

Lightning Study Guide

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Plot Summary

January 12, 1955, was a gray day, and twilight found Dr. Paul Markwell drinking heavily, though he was on call at County General. He is very drunk by the time he's called to County General because his patient, Janet Shane, is in labor and is in trouble. Markwell notes that he's too drunk to respond but will anyway, figuring that sooner or later he will make a serious medical mistake; he waits for the day with a "perverse" pleasure. Lightning strikes just feet from his house as he gets into his car and he cringes, thinking it an omen. The lightning accompanied a time traveler, Stefan, from the year 1944. He is part of an experiment in Berlin, Germany, under Hitler, in which he's using time travel to predict outcomes of specific battles and to steal technologies from the future, all in an attempt to win the war. Stefan prevents the doctor from going to the hospital because he's seen Laura's future and knows that Markwell's mistake will put Laura, the baby that Janet delivers, in a wheelchair for the rest of her life. Another doctor handles the delivery and Laura is healthy. Several years pass, and Laura and her father, in their small grocery store, are being robbed by a junkie, who is now intent on raping Laura. Stefan, knowing that Laura and her father will be murdered, appears just as the robbery takes place and kills the junkie. At both events, another time traveler, Kokoschka, looks on and wonders about Stefan's interest in the girl. He believes it has something to do with the fact that Stefan has turned traitor, but in actuality, Stefan has fallen in love with Laura.

Over the coming years, Laura's father dies of a heart attack, and Laura lives in an orphanage, making friends with twins Thelma and Ruth Ackerson. It's there that another pedophile, Sheener, becomes obsessed with Laura. Stefan beats the man to a bloody pulp and warns him away. He does leave Laura alone for awhile, then she's placed in a foster home with a wonderfully loving couple, though the wife, Nina, has a heart condition. Sheener attacks Laura one day at her new home, and she stabs him with a broken glass, killing him. Nina walks in on the scene and dies of a heart attack, sending Laura back to the orphanage, where she lives out the rest of her childhood.

As an adult, Laura begins to write and soon attracts the attention of a wonderful man, Danny Packard. They fall in love and marry. Laura writes several books, the second is a booming success that makes them financially secure for the rest of their lives. They have a son, Chris, but are told Laura can't have any more children. Then Stefan reappears, this time warning Laura, Danny and Chris off a particular highway just before a pickup comes careening out of control and slams into their car. Though Laura thinks her "guardian angel" has saved them, they are quickly attacked by a gunman - a man from Stefan's time, who has tracked him to this point. Danny is killed, though Stefan kills the gunman as well. Stefan promises to return in a few hours but miscalculates and doesn't come back for an entire year.

Just before he leaves Laura after Danny's death, Stefan says that there might be more following him. Knowing the police won't believe the truth, Laura tells police that her family happened upon an apparent drug deal, and Danny was shot by drug dealers. She spends the next year preparing for anything, learning self-defense and arming

herself. When Stefan returns, he is followed and it's Laura who protects the three of them, while Stefan recovers from a bullet wound.

As he recovers, Stefan makes plans to return to his own time to destroy the time travel building in order to stop the project, which is funded by Hitler and being used by his soldiers to improve his chances at winning the war. Stefan succeeds, though almost at the cost of Laura's and Chris's life. Though Laura says that Stefan will never replace Danny, she does come to love him.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

January 12, 1955, was a gray day, and twilight found Dr. Paul Markwell drinking heavily, though he was on call at County General. He is barely aware of his surroundings but does rouse himself to note that there's an incredible thunderstorm going on outside. He is very drunk by the time he's called to County General because his patient, Janet Shane, is in labor and is in trouble. Markwell notes that he's too drunk to respond but will anyway. He knows that sooner or later he will make a serious medical mistake, and he waits for that day with a "perverse" pleasure. Lightning strikes just feet from his house as he gets into his car and he cringes, thinking it an omen. Then, a man knocks on the car window and Markwell rolls down the glass, prepared to tell the man to move away from the car. Instead, the man points a gun at Markwell, tells him that he won't be hurt if he cooperates, but he isn't going to the hospital; the man orders Markwell back into the house. At that moment at the hospital, Yamatta tells Janet's husband that she's in distress and they're waiting for the doctor.

The man, who is named Stefan, is blond and has an accent that Markwell can't quite identify. He demands the number for the hospital and the name of the head nurse on duty, then calls and, identifying himself only as a neighbor, tells her that Dr. Markwell is too drunk to come to the hospital. The man adds that Markwell has been hiding his drinking problem for some time, but that he's now a danger to the patient. Markwell, now tied to a chair, doesn't object overly much and says that he still doesn't know the man's name. Stefan responds simply that the doctor will never know. At the hospital, Dr. Carlson delivers the child and Yamatta delivers the news to Janet's husband that that Janet died, but the baby girl is fine. Bob Shane names the child Laura Jean. Soon after the baby is born, Stefan walks out of Dr. Markwell's house, taking time only to pour out all the liquor and to leave a note urging the doctor to find a way to accept the death of his son, Lenny, or the doctor will be dead within a year, adding that it's not a prediction but a fact. As Bob holds Laura in the hospital nursery the following day, he notices a blond man in a pea coat staring intently at the child. When the eyes of the two men meet, Stefan smiles and mouths the word, "beautiful," making Bob smile as well. Then the man walks away. That evening, a tall dark man named Kokoschka stands at the window of the nursery, wondering why so much energy has been expended on this baby, and debating whether he should kill her. He decides to wait until he knows the role in "the traitor's" scheme.

The next scene begins with Laura in a store in Southern California with her father. Bob now owns a family grocery store and moved from Denver for his life with Laura. Now he considers that the heavy rains predicted will mean few - if any - customers and that he and Laura could go to a movie. He tells her to "get out the boat," and weaves an elaborate story about a toad, who is a boarder in their upstairs apartment and that he has a boat in his closet. Just then, a junkie pulls up in an old Buick, comes inside and demands cash at gunpoint. Bob agrees and begins pulling money from the drawer. The



man then orders them to the storeroom, saying that he wants "a piece" of Laura before he leaves. Just then, there's a gunshot, and the junkie falls to the floor, shot by Stefan, who has appeared, seemingly, out of nowhere.

He says he is not the police and locks the door to give himself time to create a feasible story for Bob to tell police. Stefan says only that he can't stick around to claim the status of good citizen for saving the day and tells Bob and Laura that they should tell the police that there were two robbers, that they argued, one shot the other and then ran away. He has Bob hide the money from the register and stops to touch Laura's cheek. Bob notes that Stefan's eyes have tears in them as he tells Bob to care for the little girl, that she's special, and then leaves into the rainstorm. Kokoschka is outside the store, watching. He arrived at the same time as Stefan and notes that this is the second time Stefan has saved the little girl, and he continues to wonder why.

Stefan, obviously back in his own time, drives to "the institute" armed with gear for an explosive. There, he encounters a guard named Viktor, and explains that he wasn't able to sleep and thought he'd come do some work. He spends the time in the attic, stringing the wires for the explosion. He notes that he's ensuring that the building, and all the files within, will be destroyed, despite the fact that there might be collateral damage to neighboring buildings that could even result in deaths. The following night he returns, again claiming insomnia and this time hiding the charges in the basement. He returns home to sleep, saying that he has a hard day ahead and that there will be killing. He dreams about Laura and counts that as a positive sign.

At age twelve, Laura is alone in the world after the death of her father, at age forty-two, of a heart attack. On July 24, 1967, she's preparing to attend Bob's funeral, though her father's friends don't think a child should do so. At the cemetery, she steps away from her "honorary grandmothers," Cora Lance and Anita Passadopolis, to stand in the sunshine. There she sees Stefan, though she recognizes him only as someone faintly familiar. She follows, and when she reaches another road in the cemetery, he passes by slowly in a car. She then recognizes him as the man from four years earlier during the robbery. He speeds away as she shouts for him to stop.

Then she hears her name and sees another man, dressed all in black. She goes toward him and notes that he seems cold, like winter. He asks, "Why you?" and reaches for her, but Cora calls out for her, and Kokoschka disappears. Five days later, she is again in her room over the store, this time packing up her favorite paperbacks, her clothes and her teddy bear.

Chapter 1 Analysis

There are many points of the story that are presented in such a way as to tease the reader with only some of the details. For example, Stefan is headed "to the institution" with the makings of a bomb in his car. Those details are given at the beginning of the third section of chapter one, but it will be some time before the reader is given the details necessary to make complete sense of those facts. When it becomes evident that

Stefan is a time traveler, the natural tendency would be to expect that he's from the future. That isn't the case, and it will eventually be revealed that he's from the past - 1944, to be exact - and is part of an experiment by Nazi Germany under the control of Hitler.

After the robbery attempt, Bob tries to tell Stefan that he is an upstanding member of the community and that people will believe him if he says merely that someone stepped into the store, shot the robber and left. Stefan says people envy people who are happy, that Bob is obviously content with his life, and that he's putting himself in a position to be imprisoned for the outright murder of the junkie. Bob reluctantly agrees. During the conversation, Stefan tells Bob that he's been looking out for Bob and Laura, and Bob likens it to a "guardian angel." Four years later, when Laura sees Stefan in the cemetery at her father's funeral, she remembers that he is her guardian angel. Though she doesn't put it together at the time, she also remembers that there was lightning during the night prior to the funeral, though the sky on that day was bright and cloudless.

Some readers may not immediately understand that the story is based on the potential for time travel, and that both Stefan and Kokoschka are time travelers. There is the first of many clues that provide insight into the time in which Stefan is living; for example, T.S. Eliot is not a commonly-known poet and that he's "subversive." Back in his own office after planting the explosives, he imagines Laura's face and notes that he can "always calm himself" by thinking of her. He says that her very existence gives him both peace and courage.

As Laura is packing after her father's death, she finds the gifts that had been from her father on her ninth birthday - boots, an umbrella and a scarf that had belonged to the imaginary, but infamous, Mr. Toad. The items had been in the apartment when she arrived home that day and her father had given the message that Mr. Toad was sleeping, having just returned from the Queen's business, and that her gift - a new bicycle - was in the back yard. Now she knows that her father didn't "die alone." Mr. Toad is also gone, just because her father will no longer be able to tell his stories.

As Stefan is planting the charges that will destroy "the institute," he stops to look at a device he calls "the gate." He notes that it has many dials and gauges and that it's a marvel to him. He says it's not a gate to Hell, but that in the wrong hands it might as well be. He finishes that thought by saying that it's now in the wrong hands. As he leaves, he tells Viktor that he'd eaten all the cake Viktor's wife had sent as a gift, though he'd actually fed most of it to "the animals."

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Laura stays for awhile with Cora and Tom Lance, but they are older, have no children and fear the prospect of raising someone else's. She is then turned over to the custody of the California Child Services, picked up by Mrs. Bowmaine, and taken to the McIlroy Children's Home. Laura says she bore the Lances no ill-will and "absolved" them for their decision. Upon arriving at the children's home, she meets Willy Sheener. As Laura passes him and with no adults looking, Sheener rubs his crotch while watching Laura. Later, Laura's roommates, the Ackerson twins, say Sheener often offers candy and that it seems he must have learned to be a pervert from the pamphlets handed out by police to warn children about perverts. Laura then learns that her third roommate, Tammy, is at McIlroy because her father sexually abused her and that Tammy craves the kind of attention she receives from Sheener - nicknamed "the Eel." Meanwhile, Stefan "sees" that Sheener is going to rape and beat Laura unless Stefan again intervenes in her life.

Laura is already being eyed by Sheener. On her first morning at the home, he saves her a particularly large sweet roll. On another day, he's waiting for her in a stairwell, but she pushes past him, refusing to take the candy he offers or to turn back to see what he's trying to show her. Then she arrives in her room to find that Tammy is tearing up her books, yelling that she hates Laura because Sheener no longer cares for her and can talk only of his desire for Laura. Laura, hurt over the loss of the books her father had bought, knows she's still much better off than Tammy, who has been damaged beyond repair. Then Laura learns that she's to be transferred to the Teagels, a foster family in Costa Mesa. The night before she's to leave, the Ackerman twins tell her that she should be happy if possible, but to remember that she doesn't have to stay in an unhappy foster home. They say that they've cried, sulked and broken things to gain their return to McIlroy.

Flora Teagel works crosswords, seldom talks to Laura except to offer up a list of chores, and mocks her when Laura says she doesn't know the answer to a particular crossword clue. When Laura tells the social worker of her plight and that she has so many chores she has no time for her own school work, the case worker refuses to believe her. Laura, now convinced that Sheener poses less of a threat than she'd imagined, resorts to a scornful attitude. Having recently lost so many of her own books to Tammy's rage, she hasn't the heart to break anything. That gets her returned to McIlroy in a matter of days.

Her room with the Ackermans is occupied, and she's assigned to a two-bed room with a girl named Eloise Fischer, who is soon taken by her grandmother. Sheener is soon watching her and on the day Eloise leaves, Laura finds that she's expected to spend the night alone in her room. She knows Sheener will come for her and slips into the Ackerman's room, but Tammy has alerted a staff member of the plan and Laura is returned to her room. She later slips into the game room and sleeps on the floor, hidden behind a couch.



While Sheener does make his way to Laura's room, evidenced by the fact that he left a tootsie roll under her pillow, he returns home to find that Stefan is waiting for him. After Stefan leaves Sheener's home, Kokoschka goes inside and finds Sheener, badly beaten, on the bed. Kokoschka says that he would like to beat Laura and Stefan to this degree but won't until he knows what Stefan plans and what Laura's role in that is.

Stefan goes to Sheener's house and leaves him bruised and bloody. Sheener doesn't return to work for several days, and when he does, it's obvious that he's been beaten. He studiously avoids Laura, making her certain that her "special guardian" had intervened again. She knew that there was thunder on the night she was alone but hadn't really expected that he would come through. Now she knows he did but also knows instinctively that whatever little knowledge she has of him should remain secret and so doesn't share the information with the Ackerman twins.

Then Laura is assigned a new foster home with the Dockweilers of Newport Beach. They are delighted with her, say they wanted to adopt but weren't eligible because of Nina's heart condition, but assure Laura that she is welcome to remain with them forever, and that Nina is fine as long as she avoids stressful situations. One afternoon, Laura arrives home to find the house empty and goes to the kitchen for a snack, but finds Sheener waiting for her. He grabs her, demanding to know the name of the man who'd beaten him. He threatens Laura but she continues to fight, eventually stabbing him with her broken milk glass. Nina arrives home to find Sheener's bloody body on top of Laura and keels over with a fatal heart attack.

Upon turning thirteen, Laura is transferred to Caswell Hall. The twins will join her in May upon their own thirteenth birthday, but in March Laura learns that there was a fire at McIlroy. She runs all the way there and finds her old room cordoned off and charred. Thelma is in a room at the end of the hall, and she tells Laura that Tammy - who had seemed more at peace in the months after Sheener's death - had used lighter fluid and set herself afire in a suicide attempt. The fire had quickly spread, and Ruth tried to smother the flames with her own blanket, but she caught fire, too. Thelma, on her thirteenth birthday, is moved to Caswell and assigned a room with Laura. The girls remain together until they leave the state's care, though Thelma is filled with the certainty that she left Ruth to die while saving herself.

Meanwhile, at the institute, Kokoschka has returned from several trips in pursuit of Stefan, who Kokoschka calls a "traitor." Kokoschka says that he now knows what Stefan plans and that Laura has nothing to do with the situation. One of the scientists notes that Laura can now be ignored and Stefan can be eliminated. Kokoschka agrees but likes killing and so plans to kill Laura in front of Stefan before killing him as well.

Chapter 2 Analysis

It's when Stefan reveals the fact that Sheener is going to rape and beat Laura, causing her irreparable damage, that he also tells of the difficulty to change events. He says destiny tends to seek a certain path and that when one is altered, the events tend to

seek another way to put the events as they would have originally been. He says that he saved Laura from the robber and would-be rapist and now she's being threatened by another. He wonders if one will eventually find a way to make good an attack and knows that all he can really do is to face the current situation.

Stefan arrives at Sheener's home to find that it's immaculate to the point of obsessively clean. The house is stocked with food that includes all kinds of novelty snacks, sweets and canned spaghetti. Stefan notes that it seems as if a child with a checkbook and no adult supervision had handled the grocery shopping. In the bedroom, he finds children's books, stuffed animals and cartoon characters. Stefan first thinks that Sheener probably lures children into his home, then realizes that there is no other bed in the house. He finally understands that Sheener isn't a lustful adult but a sick man seeking to take some youth from the youngsters he molests. Stefan calls it both sad and sick.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

On January 12, 1977, Laura's twenty-second birthday, she's a student in college, has published a story called "Amphibian Epics" outlining her father's tales of Sir Tommy, and receives a ceramic toad figurine in the mail. Over the coming days, several more arrive, including two that show up on the dash of her locked car. She knows someone has gone to the trouble to unlock her car, place the figurine, and lock the car back. After a few more days with toads showing up in unusual places - including at the restaurant where she works - she's frightened that the giver is actually a stalker. Then she receives a very expensive figurine with an emblem from a nearby gift shop on the box.

Laura goes there and finds that the toad was purchased by a man named Daniel Packard. Laura convinces the saleslady to give her his name and phone number, looks him up in the phone book, and goes to confront him. When she arrives, he answers the door greasy and sweaty, and she's appalled that this is her secret admirer. He professes his love for her, saying that he's cared for her since he first read her book and saw her in the library, and that he sent the toads because he wanted to break the ice but hadn't found the nerve to talk to her. He adds that his mother was beautiful but cold, and that he has a complex about beautiful women. Laura orders him to stop sending toads and leaves.

A while later, Daniel, who asks to be called Danny, calls and apologizes. He says he was fixing the dishwasher because the landlord could never get around to it, that he's a stockbroker, and that he wants to go out with her. She agrees and they plan for dinner and a movie. They arrive at an Italian restaurant; Danny says the ambiance isn't right so they go to another that's more expensive with terrible food. Danny continues to apologize and takes her home, rushing from her front door before she can invite him in. When he calls later that night, he says that he imagines she'll never go out with him again and she says that she thought he'd never call. Danny is a stockbroker and very good at his job. They are soon serious and marry just five months later.

Danny carefully manages their money and makes smart investments so they can look ahead to a time they'll be financially secure. As he continues to work, Laura stays home to write. Just before their first wedding anniversary, she completes her first novel, "Jericho Nights," and it's purchased for fifteen thousand dollars. It doesn't do well, but she sells it and starts her next book, "Shadrach." She sends the completed manuscript to her agent and allows Danny to read it. She leaves the house as he's finishing the book and when she returns, he's gone. He comes home with a gift, and she's certain he wants to give her a present to soften the news that he thinks it's "mule puke." It's a beautiful glass bowl and he paid three thousand dollars for it, showing her that he believes the book is going to be wildly successful. The initial offer for that book is one hundred thousand, but it's eventually sold at auction for more than a million. Danny quits

his job to manage their money and they have a baby - Christopher Robert. Laura has trouble with the delivery, and they're told they can have no more children.

"The Golden Edge" was published after Chris's first birthday and "The Amazing Appleby Twins," - based on Thelma and Ruthie - was published in 1984. Thelma calls after finishing the book and thanks Laura for allowing Ruthie to live in this book. When Chris is five, Laura introduces him to Tommy Toad and the fact that life goes on; this interaction with her son about Tommy Toad makes her more passionate than ever, which makes her next book, "Endless River," an even bigger success. In 1988, "Wind and Stars" has just been released. Laura and Danny have a second home in the mountains near Big Bear and spend the weekend of January 8 there. A predicted snowstorm prompts them to leave Sunday afternoon instead of Monday morning as planned.

Stefan has arrived some ten miles from the site of an accident that will take Laura's life and steals a Jeep from a parking lot in order to arrive in time to stop the event. Laura is driving when she approaches the location, sees the Jeep on the side of the road and Stefan waving to them. Danny believes the man has car trouble, but Laura recognizes him as her guardian angel. Stefan motions her off the road and she obeys, but then he fears that it might not be enough and urges her up the embankment. She yells at Chris and Danny to follow, and they frantically climb up the embankment. Then they see a pickup come around the corner at the top of the hill, but it's completely out of control, sliding sideways. It's evident that it's going to hit the Packard's car and Danny yells for Laura to go higher. There's a snowmobile in the back of the truck, and it is slung out into the Packard's car. The passenger in the truck, a woman, is slung part way through the windshield as their truck hits the Packard's. Then the truck bounces off, circles again, and falls off a steep embankment.

Laura, Danny, Stefan and Chris climb down, and Danny asks who Stefan is. Laura, though she knows him as her guardian angel, says she wants to know who he is as well. Before Stefan can explain, another car arrives and stops, and Kokoschka gets out with a machine gun, opening fire. Danny's military training kicks in, and he shoves Laura and Chris down, urging them under the Jeep, but is shot through the back before he can get down himself. He tells Laura "I love you," and she knows that's good-bye. Then Danny hurls himself at Kokoschka, though Stefan has maneuvered into position to shoot at Kokoschka. Danny is killed, but Stefan kills Kokoschka.

He then tells Laura that she has to get her story straight because he can't remain on hand to help her, and the authorities won't believe what really happened. The story she's to tell is that they came up the hill to find several cars there, that they were forced out of their car at gunpoint, that she heard something about drugs, and that the truck that came down the hill had panicked at the sight and crashed. Stefan briefly considers that Kokoschka's presence meant that they know he's a traitor and that he might be arrested upon his arrival back in his own time. He'll risk returning on the off chance that he'll be able to blow up the institute. He considers that there might be people sent to kill Laura and warns her to be prepared for such an occurrence. He then gives Laura a belt, telling her to let no one see it and not to press the yellow button. Then he pushes the



button on his own belt and disappears. A car comes along and Laura, with Chris, goes out to flag it down.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Laura, having had her world turned up-side-down by the death of her mother, her father's heart attack, the years in foster care and the heartache she's suffered, finds that her happiness seems too good to be true. She continues to worry that something is going to happen to erase her happiness. She tells Thelma that she wanted a large family for stability. With only Danny and Chris in her life, she feared the possibility of losing them. She imagines that, with a large family, there would be less chance of losing everyone she loves.

Laura has not seen Stefan in more than twenty years - since the day the grocery was robbed. She says that over that period of time, she'd come to store the memory of him as something of a myth and likened her belief in Stefan to Chris's flagging belief in Santa Claus. She still believes that Stefan let her down when she was fighting Sheener. For his part, Stefan seems to have been unaware of her battle with Sheener but that could be explained by the fact that Laura survived relatively unharmed physically from that encounter. It seems that Stefan only interferes when Laura herself is going to be physically harmed in some way. Laura later learns that Stefan is interested in her because he loves her. With that information, it's interesting that he tried to save Danny. He'll later explain why he can't change the events again so that Danny survives.

On the highway as the out-of-control truck driven by the Robertsons was about to strike the Packard's car, Laura asks Stefan why he didn't do something to stop their tragedy. He says that they are both drunk and that they're driving without snow tires, as if their stupidity is sufficient that they can kill themselves, and he isn't concerned. He intervenes because they've put Laura in danger.

When Danny is shot, Laura feels so filled with grief that she almost blacks out. She refuses to do so because she knows she has to provide as much protection as possible for Chris. She says that she now knows he is the one bright spot in her life.

At this point, the reader gets the first hints about the reason Stefan wants to eliminate the institute. He says that the alternative to returning to his own time is to remain and see the world change "in ways too horrible to endure." There are still many mysteries at this point, including the reason Stefan is so interested in Laura's life. Laura wants to know who Stefan is, and as he leaves, he promises he'll return in a few hours and give her answers to all her questions. He will actually miscalculate and it will be a year later when he returns.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Thelma arrives for a visit with Laura at the house at Big Bear to find that Laura is in the midst of target practice. Chris is nearby and checks Laura's targets for accuracy, offering advice. Several months have passed, and Laura still hasn't heard from Stefan, though she's taken his advice that she should be prepared for anyone who might be a threat. She has several machine guns in the house as well as pistols that can be easily accessed from anywhere she happens to be in the house. She tells Thelma that Chris seems to be coping, though it was difficult at first, and that she still cries at night. She sleeps only a few hours at a time and writes, but the current book is very dark, and she doubts there will be a market for it. When she feels like it, she works on a children's story about Tommy Toad.

One night, Thelma finds Laura up writing and the two talk. Laura finds herself telling Thelma about Stefan, including that she'd thought he was magical as a child and therefore shouldn't be shared and that he was on the road when Danny was killed and warned her of the need to protect herself. She tells Thelma that she doesn't have a bodyguard because she trusts no one other than Thelma and Chris, making them a family. Thanksgiving finds Laura and Chris alone, though the house is filled with the smell of roasting turkey. Chris is being taught at home by a certified tutor named Ida Palomar, who Laura says reminds her of Marjory Main of the Ma and Pa Kettle movies. She agrees to Thelma's request to spend Christmas in L.A. with Thelma and her boyfriend, Jason Gaines, a Hollywood director.

Meanwhile, Stefan has returned to the institute to discover that no one is there waiting to arrest him as he'd imagined. He knows that Kokoschka knew about Stefan changing incidents in Laura's life and that Stefan is a traitor to the cause of Lightning Road. He expects that Kokoschka, as a person responsible for security, would have turned the information over to the authorities. What he finds to be the truth is that Kokoschka has reacted to the situation as an individual person, not as a member of the Lightning Road team. He decides that he must eliminate several people who have the knowledge to rebuild the technology in Lightning Road and then blow up the building. The following day, he shoots Dr. Vladimir Penlovski and his secretary, Anna Kaspar, who happens to be in Penlovski's office. He then goes to the office of Dr. Wladslaw Januskaya but finds that he's in the document room with the third person on Stefan's list, Dr. Volkaw. He kills both, returns to his office and sets the timer on the explosives, giving himself five minutes to escape from Lightning Road to Laura's time.

He enters the calculations in the time travel device and finds that he's actually going to arrive a full year after Danny's death. With the detonator set to go off in less than four minutes, he hears shouts and knows that the bodies of two of his victims have been found and decides that he'll just have to arrive in 1989. Then Kokoschka shouts for him to stop. As Stefan reasons out how Kokoschka could be here when he'd died in 1988,



he realizes that Kokoschka must have not jumped to 1988 yet. He is still alive because his own decision to follow Stefan to 1988 occurs after this point in time. With that understanding, Stefan knows that his attempt to blow up the institute also fails. As he tries to decide what to do, he is shot in the upper chest and knows that he can't do anything but go, though it means Kokoschka and others will follow him to Laura again.

When a time traveler arrives in another time, there is a burst of energy so intense that there follows a great display of lightning and thunder. The irony is that the same event doesn't happen upon the traveler's return to his own time. As Laura and Chris get through the date of the anniversary of Danny's death, there's a sudden display of lightning that frightens Chris - it's the arrival of Stefan. It takes Laura some time to remember that she saw this same kind of lightning on the day her guardian arrived to save her from the junkie intent on robbery. When she does, she's immediately on guard, checks the windows, door and alarm and hears a thump at the door which turns out to be Stefan, almost unconscious, on the porch. She can't bring herself to leave him there and drags him inside. He rouses as she's taking off his shoes and tells her that he's being pursued - as evidenced by a second series of lightning flashes - and that they have to leave immediately. She takes him at his word.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Laura has reacted to Danny's death and Stefan's warning that others will likely follow Stefan to her by arming herself. She has an array of handguns in the house, as well as several Uzis that have been modified to be fully automatic, though that's not legal. She tells Thelma that her research as a writer has taught her how to find things, and her wealth means she can afford whatever she wants. She and Chris take self-defense lessons and live a very secluded life. In many ways, their existence is atypical for an eight-year-old boy, but Laura says that they are closer because of it.

It's at this point that more details about the institute and the time travel are revealed. Stefan notes that a person leaves the institute and returns in a "gate" that resembles a barrel at a fun house in a carnival, except that it's lined with copper and doesn't twist. He also notes that the traveler returns exactly eleven minutes after leaving, regardless of the length of time they spend in another time. That means that he returns eleven minutes after leaving to be with Laura, though he was there for more than an hour. The fact that no one is waiting for his return seems odd. At this point, he believes the Kokoschka was sent to kill him as a traitor to their cause and that those who sent him should surely have been waiting for Kokoschka's return - or for Stefan's. Another of the unexplained points of time travel is that one can't encounter himself during time travel. Because of that, he can't simply return to a few minutes before Danny's death and try again to prevent it. If a person travels to a place where he might encounter himself, he simply bounces back to the Lightning Road.

Stefan also talks of the fact that the men running Lightning Road are carefully studying newspapers, magazines and other documents that have been brought back from authorized time travel in order to determine the exact points in time where changes

should be made in order to create specific conditions in their present. While Stefan doesn't yet go into details, he does say that the current public services - such as electricity - aren't reliable. Another colleague says that it's something people have to put up with in order to gain the "socialist state of their dreams." It will soon be revealed that he's talking about Nazi Germany of the 1940s, and that all this time travel is actually originating in the past with the travelers going into the future.

While the main line of the story focuses on Laura and Stefan, her relationship with Thelma is also important. Thelma has gone through the "punk" stage, though by the time she marries Jason, she has stopped wearing green hair and is no longer into the punk style. She says that her lack of security is related to the fact that she is an orphan. As she shows Laura around the mansion she shares with Jason, she says it's difficult to believe that two girls who had lived in places like McIlroy had come to be the successes Laura and Thelma are now.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Laura wakes Chris and tells him that there are bad men coming for them. Though only eight, he is instantly alert and begins hurrying to prepare to leave. Laura has him gather several guns and put them in the Jeep, which is in the attached garage, then uses a dolly to move Stefan to the Jeep as well. Danny is in the vehicle when Laura runs back into the house to get her purse. There's noise on the porch and then gunshots as someone tries to break through the back door. The steel reinforcement holds but the drywall around the door gives way to the onslaught. Laura almost makes a run for the Jeep but instinct wins and she waits. She kills two men who rush into the room before she could have made it to safety, then shoots at a third, forcing him to run for cover allowing her to run for the Jeep. Chris has the Jeep running and the garage door starts up as Laura runs toward him.

The remaining men at the house follow in Laura's second car and she makes her way onto a gravel road, where the Jeep continues forward but the car flounders into a ditch and is stuck. A few miles farther, Laura stops to consider the situation. She wonders about Stefan and now wonders if maybe he could be a time traveler. It's an idea she's played around with but that has seemed too fantastic to consider. Now she does and she poses the suggestion to Chris who says, "holy shit," then apologizes.

Chris understands that a time traveler can only travel if he's not creating a "paradox." For example, he explains that if a person goes back in time and kills his mother when she was just a child, then the person would simply cease to exist because he had, in fact, never existed. That, Chris explains, is a paradox. It simply can't happen that way. He says that the bad guys, though with the advantage of time travel, still have to play by the rules. Chris predicts that the men in their car would simply have returned to their own time once they got stuck, and that other time travelers would have arrived a short distance ahead of Laura, Chris and Stefan to intercept them. Trusting him, though she understands little of what he's saying, Laura returns the way they've come and finds that the men are gone.

Chris then says that he believes the time travelers will only find them if Laura leaves some record of where she's been. He suggests they disappear, but Laura knows they need money in order to survive, and she can't get money without using a credit card or putting in an appearance at a bank to make a withdrawal. If she does any of those things, she'll create a record, and the time travelers will merely be waiting for her to take that step.

Laura travels to San Bernardino, where she finds a phone book and drives using a map from a gas station until she finds a doctor with an office attached to his house. She wakes Chris, holds him close and rings the doorbell, frantically crying that her son has ingested poison. When the doctor, Carter Brenkshaw, opens the door, she pulls her gun

and forces him back inside. Dr. Brenkshaw says that he is alone and smiles at Laura. He says that he's read many mystery books, that the beautiful villainess always gives in to the masculine captive, and that it would all have to happen to him when he's too old to enjoy it. Chris sobers the doctor's attitude somewhat by saying that Laura has already shot two men tonight, a story of which the doctor apparently gives some credence. She tells the doctor she has a wounded man in the car, and he says that he isn't surprised. He gets a wheelchair from his office and they go out to retrieve Stefan, leaving Chris selecting a Tootsie Pop from the jar on the doctor's desk. When Laura and Dr. Brenkshaw climb into the rear of the Jeep, he seems surprised that there really is a wounded man.

Laura has to put down the gun in order to help get Stefan into a wheelchair, but the doctor is now focused only on his patient. He soon reveals that he not only knows Laura's identity, he believed that her visit was part of a prank concocted by some of his friends. When he's convinced that Laura won't take Stefan to the hospital, he puts in some stitches and gives him a shot of penicillin. He then gives her a few additional penicillin pills and some pain killers, but Laura insists that he give them more, saying that she has no way of knowing what she, Stefan or even Chris might need over the coming days. Dr. Brenkshaw asks what they've gotten themselves into. Laura begs the doctor not to tell anyone of their visit, but he won't make that promise and Laura realizes that he's going to do his duty as a doctor by filing a police report of the shooting. She then knows that the rumble she heard earlier that she put down to a passing jet plane would have been thunder heralding the arrival of more men searching for her. She sends Chris to look out the window, and he announces the arrival of several cars. The doctor wants to call the police but Laura says that the police can't help her and that her only real hope lies in her ability to protect herself and in the man who is still unconscious.

She urges the doctor to leave with them, telling him that he'll be killed if he remains behind. They slip out a back door and encounter an assassin at the back gate but Chris reacts from his self-defense training and kicks the man's gun from his hands, then kicks him in the crotch. Laura bashes him over the head with her Uzi and they rush from the yard, though Laura says that things are moving too fast now. She shoots the next assassin to appear. The doctor and Chris go on down the alley with Stefan, while Laura remains behind to face the men who are coming around the house after hearing the gunfire. Laura, having done research for a book about a car thief, checked cars on the next street and found one unlocked with keys under the seat. She picks up Stefan and leaves the doctor, kissing him on the cheek and thanking him for his help. She drives through the night, stopping to steal a different car and then to steal another license plate.

Laura naps for a few hours and has beautiful dreams of Danny and the Ackerson twins and Chris, all healthy and happy. When she wakes, she sends Chris into a supermarket for rolls and orange juice for breakfast and peanut butter and bread for lunch. He teases that even on the "lam" from killers, he's surprised that she didn't pack a microwave, fresh vegetables and vitamins. While Chris is inside, she listens to the radio and learns

that police know about her house in Big Bear, that the police are searching for her and expect a quick resolution because her face is so well known.

Laura finds a low-class motel that will rent a room without a credit card or identification and takes Stefan inside. Chris takes a shower and Laura dozes, only to be wakened by Chris pointing out that Stefan is talking. Stefan drinks water but is clearly weak and says that no where is safe. Chris responds that they've figured out more than Stefan knows and asks "when" he comes from. Stefan says "nineteen forty-four," and "Berlin," before falling back into a deep sleep. When he wakes again, he explains that he's part of an experiment overseen by Adolf Hitler, and that the goal is to gain the information needed for the Germans to win World War II.

Laura argues that the fact that historically Germany didn't win the war means that the plan failed, but Stefan says that it could still happen, that if it happens, Laura's situation would simply change, and she would never know that it should have been any different. While Stefan says that time travel into the past is impossible, apparently because of the possibility of creating a paradox, the future can be changed. He then explains that the assassins who are searching for them will make two trips in an effort to find them - one several days ahead of Laura's own current time to find records of where she had been, and a second to intercept her at that point.

That afternoon, Stefan begins to recover his strength. Laura picks up take-out from a Chinese restaurant and Stefan reveals details of his life, including the fact that he'd been a member of the famed SS as a young man, though he did so largely to please his father. He says that by 1938, he used his position in the government to feed information to Britain. It's only after Laura questions his reason for being part of her life that Stefan says he was the first to time travel and it was on one of his trips that he saw Laura, her legs twisted and useless and one arm deformed, though she was at a book signing for her third successful novel, "Ledges," and that he had fallen in love with her. Chris understands immediately that Stefan is describing a book and a reality that would have been except for his interference. Stefan then says that in that reality, Laura was injured at birth by a drunken doctor. Stefan explains that he was able to make those changes because it was his own future he was changing, though Laura's life was changed because of his act.

Later that night, Laura asks why he didn't deal with Sheener. Stefan says that having seen so much death, he'd beaten Sheener and hoped that would suffice. She says she understood that but asks why he didn't come to her rescue on the day she'd encountered him in the Dockweiler's house, the scene that caused Nina's death. He says that he'd feared tampering too much with events of her life and that he felt some adversity was what made her into the woman he'd come to love. He also points out that destiny has a way of trying to right itself and that he likely couldn't have saved Nina her eventual fate, just as he couldn't keep pedophiles from seeking out Laura. She then says that she probably should love him, but that she doesn't, and he says that she doesn't yet know him and that they've got time.

Chapter 5 Analysis

When Laura suggests to Chris that Stefan might be a time traveler, he is immediately excited by the prospect. Laura notes that in many ways, Chris has been forced to grow up too quickly. Despite the fact of his curse word and the situation, she's happy to see that he's excited about something - an occurrence that's been missing since Danny's death. As Laura turns to Chris for an explanation, she realizes that he's extremely smart when it comes to the subject of time travel but very limited when it comes to details of everyday life.

The explanations of the time travel theory as presented by Stefan are complex and confusing. For example, he says that the fact that he killed the scientists and Kokoschka are immutable facts because they happened in his past and can't be undone. He uses this to explain that he couldn't have returned to a point earlier on the evening Danny died. He says that Danny's death and Kokoschka's death were both part of his own past, and as such Stefan couldn't change them. However, he says that facts in the future of any of the time travelers can be changed. Chris seems not only to accept the explanations, but to understand and to aid in the explaining to Laura, though Laura claims to have a headache from trying to grasp the complexities of the situation. Laura asks how they can possibly destroy the institute that was in operation some forty-five years prior to the current day, and Stefan says he hasn't yet figured it out. It is up to the reader to determine how much of the theory is important enough to understand and retain and how much should simply be taken on faith for the purpose of understanding the book.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Laura, having not been recognized at the Chinese restaurant, returns for more meals as she gives Stefan time to heal and plan. It's her thirty-fourth birthday, and Chris emerges from the motel bathroom with two cupcakes he'd bought the day before, complete with candles. Laura is delighted that he'd thought of her. When they open the fortune cookies after their take-out meal, Chris's first cookie is empty. The following two have contradictory fortunes that Laura realizes could also mean that he has no future to predict. Laura forces herself to believe that fortune cookies don't actually predict.

Stefan comes up with a plan for destroying the institute but says they need cash. Laura reluctantly calls on Thelma for help, who shows up with several thousand dollars, though she herself is dressed in a blond wig and driving a pickup borrowed from the gardener. She leaves with a shopping list that includes a computer and promises to return the following day. Later, Laura and Chris go to Fat Jack's Pizza Party Place, where she knows she'll be able to buy guns because she's bought them there before. The outside is ablaze with neon - a source of constant ire with the Anaheim Zoning Commission - and the wait staff wear costumes ranging from pirates to clowns. Greeted at the door by Fat Jack's partner, Dominick, Laura uses the code that she's called ahead and is a friend of Fat Jack's mother, indicating that she wants to buy guns. Dominick remembers her and takes her to Fat Jack's office. The man is, as Laura says, as big as a refrigerator and says that he had his office soundproofed but can still hear the kids in the pizza place. Laura says they're just kids having fun and he responds that "Mrs. O'Leary was just an old lady with a clumsy cow, but she burned down Chicago."

Laura arranges to buy several guns and two canisters of a neuroagent, a gas that kills within minutes of coming into contact with the skin. She also arranges to purchase several pills that are to be taken prior to contact with the gas, called Vexxon, that work as an antidote. Laura takes the guns with her but has to return the following day for the gas and pills.

Back in Stefan's own time, the scientists are watching the time travel device for the return of the most recent travelers. By now, the officials have some idea of what's happened but are still piecing together details. They do know that Kokoschka went to 1988 and believe he defected to that time because he was convinced that the Germans were not going to win their war. That explains the fact that he never returned, but there's an additional mystery - five men who were in the institute and should have been awaiting Kokoschka's return also vanished without a trace. Meanwhile, there's a rivalry going on between the two police factions with each hoping to find Stefan and return him to his own time. Officers involved in the hunt believe that in doing so they will earn the favor of Hitler himself.

Laura, Chris, and Stefan gather what they've purchased, along with the clothing and other items Thelma brought to them, and go to Jason's home in Palm Springs. Thelma says it's quiet there, that there's no full-time staff but warns that the gardener comes every Tuesday. Laura, Stefan and Chris go shopping, though Laura remains in the car. When Chris and Stefan return, there's an array of junk food with Stefan saying how great it is that they've now discovered that people can eat anything they want and still remain healthy. Chris immediately looks guilty and Laura accuses him of being a con man. Chris and Laura share a bed in the master bedroom, and Stefan sleeps in the guest room across the hall.

In 1944, Dr. Juttner - the replacement for the slain director of the institute - learns that Laura and Chris are found in 1989 near Palm Springs. It will soon be revealed that they are stopped by police on a specific stretch of highway, and prepare to go there to intercept her, hoping that Stefan is with her and that they can kill all three. Meanwhile, Stefan is aided by a computer to do the calculations necessary to return to an exact location after he completes his work in 1944. He plans to use Kokoschka's belt to return to the institute, then release the nerve gas as he's returning so that it will kill everyone in the institute, and choose a remote location where they aren't likely to encounter anyone who might be hurt by the gas in the instant before Stefan's departure. On the morning he plans to leave, the three are in the car on the way to that remote site when Laura hears thunder rumbling. She wants to return to the house and wait until later, but Chris says that it won't matter - that the men from 1944 have found them, and it's destiny that they take some step that causes them to encounter the men. If they return home, they'll find that on the way they have an accident or get stopped by police or create some sort of public record that was found by the men from 1944.

The group of four men from 1944 arrive, as if by magic, in a church parking lot in plain sight of two women holding casserole dishes. Klietmann tells them that they're angels and that God needs the use of their car, which the owner agrees to without dissent. The four men, dressed in black business suits and carrying briefcases, had expected to blend in as young business executives and were concerned to find that everyone on the street is dressed very casually. Klietmann, driving, pulls over to consider a map and the fact that they are some ten miles from the point where they know Laura and Chris will be stopped by a patrolman. As he studies the map, a policeman knocks on his window, and points out that they're parked at a curb marked in red. Klietmann says there are no red curbs where he's from. The officer believes the four to be preachers in town for a Baptist convention and asks Klietmann where he's from. He answers, "Georgia," knowing little of American geography, and then realizes how stupid it sounds to have said that they have no red street markings in Georgia. The officer asks him to step out of the car, and one of the men in the back pulls a gun from his briefcase and kills the officer, sprays the surrounding buildings with bullets and the four flee the scene. A few miles out of Palm Springs on Highway 111, they catch up with a police officer and know this must be the officer who files the report indicating that he had taken Laura and Chris into custody. They kill the officer and know that they should soon be in the place where Laura encounters the officer. Stefan, armed with the nerve gas, a handgun, several books and an Uzi, pushes the button on the belt and returns to 1944, but not to the time he left but to when Kokoschka left. The men who arrive with Klietmann are surprised to

see Stefan leave. They were in the lab the day Kokoschka shot Stefan and chased him into the time machine. They waited with the others, but Stefan never returned that day. Laura and Chris rush to the car and Laura fires on the men who return fire. She reminds Chris that Stefan will return in just five minutes and that he also has a machine gun. She tells Chris that those few minutes aren't so long to hold off the four men.

Meanwhile, Stefan is met by five men - the five who were present when Kokoschka left through the gate and killed Danny. The nerve gas is almost instant and the five are quickly dead. Stefan puts travel belts on all five and sends them six billion years into the future. He follows with all the lab animals, which had also been killed by the nerve gas and which might lend a clue that the gas had been present, and the empty Vexxon canister. He then enters the calculations they'd created on the computer at the Palm Springs house into the time machine and arrives in a small conference room in the presence of Winston Churchill. The elaborate pyrotechnics that accompany an arrival are present when Stefan steps into the room. There are immediately guards on hand, though Churchill himself shows no surprise nor alarm. Stefan tells Churchill of the experiment, providing proof of his claims by showing Churchill copies of the books that are, in 1989, definitive accounts of the war. He then provides the precise location of the institute, and Churchill says he'll talk to his advisers and plan to hit the target within the next couple of days.

Stefan returns to the institute, rests for a few minutes and takes his next trip through the time gate, this time arriving in another underground bunker where Hitler is. Hitler, knowing of the experiment and being familiar with Stefan as the son of a loyal follower and as a loyal soldier himself, shows no fear. Hitler removes a gun from his desk, and Stefan quickly salutes then genuflects, saying that he wants to clear his own name and to tell Hitler of traitorous activities. Stefan's goal is to undermine the influence of the institute and to encourage Hitler to go on with his actions as if the information from the institute had never been given him. He ends the conversation with Hitler by saying that there are Jews among the staff at the institute and that he believes they are involved with the conspiracy, and that he himself must return to the future to capture Kokoschka in order to find out who among the staff are the traitors. Without giving Hitler time to comment, he pushes the button and leaves. Back at the institute, Stefan rests for a minute but is fearful for Laura and Chris because he knows a Secret Service police squad are in 1989, and that Laura is even now likely facing that threat.

Laura and Chris are hiding in front of the car when the SS officers decide to split up and flank her. Two go off to one side while one goes to the other, leaving the fourth man at their car to provide cover fire. Laura soon kills one of the men in the moments he is in the open and a short time later kills a second. Just as that man goes down, Laura is shot in the back. She feels no pain and knows immediately that she's been shot in the spine. The thought that destiny strives to reassert itself comes to her mind. She tells Chris to run, and he reluctantly does so, though she can see in his eyes that he knows he's leaving her to die. Laura can only watch, realizing that destiny has reasserted itself, as she sees Chris gunned down before the gunman returns to her side. Stefan appears suddenly, his arrival heralded by flashes of light, but with bullets already flying in his direction, pushes the button that returns him to the institute. He knows Laura and Chris



are dead and he also knows that there has to be some way to save them. He recalibrates the calculations and steps back into the time travel device so that he arrives back in their time just five seconds after he initially leaves, but is dropped right back to the institute because of the possibility that he might encounter himself. He tries again with the same result before realizing that he can't possibly be in a place where he might encounter himself and so can't go back to that time. He realizes that he can send a note and so writes to Laura that she and Chris cannot remain near the car and to remember that the second canister of Vexxon is also a weapon. Laura, upon reading the note, doesn't hesitate but sends Chris for the Uzis while she grabs the canisters and the two - with the white car of Nazi soldiers bearing down on them - run for a nearby arroyo. There Laura manages to kill three of the men before emptying her two Uzis. She and Chris are at the end of a small tributary when she begins to try to open the canister of Vexxon, but the wire valve is resilient and it takes her several minutes sawing with pieces of shale to get through it. She gets the can open and the SS officer falls to the ground, firing one last burst of gunfire in the general direction of Laura before dying of the poison. Stefan, having returned minutes earlier, tracks the soldier and hears the gunfire. Upon finding Laura and Chris unhurt, he cries tears that he'd thought no longer existed, but these are tears of joy.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Laura, having dealt with Fat Jack before, has some idea what to expect from him. He has an arsenal of guns in the basement below the pizza place but keeps no quantities of ammunition or other explosives for sale, citing the need to keep his customers safe - though he claims to have no love for all the "snot-nosed" kids running around upstairs. Chris calls him a nut, but Laura says he's a fanatic, which she defines as a nut with something to believe in. In the case of Fat Jack, he believes government is corrupt and that there should be no government at all. While Laura says she has no love of the governmental officials who are corrupt and believes some are, she doesn't hate authority simply because it's authority.

The fact that five men from the institute vanished around the time Kokoschka went missing is offered up in Stefan's time as a mystery waiting to be solved. Though many think Kokoschka to have defected rather than harboring the notion that he was killed in Laura's time, the idea that five others might have defected as well doesn't seem to be a possibility. For the reader, this detail is a clue as to what Stefan has planned upon his return to his own time. The reader must remember that a time traveler returns to eleven minutes after he leaves, regardless of how long he's away. Stefan has Kokoschka's time travel belt. If he uses that for his return, he'll arrive eleven minutes from when Kokoschka left and will confront the five scientists who are now missing from 1944.

Unable to sleep in the Palm Springs house, Laura wonders about the forces of destiny of which Stefan has talked. She knows that she was to have been wheel-chair bound and a cripple and wonders if living more than thirty years with a normal body is sufficient time for destiny to have accepted this alternative. She knows that she was to have been an orphan and though she found a second "mother" in Nina, she lost her as well. She

knows that had Stefan not interfered, she would never have met Danny and Chris would never have been born, and wonders if destiny has yet accepted his presence.

It's interesting that Stefan goes into Hitler's bunker with no intention of killing the man. He intends only to set things back on the track they'd been on prior to the existence of the institute and the work at Lightning Road. He feeds Hitler's sense of genius by saying that the men who'd told him that he would make fatal military mistakes were liars. Stefan says that Hitler is on the verge of winning and that he must make only a few minor changes in the war plans he has made. Stefan himself notes that none of these changes were to major battles and that they will make no difference in the outcome of the war. On the subject of the allied landing at Normandy, Stefan tells Hitler that the stories of "D-Day" were also lies, again encouraging Hitler to take the steps he would have taken had the institute never existed. Stefan explains that he had considered killing Hitler but feared the changes in the future that might have occurred because of that act. He says that he might have returned to 1989 to find the world so completely changed that Laura had not even been born.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

When the police arrive, they find the bodies and Chris and Laura virtually unharmed. Laura tells them that the drug dealer who had killed Danny had come for her, had hired hitmen fearing that she could identify them, and that she'd been on the run because she feared the police could not adequately protect her and her son. She proves to be an excellent marksman and has a small arsenal at her disposal, which prompts the police to believe at least some of her story. She gives up Fat Jack, who says that he holds no grudge against her, that no one owes anyone anything, and that he admires "broad's like her." Laura refuses to give up the name of the man who was treated by Dr. Brenkshaw, saying that he would be greatly harmed by her revealing his name and insinuating that he was married and Laura's lover. Laura, with the finest legal counsel to be bought, isn't willing to give the police anything more and they can't pry it out of her. The fact that Laura gives restitution to everyone who was damaged by her attempts to escape - a new car to the man whose Buick she stole, for example - puts additional pressure on the police to simply accept her story.

Meanwhile, Stefan is staying with Thelma and Jason. While he admits that his life is good, he says that he fears he's losing whatever chance he might have had to win Laura's love. Using the research she'd done for a book, Laura attains documents - including a driver's license and social security card - for Stefan and gives them to him as a Christmas gift. She's also provided him with checking accounts, though Stefan objects to the size of the gift. In February, thirteen months after the shootout in the desert, Stefan goes to stay with Laura near Big Bear. In September, she invites him into her bed. It takes him three nights to work up the courage to accept the invitation.

During the year Chris turns twelve, Chris, Stefan, and Laura go to spend some time with Jason and Thelma at their new home in Monterey. Thelma, now expecting, has been told it might be twins. The two women talk about their lives and Laura admits that she's come to love Stefan, though he'll never be Danny.

Chapter 7 Analysis

As the story comes to an end, Thelma says that she sees a major change in Laura though she can't quite put her finger on what it is. Laura says that while she was an orphan, she'd learned that her main goal had to be simply to endure whatever life handed her. After Danny was killed, she was faced with finding a way to protect herself and Chris, and she then learned not to passively wait but to fight back. She says that she's now learned that sometimes she has to accept without enduring or fighting back. They end their conversation teasing about Thelma's swelling belly and the fact that "stuffed with twins," she can no longer see her belly button without the proper arrangement of mirrors.

Characters

Stefan Krieger

Stefan is a soldier in Hitler's Nazi Germany army in 1944. Like his father before him, he joined the army at a young age and devoted his life to the Nazi regime. But after witnessing much killing and the tactics of the Nazis under Hitler, Stefan wants to leave the army. He has become a major part of a project involving time travel, and it's in this role that he first encounters Laura Shane. In that reality, Laura is bent and twisted from an injury that occurred at her birth and Stefan, in love with Laura's writing and her attitude toward life, goes back in time (from Laura's adult life, but forward in time from his life) to stop the drunk doctor who performed the procedure. Over the coming years, he appears whenever Laura's life is in danger. His love is so strong and so pure that Stefan admits that he would go back in time and try again to save Danny's life if that were possible, despite the fact that Laura and Danny are married, eliminating any possibility of Laura returning Stefan's love. Over time, he travels back to Laura several times. It's these trips that eventually bring Laura to the attention of the others involved in the time travel project. Stefan does manage to save Laura and eventually win her love as well.

Laura Shane

Laura is a writer with whom Stefan falls in love. Laura is "fated" to be born by the services of a drunk doctor, whose inept procedures badly cripples her for life. Stefan encounters Laura as an adult while on one of his time travel ventures, searching for technology in the future to aid the Nazi cause in the 1940s. Laura, when Stefan first observes her, is a published author, but is confined to a wheelchair because of the circumstances of her birth. Stefan is so taken with her writing and beautiful personality that he decides to travel in time to the hours before her birth and prevent the drunk doctor from being in charge of the delivery. He is successful and Laura grows into adulthood free of physical crippling. Several other times in Laura's life when she is in grave danger, Stefan successfully contrives to prevent her death. Though Laura is not crippled, she still develops into a charismatic and strong woman, with the same characteristics that Stefan had loved when he first saw her. Laura marries the "love of her life," Danny, but he is killed when Nazis from the past use the time machine to find Laura and kill her. Though Stefan is able to save Laura and her son, Chris, he is unable to save Danny. Laura eventually learns who Stefan is and at the end of the book, opens her life and bed to him, but knows she will never love him the way she had loved Danny.



Bob Shane

Bob was Laura's father. He raises Laura by himself after the death of his wife and clings to the fact that Laura is healthy to get through the loss of her mother. His love for Laura is evident, and he devotes himself to her until his death of a heart attack.

Thelma Ackerson

Thelma is a twin who lives in the McIlroy Orphanage when Laura arrives there. Her sense of humor immediately attracts Laura and they establish a friendship that lasts a lifetime, including through the death of Thelma's twin, Ruth, and Laura's husband, Danny.

Danny Packard

Danny introduces himself to Laura by giving her toads, a play on a story she'd written about Sir Tommy, a toad. Though Laura is at first a bit afraid of Danny and annoyed, she soon finds him sensitive and loving, and they are married just months after those initial contacts over the toads.

Dr. Paul Markwell

The physician who was to have delivered Laura Shane. He has turned into a drunk and says that he knows he'll eventually make a mistake that costs someone their life—in a perverse sort of way, he welcomes that day. There's no indication what happens to him eventually, though his medical career is certainly over after Stefan calls the hospital, identifies himself as a neighbor and says that the doctor is too drunk to work.

Kokoschka

Another man from the SS army during the 1940s. Kokoschka figures out that Stefan is a traitor and plans to kill him, though he takes matters into his own hands and plans to kill Laura as well but only when he knows what her role is in Stefan's plans. His rogue actions - following Stefan into the future - actually ends in his death.

Cora Lance

The woman who operated a beauty shop just a block from Shane's Grocery. She attends Bob's funeral with Laura and takes Laura in after Bob's death. With no children of her own, Cora and her husband simply don't feel capable of taking in Laura on a full-term basis. Laura says that she fully understands.

Willy Sheener

The predatory man who works as a janitor at McIlroy Home. Stefan beats Willy and warns him to stay away from Laura, but Willy returns to Laura, seeking revenge.

Nina Dockweiler

Nina is a young woman who wants to adopt a child with her husband, but is unable to qualify as an adoptive parent because of a heart condition. Nina dies of shock upon arriving home and discovering Willy Sheener's dead body on top of Laura.

Objects/Places

Denver

Where Laura Shane was born on January 12, 1955.

County Medical

Where Laura was born and where Dr. Paul Markwell was an attending physician.

Shane's Grocery

The family grocery store owned and operated by Bob Shane.

The McIlroy Home

The foster care home where Laura is taken after leaving the Lance's home.

Newport Beach

Where Laura goes to live with the Dockweilers as their foster child.

Lightning Road

The nickname given to the project upon which Stefan is working.

Jericho Nights

Laura's first book.

Big Bear

Where Laura and Danny buy a second home and where Laura moves with Chris after Danny's death.

Project Scythe

The original name given to the time travel project that later becomes known as Lightning Road.



The Bluebird of Happiness

The California motel where Laura stays with Stefan and Chris while hiding from the assassins from 1944.

Berlin, Germany

Where Stefan is actually from.

Themes

Destiny

Destiny becomes a major theme of this story as the Stefan changes events in Laura's life. Stefan explains that destiny always tries to right itself after a change takes place. Laura sees that herself. In one reality, she was born with a deformity caused by a drunk doctor. Stefan intercepts the doctor and Laura is later shot in the back, the bullet severing her spinal chord so that she's rendered helpless; had she lived in this state, she would have been confined to a wheelchair. If Stefan had not interfered, Laura would never have married. In one possible reality, her son Chris is killed so that he doesn't exist. Laura and her father were meant to die at the hands of a junkie, but Stefan interferes and they live. Laura's father soon dies of a heart attack. She is then an orphan but finds love and happiness with another family, until her foster mother dies as well. Laura attributes the circumstances of the death to destiny's attempt again to right the fact that Laura was meant to grow up an orphan. Stefan knows that he can change things in his own future but cannot change things in his past, another point of destiny overriding the technology of time travel.

The Need for Love

Laura lost her mother at birth but bonds greatly with her father. That love between the two of them grows to a the point that she feels no lack of love. With the death of her father, Laura soon finds a replacement for that love in the Ackerson twins. With the death of Ruth Ackerson, Laura and Thelma Ackerson become as close as sisters themselves and remain so throughout their lives, often reminding each other of their love. There comes a time in Laura's life when she would have normally fallen in love with a man and moved on with a family of her own. While she seems in no hurry to seek out someone to fit this need, she does respond to Danny when he seeks her out. The love they share is immediate and deeply abiding. Laura later feels that she'll never be able to love Stefan because of her love for Danny, even when more than a year has passed since Danny's death. She eventually overcomes that and does fall in love with Stefan, fully. Finally, Laura's son Chris becomes the object of Laura's complete devotion as a mother. Laura bonds in the same way with Chris as her father bonded with Laura when Laura was a young child, even bringing the stories told to her by her father into play. She uses those stories in two ways—to get nearer her own son and to keep the memories of her father alive. When, in one reality, Laura sees Chris die, she knows that her reason for living was dying as well.

The Need to Protect Loved Ones

The desire to protect is strong in Laura and Stefan and others throughout the story. Starting from Stefan's point of view, he steps in whenever her life is in mortal danger.

Stefan has been able to step forward in time to learn about Laura's life so he can insert himself into the proper times. With this knowledge, he is able to stop the doctor who would have done damage that put Laura in a wheelchair for her entire life. He later kills a junkie who would have killed Laura. That same desire to protect is strong in Laura and when Stefan appears on a snow-covered road telling Laura that she must get off the road; she doesn't hesitate but urges her family to follow Stefan's directions. While she wanted to live, she also wanted to protect her family. When they are being shot later in that scene, she protects Chris not only from the shooting but also from the sight of his father's body riddled with bullets. As Laura's life progresses, she finds herself in a serious situation in need of help and only reluctantly calls on her friend, Thelma, for fear that involving Thelma would put Thelma in danger as well.

Style

Point of View

The book is written in the third person with a limited omniscient view, though the limitation comes from the author's desire to hold specific facts back rather than from any limited viewpoint. For example, what Stefan sees in his own time is described only to some degree, leaving out many facts and details. These omissions are meant to be misleading. The natural assumption would be that the time travelers - including Stefan - are from Laura's future. Once the reader discerns that Stefan is actually from some forty years in the past, certain details and facts become clear. While the author could have presented these facts up front, the twist that comes with that knowledge makes for a compelling read.

Setting

The book is set in dual times and places - the 1960s through 1980s in the western United States and 1944 in Berlin. The places are real and many of the events are also real, lending credence to the story. For example, Stefan comes from Berlin in 1944, during World War II. While the experiment itself isn't historically correct, it seems possible that such a thing could have been among the ideas of Hitler, who employed scientists in an effort to find the edge that would increase Germany's chances at winning the war. Hitler himself is described in one brief encounter, and that description - including Hitler's personality - seem historically correct.

The difficulty in the setting is that the 1960s through 1980s are occurring simultaneously through the eyes of the time traveler, Stefan. This means that the reader has to keep track of the different times and places, though the author does a good job at distinguishing between time frames. An interesting point when it comes to the time issue is the fact of the time travelers' attempts to fit in. It's a natural misconception to believe that the time travelers are arriving from some future date, and many of the situational issues are resolved once it's made clear that they are actually from the past.

Language and Meaning

The book is written in easy-to-read and understand language. Any reader with an adequate vocabulary will have little difficulty. The few words that may not be understood by every reader are typically explained through the context. Some readers may find the storyline a bit confusing because scenes from 1944 are interspersed throughout the book's main story line, which occurs years later. The most confusing aspect for most will be the "rules" of time travel as presented here. It should be noted that these rules vary from those of some other authors who have written on the subject and at least one of those seems to contradict itself. Stefan explains that the time traveler cannot change what is part of his own past. That means that if a time traveler arrives at a specific place

at a specific time in the future, that time becomes his past and that becomes indelible, something he cannot change. While Stefan presents that as fact, he sends a message back to Laura, urging her away from a scene he had already witnessed. It seems that in this way, he could indirectly affect the outcome, though he himself couldn't reappear in that time. The confusion of the time travel theories may be distracting to some readers, taking away from the story line itself. Some readers may find the book more enjoyable if they simply accept the details of the time travel as they occur without trying to understand them.

Structure

The book is divided into three sections, and those are each divided into seven chapters. Each chapter is also divided into sections, ranging in length from a single page to ten or more pages. While the majority of the book falls in chronological order, the fact that there is time travel involved may prove to be confusing to some readers. The fact that Stefan is planting charges and preparing to blow up "the institute" is presented at the same time that events are happening in Laura's life, but Stefan's work at the institute is actually occurring in the past. This becomes a bigger issue as the author is describing the first few years of Laura's marriage to Danny. These events are happening over the last of the 1970s. The details of those years are interrupted periodically as Stefan is in 1988, where he is trying to prevent an accident involving Laura, Danny and Chris. This is how the reader first learns of Chris, who is actually Danny and Laura's child. The scenes alternate, with many years passing over the course of just a few pages in Laura's life and time. Over those same few pages, just an hour passes in Stefan's life as he is in 1988. While this method of presentation could have been incredibly confusing, the author has handled it well, and most readers will be able to track the events without confusing the fact that the events in this section are not revealed in chronological order.

Quotes

"Her father had said she could be anything: a vet, a lawyer, a movie star, anything. 'You can be a moose herder if you want, or a ballerina on a pogo stick. Nothing can stop you.'" Chapter One, Page 38

"Although she did not understand who the blond man was or why he had taken an interest in her, Laura was reassured by the note he had left. Understanding wasn't always necessary, as long as you believed." Chapter One, Page 40

"One of the things he had learned from the experiments at the institute was that reshaping fate was not always easy. Destiny struggled to reassert the pattern that was meant to be. Perhaps being molested and psychologically destroyed was such an immutable part of Laura's fate that Stefan could not prevent it from happening sooner or later." Chapter Two, Page 51

"At last Carl looked at Nina. 'They've tricked us. She's not twelve. They've palmed off a dwarf on us.'" Chapter Two, Page 74

"They talked for an hour, mostly about Ruthie, reminiscing, not with a whole lot of tears, no, but mostly with affection. Danny and Chris appeared in the open doorway of the den a couple of times, looking abandoned, and Laura blew them kisses, but she stayed on the telephone with Thelma because it was one of those rare times when remembering the dead was more important than tending to the needs of the living." Chapter Three, Page 124

"When she was completely under the Jeep, pulling Chris against her to give him what little additional protection her body could provide, she heard Danny speak to her from the front of the vehicle. 'I love you.' Anguish pierced her as she realized that those three words also meant good-bye." Chapter Three, Page 133

"Learning to defend yourself with guns is fine, but you've got to keep perspective, you've got to have a sense of humor about our vulnerability as a species, or you'll wind up in an institution with people who talk to tree stumps and eat their belly-button lint." - Thelma, Chapter Four, Page 148

"In the documents room, they stored and studied the many books, newspapers, magazines and other materials that had been brought back by the time travelers from scheduled jaunts. These days the men who had conceived of Lightning Road were

engaged in an urgent analysis of the key points at which alterations in the natural flow of events could provide the changes in the course of history that they desired." Chapter Four, Page 163

"Besides, bunny slippers give me confidence because they're so jaunty; they make a statement; they say, 'Nothing the world does to me can ever get me so far down that I can't be silly and frivolous.' If I died and found myself in hell, I could endure the place if I had bunny slippers." - Thelma, Chapter Four, Page 172

"When they settled in somewhere, they would be at least fifty miles from Dr. Brenkshaw's place, where their enemies had last found them. But did distance matter to men who measured their journeys strictly in days and years rather than miles?" Chapter Five, Page 227

"They can pop ahead in time to see where we show up, then they pick and choose the easiest place along the time stream to ambush us. It's sorta like ... if we were cowboys and the Indians were all psychic." - Chris, Chapter Five, Page 239

"All the unfelt pain of her ruined body would have been as a pinprick compared to the anguish that wrenched her at the sight of her little boy's lifeless body. Through all the tragedies of her life, she had known no pain equal to this." Chapter Six, Page 329

"That story- one woman wiping out four experienced hitmen, plus at least the one additional whose head had been found in the alley behind Brenkshaw's house - would have been unbelievable if she had not proved to be a superb marksman, the beneficiary of considerable martial-arts training, and the owner of an illegal arsenal the envy of some third world countries." Chapter Seven, Page 347

Topics for Discussion

What happens to the doctor who is supposed to deliver Laura? What changes in Laura's life as the result of that alteration? Who else visits Laura other than Stefan shortly after her birth? Why?

When does Laura next see Stefan? What action does he take to change her life? What is her interaction at this point with Stefan? With Kokoschka?

How does Laura end up at McIlroy? Describe her two attempts at living with families. What advice does she get from the Ackerman twins as she's about to leave for her first foster home?

Who is Sheener? Why does he enter Laura's life? What prophecy about destiny does he fulfill? What does Stefan do to change Sheener's interaction with Laura? What is the eventual outcome? Laura believe Stefan simply abandoned her to Sheener's attack. What does Stefan say about that event?

When does Laura next see Stefan? What has she come to believe about him during the intervening years? What does she believe about him now? What does he promise when he leaves her on the road after Danny's death? What does he actually do?

Stefan warns Laura that others might follow him. Does she take his warning to heart? What does she do to prepare for that eventuality? What does Thelma think of the preparations?

Describe the time travel event. "When" was Stefan from? Where? What is the purpose of time travel? What is paradox? What role does destiny play in time travel? Why can't Stefan simply go back to the moment before Danny's death and prevent the shots that killed him?