

Good Night, Mr. Tom Study Guide

Good Night, Mr. Tom by Michelle Magorian

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Plot Summary

Britain is on the brink of war when young William Beech is sent to live with Tom Oakley in the village of Little Weirwold. Tom Oakley is a sad, reclusive widower who slowly accepts the idea of having the boy live with him. Tom soon discovers William has been a victim of child abuse and greatly needs his love and care.

Tom takes William under his wing and provides him with warm clothes and plenty of food. William begins to thrive and he soon begins school. There he meets caring teachers and develops a close-knit group of friends: George Fletcher, sisters Carrie and Ginnie, and Zach, a fellow evacuee. William is embarrassed because he can't read but with the help of Tom, he is soon able to keep up with his peers. During this time, William begins to realize he has a talent for drawing and acting.

Although William is happy with his new life, the events of the outside world aren't as bright. World War II is in full swing and has become a grim reality for the village. When William receives word his mother is ill and he must return to London, his heart sinks.

In London, William finds his mother has given birth. She questions him about his life with Tom and beats him when she feels his responses aren't sufficient. William's mother locks him and the baby in a closet and leaves indefinitely. Tom awakens in the night with a premonition that William is in trouble. He goes to London and finds William beaten, sick, and clinging to his dead infant sister. After a brief stay in a London hospital, Tom kidnaps William and returns him to Little Weirwold.

After returning to Little Weirwold, William begins a slow recovery. His time in London has taken a physical and mental toll on him. With the help of Tom and his friends, William begins to feel normal again. Not long after his recuperation, he learns his mother has committed suicide. William is shocked by her death but happy to learn Tom is going to adopt him.

Life continues normally until the August day when William's best friend Zach is called back to London to visit his wounded father. Weeks go by without any news from Zach. When news finally does come in, it is bleak. Zach is dead.

William is overcome with grief but with the help of his support system, he begins to understand Zach will live forever in him. William realizes he has much to live for and is thankful for his life with Tom.



Chapter 1-3

Summary

Chapter 1: Meeting

The story begins with a woman knocking on the door of sixty-something Thomas Oakley aka Tom. The woman, a billeting officer, has brought a sickly, pale boy to Tom in the hopes he will take the young war evacuee in. Tom questions why the woman has brought the boy to him and she replies his mother had wished for him to be close to a church and Tom's house fits the bill. Tom reluctantly agrees to take the boy and learns his name is William Beech. As William settles into Tom's home, Tom fashions a peg for William's jacket, provides him with a scarf, and prepares him a lunch of bacon, bread, and hot tea. William's reluctance to eat the meal and the bruises covering his legs arouse Tom's suspicions. Putting all questions aside, Tom leaves the home for a bit and leaves William to explore his new home and reflect on his past history of bad behavior. William leaves Tom's home to explore a nearby cemetery where he meets one of the town's teachers, Mrs. Hartridge. He enjoys his graveyard visit until a dog approaches him barking and jumping about. William grabs a branch and prepares to defend himself when Tom appears. He tells William to drop the branch and it is later revealed the dog, Sammy, belongs to Tom. William fears he has upset Tom and prepares for a beating. William, paralyzed with fear, vomits until he can no longer stand. Tom is quite shocked by William's behavior and soon realizes he has been a victim of severe child abuse. The chapter culminates with Tom questioning what he has gotten himself into and digging into the contents of a hope chest that once belonged to his late wife who died alongside his child during childbirth.

Chapter 2: Little Weirwold

William wakes up the next morning to find Tom, Sammy, and a cup of warm tea waiting for him. The three venture out into the town, Little Weirwold. The first stop is the home of Mrs. Fletcher, a knitter, who agrees to knit a tunic sweater for William. Next stop is a farm where the trio obtains milk and William meets a young girl his age. Returning home, Tom puts blackout shades on the windows to keep the house dark in the event enemy bombers attacked. Tom assures William not to worry because the war has little effect on the sleepy town of Little Weirwold. Sorting through the bag William has brought from home, Tom finds a note written from William's mother. It states that she is a widow and won't be able to visit him. She included a belt for Tom to use in the event William deserves to be beaten. Angry, Tom tells William that he does not and will not beat a child. Relieved, William allows Tom to dry his wet clothes and fix him a meal of eggs and toast. After dinner, Tom shares stories with William and leads him to his loft bed. Overtaken with emotion, William sobs and expresses his gratitude for Tom's kindness. Tom acknowledges William's gratitude and settles in for the long night.

Chapter 3: Saturday Morning



On Saturday morning, William wakes up in a urine-soaked bed. Visibly shaken, he gets out of bed and vomits on the floor. Embarrassed by his accidents and unwilling to take off his socks to reveal his “marks of sin”, William eventually allows Tom to help him clean up. When clean, Tom gives William a blank postcard to write to his mother. When William discloses he can't read or write, Tom offers to write a note to William's mother. Afterward, the two leave home and head to the cottage of Dr. Oswald Little, the town's doctor. Tom discusses William's ailments with the doctor who discovers the boy is suffering from malnutrition. The doctor's wife provides Tom with a few topical medicines and they are off again. Next, they go to the post office to mail the postcard to William's mother in London and then they enter the general store where William is mistaken for a London hoodlum. Tom explains to the shop owner that the boy is with him and immediately the owners become friendly and courteous. The two leave the store and continue into town noting an anxious frenzy in the streets. They wonder if the war is about to begin.

Analysis

The reader is first introduced to the two main characters of the story, William and Tom.

William Beech is a scrawny, fearful child who has shown up on Tom's doorstep. He fears everything including animals and people. His unwarranted fear of Tom and the bruises covering his body lead Tom to realize that William has been a victim of abuse. William spends his first days at Tom's home vomiting and urinating in bed when he sleeps. He is quite a pitiful creature at this juncture. William's mother leaves a note declaring he is a poorly behaved child. However, her opinion of him doesn't match his timid persona.

Tom Oakley is the elderly countryman who has been called upon to take William. To the townspeople of Little Weirwold, he is reclusive and gruff. His behavior, however, is a reflection of his personal struggle to recover from the death of his wife and child. To William, Tom is a kind and giving person who is willing to help him overcome his personal struggles. Only time will tell if William's perception of Tom and the town's perception of him will align.

The reader is also thrust into a pre-World War II setting. The villagers all have their radios on and there is a permeating air of frenzy in the general store and post office. The scene leads the reader to infer the country is on the brink of war.

Vocabulary

awkward, imminent, obligatory, adamant, threadbare, crimson, secluded, unperturbed, wriggled, romp, fiery, haversack, dainty, knickers, jaunty, mackintosh, grunt, pouffe, rapt, voluminous, protruding, gingerly, dahlias, delouse, intently



Chapter 4-6

Summary

Chapter 4: Equipped

Tom and William head into town with a horse and cart for their purchases. William is quite fearful of the animal partially because of his lack of experience. However, he falls asleep in the horse drawn cart until they reach town. The first stop is a shop where Tom buys William a lollipop and a comic book. The boy is ecstatic. As the two walk around the town square buying fabric for clothes and purchasing new shoes for William, the town is buzzing. Soldiers at the train station are leaving for war and wireless radios are on to keep the town informed of the latest news. Reeling from excitement, William is barely aware of the ruckus as he stops to admire the display in the window of an art shop. Tom is reminded of his wife who loved art but he dismisses the memories and continues to the library for books. The librarian is surprised a man as gruff as Tom would take in a child but willingly provides the pair with books. The two return home as a storm begins to brew. William puts on a new pair of pajamas and settles into bed with his new books. As he drifts off to sleep, he hears a knock at the door. Mrs. Fletcher, the neighborhood knitter, has come to visit Tom.

Chapter 5: Chamberlain Announces

The following morning, William wakes up to yet another urine-soaked bed. Fear and worry over Tom's reaction is soon dissipated as the two stare out the window to admire the day. As William dresses in hand-me-downs given to Tom by Mrs. Fletcher the night before, he is informed they will help build a trench. Before beginning the project, they head to the church to see Mr. Peters, the vicar. After preparing the chapel, a crowd begins to fill the church. William recognizes people from town, the doctor, and Mrs. Hartbridge, the teacher. The crowd sings hymns and listens to the wireless. After learning the war with Germany has officially begun, the clergy instructs the town to begin their assigned duties. Civil Defense volunteers will meet at the town hall and women and children will assume the responsibility of taking care of evacuee children. Tom instructs William to return home and start a pot of boiling water for tea. Tom returns with Mr. Fletcher and the two discuss the trench shelter they are about to build. After a quick lunch, Mr. Fletcher returns with his two teenage boys who help dig the trench with Tom and William. The work is hard and the weather is hot. However, William is reluctant to take off his tunic to expose his bruises. When the trench is complete, the group begins to take steel sheets and construct a shelter inside of it. Leaving for a meeting in town, Tom allows William to finish covering the shelter and trench with dirt. William obliges and as the sun sets, a boy he met at the post office appears before him.

Chapter 6: Zach



Zacharias Wrench is a young evacuee boy who is living with Dr. and Mrs. Little. Upon meeting William, Zach immediately befriends him and playfully calls him "Will". As the two boys get to know each other, Tom heads to the town hall for a meeting. Once inside, the meeting is filled with regulation notices (such as carrying a gas mask at all times) and volunteer sign-ups. Tom, a notoriously reclusive man, volunteers for two hours of fire watching duties and the use of his horse, Dobbs, and the cart. The townspeople are stunned he has volunteered so generously. Tom leaves the meeting and heads home in the pitch dark. Upon entering his yard, he finds William and Zach putting the finishing touches on the trench. After tea, William takes his first bath and listens as Tom tells him Bible stories.

Analysis

Deciding William will need proper clothes and books, Tom takes him into town. In this moment, it becomes painfully obvious William is lacking life experience. He has never bought candy from a general store or looked into the window of an art shop. The trip is overwhelming and simultaneously exciting for the young boy. The town is surprised by Tom's compassionate generosity toward William and they begin to look at him differently.

The following day, Sunday, brings more new experiences for William. Going to church, he observes a service that is more about fellowship and understanding than punishment and sin. At church, Tom and William learn the war has officially begun. Although Tom is aware and willing to help with the war effort, William is much too absorbed in his new life to be aware. As he helps dig trenches, William concentrates on hiding his bruises and remaining unnoticed.

Upon meeting Zach, William officially makes a friend. Surprised anyone would notice him or care to befriend him, William is excited at the prospect. Zach is extremely different from William and that intrigues him.

Vocabulary

jolted, disjointed, rigid, jaundiced, braces, ominously, exploits, marmalade, trench, witch hazel, bewildered, wireless, reverberating, hacking, gasp, balaclava, congregation, headmaster, Sabbath, hoarse, recluse, pillbox, canteen, stupor, squinted, interspersed



Chapter 7-9

Summary

Chapter 7: An Encounter over Blackberries

William is beginning to feel more comfortable in his new home and it is becoming more apparent he has a renewed sense of energy. After losing a race with Sammy, William takes a step back and feels angry and defeated. He forgets his anger when Zach and later George Fletcher appear at his home. George, at the request of his mother, has been sent to invite William to a blackberry hunt. William agrees to meet George in an hour and Zach convinces George to let him go as well. George meets the boys with local girls, Carrie and Ginnie Thatcher, and the group takes off to Ivor's Farm. After a day of picking berries and eating delectable foods William had never tasted before, the group returns home with a generous amount of blackberries. William is pleased he has survived the outing and has learned so much about Zach and the village children.

Chapter 8: School

The day has arrived when William must start going to school. With apples and an egg sandwich in hand, he heads to the schoolhouse. Once there, the children are divided by age among 3 teachers. Mrs. Hartridge approaches Zach and William and asks them if they know how to read and write. Upon learning that Zach can read, he is put in her class. When Mrs. Hartridge learns William can't read, she places him in a class with Mrs. Black and a handful of young children. Humiliated his newfound friends know that he can't read and upset about being placed with the younger children, William returns home feeling dejected. Tom attempts to cheer him and they talk about the school day over a cup of tea. Tom promises William that he will help him learn to read and the two spend the evening practicing William's name. He catches on quickly and feels proud of his small achievement. His mood is further lifted when George, the Thatcher sisters, and Zach come by for a visit. They promise William his lack of reading ability won't affect their friendship with him.

Chapter 9: Birthday Boy

It has been six days since William moved to Little Weirwold and today is his birthday. After a short run with Sammy, William returns home to find birthday letters, gifts, and jam jars. He is completely astonished, as he has never celebrated a birthday to this extent. Tom gives William a gift of clothes and a hat. His finest gift to William, however, is an art set complete with paints, a pencil and an eraser. Additionally, William receives a new book, an eggcup, and a comic from his neighbors. He is overcome with happiness. He takes his supplies to the church and loses himself in his art. He is startled when Zach finds him at the church and summons him home. When the boys reach Tom's house, they find a crowd gathered to surprise William for his birthday. After making a birthday wish and showing the crowd his newly created drawing, William and



the party attendees play games late into the night. This birthday has been William's best.

Analysis

These chapters mark a series of ups and downs for William. He is adjusting well to his life but still hasn't completely freed himself from worries and anxieties of the past.

In addition to becoming friends with Zach, William has now befriended three locals, George Fletcher and Carrie and Ginnie Thatcher. When they take him out for a blackberry hunt, William enjoys spending the day outside and socializing with other children. He considers the outing a personal triumph.

His joy is dissipated when he goes to school. When the teachers find out he can't read, Williams feels embarrassed and afraid his friends will look down upon him. Fearing that he's lost his friends, he returns home anxious and upset. Tom, true to form, makes a promise to William that he will help him with his studies. This lifts his spirits. When his friends come to Tom's and reaffirm to William they will remain friends, he is overjoyed.

William celebrates his best birthday in those first few months with Tom. He cherishes his gifts and the time spent with his friends and Tom. After receiving a gift of art supplies from Tom, William begins to realize he has a passion for art. William is completely and utterly happy. He's brought back to reality when his anxiety gets the best of him and he vomits.

Vocabulary

desperate, nonchalantly, squelching, queer, scrumptious, quenched, currant, perspiration, gales, juncture, parcels, fleeting, converse, adoration, gasp, pulpit, doomsday, muffled, eggcup, trembling, wobble



Chapter 10-12

Summary

Chapter 10: The Case

It is now fall in the town of Little Weirwold and changes have become a daily occurrence. Many of the town's men have gone off to fight in the war and some of the evacuee children have returned home to their parents. William is progressing in school and, with the help of Tom, is learning how to read. One evening, while William is spending time with Zach at the Little's home, a suitcase is delivered. The suitcase is from Zach's parents and is filled with tap shoes, manuscripts, and other items from their lives in the theatre. Zach, Williams, George and the sisters delight in the treasure. Mrs. Little, Zach's caregiver, is less than thrilled at the noise the group is making. It is decided the group must choose a new gathering spot. Summoning up his courage, William offers to ask Mr. Tom if it is okay for the group to meet at his home. To his surprise, Tom agrees to let the group of children meet on Friday.

Chapter 11: Friday

Friday has arrived and the excitement is building around the visit. Tom heads to Mrs. Fletcher's house to pick up a tunic she has made for William. While there, he comments on how happy William has been. This guarded old man is slowly beginning to soften. During this time, Tom also mentions he received a letter from William's mother saying she wouldn't be able to send money for his keep or visit during Christmas. Later in the day, the children arrive to visit William and they assemble in his upstairs loft bedroom. The children marvel at William's artwork and are quite impressed with his new room setup. Zach reveals that Mrs. Thorne will be having a children's Christmas show to help with the war effort. Although George and William are initially hesitant, they agree to help with the show. After the children's show is settled, George mentions the church is holding a carol service that will need volunteers. William volunteers but Zach declines because he is Jewish and would rather not participate in Christian church functions. The group snacks on chestnuts and one by one head home for the evening. William has changed dramatically in the past few months. Once a sickly frightened child, he now is healthy, happy, and surrounded by friends.

Chapter 12: The Show Must Go On

It is now December and winter is in full swing. World War II is continuing to escalate with bombings and invasions becoming an everyday occurrence. The children of Little Weirwold have been working diligently on the play despite the fact many of the actors (evacuee children) have been leaving daily to return home. One winter afternoon, the cast and crew of the play (A Christmas Carol) have assembled to practice. The task proves to be difficult because a number of children are absent. In desperation, Ms. Thorne, the play's director, asks William to fill in for a missing actor. Until this moment,



William has only painted scenery and served as a prompter. Bravely, he steps forward and takes the character in. Although slow to start, William soon mesmerizes the cast and crew with his amazing acting abilities. Embarrassed by the attention he is getting, William tries to divert his admirers. However, it is obvious he has a true talent. After Ms. Thorne receives a phone call confirming two of the evacuee actors have returned home to London, it is decided William will take the part of Scrooge. He agrees, stunned and surprised he was chosen. He returns home to share the exciting news with Tom who appears weak and pale. Upon questioning, William learns Mr. Bush, one of the town's teachers, will be leaving to fight in the war. Tom has agreed to take over his organ-playing duties at church. He hasn't played the organ since his beloved wife Rachel died and he is discomfited to say the least.

Analysis

Great changes are taking place in the hearts and minds of Tom and William.

Tom has begun to soften. Although noticed briefly in his visit to the town, it is now obvious William has changed Tom for the better. He now shows genuine concern when speaking of William and has taken an unusual interest in the town's events. Momentously, he has even offered to play the organ.

William's changes have been more drastic to say the least. He's progressing in school and is now learning to read. Zach's interest in theater and the arts have rubbed off on him and he's agreed to help with the town's production of *A Christmas Carol*. William's reading abilities have allowed him to take a viable role as prompter and his artistic abilities have helped with scenery preparation. When he is asked to fill in for a missing cast member, there is a startling revelation. William is also a talented actor! William has found so much self-confidence his persona as in the beginning of the story is hardly recognizable.

Vocabulary

rivulets, disgruntled, playwright, applause, archenemy, vicarage, kneeling, despondently, herrings, furrowed, cascade, insipid, nuisance, cackling, daft, escalate, monotonously, crone, admiration, scarlatina, gaze



Chapter 13-15

Summary

Chapter 13: Carol Singing

William has been perfecting his rendition of Scrooge and has just about mastered the character. One December evening, George shows up to Tom's house to pick William up. Tonight is the night of the first rehearsal for the carol service. The two boys head to the church to find Tom grumpily sitting behind the organ. As the rehearsal begins, it is clear the old man is right at home leading the chorus. He directs and instructs the men on how to sing and the group sounds noticeably better.

Chapter 14: New Beginnings

William has now progressed in his studies and is able to be moved up to Mrs. Hartridge's class. He is thrilled to be in class with his friends Zach, George, Carrie, and Ginnie. His excitement is hampered only by the fact that George's brother has recently died in the war. At first the new class is difficult, but William is diligent in his studies. As usual, he shows exceptional skill in the area of drawing and painting. It is becoming more and more apparent he is extremely talented artistically. William loves school and Mrs. Hartridge. She is kind and helpful to him and he absolutely adores her. On William's first day of class, he notices Zach and Carrie having a secret conversation followed by Carrie asking Mrs. Hartridge to speak to her outside. It is soon discovered that Carrie wishes to attend high school. Carrie is a bright student and desperately wants to take the high school entrance test and continue her education. With school falling into place and another play on the horizon, William is in pure bliss. One spring day, William returns home to find Tom holding a letter. His mother is ill and William will need to return home.

Chapter 15: Home

Mr. Tom takes William to the railroad station to take a train to London. Although Mr. Tom and the blacksmith have tried to protest William's leaving, his mother will hear nothing of the sort. After an emotional goodbye, William boards the train. He finds comfort by speaking to a sailor and sharing his drawings. When he reaches London, he finds his mother thin and frail. She barely recognizes her son and is horrified to learn of how well he is doing. She is convinced he has begged for his new clothes and belongings and has been sinful. He attempts to convince her he has been surrounded by wonderful, kind people but she will hear nothing of the sort. They return to her damp, cold home to find a baby with its mouth covered with tape to prevent it from crying. William is horrified at the scene and when he attempts to question his mother's actions and words, she beats him severely. He wakes up in a closet below the stairs, beaten and missing the warm clothes Mr. Tom had provided for him.



Analysis

William continues to grow and has now been moved up to a more advanced class with his peers. Although thrilled to be in a new class, he finally begins to take note of the situations around him. When his friend George loses a brother in the war, William finally begins to realize the outside world is much more bleak than his own.

As a separate subplot, William's friend Carrie Thatcher begins to ask her teachers about the possibility of her going to high school. This proves to be a challenge for her because typically only boys attend high school. When it is revealed that Zach has encouraged Carrie to go to high school, it becomes apparent Zach has a special way of bringing out the best in everyone he comes in contact with.

William is devastated when he learns his mother is ill and requests him to come back home. He realizes how much he has grown during his time with Tom and dreads leaving him and his friends. Trying to be optimistic, he soon realizes his mother hasn't changed. A mentally ill woman who has just had a child, Mrs. Beech beats him and questions Mr. Tom's intentions. Locked in a closet, William is full of despair and wishes he had never known what it meant to be loved and cared for. In that case, he would have never felt the sadness and despair he feels without compassion and love.

Vocabulary

stake, wobbly, dirge, rendition, plaque, nib, flaxen, plait, galoshes, shabby, dilapidated, hedgerows, anxious, jawbreakers, sergeant, lenient, rigid, dank, scrutiny, evade, blasphemous, swollen



Chapter 16-18

Summary

Chapter 16: The Search

Mr. Tom has been quite lonely since William left for London. In his mind, he hopes the boy is happy and well in London. In his heart, he fears the worst. One night he has a horrible dream in which William is calling out to him to save him. On a spring Friday, he decides he will head to London to find William. Before he leaves, he is met by May Thorne who is delivering mail. Asking if William has sent a letter, Tom learns a letter has arrived for Mrs. Hartridge. Fearing the letter was written to inform her that her soldier husband is dead, Tom enlists the help of Mrs. Fletcher to check on Mrs. Hartridge. Before he finds out the contents of the letter, Tom leaves for London with Sammy the dog in tow. When he reaches London, he questions the locals and eventually finds the area where William lives. Reveling in the poverty and despair of the area, Tom is taken aback when he hears a siren wail over the neighborhood. Safe in a shelter, he meets a woman and warden who agree to take him to the apartment building where William lives. Upon reaching the apartment, it appears to be deserted. Sammy begins to fervently scratch and bark at the door. Tom takes this as a sign that William is in the apartment. Tearing down the door, Tom enters the apartment and follows Sammy to a closet under a stairway. Upon opening the door, there is a vile smell in the dark space.

Chapter 17: Rescue

A flashlight reveals William, sick, bruised and chained to a copper pipe, clutching his baby sister. Tom takes over and unties the chains attaching him to copper piping. It soon becomes apparent the baby is dead. The crew refrains from telling William for fear that it will upset him. William is then whisked off to the hospital with Tom by his side. Since Tom is of no relation to William, they inform him he will not be allowed to go back with him. Tom waits patiently in the lobby visiting William when he can. Upon learning William had been sedated and was scheduled to go to a children's home for psychological treatments, Tom begins to plot a kidnapping attempt. One evening when the nurse is asleep, Tom takes William from his hospital bed and keeps him safe in a shelter until he can catch a train out of London. The quickest train out is heading to the village of Skyron. Tom takes the train, hitch-hikes, and walks the remaining way back home first stopping at the blacksmith to pick up his horse and carriage and then stopping at Dr. Little's for him to check on William. Zach is at the Little's and is delighted to see his friend.

Chapter 18: Recovery

Although Tom is thrilled with William's return, the path to recovery is long and painful. William wakes in the night screaming with nightmares of his hospital stay and sedation. Tom attempts to calm him and stays by his side every step of the way. William's



screams remind Tom of the birth of his own child and Rachel's death. Slowly, William begins to come around and Tom allows Zach to visit him. On Zach's first visit, he informs William of everything that has happened since he's been gone. When he mentions Mrs. Hartridge has had her baby, William is reminded of his own baby sister. That evening, he summons up the courage to ask Tom if his sister is dead already knowing the answer. In the conversation that ensues, Tom gently tells William his mother is mentally ill and it wasn't his fault that his sister died. The two exchange "I love you" and William drifts back to sleep. It is now June and the war is still ensuing. Although Prime Minister Winston Churchill has been put into office, the town of Little Weirwold hasn't changed. William makes the decision to visit Mrs. Hartridge, now a widowed mother. As he visits her, William is reminded of how much he cares for her and is renewed when he sees her nursing the baby. In that moment, he realizes he couldn't have saved his baby sister because she needed her mother. Relieved, he leaves the Hartridge home and goes to the Little's. There he finds Zach putting the finishing touches on a bike he is restoring.

Analysis

Chapters 16 through 18 represent the darkest moments of the novel thus far.

Although Tom wants to believe that William is safe, he feels in his heart something is wrong. Acting on his premonition, he takes a train to the city. Tom attempts to stay strong although he is surrounded by people and places that are foreign to him. His diligence and strength pay off when he finds William nearly dead.

Feeling guilty for allowing William to leave in the first place, Tom takes a vow never to leave his side. This proves difficult with laws and regulations concerning "strangers" being with patients in the hospital. When Tom learns William is about to be sent to a children's psychiatric hospital, he is devastated and confused. In a rare moment of weakness, he calls to his wife above and asks for her guidance. It then dawns on him he must kidnap the boy from the hospital. The ensuing kidnapping and the return to Little Weirwold solidify Tom's commitment and love for William.

As William recovers at home, the psychological and emotional toll of London appear to be worse than before. He has truly digressed. Yet again, Tom serves as his rock and pulls him through his sorrows. It is during this time the two verbalize that they love each other.

Although William has mostly recovered, he still blames himself for the death of his sister. A visit to Mrs. Hartridge helps him see past his grief. When William visits her, he notices her motherly nature and the baby's dependence on her for food and comfort. He realizes nothing he could have done would have given his baby sister what she needed. His mother is ill and he can no longer take the burden for her mistakes.

Vocabulary

chatter, extravagance, glistening, deafening, brusque, astounded, ungrateful, whimpers, accordion, agitated, frantic, alcove, involuntarily, lacerations, brazier, regulations, hypodermic, murmured, inconspicuous



Chapter 19-21

Summary

Chapter 19: The Sea! The Sea! The Sea!

Now that Zach's bike is ready, he takes a trip with Tom and William to the sea. Upon arriving, the three look for someone willing to house them. They find a widow, Mrs. Clarence, who is willing to take them in. They spend the remaining two weeks playing in the ocean and riding their bikes all around the village. Zach rides his own bike and Tom rides a bike with a sidecar for William who doesn't know how to ride. During this time, news comes in that South London has been bombed. Fearful, Zach waits for a letter from his parents to tell him they are safe. When nothing arrives, Zach calls the Littles and hears his parents have contacted them and informed them they are safe. The trip to the ocean has been a pleasant one for William. He has filled his sketch books with drawings and with Tom's help learned to float. As the trio returns home, Carrie is waiting for Zach. She informs him she has been accepted to the high school.

Chapter 20: Spooky Cott

It's now the end of August and William and Zach are about to begin school. They decide on their last weekend to check out Spooky Cot, a mysterious abandoned house in the outskirts of the village. As they head to the house, the boys are genuinely frightened and hear music coming from the house. Fearing they might see a ghost, they are surprised when they spot a middle-aged man. The man, Geoffrey Sanderton, has come from a nearby hospital. Missing an ear and physically and emotionally bruised from surviving a bombing, Geoffrey has been living at the house and working on his painting. This sparks William's interest and Geoffrey soon agrees to give him art lessons. Excited at the prospect, William returns home to find the warden from his old neighborhood, a police officer, plus a man and woman gathered in Tom's living room. They inform him his mother has committed suicide and they have come to take him to a local children's home. Will adamantly announces he will not leave Mr. Tom. After a private discussion with the group, Tom tells William he will legally adopt him. The two are overjoyed.

Chapter 21: Back to School

The children of the village begin school. Carrie is starting her first day at the high school and her family and friends are proud of her. On William, Zach, George, and Ginny's first day of school, they learn Geoffrey Sanderton will now be teaching art lessons. William is thrilled until a knock at the door reveals Zach must leave for the day. After school, William learns the severe bombing in and around London has left Zach's father injured. He must return to see him. William and the other children are saddened by the news but understand Zach must leave. During the time Zach is gone, William celebrates his birthday. Although it was a wonderful day filled with presents and a party, William



worries about his friend. After hearing of a particularly brutal bombing, William finds out from the Littles that Zach is dead.

Analysis

William has yet again made a miraculous recovery. In celebration, he heads to the sea with Zach and Tom. The trip is a pleasant one for William who has never experienced swimming in the ocean. His worries and anxieties float away and the sea represents a renewed sense of hope.

Upon returning to school, Zach finds out his father has been injured in a bombing. This is shocking to William who has been much too engulfed in his own personal struggles to worry about the war. When Zach leaves, William is unusually sad. It's almost as if he knows Zach won't return.

During the time Zach is gone, William finds out his mother has committed suicide. Ironically, William is more concerned with whether or not he will be allowed to stay with Mr. Tom. He has learned to detach emotionally from his mother and has moved past the grief and confusion that surrounds her. When William learns Tom will be adopting him, the two are overjoyed. The only thing missing in William's life is his dear friend, Zach.

Days later, William learns Zach has been killed in a bombing. Until now, he has been able to keep the war at bay. War and its casualties have now directly affected him and his sleepy village. He has overcome so much but feels he has reached his limit. Will he be able to survive another tragedy, another hurdle?

Vocabulary

panniers, tandem, mesmerized, long-johns, fortnight, estuary, incision, windowsill, snooze, prelude, chaos, scholarship, penknife, mournful, immobile, rubble, orphanage, trapdoor, clambered, surge, expedition, scuttling



Chapter 22-23

Summary

Chapter 22: Grieving

Devastated by the news of Zach's death, William becomes very introverted. Even Carrie, who is also mourning the death of Zach, can't coax him to talk. One day while attending a painting lesson at Geoffrey's house, William's walls come crashing down when he hears a song the he had listened to with Zach. Overcome with emotion, William travels to the river to sob and violently curse God. When he returns home, Tom is worried but realizes William must grieve on his own. He is touched when William calls him Dad. The next morning, William skips school and visits the Littles. When there, he asks Nancy Little if he can ride Zach's bike. She agrees and William spends the day learning to ride the bike Zach so carefully restored. Feeling rejuvenated and understanding that a part of Zach would always be with him, he visits Mrs. Hartridge. She shares that her husband had been found at a Prisoner of War Camp and was alive. William feels everything has come full circle in his life and begins to change for the better. He is more open, and outspoken, and he even volunteers for the larger-than-life character of Captain Hook in an upcoming play. He realizes now, more than ever, there is so much to live for.

Chapter 23: Postscript

The war continues on and Tom and William have created a garden for the Dig for Victory campaign. As he's working in the garden, Carrie comes up and asks to look at his new books from the library. She explains she has left her house without telling her mother and the two decide they will ride William's bike to the river to read and paint. Carrie changes into Zach's clothes before heading out. Once at the river, the two paint and read until late in the evening. As Carrie prepares to head home, William exclaims he could now die happy. He goes into Tom's home and notices the peg Tom had put up for him is lower than it used to be. William has grown in so many ways and has found happiness at last!

Analysis

Fearing he won't be able to overcome Zach's death, William becomes unusually introverted. Understanding William must grieve alone, Tom gives him his space. Tom understands the grieving process from the death of his own wife, Rachel.

One day a song that reminds William of Zach spurs his emotion. In an unusually violent and angry way, William makes his peace with Zach's death by screaming to the sky. When he recollects his emotions, he sets out on a mission to learn how to ride Zach's bike. Through the learning process, he is continuing to grieve and trying to connect with



Zach. William needs to connect with his friend and feel he's there supporting him and pushing him to be all that he wants to be.

Another way William connects with Zach is by forming a stronger friendship with Carrie Thatcher. Carrie was also touched by Zach's zest for life and his belief in her. The two share a love for their departed friend and find comfort in each other.

The story culminates with William coming full circle. He is happy, healthy, and surrounded by people who love and care for him. His life has been full of tragedy but he will not let the sadness define him.

Vocabulary

declensions, incentive, ridiculed, inanimate, unnerving, undaunted, vigorously, flinging, spluttered, devouring, vulnerable, grimly



Characters

William Beech

William also known as “Willie” or “Will” is the main character of the novel. In the beginning, William is in a delicate state. Growing up in the London slums with an abusive mother has left him emotionally bruised, battered and overly fearful. Throughout the course of the novel, he changes into an independent, well-spoken child who can deal with the tragedies and triumphs that come his way. An excellent actor and artist, William has a gift for seeing things from different perspectives. His strength and courage are beyond his years and he cherishes his friendships and his relationship with Mr. Tom.

Tom Oakley

Mr. Tom, as he is known to William, is a gentleman who agrees to take William into his home. A native of the English countryside, Tom is known as being harsh and reclusive to his neighbors. His gruff behavior is merely a facade, however. Tom is a kind soul who has never fully recovered from the death of his wife and child. He shows kindness and patience to William when he needs it most and serves as a father figure to him. William helps soften Tom and brings great joy his life. When Tom goes to rescue William from his mother in London, he displays great strength and moral fortitude.

Zacharias Wrench

Zach is William’s best friend in Little Weirwold. A fellow evacuee, Zach and his family traveled with the theater before the war. During the course of the novel, Zach lives with Dr. Little and his wife, Nancy. Loud, eccentric, and dramatic would appropriately describe his larger than life personality. Zach represents all of the things William wishes to be. He truly admires his zest for life and appreciates his friendship. When Zach passes away, William is overcome with grief. It is only when he connects with his memories of Zach that he realizes that his friend will forever live in himself.

Mrs. Beech

Mrs. Beech is William’s abusive mother. A self-proclaimed Christian and widow, she allows William to leave for shelter in the country under the pretense that she can no longer afford him. When she does allow William to return, she beats him and leaves him to die with his baby sister. Not long after William escapes from her home, she commits suicide.



Annie Hartridge

Mrs. Hartridge is a teacher at the local school and one of the first people William meets in the village. A kind and friendly woman, William immediately connects with her and finds her comforting. It is Mrs. Hartridge who helps William understand his sister's death wasn't his fault.

Carrie Thatcher

Carrie Thatcher is a local village girl who aspires to go to high school, an unusual feat for a girl during that era. She loves to read and develops a close bond with Zach, her mentor in pursuing her school career. After Zach's death, Carrie and William develop a close bond over the loss of their friend.



Objects/Places

Animals

When William first arrives to Little Weirwold, he is terrified of animals. Throughout the story, he develops a close bond with Tom's dog, Sammy. It is Sammy who eventually helps rescue William by finding him in his mother's apartment.

Tea

Tom and the villagers serve tea regularly in the story. The English tradition is apparent and many of the most important conversations in the story take place over tea.

Deptford

Deptford is the area of London where William's mother lives. It is a rundown slum of an area and Tom travels there to retrieve William when he fears the boy is in trouble.

The Arts

Throughout the story, the arts play an important role in the everyday lives of the characters. William excels in drawing and acting. Tom's beloved wife was an artist. Zach loves to dance and act in the town's musicals and plays.

Salmouth

Salmouth, nicknamed Salt-on-the-mouth by Zach, is the name of the fishing village where Tom, William, and Zach vacation. During this time, they bike, picnic, and swim. This trip is especially important for William because it is his first visit to the ocean.



Themes

Friendship

A number of strong friendships are presented in the novel.

The first is the relationship between Mr. Tom and William. Looking beyond age differences, the two characters share a common bond that unites them. They have both experienced loss and loneliness. William's loss was in the form of his non-existent mentally ill mother. Tom's loss was the death of his wife and child. The two characters understand one another on a higher level and help each other cope with their sorrows. The end result is an amazing friendship evolving into a father/son relationship.

Another important friendship is the one between William and Zach. Both evacuees, the two friends share similar life experiences. However, it is their differences that unite them. William is fearful and reserved and Zach is extroverted and jovial. Zach represents everything William wishes to be and William is interesting and unique to Zach. It is Zach's memory and persona that ultimately coax William into living life rather than fearing it.

Abuse

Good Night, Mr. Tom takes an honest look at abuse and its effects. William suffers severe physical and emotional abuse at the hands of his mother. The result of his physical abuse is vomiting, bed wetting, and lethargy. His emotional abuse has left him fearful, emotional, and scared of people. Additionally, he has violent nightmares and frequent panic attacks.

A major theme of the story is how he overcomes his troubled past filled with abuse to become a stronger person.

Life & Death

Throughout the novel, there are many reminders of the beauty of life and the reality of death.

At the beginning of the story, William has never experienced a happy life. Upon moving to Little Weirwold, however, his life drastically changed. The village has a natural beauty and simplicity mesmerizing to William. Additionally, Little Weirwold is filled with people whose hearts are pure and kind. A few people who particularly touch William are Mr. Tom, Zach, and Mrs. Hartridge. It is through all of this William realizes he has so much to live for.



On the flip side, death is a reality and a commonplace in the novel. Mr. Tom has lost his wife and baby. William loses his mother, baby sister, and best friend.

The yin-yang between life and death draws the reader to the story and reminds him life is precious.

War

The story, which takes place before and during World War II, examines the effects of war on the people of Little Weirwold.

Positively speaking, war has brought William to the village and to Tom. In a sense, war saved William and Tom from a life of loneliness and heartache. Additionally, the war unites William with fellow evacuee Zach.

On the negative side, war's casualties have taken its toll on Little Weirwold. One of the families, the Fletchers, loses their son. Zach's father's injury leads him to London where he dies in an air raid. Everyday life in Little Weirwold has drastically changed as well. The villagers must keep blackout shades over their windows at night to avoid detection. Additionally, they build bomb shelters for protection and carry gas masks. There is a sense of pervading tension in the town due to the war.

Education

When William first moves to Little Weirwold, he can't read or write. Over time and with the help of Tom and the school, he learns. This proves to be a key factor in his self-esteem transformation. Additionally, his reading and writing abilities help him to read scripts and discover a talent for acting.

A sub-plot of the story centers around Carrie Thatcher, a local, and her dream of attending high school, a feat typically reserved for boys. Through hard work and the support of her friends, Carrie makes her dream a reality.



Style

Point of View

Good Night, Mr. Tom is told from the viewpoint of a third person narrator with a shifting point of view. This means the narrator uses terms such as he, she, and it and allows the reader to understand the events from the perspective of multiple characters throughout the story.

Setting

The story takes place in the village of Little Weirwold, England. This sleepy village, a few hours outside of London, is a stark contrast to the hustle and bustle of the city. The village includes a church, main street of shops, and residences spread over the countryside.

Additionally, the Deptford area of London is briefly mentioned. It is the dirty, slum-like neighborhood where William lives before moving with Tom. He also lives here during an ill fated return visit.

Language and Meaning

The novel's language is colorful and representative of English dialect. While not spelled grammatically correctly, the words can be phonetically read and prove to be insightful in helping the reader picture the conversations.

Structure

Good Night, Mr. Tom is divided into 23 chapters averaging between 10 to 15 pages a piece. The novel is an episodic plot meaning that several short stories combine to form the whole. The first story is William's journey to Little Weirwold and his life transformation. The second is his return to his mother and the heartache of being tossed back into chaos. The third is his return to Tom and his recovery. A fourth story centers around Zach's death and William's realization his friend will forever live in himself - in his memories.



Quotes

I must be good,” and he rubbed a sore spot on his arm. He was such a bad boy. Mum said she was kinder to him than most mothers. She only gave him soft beatings.

Willie's arms and legs were covered with bruises, weals, and sores. Tom said nothing. There was no need.

Willie sat dejectedly at the table and watched Tom drag his small mattress past the window. He could hear him scrubbing away at it. He lowered his head. He was so ashamed.

Tom's heart sank. He hadn't been in the shop since Rachel had died. It was her favorite place. For forty years he hadn't been able to bring himself to venture into it again.

Mum had told him that whenever he was good she liked him but that when he was bad, she didn't. Neither did God or anyone else for that matter. It was very lonely being bad.

As soon as I see someone I like, I talk to them” “Willie almost dropped the clod of earth he was holding. No one had ever said they liked him.

Willie was always Zach's faithful assistant...

Mrs. Fletcher looked steadily into his eyes. His forehead had lost its furrowed look. The deep pitted wrinkles above his eyes had softened outwards. Behind his scowling manner was a kindly old man, and if it hadn't been for the arrival of a rather insipid little boy, she might never have known, nor might anyone else for that matter.

While Little Weirwold was returning to normalcy, events in the larger world continued to escalate.

For an instant he wished he had never gone to Little Weirwold. Then he would have thought his mum was kind and loving. He wouldn't have known any different. A wave of despair swept through him and he cursed his new awareness. He hadn't been used to this pain for a long time.

He stayed in the garden till dusk talking with Mrs. Hartridge about books and ideas for obtaining paper and where you could buy the cheapest paint. He didn't mention Mr. Hartridge and she didn't talk about his mother or Trudy. Sometimes in the middle of a conversation they would stop suddenly and look at each other with understanding. In Will's eyes she was more beautiful than ever.

I don't want to be famous, said Will. I jes' wants to draw and paint.

In an instant it suddenly dawned on him Will would be growing up with him. With a great yell of joy he leaped up from the armchair. Will threw his arms around him and together

they danced and cavorted across the room shouting and yelling, while Sammy whirled around their ankles chasing his tail and barking in lunatic fashion.

They didn't need to say anything. He knew Zach was dead. In one black moment he felt his legs buckling up underneath him and he collapsed into unconsciousness.

As he rode, his coat flapping behind him, the crisp wind cooling his face, he suddenly felt that Zach was no longer beside him, but he was inside him and very much alive. The numbness of his body had dissolved into exhilaration.

Dad" repeated William in a surprised tone, "I'm growing!



Topics for Discussion

Topic 1

Discuss the circumstances that led Will to Mr. Tom. Why is Mr. Tom chosen as Will's guardian? What character traits define Mr. Tom? Does his character evolve over the course of the story? Compare and contrast Mr. Tom with Will's mother.

Topic 2

Evaluate William's friendship with Zach. What events brought the two boys together? What roles do the boys play in their friendship? Compare Zach to William. How do their differences compliment their relationship?

Topic 3

Compare Zach and William to the village children i.e. George Fletcher, Carrie and Ginnie Thatcher, Lucy. What do they teach each other in regard to friendship? Do you think they would have ever become friends if George's mother hadn't pushed him to befriend William?

Topic 4

How does the war affect the daily lives of Little Weirwold? How would the plot have changed if a war hadn't been going on?

Topic 5

Discuss William's personal journey throughout the novel. What events changed him and molded him into the person he is at the end of the novel? What do you predict for William's future?

Topic 6

Evaluate the relationship between William and Mrs. Hartridge. The two have a mutual understanding and respect for each other. Where does that understanding stem from? Is she a mother like figure to William?

Topic 7

William excels in art and theater. Describe how his talents define him and help him create an identity.