

Bag of Bones Study Guide

Bag of Bones by Stephen King

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Plot Summary

Bag of Bones by Stephen King is a novel that contains King's trademark characteristics of blending reality with fiction and innuendo with supposition. It is a tale about a man named Mike Noonan who unexpectedly loses his wife in the prime of her life. She witnesses a freak accident and on her way to offer assistance, she suffers an aneurysm and dies on the street. The autopsy also shows that Johanna had a secret: she was pregnant. This event knocks the life out of Mike. He barely finishes the novel he is writing, but finds himself unable to so much as begin another one. After years of writing he suffers a block that has him physically ill if he even tries. With four novels in a safe deposit box, he is under little pressure for the next four years, but when that has passed and Mike still hasn't written a word, he begins to get anxious.

He finally decides to return to the vacation house called Sara Laughs at the lake he and Jo had spent summers in. It is his first return in four years and he has had numerous nightmares about it. None of these nightmares manifest as he arrives however and he is warmly welcomed by the locals at first. Then he meets Kyra Devore, a precocious toddler who's frantic mother Mattie isn't far behind. When he returns the child to her care, he discovers that she also lost her spouse unexpectedly just months earlier. Immediately taken with her outgoing charm, when he learns that she is fighting a rich and powerful father in law for the custody of her daughter, he steps in to help, offering the services of a lawyer. It is a simple gesture but the locals are not so charitable. To complicate his life further, Sara Laughs appears to be haunted. Several entities vie for his attention. Poltergeist activity is ongoing at Mattie's trailer as well, but Mike doesn't tell her they share that too. Already, the three have a deep and unusual bond able to read each others thoughts and as Mattie's feelings for Mike grow, she makes no secret of them, leaving an open invitation to come to her at night but Mike resists his feelings for her until her father in law dies. Then, in a celebration held at her trailer with Mike, their lawyers John and Rommie and private investigator George, Mike finally yields to his feelings, promising to come to her that night. The long time locals who are attending her father in law's funeral change Mike's life when they drive by her trailer firing multiple rounds from their car. Mattie is killed, and everyone but Mike and Kyra are injured by flying bullets.

All the while, the poltergeist activity increases to a crescendo. Sara Tidwell, the original owner of Sara Laughs, is just one of the vengeful entities looking for justice and it is up to Mike to unravel the truth before anyone else is killed. Sara is not about to rest quietly, haunting all who are descended from the men who raped and murdered her and killed her son decades earlier. In an explosive finish, Mike fights Sara and her killers in an effort to save himself, them and Kyra. Luckily for Mike, Johanna had discovered the horrible truth before her death, and in a series of secret visits to their summer house, has left him the information he needs. Her spirit guides him and works on both sides of the mortal plane to ensure he and Kyra survive and put the past to rest once and for all.



Chapters 1 and 2

Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

Bag of Bones by Stephen King is a novel typical of his usual work, blending reality with fiction, and innuendo with supposition. It is a tale about a man named Mike Noonan who unexpectedly loses his wife in the prime of her life. She witnesses a freak accident and on her way to assist, she suffers an aneurysm and dies on the street. The autopsy also shows that Johanna had a secret - she was pregnant. This event knocks the life out of Mike. He barely finishes the novel he is writing, but finds himself unable to so much as begin another one. After years of writing he suffers a block that has him physically ill if he even tries. With four novels in a safe deposit box, he is under little pressure for the next four years, but when that has passed and Mike still hasn't written a word, he begins to get anxious.

Mike spends a great deal of time thinking about ritual, and normalcy, and about how lucky they were that they didn't know how short their time together was. He finishes his last novel for four years just one month after Johanna's death, and though he follows the same ritual as he always has with her, it isn't the same and he misses her with a finality now that makes him realize that she really isn't coming back. It is just one of the many things that won't ever be the same again.

Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

Mike Noonan has no idea that the last time he sees his wife Joanne will be that day in August of 1994. He had been writing, but was done for the day. He offers to go for Johanna, but she insists that she wants to, citing other errands. What she doesn't tell Mike is that she is picking up a pregnancy test kit. Having tried for years to become pregnant, Mike can only assume afterward that she withheld the information so that she could be sure first. The news is a double blow to Mike, suspecting the truth for the first time when he sees the pharmacy bag with her effects. He questions her favorite brother, Frank, asking him if she'd mentioned it, but he swears that she hadn't. It is a good thing that Johanna's brothers have all come. Without them, Mike would never have made it through. They helped him with everything from funeral arrangements to haggling with the funeral directors over the price of the casket so that Mike wouldn't be taken advantage of.

Mike is on auto pilot as he finishes the novel that was in progress before Jo died. The ritual of her support and approval and the lack of it now hits home as Mike is finally done. He tries to maintain what normality he can, bringing himself the glasses and champagne, and saving the last line in his head for this moment, but the ritual doesn't bring her back. She isn't there to type in the last line as he dictates it verbatim. She isn't there to clink her glass against his in an almost superstitious habit before he boxes it up and sends it to his editor. He even has his first nightmare about her, dreaming that she

is under the bed with the dust bunnies. He tries, but it just isn't right and it occurs to him that it will never be right again.



Chapters 3 and 4

Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

Mike and Frank talk, but it is superfluous conversation and the kind that men have with each other. Mike isn't able to tell him the real truth, despite being given numerous openings to do so. Mike is suffering from writer's block, and since the novel he completed after Jo's death, he hasn't been able to complete a single chapter. In October of 1997, Harold calls Mike to tell him that several best selling authors are planning to release new novels this season and to ensure a place on the Times best seller list, which only has enough slots for fifteen writers, he should be prepared to release his new novel by the summer of 1998 in order to get ahead of the competition. Mike knows that means he has to give them his book by November which gives him only one month. Since he isn't writing, and is only grabbing from his manuscripts squirreled away from previous years of excess, this isn't really a big issue, but he can't let Harold know this. Instead, he manages to sound incredulous, and put out, negotiating a surcharge on the advance as a result. This is when the dreams begin. He begins having nightmares involving the getaway house in Maine, Sara Laughs. They are debilitating, and intensely real. When he wakes up, for some reason he thinks 'Manderley, I have dreamt again of Manderley', and from then on, each successive nightmare will be versions of the same theme. This book is the last one in his safety deposit box which now sits empty, and still, Mike is unable to write a word.

When Frank calls to invite Mike down for Christmas, on impulse Mike accepts. Frank is thrilled and Mike leaves soon after hanging up and packing a bag. He is an honorary Arlen for four days, drinking too much, toasting Johanna's memory many times, and sleeping through the night to his surprise. He didn't even think about his empty safe deposit box. When he gets home, he wakes thinking about the New Year, and suddenly feels as though he can write again. He turns on the computer, and loads the Word program and it all begins again. The clammy feeling starts, the nausea follows and he almost gives himself a concussion when he pushes away from the desk and tips over in his chair. Barring a miracle, he realizes his career as a writer is over. Looking at the floor, he turns off the power button to get rid of the Word program on the screen. Mike's publisher thinks his latest book is his breakthrough book. Harold calls three days later with what he believes is a wonderful new contract, and Mike tells him he isn't interested. That night, he has one of the worst nightmares ever, seeing Johanna's coffin at Sara Laughs.

Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

Mike's writer's block is as much physical as it is mental. When he opens his Word program to begin writing, he breaks out into a sweat, and vomits until there is nothing left. He has actually lost consciousness by trying to force himself to write and had to close his eyes much later in order to be able to approach the machine just to turn it off.



His computer is becoming an expensive scrabble game and crossword. His editor pushes for an early release on the fourth of four years since Jo's death, and after an appropriate amount of griping about the pressure it puts him under, Mike drives to Fidelity and takes his final manuscript out of the safe deposit box. It has gone from full to empty, and next year, barring something unforeseen, there will be no new release.

He is also having dreams about Sara Laughs where he is outside, but can't force himself to go in. He finds himself standing on the laneway leading to the house, able to see it but unable to propel himself forward to it, despite approaching darkness. He has been going to his safe deposit box yearly now for four years, and has removed a manuscript each time to be sent in as that year's title. Now, he has removed the last one, and rather than panic, he decides to accept an invitation from Frank to spend Christmas with the Arlen's. It is exactly what he needs. He has no nightmares, drinks way more than normal, and enjoys the family style atmosphere for four whole days. He gets back to Derry feeling refreshed and renewed. When he sits at the computer again however, the same cycle repeats itself. He is still unable to write. When Debra Weinstock calls and tells him that she thinks his latest offering is his 'breakthrough' book, he has to bite down on his hand to keep from laughing out loud as it was the oldest of the four manuscripts he had put away, and he could scarcely even remember what it was about anymore. When Mike turns down the offer of a new contract, Harold is confused and can't understand why Mike isn't thrilled about a three book deal that will net him nine million dollars. When he sleeps that night, he has the Sara Laughs dream again, only this time he manages to go down to the house. He finds Jo's coffin there and somehow, the horror between his dreams and his real life begin to blur just a little.



Chapters 5 and 6

Chapters 5 and 6 Summary

Sitting in a coffee shop in Derry one morning, it is brought to Mike's attention that he hasn't been on a vacation since before Johanna's death. He decides to spend six weeks in Key Largo and while he is there, airs out his inner self. He comes to some surprising revelations. He realizes that in order to move on, he has to go back to Sara Laughs to write. It isn't until the spring of 1998 before Mike finally goes back to the house at the lake. Before he goes, he calls caretaker Bill Dean to let him know he is coming, and asks him to take a selection of photos of the place 'with warts and all' before he cleans it up in preparation of Mike's visit. The photo that surprises him most in the group of overgrown and unused looking photos is the one of three sunflowers in full bloom, growing up through the floorboard of the stoop. They are exactly the same as they were in his recurring nightmare about Sara Laughs.

On July 3rd, Mike leaves for the lake. Having lived frugally through the years, at this stage in his life Mike is worth about five million dollars and doesn't sweat the expenses of small house repairs and the upkeep necessary to make Sara Laughs presentable again. Johanna has been gone almost four years now, and it is his first trip back. He sees Frank before he goes who makes the observation that he still has a look in his eyes that isn't right yet. Mike makes the drive to the lake at the same time of day as his nightmares had been, daring the circumstances to repeat themselves, but they don't. He even gets out at the top of the drive, and walks down as he had in his nightmare, and still no coffin or shroud of Jo appears. Bill has left a light on for him on the porch, and he goes inside, turning lights on. Hearing air escaping from the pipes he almost turns and bolts, but instead he has a reality check, grabs the flashlight and gives himself a talking to all the way back to his car. He drives it down to the house, and then continues turning on lights and revealing memories of a life that had stopped in mid stride. Evidence of Jo is everywhere, and in no time he is reduced to sobbing on the couch, overcome with grief again. He cries himself out, and goes up to the guest room, unable to sleep in the room he and Johanna had shared. The housekeeper, anticipating this, had left flowers and a welcome home note to accompany the clean sheets in that room.

Chapters 5 and 6 Analysis

Mike thinks about his life with Jo and all the little moments of laughter and triumph. All the times that seemed inconsequential at the time came back to him as he walked the same stretch of beach over and over again in the six weeks he spends in Key Largo. It is his first vacation without her. Sitting on the beach in Key Largo and thinking about his last nightmare about the Sara Laughs house and Johanna, Mike realizes for the first time that he is afraid to write and afraid to even try. He finally understands that it isn't the writer's block that scares him, it is undoing it. Part of him was terrified of picking up the pieces of his life without her and continuing on. He also begins to realize that he is



drinking way too much. When he realizes these two things, he comes to an understanding that he has to return to Sara Laughs. He calls Bill Dean to let him know he is coming, and Bill chastises him for not coming sooner, telling him that the regular folks at the lake have missed him. He says that Mike deprived them of conveying their sympathies after Johanna's death and that it is long overdue. Then he promises to get the place in shape, bringing in Mike's usual housekeeper to give the place a good cleaning, and promises to replace the section of shingles on the roof that need doing if Mike can stand the bill for it all. Mike gives him the go ahead, and Bill sounds particularly cheered that Mike is actually coming.

Before Mike goes to Sara Laughs, he meets with Frank Arlen for lunch, and Frank asks him if he is seeing anyone. The innocent question catches Mike off guard, and Frank reminds him that it has been almost four years now. Frank asks if Mike has been with anyone since, and in a moment of sheer honesty, he admits that not once has he been with anyone at all. It seemed as though there was just still too much of Johanna in his head and in his heart for that as yet. He tries to recreate his nightmare of Sara Laughs, as though tempting it to be real, arriving at the same time of day, and repeating all of the things he remembers from the dream. None of the horrible things come to pass. The worst thing that happens to Mike is that he has to once again walk through a home where Jo has left her mark in a million different ways, and where memories of her are everywhere. It brings him to uncontrolled sobbing grief again. He cries himself out and goes to bed in the guest room, not able to sleep in the room that he and Johanna had shared.



Chapters 7 and 8

Chapters 7 and 8 Summary

On his first day back at Sara Laughs, Mike decides to drive to the Village Cafe for a burger for lunch. On his way there, he sees a young toddler walking down the middle of the road all alone. Worried, he pulls over and tries to ascertain where her mother is, just as a Scout comes down the road. The child call her Mattie and though she drives by at first, Mike manages to get her attention and she reverses back to him. She is grateful to a point of tears that her daughter is okay, and tries to explain to Mike that she had promised to take Kyra to the lake that afternoon. She comments on how bizarre it is that one of her favorite writers should come out of nowhere to save her child. She asks Mike for a favor, telling him she'd be grateful if he wouldn't talk about what had happened, revealing that it wasn't a very good time for her right now, without elaborating. Mike agrees. As he is leaving, he asks her if she'll tell her husband, and she reveals that he died last August. Mike gets back into his truck and thinks about the coincidence of names, almost crying.

Buddy Jellison is the same as always and so is the menu at the Village Restaurant. Mike orders a Villageburger and when he's finished, he looks up the name Devore in the Castle County phone book. He finds several, but none that list Mattie. The only one listed on Wasp Hill Road was Lance, the book obviously in print before his death. Somehow the name Devore rings a bell in Mike and finally he remembers that a Max Devore was one of the more wealthy residents in the area. Involved in computers, he had made his fortune by knowing where and what would come next, and investing in it. Worth a small fortune now, it seemed unlikely to Mike that he would be related to Maggie and leave her and Kia to struggle on their own. He pays and drives back to the lake house, deciding to go for a swim. Later, he settles down on the deck to watch the fourth of July fireworks and is surprised when the phone rings and Max Devore's voice is on the other end. He presses Mike for information about his afternoon encounter with Mattie and Kia, and Mike, resenting his attitude and demeanor, lies and protects Mattie from a man who is obviously looking to persecute her and her parenting skills. Mike coldly suggests what he can do with his unlisted telephone number and hangs up. He goes to bed and when he wakes up three hours later to use the washroom, he hears the sound of a child crying again.

Chapters 7 and 8 Analysis

Mike finds a three-year-old wandering down the center of the highway on his way to get some lunch at the Village Cafe, and her mother who introduces herself as Mattie Devore comes flying down the road in her Scout moments later, terrified and searching for her. When she reveals that the child's name is Kyra, Mike hears Kia or the name he and Johanna had chosen for a girl should they have a child and the combination of the name and the child's age is almost enough to make him choke. He manages to get a



hold of himself. He talks to her for a moment during which she reveals that he is her favorite author, and that her husband died the previous August. She also asks that he not reveal what had happened to anyone and he agrees. Driving the rest of the way to the Village Cafe, Mike is struck by a melancholy that almost brings him to tears.

He eats and drives back to the lake house, stopping at the entrance and looking at the sign to see if the sticker he'd seen in his dream was there. It wasn't, but there was an area that still tacky. On impulse, back at the house he goes through the garbage bags left when the cleaning was done, and is only a little surprised to find the sticker from his dream amongst the rest of the garbage. He changes, goes down to the lake and jumps in, forgetting how cold the lake can be and comes up with a mouthful of water that is strangely similar to the taste that was in his mouth on the road when Mattie told him her daughter's name was Kia. Knocking it off as coincidence and trick of memory, he swims out to the float and climbing out, lays down on the warm boards suddenly glad that he'd come. Later, watching the fireworks from the deck, he is startled by the phone and even more surprised to find himself talking to Max Devore. Abrasive and arrogant, he demands to know more about Mike's encounter with Mattie, immediately insinuating that she is an unfit parent. Remembering how close to panicked she was, Mike gets angry with the old man and while wondering how he managed to get his unlisted number, he refuses to tell him anything he can use against Mattie. Max accuses him of lying and Mike firmly suggests what he can do with his telephone number before hanging up. He is strangely grateful to the man for pulling him out of his own reverie of self pity and loneliness though and goes upstairs to bed. Later, awake to use the facilities, he hears a child sobbing much like he had earlier. He goes back to bed thinking that Sara Laughs is alive for better or worse.



Chapters 9 and 10

Chapters 9 and 10 Summary

The next morning Mike goes for a walk. He makes it as far as the Warrington's and the Sunset Bar before turning back. At the house again, he strips down and swims out to the float, and decides to spend the rest of the day cleaning his work area on the second floor. Upstairs, he feels the stifling heat and for the first time realizes the air conditioner isn't working. Just as he is leaving his office, he remembers a voice activated gadget given to him called a memo scribe and decides to use it to record the child's voice that evening if it comes again. He looks into Jo's nook across the hall and finds it has been emptied though her studio is just as he remembered it except for his old IBM Selectric typewriter sitting on her desk. Later, he goes to the store and is approached by a local old geezer who comments his meeting Mattie the day before. Aware that attention from all around is now focused on them, Mike doesn't play. At home, he makes dinner, sets up the voice activated dictaphone to see if he can catch any of the strange sounds he's been hearing, and sleeps for eight hours straight. In the morning, the magnets on the fridge have been arranged in a circle and gets the creepy feeling that someone has been in the house. He moves them randomly around, leaving two that fell on the floor where they land before he notices the dictaphone, the count changed from 000 to 012. He plays it back and hears two words whispered twice clearly, "Oh, Mike."

Later that morning, Bill Dean pulls into the drive and greets him like an old friend. He apologizes for the lack of air conditioner, and asks Mike if there is anything else and Mike tells him there is, inviting him in for coffee. Bill gives him the background on Mattie and Lance Devore before leaving, telling him about Lance's death and his fathers' current attempts to prove Mattie to be unfit so he can take Kyra from her. After he leaves, Mike looks for the owls Bill assures him are there, and in the cellar he has the distinct feeling he is not alone. He begins talking, asking his company to reveal itself by knocking once for yes and twice for no. Further questioning reveals little that will help him but there is no doubt that communication took place. He even turns on the light suddenly in the hopes of seeing the mysterious house guest, but it immediately vacates the area when he does. He goes back upstairs to answer a ringing phone and finds the fridge magnets rearranged again. This time a combination of letters and numbers are in the middle. The message is simple...hel1o. He says hello back to whoever or whatever is with him in the house.

Chapters 9 and 10 Analysis

Walking The Street the next morning, Mike comes to the odd realization that the sound of the child he heard sobbing was oddly more realistic than the phone call from Max Devore was. He had the idea that he should call Mattie and tell her, but then thought that it was probably a bad idea. He didn't really want to get into an ugly dispute between the two. He thought about the fact that at the time of year Jo had died, they were usually



at Sara Laughs, and wondered why they hadn't been that year. He couldn't believe that it was the first year they had forgotten to go. He decides to clean his work area and notices the lack of air conditioning, and the fact that Mrs. Meserve had entirely cleaned out Jo's nook, overstepping her boundaries a little. He is about to leave when he feels a rush of cold air against his face, and he calls out to Jo, asking her if she is there. He goes to her studio and to his surprise not only finds all of her things but also finds his old IBM Selectric. As Jo never typed to anyone, he wonders what she was up to, especially when he finds a photo of Sara Tidwell who was the original owner of their lake house. Going to the store, a man who may as well be a complete stranger engages himself in conversation with Mike about his meeting Mattie the day before, and Mike gets the distinct and uncomfortable impression that there are way too many people paying way too close attention to Mattie's life. He remembers to set up the dictaphone that night before bed, hoping to catch some of the sounds he's been hearing so that he can play them for the caretaker to ascertain their source. What he gets instead, along with the rearranged magnets on his fridge door, shakes him to his foundation. Two words, repeated twice mournfully but clearly, "Oh Mike."

Later Bill Dean arrives and though he's been gone a few days, he's already heard about Mike's encounter with Mattie. Mike invites him in, asking him what he's stepped into. Bill wastes no time telling Mike he should steer clear of Mattie as she is in trouble. After a moment's discomfort, he adds that Max Devore is 'Howard Hughes' crazy and will rest at nothing to gain custody of his granddaughter. None of this is a huge surprise to Mike. What is a surprise are the events that follow. First, Bill suggests that Mike find the two plastic owls Jo had taken delivery of in 1993, but Mike is sure they hadn't been there. Bill insists that Jo came up on her own to take delivery of them herself and finding them will save him having to clean up after bird droppings. He leaves and Mike tries to remember if Jo ever mentioned them, telling himself that it was possible she had and he'd been so engrossed in writing that he'd tuned her out. While searching for the owls, he discovers that he is not alone in the house. An entity of some kind is definitely making efforts to communicate with him, and while fearful, Mike is also curious. He asks a series of questions and discovers that his companion is but isn't Jo, isn't Lance for certain, that the owls are not in the cellar but that he should definitely find them, and that he is but isn't safe in the house. His curiosity overcomes his fear as he turns on the lights suddenly in an effort to see whatever is talking to him, but in the space of three breaths, the temperature goes from cold enough to see his own breath to warm, and the question and answer period abruptly ends. Mike apologizes to the empty air and goes upstairs to answer the phone. The fridge magnets now say hel1o, and Mike returns the greeting. He realizes, standing there, that he can't leave. There are issues that have to be resolved, and the answers are here at Sara Laughs.



Chapters 11 and 12

Chapters 11 and 12 Summary

Mike is heading to Jo's studio to look for the owls when a Sheriff's car pulls in to deliver a subpoena. Mike puts the subpoena in the house, and now the fridge magnets read 'help r', but Mike has already subconsciously arrived at that conclusion. He calls his publisher to get a recommendation for a custody lawyer. When John Storrow calls Mike, he listens to the whole story and has two pieces of advice. The first is to be one hundred percent honest when answering this subpoena. The second is to do whatever he has to in order to convince Mattie that she needs to accept Mike's help by way of John Storrow or lose her daughter.

Mike picks up the phone to call Mattie and in a quirk of timing, Mattie is calling him at exactly that moment, so instead of a dial tone when he picks up the phone, he finds her on the other end. She invites him for dinner to thank him for rescuing Kyra, and he accepts. They enjoy an evening of good conversation, Mike reads Cinderella to Kyra until she is asleep, and to avoid any appearance of impropriety, go back outside to talk. Mattie tells him how she met Lance, and how Max first bribed her to leave, and then tried to convince her to sell Kyra to him and leave. None of it surprises Mike. Just as he seems to intuit how she feels, she also instinctively guesses his lack of writing is a writer's block, and that his wife's death affects him a great deal more than he lets on. He is taken back when she describes how fearful she has been of late, tells him she has woken in the night with the feeling she isn't alone, and found flour spilled on the counter with the word 'hello' written in it. Without wanting to reveal his own recent communications with the unseen, he steers the conversation to John Storrow, and his desire to help them. She questions his motivation and Mike assures her that he expects nothing in return. He simply wants to do something worthwhile, and her cause is one that requires help he is able to provide. Gratefully, she takes Storrow's number from him, and as he is leaving, she mentions having seen Johanna in passing conversation. Mike asks when, and Mattie is certain it was the same year she met Lance, describing the incident in detail that includes what Jo was wearing, her thoughts that she was beautiful, and that she left with another man. Mike asks who the man was, but Mattie can only provide a general description. Mike can't stop thinking about it and even remembers the blouse Mattie described with the blue roses. When he gets home, the fridge magnets read 'blue rose liar ha ha.' He mixes them up again, adds the two packages of fridge magnet letters he bought earlier to the collection, and goes to bed.

Chapters 11 and 12 Analysis

The Sheriff who hand delivers the subpoena to Mike is obviously on a subsidy payroll for Max Devore, and Mike feels violated enough by the service to mention it, ensuring that he makes no friends. The Sheriff warns him about the penalties for not appearing. When John Storrow calls him, Mike is both relieved to have someone on his side, and



dismayed by the legal might stacked against Mattie. It is glaringly obvious that unless Mattie accepts Mike's help, she will lose Kyra, mostly because Max Devore has the money to expend on legal fees. The scales of justice are not only blind, but deaf and dumb in this case.

Mattie and Mike have much more in common than he would have believed, and he quickly puts aside his preconceived notions of trailers and their occupants. He enjoys reading to Kyra in a way that Mattie finds endearing and somewhat sad, and Mattie rightly guesses that to avoid gossip, they are best off to talk outside. Their commonalities continue long past the deaths of their spouses. She tells him about Max and how she had allowed him access to Kyra even after he tried to bribe her to leave and to sell her to him. She manages even to put aside the fact that Max disowned them and consigned them to poverty after Lance confronted him about his improper behavior and unforgivable acts of financial indiscretion. For the first little while, Kyra seems to enjoy her visits with Grandpa and the 'white Nana', Rogette Whitmore. Rogette even manages to win Kyra's affections but over time Kyra seems to cool towards Max although she can't quite articulate to her mother why. It becomes so evident that fearing something was really wrong, she cut off access. Max threatens her with a custody suit, and follows through. When Mattie begins to describe the messages in flour, and her feelings that she is not alone, Mike is somewhat taken aback. Even her description that the area seems poised for something big to happen, similar to the feeling you get just before a big thunderstorm. For the time being, Mike doesn't want to admit to her that he has also had the same feelings, and that he has been getting messages as well. It seems safer and more responsible to steer the conversation to John Storrow instead. He is brutally honest with her, telling her that Max has a great deal of leverage, and finally offering John Storrow to her. While she is aware of her precarious position, she still has the presence of mind to question his motives directly. Her reaction is calm but intelligent. She understands that she needs the help, but won't be a pawn on a rich man's chessboard. Mike assures her that his motives are purely though not entirely selfish. He wants to help, can afford it, and expects nothing in return. She accepts his offer graciously and as he is saying goodbye to her, she relates an incident in 1994 when she saw Johanna for the first time. Mike is unaware of her having been at the lake house then, and revises the time frame that she had come down for the owl delivery. What rattles him however is Mattie's comment that the man with her walked away with his arm around her. He questions her further, discovering her memory is accurate right down to her clothing and though he knows he should let it go, he can't. When he gets home, even the fridge magnets taunt him with the incident.



Chapters 13 and 14

Chapters 13 and 14 Summary

On July 7th, Mike has an evening that is reminiscent of a time when as a child he had such a high fever that he hallucinated. Mike has a waking dream of being part of three different selves. One self is with Jo, another with Mattie and the third is retrieving the old Selectric from Jo's studio. Each vision is vivid and detailed, filled with music that sounds like Sara Tidwell and her group, sexual contact, and innuendo involving Jo and Mattie and visions of death. He wakes the following morning, he finds himself on the floor in the upstairs hallway with the Selectric in his office and his feet dirty and stuck with leaves. He showers and then plugs in the typewriter, types in Chapter One, and waits for inspiration to take over.

The phone ringing interrupts him and he answers to hear Mattie's voice. She tells him she has spoken with John Storrow and she is very optimistic about the outcome now. She tells him she will keep him updated, but not interrupt him while he is working. He is about to do just that when the phone rings again and Storrow begins his conversation by admonishing Mike for spending time with Mattie where they weren't in plain view at all times. They discuss Mattie's case and John tells Mike that his bill will likely be in the range of seventy five thousand dollars, asking him if that is acceptable. Mike tells him it is, but asks that the bills be sent to him instead of his agent, and that John keep the cost from Mattie. Going back to the office, Mike knows he is done for the day. He makes notes to himself regarding research he wants done and where his story will go next and goes over in his mind the story he has begun. Then he puts on his swimming trunks and heads for the lake. He only gets down the first four of five railroad ties that lead to it before his legs go to jelly and he is forced to sit. The significance of what he has accomplished suddenly overwhelms him, and he begins to cry. He sits there for some time, with all of the grief of the years he has been alone bubbling to the surface. He mourns the loss of Jo and his four years of writer's block. He realizes how much time has been wasted and simply cries it all out. Feeling renewed after this emotional release, Mike goes the rest of the way down to the lake for a swim.

Chapters 13 and 14 Analysis

Mike has the kind of dream or combination of hallucinations that he used to believe could only happen to very feverish children. In it, he is split into three directions and doing three things simultaneously. The most important of the three is hauling the Selectric from Jo's studio back to the house and his office upstairs. When he wakes, he realizes to his surprise and discomfort that he actually did this in his sleep during the night. He can only conclude that the reason he brought the Selectric into the house was to work and part of him wonders if he can. He showers and sets himself up to try.



When the phone rings interrupting his flow, he has already put several pages of a new book together. The idea is still floating in his mind when he answers the phone to find Mattie sounding very happy on the other end. When he tells her he is writing, she is surprised and seems to know that he wants to get back at it. She wants him to know she has talked to Storrow who gave her the impression that her case can be won. It is the first bit of optimistic news she has felt in some time, and she is bubbling over with it, telling him that if that does indeed come to pass, she will take both him and Storrow out for dinner somewhere special. They hang up after she promises to keep in touch, telling him that she won't call when he's working and Mike finds himself wondering how she could possibly know when he is working. It is as though she knows what he is doing and feeling. Before Mike can reach the office, the phone rings again. John berates him for spending time alone with Mattie but then goes on to give him the specifics of her case. He is particularly pleased with the Devore family history and tells Mike that in his mind, custody for this old man is very unlikely. His only hope is to perhaps marry his personal assistant so that a woman would be legally and morally in the picture, but even that seems unlikely to him. They discuss his bill which Mike assures him is fine, and when the conversation is finished, he realizes that his writing for the day is as well. He makes some notes to himself and then heads to the lake for a swim but before he can get there he is overwhelmed by the enormity of what has happened. It is as though giant flood gates have opened and allowed life to return. He feels as though he has been walking down the white line in the middle of the road since Jo's death, half dead himself. Now, for reasons he doesn't fully understand, he is getting a new lease on life and the emotions are so intense that he sits on the railroad ties and sobs with a mixture of relief, regret, and regeneration.



Chapters 15 and 16

Chapters 15 and 16 Summary

Mike appears for his deposition and is asked by Elmer Durgin or Kyra's court-appointed guardian how many times he has met 'Mary' and Kyra, and about conversations they had on the phone. Mike realizes that one or both of their phones have been tapped. He asks about Mike's conversation with Max, but Mike refuses to provide testimony that is damaging. Finally, he is through, and heads for the park where Mattie and John Storrow are waiting. They have lunch, and discuss Mattie's case. Mattie agrees to do what she can to ensure that Max isn't able to get to Kyra in other ways. John reminds them to avoid appearances of impropriety and says he'll try to come back for the local ballgame on Tuesday. When Mike gets home, Bunter the moose's bell is ringing and when it stops a woman shrieks with outrage so real that for a moment Mike joins her. Like the child crying, it finally fades. He hears a woman sobbing too and wonders if it is Jo and whether or not he should leave SL, but he goes upstairs to write.

For the next week, Mike continues to write and the manifestations continue. Bunter's bell rings, magnets rearrange themselves and sugar is spilled. On Tuesday Mike goes to the ball field to get a look at Max, but for the first time he doesn't show. Mrs. Meserve tells him some of the more colorful history of the area and Mike researches it but learns little more. John calls Mike to tell him the private investigator turned up lots of unaccounted for income for Durgin including years of back child support paid off, and the fact that he has seven children which amuses them both no end. He also recently bought a boat. Bunter's bell rings softly and the channels change until Mike finds himself watching Jo's favorite Bogart movie. He asks her who the man was at the ballgame, and the channel changes again to Perry Mason and a scene where a woman insists she never lied. The next day Mike runs into Bill at the filling station who tells him he is stepping on toes just like Jo had been when she dug into the history of the area in her final year. When Mike gets their accountant to fax Jo's schedule for that time period to him, he discovers that in the last year of her life, she had quit all of her charity work and on several days a week had come to SL instead, questioning the locals about the history of the area.

Chapters 15 and 16 Analysis

Mike sits down to his deposition and is quickly convinced that Elmer Durgin belongs to that category of overweight people that he calls ELFF or Evil Little Fat Folks who take great pleasure in despising anyone who can look down and still see their own feet. For Mike, the feeling is mutual. He doesn't much care for Durgin who is sarcastic and abrasive. He tries to get Mike to say that Mattie is unfit in several different ways including citing events like Kyra's coughing on bubbles after bubble bath horse play and even tries to get him to admit that Mattie herself might have run Kyra down the day she walked alone down the road headed for the beach when Mike had first met her. After



many unsuccessful attempts to elicit answers that he wanted using veiled threats and intimidation techniques, Durgin finally gives up. Mike finally is finished at lunch time and meets with John and Mattie in the park. John's confidence is rubbing off on Mattie and the only fear that remains is the chance that Max will attempt to steal Kyra when he realizes that he can't win her in court. When Mike returns to Sara Laughs, the haunting continues. Bunter's bell rings, a woman shrieks and Mike calls out asking if the voice is Jo and hears sobbing, thinking to himself that he should pack up and leave, but instead he goes upstairs to write unwilling to change anything that allowed that process to begin again.

The haunting continues at SL but Mike won't leave the only place he's been able to write. The Tuesday ballgame is missed by Max, but not by Mike, or on the other end of the field by John and Mattie. When Mattie tries to find out if he is okay, most people won't even talk to her. John feels as though Max is on the verge of giving up. The manifestations include laundry being rearranged, television channels changing to facilitate conversation with Mike, and Bunter's bell ringing. John admits he has the beginnings of feelings for Mattie which depresses Mike even though a part of him knows that John is a better suitor than he would be. Bill tells Mike that he is stirring up trouble and should just leave. He makes comments about Mike's relationship with Mattie, and tells Mike that he is upsetting the whole town. In fact, the manifestations at SL are also his fault because he is stirring everything up just like his wife did before she died. Mike learns that Jo was there many times in the past year without his knowledge, ostensibly researching the local history for an article she wanted to write. Mike doesn't know what to make of it all.



Chapters 17 and 18

Chapters 17 and 18 Summary

After dinner on Friday, Mike goes for a walk to think. Heading north, he is overcome by a perception of a drowning Negro boy, feeling his panic, and the end of his life at the hands of another. Mike holds onto a birch, gasping for air as Max and Rogette come up on him from behind. Taunting and using language more suited to a gutter, they keep him from climbing the bank and going home. When he tries, he is assaulted, first by one and then the other. Max hits him with his cane and uses his wheelchair to push him down into the lake where Rogette begins throwing fist sized rocks. Her aim is deadly accurate and she connects with his head several times, causing him to swallow large amounts of lake water, almost blacking out in the process. Every time he comes within range, he is pelted with large, concussion causing rocks. Already lumps are forming on his skull where they connected. He realizes to his horror that he might actually drown when he hears Jo's voice encouraging him to swim for the float. He does so, and they finally leave him alone. Still, he stays on the float for some time before slipping back into the water and swimming for shore in the dark.

In the house, he strips, showers, and dresses his wounds. He almost calls the Sheriff, but realizes that without witnesses, his story will sound bizarre. He calls John but he is gone for the weekend, and finally he calls Mattie. She answers, but her voice has none of the confidence and lift it held the last time they met. She's been fired and a brief description of her financial status has her in tears. Mike doesn't mention his encounter with evil, and instead tells her he will help her. He promises to keep track and allow her to pay him back if she wants, but that she needn't worry about the payments on the trailer, or looking after Kyra. He won't let her suffer. She has already spoken to John and has a lunch engagement with him on Tuesday which Mike invites himself to and Mattie seems happy about. Lights in the driveway momentarily terrify him, but the man on the porch introduces himself as real estate agent Richard Osgood with a message from Max in Rogette's handwriting. If he agrees to stop asking questions and cease all legal maneuvering, he will leave Mattie and Kyra alone. Mike calls Max and Rogette picks up, continuing to taunt him about his swim earlier. They verbally spar before Mike tells her they have a deal. He hangs up and goes to bed.

Chapters 17 and 18 Analysis

Walking along the lake, Mike finds himself reliving the horror that a young Negro boy felt as he was drowned by someone else. All of the young boy's feelings and emotions flood through him as the child begs in his mind for the man to let him up, and the terrible fear he feels when he realizes he is actually going to drown. Mike hangs onto a tree, unable to stay on his feet without help as the boy's life slips away. As his senses return, Mike is set upon by Max and Rogette. The couple is frighteningly evil and full of malice as they hurl first verbal and then physical abuse upon Mike. They taunt him about Mattie,



denigrating her and full of accusations. Mike isn't the kind of man who would normally take this kind of treatment, but the old man is eighty five and she is just as ancient in his mind, so he tries to simply push past them and go home, but neither of them will allow it. As the assault continues, Mike realizes with some horror that he might actually drown. The street is remarkably untraveled and Mike can hardly believe what is happening. He tries to swim in the direction of SL but is finding it increasingly difficult when he hears Jo's voice telling him to swim for the float. He doesn't think that he is able but he hears her telling him that she'll help him, and just as he is no longer able to stay afloat, he feels a force pulling him toward the float and finds the strength to heave himself up onto it. He stays there for some time, unable to know for certain whether or not the two senior citizen bullies have left. Finally, he quietly slips into the water and heads for shore.

Mike cleans up and feels as though he should tell someone about the incident. The authorities seem like a bad idea, and John is away for the weekend, but when he calls Mattie, her troubles surpass his in importance and he elects not to mention his confrontation and comforts her instead. He arranges to join a lunch meeting she has planned with John, and hangs up. When he sees the headlights come up to the house, he almost panics, knowing he is not nearly strong enough to ward off another attack and fearing the caller is the deputy on Max's payroll. Instead, a Century 21 real estate broker delivers an offer to cease and desist from Max and written in Rogette's hand. He calls her and the verbal sparring continues on the phone before he finally tells her they have a deal, and if he ever sees her on the street again, he'll use her to practice shot put. The speech he makes both disgusts him and makes him feel a little better at the same time.



Chapters 19 and 20

Chapters 19 and 20 Summary

Bill wakes him early and tells him that Max committed suicide the previous evening. In disbelief, Mike asks him a few questions and Bill makes a point of suggesting that he leave the area for a while until things calm down. He tells Mike that there are two rumors circulating, and both put him in a bad light, but Mike is not inclined to leave now that he is writing again. He corrects Bill's bad information, assuring him that he is neither sleeping with Mattie, or writing a book about the locals. Mattie calls next to ask Mike if he's heard the news, emotional and hoping he will come to lunch but he relays the message from Bill and invites her and Kyra to dinner at a local park instead. He writes until it becomes too hot, and then taking a chance, he unplugs the Selectric and takes it downstairs. His brother Sid calls and Mike asks him if any of their father's family originated in the area he is in, and Sid assures him that he didn't know, which is what he told Jo when she had asked six months before she died. When he gets off the phone, the magnets rearrange themselves to spell CarlaDean for just a moment until a second entity brushes by him with an icy touch and scatters the magnets angrily around the kitchen. Again he hears 'Oh Mike' in Jo's voice and wonders how many entities are in his house.

Mike meets with Mattie and Kyra in the park, bringing dinner from McDonald's with him. Kyra mentions the fridge magnets and Mattie admits that they've been arranging themselves, spelling out names that include his, Jo's, and several others. She is also receiving anonymous phone calls that blame her for Max's death. Mike kisses her and afterward tells her that John likes her as well. Mattie doesn't want John, but makes no secret of how she feels for Mike, inviting him to come to her after Kyra is sleeping. She promises to leave a key under a pot with tomato plants, telling him not to think about it, but just to come. After he gets home, Mike can't stop thinking about her, and finally resorts to a very cold shower. Then he calls Frank, and talking to him realizes that he was the man she had been seen with. Frank tells Mike that Jo thought SL was a dangerous house, and that it had selected Mike for some reason. Frank also says that Jo swore she would never go into the house again. Mike tells Frank they are okay and then works until midnight.

Chapters 19 and 20 Analysis

The news that Max committed suicide brings out a variety of feelings in the area, but it is safe to say that neither Mike nor Mattie are disappointed. Bill calls Mike with the news, and again warns Mike that he should leave and that there are many people who are divided about how they feel about him. Mike feels as though his life is being invaded by a slew of overly nosy neighbors and doesn't like it. Bill says half the people thinks he is fooling around with Mattie and the other half believe he is writing something damaging to the people who live in the area. Mike assures Bill that neither is true, but



that he won't leave. He doesn't explain it to Bill, but now that he is writing again, he is reluctant to do anything that might mess that up. Mattie calls and they decide to maintain decorum by having dinner together in a public park. Mike's brother Sid calls with news that their mother is slipping further into dementia. While Mike has him on the phone, he asks about their family history and whether anyone from their father's side lived in the area but Sid is no help. The magnets spell CarlaDean and then get flung around the room angrily.

When Mike meets with Mattie in the park, she greets him with a kiss and holds onto him. She is dressed up and so is Kyra. Mike is having a hard time keeping their relationship platonic. Most of him would like much more, and he senses that she feels the same way. In fact, this evening she admits it, and asks him to come to her after Kyra is asleep. Despite how much trouble that would cause for both of them, Mike wrestles with the opportunity she is giving him. She is also having visitations that play with her fridge magnets, and they talk about the things that have been spelled out, but Mike doesn't tell her about his visitations yet. He goes home to a cold shower, and calls Frank who admits he is the one who was with Jo in town. She has been there several times and admits to Frank that SL scares her. She wants him to wait outside, and act as her security should she need it, but doesn't want to have to explain why. Frank agrees and apologizes to Mike who forgives him for not telling him about it earlier. He works until finally going to sleep.



Chapters 21 and 22

Chapters 21 and 22 Summary

Mike has an episode of spiritual time travel in which he and Kyra attend the Fryeburg County Fair as it took place around the year 1900. He begins alone, walking through the fair in amazement, slowly recognizing that the band performing is the Red Tops, wearing bib overalls. Kyra tackles him happily from behind, telling him that Mattie couldn't come. She knows that the woman singing is Kito's mom, Sara, and when they get up closer, Kyra is surprised to see that Sara is wearing the exact same dress as Mattie has. Kyra wants to know why. Suddenly, Kyra is afraid and wants to go home and Mike tells her it is all a dream and if she keeps her head down, she'll wake up in her own bed in the morning. Jared Devore confronts them with a group of his followers and demands that he relinquish Kyra, but Mike refuses. They run into the Ghost House to escape. They run for some time before coming to three doors. One has a red tricycle which Kyra goes through, one has an IBM Selectric which Mike goes through and the last has a child's sled like the one Max Devore stole as a child from Scooter Larribee. Mike finds himself in his own kitchen again, with the ribbon from Kyra's hair still wound around his wrist.

The next day Mike sits at the typewriter, but is uninspired to write anything. He doodles until Mattie calls, excited to tell him that she was given her old job back at the library. Her boss admits that Max threatened to cut off all funding if she didn't let Mattie go. Kyra gets on the phone and talks to him about the Fair, but he tells him that she shouldn't talk about that night with anyone but him. She agrees. Mike cautions Mattie to beware of Kenny Auster and Bill Dean, but can't explain why. Instead, he tells her what she and Kyra are wearing and doing. She understands, and asks when he'll come see her. He promises to think about the key she has hidden for him. He goes to Slips 'n Greens but Helen isn't there. He learns that an elderly local, Royce Merrill fell down his cellar stairs and is in a coma. Then he drives to Bill Dean's and his wife, Yvette claims he isn't home. Mike presses and Bill shows himself, but there is none of the warmth and friendship they've enjoyed over the years. Bill tells him they are quits and insists he leave immediately. When Mike asks why, Bill tells him that his interest in Mattie is unseemly and that for the sake of his soul, he should stand back and leave Mattie and Kyra alone. At home, he has another episode of poltergeist activity and when he goes out for dinner later, someone slips him a napkin that tells him to get off the TR.

Chapters 21 and 22 Analysis

Mike's episode of 'time travel' enables him to see the way things were in the past. He recognizes the forefathers of the people who live on the TR now, and the emotional resemblances are uncanny. What surprises him the most is the degree of awareness he feels. It isn't like a dream, and it isn't like sleepwalking. It feels as though he stepped through a portal and found himself getting the answers he was seeking directly from the



horses mouth instead of fishing around for second hand accounts years later. Despite the strangeness of the events, Mike isn't fearful. Kyra is similarly affected and winds up together with him at the fair. She is incredibly sensitive to Sara Tidwell, feeling instinctively that she has evil intentions. Mike hasn't picked up on that, despite living in Sara's house and being exposed to her familial vibrations. It is possible that Mike simply doesn't connect the poltergeist activity to her.

Despite numerous hints from magnets both at home and through Kyla, Mike is unable to figure out what the messages mean. He doesn't grasp the importance of the owls that Johanna bought, despite having been told by Bill when he first returned. Instead, he becomes hung up in what Jo might have been doing on her trips to the area without him. Kyla vividly remembers their foray to the fair, and while Mattie is sure this is merely a strong dream, Kyla knows it wasn't. She talks to Mike about the things they wore, and the things they saw, and Mike asks her to keep their trip to the fair a secret. Kyla is intelligent enough to understand, perhaps because she has such a deep emotional and intellectual connection with Mike. Mike is relieved that Mattie's connection to him doesn't extend as deep. There are still too many things he would have too much difficulty explaining to her. The rest of the TR population seems to want him gone and make no secret of it while the poltergeists in his house have the opposite opinion, making it clear that they want him to stay and help Mattie and Kyra.



Chapters 23 and 24

Chapters 23 and 24 Summary

John calls Mike and after Mike admits to inviting himself to lunch with him and Mattie, John tells him that Rogette called with news that Mattie was given an inheritance by Max. It came with the condition that she spend at least the following year in the same home on the TR. The legacy is forfeit if she isn't tucked into her bed on TR-90 every night. Mike and John both know that if contested, Mattie will win the settlement without the condition. Mike's next call is from Mrs. Meserve who tearfully tells him that she has no choice but to resign at Bill's insistence. Old time resident Royce Merrill's funeral is the following day, and she warns him that it would be best if he took Mattie and left. Mike goes for a swim and when he returns, all of the fridge magnets are gone without a trace. Mattie tells Mike that Kyra's letters are gone as well. He wakes in the middle of the night with the touch of someone else in bed with him and turns to find Sara Tidwell. In the next lightning flash she is gone.

Mike has an epiphany the next morning and opening the local phone book he sees that there are an incredible amount of initials K and C among local residents. In fact, most of these are long time TR residents. He tries to think of a way he can convince Mattie to just pack a bag for her and Kyra, and go somewhere with him for a week - even Disneyland, but realizes that since she was offered her job back, she would reluctantly decline. He goes to the airport to meet John and George and Rommie are there as well. George and Rommie give Mike a steno mask as a memento. John plays him a tape of Rogette and afterward Mike tells him of his incident with them the previous Friday to explain his reaction.

Chapters 23 and 24 Analysis

John is extremely excited when he tells Mike about his conversation with Rogette. The idea that Mattie is entitled to eighty million from Devore's estate is worthy of a party of some magnitude and he seems genuinely happy about the fact that Mike invited himself to his lunch with Mattie. John is determined to make an event out of it, inviting Romeo Bissonette who he assures Mike is a riot after a drink or two, and George Kennedy who also worked on Mattie's case. When Mrs. Meserve calls to resign, it is tearfully and with great regret that she didn't give him proper notice even, but she explains that when Bill Dean tells her to stop working for someone, she has to or won't work for anyone else either. It was just the way things were practiced in small communities like theirs. Mike tells her that he will consider it a leave of absence for now and promises not to tell anyone about the call. However a distraught Meserve tells him that Bill and Yvette and several others will already be aware for sure. Mike has the feeling that if he can get Mattie and Kyra through the following day, the future he has if any with her will be clarified. The missing fridge magnets seem to indicate that his 'friends' are not speaking to him. A call to Mattie confirms that Kyra is distressed that her refrigerator people have



deserted her as well. Mike goes to Jo's studio and sitting in her chair he cries, feeling the emptiness of life without her yet again or perhaps just still.

At the airport, Mike blanches when he first sees the gift that Rommie and George got him. In the box, the steno mask looks more like an oxygen mask and for a horrible moment he thinks it is Max's old one. In the car, he gets his next shock when John plays an incredibly clear recording he made of his phone call with Rogette. John thought the fact that he hung up on her would amuse Mike, but just the sound of her voice is such a shock that John takes the tape out, but Mike insists he is okay and tells him to continue. After it has finished, he tells John why her voice upset him, relating the detail of Friday night and their attempt to kill him, which shocks John.



Chapters 25 and 26

Chapters 25 and 26 Summary

Mattie looks gorgeous and John makes no secret of his feelings. Mattie delegates chores for everyone, and Kyra makes a point of asking Mike if he'll take care of her. He assures her he will. They throw the Frisbee around put music into a CD player. When one of Mattie's favorite songs comes on she dances and Mike is lost. He finally admits to himself that he loves her and nothing else matters. He looks around to see that she is having that effect on all of them. Mike takes Kyra to bed, and again she asks him if he will look after her. He assures her that he will and turns to find Mattie in the doorway. He kisses her, and tells her how he feels about her, promising to use the key she left for him that night. Mattie happily goes outside to help with the clean up before thunder becomes rain, and Mike retreats to the washroom to get his breath back. The gunfire begins soon after. Mattie screams and Mike hears John cry out and George telling everyone to get down. Gunfire hits the trailer, and George walks towards the car that was returning with the gunmen to ensure the first pass was successful. He brings his gun up and fires five carefully aimed shots. The last one blew out a rear tire and the car rolled into a ditch and burst into flames. Mattie crawls towards Mike, her only concern is that Kyra is alright. The left side of her face is a mess. Pieces of her skull are on her shoulder and her brain is bulging out. Mike promises her that he will look after Kyra. When John sees Mattie, he loses consciousness, and Mike holds her until she is gone.

George herds the only survivor from the car back into the yard. Removing his mask reveals George Footman. Kennedy is bleeding badly and asks Mike to find something to tie him up before he loses consciousness and can no longer hold him there. Inside, Rommie sits at the kitchen table, his ankle too ruined to support him. Mike finds only a hammer, but goes outside and uses it on Foreman when he refuses to reveal who hired them. He gives George a belt to use as a tourniquet, and takes Kyra out to the car. He goes back to the yard one more time to cover Mattie with a blanket. John is conscious, but in shock, and George is unconscious but his pulse is steady. He takes her to the only place he can - Sara Laughs. As they drive down the lane, a tree comes down behind them, blocking them in and saving them from the group of men following them. Inside, Bunter's bell is ringing and Mike tells Kyra he is glad to see them. The storm raged, and Kyra grieved. Mike walked her back and forth across the living room until she calms and asks him about the entities she can see in the house. Mike cleans her up and gives her some Benadryl to help her sleep. When she is out cold, he begins to fill the tub. Bunter's bell is ringing madly downstairs. The storm blows through the kitchen window where a small tree fell and broke the window. Mike watches his manuscript blow across the floor and a sudden understanding dawns. Mike picks up a page and laying a steno pad along the margin, he sees 'owls undEr stud O'. As he keeps looking, the message is repeated again and again. The voices rally against him as he makes his way to the studio

Chapters 25 and 26 Analysis

Mattie looks so stunningly sexy that when John and Mike pull into the driveway they are both speechless with desire for her. Kyra is withdrawn and shy by comparison. She tells Mike that the refrigerator people don't like her anymore, but Mike promises to buy her more and she brightens. She admits that she is afraid of the lady who was wearing Mattie's dress however and won't say any more when she sees Mattie coming. They are all helping to get the barbecue started when Kyra asks Mike if he will take care of her. His instant answer of yes seems to make her feel better. Mike has no idea that this promise will be put to the test before the evening is out. He has one short opportunity to finally tell Mattie how he feels and makes the decision that his reservations about pursuing a relationship with her are unfounded. He promises to use the key she left for him that night, and just her kisses are enough to send him to new heights emotionally. He needs a few minutes to gather himself afterward before going back outside, and the delay likely saves him. The car that drives by and opens fire injures John and George, but kills Mattie. Devastated, Mike holds her, reassuring her that he will take care of Kyra until he dies. The sight of her ruined face is too much for John who loses consciousness after seeing her.

Kyra wakes and asks for Mattie. Her connection with Mike shows her that Mattie is dead and her grief is indescribable. When Mike ends Foreman's life on the lawn, he comes back to get her, but she kicks and screams to be put down. He shows her just enough to convince her to stop, gives her Striken, and puts her in the car. They head for SL and the thunder is so terrifying to Kyra that she retreats to the foot well. He takes her inside, cleans her up and gives her cocoa. She has one more breakdown before finally, exhausted, just clings to Mike. He promises to look after her, and gives her Benadryl to help her sleep. Guided by unseen forces, he fills the tub, thinking about how he will quietly hold her under until she is gone, and then cut his wrists and join her, Johanna and Mattie. The thought is crazy, but persistent. The drive to do this is so strong that he almost misses the message Jo is so desperately trying to convey. Finally, he realizes that the crossword clues left for him were really in his manuscript. Each page has the message that the owls are under the studio.



Chapters 27 and 28

Chapters 27 and 28 Summary

Mike struggles to get into Jo's studio, asking her spirit for help. The forces blocking the door relent and he is in, but the struggle continues as items inside are flung around. Mike throws himself to the floor to avoid them, and feels the outline of a latch under the throw rug. He moves the rug and opens the trap door leading to a storage space beneath the studio. Sara is joined by a young black boy, different from the son that drowned with her at the lake, and the message is clear. Leave the dead to rest in peace. He finds the owls, and under one sees that the base has been removed and then covered over. He pulls the bottom away and finds Jo's Notions. Inside that are folded papers and a photo negative of Jo at the lake. The papers are clippings mostly from the local paper, the oldest from 1865. Some were about civil war veterans returning home, and others about Sara and the Red Tops. One from 1933 describes how 'local caretaker could not save daughter' and tells a story of how Fred Dean lost his daughter in a fire. The child, Carla Dean, was accidentally left behind in the confusion, and when her father Fred went back for her, he took her into the lake and drowned her. Later, he tells himself it was just a terrible accident. Another piece of paper reveals that Kenny Auster's grandfather was Mike's granduncle.

Mike goes back to the house, and finds the tub still full of lukewarm water. Sara's voice tells him he can still salvage everything by sticking to his original plan, and horrified at what he'd been thinking, he drains the tub. He goes to the site where Sara and her son were killed and is confronted by the spirits of Jared and the men who were with him that day. All are prepared to stop him, telling him he doesn't understand. Jared tells him things were different then. He explains that they were just trying to teach her what her place was. Mike realizes that the truth was far simpler. Sara was accepted by most and that stuck in the craw of those who's bigotry was larger than life. Sara had lost her life for standing up to them, and her son Kito had died for seeing it happen. Mike digs up the bag that contains their remains and disposes of them by covering them with lye. All the while, Jo's voice urges him on, telling him she can't hold them back for long. When he finishes, only Jo remains but she is fading fast. Before she is gone completely, she tells him to hurry. He races back to SL to find that Kyra is gone.

Chapters 27 and 28 Analysis

Mike can hear Jo screaming and knows Sara is unhappy that he is in the studio and begs Sara to leave her alone. Mike knows they are not in peace, so he forces himself to continue, knowing he has to. Inside one of the owls he finds news paper clippings filled with racial innuendos that referred to the Red Tops as "Southern blackbirds" or "rhythmic darkies" and a clearer picture of the times emerges. Mike has a vision of Fred Dean and sees how Carla died, watching it like a movie and in a bizarre twist, Carla seems to see Mike, asking her father who he is. Another piece of paper links Mike



directly by blood to one of the men who helped to kill Sara and Kito. Kenny Auster is Mike's granduncle. With terrible awareness, and clarity he understands that all of the deaths are linked by blood in an awful act of ongoing vengeance.

Suddenly afraid for Kyra, he returns to the house - Jo's fading spirit urging him to hurry. Sara's influence on him is so strong, and he fights her with difficulty. He knows what he has to do, and taking lye and a shovel he goes to put Sara and Kito at peace. It will not be a simple task. Jared and his cohorts confront him, trying to justify their actions by telling him times were different then and that he just doesn't understand. Oddly, Mike wants to understand though, and his questions are answered as he watches the scene unfold in front of him. At the end of it all, he can see that Sara lost her life to Jared's bigotry, and his hold over the men who admired him. Kito died for stumbling on them as they raped his mother. They try to stop him from digging up the bones, but Jo intervenes. He can hear her struggles and her urging him to hurry. When he finally uncovers them and pours lye on their remains, Mike thinks it is over, but Jo's fading spirit is still urging him to hurry. In a flash of understanding, he hurries back to SL and finds the bed Kyra was in is empty.



Chapter 29 and Epilogue

Chapter 29 and Epilogue Summary

Mike reaches out to Kyra with his mind, but the connection seems broken. He finds a single strand of white hair and remembers the clarity of the tape John played. Rogette Whitmore hadn't left the TR. He heads for Warrington's, finding Kyra's hair ribbons along the way. Trees are falling and through the noise of the storm, Mike hears their voices. Kyra tells her to go away, insisting she doesn't want her. He sees Kyra on Warrington's dock which bounces dangerously in the water. Kyra is halfway out and for every step forward Rogette makes, Kyra backs up. When she sees Mike, her face gives him away and he loses the element of surprise. With a dozen feet separating them, Mattie's form appears. In the struggle that ensues, Rogette is impaled by a piece of the dock, and finally floats away. Mattie talks to Kyra and she listens, looking over at Mike and looking back she sees her mother fade. Mike sends Mattie a kiss which she catches before disappearing completely. Then he makes his way carefully down the dock to get Kyra. She clings to him and Mike asks her what Mattie said. Kyra tells him, whispering the last part in his ear. The first car to make it down their driveway is a Power Company truck and the County Sheriff is riding with him. He approaches with gun drawn but soon sees it is unnecessary. Mike uses the pages of his new novel to make a fire in the wood stove, and Kyra discovers Jo's Notions box. Mike tells her she can have it, and Kyra realizes that Jo was one of her refrigerator people. He shows her the slide.

At Christmas it snowed six inches. Mike spends it with Frank and the Arlen family again and this time with Kyra as well. For the first time since it all began, Mike sits with Frank after everyone is sleeping and tells him the whole story from beginning to end. He leaves nothing out. He also talks to Frank about his battle to adopt Kyra, and though it is taking a long time, he is allowed weekend visits and holidays until then. It helps that Kyra tells everyone she meets that she wants to live with Mike. In the end, Mike tells Frank, Jo gambled Kyra's life on Mike and refused to give up trying to get through to him. Frank is troubled by a couple of parts of Mike's story, and he answers as best he can. He hasn't written anything new and has no desire to.

Chapter 29 and Epilogue Analysis

Mike is on the edge of panic and at risk of losing his ability to function. He heads for the lake but a lightning bolt sends a huge spruce into the lake in front of him, clearing his brain for a moment. He knows now that Kyra isn't at SL. He hurries to Warrington's where Rogette and Max stayed. Kyra has escaped Rogette and run out onto the dock, which sways and bucks with the anger of the storm. The terror in her voice is both frightening and reassuring at the same time. Rogette is insisting that Kyra come back but Kyra continues to keep her distance, her fear of Rogette larger than her fear of the heaving dock under her feet. Rogette changes tactics, trying to lure her in with promises of games but Kyra isn't in a mood to play. She tries to bribe Kyra with chocolate, but



nothing works. When Kyra notices Mike, her face lights up with relief, giving him away. Rogette turns, face filled with undisguised hatred and rage. In her face, he sees the resemblance and is certain that Rogette is Kyra's aunt. The lake finally takes her in the ensuing struggle, and Mike manages to bring Kyra to safety. As they walk back towards SL, Kyra struggles with her grief. Mike gets her back inside, and makes food which she hardly touches. The he warms the place by burning his novel. It will never see a publisher, and when Kyra asks him about it, he tells her it was a love letter. She spies the notions box Jo used and is so taken with it that Mike gives it to her. It is the first thing that makes her smile, especially once she makes the connection between the name, the slide photo, and realizes Jo was one of her refrigerator people. When the power truck comes down the driveway, the Sheriff is with him, and he approaches the front door with gun in hand. Mike takes him inside, and they stand together watching Kyra sleep. The Sheriff knows she is okay and holsters his weapon.

Mike spends that Christmas with Frank again. He lives full time in SL now, and almost all of the haunting has stopped. Occasionally, he feels Jo's presence. He is fighting for custody of Kyra, and though there are many hurdles including that he is a single man looking to adopt a young girl, but Kyra is adamant that she wants to be with him, so chances are good that he will succeed. In the meantime, he has access to her and is allowed visitation. She is with him for Christmas as well. Mike sits with Frank after every one else is in bed, and for the first time, he relays the truth in its entirety. It is like a confessional - he leaves nothing out. He doesn't write anymore these days. Having lived an event that belongs in the fiction section somewhere - living the nightmare makes writing things of that nature seem vaguely pornographic somehow. He covers over his Selectric and retires.



Characters

Mike Noonan

Mike is a novelist who is thirty-six years old. His brother Sid lives in Virginia and his mother and aunt live in Memphis. He is an independent man who isn't used to asking for help. While able to give and accept love, he is not able to ask for help, even if he truly needs it. He and Johanna were married for ten years. During that entire time, he never suffered from writer's block. His first novel, *Being Two* was completed just after they officially became engaged and she was the first one to read it. His last novel, *All the Way from the Top* was completed about one month after her death and was published in the fall of 1995.

By the time Mike is thirty-one, he and Johanna own two houses. They have an Edwardian style home in Derry and a lakeside log home in Maine called Sara Laughs that is almost big enough to be called a lodge. Around the time of George Bush's election, their accountant let them know that they were millionaires.

Mike is a good man who gives blood regularly, which is appreciated as he is an A blood type which is a more rare type. His last vacation with Jo is to Bermuda and his first without her is many years later. He goes to Key Largo for six weeks in a silent nod to Bogart and Bacall, Johanna's favorite actors.

Mattie Devore (nee Stanchfield)

Mattie Devore lives in a double wide trailer on Wasp Hill Road at Dark Score Lake. At first glance, Mattie could pass for a young girl of twelve or fourteen, but closer inspection reveals that she is more likely closer to nineteen or twenty. When Mike meets her for the first time, she is wearing paisley shorts and a Kmart style smock. She has long yellow hair that is held back by a red elastic and Mike's first impression is 'trailer trash.' She has dark circles under her eyes and a look of terror bordering on exhaustion. Her daughter, aged either three or four had taken it upon herself to go to the lake alone. In an effort to be safe, she was walking down the center line, equating it with a cross walk in her mind. Mike sees her, and pulls over to get her off the road shortly before Mattie drives by in her Scout searching for her daughter. She is reduced to tears of relief to find her daughter Kira is okay. Her husband died the previous August.

Originally from Motton, her father was a logger and her mother was a beautician. She lost her father when he missed a corner, driving his loaded pulp truck into Kewadin Pond and her mother lost her will to live and passed away soon after him. Mattie met Lance Devore when Lance was twenty one and she had just turned seventeen. They met at Warrington's where Mattie was a waitress. Mattie and Lance were inseparable from the start. Their whirlwind courtship began with a single look into her big blue eyes,



had her pregnant within mere weeks. Ten weeks later they were married and three years after that, Lance was dead.

Max Devore

Max is eighty-five years old and has been married and divorced twice. He has a daughter who has been declared incompetent mentally and is currently living in an institution, and a son named Roger. Roger is fifty four, and is married to another man named Morris Ridding. Max returned to his hometown with the express purpose of buying his granddaughter from Mattie, and when she refuses, he begins custody proceedings with the certainty that his money will overwhelm any chance she has of winning.

Max is a man who is used to getting his own way, and has lived that lifestyle since he was a young boy. When he can't get what he wants, he is willing to steal it, or obtain it any other way he can. Max is in failing health, requiring oxygen and around the clock care performed by his personal assistant. Rogette Whitmore is his constant companion who lives in his home and provides him with whatever care he requires.

Max's wheelchair is a customized chair that looks more like a motorcycle's side car. There are half a dozen chrome wheels along each side, and four larger ones that run in a row along the back giving him both traction and maneuverability on all terrains. An enclosed engine compartment is over the back wheels and a fiberglass nacelle covers his legs. A computerized avoidance system of some sort is also attached and the armrests are covered with controllers. On the left side is an oxygen tank attached to a mask that rests in his lap.

He is thin and blue lipped. The skin around his mouth and eyes is purple and corpse like. He has little more than a few tufts of white hair and his ears appear to be enormous, looking like melted wax sculptures that have spent too much time in the sun. He has a cane of black wood and is mean through and through, both in demeanor and discussion. His body appears to be rotting out from under him.

Johanna (Jo) Noonan (nee Arlen)

Johanna came from a family with five brothers who grew up in Malden, Massachusetts. Her favorite author was W. Somerset Maugham. She and Mike Noonan met and were both English majors at the University in Maine. The last book she was reading was called the Moon and the Sixpence. Finding it under her side of the bed sets off another bout of unrestrained tears. Johanna had been a sophomore when Mike was a senior and she once told him that the greatest tragedy of the mid-twentieth century literary critics was that they embrace Lawrence while ignoring Maugham. Jo's favorite actors were Bogart and Bacall. She loved to watch their old movies at The Shade, the revival movie house in Derry. Her last vacation before her death with Mike was to Bermuda.



When Jo dies unexpectedly from a brain aneurysm, she leaves her husband Mike rudderless in life. He is devastated, and reminders of her haunt him. He discovers that Jo had been living a secret life for their last year together, investigating a mystery connected to the history of their summer house called Sara Laughs. What she had discovered had frightened her so deeply that she hid the information in the base of an owl under the floorboards of her studio at the lake. After her death, her spirit helps Mike to uncover the mystery and help put the restless spirits haunting their home to rest once and for all.

Frank Arlen

Frank is the oldest of five of Johanna's brothers from Malden, Massachusetts. He is also Johanna's favorite brother, one whom she confided a great deal in, but she never told him that she suspected she was pregnant. Frank is fifty, has red cheeks, and is on the portly side. He has a head of lush, dark hair and he organized most of the arrangements after Johanna's death. Frank has been divorced for six years. Frank is like a brother to Mike after Jo dies, and a visit to the Arlen family for Christmas marks the beginning of Mike's return to the living. He is an ear when Mike needs one, and a steady familial influence that allows him to keep Jo close.

Frank is a good and honest man. He is the only one that Mike entrusts the whole truth to after the mystery at Sara Laughs is solved. Although the tale is fantastic and otherworldly, he never once questions the validity, or the truth of Mike's account. He opens his home to Mike for a second Christmas, welcoming Kyra who Mike is trying to adopt as well.

John Storrow

A lawyer who is employed by Avery, McLain, and Bernstein on Park Avenue, John's specialty is custody law. He is the lawyer who calls Mike in response to his request to his agent for someone's help in that arena. John is a man with red hair and freckles. He has what Mike refers to as 'city shins,' which are white and bony. He is an intelligent man who looks like Sheriff Andy's boy Opie grown up.

John Storrow works on Mattie's custody case against Max Devore. He is a tenacious legal mind who knows what information will be necessary to gain the advantage in a custody suit, and his personal feelings for Mattie only help to fuel his desire to win. He confesses he has feelings for her to Mike and tells him that he will actively pursue her when he is no longer her council, unaware that Mike is already emotionally invested in both Mattie and Kyra. He will not have the opportunity to act on these feelings as Mattie is gunned down in front of him at a celebration at her trailer.



Rogette Whitmore

Rogette is Max Devore's personal assistant. She is referred to by Kyra as her white Nana and from the beginning has bribed Kyra with chocolate Hershey kisses. She is a skinny, elderly woman with white hair and a face that Bill Dean describes as looking like a child's Halloween mask. Rogette is old and unsightly, but still a prize compared to her boss. She is something of an albino, with eyes that look pinkish in color at dusk, but are more likely gray. Her mouth is as equally foul as her employers, and she doesn't hesitate to join in when he is abusive, assaulting anyone who dares to cross their path. She appears to be as crazy as he is.

Rogette is also Max's sister, which makes her Kyra's aunt. Stricken with Leukemia, she has lost her hair to chemotherapy and her mind to evil. She is a vindictive and angry woman who has no good intentions. She kidnaps her niece after her brother Max commits suicide, and dies in her fight with Mike when he comes to Kyra's rescue. Her body is taken by the lake.

Bill Dean

Bill is the caretaker who looks after Sara Laughs, Mike and Jo's getaway place in Western Maine. Each spring, he takes down the storm shutters, putting them back up again each fall. He drains the pipes in the pipes each fall and ensures that the pump is running each spring. Dean also checks the generator, makes sure all the service tags are current and anchors the swimming floats about fifty years or so of the beach after each Memorial Day. He ensures that the chimney gets cleaned if the fireplace is used and for his services, Mike pays him a quarterly stipend as is the custom with most caretakers in his situation. He doesn't question why Mike has stopped coming, but doesn't stop cashing the cheques either.

Bill and Mike have had a long relationship that ends when Mike begins to help Mattie in her custody battle with Max Devore, and looks too closely at the events surrounding Sara Tidwell and her son's death years previously. After multiple warnings to Mike that he should leave while he can, he takes a different stance, telling Mike he will no longer be his caretaker. He is also responsible for the resignation of Mike's housekeeper, and is barely able to steer clear of the group who heads to her home with vengeance on their minds.

Kyra Devore

Kyra Devore is a precocious toddler with a mind of her own and a big heart. She instantly likes Mike and makes her feelings clear to him and to her mother. She has an endearing way of mixing her words and consonants and lights up any area she is present in. She also shares an unusual bond with Mike. They 'see' the same things and share the ability to know each others thoughts and feelings. Kyra has a premonition of her mother's death and begs Mike to look after her which he promises to do. It is the



only thing that helps her to deal with her grief when her mother is gunned down. She makes it clear to anyone who will listen that she wants to live with Mike, who fights for custody of her after she is orphaned.

Sara Tidwell

Sara Tidwell is an outgoing black woman who is the leader of a band called the Red Tops. The attempt to settle in the house she calls Sara Laughs in the early 1900's, thinking she and her family are accepted at the lake, and while for the most part this is true, there are a few exceptions. Bigots who believe she should be more respectful and observant of the master white race don't share her enthusiasm to stay and become part of the local community although most do. One such small minded man lies in wait with his friends and catches her walking alone one night. Sara has known men like this her entire life, and is sorry to encounter them here as well.

Her strong spirit would have saved her, despite the gang rape she endures, had she not had the temerity to laugh at their leader when he is less than ready to perform when his turn comes. Her laughter so angers him that he chokes the life out of her. As he does so, her son Tito shows up, and he orders his cohorts to drown the boy to keep their terrible secret from getting out. Sara haunts the area from that day forward, making it her mission to ensure those responsible for her and her sons deaths pay for their actions with their lives and their children.

Kito Tidwell

Kito is Sara Tidwell's son and happens upon his mother as she is being gang raped by a group of small-minded bigots in the early 1900's. His attempts to stop them by yelling draws attention to him and he is grabbed and dragged down into the lake where he is held under until he is dead. He joins his mother in haunting those responsible until Mike Noonan finally helps them both to rest in peace.

Harold Oblowski

Mike's agent, Harold is both loved and hated in publishing circles. He doesn't cope well with bad news and words like writer's block would have him hopping a flight from New York to Derry to hold Mike's hand until he overcame whatever ailment prevented him from continuing to pump out a best seller each year. He has an office on the thirty eighth floor on Park Avenue with a great view of the East Side. Harold believes he has a connection with his writers that transcends the physical. Harold believes in the Noonan formula of writing where an author religiously puts out one best seller each and every year. Not enough so that readers get sick of hearing from their favourite author, but enough so that they are not forgotten. When Mike tries to take a year off, Harold tells him that he simply isn't the kind of author who's readers would forgive a lapse of that kind.



George Kennedy

George is the private investigator who was hired by John Storrow to dig up information on the Devore family. He is a tall man with gray hair and looks like the kind of man who would be comfortable at a farmer's auction instead of in a suit and tie. He is rumored to be a riot at parties, especially once he's gotten a drink or two in him. His wife's name is Frieda, and she is a big fan of Michael Noonan's novels - her favorite and Mike's being *The Red Shirt Man*.

Ralph Roberts

Ralph Roberts is a Derry resident who with his wife Lois hands out cookies and juice at the Red Cross blood drives. Ralph is a man in his mid to late seventies. He takes a seat with Mike in the coffee shop one day and makes the observation that Mike looks tired. For the first time, Mike is inclined to be honest with someone, and admits that while he is sleeping okay, he isn't feeling well, and has the blues. Ralph suggests that Mike take a vacation - something so obvious that Mike hadn't thought of it. Not long afterward, Ralph is struck by a car and killed, and Mike can't help but think how much he owes him.

Buddy Jellison

Buddy is the best fry cook in Western Maine who plies his trade at the Village Restaurant and is known for his 'Villageburger'. He wears a dirty white cook's apron, although his finger nails are clean and his black hair is tucked under a white paper cap that is stained with something red. Buddy could be anywhere from fifty to seventy years of age, and is a big man. He shambles over to his customers - all six foot four of him - and despite his close to three hundred pounds, he could be described as almost graceful. He has a wit that drips of sarcasm and is reflected in the bumper stickers he uses for decoration. As it is in most small towns, there is a kind of dark humor at work in Buddy.

Brenda Meserve

Brenda is the cleaning woman engaged by Bill Dean to clean up Sara Laughs before Mike returns for the first time after Jo's death. She quits as his housekeeper after being pressured by Bill Dean with the threat that he will cost her the remainder of her livelihood otherwise. She is a good woman, with good intentions, who still tries to help Mike despite the knowledge that it will cost her.



Joe Wyzer

Joe is the pharmacist at the local Derry Rite Aid pharmacy. It is the destination for Johanna Noonan on the last day of her life, as she goes to obtain a home pregnancy test.

William (Bill) Fraker

William was thirty-eight years old on the day that he hit the 1989 Toyota driven by Mrs. Esther Easterling of Barrett's Orchards. He had been putting down asphalt with three other men on the extension of Harris Avenue near the airport and he was ready for a cold shower and a cold beer. He was also looking forward to the air conditioned F-150 that he had left in the parking lot. The brakes on the dump truck weren't great, and when the Toyota pulled out in front of him .

Jared Devore

Max Devore's father, Jared is the ringleader who rapes and then kills Sara Tidwell and orders his cohorts to kill her son Kito. He is a small-minded bigot who believed that he was only teaching the 'nigger' her place in the community. His spirit attempts to stop Mike from uncovering the truth and exposing him

Romeo Bissonette

Romeo is the lawyer who sat with Mike for his deposition and played chaperon, coming to his aid when necessary. He likes to be called Rommie by his friends.

Kenny Auster

Kenny is one of the locals of the TR with whom Max exhibits pressure and control over and a descendant of one of the rapists and murderers who killed Sara Tidwell and her son Kito.

Gerry Bliss

Gerry is the stenographer who sat in at Mike's deposition and one of the last of his kind to still use a stenomask.



Mrs. Esther Easterling

Esther is a tobacco widow. She is an elderly woman who pulled out in front of the Public Works dump truck driven by William Fraker, leaving him no where to go. She suffers three broken ribs and a dislocated hip as a result.

Mrs. Irene Deorsey

Irene was the passenger in the car with Esther when they were hit by the Public Works dump truck driven by Bill Fraker. She suffered a concussion in the accident.

Debra Weinstock

Debra is Mike's editor.

Mark Quinlan

Mark is the manager of Fidelity Union where Mike keeps his safe deposit box.



Objects/Places

Derry

This is the town that Mike and Johanna Noonan lived in at 14 Benton Street.

Rite Aid

This is the name of the pharmacy Johanna went to on the day she died.

Jack's Pub

This is the pub that Frank and Mike sat in after making arrangements.

Fairlawn Cemetery

This is the site where Johanna is buried.

Fidelity Union

This is the bank where Mike kept his safety deposit box containing manuscripts not yet published.

FedEx

This is the shipping company Mike uses to ship his manuscripts to his editor.

Sara Laughs

This is the name of the retreat in western Maine that Mike and Johanna own off of TR90 in Castle County, Western Maine.

Word Six

This is the program Mike uses to write his novels.



Dark Score Lake

This is one of the deepest and cleanest lakes in Western Maine and the lake on which Sara Laughs is located.

The Shade

This is Derry's revival movie house.

Key Largo

This is the location of the first vacation Mike has taken since Johanna died and taken many years after her death.

Kia

This is the name meaning 'season's beginning' and the name Mike and Jo would have given to a first born daughter.

Kyra

This name means 'ladylike' and is the name Mattie Devore gave her daughter.

ELFF's

Evil Little Fat Folks who take great pleasure in despising anyone who can look down and still see their own feet.

Bunter

This is the name of the moose head hanging in Sara Laughs with a bell around it's neck.

Crosspatches

This is Kyra's word for crosswords.

Refrigerator People

This is the name Kyra has for the entities that use her fridge magnets as a method of communication.



Avery, McLain, and Bernstein

This is the legal firm that Mike calls upon located on Park Avenue to help Mattie and Kyra.

Castle County Airport

This is the airport that John Storrow flies into to see Mattie, Kyra, and Mike.

Peter Luger's

This is the place that John insists have the best steaks in the world.

Stenomask

This is used by stenographers to keep an accurate record as it records everything quietly spoken into it, repeated verbatim from conversations being recorded.

My Childhood Friend

This is the name of the only novel written by Mike after Johanna's death and the only one that would never see publication.

Red Tops

This is the name of Sara Tidwell's band.

Fryeburg Fair

This is the name of the county fair that Mike found himself and Kyra attending in an episode of time displacement.

Tiu

This is the Japanese word for extreme happiness.

Stricken

This is Kyra's pronunciation of Strickland which was what Mike named the small stuffed dog that was part of Kyra's Happy Meal and at her request.



Crossmock

This is Kyra's 'crosswalk.'

Slips 'n Greens

This is the name of the greenhouse and market combination that Johanna favored and run by Helen Auster, Kenny's wife.

Allamagoosalum

This is the corruption of the word the Micmac use for 'boogeyman,' which Max used to describe the demon the previous winter in his discussion with Kyra.

Jo's Notions

This is the silver box Jo secreted inside one of the owls she bought.



Themes

Love's Connections Know No Boundaries

When Mike loses his wife unexpectedly and without warning of any kind, his life is derailed. Even the one escape that he has always been able to count on, his writing, fails him. He is so filled with remorse and with regret that it manifests itself at the computer to such a degree he actually becomes physically ill at the thought of writing again. He covers this inability, telling himself it is simple writer's block, and using manuscripts he has written in previous years as current submissions, and for four years he coasts. He never once thinks about how closed off he could become when he was writing, and how much of Johanna he shut out in his Narnia like creations.

After four years in emotional limbo, Mike finally decides to go to the retreat he and Johanna purchased. Sara Laughs has been empty since before Johanna died, and Mike's return opens up a flood of changes, bringing love back into his life despite his best attempts to talk himself out of it. When Mike first meets Mattie, he feels a connection that cannot be denied. It seems as though they can feel each others thoughts, and see into each others lives. At first, Mike resists. He tells himself he is too old for her, and despite her unabashed and honest interest in him, he holds her at a careful arms length and all the while he feelings for her and for her daughter Kyra grow. Complicated by John Storrow's attentions and interest, Mike finally manages to tell Mattie that his feelings for her are genuine. He even agrees to come to her that night, but fate has other ideas. Before the evening is over, Mattie is dead, and this love is denied Mike again. He almost commits the ultimate sin wrapped up in sacrifice, yielding to pressure from unseen forces to take Kyra's life and his own directly afterward, but the spirit of Johanna intervenes. Her love for him manifests itself in a dozen little ways, all designed to point him in the right direction and to help him. Her enduring love allows her to stay long enough to ensure that Kyra is safe, and that Mike is able to put the demons of the past to rest once and for all. The boundaries that exist between life and death are blurred at best, and at times do not exist at all in Bag of Bones.

High Price of Rest in Peace

Small towns like the one on the TR where Sara Laughs exists often have their own kind of community connections where everyone seems to know everyone, and outsiders are seldom welcomed with open arms. This lakeside resort locale is no different. It is the kind of town where if you are accepted, you become part of an extended family with all of its warts and blemishes. Mike learns that Sara Laughs has a history that goes back to the late 1800's when a musical group led by a black woman named Sara Tidwell occupied the house. Sara had an outgoing personality, and was well received by almost all of the permanent residents on the TR, but there were a few exceptions. These exceptions existed largely because of prejudice, and the Devore family, strong in those days as well, led others in their hatred for any black person who believed they could



walk the same street as proper white folks did. Max's father Jared was a strong willed man with the ability to lead others. His leadership led a small group of men to ambush Sara Tidwell as she took her evening walk.

Taking turns, they raped her, sodomized her and tried to break her spirit. The only thing they didn't count on was Sara's strength. Even after they had taken their turns with her, and their fearless leader Jared was finally ready to take his turn, she found humor in the physical difficulties he was having. She laughed at him, likely sealing her fate. That by itself would not have caused her to remain tied to the earth for so many years, but at that moment her son Kito sees what is happening and tries to defend his mother. As Jared Devore chokes the life out of her, his cohorts are drowning her son. Her rage is unrelieved. She haunts the area from that day forward first making it impossible for them to forget their actions, and then ensuring that any offspring that came through that family suffered a poetically similar fate. She was unable to rest in peace until the truth was known, and her remains disposed of once and for all. In the years that follow her death, many children will be given names that begin with the letter K. This is a disproportionate number that is confined to the locals who were involved in her death and her family's subsequent suffering. The entire area pays a high price for their silent acceptance of an act of racial intolerance that led to murder.

Consequences of Intolerance and Racial Bias

Max's father Jared Devore was a bigot and truly believed that men and women of 'color' were second class citizens as best. While he was content to listen to their music or eat their food, he thought that they should be aware of their place at all times and that place was somewhere several levels beneath common house servant. As such, he had no tolerance for them behaving like white folk. They were not supposed to walk on the same streets as white people, use the same facilities, eat at the same tables, or enjoy the same levels of respect. Any black people who believed they were even approaching equal were considered to be uppity and in Jared's eyes required a lesson in humility and respect for their betters.

Sara Tidwell believed she had finally found a place that she could be free. Having traveled a great deal with her band, she had seen all walks of life and was more than just a little aware of the kinds of prejudices that existed. When she and her group came to the TR, the acceptance she felt seemed genuine. People didn't talk down to her or look for a quick way to wash after contact with her. In fact, it seemed as though she had finally found a place that she and her traveling troupe could relax. Her son Kito, the light in her life, was old enough to know that prejudices existed but she was hoping to raise him in a place where they weren't prevalent. Jared would have been happy had they just moved on, but instead, they took the liberty of owning property - a direct insult to every white person in the area to his mind and even had the nerve to eat the same quality of foods and in some cases even better than those his white friends could afford.

It was a personal affront to Jared and he spent months railing against the unseemly behavior whenever he and his followers got together. They carefully planned the



ambush of Sara Tidwell, and her subsequent rape to show her what her place was. She was something to be used by white folk so obviously better than her. Without Jared egging them on, none of the other men involved would likely have done anything to Sara. In truth, most men found her to be quick to laugh, fun to be around, intelligent, and sexy. The surprise was that so did the women. They exchanged recipes, talked about children, and shared experiences. It could have been a good life for all.

When Sara was raped and killed along with her son for the simple crime of living somewhere that Jared could see them, he set in motion events that would cost many lives over two generations. Any seed that sprang forth from that family would lose a child, and often in a way similar to how she lost her son. The children who died all mysteriously had names that began with the letter K, although the parents believed they had come to the name on their own. Lastly, the children who died often did so at the hands of their father. While Bag of Bones paints a picture of malevolent spirits intent on wreaking havoc for revenge, the underlying message of intolerance is clear. In those days, and sometimes even now, intolerance and racial bias has severe consequences that may not always be immediately recognized, but that pass from one generation down to another and can have far reaching effects.



Style

Point of View

Bag of Bones by Stephen King is written entirely in the first person perspective through the eyes of the main character, Mike Noonan. The narrative is reliable and consistent, with a great deal of importance placed on how events affect Mike directly as they unfold. In the beginning, Mike loses his wife unexpectedly which would seem to be the greatest tragedy of a lifetime, but Mike will discover throughout the novel that there are much worse things in life than simply losing the one you love. He will learn lessons about greed, influence, money, and bigotry that will affect him for the rest of his life, and throughout it all, his wife, although long dead and buried will be his steadfast support and source of information. Johanna Noonan had discovered the truth about their vacation home Sara Laughs and uncovered a murder and rape that is at the heart of many subsequent accidental deaths. Jo finds a way to communicate this to her husband and lead him to the only solution possible. Mike must uncover the long buried secret that binds the area together and expose it to the light of day. Only then will the region known as the TR be set free from the long reaching affects of the past.

Setting

The novel Bag of Bones is set entirely in the state of Maine. It opens in the town of Derry where author Mike Noonan and his wife Johanna live. They are a happy couple but fate takes Johanna from Mike after she witnesses and accident, and his life will be altered in ways he would never have believed possible. In the course of the next five years he will find the depths of despair and the heights of love. For four of those years, Mike will not leave the area of Derry but for an occasional short trip that is inconsequential to the story line. He admits to a certain stagnant depression an an old timer in town will casually suggest that he take a vacation. Mike does so, but even six weeks in Key Largo can't fix what ails him. Mike has been unable to begin a new novel since his wife's death, and in an act of desperation, he seeks to confront the demons that bring nightmares to his sleep by returning to the vacation home he remembers enjoying so much with Johanna. It is a move that is what Johanna has been waiting for even after death. Mike must help the residents of the TR-90 uncover the secret that binds them together in a knot of far reaching betrayal of wealth and racism and the cover up that follows. The bulk of this novel is set in the vacation home known as Sara Laughs.

Language and Meaning

Though Stephen King writes his novel Bag of Bones in ordinary and uncomplicated English, he is a master with descriptive phrasing and has an ability to draw a picture that can be readily envisioned by his readers. Without being overly dramatic, he



manages to weave a story of death and communication from beyond the grave that is as touching as it is frightening. As the story unfolds, the reader will be as frightened for the main character as they are disgusted by the behavior of his adversaries, and there are a great many opportunities for the protagonist to overcome mistakes made by those who came before him. In a startling twist, Mike Noonan will discover skeletons in his own closet, and find that he is more deeply involved in the haunting of the area of Dark Score Lake than he realized. As a descendant of one of the men involved in the rape and murder of a black woman and her child, he is held as equally responsible as are the descendants of the other members involved, but only Mike will be given the key to helping these souls finally rest in peace. In a strange twist, Mike decides to sell his home in Derry and move permanently to the Dark Score Lake home called Sara Laughs, enabling him to be closer to the two women who will forever be the loves of his life.

Structure

Bag of Bones is written over seven hundred pages and divided into twenty-nine chapters and an epilogue. Each chapter is a stepping stone that draws the reader forward into the drama of Mike Noonan's life. His despair over the loss of his wife will lead him from depression to denial, and then on to forgiveness and curiosity as King weaves a tale of life, death and the blurring lines in between. Mike Noonan will learn that leaving this earth when life ends does not necessarily mean that communication with the mortal plane is over. His wife, though gone from his life for four years will continue to send him messages through everything from fridge magnets to pages in his new novel in an attempt to draw his attention to the terrible wrong committed so many years before. Mike goes from being a disbeliever to a convert as the vacation house known as Sara Laughs shows him how indistinct the lines between life and death can be. Though beset by spirits he has little control over, Mike will be lucky enough to find love twice in his life, and through the second the child that he and Johanna always wanted but never quite managed to have. This story is both a horror story and love story carefully mingled into one narrative.



Quotes

"She was always the sweetest thing in my life." (Chapter 1, p. 13).

"Here's to you, Babe...I wish you were here. I miss you like hell." (Chapter 2, p. 34).

"You look like someone who's caught on something and can't get loose." (Chapter 5, p. 105).

"Oh, by the way - I don't know where you got my telephone number, but I know where you can put it." (Chapter 8, p. 165).

"I don't know that Lance Devore's old man absolutely refused to help em financially, but I do know they were living in that trailer down below Dickie's Garage, and that makes me think they were havin a pretty hard skate." (Chapter 10, p. 204).

"I don't think I really am (a realist), but I know a hawk from a handsaw." (Chapter 11, p. 236).

"He wasn't exactly thrilled when I told him I'd had you over to dinner last night, though." (Chapter 14, p. 315).

"He'll be there in his fancy wheelchair, laughing and clapping and sucking his damned old oxygen every fifteen minutes or so." (Chapter 15, p. 354).

"M. offers you a very simple deal: if you promise to cease asking questions about him, and if you promise to cease all legal maneuvering - if you promise to let him rest in peace, so to speak - then Mr. Devore promises to cease efforts to gain custody of his granddaughter." (Chapter 18, p. 436).

"I'm done with her. I'll never go through that door again, Frank." (Chapter 20, p. 485).

"I taggled my own quartermack." (Chapter 21, p. 501).

"Oh sugar, I'm almost back." (Chapter 23, p. 562).

"All that and a bag of chips." (Chapter 25, p. 584).

"So that's all right, isn't it?" (Chapter 28, p. 692).

"You take the people who work in those bureaucracies (DHS) one by one and they're mostly fine, but when you put them together" (Epilogue, p. 717).

Topics for Discussion

What place does Mike not return to for many years after Johanna's death and why is that?

How does Mike handle his writer's block?

What does Mike discover when he first talks to Bill Dean at Sara Laughs? Why does it rattle him?

Who does Mike meet for the first time when he returns to SL? What is significant about their meeting and in which ways will this change the course of his life?

What is the significance of The Childhood Friend? Why does it never see publication?

What happens to Mattie and why?

How is Sara Tidwell significant to this story?

How many entities seem to be inhabiting SL and who are they?

What happened to Sara and why?

What does Mike discover about the names of locals in the TR? How is this important?

What does Sara almost make Mike do and how does he stop her influence?

What is the last thing Mattie tells Kyra?

What do John Storrow and Mike have in common and is there ever a time that it is a problem? If so, when and how?

What does Mike find under the floor in Johanna's studio? Why is it so important?

Who does Mike tell the entire story to? Is it believed and what supports your answer?