

# **Heartburn Study Guide**

## **Heartburn by Nora Ephron**

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# Plot Summary

Heartburn, by Nora Ephron, is a novel based on six weeks in the life of Rachel Samstat. Rachel is married to Mark Feldman and they have a two-year-old son, with another child on the way. At seven months pregnant, Rachel learns that her husband is in love with another woman. Heartburn is Rachel's narrative of the events that follow this revelation.

Rachel Samstat is stunned to learn that her husband Mark is involved with another woman. The fact that she learns this after reading a loving inscription in a book, an inscription which mentions her son, is just another blow. Confronting Mark, Rachel is devastated when Mark tells her that he loves Thelma Rice, and that he believes Rachel to be a nag and a shrew. Despite this, Mark expects Rachel to stay with him, as they have a son and are expecting another baby. Rachel flees to New York, seeking a different place to think things through.

Rachel's life continues, despite her feelings that the world has stopped. In New York Rachel visits her old therapy group, reconnecting yet embarrassed because of her marriage crisis. A robbery takes place during which the ring that Mark gave her when their son was born is stolen. Rachel wonders if this is a sign. She wonders this aloud when Mark finally arrives in New York to ask her to come home. Rachel does return home, hoping that her husband is telling the truth when he says he will not see Thelma again.

Rachel's life continues, though she constantly questions herself about what she wants and what she expects. Samstat has a self-esteem issue, and seems to need to be married, a fact that is evident when she tries to imagine herself married to every man she meets. Rachel tries to work on her marriage, speaking to her closest friends about her situation, comparing her marital crisis to theirs and asking advice.

Events come to a head when Rachel tracks Mark to Thelma's house after finding more evidence that they are still serious about each other. A freak fall leads to early labor and Rachel delivers her second son early. After her recovery another discovery pushes her over the edge. Mark had purchased a necklace for Thelma while Rachel was in the hospital recovering from the birth.

Rachel tries to become the woman that Mark says she is not, and struggles throughout the novel to be what her husband wants. Events lead Rachel to finally discover that she is the woman she has always been, and Mark has changed. Throwing a pie at Mark at a dinner party is Rachel's statement that things will never be the same. Unwilling to wait for her husband to love her again, for the chance to return to something that she is unsure she wants, Rachel decides to step away, and to once again be her own person, rather than the person that others expect her to be.



# Chapter One

## Chapter One Summary

Heartburn is the story of Rachel Samstat, cookbook writer and married mother of one, with another on the way. The novel details the six weeks between the time Rachel discovers her husband, Mark, is having an affair, and her final decision regarding her future.

Rachel Samstat discovers that her husband, Mark Feldman, is having an affair with Thelma Rice. Though Rachel is naturally upset about discovering the affair, she is even more upset because she knows Thelma and her husband, Jonathan. The couple has even been over for dessert recently, and Rachel had sent the recipe for her carrot cake to Thelma after Thelma had called to say thank you.

Rachel and her friend Betty Searle have spent months, the entire seven months of Rachel's pregnancy, trying to figure out who Thelma has been having an affair with. Rachel has even asked Mark his opinion on the subject. Mark had not commented other than to reply to the negative about the possible men that she suggested Thelma is involved in.

Rachel discovers her husband's affair because she snoops through his things, already convinced that Mark is having cheating on her. In Mark's sock drawer, Rachel finds a book of children's songs with an inscription from Thelma declaring her love. Rachel calls Mark at his therapist's office to tell him that she knows about his affair and tells him to come home. Mark arrives two hours later, after his joint session with Thelma. Rachel begins her prepared speech about their love and how they can work things out. Mark tells Rachel that he loves Thelma and will not stop seeing her. When Mark leaves to give Rachel some time to be alone, she takes their son Sam and head to New York.

Rachel and Sam stay at her father's apartment, to which she has the key. Rachel's father, Harry, is in a mental hospital so the apartment is empty. Harry has been put in the hospital by Rachel's sister, Eleanor, after Harry's third wife had been found wandering the street in a towel. The third wife, Rachel's former best friend's big sister, has also had a break down, and is now living with her mother in Florida.

## Chapter One Analysis

The reader is introduced to Rachel Samstat, the narrator of the novel, Heartburn. Rachel is married to Mark Feldman, a columnist, and they live in Washington, D.C., with their son, Sam. Rachel is seven months pregnant with their second child. A cookbook writer, Rachel is originally from New York, but relocated to Washington when she married Mark. Rachel is an amusing, sarcastic woman, thirty-eight years old, and content in her marriage. This changes when Rachel discovers that not only is her husband having an affair, but he is having the affair with Thelma Rice, someone she



knows. Rachel seems more upset about the fact that she has shared a recipe for carrot cake than she is about the affair itself. It also seems that Rachel is angry because Thelma is a tall woman, very different from Rachel herself, though Samstat does not ever describe her as beautiful.

Rachel is willing to forgive her husband, and work on their marriage, but is shocked once again when he refuses to stop seeing Thelma. In fact, when Rachel calls her husband to confront him with her discovery, she finds that he is at his therapist's office, with Thelma. When Mark refuses to leave Thelma and more or less blames the fact that he is having an affair on the way that Rachel acts, she feels that she has no choice but to leave him.

The reader also learns a bit about Rachel's life from her narrative of her family. Rachel has a sister, Eleanor, who Rachel considers the 'good sister' as she deals with the family issues. Rachel's father lives in New York, but is currently in a mental hospital. Samstat's father is married to his third wife, who has also had a breakdown of some sort. The third wife is never identified by name, but as the big sister of Rachel's mortal enemy and former best friend, Brenda.

The beginning of the novel takes place in New York, where Rachel has fled with her son. Rachel stays in her father's empty apartment, contemplating what seems to be the end of her life as she knows it, but in reality is the beginning.



# Chapter Two

## Chapter Two Summary

Rachel relates tales of her life and her marriage. Samstat wonders how people that are married stay happy, and keep things happening to them. It seems to her that once couples marry things stop happening to them. One of the things that used to happen to Rachel and Mark were the constant battles between the couple and the contractors that worked on their multiple dwellings. To Rachel their marriage has been a battle between them against the world, but on the plane to New York Samstat is secretly relieved to be finished with the battles.

Rachel explains her career as a cookbook author and star of a public television cooking show. The cookbooks are more a narrative with recipes thrown in as an afterthought, and the show is more about small gatherings than cooking, but both are popular. Rachel's New York personality combined with her Jewishness make her successful, though this also conspires to keep her from network television. Rachel's quirkiness has created a niche for her.

Rachel describes her parents, Bebe Samstat and Harry Stratton. Bebe was a Hollywood agent, working primarily with specialty acts, such as midgets and people with scars and such. Harry Stratton, Rachel's father, was a character actor, playing bit parts throughout the years. During their marriage the two had accumulated some wealth, both through work and through investing in Tampax. The money was needed when Bebe became seriously ill. A heavy drinker, Bebe wound up in the hospital, dying of cirrhosis. Bebe did die, according to her, but returned when she saw the future, which included Harry cashing in the Tampax stock and spending it on women. Bebe recovered, divorced Harry and married Mel, a man she claimed to be God. Bebe finally died for the last time after Mel took her for all of her money.

Rachel reflects on her cooking, and how the cookbooks she writes are tied to her family, Mark's family and her past. Rachel also wishes that she could ask her mother about the current situation she finds herself in, knowing that her mother would not provide much insight.

## Chapter Two Analysis

Rachel's rambling narrative continues, detailing family and her career. It appears that Rachel's parents, while loving, were not the best role models. Bebe Samstat, an agent, was a career woman when most women were stay-at-home mothers, perhaps leaving Rachel and her sister to learn about life on their own. Harry is an actor, and seems to have considered his family another role to play.

In the context of family, the reader learns that Mark was raised by an aunt, one who Rachel had been planning to have on her show. Rachel is now in a dilemma, wondering



if she can still have the aunt on, now that Mark has cheated. Rachel becomes aware that the affair will affect more people than she realized, and wonders how they will deal with this.

Rachel has considered her marriage a refuge until Mark's affair. The descriptions of battles between the couple and contractors that work on their various homes give the reader insight into Rachel's thoughts. Rachel considered life 'us against the world' and Mark's betrayal leaves her grasping at the life she had grown accustomed to. At the same time Rachel feels relief. Marriage has created a steady life, but a life where nothing new ever happens. Despite the fact that Mark has been cheating on her, Rachel secretly feels some relief that finally, something is happening to her.

Rachel's career as a cookbook author and television personality shows that despite the feelings that she has of being alone in the world, she obviously has something to focus on. The cookbooks are described as stories about family and friends, with recipes almost as an afterthought. Heartburn is written in the same manner, with rambling thoughts describing the things that happen to Rachel, and the people she knows, with a recipe here and there.



# Chapter Three

## Chapter Three Summary

Rachel relates the conversation she had with her therapist, Vera Maxwell, before she left Mark. Rachel's therapist simply declares that Mark is disgusting and asks Rachel if this is the type of man that she wants for a husband. Rachel is torn, knowing that she does not want a husband like that, but that she wants a husband like Mark. It is a difficult discussion for Rachel because Vera is happily married to a wonderful man, and there is some jealousy. That, coupled with the fact that Rachel began seeing Vera when she was unhappily married to her first husband, Charlie, and now is calling for help while unhappily married to Mark makes Rachel feel worse.

The subject of moving to Washington with Mark is discussed as well. Rachel is a New York person, but moved to Washington with Mark because that is where he worked. Rachel had done so, stating that she could work anywhere, and while this was true, New York is part of her, and she deeply misses the lights and the city, not to mention the little food specialty shops.

Rachel wakes from what she thinks is a nightmare, but quickly realizes that it is not. Having spent the time waiting for Mark to arrive and beg her to come back, Rachel is more than disappointed when the doorbell rings and she finds Jonathan Rice, Thelma's husband at the door. Jonathan has come to beg Rachel to return to Mark. Rice feels that if the two of them wait patiently, Thelma and Mark will come to their senses and life will return to normal. Rachel is not happy when Jonathan reveals that Thelma has done this to him many times, but never with as much infatuation that she seems to have for Mark. Rachel refuses to return as long as Mark is still seeing Thelma, to Jonathan's dismay. Jonathan tells Rachel that he has known about the relationship for a while, and relates details that make Rachel wonder aloud if he is tapping his own phone line. The two sit together crying, with Rachel actually comforting Jonathan, until Rachel's father arrives.

Rachel introduces the two men and tells her father that Mark has been having an affair. Harry tells Jonathan to leave Rachel out of his problems and sends him on his way. Rachel's father then calls his maid to have her move in to help Rachel with Sam, orders his daughter take-out, and then leaves offering what comfort he can. Rachel is grateful, but knows that if she didn't love Harry for being her father, she would dislike him for being a man like Mark.

## Chapter Three Analysis

The reader learns of Rachel's long-standing relationship with her own therapist, Vera. Vera seems a bit unconventional as therapists go, stating simply that Mark is disgusting and acting more like a mother than a therapist. This is significant, as Rachel's own





mother is dead, and would not have been the type to help in any case. The fact that Vera's own marriage is healthy and happy while Rachel's second marriage is crumbling makes Rachel feel like a failure, something she knows that she needs to work on.

The arrival of Jonathan Rice gives the reader more insight into what Rachel faces. Jonathan has arrived in New York after discussing things with Mark and Thelma. Mark has told Jonathan where Rachel would probably be. The fact that the husband of the other woman is the man that arrives to beg Rachel to return and work things out is both comical and enlightening.

Jonathan's tales of Thelma's past escapades both help and hurt Rachel. While she is pleased that Thelma has a history of cheating and returning to her husband, this does not change the fact that this time Mark is the man caught up with Rice. Of course, it is no help at all that Jonathan is the man who turned up begging Rachel to return, when she has been waiting for Mark. The amount of information that Jonathan has about the relationship between his wife and Mark is also disturbing. Jonathan informs Rachel that he and Thelma have great communication in their marriage, but Rachel wonders if he taps his own phone. This fact will come up again later in the novel.

Harry Stratton arrives at his apartment to find a distraught Rachel comforting the devastated Jonathan. Harry comforts his daughter the best he can after sending Jonathan on his way. Harry does not possess the skills needed to take care of Rachel, but ties together comforting dialogue from his acting roles over the years. The reader better understands the difficulty Rachel has with relationships when the subject of her family is discussed. Harry does call for help so that Rachel is not alone, then leaves.



# Chapter Four

## Chapter Four Summary

After two days Rachel realizes that she needs to do something other than sit and cry, so she decides to go to her group. The idea is not necessarily a pleasant one, as she had 'graduated' from group when she moved to Washington and married Mark. On the way, Rachel rides the subway, and sits next to a man who smiles and winks at her. Rachel immediately wonders if the man is single, but then realizes that he is not hitting on her, as she is seven months pregnant. This makes Rachel wonder if he is a mugger, so she twists off her diamond ring and drops it into her bra.

Arriving at group, Rachel relates what has been going on in her life, getting sympathy from most present. Diane, one member, cries as well, but because she is jealous that things always happen to Rachel instead of her. The other members of the group commiserate, stating that Rachel and Mark were supposed to make it, and they couldn't, no one would. Vera's marriage is mentioned again, an unrealistic ideal for any.

Rachel discusses her feelings about what Mark has done, and how angry she is. Rachel states that Mark is a schmuck, but that she wants him back. When asked how she could feel that way, Rachel explains that she wants her husband back so that she can yell at him and tell him he is a schmuck. Rachel also states that she would like both Mark and Thelma dead. Realizing that the group members are looking at her strangely, Rachel turns to find the man from the subway holding a gun with a stocking over his face. The man has followed Rachel to group after seeing her hide her ring. The man robs those present and takes Rachel with him so that he can escape. Upon her return to the group Rachel apologizes for leading the man to them. Vanessa Melhado, one of the group members apologizes because the story will surely make the papers, as she is a famous movie star.

Rachel reflects on the diamond ring that she had given to the man. Mark had given the ring to her after Sam was born. Though Rachel was not sure what she would have done with the ring on her own, having the choice taken from her is not pleasant.

## Chapter Four Analysis

Rachel's need to be with others finally breaks through the sadness and despair that she has been feeling for the past few days. Deciding to go to her group is a tough decision, as she feels embarrassment about her second failing marriage.

Upon arrival at group Rachel discovers that despite the fact that her life is in a shambles, there are still people that are jealous of her. Diane is upset because things happen to Rachel and never to her. This is the direct opposite of Rachel's thoughts. Rachel has been living her life watching things happen to others, but evidently others have been watching things happen to her. This gives the reader some insight into



Rachel's feelings. Rachel had considered her life steady, and has been concerned that life was passing her by. It appears that this is simply a case of the grass being greener on the other side of the fence. Everyone wants what they do not have.

The ring that is taken by the robber plays an important role in the novel for several reasons, some which will be revealed later. At this point the ring is significant because it reminds Rachel of the relationship that she had with Mark when they were in love and things seemed perfect. Mark had given the ring to Rachel when Sam was born. Two years ago Rachel's life had seemed perfect, and Mark had seemed like the ideal man. Their love had seemed endless. Now the ring signifies all that Rachel has lost, and the thought is not a happy one. The decision that Rachel is forced to make about giving up her ring to the robber, parallels the decisions she must make about her life and her relationship with Mark.



# Chapter Five

## Chapter Five Summary

Rachel relates a tale about her past in Washington. On a quiet afternoon while cooking Rachel had heard a scream. Noting the time, Rachel tells Mark that if anyone had been murdered on the block that day it had happened at 3:20. At the time Mark had not reacted, and Rachel wondered if she was becoming one of those women who stay at home and try and make things happen. Rachel also wondered if Mark was right. Thinking back on that time now, Rachel realizes that it was the same time as Mark's affair with Thelma was beginning, and that he had acted as if he didn't care because he really didn't. Rachel wonders if she had an idea, even that early, that Mark was cheating. The thought that she had been so oblivious is painful.

Mr. Abbey, the neighbor across the street had in fact been murdered. Rachel is amazed that the man had passed up lunch after a morning auction in order to try and find a man he had seen the night before. The idea of giving up lunch for love is beyond her. Sharing this thought with Mark earns Rachel a dull look. Rachel realizes later that this is because Mark is at the point in his relationship with Thelma that food is not the most important factor in their lives.

Rachel relates this story because she is excited to once again be a witness to something. In Washington, there was nothing that she could add to the investigation because she had not seen anything, but in New York she was able to give a full description of the robber.

Rachel gives her statement to Detective Nolan, relating her thoughts about whether the man on the subway was flirting with her or whether he was a mugger. The detective has a difficult time following Rachel's line of thought, but appreciates her effort to wrap things up for him. After the interview Detective Nolan wonders how long it takes to be 'cured' and no longer need therapy, and how long he would need therapy if he went. Rachel tells him that she has been in group for nine years, but had two years off for good behavior. The detective wants to attend therapy to see if he should get a hair transplant. Rachel tells him that his hair looks fine and that he probably is the only person in the world who does not need therapy. When leaving Rachel wonders if Nolan is single and if she could be happy married to a police officer. Rachel mentally shakes herself, realizing that it will not matter because Mark will be waiting for her at the apartment, and he is.

## Chapter Five Analysis

Rachel relates the two tales of her involvement with crime with some excitement. Being involved, as a witness to the murder of Mr. Abbey, and as a victim and witness to the robbery give her some sense of worth. Knowing something that no one else knows is



empowering to Rachel, as she was left in the dark when it came to her marriage. The thought that she had no idea about Mark's affair is troublesome, but the thought that she had been so wrapped up in her own life and had simply missed the signs is even more hard to bear.

Mark's reaction to Rachel's amazement over Mr. Abbey skipping a meal for the thrill of love is telling for two reasons. New love, which Mark is presumably experiencing with Thelma makes him question his wife's thoughts. At the same time Rachel and Mark had at one time been newly in love, and had the same type of relationship. The fact that Rachel has forgotten that feeling gives the reader some insight into the marriage itself.

Rachel relates more to the detective than she does to those in her group about some things, including the need for therapy. Detective Nolan seems intrigued by Rachel and her quirky view of things. The information she relates about the robber is helpful, and her thoughts about his possible flirting on the subway are interesting as well. The fact that Rachel automatically wonders if the detective is single and if she could be happy married to a police officer make her wonder about herself. If Rachel can wonder about the availability of other men, could she be happy in her marriage. The second question is why every thought of a man seems to lead to marriage.



# Chapter Six

## Chapter Six Summary

Rachel relates her meeting Mark the first time at a Christmas party given by her friend Betty Searle. Betty warned Rachel about Mark, saying he was trouble, but there was an attraction that could not be denied. Rachel and Mark had gone out to dinner and then to bed, staying there for about three weeks. The relationship progressed with romance and love, and Rachel and Mark commuted back and forth between New York and Washington each weekend. On one such visit Rachel had found evidence of another woman in Mark's apartment and he became defensive and they broke up. Rachel moved back to New York and went on with life, hurt but happy.

After two months Mark returned to Rachel's life claiming that he made a horrible mistake and begging Rachel to give him another chance, begging her at every opportunity to take him back and marry him. Rachel resisted, based on her past marriage, knowing that marriage doesn't work.

Rachel discusses her first marriage to Charlie, a strange man that had hamsters as pets. Charlie and Rachel never really had a good relationship, but Rachel had married him at the time to avoid being alone for the rest of her life. Over time the marriage began to fail, but the final blow was the death of Charlie's favorite hamster, Arnold. After having Arnold frozen Charlie placed him in a place of honor in the freezer. Rachel realized that there was no way she could remain married to such a man. The fact that Charlie had slept with her best friend Brenda was no help either.

Rachel took Mark back, deciding against her past evidence that marriage would work this time, believing against her own feelings. In therapy Vera has told Rachel that she always chose men who are no good for her, a thought that is both troubling and revealing. In the end, Rachel knows that the one thing Mark learned through the beginning of their relationship and its trouble was not that marriage would work, it was that Rachel would take him back if he made a mistake.

## Chapter Six Analysis

The relationship between Mark and Rachel is revealed in greater detail in chapter six. The reader learns that before the two were married their relationship had been exciting and romantic, until Rachel had discovered that Mark had cheated on her. This fact is important, giving more relevance to Rachel's feelings of being a failure. Rachel has been through infidelity with Mark before, and forgiven him. She has believed his promises to change, and to never stray again, claiming that he needs her more than any other. Reflecting on this Rachel realizes now that the only thing that Mark learned from this difficult time is that he can have an affair and Rachel will accept him back with open arms.



The reader also learns about Rachel's first marriage to Charlie. Rachel never reveals Charlie's last name, which expresses how insignificant he is in her life. The true importance in the relationship is that Rachel felt the need to be married, and had accepted marriage to Charlie as an alternative to being alone.

Reliving her past sessions with Vera, Rachel thinks back to the things that she has learned about relationships and her choices. The focus seems to be that Rachel is unwilling to be alone, that she needs to be a part of something bigger than herself. Although Rachel is not happy with this thought at the time, she realizes that it is apparently true.

Rachel also thinks about her view of marriage as a compromise. Though this is not a different view from most people, to Rachel it seems that most people move beyond compromise, eventually giving more of themselves than they have to give.



# Chapter Seven

## Chapter Seven Summary

Rachel arrives at the apartment, and the maid, Lucy Mae Hopkins, tells her that Mark is there. Rachel finds Mark reading a book to Sam, a new blazer draped over the chair. Mark tells Rachel that he bought the blazer at Britches, a store in Washington.

Mark tells Rachel that he wants her to come home, and that he will not see Thelma again. Rachel does not say anything and Mark begins to cry, saying that he is in pain. Rachel gives in, unable to see a man cry, and agrees to go home. Mark stops crying immediately and tells Rachel to put her ring back on. Rachel tells Mark about the robbery at her group and he laughs, offending her. Rachel notices that Mark is already thinking about making the story part of a column and she tells him that he cannot do so because it is her story, not his. Rachel then relates that Mark always takes ideas from her and makes them part of a column. Even Sam's life has been laid out in Mark's columns and he is only two.

Rachel and Mark take Sam and go to the airport to take the last shuttle to Washington. In the past they had used the same shuttle when they were dating. Rachel likes the shuttle, not for the service, but because it is reliable. While Mark is checking in with the office a foreign man helps Rachel, leading to more thoughts for Rachel on what it would be like to be married to a different man. On the flight they see Meg Roberts, who asks Rachel why she had not been at Betty's birthday party. Rachel realizes that Betty will never forgive her unless she tells her the truth about why she missed the party, but does not want all of Washington to know about the problems in her marriage.

Sam throws up on Mark's new blazer and Rachel apologizes, then realizes that she has nothing to be sorry for. Mark tells her that everything is his fault. Rachel tells him that if that were true he would have demonstrated more remorse and at least paid her fair. Taking Sam to the bathroom to change him, Rachel asks Mark if he bought the blazer with Thelma, but does not wait for an answer. Mark always buys new clothes when in a relationship.

## Chapter Seven Analysis

Rachel's premonition that Mark would come for her finally comes true, though not in the way that she has imagined. Mark's first word to Rachel is the name of the shop where he bought his new blazer. This is extremely annoying to Rachel.

After reading Sam a book, Mark tells Rachel that he wants her to come home. This also annoys Rachel, as she feels that at the very least Mark should appear contrite. Mark's revelation that he is in pain stuns Rachel, not because he is, but because he does not even acknowledge that pain might be a factor for her. Mark says that it is difficult, but never painful for Rachel. Mark's tears push Rachel into agreeing to return home, as she





feels badly when men cry. The fact that Mark stops crying immediately is very telling; it is clear that the tears he shed were for effect only.

Mark's reaction to the news that Rachel was robbed and her ring stolen strikes an odd note as well. The fact that the man sees it as an opportunity for a column rather than a horrible experience for his wife reveals a lot about his character.

The ring itself is significant as well, symbolizing Mark and Rachel's happy life together. The ring was stolen from Rachel, just as her happiness and security was stolen due to Mark's affair.

Returning on the shuttle, Rachel realizes for perhaps the first time that she will now be one of the gossip stories that travel through their circle of friends and acquaintances. This upsets Rachel greatly. Though she has never been adverse to sharing in the gossip in Washington, being the subject of that gossip is not a pleasant thought. To Rachel, this is just one more thing that Mark has done to her.

Rachel also realizes that the blazer that Mark wears, and that Sam threw up on, was purchased with Thelma. Though Mark has said that he will not be seeing Thelma again, Rachel already knows that this is not true.



# Chapter Eight

## Chapter Eight Summary

Rachel wonders how the plot of her story is moving along, and comments that this story has a beginning and an end; a happy ending since she insists on them. Rachel also states that when she was married to Charlie she was not sure if that story was a beginning or an end. Samstat believes that all beginnings are happy and all endings should be, but the middle of a story is where one finds trouble.

Rachel discusses her friends, Arthur and Julie, the Siegels. Rachel and Mark are best friends with the Siegels, in fact, she compares the relationship to dating. The two couples did everything together. Mark had grown up with Arthur in Brooklyn, and after Arthur married Julie, Mark would bring his girlfriends to their house. Once Mark began dating Rachel, the couples had simply clicked, to the point of Arthur begging Mark to marry Rachel so they could all be happy together.

Several weeks after Mark and Rachel were married, Rachel saw Arthur kissing a woman on a park bench. Rachel did not know what she and Mark should do, and before they could do anything, Arthur arrived announcing he was in love. Mark talked to Arthur explaining that marriage is about trust and that he should talk to Julie and they could work it out in counseling. Arthur took Mark's advice and he and Julie did work things out. Rachel remembers thinking how lucky she was to have a husband that cherished marriage so much.

Rachel visits Arthur and Julie when she returns to Washington. The Siegels are very sad for her, and promise that Mark will come around and realize what he is doing. Rachel asks Arthur and Julie if they had had a good time on their last vacation, as Mark insisted that their marriage has been in trouble for a long time, and Rachel wasn't aware of it. The Siegels tell Rachel that the vacation was wonderful and that Mark is crazy.

## Chapter Eight Analysis

Rachel's thoughts on the beginnings and ends of stories is important, alluding to the fact that the things happening in her life have an ending. Though Samstat states that the ending is a happy one, the reader is left wondering what it is that will make it so. At this point in the novel, Rachel simply wants her husband and her old life back, though there have been signs that Rachel herself has not been as happy as she thought. An example of this is the character's fantasizing about being married to every man she meets, wondering if she could be happy with them.

The relationship between the Feldmans and the Siegels is introduced, giving the reader some insight into the early relationship of Mark and Rachel. Mark's friends believed that Rachel was his match, and that they could be happy together. Arthur's happiness at the



marriage; that his friends will be as happy as he is, allows the reader to see how close the two couples are.

Arthur's own infidelity leads into a description of Mark speaking about trust and the virtues of marriage, a definite polar opposite to his position with Rachel currently. Rachel remembers his speech to Arthur, and feeling proud that she had married such a man.



# Chapter Nine

## Chapter Nine Summary

Rachel speaks to Julie about her marriage and what her friend thinks she should do. Julie tells her that men change. Rachel wonders if that means they get worse. Julie tells Rachel that she just needs to hang on and Mark will get tired of Thelma and realize what he has with Rachel. This confuses Rachel, as Mark has said that he will not see Thelma again. Julie sadly tells Rachel that he will, but that he will come to his senses. The two discuss if marriage is worth it. Julie sometimes wishes she was single, and could experience different things. Rachel thinks about the things that she would not have to deal with if she were single.

Rachel returns home to find Mark in his office above the garage, and Sam with Juanita, the maid. Juanita cries, and tells Rachel that she is sorry, and that she has worked for Thelma, and does not like her because she is dirty.

Betty calls and Rachel panics, thinking that Betty knows about the affair. In reality, Betty knows about the robbery at Rachel's group since it is in the newspaper. Rachel is relieved that Betty believes this is the reason that Rachel missed her party. The two women chat for a few minutes until Betty tells Rachel that Thelma Rice is having an affair with Arthur. They were seen having drinks at the Washington Hilton. Rachel tells Betty that Thelma is not having an affair with anyone; that she ran into Thelma at the doctors and Thelma has a horrible infection. Betty feels horrible and suggests that she and Rachel meet Thelma for lunch and plan a dance. Rachel is horrified at the idea that Betty feels badly for Thelma, and tries to get out of it.

Rachel concludes with her ideas of relationships and potatoes, and how preparing potatoes in different ways is significant during the different stages of relationships.

## Chapter Nine Analysis

Rachel and Julie's discussion about marriage and whether it is worth it or not is revealing. Though Julie says that waiting for Mark to realize his mistake and come back is the right thing, it does not appear that she is very enthusiastic. Julie seems to concentrate on the different things in life might have experienced if she had ended things with Arthur and stayed single. Rachel concentrates not only on the things that she might experience, but also on things that she would not have to deal with any longer. This is important, as it seems to signal that Rachel is beginning to think beyond Mark, and is starting to concentrate on herself.

Speaking to Betty, Rachel is relieved that Betty does not know about the affair, but is horrified when Betty thinks that Arthur is the mystery man that Thelma is involved with. Trying to turn Betty's attention away from Thelma, Rachel announces the bogus



infection. The plan backfires, as Betty feels sympathy for Thelma, the last thing Rachel wants anyone to feel for Rice.

Rachel manages to put off a lunch with Betty and Thelma, but realizes that sooner or later she will have to deal with things head on.

Rachel's comparison of potatoes to life is entertaining, and again revisits her previous thoughts of things having a beginning, middle and end, though no one is ever really sure where one starts and the other ends.



# Chapter Ten

## Chapter Ten Summary

Three days pass in which Rachel and Mark go on with life as if nothing has happened. Rachel at one time tries to snoop in Mark's office, but the door is locked. The two act as if life is normal, eating, sleeping, having sex.

Rachel flies to New York for a food demonstration at Macy's. Rachel normally love to do this, but her mind is elsewhere. While cooking she recaps her road to food writer. Originally, Rachel was a journalist, but had filled in for the food editor for a time at the New York World-Telegram and Sun. The job had stuck and Rachel had built her career around it happily.

Rachel also thinks about her way of looking at cooking and how it has changed. Rachel realizes that at first cooking is a way to show you love someone, then it becomes a way to say I love you, then becomes the only way to say I love you. Samstat wonders if this is what has become of her.

Rachel feels better when she sees her producer, Richard Finkel. Rachel thinks back to the affair she had with Richard at the beginning of their relationship and how they are good friends now. The only complication in their friendship is that Rachel does not like Richard's wife, and Richard does not like Mark. The two go for drinks and Rachel wonders how she can tell Richard about what is going on in her life. To Rachel's surprise, Richard tells her that his wife has left him for another woman. Rachel tells Richard about Mark and the two commiserate.

Richard decides that it would be a great idea if he and Rachel should get married. Rachel calmly explains that it would never work because they are still in love with their spouses. Richard loudly begs for Rachel to marry him to the amusement of the people around them, and then jumps in the seal pool in Central Park. Rachel takes Richard to his apartment and puts him to bed. Richard recommends that Rachel make a grand gesture like he did today and she will feel better.

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# Chapter Eleven

## Chapter Eleven Summary

Rachel returns to Washington, thinking that at least someone wants to be married to her, even if it is not her husband. On the way, Rachel is sure that Mark will have come to his senses; that he must miss her. Arriving at the house Rachel sees a police car in front and wonders if Mark is dead. At least that would solve some of her problems.

Inside, two police officers are sitting with Mark, drinking beer. They have come to return her ring. Rachel finds a note from Detective Nolan in the bag, telling Rachel that the robber had confessed and she will not need to testify. The stone on the ring is loose, so Rachel returns it to the envelope and puts it in her purse. Mark seems angry about this.

After the police leave Mark tells Rachel that Thelma called him, very angry that Rachel was spreading rumors about her having herpes. Rachel informs Mark that if Thelma continues to call she will gladly tell everyone that she has the clap. Mark storms out in anger.

Rachel tries to stay calm, but instead winds up in Mark's unlocked office, snooping. A paper trail of hotel receipts, telephone bills and flower delivery slips tells Rachel that Mark has been seeing Thelma since March. The Sunday paper is open to the real estate section and Rachel sees that Mark has circled several properties. Anger swelling, Rachel leaves Sam with the maid and heads to the Rice's neighborhood.

Seeing Mark's car, Rachel walks up into their yard, tripping and falling on a wire in the grass, straining her stomach and spraining her ankle. Limping around the corner Rachel spots a body in the bushes. Frightened at first, Rachel realizes it is Jonathan Rice, wearing headphones and listening to Mark and Thelma, in the house. Jonathan tells Rachel that Mark and Thelma are discussing what type of house suits their needs. He also informs Rachel that Thelma had been quite fond of her before she spread rumors about her infection. Rachel listens, her stomach cramping, disgusted. Jonathan continues telling Rachel what Mark and Thelma have planned until Rachel realizes that the stomach pain is labor. Jonathan rushes into the house and Mark exits, taking Rachel to the hospital.

Rachel needs to have an emergency caesarian, as the baby is early and in slight distress. Mark stays with her, and is some comfort as he retells the story of Sam's birth at Rachel's request. Nathaniel is born, healthy but small, and is taken to the pediatric intensive care area. Rachel is not surprised that her baby arrived early. Something is dying inside her and the baby wanted away from it.





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# Chapter Twelve

## Chapter Twelve Summary

Rachel recovers from childbirth and wonders why her life has changed so much. The only thing that Rachel can come up with is that Mark has gone crazy.

Vera visits and Rachel talks with her, discussing her failings as a wife, how having Sam changed her marriage. Vera tells Rachel that the only thing that matters is what she wants to do. Rachel is angry, telling Vera that she was foolish to believe in marriage. Vera argues, but Rachel refuses to relent, telling Vera that she had gotten the last good marriage. Vera gets teary, and Rachel realizes that her therapist does this when she is being difficult, expressing the feelings that Rachel will not.

Arthur and Julie visit, sharing tales of their life and the difficulties that daily life brings. Mark visits everyday but one, saying that he has an interview in New York. Rachel finds out later that it was Thelma's birthday. Jonathan had thrown a surprise party for Thelma and his wife had not shown up.

Mark returns the next day and he and Rachel visit the nursery, feeding Nathaniel in his incubator. The following day Rachel is able to return home.

Rachel keeps up appearances as best she can, visiting Nathaniel in the hospital, attending dinner parties, and paying attention to politics. Betty calls Rachel and tells her that she has lobsters, and that Rachel should make her key lime pie for a get-together.

## Chapter Twelve Analysis

Rachel recovers from the birth of Nathaniel, and the lose of her marriage. While thinking to herself, Rachel is more than willing blame Mark for the problems they are having, but while speaking to others Rachel blames herself. Vera wants Rachel to think about what she wants. Rachel refuses, feeling badly and more than willing to make others feel as bad as she does.

Rachel comes to the realization that despite how many times she tries to believe Mark, he is not going to stop seeing Thelma. The fact that he sees Thelma on her birthday, rather than visit his wife an son, is most telling. The fact that Thelma is willing to embarrass her husband is also important. It is obvious that the relationship between Mark and Thelma is more than a fling.

Even with the knowledge that Mark and Thelma are still seeing each other, Rachel still tries to keep things as normal as possible. Rachel is beginning to accept that her life will never return to normal, but she is unwilling to give up the chance that it might.



# Chapter Thirteen

## Chapter Thirteen Summary

After receiving a call from Betty to have lobsters as long as Rachel supplies a key lime pie, Rachel and Sam head out to buy the ingredients. While out they decide to visit a toy store and pass the jeweler on the way. Rachel brings the ring into Leo Rothman, the man who Mark had purchased the ring from to have the loose setting fixed. The two chat, with Leo commenting on the flawless stone and his offer to Mark to buy the ring back. Leo asks Rachel if she liked the necklace that Mark had bought her. Rachel is stunned, but plays it off, assuring Leo that she knew Mark had bought her something, but not what. Thinking about it, Rachel sells the ring to Leo for \$15,000. The jeweler is a bit concerned, but Rachel insists that the ring does not go with her life.

Rachel spends the day acting normal, making the pie, all the while carrying the check around in her pocket. With a sense of freedom, Rachel realizes that she has found the ticket to freedom from her marriage.

At Betty's house, Mark and Betty's boyfriend, Dmitri, make the lobsters while the women talk. Afterward, they all talk in the kitchen, getting ready for dessert. Betty tells Rachel about the dance that they are planning at the Sulgrave Club; the dance they are having with Thelma. Rachel tries to tune out, but the subject of Richard's marriage comes up. Rachel sits quietly while the other three discuss how someone could be married to someone and not have a better idea of what they are like. Rachel's temper flares, but she remains quiet, looking at Mark.

Rachel thinks about how she still loves Mark, but that she would rather be dead than wait for him to love her again. Considering the pie, Rachel knows that Mark will never love her again if she throws it at him, but then suddenly realizes that he does not love her now. Liberated, Rachel throws the pie at Mark. Her only regret is that it was not a blueberry pie.

Rachel realizes that she should have thrown the pie sooner, should have thrown anything sooner, but always found a reason not to. Now there is no reason to hold back.

Her final day in Washington, Rachel acts like life is normal, but makes plans instead. Nathaniel will be out of the hospital in the morning, and the doctor says that he may travel to New York by train. Rachel calls Richard and tells him that she and the boys will be staying with him until she finds an apartment.

That evening, Mark falls asleep with his arm around Rachel, commenting that it has been a good day. Rachel thinks about how Mark used to sing to her at night, and again in the morning, silly nonsense songs they had called the petunia song. Rachel had always meant to write down the different words because they had made her feel safe



and loved. Now she cannot, because she cannot remember them. Rachel does not think that this is such a bad way to begin to forget.

## Chapter Thirteen Analysis

Rachel reflects on her position in her marriage, and how she got to where she is. It finally occurs to Samstat that though she has tried her best to alter all of the things that Mark complains about, he is still more than willing to end things, or continue to have is cake and eat it too.

While buying ingredients for the pie, Rachel happens to stop at the jewelers, to have the ring fixed. Once again, the ring is a catalyst in the novel. While having the stone set, Rachel learns that Mark has purchased an expensive necklace, obviously for Thelma. It is what finally snaps things for Rachel, and she sells the ring to the jeweler for a substantial sum. Rachel's explanation that the ring does not fit her life is the truth. The ring had been purchased as a symbol of the love that she and Mark shared, as a testament to their life. That life and that love no longer exists. The ring is now Rachel's chance to escape the marriage that she has tried so hard to maintain.

Rachel finally can take no more, listening to her friends discuss the marriage of Richard and Helen, and wondering how anyone could not know what their spouse is thinking. Rachel is not sure which is worse, that she is hearing this conversation, or that Mark is listening and commenting, acting as if his life is normal. Rachel knows that she still loves Mark, but finally makes the decision that she loves herself more, and is unwilling to be treated like this any longer.

Throwing the pie at Mark is the extreme act that Richard had referred to while in New York with Rachel. Rachel does feel better; free, and makes her plans, finally willing to step away from the pain that the person who had claimed to love her has willingly caused.



# Characters

## Rachel Samstat

Rachel Samstat is the main character of *Heartburn*, and the narrator of the novel. Rachel is a married mother of one, and seven months pregnant. Rachel lives in Washington, D.C., with her husband Mark and their son Sam, and believes herself to be happily married until she discovers that Mark is having an affair with Thelma Rice, an acquaintance of theirs.

Rachel is a seemingly easy-going woman in her thirties, a cookbook author and television personality. Her cookbooks are narratives, with recipes included, almost as an aside, to further tell the stories that she writes. Rachel loves her work, and her family, and frequently finds herself thankful that she has been so blessed.

This all changes when Rachel discovers that Mark is having an affair. Devastated with the revelation, Rachel runs to New York, and her old therapy group, partly because she is unsure of how to deal with the situation, and partly to avoid the embarrassment of the news spreading through her circle of friends. In New York, Rachel receives the support that she was looking for, and also realizes how much she misses the city and how much she dislikes Washington.

Throughout the novel Rachel struggles with herself, sometimes blaming herself for the collapse of her marriage, and sometimes blaming Mark. While trying her best to make things work, Rachel becomes more unhappy, struggling to find a balance and to get things back to the way they used to be.

In the end, Rachel decides that for her own sake and for the sake of happiness, she is unwilling to change herself, in order to gain back the love of a man that is no longer worthy of it. Rachel leaves her husband, taking her two sons to New York, and looking forward, considering it a new beginning of life, rather than an end of an old one.

## Mark Feldman

Mark Feldman is a columnist in Washington, married to Rachel Samstat. Though Mark is portrayed in flashbacks by Rachel as a loving and caring husband and father, the reader is given a different view of the man when Rachel discovers his affair with Thelma Rice.

Mark Feldman is portrayed as a selfish, egotistical man, concerned only with himself and his own happiness. Rachel leaves him when she discovers his affair, after Mark tells his pregnant wife that he loves Thelma, but that Rachel should stay and be a good wife and mother. Mark finds it hard to believe that this option would be unacceptable to his spouse. When Mark follows Rachel to New York, he does not profess his love, or



beg, but cries and tells Rachel that he is in pain. While this may be true, it appears more likely that Mark knows that tears will sway his wife more easily.

Mark promises that he will no longer see Thelma, but it is obvious that he continues to do so, despite Rachel's efforts to return to the life they had before his infidelity. Mark even spends Thelma's birthday with her, leaving Rachel in the hospital after the premature birth of their second son, Nathaniel. This coupled with the knowledge that Mark has purchased an expensive piece of jewelry for Thelma all the while lying to his wife, shows the reader that Mark is only concerned with himself.

Mark is treated to a pie in the face when his wife has finally had enough, and even this does not seem to faze him. Mark still expects Rachel to remain with him, while he plans his new life with his lover. Rachel, however, makes plans to leave him, finally realizing that there is no one Mark Feldman loves more than himself.

## **Thelma Rice**

Thelma Rice is the third party in a love triangle between Rachel Samstat and her husband, Mark Feldman. Thelma is a married woman, involved in an affair with Mark. Rachel discovers the affair when she reads an inscription in a book of children's songs that Thelma has given to Mark. This comes several days after the Rice's had stopped in to have dessert with Mark and Rachel and Thelma had called and asked Rachel for the recipe for her cake.

Thelma appears to be very self-involved, and only concerned with her wants and needs. This fact is driven home when he husband follows Rachel to New York and begs her to return to Mark so that both of them can save their marriages. It seems that Thelma has had many affairs, and has done nothing to hide them from her husband. This gives the reader some insight into the character, showing that Thelma is very unconcerned with how her actions will affect those around her.

The fact that until Rachel spread rumors about Thelma, Thelma had liked Rachel, shows that Rice has no concept at all of others' feelings, and no regard for the commitment of others. Thelma appears to win in the end, as Rachel finally leaves Mark, but as Thelma and Mark are equally unfeeling, it seems that they will wind up unhappy in the end.

## **Jonathan Rice**

Jonathan Rice is the husband of Thelma Rice. Working in Washington as the Undersecretary of Middle Eastern affairs, one would think that Jonathan is a strong person, intelligent and mature. While this may be true while he is doing his job, when it comes to his marriage it is far from the truth.

Jonathan strikes the reader as a character to be pitied, willing to be humiliated by his wife within their circle of friends and acquaintances. Jonathan follows Rachel to New



York, not only begging her to return to Mark so that they can save their respective marriages, but also seems to blame Rachel for the fact that their spouses are in love. In Jonathan's eyes, if Rachel were more accepting, and had a better relationship with Mark, he would not have wound up with Thelma.

## **Betty Searle**

Rachel's friend, Betty is a gossip. Betty knows everything that goes on in Washington and she and Rachel often discussed who could possibly be having an affair with Thelma Rice.

## **Sam**

Rachel and Mark's son, Sam is approximately two years old.

## **Richard**

The producer of Rachel's television show, Richard was once Rachel's lover. The two spend time in New York when Richard's wife leaves him for another woman. Richard asks Rachel to marry him, so they won't be alone. When Rachel finally leaves Mark she plans to live with Richard until she can find an apartment.

## **Eleanor**

A friend of Rachel's who informs her that her step-mother is wandering the streets of New York in a towel.

## **Charlie**

Rachel's first husband, Charlie had an affair with Rachel's best friend, Brenda.

## **Laszlo Pump**

One of the contractors that Rachel and Mark hired during the extensive renovations on their two properties.

## **Bebe Samstat**

Rachel's mother, Bebe was a Hollywood agent specializing in odd people, such as midgets and actors with scars.



## **Harry Stratton**

Rachel's father, a character actor. Harry is institutionalized periodically, and is at Seven Clouds, a hospital, when Rachel runs to New York after she discovers Mark's affair.

## **Mel**

Rachel's step-father, Bebe told Rachel that Mel was God.

## **Vera Maxwell**

Rachel's therapist, who handles the group that Rachel attended until moving to Washington. Vera is very supportive of Rachel, helping her see when decisions need to be made and guiding her to make the choice that is right for her.

## **Niccolo**

Vera's husband of more than twenty years.

## **Lucy Mae Hopkins**

Harry Stratton's maid, Lucy Mae moves into the apartment in New York to help Rachel care for Sam.

## **Ellis**

A member of Rachel's group therapy with Vera.

## **Diana**

A member of Rachel's group, Diana is always jealous that things happen to Rachel instead of her.

## **Dan**

A member of Rachel's group.

## **Eve**

A member of Rachel's therapy group.





## **Vanessa**

A member of Rachel's therapy group, Vanessa is a famous actress. When the group is robbed the story makes the national papers because of Vanessa's fame.

## **Sidney**

A member of Rachel's therapy group.

## **Mr. Abbey**

A man who was murdered across the street from Rachel and Mark's house.

## **Detective Andrew Nolan**

The detective who handles the robbery in New York and has Rachel's ring returned to her in Washington.

## **Meg Roberts**

An casual friend that Rachel runs into on the Eastern Shuttle when she is returning to Washington with Mark.

## **Leo Rothman**

The jeweler who Rachel sells her ring to when she decides to leave Mark.

## **Helen**

Richard's wife, who leaves him for another woman.

## **Arthur Siegel**

Mark's childhood friend, married to Julie. The Siegels are Mark and Rachel's best friends.

## **Julie Siegel**

Married to Arthur, Julie is Rachel's best friend.

## **Nathaniel**

Rachel and Mark's second son, born prematurely when Rachel falls while trying to find Mark at Thelma's house.



## Objects/Places

### Ladies' Central

The gossip network that Mark Feldman refers to while discussing who Thelma Rice might be having an affair with.

### Seven Clouds

The mental hospital or 'looney bin' where Rachel's father is at the outset of the novel.

### Washington, D.C.

The capital of the United States, Rachel and her husband Mark live in the city.

### West Virginia

Rachel and Mark have a summer home in the state of West Virginia, outside Washington, D.C.

### Britches

The clothing store where Mark purchases a blazer with Thelma.

### Eastern Airlines

The airline that provides shuttle service between New York and Washington.

### Cleveland Park

The area of Washington where Thelma and Jonathan Rice live.

### New York City

Rachel runs to New York when she discovers Mark's affair, as she is happier there. Rachel realizes that she misses the city, and has given a part of herself up by moving to Washington with Mark.



## **New York World Telegram and Sun**

The newspaper Rachel worked for when she got her start as food writer.

## **Sulgrave Club**

The club where Betty is trying to arrange a dance to be hosted by herself, Rachel and Thelma.



# Themes

## Infidelity

Infidelity is a common theme in *Heartburn* by Nora Ephron. The main plot follows Rachel Samstat as she tries to recover from the news that her husband Mark is in love with another woman. This violation of the boundaries of marriage and their relationship tears the foundation out from under Rachel's world.

Infidelity is defined as a breach of mutual trust in an intimate relationship. The act of infidelity causes feelings of betrayal and hurt. The infidelity can be both physical and emotional. In the case of Rachel, her husband claimed to be in love with Thelma Rice, but that they were not intimate. Though Mark presumably believed that this somehow made his unfaithfulness better, it was in fact worse for Rachel. Not only was her husband in love with another woman, but he loved her despite the fact that there was no sex involved.

There are other areas in the novel where infidelity is woven into the plot, including Rachel's own affair in her first marriage. Samstat mentions this affair almost as an afterthought, as she does not consider her first marriage anything more than a stepping stone to the life she has now. Both Rachel and her first husband were unfaithful, so she considers them even.

## Strength

Inner strength is an important theme in *Heartburn*, by Nora Ephron. Rachel Samstat, the main character, is devastated when she discovers that her husband Mark has been unfaithful. The fact that Rachel is seven months pregnant makes the situation worse.

At the outset of the novel, Rachel tends to look at herself as a victim, being blamed for the affair by her husband. Mark's opinion is that Rachel has failed, not being nice enough, or pleasant enough, forcing him to look outside the marriage for happiness. Rachel is willing to take the blame, accepting that things would be alright if she were a better wife.

As the novel progresses, this changes. Whether it is because of the support of friends or her own personal growth, Rachel looks within herself and realizes that she is not to blame for her husband's affair. Mark had acted on his own, choosing to have an affair rather than deal with the issues he said existed.

Rachel looks within herself, and finds the strength it takes to end her marriage, to walk away from the pain and move on with her life. This strength allows Rachel to free herself from the guilt she had thinking that she had failed, and also allows her to understand that no amount of wishing will make her husband love her if he chooses not to.



## Food

Food plays an important part in the novel *Heartburn*, not only because the main character is a cookbook author and hosts a cooking show, but also because of the role it plays in Rachel Samstat's life.

Rachel makes her living with food, writing books that are more a collection of stories with recipes thrown in than actual cookbooks. These books made way for her public television series where Rachel chats with a guest and they talk about food and cook in a casual manner. Rachel's popularity in the food world is based more on her comfortable manner than on actual training as a cook.

Rachel also uses food in her life. An example of this is her feelings about potatoes. Rachel believes that you can judge the point of a relationship by how potatoes are prepared, and provides examples of crispy potatoes at the outset, and mashed potatoes at the end to provide comfort. Rachel also realizes that during her relationship with Mark, the way she thinks of food has changed. At the outset, providing a meal was an added way to show love. Gradually, food becomes the substitute for saying she loves Mark. In this way Rachel finds fault with herself for allowing her relationship to fail.

At the end of the novel, Rachel makes a grand statement with food, throwing a key lime pie in Mark's face. The fact that Rachel chooses food to make this statement shows that food is important to her. Rachel's books are stories, and food is tied into them. It is significant that Rachel would use food in the climax of her own story.



# Style

## Point of View

Heartburn by Nora Ephron is written in the first person from the point of view of the main character, Rachel Samstat. The novel is a narrative of the six weeks in Rachel's life that encompass the downfall of her marriage. The first person narrative is extremely important in this novel as it gives the reader insight into what Samstat is thinking and feeling. The reader is able to see the main character progress during this time. At first Rachel is filled with self-pity, wondering what she has done to cause her husband to cheat. Gradually Rachel begins to feel stronger about herself and puts the blame on her husband, where it belongs.

The novel is mainly a dialogue between the reader and the main character, as Rachel Samstat details her life as if in conversation. There are small parts of dialogue between characters, which allows the reader to see not just Rachel's point of view of those around her, but lets the reader develop their own sense of the characters personalities. This is helpful because one is able to form a personal opinion of those that Rachel interacts with, and how they affect her.

## Setting

Heartburn takes place in Washington, D.C., where Rachel lives with her husband and son, as well as in New York City. Originally from New York, Rachel returns when she discovers her husband's affair. Staying at her father's apartment, Rachel realizes how much she has missed the city and all that is available in it. As a cookbook author and television personality, the choices available in food alone make her happy.

Rachel returns to her home in Washington at the request of her husband Mark. The location of the home is not specified. The home is not described in any great detail, in fact the main character does not seem to be particularly fond of it, or Washington. Rachel describes the issues that she and Mark had with contractors while they were remodeling their house, but no more. Rachel talks about visiting various areas in the D.C. area for events and parties, but does not go into great detail about them. It is clear to the reader that Rachel much prefers New York to Washington, and resents that she moved to Washington for her husband's career.

During happier times in Rachel's marriage she and her husband traveled with friends Julie and Arthur Siegel. The narrator briefly mentions different destinations such as Ireland and New Orleans, but focuses more on the food they had while traveling, rather than the locations themselves.



## Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is modern, as it takes place in modern times. The reader is able to easily follow the writing, which is from the point of view of the main character, Rachel Samstat. Rachel is a modern woman, a New Yorker transplanted to Washington, D.C. when she marries her husband. The reader is given a sense of the character by her quick wit and sarcasm, as well as her descriptions of those around her.

The characters in the novel are all peers, however the language does allow the reader to get a sense of which characters feel that they are above the others, through patterns of speech and their actions toward those around them. The main character does not change her language in any way while dealing with those around her, which lets the reader see that Rachel is her own person, willing to be herself.

The novel is written in a conversational tone, as the main character relates the details of her life to the reader. The reader feels part of Rachel's inner circle, privy to her thoughts and feelings. The language used reflects the moods of the character, allowing the reader to experience her life more easily, and relate to the events that take place.

## Structure

Heartburn, by Nora Ephron, is a novel detailing six weeks of Rachel Samstat's life. The novel is broken down into thirteen numbered chapters that vary in length. Each chapter details events in the life of Rachel, and the effects that these events have in her life. The chapters tend to be long, though they grow shorter toward the end of the novel when events speed up in Rachel's life.

The plot of the novel is straightforward, dealing with the six weeks between when Rachel discovers her husband's affair and when she makes the final decision to leave him. Woven into this is the emotional growth of the main character, and how she finds the inner strength to change her opinions of herself, ultimately leaving her husband and moving beyond her failed marriage. The novel covers a relatively short period of time, though there are some areas of flashback to give one a better insight into the person that Rachel Samstat is.

The novel is fast-paced and entertaining, drawing the reader into the events that occur to Rachel. The writer uses comedy and sarcasm to lighten the otherwise dramatic storyline, allowing one to enjoy the novel, and feel part of the character's lives.





## Quotes

"The first day I did not think it was funny. I didn't think it was funny the third day either, but I managed to make a little joke about it. "The most unfair thing about this whole business," I said, "is that I can't even date." Well, you had to be there, as they say, because when I put it down on paper it doesn't sound funny. But what made it funny (trust me) is the word 'date,' which when you say it out loud at the end of a sentence has a wonderful teenage quality, and since I am not a teenager (okay, I'm thirty-eight), and since the reason I was hardly in a position to date on first learning that my second husband had taken a lover was that I was seven months pregnant, I got a laugh on it, though for all I know my group was only laughing because they were trying to cheer me up. I needed cheering up. I was in New York, staying at my father's apartment, I was crying most of the time, and every time I stopped crying I had to look at my father's incredibly depressing walnut furniture and slate-gray lamps, which made me start crying again."

Chapter One, page 3

"I would like to ask her what a person who is seven months pregnant is supposed to do when her husband turns out to be in love with someone else, but the truth is she probably wouldn't have been much help. Even in the old days, my mother was a washout at hard-core mothering; what she was good at were clever remarks that made you feel immensely sophisticated and adult and , if you thought about it at all, foolish for having wanted anything so mundane as some actual nurturing. Had I been able to talk to her at this moment of crisis, she would have said something fabulously brittle like "Take notes." Then she would have gone into the kitchen and toasted almonds. You melt some butter in a frying pan, add whole blanched almonds, and saute' until they're golden brown with a few little burned parts. Drain lightly and salt and eat with a nice stiff drink. "Men are little boys," she would have said as she lifted her glass. "Don't stiff or you'll bruise the ice cubes."

Chapter Two, page 29

"What am I going to do?" I said.

"There's nothing you can do, baby," said my father.

"Of course there's something she can do," said Jonathan. "She can come back to him. If we both stick with it, we can sit this thing out."

"Jonathan is the undersecretary of the state in charge of Middle Eastern affairs," I said.

My father looked at Jonathan. "I suppose they don't give that job to Jews," he said.

"That's right," said Jonathan.

"You want to make a pact with someone," said my father, "go call up the president of Egypt. Leave Rachel out of this"

Chapter Three, pg. 41

"Heartburn. That, it seemed to me as I lay in bed, was what I was suffering from. That summed up the whole mess: heartburn. Compound heartburn. Double-digit heartburn. Terminal heartburn. The tears poured from my eyes as I lit on the image, and the only thing that might have made it even more satisfyingly melodramatic and masochistic



would have been to be lying in the bathtub; nothing like crying in the tub for real self-pity, nothing like the moment when every last bit of you is wet, and wiping the tears from your eyes only means making your face even wetter."

Chapter four, pgs 45-46

"I see that once again I've gotten off the track, that I've drifted back to Mark, to Mark and Thelma, but I can't help myself. When something like this happens, you suddenly have no sense of reality at all. You have lost a piece of you past. The infidelity itself is small potatoes compared to the low-level brain damage that results when a whole chunk of your life turns out to have been completely different from what you thought it was. It becomes impossible to look back at anything that's happened-from the simplest exchange between the two of you at a dinner party to the horrible death of Mr. Abbey-without wondering what was really going on. See the couple. See the couple have a baby. See the couple with the baby having another baby. What's wrong with this picture? Everything, as it happens."

Chapter five, pg. 64

"I started out telling you all this because I wanted you to understand why I so resisted getting married again. It seemed to me that the desire to get married-which, I regret to say, I believe is fundamental and primal in women-is followed almost immediately by an equally fundamental and primal urge, which is to be single again. But there was Mark. With his big brown eyes and his sweetheart roses. Forever and ever, he said. Forever and ever and ever, he said. I'll be loving you always...Not for just an hour, not for just a day, not for just a year, but always.

For a long time, I didn't believe him. And then I believed him. I believed in change. I believed in metamorphosis. I believed in redemption. I believed in Mark. My marriage to him was as willful an act as I have ever committed; I married against all the evidence. I married him believing that marriage doesn't work, that love dies, that passion fades, and in so doing I became the kind of romantic only a cynic is truly capable of being. I see all that now. At the time, though, I saw nothing of the sort. I honestly believed that Mark had learned his lesson. Unfortunately, the lesson he learned wasn't the one I had in mind: what he learned is that he could do anything, and in the end there was a chance I'd take him back."

Chapter Six, pgs. 84-85

"There has been a lot written in recent years about the fact that men don't cry enough. Crying is thought to be a desirable thing, a sign of mature male sensibility, and it is generally believed that when little boys are taught that it is unmanly to cry, they grow up unable to deal with pain and grief and disappointment and feelings in general. I would like to say two things about this. The first is that I have always believed that crying is a highly overrated activity: women do entirely too much of it, and the last thing we ought to want is for it to become a universal excess. The second thing I want to say is this: beware of men who cry. It's true that men who cry are sensitive to and in touch with feelings, but the only feelings they tend to be sensitive to and in touch with are their own."

Chapter Seven, pgs. 87-88



"Arthur and Julie and Mark and Rachel. The Siegels and the Feldmans. It's not just that we were best friends—we dated each other. We went steady. That's one of the things that happens when you become a couple: you date other couples. We saw each other every Saturday night and every Sunday night, and we had a standing engagement for New Year's Eve. Our marriages were tied together. We went to Italy, we went to Ireland, we went to Williamsburg, we went to Montreal, we went to St. Martin, and Mark drove and I navigated and Julie suggested wrong turns and Arthur fell asleep. Then, when we got to wherever we were going, Mark wanted to eat and I wanted to see the market and Julie wanted to go to the museum and Arthur wanted to take a crap. We had flat tires together and we ran out of gas together; in some fundamental sense, we were always on the road, merrily on our way to nowhere in particular. Two of us liked dark meat and two of us liked light meat and together we made a chicken."

Chapter Eight, pg. 101

"I went up to the little room on the third floor that I used for an office. In the typewriter was an article I'd been writing about potatoes. I took it out of the typewriter and put in a fresh sheet of paper. I must write all this down, I thought. Someday I may write something that's not a cookbook, and this will be the grist for it. But I couldn't. To write it down was to give it permanence, to admit that something real had happened. I thought about potatoes. The first time I made dinner for just about anyone I ever cared for I made potatoes. Very very crisp potatoes. I must make some potatoes tonight, I thought; mashed potatoes. Nothing like mashed potatoes when you're feeling blue. I could hear Mark's typewriter from the office over the garage; I kept hoping he would leave, go out for more socks, so I could dash into his sanctuary and go through the phone bills and the American Express receipts, but he was still there, tapping away. Maybe he's making notes for a novel, I thought. Worse, maybe he's making notes for a a column. That would really do it. There would be my entire marital disaster, reduced to an 850-word column in 109 newspapers. I knew just how he'd write it, too. He'd write it in that dumb Hemingway style he always reserved for his slice-of-life columns. The old man had told him it would happen. The old man had said to him, Sasha, it will happen someday. You will be on the river. You will be going downstream. You will hit a log."

Chapter Nine, pgs 119-120

"Perhaps you are wondering whether we had sex. Normally I don't like to get into this area, because it embarrasses me, but since it's probably crossed your mind I'd better deal with it. We had sex. We always had sex. That's one of the most perplexing parts of the story; that's one of the reasons why Mark's relationship with Thelma had come as such a surprise to me. Now that I look back on it, we hadn't been doing anything particularly inventive in that department of late, but I have never been big on invention in that department. Why kid around? Every so often I browse through books full of tasteful line drawings of supplementary positions —how to do it standing and in the swimming pool and on the floor—and I'm always mystified. On the floor! Why would anyone want to do it on the floor when a bed was available? I'll tell you the truth: even sex on the beach seems to me to be going too far. "

Chapter Ten, pg 129



"After Sam was born, I remember thinking that no one had ever told me how much I would love my child; now, of course, I realized something else no one tells you: that a child is a grenade. When you have a baby, you set off an explosion in your marriage, and when the dust settles, your marriage is different from what it was. Not better, necessarily; not worse, necessarily; but different. All those idiotically lyrical articles about sharing child-rearing duties never mention that, nor do they allude to something else that happens when a baby is born, which is that all the power struggles of the marriage have a new playing field. The baby wakes up in the middle of the night, and instead of jumping out of bed, you lie there thinking: Whose turn is it? If it's your turn, you have to get up; if it's his turn, then why is he still lying there asleep while you're awake wondering whose turn it is? Now it takes two parents to feed the child—one to do it and one to keep the one who does it company. Now it takes two parents to take the child to the doctor—one to do it and one to keep the one who does it from becoming resentful about having to do it. Now it takes two parents to fight over who gets to be the first person to introduce solids or the last person to notice the diaper has to be changed or the one who cares the most about limiting sugar snacks or the one who cares least about conventional discipline.

No one tells you these things—not that we would have listened had anyone tried. We were so smart. We were so old. We were so happy. We had it knocked."

Chapter Eleven, pgs. 158-159

"Sometimes I believe that love dies, but hope springs eternal. Sometimes I believe that hope dies but love springs eternal. Sometimes I believe that sex plus guilt equals love, and sometimes I believe that sex plus guilt equals good sex. Sometimes I believe that love is as natural as the tides, and sometimes I believe that love is an act of will. Sometimes I believe that some people are better at love than others, and sometimes I believe that everyone is faking it. Sometimes I believe that love is essential, and sometimes I believe that the only reason love is essential is that otherwise you spend all your time looking for it."

Chapter Twelve, pgs 164-165

"I looked across the table at Mark. I still love you, I thought. I still look at that dopey face of yours, with that silly striped beard, and think you are the handsomest man I've ever known. I still find you interesting, even if right now you are being more boring than the Martin Agronsky show. But someday I won't anymore. And in the meantime, I'm getting out. I am no beauty, and I'm getting on in years, and I have just about enough money to last me sixty days, and I am terrified of being alone, and I can't bear the idea of divorce, but I would rather die than sit here and pretend it's okay, I would rather die than sit here figuring out how to get you to love me again, I would rather die than spend five more minutes going through your drawers and wondering where you are and anticipating your next betrayal and worrying about whether my poor, beat-up, middle-aged body with its Caesarean scars will every turn you on again. I can't stand feeling sorry for myself. I can't stand sitting here feeling like a victim. I can't stand hoping against hope. I can't stand sitting here with all this rage turning to hurt and then to tears. I CANT STAND NOT TALKING!"

Chapter Thirteen, pg 175

# Topics for Discussion

How does Rachel discover her husband's affair? What bothers Rachel the most about it at the outset?

What is Mark's reaction to the discovery of his infidelity?

Why does Jonathan Rice fly to New York to see Rachel? Is he successful?

Who are Arthur and Julie Siegel? What key role do they play in the lives of Rachel and Mark?

What does Richard suggest Rachel do? Does she?

What key factors help Rachel finally decide to leave Mark?

How does the relationship that Rachel had with her own parents affect her and her current feelings about herself?