

One Last Thing Before I Go Study Guide

One Last Thing Before I Go by Jonathan Tropper

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Plot Summary

One Last Thing Before I Go is a novel by writer Jonathan Tropper. In this novel, Drew Silver is a washed up rock star who is living in an apartment building known for its desperate, divorced tenants. Silver learns on the same day that his eighteen year old daughter is pregnant and that he has an aneurysm that, without surgery, will end his life. Silver chooses not to have the surgery, much to the shock and anger of those who love him, a fact that forces him to reevaluate the direction of his life and determine if there is anything salvageable about it. *One Last Thing Before I Go* is a funny, insightful novel that leaves the reader both in love with and deeply annoyed by the character of Silver.

Silver was once the drummer of Bent Daisies, a rock band that had one hit single. Unfortunately, after the band began experiencing the sweetness of success, its lead singer decided he would be better off with a solo career. In the aftermath of the Bent Daisies, Silver lost his wife and daughter to a not unexpected divorce. More than seven years later, Silver continues to live in the Versailles, a pathetic apartment building known to be a refuge for divorced men. Silver's only friends are Jack and Oliver, two other divorced men who, like Silver, are mostly to blame for their own situations.

Casey, Silver's eighteen year old daughter, has recently graduated from high school as valedictorian. She has been accepted at Princeton. Unfortunately, Casey has also recently discovered that she is pregnant. Casey comes to Silver first, because, as she is not afraid to tell him, she is less worried about letting him down. Silver agrees to pay for and accompany Casey to get an abortion. However, shortly after their arrival at the clinic, Silver passes out. In the hospital, Silver is told by his wife's soon-to-be second husband that he has an aneurysm in his heart. If Silver does not have emergency surgery immediately, he could die.

Silver decides not to have the surgery. Not only that, but the TMI, or small stroke, he had that alerted doctors to the aneurysm, causes him to speak his thoughts out loud without really realizing it. Silver accidentally tells his ex-wife, his parents, and his brother that Casey is pregnant. This creates a storm of arguing that leaves Casey angry with Silver and the family distracted. Silver sneaks out of the hospital as they deal with Casey's situation.

His medical situation causes Silver to take a hard look at his life. He decides that there are three things he would like to do before he dies. The first is to be a better father. The second is to be a better man. The third is to fall in love.

Silver's father, a Rabbi, begins insisting that Silver attend the various milestones of life that he often oversees in his capacity with the temple. The first is a funeral of a young man who died of a drug overdose. Silver's father, Ruben, tries to stress to Silver how tragic it can be for a parent to bury a child. Silver is filled with guilt, but he continues to refuse the surgery.



As part of trying to be a better father, Silver goes to see Casey. Rich refuses to let Silver into the house, so he tricks Rich into stepping outside and then locks him out. Silver charges into his ex-wife, Denise's, bedroom and tries to convince her that he wants to be a better man. As they talk, Denise sees something of the man she once loved and reaches out to him just as Rich breaks down the door, catching Denise with the edge of the door.

Denise is confused by Silver's new attitude and her feelings of anger at Rich for hitting her with the door. Denise attempts to postpone hers and Rich's wedding, but Rich refuses. At the same time, Casey moves in with Silver and becomes something of a constant companion to him and his friends. Silver continues to go to different ceremonies with his father, including a bris.

One day, Oliver announces that he has cancer. Jack is angry, but when he learns that Oliver wants to see his kids before he has surgery, children he has been estranged from for a decade, he insists that they drive to see Oliver's son that day. The trio, plus Casey, drive to New Jersey to see Oliver's son, a reunion that goes better than expected. About the same time, Silver goes to a family dinner at his parents' home only to discover it is an intervention. Silver and his brother fight, but later make a kind of amends.

After the intervention at his parents' house, Silver takes Denise home and they share some intimacy. Silver hopes that this is the beginning of a reunion, but Denise realizes that it is a goodbye. Afterward, they go to confront the father of Casey's baby only to accidentally make a full confession in front of everyone, including Rich. The following morning, Denise makes Silver go with her to try and make amends with Rich. Denise is successful in repairing her relationship, but Silver finds himself on the outs with Casey again.

Shortly before Denise and Rich's wedding, Silver finally gets up the courage to ask out a woman he has admired for some time and spends the night with her. At the wedding, Silver makes amends with Denise, Casey, and Rich. Casey and Silver talk for a time and make decisions as to what to do about their situations. The next day, Silver undergoes surgery while Casey returns to the clinic.



Book 1: Chapters 1-10

Summary

Chapter 1

Silver, former drummer of the band Bent Daisies, is on his way to give a sperm sample for a clinical trial he and his friend Jack participate in for seventy-five dollars a week. Silver has been divorced for a little more than seven years, but a part of him continues to hope for a reunion despite his wife's impending wedding in less than three weeks.

Chapter 2

When Silver is done collecting his sample, he finds Jack flirting with the receptionist, something that makes Silver a little uncomfortable.

Chapter 3

Silver goes to The Last Page, a local bookstore where a woman named Lily sings twice a week to the children. Silver likes to hide among the stacks and watch Lily. He has watched her for over a year, but he has yet to approach her.

Silver thinks of the first girl he loved, the first girl he ever kissed.

Chapter 4

Silver, Jack, and their friend Oliver, are sitting around the pool at the Versailles, the apartment building where they live. The Versailles is famous for being a last refuge for men who are either about to be or are divorced. Invited by Jack, several college girls come daily to the Versailles to sunbath beside the pool, much to the delight of the lonely residents of the building. As they sit there, Casey, Silver's daughter, arrives to chastise them for their lewdness. Casey pulls Silver from his friends and announces she is pregnant.

Chapter 5

All Silver says to Casey's announcement is Wow, a fact that somehow reassures Casey. Casey had wanted to remain a virgin, and ironically her relationship with her boyfriend ended some months ago because she did not want to have sex. Then, at her high school graduation as she gave her valedictorian speech, she held in her hand a positive pregnancy test.

Chapter 6

Over ice cream, Casey tells her father that she has not told her mother that she is pregnant. She has not decided what to do. She hopes that he will guide her.



Chapter 7

Silver is shocked by Casey's revelation and shocked at her choice to tell him first. But, he is not surprised by her announcement that she chose him because she was less worried about disappointing him. Silver has a gig that night. He plays drums for the Scott Key Orchestra, a band that plays weddings and bar mitzvahs. Silver sometimes can convince a woman to go home with him after these gigs, and this night proves to be one of those. Dana, a backup singer, goes home with him, but only wants to be held, much to Silver's disappointment.

Chapter 8

Silver's parents come by as they routinely do. Silver's mother chastises him for not cleaning out the refrigerator, and his father presses for information on any possible romantic relationships.

Chapter 9

Casey recalls the night she became pregnant. She was swimming in the neighbor's pool, something they have routinely allowed her to do for years. Jeremy, their college age son, comes out and talks to her about his recent break with his girlfriend. Casey suggests they post pictures on Facebook that might make Jeremy's ex jealous, and this leads to intimacy. Casey actually thinks of it as a perfect moment.

Chapter 10

Jack, Oliver, and Silver watch Sad Todd, another tenant at the Versailles, gather his unruly children for pick up by their mother. The mother berates Sad Todd for his treatment of the children, but then she surprises everyone by leaving Sad Todd with a kiss on the cheek.

Silver recalls another girl he loved, a high school romance that took place mostly in letters. It was the first time Silver told a girl he loved her.

Analysis

Silver is something of a pathetic cliché. He is a former rocker who made colossal mistakes in his past that led to his divorce and estrangement from his daughter. What is unusual about Silver is the fact that he understands his mistakes and takes responsibility for them. Silver is also aware of how pathetic his life has become and makes no apologies for it. However, it is clear to the reader that Silver has fallen into some kind of rut, a life that has become routine, a life that he no longer cares about. It seems that Silver simply exists.

Silver's life begins to change when his bright, beautiful, athletic daughter comes to him and confides that she is pregnant. Casey has not told anyone else. She chose to tell Silver because she does not care if she lets him down. This does not faze silver. In fact,



he is honored to be her confidant. He takes to the role with enthusiasm despite the circumstances. The reader wonders if Silver had not been estranged from Casey if he would have reacted this way, a fact that seems to underscore the continuing lack of appropriate emotion in Silver's life.

Casey is a good girl, the kind of girl that other students admire and try to emulate. Casey even refused to give her virginity to her committed boyfriend. In the end, however, Casey proved to be as weak and misguided as most other girls her age. It is this fact that has put Casey in this difficult situation and forced her to turn to her father for help and advice.

Discussion Question 1

What is Silver's profession? How does this fit with his lifestyle? How did it contribute to his divorce?

Discussion Question 2

Who is Casey? Why does Casey visit Silver with the news of her pregnancy? What does this say about her relationship with Silver?

Discussion Question 3

Who are Silver's parents? What is his relationship with his parents?

Vocabulary

Creative, vegetarian, endocrine, hormones, murderer, unshaven, unkempt, suicidal, comfortable, caroming, clambering, forbidden, performing, gasping, somewhere, reason, swallows, thrilled, sarcasm, serious, homemade, unnecessarily, inquisitively, sprawled, relieved, meaningfully, depressing.



Book 1: Chapters 11-20

Summary

Chapter 11

Silver goes to see Lily sing again, thinking of approaching her but not doing it.

Chapter 12

Casey drives Silver and herself to the Early Intervention Clinic, a local abortion clinic. Silver pays the fee and sits with Casey as she fills out the paperwork. As they talk, Silver begins to feel overheated and as though the tinnitus, the ringing in his ears from years of playing the drums, has increased in volume. Silver presses his hands to his ears in an attempt to equalize the pressure and is surprised when the ringing goes away. However, he can't speak. Then, he passes out. He wakes up in the hospital.

Chapter 13

Denise, Silver's ex-wife, is sitting beside him in the hospital room. At first Silver cannot speak. He recalls the wedding at which he met Denise.

Chapter 14

Rich, Denise's fiancée, comes into the room. Rich, a doctor, explains to Silver that he has an aneurysm in his heart. Without surgery, Silver will die. Silver refuses the surgery.

Silver recalls a girl named Emily he once loved, a forbidden love that proceeded despite their knowledge that it could not last.

Chapter 15

Silver's parents and brother have arrived. They urge him to have the surgery. Silver accidentally lets his thoughts slip, speaking out loud without realizing it. This includes announcing to the entire family that Casey is pregnant. There is an uproar that eventually moves out into the waiting room. While his family is occupied, Silver sneaks out of the hospital with Jack and Oliver.

Chapter 16

On the drive home, Casey and her mother argue over her pregnancy and Denise's habit of making it about her.

Chapter 17



Silver sits alone in his sad apartment and makes a list of the things he wants to do before he dies. It is a short list. First, he wants to be a better father. Second, he wants to be a better man. Third, he wants to fall in love.

Chapter 18

The next morning, Silver feels more alive than he ever has. Later, Silver tells his friends, Jack and Oliver, about Casey's pregnancy and his desire to repair their relationship.

Chapter 19

Silver goes to Casey and Denise's home to see Casey, the first step in working on his list. However, Rich, who has been living in the house for several years, refuses to let Silver in. Silver reasons with him, then argues with him, finally tricking him into stepping outside. Silver slips past Rich into the house and locks him out.

Chapter 20

Silver goes into Denise's bedroom where she and Casey have been arguing. Silver locks the door and tells Denise and Casey his desire to be a better father and to be there for Casey during her crisis. Denise actually listens to him, seeming to see the genuine feeling behind his words. Then Rich breaks open the door and hits Denise in the face with the door.

Analysis

Silver goes with Casey to the abortion clinic, paying for the procedure as well as offering her support. Silver and Casey talk and actually appear to be making some progress in their relationship when Silver suddenly loses the ability to speak. Silver then passes out. In the hospital, Denise, Silver's ex-wife, is sitting beside him. To add insult to injury, it is Denise's new lover, and soon-to-be husband, who is Silver's doctor. Rich tells Silver that he has an aneurysm in his heart that needs to be repaired immediately. Silver decides he would rather not have the surgery even though not having it could mean certain death.

Silver's mini-stroke appears to have caused him to be unable to control what he says. For this reason, Silver accidentally tells the entire family that Casey is pregnant. This distracts the family long enough to allow Silver to escape the hospital, but it also causes Casey to be angry with him once again. This makes the reader wonder if all the progress Silver has made with Casey might have been set back by this one action.

After leaving the hospital, Silver makes a simple list of the things he would like to do before he dies. They seem like simple things to the reader, but the simplicity of them again shows the lack of emotion and excitement in Silver's life. It also shows Silver's deep desire to make amends to those he has hurt in his life. This is further supported when Silver literally breaks into Denise and Casey's house to make his argument to them.



Discussion Question 1

What is an aneurysm? How could it be fatal? How is Silver's aneurysm impacting his health?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Silver not want lifesaving surgery? Who wants it for him? For what reason?

Discussion Question 3

Who is Rich? What role does he play in Silver's medical situation? What role does he play in Silver's private life? How do these roles overlap?

Vocabulary

Electric, connected, surgery, aneurysm, forgiven, contact, family, approaching, eventually, romance, receives, alimony, indicative, problems, investment, legendary, indeterminate, concentrates, grudgingly, deflate, disconcerting, lurches, comforting, comforter, impure, childhood, microscopically.



Book 2: Chapters 21-30

Summary

Chapter 21

Denise is angry a few days later as she goes out to ride her bike for exercise. A male bike rider tries to best Denise, making her angry. Denise races the man, forcing him to make a bad decision and crash his bike. Back at the house, Rich, who has moved back into his own house at her request, argues with her over her desire to postpone their wedding.

Chapter 22

Jack has thrown a party for Silver. Jack tries to be intimate with one of the college age girls, but physically cannot perform. Jack returns to the party and reconnects with the girl, but Casey arrives before anything can happen.

Chapter 23

Casey tells Silver not only is she moving in with him, she has decided not to have an abortion.

Silver recalls loving a tall girl who made girls after her feel a little too small.

Chapter 24

Silver is happy to be alive when he wakes the next morning. Silver's father, Rueben arrives and insists Silver accompany him to a funeral. On the way, they discuss religious aspects of suicide. At the funeral, Silver discovers he deceased is the much too young son of a divorced couple who died of a drug overdose. When the funeral winds down, Silver sings Amazing Grace to keep the mother from having to watch her son's casket lowered into the ground without distraction. Silver tells his father that he realizes the reason he took him to the funeral was to see it is tragic for a parent to bury a child. Rueben then informs Silver he wants him to attend one of every significant life event with him over the next week.

Chapter 25

When Silver wakes the next morning, he thinks he is dead. He soon realizes that he is not. Casey talks him into going out to brunch.

Chapter 26

While eating at a restaurant Silver once frequented while still married, he reflects on what life was like shortly after the divorce. It was stares and gossip from former friends



that caused Silver to not want to frequent his old haunts. When Jeremy Lockwood comes to their table to speak to Casey, Silver immediately guesses that he is the baby's father. Casey confirms this by refusing to confirm it.

Chapter 27

Denise is in the local bridal shop having a final fitting for her dress. As she stands there, Denise thinks of the last wedding dress she bought, precious moments with her mother, and Silver's arrival at a prime moment. As she recalls this, Denise begins to feel alone and is relieved when Silver, like a ghost from the past, arrives.

Chapter 28

Silver attends a bris with his father, but spends most of the ceremony thinking of Denise. Silver becomes overwhelmed and goes outside. When the ceremony is over and the guests come outside, they find Silver with his feet in the pool, drinking from a bottle of champagne. Rueben, rather than scold Silver, joins him.

Chapter 29

Casey joins Jack, Silver, and Oliver by the pool, calling Jack out on his lewdness. Later, Silver is floating in the pool when he suddenly sinks to the bottom and cannot move to return to the surface. Casey and Jack pull him out of the water.

Chapter 30

Back in the hospital, Rich checks Silver over before again urging him to have the surgery. Silver again refuses and leaves the hospital.

Analysis

Silver's friend Jack seems to embrace the idea of Silver dying and uses it as an excuse to have a party. Things do not go as planned for Silver and the party ends early when his daughter shows up. Even when he gives up on living, Silver cannot get the simple things in life that he wants.

Casey moves in with Silver, suggesting either she is trying to fix her relationship with Silver or she is simply running from her problems, not unlike Silver. At the same time, Silver's father, Rueben, makes it his mission to involve Silver in the important moments in life in an attempt to make him want to live. It seems there are more people in Silver's life who love him than Silver ever noticed before. However, this does not seem to change his mind about dying even as he sees how it will impact those around him.

Silver seems to be reconnecting with his ex-wife. Denise has begun to see in Silver the man she once married. However, she is still engaged to Rich and planning a wedding in just a few weeks. It is a complicated situation that causes Denise to give Silver false



messages, and vice versa. This leaves it open for the person Silver might fall in love with to be Denise despite their long history and divorce.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Rueben insist Silver attend a funeral with him? Why does Rueben take Silver to a bris? What is the intended result?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Casey move in with Silver? Why has she changed her mind about the abortion? What caused this change?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Denise seem to be having second thoughts about her wedding to Rich? Does this have anything to do with Silver? Is there a chance Denise has changed her mind about Silver?

Vocabulary

Forgiveness, neglected, absorbed, measures, claustrophobic, foolproof, committed, faux pas, pretend, perpetuating, resemble, overpowering, trauma, harrowing, reliving, blessings, bris, mohel, considering, accident, admission, marital, dignified, glowing, considering, turntable, nostrils, terrified, pronounced.



Book 2: Chapters 31-40

Summary

Chapter 31

Silver and Casey arrive at dinner on Friday at Rueben and Elaine's house to discover that Denise has also been invited, along with Silver's brother Chuck, and his family. At first, Silver accepts the excuse that Elaine simply wanted to see the whole family together, but later comes to understand that it is a kind of intervention. Silver warns his brother not to do it, but Chuck tells Silver how he misses their old relationship and is upset that Silver has cut them out of his life. Silver turns on Chuck, telling him that he felt like Chuck was rubbing his perfect family and happiness into his face. A fight breaks out, and Chuck stands to leave. Silver insists on going with him. Chuck and Silver walk down to a local pond and talk about death and their relationship.

Chapter 32

Silver returns to the house and offers to walk Denise home. The path to Denise's house will take them past the house they once shared together, the house Silver lost after the divorce to foreclosure. Silver agrees to walk past it even though it is still painful. When they stop outside, Denise kisses Silver.

Chapter 33

Casey goes to a party for Jeremy who is leaving for a semester abroad in a few days. Casey has gone with the intention of telling Jeremy about the baby. Instead of telling him the news, she ends up sleeping with him again.

Chapter 34

Silver and Denise have an intensely intimate moment at Silver's apartment before Silver falls asleep.

Chapter 35

Denise feels guilty for not feeling guilty about sleeping with Silver, even though she knows that it was more of a goodbye than a rekindling of an old relationship. When Silver wakes and realizes Denise is leaving, he accidentally lets it slip that Jeremy is the father of Casey's baby. Denise insists that they go confront Jeremy together.

Chapter 36

Jeremy is walking Casey out when Denise and Silver arrive. Rich and Jeremy's mother see them and join the party. Casey tries to stop her mother and Silver from saying anything to Jeremy since he does not know, which causes Denise to become



overwhelmed. She begins to cry. Silver accidentally lets it slip that he and Denise have just been intimate. Rich becomes angry and leaves. When Jeremy's mother tries to understand what is going on, Denise tells her about Casey's baby. Casey becomes overwhelmed with anger at Silver, expressing a wish that he would die. Then, she storms away.

Chapter 37

Silver wakes the next morning, wet and shivering beside the pool. Jack and Oliver put Silver into the hot tub to warm him up. Later, Silver finds Denise waiting for him in his apartment. Denise tells Silver that she thinks they need to make amends to Casey and Rich and convinces him to go with her to Rich's cabin by the lake.

Chapter 38

Casey had not expected to find Rich at his lake cabin, but she is somehow reassured by his presence. However, Rich refuses to talk about the situation.

Chapter 39

Silver and Denise have a serious conversation as they drive to the cabin, leaving Silver with a better understanding of their situation and his outlook.

Chapter 40

Casey refuses to allow Silver and Denise into the house. When Silver refuses to back off, Casey climbs over the railing of the balcony as though she plans to jump. At the same time, Denise tries to coax Rich into letting her into the house. Instead, Rich comes out and attacks Silver. They fight pathetically at first, both afraid of injuring their hands. However, Rich finally punches Silver in the nose. Finally, Casey agrees to drive Silver home so that Rich and Denise can be alone.

Analysis

Silver's family tries to execute an intervention to convince Silver to have the surgery. Silver is annoyed by this and is open about his feelings. Silver knows he made mistakes, knows that he is at fault for his situation, but he has no apologies for what he has done, except where it involves his marriage. Silver does eventually acknowledge, however, that he stopped feeling years ago and has simply been cruising through life with no expectations of things ever changing. A life in limbo.

Silver and Denise hook up, causing Silver to momentarily think that he and Denise might have a chance of rekindling their relationship. However, it is clear to the reader that it was simply a goodbye for Denise, a way of connecting with the man she once loved and letting him go before her new marriage. This is not how Rich sees it, however, and hilarity ensues when Denise makes the somewhat unwise decision of making Silver go with her to try to make amends with Rich. It does, however, give Silver a chance to



try to make up to Casey for telling Denise who fathered Casey's baby and causing a whole scene at the Lockwood's party for Jeremy.

Silver seems to have finally cut all ties with the people who love him. Casey is beyond angry with him, Denise has chosen Rich over him, and Silver's brother and parents seem to be at a loss as to what they might do next. It seems that Silver might have been right in deciding that his life was no longer of value to anyone, including himself. However, there is love there. Hope might yet remain.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Silver's brother confront him about their estranged relationship? How does Silver react to this? Is Silver's reaction appropriate to the situation?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Denise kiss Silver? Why does Silver see this as a hopeful sign? Is it?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Casey angry with Silver when it is Denise who tells the Lockwoods about the baby? Is this anger justified? What does it say about Casey's continuing relationship with her father?

Vocabulary

Acquired, irresponsible, disappeared, beneath, estranged, momentum, inexperienced, kindness, intervention, disappointment, otherworldly, worried, circumstances, intimacy, secrets, infinity, absorbing, realized, familiar, belonging, rest stop, communication, adoration, infuriate, forgive, balcony, childishness.



Book 2: Chapters 41-56

Summary

Chapter 41

Denise sits on the porch of the lake house and waits for Rich to return from fishing. When he does, Rich invites Denise to help him cook the fish, giving her hope that everything will work out between them.

Chapter 42

Casey asks Silver to stay out of her life and to allow Denise to marry Rich.

Chapter 43

Silver is too tired to get off the elevator in his building, but the image of being found dead there inspires him to move.

Chapter 44

Rueben takes Silver to the bat mitzvah of a girl Casey once babysat for. Silver goes only in hopes of seeing Casey. At the celebration, Elaine yells at Silver for the first time in years for his selfishness in choosing not to have the surgery. Silver goes to leave, but is pulled into the celebration by the performing magician. Once again struck by one of his moments of honesty, Silver takes the mike and attempts a very public apology to Casey. One of Silver's former band mates is playing in the band. He begins performing the Bent Daisies one hit, a song Silver wrote with Casey in mind. Silver sings it, channeling his inner rock star.

Chapter 45

Casey forgives Silver, urging him to have the surgery and try to become a rock star again. Casey then tells Silver that she wants him to decide what she should do about her baby.

Chapter 46

Casey accompanies Silver and Jack to their weekly sperm donation, but Jack decides it is no longer worth it if it might have caused Silver's aneurysm.

Chapter 47

Casey goes with Silver to the bookstore where she sees him spying on Lily. Casey talks Silver into speaking to Lily. Lily seems to like Silver's unconventional flirting.

Chapter 48



Oliver tells Jack and Silver that he has cancer. Jack becomes angry that both his friends are ill. When Oliver says that he wants to see his kids before he has surgery, Jack insists on driving him to see his son that very moment. Jack, Casey, and Silver all accompany Oliver to New Jersey, but when they arrive Oliver is too frightened to go to the door. Silver, however, convinces him. When Oliver knocks on the door, Jack drives away in the hope that Oliver's son will not kick him out if he does not have a ride. Silver and Casey walk on the beach for a time. When they pick up Oliver, they learn the visit with his son went well. Jack then tells both Oliver and Silver that they cannot die and leave him alone.

Chapter 49

Silver goes with Jack and Oliver to a local bar to watch Lily sing. Jack gets into a fight with a patron over his attitude toward the bartender, who happens to be the mother of Jack's youngest child. Lily is impressed with Silver's handling of the situation and allows him to kiss her.

Silver thinks of Lily, the most recent girl he loves.

Chapter 50

Sad Todd has reunited with his wife and is no longer sad.

Chapter 51

The following day, Silver becomes aware of losing time. Lily calls while he is with Casey. Later, he visits Oliver during his final chemotherapy session before surgery. Oliver's son arrives while Silver and Jack are there. Rueben comes and drags Silver to Denise and Rich's wedding.

Chapter 52

Casey is tense when Rich comes to speak to Silver, but all Rich does is ask Silver not to ruin the wedding. Silver sits in the back of the courtyard beside his mother as the ceremony begins. He is somewhat surprised when Denise steps out of the aisle to give him a hug on her way to the altar. During the reception, Silver initially watches as Denise dances the traditional Jewish dances with Rich and Casey, then with Rich's family and Silver's parents. Casey draws Silver into the circle. He feels awkward at first, but then he begins to enjoy himself before he passes out.

Chapter 53

Silver sees himself in the hotel where he first spent the night with Denise. In his thoughts, he is curled in bed beside her.

Chapter 54



Silver wakes in a back office with Rich checking him over. Silver tries to send Rich away, but again Rich urges him to have the surgery, even suggesting he would be willing to put his honeymoon off a day to do it himself. Casey comes into the office and announces neither of them are leaving until they make a decision in their mutual crisis.

Chapter 55

Silver plays his drums before going to see Lily and informing her of the surgery he will be undergoing the following day.

Chapter 56

As Silver is prepared for surgery, Casey returns to the clinic. Denise arrives, having promised Silver she would be at Casey's side in his stead. Jack and Oliver come to wish Silver well before his surgery. As Silver is wheeled into surgery, his parents walk by his side. In the operating theater, Rich reassures Silver before the anesthesiologist puts him under. Silver sees himself as a younger man with a much younger Casey as she takes his hand and leads him off to an unknown destiny.

Analysis

Silver has angered Casey for what seems like the last time, but an impromptu performance of his hit song seems to win her back over to his side. Casey is beginning to understand that her father is human, that he has made mistakes, but he is trying to make amends. It is part of the growing up process, both on Casey and Silver's parts. The reader sees in this relationship a future that might just see them through the long term if only Silver decides to have his surgery.

As Silver continues to struggle with his own mortality and the quality of his life, Oliver announces that he has cancer, a fact he has known for weeks. Jack, the only healthy one of the trio, goes off on both Silver and Oliver, insisting they not die and leave him alone in the depressingly dark Versailles apartments. At the same time, Jack is surprisingly the one who insists on taking Oliver to make amends with his estranged son and who encourages Silver to have surgery in order to preserve what little value there is to his life.

Silver has made up with his daughter, but his relationship with his parents appears to be feeling the strain of his indecision. Denise and Rich have made up, but Silver is now on the outs with them. However, Rich proves to be the bigger man, a good winner who agrees to allow Silver to attend their wedding. The family comes together at the wedding, as they should. Finally Silver makes a choice, he chooses life at the same time his daughter chooses her future over parenthood. They are difficult decisions, and the writer leaves the reader in something of a dark place by refusing to reveal if Silver survives his surgery. However, the reader knows that whatever happens, Silver has changed his life for the better and achieved each of the things on his bucket list.



Discussion Question 1

How does Silver attempt to reach out to Casey at the bat mitzvah? For what reason? Does it achieve the desired result?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Oliver want to visit his son? What caused his estrangement with his son in the first place? How does Jack aid in this reconciliation?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Silver decide to have the surgery? Why is he now afraid of dying? Was he truly afraid before? How is this an ironic twist in his story?

Vocabulary

Bridesmaid, surrenders, situations, smooth, incipient, interrupting, ballad, reasons, treatment, gunfight, beautiful, reclaimed, intangibles, particular, instantly, relationship, presumed, destination, harsh, incontrovertible, implication, profound, discovered, commitment, various, admiration, humble, unexpected.



Characters

Drew 'Silver' Silver

Drew Silver, or Silver, is a former member of the rock and roll band, Bent Daisies, and co-author of their one hit song, Rest in Pieces. During the height of the band's success, Silver made mistakes that led to the destruction of his marriage. In the aftermath, Silver has come to reside at a depressing apartment building that is a known refuge to men fleeing shattered marriage and to participating in medical trials to make money. It is a sad existence that Silver admits has left him without much feeling for many years.

Shortly after learning his daughter is pregnant, his eighteen year old, bound for Princeton, daughter, Silver has a small stroke that reveals an aneurysm in his heart. Silver needs lifesaving surgery, but he refuses. Silver decides that there is not enough of his life that he would be willing to fight for, therefore there is little reason to have the surgery. Silver's family is devastated by his decision, and each, in their own way, attempt to convince him otherwise.

Silver decides that before he dies he wants to be a better father, a better man, and he wants to fall in love. To this end, Silver vows to help his daughter in any way he can with her unplanned pregnancy. Silver also reaches out to his ex-wife in an attempt to show him he can be a good father. Denise, Silver's former wife, sees in this new enthusiasm, the Silver that she fell in love with and married. For this reason, Denise finds herself drawn to silver again, giving him hope of a reconciliation. Even this, however, does not convince Silver to have the surgery. It is not until it appears Silver has ruined all the relationships in his life, except that with his daughter, that he finally decides that maybe life is worth living. Silver has the surgery, but the author does not reveal if he survives.

Casey Silver

Casey is Silver's daughter. Casey is a smart, mature young girl who seems to have her whole future laid out for herself: valedictorian of her high school class and a spot in the fall class at Princeton. However, Casey, who once had a boyfriend break up with her for refusing to have sex with him, finds herself pregnant.

Casey turns to her father for support in her pregnancy even though he has not been a reliable part of her life in more than seven years. Casey goes to Silver because she is not afraid of disappointing him. Silver agrees to help Casey, even paying for the abortion, but he becomes ill before it is performed. This causes Casey to think twice about the procedure, teasing Silver with the possibility that she will not go through with it.

Casey moves in with her father and continues to treat him with some cynicism. However, she is clearly happy to be building a relationship with him. In the end, Casey



forgives Silver his mistakes and helps him make the decision to have his surgery, while he helps her decide what is best for she and the baby.

Denise Silver

Denise is Silver's former wife. Denise once loved Silver deeply, but during his success with Bent Daisies, Silver became a different person. Denise divorced him and felt nothing but disdain for him as he allowed his life to fall to pieces while she fought to be a strong single mother to their daughter. Denise has met a new man to whom she plans to marry in a few weeks. However, when Silver becomes ill and begins acting like the man she married, Denise finds herself torn between the two men in her life. It is not until Denise sleeps with Silver, causing Rich to walk away, that Denise finally sees who it is she wants and where she is meant to be. Denise makes amends with Rich and marries him, but remains a close friend to Silver.

Rich

Rich is a doctor and Denise's fiancée. When Silver becomes ill, Rich is the doctor who tells him of his condition and plans to do the operation. Silver, however, refuses the operation. In the aftermath of this decision, Silver attempts to become a better man by making amends for his past mistakes with Denise and Casey. This puts Rich on edge as silver begins to hone in on his territory. Rich, who has always been kind to Silver, begins to dislike him for his actions. In the end, however, Rich wins out and proves himself to be the better man by not excluding Silver from their newly forged family.

Rueben Silver

Rueben Silver is a Rabbi and Silver's father. Rueben is a kind, gentle man who often allows his children to work out their problems on their own. However, when Silver chooses not to have his surgery, Rueben uses his responsibilities with the temple to try and encourage Silver to see the happier side of life and choose to have the surgery. This attempt has some impact, but not the one Rueben had hoped for. In the end, it brings Rueben and Silver closer together.

Elaine Silver

Elaine Silver is Silver's mother. Elaine is a kind woman who is close to Denise and Casey despite, or perhaps because of, Silver's neglect of his family. Silver feels awkward in the knowledge that his mother is still friends with Denise, feeling somehow pushed out of his mother's affection. Silver takes his mother's love for granted, leaving him shocked when his mother expresses pain and anger over his decision to forego his surgery.



Jeremy Lockwood

Jeremy Lockwood is the son of Denise's neighbors. Casey has known the Lockwoods most of her life and she and Jeremy are almost like cousins. However, one night during a night of catching up and social networking, Casey and Jeremy become intimate. Jeremy is gentle with Casey and gives her the first time she always imagined, but forgot protection. Several weeks later, Casey learns she is pregnant. Casey chooses not to tell Jeremy, who is on his way to Paris for a semester abroad, but is horrified when Denise and Silver let the cat out of the bag. Jeremy proves to be the gentleman, suggesting he might stay in town to help Casey with whatever decision she makes, but Casey is mature enough to see that Jeremy does not love her, and it would be better if he were to go.

Jack

Jack is a friend of Silver's who also lives at the Versailles. Jack was friends with Silver before they were both divorced, a neighbor of theirs. Jack is a real estate agent who is a born flirt. It is this nature, his inability to avoid temptation, which led to Jack's nasty divorce. Jack continues to hide his emotions in gratuitous sex. However, when Oliver and Silver both reveal their illnesses, Jack shows a rare side of his personality when he expresses to them his desire that they should both continue to live and be a part of his life.

Oliver

Oliver is another tenant at the Versailles, another friend of Silver's. Oliver is older than Silver and Jack, a wealthy man who has had three wives. Like Jack, Oliver's marriages all ended because of infidelity. Oliver has three children from whom he is estranged because of his past behaviors. However, after revealing he has cancer, Oliver expresses a desire to see his children before his surgery. Jack honors this desire by forcing Oliver to go that day to see his son in nearby New Jersey. The visit is a success despite Oliver's bad behavior in the past, and his son comes to see Oliver during his final chemotherapy treatment.

Sad Todd

Sad Todd is another tenant at the Versailles. Sad Todd is so called because he keeps to himself and seems excessively sad. Silver, Oliver, and Jack witness a scene between Sad Todd and his ex-wife once in which the wife berates Sad Todd over his care of their two unruly children, but then she gives him a kiss. Sad Todd turns out to be one of the rare creatures of the Versailles who reunites with his family. While Silver, Oliver, and Jack expect the reunion will not last, but they are all happy for Sad Todd.



Symbols and Symbolism

Aneurysm

An aneurysm is a balloon like structure that occurs in blood vessels when the wall of the vessels has been weakened. This balloon like structure allows blood to pool until the pressure of the blood volume causes the weakened vessel wall to burst. This can be a fatal condition. Silver has one of these aneurysms in his heart, a condition that is allowing blood clots to flow freely through his blood stream, causing his small strokes. It could burst, which would cause Silver to bleed to death.

TMI

TMIs, or Transient Ischemic Attacks, are mini strokes. Silver suffers one or more of these mini strokes while his aneurysm is active and he chooses not to have surgery to repair it.

Yarmulke

Silver's family is Jewish. After Silver refuses surgery for an aneurysm, Silver's father drags him to various religious ceremonies, including a bris where Silver must wear a yarmulke, the traditional Jewish headwear.

Drums

Silver plays the drums professionally. Silver was once the drummer in a successful rock band, but the band fell apart when the lead singer decided to pursue a solo career.

Guitar

Lily plays a guitar. Silver has been watching Lily play the guitar and sing children's songs at a local bookstore for more than a year before he finally asks her out at Casey's urging.

Bris

A bris is a ceremonial circumcision of Jewish infant boys. Silver attends one of these services with his father so that his father can show him the joys of new life.



Bat Mitzvah

A bat mitzvah is a traditional coming of age ceremony for girls in the Jewish community. Silver is dragged to a bat mitzvah with his father in order to see one of the many happy events in life in Rueben's attempt to make Silver embrace life and have his surgery. Instead, Silver makes a spectacle of himself in an attempt to make amends with his daughter Casey.

Weddings

Silver met Denise at his cousin's wedding. Rueben, in his quest to make Silver attend all the life altering events he presides over in a week, drags Silver to Denise and Rich's wedding where Rueben is officiating.

Pool

Jack, Silver, and Oliver often spend their days at the Versailles' pool watching the college girls invited there by Jack. This becomes something of a symbol of these men's lack of nurturing relationships.

Casey's Car

Silver learns that Rich gave Casey a car for her high school graduation. This would cause Silver some anger if there was any emotion left in his life prior to learning that he is dying.

Settings

Elmsbrook

Elmsbrook is the town where Silver and his family live. Elmsbrook is a small town back east, a place big enough so Silver is somewhat anonymous, but small enough that his ex-wives fiancée is his doctor. Silver feels like something of an outsider in Elmsbrook, especially the part of town where he once lived with his wife and daughter, but he continues to live there.

The Versailles

The Versailles was once a hotel that was renovated into an apartment building. Although the Versailles rents its apartments to all types of people, it has gained a reputation for being the refuge of men on the verge of, or still reeling from, the consequences of a divorce. Silver has lived there since losing his home to foreclosure in the aftermath of his divorce more than seven years ago.

Silver Home

Silver's parents still live in the same house where Silver grew up. When Silver goes to dinner there one Friday night, he is surprised to find an intervention that has been arranged to convince him to have surgery. Silver and his brother end up arguing and going for a walk in the old neighborhood, reminiscing about their past.

Hospital

Silver spends several hours in the hospital off and on in this novel as he first learns about his aneurysm and then deals with complications of the condition. The novel ends in the hospital where Silver has finally gone to have his surgery. The results are not revealed to the reader.



Themes and Motifs

Mortality

The main character of this story learns that he has a condition that could be corrected, but without surgery he will die. Silver makes the choice not to have surgery. As Silver deals with the fallout of this decision, he finds himself facing his own mortality. Twice Silver finds himself surprised to be alive upon waking in the morning, one morning convinced he is dead because he cannot immediately move his limbs. Later, Silver seems to laugh off arguments in favor of living because his life has become nothing but an emotionless pit of despair.

It is not until Silver finally makes the decision to have his surgery that he begins to fear the possibility of his death. Silver has been dead inside for so long that it took the reality of death, the idea that a lifesaving surgery could end his life, to make him appreciate life. It is for this reason that mortality is an important theme of the novel.

Quality of Life

Silver has made mistakes that have cost him his wife and child. After the divorce, it was too painful for Silver to see his daughter, so he simply stopped. In time, Silver stopped doing all the things that caused him pain, narrowing his life to the men at the Versailles and his sad job as a drummer for a cover band. Silver's quality of life died along with his marriage, leaving him an emotional lump who feels he has no reason to fight for his life when he learns he could die.

Before her father's illness is revealed, Silver's daughter Casey learns that she is pregnant. Casey turns to Silver for help because she does not care if her actions disappoint him. It is clear that Casey is thinking about quality of life, but not in terms of life or death. She's thinking in terms of how a baby would take away her chances of success at Princeton. Casey must also think about the quality of life of the baby, a life that would begin with a teen mother and an absent father. It is a difficult decision, one that Casey asks Silver to make for her.

In the end, both Silver and Casey must reevaluate their lives, make decisions based on what they want from their futures and for the people they love. In the end, they both make the decision that is right for them. The reader is left somewhat in the dark about both choices, but confident that the choices made are the right ones for the quality of life each character wants.

Relationships

Although this novel revolves around the idea that some lives might not be worth living, it also pivots on the importance of relationships in each life. Silver placed a great deal of



importance in his relationship with Denise. Silver loved Denise like no other woman before her and felt that he was completely to blame for their marriages demise. For more than seven years, Silver has lived his life in something like limbo as he quietly waited for Denise to come back to him, without making any attempts of changing the things that went wrong and convincing her of his remorse. By doing this, Silver stopped living, he ruined his relationship with his daughter, his brother, and his parents.

When Silver makes the decision not to have surgery for his aneurysm, he begins to see just how much each person in his life loves him. The relationships begin to change, to evolve again as relationships should do. Silver discovers that Denise still loves the man she once married, but it is a new man who will make her happiest now. Silver finds in his daughter an intelligence and a love that helps them both grow. Silver also finds in himself the possibility of new relationships, and the desire to fix old ones. For this reason, Silver decides to have his surgery, to look forward to the future, and to begin a new love.

Styles

Point of View

The point of view of this novel is third person omniscient. While Silver is the primary narrator of the novel, the author moves into the minds of Silver's ex-wife and daughter as well, revealing to the reader some things that Silver is not privy to but which are important to the plot.

The point of view of this novel works well because it allows the reader to develop a close relationship to Silver, to see his thoughts and emotions, as well as hear the oddities of his thinking that injects so much humor into a plot that might otherwise be overwhelmingly dark. By making the point of view omniscient, the author also allows the reader some insight into Silver's ex-wife, Denise, and his daughter, Casey, as well. In this way, the author presents a fully rounded story that is not only thought provoking, but funny as well.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is simple English. The author uses language in a way that not only tells a clear, concise story, but also injects humor into a dark subject. The author does not use foreign words or phrases, or try to make the language more sophisticated than is warranted by the background of the characters. Instead, the author uses simple language to tell a sometimes humorous, sometimes dark tale with great style.

The language of this novel fits the plot well because it is authentic to the characters and the setting. The setting is a modern one, touching on things such as social networking and cell phones. To express this, the author uses language appropriate to each of these mediums, as well as simple dialogue that might be heard in any public place in America. For this reason, the language works well with the plot.

Structure

The novel is divided into two parts and fifty-six chapters. Each of the chapters is fairly short, making the flow of the novel seem somewhat quick, but not too fast. The story is told in a linear fashion with a generous number of flashbacks that are handled expertly, enhancing the plot rather than distracting from it.

The novel contains a main plot and multiple subplots. The main plot centers around Silver and his decision not to have lifesaving surgery. One subplot focuses on Silver's relationship with his daughter, and her decision to turn to him in help in dealing with her unplanned pregnancy. Another subplot follows Silver's relationship with his ex-wife

Denise and how his decision impacts their current relationship. All the plots come to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.



Quotes

This is Tuesday, just under three weeks before his wife will be getting married, and a few days before Silver will tentatively decide that life isn't necessarily worth living when you've been doing it as poorly as he has.

-- Silver (Chapter 1 paragraph 1)

Importance: This is the introductory sentence to the novel and it seems to sum up the bulk of Silver's problems.

Yes, he is living in an efficiency hotel. Mistakes.

-- Silver (Chapter 4 paragraph 6)

Importance: This is Silver's statement about his living situation as he enumerates for the reader his many mistakes since before his divorce.

And all the while, that stick of doom in her sweaty hand, taping the podium as she turned the pages, and the thing inside her, that convergence of lust, apathy, and biology that even now must have been splitting and multiplying in her uterus like there was no tomorrow.

-- Casey (Chapter 5 paragraph 21)

Importance: Casey describes her state of mind as she read her valedictorian speech moments after learning she was pregnant, the pregnancy test still in her hand.

Someday his father will be gone, and Silver will still be able to have these conversations, word for word, from memory.

-- Silver (Chapter 8 paragraph 14)

Importance: Silver describes his relationship with his father as they repeat the same conversations when his parents come over on the same day each week.

If there's a good thing about waking up in a hospital it's that, even with your brain flickering like a loose bulb, it takes only the faintest germ of lucidity to figure out where you are.

-- Silver (Chapter 13 paragraph 1)

Importance: Silver has a TMI and wakes in the hospital. The sight of Denise, his ex-wife, in the chair beside him helps him realize where he must be.

I'm pregnant and you're suicidal. We'll have a blast.

-- Casey (Chapter 23 paragraph 21)

Importance: Casey says this to Silver after announcing she is moving in with him.



And he thinks, I used to be one of them, I used to belong here - and the thought fills him with both relief and regret.

-- Silver (Chapter 26 paragraph 18)

Importance: Silver is in a restaurant with his daughter he used to frequent when he was married to Denise. This is his reaction to seeing familiar faces in the room around him.

Friday-night dinner turns out to be an ambush.

-- Silver (Chapter 31 paragraph 1)

Importance: This is Silver's reaction to discovering that dinner with his mother and father has turned into dinner with the entire family, with the intention of throwing an intervention.

She feels guilty, primarily about not feeling guilty, and wonders if that's the same thing.

-- Denise (Chapter 35 paragraph 1)

Importance: This is Denise's response to having intimate relations with Silver while engaged to Rich.

When in doubt, grovel.

-- Denise (Chapter 39 paragraph 11)

Importance: This is Denise's advice to Silver when he asks how he might make amends to Casey after breaking her confidence by telling Denise who fathered her baby and for betraying Rich by having relations with Denise.

But whatever it is you've lost, you still have a family.

-- Rich (Chapter 52 paragraph 34)

Importance: This is Rich's final argument in his attempts to get Silver to have the surgery.

He wonders if he's died and she's there to lead him to the next place, or if she's simply there to lead him back. Either way, he knows nothing will ever stop him from following her again.

-- Silver (Chapter 56 paragraph 79)

Importance: After being put under anesthesia, Silver finds himself back in time to the home he once shared with Denise and Casey. Casey, a child again, asks him to go with her to an unknown place.