

The Things a Brother Knows Study Guide

The Things a Brother Knows by Dana Reinhardt

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Plot Summary

"The Things a Brother Knows" by Dana Reinhardt tells the story of Levi Katznelson, a seventeen-year-old high school student who lives with his parents, Amanda and Reuben, and his brother, Boaz. As the story unfolds, Boaz is due to come home that night from a three-year tour with the Marines in an overseas war. Although the identity of the war-torn country is not revealed, the earmarks described in the story all point to the battlefields of Iraq or Afghanistan.

Levi has mixed feelings about his brother returning home. He is nearly humiliated when the principal of his school holds an assembly to announce that war hero Boaz Katznelson is returning home. It seems that everyone loved Boaz even those who barely knew him. Boaz is a very cool guy. He was good looking, tall, smart and charming. Levi has always looked up to his big brother and wants to be just like him. In reality, Levi feels inferior to Boaz and fears he could never be like him.

But during the three years that Boaz is gone, Levi begins to notice changes in his brother—changes that are very disturbing. The once engaging and glib brother seems to have less and less to say every time he comes home. Sometimes when the family knew that he was on leave, he didn't even come home or call. Levi is most concerned about his parents and grandfather, affectionately known as Dov. They worry about Boaz and cannot wait to see him. Amanda, Levi's mother, worries the most. She has been cleaning non-stop since Boaz left hoping to be distracted from her fears.

But now everything will be fine. The remoteness that everyone noticed will go away and Boaz will return and be his old self. But that will not be the case. Boaz stays in his room and will only holler through the door that he is sleeping when his mother tries to get him to come downstairs to eat. Amanda is deluding herself that Boaz will be fine. He just needs time. But Levi does not buy it.

Levi begins to gather that there is something very wrong with his brother. Through some subtle investigation, Levi learns that Boaz is planning some big mission. There are maps of the northwest US all over his room with addresses marked all over them. Levi is able to hack into Boaz' email account and learns that he has plans to meet up with some people Levi never heard of. When Boaz tells the family that he was going hiking on the Appalachian Trail, Levi knows that he is lying. Boaz takes off but Levi is soon on his heels. He catches up with his brother and insists on going with him. Levi does not know where they are going and does not know what the mission is and Boaz will not tell him. But that does not deter Levi. He tenaciously stays right with him.

In the end, Levi learns to understand to some degree the horrors that his brother has experienced on the battlefield. He also learns that he is as important to his brother as he has ever been. The story emphasizes that there are multiple victims of war - soldiers, civilians, and even the enemy - and that being a "brother" has more than one meaning.

Chapter One

Chapter One Summary

Seventeen-year-old Levi used to love his brother, Boaz. But lately, he hasn't been so sure. He'd never admit it, even to Pearl, his best friend. Everyone loves Boaz - even people that don't know him. A big brother is such an important part of growing up. But once reaching adulthood, things and perceptions can change. Boaz is coming home tonight. It had been announced at assembly that day. Mrs. Bowers didn't mention Levi in her announcement but everyone knew that "Boaz Katznelson," had to be related to Levi Katznelson. Besides, there wasn't a plethora of relocated Israelis the Boston area.

Mrs. Bowers had glowed about Boaz' three years as a marine in which he had honorably served his country. Boaz had graduated from the Bay City High School and, as Bowers pointed out, was a superlative student who would have been accepted at any college.

That morning Levi had met with Zim as usual to compare homework. Levi and Zim shared the same birthday and was Levi's second best friend next to Pearl. Zim moved in across the street from Levi when they were both "seven years, eight months and eleven days old" (p. 3). Zim's mother would be bringing a dish to Levi's house to help celebrate Boaz' return. Levi was thrilled and relieved that Boaz would be coming home from a war that he didn't understand and that had worried his mother so.

It is Boaz' choice to go to war. Everyone had to live with it but it had greatly impacted the family. Boaz changed. Every time he gets home, he is different and remote. After school, nothing is different at home—no banners, champagne or cake. His mother is superstitious. She is not going to start celebrating his return until the minute Boaz walks in. Maybe when he does walk in the door, things will be like they used to be.

Levi is relaxing in his room thinking about Boaz' return when Pearl bursts in. Pearl just came from her school, the Convent of the Holy Child Jesus. Pearl has quite a challenge of being Chinese and Jewish and going to a Catholic school. They climb out on the roof so Pearl can take a smoke. She offers Levi a cigarette but he quit months ago. She'd like it if he started smoking again. He won't smoke but he loves sitting there next to Pearl. It is his safe place.

It's been thirteen months since Boaz had been home. Pearl senses that Levi is nervous about his return. She tells him it will be okay. She doesn't really know that, she tells him, but that's what friends are supposed to say. Levi swears that his mother, Amanda, has cleaned nonstop since Boaz left three years before. It's the only thing that distracts her. Instead of hanging crepe papers and balloons, she's folding laundry. Zim calls to tell Levi the news that "hottie extraordinaire," Sophie Olsen, asked about him today.

Later, Levi is playing chess with his father, Reuben, who insists on being called Abba or the Jewish word for father. The front door squeaks open and suddenly, his brother's voice fills the air. The family surrounds Boaz, his mother reaching him first. Dov, Levi's grandfather, joins in the reunion.

Chapter One Analysis

Seventeen-year-old Levi's older brother is coming home after three years in the service and in the war. Levi is cautious with his feelings. He used to look up to his brother but Boaz' decision to join the military has had a very negative impact on the family. Levi didn't understand the war or why it was necessary and why his brother would volunteer to be part of it.

It is obvious that Levi harbors a good deal of bitterness about his brother's decision. His mother has been worrying non-stop for three years. Levi thinks deep down that Boaz' decision was selfish. He used to love his brother but he looks at him in a different light. Although he's relieved that his brother is coming home, he is unsure how he will feel to be with him again. He is partly annoyed and partly envious that his brother has become such a hero in the eyes of so many—as he says, people who don't even know him love him. They didn't get to see the toll his absence took on him and his family. Levi seems to be most concerned with how Boaz' military service hurt his mother.

Chapter Two

Chapter Two Summary

Boaz does not come out of his room for three days. Zim wants to see him because Boaz used to be like a big brother to him. Levi tells him that he's a better big brother to his little brother, Peter, than Boaz is to him. Zim is taken aback by the statement. His mother knocks several times a day on Boaz' door. His only response is that he's sleeping. Boaz' surly tone of voice bothers Levi. He used to be so nice and affectionate to her. It hurts Amanda but she perks up - at least he's home, she thinks. Abba is taking it differently. He is cursing and slamming his fists on the table wanting to know when Boaz is going to come out of his room.

It is Friday night and Shabbat. Dov comes for dinner and brings some snacks from the Armenian deli. Dov always teases Levi about his long hair. From the sound of his shower and electric razor, Boaz must be planning on coming downstairs. After the others are all gathered for dinner, finally Boaz comes downstairs. Everyone is silent and stares at him except Amanda who immediately fills the gap in conversation.

At the dinner table, Levi's mom says how much they are blessed. After Boaz left, she began attending the synagogue on a regular basis - something new for her. Boaz says almost nothing during dinner but throws down the food to live up to the old nickname his mother gave him, a Human Hoover. But after Boaz finishes his dinner he says goodnight and heads back upstairs. It is only seven-thirty.

Levi has plans with Zim and Pearl to go to Chad Post's party. He feels a little guilty with his brother just coming home but it looks like Boaz will be holed up in his room all night so it won't matter. He remembered when they were really close before Boaz got his license and a girlfriend. They did everything together. He idolized Boaz who was "stronger, faster, bigger, smart and better looking" (p. 26) than Levi. He so wanted to be like him.

At the party, Chad asks about Boaz. He is obviously very impressed with Boaz' service. He wonders if he killed anyone over there. Pearl flirts with a few guys but gets no where. She doesn't get much opportunity to be with boys. Pearl was adopted by the Goldblatts when she was just eleven months old. Mama Goldblatt is wildly protective of Pearl which is why she wound up in an all-girls Catholic school. Levi feels confused. He doesn't know who he wants to be.

Chapter Two Analysis

Adjusting to life as a civilian is difficult for Boaz. He stays in his room and sleeps but he probably is just avoiding talking about his experience. He's not ready to discuss it yet. But his silence, just like his military service, is impacting the family. His mother is worried but keeps reminding herself that at least he's home. Abba doesn't understand



why his son is isolating himself and isn't just his old self. Levi is confused and hurt. It makes him feel better to recall the good times with his brother before he got his license and got a girlfriend and definitely before he went off to war which set the entire family into chaos.

Boaz' apparent depression is making Levi feel guilty. He had plans to go to a party but questions rather he should. After all his brother just returned from a war. It has not yet occurred to Levi or his family that Boaz may be suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder which strikes many returning veterans.

Chapter Three

Chapter Three Summary

Levi can hear the click-clacking of computer keys coming from Boaz' room at all hours. He knows he's not sleeping all the time. Late at night, he can hear hoarse screams coming from Boaz' room. A few times, Levi talked through the door and asked if he was okay. He was fine, he would simply reply. After Levi returns from a jog, Christina, Boaz' old girlfriend, is on the porch with his mother. She is gorgeous he thinks to himself. She has come to see Boaz but she learns that it may not be a good idea. He wonders if all those times when he didn't come home to see his family if he was visiting Christina at Dartmouth.

Christina has been there the night Boaz announced he was joining the Marines. He has been accepted at Cornell, Columbia, Tufts, and Berkeley. Everyone had been anxious to hear his decision. When he announced that he decided to join the Marines, there was only silence. Christina was the first to speak. She said people "like us" don't do that. Boaz takes offense at her biased remark. Abba and Dov had been in the Israeli army but this was way different than the US military. Abba stays silent since it is a personal decision that he understood. Boaz' mother told him he wasn't thinking clearly. Levi said what the others were all thinking: "Don't do this" (p. 39). Levi tells Christina that Boaz is fine in that he doesn't have a scratch on him. But she says that there are all different kinds of hurts.

At school, the science teacher, Mr. Hopper makes the comment that Boaz is a hero and that he hopes that Levi is proud of him. He doesn't tell him that he Boaz never comes out of his room. Sophie Olsen asks Levi if everything is all right. He says he's fine. Levi applies for a job at Videorama. When he turns in his application, Bob, the manager, asks about Boaz and says to tell him hello. Even Eddie Taylor, a student activist and war protestor, stops Levi to tell him he's glad that his brother got home safely.

Pearl stops by. She's concerned about Boaz. She asks if Boaz might be on drugs. There's a knock on the door and Levi and Pearl are surprised to see that it's Boaz. Pearl hurries out so Levi can talk to Boaz alone. Boaz tells Levi that his computer is broken. Levi offers to take a look. They go to Boaz' room which is a colossal mess. Bad news—the motherboard is out in Boaz' computer. Boaz is distraught.

Levi glances around the room and notices a lot of maps. Some are computer print-outs. Others are Rand-McNally maps. They're on the floor and pinned to the wall. In fact, hanging on the wall behind Boaz' desk is Levi's old map of the world. Levi offers to get the motherboard for him. In the mean time, Levi says he can use his laptop. Levi assures him he can print from it.

Everyday after school, Levi gets his laptop from Boaz so he can check his email. When he does, he checks the history on the laptop to learn the sites that Boaz is visiting.

They're all military-related such as Virtualsoldier.com; Inthelineofduty.com, and the like. There are also many visits to sites with maps of the northeastern United States from Boston to Chesapeake Bay. Boaz has an email account, too. Levi knows he can hack into it if need be but he'll wait to see if that's necessary.

Chapter Three Analysis

Levi who mentions several times that he's finally getting taller and maturing, feels inferior to his brother who is the guy with everything. That everyone he runs into asks about his brother, reinforces Levi's view that his brother is more respected and admired than he is.

Levi's expertise in computers may be key in learning what's wrong with Boaz. It is obvious that Boaz is suffering from his war experience. He is secretive and uncommunicative and perhaps the only way Levi can find out what's bothering his brother is to do a little investigative work. Although Levi may feel it's wrong to spy on his brother, he is probably beginning to feel an urgency to find out what's wrong so Boaz can get help.

Boaz is apparently obsessed with maps. They are spread all over his room. The only sites that he visits are military ones or ones that have maps of the northeastern US where the family lives. Since he was in the marines for four years, there is the possibility that he is planning some sort of military operation or thinks that he is.

Chapter Four

Chapter Four Summary

Levi is anxious to find out why Boaz seems to be obsessed with maps but he knows not to ask him. He talks about his brother's behavior with Zim and Pearl. Zim says he shouldn't take it personally which annoys Levi. He tells his friends that all he does is go on the Internet and look up maps. He goes on sites where soldiers take shaky videos of desert combat. Levi tells Pearl and Zim that the brother he used to have had everything. That brother has disappeared. Pearl tries to comfort him by assuring him that the Boaz that used to be is still in there and someday will reappear. will be back. Levi worries that maybe the Boaz he has become is the Boaz who will remain.

Chapter Four Analysis

It's beginning to dawn on Levi that Boaz is in deep psychological trouble. As a young man, however, Levi is uncertain how he can help his brother. He fears he has lost his brother forever and the Boaz he knew all his life is gone forever.

Chapter Five

Chapter Five Summary

Levi has always woken up during the night. When he was little, he would run to his parents' room and crawl in with them. Now he wakes up and either hears Boaz clicking away on his computer or screaming softly. He turns his radio on so that he can't hear him. At the movies with Pearl, Levi spots Christina and a guy a few rows ahead of them. The guy puts his arm around her and kisses her. After the movie, Levi tries to avoid Christina but she sees him. She asks about Boaz. Levi tells her he just stays in his room, barely talks and screams in the night sometimes. Christina wants to help. Levi tells her to come by and try to get him outside, try to convince him to go somewhere.

Levi goes to see his grandfather. Dov tells Levi that everyone deals with problems differently. Boaz just needs time. Levi is tired of waiting and he's worried. Boaz seems to be planning something. Christina comes by. Levi's parents are off to a movie, one piece of normalcy they've hung onto over the years. She tells Levi that her boyfriend's name is Max and that he's very nice. Levi runs upstairs to tell Boaz that Christina is there to see him. Boaz cracks open the door. He knows Christina is there. He saw her car pull up.

Boaz goes downstairs to see Christina. Finally, Boaz is going somewhere. They return a half-hour later. Boaz immediately goes upstairs to his room. Christina has been crying. They had gone for a walk. Boaz wouldn't get in her car. He won't get in any cars. He told her he walked home his first night home. Christina tells Levi that Boaz is really in need of help.

Chapter Five Analysis

Levi senses that his parents are too close to the situation and too emotional to help Boaz. He has growing concerns about Boaz. He thinks he is planning something and, given his psychological state, Levi fears that it could be disastrous. Levi reaches out to his grandfather, Dov, who thinks Levi is overreacting. When Levi runs into Christina he tells her his concerns about his brother. She was his girlfriend and Levi senses that she still loves him even though she has a new boyfriend. He asks her to come by and try to get Levi out of his room. He knows that it's very unhealthy for Boaz to be isolating himself. His parents and grandparents are in denial. He hopes that Christina, who Boaz was in love with, can coax him out.

Even though Levi has some feelings of envy and bitterness about his brother who has always gotten more attention than he has, at least in his mind, Levi is showing how much he cares for his brother. He realizes that he may be the only one who can save his brother. His dream is to have the brother he loved and admired back. That may not be possible but he may be able to save him from destroying himself and keep him from hurting others.

Chapter Six

Chapter Six Summary

Levi got the job at Videorama. At school, he's hoping that some other news will replace the big sign at the main entrance that is welcoming American Hero Boaz Katzelson home. The sign has been up ten days. Boaz is unlike most Bay State High graduates who go on to top colleges. But at least being "almost" famous is getting Levi invited to a lot of end of school-year parties. Amanda spots the sign and likes it so much that she goes inside to thank the principal. She is upset that Levi didn't tell her about the sign. Levi tells her that the sign doesn't mean anything. The reality is that Boaz is at home in his room and won't talk to anyone. Amanda says he just needs time. Levi says what he may need is a psychiatrist. But Amanda insists he'll be fine.

Dov wants to take Abba and the boys to his favorite Chinese restaurant, the Hungry Lion. Abba tells Levi to go get Boaz. Levi is astonished that Boaz' room is now spotless. His bed is made and there is no debris on the floor. He tells him that Dov wants to take them to dinner. Boaz says he'll catch up with them at the restaurant.

Levi tells Dov and Abba that Boaz will meet them at the restaurant. He probably wants to walk. Dov and Abba are perplexed. Walking would take him an hour. Boaz shows up after the others are already eating. During dinner, Dov mentions that Levi got a job for the summer. Abba asks Boaz what plans he has for the summer. Boaz says he plans to go on a hike in the Appalachian Trail. Dov and Abba respond approvingly. Levi knows that it's a big lie. He saw all the maps. None of them were of the Appalachian Trail.

Chapter Six Analysis

Levi is more convinced than ever that his parents aren't equipped to help Boaz. Amanda is thrilled that the high school has a big welcome home sign for her heroic son. Levi tries to "get real" with her. The sign is just words, he tells her. What needs to be addressed is the fact that her son is isolated in his room and won't talk to anyone. But Amanda chooses to be optimistic and remain in denial. She is sure he will work himself out of it. He just needs time. Levi knows instinctively that she is wrong. Similarly, when Boaz tells Dov and Abba that he plans to hike on the Appalachian Trail, they are not alarmed. They should be very concerned that Boaz, who has been exhibiting psychological distress, is planning on going on a solo hike for the entire summer. Levi has inside information and he knows that Boaz is lying. The burden of rescuing his brother is all on Levi's shoulders.

Chapter Seven

Chapter Seven Summary

Levi and Zim are at the yoghurt shop where Pearl works. Levi tells them of his concern about Boaz who claims he plans to walk the Appalachian Trail that summer. From what Levi can gather, he's heading south, maybe to Washington DC. Zim says he's probably lying about where he's going but no big deal everyone lies. Levi responds that people only lie to cover up something bad. Wherever he plans to go, Levi is sure he'll be walking.

At home, Amanda is worried about Boaz' trip but she is trying to stay positive. She raced out and bought him a tent and other camping gear. Amanda tells Levi that the trip will be good for him. Levi says he thinks Boaz plans to be gone quite a while. Levi can tell that it's not the time to bring up his worries about his brother to his mother.

Although he feels like a sneak and a thief, Levi has been able to uncover all of Boaz' passwords, even the one to his email account. His email password is PAR-PAR, which numerically translates to 727-727. What is the significance of the letters or numbers, Levi wonders. He does some searches on the Internet and runs it through a translation site. PAR-PAR is the Hebrew word for butterfly. Christina has a butterfly tattoo on her ankle.

Levi meets with Christina who tells him she will be going to Washington, D.C. with Max for the summer. Christina senses that he is upset. She's sorry but she hasn't been able to help Boaz. Levi tells her that Boaz will be hiking on the Appalachian Trail that summer.

Chapter Seven Analysis

Levi feels all the more alone in his quest to help his brother. He gets little support from Pearl and Zim. Pearl is more understanding than Zim who can't understand why it's such a big deal that Boaz might be lying about where he's going that summer. Levi feels that the person who has the greatest potential to bring Boaz back is Christina who is deserting him by going to Washington, D.C. with her boyfriend for the summer. The young man is faced with the monumental task of saving his brother from himself.



Chapters Eight and Nine

Chapters Eight and Nine Summary

Seeing all the camping equipment that Amanda bought for Boaz enrages Levi. He rushes upstairs and pounds on Boaz' door. When Boaz opens it, he pushes his way in. Levi confronts him about his trip. Levi tells him their mother has bought out the sporting goods store and he knows that Boaz is not going on the Appalachian Trail. Boaz tells him to stay out of it. Levi demands his old map back. When Levi gets his laptop back he finds that Boaz was on to him. He canceled his email account and erased his history.

The family has a dinner for Boaz' last night before his trip. Dov brings him lunch from the Armenian deli for his for day on the hike. Boaz refuses the extra cash that Dov offers him. Throughout the dinner, Boaz avoids looking at Levi. Early the next morning, Levi hears the front door shut. Boaz is heading off for his hike. Levi looks out the window and spots his brother walking down the street, loaded with the camping gear Amanda bought him. Will he ever see his brother again?

Levi saw the emails. Boaz will first be heading to Poughkeepsie to meet a guy named Loren who served in the Marines with Boaz. Levi discovers his old rolled up map tucked under his blanket. He unfurls it and sees that Boaz didn't erase the notes he wrote on it. Were they clues? Does Boaz want Levi to find him or stop him?

It's been five days since Boaz left. He tells Pearl it's time he does something about Boaz. A letter arrives from Christina. He romanticizes it before he opens it but when he takes out the one-page letter, it just has her new contact information in case he needs to reach her.

On day eight, Levi goes on a run. He runs through the same streets that Boaz took when he started out on his trip. Amanda has a short-term new job as a graphic designer. It will keep her mind off Boaz until he returns. On his run, Levi jogs all the way to his school. He is shocked to see that his mother's car is there. Something must be wrong for her to come looking for him. But she's not looking for him. She is crying and looking at the sign that welcomed Boaz home. She's not as clueless as Levi thought she was.

Amanda talks about when the boys were little. She never let them play with toy guns. She even dressed Boaz in pink pajamas. She thought she did everything right. She had given him a cell phone but he hasn't turned it on. Levi tries to calm his mother. He probably can't get good reception on the trail. He'll check in when he can. Amanda looks at Levi and simply asks him where Boaz is. Probably in a sleeping bag, he responds.

Chapters Eight and Nine Analysis

Chapter Eight

Levi is frustrated. After finally confronting his brother, he gets absolutely nowhere and is basically told to mind his own business. The rest of the family is still deluded by their hopes that there is nothing wrong with Boaz and that the trip will be good for him. Just when he thinks there is no hope, Levi finds that Boaz left his old map for him. Since Boaz didn't erase the notes he made on the map, it may be a sign that he wants Levi to know where he's going. It may be a cry for help. The fact that he is making this connection with his younger brother indicates that Boaz knows that Levi is the only one in the family who understands that Boaz is in a very bad place and needs help.

Chapter Nine

It's obvious that Amanda hasn't really bought into the claim that Boaz is just fine. She's been pretending and hoped that by cheerleading for him to get better that he would. A mother is usually in touch with where her children are in an emotional or psychological sense. It's a bond that's never broken. She knew something was wrong. Maybe she wanted to be strong for Abba, Levi and Dov. It's common for a mother to feel guilty about problems that her child is experiencing. Amanda is no exception. She tries to think back to where she might have gone wrong. She says she never let her kids even play with toy guns—a not so subtle reference to Boaz joining the military. It is also an inference that she doesn't like guns and probably didn't approve of Boaz' choice of joining the military.

While Levi is relieved that his mother is facing reality, he treats her gently because he senses her fragility. So even though he has someone who agrees with him that Boaz is in trouble, she is too emotionally distraught to really be of help. Once again, the burden of finding Boaz and learning what's wrong with him is all up to Levi.

Chapters Ten and Eleven

Chapters Ten and Eleven Summary

Levi sits in Boaz' room. He found the new phone that his mother gave Boaz in a box at the back of his closet. He looks at the map that Boaz left for him. There are addresses scribbled all over it. Levi thinks he might be able to catch up with Boaz. He talks Pearl into calling in sick to the yoghurt shop and driving him to Poughkeepsie. As they drive along, Pearl asks Levi what makes him think that Boaz will come home with them if they do find him. Levi has no answer.

Levi and Pearl find the house in Poughkeepsie where Levi was going to meet Loren. They buzz the doorbell and a voice comes over the intercom. Levi responds that he's looking for Boaz Katznelson. The door buzzes and they go in. The steps are creaky as they follow a voice that tells them, "Up here." Loren is standing in the doorway when they get upstairs. He is wearing his boxers and a t-shirt. His shaved head tells Levi he found the right guy. Levi tells Loren that he's looking for Boaz. Loren says he's not there. Levi is upset until Loren adds the news that he was there.

Levi says all he wants is for Boaz to come home. Loren says that Boaz is a marine now. He may have been his brother but now he's a marine and a marine forever. It's in his blood. Loren asks if Pearl is Levi's girlfriend. When he learns that she's not, Loren says it was a good thing because once a girl becomes a girlfriend, they become witches. Boaz' girlfriend, Christine, was a real witch, Loren says. Christine dumped Boaz probably because she found someone else. Loren warns Levi that even if he finds Boaz, he won't come home with him—at least not before he completes his mission. Loren won't say what the mission is. He tells Levi that if he does find him, get him to play cards. If he's playing cards, he might start talking.

Back at home, Levi tells his mother that Boaz called him and wants him to join him in Vermont. Amanda goes out and buys the same camping equipment that she had bought for Boaz. Abba is concerned that he'll be leaving his job. He needs to apologize to the video store but should go with his brother if that's what his heart tells him to do. Dov doesn't buy it. He knows Levi is not a nature boy. He's suspicious. Levi tells him the truth that Boaz didn't call him and that he decided to go find him. Dov tells him to call if he needs any adult advice.

When Levi is ready to leave, Amanda is standing at the front door. She is sobbing and begging him not to go. He assures her that he'll be okay. He feels bad for her but heads for the door and leaves. Pearl is outside in her car. They are going to New Jersey where she will drop him off. To his surprise, Zim is in the back seat, angry that they planned the adventure without him.

The day before, Loren had been able to find Levi's phone number and called to tell him that Boaz had camped in Harriman State Park, stayed in a Motel 9 in Ridgewood and is

headed to the home of a mutual friend. The woman lives in Edison. Loren gave Levi her address. To stay awake during the drive, Levi goes over the inventory of the equipment he brought with him. It includes two decks of cards and the \$1,000 that Dov slipped him.

Chapters Ten and Eleven Analysis

Due in part to the emotional state of his mother as well as his own worries and concerns, Levi is compelled to take action. He must find his brother and try to bring him home. He is sure he's in trouble. Finding Loren is ultimately helpful although at first his cynicism and negativity is almost too much to bear. Levi does learn from Loren that he is on the right track. Boaz was there but Loren either won't tell him where he's going or doesn't know. Apparently, the break-up with Christina could have contributed to Boaz' state of mind. One disturbing piece of information is revealed. Loren mentions that Boaz won't be ready to come home until he completes his mission. That news is a bit ominous.

Levi has become the new head of the family in that the responsibility has fallen to him to find the runaway son and return him home. Despite his mother's pleas, he has to go. Nothing can stop him. He feels it the last desperate chance to make his brother whole again and thereby make his family whole. Although his mother is miserable that another son is setting off in the great unknown, he knows that the only way to make her happy again is to go and find her other son. It is no coincidence that Levi is turning eighteen in a matter of weeks. At eighteen he is an equal to his brother. He is a man and would even be eligible to join the military.

Chapters Twelve and Thirteen

Chapters Twelve and Thirteen Summary

Around 11 a.m., they pull into the Motel 9 in Ridgewood. The desk clerk confirms that Boaz was there but checked out that morning. Levi is trying to calculate how long it would take Boaz to walk to Edison. He's pretty sure the type of road Boaz would choose to walk. They drive to Orange where they park the car and begin to walk. Levi chooses the route he thinks Boaz would be taking and walk in the direction he would be coming from, hoping to run right into him. After walking an hour, Levi realizes it's time to turn around. They either missed him or he took another route.

Pearl refuses to camp out that night and they get a motel room. Levi is still tensed up and decides to go for a run. The other two are exhausted and do not join him. He runs four miles and then turns back toward the motel. It's dark by then and he spots a Chinese restaurant. Pearl wanted him to bring some takeout back but he doesn't have his wallet with him. He peeks in the window and sees several old men who remind him of Dov, a couple of college-age guys and in the corner he sees a lone figure with a shaved head with his back to the window.

Levi goes inside the restaurant. Levi takes the empty chair across from him. Boaz just says, "Hi" and keeps eating. Levi becomes enraged and calls his brother a few not so nice names. He's enraged and rushes outside, not wanting his brother to see the tears in his eyes. After Levi composes himself he goes back in the restaurant and tells Boaz that he's there to stay and that he's going with him. Boaz tells him that he will not be going with him.

Boaz pays his bill and leaves the restaurant. Levi is right on his trail even though Boaz shouts at him to go away. Boaz walks to a hotel, opens the door and grabs Levi by the back of his neck and tells him to get lost. Boaz shoves him back, enters his room and slams the door behind him.

The next morning, the trio heads over to the hotel where Boaz stayed but he has already checked out. To kill some time, they take in a movie. Later, they take off for Edison. Zim offers to stay with him but Levi says he has to go it alone. Pearl and Zim drive off. Levi arrives at the address Loren gave him. He waits out in front for a while but then finally rings the doorbell. A woman with bright red hair answers the door. She assumes that he is "Bo." The woman's name is Maria. He tells her that he's Bo's brother and that he's meeting him there. Levi arrives soon after. He is not surprised to see Levi in fact there is a glimmer of respect in his eyes. He tells Levi that he's persistent and asks what he wants. Levi tells him he wants him to come home. He can't come home yet. When Levi insists that he wants to go with him, Bo simply says, "Suit yourself."

Maria shows them her son's room. He's serving in the war. She asks them to pray with her. She prays that her son is safe and for the safety of all those who are serving. Levi and Boaz leave early the next morning for parts unknown as far as Levi is concerned.

Chapters Twelve and Thirteen Analysis

Things begin to turn in Levi's direction. He has the understanding, if not the support of his mother. His grandfather is on his side and knows what's going on. His friends, Pearl and Zim, are giving him moral support and real support by going with him to find his brother. He also gets help from an unexpected source—Loren who had not been especially helpful in the past. Levi is gaining strength and resolve in his search. He is learning that being tenacious and single-minded pays off if it is mixed with a bit of patience and luck. The momentum is now with Levi and he feels the window of opportunity is open to him now but probably not for much longer.

Levi is proving something to himself and now to his brother. He is tenacious and stubborn. He is earning his brother's respect. In fact, Levi has finally broken through to Boaz, at least to some degree because he's going to allow him to go along with him although he won't tell him where they are going or what his mission is. The woman who Bo had plans to stay with in Edison also has a son who is fighting in the war. Boaz never seems to be surprised that Levi keeps showing up. Perhaps when a person has been on the battleground, there are no real surprises. Since Boaz is allowing Levi to go with him, he apparently is softening his stance to go it alone. He doesn't talk much but at least he is walking alongside his only brother. He's not alone any longer.

Chapters Fourteen and Fifteen

Chapters Fourteen and Fifteen Summary

For two days, Boaz and Levi walk without much interaction. Levi doesn't know exactly where they are going but he thinks that the ultimate destination is Washington, DC. Levi sneaks a call to Pearl and asks her and Zim to do some research on the Internet to learn if there's a rally or some event in DC in about ten days from then. That night they play blackjack in their room. Boaz is beginning to relax and enjoy himself.

The next day, Levi sneaks a call to his mother to tell her that all is well. As they are walking down one remote road, a small Toyota truck comes speeding by. Boaz leaps into the ditch alongside the road and covers his head. At first Levi thinks that the truck grazed his brother. But Levi hadn't been touched. Boaz tells Levi that he thinks his motherboard is broken.

Levi learns from Pearl and Zim that there was a big march scheduled in DC. It was a support the troops rally on the Mall. It's also a protest against a legislative bill that would cut funding to the military. Levi wonders to himself if this whole thing is about Christina. Maybe he somehow found out she was in DC.

They are heading to a specific address in Riverside, New Jersey. When they arrive at the house, there is a banner welcoming "PFC Bo Katznelson," and a small group is gathered that applauds and cheers at the sight of him. It's a party and soon they are both eating barbeque hamburgers and potato salad. An attractive young girl rides up on a bike. She and Levi exchange glances. Soon she walks over to him. Her name is Celine and has a brother, Mitch, who is a marine and is serving in the army. Her father, Paul, is holding the little gathering for Boaz. Her parents are divorced. Her brother is supposed to come home in a few months. Levi confesses that it's good to have his brother back but that he's changed a lot.

Levi asks Celine what her brother is like when comes home on leave. She tells him that he's tired, hungry and more polite than he used to be. Celine figures that since she hasn't been through what Mitch has, she has no way of understanding how he feels. Levi is a little tipsy from the fruit punch that Celine spiked with alcohol. He wanders inside and finds Boaz' backpack. He starts to go through it and has his hands on the box that Boaz always kept his secret stuff in just when Boaz enters the room. He grabs the box out of Levi's hands, grabs his backpack and slams out of the room.

That night they sleep on the floor. Boaz starts thrashing around and screaming. Levi jumps on top of him and tries to wake him. Boaz flips him over and pins him to the floor and starts to strangle him. Boaz suddenly stops and seems startled by his own actions. He says he was dreaming. He apologizes to Levi. He asks again where they are going and what Boaz' mission is. Boaz will only say that it's something he has to do.

Chapters Fourteen and Fifteen Analysis

Thankfully, Levi lets his mother know that everything was okay. She undoubtedly was greatly relieved. It is obvious that Boaz is suffering from the impacts of war just as Levi suspected. It is a big admission for Boaz to say that his "motherboard" is broken—translation: he's broken and not functioning properly.

Although Levi has virtually abandoned his own family, it seems he has found a new one—a network of the families of his fellow marines. Levi realizes from his discussion with Celine that he needs to be more understanding about his brother's behavior. He has no idea what horrors his brother lived through. Levi is gathering more intelligence about what Boaz' mission may be. He is narrowing it down to a rally or a reunion with Christina. However, he knows he could be off base on both possibilities.

There are more breakthroughs with Boaz. It is obvious that he is hiding a secret in his backpack that he doesn't want Levi to see. It probably would explain what Boaz' mission is. Boaz had an emotional reaction when he saw that Levi was about to open the box. It is apparent that Boaz is suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) from the nightmare he had and from the reaction he had to Levi when he tried to wake him. Boaz feels terrible. He was choking his brother and could have killed him.

Chapters Sixteen and Seventeen

Chapters Sixteen and Seventeen Summary

Levi wakes up early the next morning and runs outside with his backpack. He finds Christina's letter and calls her. Levi tells her that he's with Boaz and they are heading to Washington, DC. He wants to know if she broke up with him. He tells her he thinks that maybe the problem with Boaz is her. Maybe he found out where she's living and he's coming there to get her or back or prove something. Christina tells him that their break-up was complicated. They were in love in high school. Since then, they've matured and gone in different directions. She cares for him but she is certain that whatever is troubling Boaz has nothing to do with her.

Inside Levi has coffee with Paul and Boaz. He wonders where Celine is and if he'll see her before he leaves. Suddenly she sweeps into the kitchen and grabs a glass of orange juice. She tells Paul, her father, that she's going to walk to her mother's house. She plans on walking with Levi and Boaz. Immediately Levi's spirits are lifted. Paul and Boaz go in the other room to use Paul's computer. Celine tells Levi she thought he was going to kiss her last night but all she got was zilch! Levi is tongue-tied.

As they three young people walk along, Boaz is a few steps ahead of Levi and Celine. She asks if they are going to march in DC. Levi confesses he doesn't know. Celine and Levi discuss their brothers and both learn they have had similar experiences with them. They don't talk about their war experiences and their personalities have changed. Celine says she had to relearn how to talk to her brother. Levi tells Celine that Boaz seems to be lost and just goes through the motions of living. Celine points out that Boaz did come home. He could have gone somewhere else. He must care for his family.

Levi buys some food in a convenience store. When he goes outside to join Boaz and Celine, he is surprised to see Boaz talking and laughing with Celine. He seems like his old self—charming and engaging. It's time for Celine to part with the brothers. She tells Levi to turn around. She unzips his backpack, takes out his cell phone and programs her number into his phone. She kisses him lightly and tells him goodbye.

Levi and Boaz are in Philadelphia and Boaz is not talking again. Levi apologizes to him for going through his backpack. He again asks where they are going and what the mission is. But Boaz remains silent on the subject. One good sign—he suggests they play cards. The next morning when Boaz is in the shower, there's a knock on the door. Levi hopes it's Celine but is surprised to see Pearl and Zim standing there. It is the birthday that Levi and Zim share. They came to wish Levi happy birthday in person. Zim hands him a gift. Levi feels a little uncomfortable because he's beginning to realize that there's a little romance blooming between the two of them. They have to leave right away so they get back home in time for work. Zim got Levi's job at the video store. Zim's gift to Levi is his old skateboard. Boaz tells Levi this birthday, Levi's eighteenth birthday, is "my best of your birthdays." (204)

Boaz is beginning to talk more. He tells Levi that he takes long showers because when he was on the war front, he'd sometime go a month without a shower. As Boaz walks, Levi rides the skateboard alongside. Later, Boaz takes the skateboard and tells Levi to call Celine. Levi takes his brother's advice and calls Celine but gets her voice mail. He leaves a friendly message and asks her to return the call. After Boaz falls asleep that night, Levi sneaks out to the business center at the hotel and gets on the Internet. He estimates that they are about five days outside of Washington DC and he learns online that the Million Strong for America is in six days.

Chapters Sixteen and Seventeen Analysis

Levi is trying his best to figure out what's wrong with his brother. Did Christina break his heart? She claims she didn't but Levi doesn't necessarily believe her. A romance is blossoming between Levi and Celine. Levi admires Celine because she has an attractive aggressiveness about her and he's shy and unsure of himself around girls he's attracted to. And he is attracted to her.

Levi is surprised when he sees Boaz seemingly normal in his interactions with Celine. He laughs and talks with her and tells stories. He talked more to this young woman he had known for less than 24 hours than he had with Levi since he'd been home. It could be the emotional stake he has with his brother that keeps him from opening up to him—the floodgates could be unleashed. It's a lot easier for Boaz to converse with a stranger than with a brother he loves. Levi feels comforted to learn that Celine had similar experiences with her marine brother as Levi is experiencing with Boaz. It made him feel hopeful that what Boaz is going through is a normal part of the readjustment process.

Levi has been friends with Zim and Pearl for so long that he feels uncomfortable that they are apparently becoming a couple. Pearl is his best friend and Zim is his second best friend. Their relationship is threatening to Levi because it will change the dynamics of the three young people and he's unsure exactly where he'll fit in. But Levi is turning eighteen. As he learned from Boaz' experience, that's when one's life can change and change forever. When Boaz tells Levi that this was "the best of your birthdays," he is telling his younger brother that he's glad to be with him and glad that he's sharing a mission that's very special to Boaz. Levi gets a hint of how rough it was on the war front when he realizes that a simple thing like a shower was a luxury and even sometimes dangerous.

Chapters Eighteen and Nineteen

Chapters Eighteen and Nineteen Summary

Levi asks why Boaz won't get in a car or a train or bus. Boaz says he likes to walk which Levi doesn't buy. Finally, Boaz tells Levi about when he and a fellow marine were traveling in a Humvee. Suddenly they struck an improvised explosive device or IED. The truck blew apart. When Boaz found his friend, his torso was laying three feet away from his legs. Since then, Boaz hasn't liked getting into vehicles. He also likes to walk because he can—because he has his legs. Levi walked the rest of the day and didn't use his skateboard. They cross the border into Maryland.

That night he calls Celine again and this time she answers. He tells her that he's two blocks from her aunt's house in Edgewood. As he and Boaz walks, she gives him directions on how to find the house. When they reach it, Levi is astonished when he sees Celine sitting on the front porch, waving at him.

After everyone else is in bed, Levi goes down to the basement where Celine is sleeping. They make out for a while but before it goes too far, they say good night. Dov calls the next day. He is flying to Baltimore and insists on taking them to dinner. Levi is going to have to tell Boaz that Dov knows they're not on the Appalachian Trail.

Boaz gives Levi the silent treatment when he tells him that Dov is meeting them in Baltimore. Levi tries to explain that he just couldn't lie to the old man. He tells Boaz that Dov loves him and is worried about him. Boaz finally agrees to have dinner with Dov. Baltimore is famous for their crab meals and the threesome order way more than they can eat. Dov tells both the boys that he's proud of them and of the adventure they were on. But Dov says it's time to come home. Boaz tells Dov they're not going home. They are going to Washington, DC, which is now only about forty miles away.

Dov tells Boaz he understands about being a soldier and being in a war. But the horrors of war eventually fade. As much as Dov pleads, Boaz won't budge. Dov hugs the boys goodbye. Levi tells him to come to DC for the march and to bring his parents. Levi calls Christina, Zim, Pearl and his parents. He asks them all to come to the march—to come there for Boaz.

The DC that Levi imagined is not what he finds when they arrive. Their final day's walk brings them to Walter Reed Memorial Hospital. At the front desk Boaz asks to see Staff Sergeant Jack Bradford. They wait for quite a while when a woman with a clipboard has them follow her down endless hallways. Boaz introduces Levi to Jack who shows them his new set of mechanical legs.

Something comes over Levi. He almost feels faint like he's going to collapse. Then it dawns on him that Boaz and Jack are brothers. And Mitch and Loren and all the guys—

they're all brothers. Levi reaches in Boaz' backpack—not for the secret box but for Boaz' electric clippers.

Chapters Eighteen and Nineteen Analysis

Boaz is continuing to open up more about the horrors of war. Levi's insistence that he go with his brother has turned out to be a positive and healthy impact on Boaz. Had he been alone all that time, he would have been alone with his horrid memories. The strength of the brothers' renewed relationship will be tested when Boaz realizes that Dov knew all along that they weren't on the Appalachian Trail. Will Boaz refuse to go to dinner with Dov? It will break his heart if he doesn't get to see that his grandsons are okay. Levi has more to worry about.

Levi has a cathartic experience when he and Boaz visit Jack Bradford, the marine who lost his legs in the Humvee attack. The close-cropped hair of the two marines symbolizes to Levi that they are brothers as much as he and Boaz are brothers. He thinks of Celine's brother, Mitch, and Loren—all with their close-cropped, shaved heads. But the hair wasn't what made them brothers, it was the experiences that they shared. Levi is now beginning to grasp how his brother feels and how he has been changed forever. As a sign of solidarity and in an effort to be part of his brother's new "family," Levi cuts off his long hair and shaves his head.

Chapters Twenty and Twenty-One

Chapters Twenty and Twenty-One Summary

Boaz and Jack get a kick out of Levi's shaved head. They laugh until they cry seeing the kid with the long hair nearly bald. Jack tells Levi that he's going with them in the morning. Jack hasn't been cleared to leave the hospital yet and he hasn't been given the green light to ride in his wheelchair six miles to the Mall. The injury to Jack is obvious. Jack asks Levi how Boaz is. Levi answers honestly and says he needs some help. Boaz indicates that he'll seek help after the mission is completed.

Jack is strong but it takes a lot of strength to wheel himself for such a long distance. He's glad to be free again—free to know that a truck load of insurgents isn't coming at them or that a bomb isn't hidden in a trash dumpster. Jack goes into a convenience store to get drinks for everyone. Levi mentions the Million Strong for America rally. Jack tells him that's not where they're heading. Boaz comes back out and confirms that it's not the rally they're heading to but to the Vietnam Memorial. . . at sundown.

Levi tells Boaz and Jack he'll meet up with them and takes off on his skateboard. He makes his way through the crowds to the front of the Museum of American History where he told everyone they'd meet them. Sitting on the grass in the semi-circle are his parents, Dov, Christina, Pearl and Zim. Paul and Celine are there, too. No one recognizes Levi at first because of his shaved head. His mother thought he was Boaz.

After the rally, everyone sits outside the Museum. The Mall is littered with blue and red pamphlets and various forms of trash. People are filing out. Clean-up crews are picking up the debris. Levi tells everyone that they'll meet up with Boaz at the Vietnam Memorial. After they have dinner, the group walks over to the Vietnam Memorial. People are reading the names of the loved ones that they lost in the war. Levi realizes the gathering is a protest. Was Boaz anti-war now or did he come to disrupt the protest?

Levi decides not to draw any conclusions but to just wait and see. After a while, Jack wants to get on the stage but there is no ramp. Boaz and several other men lift Jack up on the stage. Jack takes the microphone and tells the story about how he lost his legs in the Humvee he and Boaz were in. Jack reads the names of the Marines who died that day.

Next it was Boaz' turn. As he takes the stage, he has the secret box with him. He tells about an incident when a speeding van was coming right at him and his unit. They fired a few warning shots but the van kept coming. Several marines had been killed in a similar incident a few weeks before so there was reason for concern. They shot directly at the van and caused it to crash. Some of the passengers were injured and some were killed. There were both adults and kids among the injured and dead. People started climbing out of the van. One young guy whose face was dripping with blood rushes up to Boaz screaming at him. Boaz called for an interpreter who had some lengthy

exchanges with the young man. The interpreter told Boaz that the man wanted him to kill him, to shoot him. The man was holding a bloody shirt up to his chest. The man told Boaz that his brother died in the crash. Boaz understood how the guy felt because he had a brother, too. Boaz refused to kill the man even though the man could have had a bomb or a gun.

Boaz opens the box and takes out a piece of paper. He begins to read the names of the people who were killed in the van that night. Two sixteen-year-old boys and one fifteen-year-old boy were killed. He takes a blood-stained shirt from the box and places it at the Memorial. After the ceremony, Boaz tells his parents he will go home but he has to take Jack back to the hospital first. Levi tells Boaz he'll walk with him. Levi feels the relief and satisfaction of mission accomplished. He knows that Boaz just took the first step in really coming home.

Chapters Twenty and Twenty-One Analysis

Levi's outreach to his brother is helping to bring Boaz around. He promises to get help after his mission in DC is complete. It is an admission by Boaz that he can't continue to go it alone. He needs the support of his family and friends and he needs professional help. Boaz will never be the same guy who left three years before to join the military. He was eighteen—the same age as Levi is now—and had the hopes and dreams of youth that will never be realized. War has a way of escalating one's maturity. Through their long trek together, Levi and Boaz have learned a lot about each other and grown closer.

Finally, Levi finds out what the mission is. It is not joining the rally to support the troops. Rather, it is a mission to pay homage for those who have died in war and not just American soldiers. The ceremony at the Vietnam Memorial is being held to honor all the dead killed in war—even the enemy. Levi is still confused about his brother. Is he now anti-war? Was the gathering a protest or did he plan to interrupt the protest? Even to the final hour, Levi is not totally clear about his brother's intentions.

The heart of Boaz' depression is something that he can never know. He is one of several marines who shot into a van that was speeding right at them. The van could have been a suicide bomber ready to take his unit out. The soldiers had to defend themselves. But the victims in that vehicle included three young boys who, at the time, were close to his own brother's age. The older brother who survived wanted Boaz to kill him, too. He understood how the man felt because he could imagine how it would feel to lose his own brother. Boaz is living with the guilt of possibly having killed one or more of these young boys because his bullets penetrated the vehicle just as those of his fellow soldiers had. On that day he wants to pay tribute to these three young boys—who are someone's brothers—as victims of the war. With this part of his experience somewhat resolved, Boaz is ready to begin his recovery. Levi had supported his brother even in the roughest times. But it paid off because he gets what he wants - his brother back.

Characters

Levi Katznelson

Levi Katznelson is a seventeen-year-old high school boy who lives with his parents and his older brother, Boaz, in a small community outside Boston, Massachusetts. Levi loves and admires his older brother and had always wanted to be just like him. Boaz has been gone three years while serving with the Marines on a foreign battlefield.

When Boaz comes home, Levi knows immediately that something is very wrong with him. He confides in his best friends, Pearl and Zim, but they think Levi is overreacting. He tries to talk to his parents and grandfather but they all agree that Boaz will be fine. He'll be his old self again. He just needs time to readjust to civilian life.

Levi does some investigating and learns that his brother has plans - plans that are much different than what he told his family. Boaz is uncommunicative and remote. He barely talks and rarely comes out of his locked bedroom. When Levi is able to get inside his room, he sees that he has maps all over his room and is planning something big and mysterious. Levi hacks into Boaz' email and learns that Boaz is meeting up with some fellow soldiers and a network of soldier families but he doesn't know why.

After Boaz leaves, Levi is able to track him down in a very different locale than what he had told his family. Levi sticks with his brother and eventually learns what his brother's "mission" is, why he's been so secretive, some of the horrid experiences he had, and that his brother loves him as much or more than he ever had.

Boaz Katznelson

Boaz Katznelson lives in a small community outside Boston, Massachusetts, with his parents and younger brother, Levi. As the story opens, Boaz is due home after having been away for three years. He had joined the US Marine Corps right out of high school and spent several tours overseas in the battlefield. When he returns home, he is greeted as a hero but he feels anything but heroic. He is uncommunicative and remote. He spends all of his days locked in his bedroom. He will barely talk to anyone and will answer no questions about his experiences or what his plans are.

But Boaz has big plans. He downloads maps of the Northeastern US and has old maps hung all over his wall. He has penciled in some notes and addresses on his maps. He tells his family that he is going to hike on the Appalachian Trail during the summer but his younger brother, Levi, knows better. He's seen all the maps and he hacked into his brother's email account. He has evidence that Levi is not going to the Appalachian Trail; rather, he is heading for Washington, D.C.

Much to his brother's dismay, Levi figures out the direction in which Boaz is heading and joins him on the hike. Boaz refuses to tell his brother where they're going or what his



mission is—only that he must complete it. In the end, Levi learns that his brother had some horrific experiences in the war. His best friend lost both legs and Boaz himself is suffering from PTSD from his wartime experience. He is filled with guilt because he, along with fellow marines in his unit, shot into a van that was racing toward them. Their fire killed three young teenage boys - boys close to Levi's age at the time. The guilt has haunted him ever since. After Boaz pays tributes to all victims of wars at the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C., he is ready to get the psychological help he knows he needs.

Pearl

Pearl is Levi's best friend. She is Chinese and Jewish and attends an all-girls Catholic school. She was adopted when she was eleven months old.

Zim

Zim is Levi's second best friend. He lives across the street and the boys have known each other since they were seven. They share the same birth date.

Amanda

Amanda is Levi's mother. She is so elated to have her son, Boaz, home from overseas that she deludes herself into thinking that his depression is just a passing thing.

Celine

Levi and Boaz visit the home of one of his fellow marines who is still overseas. Levi meets the guy's younger sister, Celine, and a romance sparks between the two teens.

Abba

Reuben is Levi's father. Instead of "Dad," he likes to be called "Abba," which is the Hebrew word for dad.

Dov

Dov is Levi's loving grandfather. He senses that Boaz didn't go on a hike on the Appalachian Trail. He gives Levi \$1,000 to take with him in his effort to track down Boaz.

Christina

Christina is Boaz' beautiful high-school sweetheart. Levi recruits Christina to lure Boaz out of his bedroom. She gets him out for a walk, but he immediately returns home and shuts himself off again.

Jack Bradshaw

Levi and Boaz visit Sergeant Jack Bradshaw at Walter Reed Memorial Hospital in Washington, DC. Jack lost both legs when when an IED blew up the Humvee he and Boaz were riding in.

Objects/Places

Boston, Massachusetts

Levi Katznelson lives in a small community with his parents and older brother, Boaz, on the outskirts of Boston, Massachusetts.

Bay City High School

Levi attends Bay City High School, the same school Boaz attended. At a school assembly, the principal announces that American Hero Boaz Katznelson is returning home after his tour of duty. There is also a big welcome home sign for Boaz at the front of the school.

Israel

Abba and Dov were both born in Israel and both were soldiers in the Israeli Army. Abba met Amanda when she was visiting Israel.

Improvised Explosive Device

Improvised Explosive Devices are bombs that are made by hand by enemy combatants. They are bobby traps that are placed along the road and explode when the tire of a Humvee runs over them.

Appalachian Trail

Although Boaz has other plans for the summer after he returns home from his tour of duty, he lies to his family and tells them that he is going to be hiking on the Appalachian Trail over the summer.

New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland

After Boaz leaves home on his trek, Levi is able to track him down and join him on his walk. Together they walk from New Jersey through Pennsylvania and Maryland and finally to Washington, D.C.

Washington, D.C.

Levi assumes that Boaz is walking to Washington, D.C. to join a rally in support of the troops but he is wrong. The rally, which was called Million Strong for America, does take place in the capital.

Walter Reed Memorial Hospital

When Levi and Boaz first arrive in Washington, DC, they go directly to Water Reed Hospital and visit Sergeant Jack Bradshaw who lost both legs in the war.

Museum of American History

Levi calls his family and friends and tells them to meet Boaz and him in front of the Museum of American History to show their support for Boaz and the troops.

Vietnam Memorial

Boaz and Jack participate in a ceremony at the Vietnam Memorial to honor all the victims of war including soldiers, civilians and even the enemy.

Themes

Brothers

It is impossible when reading Dana Reinhardt's "The Things a Brother Knows," not to notice that several themes emerge involving brothers. The story unfolds when seventeen-year-old Levi is contemplating the return of his older brother from his stint in the US Marines. He reflects back to how close he and his brother had been growing up. With a little bitterness, he remembers things changed when Boaz got a driver's license and a girlfriend. Even though Levi wants to be just like his brother, he fears he never will measure up because Boaz has it all.

As the story unfolds, however, it is Boaz who must rely on his younger brother to readjust to civilian life. Perhaps because the brothers are so close, Levi knows instinctively that his brother is in trouble and needs help. He barely talks to anyone in the family and rarely comes out of his room. Since everyone else in the family is in denial, it is up to Levi to face facts and help his brother. Levi vows to do anything to bring his brother back.

When Levi sees how close Boaz is to another soldier, Jack Bradshaw, he realizes that because of their experiences together on the battlefield that they were brothers, too. In fact, all the soldiers were brothers. In an act of solidarity, Levi shaves his head to show his brother that he understands his brotherhood with his fellow soldiers and that he wants to feel a part of it.

Boaz is haunted by an incident that occurred on the battlefield. A van came racing at him and his unit. To protect themselves, the soldiers shot into the van. Several young teens who were around Levi's age at the time were killed by the gunfire. The older brother of one of the slain teens begged Boaz to kill him as he clings to the bloody shirt of his dead brother. Boaz would never know if it was one of his bullets who killed young boys but Boaz carries the guilt of those deaths with him after he returns home. At the Vietnam Memorial, Levi pays tribute to the victims of war. He lays the young boy's bloody shirt on the Memorial in honor of him and his brother.

Facing Reality

Boaz Katznelson was suffering from Post-Traumatic Street Disorder when he returned home from the battlefield. Boaz was lucky that he had a younger brother, Levi, who instinctively knew that his brother needed help. Even before Boaz returned home, Levi knew his brother had problems. On leaves from duty when he came home, Boaz didn't talk much and wasn't his old gregarious self. On other leaves from the service, Boaz didn't come home or even call. Levi had idolized his brother all his life. He knew Boaz was in trouble.



Amanda and Reuben Katznelson, the boys' parents, are initially thrilled to have their son home. But as time passed, and Boaz locked himself away in his room day and night, Reuben was frustrated and angry. Amanda goes around smiling and happy because her son was home. Even when Levi tries to hint that there was a sign of trouble, she didn't want to hear it. Dov, the boys' grandfather, has been in the army in Israel. He knows what being in war does to you. Boaz will recover and be his old self. It will only take time.

Levi does not buy any of it. His brother had to be confronted and not allowed to get worse. His mother enables him, his father gets angry with him, and his grandfather swears that patience is the answer. Perhaps it is because the two brothers had been so close all their lives that it falls to the youngest member of the family to be the "adult" and face the problem head-on. Levi's brother, or the brother that he knew, is gone. Levi is determined to get his old brother back and fix him.

Tenacity

Levi Katznelson thinks that his brother has it all: intelligence, looks, athletic ability, and charm. He always lives under the shadow of his big brother. Levi loves and admires his brother and wants to be just like him. When his brother comes home from three years of service with the Marines in a foreign war, life for the brothers is turned on its end. Nothing is the same and normal no longer can be used to describe Boaz's behavior. Levi has been close to Boaz all his life and more than anyone in the family, knows that Boaz needs help. Levi, the little brother, now has to become the rescuer and he is determined to do whatever it takes to get his brother back.

Boaz does not make it easy for Levi. He will hardly talk to Levi and he will not answer any questions about his experience or what his plans are. Many with less will and determination than Levi will have given up on their brothers. But Levi holds on because the prize is worth it and the prize is getting his brother back. As frustrating as his brother's behavior is, Levi isn't going to give up on him.

Boaz is suffering from a form of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, a condition common from the lingering impact of being in battle. Levi was obsessed with learning what his brother's plans were and he knew he had big ones. There were maps all over his room. This young man who he barely knew any longer and who was a marksman in the Marines was planning a clandestine operation and could be a danger to others as well as himself. Boaz did some investigative work and figured out a way to track down his brother who had left home for what turned out to be a bogus destination.

Since everyone else in the family is deluding themselves into believing that Boaz just needs time and will be his old self again, the entire burden of finding and saving his brother and bringing him back is all on Levi's back. Without the love and tenacity that Levi exhibited, the story of the two brothers would undoubtedly have turned out much differently, perhaps with a tragic ending.

Style

Point of View

"The Things a Brother Knows" by Dana Reinhardt is written in the first-person with the protagonist, Levi Katznelson as the narrator. The book is written in the past tense. Levi tells the story of his brother's return to civilian life after three years on the battlefield as a US Marine. The reader is privy to Levi's progression in the story from a brother who is unenthusiastic about his older brother's return to a young man who will literally do anything to rescue his brother and bring him back to the brother that he always admired and looked up to.

The reader knows what steps Levi takes or plans to take to help his brother. The clever way that Levi is able to discern at least some of what his brother is planning to do is intriguing and engaging. Although Levi tries to portray himself as cool and uncaring, he is determined to help his brother recover. The love Levi has for his brother makes the reader root for his success. The strength that the character shows in pursuing his worthy goal is admirable and compelling.

Reinhardt has written several other books including "A Brief Chapter in My Impossible Life," "Harmless," and "How to Build a House." In the "Acknowledgments" section following the story, Reinhardt discusses how she rewrote and rewrote the book which indicates her determination in getting it just right.

Setting

"The Things a Brother Knows" by Dana Reinhardt is set in a small community on the outskirts of Boston, Massachusetts. The protagonist, Levi Katznelson, lives with his parents and older brother, Boaz. Levi's big brother is just returning from three-years with the US Marines. Although the exact location of the war in which Boaz was fighting in is not revealed, it is apparently a modern-day war in either Iraq or Afghanistan.

On day at school, the principal at Levi's high school, Bay City High School, announces the return of American hero Boaz Katznelson at an assembly. The high school features a large sign outside of the school that welcomes Boaz home. Levi discovered his mother in front of the school when the lot was abandoned, just sitting there crying and looking at the sign.

Although Boaz tells everyone that he is going to hike along the Appalachian Trail in the summer, he goes in another direction. He travels from Massachusetts down through New Jersey, Philadelphia, Maryland and finally to Washington, DC. Levi makes some assumptions about where Boaz is heading and tells his family and friends to meet them in front of the Museum of American History in Washington, DC, where the Million Strong for America march and rally in support of the troops is scheduled to pass by. But Boaz

was actually heading to the Vietnam Memorial where he and other soldiers paid tribute to all victims of war.

Language and Meaning

"The Things A Brother Knows" by Dana Reinhardt is written from the perspective of Levi Katznelson, a seventeen-year-old boy. As such, the narrative reflects the language and thoughts typical of a teenage boy. The reader learns that the young boy, which is often the case, admires and even envies his older brother. Boaz is smarter, taller, better looking and more charming than Levi is—at least in Levi's estimation. Through his words and thoughts, the reader learns that Boaz is not completely captivated by his older brother now that he is maturing. There is even a hint that Levi feels a competition between them.

The interactions between Levi and his best friend, Pearl, and his second best friend, Zim, is rife with teenage repartee that includes sarcasm and silliness. For example, no one is allowed to smoke in Levi's house so when Pearl visits him, they both climb out the window and lie against the tilted roof of his house.

When Boaz returns from the service, he is a different boy than the one who left. He is silent and shuts himself in his room. When his computer breaks and Levi, a computer whiz, gives him the bad news that the motherboard isn't functioning, he is beside himself. When Boaz has a nightmare and attacks and almost chokes Levi one night, he apologizes and tells his brother that his "motherboard isn't functioning."

The Katznelson family is Jewish and there are a few Jewish words interspersed in the book, especially in the first part when Boaz and Levi are still at home. There is mention of the synagogue and the day of worship, or the Shabbat. Levi is able to hack into Boaz' email account and learns that his password, PAR-PAR, is Hebrew for butterfly. Reuben, the boys' father, prefers to be called Abba which is the Hebrew word for dad. Abba has a quick temper and when he becomes angry during one incident, he shouts the Hebrew word, "Benzona" which is a not so nice word. The boys affectionately call their grandfather, "Dov," which translates from the Hebrew language as "Bear."

Structure

"The Things A Brother Knows" by Dana Reinhardt is separated into twenty-one medium-sized chapters. The story of a young man returning from war and the impact of his experience on his family is told in a mainly chronological order. There are some brief flashback scenes which are necessary to more fully explain the characters and their storylines and their relevance to the narrative that describes the present time.

From the beginning, there are mysteries that are not solved until later in the book. The largest unknown is why Boaz, the returning Marine, is depressed and remote and different than the old Bo, is not revealed until the very end of the book. This mystery

serves to maintain a high level of reader interest and keeps the reader engaged throughout.

The author weaves a story about the impact of one brother's pain with the frustration of another brother. By telling the story from the perspective of the marine's younger brother, the reader is able to uncover along with him the mysteries that surround his older brother. The story parallels the older brother's struggle to readjust to civilian life and leave the horrors of war behind him with the frustrations of the younger brother who wants to save his brother and is forced to mature a great deal during the process.

An acknowledgments section follows at the end of the story.

Quotes

"Your brother's face is one of the first you ever see. His hands are among the first to touch you. You crawl only to catch him." (Chapter 1, page 1)

"I stare at my feet. I heard someplace I can't remember, but probably from Zim because he's a wealth of totally useless knowledge, that if your second toe is longer than your fist, you're twice as likely to reach a position of power in your life." (Chapter 1, page 4)

"Something about people who sit around all day getting high, and then have the nerve to complain about the people who put their own lives at risk every time they swing their feet out of bed and drop them on the floor." (Chapter 3, page 46)

"There's a saying about the military that you go in a boy and come back a man. But I'm pretty sure Boaz went in a man and came back a ghost." (Chapter 4, page 61)

"It's a marathon, not a sprint. . . it's the same slogan used to justify why we've been in this war so long, why so many lives have been lost, why so many soldiers have come home without arms or legs or traces of their former selves." (Chapter 6, page 78)

"I know worrying is far better than grieving. But, God help me, sometimes I don't know the difference. I can't separate the grief from the worry." (Chapter 9, page 109)

"There are variables. Of course there are variables. Life is nothing but a whole mess of variables." (Chapter 12, page 138)

"Because the truth is, I'm always the guy sitting on the curb. Or on the floor of my room. Or wherever. I'm the one who waits for something that never comes." (Chapter 13, page 149)

"'Is something broken?' Bo puts his face in his hands and lets out a sound that's one part laughter, one part sigh of resignation. 'I'm afraid it's my motherboard.'" (Chapter 14, page 171)

"I've gone a month without a shower. And even when there were showers to be had, you got in and got out 'cause some other guy was waiting. . . So taking a long, hot shower in a place where it feels safe to do so is maybe the best part of being back." (Chapter 17, page 203)

"The whole thing blows apart. One minute everything is quiet, everything is fine. . . and the next minute your friend is lying three feet away from his legs." (Chapter 18, page 210)

"I also know that the old fortune cookie wisdom of the journey being the destination probably bears some truth." (chapter 21, page 235)

Topics for Discussion

Why is Boaz so uncommunicative when he came home? How do the various members of the family react and why?

What is the relationships between Levi, Pearl, and Zim? Why does Levi feel slightly disturbed when it is obvious that a romance is beginning between Pearl and Zim?

What is the larger meaning of "brothers" in this story? Describe the different ways in which "brothers" are described or symbolized.

What is the significance of the fact that Levi turned eighteen during his trek with Boaz? What meaning is associated with Zim giving his skateboard to Levi?

Why does Levi shave all his hair off when Boaz and he met with Jack Bradford? What does the action symbolize to Levi?

Why doesn't Boaz want to get into a vehicle? Why does he want to walk everywhere?

Who does Boaz honor at the Vietnam Memorial? What guilt does he carry from the war? Why is it a first step toward recovery?