

Bruiser Study Guide

Bruiser by Neal Shusterman

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Plot Summary

Bruiser is a novel by writer Neal Shusterman. Bruiser is about a teenage boy who is so standoffish at his school that his fellow students voted him most likely to receive the death penalty. However, when Bronte and Brewster begin to date, Bronte begins to bring Brewster out of his shell, placing him in the impossible position of having to reveal to her a special gift that he possesses. This places his life in danger when he cares about another person. Bronte and her twin brother, Tennyson, try to help Brewster, but instead allow themselves to become addicted to Brewster's special gift. Bruiser is a novel about the pain of living and the ways in which everyone learns to deal with it and the addictions that only delay reality.

Tennyson is not happy when he learns that his sister has begun dating Brewster Rawlins, an outsider at their school. Brewster is also known as the Bruiser because of his immense size and his anti-social behavior. Tennyson warns Brewster away from his sister, but Bronte refuses to allow her brother to dictate who she can and cannot date. Bronte continues to see Brewster, slowly getting to know a boy who has always been there, but has always lived on the outside.

One afternoon while on a picnic with Brewster, Bronte sprains her ankle. However, when Brewster touches her, the pain instantly vanishes. A few days later, Tennyson points out that Brewster is now limping. Not long after that, Bronte sees scars and bruises on Brewster's body and demands to know if his uncle is abusing him, but Brewster denies it. Bronte believes him, only to see the truth on his body a short time later. Bronte wants to call the police, but Brewster tells her that he and his little brother would be separated if she did. Hence, Bronte allows Brewster and Tennyson to come up with an excuse for Brewster's bruises to hide the truth.

Brewster returns home from school that same day to find his uncle in a rage. As Brewster tries to fight back for the first time in his life, Brewster's uncle begins to have a stroke. As an empathy, Brewster begins to absorb the effects of his uncle's stroke, to experience his uncle's death. However, Brewster wants to live. Hence, Brewster makes his way out of his uncle's house and leaves him to die. Later, Brewster and his brother move into the home of a neighbor where Brewster must pretend to dislike his new foster parents to prevent himself from absorbing their ailments.

Bronte and Tennyson, worried about Brewster and his future, talk their feuding parents into taking in the two orphaned boys. From the first moment Brewster moves into the house, Bronte and Tennyson's parents stop fighting and begin to get along for the first time in over a year. At the same time, Tennyson begins to feel more optimistic about life despite the imploding of his relationship with his girlfriend. Tennyson eventually figures out what it is Brewster does, that his healing powers go beyond physical ailments. However, Tennyson feels so good that he cannot stop allowing Brewster to take his pain.



One day, her mother's lover comes to the house. Bronte expects an emotional hurricane to shatter her parents, but instead they take the situation calmly and with great maturity. Brewster, however, is suffering from some unknown pain. It is then that Bronte realizes what Brewster has done for her family. Bronte leaves the house so that she can think things through and accidentally hits her head in the high school pool. Brewster finds her and takes the injury away, causing his own drowning. By the time Bronte and Tennyson find him, it appears to be too late. However, Tennyson realizes that if they give back some of what Brewster has taken, he might have a chance. Brewster begins to breathe again, but does not begin to recover until the day Bronte and Tennyson's parents announce their impending divorce.



Chapters 1-12

Chapters 1-12 Summary

In Chapter 1, Tennyson learns at dinner that his twin sister, Bronte, plans to go on an afternoon date with Brewster Rawlins, an antisocial boy from their school who was once voted most likely to receive the death penalty. Tennyson is unhappy with this situation and schemes to ruin the date.

In Chapter 2, Tennyson takes his girlfriend, Katrina, to the same miniature golf course where Brewster has taken Bronte on their date.

In Chapter 3, when Tennyson and Katrina catch up to Brewster and Bronte, Tennyson manages to get Brewster alone where he threatens him, promising bodily harm if he touches Bronte. Brewster and Bronte leave.

In Chapter 4, Bronte gets angry with Tennyson that night, insisting that Tennyson knows nothing about Brewster and is unwilling to give him a chance. Tennyson accuses Bronte of just dating Brewster because she feels sorry for him.

In Chapter 5, Tennyson wonders if maybe he is a snob and that is why he dislikes Brewster.

In Chapter 6, Tennyson meets Brewster in the locker room and sees him without his shirt on. There are multiple scars and bruises on Brewster's back.

In Chapter 7, Tennyson thinks that Brewster is being abused by his uncle.

In Chapter 8, Tennyson mentions to Bronte that there might be something wrong with Brewster.

In Chapter 9, Tennyson follows Brewster home from school.

In Chapter 10, when Brewster arrives home, he finds his brother upset because the bull his family keeps has died. Then Brewster's Uncle Hoyt comes out of the house and threatens to beat the brother, Cody, if he does not quiet down. Tennyson intervenes.

In Chapter 11, Brewster invites Tennyson into his house. They talk for a few minutes about Brewster's living situation. Brewster reveals that he does most of the chores because his uncle works night for the city. Then Uncle Hoyt comes and tells Brewster to get rid of the bull's remains.

In Chapter 12, Tennyson notices that some scabs that were on his hands are gone and that Brewster seems to have the same wounds on his hands now.



Chapters 1-12 Analysis

Tennyson is a sixteen-year-old boy who has a twin sister with whom he is fairly close. Tennyson tries to protect his sister by becoming involved when she decides to begin dating an antisocial and somewhat frightening boy from their school. At first Tennyson tries to bully Brewster away from his sister, but then he begins to get to know Brewster a little bit in an attempt to respect his sister's desire to know him. In doing this, Tennyson begins to realize that Brewster has a difficult living situation in which he cares for a younger brother and is forced to deal with an abusive guardian in his Uncle Hoyt.

Tennyson proves to the reader that he is not simply a self-centered teenager, but a young man who clearly cares about his sister. In his attempts to protect his sister, Tennyson learns more about Brewster. This foreshadows a growing relationship between the two boys that will go beyond the relationship between Brewster and Bronte.

Brewster is an orphan. His mother died and now he and his younger brother live with an abusive uncle who once abandoned his own wife and children. This is a situation that clearly leaves Brewster in a difficult situation that most children never have to experience. For this reason, Tennyson begins to understand why Brewster is so antisocial at school. However, Tennyson notices something strange about Brewster that may further explain his behavior at school.



Chapters 13-23

Chapters 13-23 Summary

In Chapter 13, Bronte describes her dating style.

In Chapter 14, Bronte recalls how she met Brewster one day while working in the school library. Brewster was in the poetry section and Bronte went to help him, assuming he was lost only to learn that he was looking for a specific poetry book. Bronte began to talk about Brewster about poetry.

In Chapter 15, after their first disastrous date miniature golfing, Bronte suggests they go on a picnic. Bronte meets Brewster in a park and leads the way up a hiking trail. As they walk, Bronte sprains her ankle. However, after Brewster touches it, it seems all better.

In Chapter 16, Bronte invites Brewster and his brother Cody to go swimming with her. Cody enjoys the outing, but Brewster refuses to take off his shirt or go very deeply into the pool. Cody announces that Brewster cannot swim. Brewster then begins to get out of the pool, but slips, causing his shirt to ride up. Bronte insists on knowing if Brewster's uncle beats him, but both Brewster and Cody insist he does not.

In Chapter 17, after dinner that night, Bronte talks to Tennyson about Brewster. Tennyson encourages Bronte to keep seeing Brewster.

In Chapter 18, Bronte claims that she was wearing blinders when it came to her parents' dying marriage.

In Chapter 19, Bronte makes a special dinner because she has invited Brewster to dinner. However, during dinner Bronte's parents begin to argue.

In Chapter 20, Bronte compares her understanding of her parents' problems with the crewmen on the Enola Gay, the plane that dropped the atomic bomb.

In Chapter 21, Bronte's parents begin arguing about an affair Bronte's mother has been having on Monday nights when everyone thought she was teaching a class. Brewster storms out of the house and claims he does not care about Bronte.

In Chapter 22, Bronte goes to clean up the dinner mess and cuts her hand. Tennyson helps her clean and cover the wound.

In Chapter 23, at school, Bronte confronts Brewster, hitting him for his callous words and for abandoning her when she needed him. Brewster confesses he lied about not caring about her. Then Bronte becomes aware that Brewster's hand is bleeding. At the same time, Bronte realizes her own cut is gone. Brewster tries to explain his gift. Bronte tells him she loves him.



Chapters 13-23 Analysis

The first-person point of view of the novel switches from Tennyson's voice to Bronte's. Bronte describes how she met Brewster and began dating him. Several strange things happen during these early dates that Bronte mentions, such as how she sprained her ankle badly, but Brewster's touch seemed to take the pain away. At the time, Bronte just assumes the injury was not as bad as she initially thought it was, but later evidence will suggest that something stranger happened.

Tennyson has already informed the reader that his parents have been struggling in their marriage since an indiscretion her father had the previous year. When Brewster comes to visit, the marriage seems to implode when Tennyson and Bronte's father announces that his wife has taken a lover of her own. Brewster rushes out of the house for unknown reasons, simply telling Bronte that he does not care about her. However, Brewster admits it is a lie the following day at school. Then Brewster takes a cut Bronte has on her hand, completely healing her cut and causing one to open on his own hand. It is then that Bronte becomes fully aware of the gift that Brewster has been trying so hard to hide: he can heal the hurts of people he loves.

Brewster's gift is complicated. Brewster is empathetic and can take people's injuries, but then he must suffer those injuries himself. When the reader thinks back to the scars and bruises both Tennyson and Bronte have seen on Brewster's body, it poses the question whose injuries are they and where have they come from? It also makes the reader realize that Brewster's life must be a very difficult one and he must be very careful about who he cares for so that he does take too many injuries into himself. However, this knowledge foreshadows difficulty in Brewster's relationship with Tennyson and Bronte because they are both social, normal teenagers who will want to expand Brewster's social circle. This could cause trouble for Brewster in the long run.



Chapters 24-30

Chapters 24-30 Summary

In Chapter 24, Brewster has tried to remain antisocial to reduce the number of people he cares about, therefore protect himself from taking their injuries. Brewster's uncle knows what he can do and does not like him to take injuries from anyone but himself and Cody. Therefore, the uncle tries to keep Brewster at home when he is not in school.

In Chapter 25, despite his uncle's attempts to keep Brewster isolated, Brewster begins lying about his whereabouts in order to sneak away with Bronte.

In Chapter 26, when his mother was diagnosed with ovarian cancer, she sent Brewster away to protect him from getting the cancer when it began to spread. However, his mother called him every day.

In Chapter 27, Brewster is bullied by another student in the lunch line until Tennyson comes to his defense.

In Chapter 28, Tennyson begins training Brewster on weights. Tennyson does not realize that Brewster takes on both their pain from the exercise.

In Chapter 29, Brewster goes to one of Tennyson's lacrosse games with Bronte. Brewster absorbs all of Tennyson's injuries on the field, making Tennyson a much better player.

In Chapter 30, Cody has been told all his life to keep Brewster's gift a secret. Therefore, when he broke his arm jumping off the roof of the house and Brewster took it from him, Brewster began to fear he would never learn the consequences of such acts. Brewster made a cast for Cody and made him wear it until the principal at Cody's school called it child abuse and made them take it off. Brewster also takes Cody's hurts when their uncle beats him. Despite this, Cody remains afraid of his uncle especially now that Brewster is spending so much time with Bronte. For this reason, Brewster has Cody go to the library after school and sometimes lets him join he and Bronte.

One night, Cody and Brewster come home late from being with Bronte. Uncle Hoyt is angry and yells at Brewster for being gone. Brewster does not stand up to his uncle. Later, on the porch, Uncle Hoyt burns his own arm with a cigarette in an attempt to punish Brewster.

Chapters 24-30 Analysis

The narration changes to Brewster's voice. A fan of angry poetry, Brewster narrates in verse. Brewster tells how his mother cared deeply for him despite her own problems and that she helped him the best she could until she got cancer. Brewster's mother



knew he would take the cancer from her when it moved to an organ he had, so she sent him away before that could happen. Despite her deep love for her children, Brewster's mother had few choices in who could take her children, so she sent them to her brother. Uncle Hoyt learned of Brewster's gift almost immediately when he took Hoyt's kidney infection a month after the boys came to live with him. From that time on, Hoyt moved to isolate Brewster from the rest of the world.

From Brewster and his brother, Cody's, point of view, the reader learns how Uncle Hoyt has grown used to Brewster taking away his minor aches and pains as well as his illnesses and larger injuries. At the same time, Cody has grown somewhat fearless because he knows that his brother will always take his pains away from him. Both these people use Brewster for his gift, taking the good parts and leaving Brewster to deal with the bad parts. It is for this reason that Uncle Hoyt appears to desire to keep Brewster isolated even though he tells Brewster it is for his own safety and in an attempt to keep the brothers together.

This section of the novel not only shows the nature of Brewster's gift, but it also shows the downfall of his gift. Not only does Brewster suffer when he takes injuries from those he cares about, but his taking of their injuries allows those around Brewster to live a painfree, carefree life that can be addictive. This foreshadows a time when this addiction will spread to others, causing Brewster more pain than he might be able to handle.



Chapters 31-39

Chapters 31-39 Summary

In Chapter 31, Tennyson is upset at the beginning of his lacrosse game because he sees his girlfriend with Ozzy O'Dell, a bully from their school. Tennyson then proceeds to play a fantastic game, never growing tired or suffering for long from his many injuries. It is only at the end of the game that Tennyson realizes why he feels so good. Tennyson charges toward Brewster and tells him to never come to another of his games.

In Chapter 32, Tennyson feels badly about how he yelled at Brewster and promises Bronte he will ask forgiveness.

In Chapter 33, Tennyson thinks about what happened at his game and wonders about his emotions at the end of the game.

In Chapter 34, Tennyson invites Brewster and Cody to play basketball with him and his father. They have a good time and Tennyson notices his dad is more relaxed and happy than he has been in years.

In Chapter 35, that morning when Brewster and Cody prepared to go play basketball, Uncle Hoyt confronted them. Brewster told the truth and warned Uncle Hoyt to back off. A short time later, Cody overhears Uncle Hoyt speaking to his boss on the phone. It turns out that Uncle Hoyt was in a car accident the night before while driving a steamroller. This has resulted in Uncle Hoyt being demoted, something he refuses to accept. Later that night, when Cody gets up to go to the bathroom, Uncle Hoyt becomes angry at him for not opening the porch door quickly enough. Uncle Hoyt drags Cody out to the shed at the back of their property and Cody knows he is about to get a beating. However, Brewster is not home, therefore Cody will feel all the pain. Fortunately, Brewster arrives just before the beating starts. Brewster stands quietly outside and takes all of Cody's injuries without his uncle ever touching him.

In Chapter 36, the beating is worse than it has ever been before and Uncle Hoyt is sorry afterward. Cody helps Brewster to their bedroom where he cares for his wounds. When Cody becomes sad and Brewster takes that away too, he becomes frustrated. The next morning, Brewster and Cody rise to go to school like any other morning.

In Chapter 37, Bronte says that she misunderstood the nature of Brewster's gift at first.

In Chapter 38, Bronte has been encouraging Brewster to expand his social circle since they began dating. Although Brewster is clearly reluctant, Bronte pushes him. It was with Bronte that Brewster was with when he should have been home with Cody the night of the beating.

In Chapter 39, Bronte and Tennyson are walking to school when they see Brewster. Both are shocked at the sight of Brewster because of the bruises and cuts on his face



from Uncle Hoyt's beating. Brewster reluctantly admits that Uncle Hoyt caused the injuries, but does not explain fully. Bronte wants to go to the police, but Brewster is afraid that he and Cody will be separated and that someone might find out about his gift. Tennyson then offers for Brewster to tell everyone that Tennyson beat him up because of Bronte. Brewster agrees and soon everyone at school is talking about it. Bronte, however, thinks she should have gone to the police anyway.

Chapters 31-39 Analysis

As Brewster and Bronte grow closer, they spend more time together. On the one hand, this is a good thing. However, it is also a bad thing. On the one hand, Bronte is pulling Brewster out of his shell, introducing him to new people and expanding his social circle, something that seems to make him happy. Unfortunately, Brewster cannot control who he begins to care about. This includes Tennyson. When Brewster attends Tennyson's lacrosse game, he takes away Tennyson's pains and his exhaustion, making Tennyson a better player. However, he also takes away the pain that makes the game something Tennyson can be proud of enduring and surviving. Tennyson becomes angry and sends Brewster away.

At the same time, as Brewster grows closer to Bronte and spends more time with her, the more he has to defy his uncle. This causes tension at home. This is when the reader learns exactly what Uncle Hoyt has been doing to punish Brewster. Rather than attack Brewster himself, since Brewster is a big young man and could probably hurt Hoyt if he grew angry enough, Uncle Hoyt attacks Cody. Cody takes the beating, but feels none of the pain as Brewster absorbs it all from him. This explains to the reader why Cody might feel fearless most of the time. There is also the emotional pain, however, and Brewster takes that from Cody as well, making Cody frustrated and wishing he could feel his own emotions for once.

Brewster's situation is a sad one and it seems to be heading to disaster. The reader can see that Uncle Hoyt's behavior will one day cause Brewster to be so badly injured that he will not survive. At the same time, Brewster's social circle is changing and there are more people for him to take pain from. This leaves the reader deeply concerned for Brewster's future even as he seems to be finding his own happiness for the first time in his life.



Chapters 40-48

Chapters 40-48 Summary

In Chapter 40, Brewster returns home that night to find his uncle very angry. Brewster decides he no longer wants to take his uncle's abuse and he wants to stand up to him. However, as Brewster and his uncle argue, Brewster begins to feel the effects of a stroke his uncle is beginning to experience. As Brewster absorbs the stroke, he can hear his uncle telling him that this is what his purpose is in life. However, Brewster does not want to die, so he fights the symptoms and leaves the house, moving far enough away that he can no longer take the ailment from his uncle.

In Chapter 41, Tennyson and Bronte hear at school that Brewster's uncle died, but they do not hear directly from Brewster. Eventually they learn that Brewster has gone to live with a neighbor, but when they try to see him they are turned away.

In Chapter 42, Bronte tells Tennyson that she wants to ask their parents to take in Brewster and Cody, but she thinks it would be better coming from Tennyson.

In Chapter 43, Tennyson speaks to his father about taking in Brewster and Cody, playing his father against his mother in order to convince him to do it. Tennyson's parents at first refuse, but when Bronte threatens to sue for emancipation, they decide to speak with a social worker and soon find themselves approved as foster parents.

In Chapter 44, the Gortons deliver Brewster and Cody to Tennyson and Bronte's house. From the first night it seems things are better in the home when Tennyson's parents are actually civil to one another.

In Chapter 45, Tennyson speaks to Brewster and learns that he feels guilty over his uncle's death.

In Chapter 46, Katrina tries to reach out to Tennyson over his parents' marital problems, but he brushes her off.

In Chapter 47, on a half day at school, Tennyson goes to a smoothie shop with his friends. When Brewster walks in, Ozzy O'Dell makes rude comments toward him. Tennyson jumps to Brewster's defense, eventually finding himself bullied into a fight. However, Tennyson is worried about the injuries Brewster will suffer if he fights, so Tennyson makes quick work of it, breaking Ozzy's nose before Ozzy can get a punch in.

In Chapter 48, when Cody learns what Tennyson did, he questions him, expressing a fear that he might be like Uncle Hoyt.



Chapters 40-48 Analysis

Brewster argues with his uncle only to find himself suffering the symptoms of his uncle's fatal stroke. Brewster desperately does not want to die. When Brewster manages to push away the symptoms and leave the house, he shows the reader that he does have some power over what he can absorb and what he does not. However, Brewster is a kind, gentle man who cares deeply and the more he cares, the harder it is for him to avoid absorbing hurts.

Tennyson and Bronte learn of Brewster's current situation, where he is living with a neighbor and might have to go into a foster home. Bronte comes up with the idea of having Brewster live in their home and Tennyson helps her work it out. When Brewster comes into the home, there is an immediate change in the behavior of their parents that Tennyson cannot help but see from the first moments. The reader might recall that Brewster was able to absorb Cody's sadness and this might explain why the atmosphere in the home has changed. Brewster clearly cares about Bronte and her entire family, therefore there is a good chance that he is absorbing the hard feelings that exist there.



Chapters 49-56

Chapters 49-56 Summary

In Chapter 49, while Brewster, Tennyson, and his father are playing basketball at the park, Cody is playing with a new kite Tennyson bought him. Cody has trouble getting the kite in the air, so when it finally goes up he allows it to go where it wants. This means crossing the street and heading toward some power lines. When the kite gets tangled in the power lines, Cody climbs up to retrieve it, unaware of just how high he is going. When the others become aware of what has happened, Brewster quickly climbs up the tower to save his brother. When Cody slips, Brewster grabs him and keeps him from falling any further. Cody is afraid and he begins to feel his fear slip away. However, Cody wants to keep his fear, so he hangs on to it. This is the first time Cody has done this successfully so close to Brewster.

In Chapter 50, Bronte looks back and sees that she was blind to what Brewster was going through when he lived with her family.

In Chapter 51, after Brewster saved Cody from falling off the power lines, he became very popular at school.

In Chapter 52, in the middle of the night, Bronte finds Brewster awake, suffering the after effects of one of Cody's nightmares. Brewster tells Bronte how he killed his uncle. Bronte argues that Brewster's uncle used him and deserved to suffer his own death.

In Chapter 53, Tennyson and his team lose an important lacrosse game. Tennyson knows his game was off and blames it on Katrina not being there.

In Chapter 54, Tennyson decides he needs to be a winner to get Katrina to pay more attention to him, so he asks Brewster to come to his next game.

In Chapter 55, Katrina comes to the next game. Tennyson plays well and they win, thanks to Brewster. However, Katrina tells Tennyson afterward that she has been seeing Ozzy for a while and wants to break up.

In Chapter 56, Tennyson is upset all the way home. However, when he gets home he finds that the bad feelings begin to disappear. Tennyson realizes that Brewster not only takes away his injuries but his hurt feelings too. Tennyson tries to leave the house to spare Brewster, but finds that he cannot.

Chapters 49-56 Analysis

Brewster saves Cody from falling from a tall power line tower. This causes Brewster to gain even more friends at school, something that is totally unexpected and exciting for Brewster. However, it also creates a larger pool of friends for Brewster to care about



and steal injuries from. At the same time, the reader sees Cody take back and hold on to his feelings of fear. This leaves the reader aware that this is possible and that it might actually help Brewster, opening the door for someone else to make this same sacrifice for Brewster and change things for him.

Tennyson, who began as Brewster's biggest enemy and has become his biggest friend, begins to see the benefits of Brewster's gift as far as his own life is concerned. Tennyson finds himself about to lose his girlfriend and his MVP award in lacrosse, so he decides to use Brewster's gift to help himself. Later, when Tennyson learns that Brewster's gift extends to emotions, he knows that he is doing harm to Brewster and he should leave him alone. However, Tennyson finds the good feelings that Brewster's gift leaves him with addictive and impossible to ignore. Tennyson allows Brewster to continue taking his bad emotions like a drug addicted might continue using despite all the arguments against it.



Chapters 57-66

Chapters 57-66 Summary

In Chapter 57, several weeks pass and Bronte notices Tennyson acting weird. However, she does not question him too closely.

In Chapter 58, Bronte admits that she never fully understood the impact on Brewster of his gift. Then one night her mother's lover came to the house. Bronte is shocked, but becomes even more shocked when her parents calmly talk to him and then go back to mundane household chores. Bronte is even more shocked to learn her mother is continuing to see her lover. At the same time, Bronte becomes aware that Brewster is in terrible pain for an unknown reason.

In Chapter 59, Bronte goes to speak to Tennyson and realizes that Brewster is taking away their bad feelings and that Tennyson has been aware of it for some time.

In Chapter 60, Bronte confronts Brewster and he shows her his body. There are multiple bruises and wounds all over his back and chest. Brewster tells her where each came from, naming her, her family, and multiple friends she has introduced him to.

In Chapter 61, Bronte leaves the house, afraid if she stays he will take her emotions and she will not be able to puzzle out what she now knows. Bronte goes to the high school pool and swims for a while, working it all out in her mind. When she goes to leave the pool, Bronte becomes dizzy and falls backward, hitting her head.

In Chapter 62, aware that Bronte is upset, Brewster goes in search of her.

In Chapter 63, when Brewster finds Bronte in the pool, he wades in beside her and takes her injury away, aware that it will take his life.

In Chapter 64, Tennyson followed Brewster. Tennyson does not immediately see Brewster in the pool, but when he sees Bronte he knows something is wrong. They pull Brewster out of the water and begin CPR, but it has no effect. They try a defibrillator, but it too does not work. Tennyson then suggests that they have to take back some of what they let Brewster take from them. When he concentrates, Tennyson feels a bruise return to his shoulder. A second later, Brewster begins to breathe again.

In Chapter 65, Cody now lives in a group home. The social workers took him away from Tennyson and Bronte's home because of the mysterious circumstances surrounding Brewster's accident. While he was being interviewed by the social workers, Cody jumped out of a second floor window and now has a broken leg. With Tennyson, Bronte, and their parents, Cody goes to visit Brewster in the hospital where he is still in a coma.

In Chapter 66, Tennyson and Bronte's parents sit them down and tell them that they are going to get a divorce. Although they are saddened by this news, they are also



somewhat relieved that it is finally over. Then Tennyson's cellphone rings, the same phone he had in his pocket when he jumped in the pool to save Brewster. The phone should not work, but somehow it does. Tennyson hands it to Bronte and tells her it is for her. Tennyson knows that Brewster has woken up.

Chapters 57-66 Analysis

Bronte comes to realize what Tennyson has known for a while, that Brewster can absorb bad emotions as well as injuries. This is why their parents have gotten along in recent weeks. However, Bronte knows that this is wrong, that it is not fixing anything, it is simply giving everyone a false sense of contentment. Again the drug addiction metaphor comes in here. Bronte becomes aware of everything Brewster has hidden from her, the injuries he has suffered because of her insistence that he make more friends and start caring about more people.

When Bronte hits her head in the pool and nearly drowns, Brewster knows that by healing her wound, he is basically committing suicide. However, Brewster is willing to do this because he loves Bronte so much. There is a stark contrast between this moment and the moment in which Brewster realized his uncle was dying. Brewster wants to save Bronte at all costs, even if it means his own life, showing the reader how deeply Brewster cares about Bronte and how much he was unhappy with his miserable uncle.

In the end, Tennyson is the one who cares enough about Brewster to recognize what he and the others have done to Brewster both willingly and without realizing their mistakes. Tennyson insists that they must take it back. When their parents finally own their mistakes and decide to end their marriage, it seems to be the final acceptance of all that has happened and the final take back that helps bring Brewster back to the real world. In their own way, by taking responsibility for the bad emotions and events in their own lives, Bronte and Tennyson have saved Brewster.



Characters

Tennyson Sternberger

Tennyson is the sixteen-year-old twin brother of Bronte. Tennyson and Bronte's parents are literature professors at the local university, therefore they have been named after famous writers. Tennyson is fairly popular at school and is a star athlete in lacrosse. When Tennyson learns that his sister is going out with Brewster Rawlins, an antisocial boy from their school who is known as the bruiser, Tennyson is not happy. Tennyson makes an attempt to break them up, but when Bronte convinces him that Brewster is not what Tennyson thought he was, he tries to get to know Brewster. What Tennyson learns is surprising.

Tennyson discovers that Brewster and his brother live with an uncle who is very abusive. Brewster takes on most of the responsibilities of the household because of his uncle's unwillingness or inability to do it himself. This leaves Brewster with very little free time to be a kid. AT the same time, Tennyson begins to suspect that there is something unusual about Brewster. Soon enough Tennyson comes to understand that Brewster has a gift in which he can take the injuries of people he cares about.

At first, Tennyson is an advocate for Brewster, doing his best to keep Brewster from absorbing his hurts and taking responsibility for his own problems. However, when Tennyson comes to realize that Brewster takes away his bad emotions too, he becomes addicted to the carefree sense that Brewster leaves him with. Tennyson allows Brewster to take his entire family's emotional hurts, never thinking about the impact it might be having on Brewster until it is nearly too late.

Bronte Sternberger

Bronte is a sixteen-year-old girl. She attends high school where she is the swimming star. Bronte meets Brewster Rawlins in the library one day and decides to take him on as some kind of project because she feels bad for him. However, this relationship soon blooms into a romance. When Bronte learns that Brewster can take injuries from people he cares about, she tells him she loves him. Bronte tries to pull Brewster out of his self-imposed cocoon and help him make new friends. However, by doing this Bronte causes Brewster to expose him to more concern for the people around him and to take more people's injuries.

Bronte goes out of her way to try to help Brewster, her intentions good even though she continues to be blind to what she is truly doing to him. When Brewster's uncle dies, Bronte arranges for Brewster to become a part of her family despite the dark emotions of her parents' imploding marriage. This causes more harm than good to Brewster, but he refuses to admit the truth to Bronte until he has no choice because he does not want



to burden her with his pain. In the end, Brewster gives his life for Bronte. In return, Bronte and Tennyson try to take back some of their pain to help Brewster.

Brewster Rawlins

Brewster is a fifteen-year-old high school student who goes to the same school as Tennyson and Bronte. Brewster has always been something of a loner, staying out of the main stream, living without many friends. However, when he meets Bronte, he finds himself pulled into her world quicker than he thought possible.

As Bronte and Brewster grow closer and closer, Brewster finds it impossible to hide from her his secret gift. Brewster is an empath. He steals the injuries and bad emotions from the people he cares about, taking them on as his own. This causes Brewster to often sport injuries he did nothing to cause except to care. When Brewster's brother is beaten by his uncle, it is Brewster who bares the wounds. When Cody falls from a tree, it is Brewster who suffers the broken arm.

Brewster allows Bronte to pull him out of his self-imposed shell because he knows it makes her happy. However, being a part of Bronte's world means caring about a large number of people. Brewster is soon covered in bruises and cuts, soon feeling all the dark emotions that surround the emotions of the implosion of Mr. and Mrs. Sternberger's marriage. When Bronte learns the truth, she struggles to deal with the enormity of it. Bronte falls and nearly drowns in the high school pool. Brewster takes it from her willingly, happy to give his life for her.

Cody Rawlins

Cody Rawlins is Brewster's younger brother. Cody is only eight years old, therefore he does not fully understand the impact of Brewster's gift. Cody lives his life with a lack of fear because he has never had to feel the pain of his own injuries. However, as Cody matures and watches the pain that Brewster suffers, he learns how to keep his own emotions. Cody even finds some satisfaction in having a broken leg that Brewster has not been able to take from him.

Uncle Hoyt

Uncle Hoyt is Brewster's uncle. Hoyt is a very angry man who is unhappy having to take custody of his two nephews after leaving his own wife and children. However, Hoyt knows that Brewster can take his pain and his injuries. This causes Hoyt to hold on tight to Brewster, never allowing him out of the house except for school, so that no one else will ever learn of what he can do and try to take him away. Somehow Hoyt manages to hold on to his anger around Brewster and he often uses it to lash out at Brewster by injuring Cody. In the end, Brewster stops caring for his uncle, leaving his uncle to die of a stroke.



Ozzie O'Dell

Ozzie O'Dell is another student at the school where Brewster, Tennyson, and Bronte go. Ozzie often makes fun of Brewster, causing Brewster great discomfort. Then Tennyson begins to stand up for Brewster against Ozzie. One day, Tennyson breaks Ozzie's nose to keep him from making fun of Brewster or hurting Brewster in a fight with Tennyson. Later, Tennyson learns that his girlfriend has begun dating Ozzie behind his back.

Katrina

Katrina is Tennyson's girlfriend. Tennyson and Katrina started dating out of a type of consolation prize when each of the people they liked started dating someone else. Tennyson cares deeply about Katrina and thinks there is a future in their relationship. However, this ends when Tennyson learns that Katrina has been seeing Ozzie for a while.

Lisa Sternberger

Lisa Sternberger is Tennyson and Bronte's mother. After her husband cheated on her the previous year, Lisa began seeing another professor at the university where both Lisa and her husband work. This leads to a great deal of tension in the household that seems to all but disappear when Brewster moves in. However, Lisa continues to see her lover and when Brewster leaves the home, they decide to divorce.

Daniel Sternberger

Daniel Sternberger is Tennyson and Bronte's father. Daniel once had a brief affair that has caused a great deal of discord in his marriage. Daniel's wife blames him for their unhappiness. When his wife begins to have an affair, Daniel makes accusations against her in front of the family. In the end, Daniel takes responsibility for his own actions and leaves the family, agreeing to a divorce.

The Gortons

The Gortons are an elderly couple who live near the Rawlins. When Uncle Hoyt dies, Mrs. Gorton offers Brewster and Cody a place to live. While there, Brewster feels he must dislike the Gortons to prevent himself from caring enough about them to remove their ailments. Hence, the Gortons never really like him and are happy to see him go when they are turned down as foster parents.



Objects/Places

Kites

Cody enjoys flying kites. Cody climbs up a power line tower in an effort to free a kite and nearly falls. Cody learns how to keep some of his emotions around Brewster in this experience.

Band-Aids

Brewster and Cody have developed a ritual of caring for Brewster's injuries. Brewster is often covered in Band-Aids. A new Band-Aid on Brewster's hand alerts Uncle Hoyt to Bronte's existence in Brewster's life.

Porch Screen Door

The handle on the porch screen door is broken, so Uncle Hoyt requires help entering the house. When Cody hesitates to open the door one night, Uncle Hoyt becomes angry and beats Cody for it.

Roast

Bronte makes a roast for Brewster's first dinner with the family, but Tennyson refuses to eat it because of his experience chopping up the bull.

Allen Ginsberg Poetry

Brewster and Bronte meet when Brewster goes to the school library in search of a book of poetry by Allen Ginsburg.

Tri-tip

The Rawlins had an old bull called Tri-tip. However, the bull dies, forcing Brewster and Tennyson to have to chop him into pieces to dispose of the body.

Smoothie Shop

Tennyson and Ozzie O'Dell get into a fight over Brewster when Tennyson and his friends are hanging out at a local smoothie shop.



Basketball Court

Tennyson invites Brewster and Cody to play basketball with him and his father at the basketball court in the park. It is during this first play time that Tennyson notices the emotional impact on his father of Brewster's nearness.

Shed

There is a shed on the Rawlins' property that is far from the nearest neighbors. Hence, Uncle Hoyt often takes Cody there to beat him.

High School Pool

Bronte invites Brewster and Cody to swim with her at the high school pool one weekend. It is here that Bronte first sees Brewster's scars and bruises. Later, while swimming there Bronte falls and hits her head. Bronte would have drowned if Brewster did not arrive and take the injuries from her, drowning in her place.

Lacrosse Field

Tennyson plays lacrosse. During games, Brewster comes and takes away Tennyson's pain and exhaustion, helping him play a better game.

Wackworld Miniature Golf Emporium

Brewster and Bronte have their first date at the Wackworld Miniature Golf Emporium. Tennyson crashes the date and threatens Brewster away from his sister.



Themes

Empathy

Empathy is defined as the capacity to recognize feelings that are being experienced by another. In the case of Brewster Rawlins, he not only has the ability to recognize other's feelings, but he can steal their injuries and bad emotions and make them his own. Brewster can only do this with people he cares about, so he has tried all his life not to care too much for other people. Brewster's uncle is aware of his ability and he takes advantage of it, keeping Brewster near so that he is always there to take away his uncle's pains.

When Brewster meets Bronte, he begins to expand his social circles, growing closer to a multiple number of people. This causes Brewster to take on a great many injuries and hurt feelings, suffering silently. In the end, the burden of all these bad feelings and injuries leaves Brewster in constant pain and willing to give his life for Bronte.

As Brewster takes away the bad emotions of those he cares for, those around him grow addicted to the good feelings he leaves them with. Tennyson likes feeling carefree rather than worrying about the pain of losing his girlfriend. In this way, Tennyson and the others forget to see and understand Brewster's feelings. In this way, there is a lack of empathy for Brewster. However, Tennyson eventually sees his mistake and tries to take back his bad emotions from Brewster, saving Brewster's life in the end.

Addiction

Feeling good can be addictive. Brewster's uncle is an older man who suffers many aches and pains, such as sciatica. This leaves him in pain and unable to do what he needs to do in his everyday life. Brewster takes this from his uncle, leaving him feeling younger. Uncle Hoyt begins hiding Brewster away, keeping him from going anywhere outside of the house other than school. At first this seems like a selfish act, but it is an act that keeps Brewster from caring about so many people that he is overwhelmed by their injuries and hurt feelings.

Tennyson knows what Brewster can do. At first, Tennyson wants to own his own pains. Tennyson wants to win his own lacrosse games, wants to feel the pain of his efforts. However, when he realizes he is losing his MVP reward and his girlfriend, Tennyson asks Brewster to come to his games. Brewster takes away Tennyson's hurts, but it causes him even more pain and hurt. Then, when Tennyson loses his girlfriend, his devastation disappears the moment he comes near Brewster. Tennyson knows what he is doing is wrong, but he cannot make himself stop giving his bad feelings to Brewster. Tennyson is addicted to feeling good, making addiction a theme of the book.



Unconditional Love

For Brewster's gift to work, he must care about the person in question. When Brewster does not care about a person, he does not steal their darkness, their emotions and their injuries. Therefore, Brewster tries not to care about anyone outside of his brother and uncle. In the end, Brewster even learns not to care for his uncle in order to save himself from certain death.

When Brewster meets Bronte, he begins to fall slowly in love with her. Brewster does not want to love Bronte, but even when he turns from her and claims he does not care, he cannot stay away. When Bronte confronts Brewster, he takes her cut from her. It is then that Bronte learns the nature of Brewster's gift. It also then when the reader begins to see just how much Brewster feels for Bronte.

At the end of the novel, Brewster finds Bronte drowning in the high school pool. Rather than pull her out and give her CPR like another person might do, Brewster wades into the pool and allows her injury to become his own. Brewster knows that this will kill him because Bronte will be too disoriented when she comes to help him, but he does it anyway. This is the absolute proof of Brewster's deep, unconditional love for Bronte, something that has not been completely returned to him by anyone in his life, except perhaps by his mother.

Style

Point of View

The point of view of the novel is the first-person perspective. There are multiple narrators in this novel, therefore each chapter is given a heading that allows the reader to know which character is the narrator. When Tennyson and Bronte are the narrators, their chapters are given a difficult vocabulary word that they have learned from their educator parents. When it is Brewster's turn to be the narrator, his chapters are in verse. When Cody is the narrator, the chapters are titled stuff and filled with a rambling narration that reflects his young age.

The point of view of this novel is first person, creating an intimate relationship between reader and narrator that might not exist in another type of narration. In this novel, the author does not remain in the head of one character, but in four. Each narrator has a unique voice that is characterized by that character's personality, motivations, and education level. The point of view tells a well-rounded story that shows the events from multiple points of views, but never leaves the intimacy between reader and character.

Setting

The novel is set in a moderate sized university town. The main characters are all teenagers, except for Cody who is only eight. For this reason, much of the book takes place in the local high school or the homes of the main characters.

The setting of this novel works well with the plot because it is simply what it is intended to be, a background to a compelling story. The setting has little to no impact on the overall plot of the story. However, the setting does support the motivations and actions of the characters by reinforcing the world of high school that most of the main characters live in. Hence, the setting of the novel works well with the plot.

Language and Meaning

The novel is written in simple English with some more difficult vocabulary added in. The main character's parents are literature professors, therefore the chapters that are narrated by Bronte and Tennyson include chapter titles that are difficult vocabulary words taught to them by their parents. Brewster's language is equally complicated, but this comes from his love of poetry. Cody's language tends to be much simpler.

The language of the novel works well with the plot because it makes the characters seem more authentic. The language is a language that a reader might expect the children of two very well educated parents to speak. There is a combination of sophistication and slang in the language, making the language appropriate not only to the plot of the novel and the intended audience, but also the characters.

Structure

The novel is divided into sixty-six chapters. Each chapter is titled with a vocabulary word that both Tennyson and Bronte learned from their parents, that Brewster feels illustrates his poetry, or Cody likes. The chapters are given a title character's name as well, so that the reader will know which character is the first person narrator of the following chapter. Finally, Brewster's chapters are all written in verse.

The novel has one main plot and several subplots. The main plot follows Brewster as he struggles to deal with his changing social status in light of his empathic abilities. One of the subplots involves Brewster's relationship with his uncle. Another subplot follows Brewster's relationship with his brother, Cody. Finally, one of the subplots follows Brewster's growing friendship with Tennyson and Tennyson's addiction to Brewster's gift. All the plots come to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.



Quotes

"If he touches her, I swear I'm going to rip out his guts with my bare hands and send them to his next of kin for lunch" (Chapter 1, p. 3).

"Maybe it did take guts to stand up to his crazy, belt-wielding uncle, but I think it took more guts for the Bruiser to invite me inside" (Chapter 10, p. 42).

"It took a day for that strange feeling to fade, although it never wore off entirely. Eventually I was able to hurl enough reason at it to camouflage it against a background of protective logic" (Chapter 16, p. 68).

"My blindness didn't allow me to see it coming" (Chapter 18, p. 85).

"I saw the weak hearts of my classmates shredded by conformity, bloated and numb, as they iced the wounds of acceptance in the primordial gym, hoping to heal themselves into popularity" (Chapter 24, p. 110).

"Brewster said I should always be the rag doll, but I never liked that much. I told him I'd rather be Plastic Boy instead, cuz that's a good name for a superhero" (Chapter 30, p. 133).

"Angry and robbed. I'd rather play hard and lose honestly than suffer such a despicable win. He stole more than my pain today" (Chapter 31, p. 153).

"The way I see it, the impossible happens all the time; but we're so good at taking it for granted, we forget it was once impossible" (Chapter 37, p. 184).

"I don't know how things would have been different if I had made that call. Maybe it might have saved Brew from what happened next. On the other hand, it was going to happen one way or another, no matter what any of us did" (Chapter 39, p. 196).

"I suppose surrogate stress is a kinder, gentler form of trauma" (Chapter 45, p. 231).

"I had the sudden sneaking suspicion that Tennyson knew something I didn't" (Chapter 58, p. 292).

"So open your eyes, Brew. Open your eyes, and talk to us. We'll keep our pain, but I promise we'll share our joy. Talk to us, Brew...because we're finally ready to take your call" (Chapter 66, p. 328).



Topics for Discussion

Who is Brewster Rawlins? Why does Tennyson dislike him at the beginning of the novel? Why does Brewster avoid people? Why does Brewster live with his uncle? Why does Brewster hesitate to become friends with Bronte and her brother, Tennyson? What happens the first time Brewster touches Tennyson? What happens when Bronte sprains her ankle?

Who is Tennyson? Why does he dislike Brewster Rawlins? Why does he try to stop Brewster from dating his sister? Why does Tennyson later wait for Brewster in the locker room? What does he see? What does he think about what he has seen? Why does Tennyson later follow Brewster home from school? What does he see then? How do these events cause Tennyson to change his mind about Brewster?

Who is Bronte? Why does she begin dating Brewster Rawlins? Why does Bronte feel hurt when Brewster walks out on her family dinner after a fight breaks out between her parents? Why does Bronte later confront Brewster about this event? How does Brewster respond to Bronte's feelings? What causes the cut on Brewster's hand? What does this cause him to reveal to Bronte?

Who is Cody? Why does Cody live his life feeling as though there are no consequences to his actions? Why is Cody not afraid of his uncle's beatings? Why is Cody not afraid of falling from large heights? How does Brewster try to teach Cody a lesson in regards to the consequences of his actions? How does Cody finally learn to hold on to fear?

What has happened between Tennyson and Bronte's parents? Why does Tennyson refer to his parents as deceased in the beginning of the novel? Is this a joke or is it a serious jab at their behavior? What does Tennyson learn about his mother that upsets him later in the novel? What delays the Sternbergers from getting a divorce? For what reason? How is this finally resolved? How do Tennyson and Bronte feel about it?

Discuss Brewster's gift. How does it work? Why does it work? Why does Brewster's uncle force him to hide from the rest of the world? Is this for Brewster's protection or some other reason? How does Brewster feel about this situation? Why? What changes when Brewster meets Bronte? How does her relationship change Brewster fundamentally? What does this relationship do to Brewster's health and well-being?

How does Brewster keep himself from absorbing his uncle's stroke? Why does he do this? Why has Brewster never been able to resist an illness or injury before? Why does Brewster take Bronte's injury when she falls in the pool? Why does he allow himself to suffer her drowning? Does Brewster want to die? How does Tennyson bring Brewster back to the living? Why does Brewster not immediately wake? What causes him to wake?