

After the Rain Study Guide

After the Rain by Norma Fox Mazer

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Overview

After the Rain explores the nature of relationships and their effects on independence. The novel focuses on Rachel Cooper, a fifteen year old who worries about her appearance, her differences from other girls, and her prospects for having a boyfriend. These concerns reflect a sense of insecurity that Rachel must overcome in order to mature and to accept relationships.

The novel treats the universal struggle to achieve independence without alienating loved ones whose affection sometimes appears confining. Young adults empathize with Rachel's irritable outbursts against her parents, the guilt she feels afterwards, and her driving need for independence. After the Rain clarifies the relationship between self-esteem and the ability to accept love, shedding light on the meaning of maturity and the process of attaining it.

About the Author

Norma Fox Mazer was born on May 15, 1931, in New York City, to Michael and Jean Garlen Fox. Educated in New York, she graduated from the Glen Falls High School, where she was editor of her school paper and a correspondent for the town newspaper. She married Harry Mazer, also a writer, on February 12, 1950, after her first year at Antioch College. She later studied at Syracuse University. Her writing career, largely inspired by her four children, developed through years of writing short stories and articles for magazines and plays for television. These works appeared in such varied magazines as *Jack and Jill*, *Child Life*, *Top of the News*, and *Redbook*, but her major writings have been critically acclaimed novels for young adults, many of which have earned prestigious awards.

After the Rain won an honorable mention for the 1988 Newbery Medal. *A Figure of Speech* was nominated for the 1973 National Book Award, and *Saturday, the Twelfth of October* won the Lewis Carroll Shelf Award in 1975. In 1976 *Dear Bill, Remember Me?* received the Christopher Award, the New York Times outstanding book of the year award, and the American Library Association designation as one of the year's best books for young adults. The American Library Association extended the same recognition to *Solid Gold Kid* in 1977, *Up in Seth's Room* in 1979, and *Downtown* in 1984. *Solid Gold Kid* also received the International Reading Association's selection for Children's Choice in 1978. *Taking Terri Mueller* won the 1981 Edgar Award for the best juvenile mystery, and *Mrs. Fish, Ape and Me, the Dump Queen* (1980) was included on the Austrian Children's Book List of Honor and received the German Children's Literature Prize in 1982.

Mazer and her husband continue to write at their home in central New York State, working on both novels and short stories.



Plot Summary

Fifteen-year-old Rachel Cooper helps to care for her irascible grandfather during his final illness and endures his death. She learns about the nature of relationships, independence, love, and loss in this sensitive coming-of-age novel.

Every Sunday, Rachel, her mom, Shirley, and her dad, Manny, visit Izzy, her grandfather. Angry, sharp-tongued and judgmental, Izzy frightens Rachel. Izzy has disowned his actor son, Lenny, and angered Rachel's footloose brother Jeremy. He seems bent on alienating the rest of the family. Despite a recent case of stomach flu, Izzy is apparently healthy, walking 4 miles each day and bragging about his strength and stamina as a youthful stonemason. Rachel dreads the visits to her grandfather every Sunday, but she enjoys preparing a big dinner in his kitchen with her mother, joking and bumping into each other in the small apartment kitchen. This is strange, since Rachel avoids cooking with her mother at home.

Grandpa Izzy is diagnosed with asbestosis, also called mesothelioma, a terminal cancer caused by handling asbestos. The "mean old man" clings to his independence and refuses to live with Rachel's family. Reluctantly at first, Rachel begins to help care for the prickly codger. When Izzy falls during his daily walk, Rachel volunteers to accompany him. He's so unpleasant that each day Rachel promises herself she won't walk with Izzy again, but by putting aside her own wants and desires, Rachel gradually begins to empathize with Izzy. As Rachel matures, she puts the old man's needs before her own. Although he was remote and angry at first, Grandpa Izzy and Rachel eventually develop a relationship that is close and tender but never easy.

When Grandpa Izzy inevitably dies, Rachel has to confront her feelings of loss, as well as regret for all the years Izzy wasted squabbling with the family. She learns much about herself, her family, the importance of understanding and forgiveness, and the nature of immortality.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Rachel sits at the kitchen table with her parents, describing the scene in her notebook and writing about her feelings of alienation from them. She hopes eventually to create a short story about her family. She has aspired to be a writer ever since the noted author, Wilda Sycora, visited her school 2 years ago.

Rachel wishes her family were more like the Cosbys on TV. Instead of witty remarks and family conferences, she has parents as old as most people's grandparents, and two grown brothers. Instead of glamorous jobs like doctor and lawyer, her parents are an accountant and a secretary. Her oldest brother, Phil, is a car salesman, and Jeremy is a waiter. Rachel thinks her plump, soft, compassionate father looks like a whale. Her excitable mother looks like a moose with her full body and skinny legs.

Her parents have called her "Mouse" since she was tiny, and Rachel loathes the reference to her diminutive height and their patronizing. They love to tell the story of Rachel's birth--how her mother never suspected she could be pregnant at 46 until she felt Rachel kick, and how her father, on seeing the tiny, pink hairless baby, exclaimed, "No wonder you didn't know, Shirley! Look at this mouse you've been carrying around inside you!" Rachel longs to issue a proclamation: you will never call me Mouse again! She imagines shouting, "Either I'm a Mouse or a man!" and hearing the world applauding. In reality, however, she knows this would hurt her parents, and Rachel could never do that.

Rachel worries about the bomb, the future, her lack of a social life, and the fact that she will be 16 and then 17 without ever having been kissed by a boy. She longs to be as charming and cute as her best friend, Helena. Sometimes she gets angry with her parents, but she is reluctant to say anything that will hurt them. Their children hurt them easily, and the slightest remark can bring tears to her father's eyes.

Chapter 1 Analysis

This chapter deals with traditional coming-of-age issues. It introduces the central conflict of the book--Rachel's struggle to move from childhood to adulthood without alienating her parents. Initially, Rachel's relationship with her parents is very strained. She longs for independence yet often reacts like a selfish child. Rachel knows her parents love her deeply, yet she risks hurting them if she's open about her feelings. Rachel describes the family scene as viewed from above, allowing the reader to be both objective and included in the scene, just as Rachel herself is. Rachel agonizes over hurting her parents but seethes with suppressed anger. Her sense of alienation is only increased by the contrast between her family and the idealized families she sees on TV. The entire world seems to be conspiring to treat Rachel as a child, from her English teacher who

assigns a theme on "How I Spent My Summer" to her parents, who remind her to do her homework and talk to her as if she were 9 years old.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

This chapter is a letter from Rachel to Jeremy. In the letter, Rachel confides that she did something terrible, exploding at their parents in response to their coddling. Rachel realizes she was overly emotional, although it didn't seem so at the time. The trio was innocently sitting around the kitchen table. Manny was asking if Rachel expected to be on the honor roll again when suddenly Shirley "zoomed in" as if to squeeze a pimple on Rachel's face. Rachel screamed at both her parents to stop treating her like a child. Manny called her by the hated nickname "Mouse" and that made it all worse. Rachel stormed to her room. Manny tried to mollify Shirley, saying the girl is only fifteen, right in front of Rachel. This made Rachel even angrier. Afterwards, Rachel felt miserable for losing her temper and hurting her parents.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Rachel wonders how she can ever get her parents to see her as an independent young woman, without hurting them. Ironically, the more Rachel worries about being treated like an adult, the more she acts like a willful, spoiled child.

This first epistolary chapter features Rachel's letter to Jeremy. Rachel's relationship with Jeremy is clearly more open than with her parents. It's a one-sided relationship, however, since Jeremy rarely writes or calls Rachel. She describes blowing up at her parents' coddling and being unable to control her temper despite her best efforts. Jeremy is the one adult in whom Rachel can confide. He seems to understand everything, although he seldom writes back, and she almost never sees him in person.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

As she lies on the floor in her room, Rachel considers the letter to Jeremy. She will mail it tomorrow. She knows that for 2 or 3 weeks--maybe even a month--she will check the mailbox, hoping for a reply from Jeremy. He almost never responds. In her entire life, she has received only a handful of postcards from Jeremy and a total of three letters. The first letter arrived when she was 8. Jeremy was living in Boston. The second was sent from San Francisco when she was 11. The last letter is only 6 months old, and it was sent from New Orleans. Sometimes it bothers Rachel that he doesn't write more, but her brilliant brother fascinates her.

Jeremy received several scholarships to college, but dropped out after a year to enlist in the Army. He was sent to Vietnam for 3 years. She overhears her father saying that Jeremy has never recovered from the war. Shirley chides him gently, asking how long should it take him to adjust: a year or two? It's been more than 10.

She imagines Jeremy frowning when he reads about her shouting at their parents. Rachel goes downstairs and apologizes to her mother. Shirley is knitting a scarf for Grandpa Izzy. Rachel kisses each of her parents on the cheek, and they are happy again. She takes the phone into the stifling closet under the stairs and calls her best friend Helena. She doesn't really feel like telling Helena about the fight with her parents, so Helena does all the talking, particularly concerning the continuing drama of her relationship with Mikey Shedd. Helena has had a boyfriend every year since first grade. Rachel has had only one once, in fifth grade for 2 weeks. Then he moved away.

When the author, Ms. Sycora, visited 2 years ago, Rachel stood and asked whether someone young, without any experience, could become a writer. Everyone laughed at her. Afterwards, at lunchtime, Helena took her arm and asked Rachel to sit with her. At first, Rachel refused, because she thought Helena was just feeling sorry for her, but Helena convinced her she was impressed with the question and really wanted to know Rachel better. Helena insisted they should do something about a boyfriend for Rachel, but Rachel couldn't think what. She was just concerned that she will be 16 and then seventeen without ever really kissing a boy.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Rachel's initial coldness with Helena indicates that she has difficulty developing relationships, just as Izzy does. She displays typical teenage behavior by exploding at her parents. Rachel recognizes her irrational behavior and makes up with her parents. She wonders why it's so easy to pour out her feelings to Jeremy in a letter, but hard in her journal. Maybe it's because it's almost like writing to yourself. Still, sometimes she wishes he would write back more often. Does he even read her letters? We learn the



reason for Jeremy's job-hopping and inability to stay in a relationship: he never recovered from his experiences in Vietnam. Still, Rachel imagines Jeremy shaking his head over her outburst, and it prompts her to go downstairs and apologize to Shirley and Manny.

Helena is always trying to improve Rachel by asking her to smile more, wear more makeup, and not act so brainy. These suggestions by her smart, beautiful friend do nothing to help Rachel's self-confidence.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

While sitting in the library during seventh period and writing in her notebook, Rachel finds Lewis Olswanger staring at her. At first, Rachel thinks he's staring at Rhoda Rivers, beside her. Rhoda is a senior at Alliance High, and she exudes charm and personality. She's beautiful, with masses of frizzy hair, and she always wears something odd, different, or surprising. Today, she has ribbons tied above and below the elbows of her blouse, but Lewis Olswanger is not staring at Rhoda.

Rachel writes his name in very small letters in the corner of her notebook. She knows the boys disregard her because she's so short, and she looks younger. She prays for two more inches or even one!

After school, Rachel phones Grandpa Izzy. She tries to call him once a week. He is as irritable as always, and she finds it impossible to have a conversation with him. She asks how he is and he replies, "How should I be?" He's 83, but he walks 4 miles a day, his heart is strong, and he insists he is good for another 20 years.

A few years ago, when Jeremy came home for a visit, he was shaking because Grandpa Izzy told him off. Izzy chastised him for not staying married and for his job-hopping. He said Jeremy was selfish and had lost his chance for a decent life.

Years ago, before Rachel was born, Grandpa Izzy had a fight with Rachel's Uncle Lenny, who wanted to become an actor. Uncle Lenny ran away to England when he was younger than Rachel is now. He came back only for his mother's funeral.

Sometimes it makes Rachel's mother sad that she never sees her younger brother, but she explains that Grandpa Izzy was brought up in a different time. He believes you should get a trade and stick with it, stay married, and raise your children. He was born in a different country, and he doesn't understand new ideas, being an actor, or finding oneself.

Rachel thinks Grandpa simply must have his way all the time, talking to Jeremy as if he were a lowlife. Izzy's a bully, but, as Rachel's mother points out, he's not senile, and he's independent. He's certainly no complainer. Grandpa gives crotchety answers to Rachel's questions, refusing to discuss TV or his day. Finally, she says goodbye and hangs up.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Rachel's concerns in this chapter are typical of early adolescence--a boy, her social life, her independence from her parents. She longs to be treated as an adult, but she has no concept of adult responsibilities. Lewis Olswanger is staring at Rachel, a fact that she



finds hard to accept because of her typical adolescent insecurity. Can a boy really be staring at her? Rachel attributes her lack of success with the opposite sex to her short stature.

The discussion of Izzy's recent flu and overall good health foreshadows his eventual illness and death. We learn more about Grandpa Izzy's anti-social behavior and his complete alienation of Jeremy and Uncle Lenny. Uncle Lenny has not seen his father since he was younger than Rachel. Grandpa Izzy's cold answers to Rachel's well-meaning concern indicate he is unwilling or unable to have a warm relationship even with those who are closest to him. Still, the old man has redeeming qualities: he's strong, sharp as a tack, and definitely not a complainer.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Rachel plays paddleball with Helena and her parents, the Minors. Afterwards, while raking leaves outside, Rachel tells Helena about Lewis Olswanger staring at her in the library. Rachel suggests several explanations--maybe he is nearsighted or has mistaken her for someone else. Helena insists he's interested in Rachel. Finally, Helena admits that Lewis is Mikey's cousin, and Helena has been talking about Rachel to Lewis. Rachel is embarrassed and a little angry. Talking about her! As if she's a helpless charity case! She decides she couldn't care less about Lewis. The next time she sees him, she will just ignore him! She twists the top on the leaf bag with as much satisfaction as if it were Lewis' neck.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Like the preceding chapters, this one focuses on a picture of Rachel's normal life before Izzy becomes ill. No one in Rachel's family is athletic except Jeremy, who "voluntarily" plays basketball every Saturday. Their main winter outdoor sport is keeping warm, so Rachel feels clumsy and embarrassed playing paddleball with the Minors, especially when her team loses. The entire episode only emphasizes the differences between pretty, vivacious, and popular Helena and Rachel, who feel drab and socially inept.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

The Coopers make their regular Sunday morning visit to Grandpa Izzy's apartment. Rachel's parents take the car, which is laden with bags and food. Even after loading everything into the car, Rachel's mother keeps returning to the house to check that the gas jets are turned off and the door is locked. As usual, Rachel chooses to walk the mile-and-a-half to her grandfather's apartment. She loves to walk--she even thinks if walking were an Olympic sport, she would be a champion. The only thing she doesn't like about walking is the dogs--as much as Rachel hates to admit it, she is afraid of dogs. She's mapped out a route that takes her past only two dogs, both of which are secured safely with chains.

Grandpa Izzy lives in Loren Towers, three five-story brick buildings of no-frills apartments. Grandpa Izzy is a big, bulky man with wild gray eyebrows. His teeth are stained from smoking, but his hands and arms are still strong, even though he hasn't worked as a stonemason in 20 years. Rachel and her mother put the food in the tiny kitchen and everyone sits in the bare, clean living room. Izzy has strong opinions on everything from labor unions (good) to women's rights (bad). Over the years, he has become more abrupt and rude about expressing them. Today it's warm in the apartment, but sometimes he throws the windows open in the winter, making it freezing inside. When that happens, the Coopers sit shivering in their Sunday clothes while Grandpa is warm in layers of shirts and coats.

After a few minutes of futile conversation with Grandpa Izzy, Rachel and her mother retreat to the tiny kitchen to cook a big meal. This is actually Rachel's favorite part of the day. They joke and bump into each other, which is odd because at home she does anything to get out of helping her mother in the kitchen.

After dinner, they all go to the zoo. Rachel's father makes a joke, and they all laugh, together for once.

Chapter 6 Analysis

In typically adolescent fashion, Rachel sees her parents only as they interfere with her wants and desires. We see a portrait of Izzy's distant, cold relationship with Rachel. Shirley reveals her excitable nature by repeatedly returning to the house to check that the gas is turned off and the door is locked. Rachel is more than a little scared of her irritable, intimidating grandfather. He does nothing to dispel her fears. He's uniformly rude and abrupt to everyone, even his own daughter. The Sunday visit is a ritual, following a timeworn pattern. Every Sunday, Rachel's mom asks the same concerned questions and receives the same querulous, abrupt answers. Every week, Shirley and Rachel kid around in the small apartment kitchen, cooking too much food for dinner. The

visit is saved from total misery only by Manny's well-timed jokes and unfailing good humor.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Rachel hates getting up in the morning, and she gets up late on Monday. Her mother cooks a full breakfast, but Rachel cannot face food this early. She takes two tiny nibbles of egg and rushes out the door. Already late, she runs to school, knowing that it'll be a miracle if she makes it. She races up the steps and through the doors without a moment to spare and slams right into Lewis Olswanger. They scramble around picking up spilled papers and books. If this were a teen romance novel, Rachel knows their eyes would meet and she would feel an electric current between them, but it's not a teen romance; it's real life, and she doesn't feel a thing.

Suddenly, Rachel does feel something. She feels a fist of nausea in her stomach. As fast as she can, she walks to the nurse's office, clutching her hand over her mouth. Rachel arrives just in time to vomit in the nurse's sink. The nurse's name is Mrs. Brandor--everyone calls her Brandy. Rachel lies down while Brandy calls her parents to pick her up. She is humiliated when Lewis comes to check on her and she throws up again. Rachel stays out sick all week. On Saturday, she accompanies her mother to pick up Grandpa Izzy. He's been in the hospital overnight for some tests.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Rachel continues to focus on her own interests and social life. At first, Rachel asks the nurse not to call her parents. She doesn't want them upset. After Lewis' visit, she is embarrassed that she threw up in front of him and can't wait to get away from school. This is obviously not working out like the romances in novels.

Izzy's illness and fear foreshadow his death. When Rachel and Shirley pick Grandpa Izzy up from the hospital, he's subdued. He asks the doctor to give the prescription to Shirley and takes her arm, leaning on her while he waits for the elevator. If Rachel didn't know better, she'd think her grandfather was afraid of something.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

On Monday, Rachel interviews Brandy, the nurse, for the school paper. She vaguely remembers Lewis being there but she was feverish, and it's a blur. On Tuesday, she walks into the school office, and there he is! She tries to back out, but the secretary has seen her, and calls her name. Rachel says she forgot her locker key and needs to borrow the schoolmaster. It turns out Lewis has forgotten his, too, so they have to share the master. They walk to her locker together, but Rachel can't think of anything to say. All she can think about is how embarrassed she was to be caught throwing up in the nurse's office. After Lewis walks away, she thinks she should have said something. At least she could say, "I'm sorry I dropped my book on your foot last week."

Suddenly, Rachel is running into Lewis every day. On Tuesday, he's leaving the library as she enters. He says "Hi," so she says "Hi" back. On Wednesday, she talks to Ted Pikens, the newspaper editor, about her article on Brandy. Lewis is in the next room. He's volunteered to get ads for the paper. On Thursday at lunch, Rachel heads for her favorite corner with her sandwich and a book and trips over someone's feet. It is Lewis, again.

That's not all. The D'Oyly Carte Company is coming to the Civic Center to perform HMS Pinafore. Rachel's father loves the D'Oyly Carte Company. It has been a tradition for years for him to take Rachel, and they always go out for banana splits afterwards. Rachel tries to get out of it, but when she sees how hurt her father is, she quickly agrees to go. Once they are seated in the theater, she sees none other than Lewis in the very same aisle, three seats away.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Rachel's social life is the most important thing in the universe, as far as she's concerned. It is hard to be sure whether Rachel constantly bumps into Lewis by accident, or whether he really does like her. He doesn't act like it. He is almost as tongue-tied as Rachel herself. At first Rachel doesn't want to go out with her father because he makes dumb jokes, and he's so old. She thinks about her friends who are going out with boys, not on "dates" with their father. When she realizes how hurt he would be if she refused, however, Rachel agrees to go.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

On Monday, Rachel's parents go to visit friends. Home alone, she washes her hair and lolls about on the living room floor, writing a poem, her journal entry, and a letter to Jeremy. She enjoys being in the house alone and hearing the cozy noises the house makes.

Suddenly, the phone rings. It's "Ron Heartbroker of station WTIC" with a trivia contest worth three dimes. Three dimes? *Who is this really?* Rachel asks. It's Lewis. They kid around on the phone for a few minutes, but then Lewis' dad needs the phone and he hangs up.

About 10 minutes later, the phone rings again. It's "Dr. North" pretending to make an appointment with Rachel's mother for tomorrow at noon. By the time Rachel realizes it really is Grandpa Izzy's doctor and not Lewis kidding around, it's too late. A Dr. Roofus Roof calls to discuss "all sexual problems." It's Lewis again, this time with an accent like Dr. Ruth. Rachel is half-asleep when her parents come home, and she forgets to tell her mother about the appointment until the next morning.

Chapter 9 Analysis

In typical teenaged fashion, Rachel is much more concerned about calls from her friends than about the appointment with Dr. North. She even forgets to tell her mother about the doctor's appointment. Finally, Lewis acts like he is really interested. He is charming and funny on the phone but concerned Rachel will think "Ron Heartbroker" is an ass. He makes her say Ron isn't before he'll hang up.

Rachel settles down with a jam tart and a book, but she can't concentrate. She keeps wondering why Dr. North wants to talk to Mom about Grandpa's test results.

When she tells her mother about the appointment the next morning, Shirley looks so upset Rachel volunteers to go with her. Her mother argues but reluctantly agrees.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Dr. North tells Rachel's mother that Grandpa Izzy has two nodules growing on his lungs. He has mesothelioma, a form of cancer also called asbestosis that is associated with people who have worked with asbestos. Grandpa Izzy's history of smoking has made him more susceptible to the disease. Since there's no treatment, Dr. North sees no point in telling Grandpa Izzy about his illness. Distraught, Shirley suggests chemotherapy but Dr. North says the illness is too far advanced. Under her probing, Dr. North reluctantly admits there is a slight possibility that the tests might be wrong. He writes a prescription for pain medication. Reluctantly, Shirley gets up to leave but Rachel has to know more. She asks the doctor what will happen to her grandfather now? Dr. North replies that he will get weaker and weaker.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Rachel takes a tiny step toward maturity by realizing Shirley needs support and by accompanying her mother to the doctor. Dr. North keeps referring to Grandpa Izzy as "the patient." Finally, Rachel realizes that he means "the patient" is going to die. She wishes she could just reach into the bluish x-rays and grab the nodules out of his lungs. As Shirley grows more and more distraught, Rachel feels removed from the action, as if there were a wall between them.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Rachel interviews Coach Al for the school newspaper. She feels strangely disconnected, as if she were observing her own life. The coach talks about how he had to abandon his dream of being a professional basketball player when he stopped growing at 17. Instead, he became a champion college wrestler. Rachel sits staring blankly, trying to take notes. Finally, she interrupts him mid-sentence and says, "My grandfather is dying." He pats her arm.

Outside, she sees Helena and tells her. Rachel feels guilty for telling Helena because it seems like she's just using her grandfather to try to get sympathy.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Rachel immaturely continues to focus on her own thoughts and needs, rather than Izzy's or her family's. She has trouble absorbing the reality of Izzy's impending death because she has trouble empathizing with him. Rachel feels numb, like an observer in her own life. She thinks that maybe if she tells someone her grandfather is dying, she'll begin to feel it. She keeps thinking of the way people die in movies with ketchup everywhere or a few brave words. That can't be what's happening with Grandpa Izzy, can it? When she spoke to him on Monday, all he cared about was his Scrabble game. Rachel knows she should feel bad, but she just doesn't.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

After school at Helena's, she wants Rachel to describe the visit to the doctor's office, so she can use it in her acting. Rachel tries, until Helena stops suddenly and apologizes. She's forgotten that this is real for Rachel and her mother, not just acting. Helena's boyfriend Mikey stops by. His cousin, Lewis Olswanger, is following him, looking glum and silent. He looks bored or ready to fall asleep.

Mikey wants to be an airline pilot. When he remarks that he may work for a small commuter airline, Rachel rudely tells him about the high accident rates among small planes.

Helena makes a toasted cheese sandwich on English muffin for Mikey, who is hungry. He teases her that she can cook only one thing, and Rachel snaps at him, "If you don't like it, why don't you make your own damn sandwiches?"

Mikey looks taken aback, but he agrees. Upset, Rachel rushes out of the house and walks home in the drizzle. Lewis follows her, and they talk on the way home. She tells him about her grandfather's illness.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Rachel is still very much a child emotionally because she focuses only on her own thoughts and emotions. Rachel still cannot feel anything about her grandfather's illness. She does not appreciate being thrown together with Lewis although it is nice to see him. He is so silent that she thinks maybe they get along only over the phone. After her outburst at his cousin, she expects Lewis to drop her, but he walks her home and talks all the way. When Rachel tells Lewis about her grandfather's illness, she feels something for the first time, like stones dropping inside her.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Rachel writes a letter to Jeremy. She knows Mom already told him about Grandpa, but she wants to as well. When she was 10, Rachel read *Little Women* about five times and cried all the way through when Beth died. Now her real grandfather is dying, and she can't cry. Rachel tears up the letter and starts again, several times. She wonders whether something is wrong with her. Shirley is deeply upset and accuses Rachel of not caring. Rachel becomes so angry she pushes her mother's favorite English china sugar bowl off the table, and it breaks, upsetting her mother even more.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Rachel continues to pour out her feelings in letters to Jeremy. Although Rachel feels close to her brother, it's not a fully developed relationship. Their communication is exclusively focused on Rachel's adolescent thoughts and feelings. Rachel wonders whether Jeremy is still angry with Grandpa from the argument they had last time he was home. She is, perhaps childishly, still offended at the look her mother gave her when she offered to accompany her to Dr. North's office before she relented and agreed. She's sorry she broke her mother's favorite sugar bowl and wants to hug her or something, but Rachel still feels numb. She can't fully feel Izzy's loss, because she doesn't really have a relationship with him.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

On Thursday, Rachel calls Lewis from work. She bags groceries at the market from 5 to 9. Lewis comes to the market to pick up something for his mom, and she bags his groceries. At home, the air is heavy. Shirley stares at her plate without eating or sighs deeply. Rachel knows she is upset about Grandpa. Mostly, Rachel doesn't think about the disease. She thinks about Lewis, and wonders what kissing him would be like.

On Saturday, they go to the movies. Rachel and Lewis each pay for their own ticket, but they hold hands in the theater. When Rachel has to scratch her nose, Lewis puts his arm around her. Rachel leans her head against Lewis' and they watch the rest of the movie. After the movie, they stop for burgers and talk non-stop for hours. Afterwards, Lewis leans across the table and rubs his nose against Rachel's, an Eskimo kiss.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Grandpa Izzy's illness is still not completely real to Rachel because she is still focused almost entirely on her own needs and feelings. Rachel recognizes that her mother is upset and wishes she could help, but spending time with Lewis, flirting and going to the movies, and talking for hours is more real.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

Sunday morning brings the ritual visit with Grandpa. Shirley is even more upset. How can she face her father, knowing he is dying, when he knows nothing? Izzy is as contentious and gruff as ever. Rachel and her mother cook a big meal. Manny enjoys the food and company. Izzy finds something to criticize in everything. Afterwards they watch TV, read the Sunday paper and play Scrabble.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Izzy's poor interpersonal skills are highlighted even more as he continues to criticize the family, even as they try to help him. It's uncomfortable, both for the Coopers and for the reader, to know that Izzy is dying while he remains unaware. Shirley prepares a big meal with Rachel's help, trying to use food to convey love to her irritable father. Death is the unspoken secret at the Sunday dinner table.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Rachel is home alone after school when the phone rings. It's an Alice Farnum. She says Mr. Shapiro--Izzy--fell down in the street outside her house. She gives Rachel the address. Can someone come and get him? Rachel assures Alice Farnum that her father will come. She calls her father at work but gets his answering machine only. She considers calling her mother, but then remembers that Shirley rides the bus to work. By the time she catches a bus from downtown, she won't be here for at least an hour.

Rachel berates herself for not getting Alice Farnum's number. She checks the phone book, but no number is listed. Finally, Rachel decides to go get Grandpa herself. It's only about half a mile farther than Grandpa's apartment.

Rachel runs almost all the way, not even noticing the barking dogs on the way. Alice Farnum answers the door. She's at least 6 feet tall, is about 40, has flaming red hair, and is wearing a long purple skirt and silver slippers.

Grandpa Izzy has no idea how he fell. He was out for his daily walk, he was short of breath, and he just fell over. When he was a young man, he was so strong that he could run with a full wheelbarrow of bricks or cement. Now, he can't even walk up Schuyler hill.

Alice Farnum's car is being serviced at the garage, so she can't drive them home. Izzy feels better after resting and insists on walking home. Alice is shocked--she just met Grandpa and doesn't know how opinionated he is. Alice suggests they call a taxi, but Izzy refuses. Rachel decides there is no stopping him, and she had better walk with him to make sure he gets home safely. He is not at all gracious, saying "Go Home. Who needs you?" but for once, Rachel has the last word.

Chapter 16 Analysis

Initially, Rachel reacts like a child in a crisis, trying to contact her parents. When she's unable to reach them, Rachel takes the first step toward maturity and decides to handle the problem as if she were an adult. Rachel is able to put aside her own feelings to help Izzy. She flies all the way to Alice Farnum's, ignoring all the barking dogs, even though she is usually afraid of them. When Alice produces her aging mutt, Theo, Rachel even pets him gingerly. Best of all, when Grandpa Izzy insists on walking home, Rachel is just as stubborn and insists on following him. Izzy's collapse foreshadows his death. For the first time, he seems really ill to Rachel.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

When Rachel gets home, her parents have already eaten, and they are annoyed that Rachel didn't leave them a note. When Rachel tells them about Grandpa Izzy's fall, they demand the details but keep interrupting her. Shirley fixes Rachel a plate of dinner and urges her to eat. Manny calls Dr. North's answering service. When the doctor calls back, Manny hands Rachel the phone and lets her explain her grandfather's condition. Dr. North says Izzy's fall was caused by his breathing difficulties and will probably happen again.

At school the next day, Rachel manages not to think about her grandfather. Instead, she has a good time, flirting with Lewis in study hall. After she gets home from school, she starts to feel guilty about Grandpa. Rachel calls just to check on him. She asks whether he was bruised in his fall, and he tells her about all the fights he used to get into when he was a young man.

Chapter 17 Analysis

Like many teenagers, Rachel fluctuates between acting responsibly and being selfish. When Rachel can't reach her father after Izzy's fall, she makes the leap to responsibility and handles the situation like an adult. At school, however, she compartmentalizes her feelings, focusing only on herself and her social life during the day. As soon as she gets home, Rachel sees her mother's sweater on the back of the kitchen chair and feels guilty for not being more upset about her Grandpa all day. She wants to eat salami, but saves it for Grandpa and has peanut butter instead. She talks to Helena on the phone, and then calls Grandpa. As Rachel focuses on Izzy's needs rather than her own, she becomes more mature, and they begin to develop a relationship. When she hangs up, Rachel is thrilled and happy to realize they just had their first real conversation ever.



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

Shirley and Manny discuss Grandpa Izzy's illness. Shirley is sure he will fall again, but Manny is optimistic. Shirley says Izzy should come to live with them, and Manny agrees if it will put her mind at rest. Rachel tries to imagine her grandfather there every minute. She dreads his constant critical comments on everything. Feeling guilty, she remembers that "all the time" means only 2 or 3 months until Izzy dies.

Shirley calls and asks Izzy to come live with them. He refuses, exclaiming he is not sick; he is just a little short of breath. Why is everyone making such a big fuss? Manny calls Grandpa Izzy and tries to convince him, but fails. Rachel offers to try to convince him. To buy time she asks, "Are you going for a walk tomorrow?" Suddenly she has an inspiration. "Wait until I get there for your walk--I'm going to walk with you." Izzy blusters but Rachel is firm, and she hangs up first, just like a junior Izzy.

The next day on their walk, Izzy is gruff and abrupt. He has to stop for breath several times, and he wheezes, but he doesn't fall. When they get back to his apartment, a neighbor asks who his pretty friend is and Izzy replies, "She's my watchdog."

Chapter 18 Analysis

Focusing only on her own needs and reactions, Rachel inadvertently initiates a relationship with Izzy by suggesting they walk together. Rachel's ambivalence about Grandpa Izzy is obvious. She is as concerned as Shirley is about his fall, but, when she imagines him with them *every minute*, living in the house, sitting in her father's favorite TV chair, griping about meals and television shows, she can't stand it. Izzy points out to Shirley that if everyone is at work or school, no one will be home when he falls, anyway. Rachel's sudden inspiration to accompany Izzy on his walk seems a perfect solution.

For the first time, we see how alike Rachel and Izzy are. Both could use some help in managing relationships. Rachel can be just as stubborn and abrupt as her grandfather. On the walk, Rachel worries that if Izzy falls, she might not be able to catch him. He is as rude as ever, and she realizes that they don't like each other. She would never walk with him if he weren't sick, and he would never walk with her.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

School lets out early, and Rachel goes for a ride to Indian Falls Park in Mikey's new green VW beetle with Helena and Lewis. Helena and Mikey hike up to the fire tower. Lewis and Rachel walk to the waterfall. Suddenly, Lewis' head bumps hers, their teeth crash together, and they kiss. Walking back up the path, Lewis does his funny Dr. Roof imitation again. Rachel then grows a little jealous, imagining Lewis has kissed dozens of girls. They argue for a minute, and he confesses that he has kissed only two girls before Rachel. When they return to the car, Helena asks where they've been, and Lewis replies, "Howling at the moon."

Chapter 19 Analysis

Rachel's relationship with Lewis grows, but it doesn't bring her the sense of maturity and peace she expected. Rachel finally gets her long-awaited kiss. Best of all, it's with cute, funny, smart Lewis. So, why does she suddenly feel jealous of all the girls she imagines he has kissed before? They have their first spat and kiss to make up about 2 minutes later.



Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

After work, Grandpa Izzy calls, angry and hurt because Rachel didn't show up for their walk. Rachel protests she was working, although she had plenty of time before work since school let out early. Rachel feels guilty, as though she has done something wrong, even though she didn't know he was expecting her. She protests, but he curtly says, "See you tomorrow," and hangs up.

On Friday, she takes Izzy for his walk. He is silent the whole time. At supper that night, Rachel opens her mouth to tell her mother she doesn't want to walk with Grandpa any more. Before Rachel can say anything, Shirley tells her what a relief it is to know Rachel will be there for his walk. Her mother's eyes are wet with tears of relief as she thanks Rachel. So Rachel is sort of "stuck."

Lewis wants to get together after school, but Rachel tells him about her grandfather. As she and Izzy walk silently, Rachel tries to write a story in her head. Then, she thinks about Lewis. She thinks if this keeps up, she will die of boredom. So she asks her grandfather a few questions about Alice Farnum, the woman who found him after his fall. He admits she has called to check on him, but he refuses to discuss it further. Back at the apartment, he curtly dismisses Rachel in the lobby. He may be sick, she thinks, but he's still Izzy.

Chapter 20 Analysis

Rachel's relationship with her grandfather develops, and she takes a big step toward maturity when she realizes Izzy and Shirley depend on her. Rachel also begins to understand that as much as she wants to be with her friends, her responsibilities to her family take precedence. Rachel feels guilty for letting Grandpa Izzy down, even though she didn't realize he expected her. She can hear from his tone of voice that he is angry, but he is also hurt. Rachel is angry and resentful. If she walks with him tomorrow, will he expect her on Saturday, too? What about next week? Does he expect her to walk him every day? Her eyes sting with the injustice of having to spend so much time with an old man who obviously doesn't want her around and always behaves hatefully. Lewis' words about death foreshadow Izzy's understanding that he is dying.



Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

All through the next week, Rachel and Izzy walk together. Every day Izzy leaves her in the apartment lobby and says in an offhand way, "I suppose you're coming tomorrow?" Another week passes with the same pattern. The walks are slow, tedious, and filled with random pointless remarks about the traffic and the weather as Rachel tries to make conversation.

Every evening Shirley presses Rachel for details about Izzy's health. Is he wheezing more? Is he eating enough? Does he seem to be getting weaker? Finally, under Rachel's repeated attempts at conversation, Izzy admits that only a fool would be positive he won't fall again. . . and Izzy's not a fool.

When Rachel complains about how boring the walks are, Helena suggests she use the time to get to know Izzy better, like an oral history project. "You're such a blooming Girl Scout!" Rachel says. "If I didn't like you, I really wouldn't like you." Rachel tries asking Izzy a few questions about her grandma, Eva, but he barely answers.

On Thursday, Rachel goes to work, and then she and Lewis go to Poppie's, a small diner on Canal Street, to eat. When the talk turns to Grandpa, Lewis says sometimes people who are dying know because their body sends them signals. Sometimes they don't even realize they know.

Chapter 21 Analysis

Rachel and Izzy's relationship continues to flounder, with each of them wrapped in their own concerns. Izzy acts like the walks are all Rachel's idea, and he is doing her a favor to tolerate her presence. He resists all her attempts at conversation. We are unsure whether it's because he is out of breath or just downright surly. Rachel is thrilled when her mother asks her opinions on Grandpa's health because she enjoys being treated like an adult. In many ways, she still acts like a child, focusing on her own problems and thinking to herself, "today is absolutely the last time I'm doing this."

Izzy's admission that he could fall again makes Rachel wonder whether he knows something they have all been trying to keep from him. Does Izzy know how sick he really is? It appears so. Rachel enjoys her evening with Lewis and hardly gives her grandfather a thought. It seems likely that Lewis is right--Izzy knows he is seriously ill, even if he won't admit it to himself.



Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

This chapter contains entries from Rachel's journal. The reader learns that when she arrived on Friday, Rachel could tell Izzy was in a bad mood. His eyebrows were furrowed together. Izzy walked more quickly than usual and was absolutely quiet. He resisted all Rachel's attempts at conversation. Rachel is angry with her grandfather at first, but as he continues to cough and wheeze, she begins to feel empathy.

Rachel decides to try to change her grandfather's mood. She talks about her job sacking groceries, but he just grunts. Finally Rachel gives up trying to start a conversation. Surprisingly, Grandpa begins to make conversation, asking Rachel questions. Rachel is proud that when Izzy snaps at her, she snaps right back. Walking along in silence, Rachel realizes why her grandfather is so silent today. Izzy enjoys walking everyday. When Rachel works on Thursdays, he doesn't get out of the house at all.

Tapping into this newfound empathy, on Saturday Rachel asks her Grandpa if he and Grandma Eva walked together when they were younger. Izzy surprises Rachel by giving a long answer. When they were young, Grandpa Izzy says, no one walked. Eva worked hard caring for the house and their two children. Izzy did hard physical labor as a stonemason. Rachel asks, what about exercise? Izzy replies that exercise is a modern invention, and then he laughs. He seems pleased with himself.

Chapter 22 Analysis

Rachel's relationship with her grandfather suffers a setback, clearly illustrating why the cranky old man is feuding with Jeremy and Uncle Lenny. Their relationship improves, and Izzy opens up when Rachel gets him to talk about the central relationship in Izzy's life--his lifelong love for Grandma Eva. As Rachel begins to see Izzy's point of view and empathize with his feelings, she takes the first tentative steps towards maturity.

Rachel doesn't initially understand Izzy's anger and resentment. She worries when he tries to walk too fast. It is almost as if he's hoping to get better, so he won't need her any more. The more he wheezes and coughs, the more empathy Rachel has for him. She tries to tease him out of his bad mood, but it doesn't work any better for Izzy than it usually does with Rachel. When Rachel realizes that the old man is really angry--because he is cooped up in the apartment all day without her--she begins to truly understand him. Izzy is used to a strong, active life. He resents being sick and depending on his granddaughter.

Rachel asks whether Izzy went outside at all yesterday. He grunts, but she is pretty sure it's a no. Something changes when Rachel understands her grandfather's predicament. She begins to see him as a person, not a burden, and he gradually begins to talk more

to her about his life. Their relationship improves as Rachel matures. Ironically, this is the very time when Izzy becomes weaker, foreshadowing his eventual collapse and death. The reader is as eager as Rachel to develop a relationship with Izzy before it's too late.



Chapter 23

Chapter 23 Summary

Izzy is not waiting in the lobby for Rachel when she arrives. She runs up the stairs to his apartment. She's afraid to knock. Finally, she taps softly, and he opens the door. He is lying on the sofa under a blanket. Izzy says he didn't sleep all night. The whites of his eyes are streaked red. He falls asleep talking to Rachel and then jerks awake. He insists they go out, saying he needs to stop at the store.

The next day, they walk to the cemetery where Grandma Eva is buried. It is hidden by a fieldstone wall with a wrought-iron Star of David above the gate. Izzy stops to admire the stonework on the wall. He points out how little mortar--he calls it "mud"- is used between the stones.

Suddenly, Rachel asks whether he built the wall. No, he replies, it's an old wall. He repaired it when it was broken. He tells Rachel all about being an apprentice stoneworker. He boasts about the fine bridges over Clearbrook Creek that he built.

Izzy kneels by his wife's grave. He says, "You asked me not to come, so I don't." Then he murmurs something else. Rachel wonders whether he is talking to his wife. Izzy is silent on the long walk back home. When they part, for the first time, Rachel kisses him good-bye.

Chapter 23 Analysis

Izzy's death--and Rachel's sense of loss--is foreshadowed by his illness. Rachel is afraid to knock on Izzy's door. What if he is asleep and she wakes him up? What if he's very sick and needs help? What if he is dead? When she finally taps on the door, he looks very ill. Rachel is reminded that despite his rough edges, he is a very sick man.

Rachel learns much more about her grandfather's life when they visit the cemetery. For the first time Grandpa Izzy talks about his work--being a stonemason. He is proud of the walls and bridges he created. She is able to imagine the strong, vigorous man who worked so hard to provide for his family. His tenderness at the grave of his dead wife surprises and touches her. She begins to see her grandfather as a person, not just a mean old man. She's a little startled by her own feelings of affection for him.



Chapter 24

Chapter 24 Summary

It's drizzling when Rachel leaves school and raining hard when she arrives at the apartment. They can't go out for a walk, so Izzy asks why she came. Rachel thinks about it. To check up on Izzy? To go for a walk with him? To annoy him? To see him? Yes, all of the above.

Since they can't go out, Rachel suggests they play Scrabble. Rachel makes quick moves with flashy words. Izzy deliberates like they are playing chess. He makes ordinary words, but wins with a very high score. He gloats about beating her, even though he never went past eighth grade.

Rachel hates losing, so they play again. Rachel tries to play for points instead of fancy words. Izzy wins with a seven-letter word that gives him 50 extra points.

Rachel's Mom calls, nervous as ever, and tells Izzy to tell Rachel not to go home until the storm stops. Izzy says Eva was afraid of storms, too. Rachel and Izzy agree they like storms. "Are you afraid of anything?" Rachel asks. Izzy shrugs. "Are you afraid of dying?" Rachel can't believe she asked that. She wishes she could take the words back.

"Everybody dies. Why be afraid of that?" Izzy replies. Rachel can't tell whether he knows or not. The next day, it is clear. Izzy is not waiting in the lobby. When Rachel knocks on his door, she hears only silence. Most of the time she forgets he is even sick, until something like this happens. Finally, she hears Izzy unlocking the door. His hair is messy and he is wearing his undershirt. Rachel feels stupid with relief. She grabs his hand and kisses it.

Chapter 24 Analysis

The rain symbolizes Rachel's sense of loss at Izzy's impending death. The reader can clearly see how much Rachel and Izzy are alike. Both Rachel and Izzy are direct, sometimes grouchy, and stubborn, and they both love thunderstorms. When they are angry, their brows form cliffs, and their eyes squint. Who would have dreamed they had so much in common? They are both competitive, too, so Rachel hates losing at Scrabble.

As Rachel's relationship with her grandfather improves, she is more sensitive about hurting him and less focused on herself. Rachel hates that she blurted out such a rude question about dying. It is beginning to look as if Izzy does know that he is dying and maybe even has accepted it. Although Izzy is apparently resigned to death, Rachel--and the reader--are not so sanguine. Just when Rachel is feeling closer to her grandfather, he is ill again. When he doesn't answer the door, she is always afraid of the worst. When he opens the door, looking sick but alive, she feels a rush of affection and relief.



Chapter 25

Chapter 25 Summary

The chapter contains entries from Rachel's journal. The reader learns that on Wednesday, Grandpa Izzy wanted to walk up Schuyler Hill. It looked as steep as Mt. Everest to Rachel. Before they were halfway up, the old man was wheezing and gasping. Izzy had to stop for rest. Rachel knew he wanted to go on, but he just couldn't make it. They turned around and went back down. Izzy didn't remark about the walk, but Rachel knows he feels awful, and so does she.

On Friday Izzy was exhausted after walking only twenty minutes. The two sat on a bench to rest. Rachel shared some jellybeans she had in her pocket. They discover that they both like the black ones. Izzy tells Rachel her Grandma Eva hated licorice, but loved chocolate candy. It was her favorite birthday gift. Rachel asks more questions and Izzy tells her about Grandma Eva, who died before Rachel's birth. Rachel quits asking questions when she thinks talking about his dear wife is making Izzy too sad.

Rachel realizes that when they meet, she always gives Izzy a kiss on the cheek now. When he saw her on Tuesday, he said "A-ha! Here's the kisser" and held his face up to be kissed.

Chapter 25 Analysis

Rachel's relationship with her grandfather continues to deepen, creating an increasing awareness in the reader of Izzy's impending death. Rachel is finding it much easier to share her innermost thoughts in her journal. She and Grandpa Izzy have developed a close relationship and are becoming a team. Together, they try to get up Schuyler Hill, and together they feel dejected when they don't make it. They share jelly beans and stories of Rachel's grandmother and feelings of sadness that she is gone. The loss Rachel is beginning to feel about her grandfather's death is foreshadowed in the bittersweet memories of Grandma Eva. Rachel's new understanding of her grandfather makes her feel affection, and she kisses him every time she sees him. He even seems to enjoy it!



Chapter 26

Chapter 26 Summary

Alice Farnum comes to visit Grandpa just as they are about to go for their walk. She is wearing blue pants, a turban, and a turquoise jacket. Grandpa is delighted to see Alice. He doesn't mind missing his walk at all! Alice remarks on Izzy's houseplants, and he admits they were his wife's. Eva asked him two things before she died, Izzy says. Not to visit her grave all the time--once a year was enough--and to keep her plants alive. She taught Izzy how to care for them.

Rachel is amazed Grandpa is talking so openly to Alice, telling her things Rachel doesn't even know. She goes into the kitchen and noisily starts cleaning. When Alice leaves, Izzy gives her one of the plants, a big shiny jade plant almost like a small tree. Alice kisses him, and that traitor Izzy kisses her back.

Chapter 26 Analysis

Rachel's growing maturity isn't complete--she still feels a childish jealousy of Izzy's attentions to Alice Farnum. Rachel likes Alice Farnum, but she resents Izzy's easy intimacy with her. Why is he so nice to a stranger when his own granddaughter has to work so hard to get to know him? Rachel is touched by his tenderness toward Eva and their deep love for each other, but she is angry that he is revealing it to a stranger. Rachel's jealousy is another sign of her insecurity and her increasing affection. She shows her anger in an Izzy-like way by banging around in the kitchen while the two are talking. She resents Izzy's kissing Alice when she leaves. The theme of death continues as we learn more about Grandma Eva's death and Izzy's continued devotion to her.



Chapter 27

Chapter 27 Summary

Shirley and Manny are both working late, so Izzy cooks dinner for Rachel. Actually, Rachel is here as a spy. Shirley is worried Izzy isn't eating enough. She is supposed to report back to Shirley on how much Grandpa is eating.

Izzy cooks the special scrambled eggs he always made for Grandma Eva. He barely eats a few forkfuls. Wheezing, he leans across the table and asks Rachel, "What did the doctor say?" Rachel is scared. She isn't sure how much to tell Izzy. Finally, he urges and she tells him he has Mesothelioma. She tells him everything he wants to know. When Rachel is done she sits and cries, and Grandpa pats her hand.

Chapter 27 Analysis

Ironically, Rachel is becoming truly close to Izzy only as he is dying. Rachel knows Shirley is right. Izzy is losing weight. His face is gaunt and drawn. His wheezing is getting worse. When Izzy asks her what the doctor said, she is terrified. Will he get upset or depressed if she tells the truth? Will it make him even sicker? How much has he guessed? Finally, she answers all his questions, confirming what Izzy has already guessed. She is more upset than Izzy is and starts crying, while he comforts her. Izzy's increasing affection for Rachel doesn't seem to have taught him anything about the other fractured relationships in his life--with Jeremy and Uncle Lenny.



Chapter 28

Chapter 28 Summary

On Saturday afternoon, Izzy announces they are taking a bus trip. Rachel is curious about their destination, but Izzy refuses to answer her questions. They get off at Richardson Avenue and walk to West Creek Street. It is divided by Clearbrook Creek. At Fulmer Avenue, the creek flows under a small arched stone bridge. Grandpa inspects the bridge on both sides. Suddenly, Rachel understands. "Grandpa, did you build this bridge?"

They walk down to the next bridge and look at it. They admire all the bridges. On the bus on the way home, Grandpa tells Rachel he built all those bridges. On one, he left his handprint in the mortar. He wrote his initials, I.S. - Isadore Shapiro -in the soft "mud." Later, Rachel asks Lewis, "If you were going to leave your mark, what would it be?"

On another day, it is cold on their walk, and Grandpa Izzy looks so pale that Rachel insists they go into a cafe. She treats him to maple walnut ice cream with money she earned from her job. He objects that it is too cold, but he finally eats the ice cream. As they leave, Rachel tells Grandpa Izzy they'll come back. He is strangely silent. She wants him to answer, wants him to assure her they have plenty of time left, but over the next few days, she notices it's getting harder and harder for him to breathe.

Sometimes at night before she falls asleep, Rachel tries to tell herself he is dying. It just doesn't seem real to her. At other times, she truly believes their time together is coming to an end. It doesn't seem fair! She is only beginning to know her grandfather and now he's dying! Sometimes she wonders if Dr. North could be wrong. Lots of people are thin and short of breath, and they aren't all dying, are they?

Chapter 28 Analysis

Izzy's stone bridges symbolize his life, his strength, and his deep abiding love for Eva. When Izzy shows Rachel the bridges he built as a strong young man, she feels closer to him than ever. He always forgets to be grouchy when he reminisces about his work as a stonemason. Other than being married to Grandma Eva, it is the most important thing he has ever done. Ironically, leaving his handprint in the bridge meant he lost his stonemason job.

Rachel tries to get Izzy into the cafe to warm up, and also to get him to eat more. She is thrilled that he enjoys the ice cream. When they leave, she wants him to assure her they will be back. Rachel just can't bear to think that her time with her precious grandfather is coming to an end, just as she begins to really know him.

She hopes that Dr. North is wrong, although in her heart she knows he is not.



Chapter 29

Chapter 29 Summary

This chapter contains entries from Rachel's journal. The reader learns that on Saturday, while they rested, Grandpa Izzy started talking about the handprint he left on the bridge. When Grandpa's boss, Dondahough, discovered it, he fired Izzy. Rachel is shocked that he could be fired over such a small thing, but Izzy disagrees. He says during the depression, many men wanted jobs. Workers were fired for the smallest transgressions. Izzy points out it would be a problem if everyone put left his handprint in the wet cement, and Rachel has to agree.

Grandpa says that Rachel's mother should have named her after Grandma Eva, instead of after her paternal grandmother. Rachel disagrees, but realizes she is no longer afraid of Izzy. While the pair is walking on Friday, a large white dog runs after them on Blake Avenue. Rachel cries out in fear and surprise. Her Grandfather puts his arm around Rachel and tells her to keep walking. Even after the two are past the dog, Izzy keeps his arm around Rachel.

Chapter 29 Analysis

Ironically, Rachel's relationship with her grandfather grows deeper as his health deteriorates. They bicker and disagree because both have strong personalities, but Rachel realizes that she no longer fears Izzy's wrath. She's much more afraid of his death. When she's afraid, he protects her and affectionately keeps his arm around her all the way home. She's matured sufficiently that she enjoys being treated like a child--something she would have resented just a few weeks ago.



Chapter 30

Chapter 30 Summary

It's drizzling outside, and Izzy's chest is bothering him, so they decide to stay in. Grandpa urges Rachel to go home, but she insists she's not bored. She asks whether he has any pictures of himself when he was a young man or of Grandma Eva. He is brusque and argumentative as ever, but finally he brings out a manila envelope filled with old photos.

There is a picture of Izzy and Eva together, and he's actually handsome. In one photo, Grandma Eva is just Rachel's age. She is standing on the peak of a roof, with her hands on her hips, smiling slightly into the camera. Grandpa gives Rachel that picture.

Grandpa rests on the couch, and tells Rachel about meeting Eva on the beach. He talks about the brick house he built for her with his own hands and how practical she was with money.

Rachel stays and cooks supper for Izzy a few times a week now. She makes simple things like hamburgers, steak, and potatoes. Later Manny and Shirley come to pick her up. They visit with Izzy a while, sometimes watching TV while Rachel does her homework.

Tonight Lewis is coming over to take her to a basketball game. He wants to meet Izzy. When Lewis offers a handshake, Grandpa inspects his hand critically. No strength, he pronounces. Lewis could never be a stonemason. Lewis is flushed. Rachel wants to say Lewis, give him a chance. Grandpa, be nice, get to know him. Walking to the basketball game, Lewis is angry until Rachel kisses him.

Later, Rachel tells her parents about Izzy's being mean to Lewis. Shirley says he was the same way to Manny when they first met. That's why they ran away to get married. Rachel is amazed. . . Her parents ran away to be married? Shirley says her father was so shocked they got married by a justice of the peace that they had another ceremony with a rabbi. Rachel realizes Izzy was rude to Lewis because he is jealous of the time he spends with her.

Chapter 30 Analysis

The rain returns, insistent as Izzy's impending death, and it foreshadows both the death and Rachel's loss. The rain symbolizes Rachel's growing sadness at the loss of her grandfather. Rachel doesn't go home because she's come to enjoy spending time with Izzy. She's shocked at how difficult the simplest actions, like opening a drawer, have become for him. Despite his protests, Izzy looks strong and handsome in the pictures, and Grandma Eva is beautiful and brave standing on the roof. The reader can't help but



wonder why Izzy, capable of such a strong relationship with his wife, wasn't able to sustain relationships with so many others--even with Rachel until he became ill.

Rachel is learning new things about her parents and grandparents as her relationship with her grandfather deepens. She learns that Manny and Shirley ran away to get married because Grandpa Izzy disapproved. This seems totally out of character for her traditional, staid parents. Rachel begins to see her grandparents as young lovers. She realizes that by being mean to Lewis, Izzy is revealing his increasing love for his granddaughter.



Chapter 31

Chapter 31 Summary

This chapter contains entries from Rachel's journal. The reader learns that Grandpa Izzy fell again on Tuesday. Fortunately, Rachel was there to catch him and she eased him onto the bench at a bus stop. Izzy was panicky, gasping for air. Rachel didn't tell her parents right away, knowing they would only worry. She remembers the doctor saying there's little that can be done. Most of the time Rachel and her parents avoid talk of Izzy's illness and looming death. It's almost as if they believe if they don't discuss it, it will go away.

Rachel finally tells her mother about Izzy's fall on Wednesday. Shirley is furious, insisting Rachel should have told her right away. Shirley accuses Rachel of being irresponsible. Then Shirley panicked and called the doctor. Dr. North explains that Izzy will continue to feel weaker, and there is little that can be done. Shirley apologizes for her attack on Rachel, and Rachel forgives her. Rachel realizes she's not mad at her mother, but she is angry that Izzy is dying. She wants to cry, but she can't.

Chapter 31 Analysis

The second major conflict of this novel--the inevitability of death--moves to the forefront. Like Rachel, readers have trouble accepting Izzy's illness. Rachel confronts Grandpa Izzy's deteriorating condition with anger. Aren't doctors supposed to be able to help people? Dr. North doesn't even sound concerned. As she assumes more adult responsibilities, Rachel is much more tolerant of her mother's nervous, hypersensitive ways, but she's furious at the unfairness of a world where doctors can't do anything, and grandfathers have to die.



Chapter 32

Chapter 32 Summary

Tomorrow is Helena's birthday. She invites Rachel to have cake and ice cream with her, Mikey, and Lewis. Rachel reluctantly declines. Helena begs her to skip one day with her grandfather, but Rachel keeps thinking about his falling again.

On Friday, Izzy does better on his walk. He's a little slower but seems to be breathing better. As they pass the soccer field, it begins to drizzle. Rachel wants to take shelter, but Izzy says, "What's a little water?" so they walk back.

When they get to the apartment, Helena, Mikey, and Lewis are waiting for them. Lewis has a bunch of balloons. Helena charms Izzy by asking him to stand in for her grandfather in Cincinnati on her birthday. Grandpa Izzy joins in the party, dancing after they cut the cake and jokingly calling Lewis "Olswatter." Rachel is jealous when Izzy lets Helena hug him. Exhausted from the exertion and gasping for breath, Izzy collapses on the sofa. He falls asleep, and the teens tiptoe out. Rachel stays until Grandpa wakes up and asks her, "Still here? Go home. . . darling."

Chapter 32 Analysis

Rachel becomes an adult when she begins focusing on other people's needs, not just her own. Rachel misses her friends but realizes she has a greater responsibility to her grandfather. Without her there, he could fall and be seriously injured. Helena thoughtfully brings the party to Rachel instead. At first Izzy is skeptical, but Helena is charming as always, and soon makes Izzy feel he is the reason for the celebration. He even jokes with Lewis and dances with Helena. Rachel is torn between sadness because she knows she is losing her grandfather, and jealousy when he gives Helena more attention. Izzy's death is foreshadowed by his collapse on the sofa. All that is forgotten when he wakes up and calls her "darling."



Chapter 33

Chapter 33 Summary

Rachel arrives at the apartment early on Saturday. She worried about Izzy all night. Helena and Lewis both called because they were worried about him, too. Grandpa Izzy looks well rested, but he barely eats a forkful of egg and toast. It's a beautiful day, the sun is shining, and he wants to stay outside all day.

They walk all morning, with frequent rest breaks. They stop at the little cafe for lunch and Grandpa gets the maple walnut ice cream again, although he barely eats anything. Suddenly, Izzy looks very young. Rachel buys a bag of jellybeans. They rest on a bench, and she picks out the black ones for Izzy. He eats only two, but he smiles. "I'm having a good time."

On Baker Street, he starts to collapse. Rachel barely supports his weight long enough to get him into a nearby hardware store. The owner brings a chair. Rachel calls her parents. Manny and Shirley are there in 10 minutes. They drive Izzy back to Loren Towers, and on the way back, he gasps that his granddaughter gave him a beautiful day. He collapses on the floor, not far outside his apartment door.

They call Dr. North, who meets them at the hospital. Dr. North calls Izzy "Mr. Shapiro" and assures him he'll probably be home in a few days. Privately, he tells Manny "I don't think he'll be coming out again, Mr. Cooper."

Chapter 33 Analysis

This last day is a symbol of Rachel and Izzy's newfound closeness. The sky, unmarred by rain, gives no hint of the sorrow to follow. It's a celebration of the renewal of relationships. Rachel gives her grandfather one last gift--a beautiful day together. They share all their favorite things one last time: a long walk, maple walnut ice cream, a rest on a bench, and black jelly beans, all under a beautiful sunny sky. The day is a celebration of their new intimacy and affection. When Grandpa collapses, we, like Rachel, suspect the end is near. Dr. North's statement just confirms what we already knew.



Chapter 34

Chapter 34 Summary

Rachel waits outside Izzy's hospital room with Manny and Shirley. She can hear Grandpa groaning inside as Dr. North draws the fluid out of his lungs. She is terrorized by the idea that this collapse was caused by their walk. If only she had made Izzy rest, maybe he would be okay? Dr. North says it's fluid accumulation in the lungs, and it wouldn't matter, but Rachel still wonders. After the treatment, Izzy falls into a deep sleep, and Dr. North sends the Coopers home.

When they return the next morning, Izzy's hospital bed is empty. Rachel has visions of Izzy's dying in the night and the body being removed, but he's only in the bathroom across the hall. Izzy seems to be feeling much better, his old crotchety self.

Chapter 34 Analysis

Izzy's empty hospital bed foreshadows his impending death. Rachel is wracked with guilt that their outing may have caused Izzy's collapse, but she treasures their one last happy day and is glad it was everything Izzy wanted. When the Coopers return the next morning, Rachel wonders whether she has caused her grandfather's death. She is so happy to see him feeling better that she hardly notices how grumpy he is.



Chapter 35

Chapter 35 Summary

The next day is Monday. Rachel tells her mother she is going to stay home from school and go to the hospital to be with her grandfather. They argue because Shirley thinks Rachel should be in school. Rachel persists, and finally Shirley reluctantly agrees.

When Izzy asks why Rachel isn't in school, she says, "Because I'd rather be here with you." A nurse gives Izzy an IV, and a technician hooks him up to an oxygen tank. Both are portable in case he wants to move around. Doctors and nurses wander in and out of the room all day.

Shirley takes off work early. She arrives in the early afternoon with Manny. They stay through dinner, with the Coopers eating in the cafeteria. Then they watch an old Marx Brothers movie on TV.

The next day, Rachel goes to the hospital again. On Wednesday, she goes back to school, at her parents' insistence. Rachel meets with each teacher and asks for all her assignments for this week and next week, too. She explains about her grandfather. Most of the teachers are sympathetic, a few are resentful, but they all give Rachel the work, which is all she cares about. Rachel's parents argue with her, but finally they see she simply will not leave Izzy in the hospital alone.

Chapter 35 Analysis

Ironically, Rachel truly becomes independent from her parents when she is most engaged in helping them care for Izzy. In her first fully adult decision, she refuses to go to school and leave her grandfather alone at the hospital. Rachel proves she can be just as stubborn as her grandfather. She returns to school on Wednesday, but only to get assignments from her teachers. Rachel feels that she has only really known her grandfather for a few months. She refuses to give up any of her time with him. As long as he is alive, she feels she must be at the hospital with him. As Rachel becomes independent of her parents, the primary conflict is resolved. She still struggles with the secondary conflict, accepting Izzy's death--and so does the reader.



Chapter 36

Chapter 36 Summary

Rachel arrives at the Hospital by 8 every morning. Every morning, Izzy greets her with a mixture of disapproval and relief. They have a daily routine. She kisses Grandpa, opens the curtains, and turns on the radio Manny has left here.

Around 11, Martin, the technician, asks Rachel to step outside. She wonders what is so private about a breathing treatment, but she agrees. Izzy has turned from a gruff old man to an eager, anxious boy waiting for the doctors and nurses. He has turned into a "patient."

Manny and Shirley come by after work and laugh at little remarks, even though they aren't funny. When Dr. North stops by, Izzy asks when he will be able to go home. Dr. North is evasive, saying it "won't be long."

Chapter 36 Analysis

Rachel's inner conflict over Izzy's death is apparent. It hurts Rachel to see her feisty, controlling grandfather turned into a helpless patient. She misses his gruffness and anger, the very qualities that used to scare her. She realizes that Dr. North is lying; Izzy will never go home. And we suspect that Izzy knows that, as well.



Chapter 37

Chapter 37 Summary

Lewis calls Rachel at home just as she's about to go to bed. She tells him about her feelings when she is at the hospital, and that her grandfather is just evaporating. She fears he is growing smaller and smaller before her eyes until there is nothing left. Sometimes she feels numb.

Lewis tells her about a fire drill at school. Rachel tells him sometimes she thinks about going to school. She gets up and puts on her clothes, but her feet just take her back to the hospital to be with her grandfather.

Chapter 37 Analysis

Rachel's increasing maturity is obvious. She misses school and her friends, but she is also starting to miss her grandfather, even though he's not gone yet. She has come to treasure that relationship more than her social life or school concerns. At other times, she is just not able to process the loss and feels numb. She likes talking to Lewis and misses him, but feels a strong need to be with her grandfather as much as she can before he dies.



Chapter 38

Chapter 38 Summary

The Coopers eat dinner in the hospital cafeteria. Rachel likes the macaroni and cheese, but Shirley thinks the food is terrible. She brings a jar of homemade soup, but Izzy insists he has to eat a special, bland diet and tells her to take it back.

The next day, Izzy's furious with everyone. He's angry with Shirley and Rachel and angry with the doctors and nurses. He complains that he can't walk, can't breathe, and can't even spit up whatever is in his chest. He won't talk to Rachel or anyone.

When the Coopers leave, Izzy rears up in bed and tears off his oxygen mask. He demands to be told when he can go home. He yells at Shirley and then lies down, exhausted, and puts the mask back on.

Chapter 38 Analysis

Like Izzy, we struggle with death's inevitability--the second major conflict of this novel. Izzy's relationships with those he loves continue to suffer. As Izzy grows weaker, he becomes angry at the hospital staff and at the treatments that don't work. He is angry with his own body that was once so strong. He lashes out at the doctors and nurses, and even at those he loves the most--Manny, Shirley, and Rachel. Izzy struggles against the inevitability of death, tearing the mask from his face and demanding to go home and then, admitting defeat, replaces it to breathe the life-giving oxygen. It breaks Rachel's heart to see her grandfather like this.



Chapter 39

Chapter 39 Summary

This chapter contains entries from Rachel's journal. The reader learns that Izzy was in a lot of pain on Sunday night. It's terrible for Rachel to see her grandfather in pain, and not be able to help. It's difficult for Shirley, too; so difficult she had to leave. Alice Farnum came to visit Izzy in the hospital. Izzy made a special effort to be sociable with Alice, then began gasping for air as soon as she left. When Rachel sees her grandfather gasping for air, she feels as if she can't breathe, either.

Izzy won't eat his lunch on Monday. He says no one can help him. Rachel keeps telling herself he is dying, but she doesn't really believe it. No one else says it. They all remind Rachel of meteorologists who only want to predict sunshine. When Izzy asks the date on Wednesday, Rachel tells him it's November 12th. Grandpa says that he won't make it to Thanksgiving. Then he asks Rachel what the weather is like. She tells him it was sunny, and Izzy replies that they had a beautiful fall day.

Izzy says he is afraid to sleep on Saturday night. When Shirley asks why, he simply tells her she knows. Manny decides to stay overnight at the hospital with Izzy, sleeping in the big chair in his room.

Chapter 39 Analysis

Izzy seems to have learned nothing about relationships. He's just as irritable and grouchy as usual. Rachel knows her grandfather is growing weaker and weaker. Izzy's death is foreshadowed, even overtly predicted by Izzy himself. Once again, Izzy talks about "a beautiful fall day," evoking the symbol of the beautiful final day he shared with Rachel. This day has come to symbolize positive, loving relationships. In a sense, for Izzy, it is a compensation for all the time he and Rachel weren't close. All the Coopers feel helpless watching him suffer.



Chapter 40

Chapter 40 Summary

On Tuesday night, it's time for the Coopers to leave the hospital. Manny holds the elevator for Rachel, but she can't force herself to get on. An invisible force keeps pulling her back to Grandpa Izzy's hospital room. Finally, she tells her parents to go home without her. She wants to scream *Don't leave Izzy alone tonight*. Rachel's parents look like big, tired animals to her. She tries to get Shirley to stay with her. Finally, her parents reluctantly agree that Rachel can stay at the hospital overnight.

Around midnight, Grandpa wakes up. Rachel gives him a sip of water. He asks her to hold his hand, hold on tight. She does. He goes back to sleep. When she wakes up, it is nearly dawn. Grandpa is delirious, murmuring about tickets and boats. He's covered with icy sweat. Suddenly, his head falls to the side and there's a rattling noise in his throat. Then he's quiet.

Rachel rushes out into the hall and calls the nurse. The nurse checks his pulse and says she will call the doctor. Rachel feels like she can't breathe. A fat, young doctor comes and asks Rachel to step out into the hall. He comes out and says Grandpa is dead. Rachel nods her head. She knew that when she called the nurse. Then she realizes, he's not officially dead until the doctor says so. She goes to a phone and calls her parents to tell them Grandpa is dead.

When she goes back to the room, something has changed. Izzy looks different. He's in the same position, but he almost looks alive again. He doesn't look as thin. Too bad, she can't tell him the joke: Grandpa, you look better dead than alive. Her parents come, but Rachel doesn't want to leave. All she can think is *I want to see him again and I won't. I'll never see him again*.

Chapter 40 Analysis

Ironically, Rachel truly becomes an adult in the eyes of her parents and in her own eyes as well when she is thinking about Izzy instead of about herself. In a truly mature act, she insists that she stay at the hospital with Izzy overnight despite her parent's objections. She holds his hand and feels helpless when he cries out at midnight. Just before dawn, she wakes up, and he dies without fully recovering consciousness. Numb, Rachel summons the nurse, talks to the doctor and calls her parents. The only person she really wants to see is her Grandpa to tell him the funny joke she just thought of, but she knows she never will.



Chapter 41

Chapter 41 Summary

Izzy left a note in his medicine cabinet at home with instructions about his death. He wants to be cremated. There is to be no funeral, no fuss, and no speeches.

The note is dated about 3 weeks before he was admitted into the hospital. Shirley keeps remembering his asking Dr. North when he could go home. She wonders whether he wanted to get better or just to die at home. Rachel tells her mother Izzy knew he was dying.

Her brother, Phil, from Spokane is there, showing her father a special birdcall. Her niece, MB, who is only a few months younger than Rachel, is there, too. MB hugs Shirley, and Rachel is jealous because MB still has her grandparents.

For years, Rachel and Izzy weren't close. He never looked at her with the total acceptance that's in Shirley's face when she looks at MB, but when the white dog scared her that day on their walk, he kept his arm around her the whole way. He called her "darling." She remembers Izzy's winning at Scrabble and making her scrambled eggs. She remembers how he showed her his stonework, how she asked about the name of his disease, and their eating licorice together. Still, the time they had together doesn't seem like enough. Jeremy flies in, and the family is all together for the first time in ages. It makes Rachel sad to think her grandfather's death caused this much happiness.

Rachel goes into the kitchen for a glass of water and thinks about her grandfather's never drinking another glass of water. She closes her eyes, and for a moment she sees herself, walking down a dark road among tall trees with hard streams of water falling down. All Rachel can think is, *I'll never see him again.*

Chapter 41 Analysis

The final and most powerful use of rain as a symbol for the pain of loss occurs in this chapter. Whenever Rachel misses Izzy the most, she has a vision of herself, alone, walking through hard streams of sharp, cold rain, a solitary figure. For Rachel, this vision suggests unending grief and a sense that her grandfather left no lasting legacy. She fears that her newfound closeness for him was in vain.

Even in death, Izzy's relationship skills haven't improved. He leaves his family a note insisting they avoid a funeral, sacrificing their feelings of closure and family solidarity to his wishes. Shirley wonders aloud whether Izzy knew he was going to die. Rachel assures her mother that he did, but Shirley still has her doubts. Shirley also thinks Izzy wanted to die at home surrounded by his family, not in a cold, impersonal hospital



where he was constantly being poked and pried. Shirley feels guilty about leaving Izzy in the hospital.

Rachel misses her grandfather terribly. It's ironic that they really became close only at the end of his life. It seems they had barely begun to know each other, and now he's gone. She will never see him again. Rachel watches her niece, MB, hug Shirley, and she is jealous. MB still has grandparents, and she'll be able to enjoy them for a long time, although she is almost the same age as Rachel.

Rachel also envies MB's easy relationship with Shirley and Manny, who shower her with unconditional love. As much as Rachel came to treasure her grandfather when he was sick, as close as she felt to him, he was never an easy man to be around. Sometimes she longs for the uncomplicated, easy love of a Grandma.



Chapter 42

Chapter 42 Summary

Uncle Lenny calls from London. After he talks to Shirley, he speaks to Rachel. He tells Rachel he's seen the photographs her mother sent, and he thinks she looks exactly like his mother. Rachel can't believe it. Like Grandma Eva? No one has ever told her this. Not her mother or father, and certainly not Grandpa Izzy.

Uncle Lenny invites Rachel to come to England some day to meet her cousins. He says families should stick together. Then he says he always thought he had plenty of time. . . and his voice trails off. He asks to speak to Phil and Jeremy next.

The next morning Jeremy recalls how difficult Grandpa Izzy could be, and how he just said whatever was on his mind. Shirley tries to shush him, but Phil tells a funny story about Grandpa Izzy's pulling his tooth when he was 6. They each take turns reminiscing about Grandpa. When it's Rachel's turn, she can't think of anything except walking down that road by herself in the dark rain. All she can say is "I loved Grandpa."

That afternoon they all go to the cemetery and sprinkle Izzy's ashes over Eva's grave. Rachel doesn't want to cry in front of everybody, but she can hardly hold back the tears. They decide to plant a blue spruce in his memory. Grandpa liked the blue spruce on the corner near his apartment.

Chapter 42 Analysis

Ironically, the death of an old man who destroyed many relationships creates closer bonds among the family. For the first time, Rachel talks to her Uncle Lenny over the phone. Rachel is shocked and pleased to hear that she looks like her beautiful, high-spirited grandmother. Why has no one told her she looked so much like the pretty girl standing on the roof in her photo? Even though Uncle Lenny didn't create the feud with his father, we can tell by his voice that he regrets it. He always thought there would be time to make up, but now it's too late. Uncle Lenny has a new appreciation for families who stick together.

Izzy didn't want a funeral, but the family gathers informally and remembers him. Many of the stories they tell fondly recall his brusque, rude, argumentative ways. Rachel can't think of anything to say except "I loved him." Rachel longs to have a lasting legacy from Izzy. Perhaps the most enduring legacy he has left is drawing the family closer together and showing them the mistakes to avoid in their relationships.



Chapter 43

Chapter 43 Summary

Late in the afternoon, Jeremy and Rachel go for a walk around the neighborhood. He shows her the drugstore that used to be a crummy little market where all the teens bought sodas and cookies.

Suddenly, Rachel asks Jeremy if she should stop sending letters. Does he even read them? He never answers. Jeremy insists he reads every word. He likes the letters a lot. He looks forward to them.

Jeremy admits he's still sore at Grandpa. He wishes he'd visited him and told Grandpa how he felt. Now, he will never have a chance--like Uncle Lenny--he'll never have a chance to make up with Grandpa. When they talk about it, Rachel starts crying, and then she feels angry at Izzy, angry for all the arguments he caused, angry for all the time he wasted not really letting Rachel get to know him. She's furious that he was so selfish. Jeremy sits with his arm around Rachel while she cries. When they get up to go in, he asks her to keep sending letters, and she agrees.

Chapter 43 Analysis

The theme of relationships is clearly illustrated in this chapter. As much as Rachel misses Grandpa Izzy, in some ways it's harder on Jeremy and Uncle Lenny because they have lost their chance to reconcile with the old man. Rachel recognizes the enormous cost of his fractured relationships with these two young men. In some ways, Jeremy knows he will never feel as close to Izzy as he should. Rachel, too, resents all the years Grandpa ignored her, getting to know her only in the last few months. She's furious at him for his selfish actions, and she misses him terribly.



Chapter 44

Chapter 44 Summary

Life is back to normal for Rachel--school, Helena, Lewis, writing--but she feels as if she is just going through the motions. She constantly feels like she should be with Grandpa Izzy. Sometimes at night, she dreams she's at the hospital with him, or they are playing Scrabble and he's winning. She remembers the walks, the games, the maple walnut ice cream, and the white dog.

After a few weeks she isn't reminded constantly any more. She tries to write a short story about an old stonemason who searches for his handprint in a bridge, but he dies before he finds it. She complains to Manny that they never talk about Izzy now.

One drizzly, dirty day in March, she walks up and down West Creek Street counting the bridges. Later she calls Lewis and asks him to help her. On Saturday, they spend the entire day looking for the handprint. They go back a few afternoons during the week, but can't see it. When they check every bridge without finding a trace, Lewis suggests they start all over again. This time they clear out some of the debris at the base of each bridge. On Saturday, they pack their backpacks full of food and spend the whole day looking.

Rachel is full of despair. Maybe Grandpa Izzy was too old, too confused. Maybe he forgot that the handprint was somewhere else, or he just imagined it, but she keeps on looking.

Suddenly, she clears away some leaves, and she finds the print of a big, strong hand with the initials I.S. inside it. She puts her hand into the print. Grandpa Izzy wasn't crazy or senile after all. He did leave something behind, something permanent. Standing with her hand in the handprint, Rachel thinks it will still be in the cement when she is an old woman. Nothing can erase it. For just a moment, she feels the clouds part and the warm sun on her head, as warm as a living hand.

Chapter 44 Analysis

In this chapter, Rachel faces her overwhelming feelings of loss for her grandfather. Those feelings are heightened because they became close only at the end of his life. Rachel misses her grandfather and longs for a permanent reminder of him, an indication that in some small way his life made a difference. She longs for a tiny part of him to live forever. Suddenly, it becomes very important to find the handprint, Izzy's tangible legacy. Lewis helps her search, and then insists they look at every bridge again. Rachel has all but lost hope when she suddenly finds the handprint.

When Rachel places her hand in the cement outline of her grandfather's hand, it is as if he's holding her hand, as if he has his arm protectively around her while they walk past



the white dog. Some part of him lives on forever in this handprint. While Rachel stands there, the sun comes out and she feels its warm touch on her head again. This ray of sunlight may be real or imagined. It symbolizes both an end to Rachel's grief and Izzy's enduring love for her--a legacy that, along with the handprint, will endure as long as she lives.



Chapter 45

Chapter 45 Summary

Rachel and Lewis walk down the hall at school. Right in front of the trophy case, they have to part, to go to their separate classes. Rachel stops and tells Lewis thanks for helping her find the handprint and for sticking with her. He insists it was nothing, but she insists it was important, so she thanks him again before they go to their classes.

Chapter 45 Analysis

Izzy's handprint symbolizes his permanent love for Rachel. It is a sign that we don't live and die in vain, but that a small part of us endures through the work we do and the people we love. It's hard to know what to do for friends when they are grieving for someone who dies. Lewis shows his friendship for Rachel by helping her do the only thing that matters when he helps her find the handprint.



Characters

Rachel Cooper

Diminutive brunette Rachel is an insecure adolescent, agonizing about her appearance, and wondering whether she will experience her first kiss before her sixteenth birthday. Compared to her best friend, Helena, Rachel seems socially inept, often blurting out whatever is on her mind. Helena, an attractive and popular aspiring actress, engineers a meeting between Rachel and Lewis Olswanger. Lewis gradually becomes Rachel's boyfriend.

Rachel tries to be patient with her parents Manny and Shirley, who are the same age as her friend's grandparents. She hates it when they baby her, and especially when they use her childhood nickname, "Mouse." Although Rachel tries to tolerate her parents, she occasionally explodes in anger, and then regrets hurting them.

Rachel wants to be a writer, so she began keeping a journal after Ms. Sykora, a noted author, visited her school. Throughout the book, Rachel's innermost thoughts and feelings are revealed in letters to her brother Jeremy and excerpts from her journal. She agonizes over journal entries but finds it easy to pour out her feelings in letters to her grown brother, Jeremy. Perhaps it's easier to write to Jeremy since he seldom replies.

Like her grandfather, Rachel squints her eyes and joins her eyebrows when she is angry. Her family affectionately calls this "The Look." She loves black jellybeans and long walks, and she sometimes rudely blurts out whatever she's thinking. Her brown hair, eyes, smile, and independent spirit are just like her Grandma Eva's.

Manny Cooper

Rachel's dad is a soft, round, kind, unfailingly optimistic man. An accountant, he gives Rachel pocket money in the summer for filing and sweeping in his office. He forgets slights and dwells on the positive. Rachel thinks that if people were animals, Manny would be a whale--a kind, friendly whale. Manny's calm, sunny nature is a great counterpoint to Shirley's nervous personality.

Shirley Cooper

Shirley is nervous, high-strung, and even neurotic. She is constantly hurt by her father's disapproval and frequently cries at his rudeness and bullying. She cooks special meals and brings him enormous quantities of food, but he resists all her well-meaning efforts as attacks on his independence. In Rachel's animal kingdom Shirley would be a moose--big bodied with spindly legs and nostrils flaring in alarm.



Isadore "Izzy" Shapiro

Grandpa Izzy is a large man with big hands still stained gray from cement, although he hasn't worked as a stonemason for 20 years. He is lively, rude, strong, and cantankerous. Izzy lets nothing pass without an argument. Underneath his gruff exterior, he still adores his wife Eva, who has been dead for many years. He's worked in a hard trade all his life to support his family, and he doesn't tolerate other lifestyles very well. Over the years, Grandpa has hurt and alienated many people, including Rachel's Uncle Lenny and her brother, Jeremy.

Phil Cooper

Rachel's oldest brother lives in Spokane with his wife, son Tyler, and daughter MB, who's just a few months younger than Rachel. Even though Phil lives far away, he stays in touch with regular phone calls and visits every few years, so Rachel feels she knows him well. Phil is like a carbon copy of Manny--big, soft, flabby, and thoroughly good-hearted. He is so optimistic, kind, and generous that Rachel can't help but feel close to him, although he was almost grown up when she was born.

Jeremy Cooper

Jeremy's brilliant second brother is currently a waiter in New Orleans. Despite stellar SAT scores, Jeremy dropped out of college after one year. Jeremy was on his way to Vietnam when Rachel was born, so they have never lived together. Even at 35, he is still haunted by his war experiences. Jeremy has had a string of jobs in different cities, and a string of wives and girlfriends over the years. Grandpa Izzy created a rift with Jeremy 3 years ago by angrily denouncing his lifestyle, telling Jeremy, "It's too late. You'll never have a decent life now." Shirley and Manny quietly fret that Jeremy will never be happy. In some ways, Jeremy is Rachel's closest friend. Rachel pours out her heart in long letters that Jeremy eagerly anticipates, reads, and treasures.

Helena Minor

Rachel's best friend is everything Rachel is not. Pretty, confident, athletic, popular, optimistic, and tactful Helena would be easy to dislike if she weren't so much fun. In Rachel's animal kingdom, Helena is a pretty, self-satisfied white cat. Helena's boyfriend, Micky, is a young lion.

Lewis Olswanger

Lewis is the cousin of Helena's boyfriend, Micky, and is a thin, dark, intelligent, and funny young man. He does hilarious "Dr. Roof" imitations and stares at Rachel in study



hall. Eventually, Lewis becomes Rachel's boyfriend and helps her find her grandfather's handprint on a stone bridge after he dies.

Eva Shapiro

Married when she was just a teenager, Rachel's grandmother was spirited, independent, and beautiful. She was practical and good with money. Eva died before Rachel was even born, but she was the love of Izzy's life. He still painstakingly tends her houseplants, which are older than Rachel. Only after Izzy's death does Rachel learn from her Uncle in England that she looks almost exactly like Eva.

MB Cooper

MB is Rachel's niece, although she's only a few months younger than Rachel. MB is the daughter of Rachel's oldest brother, Phil, and lives in Spokane. When MB and Phil visit after Izzy's death, Rachel finds herself jealous. MB still has the unconditional love of her grandparents, but Rachel has lost Izzy. Worse yet, she hardly had a chance to know him before he died.



Objects/Places

The Cooper's House

The Coopers live in a modest suburban single-family home. It's situated on a bus route so Shirley can take the bus downtown to her secretary's job while Manny drives the car. In the evening, mother and daughter do the dishes in the kitchen together, and Rachel does her homework at the kitchen table while her parents have a last cup of coffee.

Rachel's Room

Rachel's room is her cave, her sanctuary. The walls are covered with magazine articles and news stories, photographs of her family, pictures from magazines, and Jeremy's infrequent postcards.

Grandpa Izzy's Apartment

Grandpa Izzy lives on the top floor of building C of Loren Towers, a five-story brick no-frills apartment complex. Many of the other residents are senior citizens. Izzy has a bedroom, a small living room and a tiny kitchen. All the rooms are bare but clean. The living room window is filled with Grandma Eva's houseplants that are older than Rachel. Grandpa Izzy waters them each week and feeds them faithfully each month, just as his beloved Eva taught him before she died.

Grandpa Izzy's Kitchen

Every Sunday, Rachel and her mother cook a big meal in Grandpa Izzy's tiny apartment kitchen. It's so small they bump into each other and kid around. It's Rachel's favorite part of the visit, which is strange, since she will do anything to avoid cooking at home.

Black Jelly Beans

Rachel and Grandpa Izzy spend a lot of time resting on bus stop benches during their walks. They use the chance to talk or to share jellybeans. They both like the black ones best. Rachel learns her Grandma Eva hated black jellybeans. She preferred chocolates.

Maple Walnut Ice Cream

Rachel takes Izzy to the cady and treats him to a maple walnut ice cream when he especially needs a rest on a walk. At first, he is reluctant, but she can tell he's worn out. Later, she practically begs him to agree that they can come back. He is growing weaker,



and she knows he's going to die soon. On the last day before Izzy collapses and has to be admitted to the hospital, they walk all day and return to the cafe for maple walnut ice cream. Afterward, Izzy says, "My granddaughter gave me a beautiful day." Actually, the perfect day was a gift they gave each other.

Rachel's Journal

Rachel wants to be a writer and makes daily entries in her journal. At the beginning of the novel, Rachel has trouble writing about her emotions freely in her journal--that is much easier to do when writing letters to her brother Jeremy. By the time her grandfather dies, Rachel has no trouble at all expressing her inner feelings in her journal.

Letters & Postcards

Rachel constantly writes letters as long as 10 pages to her brother Jeremy, pouring out her feelings and the details of her arguments with her parents. For a few weeks afterwards, she hopes for a reply, although she knows it's unlikely. Jeremy has sent Rachel just three letters and a few postcards in the past 10 years. Jeremy treasures Rachel's letters, and eagerly awaits them, but insists he's just "not the letter writing type."

Food

Rachel's mother tends to show her love with food. Every Sunday she takes bags and bags of food to Izzy's apartment. Together, Rachel and Shirley cook a huge meal for the family to enjoy with Izzy. When Izzy is in the hospital, Shirley brings him homemade soup, although he protests he's on a bland diet. Shirley may not always be able to verbalize her love for her family, but she shows it through food.

The Cafe

When Izzy is pale and tired on one of their walks, Rachel takes him into a nearby cafe. She has money with her she's earned at her job, so she treats him to a dish of his favorite maple walnut ice cream. As they leave, she almost begs him to say they will return. She really wants to be assured they will have more time together, now that they've finally gotten to know each other. On their last, beautiful day together, they do return to the cafe, although Izzy is so sick he can barely eat any ice cream.

Izzy's Handprint

As a stonemason, Izzy Shapiro built all the bridges along the creek road. In one, he placed his handprint in the cement, with his initials, I.S. He was a strong, active



stonemason who could provide for his family, and that was a source of great pride to Izzy. The handprint symbolizes Izzy's lasting legacy to Rachel and his abiding love for his daughter and darling wife, Eva. Just as Shirley uses food to show love, Izzy shows the stone bridges to Rachel as a symbol of his deepening love for her. After Izzy's death, Rachel feels compelled to find the handprint with Lewis' help, to assure herself that her grandfather's legacy--and his love--is real and enduring.

Setting

One very brief reference sets *After the Rain* in the eastern United States, where Rachel and her parents live in a house within walking distance of her grandfather's apartment. Weightier concerns with juvenile delinquency, drugs, or poverty do not burden this contemporary middle-class setting, where understanding and perseverance promise to resolve the internal and interpersonal conflicts.

The significant events described in the novel occur within a crucial ten-week period that alters Rachel's life forever.

Set in the present day, the story handles timeless themes of growth and maturity.

The narrative begins when the Coopers learn that Rachel's maternal grandfather will probably die within three months. As the Coopers cope with the imminent loss, they reexamine themselves and their relationships.

Social Sensitivity

After the Rain focuses on two diverse groups of people whose lives are complicated by problems stemming from their ages: teen-agers with little experience who yearn for independence and the enfeebled elderly who struggle against relinquishing the independence gained through experience. Both groups are often inadvertently neglected by a middle-aged population absorbed with the responsibilities of providing for the family. Mazer advocates that strong bonds be forged between the old and the young.

Both groups need good listeners who are willing to give without forcing their opinions on others. Young people can benefit from the experience of the elderly, and the older generation benefits from the sense of worth derived from the relationship.

Instead of addressing more dramatic issues such as drugs, crime, poverty, and child abuse, Mazer focuses on universal but not sensational aspects of life. She tends to avoid overt social commentary; for example, the reader learns only incidentally that the Cooper family is Jewish. Rather than emphasizing issues and problems related to being part of a religious minority, Mazer treats this information as irrelevant to the conflicts among the characters. None of the characters are stereotypes, nor are their problems addressed in stereotypical fashion. Mazer depicts the characters as real human beings with problems common to ordinary families.

Literary Qualities

After the Rain treats unsensational themes and common experiences, and Mazer's style reflects this. Carefully controlled diction encourages the reader to draw upon personal experiences to understand each character, and convincing internal dialogue offers a sympathetic portrait of Rachel's feelings. The third-person, limited omniscient point of view reinforces the empathy readers feel for the main character, inspiring them to rejoice in her accomplishments and to share in her losses. Mazer captures the real language of intelligent, thoughtful people as she appears to eavesdrop on the conversations and thoughts of a thoroughly believable family as they deal with universal, if commonplace, conflicts.

The themes of alienation and death give the novel a poignant tone. Even though Rachel learns to communicate better with others in the course of the novel, her deepest sharing will continue to be long letters to her brother Jeremy, who may not even read them. Izzy Shapiro's helplessness as he faces death is deeply touching as he asserts his independence by ripping off his cumbersome oxygen mask, only to cast aside his pride a few moments later when he replaces it, clinging to his last few hours of life.



Themes

Relationships

Understanding relationships that work, and especially those that don't, lies at the heart of *After the Rain*. Rachel's deepening relationship with Izzy, cut short by his death, becomes the vehicle for her growth into a mature adult. Rachel's relationship with her parents is tinged with typical adolescent turbulence. She is fondly tolerant of their advanced age one moment, and furious at their coddling the next. Rachel is all too aware that the outbursts fueled by her insecurities hurt her parents, but she is unable to stop.

At the beginning of the story, Rachel is focused entirely on her own feelings. She intensely wishes for a wider social circle and a boyfriend. She is afraid she'll turn 16 and then 17 without ever being kissed. This concern proves baseless when she develops a relationship with Lewis Olswanger. This story is not a romance, however, and Lewis' main contribution is fostering Rachel's independence and helping her find Izzy's handprint on the bridge after his death. By the end of the story, Rachel has matured sufficiently to focus on others' needs, as well as her own.

Many of the relationships are centered around Izzy, Rachel's irritable, disapproving grandfather. Izzy disowned his son, Uncle Lenny, years ago because he chose an acting career. Izzy continues to bully the family, partly to hide his own increasing dependence. He is disparaging to all the family members and especially so to Rachel's brother Jeremy, a free spirit who continues to navigate through a series of jobs and romances at 30.

Initially intimidated by her grandfather, Rachel gradually comes to treasure him, and to see the tenderness and affection he hides behind his cutting remarks. She appreciates his life-long love for her deceased grandmother and his staunch commitment to providing for his family. Izzy wants only the best for his family and is positive that he knows exactly what constitutes the best. The two chasms with Uncle Lenny and Jeremy, which could easily be bridged with understanding and a kind word, are never bridged. It is possible to draw comparisons between Izzy's irascibility and Rachel's own blunt, forthright, and occasionally rude conversations with her friends. The reader can only hope she will learn to be more understanding than her grandfather was. In elaborating on these various relationships, Mazer implies that with independence fueled by security, understanding can overcome all differences.

Death

The most powerful messages in this book revolve around Izzy's increasing illness and death, even as Rachel grows closer to him. The fact that he is a crabby, critical old man



who is not easy to love, makes his strong points--his energy and strength, his adoration of his dead wife, and his commitment to his only child--all the more poignant.

Water is often used in literature to represent life. Here, rain symbolizes death, the loss of a loved one. Rachel walks with her grandfather every day, even through the rain. She realizes he is becoming weaker. Finally, devastated by her grandfather's death, Rachel imagines herself walking through the rain alone--summoning images both of desolation and of tears. Rachel's vision of herself walking through the rain alone without her grandfather provides the reader with a glimpse of her feelings of abandonment and grief. At times, she is angry at her grandfather for wasting so much of his energy at being angry with Uncle Lenny and Jeremy. She is furious that he didn't allow her to develop a relationship with him until the end of his life. It becomes vital to her to find the handprint and initials the young Izzy, a proud stonemason, left on a bridge. The handprint, a talisman of Izzy's strength, and his commitment to his work and his family becomes symbolic of her grandfather's legacy for Rachel. Only by finding it can she be assured that her grandfather's strength, energy, and love will leave a permanent mark.

Empathy and Maturity

As the book opens, Rachel wonders how she will get from "here," who she is today' to "there," who she must become to be an adult. Rachel longs to be treated like an adult, although she often acts like a willful, spoiled child. Her grandfather's death provides that bridge from childhood to adulthood, although it is a painful path. As Izzy's illness progresses, Rachel assumes more adult responsibilities. She empathizes with the people around her and focuses on their needs instead of her own desires. Realizing her sensitive mother has trouble coping with the situation, Rachel accompanies her on doctor visits. When the irascible Izzy refuses to live with the family but is unable to function alone, Rachel becomes the bridge between the families and assumes more care of Izzy.

Rachel asserts her independence by insisting on staying at the hospital with Izzy throughout his illness, even though she misses several weeks of school. Her parents adamantly disagree, but Rachel feels this is something she must do. The tragic circumstances of her grandfather's death force Rachel to adopt a more adult role, which forces her parents to recognize her growing maturity. Finally, in what is perhaps her first fully adult action, Rachel chooses to stay with her grandfather overnight, so that she is there when he dies. The grief of his death is a final trial.



Themes/Characters

The novel explores the strains that an insecure teen-ager's quest for independence place on her relationships with others. Initially, Rachel Cooper has difficulty with relationships, especially those that involve receiving and giving love, because she feels uncertain about who she is. Insecure about her own attributes and lacking self-confidence, Rachel has difficulty accepting her parents' sincere love because she fears that accepting love diminishes her independence. Similarly, thinking that her classmate Helena is motivated only by pity, Rachel at first rejects Helena's overtures at friendship. The same feeling prevails when Lewis, who becomes Rachel's boyfriend, first notices her.

Mazer further illustrates the insecurity of youth when Lewis calls Rachel and hides behind the humorous facade of a German accent to help overcome his nervousness. Rachel's insecurity also causes her to accept her grandfather's bullying ways, his method of keeping others from penetrating his life and from reducing his sense of independence. As Rachel, Lewis, and her grandfather all become more secure, they realize that they are worthy of love, and they learn to accept and give love.

Rachel also learns about dying and death. Acting as a framework for the events of the narrative is the diagnosis of her grandfather Izzy Shapiro's imminent death from asbestosis, his struggle to remain independent for as long as possible, and finally, his death. A bittersweet tone pervades the novel as it convincingly reflects one of life's realities—that as much as one might like either to escape the death of loved ones altogether or to set aside even temporarily the responsibilities of living to attend to the dying, neither is possible.

Another major theme of this novel is the universal struggle to step gracefully over the threshold from childhood dependence to adult independence without alienating others. Rachel's mother, Shirley, remains dependent upon her father's approval and suffers for years because he refuses to accept her love and caring lest he appear weak.

Whereas Shirley continues her attempts at conciliation and, in Rachel's eyes, remains dominated by Izzy's cruelty, Shirley's brother Leonard retreats from the battle and never visits his family again after Izzy belittles his aspiration to become an actor. Until Rachel breaks the chain, the next generation follows the same pattern. Her oldest brother, Jeremy, has not been home in nine years and probably will never find the graceful balance between love and independence, while Philip, the middle sibling, can relate comfortably to his parents only in a monthly phone call and a visit every two years.

Through each of her characters, Mazer shows that independence is gained through self-esteem. Rachel cannot accept without resentment her parents' love, Lewis's attentions, or Helena's friendship until she can accept her father's pet name "Mouse" without feeling diminished, look in the mirror and accept her own imperfections, and ask questions in school without feeling "dumb" afterwards. Except for Rachel's father, who plays only a minor role in the novel, Mazer's adult characters have the same difficulties.



The theme is clear: only those who learn to value themselves in spite of their imperfections and limitations can unreservedly accept the sincerely offered love of others.

Although the other members of her family have not established peaceful and comfortable relationships with one another, Rachel's perceptions, determination, and kind nature allow her to win a major and probably lasting victory.



Style

Point of View

Narrative sections of *After the Rain* are written in the third-person point of view from Rachel's perspective. The immediacy of the present tense somewhat moderates the restrained, rather distant perspective that protects the reader from the harshest realities of illness and death.

Parts of the book are epistles--Rachel's journal entries and letters to Jeremy. These first-person sections, written in the past tense, provide a clearer voice for Rachel and insight into her deepest thoughts and feelings.

Setting

Rachel lives with her parents in a generic middle-class suburban eastern U.S. community, a mile-and-a-half from Grandpa Izzy's apartment. Their home is far from her brothers Jeremy in New Orleans and Phil in Spokane. Uncle Lenny lives in England, where he has a home in London and a country house.

In Rachel's community, there is public transportation, but no urban strife intrudes on the story. Gangs, inner-city crowding, urban renewal and drug problems are not present in Rachel's world. Her high school has a swimming pool where she hangs out in the summer and she does part-time summer work for her father, filing and sweeping the floor in his accounting office. During the school year, she works one day a week bagging groceries at a local market until she has to take a leave of absence to care for her grandfather.

Rachel's world includes the home she shares with her parents, her school, and her grandfather's apartment. Their daily walks take them around this familiar neighborhood, past a soccer field, a cafe where they enjoy ice cream, and many benches that they can rest on. The exterior space of this novel is much less important than the interior space, especially Rachel's growing independence, her deepening relationship with her grandfather, and the sense of loss she feels at his death.

Language and Meaning

Mazer employs language that is transparent, neutral, and faintly remote to provide a certain measure of distance from her characters. She varies the speech patterns to establish believable characters. Isadore "Izzy" Shapiro's language reflects his Jewish heritage much more than the Coopers' speech does. Born in an unspecified foreign country, Izzy uses phrasings that are typically and charmingly Jewish.



After the Rain continues to appeal to young people partly because it avoids the jargon of a particular generation. Rachel and her friends seldom swear, but they sound like kids from any era by avoiding the slang of any particular period.

Rachel's internal struggles, which are revealed in her thoughts, words, and especially in her writings, are realistic and believable, yet not overly emotional.

Structure

The book is divided into 45 short chapters. Narrative is interspersed with epistles-- letters and journal excerpts that reveal Rachel's innermost thoughts and feelings. In particular, Rachel pours out her feelings of resentment against her parents in letters to her brother, Jeremy. She feels close to Jeremy and holds the conviction that he reads every word, although he seldom replies, insisting he is "Not the letter writing type." A few of the letters are too emotional and open even for Jeremy, and Rachel tears them up, but not before the reader sees them.

Initially, Rachel has trouble expressing her thoughts in her journal, but the excerpts from her journal during Izzy's final hospitalization clearly reveal her anguish and sense of helplessness.

The opening chapters provide a picture of Rachel in various settings--at home with her parents, in school, and at play with her friends. The majority of the book depicts Rachel's time spent with her grandfather. At first, Rachel is reluctant to spend time with the unpleasant, grumpy old man. Then, as her affection grows and he becomes more frail, the time they spend together is bittersweet. Rachel finds herself often hoping the doctor is wrong, and Izzy will recover. In her heart, she realizes this is not to be.

The difficult period of Izzy's hospitalization is revealed in short, emotional journal entries. The final scenes of Izzy's death and Rachel's search for the handprint, her grandfather's bit of immortality, are told in narrative scenes.



Quotes

She has heard the story innumerable times. How no one knew her mother was pregnant, including her mother. "My age, who thought about being pregnant at forty-six? My baby days were over. So I thought. But somebody else thought otherwise." A flirtatious little look at Rachel's father. "And then I'm heavysset and my weight goes up and down all the time, so I thought I was gaining a little weight. Until you began kicking inside me. Was I surprised!" Chapter 1, p. 8.

"He wouldn't have to be a waiter right now if he'd graduated from Harvard. Well, knowing Jeremy, he might have ended up being the best educated waiter in the United States." Chapter 3, p. 15.

"Ms. Sycora" - saying Ms. had been her first mistake - "Ms. Sycora, in your opinion, is it possible for someone young to break into the writing field? Or do you need to be experienced? Chapter 3, p. 21.

And then he [Grandpa Izzy] had delivered his verdict, like a curse on Jeremy. "You're too old now, the time is gone. You've lost your chance for a decent life." Chapter 4, p. 33

"I don't see what good it will do to tell your father the exact facts," Dr. North is saying. "Will that cure him? No way. It could even make things worse. It could very well depress him, take away his will to live. The body needs hope to fight its battles." Chapter 10, p. 76

"Me. I invited me." Before he can protest Rachel adds, "I'll say good-bye now." And, like a junior Izzy, she hangs up first. Chapter 18, p. 124

"Can I-" Lewis yells. "Can we-" And he leans toward her fast, their lips bump, their teeth crash. For a moment, Rachel's not quite sure, then she is--it's a kiss. Chapter 19, p. 132.

At the end of the hour, they're back at the Loren Towers. And Izzy says, with an offhand shrug, "I suppose you're coming tomorrow?" As if her walking with him is something she wants and has nothing to do with him. Chapter 21, p. 141.

Rachel stops in the act of taking off her damp sneakers. Why *did* she come? Multiple-choice test. One: to see Izzy. Two: to annoy Izzy. Three: to walk with Izzy. Four: to check up on Izzy. Answer: All of the above. Chapter 24, p. 161.

When Eva was dying, she said two things. She didn't want me visiting her grave and crying over her. She said, 'Once a year is enough. You can come and remember me, remember the nice things, that's okay.' And then she said, "Don't let my plants die." Chapter 26, p. 170.

I try not to act cowardly around dogs, but I was off-guard, taken by surprise, and I cried out. Grandpa put his arm over my shoulder. "Just keep walking." Even after we were past the dog, he kept his arm around my shoulder. Chapter 29, p. 187



When he wakes up, Izzy says, "Still here? Go home. . . darling." Chapter 32, p. 209

Izzy seems to feel better. He sits in the passenger seat next to Manny and talks in his breathy voice. "Beautiful. . . day. My granddaughter gave. . . me a beautiful day." Chapter 33, p. 214

"On a sheet of paper found, oddly enough, in the medicine cabinet in his apartment, Izzy had left instructions in his rather stiff, ornate handwriting about his death. The paper is discovered by many the day after Izzy's death, folded and taped to the inside of the cabinet door with the notation "To my family." Chapter 41, p. 259

"Hello, dear, how are you?" Uncle Lenny has an actor's voice, full, rich, deep. "Your mother's sent me pictures of you. I think you're a wonderful reincarnation of my mother." Chapter 42, p. 269



Topics for Discussion

1. Initially, Rachel and her grandfather resist the idea of developing a close relationship. What leads them to take an interest in each other? Is either one of them primarily responsible for fostering the relationship?
2. Why is Rachel irritated when her parents take an interest in what she is doing? Is her anger justified? Should she be so bothered by the nickname "Mouse" her father has given her?
3. Should Rachel have expressed her irritation with her parents? How could she have done so without hurting their feelings?
4. What could Rachel's parents have done to maintain closer relationships with Philip and Jeremy?
5. No one informs Izzy Shapiro that he has only a few months left to live. Do you agree with this decision, or should Izzy have been informed?
6. Will Rachel continue to write long letters to Jeremy after her grandfather dies? Why or why not?
7. Why does Rachel resist offers of friendship from Helena and Lewis?
8. Do you think that Uncle Leonard, Jeremy, and Philip will interact more with Rachel's parents now that Izzy's death has provided the opportunity to leave old grievances behind?
9. Izzy graciously accepts assistance from a stranger when he falls. Why is he so willing to accept help from her but not from his own family?
10. Are there any indications that Rachel's mother has changed during the story? If so, how?
11. How will Izzy's death alter Rachel's relationship with her parents? Why?



Essay Topics

Rachel tries to be patient with her elderly parents, but occasionally she finds herself "exploding" in anger. Then she's sorry she hurt them. Is this behavior unusual in teenagers? What are some other ways Rachel could handle her feelings? How could she vent them before she says something she'll regret?

Rachel sometimes blurts out whatever's on her mind, such as when she tells Mickey not to become a commuter pilot because the accident rates are much higher than commercial airlines. Is this a good trait, a bad one, or both? Why?

At the beginning of the book, Rachel is afraid of her grandfather and doesn't feel at all close to him. Is she initially eager to take him on walks?

How have Rachel's feelings towards her grandfather changed by the end of the book? Why do they change?

Family members are often alike. How is Rachel like Grandpa Izzy? How is she different?

This book deals with a very sensitive topic--death. At the beginning of the book, Rachel isn't thinking about death at all. Do most young people give a lot of thought to death? Why?

Dr. North believes that it's better not to tell patients who are seriously ill they may die, a view that was fairly common in 1987 when this book was first published. Today, many doctors believe it's best to be honest with patients about their condition. Which do you think is better and why?

The book includes letters that Rachel writes to her brother Jeremy, and entries from Rachel's journal. What do these writings tell us about Rachel's thoughts and feelings? Why do you think the author included them?

Izzy Shapiro is a stonemason, not a very glamorous job by today's standards. Yet, he is proud of his work. Why?

Izzy Shapiro leaves his handprint and initials in one of the Crosscreek bridges, even though it costs him his job during the depression, when jobs to feed his family were very hard to find. Why was it so important for him to leave his mark on the bridge?

Why is it important for Rachel to find the handprint after her grandfather dies?

When Rachel first starts taking daily walks with Grandpa Izzy, she is ambivalent. Ambivalence is when we have two strong contradictory feelings. What are Rachel's opposing feelings about the walks? How does she resolve them?



Izzy Shapiro is Jewish, a fact portrayed by the family's use of the traditional toast l'chaim, and Grandma Eva's burial in a Jewish cemetery. What are some other signs that the family is Jewish? Is being Jewish a huge issue in Rachel's life? Is her life very different from that of her friends?

When Rachel first learns of her grandfather's illness, she is numb. She can't seem to feel the reality of the situation, and she is afraid she's a bad person because she's not crying. This stage is called denial, and it's very common with people who are grieving. How do Rachel's feelings change by the end of the book? Is she able to cry?

During the months of her grandfather's illness, Rachel misses a lot of school but has no trouble keeping up with her class. Is this realistic? Why do you think the author choose to portray the situation this way?

It's common for grieving people to feel angry at the person who died, at life or at God. After her grandfather dies, Rachel feels angry with him. Is she still angry at the end of the book?

Rachel walks through the rain with her sick grandfather. After his death, she envisions herself walking alone through the rain. When she finally finds the handprint, she feels the warm sun on her head for a moment. What does the title *After the Rain* mean?

Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Trace the major events in the novel and explain their effects on Rachel's developing maturity.
2. List five adjectives that describe Rachel's characteristics at the beginning of the novel. Support your choice of adjectives with events from the story.
3. Research the causes, symptoms, and possible cures for asbestosis. Does Mazer accurately describe Izzy's struggle with this disease?
4. Contrast the marriages of Rachel's parents and her grandparents with marriages described in another novel you have read recently. How are they different? What do you think causes these differences?
5. Assume that you are Rachel Cooper's close friend. Write a letter to Rachel's parents explaining the tension between Rachel and her family, and explaining how Rachel can be so annoyed with her parents even though she loves them. Suggest ways that her parents can help Rachel feel more comfortable with their expressions of affection.

Further Study

Bradley, Betsy. "Review." *Voice of Youth Advocates* (June 1987): 80. This review of *After the Rain* finds it "an engaging story of getting to know a grandparent . . . [and] a novel well in the mainstream of young adult literature that teens will enjoy."

Metzger, Linda, ed. *Contemporary Authors, New Revision Series*. Vol. 12.

Detroit: Gale Research, 1984. Contains a brief sketch reviewing elements of the author's personal life, career, and writings. Several quotations from the author are included.

Noah, Caroline. "Review." *School Library Journal* (May 1987): 116. Noah compliments the novel's careful characterization, rich visual imagery, and effective, readable prose.

"Review." *Horn Book* (September/October 1987): 619-620. Describes *After the Rain* as "a powerful book dealing with death and dying and strength of family affection."

Stine, Jean, ed. *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Vol. 26. Detroit: Gale Research, 1983. In addition to notes about the author, a sampling of criticism of Mazer's work is presented.



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