

Out of Reach Study Guide

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Plot Summary

When Rachel's brother, Micah, leaves home after a failed stint at a drug rehabilitation center, Rachel thinks that she is better off without him. One day, she receives an anonymous e-mail telling her that Micah is not far away and is in trouble.

Rachel does nothing for two weeks but feelings of guilt finally make her take action. She finally decides to look for Micah and enlists Tyler, Micah's best friend and band member, to help her.

Using her friend, Michelle, as a cover, Rachel and Tyler drive to Ocean Beach to find Micah. They ask people whether they have seen Micah, but no one has. Realizing that time on the meter is running out, they decide to return to the car, only to discover that someone has stolen it.

After reporting the theft, they decide to continue their search. Tyler contacts a surfer friend, Dillon, to help them. He has seen Micah recently, but doesn't know where he is now. He agrees to help them with their search and drives them to Mission Beach. He has to pick up his surf board, so they stop by a shop owned by two brothers. The brothers have also seen Micah and have loaned him money. They also tell Rachel that Micah is now selling drugs. She finds out that Tyler also knew about this. The news angers her.

Dillon unearths a girl Micah has been living with. Her name is Finn. The trio go to her house and discover that she is the one who wrote the mysterious e-mail. Micah, however, is no longer there. Rachel looks in his room and discovers some things that he left behind. In addition to one of her books, "The Hobbit" she finds a phone number in his jean pocket. She takes it with her, but doesn't tell anyone about it.

After leaving Finn's house, she, Tyler, and Dillon go to a beach party. Dillon gets drunk, and afterwards, Tyler has to drive. They stop to get something to drink, and while he's in the convenient store, Rachel calls the number. Someone picks up, but hangs up when she asks whether it's Micah. She calls back, gets voicemail, and then someone hangs up before she has the chance to leave a message. When Tyler returns, she doesn't tell him about the phone call.

Rachel is upset by the result of the call and almost causes Tyler to have an accident. The jolt of the car wakes up Dillon. He checks his phone and tells them that a meeting with a drug dealer that he's set up is on. The meeting never happens, though, because another group comes and beat up the drug dealer while the trio watch. After calling 911, Rachel and Tyler take Dillon home and as they can't get anyone to pick them up and there are no buses for hours, they spend the night at a church.

During their stay, Rachel has a revelation and accepts the fact that Micah needs to go on his journey alone.

As she and Tyler get something to eat the next morning, Rachel sees her car. She "steals" it back and she and Tyler return home.

Once there, both she and Tyler admit that they are attracted to each other and Rachel writes Micah an e-mail telling him that things are okay between the two of them and she's willing to let him go and accept that he needs to do what he needs to do on his own.



Chapters 1 - 5

Summary

In Chapter 1, readers discover that Rachel's brother, Micah, is a meth addict. Rachel knew about his addiction long before her parents did because Micah had confided in her and she had covered for him -- something that she later regrets as the thought that she could have saved him in some way haunts her. When her mother and father finally found out, they sent him to rehab and went to meetings with him. In the end, however, he ended up using drugs again.

One morning, Rachel got up and discovered that Micah didn't come home the night before. Her mother told her that Micah went to visit their uncle for the summer, but her body language, plus what's missing from Micah's room, alerts Rachel to the fact that he had run away from home. Rachel decided to move on. That is, until she gets an anonymous e-mail a few months later saying that Micah is in trouble. The e-mail's author tells her that he's in Ocean Beach. The writer says that Micah talks about Rachel the most.

Rachel waits for about two weeks before enlisting the help of Tyler, a member of Micah's band and one of his friends, to help her look for him in Ocean Beach. The two teenagers take Rachel's car. Her friend, Michelle, knows what she's doing, but Rachel doesn't tell her parents. As they drive, Tyler sleeps and Rachel wonders why Micah has decided to throw everything away and do drugs.

The two arrive in Ocean Beach in Chapter 3. Rachel asks Frank, her name for God, to help her find Micah. Tyler takes the lead as they start asking people whether they have seen Micah, even though at times Rachel talks more than Tyler thinks she should. They encounter drug addicts and surfers. No one has seen Micah and more than once someone advises Rachel to forget about him because he doesn't want to be found.

Analysis

This section serves to introduce many of the novel's main characters. It also introduces several of the novel's major themes: sibling relationships, the effects of addiction on families, and the role of choice in people's lives.

Readers realize as early as the first chapter that Rachel and Micah have a close bond. It's a bond, however, based on deception and covering for each other. In this sense the phrase, they are as thick as thieves, almost literally applies to them. Even though they excel in the fine art of telling lies, they trust each other. It's the two of them against their parents, and in a way, against the world. They trust each other so much that Micah confided in Rachel after he first tried meth. The conversation, however, highlights a difficulty close sibling bonds often suffer from as the siblings grow and other forces, and people, begin to enter their lives. The two have been drifting away from each other.



Rachel understands the signals Micah gave when he walked into the the room and started touching the books on her shelf, but that was where her understanding ended. The book Micah chose to pull out was "The Stranger" -- a book in which the main character is condemned because he doesn't play the game. If Rachel had been more in tune with her brother, she may have realized that he was sending a signal by pulling out this book. On the surface, he felt like a stranger to himself and members of his family, including Rachel. On a deeper level he was saying that he was condemned to death because he didn't fit in. He didn't follow the norm. His love is music, yet this doesn't fit the rules of what a person should do as a "grownup." He's at the age where he's beginning to feel the pressure to conform, but he can't. This is his problem. Others don't understand why he has thrown everything away and chosen drugs instead. Their opinions of what he has is what they value, not him. This situation is much the same as Rachel's mother's attempt to make her stop telling lies. She tries to entice Rachel with the idea of heaven. Heaven doesn't appeal to Rachel, however, so she continues to lie.

Rachel's response to Micah failed to give Micah the support he sought. She realized that, telling the readers that he looked at her like she was the little sister "who didn't know anything." Readers didn't know, however, whether she thought that at the time or whether she's thinking of it as she retells the story.

Readers later learn about the forces that may have pulled Rachel away from Micah much as meth has pulled Micah away from Rachel. It was her relationship with Keith. She was even happy to not have to attend Micah's group meetings because she was dealing with issues related to Keith cheating on her. This took priority. Her bond with her brother had been replaced by her relationship with Keith.

The events that occur once family members discovered that Micah was taking meth shows how family members may react to the fact that a family member is an addict. Some may choose to ignore it, other's may react with anger. some with ignorance and some with acceptance. Micah's parents did what they thought was best by making Micah enter a rehab program, but they didn't understand him at all. Thus, the program didn't work for him. His father was angry, his mother seemed overwhelmed, and Rachel accepted what's he's done, thinking that he is different from other meth addicts and could thus overcome the drug's temptation on his own.

The entire first chapter shows how estranged the children are from their parents. Micah told Rachel about the time he first tried meth, but not his parents. Rachel didn't see fit to tell her parents and lied about it when they ask her. On the surface, the family may look perfect, but in reality they do not act like a family at all.

Rachel even hides the e-mail from her parents, deciding to look for Micah on her own with the help of another teenager.

The forces of choice are everywhere in this section. Micah chooses to continue to take meth. Rachel chooses to ignore the e-mail for two weeks. Her parents choose to judge Micah instead of trying to understand him. Each one could have made a different choice leading to a different outcome. How can those who try a drug and experience the high



choose not to do it again? How can a family with no drug use related experience make the right choice concerning treatment? How can one accept the consequences of their own choices and those of others? This section causes readers to ponder such questions.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Rachel begin the novel by talking about lies?

Discussion Question 2

What do readers learn about Rachel's family from their interaction in Micha's rehab group session meeting?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Rachel wait for two weeks before looking for Micah?

Vocabulary

deterrent, eternal cliché, burden, tame, emancipated, ratty, callousness, apathy, euphoria, dopamine, anhedonia, pathetic, inauthenticity, sobered, eulogize, siege, dilapidated, arduous, paranoid



Chapter 6 - 10

Summary

In Chapter 6, Rachel reveals that she has never taken drugs and she doesn't drink much. She's seen how it causes people to lose control. She doesn't like being out of control. She's tried to figure out who Micah bought his drugs from, but never could. She did, though, keep an eye on how much he took, as she knew where he kept it. After talking to Michelle about Micah's drug abuse, Rachel decided to research her family history in an effort to find out whether Micah could have a predisposition to addictions. She found out that there is a lot of divorce, depression, cancer and alcoholism in the family, but she decided that Micah chose the drug in the first place. She couldn't understand why he chose this route. She recalls having her father ask him the same question one night and watched Micah shut the door in his face.

Chapter 7 returns to the current day. Tyler and Rachel continue to look for Micah. Tyler warns Rachel not to talk too much. He doesn't want her to get hurt. As they look, they trade memories about Micah. Rachel notices that they talk about him using the past tense. Along the way, they meet a man cleaning a fish. The sight reminds Rachel about the night when she had found out that Keith had slept with another girl. Thinking that Rachel's reaction is due to worry about Micah, Tyler reassures her that they will find him.

The story of Rachel's relationship with Keith returns in Chapter 8. Micah had never liked him. Even though Keith had seemed charming while they were dating, when Rachel broke up with him, he tried to smear her reputation by writing about their relationship and sex life on the Internet.

Chapters 9 and 10 bring readers back to the search for Micah. Time is running out of the parking meter, so Rachel and Tyler walk back in the direction of the car. As they go, they ask more people whether they have seen Micah. Rachel gets to know Tyler better and learns that he writes comics. They approach the place where the car should be and realize that they can't find it because someone has stolen it. Tyler reports the theft and the two go to get something to eat.

The teenagers continue to learn about each other and talk about what they are going to do after high school and the band. The conversation returns to the search. Tyler reads the e-mail again. He refrains from asking Rachel why she had waited so long to react to it. She's glad that he doesn't ask as she's not ready to explain herself. After confirming that Rachel still wants to look for Micah, Tyler says that it's time to implement Phase 2 -- Operation Dillon.



Analysis

How do families deal with the addiction of another family members? Is an addiction predestined due to genetics or is it a personal choice? Is it possible to live your own life when a family member suffers from an addiction? Can people be addicted to things other than drugs that are just as harmful? What are the consequences of telling lies? This section addresses all of these questions.

This section shows how Rachel and her father reacted to Micah's drug abuse. Both of them wanted to know why. Both of them saw it as a choice that Micah made and he has disappointed them. Rachel's attempt to answer the question "why" went as far as to do research into the family's history and watch TV shows about addiction. In the end she decided that Micah could have stopped after the first time. He chose to continue and thus his current situation was due to his own choice. It was his fault. There was no one, or nothing else to blame other than him.

Her father also wanted to know why. He asked Micah how he could do this to himself. Then he took it on a more selfish level and asked how Micah could do it to his mother.

Both Rachel's and her father's reaction show how much they don't really know Micah. Everyone thinks that he had lots of potential that he's thrown it away. However did Micah see himself in the same way? As they search for Micah, Rachel learns things about Tyler, like the fact that he draws cartoons, that she never knew. Would she have found out things about Micah and what made him think that he needed meth in his life if she had spent the same amount of time talking to him instead of simply keeping tabs on him?

Her entire family's reaction to his abuse was to try to figure out why and do what they think is "right." Their actions were passive, however. Rachel monitored his usage, but never really did anything to try to help him stop. Instead, in her attempt to understand why he made this choice, she worried that she could do the same thing at some point.

It's a selfish thought and this section shows that people have their own issues to deal with as they also try to deal with an addict's issues. Rachel was dealing with her cheating boyfriend. Her father was dealing with the despair her mother feels. The family went for months without looking for Micah. Like Tyler, readers may wonder why. Could it be for selfish reasons? Rachel's decision to continue the search are for purely selfish reasons. She hopes finding him will end the silence in the house, she'll know what really happened to him, she'll go back as a hero, and finding him will relieve her of the burden of guilt she feels for not seeking help when he first started doing drugs. Nowhere does she mention that she wants to help Micah.

Is it just better for the addict to disappear on their own accord? People keep on telling Rachel that Micah doesn't want to be found. With him gone, family members are able to move on. In Rachel's case, she's trying to overcome the feelings associated with Keith. Keith is her own addiction. She admits that almost everything she did with him was a mistake. Just as it's a mistake to continue to take drugs. Micah did not approve of Keith



just as Rachel did not approve of Micah's drug use. However, she did not listen to him and had to learn what he was really like the hard way. She thought she could handle the situation -- that she was different -- just as drug addicts think.

This section also shows how dysfunctional Rachel's family is. She confides in her friend Michelle about Micah's drug use instead of her family. When she decides to look for him, she calls one of Micah's friends to help her. Michelle knows what's going on, but not her parents. In addition, she takes the decision to act on the e-mail, or not, upon herself. She doesn't tell her parents about it. Is life better for the sibling of a drug addict once that person is gone? Maybe Rachel thought it would be, but found out that things were still not right so decided to embark on the search for Micah and return as the hero.

Rachel didn't let her parents know that Micah was taking drugs when he first started. Would things have turned out differently if she had let them know at an early stage? One doesn't know, but she's left feeling guilty because of her lies. When someone steals her car, she tries to figure out what lies to tell her parents. She's the good one, after all. When Tyler tells her that she can work up the courage to tell her father the truth, she looks at him doubtfully. She's not used to being truthful to her parents. Now she's facing the consequences -- the guilt associated with Micah's situation and a missing car in Ocean Beach to explain.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think Rachel kept tabs on Micah's drug use?

Discussion Question 2

Micah never liked Keith. Why didn't Rachel listen to him?

Discussion Question 3

Is there any similarity between Keith's relationship with meth and Rachel's relationship with Keith? If so, what is it?

Vocabulary

lame, pacifists, shady, gratuitous, predisposed, impetus, advocated, cathartic, absolution, leverage, entities, astute, innuendo, musty, spiel, depicted, hostel, wager, profiling, unsolicited

Chapters 11 - 15

Summary

Chapter 11 opens with Tyler telling Rachel more about Dillon, one of Tyler's and Micah's surfer friends. Rachel has a feeling that Tyler may be hiding something from her. He promises not to sugarcoat anything.

The two teenagers meet Dillion at the house he lives in with his mother. He has seen Micah recently. The last time was in Mission Beach. He agrees to drive Rachel and Tyler there and to aid in the search. He decides to combine it with a trip to pick up his surf board. As Dillion drives them there, Rachel realizes that she's not going to make it home any time soon and calls her mother. Her mother thinks that she's shopping with Michelle. Rachel asks whether it's okay for her to spend the night at Michelle's house. The family has something planned, but Rachel's mother agrees when Rachel tells her that she wants to spend time with Michelle before Michelle leaves to spend time with her father. Tyler comments that Rachel is good at telling lies. He doesn't bother to call his parents.

Rachel flashes back to the past in Chapter 12. She talks about a time when her history teacher had warned her class to stay away from meth and another time when Micah had pulled her out of a flooding drainage pipe. At the time, they had joked that if the situation had been reversed, he would have drowned because she wouldn't have been able to hold on to him. Then he added that she would have found a way to save him.

The trio arrive in Mission Beach in Chapter 13. Dillon goes to pick up his surfboard and Rachel and Tyler meet the owners of the shop, Reeves and his brother Spencer. It turns out that Micah had been in the shop a couple of weeks ago and had borrowed some money. They gave it to him as they saw that he was a good kid but was really in over his head. They break the news to a confused Rachel that Micah now sells drugs. Reeves, who is a recovering sex addict, tells Rachel some of the same things she had heard in Micah's Twelve Steps recovery program and Spencer tells her what others have said. Micah needs to find himself. It's not about her. It's about him taking this step.

Their advice, plus the fact that Tyler knew that Micah was selling drugs, makes Rachel angry and she walks out. Dillion and Tyler follow her in the car, When she refuses to get in, Tyler gets out and Dillon drives off. As Tyler explains why he didn't tell her about Micah, he uses a phrase that was in the email. She wonders whether he had written it. They smoke a cigarette and share tales about when they first started smoking. By the end of the chapter, Tyler promises not to keep any more secrets, but Rachel knows it's not a promise anyone can keep.

Part of the Twelve Steps program requires participants to believe in a Greater Power. Rachel does not only believe in God, but she also thinks that she has felt his presence. She speaks about this in Chapter 14. The narration returns to the boardwalk in Chapter



15. Tyler and Rachel connect by sharing ideas about sand art and who should pay for dates. Rachel makes Tyler happy by telling him that she thinks that he's talented. The subject of Keith comes up and Tyler confirms that Micah had never liked him and that he disapproves of what Keith had done to her. Rachel had been enjoying her time with Tyler and had not been thinking of Micah. She throws her ice cream cone in the trash and says that that's one thing Micah won't have to worry about any more.

Analysis

This section paints a picture of Rachel's, Micah's, and Tyler's characters. It also shows how those who are recovering addicts treat other addicts.

Readers continue to realize how much Rachel really didn't know about her brother even though she thought she was keeping tabs on him. She's meeting people that she had no idea he knew. Tyler, in fact, knows much more about him. He knows his surfer friends and he knows that Micah has turned to selling drugs. Rachel's lack of knowledge shows how much she has moved away from Micah. Rachel also begins to appear to be a bit snobbish. Or at least to show that she thinks that she and her family are better than the people she's meeting that Micah knew. She always has to be assured that someone is okay. She laughs at Reeves' addiction. She finds it hard to believe that her brother is selling drugs. Her research has not accounted for this.

She also shows signs of being selfish. The owners of the surf shop even have to tell her that Micah's situation is not about her. She remembers the time when Micah had risen to the occasion to save her, but what has she done for Micah? She was consumed with Keith while he was home, She waited for two weeks before looking for him when she found out where he was. When she and Tyler eat ice cream she gets annoyed when the conversation turns to Micah. She's enjoying her time with Tyler and really doesn't want to be reminded of Micah. She's not really trying to save him. She's given it a half effort to erase her own guilt. This act is another sign of her selfishness. Her search for Micah is about her. She wants things to be better at home for her. She wants to feel free of guilt.

Her ability to give up on Micah could be partly explained by her belief in a Higher Power. Maybe she believes that someone is watching out for him. In addition, she's concluded that Micah chose his current life. It's sad, but it's what it is. She's not going to let it pull her down. She tried her best to find him and everyone keeps on telling her that he's not ready to be found. So, she's ready to move on. Looking at it this way, readers may think she's being strong and moving in the right direction. Yes, she's thinking of herself, but if Micah isn't ready to come home and deal with his addiction, there is nothing she can do.

Rachel also shows that she lives by double standards. She can lie to her mother. She can keep secrets from others (like the fact that she smoked), but everyone is supposed to tell her the truth and not keep things from her.



Micah's character comes through in this section, not just from Rachel's memories, but how others who know him perceive him. Everyone says that he's a good kid. Everyone feels bad to see him in the state he's in. In a way, they understand him better than Rachel. Readers have to wonder whether his situation would have been different if his family had focused more on him before he started taking drugs and if Rachel hadn't become so preoccupied with Keith -- a person Micah did not like at all. Rachel's phone call to her mother shows how indifferent her mother can be. She doesn't question Rachel and she let's her do what she wants as opposed to insisting that she attend the dinner party. It's this not knowing that plays into Rachel's sense of guilt.

This section also displays more about Tyler's character. He's a good friend to Micah, doing what he thinks is best, trying to protect Rachel and not showing interest in her, until now, because guys don't hit on their friends' sisters. The fact that he is now beginning to show Rachel that he likes her shows that he is beginning to think that they won't find Micah.

Discussion Question 1

The owners of the surf shop think that Micah is a good kid and feels bad for him. Why don't they try to contact his family members through someone like Dillon who knows him?

Discussion Question 2

Is Rachel trying to help Micah for the right reasons?

Discussion Question 3

What does Rachel's comment about the conversation returning to Micah when she had been enjoying her time on the beach with a cute boy say to you? Support your opinion.

Vocabulary

tweaking, greaser, defaced, chivalry, flustered, silhouette, kamikaze, hypochondriac, narcolepsy, annihilate, pristine, paraphernalia, legit, mooch, humility, reconcile, subtle, terrain, mediated, leered, pseudo



Chapters 16 - 21

Summary

In Chapter 16, Rachel tells readers about a conversation she had one night with Micah after he returned from rehab. When he came into her room and called her name, she pretended to be sleeping. When he continued to talk, however, she tried to connect with him. He's wanted to know whether she was mad at him. She denied that she was, but he didn't believe her. She asked him what was keeping him from sleeping and he ran off a list ranging from band related issues to his future and the fear that he would be stuck at home after finishing high school. He wanted to make sure that the two of them were "cool." and reminded Rachel that he was still her big brother and was there for her. Rachel didn't answer because she was thinking that if Micah hadn't been on drugs, he would have taken care of Keith. Micah left, but not before saying that he had lost his muse and putting his initials on the window along with Rachel, as children do. Rachel knew that by morning, their initials would be gone.

Chapter 17 shifts to the present. As evening approaches, Rachel suggests that Tyler call someone to pick them up and take them home. Tyler calls, but has to leave a message. Then his phone goes dead. When Rachel admits that she's tired, Tyler takes her to the amusement park for a ride. He pays and she feels as if she's on a date. It's during this time that Rachel finds out that Micah had confided in Tyler and had thought that Tyler was trying to take the band away from him. In the end, Tyler was the one who had told Rachel's and Micah's father about Micah's addiction. Tyler thinks that Rachel's parents blame him, but she assures him that they don't. After talking to him they had put him in rehab, but it hadn't work. Tyler says that it takes several stints in rehab before it sinks in. He knows because his father was an alcoholic and had had to go three times. He assures Rachel that he's not addicted to anything, though.

Rachel tries to ignore his gaze and sees someone singing who she thinks could be Micah. It's not, but his voice was better than Micah's.

In Chapter 18, Rachel talks about a time when she had found her mother looking worn out and flipping through an old photo album with pictures of Rachel and Micah as children. She told Rachel that she was always the good one and wondered when she lost Micah. Rachel wanted to tell her mother the truth about what had been happening in her life to show that she wasn't always good. She also wanted to tell her that she was still there and needed her parents. Instead she tried to cheer her mother up by saying that Micah would come back.

The narration returns to the present in Chapter 19. Tyler and Rachel find Dillon. He tells them that he's found the name and address of a girl Micah had been staying with. Her name is Finn and they go to see her. When they get there, she admits that she wrote the e-mail. Micah, however, has left. Some of his things are still there. Rachel takes a look and finds one of her books, *The Hobbit*, and a phone number in the pocket of a pair



of his jeans. Rachel finds out more about Finn and tells Rachel that Micah really loved her and had beaten up Keith after he had tried to ruin Rachel's reputation. Rachel realizes that Micah had cared. Finn thought Rachel should know, but says that it's hard to let someone go whom you love.

Chapter 20 goes back to the past and Rachel lets readers know how teachers had perceived her compared to Micah. She was known as Micah's little sister. She got good grades and did well in sports. Micah had been an average student was about everything until meth had come along. The first dinner after he returned from rehab was awkward. At the end of the evening, Rachel had tried to convince herself that everything would be okay.

Chapter 21 is back in the present, and after leaving Finn's house, Dillon says that they need a break. He takes them to a party on the beach. At first Rachel feels uncomfortable, but then Tyler starts to sing and everyone starts to have fun and relax. When he's done, Rachel finds out that he never sang in the band because Micah was a better front man and Tyler didn't mind taking second stage. Rachel took that to mean that Micah did. They meet a surfer and Tyler shows signs of jealousy.

Dillon finds them. He has another lead. As Dillon is drunk, Tyler drives. They don't find Micah, but Rachel is told once again that he'll show up when he's ready.

Analysis

The section further explores the themes of the effect of addiction on family members, the journey towards personal growth, sibling relationships, choice, and the need to let go.

Rachel reveals two conversations that she had. One was with Micah after he returned from rehab. The other was with her mother after Micah had left. The conversation with her mother exposes how the parents of children with addiction may possibly handle the situation. Rachel's and Micah's mother wondered where they lost him and held out hope that he would find his way back. Rachel found her looking at old photo albums with pictures of the children where they both appeared to be happy. Was this all a facade? Had it always been one? When did things change? What was really going on with Micah and when had he turned from a good boy into an addict? The designation that Rachel's mother made calling Rachel the "good" one implies that an addict is the "bad" one. Rachel wanted to tell her mother that her "goodness" is only surface. She didn't however. She didn't want to disappoint her mother and bring on any more burdens.

Along with the tendency to label the child without the addiction as the good one comes another assumption -- that this one is strong enough to take care of themselves while the parents agonize over the lost one. Rachel wanted to remind her mother that she is still there and needs her, but she kept quiet, shouldering the burden of being strong for everyone.



This task risks coloring what could be an already eroding relationship between the "good" sibling and the addict. Rachel resents not getting the attention she needs. She secretly wishes that Micah would just disappear, thus her slow reaction when she gets the email about his whereabouts. Her conversation with Micah in her room reveals that she resents Micah for not being there for her. She thinks if Micah had been himself, Keith would not have gotten away with what he had done to her.

Still, she wants to stay connected to her brother. She doesn't know how by talking and listening to him, though. When he tried to talk to her she pretended to be sleeping at first. She was afraid that something "would break again between them." Instead of facing the situation, she tried to hide. Micah tried to talk, to be honest with his feelings, but she had not yet learned this form of communication. She asked questions, but thought about what he didn't do for her instead of listening and giving Micah the support he was seeking. The best she could do is what they did when they were children -- put her initials on the window. He did the same. A bond on this level no longer existed between the two of them, though. They had outgrown it and by daybreak the initials would be gone. There would just be smudges that represent their current messy paths.

Readers learn more about the addict's struggle as well. Micah isn't a bad person. He is lost, though. His family doesn't communicate with each other and the children are not used to telling their true feelings. Micah tried with Rachel when he went to her room, but she first tried to hide, then didn't really listen. She didn't get what he was going through. Their changing relationship actually added to his burden. He worried that he'd made her mad and that there was a rift in their relationship. He loves her, as readers learn from him as he told her that he would always be there for her and later on from Finn. Rachel didn't realize this, though, until he is already gone and finds out that he had intervened in her situation with Keith. He had beaten Keith up. Micah left because he has to go on his own journey to find himself. Everyone has been walking on eggshells around him and this just added to his burden. One thing that he couldn't do was say goodbye to those he cares about, so he left without saying goodbye to Rachel. In a similar fashion, he left without saying goodbye to Finn.

When Rachel looks through the things Micah left at Finn's she finds one of her books, "The Hobbit." The book symbolizes the journey he's on. Like Bilbo Baggins he's on a personal growth journey. He used to live in a rather safe, protected world and is moving on to more sinister territory, first by doing drugs, then going from home to Ocean Beach and Mission Beach and selling drugs, and then possibly going to LA. Hopefully he will achieve the same level of competence, maturity, and wisdom that Bilbo found. It's interesting that he leaves this book. It's almost like a sign to Rachel that this is what he's doing now and what he needs to do. It may also be a sign to her that she needs to let go and go on her own journey to find the same. This is a choice he's made. Rachel now has her own choice. Will she let go or will she continue to grieve over the loss of Micah?

Rachel takes a step towards growth at the beach party. She starts off feeling like her old self. She feels out of place. By the end she's part of the group and she's bonded more with Tyler. She creates more bonds with Tyler through his singing and she doesn't keep quite about his talent.



Readers also discover more about Tyler in this section. As opposed to Keith, who was the star, and Micah, who didn't like playing a supporting role, Tyler is responsible and humble. He has talent, but doesn't flaunt it. His personality also serves to show that the children of addicts can be good citizens.

The search continues for Micah, but almost more because Dillon keeps on finding leads. Once again, at the end of the section, someone tells Rachel that Micah will come back when he's ready.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think Rachel and Micah connected when he came to her during a sleepless night after returning from rehab? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Tyler told Rachel's father about Micah's addiction? Why do you think that she, as the narrator, waits so long to reveal this fact?

Discussion Question 3

At the end of Chapter 19, Finn says that when you love someone, it's hard to let them go. Do you think that she really thought her e-mail would reunite Micah and his family?

Vocabulary

muse, confide, maneuvered, henna, liquidated, ruefully, orphaned, lingering, jugged, shriveled, enormous, pursed, engage, nonchalant, irritate, lingering, gypped, distorted, sarcastic, hook



Chapters 22 - 27

Summary

When Rachel and Tyler return to the car in Chapter 22, they discover that Dillon has passed out. Tyler drives. Without Dillon to give them directions, they don't really know where they're going. They decide to stop at a convenience store to get something to drink. While there, Tyler gets directions to Dillon's house while Rachel calls the number she found in Micah's jeans pocket at Finn's house. Someone picks, but hangs up when she asks if it's Micah. She calls back and is sent to voicemail, but doesn't get to leave a message because someone hangs up. Tyler sees her hang up the phone, but she doesn't tell him who she called. The call causes her to have a pain in her chest (she has a heart murmur). Tyler sees that something is wrong with her and volunteers to pull over, but she insists that she's okay. His attention to her almost causes him to run over a cat. Rachel sees it and warns him. He swerves and ends up hitting the curb and some trash cans.

The incident wakes up Dillon. He gets on his phone and tells them they have an appointment at 1:00 am at a department store's parking lot. He says, though, that he can't promise anything. The chapter ends with Rachel letting go of the piece of paper with the phone number she had called.

In Chapter 23, Rachel tells readers about the time when she found out that Micah was still doing drugs. He doesn't want to listen when she tried to lecture him. He played a song for her. She started to give him feedback, but then Keith called and she told Micah that his piece was good, and she started to leave. Before she did, Micah wanted to know whether everything was good between them. She lied and said it was.

Back in the present (Chapter 24), Dillon, Tyler, and Rachel get to the parking lot. The plan is to meet a dealer and see whether he can lead them to Micah. Instead, they witness the dealer getting beat up. No one sees them and when the culprits leave, they go to check on the drug dealer. Using his cell phone, they call 911. They leave and take Dillon and his car back to Dillon's house. Tyler tells Rachel that her concern for the drug dealer had impressed him. At the end of the chapter, she's sitting on a swing with Tyler pushing her. She wishes she could go back to the time when she and Micah were innocent children, free of ex-boyfriends and drugs.

Chapter 25 finds Tyler and Rachel spending the night in a church as they have to wait for several hours for the next bus and they haven't slept yet. When they first arrive, Rachel notices an image of Jesus in which he shows the same pain that she had seen in Micah's face. Before going to sleep, the two confess to each other. Rachel tells Tyler about Keith and Tyler shares his secrets. The conversation turns to why she's looking for Micah. She prays expressing how she really feels and wondering what the point was for her looking for Micah. As she looks at Jesus, though, she suddenly understands that



everyone suffers and people have to walk through the pain alone. She then recites a prayer from Micah's rehab group. Tyler says "amen" to that one.

Right before they fall asleep, Rachel worries about what she's going to tell her parents about the car. Tyler suggests telling the truth. Then he confesses that he thinks that Keith was stupid for not appreciating her.

In Chapter 26, when Rachel and Tyler wake up, Rachel sees an image of Jesus that she had not seen the night before. In this picture, Jesus has a halo over his head and looks calm and peaceful. She knew that Micah would eventually make it. When Tyler asks her whether she's ready to go, she says she is.

When the Rachel and Tyler leave the church, they go to get breakfast. Rachel sees someone who she thinks might be Micah, but realizes it isn't. She starts to wonder what it means to let go. When they go outside, she sees her car. The two steal it back. The experience makes the two laugh. Tyler says that she laughs like Micah. She acknowledges it with a smile.

The two return home in Chapter 27. Tyler is open with his feelings and says that he was happy to have the chance to spend time alone with Rachel. She is more guarded, but tells him that she could have chosen anyone to go with her, but chose him.

Later, she sends an e-mail to Micah telling him about the day and saying that she's letting him go.

She gets a goodnight message from Tyler and responds. On her window, there are still the smudges of the initials she wrote with Micah. Hers were a little below his, right where they belonged.

Analysis

In this section, Rachel finally lets go and makes great strides in her own journey of personal growth. The author fills these last chapters with various events that show her progression. The events take form in Rachel's physical actions, her interaction with people, and where she chooses to stay when she and Tyler need a place to sleep.

Rachel demonstrates that she's willing to let go by throwing away her last possible way to find Micah -- the phone number that she finds in his jeans. This isn't the case at first. She calls it and gets an answer, so it's a valid number. Whoever answers, however, doesn't respond when they hear her voice and she asks if it's Micah. And when she calls back, she doesn't even get the chance to leave a message. Someone picks up and hangs up. She keeps the number and doesn't tell Tyler about it. The experience literally causes a pain in her heart. She starts having chest pains which she explains as a heart murmur. The pain could be taken as the realization that Micah really doesn't want to be found. Indeed, in Chapter 23, Rachel tells readers about when she confronted Micah because she discovered that he was still doing drugs. What readers realize is that he



doesn't want to anyone to lecture him, not even Rachel. He just needs the assurance that everything is okay between the two of them.

When Rachel throws the number away, she makes a choice. The option she takes shows that she's ready to let go because she's doing it physically. Her progression may be on a subconscious level (she rationalizes it by saying that it may have not even been Micah), but even though she may not even be able to explain it to herself, on some level, she's finally beginning to understand and honor what Micah really needs -- to go on his journey alone while knowing that their relationship is intact. Giving him this knowledge is what will keep him going -- and it's something that she still can't understand.

However, she, as the family member of an addict needs to ask for the same strength that the addict needs. After expressing her anger, one of the stages of grief, she shows that she has reached the final stage of acceptance by asking for the serenity to accept things that she can't change, the courage to change the things that she can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Throughout her journey she's realizes that she can't change Micah's current path. He will return when he wants to. There are things that she can change, in her own life. She's beginning to develop the wisdom to tell the difference between the two. When she and Tyler return, he shares the fact that he was happy to have had the chance to spend time with Rachel. Rachel isn't as open at first because she's afraid of being hurt again, but recovers in time to let Tyler know that she likes, and is interested in, him.

In addition to making new connections, Rachel's views change. She's no longer in denial. At the beginning of the novel she sees the drug addicts on the street as different from Micah. It's as if she sees them as losers and people who are a lower level than Micah, and thus her and her family. She always wants to know about people to know if they are okay. She's even disgusted by Dillon's drunken behavior. This section, however, shows her touching a drug addict after he's been beaten up. When Tyler praises her for how she had handled the aftermath of the beating, she says that even drug dealers are people. She now sees that they aren't any different than Micah and Micah isn't any different from them.

Rachel's changing perspective truly manifests itself in her view of Jesus in the church. The evening in which she's fighting with her feelings shows her a Jesus who is in pain and suffering, much like Micah. When she wakes up the next morning (after confessing and saying the prayer of serenity) she literally sees Jesus in a different light. He no longer looks as if he's in pain. He looks calm and peaceful and does not appear to be suffering anymore. This shows her changing view of Micah and maybe even her own life. Neither one of them is suffering anymore. Micah is taking the journey he must take. Rachel may not understand it, but she accepts it and can now go on to live her life.

Discussion Question 1

Why doesn't Rachel tell Tyler about the phone call she made?



Discussion Question 2

Would things have been different if Rachel had told Micah that things were not okay between the two of them?

Discussion Question 3

What do you think caused the change in Rachel's perspective while she and Tyler were in the church?

Vocabulary

stethoscope, tenderize, claustrophobic, significance, offensive, medieval, pulpit, emaciated, frail, pronounced, mediate, shrink, frays, buffer, tormented, contorted, sadists, serenity, vibe, mosaics



Characters

Rachel

Rachel is the novel's narrator and the person who is looking for her brother Micah -- the story that carries the novel's plot. Her best friend is Michelle, who covers for her while she looks for Micah. Her ex-boyfriend is Keith. She chooses Tyler, a member of Micah's band, to help her look for Micah. Through her, readers see the manifestations of several themes.

One theme is that of the relationship between siblings. When Rachel and Micah were young children, they were close. He, in fact, was her role model. She learned how to lie from him and she judged most things based on his opinion. He acted like her big brother, trying to save her and protect her. He even saved her after they rode into a pipe that they knew they shouldn't have and got caught when rain water started to come in.

As she grew up, Rachel carved out her own identity and moved from just being Micah's little sister to the smart, athletic girl with the popular boyfriend. She became 'the good one'. On top of that, she no longer listened to him. Micah tried to tell Rachel that her boyfriend was no good, but she chose him, over Micah.

As Micah descended into addiction, Rachel thought he was different from other addicts and was strong enough to stop whenever he wanted. She looked at him and thought that he still looked healthy. She monitored him by looking at his stash, but she didn't alert their parents, even though they asked her if he was on drugs. In addition, Rachel was not honest with Micah when he asked if everything is okay between the two of them. Instead, she thought about herself, her situation with Keith, and how she thought that Micah hadn't helped her because of his addiction.

When Micah leaves, Rachel tells herself that things are better with him gone. She wants attention from her parents. She hopes things will return to normal with him gone. So, she waits before responding to the e-mail she gets from Finn. Her actions show how family members can react to the addiction of another family member.

Once she starts looking for Micah, Rachel not only goes on a journey to look for him, but also one that helps her grow. During it, she learns to let go of her guilt, Micah, her feelings associated with the Keith episode, and to connect to other people. She returns home as a wiser, stronger, and more mature person.

Micah

Micah is Rachel's brother and the leader of the band that Tyler is a member of. Through him, readers get a glimpse of what causes a person from a "normal" family to turn to drugs and become an addict.



When he was young, he was the one his younger sister looked up to. He became the cool leader of the band. As he got closer to graduation though, his future became murky, at least to him. Rachel was carving out her own identity, and no longer listened to him, even though she was going out with a jerk. Micah saw that others were just as, if not more, talented than him. He felt that he needed stimulation to stay on top, thus when he first took meth, he felt that he had what he needed.

Like others before him, he thought that he had it all under control and, therefore, chose to continue. The drug, however, took over. Things are worse now. His relationship with Rachel, whom he loves, is in jeopardy. He doesn't know what he's going to do when he's finished high school. The typical route is not for him, but will he succeed as a musician? He symbolically rejects college by spending the money in his college fund on drugs. This action makes his father angry. So, instead of getting the understanding that he needs, he's faced with an angry father, a helpless mother, and a sister who's more concerned about herself and her loser boyfriend than him. At least that is his view.

He lets Rachel and readers know what's going on with him through books. When Micah first told Rachel that he took meth, he pulled out the book, "The Stranger." When she finds items that he left behind at Finn's place, she finds "The Hobbit". "The Stranger" represents the fact that he feels as if he's condemned because he doesn't fit in. The Hobbit represents the fact that he's on a journey that he has to complete before coming home.

Still, before he left, he acted as Rachel's protective older brother and beat up Keith for what he'd done to Rachel.

Tyler

Tyler is Micah's friend, a member of his band, and the person Rachel chooses to help her look for Micah. He's street smart and responsible. He also has a lot of talents that Rachel finds out about during the search. He's a contrast to Micah though, in that he's humble. He doesn't have to be number one. Rachel finds out that he didn't mind being Micah's backup. Micah, on the other hand, had problems not being the front man.

Tyler is also no stranger to addiction, as his father was an alcoholic. He's also seen his mother cheating on his father. Still he has survived and is making his own way. At the end of the novel, there is a blossoming relationship between him and Rachel -- something that would not have happened with Micah around out of respect to Micah.

Keith

Keith is Rachel's ex-boyfriend. On the surface, he's charming and a great catch. Micah, however, saw his true nature, but no one, including Rachel, listened to him. Keith cheated on Rachel and when she finally broke up with him, he tried to ruin her reputation by writing negative things about her and their relationship on the Internet.



People's reaction to Keith shows how they can be fooled by appearances. Rachel's mother loved Keith and would put him above someone like Dillon. Dillon, however, is the better person.

Rachel's and Micah's Mother

Rachel's and Micah's mother is first introduced on page 1. Readers see that she's trying to raise good children as Rachel says that she tells her that people who lie don't go to heaven. While her efforts may resonate with them and they may appreciate her efforts, they may not be surprised to find out that Rachel still lies. Just the way Rachel tells readers about this, using the words "the first time" clues readers into what Rachel later tells them. She and Micah lie all the time and her mother doesn't even know it.

Her mother really has done the best she can and even though she tries to put on an "I'm in control" face, she's really frazzled between the roles of work and raising kids. Rachel sees her mother with her veil lifted when she finds her looking at old pictures of Micah and Rachel when they were kids. She also hears it in her voice when she calls her mother and says that she won't be coming home (pretending to stay with Michelle).

Her wondering when they lost Micah and thinking that Rachel is the good child shows one way that family members can deal with the addiction of a family member. Her willingness to believe Rachel when she calls to say that she's staying with Michelle, shows that she trusts Rachel. Rachel's perception of how she sounds on the other end of the phone causes readers to realize that her mother is stressed and trying to do the best that she can trying to juggle it all.

In the end, she personifies the parent of the addict that no one ever thought would become an addict. The family is intact, the mother tries to raise good children, and they think everything is okay. The question is always, "Where did we lose him/her?"

The thing is, she never understands her children. Rachel wants to tell her that she's not the good one, but doesn't. When Micah comes back home after rehab, she looks for signs that he's recovered. She doesn't realize that he's still suffering. Her children do respect her, even though they don't listen to her, and don't want to upset her by showing a side that's different from what she desires.

Michelle

Michelle is Rachel's best friend and confidant. She covers for Rachel when she goes off to look for Micah. The fact that Rachel tells Michelle about Micah's addiction and not her parents shows the dysfunctional element in her family. From a universal view, it implies that teenagers trust their friends before trusting their parents. It's also interesting that Michelle is from a broken family and even though she's not a saint, she's responsible.



Rachel's and Micah's Father

Rachel's and Micah's father symbolizes another way in which the family members of addicts can respond. He responds with anger. When he found out that that Micah spent his college fund on drugs, his response was an angry one. He was angry when he asked Micah how he could do this to himself and his mother. Micah slammed the door, representing the gulf in their relationship.

For Rachel, her father is someone she doesn't want to disappoint, like her mother. When someone steals her car, she's worried what she'll tell him because showing that she was responsible had helped her call the car her own.

Dillon

Dillon is one of Tyler's and Micah's surfer friends. When someone steals Rachel's car and they decide to continue the search for Micah, Tyler contacts him. It's with Dillon's help that they find Finn, the person who wrote the e-mail to Rachel. He finds other leads and finally leads them to a meeting with a drug dealer, which never happens as the drug dealer is beaten up by some other people before they have a chance to approach him.

At first Rachel wonders if he's okay (meaning that he's okay to associate with) and she doesn't even want him falling over on her when he's been drinking too much. Yet, even though she looks down on him, he's the one who leads them to places with answers including the owners of the surfboard shop and Finn. He keeps on following leads until it becomes too dangerous.

Even though Rachel looks down on Dillon, he represents a more well-adjusted Micah. Micah fears being stuck at home after graduating from high school. Rachel immediately realizes that Dillon is older than Micah and Tyler and asks about it. She finds out that he has a plan. It's not the typical finish high school, finish college in 4 years, and get a job plan, but he has one that works for him. This is something that Micah had not been able to do. He worried about being stuck at home because he didn't fit in with the typical after high school trajectory. Dillon lived at home with his mother and it didn't bother him.

Finn

Finn is the person who sent Rachel the e-mail. She's most likely an addict herself, but she understands and cares enough about Micah to try to do something to help him. As he spoke a lot about Rachel, she thinks that connecting the two would do him good.

It's interesting that she is someone who some may look down upon due to her addiction, yet she tries to understand and help Micah in a way that the "normal" people haven't done. All of them, Rachel and her parents, have thought more about themselves and their needs and not really tried to understand what Micah needs.

The Drug Dealer

Dillon sets up a meeting with a drug dealer to find out whether he knows anything about Micah. He, Tyler, and Rachel aren't able to talk to him though because another group shows up and beat him up. Once the shocking event ends, the trio go to see if he's okay and instead of shying away, Rachel tries to help him. Her actions show a shift in her perspective. Before, drug dealers were bad and the addicts they met were all losers, people who were different from Micah. Now she realizes that all of these people are just that -- people. They all have stories that got them to where they are today.



Symbols and Symbolism

Micah's Picking up the Novel "The Stranger"

Micah pulled this book out as he told Rachel about his first experience with meth. It's symbolic because it shows his frame of mind. Like the protagonist in the book, Micah feels as if he's condemned because he doesn't play the game. In his case it means that he doesn't fit the conventions of what a young person has to do to become successful in society. He loves his music, but he's beginning to doubt his talent and he worries that he'll be stuck at home because the "normal" path does not suit him. Being stuck at home will classify him as a loser. Is being classified as a loser because one does drugs a worse fate than not fitting it? That's a question readers must ponder.

Rachel's Car Being Stolen and Then Found

Rachel needs to learn a lesson of her own. If she had had her car, she may have been tempted to leave before completing her own journey. When someone steals her car, she has to rely on others (people she may not have trusted before) and she has to stay until her lesson is complete. When she finally learns it, she miraculously finds her car and is able to get it back.

Rachel's Journey to Ocean and Mission Beach

Rachel must undergo her own journey in order to deal with the grief of Micah's absence, her guilt, and her lingering feelings regarding Keith. She needs to do this in order to move on. Even though she undertakes the trip under the guise of finding Micah, she is the one who grows and comes out on the other end as a new person.

Keith

On the surface, Keith is Rachel's ex-boyfriend, but in reality, he was her drug of choice. Micah never liked him and warned her about him, but she didn't listen -- much as a drug addict doesn't listen to those who warn them about taking drugs.

Keith is charming, seems appealing, and draws unknowing people in -- much like a drug.

Looking back, Rachel realizes all the mistakes she made that pulled her in closer and closer to Keith. Everything started off lightly and easily enough and then she got in deeper and deeper until she had sex with him. Her description mimics what happened to Micah. He started off innocently and then got drawn in.



Going out with Keith, a popular boy, fed her ego. Doing meth takes Micah to a better place.

Rachel's Throwing Out the Ice Cream Cone

Rachel does this because the mention of Micah ruins the moment. This action symbolizes her conflicting emotions. She's supposed to be there looking for Micah. On some level, though, she prefers to forget him and enjoy her time with Tyler as she's attracted to him. The problem is that she can't enjoy her time with Tyler until she's dealt with Micah. She thinks she's ready, but she's not and the reminder of this frustrates her.

The Meals Rachel has With Tyler

While they look for Micah, Rachel and Tyler eat a lot together. They have pizza and ice cream. Meals provide a chance to bond and the two indeed do bond as they eat.

Readers do see a meal that Rachel and her family share when Micah returns from rehab, but it's not relaxed at all and Micah ends up excusing himself. Everyone's stepping on eggshells around him. They don't connect as a family.

The Book "The Hobbit"

When Rachel finally finds the person who wrote the e-mail, she finds some things that Micah left behind. One of these items is "The Hobbit." It's a message to Rachel symbolizing the fact that Micah needs to go on a journey and it's something that he has to do for personal growth, much as the protagonist of the book did.

Leaving the book behind is a message to Rachel that Micah has to do this, but it can also be a message that Rachel has to undergo her own journey.

Los Angeles

In the book, "The Hobbit," the protagonist leaves a safe place and moves on to dangerous territory. This is a trip he must take in order to complete his journey. Micah is doing the same thing. He leaves home, moves on to the more dangerous territory of Ocean and Mission Beach. Finally, Rachel discovers that he might have gone to LA. Even Rachel realizes that LA would take the search to a total different level -- something that she can't do. For Micah, LA is much more dangerous than Ocean and Mission Beach. But he must go to this place as part of his journey.



Initials on the Window

Writing their initials on the window signifies the connection that Rachel and Micah had when they were kids. The fact that she knows they will fade in the morning signifies the fact that their relationship has faded.

The Chest Pain that Rachel Feels After Calling the Number She Finds in Micah's Pocket

The thought that she might have spoken to Micah and he didn't want to speak to her is painful to Rachel. It literally gives her a pain in the heart.

Rachel Throws Away the Phone Number

Rachel's throwing away the phone number symbolizes her letting go of Micah.

The Church

Going to the church represents putting Micah to rest, a place to confess and tell the truth, and a place for Rachel to be reborn.



Settings

Rachel and Micah's Home

Rachel and Micah's home is safe compared to Ocean Beach and Mission Beach. Both Rachel and Micah need to leave this protective setting in order to complete their personal growth journey. Micah is afraid that he'll be stuck there -- meaning that he won't grow.

Rachel completes her journey and returns home. Micah isn't ready to return, yet. In fact he needs to go to darker places, both physically (LA) and in his life (doing drugs and selling them) before he can come back.

Micah's Rehab Meeting

Rachel tells readers about the time the entire family attended Micah's rehab meeting. What took place there shows how dysfunctional the family is. Their father got angry. Rachel lied. Everyone thought that Micah was not like the rest of them - even Micah himself. Readers leave with them, knowing that his attempt at rehab is not going to work.

Ocean Beach and Mission Beach

These places represent the shift Micah has made from a safe place to more dangerous places as he embarks on his journey. Here one gets a taste of real life of addicts. A progression occurs as Rachel and Tyler move from Ocean Beach to Mission Beach. It's at Mission beach where they witness the attack on the drug dealer. Both places, though, are much tamer than LA, possibly the next stop on Micah's journey.

The Places Rachel and Tyler Eat

Eating together builds bonds. Rachel and Tyler learn more about each other when they eat together. The bond they create is in sharp contrast to the tense meal Rachel had with her parents when Micah returned home from rehab.

The Church

The church that Rachel and Tyler spend the night in serves two purposes. As it is the last place they go before returning home, it is the place where they put Micah to rest. It also serves as a place of rebirth for Rachel personally and for her relationship with Micah because even though she hasn't found him, she now understands what he needs to do and is at peace with it.



Themes and Motifs

The Nature of Sibling Relationships

The bond between siblings is one of the deepest bonds people share. Indeed, from what Rachel tells readers about growing up with her brother, the two were close when they were little. Rachel's brother served as her role model, almost more than her mother. Her mother told her that it was wrong to lie, but Micah taught her how to excel at it. The siblings covered for each other. Rachel also stopped playing the "let's pretend" road game when Micah tired of it. She admits that she "measured most things against his opinion".

For his part, Micah willingly accepted the role of Rachel's protector, saving her from real life-threatening situations like the oncoming waters in the pipes. He told his band members to behave around his sister. Tyler says that he never would have approached Rachel in a romantic fashion with Micah around.

As they grow up, however, readers begin to see a shift in their relationship. Shifts in sibling relationships are a natural part of the growth of each sibling. As they get older, outside forces begin to enter their lives. Each sibling begins to search for their own identity -- an identity that separates them from their sibling. Rachel tells readers about the experience that younger siblings go through when they have the same teachers (or attend the same school) as their older siblings. The older sibling sets the family standard. When teachers realized that Rachel was Micah's sister, they automatically made some type of mental link to his behavior. In order to create her own identity, Rachel made good grades and was active in sports and school activities. She even dated the cool guy in school to etch her place on the cool list. Micah was already there because of his band.

As in any relationship, though, problems occur when one party moves ahead and the other lags behind, or at least feels as if they do. Rachel paid less attention to Micah when she started dating Keith. She didn't even take the time to give him feedback on a new song because she had to take a call from her boyfriend. She didn't even listen to his opinion anymore. He let her know that he didn't like Keith, but she continued to date him anyway.

Micah reached out to Rachel. He confided in her with his first tries meth. He continued to come back to her to find out whether things are okay between the two of them. Rachel wasn't truthful, though, and he knew it. After all, he was the one who taught her how to lie. In the end, this rift between him and his sister contributed to his decision to leave. As Finn tells Rachel, he loves her and even acted to protect her while on drugs, something that Rachel had wished he had done, but had no idea that he had actually done. The fact that Finn, and Tyler, had to tell Rachel how much Micah cared about her and what he had done to protect her shows how much they had drifted apart.



In the end, both of them are out of the reach of each other. Micah can't reach Rachel. She doesn't understand his pain. She couldn't be honest with him and she continued to become more serious about Keith even though Micah warned her about him.

When Micah left, he became literally out of Rachel's reach. She couldn't reach him physically; she couldn't reach him on the phone; in the beginning of the novel, she couldn't even reach him mentally. She wants to know why he's done what he's done. She doesn't understand until she searches for him. While she doesn't reach him physically, she does begin to understand him and what he needs to do. This discovery brings them closer together as demonstrated through her e-mail to him at the end of the novel.

The Role of Choice in the Outcome of One's Life

When Micah started doing meth, Rachel's friend, Michelle, suggested that maybe he has a predetermination that lead him to have an addictive personality. Other sources that Rachel accessed imply that such a predisposition may explain drug addiction. Yet, even though research into her family history uncovered dark things such as alcoholism, divorce, cancer, and depression, she concluded that Micah's addiction was his choice. In her opinion, to become addicted to something means that you had to choose whatever it is that you're addicted to. One makes this choice multiple times -- leading one down a slippery choice that can lead to death.

Micah's choices have led him to a dangerous place. As Rachel searches for him, she realizes that he doesn't want anyone to find him. Others along the way tell her that he'll come back when he's ready. In other words, he'll come back when he chooses to do so.

Rachel's own choices led her to the bad break-up with Keith. She chose to go out with him. She chose to sleep with him. She chose to stay with him even though he's cheated on her before and Micah warned her that he is not a good guy. In the end, she suffers the consequences of her choices.

Throughout her search for Micah, Rachel has other choices. Is she going to continue to feel guilty or is she going to let go? Is she going to search for Micah or is she going to ignore the e-mail? Is she going to accept what she can't change and find peace, or is she going to keep on fighting against the flow?

When she throws the phone number out the window, readers realize that she's choosing to let go and accept what she can't change. Her decision to go to a church cements her choice. When she and Tyler return home, he's honest with her. At first she's a bit distance, giving him the wrong message. She chooses, however, to recover the situation by telling him that she could have chosen anyone to come with her, but she had chosen him. Writing the e-mail to Micah is another choice. Rachel chooses to finally let Micah know that everything is truly okay between the two of them and that she has let go. This choice gives both of them the freedom to continue to grow.



The Effect of Addiction on Family Members

Addiction affects every single member of a family and every single member can have a different reaction. The reaction can include feelings of anger, guilt, grief, denial, and acceptance. In this novel, readers see all of these reactions as they view Micah's sister, mother, and father. The story even takes the effect outside of the family by showing how friends of the addict and friends of the addict's family members feel.

Micah's addiction generates anger in his father. He demonstrated anger when Tyler told him about Micah's addiction. Tyler tells Rachel that her father needed someone to blame and he thinks that her father is angry with him. Rachel's and Micah's father also demonstrated anger at Micah's rehab meeting when Micah told everyone that's he'd spent his college fund on drugs. His father also wants to know why - why is Micah doing this to himself? Why is he doing it to his mother (and him)? Family members want to know why, but do they really listen and understand when the addict tells them why?

Micah's mother also wants to know "why." She, however, goes a bit deeper than just wanting to know "why." She wants to know when they lost him. Readers know, however, that they never had him as he and Rachel lie about everything. They had lost him a long time ago.

Micah told Rachel "why" but she didn't listen to him and didn't give him the help he needed to navigate his issues. As she thinks back, she recognizes the talks he had when he was reaching out to her and she hadn't given him what he needed. She wonders "why" and decides that he made the choice for whatever reason. She also feels guilty. She's feels guilty for not listening to him, for not reacting faster to the e-mail she receives, and for not telling her parents about his addiction.

Rachel didn't tell her parents partly because she's in denial. She thought that Micah was different (better than) from other drug addicts and could stop whenever he wanted. This is in spite of the research she does that shows how meth affects one's brain over time.

Rachel is not the only one who is in denial, however. So is Micah. He said that he's not like the other drug addicts. He believed that he was in control. Rachel's research, however, shows the influence of the drug on one's brain. In the end, it's in control.

The novel also shows how an addict can move from a normal life to that of an addict. Readers begin to see Micah's doubts and the pressure he feels. Is he really such a good singer, or are others better? He's not a good student. What are his college options? What would he study? Who can he lean on? His sister's life consumes her and he's not really close to his family. They don't understand him. He's a stranger.

The friends who know about the addiction represent two different approaches. Tyler told Micah's father. Michelle thought that it may be due to a predisposition and took a passive role.



The Journey Towards Personal Growth

When Rachel finds some of Micah's belongings in Finns' apartment, she finds one of her books, "The Hobbit". This is a book about a hobbit who goes on a journey. His journey leads him from a safe haven to more sinister places. During his quest, he must use his wits, common sense and accept his nature. In the end, he comes out more mature, competent, and wise.

This book symbolizes the journey that both Micah and Rachel are on. The two teenagers are at a point in their lives where they are trying to define their own identities. Micah knows that it's time for him to take the next step in life, but faces the fear that he's going to fail as he doesn't fit the norm and follow the rules. His embracing method is his choice to take the journey he needs in order to move on in life. Other addicts realize that this is what's going on in Micah's mind. They all tell Rachel that Micah will come back when he's ready. He'll be ready once he finds what he's looking for and hopefully he'll return with the same qualities that the hobbit returned with.

Rachel is on her own journey. She feels guilty and even though she tries to ignore it, the feeling is definitely there. She even wonders if the person who sent her the e-mail knew that guilt was her weak point. Letting go of her guilt is just one of the lessons Rachel needs to learn. She needs to learn the value of the truth. She needs to learn how to honestly connect to others, and she has to learn how to not judge people based on their condition in life.

During her search for Micah she learns all of these things. Her journey starts with her not wanting to talk about why she had waited so long to follow up on the e-mail she received. By the end, she admits the truth. She's also ready to face her feelings about Keith and tell Tyler about them and him. When they first go to Ocean Beach, Rachel always wants to know whether the people they associate with are okay. She also thinks that Micah is different from everyone they encounter. In the end, she not only tries to help a drug dealer, she also touches him.

Finally, when they go to the church, she expresses her anger, but then lets go. She accepts what she can't change as exemplified in the changing face she sees of Jesus the next morning.

Once Rachel's learned the lessons she needs to learn, she gets her car back. Micah's journey, however, continues as he goes into the more sinister world LA represents.

Grief and the Need to Let Go

Tyler and Rachel often speak about Micah while they're looking for him. When they do so, they speak of him in the past tense. The Micah they knew is dead. When he left, readers see Rachel going through the stages associated with grief due to the loss of a loved one.



When Micah first left, Rachel is in a state of denial. She thinks that she has let go, and that she is handling the situation and that everything is better now that Micah has gone. The times she talks about her life at home shows that this is not the case. There's silence. Things are not the same. The thought of returning to this environment spurs her to continue her search for Micah.

As the search continues, Rachel enters the angry stage. She gets angry at anyone who tells her the truth about Micah and how she needs to deal with the situation. She gets angry at the owners of the surf shop, she gets angry with Tyler, she even tells Frank (God) that she's angry.

She feels the guilt associated with grief and constantly thinks of the "what ifs" and "if onlys." If only she had told my parents earlier. If only she had acted on the e-mail message earlier. If only she had realized that Micah wouldn't be able to kick his drug habit on his own.

As they continue looking and don't find Micah, depression starts to sink in. He's not coming back. She wonders, "What's the point?" In fact, in her prayer she runs down the list of all the negative things that have happened since she's been on her search. She lied to her parents, her car got stolen, a drug dealer could have killed them, and they still hadn't found Micah.

While she's at church, however, she enters into the final stage of grief, acceptance. She sees Jesus and suddenly understands that everyone suffers. Sometimes people walk through the pain alone and sometimes they have people help them. This realization causes her to say the prayer of serenity. The next day, she literally sees things in a different light. The Jesus who had been in such pain the night before is now at peace. Rachel physically lets go of Micah when she throws the paper with the phone number out of the window. Now she mentally lets him go. The final sign that she has reached this point, and peace, is when she sends him the e-mail at the end of the novel.

Letting go is important for both of them. At this point, Micah needs to complete his journey alone and Rachel needs to let go in order to give him the space he needs and to move on herself.



Styles

Point of View

The novel uses a first person perspective in the narrative. As the story focuses more on the effect of drug abuse on those close to them as opposed to the addict himself, this choice makes sense. Rachel's voice reflects her mood and her transition as she moves through the phases of grief once Micah leaves. Readers sense the distance between the two as she worries more about her relationship with Keith than about Micah. They feel her anger when she finds out that Micah is now selling drugs. They also see her transformation as she finally lets Micah go, finds compassion for others, and connects with Tyler.

Rachel notes that when she and Tyler talk about Micah, they use the past tense. This choice represents that even though they don't know whether he's alive or dead, the Micah they know is dead. He hasn't been himself for a long time.

It's important to note how Rachel uses flashbacks to tell readers stories about Micah. While she's struggling with her guilt, and before she lets go, these stories appear in separate chapters. As she reconciles what has happened and moves on, her flashbacks occur in the same chapter as the current action. It's as if her acceptance of the situation means that she can internalize memories of Micah while before she had to place them in a separate place. He might be out of reach, but memories of him aren't.

As the point of view is Rachel's, readers should realize that she may not be always reliable. One can't always judge others feelings, even Micah's, based on what she says.

Language and Meaning

There are several points to note when looking at the use of language in "Out of Reach" First, as Rachel is a teenager, the general language used throughout the novel is at an appropriate level for young adults reading the novel.

Second, since the novel deals with drug addiction, vocabulary associated with drug use appears as she looks for Micah amongst other addicts and as she talks about her hunt to try to understand why he decided to use drugs. She opens Chapter Four, for example, with various names for Crystal Methamphetamine. The words she uses are "crank", "ice", "chalk", "speed", "trash", "tina", "tweak", and "shards". Even though she uses these words, those who have no idea about the drug scene aren't lost. It's as if readers are learning about drugs as Rachel learns about them.



Structure

The book's distinctive structure features both a narrative that moves the plot of finding Micah forward and flashbacks that help readers understand how Rachel, and Micah, have gotten to the point where they are now. The book switches regularly between the present and the past. There's coherency in the transitions as the flashbacks are closely related to something that happened in the previous chapter dealing with the present. For example, when she and Tyler first start to search for Micah and meeting addicts on the streets, the narrative switches to what Rachel found out about drugs from her research. This helps readers understand what she's seeing and will be telling readers about.

The structure also helps promote the theme of overcoming grief and letting go. First of all, as she moves towards acceptance, Rachel's stories about Micah become part of the chapters that deal with the present. She now doesn't have to keep the past and the present separate. She has reconciled everything and can talk about them and handle them in the present. Keeping the past separate from the present also meant that she was keeping something aside -- almost like keeping a secret. Once she begins to be more honest about her feelings and connect with others, she no longer keeps these secrets. Her past becomes part of her present -- there to be told to all.



Quotes

The first time my mom told me liars didn't go to heaven was when she tried to get me to confess to hitting my eight-year-old brother.

-- Rachel (chapter 1 paragraph 1)

Importance: This quote sets the tone for entire novel. This one sentence reveals how the family members interact with each other. Rachel's mother tries to raise good children, She tries to teach Rachel that it's not good to lie. Readers wonder how much this threat, the idea of not getting into heaven, deters Rachel from lying or any other type of bad behavior, because Rachel says that this is what her mother said the first time. That means that she must have had to say it several other times. Readers later find out that that indeed, this threat didn't keep Rachel from lying. Maybe Rachel and her brother aren't as good as their mother thinks they are. It also introduces the concept of believing in a higher power and how the choices you make will influence your future. Getting into heaven is your choice. If you're good, you'll get to go. If not, you won't. One last significance is the fact that Rachel's mother is trying to get Rachel to behave in a manner that she sees fit by telling her what the outcome will be of her bad behavior based on what she sees as important -- getting into heaven. The threat of not getting in only works if one sees heaven as a desirable place to be. Rachel later tells readers that she doesn't think that it's a great place. Thus, the threat of not getting in doesn't stop her from lying. Rachel has to learn the value of telling the truth in a way that resonates with her. This concept applies to Micah's addiction. Everyone tries to deter him by telling him things that don't resonate with him. The lectures mean nothing. He has to go through his own journey to find his own truths and stop lying to himself about how he has control over his drug habit.

The truth? Everyone lies. Every single person.

-- Rachel (chapter 1 paragraph 7)

Importance: Rachel shows a dark, sarcastic view of life here. She's already told readers how she and Micah lie all the time, Now she's justifying it by saying that she's no different from anyone else because not only does everyone else do it, but even her mother, the person who's trying to teach her not to lie, does it. The quote also foreshadows that something bad is about to happen. Rachel's mother is lying to her and if she really doesn't believe in lying. Therefore, the fact that she's had to do it must mean that something bad has happened. In addition, the fact that her mother lies, and she thinks that everyone does, may partly explain why she never tells her parents about Micah's addiction, doesn't tell them the truth about going to look for him, and considers what lie she's going to tell about her missing car. Tyler, on the other hand, has a different view about telling the truth (which he shows by encouraging her to tell the truth about her car). He, unlike Rachel, tells Micah's father about Micah's addiction and is instrumental in getting Micah into rehab.

I could have been the hero of the family. Instead, I lied and told myself that it was just a phase. Micah would be able to quit when he wanted to. Now I carry that burden."



-- Rachel (chapter 1 paragraph 24)

Importance: This quote reveals Rachel's struggle with trying to deal with Micah's addiction. On the one hand she feels guilty for covering for him. She had lied, both to her parents and to herself, because she kept on thinking that he wasn't like the others. He would be able to quit when he wanted to. However, as the good one in the family and the one who isn't getting so much attention due to Micah's problem, she thinks of how telling her parents the truth about Micah's addiction would have boosted her status in the family. Instead of thinking that it might have helped him, she thinks that she could have been the hero.

How was there peace in accepting what couldn't be changed?

-- Rachel (chapter 1 paragraph 40)

Importance: At the beginning of the novel Rachel is suffering. Not from the affects of drugs, but because she keeps on thinking, "what if" and her what ifs are haunting her. Even though she may think she can, she can't move on from the guilt of wondering what would have happened if she had told her parents. As readers find out more about her relationship with Keith, and her reluctance to talk about it, they discover that she hasn't come to terms with this either. Thoughts of him and the mistakes she made keep on coming into her mind. She doesn't find peace until she finally understands the importance of accepting what can't be changed and moving on from there. What had happened with Keith had happened. she couldn't change it. The same things was true of Micah's situation. Instead of beating herself up by blaming herself, she just needs to accept what has happened. She realizes this at the end of the novel and this marks the end of her journey, as symbolized by the fact that she finds her car.

Safe places exist only where people aren't.

-- Rachel (chapter 1 paragraph 76)

Importance: This quote shows how Rachel, and maybe even other teenagers on a whole, see the world. One might understand why she wouldn't feel a room of strangers as a safe place (and if she doesn't to see it a a safe place, how easy is it for a drug addict their first time there?), but she doesn't even see her home or even her school as safe places. Thus, when she gets the e-mail about Micah, Rachel doesn't tell her parents. When she goes to look for Micah, she doesn't tell her parents. She carefully chooses who to help her look for Micah because she knows she does need help and she tells Michelle what is going on because she's Rachel's cover. Rachel thinks, however, that she's better off acting independently. If Micah thinks the same way about home and school, then readers can see how he redraws into himself and uses drugs to do this. He's safe where people aren't, so he's safe alone even though it is in the grips of a life-threatening drug.

The funny thing about telling a lie is that once it has been said and believed, it lives and becomes.

-- Rachel (chapter 1 paragraph 79)



Importance: Rachel's family had been living a lie. Until Rachel and Micah's parents discover that Micah is doing drugs, they think that they have a happy, functional family. The truth about Micah finally comes out, but they still believe that Rachel is the good one. They don't know the entire story surrounding Keith and they don't know that Rachel kept her knowledge about Micah's drug use from them. Rachel also lies to herself, and Micah, when she says that it will be good to have him home. It's not until he's gone, and she realizes that she actually likes the fact that he's not there anymore that she starts to feel the effects of struggle. If the lie, that it would be too good to have Micah home, had never been removed as a result of her journey, she may have still been carrying the lie around with her, like a souvenir, and suffering because of it.

Someone was worried about my brother, and knew my weakness, guilt.
-- Rachel (chapter 2 paragraph 30)

Importance: This quote confirms that Rachel decides to look for Micah due to feelings of guilt. It shows one possible reaction of a drug addict's family members. She doesn't look for him because she misses him, because the Micah she knows has gone anyway. She doesn't look for him with the hopes of helping him kick his habit. Some family members may actually feel relief when the addict leaves. Rachel, however feels guilty because she hasn't done something to help Micah. She needs to address her own sense of guilt.

Words stick, even when we don't want them to.
-- Rachel (chapter 5 paragraph 74)

Importance: Rachel says this in reaction to what her father says to Micah when he catches him using pot and asks him if he wanted to end up as a loser junkie, almost making it a self-fulfilling prophecy for Micah that he would become a drug addict. These words could have become implanted in Micah's mind and served as a way for him to identify himself because he felt that others already thought of him that way. Rachel's words also stick. Over and over again Micah asks if everything is okay between the two of them, and she lies. Given their history of telling lies and the fact that he taught her how to lie, Micah knows that she's not telling the truth when she says that everything is okay between them. This knowledge adds to his burden as he really does love her. While Rachel refers to her father when she states this quote, one wonders whether she knows that her words have stuck as well.

To become addicted to something meant you had to choose that drug or that drink.
-- Rachel (chapter 6 paragraph 33)

Importance: This quote focuses on the debate as to whether addiction is due to some type of genetic predisposition or human choice. Rachel concludes that it is choice. Yes, Micah had tried drugs. He knew how it made him feel. At that point, though, he wasn't addicted. He had chosen to continue to take drugs even though he knew the consequences.



It's impossible to keep someone safe.
-- Rachel (chapter 7 paragraph 30)

Importance: This quote basically says that people make their own choices. No matter what someone else may do to try to shield others, if the person one tries to protect decides to do something that will put them in harm's way, there is nothing another person can do about it. Micah tried to keep Rachel safe. Still she ended up dating Keith. It was her choice. In her way, Rachel tries to keep Micah safe. She keeps tabs on him. She does research to try to understand what meth does to people. She confronted him when she found out that he was still doing drugs. It was his choice, however, to continue.

Parents were clueless sometimes.
-- Rachel (chapter 7 paragraph 34)

Importance: This quote highlights one of the biggest flaws in family interactions. Parents think of themselves, but forget that they have children, or teenagers, in the house. So parents stock up of alcohol and then go away, not thinking about the fact that kids are in the house who are naturally going to be attracted to the forbidden (in this case alcohol). The same holds true for Micah's situation. He isn't the child who's going to follow the corporate path. If his parents had realized and accepted this, he may not have felt so much pressure -- pressure that contributed to his drug use. His parents were clueless, however. They don't understand his needs and they don't understand Rachel's needs when Micah left. Luckily, Rachel is able to save herself because she believes in a higher power. This power is higher than her parents.

All that matters is perception.
-- Rachel (chapter 8 paragraph 25)

Importance: This quote represents Rachel's view of society. On the surface, Micah and Rachel seemed to be good kids, even though they spent their young lives lying. Rachel is still seen as a good kid even though she has had pre-marital sex, lies, doesn't tell her parents about her brother's addiction even when they ask her about it, and has been "exposed" to other students through Keith's manifesto. Keith had been able to fool everyone, except for Micah, through artificial charm. Taking this idea further, the perception of drug addicts and dealers is that they are bad people. Rachel has the same perception of other addicts and dealers at first. Then, she realizes that this perception is wrong and that these people need to be treated as people who are in search of something that's missing in their lives. It's necessary to go beyond the perception to understand people and situations.

It was a good gesture on both our parts, but I knew that neither of us could promise such a thing. No human could.
-- Rachel (chapter 13 paragraph 114)

Importance: This quote shows Rachel's continued belief that people aren't perfect. They may say that they are not going to keep secrets, but they still will in spite of their



good intentions. This quote, though, shows an improvement over her perception of human nature in the first chapter. There she stated that everyone lies as if that is just what people do to suit their own purposes (because that's what she and Micah had done). Now, however, she realizes that people may have good intentions, but the circumstances may cause them to keep secrets. In a way, this revelation helps her understand the meaning of having the power to accept what can't be changed. People may keep secrets for whatever reason, but she has no control over their choice to do so. Instead of fighting it, she just needs to accept it and in doing so, she will find peace.

Not everything's meant to last forever.

-- Rachel (chapter 15 paragraph 47)

Importance: This quote shows Rachel's understanding of the shifting nature of life and change. Things change. This includes relationships and people. Her relationship with Micah changed as they grew up. Before, she had been in his shadow with him protecting her. Relationships change, however, and he can't always be there to protect her, even though he may like to. At some point, each one has to go off on their own journey in order to find themselves and grow.