

# **How I Live Now Study Guide**

**How I Live Now by Meg Rosoff**

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## Plot Summary

A teenager named Daisy arrives from her home in New York City to live with her Aunt Penn and four cousins on a farm in rural England. The time is indefinite, but appears similar to the present and therefore could be based in the near future. Talk of war and occasional terrorist bombings have been occurring for several years in both America and England. Daisy is annoyed with her father for having complied with the wishes of her stepmother, whom she calls "Davina the Diaboloical," to send her to England. Daisy, who believes that Davina hates her and wants to poison her, has developed the habit of eating very sparingly, and is quite thin. Her 14 year-old cousin, Edmond, picks her up at the airport, and she is immediately taken by his rakish but gentle manner. The straightforward and loving nature of her nine year-old cousin Piper also quickly captivates her, as does the beautiful but somewhat crumbling farmhouse on a large property. Her two other cousins, Isaac and Osbert, who are also teenagers, have their own distinctive personalities and her Aunt Penn is a kind and admirable person. Daisy has fallen into a charming situation and wants nothing more than to luxuriate in it, especially after her attraction to Edmond turns into love that he reciprocates. This happens after Aunt Penn leaves the children alone to go to an antiwar conference in Oslo, Norway. The father of the cousins does not figure in the story and is never mentioned. The day after Aunt Penn leaves, a bomb at the London train station kills many people, and before long, occupying forces have taken over England. Even as the underage affair between Daisy and Edmond burgeons and the war escalates, threatening their tranquil life.

Aunt Penn does not return and eventually, British soldiers take over the farmhouse, separating Daisy and Piper, who are sent to live with a family called the McEvoy's, a long drive away. Edmond and Isaac are sent elsewhere, and the eldest brother, Osbert, goes off to fight with the soldiers. Daisy, who has shown no interest in the war up to this point, now realizes that she must become involved if she is to return Piper and herself to the boys. She frequently talks in her mind with Edmond, whom she loves deeply, and she can sense him listening. Most members of this family have unusual telepathic abilities, which extend to animals in the cases of Piper and Isaac. Daisy manages to discover from Major McEvoy, the head of the McEvoy household, that the boys are being kept at a place called Gateshead Farm. After Major McEvoy is killed in the war, Daisy and Piper walk to Gateshead Farm, where they find many bodies from the aftermath of a massacre. They return to their family farm, now abandoned by the soldiers, where Daisy's father locates her by phone. Six years pass. Daisy has been brought back to America against her will, but now she is an adult. The war, which encompassed many countries, has finally ended, but Daisy doesn't know what happened to the others. She returns to England, where she finds Piper well and in love with a young man. Isaac and Osbert are also well, but Aunt Penn was killed in the war. Edmond, who witnessed the massacre at Gateshead Farm, is badly damaged psychologically. Daisy decides it is up to her to nurse him back to mental health. This, she says, at the end of the book, is "How I live now."



# Chapters 1-3

## Chapters 1-3 Summary

How I Live Now, an award-winning first novel by Meg Rosoff, describes how a 15 year-old girl named Daisy escapes an unhappy home life in New York City, finding solace among extended family members in rural England, only to endure the devastating effects of a major war. The story quickly becomes one of survival on every level: physical, mental, and emotional. In Chapter 1, Daisy introduces herself as a plain girl whose life changed dramatically the summer she went to England, although the war was only one reason. The main reason, to Daisy, was meeting Edmond. In Chapter 2, she describes arriving at the airport in London, where she expects to meet her middle-aged Aunt Penn, whose face she has seen only in photographs. Instead, she is greeted by her 14 year-old cousin, Edmond, who strikes her as puppy-like in his direct simplicity, although he also has badly cut hair and is smoking a cigarette. Despite her better judgment, Daisy is impressing by the smoking, which she doesn't mention for fear of looking silly. He says his mother was working, so he drove to the airport himself, which Daisy seriously doubts. Even so, it appears he did drive, so she gets in the jeep and Edmond immediately drives the wrong way, crosses a ditch, and gets onto the highway, while complaining about the cost of parking at the airport. Daisy thinks how strange all this is and Edmond says she'll get used to it, which is odd, because she hadn't spoken aloud.

In Chapter 3, Daisy falls asleep during the long drive and awakens to a "welcoming committee" of four kids and two dogs named Jet and Gin, plus cats, ducks, and a goat. Daisy tries to look as if this sort of thing happens to her everyday. Aunt Penn isn't around, but she meets her other cousins, Isaac, Osbert, and Piper. She immediately likes the youngest child, Piper, who has a direct and honest manner. The house, L-shaped and made of yellowing stone, is in ill repair but is beautiful. In the back, a brick-walled garden is full of flowers, with a statue of an angel in one corner marking where a child was buried hundreds of years earlier. The inside is a jumble of corridors, stairs, comfortable furniture, books, and paintings. Behind the house are meadows and farmland. Daisy learns that her Aunt Penn does important work concerning the process of maintaining peace. Piper takes an exhausted Daisy upstairs to a small, comforting room with thick walls, where she pulls a sheep blanket over her head on the bed and quickly falls asleep.

## Chapters 1-3 Analysis

Although Daisy quickly makes the point in Chapter 1 that she is never called by her real name, Elizabeth, because she is too plain for such a grand name, it quickly becomes apparent that her personality is anything but plain. She tells her story in a slightly sarcastic voice, peppered with insights that make it clear she is clever, observant, and that she yearns for a happy life but is already too worldly to expect it. In immediately



announcing that the main importance to her of this summer in England was not the coming war but her relationship with Edmond, she foreshadows a wartime love story. Chapter 2 accomplishes two basic goals. The first is to sketch Edmond as a precocious, kind, quirky person who impresses Daisy right away. The second goal, which occurs in the last exchange of the chapter, is to imply that Edmond might have the ability to know what she's thinking before she says anything. Chapter 3 establishes a key setting, at the farmhouse of her cousins and their parents. The dilapidated comfort of the place, with its abundance of plant and animal life, the four children, the books and art, are clearly much different from Daisy's life in New York, although no information has yet been given about her own home. This lack of information seems foreboding, particularly given Daisy's obvious sense of security and relief in her new surroundings.



# Chapters 4-6

## Chapters 4-6 Summary

In Chapter 4, after sleeping almost an entire day and night, Daisy awakens in what to her is the eerie quiet of rural life, and discovers her cell phone has no signal. She thinks about her stepmother, whom she calls Davina the Diabolical, now pregnant with a child that Daisy and her friend, Leah, have decided to call Damian, whether it's a boy or girl. Daisy thinks Davina forced her out of the family home, sending her across the ocean to relatives she had never met. She also believes Davina would have poisoned her, but Daisy protected herself by rarely eating anything. Piper arrives at the door and asks her to come downstairs for a cup of tea. After she has tea, Piper takes her hand, which Daisy loves, and guides her to the barn to look at the animals. Daisy has to lie down again, and Piper remarks that she looks thin, which Daisy dislikes. When she awakens, her Aunt Penn is up, having worked much of the night. Aunt Penn is kind, although a bit distracted by her work. The reader learns that her sister, Daisy's mother, died when Daisy was very young. Aunt Penn says she has to go to Oslo for an anti-war conference for a few days. Daisy isn't very interested, as she has listened to talk about the possibility of war for the past five years.

Chapter 5 opens the next morning, when Edmond takes Daisy and the others fishing. Daisy hears a bird singing by the river, wonders what it is, and Edmond says it's a skylark, although she didn't ask aloud. Daisy daydreams about being happy, which makes her think of her mother, who died giving birth to Daisy. Her father never mentions her mother, whereas nobody at her friend Leah's house can stop talking about her father, who shot himself after losing a fortune as a Wall Street trader. Daisy decides to ask Aunt Penn about her mother, and then her cousins lie beside her on the blanket, and she feels peaceful. In Chapter 6, Daisy says she doesn't see 16 year-old Osbert much that week, because he goes to school, unlike the others, who are homeschooled. Isaac is very quiet, but Daisy has lots of conversations with Edmond and the nine year-old Piper. One night, Aunt Penn shows her photos of her mother as a child, and says she angered their father by deciding to marry Daisy's father instead of studying history in college. Aunt Penn goes to Oslo, and the next day, a bomb goes off in the London train station. Immediately, the media reports begin of impending war and food shortages, so the children walk to town and buy supplies with money Aunt Penn left for them. They bring supplies and bedding to the lambing barn, hidden in the trees a mile from the house, in case trouble comes. They make up a big bed in the hayloft, bring the two dogs, and stay there overnight.

## Chapters 4-6 Analysis

Chapter 4 establishes Daisy's poor relationship with her stepmother, and suggests that Davina has taken control of Daisy's father. The anxiety and anger this situation creates in Daisy is contrasted to the calm affection of her cousins, in particular young Piper. It's



not surprising that Daisy is clearly more interested in her new surroundings and family than in the talk of war, or the work that Aunt Penn is doing to try to keep the peace. She is, after all, a 15 year-old who has been uprooted from her home and apparently does not know when, or if, she will return to New York. Neither is any indication given of what the impending war is about, or of when all this is taking place. The author has chosen to emphasize the situation itself rather than the details, which begins to make the story seem universal, or even myth-like. When Daisy goes fishing with the others in Chapter 5, the contrast is heightened between her anxiety-ridden life in New York and the tranquility of her new life. Both the rural setting and the warmth of her new family contribute to her sense of well-being. In Chapter 6, she gets to know her cousins better and her appreciation of this new family feeling inspires her to ask her aunt about her mother. Aunt Penn's photos and stories give Daisy a portrait of her mother as a child that she never had, which is clearly a precious gift to her. The bomb that goes off in the train station after Aunt Penn leaves England is a harbinger of war, but the preparations that young people make in the lambing barn seems more like a game than a serious attempt to prepare for the worst. A sense of doom or foreboding has begun to invade the story.



# Chapters 7-9

## Chapters 7-9 Summary

At the start of Chapter 7, the young people move back into the house, because it's cold and not too comfortable in the lambing barn. Daisy receives letters from her father and Leah. Her father writes mostly about Davina's pregnancy and tacks on a concern about Daisy's health, all of which annoys her. Leah's letter, about who is dating whom at school, interests her mightily, and she's very sad that she has no cell phone or email service to communicate with Leah. Her cousins have had word that their mother is trying to get back to England, and has arranged for them to take money out of the bank account. News reports arrive that three cities in America have been attacked, which doesn't perturb Daisy, who has heard about other attacks on the U.S. in recent years. In Chapter 8, Daisy talks about Isaac, the quiet cousin, who she now realizes keeps an eye on Piper and Edmond, but in a less obvious way than the eldest brother, Osbert. Isaac is observant but non-judgmental, and almost scientifically detached from other people, but he has a deep engagement with animals, and they seem to return his interest in them.

In Chapter 9, two men from a local group called the Council visit the farmhouse to ask if anyone needs food or medical care. They're surprised to discover that the young people are alone, but it looks like they'll do nothing about it, and they have no answers to questions about the war. The children walk to the village every day, where they hear many theories about the cause and effects of the war, but Daisy finds most of these ideas foolish. People ask after the children's well-being, but Daisy thinks they don't want to go out of their way to help, because they have enough problems at their own homes. People appear to be trying to keep from panicking, but Daisy still feels detached from the reality of war, and disinterested. Edmond comes to Daisy's room and asks why she doesn't eat much, and she realizes his question doesn't bother her as much as it would if someone else had asked. She explains about originally fearing that Davina would poison her, but says she eventually began to like not eating, because it drove everyone mad, and made her father spend large amounts of money on "shrinks" for her. Edmond rests his leg against hers, which gives her a feeling she figures she shouldn't have for a cousin. She tries an experiment by thinking about something and Edmond responds by kissing her. This makes her realize she is starving for him and is intensely happy.

## Chapters 7-9 Analysis

In several ways, Chapter 7 demonstrates that Daisy remains emotionally uninvolved in the war that is developing around her and overseas. Her focus is on the people at the farm, and to a lesser extent those in the village and her family and friends in New York. This shows that Daisy, while intelligent and insightful, is also given to living in the present, without considering what the future might bring. This trait, which could be seen as a form of self-involvement, is characteristic in children. Daisy is a girl wounded by life





who has not yet developed her skills in coping with disappointment and loss. In part, such skills stem from an ability to look outward. Her examination in Chapter 8 of Isaac is interesting in that regard, because he sees the world in a detached way, almost scientifically. His emotional responses to people seem blunted, which certainly is not the case for Daisy, and yet she is emotionally indifferent to the big picture of the misery war can wreak. The author could be suggesting here that any sort of emotional detachment from the world is limiting for a person. Caring about animals as Isaac does is fine, just as caring about herself and the people around her is fine for Daisy; but perhaps for both children, a wider emotional scope would be preferable.

In Chapter 9, the visit from the local councilmen and the wild theories the villagers have about the war—for example, that it's the fault of the French, or the Chinese, or the Jews, or that people are eating their pets, or that shareholders of the Marks & Spencer department store in London are the only ones allowed in the nuclear bunker underneath it. This enhances the feeling that everyone is helpless in the grip of such large events. Daisy's indifference and scorn help her to cope with a terrifying situation. When she's in her room with Edmond, the two find solace in each other. Their emotional attachment strengthens their ability to withstand the stress of a world that's beginning to crumble around them. For Daisy, this attachment immediately becomes a ravenous hunger directed at Edmond, but which also is a hunger for the bonding and sense of security love can bring.



# Chapters 10-13

## Chapters 10-13 Summary

In Chapter 10, the relationship between Daisy and Edmond develops into a full-blown affair. She insists it has nothing to do with the war, except that the war's disruption of convention is what allows underage cousins to have an affair in the first place. Aunt Penn has not returned for weeks now. Daisy and Edmond try to hide the intensity of their feelings from the others, although Osbert is too preoccupied with the growing war to notice them, anyway. Daisy doesn't feel she is corrupting Edmond, who is a year younger than she, because she sees him as utterly incorruptible. In Chapter 11, the war has been going on for five weeks, and reports of bombings occur almost daily. The airports are closed, and electricity and communications are intermittent. In the village, the lines are long for food, and rumors break out of a smallpox epidemic sweeping the land. Yet, flowers are blooming in the midst of spring, and Daisy's appetite is strong for the first time in years, because she's in love. The garden is producing plenty of food for them, but reports arrive that people are dying of simple diseases like measles or pneumonia because of the scarcity of medical supplies. Still, Daisy feels that the war hasn't touched her, and that she is safe so long as she can be with Edmond.

In Chapter 12, a young man named Dr. Jameson comes to the door, asking if they have any spare medicines. Most of the drugs and medical care have been shifted to war casualties, and other people with chronic conditions are suffering, he explains. When Daisy's cousins go upstairs to rummage for medicine, she's left with Dr. Jameson. As she talks about how pleasant it is for her to be here and what a shame that it will have to end, he asks how long this has been going on. She knows what he means, but plays dumb. He sighs, and asks if everyone doesn't have enough trouble already, without this. He's very tired, and when the others return with the medicine, he thanks them and leaves. In Chapter 13, the doctor's visit seems to have made everyone realize that the world will encroach on them soon. That night, Piper asks if Daisy is in love with Edmond. She says yes, and Piper says that's good, because she loves him, too, which makes Daisy cry. The next day, they all go to the river for a swim. It's a beautiful day. They lie under the trees with the two dogs and with Piper's goat, Ding. They don't go home again until sunset.

## Chapters 10-13 Analysis

Daisy becomes so deeply involved with Edmond in Chapter 10 that she perceives almost nothing outside their small world. Her only concern is that the affair will not upset her other cousins, and her avid denial that the war has anything to do with it is a case of protesting too much. On some level, she probably is aware that the unusual circumstances of the war have increased her need for a loving relationship, but she is still trying to keep the war at bay. In emphasizing the power of the feelings between Daisy and Edmond, the author has succeeded in downplaying notions of wrongness,



although in some cultures it would be considered incest between minors. Daisy deals with this awareness by emphasizing the purity of Edmond, which is to say that their love cannot be a corrupting influence. The escalation of the war in Chapter 11 is a metaphorical counterpoint to the affair between Daisy and Edmond. Energy supplies and communications are breaking down, and diseases are spreading, yet the landscape is rich and healthy with spring, and Daisy's appetite has returned. So far, the war is happening somewhere else, and in the same way, any bad consequences of the love between Daisy and Edmond have not touched them.

Only in Chapter 12, when Dr. Jameson implies his disapproval without actually stating the problem, does Daisy begin to realize that the outside world will soon invade her current dream-like state. In Chapter 13, that awareness spreads to everyone in the house. When Piper gives her approval of Daisy's love for Edmond, Daisy is filled with gratitude and relief to the point of tears. This shows she is thinking about the consequences of her actions, which is a mark of maturity. Even so, she still is capable of living fully in the moment without considering the future, as she does with the others on the day that they spend by the river. All of them are on the cusp of a new maturity, a facing of harsh facts, but nobody wants to step toward that harder world. The parallel here is between the movement from peace to war and the progression from childhood to adulthood.



# Chapters 14-17

## Chapters 14-17 Summary

In Chapter 14, two soldiers from the British Army arrive at the farmhouse and ask about the condition of the house and the number of outbuildings. Edmond answers, but doesn't mention the hidden lambing barn. The men inspect the property and decide it will be perfect. Daisy soon realizes that this means the property will be sequestered, or taken over by the army. Osbert wants nothing more than to be helpful, but when he asks what will become of them, the army men have no idea. Daisy and Edmond spend a night of love together that has an air of desperation about it. In Chapter 15, Osbert is delighted to be recruited by the army. By noon, the house begins to fill with soldiers. Osbert, looking guilty, tells Daisy and Piper to pack their things, because they will be rehoused. They take one of the dogs, Jet, with them and are driven a long way in a jeep. They pass through numerous checkpoints and finally arrive outside a village called Reston Bridge, where they stay in a brick home with Jane McEvoy, her army husband, and their four year-old son, Albert. The husband is away on duty, and Daisy can see that Jane McEvoy is putting on a brave front, but is deeply sad. Piper worries that it's bad for Daisy to be stuck with her, and Daisy assures her forcefully that she is extremely grateful to have Piper's company.

Major McEvoy comes home at the start of Chapter 16 and Daisy immediately demands to know the whereabouts of her other cousins. He's surprised, but then tells her they have been moved to a farm near Kingley, to the east. Resolving to reunite with the others, Daisy finds Kingley on a roadmap. She sees they could follow the river to get there. That night, Piper says she always wanted a sister, and would want her to be like Daisy. In response, Daisy says they are practically sisters, but refrains from divulging that she never wanted a sister. Yet, she also never imagined how much she could love someone as much as she loves Piper. The little girl frets about her mother, but eventually goes to sleep. Reflecting on her love for all of them, Daisy realizes how much she has changed, because she feels somehow responsible for saving them. Lying quietly, she can hear Edmond thinking about her. In Chapter 17, Daisy and Piper settle into their life with the McEvoy's, who have an elder son away at war. Major McEvoy, who is organizing a field hospital for local residents and distributing food, is full of stories about how the usual procedures and systems of community life have broken down. Daisy learns that England is the control of occupying forces, which occurred while most of the British troops were fighting in other countries. The occupiers set off bombs, poisoned water supplies, and disrupted communications and transportation, but Major McEvoy contends they will soon be eliminated by returning British forces. Daisy now feels a bit guilty that she dallied along in ignorant bliss while all this was happening. She realizes that joining the war effort is, after all, the best way to get back home.



## Chapters 14-17 Analysis

The war arrives in a big way at the start of Chapter 14 when the army decides to sequester the farmhouse. Edmond's failure to tell them of the lambing barn, hidden in the trees a mile away, foreshadows its later use as a refuge. The ignorance of the army men about what will happen to the children is powerful evidence of their inability to influence events, and of their narrow focus on following orders. Daisy and Edmond are now a bit frantic, and their fears are realized in Chapter 15, when the soldiers send away Daisy with Piper. Isolated at the McEvoy's, the two girls bond even more powerfully than they already had done. At the start of Chapter 16, Daisy shows her resolve to do something about their situation, when she demands that Major McEvoy tell her the whereabouts of her other cousins. Another foreshadowing of future events is her recognition from the roadmap that the others can be reached by following the river. Piper's talk about Daisy and sisterhood, and her worry about her mother, indicate the depth of her trepidation, and yet she is remarkably strong for a nine year-old in such a difficult situation. Daisy's recognition of her responsibility for Piper and her feelings of protectiveness for the others is a major step forward in her personal development. The arrival of the war in her life has accelerated her growth as a person, by bringing her out of her own concerns and making her focus on the welfare of loved ones. This change is accentuated by her almost telepathic connection to Edmond, which symbolizes the invisible ties of love. Chapter 17 fills in some details of the war's extent, including its devastating effects on society, and the occupation of the country by foreign forces. The author gives no reason for the war, but indicates that it is occurring in countries beyond England and America. This deliberate failure to discuss the war's political, economic, or religious origins is a way of suggesting that what really counts is not the reason for war, but the widespread death and ruin it brings. Now that such troubles have come into Daisy's life, she finally realizes that the only way to help bring back normalcy is to become involved. Her time of hiding and false security is finished. Similarly, the illusions of childhood are giving way to the realities of the adult world.



# Chapters 18-21

## Chapters 18-21 Summary

In Chapter 18, Daisy recounts the frequent communications she is having with Edmond, in which she sometimes can smell him, hear him breathing, or sense the weight of him lying beside her. She doesn't see him, but one time she envisions where he and the others are living. She talks to him constantly about the life she and Piper have at the McEvoy's and often can sense him listening. Daisy declares she is not interested in the paranormal, but she thinks this is happening because of the rare circumstances brought about by the war. In Chapter 19, Daisy asks Major McEvoy about the smallpox threat, and he suggests it has been overblown by the army to prevent people from wandering around, getting into trouble. Secretly, Daisy likes this answer, because it means she can plan to get back to the others. She suggests to the major that she and Piper can help in the war effort by using Jet, their well-trained sheepdog, to herd local stock, because no gasoline is available for the off-road motorbikes the farmers generally use for that task. He takes them to Meadow Brook Farm, a large dairy farm, where Jet herds cows. Daisy doesn't have much to do at the dairy farm, so she learns to shoot a gun. She suggests they get the other dog, Gin, to help with the herding, but the major says she's probably already doing that work at Gateshead Farm. From this slip of the tongue, Daisy knows where her cousins are.

Daisy helps to distribute milk and butchered chickens to the local populace in Chapter 20. While picking apples, she makes friends with a woman named Elena, and they share confidences, although Daisy refrains from talking about Edmond. A dull-witted young man named Joe becomes interested in her, but Daisy snubs him. One evening, as they are being driven in a truck back to Reston Bridge, Joe stands up and starts yelling obscenities at the checkpoint guards, one of whom shoots him in the head. He falls out of the truck. Major McEvoy gets out, and the guards shoot him dead, too. Jane McEvoy is out of her mind with grief in Chapter 21. Piper has nightmares and can't stop crying. Daisy communes with the absent Edmond for hours, and feels that he is listening with sympathy. In the morning, Mrs. McEvoy is frozen in shock. A corporal ushers Daisy, Piper, Mrs. McEvoy, and her little son, Albert, into the back of a jeep that drives away before they can get Jet. They drive for a long time, arriving at a large barn occupied by many soldiers. The men are nice to them, but Daisy and Piper feel that all they have left is each other.

## Chapters 18-21 Analysis

The apparently telepathic connection between Daisy and Edmond, which is emphasized in Chapter 18, achieves two opposing objectives for the author. First, it makes the relationship of the young lovers special, elevating them above a normal or usual affair. Second, it serves as a subtle reminder of the familial connection between them, because Piper and Isaac are attuned to animals just as Edmond and Daisy are attuned



to each other. The ability of Edmond and Daisy to communicate by thought is, therefore, both wonderful and the mark of the danger in their affair. In Chapter 19, when Daisy learns from Major McEvoy that the smallpox threat has been overstated by the army to keep people at home, it opens the way for her to set her plan in motion to reunite Piper and herself with Edmond and the others. This clever plot development is quickly followed by two other inventive pieces of plotting. The first is when Daisy convinces Major McEvoy to let Jet help with herding cows, because that gets Piper and Daisy out of the farmhouse. The next clever plot trick is when Daisy asks about getting Gin, and Major McEvoy mentions Gateshead Farm. This seems quite natural in the context of the conversation, but it's important in letting Daisy know exactly where to go to find the others.

Chapter 20 integrates Daisy into the war effort by giving her useful things to do. At last, she is participating in the life around her, rather than hiding from its difficulties or trying to ignore them. By showing his romantic interest in Daisy, the young man named Joe becomes symbolic of Edmond. Similarly, Major McEvoy is a kind of stand-in for Daisy's absent father. When both these people are shot dead, the power of the war to destroy anyone - even the people closest to Daisy - is brutally demonstrated. This raises a question in the reader's mind of whether Edmond and the others are still unharmed. In Chapter 21, everyone leaves the farmhouse, which is no longer safe now that the head of the household has died and his spouse is in shock. Piper and Daisy find themselves alone in a hostile world. The protection of the soldiers, who are strangers, seems thin. By now, Daisy is a long way from the sardonic and disaffected child she was at the novel's start. She has become the only guardian of her young cousin, and the two are caught in the grip of war. The tone is dark, yet the strength of the bond between the girls seems to offer hope that they will survive.



# Chapters 22-25

## Chapters 22-25 Summary

In Chapter 22, a soldier named Baz whom the girls know from the diary farm makes sure they are fed and warm. Mrs. McEvoy, the only other female in the barn, is still in poor psychological shape. Baz tells Daisy and Piper that the deaths of Joe and Major McEvoy have sparked fighting, which has been joined by local farmers taking potshots at the occupying forces. Daisy confides to Baz that she wants to travel to Gateshead Farm, which worries him, but he admits the girls might not be any safer in the barn, because the soldiers might be attacked. He advises that they should travel alone and try not to make contact with anyone on the road. The girls stay another week in the barn during Chapter 23, during which Baz takes care of them and the other soldiers are friendly. In the middle of the night, Baz hurries Daisy and Piper out of the barn amidst scuffling and shooting. They run and walk a long time, and then Baz points them eastward and leaves them, which makes Piper cry. The footpath is well-made, and they have a compass and some food. The next night, it rains, and the sheet of plastic they have doesn't keep them dry. The following day they keep walking, seeing very little sign of life. It rains again that night, but they find a hut and fall into exhausted sleep.

By Chapter 24, they still have seen only small animals, no people or living stock, but a sign on the path gives them a bearing on the map, and then they hear the river. This delights them, because they can wash and drink, and because they can follow the river to the general vicinity of the others. They soon know precisely where they are, and that they have twenty miles to go. That night, Daisy has good news in her thoughts for Edmond. In Chapter 25, Piper finds some field mushrooms and Daisy cuts them up that night with a bit of sausage she has, and fries them over an open fire. The mushrooms turn out to be hallucinogenic, and they both spend a terrible, frightening night. They wait, trembling, until it is light enough to walk, and they don't stop until twilight. They don't sleep much and are soon walking again, figuring they will reach their destination in one more day.

## Chapters 22-25 Analysis

Baz, who makes his appearance in Chapter 22, is a kind young man whose presence is reminiscent of Piper's brothers. His watchfulness over them is so benevolent, it even reminds Daisy at one of point of the way Jet used to guard them. Baz represents the goodness and reliability of people even under the worst circumstances, such as when they must fight and kill in war. His agreement that Daisy and Piper might be better off leaving the barn is evidence that his first loyalty is to their safety, even above his duty to the army. In Chapter 23, he doesn't have to make that decision, because an attack by the enemy makes it for him. Once he leaves the two girls on the path heading east, they are truly alone for the first time in the book, with little food, and no shelter. They walk and try to stay dry, much like soldiers would do on a march. This part of the chapter





shows the mindlessness of trying to survive. It demonstrates how a person's thoughts can narrow down to simply putting one foot in front of the other and getting through the day.

Chapter 24 presents a turn of fortune when the two discover the river. This achievement has both literal and symbolic significance. In a practical sense, it means they can get cleaned up, they can drink, and they can follow the river to the others. Symbolically, the river stands for renewal and for constant movement; it is the stuff of life. Just when things look bleakest, when the girls seem to be lost and are running out of food, their discovery of running water represents the return of hope, as is often the case in stories of adventurous or dangerous journeys. Likewise, a good turn of events in an adventure story is often quickly followed by yet another problem, such as the one that befalls the girls in Chapter 25. Their bad luck in eating psychedelic mushrooms not only gives them a miserable and terrifying night, but symbolizes the worst that could become of them and the boys. The temporary insanity of their mental state under the influence of the mushrooms is like a milder version of the temporary insanity of war. It is as if Nature herself were warning them to beware of what man has wrought in this place.



# Chapters 26-29

## Chapters 26-29 Summary

In Chapter 26, the footpath ends about a mile from the village of Kingly, and the girls enter a road sunken under high banks. They arrive at a sign that says "Gateshead Lane," and turn that way. They come to a farm that appears to be abandoned, except by birds. They see many crows, and then foxes, and then corpses, and the smell of death hits them. Daisy, who has gone cold, counts seventeen human bodies that she can see, and she begins to check them, one by one, even as the birds feast on them. She thinks she identifies the corpse of Dr. Jameson, but cannot recognize any others. In the paddock, most of about 100 stock are dead, and are being eaten by rats and foxes. Daisy starts running, calling for Piper, and then she hears a bell that she recognizes as belonging to Piper's pet goat, Ding. Piper brings him water, but he is almost dead. Daisy covers him with a grain sack and shoots him. The two start walking along the river again, because they know it will lead to their own farmhouse. Eventually they arrive, but they find no sign that the house is occupied. The rooms are mostly destroyed, so they continue on to the lambing barn, where they find the blankets they left in the loft, and they go to sleep. In Chapter 27, they decide to stay in the barn. Daisy remembers food they wrapped and stashed there, and much of it has remained edible in the cold weather, even though five months have passed. That night, they hear a rustling and are joined by Jet. They go back to the house the next day, and find clean clothes in drawers. They use water from the rain barrel in the garden to wash themselves, and then they bring dog food and other supplies back to the lambing barn. That night, Piper cries uncontrollably.

In Chapter 28, they dig potatoes and other vegetables from the garden, and Piper knows where to find honey, watercress, safe mushrooms, wild onions, and other food from the woods. Piper catches fish and they make mint tea. Daisy thinks about food she can't get, and realizes she has lost all desire not to eat. In Chapter 29, Daisy worries that she can't sense Edmond in her head anymore, but consoles herself that she didn't find his corpse. She makes periodic trips to the big house, to see if he has arrived and the smallest sound makes her hope he has arrived. She cleans up the house as best she can. One day, when she and Piper are there, the telephone rings. Daisy picks it up, but says nothing. She then also recognizes the voice.

## Chapters 26-29 Analysis

The full impact of the war finally hits the two girls in Chapter 26, when they arrive at Gateshead Farm. Rather than dwelling on the corpses, the author chooses to depict the horrors of battle by emphasizing the scavenging birds, foxes, and rats. It is as if Nature already has begun to reclaim the farm from humankind, but that reclamation is not gentle. It begins with consuming the dead, as if to remind the reader that Nature's process of renewal encompasses even the worst that humans can do. When Daisy



shoots Ding, it is almost as if she is putting a final end to the tranquil life she and her cousins knew before the war arrived. Their choice of the lambing barn as refuge seems apt, because it is the only place on the property relatively untouched by the carnage. In Chapter 27, the author ties up a plot thread when the girls rediscover the food they had left wrapped in the barn. Jet's arrival is like a mini-rebirth of the life they used to know, and it serves as an unspoken suggestion that if he survived, the boys might also still be alive. When the girls find clean clothes in the house and take baths, the improvement of their condition prompts Piper to tears, because this slight change reminds her of everything they have lost forever. The girls' harvesting of wild and cultivated food in Chapter 28 serves the plot's practical purpose of showing how they can survive, but more important, it focuses Daisy on her hunger, which is not only for food but for life and love. Despite all the war's depredations, it also has served to awaken her to her best instincts. Once the girls have settled in, Daisy has time in Chapter 29 to concentrate on Edmond's fate. Her inability to sense his presence when she thinks of him is a bad sign, foreshadowing something wrong. Daisy's reflection that she didn't find Edmond's corpse may be a hint that whatever is wrong with him might not be as dire as death. Her efforts to clean up the house are symbolic of her desire to put her life and that of her loved ones back in order again. The chapter ends on a classic "cliffhanger," when Daisy recognizes the voice on the other end of the phone, but the reader is not told who it is.



# How I Live Now

## Summary

A final section of the book is untitled, just as the other section was, but it begins with an image of a black ball, reminiscent of an eclipsed sun. Chapter 1 finds Daisy in a hospital in New York, where she has been for months. She explains that hospitalizing her was the easiest way for her father to get her out of England. After she is released, she writes down everything she can remember, even the happy parts, which are the hardest for her to bear. Six years pass. In Chapter 2, the war has finally ended. The occupation of England lasted only nine months, but Daisy was not allowed to go back to England. The worst part for her has been not knowing the fate of Edmond and the others. Daisy meets her half-sister, Leonora, who is a normal child, but quickly leaves her father's home to live in a derelict office building. She gets a job at the public library. Finally, the many wars around the planet end, and she receives a letter from Piper. With her father's help, she manages to get back to England. The airport is overgrown, and in command of soldiers. Her passport is stamped "Family," and she gets on a bus. In Chapter 3, she calls a phone number Piper had given her and leaves a message with a man whose voice she doesn't recognize. Seven hours later, she gets off the bus in a deserted-looking village and sees a beautiful, dark-haired woman approaching her. It's Piper, and the two exchange a long embrace. They don't mention Edmond, but Piper talks about Aunt Penn, who was shot dead two years after leaving the farm, during an attempt to return to her family. Osbert was then eighteen, so he became head of the family, although he has now moved out to live with his girlfriend. Isaac is the same, still speaking mostly to animals, and medically treating them for neighboring farmers. Piper says she is in love with a man named Jonathan. When they get to the house, she takes Daisy to see Edmond.

In Chapter 4, Daisy sees Edmond sitting quietly in the garden. He doesn't respond to her except to close his eyes. The garden looks sumptuous and beautifully tended, and Daisy realizes Edmond has done this work, but for days she finds it hard to go there, because Edmond remains unresponsive. Finally, Isaac advises her to talk to Edmond. She tries for days, to no avail, but at last she gains the strength to say she loves him, and she continues to repeat it, until he says simply, "OK." In Chapter 5, Piper tells Daisy how she met Jonathan through the local food cooperative. He lives with them now, and Daisy likes him. One night, she asks what happened, and Jonathan describes how Isaac and Edmond sensed that trouble was coming to Gateshead Farm. Edmond didn't want to abandon the other people there, but Isaac forced him to go with him into hiding. The soldiers were everywhere, and Isaac went back to their family home, but Edmond would not go. Instead he returned to Gateshead. After the massacre, he was found by soldiers a few miles away. When he was sent back to the family, he started working on the garden obsessively. Suddenly, Daisy realizes that Edmond must have witnessed the massacre. In Chapter 6, Daisy starts working on the garden, to get closer to Edmond. She realizes that Isaac survived the horrors because he could talk to animals, and that Piper has Jonathan, and that she herself has become good at fighting back. She knows



that she belongs with Edmond. The story ends with her declaration, "And that's how I live now."

## Analysis

This part of the book is given its own section because it represents a major break in time and place. The sudden shift to Daisy in the New York hospital at the start of Chapter 1 is an effective surprise to the reader that also allows the author to reunite Daisy with her father, who was obviously the person on the other end of the phone at the conclusion of the first section. The author lets six years pass, which makes Daisy an adult, and resolves any legal issue concerning her return to England. In Chapter 2, her father's allegiance to his second wife underscores the point that Daisy's real home now is in England. On the other hand, his help in arranging her return to England shows that he wants what is best for her. Daisy's poignant reunion with Piper in Chapter 3 is followed by news that Aunt Penn was killed, which is delivered rather matter-of-factly, in keeping with the magnitude of loss everyone has suffered. In establishing the current situations of Isaac and Piper, the author shows that they are both making progress toward rebuilding their lives now that the war has ended. Edmond is the one with the biggest problem, as Daisy quickly learns in Chapter 4. His failure to respond to her is, in part, a silent rebuke for her leaving England, even though it was not her choice. On another level, his silence is a withdrawal that demonstrates his lack of faith in humankind in the wake of the war. Edmond's obsession with tending the garden symbolizes the survival, somewhere deep inside, of a desire to repair the damage all around and within him. Initially, Daisy is taken aback by Edmond's condition. It is left to Isaac, the silent one, to urge her to continue speaking with him. In Chapter 5, the author develops Jonathan as a kindly character, and he describes the ordeal of Isaac and Edmond. The closeness between Edmond and Daisy is what allows her to understand that Edmond must have witnessed the massacre, and with this understanding, her compassion takes over. In Chapter 6, it is clear that Daisy will devote herself to Edmond's recovery. The author does not suggest what the extent of that recovery may be, but based on the intensity of the love between Daisy and Edmond earlier in the novel, the outlook appears to be good.



# Characters

## Daisy

Daisy, a 15-year-old New Yorker, is the novel's protagonist and narrator. Describing herself as a skinny, plain girl, she quickly establishes that nobody uses her formal name, Elizabeth, because it sounds too fancy for her. Even so, Daisy's sardonic and insightful views on just about everything in her life soon belie her modesty. She is anything but plain, at least in terms of her personality. She often uses her wit defensively, to ward off intimidating people or circumstances. She is capable of forging strong emotional bonds to others, as she does with her cousins, but she also will excoriate people she doesn't like, such as her stepmother. She takes a contrary stance against her father and stepmother by refusing to eat, which she argues to the reader is because she fears her stepmother will poison her. Yet she also admits that she doesn't eat because it bothers people, and she enjoys the effect of stirring people up. When Daisy goes to England and becomes enamored of Edmond, the power of her feelings astonishes her. As a teenager, these emotions are fairly new to her, but she also is surprised by them because by nature, she is a guarded person. She feels fiercely unwanted by her stepmother, and although Daisy loves her father, his allegiance to his wife has dampened his daughter's feelings for her. This is because Daisy is an intensely loyal person, who does not easily forgive betrayal. Later in the novel, when Edmond suspects Daisy of betraying him, she understands his anger because of the power of her own sense of loyalty. During much of the story, Daisy is forced to confront challenging situations brought about by war, and her responses display courage and initiative. She is very bright, and proves to be an excellent guardian of young Piper when the two are on their own together. She also appears to have the family's telepathic capabilities, at least to the degree of communing silently with Edmond.

## Piper

Piper is the nine-year-old cousin of Daisy. Physically, she is a lovely, dark-haired child, and emotionally, she is quick to form trusting attachments. The way she holds Daisy's hand shortly after they meet, and then continues to hold it frequently throughout the story, charms her older cousin immensely. Piper has the wisdom sometimes ascribed to small children. She has a way of getting right to the heart of a matter, and does not mince words, even if the topic is delicate. For example, at one point she asks if Daisy is in love with Edmond. Surprised, Daisy admits she is and Piper responds that this is good, because she loves her brother, too. When Piper comes under Daisy's care and the two suffer hardships that include separation from Piper's mother and brothers, she cries on several occasions, but then she collects herself and carries on. Piper is well-versed in living off the land, which comes in handy, and, along with her brother Isaac, she is particularly attuned to animals. Occasionally, she talks with a pet dog or goat that somehow seems to understand her. Other people, especially adults, are invariably delighted with Piper's presence. The soldiers she and Daisy meet on their adventures



all seem to love Piper, and occasionally act as if they would do anything to protect her. In the final chapters of the book, when six years have passed and Piper is 15, she falls in love with a young man, which seems plausible, considering how quickly the war years have made her grow up. She seems to have recovered from the trauma of war, including even her mother's death, and shows every sign of being a strong survivor.

## Edmond

Edmond, one of Piper's brothers, is 14 years old throughout most of the novel. He undergoes the most dramatic change of all the characters throughout the course of the story. At first, Edmond is self-assured and worldly for a young teenager and perhaps a bit cocky, but with a strong streak of gentleness. He smokes cigarettes incessantly, and when he first meets Daisy at the airport, he drives her home - even though he's underage - going over grass and a ditch, and the wrong way down the road, to avoid paying for airport parking. It seems no wonder that Daisy finds this daring but sweet boy attractive, and after she realizes that he seems capable of reading her thoughts, she is hooked. Edmond answers questions that Daisy poses in her mind as she is mulling over one topic or another, just as if she had spoken aloud. Indeed, when she first wishes that he would kiss her, he complies. Their subsequent love affair is torrid, but Edmond appears to consider it as much a phenomenon of their hearts and minds as it is of their bodies. Later, when the two are separated by the war, Daisy speaks to him in her mind and can feel his benevolent presence, as he listens sympathetically. In the last section of the novel, after they have been separated for six years, Edmond seems incapable of forgiving Daisy for her absence, but even worse, he has been so damaged by the killing he has witnessed that he does not even want to interact with other people. He has almost totally ceased to communicate, and even under Daisy's patient ministrations, it is uncertain to what degree Edmond will be able to restore himself to the person he was.

## Aunt Penn

Aunt Penn is the mother of Daisy's cousins. She has a fairly small part in the novel, because she leaves the family in England to go to Oslo early in the story, but her impact on the other characters is quite significant. Aunt Penn is a kind and beloved mother and aunt, but she is also a prominent anti-war activist, struggling to prevent the world from descending into chaos. When Daisy first meets her, Aunt Penn has the presence of mind to talk about her own sister, Daisy's mother, who died when Daisy was born. She shows Daisy photos of her mother as a child, and tells stories that give Daisy something real to feel about her mother, whom her close-mouthed father never discusses. Aunt Penn goes to Oslo to speak at a major rally, and even though the outbreak of war prevents her return, the other characters think of her often. Late in the novel, when it is revealed that she never made it home, having been shot dead at the border, she has already become remote as a character because of her long absence, which makes her demise less troubling.



## Isaac

Isaac is another of Piper's brothers. He's exceedingly quiet, and his attitude toward other people seems distant or clinical. It is as if he were examining others objectively, perhaps making notes in his mind, and giving the impression that he is withholding emotional involvement. He's a very capable boy, which Daisy explains by telling how he can be separated from the others in a crowd and then find them easily. He often seems tranquil as if his emotional distance from everyone helps him to keep himself under control. With animals, however, he becomes animated and fully engaged. He is so good with them that later in the novel he earns his keep by mending sick animals for neighboring farmers and ranchers, even though he has no veterinary training. Like Edmond, Piper, and Daisy, he seems to have psychic abilities, particularly when it comes to interacting with animals. He seems to know what they're thinking and feeling. Daisy credits this trait with preventing Isaac from being emotionally ruined by the effects of the war. Isaac does one thing in the novel that seems uncharacteristic of him. When he and Edmond are threatened by war being waged all around them, Isaac goes back to the family home and leaves Edmond, who does not want to accompany him. Even so, this seems acceptable under the circumstances of war, when young men often have to make their own decisions.

## Osbert

Osbert is the eldest of Piper's brothers. Accordingly, he's rather self-important, full of opinions about what's going on in the world, and a bit world-weary about his role as the one who must head the family while the children's mother is away. As conflict begins to escalate around the children, Osbert is the only one who keeps track of events. In that sense, he clearly is the child closest to adulthood. When soldiers finally arrive at the farmhouse, Osbert embraces their presence, and even rejoices in it. Sadly, he makes no effort to help the girls or his younger brothers when the army decides to relocate them. He soon goes off to war with the men, and does not reappear in the novel, although he is mentioned later. Daisy learns from Piper that Osbert returned to the family after the war and became head of the household, because their mother had died. Eventually, he moved out to live with his girlfriend, but he still kept in touch. Among Daisy's four cousins, Osbert is the least sympathetically portrayed character.

## Major McEvoy

Major Laurence McEvoy is a British army soldier whose family takes in Piper and Daisy after they are relocated from their family farmhouse. A straightforward and helpful man, he responds honestly to Daisy's direct questions about their whereabouts of her other cousins, although he does not give her many details. His job in the army, to coordinate food and medical supplies to the populace, is a way for the author to position him as a likeable character. When a young man under his protection is shot dead by occupying forces, Major McEvoy heaves a sigh and gets out of the truck to retrieve the body. The implication is that he realizes the soldiers are now likely to shoot him, because he left





the truck, but his sense of duty compels him to do the right thing by the dead boy. The soldiers do kill Major McEvoy, in an incident that transforms a shaky local truce into all-out battle.

## **Mrs. McEvoy**

Jane McEvoy is the major's wife, and the mother of their little boy, Albert. They also have an older son, unnamed, who is fighting overseas. Mrs. McEvoy is already emotionally frazzled when Piper and Daisy come to her house to live, and after Major McEvoy's death, she goes to pieces. Her shock takes the form of almost catatonic state, which renders her incapable participating in any meaningful way in the events around her. Daisy and Piper leave her in the care of British soldiers when they attempt to reunite with Piper's brothers.

## **Dr. Jameson**

Dr. Jameson is described as man about 35 years old who comes to the family farmhouse before British soldiers occupy it and the children are sent away. He is looking for medicines to treat local people with chronic health conditions, who are being underserved because of the war casualties. Dr. Jameson quickly recognizes that Daisy is having an affair with Edmond. He expresses his disapproval without accusing Daisy of anything in particular, knowing she will understand what he's talking about. When the soldiers come to the farmhouse, Daisy wonders if they had been alerted to it by Dr. Jameson. Later, Daisy finds the doctor's corpse at Gateshead Farm, after the massacre that Isaac and Edmond escaped.

## **Davina**

Davina is Daisy's stepmother, whom she calls "Davina the Diabolical." Daisy thinks Davina wants to poison her, and she blames Davina for manipulating Daisy's father into sending her to England. Of all the characters in the book, Davina is the one for whom Daisy reserves her greatest contempt and hatred. Davina is discussed by Daisy often enough, but does not have an actual scene in the book.

## **Daisy's father**

Daisy's father, who is unnamed and also does not appear in any scene in the novel, is portrayed by his daughter as kind-hearted but weak. He also is not forthcoming with her about her real mother, and he does not keep in touch with Daisy when she is in England. Daisy is frustrated and annoyed by him but seems to love him, even though there is little evidence that he deserves her affection.



## Daisy's mother

Daisy's mother, who died during Daisy's birth, is a cipher. Her sister, Daisy's Aunt Penn, tells a little about her, but her husband, Daisy's father, has nothing to say. As a character, the mother is mostly a symbol of blame for Daisy, because her mother gave her life to bring Daisy into the world.

## Leah

Leah is Daisy's best friend in New York. She does not have a scene in the story, and exists mostly as someone whom Daisy feels nostalgic about when she is in England. Daisy could communicate her doubts, fears, and excitement without hesitation to Leah if she had the means to do so.

## Joe

Joe is a rather dull-witted young man who develops a crush on Daisy while they are working with others in the crop fields during the war. Apparently in an attempt to impress Daisy, he stands up in the pickup and yells obscenities at occupying soldiers, who shoot him dead. This leads to Major McEvoy's death and widespread fighting.

## Leonora

Leonora is Daisy's half-sister. She is born while Daisy is in England, and the two meet late in the book. Leonora is normal little girl, self-satisfied and aware that she is well-loved. Daisy is understandably annoyed by this situation, but accepts that Leonora is merely a small child and holds no ill will toward her.



# Objects/Places

## The Farmhouse

The Farmhouse is the family home in rural England of Daisy's cousins and her Aunt Penn. It's a dilapidated but beautiful house on a large property with a flower garden, pastures, crops, farm animals, and several outbuildings. To Daisy, the house is a wonder of hidden corridors and stairs, comfortable furniture, paintings, and books. It's a dramatic change from her life in New York City and she loves the place immediately.

## The Lambing Barn

The Lambing Barn is about a mile away from the family home of Piper's cousins and aunt. It is still on the property, but is hidden among trees. After Aunt Penn leaves for Oslo, the children move bedding and provisions into the lambing barn, but they stay only one night before returning to the house. Later in the novel, Piper and Daisy return to the farmhouse, which has been trashed by British troops who stayed there. The girls opt to stay in the secluded lambing barn. As a setting, it is a needed respite for them from the deprivations of war.

## The Garden

The Garden, in the farmhouse's back yard, plays an important role at the end of the story. Edmond, traumatized by the war, sits there for hours every day. He also works the garden obsessively, forming its flowers and bushes into patterns that are at once spectacular and frightening to Daisy. She knows he is trying to combat the effects of war by creating beauty in this place, but there is also something foreboding to her in its opulence. As a setting, the garden symbolizes something beautiful yet damaged in Edmond himself.

## The War

The War is of indeterminate origin and occurs for unstated reasons. It takes place in England, the United States, and many other countries around the world, and might be a single war or a number of independent wars. The battling appears to be of the guerrilla or terrorist style, rather than excessive air raids or nuclear bombing. Daisy calls the war "The You Know What."

## The McEvoy's House

The McEvoy's House is on the outskirts of an English town called Reston Bridge. After British troops sequester the family farmhouse, Piper and Daisy are rehoused with the



McEvoy's. They lie there in relative peace until Major McEvoy is killed and fighting breaks out, after which the girls, Mrs. McEvoy and her young son, Albert, are all relocated.

## **Meadowbrook Farm**

Meadowbrook Farm is where Piper and Daisy go with others to pick crops for distribution among the populace around Reston Bridge. Piper also brings her dog, Jet, who is trained in herding, and helps with the stock. Meadowbrook Farm is a pleasant respite for the girls, until the day they are returning from work there with Major McEvoy and the occupying troops kill him.

## **Gateshead Farm**

Gateshead Farm, east of Reston Bridge, is where Edmond and Isaac are rehoused by British troops. When Piper and Daisy walk there, hoping to reunite with the boys, they find instead the aftermath of a massacre. Gateshead Farm turns out to be the most gruesome setting in the novel.

## **Kingly**

Kingly is the town nearest to Gateshead Farm. When Isaac and Edmond leave the farm prior to the massacre there, they go to Kingly. By this time, open warfare is swirling around them and they do not stay long.

## **Eighty-eighth Street**

Eighty-eighth Street in New York City is where Daisy's father lives with her stepmother, and later, with their daughter, Leonora. Before moving to England, Daisy lived there, too. She returns there from England, but only stays for about a month. The apartment does not figure in an actual scene in the book.

## **The New York Public Library**

The New York Public Library is where Daisy works briefly after returning to the city from England. Soon after beginning work there, she returns to England.

## **Oslo**

Oslo is the city in Norway where Aunt Penn goes to give a lecture at an antiwar rally. None of the story actually takes place in Oslo. It functions simply as the city far away where Aunt Penn went to try to halt the war, never to return.



# Themes

## The Effects of War

Stories about war have traditionally dealt not only with its destructive traits but also with the way it transforms people, and this novel is no exception. When the horrors of war are visited upon Daisy and her cousins, the first victim is their home life, whose security and joys are destroyed. The teenagers are separated by gender and sent elsewhere. Aunt Penn already has left home to play her role in the antiwar effort, and she never returns. She is the only member of the family to actually die in the war, but all the others are changed forever. The first thing that happens to each of the teenagers is the war thrusts them into situations so challenging and terrible that they are forced to abandon childhood. The well-known saying that war makes children grow up quickly is vividly demonstrated in this novel. Likewise, the lasting after-effects of war's trauma are clearly portrayed, especially in the psychological damage that Edmond endures. The author does not attempt to construct social, political, economic, or religious causes for the war. Late in the book, Daisy suggests that any or all such elements could have played roles in the conflict, but perhaps nobody will ever know exactly what happened. The author's lack of concern with such details keeps the book's focus narrow, on the effect of war on individual lives rather than on society at large. This is probably one reason why she indicates that the war's battles were guerrilla-style skirmishing rather than aerial bombing. The absolute destruction of nuclear warfare for example would leave less opportunity for a novelist to dwell on the interior life of one girl in love with one boy, in the midst of a world gone mad.

## Nature's Regenerative Power

Throughout the book, the natural world is symbolic of the way things can and should be, particularly in counterpoint to the troubles humans make for each other. At first, such trouble is largely in the life of Daisy, who has been sent by her father and stepmother to another country, where she knows nobody. Her internal sufferings soon receive salve in the form of a bucolic life on the farm with her aunt and cousins. Dogs, cats, chickens, and other farm animals with which she has seldom had contact as a city girl help to create a sense of wonderment in her, as do the crops, pastures, and the lovely flower garden in back of the house. New York City, which is never described in the book, becomes equated with the bleakness of her life there. Surrounded by Nature in rural England, she begins a rebirth. Nature also provides for her and her cousins throughout much of the book, when war diminishes or eliminates their normal sources of food and shelter. Often, they live off the land and occasionally, they shelter under trees. When Daisy and Piper finally return to their farmhouse after their travels and trials, Daisy is struck by the luxuriant spring vegetation all around them. Nature has continued with its normal, sane cycle, despite the insanity of war. Late in the story, when Daisy returns from America to England, she finds the shell-shocked Edmond tending the garden behind the farmhouse. The only way Edmond knows to cope with the horrors he has



witnessed is to turn to Nature. The implication is that this instinctive reaction on his part—to grow things, to create life—is the best choice he could have made for his own, eventual recovery.

## Connecting through Love

Even though most of this novel takes place during a war, it is not a war novel. Rather, it is a love story told in a time of war, which makes the potential power of love all the more poignant. Daisy and Edmond are separated by war and spend much of the story apart from one another, yet they maintain such close contact that they almost seem to be side-by-side. Their telepathic connection, which is established early in the story, becomes their means of communication when they're apart, but it is also clearly a product of their deep feeling for one another. Their ability to commune across distance becomes symbolic of the unbreakable bonds of love. In the same way, Isaac's powerful mental connection with animals derives from his love for them, which, by extension, represents his love of life. Indeed, most of the teenaged relatives in the book share this telepathic capability in one form or another, and in each case, it suggests an attunement that derives from a heightened or concentrated love for each other and for existence. The wider significance of their ability to connect in this loving manner is that it can overcome distance, destruction, and even despair. Its final test comes near the end of the novel, when the effects of war have left Edmond incapable of responding to anyone. Daisy, standing now by his side, does not have to resort to telepathy to communicate with him. Indeed, she finds herself shouting in his ear, trying to make him listen. In the end, she starts working with him in the garden, side-by-side, silently communing. The author is suggesting that the mode of communication, by thought or word, is not really what counts. It's the love itself that makes the connection.



# Style

## Point of View

The novel is told entirely from the first-person viewpoint of the protagonist, Daisy. This is an important aspect of the story, because in several ways, the book's effectiveness relies heavily on her voice. Initially, her tone is flip and self-involved, with occasional bursts of anger directed at her father and stepmother, and a lot of skewering humor, but with very little interest displayed in the threat of war around her. It is the very believable voice of a bright American teenager. However, as Daisy settles into her new life in England and her new fascination with her cousin, Edmond, more of who she really is begins to surface from underneath her sardonic exterior. Her voice starts to reveal shades of melancholy, disappointment, fear of the future, and a desperate need to love and be loved. Later, as the war escalates and Daisy is thrown into the thick of it, with young Piper under her protection, these complex qualities of her character again come through in the way she thinks and speaks to the reader. First, she stops avoiding the reality of war, and accepts that she must enter fully into this bad situation if she is to survive it. Next, she begins to frequently express her determination to get through these trials and reunite her newfound family. Similarly, her affection for Piper changes from a warm feeling to fierce love. All these aspects of her character that develop under the harsh conditions of war become the story's main focus. This is war seen through the eyes of one person, a teenaged girl who is also in the midst of her first love affair. If the novel did not have this singular point of view, it would be a work so unimaginably different from what it is.

## Setting

Several rural dwellings in England are the principal settings in this novel. The other significant place is New York City, where some of the action occurs late in the book. Initially, Daisy is somewhat removed from a sense of place, because she tells the story in past tense, and does not say where she is now. However, after the short first chapter, she and Edmond quickly leave the airport in London, which is scantily described, and a main setting is quickly established at the farm in rural England where her cousins and aunt live. Numerous details of this property are provided, to give a feeling of the emotional warmth and security afforded by the old homestead, the farm animals, and the surrounding cropland and pastures. This is important to Daisy, whose home life has been markedly insecure. Indeed, the farm is a haven to which Daisy and her cousins gravitate after the war separates them and sends them away. Two other relatively tranquil settings are the McEvoy's house, where Piper and Daisy live after being moved from the farmhouse, and Meadowbrook Farm, where they work in the fields while staying with the McEvoy's. Both these places are lost to them, however, when the war escalates. What apparently was once a calm place for Isaac and Edmond, Gateshead Farm, turns into the scene of a massacre, which makes it the setting that most vividly demonstrates how war destroys peaceful security.



The lambing barn, hidden in the trees a mile from the farmhouse of Daisy's cousins, is the quintessential hideout in the novel. Occasionally, Daisy and Piper take shelter in huts or under trees when they are traveling in the midst of the war, but the lambing barn is the one place where they are not under the protection of adults and still feel relatively safe. Its close association with animals and Nature is a key part of its symbolic significance as a sanctuary from war. New York City, where Daisy lived before moving to England, and to which she returns for a while at the end of the story, is not described. No details are given of the apartment where her father and her stepmother live with their baby, and the city itself is faceless in the novel. It could be anywhere, which apparently is the author's intent in giving no character to New York. Daisy knows her home is now with her cousins, and when she flies back to them, the garden in the back yard of the farmhouse is ablaze with flowers. The garden, the last important setting in the book, both impresses and frightens her, because of its furious growth, tended by the emotionally wounded Edmond. The garden thus represents both the healing power of Nature and the intensity of everything that the characters have endured.

## Language and Meaning

Probably the most notable characteristic of the writing in this novel is Daisy's penchant to capitalize Important Phrases. She does this frequently for comic effect and it beautifully showcases both her dramatic flair and her ability to put her finger on the pulse of an issue or situation. The other key aspect of her narration is a tendency to string together long sentences, made of phrases that meander from one topic to the next, as if she were simply recording the course her mind happens to be taking, until her thoughts return at last to their starting point with a conclusion that manages to unite all these seemingly independent phrases. As the story goes along, she starts using less teenage slang and larger words, even while events in the novel become increasingly darker. The section at the end indicates that six years have passed, and Daisy, now 21, narrates the story in a more adult-sounding voice than her catty and affronted tone early in the book. In these ways, the author uses language to indicate not only Daisy's normal growth from teenager to adult, but also the seriousness of mind that she is forced to adopt in response to the major difficulties she must surmount in the course of a long world war. Little attempt is made to differentiate American English from that spoken in England. Instead, the author's decision to tell the story entirely through Daisy's eyes means that language becomes a principal way to convey changes in the narrator's inner life.

## Structure

The novel's structure is fairly simple and mostly linear. The first 29 chapters, each introduced only with a numeral, are not arranged in any section, although the last six chapters are preceded by a page that contains nothing but a circle filled with black. After that, the chapters of this final section begin again with number one, extending through six. These last six chapters occur when a half-dozen years have passed after the events of the previous part of the book. Another notable attribute of the novel's structure





derives from it being narrated in past tense. This makes it easy for Daisy to detour into stories about things that happened before her arrival in England. For example, she reminisces about her friend, Leah, in New York City, and a few other students they know at school there. She also thinks about her father and her stepmother, and tells generalized stories about her rocky relationship with them. Such diversions into the past help to fill in Daisy's "back story," providing a more rounded portrait of her as a character. Structurally, these diversions are not long enough to create a fully fledged "detour" in the storyline, which continues in a linear fashion from Daisy's arrival in England until she returns to New York. The six years that have elapsed at the start of the final six chapters are summarized by Daisy's narration, and then the story takes up its linear structure again, as she returns to England and reunites with her cousins.



## Quotes

"Early the next morning I was strolling around as usual in my unpleasantly populated subconscious when I heard Edmond's voice very close to my ear saying Daisy Wake Up!" (Chapter 5, p. 17).

"I was thinking about almost nothing except that bird and then Edmond was next to my ear whispering Skylark, and I just nodded, knowing it was futile to ask how he knew the answers to questions you hadn't even got around to asking yet" (Chapter 5, p. 18).

"The first thing that happened wasn't our fault. That was a bomb that went off in the middle of a big train station in London the day after Aunt Penn went to Oslo and something like seven or seventy thousand people got killed" (Chapter 6, p. 24).

"We were quiet for the longest time just listening to the rain on the window with his leg resting against mine and a feeling flying between us in a crazy jagged way like a bird caught in a room" (Chapter 9, p. 44).

"So there we are carrying on our happy little life of underage sex, child labor and espionage when someone came to visit us, which, after weeks of Just US Five kind of took us by surprise, to put it mildly" (Chapter 12, p. 57).

"Of course in order to survive Piper and I needed to have a plan, and I was the one who was going to have to make it because Piper's job was to be a Mystical Creature and mine was to get things done here on earth which was just how the cards were dealt and there was no point thinking of it any other way"(Chapter 16, p. 77).

"Piper and I lived with the McEvoy's like people living someone else's life" (Chapter 17, p. 83).

"As the day went on the army guys kept coming and going and they all seemed to have some sort of plan like ants in an anthill going about their business in a nice orderly fashion until a foot comes along and stamps on the whole structure" (Chapter 21, p. 110).

"My legs kept walking forward and when I got a little closer I could see that some of the bodies were human and then a kind of coldness came over me and no matter what I discovered I wasn't going to scream or cry or anything" (Chapter 26, p. 141).

"I was thinking of approaching my old school next time I was in New York and telling them to replace the unit on Media Communications with one on How to Survive Half Dead in the Wild Without Much in the Way of Hope" (Chapter 28, p. 155).

"It's fashionable nowadays to talk about cramming a whole life into a few years, especially when people turn up dead at the end of it, which increasingly they do" (Chapter 1, p. 169-70).



"I have no idea how damaged Edmond is, I just know that he needs peace and he needs to be loved. And both those things I can do" (Chapter 6, p. 193).



## Topics for Discussion

Daisy is impressed right away when she meets Edmond, but he smokes and drives underage, disobeying road signs. Why do you think she is attracted to a boy who seems to disregard rules of society?

Daisy says she thinks her stepmother was trying to poison her, which is one reason why she stopped eating. Assuming that this is not likely to be true, what do you think the act of eating or not eating means to Daisy, in terms of her relationship to herself and to others?

Why do you think Aunt Penn left her family alone, to go to another country and deliver an anti-war speech? Do you think it have been wiser or more responsible for her to have stayed with the children?

After the soldiers arrive at the farm, Osbert is slightly apologetic toward the others when he explains that they will be rehoused, but he does not seem particularly worried. Why? What do think is going on his mind at that point?

Edmond and Isaac realize trouble is brewing at Gateshead Farm, and Edmond forces his brother to leave with him, but later, Isaac does not insist that Edmond accompany him home to the farm. Why do you think Isaac finally allows Edmond to part ways with him?

Why does Edmond stop communicating with Daisy and others after the war? He obviously has been psychologically troubled by what he has endured, but why do you think this manifests as an unwillingness to speak?

How would you describe Daisy's frame of mind or attitude about herself and others when she first arrives in England, compared to later in the book, when she returns to England? How has she changed?