

# **Z for Zachariah Study Guide**

**Z for Zachariah by Robert C. O'Brien**

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# Plot Summary

Z for Zachariah is a novel by author Robert C. O'Brien. In this novel, a young girl named Ann Burden appears to be the only survivor of a holocaust that destroyed the majority of the United States, but left untouched the valley where she has lived all her life. Ann survives a year on her own, eating food from the local store and growing her own garden, until one day a man walks into her front yard wearing a strange suit. Ann is at first weary of her new companion, but when he becomes sick Ann feels she must do something to keep the only other person alive well. Little does Ann know that this new companion will prove to be something of a tyrant, a man who will make life with a companion far worse than life alone. Z for Zachariah is a novel of survival that will leave the reader wondering what they would do in Ann's circumstances.

Ann Burden has become aware of a person traveling on the roads outside of her little valley. When it becomes obvious this person intends to come into Ann's little valley, Ann hides all evidence of her existence and hides in a cave on the hillside. Ann is frightened that this person, the only other apparent survivor of a nuclear holocaust, will be someone who will mean her harm. Therefore, Ann has decided to wait and watch before letting this person know she is there.

The person arrives in the valley and he takes up residence in Ann's front yard. Ann watches from afar as the man explores the valley and takes a bath in Burden Creek which Ann knows is poisoned by whatever it is that killed everyone in the towns around the valley. Ann thinks she ought to tell him, but is still reluctant to reveal her existence. It is not until the man becomes terribly sick that Ann realizes this is the only other human being in the area and she does not want him to die.

Ann takes the man, whose name is Mr. Loomis, into her house and helps him through his illness. At the same time, Mr. Loomis helps Ann figure out how to get gas for the tractor so that she can plow and plant the fields of her father's farm. As Mr. Loomis struggles with his illness, Ann stays by his side, listening to his fever induced hallucinations. Over time, Ann comes to realize that Mr. Loomis, who was a scientist before the war, shot a co-worker when the co-worker attempted to take the only existing radiation-repelling suit to check on his family. This leave Ann a little fearful of Mr. Loomis.

As Mr. Loomis recovers from his illness, he begins to exert power over Ann by insisting on the planting of specific plants despite Ann's own experience and knowledge. Then one night Mr. Loomis sneaks into Ann's room and attempts to have sexual relations with her. Ann runs away. The following day, Ann returns to work the fields, but refuses to have any contact with Mr. Loomis. After a while, Mr. Loomis refuses to allow Ann to use the tractor. Shortly after this, Mr. Loomis locks the door to the store. When Ann comes into the yard of her own home, Mr. Loomis shoots her ankle in an attempt to force her to remain in the home with him. Instead, Ann is able to escape into the hills.



Finally Ann realizes that one of them has got to leave the valley. Ann decides it should be her. Ann steals Mr. Loomis' radiation-repelling suit and all his other gear, intent on finding other survivors somewhere outside of her valley. Mr. Loomis tries to stop her, but Ann steps into the hot zone and successfully escapes her tyrant.



# Chapters 1-2

## Chapters 1-2 Summary

This novel was written in the seventies, a short time after the Bay of Pigs scare that left many Americans afraid of a nuclear attack. This novel takes place some years after a week long war that left most of the country devastated not only by nuclear fallout, but also nerve gases and other biological weapons.

In Chapter 1, Ann Burden can see smoke in the distance. This convinces Ann that someone is coming toward her small valley. Ann has been alone in her valley since shortly after the war. Ann's family and the couple who ran the general store took a truck and went outside the valley to learn what has happened. They never came back, leaving Ann alone in the valley, a valley almost completely untouched by the nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons used against the United States in a week long war.

In Chapter 2, Ann watches the progress of the stranger and begins to worry that it might be someone who means her harm. Ann decides to hide all evidence of her existence by burying her garden and releasing her animals, then climbing up to a cave in the hills over her valley. Ann worries about what will happen when the stranger arrives because she is not sure she can survive a winter in the cave. As Ann gathers supplies for her hideaway, she recalls how she and her brother came to realize that Burden Creek, which comes into the valley from the hills and empties out on the other side of the valley, was poisoned. All the fish in the creek were dead. However, there is another source of water, a pond that is fed from an underground spring. Finally Ann catches sight of the new person and realizes it is a man in a funny green suit.

## Chapters 1-2 Analysis

The reader meets Ann Burden in these early chapters, though the reader does not learn Ann's name until later in the novel. Ann is telling the story in a diary format, writing each day the things that are happening around her in her little valley. Ann once lived in this valley with her family, but after the phones stopped working during a week long war, Ann's father and brother first made an excursion to a nearby town and found everyone dead. A short time later, the entire valley, except for Ann, went in search of survivors and never came back. Ann now lives in her valley, which was miraculously spared from the war, alone.

The conflict is set up in the first words of the novel as Ann announces that someone is coming toward her valley. Ann cannot tell who the person is until he comes close enough for her to see him with her binoculars. Ann knows he will come to her valley because it is the only place for miles and miles where there are green trees and flourishing plant life. Ann is scared, as she should be, because she does not know who

this person is. This foreshadows the arrival of the person and the difficulties that Ann might face with his arrival.



# Chapters 3-5

## Chapters 3-5 Summary

In Chapter 3, the man arrives in the valley. He parks his wagon in the front yard of Ann's house and goes inside, calling out for anyone. The man seems puzzled when he cannot find anyone. The next day, the man explores the rest of the valley and captures a chicken for dinner. The man uses some kind of instrument and takes readings of the area, including the pond. Later, the man takes a bath in Burden Creek. Ann worries that she should have warned him, but hopes that the creek is no longer poisoned.

In Chapter 4, Faro, a dog that once belonged to Ann's cousin, has come back into the valley. Ann is afraid the dog will lead the man to her, so she sends him away. The man takes the dog in and feeds it. This worries Ann because she knows eventually the dog will take the man to her location. Ann watches as the man continues to walk around the valley. While walking near Burden Creek, the man suddenly notices the lack of animal life in the creek. Then the man becomes violently ill. The man returns to the farm yard and collapses in his tent, not coming out the rest of the night.

In Chapter 5, Ann becomes concerned for the man so she finally goes down to the farm yard with her gun to see if he is still alive. When Ann goes inside the tent, she discovers the man is unconscious and running a high fever. Ann gives him water and feeds him soup. Ann then moves back into her house and continues to nurse the stranger. In the morning the man is better. The man asks Ann to use one of his instruments to check the creek. When Ann tells him the reading, the man becomes frightened. He tells Ann that he has been exposed to 300rs of radiation. The man then explains how radiation sickness affects a person, causing anemia and a reduction of immunity. The man is afraid he will die.

## Chapters 3-5 Analysis

Ann watches the man who has come to her valley with caution. Ann remains afraid. However, when the man becomes ill, Ann cannot help but run to his rescue. Ann shows that she has a sense of humanity and a need to be with another human being by doing this. Ann also feels guilt for not warning the man that the creek was poisoned.

Ann and the man get to know one another as the man suffers from his illness. Now, as the man explains radiation to Ann, it appears the man could die from his illness. This seems ironic to the reader that someone has finally come to Ann's valley but he may soon die.



# Chapters 6-7

## Chapters 6-7 Summary

In Chapter 6, Ann learns the man's name is John Loomis and he was a chemist in Ithaca, New York. Ann tells the man about her family and he suggests they might have died from nerve gas. The man then tells her a little about his travels from New York, how he walked all the way searching for survivors, but found nothing until now. Ann then moves Mr. Loomis into the house where she can better help him.

Over lunch, Ann learns that Mr. Loomis worked for a man who invented a type of polymer that would repel radiation. The team had worked a long time and had just created a full suit made of this polymer and were waiting for the military to come see it when the war broke out. Mr. Loomis claims he was alone in the lab the night the nuclear bombs fell and this is how he was able to use the suit to search for other survivors. Mr. Loomis also tells Ann that his team created a filter for water and material to cover food and other items that could be contaminated with radiation. This is how Mr. Loomis survived on his walk to Ann's valley.

In Chapter 7, Ann continues to care for Mr. Loomis while also replanting her garden and caring for the livestock. Mr. Loomis comes out and sees Ann working in the garden. Mr. Loomis asks why she does not use the tractor and Ann explains that the gas pumps at the store are electric. That night, Ann plays the piano for Mr. Loomis even though she feels she cannot play well. Afterward, Mr. Loomis goes to bed. Late in the night, Ann goes to check on him and hears him having a bad dream about a co-worker named Edward. This causes Ann to worry that Mr. Loomis might be becoming delirious again.

## Chapters 6-7 Analysis

Ann continues to take care of Mr. Loomis whom she now knows is a scientist. Mr. Loomis explains the suit he was wearing, a suit that repels radiation and makes it safe to walk out in the nuclear fallout. With this suit, Mr. Loomis was able to make it to Ann's valley, but without it he more than likely would have died within a few miles of his lab from radiation poisoning.

Ann overhears Mr. Loomis having a nightmare about a co-worker named Edward. Ann cannot decipher the dream from just Mr. Loomis' mutterings, but the reader is beginning to wonder what happened to Edward and what Mr. Loomis had to do with it, if anything. At the same time, Mr. Loomis wonders about the tractor Ann's father used to work the farm, leaving the reader aware that Mr. Loomis is beginning to think about survival and ways in which to make survival easier.





# Chapters 8-9

## Chapters 8-9 Summary

In Chapter 8, Ann rises early and collects greens to make a salad with. As she picks, Ann imagines what it would be like to marry Mr. Loomis. The idea makes Ann happy because she likes the idea of having children of her own. When Ann returns to the house, she finds Mr. Loomis checking the radiation levels of Burden Creek with his Geiger counter. Mr. Loomis is hopeful Ann was wrong about the reading, but it turns out she was correct. Mr. Loomis, however, thinks they could use the creek to make a generator to power the refrigerator and a few lights.

Later that day, Ann goes fishing. Mr. Loomis wants to go along, but the anemia makes it impossible for him to make the walk. Later Mr. Loomis appears fully recovered. They have a nice dinner and Ann gives Mr. Loomis her father's set of books called *The Farmer's Mechanic* to help him build his generator.

In Chapter 9, Mr. Loomis uses the *Farmer's Mechanic* to show Ann how to get gas out of the pumps manually. This allows Ann to start up the tractor. Ann spends most of the day plowing the fields behind the house, leaving one for the cows to graze on. Ann decides she will plant corn and beans because she can process and use both, but cannot process something like wheat.

## Chapters 8-9 Analysis

In these chapters, Ann shows her intelligence and ingenuity by finding weeds that can be eaten as salad and deciding what crops to plant in her newly plowed fields. Ann is a smart girl who was raised on a farm and knows all about planting and harvesting. Mr. Loomis knows about mechanical things and he focuses on building a generator. It seems that at this point Ann and Mr. Loomis make a good team if they will work together.

Mr. Loomis learns that he was exposed to a lot of radiation in Burden Creek and he is worried about his future. Ann is focused on his health as well, especially when he has trouble walking to the pond. This seems to suggest that Mr. Loomis is about to have a major health crisis, leaving the reader wondering what will happen to Ann if Mr. Loomis dies.



# Chapters 10-12

## Chapters 10-12 Summary

In Chapter 10, Mr. Loomis' illness has returned and he is running a high fever. Ann puts Mr. Loomis to bed and gives him a pair of flannel pajamas her father used to wear. In the morning, Mr. Loomis becomes angry when he wakes and cannot find Ann. Ann puts him back to bed and takes his temperature. It has gone higher. Ann becomes afraid to leave the house in case Mr. Loomis wakes and needs her. Ann takes the tractor and a cart to the store and loads up on all she might need so that she will not have to leave Mr. Loomis again. When she returns, Mr. Loomis is once again upset. In fact, he has a gun and is shooting at the top of the house. Ann is able to get the gun away from him and put him back to bed.

In Chapter 11, Mr. Loomis' fever has gone beyond the scope of the thermometer. Mr. Loomis is delirious most of the time now. Often Mr. Loomis talks to Edward. From his speech, Ann has come to believe that something bad happened between them. Mr. Loomis also seems afraid for the radiation suit. Ann goes out to his wagon and retrieves it and this seems to make him feel better. Finally, Ann begins to realize that Mr. Loomis and Edward were locked in their lab together. Edward wanted to use the suit to check on his family, but Mr. Loomis did not want him to. Ann believes that Mr. Loomis shot Edward when he tried to leave with the suit. Several patched holes in the suit seem to support this conclusion. Ann, confused and scared, goes to the church to pray.

In Chapter 12, Mr. Loomis has lived through the night. The next morning, Ann goes again to the church. In the church, Ann finds a baby crow. Ann takes it outside and leaves it where the parents can find it again. That night, Ann plays the piano again, hoping it will help Mr. Loomis. Ann worries about what she believes she knows about Mr. Loomis and Edward. However, she feels that Mr. Loomis might have had good reason for what he has done, so she decides to give him the benefit of the doubt.

## Chapters 10-12 Analysis

As Mr. Loomis becomes delirious from his illness, Ann learns the truth about the suit. It appears that Mr. Loomis shot a co-worker so that he would not take the suit and leave Mr. Loomis forever alone in the lab. This shows the reader that Mr. Loomis is the kind of person who is willing to do just about anything to get what he wants. The reader wonders then what Mr. Loomis might be willing to do to get Ann to conform to his wishes. Ann, however, shows her kind spirit by deciding that Mr. Loomis had a good reason for what he did. Ann is a trusting, kind person, but the reader wonders if this trust will cause her pain later on.



# Chapters 13-16

## Chapters 13-16 Summary

In Chapter 13, Mr. Loomis begins to recover. Ann begins to feed Mr. Loomis as he slowly comes out of unconsciousness. As he recovers, Ann brings the wood stove into the house to cook on.

In Chapter 14, Mr. Loomis comes back to consciousness and tells Ann that he heard her playing the piano and reading to him in his delirium. After a few days, Mr. Loomis can sit up and feed himself. Ann finally feels safe returning to the fields. Mr. Loomis yells at her, though, for not getting to the planting sooner. Later, Mr. Loomis practices walking, but falls. However, Mr. Loomis will not allow Ann to help him rise.

In Chapter 15, Mr. Loomis begins to design a generator as he slowly recovers. Ann asks him if it would be possible to use the suit to go into the next town to get books from the library, but Mr. Loomis refuses to even consider the idea of her using the suit. Mr. Loomis, then, criticizes her for not planting the crop while he was ill and for not planting wheat and beets. Ann argues that they cannot process those crops, but Mr. Loomis insists she plant them anyway.

In Chapter 16, Ann puts chairs out on the front and back porches so that Mr. Loomis can go outside during the day while she works. However, Ann quickly becomes aware that Mr. Loomis is using these chairs to keep tabs on her activities. Ann tries to defend Mr. Loomis' actions because of his loneliness from being alone so long and what happened with Edward. Ann decides she must get to know Mr. Loomis better. Ann asks Mr. Loomis questions about himself, but he answers with curt responses. When Ann asks if he is married, Mr. Loomis grabs her hand. In her attempts to get away, Ann accidentally hits Mr. Loomis in the face.

## Chapters 13-16 Analysis

Mr. Loomis recovers from his illness and instantly begins bossing Ann around. Ann is a good person, therefore she attempts to excuse Mr. Loomis' behavior. However, Mr. Loomis becomes not only demanding, but physically bullying. This reminds Ann of what she knows of Mr. Loomis' crime against Edward and she quickly becomes frightened. The reader, too, is worried for Ann. Mr. Loomis is only looking to the future, to creating food for them that will last beyond the shelf life of the canned food they have been living off of. However, his bossiness seems to imply that he feels he is in charge despite the fact the valley was Ann's first. This suggests a conflict that might become dangerous for one or both of them.



# Chapters 17-20

## Chapters 17-20 Summary

In Chapter 17, Ann has moved back to her cave. The day began with a discussion of the fertilizer Ann planned to use on the field. Mr. Loomis warns her to make the chemical fertilizer last until they could switch to manure. That night, Mr. Loomis demands to sit at the kitchen table for dinner. Afterward, Mr. Loomis makes Ann read to him from her book of poetry. Ann was puzzled, however, by the fact that Mr. Loomis did not appear to listen.

In Chapter 18, Ann plays the piano for Mr. Loomis but is frightened when he hits his cane on the floor. The next night, Mr. Loomis does not ask Ann to read or play the piano, so she goes for a walk with Faro. When Ann returns to the house, she sees Mr. Loomis walking in the yard without his cane. That night, Mr. Loomis comes into her bedroom and tries to pin her to the bed. Ann is awoken by Faro and manages to escape. Ann runs away with her shirt ripped down her back.

In Chapter 19, Ann goes to the store to get supplies in the dark. She is frightened, but Mr. Loomis has not followed her. The next morning, Ann watches the house. Mr. Loomis feeds Faro and then ties him up. As Ann watches the house, she realizes that she cannot go back, but she cannot allow Mr. Loomis to remain alone without someone to help with the farm chores. Ann wonders if Mr. Loomis would be open to a compromise.

In Chapter 20, Ann watches as Mr. Loomis tests Faro, to see if he will lead him to Ann's hiding place. Ann finds a place where she can build a fire and she builds a wall to conceal the flame. Ann then gathers some supplies and sleeps near the fire rather than inside her cave. The next day, Ann goes to the house and tells Mr. Loomis she plans to come each day to work the fields, but she will not return to the house. Ann spends the day in the fields, dividing the eggs and gathering water and supplies for Mr. Loomis before returning to her cave. That night, Ann watches once again as Mr. Loomis attempts to use Faro to find her.

## Chapters 17-20 Analysis

Mr. Loomis becomes so demanding that Ann begins to feel uneasy. When she asks if he has been married, he grabs her hand and frightens her, but he never apologizes. Later, Mr. Loomis attempts to rape Ann. This causes Ann to run away and hide in her cave, a cave Mr. Loomis knows nothing about.

For several days, Mr. Loomis uses the dog that belonged to Ann's cousin to try and find her. This makes Ann frightened for her safety. Just the same, however, Ann returns to the farm to do the chores, loathe to see the crops go to waste without care. Ann hopes that Mr. Loomis will be willing to share everything equally. However, his actions thus far imply to the reader that Mr. Loomis is not interested in anything fair or equal.



# Chapters 21-23

## Chapters 21-23 Summary

In Chapter 21, Ann tells how for ten days she continued to work the farm while living in the cave. Mr. Loomis continued to use the dog to search for her. On the tenth day, Ann sees Mr. Loomis sneak to the road to watch her approach, so she goes a different direction to the farm. That day she butchers a chicken for her dinner and gave Mr. Loomis half. As he fries it, Ann goes to start the tractor, but cannot find the keys. When Ann goes to ask Mr. Loomis about the keys, he refuses to give them to her. Ann decides to go home and fish for the rest of the day.

In Chapter 22, Ann returns to the farm to milk the cow. When she is back in her cave, Ann hears the tractor. Ann watches as Mr. Loomis drives the tractor to the store and sneaks inside, obviously searching the apartment on the top floor. Ann finds this amusing since it appears Mr. Loomis believes she has been living in the store. However, her amusement quickly evaporates when Mr. Loomis puts a lock on both doors of the store, blocking her from having access to her sole source of food.

In Chapter 23, Ann goes to the farm to speak to Mr. Loomis. However, rather than come outside to talk to her, Mr. Loomis shoots at her. Ann quickly runs away into the hills and discovers that one of the bullets grazed her ankle. Ann has no means to treat the wound, so she simply washes it clean in the pond. Ann realizes that Mr. Loomis had meant to shoot her in the leg to force her to remain in the house with him. As Ann washes her ankle, she hears Mr. Loomis start the tractor once more. This time he has brought Faro. Faro leads Mr. Loomis to the cave, forcing Ann to grab all she can and move higher into the hills. When Mr. Loomis has gone, Ann comes back to find all her things burned.

## Chapters 21-23 Analysis

Ann has done all she can to make living in the valley with Mr. Loomis advantageous for them both. However, Mr. Loomis clearly does not want to share everything equally. Mr. Loomis wants to take Ann as his possession. This is made clear when he steals the tractor keys and locks up the store to force Ann to come back to him. It is also made clear when he attempts to shoot her.

Ann is frightened, she is without food, and she is desperate. The reader can only wonder what she will do next. Ann cannot get food or medical supplies, she cannot return to her cave now that Mr. Loomis has found it, and she cannot return to the house. The reader now wonders what options she has and what she will choose to do with them.



# Chapters 24-26

## Chapters 24-26 Summary

In Chapter 24, Ann comes to the conclusion she must leave the valley. Ann has had dreams of other people, people who need her to come to them and teach them. Ann decides she must leave the valley and search for these people. This decision came after Mr. Loomis left the store door open to trick her into the open. Ann approached the store and became aware of the trap at the last second. Mr. Loomis sent Faro after her. Ann jump Burden creek, causing Faro to fall into it. Faro died later that night.

In Chapter 25, Ann buries Faro under some rocks. Ann then gathers her few remaining possessions and prepares to steal Mr. Loomis' suit. Ann leaves a note for Mr. Loomis, asking him to meet her on the far side of the valley. When Ann sees him leave, she rushes into the yard, puts on the suit, and pulls Mr. Loomis' wagon to the edge of the valley.

In Chapter 26, Ann allows Mr. Loomis to approach her at the edge of the valley. Ann confronts him, telling him all she knows about Edward and how she knows he will do the same to her. Mr. Loomis begs her to stay, to not leave him alone, but Ann refuses. Ann picks up the wagon's handles and moves into the deadness, hoping to find her valley of children waiting for a teacher.

## Chapters 24-26 Analysis

There are only two ways to end this story, with someone dying or someone leaving. Ann decides she must leave the valley despite the fact that it was her home first. Ann steals Mr. Loomis' suit and wagon after her dog dies. However, it is not in Ann's character to just leave. Instead, Ann waits for Mr. Loomis to come to her and tells him that she is leaving and why. Mr. Loomis reveals his own fear when he begs her not to leave him alone. Ann does not listen to his plea, however and she continues with her plan.

The reader is left with two people, one alone in an unaffected valley, and another traveling in the deadness with no idea as to whether she will ever find a safe place to stop. This is how the novel began, bringing the characters back full circle. Now the reader must wonder if either will survive and if so, what the future holds for them.



# Characters

## Ann Burden

Ann Burden is a teenage girl who is the sole survivor a war that ended in nuclear holocaust. Ann's valley was protected from the nuclear fallout because of some meteorological phenomenon. Ann's family and their neighbors, the Kleins, also survived the initial attack, but later disappeared while exploring the area outside of their valley. This left Ann alone, unsure if anyone else in the country survived.

One day, Ann notices smoke in the distance. Ann follows the progress of this smoke until one afternoon a man comes into her valley. Ann initially hides, afraid of what this man might want. Later, however, Ann comes out of hiding to nurse the man back to health. Unfortunately, the man has strange ideas of how he would like to survive this holocaust and he becomes tyrannical, frightening Ann until she decides she has no choice but to leave the valley for the unknown outside its boundaries.

## Mr. John Loomis

Mr. Loomis is a scientist who worked with a team who invented a material that repels radiation. The group made a suit out of this material, as well as a filter for water and containers for food. The team was waiting for the military to come inspect the invention when war breaks out and the United States is devastated by a nuclear holocaust. Mr. Loomis is locked in his lab with another scientist. This scientist wants to take the suit and find his family, but Mr. Loomis refuses. Mr. Loomis kills his co-worker when the man refuses to back down.

Mr. Loomis waits for a few months and then he uses the suit to leave the lab and search for other survivors. Mr. Loomis finds Ann's valley and takes up residence there. Unfortunately, Mr. Loomis takes a bath in a radiated stream and becomes very ill. After his illness, however, Mr. Loomis focuses on the future and begins treating Ann like a possession. In the end, Ann tires of Mr. Loomis' tyrannical ways and leaves the valley with his suit.

## Edward

Edward is Mr. Loomis' co-worker. Mr. Loomis and Edward both worked late the night the bombs hit New York. Edward wants to use the suit to go find his family, but Mr. Loomis is afraid that he will not come back and he will be stranded in the lab. When Edward continues to insist, even going so far as to put the suit on, Mr. Loomis shoots and kills him.



## Mother and Father

Ann lived in the valley with her mother and father before the war. Ann's father went to the nearest town after the phones stopped working to learn what had happened. Ann's father came back with stories of death and devastation. A short time later, Ann's parents decided to travel in the opposite direction to find survivors. They never come back. However, Ann uses all her parents taught her to survive alone in the valley.

## The Kleins

The Kleins were an elderly couple who owned a store not far from the Burden farm. The Kleins lived in a small apartment above the store. Before the nuclear weapons came, the Kleins sold a great many of their products to the nearby Amish families. For this reason, the store the Kleins owned before the war is well stocked with many supplies, including food, seeds, and fertilizer.

## Joseph

Joseph was Ann's brother. Joseph was a year older than Ann. Joseph went with his father to the Ogdentown to see if they could learn what happened to cause the phones to go out. When they arrived, they saw terrible things. Joseph cried when he came home, something Ann had never seen him do. When Ann's parents went again to investigate outside the valley, Joseph went with them.

## David

David was Ann's cousin. David came to live with the Burdens when his parents died. David brought with him Faro, a hunting dog. On the day Mr. and Mrs. Burden decided to explore outside the valley, David was to remain with Ann. However, David snuck into the back of the truck, leaving Ann alone when the truck never returned.

## Faro

Faro is a dog that was once owned by Ann's cousin David. Faro disappeared shortly after David and the rest of the family went in search of survivors. Ann thought he had gone after David. However, Faro returns the same day Mr. Loomis comes into the valley. At first Ann is happy about this. However, when Ann is forced to run away from Mr. Loomis, she realizes that Faro will be a weapon against her as Mr. Loomis trains him to track for him. In the end, Ann is forced to kill Faro by causing him to fall into the radiated Burden Creek.





## **Professor Kylmer**

Professor Kylmer is the scientist who invented the magnetized polymer that can repel radiation. Mr. Loomis worked for Professor Kylmer in the days before the war and helped create a radiation-repelling suit. It is this suit that enables Mr. Loomis to travel to Ann's valley and later allows Ann to escape the valley and Mr. Loomis' tyrannical ways.

## **Mary and Bill**

Mary and Bill are Edward's wife and son. Edward is concerned with the safety of his family when he realizes that a nuclear weapon has been dropped on Ithaca, New York. Edward wants to use the radiation-repelling suit to go find his family, but Mr. Loomis refuses to let him. In fact, Mr. Loomis shoots Edward and kills him before he can find his wife and child.



## Objects/Places

### Suit

Mr. Loomis arrives in the valley wearing a suit made of a plastic that resists radiation. Mr. Loomis killed a man over this suit. Later Ann takes the suit and escapes the valley.

### Wagon

Mr. Loomis travels with a wagon that is covered in the same plastic that resists radiation that his suit is made of. This wagon contains food, water, and Geiger counters.

### Piano

There is a piano in the Burden house. Ann plays the piano several times for Mr. Loomis even though she feels she does not play well.

### Oven

Ann moves an old cast iron oven into the house to use for cooking because it does not need electricity or gas.

## Famous Short Stories of England and America

Famous Short Stories of England and America is Ann's favorite book. The book is burned when Mr. Loomis finds her cave.

### The Farm Mechanic

The Farm Mechanic is a series of books that Ann gives to Mr. Loomis so that he can figure out how to build his water generator. They also use this to help figure out how to pump gas without electricity.

### Cows

Ann has three cows, one of which is a bull calf. Ann hopes to use these animals for milk and fertilizer.



## **Chickens**

Ann has some chickens on the farm that she uses both for eggs and meat.

## **Church**

The church in Burden Valley was built by an ancestor of Ann's but was never used. Ann goes to the church many times during Mr. Loomis' illness.

## **Store**

Ann gets all her food from the Klein store in her valley.

## **Cave**

There is a cave above the valley where Ann, Joseph, and David once played. Ann hides here when Mr. Loomis first arrives in the valley and later when she feels living with him places her in danger.

## **Burden Valley**

Burden Valley is a valley in Pennsylvania that contains the Burden farm, a store, and a small church. This is where Ann lives and where Mr. Loomis comes after the war.



# Themes

## Nuclear Holocaust

Ann lives in a world that has been devastated by a nuclear holocaust. For one week a year ago, war raged between the United States and an unknown country. This war ended when the other country bombed the United States with nuclear weapons, nerve gas, and other unknown biological and chemical weapons. The bombs wiped out entire towns and the radiation fallout killed people, animals, and plants all over the country.

Ann lives in a valley that was protected from the radiation for an unknown reason. However, Ann is alone because her family went in search of answers and never came back. Ann tends a garden and the few animals left from before the war while getting most of her food from the local store. Ann knows she must look ahead to the future, to when the food in the store is no longer edible, but does not have an answer as to how to do this until Mr. Loomis comes along.

Mr. Loomis has seen the destruction of his country, has walked for weeks through the cities and country that has been devastated. For this reason, Mr. Loomis knows what must be done to survive. Mr. Loomis takes over the valley, treating everything as his own possession, including Ann. This leads to conflict, ending their precarious relationship.

## Companionship

Ann is alone in her valley. Ann is lonely at first, wishing she had someone to talk to and to share the burdens of survival with. However, as time passes, Ann becomes accustomed to living alone. When Mr. Loomis finally comes along, Ann is frightened that he might mean to harm her. Ann hides out until her compassion leads her to care for a sick Mr. Loomis.

Ann finds she likes having someone else around and is fearful that Mr. Loomis' illness will kill him before they have had a chance to get to know one another. However, as time passes, Mr. Loomis begins to frighten Ann with his bossy ways and his sexual overtures. Finally Ann must leave. Ann discovers that companionship is not all she thought it might be, at least not with Mr. Loomis. However, Ann hopes to find other survivors to whom she might be a blessing rather than the possession that Mr. Loomis treated her as.

## Tyranny

A tyrant is a person who rules others to the point of cruelty. In this novel, Mr. Loomis becomes a tyrant over Ann to the point where she feels she is no longer safe living in the same house with him. Mr. Loomis dictates what should be planted in the fields, how



they should be planted, and where. Mr. Loomis dictates as well how Ann should spend her time. Mr. Loomis even decides that Ann needs to live with him as his lover. Mr. Loomis goes so far as to attempt to shoot Ann in the leg to make her stay with him.

Ann is a good person who helped a man in need. Ann welcomes Mr. Loomis into her valley, after a bumpy start, and is willing to share everything with him. However, Mr. Loomis decides that he must take charge, stop Ann from doing as she pleases, and treat her like a possession. It is this behavior that ends the relationship between Ann and Mr. Loomis, leading Ann to steal his suit and run away.



# Style

## Point of View

The novel is written in a diary format, therefore the point of view is first person. This novel has two main characters. The novel is told in a diary through the eyes of Ann Burden, a teenage girl who has survived a nuclear holocaust in her tiny valley home. Ann is joined by another survivor, Mr. Loomis, a year after the war. Ann tells how she became aware of Mr. Loomis' approach to her valley and everything that happened after he arrived.

The point of view of this novel is important because of the diary format the novel is written in. Ann is a young woman and everything in the plot is seen through her point of view and with her understanding of the situation. If the novel had been written from Mr. Loomis' point of view, it would be a different novel entirely. Therefore, this point of view, dependent as it is on the format, is the appropriate point of view for this plot.

## Setting

The novel is set in a valley somewhere in the Eastern United States, most likely Pennsylvania. This valley sits in the middle of a country devastated by nuclear holocaust. However, the valley is left untouched by radiation, assumedly because of a meteorological phenomenon that keeps the radiation away. This valley is the only place that is free of radiation that Mr. Loomis finds on his walking tour from Ithaca, New York.

The setting of this novel is important for two reasons. First, the fact that there has been a nuclear holocaust that has caused devastated human, plant, and animal loss sets up a situation in which Ann is vulnerable to any person who happens to come along. Second, the valley that has been untouched by the war is a valuable place to any survivors that might happen across it. These two settings drive the conflict of the novel by providing a reason for these two characters to come together and something for them to fight over. For this reason, the setting is an intricate part of the plot of this novel.

## Language and Meaning

The novel was written for an audience of young adults. Therefore, the language in this novel is very simple. The main character, a teenage girl, knows nothing of foreign languages and her education ended with the war, leaving her with a typical teenage vocabulary. The language of this novel fits this character well, keeping the language simple, but not too simple.

The language of this novel is appropriate to the novel. Ann Burden is a young and fairly uneducated young woman who is living on a farm that she has lived on all her life. Ann knows all about farming and hard work, but she does not know fancy words or foreign



languages. For this reason, the language of the novel is simple. Even when Mr. Loomis speaks in the novel, the language remains simply because Ann has translated it into her diary and in a sense the language becomes Ann's. Therefore, the language of this novel is perfect for the character and the intended audience.

## Structure

The novel is written in twenty-six chapters. Each chapter is divided into diary entries that are each started with a specific date. However, the author of the diary admits that she is unclear if these dates are correct because she has nothing to go by except for an old calendar that she admits she has lost track of the days on. The story is told in both exposition and dialogue. Although the novel is told in diary format, Ann dictates many of the conversations she had with Mr. Loomis in the course of her day.

The novel has one main plot. The main plot is Ann's attempts to survive in a post apocalyptic world. Ann has survived quite well alone for a year, but when Mr. Loomis comes to her valley things begin to change. Ann becomes aware that Mr. Loomis killed a man over the radiation-repelling suit he wore to reach her valley. Ann also becomes aware that Mr. Loomis is something of a tyrant and she begins to fear for her life. For this reason, Ann flees the valley, bringing this plot to a satisfactory and if it is a suspenseful end.

## Quotes

"I am afraid. Someone is coming" (Chapter 1, pg. 1.)

"I feel as if it is the beginning of the end" (Chapter 2, pg. 14.)

"He is in my house" (Chapter 3, pg. 20.)

"An inexplicable thing: the dog, Faro, has come back" (Chapter 4, pg. 32.)

"I just realized that, after all this, I still do not even know his name" (Chapter 5, pg. 53.)

"The last page of all was 'Z is for Zachariah,' and since I knew that Adam was the first man, for a long time I assumed that Zachariah must be the last man" (Chapter 7, pg. 75.)

"The next morning, amazingly enough, I got the tractor running" (Chapter 9, pg. 90.)

"So it was Edward again" (Chapter 10, pg. 109.)

"Morning. He has lived through the night" (Chapter 12, pg. 121.)

"In these few days my uneasiness had grown worse" (Chapter 16, pg. 154.)

"Mr. Loomis does plan to use Faro to catch me" (Chapter 20, pg. 185.)

"It was the next morning he shot me" (Chapter 23, pg. 217.)

"As I walk, I search the horizon for a trace of green. I am hopeful" (Chapter 26, pg. 249.)





## Topics for Discussion

Who is Ann Burden? How did she come to live in the valley alone? What happened in the outside world and for what reason? How does Ann survive? Why does Mr. Loomis come to her valley? How does the arrival of Mr. Loomis alter Ann's existence? What does she do when she initially becomes aware of Mr. Loomis' impending arrival? For what reason?

Who is Mr. Loomis? Where did he get the suit he wears to reach Ann's valley? Why does Mr. Loomis take a bath in Burden Creek? What happens as a result of this bath? Why did Ann not tell him to stay away from the creek? Whose fault is Mr. Loomis' illness? Why does Ann come down to care for him?

Why does Mr. Loomis begin bossing Ann around? Does Mr. Loomis know better how to run a farm and what crops to plant? Why does Mr. Loomis not listen to Ann's suggestions? Who does all the work on the farm and for what reason? Is this fair? Should Mr. Loomis help Ann more? Why does he not?

Why does Ann leave the house? What did Mr. Loomis do to frighten her? Why does Ann continue going to the farm to care for the animals and the field? Is this a smart thing to do on Ann's part? Why does Mr. Loomis take the keys to the tractor? Is this fair? Why does Mr. Loomis lock up the store? What does Mr. Loomis expect Ann to do in response to these things? What does she do?

Who is Faro? How did he survive after the war? Why does he come back to the valley? What is Ann afraid Faro might do? Why does Mr. Loomis tie Faro up after Ann runs away? Why does Mr. Loomis use Faro to help find Ann? Did Ann kill Faro? Explain.

Why does Ann steal Mr. Loomis' suit? Why is she not afraid he will shoot her? Why does Ann believe there are people outside of her valley? Is this possible? What will happen if Ann never finds other people? Will she return to the valley? What would you do in Ann's position?

What is a nuclear holocaust? Why did the author choose to set her novel in a post-nuclear holocaust world? What might the time in which the novel was written say about why the author chose this type of world? What do you think caused the war? What caused the devastation? What might happen in Ann's future?