

# **The Unquiet Earth: A Novel Study Guide**

## **The Unquiet Earth: A Novel by Denise Giardina**

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# Plot Summary

The Unquiet Earth by Denise Giardina is the story of star-crossed lovers and unrequited love. There are two stories of love that could never be that endure through several generations of the same family. The first story involves Rachel Honaker and Dillon Freeman. Dillon is a fourteen-year-old youngster whose parents never married but who genuinely love each other. Dillon had been only an infant when his father died. His father, Rondal Lloyd, was a union organizer who died from a gunshot wound he sustained during a labor dispute that turned violent. Dillon mourns for the father he never knew and spends the rest of his life trying to live up to his father's legacy.

Rachel Honaker is Dillon's sixteen-year-old first cousin who lives in the same mining town as Dillon. Rachel's mother wants her daughter to have a better life than she did and marry well. Dillon falls in love with Rachel, a love that is sparked when she almost drowns in the river. After he and his mother pull Rachel out, he feels a responsibility toward her the rest of his life. As he matures, his love turns into a deep passion and desire. Dillon is open about his feelings for Rachel but she resists, even though she has the stirrings of a romantic love for him. After marrying the wrong man, Rachel finally admits her love for Dillon. Soon after they have sex, she learns that she is pregnant. She has a daughter, Jackie, but never knows whether Dillon or her husband is the biological father. When she dies, Dillon is at her side, telling her that he will be with her again.

The other story of unrequited love is the story between Jackie and Tom Kolwiecki. Tom is a VISTA volunteer in the mining region of West Virginia where Jackie lives. After serving with the federal program, Tom plans to enter the seminary and become a Catholic Priest. At fifteen, Jackie begins to have emotional ties to Tom who is twenty-two. Just like Dillon, Jackie falls in love young and never stops loving Tom.

Eventually Tom realizes that Jackie has feelings for him. He also has feelings for Jackie that are inappropriate for a priest to have. Tom comes in and out of Jackie's life several times. He has a difficult time with the conflicted feelings he is experiencing. He has passionate feelings for Jackie yet he has a calling from the Lord for a devotion to the priesthood. But just like Rachel and Dillon before them, they eventually became involved and continue to love each other. But Tom's draw to religion proves stronger and he eventually returns to his duties as a priest. Tom dies in a flood when the dam breaks in the mining community. Rachel repeats to him what he had said to her once—"we're not done yet."

Running through the entire tale of romance and lost love is the story of the hardships of the people in the poor mining town in Appalachia.



# Chapter 1: The Ice Breaks 1930s

## Chapter 1: The Ice Breaks 1930s Summary

Dillon Freeman

Dillon is just an infant when his father dies. He and his mother continue to live in the same cabin where he died. They live in West Virginia in a mining community. Dillon envies his cousin Rachel Honaker who remembers her father while he has no memory of his. His father was a labor organizer who had been shot in the spine. He had languished in bed after the attack, paralyzed and miserable until his death. Dillon's Uncle Ben is afraid that Dillon and his mother won't be able to stay in the house because of the property tax. Uncle Ben opens a general store to help pay the mortgage. Carrie buys only lard and salt from the store but refuses to buy bread. She makes her own. Dillon hates school but is not a bad student. Rachel is sixteen and the smartest kid in school. Dillon is fourteen and a half and right behind her. Rachel's mother makes pretty clothes for her to wear.

Rachel Honaker

Rachel wears a white dress and red coat on Class Day to impress the teacher, a young man newly graduated from Transylvania College. It rains during the two-mile walk to school and the red of her coat bleeds on her white dress. Dillon encourages her to take her coat off because no one would dare laugh at her. Rachel takes her coat off and proudly recites "Ode on a Grecian Urn" to the delight of the class and teacher.

Rachel has warm memories of Dillon and his mother, Carrie. Rachel's mother will not allow her to call her "Mom" unlike Aunt Carrie who Dillon calls "Mom." Aunt Carrie would always care for Dillon if he fell and skinned his knee. If Rachel fell, her mother would tell her she was careless. But their house is pretty. Her mother copies the décor she sees in magazines. When she is six, Rachel had told tells her mother she wanted to marry Dillon. Her mother tells her that she can't because she'd have babies that weren't right. Rachel tells her mother that Dillon had told her that babies come from peters and that she is sure any baby that comes from Dillon's peter would be fine. Her mother slaps her hard across the mouth. Rachel cries all night. Her mother always draws close to the radio when the Kentucky Derby runs. She tells Rachel that the fine ladies who attend the race always wear fabulous hats.

Dillon Freeman

Dillon chops a hole in the icy Blackberry River and casts a fishing line. He knows that Rachel will be crossing with the cows and listens for her. Suddenly there is a loud crack. Dillon and his mother run down river. He knows that Rachel will be in danger. They see her crossing on her mule, Mag, and suddenly the ice breaks under their weight and Mag and Rachel are under water. Dillon tries to go in after her but Carrie stops him, telling



him he'll drown. Mag finds his way to the bank dragging Rachel who sticks her finger in his bridle behind him. Carrie pulls her in the rest of the way. Carrie and Dillon carry her home. Carrie takes Rachel's wet clothes off and covers her in a warm quilt by the fire. Rachel's finger is broken and will be bent and twisted the rest of her life. Dillon feels guilty that he did not go in the water and save her.

## **Chapter 1: The Ice Breaks 1930s Analysis**

Dillon Freeman is a fourteen-year-old boy who lives with his widowed mother. Dillon's father was a union organizer who died from a gunshot wound during a labor dispute. Dillon idolizes his father of whom he has no memory. He is very close to his cousin, Rachel Honaker, who is sixteen. The cousins love each other and there is a hint that their love could be illicit as they mature. As a six-year-old Rachel told her mother she wanted to marry Dillon when she grew up. The mother tells her she cannot marry a cousin and strikes out in anger at her daughter. The mother, Flora, is adamant that her daughter will not wind up with trash which is probably a reference to Dillon's parents not being married. Flora fixates on the Kentucky Derby where fine ladies wear beautiful hats. Flora is picturing herself and probably her daughter in a better place than in coal mining country in West Virginia. Dillon has a crush on Rachel and feels guilt when he fails to rescue her from the river. He blames himself for the broken finger she suffers from her near-fatal dip in the river.



## Chapter 2: Rat's Alley 1939-1944

### Chapter 2: Rat's Alley 1939-1944 Summary

Rachel Honaker, 1939-1940

Dillon begs Rachel not to go away to school. The bank is about ready to take their house away but he vows to fight them. Dillon is upset that Rachel is leaving and vows to never speak to her again. Rachel accidentally pokes her broken finger with the needle she's using to sew. Dillon grabs her finger and sucks the blood away. That's the last thing I'll ever do for you, he tells her as he storms out. Flora wants Rachel to go to school but not to become a nurse—it is beneath her. She needs to position herself to marry quality.

Rachel arrives at the Grace Hospital in Justice town. As a new student, she is given a copy of Arnold Toynbee's Study of History, in which he describes the people of Appalachia. Miss Kurtz, the director of nursing, tells the new students that they must rise above the inbreeding and filthy living conditions to which they had been accustomed. Tommie Justice, a student, asks if inbreeding causes hairy penises. Miss Kurtz is appalled and tells Tommie not talk like that. Tommie irks Miss Kurtz again during an anatomy class when she asks how a penis gets hard since it doesn't have a bone.

One day Rachel's father stops by the school and tells Rachel that he has lost his property including his general store. He is going to hop a freight to Norfolk and work in the shipyard. Aunt Carrie is staying with them and Dillon has run away. Her father gives her a note from Dillon in which he reiterates that she is a coward for leaving but that he is a bigger coward for running away.

Rachel learns that Tommie Justice's father is the police chief who had tried to protect the union workers on the night Dillon's father was shot. Rachel and Tommie became roommates and friends. Tommie fixes Rachel up with her boyfriend's friend, Tony Angelelli, an Italian. They begin dating and Rachel has her first kiss. She meets his mother who can barely speak any English. One day when Rachel and Tommie are at a diner in Justice, Rachel suddenly hears her name being called. It is Dillon. She introduces him to Tommie who tells him that Isom Justice is her father. He is stunned. Isom had been his father's best friend, a fact that Tommie already knows.

Dillon has been staying with his cousin Brigham and working for him in the mines. Dillon buys Rachel a hamburger and takes her to a movie. Dillon finds out about Tony and is jealous. He kisses Rachel, and tells her he has always loved her and that he wants to make love to her. Rachel tells him that they can't become involved because they are first cousins. She calls him hillbilly trash and hurts his feelings. The next she hears about him, he has gone off to Canada to join the army so he can fight in a war.

Carrie Freeman, 1940-1943



Dillon is assigned to Egypt. Carrie stays with Flora while Ben works in the shipyards. Flora has a stroke and will never be able to walk or talk again. They live in the coal camps along Blackberry Creek, Jenkinjones which is the poorest of the camps. Ben returns and runs the company store. He pays the coalminers out of the company store. The cost of the food the families buy during the week is deducted from their pay so many of the men have nothing left in their pay. The bookkeeper for the company is Tony, Rachel's boyfriend. Flora is unhappy that Rachel is being courted by Tony. Even though she can't talk she displays her displeasure, being meaner than ever according to Carrie. Carrie doesn't think Tony is right for Rachel and tells her she could do better. Rachel admits to Carrie that she has feelings for Dillon but understands that it is wrong. She is worried that Dillon will be killed in the war.

After Pearl Harbor, everything changes. Rachel and Tommie graduate and become army nurses. A week later, Carrie gets word that Dillon has been wounded in action. He comes home, limping from the bullet that hit his leg. He is worried about Rachel being on a hospital ship in the South Pacific. Dillon tells his mother of the horrors of war and how he had had to kill an American soldier who had become mad from the heat and sun of the desert. He had started firing at Dillon who had had no choice but to defend himself. Dillon announces that he has gotten a job at Number 13 Mine, working for his cousin Brigham.

Dillon, 1943

Dillon, Brigham and some other men are trapped in a mine collapse. Dillon finds food in a buggy that has been crushed from the falling rock. They plan to take turns banging a tin pan so someone can rescue them. Dillon thinks about Rachel who is heading to the Philippines. Ten hours later, the men are still banging on the rocks. They try to conserve the air and the little bit of food they have. The men are exhausted and tense and begin arguing with each other. Suddenly the bang, bang, bang of their pan is followed by a faint tap, tap, tap. Someone has heard them. One of the men, a black man named Sim Gore, reaches up to a crevice and strikes a match to lead their rescuers to them. The men are yelling loudly even though the air is thin and it is getting hard to breathe. Dillon has thoughts of Rachel, not saving her from the river, and of killing the man in Egypt. The light blinds him and the angels lift him away.

## Chapter 2: Rat's Alley 1939-1944 Analysis

Dillon is in love with Rachel and is angered that she's going away to school. He tells her he'll never talk to her again but he just is saying that in anger. Flora is obsessed with class, fearing that Rachel would not meet a quality man as a nurse. Flora stresses that most men are after one thing—perhaps she is speaking from experience. Dillon has a difficult time dealing with life. Their home is lost and he can't bear being without Rachel. He shows that he has a low opinion of himself by calling himself a coward for running away from home.



Rachel and Dillon run into each other again and he is angered and jealous that Rachel is seeing another boy. He finally abandons propriety and confesses his feelings of deep love for her. He refuses to accept Rachel's argument that they could never be together because they're related. Dillon is immature and is in denial and has a difficult time facing the truth. There is great tension between Rachel and Dillon and although Rachel tries to deny her feelings, she seems to have very deep feelings for her younger cousin. When he goes off to war, Rachel fears that he will be killed. Carrie, who was not married to Dillon's father, has a liberal sensitivity and is not alarmed when she realizes that Rachel and Dillon have deep feelings for each other.

Flora is not very realistic or practical. Although her family is from a poor mining town in West Virginia, she feels that no man is good enough for her daughter. Flora is living through her daughter, hoping that she will do better in life than she had. There is much drama in the collapsed coal mine. Dillon, who thinks he will die, is plagued by guilt—guilt that he didn't save Rachel when she was in the river and guilt that he killed a fellow soldier. The chapter ends with a cliff hanger with the reader not knowing if Dillon and the other men live or die. There is racial tension in the collapse since one of those trapped is a young black man. Although Dillon thinks the angels are carrying him away, it is probably his rescuers.





## Chapter 3: God's Bones

### Chapter 3: God's Bones Summary

1945-1946

Rachel, 1945

Even though they take a lot of teasing about their accents and where they hail from, Rachel and Tommie are having a great time as army nurses. Tommie is engaged but she has lots of boyfriends. Rachel has a steady boyfriend in Manila named Fred Sullivan who is from a wealthy family in New Orleans. Tommie thinks Fred is a snob and tells Rachel that she thinks she is sweet on Dillon. Rachel admits she cares for Dillon and misses him. Although the girls have fun, they also work hard, putting in twelve hour shifts. That August, the US drops the big bomb, the war is over, and the girls are heading home. Fred tells Rachel he wants to come to West Virginia and marry her. He gives her the skull of a dead Japanese soldier as a souvenir. Tommie, the daredevil that she is, takes a cargo pilot up on a quick flight before she leaves. As Rachel watches, the plane crashes and kills her best friend.

Rachel, 1946

There is no letter from Fred waiting for Rachel when she returns home. Dillon comes to see her when he gets off. He has grown taller and he picks her up and swings her around. She tells Dillon she is engaged to a boy from New Orleans but Dillon still proclaims his love. He grabs her, kisses her and touches her all over. She feels herself giving in to him but finally resists. He tells her she doesn't love Fred—she loves him. He sees the Japanese skull and is appalled that Fred had given it to her. He takes it with him when he leaves.

Dillon

Dillon is upset that Rachel had the skull. It isn't like her. Upset and driving home recklessly in the dark, Dillon hits a red fox and kills it. He picks it up and buries it with the skull. He decides he doesn't love Rachel and never did.

### Chapter 3: God's Bones Analysis

The important element of this chapter is Rachel's admission to Tommie that she loves Dillon. Her dilemma is that she has found a rich boy who wants to marry her. Such a union would please her mother who is determined that her daughter marries well. But Rachel cannot get the thought of her cousin out of her mind.

When Dillon and Rachel reunite after the war, Dillon appears more manly and mature to Rachel and the attraction she already had for him intensifies. He is open about his



feelings for her but she is still trying to fight her feelings because she feels a relationship between them would be a sin. Dillon is disappointed that Rachel has a skull, a souvenir from the war given to her by her boyfriend. Dillon sees less than the perfect girl he had idolized all his life. Dillon has an anger issue that stems from not being raised with a father he has also idealized.



# Chapter 4: Trace Mountain 1946-1951

## Chapter 4: Trace Mountain 1946-1951 Summary

Fred never contacts Rachel. She is upset but knows it is over. She begins seeing Tony again. She knows this will upset Dillon. Although it is a mistake, she marries Tony. It is her fault—she had pushed it. But she has her father's blessing and Flora doesn't protest. Carrie and Dillon are both against the marriage. Dillon avoids running into her. Rachel and Tony move into a house near her parents. Tony buys a car and starts staying out late most nights. Even though she doesn't love him, she wants children but none come. Her doctor found her able to bear children and suggests that Tony might be sterile. When she approaches him, Tony refuses to be tested.

Rachel, 1950

People on Trace Mountain make their livings tending apple orchards and honeybees. Tuberculosis and polio are both common on the mountain. Rachel tends to the sick including Shep and Bertha Ingram. Shep is paralyzed from a mining accident and Bertha has TB. She also cares for Granny Combs who is 87 and lives alone. Rachel uses an old army jeep to travel around the muddy, rutted roads in the mountainous region. When she is visiting Granny, the jeep breaks down and she calls Tony to come and fix it. He is going to the Moose Club and tells her to find help on her own. She reluctantly calls Dillon who confronts her with the fact that her husband should help her. She hangs up on him and decides she doesn't need either one.

Dillon

Dillon does come to help but Rachel is angry and tells him she'll walk. He tells her he'll always be there for her. Rachel waits at Granny Combs' house while Dillon fixes the jeep. Granny tells them that Dillon Lloyd, Dillon's uncle, has a cabin a little ways up the mounting. Dillon fixes the jeep and has it running. It is dark when they finally leave. Dillon suggests that they leave the jeep there and take his truck to try to find his uncle's old cabin. They find the cabin but it is late and they decide to stay. Soon the two begin to kiss and fondle each other. They undress and lay on a sleeping bag in the back of the truck and make love.

Rachel

Rachel is afraid but doesn't want her relationship with Dillon to end. They confess their love for one other. Dillon asks her to leave Tony and move in with him. She tells him she isn't that strong yet. They plan to meet at his place that Friday. When they meet, their feelings are only stronger. Dillon promises Rachel that he will give her a baby and it won't be deformed. Rachel misses her period and then the morning sickness comes. She had had sex with Tony two days before she had been with Dillon. It could be either man's child. Dillon is upset with the prospect that Rachel may be having Tony's child but



he will love her none the less. Jackie is a perfect baby. Tony is disinterested and only comes to take them home. When they leave the hospital, Dillon's truck is parked across the street. Rachel holds the baby up so he can see her.

## Chapter 4: Trace Mountain 1946-1951 Analysis

Fred has abandoned Rachel and she marries Tony on the rebound. It becomes readily apparent that the marriage between Rachel and Tony is a mistake. She can barely tolerate him and he begins staying out late most every night. Her main reason for staying with him is to have a child but it appears that he may be sterile and thus her reason for maintaining her marriage may have vanished. Compelled by her unhappy and childless marriage, she turns to the one man of whose love she could be sure. Rachel, overcome with her love for her cousin, allows the final barrier to be crossed. She no longer can deny that she loves Dillon and that her love is not that for a cousin. Rachel finally admits to herself that she loves Dillon deeply and passionately, just the way he has always loved her. She becomes pregnant, unsure who the father of her daughter is. It is apparent that she hopes, in a way, that it is Dillon but fears the child may be deformed. The paternity of the child remains unknown but she remains with Tony, afraid to make the move to be with Dillon. She is worried what people, including her family, would think about her, Dillon and their daughter. The two star-crossed lovers are still apart.



# Chapter 5: The Child 1959 -1961

## Chapter 5: The Child 1959 -1961 Summary

Jackie, 1959

At eight years of age, Jackie has insomnia. The doctor says it will pass but Jackie is afraid that bad and scary things, including snakes, live outside her house. One day after she gets home from school, her father comes home and tells her that her Mamaw Honaker is very sick. Her mother has taken her to the hospital. Her father works as a bookkeeper and does the payroll for the coalminers. The next morning, Rachel is still not home. Jackie goes to school on the school bus. She is crying afraid that her mother might die. That night, Tony takes her to the Moose Club. He leaves her in a room alone with pool tables.

Rachel is home when they return. She screams at Tony because she had been trying to call him all evening. Her mother is dying! They argue more and Tony leaves to stay at his mother's. Rachel takes Jackie in the bedroom and packs her suitcase. Dillon is on his way to take her to his house. Jackie recalls times when Dillon had come over to see her mother. He had never come when Tony was home. They would talk quietly. She had heard Dillon ask how long she would punish him. She had responded until he could accept Jackie completely. Not while Tony is raising her, he had told Rachel.

Dillon lives in Winco in a house that is only sparsely furnished. Dillon plays a Civil War game with Jackie that she had brought. He is the only one who has agreed to play the game with her. Dillon takes Jackie on a trip up Trace Mountain to his uncle's old cabin. Dillon tells Jackie that he and Rachel had been there one time before she was born. That evening, Dillon makes hot dogs and pork and beans. He explains that he doesn't have much money since the mine has closed. They visit his cousin Brigham later and have popcorn and soda.

Mamaw Honaker dies and Papaw Honaker goes to live with Aunt Carrie and moves back to Kentucky. Jackie's mother cries a lot after Mamaw dies and Papaw moves. Dillon comes to visit often, not caring whether Tony is there or not. Jackie's favorite book is Charlotte's Web. Dillon reminds her of the spider with his black hair and long gangly legs. He doesn't say "Some Pig" but Jackie senses he is trying to tell her something important.

Jackie, 1961

Tony kills two spiders that had webs outside of Jackie's window. She screams at him not to kill them. She had named them and liked watching them. But he kills them with a broom right in front of her. She vows she will hate him forever. Rachel confides a lot in Jackie, telling her bad things about Tony. She tells her about having sex and making



babies. Rachel has a bad heart and has been told not to have any more babies. She has had her tubes tied so she can't get pregnant.

Tony takes Jackie to the carnival one night when Rachel is working. He introduces Rachel to a woman named Jean. Tony won't go on the Scrambler so Jean does. Later, Jackie tells Rachel about Jean. They go to Tony's mother's house where Rachel confronts Tony who claims Jean is just a friend. Rachel tells him she doesn't care what he does but not to bring Jackie around his hussy. After more bitter words, Rachel and Jackie go home. Rachel tells Jackie to pack her bag.

Rachel asks Jackie if it would bother her if she divorced her father. Jackie says she would like it better. Dillon would probably move close to them, too. Jackie says she wishes Dillon was her father. Aunt Carrie tells Jackie not to feel any guilt about her parent's divorce. Tony is all wrong for Rachel. Jackie feels upset about the changes. She will have to go to a new school. Aunt Carrie comforts her and tells her that Dillon will be there the next day.

## Chapter 5: The Child 1959 -1961 Analysis

Fred has abandoned Rachel and she marries Tony on the rebound. It becomes readily apparent that the marriage between Rachel and Tony is a mistake. She can barely tolerate him and he begins staying out late most every night. Her main reason for staying with him is to have a child but when it appears that he may be sterile and thus her reason for maintaining her marriage may have vanished. Compelled by her unhappy and childless marriage, she turns to the one man whose love she could be sure of. Rachel, overcome with her love for her cousin, allows the final barrier to be crossed. She no longer can deny that she loves Dillon and that her love is not that for a cousin. Rachel finally admits to herself that she loves Dillon deeply and passionately, just the way he has always loved her. She becomes pregnant, unsure who the father of her daughter is. It is apparent that she hopes, in a way, that it is Dillon but fears the child may be deformed. But in the paternity of the child remains unknown but she remains with Tony, afraid to make the move to be with Dillon. She is worried what people, including her family, would think about her, Dillon and their daughter. The two star-crossed lovers are still apart.



# Chapter 6: The Roving Pickets 1962

## Chapter 6: The Roving Pickets 1962 Summary

Jackie

Jackie and Rachel move into their new house near the Number Thirteen mine. It is a house in which a doctor had lived. Dillon sleeps in a basement bedroom sometimes. A thirteen-year-old boy with rotten teeth named Toejam Day lives at the Number Thirteen mine community, too. Toejam is not very bright. Jackie helps him deliver newspapers on his route. Jackie loves to read and write but fears she isn't very good at writing. Jackie worries when Rachel is late getting home—always fearing that she is dead. Jackie decides that a girl, Brenda, in her class needs saving. She feels uncomfortable but finally musters up the courage to ask her if she wants to go to church. When Brenda says, "Not really," Jackie figures she has tried and gives up her missionary work.

Rachel

Rachel sees the decline of the community up close. People wait for hours in the clinic just to see her for a few minutes. Rachel visits the sick in their homes—old people who wheeze and cough and sleep in cold houses. She sees President Kennedy on TV talking about stamping out poverty. She learns for the first time in her life that she lives in a place called Appalachia and that it is one of the poorest places in the country. The longer she and Dillon are together, the more she sees their differences. Dillon is obsessed with politics and she pays no attention. He gets angry every night watching the TV news.

But Rachel is more practical. Dillon would have openly shown his love for her but she cares what people think of her and Jackie. She takes Jackie to the Methodist Church—how would the congregation react if they knew the sins she had committed. Dillon finds it difficult to relax and grows bored easily. He had been wild but Rachel is his peace. Dillon tells Rachel that mine Number Thirteen is going non-union, reducing the miners' wages in half. Dillon tells Rachel to quit her job with the county and go to work for a hospital. Things are going to get tense when the union strikes. It would make things difficult between them.

Jackie

A TV network comes to film a spot at school. A shoe company donates several cartons of shoes for the children and the TV network wants to film it. The teacher is resentful. The TV men act like they are all dumb and trashy. Brenda and another student, Doyle, start shoving and hitting Jackie after she throws her free shoes away. The teacher pulls them off of her. She doesn't know why they hit her. That night Dillon, Rachel and Jackie watch the TV spot of the shoe giveaway. Dillon becomes upset and switches the TV off when the reporter says, "The land that time forgot. Why do these people live here?"



## Dillon

Dillon has never been much of a churchgoer. He prefers the tar paper building on Blackberry Creek, near Number 13. The minister babbles in the lost tongues of the ancient Amorites. Many of the coalminers prefer the church. Dillon calls a union meeting there one night. They discuss their loss of benefits and wages. Dillon calls for a strike and everyone in the room supports him. Dillon goes to talk with the president of the local union but gets no where. It is Sim Gore, the black man with whom he had been trapped in the collapsed mine years before. He asks if he plays basketball after work at the high school. Sim says he does sometimes. Dillon leaves and returns to Brigham's house. Dillon tells Brigham that he'll be playing basketball in the morning and needs to sleep a few hours on his couch.

Dillon is the leader of a labor dispute that results in the strike of hundreds of miners. Dillon and Sim are the leaders of the violence waged against the mine owners. They burn buildings, tear up track, establish picket lines and, most damaging to the owners, stop the movement of coal.

## Arthur Lee Sizemore

Arthur Lee Sizemore is the manager of the local mines for the American Coal Company. When Dillon and Sim lead the attacks on the mines, Sizemore refers to them as the Roving Pickets. He calls on the US Justice Department for help but gets no support. Sizemore is upset with President Kennedy because he has put so much focus on poverty.

## Dillon

Dillon keeps his lights off in his house. His house has sustained several gunshots and Dillon doesn't want to be a sitting target in the light. He drops by Rachel's house and warns her to stay away from the windows. They are at odds about the strike—she is against his actions and he tells her he'll be disappointed in her if she opposes him. Dillon has a talk with Jackie explaining that he won't be around for a while, maybe as long as a year. Jackie is hurt and confused although Dillon assures her that he loves her. A man claiming to be an FBI agent shows up at Dillon's house. The FBI knows that Dillon is behind the labor violence. He warns Dillon that there is an injunction against the strike and to stop his activities or he'll be arrested. Scab truck drivers are called in to haul coal and some miners are forced to work at gunpoint.

## Rachel

Like everyone else, Rachel is upset to see the miners marched to the coal mines at gunpoint. She warns Jackie not to look out the window at the commotion. Rachel does not see Dillon among the men being forced to work. He calls later and tells her he is safe. Sizemore contacts Rachel and wants to know if she's seen Dillon. He tells her Dillon is in trouble. The FBI is building a conspiracy case against him. Sizemore says he could keep Dillon out of jail if he cooperates and stops his activities. He also reveals that





he has feelings for Rachel and wants to marry her. He'd be good to Jackie and send her to college. Rachel is astonished and remains silent.

Rachel and Dillon are still conflicted over the strike. Rachel doesn't want to get involved because of Jackie but Dillon feels Jackie is old enough to understand. She tells him about the FBI being after him. Rachel tries to convince Dillon that Sizemore could help the miners. Dillon doesn't buy it and tells Rachel to quit her job and tell Sizemore to go to hell. Sizemore drops by her office the next day. Rachel tells him that Dillon wouldn't listen to her. She begins crying when he pushes her about marrying him. He tells her she is worth waiting for.

Hassel

Dillon's house explodes and burns down. Rachel is panicked but his truck isn't there. Everything has been incinerated to such a degree that it is impossible to tell if anyone had been inside.

Arthur Lee

Rachel wakes Sizemore up in the middle of the night demanding to know what he knows about the explosion at Dillon's house. Sizemore wonders to himself if his men screwed up. It could make him lose Rachel. He pretends to know nothing. She accuses him of the bombing. She tells him she won't marry him because she doesn't love him. She shocks him when she tells him she is in love with Dillon and asks him to keep him safe.

Dillon had not been in the explosion. In the dark, he had planted nitroglycerin and dynamite under the bridge. The explosion had been felt all the way to Rachel's house. Dillon waits at the track as the FBI agent walks toward him pointing a rifle at him. Dillon says, "We're even."

## **Chapter 6: The Roving Pickets 1962 Analysis**

Jackie is suffering from low self-esteem probably due to the conflict and confusion in her life. Part of her insecurity is seen when she thinks her mother is dead when she is just late coming home from work. The author illustrates the isolated world in which the people of Appalachia exist. Rachel hadn't known their region was called Appalachia and doesn't know they are so poor until she hears it on the news. It seems that Dillon is destined to replicate the life of his father, either by destiny or design. When the coal company threatens to bust the union and lower wages, it is Dillon—just like his father—who organizes a strike and a series of violent attacks on the company. Dillon's activities are creating a wedge between him and Rachel. Rachel fears for Dillon's safety and that of herself and daughter. Dillon, who has lived in the shadow of a legendary father all his life, feels honor-bound to lead the strike.

Rachel is surprised by Arthur Sizemore's proposal of marriage. He has at least some suspicions that Rachel is close to Dillon and offers to keep him out of jail if he stops his



acts of sabotage against the company. Sizemore is trying to leverage Rachel's feelings for Dillon. If he promises to keep Dillon safe and out of jail, she may be grateful enough to marry him. Rachel knows that Dillon is in danger but he is adamant that he continue his activities against the company that is bringing hardship to so many people. He is the hero of the strike just like his father was who was shot years before during a labor dispute.

In an effort to save Dillon who is in grave danger, Rachel tells Sizemore that she doesn't love him. She loves her cousin, Dillon. She thinks, perhaps naively, that because Sizemore loves her, he will see to it that Dillon is not hurt. She may be trusting him too much. In his mind, she may have presented him with two ways of winning her heart. He could see to it that Dillon is killed or jailed and therefore eliminated as a competitor; or, he could be resentful of Rachel's rejection and spread the news that Rachel is in a sexual relationship with her first cousin.

Dillon's house is bombed. In retaliation, Dillon bombs the bridge. He waits at the bridge to be arrested. Perhaps he wants to be arrested so that he no longer presents a danger to Rachel and Jackie.



# Chapter 7: Number Thirteen 1963-1968

## Chapter 7: Number Thirteen 1963-1968 Summary

Rachel, 1963

Rachel hears on the radio that President Kennedy has been shot and killed. She wonders if Dillon hears the news where he is serving five years in the federal penitentiary in Atlanta. Rachel and Jackie go to the trial and afterward, Jackie is quite upset. Dillon doesn't write Rachel or Jackie which hurts them both. Jackie is glad Kennedy was shot. He's the one who put Dillon in jail. The trial had been US vs. Dillon Freeman.

Jackie, 1963-64

Jackie learns that there is a big difference between sixth and seventh grade. The boys had liked the smart girls in sixth grade but like the girls who have grown big chests over the summer in the seventh grade. Jackie can't even fit in a training bra but she is getting all As and Bs. She and her friend, Brenda, are in the same spot. They get the best grades and everyone hates them.

Hassel

Hassel and some of the townsfolk resent the presence of VISTA, a federal organization which helps fight poverty. It is like the Peace Corps, but it is for the poor in the US. Hassel hopes that VISTA can help them get a bridge built. Sizemore suspects that VISTA is a communist front and tells Hassel to stay away from them. But it is too late. Tom Kolwiecki, a recent graduate from Boston University and a member of VISTA, is staying with Hassel. He tells Hassel that he plans to be a priest after his tenure with VISTA.

Jackie, 1965

Jackie has a crush on Tom Kolwiecki who is smart and looks just like Paul McCartney. He is friendly with all the kids who hang out in Hassel's trailer after school. It is like their club. Rachel allows Jackie to throw a welcome party for Tom. Rachel serves pizza and soda and snacks. Toejam embarrasses Jackie by asking Tom if he is going to kiss her. After the party, Jackie is crushed when her mother tells her that she heard Tom, who is 22, is going to be a priest.

Rachel, 1965

Dillon is out of jail and visiting a neighbor. Rachel sends word that he is welcome there. Dillon comes by. He is thinner and has graying hair. Rachel gets after him for not writing her or Jackie. Dillon goes upstairs to see Jackie who is glad to see him but has a lot of questions. Rachel tells him he can stay with them until he finds a job. The old tensions



between Dillon and Rachel return. Dillon tells Rachel and Jackie that he and Sim Gore are talking about opening and running an automatic car wash.

Dillon, 1965

Although Dillon had thought about going to other cities to work after prison, he returns home. He visits his mother in Kentucky who asks about Rachel. Dillon tells her whatever they had was over. He tells Carrie about the car wash and that he'll be able to help her out. Carrie tells him she doesn't need help. He should take care of himself. She tells him to give Rachel a chance.

Hassel

Luther Beasley, a local cop, arrests Tom for panhandling, obstructing traffic and handing out seditious literature. They are all trumped up charges and Luther is ordered by Arthur Lee to arrest Tom, sure that he is a communist. After his supervisor from Washington, D.C. calls Luther, they let Tom out and he hitchhikes back to Number 13.

Jackie, 1966

Jackie doesn't like Arthur Lee but Rachel insists that she be nice to him because he helps support them. Dillon doesn't like Arthur Lee but Jackie doesn't spend much time with him. She hangs out with Brenda and Tom the most. Even though she doesn't see him often, she thinks about Dillon a lot. At fifteen, Jackie doesn't date anyone. Rachel goes a lot of places with Jackie but Jackie is beginning to resent it.

Jackie is at Dillon's house when Brenda is shot in the head. She is the innocent victim of a fight between Brigham and Doyle Ray, her brother. Tom, who has an after school program for the kids, comes to help. They take Brenda in a pick-up to the hospital. Tom blames himself for not preventing the violence. Brenda is in a coma for two weeks and after six months comes home. Doyle Ray is sent to reform school. Brenda is brain damaged and will be in a wheelchair the rest of her life.

Rachel, 1966

Rachel is living with Arthur Lee but still dreams of Dillon. Rachel is diagnosed with rheumatic fever. She tries to appear healthier than she really is so that Jackie won't worry so much. She fears Jackie will ask Dillon to come see her. Rachel is not strong enough for that.

Dillon, 1966

Dillon and Hassel drive up the mountain and see the deleterious impact the strip mining is having on the mountain area, driving all the residents out. Dillon is angered and blames VISTA. He takes Jackie up to the old cabin in the mountains for a picnic. She invites Tom along who Dillon doesn't like because of his connection to VISTA, but he wants him to see the destruction to the area. Tom and Jackie are both shocked by the



deterioration they see. Dillon and Tom get into an argument about who is to blame for the strip mining. They almost come to blows until Jackie stops them.

Jackie

Jackie runs off after the argument and throws mud all over Dillon's windshield. Tom and Dillon catch up with her and drive down the mountain. Tom plans to get the strip mining stopped.

Hassel, 1966-1967

Tom calls the Agriculture Department. He learns that they won't issue any food stamps for the area due to Arthur Lee's political connections. Hassel comes into Tom's room one afternoon and finds him in his underwear on the floor, praying. Tom admits that there have been times when he has wanted sex with a woman but priests have to take a vow of celibacy. Tom tells Hassel that he has to resist temptation because he has a real calling to be a priest. One morning, the FBI comes and confiscates all of Tom's files. Tom is being investigated for misuse of federal funds.

Dillon, 1967

Dillon suspects that Tom is attracted to Jackie. Tom tells Dillon that the feds are threatening to bring criminal charges against him unless he shuts down his VISTA operations. Dillon confronts Tom about his feelings for Jackie. She is in an emotional turmoil as Tom is preparing to leave. Dillon tries to comfort her but she tells him she hates him for being mean to Tom and hates Arthur Lee for making Tom leave.

## **Chapter 7: Number Thirteen 1963-1968 Analysis**

Dillon's five year sentence for blowing up the bridge is a test of Dillon and Rachel's feelings for one another. They both seem to fail the test. Dillon goes into a psychological cocoon and refuses to fight either Rachel or Jackie. He is a bitter and angry man who has found every aspect of life difficult. For her part, Rachel still refuses to marry Arthur Lee, but she does get involved with him. She has no real attraction to him but he offers her financial security and a better future for her daughter. Another pressing issue for Rachel about which Dillon doesn't know is that Rachel is very ill and probably fears she may not be able to work much longer and support her daughter. But just like her mother, Flora, Rachel wants a better life for her daughter.

Jackie begins to have an interest in boys although no boys seem interested in her. She's too smart for the boys' egos to bear and her breasts haven't developed yet. Jackie is like her mother in that she begins to fall for someone she cannot have. While Rachel fell in love with her first cousin which in normal society is immoral and even illegal, Jackie falls for a young man who has a calling to become a priest. Dillon is rooting for a relationship between Jackie and the young man, Tom. Perhaps he will have some form of resolution if Tom is able to achieve something he could not—make a happy relationship from one that he shouldn't have.



Arthur Lee, who has been kind to Rachel and Jackie, is proving to be the villain of the story. To keep his company running, he pulls political strings that cause great hardships for the people of the Number Thirteen community. It seems as though he will stop at nothing—even having food stamp privileges pulled from the poor. To try to stay on the good side of Rachel, he does most of his political maneuvering behind the scenes. Thus far, Rachel is fooled by him or turns her head the other way or maybe both. But Jackie is on to him and doesn't like him. Perhaps her mother will eventually find her old spirit and stand up for what she thinks is right and decent.



## Chapter 8: Death by Water 1969-1971

### Chapter 8: Death by Water 1969-1971 Summary

Hassel

As soon as Tom leaves, Arthur Lee has the feds send all the poverty money to him so he can dole it out. A doctor from Beckley comes looking for Dillon carrying a jar with a pair of black lungs inside. He tells Dillon that the unions need to be cleaned up and this time he will have help. A "black lung" rally is planned in Charleston.

Dillon, 1970-1971

Dillon tries to approach Rachel but she is still standoffish. Her health is worsening. She is having heart tests and hires a cook and housekeeper because she is too weak to do the work herself. Sim and Dillon are still secretly organizing the union while they operate their car wash. Dillon gets word that Rachel is in the hospital. By the time Dillon reaches the hospital, Rachel has been taken by helicopter to a cardiac unit in Charleston.

Dillon drives the three hours there and finds Rachel unconscious. Jackie tells him her lungs are filling with water like she's drowning. With great sadness, he remembers when she almost drowned so many years before. She opens her eyes and sees him. He tells her to go where she has to go. He will find her. She never takes her eyes off him until she stops breathing.

### Chapter 8: Death by Water 1969-1971 Analysis

Dillon continues in the tradition of his father. He is union organizing again even though it may lead to trouble. He cannot let go of the legacy of his father. Rachel dies while looking at Dillon. The tragedy is that they had loved each other all their lives but they could never be together. He vows to see her in Heaven. Dillon is a loyal man—loyal to his heritage and to those he loves.



## Chapter 9: Exile 1980-1982

### Chapter 9: Exile 1980-1982 Summary

Jackie, 1980

Rachel is buried where she had wanted to be laid to rest—back in Homeplace. Dillon is the first to arrive and the last to leave. Jackie can't bear to watch him. Jackie earns a degree in journalism and spends a year in England. She takes a job working for a congressman in Washington, D.C. At President Reagan's parade, she runs into a priest—it's Tom. Tom is running the Cervantes Center, a place that helps the poor and underprivileged. They have a few beers and Jackie feels a little giddy. She makes a weak pass at Tom which he rebuffs. He offers her a job at the Cervantes Center. She'd have to take a pay cut but she could live rent-free in the housing at the center.

Jackie takes the job and sells all her possessions including her car and moves into the center. She and Tom do a lot together but just on a friend basis. He reveals a lot to her about his unhappy childhood. They become very close. Jackie misses her mother. She only has Dillon left and he is hard to get along with.

Jackie 1982

Dillon calls to say he is coming to Washington for a black lung demonstration. Tom talks about taking an assignment in Central America which bothers Jackie. Tom and Jackie meet Dillon when he comes to town. Dillon tells them things are getting tough back home. Dillon tells Jackie that the Justice Clarion needs to hire an editor. He'd like Jackie to take the job because he misses her. If she takes, he promises to quit smoking. Eventually, Tom moves to Honduras and Jackie takes the job at the Clarion. A year passes before Tom writes to Jackie. His next and last letter comes six months later.

### Chapter 9: Exile 1980-1982 Analysis

Dillon shows his life-long love for Rachel by the devotion he displays for her at her burial. Jackie's and Tom's lives continue to be intertwined despite time and distance. The storyline is building to a relationship between them and some resolution about their feelings. Jackie is paralleling the life of her mother in that her love is all-consuming and unwavering. She continues to carry the torch for someone she cannot have. Dillon is still a part of Jackie's life and she feels a love and loyalty to him and is drawn back to her roots when she accepts a job in her old hometown. The relationship between Dillon and Jackie is yet to have resolution but there are indications that it is heading to one.





# Chapter 10: Bridges and Dams 1985-1986

## Chapter 10: Bridges and Dams 1985-1986 Summary

Hassel, 1985

Toejam begins courting Brenda. They begin to fall in love. Hassel is surprised when Jackie comes back. He tells her she looks more like Dillon all the time. Doyle Ray reforms from his reform school days and becomes a preacher. Toejam and Brenda decide to get married and Doyle Ray is the preacher.

Jackie, 1985

Jackie buys a house in Felco. Driving to work every day, she sees how the area has declined. One day, Tom calls and says he is in town. Tom has been kicked out of Honduras. It's a political thing—the Honduran military had wanted him out. Tom is testy with Jackie. She finally tells him she loves him and won't apologize for it. He reminds her that God had put him on earth for a purpose. They argue and she storms off. A few days later, he comes by her office with a rose and apologizes. Tom rents a place and stays. He holds mass every Sunday at 10 am but no one ever comes.

Hassel, 1986

Tom starts drinking hard. He tells Hassel that his mother is an alcoholic. Tom begins to question his worth. Nobody comes to mass and nobody is interested in the support group he forms. Hassel and Tom go to Charleston to the Governor's Office. Hassel tells an assistant that he wants to see the Governor to ask him to build a bridge in Justice. The aid tells him that the state doesn't have the money. Hassel gets a state decal for his windshield while he is there. He tells Tom that he will never give up on the bridge.

Dillon, 1986

Dillon takes care of weeding the grave sites of his family plot and the ground where his home had been. He tells Jackie he buried a Japanese skull that Rachel brought back after the war. But that was when her mother was young and foolish. Jackie wishes she had known her then. Dillon is tempted to tell her about him and Rachel but he resists. Once a year on the anniversary of the first time he and Rachel made love, he visits the cabin on Trace Mountain. The waste that is dumped by the coal company is making the dam dangerously close to breaking. He tells Arthur Lee that he needs to make sure it doesn't burst.

Jackie, 1986



Dillon tells Jackie about the dam. She writes an editorial about the unsafe dam. Tom and Hassel call a meeting and have people in the community sign a petition that is sent to the American Coal headquarters. Arthur Lee calls Jackie and asks her to tell her friends not to send any more petitions. Headquarters is on his back about it. After a dry spell the water goes down and the dam doesn't pose a threat for the time being.

## **Chapter 10: Bridges and Dams 1985-1986 Analysis**

Perhaps by attending college and living in another community, Jackie is able to understand the strife and hardship that people endure in her hometown. In her new position as editor of the local newspaper, she will be able to bring light to the suffering. Tom is following the pattern of his mother and is becoming an alcoholic. He suffers from an abusive childhood and the conflicts and confusions he has about his role in life. He feels called by God to be a priest yet he is attracted to Jackie and has feelings for her. He has turned to alcohol to put reality out of focus. Dillon still struggles with his relationship with Jackie. He would like to tell her that he may be her father but he resists—perhaps he's afraid that she may be angered by the news and reject him. He still doesn't know whether or not he is her biological father which deep down must cause him anguish.



# Chapter 11: Kudzu Jesus-1986

## Chapter 11: Kudzu Jesus-1986 Summary

Hassel

Tom is depressed and still drinking. His bishop is going to visit and he is worried about having only a one person mass. Hassel says there is a miracle. A tree nearby has kudzu (a type of vine) growing on it and the way it has grown has created the face of Jesus. Hassel gets a dozen people to agree to come to mass when the bishop visits. It would be a surprise for Tom. Everyone attends mass and the bishop is impressed. But Tom is overcome with guilt and confesses to the bishop that he is a liar and a terrible priest. The bishop hears his confession and absolves him but the two talk privately after the mass ends. Hassel prays that the Lord keep Tom safe.

Jackie

Jackie pours her heart out to Dillon about Tom. Dillon is certain that Tom had come back because of her. Jackie falls asleep on his couch. Early in the morning Tom calls. He wants to talk to her. He has been lying about a lot of things—about religion and Honduras—but mainly he's been lying about his feelings for her. He wants to return to Honduras but he wants to have sex with Jackie before he goes. Tom and Jackie make love and she stays the night with him. Tom stays one more week. When he leaves, he tells Jackie that they aren't done yet.

## Chapter 11: Kudzu Jesus-1986 Analysis

Due to his good deeds and basic decent nature, Tom has earned the love and respect of the community who support his mass even though none of them are Catholic. He confesses to the bishop that he is not a good priest. The bishop absolves him of his sins; however, he has sex with Jackie before he leaves to return to his work as a priest—not the actions of someone who has just been forgiven for his sins. His actions do not coincide with that of a holy man. When he leaves, he tells Jackie that they are "not done" yet. If he doesn't mean those words, they are cruel because they give Jackie false hope that they can have a relationship. If they are true, he is being dishonest about his intentions to be a devoted priest. Tom has not dealt with his alcoholism which is what is driving his other problems.



## Chapter 12: God's Bones-1987

### Chapter 12: God's Bones-1987 Summary

Jackie

The American Coal Company obtains rights to Homeplace which means they will strip mine the area where the family graves are. Dillon and Jackie discuss relationships and Dillon clams up when she asks him if he's ever been in love. Arthur Lee supervises moving the graves which is very emotional especially for Jackie. The machine that moves the graves malfunctions when moving Dillon's father's remains and they scatter all over the ground. Dillon becomes enraged and starts choking Arthur Lee. Jackie rescues a skeletal hand so that Dillon can bury it near him. The emotional Dillon tells Jackie that he is her father. He is more sure than ever because he sees himself in her more every day. He tells her how much he and Rachel loved each other.

### Chapter 12: God's Bones-1987 Analysis

Dillon is no longer able to repress his emotions. When his father's remains are strewn all over the ground, he feels he has no one. He needs to have family, to belong to someone. His emotions compel him to tell Jackie that she is his daughter. Jackie is not surprised. Something within her always sensed that he was her father.



## Chapter 13: Waiting for Lech 1988-1989

### Chapter 13: Waiting for Lech 1988-1989 Summary

Dillon

The coalminers wage a strike against the International Oil Corp that bought out American Coal. Jackie writes editorials about it. Dillon and Jackie are at the picket line and a guard orders Jackie to get away even though she tells him she is a member of the press. The strike looks to be one that will last a very long time. Someone puts up a sign that reads "Poland, West Virginia." Dillon can see that someday any semblance of the life and work that he has known will vanish.

Jackie, 1989

Hassel tells Jackie that Lech Walesa is coming to support the strike. As the town is prepping for Walesa's visit, Tom suddenly appears. He can only stay a week. Tom advises Jackie to think about leaving the area because it is dying. Tom confesses that he loves Jackie and asks her to meet him sometime in Costa Rica. Jackie asks Tom to stay with her while he's in town. Dillon sees Walesa on TV at the Kennedy Center in New York. He flips off the TV.

### Chapter 13: Waiting for Lech 1988-1989 Analysis

Tom finally admits to Jackie that he loves her but that he feels he still has a calling to be a Catholic priest. There are many indications that the region is in decay and will someday vanish. Polish union leader Lech Walesa promises to come to support the strike. However, when Dillon sees him on TV in New York, he realizes that Walesa will not be coming to the region after all and is again disappointed with the lack of outside support for the region.



# Chapter 14: Till Human Voice Wake Us-1990

## Chapter 14: Till Human Voice Wake Us-1990 Summary

Dillon sees that the dam is ready to rupture. He notifies Arthur Lee who comes out to inspect it at the same time Dillon was there. It begins to breach and Arthur can't make it back to his car. Dillon slows his truck so Arthur can jump in. As they drive off, the machinery in the dam is overworked and explodes. Dillon drives by houses warning the people to get out. Arthur Lee goes by foot to warn others. Tom and Jackie take separate cars to spread the word that the dam is bursting. The dam bursts and floods the entire region. The water surrounds Tom who holds onto a tree to keep from being taken by it. He swims to a nearby roof where he sees a child clinging to a chimney. The water swells and takes the boy out of his arms.

All the houses are gone. Sim is lying next to Jackie. He doesn't know where his son, Leon, is. Jackie tries to comfort him. He dies in her arms. Dillon hurts his leg when he falls down a hill. The water reaches him, coming up to his thighs and pulling him down. The next morning Jackie is looking for Dillon and Tom. Tom is taken to the Holiness Church. A large piece of wood is lodged in his chest and he is bleeding heavily. By the time Jackie arrives, he is dead. She tells him she loves him and that they are not done yet.

## Chapter 14: Till Human Voice Wake Us-1990 Analysis

Tragedy strikes the region when the dam, that had always loomed over the region, finally bursts. The resulting flood takes Tom's life. Although Jackie mourns his passing, she is able to have resolution about their feelings for one another. Tom tells her he loves her and even though he is already dead when she reaches him, Jackie tells Tom that they are not done yet. Her last words to Tom are very similar to Dillon's last words to Rachel when he tells her that he will find her again. The parallels between the two relationships cannot be denied.

# **Chapter 15: The New World**

## **Chapter 15: The New World Summary**

Dillon is never found. Jackie takes a new job for a Pittsburgh newspaper as an editor. Hassel calls once a month with updates about Number Thirteen that has been spared in the flood. The governor finally approves a new bridge. Jackie knows that she can never return. Everything she knew and loved there is gone.

## **Chapter 15: The New World Analysis**

Jackie has final resolution about her relationship to Dillon. Since everything is gone that Jackie loved she knows she will never return to the area. There is too much sadness connected to the little mining community.



# Characters

## Dillon Freeman

Dillon Freeman is only a baby when his father dies. Carrie, his mother, had not been married to his father, but she truly loved him. Dillon's father had been a union organizer for the local coal mine and was shot in a labor dispute. He had died a short time later. Dillon always longs for his father and tries to live up to his legacy the rest of his life. Dillon has a lot of inner anger and unresolved feelings his entire life. He becomes fixated on his cousin, Rachel, who is just a few years older than he is. He falls in love with Rachel when he is fourteen years old and loves her the rest of his life.

Although Dillon is more than willing to have an open relationship with her, Rachel fears family and community backlash if they married even though she loves him, too. Dillon carries the torch for Rachel his entire life. They eventually have a romantic relationship even though Rachel has married. Rachel becomes pregnant and there is never any certainty about who the biological father of the child, Jackie, is. But Dillon is sure that she is his.

Dillon spends five years in the federal penitentiary for blowing up a bridge in retaliation for the union busters blowing up his house. While he is away in prison, Rachel begins a relationship with the manager of the coal company with whom she stays with until she dies. But Rachel and Dillon love each other until that day. As she lays dying, Dillon tells her he will find her again.

## Rachel Honaker

Rachel Honaker is the first-cousin of Dillon Freeman. When she is sixteen-years-old, the fourteen-year-old Dillon falls in love with her and never stops loving her. Although she resists his advances, she has deep feelings for Dillon. She has been told by her mother that when a man and woman who are related to each other have a baby, it could be born deformed. Rachel has also been told by her mother that a relationship between her and Dillon would be a sin.

Rachel goes away to nursing school and when she graduates, World War II has begun. She and a friend from nursing school sign up to be army nurses and serve overseas until the war ends. While overseas, a young soldier proposes to her and promises to get in touch after they return to the states. He never contacts her and on the rebound, Rachel marries an old boyfriend, Tony Angelelli. It is a bad marriage and she never loves him.

Rachel seeks comfort in the one man who has always loved her—her cousin, Dillon. Rachel finally admits her love and desire for Dillon who has never stopped loving her. Soon after they have sex, Rachel is pregnant. She has a daughter, Jackie, and Rachel never knows whether her husband or Dillon is the father of her child.





Rachel has a bad heart and dies young. When she lays dying, Dillon is at her side. He tells her that he will find her again.

## **Jackie Honaker**

Jackie is Rachel's daughter and only child. She grows up thinking that Tony Angelelli is her father. But Rachel is not sure if Tony is Jackie's father or if Dillon is. After Jackie is an adult and her mother has died, Dillon tells her he is her father.

## **Carrie Freeman**

Carrie Freeman is Dillon's mother. She had not been married to Dillon's father and is the talk of community but she doesn't care because she loves him so.

## **Rondal Lloyd**

Rondal Lloyd was Dillon's father. He was a union organizer who was shot in the spine during a strike. He was paralyzed and died soon after sustaining the wound.

## **Tommie Justice**

Tommie Justice is the friend and roommate of Rachel Honaker when Rachel goes to nursing school in the town of Justice. Tommie is from a wealthy family and has a reputation for being promiscuous. She dies in a plane crash during World War II.

## **Tony Angelelli**

Tony Angelelli is Rachel's boyfriend while she attends nursing school. After she is abandoned by another boyfriend, she marries Tony on the rebound. Rachel is never happy in this marriage.

## **Arthur Lee Sizemore**

Arthur Lee Sizemore is engaged to Tommie Justice who dies overseas during World War II. He treats the miners unfairly and tries to bust their union. He falls in love with Rachel and eventually lives with her but she would never marry him.

## **Tom Kolwiecki**

Tom Kolwiecki works for VISTA and comes to the region to help the poor. Jackie falls in love with him and he has strong feelings for her. But he has a calling to be a Catholic priest and they are never able to develop a relationship.



## Hassel

Hassel is the self-appointed mayor of the community around the Number Thirteen coal mine. He survives the flood after the dam bursts and continues to fight for a new bridge for the area.

## Sim Gore

Sim Gore is in a mine with Dillon and some other miners when it collapses. They are rescued after more than ten hours. Sim Gore later becomes the president of the local miner's union.



# Objects/Places

## Appalachia

The story of *The Unquiet Earth* takes place in Appalachia. Rachel Honaker doesn't know that she lives in a place called Appalachia until she sees President Kennedy on TV talking about stamping out poverty and mentioning Appalachia as one of the poorest regions of the nation.

## Number Thirteen Mine

The Number Thirteen Mine is the mine that is focused upon in *The Unquiet Earth*. It is the mine where Dillon and his father before him worked. Many of Dillon's relatives had worked there and it is the only mine that is spared in a flood after the dam breaks.

## Blackberry Creek

The mining community of Number Thirteen Mine lives near the Blackberry Creek. Most of the miners live in houses that line the creek. Rachel almost drowned there when she was a teenager.

## Blackberry Creek Bridge

Dillon's house is bombed and burned down during union fighting. In retaliation, Dillon sets an explosive under the Blackberry Creek Bridge and blows it up.

## Federal Penitentiary, Atlanta

Dillon is convicted of criminal bombing and arson when he blows up the bridge in retaliation for the burning of his house during a union dispute. Dillon is sentenced to five years in the Federal Penitentiary in Atlanta, Georgia.

## Hermit's Cabin

Dillon and Rachel discover an old cabin in the mountains where a great uncle of Dillon's had lived. The cabin is the first place where Dillon and Rachel make love.

## Honduras

Tom Kolwiecki becomes a Jesuit Catholic priest and serves many years helping the poor and underprivileged in Honduras.



## **The Dam**

The dam on the river in the mining community of Homeplace bursts and floods the entire region. Tom Kolwiecki dies in the flood and Dillon presumably drowns—his body is never found. The flood destroys everything in the valley except the Number Thirteen Mine.

## **Washington, D. C.**

After Jackie graduates with a journalism degree, she accepts a job in Washington, D. C., working for a congressman. It is in Washington D.C. that she renews her relationship with Tom who had been away in Honduras for several years.

## **Justice Clarion**

Dillon suggests that Jackie take the job as editor of the Justice Clarion back home. He wants her to take the job because he misses her. By taking the job, she is able to shed light on the misery and struggle of the people of the mining community.



# Themes

## Unrequited Love

The main theme of *The Unquiet Earth* by Denise Giardina is love. But there are several sub-categories of this theme. One theme that runs throughout the story which relates the lives of several generations of a family in a coal mining community in Appalachia is that of unrequited love and how it impacts one's life. From the time Dillon is a young teenager to the end of his life, he loves Rachel Honaker. But for many reasons, which are included in the second sub-category of the love theme, Rachel never fully returns that love. Dillon is a very loyal person. He is the type of person whose love never weakens or vanishes but only strengthens and grows. Since Dillon can not have the woman he loves, he never marries. And since he can not claim the daughter that he feels in his heart is his, he has no other children.

Rachel and Dillon's daughter, Jackie, is in many ways like her father. Just like Dillon as a young teenaged girl, she falls for Tom Kolwiecki who also, because of circumstances, can not return her love. But her love for him never wavers and, like her father before her, causes her to lead a lonely life—never marrying or having children. Dillon and Jackie are very much alike. They are loyal people who love only once and won't settle for anything less. As a result, they both lead solitary lives because the flame in their hearts only burns for their one and only loves.

## The Struggles of the Poor

The suffering of the poor in the coal mining region of the Appalachia mountains is an underlying theme throughout the story of *The Unquiet Earth*. The isolation of the underprivileged contributes to their suffering. Without support from outsiders, it is difficult for them to learn how they can help themselves, what rights they have as citizens and how the suppression of their rights keeps them poor. This separation from other more successful societies ensures that families in this region will maintain the same cycle of hard work with little reward for generations.

The isolation and ignorance of the coal mining community is crystallized when Rachel Honaker sees President Kennedy giving a speech on TV in which he wages a war on poverty. He points to the West Virginia region where she and her family live as one of the poorest in the nation and refers to it as Appalachia. First, she doesn't know that her region is called "Appalachia." Secondly, she doesn't know that her region is poverty stricken. The segregation of the people in this region has kept them from the knowledge that the majority of other people in the nation live better lives than they do. Most family members do not leave the area to work or attend school elsewhere, especially back in the the mid-century when this story begins. Therefore, there is no one to return home and enlighten the others that there are happy successful people who don't go without.



The corporations in the area supply cheap housing as a way to keep the poor workers on the payroll. The offer of inexpensive living conditions in no way make up for the good life and it keeps the majority of the residents in the area from pursuing it. These are downtrodden people who have no confidence to seek better lives.

## Forbidden Love

Love is the main theme of *The Unquiet Earth*, and one of its sub-categories establishes a theme of its own. There are two examples of forbidden love in the tale of a family in a coal mining area of West Virginia. The first is the love story between Dillon Freeman and Rachel Honaker. Dillon and Rachel are first cousins. Dillon is a reckless sort and the kind of fellow who does not live his life based on the value of others. He falls in love with his first cousin, Rachel, when he is fourteen and she is sixteen and he loves her for the rest of his life. He is ready to tell the world but Rachel is more influenced by societal mores and the opinions of others and never allows the relationship to fully develop.

Although Rachel eventually admits her passionate love for Dillon, she can never reach a level of comfort that would allow her to be open and public about her feelings. As a young child, her mother had told her that if a couple was related by blood that any child they had would be deformed. She is concerned what her family, community and her congregation would think of her and Dillon and subsequently their daughter who is born healthy and perfect. Although it doesn't surface as an issue in the book, a sexual or marital relationship between first cousins is illegal in some states.

There is a second tabu relationship that develops in the story. Dillon and Rachel's daughter, Jackie, falls in love with Tom Kolwiecki who first visits the coal mining region as a VISTA volunteer. After his stint with the federal government support group, he plans to become a Catholic priest. Jackie who is fifteen to Tom's twenty-two, immediately begins to have emotional stirrings for the young man. As the months and years pass, Jackie falls desperately in love with a Catholic priest who cannot marry and who has taken the vow of celibacy.

In both cases, the love affairs that develop are doomed from the beginning. But the passion and desire that are most human override the certitude that there will be no happy ending.



# Style

## Point of View

The *Unquiet Earth* is written in the first person from the perspective of the main characters of the story. Within one chapter, the story is narrated by as many as three or four different characters. In that way, the characters are providing their viewpoints on the events and their dealings with each other. Although naturally some characters interpret events differently just as in real life, there is a minimum of conflict in the storytelling which serves to move the story along at a good pace and with a minimum of confusion.

Once the reader becomes accustomed to the personalities of the different characters, it facilitates the understanding of the entire saga. For example, Dillon is angry and bitter and the reader comes to expect that he will give a cynical view of events. Many sections are narrated by the character, Rachel, who is Dillon's star-crossed lover. She is more temperate and conservative than Dillon and the contrast between their observations is apparent and expected. Just as in real life, the reader learns to discern the veracity of a character's account and "read between the lines."

The reader is with the character Jackie from the time she is born until the end of the book when she is in her thirties and has lost everyone she loves. Although she is not cynical like her father Dillon, she is more practical and straight-forward than her mother. Her intellect and her wisdom show through clearly in the sections she narrates.

By providing the distinct perspectives of the main characters, the author draws a nice balance and allows the reader to get to know the characters and rely on them to tell their stories.

## Setting

The *Unquiet Earth* takes place in a coal mining community in the Appalachia region of West Virginia. The main characters of the story are Dillon Freeman and Rachel Honaker who both live in the small community referred to as Homeplace. Most of the coalminers in the story work at the Number Thirteen Mine. There is an episode in the book in which Dillon is trapped with several other miners when the mine collapses. They are rescued ten hours later. However, their strife is effectively portrayed by the thirst, lack of air, and fear they suffer while trapped there.

The mines are near Mount Trace, a beautiful green mountain that eventually is ruined by the greedy company that forces it to be strip mined. During the strip mining, the company dumps its trash in the rivers and creeks eventually causing the dam to burst and flood the valley. The detailed description of the flooded community brings into sharp focus the danger and suffering that poor people in mining towns have had to endure during the last century through to the present day.



Along the banks of the Blackberry Creek, the mining company has built cheap housing or supplied trailer homes for the workers and their families. The river in the area is where Rachel almost drowned as a teen. There had been a river bridge that Dillon had bombed and set on fire in retaliation for the union busters who had burned his house down.

## Language and Meaning

The *Unquiet Earth* takes place in one of the coal mining regions of West Virginia. Author, Denise Giardina, was born in Bluefield, West Virginia, and therefore, has some firsthand knowledge of Appalachia and the hardships that the coalminers and their families have suffered through over the last century. Although the book focuses on the relationships of several generations of one family, there are many elements relating to coal mining that are interspersed throughout the book. There are references to "black lung," a deadly condition that is exclusive to coal miners. The labor disputes and union strikes that are part of that world are also featured. The violence includes bombings, arson and murder. The greedy corporations that reduce the coalminers' wages but increase their hours and responsibilities are also showcased in this saga.

The author also writes in the voices of the people and the vernacular that is typical to that region. For example, the author presents the speech of some of the older residents of the region with "Hit's not here," instead of "It's not here," which reflects an accent that is indicative of that area. There are other expressions that apparently represent the folks of the area such as, "Ain't you heard of. . . ." By inflecting the local way of speaking into the characters' words, a realism is brought to the work.

The author writes in a very tender and respectful manner about the people of Appalachia. She is able to give the reader insight into the struggle of a group of people that could barely keep afloat but portrays them as hard-working, God-fearing, honest and decent people.

## Structure

The *Unquiet Earth* has a unique structure. The book is divided into four main books. Book One contains five chapters and covers the years 1930 through 1961. These chapters cover the early lives of Dillon and Rachel, who are first cousins and live in a small mining community in the Justice Valley of Appalachia. Book Two contains only one chapter which is entitled "The Roving Pickets" and describes the intrigue and violence surrounding the mining union strikes and labor disputes that took place during 1962.

Book three has two chapters and covers the years 1963 through 1971. This section covers Jackie's teen years when she first meets Tom and also includes the death of her mother. Book Four covers the years 1980 through 1990 and has seven chapters. Leaving a ten-year gap from the preceding section, these chapters describe Jackie's adult life, her continuing relationship with Tom, resolution with Dillon and the destruction



of her homeland when the river dam bursts and wipes away most of the Justice Valley mining community.

Within each of the chapters, are separate sections that are written from the point of view of the various characters. For example, in Book One, the reader is privy to the definitive thoughts and viewpoints of Dillon, Carrie and Rachel. The years that the character is narrating are included in some of these character headings.



## Quotes

"She dragged the deathbed outside and burned it like a funeral pyre. He was already buried in the Homeplace cemetery with the rest of her people. But it was like she had to see something go up in flames." (Chapter 1, page 15)

"No. Dillon don't know how to say goodbye proper, not when it's something he cares about." (Chapter 2, page 26)

"Land is so fragile—it can be taken by flood or fire or a piece of banker's paper—that it is best to build a life inside oneself that can be planted anywhere and held onto until the last breath." (Chapter 2, page 29)

"It's a good thing we will die or life would be worthless, we wouldn't even know what it is. Except I don't want to die this soon." (Chapter 2, page 56)

"Sin is a puny thing to speak of when two people love." (Chapter 4, page 93)

"I got down on my knees and promised Jesus that if my mom came back safe I'd go off to Africa and be a missionary. I was sorry for that promise as soon as she walked in the door and said she'd had a flat tire." (Chapter 6, page 125)

"The God I believe in doesn't take kindly to people sitting around in buildings feeling pious. I fancy a God that would as soon level a church building as look at it." (Chapter 6, page 144)

"Picture falling off the wall means somebody will die. I didn't want to say it in front of Toejam else he'll blame hisself." (Chapter 7, page 189)

"The teachers are grading on a curve and you're keeping everybody else from making good grades. If you don't stop scoring so high, no one will ever talk to you again. And the boys already hate you." (Chapter 7, page 194)

"Goblins used to hide in the coal tipples, fairies lived in the basements of the company stores, and the mountains were magic. Now they're just tipples and closed-up buildings and Trace Mountain is being stripped." (Chapter 7, page 220)

"You, son, you're like a fish on a line. They'll give you some slack, let you run for a while, but then they'll haul you up on the bank to die." (Chapter 7, page 236)

"I had been living as though she was already gone. I watched the ice floes carry her down the river and banished her from my thoughts. Now she's started dying by bits, far away where I cannot reach her." (Chapter 8, page 254)



## Topics for Discussion

How are Rachel and Dillon related to each other? Why is it impossible for Rachel and Dillon to have a romantic relationship? How do they feel about each other?

How does Rachel feel about Tom? Why is it impossible for Jackie and Tom to have a romantic relationship? What conflicted feelings does Tom have for Jackie?

How is Jackie like Rachel? How is she like Dillon? Who is Jackie's biological father and what evidence is there for that conclusion?

What is black lung disease? What kind of workers are victims of black lung disease? Why?

What does Flora want for her daughter, Rachel? What does Rachel want for her daughter, Jackie? How is Rachel like Flora? How is she different than her mother?

Why does Rachel not want to find out who Jackie's father is? Who is she protecting by not revealing the possibility that Dillon is Jackie's father?

How does Jackie find resolution when Tom dies? How does Jackie find resolution before Dillon is missing? In the end, why is she able to leave her hometown behind?