cart by a dainty bundle of horsebalm leaves. The dry autumn breeze sent crunchy leaves skidding across the path, Ollie's footsteps being the only sound in the lifeless morning. Over the years, Ollie had perfected his milk deliveries, leaving each glass at the perfect spot: Lady Richard's bright red mailbox, left of Mr. and Mrs. Gorman's white picket fence, and on Dr. Henry's crackling windowsill. There was one particular delivery which Ollie paid close attention to - Junia's. She preferred the milk be delivered on her doorstep, next to the chipping glass vase of Rhododendron buds. A few months ago, Ollie had begun tying velvety, red ribbons on Junia's bottles, an ode to a walk around the Versailles graveyard they once took in middle school, where she had tied up her short curls with the same type of ribbon. Ollie claims to have fallen in love with Junia, the enchanting, yet elusive woman who seemed to show no mutual romantic interest. Nevertheless, Junia was kind, enjoyed reading the works of modern philosophers, and was seemingly always occupied with pocket-sized dictionaries which encompassed the common dialogues of several latin languages.

Ollie awaited with pleasure the moment each day in which he would step across the overgrown gravel path, collect the empty bottle from the day prior, place the milk by the buds, and most excitingly, wave to Junia while she distractedly lay atop a stone slab in the hermitage. Sometimes she would look up from her hand-held Latin dictionaries, perhaps even return a smile, but often the sight of her was enough for Ollie to delay his delivery schedule by several seconds. These additional seconds were exciting, even rebellious, and on this chilly September morning, Ollie routinely made each treacherous step across Junia's wild, drooping gardens, until he witnessed something so shocking, startling, and downright-absolutely-unusual.

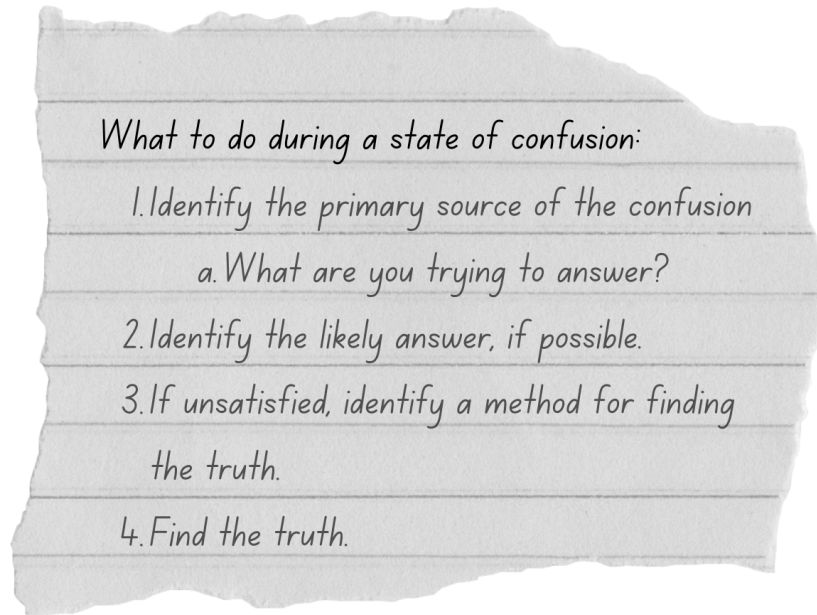
## 2

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There are times when one feels stuck in life. No matter how wonderful their life had just been, some things are so shocking, that one must sit and think before acting any further. It's the arrival of bewildering, unexpected truths which send many on a ceaseless journey towards restoration of what had once been. If Ollie was a doll, limbs hanging by strings and words but his own, I would steer him away from the pointless pursuit of restoring his orderly life, but Ollie, completely self-directed, chose quite the opposite. It was the pursuit of the truth which drove him towards his unusual behavior following the horrific sight awaiting him on Junia's doorstep.

Now, you're probably *dying* to know what had happened, what this ghastly sight had been, but you must remember that Ollie has known little more than his typical, repetitive routine in the quiet town of Versailles. What sat, in the same spot which it had been placed the morning prior, was Junia's quart-sized, ribbon-tied, buds-adjacent glass bottle of milk. What was worse was that it had *expired*, summoning thirsty flies and a swarm of buzzing thoughts into Ollie's distracted mind. Watch ticking, Ollie fought the urge to turn around, cross the gardens, and continue his deliveries until his neighbors had been provided their morning's supply of milk, but Ollie couldn't stand the thought of being confused, especially about something as bewildering as his missing lover. That's when Ollie decided to pull out a slip of paper which he had jotted down several years ago while he had fixed himself his daily breakfast staple - warm milk, toast and blueberry preserves, and an egg, perfectly

prepared. That's what he had eaten since, preserving the note as a method for navigating the most confusing of circumstances. It was on this note which read:



With these steps in mind, Ollie stood still while thoughts hurriedly encompassed his mind. It had appeared to him that his central question, the one which brought him the most abundance of confusion, was “Where is Junia?” It was unusual that the milk glass had been left untouched, expiring in the long, warm hours of the day. What was more unusual was that Junia hadn't taken the milk - perhaps she had forgotten, or worse, perhaps something had happened. Ollie began to speculate. It was probable that Junia had been too occupied with her dictionaries, and became so encompassed that her daily supply of milk was left waiting on her doorstep. Or, she suffered an electrically-related accident with her toaster while preparing her breakfast, causing her to tragically perish while the milk expired beside the empty, corpse-occupied home. None of these seemed like valid or evidence-based conclusions to make regarding the disappearance of Ollie's lover.

He decided to take it a step further. It was time to check, just to make sure, that Junia hadn't died in a tragic toaster accident, but rather had been occupied with something so enthralling that it had distracted her from drinking the carefully, timely, and thoughtfully delivered milk which sat atop the doorstep beside her Rhododendron buds. First, Ollie knocked on the door. Knock after knock, for several seconds, the paint-chipping, sage-green, and ivy-encompassed house felt abnormally quiet. Next, Ollie took to peering through the keyhole. In his mind, this seemed like the most logical step, but as he had experienced similarly prior, keyholes are so small, dark, and practically useless in obtaining information about those occupying the space behind it. With two failed attempts at obtaining his yearned truth, Ollie stood blankly for several seconds before wandering through the gardens. What had once been bright, blooming wildflower colonies across the garden were now graying leaves, surrounded by unraked mountains of crispy brown leaves and unwashed stone paths which seemed to lead nowhere. Within each nook of the garden stood several garden gnomes, each one angrier than the one before. Ollie was unsure why Junia had chosen such elaborately-painted and explicitly angry ceramic creatures to occupy her garden, but he was convinced that the romantic style had been a well-chosen, yet incomprehensible choice.

Ivy tentacles reached from the untamed bushes into the garden, lining the paths and practically enveloping the muddy, granite fountain which sputtered beside the milkman. Towards the side gardens lay Junia's hermitage, where wire arches which had been completely overtaken by thorny red roses and the small stone circumference which lay beside pinkish-white hydrangeas, still as stone, remain unoccupied. With a diminishing

supply of ideas, there seemed to be no obvious next step, confusing Ollie to discomfoting levels, until, alas, an object hidden beneath the flaking flowers had caught his eye.



A *blue beret*. Junia, a notorious europhile, yet far from French descent, fancied berets. She had dozens of knitted berets, each one gifted by the town librarian, which she paired with nearly every accessory possible - bright, purple-rimmed sunglasses, rings of every birthstone, and silky-white ballet flats. On the navy-blue beret, which daintily hung from the hydrangea branches, was the Tyson Library emblem, neatly embroidered to the front of the hat. With that, there seemed to be no other logical option than to go to the library in Ollie's mind, for the library is the perfect place to become ever-distracted as to not consume one's daily supply of cow milk. Note slip in hand, Ollie rushed through the gardens, stepping atop the rickety milk cart, creaking through the quiet streets, and rode to the Tyson Library.

The Tyson Library was far from inspiring, but it served its purpose in supplying Versailles with a variety of reading options. Its cream stone walls and ropy outdoor fall decorations would deter the common reader, yet its simplicity and persistent attempts in attracting the townsfolk provoked the strongest attraction among the town's avid readers. Among this finite group was Junia, who had commonly spent her afternoons in the library,

nagging the librarian to order more books, and quietly enveloped within whichever worldly topic had interested her at the time. This library was far from well-loved, but a good library is always a bit messy and dustless, because someone will always be in it, staying up late beside the chipping tealit windows, dreaming of the vast world beyond the confines of the small town.

With the sound of tapping glass bottles projecting through the streets of Versailles, Ollie hurriedly arrived at the library, parked the cart in the brown grass yard, and quickly stumbled out of the cart and on to the paved pathway before heading inside. Inside of the library, Ollie waved to the librarian, who quietly knitted to mellow, rhythmic jazz, and wandered between each shelf, searching for Junia. Ollie was unsure what he would do when he found his lost lover, but the search for the missing truth sent him on a relentless mission to restore his life, which like clockwork, was rhythmically orderly, simple, and left him with no unanswered questions. It was by the historical biography section where the words “MILK” caught Ollie’s dairy-driven mind. Without a second thought, Ollie slid the thick, white book off the shelf and sat by a neighboring stool to see what miraculous book had been brought upon the library’s limited and struggling collection of dairy-related topics. The book was titled *The Catastrophic Influences of Milk on the Modern Age*, and on the cover was the corner of a small, glass cup of milk, bubbles forming by its edges. An avid milk-enthusiast, Ollie began reading, entirely encompassed and enlightened by the fascinating knowledge that lay within its pages.



### 3

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Unbeknownst to the milkman, several hours had gone by as Ollie flipped through the fascinating pages of the book which had chronicled the history, lessons, changes, and applications of dairy production and consumption over the modern age. The lactose intolerance chapter sent Ollie into a literary frenzy, and he rapidly pondered and reflected on its impacts, until several tealights by the library windows had begun to turn on. This startled Ollie, who had now disappointedly realized that he had fallen off track, so distracted by countless dead ends that he had forgotten about his primary question: “Where is Junia?” Ollie left the book on the stool, using the what-to-do-in-a-state-of-confusion note as a bookmark, and paced through the library until arriving at the librarian’s desk.

*Have you seen Junia? I recall she comes here a lot, but I am worried that she’s gone missing,* asks Ollie.

The librarian paused her knitting and looked up at Ollie, who eagerly awaited the response which was coming. She hesitantly opened her mouth, until a sudden whirring sound, which seemed to become gradually louder, had now distracted both her and Ollie. It was unclear what the source of this whirring sound was, but as it reached a higher and higher pitch, it had begun to concern Ollie *and* the librarian, who had now been so distracted by the loud noise, as if awaiting some kind of enormous bee which had entered the shelf-lined room, invoking danger among the library-goers of Versailles.

While enormous, dog-sized killer bees would populate a children's novel with the highest form of entertainment, what had truly been accelerating towards the library was a small, black car. In the matter of instants, the library's side wall had been completely pulverized, sending white, dusty chunks of drywall soaring through the room, books being scattered, pages ripping out of projectile literature, and water pipelines in the wall sending faint spurts of water into the sky into small puddles of rotting stories and rocky debris. The small black car, surrounded by a rising cloud of dust, had now stopped, parking itself by the romance section, which had now somehow reached levels of messiness which exceeded the stories within them. As the dust began to clear, Ollie, and the librarian, who had now hidden beneath a large counter of returned books, had observed a fascinating set of events following the destruction which unfolded in front of their eyes.

In life, sometimes one small event, like a butterfly flapping its wing, can cause another event to happen, like a match, which had been sitting adjacent to the butterfly, to suddenly ignite. It's these small changes in nature, the ones so small, and seemingly meaningless, which end up possessing the greatest of influences, causing new, unpredictable and evenly divinely lucky events to occur. What Ollie had witnessed next was a set of small, handheld metal dice, which hung from the rearview mirror of this mysterious black car, miraculously escaping the car's interior, being flung through the windshield, through the library's tealit front window, and landing (with a mysterious level of precision) on Junia's undelivered, ribbon-tied milk bottle which sat atop the rear panel of the milk cart. This collision was enough to crack the glass, sending the aging milk spilling over the cart into an expanding puddle of white which lay in the grass yard.

In the chilled autumn afternoon, golden, cloudless skies lay watching as the once-serene library had become a crumbling pile of rubble, debris, water, and milk. It was like this miraculously unfortunate series of events had unfolded in front of the eyes of Ollie and the librarian, offering a bitter entertainment and leaving them both utterly clueless, confused, and apprehensive about what chaotic events may begin once they discover who had accelerated into the Tyson Library. As the dust cleared and the faint sound of sirens began, a figure formed amidst the swirling dusty air surrounding the car. Out of the car, stumbled a man, completely unscathed, who had now collapsed atop a wooden reading bench several feet from Ollie.

What was different about this man was that it didn't make sense he was there. No, not that it didn't make sense that this man had driven into the town library, but rather that Ollie knew this man. He was none other than Johnny Augustus Montgomery, former poet and Ollie's dead brother. Three years prior, Johnny had been traveling metropolitan Indiana, reading poems at small underground bars, drunkenly wandering the streets into extraordinary hours of the night. One night, Johnny had completely disappeared, without a trace, leaving Ollie confused, yet somewhat relieved that the horrendous state of his brother was now unknown and couldn't continue haunting his orderly thoughts. Johnny had been announced dead, and now he had stumbled out of this smoking black car, which had just parked beside the romance section of the Tyson library, and he lay atop a reading bench, once again, blindly drunk.

*Johnny? What are you doing here?* asked Ollie, who slowly inched towards the swaying figure.

*Ollie! I came just for you. I know where Junia is, and if you come with me, I promise I'll tell you everything you want to know.*

The sound of sirens became increasingly louder, but Ollie wasn't prepared to leave the crumbling library behind just yet.

*I'm not going. Johnny, look what you've just done! You're **crazy**. You've been gone for three years, and now you know the truth about my lover after crashing into Ripley County's only library. This was one of her favorite places, for god's sake, and now you'll get arrested, and I'll be asked questions, and my milk deliveries will be even later than before, and you're just so downright stupid for doing this, Johnny! Like, what were you think-*

Before Ollie could continue scolding his brother, Johnny tugged his arm and started running for the library's side door. Ollie, resisting the pull, stumbled, yet began moving with Johnny to flee the scene. Now, before I continue, it's important to mention that Ollie is far from a rule breaker. If he hadn't been in this utter state of confusion and disorder, Ollie would have remained by the disastrous scene, but there were too many unanswered questions to think in his typical linear pattern.

Stumbling step by step, Johnny and Ollie snuck through the parking lots, empty roads, and blooming bushes which lined the roads of Versailles. Headed towards the town cemetery, countless questions anxiously flooded Ollie's mind as he prepared to learn his mysterious truth. Hidden from the view of the library, the cemetery offered a calm refuge amidst the chaos which had just unfolded within, and now throughout the library walls. Seeing the library, the source of such beautiful, and extensive knowledge despite its limited selection, saddened Ollie as he mindlessly followed his drunken brother through the stone rows.

*Johnny, are you going to tell me, or not?*

*Yes, of course brother. But first, we must arrive at the pond. I will tell you there.*

*Alright... Johnny, where have you been? Are you alright?*

*Yes, I'm doing quite well. I've got a small family, and they're going hungry, so if you buy a bit of rum (I'm not picky) - to sell, of course, not to drink, you could save their lives.*

*A family? With who? Why rum?*

*Oh Ollie. Always such a goober!*

Ollie struggled to follow along with the conversation, which seemed to bring him no further towards the truth than before.

*I just want things to be the way they were before... before today at least. All I need is to know, and then tomorrow, I can go right back to making my morning deliveries, like I always have.*

*I know what you want. You want order. But, you have to think a bit deeper. Don't you find it boring, Ollie? Doing the same thing, every day, every minute, no different from the day before. This town is so dry and dead - like a crumbling moth, barely flapping its wings to stay afloat. It's the chaos of life, the unexpectedness, the exciting feeling of **not knowing** that keeps me alive. Without it, life would be boring, ceaseless, and the only thing worse would be my own death. I know you want to know where I've been, and why I know the truth, but you have to remember that some things just can't change. I can't go back to yesterday and fix it. Our actions are **irreversible**. Oh, for a sip of rum right now, I would do anything, please Ollie?*

Ollie remained silent, trying to understand what his drunken brother had intended to convey, but it still didn't make sense. The only thing Ollie wanted was for things to be the way they were.

*I once had poison for breakfast. Oh, it was disgusting, and I thought I would die, but I didn't. Yet while I waited for it to come, I couldn't stop thinking about what I had done. I couldn't go back, fix relationships, apologize for my mistakes. My life is irreversible. What I do today will forever be done, and there's nothing anyone can do to go back and erase it. It's like spoiled milk. Once it's spoiled, you can't fix it and bring it back to freshly-squeezed cow milk, it's just always gross, and chunky, or whatever. Anyways, I think what I'm trying to say is, don't be stuck in the past, Ollie. Sometimes the universe will change, and it's an icky feeling, like it's out of your control, but it's the change and the hardship that makes the path all the better.*

Ollie and Johnny had now sat atop a mossy tree stump beside the lake which had stood still beside the cemetery. The hazy sunset and faint sound of sirens lie painted upside down in the still water while the two brothers sit in silence. Ollie had pondered his brother's advice, although he was unsure if his brother had even been in the right state to give it. Johnny slowly rose, removed his shoes, and stepping into the still water, swirled the bubbles atop around with his fingers. It was a peaceful moment, disrupted by nothing but tension and the busy minds of the two brothers.

Yet, as you know, the order that is, will never always be, and disrupting the tranquil, crispy autumn air were the sounds of Johnny's screams while something tugged at his feet. In what felt like an instant, the man was completely submerged beneath the once-calm waters, water spraying upwards in fantastic vortical patterns above the pond. Yet before Ollie could act, the chaotic nature of the pond had subsided, and what now lay before him were a few things: the still pond, his drowned brother, and the most gut-wrenching feeling of cursed irreversible chaos entering his now off-tempo life.

The events which occurred on this fateful day are particularly curious. Not because of the strange tug at Johnny's feet which had led to his demise, but rather the achy, bewildered feeling which churned Ollie's nerves like butter. It is obvious that each one of us will eventually perish. It's an undeniable truth, an accepted fact, yet when it truly happens, whether to a friend, neighborly figure, or long-lost brother, it is completely and utterly surprising.

It was Ollie's sense of bewilderment which fueled the exhausted milkman as he hastily stumbled through the graveyard and to the neighboring Ripley County Sheriff's Station. Reaching the stairs in no time, Ollie reached for the handle, stepped inside, and was met with the eyes of several officers.

It was here that Ollie began to describe the events which had transpired over the last few hours. From spoiling milk to his drowning brother, Ollie thoroughly described each event, failing to recognize the root cause of why his journey began. Yet once he uttered Junia's name, the sheriff quickly interjected. The sheriff had no friendly presence. She had dark, skeptical eyes, and tapped her foot atop the gray carpet as if there were an enormous, distracting stopwatch ticking in the corner of the dull room.

*Why were you looking for Junia, sir? What do you want with her?*

*Sheriff, I was looking for Junia because I noticed something rather peculiar earlier today. Every day, I leave a red ribbon on her milk glass, because, well, I am in love with Junia. I always hoped she would recognize what I do, and perhaps it would initiate a long, deep*

*conversation that practically carries us both to a point of mutual love and interest. It was odd, however, that Junia hadn't brought in her milk glass from yesterday, and that's why I began to search. I just want to make sure-*

*Oh Oliver, do I have some news for you. Junia, your neighbor, and apparently the woman you have fallen in love with, is my sister. Junia isn't missing, nor is she dead. She is simply traveling, and must've forgotten about canceling her milk deliveries prior to her departure. Junia is off in Barcelona because she fell in love with a Spanish sailor after signing up for a digital pen-pal. It seemed like a perfectly logical option. She could use the Spanish she's been studying, travel beyond the confines of this dull town, and meet someone new. Don't take it personally, Oliver Montgomery. She simply has found love elsewhere, and that's alright. As sick as it makes me feel however, I am going to need your wrists. You're under arrest, Oliver Wilfred Montgomery, for leaving the scene of your crime, and now being suspected of murdering your brother Jonathan.*

Ollie stood up, offering his wrists as the officers placed cold, metal handcuffs over them and led him to a tiny, fluorescently-lit room. It was here that Ollie waited, completely aghast at the truths that had just been thrown his way. He struggled to comprehend it all, but it was clear eventually that Junia had never loved him. She always seemed distracted, but the thought of this elusive Spanish sailor whisking her away, the two pleasantly sailing through the Balearic sea, was sickening. Despite knowing the truth, Ollie's twisted, churning feeling only strengthened. He had figured that once he found the truth, everything would be restored to its original state, but Ollie found himself now responsible for his irreversible actions, just as Johnny had described.



For what seemed like hours, Ollie quietly sat atop the metal stool, thoughts flooding his mind. At a certain point, his confusion and inner pain had evolved into an incessant influx of anger. He felt a certain unavoidable irritation, caused by his fear of the unknown and the upsetting feeling that he couldn't go back, and that rather than wasting his time and the precious gallons of spoiling milk which sat atop the library yard, he could've left his life just as it had been, uninterrupted by Junia's false death.

It was here that began yet another peculiar event. Just as Ollie's fingers trembled with distaste for the chaotic state of his life, the ground beneath him began to similarly shake. The glass on the walls quickly snapped, as though imaginary flying metal dice had flown through each one, glass shards raining in the small, now darkly-lit room. Voices flooded the halls, and as the shaking earth only strengthened in magnitude, the thin, white walls began to crumble like goat cheese, and a thick dust settled within the room. Nearly every wall had now cracked and crumbled into small particles of dust which had painted the air, now so opaque that Ollie could barely see his own tied-up fingers. Rushing for the door, Ollie desperately attempted to escape the crumbling mess, but within seconds, the entire station had been crushed by a cracking roof, the entire town of Versailles being the unforeseen victim of one of the highest magnitude earthquakes reported in history.

This was a tragic end to the small town of Versailles, Indiana, which had seemed to settle shortly after the deaths of its inhabitants in a dark cloud of fire smoke, drywall dust, and the tragic ruins of a town so beloved by its townspeople. It's unclear if anyone survived the drastic destruction which took place, for the utterly chaotic vibrations had decimated nearly everything within it. The peaceful existence of the town had never been restored after Ollie's decision to find Junia, and it only leaves us to wonder how Ollie and this small

town may have been connected in some odd way. Of course, however, we will never know, for the town now lies in treacherous ruins, lacking a living survivor to re-tell its tales.

While it's easy to avoid being alarmed by the tragic events which had transpired in Versailles. The town is an anomaly, as it's highly unlikely that the smallest of actions in one milkman's life could cause the entire town to catastrophically perish. However, in the pursuit of restoration of the past, destruction ensued, and just as Chet Baker had always said, *it could happen to you.*

**THE END.**

## Motifs and Connections to *Arcadia*

Overall, the major themes within this piece are chaos, irreversibility, and the dangerous nature of love, each of which are inspired by similar themes in *Arcadia* by Tom Stoppard. The pursuit of restoration and love is ultimately what leads to the tragic and chaotic demise of the town, and as the story progresses, its events become increasingly unpredictable and drastically destructive. In addition, Johnny acts as a symbol of irreversibility and death, as he describes how his life experiences had contributed to his understanding that there is no way to undo your actions, and that there is no point in feeling regret for the past. These lessons and concepts become clearer throughout the story as Ollie learns that the restorative order which he yearns for may never be his reality again, and that the smallest decisions may lead to the most drastic, unforeseen events, just as the butterfly effect mechanism.

### Key Motifs

- **Milk** - represents irreversibility due to spoiling and Ollie's emphasis on ensuring that it remains unspoiled and delivered to its organized, respective locations. This is the first example of Ollie's failure to restore the order that the milk glasses were once in.
- **Red Ribbon** - symbol of love and romantic interconnectedness. In *Arcadia*, there was a web of romantic dynamics which had "tied" its characters together. The ribbon similarly romantically ties two individuals together.
- **Metal Dice** - chance. Rare, yet possible events occurring are represented by the effects and uses of the dice.
- **Versailles, Indiana** - chaos. Town moves towards an irreversible chaotic ending.