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## NAVIGATING THE SPECTRUM OF HUMANITY IN *AS BRIGHT AS HEAVEN* (2018) BY SUSAN MEISSNER

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### ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the social situations and interpret quotes that express the social conditions and human value as reflected in the novel "As Bright as Heaven" amid the pandemic and World War I. In this research, the writer used a qualitative method with a sociological approach. The primary data was collected from the novel, and the secondary sources were journals, e-books, and internet references. This research concludes that "As Bright as Heaven" is a novel exploring seven social situations. There were feelings, human values, hope and hopelessness, romance, death, moving, and after the pandemic. In each chapter, Meissner describes social situations based on their respective characters. Susan Meissner creates an emotionally rich and exciting story in this novel that highlights the strength of human beings in the face of tragedy through the characters' experiences and emotions.

**Keywords:** *As Bright as Heaven; Human Value; Sociological Approach; Social Situations*

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### I. INTRODUCTION

In social situations, a mutual relationship exists between one human being and another (W.A. Gerungan, 1978, p. 77). Any situation that causes social interaction can be classified as a social situation. The existing context and conditions determine the social situations that occur.

Social situations can be reflected in various events such as pandemics; for example, Queen and Harding (2020) analyze the effect of the pandemic on social conditions, focusing primarily on the issue of numerous job losses. People who lose jobs experience emotional discomfort, decreased self-esteem, and the responsibility of seeking different job possibilities. They also emphasize the effects on families, as losing a job can alter family relationships, raise financial stress, and cause mental health issues (Ali, 2023). This means that social situations can considerably impact the occurrence and intensity of catastrophes like pandemics.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) cited in Ducharme (2020), a pandemic is the worldwide

spread of a new disease. This means that a disease is declared a pandemic when the rate of increase in cases continues to rise and spreads across a large geographic area, affecting multiple countries. Although the word "pandemic" conjures up frightening images, it just refers to the widespread spread of the disease rather than its severity. Until now, many pandemics have occurred and have been recorded in history. According to Balita-Centeno (2020), the pandemics recorded in history are the Antonine Plague, The Black Death, Small Pox, Cholera, the Russian Flu of 1889, Spanish Flu, H3N2, HIV/AIDS, SARS, and most recently, COVID-19. This means that this world has gone through difficult times not just once but many times, and indeed, this world has gone through social situations that occur in each condition.

Due to the pandemic's spread, everyone must know its existence. Nowadays, authors are producing books that tell the pandemic's story or use it as a setting for stories they want to write. Some of the literary works inspired by the pandemic include the novels "The End of October" by Lawrence Wright, "The Pull of the Stars" by Emma

Donoghue, "Breathless" by Jennifer Niven, "The Andromeda Strain" by Michael Crichton, "Severance" by Ling Ma, "One of Ours" by Willa Cather, "Station Eleven" by Emily St John Mandel, "As Bright as Heaven" by Susan Meissner, and many more. Moreover, many authors have produced poetry, short stories, and essays about the pandemic and how it has affected daily life. The pandemic has changed how people live (MacKay & DeCicco, 2020), and writers will undoubtedly continue scrutinizing and exploring our society and culture.

"As Bright as Heaven" by Susan Meissner is one of the best fiction books (John S., 2020). The Spanish Flu, one of the flu pandemics that swept during 1918, is the subject of this historical fiction book. The Bright family, which relocates to Philadelphia so that Thomas Bright can work with his uncle in his mortuary business, is home to the primary characters. The death of 4-month-old Henry, who was born with a damaged heart, has devastated the entire family, including wife Pauline and daughters Evelyn, Maggie, and Willa. The story is split into two parts: the first describes how the family and Philadelphia deal with the pandemic, and the second depicts how life changed after the war and the virus.

The Spanish flu strikes the Bright family in this novel just as they become used to their new house and way of life, having terrible consequences for both the Bright family and their surroundings. It caused many deaths that occurred in a short time because, at first, there was no medicine or vaccine found. In fact, in just eleven days, the Spanish Flu has killed seven thousand people. In this situation, they could only hope that everything would pass quickly, and here they also lost their loved ones to the flu.

This research explains the social situations in the novel "As Bright as Heaven" amid the pandemic and

World War 1. In this research, the writer analyzes and interprets quotes that express various human values and social situations.

## II. RESEARCH METHOD

Qualitative research is a type of research that gathers and uses non-numerical data. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005:2), Qualitative research focuses on various methods and takes an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject. Qualitative researchers investigate phenomena in their natural contexts, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people assign to them. The writers use qualitative research methods in this study to analyze the social situations in the novel "As Bright as Heaven" by Susan Meissner.

The object of this research is the novel "As Bright as Heaven" by Susan Meissner. "As Bright as Heaven" is a historical fiction book. This novel was published in 2018. The writers utilize this work as an object because it presents the story of a family reborn through loss and love during a pandemic, which can assist the writers analyze social situations that develop.

The writers use two methods to collect data, namely primary data and secondary data. The primary data for this research was collected from the novel "As Bright as Heaven" itself. Secondary data sources for this research are journals, e-books, and internet references related to the topic and object of this research.

The writers use a sociological approach to analyze and interpret the quotes that express the social situations in "As Bright as Heaven." Little (2014) highlights that there are six scientific methods in sociology: 1.) Ask a question; 2.) Research existing sources; 3.) Formulate a hypothesis; 4.) Design and conduct a study; 5.) Conclude; 6.) Report results.

### III. DISCUSSION AND FINDING

The writers found several human values and social situations in this research. Those are feeling, humanity values, hope, romance, and death.

#### Feeling

Feeling is the emotional response to any state or situation. There are various emotions, such as sadness, happiness, good, bad, anger, etc. Susan Meissner describes feelings in a variety of ways in this novel. The Spanish flu outbreak changed their lives from happiness to fear, sadness, and anger. They are afraid because the people they love could become infected and die, sad because they cannot do anything when they are abandoned by the people they love, and angry because the Spanish flu made their lives miserable. Here are quotations that show feeling:

*“The few months we had with Henry were wonder filled and happy. He did everything a baby does that makes you smile and laugh and want to kiss his downy head.”* (Chapter 1)

This quote explains that a few months after Henry's death due to liver disease, his mother, Pauline, felt that the time she spent with Henry was full of miracles, and happiness was so short. Henry was not like a baby; he did everything other babies could not do. She also felt unfortunate about Henry's departure. Why has all this happened to our family? We have not been able to accept all this in such a short time.

*“Evelyn is still sad, Maggie is still angry, and Willa is still bewildered that Henry was taken from us.”* (Chapter 1).

This quote explains the feelings of Henry's family, especially his siblings, Evelyn, Maggie, and Willa. Where their feelings are different when they get the news that Henry died of liver disease. Evelyn is still feeling very sad

because she heard of Henry's death. Maggie's feelings were anger when she heard that Hendry died; maybe she felt lied to by them, but in fact, she heard the news that Hendry died there. She also felt unfortunate that her only brother, who had not yet turned one year old, died of liver disease. The last feeling Will, who still feels confused about Hendry's departure, has is that he may not believe that Hendry left him. Willa is confused about why God took Henry so soon from her family. That was the feeling of Henry's sisters when they heard the news of Henry's death; some felt confused, sad, and angry.

*“I feel inside that I am not sure there are words to describe it. I should still be sad, angry, and bewildered, but instead, I feel a numbness regarding death that I have told no one about.”* (Chapter 1)

This quote explains the feeling that Pauline's mother, Hendry, felt when she heard that her son died of liver disease; in which she was distraught with grief and mixed emotions when she heard the news of her child's death. She felt confused and numb about this incident, which had not happened to her before. By the time she heard the doctor say that Hendry had died of liver disease, she was feeling numb; she was going to tell me all this.

*“Life is beautiful, but oh, how hard it can be. Dying, by contrast, is easy, almost gentle. However, who can I tell such a thing to? No one. I am troubled by how remarkable this feeling is.”* (Chapter 1).

The quote explains how extraordinary the feeling Pauline's mother experienced when she heard that her child had liver disease and died so quickly. She was troubled by the emotions she experienced, but to whom she could relate these feelings, there was nothing, no word from Hendry's mother. The feelings that Hendry's mother experienced when her infant son, who did not know what

died of liver disease, the feelings of a mother who loved her child so much but left her mother so quickly.

*“Mama is sad today that we are not going to Quakertown, and I am sad, too.”* (Chapter 20)

This quote explains when Pauline and the children planned to return to Quakertown. She called her mother to tell her this, but her mother did not want them to come because they could have brought the virus to baby Curtis. Pauline finally sadly said that they had to stay to help Uncle Fred take care of all the mess that was happening because of the flu. She did not tell the real reason why they were not coming back, but they already knew.

*“I am so grateful Will was spared, but why does it come for the young and innocent? Why does it not wait until the body is old, gray, and full of years?”* (Chapter 30)

After having the flu for three days, I will finally recover. Pauline was happy that Will was spared the worst of it, but she still did not understand how death could come to such a young and innocent person. Pauline could not understand even more why Henry died at such a young age when he did not even understand anything about the world, why death did not come when people were old.

*“She just fell over,” Will whispers, her voice full of fear.* (Chapter 31)

After seeing Will recovering, Pauline felt unwell. Willa asked for blackberry syrup pancakes, and Pauline intended to make them for Will, but she fell before she could get out of Will’s room. This scared Will, and she screamed, and Evie came to check what had happened.

*Uncle Fred does not like that idea, either. “I cannot be running up here all day to look after you, Pauline. It is like a madhouse downstairs.” Now, Uncle Fred sounds as if he is about to cry. Maybe he is. Maybe after days and days of sorting out the dead by the*

*dozens, some of whom were friends and neighbors, he is past the point of being able to shoulder the terrible weight of the situation. Maybe he is saying, “I cannot do this anymore.”* (Chapter 31)

Pauline caught the flu after looking after Will for days without wearing a mask. Uncle Fred was at a loss about how he would cope with everything. He was already so busy dealing with the bodies arriving non-stop; now Pauline was sick, and Thomas was not home. He could not go back and forth all day from his office to Pauline’s room to check on her. Uncle Fred felt he could no longer do it all; he was tired.

*“When I step into her room, mama is sleeping, which I am glad of because she cannot command me to leave. However, it also means she is not awake to take the aspirin. I set the bottle on her bedside table.”* (Chapter 31).

After caring for Will, Evie went to the kitchen to get water and cotton wool before entering her mother's room wearing a mask. Pauline was asleep when Evie entered. Evie was happy she could see her mother as she could not send her out. However, on the other hand, Evie was worried because it meant that her mother would not take her medication. She was afraid that her mother's condition might get worse.

### **Humanity Value**

Maio (2018) explains that we usually refer to important abstract ideals when discussing human values. Things like freedom, equality, security, tradition, and peace come to mind. Human values guide us in considering the human element when interacting with other humans (Ali & Husain, 2023). Respect, acceptance, consideration, appreciation, listening, openness, affection, empathy, and love for other people are other examples of human values.

Despite the sadness and fear surrounding them, the characters in *“As Bright as Heaven”* remain true to their humanity. Even in the face of adversity, they show compassion and kindness to those around them. Maggie demonstrates this when she offers to care for the baby of a woman who died from the flu. This kindness demonstrates how even the slightest compassion can significantly impact those around us. In this novel, Sussan Meissner describes human values through empathy, love for other people, and even acceptance.

Here are quotations that show humanity's values:

*“He is so busy because of the flu,” Mama said, wiping her eyes with her sleeve. “He barely has time to sleep. We should stay and help him.”* (Chapter 20)

This quote mentions that after learning that they could not return to Quakertown because her parents were worried of they would bring the virus to Jane and the baby, Pauline decided they should stay to help Uncle Fred, who barely had time to sleep because he was busy with the flu.

*“The school and church cafeterias have been turned into soup kitchens, and volunteers are making food for people who are too sick to cook their meals,” one of the ladies said.*” (Chapter 20)

Some women from the church visited Pauline and said that the school and church cafeteria had been turned into a soup kitchen. Volunteers cook meals for people who cannot make food due to illness.

*“You are going to do it, mama?” Evie asked. “Isn’t it a bit dangerous?” “I may as well be useful if I am to stay here,” Mama said. “It is only dangerous if you are not careful. Besides, can you imagine what it must be like to be ill and have no family to look out for you? To feel as though you have been abandoned?”* (Chapter 20)

Pauline was willing to volunteer to bring food to those who were sick, even though she knew it was dangerous because the virus could be transmitted. However, what she thought about was how sick people would feel when they were left behind.

*“She is light as a feather and weak from illness. Perhaps I am meant only to leave the soup for her and go, but I wonder if she has the strength even to open the jar. “How about I help you eat a little? I have everything all right here,” I say, glad I do not have to rummage through her tiny kitchen for a spoon. I spoon some of the soup into a small bowl from my basket. I pull up a rickety chair beside her bed and sit, wondering what to say as I help her eat. I still do not know if she speaks any English. However, the conversation is not needed. Mrs. Abramovic is so weak that she lies back against her pillows after only five spoonfuls of soup.”* (Chapter 22)

Pauline was only in charge of bringing food and then going to bring food to the next sick person, but when she saw Mrs. Abramovic, he became unsure whether Mrs. Abramovic even had the strength to open jars of food or could not do it. Pauline decided to stay for a while and help Mrs. Abramovic eat since there was no one to look after her, although she was unsure if Mrs. Abramovic understood English.

*“She just fell over,” Willa whispers, her voice full of fear. “Mama?” I kneel to touch her shoulder, shaking it just a little. She moans softly and raises a hand toward me, not for me to help her get up but in protest. She is trying to shoo me away. “Mama!” I say again, and I put my hand to her forehead. It is hot with a fever. I see no sign of her mask anywhere about her. She had been caring for Will without wearing it.”* (Chapter 31)

Seeing her mother fall asleep in Willa's room, Evelyn realized that her mother had not been wearing a mask while caring for Willa, which is why her mother is sick. Even when her mother was ill, she did not want her children to be around her so as not to catch the flu.

*“My insides feel like they are being pulled in all directions. Our house, filled with the dead and now the flu itself living here, clearly is unsafe for the baby. However, are there completely safe places anymore? Moreover, who else can take a helpless orphaned child? Dora Sutcliff could probably care for him for a while, but she already said she did not think she could care for a baby along with Charlie.”* (Chapter 31)

Evelyn was distraught as their home was no longer safe due to the presence of dead bodies, and even the flu was already in their home. She was worried about the baby because there was no safe place and no one else to take the orphan. For a moment, she thought of letting the baby be cared for by Dora Sutcliff, Charlie's mother, but Mrs. Sutcliff had already said she couldn't because Charlie was sick.

## Hope

Hope means a positive wish for things to improve for the better. Hope means a positive wish for things to improve, while hopelessness is a condition without hope. We found a social situation of hope and hopelessness in this novel, where when the flu hits, they still have hope like someone who has had the flu will get well and be refined to the point where they are hopeless because their closest person has died from the flu.

Here are quotations that show hope and hopelessness:  
*“I am suddenly overcome by my inability to understand why some will survive the flu and some will not. Why do some babies live and some do not?”*  
(Chapter 22)

Pauline wonders why some people will survive and will not survive this flu. She also could not understand why some babies lived and some did not. In this situation, Pauline hopes everyone can survive and that Henry is still with them.

*“It is the fourth day since Mama came down with the flu. Today, she will start to feel better. This was the day I woke up with excellent skin and clear eyes. Today will be different. I already feel like it will be.”*  
(Chapter 34)

This quote mentions that it was already the fourth day since Pauline had caught the flu. Maggie hoped that this was the day her mother would recover, as she recovered after the third day.

*“You are my brave girl,” Mama whispers, pulling her feet up and away from me. The front half of my body is now lying across just a bed and blanket. Mama has curled up into a ball and turned to the wall. She will get better; I say to myself as I back away from her bed. It is the fourth day. Later today, she will start to feel better.”* (Chapter 34).

Pauline knew that Maggie was very sad about her situation, so she encouraged her by saying she was brave. Maggie reassured herself that her mother would be okay because it was the fourth day, which should have been the day her mother would recover, just like Willa, who had already recovered on the fourth day.

*“I keep thinking I am having a bad dream, and soon I will wake up, and everything will return to how it was before the flu. She is gone. Mama is dead. The flu took her just like it wanted to take Willa.”* (Chapter 36)

This quote shows that after their mother died from the same flu that infected Willa earlier, Evelyn hoped that it was all just a bad dream and that her mother would soon wake up without the flu like before: *“Everyone is intent*

on their reason for being out on the street in the middle of a plague.” (Chapter 38). Even though the epidemic hit the city, people do their usual activities to earn income: “*She died of the flu, Eunice!*” Papa says, his voice raised.” (Chapter 39).

Pauline's family does not accept that their child died of an epidemic and blames Pauline's husband for killing her because they do not believe that their child died of a pandemic.

### **Romance**

Romance is a strong attraction or a feeling of love for another person. The romance in this novel is aimed at their lives after being hit by a pandemic (Ali, 2024). The writer relates romance with family conflicts, which complicates their love story. Romance in this novel is shown as a form of love for their partner and family.

Here are quotations that show romance: “*I come inside from having spent the afternoon at Ruby’s, and there it is on the table inside the front door, and the rest of the day’s mail is inside. I cannot get my Mittens off fast enough. I tear the envelope open and stand there reading the Letter in the foyer with my boots dripping melted snow all over the rug. Jamie’s letter to me fits on just one side of the thin paper: dear Maggie.*” (Chapter 44).

This quote shows that Maggie received a letter from Jamie and was moved to tears by the letter's contents: “*It is not that I do not want to be married. I do. However, I want to experience it again. That electrified sensation I felt with Gilbert all those years ago when the way. He looked at me and made my heart flutter. That feeling had been natural and Incredible and different and very new. I only started loving Gilbert when the flu snatched him away.*” (Chapter 48).

Evelyn has not gotten over Gilbert's death and still cannot open her heart to another man: “*Do you hear what*

*I am saying?*” Palmer tips his head to make eye contact with me. “*I am saying I am in love with you. Please come with me. As my wife.*” (Chapter 53)

Palmer invites Maggie to move to New York because Palmer gets a job offer with a higher salary. However, Maggie does not want to move to New York because she cannot leave her father and Alex.

“*What if I asked you to stay?*” The words come out of my mouth, soft as gauze. “*What was that?*” “*If I asked you to stay with me in Philadelphia, would you?*” He blinks, but his gaze never leaves mine. “*you want me to decline the job?*” “*No, I do not. I want to know if you would if I asked you to.*” “*To marry you and live here?*” My heart is pounding at the thought. “*yes.*” He puts his hands around my waist and draws me to him even though we are on the street, and passersby are indeed staring. “*if you asked me, I would stay.*” (Chapter 53)

Ultimately, Palmer allows Alex to come with them, but Maggie does not want Alex to be away from his father and sisters. Maggie still wants to live in Philadelphia, and Palmer does, too, and Palmer says yes.

“*He had happily kissed me, and then he had taken my hand to accompany him to the office where my father often retired in the evening to smoke one of Granddad’s cigars and read.*” (Chapter 59).

After Palmer got the answer he wanted from Maggie, she was pleased and kissed him, and then they went to her father’s office to smoke and read a book.

“*I tilt my head into his palm and kiss it before I know what I am doing. His strong hand is wet with my tears, and I taste salt. A second later, Conrad’s arms are around me, and his lips are on mine, tender and hesitant. We both sense that we are poised above a*

*dam about to burst, and the water could sweep us away if we let it. If we want it to.” (Chapter 60)*

When Conrad saw Evelyn in disarray, he approached her and held his hand to calm her down. At first, Evelyn tilted her head into Conrad’s palm, then Conrad’s arms wrapped around her and kissed her hesitantly.

*“A second later, I return his kiss, and then his hands are everywhere on my upper body, and his lips are finding me in places I have never before seen. Behind my ear; along my jaw, on the chevron between my clavicles. His chest muscles are tight under my fingertips, tensing with desire, and I hear a small voice in my head telling me nothing good can come from continuing this. Nothing. Conrad is married.” (Chapter 60)*

Evelyn's love for Conrad was so great that she could do anything for Conrad. Live for him, die for him, including healing his wife, if he can and if it will make Conrad happy.

*“He takes another step, and I rush forward. “Conrad, wait!” I grab his hand, and my fingers touch his wedding ring. We both look down at the circle of gold. He pulls his hand away but then reaches up to touch my face for the merest second before he steps outside.” (Chapter 60)*

This quote describes how, after Conrad takes another step, Evelyn rushes forward to stop Conrad from taking his hand. Then Conrad reached out to touch Evelyn’s face before they parted.

*“But it is true. It is!” Fresh tears spill from my eyes, and I want him to pull me into his arms and whisper that all will be made right in time. Not to worry. Everything will be made right. You will see.” (Chapter 61).*

This situation depicts Conrad assuring Evelyn that what Evelyn was doing was not right, and then Conrad calms her down, pulls her into his arms, and whispers that everything will work out in time.

*“What I must say will not entail an extended visit that requires chairs or tea. I move toward him and take his hands in mine. “what I would like, Conrad, is to spend my life with you.” (Chapter 66)*

Four weeks after Evelyn memorized Conrad’s address, she visited Conrad and Sybil’s house. Conrad asked why Evelyn was at her house, and then Evelyn answered without hesitation that she had to meet Conrad. Evelyn does not require lengthy visits, chairs, or tea. Evelyn just wanted Conrad to spend time with her.

*“I am already yours, my heart replies. “I would be yours to whatever extent you want me to be,” I say aloud. “You said the other day at the asylum that I deserve happiness. I cannot be happy if I am not with you.” (Chapter 66)*

Evelyn wanted to have Conrad; she could not forget what Conrad said the other day in the mental hospital that Evelyn deserved to be happy, and Evelyn said she could not be pleased if she were not with Conrad.

*“I love you, Conrad,” I tell him when he says nothing. “I will not love anyone else. I cannot.” (Chapter 66).*

When Evelyn confesses how much she loves Conrad, Conrad pulls Evelyn to him and kisses her, where they feel not just a kiss of raw physical desire but a fusion of two broken hearts that, after everything that happened to them both, can still love.

## **Death**

Death is the end of the journey of life in the world, and no one knows when it will happen. The Spanish flu in this novel resulted in many deaths in a short time because, at first, there was no way to prevent the spread of the flu.



Here are quotations that show humanity's values: "There will be no reminders anywhere that Henry was ever mine." (Chapter 1). At the time of Henry's death, she will not forget that Henry was once her own. Although it was very short, she will never forget Henry. The only son she had died of liver disease: "Is there no one to take care of you? No children or siblings?" Again, she shakes her head. "My brother died last week. His wife, the day before. Only me now." (Chapter 22).

Pauline asked about Mrs. Abramovic's family because she was sick, and no one seemed to be taking care of her. It turns out she lived with her brother and her sister-in-law, but they died last week because of the flu. So now only Mrs. Abramovic lives there, and no one can take care of her: "Uncle Fred told me seven thousand people in Philadelphia are dead from the flu—seven thousand people in just eleven days." (Chapter 27)

They were discussing the baby that Maggie and Pauline had brought home. Uncle Fred then told Evie that seven thousand people had died in eleven days from the flu, and he thought maybe the family of the baby thought the baby was dead: "She is gone. Mama is dead. The flu took her just like it wanted to take Will." (Chapter 36).

This quote mentions that Pauline died from the same flu that they wanted to take will, too: "I run back to the kitchen, and Papa turns from the sink, rinsing out his cup. "What is it?" He says. I can barely squeak out the words. "Uncle Fred is. He has gone." Papa does not understand. He thinks Fred has left the house. "Gone where?" "He is dead, papa!" My father brushes past me, and I follow him to Uncle Fred's bedroom." (Chapter 36)

Thomas is ready to take care of Pauline's body. Evelyn goes to Uncle Fred's room to wake him up because Thomas needs her help, but Evelyn finds Uncle

Fred dead in his bed, so she immediately calls her father: "Roland was just here," he says, his voice void of strength. "Charlie Sutcliff died last night, too." (Chapter 36).

This quote explains that not only did the flu take Pauline's life, but that night, it also took Charlie's life. Roland, Charlie's father, came to take care of Charlie's body: "I was sad to hear that the German girl Gretchen Weiss got it and she died." (Chapter 40).

Willa regrets the German woman who died because of the pandemic; she wants to take care of her dog because she feels she can take care of the dog: *Mr. Galway also died from the flu.* (Chapter 40)

Mr. Galway was her favorite teacher. Evie also died because of the pandemic, and that made Evie very sad about the passing of Mr. Galway: "The other one is Sally. She got the flu and died." (Chapter 40)

Willa's best friend also died from this pandemic, Sally. Sally is a good friend of Will. Willa still does not expect and accept that Sally was killed due to a pandemic: "Mama, Uncle Fred, Charlie, Mrs. Arnold, Sally, and so many others—they are all still gone. Moreover, they will stay gone." (Chapter 41).

As the oldest sibling, Maggie feels the loss of them due to this pandemic, and Maggie tries to make peace with the fact that they will be gone forever: "Gilbert is gone. He died the same day and started to get better." (Chapter 42). Gilbert, the son of Mr. Galway, and his favorite teacher, Evie, also died from the pandemic. Evie felt she had not gotten close enough to and knew Gilbert and was eagerly waiting for that day to come.

"I will help Papa move the deceased woman into the parlor. I will make sure she looks as peaceful as a dreamer. I will position the flowers so that she

appears to have been found napping in a garden among the butterflies, and then I will run across the street to Jamie. When Willa comes home from school, I will tell her that Alex is coming back to us and that maybe she will finally let go of the anger she guards like a prized possession. Moreover, when Evie comes home tonight, I will tell her and ask how her grand experiment is going so far.” (Chapter 67)

This quote describes how Maggie and her papa move the dead woman to the living room. Maggie makes sure he looks peaceful, like a dreamer. Maggie positioned the flowers to look like they had just been found napping in the butterfly garden.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Based on this research, “*As Bright as Heaven*” is a novel that explores many social situations such as feelings, human values, hope and hopelessness, romance, death, moving, and after the pandemic. In each chapter, Meissner describes social situations based on their respective characters. Susan Meissner creates an emotionally rich and exciting story in this novel that highlights the strength of human beings in the face of tragedy through the characters' experiences and emotions.

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