

My Darling, My Hamburger Study Guide

My Darling, My Hamburger by Paul Zindel

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Overview

My Darling, My Hamburger is a novel about adolescent love. The four main characters—Liz, Sean, Dennis, and Maggie—experience difficulties with their parents, their desires, their expectations of love, and their responsibilities. Dennis and Maggie, like many adolescents, think of themselves as grotesque, and envy Sean and Liz, who, on the surface, seem self-assured. Liz's and Sean's parents—particularly Liz's stepfather and Sean's father—erode their children's ability to love; Dennis's and Maggie's parents are supportive but largely unaware of their children's needs.

Like all of Zindel's novels, *My Darling, My Hamburger* is told from the teen-agers' perspectives. But unlike *The Pigman*, which features first-person narration, *My Darling, My Hamburger* has a third-person omniscient narrator who relates the main characters' thoughts.

The novel is both melodramatic and suspenseful, filled with romantic sentiment, adventure, and fast-paced action.

Because of the fear and anxiety generated by Liz's pregnancy and abortion, *My Darling, My Hamburger* contains little of the humor usually found in Zindel's fiction.

About the Author

Paul Zindel was born on May 15, 1936, in Staten Island, New York.

When Zindel was very young, his father abandoned the family, reducing Paul, his mother, and his sister to poverty.

The Zindels moved frequently, thus remaining perpetual outsiders in the ethnic neighborhoods of Staten Island.

Diagnosed with tuberculosis at age fifteen, Zindel was sent to a sanatorium called Stony Wold for a year and a half.

Despite these setbacks, Zindel managed to graduate from Port Richmond High School only a year late and went on to Wagner College in Staten Island, New York, where he graduated with a bachelor of science degree in 1958.

Zindel served briefly as a technical writer for a chemical company, but had little interest in the job. He returned to Wagner College, received a master of science degree, and taught chemistry at Totenville High School in Staten Island from 1959 to 1969. Even before Zindel graduated from college, he began to write for the theater; his early work was promising enough to earn him a Ford Foundation grant to sharpen his talent at Houston's Alley Theatre.

Although Zindel still regards himself primarily as a playwright and screenwriter, he has been a critically and commercially successful young adult writer as well. Zindel's play *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds*, first produced in Houston in 1964, was an immense commercial and critical success, winning an Obie Award for best new American play (1970), a Pulitzer Prize for drama (1971), a New York Drama Critics Circle Award for best American play (1969), and a Drama Desk Award (1970). The play attracted the attention of an editor from Harper and Row, who recognized Zindel's potential for writing about adolescents. Marriage to his wife Bonnie on October 25, 1973, and the birth of two children have furnished Zindel with a collaborator and fresh material for years to come.

His father's decision to abandon the family remains an important early influence on Zindel's fiction. Like the teenagers he writes about, Zindel sees himself as an outsider. Parents and teachers in Zindel's novels generally appear hostile, although adult women fare better than adult men. As a writer, Zindel seems fascinated by the causes of hatred, particularly adolescent selfhate, and his novels usually feature adolescents who recover a positive sense of self. His work also examines those people—parents, peers, teachers—who make adolescents doubt themselves.

For twenty years, young adults have responded favorably to Zindel's work; despite his age, Zindel seems to be one of them.



Plot Summary

My Darling, My Hamburger is Paul Zindel's novel of teenage angst set in the late 1960s. The story focuses on four friends, Liz Carstensen, Sean Collins, Maggie Tobin and Dennis Holowitz, an unlikely foursome, who as seniors in high school face some dramatic life changes as their lives transition into adulthood.

Liz and Maggie are unlikely friends, since Liz is pretty, popular with boys and comes from a family with money. Liz has a sarcastic demeanor, which belies her troubled home life, and Maggie takes the brunt of Liz's volatile moods. Maggie is not as pretty or graceful as Liz is, and she is happy to play a supporting role to Liz because she can be moderately popular by association. Sean is also a popular student whose family life is similar to Liz in that he comes from a family with money but no real emotional support. Dennis's life mirrors Maggie's because his family is of modest means, and Dennis is gawky and considered unattractive by most of the girls at school.

Accordingly, Maggie and Dennis consider themselves socially incompetent and physically unattractive, which undermines their self-confidence and allows them to be swayed by Liz and Sean. The novel addresses the typical teenage issues of pre-marital sex, loyalty, career choices and family relationships.

The core of the novel stems from the adult choices the friends make during their senior year in high school, which will affect them for the rest of their lives. Sean and Liz have dated for a while, and Sean's sexual frustration pushes Liz into an intimate relationship for which she is not prepared. Liz's resulting pregnancy initiates Sean's agreement to get married, but Sean ultimately relents due to advice from his shallow and coarse father. Sean provides money for Liz's abortion but essentially disappears from Liz's life afterwards, which leaves Liz devastated emotionally.

Maggie's devotion to Liz during this time affects Maggie's relationship with Dennis, which never recovers from the destruction. To her credit, Maggie is the only character who is capable of unconditional support and loyalty, and she is ironically the one who is abandoned in the end. By the end of the story, though, Maggie gains some personal confidence and evolves during the senior year into the most mentally healthy and most capable of entering adulthood through the lessons she has learned.

Although the issues addressed in the novel are important for teenagers, the time period in which it was written, the late 1960s affects the choices and ultimate outcomes for the characters, especially Liz and Sean. The title of the novel stems from a teacher's advice counseling girls to suggest going for a hamburger when a boy's sexual intensity becomes too much to handle. This naive and inadequate perspective reflects the woefully inappropriate counsel provided by those who are in a position to guide and support teenagers faced with the clash of intense physical and emotional experiences. At the time, abortions were not easily gotten, and the social stigma of an unwanted pregnancy was crippling for a teenage girl. Today's abortion rights alter the options for

pregnant teenagers, making the novel somewhat less relevant on this topic, but the story is important for its messages about loyalty and family situations.



Part 1, Chapter 1

Part 1, Chapter 1 Summary

As the novel opens, high school senior Maggie Tobin tells her friend, Liz Carstensen, that another classmate asked in Miss Fanuzzi's biology class about how to stop a boy if he wants to go all the way. Maggie was not satisfied with Miss Fanuzzi's answer, declaring that Miss Fanuzzi is a technical biological expert but is limited in real life experience with men. Maggie and Liz are making their way to the auditorium where Mr. Zamborsky, the senior class advisor, is holding an assembly on the topics of Senior Day, the prom and graduation.

Soon the meeting is turned over to class president Pierre Jefferson, who opens the topic of the prom. Maggie's spirits drop as she is faced with the reality that she will not be attending the event because she knows that no boy finds her attractive enough to ask to the dance. Maggie's confidence is further depleted when Liz tells Maggie that her eyebrows are plucked in a crooked line and that her hair looks like fungus.

Liz points out her boyfriend, Sean Collins, seated in the auditorium next to a boy named Dennis Holowitz. Liz tells Maggie that she and Sean are attempting to convince Dennis to ask Maggie out on a date, but Maggie is appalled because Dennis is tall and skinny with a face "like an undernourished zucchini." Maggie is not too concerned, though, as she knows Dennis will never ask her out.

Liz's attention turns away from the assembly as she settles down with a love comic book and absent-mindedly asks Maggie about Miss Fanuzzi's answer to how to stop a boy from going too far. Maggie tells Liz that Miss Fanuzzi suggests that when any situation with a boy gets out of control, the girl should simply suggest that the couple leave to get a hamburger.

Part 1, Chapter 1 Analysis

The story is told from the third person omniscient perspective, which means that an unnamed narrator relates not only the events and activities of the plot but also shares the thoughts and emotions of the characters. This technique allows the author to share more information about the characters so that the reader may understand the motivations and reactions exhibited by the main characters.

The actual location of the story is never identified, but the setting is a small town near the water in the United States. The scenes throughout the novel include those typical of high school students such as the school auditorium, classrooms and the homes of the main characters.



Part 1, Chapter 2

Part 1, Chapter 2 Summary

Dennis Holowitz awkwardly approaches Maggie's home to pick her up for a date. Dennis is greeted by Maggie's sister and mother, and soon Maggie descends the stairs looking awkward and gangly in a dress she has made. Dennis thinks that at least Maggie's hair looks nice in spite of the horrible dress and comments on how pretty she looks. Maggie's mother is concerned that the young people are going to see a movie entitled *Primitive Love*, but Dennis assures her that the film is a documentary and not anything too provocative.

Dennis and Maggie join Liz and Sean in Sean's car. While Liz relates the story of seeing a girl attacked in a shopping mall parking lot, Dennis takes the opportunity to examine Maggie a little more closely. He notes that her eyes are pretty in spite of her crooked eyebrows and that she looks better than the first time Sean pointed her out to Dennis at school.

Liz is less impressed with Maggie's appearance and berates Maggie's homemade dress, further undermining Maggie's lagging confidence. Maggie realizes that she cannot emulate Liz's graceful walk and mannerisms and feels even more awkward walking into the theater's balcony ahead of Dennis.

As the film about the Wambesi tribe begins, Dennis contemplates whether he should put his arm around Maggie. Dennis sees that Sean and Liz have started to kiss in the seats next to Maggie, while Maggie considers how she will deflect any intimate moves initiated by Dennis. The narrative transitions between Maggie and Dennis's thoughts on how each of them should behave in this situation. Dennis's thoughts progress to the end of the evening, and he determines that he will not walk Maggie to her door to avoid the awkwardness of a goodnight kiss.

The chapter ends with a note written by Maggie to Liz, which is sent during class the next day. The note shares Maggie's appreciation for encouraging Dennis to ask Maggie out, but she says that Dennis is not interested in her, since he ignored Maggie in the hall between classes earlier in the day.

Part 1, Chapter 2 Analysis

By using the third person omniscient point of view, the author is able to let the reader understand both Maggie and Dennis's thoughts as they battle with the awkward situation presented in the movie theater. The author also breaks up the narrative by inserting a handwritten note sent by Maggie to Liz to explain what happened after the date with Dennis. This is a unique technique that allows the author to share plot information without the need for dialogue between the characters.



Part 1, Chapter 3

Part 1, Chapter 3 Summary

Sean used to think about suicide all the time and contemplated all the drawbacks of each method, but he rarely considers the topic anymore. Sean knows that he will not kill himself, but he thinks about suicide a lot mostly because he thinks the human race is so pathetic. As far as Sean is concerned, there is not much to live for except for his girlfriend, Liz.

Sean remembers first seeing Liz at school one year and how she repeatedly turned down his requests for dates. He decided that her refusals were defense mechanisms, and his persistence and friendliness won her over. Sean and Liz went on a picnic on their first date, and he recalls feeling as if he had finally found someone with whom he could communicate for the first time in his life.

Sean convinces Dennis to ask Maggie out for a second time, and the couple double dates with Sean and Liz. Maggie is slightly upset when Sean stops at a convenience store to buy beer for all of them before continuing on to Marine Park Beach. Sean's careless driving almost lets the car run over a few rabbits scurrying out of the car's path, and Liz is touched by the animals' fear.

When the couples reach the beach, Sean and Liz take a blanket toward the sand, and Dennis and Maggie remain in the back seat of Dennis's car. While Liz studies the starry sky, Sean spreads the blanket on the beach and calls for Liz to join him. Liz is thinking about her latest astrological prediction warning her about her gluttonous behavior, which could cause much pain and possibly even murder one day. The horoscope urges her to "Pray to the Madonna. On Sundays pray to the Madonna. Pray that God will forgive your lust."

Sean has other intentions for the evening and kisses Liz passionately, and she responds in kind. Sean is frustrated that Liz will not make love with him, and they have another argument about the state of their relationship before rising and walking back to the car.

Maggie and Dennis are still sitting in Sean's car, and Maggie is nervous, hoping that Dennis will not make any inappropriate advances. Dennis tells Maggie about the day one of their classmates drowned in the nearby water, and the look on Maggie's face seems to urge him closer. The two kiss awkwardly, and Dennis silently appreciates the fact that Maggie allows him to kiss her. When Dennis opens his eyes, he sees Maggie staring directly at him. Unnerved by Maggie's directness, Dennis breaks the kiss, and Maggie suggests that she and Dennis go get a hamburger.



The chapter ends with a memorandum written to Sean from Mr. Zamborsky. It recommends Sean for participation in the English Honors Class due to his particularly excellent work on an essay on the topic of suicide.

Part 1, Chapter 3 Analysis

The author uses the literary technique of foreshadowing with the topics of Sean's obsession with suicide and the incident where Sean narrowly misses hitting the rabbits on the road. Death of spirit as well as the end of a life will become important by the end of the novel, and the author illustrates how obsession and fear can be fully realized by decisions and fate.

There is also foreshadowing in Liz's astrological reading, which states, "You are a selfish, passionate individual who hates with the strength of a scorpion's poison and loves with the madness of a gypsy. It is in your nature to steal, and unless you pray to the Madonna you will be punished for this sin as well as your sins of omission. You embrace life with gluttony, and unless you control your appetite you will suffer much pain. One day you could murder. Pray to the Madonna. On Sundays pray to the Madonna. Pray that God will forgive your lust." (page 23) The very nature of horoscopes is future-focused and this one will prove to have major significance in Liz's life in the very near future.



Part 1, Chapter 4

Part 1, Chapter 4 Summary

Liz's mother, Mrs. Palladino, informs Liz that Sean is on the phone, but Liz declines to speak to Sean. Mrs. Palladino asks Liz to come to the master bedroom where Mrs. Palladino is preparing for a night out at the country club with her husband. Liz is grateful that her stepfather, Mr. Palladino, is still in the shower because he makes her uncomfortable whenever any family discussion takes place.

Mrs. Palladino wonders if Liz has seen the Madonna that Mrs. Palladino has placed on Liz's dresser. Mrs. Palladino hopes that the religious statue will remind Liz of her spirituality and religious obligations, since Liz no longer attends church. Mrs. Palladino also questions Liz about the level of intimacy between Liz and Sean. The line of questioning offends Liz, and her tone turns acerbic toward her mother. Liz has become less of a priority to her mother since the woman married Mr. Palladino, and Liz cannot hide her resentment.

Liz escapes the uncomfortable conversation after her stepfather arbitrarily issues more curfew restrictions. Liz phones Maggie to tell her that she is not going out with Sean tonight, and Liz wants Maggie to break her date with Dennis too. Not fully understanding Liz's motives, Maggie reluctantly breaks the date with Dennis because of her undying loyalty to Liz.

Maggie's mother, Mrs. Tobin, talks to Maggie about Dennis, whom Mrs. Tobin thinks is nice looking and respectful. Mrs. Tobin shares the fact that Mr. Tobin was never the best-looking boy in school, but he loves Mrs. Tobin and provides well for the Tobin family. Those qualities, she says, are more valuable than physical appeal.

Sean interrupts his father, Mr. Collins, who is hosting a couple of friends in the den of the Collins home. Sean would like to speak to his father about his trouble with Liz, but Mr. Collins's raucous humor about Liz in front of the elder Collins's friends is embarrassing for Sean, who wishes his father would speak to him seriously someday about the issues which bother him.

At the Holowitz home, Mrs. Holowitz calls Dennis to supper, but Dennis does not have much appetite, since Maggie has phoned to break their date for tonight. Dennis feels sure that Maggie invented an excuse not to go out tonight, and he is distracted at the table trying to determine her reasons. Dennis notes that the dinner table is set with mismatched linens and china as opposed to the elegant settings he has seen at Sean's home, but Dennis loves his hard working Polish parents. Dennis's thoughts naturally stray to the idea that Maggie finds Dennis unattractive and awkward and does not want to spend time with him any longer. Dennis is unable to eat or participate in the dinner conversation because of his distracted thoughts about Maggie.



The chapter ends with a note written by Liz and sent to Maggie wanting to know if Maggie has seen Sean lately because Sean has not called Liz all week. Liz wants Maggie to tell Sean that Liz does not care about Sean's avoidance, should Maggie happen to encounter Sean anywhere.

Part 1, Chapter 4 Analysis

The author uses the literary technique of irony when Mrs. Palladino gives Liz a Madonna statue for her bedroom. The Madonna is a symbol of virginal purity and motherhood, both qualities that will soon challenge Liz in ways she could never expect. It is also ironic that the Madonna is provided by Mrs. Palladino, who is not nearly as dedicated a mother as she should be. Mrs. Palladino's interests lie primarily in her new husband, who is verbally abusive to Liz without being challenged by Mrs. Palladino.

The author also makes some social commentary related to the income and status of the families in relationship to their interest in their children. Liz and Sean, who live in financially prosperous families, are deprived of personal attention and interest from their parents, while Maggie and Dennis are loved and respected by parents who are less financially secure but are wealthy in love for their children.



Part 1, Chapter 5

Part 1, Chapter 5 Summary

A few nights later, Liz leads Maggie on a trek to the Red Pub Inn for some fun and excitement. As the two girls walk along the highway leading to the inn, Maggie secretly wishes that she had not allowed Liz to talk her into breaking the date with Dennis because Dennis has not called Maggie since that time. Suddenly, two boys in a red Cadillac convertible pull up beside Liz and Maggie, offering a ride. Liz accepts against Maggie's better judgment. Liz knows the boys as former students from the high school and introduces them to Maggie as Don McHugh and Rod Gittens.

Maggie is slightly uncomfortable riding with strangers, but the boys seem very polite. Maggie takes some comfort in the fact that Liz knows the boys. By the time the boys drop Liz and Maggie at the Red Pub Inn, Maggie is infatuated with them, but Liz shatters Maggie's perceptions by revealing the boys' unsavory histories. "They're just pigs. They'd beat their mothers for beer money," said Liz. (page 46)

Maggie is very apprehensive about entering the pub, and her apprehension is increased when Liz presents a false birth certificate, telling Maggie that she must adopt the identity of another person to enter the bar because she and Liz are still under age to drink alcohol.

Meanwhile, Sean and Dennis are driving around in Sean's car, and Sean laments his troubles with Liz because she will not have sex with him. According to Sean, having sex is a natural activity and should not be inhibited by societal restrictions. Sean cannot understand how Liz can tell Sean that she loves him yet not have sex with him, concluding that girls must not care about sex as much as boys do.

Part 1, Chapter 5 Analysis

The author uses this chapter to show the main conflict in the story, the disparity in the definition of love shared between Liz and Sean. Liz loves Sean because they connect intellectually and emotionally, but Sean is not satisfied without a physically intimate element to the relationship. The difference in the way men and women perceive love is a universal story, and Liz and Sean represent most people, especially those of high school age, when the risks involved in having sex are greater than they are in a mature, committed relationship.



Part 1, Chapter 6

Part 1, Chapter 6 Summary

This chapter consists mostly of a letter written by Liz to Sean, in which Liz confirms her love for Sean and her hope that he will speak to her again. Liz does not feel that having sex with Sean is the right thing to do and does not want to end up like Rod Gittens's girlfriend, who had to have an abortion. Liz wants Sean to know that her mother and stepfather suspect that she and Sean are having sex and doing drugs and that her stepfather behaves inappropriately toward Liz.

Sean is the only person who matters in Liz's life, and she would be destroyed if he were to tell her goodbye permanently. Liz tells Sean that she thinks about having sex with him and that their dates are no longer any fun because of the pressure of the subject. Liz admits that she would have sex with Sean if they were to become engaged first.

The chapter ends with a notice of a Winter Starlight Dance at the high school and a note from Maggie to Liz declaring Maggie's hope that Dennis will ask her to go to the dance with him.

Part 1, Chapter 6 Analysis

The author uses the literary technique of foreshadowing when Liz mentions in her letter that she does not want to be like Rod Gittens's girlfriend, who had to have an abortion. The emotional intensity between Sean and Liz puts them on a course that will soon have life-altering consequences.

The author also provides some insight into Liz's character through her letter to Sean. Liz's tough exterior hides many emotional wounds from her fear of losing Sean to her mother's marriage to a man who bullies both Liz and her mother.



Part 1, Chapter 7

Part 1, Chapter 7 Summary

As Liz gets ready for the Winter Starlight Dance, her mother tells Liz about the improvement in Liz's behavior since Liz has stopped seeing Sean. Liz fights back tears because she misses Sean and slips into a new blue dress, of which her stepfather does not approve because it is too low cut. Liz leaves the house as quickly as possible with Rod Gittens, who is Liz's date for tonight. Liz pushes thoughts of Sean out of her mind, and she tries to concentrate on what Rod is saying as he smiles leeringly at her from the driver's seat of his car.

Part 1, Chapter 7 Analysis

Liz's emotions are near a breaking point as she squelches her feelings for Sean and attempts to better the relationship with her mother and stepfather. Liz's need to be validated in Sean's absence from her life prompts her to make the poor choice of asking Rod Gittens to the dance, which will have unfortunate consequences.

There is also symbolism in this chapter when Mrs. Palladino notes that the Madonna statue has been moved from Liz's dresser to a place atop a stack of old magazines. Liz's life is about to make a radical shift from the virginal symbol in which Mrs. Palladino places so much trust.



Part 1, Chapter 8

Part 1, Chapter 8 Summary

Dennis and Maggie arrive at the Winter Starlight Dance, and Dennis cannot help but notice the change in Maggie since she has lost some weight and is wearing a more stylish dress. Maggie is also impressed that Dennis has changed his style of dress to a more mature look and compliments him on his new suit.

Liz and Rod dance, and Liz wants to make sure that everyone sees that she is escorted by the best-looking boy in the hall. Rod cannot help but notice that Liz's eyes are wandering, hoping to catch sight of Sean. During a break, Rod gets some sodas and pours some alcohol into their cups from a silver flask hidden in his jacket. Liz quickly wearies of Rod's self-importance and lack of conversational skills and welcomes Maggie and Dennis's approach.

Rod whisks Liz back out on the dance floor, and Maggie cannot bear to watch Rod's brutish behavior. She phones Sean, asking him to come over to the dance hall. After talking for a few moments, Maggie learns that Sean did not receive Liz's letter declaring her love for him and her hope that the two would marry one day. Sean instantly decides to come to the dance in the hopes of talking to Liz and hangs up the phone before Maggie can tell him that Liz is with Rod Gittens tonight.

Maggie rushes out amid the dancers to find Liz but learns that she and Rod have left the dance floor. Maggie learns that Liz and Rod are in the art room and finds the couple locked in a serious embrace. Maggie wants to escort Liz out of the room, but Liz does not want to come with Maggie, who leaves not knowing how to extricate her friend from the situation.

Liz's plan to make sure that several people see her kissing Rod has worked, but now the situation is getting out of hand, as Rod forces himself on Liz. Liz is able to feel her way along the wall, and she pulls a tack from a bulletin board and rams the tack into Rod's neck. Rod slaps Liz across the face just as Sean and Maggie enter the room. Sean and Rod engage in a fight until they are separated by one of the dance chaperones.

Part 1, Chapter 8 Analysis

Liz's plan to be noticed with Rod and to make Sean jealous has worked and ended in an altercation between Sean and Rod. The author also uses this chapter to contrast the volatile relationship between Liz and Sean with the easygoing relationship between Maggie and Dennis. Some of the conflict between Sean and Liz is due to their having dated much longer than Maggie and Dennis have, but the author also wants the reader to understand how the family lives of the two couples makes a dramatic impact on their relationship styles. Sean and Liz have financially secure but troubled relationships with

their parents, while Maggie and Dennis come from more modest families who are very vested in their children's lives.



Part 1, Chapter 9

Part 1, Chapter 9 Summary

Liz is able to find Sean parked in his car near the school. She tries to apologize for her behavior, but Sean does not understand how she could go out with someone like Rod Gittens and allow him to manhandle her the way she did. Ultimately, Sean relents and asks Liz to get in his car out of the falling snow. Sean drives silently to the beach, and he reveals that his father must have intercepted Liz's letter. Liz admits that she has missed Sean desperately, and they embrace passionately until Liz breaks it, fearing that she and Sean will go too far.

Sean's frustrations do not improve as he tries to drive the car away from the beach and realizes the car has a flat tire. Liz calls her mother from a phone booth to tell her that she will not make her midnight curfew, and then Liz's stepfather grabs the phone and berates Liz, calling her a tramp. Liz hangs up the phone without further conversation with her parents and returns to Sean's car to tell Sean that she is no longer in any hurry to return home.

Part 1, Chapter 9 Analysis

The author uses the literary technique of irony to show that Liz's parents actually add to her poor choices instead of protecting her from them. Mr. and Mrs. Palladino seem to show concern for Liz by constantly setting rules and curfews, but their actions show a lack of concern. Mr. Palladino's abusive comments to Liz on the phone actually push Liz to make an ill-fated decision. Had Liz had emotional support at home, she may not have felt so abandoned and unloved, and she may not have made a decision that will affect her for the rest of her life.

Part 2, Chapter 10

Part 2, Chapter 10 Summary

The chapter begins with two notes written by Maggie to Liz. The first note asks where Liz and Sean have been lately and if Liz is all right. Maggie also asks Liz to call her to discuss shopping for prom dresses. The second note asks Liz why she has not called to discuss shopping because the prom is just days away. Maggie also mentions Pierre Jefferson, who is impressed with Maggie's academic performance lately.

Liz and Maggie shop for prom dresses. As this is the first prom Maggie will attend, she is enthralled with the process, but Liz's surly behavior towards the dress shop clerk reaches the point of embarrassing Maggie. Maggie soon learns the reason for Liz's mood, as Liz shares with Maggie that Liz is almost three months pregnant. Liz has told no one other than Maggie and Rod Gittens about her condition, and she snaps at Maggie, who suggests that Liz needs to tell Sean. Liz tells Maggie that she plans to have an abortion and needs Maggie's financial and emotional support.

Part 2, Chapter 10 Analysis

The author uses this chapter to provide foreshadowing for the imminent absence of Liz and the entrance of Pierre Jefferson in Maggie's life very soon.



Part 2, Chapter 11

Part 2, Chapter 11 Summary

Liz rushes to leave her house at the honking of Sean's car horn, and her mother compliments Liz on her improved demeanor lately. Meanwhile, at Maggie's house, Maggie lies on her bed in shock over the news of Liz's pregnancy. Maggie also has her own secret to hide, as she gave Liz all her money for the abortion, including the money Maggie's mother had given her to buy a prom dress. Now Maggie will have to invent some reasons for not having a new dress. Maggie also has to break the prom date with Dennis, and she does not know if he will understand. If she calls him tonight, he could possibly ask someone else to go.

Sean and Liz park at their spot at the beach. Liz tries to summon the courage to tell Sean that she is pregnant, but his amorous advances prohibit it. Finally, Liz jumps out of the car and down the beach. Sean pulls Liz out of the cold water and manages to carry her back to the car, where Liz glares at him with hate.

Maggie phones Dennis to break the prom date, and Dennis returns to the dinner table hoping that he can convince his parents that nothing is wrong. Dennis's stomach feels sick as he silently wonders why Maggie would break their date at this point. Dennis feels that this rejection is a reflection on his attractiveness and that Maggie had simply agreed to go with him unless somebody better asked her.

Part 2, Chapter 11 Analysis

The author makes quick transitions in setting in this chapter to indicate events happening simultaneously. The quick pace lets the author show how quickly the relationships between Sean and Liz and Maggie and Dennis are deteriorating. Ironically, Maggie is losing Dennis because of her blind devotion to Liz, even though Liz has not been especially kind or faithful to Maggie during the course of their friendship. Maggie's self esteem is fragile, but Dennis's is even more precarious. They will suffer emotional wounds because of Maggie's blind support of Liz.



Part 2, Chapter 12

Part 2, Chapter 12 Summary

The next day at school, Maggie is concerned because Liz is absent, but later that afternoon, Liz finds Maggie to tell her that Sean wants to marry Liz now that Sean knows about the pregnancy. Liz had not pressured Sean but simply asked for two hundred dollars for the abortion, and Sean suggested that the couple marry after graduation. The plan is for Sean and Liz to move to California where Liz can work while Sean attends college, and they can both be away from their parents' interference.

Sean waits at his home for his father to return from work so that he can speak to him. Sean's father arrives and assumes his normal routine at the liquor cabinet. Sean waits for his father to have two drinks and enters the den to speak to him on behalf of a classmate who needs advice about a girl. Sean does not reveal that the "friend" is Sean himself and asks his father about a boy's obligation if his girlfriend is pregnant.

Sean's father suggests that the boy get some of his friends to scare the girlfriend into backing away, and if that does not work, then the boy should give the girl the money for an abortion. Sean's father scoffs when Sean mentions that the boy loves the girlfriend and urges Sean to tell his friend to rid himself of this girl before she ruins every chance the boy has for a good life.

The chapter ends with a note from Liz telling Maggie that she has purchased Maggie's prom dress now that she does not need the money for an abortion. Liz's note mirrors her ecstatic mood about the wonderful surprises in store.

Part 2, Chapter 12 Analysis

The breakdown in communications between Sean and his father leads to a disastrous conclusion, with Sean adopting a more mature stance than that of his father on the topic of an unwanted pregnancy. Unfortunately, Sean's relationship with his father is so poor that Sean cannot share his problem with his father and is forced to fabricate a story to get advice. Ironically, at one of the most important moments in Sean's life, when he could use the mature advice of a caring father, Sean is forced to minimize his feelings for Liz and adopt a negative perspective about women from a shallow, narrow-minded father.



Part 2, Chapter 13

Part 2, Chapter 13 Summary

Dennis and Maggie have not spoken since Maggie broke their date to go to the prom, but when Maggie sees Dennis in the cafeteria, she cannot resist taking the chance to speak to him. Dennis is understandably hurt and maintains a cool demeanor in spite of Maggie's attempts to chat with him. Eventually, Maggie tells Dennis goodbye and walks away with tears in her eyes.

After school, Sean picks up Liz, who is delighted to see her white prom roses sitting on the car seat. Liz assumes that Sean has brought the flowers early to make sure they will match Liz's dress. Liz is oblivious to Sean's quiet mood and launches into her plan for getting a job and paying for hospital bills after she has the baby. Liz also wants to discuss baby names, but Sean's silence finally alerts Liz that something is wrong.

Sean has almost wiped out his savings account to bring three hundred dollars to give to Liz for an abortion, and he pulls the car to a stop to tell Liz that they should not get married. Naturally, Liz is hysterical at this news, and there is nothing Sean can say or do except give Liz the money. At first, Liz is offended, but reality takes over. She stuffs the money in her purse, and Sean leaves her standing outside the car alone. The chapter ends with a note from Liz asking Maggie to meet her during 5th period for an urgent conversation.

Part 2, Chapter 13 Analysis

At this point in the story, both Liz and Maggie lose their boyfriends as well as parts of their souls. Although in different ways, each girl feels as if a critical part of herself is being cut away. Maggie likens her experience to "a smiling Oriental lady who had been insulted or disgraced. The smile was one of pride. Dignity. Self-respect. But she had plunged a sword into her side. The caption with the picture had quoted the smiling lady. She was saying something like, 'Forgive me, but I have lost the honor of my soul.'" (page 124) Liz is about to undergo an abortion that will cut away her dignity and honor, and both girls will carry the emotional scars of these traumas for the rest of their lives.



Part 2, Chapter 14

Part 2, Chapter 14 Summary

On the night of the prom, Maggie dresses in her new gown, and amid her mother's best wishes for a wonderful night, she leaves the house, walks down the block and enters Rod Gittens's car. At Liz's house, Liz is also dressing in her new evening dress and descends the stairs to the admiring comments of Mr. and Mrs. Palladino. Liz leaves the house, not really hearing her parents' best wishes. She gets into Rod Gittens' car, which is waiting outside.

Rod has arranged to take Liz to a doctor who will perform an abortion tonight, and Maggie has come along for moral support for Liz. Rod gives Liz the instructions and takes the agreed upon sum. About an hour later, the threesome arrives at the doctor's office. Liz goes in alone while Maggie endures the sullen company of Rod waiting in the car. About an hour later, Liz emerges and gets into the car, her mood cheerful and light. Liz is in no mood to talk, and Maggie keeps silent.

When the car arrives at Liz's house, Maggie turns to find Liz slumped and bleeding in the back seat. Maggie immediately runs toward Liz's house to inform Mr. and Mrs. Palladino while Liz screams for Maggie to let her die.

The chapter ends with an essay written by Sean and a note written by Maggie to Liz. Sean's essay, called "The Circus of Blackness," addresses a dreamlike circus where a newborn child is killed amid cheers of a macabre audience. Maggie's note is a plea for Liz to understand why Maggie felt it necessary to get help for Liz after the abortion and expresses Maggie's hope that Liz will speak to her again one day.

Part 2, Chapter 14 Analysis

The author uses the literary technique of symbolism in Sean's essay, in which a newborn child is produced by a boy and girl who are forced to surrender the infant to be killed in a circus-like environment. To the horror of the boy and girl, the audience cheers at the macabre event, just as most of the people Sean and Liz know encourage the act of abortion. Ironically, Sean and Liz's baby is murdered stealthily without any sort of ceremony, which makes the personal pain a quiet horror to both Sean and Liz, who cannot speak to each other or anyone about the life-altering event.

Part 2, Chapter 15

Part 2, Chapter 15 Summary

Finally, graduation day arrives, and Maggie conquers her shyness to march into the auditorium with pride. Maggie is painfully aware that Liz is not able to graduate with the class today and is filled with melancholy when she sees both Sean and Dennis in the hall. In an attempt to turn her mind away from sad thoughts, Maggie focuses on Pierre Jefferson's speech and the little twinge of excitement she feels knowing that she will be attending a party later on with Pierre. Maggie contemplates her white dress and corsage, and she feels as if she is dressed for a wedding. The only thing missing is a ring.

Maggie allows her eyes to drift toward the ceiling of the room, where she spots a plaster cherub in the architecture, and her mind drifts back to all the time spent with Liz in this same auditorium. Maggie's stomach turns as she thinks about the lost relationships with Liz, Dennis and Sean, but she accepts her diploma and sees her parents beaming from the audience. After the ceremony, Maggie speaks to Dennis, who now understands what happened with Liz and why Maggie broke their prom date. Dennis promises to keep in touch, and Maggie wishes him well and walks away down the corridor.

Part 2, Chapter 15 Analysis

The author again uses symbolism in this chapter to point out the beginning of Maggie's new life. By comparing Maggie's outfit to a wedding dress, the author wants the reader to understand that this day is the beginning of a more mature life experience symbolized by the typical white clothing of a wedding or transition. The cherub in the ceiling could be explained as the spirit of Liz's aborted baby. Although Maggie is saddened by the loss of Liz's friendship, Maggie has persevered, made smart choices, and has the confidence to build a good life in spite of all the recent loss and sadness.



Characters

Maggie Tobin

Maggie is a chubby, clumsy, socially awkward high school senior who is continually eclipsed by her friend, Liz. Maggie comes from a family of moderate means and makes her own clothes to fit her overweight body, so she is doubly compromised, especially in comparison to Liz's graceful lean figure and nice clothes. During the course of the novel, Maggie's self-confidence grows. She loses weight and learns how to fix her hair to make herself more attractive. Although she would not be called one of the popular girls, Maggie is capable of unconditional love and support, which makes her an invaluable friend. Maggie's inexperience with boys makes her hesitant to experience a relationship, especially with the equally unattractive Dennis, but their brief relationship is beneficial to both as it boosts their confidence levels. Maggie matures to the point that she can move on once relationships end, and her date with Pierre Jefferson will launch her into another world of academic and social popularity which she could not achieve with Liz, Sean and Dennis. The author ends the story by providing Maggie's introspection at graduation about learning from mistakes and leaving negative and destructive patterns and habits in the past.

Liz Carstensen

Liz is the primary character in the book, partly because of her dominant personality but also because her personal decisions create the most dramatic impact on the other characters. The introduction to Liz reveals her to be self-absorbed and self-indulgent, with an acerbic wit. Liz is pretty, has all the right clothes and is popular with boys. Her unlikely friendship with the gawky Maggie belies her need to have continual emotional support in spite of her outward appearance of massive self-confidence. Liz's home life is not happy due to her mother's remarriage to a gruff, strict man whose interest in Liz is nonexistent except in an inappropriate, leering way. Liz feels betrayed that her mother indulges her husband, whose interests and needs take preference to Liz's needs in the family. Liz finds her most important emotional connection with Sean, whose pressure for a sexual relationship prompts Liz to acquiesce in spite of her better judgment because of her love and need for Sean in her life. Liz is forced to make the decision to have an abortion without support from Sean, who essentially abandons her, or from her parents, whom she does not tell about her situation. The abandonment and emotional devastation force Liz into self-imposed seclusion, and she ends her high school years as an outcast due to the stigma of her unwanted pregnancy and resulting abortion.

Sean Collins

Sean is like Liz in that they come from financially secure homes where the parents are self-absorbed and not emotionally available for them. Sean's mother is almost



nonexistent in the home because Sean's father is so overbearing and dominant. Sean is a literary artist who likes to write, but his father would prefer that Sean be more dominant and pursue more typically male activities. Sean is in constant conflict between his father's dominant tendencies and his own more aesthetic and sensitive ones. Sean's home life has led him to feel almost alien in his world until he meets Liz. With her, he can connect emotionally with someone for the first time in his life. The relationship with Liz ultimately leads to physical needs, and Sean's sexual frustration over Liz's denial to have sex creates problems in their relationship, which ultimately threatens Sean's sense of well being. When Sean and Liz do take their relationship to a more intimate level, the resulting pregnancy negates any pleasure that Sean had anticipated. True to form, Sean's father provides inappropriate and crass advice, which is in conflict with Sean's true nature. Sean makes the decision his father wants and not necessarily the decision which is best for him. The decision to abort Liz's baby haunts Sean, as exhibited by the dark tone of his subsequent writing and his disappearance from Liz's life.

Dennis Holowitz

Dennis is the unlikely friend of Sean Collins because of the disparity in their personal styles and family lives. Dennis comes from a working class family of Polish descent, and their lives are simple but filled with lessons of respect for Dennis to emulate. Dennis is considered to be tall and unattractive as opposed to the good looking and confident Sean. Dennis is the male version of Maggie Tobin, which is essentially what draws the two of them together. Dennis, like Maggie, is ancillary to the characters of Sean and Liz, and Dennis suffers the most from the divisions between the foursome at the end of the school year. Maggie's unfailing loyalty to Liz destroys Maggie's relationship with Dennis, and Dennis assumes the break is due to his unattractiveness or grotesque personal characteristics. By the end of the story, Dennis learns the truth about the break up and is able to speak to Maggie civilly, although he will probably never trust her again. Dennis's self-confidence grows slowly throughout the story to mirror his growing physique, and although it is not addressed, it can be assumed that Dennis will continue to mature and grow into a respectful man with quiet confidence.

Pierre Jefferson

Pierre is the senior class president of the school attended by Maggie, Liz, Sean and Dennis. Pierre is perceived to be a strict academic with no social skills, but by the end of the novel, Maggie is attracted to Pierre. The two make a date for the evening of graduation day.

Miss Fanuzzi

Miss Fanuzzi is the high school biology teacher whose advice concerning overly amorous boys is for girls to suggest going for a hamburger when situations get too emotionally heated.



Mr. Zamborsky

Mr. Zamborsky is the senior class advisor who facilitates the high school assemblies and meetings and also recommends Sean for the English Honors Class.

Mrs. Palladino

Mrs. Palladino is Liz Carstensen's mother, who has remarried a man other than Liz's biological father. Mrs. Palladino's emotional needs eclipse those of Liz's, and Mrs. Palladino invests time in her husband instead of Liz, who has huge emotional needs.

Mr. Palladino

Mr. Palladino is Liz Carstensen's overly restrictive and severe stepfather, whose emotional and verbal abuse includes both Liz and Mrs. Palladino.

Mrs. Tobin

Mrs. Tobin is Maggie Tobin's mother, whose unassuming demeanor belies her simple philosophy of life that Maggie should marry a man who loves and respects her in spite of physical attractiveness.

Mr. Collins

Mr. Collins is Sean Collins's father, whose brash, shallow behavior affects Sean's life by being in stark contrast to Sean's aesthetic nature.

Rod Gittens

Rod Gittens gives Liz and Maggie a ride to the Red Pub Inn, takes Liz to the Winter Starlight Dance and also takes Liz to a doctor he knows about who performs abortions.



Objects/Places

School Auditorium

The high school auditorium is the first location noted in the novel. Maggie and Liz gather there with the senior class to vote on end-of-year activities, and it is the setting for the Winter Starlight Dance and the graduation ceremony held in the spring.

Marine Park Beach

The beach is the location of Dennis and Maggie's second date and their double date with Sean and Liz. It is also the site to which Liz and Sean escape when they want to be alone.

The Madonna Statue

Mrs. Palladino gives Liz a Madonna statue as a symbol of her religion and a reminder to Liz to behave properly in her encounters with Sean Collins.

Astrology Magazines

Liz refers to her horoscope constantly to help her guide her life, and she keeps a stack of old astrology magazines in her bedroom.

The Movie Theatre

The movie theatre is the location of Dennis and Maggie's first date and their double date with Sean and Liz.

The Red Pub Inn

The Red Pub Inn is the bar to where Liz and Maggie hitch a ride and where Liz writes a letter to Sean on paper place mats.

Winter Starlight Dance

Liz asks Rod Gittens to take her to the dance, which turns out disastrously when Rod's advances toward Liz turn too rough and Sean witnesses the spectacle.



J. LaSalle, M.D.'s Office

Dr. J. LaSalle is the doctor who performs Liz's abortion, and Rod drives Liz to his office on the night of the prom for the procedure.

The Teen Shoppe

The Teen Shoppe is the dress store where Maggie and Liz shop for prom dresses.

Three Hundred Dollars

Sean gives Liz three hundred dollars to pay for the abortion at the end of the story.

Setting

My Darling, My Hamburger takes place in the 1960s in a waterfront community much like Zindel's own Staten Island, but the setting is never pinpointed. For Liz, Sean, Dennis, and Maggie, all high school seniors, life is measured by the school year. Though the four are friends, Maggie's and Dennis's lower-middleclass backgrounds seem to separate them from Liz and Sean, who come from more socially established middle-class families. The pressures of teachers' and parents' expectations weigh heavily on all four characters.



Social Sensitivity

While *My Darling, My Hamburger* features positive adult characters in Mrs. Tobin and the Holowitzes, the general picture of adults is a brutal one. Mr. Zamborsky, a teacher, is always shouting and blowing a whistle; he seems thoroughly insensitive. The same is true for most other adults in the novel, which features a self-satisfied, callous Mr. Collins, a mother who sacrifices her daughter to her husband, and a stepfather who regards his stepdaughter with brutal and prurient interest.

Adolescents may enjoy the adult caricatures in Zindel's writing, while adults may question Zindel's fairness.

The major issues in the novel are abortion and teen-age premarital sex. These issues are controversial, but Zindel avoids profanity and graphic sexuality.

The many voices in the narrative broaden its perspective, and the novel does not judge or advocate; it merely describes the moral dilemmas adolescents face while learning about love.

Zindel does, however, present Maggie's ethical love of others in a favorable way.

Her choices cost her, but one can only admire her for them.

Zindel emphasizes the importance of personal responsibility. While Liz's and Sean's troubles are triggered in part by their parents' attitudes and actions, their difficulties also arise from their desire to abandon responsibility for themselves and others at critical times.

Zindel calls for tough decision-making in *My Darling, My Hamburger*.

Literary Qualities

For a short novel, *My Darling, My Hamburger* has a complex narrative perspective. Notes, letters, a short story by Sean, and other bits and pieces in the first-person voice supplement the novel's third-person omniscient narration. Despite this shifting perspective, Zindel maintains a remarkable continuity. The varied points of view efficiently reveal the family and personal problems of each character.

The shifting narrative perspective also helps to set emotional tone for different parts of the novel—generally melodramatic for Liz and Sean's story, and quietly comic for Maggie and Dennis's.

What humor exists in *My Darling, My Hamburger* arises from Maggie's and Dennis's blundering attempts to meet social expectations without sacrificing self-respect. Sean's pain is best revealed by what he says in veiled ways; he voices his grief at the abortion in his short story "The Circus of Blackness," in which a boy places a baby's neck in the path of a guillotine. The silence that follows Liz after her abortion almost feels like the death of her personality.

Zindel juxtaposes pieces of narrative in interesting ways, and a symbolic system evolves naturally from repetition in the action. The author's most artful use of juxtaposition is the contrast established by alternating the text-of the documentary *Primitive Love*, which shows the natural sexuality of the Wambesi, with the tortured self-consciousness of Maggie's and Dennis's monologues.

Symbols take shape in the consciousness of Sean and Liz. The mail-order astrological prediction that advises Liz to "pray to the Madonna" and her mother's gift of a Madonna serve as an apparent prophetic curse. Even the structure of toothpicks that Sean mocks oddly describes his own house and his family's ambitions.



Themes

Teenage Angst

The most important theme in the story is emotional teenage angst. External forces, as well as burgeoning emotions, complicate the lives of Sean, Liz, Maggie and Dennis. The impact of family and home situations is clearly seen in the contrast between the home situations of Liz and Sean, who have more privileged life styles but less parental support, and the home lives of Maggie and Dennis, who come from more modest homes with involved parents who participate in their children's lives. A big source of anxiety for Maggie and Dennis is physical attractiveness, and the two suffer from looking and acting less than perfect, especially in contrast to the beautiful Sean and Liz.

The major source of emotional distress is the sexual tension experienced between each of the couples, although to differing degrees. Maggie and Dennis experience the pangs of a new relationship and the awkwardness that accompanies new love. Sean and Liz have been dating longer, and their emotional and physical relationship has progressed to a different level of intimacy, which creates discord when Liz will not have sex with Sean. Each date and encounter is rife with frustration because of the denied sexual pleasure, and their friendship begins to break apart as a result. Finally, the ultimate source of angst is Liz's pregnancy and resulting abortion, which creates a deep wound for both she and Sean from which they will never recover.

Peer Pressure

An important theme in the novel is peer pressure. Throughout the novel, Maggie compares herself to Liz, whose level of beauty and social acceptance Maggie feels she can never achieve. Maggie's confidence is further undermined by Liz's derogatory comments, but Maggie remains a friend to Liz because the friendship elevates her social status. Dennis also feels unattractive and awkward and compares his self-perceived inadequacy to Sean's cool demeanor. Dennis feels that the girls he dates do not measure up to those Sean has dated, especially Liz who is beautiful and wealthy. At the beginning of their relationship, Maggie and Dennis are hesitant because each feels the other is not worthy of his/her attentions.

In addition to the pressure to be beautiful and confident, there is another level of pressure, which includes those students like Pierre Jefferson who excel academically but are shunned socially. Even Maggie and Dennis feel that Pierre is less socially acceptable than they are, and there is pressure to not associate with students like Pierre. It is only at the end of the novel that Maggie has lived through some of the emotional problems and realizes a newfound maturity, which includes her ability to date Pierre in spite of the peer pressures from earlier in the school year.

Teenage Pregnancy and Abortion

The most life-altering theme in the book is Liz's pregnancy and subsequent abortion. The author has positioned Liz as taking the bulk of the responsibility for the events, which reflects a common perception of the topic in the 1960s. At that period in time, the girl in the relationship shouldered the burden of unwanted pregnancies, while the boy typically provided the funds for the abortion. This is a situation that young men and women have addressed for years, but the characters in the novel have fewer choices than do young people today. Liz and Sean are no different from other young men and women who wish to express their love for each other in the most intimate way possible.

Unfortunately, people in their late teen years lack the financial and emotional stability to create a family, and the consequences for Liz and Sean are unhappy. The same situations exist today, although they are minimized through more accessible birth control and abortions. In the 1960s, the girl who became pregnant outside of marriage was considered to have a negative reputation, and her life changed dramatically as she was ostracized from academic and social pursuits. Today's young women still suffer the emotional scars from unwanted pregnancies and abortions, but the social stigma does not exist to the same extent as it did forty years ago.



Themes/Characters

Maggie Tobin is a plump, somewhat unattractive girl with little self-confidence, particularly in relationships with boys. Her best friend, Liz Carstensen, represents all that Maggie would like to be: attractive, articulate, and confident.

But Liz is afraid of and disgusted by her stepfather and has no rapport with her mother, who has submerged her own personality in order to live in peace with her husband. Liz's mother constantly harasses her about dating the right kind My Darling My Hamburger of boy, while her stepfather barrages her with a daunting stream of verbal abuse.

His excessive concern with Liz's sexual activity arouses suspicion of his own sexual interest in her. Liz's boyfriend, Sean Collins, must also weather parental disapproval. Sean's father is a macho male stereotype who cannot understand a son who prefers creative writing to football. Sean's alienation from his father extends to his relationship with society in general. He sees no good in anyone but Liz, and at various times in the past he has seriously contemplated suicide, even calculating how fast his head would fly off if he shot himself.

Sean's buddy Dennis Holowitz is selfconscious, shy, and acutely embarrassed about his personal appearance.

In Maggie's words, he is somewhat "weird-looking ... like an undernourished zucchini." Dennis also experiences a typical inability to communicate with his parents.

All four teenagers mature sexually and emotionally during their senior year.

Maggie and Dennis become a couple, first because Liz and Sean push them into dating, but eventually because they truly like each other. Maggie loses weight, learns to control her wispy hair so that it no longer looks like "thin fungus," and begins to think of herself as a normal human being. Dennis's body begins to fill out, and he learns to minimize his ungainly height so that he looks less like a human erector set. His friendship with Maggie encourages his self-confidence. Unfortunately for Dennis and Maggie, their growing relationship ends abruptly because of complications in the more intense relationship between Sean and Liz.

Zindel explores the consequences of premarital sex through Liz and Sean's relationship. When the novel begins, Liz is already fending off Sean's hands and his assertion that sex is natural because "we love each other, don't we?" Liz's unwillingness to have intercourse temporarily ends their relationship. Parental difficulties further estrange the couple: Liz's mother praises her for realizing that Sean is not good enough for her, while Sean's father intercepts Liz's letter of apology. Seeking to make Sean jealous, Liz deliberately throws herself at the good-looking Rod, who once deserted a girl who was pregnant with his child. Maggie's timely intercession with Sean, Sean's rescue of Liz when Rod nearly rapes her, and Liz's anger with her stepfather's unwarranted



accusation of sexual promiscuity lead Liz and Sean to a physical expression of their love.

Two months before graduation Liz becomes pregnant. When Liz first tells Sean, he is shocked, but says that he loves her and is willing to accept his responsibility. All too soon, however, Sean is racked by second thoughts, for he realizes that marriage will ruin his chances for college and a career. Approaching his father under the pretext of inquiring for a friend, Sean receives the advice that he does not, and yet does, want to hear: abortion. Liz cannot confide in her parents any more than Sean can talk honestly with his father, so she goes through with an illegal abortion, arranged for her by the rejected but cynically amused Rod. Maggie breaks an important date with Dennis to be with Liz, and Dennis, who is unaware of the problem, is left feeling ugly, hurt, and unwanted.

All four suffer from the effects of the abortion. When Maggie discovers that Liz is hemorrhaging, she breaks her vow of silence and tells Liz's parents about the abortion. Liz, who would rather die than have her stepfather know, feels that Maggie has betrayed her trust.

Thus, in one night, Maggie loses her best friend and her boyfriend. Although Maggie and Dennis finally talk at their graduation, their relationship has changed, and Maggie is left with the realization that maturation involves looking back and seeing former selves as naive or silly. Maggie and Dennis have matured, and their year together has been a part of this process, but their lives will now go in different directions.

Sean also graduates, but as Maggie watches him accept his diploma, she sees that the abortion has scarred his life, that he will always remember Liz and his unborn child, and that he will never be able to run away from his past.

Although Zindel stresses that both sexes pay a price for entering into sexual relationships before they are ready, he realistically portrays Liz as bearing the brunt of the consequences. Liz is not at graduation; she is sunk into obscurity with her ineffectual mother and obscene stepfather, paying an enormous price for a mistake she and Sean both made.

Both Liz and Sean suffer a loss of personal identity by playing roles created for them by their parents.



Style

Point of View

The story is told from the third person omniscient point of view, which means that an unnamed narrator has access to not only the events and activities in the story but also the thoughts and emotions of each character. For example, when Dennis arrives at Maggie's house to pick her up for their first date, Dennis thinks to himself that Maggie's house has an odd smell just like all the other girls he dates and that Sean's girlfriend's houses must smell of fine perfume.

Obviously, Maggie or her family cannot know what Dennis is thinking in this instance, but the observation and door into Dennis's thoughts provide more information about his past experiences and perceptions more quickly than the author could provide in dialogue. This point of view allows the reader to understand the scope of the relationship between the four friends while each of the characters can obviously have only his or her own perspective. The point of view transitions frequently throughout the book, and the characters' personalities are also revealed through notes passed between Liz and Maggie, as well as poems and essays written by Sean, which are all in the first person point of view.

Setting

The actual location of the story is never defined, but the town where the four friends live is near water, as indicated by the frequent visits to the beach. It may be assumed that the town is on the East Coast because toward the end of the novel, Liz wants to move to California with Sean to have their baby and start a new life. It would be reasonable to expect that Liz would like to move as far away as possible from her current life. There are important locations in the book, including the high school auditorium for meetings, dances and graduation; the art room where Liz is accosted by Rod Gittens; Liz and Maggie's bedrooms, where they dress for dates and the prom; and Sean's car, the scene of Liz and Sean's fights when the evenings end in sexual frustration. Ancillary locations include Rod Gittens' car when he drives Liz and Maggie to the pub and to the doctor's office for Liz's abortion; the cafeteria where Dennis and Maggie have a frosty encounter; and the homes of the separate characters when they interact with their parents. The time period for the story is the autumn through spring months of a senior year in high school sometime during the 1960s.

Language and Meaning

The author uses the typical language of teenagers, although there is no slang or colloquialisms that date the narrative to the time period or location. There are no indications of regional accents or dialects either, and the characters are well spoken and



articulate. The language transitions from a more formal tone to informal when moving from the narrative to the personal notes between Liz and Maggie.

The style becomes even more formal in Sean's poetry and essay, which demand proper grammar and style. The novel is unusual in that the author does not employ any slang words or phrases, which are the usual hallmarks of teenagers. This lack of slang or vulgar language seems to indicate that the four friends have been well educated and do not need to rely on being crass or inappropriate to communicate. Liz's outbursts with Maggie, shop clerks and her parents are the only emotional displays in the book and serve as indications of Liz's inner turmoil.

Structure

For such a short book, the author has several structural elements at work. In addition to the basic narrative, the author incorporates handwritten notes between Maggie and Liz, a note from Mr. Zamborsky's office to Sean, a letter Liz writes to Sean on the paper place mats of a restaurant, excerpts from astrological magazines, a notice of a school dance, the text of Sean's essay and the text from the graduation announcement for the senior class. The introduction of these elements adds interest to the formal narration. The elements seem appropriate for high school students and add to the character development and energy level of the novel in general.

The novel is also divided into two parts, "The Darling" and "The Hamburger." The first section, "The Darling," is where the characters are introduced and the relationships identified for the reader. At the point when Sean and Liz become sexually active, the book transitions into "The Hamburger" section. This division of the narrative supports the advice given early in the story to the girls about how to handle situations when a boy's intimate advances become too intense. At that point, the girl should suggest that the two of them go out for a hamburger. Ironically, Liz does not heed this advice, and the consequences affect many lives permanently.



Quotes

"What advice did she give for stopping a guy on the make?' 'You mean about what to do when things get out of control?' Maggie could tell when Liz Carstensen really wanted to know something because she would start tapping her fingers. 'Yes, stupid.' 'Well' - Maggie lowered her voice - 'Miss Fanuzzi's advice was that you're supposed to suggest going to get a hamburger.'" Chapter 1, Page 7

"Once inside, Dennis almost keeled over from the smell of cooked cabbage. Why was it that any girl he took out had a house with an incredible smell? He had gotten trapped into dating a cousin's boyfriend's sister two months ago, and her house smelled like a mixture of mothballs and Mongolian incense. And his date for the junior prom was a friend of the sister of a girl in his History of America class, and her house smelled like bananas. I'll bet Sean gets Chanel or Shalimar, Dennis thought as he sat down to wait." Chapter 2, Page 9

"Sean walked up the balcony steps with Liz. Maggie started up after them while Dennis was getting a drink from an ornate water fountain in the lobby. She looked at Liz's graceful walk and tried to imitate her, but she knew she'd be lucky is she could even get up the stairs without tripping." Chapter 2, Page 12

"Dennis loosened his tie. She's not even watching the movie, he thought. She's sitting there waiting for me to hold her hand or something. She can wait until the year 5000 before that. And if she thinks I'm going to kiss her goodnight, she is delirious." Chapter 2, Page 14

"Dennis could tell she knew he was watching her out of the corner of his eye, so he made believe he wasn't. Then he started to think about walking her to the door at the end of the evening. He wouldn't get out of the car. Let her go by herself. That way she couldn't corner him into a kiss. One thing was for sure. He wouldn't take her out again. Not in a million years." Chapter 2, Page 15

"They had gone to a picnic on the first date, but all they did was talk - and laugh. He remembered feeling like a creature from outer space who after a million years of banishment from his home planet had at last found another exile. Two foreign spirits trapped under human skins were finally able to breathe." Chapter 3, Page 19

"A three-foot replica of the Empire State Building made out of toothpicks was standing on top of the meat freezer. It was faded and looked ready to topple. Sean moved closer to read the newspaper clipping to the bottom of it. Its date was almost thirty years old, and there was a picture of the owner with his toothpick Empire State Building. He was looking directly into the camera. It was sad to think of anyone sitting down and gluing all those toothpicks together. How useless." Chapter 3, Page 21

"I need you,' Sean whispered. She loved being near him. He made her feel secure and happy. When he touched her hand or pressed against her, she was certain there was a



special chemistry between them. If only he could be satisfied with what they had been doing - at least for now." Chapter 3, Page 24

"He kept his lips pressed against hers for a few moments, and he was surprised she didn't pull away. '*She's letting me kiss her,*' he told himself. '*She's letting me kiss her.*' In the middle of the kiss he opened his eyes, and he almost jumped. She was looking right back at him! 'I th... th... th... think,' she stuttered. 'I think we'd better go get a hamburger.'" Chapter 3, Page 26

"Mrs. Tobin got down on her hands and knees to check the back of the broiler. 'A boy doesn't have to look like a prince to make a good husband. That bald-headed man out there in our living room was never a raving beauty, you know. But he loves me.' She looked up at her daughter. She touched her hair, aware of how disheveled she looked. 'I love him too.'" Chapter 4, Page 34

"Perhaps Maggie thought he was too weird-looking. A weird body. He had grown so quickly he was taller than his mother or father. But he was so skinny, and his feet and hands had grown so big. He hated taking his socks off at night because his feet looked like they didn't belong to him. A year ago they were small, and now they looked like surfboards." Chapter 4, Page 38

"But now Nature starts doing things. The hormones start rolling and those old testicles start producing and all the rest of it - like breathing. You don't go around asking for it. It happens. It happened to me when I was twelve. Now, I don't care what anyone says, Nature arranged it so that we have the equipment. And the need. So we'd better find a way, or we're going to do something as bad as suffocating. If you ask me, that's why there're so many sickies in the world. Everybody gets suffocated as teenagers." Chapter 5, Pages, 49-50

"We had wonderful nights at the beach and I'm not saying we didn't. I just think we started going too far. We went further and further on each date and you expected to always get as far each time, and if I stopped you, you'd say I was being mean. Did you think I wanted to stop? I want to have sex with you. I've often thought what it would be like! You think it's been easy for me? We don't have any fun now when we go out. We used to enjoy the evening and think about kissing at the end of it. Now I can tell by looking at you you can't wait for the movie or miniature golf game to be finished so we can go park. You think about what's going to happen at the end of the evening before it gets started. And you've got me worrying about how I'm going to stop us from going too far, so no wonder we don't have fun anymore. No wonder I'm a pain in the ass." Chapter 6, Pages 57-58

"He put his arm around her, and she moved very close to him. There wasn't a boy in that gym who was better-looking than Rod Gittens. That was what mattered. She wasn't sitting home. She wasn't in mourning over anybody. Not anybody." Chapter 8, Page 72

"Did you see Liz Carstensen?' Maggie asked. The two girls started to laugh. Maggie was annoyed. 'What's so funny?' 'We saw her,' one girl said. 'She's in the art room.' The



other girl hurriedly added, 'But the only thing she's drawing is a crowd.'" Chapter 8, Page 79

"'Go to hell,' she said under her breath - that was what she should have told her stepfather. What could he do? Punch her when she got home? Kick her? He wouldn't dare lay a hand on her, she knew, or she'd have him arrested. Let them both scream their heads off. She wouldn't even hear them because she was in another world millions of miles away. Another galaxy. Then, in the next moment, she was frightened. She didn't really have a world of her own. All she was certain of was that she didn't belong in theirs." Chapter 9, Page 89

"'That lace collar looks like cheap surgical gauze,' Liz said, adjusting the sleeves. Then she whispered, 'I'm getting rid of it.' For a moment Maggie didn't understand what Liz meant. She thought she was talking about the lace, but she couldn't mean getting rid of the material. She finally understood." Chapter 10, Page 101

"He wouldn't ask anyone else, he knew. It was too close to the prom. He put another piece of meat into his mouth. *Oh, God, what was wrong with him?* He'd thought everything was going along fine. He would've asked her to go steady. Maybe that's why she broke the date, he thought. She knew they were getting to that point. Perhaps someone else had asked her. Perhaps she had been using him all these months, just waiting for someone else to come along. Anybody. Anybody was better than Dennis Holowitz. *I'm so ugly*, he thought, grinding the meat between his teeth. *Ugly. I'm sick. I'm ashamed. My clothes are ugly. My face is ugly. My body is ugly. What am I doing alive? I always come back to this point. It's always there. This ugliness. I can't fight it. I'm running out of strength.*" Chapter 11, Pages 110-111

"'Boy, your friend doesn't know what love is. He can think he loves her now, but if he's thinking of marrying her - forget it! Is he planning on going to college, or is he some kind of dummy?' 'College.' 'Well, she'll kill him. She'll kill any chance he ever gets. He'll be a zero. A nobody. You think he'll ever finish college? You wait till he tries to take quantitative chemistry or astrophysics and comes home to a wife and a brat or two. Tell him to cut her out now. There's big things ahead in life. He doesn't know half of them yet. Christ, if it was you, and you were thinking of marrying that little blonde you're running around with, I'd slap you right across the face. A regular idiot. Tell your friend to give that girl of his a kick in the behind now and get it over with. A man's got to protect himself. Tell him to ask his father. You do that. His father'll say the same thing. In fact, why the hell didn't he?'" Chapter 12, Page 121

"Liz used to tell me almost everything, she remembered. Sean had so many problems, Liz always said. Maggie felt like yelling across the auditorium at him she was so angry. *'Are you satisfied?'* That's what she'd like to ask him. *'Are you satisfied about what you did to Liz? When you give someone the kind of shame you gave her - the kind that stops her from showing her face in public - that's something to blow your head off about, Sean Collins!'*" Chapter 15, Page 156



"Perhaps nothing is new, Maggie thought, nothing is new in the whole world. Nothing her mother or father or the principal or Miss Blair or Mr. Zamborsky or Miss Fanuzzi - nothing anyone said was new. She remembered Miss Fanuzzi's advice about how to stop a boy if he was getting too passionate. She could still hear herself suggesting going to get a hamburger. Dennis had just kissed her once, and she was screaming for a hamburger." Chapter 15, Page 157



Topics for Discussion

1. While the Tobins love Maggie and the Holowitzes love Dennis, both adolescents have some difficulties with their families. What are the difficulties each character faces, and how are Maggie's and Dennis's difficulties similar?
2. How do Liz's problems with her mother and stepfather influence her relationship with Sean?
3. Describe Sean's relationship with his father. How does it influence his relationship with Liz?
4. What choices do Liz's pregnancy and her decision to have an abortion force upon Maggie? Do you think Maggie chooses correctly?
5. What makes Sean abandon Liz during her pregnancy? How does this decision affect him?
6. What happens to Maggie and Dennis at the novel's end? How do they feel about their relationship? How do they feel about themselves?



Essay Topics

How would the course of the story be altered if Mrs. Palladino had provided more emotional and realistic support for Liz?

Discuss the impact of the respective family situations on each of the characters.

How is the situation of teen pregnancy perceived today as opposed to the view of the situation in the 1960s?

Discuss the role responsibilities and inequities in the relationships of young people who become sexually active.

Do you think that Maggie is an example of a true friend or simply someone willing to martyr her true needs to be accepted?

How could Sean's father have altered the course of the novel if he had behaved differently and provided more mature advice on the topic of unwanted pregnancy?

Discuss Sean's obsession with suicide. Do you think his thoughts and dark writings on the topic would go unaddressed by teachers today?

Project each of the characters ten years into the future and discuss their situations and lives based on the choices they have made and may make.



Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Unwanted pregnancies remain a major problem in the United States, despite several means of birth control.

Why is this the case? Why are Sean and Liz faced with this problem?

2. Discuss the shifting narrative vision of *My Darling, My Hamburger*, considering the first-person documents and the third-person narration colored by the consciousnesses of the four major characters. How successful is this narrative approach in conveying Zindel's meaning?

3. Write an essay describing what Maggie has learned from her experiences with Liz, Sean, and Dennis.

4. Liz's stepfather is an unsympathetic character who contributes much to Liz's pain. What are the problems that stepchildren and stepparents often experience?

5. Zindel juxtaposes the text of the documentary *Primitive Love* with Maggie's and Dennis's monologues to emphasize the awkwardness of their relationship. Identify and discuss other instances of such juxtaposition in the novel. Is this an effective device?

Further Study

Commire, Anne, ed. *Something about the Author*. Detroit: Gale Research, 1979.

Presents Zindel's views of his life and work.

Haley, Beverly A., and Kenneth L. Donelson. "Pigs and Hamburgers, Cadavers and Gamma Rays: Paul Zindel's Adolescents." *Elementary English* 51 (October 1974): 941-945. A perceptive evaluation of Zindel's view of adolescence as seen in his early novels and his award-winning play, *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds*.

Henke, James T. "Six Characters in Search of the Family: The Novels of Paul Zindel." *Children's Literature Annual* 5 (1976): 130-140. A fine analysis of the pattern of adolescents assuming the parental role in Zindel's first three novels. In the case of *My Darling*, *My Hamburger*, Henke treats Sean and Liz's parenting of Dennis and Maggie but devotes more attention to their failure as parents as suggested by the abortion.

Jakiel, S. James. "Paul Zindel: An Author For Today's Adolescents."

Arizona English Bulletin 18 (April 1976): 220-224. A useful investigation of Zindel's biases and their effects on his fiction.

Related Titles

Several of Zindel's novels resemble *My Darling, My Hamburger*. In terms of narrative technique, most of Zindel's novels show sophistication in point of view and symbolic development. The two firstperson narrators in *The Pigman* serve similar functions to the narrative voices in *My Darling, My Hamburger*. Zindel's biases and values are consistent from novel to novel; for the most part, he is hostile to adults and caricatures them without mercy, although his characterizations of women are more sympathetic than those of men.



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Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Editor

Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Cover Design

Amanda Mott

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Includes bibliographical references and index

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for the works of authors of popular fiction. Includes biography data, publishing history, and resources for the author of each analyzed work.

ISBN 0-933833-41-5 (Volumes 1-3, Biography Series)

ISBN 0-933833-42-3 (Volumes 1-8, Analyses Series)

ISBN 0-933833-38-5 (Entire set, 11 volumes)

1. Popular literature—Bio-bibliography. 2. Fiction—19th century—Bio-bibliography. 3. Fiction—20th century—Bio-bibliography. I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952-

Z6514.P7B43 1996[PN56.P55]809.3—dc20 96-20771 CIP

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Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1996