

Waiting for Normal Study Guide

Waiting for Normal by Leslie Connor

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Plot Summary

Addison Schmeeter is a newly minted sixth grader who lives with her mother, aka Mommers, in upstate New York. Addie's life has been filled with hardship, but Addie seems to have survived the hard times with a good attitude and a generous heart. Addie and Mommers have just been moved into an old trailer by Mommer's ex-husband, Dwight. Dwight and Mommers have been divorced for some time and share two daughters between them, Brynna and Katie. Addie is Mommers' daughter from a previous marriage. Mommers has mismanaged the money Dwight gave her and their house has been foreclosed on as a result. Brynna and Katie now live with Dwight while Addie lives with Mommers.

Addie's mother is probably bipolar or as Addie says: "Mommers is all or nothing." Some days Mommers remembers to take care of Addie and other days, she only takes care of herself. On those days she barely even do that. Addie is the adult in her home and is in charge of cooking, cleaning, and covering up for Mommers when she makes mistakes. Mommers sees her twelve-year-old daughter as more than capable of taking care of herself, even going so far as to leave her alone for a week at a time.

Addie's ex-stepfather, Dwight, loves Addie dearly and tries his hardest to help Addie despite Mommers' attitude toward him. However, because Addie is not his natural daughter, there is only so much Dwight can do to help Addie. Addie is also helped by her paternal grandfather and her friends, Soula and Elliot, who own the minimart next door. Soula and Elliot watch over Addie when her mother isn't home. Soula, who suffers from breast cancer, saves Addie's life one night when Mommers is gone. She is one of Addie's everyday heroes.

Addie is waiting for a normal life; much like the one she used to have. She knows that Mommers and Dwight will never be together again and shouldn't be, but Addie would love to be part of a family again and to live with her sisters and Dwight. After Soula saves Addie's life, things change dramatically and Addie is finally able to realize her dream of living with Dwight and her sisters forever.



Chapters 1 - 10.

Chapters 1 - 10. Summary

As the book opens, Addie and her mother are being moved into their new home by her mother's ex-husband, Dwight. Dwight is not happy with the trailer he must move them into, but it is all he can afford now that Addie's mother has had his house foreclosed on. Addie takes the new trailer in stride and is excited by all of the small spaces inside her new home. She will be beginning the sixth grade at a new school in a few weeks and seems to adjust easily to life's changes.

In Chapter 1, Addison is a young girl who lives with her mother, Denise, who is single. Her ex-stepfather, Dwight, picks them up and is taking them to live in a new trailer which he is giving them. Addie is excited to see the new trailer and has imagined that it will be a happy place in a trailer park with a small yard and a yard gnome. When they arrive at the trailer her mother is furious. The trailer is in bad need of repair and is just sitting off of the road. Denise, called Mommers, begins to scream and yell at Dwight. She asks him why she has to live in this place and wants to know why she can't have the duplex he owns. Dwight tells her he had to sell the duplex to pay for the house and that this trailer is all he has left. He knows it isn't much and tells her they can fix it up. He tells Addie that he has a computer set up inside for her. Addie is disappointed, but it is Mommers who is the most upset. She curses at Dwight and throws the key to the trailer across the yard. Dwight tells Denise her other option is to live with Jack, Addie's father's father, but that just infuriates Denise even more. Dwight leaves, promising Addie that he will always be there for her and that he will bring her half-sisters, Brynna and Katie, to see her soon. Mommers sits down to cry and Addie begins to comfort her. While patting her mother she sees the trailer key and picks it up off of the ground.

In Chapter 2, Addie lets herself and her mother into the trailer and is excited by what she finds. She loves little spaces and thinks all of the small nooks and crannies of the trailer are fun. Addie tells her mom there are six steps to get anywhere in the house. Six steps from the door to the sink, from the kitchen to the dining/living room, six more to the only bedroom. Addie's mother takes the bedroom, which Addie calls the Luxury Bedroom and Addie gets a small bunk above a closet. She is thrilled by the new home and finds happiness and positive things in everything. Her mother is the opposite. All Mommers can do is complain about everything. She also allows her daughter to take over all of the grown up responsibilities. Addie cooks and does the dishes while her mother gets on the internet and finds a chat room. Addie thinks about when they lived with Dwight and how nice it was to live in his house, although she admits that at first she felt strange. Much like she does here. She then thinks about the days after Dwight moved out. The house was a mess because she and Dwight had done all of the cleaning. Mommers didn't wake up in the mornings, so Addie would make food for herself and the Littles (her nickname for her sisters). Eventually the trash bill didn't get paid and the garbage men wouldn't pick up the trash any longer. Addie comments that all the trash made Dwight the maddest. Addie grabs a book when she realizes her mom



will be on the computer for the rest of the night and won't talk to her anymore. She eventually falls asleep, wondering how her sisters are and missing her old life with Dwight.

In Chapter 3, Addie notices that across the street from the trailer is an empty lot she calls Empty Acre. She also notes that the lot has a mini mart and gas station built on the site. While investigating the mini mart she discovers a glass room, like an atrium, off of the back of the mini mart. Addie decides that someone must live in the room off the convenience store. She goes into the store to do some snooping around and meets Soula and Elliot, the owners of the store who live in the back. They are friendly and seem to have watched Addie and her family move in across the street. Soula and Elliot have a great sense of humor and crack jokes to make Addie feel welcome. Soula tells Addie to come over if she needs anything and then offers to give her a free microwaveable snack pie. Soula gives Addie the nickname Little Cookie.

In Chapter 4, Addie comes home from the minimart to find that her mother is finally awake, it is four in the afternoon. Mommers is in a robe, a dirty t-shirt and has bed hair. She asks Addie where she has been and Addie tells her about Soula, Elliot and the hot apple pie. Mommers tells Addie she doesn't want her hanging out at the minimart like a puppy, but Addie has already decided she will be hanging out there. She likes Soula, Elliot and the pie. Mommers lights a cigarette and goes back to the computer, complaining about everything and everyone the entire time. Addie thinks about her father and reveals that her mother divorced him because he didn't have the Love of Learning. Addie knows this isn't true. She is working on a notebook with vocabulary words. Today's words are "mortgage" and "reprobate." Mommers told her that Dwight was a reprobate, but Addie thinks that he is the only person around there who even tries. She thinks about mortgage and reveals that Mommers used the mortgage money Dwight gave her on something else. That is when the bank took the house and Dwight took the Littles and set Addie and Mommers up in the trailer. Dwight told Addie that he couldn't make everything right, but he would do what he could for her. Mommers asks if Addie has homework. Addie says "no" and tells her of a mean boy at school. Then she sits down to practice her flute, but feels bad because they stole the flute from her old school.

In Chapter 5, Addie is trying to figure out what to call the track that the train rides on. Is it an underpass or an overpass? Soula tells her that the underpass part used to be the main road, but pollution from an old factory shut the road down. Soula is active in the community and puts newspaper clippings of community issues on the board in her store. Addie wants to read the clippings, but would be embarrassed to have to pull out her vocabulary cards to help her read. Dwight comes over one rainy afternoon and brings the Littles with him. The girls, Addie and Mommers are overjoyed to see each other. Mommers tells Dwight he can leave for a while, but he refuses to leave her alone with the kids. This starts a fight, but Dwight tells Denise to stop when he notices Addie watching them. He wants the courts to decide custody issues. He makes the girls a rope swing and brings a seat for it the next week. Every weekend when Dwight brings the kids they all play on the swing, except Mommers. Addie loves the way that Dwight includes her as one of his "girls."



In Chapter 6, Dwight is at the trailer and is outside talking to Denise. Addie can't help but eavesdrop on their conversation from her bunk by the window. Dwight has been offered a job out-of-town that will take him and the Littles away until April. Denise is devastated and angry. She screams that he is enjoying doing this to her and begins to fight him. Dwight tells her he might enjoy it if Addie wasn't involved. Denise is convinced Dwight planned this with Grandio. Dwight tells Denise that it is a big job and will help pay the bills. He restrains her from hitting him and she gives him a bloody lip with her head. Dwight tells Denise he will try to bring the little girls down every other Sunday to see them. Then he goes into the trailer to tell Addie. Addie is heartbroken, but doesn't want Dwight to know. She wants to protect him from feeling bad.

In Chapter 7, Addie has her tryout for Ms. Rivera, the orchestra teacher, and does very well. Addie tells Ms. Rivera that she can't play music until she hears it a few times. Ms. Rivera looks at her for a moment and then asks her to play something she already knows. It is unclear if Addie has a learning disability, but she certainly has a hard time reading words and sheet music. Addie leaves the tryout and is confronted by Robert, a bully in her class. He wants to know if she made it into the special Stage Orchestra. Addie had no idea that the tryouts were for Stage Orchestra, but now she really wants to make it. The results will be out by Halloween. Addie moves past Robert and finds her friends Marissa and Helena. They ask how she did, but before she can answer Robert comes over to taunt Helena. Helena had to see the school nurse that morning to discuss her BO. After school, the girls walk home together. Addie tells Helena she had the BO talk with her mom and now uses deodorant. She also reveals that at her last school the nurse asked her twice a week if she had eaten breakfast. Addie mentions puberty to Helena and tells her she is horrified by some of the changes. The girls laugh hysterically while passing the fire house, then Helena turns down her street and Addie continues home.

In Chapter 8, Addie is hanging out with Soula at the store while Elliot is away. She notices that Soula is tired and that the woman is sweating a lot. Addie also thinks about how Soula pushes a lawn chair around the minimart so she can sit down. Addie knows that Soula has to sit because she is sick in some way, not because she is overweight. However, Mommers told her that it isn't polite to ask people about their illnesses; if they want you to know they will tell you. Addie and Soula begin to talk about the university that is up the street. Addie tells Soula it looks magical and Soula tells her that sometimes gates and bridges can do that. She tells Addie she always thinks she will be happier and safer if she lived a little outside of the city. Soula discusses the waste from the factories, the Empty Lot and even the gas and junk food she sells. She tells Addie it is all waste. Addie tells Soula that her Grandio lives on a farm and is healthy, but isn't happy. She tells Soula that maybe people need heroes, just ordinary people to look up to. Soula thinks about this and shares it with Elliot when he comes in. Elliot agrees that life would be empty without heroes.

In Chapter 9, it is supper time and Addie must find something for them to eat. Addie hates dinnertime. She thinks breakfast is ok because they eat toast or cereal for breakfast, normal foods. But often for dinner Addie makes toast with condensed chicken soup on top, or toast with cheese or with tomato. Mommers doesn't shop well and she is



too preoccupied by the computer and TV to make any dinner. Addie doesn't like eating abnormal dinners. She makes her mother a plate of toast with soup topping and then makes herself one. Addie thinks about the times when her mother seems to get excited about cooking. During those times her mother will make tons of food, spaghetti sauce and even a Thanksgiving dinner in July. Addie's mother likes to watch Jeanette for the Judgment in the evenings, but Addie can't stand the show. Her mother brags that she always gives the same verdict as Jeanette, but Addie doesn't see this as a good thing. Addie feels that no one wins in the court cases; that they all end up sad; and hence, they all lose.

In Chapter 10, Addie is excited to see Dwight and her sisters for the first time since they left. It is October and she is happy that Dwight's project is on time. That means they will be home in April as promised. Addie's sisters are excited about a surprise they brought for her and they try to make her guess what it is. Addie is a little jealous the three of them have a secret together, but she is excited that it is a surprise for her. Dwight reveals that they have brought her a pumpkin and a little white hamster. Addie is thrilled by the hamster and names it piccolo, after her dream of playing the piccolo after she masters the flute. Mommers is not thrilled by the hamster, and lets Dwight know it. Dwight asks Denise how her job hunt is going. He invites Denise and the girls to lunch and they head out to a diner. Addie is worried about what her mother will say or do, but lunch goes well and Addie thinks that - to outsiders at least - they must seem like a normal family. As Dwight leaves with the girls, Katie tells Addie she is sad that Addie can't come home with them. Addie is sad too and the evening would be terribly lonely if she didn't have Piccolo.

Chapters 1 - 10. Analysis

Chapter 1 does a good job of setting the scene for the book. It introduces the characters, their personalities, their goals and challenges. Mommers is painted as an ungrateful woman who believes she is entitled to the things she wants. Addie seems to be a thoughtful girl who understands that Mommers is limited and appreciates what Dwight does of them. Dwight is a man who is good at heart, even when he doesn't have to be. He told Addie a long time ago that he would be there for her even if he wasn't married to her mother. It is revealed that Addie's father died when she was three, but made sure she had a good relationship with her grandfather, Grandio.

In Chapter 2, Addie is extremely responsible and grown up for her age; she will be entering the sixth grade in a couple of weeks. Mommers is portrayed as selfish and spoiled. She seems to feel Addie is ok taking care of the two of them and she escapes her life's disappointments by getting online and smoking. It is clear that Addie misses the life she had with Dwight: being cared for, having family around and having security. However, Addie remains positive and doesn't seem to be too upset about the turns in her life. She seems to be used to them.

In Chapter 3, Soula is described as a large woman wearing a flowing, flower-printed dress...similar to a moo-moo. Her husband, Elliot, is a tall skinny man with red hair and



freckles. A customer in the store asks Soula how she is feeling and she tells him she has "four down and four to go." It is implied that Soula is sick in some way. Addie professes to the couple that she is a snoop and shows that she has an inquisitive nature.

In Chapter 4, Mommers is in her own little world. She clearly doesn't feel the need to parent Addie. She seems to be a selfish character who is more concerned with the perceived wrongs done to her than with her three daughters. Mommers doesn't seem to follow the rules, but still expects Addie to answer to her as a parent.

In Chapter 5, Addie has a true love for Dwight and it seems that her feelings are returned. Despite the issues Mommers has, Dwight brings the younger girls over each weekend to see her and Addie. Addie struggles with reading and is convinced she doesn't have a Love of Learning like her mother, that she is more like her father in that regard.

In Chapter 6, Addie is heartbroken that she won't get to see Dwight and her sisters each week. She holds her emotions back so that she doesn't make Dwight feel guilty; she knows he is doing what he has to do. She hugs his arms and thinks about how his arms always make her feel better.

In Chapter 7, Addie enjoys her friends, Marissa and Helena, and is a very social kid. She is a great flute player despite the fact that she can't really read music, although she swears to the teacher she can. Addie must hear a musical piece played about 10 times before she memorizes it. It is unclear if Addie has a learning disability.

In Chapter 8, Addie is an insightful and thoughtful young girl. She knows that Soula is sick and worries for the woman, but she respects Soula's privacy. She understands that safety and money can't make you happy and she also understands the value of everyday heroes. This could be some foreshadowing. Perhaps people like Soula and Dwight are Addie's heroes, or, perhaps, she may become an everyday hero herself.

In Chapter 9, as Addie describes her mother's habits it starts to become clear that her mother may have some sort of mental instability that drives her behavior. Her lack of energy at some times contrasted with her overly energetic behavior at other times may signal some sort of problem. Addie, however, thinks that she is the one with the problem because she doesn't like Jeanette for the Judgment and her mother (who has a Love for Learning) does.

In Chapter 10, Addie understands why her mother and Dwight are no longer together, but it is hard for her to see that her sisters have a home with Dwight and she is left out.



Chapters 11 - 20.

Chapters 11 - 20. Summary

In Chapter 11, Addie is with Soula at the store when she notices a new newspaper clipping on the board. It is an old picture of the overpass with "Dory is a numbskull" sprayed across it. Soula tells Addie that the town tried to erase the graffiti, but it just kept coming back. Finally it was revealed that Dory's little sister was behind the prank. As Soula is telling the story, Rick, the man who owns the Numbskull Pub (where Addie ate with Dwight and the girls), comes in. Addie thinks he is the one who wrote the graffiti and he tells her that he thought the graffiti was so funny that he stole the words for the name of his pub. He asks Soula if he can leave a note for the "love of his life" and then hands the note to Addie. The note is for Elliot, whom Addie assumed was Soula's boyfriend. Soula laughs and tells Addie that he is her best friend and sometimes, her hero.

In Chapter 12, Addie's mother enters the house complaining about the smell of rotten pumpkin and asks Addie to move the trash away from the door. Addie shows her the hamster crawling inside the carved pumpkin and they both laugh. Addie packs up the hamster to take her over to Soula and Elliot. Her mother remarks that she spends a lot of time there, and then undermines Addie's self-worth by asking if they really want her there or if they are just being nice. Addie thinks on this when she arrives at the store. She can't find Soula or Elliot, so she goes to the Soula's house in the back. She finds Soula vomiting and Elliot comforting her. Soula has breast cancer and is suffering the after effects of chemotherapy. Addie attempts to leave, but Soula wants her to stay and show her the hamster. Elliot goes back to the store and Soula tells Addie that the chemo is the bad part of the cancer. The doctors took a tumor out of her breast. Soula jokes that they were lucky to have found the tumor because she is so large. Addie remembers her Grandio's friend died of cancer.

In Chapter 13, Addie comes home to find her mother dressed up to leave for the evening. Her hair and make-up are tastefully done and she has on heels. Mommers tells Addie she is going to a job interview that will take place over dinner. She says the job is in sales. She was going to make Addie macaroni and cheese for dinner, but didn't get it done. Addie asks her mother if she does self-breast exams and her mother says yes. Then Mommers slips on pumpkin guts and yells at Addie to clean them up. After Mommers leaves, Addie makes dinner and cleans the pumpkin guts. Then she wishes Mommers will have a good dinner, a good interview and will be home before midnight.

In Chapter 14, Addie starts to get scared when Mommers isn't home by midnight. She isn't afraid to be home alone, she is afraid because this has happened before. When Addie was 9, Brynna was 3 and Katie was 1, Denise had disappeared for three days. Just as she said this evening, back then she said she had a job selling things. Dwight and Denise were divorced and he was out-of-town working. For the first couple of nights Denise would call, then she stopped calling to check on the kids. She told Addie she



had arranged to work this week because Addie was home on break and could take care of the Littles. Dwight called every night and was enraged to find out that Denise hadn't been home in three days. He called Grandio and then quit the out-of-town job. Grandio was furious when he arrived to find the girls alone. He told Addie that this was child abandonment and that it was over.

In Chapter 15, Mommers arrives home at 2am and wakes Addie up to let her know she is home. Addie remarks that she is late and hears her mother typing out an email. Her mom tells her the business plan was great and that Pete, the guy she met with, is gorgeous. When her mother goes to the bathroom Addie reads the email to Pete. Mommers comes back and Addie asks her if she gave Pete the money Dwight gave them.

In Chapter 16, Addie isn't sure if Mommers gave Pete their money, but they seem to have plenty of money to buy things. Mommers has new office supplies for her job and new outfits to wear in the evenings when she works with Pete. What they don't have, Addie notices, is bread. Addie makes the Stage Orchestra and everyone is happy for her, even Robert the bully. Mommers is thrilled that Addie made the orchestra and suggest they go to Numbskull Dory's for dinner. They get dressed up and have fun at the diner. Mommers reveals that she has a business credit card that she can use to pay for dinner. Addie isn't sure it is a good idea, but lightens up when Denise makes fun of her. Addie asks for Rick and her mother teases her about knowing him. On the way home Mommers tells Addie that they will move into a house soon. Addie doesn't think too much about a house, she is focused on the orchestra concert in December.

In Chapter 17, Addie wants to go trick-or-treating with her friends, but they already have plans. She asks Mommers to take her out and her mother belittles her, telling Addie that she is too old to trick-or-treat and that people won't give her anything. Then Mommers tells her she has plans that night anyway. Addie goes to the minimart and Elliot and Soula dress her up like Soula. The three laugh and Addie goes home to show her mother. Denise is in a tizzy when Addie arrives. She thinks Addie looks silly and gets upset that Addie won't do as she is told and stay home for Halloween. Addie tells Denise that she will be at the minimart handing out candy to customers. Denise is searching through office supplies and tells Addie that Pete thinks the office is in an actual house and that he doesn't know she has kids. Then she tells Addie she is going with Pete on an overnight business trip. Addie doesn't want her mother to go. She asks if there is bread and Mommers gives her \$10, and then dismisses her by telling her to buy it at the minimart where her friends are. Denise leaves and Addie tries to have fun at the minimart, but comes home early to an empty trailer.

In Chapter 18, Friday becomes Saturday and Addie is still waiting for Denise to come home. The phone rings and it is Dwight, he wants to hear about her Halloween. Addie tells him everything is great and speaks with the girls. The girls tell her about Hannah, the woman who owns the mansion Dwight is working on. When Addie asks about Hannah, Dwight tells her he wants Addie to meet her. He says he will be at Grandio's for Thanksgiving and wants to bring Addie to meet Hannah and to stay for a couple of days after the holiday. He tells her he needs to clear this with Denise and asks if she is there.



Addie says no and Dwight seems to pick up on her hesitation. They get off the phone and Addie packs for the trip even though it is still three weeks away. Saturday becomes Sunday and Mommers still isn't home.

In Chapter 19, Addison is leaving for school Monday morning when Mommers pulls up in a new blue car. She is overly excited and acts as if it is normal to be gone for three days and then show up in a new car. She pushes Addie into the car and then drives her to school. As they leave, they pass Soula outside of the mini mart. Mommers is honking the horn and waiving, much to Addie's embarrassment. Addie gets out of the car at school and Mommers asks her if she wants to know where the car came from. Addie tells her she doesn't want to know. Mommers tells Addie that she isn't supportive. Addie agrees that she isn't.

In Chapter 20, Addie goes to the mini mart and Soula remarks that she hasn't seen her lately. Addie stayed in the trailer the entire time her mother was gone, out of fear that someone would find out her mom hadn't come home. Soula asks Addie if her mother has some problems with her moods. Addie tells Soula that her mom is sort of an all or nothing person. She goes home and thinks more about this. Addie remembers that her mother was going to nursing school and then suddenly quit, that she was in another college program and quit and then she started coming up with business ideas with people on the internet. It was those ideas that caused money fights with Dwight. Dwight supported all of Mommer's choices, until she lost money on the internet. Denise divorced him and didn't come home for three days. Addie feels that she blew everything by telling Dwight her mother was gone. If she hadn't told Dwight, then her sisters would still be with her and they would still live in the house they were in.

Chapters 11 - 20. Analysis

It is revealed in Chapter 11 that Elliot is gay and is dating the owner of the local pub, Rick. Soula's off-beat sense of humor is also displayed again when she tells Addie about the overpass graffiti.

In Chapter 12, Addie's mother has a way of saying things to her daughter that are unkind. Addie accepts these comments as truth and doesn't seem to question them. Addie is scared when she finds that Soula is so sick and she isn't sure what to do. However, it is apparent that being with Addie brings Soula great joy and comfort.

In Chapter 13, Denise's job interview seems slightly suspicious, but Addie is happy for her. She doesn't seem to be upset that she has to make her own dinner and clean while her mother goes out on the town.

In Chapter 14, Addie is terrified of what might happen if her mother doesn't come home. She doesn't seem to be concerned about safety, but more about the problems that will be caused if her mother stays away. Addie also reveals that she has a learning disorder that centers around spatial relationships. She describes it as words sliding around on



the page. Her new friends, Marissa and Helena, try to help her and try hard to make her feel normal.

In Chapter 15, whatever "business" Denise has become involved in, seems to be a scam.

In Chapter 16, Addie and Mommers have a great time out to eat with each other. They seem to have a nice relationship when Mommers is in the mood to have one. Addie takes things in stride, although she is worried about money and how Mommers is paying for things.

In Chapter 17, Denise has been lying to her boss about her work and about her circumstances. Addie is chilled when she realizes this and knows that something bad will eventually happen. Denise doesn't want Addie to enjoy Halloween, but has not intention of denying herself any fun on the holiday. She doesn't think twice about Addie's health or safety before she leaves for a trip out-of-town. Addie is sad, lonely and depressed at the end of the night.

In Chapter 18, Addie is disappointed she won't be able to see Dwight and the girls for three weeks, but she is so excited at being able to stay the weekend with them that she soon forgets her disappointment. She is slightly worried that her mother still isn't home, but Dwight's news makes that feel better too. She is almost out of bread, but still has some money left over from the ten dollars her mother gave her.

In Chapter 19, Addie is excited to ride in the car because they don't have one. She thinks it has been a few month since she has ridden in anyone's car. She is embarrassed by her mother's out-of-control excited behavior and has a bad feeling about the car.

By Chapter 20, it has become obvious at this point in the book that Addie's mother suffers from some sort of bipolar disorder. To Addie, her mother's behavior is normal. Addie believes the unkind things that her mother says to her and she blames herself for their family being broken up. She has yet to feel that their circumstances are truly her mother's fault. Although, Addie doesn't blame anyone else either.



Chapters 21 - 30.

Chapters 21 - 30. Summary

In Chapter 21, Addie's mother doesn't have a problem with Addie going to Grandio's and then on to Dwight's place for Thanksgiving. She tells Addie that she won't go to Grandio's and that she will make other plans for herself. She also tells Addie not to get on the wrong bus coming home because she doesn't want to have to go looking for her. Addie is thrilled when her mother drops her off in the driveway of Grandio's farmhouse with her flute and a paper bag for a suitcase. The place reminds Addie of better times when her family was normal. She remembers Dwight helping Grandio on the farm and Grandio saying having Dwight was like having a son again. Grandio calls for Addie to come in the house and she is surprised to find a huge Thanksgiving feast prepared. A few minutes later Dwight shows up with the Littles and Hannah. Dwight tells Addie that he and the girls have moved into Hannah's mansion, which she is turning into a bed and breakfast, and that they would like to be married soon. He tells Addie he wishes they could all be together, her included. Addie is devastated, but she is happy for Dwight and the girls and she likes Hannah a lot so far.

In Chapter 22, Addie decides that she needs to do some snooping around about Hannah, so she arranges for them to sit by the fire after dinner where they can talk privately. Addie asks Hannah what she did before she opened the bed and breakfast. Hannah tells Addie that her life was lived by twos and fours. She went to work for two years, college for four, on a trip with two friends, stayed out West for four years, etc. Eventually her parents became sick so she moved home. She was about to leave again when she found and bought the bed and breakfast. Hannah ends the chapter by telling Addie that now she has fours again, four reasons to change her life: Dwight, the Littles and Addie.

In Chapter 23, Addie arrives at the Lake George mansion on Thanksgiving night. The place is large and she tells Dwight that she can see why he likes it so much. Dwight takes Brynna into the house and Hannah picks up Katie. Addie follows them inside and watches them go through their bedtime routine. She isn't sure why, but watching them have a routine without her leaves her feeling sad and left out. Dwight and Hannah notice her staring at them all and ask what is wrong. Addie doesn't know what to say so she tells them the girls have to potty before bed. Dwight takes Brynna to the bathroom and Hannah asks Addie if she would like to do Katie's diaper. Addie tells Hannah that she took care of the girls for three days one winter all by herself. Hannah says she has heard the story. Brynna says she wants to hear the story, but then falls asleep in the middle of asking to hear it. Addie and Hannah laugh and Addie decides she really likes Hannah.

In Chapter 24, Addie wakes up to the smell of pancakes and to her little sisters waiting for her. The three girls go downstairs and find Hannah cooking breakfast. Dwight has already left the house for work. Addie tells Hannah to give the girls the first pancakes



and that she will make her own. Hannah tells her that the first person up gets to make the breakfast. Addie is amazed by this. The girls follow Hannah to the basement where she has an arts and crafts mail order business. She finds crafters and then fills their orders over the internet. The girls help Hannah fill the orders and load the boxes each day. Every day in the afternoon they eat lunch and then go outside to play. On the last night, while walking to the bathroom, Addie overhears a conversation between Hannah and Dwight. Hannah and Dwight would like Addie to come and live with them. Dwight has tried to get custody of Addie before, but was told by the judge that he had no chance unless Denise was willing to sign over her custody rights. Unless Denise messes up again there is no way he will get custody of Addie. Addie is a daughter to him in his heart, but not by blood. Hannah tells Dwight she wants Addie to come and see them whenever she can. Addie is thrilled to hear that Dwight tried for custody, but feels maybe it is her job to be Denise's family. The next morning Addie wakes up early and makes breakfast for everyone. Katie tells her she wishes Addie was with them all the time at home. Addie reminds all of them that she has a Stage Orchestra concert in the middle of December.

In Chapter 25, Addie gets off the bus and is disappointed to find that her mother isn't there to greet her after being gone for four days. She heads to the mini mart to check on Soula and Elliot. Things have been the same since Addie has been gone, Soula has had four chemotherapy treatments and only has two more to go. They are all sitting in the mini mart talking when Addie realizes she needs to check on her hamster, Piccolo. Addie arrives at the trailer to find that she is locked out, she goes to her window to check on the hamster and is startled when Mommers pulls up. Mommers tells Addie she has taken care of the hamster and asks Addie to help her unload the trunk. Mommers has brought home two turkey carcasses from the soup kitchen and pounds and pounds of potatoes, onions and soup fixings. She plans on making tons of soup for them to eat. Mommers explains that her plans with Pete fell through so she volunteered for Thanksgiving at the soup kitchen. Addie cleans Piccolo's cage while her mother makes soup. Mommers seems to be in a very good mood and mentions that they need to get Addie an outfit for her performance in a couple of weeks. Addie tells her that she will stop at Goodwill and find something. They eat soup and Addie notes that Piccolo has already begun to build a new nest in his cage; she destroyed the old one when cleaning.

In Chapter 26, Addie wakes up for school and decides that her day is not starting off well. She gets the last piece of her favorite bread, but it burns in the toaster while she is trying to find a pair of underwear that still fit and are in good shape. She finds underwear, stuck to the back of her sweater, only to find that she has had her first period and now the underwear are ruined. She wakes up Mommers and is given pads and a pair of underwear to put on. Addie goes to school and Ms. Rivera asks her to perform a solo piece at the concert in 10 days. Addie agrees, but is nervous and jokes with Helena about being dressed in a black skirt, a white shirt and a red face. Mommers comes home and hands Addie a box with a dress in it. She has purchased Addie a tight black dress with ruffles and spaghetti straps to wear for the concert. Addie hates the dress as it is way to old for her. Her mother could care less about her discomfort. At that moment Dwight shows up at the door with a poinsettia and money he owes Denise for



the first of December. He is shocked by the dress Addie has on and agrees with Addie that it is inappropriate. Mommers tells him that he has no say in the matter and neither does Addie. Addie goes to her bunk and hides. Mommers also embarrasses Addie and Dwight by telling him that Addie has started to menstruate. Dwight calls to apologize to Addie and Addie cries over the dress.

In Chapter 27, it is the day of the concert and the Stage Orchestra has a rehearsal in front of faculty and staff. Everyone hits their notes perfectly. Including Addie. After the rehearsal Addie is upset, she tells Helena about the dress her mother picked out and how embarrassed she will be. Helena suggests that she put a sweater over it. The girls walk home past the fire house and Helena jokes that Addie should ask them for a rain coat to cover the dress. Addie sees a hibiscus plant blooming in a store and asks Soula about it. Soula comments that the plant is willing to bloom in strange circumstances. Addie figures she is also willing to bloom in strange circumstances.

In Chapter 28, the concert is only hours away so Addie settles in to wait for Mommers to get home. At six she decides to eat and shower so that they can be on time for the concert to start at seven. At seven-fifteen Mommers still isn't there. Dwight calls and Ms. Rivera holds up the concert so he can pick up Addie. Addie arrives ready to play, but backs out when she realizes her old music teacher is in the audience. Addie thinks the teacher will know she is playing with a flute stolen from her old school. Hannah and the girls come up and Dwight suggests they look at Christmas lights and then head to Numbskull Dorry's for dinner as planned. Addie asks to go home and change first. Denise arrives at Dorry's and begins yelling at Addie. She is a mess and wants to know why Addie wasn't on stage playing like Mommers expected when she arrived at the school. Everyone is uncomfortable, and then Addie tells her mother that she waited for her at the trailer forever.

In Chapter 29, as Denise and Addie stare at each other in the diner something seems to change inside Denise. She is no longer angry or rude. She seems to have calmed down and is now confused by her own behavior. Addie feels sorry for her mother because it is clear that Brynna and Katie would rather sit by Hannah than Denise. Katie keeps the conversation light, but Brynna won't look at her mother. Addie goes home that night and feels terrible that she let everyone down. She decides to quit the flute and feels that if she had never taken it up then this wouldn't have happened. Realizing that library books would always get lost in the house, she stopped checking them out.

In Chapter 30, Addie wakes up on Saturday to the sound of Mommers talking to Dwight. Dwight has asked to have Addie for half of Christmas break. Denise told him she would think about it. Denise leaves for the day and Addie gets dressed to return the flute. It is cold outside and she needs boots, but she doesn't have any. She walks to her old school and waits for a road crew to leave before she sets down the flute and says goodbye to her music.



Chapters 21 - 30. Analysis

In Chapter 21, Addie wants to dislike Hannah, but she can't. She thinks it is unfair that Hannah now has a connection with Dwight and the Littles, a connection that should be hers. She is happy that Dwight has found happiness, but is concerned about being left behind. Addie is also upset when Grandio makes unkind comments about her mother in front of Hannah.

In Chapter 22, Hannah seems to be a warm, giving and genuinely loving woman who accepts Dwight and his kids, including Addie, with open arms. She is clearly looking forward to a new life with them and with her new business. Addie really likes her and decides this is the most thankful she has been in a long time. Addie also sees how wonderful Hannah will be for her sisters.

In Chapter 23, seeing that Dwight, Hannah and the girls have a normal bedtime routine is strange for Addie. She is used to being the person in charge of the girls, which is her usual role in the family. It seems that Addie now has no role and she feels out of place. Hannah clearly tries to give her reassurance by allowing her to change Katie and by laughing about Brynna with her.

In Chapter 24, finally, Addie has found a place where life is normal. She loves her mother, and feels responsible for her, but it is nice to be in a place where she is loved and wanted. Addie doesn't want to leave, but it means the world to her that Dwight wants custody of her. Some foreshadowing may be occurring here in the bedtime conversation between Hannah and Dwight. Dwight tells Hannah that he can't get custody of Addie unless Denise "messes up" again. Addie has overheard this and it may become a catalyst for her telling on her mother's recent bad behavior.

In Chapter 25, even though Addie's home with Mommers isn't perfect, it is the only home she has. She is glad to be with her mother and to get to see Piccolo, Soula and Elliot. She is also glad to be back at the trailer. Even though it is noisy and small, it is her home and it is familiar. Addie is nervous when she talks to Mommers about Dwight, but her mother already knows that Dwight has moved in with Hannah and she seems to be happy for them. Denise asks if the little girls missed her and Addie tells her that they asked about her as soon as they saw Addie.

In Chapter 26, Denise is a cruel and thoughtless person who doesn't think about how her words and actions affect others. She thinks that Addie is too conservative and insists that she wear the dress, even though it is inappropriate for Addie's age. Denise seems to take pleasure in telling Dwight that he isn't Addie's father.

In Chapter 27, Addie is scared and nervous about the evening's concert. She isn't sure she can perform so perfectly twice in one day. She also is worried about looking silly in the dress her mother bought.

In Chapter 28, Addie is furious at her mother for letting her down. She is embarrassed that she has a stolen flute and she is heartbroken that she didn't get to play in the recital

she worked so hard on. Mommers coming into the diner in a rage, acting like she did nothing wrong, seems to be the last straw for Addie.

In Chapter 29, Addie is always feeling sorry for her mother, but has yet to realize that her mother is the cause of her own problems. Any time Addie can take the blame for her mother's behavior, or dismiss her bad behavior, she will.

In Chapter 30, Addie leaves the flute at her old school in yet another attempt to right her mother's wrongs. She decides that she is finished with music and hopes never to hear about the flute again. However, Addie loves music, which is shown by the fact that she sings her orchestra tunes during her long walk to the old school.



Chapters 31 - 40.

Chapters 31 - 40. Summary

In Chapter 31, Addie's walk home from her old school is a cold one. She tries to run as much as she can to stay warm, it is twenty-two degrees outside and she doesn't have boots on. Halfway home she has an unexpected meet-up with Grandio who sees her as he is driving by. He picks her up and they have Saturday lunch at his favorite hamburger place; it is a place they used to go to every week when Dwight and Mommers were still married. After lunch Grandio drops her off and gives her twenty dollars just to spend on herself. Addie is excited and wants to spend it before her mother can borrow it and not give it back. She goes to the mini mart and buys a cup of soup. Soula tells her that she could have it for free, but Addie is so excited to have money that she insists on paying. Elliot is installing a new phone for Soula, who thinks the phone is too high tech and unnecessary. Soula asks about Addie's Christmas plans and Addie tells her she might visit her sisters. Elliot remarks that some day Addie will probably leave the area and stay in Lake George. Addie doesn't see that happening.

In Chapter 32, Addie arrives at school on Monday and is confronted by Ms. Rivera. The teacher wants to know what happened at the Stage Orchestra concert. Addie explains about the flute and Ms. Rivera tells her that they may be able to get her another one. Addie tells her no thank you; she doesn't want to be responsible for someone else's flute again. On the way home she explains this to Helena and her friend is sympathetic. They pass the fire house and are each given a box of chocolates by a fireman dressed as Santa. Addie stops at the mini mart to share her chocolates, but Soula tells her to save them for later. Soula, Elliot and Rick give Addie a Christmas present of new warm boots, socks, pink nail polish, hot chocolate and microwave popcorn. Addie is thrilled. Before she leaves Soula gives her another present to open when she gets home. The present contains new underwear and Addie is touched that Soula didn't want her embarrassed in front of Elliot. Addie's mother is home, which is strange for a Friday night. Denise tells Addie that Pete had plans. She asks Addie to make dinner while she watches TV and talks in an internet chat room. Addie makes sugar cookies for Soula, Elliot and Rick and tells her mother she gave the flute back. Denise is surprised and tells Addie she will get her another one, Addie isn't too worried about her mother following through with her plan. Out of the blue Denise tells Addie she will allow her to spend the week between Christmas and New Year's with Dwight. Addie is excited as she considers getting to see Dwight and the girls the third Christmas gift she has received that day!

In Chapter 33, Addie can't wait for Christmas to come and go. She is walking inside with her third load of laundry from the Laundromat when her mother meets her at the door. Denise remarks that Addie is in a hurry to get out of here and to Dwight's. Addie ignores her and begins to sort clothes. She picks up her box of chocolates only to find that her mother has eaten all but one, and that one has a bit taken out. Addie is upset and Mommers makes fun of her for being mad. Then Denise takes the last chocolate,



laughs and eats it. She grabs one of Addie's clean towels and heads off to the shower. Before she shuts the bathroom door she asks Addie what she is looking for at Dwight's. Addie doesn't respond, but thinks to herself that she is just waiting for normal.

In Chapter 34, Mommers goes out for a drink with Pete on Christmas Eve and doesn't return until around nine on Christmas morning. When she comes home she hurriedly wraps a few presents for Addie and then tries to rush Addie through opening. Addie notices and asks her mother if she is trying to get out of the house again. Her mother says, no. Addie gets a notebook and pen from her mother, a sweater and a new box of chocolates. She gives her mother a lamp shade for the overhead light. They turn on the TV and Denise complains that Dwight won't pay for them to have cable. Then she turns on Christmas services and makes fun of the singing. Addie is saddened by this, Mommers didn't get a tree and Christmas morning wasn't great. She feels that the music makes the day feel more Christmassy. Addie asks Denise what they should make for Christmas dinner and is told that Denise won't be there. She has plans with Pete to go sleigh riding. When Addie objects, Denise tells her she is leaving the next day so what is the big deal? Addie is devastated as it is clear that Denise still hasn't told Pete she has children. Denise explains that Pete isn't a family man, but he will be soon because she is pregnant. Addie is dumbstruck. She asks her mom how this will make Pete a family man and who will take care of the baby. She tells Denise that she can't believe she would do this. Denise gets upset by Addie's lack of support, takes Addie's only snow hat and leaves to see Pete.

In Chapter 35, Addie steps off of the bus at Lake George and is met by the entire family. Her brown clothing bag breaks on the way to the car, but it is ok because one of her gifts is a new duffle bag. Dwight and Hannah held off Christmas for Addie so the whole family could enjoy it together. After dinner Addie tells Dwight that Brynna is smart and then tells him she isn't. Dwight is upset to hear Addie say this and blames her words on Denise. He tells her that she has Dyslexia, and the learning disability doesn't make her not smart, it just means she learns a different way. He also tells Addie that Brynna has had a hard time coping with leaving Denise and they have taken her to see a therapist. Addie wants to tell Dwight about the new baby and Pete, but she feels that Dwight's world is a vacation and she knows that her reality is with her mother. They have a wonderful visit, but on the last night Addie decides that this isn't something she can do anymore.

In Chapter 36, January begins by dumping foot on foot of snow in upstate New York. Addie and her friends joke that school is out more than it is in. She spends most of her time with Soula and Elliot, cardboarding (cardboard used as a sled) down the snow mountain that the city has put in front of Soula's windows on the Empty Acre. The snow pile upsets Elliot, but Soula and Addie see it as a means for fun. The adults watch Addie play on the pile all day, the three have a great time. It has been six days since Denise has last been home and five days since she has called. Addie knows her mother could get home if she wanted too, but Denise blames the snow for her absence. Dwight calls and asks Addie to visit, but Addie tells him the busses aren't running because of the snow. He asks to speak to Denise, but Addie tells him the phone connection is bad and hangs up. He calls back, but she doesn't answer.



In Chapter 37, Denise finally comes home and has no remorse for being gone for so long. Addie tries to make an issue of her absence, but Denise throws in her face that there is food and the pipes aren't frozen so to lay off. Denise is in a panic about Dwight's monthly check. It is early, but post-dated so she can't cash it. She convinces Addie to ask Soula to cash it at the mini mart. Soula agrees, but Addie knows this won't be the only time something financially bad happens. Denise tells Addie that she needs the money to pay Pete, Pete was not happy when the credit card bill came. She also tells Addie to go easy on the grocery list, then only brings home half of the groceries on the list before leaving again. That afternoon Grandio shows up at Dwight's request. He checks to see if everything is ok and is not happy about what he finds, although he doesn't say much to Addie about it. He asks Addie if the phone and answering machine are broken. Dwight has been leaving messages and no one calls him back. Grandio tells Addie that the Littles are sick and then he leaves. Addie tells Piccolo that they are officially on notice, it is just a matter of time before Dwight sends Grandio again or shows up himself.

In Chapter 38, Addie walks out of school on Valentine's Day to find Dwight waiting for her. He has been inside to ask how she is doing, but the school can only tell him so much because he is not her guardian. He purchased her a roll of lunch tickets and asks her to walk with him. Dwight gives Addie her own ATM card and shows her how to use it. He tells her it is for emergencies and asks her not to tell Denise about the card. Addie agrees and wants Dwight to leave. She doesn't want to see him anymore because leaving him is too hard. Dwight asks what is wrong and she basically tells him this. He thinks on what she says, but it is clear that he needs time to work some things out. He tells Addie their discussion isn't over and he drops her off at the trailer. Addie doesn't let him in and she doesn't hug him good-bye. She is lonely in the trailer and feels bad that she was mean to Dwight, but she feels it needed to be done. She looks through the pantry and fills empty boxes with a magazine and pins so if Grandio comes over he won't find out they are empty. She wants to be with her family, but is resigned to her fate with Denise. At least, she thinks, Mommers always comes home before the food runs out.

In Chapter 39, Mommers is home the next time Dwight calls. He asks to have Addie for the long weekend in February and Denise tells him, "no." Addie wonders if he will stop asking now. They unload groceries and Addie silently counts up how many meals they will have. Denise comments on how much food they have left and Addie tells her she filled the empty boxes in case Grandio comes back. Hearing that Grandio was at the trailer makes Denise angry. She asks Mommers if she is staying and Mommers replies that she is here now. Then she lights a cigarette. Addie asks her if that is ok for the baby and Mommers throws Addie's disapproval of the baby in her face. Then she says that she is quitting, she is just stressed. After that she asks Addie to make dinner stating that pregnancy makes her tired.

In Chapter 40, Addie has begun to eat most of her suppers with Soula and Elliot. She makes them toast dinner with tomato soup on top and Soula tells her how much she loves it. Addie has noticed Soula's skin is turning yellow and Soula tells her that nothing really tastes good anymore. Elliot tries to make Soula eat salad and they get into a fight.



He wants her to eat healthy. She asks him if she looks healthy to him. After the fight, Elliot apologizes and Soula makes him promise that he will throw a party and make a huge chocolate cake after her last chemotherapy. Addie goes home to find Mommers making Fiesta Night dinner. Addie tells her she has eaten and Denise tells her she will eat again. Denise makes a huge mess in the kitchen for Addie to clean up. Addie is fed up and angry, she tells Denise she knows that she is just stuffing food in the house so that she can leave again. She tells Denise that they are going to get caught and is angry that Denise still hasn't told Pete that she has children or that she is pregnant again. Denise tells Addie that they will not get caught because Addie is older and can take care of herself. She tells Addie she will clean the rest of the mess. Addie agrees that her mother will clean it and wakes her up in the morning with a reminder to get the kitchen clean.

Chapters 31 - 40. Analysis

In Chapter 31, Grandio is an interesting character. He loves Addie, but hates her mother. Grandio allows his irritation for Denise to get in the way of his relationship with Addie. Addie's memories of Grandio seem to be centered on her mother's marriage to Dwight. After the divorce it seems that Grandio and Addie are no longer close. However, Grandio and Dwight must still be close if Dwight and Hannah spent Thanksgiving with the old man. As much as Addie admires her grandfather, he seems to be like her mother in the way that he looks out for his own interests and can't be bothered to be there for Addie no matter what.

In Chapter 32, the mother-daughter dynamic between Addie and Denise is very dysfunctional. Denise seems to feel that it is Addie's responsibility to take care of herself and her mother. Denise doesn't seem to have maternal behavior when it comes to her daughters; she spends her time taking care of herself. However, when she feels like controlling Addie or bullying her, Denise will pull the "I am the mother" act to get what she wants. Denise should be humiliated that strangers would feel the need to buy her daughter boots and underwear, but she doesn't seem to think about their act of kindness at all. Addie, on the other hand, is too young and naive to understand Soula and Elliot's motives for purchasing these types of gifts. To Addie, Soula, and Elliot are wonderful, giving friends.

In Chapter 33, Addie's mother is selfish, rude, and mean-spirited. It is unclear what her motive is for allowing Addie to see Dwight during her break, but most likely she has found something to do with her friends on the internet. It seems that Denise may be slightly jealous of Addie's dependency on Dwight, but if she is she doesn't show it too much.

In Chapter 34, Denise's world is filled with poor decisions and bad consequences. None of which she blames on herself. Her poor choices cause destruction in the lives of those around her, especially in Addie's life, but Denise is too self-centered to see this. The consequences of a new baby coming are not lost on Addie. When she asks who will care for the baby she already knows that the answer is her.



In Chapter 35, Addie likes her time with Dwight to her stolen flute. It is clear that she has made some sort of decision about her life, but it isn't clear what that decision may be. She could decide to walk away from Dwight and the girls, as she did the flute. Or she could decide to tell on her mother so she can be taken away from Mommers. However, considering the responsibility Addie feels for her mother - and the new baby - any choice that will take her out of her mother's home will be a tough one for her to make.

In Chapter 36, Addie knows her mother is neglecting her and she doesn't want Dwight to find out. She runs through the contents of the kitchen and decides she is fine with some mac and cheese, cans of soup and two eggs. It is clear now that Addie's way of dealing with the sadness of leaving Dwight and the girls is to avoid them completely.

In Chapter 37, Addie's small safety net is starting to fade again. Her mother is back to her old bad behavior and now there are money problems that threaten Addie's newfound friendships (at least in her mind). Addie's guard is up as she tries to cover for her mother's behavior. Addie finds herself trying to hide from everyone around here who may be able to tell what is going on in the house. She doesn't seem to realize that the adults around her understand her circumstances better than she thinks. At this moment Addie is trying to keep life from spinning out of control. It isn't clear how much longer she will be able to accomplish this, and she knows it.

In Chapter 38, Dwight knows there is a problem and Addie understands that he knows. At this moment they are in a holding pattern. Addie wishes she could make him go away, leaving her to run her world without fear of ruining things like she did when she told Dwight that Mommers was gone all those years ago. She is terrified that if she tells the truth about her situation her family will be destroyed even further. Dwight seems to have his hands tied. He has no legal right to Addie, but he wants her to be safely living with himself and Hannah. As they stated on Addie's first visit, there is nothing the courts can do until Denise messes up again.

In the past few chapters, Addie's resentment and intolerance of her mother's behavior has begun to grow. In the beginning of the book, Addie seemed to accept her mother's behavior and to deal with it. However, recently she has begun to challenge and question her mother. This reflects her growing irritation with her mother's behavior.

In Chapter 40, if Fiesta Night is any indication, Addie is finished taking care of her mother's messes. The mess from dinner is symbolic of all the messes Addie has to clean up after for her mother. She has finally expressed, out loud, her fear that her mother will be caught leaving her alone again.



Chapters 41 - 49.

Chapters 41 - 49. Summary

In Chapter 41, Addie stops by the mini mart, but Soula is in bed. Elliot tells her that they have delayed the last chemo treatment so Soula's body can have a break. Addie understands, Soula told her that chemo was the cure, but the cure was a killer. Elliot seems sad, so Addie stays and the two of them dance to new music on the radio. Addie returns home through the water caused by the March weather on the melting snow piles. Mommers hasn't been home and never cleaned up the last of the Fiesta Night mess. Addie cleans all but the mess that Mommers was supposed to clean. She refuses. She tells Piccolo that from now on she is only taking care of herself and the hamster.

In Chapter 42, Addie is awakened at five in the morning and thinks that her mother is home. Denise is still gone, but Addie can't get back to sleep. She pulls out her last hot cocoa and boils some water. However, Addie turned on the wrong burner and the Fiesta Night pan, clogged with grease, catches fire. Within minutes the trailer is engulfed in flames. Addie grabs Piccolo and runs out the front door. She is met by Soula who pulls her away from the trailer. The effort and stress are too much for Soula so Addie gets the lawn chair from the mini mart and they wait outside for the fire department. Soula tells Addie that she is thankful for the new phones that Elliot installed, she saw smoke and just had to press a button for the fire department. Addie tells Soula that the fire is her fault because she turned on the wrong burner. Soula assures her that it doesn't matter. Addie tells the firemen that the trailer is hooked up to the Laundromat, this information saves the Laundromat from catching fire.

In Chapter 43, Elliot arrives and takes Soula and Piccolo into the mini mart. Addie is still in her robe, but she can't go inside. She is having a hard time processing what has happened. Gawkers come and go and a woman arrives in a silver car. Grandio arrives a few minutes later and the woman identifies herself as someone from the Department of Youth and Family Services. Addie glances into the mini mart and knows Soula called them. She asks Soula to take care of Piccolo and Soula tells her that she called Family Services. She tells Addie that she should have done it a long time ago. Addie understands, but can't express this to Soula. She gets into her grandfather's car and looks out at Soula, then writes the word "hero" to Soula on the fogged up car window. It is unclear if Soula sees this.

In Chapter 44, Grandio has Addie call Dwight when they reach the house. Dwight is shocked by what has happened and drives down immediately with the Littles and Hannah. Grandio tells Addie to get showered and they all enjoy a happy, surprisingly upbeat, dinner together. Dwight tells Addie that he doesn't care about the trailer, just her. Then he jokes that if she was going to have a bonfire she should have called. Addie sits with Dwight on the couch until he and Hannah have to leave.



In Chapter 45, Helena and her mother bring a box of donated clothes out to Grandio's farm. Addie and Helena act as if they will see each other again, but Addie doubts that will happen. Addie will be going back to her old school now that she is living at Grandio's. Child Services found Addie's mother and there was some talk that her mother was put in jail. Addie isn't too concerned and knows that Family Services will contact her when they have questions. That night she asks Grandio if they can get Piccolo back from Soula, he agrees.

In Chapter 46, Addie arrives at the mini mart to pick up Piccolo and to hug Soula. When she gets there Elliot has some bad news. Soula has passed away. Addie immediately blames herself and the fire, but Elliot assures her that the cancer was just too much for Soula to take. Addie stays with Elliot and cries a lot. Elliot gives her an envelop from Soula. Inside is \$300 and a letter. Soula tells Addie that she wants her to use the money to buy a flute and to get her dreams back on track. She also tells her that if she made any mistakes trying to help Addie, she is sorry. She says that being a hero isn't easy. Elliot promises Addie he will take her to get a flute. Addie looks at Piccolo, but only sees Soula.

In Chapter 47, after five weeks of staying away, under court order, Mommers arrives at Grandio's house. Grandio allows them five minutes to talk. Mommers is a mess. She has told Pete about the baby and knows it will be a boy. Pete is shocked by all she has hidden from her, but has agreed to help with the baby. The court is making Denise take parenting classes. Denise asks Addie what she wants and Addie tells her she just wants normal. Addie tells her mother that "normal" is being able to predict what will happen next, something she can't do with Denise's "all or nothing" attitude. Grandio yells that time is up and Denise leaves. Over dinner Grandio begins to rip into Denise again. Addie yells at him to stop and he agrees to let it go.

In Chapter 48, May becomes June and Addie is still living at Grandio's house. Mrs. Casey, from Family Services, comes often to ask her questions. Addie thinks that Mrs. Casey is wasting everyone's time; eventually she will end up back with Mommers. Dwight and Hannah come a few times each week to visit. They have decided to put off their wedding until some things get settled. Addie knows that they are ok because Brynna isn't upset and Dwight is always holding Hannah's hand. Elliot and Rick take Addie to the mall to look for a flute. She puts her name on a waiting list for a second hand flute. The three enjoy their time together and leave the mall laughing. Later in June, Dwight shows up with amazing news. Denise has signed over her rights to Addie to Dwight. Addie has officially been adopted by Dwight. Addie, Dwight and Grandio are thrilled. They have been working on the papers for a while, but didn't want to tell Addie until it was official. Grandio remarks that Denise finally did something right.

In Chapter 49, everyone agrees that Addie should finish out the last two weeks of school at Grandio's house. When the time comes, Dwight comes to pick up Addie and Piccolo and take them home to the mansion at Lake George. Addie thinks about Mommers and some of the good times they had together. She will see her mother again, maybe when Mommers brings the new baby to meet her other children. Addie knows that her mother loves her and decides to make a point of telling Brynna and Katie



that Mommers loves them too. Dwight's truck pulls into the driveway of Addie's new home and her sisters rush out to greet her with a welcome banner. Addie rushes up the steps and is finally home. She has found a "normal" life.

Chapters 41 - 49. Analysis

In Chapter 41, Soula's cancer seems to be progressing and it has Elliot very worried. It is unclear how much Addie understands about Soula's prognosis, but she knows things are not good. Addie has taken a stand with the Fiesta Night dishes and seems to be willing to stick to her decision.

In Chapter 42, Addie blames herself for the fire because she refused to clean her mother's pan. However, Soula reassures her that everything is ok. Soula knows her mother isn't home and is horrified by what could have happened to Addie if she hadn't been awake to call the fire department. This is the moment of truth for Addie and her mother. There is no way that the fire can be hidden from Dwight, Grandio or the authorities.

In Chapter 43, Addie doesn't want to deal with Family Services, but she knows that it is time. She feels betrayed by Soula, but understands why Soula did what she did. She also feels guilty for causing Soula so much pain when she is already sick. When Addie writes "hero" on the car window it becomes clear that she needed someone to help her, because she couldn't help herself. The chapters are getting shorter now and the pacing is picking up. The fire represents the turning point in the plot. Now the subplots must be resolved.

The tone of Chapter 44 seems to be one of relief. Now that Mommer's absences have been exposed, and the fire has happened, something can finally be done to take care of Addie. The fire was a catalyst for change within the lives of everyone in the book. Interestingly, there is no talk of Denise or of finding Denise to tell her what has happened. Dwight's big heart is again reflected in his care and concern for Addie, a girl who isn't his daughter by blood.

In Chapter 45, Addie weathers the changes in her life very well. She seems to know what to expect next and doesn't have too much concern for what will happen to her mother.

In Chapter 46, Soula did see the writing on Grandio's car window the day of the fire. Her note to Addie is beautiful and understanding. It is the perfect closure for the Addie-Soula subplot. Soula understood far more about Addie and her life than she let on and she hopes that her actions and words will help the girl in the future. It is poignant that Soula's last two acts before death were the acts that will save Addie's life.

In Chapter 47, it is clear that Denise is lost. She has a mess to clean up with Pete and a mess to clean up with Addie. She seems to love Addie, she is just incapable of taking care of her. Grandio is upset with Denise, but he also seems to be somewhat upset with



himself for not protecting Addie the way he should have. Addie doesn't know what is going to happen. Grandio doesn't seem to be the "normal" that she is looking for.

In Chapter 48, Grandio said it best when he tells Dwight and Addie that Denise has done a good thing. In fact, Denise signed over custody of Addie with no stipulations or conditions. Denise's motives for giving Addie to Dwight are not known, but it is hoped that she realizes taking care of Addie is too much for her and that Addie will be happier with Dwight and Hannah.

In Chapter 49, the book concludes with a happy ending for everyone. There is even hope that Addie will still see her mother and her belief that her mother loves her. After all of the ups and downs in Addie's life, she is finally going to have the normal life that she pines for and deserves.



Characters

Addison Schmeeter.

Addison Schmeeter is a cheerful, loving twelve-year-old girl who is in the sixth grade. Addie loves to play the flute and has a learning disability called dyslexia. Addie thinks that she isn't a very smart girl because learning doesn't come easy for her. Or, as she terms it, because she doesn't have the Love of Learning that her mother has. Addie has had a life full of abandonment. Her mother has emotional problems and is never there for Addie when she needs to be. The only stable person in Addie's life is her ex-stepfather, Dwight, who loves her as if she were his own daughter. Addie makes friends easily and is a thoughtful girl who thinks of others before herself. She has a hamster named Piccolo and was responsible for her younger sisters until they were taken away from her mother to live with Dwight. Addie wishes that she could be with them too, but knows that her place will always be with her mother. Addie's job seems to be taking care of her mother and hiding her mother's massive mistakes.

Denise.

Denise, aka Mommers, is Addie's mother. It is probable that Denise suffers from bi-polar disorder. She seems to ruin most of her relationships with her impulsivity and selfish behaviors. Denise is angry with her ex-husband Dwight, even though he pays her alimony every month and takes care of their two children and Addie. Denise doesn't know how to take responsibility for herself or for her actions. Addie describes Denise's behavior as, "all or nothing." She is not a maternal character and thinks nothing of leaving Addie alone for days without food or supervision. Denise feels that Dwight owes her and blames her problems on everyone but herself.

Dwight.

Dwight is Addie's ex-stepfather and is the father of her sisters, Brynna and Katie. Dwight is a loving man who feels that Addie is his own daughter. He feels responsible for Denise because she is the mother of his children, and because he knows that if he abandons Denise Addie will suffer too. Dwight knows that it is just a matter of time before Denise does something to put Addie in danger. He has been told by the courts that he has no claim on Addie because she is not his daughter. Dwight is a quiet man who doesn't like confrontation. He is also the the most stable, constant person in Addie's life.

Brynna and Katie.

Brynna, 6, and Katie, 3, are Addie's little sisters. Addie and Dwight refer to the girls as the Littles. Addie loves her sisters and is devastated she can't live with them all the time.



The girls have lived with Dwight since Denise left them home alone for three days when Katie was just a year old. Bryanna and Katie love their sister. Bryanna suffers from some emotional problems due to their mother's behavior.

Soula.

Soula owns the minimart across the street from Addie's trailer. Soula is a large woman with a wonderful sense of humor. She has been fighting breast cancer and eventually has 5 chemotherapy treatments for the disease. Soula knows that Addie's life is not an easy one and takes the girl under her wing. Soula enjoys having Addie around and it is clear that Addie brings joy into Soula's life.

Elliot.

Elliot is Soula's best friend. He helps her around the store and tries to make her life easier as she is going through her treatments. Soula and Elliot don't always see eye-to-eye on how Soula should take care of herself, but their friendship helps them to understand their differences. Elliot is a gay man and is dating a man named Rick. Rick owns Numbskull Dorry's Pub.

Grandio.

Grandio, Jack, is Addie's paternal grandfather. Addie's father died when she was three, after her parents were divorced. Grandio is a gruff old man who loves his granddaughter, but hates her mother. Addie has seen very little of Grandio in the last few years because he and Denise can't be civil to each other. Grandio is not there for Addie in the way that he probably could be. However, when Addie needs him the most, he is there for her.

Hannah.

Hannah is a generous and loving woman with whom Dwight has fallen in love. She owns the mansion at Lake George where Dwight has been working. Dwight and Hannah are planning to get married in the spring. Hannah loves the Littles and Addie. She supports Dwight's decisions and wants all three of the girls to live with them.

Marissa and Helena.

Marissa and Helena are Addie's new friends at school. They sit together, chat with each other and walk together after school. Marissa and Helena both know Addie has a learning disability and they are very supportive of her.



Robert.

Robert is a boy in the Stage Orchestra who also has classes with Addie, Marissa, and Helena. Robert is a bully and has a habit of saying unkind things to the girls.

Piccolo.

Piccolo is Addie's white hamster. Dwight showed up with Piccolo one day as a surprise for Addie. Addie feeds and cares for Piccolo as if he were the most precious creature on earth. Piccolo is a comfort for Addie and keeps her from being lonely when her mother is gone.

Mrs. Casey.

Mrs. Casey works for the Department of Children and Family Services. She becomes Addie's caseworker after Soula reports that her mother has stopped coming home. Mrs. Casey's work helps Addie to be adopted by Dwight.

Firehouse 6.

Addie and Helena pass the good-natured men of Firehouse 6 everyday on their walk home. When Addie's trailer catches fire, it is the men from Firehouse 6 who come to help.

Ms. Rivera.

Ms. Rivera is the music teacher at Addie's new school. She has invited Addie to play her flute in the Stage Orchestra and understands that Addie can't read music. Ms. Rivera tries to help Addie when there is a problem with the flute that Addie is playing.



Objects/Places

The Trailer.

The trailer is a small, old trailer where Addie and Mommers come to live after their home is foreclosed on. The trailer is owned by Dwight and is the last place he has where Addie and her mother can stay. Everything in the trailer is small and cramped. Addie counts that it only takes six steps to get from the door to the kitchen, the kitchen to the living area, etc. Mommers hates the trailer, but Addie is happy there. After a while, it feels like home.

Numbskull Dorry's Pub.

Numbskull Dorry's Pub is a place where Addie begins to build good memories in her new home. It is a diner where she and her family go to celebrate things and have ice cream or dinner. Numbskull Dorry's got its name after graffiti that was written on the underpass where the train drives. The pub is owned by Rick, Elliot's boyfriend.

The Minimart.

The Minimart sits across the street from Addie's trailer. Soula owns the minimart and lives in an apartment in the back. Soula's apartment has a greenhouse on the back. Addie spends much of her time in the company of Soula and Elliot at the minimart. It is a place where she is always welcome.

The Heads and Roses Laundromat.

The Heads and Roses Laundromat is located next door to Addie's trailer. The trailer is hooked up to the same electrical circuitry as the trailer. The Laundromat is owned by the Roases and is decorated by mannequin heads, a fact that Soula and Elliot find hilarious.

The Stage Orchestra.

The Stage Orchestra is a special school orchestra that is invite only. Addie makes the Orchestra after she plays the flute for Ms. Rivera, the music teacher. The Stage Orchestra is a big deal for Addie, who doesn't have much confidence at school. Addie is asked to play a solo at the Stage Orchestra performance, but doesn't play out of fear that it will be discovered her flute is stolen.



The Flute.

Addie is a wonderful flute player, even though she can't read sheet music. Addie works hard to memorize music pieces and enjoys playing. However, she feels terrible because her flute was stolen from her old school. Addie's mother never returned it after they left. On the night of the Stage Orchestra performance Addie refuses to play because her old music teacher is there and the teacher knows she never returned the flute. To Addie, it is easier to never play again than to be responsible for someone else's property. She returns the flute to her old school and quits orchestra.

The Mansion at Lake George.

Dwight leaves town for a few months to work on a mansion in Lake George. The mansion is owned by a single woman who wishes to turn it into a bed and breakfast. Eventually Dwight and the Littles move into the mansion to live with Hannah, the owner.

Grandio's Farm.

Grandio's farm is just outside the city and is the last place where Addie felt normal. She has great memories of the farm and being there with Mommers, Dwight, Grandio and the Littles.

The Over-Underpass.

The trailer is located under an overpass that runs trains. When Addie first moves in, she can't decide if she should view the structure as an overpass or an underpass, so she calls it the Over-Underpass.

Empty Acre.

The Empty Acre is an abandoned paved lot that lies behind the minimart across from the trailer. Soula tells Addie that Empty Acre is an example of the waste left behind by corporations and factories.



Themes

Family.

The importance of family is the overarching theme of "Waiting for Normal." In the story, a family isn't necessarily the people you are born to; it is also the people with whom you surround yourself. Just because a person is related to you doesn't mean they are good family and just because a person isn't related to you doesn't mean they aren't family.

Addie and Mommers are family, but what does that mean? Mommers doesn't take care of Addie the way that Addie takes care of her. She loves Addie, but she is too irresponsible to love Addie in the way the young girl needs to be loved.

Soula and Elliot are family to each other. They are not romantically linked, but they are best friends. Soula and Elliot take care of each other and try to make each other happy. They also become family to Addie, taking care of her when she needs it and just enjoying her company. Addie loves Soula and Elliot with all her heart and looks after them too.

Dwight is Addie's family even though he isn't related to her. Dwight and Addie love each other like a natural father-daughter pair. Dwight tries hard to take care of Addie as well as he does Brynna and Katie. Dwight also seems to be a part of Grandio's family, helping the old man feel like he has a son again.

Addie loves her sisters to distraction and hates that she is separated from them. They truly are her family.

Responsibility.

Responsibility is a large theme in this book. Responsibility for self, for others, and the limits of responsibility are all pieces of this theme.

Mommers does not take responsibility for herself and her own actions. She also does not take her parenting responsibilities seriously. It is hard to say if Mommers has learned her lesson by the end of the book as it is unknown if she gave Addie up for Addie's sake, or for her own.

Soula and Elliot take care of their responsibilities even in the face of a devastating illness. No matter how bad she feels, Soula is always at work in her store. Elliot helps to share this responsibility with Soula. Soula and Elliot stop short of taking responsibility for Addie, but they watch her and know that she is neglected by her mother. It is Soula who finally calls family services.

Dwight is a beacon of responsibility in this story. He takes responsibility for himself and for everyone around him. He doesn't feel burdened by Addie, Brynna and Katie. He



takes care of them because it is his responsibility and because he loves them. Dwight represents the parent and truly evolved adult in the novel.

Grandio, much like Mommers, tries to avoid responsibility. There are times when he could have intervened on Addie's behalf, and should have, but he didn't want the responsibility of raising a child. After the fire Grandio is angry with Mommers, but he is also upset that he didn't do anything to help Addie sooner.

Addie takes on responsibility when she shouldn't. She feels it is her job to be the adult in her home. She feels responsible for her mother's actions and for protecting her mother. Addie takes on the adult duties of her home and is the only one, between herself and Mommers, who feels moral responsibility for things and people. Addie's lesson in this book is to learn how to let go of her need to take responsibility for things that are not hers.

Sacrifice.

What are family and responsibility without sacrifice?

Addie and Dwight personify sacrifice in the story. Addie sacrifices her safety, her childhood and her family so that she can take care of Mommers. In fact, she feels that it is her destiny to not have a normal life, but to always be with her mother. Addie willingly allows herself to be treated poorly so that she doesn't disrupt her mother's life.

Dwight sacrifices money, time and worry for Addie and Mommers. It becomes increasingly apparent that he wouldn't be doing the things he does for Denise if she didn't have Addie with her. Dwight feels responsible for Addie because he loves her and he is willing to sacrifice to help take care of her. He travels on weekends, works extra and puts off his marriage all in an attempt to help Addie.

Ironically, it is Mommers who makes the greatest sacrifice in the book. As Addie says at the end, her mother loves her and the Littles. Mommers has given away her children to Dwight hoping that they have a better life than the one she can give them. Denise knows that she has problems, a fact that she can no longer hide after the trailer burns down. When Mommers comes to see Addie at Grandio's and asks Addie what she wants, Addie tells her she wants to have normal with Dwight and the Littles. Apparently, Denise takes Addie's answer to heart. The reader can only assume that Mommers signed the adoption papers after seeing how sad and miserable Addie is. It is the reader's hope that Mommers sacrificed her custody to make Addie happy.

Style

Point of View

Waiting for Normal is told from the first-person point of view of Addie, a mature 12 year old. Addie's language and dialogue reveal she is both young and thoughtful. She has been exposed to more in life than other kids, which is shown in her understanding of human behavior. However, she is not a jaded child. She is still happy and slightly naive when it comes to her mother's behavior and motivations. Addie chooses to see her life as a good one and not as a bad one. Often Addie's analysis of a situation is hindered by her age. However, through dialogue, body language and word choice, the author allows the reader to see that there is often more to a situation than what Addie perceives. The adult issues in the book are never discussed by Addie, but are noted on and noticed by the characters around her.

Setting

The setting for the book is New York, but most of the book takes place on the poor side of town. Addie's world is that of a 12 year old. She goes to school, walks home, goes to the minimart and the laundromat, and lives in the trailer next door to the two places. This small area is the setting for Addie's world and the majority of the book. Occasionally, action takes place outside of town at Grandio's farm and at the mansion at Lake George. A different set of circumstances goes along with each of these distinct settings. Addie's worlds rarely collide and are fairly compartmentalized. Each setting represents a different part of Addie's life. The trailer is a place where Addie is alone and is burdened with adult responsibilities. It is a place where she never has enough to eat and where she is lonely, it is her present life. Grandio's farm is a carefree place where Addie has great memories of being "normal." The farm represents Addie's past life and memories. The mansion at Lake George represents the future; a future that Addie is certain she won't be a part of. Lake George is a place where Dwight and the Littles have started over. Addie loves to be there, but it breaks her heart to have to leave and return to the trailer.

Language and Meaning

The author's word choices help the reader to better understand Addie and her world. Each character in the book has their own way of speaking and many have accents that help define their socioeconomic place. Addie and her school friends discuss life as any 12 year old would. The Littles also use language appropriate to their ages. Hannah's language and dialogue match her artistic and kind personality. Her words show her as an open and honest person. Mommers' speech patterns alert the reader to her state of mind. The author does a good job of using description and dialogue to get across each character's personality and thoughts. Addie's thoughts and explanations tend to be



structured to shield her mother from blame and ridicule. However, descriptions of the actions and reactions of others fill in the details that are often missing from Addie's description and understanding of her world.

Structure

The book is divided into 49 titled chapters. Each chapter title gives insight into what will happen in the book. *Waiting for Normal* is a slowly paced book where relationships and human drama are the core of the plot. There is not a lot of action in the story as it is a story of a girl and her family. The first three-fourths of the book build the characters and their circumstances. The last fourth of the book covers the resolution of the main story line and smaller subplots.



Quotes

"It's best to know right from the beginning that my family is hard to follow — like a road that keeps taking twists and turns" (Chapter 1, p. 1).

"Me, I'm good at getting used to things - been doing it all my life" (Chapter 2, p. 13).

"She touched the sides of her black hair like she was adjusting a hat" (Chapter 3, p. 16).

"He'd made me feel like I was one of his girls too" (Chapter 5, p. 31).

"But don't you think its possible... ' - I twisted up my face - '...that every person is a hero to someone else'" (Chapter 8, p. 46).

"I felt a twinge of sickness inside of me. Mommers was telling lies to Pete" (Chapter 17, p. 87).

"She's kind of an all-or-nothing person, I guess" (Chapter 20, p. 100).

"I remembered us just being normal" (Chapter 21, p. 104).

"That was the thing that bothered me most: the counting-on part" (Chapter 29, p. 174).

"It felt good to know what was coming next, even if it was just lunch" (Chapter 31, p. 183).

"They hoped for such simple things, like meals and beds. I felt glad I had those things" (Chapter 32, p. 195).

"I had borrowed it - like the flute - and tomorrow I might have to return it" (Chapter 35, p. 214).

"I need you to do something wrong to do something right. Can you understand that?" (Chapter 35, p. 233).

"From now on, Pic, I clean up after me and you. I'm changing my life!" (Chapter 41, p. 253).

"I didn't care that it wasn't likely to happen, or that I was just a pebble in a big sea that would decide what to do with me" (Chapter 48, p. 286).

"It made me laugh when I thought about it; I had come twisting and turning home" (Chapter 49, p. 290).



Topics for Discussion

It is revealed that Soula has breast cancer and is undergoing chemotherapy. Why does Soula think she developed breast cancer? What do you think about her theory? What evidence do you have that she thinks this way?

There is something wrong with Mommers. Her behavior is not usual for someone of her age. What do you think is wrong with Mommers? Why do you think this? Provide sources from the text to support your diagnosis of Mommers.

Addie is only twelve years old, but she seems to understand life better than others her age. Why is this? What has Addie been through that has helped her mature? Provide examples of Addie's past challenges and tell how each challenge may have changed her.

It is revealed that Elliot is not Soula's boyfriend as Addie first believes. He is a gay man who's boyfriend, Rick, owns Dorry's Pub.

1) Why might the author include a gay character in the book?

2) How does Addie react to this news?

3) What does Addie's reaction say about Addie?

Compare and Contrast Grandio and Mommers. How are these two characters the same? How are they different?

1) Do you think Grandio is more like Dwight or more like Mommers?

2) Why do you think the way you do? Provide examples from the text.

3) Do you think Grandio could have helped Addie sooner? Why or why not?

Who is Hannah and why do you think she is included in the book? Does it help to compare Hannah and Mommers? Why or why not?

At the end of the book, Mommers' life has changed dramatically. She is pregnant and has been lying to her boyfriend. She has also lost custody of all of her children. What do you predict will happen to Mommers in the future? Do you think she will change? Why or why not? Do you think Addie will see her mom again? Why do you think the way you do? What do you predict will happen to Pete and the new baby? Explain your answer.