

We the Living Study Guide

We the Living by Ayn Rand

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Plot Summary

Kira Argounova arrives at Petrograd in 1922 on the "threshold of a box car" because there were not enough seats in the passenger cars. She is eighteen years old and is accompanied by her mother, Galina, her father Alexander, and her twenty-eight-year-old sister, Lydia. Kira almost immediately announces that she plans to attend the Technological Institute to become an engineer. Under the Communist Party, her college is free and she's granted a student ration card which entitles her to a small allotment of food, though it's not sufficient to support her entire family. Her father is the former owner of a successful factory and he opens a textile store. However, it soon closes because there are few people with any money to spend on anything other than food. Alexander and Galina next take the advice of a former employee and go into the soap business, but it's also a failure. Galina eventually becomes a schoolteacher and a staunch supporter of the Communist regime.

Meanwhile, Kira falls in love at first sight with a man named Leo. Leo's father was a counter-revolutionary and he's sought by the Communist police at the time he meets Kira. They arrange to meet again the following month, and it's on their next meeting that Leo tells Kira he's leaving the country by boat, bound for Germany. Kira, without saying goodbye to her family or picking up any personal belongings, goes with him. They spend one night together on the boat but are captured by Communist police, which includes a man named Stepan who doesn't arrest Kira and apparently arranges for Leo's release a short time later. Kira and Leo move in together but life is hard. They are both students and Leo teaches, but they are both soon expelled because of their family backgrounds. When Leo refuses to teach additional classes without pay, he's released from his job as well. They struggle to feed themselves and then Leo is diagnosed with incipient tuberculosis. He gives up, but Kira searches for a way to get him the treatment he needs. She's turned down by everyone and is out of options when she asks a Communist officer, Andrei, for money.

Andrei and Kira met while Kira was a student at the Institute. He is a Communist officer and falls in love with Kira, though she never fully returns his feelings. It's through his contact with Kira that Andrei learns to accept that it's alright to have fun for fun's sake. He also begins to question the ideals of his Party. When Kira first begins a sexual relationship with Andrei, she tells him that her parents and sister need food and Andrei gives her his entire month's pay. She uses it to pay for Leo's stay in the tuberculosis sanatorium and it's Andrei's money that pays those bills for Leo's entire stay.

Leo opens a store that becomes a front for a smuggling operation and he is the one held accountable when Andrei's investigation prompts police action. Leo is arrested and it's during that arrest that Andrei discovers that Kira lives with Leo. Leo doesn't yet know that Kira has become Andrei's mistress, though the men know each other. When Andrei finds out, he's hurt, but Kira tells him that she did what she did for the man she loves and Andrei says he understands because he'd do anything for Kira. Leo doesn't find out until after Andrei's death and he tells Kira that knowing of her infidelity makes it easier for him to leave with a wealthy woman who has offered him money to become her

companion. Leo does leave and Kira spends all her time and energy working on a way to get out of Russia.

She takes a train to a border town, using a faked travel permit, and then, dressed all in white, makes her way toward the border. She's told to walk until she sees a guard, then to drop down and crawl in the snow. She encounters a guard named Ivan who thinks he saw something but isn't certain. Ivan shoots and fatally wounds Kira, though he doesn't go check on his shot. She makes her way some additional distance and dies alone in the snow.



Part One: Chapters I through III

Part One: Chapters I through III Summary

Kira Argounova arrives at Petrograd in 1922 on the "threshold of a box car" because there were not enough seats in the passenger cars. She is eighteen years old and is accompanied by her mother, Galina, her father Alexander, and her twenty-eight-year-old sister, Lydia. They lived in Petrograd prior to the revolution but eventually fled the war. When they get to the city, they go to the home of Galina's sister and her family. Maria Petrovna was once beautiful but is now just another over-worked, under-fed woman with a family to worry over. Her husband, Vasili, has refused to become part of the revolution and the family is barely getting by. Their son, Victor, is an engineering student at the Technology Institute. Their daughter, Irina, is an art student. They have a younger child, Acia. The families have much in common. Vasili had been a wealthy furrier before the revolution and the family has since sold off the majority of their possessions in order to eat. Alexander was a factory owner, though not as wealthy as Vasili, and has also lost almost everything he'd worked to achieve. Both men are reluctant to become part of the Communist Party. They spend the evenings catching up with Maria, sharing news, such as the fact that one of their acquaintances died after her husband brought home part of a horse and they ate it, and that another had both legs chopped off trying to catch an overcrowded tram.

During their first evening in the city, Kira is asked what she might plan to do with her life. She says that she wants to be an engineer. Victor says that women are needed in other areas and calls her goal "selfish" and "anti-social".

Though Galina doesn't think engineering is an appropriate field for her daughter, she notes that there's no reason to try to talk her out of something once she's made up her mind. Lydia says that Kira has always managed to get her way, that when Kira ran away from a church service, she was never again sent to church, and that when she threw away a book she didn't like, their governess bought only books that would please Kira. Kira fills out her "labor card" and enrolls as a student.

There is an extensive description of Kira's youth. She has a good education but has seldom given in to the dictates of society. For example, she doesn't particularly notice things like fashion. Anything "gay" holds a special fascination for her. She loves the dancing girls of Europe, although not because they entertain her, but because she recognizes in them a feeling she worships—gaiety.

Part One: Chapters I through III Analysis

It's interesting that Kira believes their arrival in Petrograd is the beginning of something wonderful. There's no indication as to why the family returned to the city but there are



hints that their lives in Crimea—a more rural area—wasn't nearly as bad as it becomes in the city.

It's noteworthy that Victor is an engineering student and that it could be jealousy that makes him insist that engineering isn't an appropriate field for women. Victor is a selfish person and will go to great lengths, even to turning in his own sister for a certain death sentence, in order to get the job assignment that he wants.

Kira believes work and effort are "ignoble", but she selects an occupation that requires hard work. She says that in the dancing girls all over Europe she sees not entertainment, but joy. Because she "worships" joy, she has a "solemn reverence" for gaiety. Kira talks of a particular song that evokes those elusive feelings within her. She says that she doesn't really understand what it is that prompts her feelings and can't even identify them, but seems to feel they're important to her. It seems this is one of Kira's first statements of her own need for individuality.



Part One: Chapters IV through VII

Part One: Chapters IV through VII Summary

Kira's father bribes his way into an apartment. Galina returns to their former home, now occupied by another, and asks for their furniture. The occupant tells her she can have whatever is in the garage, which is mostly unusable but does include Lydia's piano. They hire a man to carry one load, then the family carries the rest in a borrowed cart.

Victor visits often and it doesn't take long for Kira to realize that he's interested in her, though she simply doesn't seem to care. One night, in a park, Victor asks Kira if she's ever thought of love and proceeds to put his arms around her. She pushes him away and begins the walk home. Victor follows until she threatens to tell a military man that he's bothering her. Nearby, she encounters a man she'll come to know as Leo. Leo is actually searching for a prostitute, though he doesn't explain why. Kira is immediately taken with him and pretends to be a prostitute in order to remain with him. He takes her to a small garden and they talk, with him finally realizing that she isn't a prostitute at all. He tells her that he's leaving the city and they arrange to meet one month later at the same place.

Kira is careful not to think of Leo during his month away and she never approaches their garden meeting place because she doesn't want to see it without him. She is so taken with him that she forgets to pick up her student rations one day and the family has no supper that night. It's during this waiting time that Kira meets "Comrade Sonia", who declines to offer her last name. Sonia tells Kira that it's her duty to take part in student demonstrations and to vote, then offers to tell Kira how to vote. She immediately realizes that Kira isn't the kind of person who will accept Sonia's instruction and leaves, but Kira does attend the rally. She sees her cousin, Victor, who is elected to a position along with Sonia, and a man named Pavel Syerov.

It's during this time that Kira meets a man named Andrei Taganov. She is actually speaking out against Communism when Andrei overhears her comments. Andrei is a member of the G.P.U.—an enforcement agency of the Communist Party.

Kira accepts an invitation from Andrei to attend the opera and tells her mother that she must have a dress. Lydia and Galina work over an old grey silk dress for Kira and then she tells them that Andrei is a member of the Communist Party. Galina says that Kira seems to search for ways to make life more difficult. Andrei gets a cool welcome from Kira's family when he picks her up for the opera. Despite the fact that she likes Andrei, Kira's mind strays constantly to Leo. With days left before their next scheduled meeting, she leaves class to find him waiting for her. Leo says that he couldn't wait to see her and they declare their love for each other. Pavel Syerov sees them at the gate. When Leo says he'll return soon to see her again, she fears for his safety and tells him to wait for a week.



Meanwhile, Alexander closes his little textile shop and is contacted by a former bookkeeper of his own factory. The two form a partnership, with Alexander buying the ingredients and making soap while the bookkeeper markets it. They make it of spoiled pig lard; as an afterthought, Alexander uses a button to press a "trademark" into the somewhat soggy bars.

Part One: Chapters IV through VII Analysis

It's interesting to note that Galina is already beginning to adapt. When the family is moving into a small, dismal apartment, it's Galina who says that the rooms can be made into a home with a little "artistic" endeavor. Galina will soon become a teacher of Soviet children and will become completely caught up in the ideals of Communism. She'll constantly tell Kira that Russia is a place of opportunities for the young people.

While Leo is also taken with Kira on their first meeting, it's noteworthy that she is willing to pretend to be a prostitute in order to be near him. She will always be willing to do anything in order to remain at Leo's side and in an effort to gain his love, but the relationship will always be at least somewhat one-sided.

Kira is becoming accustomed to the poor living conditions but is starting to question the Party politics behind the ideals. It's important to remember that the "Red" party, or the Communists, are in command. However, there remain some who are not conforming and Kira quickly realizes that she has more in common with those "White" objectors.

Kira again meets Leo and they talk about their futures. Leo asks if Kira believes the engineering degree is worth the effort and she says she does. Kira's father is holding to the idea that he can make something of and for himself. He opens a textile store but the family is actually living off savings they had when they returned to Petrograd. Kira's Uncle Vasili is holding on to the idea that conditions will return to those of the days before the revolution. He says that he's kept track of the furniture from his old store so that he can collect it when the revolutionaries are turned away.

It's interesting that the people of the day, though many are starving and Kira herself had moldy millet for supper, find a way to attend the opera. Kira herself asks Andrei if he can see that he's missing something belonging to the Communist party and he says that it "seems rather silly". He does, however, say that he enjoyed the fact that Kira seemed to like the opera. Lydia has never quite given up on her previous lifestyle. She continues to spend a half hour each morning brushing her hair and is proud of this feature. She also spends three hours each day practicing her piano playing.



Part One: Chapters VIII through XI

Part One: Chapters VIII through XI Summary

The next day, Pavel Syerov summons Kira to the office of the Communist Cell and asks her for the name and address of the man she was talking to at the gate. She says she doesn't know his name and that he'd merely asked for directions. Pavel is becoming heated in the questioning when Andrei walks in. When Andrei dismisses Kira, he tells Pavel that he's not to take on the duties of the GPU again.

The soap business fails, but Galina finds another enterprise and the family is soon packing saccharine tablets and crystals for resale. The man who hires them has them putting eighty-seven tablets into boxes labeled "one hundred". Kira has to leave her evening studies to help and notes that the sharp taste of saccharine burns her throat when she breaths in. She's working with the family when Andrei stops in to say that she won't be questioned further. He says that it's because he trusts her, though he can't say why this is true.

When Kira meets Leo that night, he tells her that he's going to Germany. Kira says that she intends to go with him despite the fact that she can't even return home to tell her parents or to pick up anything and that it's dangerous. They enter a tiny cabin of a ship that's smuggling a group of counter-revolutionaries out of the country. Leo tells Kira to undress and the two go to bed together.

They're awakened the next morning when a Communist officer barges into their cabin. The officer, Stepan Timoshenko, allows them to dress in privacy and Leo's first words to him are that he'll sign any confession as long as they realize that he kidnapped Kira and that she's to go free. Timoshenko says nothing at first, but later says that the story is as Leo presented it. Kira objects but Timoshenko tells Leo to keep Kira quiet. Timoshenko later tells Kira that he believes there will be a truck waiting when they dock and that he believes no one will be looking at her. He tells her to walk away and not to return. Kira objects, saying she wants to stay with Leo, but Timoshenko tells her that she can't help him and that it's "easier to get one—than two—out of the G.P.U", which seems to mean that he might also be able to help Leo. He tells her where to find him and that he might have news for her later. Leo warns her to stay away from him and they kiss as they prepare to part.

When Leo comes to Kira's apartment, she leaves with him without making any explanation to her family though he—answering Lydia's question—says he's just been released from jail. Kira spends the night and returns the next day to retrieve her belongings. Lydia is hysterical, saying that wicked women such as Kira shouldn't be allowed to live and Galina tells Kira that she's never to return. Kira, upon returning to Leo's home, is defiant and triumphant, but Leo feels that they have much against them.



Leo attends the University and Kira attends the Technological Institute. Leo studies history and works for the state's publishing company, translating books from other languages. It's not certain how much Leo—born Lev and dubbed Leo by his foreign tutors—has told Kira about his past life. His father was Admiral Kovalensky, who lost his sight in a battle. Leo's mother was a countess who died young, leaving the Admiral to raise Leo alone. He commanded his way through life, often with nothing more demanding than a smile. He found his way into the beds of many women.

As the spring of 1923 begins, there are some important events. Vasili sells the last lampshade in the apartment while Maria hides her handkerchiefs that would reveal the extent of her illness to her family. Lenin has a stroke and loses his ability to speak and Victor talks with his Communist friends about the possibility of electrification. Andrei takes Kira to a ballet and when she returns, Andrei admits to being jealous of her "Communist boy friend".

Part One: Chapters VIII through XI Analysis

Andrei has been a fighter, which sets him apart from some of those who were nothing more than college students who rally for a cause and distribute pamphlets. He is born in 1896, and his father is arrested for Communism when Andrei is ten. His father is apparently exiled to Siberia but never returns. His mother takes in washing until her death just a few years later. Andrei begins work in a factory and joins the Communist Party, though his activities are quieter than his father's had been. Andrei talks a group of fighters from the White Army to join the Red, though he's wounded during his efforts. He later finds himself alone with a single White Army officer, both wounded, but able to walk. They find that the Red Army's flag remains, meaning they were the victors. The officer, Captain Karsavan, is wanted and Andrei lends him a gun so that the man can kill himself rather than face what the Red Army would have in store for him.

It's interesting that the men who don't have jobs are assigned to shovel snow, but that they aren't paid anything for their labor. This practice points out the basic problem with Communism. There's no incentive for the men to do a good job other than their own work ethic. They aren't paid and won't be allowed to leave early if they work hard. They simply shovel until they're told to go home.

When Andrei is at Kira's apartment, Lydia plays the piano. Andrei notes that the music is beautiful and Kira asks why he comments when he's never cared for such things before. He can't explain why but compliments Lydia and asks that she play it again. Feigning tiredness, she refuses.

As Kira talks to Timoshenko at the GPU Headquarters where Leo is being held, he explains that Leo's father was involved in a counter-revolutionary plot and had been executed but that tempers had cooled and that Leo would probably be allowed to leave within a few days. He then tells Kira to go home and wait and that she should "get her claws" into Leo and hang on to him once he's freed. When Kira asks Timoshenko why



he's taking these steps for Leo, he says that he served with Leo's father and that he "was not the worst commander" he'd known.

It's interesting that Kira contends that there are two separate parts to her life. She considers her time with Leo "life", and the rest as something other than life though she gives it no specific name. She's implemented the rule that he can't see her cooking because that's part of the "other", and her own interest in her studies have lessened next to her desire to have Leo near. Despite the fact that she simply walked away from her own family without seeming to care, it's Kira who makes the first move back toward them. She stops in to visit her cousin Irina, though Irina's father refuses to acknowledge her. Irina later visits Kira, informs Leo that she hopes he likes her because she's the only one of his "in-laws" that will visit for the foreseeable future, and asks Kira if she's happy. It's interesting that when Kira talks to Andrei she doesn't reveal the turn her life has taken. It's likely at least partly because Andrei stood up for her when she was questioned about Leo's address. She notes that she can't bring herself to tell him about Leo, and despite her dedication to Leo, she agrees to attend a ballet with Andrei. She then allows him to drop her near her parents' apartment but goes on to the house she now shares with Leo.



Part One: Chapters XII through XV

Part One: Chapters XII through XV Summary

As Kira is returning home one evening with a loaf of bread, she encounters Irina, who says that Kira's family are literally starving. She says the man who'd hired them to package the saccharine has been arrested and that they're desperate. Kira sends the loaf of bread and Galina arrives at their home the following day. She begs them to forgive the family's harsh words and offers to return the unused portion of the bread. Kira insists that they keep it and Galina leaves, asking them to visit. Kira and Leo later go to a railway station with plans to buy a loaf of bread from the black market that naturally forms there. A man, about to be searched, distracts the soldiers by telling on a fellow traveler and causing the old woman's arrest. He then shows Kira and Leo a loaf of bread and a ham he has concealed within his heavy jacket. Kira, admitting to a feeling of panic that she couldn't understand, runs away.

Vava throws a party and invites both Kira and Lydia. Because Lydia doesn't have a date for the party, Kira invites Andrei, first telling him that Leo would be there. Lydia spends much of her time playing the piano and suspects that's why she's invited to these rare gatherings. Vava's father, a gynecologist who is willing to perform some surgeries that are not sanctioned by the state, is in a rare position as host in that he can offer refreshments to the guests. He seems to enjoy the role. That doesn't stretch to firewood, and Vava asks each guest to bring one log along to help heat the seldom-used drawing room of their home where the party is held. No one leaves until daylight because the streets are simply not safe. Even then, they remain in groups as long as possible.

Leo and Kira sometimes escape the stifling heat of Petrograd for a day in the country. At one point, they try to get a room to spend a night, but are told they must have a release from their own Upravdon, a release from the militia and their labor books for registration as transients. It's during this time that Russia becomes the USSR. It's also during this time that Galina takes a job teaching Russian children to sew. Though Leo and Kira occasionally visit, there's nothing to talk about. Kira says that the only reason she continues is that her father seems almost glad to see her, though he has become dulled to the point that he seems to notice nothing.

Leo is told to begin teaching language classes three nights each week and is told he's expected to teach for free. He declines and is fired. Things begin to deteriorate and Kira goes less often to class. Then comes the day when she tells him there's no real supper but that she has bread and some fried onions to eat. He asks where her own portion is and she says that she's already eaten it. Later, Leo begs a clerk to allow him to tear off an extra week's ration card so that he can tell "someone at home" that he received two weeks' rations and that he ate his half on the way home so that she'll eat more herself. Leo finds that he can't get a job without being a member of a trade union and can't join a union without a job. At one point, he's told that jobs are rare and that a person who



gets one should be grateful, but when he says that he's broke, the man calls him a bum and sends him away without a job.

There comes the day when Kira finds a strange woman named Marisha Lavrova in the two rooms she and Leo share with orders for Kira to vacate one of the two for the woman. Kira hands the Upravdom some money and he pledges to throw the woman out, but upon finding that she had a membership card for the Communist Union of Youth, he tells Kira to remove her personal things from the room. They appeal to a court but are denied based on "social class" and the Upravdom's testimony that Kira and Leo live in "sexual intimacy" just as if they were married. Marisha is pushy, refuses to even knock before parading through the bedroom that Kira and Leo now live in, and says only that she has a friend who told her of Kira and Leo's extra room. One day, Kira passes through Marisha's room on her way outside and discovers Victor there. She suddenly understands, and when she tells Leo he threatens to "break every bone in Victor's body". Later, Marisha comes to Kira, asks what she uses to keep from becoming pregnant, and says she's in trouble. She later has an abortion and asks Kira not to tell Victor. It was not Victor's child but Marisha says that Victor is a gentleman.

Kira is called by her cousin, Acia, who says she is frightened. When she arrives, she finds her aunt Maria—who has had a chronic cough for some time and has been hiding the fact that she's coughing up blood—is having trouble breathing and is drooling blood. She dies a few minutes after Kira's arrival. Meanwhile, Leo is working on a construction site. The work is hard and when he arrives home that night Kira notices that he is coughing.

Kira files mountains of paperwork at the House of the Peasant that are never again seen and counts piles of books with titles that indicate their pro-Communism contents. The purpose of the House of the Peasant is ostensibly to provide peasants with services, but what really happens is that those from the rural areas are educated about the Communist way of life. The occasional person who requests help for grain shortages, for example, is told instead about cultural and educational opportunities being arranged for his sake. Kira puts her life at risk to grab a handle on a tramway rather than risk being late for work. She feigns enthusiasm and works quickly. Still, there comes a day when a criticism of Kira is posted on the "Wall Newspaper" of the House. These are articles, drawings, and criticisms of the various people and no one dares ignore a criticism. Kira wonders how it is that she works so diligently and still stands out as being someone outside the group. She finally begins to wonder if it's because she doesn't join in on the whispered conversations that take place when Comrade Bitiuk, the overseer, leaves the building. She tries to join in but her attempts are self-conscious and feeble. She spends the mandatory evenings in Marxist group meetings to meet the required social activities mandate. Kira has lost her interest in sex simply because she's tired. She says that she loves Leo and that she wants to want him, and these thoughts make her rouse herself when he reaches for her. One of the things Kira hates most is that they have only a single room to share so that there's no option but for Leo to be in the room while she cooks.



Part One: Chapters XII through XV Analysis

Kira's actions are somewhat puzzling because she declares her dedication to Leo but doesn't seem to want to completely cut her ties to Andrei. Andrei asks her to step out onto the balcony with him and she does, but Leo follows them and says that Kira isn't state property for Andrei to order around. Andrei notes that it might be better for Kira if she were. As the party breaks up, Andrei asks if she sees much of Leo. Kira had actually hoped that Andrei would learn that she and Leo were living together on his own but now realizes that it hasn't happened. She notes the tone of his voice when he asks the question and decides that she's not going to tell him. Andrei will be away for the summer and Kira will write to him, though the details of the letters are not revealed.

Though Kira and Leo live in the house once owned by Leo's father, private ownership is no longer allowed. The home is now owned by the state. There were seven rooms but the house had already been divided so that Leo and Kira had only three. Then they were notified that they must give up one of those rooms. The old man who takes the room is meek, cooks for himself, and asks only to use the bathroom once a month for a bath. He promises to use the outdoor privy for his personal needs so that he won't disturb Kira. With the change, Kira asks Leo to always remain in the bedroom while she cooks. She still refuses to allow him in the room while she performs this duty that she terms a necessary waste of time and something other than real life.

Under the law, Kira would have been allowed one of the rooms while Leo had the other, but a married couple would have been granted only one of the rooms. The Upravdom's testimony seems to have eliminated the application of that law in this case. It's also noteworthy that the judge asks about the employment history of Kira and Leo's fathers.

She later agrees to have tea and a pastry with Andrei. As is typical when the two are together, they talk about ideals and Kira says that she understands a warrior's right to kill but not the right to deny life to those who are still breathing. As she raises the pastry to her mouth, Andrei realizes that she's nearly faint with hunger and immediately takes the sweet from her, ordering soup and a filling meal instead. He asks why she didn't tell him of her plight and she says merely that she has tried to find work. He makes a phone call and secures a job for her and then gives her money. She first refuses the money, but he says that if she won't take it for herself there's bound to be someone at home who needs it. She is apparently thinking of Leo as she accepts.

Kira joins in a peasants' march directly under a banner that reads, "WE, SOVIET CLASS PEASANTS, STAND AS ONE FOR OUR BRITISH CLASS BROTHERS!" Kira tells herself that she marches to keep her job and that she keeps her job for Leo. She continues to say that she hasn't "sold out" to the Communist Party but is merely doing what she has to do to survive. It's this attitude that her Uncle Vasili and her father have condemned. Both remain true to their beliefs despite the fact that their families were hungry. When Kira sees the British, she notes that the woman wears a well-fitting dress, stockings, and quality shoes. The woman says that they, the British, have been sent to Russia to see the results of the "experiment" currently underway. She says that she'll



report back that the experiment is working, that she saw groups of hard-working people willing to march in support of their government. Kira wants to tell her that it's all a false front but knows two things—the world won't listen and Leo needs the money Kira earns. Leo is despondent about the fact that Kira is earning their living and his cough continues to grow worse.



Part One: Chapters XVI and XVII

Part One: Chapters XVI and XVII Summary

Through all the struggles, Kira has been able to lose herself in her occasional ability to attend lectures at the Institute. She has said that their hope for a future lies in their education. Then students are notified that they are to fill out questionnaires as the colleges prepare for the great purge. The official statement is that education is for those loyal to the state and that those against the state won't be educated. The main questions are centered around the employment history of the student's parents, the student's activities during the civil war, and any organizational affiliations. Kira and Leo fill out their questionnaires and each knows that they've signed "the death warrant of their futures". Andrei is there as Kira is being questioned, and he asks if she's strictly sympathetic to the Soviet cause. She answers yes, but it's not enough to keep her in college. Kira admits that she's not prepared when she does see her name on the list of expelled students. It's noted that expelled students will never be allowed back into a college. It's accepted that students of wealthy parents with nothing else in their favor are to be expelled. The fact that Kira's father was a factory owner and that her family had servants ensures her expulsion. Leo is also expelled, and when she arrives home Kira finds that he's been drinking.

Leo returns from the doctor with the news that he has "incipient tuberculosis". The doctor tells Kira that Leo's only hope for survival is to go south. He says another winter in the city will kill Leo. Leo takes the death sentence calmly, after his initial reaction. He says that life is actually easier when the end is in sight. Kira begins a quest to get him admitted to one of the sanatoriums in the south. She finally realizes that she can't gain entrance to any state sanatorium and begins trying to raise money for a private one. Leo's one aunt flatly turns her down, Vava's father denies that he has the funds available, and her attempts at securing a private, high-interest loan is denied because she lacks collateral. She turns to Andrei, but he refuses even to speak to her and she's not certain what prompted this attitude. She approaches a stranger on the street, seemingly willing to sell her body, but when she names the price he laughs at her. One day at the House of the Peasants, Kira hears a familiar voice and turns to see Sonia laughing at her presence there. Kira knows that her days of employment are numbered and she's soon dismissed. She continues to try to find a way to get Leo moved to the south and finally decides that she must try one more time to see Andrei.

Kira goes to Andrei's apartment and he admits that he has stopped seeing her because he loves her. He says that he knows she can't return his love because he represents everything she hates. She hesitates then tells him that she loves him as well but hadn't thought that he felt the same. They have sex and he begs her to stay and to marry him. Kira points out that he's a member of the Communist Party and that she's not, which means her presence in his life won't be good for his career. She also says that having him in her life will be difficult for her family to bear. She convinces him to keep the affair secret and he agrees. A short time later, she mentions the serious financial condition of



her family and he gives her his full monthly pay, telling her to keep as much as she needs. She feels some guilt but keeps most of it, paying for Leo's first month in the sanatorium. She tells Leo that her wealthy uncle in Budapest sent her the money and begs him not to mention it to her family because there had been a family quarrel.

Part One: Chapters XVI and XVII Analysis

The social situation is hard on relationships, ranging from families to lovers and even friendships. Vava has long suspected something of Victor and she leaves home with the stated intention of visiting Kira. She discovers Victor at Marisha's room, which she had fully expected, but doesn't stop to talk to him. She goes directly in to Kira's room, though Leo is at home alone. Meanwhile, Kira is late home from work because she promised to meet Andrei. They have recently spent time together, including an afternoon of swimming and dinner at a restaurant. Kira doesn't analyze or explain her relationship with Andrei to anyone, least of all herself. She knows that Leo's cough has gotten worse and he's finally agreed to see a doctor on this particular Wednesday. Kira waits for Andrei for an hour but he doesn't show up. She heads home to find out what the doctor told Leo about his cough and discovers Vava in his arms. Meanwhile, Victor has joined the Communist party. Irina says her father is trying to be "broadminded" but that she fears it will really be the death of him.

There's no real indication that Kira plans to allow things to go to this level with Andrei. It seems that she is almost ready to leave his apartment but then changes her mind. She continues to refuse to analyze her relationship with Andrei and finds it difficult to be in the same room with Leo after the first sexual encounter with Andrei. On the day Leo catches the train out of town, he and Kira wait at the station. Kira has plans to meet Andrei later that evening. As the train pulls away, Kira is suddenly overtaken with fear and wildly chases after the train. There's no indication that she has plans for continuing to take money from Andrei to pay for Leo's medical treatment or what she plans to do when Leo returns to the city in the spring.



Part Two: Chapters I through IV

Part Two: Chapters I through IV Summary

Andrei is totally in love with Kira. No one seems to know why he gave up his apartment for a room no longer used by the Communist Party, but it has been a perfect love nest for the two for the eight months following Leo's departure. While Andrei's love grows deeper, he becomes more desperate to have Kira return that love. Though she goes through the motions, he seems to have doubts. He showers her with gifts, including clothes and perfume. She objects, saying he's given too much already. He says that it's not for her but for her family. She leaves Andrei's bed, returning home to await Leo's return. Kira herself has remembered that Leo would return and that fact has "burned everything out". She thinks of the benefits Leo is receiving from the treatment but admits that she also thinks of what's she's done "to another man's soul".

Leo's train is late and Kira visits Irina, where she finds a young man is also visiting. The man's name is Sasha and he seems to be fully against the Communist Party. Sasha walks Kira home and says that there is "an awakening" among the people. Kira asks if he thinks the possible outcome is worth the risk, but he assures her that he's in no danger.

Leo arrives the following day, tanned and healthy, but Kira notes that something in his eyes hasn't healed. He refers to himself as a "gigolo", says that he hates the fact that Kira has supported him and that he has nothing for a future except to watch her continue to drag herself through the hell their lives have become.

Kira spends her evenings at home with Leo, though she tries to find excuses to go to Andrei. One evening, they are visited by a wealthy woman Leo met in the sanatorium. On another, Kira says that she has to visit her family but they arrive just as she's about to leave. Galina makes comments that indicate her way of thinking is leaning toward Communism. She says that it's a time of great opportunity for the young. Andrew has taken a job as a bookkeeper but Galina belittles it, saying that it's not nearly the level of responsibility as her job as a sewing teacher. They spend the evening listening to Galina preach the need for Communist ideals and Lydia preach the need for spiritual ones.

The next evening, Kira goes to Andrei. She enters with the request to be forgiven first and that she'd then explain. Andrei says only that she's already forgiven and that there's no need for an explanation. At her request, he takes her to a club, skipping a party cell meeting. He says that he once felt that taking her to such a place was a sacrifice but that he has come to like being there simply because it's somewhere he wants to be. Kira tells him that she recognized in him a hunger for life when he first said that he loved her. She says that she'd wanted only to fill that hunger—nothing more. He says that it's impossible for a woman like her to "love only like that". He gives her his money though she tells him that her family is now financially secure and that she doesn't need it.



When she arrives home, Tonia is there along with a man introduced as Karp Karpovitch Morozov. Kira has seen the man before, once when he pointed out a fellow passenger who was smuggling food to prevent his own search and arrest and another time at a sidewalk market. Morozov is telling Leo about his plans for a food store. In reality, it's a front for government shipments of food that will then be distributed among buyers around the country. Kira points out that Leo is putting his life on the line and he says that it's a small price to pay.

Morozov tells Leo that he has a Communist officer who'll be their third partner and who'll help get the government shipments diverted to the food store. That officer turns out to be Pavel Syerov. Pavel and Morozov discuss the fact that Leo—because of his father's execution as a counter-revolutionary—will be the perfect person to take the blame if the store's real business is discovered.

Part Two: Chapters I through IV Analysis

It's interesting to note that Victor is constantly saying that he alone is supporting his family but that he can't seem to see that the reason is that the Communist Party of which he is so proudly a member is structured so the best a family can do is barely survive. Victor's sister is irreverent of his Party affiliation, a fact that angers Victor.

Leo and Kira are at home one evening when a well-dressed woman who Leo calls Tonia arrives. She and Leo were in the sanatorium together—she for her nerves. She says that she has connections through "Koko", though she never explains who Koko is or what the connections are. Kira is quiet and Leo berates her for not being more friendly. She says that Tonia didn't come to visit her, but came to see Leo. Leo points out that having Tonia as a friend with the right connections couldn't be a bad thing and says that at least she's not "red". It seems to be said against Kira's friendship with Andrei and it's interesting to note that Kira seems jealous of Tonia, though she denies it.

Pavel has an important position but a disrespect for other people. When he returns from lunch with Morozov, he dismisses people who have been waiting for three hours for the opportunity to talk with him. The problem is that Pavel is already having trouble keeping his secret to himself. He throws a party, gets drunk, and tells Sonia that he has a secret but that he can't tell her what it is. He is flaunting the fact that he has plenty of money and that he can afford to both buy and share food and liquor. While Pavel is drinking, Sonia lures him into another room and they have sex.



Part Two: Chapters V through VIII

Part Two: Chapters V through VIII Summary

The store is doing very well and Leo soon has enough money to buy foreign-made clothes. He stops in on a particular afternoon and demands that the clerk give him all the money from the cash register—apparently a common practice—and the clerk points out that Karp Karpovitch had objected to the practice. Kira continues to hold her Soviet job and she must wear old clothes to keep up the appearance of needing that job. There's a maid at home who helps her out of her work clothes and into the new clothing from the closet where several new coats and silk stockings are kept. She continues to make excuses to both Leo and Andrei.

Leo purchases an expensive vase as a gift for Victor upon his wedding but Kira objects, saying that it's dangerous for Victor to know how much money they have. Leo, angry, throws the vase to the floor, shattering it. Kira is upset at the amount of money wasted, but Leo says that his life may not last long and that he wants to waste money while he has the opportunity. Andrei is at the party. When they have a moment together, he tells Kira that he hopes she isn't spending too much time with Leo. Kira tells him not to attempt to dictate her friends and then reminds Andrei that the two of them have a secret—a fact that warms Andrei. Later, Andrei and Leo have words and Kira allows Andrei to take her home after Leo, who is drunk, makes subtle threats toward Andrei. Irina interrupts, pushing Leo out of the room and asking him if he were on the verge of informing a member of the GPU that Kira is his mistress. Kira stops off at Andrei's house. When she arrives home, Leo tells her that she should leave him but acknowledges that she won't. She asks him to quit the business but he says it's already too late. He then says that it's only a matter of time "before they get me", but that he has Kira and her love in the meantime.

Victor is trying to get a better position because of his recent graduation with an engineer's degree and it's noted that his marriage to Marisha has helped but that some are still skeptical of him. When he arrives home that night, Sasha is visiting Irina. Victor demands that it stop and Irina says they're engaged. Victor says that it's difficult to get ahead in the Party with the "millstone of this family tied around my neck". Vasili tells Victor that Irina loves Sasha and that he won't interfere.

Kira encounters Vava, who has married a young man and says she had nothing to wait for after Victor's marriage. It's about this same time that Sonia goes to Pavel and tells him that she's pregnant with his child. Pavel asks how he's to be certain the child is his. Sonia cuts him off by pointing out that she can be a good person to have on his side, leaving the sentence hanging. Pavel asks about an abortion, but Sonia says she's three months along and that it's too late. Sonia also tells him that this is an opportunity for the two of them to raise the perfect revolutionary child. Pavel asks for some time, but when he talks to others that evening, he discovers that Sonia is already spreading the news



that they are to marry. They take that step three days later and Sonia moves in with Pavel.

Kira never knows how Andrei will act from one day to the next. Sometimes he's angry and drinking, other times he seems bored or indifferent. Occasionally, she finds that he's clear-headed and that he's his old self for a brief period of time. Now and then, Irina visits Kira. When Andrei is home, she relates "dangerous political anecdotes". When Irina is alone with her cousin, she sometimes admits that she's afraid for the future of their country and that she's afraid that Sasha will be exiled to Siberia for his involvement in the counter-revolutionary movement. One evening, Sasha's young neighbor, Katia, is waiting for him down the street. Katia's mother sent Sasha to tell him that it's not safe for him to return home. He tries to make contact with others in his political group but finds that there are either people at their apartments or that there's a signal indicating that it's not safe. Sasha makes his way to Irina's house and hides in a closet in her room for several days. While he's hiding there, Irina's sister-in-law Marisha brings her a loaf of bread. She knows that Irina is hiding Sasha and wants to help simply because she knows Irina loves him. She says that she's not certain about Victor and that he's recently acted "queer". She urges Irina to get Sasha away soon. Irina has a ticket for Sasha to Baku that night, but Victor, having come to the conclusion that Sasha is hiding in the house, reports his presence to the Communists. Victor is asked who else lives in the house and Victor says that no one else in the house knows about Sasha and that Irina alone is responsible.

Galina comes to Kira's room and says she has something to sell. She offers Kira her own wedding dress. Though Kira tries to give her mother money, Galina seems to have too much pride to accept it. She also talks about the fact that her paycheck was short because of dues and fees that were deducted, including membership dues to an organization that she didn't know she was a member of. Kira lies, saying that she was about to look for a new evening dress anyway and that the gown can be altered perfectly. Kira gives her mother all the cash she has on hand, though her mother tries to say it's too much. When Leo arrives home, Tonia is with him and they are planning to attend a club opening. Kira pretends that she has a meeting to attend but goes to Andrei's apartment instead. He tells her that he is worried about his Party and that it seems she was more knowledgeable on the subject that he imagined. He says that he'd hoped, through Communism, to "raise men to our own level". The problem, according to Andrei, is that those men don't rise but others lower themselves.

With just an hour left before time for the train, soldiers knock on Irina's door, present a search warrant, go directly to Irina's closet, and arrest Sasha. They then announce that both Irina and her father, Vasili, are to accompany them. Victor tells Irina that he'll see what he can do, but Irina stops his false sympathy with a stare. Irina and Sasha are each sentenced to ten years in a Siberian prison but Vasili is held for three days before being released. Vasili manages to arrange for Sasha and Irina to marry while they are awaiting transport to prison and then discovers that they're to serve their time in facilities many miles apart. He begs for them to be sent to the same prison but is denied time after time. Andrei offers to ask that Irina be sent to the same prison as Sasha and Kira reluctantly agrees. Andrei finds out that his superiors know that he's been "keeping a



mistress" when he's accused of trying to ask a favor for "a relative". It's also pointed out that Kira, the daughter of a former wealthy factory owner, isn't a person who can help Andrei's career. Finally, he's told that he hasn't many friends left "in the Party". Leo goes to Pavel and asks him to intervene, but Pavel also refuses. Then Vasili asks Victor to intercede in order to get the couple sent to the same prison. Victor refuses and Vasili leaves with Acia.

Sasha and Irina travel together on a train for a while and have time to talk. She makes him promise that he won't blame himself for her arrest because she says that she couldn't have stood remaining behind while he was sent away. She also tells him that they must never give up and suggests that they look at the moon as often as possible and remember that the other is looking at that same moon. Then Irina is taken off the train to catch another.

Part Two: Chapters V through VIII Analysis

Kira is carefully listening to the statements made during the mandatory excursion guides' meeting and is able to talk about the contents of the speech afterward. She can rattle off all the pro-party propaganda without thinking about it just as she can rattle off the various parts of her excursion guide speech and just as she can rattle off her excuses to Andrei and Leo.

Most think Victor married Marisha only because her father's war record is a positive point in his favor. Victor offers a toast to his new father-in-law, Glieb Ilyitch Lavrov, who Victor calls one of the first to fight for peasant rights. Glieb acknowledges the toast but says that the only difference the years have made is that the current heel of oppression is from a red boot. In that statement, Vasili suddenly connects with this man and the two drink to the happiness of their children, though neither believes happiness is part of the future.

A speaker for the Communist Party announces that the party will be purged of internal dissent. Following the announcement, Sonia addresses Andrei, asking what he thinks of the speech. He says that he prefers not to discuss it and she asks why he believes that he has the right to an opinion of his own. It seems that his own ideals are changing, either because of Kira's influence or his love for her. It's interesting to note that everyone seems to know of his opinions and that he's no longer the absolute authority that others bow to. Later, Stepan Timoshenko arrives at Andrei's room, saying that he's been taken off the GPU and that next he'll be expelled from the Communist Party. He has been drinking and tells Andrei that he sees no future for the people of Russia. He points out the number of comrades who have died of the "ceaseless toil" and says that's just the media's way of saying that the person committed suicide. Stepan says that the one thing he regrets is that he could give his life now for Andrei—the only "man" he knows—and that it still wouldn't make any difference in Andrei's own future.

Kira is walking home one day when she sees a building under construction. She stops to watch and for just a moment she wonders why she isn't standing up there with the



man giving orders. Then she remembers that it's because she hasn't bowed to the Communist Party and that she's denied the opportunity of further education. She stands and watches until a man tells her that standing and staring is a waste of time.

Victor is still angry that he hasn't been assigned an important job so that he can put his engineer's degree to work. It seems likely that he believes that telling on Irina will earn him something with the Communists and that it could be his stepping stone into a better job. He tells his father that he doesn't plan to continue in his job of "slave's drudgery" for the rest of his life. It's interesting to note that he can't seem to see that the very political party he's so adamantly in favor of is the same party refusing to allow him any advancement in his career field. It's also interesting to note that he's among those talking of the importance of the Communist ideals but that he wants to better himself through his degree. Another point Victor makes is that Communism calls for a person to put the collective good ahead of his own family. Victor says that's why he's willing to turn in his sister for harboring Sasha.

Vasili has never been blind to how Irina and Sasha were caught. He's also never asked Victor to help until he's exhausted every other possibility. Then he tells Victor that he'd always wanted a son and that it was because he never trusted other men. He says that he wanted a son so that there would be a man in the world who he could trust completely. He says that he's not willing to question Victor and doesn't want any explanations, but asks him to help with the assignment. He says that Victor should think of it as a "death-bed request" from his sister. Vasili says that if Victor does this, he'll forget everything that came before. He warns that if Victor refuses, he will no longer be his son. Victor lies, saying that he's tried and that there's nothing he can do. It's interesting to note that Vasili suddenly seems stronger than he has before. He seemed withdrawn and absent-minded about life in general before his wife's death. It's as if Irina's arrest has forced him back into life.



Part Two: Chapters IX through XIII

Part Two: Chapters IX through XIII Summary

Victor's reward is almost instantaneous as he's appointed a post on a hydroelectric project. He tells Marisha that he'll come home when he can, denying her request to accompany him to the job site. She runs across him once but he lies, saying that he's returning on the "midnight train". Marisha knows there's no midnight train but doesn't call him on it. She is lonely and sometimes frightened in the big apartment. Victor has confidentially talked to a friend and no one has been assigned the extra rooms of their apartment. Marisha spends most evenings with her parents.

Kira visits Andrei and he presents her with a filmy nightgown. He says he bought it on the black market and tells her that they apparently wear such things abroad. He then tells her that he wants to marry her and that he wants them to leave Russia. She says that she can't do either and they agree not to mention it again that evening. Leo doesn't come home that night and Kira gets a call from Karp Morozov the next morning, asking Kira to come get Leo.

She arrives to find that he and Tonia spent a great deal of money in a casino the previous evening. Tonia took money that was to have been paid to Pavel, and Karp becomes agitated. Leo tells him that Pavel can't do anything to them, but Karp points out that Leo gets his fair share of the proceeds and that Pavel has a right to expect the same. When they arrive home, Kira tries to reason with him. She suggests that they save everything they can with the intention of leaving the country. She says that she knows Leo doesn't care to live but asks him to go away with her. She says that she wants him to decide whether he wants to live or die once they're out of Russia. Leo says simply that there's no way he could get a passport. He asks if she's "delivering an ultimatum", and when she says that wasn't her intention, he says the conversation is over.

Pavel is angry when his share of the money is late. A woman telephones him, saying that he'd promised to buy her a bracelet. His wife says that she must have a fur coat before winter so that she doesn't catch cold while she's pregnant. Karp Morozov avoids him and Pavel gets drunk. He goes to Karp's house and slips a note under the door. The note reads, "MOROZOV, YOU GOD-DAMN BASTARD! If you don't come across with what's due me before tomorrow morning, you'll eat breakfast at the GPU and you know what that means. Affectionately, Pavel Syerov".

Karp goes to a club later and holds whispered conversations with several important-looking men, ending up with the money to pay Pavel. He's then approached by Stepan Timoshenko, who is very drunk. Stepan accuses Karp of having "patched his pants" with the revolutionary soldiers' work. He says that Karp and others like him have become wealthy and that it's all because of soldiers—like himself—who fought and died for a cause they believed in. Karp keeps trying to leave, but Stepan continues to insist that they drink together. He is loud, talking about several officials, and Karp becomes



very agitated when Stepan mentions Pavel's name. Karp insists that he has nothing to do with Pavel though he's not insistent that he has nothing to do with the others. Karp then drops the note Pavel had left and Stepan sees it. Karp first says that it's nothing but a scrap of paper but continues to glance on the floor for the paper and decides that he doesn't want to leave after all. Finally, Stepan grabs the paper and leaves the club. Karp can't catch him and doesn't leave the house for the next two days, not even to give Pavel his money. Then Karp sees a brief article in the newspaper, saying that Stepan had died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound. The article says there were "no papers" found on Stepan's body indicating a reason for his suicide.

In fact, Stepan had sent a letter to Andrei the previous day. In the letter, he cited a promise he'd made to Andrei that he wouldn't kill himself without saying goodbye. He says he hopes Andrei will forgive him for putting it in a letter. He then says that he's leaving Andrei "a hard legacy" in the form of the letter from Pavel to Karp and that he hopes Andrei won't follow "too soon".

Pavel is in his office when he first gets a glimpse of Andrei. Pavel asks what Andrei is doing there and Andrei asks if Pavel is finished questioning him. Pavel denies that he would question Andrei and says he was merely being sociable. Next, Andrei goes to Leo's store and buys linseed oil. The clerk, answering Andrei's questions, says that business isn't good but that he doubts he'll lose his job since his boss, Leo, isn't likely to do the clerking himself.

Kira is on her way to Andrei's after Leo and Antonia leave for a ballet, but she finds herself reluctant to go because of the previous night with Leo— "a night such as her first one". Kira asks Andrei to take her to a movie, and the only one available is a revolutionary film about the masses surviving after the war. During the film, Andrei asks her whether she knows of Leo's store. He also says that he doesn't want to see her sacrifice years of jail time and that she should not be seen with Leo because he is "friendly with the wrong kind of people". Andrei then says that he's not speaking to her as a member of the GPU but that he doesn't want her name to be implicated in connection with Leo's. They leave before the second film is finished and Kira asks why Andrei—who had wanted to go abroad—would begin an investigation such as he's describing. He says that it's so he can decide for himself whether to remain a member of the Party. That seems to make Kira angry and she says that he's putting lives at risk for the sake of a "test" of his political party. Kira begs him to drop the investigation, but Andrei's face takes on the hardness of the GPU officer she'd met so long ago. As soon as they part, she hurries to the theater where Leo and Tonia are watching "Dance of the Toilers". They leave with Kira outlining that Andrei knows about the store and Leo putting it down to jealousy.

A short time later, the store is emptied of all shipments being smuggled through the basement holding space and future shipments are canceled until further notice. Leo returns home and tells Kira that Pavel will take care of Andrei's investigation. Kira says that Andrei cannot be bribed and Leo says there are other ways of stopping him. Leo seems unmoved and refuses to consider leaving town, but Kira notices that he's trembling.



Andrei is questioned by the head of the Economic Department of the GPU. The man tells Andrei that he should drop his investigation. Andrei refuses and the man suggests that he could offer Andrei a promotion or ensure that Andrei will be among the next group to be purged from the Party. Neither makes an impression on Andrei, and he says that he intends to turn in his report to his own commander that afternoon. When he meets with his commander, Andrei is told that it's the perfect time for the government to show that they are working on behalf of the people with a case such as Andrei has produced. He is then told that it's not acceptable for any Party member to be associated with the investigation and that because the store is registered only to Leo, Leo alone will stand trial. Andrei says that he doesn't know how to agree or disagree but only to accept orders. He's told that he's to be part of the arresting party that evening and that he's never to tell anyone of the true contents of his report incriminating Pavel and Karp. Meanwhile, Pavel is being told by his superiors that he's to cut all ties with any activities outside his current job. Karp is told to cite ill health as the reason for his decision to resign his position with the Food Trust and will be assigned a position in the Crimea. He's told not to hurry back to the city and warned against trying to pull any strings for Leo from his new position. He insists that he knows nothing about Leo and that he's certain any investigation will reveal that Leo is the sole owner of record of the store.

Andrei leads the group of soldiers into Leo's room to conduct the search. It's Andrei who opens the second wardrobe door and finds women's clothing, including clothes he recognizes as Kira's. Leo says that the discovery is bound to be "a disappointment" to Andrei. As Andrei arrests Leo, Leo says that it's probably the most wonderful duty the agent has ever had. Kira arrives before the search is finished. The people who live in another room in the building try to detain her but she breaks through. Andrei opens the door for her and asks if she lives there. She says "yes", and she and Leo share a long, lingering kiss before Andrei takes Leo away. Kira then goes to Andrei's apartment where she tells him the truth—that she loves Leo and that she "sold" herself to Andrei in order to pay for Leo's medical care. She rants about the unfairness of the political power that put her in that position and at Andrei for being part of it. She tells him that she wants him to know that truth—that she was never in his arms without thinking of Leo. Then she seems to run out of anger and wonders aloud what she's done to Andrei. He says that she's actually redeemed herself in his eyes because he now knows that she's the kind of person who would do whatever is necessary for the man she loves. He then takes her home and goes to a meeting where he's to talk about the agrarian situation in the country.

Part Two: Chapters IX through XIII Analysis

Andrei says that he can get an assignment abroad, ask for Kira to accompany him as his secretary, and that they can simply drop their passports and run away. It's interesting that Andrei has come to realize many of the truths about his Party but doesn't realize that they aren't likely to let him leave the country because of his tentative footing with the Party. It's also interesting that Leo—who has never been a member of the Party—knows without a doubt that he could never leave the country legally.



It's interesting to note that Stepan has actually lost faith in the revolution that he's fought for so hard. He's certainly not the only person to do so but some handle it much differently. For example, Pavel apparently has no real interest in the ideals of the Party and is willing to exploit his own position for the money he's able to make through his partnership with Karp and Leo. Even Sonia—who continues to tout the Party's ideas—says she knows of her husband's illegal activities and asks for a fur coat. It's also interesting that many show such a willingness to do whatever it takes to get ahead. For example, Sonia found Pavel drunk and seduced him. It's not clear whether she did become pregnant from that single encounter or if the child even belongs to Pavel.

As Kira is telling Leo what she's learned about Andrei's investigation, Tonia begins to remind Leo that she knew nothing about the store; she had only carried money occasionally and had no idea where the money originated. It's evident that she's trying to save herself if they are caught. The attitudes of the two women are vastly different. In Kira's case, she's doing what she believes she should do to save the man she loves. Tonia has at one point told Karp that she hasn't yet managed to take Leo for a lover but that it wasn't for lack of trying. Her reminders to Leo that she knows nothing if they are questioned indicates that she's set out early to save herself with no interest to the fact that the man who supports her and the man she's hoping will become her lover could be arrested and exiled—the same as a death sentence. It's also interesting that there's no indication whether Kira has considered that she's placed Andrei's life in danger by telling Leo that he's being investigated. She seems to once again have put any feelings for Andrei aside in favor of her love for Leo.

It's interesting to note that, despite the fact that the Communist Party is set on the needs of the collective, the Party itself is divided into sections. For example, Andrei is not involved in the economic issues and would not be assigned to investigate an economic matter such as Leo's store. When the head of that department calls Andrei in for a conversation, Andrei is quick to point out that he's not required to answer to that department. After Andrei delivers Kira home, he attends a meeting where he's to report on the agrarian situation. He begins to tout Kira's arguments, saying that the people who have been wronged are those peasants who are being deprived of even the most basic ability to survive. He cites specific cases of cruelty and then asks his "comrades" what they should do when there are questions about the political practices that can't be answered. He is called down several times but refuses to yield the floor. It's interesting that this political party, with such complete control over so many aspects of life, doesn't call for Andrei's arrest as he's talking. As Andrei leaves the building, someone says that it's likely Andrei will become a victim of the next party purge.



Part Two: Chapters XIV through XVII

Part Two: Chapters XIV through XVII Summary

Andrei goes to Pavel and tells him that he's to pull whatever strings are necessary to have Leo released. Pavel tries to argue, promising that he'll see to it that Andrei is not purged from the Party and then telling him that Kira has been Leo's mistress. Andrei says only that there are photostatic copies of documents that will make a problem for Pavel if they reach Moscow and that they will unless Leo is released.

After three days of incarceration, Leo returns to the room he shares with Kira. She's there and is anxious about his lack of emotion. She asks if he had been tortured and he says he hasn't. She finally asks if he loves her and he doesn't answer, saying only that it's a typically feminine question. They are interrupted by Andrei, who says he wants to talk to Kira, but relents to Leo's objection and tells Leo of the story he made up about the copies. He says that he doesn't believe Leo will ever need it but that it could be protection in these troubled times. When Andrei leaves, Kira runs after him, but he says that it's best if they leave the matter without talking, remembering that they still have that much in common. When Kira returns to her room, Leo is on the phone with Tonia and tells her to come right over and to bring liquor.

Andrei is transferred to a job as librarian. One evening, he's suddenly calm as he always is once he's reached a decision. He goes through the items in his room carefully, burning everything that he doesn't want to be there after his death. Then he leaves a note indicating that no one is to be held responsible for his death and shoots himself.

Pavel and Victor are among the pallbearers and Pavel delivers a funeral speech indicating that he was once of Andrei's "closest friends". He cites Andrei's war actions but says he could be most proud of his membership in the Communist Party. Victor and Sonia each speak, though there's little said about Andrei. The speeches focus on the future of the Communist Party and those in it. At the end of it, Kira stands over Andrei's grave and wonders if it was she who killed him or the revolution.

Leo tells Kira that he's not going to slave over a Communist job but that he's taken a "position" as Tonia's lover. He says Karp left her some money when he went away and that she now plans to leave the city. Leo says that he accepted three days earlier and that he'd struggled with how to tell Kira. He says the problem was solved when Pavel told him that Kira had been Andrei's mistress. He says that Pavel congratulated him on the death of his competition but it seems likely that Pavel had malicious intentions. Kira asks Leo if there is anything that might have changed his mind and he says there isn't. Kira leaves the apartment and returns to her parents' home, promising that she won't need a place to stay for long. She announces that she plans to go "abroad", but doesn't elaborate on her plan. Leo comes to say goodbye and says that they'll meet again when years have passed. Kira says that could happen if Leo doesn't die and if he remembers her. Then they kiss and Leo leaves.



Galina objects when Kira files for a foreign passport. She says that she'll hold Kira in the country any way she can because she believes Kira will have no chance out of the country where she has no skills and no friends. Kira's request is denied and she begins working on an illegal way out. She's told that she should dress all in white and escape alone, on foot, through a particular forest. She has a bear skin made into a coat, remakes her mother's wedding dress, dyes her boots white with lime and buys a forged travel permit. She sells everything she has and takes all the money with her. As she's leaving town she sees Vasili. He says that he and Acia are well and that the little girl is doing much better in school. He asks where she's going but Kira doesn't tell him. In fact, she leaves no note and no word for her family at all.

Kira takes a train to a border town and walks to a cabin where she hands a man some money. There's little need for explanation. She eats cabbage soup though she's not hungry, and the man tells her that she should walk as long as she can, dropping to a crawl as soon as she encounters guards. He says it will take most of the night to make the walk. She is soon aching from the strain of walking through the snow. When she sees a guard, Ivan Ivanov, she drops to the ground. Ivanov thinks he saw something move but isn't certain. He shoots and still nothing moves. He considers walking to that spot but decides against the long walk in the deep snow. He leaves and Kira stands, discovering that she's been shot slightly below the spot on her left breast where she'd sewn the small amount of money she saved for the trip. She continues to press onward, bleeding through the lace dress and the fur coat. At one point, she faints and remembers to cover the bloodied snow before moving on again. She reaches a hill and stops, screaming for Leo. She notes that her life held such promise and acknowledges that she's dying.

Part Two: Chapters XIV through XVII Analysis

Kira and Andrei have a conversation while Leo stands listening. Kira asks if he is going to regret being thrown out of the Party and Andrei says that he hopes the Party will never worry about him because he holds no ill-will. While they talk in terms of his relationship with the Party, it's evident that they are talking about his relationship with Kira. Later, as Andrei prepares to kill himself, he seems to go through a ritualistic farewell to Kira. He burns personal effects, then burns everything that indicates Kira's presence in his room. It could be argued that he's trying to save her from being involved, but the Party officials already know of his relationship with her. For that reason, his decision to burn the chiffon nightgown and other things seem his way of forever ending his relationship with Kira.

There are many mourners at Andrei's funeral and Kira is near the back with the few stragglers who are not affiliated with any Party or Communist Cell. The conversations flowing around her indicate that most of those present don't even know Andrei and are merely joining the march because they've been told to do so.

It's interesting to note that Leo has had something akin to a death wish. He's had no problem flaunting his wealth though it could mean an investigation. He never seemed to



care that he was also putting Kira in danger. It's interesting that once he's out of jail he doesn't choose to commit suicide. He says there's no way he can live on a pauper's wage and that he'd rather sell himself to Tonia where he'll have the finer things in life than to settle down and work at Kira's side.



Characters

Kira Argounova

The eighteen-year-old girl who returns with her family to Petrograd upon what they believe to be the end of the Civil War. It's noted that Kira gets what she wants, though Lydia says she doesn't understand how Kira manages that. When Kira slipped away from church and was returned home hours later by the police, she's never again sent to church. When her nanny buys a book Kira doesn't like, she throws it out the window and her next books are those that Kira will approve.

When her family returns to Petrograd, Kira announces that she plans to attend the Technological Institute to study engineering. Her cousin tells her that she's being selfish by choosing that route because there are other careers better suited to women. Kira doesn't listen and says only that she wants to be an engineer because it's what she wants. She imagines constructing buildings and skyscrapers.

Kira falls in love at first sight with a man named Leo. Their relationship is complex and becomes more so after she begins her friendship with Andrei. When Kira meets Leo, he is actually on the run from the GPU—the Russian police—of which Andrei is a member. Kira loves Leo fully and is willing to do anything for him. She leaves her family without a backwards glance and even resorts to the menial chores necessary for life, though she'd never given thought to keeping a house together before. When Leo becomes ill she turns to the one man who is in a position to help—Andrei. She begins a sexual relationship with Andrei, and when he gives her money that he believes is going to help her family survive, she pays Leo's medical bills. She claims that she cared nothing for Andrei but it seems that her love for Leo simply pushed everything else aside. When Andrei dies, Kira attends the funeral. Kira's passion for life and her belief that Communism is wrong eventually touches Andrei, though her love for Leo isn't enough to save him from his own desires—for a place among the wealthy.

Leo Kovalensky

The man Kira meets on the street after her argument with Victor. She recognizes him instantly as someone she will come to care about and puts herself before him as a prostitute. He then admits that he's never attempted to "buy" a woman before and she eventually admits that she isn't a prostitute, though it seems that she would have been willing to go through with the lie just to remain near Leo. When she meets Leo later, he tells her that he's going to Germany and she immediately says she'll go also. When they're caught and returned to Russia, Leo is held by the GPU for several days. Upon his release, he and Kira immediately move into Leo's father's home. Leo never seems to love Kira as much as she loves him.



When he becomes ill, Leo says that he's going to die, but Kira secures the money for his treatment from a Communist officer, Andrei. When Leo returns from a stay in a sanatorium, he continues to seem depressed. He spends money wildly once he's involved in a smuggling scheme with two Communist office holders. When Kira points out to him that he's putting himself in danger by flaunting the money he's making, Leo says he doesn't care. He seems almost to have a death wish and it seems that he doesn't care if Kira is caught up in the scheme. When the smuggling scheme is shut down, Leo accepts the offer of an older woman who has some money to travel out of Petrograd. He says that he'd struggled with how to tell Kira until he discovered that she'd had a relationship with the Communist officer, Andrei. He says that her affair merely gave him the courage to tell her about his plans to leave with the other woman, but that he would have gone anyway.

Andrei Taganov

The member of the Red Party who first confronts Kira about her pro-White statements. Then he pauses to help Kira up an icy sidewalk and later asks her to an opera. He argues that he is pro-revolutionary because he wants to bring the masses up from their low levels. When Kira asks Andrei if he's happy, he replies only that he's never been unhappy. Andrei is born in 1896 and his father is openly pro-Communism. He was arrested when Andrei was ten and apparently exiled to Siberia. Andrei's mother took in washing until she died a few years later. Andrei begins working in a factory and soon joins the Communist Party, though he operates quietly. He distinguishes himself during the Civil War where he is shot and requires several months recovery time.

When Leo becomes ill, Kira tries to get him into a sanatorium but fails. She finally turns to Andrei and tells him that her family is in need of money. He provides most of his monthly pay to Kira and she uses it for Leo's treatment. When Andrei finds out that Kira is living with Leo and that she has been his mistress during their entire relationship, he's angry. Then she tells him that it's his Communist Party that forced her into the situation. She says that she was willing to do anything for Leo, including selling herself so that he could get the medical treatment he required. Andrei, rather than being angry at her words, says that she's redeemed herself in his eyes because he says that he would do anything for Kira. He blackmails other Communist officers into releasing Leo after he's charged in connection with a smuggling operation. Andrei then burns everything that could have tied Kira to him, though the Communist officials already knew that she'd been his mistress. He then kills himself.

Victor

Galina's nephew and Kira's cousin. Victor seems very interested in Kira and she tolerates it until he makes a pass at her in a park. Victor is very involved in the "Red" politics at the Technology Institute where he studies and where Kira often sees him. When Kira announces that she plans to study engineering as well, Victor berates her choice, saying that it's selfish. He says that there are many "feminine" options available



to her that would be of greater benefit to society. Victor himself is willing to do whatever is necessary to gain the notice and promotions necessary for success. He goes against his family, joining the Communist Party, and becoming active on the social scene. He marries a woman with the correct Communist connections in order to further promote himself. When Victor has been denied the opportunity to work on a hydroelectric project, he tells officials that his sister, Irina, is hiding a fugitive, prompting the arrest of both the fugitive and his sister. The fact that Irina was engaged to the fugitive made no difference to Victor, nor did the fact that they would likely die in prison. Irina marries the young man soon after their arrest. Victor's father, Vasili, then asks Victor to intercede on his sister's behalf so that she would be sent to the same prison camp as her husband, but Victor refuses that as well. His report of Irina's "crime" results in Victor's promotion to the hydroelectric project.

Galina Petrovna Argounova

Kira's mother. Like Lydia, Galina doesn't understand Kira. She talks of the fact that Kira has given no thought to marriage and a family and that it's unladylike to want to become an engineer. When the family bribes their way into a squalid little apartment, Galina notes that the place won't be too bad with a little "artistic" touch. She works with what little she has at making life better for her family. Galina is the first of Kira's immediate family to adapt to the Communist way of life. She becomes a teacher and is active in the social scene. When her paycheck is incredibly short because of fees and dues, she doesn't complain, but simply tries to sell something so that her family can eat. She tells Kira that the young people of Russia have an incredible opportunity and can't believe that Kira doesn't embrace Communism as well. Kira's sister, Lydia, is given to bouts of crying and Galina can't understand that Lydia is facing the depression that was common among those of the period.

Maria Petrovna Dunaev

Galina's sister who was once affluent but is now reduced to the level of a pauper. Maria has aged dramatically from the beautiful woman who was once the subject of paintings and poetry. She's called "Marussia" by Galina. Maria tries to hide from the family the fact that she's coughing up blood. Kira is called to her home when Maria is about to die and she tries to comfort the woman in her final moments of life. Just before she dies, Maria cries out to Kira that she wants to live. When Kira arrives home from that horrific scene, Leo is coughing.

Vasili Ivanovitch Dunaev

Marie's husband. Vasili doesn't seem to want to move into the new life required in Russia. Instead, he seems to live in the past. One of his greatest accomplishments, in his own mind, is that he's saved enough of the previous currency to pay off a particular debt. He doesn't work, refusing to have anything to do with the new regime, and says



that he'll one day open his store again as a fur dealership. Vasili seems to have lost interest in life and is only waiting for a return of the days before the revolution. It's not until Irina is arrested that Victor seems to come alive. He begins to work toward having his daughter and her husband sent to the same prison, but meets with failure. It's Vasili's son, Victor, who is responsible for Irina's arrest, and Vasili tells Victor that he must intercede on Irina's behalf. When Victor refuses, Vasili takes his youngest daughter and leaves his home and Victor behind.

Pavel Syerov

A man who Kira first sees when he's running for a Communist office. Pavel will eventually form a smuggling ring with Leo and Karp, using his position as overseer of the railroad to detour loads of food through Leo's store. Pavel is angry when his share of the money is delayed and leaves an incriminating note that is eventually discovered by a Communist officer. When they are caught, Pavel is told only that he will give up all his endeavors outside his job and is not given any jail time.

Antonina Pavlovna Platoshkina

The wealthy woman who is in the sanatorium with Leo and who looks him up when they return to the city. She helps make the connection between Leo and Karp and the two men form a smuggling operation. When that operation is about to be investigated by the Communist police, Tonia tells Leo that he must remember that she has nothing to do with it. After Leo is released from jail, Tonia offers him money to go away with her and he accepts.

Karp Karpovitch Morozov

The man who Tonia refers to as "Koko". He's a speculator and is the man Kira sees once outside a train station with a loaf of bread and a ham for sale. When the police are about to search him, he points out a fellow passenger who is then accused of smuggling food into the city. Karp then offers to sell the ham and bread to Kira and Leo. Kira later sees him in a marketplace and notes that he seems to have grown wealthy with an increase in items for sale. Karp, head of the Food Trust, eventually forms a smuggling ring with Leo. Karp is careful that he is not incriminated in the business and puts everything in Leo's name. When they are caught, Karp is told to resign his job and is reassigned away from the city.

Stepan Timoshenko

The officer who captures Leo and Kira on their first morning aboard the ship. It's Timoshenko who makes the decision that Kira was kidnapped and who tells Leo to keep her quiet. Stepan finds the note from Pavel to Karp indicating their relationship in the smuggling ring and sends it to Andrei just before committing suicide.



Sasha Chernov

The young man visiting Irina when Kira drops in on the night Leo is due to return from the south. Sasha is a counter-revolutionary and his group is eventually caught, though Sasha escapes to Irina's house where he hides until Victor turns him in.

Ivan Ivanov

The patrol guard who is stationed at the point Kira attempts her crossing. Ivan believes he sees something move in the snow and shoots in that general direction. He doesn't see anything move again and considers going to check. Saying that it's a long way to walk through the snow, he doesn't go look, but if he had, he'd have found Kira, fatally wounded.



Objects/Places

Petrograd

The city where Kira Argounova lived with her family until the Civil War in Russia drove them out of their home. It's the city to which they return and it's Kira who feels such a sense of promise upon her return. The city was previously St. Petersburg and would become Leningrad after the revolution.

Song of the Little Apple

A song of the revolution; it's noted that the song is "in every weary throat". The question is posed, "Hey, little apple, where are you rolling?" No one seems to know what the "little apple" is but "everyone understood".

Internationale

A song of nationalism that Kira hears for the first time in Petrograd. It's noted that she tries not to listen.

Argounov's Navy Soap

The business enterprise started by Kira's father after his textile shop fails. The soap business is also a failure.

Gorokhovaia 2

The address for the Petrograd Headquarters of the GPU where Kira believes she'll find information about Leo following his arrest.

Primus

A small stove that burns kerosene and seems similar to a camp stove. Kira describes the sounds of the flame as "hissing" like a blowtorch.

Nikolaevsky Station

The railway station where food sometimes arrives from the countryside. It's near here that black market deals are made for the food, though it's substandard and often unclean.



Crimea

A southern region where Kira's family are during a period of the war and where Leo goes when he's diagnosed with tuberculosis.

Siberia

Where many are exiled for counter-revolutionary activities, including Irina and Sasha. Conditions are deplorable and few survive their years in prison there.

Pravda

The Soviet newspaper that prints the article about Victor's appointment to the hydroelectric project.



Themes

The Need for Self-Accomplishment

Selfishness is human nature and is not wrong until it's taken too far. Everyone has personal desires and goals and finding a way to achieve at least some of those creates a sense of fulfillment. In this story, those desires range from the attainable to the fantastic and the characters have varying degrees of success in their quest for fulfillment. Kira wants to be an engineer and admits that it's not because it's good for the collective, but only because it's something that she wants. She imagines glass skyscrapers and aluminum bridges that she's had a role in making and believes that will bring her a sense of accomplishment. When she's denied an education, her dreams of being an engineer dies, though it still comes to the surface periodically. Kira then turns her attention to escaping the country that has killed her dreams. She wants to leave with Leo, but when he abandons her, she decides that she'll go on her own.

In Leo's case, the sense of accomplishment comes with money and it seems nothing else matters. He's free with money while he's making it, though he and Kira have been through hard times with too little to eat. After his smuggling operation ends, Leo knows there will not be another option for that kind of money and so he accepts a "job" with a wealthy woman as her companion. He tells Kira that he wants the finer things in life and in his case, only those possessions can bring a sense of accomplishment. There's no way to know whether he achieves that sense of accomplishment through his latest decision.

In the case of Galina, Kira's mother, the sense of accomplishment comes from fitting in. Galina, who had initially been against anyone who was Communist, finds during her tenure as a teacher that fitting into the social scene makes life easier. She willingly adapts, becoming a busy member of society and spending her time as the Communist Party dictates. Victor becomes a member of the Communist Party but doesn't find that sufficient. He goes so far as to sell out his own sister, condemning her and her fiancé to an exile in Siberia where they will likely die in order to gain the trust and gratitude of the Party. With that gratitude comes a promotion that Victor had badly wanted.

The Need for Individuality

Kira is a person who is accustomed to doing what she wants because she wants it and it's impossible for her to simply accept a role as one part of the collective that's required in Communism. She doesn't want to do what's best for the interest of the many over what's best for herself, but more than that, she doesn't believe it's right to expect that of others. It's Kira who says that Communism treats men as though they were intellectual equals and that's not true. She says that denying the few who deserve a place "at the top" their rightful position doesn't mean that others will rise up—it means those few will be brought down. Kira quickly falls victim to the rules of Communism. Because her



father had worked to establish a successful business, Kira was considered among the "bourgeois" and was expelled from college. The collectives are judged not on their individual abilities but on family connections and willingness to join the correct political party. It's noteworthy that a person can also be judged because of their unwillingness to put forth specific social efforts. Individuality is lost among the requirements to become part of the collective.

The need for individuality is seen in various aspects of life, even to the point of clothing. When textiles are being rationed carefully, women begin to share news of what kinds of material and clothing is available at specific distribution points. One evening, Kira arrives at her cousin Irina's house to find that the two women had selected the same dress and looked "like twins". Irina mentions that she chose that particular fabric thinking that fewer women would be likely to select that dress. In this case, Irina was willing to forego the dress she liked most in favor of having one she thought fewer woman would want.

The Desire to Live

Kira wants to live but she's not the only person who shows that desire. Kira is called to her aunt Maria's home one evening to find the woman struggling to breath. She'd been trying to hide the fact that she was coughing up blood for some time and continues to say that she's not really that sick. On this particular evening, it's easy to see that she's dying, and she screams out to Kira that she wants to live. When Kira returns home, Leo is coughing and Kira begins the quest to find adequate medical treatment for him. She begs, stands in lines, asks for money, and is turned down on all fronts. In this case, Leo is willing to give up and says that he's accepted the fact that he'll die. But when Kira secures the money to pay for a sanatorium, Leo accepts that as well. Had he truly not wanted to live, he could have turned down the treatment and told Kira to spend the money on food for herself instead. His desire to live shows, though he denies that he has any will to live.

This desire extends to the desire for a life. Because of the revolution, Kira's uncle Vasili has lost everything he worked for—his furrier dealership and the possessions his family enjoyed. Vasili can't move ahead into a new life but spends his days in absent-minded contemplation. He doesn't work and has no real goals other than to hold out long enough for someone to rescue the people of Russia and to set things back as they were before the revolution. It's not until his son causes the arrest of Vasili's daughter that Vasili seems to come to life. He works to gain approval for his daughter to be married while in jail and then learns that marriage doesn't mean the two will be imprisoned in the same place. He then begins to work to have them spend their exile in the same prison but meets with no success. When he demands that his son intercede on his sister's behalf, Vasili hands down the ultimatum that he do so or that Vasili will move out of the family home. When his demand is not met, Vasili takes his youngest child, Acia, and leaves. He's had little interest in Acia before, but now begins working with her daily to improve her school work and realizes that the child is the hope of the future. Vasili is an

example of someone who seeks a new life for himself and his child. Kira similarly seeks that same change, though she believes the only answer lies in leaving the country.

Style

Point of View

The book is written in third person from a semi-limited point of view. Because the story is about Kira and her life in Communist Russia, this point of view is adequate. The reader could gain some knowledge if the view were less limited, but the explanations and details of Kira's life are adequate to explain the story line. For example, Kira learns that Leo is planning to leave with Tonia only after she attends Andrei's funeral. He says that he's been told of her relationship with Andrei and that knowledge makes it easier for him to tell her that he's leaving. The reader has no direct information of Tonia's situation or the offer she made Leo other than what Leo tells Kira, but that limited view is sufficient. There are some scenes that are outside Kira's point of view that are included in the story. Among those are the details of how Pavel and Karp are told that they are to stop their smuggling operations. It's necessary for the reader to gain those details and Kira would never have known them personally. In those cases and some other similar situations, having information outside Kira's limited vision is necessary for understanding the story. It's noteworthy that Kira's feelings are seldom explained, making the point of view even more limited and leaving it to the reader to decide what the undertones imply.

Setting

The book is set in Russia in the early 1900s. The setting is realistic with regard to cities, conditions, and political details. The author herself lived in Russia during that time period and has first-hand knowledge of the living conditions. This is evident in the writing and helps the reader more fully accept the story. There are some longer descriptive passages but those generally don't hamper the flow of the book. The descriptions lend instead an even greater sense of reality, putting the reader into those places as the Communist Army marches through a parade ground or as Kira stands beside a lonely grave.

The city, Petrograd, is another name for St. Petersburg, and it would eventually become Leningrad. Any modern-day reader who has studied history at all will recognize those names and will understand the hold the Communist Party had on the people of Russia in those days. It's never fully explained why Kira and her family return to Petrograd from the more rural area where they'd spent the past several years, but it's noteworthy that Kira believed Petrograd to be a city full of promises. As the family drives along a crowded street, her mother notices only the muddy conditions. Kira sees potential and believes that her life is going to begin now that the family have arrived in the city.



Language and Meaning

The language is clear with only a few words the average reader will find unfamiliar. Though the book is set in Russia, there are few Russian words and phrases and all are adequately explained. The names may prove difficult for some readers and may become a distraction simply because many are unfamiliar. Some may read several chapters before fully understanding and remembering the relationships of the various characters. There are a few lengthy descriptive passages but these generally add to the realistic feel of the story, putting the reader into the scenes at the garden where Kira first meets Leo, on the ship where they first make love, and later in their first home where Kira refuses to allow the mundane task of cooking to interfere with the life she wants to have.

There is a single plot in the growing of the main character, Kira, with several subplots. The complicated relationships of Kira and Leo, Kira and Andrei, and even Kira and her family are sometimes difficult to fathom. In that respect, the writing is sometimes overly simplistic and leaves much for the reader to decide. For example, Kira claims to be devoted to Leo but spends afternoons in the country with Andrei when Leo is working. She never examines her relationship with Andrei, but once he discovers that she's been living with Leo, she tells Andrei that she never cared for him and only used him. In this respect, the meaning of Kira's words is left to the reader to decide.

Structure

The book is divided into two sections. The first section is Kira's life leading up to the moment she and Leo separate as he goes to spend several months in the sanatorium. The second is Kira's life after Leo leaves. That moment when he steps on the train seems to be a dividing point for Kira and an appropriate place for the division of sections. Each section is further divided into chapters of widely varying lengths. The chapters are chronologically correct and are generally divided at the end of specific events. For example, one chapter ends just as Andrei steps down from the platform, having told his Communist friends that the Communist ideals are wrong and that people are suffering at the hands of the Communists. Some chapters have smaller divisions within them, also ending at the conclusion of specific events.



Quotes

"Behind her was a car overloaded with a freight of humans and bundles. The bundles were wrapped in bed-sheets, newspapers and flour sacks. The humans were bundled in ragged overcoats and shawls. The bundles had served as beds and had lost all shape. Dust had engraved wrinkles on the dry, cracked skin of faces that had lost all expression." Part One, Chap. I, p. 19

"'Frankly,' said Victor, 'your attitude is slightly anti-social, Kira. You select a profession merely because you want it, without giving a thought to the fact that, as a woman, you would be much more useful to society in a more feminine capacity. And we all have our duty to society to consider.'" Part One, Chap. II, p. 42

"Every citizen over sixteen had to have a labor book and was ordered to carry it at all times. It had to be presented and stamped when he found employment or left it; when he moved into an apartment or out of one; when he enrolled at a school, got a bread card or was married. The new Soviet passport was more than a passport; it was a citizen's permit to live. It was called 'Labor Book,' for labor and life were considered synonymous." Part One, Chap. III, p. 43

"They had been congratulated as if it were a miracle. The miracle had been made possible by a handshake between Alexander Dimitrievitch and the Upravdon - the manager - of that house, a handshake after which Alexander Dimitrievitch's hand remained empty, but the Upravdon's did not. Three rooms and a kitchen were worth a little gratitude in an over-crowded city." Part One, Chap. IV, p. 52

"For the first time in Petrograd, Kira heard 'Internationale.' She tried not to listen to its words. The words spoke of the damned, the hungry, the slaves, of those who had been nothing and shall be all; in the magnificent goblet of the music, the words were not intoxicating as wine. They were not terrifying as blood; they were gray as dishwater." Part One, Chap. V, p. 73

"'Deny the best its right to the top - and you have no best left. What are your masses but millions of dull, shriveled, stagnant souls that have no thoughts of their own, who eat and sleep and chew helplessly the words of others put into their brains? And for those you would sacrifice the few who know life, who are life? I loathe your ideals because I know no worse injustice than the giving of the undeserved. Because men are not equal in ability and one can't treat them as if they were.'" Part One, Chap. VI, p. 90

"There were words that people did not like to mention; they felt a superstitious fear in



uttering their sounds, as when they spoke of a desolate cemetery, a haunted house, the Spanish Inquisition, Gorokhovaia 2. Many nights had passed over Petrograd; in the nights there had been many steps, many ringing door bells, many people gone never to be seen again; the flow of a silent terror swelled over the city, hushing voices to whispers; the flow had a heart, from which it came, to which it returned; that heart was Gorokhovaia 2." Part One, Chap. X, p. 127

"You may claim the right to kill, as all fighters do. But no one before you has ever thought of forbidding life to those still living." Part One, Chap. XIV, p. 189

"She wondered why the words: 'But he's going to die,' meant so little to them, and the words: 'But he's not a registered worker,' meant so little to her, and why it seemed so hard to explain. She made Leo do his share of inquiries. He obeyed without arguing, without complaining, without hope." Part One, Chap. XVI, p. 222

"Comrades! The Union of Socialist Soviet Republics is surrounded by a hostile ring of enemies who watch and plot for its downfall. But no external enemy, no heinous plot of world imperialists is as dangerous to us as the internal enemy of dissention among our ranks." Part Two, Chap. VI, p. 308

"Did it ever occur to you, Comrade Talanov, what a peculiar thing it is that so many of our Party comrades are dying of overwork? You've read it in the papers, haven't you? Another glorious victim fallen on the path of the revolution, a life burned out in a ceaseless task. . . You know what they are, don't you, those comrades dying of a ceaseless task? Suicides." Part Two, Chap. VI, p. 322

"And in her mind, four words filled the void she felt rising from somewhere in her breast: 'Perhaps . . . Some day . . . Abroad.'" Part Two, Chap. VII, p. 324

"We were to raise men to our own level. But they don't rise, the men we're ruling, they don't grow, they're shrinking. They're shrinking to a level no human creatures ever reached before. And we're sliding slowly down to their levels." Part Two, Chap. VII, p. 334

"'Hell, I hold a profound admiration for you, Comrade Morozov. You've taken the greatest revolution the world has ever seen and patched the seat of your pants with it.'" Part Two, Chap. X, p. 371

"I was born and I knew I was alive and I knew what I wanted. What do you think is alive in me? Why do you think I'm alive? Because I have a stomach and eat and digest the



food? Because I breath and work and produce more food to digest? Or because I know what I want, and that something which knows how to want - isn't that life itself? And who - in this damned universe - who can tell me why I should live for anything but for that which I want?" Part Two, Chap. XIII, p. 404

"He had been spending the last of their money and she had not questioned him about the future. She had not questioned him about anything, for she had been afraid of the answer she knew; that her fight was lost." Part Two, Chap. XVI, p. 439

Topics for Discussion

Kira says that she wants to be an engineer simply because it's the career she chooses. What does Victor say about her choice? Does Victor exhibit that ideal himself?

Describe at least three Communist officials and their own beliefs on Communism. Are their beliefs in keeping with the ideals of Communism?

Why is Kira expelled from the University? Why is Leo expelled? Why is Irina expelled while Victor remains?

What happens when Kira discovers that Leo has the early signs of tuberculosis? How does she react? How does Leo react? Does Leo recover physically? Mentally?

How does Irina end up in jail? What does Victor gain? What does he lose?

What is the fate of those sent to Siberian prisons? What does Irina's father try to accomplish before she leaves? Is he successful?

What is it that Kira has against Communism? How do her ideals change Andrei? Would he have come to those conclusions without Kira?

Describe Andrei's funeral. What is significant about those in attendance? What kinds of speeches are given?