

Child's Play

Patrick Sagaram

Quote bank:

Pg.	Quote	Annotation
107	"Along the corridor ... I hear a cry, a pitiful mew" / "I shout at him to stop / "I threaten to call the police" / "I retreat inside my flat"	Opens the story with the narrator as protector/intervener — escalating verbs (shout → threaten) showing assertiveness, but "retreat" undercuts this, hinting his control is partial/performative. 1st corridor instance — establishes the space as one of unconscious identification with vulnerability and unresolved confrontation
107	"there's no point in saying anything" / "Somewhere in the room, there's a gurgle from the pipes. A house lizard peels out a few clicks"	Domestic sounds fill the silence between the couple — mundane details (lizard clicks, gurgling pipes) draw attention to what is <i>not</i> being said. "No point" suggests words/dialogue have lost meaning and utility, so silence is characterised through ambient noise instead — an early author's technique of withholding.
107–108	"I turn my thoughts over to Claire, feeling an urge to put my arm around her. Except I know she'll only shrug from underneath, inching away from me. I touch her shoulder, but she doesn't move. She keeps her back towards me"	Physical distance mirrors emotional distance — repeated small negations ("shrug," "inching away," "doesn't move," "back towards me") accumulate to show rejection without a single word spoken. Good example of gesture replacing dialogue.
108	"It will be hours before sleep comes ... I keep worrying about the things I can't control"	Establishes anxiety and lack of agency as already familiar states — "can't control" is a key phrase to track, since control (or its absence) recurs as a motif throughout Sagaram's characterisation of the narrator.

109	“...chances like this don’t often land on my lap. I’ve got to make this happen”	Work-driven, ambitious tone — contrasts with his domestic helplessness. Suggests professional life is where he can exert control, unlike his marriage/grief. Perhaps gendered expectation of the male to have everything together?
109	“I give the impression everything is under control. But I feel an enormous lethargy wash over me”	Appearance vs. reality theme — “impression” flags performance; “lethargy” signals depletion. Buckling under the pressure of acting confident, stable, and reassuring both at work and at home, burying his own feelings
110	“I force a smile, as if everything is fine” / “I say in a bright voice”	Reinforces the performance motif from pg. 109 — “force” and “as if” are the giveaway words indicating inauthenticity. Look for repeated vocabulary of forcing/pretending across the text — this is a linguistic pattern worth tracking.
111–112	“...my teeth clench and my hands curl into fists . I want to say terrible things and walk away. I want to slam doors, break things. Except I say and do nothing”	Vivid physical imagery of repressed rage — note the structure: desire stated boldly, then immediately negated (“Except I... nothing”). This “except” pattern recurs (see pg. 107, pg. 119) — worth tracking every instance of “except” as a marker of restraint/withholding.
112	“I can’t imagine what she’s going through. And my anger turns to shame”	Emotional pivot — anger redirected inward as guilt. Shows empathy overriding self-pity, complicating a simple reading of him as merely frustrated.
112	“strings of noodles from days ago” / standing at the kitchen sink alone and eating vs “another time when Claire and I would sit at the table and swap	Juxtaposition of past intimacy and present isolation — food/eating has devolved from a symbol of marital closeness to

	stories after dinner” / “I wonder how long this is going to be: me, alone with my thoughts, my half-empty plastic container”	one of distance. “Half-empty” is both literal and symbolic (relationship, hope).
112	“I go out to the common corridor ... I hear mewling ... He purrs, rubbing his head and body against my leg. I kneel to scratch his head”	2nd corridor instance — tonal shift from confrontation (1st instance) to tenderness. “Kneel” is a posture of humility/care; corridor now becomes a space for expressing gentleness without an audience, revealing his authentic self
114	“Except our families and a few close friends, no one knows the truth”	Explicit statement of secrecy — the word “truth” is loaded, implying something being actively hidden. Central quote for any withholding/symbolism-focused essay.
114	“I walk along the corridor ... looking for the kitty ... Looks like he vanished ... I feel stupid standing around with cat food in my hand”	3rd corridor instance — absence/anxiety motif. “Stupid” suggests vulnerability at being caught caring, suggesting he’s still uncomfortable with open displays of tenderness. Corridor as a space of absence/futility/ unfulfilled desire to show care
114–115	“Baby photos, photos when we turned 16, photos taken when we were dating ... one with the two of us kissing ... when this flat was just an empty shell of cement and concrete” vs now the flat is filled and furnished but lacking the intimacy they once shared	Temporal juxtaposition — physical fullness (furnished flat) ironically contrasted with emotional emptiness. Photos as symbols of a linear , hopeful past set against a stalled present . Strong evidence for temporal structure/juxtaposition angle.
115–116	“she is squatting along the corridor ... Claire strokes [the cat] with the back of her hand ... I tell her what happened”/ the narrator brings the cat food he had bought earlier and they feed the cat together	4th corridor instance — first shared, wordless moment of reconnection. Her “squatting” and “strokes” mirror his earlier “kneel” and “scratch” — parallel gestures linking the couple through the act of showing care towards the cat

116	"I feel my tears coming so I clench my jaws. This is for better, for worse, in sickness and in health. This means loving someone no matter what"	Marriage vow language deployed mid-crisis — recontextualises formal words with raw emotional weight. "Clench" recurs (see pg. 111) as physical restraint vocabulary
116	"I need you to be patient with me"	Claire's rare direct speech — significant because she is otherwise shown mostly through action/gesture, not dialogue. One of very few moments she speaks for herself. Marriage is wounded, not broken
119	"I want to tell her about the weeks after it happened. How Claire began to spend her days on the sofa with the TV going, staring into the screen with those dull eyes. Then came irregular meals, not showering and finally the bed, where she lay coiled up sleeping or pretending to sleep. I want to say all this because I feel my insides being split apart, atom by atom. Except I don't. I do what I've been doing all this time, which is to choke it down.	Shows Claire's grief entirely through external behavioural symptoms (narrator's observation), never her interiority directly. "Except" pattern repeated (withholding/restraining desire). "Split apart" echoes the imagery of "slam" and "break" but this time describing his internal state rather than objects. Rich for both characterisation and symbolism angles
120	"Chee Kheong and I have our problems. But we hide it with work. We bury it with distractions" / "All I know is, any marriage except your own is one thing you'll never know"	Introduces a foil/parallel relationship — universalises the theme (all marriages have private struggles), while "bury" underscores the pressure/force of the narrator and Claire's socially hidden "truth"
120	"I decide to say what's on my mind. It will cost me, but what if what I say makes her consider what matters most?"	Turning point — first deliberate choice to break silence, contrasts with all prior "except I say/do nothing" moments. A key structural pivot for essays tracking his character arc.
120	"Before I can stop myself, the tears	Direct contrast to earlier restraint

	come fiercely. This time, I let them”	(“clench,” “choke it down”) — “This time” signals conscious change ; crying is no longer suppressed. Important companion quote to pg. 116 and 119.
121	“I walk along the corridor towards my floor ... The bags slip from my fingers ... I catch him by his collar ...” / “For reasons I can’t explain, I recall the way my father was when he wasn’t drunk ... I relax my hold on the boy”	5th corridor instance — climax of the corridor motif. Structurally mirrors the 1st instance (same conflict, same space) but resolves differently — showing character growth through altered response. The father flashback introduces intergenerational trauma/inheritance triggering reflection, showing internal change and inherited patterns of care/violence being consciously broken
122	“Let’s go for a drive. We can decide later”	Deferral , not resolution — ending avoids neat closure, modelling emotional realism (healing is ongoing, not ‘fixed’).
122	“At some point, we’ll have to have it, the talk to see if we’re willing to try again. To be sure we are prepared for everything when it didn’t work out the first time. But we won’t talk about that tonight”	Explicitly postpones resolution . Reinforces theme that grief/healing is a process without a clean endpoint .

Word bank for literary analysis

To Show Similarity or Connection

- Mirror: Reflects a character, theme, or plot point closely.
- Parallel: Runs alongside another element to show a clear connection.
- Echo: Repeats an earlier sound, word, idea, or feeling subtly.
- Align: Matches or connects an action with a broader thematic concept.
- Juxtapose: Places contrasting elements side by side to highlight differences.

To Show Emphasis or Importance

- Emphasise: Gives special importance or prominence to an idea.
- Underscore: Stresses or draws sharp focus to a crucial point.
- Highlight: Directs attention to a specific detail.
- Foreground: Brings an element to the front of the reader's awareness.
- Accentuate: Makes a feature or feeling more noticeable or prominent.

To Show Development or Growth

- Accumulate: Builds up layers of meaning, tension, or imagery over time.
- Reinforce: Strengthens an existing argument, motif, or emotional tone.
- Amplify: Increases the intensity or significance of something in a way that expands or enhances.
- Escalate: Increases the intensity or significance of something in defined stages—typically tied to problems or conflicts.
- Crystallise: Makes a vague concept perfectly clear, sharp, and defined.

To Show Patterns or Repetition

- Recur: Appears repeatedly throughout the text to form a motif.
- Reverberate: Echoes repeatedly through multiple scenes, moments, or characters.
- Resonate: Evokes a strong emotional connection that is deeply meaningful.
- Weave: Threads an idea tightly into the fabric of the narrative structure.
- Punctuate: Interrupts the narrative flow regularly with a specific image.