

We Are Not Ourselves Study Guide

We Are Not Ourselves by Matthew Thomas

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Plot Summary

“We Are Not Ourselves” by Matthew Thomas is the story of Eileen Tumulty Leary. The tale begins when Eileen is ten-years-old. Her father, Big Mike, is a beer truck driver who picks her up after school or dance class every day. They don’t go directly home; rather, they go to his favorite haunt, Doherty’s Bar. Young Eileen sits off to the side and sits alone at a table doing her homework while glancing once in a while at her father who is the most popular patron of the bar. The other guys all look up to him and ask him for his advice or bits of wisdom. Big Mike revels in the attention and believes his own publicity.

Eileen is a bright little girl but is suffering from the dysfunctional marriage of her parents. Big Mike likes to think he can hold his alcohol. He can keep up a front with his buddies at the bar but at home he often turns into an angry and violent man. He doesn’t feel quite as important in the reality of his home as he does in the glow of the artificial admiration of drunken friends at the bar.

Bridget, Eileen’s mother, tries to keep a semblance of normalcy by insisting that dinner is always at 6 p.m. When Mike and Eileen come home late, Bridget locks herself in her room and sulks. Bridget feels some joy in her life when she discovers that she is pregnant with her second child. But the miscarriage sends her in a downward spiral from which there is no return. Like her husband, she turns to alcohol to ease the pain.

Eileen thinks of nothing but escaping, and she is smart and practical enough to know that the best route is through a good education. She finishes college in three years and goes on to get her masters in nursing. Nursing was a natural choice for her since she cared for her drunken parents from a little girl on. A friend introduces Eileen to Ed Leary who is a brilliant scientist and researcher. There is an immediate attraction and soon the two get serious and are planning a wedding. A red flag should have gone up with Ed is angry over the gold watch Eileen gives him as a wedding gift. He says it is a waste of time and a frivolous expense. She is hurt over his inflexibility in this and other matters but she feels certain that he will change in time.

Eileen and Ed have one child, Connell, who they both adore. However, Eileen’s idea of affection is to hector him about his future and his education. It is Ed who has fun with Connell, hugs him and tells him he loves him without hesitation. Eileen envies how easy Ed can show Connell affection. Ed refuses several chances for advancement and promotion because he likes to teach and he’s not concerned about being wealthy. But Eileen wants a big house and money is important to her.

But the goals and dreams of both Eileen and Ed are dashed when Ed begins to show troubling signs that something is wrong with him. Eileen wonders if Ed’s been working too hard, if he’s under a lot of stress at work, or if he’s depressed. But it turns out it’s much worse. When Ed’s behavior continues to worsen, he is checked out by a doctor who gives him the grim diagnosis of Alzheimer’s Disease.

Eileen is dedicated and loyal to Ed during his ordeal. There is no good ending to Ed's story. He won't get better or even stay the same. But Eileen never deserts him, works hard to support him and deals with the heartbreaking reality of a disease that destroys the victim along with his loved ones.



Chapters 1 - 5

Summary

Chapter 1

Nine-year-old Eileen Tumulty's father, Mike, picks her up from Irish step dancing class after finishing his delivery route for Schaefer Beer. He is a large man who fills the doorway. They stop by Doherty's bar where Eileen does her homework while her father drinks beer with his friends. They call him Big Mike. Bridget, Eileen's mother wants them home by six o'clock the time dinner is served every evening. One night in June a week before she is to finish fourth grade, Mike and Eileen are late. Her mother sulks and her father leaves.

Eileen and her parents share a room while their lodger, Henry Kehoe, has his own bedroom. Mr. Kehoe keeps to himself and frequently plays his clarinet. She feels safe with Mr. Kehoe, especially on nights when Mike drinks too much whiskey. When Mike drinks whiskey he's angry and violent. One night Eileen hears her parents arguing about money. He hocked Bridget's engagement ring and lost the money he got for it betting on the horses. One night Bridget shows Mike her naturalization papers. She had become a citizen that day. He is hurt that she didn't tell him and didn't let him sponsor her. After Mike leaves, her mother tells Eileen not to love anyone. She'd just wind up with a broken heart.

Chapter 2

In the spring of 1952, Eileen's mother is expecting. Eileen's heart is broken when she later learns that her mother miscarried. She had to have a hysterectomy and stays in the hospital for six months. Eileen must take over the cooking, cleaning and laundry. She and Mike visit a friend who lives in Jackson Heights. She is amazed by the yard and the green grass and hearing the birds chirp in the trees. She realizes that there are some places that are happier than other places. Mr. Kehoe is developing a bad cough. He gives Eileen a beautiful illustrated copy of Grimm's Fairy Tales. Her father doesn't like it and gives Mr. Kehoe the money for it. He also tells Mr. Kehoe to quit making a racket with his clarinet playing. Mike tries to grab the clarinet but Mr. Kehoe holds onto it. The next night, Mr. Kehoe is gone. Eileen is happy that her mother is coming home and that she and her mother will take over Mr. Kehoe's room.

Chapter 3

Bridget returns home after being in the hospital eight months. She gets a job at Loft's Confectioner's on Forty-Second Street. She begins drinking and often comes home late and drunk. Eventually, she begins drinking at home and stops cleaning the house and doing the laundry. She often falls asleep on the couch with lit cigarettes. Bridget had left home when she was eighteen and did domestic work on Long Island. She dreamed



about living in one of the mansions she cleaned. She thought it was marvelous the lifestyle these women enjoyed.

A few days before Christmas, Eileen and her mother visit Fifth Avenue to see the decorated windows along the street. Late that night she wakes to find her mother asleep on the couch with a drink in one hand and a cigarette in the other. Eileen receives a package that contained Mr. Kehoe's clarinet and a book on how to play it. Mr. Kehoe had died of lung cancer. The clarinet is the nicest thing Eileen owns. She decides that it belonged in a better place than an apartment. Someday she would live in a beautiful house where she would keep it.

Eileen earns a full scholarship to St. Helena's High School in the Bronx. Her mother stops going into work. One day she is found passed out in the apartment building lobby. Bridge eventually winds up at AA. Eileen dreams of getting away from it all – maybe to Death Valley where she wouldn't mind being alone.

Chapter 4

Big Mike is promoted at work from driver to manager of drivers. He begins drinking at home which he had never done before. He buys new glasses and sips on ice and whiskey all evening. Mike makes her go to church with him. He elbows her during the mass when she drifts off. Later, Mike tells her that he's going to teach her a lesson about drinking. He has her try different strong liquors including beer, whiskey and vodka. His final advice is to drink only whiskey, good whiskey. She vows to never drink again.

Chapter 5

Eileen attends St. Catherine's Nursing School in Brooklyn. She excels and is highly regarded for her abilities. She earns money for her education by being a dress model at Bonwit Teller. She is beautiful and becomes the most popular model at the store. She dreams of meeting a wealthy man who would give her a life of leisure. She could leave nursing and bedpans behind her. Eileen detects that her mother is not truly happy, that past mistakes still linger in her mind. Eileen has her own life to worry about and doesn't ask her mother what is bothering her. She thinks of the big mansion she'll live in and feels distressed to think that it didn't seem to be enough – but she'd had to make it be enough.

Analysis

Alcohol is a presence in the life of young Eileen Tumulty. She goes with her father to a bar frequently. She does her homework at the bar while her father drinks with his friends. She is a young child and Big Mike's drinking has apparently been part of her life forever. Eileen gleans a positivity from the drinking and bar environment. Her father is very popular; everyone looks up to him. In her young mind, she makes a connection between being well-liked and drinking. She accepts his drinking because she is ten years old. But Big Mike is abusing his daughter by not giving her the attention she



needs. He brings her into an environment which main draw is alcohol. But Big Mike, so adored by his fans at the bar, needs to quench his thirst and feed his ego. It is too alluring for him to resist. A man or woman like this does not stop to think how much he could give his child in the form of confidence and self-value if he spent all that time with her, helping her with her homework and asking her how her day went.

The drinking and carousing is driving a wedge between Big Mike and his wife, Eileen's mother. When Big Mike is among his friends who are all downing their mugs of beer and telling Mike what a great guy he is, the alcohol seems to be a positive. But when he goes overboard and has a little too much, he comes home angry and violent. Perhaps the demons that reside within him have a breaking point and surface when there is an alcoholic overload. Big Mike is the king of the bar he hangs out in but it's not his reality. His reality is his home, his wife and his daughter. Since his wife is not one of his adoring fans, it is her who becomes the focus on his anger and the pain that resides within him.

Alcohol is not only a physical threat to a family, it is an economic one that brings on more stress. Big Mike is a beer truck driver and as such is not a wealthy man. The money that Big Mike throws away at the bar could go for many things that his family needs. Studying in her room at night, Eileen's stomach is in a knot while she hears her parents arguing over money.

Tragedy strikes the Tumulty family when Bridget has a miscarriage. Her pregnancy had given her new reason for hope and something wonderful to look forward to. She would be able to ignore her dysfunctional marriage and her alcoholic husband at least for a while by focusing on a new baby. Bridget is distraught and develops an infection that lands her in the hospital for almost a year. Instead of being concerned about Eileen not having a mother, Mike forces Eileen to take on the responsibilities of his wife. She has to cook and clean and shop and she spends more time focusing on her father than on her own development and needs.

It is obvious that Bridget is suffering from chronic depression after she returns home. Instead of concerning herself with Eileen's needs, Bridget becomes wrapped up in her own lost hopes and dreams. She stops doing laundry and the cooking and cleaning which, once again, all fall on Eileen. Eileen has become her mother's parent. Eileen frets over her mother's welfare and ultimately her drinking. Young Eileen watched over her mother even grabbing a lit cigarette from her mother's hand after her mother had passed out on the couch. A ten-year-old should be playing with her dolls or outside. She shouldn't be her mother's keeper.

Eileen's mother's alcoholism advances to a dangerous level. It is young Eileen who contacts AA and pleads for help. Bridget is admitted into a rehab program and begins attending AA meetings but the harm is done and the hurt is permanent. In Eileen's pain and frustration she begins to think of only one thing – getting away from her mother. But Eileen's real confusion is over her father but she doesn't realize it. When she is a young teenager and Big Mike finds out she had an alcoholic drink, he demonstrates complete failure as a father and his utter misunderstanding of what a parent is. But he's an alcoholic himself and as such, instead of counseling her properly, he makes her take a



drink of every liquor he has in the house to refine her taste buds. He wants her to be a discriminating alcoholic!

A bitterness begins to form within Eileen, a bitterness that is too mature for her years and one that yields debilitating effects for the rest of her life. Her parents have both hurt her irreparably but she is not mature enough to put the harm they caused her into words. They have both abandoned her as parents. She has been made to be her mother's keeper and her father's helper. Eileen is a bright child who could have become anything she might dream of, but her dreams were stripped away from her by own parents.

Discussion Question 1

How is young Eileen abandoned and abused by her parents? What role is she forced to take on with her father? With her mother?

Discussion Question 2

How was the tragedy of Bridget's miscarriage a pivotal point in the Tumulty's marriage and in Eileen's life? If Bridget had had the baby, would it have solved their problems or would it have caused even more destruction in the family?

Discussion Question 3

How is Eileen able to survive her childhood? What develops within her as a means to deal with the hurt and misery and what are the dangers of building up such protective armor?

Vocabulary

rectory, lanky, jitterbug, impeccably, Stetson, clarifying, gallivanting, adhere, thespian, sylvan, verdancy, palpable, charisma, hysterectomy, repertory, benignly, permutations, confiscated, malevolent, indefatigable, prophylactic, vestige, languor, forbearance, salubrious, insolent, senescence



Chapters 6 - 10

Summary

Chapter 6

In the fall of 1963, Eileen tries to convince her cousin Pat to apply to college. He claims he's not college material. She tells him how smart he is and what a future he could have but Pat isn't convinced. He needs to be outside and on the move. The thought of being cooped up in a classroom for four more years does not appeal to him. In 1964, Pat is drafted. Eileen appeals to him again. If he enrolls in college, he'll get a deferment. Pat went to a Marine recruiter instead. After training at Parris Island and a brief tour at Camp Lejeune, he volunteers to go to Vietnam. Pat has been like a brother to her. She warns him that he better stay alive. Even though he won't admit it, Big Mike is worried about Pat, too.

Chapter 7

Eileen begins to look forward to getting married. In December 1965, Eileen is in a master's program in nursing administration at NYU after completing college in three years. Ruth, a friend and fellow classmate, tries to talk Eileen into being set up with a friend of Frank, her boyfriend, for New Year's Eve but Eileen is resisting. The man is a grad student in science at NYU and he is handsome. Finally, Ruth talks Eileen into the date. Eileen meets Ed Leary who is tall and good looking. She is immediately attracted to him. Eileen can see herself spending the rest of her life with him.

Chapter 8

Ed's family had been in New York before the Civil War. Their one claim to fame was that his great-great-grandfather helped build the USS Monitor. Cora, Ed's mother, is pleasant and spends Friday nights with the couple at her flat in Carroll Gardens near the train tracks. His father, Hugh, had been dead a few years. Eileen finally learns that Ed's father had a drinking problem just like her own father. Cora would send Ed on paydays to Hugh's company to try to get the check before he squandered it at the bar. Hugh also made money by singing at funerals. Ed sometimes served as an altar boy at the funerals where Hugh sang. He told Ed not to tell his mother about the pay he received for the service. Once the ice was broken, their childhood issues with their fathers became the focus of many of their conversations.

Ed was bright but eventually turned his back on his studies. He was suspended several times but Cora was able to get him reinstated and he was able to graduate. He got a job mixing dyes at a paint factory and came to admire a scientist who was his supervisor. He eventually enrolled in college but still had to deal with a drunken father. He'd pick him up at the bar but would never go in. He couldn't bear to see his father drink. Ed



made the honor roll at his college. A few days before Ed was to graduate his father died of a heart attack. Ed has mixed feelings about his father. Eileen relates.

Chapter 9

Through a friend of her father, Eileen purchases an eighteen-karat gold watch as a wedding gift to Ed. She has it inscribed with his full name. Ed opens the gift at dinner one night. He admired it but he couldn't keep it. It was too ostentatious. Eileen is crushed. She can't return it; the watch is a prototype and not returnable. Besides it is engraved. Eileen is very hurt. The wedding takes place a little over a year after they first met. After their honeymoon, Ed tells Eileen that they wouldn't be going out much during the next year while he did research for his dissertation. They move to a small apartment which isn't Eileen's dream house but she makes the best of it. They live in a multiplex over the Orlandos who own the building.

Although Eileen didn't believe Ed's warning about no social life while he studied, two months into the marriage it is obvious that he was serious. They hadn't gone anywhere. To Ed, his work and making a contribution to science are the only things he considers authentic and important. Eileen begins to resent Ed's singular focus on his work. She hates his desk, a symbol of his inattention to her. The desk is important to Ed. Sharing the desk with his father is one of the only happy memories he has.

While visiting her parents, Eileen spots a sign in Doherty's window, "Big Mike Tumulty vs. Pete McNeese in a footrace. Friday, July 21, 7:00." Mike had bragged about being fleet of foot. So the thirty-year-old Pete had challenged the sixty-year-old Mike to a race. Mike takes a glass of Irish whiskey to warm up. Mike crushes Pete in the doorframe before the race even begins. Pete stumbles out spent and exhausted.

Chapter 10

Ed is an expert on the brain, specifically within the field of "psychopharmacology and the effects of psychotropic drugs on neural functioning." For his dissertation research, he conducts a series of experiments testing the effects of drugs on the ability to learn using West African mouthbrooder fish. His experimentation with the fish lasts for nearly a year. He misses out on gatherings with family and friends and on a lot of sleep. He is not defeated when the aquarium he uses malfunctions and kills the fish. There is no anger or resentment. Ed gets new fish and starts all over. After another year, they finally start socializing again. In December 1970, they head to Fifth Avenue to see the window displays. Ed isn't thrilled but goes along with Eileen who is excited to see the displays. He parks a mile away from the stores and refuses to take a cab. It is 20 degrees out and she is wearing heels but he is adamant that they walk. Ed is a killjoy, complains about the crowds that had gathered and ruins the evening for Eileen. She imagines herself in one of the window displays. Real life is messy. Finally he pulls her away and they head back.



Analysis

Eileen elects to become a nurse. Perhaps her early years as a caregiver to her mother and father had something to do with her decision. Eileen is very concerned about her younger cousin Pat. She wants him to go on to college. He could become anything he wants to be. But he says he is not college material and chooses to join the military. Eileen has been the “parent” so long that she feels motherly toward Pat. She cares about Pat’s future and wants to have the confidence that he can accomplish anything. She did not receive that kind of gift from her parents. She wants to support Pat and urge him on to do his best and have a good life. She wants to help build his self-esteem - something that she was forced to grapple for on her own.

Looking for a way to establish her identity, Eileen begins to think she’d like to be married. It would also give her the chance to drop her Irish surname. Her wish to lose her Irish identity is symbolic and is closely tied to Big Mike, someone she admired on the surface but had deep problems with, things she repressed and buried as a matter of survival.

When Eileen first meets Ed she notices that he is respectful and polite. Again, something that was on short order in her childhood. She notices that he hardly touches his beer – a signal that she wants to leave alcohol and alcoholism in the past. Ed reveals that his father had a drinking problem. He refers to his father using him as a ventriloquist’s dummy a metaphor indicating that he felt his father spoke for him and had control over him. Ed’s father had a serious drinking problem that haunted him into college. Just as Eileen had done, Ed has repressed anger and resentment about his father’s alcoholism.

Eileen is hurt that Ed rejects the gold watch she gives him. On the surface, Ed claims he is frugal and doesn’t believe in such an ostentatious gift. But since they are engaged to be married, it seems he could have relaxed his strict personal standards and accepted the gift. The incident shows that Ed isn’t flexible and that he puts his own standards above the feelings of Eileen. Ed may have had a problem taking the expensive watch because he had been so demoralized as a youngster by the alcoholism that he fundamentally felt he didn’t deserve such a gift.

Eileen is disillusioned when Ed spends all his time on research and refuses to go out or get together socially with other young couples. Again it shows his inflexibility and perhaps even a self-centeredness. He could have bent a little especially when Eileen wanted to go to a party. It’s also a sign that Ed has an obsessive trait which can be connected with a mental or emotional disorder.

Again Ed’s obsessive personality and his unrelenting adherence to his own moral code emerges when Eileen wants to look at the Christmas displays on Fifth Avenue. He doesn’t want to go in the first place but he insists on parking a mile away to save on parking even though it’s freezing out and Eileen is wearing heels. He turns a cold eye toward Eileen’s wants and needs.



When Eileen pictures herself as part of one of the window displays, it is her disappointment in Ed that makes her want to be somewhere else – just like when she dreamed of leaving home as a child.

Discussion Question 1

How does the fact that both Eileen and Ed had alcoholic parents impact their relationship?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Eileen seem willing to adhere to Ed's value system? What is Eileen value system?

Discussion Question 3

What common traits to Ed and Eileen share? In what ways are the different? Which are the drivers of their relationship – their commonalities or their differences?

Vocabulary

redolence, conviviality, plaintive, interval, chivalry, parabolic, ferocity, rictus, sacristy, encapsulate, posterity, embellishment, contemplative, dissertation, sequestration, perfunctory, pathologies, adherents, psychotropic, jeremiad, mollified



Chapters 11 - 15

Summary

Chapter 11

After Ed receives his Ph.D., he is offered a position as an executive at Merck. He'd have his own lab and state-of-the-art equipment along with a staff. Eileen is thrilled. Finally, she'll have her dream house. Ed is an assistant professor at the Bronx Community College and eventually will be a full professor. He turns down Merck.

When Eileen is 31 and had been married five years, she becomes pregnant. A few months into the pregnancy, Eileen miscarries and she is devastated. She relieves the pain she experienced when her mother lost her baby. Ed seems to be resigned to not having children. Eileen secretly wonders if he might actually be relieved. A child would take time and attention away from his work. Eileen throws herself into her work but she is haunted by the loss of her child.

To make extra money, Ed starts teaching night anatomy classes at NYU. To Eileen's disappointment, he passes up the chance for a position at NYU's biology department which would be a step up from his community college. At thirty-five Eileen conceives a child. She delivers a baby boy in March of 1977 who was named Connell.

Chapter 12

Eileen's mother continues cleaning houses into her mid-sixties. After getting sober, she hates to be idle. Bridget spends her time and money on making frequent trips to Ireland. The American experiment had been a failure. Seeing her mother's regrets and fear at the end of her life makes Eileen more determined than ever to fix her life, her marriage. By Christmas of 1980 Eileen is the nursing director at Lawrence Hospital in Bronxville. She buys Ed a VCR even though he thought they were too expensive. Ed is angry when he opens his gift. As usual, Eileen is hurt but in a few days, Ed comes around. He likes the gift. Ed surprises Eileen when he tells her he doesn't know what he'd do without her.

In January 1981, Bridget is diagnosed with cancer of the esophagus. Both Ed and Eileen tend to her every need. November 1981, Bridget enters the hospital for the last time. It is then that Ed complains of a pain in his chest. It's discovered that he has cancer in his chest cavity. He is placed in a room down the hall from Bridget. Bridget tells Eileen that she'd been sober for twenty-five years. She wishes she hadn't stopped drinking. She would have traded just about anything for a drink and still would. She dies a short time after this conversation. Her father dies two weeks later.

Chapter 13

In February 1982, Ed is offered the deanship of the Bronx Community College. He could also be in line to become the school's president. Becoming dean would be the end of



Ed's teaching career. Eileen of course wants him to take it. She had never gotten over her dream of leaving in a luxury in a big beautiful house. In the end, Ed feels that the classroom is more important and turns down the advancement. She is bitterly disappointed but hopes that his "idealism will trump her pragmatism."

Eileen tells Ed she is tired of living in the apartment. They'd been there fifteen years. He likes it there. The more he wants to stay in the apartment, the more determined she is that they leave. She feels that it is the only way their marriage can be saved. He needs a real home as much as she does.

Angelo Orlando tells Eileen he is running into some financial problems and has to sell the house. He wants to know if she and Ed would be interested in buying it. Angelo would sell it to her at a discount and would like to rent their apartment from the new owners.

Chapter 14

October 23, 1986

Connell is a little chubby; Eileen plans to see that he starts to eat better. Connell is shoving food in his mouth and eating too fast. Suddenly his face is turns red and he's choking. She is a nurse and has dealt with choking before. She can't get him to dislodge the blockage. She begins to panic and screams for help. Angelo and Donny run down the stairs. Donny is able to get the piece of food to fly out of his mouth using the Heimlich. That evening Connell watches the playoff game while Eileen sits and reads. She wishes she could take him in her arms but she didn't know how to do that. She doesn't know how to break through the emotional barrier that is there.

Ed comes home around ten and starts watching the game with Connell. Eileen tells Ed about the cherry tomato that was stuck in Connell's throat and how Donny had gotten it out. Ed embraces Connell – Eileen wishes it was that easy for her. Connell started sobbing. She envies Ed's easy casualness with Connell. She had been affectionate with Connell when he was little. When he turned three something changed.

After Connell finally goes to bed, Eileen tells Ed about the choking incident and how she had frozen. Perhaps it was because Connell means so much to her. In the middle of the night, Connell crawls into to bed with Eileen and Ed for the first time in a long time. Connell tells Ed how scared he was. Eileen worries that she lost some of Connell's trust that night. She vows to never serve cherry tomatoes again.

Chapter 15

Ed vows to start taking it easy and end his work day when he comes home. He had given up the night classes. The next day he cancels a day class – something that had never happened before. When she returns from work that day, he is in the same spot as when she left that morning. He plans to take the next day off, too. He is clearing his head and enjoying the freedom. Eileen wonders if he is having a mid-life crisis. Ed returns to work after another day off. At night he continues to lounge around and listen



to music with his earplugs. One evening she spots him at his desk. She thinks he's probably grading papers but as she approaches him she sees that he is writing in a journal which he hides from her. Later, she looks for the journal but it is gone. Ed begins to communicate less and less. He averts his eyes when she looks at him. A listlessness had come over him, a dreamy quality.

The neighborhood had been Irish, Italian, Greek and Jewish when they first moved in. Now it is a transitioning neighborhood with Colombians, Bolivians, Chinese, Indians and Iranians and members of other ethnic groups moving in. Many of the stores she had enjoyed are gone replaced by T-shirt shops, fireworks stands and karate schools. The local theater is now a Latin dance hall. She understands and accepts the reality of immigration but she is beginning to feel displaced. They had even been robbed once while they were away on vacation. Ed's preoccupation with music and his need for solitude is wearing on Eileen. Connell asks his father why he's always listening to music. Eileen tells Connell that Ed is just getting older.

Analysis

The lack of communication between Eileen and Ed causes problems in their relationship. When their true feelings emerge there are hurt feelings from misunderstandings and misguided expectations. Eileen wants a second child but Ed has more interest in the state of his research and the advancement of science. Eileen did not learn the lesson of the gold watch. When Ed opens his Christmas present and finds a VCR, he is angry. It is a waste of money he tells her. Again she is hurt and angry that Ed doesn't appreciate her gift. Both Eileen and Ed are attempting to transfer their own value system on the other. Ed never changes but Eileen's mistake is that she keeps thinking he will change.

When Eileen miscarries her second child, she connects with her mother who suffered the same tragedy. It does not go unnoticed that one of the first things Eileen does in her recovery is to drink a large glass of wine. She is making a connection between the tragedy of losing a child and alcohol. Eileen always had the dream to have a large comfortable home, a mansion in fact. But such a residence is not even on Ed's radar. His focus is on his work and his son. He is living in the present. Eileen is living in the future. She'll have the promise of happiness that she created in her childhood if she could just escape to that mansion.

Although Ed is frugal and hates to spend money on what he considers frivolous, but he does not aspire to wealth. He is happy doing his research and teaching. He begins teaching night classes which he does not just for the extra money. He likes to teach. But Eileen wants that mansion. She has to have it in order to finally be happy. When Ed passes up a position as a Vice President of a large chemical company, she is devastated and hurt. She can't imagine how he could pass up such a job. He can't imagine why he'd take it. Later, he passes up the chance to join the staff of a more prestigious college than he is currently teaching at. But Ed also passes that up. He's happy where he is. The extra money he would make and the "prestige" he would enjoy



are meaningless to him. Eileen on the other hand is crushed that he doesn't take the opportunity. He would make more and she'd be a step closer to her mansion. And, because she suffers from low self-esteem, she resents that she will not have the opportunity to boast to her friends and colleagues that her husband is on the staff of a major university. Eileen pushes Ed to move from the small apartment they lived in for fifteen years. But it's not important to him. He'd rather stay there and save money for Connell's education. She'd rather live in a big house. The incident almost makes Eileen start drinking but she resists. Her focus is still on that big house.

Eileen loves Connell more than anything but it is almost impossible for her to show it. The "affection" she can show is in the form of nagging him about doing the best so he'll have a bright future. What she can't do is hug him. She didn't get enough of those when she was young.

Ed is so predictable in his actions and habits that Eileen is stunned when he starts working less and spending time leisurely listening to music. She thinks it's good; it's a sign that he won't be so obsessed about his work. His change of behavior is a sign but it's not a good one. He is beginning to experience the impact of Alzheimer's disease but neither one knows at the time.

Bridget falls ill with cancer. She has many regrets one of which is going sober. She went through years of stress fearing that she'd go off the wagon. Now she is dying. Did her sobriety make any difference? One of the last things she says to Bridget is she'd give anything for a drink. Strange choice for parting words. She could have said, "I love you, Eileen." Ironically, Eileen's father falls ill with cancer himself and is placed a few rooms down from his dying wife. They both die within a few weeks of each other. For Eileen it is the closing of a sad chapter of her family but the tentacles from their sorrow and dysfunction and the destruction they caused were far-reaching and undying.

Discussion Question 1

How did Eileen's misguided interpretations of Ed impact their marriage? What were Ed's priorities as opposed to Eileen's? Describe some instances when their diverse priorities emerged and caused anger and hurt.

Discussion Question 2

How does Eileen convince Ed to buy the multi-family home? What compromise did she make in buying the house? Explain why or why not the purchase of this house has satisfied Eileen's dream of attaining the ultimate in happiness.

Discussion Question 3

Describe Ed's relationship with Connell and Eileen's relationship with Connell. What does Eileen envy about Ed's relationship with Connell?



Vocabulary

motility, foreboding, fecundity, compensatory, patrician, moniker, placidly, pragmatic, sardonic, esophagus, caprice, lugubrious, capitulation, sciatic, savant, contemplative, crescendos, erudition, flummoxed, specious



Chapters 16 - 20

Summary

Chapter 16

One day Ed takes Connell to the batting cages. Connell struggles to connect with the fast-moving balls. Ed takes a turn after Connell urges him to give it a try. Ed lets most of the balls go by him. Connell pushes his father to take a swing. Ed waits until he gets the right ball and smashes it. It would have been a home-run in a ball field. Connell is impressed. He takes another turn and does better, knocking out a few line drives. They have lunch afterwards at a diner. Ed tells Connell he always liked to watch him eat when he was a baby. Perhaps it made him feel confident that Connell would thrive. He still likes watching him eat.

Chapter 17

Eileen decides to give Ed a surprise party for his fiftieth birthday. She thinks it will help wake him up and get him off the couch. She decides to reach out to some of his old buddies from the past and invite them. She fixes up the exterior of the house with new flowers in the flower boxes. It irritates her that the neighborhood is filled with cars blaring with salsa music, the drug cartels and the prostitutes in the area. It isn't the way Jackson Heights used to be. She isn't a racist but she didn't like the turn of her community. It is becoming a war zone.

On the day of the party, the guests are crowded inside and waiting for Ed to arrive. She is afraid of his reaction but when he finally enters the house, he is beaming and greeting all the guests. He seems to be ecstatic but Eileen detects a disingenuousness about his demeanor. Later, she finds him sitting in the landing between the second and third floors. Ed would have preferred a quiet dinner. Eileen notices flaws in the house and décor that bother her. She is straightening the shelves in the basement when Ed and Connell tell her that they are going to mass. She goes with them.

Chapter 18

Connell is being bullied by the other boys at school. It is after Connell won the science fair, the math bee and the spelling bee that he becomes the target of the other kids. It didn't help that he was chubby. Now in the eighth grade, he is still referred to the "fat kid" even though he has grown and the baby fat is turning into muscle. He doesn't feel comfortable talking to Ed about it. Instead, he works out with weights in the basement. One day two boys pull his pants and shorts down while he's dunking a basketball. He tells his parents that it happened to some other kid. The only thing he looks forward to is the end of the day. At dinner he tells them he has to write an essay about someone's profession. Eileen suggests that he write it about his father. She'll let him stay home, go with Ed to his college and write the report.



On their drive to school, Ed tells Connell to sit in the back of class and not ask any questions. After they park, he takes Connell to his lab, gives him a magazine and suggests that he stay in the lab until Ed is done with his class. Connell has to write his report about Ed's class. Connell is sitting in the back of the classroom when Ed enters. He walks to the podium and begins reading from his legal pad. He tells the class that he can't be interrupted with any questions. Any questions should be written out and handed to him after class. Ed begins reading his prepared lecture. The students begin taking quick notes. A few hands go up now and then but they are ignored.

Ed continues on and it's obvious that everyone is lost. Eventually, every student in class is raising his or her hand. Connell feels compelled to help his father. He stands and shouts, "Dad!" several times before Ed looks up at him. After a few moments, Ed begins reading again to a new round of groans. Ed stops for a time and seems to recover himself. He asks the class if they mind ending class early. The students start packing up; many are angry but Ed doesn't seem to notice. Ed asks Connell not to tell Eileen about the incident.

Chapter 19

Eileen begins to think that Ed is depressed and in need of treatment. She knows she could never get him to go to a psychiatrist. Maybe a move to a new house would help him – help them all. Ed is adamant. He doesn't want to move.

Ed has tickets for the Mets game. They are great seats in the lower level. After they are seated, Ed takes the food and drink order and takes off for the concession stand. He's gone a long time when Eileen spots him standing at a railing. Ushers are trying to get him to move. She sees that Ed is becoming agitated. Eileen comes to his rescue and they return to their seats. He is angry at her. "Where were you?!" he demands to know.

Chapter 20

Eileen and Connell sit on the steps looking at the constellations. Eileen isn't that interested in them but Connell knows all about them, pointing out the Big Dipper, Little Dipper and the North Star. She is happy that he doesn't seem to have the makings of a scientist. He is merely admiring the stars. She is shaken when he says that he likes to think about people thousands of years ago who looked at the same stars and the people who will look at them long after they are dead. Although she'd lost both parents and sees death every day in her work, it bothers her that Connell thinks in terms of dying.

Analysis

Eileen is adamant that she is not a racist but she shows indications that she is just that. Her community is changing and she doesn't like it. It makes her want that mansion in the clouds more than ever. When Eileen has a surprise party for Ed's fiftieth birthday, she notices that he seems different. There is a false smile on his face. There had never been an ounce of phoniness about Ed before but she spots it as he visits among the



guests. And it was a false smile. He tells her he'd rather have had a quiet dinner with just her and Connell. Ed knows he's changing and it's stressful for him to be with others because he cannot control his odd behavior.

Although Ed's behavior and appearance at the party makes her wonder about his mental state she tries to put it out of her mind. She doesn't want to "go there" yet. But as a nurse, she has to have the strong sense that something unusual is going on with Ed. Surely in all her years as a nurse she has seen the same kind of behavior exhibited by some of her patients. When he says that he is looking forward to summer vacation and not teaching, she knows in her heart of hearts that Ed has a problem. At the party she stays by his side just in case she needs to rescue him. She had practice rescuing her parents when she was young. Now she is putting that skill to use again.

Ed is taking more and more of Eileen's attention and focus. As a result, she is unaware that Connell is suffering at school. He is being bullied by a group of kids; the harassment continues to grow. He's afraid to tell his parents about his problem. His pants are pulled down during gym while he's trying to make a slam dunk. He's humiliated but doesn't feel comfortable telling his parents. His mother is so remote and harsh and would probably blame him. His father isn't himself lately. Connell almost tells them about the incident. He tells them that it happened to another boy.

Ed is getting worse yet he is still in touch to some extent. Connell accompanies him to class so that he can write an essay about his work. Ed's behavior is so bizarre that there's no denying that he has a major problem. Ed knows that telling Eileen would just make matters worse and asks his son not to say anything to her. This incident shows two things: he is keenly aware that his behavior is bizarre and secondly that he cannot control it.

Ed's health issue is overwhelming and all-encompassing for Eileen. It's not that she ignores Connell intentionally it's just that she's spread too thin. Eileen is a little reluctant to tell her friends about Ed's condition which isn't fair to him. They wonder about his at times bizarre behavior but no explanation is forthcoming. Perhaps it's partly a protective instinct within Eileen and partly pride that her brilliant husband is literally losing his mind.

Just as Eileen has held on the mansion as the panacea that would cure everything, she thinks Ed, who continues to deteriorate, would be better off in a nice big house. To Eileen it is the fix-all for everything. She has held that belief, a childish belief, since she was ten-years old. Although its logic would escape most, she has believed it so long that it has become the truth to hear.

At a baseball game, Ed's vexation with his new reality comes to the forefront when Ed can't find his way back from the concession stand to their seats. His frustration manifests itself in anger at Eileen and demands to know where she was. Eileen chooses to worry about Connell not catching a foul ball rather than her husband who is slipping into madness.



Eileen is happy that Connell doesn't seem to be interested in science like his father. Ed had always been so obsessed with his work and made it his priority. Eileen is glad that Connell won't turn out like Ed. She may also be relieved that her son is not like him and will not lose his mind like Ed apparently is. It bothers her that Connell thinks in terms of dying. She is shaken because she doesn't want to think of death although it may be nearing her doorway.

Discussion Question 1

What indications are there that Ed is out of control? What indications are there that Ed is aware of his odd behavior and doesn't want anyone to know?

Discussion Question 2

Why doesn't Connell defend himself when the other boys are bullying him and physically attack him? Who does he blame and why?

Discussion Question 3

What makes Eileen hold on to her dream of a new house and what in the deep recesses of her mind makes her think that a big house could "fix" everything even Ed.

Vocabulary

cartel, ecstatic, inexorably, timbre, camaraderie, astringency, tribunal, errant, atomized, sadistic, phalanx, maniacally, progeny, curmudgeon, deleterious, torpor, pittance, transcendence



Chapters 21 - 25

Summary

Chapter 21

Although Eileen is the family member who gets everyone to Mass, she is beginning to doubt her belief in God. She's seen too much death to think there is a divine plan. Church is good for Connell; it provides moral lessons for him. She also believes in the good works that the church teaches. Eileen is surprised at the number of Indians who joined the church. Ed is more open-minded about other cultures.

Ed listens intently to the homily of the new pastor, Father Choudary, an Indian, who speaks of the science of God. If it is cosmic dust that everyone is made from then there is resultant responsibility to one another. Ed is upset that Eileen continues to look for a new home. He likes their home and their new parish priest. The new priest is Indian, she points out. She tells him to look around at the neighborhood and take in what's happened to it. Ed has an answer for her every objection.

Chapter 22

Eileen looks at a house that's for sale for \$900,000. It is more than they can afford but she wants a basis of comparison. If only Ed could understand that she could breathe there and make life better for all of them. When Eileen arrives home, Ed is on the couch with his headset on. Connell tells her that Ed was at his ballgame and did something weird. Connell had helped the coach carrying the equipment after the game. When Connell got to the car, Ed began screaming at him for making him wait. He acted crazy, he told her. That night, Eileen asks Ed about the incident. He just lost his temper, he tells her. He vows that it won't happen again. Eileen starts working with a realtor in Bronxville.

At a picnic, Connell and Ed are playing catch. Ed tells Connell not to throw so hard. Eileen senses a tension between father and son. Connell doesn't ease and one ball strikes Ed in the chest and knocks him over. Eileen and Connell both run to him. Ed swears he's okay. They resume play and Ed screams at Connell to throw the ball harder and harder. That evening Eileen confesses that she looked at some houses. She brings up the same arguments but they have no impact on Ed. He likes the house and doesn't want to move. Besides, he is recovering and doing things he'd never done before. He promises to fix the place up over the summer. To Eileen it is more the neighborhood than the house.

Chapter 23

Gloria shows Eileen a house with a gray brick exterior. The interior is three times the size of their living quarters. She finally tells Gloria that she can only afford a house for around \$400,000. Gloria vows to find the perfect house – one that even her husband



won't be able to resist. The reality is that Eileen cannot afford the house she wants and never will live in it. She wonders what life would have been like had she married someone else. She tells Gloria that she can't get the house she wants for the money she has. The neighborhoods in the less expensive houses were in reminded her of her current area.

Chapter 24

On the days that Connell doesn't have a game or practice, he often goes to the Seventy-Eighth Street Park and plays pick-up softball there. A kid he knows, Benny Erazo, tells him one afternoon that he should worry about his reputation. The word is out that Connell is soft. When Connell comes home, he heads downstairs to work out. As he lifts weights, Connell thinks of all the things he could have said to Benny. Connell is convinced that he soft. He blames his father who is always too nice. Connell doesn't want to do anything that would jeopardize his education or future.

Chapter 25

Eileen takes Connell to see some houses. She asks Connell to keep quiet about it. They meet Gloria who tells Eileen she found the perfect place for them. It is gorgeous and only slightly out of her price range. They drive to Yonkers which is in the Bronxville vicinity. Eileen takes in the neighborhood as they drive – it looks promising. She falls in love with the house which has a price tag of \$560,000 – over her budget.

At home, Ed is cross with Eileen. He wants to be left alone while he grades papers. He has a lot of pressure on him. Some of the kids have complained about him because he miscalculated some grades. When she wakes at three in the morning, Ed is still at his desk. He looks wild and refuses to come to bed. He had to finish his work. She notices two notepads with the same names and numbers written on them. His grade book is opened by there's nothing recorded. It is obvious that he is so unsure of himself that he's checking the calculations twice.

Eileen is surprised when he allows her to help him. She checks his numbers and he records them for each student in his grade book. She is exhausted but thrilled that they are working on something together. Ed becomes enraged when they record one grade incorrectly. Later in bed Ed begins sobbing uncontrollably. She tries to comfort him. He is stressed about aging but he's been acting strange for some time. He claims he just needs some time off. He'll recuperate over the summer.

Analysis

Eileen is beginning to have doubts about religion and God. She knows that Ed is not heading in a good direction. Her doubts stem from a resentment that has built up over the years. She has always worked hard at everything she has ever undertaken. And she is the one in the family who sees to it that they head to Mass every week. Yet she has been beset with problems her entire life. She suffered through a childhood with two



alcoholic parents yet she excelled at school, went to college and grad school and secured a good job.

Catholicism teaches that good works are the way to heaven. What could be a better pathway than being a nurse? She has treated and comforted the sick and the dying for years. If there was a God would he inflict the tragedy that seems to be in the works upon such a good person? And is death really the proper ending to a divine plan? The only purpose she sees in religion at this time is that it provides good moral lessons for her son.

Another issue about the church is bothering her. It harkens back to her tendency toward racism and to judge others based on their ethnicity. She is not pleased that the new pastor of their church is Indian. To Eileen it is yet another confirmation that the old neighborhood is deteriorating.

Ed's behavior is worrisome. He screams at Connell for making him wait after a ballgame. Connell tells his mother that Ed is "acting crazy." But Ed is still hanging on to a measure of normalcy and is still lucid enough to see that his aberrant behavior is impacting his family. He really doesn't want to hurt Eileen or Connor. He apologizes for his behavior and promises to not let it happen again. But they are empty words which he knows and which Eileen is aware of at least on some deeper level. Incidents like that will happen again because he can't control them.

Eileen is house hunting and she smells victory. Finally, she is actually shopping for the elusive mansion that always held the dream of total happiness and completeness. Eileen wants to impress. She tells the real estate agent that she wants a house with great curb appeal. She is most concerned with the superficial – the beautiful exterior of a house and the appearance that her family is perfect. To prove her point, she tells the real estate agent that her son is going to a prestigious private high school. Eileen's dream is within her grasp.

Pressing Ed to move to better and bigger house, she points out to Ed that there are many repairs needed to their current house. They should sell it before more things start to go wrong with it. When he tells her that he's recovering and that he'll do all the repairs and get the house in perfect condition. Eileen is smart enough to know that Ed will not be physically capable of doing so. Does she think beyond her desire to have her mansion and have any concern about the stress that she is placing on her husband?

Ed is struggling with the grading and recording of test papers. He reveals to Eileen that some of the students complained that he had recorded the wrong grades for them. This has to be a red flag for Eileen. Ed is such a perfectionist and takes pride in doing everything just so. Is it just the stress that Ed claims is getting him down? As a nurse she has to have at least the suspicion that Ed has a serious problem. He's not "recovering" as he claims; he is getting worse. When he begins sobbing she attributes it to the fact that he's aging. Denial is one of the early stages of grief. One can grieve over losses other than death.



While Eileen remains loyal to Ed and dedicated to helping him through this difficult period, she is being pushed to the literal edge. After he screams at her because she has the TV on, she has had it up to her ears. She threatens to take Connell and leave him. He is still in touch enough to rein it in as much as possible. He doesn't want to hurt his family and he doesn't want them to leave. Most of all he doesn't want to become the monster he is becoming but it's out of his hands.

Discussion Question 1

The frequency and intensity of Ed's bizarre behavior is increasing. Being a nurse and surely having many experiences with Alzheimer's patients, why isn't Eileen more suspicious about his condition? Why does place more focus on finally getting the house of her dreams than on her husband who is obviously suffering and needs help?

Discussion Question 2

Eileen realizes that she will soon be going through the change of life. How does that knowledge impact how she feels toward Ed and what effect does it have on her desire to get her dream house?

Discussion Question 3

What are some of the excuses Eileen uses to explain Ed's behavior? How do the seven stages of grief apply to Eileen and her view of Ed's condition?

Vocabulary

harbinger, effigy, homily, canoodling, torpor, attenuation, equanimity, sojourn, quotidian, stodgily, inviolate, blandishment, atriums, baleful, churlish, fantasist, subterranean, enigmatic



Chapters 26 - 30

Summary

Chapter 26

Gloria encourages Eileen to talk to Ed and to act immediately. The house is under market and won't last long. Eileen drives to the house to take it all in again. The patio door easily slides open and she steps inside. She goes upstairs and passes by the bedroom that would be Connell's room. She leans against the wall in the master bedroom staring out the window. Suddenly, she hears voices and looks for a place to hide. She fears she'll be caught and that the cops would be called in.

After listening closely, she realizes that a couple is looking at the house with another agent. Eileen continues to try to devise a way out without being noticed. Finally, she makes herself known and without apology asks the agent to let her out the front door so she can see the front porch. She could still hear the voices of the couple and their agent. They are weighing the pros and cons and seriously considering it. In her mind, the house already belongs to her. She vows to do whatever it takes.

Chapter 27

Connell really doesn't want to move. He told his mother he did because he knew how much she wanted to. He has friends in the neighborhood. Plus he'd be leaving part of himself behind. Eileen herself had stayed in the same neighborhood she was born in until her early twenties. Connell's friend, Farshid tells him he should go for it – live in the suburbs and maybe have a pool. Besides, since Connell will be going to school in Manhattan, they wouldn't see each other as much. They are all growing up and their lives will be changing.

Chapter 28

Connell continues to have trouble with the kids at school. He allows a student to look at his paper during a test. He is cajoled into making prank calls to other students, even his friends. He is chided for not shoplifting. Out of frustration he throws a baseball as hard as he can into the plate glass window of a store shattering it to pieces. Connell is panicked and runs home. He fears the cops will be after him. He feels bad for the shop owners who he knows well.

Chapter 29

Eileen is helping Ed grade more papers. He makes her to sit in the chair next to his desk and remain quiet. When he is finally ready, he tells her to record the grades in the grade book. Ed wakes Eileen in the middle of the night and has her follow him to the kitchen. He had made some changes and wants her to correct the grade book entries.



She sees a pattern; he increased the grades by a full letter. By the next morning, he had kicked all the grades up again – there are now only As and Bs.

Chapter 30

Sitting on the stoop, Eileen thinks that once she sells the house, she will no longer detest the neighborhood. She'll be able to view it with a measure of detachment. There are some things she likes in the old neighborhood – her hairdresser and some of the shops and restaurants. There would be better places in her future. Eileen is enraged when she learns that Ed spent over \$200 on comic books for Connell. Ed, Eileen and Connell have dinner at Arturo's. He is relieved that his school year is over. She brings up the subject of the house she wants. Eileen is stunned when Ed says that if she wants to move, they can move. Connell tells Ed he wants to move, too. It'll be a new start for everyone. Eileen presses Ed about his change of heart but he just seems happy that his school year is over.

Analysis

While Ed is having his problems and trying to focus on his work, Eileen is single-minded in her quest for her mansion. Her obsession leads her to break into the house to look around. When an agent brings another couple, she fears she'll be arrested. But she makes it out without incident. Her obsessive focus on the house is making the formerly careful and conservative Eileen a risk-taker. She has vowed to do whatever it takes to get the house and she is following through on that promise.

In the meantime, her husband is deteriorating into hell and her son feels lost and alone and is the target of the bullies at school. Connell does not feel comfortable discussing his problem with his mother and can't discuss it with Ed. Connell strikes out by breaking a plate-glass window with a baseball and stealing from his neighbors. If he had a mother who he could approach without feeling he'll be punished for his every misstep, these incidents could have been avoided. But mother has a solution for all their problems – the mansion of her dreams.

Although Eileen is vitally aware of Ed's decline – she continues to help him with his recordkeeping – she seems to turn a blind eye to the severity of his problem. If she did focus adequately on her husband it would undoubtedly change her plans about buying the big house. She cannot let that slip from her grasp. It had been a dream far too long for her to abandon it now. By ignoring the signs of a major health issue, Eileen is able to continue her folly and live out her fantasy.

Everything will be cured and fixed with the acquisition of the big house. Connell will be fine and attending his exclusive school, Ed will miraculously come out of his decline, she will no longer feel any prejudice against others and most of all she will finally be happy.



When Ed tells Eileen he wants to move it should have been a red flag. She presses him about his change of heart but he is focused on eating his bread. He'd agreed to anything to have more bread.

Discussion Question 1

What are signs of Eileen's obsession with the new house? How does her obsession impact her family – Ed and Connell?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Connell break the store's plate glass window? Why does he feel he can't talk to Ed? Why doesn't he talk to his mother about the bullying at school?

Discussion Question 3

Why should it have been a red flag when Ed has a change of heart about moving to the new house? What expectations does she have for her family after they move to her dream house?

Vocabulary

staunch, sleight, sniggling, pugnacious, imperious, exultantly, nostalgic, dubiously, largesse, benignly, extraneous, insuperable, circumspection



Chapters 31 - 35

Summary

Chapter 31

Eileen has Connell bury a St. Joseph statue in the yard which is supposed to help a person sell his house.

Chapter 32

Eileen lists the house with a family friend. She goes upstairs to tell the Orlandos that the house is for sale

She and Ed have decided to sell the multi-unit. Donny congratulates and says they might be able to buy it. After the first open house, an Indian couple make a full-price offer of \$365,000. Eileen contacts Gloria and tells her to make an offer on the Bronxville house.

Chapter 33

Connell wakes to his father screaming at him. He'd left the jelly out over night! As what has become a pattern, a short time later he apologizes to Connell. He doesn't know what came over him. Ed is going through an energy crusade over the summer – turning off lights, showering every other day, turning off the air conditioner and opening the windows. He sulks when they go on outings. Connell is dismayed by Ed's behavior.

Chapter 34

They move at the end of August. Ed refuses to go on a final walk through with her to make sure they have everything packed. She looks through the house by herself. She is leaving behind a lot of memories. Just as she had suspected, as she drives through the neighborhood for the last time, it no longer angers or frightens her. There are no regrets or nostalgia. She sees it from a distance now.

When she pulls into the driveway of the new house, it looks small and ordinary. She at first thinks she's in the wrong driveway. As she steps onto the drive, she sees that it needs a new layer of blacktop – something that Ed and Connell can do before the bad weather hits. Inside they all look around in their own silent worlds. Eileen is seeing the reality of the house – there is a lot of work to do there.

Chapter 35

Connell starts his new school. No parents were invited to the first day of school. Connell works up his nerve to introduce himself to a tall boy named Rod Henni who is also from Westchester. During the first week of school, both boys attend a cross-country meeting.



To Connell it wasn't a real sport. He joined just to strengthen his legs for baseball. Rod's slowness and lack of coordination are obvious in cross-country workouts. Rod is hurt when Connell laughs along with the other boys who ridicule him.

Ed takes Connell to a cross-country meet. He takes pictures of the team as they line up. Taking pictures has recently become a new pursuit of Ed's. He takes pictures of everything. It is a grueling course and Connell is heartened when he sees the finish line ahead. He hears Ed cheering him on. Fellow student Declan Coyne rides in on the train from Bronxville with Connell. One night, Declan takes Connell to the park where he hangs out. Most of the kids there are preppies but some are older – college students and even dropouts. One of the guys hands Connell a beer. When no one is looking, Connell pours the beer on the ground. He is handed another one which he feels obliged to actually drink. Suddenly cop cars swarm the area. Connell is arrested and is told that the incident would be reported in the paper. His parents and his school would also be notified. Connell is hauled off to juvenile court. Eileen smacks his face when she sees him. Ed looks concerned but not angry. Connell is grounded from everything but cross-country practice. The judge gives him 30 hours of community service and the warning that he'd spend jail time if he saw him again. On the way home, Eileen warns him to never disgrace her again.

Analysis

Despite Ed's deteriorating condition, Eileen forges ahead with the sale of her house and the move to the big house in Bronxville. When they move in, Eileen immediately sees a thousand things that have to be fixed, changed or improved. She thinks that Ed can do many of the repairs. But is she thinking right? Does she think this man who is just the ghost of the man he used to be can handle all the repairs that need to be done? It's a lot of pressure to place on someone who is ailing. She piles on responsibilities on a man who can't record his own test papers correctly.

As a nurse for many years, it is difficult to believe that Eileen didn't suspect that Ed was suffering from a serious neurological problem. But her quest to realize her dream was more important to her than Ed's health. She would deal with that later. Besides, once they moved to the big house, things would fall in place. Maybe Ed would even recover. Those are not the thoughts of an intelligent, experienced head nurse.

But reality hits Eileen on the first day she moves into her dream house. It didn't do it for her. The house looks smaller, there are so many flaws. She doesn't feel the euphoria she thought she would. She tells the movers to place the couch under the window. It's her first decision in her new house but it is empty and unrewarding. Eileen had held onto the fantasy that the size and appearance of a house could make her happy. She's learning rather quickly that her dream was just that and has little to do with reality.

Connell is feeling his oats and gets arrested for drinking beer as a minor. The moment that Eileen walks in to bail him out she slaps him across the face. One can understand her anger and embarrassment but she could have talked to him and try to find out the



circumstances of the incident. She is ready to believe that he is guilty without hearing his side. She is most concerned with her reputation and not what's going on in Connell's life. All she has to say after he gets 30 hours of community service with no jail time, is that he better never take another drink until he's 21. She never does ask him the simple question, "What happened, Connell?"

Discussion Question 1

Why does Ed refuse to do a final walk through when they leave their old house? Why does Eileen suddenly have a different view of her neighborhood and community as she drives through it for the last time?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss why Eileen an experienced nurse and nursing supervisor does not seem to even suspect that Ed is having major neurological problems. How will the added responsibilities of repair work at the new house impact Ed? Why does Eileen have an empty feeling when she finally moves into the house of her dreams?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss how Eileen handled Connell's arrest. What other approach could she have taken that would have been better and drawn her closer to her son?

Vocabulary

ineluctably, intrepid, disconcerted, monolithic, obscurity, diaspora, cauldron, flotsam, buffering, prefatory, chrysalis, modicum, precipitous, harangue, indigenous, desultory



Chapters 36 - 40

Summary

Chapter 36

Ed is expending all his time and energy scraping off the varnish off the brick floor in the kitchen. Eileen offers to bring a contractor in but Ed insists that he's doing fine. She is tired of living out of boxes and wants to get the floor done. He grabs her and warns her not to bring anyone in to finish the job. It is his job.

Chapter 37

The family goes on a vacation to Cooperstown. It was Ed's idea and it is all for Connell's benefit. They had a dispute earlier in the day. Ed told Eileen about it but wasn't specific. She asks Connell what had been said. He had told his father that he had bad breath. Ed said "thanks" and retired to the bathroom for an hour brushing his teeth.

At Ed's request, Eileen takes a picture of Ed and Connell in front of the Hall of Fame. While they tour the Hall of Fame, Eileen goes shopping. Ed doesn't tire of the museum but after a while, Connell is ready for lunch. Ed is sure that Connell will be inducted some day. Connell waits for a chuckle that isn't forthcoming. Connell had made his high school team but he knows he wasn't going to be scouted. Ed breaks into a serious discussion that Connell would rather not have – especially in public. Ed has noticed something in Connell that bothers him. It reminds him of himself at his age. It made life harder for him. He sees Connell closing his mind off and that isn't Connell – Connell is open and beautiful.

Connell insists he is fine but Ed persists. He wants Connell to feel in his bones that he will be inducted into the Hall of Fame. Ed tells him to feel it, believe it. He pitched for the Mets during his whole career. His fans cheered him; his wife and kids are in the stands. He realizes that his father is trying to tell Connell that he believes in him. Connell assures his father that he believes, feels powerful, isn't angry or afraid. Ed is satisfied and is ready to go find Eileen.

Chapter 38

Eileen gets the cabinets and countertops of her dreams installed. She takes a shopping trip to the market and buys everything she might ever need. Connell helps carry in the many bags of food and other items. Ed goes crazy when he sees all the bags. He screams that they eat too much and don't need all this food. He proclaims that they're getting fat and will henceforth each only one meal a day. As he storms off, Eileen tells him he can eat one meal a day but she and Connell will eat like kings.

Chapter 39



Things are in disrepair. Ed has taken a hammer to the basement drywall. He also ripped up the floorboards around the house. The drains are clogged and the garage door stopped working. There had been a storm and they suffered more water damage. Ed declares that he'll fix everything himself – no contractors. Ed and Eileen have dinner at another couple's house, Ruth and Frank McGuire. Ed is quiet and unresponsive. He struggles and makes a mess trying to get some meat on his plate. Eileen serves the potatoes and vegetables to avoid another mess. The other couple realizes that Ed is having problems. Ed goes on about Connell having a hard time with biology. Connell might come and spend a weekend with the McGuires. Ed asks Frank to talk to Connell about giving more time to science. Eileen is relieved when it is time to go.

Chapter 40

In December, the floor boards are a mess in the dining and living room. Ed insists on fixing the basement first. It is driving Eileen crazy. She has to forget about entertaining at Christmas. The sounds emanating from the basement sound like they're coming from a torture chamber. When he's not down there, Eileen checks on his progress. It surprisingly is coming along. She is stunned when she finds his razor and a gob of shaving cream on his copy of "The Origin of the Species." He had always been so protective of it.

Eileen begins leaving him notes on his nightstand reminding him of things they have planned or chores that need to be done. She writes him a note reminding him to get Connell a new baseball glove for Christmas. She realizes that it's abnormal to be writing notes to her husband. She begins to think that Ed might have something physically wrong – a tumor, glandular problem, failing organ. She would have him checked out. She knows it will be a battle to get him to see anyone. She would wait for the next odd thing he does or says to pounce. She calls his doctor who had just seen him six months before. He is in perfect condition, the doctor tells her. She waits for the slipup but it's not forthcoming. He comes home from work and toils in the basement. She sees that he's exhausting himself. One night he can't even get up from the floor. He looks as if he'd been beaten. He has to finish a section. She tells him he is done. He refuses to come to dinner. Eileen calls in a contractor to do the floors and paint and plaster the first floor. Ed puts up on fight when she tells him.

Analysis

Ed is scraping off the varnish on the brick floor in the kitchen. It intense work and he's not getting very far. Eileen doesn't indicate any worry about his long hours and the stress he's under but wants to get the kitchen done. She's tired of living out of a box. She wants to bring in a contractor to finish the job. This riles Ed who warns her not to bring anyone in to finish the job. It is his job. Ed is trying to hold onto a scintilla of his former self. It will be a personal victory, a monumental achievement for Ed to finish the kitchen floor. It means much more to him than just finishing the floor. Once he completes the job, a measure of his self-worth will be restored. He will prove to himself



that he still can accomplish things and that he has value. Eileen is insensitive to that need and is strictly concerned about her own wishes – she is tired of living out of boxes.

Surprisingly, Ed agrees to see Eileen’s doctor. Dr. Khalifa gives him a few simple tests which Ed struggles with. He can’t recall the current president’s name. The diagnosis will be forthcoming and it looks ominous.

In his own unique way, Ed wants to convey to Connell how much he thinks of him. He tells Connell that he’ll be in the Baseball Hall of Fame one day which Connell knows is ludicrous. He thinks it’s a joke but Connell doesn’t laugh. Connell is sensitive to his father’s issues and doesn’t argue with him. Connell is much more in tune with his father’s needs than Eileen is. What Ed wants Connell to know more than anything is that he believes in him.

Finally it dawns on Eileen that something is really wrong with Ed. She thinks in terms of a tumor or glandular problem. She can’t bring herself to think it could be early-onset Alzheimer’s. But for some reason she decides to give it more time. One more slip up and she’s taking him to a doctor. She’s actually giving herself more time. Ed’s had already run out.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Eileen want to hire a contractor to get the kitchen floor done? What is Ed angered by her suggestion? Why does he insist on finishing the job himself?

Discussion Question 2

What does Eileen see her doctor about? Why does Eileen threaten to leave Ed if nothing is physically wrong with him? What preliminary test results that Ed agrees to take are ominous?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Ed tell Connor that he thinks he’ll be in the Baseball Hall of Fame someday? Does he really believe it or is there an underlying message that he is trying to convey to Connell? And what is that message?

Vocabulary

sanctuary, fastidious, foliage, fabricator, frenzy, regime, indiscriminately, protocol, resilience, supplicating



Chapters 41 - 45

Summary

Chapter 41

Ed curses out one of the contractors with foul language that Eileen had never heard him use before. She apologizes to the worker and tells him that her husband is under a lot of stress. Eileen is having a lot of work done. The roof and the basement will both have to wait. She can't live with the old furniture and wants to get all new things. There will be a lot of expenses but she can use some of their savings and use her credit line. She'd pay it all off and build up their savings again.

Chapter 42

Eileen sees her doctor about shortness of breath she'd been experiencing. She tells him that if nothing is physically wrong with Ed, she will divorce him. She can't take it anymore. Surprisingly, Ed agrees to see Eileen's doctor. After the visit, the doctor referred Ed to a neurology team. He is thoroughly checked out by the doctors and given a thyroid test and a CT scan. When Dr. Khalifa tells Ed to count backwards from 100, he skips from 97 to 86. After a pause he recites a few numbers in succession then skips over others. He struggles to draw three concentric circles. Ed knows that the current US President is a Republican. He asks the doctor if it's Reagan. He can't really recall his name. Ed finally comes up with the right answer, George Bush. He has trouble touching his nose.

Chapter 43

Eileen tells Connell that he won't go anywhere in baseball. She encourages him to join the debate club. Ed tells her to let the kid be and let him do what he wants. Eileen believes that the debate club will allow him to make his mark and have the chance at an Ivy League college. He could become a lawyer or a politician and have the good life.

Chapter 44

After more testing, the results are finally in. Dr. Khalifa tells him he is physically healthy but that he is probably suffering from Alzheimer's. The doctor tells Ed to make the most of every day. With Ed being only fifty-one, it is an early onset of the disease but it's not uncommon. Ed is insistent that Connell not be told about his condition. He isn't going to tell anyone at the college either. Ed grows quiet after the diagnosis, stops showering and brushes his teeth only when Eileen makes him. One night he tells her that he's dying and that he's afraid that Connell will have what he has. Eileen has had lots of experience with Alzheimer's patients. She'd seem them wandering the halls of the hospital completely lost. They'd come in the emergency room with cuts and burns of unknown origin. Eileen calls around and learns of several research projects that Ed can



participate in. Ed has to sign a form to participate. His signature lands an inch above the line and trails off down to the right like it's falling down.

Chapter 45

Eileen treats herself to a mink coat. She wants to wear her new coat before the weather turns warm. She makes reservations at Le Bistro for her and Ed. As it turns out it is too warm for her coat and she takes it off before she gets to the restaurant. The coat is a symbol to Eileen. She had wanted a mink coat for as long as she could remember. Even though minks are out of style and women her age are rarely seen in them, it means a lot for her to have it. She'd pay it off when she gets the other bills under control.

Analysis

Eileen tries to make a connection to her childhood but holds herself back. Perhaps there were too many bad memories for her. She goes as far as looking up Virginia, an old school friend, but she can't bring herself to identify herself. She had left so much behind and too fought against so many old demons to revisit it. But her attempt to do so underscores a need to resolve old wounds, old wounds that apparently never healed.

Ed also takes a trek into the past but he brings Connell with him. It is noteworthy that Ed wants Connell with him as he recalls the past and Eileen's trip was a solo venture. Connell is polite but grows weary of hearing about the "old days" from his father. He may be thinking that Ed should be concentrating on the present and on trying to be a "normal" father for once.

Eileen may be giving Connell good advice to focus on the debate club instead of baseball but she's so harsh and unfeeling in her approach. She tells him bluntly that he won't go anywhere in baseball – a sport that he and Ed love. Perhaps her bitterness stems from the close relationship that Ed and Connell have. They share a love for baseball something that she is left out of.

The dream house hasn't made Eileen happy. In fact, things have gotten worse at home due in large part to Ed's condition. She buys a mink coat that she can't really afford. It's a way of looking happy and successful at least on a superficial level.

Discussion Question 1

Contrast how Eileen discusses a future in baseball with Connell to how Ed approached it. Discuss the difference between giving a young person sound advice in a positive way and giving him sound advice with a negative tone.



Discussion Question 2

Discuss the reactions of Ed and Eileen to the grim diagnosis he receives. Why is his first instinct to tell no one – especially Connell?

Discussion Question 3

With all her problems and the potential for huge medical bills for Ed why does Eileen buy a mink coat? How is that action similar to her dream of a huge house?

Vocabulary

ambiance, discordant, concentric, quiddities, paradox, mulling, knavery, adamant, cowlick



Chapters 46 - 50

Summary

Chapter 46

Uncle Phil visits. In conversation, Ed claims to be six feet tall. The three get into a debate about his height. Connell forces him to stand against the wall and be measure – five-ten and three-quarters. Ed wants to keep a knife that had a life-time guarantee. He wants to the call the company on it. Connell points out that the blade is broken off and it's nothing but a stub. Eileen speaks up in support of Ed. She tells Connell Ed bought that when they got married. He paid a lot for it.

Chapter 47

Eileen finds herself grading more and more of Ed's papers. Ed is spending his time gathering material for a research grant he plans to apply for. After the diagnosis, he was more anxious to get the grant. Sadly, Eileen knows that he'll never be awarded the research grant but she is proud that he hasn't given up. Ed takes the experimental drugs twice a day. Eileen makes sure he takes them. He feels like a lab rat. Maybe it's his turn to be the rat. Eileen says that it may help him but his focus is on helping others.

Ed is weighed and his vital signs are recorded. They administered an electrocardiogram and memory tests. He hates the writing tests more than anything. It shows in a nutshell how much he'd deteriorated. After the battery of tests, Ed is given a thirteen-week supply of drugs. After they were depleted, he would have to come back for another exam.

Chapter 48

Eileen reads a book on Alzheimer's. Ed is supposed to be reading, too, but he's just looking at the ceiling. Eileen feels it's time to tell their friend – it would explain some of his behavior. She suggests having a dinner party and telling their close friends and family all at once. Ed is not in favor of it and is still against telling Connell. He wants Connell to remember him the way he was. The pills may kick in and make him better. Ed finally agrees to the dinner party and to tell Connell the next week after his game.

On the night of the dinner party, Ed gets cold feet. He doesn't want to tell their friends. Later, he surprises her and makes the announcement – he has Alzheimer's. Some doubt the diagnosis. Other friends offer their support. Jack is upset that Ed told everyone. He blames Eileen because no man would choose that way to announce his condition. Ed explains to the group that Alzheimer's is due to plaque deposits that reroute synapses causing the brain mass to decrease and not function correctly. Eileen tells them that early on-set, like Frank has, is the most virulent variety. It erases memory and dismantles motor functions.



The next Saturday, Ed tells Connell that he's been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and that he's on experimental drugs. Connell is in denial; his father is too young for the disease. Ed could be okay for years or it could be quick. Connell asks if it will get to the point that Ed doesn't know who he is. Ed tells him he will always know who Connell is. Connell hugs Ed and motions to Eileen to join them. She can't engage in a group hug. It would be embarrassing.

Chapter 49

Eileen gets into the habit of calling her friends after dinner to talk about Ed's condition. She needs their support. She calls Ruth and Jack and asks him to get in touch with Ed. He needs him. Jack is having a hard time dealing with it. Frank didn't call and when she forces them to speak, it makes Jack withdraw from Ed even more. Ruth senses that Eileen is struggling, too, and suggests she seek therapy. Ruth had seen a therapist, Dr. Brill, and recommends him to Eileen. In her first session with Dr. Brill, she tells him of her troubled childhood and about Ed's condition. Dr. Brill says that an intelligent person like Ed may have had problems for a long time but used his intellect to hide it. He asks her how Ed's condition makes her feel. In their next session, Eileen reveals that she fears being alone. Dr. Brill stresses that the disease has a severe impact on the victim's family and friends.

Eileen realizes that Ed will not be able to continue working. She contacts the Alzheimer's Association for help and learns that Medicaid only provides funds when the family has become impoverished. She is advised to liquidate investments and told that she will not be able to keep any of Ed's income but Eileen will be able to keep the house. There is no funding for nurses if the family still has assets – including savings, retirement funds and stocks. Eileen realizes that to have at-home nursing care, she would have to take out a second mortgage. Eileen saw Bruce Epstein, a lawyer and husband of a friend. He tells her that the best thing to do would be to divorce Ed. He'd get Medicaid right away. She doesn't have to tell Connell. She'll have to explain to Ed that she is trying to be smart. Nothing would change. She wouldn't be divorcing him in her heart. She doesn't like the idea but he tells her to give it some serious consideration.

Chapter 50

Connell is in his girlfriend Regina's basement. All he has on his mind is making out with her but he's not getting anywhere. Knowing that she feels sorry about his father's condition, he uses it to try to get farther with her. Connell tells her he fears that one day his father won't know who he is. His father is leaving him; Regina will leave him one day, too. She assures him she will be there for him. She embraces him. Connell kisses her passionately and his hands are all over her. She doesn't push him away. Connell got farther with Regina than he ever had with his father's help.



Analysis

After many years of resenting Ed and his frugal and stringent ways, something begins to open up in Eileen's heart. Ed doesn't want to throw a broken knife away but Connell points out that it's useless. The blade is only a stub. Even though Ed's argument has no merit, Eileen comes to his defense. It was an expensive knife that Ed bought when they were first married. He can keep it if he wants to she tells Connell. But the connection to the past when they were young and there was no horrid disease that they were dealing with was felt by Eileen. And if that stubby knife connected Ed to a better time, she wasn't going to let anyone take that away from him. Although he has no chance of being awarded a research grant, she is proud of him for applying for it.

In the movies, friends and family are supportive of a person diagnosed with a serious disease but this story brings reality to that myth. It's precisely why people are reluctant to reveal this kind of personal news about themselves. When Ed tells a gathering of his friends, they mainly fall silent. One friend is angry that he told everyone. It wasn't manly.

The most important person to be told is the last to be told. Connell had been dealing with his father's strange behavior for years. It was time for him to know. When Ed finally tells him that he has Alzheimer's Disease, Connell is in denial. His father is too young for that. It's an old person's disease. He's afraid his father won't know him as the disease progresses. Ed tells him that he'll always know him. Connell wants his mother to join in a group hug. But she can't. She'd be embarrassed. Why is it embarrassing for her? She can't display her love for another in an open way. She fears rejection. She learned that lesson at an early age.

Eileen begins to face the huge financial strain that Ed's condition will cause. Although very familiar with health care and its costs and the agony of dealing with health insurance, she realizes it's very different on a personal level than as a nurse who is just on the periphery of the process. Eileen is through in her research to find financial support. She rejects a lawyer's suggestion that she divorce Ed. It would allow him to get funds immediately. But Eileen doesn't want to divorce her husband even if it's just on paper. He means too much to her.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Eileen exhibiting a protective attitude toward Ed? How does her attitude connect back to events of the past?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Ed adamant that Connell not be told about his diagnosis? How practical is his stance? How can Eileen help Ed and Connell with the matter?



Discussion Question 3

What are signs that reality is finally hitting Eileen? What challenges does she face emotionally, physically and financially?

Vocabulary

electrocardiogram, synapses, proximity, impregnable, virulent, cadaverous, jocular



Chapters 51 - 55

Summary

Chapter 51

Eileen looks up the address of an old school mate who was from a wealthy family. She parks in front of the house and walks to the door. The school mate comes to the front yard from the back. Eileen starts to identify herself to the woman who doesn't recognize her but decides against it. She asks her for directions and then leaves.

Chapter 52

Ed takes Connell on a drive through his old neighborhood for the third weekend in a row. He wants to show him everything before he forgets what it was. Connell is being very understanding. He's missing a Halloween party to tour the old neighborhood with his father. Deep down Connell resents his father; Ed has never been a normal father.

Chapter 53

Connell asks Ed to help him prepare for a debate tournament. The subject is whether euthanasia is morally justifiable. Connell will take the pro side and Ed will take the con. Connell starts out by declaring that every human has the right of self-determination. Patients have the right to have control over their bodies. After Connell expands on his argument, it is Ed's turn to counter it. Ed seems lost and is unable to keep up with Connell's argument. Finally, he says that he doesn't believe in euthanasia. Connell suggests he could make a "slippery slope" argument. Going down the path of euthanasia could someday justify suicide. An argument against it could include the fact that the medical field has no right to help patients end their lives. No matter what suggestion Connell comes up with, Ed repeats that he doesn't believe in it. Connell finally says the best negative against it is that someone like Ed could have been taken out already.

Chapter 54

Ed's chair, Stan Kovey, calls Eileen to tell her that there had been several complaints from Ed's students. There had also been a threat to beat Ed up. Eileen is enraged at the ingrates. Ed has dedicated his life to his students. She hopes the guilty ones are expelled. The purpose of Stan's call is really about Ed's work. This is the call Eileen has dreaded. Ed has a year and a half to go before he had thirty years in. It would mean a lot to his pension if he could stay that long. He'd talk to Ed but he's stopped talking to everyone. Ed is not assigning grades properly. Eileen denies knowing anything about Ed's problems. He has suffered from headaches lately. She tells Stan he's going to have a brain scan to check for a tumor. Eileen calls Jasper who is Ed's protégé. She tells him about the call from Stan and confides in him that Ed has Alzheimer's. She asks him not to say anything. They don't want anyone in his department to know. Jasper



promises to cover for him and help him with his grades. She asks Jasper not to let Ed know that she called him.

A week later, she calls Stan to let him know that Ed didn't have a tumor. She'll let him know if she finds anything else about Ed's condition. She warns Ed not to talk to anyone other than Jasper. She reminds him not to tell anyone he has Alzheimer's. He asks her what Alzheimer's is. She is floored by his response until she sees a little impish smile cross his face.

Chapter 55

A month later Stan calls again. Ed has to leave the classroom. Things have deteriorated; he can't do his job. Stan is hoping that he retires. Eileen knows he has rights of tenure but she can't keep forcing Ed to work in an adversarial situation. He has a right to a review. He could sit it out; a review could take a couple of years. Suddenly a solution occurs to her almost as if Ed whispered it in her ear. She suggests to Stan to just let him finish out the year and then use the sick days he has coming – over a year's worth – to make it to his thirty years.

Stan calls the next day with good news. Ed's colleagues volunteered to fill in for Ed for the rest of the school year. He'd be on the payroll until summer. His sick days would start in the fall.

On February 13, 1993, Ed went to class for the last time. Eileen had been right about the amount of sick days he had but she didn't realize that they wouldn't count toward his pension. She asks Stan to credit Ed with that time but he isn't open to the idea. Ed would finish his career with 29 years instead of 30. Thirty years would have given him a pension with a higher percentage of his salary. He'd get some money from Social Security disability but they'd have to make some radical adjustments. Ed has also lost his research grant money. He has medical coverage until his sick days run out. In order to have medical coverage for the two of them, she will have to keep working full time and she'd have to stay ten years for her pension and for health insurance in retirement. She wouldn't be able to stay home and care for Ed when he'd need her the most. Nursing care or a nursing home would wipe them out. So many expenses are coming up including Connell's college tuition. Eileen had worked and saved all her life. She could lose everything because of the American health care system.

Analysis

Connell asks Ed to help him prepare for a debate. The subject euthanasia is an ironic choice for Connell given that there are those who feel that advanced Alzheimer's patients would be better off with an early out. Ed isn't much help. All he can say is that he doesn't believe in it. Is something connecting within Ed that some could make a case for people with his condition be euthanized? But Connell finds a good debate point observing his father. He shows his love for Connell telling Ed that he is the best case for



not euthanizing people. Ed doesn't understand what he's saying but he may have felt the love.

Eileen has kept Ed's diagnosis from his college. But his deterioration is obvious to everyone. It is a futile effort on Eileen's part to think that Ed could continue in his capacity as science professor. Eileen is worried about money not because she's cynical, she has to worry about it. If Ed could stay until he gets in thirty years, he would get more on his monthly pension. But Eileen is forced to face reality and concedes that Ed cannot continue.

While Eileen is still hiding Ed's condition from the college, she instructs him to not tell anyone about his condition, about his Alzheimer's. He asks her what Alzheimer's is. She is frustrated with his response until she sees a little coy smile. Ed is still in there and he still has a sense of humor.

The second phase of the tragedy – the financial one – falls upon Eileen's shoulders. They are not wealthy people and the expenses will be untenable. She feels resentment for the health insurance system. She has worked and saved all her life. Now it could all be gone in an instant. But Eileen is resilient and proactive. She will find a way to survive. She always has.

Discussion Question 1

What does Connell discover about his father when he asks him to help him prepare for a debate? What does it indicate about Connell that he thought to ask his father to help him?

Discussion Question 2

Eileen is keeping the truth about Ed's condition from the college where he teaches. Is she lying by omission? Discuss her responses to Ed's boss who called with concern over Ed's performance in the classroom. Was it unethical for Eileen to tell Ed's boss that Ed had a tumor?

Discussion Question 3

Describe the current health care system and how someone with a debilitating disease can be ruined with the onset of a major illness.

Vocabulary

gamin, chastened, enunciation, derelict, lucidity, euthanasia, efficacy, unfeasible, eugenics, protégé, protocol, adversarial, algorithm, exemplary, palatable



Chapters 56 - 60

Summary

Chapter 56

Ed agrees to teach Connell to drive which is a hair-raising experience for both of them. Ed starts screaming at Connell the minute he pulls away from the garage and doesn't stop until they return. Ed is always sorry but Connell decides to take driver's ed at school. Connell notices that Ed is coming in and out of his old self more frequently.

Chapter 57

Eileen tapes cards on the microwave that read, "start" and "press here." She sets the cook time for Ed's lunch before she leaves for the day. Ed is not eating much and has stopped reading. He can usually deal with easy errands like buying milk or getting a newspaper. She always sees that he has money in his wallet. He gets to know the storekeepers who help him at the register. One market keeps a tab which Eileen pays off each week.

One day he is sure that he wasn't given the right change and insists on going back to the store to straighten it out. Eileen dreads a scene but accompanies him. She tells Ed to wait for her while she goes in to talk to the checker. Ed tells Eileen he goes to church sometimes and just sits there alone. He thinks about her and Connell. He worries if they'll be okay after he's gone. He fears that Connell will get his disease.

Chapter 58

Eileen and Ed stay home on New Year's Eve. It's too much effort for Eileen to get Ed out. Besides, she'd have to take care of him all night. She thinks back about first meeting Ed on New Year's Eve and the celebrations they had while living in Jackson Heights. Connell is going to a party in White Plains with Cecelia. He wants to take Ed's car. Eileen insists that Connell have dinner with them. Later, she decides to go out after all. It is snowing when they leave so she has Connell drive instead of Ed. She's been meaning to get Ed's car away from him. He shouldn't drive any longer. There'd been a few close calls.

Connell is having difficulty driving in the snow which is becoming more intense. He's sliding around and losing control and rear-ends a parked car. The tow truck driver gives them a lift home. Eileen and Ed eat ice cream out of the carton and watch New Year's celebrations on TV. Ed drifts off. She thinks of the night they met, their blind date on New Year's Eve. She thinks of their first kiss. Ed is a different man now. Ed's car is declared totaled.

Chapter 59



People come from all over for Ed's mother's funeral. Having his brother Phil around seems to make Ed's grieving worse. Phil does all the talking; Ed just sobs. Eileen has to keep reminding Ed to breathe during the funeral. She never realized that Ed had such strong feelings for his mother. She notices how aged Ed has become. He looks like more a contemporary of his mother rather than her son. She realizes that she is not as worried about being alone as she is about dying.

Eileen keeps a log of Ed's behavior. He's always reluctant before a social engagement. Eileen tells him he's smarter and funnier than most people. She is surprised by how her own words ring true. She notices that after a stressful social event, he is exhausted for days. An outing at the art museum underscores that his memory is slipping rapidly. He can't remember Plato's name in his favorite painting, David's "The Death of Socrates."

Chapter 60

Connell is growing increasingly uneasy with his father's condition. He wants to go away to college, far away so that getting back home will not be easy or inexpensive. Eileen plans to pay for his education through an equity loan on the house. She doesn't want him to have big student loans to repay. Connell looks forward to a whole new world, a new start.

Analysis

Analysis

Eileen has decided to leave Ed at home by himself. She has stressed to him that he must stay in the house. She leaves notes of instruction all over. He is able to do small errands like buying milk or the newspaper. But Eileen knows from her professional experience that leaving Ed alone will not be a permanent solution to their situation. He won't be a danger to anyone other than himself. As his condition is worsening, he won't be lucid enough to pick up the phone and call for help. Her worries are confirmed when she comes home one day to find that he didn't eat all day. It was too difficult for him to figure out how to heat up his food.

Trying to hold onto to tradition and good times of the past, Eileen makes an ill-advised decision and decides that the three of them should go out for New Year's Eve dinner. The weather is horrid and the snow is coming down. Connell, an inexperienced driver, is at the wheel and crashes into a parked car. The evening is a disaster. Eileen thinks back to another New Year's Eve – her first date with Ed. It was a better time and Ed was a different person. She is acknowledging to herself that that Ed is gone forever.

Ed is reluctant to attend social events because he knows he can't control his behavior. On one occasion, she urges Ed to attend a party with him. He is reluctant but she tells him that he's smarter and wittier than anyone else at the party. Her own words surprise her and it surprises her that they ring true with her. Ed is smarter and funnier than most people. Alzheimer's has taken away a lot from him but they can't take away how smart and accomplished he was.



Discussion Question 1

Describe the level of functionality Ed has. What chores can he be trusted to do? Why is it risky to leave Ed home alone?

Discussion Question 2

Why did Eileen take the risk of venturing out on New Year's Eve during a storm? What from her past was she trying to relive?

Discussion Question 3

Although Ed's emotions and memories are being zapped from him, explain the huge emotional reaction he has to his mother's death. What realization does Eileen face about herself as a result of her mother-in-law's funeral?

Vocabulary

cajole, wraith, excruciating, languorous, fealty, augured, recalcitrant, utilitarian



Chapters 61 - 65

Summary

Chapter 61

Connell misses the last train out of Grand Center. He angrily kicks a recycling bin. The next train wouldn't come until 5:30. He decides not to call his mother even though she'd worry. She wishes he'd be around more but has gotten used to his late hours. To kill time, he walks over to Smalls, a jazz club that allowed minor in but didn't serve them alcoholic beverages. He stays all night. At five in the morning, a free breakfast buffet is served which he dug into. When Connell walks in at seven in the morning, he finds Eileen asleep at the kitchen. She had made Christmas cookies which he was supposed to help her with. He wakes her and tells her to go upstairs to bed. She promises to never worry about him again. He is free, she tells him.

It is Christmas Eve and radios on the first and second floor are tuned to the same station that plays Christmas songs all day long. Connell wanders into his father's bathroom. Ed has plied himself with a mountain of shaving cream. Connell watches closely as Ed attempts to shave. As usual, Eileen has gone overboard for the holiday and Ed claims he doesn't like Christmas and never has. Connell wonders to himself how Eileen will withstand the challenge of Ed's inanity. She does everything for him but he's never appreciative. She gives Connell \$40 to get his father a gift.

Connell buys his father an electric razor. Ed tries out the electric razor. He claims he shaved with a Bic razor even though the whirr of the electric shave was obvious. They get into a heated argument about what Ed shaved with. Connell is sick of the BS! Ed starts jabbing himself in the face with the Bic. Connell tries to take the razor from Ed but he lunges the razor at Connell. They wrestle for the razor. Finally, to end things, Connell agrees that Ed used the Bic. He asks his father to try the electric razor. Ed says he already did and it worked fine. Eileen just wants to have a nice Christmas.

Chapter 62

On Valentine's Day, Ed abruptly leaves the house. He tells Connell he's going to get a Valentine for Eileen. It is freezing out so Connell tries to convince Ed to wait until Eileen gets home. They can take the car. Ed keeps walking; Connell catches up so he can go with him. In the gift shop, Ed selects a big stack of greeting cards. Connell offers to pick out a card for Eileen. Ed is all for it. Connell buys a funny Valentine card for his current girlfriend, Kaitlin.

Chapter 63

Eileen likes to stop by the new Starbucks by the train station. She goes there on Saturdays to get away from Ed. She could be alone in a crowd there. She likes her anonymity there. A young woman sitting nearby is crying. The cries turn to sobs. She is



drawing the attention of the other patrons. Eileen doesn't feel in a position to try to comfort the woman and tell her that everything will be fine. Maybe everything won't be fine.

A few minutes after the woman leaves the coffee shop, Eileen leaves and tries to find her. She runs in the direction that the woman was walking in. She eventually catches up with the woman. She plans to tell her that she was not alone in her misery. Eileen gets cold feet and doesn't say anything to her. She thinks to herself that the woman will work it out herself.

Chapter 64

Connell is leaving for college soon. Eileen urges him to spend a day with Ed before he goes. He takes his dad to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Ed recognizes "The Gulf Stream" one of his favorite pieces. Ed seems inspired; he loves art. They leave in the pouring down rain. Ed thinks it's beautiful. One day at home, Connell comes into Ed's study looking for something. Ed is sitting and staring at his diplomas on the wall. A few hours later, Connell pops back in and Ed is still in the same exact position. He thinks Ed must have drifted off but when he looks, Ed is wide awake. He tells Connell that it must have taken a lot of work to get those diplomas.

Eileen is at work when Connell leaves for the airport for Chicago. He walks in town with his father who plans to go to church. Ed stops when they cross over the Bronx River. Ed is watching a frog on a rock. He claps loudly making the frog skitter off the rock. Connell takes Ed to a coffee shop where Connell hung out all summer. He orders two brain freezers. The second after he said it, he cringes at the "brain freeze" reference but Ed didn't notice. Connell tells Ed that he'll miss him. Ed tells him to have fun and live his life. Ed says he'll be fine walking home by himself. Connell, his face wistful, watches his father walk away.

Chapter 65

Eileen is worried when the TV goes out. How will Ed survive all day without a TV. Ed did survive. Eileen tips the TV repairman \$40. She asks that if they need help again that he put them at the top of the list. They can't do without a TV.

Analysis

When Connell comes home in the middle of the night, Eileen finally concedes that he's growing up. She tells him that he's free and that she'll never worry about him. It was fatigue talking. Eileen will worry about Connell to her final days and he knows it.

Connell decides to give his father an electric razor for Christmas. He had observed the excessive amount of shaving cream on his father's face. And it's probably not a good idea for Ed to be using a razor blade. When Ed opens the present, he immediately goes into the bathroom ostensibly to try it. Connell can hear the buzz of the razor. When Ed returns, he is carrying his razor blade and tells Connell that he didn't try the electric razor



that his razor is better. Of course, Connell knows that he did use the electric razor. They get into an argument with Ed trying to jab himself in the neck with his razor. Connell was right to get him the electric razor. Suddenly, Ed calms down and tells Connell that he did try the electric razor and it worked fine. The incident points to Ed's attempt to try to grasp at a bit of control. He asserts that the razor he had was fine. He didn't need his young son to take it away from him and give him something safe to use. Ed's behavior was a bit of a rebellion that went nowhere but it demonstrated that he still had some vitality and pride left within him.

When Eileen encounters a young woman who is upset and crying at the coffee shop her first instinct as a life-long caretaker is to tell her that everything is going to be okay. Suddenly, it's as though Eileen is looking at herself. She can't tell the young woman that everything will be fine because it won't be. It's just life.

Discussion Question 1

Why was Ed adamant that he didn't try the new electric razor that Connell gave him? What did it represent to him and what underlying reason could he have had for pretending that he didn't need it.

Discussion Question 2

Who does Eileen see in the young woman who is crying and upset at the coffee shop? Why does she decide against trying to comfort the girl?

Discussion Question 3

What may have been going through Ed's mind as he sits and gazes at his framed diplomas on the wall of his study? Why does he say that it must have been hard work to get those diplomas?

Vocabulary

netherworld, aficionado, dextrose, proliferating, inanity, embargo, ambience, aswarm, philanthropists, aesthetic



Chapters 66 - 70

Summary

Chapter 66

Connell has to rush to class so he's not late. He had stayed up all night trying to finish "Crime and Punishment." He'd drifted off in the morning and had to scramble to his eleven o'clock class. He is missing a lot of meals and wasting the money allotted for them on his meal plan. He has lost weight and is long and lanky. His gaunt appearance makes him look like he's taking drugs although he's afraid to try them. He has witnessed a screwed up brain up close and doesn't want to take any chances.

Connell is called upon by the professor to explain what Raskolnikov's motivation was for killing. Connell gave a thoughtful and insightful response that brought a smile to the professor's face. Connell is suffering from sleep deprivation; he even drifts off standing up sometimes. Connell misses his father. Connell wins the part of Orlando in "As You Like It." The debate club had helped him develop a rhetorical polish. The cast spends a week practicing the fight scenes. His father would have enjoyed the fight scenes. Ed is often on Connell's mind no matter how busy or exhausted Connell is. He fidgets with a sugar packet at the restaurant after rehearsal while the other cast and crew members are discussing the play. He recalls that when his father was young he worked at a sugar processing company. Connell is struck that he could be holding sugar that his father processed long ago. He'd call and tell Ed but Ed isn't in a state to appreciate it.

Connell leaps down the dorm stairs the next morning and breaks his foot. There is no understudy so Connell will have to play the part with a cast and perhaps even on crutches. His need to adjust to the physical demands of the part takes away his anxiety over forgetting his lines. Maybe he did make a connection with Ed when he looked at the sugar packet. He'd give his dad a call soon.

Chapter 67

After Mass, Eileen and Ed go to the Food Emporium. As soon as Ed leaves the store he starts shouting, "No! No!" Eileen tries to calm him and guide him outside but he freaks. He screams that he won't go with her. He yells for the police. A small crowd gathers as Ed continues to rant and rave. Someone did call the police. She explains the situation to the police. The police help Eileen get Ed to the car. At home later, Ed smiles and comments on the wonderful day they had. After dinner, Ed goes to bed. She drinks a whole bottle of wine while she talks on the phone to a friend telling her about almost being arrested. She starts to get a headache which is one of the reasons she stays away from alcohol along with the loss of control and the forgetting... although forgetting could have its merits.

Chapter 68



Although the cold air may not be good for Ed, Eileen decides they need to go see the Christmas displays. She holds tightly onto him as they make their way through the crowds. He doesn't complain in fact he enjoys the displays for the first time in his life. Ed may have been cold but the evening had been good for him.

Connell calls to tell Eileen that he decided to stay in Chicago and have Christmas with his new girlfriend and her family. Ed will be disappointed. Ed's cousin Pat and his wife and kids were coming that night and staying over for Christmas Eve. Ed is there to greet the guests but he disappears upstairs before dinner. Eileen urges him to join them for dinner. He is fearful because he doesn't know who the woman is. Eileen tells him it's Tess but no one will know that he doesn't remember her.

Pat's daughters help Eileen with breakfast while Ed goes for a newspaper. After he is gone an hour and a half, Eileen begins to worry. She slowly drives down the route he would take home to look for him. She drives around for a while then finally spots him. He is in the street approaching a car at a stoplight, frantically waving his hands in the air. She quickly drives over to him, throws on her hazard lights and pushes him in the car. He had gotten lost trying to find the mall. He wanted to get something for Eileen. She is astonished that he remembers that they met on Christmas Eve and got married on January 22nd. Eileen turns the car around and heads to the mall. She gives him \$100. Eileen lets him shop while she waits at a designated meeting spot. A sales girl helps him pick out a beautiful blue dress. Ed likes her in blue.

Other friends couldn't make the Christmas party this year. Eileen has noticed that the women are tentative around Ed and the men are remote. In the morning, Ed wakes up early and begins screaming and hollering. He wakes everyone up. It is a joyless Christmas for Eileen. Connell was right not to come home, she thinks to herself. Next Christmas would be better.

Chapter 69

When Eileen gets a new supervisor, she is placed on the night shift. The new supervisor Adelaide, is a former subordinate of Eileen's. Adelaide tells Eileen she's putting her on the night shift because she needs someone of her stature on that shift. Eileen is sure it's due to revenge or resentment and that she was probably trying to force her out. The night shift is a welcome change. It will help Eileen cope with Ed. Just when she is working things out, she is transferred back to days.

Eileen begins looking for an in-home nurse. She finds a Jamaican girl to stay with him during the day but she has to fire her because she is always late. The second girl is fired because Eileen caught her ignoring Ed and watching soap operas. The third girl calls Eileen in a panic. Ed had fallen and she couldn't get him up. Instead of replacing the third girl, she decides to try leaving Ed at home alone. She gives him strict instructions not to leave home or answer the door.

Chapter 70



An old friend and fellow nurse Bethany hears about Eileen's problem and offers to help. She lives nearby and could run over to the house as needed. She calls Eileen everyday to check in. Bethany is into faith healing. Bethany stays in close touch the Eileen. Bethany pushes Eileen to get involved with faith healing but Eileen isn't interested. One night she tricks Eileen into going to a meeting. She balks and doesn't want to go in but she's a good sport and agrees to attend the meeting just that once. A psychic channeler leads the meeting which begins with a deep-breathing exercise. Eileen is introduced and states that she is there just to watch. The psychic already has Ed's name and states her intention to see what's going on in Ed's soul. She calls a spirit in to talk to Eileen about Ed. The woman will act as a conduit for the spirit. The "spirit" tells Eileen that Ed is a repressed soul. He has been fighting a battle with his own spirit. Eileen doesn't take any of it serious.

Analysis

Analysis

Connell is putting his father's tragedy behind him as much as he can. He is diving into activities while away at school in Chicago. Of course, he can't totally obliterate them from his thoughts but he has his life to live. And if Ed were more lucid he would tell him as much. He has a moment of reflection when he picks up a sugar packet in his hands. He recalls that his father's first job was at a sugar processing plant. He is holding sugar that could have been process by his father so long ago. Connell is making an emotional connection to that young Ed and to the Ed, the father he knew.

Ed's behavior drew the attention of the police when he made a scene at the Food Emporium. How long can Eileen cope with the situation by herself? She can't quit work and take care of him because they need the money and health insurance. But she is only one person and everything is falling on her shoulders and she has no solutions. Eileen realizes that she cannot trust Ed to leave the house alone any longer. He got lost when he went to get a newspaper. She found him in a dangerous situation – out in the middle of the street trying to wave down cars. She is a responsible person and she can't allow Ed to be alone. She must think of a solution. She is touched and surprised when Ed remembers that they met on New Year's Eve and got married on January 22nd. There is still a part of her husband left.

Ed's increasingly bizarre behavior compels Eileen to being looking for in-home care for Ed. It's stressful because it will be yet another expense for Eileen who is already stretching the money she has for her current expenses.

Eileen's problems are so overwhelming for her that she agrees to see a psychic. She really doesn't believe in psychics but she finds it entertaining. The psychic tells her that Ed is fighting his own spirit and has been doing so for some time. Although there might be a modicum of truth to what the psychic told Eileen, she doesn't take it seriously. She knows that the solutions she needs for her real life problems will not be attained through a psychic.



Discussion Question 1

How is Connell coping with his father's disease? What connection does he make to his father while in the coffee shop and what meaning did it have?

Discussion Question 2

How did Eileen react to Connor not coming home for Christmas? How did she really feel about it. Did Connell have a reason other than being with his girlfriend for staying away from home?

Discussion Question 3

Eileen is trying to find a caretaker for Ed. Describe the problems she has with the first few caretakers she hires. Is she being too demanding or is she being reasonable about the care Ed must receive?

Vocabulary

diabolical, deprivation, astringent, rhetorical, vestibule, mollified, beatific, animosity, garrulous, perfunctory, lackluster



Chapters 71 - 75

Summary

Chapter 71

Ed is deteriorating quickly. Eileen hopes he can make it just one more Christmas which was eight months away. There are so many things they hadn't done. They hadn't finished the house, she hadn't gone back for her doctorate, and they didn't learn any Gaelic together. If he could make it to Christmas, she could withstand whatever came next. She'd even drive him to the home the next day.

Chapter 72

Eileen returns to another channeling meeting with Bethany just for entertainment's sake. She considers it a charade but a way to channel wisdom through performance art. Eileen learns that she'd have to pay \$100 next time and \$150 if she wanted a private session. She doesn't really want to return but she is beginning to enjoy it and goes one more time. She writes a check after the meeting ended.

Chapter 73

Eileen gets a call to pick Ed up at the police station. Ed is sitting in the waiting area when she enters the station. She checks in with the desk sergeant. He leads her to his desk. She has some papers to sign. Ed had been wandering in the traffic in front of the church. He was stopping cars and waving at them. He went wild when the police arrived. He was trying to find his way home. The officer advises Eileen not to let him out alone. He'd be arrested if he is a danger to himself or others. She has a son away at school but she can't ask him to leave school. The sergeant disagrees – actually she could ask her son to come home.

Chapter 74

It is the first day of practice for the cast. Connell and Jenna meet at a restaurant before rehearsal. There is some tension between them and Connell wants to talk. She asks if he's going home. He doesn't have to. If it means something to her he'll stay. She tells him he should go home. He needs to be there. He'll miss her. He doesn't know if he can do without her.

Jenna is not angry with him about anything. The only thing that bothered her was when he proposed to her. She should have said no right away. She hands him an envelope with the engagement ring inside. They're too young, she tells him.

Connell could have used Jenna as an excuse not to come home had she accepted his proposal. He could tell Eileen he was staying in Chicago to straighten things out with his future wife. Now that is not an option. He really isn't ready for marriage. He's relieved



more than disappointed. When he comes in, the TV is blaring from the other room. Ed has lost some hearing. He finds Ed in the vestibule balancing himself on a stepladder and looking out the front door windows. He doesn't acknowledge Connell. He tells him that the man is outside and that he comes every day. Ed is making no sense. He helps his father down from the ladder. As it turns out, the man that Ed is talking about is the mailman. Ed doesn't trust him. Ed's job is to get the mail. They watch Columbo together. There is no conversation between them even when Connell brings up baseball.

Eileen asks Connell to stay home with his father the entire day while she's at work. Connell trusts Ed with a glass of soda but it slips out of Ed's hand and shatters on the kitchen floor. He realizes he'll have to hold the glass while he drinks or give him a plastic cup. Worse yet, he craps his pants. Connell gets him upstairs but Ed keeps telling Connell to go away. Connell stays focused on cleaning his father up and it's a real mess. Connell gets him into the shower and throws his soiled clothes away. It is a struggle to get Ed clean especially since he isn't cooperating. When Ed falls asleep, Connell leaves to buy some adult diapers. His mother should have already done that.

The next morning, Eileen tells Connell that Ed wants to give his desk to him. Connell knows that his father treasured that desk; his father had left it to him. Now the desk was covered in index cards with people's names and various directions on them. Connell disassembles the desk and takes it to his room. Later, Connell wakes from a nap to hear his father screaming about his missing desk. He didn't want Connell to have it until he was gone. Connell lugs the big desk back down that evening.

Connell decides that playing catch outside might be good for Ed. He hands him his ball glove but Ed can hardly hold it. Connell ditches the gloves and just lightly tosses the ball to his father. He usually doesn't catch it and Connell has to retrieve it. Ed can bounce the ball back but he can't throw it. Connell gets tired of watching TV all day and all night. He spends time in his room reading and trying to write a letter to Jenna. While in his room, his father slips on a rug and smashes his face into the floor breaking one of his front teeth. Connell tells Eileen about the accident as soon as she comes home. He tells her he doesn't think he can keep caring for him. It's too hard. Connell offers to get a job so they can hire a caretaker. Eileen is hurt, disappointed and angry. She tells him to cut up the chicken and broccoli. Her feet hurt and she's going to sit down. Connell offers to rub her feet like he did when he was a little boy. She accepts the offer and for a moment she languishes in the pleasure of a deep foot massage.

Chapter 75

Eileen decides to look for a handyman type to stay with Ed, someone big and strong enough to pick him up when need be -- someone who could be around a lot so she could have some free time. Nadya, a nurse who works with Eileen, tells Eileen that her brother, Sergei, would be ideal. He's not a nurse but he's big and strong and interested in doing the job. Eileen would pay him \$900 a week.

Eileen tells Ed that they're having company. Sergei and Nadya are coming. When they arrive, Sergei shakes hands with Eileen and Ed. Nadya gushes over the house. Eileen



leaves Nadya with Ed and gives Sergei a tour of the house. Ed soaks the bed that night. She had tried the adult diapers but Ed didn't like them.

Eileen cleans the house in anticipation of Sergei's arrival. She keeps dropping hints to Ed that Sergei is coming to work for them. When Sergei arrives, Ed shouts "NO!" and squeals like a baby. Sergei's main job is to cook Ed's meals and watch over him.

Analysis

Eileen laments that she and Ed had not done everything they wanted to do. But that's true of every person. A person is never done with planning, hoping and dreaming. But unlike most, that reality is staring Eileen in the face. Eileen returns to the psychic for, she claims, just entertainment's sake. But something is drawing her there. She faces such a dismal future that she needs something to hang onto a glimmer of hope for the future. Maybe the psychic can give her what she needs even if it's on a temporary basis or even if it's a bunch of baloney.

Against Eileen's orders, Ed had ventured out again and again was directing traffic. She gets a call from the police to pick him up. The police tell Eileen not to let him home alone. Now it's final. She has to get help. The authorities have told her to not let him alone. Next time they would arrest him on the basis that he is a danger to himself or others. The sergeant tells her to have her son come home and help. Eileen hadn't considered that but she is desperate. As concerned as she has always been about Connell's education, it quite a sea change for Eileen if she asks him to leave school.

Connell had gotten serious with a girl at school. He had even proposed to her which was something that Eileen wasn't aware of. The girl turned him down. They were both only nineteen. She tells him he should return home and help his family. She may be concerned about Connell's family but she may also see it as an opportunity to put some distance between them. On the other hand, Connell could have used the girl as a reason not to come home. He could have pleaded his case with Eileen claiming that he had to work on his relationship with the girl. Maybe he wanted to help his parents but he, too, may have wanted to go home and get away from what may prove to be an awkward situation for him and the girl.

Connell finds a real challenge when he comes home. It would be too much for most young people to cope with. Connell has become Ed's parent – diapers and all. Connell hints at his displeasure with being Ed's caretaker and offers to get a job so they can hire someone. Eileen is hurt that he doesn't want to continue caring for his father. But it probably wasn't a good idea in the first place. Eileen is floundering, trying to find her way.

Discussion Question 1

Why was Eileen careless with Ed's safety when she left him home alone? What dangers was he exposed to by being alone?



Discussion Question 2

Describe the challenges that greeted Connell when he came home to care for Ed. Was it fair for Eileen to ask Connell to take his father's care on? How would most young people react to the responsibilities and duties that had been thrust upon him?

Discussion Question 3

What took Eileen so long to do the right thing? Why did she decide to look for a handyman instead of a nurse's aide to look after Ed? What are the pros and cons of having a handyman versus an aide tend to a person as ill as Ed.

Vocabulary

feral, sedimentary, roughshod, pristine, virility, inscrutable



Chapters 76 - 80

Summary

Chapter 76

Even though Connell would be heading back to school, he stayed around for a while to help. He didn't want to abandon his parents. He just couldn't be the primary caregiver for his father. Eileen is jealous when Connell chooses to go to an old teacher to help him figure things out. That's his father's job. He reminds his mother that his father is not himself.

Mr. Corso had been his teacher and coach. He still can't believe that Connell gave up baseball. He had such a great throwing arm. Connell tells Mr. Corso that he declared English as his major. He thanks Mr. Corso who had a lot to do with that decision. Connell tells Mr. Corso about his father and that he'd come home to help. He's not up to playing nursemaid. Mr. Corso tells Connell of a summer job as doorman or porter at a nearby building.

Chapter 77

Connell is stationed in the basement near one of the four serve elevators. He takes the elevator up. It's his job to shuttle nannies to the laundry room and residents to their storage lockers. He also collects trash from resident trash cans and dumps them into a large one. Connell hopes to be promoted to doorman and be stationed in the lobby. Mr. Marku, the super, catches him reading one afternoon and makes him go sweep the building's perimeter. After that he is to go to the store and get cigarettes and beer for Marku. When he comes back he is to mop the stairs.

Chapter 78

Since Sergei's arrival, Eileen had been able to sleep through the night. When Ed starts raving in the middle of the night.

Chapter 79

Marku catches Connell reading again. He has him come to his office. He asks him if he's familiar with Camus' "The Fall." Connell suspects a trap. He responds that he's familiar with it but hasn't read it. Marku tells him it's a parable of hell. To Connell's great surprise and delight, Marku tells him that he's promoting him to doorman.

Chapter 80

After an evening out with Bethany, Eileen comes home to find Sergei drinking coffee in the kitchen. He tells her it was a hard day. Sergei doesn't mind hard work but Ed is very hard work. They walk outside where Sergei smokes and offers her a cigarette. She had



never smoked before but she accepted the offer. She coughs like a teenager not a fifty-four-year old woman. He can't believe she's fifty-four. Ed comes in and stammers at Sergei who leaves the room.

Analysis

Even though Connell is released from his caretaker duties, he's not ready to return to school. It could be the girl who he needs to stay away from for the time being. It isn't easy for a young man to propose to his girlfriend and get a "no" no matter what the circumstances are. Connell probably wants to stay around for his parents. He doesn't want to abandon them but he also didn't want to be the main caregiver. Perfectly understandable that a nineteen-year-old boy would feel that way. Connell is trying to find his way and where he belongs. It is natural that he feels confused and conflicted on several levels. He is probably wise to hold off on his education while there is so much trouble and uncertainty at home.

Connell takes on a challenging job as a porter in an apartment building. It is hard labor but maybe that's what he needed – to get away from both his parents and his girlfriend at least temporarily. He wants to stay connected to his education and intends to return to school. His self-confidence gets a boost when his boss, the manager of the apartment building, promotes him to doorman.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Eileen jealous when Connell seeks the advice of an old teacher? What did Connell choose to seek counsel from his teacher instead of his mother?

Discussion Question 2

How has Sergei made life better for Eileen and for Ed? What type of relationship is beginning to develop between Eileen and Sergei?

Discussion Question 3

Why was Mr. Marku impressed with Connell's work? Will Connell's promotion tempt him to stay and not return to school? What would be best for Connell to do for the time being?

Vocabulary

au pair, bestowing, parable, solidarity, imbecility



Chapters 81 - 85

Summary

Chapter 81

Connell, working as the doorman in the summer heat, is sweltering in his uniform. He helps many of the building's residents get to their cars for weekend getaways. Connell has good relationships with those resident who stay for the weekends. He is especially glad when Mr. Marku is away for a few days. He can read in the open then. He is friendly with Chase Shanahan the son of an investment banker who lives in the building. Connell likes have the doorman responsibilities as opposed to those of porter. He is having a hard time with the guilt he feels over abandoned his father and causing his mother extra expenses. Maybe he is just a selfish person or has the Oedipal complex that he learned about when studying "Hamlet." Maybe there is something going on deeply within him that makes him the way he is.

Chapter 82

Eileen has scheduled a solo session with Rachelle who tells her that her husband's story is more complex than she thinks. The spirit tells Eileen that Ed puts others before himself. She recalls how he had always prayed for her and Connell but never for himself. The spirit, known as Mr. Vywamus, tells Eileen that Connell left because he is angry with Ed. The battle between them has been going on for centuries. Eileen thinks to herself how absurd the experience is. She knows that it is Rachelle who is spewing the wisdom while she collects hundreds of dollars every week. The spirit tells Eileen that she still suffers from childhood issues and that she needs to reach out with her love to those she cares about. Eileen has been good to Ed – she has helped his soul.

Chapter 83

Connell eavesdrops on his mother's phone calls about a friend of Bethany's. Something tells him that she's being taken by this person. Mr. Marku calls Connell in and lists all the things he lets Connell get by with but not wearing his hat is something he can't let go. He's not firing him yet but he's going to return to porter duties.

Chapter 84

Eileen adds a \$125 an hour phone call with Rachelle in addition to the regular meeting and the private session. One afternoon when she is on the phone with Rachelle, Connell sits at the table with her. She motions for him to go away but he stays. Connell tells her that the woman is taking her. The next time Rachelle picks her up to go to a meeting, Connell and Sergei follow her and when Eileen is about to enter Rachelle's house, Connell barges in. Eileen is surprised, upset. He tells her he doesn't like what's going on. When she tells him he needs to go be with Ed, he responds that she needs to be home with Ed. Things get nasty and Rachelle tells Connell to leave and if he doesn't



she'll call the police. Eileen finally tells Rachelle that she's decided to go home with Connell. Sergei accompanies Eileen down the stairs and to their car. Connell seems to have grown up before her eyes. She thanks him for caring. She wants to hug him but he looks dubious. She hugs him anyway. She thinks that maybe the crazy ladies helped her. It was the first time she hugged him first since he was little.

Chapter 85

Ed is having problems with physical activities. Eileen has to accompany him up the stairs and tell him which leg to use next. She hates the weekends when Sergei is not there. Ed is exhausting her. Getting him to climb in the bathtub is another challenge. She is stressed the whole time he showers, fearing that he'll fall. On one particular occasion, she cannot get him to step out of the bathtub. She needs help but is afraid to leave him alone while she gets the phone. His legs are shaking from standing so long. He wants to sit but he can't. Finally, after she sits on the floor and prays for help, he begins to step out of the tub. She walks him to his bed. It had taken two hours to climb the stairs and take his shower. How much longer can he stay home?

Eileen comes home from a visit to a friend to find Ed lying in the vestibule. She isn't strong enough to lift him. She is angry with Connell who left a note saying he was going out with friends. Eileen calls an ambulance. He is taken to the Emergency Room. He walks in with help but goes wild in the Emergency Room. Connell comes home at two in the morning. Eileen chastises him for leaving Ed alone. He was asleep in bed when he left, he tells her. When Sergei shows up Sunday afternoon, she apologizes; she'd forgotten to call him to let him know that Ed was in the hospital. Sergei isn't upset. He tells her he'll stay with her.

Ed is refusing to eat in the hospital. Eileen tells him that if he doesn't eat, he can't come home. It must have registered with Ed because he starts eating and finishes his meal. The doctors tell her that he can go home when he can stand and walk to the bathroom unassisted. One evening when Eileen is too tired to cook or even order food she comes home to find that Sergei had made a delicious beef stew for her.

Eileen takes Connell to the airport for his return to school. He apologizes for not helping more. She can't afford to fly him home until Thanksgiving. She'll be fine. She has Sergei. He tells her to call him if she needs him. At work, Eileen gets a call that the hospital will be driving Ed home. Eileen feels he's not ready to come home. He can't walk unassisted and can't walk up stairs. She is going to appeal their decision to send him home with Medicare. The hospital has to keep him two extra days until the appeal is heard.

Eileen begins to think that Ed would be better off in a nursing home. She makes calls to various nursing homes to learn her options. One home has room for him but they want three years' fees in advance which would come to \$225,000. All the resources she has or could have through liquidation would not get her near to that amount. She learns of another home, through a friend. She will only have to pay \$5,800 for the first month and Medicaid would cover 100 percent for twenty days and then eighty percent thereafter.



Eileen asks Sergei to stay on until she determines if Ed's placement is temporary. She needs help around the house anyway and of course she'd pay him. She worries about Ed being alone in the home with people much older than he is. She thinks about how alone he'll feel. Then again, he'd been "a stranger in the world for most his life."

Analysis

Connell is getting along well with the residents of the apartment building, especially a young investment banker and his teenage son. He has a lot in common with them. He is suffering from guilt over not wanting to be his father's caretaker and for causing his mother more expenses. He thinks he might be a selfish person. But he's not selfish; he's just a normal nineteen-year-old boy. Connell will have to learn to deal with his guilt and shame. Someday he will forgive himself and realize that what he did wasn't wrong.

Eileen shows her desperation by scheduling a private, and more expensive, appointment with the psychic. She must like what she is hearing from the psychic but that's what psychics do. They tell people what they want to hear so they keep coming back. They are probably sensitive people who can easily assess people's wants and needs. Seeing a psychic is a departure for Eileen.

Connell is becoming aware that his mother is becoming involved with someone who intends to take her money which is not helpful since Eileen has so many expenses now. Connell overhears her mother make an appointment with the psychic. After her friend picks her up, Connell and Sergei follow her. Connell shows his assertiveness and his protectiveness for his mother when he confronts the psychic and basically calls her a fraud. He insists that his mother come home with him. Eileen, who usually has her way in the family, because Connell is so sincere. Maybe his words and actions make her come back down to earth. She is wasting money because she doesn't really believe in psychics. She was just trying to find a ray of hope somewhere. But perhaps her son's concern and obvious love for her is the ray of hope she was looking for. It isn't much of a choice. She goes home with him.

Ed continues to deteriorate. He has trouble walking up the stairs. It takes two hours of Eileen's time to get him up the steps, into and out of the shower and ready for bed. She doesn't like the weekends because Sergei isn't there. She has come to depend on him so much. And with Ed's declining physical strength, she knows she cannot care for him by herself. After a brief visit with a friend, she comes home to find Ed on the floor of the foyer. He's sound asleep. She's not strong enough to pick him up. She has come to a pivotal point in her ordeal. She has no choice but to call for help. Ed is taken to the emergency room where he has a raving fit.

Discussion Question 1

What are some of the turning points in Ed's care? What incidents convince Eileen that there must be a drastic change in his caretaking?



Discussion Question 2

Why is Connell so upset when he learns that his mother is seeing a psychic? Discuss his motivations for intervening in his mother's new pursuit.

Discussion Question 3

What major change helps things to fall in place for the family? Why does Connell feel free to return to school? Why does he still harbor some guilt about the challenges facing his parents. Why is it good that he leaves?

Vocabulary

magnate, cannily, acolytes, rhetoric, crystallizing, profound, malice, solitary, atrophy, superfluous, atavistic, augury, catabolic



Chapters 86 - 90

Summary

Chapter 86

Ed is transferred at noon. Eileen drives to the home after work. Ed is in a wheelchair in the TV room with mainly old women and a few old men. He wails when he sees her. She takes him to a common room down the hall all the while he is moaning and wailing. In the common room, she tries to soothe him but he tries to bite her. She tells him that she will visit him every day. All he can say is, "No." She tells him that he'll just be there temporarily.

When she comes home, she walks up the stairs and stands outside Sergei's door. She hears classical music playing. She lets Sergei know she's home and invites him down for tea. He tells he likes classical music and that his daughter plays violin and is a student at Julliard. Eileen is duly impressed. She never had time to talk to him before. Eileen thanks him again for staying and makes it clear that she will pay him. He needs the job. He'd stay even if she didn't pay him to get away from his wife. She doesn't work hard like Eileen does. She tells him she has some home improvement jobs for him. He was an engineer in Russian. She needs to get the house in shape to sell. She gives Sergei the list of repairs she needs done. In bed later, she worries about what she'll find at the nursing home the next day.

The next day at the nursing home, she learns that Ed had a rough day and had to be restrained. He is in his bedroom, staring at the ceiling. There is rap music playing on his radio. She snaps it off and tells one of the girls passing by that rap music is never to be played on his radio. She puts on a Nat King Cole CD for him. Eileen is determined to be the woman who won't go away. She will be there for him. No one there has any idea how brilliant this man is.

Chapter 87

Sergei works on repairs on the outside of the house first and then the inside. He organizes the attic and the basement. He rips out a toilet on the first floor and replaces it with a new one. He reinforces the retaining wall at the end of the driveway. Eileen's to-do list seems limitless. Neighbors stop by to complement Eileen on the improvements. Her friends are impressed with Sergei's skills and abilities. She hears a hint of suspicion in their tone about her relationship with Sergei. She doesn't care what they think. To her surprise, Sergei enjoys the praise and is proud of his work. She does not look forward to the day he leaves.

By November there were few if any chores that were undone. The house is in pristine condition. She can't afford or justify the \$4,000 a month she's paying him any longer. She tells him she can't afford to keep him there. He suggests that he stay and do



handyman work for her neighbors and friends. He could stay and have free room and board. He'd have to eventually look for his own place. Eileen puts fliers around at work for Sergei and placed an ad in the Pennysaver. She tells her neighbors that Sergei is available to do handyman work for them.

Eileen didn't feel guilty that she had kept him away from home so much. His decision to leave his wife was his decision and it was a long time in coming. Sergei always pays for half the food and utilities. He likes to cook dinner for Eileen. He does his own laundry and they watch TV in their own rooms. They are roommates respectful of each other.

Although she could justify Sergei's presence there, she hasn't told him. She didn't look forward to telling him at Thanksgiving. She tells him to not come home for Thanksgiving but to apply the credit to another flight. Money is tight, she tells him. On Thanksgiving, she visits Ed before she makes dinner for herself and Sergei. It is his first Thanksgiving Dinner. He has two helpings of everything.

One night in December after a harrowing time at work and during her visit to Ed, Eileen is washing the dishes when she sees Sergei standing in the doorway. After a few minutes she turns towards him. He approaches and put his hands around her waist. She doesn't resist when he kisses her. She walks up the stairs with him. Later, alone in her room she locks her door and cries but she sleeps well that night. The next day, Sergei apologizes and tells her that he will move out. She tells him not to be ridiculous. He has a job to do. He can live there until he finds another place.

Chapter 88

Eileen decides to have her Christmas party on Christmas night instead of Christmas Eve. Connell decides to surprise her and makes arrangements for his father to be there. Eileen and Connell visit Ed on Christmas morning. It is the first time that Connell has seen him in a wheelchair. Ed has deteriorated quite a bit. Despite his condition, Connell is determined to bring him home for the day. He'd carry him around if he had to. After they give Ed a few gifts they have for him, Eileen and Connell leave. Outside Connell tells his mother he needs to use the restroom and runs back inside. He tells the desk that he plans to return for his father that evening.

Connell and Sergei help Eileen prepare for the party. The house is decorated and the food is all prepared. When the guests arrive, Connell takes their coats and welcomes them in. He tells his mother that he has to run to the store for a string of outside lights to replace one that went out. Instead, he drives to the nursing home and finds his father eating in the room reserved for the rowdy patients. Connell wheels his father out to the car. It is the first time Ed had been off the grounds in months. On the ride home, there is no conversation and Ed slumps to the side, his head on the window.

Connell hopes that when Ed sees the house all lit up and decorated, and have memories about the holidays. Connell knows his mother will be happy. When he approaches the house, he encounters Ruth McGuire. She is concerned that Eileen doesn't know that Ed is coming. Ruth is afraid that Eileen will be upset; she's under so



much stress. Ruth is adamant that he take Ed back. He will not know the difference. Connell is just as adamant that Ed stay. Connell wheels his father to the staircase and carries him from there. Jack hears him coming and opens the door for him. He smiles at Connell but his smile fades when he sees that Ed is there. His mother doesn't have the joyful reaction he hoped. She stands and looks at Ed for a long moment then breaks down and sobs his name. Everyone is uncomfortable. Eileen tells Connell to get some drinks going. They have to make the best of it. At that moment, Connell knows that his father is gone forever.

Chapter 89

The party doesn't last long. Jack and Connell help Eileen get Ed back to the car. She is going to take him back. She parks in front of the front door and helps Ed walk inside. She rang the bell at the desk for assistance. She asks an attendant for a wheelchair. She gets him into bed, kisses him goodnight and leaves. She and Sergei had not been intimate since that first night but Sergei often embraced her. The next morning, Sergei is sitting in the kitchen when she comes down. He has packed up his things. He is going to stay with his daughter for a while. Eileen senses that he had plans to return to his wife. She invites him to breakfast before he takes off.

After breakfast, Eileen walks him to his car. He offers to take her home but she wants to walk. She embraces him one last time. As she leaves him, she realizes that she is carrying around the years of Ed's illness with her and will be for quite a while.

Chapter 90

When Eileen leaves Ed, she tells him she has to run to the store or do some other errand. She never tells him she's leaving him for the night. Eileen goes to see Ed every day. She never goes away for a weekend. Her friends tell her she's being too hard on herself. She becomes nostalgic when she looks in the glove box of her car. During his last lucid days, they carried around all his personal identification in the car and things that were sentimental to him.

Ed's roommate is named Mr. Huggins. He had been a celebrated piano teacher. Mr. Huggins now pushes a walker around and doesn't say anything unprompted except to ask for water. He does respond to Eileen when she asks how he is.

On December 2, 1997, Eileen secures her ten-year pension. It is an important milestone for her. She brings a bottle of champagne to the nursing home. She startles Ed when she pops the cork. He enjoys the bubbly. She couldn't retire. The nursing home is costing \$7,000 a month. What would she do all day at home anyway. She liked her job.

Analysis

Even though the real Ed is long gone, a fragment of him still remains. It is difficult for Eileen to leave him at the nursing home. When he sees her, he can't say anything because he can't talk now. But he wails. That wail had to go through Eileen's body.



Even though Eileen did the right thing, it doesn't mean that she is free of worry, concern and guilt. They will be her companions until Ed's last day.

Eileen is getting to know Sergei a little better now that Ed is gone. Ed so dominated the household when he was there that Eileen had learned very little about Sergei. He had impressed neighbors with his handyman skills and convinces Eileen to let him stay on there and do work for her and her neighbors. It's a little awkward for Eileen to be alone in the house with another man but Sergei is a big help to her and he can earn his way by working for neighbors and friends. She will no longer have to pay him.

Eileen's protective nature emerges when she finds that Ed had to be restrained that day and that rap music is playing on his radio. She sternly warns the nurse's aide that rap music is NEVER to be played on his radio. He is such a love of classical music and jazz, Eileen might conclude that the rap music drove him over the edge. But the incident illustrates that she has little or no control over what happens to him each day.

There is an attraction between Eileen and Sergei that culminates in an intimacy that took Eileen completely by surprise. She didn't realize how attracted she was to him until he embraced her and kissed her. She could have kicked him out but instead walks upstairs to his bedroom. Later, she returns to her room and locks the door. She doesn't want a long-term relationship with Sergei. He is really not her type and he's married. But she slept like a baby that night. Maybe Sergei was what she needed even if it was only for one night. He claims that he is separated from his wife but Eileen thinks he has plans to eventually return to her.

Connell's heart is in the right place when he makes arrangements to bring Ed home to surprise Eileen. She had always wanted them together at Christmas. It'll make her happy and perhaps all the Christmas lights will stir something within Ed. Connell is not ready to give up on his father. Although intellectually he knows that his father can't recover, he hopes for a miracle – maybe the miracle of the Christmas lights?

But it is a mistake. A family friend catches Connell and Ed when they pull in the driveway. She tries to convince Connell that it was a bad idea to bring his father home. Eileen is under a lot of stress and it will not make her happy to have him there. Basically, the family friend is telling him that Ed will ruin Eileen's Christmas. But Connell refuses to take Ed back. He's home for Christmas.

The family friend was right. Ed's presence puts a pallor over the Christmas party and dinner. The party ends early and there are many awkward moments. The friends and family gathered there hadn't seen Ed in a long while and his gaunt and fragile appearance was a shock to them. Everyone knows that it will be Ed's last Christmas at home.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the transition for both Eileen and Ed after he is transferred to the nursing home. Why is Eileen upset that rap music is playing on Ed's radio?



Discussion Question 2

Why did Eileen get involved with Sergei? Discuss whether there is a chance for a long-term relationship. Why does she think there is no chance?

Discussion Question 3

Why was Connell so adamant that Ed come home? What impact did he think being home would have on Ed and what does he learn?

Vocabulary

distended, vestige, samovar, mortified, intermittent, abstention, fondant, prurience, demurrals, patina, tenebrous, enervating, redundant, incandescence, festooned, sardonically, chastening, ambulatory, infirmity



Chapters 91 - 95

Summary

Chapter 91

Connell goes alone to visit Ed after Thanksgiving 1998. It takes him a few stops and starts before he enters the room. He sits with him for a while then wheels him down to the lunchroom. Connell notices that the screams of the men have no impact on Ed while the screams of the women make him tremble. Connell would not be coming home for Christmas. His mother didn't know it yet. He plans to stay away so that she is forced to accept other invitations. Connell gives Ed an early Christmas gift – a Mozart CD. Ed enjoys the music and even claps along. During Mozart's fortieth, Ed smiles widely then dissolves into sobs. When the anger sets in, Connell knows it's time for him to leave.

Chapter 92

For weeks before Ed died, Eileen sees that he is failing. There are still hints of awareness at times. She wonders if he knows that the end is near. She hopes that he doesn't know. She is wheeling him down the hall around Valentine's Day. The home is decorated in pink and red hearts thanks to some local middle school students. He grasps a heart that swished when they went by. In his room, he drops it on the floor between them. Eileen picks it up. It's her Valentine from Ed. She kisses him and tells him Happy Valentine's Day.

Chapter 93

Connell returns his mother's call right away. He had a bad feeling about it. She tells him that his father is sick. His father isn't going to make it through the night; he has pneumonia. Connell packs hurriedly thinking how he'd heard that the death of a man's father is a pivotal moment in his life.

After boarding the plane, Connell goes to the restroom. He looks in the mirror and he sees his father's face. He looks at his teeth and remembers how his father drove him to the orthodontist once a month for two years. He tells his mirror image that he is going home to his dying father who is his best friend. He'd never be the same. An attractive girl named Karla is sitting next to him on the plane. They get along well during the flight. He invites her to dinner during the time they'll both be in New York.

As Connell walks to baggage claim, he spots his Uncle Pat by the revolving doors that lead outside. Beyond Pat, he sees his mother standing outside. That could mean only one thing. As soon as he nears his mother she tells him what he already knew. Pat drives them back to the home. Connell sees his father for the last time. He kisses his father on the forehead and smooths his hair down.

Chapter 94



Pneumonia had killed Ed. His organs stopped functioning as his brain deteriorated. Eileen will never marry again. She will be Eileen Leary for life. They shared a love story. She considers an autopsy but she can't bear to think of his body being ravished any more than it already has been. A lot of unanswered questions are buried with him.

Although she had long ago replaced the gold band on the LeCoultre watch she gave him with a leather strap, he never wore it. She plans to see that he finally wears it. A few weeks after his death, Eileen hired workers to haul away the contents of his desk and his personal items including his library of VHS tapes and his science textbooks. Eileen has a recurring vision of Ed at the time he was just getting sick. He was still handsome, his black hair was still striking. He was having memory problems and chose TV over newspapers because he often couldn't remember what he read. He listened to music; sometimes Eileen read to him.

Eileen finds a skull in a box in Ed's closet. It is a specimen he used when he taught anatomy. She recalls how he could call it "George" and took it out to show Connell and his friends. Ed told Eileen he wanted the skull to be used for anatomy students after he died. Eileen wonders if Ed turned down the NYU offer all those years ago because he knew something was going wrong in his brain. She recalls the experimental study he was participating in and how she fed him his pills until it became too difficult for him to swallow them. She wonders if the pills might have caused some of his physical problems. Maybe he would have lasted longer without them. She shudders to think what would have happened to him had she divorced him. It was destiny, she decides, that kept her there with him. Taking care of Ed had been her most important life's work. She is finally able to sleep soundly again. For a while, she continues to stop by the home. She had gotten to know some of the patients. She brings them cookies and watches the evening news with them. One evening Mr. Huggins whispers, "No more! No More!" repeatedly. She takes it as a sign that she needn't come back any more.

Friends tell her to sell the house. It's too big for one person. She is able to pay off the home equity loans with insurance money. She has enough to put a new roof on the house. She has her salary and Ed's pension to live on. She will stay where she is.

Chapter 95

Three weeks after his father died, Connell enters his last quarter at school. He is dating a girl named Danielle and hanging out with his friends. He is also tutoring a fifth-grader named Delores and has to practice his part in a Tennessee Williams one-act play. He has neglected to do a paper in medieval literature and a project in science class. Since he's only taking three classes he can't drop anything. Eileen wouldn't be able to come to graduation because of work so he wouldn't have to explain why he wasn't walking across the stage with the other graduates.

Connell packs up and takes an Amtrak back home. He thinks about his father a lot on the trip because they had talked about riding the rails across the country someday. His first stop is at the apartment building where he asks Mr. Marku for a job. He promises to



do a better job than he did before. Marku gives him a job that will be just for the summer.

Connell covers for the doormen when they are off and works at the service entrance and handles the elevator runs. As promised, Connell follows all of Marku's rules even though he made less than he did before due to a union strike. Marku gives him more time in the lobby because he relates so well with the professional people in the building. He does all his duties in an exemplary manner.

While Connell is working as a doorman and porter, his mother is urging him to go to graduate school. Since he didn't finish college that was not possible but she didn't know that. Connell shares an apartment with another guy in Greenpoint. He gives his mother a check to help pay down his college costs but she rips it up in front of him. He wants to finish school but it's an awkward situation. Connell keeps depositing his checks without checking his balance. He always has enough to pay his bills. There are worst places to spend your time, he thought to himself.

Due to his affability and eagerness to please, he becomes one of the favorite doormen. Connell gets close to the Marku family. He's invited for dinner and family celebrations. Marku's son, Peter, is accepted at Regis. Connell looks forward to Peter enjoying his time there and he is ready to help him in any way he can. Perhaps he will experience college again by living through him.

Analysis

Connell visits his father alone on Thanksgiving. He tells him about life in Berlin where he's going to school at the time. Whether his father absorbs anything he's saying, perhaps just the sound of his son's voice is soothing to him. Connell isn't coming home for Christmas this year so he brought his father an early Christmas present – a Mozart CD. He gets an unexpected reaction out of his father. He smiles and claps along with the music. Shortly afterwards, he dissolves into tears. The music stirred something within Ed. But within his mind somewhere it reminded him of the man he used to be but would never be again.

Eileen continues to visit Ed every day. She sees that he's failing badly and in her heart of hearts knows that his time is short. On Valentine's Day, the halls of the nursing home are decorated with Valentines made by local middle-school students. As Eileen whisks Ed down the hall, one of the Valentines dislodges and winds up in Ed's lap. Back in his room, Ed drops the Valentine on the floor between him and Eileen. She snatches it up. She takes it as her Valentine from Ed. Maybe Ed does, too.

Connell gets the call that he has been dreading. Ed is dying and he must hurry home before he's gone. Ed stalls and makes excuses for not leaving. He suddenly feels he has to clean up the apartment and do his laundry. His stall tactics aren't about housecleaning. He is not anxious to face what awaits him at home.



Pneumonia took Ed. The disease causes organs to stop functioning because the brain cells are dying off and it is the brain that controls the organs. Eileen will never marry again. Ironically, before she met Ed she had wanted a non-Irish surname. Now she wouldn't give up her Irish name under any circumstances. She and Ed had shared more than a name they shared a life together and a true and lasting love. There are memories everywhere that haunt her. She looks at the gold watch that he wouldn't wear and imagines him when he was young and handsome. That was so long ago.

The guilt and self-chastisement lingers. Did the experimental drug program she found for him cause him to deteriorate faster and die sooner. Although she's a nurse and knows that that is probably not the case, she is a wife and lover first. Her angst is that she was cheated out of so much with his early onset disease and now his death at only fifty-five. They could have had thirty more years together. But now she is left with only memories. She tries to focus those memories on the real Ed, the Ed of years gone by. Not the Ed of recent years who literally didn't know his own name.

Ed's death upsets Connell more than he realized. Although he returns to school, he is not able to concentrate on his studies and fails. Eileen doesn't need something to stress about so Connell tells her he graduated. He'll tell her in time but he'll wait until she's strong enough for another jolt.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Connell stall after he gets the call from home that Ed is dying? Does Connell show disrespect for his father or a lack of caring by delaying his departure?

Discussion Question 2

What memories does Eileen concentrate on after Ed's death? Describe the regrets and guilt that Eileen may be suffering from.

Discussion Question 3

Did Connell do the right thing when he lied about graduating? Are there times when a lie is better than the truth. Explain.

Vocabulary

chivalrous, atrocities, xenophobe, modulated, imprimatur, manifestly, ebullient, palpable, surfeit, coruscated, crenellations, viscosity



Chapters 96 - 101

Summary

Chapter 96

Eileen takes a vacation to the Furnace Creek Inn, a luxury resort in February. She goes with a group one night to the national park. She doesn't need a guide to know that she is looking at the Milky Way. There were sailing stones in the park. How they moved "on their own" had never been explained. One of the tourists offered a theory. All Eileen could think of is how Ed would have enjoyed the experience and how he would never speak up unless he knew what he was saying was true.

Chapter 97

Eileen and Connell visit Ed's grave on the first anniversary of his death. Connell picks up a bouquet on the way. Eileen says a prayer over his grave. She's never been good at it so she asks Connell to help her. He expresses how he misses telling his father things. He runs across newspaper articles he'd like to share with him but can't. He tells Ed he loves him dearly. They both say the Lord's Prayer.

Connell worries about his mother staying alone in the big house. She had plans to sell it once but just couldn't bring herself to do so. Eileen tells Connell that Ed had picked out his own burial plot long before he got sick. He wanted to be on a hill. Ed was always intrigued by cemeteries. Wherever they went, he'd want to visit graveyards. He liked to read the inscriptions. Maybe she should have come up with something better than, "Beloved husband and father." Connell notices the blank space under Ed's name. Someday his mother would be lowered into the grave. He feels panicked for a minute then puts the thoughts out of his mind. Ed liked the cemetery because Babe Ruth was buried there. Eileen shows Connell the Ruth grave. Connell rubs his hand on the grave. Maybe it would give him a little luck.

Back at the house, Eileen gives Connell an envelope that his father wanted him to have. Connell is not eager to open the envelope and busies himself at Ed's desk and bookshelves, looking through the drawers and shelves. He reads through the notebooks that Ed made daily entries in. He realizes that his father, at one point, must have known what was happening to him. He cannot read the scribbling toward the end of his writing days. After Connell runs out of things to look at, he holds the envelope before him.

Chapter 98

Ed wrote that he had gotten some bad news. He wanted to be a presence in his life even after he's gone. He wanted to write the letter to Connell before it became impossible for him. He tried to be a good father. He didn't want to leave Connell with any questions. He asked that Connell remember the good times they had together and the places they went, the baseball they played together and the jogs they took. Ed also



wanted him to remember how Ed helped him with his homework. Most importantly Ed wanted Connell to live his life to the fullest. He regrets that he won't be there for many of the major events and ups and downs of his life. Victories will always follow defeats. It didn't matter if Connell wins the race; it's important that he finishes strong and with pride. A piece of Ed will always be with Connell. He wants him to hear his voice in his head after he's gone. Ed ends the letter with, "My beloved boy, you meant the world to me."

Chapter 99

Eileen asks Connell what Ed said in the letter. He responds that he didn't finish. He clarifies his words by saying he read the letter but he didn't finish college. He was a couple of classes short. Eileen is upset and strikes out at him, ridiculing his job at the apartment building. Connell apologizes. He understands why she's angry. She brings up the money; he promises to pay her back. She wants him to quit his job and finish school. Eileen berates herself for not catching it. She knew working as a doorman wasn't him – leading that ridiculous existence. Connell responds that it might be him. Connell tells her she can't make him go back to school. She disagrees.

Chapter 100

Eileen buys a pair of Mets tickets and goes alone. The other seat is for Ed. She is there but not there. She doesn't clap along with the other fans or stand when they stand. The game goes into extra innings --- something Ed would have cherished. She begins to understand why Ed likes baseball so much. For a brief moment, it is an escape from real life. She stays in her seat long after everyone else had gone. She stands and leaves when the groundskeepers begin doing their work.

Chapter 101

Eileen drives to the last address she had for the Orlandos but they had moved. She found another old neighbor, Mr. Palumbo. His wife had died. Eileen can't bring herself to tell him that Ed is gone, too. Mr. Palumbo gives Eileen a card with Donny's auto body shop address in Garden City. Donny got remarried and his two daughters with his new wife. Lena died shortly after Mrs. Palumbo passed.

Connell did return to school in Chicago. Eileen is worried about his future. She doubts that she'll try to contact Donny. It has been too long. Standing in the old neighborhood, she imagines being transported back to those days. She is standing in front of her old house. There are so many memories. She wants to see it one more time and knocks on the door. She introduces herself to the young man who answers. She tells him who she is and that she'd like to see her old house. The young man's father, Mr. Harris, greets her. He knows who she is. The décor is so different.

The young man went to the same schools as Connell did. He had won a trophy from the debate club. His sister is attending Yale. Mrs. Harris joins them. She offers to show Eileen around. The renovations were tastefully done. She had spent most of her years there thinking about another house. Maybe that was a mistake. Mrs. Harris asks about



Ed and Connell. Since she is asked directly, she is compelled to tell her that Ed died. Mrs. Harris asks Eileen to stay for dinner. She normally would make excuses and say she had to go but she wanted to stay with these nice people in their lovely house. When Mr. Harris asks if she likes Indian food she is silent for a moment. She actually hates it but doesn't want to be rude. She finally says she never had it before. She is surprised that she likes the food.

Analysis

Everything Eileen does or sees reminds her of Ed. They had been together so long that he is still with her. He will probably with her in that sense forever. She compares him to others and sees how much smarter and more cultured he was than others.

Perhaps it is Connell's dramatic training, but he blows Eileen away with the prayer that he says over Ed's grave. She had started out with the prayer but admitted that she wasn't good at praying. She asks Connell to take over and take over he did. He ends his powerful and sincere words by saying that he loves his father dearly. Connell is concerned about Eileen staying in the big house all by herself. When they are at the gravesite, he shudders when he sees the blank space under Ed's name. It occurs to him that it's for his mother. He can't bear to think of that and panics for a minute. To ease the tension mother and son go look at Babe Ruth's grave. Ed would have approved.

Eileen gives Connell a sealed envelope with his name on it. It's from Ed. He wrote it when he was lucid and wanted Connell to read it after he was gone. The letter is an emotional experience for Connell. Something in the letter compels Connell to finally be honest with his mother about not graduating. His father tells him that it didn't matter if Connell wins the race but he should finish with pride. Connell tells his mother the truth. After what she's been through, she is too spent to get too worked up. But she does insist that he finish.

Eileen returns to the multi-family apartment she shared with Ed during their first fifteen years together. She is invited for dinner by the Indian couple who bought the house. She doesn't like Indian food but she tells them she never tried it before. To her great surprise, she tries the food and likes it. It tells her that opening up exposes her to new joys. She had lived so much the other way most of her life.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Connell worried about his mother? Why is he shaken when he looks at the space below Ed's name on the gravestone? What reality does it bring to him.



Discussion Question 2

How does the letter from Ed stir Connell's emotions? Why does it compel him to tell Eileen the truth about not graduating?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Eileen's visit to her former home. Although she hated Indian food, when she tries it at the new owner's she finds that she likes it. How did that experience inform Eileen?

Vocabulary

rudimentary, anecdotal, erudition, capillaries, boilerplate, plinth, subterfuge, condolences, inauspicious, proselytizing



Characters

Eileen Leary

Eileen Tumulty is ten-years-old when she accompanies her father to his favorite bar after school every day. While her father – the most popular guy in the bar – guzzles beer and glows of the admiration of his drunken friends, young Eileen does her homework alone at a table in the corner. Eileen's mother is depressed and unhappy in her dysfunctional marriage to an alcoholic. When she has a miscarriage her hopes for some joy in the future is gone and she turns to alcohol. All Eileen can think of is escape – she dreams of a big beautiful mansion to live in where she will finally be happy.

Eileen is very bright and finishes college in three years. She goes on to get her masters in nursing and secures a challenging and important job as supervisor in a local hospital. Eileen is introduced to Ed Leary who is a brilliant researcher and scientist. They are immediately attracted to each other and soon are planning their wedding.

Eileen has great expectations about Ed and her future with him. But he is inflexible and does not share her dream of a big house. Their small apartment is fine with him. He is ambitious in his teaching and research but he is not ambitious to become wealthy. Eileen is upset when he turns down jobs that would pay much more money and could eventually get Eileen the big house she still dreams of. When Ed falls ill to the cruel Alzheimer's Disease, Eileen's life changes forever. Eileen devotes herself to Ed and withstands the almost impossible challenge that the horrid condition lays at her feet. She learns that Alzheimer's destroys not only the victim but the victim's loved ones.

Ed Leary

Ed Leary was born and raised in New York. His father was an alcoholic and his mother had to struggle to keep the family afloat. She would send Ed when he was a young student to his father's workplace on payday to try to get his father's check before he got it and blew it on booze and gambling. As an older student, Ed had to pick his father up at the bar on occasion because he was too drunk to drive. Ed would never go into the bar because he couldn't bear to see his father drinking.

Ed is a bright student and doesn't find school challenging. Because of his problems at home, he begins to drift and gets in with the wrong crowd. But something within him wants to achieve and, when he works under a scientist at a paint company he works at, he decides that he will pursue a career in some form of science. Ed straightens himself out and obtains a degree in science and is working toward a doctorate when he meets Eileen.

There is an immediate attraction between Ed and Eileen and soon after they meet and start dating, they are planning their wedding. The couple has a few rough spots when they learn how different their priorities are. Ed is focused almost exclusively on research



and science, sometimes to the detriment of his marriage. Eileen wants him to take a job as vice president of a huge chemical company. She has had a dream all her life to live in a mansion. But Ed has a teaching job and loves it. He is devoted to his teaching, to science and to his research. To him money is not to be spent on frivolous things just for necessities and, of course, to support his work.

Ed begins to exhibit bizarre behavior and break out in fits of anger and frustration. At first he can rein these spells in a bit but eventually he deteriorates and is totally out of control. He is diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease and, as a scientist, he knows that there is no cure or recovery. Ed continues to spiral down with Eileen always at his side no matter how dark the day is. A brilliant mind and scientist was lost to a disease in his mid-fifties... far too soon.

Connell Leary

Connell Leary is the only child of Eileen and Ed Leary. He is closer to his father who adores him and always gives him his full attention. Eileen is crazy about her son to but she is more standoffish and more concerned with Connell's future than his present. The book chronicles Connell's life from birth to his early adult years after college.

Sergei

Sergei is from Russia and has been in America only a short time when he becomes Ed's caregiver. Sergei is a strong, large man who loves classical music. There is an attraction between Sergei and Eileen that results in a brief intimacy but not a long-lasting relationship.

Big Mike

Big Mike is Eileen's father. He is a beer truck driver and the most popular guy at Doherty's Bar where he hangs out every day after work. Mike has a drinking problem that sometimes results in unabashed anger and violence.

Bridget

Bridget is Eileen's long-suffering mother. She is married to an alcoholic man who spends their money drinking and gambling. She is distraught when she has the miscarriage of her second child. She spirals downward into depression and alcoholism after the loss.



Cora

Cora is Ed's mother. She had suffered through a marriage to an alcoholic. She would send Ed when he was a young boy to his father's workplace to try to get his paycheck before he got it and "drank" it away. She is a pleasant woman and spends Friday nights with Eileen and Ed when they were first married at her flat in Carroll Gardens near the train tracks.

Jack and Ruth

Ruth and Frank McGuire are good friends of Ed and Eileen. When Ed becomes ill and continues to spiral downward, Jack has a difficult time being with him. He feels uncomfortable because the new Ed is not the Ed that he'd known for years.

Donny

Donny Orlando is one of Eileen and Ed's neighbors. Once when Ed isn't home, Connell starts choking on a cherry tomato. Even though Eileen is a nurse she is too panicked to dislodge it. Donny comes to the rescue and performs the Heimlich maneuver on Connell and saved his life.

The Orlandos

The Orlandos owned the multi-family dwelling where Eileen and Ed lives for fifteen years. They became good friends and helped watch Connell when he was young. When they ran into financial problems, they sold the house to Ed and Eileen and the Orlandos became the renters.



Symbols and Symbolism

The Mansion

As part of Eileen's need to get away from an unhappy childhood, she always held fast to the idea of living in a mansion where she would finally live happily ever after.

Test Papers

Ed became confused and unable to accurately record his test papers. Eileen helped him check and record the grades. It was one of the first signs that something was amiss with Ed's brain.

Headphones

Ed suddenly begins listening to classical music during all his free time. He lies on the couch, closes his eyes and listens to the music through his headphones.

George

"George" is the name that Ed gave a human skull that he used when teaching an anatomy class.

Christmas Displays

Eileen loves to look at the Christmas displays on Fifth Avenue. She went there as a child with her mother and dragged Ed there after they were married. She'd picture herself in the displays where she could leave reality behind.

Blocks of Wood

When Ed is cleaning out the garage and making repairs on the house, Eileen finds a little pile of wood in the driveway covered by a sheet. Later, she figured out that he was trying to build something but she didn't know what it was.

Valentine

On Valentine's Day when Eileen is wheeling Ed down the hallway which is decorated with Valentines made by school children. As they proceed down the hallway, his hand catches on one of the Valentines. Back in his room he drops it on the floor between himself and Eileen. She picks it up – she takes it as a Valentine from Ed.



Rap Music

Eileen is enraged when she comes into Ed's room and rap music is blaring from his radio. Eileen lectures the nurse's aide to NEVER have rap music playing on Ed's radio.

Mozart CD

The last Christmas present that Connell gives his father is a Mozart CD. He plays it for Ed who claps along. It seems the music made a connection with Ed.

Connell's Letter

After Ed's death, Eileen gives Connell a letter from his father that he wanted him to have. In the letter he reminisces about their time together, his hopes for Connell's future and most of all that he loved him. Ed ends the letter with, "My beloved boy, you meant the world to me."



Settings

Jackson Heights

When Eileen and Ed first get married they take a small apartment in a multi-family home. It was owned by the Orlandos who later sold it to Eileen and Ed and became their renters.

Bronxville

Eileen always admired the big houses in and around Bronxville. She finally got the house of her dreams in that area – it was the mansion that she dreamed of all her life.

Bronx Community College

Ed was a professor at the Bronx Community College. He was offered an advancement there and several other jobs that had more prestige and paid more but Ed was happy being a teacher and research at the community college.

Lawrence Hospital

Eileen had her master's degree in nursing and was employed at the Lawrence Hospital in Bronxville where she assumed a supervisory position.

Maple Grove Nursing Home

When it was impossible to care for Ed at home, Eileen had him placed in the Maple Grove Nursing Home. Eileen visited him every day without fail.



Themes and Motifs

Alcoholism

Among other ill-effects, the disease of alcoholism ultimately zaps the brain cells and ravishes the liver of the victim. But the damage is much far-reaching than that. Alcoholism destroys marriages and families and leaves permanent scars on the victims. Children are the most vulnerable victims of the disease. The behavior of the parent that is distorted by alcohol frightens and confuses the child. The parents present different personalities and characteristics when they are sober than when they are drinking. In one instance, the child can speak freely and openly. When the parent is drunk, however, the same words from the child might be greeted with rage and even violence. The child loses confidence and begins to feel guilty that he is doing something wrong and bringing on the abusive actions of a parent.

In Eileen's case, she became her mother's parent and her father's assistant. Eileen learned to watch her mother when she drank and smoked. When her mother fell asleep it was often on the couch with a lit cigarette. Ten-year-old Eileen realized it was up to her to snatch the cigarette so that they all didn't go up in flames. Her father forced her to do the household chores when her mother was unable to. And instead of playing with her friends after school, she was forced to spend her time at her father's favorite bar, doing her homework and watching him guzzle beer.

Ed's father was also an alcoholic. His mother would send him to his father's workplace to try to get his paycheck before his father got it and drank it away. As a young college student, he had to pick his father up at the bar because he was too drunk to drive. Ed would never go inside because he couldn't bear to witness his father's destruction.

The damage from alcohol takes many forms – guilt, shame, resentment, hurt, rage. Did Ed insist on living within the narrow parameters that he set up because of the chaos and uncertainty of having an alcoholic father? Did Eileen never let go of her dream of a mansion to live in because everything would finally be all right if she made it to the mansion? Alcoholism is a non-discriminating destructor and spares no one.

Abandonment

A strong theme of abandonment emerges in, "We Are Not Ourselves" by Matthew Thomas. Both the main characters – Eileen and Ed – suffered from the extreme abandonment that is brought about by alcoholism. When Eileen's father, Big Mike, picks Eileen up after school or dance class, instead of taking her home and asking about her day and helping her with her homework, he takes her to Doherty's, his favorite bar and hangout.

While Mike guzzles beer after beer and glows in the admiration of his friends, Eileen is made to sit in the corner at a table by herself and do her homework, glancing up to look



at her father once in a while and being disappointed when he never looks back. Big Mike abandoned his responsibilities as a father in favor of drinking and laughing it up with the boys. The hurt caused by such behavior is a lasting one – one that endures throughout Eileen's life.

Eileen's mother is not happy in her dysfunctional marriage. She is emotionally remote from her daughter and gives Eileen only superficial attention. When her mother has a miscarriage, she is devastated and spirals down into a blackness from which there is no return. Her mother turns to alcohol to ease her pain. She totally abandons her responsibility as a parent. Ten-year-old Eileen has to watch over her mother and snatch lit cigarettes away from her after she passes out drunk on the couch.

Ed's background was similar and only superior because his mother was not an alcoholic. But he suffered from his father's addiction. Ed's mother would send young Ed down to his father's workplace to try to get his father's paycheck before his father blew it on booze and carousing. When he is older he picks his father up from the bar because he's too drunk to drive. Ed can't bear to go inside because he doesn't want to see his father drink.

In both cases, Eileen and Ed were abandoned by their parents and were forced to take on the role of protector and enabler, even parent, themselves. The stigma that is associated with childhood abandonment is a lasting one that can leave an open wound that never heals. Eileen and Ed were hurt and scarred but they survived their childhood as best they could.

Dedication

Perhaps it was partly her religion and partly from living a difficult life in which there was always uncertainty about her future, but whatever compelled her Eileen remained loyal and dedicated to Ed until the very end. Their marriage like all marriages had its ups and downs but there was a deep love that the couple shared. Their conflicts arose from the different priorities and values they had. Ed was frugal and focused on his research and was happy where he was. But Eileen wasn't happy where she was. Eileen wanted a big house – the house of her dreams – where she could finally be happy and achieve fulfillment.

Eileen was raised a Roman Catholic a religion that doesn't sanction divorce. Her religious teachings were ingrained in her from her first memories and difficult to abandon. Her confusing and chaotic childhood as the only child of two alcoholics perhaps made her determined that she would not repeat their sins. She would have a happy husband and child. Of course, true happiness wasn't attainable in a small apartment. It needed a big house in which to grow. But even though she stayed in her small apartment far longer than she ever imagined or wanted to, she remained dedicated to Ed even in the darkest of times. And there were more than enough dark times.



Eileen used to scrap with Ed over their diverse goals and priorities. But once she began to see his decline, she was like a mother lion. She became his caretaker, his parent, his biggest defender. No matter what the offense was, Eileen found a way to take up for Ed, make excuses, maintain her love for him. She saw him as a wounded and vulnerable bird that she had to tend to until his days were over.

Eileen's loyalty and dedication to Ed probably was fostered by many things in her life. But in the end the strongest motivator for her loyalty to Ed was her deep love and respect for him.



Styles

Point of View

“We Are Not Ourselves” by Matthew Thomas is written in the third person limited omniscient. Writing from this point of view, the narrator tells the story of the characters. By using limited-omniscient, the author provides the reader with the thoughts, hopes, dreams, fears and motivations of a select number of characters. In this instance, by using this technique the reader know what emotions and hurt that Eileen is repressing, the frustration that Ed is feeling as his condition deteriorates and how their son, Connell is coping with his parents and with his maturation and finally his adulthood.

The story of Eileen Tumulty Leary takes place in New York City where not incidentally the author, Matthew Thomas was born and raised. He attended the University of Chicago and Chicago is where young Connell heads to college. Although there is no reference about the author having a family member with Alzheimer’s disease, he brings the pain and agony that the victim of the disease and his loved ones to life. Either through some personal knowledge of the devastating effect that the disease has or through extensive research, Thomas makes the struggle and challenge that Eileen and Ed face believable and heart-wrenching.

“We Are Not Ourselves,” the title of the book, is taken from Shakespeare’s “King Lear.” ‘We are not ourselves when nature, being oppressed, commands the mind to suffer with the body.’ Reading the entire quote makes the title a perfect selection.

Language and Meaning

In “We Are Not Ourselves,” the author Matthew Thomas uses mainly ordinary language in the telling of this fictional family that has been stricken with Alzheimer’s disease. When Ed is diagnosed with the disease, language is used to discuss his condition and the tests that he took for the doctors to make their conclusions.

The author uses various dramatic literary devices such as symbolism. Here is an example: When Ed was small, his father sat him on his knee and had Ed pretend he was a ventriloquist’s “dummy.” It can’t have been a positive to be called a dummy no matter how comedic or light the situation was. The ventriloquist’s dummy is symbolic of one person being the voice of another or speaking on behalf of another person. Also, the dummy is inanimate and is controlled by another.

The “mansion” that Eileen has idealized all her life is a metaphor for happiness. Eileen has held onto the dream of the mansion since she was a little girl. She believes that moving to the right house in the right neighborhood will fix all ills. She even wonders if moving to a new house would help Ed when he was in the first stages of his disease.



The epigraph used at the beginning of the book provides the book's title and captures the main subject of the story: "We are not ourselves when nature, being oppressed, commands the mind to suffer with the body." (Shakespeare's "King Lear.")

Structure

"We Are Not Ourselves" by Matthew Thomas is told in a chronological order and is separated into six main sections: Part I: "Days under Sun and Rain, 1951 – 1982," which covers Eileen's early years through the first years of her marriage to Ed. Part II: "The Salad Days" covers just one day – Thursday, October 23, 1986, the day that Connell nearly choked to death on a cherry tomato.

Part III: "Breathe the Rich Air, 1991" which describes worsening of Ed's condition and the move to the big new house. Part IV: "Level, Solid, Square and True, 1991-1995" follows Ed's decline and diagnosis, Eileen's struggle to cope with everything and Connell's maturation. Part V: "Desire Is Full of Endless Distances, 1996" describes Connell's college experience and Eileen's continuing struggle with Ed's condition and her decision that he needs to be placed in a nursing home. Part VI: "The Real Estate of Edmund Leary, 1997-2000" covers Ed's final days and Eileen's struggle to find resolution.

Before the first chapter there are "Dedication," "Epigraph" and "Prologue" sections. An "Epilogue," an "Acknowledgements" section, a "Reading Group Guide" and an "About Matthew Thomas" section follows the last chapter.



Quotes

She wasn't too young to understand that the ones who pleased him were the rare ones who didn't drain the frothy brew of his myth in a quick quaff, but nosed around the brine of his humanity awhile, giving it skeptical sniffs.

-- Narrator (Chapter 1)

Importance: Eileen realized that her father liked those who questioned him a bit instead of the majority of his friends who hero-worshipped him.

Sometimes, she thought, life makes you grow up early. And some people never grow up at all.

-- Eileen (Chapter 8)

Importance: As children, both Eileen and Ed suffered from having alcoholic fathers. This quote captures how children are taught to cover for alcoholic parents who are children who misbehave, ruin lives and take no responsibility for the destruction they cause.

She knew it wouldn't be like this forever; soon she'd make demands on him, expect the world of him. She was going to enjoy this part. She was going to fill up her heart with it enough for years.

-- Eileen (Chapter 11)

Importance: Eileen plans to enjoy every moment of her time with her baby. She knows that things will change as he matures. She knows that she will make demands of him and become like her mother.

It was the kind of thing she imagined people did when they came to a point where the roads to the past and the future were equally muddy – retreat to the high ground of a major project.

-- Eileen (Chapter 15)

Importance: Eileen is trying to figure out why Ed has become reclusive and increasingly disinterested in his work. When he tells her that he plans to listen to all of his records it confirms to her that he has arrived at a crossroads in his life and plans to distract himself with the monumental task of listening to each and every one of his vast record collection.

I like to imagine people thousands of years ago looking the same stars.... And people in the future long after we're dead.

-- Connell (Chapter 20)

Importance: Eileen and Connell are stargazing. Eileen is shaken that Connell thinks in terms of his own mortality.



All they wanted to do was move her things from one location to another. They had no idea that everything they placed in a definite spot brought her one step closer to disappointment.

-- Eileen (Chapter 35)

Importance: Eileen finally gets her dream house. But she does not feel the euphoria she hoped she would. She stalls the movers from bringing all her belongings it because it will underscore her disappointment.

This is a disease where you never win. It doesn't just take down the sufferer. It takes down the spouse, the children, the friends. It can feel tremendously isolating.

-- Dr. Brill (Chapter 49)

Importance: Eileen seeks the help of Dr. Brill, a therapist. This quotation captures the debilitating nature of Alzheimer's disease.

Half of you is better than ninety percent of people with a whole brain,' she said, and was surprised to find she believed it.

-- Eileen (Chapter 59)

Importance: Ed doesn't want to attend a party. Eileen tries to convince him to attend by showing her support of him. She is surprised that she believes her own words – Ed is better than most people.

It seemed to her that she had graduated from the ranks of ordinary wives into a rare stratum inhabited by widows whose husbands were still alive.

-- Eileen (Chapter 68)

Importance: This quotation captures the loneliness that spouses or the loved ones of Alzheimer's victims suffer.

He found the gloves in a tote bag on which his father had written the family name multiple times in permanent marker during the period when he'd gone around labeling everything. The longer Connell looked at those insistent capital letters, the more they sounded like the cry of a drowning man.

-- Connell (Chapter 64)

Importance: Long after his father is diagnosed, Connell looks back and saw that there were early signs that his father was having problems. He and his mother didn't see them or perhaps they didn't want to see them.

The point wasn't always to do what you want. The point was to do what you did and to do it well. She had worked hard for years, and if she had nothing to show for it but her house and her son's education, there was still the fact of its having happened, which no one could erase from the record of human lives, even if no one was keeping one.

-- Eileen (Chapter 90)



Importance: Eileen had come to terms with her life. She did not become wealthy but she did her job well and was able to have a beautiful home for her family and to send her son to college. No one could take those achievements away from her.

It was pneumonia that killed him. As the brain had deteriorated, the body parts had stopped working. His lungs filled with mucus. He drowned in it.

-- Narrator (Chapter 94)

Importance: This quote captures the connection between the physical and mental that is characteristic of Alzheimer's. It is not just dementia... the disease causes a real physical decline.