

# **Life as We Knew It Study Guide**

**Life as We Knew It by Susan Beth Pfeffer**

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## Plot Summary

Life As We Knew It explores what happens to an ordinary family in a normal American town when their world changes forever. An asteroid hits the moon, knocking it into a closer orbit. This causes all kinds of disasters that bring the world to a halt. Without shops, food, electricity, heat and water, Miranda and her family face problems together and struggle to survive.

The story begins with a brief introduction to Miranda's life. She is a normal sixteen-year-old girl who attends high school and thinks about friends and boys. The story is told in the form of her diary, allowing the reader to see her private thoughts and feelings. Everyone at her school is excited about the asteroid that will hit the moon, but when it happens it is not the exciting event they all thought it would be. Instead, the asteroid knocks the moon closer to the earth, causing tsunamis, storms and earthquakes all over the world. Miranda's mother begins to worry about the future, and takes Miranda and her younger brother Jonny out of school to help her shop for supplies. They each take a cart at the supermarket and keep going back for more until their car is full. They buy canned food, dry food, medicine, water and other supplies. Miranda thinks her mother is a little crazy for buying so much, but they will later come to be very thankful for it. Later, Miranda's older brother Matt comes home from college.

Soon shops close and food begins to run out. School is closed early for the summer because they have nothing left to feed the students. Jonny's baseball camp is still on, and he will be able to have fresh food by working at the nearby farm. When Jonny has gone, Miranda's mother introduces rationing. Miranda becomes jealous, irritable and frightened, and gets into a lot of arguments with her mother. She starts a brief relationship with a boy called Dan who swims at Miller's Pond with her, but this does not last long because Dan decides to leave the town. Miranda's friend Sammi also leaves, and her other friend Megan dies.

When Jonny comes back from camp, his father picks him up and visits them. He is heading to Colorado with his new wife Lisa, who is pregnant and wants to be near her parents. He helps them to chop wood for the winter and gives them some more food, then leaves. More problems begin to emerge, such as the huge grey ash cloud blocking out the sun, caused by volcanic eruptions. This means they cannot grow food, and things will soon get very cold. Miranda begins to realize that town is not safe anymore on her own, and has to give up high school because it is in town. She brings home textbooks for her and Jonny to home school. When the gas runs out they use the oil furnace to make sure the pipes do not freeze, and shut off the top floor of the house, moving the mattresses downstairs. Miranda's mother hurts her ankle and is forced to stay in the sunroom with the wood stove on. When it snows, they work to clear the snow from the sunroom roof so it doesn't collapse, and Matt gets the skis out so they can learn to cross-country ski in case they have to travel in the snow.

When the water runs out they turn off the oil furnace and all move into the sunroom. They are having to ration food a lot, but are managing to survive and are happy. They



even manage to celebrate Christmas. However, in the new year the family gets sick with flu, and only Miranda is unaffected. She rushes to the hospital, but their mother's doctor friend, Peter, is dead. Miranda nurses her family back to health, and saves them when the wood stove backfires and fills the sunroom with smoke. They are recovering, but food is still running out. Eventually Miranda decides to sacrifice herself so that Jonny can have more food and so have a hope of surviving. She does not want her mother to have to watch her die, so she decides to walk into town and not come back. When she gets to town, she finds men giving out food in the town hall. She takes food home, and the men promise to bring more each week. The family is now through the worst of the crisis and is still alive. The world will never be the same again, but Miranda is just glad that they have each other.



# Chapters 1-2

## Chapters 1-2 Summary

**Life As We Knew It** is a survival story in which the moon is hit by an asteroid and is knocked into a closer orbit. This affects the tides and the volcanoes, causing chaos on earth. This leads to a breakdown of civilization and food shortages. Life as people once knew it is over, and the narrator and her family have to struggle to survive as their electricity, fuel, water and food runs out.

The story is told by Miranda in the form of her diary. It begins on May 7th when Miranda's dad calls to tell her that his new wife is pregnant. Miranda tells him this is great news. She asks her mother for skating lessons, but her mom is reluctant. They fight because Miranda thinks her mom is more willing to spend money on her little brother Jonny. At school, Miranda hangs out with her friends and thinks about how her two best friends Megan and Sammi have grown distant. Everyone at school is preoccupied with the fact that an asteroid will hit the moon later in the week. Several teachers set papers on moon-related themes. Miranda's older brother calls from college, feeling anxious about the moon but not sure why. Miranda also begins to feel uneasy.

At the moon event, Miranda, her mom and Jonny all go out to the street to watch what happens. The asteroid hits the moon, but something unexpected happens. The moon appears to move closer to the earth, and looks oddly shaped. People on the street begin to scream and panic. They go inside and try to switch on the news, but there is no CNN, and the cell phone networks and internet are also down. Eventually Miranda's mom manages to find a news channel, which reports that the moon has indeed moved closer to the earth. This has caused sudden tsunamis, because the moon's pull affects the tides. The whole eastern seaboard has been hit, the Statue of Liberty has been washed out to sea, thousands are dead, and some places are completely submerged. This is happening all over the world. The president tries to reassure people from his ranch in Texas, but everything is still very confused. Matt calls from college to let them know that he is okay. Miranda, her mom and Jonny go to bed in shock.

## Chapters 1-2 Analysis

The first two chapters introduce readers to the main characters in the story. Miranda is a normal teenage girl with a normal teenager's life. She goes to school, worries about her friends growing distant with their own concerns, worries about who will ask her to prom, and deals with family issues. She argues with her mom and apologizes later. It is important for the author to establish that Miranda has the life of an average teenager in the USA, because this will help to draw a strong contrast between her life now and her life after disaster strikes. The changes to ordinary people's lives when the world changes is one of the major themes of this book, and so is being set up here. The fact that Miranda is an ordinary teenager also helps readers to relate to her, because her life



is not so different from their own. This consequently makes the disaster seem more real, and the dire consequences of it are emphasized because the reader knows that this is how their own life would change under these circumstances. This also emphasizes the bravery of the family and of the narrator. They are not heroes; they are just like any other family in America.

These two chapters also quickly establish a slightly sinister atmosphere in the days leading up to the disaster. Matt is uneasy but cannot say why, and Miranda soon becomes anxious too. She admits that she does not know the 'ending' or the 'beginning' but that she somehow knows that something big is going to happen. These feelings of unease and anxiety foreshadow the disaster, as well as all the terrible effects that will be felt for a long time afterwards. When the moon is hit by the asteroid, the observers' excitement suddenly turns to fear and unease. Miranda describes this as being the feeling that the moon is part of the earth, and that for it to be hit seems like they are also under attack. She almost seems to feel violated by the hit on the moon, as if the natural order of the world has been disrupted and nothing is quite the same. This is also a strong bit of foreshadowing since the observers, without knowing it, have predicted exactly what is going to happen. The world will never be the same again, and everything has changed. The moon is strongly connected to the earth, and if the moon is affected then the earth will also be affected. They will all soon feel like they are under attack when they are hit by storms, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions and other disasters. The natural order of the world has been affected, and all Miranda's feelings of fear and unease are justified. When the moon suddenly seems to have moved closer, people's unease turns to pure panic and terror. Even though the observers do not know exactly what has happened and what it means yet, they know that something is terribly wrong.

Another major theme of this book is what constitutes civilization and what happens when some of the staples of modern day life begin to break down. This theme is also introduced in these chapters. When the moon is struck by the asteroid, cell phone networks and the internet go down. This is most likely because so many people are trying to contact each other that the networks cannot cope. It is also possible that some of the transmitters and servers have been destroyed in the storms and tsunamis. When Miranda's mom tries to switch some news on, CNN is also down. Miranda and her family cannot quite believe this; CNN has become such a staple of their life that they had never thought there could be a time when it wouldn't be there. Miranda says that she thought CNN would always be reporting, even up to the end of the world. When a woman on her street realizes that the cell phone networks are down, she reacts in a similar way to how Miranda's family felt when they could not switch on CNN. These are the modern day conveniences that people take for granted, and that become so important to people's lives that it feels like the end of the world when they are not there. Miranda associates them with civilization, feeling as though the civilized world is already breaking down. This is ironic, because none of these things are really that important, and civilization has existed for a long time without them. This shows how reliant people become on conveniences to which they are accustomed. This loss of the first small marks of civilization is also another piece of foreshadowing, since many more things will be lost, and civilization will break down considerably in the coming months. If Miranda and her family think it is bad now, they have no idea how bad it is about to get. Soon

they will look back on CNN, cell phones and the internet as being the very least of their worries.



# Chapters 3-4

## Chapters 3-4 Summary

In the morning, Miranda's dad calls to let them know that he is alright. Miranda is glad that school is still on, since it gives her something normal on which to focus. However, at school a storm hits; lightning crashes around them and they lose electricity. Miranda's mom arrives soon after to take Miranda away. At the car, Jonny and an old family friend called Mrs. Nesbitt are waiting for them. Miranda's mom gives her an envelope full of money, and explains that they are going to the supermarket to buy as many supplies as they can.

At the supermarket they split up and stuff as much as they can into their carts. They focus on canned food, water, dry food and health supplies. There are lots of other people fighting over food inside, but they manage to get what they need and pack it into the car. They then stop off at the strip mall to buy pet supplies for their cat and seed trays to grow food. Miranda also buys oil lamps and Mrs. Nesbitt gets candles. Miranda thinks that this is all crazy, but her mom insists that they stock up, just in case.

The next day Matt calls to say that he is okay and plans on coming home on Wednesday. The electricity is coming on and off unreliably and school is cancelled. Miranda checks the fan site of an ice-skater called Brandon who lives locally but is away competing for medals. No one knows if he is alive. The president comes on TV and explains that things will get worse. The oil tankers and off-shore refineries are all gone, so there will be oil shortages. The local governor then comes on and says that gas might have to be rationed, but for now people should only get what they need. School will resume on Wednesday.

They decide to drive out to get McDonald's, but when they get there it is closed. They find a pizza place instead and bring pizza home. Mom says that this will probably be their last meal like this until things get back to normal. On Tuesday, mom takes them out shopping again and they stock up on warm clothes. On Wednesday, school starts again, but there are a lot of absentees and nothing feels the same for Miranda. Matt comes home and helps them sort out their stores of food. They read a list of the dead posted online, and Miranda is relieved that no one she knows is on there.

## Chapters 3-4 Analysis

In these chapters, some people's early reactions to the crisis are shown, commenting on human behavior. The most common reaction seems to be confusion. People do not understand what is going on, and do not know what to expect. This naturally leads to panic. Miranda's mom insists that they all go to the supermarket to stock up on as many supplies as they can. She has taken out a large amount of cash to buy everything they might need. Miranda thinks that this is crazy, since the world is not coming to an end





and they will not need all the things they are buying. However, her mom is not alone in thinking like this. The supermarket is full of other people rushing to buy everything they can. People are so panicked that they are knocking everything off the shelves, spilling things in the aisles, competing to grab everything they can, and frightening the cashiers. The supermarket has no electricity to work the tills, so has had to respond to this panic by telling everyone to pay \$100 per cart. Mrs. Nesbitt is almost attacked by another shopper who wants her cart, and the man is only stopped by Miranda ramming her own cart into him. Mrs. Nesbitt jokes that this is war, but she is half-right. When people panic, they tend to think only of themselves, and so can be very dangerous. There is a tense atmosphere running through this whole episode, and when the family get safely away from the shops without being harmed, the reader is relieved. The behavior of the people in the shops foreshadows events later in the book, since it begins to show how people will behave when they are struggling to survive. Soon every family will be out for itself, and some people will even become violent towards others. Activities that were once safe, like walking into town alone, will become more risky. This behavior is already starting to show itself, as the man who tries to take Mrs. Nesbitt's cart indicates. This will only get worse.

While some people react to a crisis with panic, others show their fear in different ways. The children at school all seem very quiet and subdued. They do not know how to react and are confused about what it all means to them. When the storm strikes they begin crying and screaming, and some think that they are going to die. Others begin to laugh nervously, which is a hysterical reaction to fear and stress. Miranda herself exhibits this behavior when the storm hits and she thinks about all the people who have already died. Later, when her mother comes to get her, she stops laughing and seems to calm down. She is still frightened, and not sure what is going on, but when she is with her family she at least feels like there is a little more stability. It also helps that her mother seems to have a firm plan and is in control. She gives Miranda something on which to focus, which Miranda begins to find almost fun. Despite the fact that she thinks it is crazy behavior, it still helps her to feel like she is doing something constructive.

Miranda's mom's determination to stock up on supplies shows a lot of forethought. Unlike the other shoppers, she is not simply giving in to blind panic and trying to buy as much food as possible in case it runs out. She actually thinks about what they will need, and what kinds of food will last. She is thinking more long term than about what they will do if the shops are not open for a week or two. She is clearly worried about what will happen if the shops close permanently and food is unavailable for a long time. She buys canned foods that will last, and even buys seed trays so that she can grow her own food if things get really bad. She also has the good sense to buy water, despite the fact that their water supply is still running. She is thinking long term, about all the possible consequences of the disaster. If civilization really does break down, then they cannot rely on electricity, water, or shops. She shows how far ahead she is thinking when she stocks up on warm winter clothes, although it is still spring and very hot outside.

Miranda's mom is not only acting more sensibly than the other panicked shoppers, she is also acting more compassionately too. The family proves that they have not lost their humanity yet when they aid the man who has a pregnant wife and begs for their help.



Miranda's mom is also determined to look after Mrs. Nesbitt, rather than abandoning her and thinking only of herself. When they get home, they do not quarrel about the food or question what belongs to whom. They simply share it out, making sure Mrs. Nesbitt gets enough. Miranda also makes sure that Mrs. Nesbitt has one of the oil lamps, despite the fact that this had been her own thought and she bought them herself. The family's thoughtfulness and kindness makes them more sympathetic characters than many of the other townsfolk.



# Chapters 5-6

## Chapters 5-6 Summary

Food at school is beginning to run out, and the children are given stale peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for lunch. School will close early because of the food situation, and there will be no tests to determine grades. Megan has begun giving other children her own sandwiches at lunch, and Miranda finds this selfless behavior disturbing because Megan claims she only needs God's love for nourishment.

Miranda is concerned that her mom doesn't care about her grades anymore, but her mom is more worried about surviving. Miranda wants to give blankets as aid to people in New York and New Jersey but her mom won't let her. She says they have to look after themselves now. Miranda finds out that they cannot get more heating oil, so will have to rely on the wood stove if things are not back to normal by winter.

Miranda's dad calls. The plan is for Jonny to go to camp, and on the last day for Dad to pick him up, then come to collect Miranda so they can spend the summer with him. Matt will stay with mom. Mom's friend Peter comes to visit. He is a doctor, and warns them to wear insect repellent because mosquitoes are spreading illnesses like West Nile virus. Miranda decides to go swimming at Miller's Pond anyway, where she meets a boy from school called Dan. He asks her to go to prom with him if there is a school and a prom next year. Miranda's mom is annoyed that she slipped out without saying where she was going, but says she is allowed to go to Miller's Pond if she wants. Miranda continues to swim there, and meets and kisses Dan there regularly.

One day mom realizes she has yeast, so she bakes fresh bread. Dad calls and tells them that Lisa is okay and the pregnancy is still fine. The electricity comes on again for a bit, and they manage to get some laundry done and watch sitcoms on TV. This good day is followed by a bad one. They give Dan a lift home and drive into town. While mom is getting gas, Miranda notices a long queue outside the school, and realizes that they are handing out bags of food. Mrs. Nesbitt gets in line and Miranda runs to get Dan. They run back together and join the line, managing to get a bag each before the food runs out. However, Miranda's mom is extremely angry that Miranda went to get Dan, because she might have missed the opportunity to get food. Miranda tries to explain that she is seeing Dan, but her mom is angry and demands to know if she is sleeping with him. Miranda is shocked at her lack of trust and storms off. Matt tells her how worried mom is, and Miranda says she doesn't want to cause her any more worry. She invites Jonny to go to the pond with her, and mom seems happy. When they get home, Miranda asks her mom to teach her how to make bread, and her mom smiles.



## Chapters 5-6 Analysis

These chapters show how the world is beginning to change for everyone, and how people change to adapt to it. At the beginning of Chapter 5 it has been two weeks since the asteroid hit the moon. Electricity is still intermittent and the shops are all now closed. Many people's food is beginning to run out, meaning that the children at school are not eating well. Miranda herself feels hungry, though she knows she must be eating a lot better than most of them thanks to her mother's foresight. The school itself is running out of food, giving the children each one stale peanut butter and jelly sandwich for lunch. As the days move forwards towards one month since the asteroid strike, things only get worse. Electricity is hardly ever on, and when it is they have to rush to get as many things like laundry done as they can. Food is getting scarcer, and petrol is also running out. More worrying, there is no more heating oil, which means that when it runs out heat will be harder to come by too. Unexpected consequences are also beginning to show themselves, such as the diseases caused by mosquitoes. When Mrs. Nesbitt comes round with eggs and Matt produces a chocolate bar, the family enjoys them as if they are a magnificent feast. What were once the most ordinary food items have become extraordinary. When electricity comes back in brief spells the family enjoy sitcoms on the TV again, and Miranda compares this joy to that of several major holidays. The fact that such normal everyday things have become so special shows how much the world has already changed.

Miranda is starting to experience considerable food-guilt. She feels self-conscious that she has more food than others, but knows she should not talk about it. When Megan begins giving away a portion of her food to another student each day, Miranda confronts her. She doesn't think it is sensible for Megan to do this, since she needs the food herself. Megan claims that she only needs God's love to sustain her, and is more concerned about being a good person than about staying alive. Miranda sees this as a threat to her friend, but perhaps also feels very guilty because she is not doing the same. She has more food than the others, but still keeps her own portion for herself. She worries that she would not be able to give up food for her own brother if needed, and seems to feel that she is not as good a person as Megan. This is reinforced by her dreams, in which she dreams that her deceased friend Becky denies her entry into heaven. She is told that she is not good enough to be dead. The implication is that Megan will die because she is a good enough person to give up her food for others. Miranda will survive because she is selfish. Miranda understands that selfishness is an essential survival instinct, and that she needs to be selfish now more than ever. However, her dreams show clearly that she feels a lot of guilt because of this need to be selfish. Ironically, Miranda's ability to give up food for her younger brother will be tested later in the story, foreshadowed here by her worry that she would not be able to do so. Miranda is obviously a better and stronger person than she thinks, because when the time comes she does manage to put her brother's and her family's needs before her own.

Miranda's mom also understands the need to be selfish to survive, and tries to reinforce the message to Miranda. She tells her that family comes first, and that friendships and



sharing are a luxury they cannot afford right now. When Miranda wants to give blankets to aid people in New York and New Jersey, her mom forbids her, saying they may need the blankets themselves in winter. When Miranda runs to get Dan to tell him that they are giving away bags of food at the school, Miranda's mom is very angry. Miranda could have missed the opportunity to get food for them by running for Dan, and she needs Miranda to understand that her own family must come first. Miranda is shocked at this attitude and behavior, because it is so different from her caring mom who always used to like to help others. This shows how severe things have really become, and how much people can change when they are desperately trying to survive. It also shows Miranda that things are really serious, and she starts to consider the horrible possibility that she is actually in danger of dying.

Miranda's own method of coping with the changing world is to attempt to keep as much normality as possible. She refuses to listen to the disasters and death lists on the radio, preferring to pretend that nothing bad is happening anywhere else. She does not want to constantly think about death, and says she did not begin her diary for it to become a list of death. She still tries to value friendship and compassion for strangers, and is angry when her mom challenges this because it reminds her that things have changed. She wants school to continue as normal, and resents the fact that it is different now there are fewer students there. She worries about her math grade and is shocked when her mother does not care about it. She goes to Miller's Pond to attempt to continue with a sense of normal life, keeping up her swimming practice as if there might still be a swimming team one day. When Dan is interested in a relationship Miranda welcomes this as a sense of being a normal teenager again. She enjoys spending time with Dan at the pond and kissing him, and when she is here she does not have to think about the changes in her life and the world. However, she cannot escape the changes, and is soon forced to see that she will never be normal again. Her mother shows her that she needs to be selfish and focused on her own family now, and the shortage of food and oil bring home to her how severe the situation really is. Her dreams reflect how her desire for things to be normal is shattered by the reality she faces. She dreams that Dan takes her to prom, but then she thinks about being hungry and sees a table laden with food. When she tries to eat the food, however, she is told that she cannot because she is not in heaven. The dream ends yet again with Miranda thinking about how she might die.

Miranda reacts to these changes in her life with a lot of anger, particularly focused on her mother. This is because Miranda is actually very scared, and her mother is not doing anything to comfort her. Instead, her mom makes her face reality, something that Miranda resents but soon comes to understand. At the end of Chapter 6 Miranda has realized that she should not be angry with her mom, but that they have to get through this as a united family. She shows this by taking Jonny with her to the pond, and by asking her mother to teach her how to make bread.



# Chapters 7-8

## Chapters 7-8 Summary

Miranda's mom drives Jonny to baseball camp. Miranda decides to visit friends, but Sammi is out, so she goes to see Megan. Megan is looking very thin and ill, and is obviously not eating enough. Miranda tries to reason with her, but Megan is completely overcome with religious fervor.

Mom suggests cutting down to two meals a day, so Miranda chooses to skip breakfast and eat a brunch instead of lunch. One day, the sky turns a horrible shade of grey and stays that way. Miranda's mom explains that the moon's pull has affected the volcanoes, making most of the volcanoes in the world erupt. This has caused ash clouds to hang in the sky, drifting with the wind and blocking out the sun all over the world. Without sunlight, the crops will all die, and they cannot be sure of growing vegetables in the garden. This means they have to ration food further. Matt and Miranda will cut down to eating brunch every other day, and fast on Sundays. Miranda's mom is cutting down to one meal every day. Miranda's mom also suggests boiling all water from now on since the water source may become polluted.

One night Miranda accidentally loses the cat, Horton. She feels very guilty about this until Horton returns. Sammi comes over to tell Miranda that she is leaving with a much older man who has promised to protect her. Sammi's parents think it is a good idea, since she is more likely to survive with him. They are planning on heading south, where they have heard that conditions are better. This is a shock for Miranda, who knows she will probably never see Sammi again.

Miranda's mom tells her that she cannot visit her father this summer because he is going south with Lisa to stay with Lisa's parents. Dad picks up Jonny from camp and brings him home, staying for a while before heading on. Dad brings them food and supplies, and Miranda thinks that it is like Christmas. Dad helps them chop more firewood, and they decide to store the logs in the dining room so that they cannot be stolen by others.

They decide to have a dinner party to celebrate Jonny's return from camp, so Miranda bikes into town to get Peter. He has moved out of his doctor's office and into the hospital, where he can help more people. At the hospital she runs into Dan, who tells her that he is leaving to try to find somewhere where things are better. His father swapped their car for a motorbike and taught him to ride it. Miranda says goodbye to Dan. At the dinner party that night, Jonny asks if they will die. They try to comfort him but they also do not want to give him false hopes. Lisa goes upstairs, upset by the conversation. Two days later, Dad and Lisa leave.



## Chapters 7-8 Analysis

Miranda decides to visit her friends, since she has not seen anyone in ages and she finds that she has very little to do during the day. She reflects that calling on people rather than ringing, texting or emailing them is a very 'Jane Austin' thing to do. Jane Austin is a Georgian author who wrote several famous books including *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Sense and Sensibility*. In her books, the main characters tend to 'call on' their friends, which means visiting them in person. In Georgian times they did not have phones, cars, or the internet, so visiting each other and sending letters were the only ways to keep in touch. Miranda's reference to Jane Austin reminds the readers how much the world has changed for her. She can no longer use the car, her phone, or her computer, so just like a Georgian woman she has to physically visit her friends in order to talk to them. Since the moon was struck by an asteroid, the world has quickly been losing all its modern conveniences, and people are having to adapt to living in a different way. They are now living more like people in history did. This shows how different life is, and how 'backward' the world seems to have become. However, it also shows that civilized life can and did exist without modern conveniences. People will have to learn to adapt, but as long as food can be found, life can continue. Although losing modern things may seem like the end of the world to Miranda and a lot of people, it really is not.

When Miranda visits her friend Megan, two different views of the world are presented. Megan sees meaning and God in everything, thinking that God is punishing mankind by causing this disaster. Megan believes that the way to be happy is to embrace and love God, and to accept what comes. She is not killing herself deliberately, but she seems to have completely given up on this life, hoping for happiness in the next. Miranda thinks that Megan is crazy, and that Reverend Marshall has preyed on Megan's religious beliefs and her fear over the disaster to convince her that there is nothing in this life for her anymore. Miranda does not believe that any of the things that have happened have meaning. She sees them as unfortunate consequences of a random event; the asteroid hitting the moon. No God caused this to happen, and there is no reason behind it. Miranda also believes that life is something special, and that the real sin is to give up on it and to not want to fight to survive. Megan believes that there is no point surviving if it means compromising her values and morals in order to do so. Survival means acting selfishly, and Megan cannot do this. Miranda has now accepted that survival means changing, and acting selfishly to prioritize oneself and one's family, and she is willing to do what it takes. She sees worth in life, rather than in a higher spiritual power.

Miranda has accepted that she needs to act more selfishly, but she is finding it harder to accept favoritism within her own family. She sees that her mother is more concerned with Jonny's diet than her own, and this makes her angry. She thinks that her mother has always put Jonny's needs before her own, which is proven by the argument she had with her mother at the beginning of the book over Jonny's baseball lessons. She now thinks that her mother is betting on Jonny's survival over her own, and so preparing for the possibility that she will have to help Jonny survive at the expense of her other two children. This makes Miranda extremely sad and jealous at the same time. She is not



yet willing to accept these circumstances, or the possibility of her own death. She is not willing to accept that Jonny should be prioritized over her, and she cannot face the fact that her mother might choose him over her. At the same time, however, she is also experiencing a lot of guilt over the fact that her mother is eating much less than her, and that Matt is working harder than her. She can accept other's sacrifices for her, but is jealous when asked to make sacrifices for Jonny. This is natural behavior for a girl who is still only a teenager and is being asked to cope with some very adult things. Jonny is still being treated as a child, but Miranda is expected to act grown up. Her conflicted feelings cause her to react with anger and frustration. She is irritable, particularly with her mother. She finds herself acting more and more like a child as she finds anger the only way to cope with what she is feeling. She is rebelling against being treated as an adult, and showing that she wants to be protected like a child too, as Jonny is. Her mother and Matt are also snappy, with tempers running short due to hunger and worry. This makes for some very unpleasant scenes in the house.

In these chapters, Miranda's family and circle of friends suddenly grows smaller. Sammi leaves, Dan leaves, and Megan has shut her out because of her religious fervor. Now Miranda's father is leaving too, and she will not stay with him this summer as planned. Her father has had to make a difficult choice between two families, and has chosen his new family over his old one. He brings them gifts, but then abandons them, looking out only for himself and Lisa. This is another survival mechanism, but a particularly brutal one. It demonstrates that families are starting to have to make choices as to who will survive, and who they will protect. Dan's and Sammi's families have both done this too by sending their children away in order to give them a better chance. Matt is angry with his father for abandoning them, but it is now clear that they are on their own. Their wider family still includes Mrs. Nesbitt and Peter, but it cannot be much longer before this circle of family closes too. One day Miranda's mother might have to make the choice between her children, and if she does, who will she choose to survive? Will Miranda be strong enough by then to accept the decision?





# Chapters 9-10

## Chapters 9-10 Summary

The first frost falls in August. Miranda asks her mother if things can get worse, and her mom explains that there are still volcanoes erupting, crops won't grow, frosts are coming, there are epidemics, and an earthquake has caused a nuclear plant accident in California. Miranda and her mother get into an argument in which mom calls Miranda ungrateful and complains that she does nothing, and Miranda says that she should have gone with her dad, who at least loves her. Miranda's mom yells at her to get out, so she cycles to Megan's house. She tells Megan everything, who is sympathetic. Then Megan tells Miranda she cannot come back because she reminds Megan of her old life, which makes her desire and think about sinful things such as boys. Miranda leaves and goes home, where she and her mom both apologize and make up.

Jonny's birthday arrives, and they celebrate as best they can. Mrs. Nesbitt makes oatmeal cookies, and Jonny makes a speech about sticking together through the crisis. Soon after, there is a meeting about school. There are not enough teachers to go around, so only two schools will be kept open. There will be no after school activities, no food and no bus service. There will be no exams and no real grades, because there are too few teachers to teach everything. People are encouraged to home school if they prefer. Miranda decides she wants to go to school, and that she'd rather attend the high school in town if possible.

One day Miranda bikes into town, but on her way to the library she sees older boys on the street, pulling plywood off the store fronts. Some of them have guns. Miranda is a little frightened, and angry that the men are stealing plywood and have a truck full of gas. She knows that gangs like this must be everywhere, taking from those who can't stop them and selling to others for anything they can take. She bikes to the police station but there is no one there, so she goes to the hospital. The guards there tell her that there are no more police, and it isn't safe for girls to come to town on their own anymore. She bikes home again, scared. She realizes that going to the high school in town is not safe. She tells Matt what happened, but doesn't want to worry her mom. Matt agrees that she should not go out alone anymore.

## Chapters 9-10 Analysis

In these chapters the idea of sacrifice is explored. Megan is trying to sacrifice everything that she sees as part of her old life, the life she associates with sin. She is trying to cleanse herself in order to show her God that she is serious about her religion and about getting into heaven. She has given up on this life and is focusing on the next. She tells Miranda that she cannot come around anymore, because she reminds her of her old life and so makes her think about things that are sinful. Miranda's presence dents her willpower and forces her to question God. She means to sacrifice her friendship with



Miranda as she has sacrificed everything else, and believes this is what is necessary to form a better relationship with God. Miranda tells Megan that her God is evil if he would demand sacrifices like these. She thinks about true sacrifice and thinks about her mother. She believes that her mom is a better example of meaningful sacrifice than Megan, because she is sacrificing so much to keep them all alive. Her mother is trying to remain strong, and determined to do whatever it takes to save her family. Megan might think she is being strong, but she is actually weak because she has given up and refuses to try to survive. Her sacrifices seem meaningless because they do not help anyone, and only cause Megan's mom a lot of grief and worry. For Miranda, sacrifice is not about giving up on life, but is about putting up with hardship for love and family. It is about being strong, not about being weak. Miranda realizes that she admires her mother, and wishes she could be more like her. Miranda should give herself more credit. Although she is finding it hard to cope with the changes in her life, and often reacts with anger, Miranda is just as determined as her mother to make sure her family survives. She gives up food without complaint, and helps out however she can. She has grown up a lot, and shown that she can sacrifice in ways that are important.

Jonny is another example of meaningful sacrifice. Jonny's birthday comes up, but he understands that it cannot be a big deal like birthdays used to be. He understands that he won't get any presents. Instead, the family celebrates as best as they can, and Mrs. Nesbitt makes oatmeal cookies. Jonny is very gracious about it and acts extremely maturely. He gives a speech about how everything will be alright as long as they stick together and support each other. Miranda thinks about how much he has grown up, and how he is older than his years. Jonny has sacrificed his childhood, understanding that in this changed world he can no longer be a child. Miranda is sad about this, but also proud. Miranda also thinks about how much she has changed. She has grown up too. She remembers her last birthday and how immaturely she acted. She remembers all the inconsequential things that mattered to her then, that now seem so unimportant. The disaster has forced all of them to grow up and mature very quickly, and changed their priorities and values forever. Now they focus on the things that are really important in life, like family, love and survival.

Now the reader is beginning to see some of the frightening consequences of disaster in terms of human behavior. When times are hard, some people will react by trying to stick together and protect each other, and others will focus on themselves. The reader has already seen that being selfish is an essential survival technique. Unfortunately however, there are some people who take things further than this, and instead of simply being focused on themselves, they actually harm others. When Miranda cycles into town, she sees a gang of older boys tearing plywood off the store fronts. Some of the men have guns, and she is both extremely angry and at the same time very frightened of them. This is because she knows that they are one of the many gangs who take from those who cannot protect themselves, and sell to others for whatever they can get. Their survival technique is survival of the fittest, so instead of trying to get by with what they have, they take from others. This makes them very dangerous, since they would think nothing of harming Miranda if she had something they wanted. When Miranda goes to the hospital, the guards there tell her that it is not safe for her to go out on her own anymore. This is shocking for Miranda, because she has always lived in a place



that is safe and would never have considered that ordinary townspeople might hurt her. Even the fact that there are guards at the hospital doors is very sinister. People are beginning to get desperate, and with an attitude that everyone is already out for themselves, it is not a huge leap for people to become violent to get what they want. As Miranda finds out, there are no more police, and any law and order must come from people policing themselves. It is unclear whether the guards at the hospital are helping out because they want to protect a very important place that helps keep people alive, or whether they are being paid for protection. Certainly nowhere else seems to have guards. Law and order, one of the marks of civilization, has now completely broken down, leaving the reader wondering what will be next.

When Miranda realizes that it is no longer safe to go into town on her own, her world suddenly gets a lot smaller, just as her circle of family and friends has reduced in previous chapters. Miranda's world now consists of her house and the nearby area, and the elementary school if she decides to go. Town is off limits, and travelling anywhere else on her own would probably be equally dangerous. This is a trend that runs throughout this book, since Miranda's world will continue to shrink as things get harder. This reflects the things that are important in Miranda's life. She sheds old friends, shops, the town, and school. Later she will shed everything else until it is just Miranda and her family. In the end, it is only each other that will help them get through this crisis. Meanwhile, it is getting harder and harder to maintain any degree of normalcy in Miranda's life, as her life becomes more and more about simple survival.



# Chapters 11-12

## Chapters 11-12 Summary

Miranda attends the elementary school, but there are not enough high school students there for it to be worth teaching classes. The teacher in charge decides that it would make more sense for all high school aged students to go to the high school in town. Those who cannot get there will have to home school. Miranda knows she cannot go to town on her own, so she collects books for herself and Jonny to home school themselves. She also steals school supplies including notebooks and pens when the woman in the office is not looking.

Miranda's mom goes to her bedroom for a nap one day, and something makes Miranda go to the pantry. She sees how much food they have stored away and is surprised at how much they are having to ration. Feeling annoyed and reckless, she grabs the bag of chocolate chips that she had picked out on Crazy Shopping Day, and begins to eat them all. Her mother comes in and catches her and is extremely angry. She had been saving the chocolate chips for Matt's birthday. She forces Miranda to eat the entire bag, then tells her she has to skip her next four meals. Miranda goes to bed feeling upset and guilty.

They receive two letters from their dad, telling them that he and Lisa had not been allowed into Kansas, even though they just wanted to drive through to Colorado. They are thinking of driving to Oklahoma to get to Colorado that way. Dad says there are officials who might be bribed to let them through. He says that they are staying in a refugee camp but have to leave soon. There are vigilantes who are stopping people from entering the State, so they have to be careful.

## Chapters 11-12 Analysis

As the story officially enters the fall season, it has been three months since the asteroid hit the moon and the world has changed so much. It already feels like winter, despite being only August. Ordinary life has changed beyond recognition from what it once was. There is no school, no more police, no shops, no food, no electricity, and no gas; the oil is running out, there is no more sunlight, no contact with the rest of the world, and people have to focus on survival every day. Life as everyone knew it seems gone forever. Whereas earlier in the story it seemed like the world had reverted to an earlier stage in history, in which people had to live without modern conveniences, now things are much worse. Now the basic staples of civilization itself have broken down, such as law and order and a feeling of community. Now everybody is completely focused on themselves, and life is simply about survival.

More worrying reports of violence and people turning against each other in these chapters show how bad things are really getting. The pupils in the school talk about a



girl called Michelle Schmidt who has gone missing, and hint that other girls have too. They feel that it is no longer safe for children to be out away from their parents. Miranda is so scared by the town and the townsfolk that she decides to be home schooled. Their father's letter also shows that people are acting violently to protect what is theirs elsewhere in the country. He reports that some states are not letting people enter unless they have family there, wanting to avoid masses of refugees entering and causing everyone there to suffer. Vigilantes patrol the borders to protect themselves and their homes, and the suggestion is that they will act violently towards anyone who tries to get in. This is a situation that ironically already exists in states that border Mexico, but now it is being experienced within the United States itself. People no longer feel connected as citizens of the same country, but see other people as a drain on their resources and a real threat to their lives. This is horrible and frightening, but is actually quite a sensible survival tactic, and the people cannot necessarily be blamed for their actions. It is nice to imagine that people would look after each other in a crisis, but the harsh reality is that survival is about being selfish. Miranda's mom has already proved this by insisting that her family only help each other and forget everybody else. Even normally kind and compassionate people are being forced to harden themselves. Miranda, too, gives in to crime in these chapters. She steals notebooks and pens from the elementary school. This is partly a realization that without law and order she may as well join in the crime in order to help herself, and forget everybody else. However, it also seems like she is lashing out at the school for disappointing and failing her. This school had been Miranda's last hope for keeping up some kind of normalcy in her life. Without it, the reality of what her life has become is now forced upon her.

As in previous chapters, Miranda's world closes in a little bit more here. She can no longer go to the elementary school because there are not enough high school aged pupils there to warrant teachers. She cannot go to the high school because it is in town and therefore dangerous to get to. This means that she will have to be home schooled, taking school away from her list of places. Now her world has shrunk even more, and contains only her house, Mrs. Nesbitt's house, and Miller's Pond, though it is too cold to swim there anymore. It cannot be long before Miranda loses these places too, and her world shrinks still further.

Miranda's mom is finding it hard to even keep up the pretense of caring about school work. She insists that they study, and that being home schooled does not mean slacking off, but makes no effort to ensure that they are studying. Miranda pretends to study but her heart is clearly not in it, and her mom makes it clear that it does not really matter anyway. This lack of care over their futures is depressing and frightening for Miranda, who sees it as a sign that her mom thinks they will have no future at all. This is not a good way for her mother to keep morale up. Miranda is frightened and hungry and not getting the support she needs from her mother. She may have grown up and matured a lot, but she is really only a child. This is most likely what causes her to eat the chocolate chips. She sees all the food in the pantry and part of her gets angry and goes a little crazy. She thinks that if her mom has given up on life, then they may as well eat. She is annoyed that they are rationing so strictly when there is so much food stored away. Her mother has not actually explained things to her, or trusted her enough to see what is in the pantry. Her mother may think she is protecting Miranda, but her insistence on



survival and her strict rules are only depressing and scaring Miranda. Miranda's mother has become like a mindless automaton going through the motions of survival without seeming to care. This is not a good way to act, since survival is not just physical but mental too. Miranda and her family need to feel like they have something to live for, and a future ahead of them. Although the chocolate chip incident causes a huge fight, perhaps it is the storm that is needed to clear the air and get the family behaving like humans again.



# Chapters 13-14

## Chapters 13-14 Summary

One day when Matt and Jonny are at Mrs. Nesbitt's, Miranda's mom falls and hurts her ankle. Miranda bikes to the hospital, but the guards won't let her in, and refuse to take a message to Peter because she does not have any ID on her. Miranda begs but the guards don't care. She waits outside the hospital for someone to come out who can take her message in, but no one will. Eventually Matt turns up, looking for her. He knows one of the guards, so is allowed to go inside. He brings Peter out and they return home.

Peter says mom's ankle is just sprained, but she cannot put any weight on it for awhile and will have to walk with the aid of a cane. They move her mattress downstairs. Peter also gives them surgical masks to wear when outside, since the air quality is now very bad and cases of asthma are starting to emerge. Miranda keeps her mother company in the sunroom and mom decides she wants Miranda to cut her hair. It looks terrible. Miranda also goes to visit Mrs. Nesbitt, since her mom can no longer walk around. Miranda sees Michelle Schmidt when she and Matt are walking to the library one day. The knowledge that nothing horrible happened to her makes Miranda feel better.

However, when October starts the natural gas is turned off, and the stove will no longer work. Thankfully they have a wood stove so are not dependent on gas for heat. They also have an oil furnace, which Matt says they should use to keep the pipes from freezing. They decide to move all the mattresses downstairs and close off the upstairs of the house so there is less space to heat.

One day Matt comes in with news that Megan and her mother are on the dead list. Miranda goes to the church to talk to Reverend Marshall, who tells her that Megan passed away and her mother hung herself. They refused to bury the mother because suicide is a sin. Reverend Marshall does not look starved, and Miranda realizes that his congregation members have been giving up their food for him. She is disgusted, and leaves.

The weather suddenly heats up a little, and Miranda decides to go skating on Miller's Pond. When she gets there Brandon Erlich is already skating there. She is amazed to see he is alive. They skate together, and he asks her to come back the next day. She says she will try.

## Chapters 13-14 Analysis

Previous chapters have shown how people react to disasters with panic and selfish behavior, and how some people turn violent and prey on others. These chapters explore further the types of despicable behavior that emerge, and how those with power or strength can and will dominate those who are weaker than them. First, Miranda experiences this at the hospital, where the guards will not let her inside and seem to



enjoy holding power over her. Miranda's begging pleases one of the guards, who obviously finds pleasure in refusing her and making her beg even more. This makes Miranda feel sick, because the man is getting entertainment from others' suffering, and must do this to so many other people. It is very unfortunate that a person like this man should be in a position of power, but there is nothing anyone can do about it. It also makes Miranda extremely angry that Matt can get into the hospital easily just because he knows one of the guards. This is just another harsh example of how unfair the world has become. Later, Matt mentions the black market and how their father had managed to get food on it. This suggests that there is a large business in people taking from others, or stealing and then selling it to people in need. This is a horrible thought at the best of times, but particularly nasty when people are really suffering and are so desperate.

However, the very worst case of a person abusing their power comes when Miranda goes to see Reverend Marshall. Reverend Marshall still looks healthy and not thin, and it is clear that he has been eating. When questioned, he admits that he eats the food his congregation brings him. He is eating well while they starve and go without. Megan died from lack of food but Reverend Marshall does not seem to care. He has obviously preached that God is punishing them, and that the way to heaven is through sacrifice and acceptance of death. This is very clever, since it means the people will go without food and offer him what they do not eat. He has used his power and their trust in him to manipulate them into helping him survive, while they die. This is a truly terrible case of taking from others in hard times, and Miranda is so disgusted with him she shouts at him and then leaves.

However, among the cases of people acting selfishly and cruelly, there are still real heroes to be found in the world. Peter is spending all his time at the hospital in order to heal the sick. He is beginning to look very old and harassed, and Miranda realizes what an awful toll it must be taking on him. Matt reveals that Peter lost his own family before this whole disaster struck, so Peter is naturally compensating by putting his worries onto their family and others. He feels that it is his responsibility as a carer of people to continue to do so. Even though other people, such as the police and the teachers, have given up their jobs and stopped caring about what happens to others, Peter has refused to do this. As a result, he is putting his own life in serious danger. Miranda realizes she has never really appreciated Peter, and that if things were normal then he would be having a serious relationship with her mother and might be considered one of the family by now.

When Miranda and Matt are walking to the library one day, Miranda sees Michelle Schmidt, the girl who had supposedly gone missing. Seeing her shows Miranda that not every rumor she hears will be true, and that perhaps the town is not as dangerous as she had feared. She now feels braver about leaving the house, and seems to go out a lot more with Matt into the town. She also admits that things are a lot more cheerful now with the wood stove burning, and they are beginning to act like a family again and arguing less. Miranda's world suddenly seems to be opening up again. However, just as things are looking good, the gas is turned off and they no longer have heating. They have a wood stove and an oil furnace, so things are not dire, but from now on life will be





a lot harder. Laundry takes a lot of work, and everything seems to be permanently grey. Both Miranda and her mother are forced to cut their hair short because it is impossible to keep clean. Matt realizes that they need to use the furnace to keep the pipes warm so they don't freeze and cut off their water supply. They decide to close off the upstairs of the house so there is less room to heat, and bring the mattresses downstairs. This means that Miranda will be sharing a sleeping space with her mother. Suddenly she has lost her private space, and can go nowhere when she wants to be alone. When she needs to cry about Megan, she is forced to shut herself in the pantry to get some privacy. Just when it looks like Miranda's world is opening up again, it has just gotten a lot smaller. Now she has no upstairs and no room of her own.

Thankfully, however, Miranda does still have Miller's Pond. On a day that is warmer than usual, she goes out to the pond to skate. There she sees Brandon Erlich, on whom she has always had a crush and admired. They skate and talk, and it seems like a dream come true. This is an interlude of peace and happiness, and almost seems like life is normal again, before Miranda is sucked back into the game of survival. It is as if the universe has given Miranda one day off. This is exactly what Miranda needs in order to cope with some of the horrible things that have happened recently. As shown earlier in the story, survival is as much about mental attitude as physical things, so it is very important that Miranda finds things in which she can still be interested , and reasons to keep fighting for her life.



# Chapters 15-16

## Chapters 15-16 Summary

Miranda's mother trips and hurts her ankle again. They move her back into the sunroom and Miranda stays in the kitchen to get some privacy. She decides not to go skating anymore since she has to look after her mom. Miranda goes to see Mrs. Nesbitt, who says she is glad that her mother cannot walk, because she wouldn't want her to find her dead when her time comes. Miranda loves her less, so will cope with it better. She tells Miranda that she wants to give some of her jewelry to them, and that when she is dead they should take absolutely everything they need from her house.

Matt decides to board up all the windows in the house to help keep heat in. Soon after, the water in the well runs out. They will have to collect rain and boil snow, and use what bottled water they have. Without water there is also no reason to keep the heat on to keep the pipes warm, so Matt suggests turning off the furnace and everyone moving into the sunroom together.

One day Miranda finds Mrs. Nesbitt dead. She takes the jewelry that Mrs. Nesbitt wanted them to have, then searches the attic where she finds baseball cards and chocolates. She thinks she will give the cards to Jonny and the chocolates to her mom on Christmas. She puts a load of things into a pillowcase, then walks to where Matt and Jonny are chopping wood and tells them the news. They take the car and the van over to her house and fill them up. Miranda drives the car back to the house tentatively, but manages not to crash. Matt and Jonny go back for another load and then take the body to the hospital.

One day Matt comes home with a message from their Dad, though it is an older letter than one of his previous ones. Matt thinks this is a good sign since it shows the mail is erratic so they could receive a new letter from him at any time. The day after Thanksgiving, Matt comes home with Peter and a real chicken. They enjoy it as if it is a magnificent feast. Then mom tells them they should all be studying and makes them pick one subject to learn. Miranda decides to go back to Mrs. Nesbitt's and finds old coloring paper and pencils that she intends to give to Matt on Christmas, since she remembers that he liked drawing. After the third day of the temperature being above zero, Miranda enjoys skating on the pond again.

## Chapters 15-16 Analysis

Chapter 15 is a very depressing chapter, but by the end of Chapter 16 things are extremely hopeful. These two chapters take Miranda and her family on a very emotional journey. At first, Miranda's world begins to shrink even further. Her mother falls and hurts her ankle again, so Miranda decides she needs to look after her. This takes the pond away from her just as she had discovered a new friend there. Once this would have



caused Miranda to despair, since meeting and talking to Brandon Erlich would have seemed like the most important thing in the world to her. Now, taking care of her mother is much more important, and Miranda shows how mature and caring she has become. However, when Matt begins to board up the windows, Miranda can hardly stand it. She can cope with losing the pond and Brandon, but losing the view from the windows seems like too much. For her, the view from the windows let her see the world and reminds her that it is there. The windows represent hope and life, and without them all that exists for Miranda is the kitchen and the sunroom. Matt has boarded them up without really even thinking or trying to understand what this might mean to Miranda. Miranda understands that they have to do it, but she wishes he had at least consulted her first. They are all having to act like adults and take on huge responsibilities now, and she hates being left in the dark as if she is still a child.

Just when things are looking bad for Miranda's sanity, her world gets even smaller. The water runs out, which means the furnace does not have to be kept on to keep the pipes from freezing. Without the furnace it is too cold in the rest of the house, so they will all have to move into the sunroom where the wood stove still provides heat. Miranda is upset about this, since it means taking away the last of her privacy. Now they will all be in one room together, and she finds this a difficult idea. Shortly after this, Mrs. Nesbitt dies. Now Miranda's family and world once again shrink. She can no longer go to Mrs. Nesbitt's house or talk with her, and there is nothing left but the sunroom and her immediate family. It is just the three of them now, in the one room desperately trying to survive. As the world closes in around them, so things seem to get bleaker and bleaker. This is the lowest point so far in the book.

However, things do not stay depressing for long. Mrs. Nesbitt's death is sad, but they can respect her dignity and her kindness to the end. They now also have a lot more food and water thanks to her. Miranda is also realizing how much love she has for her mother, reflecting that she never knew she had this much love inside her. Miranda is really starting to focus on important things. She notices gestures such as Peter's gentleness with her mother, and is seeing the good and the love in other people rather than arguing with them. When Matt brings Peter and a chicken home for dinner the day after Thanksgiving, they enjoy their meal as if it is a magnificent feast, and Miranda thinks of Peter's company as a gift. They are taking pleasure in the most simple, and yet the most important things: food, friendship, and family. It is these three things that are at the heart of Thanksgiving, and the things for which people are supposed to offer thanks. These are the things for which people should be thankful every day, but often take for granted. Through the crisis, Miranda and her family have learned what it is really important in life.

This meal and the family bonding seem to revitalize everyone in the family. Miranda's mom insists that they all start studying again and stop wasting their lives. This shows that she is thinking about the future again and admitting that there might be one. This is a very positive step. Miranda also decides to go skate on the pond again. The pond is a symbol of Miranda's hopes for the future, of her happiness and interest in life, and of her independence. It is a place of privacy, and one where she does not have to think about survival but can actually enjoy herself. It is therefore a very good sign that she has gone



back there. Things are really starting to look hopeful again at the end of these chapters. The family members have accepted what is happening but are determined to get through it, and have realized that love and family will get them through. This finally gives them hope for the future again.



# Chapters 17-18

## Chapters 17-18 Summary

Matt is out volunteering at the post office when it suddenly begins to snow. It is very thick already, and snowing very heavily. Mom immediately starts to get worried about Matt. They put barrels out to collect the snow for water, but there is still no sign of Matt. Miranda suggests they take turns to wait in the road for Matt, with an oil lamp to guide them home. It is getting dark and hard to see outside, and they are worried Matt could get lost or walk right past the house. Jonny goes first, then Miranda takes over. Miranda is weaker than Jonny, and a gust of wind blows her over and her lamp goes out. Then out of the blizzard Matt appears, and Jonny meets them with a lamp and guides them in.

It snows heavily all night and all the next day. The sunroom roof is covered, and Matt insists that they have to shovel it off or the roof might cave in. They spend the day moving snow away from the garage door so that they can get to the ladder and shovels, then Matt and Jonny clear the snow off the roof.

Now everyone is forced to sit in the sunroom together and endure each other's company. Because they are constantly together, Jonny notices for the first time that they are all eating less than him. Miranda reassures him that it is a good idea for him to stay strong and eat more than them. Matt decides they should eat breakfast instead of dinner each day, since they will be less hungry that way. They do, and Miranda feels that life has improved.

On Christmas Eve they hang up some tinsel on the clothesline and call it a vertical tree. Then they hear singing outside and go out to find people caroling in the street. They join in, and have a wonderful time. On Christmas they make more food than usual and call it a feast. Each of them has managed to find something to give the others as presents. On New Year's Eve Miranda decorates the sunroom with pictures and makes it feel like a home. Matt tells them that his resolution is to practice cross-country skiing, and Jonny and Miranda join him. They hope to get good enough to be able to ski into town if necessary. They practice every day.

One day Mr. Mortensen, the neighbor, comes round and begs for help. His wife is very ill and feverish. Miranda's mom gives him some aspirin but cannot help more.

## Chapters 17-18 Analysis

These are very hopeful chapters, following on from the positive note at the end of Chapter 16. Miranda says that she thinks these are the good times; she appreciates the fact that she is eating one meal every day, and that they are all alive and still relatively healthy. Her priorities have changed so much since the beginning of this story. Just as her world has grown smaller, so has her list of things that she needs to be happy. Now,



nothing is really important except life and loved ones. Even though conditions are constantly worsening, Miranda has learned to be grateful for everything she does have, which means it is now easier for her to be happy even when things are very hard. In fact, in some ways she is happier now than she was before the whole crisis began. She reflects how this is the best Christmas ever, and that despite the fact that she has had more presents in previous years, she has enjoyed this Christmas more. This is because this Christmas there is so much goodwill, love and support in the family that it feels truly special, and really is what Christmas should be about.

The hopeful feeling in these chapters is summed up in the Christmas carols on Christmas Eve. Singing these carols is a symbol of hope, determination and life. When they hear the singing they cannot believe their ears at first, then realize what it is and rush out to see. There are neighbors from the street all singing together, and Miranda and her family hurry to join in. Through this, for one night everyone on the street feels a sense of solidarity and community again, something that seemed like it had been completely lost since the crisis began. The carol singing shows that there are still people alive, and a world continuing to exist. There is still hope, defiance and survival despite the odds. The carol singing represents the power and endurance of the human spirit. After the carol singing, the family has a wonderful Christmas. They have very little food but manage to make it seem like a feast, and give each other whatever they managed to find as presents. Somehow, each of them has managed to find something to give, and no matter how small it is, each present is given with so much love and goodwill that they seem like the best presents ever. The determination to celebrate Christmas no matter what shows that some things from the old world can still be valued and carried on. It may seem like civilization has broken down, but humanity will continue as long as people continue to hold on to what is important.

After Christmas, the good spirit and hope in the family continues. Miranda decorates the sunroom on New Year's Eve, making it not just a survival shelter but a home. This shows a significant switch in her attitude towards her life at the moment. She is no longer just surviving and wishing things were different, but accepting their situation and trying to make herself a new life. Matt gets out the skis and decides that they should practice using them. When they get better they will then be able to cross-country ski into town. This is also a very positive step, since it gives them hope for the future, as well as something fun to do that is not just all about survival. Taking an interest in other things and taking up hobbies, such as Matt's drawing and Miranda's hope to go skating again, is another way to find something positive in their new life and a reason to live. The whole family now has the right attitude to survive.

Miranda now realizes that she would give up food for her little brother if things ever got really bad. She agrees that he should be eating more than the rest of them and that he has the best chance of survival. This is extremely brave and mature of her. At the beginning of the book, when the crisis was only just getting started and food beginning to run out, Miranda worried that she would not be able to do this, but now she knows that she can. She had thought Megan a better person than her, and felt guilty for eating her share. Now it is clear that she understands true sacrifice better than Megan did, and that she knows when it is important. It is ironic that now Miranda is the one comforting



Jonny and trying to stop him from feeling guilty for eating more food, since she had previously been very jealous of Jonny for getting more than her, and at the same time guilty for being angry with him. Miranda now shows what a strong young woman she has become. Now instead of being jealous of Jonny, she feels sorry for him because he had gotten two and a half years less to enjoy being an ordinary innocent child before he was forced to grow up.

Despite the positive feeling in these chapters, Chapter 18 ends on a slightly sinister note. Mr. Mortensen, their neighbor, comes over one day and begs for medicine for his wife. He explains that she is sick and feverish. Miranda's mom gives him aspirin and he leaves, but the whole family is left with an uneasy feeling. It is a reminder that tragedy can strike unexpectedly at any time, and that danger cannot always be foreseen and protected against. Miranda starts to be glad every morning and evening when they are all still alive and well. She begins to think about all the bad things that could happen again, and the positive feelings from the Christmas period begin to fall away. The chapter is ended on an uneasy note, as if something very bad is lurking just around the corner. The reader cannot help but feel that the family is not over the worst yet.



# Chapters 19-21

## Chapters 19-21 Summary

Miranda wakes up to find that her mother is sick and Jonny is delirious with fever. Matt tries to stand up but sways and has to sit down again. Miranda is the only one who is still well, so she goes to the hospital to get help. However, at the hospital Miranda only finds two nurses, who tell her that everyone else is dead, including Peter. They explain that it is a bad strain of flu, and all she can do is give her family food and fluids and let it run its course. Miranda returns home and tries to look after her family.

One night Miranda wakes up coughing and realizes that the wood stove has backfired. She remembers that smoke inhalation can kill and quickly takes blankets into the kitchen. Then she and Matt drag Jonny and their mom into the kitchen. Miranda tells the weakened Matt to stay there while she runs down to the basement and turns the oil furnace on. Thankfully there is still enough oil left to heat the house. Miranda then opens skylights and takes plywood off one of the windows in the sunroom to let the smoke out. She dries the wet wood stove by burning paper from one of the textbooks in it.

After a few days, Miranda's mom, Jonny and Matt all pull through and the flu is gone. Miranda keeps doing the housework, cleaning the sheets and sponge bathing her family, and clears the snow off the roof. Her mother asks about Peter and Miranda is forced to tell her that he died. Matt is still very weak, but he practices going up the stairs and manages more each time. Miranda and Jonny continue to practice skiing. One day the electricity suddenly comes back on. They turn on the radio and hear the list of the dead, as well as the president claiming that the country has turned the corner and that good times are ahead.

However, food is running out now. Miranda starts eating less than one meal a day and her mom is eating every other day. Miranda starts thinking about the order in which they will die. Miranda decides that she needs to sacrifice herself for the others, particularly Jonny. She cannot eat any more of their food, but she also doesn't want her mother to see her die, so she decides to walk into town, knowing she won't come back. She pretends she's going to the post office, and sets off. She almost collapses several times, but makes it into town. She sees a flyer about a meeting in the town hall and is curious, so she goes to see what it is. Inside, there are people handing out food. They give Miranda a lift home on their snowmobile and give her bags of food, promising to drop off more later. Sure enough, on Miranda's birthday they arrive with ten bags of food, and promise to bring them four bags every week. The family is now out of the worst and can look forward to the future again.





## Chapters 19-21 Analysis

These final chapters start off very badly, following on from the uneasy note at the end of Chapter 18. The family reaches a crisis point with flu and smoke threatening all their lives. Even if Miranda can get them out of the smoke, she has to fix the wood stove or they will all die later anyway. Thankfully, Miranda manages to avert disaster, save the wood stove, and nurse her family slowly back to health. It now looks as though the family has gone through the worst and things are looking better again. Miranda goes skiing again and the electricity comes back on. Even the president says the worst times are over. However, the reader is suddenly brought crashing back down to earth, because the food is running out. All the electricity and the hope in the world cannot keep them alive without food. Now things are really severe. Miranda goes down to less than one meal a day and her mother is hardly eating at all. The electricity, reflecting their mood, starts to go off again, and comes on in smaller bursts each time. This is like hope being given and then taken away again, which Miranda thinks is worse than never having been given it at all. Miranda now begins to think very morbid thoughts about how long any of them can survive and in which order they will die. She makes the decision to sacrifice herself for the good of her family, in the hope that maybe Jonny at least will survive. Now things have really hit rock bottom, and things cannot get any worse for the family. However, just as the reader thinks the book will have a very tragic ending, hope is suddenly offered again. This is the way things have been all the way through this story, since hope always seems to emerge just when things are looking terrible. This time, it seems things really have turned a corner, and the family will start receiving food regularly again. They are getting stronger, and Miranda no longer thinks they will die. Everything is far from normal, and perhaps it will never be normal again, but at least they are alive. The people who survived will have to get used to a new world and a new way of life. However, as long as Miranda has her family, she knows she will be alright. It is through the efforts of all of them, and the support and love they offered each other, that they have been able to survive. Though the future is still uncertain, the book ends on a final hopeful note.

Miranda shows what an incredible and strong person she has become in these final chapters. She shows that she can really come through in a crisis; when the wood stove backfires and smoke fills the sunroom, she remains level headed and quick thinking, and does not let herself give in to panic. She is very brave, and shows incredibly selfless behavior when looking after her family and endangering herself to do so. She understands how important the wood stove is to them, and manages to get it working again. She then nurses her family back to health, taking on all the responsibilities and work while they are too weak to do anything. She has changed so much since the beginning of the book. She is no longer a child. She calls Peter a hero, but she is a hero too. This is proved later when she sacrifices herself for the good of her family, and does so in a way that spares her mother having to watch her die. She has taken a lesson from Megan and her mother, and knows that she could never put her mother through what Megan's mother suffered. She shows what true sacrifice is, for the right reasons, for love rather than despair. Miranda is not giving up, but giving life to someone else. It is her decision to die that brings them life and saves her family, but not in the way she



had thought. Ironically, her choice to die is actually what saves her life, and had she tried to survive by staying at home, she would almost certainly have died. If she hadn't walked into town, she would never have known they were handing out food in the town hall, and her family would most likely have died one by one from starvation. Now they are all saved, thanks to Miranda. Miranda had been worrying earlier about her ability to be selfless, to be a hero, and to be strong enough to get through the crisis, and in these chapters she proves all of this to herself and to the readers.



# Characters

## Miranda

Miranda is the main character of the story, and it is told in first person from her point of view. She keeps a diary of her life, recording her feelings and anything significant that happens to her. She is sixteen years old and at the beginning of the story seems to be a very normal teenager. She lives at home with her mother and younger brother Jonny, and her older brother Matt is away at college. Her father has left her mother, and now lives in Springfield with his new wife Lisa who is pregnant with their first child. Miranda seems to handle this situation well, without resentment. She tries to be nice and act politely to Lisa, though it is clear that she is not yet completely comfortable with her. She lives mostly with her mother, but visits her father on holidays. She attends a normal high school and has a few friends, who she worries are growing apart as they take interest in different things. She worries about boys and being asked to the prom. She has a few interests outside of school, including ice-skating and swimming. She argues with her mother about what activities she will be allowed to do, since there is not enough money for her to do everything. Miranda's life is the average life of a teenager living in the US, and her preoccupations, worries and values all seem to be very ordinary for a girl her age.

Miranda's normal life soon takes a massive turn in another direction when the asteroid hits the moon and disaster strikes. Like all people her age, all over the world, things suddenly get very serious and her priorities and worries are forced to change. Miranda changes a great deal throughout the story since she has to adapt to a new way of life. At first, she is afraid and irritable, not understanding the severity of their situation. She worries about all the things in her life that she is used to and does not want to lose, like school, swim team and proms. She spends most of her time desperately hoping for things to return to normal, and it takes a long time for her to accept that things will never be the same again. She gets annoyed with her mother when she insists that Miranda change her behavior and values to fit their new situation. They cannot be the same people they once were, but must now focus on survival. Miranda resents being questioned over where she is going, and being told off for trying to help others. At first she is unwilling to accept that her mother is being sensible and trying to protect them, but as things get more and more severe she starts to see that survival will not be as easy as she had thought. She sees that her mother is right. However, as she gets hungrier and more scared, her temper gets shorter and she is more irritable. She hates all her mother's rules, while at the same time seeing that they are necessary. She also begins to feel that her mother is giving up on her and her future, as if she does not expect Miranda to survive. This frightens her, and also makes her very sad. On top of this, she is very jealous of Jonny, on whose survival her mother seems to be betting. Miranda sees that her mother is giving Jonny more food, and she interprets this as her mother loving him more. Miranda begins to get into lots of fights with her mother, and finds herself acting like a child; frustration and anger are her only way of coping with her fear and feelings of guilt and abandonment.



After a while, however, Miranda's anger turns into acceptance. She begins to realize that the world is altered forever, and manages to let go of all the things she used to worry and think about. She realizes that school, friends, boys, parties and possessions are not important. All that matters in the end is love, family and survival. She also realizes that her mother is right in thinking that Jonny has a better chance of survival than the rest of them, and actually agrees that he should be eating more food than her. She even comforts Jonny about it, and tries to assuage his guilt. This is such a turnaround from her earlier thoughts and behavior that it shows how much Miranda has grown up and matured through the crisis. She has come to understand what is important, and now knows that she would sacrifice herself for her little brother. This is something that she had worried about earlier, especially when faced with her friend Megan's selfless behavior towards others. She had worried that she could never be as good as Megan, and had felt guilty that she had been eating more than others. However, she proves this earlier worry completely wrong by the end of the book. Unlike Megan, she has always been determined to survive, and still values life and this world. Megan may seem like she is acting benevolently, but she has actually just given up on life. Miranda fights for her survival, which requires some selfish behavior, but when it matters she shows she is willing to sacrifice. When she thinks that her staying alive is endangering her brother, she decides that she needs to stop eating to give him a better chance. However, she is also determined not to cause her mother the grief of watching her die. She decides to walk into town and not come back, and so spare her mother. This is incredibly selfless and thoughtful behavior, and a more meaningful sacrifice than anything that Megan has done.

Miranda shows herself to be a very strong and brave young woman by the end of the story. She is faced with a frightening crisis when her family all get sick and she is the only one who can look after them. On top of this, the wood stove backfires, causing smoke to enter the sunroom. The smoke will kill them if Miranda does not get everybody out in time, but the cold will kill them if she does not save the wood stove. Miranda manages to get them to safety in another room, turn on the oil furnace so they don't freeze, and save the woodstove. She then spends the next few days nursing them back to health. This is very frightening for Miranda, who has not had to cope with anything on her own since the whole disaster began. She has always had her mother and Matt to lean on as the sensible ones with the solutions, and Jonny as the strong one. She proves that she can be just as quick thinking and sensible as her mother. This episode, combined with Miranda's willingness to sacrifice herself for her family, proves that she is a real hero.

## **Mom/Laura**

Laura is the mother of Miranda, Matt and Jonny. She is a published author and makes a living by writing books. She is divorced from her children's father, who is now living in a different town with his new wife, who is pregnant. Laura seems to have accepted this situation and gets on well with her ex-husband's new wife. She even thinks of her in the crisis, buying baby clothes for the new baby. She seems to think of her ex-husband and his wife as part of her extended family. Laura is also seeing someone else, though their



relationship is still very new. He is a doctor called Peter. Laura thinks about Peter during the crisis and invites him to come around, and sometimes leans on him for medical advice. However, Peter is never exactly treated as though he is one of the family, and she does not look after him in the same way she helps Mrs. Nesbitt and her children. In the crisis, Laura is forced to choose who she will dedicate herself to saving, and she picks her immediate family over her new boyfriend.

Laura is quick-thinking, calm and sensible during a crisis. She realizes before many other people do that the asteroid hitting the moon could have long term affects on the world and day-to-day life. She worries that shops may close and food may be scarce, so she pulls the children out of school to help her stock up on supplies. Miranda thinks that she has gone a little crazy, but Laura insists that it is better to be safe than sorry. This proves to be very sensible since the family only manages to survive thanks to her forethought in this matter.

When things get really bad, Laura tries to look after her children without worrying them. She sets rules, but does not always explain them very well to Miranda. This causes Miranda to get angry with her and frustrated, because she does not understand why they are having to ration food so much, or why her mother is insisting they change their normal behavior. Just like Miranda, Laura often reacts with anger when she is frightened and when things are hard. She gets into a lot of fights with her daughter, who wants to be treated with more trust rather than like a child. When things get very severe later in the book, Laura begins to give up a little. She loses interest in the future and stops insisting that the children study. She does not let them go out or have interests beyond survival. She gets very worried and depressed, and often seems to take this out on others. This is because she has taken sole responsibility for everybody on herself. When she realizes that she can trust her children and that they are very brave and capable, she begins to loosen up a little and look towards the future again. She takes pleasure in little things and tells Miranda that she should go skating. She begins to realize that they will all have to work together to get through the crisis, and that she cannot do everything herself. She also seems to realize that having the right attitude and enough hope is just as important as physical survival if they are going to get through this. There are two main events that cause this shift in her character and her attitude. The first is when she falls and sprains her ankle, and has to rely on the others taking care of her. Miranda bikes to the hospital to fetch Peter for her, and Laura sees how capable and grown up Miranda has become. The second event is when the family gets sick and the wood stove backfires, and Miranda deals with this whole disaster very sensibly and bravely. Her mother realizes that Miranda can be trusted and that they all need to stick together to survive.

Laura has to make some very difficult decisions in this story. She is forced into the terrible position of having to choose between her children. She knows that they may not all make it through the crisis alive, and thinks that Jonny has a better chance of survival than Miranda. Matt would have the best chance, but Matt would never take Miranda or Jonny's food. Jonny is also the youngest and still very much a child, and it is probable that Laura cannot bear the thought of him suffering. First Laura chooses all her children over herself, and begins to eat less and less. Then she asks Miranda and Matt to eat



less while Jonny eats more. Later, she asks Miranda to eat less than Matt and Jonny. She manages to enforce this and cope with the guilt, despite Miranda's initial tantrums and sense of betrayal, showing how strong-willed she is. It is clear that Laura feels a lot of guilt over this. She is a very loving woman who always tries to do what is best for her family. Miranda thinks she is a great example of sacrifice, because she spends all her time trying to help her family and never thinks about herself. She doesn't do this because she has given up, but out of love.

## Matt

Matt is Miranda and Jonny's older brother. He is away at college when the asteroid hits the moon, but returns home soon after. He is a very practical and sensible young man, and kind to his younger siblings. Miranda thinks of him as someone she can always lean on, and she looks up to him a great deal. She puts a lot of trust in him, and when he appears to be feeling afraid or giving up, this immediately affects her worse than if anyone else were down. When Matt comes home he takes the role of father in the absence of their dad. He looks after them and does anything physical that needs doing such as chopping wood. He is someone in whom their mother can confide without feeling like she needs to shelter him from the harsh reality of what is happening. He is also someone in whom Miranda can confide when she does not want to upset or worry her mother. Matt is very thoughtful and generous throughout all this, despite the fact that it must be tough to be the rock on whom everyone else thinks they can lean. Matt does not really have anyone else to whom he can turn when he is upset, and he can get a little irritable when he feels too put-upon. He is angry with his father for leaving, because he sees this as his dad abandoning his old family for his new one.

Matt is sensible and calm during a crisis, and often thinks of the best thing to do when they have problems. It is thanks to Matt that they still have oil in the furnace when they need it, and that the pipes did not freeze and cut off their water supply. It is also Matt's idea to get the skis out, which turn out to be a very useful way to get to town in the snow, and it is Matt who points out that they need to clear the sunroom roof so it does not collapse. It is also Matt who tends to be able to explain things more calmly to Miranda and Jonny and help them to see how worried and tired their mother is. He often plays the role of peace-maker.

## Jonny

Jonny is Miranda's younger brother. He is the youngest in the family, and so tends to be protected and treated like a child by the others. He is obsessed with baseball and determined to be a professional baseball player when he is older. He has an ordinary child's life until the asteroid hits the moon and disaster strikes, after which he is forced to grow up very quickly. As the youngest, he often does not understand how serious things are, and tends to do what the adults tell him without question. He is therefore less frightened than Miranda and less inclined to have tantrums or arguments. He is very quiet a lot of the time, but still picks up on what is going on and worries that they might



die. He grows up fast through the course of the story, and acts very maturely in situations during which children would normally get upset. For example, he understands that they cannot make a big deal of his birthday, and that he will get no cake or presents. Later, when he realizes that everyone else is eating more than him, he wants to eat less too. He does not want to be treated like a child and have more when everyone else is suffering. When the others try to persuade him he should eat more than them, he gets very upset, since he realizes that they are sacrificing so that he will survive. Miranda explains that they think he has a better chance, and that they need him to be strong. Jonny worries that he is not strong enough mentally to cope with the crisis, or to carry on if they all die, but he proves many times in the story that he is.

## **Peter**

Peter is Laura's boyfriend and a family friend. He is a doctor, and when the crisis happens he is determined to carry on helping people for as long as he can. He moves out of his office and into the hospital. When he comes to visit the family he always brings food. Miranda notes that he always seems very tired and depressed, and that he always brings bad news. He is a doctor, so he sees the many different ways people are dying. He warns them against mosquitoes, unhealthy air, allergies, sickness and bad water. He also helps when Laura hurts her ankle. His determination to heal people is taking its toll on his health, and his selfless behavior eventually leads to his death, because he does not do enough to ensure his own survival and puts himself at risk for others. This makes Miranda very sad, since by the end of the book she has come to accept him as family, though she had not been sure of him at first.

## **Mrs. Nesbitt**

Mrs. Nesbitt is the family's neighbor, and a life-long friend of Miranda's mother. She reveals later that she has always thought of Miranda as a daughter, and of the children as grandchildren. In turn, they consider her family, and are determined to protect her and help her during the crisis. Mrs. Nesbitt is a very old lady, and quite frail, but she is mentally still very sharp, and keeps up her sense of humor even when things are very bad. She knows that she is too old to make it through the crisis alive, but is determined not to give up. She shows that she is both very brave, and at the same time very gracious. She is kind to Miranda's family, and insists that when she is dead they take anything they need from her house. She talks of her own death calmly and bravely, and Miranda is moved by her attitude.

## **Dad**

Miranda, Matt and Jonny's father lives in Springfield with his new wife, who is pregnant with their first child. He still keeps in contact with his old family, and is anxious for his children to accept his new wife Lisa. When the crisis strikes, he tries to keep in contact with them, but this gets increasingly difficult. Eventually, he is forced to choose between



his two families, and chooses to go to Colorado with Lisa to go stay with her parents. He cannot help and protect both families. Matt is annoyed with him for choosing Lisa and abandoning them, but the others seem more accepting of his choice. He tries to help them as much as he can before he goes. They receive a few letters from him indicating that it is hard to get to Colorado, and they never find out whether he actually made it there alive. At the end of the book, the reader still does not know if he and Lisa survived.

## Lisa

Lisa is the new wife of Miranda, Matt and Jonny's father. She is quite a bit younger than her new husband, and is pregnant with her first child. She seems very frightened by the crisis, and she is also very emotional. She is extremely happy when she sees the baby clothes Laura bought her, but afraid and depressed when Jonny asks about their future. She excuses herself and goes to bed, and soon after that they leave. Their father explains that she is very anxious about her pregnancy.

## Megan

Megan is Miranda's friend from high school. She is a very religious girl who has grown distant from Miranda because of her new fervor for God. She spends most of her time at church or with her new religious friends. She seems to believe deeply in the importance of being saved and entering heaven, and is constantly trying to get Miranda to repent and act more like a Christian. Megan gives up her lunchtime sandwiches at school to the other children, and Miranda argues with her that she should eat the food herself. Megan talks about the need to sacrifice things for her God, and seems to believe that the whole crisis has been sent by God to punish mankind for their sins. Her idea of sacrifice is to barely eat, and eventually to give up her friendship with Miranda too. Miranda feels sorry for her, and tries to persuade her otherwise, but Megan will not listen. It is obvious to Miranda that Megan has simply given up on life. Miranda also believes that she is under the influence of an evil reverend called Reverend Marshall. Eventually, Megan's self-starvation leads to her death.

## Megan's Mom

Megan's mother despairs of Megan's newfound religious zeal and wishes that she could persuade her to eat more. She does not understand why her daughter has given up, and suffers watching her slowly die. When Megan does die, Megan's mother kills herself.

## Reverend Marshall

Reverend Marshall is the reverend who seems to be influencing Megan to stop eating and give up on life. He is not thin and appears to be healthy, and Miranda realizes that he is taking food from his congregation. She thinks he is evil, and that his holiness is all





pretense. He is manipulating people who trust him in order to survive, and does not seem to care about anyone else.

## Sammi

Sammi is Miranda's other friend from high school. She is more interested in boys than the other two, and seems to be focusing on dating as a way to cope with her friend Becky's death. She finds a forty-year-old man who is willing to look after her, and decides to travel south with him, where they have heard that conditions are better. She does not seem particularly happy about this, but is resigned to the fact that it is her best chance of survival. Her parents encourage her to go, wanting her to survive even if it means losing her.

## Dan

Dan is a boy from Miranda's high school who is also on the swim team. She meets him at Miller's Pond when she goes swimming there, and they start a relationship. She goes back there to talk to him and kiss him, but they do not take things any further. He says he would like to take her to prom if there ever is another one. When things get really bad, Dan also leaves to try to find a place where things are better. Miranda likes Dan, but her relationship with him seems to be more about finding comfort in someone else and something seemingly normal, than about any real feelings they have for each other.

## Becky

Becky is Miranda's old friend who died before the whole crisis began. It is not explained how she died, but it seems to have been from a long, protracted illness. She was also Megan and Sammi's friend, and it seems to be her death that started the girls drifting in different directions. Miranda often dreams of Becky, who seems to represent her feelings of guilt over surviving when others do not.

## Brandon Erlich

Brandon is a professional skater who lives in the same town as Miranda. His skating coach is also the same coach who taught Miranda, before an injury stopped her from skating. Miranda is slightly obsessed with Brandon at the beginning of the story, following his career and idolizing him. However, she soon forgets about him when things get really hard. Towards the end of the story, when Miranda decides to go skating on Miller's Pond, she meets Brandon there. He has returned home, and is using the pond to practice. They skate and talk, and it is a brief perfect interlude in Miranda's difficult life. He asks her to come back but she has to look after her injured mother. She never sees him again, and even wonders if she dreamed or made up the whole event.

## Horton

Horton is Miranda's family's cat. He is part of the family, and even when times get really hard they do not ever consider eating him. Often Horton helps to cheer them up by curling up near them and offering silent comfort or support. Horton is particularly fond of Jonny. Miranda accidentally loses him one night, and feels terribly guilty, but thankfully Horton wanders home on his own. Horton helps to save them all when the wood stove backfires, when his yowling wakes Miranda up before the smoke can kill them.



# Objects/Places

## The Moon

All the disasters in this story are caused by one event: an asteroid hitting the moon. The asteroid is denser than expected, and so has a bigger impact on the moon than expected. The observers notice that when it hits, the whole moon seems to move closer to the Earth. This is exactly what has happened, because the asteroid knocked the moon into a closer orbit. The moon's gravitational pull therefore increases, causing all sorts of natural disasters like tsunamis, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. In this story, the moon goes from being something familiar to something sinister.

## Ash Cloud

When the volcanoes all erupt, they spew a lot of ash into the atmosphere. This gets blown around the world by the wind, causing a huge ash cloud that blocks out the sun. This makes the sky permanently grey, reflecting the bleak outlook for the world and for Miranda and her family. Without the sun, crops die, and the weather begins to get very cold.

## The Oil Furnace

Miranda's family has an oil furnace in the basement, which heats the house in the absence of natural gas for the main heating. They switch this on when the natural gas is turned off, to keep the house warm and ensure that the pipes do not freeze and cut off their water supply. When the water runs out, they decide to preserve the oil and turn the furnace off. They use the wood stove for heat instead. When the wood stove backfires, Miranda turns the furnace back on briefly while she fixes the wood stove. The oil furnace is just one of the things that help to keep the family alive.

## The Wood Stove

The wood stove is a wood-burning heater in the sunroom. This is a luxury item that the family is lucky to possess, since it ends up saving their life. When all the other heating fails, they can still burn chopped wood in the wood stove to get enough heat to survive. Ironically, the wood stove also nearly kills them, when one day it backfires and smoke begins to fill the sunroom. Miranda fixes it by removing the wet logs and drying out the wood stove by burning dry paper in it.



## Miranda's House

Most of the story is set in Miranda's house, which shrinks as conditions worsen. First they have to close off the upstairs so that they only have to heat the downstairs. Then they close off each room until there is only the sunroom left.

## The Sunroom

This is the room in which the wood stove is kept. It is here that Miranda's family eventually ends up when all the other rooms are closed off, sharing one small space in order to survive. The sunroom represents a lack of privacy for Miranda, but it is also a place of family, support and love. After a hopeful Christmas, Miranda is determined to make it feel like a home rather than a survival shelter, so she decorates it as best she can.

## Miller's Pond

Miller's Pond is where Miranda likes to go to spend some time away from her family. At first she swims here, but when it gets too cold and ices over, she comes here to skate. This is where she meets Dan and has a brief relationship with him. This is also where she skates and talks with Brandon Erlich, her skating idol. Miller's Pond represents freedom and hope to Miranda, and is a place where she can feel like she has a normal life again.

## The High School

Miranda attends the high school with her friends until it is closed for the summer. Due to food shortages, teacher shortages and other problems, only two schools are reopened after the summer: the high school and the elementary school. Miranda wants to attend the high school for a feeling of normalcy, but the town has now become too dangerous for her to walk to alone. Instead she goes to the elementary school, but is told that there are not enough teachers there to teach high school classes. In the end she is forced to be home schooled.

## Town Centre

The town centre is a normal town centre in an average American town. It has shops, a post office, a library, a high school, a hospital, a town hall, and a police office. When things start to get severe, shops and buildings close. The library and the post office stay open as long as possible, but eventually they have to close too. There are no more police, and law and order is no longer upheld. The town becomes unsafe as gangs of young men roam the streets with guns, taking what they want from others and selling on the black market. When Miranda realizes how unsafe it has become, she does not dare



go into town on her own. However, in a crisis she does not hesitate to go to the hospital. At the end of the book, the town hall reopens and food is being handed out, indicating that things are finally getting better again.

## The Post Office

The Post Office remains open for a long time when other buildings close. When it can only remain open with the help of volunteers, Matt decides he will work there. The post office is a symbol of hope for Miranda's family, since it their only way of getting news from their father.

## The Library

The library remains open when other buildings in town close, and only closes when the heat is turned off. Miranda likes to come here to borrow books, because it gives her the sense that some things are staying normal.

## Skis

When it begins to snow heavily, Matt gets the skis out of the garage. On New Year's he makes a resolution to learn how to cross country ski so that he can go to town when needed. Miranda and Jonny join him, and soon the skis become a way for them to get some freedom. Skiing is also an activity on which they can focus, giving them something fun to help them enjoy life and have a reason to live. The skis therefore represent hope and freedom.

## Textbooks

Miranda brings back textbooks from the school, and the family members each choose a subject to study. At first Miranda's mother does not care about schoolwork, but when she gains new hope she insists on them all studying again. This proves that she is more hopeful about the future, which helps Miranda and Jonny feel better. The textbooks represent hope and are important for morale, because there is only a point in studying if they think there will actually be a future to study for. By studying, therefore, they are showing that they are not giving up on life.

## Canned Food

Miranda's mother buys huge stocks of canned food on Crazy Shopping Day soon after the asteroid hits the moon. This turns out to be very sensible, because food runs out and they have to live off their stores of canned food.



## The Radio

The family listens to the radio whenever the electricity comes back on, and sometimes they also listen to it with batteries. The radio keeps them connected to the outside world by telling them what is happening elsewhere, and by listing the dead. This is morbid, but it proves that life is continuing.

## The Hospital

The hospital remains open when all the other buildings in town close. Peter moves here in order to help more people. Soon the hospital fills up with sick and injured people, from diseases, air pollution, allergies and other dangers. The hospital is forced to post guards at the doors in order to protect the medicine and the people inside from looters and gangs. Unfortunately, this makes the hospital and Peter hard for Miranda to access. Eventually, everybody at the hospital dies of flu, including Peter.

## Chocolate Chips

Miranda eats a whole pack of chocolate chips one day when she is particularly upset and hungry. Her mother catches her and it causes a massive argument. However, this argument does help to clear the air, and stops Miranda's mother from behaving like a robot who is only focused on survival.

## Mrs. Nesbitt's House

Miranda and her mother often go to visit their old neighbor Mrs. Nesbitt. Her house is not described, but it does have an oil heater like Miranda's house. When Mrs. Nesbitt dies, the family takes what they can from her house, including food and water that help them to survive. Miranda also finds gifts here that she can give to her family on Christmas.

## Crazy Shopping Day

This is what Miranda calls the day soon after the asteroid hit the moon, in which her mother took her and Jonny out of school in order to buy supplies. On Crazy Shopping Day they each take a cart and fill it with as much dry and canned food, bottles of water, medicine and other supplies as they can. They go back for more and more until the supermarket is ransacked and their car is full. There are other people panicking and buying food in the shop, and Miranda thinks that they and her mom are all a little crazy. However, they come to be very thankful for their mother's foresight and good sense as the food, water and electricity runs out.



# Themes

## Survival

Survival is the main theme of this story, as every person in it struggles to survive the crisis that happens when the asteroid hits the moon. At first it seems as though survival will consist of adapting to the changes in the world, and managing to hold on to enough food to last until things are sorted out again. However, it quickly becomes clear that this will not be nearly enough, and that it is going to be a very long time before life regains any sense of normalcy.

The first and most important thing that needs to be survived is the lack of food. Shops close, deliveries stop, and food quickly becomes scarce. Miranda's mother has the foresight and good sense to stock up on supplies when the crisis first began, meaning that the family has a lot more food stored away than most other people. Miranda's mother is also practical and sensible, and does not give in to panic as other people do. She makes sure to stock up on food that will last, such as dry and canned food. Other people panic in the shop and buy too much perishable food, such as fresh meat and vegetables. Miranda's mother also shows very good sense in introducing rationing within her house very quickly, making sure her food lasts as long as possible. Miranda thinks this is all crazy, but her mother insists that it is better to be safe than sorry. Other people who think like Miranda suffer for it later. By rationing the food, Miranda's mother ensures that they have enough to last until winter before the supplies begin to very seriously run out. This shows some of the most important traits for survival: good sense, practicality, forethought and self-restraint.

It soon becomes apparent that food will not be the only problem in this new world. The moon is now closer to the earth, causing a greater gravitational pull. This causes tsunamis, earthquakes, storms and volcanic eruptions. Those lucky enough to survive these or to live in unaffected areas soon realize that they are not untouched after all. The ash clouds from all the volcanic eruptions gather in the atmosphere and are blown around by the wind. They block out the sun all over the world, causing crops to die and the weather to get a lot colder very quickly. This means that no new food can be grown. The ash in the air is also polluting water and causing asthma. On top of this, diseases are spreading, some caused by mosquitoes and some by the cold. A particularly nasty strain of flu wipes out a lot of people. Others die from allergies because they are so desperate to eat that they even eat things to which they are allergic. Miranda's family is forewarned about a lot of this by Peter, and they are very lucky to have a friend who is a doctor. Miranda's mother and older brother Matt also show incredible foresight and good sense by chopping wood and storing as much as they can. They know that the electricity cannot last forever, and that the natural gas will be switched off eventually too. This turns out to be true, meaning that their only source of heat is an oil furnace and a wood stove. There is no more oil available, so soon there will only be a wood stove to keep them alive in the freezing winter. They are very glad of all their logs. This shows good sense, but also a good amount of luck, since many families do not have a



wood stove. Matt also thinks about heating the house with the oil furnace to keep the pipes from freezing, or they will lose their water. When the water does eventually run out, he insists on preserving the oil they have left, and they all move into the sunroom. Thankfully, Miranda's mother had purchased plenty of bottled water on Crazy Shopping Day, which now helps to keep the family alive. Matt's insistence on preserving the oil also ensures their survival when the wood stove backfires and Miranda has to move her sick family into the kitchen. When flu strikes, it is Miranda's determination and level-headed thinking in a crisis that keep them alive. Each one of them plays their part many times, and they could never survive without each other. This demonstrates two more important aspects of survival: solidarity as a family, and adapting to problems.

Another essential survival tactic is the willingness to be selfish. Miranda's mother quickly makes it clear that only by sticking together as a family can they survive. This means helping each other, but not helping anyone else. She spells it out when she tells Miranda that friendship is not a luxury they can afford. They must save all their supplies for themselves, and not risk themselves for anyone else. She tells Miranda off for running to get Dan when the school is handing out food, in case she had missed her chance while getting him. Miranda is shocked at first, because her mother has always been charitable and compassionate. She soon realizes that her mother is correct, however. She recognizes that nobody else is talking about what supplies they have, and that everyone at school has become more secretive. She also disapproves of Megan giving her food away. She feels guilt that she cannot do the same, and that she has more than everyone else, but she still eats her share. Megan is not willing to be selfish to survive, and gives up on life instead. Even Miranda's father shows his selfish survival streak when he abandons them to look after himself and Lisa. Matt is angry with him for doing it, but the others recognize that this is what he has to do. Peter, on the other hand, is an example of how selflessness only leads to death. Peter is determined to help others as long as he can, and works at the hospital trying to cure people. He eventually works himself to death, because he would not take the time to look after himself. He put himself in danger of getting ill when he really needed his strength, and died at the hospital of exhaustion and flu. Miranda remarks that he is a hero, but her mother says she wishes there were less heroes. In other words, she wishes he had been a bit more selfish and had survived.

Although a certain amount of selfishness is necessary, solidarity and sacrifice where it counts are also needed to survive as a family. None of Miranda's family could have survived on their own, and none of them would have wanted to survive if it meant abandoning the others. As a family they need to be selfish, but as individuals in the family they need to help each other. This is what Miranda does when her family is sick, instead of simply leaving them to save herself. This is what keeps them alive so long. In the end, Miranda, her mother, and Matt all agree that Jonny has the best chance out of all of them. They eat less than him to keep him strong, and Miranda eventually decides to sacrifice her life for his. This shows that heroics and sacrifice can still exist, even if charity and selflessness towards strangers need to be abandoned in order to survive.

Finally, it is not simply physical behavior but the right mental attitude that is vital to survival. This is something that Miranda's mother does not always understand, and she





often gets very depressed and seems to give up on the future. This is because she is weighed down by her responsibility, worries, and guilt. Later, however, when she is given reason to hope again, she manages to get the right spirit. She insists that the children continue to study, proving to them that she believes they have a future. She also insists they have interests beyond mere survival, such as skating and skiing. The others respond well to this, because it helps to alleviate their fears that there will be no future at all. Without a reason to live, and hope for the future, people simply give up. This is what has happened to Megan, and is in danger of happening to Miranda's mother before the Christmas period, the caroling, and her own family's love and support cheer her up. Each of them have their own ways of getting their morale up. For Miranda it is skating on Miller's Pond, or decorating the sunroom to make it a home. For Matt it is skiing and going into town, and later drawing. For Jonny it is anything to do with baseball, and for their mom it is her insistence on them studying for their futures. Even mom joins in with this, learning French to give her something on which to focus. It is this determination to survive, and the conviction that life is good and not worth giving up on, that really keeps them alive through the difficult times.

## Sacrifice

Sacrifice is a recurring theme in this story. Megan introduces the idea when she begins to give up her school lunches to other hungry children. Miranda questions her about it, and Megan explains that God caused the crisis to punish mankind for their sins, and that the only way to heaven is through sacrifice. She becomes more obsessed with this idea as the story goes on, until she has lost all interest and hope in this world and has become focused on the next. Megan thinks that she is making meaningful sacrifices, of food and friendship, for her God, but Miranda thinks that she has simply given up. However, Megan's sacrifices do affect Miranda. Miranda begins to feel considerable 'survivor's guilt' as she sees that she has more food than others, and begins to understand that in order to survive it is essential to be a little selfish. She looks at Megan and wonders if she could ever have the strength to give up something for somebody else. She worries that she could not give up food for her little brother if he really needed it. Her guilt and worry begin to affect her dreams, as she dreams that she is refused entry into heaven because she is not good enough to be dead. The implication is that if she were a really good person, she would be dead already, because the people who survive are the selfish ones who refuse to help others. There is a certain amount of truth in this, since both Megan and Peter die in this story, and both of them had given up their own futures to give to others. However, Miranda comes to the conclusion that Megan's sacrifice is meaningless, because she has given up on life and does not really want to be alive. True sacrifice, to Miranda, is about fighting for life and for the people you love. She thinks her mother is a good example of true sacrifice, because she thinks of her family's well-being over her own. Her mother would never sacrifice meaninglessly, but out of love.

Peter is a slightly better example of sacrifice than Megan, but like Megan he does appear to have given up on himself. His wife has left him and his children have died long before this crisis, and he seems to feel the need to care for and protect everyone



but himself. He is a sad person, and seems to get more tired and depressed as the story goes on. The only thing he has to live for is Miranda's mother, but she has to be focused on her own family now. Peter chooses to sacrifice himself to help others instead. His death is heroic but also very sad.

Although Miranda had worried earlier in the story that she could not sacrifice for her brother if needed, she proves herself wrong at the end of the book. She realizes that her mother is right, and that Jonny does have the best chance of all of them. She agrees that he should have more food, and when the food begins to run out she decides to sacrifice her life for his. She is brave enough to do this, and kind enough to do it in a way that will not make her mother suffer, as Megan's mother did. Miranda shows how selfless and heroic she can be too, and walks into town to save her family the suffering of watching her die slowly. She does not sacrifice herself because she has given up, but out of love for Jonny. In some ways, this whole story is about Miranda's sacrifice, as the reader sees her initially fighting against it, then coming to terms with it, then actually doing it. It is almost as if Miranda has known all along that this day would come, but has needed all her experiences along the way to give her the strength to do it when the time comes. Miranda's sacrifice is rewarded; she finds food and saves herself and her whole family. This would not have happened if she had not walked into town. Ironically, by sacrificing her life, she saves her life.

## What is Really Important in Life

This story explores what is really important in life. At the beginning, Miranda and her family are concerned about the same things with which normal American families are concerned. Miranda has an ordinary teenage life, and worries about friends, schoolwork and boys. Jonny is obsessed with baseball and determined to be a professional player. Matt attends college, and Miranda's mother has a job, a boyfriend, and a family to run. However, when the asteroid hits the moon, everything changes, and old concerns are forgotten. Miranda tries to cling to the normal things of her old life, such as school and friends, but it soon becomes apparent that the world has changed too much. Miranda comes to learn that what she thought was important really isn't, and that other things in life matter more.

School and grades are one of the first things to be lost, as Miranda quickly realizes that these are not important in a world where survival is the main concern. Nobody knows what the future will hold, and schoolwork and grades suddenly seem less important. Later, Miranda's mother insists the children study again, but this is less about grades than it is about trying to give them some kind of hope that there will be a future. After school goes, so does contact with friends, and any thought of boyfriends. Later, Miranda finds Dan at Miller's Pond, but their relationship is also soon given up. In order to survive, Miranda has to forget all the minor worries of her old life, as well as seemingly important things like friendship. Instead, she focuses on her family. The reader can see how important this has become to her when she chooses to stay with her mother rather than go see her idol Brandon at the pond. Obsessing over Brandon is suddenly very unimportant, but caring for her family is vital. The things that are now important to



Miranda are food, warmth and shelter, and most importantly family and love. This is the message conveyed at Christmas, when Miranda reflects that it is the best Christmas ever because it is the one in which the spirit of Christmas has been best upheld. By the time Miranda decides to sacrifice herself for her brother, she has shed all her old concerns and values, and held on to only the most important: love.

## Civilization

This story explores what happens when life as people know it is disrupted and changed forever. First, small things are lost, such as CNN and mobile phone networks. This is frightening enough for people, since they had always come to associate these familiar day-to-day things with civilization. Next to go is the internet, then McDonald's, which Miranda finds particularly shocking because she had assumed McDonald's would always be there until the end of the world. Then people begin to lose electricity, shops close, and gas is beginning to run out so it is harder to use cars. When these things are gone, people react as though civilization itself is breaking down. This is because we have come to associate modern conveniences as being a natural part of life. People take these things for granted because they are there every day without fail. However, these things do not constitute civilization; they are simply part of modern life. Miranda realizes that when she has to call on her friends without texting or emailing them first, she is like one of the women in a Jane Austen novel. In other words, she feels as if she has been transported back to the Georgian times. This is a period in history when cars, the internet, phones, electricity and fast food were not available, and yet people managed to live perfectly fine. Modern technology is not essential to civilization.

This brings up the question of what civilization is and when can we say that it is beginning to break down. In this story, things go much further than the loss of a few modern conveniences. When schools are closed, when there are no more police and no law and order, when hospitals have to have guards and families begin to isolate themselves just to survive, it begins to look as though civilization really is disintegrating. The biggest blow to civilization is the fact that there is no more sense of community, and that all contact between people is beginning to cease. However, civilization is not dead, and humanity continues to exist. Miranda constantly talks about the world ending, and it must seem like the end of the world when it is the end of civilization as we know it, but this is not true. The world never does end in this story, and civilization manages to endure.

## Growing Up

The crisis in this story causes the characters in it to grow up very quickly. Jonny begins the story as a child, but soon becomes very quiet and withdrawn. He does what he is told, but shows that he picks up on the feelings around him and asks questions about their future. He deals with events calmly and appears to perfectly understand the severity of what is happening. He shows very mature behavior on his birthday, and never throws tantrums or gets into fights. In some ways he acts more maturely than



Miranda, though this is partly because he is more sheltered from the worry than she is. Miranda reflects how much Jonny has changed, and how he did not have enough chance to be a normal child. Now he cannot play and enjoy himself, but must focus on survival with them. He never had the chance to be a teenager, but went straight from child to grown-up. However, at points Jonny does still show how young he really is, such as his excitement over the snow, or over the battery-powered baseball game.

Miranda is also forced to grow up fast. She is not as sheltered from the reality of their situation as Jonny is, and forced to put up with a lot more worry. In turn, she expects to be trusted more, and gets very angry with her mother when she is not. She is constantly afraid, and resents the fact that her mother does not explain things properly to her, or attempt to comfort her as she would Jonny. She also feels very jealous of Jonny because he is more protected than her and allowed to eat more food than her. She interprets this as her mother loving Jonny more. She reacts to this by acting quite childishly, having tantrums and getting into fights with her mother. She also attempts to cling to her old life for as long as she can, refusing to accept that she can no longer be a teenager. However, when she does start to understand the severity of their situation, she responds bravely and maturely. She helps with housework and rationing, collects wood and makes sure Mrs. Nesbitt is alright. She cycles into town when needed. When her mother is injured, she looks after her, and even gives up going to see a boy at the pond in order to care for her. She also begins to realize how her mother is right about giving Jonny more food, and even helps to reassure him when he is upset about it. When her whole family gets sick with the flu and the wood stove backfires, Miranda deals with the crisis calmly and efficiently, and then nurses her family back to health. She shows how brave, level-headed, mature, sensible and determined she has become. She starts the story as an average sixteen-year-old girl, but ends it as a young woman.



# Style

## Point of View

The story is told in first person from the point of view of Miranda. It is presented as her diary, and so has an entry for almost every day. This is a very personal format, allowing Miranda to share with the reader her most intimate thoughts and feelings. This really helps the reader to get into her head and so understand her character better. The reader is given first hand evidence of how she reacts to things and how she feels about them. When Miranda seems to be angry and argumentative, the reader knows that she is really very frightened, or feeling guilty. This helps to make Miranda a more sympathetic character. Because we are being told the story from Miranda's diary, rather than usual first person narrative, it also means that the reader has no idea if Miranda survives. If Miranda were telling us the story in past tense from the future, then the reader would know that she is alive and able to tell her story. However, in this case each diary entry is written at the end of each day, meaning that Miranda could die at the end of the book and her diary would simply stop.

Miranda is a good choice of point of view character, because she is a sixteen-year-old girl who had a fairly normal teenager's life before the crisis began. This means that the reader can relate to her more easily. It also means that readers can see how the crisis affects ordinary people, and can imagine that their own experiences would be similar. This helps to make the story more immediate.

## Setting

The story is set within a normal American town, far enough inland to not be affected by the flooding of the seaboard. Before the asteroid hits the moon the town is like any other in the USA. It has a town centre, several schools, shops and strip malls, fast food places and friendly neighborhoods. When the crisis hits and things begin to get very hard, the town begins to fall apart. Shops and schools are closed, and neighbors no longer interact. The library and the post office remain open for a while, but even these are forced to close eventually. The only public place that remains open is the hospital, which has to post guards at the doors. By the end of the book, the town feels more like a war zone than an ordinary American town.

Most of the story takes place in Miranda's house. It seems to be a comfortable, average American home, with bedrooms, a kitchen, dining room, living room and a sunroom. Miranda also likes to visit Miller's Pond near her house, and they regularly visit their neighbor Mrs. Nesbitt. Miranda attends high school briefly at the beginning of the book, but this is soon forced to close. As conditions get worse, Miranda notices that her world begins to shrink. First she loses school, then it becomes unsafe for her to go to town on her own. Eventually it gets too cold to go to Miller's Pond, and Mrs. Nesbitt dies. As things get really bad, the house begins to shrink too. First they are forced to abandon



the upstairs, then the dining room and living room are shut up. When the water runs out there is no more reason to keep the oil furnace going, so they move into the sunroom. Miranda's world has been reduced to one room shared by four people and a cat at the end of the book. Miranda's shrinking world echoes her shrinking list of concerns. She is forced to forget her old life, friends, boys, parties and other normal teenage things, then to forget her interest in swimming and skating. In the end, she realizes that all that is important is love, family and survival.

## Language and Meaning

The language used in the story tends to be very simple, everyday language. This is because Miranda is a normal teenager, and would not use flowery or expressive language. It is also because she is writing in her diary, in which people tend to write in a very clear and straightforward style, rather than with any literary flair. As a result, there are very few metaphors and similes, or allegories and allusions in the text. This helps the story to feel more realistic and grounded. However, some poetic license is used. In a diary, a person is not likely to spend long describing things, or explaining events in any detail. A diary also usually sums up a person's feelings at the time they are writing it, rather than remembering exactly how they felt at a specific time. Miranda's diary does not do this, but describes and explains things in detail for the reader. This is of course a necessary narrative technique, since there would not be a very interesting story otherwise.

## Structure

The book is structured like a diary, since the story is told in the form of Miranda's diary. There is an entry for almost every day, with days only missed out if nothing interesting happens during them. This helps to keep the diary format more authentic, because people do tend to write in their diaries every day, and only miss days if nothing at all happens. If Miranda is even feeling something, like fear or boredom, she will make a quick note of it in her diary. Within this format, the author has been able to keep things interesting by ensuring that there is always something happening for Miranda to discuss, and cliff-hangers are often left from one day to the next. The diary format also gives a sense of Miranda trying to hold on to a life, rather than just simply surviving without really living.

The book is split into chapters, which helps to break up sections in which significant things happen. On top of this, the book is also split into four sections corresponding to the four seasons. This helps to break up a structure that could otherwise seem quite monotonous and daunting to the reader, making it more accessible. It also helps the reader to understand when major changes are taking place. The sections that are named after the different seasons also highlight the fact that the weather has altered so much. The book is still set in summer when the first frost comes, and they are already worrying about freezing to death before they are anywhere near winter.



## Quotes

"Sometimes when mom is getting ready to write a book she says she doesn't know where to start, that the ending is so clear to her that the beginning doesn't seem important any more. I feel that way now only I don't know what the ending is, not even what the ending is tonight." Page 18

"'My cell phone is out!' someone screamed a few doors down, and she sounded the way we'd felt when we saw CNN was gone. Civilization has ended." Page 22

"I'm already starting to forget what normal life felt like, clocks that were on time, and lights that went on with the flick of a switch, and Internet, and street lights, and supermarkets, and McDonald's, and..." Page 58

"One thing Matt did say to me was that no matter what the future is, we're living through a very special time in history. He said that history makes us who we are, but we can make history, also, and that anyone can be a hero, if they just choose to be." Page 56

"I don't want to have anything more to be afraid of. I didn't start this diary for it to be a record of death." Page 72

"We are all still alive, and I'm really not ready for Heaven. Not as long as I can swim in Miller's Pond and go on make-believe dates with Dan and dream about the possibility of eating pancakes slathered in maple syrup." Page 92

"Watching sitcoms was like eating toast. Two months ago, it was so much a part of my life I didn't even notice it. But now it feels like Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny and the Tooth Fairy and the Wizard of Oz all rolled into one." Page 95

"'Sharing is a luxury,' she said. 'We can't afford luxuries right now.'" Page 101

"This life, this everyday existence, is the one gift we're given. To throw it away, to want it to be dead, to me that's the sin." Page 115

"Sometimes it's safer to cry about people you don't know than to think about people you really love." Page 199

"I feel myself shriveling along with my world, getting smaller and harder. I'm turning into a rock, and in some ways that's good, because rocks last for ever. But if this is how I'm going to last for ever, then I don't want to." Page 237

"Do people ever realize how precious life is? I know I never did before. There was always time. There was always a future." Page 289

"I never knew I could love as deeply as I do. I never knew I could be so willing to sacrifice things for other people." Page 289



"But today, when I am 17 and warm and well fed, I'm keeping this journal for myself so I can always remember life as we knew it, life as we know it, for a time when I am no longer in the sunroom." Page 339





## Topics for Discussion

What methods and tactics do Miranda and her family use to survive? What kind of attitude and values are needed for survival? Who does not survive and why?

Discuss sacrifice in this story. Who sacrifices something and why? When is sacrifice meaningful, and is it ever meaningless?

Discuss faith in this story. In your answer you should think about different kinds of faith, such as religious faith, faith in family and others, and faith in oneself.

What lessons does Miranda learn in this story? How does she change and why? Is she a better person at the end of the book?

How does this story represent civilization? What is civilization and what things are needed to keep it going? Does it ever fall apart in this book, or does it just feel like it for the people involved?

Discuss love in this story. What different kinds of love are shown, and which are the most powerful? Who displays love and when? How does love help Miranda and her family to survive?

How do people's values change throughout the story? What things are shown as being really important in life, and what things are quickly forgotten? Do you think Miranda and her family end up valuing what is really important, or do they lose sight of it in the crisis?

How do the children in this story grow up throughout the course of the book? What causes these changes?

Are there any heroes in this story? If so, who? If not, why?

Discuss guilt in this story. Who feels guilty and why? Are there any cases of 'survivor guilt'? How do characters manage to deal with this guilt? Do you think they are right to feel guilty?

Is Megan a better person than Miranda? Do you think Miranda is correct to insist that life is wonderful and the real sin is to give up on it? Is Megan correct in saying that Miranda is selfish and a sinner? Is Megan's sacrifice meaningful or not?

If an asteroid were to hit the moon tomorrow, would you survive? Think about everything that happens in the story, and the way the characters manage to deal with each new problem. Think about your own life, family and home. Would you be able to survive all the things Miranda faces? If you had to sacrifice yourself for a person you love, could you do it? Base your answers on the actions of the characters in this story, as well as your own experiences. Use examples from the book to support your answers.