

Nights of Rain and Stars Study Guide

Nights of Rain and Stars by Maeve Binchy

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Contents

Nights of Rain and Stars Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	4
Chapter 1.....	6
Chapter 2.....	8
Chapter 3.....	10
Chapter 4.....	13
Chapter 5.....	15
Chapter 6.....	17
Chapter 7.....	19
Chapter 8.....	20
Chapter 9.....	23
Chapter 10.....	25
Chapter 11.....	27
Chapter 12.....	29
Chapter 13.....	31
Chapter 14.....	33
Chapter 15.....	35
Chapter 16.....	37
Chapter 17.....	40
Characters.....	44
Objects/Places.....	51
Themes.....	54
Style.....	56
Quotes.....	59



Topics for Discussion..... 60



Plot Summary

The novel, published in 2004, takes place in modern times and tells the story of a shocking tragedy that impacts the lives of both the locals and a group of tourists. It is set principally in a small Greek fishing village called Aghia Anna, located on a small Greek island.

Andreas, the gentle old tavern owner, is the first to witness the tragedy, but is unwilling to accept it as reality. From his tavern high on the hill, he sees the fire down in the bay. He is convinced his eyes are playing tricks on him; it cannot truly be coming from the *Olga*, his friend Manos's tourist boat.

As he prepares his tavern for the day, he notices a group of tourists climbing the hill, turning in open-mouthed horror to stare at the bay. Their remarks confirm the awful truth: the *Olga* is indeed on fire. A few in the group comment that they were on the same boat only yesterday; it could have been them in the fire.

The tragedy quickly draws the little group closer, allowing them to learn more about each other than they would have otherwise. Andreas serves lunch and persuades them to call family or loved ones back home to assure them they are safe. The resulting dialogue begins to reveal the reasons that they are there. Each is escaping a bad situation at home. Elsa, a beautiful young German journalist, recently quit her position on a television current affairs show and has run from her boyfriend/ boss. David, an English Jew, loves his family but does not want to take over his father's business. Thomas, a professor and poet, can handle his divorce, but not the thought of sharing his son with another man. Fiona and Shane, a young Irish couple, are grappling with their relationship. Fiona loves him unconditionally and has run away with Shane to prove to everyone that they are wrong about him. He deals drugs, loves no one, and believes that he is right and the world is wrong.

As they return to their accommodations in town, their warm, caring attitudes concerning the boat tragedy cause the villagers to open up to them and become involved in their lives. One resident, Vonni, an Irishwoman who came to the island thirty years before to marry a local, becomes especially involved with these foreigners. They find that she has an uncanny knack for drawing out personal issues, seemingly thinking she has all the answers. However, she remains a mystery to the intrigued group, who endeavor to find out about her mysterious past. The villagers, however, are fiercely protective and secretive about her, and offer little help. If the tourists have any questions, they must ask her.

As the days go by, the small group becomes close friends in a short amount of time. The villagers remark that they assumed they had been friends for years. With Vonni's help, the tourists gradually begin to realize how they must solve their problems, developing new wisdom and maturity during their short stay in Aghia Anna. As they prepare to act on their newfound wisdom, they gratefully recognize Vonni's momentous role in their growth, though they may have resented her at times. However, Vonni



begins to question her right to interfere in the lives of others when she has made such a mess of her own life.

As light rain falls on Andreas's tavern, and his recently returned son, Adonis, dances his native Greek dance, Vonni, Andreas, and the remaining group are hopeful that Vonni's son will also one day return.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

The chapter takes place in Aghia Anna, a small Greek fishing village on a Greek island. Andreas, a tavern owner, sees a fire in the bay coming from the *Olga*, his friend Manos's tourist boat. He doesn't want to believe it's true, but when he sees a small group of tourists climbing the hill toward his tavern and watching the flames in horror through a pair of binoculars, he knows it must be. Andreas privately believes the fire started because Manos took on too many people and let them drink too much. Later, it roared out of control because there weren't enough fire extinguishers or life vests. Though deeply saddened by the tragedy, he is angry because he feels it could have been prevented.

The tourists are kind to him when they realize that this is his village and he knows many people involved in the accident. Elsa, the beautiful German girl, urges him to sit down, and retrieves glasses for Metaxa brandy. David, the English Jew, asks if they can help somehow. Thomas, the tall American, reasons that by the time they returned after a three-hour trek down the hill, they would only be in the way. Fiona, the Irish girl, proposes a toast that the departed souls rest in peace, causing her boyfriend, Shane, to wince. Andreas offers a blessing and bows his head on the worst tragedy Aghia Anna has ever known.

As Andreas serves them a simple Greek lunch, the individuals begin to share about their lives and what has brought them to the island. Thomas, on a one-year sabbatical from his university, is traveling and writing an article for a magazine. Elsa, a television journalist, has quit her job and is using her savings to travel for a year. She loves Greece and intends to stay for some time. Fiona looks uncertainly to Shane, moody and bored, for confirmation as she explains that they want to find a place free from the disapproving judgment of others. David yearns to see the world while he is still young enough to know and do what he likes. He doesn't want to end up an old man filled with regret at lost opportunities. While he listens, Andreas notices that no one mentions family. He tells them a little bit about Aghia Anna, explaining that the town is rich today compared to when he was a boy. All his brothers have long since gone to America. His wife is dead and his only son, who left following an argument nine years before, has never returned.

As the group sits on the terrace, sharing their life stories with each other, Andreas abruptly suggests that they telephone loved ones back home to let them know that they are alive. The news will be on television, he explains, and their families will fear they may have been on the boat. At their various excuses, he urges again, directing them to his telephone and opening a bottle of wine to celebrate new friends, hopes and dreams. As they call home one by one, Andreas overhears their conversations while polishing glasses, and decides that they are all running from a bad situation at home.



Chapter 1 Analysis

Nights of Rain and Stars is set mainly in Aghia Anna, a small fishing village on the island of Naxos, Cyclades Islands, Greece. The author likely chose this village due to its tourist appeal. The island, in addition, has small village appeal; the locals are friendly and welcoming, and the community is tight-knit.

Aghia Anna is set on the coast of the Aegean Sea. Its steep hills allow the main characters a view of the tragedy, but prevent them from being able to help. Andreas's tavern is thus situated, leading Andreas to believe at first that the fire aboard the *Olga* must be the glare from the sun. He discovers the truth only when the tourists arrive after a three-hour climb up the hill. Ms Binchy intentionally places the main characters away from the tragedy, prohibiting them from getting directly involved. However, they are able to observe—set apart, yet grouped together—and this causes a common bond to develop. This bond allows them to share their lives with each other sooner than might have otherwise occurred, and causes any potential instinctive reserves to break down.

The story is told in the third person point of view, with narration switching frequently between several main characters. This gives readers the privilege to see the action and feel the emotion through several characters, rather than only one.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Andreas senses that none of the tourists want to leave the tavern on the hill. He wonders about families and about his own son, so far away in America. Should he have been more free and giving all those years ago? Would his son have then stayed? He reasons that though these young people were taking the liberty to do their own thing, they still seemed to have problems at home. He listens to their conversation all evening over the wine. They talk more freely as the evening wears on.

Fiona complains to Shane about her mother's concern that she will miss her parents' silver wedding anniversary. "She's actually crying about a party, and here we are with all those people down at the harbor who really do have something to cry about." Shane says simply, "Told you."

Thomas tells them that his little boy, Bill, was at day camp when he called and his ex-wife, who answered the phone, wasn't pleased with his call. He shows them a photo of Bill. When Shane points out that his son hasn't called once, despite his ex-wife's claims that she lets him know where Thomas is every week, Thomas wishes he had called his own mother instead.

David had wanted to leave a message for his parents, but they were home when he called, and he was forced to talk to them. His father asked why he called if he was okay, and his mother wanted her husband to tell David about his award and the ceremony honoring him for his monetary achievements. Though David attempted to talk about the tragedy, his parents were interested only in talking about his father's award.

Elsa informs the group that nobody was home in Germany and that she left two messages on two different answering machines. What she does not share is that one was cheery while the other cold and hate-filled.

Fiona broods over how she might have handled her call differently. Perhaps she could have apologized for worrying them, and described the anguished mothers and daughters she was sure were at the harbor. Perhaps if she had told them that she cared and would try to make it home.

David, too, thinks about what he might have said differently. He could have shared that he was learning about the world. He should have mentioned the tragedy. Life is short. If he had explained that he was learning about himself and becoming a better person, perhaps they would have listened.

Thomas knows now that he should have called his mother. He should have notified her of the tragedy and asked her to call Bill. He could have described his new acquaintances and how he had explained to them what a great woman she was. But he had wanted so badly to talk to Bill.



Elsa thinks she handled her calls exactly the way she had meant to. She does not want anyone to know where she was, and has successfully maintained her secret whereabouts; no one will know quite how to get in touch with her.

When the phone rings, Andreas thinks it's his brother, Georgi, from the police station. However, the man on the other line is a German looking for Elsa. Andreas tells him that she is not there and that he has no way of contacting her. When he hangs up, Elsa thanks him; she couldn't handle that conversation tonight. Andreas understands.

Georgi calls to inform Andreas that the death toll from the accident is twenty-four—twenty foreigners and four locals, including Manos, his eight-year-old nephew, and two boys who worked for him. As Elsa tries to comfort Andreas, she urges him to write to Adonis, who is in Chicago, and ask him to come home. Despite his skepticism, Elsa continues to plead, telling him she will help him get the words right. Adonis will hear of the tragedy, she says, and will want to hear from him. Before he can answer, the rest of the group comes in from the other room, trying to pay for the food. Andreas refuses, insisting that friends do not pay for their food. Rather than insult him, Elsa suggests they take up a collection to give to the families of those who died. Andreas is touched by their generosity. The truck later arrives to transport them back down the hill to Aghia Anna, which has changed so much in so short a time.

Chapter 2 Analysis

The author now begins to reveal more into each character's personality, attitude and struggles. It becomes increasingly evident from Andreas's thoughts and speech that he is indeed gentle and caring. He regrets being hard-nosed with his son, and feels that perhaps he should have listened to Adonis' suggestions about his business. Though Fiona loves Shane and is quick to defend him, her servile speech and acts betray her fear of her boyfriend. Using few words, Ms. Binchy deftly depicts Shane as an unlikable and surly character. He contrasts sharply with the kind Elsa, who gently convinces Andreas to write to and reconcile with his son, even offering her own editorial services. Ms. Binchy skillfully portrays the inner turmoil of Thomas, David and Fiona regarding their families. Though they love them, they can't seem to get along with them. Rather than describe these mental battles, however, the author allows us to draw our own conclusions through the characters' thoughts, speech and action.

Here the author touches upon a theme that is a common human dilemma: family ties, and the love/hate relationships they produce. Even though people desire to be loved and wanted, they want it on their own terms. They do not want to be smothered or manipulated, or made to feel uncertain about the love of another. Such a potent struggle in the minds of these characters forces us, as readers, to face the problems in our own relationships. It is much easier to try to fix others' problems than to face the difficulties in our own lives.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

The little group rides back to the town in silence. As they bump back down the hill, they know they face a hot, sleepless night ahead of them.

Elsa is staying in the Studio Apartments, an apartment hotel, which is furnished with Greek rugs and pottery, and was built by a local who went to Florida to learn the tourist trade. As she stands on the tiny wrought iron balcony surveying the stars and the dark sea, she understands for the first time why someone sad and lonely might want to end life in its murky arms. However, she realizes how foolish this would be. Drowning is not a matter of slipping gently away, but would include thrashing about and gasping for air. She decides that although she doesn't really want to die, being aboard the *Olga* when it burst into flames would have solved a lot of her problems.

David's stuffy little room is in the home of one of the families whose son died on Manos's boat that day. He learned of this when he returned from the tavern. Now they are wailing too loudly for him to sleep. He had shuffled awkwardly and tried to express his sorrow, but his Greek was inadequate, and he felt he was, too. They don't notice when he slips back out for a walk in the night air. David finds himself trying to imagine the scene in his own home if he had died on the boat that day. Would they wail? Or would his father say coldly that the boy had made his own choice, by which he must live and die? He feels anxious and longs for the company of his little group—except for that awful Shane. He heads toward a tavern in town to listen to the sad recollections of the locals as they talk about the tragedy. Perhaps he'll run across Fiona and talk to her about Ireland. Are they friendly to the English now? How about nursing—was it rewarding? If he runs into Thomas, he'll inquire about poetry, his sabbatical and his son. David loves to listen to people and knows that is why he will never be successful in his father's investment broker business. As he walks, he sees Elsa on her balcony, but refrains from calling out to her. He is intimidated by her. She has no need for a fool like him at a time like this, he thinks.

Thomas is staying in a small luxury apartment over a craft shop owned by an eccentric woman named Vonni. She looks to be in her late forties and dresses in black shirts and floral skirts. She looks almost indigent, and Thomas wonders about this apartment that she rents to visitors. She claims to be staying in the shed with the hens and he can't figure out why she doesn't use the spare bedroom in the apartment. He would rather lodge at a cheaper place, but he needs a phone in case Bill calls. He resisted getting a cell phone—too intrusive. Besides, he has heard endless complaints about lack of service in remote places. He had thought living in the same town with Bill would be easy. After all, the divorce had been civil. Shirley's remarriage to that jock Andy had changed things. He resented her patronizing attitude and Andy's intrusion into Bill's life. Andy was a reasonable and sensible fellow, though, and that annoyed Thomas even more. He hated feeling like an outsider during visits, seeing Andy's vitamins and health



magazines lying about. This opportunity to get away, he had convinced himself, was best for everyone. Now that the tragedy has occurred, though, everything seems different. He is unable to sleep. The crying from the harbor keeps him awake, as does his curiosity about Vonni, staying in the old shed.

Fiona, too, is restless in bed. She and Shane are staying in a cramped house outside of town. Eleni has three little boys and no husband, and accepted their small handful of Euros for overnight accommodations after Fiona had knocked on several doors, at Shane's insistence. Wide-awake, she thinks about Shane's decision that they travel to Athens the next day. He said it would be creepy here now, with the tragedy. Fiona wants to stay for the funeral of Manos, who had said she was *orea* (beautiful), but is afraid to say so. She thinks wistfully about her fellow travelers. She admires them and would have liked to get to know them better. She wishes Shane had been nicer to them, but understands that he had lived a confused and loveless life until he met her. She alone knows how to reach him.

As the stars glisten overhead, Andreas composes his son a letter. He pens several versions before he's satisfied, and when the sun comes up, he putt-putts down to the town on his motorbike.

Thomas answers the phone in his apartment over the craft shop. It's Bill, returning his call and asking if he is okay. Thomas reassures him, and Bill tells him that Andy had gotten out the atlas and showed him where Thomas was. When Bill mentions that Thomas is a long way away, his father cheerfully reminds him that he is only a phone call away. Bill tells him he has called his grandma to let her know that Thomas is fine. When he hangs up, he feels alive; his son has called. Fiona goes to the bathroom and realizes her period is late.

Elsa walks down toward the harbor where, to her horror, she recognizes a German news crew from her network setting up. She backs quickly into a café. David is there, about to leave to visit a temple and artists' colony. Elsa asks him to call a taxi and says that she will accompany him. When he argues that he is taking the bus, she begs him to get a taxi; she can easily afford to pay for one. While he leaves to get the taxi, she waits in the dark café with her head in her hands.

Chapter 3 Analysis

In chapter three, the author introduces us to the temporary residences of our main characters, chosen generally to reflect their personalities and characters. Ms. Binchy brings us into their thoughts as they face the sleepless night ahead and gives us a glimpse into the differing reasons for their sleeplessness.

Elsa's apartment, although small, is upscale, efficient and expensive—just like her. She has chosen a place that is modern and clean, with a touch of local flair (Greek rugs and pottery). Her sleeplessness is a result of misery over ending a relationship with a man she still loves. As she stares out at the dark sea, she begins to grasp "why someone



sad and lonely might want to end a life in the arms of the sea." Her practical side, however, realizes it wouldn't be a gentle death. She wrestles with the thought that perhaps it would have been better if she had died like those on the boat, and supposes it would have solved her problems.

David's room is small and stuffy. He didn't mind at first, but it has now grown depressing with all the wailing. His needs are few, and although he likely could afford better, he doesn't think he deserves it. His rebellion against his father's love of money has caused him to reject the things of monetary value.

Because of his father's disapproval, David constantly feels inadequate. His inability to console the grief-stricken family forces him out of the house. He anxiously yearns for the company of his new friends, but his feelings of inferiority prevent him from seeking them out. Instead, he wanders the streets, hoping to run into one of them casually, composing imaginary conversations in his head. When he finally sees Elsa on her balcony, he continues on, believing that he is the last thing she needs.

Thomas is staying in a luxury apartment—but only, he tells himself, because it has a telephone. He feels uncomfortable that his landlady has renounced the spare room for a shed, but considers her the perfect landlady because she leaves him alone—not to mention the fact that she takes his clothes to the local laundry and leaves grapes or olive snacks for him. Thomas's thoughts buzz around, keeping him awake. He had thought that getting away from his son, his ex-wife, and her new husband would solve their problems. He would be able to keep in touch with the boy without having to see him with this new family, keeping his resentment at bay. Now, after this tragedy, things have changed. He can hear the weeping from the harbor, and his thoughts are on his family and what he has lost—and on his strange landlady in the little shed.

Fiona and Shane choose the cheapest dwelling available. Shane says they don't have money to throw around, and Fiona won't argue with that. In fact, Fiona won't argue with anything Shane says. She tells herself that it doesn't matter; she's happy just to be with him. However, on this night, she cannot sleep because Shane has suddenly decided to go to Athens. He says the town will be too creepy after what has happened. Besides, he already has plans to meet a fellow there. Fiona questions this—but only to herself. She wants to stay for the funeral of Manos, whom she remembers as a handsome, sexy Greek. He had called her *orea*. She also wants to get to know her new friends better. If their room were nicer, she thinks, maybe Shane would want to stay.

Shane, totally self-absorbed and uninterested in anyone else, is the only one who can sleep that night. When the sun comes up, the individuals face a whole new set of adventures and problems. Thomas is ecstatic after a satisfying conversation with his son, Fiona discovers she may be pregnant, and Elsa finds that her hideout is about to be discovered. Desperate, she enlists the help of David, who is only too willing to come to the aid of a beautiful lady.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Fiona lovingly watches Shane as he sleeps, wanting to wake him up, but fearing to do so. Shane finally awakens in a foul mood and blames Fiona for allowing him to sleep in a chair all night. He transfers to a bed, and she scurries off to fetch him breakfast from town. On her way, she runs into Thomas, who offers to buy her a cup of coffee. She explains that she is there to buy bread and honey for Shane—and some for Eleni, who may then allow her to make coffee for Shane. She tells Thomas that she wishes she could stay in town, explaining that Shane wants to go to Athens. As she talks, she sees that look on Thomas's face—the same look everyone has upon meeting Shane. Before she leaves, she asks Thomas if she can give him money for flowers for the funeral. He assures her that he will get flowers and sign them, "from Irish Fiona."

Thomas sits and ponders life and love, only to realize that he knows nothing about either. He sees Vonni and hails her, "Ya sou." He asks if she knew Manos and she assents. He wants to ask her about herself, but he knows that Vonni discourages intimacy, and he watches as she heads toward her craft shop, easy and at home with the locals.

Elsa hides in the taxi with David as they head to the temple ruins. As David describes the site they are about to see, she finds herself able to relax. David wonders if he is boring her, and she replies that she finds him peaceable.

After bread and coffee, Shane feels better, and wants to find some action. Fiona reminds him about the press and investigations into the tragedy—and the funeral. She longs to stay but has much to tell him, and decides to wait to ask. She suggests going to a little place on the point with freshly grilled fish. Shane agrees but orders that they make the goodbyes with their new friends quick. When Fiona laughs and comments that it wouldn't hurt to be polite, he tries to pick a fight and she relents, knowing that this is not the time to argue. They should go to the tavern right away.

The day is becoming hot, and Thomas decides against climbing the hills. He peeks into the craft shop, where he sees Vonni napping in her chair. She has closed the shop out of respect for the grieving families. He thinks she should sleep in the empty bedroom, but knows better than to suggest it. He decides to go to a place on the point with a cool breeze and fresh grilled fish.

Elsa and David arrive in the old square of Kalatriada, lined abundantly with restaurants and potter shops. Elsa thanks David, her "hero," who is surprised; he is so often the buffoon. He tells her that he has let his father down and always makes a mess of everything. For her part, Elsa confides that she never knew her father, but argued with her mother. David says he and his father do not argue; they simply sigh and shrug. Elsa



tells him her mother died in a car crash, and he comforts her. She calls him peaceable David. He translates the taxi driver for her and she tells him, "*Efharisto poli.*"

Andreas visits his brother Georgi at the police station and confesses that he has written to Adonis. Georgi knows why: the tragic deaths have reminded everyone that life is very short. Thomas passes the television crews. They are mere insects to him, gathering only where there is a disaster. He thinks of Elsa and wonders where she was going in the taxi.

Meanwhile, David and Elsa finish exploring the temple and retreat to the little table where they had coffee earlier. As they chat like old friends and drink *metrios*, Elsa tells David that she would like to stay there. David's confusion rises as she does her best to explain that once the news crew recognizes her back in town, her lover will come find her. He concedes immediately when he feels her tears on his fingers.

Alone with Shane in the restaurant, Fiona waits for the right time to break the news of her pregnancy. She is certain she is pregnant because she is seven days overdue. Anger replaces disbelief as he listens to her share about her dream of staying on the island, where he will get a job and they can raise a family. Furious, he demands that she get rid of the baby and comes at her with clenched fists, showering insulting names upon her. She feels the stinging blow of his fist on her face, and all of a sudden, Thomas is there, guiding her to a chair and telling her that she's all right now.

Chapter 4 Analysis

In this chapter, the author continues to expose the personalities of the main characters. Readers find themselves alternately rooting for, and becoming impatient with, these five tourists. Ms. Binchy also raises a slew of intriguing questions: What secrets is Vonni hiding? How could Fiona have possibly believed that Shane would be happy about her pregnancy? Will his violence be the final straw? Why would Elsa run from someone she still loves, and who loves her enough to try to find her? Why does Vonni refuse to sleep in the spare bedroom? Will David ever overcome his struggling self-esteem? The author has purposefully left these questioned unanswered for the time being in order to create suspense.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Shane mocks Thomas's threat to call the police; he is convinced that Fiona will not press charges. Thomas nevertheless telephones Georgi, who recognizes him as one of the generous tourists who gave to Manos's family. Shane grows nervous when Georgi comes to arrest him, and protests that Fiona will not press charges. It doesn't matter, Georgi tells him; several witnessed the assault, and he will most certainly be locked up. Fiona cries as they lead her boyfriend away. She needs a friend, a woman who can counsel her, and Thomas suggests Elsa. He also advises that she eat something, and they afterwards embark on a journey to track Elsa down.

When they find her, Elsa panics at the thought that someone else may be looking for her, but Thomas and Fiona assure her that they were merely hoping Fiona could talk to her. She informs them that she and David have decided to stay there, and suggests that the two join them. They sit around the little table and talk like old friends, even though they have known each other for only a day. Elsa takes Fiona to a room in the little hotel and suggests she sleep, and to Fiona's surprise, she does. Elsa sits and watches the shadows deepen. The rain covers the blanket of stars. Thomas and David enjoy a game of chess together.

The four dine inside that evening, away from the rain. Ireni, the tired-looking woman who runs the little hotel, serves them kebabs and salads and beams at their compliments. Elsa muses that once, she might have known what was wrong with Ireni's life; now she is no longer sure. Though she had to work hard, with no apparent help from the three men who sat playing games in the corner, perhaps it was still better for her to live on this beautiful island. A day ago Elsa would have told Fiona to take a good, hard look at Shane and accept that he would never love her. Now, however, Elsa isn't sure anymore. She has no idea what is right for anyone.

The four discuss Vonni and piece together a rough picture of her: she is an Irishwoman who came here years ago and now runs a shop which houses a good range of objects. Additionally, she seems to care for neither money nor appearance. When Thomas mentions that he has informed Vonni that he will not return that night, Fiona is amazed at his consideration—Shane would never do that. They discuss their return trip tomorrow, and Elsa tells them she plans to stay there for a while. She confesses she is avoiding someone and must stay away until he is gone. At the men's request to help, she explains mysteriously that it is not the man she fears, but rather herself. She left him behind when she left Germany, and refuses to cave in now. When Fiona mentions that she would stay with her if it weren't for Shane, Elsa points out that she doesn't have to return—she merely wants to. To ease the growing tension, Thomas suggests they meet for breakfast the next morning. Elsa apologizes for putting her selfish affairs before the tragedy and decides that she will return with them the next day for the funeral.



Chapter 5 Analysis

This chapter illustrates the growing friendship among the four tourists. Thomas steps in to help Fiona, while Shane receives just punishment. Fiona remains fiercely loyal to Shane, but notices Thomas's considerate nature and is stunned by the sharp contrast between the two men. Elsa questions her right to judge another woman's choice of lifestyle, and finally admits her fear that she will be unable to resist ex-boyfriend Dieter if she sees him again. Ms. Binchy develops these characters realistically, layering them with common foibles, faults and unanswered questions. However, she does it in such a way as to endear them to the reader. These are characters who understand the value of friendship; though they may disagree with each other, they are always quick to apologize and set things right. Notice, also, the appearance of rain following a clear night of stars. This is patent symbolism of the highs and lows in life.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Shane sits in the holding cell waiting for Fiona. Where is she? He bangs on the door and asks Georgi if she has visited, saying he has rights. When Georgi informs the prisoner that Fiona has not appeared, and furthermore believes she has left Aghia Anna, Shane shouts in disbelief.

Georgi is worn out from the reports and the cameramen. When he mentions Shane to Vonni, she suggests deporting him, and although he is skeptical, he decides it's the best solution. He gives Shane two options: he can sit in jail for a week, and perhaps go to jail, or get a free trip to Athens. Shane reluctantly chooses to leave. As he collects his things, he sees Fiona's belongings, but the police do not mention to him that she will return.

The four tourists return on a bus from Kalatriada, lost in their thoughts. Elsa ponders the odds that Dieter would show up on this tiny island where she had come to escape him. Fiona hopes Shane has calmed down, and plans to ask Andreas to talk to his brother. Thomas plans how he will ask Vonni to sleep in the spare room; he does not want to sound patronizing. David looks out at the waving children and considers what life would have been like with siblings. Perhaps all the pressure would not have been burdened on him. Fiona had mentioned Catholic guilt. She had no idea what Jewish guilt was like!

As Georgi and Andreas deport Shane, they ask if he would like to write a few lines to Fiona. He refuses, despite Andreas's urging. Andreas knows it will break Fiona's heart.

Thomas arrives at his apartment and hears children reciting "The Lord Is My Shepherd." As David and Fiona walk Elsa to her apartment, they notice how quiet the streets are. Fiona hurries to the police station for Shane as the ferry hoots from the harbor, while David and Elsa talk of life and love. Though they are both twenty-eight, David feels that she has put her years to better use. Elsa, however, is not so sure. Seeing that she has become a bit morose, he tries to cheer up with a golf joke that fails miserably. She is touched by his attempt, however, and invites him to have lunch at her apartment.

Upon discovering that Shane has left on the ferry for Athens, a weepy Fiona resolves to follow him. However, no boat is available because of the funeral. Georgi tries to comfort her, suggesting that Shane may write when he has settled in a bit. He then asks Fiona to help Vonni with her children during the funeral, propelling Fiona to dream aloud about a future on the island with Shane and their future family. Georgi feels a lump in his throat as Fiona helps Vonni.

On his way to get Elsa for the funeral, Thomas sees the priests. He wonders why men from this sunny island would join religious orders, then remembers those at home in California whose faith seemed to strengthen them. When he arrives at Elsa's apartment,



he is surprised to see David there. As the three head to the funeral, they see villagers dressed in black, fishing boat flags at half mast, and rows of closed shops. Television cameras from various countries abound. The little church is bursting at its seams with mourners, and sobbing fills the air as the children sing "The Lord Is My Shepherd" and "Tannenbaum." They are pleased to see Fiona with Vonni and the children. No one wants to be alone, so they agree to go back to Thomas's together for a snack. Elsa, who feels a bit chilly, says she will pick up a scarf and some olives from the deli and meet them there.

Elsa sees Dieter as she leaves the deli. She ducks into the doorway, but it is too late; he has spotted her and runs to her. She has forgotten how handsome he is. He tells Claus, his cameraman, to go to Athens without him. Elsa tells him not to stay for her; if he tries to force her, she will get the police. Astounded, Dieter says that he loves her and only wants to know why she left. She agrees to go back to his place and leaves the olives at the deli with a note to have them delivered.

Vonni thanks Fiona for her help and praises her ability to handle children. As they talk, Vonni admits to having a son, but refuses to elaborate, and Fiona confesses her pregnancy. Vonni takes her to Thomas's when there's no answer at Elsa's. Thomas and David admit that they think Elsa is with the German man.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Shane's departure to Athens allows the four tourists to deepen their bonds. Because Ms. Binchy has drawn a completely unsympathetic picture of Shane, the reader is glad to be rid of him. Indeed, he makes himself even more despicable when he refuses to leave Fiona even a simple goodbye note. Conveniently enough, Fiona is unable to follow him due to the unavailability of ferries at this time of mourning.

Ms. Binchy touches upon Catholic guilt, a subject with which she is certainly familiar, having been raised Irish Catholic. David, however, claims that Jewish guilt is even worse.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

At the Anna Beach, Elsa and Dieter snipe at each other over coffee until she surprisingly suggests that they go to his room, where she succeeds in reducing their relationship to mere crudeness. Vonni visits Maria to help in the kitchen and offer advice on how to handle well-meaning but interfering relatives. She tells of a hardship in her past and assures Maria that she will someday laugh again. Thomas invites David and Fiona to stay with him after discovering that neither wants to return home.

Andreas and Georgi are alone at the station. They discuss the events of the day and talk about their sister Christina, who lived too far away to attend the funeral. A lonely Maria asks Vonni to spend the night. Her bed is too big and empty. Vonnie agrees after warning that she snores. That's okay, Maria tells her, Manos did too, though he always denied it.

Alone in the spare room of Thomas's luxurious apartment, Fiona wishes Shane could be there with her, then realizes that he would have fought with Thomas. What a tragedy, she thinks, that people misunderstand him. She lies on the blue cover and cries herself to sleep. Thomas and David, in the next room playing chess, overhear her sobs and agree that women are difficult to understand.

Elsa goes to Dieter's room, where they make love. He is bewildered when she abruptly goes to leave; he thought everything was fine. He offers to marry her, and as she rejects the proposal, we finally hear the reason that she fled: he had a child with a former lover, and he has never bothered to contact the child. As an abandoned child herself, Elsa cannot respect a man who would do such a callous thing. With firm resolve, she tells Dieter a final goodbye and leaves him pleading and pledging his love. Vonni, who has gone for milk for Maria's family, overhears.

Chapter 7 Analysis

In this chapter, it becomes evident that it is not a night for anyone to be alone. As the tragedy becomes a reality for all the villagers and tourists, many seek companionship and spend the night with friends or even adversaries.

Elsa begins to exercise her independence by correcting Dieter's drink order for her at the hotel. Later, even though she is ready to end their relationship, she coldly toys with him sexually, reducing their relationship to one of mere physical pleasure. Her own abandonment by her father erases any respect she may have had for him. This is a final, symbolic goodbye.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

The friends awake in Thomas's apartment with fresh hope and plans. Fiona will calmly ask the police chief to help her find Shane, and offer to help Vonni with the children. David plans to visit Andreas. Thomas intends to call his son, but not before, he convinces Vonni to stay in her own bedroom. After watching the sunrise, Elsa takes a shower and returns to the balcony, where she watches as the ferry prepares to leave. She picks Dieter out of the crowd and sees him searching futilely for her. From her balcony far away, she hears him call out that he loves her as tears fall into her coffee.

When David arrives at Andreas's, the tavern owner's face lights up, making David wistful about his own father. As the two talk, Andreas reminisces about Manos and Adonis playing on the tree swing as children and wonders if his wife knows from heaven that Manos is dead and that Adonis is in Chicago. As their conversation progresses into spiritual matters, David describes his view of Jewish heaven, which comforts Andreas. David wonders why his foolish son ran away to Chicago.

Fiona is upset when she arrives at Eleni's and sees that Shane's things are gone, without a note. Later, when she realizes that she has miscarried her baby, she calls for Vonni. Vonni will know what to do.

Meanwhile, Thomas pleads with Vonni to accept his friendship and stay in the spare room. As they argue, they hear the children shouting something from upstairs. Vonni jumps up to leave, and Thomas takes her wrist, refusing to let her go until she agrees. She relents and tells him to get a taxi, explaining that Fiona is losing the baby and needs their help. Though questioning the necessity of his presence, Thomas climbs obediently into the taxi. Once there, he buys Eleni's children a *karpouzi* to keep them occupied while Vonni tends to Fiona.

Fiona is fine but has lost some blood, and Vonni suggests resting somewhere under someone's watchful care. When Thomas intimates that Elsa might be tied up with her own affairs, Vonni contests that the German has left, following Elsa's own wishes. Thomas goes to investigate.

When Fiona declares that she doesn't care if she recovers or not, Vonni reminds her that many people care about her and have gone out of their way to help her. Furthermore, after so many young deaths in the tragic accident, it is selfish to be negligent and blasé about one's own life. When Fiona questions if Vonni thinks the miscarriage was for the best, Vonni replies negatively: losing a human being at any stage in life is a terrible thing. However, she must remain strong. She reminds Fiona that she has friends, including Elsa. Fiona fears that Elsa won't want anything to do with her, but Vonni reassures her and indeed, Elsa takes Fiona back to her beautiful apartment for rest.



Thomas's phone call to Bill does not go well: he feels that Andy has dismissed the tragedy, he discovers that the atlas and dictionary have been stowed on the upstairs landing, and Bill makes a pointed reminder of Thomas's abandonment. He hangs up feeling very low. When Vonni begins to comment, he replies that she does not know what it is like to have son. Here Vonni confesses that she does have a son, who left because she, like Thomas, made a mess of things.

When Georgi brings Andreas a leg of lamb, Andreas decides to prepare it for the policemen, who worked so hard at the funeral, and David and his friends. On his orders, David goes to Adonis's room to retrieve long red pillows for the benches at the police station, and is astonished that the room is still completely intact, as if awaiting his return. As he looks out at the window, David wonders how Chicago could compare to the beauty of this island. David longs for a father like Andreas, so easily satisfied with simple things.

Thomas is pleased at the thought of the feast. As Vonni leaves to invite Fiona, she explains to David the situation surrounding both Fiona and Elsa, and warns him to be tactful.

Spirits are high at the feast, and the policemen and tourists teach each other words for the wine and the toasts. Even though it has only been two days, it feels like much more time has passed since they were in Kalatriada in the rain. Near the harbor, they see a group of young men gather in front of Maria and Manos's house. People are leaving restaurants and cafés to join them. Fearing tension and accusations may develop, Georgi sends a policeman to the house. However, it is only a group of men who have come to dance *Syrtaki* in honor of Manos and his friends. As they watch silently and listen to the music from the *bouzouki*, many wipe away tears while they clap along. Fiona wonders, as the stars shine on Athens and across the expanse of land and ocean, what families and friends are doing back home, and if they could possibly understand this emotional moment.

Chapter 8 Analysis

In this chapter, the main characters awaken to a bright and sunny new day, symbolizing hope and fresh beginnings. Even an anguished Elsa has showered and donned a sunny yellow dress as she picks up the pieces of her new life without Dieter.

A conversation between Andreas and David about heaven raises the topic of spirituality and religion. The author uses Andreas's acceptance of David's opinion of Jewish heaven to indicate to readers that perhaps there really is not much difference between certain beliefs.

Fiona's miscarriage foreshadows the end of her relationship with Shane. Despite her claims that she doesn't care about her wellbeing, she embodies the resilience of the human spirit as she recovers, still intent on finding Shane. Elsa has washed the dress

and jacket she wore to Dieter's room, and offers them to Fiona as another symbolic gesture of the finality of their breakup.

The funeral and dance performed by the young men of Aghia Anna, offer a reminder of the necessity of ritual and respect in civilized society while demonstrating that beauty and optimism can persevere despite the hardships and tragedy of life.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

In Dublin, Maureen and Sean Ryan have a heated discussion about their daughter Fiona. Maureen is touched that Fiona called to let them know she was all right, even though they hadn't even known she was there. Sean, however, is unbending. He cares little whether or not she comes home for their silver anniversary; he thinks she would spend the entire time hanging on the arm of her drug addict boyfriend, exclaiming that they don't understand him. Maureen has invited Fiona's best friend Barbara over to talk. They both miss Fiona and want to see her again. Barbara proposes that they each write her a letter, asking if she and Shane will be home in time for the wedding anniversary or Christmas. When her parents protest, Barbara explains that she has a feeling that their relationship will not last, and suggests that if they pretend to accept Shane, Fiona may be more open.

In Manchester, David's parents Miriam and Harold watch news coverage of the accident in Aghia Anna. Harold, dripping with sarcasm, says the accident must have been horrific for David to call. Miriam defends David, reminding her husband of their son's many letters. Suddenly filled with doubt, Harold wonders if he should have reacted differently to David. Though Miriam reassures him, he cannot help questioning why their son fled to a one-horse Greek town.

Miriam pleads with her husband to allow her to share his new feelings with David, but he refuses; he does not want his son's pity. Later, they discover that Harold has indeed won Businessman of the Year and has been invited to a ceremony and to dinner with the mayor. Miriam is sure David will be proud and will come home to celebrate; Harold is less certain.

Meanwhile, Shirley and Bill are in deep conversation about his father, Thomas. Shirley explains to her son that although adult love is less certain, her love for him is unconditional. Such is the nature of love between a parent and a child. However, Bill disagrees because Thomas does not seem to love him that way. In fact, Thomas is the one who left.

Later, Bill confesses to Andy that he is feeling down and asks if Thomas knows that he is welcome to live close by and be a part of his life. When Andy assures him that Thomas knows, Bill wonders why his father has chosen to leave.

Birgit is delighted when Claus arrives at the newsroom, but he knows it is not because of him. She immediately inquires about Dieter, and he enjoys the expression on her face when he tells her that Dieter has found Elsa and has stayed on Aghia Anna.



In Chicago, Adonis reads about the tragedy in the newspaper but decides he will say nothing about it to others. He contemplates calling his father, but decides against it, fearing he would look weak.

Shane wants to go to the Exarchia area. He has heard that it is full of ouzo shops and taverns where he can sell his grass. However, he cannot understand the Metro system in Athens. Fiona had always taken care of that sort of thing. Fiona, just like everyone else, has let him down. He is certain that she is not really pregnant, and imagines that she will probably head home, where she will receive a great welcome when her family discovers that he is not with her. He finds a good location to do his business, but almost immediately, a camera flashes in his face, and he feels a harsh hand on his collar. A voice tells him to leave and never come back, lest he choose to face the police. He learns to apologize in Greek, *signomi*, before he staggers off into the warm night.

Chapter 9 Analysis

In this chapter, Ms. Binchy depicts familiar figures: the loving, merciful mother and the authoritarian, rigid father. Fiona's parents are in disagreement. Maureen wants her daughter back, while Sean can do nothing but rant against her boyfriend. David's parents also argue. His father is bitter, and though his mother wants to support him, she desires nothing more than to establish peace between father and son. These examples illustrate the common theme of mother as peacemaker and father as prideful authority figure.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Thomas awakens with a headache. He thinks about buying breakfast to share with Vonni to solidify their friendship, but discovers oranges and rolls waiting for him in the kitchen and realizes that she has already been up for a long time.

Elsa leaves a note for Fiona, who is still asleep, to let her know that she has gone to the harbor and to suggest that they meet for lunch. Outside there is a distinct solemnity, but the locals are continuing on with their lives. Elsa feels isolated, and when Vonni invites her to go swimming with her and the children, she accepts, grateful to feel like she belongs somewhere—at least for a while.

David hires a bicycle and sets out for the beach recommended by the family with whom he is staying. Though he would like to be with his new friends, no one has suggested anything, and he does not want to ask. As he rides along, he admires the countryside. How could anyone choose to live in a city over this? When he arrives at the beach, he is dismayed to see that Vonni, Elsa, and the children are there. He lies on a grassy mound, longing to join them, until Elsa spots him and invites him over.

Thomas walks to the harbor and responds as the fishermen nod to him. He regrets not having studied his phrase book when one of them says something he does not understand. *Signomi*, he apologizes. A sailor translates that Thomas and his friends are good people for sharing in their tragedy. They are all saddened by it, Thomas tells him, and touched at the dancing. When the sailor realizes that Thomas and his friends all hail from different countries, he is surprised; he thought they had always been friends.

Fiona reads Elsa's note and marvels that she would meet such a kind person so far from home. Shane will be glad when she tells him—she knows he will get in touch soon. She wishes she could attend her parents' silver anniversary, but faults her father's for being so defiant about Shane. She puts on her best face and leaves to meet Elsa.

After leaving David at the beach, Vonni brings Elsa to the harbor. Elsa is shocked to discover that Vonni has been on the island for over thirty years. Though Vonni claims she doesn't mind answering reasonable questions, she refuses to answer Elsa's inquiry about an old romance.

Elsa sees Thomas and joins him, and together they admire the sea. As they discuss the beauty of the waves, Thomas begins to quote Byron. Elsa astonishes him by finishing the quote. They discuss poetry and German words companionably, as if they have known each other their entire lives.

Vonni visits a weeping Maria and offers to teach her how to drive. That way, she can help out in the shop and collect things for her. When Maria protests, Vonni tells her that Manos would have been of her, eliciting a smile from the widow.



David comes across a driving lesson in progress. Noticing that it seems to be going poorly, he offers to teach Maria, and he proves to be a kind and patient teacher. Vonni leaves them and pedals his bike into town, where she runs across Fiona, who is waiting for Elsa at the café. Fiona is initially upset when she thinks that Vonni, like everyone else, is judging Shane unfairly. She quickly apologizes and asks for Vonni's opinion about Shane returning. When Vonni suggests he might contact her in Dublin, Fiona announces her plans to stay on the island. Vonni insists that this is merely a holiday place for vacationers, and Fiona reminds her that she stayed. Vonni lets slip that she came here with a man named Stavros, but catches herself and ends the conversation abruptly. Vonni leaves as Elsa arrives, and David soon joins them. Both Fiona and Elsa agree not to reveal what they have learned about Vonni.

Thomas does not want to return to the empty apartment. He had made a list of things to talk about with Bill during their next conversation, but concludes that the topics are dull and that he is pitiful. Vonni comes home to find him sitting in the dark. As he confesses his self-doubts as a father, Vonni reassures him that his inability to communicate with his son is normal. She urges him to return home to his family, and Thomas recalls her confession that she, too, had ruined things with her son. He prays that he will do the right thing.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Once again, the author reveals David's insecurities. It seems that he is constantly on the outside looking in, waiting to be invited. Ms. Binchy paints him as a likable character with whom the reader can identify. Unsurprisingly, he proves to be a patient and kind instructor when he teaches Maria how to drive. Through the fishermen's assumptions that the tourists are old friends, Ms. Binchy beautifully illustrates the closeness that can occur in relationships in response to tragedy. Vonni has begun to reveal bits and pieces of her past as she tries to give advice to Fiona. Though she is wise, she finds that often people do not want advice; they simply want someone to say what they want to hear.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Over coffee with Vonni, David talks about his difficult relationship with his parents. When she tries to comfort him by saying that they perhaps will have softened by the time he returns, he declares that he is not going back. In a repeat of her conversation with Fiona, Vonni tells him that he cannot stay on the island forever. When he reminds her that she did, she says she is tired of explaining that those were different times. She mentions that she once owned the large petrol station, but changes the subject when he asks about it. As the subject shifts to Andreas, Vonni suggests that there is a parallel between his situation with his parents and that of Andreas and Adonis. David, however, refuses to see the similarities. Vonni begins to talk about her son Stavros, describing a time when she was less kind.

Andreas and Georgi play backgammon in a café and speak of their sister, Christina, who had a troubled youth but has found happiness on the other side of the island. They do not talk of her past, or of Georgi's former wife.

Thomas finds the *vivliopolio* (bookstore) Vonni had told him about. He finds a book of German poetry with English translation and is copying lines to recite to Elsa when she discovers him. When he confesses that he had hoped to impress her, she responds that she is already impressed.

Andreas receives a call at the tavern from Barbara inquiring about Fiona. He says nothing, but gives her the number of the police station. He regrets writing the letter to Adonis.

Fiona sees Dr. Leros, who pronounces her to be perfectly healthy. Hoping to find a way to settle on the island, she asks if he might have a job for her. He doesn't, and suggests that she try the hotel. She discards the idea immediately, as it closes in winter. He is amazed that she intends to stay year round. When she reminds him that Vonni did, he says, "That's different. She married a Greek," and refuses to elaborate.

Georgi delivers an email from Barbara to Fiona. She lights up, thinking the email is from Shane, and is immediately disappointed. Georgi feels badly that they are keeping his whereabouts from her, but reasons that Shane could contact her if he truly wanted to. She reads Barbara's letter and is stunned; her parents seem to have changed their minds about Shane.

Elsa stops at Vonni's craft shop and invites her to dinner; Fiona is cooking. However, Vonni already has plans that night to work with blind people who make rugs. She reveals to Elsa the saga of her relationship with her husband: he had an affair, moved in with the other woman, and brought their son with him. She said the people here were kind to her, even though she was a foreigner and did stupid things. At this, Elsa confides



her reasons for ending her relationship with Dieter. To her amazement, Vonni tells her to grow up. Elsa expects too much from him, says Vonni, and should not return because she will always be disappointed in him. Confused, Elsa later mentions the quarrel during dinner with Fiona, who thinks Elsa should go back if she loves him.

The four friends meet at the harbor café and discuss what they know about Vonni. David concludes that she is an alcoholic, as she never drinks alcohol. The others are impressed that he has noticed.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Vonni continues to unravel the secrets of her past life to the friends as she tries to help them with their problems. She reveals her sad story in an effort to make them see their own foolishness, as if to say, "See, this is what I went through. Your situation isn't so bad. And even if it is, don't be stupid like I was. Learn from my mistakes."

Fiona's attempt to get a job fails. She receives a hopeful letter from an old friend, in a foreshadowing of her eventual desire to return home. Here the author demonstrates the symbolic opening and closing of doors in life.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Although the four friends ask around Aghia Anna about Vonni, the locals will reveal nothing to them. Thomas admires Vonni's blouse, and Vonni comments that a woman named Magda made it for her. Thus, Vonni invites us into another slice of her past: she befriended Magda when the woman's marriage was shaky, and in the process, she stole Vonni's husband. She then continues to shed the layers of her past with the story of her romance with her husband. They met in Ireland when she was just a girl, and she fell in love, embezzled two and a half thousand dollars, and ran away to Greece with him, telling Stavros that the money came from her savings. Around the time they arrived in Greece, Christina, who was pregnant with Stavros's child, tried to kill herself, but only succeeded in killing her unborn child. Vonni visited her for weeks and the two became friends. They bought a service station and she worked in it night and day. After Vonni's son was born, Christina gave her baby clothes she had made for Stavros's child. Vonni concludes by telling Thomas that she eventually paid back the money she had stolen.

David receives a disappointing letter from his parents detailing the award and the ceremony. He decides to write letter back, politely stating that he won't be there.

Fiona writes to Barbara, describing the beauty of the island and the courage of the people in the face of tragedy. She explains that Shane has gone to Athens for work and will return any day. Elsa receives a fax from Dieter and correctly guesses what he has written: they will get married, he writes. Why play games? Adonis cries upon reading his letter from Andreas. He cries again because he has no one to bring home.

In prison, Shane demands his right to make a phone call. The phone rings at the police station in Aghia Anna, and Georgi informs him that Fiona is not there. The police allow Shane a second call, and this time he telephones Barbara in Ireland to ask if Fiona has returned to Dublin. Barbara is thrilled, thinking the two must have split up.

Vonni continues to share her past with Thomas. Though it took nearly thirty years to repay the money, she says, it never made a difference to her unforgiving family. She went crazy at one point. Afterwards, Vonni gives Thomas permission to retell her story to the others, hoping this will stop them from bothering the locals with questions. He tells his friends the next day, and says that he is certain she will continue her story with someone else soon.

The next day, David shares his mother's letter with Vonni, and says he won't go back for the award ceremony. Vonni explains to him that she was not welcome at her home, and regrets not being able to see her family. She tells him the story about Magda and her violent husband, how she tried to help the woman, and how she finally discovered Magda in her bed with Stavros. Vonni got so drunk that she ended up in the hospital. Christina told her to pretend to be calm so the hospital would release her. When she



returned home, Stavros refused to speak to her, and moved in with Magda. He told her he planned to sell the garage and move away with Magda and little Stavros, who at the time was living in Athens with his aunt. How was she to pay back the money now?

David relates this new information to his friends, and the friends await the next segment of Vonni's story. Elsa tells David that he is easy to talk to; she wouldn't be surprised if he were next.

Later, Vonni asks David to make a delivery to the hospital with her. She is convinced they will lock her in as they did before. She explains that at one point after the discovery of her husband's unfaithfulness, she was there for years. She tells David of selling things from Stavros's house to buy drinks. She saw little Stavros once a week on Saturdays, but frightened him by crying and clutching at him, and Stavros finally succeeded in taking him away from her by claiming that she was an unfit mother. After they left, she began to pick up the pieces of her life. She wrote her son a letter every year on his birthday and delivered it through his grandfather, and later his aunts. There was never an answer. David exclaims that both her son and Adonis are foolish for letting their relationships with their parents drift, to which Vonni responds that some in England may feel the same way about him. David claims that his situation is different, and is shocked when Vonni relays a message from his mother, begging him to come home because his father may be dying.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Throughout this chapter, the four friends try to dig up Vonni's fascinating past that she seems to guard so closely. As the chapter unfolds, the author continues to reveal disturbing details of her early years in the village. In a running theme of the novel, Vonni exposes her painful past to these four characters to prove to them that their circumstances are not that bad.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Elsa has not written back to Dieter. She is still undecided about what to do. As she walks outside, imagining a life with him, she runs into Vonni coming out of a house. Inside is a young pregnant woman—a widow from the recent tragedy—who wants to end the pregnancy, against Vonni's advice. Elsa is surprised; she and her friends always listen to her. David, she tells Vonni, is unsettled and plans to call home today. Vonni invites her into a little building, where she tends to an old man who shuns modern medicine. When they start back down the road they argue about Dieter, and each is unswerving—Elsa declares she will go back, while Vonni thinks this is a bad idea. They exchange heated words, and the walk ends in awkward silence.

When Thomas calls Bill, he is rude to his ex-wife and her new husband. While chatting with Bill, he discovers that Shirley is pregnant, and begins to crack jokes. Tension builds between father and son, and Thomas hangs up. Later, Vonni tells Thomas again that he has blundered; he should go back to Bill. She scolds his self-pity, reminding him that he is at fault for the distance between him and his son. Then she goes out to sleep in the shed with the chickens again.

Fiona is at the hotel, talking to the manager about a possible job, when she sees Vonni stocking the shelves of the hotel craft shop. She asks Vonni to vouch for her. Much to her dismay, Vonni states that she is unreliable and should go home and stop waiting for Shane. Fiona is crushed.

Later, in conversation with Andreas, Vonni admits that she has argued with all four tourists and feels selfish and useless. She asks him not to let her go down the path of alcohol again. Andreas tells her that people love her; she has helped so many of them. The words, however, have little effect: she feels empty and no longer has any desire to help. She and Andreas head to the tavern to make *dolmades*.

The four friends discuss Vonni and share their conversations with her, wondering why she has attacked them all. When David indignantly tells them of Vonni's opinion that he is following in Adonis's path, their expressions betray that they perhaps agree with Vonni. During another driving lesson with Maria, the two discuss his father's mysterious health. David insists that his father is fine, and has no answer when she asks him if he plans to call home.

At the tavern, Vonni eyes the brandy. She is depressed, and Andreas' efforts to comfort her are useless. Finally, he suggest that she open the brandy; he would rather her drink with him watching. She declines and decides to call Fiona and apologize. She admits to an outraged Fiona that Shane is in jail and that they have kept this a secret from her. Vonni offers to take her over to him the next morning. That done, Andreas confesses how difficult it has been to wait in vain for a response from Adonis. Vonni assures him



that his son will respond, and proposes that they paint Adonis's room to ready it for his arrival. As life and enthusiasm return to Vonni's face, Andreas agrees to the plan.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Elsa's fickle behavior regarding Dieter is irksome, even to the reader. It seems she is only interested in arguing against whatever advice she receives—hence her argument with Vonni. Vonni also has strong words for Thomas, who still insists that this distance from his son is best for everyone. Later, Vonni refuses to help Fiona get a job. Her impatience with these young people is becoming increasingly evident.

It is apparent that each character believes that the problems of the others have simple answers, while his or her own are substantially more complicated. This, the author reveals, is a common human condition.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

David's mother is ecstatic at the sound of his voice. As they talk, David feels the familiar pressure on his chest and shoulders. When he inquires about his father, his mother is evasive. He asks if his father is ill, and Miriam is amazed. She admits that he has colon cancer and only has six months to live. He tells her he will call again soon with his plans.

When Thomas calls his mother, the two discuss the difficulties of parenting, and she assures him that his situation is much harder than hers was. In response to his complaints about Andy, she tells him that he should nevertheless go home and be near Bill. His son, after all, needs him.

Elsa receives another fax from Dieter, begging her to give him an answer and come back. She responds with an email explaining that she needs time to think and asking him to stop hassling her. Fiona asks Elsa for bail money for Shane. Though she answers kindly, Elsa refuses and warns Fiona that no one will give her money because he deserves to be in jail.

On the ferry to Athens, Vonni tries hard to apologize to Fiona by bringing her coffee and *loukoumades*. Fiona graciously accepts. Andreas visits Georgi and tells him about a strange, complicated message on his answering machine from Adonis's workplace. He feels that perhaps Adonis is coming home. Elsa emails her friend Hannah and tells her that she needs time to think things through regarding her relationship with Dieter. Hannah shows the email to Dieter, who is pleased.

As they discuss luck and faith, Vonni shares that she believes one creates his own luck. Fiona is nervous about seeing Shane—he may be mad that she took so long to get there—but Vonni assures her she will take full responsibility.

On a farewell rowboat ride, Elsa tells Thomas that she plans to go home but has not yet broken the news to Dieter. There are some things she still needs to sort out. As the discussion turns to Thomas's situation, Elsa assures him that Bill wants him home. When she was a girl, she confides, she would have given anything for a phone call from her father telling her that he was coming back. Thomas is astounded and puts his arm around her shoulder.

A nervous Fiona tries to cover her bruise with makeup before she goes to see Shane. Georgi calls the Athens police with a thumbnail sketch, and they confess they almost feel like giving her the bail money, just so they can be rid of him. Shane continues to be rude and angry when they tell him that Fiona and Vonni are on their way.



David informs Andreas that his father is ill and asks for advice. Andreas explains that he would like nothing more than to hear Adonis say that he has been a reasonable father to him. David promises to say those same words to his own father when he gets home.

Shane is not happy to see Fiona, nor does he respond when she holds out her arms. He demands to know who Vonni is and rudely tells her to leave them alone; she complies. Though Fiona is confused by his standoffishness, she tells him the sad news of their miscarriage. They can try again, though, when they are ready. Shane, however, cares only about the bail, which Fiona does not have. As tension builds between them and Shane's disrespect mounts, Fiona begins to feel a change in her. She is amazed to discover that he is bored by her and, in fact, has never loved her. She gets up to leave, and when Shane realizes this, he grabs her hair, but the guard is quick to rescue her. As Fiona leaves, she announces that she will not post bail.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Vonni's intuition gains credibility with David when he receives verification from his mother that Vonni has been right about his father's health. Thomas's mother, like the others, urges him to return to his son. A strange message on Andreas's answering machine creates hope that he will hear from Adonis. Elsa continues to waffle about her decision, and Fiona is fearful of Shane's reaction. As the book nears completion, the author carefully begins to set up each story line for the resolution.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

After their boat ride, Elsa and Thomas stop at a café. As they discuss Thomas's situation, Andreas rushes over with the good news that Fiona has left Shane. He invites them to his tavern for a goodbye dinner for David. When Thomas finds out that Vonni may be there, however, he quickly excuses himself—and Elsa—saying they already have plans for dinner.

Fiona and Vonni walk through Piraeus, taking in the busy streets, and Fiona offers to treat Vonni to a late lunch of *barbouni* and wine. After a companionable dinner, Fiona refuses Vonni's offer to pay half. After all, she has an extra two thousand Euros from Shane's bail. On the ferry back, Vonni sees Fiona looking out to sea, her lips moving, and wonders if she is crying or praying.

Andreas teaches David to make a Greek dish to cook for his father and tells him that Fiona is coming back without Shane. Though David is skeptical at first, Andreas finally convinces him.

Elsa and Thomas decide to bring dinner back to his place. If they see Vonni, they will tell her that their friend never showed up. David, Vonni and Andreas all sense a change in Fiona. Having shed her stoop and defensive tone, she smiles readily as she helps organize dinner. She takes charge of waitress duties to allow Andreas to sit with the others. Andreas offers her a job, and she gratefully refuses, surprising everybody with the news that she is going back to Dublin.

Meanwhile, Elsa shares her dilemma with Thomas. When she discovered that Dieter had a daughter whom he had never seen or acknowledged, she felt she could never trust him again. However, her feelings changed when Dieter visited: he showed he loved her and was willing to do anything for her. Thomas understands; he knows that love causes people to pretend all sorts of things. He confides that Bill is not his son and that he was unable to confess this knowledge to Shirley because he loved her too much at the time. Now his life is centered on Bill. Elsa decides that Dieter must accept and recognize his daughter, and asks Thomas for his opinion. Thomas is reluctant to share his thoughts, but upon Elsa's insistence, says she should be with someone who not only loves her, but who also understands her.

Those at Andreas's tavern are still stunned at Fiona's news. Fiona congratulates Vonni for being right about Shane, and Vonni responds by saying that it's not about keeping score. In fact, she is loathe to say she was right because that has been the root of most of her trouble—always interfering and thinking she knows what is right for everyone but herself. The others reassure her; they value her help. In fact, she has made their lives better. Vonni's heart is full, and she chokes out *Slan abhaile* to Fiona.



As Thomas and Elsa talk on his balcony, he tells her she should forget about Dieter, telling her, "I could comfort you." Gasping, she reminds him that they are just friends. It must be the wine and stars talking. She teases and then apologizes, recognizing that it is always easier to know what everyone else should do. It's her own decision that isn't clear.

Fiona and David, meanwhile, decide to leave together and fly to London. Vonni will continue to give Maria driving lessons. Andreas offers Fiona his phone to call home, just as he did that day Manos perished on the boat. He wonders why none of them have cell phones and Vonni reminds him that they were all running away—why would they carry cell phones? Fiona calls Barbara with news that she is coming home, and asks her to relay the message to her parents. Barbara is delighted, and they make plans to share a flat.

Thomas walks Elsa home and kisses her on the cheek. They make plans to meet the next day at the harbor. As Fiona packs in Elsa's villa, she apologizes for asking to borrow money for bail. Elsa, in return, apologizes for her harshness. Fiona confesses that says she was finally able to see the truth about Shane and to understand that all that time, he had only tolerated her. It was his indifference that finally changed her. Elsa writes to Hannah to let her know that she will make her decision in a few more days, and tells her about recent conversations that have made her really think. Why do people change, and why should they have to change for each other?

Chapter 15 Analysis

In this chapter, "poor little Fiona" finally finds her own voice and shucks Shane's oppressive influence. She stands straighter, smiles more, and exudes a newfound confidence. The author additionally reveals an interesting relationship beginning to burgeon between Thomas and Elsa. Their frustration with Vonni and reluctance to join the others for the farewell dinner set them up for time alone together.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

As she prepares David's room for his homecoming, Miriam asks Harold not to preach responsibility to their son. Harold is just relieved that David has given up those "cracked notions," and Miriam responds by reminding him that David is coming home because he sensed Harold's illness. He won't have his pity, Harold says. Miriam responds, "But you might want his love."

Sean comes home from work, weary and discouraged. However, there is good news awaiting him: Fiona is coming home—without Shane. Relieved, he thinks that perhaps there is a God.

Bill calls Thomas with news that the family is taking a trip to the Grand Canyon. When no one picks up, he leaves a message. Before he hangs up, Andy says that Thomas can always reach them on his cell, and mentions that when Thomas returns, perhaps he can take Bill again. As he begins to hang up the phone, Bill says, "That is, if he ever comes back." When Thomas returns, he hears the entire message. He sits and thinks about Vonni refusing to sleep in the guest room and her strange life among these people; about Elsa returning to that selfish man; about Andy, who was only trying to do his best; and Bill, who thought his father might never come home. He thinks while the stars fade from the sky.

As the four friends share a last lunch at the café with the blue checked tablecloths, David studies the Greek letters that spell out the name of the café and finally deciphers the name: Midnight. Elsa is sure he would be a great teacher, but he has his reservations. As they go over their separate plans, David explains that Fiona will stop by and visit his parents on her way home. Thomas plans to return to California soon. Elsa surprises them with news that she is not going back to Germany.

Andreas urges Vonni to say goodbye to the four friends, but she fears she has annoyed them too much; she will let them go in peace. She cannot forget how she upset Thomas and Elsa. Besides, how much advice did she and Andreas listen to years ago? They discuss what they might have done differently. Vonni would have fought to keep her son and the station, and Andreas would have managed to keep Adonis on the island. Then he reveals a little secret: he also would have asked Vonni to marry him twenty-five years ago. Vonni is astonished. She tells him it would never have worked, but assures him Adonis will be back.

Shane writes a letter, addresses it to Andreas's tavern and asks Dimitri to mail it. The four friends depart in different directions from the Midnight and make plans to meet at the ferry before departure. Their Greek friends give them gifts, and David and Fiona remark that they have not seen Vonni. They expect her to come see them off. David



mentions how nice it would be if her son met Adonis in Chicago and they came back together. Fiona teases him, "They say the Irish are sentimental!"

Thomas is mildly upset that Elsa has hid her plans from him and announced them to everyone at once. She, however, is unrepentant, and leaves to find Vonni.

After searching the henhouse, craft shop and police station, Elsa finally finds Vonni at the home of the old man who doesn't believe in modern medicine. The old man is dying. Vonni sends Elsa to Dr. Leros for some morphine. Armed with some pottery bowls from the shop, she hitches a ride in an old van and returns quickly. After Vonni gives him medication, he comments that the herbalist is beautiful. Tears spring to Elsa's eyes, but Vonni urges her to keep smiling at him; hers will be the last face he will see.

Dimitri phones Georgi regarding the letter that Shane has sent in care of Andreas's tavern. Fiona is leaving that night though; the letter will arrive too late. Dimitri then asks about Adonis, and Georgi admits that he never came back. A garbled message on Andreas's answering machine sparked hope, but it turned out to be a false alarm.

The friends gather at the ferry to say goodbye to Fiona and David, and a flurry of gifts is exchanged. Amid the high emotions, Vonni extracts a promise from them that they will write within twenty-four hours of their arrival. As the ferry steams onward, David tells Fiona that she's lucky to have a friend waiting for her back home, as well as siblings to take the brunt of parental pressure. He dreads working for his father. Fiona is convinced his parents will be so relieved that she is not his girlfriend that they will "gather him to their bosoms." That's the problem, David says—they were never slow on the bosom gathering.

Back on the island, Thomas and Elsa decide to make the most of the time they have left together. Elsa tells him about her afternoon watching the old man die. Vonni was wonderful, she says, sort of like an angel. They make plans to take a boat out to sea the next day, and as he turns to leave, Elsa hugs him.

Thomas calls Andy and broaches his plan to come home early and get a house nearby so that Bill can visit. Andy thinks it's a great idea once Thomas reassures him that he won't try to take Bill back. Andy promises to keep it a surprise. Deep in thought, Thomas realizes that perhaps even Shirley does not know that Bill is not his flesh and blood.

Vonni settles in the shed, envious of Thomas and Elsa—they still have so many years ahead of them. She thinks about that day and how she had to close the old man's eyes. She thinks about Georgi and the wife he never mentions. She wonders how Magda must look now, and her thoughts then turn to Andreas and his confession that he and Vonni should have married. If Adonis were her son, she would have made Adonis come back, she thinks. Then she remembers her own son, who once sent her a message accusing her of stealing his childhood and saying that he never wanted to see her again. She had never told anyone about that. She said a prayer for her son then, as she did every night—just in case there was a God.



Chapter 16 Analysis

The four friends share a last lunch together at the café with the blue and white checked tablecloths. David deciphers the Greek name to mean "Midnight," a symbolically appropriate name, considering the title of the book: *Nights of Rain and Stars*. The reader's heart goes out to Vonni as the woman chides herself for trying to fix everyone's lives, when her own is such a mess. Andreas kindly comforts her, reminding her of the goodness she has brought to so many people. We later see her jealousy of Elsa and Thomas and the years that still remain ahead of them, as well as various heartrending thoughts and memories. The author depicts a kind, wise, yet vulnerable woman who appears confident and together, but is riddled with self-doubt and heartbreak like everyone else.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Thomas picks Elsa up for their picnic and discovers that she has packed a basket full of food. He stammers something about maybe going up to Kalatriada and staying overnight. Surprise: Elsa just happened to pack a toothbrush and extra panties. In the boat, they identify landmarks as they pass by, and stop halfway for their picnic. Thomas tells Elsa that she is quite beautiful and she thanks him, but waves away the comment. Ireni remembers them. She only has one room left, but it has two beds. They take it.

Harold Fine frets about "this girl" David is bringing home. He is not appeased when Miriam reminds him that the girl is Irish and will only stay one night.

Sean wants to know why Fiona is making a quick stop in the British Midlands. When Barbara tries to explain about David, he dismisses him as "Another lame duck." Maureen puzzles over Fiona's request that they not pick her up at the airport, and Barbara explains that Fiona hates emotional scenes in front of strangers. Her parents are placated when Barbara agrees that they can all have dinner together after Fiona arrives from the airport.

Shane questions Dimitri about a reply to his letter to Andreas. Dimitri says there is no reply. Later, Andreas calls to report that he is unable to relay Shane's message to Fiona because she has returned to Ireland. Dimitri asks him to send written confirmation to show Shane. Andreas is poor at writing in English, but knows someone who can do it for him.

Thomas and Elsa dine at a little table outside under the stars. Thomas comments that he feels strangely calm and happy here, but Elsa knows it's because out here they do not feel as much pressure. He will return to Bill, but does not know when, and she has no idea where she will go next. They climb the wooden stairs together and stand awkwardly in the bedroom. After Thomas stammers for a bit, Elsa tells him to hold her and love her.

Vonni writes the letter to Shane for Andreas. As the two talk, Vonni tells him that he has a soft heart for everything but his son. Andreas corrects her: he has a soft heart for him now, but it's too late. As they talk more, Vonni tells him that he is a dear man, and he is pleased.

David tells his father that he is proud of his achievement, and Harold smiles and replies that it wouldn't be the same if he weren't there. Fiona describes to Miriam the wonderful people on the beautiful island. As she explains that she is a nurse in Dublin, Miriam feels relief; this girl does have any intentions with her son. The more they talk, however, the more Miriam realizes that she could not have asked for a better visitor to her home.



The desk clerk at the Hotel Anna Beach spots Vonni in the craft shop and notifies her of several faxes he has received for Elsa. When he offers to fax back some sort of answer, Elsa tells him not to get involved.

Vonni receives a letter from Fiona detailing her visit with David and his parents. His father did not look well and only has a short time to live. They cried when they said goodbye at the airport. Fiona then tells Vonni of her return home, with her father walking on eggshells and her mother drowning her with food as if she had been starving, rather than on an island of wonderful smells and tastes. She asks Vonni to give Andreas her love, and says she has not told anyone of her miscarriage or of Shane's imprisonment. Lastly, she thanks Vonni for the day in Athens, and hopes that she will find her husband and son again.

Vonni later receives a letter from David, who share that he misses Aghia Anna every day. His father looks awful. Fiona was wonderful with his parents, and has promised to return soon. In the end, his mother was sorry that he and Fiona were just friends. He is relieved that he decided to come back, and is weak at the thought that he might not have, if it hadn't been for Vonni. He will start at the office soon, and meanwhile is struggling to figure out how to share his feelings with his father. He will write later to tell her about the award ceremony, ask for an update on Maria's driving, as well as Thomas and Elsa's whereabouts. He tells her that he dreamed that her son came back on a boat.

Thomas and Elsa have been living a strange life in Kalatriada, disconnected from the rest of the world. Their time is spent shopping in the markets, buying cheese for lunch on the hill, and buying books and a plate engraved with Thomas's mother's name. They buy extra garments because they had not packed for an extended stay. Elsa buys him a pair of cream-colored trousers, and he grumbles that he misses his shorts. A blanket would be more elegant, Elsa says, then rectifies herself: "I'm talking like a wife; wear anything you like." They decide to head back to Aghia Anna the next day.

When they return, Maria and Vonni spy them kiss goodbye and surmise that the trip was a success. Vonni and Maria go to the town square, where Takis, the lawyer, has a message waiting for Vonni. She was up half the night before, wondering if it has anything to do with either her son or her ex-husband.

Elsa sits with her organizer diary, cleaning out her faxes and telephone messages. She emails Dieter to let him know that she has written him a letter to explain why she is not coming back. There is no sense in him coming back to the island to find her; she will be gone.

Thomas phones Bill, who is still on vacation, to describe the wonderful little village. He will take him there someday. When Bill inquires if he was lonely there, he replies, "Well, no, not lonely." Thomas realizes that Bill thinks he doesn't miss him, and he assures his son that he misses him every day and will come home for good. Tears roll down his cheeks as he hears Bill shouting joyfully to his mom and Andy that his dad is coming home forever.



Vonni visits Takis, the lawyer, who informs her that Nikolas has left everything to her—his little house, his furniture, his savings. She says she will give his house and furniture to his neighbors. He tells her that his savings contained over a hundred thousand Euros, and Vonni is stunned. She tells Takis she will not touch the money, but instead plans to draw up a will to leave the amount to her son, Stavros.

Elsa visits Thomas, who shows her a note from Vonni and a vase of flowers she left them. Elsa laments that they seem to be going in different directions, but Thomas assures her that they will work out their relationship.

Vonni receives letters from both Fiona and David. Fiona misses Aghia Anna and describes the horrific ward sister who incessantly dreams up ways to punish her for leaving. She tells of her wonderful flat and the upcoming housewarming, as well as the simplified plans for her parents' silver wedding anniversary. She has spoken with David, who hates being back but has resolved to stay until his father dies. She is surprised by the unforeseen romance that has developed between Elsa and Thomas, but is happy for them. David is pleased with Maria's driving progress, and is pleased that Thomas is going home, but wonders how Thomas and Elsa will manage the distance. He describes the awful awards ceremony with his frail father, proud mother, and the businessmen who seem to worship the god of money. His father has announced David as the head of his company starting in January. David hates it; he feels like his life is over at twenty-eight. In a perfect world, he says, Vonni would be his mother and Andreas, his father.

Elsa and Thomas spend time together in front of the computer. She examining job opportunities while he contacts the university and works out arrangements to come back early.

Elsa suggests a trip to Andreas's tavern, and they watch the stars unfold over the sea as they ride in the taxi. At their private table at the edge of the courtyard, they discuss their future. Elsa wants to talk about her job search, and Thomas confesses his fear that she will return to Germany and fall back into the arms of Dieter. He cannot bear to lose her. She surprises him with news that she has gotten a job based in Los Angeles, with travel up and down the coast. She is hopeful but nervous about his reaction; she can't bear to lose him either. As Thomas stands up and pulls her to her feet to kiss her, someone takes a picture, but they don't care. The group from the kitchen comes out to toast them. It turns out that the man who took their picture was German and recognized her from television. Vonni tells them she informed the man that Thomas was a high-powered American academic and Elsa's fiancé. As they continue to talk and celebrate, they see a man toiling up the hill with a backpack and a suitcase in each hand. Vonni cries out to Andreas, who staggers toward the gate with his arms out, crying out, "My son, you have come back." The others look on, inwardly rejoicing, as father and son embrace. After a round of introductions, Andreas, Georgi, and little Rina retrieve food and wine to celebrate the arrival of the prodigal son. Adonis asks Vonni about her son Stavros, and she tells him that he has a life of his own somewhere. As Adonis is borne away by well-wishers, Andreas and Georgi assure her that Stavros will come back someday. Adonis begins to dance to the bouzouki music and the beat of clapping



hands. He swoops and bends, overjoyed to be back. Light rain sprinkles down, but it doesn't get in the way of the stars.

Chapter 17 Analysis

In this last chapter, the relationship between Thomas and Elsa deepens, as they become intimate friends, and then lovers. As he works out the details of his own job, she finds a position where she can be near him in California. Both are still filled with uncertainty, but in the end, they work it out and, through Vonni's "interference," become engaged.

The author ties up loose ends in this last chapter. Fiona stays with a friend, in the hope of developing a better relationship with her parents. David goes home as well, this time to a less prideful and demanding father. Although he hates the idea of running his father's business, he is committed to staying at the job at least until his father's death. Back on the island, Vonni inherits a house, which she bequeaths to deserving neighbors, as well as a large sum of money, which she will leave to her son. In the end, she realizes how much her friends love her. She sees that her life has brought joy to others, and understands that miracles still happen. As a final surprise, Andreas's son comes home! Though there is light rain, "It didn't get in the way of the stars." Ms. Binchy gives us a happy ending!



Characters

Andreas

Andreas is the gentle old tavern owner. At sixty-eight, he is tall and slightly stooped, with thick gray hair and bushy eyebrows. He is the first to witness the fire in the harbor and initially thinks it must be a reflection or the sun setting. He is well-loved by everyone for his friendliness and warmth. His wife died long ago, and his son Adonis left nine years before to move to Chicago after a quarrel over updating the tavern. Andreas had refused to consider his son's modern ideas, which included turning the tavern into a nightclub. He regrets that his wife was not there to be a buffer between them, and wishes he had been more amenable to his son's ideas. Now, in his later years, he is lonely for his son, but too proud to let him know. As his tavern becomes a gathering place for the main characters, he transitions into a kind fatherly figure, armed with advice and encouragement. One tourist in particular—David—becomes a surrogate son to him, and Andreas provides the acceptance and kindness David has always desired from his own father. The boat tragedy, as well as the insistence of a lovely young tourist, Elsa, pushes Andreas to write his son the letter he should have written long ago. Thus, the waiting begins.

Elsa

Tall, blond and beautiful, Elsa is a young German television journalist in her late twenties. She recently quit her job at a current affairs show, with plans to travel for a year. This furlough, though, is in reality a means of escape from her boyfriend, Dieter, who also happened to be her boss. She was appalled when she discovered that he had a daughter (from a previous relationship) whom he had never bothered to contact, and broke off their relationship. As an abandoned child herself, she finds Dieter's attitude incomprehensible. Though she loves him, she can no longer respect him. When she discovers that he has come to the island to find her, she tries to flee to another town, but returns with her new companions to Aghia Anna, where she unintentionally runs into him. Although this starts a roller coaster ride of emotions for her, she ultimately says goodbye. Her indecision continues, however, as he faxes and emails her. To further complicate matters, she has begun to develop a deep friendship with one of the other tourists, Thomas, who begins to show signs that he thinks of her as more than just a friend.

Thomas

Thomas is an American professor of nineteenth century literature, a writer and a poet on a one-year sabbatical from his university. He has been commissioned by a prestigious magazine to write articles recounting his travels. As a California resident, he has a penchant for wearing unflattering baggy shorts with big pockets—a popular trend in



America. He is fairly recently divorced from his ex-wife, Shirley. Though the two share custody of their nine-year-old son, Bill, Thomas knows that Bill is not his true, biological son. Around the time he found out about his sterility, his wife announced she was pregnant, and he was unable to confess to her that he knew about her unfaithfulness. Nonetheless, he loves Bill and has never informed Shirley that he is not the child's biological father, for fear that she will end his parental rights. He believed that they could both be involved in Bill's life and remain civilized as parents, until Shirley fell in love and remarried. Now, he finds it painful to watch as Bill's stepfather, Andy, becomes an ever-increasing influence in his life. Thomas is an academic; Andy is a jock, and he sees barbells replacing books in his son's life. He convinces himself that it would be best for Bill if he were not constantly around to confuse matters, and thus takes off on a one-year sabbatical. After the tragedy, he calls Bill and instead talks to his hostile-sounding wife, who reminds him that Bill is at day camp. Thoroughly frustrated, he wishes he had called his mother instead. Despite Bill's constant requests that he come home, Thomas continues to tell himself—and anyone who will listen—that he will make everyone happier if he stays out of the way.

David Fine

A small, sensitive, anxious-looking Jew in his late twenties, David has a habit of constantly removing and cleaning his glasses. An only child, he was raised in Manchester in the East Midlands of England and has a degree in business. He has run from his demanding father, who expects him to take over the family business and earn huge profits, as he did. However, David would rather see the world and make his mark in life. Perhaps he would like to work with his hands, maybe do pottery—anything but investment brokering. He is intensely interested in the lives of other people. He knows he is not the type of person who just gives advice about investments and money matters, but he feels guilty about letting his father down. He feels that he is a bumbling fool, and is unable to see that others view him as sensitive and kind, and in need of encouragement. After the tragedy, he reluctantly calls home, but has yet another misunderstanding with his father. David longs to share his feelings concerning the tragedy, but his father can talk about nothing more than his upcoming Businessman of the Year award. When Andreas shares about his prodigal son, David is amazed that anyone could leave such a beautiful island and a father as wonderful as Andreas. He places Andreas on a paternal pedestal and is determined to stay away from his avaricious father—until he suspects that he may be dying.

Fiona Ryan

At twenty-four, Fiona, a slender Irish nurse with red hair and a freckled nose, has left behind her friends and family in Ireland to travel with the man she loves blindly. She has given up everything for him—her profession, her family, and her friends. She believes that he is misunderstood and merely needs someone to love him—and she is certain she is the one to do it. She feels the need to defend him against any critique, and finds herself constantly apologizing for him. Though she is nervous and fearful of him at



times, she will not admit this, not even to herself. She is a willing scapegoat, and Shane is only too happy to throw the blame on her. When she discovers she is pregnant, she carefully selects the right time to tell Shane. Nevertheless, he reacts badly, striking and insulting her. However, she continues to defend him, finding ways to excuse his behavior. His deportation to Athens devastates her, and she is determined to follow him, but is unable to find a running ferry. When at last she is able to visit Shane in prison, she finally realizes his self-absorption and complete lack of love for her, and is able to walk away from him.

Shane

A native of Dublin and the object of Fiona's blind affection, Shane is smallish and swaggering, brooding and rude. He works at doing "this and that" and cares for no one but himself. Fiona calls him "prickly," but he is more than that—he is cruel and cynical. He was raised in the streets, and survives by selling drugs and doing other illegal things that do not involve manual labor. He is quick to blame his troubles and mistakes on others, portraying himself as a perpetual victim. He treats his Fiona with extreme disrespect, and considers everyone else a complete idiot. When he finally is arrested for striking Fiona in public, he continues his unrepentant swagger, certain that she will run to him and bail him out. He is furious when the police deport him to Athens before she can help him. Once in Athens, he is quickly rearrested for trying to deal drugs. His perpetual disdain and complete lack of consideration finally catch up with him when Fiona sees him for who he truly is and leaves him. When he tries to attack her, the burly guard steps in.

Vonni

Vonni, who has lived on Aghia Anna for thirty years, appears to be in her late forties, although she may be older. She is small and swarthy, with braided hair, a lined face, and a broad smile. Always dressed in a black shirt and a floral skirt, she vaguely resembles a mendicant. Thirty years before, she left Ireland and followed the man she loved, a Greek, back to Aghia Anna. There she married him, despite discovering a woman who was pregnant with his child. She stayed on the island even after he cheated on her, ruined her life, and left with their son. She is loved by all the residents, who consider her to be a kind of saint or angel, and has made her mark with her selfless desire to help everyone. When she left Ireland with her husband years before, she embezzled two thousand dollars. Even though she eventually repaid the money, her family has never forgiven her. Her biggest heartache is that she has not seen her son since he was taken from her. She rents out a luxury apartment in her house to tourists and sleeps in the shed used for a henhouse, rather than the spare room. She tends to get involved in others' lives and give advice freely. She is, however, usually right.



Georgi

Andreas's brother, Georgi, is the police chief of Aghia Anna. His wife left him years before, and nobody ever brings it up. He and Andreas talk frequently and spend time together playing cards.

Bill

Thomas's nine-year-old son, Bill lives with his mother and stepfather in California. Even though he enjoys his stepfather, he misses Thomas, and yearns for him to come back home and be near him. He cannot understand why Thomas stays so far away.

Dieter

As the head of a television news division in Germany, Dieter is Elsa's lover and ex-boss. He is a good-looking man (the Robert Redford type) with intensely blue eyes, and is determined to get her back. He has a daughter, from a previous relationship, whom he has never seen.

Maria

Maria, Manos's widow, is heartbroken and frightened by the sudden loss of her husband, but she proves to be braver than even she knows. She learns to drive and takes a job in Vonni's craft shop.

Maureen Ryan

Maureen, Fiona's mother, loves and misses her oldest daughter, but is afraid that accepting Fiona's lifestyle will send the wrong message to Fiona's younger siblings. She constantly finds herself defending Fiona to her unforgiving husband.

Sean Ryan

Sean, Fiona's father, also loves his daughter, but is unbending in his attitude. He unrelentingly disapproves of her choice of boyfriend and lifestyle and considers Shane to be a lazy lout and a foolish drug addict.

Miriam Fine

David's mother, Miriam, loves her son dearly, but tends to side with and defend her husband. She is willing to take the blame for the poor relationship between father and



son, though all know she is not at fault. Ever the optimist, she continually strives to bridge the gap between the two men.

Harold Fine

David's father Harold is a proud man who cannot comprehend why his son refuses to follow his footsteps and take over the family company, as he did for his father. Though he has only six months to live, he will not tell his son because he does not want David's pity.

Shirley

Thomas's ex-wife, Shirley, loves her son, and only wants what's best for him. She is disturbed and confused by her ex-husband's resentment toward her and her new husband, as well as his refusal to live near Bill and be a part of Bill's life.

Andy

A car salesman and jock, Andy is Shirley's husband and Bill's stepfather. He is a decent fellow caught in the middle, trying to do the right thing for Bill.

Barbara

Barbara is Fiona's red-haired best friend back home in Ireland, and fellow nurse. Even though they have quarreled over Shane, she loves Fiona and wants her friend to be happy. She plays an integral role in bringing Fiona and her parents back together.

Hannah

Elsa's best friend, Hannah. works at the television station where Elsa previously worked, and receives periodic emails from Elsa.

Eleni

A thin, anxious woman with three small children and no sign of a husband, Eleni owns a cramped little house outside of town where Fiona and Shane decide to stay. She is the one who gave Adonis a contact in America—her cousin—many years before.

Claus

The chief cameraman at Dieter's news station, Claus is jealous of Dieter's good looks and success with women. He travels to Aghia Anna to film the aftermath of the tragedy.



Birgit

A "hard woman," Birgit is another employee at Elsa's old news station. She had a one night stand with Dieter and eventually divulges to Elsa his long-ago affair with Monika and their resulting daughter.

Monika

Monika shared a past romance with Dieter and is the mother of their daughter, Gerda, whom he has never met.

Dimitri

Big and muscular, Dimitri is the jail keeper in the Athens jail where Shane is held after his arrest. He restrains Shane after Shane tries to attack Fiona during her visit.

Adonis

Andreas's prodigal son, Adonis fought with his father about the tavern nine years before and subsequently moved to Chicago. He has not contacted Andreas since.

Christina

The sister of Andreas and Georgi, Christina lived a troubled youth and became pregnant with the child of Vonni's new husband. She now lives happily with a man on the other side of the island, thanks to Vonni's help.

Ireni

A pleasant, easygoing woman, Ireni runs the little hotel in Kalatriada. Though she often appears tired and strained, she is always happy to serve. She takes care of all the cooking and cleaning in the hotel and receives no help from the three men in her family, who spend all day playing a board game.

Dr. Leros

The kindly Dr. Leros is the resident doctor of Aghia Anna. His heart breaks over the deaths of the men he delivered into the world. He also tends to Fiona after her miscarriage. Vonni assists him with certain patients who do not believe in traditional medicine.

Rina

Always referred to as "little Rina," she is a young waitress at Andreas's tavern.

Magda

Magda, a lovely, gentle woman with a beautiful smile, had a hard life. When Magda's marriage was in trouble, Vonni invited her into her home, where she smiled, wept, sang and stole Vonni's husband.

Takis

Takis is Vonni's lawyer in Aghia Anna. He calls her with her stunning news about an inheritance.



Objects/Places

Aghia Anna

This factual fishing village provides the backdrop for most of the scenes in the book. It is located on the island of Naxos in Cyclades Islands, Greece.

Andreas's tavern

Nestled high on a hill overlooking the harbor of Aghia Anna, Andrea's tavern becomes a key gathering place for the tourists. The tourists come here the night of the tragedy, and return at the end.

Olga

The tourist boat is the scene of the accident; several people are killed.

Metaxa

A Greek brandy known as "the Nectar of the Gods."

Orea

A Greek word meaning "beautiful."

Ya Sou

A Greek greeting meaning "hello."

Kalatriada

A little town several kilometers from Aghia Anna, Kalatriada is home to a minor temple that has been excavated, as well as an artists' colony. Silversmiths and potters come here from all over the world to work. Several of the tourists visit Kalatriada during their stay on the island.

Efharisto poli

Greek for "thank you very much."



Metrios

A medium sweet coffee served in Greece.

Karpouzi

Greek for "watermelon." Thomas buys one for Eleni's children after they come fetch him and Vonni after Fiona's miscarriage.

Bouzouki

A Greek musical stringed instrument, the Bouzouki is a living tradition of the country. It links Greece to the immortal tradition of the Byzantine Empire.

Syrtaki

A Greek folk dance. Several men in white shirts and black pants dance this for Manos's widow.

Signomi

Greek for "I'm sorry." Shane learns this phrase the hard way when he is violently thrown out of a bar for trying to sell drugs.

Siga

Greek for "slow down." Vonni yells this at Maria when she tries to teach her how to drive.

Pa-may

Greek for "let's go." Vonni warns David to hang on when he utters these words to Maria during a driving lesson.

Vivliopolio

Greek for "bookstore." Thomas learns this from Vonni. He goes there to buy a German poetry book to try to learn German poetry to impress Elsa.



Portokalada

Greek for "lemonade." Thomas offers Portokalada to Vonni after David points out that she always drinks it.

Yati

Greek for "why." Maria asks David why he will not phone his father.

Loukoumades

Greek dessert of honey fritters with cinnamon. Vonni offers them to Fiona as an apology.

Barbouni

Red mullet. Fiona treats Vonni to a late lunch of red mullet on their way back from visiting Shane at the jail.

Retsina

A strong, inexpensive Greek wine. When Fiona wants to drink, Vonni tells her it shouldn't be that "paint striper of a wine."

The Midnight

A little café with blue checked tablecloths. The four tourist friends meet here many times, referring to it simply as "that place with the blue checked tablecloths" until David deciphers the name.

Slan abhaile

Irish for "safe home." Vonni wishes Fiona "Slan abhaile" when Fiona tells her that she will return to Ireland.

Dolmades

Greek specialty consisting of little fat packets of rice and pine nuts wrapped up in grape leaves.



Themes

Complicated Family Relationships

In *Nights of Rain and Stars*, as in many of her books, Maeve Binchy explores in depth the theme of family relationships and the complicated feelings that result. Andreas's deep love for his son is apparent, but his stubbornness and pride as a father prevent him from righting the situation by writing to his son, whom he misses terribly. Adonis loves his father as well, but his stubbornness also keeps him from writing to him, for fear his father will see this as a sign of weakness. Yet, he yearns to hear from him.

Thomas loves his son more than anything else. He misses him dearly, yet makes the decision to travel for a year, telling himself it's better for Bill if he's not around to complicate things. Despite constant reassurance by Bill, Shirley, Andy and all his new friends that Bill needs him close by, his low self-confidence prevents him from returning. Bill can't understand why his father claims to miss him, yet refuses to come home to be with him. The maturity of his insight is clear when he tells his mother that Thomas just wants Bill to feel sorry for him. Thomas says he misses Bill but never comes home in spite of the fact that there is nothing stopping him.

Fiona also loves her parents, but feels the need to prove to them that she has grown up and is capable of making her own decisions. She is certain Shane loves her, and wants her parents to accept him. When they don't, she chooses him over them. Her parents, who love her and only want the best for her, cannot accept someone that they know is bad for her. Their advice and concern fall on deaf ears, however; Fiona refuses to listen because she is certain they simply do not understand. Even though they love her, their meddling words and deeds only drive her away.

Though David loves his parents, he feels consumed by guilt because of his desire to get away from them. He hates the idea of taking over his father's business and feels he has disappointed him by wanting something different out of life. His mother, he feels, always sides with his father against him. His parents love him, but his father can't understand why David refuses to see the business as a great opportunity. *He* was grateful to his father for working hard to provide him with a way to make money, and sees David's disinterest as ingratitude. He equates David's rejection of his business as a rejection of him. David's mother, meanwhile, is caught between the two men she loves.

Elsa, abandoned by her father as a child, has always yearned for a relationship with him. Thus, when she discovers that her lover has never acknowledged a daughter he fathered out of wedlock, she immediately loses all respect for him. Although she loves him, she is unable to reconcile her feelings of abandonment with what her lover has done.

Vonni carries the guilt and heartbreak of being shunned by the son she loves and lost as a result of her "madness." After she left her family for the man she loved, and he



betrayed her with another woman, she turned to alcohol, and became for a time a pathetic, self-pitying woman. She faults herself for her son's rejection, yet leaves him everything she has out of her love for him,.

Friendship and Love

Friendship is another theme of the book. As Andreas, Vonni, and the four tourists share the horror of the fiery tragedy, they quickly become close friends, learning of each other's lives and struggles in just a few days. Though initially reluctant to open up, they quickly grow to care about one another. Though hurt and irritation at times arise through the exchange of honest advice, their deep friendship allows them to sincerely mend their rifts.

Love, too, runs heavy through the chapters. As readers, we watch as the characters learn both difficult and rewarding lessons about love. For example, though Elsa thinks she loves Dieter, she is uncertain because she cannot respect him. Fiona loves Shane, but finds herself constantly defending him because other people do not understand him. She theorizes that one is always a little nervous about seeing the person one loves, failing to understand that what she feels is in fact fear. When Thomas and Elsa begin to fall in love, Thomas worries about her feelings for him, while Elsa fears he may think she is too forward. Through these characters, Ms. Binchy illustrates that love is often complicated and rarely easy.

Life's Ups and Downs

Ms. Binchy utilizes various plot twists to symbolize the good and bad times of life. She compares the joyful times to stars and clear skies, and the cheerless times to rain. She demonstrates that the journey of life will always be filled with trials, and even though we may make wrong decisions, we can learn to be content with patience, love, friends, and family. In the end, a soft rain may not be all that disturbing.

Style

Point of View

Maeve Binchy's *Nights of Rain and Stars* is told in the third person point of view. As readers, we hear multiple voices, depending on who is speaking or thinking at the moment. This allows the reader to experience the emotions—as well as the hopes, dreams, and faults—of all the characters, and gives the author the opportunity to tell the story from various angles. For instance, when Andreas first sees the fire aboard the *Olga*, he is not sure what to think: "He must indeed have been mistaken. But now he must pull himself together." Later, however, as the shocked tourists arrive, "for the first time, Andreas realized that it was true." Ms. Binchy allows the reader to follow Andreas' thoughts and see the episode through his eyes.

In the second chapter, the author begins to switch voices as the tourists at the tavern compare phone call experiences. "Fiona *might* have said to her mother that there were many anguished mothers and daughters looking for each other down at the harbor. David thought he *might* have said that he was visiting many places and learning a lot. Thomas realized that he should have called his mother. Elsa alone thought that she had handled her calls well."

Later, each is shown in their respective rooms or apartments, where their thoughts and feelings are once again revealed. In this way, the author has the ability to tell the story from any location and at any time. She is not limited to one voice. Each chapter is divided into several sections, giving a glimpse into several characters' point of view.

Setting

Written and published in 2004, the book takes place in a small, present-day Greek fishing village called Aghia Anna, situated on the island of Naxos, Cyclades Islands, Greece. Though tourists abound, its relative isolation allows the atmosphere to remain quaint and intimate. The locals are friendly but generally keep to themselves. The tragedy of the fire, however, and the subsequent loss of the lives draw some of the tourists and locals together.

The action opens at Andreas's tavern, situated high on a hill overlooking the harbor, setting the scene for the tragedy that becomes the catalyst for the story. Andreas and the tourists are able to witness the fire, but cannot do anything because they are too far away.

A segment of the story takes place at Kalatriada, a little artisan town several kilometers from Aghia Anna. David and Elsa visit and are later joined by Thomas and Fiona. Still later, Thomas and Elsa return to Kalatriada for a farewell trip together. A third location in the book is Athens, although the author only takes us there briefly on two occasions.



Family and background information is given to us from a smattering of other places, including Ireland, England, and California, but the central story takes place in Greece.

Language and Meaning

Because *Nights of Rain and Stars* takes place in Greece, the reader is treated to many Greek words and phrases. At times, the author directly translates the meaning; other times, she allows the context to give the words meaning. The four tourists learn some Greek during their time on the island. In addition, due to the various ethnicities of the tourists, Ms. Binchy throws in a few phrases of German, Irish and Jewish. All characters are open and eager to learn each other's languages.

The first chapter reveals Andreas preparing his tavern for the day. While composing the menu on his blackboard, he writes, "Welcome" in six languages for the sake of the tourists. Because this is a village that depends partly on the tourist trade, many of the inhabitants speak English and other languages in addition to their native Greek. Later in this chapter, the tourists raise their glasses to toast the victims of the *Olga*, each in his or her own language.

Vonni, who is Irish, has lived in Aghia Anna for thirty years and speaks Greek fluently. David, intelligent and sensitive, resolves to learn several words and phrases each day and has thus far learned fifty Greek phrases. Elsa impresses Thomas with her ability to recite American poetry, and Thomas buys a book of German poetry in an attempt to impress her.

Maeve Binchy's Irish heritage, as well as the renowned rich language and storytelling abilities of the Irish, makes the variety of languages in this book doubly interesting.

Structure

Maeve Binchy's *Nights of Rain and Stars* is divided into seventeen chapters, with no prequel or appendix. Each chapter is divided into several sections, signifying a jump in point of view. The chapters advance the story gradually, unfolding the history and problems of each character. Ms. Binchy gives us a straightforward account with no chronological deviation or flashbacks. Each person is allotted equal space in the book, allowing him or her to slowly reveal personal struggles and triumphs.

The first third of the book sets up the backdrop of the tourists and shows how they are thrown together into each other's lives. Their collective trek to Andreas's tavern, as well as their unified observation of the tragedy, shapes them into a sympathetic, cohesive unit. Their individual problems are introduced early, and they quickly get to know both each other and the locals. We soon meet Vonni as Thomas's landlady, and thus the six main characters are established. The author eventually gets rid of Shane, allowing Fiona to interact more deeply with the others. By the end of this segment in the book, the primary friendships have been formed.



The middle segment of the book dives deeper into each character's thoughts and problems. The spotlight shines often on Vonni as she becomes involved in the lives of the others and the friends begin to piece together her sad story. Fiona loses her baby, Elsa bids Dieter goodbye, Thomas agonizes over his relationship with his son and David learns that his father may be dying.

By the last third of the book, the main characters have become thoroughly mixed up in each other's lives. Vonni's story is now longer a secret, Fiona sees Shane through new eyes, Thomas decides to go back to his son, and David knows he must go home to help his dying father. Elsa keeps the reader guessing until the very end. At last, Andreas's son returns home.



Quotes

"L'chaim, said David, the English boy with the glasses. "It means 'To life,'" he explained.

"Ruhet in frieden," said Elsa with tears in her eyes.

"O Theos Anapafsi tin Psihi Tou," said Andreas, and bowed his head in grief as he looked down on the worst tragedy that Aghia Anna had ever known. (Chapter 1, pg. 5)

"A professor, a poet, a writer—and he didn't understand the smallest thing about life and love. Such as why Shirley found him cold and distant and found the empty-headed Andy a delightful companion." (Chapter 4, pg. 41)

"I know, I know." Georgi did not need to inquire why his brother had written to the long-estranged son in Chicago. He knew why. It was because the death of Manos and all the people on the boat had shown them how very short life was. That was all. (Chapter 4, pg. 48)

"Last night Fiona had mentioned Catholic guilt. She didn't even begin to know what Jewish guilt was like!" (Chapter 6, pg. 69)

"Cry a lot, but laugh as well. It's how we survive." (Chapter 7, pg. 88)

"I wonder if she can see from heaven—see poor Manos buried, see Adonis over in Chicago cutting himself off from everything here. If hearts can be heavy in heaven, her poor heart will be like a lump of lead." (Chapter 8, pg. 102)

"Thomas sat with his head in his hands thinking how pathetic he was not to be able to find something to say to the boy he loved with all his heart." (Chapter 10, pg. 146)

"It's totally different. My father isn't reasonable, he's just never wrong. No one could live with him." (Chapter 11, pg. 153)

"I encouraged her when her marriage was bad; she came to our house to sew and looked up from the under her thick dark hair and her long lashes. She smiled and she wept and she sang and she stole my husband's heart." (Chapter 12, pg. 171)

"Well, I think you're always a bit nervous of someone you love. It sort of goes with the territory, doesn't it?" (Chapter 14, pg. 220)

"When shall we go back to the real world?" (Chapter 17, pg. 281)

"And a little light rain came down but nobody cared. It didn't get in the way of the stars." (Chapter 17, pg. 294)



Topics for Discussion

Why does Andreas find it so difficult to contact his son, even though he regrets his stubbornness and misses him terribly?

Why can't Thomas see how much his son loves and misses him?

Explain how Fiona can be so blinded to Shane's faults and defend him so passionately to everyone. Do you think she really believes he loves her?

Are women really attracted by the bad boy type? If so, why do you believe this is true?

Discuss Elsa's conflicted emotions about Dieter. Why the on again, off again contradictions?

Why does David find it so hard to tell his father that he doesn't want to run the family business? Do you think he will, in the end? Why or why not?

Are Vonni's intentions pure when she offers the tourists advice? Do you agree or disagree with her assessment that she has no right to offer advice to others when her own life turned out such a mess?