

Barely Breathing Study Guide

Barely Breathing by Rebecca Donovan

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Plot Summary

“Barely Breathing” is a young adult novel by Rebecca Donovan. It is the second installment of her Breathing Series. “Barely Breathing” focuses on the six months of Emma’s life after she was murdered and resuscitated by her adoptive aunt, Carol. Emma has since been living with her best friend Sara and her family. Rachel, Emma’s mother, convinces Emma to move in with her, and Emma hesitantly accepts, hoping to reconnect with her mother.

The move is disastrous. Rachel is a drunk and a drug addict who also appears to be mentally unbalanced. Rachel’s twenty-four year-old boyfriend Jonathon ends up developing a connection with Emma, who is reluctant to break it because they both understand darkness in life. This complicates things with Evan, Emma’s boyfriend.

After Emma is savagely beaten by her mother’s drug dealer, she decides she has had enough of living with Rachel. However, when Evan and Jonathon fight one another, Emma realizes that she will only ever hurt the good people in her life, and she heads to California for college, forcing Evan to stay East. She tells Jonathon that she never wants to see him again.



Prologue - Chapter 9

Summary

Prologue

The prologue takes on the form of a journal entry. Six months before, Emma Thomas had died. But, she has been resuscitated. How, she does not know. The culprit is Carol, Emma's step aunt. Emma's Uncle George was the one to call the paramedics. Carol can no longer hurt Emma. The court records from the case have been sealed; Emma believes it is thanks to Sara's father. Despite everything seeming to move on, Emma still hurts deeply. Her ankle will never be the same, and nothing else in the world feels the same. Emma is not sure her friends Sara and Evan will understand it. Emma longs to get out of Weslyn, Connecticut, but she still has six months to go.

Chapter 1

Emma has a nightmare and awakes to see a terrified Sara. She and her family, the McKinleys, have taken in Emma. Emma's real mother then calls, asking if Emma will live with her because she lives in Weslyn, now. Emma will be moving in on Sunday. Emma's mother is excited at the prospect of reconnecting with her daughter. Anna, who is Sara's mother, and her husband Carl have guardianship of Emma. They want to meet Emma's mother before they allow her to move in. Sara is angry at Emma's quick decision to move out. Emma feels as if she should give her mother another chance; Sara disagrees. They get ready for a New Year's dinner with the Mathews family. Vivian personally invited them. Emma looks beautiful, but Sara, Emma thinks, looks gorgeous. Emma then receives a text from Anna and Carl, who speak with Rachel, Emma's mother, and they decide to allow her to move in with Rachel.

Emma and Sara go to meet Jared and Evan. Jared is literally amazed by Sara's beauty. They arrive at dinner with Vivian and her husband Stuart. After dinner, in the bathroom, Emma overhears Stuart telling Evan that Emma is not worth giving up Yale for and that he won't let his son throw his life away. Emma is crushed that Stuart does not approve of her. Later, they head to the ballroom for the dance. Vivian tells Emma and Sara that she is glad they could attend, and it is revealed that both Evan and Jared have had dance lessons. However, Jared had failed them. Evan is surprised to hear that Emma will be moving back in with her mother. As Evan goes to dance with his mom, Emma tries to make conversation with Stuart, who refuses to speak to her.

Later, Vivian is honored for her philanthropy, and Emma congratulates her. Vivian hugs her and tells her that she is so glad Emma is there with them. Evan then tells Emma that they are going somewhere.

Chapter 2



Evan pulls a backpack out of his BMW, giving Emma her tennis shoes. Emma realizes that whatever is going on, Sara is in on it too, for she would have been the one to give Emma's tennis shoes to Evan. They go for a walk to a house owned by friends of Vivian, who gave their permission for Evan to use their fireplace. Nearby is Emma's gift on a table. It is two concert tickets. Evan wants to take her to her first concert. Emma's gift to Evan is the news that she has gotten into Stanford through early admission. Evan is thrilled, and looks forward to seeing which colleges accept him, so that he can join Emma wherever she is. Evan is determined to go to California with Emma, despite the wishes of his father, he tells her.

Evan declares that he is going to teach her how to dance. As they dance to music, Evan tells Emma she is amazing. Emma suggests that they go back to the hotel. As they head back to the hotel, they wonder if Jared and Sara have also hooked up. Evan then asks Emma about moving back in with her mother. Emma explains she wants to reconnect. Evan tells her he believes the coming year will be better. When they get to the hotel, Evan tells Emma they don't have to go into things with expectations. They should let things happen naturally. Emma insists that she has been waiting to have sex with Evan for six months. Evan says the same. As they get to the hotel room, they realize that Sara and Jared have not gone to bed with each other, so sex is out of the question for the night. Sara finds it hysterical. Sara tells Emma, as they go to sleep, that it will be the best year of their lives.

Chapter 3

Sara explains that she didn't sleep with Jared because she needs to forget about him because she and Emma will be living in California. After they get home on New Year's Day, Emma and Sara watch romantic comedies. Sara asks Emma if she wants to go to a party that night, and Emma declines, worried someone will be too drunk and will ask personal questions about the past. She tells Sara to go and have a good time. Emma also gets a letter in the mail, postmarked from Boca Raton, Florida. After Sara goes to the party, Emma opens the envelope to find a drawing by Leyla and Jack, her step siblings. The drawing is of their father and a woman whom Emma believes to be someone other than Carol. She breaks down and cries. Anna comforts her and tells her she understands why Emma wants to move in with her mother. Anna tells Emma that if things don't work out, she is welcome back any time. She goes on to say that they all love Emma, and they would do anything for her. Emma thanks her and then goes to get some ice cream with Anna in the kitchen.

Sara and Anna bring Emma to her mother's. Carl tells Emma that it has been great to have her with them. Emma is moved by this. As they head toward Emma's mother's, Emma recounts how she felt safe with the McKinleys.

Chapter 4

They arrive at Emma's mother's place, a quaint two-story house at the end of a street near the woods that surround the neighborhood. It turns out that the day before, Emma, Sara, and Rachel spent the day shopping for things for Emma's room, which looks



beautiful. Sara tells Emma that Rachel is probably more nervous than she is and that she doesn't think Emma has anything to worry about. As Anna and Sara leave, Emma is nervous to be alone with Rachel. Rachel seems just as nervous. Rachel asks if she can come to Emma's next basketball game, and Emma consents. Evan swings by for a visit, and Rachel is happy to let him in. But Evan can tell she is nervous. Evan brings photographs to Emma as a surprise. There are photographs of her playing soccer, of her just hanging, and of them together.

Rachel orders pizza for dinner, inviting Evan to stay over. After dinner, Emma lies and says she has to work on a paper so she can be alone. She realizes that she has barely spoken to her mother in five years, but they are roommates now.

Chapter 5

Evan picks Emma up for school the following morning. Evan is amused, noting that when Emma is nervous, she says nothing. However, when Rachel is nervous, she talks a lot. At school, Sara is thrilled to see Emma. Jill says good morning and tells them that Michaela's party ended in disaster with the premature return home of her parents. They discovered Nick and Tara having sex on their bed. A freshman named Joel Rederick passes by, sneering at Emma, telling her he is glad she "survived" vacation. Immediately, Evan pins the guy to the wall, and several other seniors surround Joel. Evan tells him to not ever walk down the senior halls again. Emma thanks Evan, and then she sees that something is wrong with Sara, but Sara won't talk about it.

After basketball practice, Emma and her mother make a shopping list. On the way to the store, Rachel tells Emma she wants to be friends. She wants to get to know Emma. Emma smiles and says she would like that. Rachel tells Emma that she can call her Rachel instead of mom. Rachel offers to teach Emma how to cook, and Emma says she would be happy to try, though her past attempts had been failures. Rachel is happy that Emma has Evan, and she is sad that she will never find another one like Derek, Emma's deceased father. After they shop, Rachel cooks dinner, explaining things to Emma as she goes.

That night, Emma wakes up to hear a crash outside her room. Her mother is drunk, which disappoints Emma. Rachel has dropped stacked photographs of Derek. She had forgotten how much Emma looks like Derek, and she wanted to bring out the old pictures of him. Unable to deal with the emotional trauma, she ends up throwing them all down the stairs. Emma guides her mother to bed and cleans up the mess below, hoping that her mother won't be drunk every night. Emma dumps the rest of her mother's bottle of vodka down the sink.

Chapter 6

When Emma wakes up for school, Rachel has already left for work, texting her apologies. After practice, Emma finds her mother rushing around to get ready, and Emma tells her not to worry about dinner. Rachel says her friends don't like it that she is always so late. Emma pretends she has a lot of homework, so her mother won't be



upset. Her mother explains she had these plans before she knew that Emma would be moving in. A snow storm that night means no school the next day, and Emma awakens to find a strange man named Chris in the house. He looks to be about Jared's age. He helps himself to some cereal and then goes out to start Rachel's car at her request. Chris is obviously involved with Rachel, and Emma is not prepared for Rachel's lifestyle. Over time, Rachel brings more guys home.

Emma has a nightmare, which scares her to death, waking up Rachel. It happens several more times, and Rachel knows there is nothing that can be done.

Chapter 7

Rachel reveals that she is dating someone who is twenty-eight, whom she really likes. Emma tells her to not worry about the age if neither of them is concerned with it. Before rushing out to work, Rachel ends up hugging Emma, which stuns her. Rachel later texts Emma, saying she has another date with the same guy that night, and it makes Emma laugh happily. Emma explains to Sara that she hasn't gone into too much detail about Rachel's lifestyle, worried that Evan will be worried about Emma being in the same house with strange men. After a late practice, Emma rushes home to find she is alone. She hops into the shower. After she gets out of the shower and wraps herself in a towel, she realizes a man named Jonathon is also there. He is looking for Rachel. He apologizes for just walking in and leaves. Emma rushes back down the stairs after he leaves and locks the door. She then rushes to get ready for her concert date with Evan. Emma has a wonderful time and thanks Evan with a long kiss. That night, Emma has a nightmare, which she is startled out of by Rachel, who is angry at being awakened.

Chapter 8

Rachel is continuing to date Jonathon, and she is as happy as a sixteen year-old about it. She apologizes again about being drunk a few weeks back. Rachel says that Jonathon wants to meet her, so that she won't feel uncomfortable if he comes around. Emma pretends to be excited about meeting him, though she dreads it after their first meeting.

The meeting is to be at a steakhouse, but Rachel is late at work. Emma reluctantly agrees to meet Jonathon as scheduled, remembering that he has intense brown eyes. He appears to be the all-American quarterback type to Emma, definitely in his twenties. Jonathon says they don't have to have dinner if Emma doesn't want to, but Emma insists on it, wanting to be nice to her mother. Jonathon tells Emma she is just like her mother, though she doesn't look like her mother. He explains that he met her mother at work. His architectural firm is collaborating on work with her engineering firm. Jonathon explains that Rachel wouldn't go out with him for the longest time because of the age thing; Emma says that age shouldn't matter. Emma notices all the women in the restaurant are staring at him. Jonathon says it is because he was a jeans model in college. They probably recognize him from the ads.



Emma tells Jonathon about playing basketball; Jonathon reveals he played football, though only second string. Rachel arrives a short time later. Rachel obviously likes Jonathon, and Jonathon definitely cares for her. Emma leaves early to meet Evan. Also, she is not ready to see her mother dating. Jonathon is invited back to the house by Rachel. At home, Evan is introduced to Jonathon, and he later tells Emma that Jonathon is not the man he was expecting. Sara arrives a moment later. Sara is also ridiculously impressed by Jonathon, finding him very attractive. Evan looks troubled.

Chapter 9

Rachel is nervous about whether or not Jonathon really likes her, and Emma tells her to stick with Jonathon, to not count herself out if she really likes him. Rachel is amused she is getting dating advice from her seventeen year-old daughter. The first night Jonathon spends at the house, Emma has nightmares. He wonders if she is okay, and Rachel tells Jonathon to come back to bed. The next morning, Emma sees Jonathon in his work attire as he heads out the door. He tells Emma that he was worried that he woke her up. Emma says he didn't, and he waves to leave. Emma waves back, realizing she has watched him leave and her hand is still in the air.

At her next basketball game, a win for Weslyn, Emma is stunned to find that Jonathon has also attended the game with her mother. Emma is nervous, as if she has never seen Jonathon before. Emma then attends a party with Sara, and Emma wants to know why Sara told Evan that he couldn't hang out with them at the party. Sara says she needs girl time with Emma, and she is unhappy with how much Evan spends time with them. Jill and Casey ask about Jonathon. They think he is hotter than Evan, which causes Emma to leave the conversation. Sara and Emma leave the party after Sara is introduced to a visiting boy from New Hampshire. Emma asks Sara what is wrong, but she refuses to answer. Evan meets Emma outside. He tells her the cops raided the party just after she and Sara left. They decide to do something to make Sara smile, figuring it has to do with Jared. So they build a snowman for Sara.

Analysis

When Rebecca Donovan's novel "Barely Breathing" begins, Emma is literally barely breathing. She has managed to be resuscitated after being murdered by her aunt. She goes to live with Sara and Sara's family. Emma feels safe with the McKinley family. But, her desire to reconnect with Rachel, her mother, compels her to move in with her. Rachel has not been around Emma for five years. The reader already knows early on that this is a rash and ridiculous decision to have made. Emma immediately discovers her mother still has a drinking problem, and it shows through time and time again. Indeed, Emma is turned off by Rachel's lifestyle of multiple men, drugs, and alcohol. Indeed, Rachel's dangerous lifestyle also dangerously impacts Emma's life, with the emergence of Jonathon.

At first, it is not apparent that there is some sort of connection between Jonathon and Emma. Over time, something of a friendship develops between the two. However,



something seems amiss about the friendship. Emma has barely survived a horrible set of living conditions before moving in with her mother. Now, perhaps, she has voluntarily placed herself in more danger.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Emma decide to move back in with her mother? Is this a sound decision? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Rachel says she gets drunk? Is this believable? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Emma and Jonathon seem to connect with one another fairly quickly. Why do you think this occurs?

Vocabulary

Impromptu, implored, ingenious, Hellenic, exquisite, nonchalant, quaint, tentative, feral, oblivious, inadvertent, disheveled, jubilantly, enthralled, infamous.



Chapter 10 - Chapter 18

Summary

Chapter 10

The next morning, Sara is angry, having kicked over the snowman. Emma goes home, finding the door unlocked. She is startled to find Jonathon in her room. He apologizes, saying that Rachel told him to use her computer to check his e-mail. Emma turns red at overreacting, and Jonathon asks if she always turns that red, because it is cute. He apologizes for their first meeting, saying Rachel had told him to just come in. He realizes he has made Emma more uncomfortable, and apologizes for it. Emma feels more confident then. Rachel is a little uneasy to see them both come out of Emma's room, and Jonathon explains he was checking his e-mail. Suddenly, Rachel's suspicions are gone. Emma spends the rest of Saturday alone, and goes out for a pizza and a movie rental.

When she gets home, Jonathon is watching television, and Rachel is sick in bed. Emma invites Jonathon to watch the movie with her, which turns out to be a horror film. Afterwards, they watch sports shows, which all talk about the Superbowl the following day. Jonathon regrets that he will not be able to watch it, since he is going to be hanging out with Rachel and her friends. That night, Emma has more nightmares, and she reluctantly opens her door when Jonathon asks her to. He explains to her that when she has nightmares, she shouldn't go back to sleep. She should get up, get some water, watch some television, do something so that nightmare isn't waiting for her when she goes back to sleep. She decides to stay awake with Jonathon for a little while. Emma curls up under a blanket on the couch, while Jonathon takes the loveseat. Emma wonders how he knows about nightmares. She also notices his strong jawline. He tells her things will get better; and she asks him how he knows. Jonathon tells her to believe him, that things do get better.

Chapter 11

The next morning, Emma volunteers to make her sick mother some tea, while Jonathon says he will go out and get flu medicine. Rachel asks if Emma likes Jonathon, and Emma says that Jonathon is okay. When Jonathon returns, Emma tells him it looks like he will get to watch the Superbowl after all, and says she can take care of her mother if Jonathon wants to leave. Jonathon says he will stay, that it is okay, and asks where Evan and Sara are. Emma says she doesn't know where Sara is, and that Evan is at Cornell with his brother. Emma runs to the grocery store while Jonathon tends to Rachel. Jonathon then helps Emma bring in the food. He has to go out for a little while, and leaves Emma his number in case she needs anything.

Emma spends the time texting Evan, letting him go for kickoff. When Jonathon returns, he explains he had some things to do, such as getting a haircut, hitting the gym, and



running by his place to check on everything. He has a beer while Emma has a Mountain Dew. Sara comes over during the third quarter. Emma and Sara go up into Emma's room to talk. Sara apologizes for being so mean to Emma. She is jealous of what Emma and Evan have. Sara wants the same kind of connection with someone. Emma tells Sara to give it a chance with Jared, but Sara is afraid of losing her heart. Sara wants to throw a party the following weekend, and insists Emma help her. Emma agrees. It will be a Love Stinks party, at which touching the opposite sex is not allowed. Sara tells Emma not to screw things up with Evan. She and Emma then watch the fourth quarter with Jonathon. Jonathon comes down with the flu for most of the week, around the time that Emma begins to get sick.

Chapter 12

While all the girls dress like gothic vixens, Emma is given a squirt gun to squirt people who do not follow the rules of no touching, kissing, or hooking up. Evan finds Emma's slutty gothic look hot. Jill, Sarah, and Karen are also armed with water guns. Later in the evening, Jared shows up with black roses for Sara. Later, Emma finds Jared and Sara upstairs, with Jared singing and playing guitar for Sara. Sara and Emma go to the basement for more ice. Emma later finds Jared and Sara kissing, and she shoves them in the pool. Evan then shoves Emma in the pool, and follows. Lot of people begin to jump in.

That night, a drunken Rachel calls Emma, accusing Emma of not wanting to live with her anymore. Jonathon takes the phone from Emma, asking Emma if she is okay. Emma says she is not, and Jonathon explains that Rachel had too much to drink, and that they had gotten into an argument. Jonathon tells her to go back to sleep, that it will be over in the morning. Evan then finds Emma, asking her if she is okay, and Emma replies that she is, that her mother just forgot she was spending the night at Rachel's. Evan then holds Emma.

Chapter 13

Emma gets up early to help clean the house after the party. Sara explains that after New Year's, Jared wanted a relationship, and kept trying, but Sara kept refusing, and eventually Jared stopped –which is what made Sara so angry. Sara will be going to Florida for February break, while Evan and Jared go to Tahoe. Sara then decides to call cleaning ladies instead. Evan brings Emma home, promising her a better Valentine's Day date when he gets home. Emma dreads going home. Emma tells Evan she is just worried about the miscommunication with her mother, and she says if anything was truly wrong, she would tell him.

At home, Emma finds a happy Rachel, which is the opposite of what she expected to find. Rachel is overseeing Jonathon making salsa, for "Margarita Call Out of Work Day." When Sara leaves the room, Jonathon explains that he needs some space to breathe, but it all came out wrong, because it was Valentine's Day. Emma spends the rest of the day sleeping, and showers after it gets dark out. She falls asleep on the couch, watching television, and is awoken by Jonathon, telling her she should go up to sleep. It



is after two in the morning. Emma asks what he is doing up. He explains he was stepping away from a bad dream. He explains that he is probably going to be attending graduate school in D.C., but that he is happy to be with Rachel because Rachel doesn't ask him questions about his past. He is just worried that Rachel needs him too much, and he doesn't want any pressure. Emma says her mother has always needed someone, and Jonathon isn't sure if it is him that she needs. Emma wonders what Rachel sees in Jonathon that reminds Rachel of her father. Emma asks Jonathon not to hurt her mother; he says he doesn't want to hurt her, either.

Chapter 14

A week goes by, and Rachel appears to be adjusting to Jonathon's absence. She worries Jonathon will leave her. A few nights later, she gets a call from Mick's place in Stenton. Her mother is drunk. Emma calls Jonathon to ask for his help. He agrees immediately. He tells her everything will be okay. He also tells her to stay in the car when he goes to get Rachel, because Mick's is not the nicest place. It is a ramshackle bar. Jonathon tells Emma once more to stay in the car. Several burly patrons by the door begin checking Emma out. When Jonathon brings Rachel out, one of the men says Jonathon should let him have a taste of one of the girls. Jonathon and the man stand toe-to-toe, Jonathon ready to defend Emma. Emma begs him to leave, and they get in the car and leave.

Jonathon puts Rachel to bed. He and Emma then sit on the couch together. Jonathon blames himself; Emma says he shouldn't. She asks if he was really going to fight the guy at the bar. He says he was, that it was part of his past, and that no one has ever been able to get him to stop before. He has dealt with anger in his past. Emma says it scares her, and Jonathon is very sorry for it. He says he doesn't want to ever scare her again. He asks where Emma has been the past five years. She responds, "In hell." Emma falls asleep beside Jonathon on the couch. When she wakes, her head is on his thigh. Jonathon also wakes up, and Emma asks him to stay. He agrees, reluctantly looking up the stairs. Emma tries to blame herself for what happened the previous night, but Jonathon says the truth is that neither of them did anything to Rachel. He asks about Emma's ankle, which he figures is from hell. He then shows Emma a scar along his ribs, which he says is also from hell. Emma wonders what Jonathon has been through.

Chapter 15

Emma falls back asleep, and when she wakes up, she hears her mother pleading with Jonathon not to leave her. He says he will be back later to talk about things. Emma goes out jogging, and finds Jonathon's truck in a park. He is sitting on a bench, and she runs over to him when he sees her. Jonathon says his life has been complicated, and he needs simplicity in his life. He says, further, that his father always tried to control his life, but that he wasn't submissive like his mother. Emma is worried about her mother being hurt, though she understands where Jonathon is coming from. Emma reveals that her aunt strangled her. She wonders why it still gets to her. Jonathon says his father has been dead for years, but that it still gets to him. When Jonathon says he will not be



leaving Rachel, Emma is relieved, for her mother, and for herself. She realizes she doesn't want Jonathon to go anywhere, either.

Casey asks Emma to go to a party with her. Emma agrees. Rachel seems distraught, and Emma tells her she is stronger than this. She sees Jonathon arriving as she goes out to meet Casey. It turns out the party will be at Drew's, and Emma is beyond angry. Casey promises they will only stay an hour. Emma travels around the grounds, finding an indoor basketball court. Drew finds her there. They decide to shoot hoops. Emma hurts her ankle after hitting Drew's shoulder and falling down. Drew tends to her ankle with an ice pack. Drew apologizes for not taking better care of her when he had her. He drives her home when Casey goes to another party. He apologizes for everything once more, telling Emma he wishes he had known what was going on. He asks if he can call her some time, and Emma doesn't answer. She shuts the door behind her.

Chapter 16

Rachel gives Emma a framed photo of her and her father when she was younger, in a soccer uniform. Jonathon calls up to them, asking if they are ready, and then tosses two squirt guns onto Emma's bed. Jonathon then appears with a blue squirt gun, and shoots Emma and Rachel. They have a water gun fight. Evan arrives, and is drawn into the water gun fight. They then go to Evan's house. Emma confesses about going to a party at Drew's. Evan is not angry. He trusts Emma. He is only worried that Drew wasn't nice to her. Emma assures him that he was. Emma wonders how she could have ended up with someone so wonderful. She tells Evan she loves him. They then make out, and Evan and Emma get near sex, but don't go all the way. Evan explains that, when it happens, he wants it to be special –not on a couch or in a car.

Emma calls Sara for sex advice. Sara tells Emma that sex is all about trust, and it is about being completely open. Emma worries if she can be that open.

Chapter 17

The next day, Sara is alive with stories about Jared, which seems weird to Evan. Sara gives Emma a college textbook about sexuality. Evan is amused by that, but he insists that Emma doesn't need a textbook. They attend art class, where Ms. Miers reveals the medium for work will be nails, hammers, and wood. Evan examines his hammer, and then leaves, later telling Emma he went home through text message. Emma asks if he wants to come over after practice. Evan says no. Evan doesn't answer Emma's calls later on, either.

At home, Rachel sees the sexuality textbook, and realizes her daughter is still a virgin. Rachel then goes out to eat with Jonathon. Evan later texts, saying he will pick Emma up in the morning. But Emma is not relieved, and can't sleep. Jonathon gets up about half an hour later, and hesitantly comes down to sit beside Emma. He asks if Emma always has the same nightmares, or if they are different each time. She says they are all different, but they all end as she is about to die. Jonathon says his nightmares are always the same, that they won't let him forget. She sees Jonathon look angry at the



memory, but then he comes back around. The conversation turns to how Emma and Evan are doing. Emma explains that Stuart doesn't approve of her. Jonathon explains he was in Emma's place, once, and the girl he loved was rich. Going away to college wasn't going far away enough, and it caused things to happen, and a break-up.

Jonathon reveals he got into USC, and Emma is very happy for him, but then realizes he hasn't told Rachel yet. She then realizes that Evan should have known about Stanford by then. Jonathon tells Emma not to worry just yet. Emma realizes then, that Jonathon is not twenty-eight. He is actually twenty-four. They laugh about it. Rachel asks if Jonathon is coming up to bed. As Emma heads up herself, Jonathon tells her that he likes talking to her, that most people don't understand the things they talk about. Emma agrees, realizing she can share things with Jonathon that she can't share with anyone else. The next morning, she finds Jonathon asleep on the couch.

Chapter 18

Evan arrives the next morning, wanting to know how Emma is doing. Evan has a letter, but his mother hasn't let him open it yet, out of respect for Jared, who didn't get into the first school of his choice. Before class, Emma sees that there is a new girl in school, Analise, who is from New York, and whose mother works for Sara's mom's consulting firm. Analise is a pretty, petite blonde. She is a junior. She and Jill seem to have instantly become friends. Analise is in art class. She takes Evan's spot for the duration of the current project, since Evan won't be working on it, according to Ms. Meir. Emma is not talkative. Emma apologizes for not being talkative to Analise, who says it is alright, and she understands.

Emma's mom makes dinner that night. Evan tells Emma they can talk again another time. Rachel tells funny stories about Emma as a child, including one where she almost fell out of a tree. Rachel says she would love to see one of Evan's games. After dinner, Emma and Evan go for a walk. Emma is sad she can't remember much of her childhood.

Analysis

Despite what Emma may believe, there are at least two unfailingly loyal and protective people in her life – Sara, and Evan. Additionally, there are Sara's family, and Evan's mother and brother who also want to watch out for Emma, especially after all she has been through. Emma's mother, however, is not one of these people. Her continued drunkenness, as well as the dangers of her lifestyle, seem to be sucking Emma back away from the goodness in her life. It almost appears as if Emma is a magnet for cruel things to happen to her; but the reader realizes that Emma is now making her own choices. In the past, she was forced to live with Carol and George, and had little chance of escape. However, Emma's decision to go and live with her mother is truly her own – despite the advice of Sara and her family not to.



Emma is also growing closer to Jonathon, alarmingly so. Despite Jonathon's outward kindness, there is something in him that Emma notices, but brushes over, that concerns her and the reader. There is some kind of anger, of hatred, welling beneath Jonathon's surface, though Emma believes that this is perhaps only because of the darkness of his past. After all, Jonathon has nightmares, just like Emma does. Disturbingly, she also becomes something of a mediator between herself and her mother, and realizes she cannot handle her mother alone without Jonathon. For the time being, Emma appears to be stuck with both her mother, and with Jonathon.

Discussion Question 1

Why is it that, despite their unfailing kindness and loyalty, Emma refuses to entrust Evan and Sara with everything that is going on? Do you support or oppose Emma's choice? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Despite Jonathon's kind nature, there appears to be something else at work within him. What do you believe that is? How does it relate to Emma?

Discussion Question 3

What is Emma's reasoning for continuing to stay with her mother this far into things? Is she making a sound decision? Explain.

Vocabulary

Impervious, quizzically, unfathomable, adamant, exuberant, audibly, indifferently, delusional, mortified



Chapter 19 - Chapter 27

Summary

Chapter 19

Rachel apologizes for being too talkative and tipsy at dinner the night before. Emma assures her that she was fine and that she can even bring Jonathon to Evan's game if she wants. That makes Rachel's mood change, for she is worried Jonathon is keeping something from her. She asks Emma what she and Jonathon talk about when they are both up at night, and Emma tells her that they talk about sports, commercials, and how they both wish they could sleep. Rachel wants to know something, anything about Jonathon's past. Emma tells her mother that she is sure that nothing is wrong with Jonathon, despite her mother worrying that something is wrong. Emma feels horrible that she knows about Jonathon going to school in California, while her mother knows nothing about it. She is angry at being in that situation, so she texts Jonathon, who says he is in NYC and he will tell Rachel.

After Emma's next basketball game, Evan consents to giving Analise a ride home, and this makes Emma unhappy. She believes Analise has a crush on Evan. At home, Rachel is drunk once more, and Emma does her best to keep her mother from drinking anymore, by talking about the game. Emma helps Rachel up to bed, who says that it isn't so much that she likes Jonathon, as she doesn't want to be alone. It reminds Emma of her childhood.

In school the next day, Emma agrees to a Saturday sleepover at Sara's. In art class, Emma is asked by Analise if they can sit together for Evan's game. Unfortunately, she has practice afterward, so can't join Evan out to eat. But she reaffirms their date for Friday night. Sara says that she will be going out to eat, though, and Emma tells her to be nice to Analise. Evan later explains that he drove Analise to the game.

Chapter 20

Analise sits next to Evan during Emma's game, but Emma doesn't let that get to her too much. She is looking forward to her date with Evan. Emma dashes home to get ready, running into the bathroom in her sports bra and shorts, only to come fact-to-face with Jonathon, who is in his running clothes. Evan arrives, and calls up to Emma, who calls back down saying she is just getting into the shower. She shuts the door and wonders what to do. Rachel calls up, asking Emma if Jonathon has arrived yet, and she says she hasn't looked for him. She decides to take a shower, telling Jonathon to stand by the door. Jonathon is amused with the entire situation, and says he won't peek. When Emma finishes showering, she sees that Jonathon is gone. He is downstairs talking to Rachel, saying he was on video chat on Emma's computer with the office the whole time. Jonathon then heads in to take a shower.



Emma dresses for her date. Rachel tells her she looks beautiful. Emma and Evan eat at a place on the waterfront a few towns over. Evan asks what happened after the game to hold Emma up, and she explains that her battery was dead. Jill had to jump-start her car. Evan then tells Emma about his friends in California. The date goes well. Emma wonders why people drink. Evan admits to being drunk before, though he hasn't been in a while. Emma explains she never tried drinking. They decide to go hiking on Saturday.

At home, Rachel, and Jonathon are back early. Rachel is screaming at Jonathon. Emma is horrified that Evan will see her mother like this. Rachel is holding Emma's sweater, which she had left at Drew's party. She demands to know why it is in Jonathon's truck. She sees Emma and tells her that she knows something is going on, that she isn't stupid. She then storms up to her room. Jonathon apologizes, saying that he and Rachel had a fight and Rachel isn't thinking clearly. Evan offers Emma the chance to leave, but Emma says she needs to be there for her mother. Evan offers to stay, but Emma politely declines. Jonathon reveals that Rachel told him she loved him, and he revealed he was going to USC. Emma accuses Jonathon of leading her on; Jonathon says he is not. Emma disagrees and goes up to bed. There, her green sweater is cut to shreds and lying on her bed.

Chapter 21

Emma awakes to find her mother and Jonathon both gone. Rachel returns around noon with a new sweater for Emma. Rachel apologizes profusely, and Emma tells her she is still invited to her game that night. Rachel is excited and asks Emma for help with what to wear. Emma finds an old drawing that her dad made of her mother. Rachel reveals that Emma used to look at the picture all the time when she was little. Emma doesn't remember a lot of things, which makes Rachel wonder if she remembers anything at all. They go to dinner before the game. Rachel waves to Mark and James, two friends of hers. She says that Jonathon probably isn't coming, but Emma thinks he might be running late. Rachel puts alcohol in Jill's and Casey's drinks, earning their approval. Emma realizes she is in over her head, so she texts Jonathon for help. He says he will be there in fifteen minutes. When he arrives, he is shocked to find her drunk. Emma explains that her mother thinks Jonathon doesn't care about her anymore. Rachel pops a pill into her mouth, saying she has to have fun. Jonathon says he can't handle things anymore and leaves. Rachel begs Emma to go after Jonathon, which she does. Rachel follows. Jonathon explains he just can't handle the paranoia and the drama anymore. Emma begs him not to leave so the whole school doesn't see the drama. Jonathon convinces Rachel to let Emma drive her home, where he will meet her.

Emma takes her mother home, texting Evan that she is sorry she missed him. Jonathon tries to talk to Rachel inside, but Rachel yells. Jonathon asks what is wrong with her. Rachel says that Emma is what is wrong, that Emma will take Jonathon away just like she took Derek away. Jonathon defends Emma, saying that what is going on has nothing to do with Emma. Rachel begins breaking glasses, and Jonathon carries her up to bed. Evan calls Emma. Emma asks if she can come over, but Evan says he is taking Analise to Jeff's party. However, he can cancel. Emma tells him not to cancel. As Emma begins to clean up her mother's mess, Jonathon comes back down to help her. After



they clean, they sit beside one another on the steps. Jonathon is ready to end things, but he knows it will be worse for Emma if he doesn't stay. Emma tells him that is no reason for him to stay. Jonathon tells Emma he is not leaving her, though. He tells her he is always there for her. Emma thanks him and goes to bed.

Chapter 22

Emma goes to the Mathews' house. She lets herself in when no one answers. Analise is over, helping Stuart and Evan stuff envelopes for Vivian. Emma goes to wait in the rec room above the garage, where Jonathon texts her to see how she is doing. Sara comes up to see Emma, for she is also going hiking. She has heard about what happened at the game. They then head out to hike. Analise is also going, invited by Evan. As they hike, Sara strays back with Emma, annoyed beyond belief at how flirty Analise is with Evan. Evan later asks Emma about the sweater incident the other night, and Emma lies, saying it isn't her sweater. When they get back, Sara offers Emma the chance to sleep over, which Emma takes, stopping off at Emma's house before going to Sara's. Emma opens the door to her house, trying to be quiet. She sees her mother having sex on the couch. Emma races back outside.

Chapter 23

Emma avoids her mother and Jonathon all day. She tries to avoid them before school on Monday as well, but her car won't start. Jonathon offers to drive Emma to school, which she reluctantly agrees to. Emma wants to know how Jonathon could go back to her mother. In the end, they are only going to break up. She says he is coddling Rachel. Jonathon asks if Emma isn't. Jonathon knows he has to end things, but asks if he should wait until after Rachel's birthday. Emma doesn't know. Their eyes keep meeting. Emma sees Evan and Analise get out of Evan's car. This hurts Emma, and Jonathon sees something is wrong, but Emma won't talk about it. Jonathon tells Emma that he didn't stay for Rachel. Then, Emma gets out.

Evan offers to look at Emma's car, but Emma says Jonathon will handle it. It is also explained that Analise and Evan will be doing some things for Vivian after school, so it made sense to take one car. Emma is upset by this, and Sara later tells Emma she will come over to talk about the Analise situation. At lunch, Analise sits with them, revealing she and Evan went to a dinner the night before and that Evan introduced her to lots of people. Emma storms out of the cafeteria, and Evan catches up to her, trying to explain that Analise came with her mother. Evan says that Emma hates those dinners, and Emma retorts that so did Evan.

Later, Jill and Casey apologize for the drinking the other night at the game. Emma walks off to class. After school, Sara comes over, and Rachel invites them to her birthday party. Emma texts Jonathon to wait until after the birthday. Emma says she needs to set boundaries for Evan; Rachel counters that Evan should be setting boundaries for Analise. Emma agrees to talk to Evan about it. As Sara leaves, Evan shows up. Emma challenges Evan on Analise, and Evan says Analise is like a little sister to him. Evan says he will set boundaries, and as he and Emma begin to make out, Jonathon walks in



on them. Evan then asks Emma about boundaries as Jonathon leaves, and Emma agrees.

Chapter 24

Rachel prepares for her birthday, setting up chips and dip. Emma and Jonathon watch Rachel's excitement with amusement. Sara arrives. Jared arrives a few moments later, saying Evan has taken a separate car. He arrives a short time later with a poker table. Rachel immediately brings out alcohol, and Jared and Sara have some. Emma puts on music using Jonathon's iPod. As the guests arrive, Emma meets Sharon, Rachel's best friend. As the night wears on, and more poker is played, more drinks are consumed. Later on, Emma asks her mother if she is having a good time, and Rachel says she would be if "he" would stop staring at Emma. She believes there is something going on between Jonathon and Emma.

As the party ends and cleanup begins, Rachel reminisces on the day Emma's father was in an accident –her birthday. Emma runs out of the house in tears. Evan finds her curled up on the ground a short time later, and brings Emma to his car. Evan then puts Emma to bed at his home, telling her that he will never let her go.

Chapter 25

The next morning, Emma explains that Rachel blames her for her father's death, because he dies on the way home from the city bringing her a birthday cake. They snuggle up on the couch and fall asleep. Evan tells Emma that it is not her fault when they wake up. Emma insists on going home. Once at home, Emma cleans up the remnants of the party and goes into her mom's bedroom to talk to her, telling her she is going to stay. Emma goes out to get a movie and ice cream to have an evening in with her mother. She calls Jonathon. He is stunned that Emma could be home. Emma says he cannot let her mother suffer alone. Jonathon says that he will always be there for her, and Emma promises to call him if she needs anything.

Emma and her mother watch a movie and eat ice cream, and Rachel ends up crying. Emma holds her until Rachel goes to bed. Emma, who has another nightmare, calls Jonathon in the middle of the night.

Chapter 26

For the next few weeks, Emma attempts to learn how to cook from Rachel, and Rachel attempts to learn how to play basketball from Emma –both disastrous attempts. Emma tells Jonathon about it all on the phone. He tells Emma to let him know how the night turns out and that they should hang out sometime, and Emma agrees. Emma is going to be having dinner with Evan, Vivian, and Stuart. Vivian is already aware that Evan wants to attend Stanford. He's wearing a Stanford t-shirt beneath his dress clothes, and this makes her smile. Stuart, however, refuses to attend for the evening, and Vivian congratulates her son on making it into Stanford. Emma knows, however, that Stanford has divided the Evan's family.



At home, Emma is sad because of the rough night with Stuart's absence. Emma sees that her mother isn't home. After 3, she calls Jonathon, who tells her to call Rachel. Sharon picks up, saying Rachel is with her and has passed out. Emma calls Jonathon to let him know.

Chapter 27

Emma, overtired from not sleeping the night before, falls asleep in her car and misses practice. She was dreaming of her father. Casey wakes Emma up by tapping on the window. Emma then heads over to Sara's house. Anna and Carl are happy to have Emma around. Carl tells Emma they should book a flight to California to check things out at Stanford. Emma and Sara then go to a party at Jill's house. Emma and Sara are not thrilled to see that Analise is also at the party. Emma texts her mother, but she doesn't respond. Emma gets a voice mail from Vivian, who asks Emma to brunch on Sunday to meet someone important. Emma then sees Evan at the party, and they kiss.

Emma and the other girls change into bathing suits for the hot tub. Evan goes to get his swimming trunks. Emma worries if her scars will be too visible. Emma is stunned to see Drew sitting next to Evan in the hot tub, and Analise on the other side. Emma squeezes in next to Evan, who wraps his arms around her. Evan insists seeing Emma in a bikini is torture, and they agree to go to his house, for his parents are out for the night. As Emma leaves, Drew asks if she got her sweater, because he left it on her front porch. Jonathon had then found it and put it in his truck, as previously explained by Jonathon. Emma hopes Evan doesn't hear Drew's question. Inside, Emma goes to get changed and notices a message from Rachel, accusing Emma of being with Jonathon. As Emma leaves, she asks if Sara will be spending the night because Emma had driven. Sara says she will probably spend the night at Jill's house.

Emma tells Evan she wants to go home instead, feeling horrified by Rachel's message. When she gets home, her mother's car is in the driveway, the engine is running, and one of the front tires is on the lawn. Rachel is passed out on the steps. Unable to carry her, Emma knows she has only one option after Rachel throws up on her.

Analysis

As Jonathon seeks to distance himself from Rachel, the inexplicable and undeniable connection he has with Emma only continues to grow. Emma is seduced by the idea that she can speak to Jonathon about the darkness because Jonathon himself has experienced the darkness in ways that few others ever can. It is this shared experience and firsthand understanding of the darkness that truly appeals to Emma. Also, Jonathon's ways of handling the darkness seem to work for Emma. They both have nightmares and find solace in what they can do to get away from the nightmares.

As expected, Rachel's lifestyle continues unabated. At her birthday party, Emma and her friends get a glimpse of the deviant lifestyle that Rachel and her friends have lived, seeing their haggard forms continuing to live on as if they were in their twenties forever.



Rachel continues to get drunk, blaming Emma for the death of her father over and over again. It finally causes Emma to break, sending her fleeing from the house in hysterics. It is Evan who finds, soothes, and takes care of Emma. Nevertheless, whether out of kindness, love, or stupidity, Emma returns to her mother. The cycle of drunkenness and emotional turmoil continues.

When everything else falls apart and Emma is left alone to handle Rachel and survive the darkness, she has only one person she can call –Jonathon. This will not have good consequences, Emma knows, but there is no one else she believes she can call.

Discussion Question 1

Despite the turmoil that Jonathon's presence causes between Emma and her mother, as well as Emma, Evan, and Sara, Emma continues to want to be with Jonathon. Why?

Discussion Question 2

Even after the fiasco of Rachel's birthday party, why does Emma still go back to her mother? What is her reasoning for this? What do Evan and Sara think of this reasoning?

Discussion Question 3

Rachel seems to be a character who has never grown up. She still behaves as if she is seventeen. Why? How does this affect those around her? How does it affect Emma?

Vocabulary

Wafted, faltered, spontaneous, evasively, incapacitating, debacle, vanquishing, incredulously, surreptitiously, unperturbed.



Chapter 28 - Chapter 35

Summary

Chapter 28

Jonathon arrives to help Emma handle Rachel. He is in a suit, and Emma believes she has ruined his plans. They clean up Rachel and Jonathon stays with her while Emma gets cleaned up. She begins crying in the shower. Jonathon asks her if she is okay; she says she is. After the shower, Jonathon asks her what happened. Emma explains that for weeks, things have been great, until that night. She apologizes for ruining Jonathon's night, and Jonathon says he meant it when he told her to call him anytime. Jonathon tells her she needs to talk to Rachel, that Rachel can't keep doing this to Emma. Jonathon stays up in Rachel's room while Emma sleeps.

Jonathon wakes up Emma when he leaves a little after seven, so Rachel doesn't know he was there. Emma sleeps through part of soccer practice, awakened by Casey's call, who says she will tell the coach that Emma is sick. Emma gets up to clean up her mother's vomit outside, but Jonathon has already taken care of it. When Rachel wakes up, she demands to know why Emma is still talking to Jonathon. Emma explains that all they do is talk. Rachel says it hurts her. Rachel is further enraged to hear that Jonathon helped out the night before. She demands that Emma never speak to Jonathon again.

Chapter 29

Emma goes to meet Vivian Sunday morning, avoiding Rachel. Vivian, while waiting for the individual she wants Emma to meet, talks to Emma about Stanford, saying she is trying to find some common ground to bring father and son together. Emma admits that she overheard Stuart talking poorly about her; Vivian is not happy about Stuart's remarks. She says that the father-son disagreement has nothing to do with her. Emma says she would never come between the family, and Vivian says that is why she wouldn't want Evan with anyone else. Emma beams happily. Emma is then introduced to Dr. Michelle Vassar.

Emma then goes to her game. Since she missed two practices, she is only allowed to play the second half of the game. After the game, she and Evan decide to go bowling with Sara and Jared. Evan asks Emma to go with him to Hawaii for break, but Emma says she can't miss soccer. Evan decides he will host a graduation party for everyone when the time comes. On the way to Sara's, Emma asks Sara about the Stanford situation with the Mathews, and Sara explains that Stuart has threatened to cut off Evan if he goes to Stanford. Emma says that she can't let that happen; Sara tells her that it is Evan's decision, not hers.

Chapter 30



Emma and her mother make amends without talking about it. It is April, and the weather is beautiful. She and Sara decide to spend the weekend together. Emma has a date that night with Evan. At home, a lawyer, Charles Stanley, comes to talk to Emma about her father's estate. He is the executor. He explains that Derek graduated with a master's degree from Cornell. He then went to Boston to be near family and take work at an engineering firm, where he first met Rachel Wallace, a temp for the receptionist. Rachel lies about her age, saying she is 26. Derek is 32. When he learns that Rachel is actually 20, he breaks things off, saying integrity matters above all else. Rachel begs to be taken back because she is pregnant. Though they never marry because Derek is suspicious of Rachel's social habits, he buys a house for her that they share together for seven years. Emma is stunned.

It turns out that Derek, through careful saving, investing, and taking care of the inheritance from his own father (Emma's grandfather) provides assets for Emma when she turns eighteen. The figure of money involves several commas. She will have full control over her funds when she either graduates from college or turns twenty-one. Charles tells Emma not to tell Rachel about the inheritance. Rachel wasn't trusted by Derek. Derek had originally intended for Emma to be taken care of by someone other than Carol and George, but it didn't happen. Emma is finally going to get the life which she deserves. Emma programs Charles's number into her phone in case she needs anything.

Emma later realizes the gray-haired woman in the drawing by Jack and Leyla is her grandmother. She also realizes she was not meant to exist.

Chapter 31

Emma goes to see Evan. Emma asks Evan what things would be like if she never existed. This worries Evan. Evan says she shouldn't think about not existing, that her father was probably happier having her in his life than not. Evan then asks Emma to prom, and she accepts. They decide to have sex the night before prom, so they don't remember their prom night like it is a bad movie.

At home, Emma asks Rachel about her life. She says she is from a small farming town in Pennsylvania. Emma then asks Rachel why she made her stay with Carol and George all those years, but Rachel doesn't want to talk about it. Emma thinks she sounds guilty.

Chapter 32

Emma wonders if she should fully make up with Rachel. She heads out to school as Jonathon arrives on his motorcycle. She decides to skip school to hang out with him. Jonathon drives her into New York, saying there is something he wants to show her. It is the ruined burnt-out house he lived in, the source of his nightmares. The fire killed his whole family. Jonathon listened to them scream to death, powerless to save them. Emma says he shouldn't blame himself. Emma confesses she is afraid of heights, so Jonathon brings her a flat ledge over a pool of water beside a stream. Emma jumps in,



confronting her fear at Jonathon's insistence. He jumps in behind her. Emma uses Jonathon's knife to cut her jeans into shorts. Emma jumps again. She confesses to Jonathon that her fear is a fear of dying.

Chapter 33

Jonathon gets Emma ice cream. Emma is worried how Evan will handle her spending the day with Jonathon. She is determined to tell him the truth. Emma realizes Jonathon has a hard time getting close to people. He says he does, and that he is afraid of something, but before he finishes his thought, he begins going to his motorcycle. Emma chases after him, begging him to tell her what he is afraid of. He explains that his girlfriend, Sadie had accepted his marriage proposal. Then, she hooked up with another guy. She violated his trust. After Sadie, he hadn't been close to anyone until Emma. They both realize they have a connection that isn't romantic.

When Emma gets home, Rachel is waiting, angry and panicked at not knowing where Emma has been. She realizes Emma has been with Jonathon. Emma says it doesn't matter, that Rachel hasn't ever been her mother. Emma goes on, wondering if Rachel ever considers Emma's feelings, especially when she drinks or disappears. Emma continues, asking why Rachel obsesses over a man who never loved her. Rachel slaps Emma. Evan suddenly arrives, wondering what has happened, but Emma says she has to go to practice, and they will talk about it later. Evan wants to know why she didn't call, but Emma tells him she will tell him later.

Chapter 34

Jonathon apologizes to Emma for the day, but she says it is not his fault. Evan calls after practice, saying he will not meet with Emma that night. He says if he is going to be a part of Emma's life, she can't keep shutting him out. Evan says he will be back next Saturday, and they will talk then. Rachel is drunk. She blames Emma for taking Derek and then Jonathon away from her. Rachel reveals that Sharon had left Emma with Carol and George, because Rachel had overdosed. Rachel says she can't ever love Emma. Emma, seeking relief of pain, tries Vodka. Later, she is disgusted with herself. She goes to Sara's. She tells Sara everything about the money, about her mother not wanting her. Emma explains she thought she could fix her mother, but has failed. Emma hurts so badly, but Sara cuddles her up, saying she doesn't have to hurt anymore.

Chapter 35

The next morning, Emma tells Sara about spending the day with Jonathon. Emma knows she cannot live with Rachel anymore. Emma also explains that she didn't get a chance to tell Evan about it all. Emma further thinks Rachel attempted to commit suicide when she was left with George and Carol, and Emma feels bad about what she said to Rachel. Anna senses something is wrong, and later tells Emma that they will help her however they can, that she wishes Emma didn't keep getting hurt. Emma knows she will have to be honest with Evan the way she has been with Jonathon. Rachel calls later, apologetic about Friday's argument. Emma tells Rachel she is staying with Sara for the



week. Sara tells Emma she has to end things with her mother, before they get worse, because Rachel is using Emma as an emotional punching bag. Emma wants to know why Rachel keeps hurting her, and then reeling her back in. Emma decides to talk to Rachel, and Sara goes as well.

Rachel's house is a disaster area after a party. Even Emma's room has been invaded. Sara says this is more proof that Rachel is not going to change. As Emma and Sara leave, Rachel arrives home with a blonde guy, and Emma says she will back in a week to get her stuff. She then leaves with Sara.

Analysis

Finally, Emma has her breaking point. She realizes her mother is not going to change, not now, not ever. Evan and Sara are the ones who rally around Emma. But Emma, because she cannot connect to them on the level of darkness, reaches out to Jonathon, whose own promises to always be there to protect her, are laced with dangerous intent. Jonathon, it is becoming clear, has more than a simple platonic interest in Emma, though Emma is slow to realize it. Jonathon clearly has some kind of romantic feelings for Emma, though he does not come right out and say it yet. This serves to present an existential threat to Emma's relationship with Evan.

The existential threat is no more potent than when Emma blows off Sara and Evan, the people who have been the most loyal to her, to go and spend the day with Jonathon. She doesn't even tell them where she will be. Emma clearly struggles with great moral ambiguity given the nature of her upbringing, doing so much to keep the horrors of her life a secret so as not to harm others, but also placing herself in direct danger when she knows better, or when she is shown better. Emma's mother's life should be enough to convince Emma that being self-centered, even under the pretense of protecting others, is not necessarily warranted or justifiable.

Discussion Question 1

If Sara hates Emma so much, why do you think she keeps accusing Emma of leaving her? How does Emma respond to this?

Discussion Question 2

Do you believe Sara truly does hate Emma? Or do you believe she loves Emma in some way? Explain using evidence from the novel.

Discussion Question 3

The closer Emma gets to Jonathon, the further she seems to drift from Evan in different ways. Is this a fair assessment? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

Fazed, deliberating, disgruntled, retorted, trudged, confounded, feeble, cajoled.



Chapter 36 - Epilogue

Summary

Chapter 36

Emma and Evan make up on the phone at 2:00 a.m. They agree to talk more the following day. Emma reveals this to Sara the next morning. Sara also drops a bombshell: She will be going to Parsons in New York. Emma knows this is because it is closer to her family, and to Jared. Emma realizes she is going to lose not just her best friend, but really her sister.

Though Evan is still a little off, the conversation with him goes well, as Emma explains to Sara. Emma reveals she will be asking Casey to stay with her until Evan gets back. Sara finds it sweet and amusing that Emma and Evan have a planned sex date. Emma has a nightmare that night, but rather than wanting another awkward conversation with Evan, she watches TV instead. She ultimately calls Jonathon. She tells him she will not be moving back in with Rachel. Emma wants to hang out with Jonathon again, without cliffs. Jonathon suggests dinner, as he has something to share. She agrees.

Chapter 37

Emma hangs out with Jonathon and plays pool. She asks to hang out longer because Casey is still at a party. Jonathon agrees. Emma wants to hear a band Jonathon was talking about, and he is hesitant to bring Emma to his place. He has never had anyone over. Emma asks why he stuck around so long with Rachel when he didn't have to; he explains that they shouldn't talk about depressing things. Jonathon's place is amazing to Emma. It is sleek and modern. They talk about Evan. Listening to Jonathon's music, she falls asleep, to be awoken by Jonathon. They talk about being able to understand each other because they are both hated by people who are supposed to love them. Emma falls asleep again on the couch, and Jonathon covers her with a blanket. As she goes to sleep, she asks him if he will ever love again; and Jonathon says he thinks so, and that he'll see her in his sleep.

Emma has more nightmares, and Jonathon is there to comfort her. He gets her some water. He then decides to drive her somewhere in Wesley. He brings her to the house where she died, so she can face the fear of it. Emma finally reveals everything that happened to Jonathon. She asks to leave. He obliges instantly.

Chapter 38

Emma sleeps soundly for a few hours, and Jonathon is there for her when she wakes up. She doesn't know if she has been cured or not, but she is happy to have slept. Jonathon asks if he can watch her soccer game, and Emma says that she will text him where the game will take place. He thanks Emma for everything, for their being able to



talk. Emma says she likes it, too. But she worries as she leaves if Jonathon is getting closer to her.

Emma goes to Casey's to spend the night. Evan calls. They make plans to see one another the following day. Emma goes to get her uniform shirt from Rachel's house. She walks in on her mother being beaten by a man over top of her. The man tells Emma to leave. When she goes to help her injured mother, the man shoves her down and tells her not to get involved. He then leaves. Emma helps her mother up, to take her to the hospital. Rachel says she owes the guy some money. Emma knows then that the guy is Rachel's dealer. At the emergency room, Emma takes Rachel's phone to call Sharon to pick her up, to stay with her. Rachel pleads with Emma not to say anything about the drug dealer, and Emma seethes that it is none of her business what Rachel does.

Jonathon calls Emma to see what has happened, and tells her not to go into the house until he gets there. Emma doesn't listen. She comes face-to-face with the drug dealer, who is stealing her necklace from Evan. When she tries to stop him, he punches her. He savagely beats Emma, who is saved only in the nick of time when Jonathon shows up, beating the drug dealer into a bloody pulp. Emma begs him to stop, and at last, he does. Emma wonders if the dealer is dead, and Jonathon says he will never let anyone hurt Emma. He then tends to Emma's injuries. He puts the drug dealer's body in his car, and tells Emma to follow him to Mick's Bar, where Jonathon leaves the Charger and the dealer, wiping down the door handle of fingerprints. Jonathon explains the man isn't dead, but he won't ever bother with them again. Emma isn't so sure.

Emma notices Jonathon's hands are skinned, and that they need to be tended to, but Jonathon is more worried about Emma's face getting ice. Emma insists on taking care of Jonathon. They look into each other's eyes, and kiss –and Emma rushes out of the house.

Chapter 39

Emma rushes to Evan's house to see him. He is horrified at the sight of her. Emma can only shake and hold onto Evan. Vivian walks in, wanting to know what has happened. Emma, in shock, says "he" tried to take it –and holds out Evan's necklace. Vivian insists they go to see Michelle, and then the police. Vivian tells Emma to let them care for her. It turns out that Emma has two fractured ribs, and they will take up to six weeks to heal. Evan reveals that he waited for Emma that night outside her house when Carol killed her. He admits having fallen asleep, and rushing in to stop Carol, to help George, who was trying to get Carol off of Emma. Evan feels as if he has broken his promise to never let anything happen to her again.

Evan asks Emma why he spent the day with Jonathon, and what happened with Emma. Emma explains everything about Rachel; and says Jonathon is only a friend who was there for her. Evan says he is here for her now, and he is never going to leave. The next morning, Sara is back, having caught the earliest flight she could.



Emma hears Evan outside, telling Jonathon he doesn't need to be there anymore. Emma goes outside to settle the situation. Jonathon asks Emma not to give up on him. Emma says she needs time. Jonathon then leaves, and Emma explains that Jonathon fought off the drug dealer. Evan says he doesn't trust Jonathon.

Chapter 40

Emma finds it hard to believe that someone as gentle as Jonathon can be so violent. Emma decides to go with Evan to Rachel's to get Emma's stuff that afternoon. Emma's room is a mess. Her laptop is gone. She and Evan pack. Rachel returns home while they pack. Evan brings Emma's things out to the car while Rachel asks Emma what is going on. Emma says she is leaving, as planned. But Emma notices that the photo of herself and her father is gone. Emma confronts Rachel, refusing to wait for Evan. She condemns her mother's drug use, and says she is leaving, heading straight to Evan's car. As they drive away, Evan brings Emma to the art room at school. He tells her she is stronger than she thinks she is.

Chapter 41

Emma gets a call from Sara, who says she is going to get the last box from Emma's room. Sara calls back to tell Emma that an ambulance is on its way, and that Rachel is not breathing. Emma rushes to see Sara; and Emma refuses to go to the hospital, because she knows that Sara has overdosed to hurt Emma. Emma does not care if Rachel lives or dies.

Sara, Anna, and Emma clean Rachel's house. Emma then goes to see Jonathon. Emma, in tears, reveals Rachel's suicide attempt. Jonathon tells her it is not her fault. He soothes her as she cries, and they kiss, but Emma jumps up, saying she can't. Jonathon says she feels something for him, too, or she wouldn't be there. He says to give it time and that they will figure everything out. He says he doesn't know how to give up the connection they have. He asks her if she knows how, and she shakes her head. She thanks Jonathon for understanding, and he tells her he is always there for her.

Chapter 42

Jonathon reveals in a text message that he stayed so long with Rachel, for Emma. She wonders if she will see him at her game, but she can't find his truck. Sara, Emma, Evan, and Jared decide to have a senior skip day of their own on the coming Friday. Emma later talks to Jonathon on the phone. They both confess to sleeping better, but not great. And Jonathon says he doesn't want to lose Emma, and she says she doesn't want to lose him either, but that she has to go. Analise comes in, and tells Emma she had better deserve Evan's love, that she can really tell how amazing Evan is, and how great his love is for Emma.

Evan later reveals a surprise for Emma: he has built her a tree swing, to remind her of her father, and of him. Emma is thrilled.

Chapter 43



For senior skip day, Emma, Evan, Sara, and Jared go to the beach. It is chilly, and Evan and Emma curl up under a blanket. They decide they each get a night to plan for the other. Emma gets prom night. Emma decides to spend that evening with Evan at his request, since Evan believes he and Jared will be hiking the next day. Evan decides they should camp out in the backyard in a tent since it is warm enough. They drive out into the woods on an ATV behind Evan's house, and set up camp. Evan reveals that night that he hates hammers, because Carol used a hammer to shatter Emma's ankle. He asks Emma for forgiveness for not protecting her. She says she forgives him, and then asks Evan for forgiveness. Evan forgives Emma quickly. The kiss, and finally make love.

Chapter 44

In the morning, Emma smiles, happy, and wishes Evan a happy birthday. When Emma gets to Sara's, Sara can immediately tell Emma has had sex, and is very excited about it. Emma wants to make Evan dinner, but she and Sara both know the only place to do so is the kitchen at Rachel's house. But Jonathon shows up before Evan does, as Emma's phone dies. Jonathon declares his love for Emma, telling her that he isn't going to force her to choose between him and Evan, because he will wait for her as long as she needs time to decide. Jonathon he came to tell her that the police found a partial print and traced it to him. Emma wonders what they have done; Jonathon tells her that she didn't do anything. Jonathon tells her that he told the police that he was at the party Rachel threw the night before, and may have inadvertently touched the car. As long as Emma tells the police she can't remember what the dealer's face looked like, there will be no chance of connecting anything.

Emma asks how the police traced his prints. Jonathon confesses that he killed his father. His family wasn't supposed to be home. He needed to protect his family from his father, but it turned out horribly wrong. Emma starts to cry, and Evan arrives, demanding to know what Jonathon has done to Emma. Jonathon says it doesn't concern Evan. Evan wants to know what doesn't concern him, and Jonathon, despite Emma's pleas, tells Evan that she tells him things that he could never understand. Jonathon says he is not taking Emma away from him, but just that he wouldn't understand. Jonathon says Emma calls him at night when she can't sleep, that he will always be there to protect her.

Evan then punches Jonathon, and they grapple and wrestle around the house. Emma tries to intervene, but accidentally is elbowed by Jonathon. Evan, seeing Emma, fails to defend himself against a blow, and is knocked out. Emma tells Jonathon that they are just as bad as those in their past, that they destroy lives. She tells him that he is just as much of a monster as his father, because he has killed people. She tells Jonathon to stay out of her life, and not to wait for her, and that she would never love him. Jonathon leaves. As Evan comes to, she tells him she will never hurt him again, that she won't destroy his life. She tells him she loves him, and leaves.

Epilogue



Anna and Carl drop Emma off at the airport. She is moving into her dorm room early. Sara tells Emma she is making the biggest mistake of her life, but Emma goes anyway. Evan settles into college, keeping close his memories and treasures from Emma, such as her photo. He says he doesn't know if he is staying in the East. However, a letter to his mother from Emma mentioned that he had decided on staying in the East for the time

Analysis

The choices that Emma continues to make with respect to involving herself in her mother's life, even in the periphery of her mother's life, prove to be traumatic and devastating to her. She simply cannot believe that she is any different than her mother. Jonathon doesn't help, telling her that the two of them will always hurt other people. This is simply not true. Emma doesn't have to keep crawling back into her past. She is her own person, and she has the ability to make good choices about her life as it unfolds. Unfortunately, she does not make the wisest decisions.

Yet, it is also the presence of Jonathon in Emma's life that seems to come between Emma and Evan. Though Emma wants nothing more to do with Jonathon, she believes she can have nothing more to do with Evan. She believes what Jonathon says about her, that she is destined to hurt others. She doesn't want to hurt Evan anymore. So, she leaves Evan behind. However, the end of the novel indicates that Evan is not prepared to be left behind. He is already planning on going after Emma.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Jonathon tell Emma that the two of them will always end up hurting people? Is this fair? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Emma walk away from Evan? Is she correct in her reasoning? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

At the end of the novel, it appears as if Evan is still holding on to feelings for Emma, and he is prepared to go after her. Why do you believe this is so? Explain, using evidence from the novel to support your conclusion.

Vocabulary

Coherent, quivering, frantically, impassioned, remorse, bludgeoning, grotesque, queried, escalation, stoically, vehemently, abhorrence, beseeched.



Characters

Emma Thomas

Pretty, but deeply-wounded seventeen year-old Emma Thomas is the main character, principal protagonist, and narrator of the novel “Barely Breathing” by Rebecca Donovan. Emma’s entire life has been one of violence, heartache, and torture, culminating in her murder by her psychotic aunt, Carol, and her later resuscitation in the hospital. Emma thereafter moves in with her best friend, Sara McKinley, and her family, who welcome Emma with open arms. Emma takes comfort in her boyfriend, Evan, who deeply cares for and loves Emma.

Emma, however, suffers from tormenting nightmares of her death. She decides to move in with her mother, Rachel, for the last six months of her senior year in order to reconnect. But her mother is a drunk, a drug-addict, and emotionally abusive. Her much-younger boyfriend, Jonathon, connects with Emma, for he also has his past demons to contend with. But when Jonathon convinces Emma that she will always hurt people, like he will, she decides to leave Evan behind and go to college in California without Evan.

Sara McKinley

Sara McKinley is the absolutely beautiful, seventeen year-old best friend of Emma Thomas. Sara is loyal, supportive, and unfailingly protective of Emma. Sara and her family take in Emma following her near-death experience. Sara ultimately helps Emma move out and begins to date Evan’s older brother, Jared. Sara believes Emma’s leaving Evan is a big mistake, but she fails to convince Emma otherwise.

Evan Mathews

Evan Mathews is the handsome, kind, and loving boyfriend of Emma. Wealthy, confident, and intelligent, Evan is absolutely in love with Emma. He wants to protect her always and laments that he did not do more to stop Emma from being so hurt. At the end of the novel, hoping to protect her, Emma leaves Evan. Evan, though, appears to be ready to go after Emma in California.

Rachel Wallace

Rachel Wallace is the mother of Emma Thomas, and the former lover/girlfriend of Derek Thomas. Rachel meets Derek filling in as a temporary receptionist at Derek’s firm. She lies about her age, saying she is twenty-six when she is only twenty, in order to date Derek, who is thirty-two. Derek breaks up with Rachel for her lack of integrity, but reunites with her when he finds out she is pregnant with Emma. Rachel is a drug addict,



an alcoholic, and an emotional wreck, blaming Emma for Derek's death. Rachel attempts to overdose to get Emma to stop from leaving, though she also tells Emma that she will never love her.

Jonathon

Jonathon is the twenty-four year-old boyfriend of Rachel Wallace, who harbors romantic feelings for Emma, though she ultimately rejects him. Jonathon is responsible for the accidental deaths of his family in a fire that he set, hoping only to kill his father, who was abusive. At the end of the novel, Jonathon leaves after being rejected, seemingly never to return.

Jared Mathews

Jared Mathews is the older brother of Evan Mathews. He is kind, confident, and musically talented. He is in love with Sara, and he pursues her until she finally decides to date him, despite it being a long-distance romance.

Stuart Mathews

As the patriarch of the Mathews family, Stuart is an elitist. Having high expectations of his sons, he is distant from them. He disapproves of Emma dating Evan, and he threatens to cut Evan off from his money if he goes to California with Emma.

Derek Thomas

Derek is the deceased father of Emma Thomas. Derek Thomas was a kind, gentle, and good man who became involved with Rachel. He consented to staying with Rachel in order to raise Emma. When he was killed driving home with Emma's birthday cake, Rachel blamed Emma for the death. She continues to blame her years later. Derek, however, had always intended for his daughter to have a good life, so through careful saving and investing, he created a fortune for her.

Anna McKinley

Anna McKinley is the mother of Sara McKinley and the husband of Carl McKinley. Anna is beautiful, sweet, warm, and kind. She spares no expense to let Emma know that she is welcome with the McKinleys. She even serves as a surrogate mother for Emma frequently.

Analise

Analise is new at school. She is a gorgeous, petite junior who has her eyes set on Evan. After Evan consistently refuses Analise's advances and she sees how much he loves Emma, she backs off. Analise ultimately tells Emma she had better not waste Evan's love.



Symbols and Symbolism

Photographs

Photographs are how Emma remembers her father. A photograph of Emma and Derek following one of her soccer games is given to Emma by her mother Rachel, who later takes it back.

Necklace

A necklace, given to Emma by Evan, is her most treasured piece of jewelry. Emma is savagely beaten for attempting to stop a drug dealer from stealing it. She is able to recover it.

Tent

A tent is what Emma and Evan set up in the woods behind Evan's house to camp out. It is in a tent that Emma and Evan first have sex.

Alcohol

Alcohol is passed around and consumed in various forms and in large quantities by Rachel, Jill, Casey, and various other individuals in the novel.

Concert Tickets

Concert tickets are a Christmas gift to Emma from Evan when the novel begins. Emma has never been to a concert before, and Evan is thrilled to be able to take her to a concert.



Settings

Weslyn, Connecticut

Weslyn, Connecticut, is the town where Emma, Sara, Evan, and others call home. It is an upscale town, with many wealthy residents, though it does have its lower income areas. Rachel moves to a lower income area and asks Emma to come and live with her.

Weslyn High School

Weslyn High School is located in Weslyn, Connecticut. Weslyn High is where Emma, Sara, Evan, Jill, Casey, and others attend school. It is the scene of sporting events, and it is one of the places that Emma goes to escape from the difficulties of her life. Specifically, the art room is such a place that Emma retreats to as an escape..

New York

New York is where Jonathon was born and originally lived before leaving. The ruins of his old house are in New York. He brings Emma to the ruins so that he can confront his own nightmares.

Rachel's House

Rachel lives in a small, two story, yellow house at the end of a neighborhood road, It is modest, but welcoming. However, it does not seem welcoming for long. It becomes the scene of several parties and a break-in by a drug dealer. It is where Emma is savagely beaten and where Evan and Jonathon get into a fight. It is also where Emma decides to leave Evan.

Evan's House

Evan's house is located in the upper class section of Weslyn, Connecticut. Evan's house is huge and beautiful. It is the scene of many social functions and a refuge for Emma. Emma and Evan first have sex while camping in the woods behind his house.



Themes and Motifs

Family

The theme of family is a dominant theme in Rebecca Donovan's novel, "Barely Breathing." In the novel, the idea of family includes anyone who shows unconditional love, loyalty, compassion, protection, and concern for others who may or may not be blood-related. The concept of family primarily concerns itself with the character of Emma Thompson. Family appears as both a successful and a failed institution.

In terms of the failure of family, Emma's own mother is an example. As if Emma's near-death at the hands of her Aunt Carol wasn't enough, Emma now has to contend with her mother Rachel, who is utterly self-centered. Rachel is a drunk and a drug addict. Rather than seeing to the concerns of her daughter, Rachel is obsessed with parties, drugs, alcohol, and guys. Furthermore, rather than seeking to be Emma's mother, Rachel wants to be Emma's friend and detests being called "mom." Rachel also takes out her anger and frustration on Emma, using her as an emotional punching bag, as well as a crutch.

In terms of the success of family, Emma has no shortage of family. Sara and her entire family take Emma into their home to care for her as one of their own. Anna McKinley tends to Emma as a mother, while Carl steps in as something of a father for Emma. Both parents take an active interest in Emma's life, and in caring for her. Indeed, as it turns out, Emma's own biological father, Derek, was an impossibly good and kind man, who devoted his life to making sure that Emma would be taken care of, both before and after his death. He took an active interest in coaching her soccer team and attending her games as a child, as well as making sure she always had a new dress for her birthday.

Friendship

The theme of friendship is a continuous theme throughout Rebecca Donovan's novel, "Barely Breathing." Friendship, which involves mutual care, concern, loyalty, support, compassion, and platonic love between one or more individuals, occurs primarily between Emma and Sara. Indeed, no friends in the novel demonstrate friendship more conclusively or completely than Sara. When it comes to Sara and her friendship with Emma, Emma is nearly unflinching.

The friendship between Emma and Sara means that both girls tell each other nearly everything. They support one another through trials and hard times. For example, Emma encourages Sara's dating of Jared because Sara is despondent over being alone. Sara, on the other hand, has no issues whatsoever about Emma moving in with her family, wanting only to take care of her and make sure she is okay.



Sara's friendship with Emma and her unconditional loyalty toward Emma go beyond what anyone can reasonably expect. Sara's friendship is so strong that she is willing to risk her safety to get a box of possessions from Emma's room at Rachel's house for Emma. However, this friendship appears to be challenged at the end of the novel, when Sara makes the decision to stay East rather than go West for college with Emma.

Fate and Free Will

The concept of fate and free will is a major theme in Rebecca Donovan's novel, "Barely Breathing." Fate is the concept that people, no matter what they do, are destined to do something, or reach an end, with or without trying. Free will argues that people have choices in the things they do, and their decisions are ultimately their own and are not bound to fate. The dual concept of free will and fate affects primarily the character of Emma.

The idea of Emma's life being fated is clearly elaborated upon by Jonathon. Jonathon tells Emma that people like them will always hurt those around them. Indeed, Emma believes she is ultimately no better than her mother and will continue to suffer in a cycle of hurt, violence, and sadness. Given the volatile nature of Emma's past and her present, it seems that Jonathon's assessment is true.

However, on the other hand, it can be argued that Emma is not fated at all. Instead, everything that happens to her is the result of her own choices and decisions. She decided to move back in with her mother. She decided not to leave when things got rough. She decided to continue trying to change her mother. She decided to hang out with Jonathon. She decided to use Rachel's house to prepare dinner for Evan, resulting in the fight between Evan and Jonathon. She has the freedom and power to remove herself from the cycle in which she has chosen to place herself, at any time.



Styles

Point of View

Rebecca Donovan tells her novel, “Barely Breathing” in the first person limited-omniscient narrative, from the point of view of her main character, Emma Thomas. This is done for two very important reasons, at least. The first is that the novel revolves around the experiences and trials of Emma, and so there is no one better than Emma to tell her own story. This is also done because the things which happen to Emma are so intimately personal, that a firsthand relation of the experiences causes the reader to personally relate and connect to Emma.

Language and Meaning

Rebecca Donovan tells her novel, “Barely Breathing” in language that is simple, straightforward, yet slightly poetic. This is done for at least two reasons. The first is that the novel is narrated in the first person by Emma, who is a senior in high school. The word choice and the vocabulary reflect her character's age and personality. The second is that Emma, despite the emotional and physical trauma she has experienced, is at heart a sweet, beautiful human being, and she is capable of beautiful things. The language becomes most poetic when beautiful things happen to Emma, such as simply being able to spend time with Evan.

Structure

Rebecca Donovan divides her novel “Barely Breathing” into forty-four consecutive and linear chapters, preceded and succeeded by a prologue and an epilogue, respectively. The prologue takes the form of a journal entry; the epilogue reveals Emma's departure, and Evan's decision to want to go after her. The forty-four chapters are structured as such to reveal the time between Emma's death and resuscitation, and her life during the last six months of high school before college. This simple, straightforward structure allows the reader to focus specifically on the plot, rather than being confused by a book structure that might not be linear or chronological.



Quotes

Sometimes people hurt more than they can handle... And sometimes they don't know when to ask for help.

-- Anna McKinley (Chapter 35 paragraph p 380)

Importance: Here, Anna is speaking to Emma about the pain and difficulties that her mother is facing; however, this quote is also apt for, and clearly directed at Emma as well. Emma clearly does not know when to ask for help, and Anna is soothingly attempting to convince her of this.

I needed him more than I needed to breathe.

-- Emma (Chapter 43 paragraph p. 476)

Importance: Being with Evan makes Emma realize just how much she loves him and just how much she needs him. Much of the novel focuses around Emma's efforts to breathe freely, to breathe at all, especially given the nature of her near-death experience. For Emma to say that she needs Evan more than she needs to breathe is a revelation of such high magnitude that it is immeasurable.

Whether moving in with my mother was the right thing or not, I was committed to trying.

-- Emma (Chapter 3 paragraph p 31)

Importance: Emma, reflecting on her decision to move in with her mother, sets the stage for the entire novel. It is Emma's moving in with her mother that will prove to be the catalyst for all of the succeeding events that occur until she departs for college.

I nodded, unable to tell her how helpless it made me feel to watch her drown her pain in vodka.

-- Emma (Chapter 8 paragraph p 74)

Importance: Here, Emma reflects on being absolutely powerless to help her mother handle her pain. Rachel uses alcohol and drugs to try to forget, but it never works. Emma, who desperately wants to connect with her mother, is unable to do so, except through pain, it seems.

I listened to his calm, wanting it to capture me as well, but the storm inside me wouldn't rest.

-- Emma (Chapter 12 paragraph p 127)

Importance: Evan proves to be Emma's refuge, time and time again, though the storm that rages inside and around Emma never quite seems to settle down. Nevertheless, she takes comfort in Evan, always hoping that his calmness will affect her as well.

I couldn't even imagine how to begin to ask him to reveal his nightmares.

-- Emma (Chapter 14 paragraph p 151)



Importance: As Emma grows closer to Jonathon, she realizes that Jonathon also suffers from nightmares, the cause of which she does not know. She also realizes that she doesn't even know how she can begin to ask Jonathon about his nightmares – though they both share nightmares.

The vulnerability of letting someone, anyone, into the darkness I couldn't face myself was unfathomable. It wasn't because I didn't trust Evan. I didn't want to reveal it to anyone, not even myself. After all, they were secrets for a reason.

-- Emma (Chapter 16 paragraph p 180)

Importance: Emma reveals here her decision not to tell Evan everything that goes on in her life. She is afraid of hurting someone else the way her mother hurts her –and she is powerless to truly help her mother. Emma knows that no one will truly be able to help her, except perhaps someone who has also experienced the darkness.

We'd done this before. I'd spent my childhood listening to her cry. Her cries haunted me, still echoing through my head when I tried to sleep that night.

-- Emma (Chapter 19 paragraph p 211)

Importance: Emma reflects on her childhood, which, following the death of her father, consisted of her mother's alcoholic binges, drug use, and crying –which prevents Emma from being able to sleep as well. Here, the reader begins to realize that Rachel will not ever change, though Emma herself has not yet accepted it.

Logic didn't matter when the person I loved most had been taken from me. I finally understood why my mother needed me to feel her suffering. It hurt her too much to keep it inside.

-- Emma (Chapter 25 paragraph p 283)

Importance: Emma realizes that her mother's pain and suffering is too much to bear, too much to keep inside. Emma begins to wonder as well if she will be able to always keep her own pain and suffering inside –and it already hurts Emma terribly to keep it all inside, despite her reasons to do so.

But I'd trade it all, every penny, to have him back, I wanted to say.

-- Emma (Chapter 30 paragraph p 339)

Importance: Here, Emma reflects that her deceased father had carefully saved and invested to leave Emma a fortune, to live her life happily and freely. But, she readily confesses that she would give up every cent to have her father back again.