

# After Thursday Short Guide

## After Thursday by Jean Ure

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## Overview

After Thursday opens with the protagonist Marianne Fenton reluctantly trying to help her mother decide how to use the things they have moved with them to decorate their new apartment.

Marianne has little concern for how things look, including herself, so she is not interested in her mother's decorating efforts for the apartment nor herself.

As the plot develops, seventeen-year-old Marianne struggles to discover the reasons for her love of Abe, a twenty-five year-old, blind music teacher. Marianne and others her age and older meet in the apartment Abe shares with Donald, a fellow musician, on Thursdays to perform madrigals.

She has taken on a custodial role with Abe, shielding him from activities she thinks will be an embarrassment to him because of his blindness. She allows her involvement with Abe to keep her from doing things she would like to do, such as playing net ball on a neighborhood team, learning to ride a horse, and making friends in her new neighborhood. She justifies her choices by telling herself that Abe cannot do these things and she would not hurt him by making him feel different because of his blindness. Her mother thinks she spends too much time with Abe and does too much for him, that she coddles him. Marianne believes she loves Abe and from all indications, he loves her, in spite of an eight-year difference in their ages. Marianne struggles within herself as she examines her love for Abe. Does she love him or pity him, feel sorry for him or admire his spunk and determination, or does she smother him or respect his independence?

A childhood friend appears in Abe's life and complicates matters for Marianne when Abe agrees to be her accompanist for an upcoming concert. Abe goes to Manchester for three weeks to rehearse and does not call Marianne at the appointed times. She worries first about his safety, then about his being with Debbie, who has turned out to be quite attractive and more Abe's age, then becomes angry when she thinks he has been inconsiderate and left her waiting for calls that do not come or come late.

Peter, Donald's brother, has come to stay with Donald and Abe until the fall semester of school. He finds Marianne attractive and begins a campaign to win her friendship and affections.

Against her will, Marianne is attracted to him. She begins comparing carefree and spontaneous Peter to steady, predictable Abe and is persuaded by Peter to join him on several occasions with the cliché, "While the cat's away, the mice will play." He convinces Marianne that Abe is partying while he is in Manchester and not thinking about her, while she, on the other hand, is sitting at home by the phone, refusing invitations to go with Peter, and to play net ball on a neighborhood team. Peter invites people he does not really know to the apartment and coerces Marianne into a compromising situation. The "guests" become rowdy because of drugs and alcohol.



Marianne is brought to her senses when one of them pounds on Abe's piano, and she angrily chases them all out.

When the night of Debbie's concert arrives, Marianne is unsure about Abe's feelings for her and only attends it at her mother's insistence. She feels certain Abe will not want her there even though he is accompanying Debbie. At the reception it seems her worst fears have come true. Abe and Debbie are a couple.



## About the Author

Jean Ure (pronounced "ewer") was born in Catherham, Surrey, England, January 1, 1943. Ure is a compulsive writer who has continued nonstop ever since she first learned to write. Her first piece, at the age of four: M'Daddy had a boot lace, M'Daddy did it loose, And when the rain began to pour, There it was a-hanging on the door.

At fourteen Ure wrote a wish-fulfillment book called *Dance for Two*. The young protagonist, Colleen, desperately wants to learn ballet but cannot because of lack of family finances. Ure was Colleen, who was never allowed to study ballet, but Colleen as part of Ure's imagination did and ended up dancing the lead in *Coppelia*.

Ure wrote many novels that were never published, but when she was sixteen, *Dance for Two* was published in the United Kingdom and a little later in the United States. This proved a double-edged blessing, because a year later she decided to drop out of school and make her living as a writer. Over the next few years she actually scrubbed floors, waited tables, sold groceries, did nursing, worked a short time at the BBC, NATO, and UNESCO because none of these jobs required much qualifications. In 1965, she decided she needed some more schooling, so she enrolled at Webber-Douglas Academy of Dramatic Art, in London, where she met her husband.

Ure did quite a bit of writing for adult readers but in 1980 wrote a book for young adults called *See You Thursday*, still one of her favorites, followed by the sequel *After Thursday* (1985). She says that ideas for her books come from within herself and her own experience; consequently she does little research for them. Her approach to developing characters causes her to live with them for long periods. She is not ready to capture them on the page until she can actually hear them talking. She says of herself: People often ask me why I write. I do so primarily for my own satisfaction—I am very much a writer who writes from 'within' rather than 'without,' by which I mean that I tend to look inwards into myself rather than outwards at the world for my inspiration. Nonetheless, I always bear the reader very much in mind. If I have any conscious aim—though it becomes conscious only when I'm forced to stop and think about it—it's to stimulate and entertain, and hopefully, for the receptive few, to unlock the door to that same lifetime of spiritual and intellectual nourishment which was unlocked for me over forty years ago by a book called *Little Women* . . . as dear to me now as it ever was then!

# Setting

After Thursday is set in a community about twenty miles from London. Marianne and her mother live in an apartment near small shops and public transportation. It seems a safe neighborhood, even though Abe insists, at one point, in walking Marianne to her door and seeing her safely inside.

Young people move about freely, walking to school, playing net ball, riding bikes, and taking public transportation across town or into London.



## Social Sensitivity

Marianne is growing up in a singleparent home. Ure portrays Mrs. Fenton as a hard-working parent attempting to provide a stable and loving home for her daughter.

Physical handicaps are still a fact of life in today's society. Ure has treated the handicap of blindness with sensitivity. Through Marianne, the reader is able to ask questions he or she might hesitate to ask otherwise. Ure's main characters are gracious towards Abe, treating him with the same respect and dignity that is due anyone, regardless of physical conditions or station in life.

Only Peter, true to his character, is a little irreverent towards Abe. Ure paints a realistic picture of life for a blind person and how he or she is perceived by others; she does a good job of developing the challenges a blind person encounters in search of a balance between independence and dependence, while trying to live with dignity.

## Literary Qualities

After Thursday is written in a very readable style, using a great deal of conversation. Because Ure is British and the setting is near London, she employs patterns of speech and vocabulary familiar to the British: "the odd bit of noise," "get besotted about," "drop-handled bicycle," "There's a nice lot of room."

Ure deftly moves the reader from Marianne's crush on Abe at the ending of See You Thursday and develops a growing friendship between Marianne and Abe in After Thursday, creating a story that stands on its own merits.

Her portrayal of Marianne and Abe and their growing friendship is honest and will interest young adult readers.





# Themes and Characters

Several themes common to young people are evident in *After Thursday*.

Marianne experiences first love. Often girls have crushes on a teacher, an "older man," and sometimes suffer disappointment or disillusionment when their love is not requited. In Marianne's case, she struggles to be mature, not to disappoint or hurt Abe by being immature or flippant about their feelings for each other because he has been hurt before.

Another strong theme is that of seeking independence. Marianne seeks more and more independence from her mother who remains motherly, while giving Marianne the space she seeks.

Mrs. Fenton seems very perceptive in assessing Marianne's feelings and behavior where Abe is concerned.

A more subtle theme is Mrs. Fenton's attempts to get Marianne to broaden her interests. Teen-agers sometimes narrow their group of friends, interests, and activities, and become exclusive, causing them to make poor or inappropriate choices, which is what Marianne does. From time to time, Mrs. Fenton gently nudges Marianne into broadening her interests. She allows her to make some choices that have the potential for embarrassment for Marianne and Abe as well as herself, such as when Marianne chooses to dress inappropriately. Mrs. Fenton does not intervene when Marianne insists on a specific dress, and she allows Marianne to suffer the consequences.

Teen-agers experience a plethora of strong emotions. The teen years provide a proving ground for learning to trust one's own emotions and judgments and gain confidence in relationships. They need a safe environment for all this experimentation, and Marianne has that luxury in *After Thursday* as she works through some of these challenges.

We all find trust a difficult issue.

Learning to trust friends, good friends, builds character and confidence. Marianne finds her trust in Abe challenged by her imagining of what he is doing while he is gone; this imagination is fed by Peter who exploits Abe's absence to pursue his romantic interests with Marianne. She discovers aspects of her own character as a result of Abe's changing affections to Debbie, who is a more compatible partner for him.

Seventeen-year-old Marianne Fenton is a strong, well-defined protagonist.

She possesses some athletic ability and is musical enough (thanks to Abe's prodding) to be included in the Thursday group. She is self-assured and outspoken where Abe is concerned, thinking she knows what is best for him and for herself. Marianne deceives herself in thinking that Abe's blindness does not bother her, but finds she likes the role of protector and guide for Abe.



Only when Peter enters the picture, does she begin to question her motivation and her relationship with Abe.

She has pretty much narrowed her life down to school, homework, the Thursday Night group, and Abe. Abe and what he can or cannot do are at the center of her decisions. She has a decent relationship with her mother, who wants her to expand her interests. Feeling as many young people do that their parents do not really understand them, Marianne is mildly rebellious towards her mother. Perhaps because Abe is blind, Marianne is not concerned with her own appearance.

Marianne changes and matures as she faces some of the realities of life; she learns to trust Abe, trust herself, and to actually, physically, walk with a man rather than taking the lead and steering the way and caring about her appearance. Her relationship with her mother matures as well, as they become more accepting of each other's choices.

Abe Shonfeld is Marianne's boyfriend. He has been blind since birth.

He is an accomplished pianist and teaches at Rosemont, a Private School in the London area. Abe is a sensitive young man, gentle and a gentlemen with Marianne. Because he is older than Marianne, he is protective. When they go with friends to a local pub, Abe makes certain no one orders alcohol for Marianne.

As the reader gets to know Abe, first impressions of a young man in control, able to take care of himself, do things for others change to impressions of someone who seems uncertain about himself, willing to allow someone else to usher him from place to place, willing to stay in the background at parties, unwilling to perform in public, although he is an accomplished pianist, and content to hide away and teach in a local school. He seems willing to allow his blindness to make him dependent on Marianne. As the story progresses, subtle changes take place in his personality. He begins to insist Marianne allow him to do more for himself, suggesting he might look into getting a lead dog so he can go places alone. When he does take off alone without informing Marianne and leaving no message, it throws Marianne into a panic and then anger that he would be so selfish and thoughtless. In the end, Abe does become more selfsufficient, taking in stride a public performance as he accompanies Debbie in her concert.

Mrs. Fenton is a stereotypical mother, fretting over Marianne and her self-imposed attention to Abe, lack of friends her own age and general disregard for personal grooming. She works as a solicitor's clerk to support Marianne and herself; there is no husband in the home. Prior to her present job, she had rented rooms to boarders in their previous home. She met Abe when he came to be a boarder in her home and "from the beginning she had resolutely treated Abe as if he were no different from anyone else." She is a matter-of-fact person who seems to take life's opportunities and problems in stride.

Peter is a carefree young man, brother to Donald, with whom Abe shares an apartment. Peter moves into Abe's and Donald's apartment temporarily, while he waits for fall term to begin, and he makes himself at home in a small cupboard area under the stairs.



Peter gets along with people easily and is immediately solicited by the Thursday Group to join them as a tenor. He loves fun, considers the Thursday Group rather stodgy and their music stuffy, but does help them out because he is attracted to Marianne and is flirtatious with her. His unwanted attentions confuse Marianne's emotions.

Peter lives for the moment and seems oblivious to the consequences of poor choices. He pursues his own selfish desires and does not seem to mind compromising friendship to get what he wants. What he wants is sex.



## Topics for Discussion

1. After reading the first two chapters of *After Thursday*, what is your impression of Marianne, of Abe? What do you think the story is about? Explain your answers.
2. Marianne feels a bit left out as Abe, Donald, and Helena are absorbed in their music. Even so, she refuses to gang up with Peter and range herself "on the side of the Philistines." What does Ure mean by this statement? Who were the Philistines? Who did they gang up against? How is that incident like this one?
3. Marianne is seventeen and Abe is twenty-five. What would be your parents' reaction to you dating someone that much older than you? How do you feel about the relationship between Marianne and Abe?
4. In chapter 5, Donald tells Marianne, "It's just that I'd hate to see him [Abe] hurt, that's all." Marianne is indignant because she is sure she will not hurt him and tells herself that Donald does not understand the kind of relationship she and Abe have. What kind of relationship do they have?
5. Reread page 81. Explain what Mrs. Fenton means by her final statement on that page.
6. Now reread page 82. Has Marianne been sleeping with Abe? Why not? Is she over-involved? Why is Abe more vulnerable? Is Marianne emotionally blind? "What was the woman talking about?" thinks Marianne. Do you understand what her mother is talking about? Explain.
7. Marianne seems indignant when Abe suggests he would like a guide dog? Why?
8. Why is Marianne so upset when Abe leaves in chapter 8 and does not tell her where he is going?
9. Marianne thinks she does not treat Abe differently because he is blind. Is that true? Explain. Has she really come to terms with his blindness?
10. Marianne says she does not want to do things Abe cannot do. Is she being honest with herself? Explain.
11. Why are Marianne's emotions upset by Peter? If she is attracted to Peter, does she really love Abe?
12. Does she really love Abe or is it a crush on an "older man?"
13. If she really loves him, why doesn't she trust him with Debbie?
14. What led Marianne to conclude that Debbie and Abe were announcing their engagement at the reception after the concert?

15. What do you think will happen to Marianne and Abe in the sequel? Why?



# Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Blindness at birth can have a variety of causes. Use library resources to see what you can find about the handicap. What is being done to prevent it?
2. Abe uses Braille to read, write and play music. Find an example of Braille and a chart or printed information that would demonstrate the Braille patterns for the letters of the alphabet. Make a display in your class and invite classmates to "write" their names in Braille.
3. Interview a blind person or a person with limited vision. Find out about that person's life. What is it like? What brings joy to his or her life? What causes consternation and frustration?

How would he or she have others change?

4. Have you ever wondered what it would be like to be blind? Pair students up in your class. Now move around your campus together with one of you blindfolded and the other acting as a helper for a morning or afternoon, attending classes, taking notes, eating in the cafeteria. Record your observations on a tape recorder as you move through the exercise. Share your observations with classmates in a discussion period.
5. Write a paragraph about your perception of blind people prior to and after reading *After Thursday*. Has your perception changed? How?
6. Debbie is "breaking in" the professional concert world. How does a professional prepare for a concert whether it is classical music or rock music? Perhaps you could clip pictures and articles from newspapers and magazines that illustrate different steps in the process of preparing for a concert, creating a collage as an aid in reporting to your classmates.
7. The Thursday Group does madrigals. What is a madrigal? Find a piece of madrigal music to share with the class. You do not need to perform it, just bring it in if you can find it on a tape.
8. If you had the opportunity to go professional with a talent you have, what talent would you choose? Why?

## For Further Reference

Commire, Anne. *Something About the Author*. Volume 48. Detroit: Gale Research, 1987. An article detailing Ure's life and work, includes a photograph.

Holtze, Sally Holmes, editor. *Junior Authors & Illustrators*. New York: H.W. Wilson, 1989. Short article about Ure with a photograph.

Nettell, Stephanie. "Escapism or Realism? The Novels of Jean Ure." *British Book News* (March 1985). Includes a short summary and bibliographic information about Ure's novels.

## Related Titles

*After Thursday* is a sequel to *See You Thursday*, where the reader first meets Marianne and Abe. In *See You Thursday*, Marianne is sixteen. Abe, a blind music teacher, boarding in her mother's house, has made a hit with Marianne, a lonely girl who is uncomfortable at the expensive girls' school she attends.

Marianne finds an unexpected friend in Abe and develops a crush on him.

*See You Thursday* was chosen one of the American Library Association's Best Books for Young Adults in 1983.

In 1989 Ure said she was working on a third story called *Tomorrow Is Also a Day*. Ure writes about a variety of themes, but she says "basically all my books are concerned with relationships—of people to themselves and of people to each other."





# Copyright Information

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