

Life as We Knew It



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF SUSAN PFEFFER

Susan Beth Pfeffer declared her intention to become an author when she was just six years old. She wrote her first published novel, *Just Morgan*, while still an undergraduate at New York University. Since then Pfeffer has gone on to write more than seventy novels for children and young adults. She lives in Middletown, New York with her cat, Scooter.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Pfeffer published three sequels to *Life As We Knew It*: *The Dead and the Gone*, *This World We Live In*, and *The Shade of the Moon*. Books with similar themes of survival amidst natural disasters include *Ashfall* by Mike Mullin, *Shipbreaker* by Paolo Bacigalupi, and *How I Live Now* by Meg Rosoff.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Life As We Knew It
- **Where Written:** New York
- **When Published:** 2006
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary Young Adult
- **Genre:** Science Fiction / Post-apocalyptic, Young Adult fiction
- **Setting:** Howell, Pennsylvania
- **Climax:** Miranda walks into town, knowing she doesn't have the strength to return, and finds the flyer for food distribution.
- **Point of View:** First person, written in epistolary form of Miranda's journal entries

EXTRA CREDIT

Holiday inspiration. Pfeffer was inspired to write *Life As We Know It* after watching the movie *Meteor* on the Saturday after Thanksgiving in 2004.

Lofty influences. Miranda Evans is named after the character Miranda in Shakespeare's play [The Tempest](#).



PLOT SUMMARY

In her journal, sixteen-year-old Miranda Evans is counting down until her sophomore year of high school ends and summer vacation begins, but in the meantime she has tests, fights with her mom, and friendship drama. She first hears that

a large asteroid is going to hit the **moon** from her mom's boyfriend, Peter, but soon it's all the newscasters talk about, and her teachers too—they use it as an excuse to assign moon-themed projects.

Despite the extra schoolwork, the mood is festive on the night the asteroid is supposed to hit. People in New York are having rooftop viewing parties, and even on Miranda's rural Pennsylvania street, all the neighbors are out in an impromptu block party. Despite her older brother Matt's misgivings about the event—which he had called home from college the night before to share—Miranda joins in the excitement with her mom Laura and younger brother Jonny.

When the asteroid first appears in the sky, however, the mood quickly changes to one of panic. The asteroid is denser than scientists had predicted and the collision knocks the moon off kilter, forcing it closer to Earth. The impacts are immediate, even if Miranda doesn't know the full extent of them because cell service and cable channels stop working.

By the next morning Miranda has ascertained that her father Hal and pregnant stepmother Lisa, as well as her Grandma and Matt, are all okay. The world as a whole, however, is not. Due to sudden unpredictable tides and tsunamis, there were massive casualties on both coasts of the United States. Countries around the world with coastlines are devastated by the impact of the moon's increased gravitational pull on their tides. Millions are dead.

Laura reacts to this news and the powerful electrical storms of the next day by pulling Miranda and Jonny from school and having them join her and their elderly neighbor Mrs. Nesbitt on a high-stakes shopping spree, where they buy nonperishable items and plants for a vegetable garden. Looking at their full **pantry**, Miranda tells herself that these precautions are ludicrous and unnecessary.

But in the weeks that follow, electricity continues to be unreliable, gas prices skyrocket, and the grocery stores remain bare. By the time Matt returns home from college and the school year ends, food shortages have become severe enough that classmates squabble over who will get Miranda's friend Megan's lunchtime peanut butter sandwich. Megan, like other congregants at the local Reverend Marshall's church, has decided to fast and pray in response to the disasters.

Instead of things going back to normal, the outages escalate—as do the temperatures and the incidents of rare illness. The tides and tsunamis also haven't stopped, and one morning Miranda wakes up to a grim, gray sky—the result of the **ash cloud** from dramatic worldwide volcanic eruptions.

Within days the temperatures plummet, and the vegetables in

Laura's garden begin to wither from lack of sunlight. Miranda had been making trips to swim at **Miller's Pond** and meet up with Dan, a boy she's started to see, but it's soon too cold. By early August there is frost, and many people—including Hal, the pregnant Lisa, Dan, and Miranda's friend Sammi, who is dating a forty-year-old man with resources and connections—leave their homes in the hopes of finding better conditions elsewhere in the country.

Miranda, Matt, and Laura all cut back to two meals a day, then decide to skip an additional meal every other day. They don't share this plan with Jonny, however, because at thirteen years old, they think he's too young to cut back more on meals. And, Miranda realizes, he is the one her mother is betting on to survive if they can't all make it. She resents her mother for this, despite the fact that Laura is eating even less than the amount they agreed upon.

When their heating oil runs out the Evanses move into their sunroom, which has a wood stove. Miranda chafes under the lack of privacy and continued lack of food. A pair of old cross country skis is found in the attic and Matt, Jonny, and Miranda all take turns training on them. Laura, who has limited mobility due to a twice-sprained ankle, does not. Matt and Miranda discuss how the last person alive will use them to leave.

When Jonny, Laura, and Matt all begin to run fevers and are too weak to leave their mattresses, Miranda skis to the hospital for help. The building is deserted except for two nurses who explain that everyone else is dead—including Peter, Laura's boyfriend. Miranda adds him to the list of deaths she's endured, which now includes Mrs. Nesbitt and her friend Megan, who chose to starve to death as a sign of her religious faith.

Slowly, under Miranda's care, Jonny and Laura recover. Matt does too, but he seems permanently weakened, and they fear that he strained his heart helping Miranda care for the other two while still sick.

In late February electricity begins to reappear sporadically for a few minutes at a time. The news reports are still much the same: lists of the dead, natural disasters, famines, droughts, and illnesses. In mid-March, with food supplies dangerously low, Miranda realizes that her whole family is not going to survive, and they can all starve to death slowly, or she can give Matt and Jonny a fighting chance.

In order to spare her mother from having to witness her death, Miranda walks into town—knowing that she does not have the strength to make the return trip. However, when she sits down on one of the deserted streets, she glimpses a **yellow flyer**. She hasn't seen anything bright-colored in so long that she musters the energy to get up and capture it. The flyer directs her to City Hall, where food distribution had begun a few weeks ago. Miranda is driven home with four bags of groceries, and with the promise of more bags to come every week.

The novel ends on Miranda's birthday, with her celebrating the

fact that there's food in the pantry, her family is alive and together, and with the hopeful assertion that she's writing this journal not to chronicle her life for those who outlive her, but for herself, for a time when things look better than they are now.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Miranda Evans – The sixteen-year-old narrator of the novel, which is told in the format of her diary entries. Prior to the asteroid's impact with the **moon**, Miranda was concerned with grades, friendships, boys, and ice skating, but in the fallout of the asteroid's strike, her life becomes centered on her own survival and helping her immediate family, which consists of her mother (Laura), and brothers, (Matt and Jonny). Sprinkled throughout the bleak entries of Miranda's journal are glimpses of how her age and perspective inform the way she interprets and reacts to the increasing threats in her life. While she realizes the inherent danger of her day-to-day life, she also reminisces about typical teenage priorities like school, dating, college, and prom. Miranda mourns the life that she lost, while simultaneously doing her best to record and endure life as she now knows it.

Matt Evans – The older brother of Miranda and Jonny. He is away at college when the lunar impact occurs but makes his way home from Ithaca, New York to Howell, Pennsylvania to be with his family. Miranda idealizes Matt and looks to him as a source of wisdom and strength. He acts as the peacekeeper in the family, often mediating disagreements between Miranda and Laura. He believes in treating Miranda like an adult and keeps her informed of new dangers, but agrees to shelter Jonny for as long as possible. While he is the most physically fit at the beginning of the novel, he strains his heart moving Laura and Jonny out of the sunroom to save them from smoke inhalation and never fully recovers.

Jonny Evans – The younger brother of Miranda and Matt. Jonny is thirteen years old and hopes to be a professional baseball player when he grows up. Prior to the asteroid's strike, Jonny had planned to spend the summer at baseball camp. Laura decides that he should still attend, despite the new dangers and lack of consistent electricity or phone lines, because the camp promises to provide better food than she can give him at home. While he is gone, Miranda, Laura, and Matt come to an agreement that while they will cut down on the number of meals they're eating, they don't want Jonny to fast. This is part of their unspoken agreement that if only one member of their family survives, it should be Jonny.

Laura Evans – The mother of Miranda, Matt, and Jonny, and ex-wife to Hal. Laura is an author prior to the **moon** incident. In the aftermath, her sole focus is keeping her family alive despite all

of food shortages and dangers. Laura shows keen survival instincts, such as the foresight to stockpile food and wood, planting a garden, and moving her family from the main part of their house into the sunroom with a wood stove. Her fear throughout the novel is that she will fail in her task and have to witness her children's deaths.

Mrs. Nesbitt – The elderly neighbor of Laura, Miranda, Matt, and Jonny. Mrs. Nesbitt grew up with Laura's parents and is considered to be part of their family. When preparing their home in the aftermath of the natural disasters, they also make sure that Mrs. Nesbitt's home is stocked, and they check on her frequently in the months that follow. Before Mrs. Nesbitt passes away, she tells Miranda to take anything that is useable from her house.

Hal – Miranda, Jonny, and Matt's father, Hal is divorced from Laura and married to Lisa, who is pregnant with their first child together. He is a professor and lives in Springfield, but leaves to attempt to travel to Colorado where Lisa's parents live. The last update that Miranda and her siblings receive is that Dad and Lisa had made it to the Kansas border, but weren't being allowed into the state.

"Rachel" – The imaginary name that Miranda gives to her stepsister once she realizes Lisa's due date has passed and she's likely given birth. Miranda daydreams of conversations with her stepsister and a future in which they are together, healthy, and happy. Since they are cut off from phone communication and mail is no longer being delivered, Miranda has no way of confirming whether or not the baby has been born or what she was actually named.

Horton – The Evans' family cat. He has the strongest bond with Jonny, and when Miranda accidentally leaves the door open and allows him to escape during the time while Jonny is away at camp, she agonizes over how to tell him that Horton is gone. Luckily Horton makes a surprise reappearance after being missing for eight days.

Brandon Erlich – A famous ice skater whom Miranda idolizes. Before turning pro, he trained with Mrs. Daley, the ice skating coach Miranda had until she was sidelined by an injury. Miranda is very active in Brandon's message boards before the **moon** incident. Afterward she worries about his safety and well being. At one point in the narrative she recounts a day where she meets Brandon and skates with him on **Miller's Pond**, but later she doubts whether this actually occurred or was just a hallucination.

Mr. Mortensen – One of Miranda's neighbors. After the asteroid collision the Evans family see him twice—once when there is neighborhood caroling on Christmas Eve, and once when he knocks on their door, desperate for medicine for his sick wife. This is the first indication the Evans family has of the deadly flu that decimates the population.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Lisa – Miranda's stepmother. Miranda's dad reveals on the first page of the novel that she is pregnant with a little girl, whom Miranda mentally dubs "Rachel."

Megan Wayne – A childhood friend of Miranda's. Megan is very religious and highly influenced by Reverend Marshall. She spends the days following the **moon** incident in prayer and fasting until she eventually dies.

Mrs. Wayne – Megan's mother. After Megan starves to death, Mrs. Wayne hangs herself.

Reverend Marshall – Corrupt leader of the local church that Megan Wayne attends. He tells his congregants that the fallout from the **moon** impact is God's punishment for their sins. While his congregants starve and pray for forgiveness, he continues to eat regularly from the food that they bring as offerings.

Peter Elliot – Laura's boyfriend and a local doctor. He frequently visits their house, bringing information about new illnesses and risks. He eventually succumbs to the flu epidemic.

Dan – A member of Miranda's swim team that she forms a brief romantic relationship with over the summer. They meet at **Miller's Pond** until Dan's parents decide he should leave and travel west in search of better conditions.

Sammi – A friend of Miranda's. She is characterized as "dating all kinds of guys," and after the **moon** impact she begins seeing George, a much older man with resources and the means to get her to Tennessee, where conditions are supposed to be better.

George – The forty-year-old boyfriend of Miranda's friend Sammi. He has connections that enable him to provide food and resources for Sammi's family. He and Sammi move to Nashville.

Becky – A friend of Miranda, Megan, and Sammi's who passed away after a long illness before the beginning of the novel. She appears in Miranda's dreams as a gatekeeper to heaven or food.

Mrs. Daley – Miranda's former figure skating coach. She also used to coach champion figure skater Brandon Erlich, a fact that Miranda likes to brag about in online forums before the asteroid's impact.

Grandma – Miranda's grandmother lives in Las Vegas. The Evanses initially have contact with her and confirm that she's fine, but as communication systems deteriorate, they lose touch.

Michelle Schmidt – A classmate of Miranda's who is supposedly abducted while walking home from church. This story increases Miranda's fears of walking alone in public. Later Miranda sees Michelle leaving the town library and realizes the story isn't true after all.

Mayor Ford – Along with Tom Danworth, he runs the food distribution for the town of Howell, PA.

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Mrs. Hotchkiss – The volunteer librarian in the town library. On the day the library is closed, she encourages Miranda, Matt, and Jonny to take as many books as they can carry because there is no guarantee that it will ever open again.

Evan Smothers – A classmate of Miranda’s who becomes part of an opportunistic gang in the aftermath of the lunar incident. Miranda encounters them looting stores in town but flees when she realizes they are armed.

Ryan Miller – A former hockey teammate of Matt’s who becomes part of an opportunistic gang in the aftermath of the lunar incident. Miranda encounters them looting stores in town but flees when she realizes they are armed.

Hospital guards – Hired to guard the local hospital after the police department disbands. They warn Miranda that it is no longer safe for her (and women in general) to go out in public alone.

Nurses – When Miranda ventures to the hospital to get help for her sick family, she finds it empty except for two nurses. The nurses tell her the magnitude of the flu epidemic—Peter, along with “just about everyone,” is dead.

Aaron – A classmate of Jonny’s whose father is president of the school board.

Aaron’s father – The father of one of Jonny’s friends and president of the school board. Aaron’s father leads the meeting that informs the town of closing schools.

Emily – Along with Karen, Emily is a member of Miranda’s swim team. She occasionally swims at the **Miller’s Pond** with Miranda, interrupting her and Dan’s opportunities to be alone and kiss.

Karen – Along with Emily, Karen is a member of Miranda’s swim team. She occasionally swims at **Miller’s Pond** with Miranda, interrupting her and Dan’s opportunities to be alone and kiss.

Michael – A classmate of Miranda’s. He receives a piece of Megan’s sandwich when Megan begins to fast despite food shortages.

Brian – A classmate of Miranda’s. He receives a piece of Megan’s sandwich when Megan begins to fast despite food shortages.

Jenna – A classmate of Miranda’s. She receives a piece of Megan’s sandwich when Megan begins to fast despite food shortages.

Mrs. Sanchez – Principal of Miranda’s high school.

Madame O’Brien – Miranda’s French teacher.

Mr. Clifford – Miranda’s English teacher.

Ms. Hammish – Miranda’s history teacher.

Dave – A classmate of Miranda’s. He receives a piece of Megan’s sandwich when Megan begins to fast despite food

shortages.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



SURVIVAL AND DEATH

At its core, *Life As We Knew It* is a story about what it takes to survive in a post-apocalyptic world. After an asteroid collision alters the rotational path of the **moon**, the world is faced with tsunamis, earthquakes, volcanoes, drastic climate change, and other catastrophes. The main characters: Miranda, her mother, Laura, and two brothers, Jonny and Matt, face immense and ever-changing dangers as they struggle to adapt to an unstable and unpredictable world and to accept that “life as they knew it” is forever altered.

In the days, then weeks, and months after the catastrophe, the hardships that the characters must face intensify. Slowly but surely they must endure and figure out how to live through the loss of, first, the basic physical comforts that they had always known, and then even more fundamental needs like heat and food. But the family’s trials are not only physical. In fact, it is just as hard, if not harder, to endure the spiritual and emotional trials of the catastrophe. Miranda and her brothers all had hopes, dreams, and ambitions before the asteroid strike. In the world afterwards, they must deal with the fact that those dreams are gone. Their new goals aren’t professional teams or college degrees, but making it through another week or month. The characters must also endure the way that their struggle to survive changes their values, their basic selves. In this new world where resources are limited, acts of altruism, such as contributing to a blanket drive or helping a sick neighbor or friend are revealed to be dangerous, as acts that can endanger one’s self or family. Meanwhile, the character’s begin to feel both cut off from their own humanity—they can’t process or feel connected to the millions of people dying across the world, even as they know it is a tragedy of vast proportions. At the same time, the family must also watch as people around them, such as their beloved neighbor Mrs. Nesbitt, die. Such deaths fill those who live with both terrible grief and a sense of inevitability about their own deaths which can be terrible to endure.

All this leads Miranda and her family to debate the cost of their survival, whether it’s “worth it” to survive or if they even want to continue to live during such unrelentingly bleak times. As the book demonstrates, in such dire situations, people live on not for themselves but for others, such as the way Miranda

struggles with how much it would pain her mother and brothers to watch her die. And yet, even such loving thoughts are complicated in a catastrophe. For example, Miranda also realizes that if she *does* die, there will be more food to feed her family. Her death could be a kind of gift that aids the survival of the rest of her family.

As Miranda spends her diary entries grappling with the decision to endure in a world that feels inhospitable to survival, Pfeffer is asking larger questions about what makes life worth living. Each character has to grapple with determining what would be unendurable. For Miranda's friend Megan's mom, the death of her daughter drives her to suicide. Similarly, Miranda worries about her own mother's ability to endure the death of her or her siblings. Through Miranda's own conflicts and struggles, the reader is led to question their own ability to survive in extreme conditions—not only what skills are necessary, but also what would we be willing to sacrifice in order to survive? And, at what point does the cost of survival become unendurable?



CURRENCY, COMMODITIES, AND VALUE

The start of the book, which occurs before the asteroid strike, portrays “life as we knew it,” and what is seen as valuable seems familiar and normal

to the average American reader. Most obviously, money is used as currency—and even in the days just after the disaster, cash is the only thing people will accept. Meanwhile, Miranda, the teenage girl protagonist, values school, grades, friends, boys, and ice skating. After the disaster, however, things change drastically, and what is seen as valuable and viewed as a commodity shifts as well. Cash quickly becomes useless, and people start to trade, steal, or hoard wood, gasoline, and food. Schooling becomes less important—districts are consolidated and very few students or teachers show up—while other kinds of knowledge become more valuable. With radio, TV, and the internet becoming unreliable and then failing entirely, news of the outside world becomes precious. Practical knowledge, such as Peter's medical knowledge but also Laura's gardening hobby, ability to cook, and the family's skiing skills, all become suddenly lifesaving. In comparison, the intellectual professions that Laura and Miranda's father Hal had pursued before the disaster—as an author and college professor—are no longer as useful.

As the impact of the disaster continues and deepens, it's not only the value of skills and goods that are reassessed, but also relationships and, even more fundamentally, the basic value of other people. In the beginning of the book, Miranda is focused on friendships and prom dates, but as the book progresses her social circle constricts dramatically. When she does enter into a brief romantic relationship, both she and the boy, Dan, realize that they cannot have a future—as feelings for each other would endanger their own survival. For instance, at one point

Miranda leaves a food distribution line to try to find Dan to tell him about the food being provided, and almost misses out on getting food for her family. In the evaluation of family vs. friends vs. neighbors, then, it quickly becomes clear that the key to survival for the characters is to *only* focus on immediate family. Every other relationship becomes devalued and a potential liability. Miranda's friend Sammi, meanwhile, gives up on her typical teenage values and begins a relationship with a forty-year-old man who has the connections to ensure her survival and comfort in the changed world. As the dire situation worsens and the chances of survival begin to be a zero sum game in which one person getting resources means another person not getting them, characters start to constantly assess other character's worthiness of receiving resources and, by extension, of continuing to live.

Essentially, the arc of the novel is about stripping things down to what is truly valuable—and to reveal that what is valuable is very dependent on the nature of one's situation. Pfeffer's exploration of what becomes valuable or is considered a “commodity” in different situations, then, encourages readers to consider what is truly valuable in their own lives, what is truly valuable in the civilization that we take for granted but is in fact just “life as we know it,” and how those priorities might change in a disaster situation.



FAITH

As the world around them becomes increasingly unpredictable and unstable, the beliefs of the survivors are constantly challenged. With the escalating uncertainty and corrosion of fundamental beliefs, the characters search for other answers to fill the voids and answer their questions.

Several characters, most notably Miranda's friend Megan, turn to religion to give them stability in the face of their anxieties. They express deep conviction that the **moon** strike and resulting damages are the result of a Judeo-Christian God's intervention; that the catastrophe happened because it was *meant* to happen. This belief gives the catastrophe and the subsequent suffering it causes meaningful, as opposed to meaningless, and leads these characters to a fervent need to prove they are worthy of salvation. Megan becomes so devoted to proving her worth that she starves herself to death. Miranda, while rejecting an idea of a vengeful God, is also impacted by the faith of those around her, and she dreams that she's being blocked from Heaven. However, while some characters do find comfort in their religious faith, prayer, supplication, and repentance are not presented as solutions to the problems of the novel, and the novel shows how some “religious” people take advantage of the religious sentiment of others: the reverend at Megan's church remains overweight throughout the catastrophe—fed by the food offerings of his congregants.

On a more personal level, the weight of the characters' faith in

others also changes when the people they've always looked up to can no longer provide the answers that they need. Miranda struggles with how the disaster has redefined her mother's role, in that her mother doesn't have the answers or guidance Miranda has always expected adults to provide, and she cannot shield her children from the cruel realities of the world.

While there are many aspects of their everyday life that Miranda and her family take for granted (or have "faith" in) at the beginning of the novel, these are called into question as the narrative progresses. The family members experience a loss or change in their expectation or dependence upon things like: electricity, running water, heat, food, medicine, Internet, phones, and radio. On a much larger scale, even the rules of nature are rewritten by the asteroid's collision, and the characters cannot depend on the fundamental "facts" that govern the natural world. For example, after Miranda's watch battery dies, she is no longer able to tell the time of day because the ashy sky prevents daylight from penetrating. Despite having no real need for time, this disorientation is continually disconcerting and reflects the shift Miranda needs to make from faith in externalized elements, to internalized beliefs about her own capabilities.

Throughout *Life As We Knew It*, Miranda struggles to find a point of stability she can cling to. While others turn to religion or science, Miranda doesn't find comfort in these, especially not in a world that feels deceptive and fickle. Denied the ability to lean on her core beliefs about the nature of life and the world, Miranda often repeats the few fundamental things she *does* know – that she loves her family; that they are doing their best to get through this together. The narrative privileges hope, family, self-determination, and the willingness to sacrifice. It makes it clear that even when the characters don't have faith that they'll live to see the sunrise—or even *if* the sun will rise—they can look to an internalized center of control and draw their strength from that.



LEGACY

As Miranda and the others come to grips with their own mortality and the very real chance they might not survive, they grapple with the idea of legacy, what is or is not left behind to represent their lives. A number of characters in the novel seek to create a kind of artistic legacy, a record to capture what they think and experience in the catastrophe, from Mrs. Nesbitt's photographs, to Matt's sketches, to Miranda's diary entries. Miranda's mother, however, creates a different sort of legacy. She'd spent her career as an author prior to these disasters, yet the legacy she seeks to create has nothing to do with art. Knowing the unlikelihood of her whole family surviving, she chooses to make sure her children have a greater chance of living by eating less food. She sees her children as the legacy that will stay behind in the world, and sacrifices herself for that cause.

Actively choosing *not* to leave a legacy is another possibility in the story. Mrs. Nesbitt burns her journals and letters before she dies so that no one is tempted to read them – in destroying her legacy she erases her pain and suffering from the world. Mrs. Nesbitt's action leads Miranda to question her own purpose for writing her journal. Is it boredom? Is she writing for a future reader? Does she believe that there *will* be a future with readers who could learn from her experiences? Ultimately Miranda decides that she's writing the journal for herself, to document what's she's endured so that she can look back. This decision comes from a place of hope, because it's based on Miranda's belief that she *will* survive.

As characters are stripped of their opportunities to create futures, the records they leave behind become increasingly personally important. But, with the uncertainty of the times in which they live, it is also clear that there's no way to ensure that what they leave behind will ever be considered, and no way to govern the way in which it is interpreted. Thus the act of leaving a legacy, as presented by the novel, is less about creating a record for those who follow, and more of a way of creating a personal record for the present, as a way of processing experiences as they occur.



PERSPECTIVE

Life as We Knew It is told in "epistolary" form, through the entries of Miranda's diary. This format is often used in novels featuring teen protagonists like *I Capture the Castle*, *Go Ask Alice*, *The Princess Diaries*, and *Absolutely Normal Chaos*. It's chosen as a way to enhance the realism of the narrative—to create a stronger connection with the character's thoughts and feelings, though it also presents a unique set of limitations as well.

Since the story is told through Miranda's journal, many of her thoughts and beliefs are recorded, but never verified or challenged, and are unreliable because of the things she does not know and the things she is too scared to ask. For example, Miranda frequently posits that her mother is 'betting on' Jonny and Matt's survival more than her own. Miranda offers evidence of this via her observations and personal choices, but never directly affirms this with her mother, Laura. Emotion also often clouds Miranda's thoughts, and her descriptions of fights with her mother or kissing Dan by **Miller's Pond** impact the tone and mood of the narrative. Furthermore, as her food supply and energy dwindle, Miranda begins to second-guess her own thoughts: Did she really see figure skater Brandon Erlich at the pond, or did she fantasize it?

Because Miranda is recording the events of her life as they occur—without the distance of time or a wider perspective—her newest entries constantly redefine those that came before. She often retrospectively realizes that her evaluation of previous situations was inaccurate based on what

she now knows in her current reality. For instance, when her mother sprains her ankle for the first time, Miranda assumes that this is the worst thing that could occur (and in general she uses the words “best” and “worst” quite liberally), yet when her mother re-sprains her ankle at a time when their situation is more dire, she reflects back on her previous thoughts and reevaluates them.

In addition, with limited news reaching their family, Miranda often loses perspective of the larger world. Her concerns must focus on the immediacy of her own needs and those around her. As she says, “[W]ithout hearing what’s going on in the real world, it’s easy to think there is no real world anymore, that Howell, PA, is the only place left on earth.” The lack of reliable sources of news, compounded by Miranda’s own needs not being met, means that she often lacks the energy to care or consider the well-being of those outside her immediate sphere. As the struggle for survival overtakes both Miranda and the rest of the world, her perspective is forced to narrow.

The appearance of truth created through Miranda’s diary entries is counterbalanced by the insular nature of her experiences following the asteroid crash. The realism and intimacy of her writing can also create a false sense of security, lulling the reader into forgetting how influenced this story is by Pfeiffer’s choice of narrator and method of narration. It is important to consider that *Life As We Knew It* is really the story of life as *Miranda* knew it, and not a global or objective perspective at all.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



THE MOON

Traditionally the moon often symbolizes a natural rhythm or cycle, but the moon in *Life As We Knew It* has been knocked off course by a dense asteroid. The moon in this novel, then, represents the opposite: uncertainty and discord. When the moon is moved closer to Earth, the change in its gravitational pull causes tsunamis and earthquakes. It also causes volcanoes to erupt—not just active volcanoes, but ones that had been long dormant and new ones that had hadn’t existed prior to the moon incident. The moon is thus the source of all of the unnatural disasters and hardships that are affecting the characters’ lives, and even the moon’s appearance—closer to the earth and at an odd angle—is frightening and unfamiliar, a reminder of everything that has gone wrong.



THE ASH CLOUD

When the ash from erupting volcanoes first appears in the air, turning the sky a murky gray, Miranda is relieved because it obscures the **moon** and wistfully writes in her journal, “I’m glad I don’t have to see it anymore. I can pretend it’s not there and if it isn’t, maybe things will get back to normal.” But instead of things getting better, the ash cloud makes things worse, as temperatures plummet and crops die off from lack of sunlight. The ash cloud represents dreariness and a loss of hope. It is a physical manifestation of the bleak chances of the characters’ survival.



MILLER’S POND

Miller’s pond is a local pond where Miranda and her family swim, skate, and socialize. After the events of the **moon** impact and resulting natural disasters, Miller’s pond remained an oasis for Miranda. While the public pool has closed, she can still practice swimming at the pond. Later, when it freezes, she spends days ice-skating there. Going to the pond is one of the few freedoms that Miranda is permitted as the disasters and restrictions escalate. It’s at the pond that Miranda connects with friends from the swim team and develops a short-lived romantic relationship with Dan. During the winter Miranda records that she spent the day skating with her hero Brandon Erlich, but she later questions in her journal whether or not it was a delusion. The pond thus represents an idyllic version and reminder of the world that no longer exists.



THE PANTRY

In the days following the disaster, Laura, Mrs. Nesbitt, Jonny, and Miranda have a shopping spree for nonperishable items, which they use to fill their pantry. It is later re-stocked with boxes of food when Mrs. Nesbitt dies and they take her supplies, and again when Hal comes to visit. The pantry represents security and a chance that the family will survive. But, with the exception of the few times when they are filling it, Laura discourages her children from opening the door or looking inside. The pantry, with its door closed and contents hidden, can create a false sense of security—lulling them into a belief that their food supplies are sufficient. When, late in the novel, Miranda decides to take an inventory of the pantry, she is horrified to discover “There’s maybe 2 weeks worth of food if only Jon and Matt eat. With Mom and me eating occasionally, we’ll run out of food in 10 days.” But after her life-saving discovery of the food distribution at the end, Miranda proudly records the new bags of food in the pantry and hopes that these and more like them will help her family endure.



THE YELLOW FLYER

At the end of the novel, when her family's food supply is almost gone, Miranda walks toward town, intending to spare her family from having to witness her death. When she can walk no further she sits down to record her last thoughts. While doing so she spies a flash of yellow in the street. After living under the ominous **ash cloud** sky for many months, the color is startling. "My world has been nothing but shades of gray for so long that the yellow almost hurt my eyes." Despite her fatigue and weakness, the sight of the flyer buoys Miranda's spirits and she uses her remaining strength to chase it down. "But it was yellow. I had to have it." The paper directs her to City Hall where food distribution has commenced, thereby saving herself and her family from starvation. The flyer, then, and specifically its yellow color, symbolizes hope and the possibility of a brighter future ahead.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Harcourt edition of *Life as We Knew It* published in 2006.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☝ They said asteroids hit the moon pretty often, which is how the moon gets its craters, but this one is going to be the biggest asteroid ever to hit it and on a clear night you should be able to see the impact when it happens... They made it sound pretty dramatic, but I still don't think it's worth three homework assignments.

Related Characters: Miranda Evans (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

Miranda is detailing how newscasters discuss the impending asteroid collision with the surface of the moon. It's been getting a lot of news coverage and has generated a lot of school assignments from her teachers. Miranda, who is finishing up her sophomore year in high school, is both pleased by anything that brings excitement and novelty to her life, but also highly skeptical that this asteroid is going to live up to the hype.

This quote is heavy on the foreshadowing, because while all of the predictions about the asteroid's size and impact turn out to be true, no one had any idea of the result of the

collision. What she's calling 'dramatic' turns out to be not laughable in the face of the *real* reaction caused by the asteroid. And the homework assignments that Miranda bemoans will soon be rendered unnecessary and laughable, because the priorities of society as a whole will shift away from education and toward survival.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☝ Sometimes when Mom is getting ready to write a book she says she doesn't know where to start, that the ending is so clear to her that the beginning doesn't seem important anymore. I feel that way now only I don't know what the ending is, not even what the ending is tonight.

Related Characters: Miranda Evans (speaker), Laura Evans

Related Themes:

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

Miranda is writing in her diary after the asteroid's collision with the moon, and even though the collision has happened and the day is over, she's struggling with how to gather her thoughts and put them in context. Her comparison to the way in which Laura writes novels is apt, because Miranda is recognizing that the details she thought were important and relevant that morning have been rendered obsolete by the events of the night. Despite this, Miranda recounts her entire day in her journal, even the parts that no longer seem important. She does this to create context for the events of the night and also as a delay tactic, since she's not quite ready to process what has just happened. The fact that Miranda doesn't know what will happen next has left her shaken, and even the act of writing about it doesn't bring the comfort she craves.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☝ Somehow I'd forgotten there were other countries, that we shared the moon with other countries.

Related Characters: Miranda Evans (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 28



Explanation and Analysis

In the aftermath of the moon's collision, Miranda struggles to make sense of everything that has gone on—the loss of electricity, the massive loss of lives along both coasts of America. She's heard the reports on the news and heard directly from her brother Matt and her father. These facts, however, don't feel real yet, because other than the moon's strange appearance and the inconsistent electricity, they haven't impacted her personal life. Even less important to her is the idea that other countries' survival is affected. Miranda had always hoped to travel abroad, but had never gotten the chance. The idea that these countries, which were already less concrete in her mind, were as impacted by the asteroid strike as the United States feels surreal to Miranda. This line reads as self-absorbed, but it's also because she's so overwhelmed by what's going on in her immediate vicinity that Miranda hasn't had a chance to process or reflect on what's happening outside her sphere.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☝ I know it's dumb of me, but I keep thinking that once Matt gets home, everything will be okay. Like he'll push the moon back into place.

Related Characters: Miranda Evans (speaker), Matt Evans

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 48

Explanation and Analysis

Miranda has documented her hero worship of her older brother, Matt. When he calls from college to let her know that he'll be done taking finals and home soon, Miranda's relief is palpable. She recognizes that Matt doesn't actually possess any super powers or supplies that will make it easier for her family to survive the aftermath of the moon's collision with the asteroid, but she also knows that his presence is calming for her. Her faith in his ability to make things better is both a compliment and a curse for Matt—especially since their parents are divorced. While he might not be capable of pushing the moon back into place, many jobs that *should* have been completed by his father, Hal, will now fall on Matt's shoulders. Not the least of these is reassuring his younger siblings that things will be okay.

☝ One thing Matt did say to me was that no matter what the future is, we're living through a very special time in history. He says that history makes us who we are, but we can make history also, and that anyone can be a hero, if they just choose to be.

Related Characters: Miranda Evans (speaker), Matt Evans

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

Miranda records Matt's pep talk in her diary, but she's feeling skeptical as well as insecure about her own ability to be heroic. While Miranda idealizes Matt, she feels like her own cravings for ice cream and swim team and normalcy disqualify her from the category of hero. Miranda does recognize that Matt is her hero, but she also fails to realize that being heroic and being human are not mutually exclusive, and that Matt, like her, probably craves an escape from the burdens that have been thrust on him since his return from college. Like Miranda, there are surely things about life before the moon collision that Matt misses as well.

Chapter 5 Quotes

☝ “There are lots of different ways to be hungry, you know. Some people are hungry for food and others are hungry for God's love.” She gave me a look then, pure Megan, to let me know which camp I fell into.

Related Characters: Miranda Evans, Megan Wayne (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 69

Explanation and Analysis

Megan and Miranda have very different ways of reacting to the moon's collision with the asteroid. While Miranda finds comfort in being with the people she loves, Megan becomes even more involved with her church. Both of these are exaggerations of their pre-moon priorities: Miranda has always been family oriented, and Megan's participation with church youth group activities had already tested their friendship.

Here, however, is a time where Megan's judgment is turned against Miranda. Prior to this, it was their friend Sammi and

her dating life that had been the usual target of Megan's religious scorn. In this dialogue, however, Megan is lashing out against Miranda's concern that she isn't eating enough. Miranda believes it's foolish for Megan to be sharing her sandwich at lunch when food is so scarce. Megan, however, views this as an opportunity to demonstrate her Christ-like generosity. Their different perspectives escalate into a disagreement, one that will plague their relationship until Megan dies—having starved to death while still insisting it is God's will she do so.

“I'm the one not caring. I'm the one pretending the earth isn't shattering all around me because I don't want it to be... I don't want anything more to be afraid of. I didn't start this diary for it to be a record of death.”

Related Characters: Miranda Evans (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 71

Explanation and Analysis



Miranda has seemingly reached her tolerance threshold for disaster and bad news. Rather than compulsively seek out information like they all had in the days after the quake, Miranda has now begun to try and insulate herself from new information. She berates herself for this action, and for the numbness she's begun to feel—comparing her reactions to those of her family and other people around her, and judging herself as lacking because she isn't exhibiting the same types of compassion she attributes to everyone else.

While Miranda criticizes herself for “not caring,” she fails to recognize just how human her reactions are. Her responses to the incremental traumas of the past few weeks have actually resulted in a normal self-preservation response. The fact that the very next day she gets so excited about the idea of a blanket drive to help those in New York and New Jersey proves just how inaccurate her self-reflection is—she isn't devoid of compassion, she actually cares a great deal, and it was simply the lack of an outlet for those feelings that led her to shut down emotionally.

Chapter 6 Quotes

Watching sitcoms was like eating toast. Two months ago, it was so much a part of my life I didn't even notice it. But now it feels like Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny and the Tooth Fairy and the Wizard of Oz all rolled into one.

Related Characters: Miranda Evans (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 95

Explanation and Analysis

As power outages continue and their supplies dwindle, Miranda's perspective changes. Things that she had once taken for granted are now the focus of her appreciation. In this scene, Laura has made bread with some forgotten yeast. Since the electricity cooperated and stayed on for an extended period of time, the family celebrates by toasting a piece of bread to share and watching not news and the lists of the dead like they typically do, but sitcoms. A shared piece of toast and reruns would not have brought Miranda joy before the asteroid's collision, but now her perspective has shifted and she's able to feel almost euphoric about these simple pleasures. Her comparison between sitcoms and toast and Santa and the other characters is significant. Like the Easter Bunny and Tooth Fairy, a world in which toast and TV can be taken for granted feels like a childlike fantasy—both innocent and unrealistic.

“You think we're going to die,” I said.
Any sadness immediately evaporated and rage took its place. “Don't you ever say that to me again!” she yelled. “None of us is going to die. I will not allow that to happen.”

Related Characters: Laura Evans, Miranda Evans (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 101

Explanation and Analysis

Miranda and her mother, Laura, argue frequently throughout the novel, but this particular fight is brutal. Laura is furious that Miranda left a food distribution line in order to chase down her boyfriend, Dan. Laura's fear that food could've run out while Miranda was away is palpable, and causes Miranda to realize just how dire their situation has become.

When Miranda accuses Laura of thinking they're going to die, Laura's reaction is more telling than Miranda's statement. While Laura is vowing that she won't “allow” her children to die, this is something she has very little control over. Laura has very little control over anything these days, which is why she's becoming increasingly fixated on

knowing her children's whereabouts at all times. It's also why she's become so focused on the contents of their pantry and being the only one who is in charge of those supplies. These actions give her a semblance of control—they enable her to believe that if she makes the right choices and keeps her children close, she can ensure their safety throughout all of the moon collision's aftermath.

“I know Mom doesn't want us to die,” I said. I thought really hard about what I wanted to say so it would come out right. “But I think maybe she doesn't want us to live, either. We should just hide in our rooms and not feel anything and if we get rescued, great, but if we don't, well, maybe we'll live a little longer. If you can call it living. I know Mom tells you things she doesn't tell me, but am I wrong? Because I really feel that way more and more. I'd like to be wrong, because it scares me if Mom feels that way. But I don't think I am.”

Related Characters: Miranda Evans (speaker), Laura Evans, Matt Evans

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 105

Explanation and Analysis

Miranda is talking with her older brother, Matt, and discussing the aftermath of her argument with Laura. Miranda has begun to process and understand why Laura has been so controlling lately—why she panics if Matt stays out too long chopping wood or if Miranda goes to Miller's Pond without telling her. But while Miranda understands her mother's motives, she doesn't truly understand the feelings behind them.


Instead, Miranda is processing her mother's actions through her own vantage point. Miranda has recognized that their future is dubious, but rather than subscribe to Laura's abundance of caution approach, Miranda is advocating living her life to the fullest. While Laura is prioritizing keeping them all alive for as long as possible, Miranda's position is that they need to enjoy the life they do have. The disparity between their positions is alarming to Miranda, as she struggles to let go of her sixteen-year-old girl perspective and understand the larger powers at work on her life.

Chapter 7 Quotes

“Maybe we'll be lucky. Maybe something good will happen that we can't imagine just now. But we have to prepare for the worst. You and I and Matt and Jonny have to prepare for the worst. We have to assume frosts in August. We have to assume no power and no food coming and no gas for the car and no oil for the furnace. Up till now we've been playacting survival, but from now on we have to take it seriously.”

Related Characters: Laura Evans (speaker), Jonny Evans, Matt Evans, Miranda Evans

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 123

Explanation and Analysis


When Miranda wakes up to a strange gray sky, Laura and Matt explain that volcanoes have been erupting all around the world. The resulting ash cloud from these eruptions has begun to block the sun and will change not only the temperature, but also impact the ability to grow any crops. While Laura has been in survival mode since the day after the asteroid's collision with the moon, now she informs Miranda that they'll need to take things to the next level.

Miranda panics at this pronouncement, particularly Laura's categorization of what's happened so far as “playacting survival,” because it hasn't seemed like a game to Miranda and she thought she had been taking it seriously. Once she gets past the sting of that comment, she realizes the truth—things have been bad so far, but they're only going to get worse.

Chapter 8 Quotes

“I know Dan thinks I'm lucky that I've been “untouched” by everything that's happened. And I know I'm self-pitying to think otherwise. But sometimes I wonder if the big cannonball horror of knowing someone you love has died is all that much worse than the everyday attrition of life.”

Related Characters: Miranda Evans (speaker), Dan

Related Themes:  



Page Number: 150

Explanation and Analysis

Throughout the novel Miranda is constantly creating comparisons to determine if she's good enough, brave enough, strong enough, moral enough. Here, she has just said goodbye to the boy she's been seeing throughout the summer, and she wonders if she's suffered "enough." Dan is leaving town—leaving his parents behind as he goes to find somewhere where conditions are better. His sister's name had shown up on the lists of the dead, and his mother is in the hospital. He's not sure if she'll make it. His comment about Miranda being "lucky" not to have known anyone who has died yet sits uncomfortably with Miranda, and for once she isn't devaluing her own experiences and worth. In this case she is acknowledging the pain of having lost a loved one, but also respecting the constant emotions of spending each day of hardships with the people you love—and the accumulative fear of waiting and worrying that something will happen to them.

“Life may not continue the way we know it today, but it will continue. Life endures. I'll always believe that.”

Related Characters: Peter Elliot (speaker), Jonny Evans, Miranda Evans

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 152

Explanation and Analysis

In the middle of a dinner party with their family, including Mrs. Nesbitt, Hal, Lisa, and Peter, Jonny asks the table what will happen when the food runs out. Not, *if*, but *when*. This question instantly changes the mood, with Lisa leaving the table and Hal going after her, but the others take Jonny's question seriously and offer him realistic answers that boil down to *I don't know*.

Peter, who Miranda has come to associate with pessimism and bad news, since he always comes with stories and warnings about the latest illness and threats to their health, is actually the one who offers the most optimistic answer—that life will endure. Within his answer he acknowledges that it may never return to the “normal” of before the moon's collision with the asteroid, but that life will go on.

Chapter 10 Quotes

“I write stuff down in here and I don't read it. Things are bad enough without having to remind myself of just how bad things are.

But I just read what I wrote a couple of days ago. All about how wonderful school is and all that crap. Tests. Whoo-who. Report cards. Whoo-who. The future. Biggest whoo-who of them all.

Related Characters: Miranda Evans (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 168

Explanation and Analysis

Miranda has repeatedly stated that her journal is an ongoing record, not something she re-reads, or has any desire to re-read. But in this entry Miranda does look back to what she had written a few days before—when she had been cautiously optimistic about school and looking forward to the purpose it would give to her days. She had stated that no one talks about the future for fear of jinxing it—and that fear had turned out to be prescient, because she's just returned from a meeting where it was announced the schools won't be opening as usual this year.

Miranda records a dramatic change in her perspective, one that occurred over the course of just a few days. Having dared to hope, she's opened herself up to the possibility of disappointment, a possibility that has manifested. All those times where people reassured her that things would be back to normal 'by fall' have proved to be false. And school as she knew it is unlikely to occur again.

“But without hearing what's going on in the real world, it's easy to think there is no more real world anymore, that Howell, PA, is the only place left on earth. What if there is no more New York or Washington or LA? I can't even imagine a London or Paris or Moscow anymore. How will we know? I don't even know what time it is anymore.

Related Characters: Miranda Evans (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 174

Explanation and Analysis

The radio stations are no longer broadcasting. Miranda's family still has batteries, but there is nothing to listen to and

Matt points out that the stations must have run out of fuel for their generators. Without any source of news from the outside world, it's hard for Miranda to remember that it still exists at all. Her perspective within this entry vacillates from the local to global, then back to local.

It's hard for her to picture life beyond the boundaries of her town, and as the narrative progresses and the Evans family is snowbound, those boundaries will shrink to just her property. Since she can't even count on receiving news from her father, Sammi, Dan, or anyone else who is traveling within her country, it's impossible for her to imagine life internationally. At times this means Miranda can dream that other locations are untouched by these disasters, but more often it manifests as her forgetting they even exist. The concerns at home are too pressing and immediate for her to have time for worrying about foreign countries full of people she's never met.



The final beat of this entry, about Miranda no longer knowing the time, feels disconnected with the rest of the complaints, until viewed in the larger picture of her disorientation. Without the sunlight to orient her to day and night and with her watch having stopped, Miranda can't tell the difference in time of day—a fundamental that she's depended on and taken for granted, in the same way she's always taken for granted that a larger world exists. Neither of those is certain anymore.

Chapter 13 Quotes

☹☹ But for that one moment I felt so weak, so helpless. I felt nothing but fear and despair and the most awful need to be anyplace else. I told myself it was hunger, but I knew that was a lie.

As long as Mom was all right, I could fool myself into thinking we'd all be all right. But even though I knew Mom could have fallen anytime and sprained her ankle anytime, this felt as though it was the beginning of the end.

Related Characters: Miranda Evans (speaker), Laura Evans

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 206

Explanation and Analysis

Laura has sprained her ankle and Peter has directed her to keep all weight off of it while it heals. In the grand scheme of things nothing dire has happened—Laura will recover and Jonny, Matt, and Miranda are capable of taking care of the chores by themselves, but this event shakes Miranda to her

core. Part of this is that when Miranda biked to the hospital to seek help from Peter, she was denied entrance by armed guards who got twisted pleasure from her despair and discomfort. If it weren't for Matt's arrival and his acquaintance with one of the guards, they would not have been allowed to contact Peter at all, and Miranda didn't think she had the strength to bike back home. This terrifies Miranda, as it's a complete shake-up of the world she's grown up in—one in which you can depend on hospitals for help and people don't enjoy others' pain.

But the bigger issue that Miranda's reacting to is how this accident reveals the family's fragility. It makes her aware that anything could go wrong at any moment, and while they've been surviving day-to-day, next time something goes wrong it could be much, much worse. It is the unknown and the potential that Miranda's reacting to, instead of the actual events of the day.

Chapter 14 Quotes

☹☹ I know it shouldn't bother me but it does. I can see Mom's upset, too, even though she's acting like she isn't. I guess it's because things have been kind of level for awhile, and now they're worse again. Not big bad worse...but worse anyway.

Related Characters: Miranda Evans (speaker), Laura Evans

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 214

Explanation and Analysis

The natural gas has run out in the Evanses' home. This won't be a catastrophic event for them the way it will be for many of the people in their community, because they still have a woodstove that they can use for heat and cooking. But despite having been warned that this day is coming, its arrival catches Miranda and Laura off guard. In their fragile state of survival, *any* change is significant, and a change that makes their life more difficult is very upsetting. Miranda keeps waiting for things to get better, yet the months and seasons keep passing without improvement—in fact, conditions have deteriorated, and with every indication that they'll only continue to get worse.

Chapter 15 Quotes

“ I’ve never really thought about what it would be like to be an old woman. Of course nowadays I’m not sure I’ll live long enough to be any kind of woman. But I hope when I get closer to death, however old I might be, that I can face it with courage and good sense the way Mrs. Nesbitt does. I hope that’s a lesson I’ve truly learned.

Related Characters: Miranda Evans (speaker), Mrs. Nesbitt

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 234

Explanation and Analysis


Once Laura is confined to their home due to her sprained ankle, the task of visiting their neighbor, Mrs. Nesbitt, becomes another of Miranda’s chores. Since Mrs. Nesbitt has been like a member of Miranda’s family, when she starts to matter-of-factly discuss her death and the things she’d like done after she’s passed, Miranda is understandably shaken.


She quickly comes to realize, however, how Mrs. Nesbitt’s plans are an act of love and a blessing. Mrs. Nesbitt doesn’t want the others to worry after she’s gone. She doesn’t want her body to be a burden, and she wants to make sure her belongings and supplies go where they’ll be of the most use. Unlike Miranda’s friend Megan, who not only embraced death, but actively sought it, Mrs. Nesbitt has no desire to rush her demise. She simply knows that it’s inevitable and accepts that fact with calm certainty.

Miranda does internalize these lessons, and when things become grim and her own survival seems unlikely, she faces it with stoicism and courage.

“ I’d dream of Paris, of London, of Tokyo. I wanted to go to South America, to Africa. I always assumed I could someday. But my world keeps getting smaller and smaller. No school. No Pond. No town. No bedroom. Now I don’t even have the view out the windows. I feel myself shriveling along with my world, getting smaller and harder.

Related Characters: Miranda Evans (speaker), Matt Evans

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 236

Explanation and Analysis

Matt has arranged to get plywood from the black market gang in town. Miranda resents this fact because he didn’t consult her—but more so because he uses this plywood to cover the windows of their house to help insulate it against the bitter cold.

Miranda had already been chafing against the claustrophobia of spending almost all of her time inside her house with just her family for company, and this further narrowing of her world feels catastrophic. While she rarely thinks of the world outside her family and her town, this feels like yet another piece of evidence that she’ll never get to achieve the future she’d always planned on. International travel is impossible in a world where she doesn’t know if other cities even exist anymore—facts that feel less pertinent than the fact that her own bedroom is now too cold for her to live in and her world has shrunk again.

“ But as long as we don’t know what the future is going to bring us, we owe it to ourselves to keep living. Things could get better. Somewhere people are working on solutions to all this. They have to be. It’s what people do. And our solution is to stay alive one day at a time. Everyone dies in increments, Miranda. Every day we’re one day closer to death. But there’s no reason to rush into it. I intend to stay alive as long as I possibly can and I expect the same from you.”

Related Characters: Laura Evans (speaker), Miranda Evans

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 238

Explanation and Analysis

Laura delivers this pep talk in response to Miranda’s reaction to the pronouncement that the whole family will be moving to the sunroom to preserve what little is left of the heating oil. Miranda, who rather stoically endures the hardships of starvation and other difficulties, cannot handle this loss of privacy. She’s already been feeling overwhelmed by her lack of personal space, and this move to share a room with three other people removes even the illusion of it. In her emotional outburst, she doesn’t see the point in attempting to survive because everything about living feels insurmountable.

Laura's speech is counterpoint to this; she provides optimism in a global sense, which contrasts directly with Miranda's feelings about her world shrinking. Laura posits that somewhere people are working on a solution—that somewhere there is hope and progress being made and all they need to do is endure until it happens.

Chapter 17 Quotes

☞ “If we all die, you'll leave,” I said. “Because you'll be strong enough to. And maybe someplace in America or Mexico or somewhere things are better and you'll manage to get there. And then Mom's life and Matt's and mine won't have been a waste.”

Related Characters: Miranda Evans (speaker), Matt Evans, Laura Evans, Jonny Evans

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 273



Explanation and Analysis

Miranda is trying to comfort Jonny about what will happen if they all don't survive. She's trying to make sense of why everyone in their family insists Jonny eat the most, even though they're all starving. Much in the way Matt treats her with respect when she asks questions she suspects are ridiculous, Miranda is trying to answer Jonny's questions with the dignity and seriousness they deserve.

Once Miranda had resented the same plan she now repeats to her brother—she'd been jealous that Jonny was given more food and that her mom had pinned all her hopes on him. Now, however, she embraces it. It's not that Miranda wants to or expects to die, but she is grateful that if she does, the choices and hunger they've faced will give Jonny a chance to leave and survive. She's started to view him as a part of her legacy. Her sacrifice being the price of his survival is a price that she's willing to pay.

☞ Every day when I got to sleep I think what a jerk I was to have felt sorry for myself the day before. My Wednesdays are worse than my Tuesdays, my Tuesdays way worse than my Tuesday of a week before. Which means every tomorrow is going to be worse than every today. Why feel sorry for myself today when tomorrow's bound to be worse?

Related Characters: Miranda Evans (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 275

Explanation and Analysis

Miranda's diary entries are a reflection of her constantly shifting experiences and perspective. While she's frequently moved to recount some small joy or simple moment that happened throughout the day, the general shift in tone is toward a greater bleakness. Despite the quiet moments of laughter and love with her family, the situation has not improved. Each day there is less food in their pantry, and each week seems to bring new threats or fears—injuries, illnesses, the danger of the roof collapsing or being snowed in during an emergency. Miranda's journal entry here is neither a celebration nor a complaint: it's resignation. She doesn't see the point in complaining about the hardships of her days, because she realizes how quickly her perspective is changing—and what had seemed insurmountable a week ago will likely feel like a triviality compared to whatever challenge she has to face next.

Chapter 18 Quotes

☞ We hugged each other and said we should see more of each other, but I doubt that we will. We don't want anyone else to know how much food we have or firewood. And they don't want us to know, either.

Related Characters: Miranda Evans (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 280

Explanation and Analysis

When Miranda and her family join their neighbors in caroling on Christmas Eve, it is the first time they have gathered since the impromptu block party to watch the asteroid collision. And the circumstances are incredibly different—that night started festive and turned to panic, and this night their spirits started bleak and were cheered by the knowledge that they aren't alone. And though Miranda has repeatedly expressed how tired she is of spending time with just her brothers and mother, and as much as she enjoys seeing that they are not the only people still alive in the neighborhood, Miranda is quick to clarify that she doesn't foresee them socializing again any time soon. There's too much at stake, and too much they're keeping hidden—mainly what they have for supplies and

their chances of survival. Miranda appreciates these neighbors in abstract—as in, she’s grateful they’re not the last people alive, but she doesn’t want to get to know them personally. For her right now, her family is enough, and much like Laura had told her when Miranda started seeing Dan over the summer, Miranda now realizes that forming relationships with other people would only endanger her family’s survival.

☝ Do people ever realize how precious life is? I know I never did before. There was always time. There was always a future. Maybe because I don’t know anymore if there is a future, I’m grateful for the good things that have happened to me this year.

Related Characters: Miranda Evans (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 287



Explanation and Analysis

It seems almost ridiculous for Miranda to spend her New Year’s Eve expressing gratitude for the previous year. Since the asteroid’s collision in May, her life has only gotten increasingly painful and more difficult. But despite this—in fact, *because* of this, Miranda has come to appreciate aspects of life that she’d taken for granted before the disaster. Miranda no longer takes anything for granted, not even her life or the idea that she’ll have a future. Instead she’s taken to using her diary not only to chronicle her hardships and complaints, but also the simple joys she experiences with her family—sharing stories, playing poker and Scrabble, things that make their cat purr, joking about the horrible haircuts they’ve given each other to help stay clean, ice skating, etc. Her change in perspective reflects the fact that she knows they may not survive, so she wants to make the most of the time she does have with the people she loves.

Chapter 19 Quotes

☝ I don’t even know why I’m writing this down, except that I feel fine and maybe tomorrow I’ll be dead. And if that happens, and someone should find my journal, I want them to know what happened.

Related Characters: Miranda Evans (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 299

Explanation and Analysis

Miranda has woken up to discover that the rest of her family has fallen ill with the flu that has decimated the local population. She doesn’t know if they’ll survive, but the two surviving nurses at the hospital tell her it’s very unlikely. Miranda is exhausted from caring for Jonny, Laura, and Matt all day. She’s terrified that they will die and she’ll be left alone, but also scared that if she falls ill, there will be no one left to take care of them. Despite the fact that she’s stretched herself to her limits, physically and emotionally, Miranda still takes the time to record her thoughts about the day before going to sleep. This is an indication of how uncertain she feels about the future. Though she feels fine right now, she knows there’s no guarantee that she’ll wake up in the morning. In case that happens, she wants there to be a record—for some hypothetical future reader—of how hard she tried to save her family and what has happened to them.

Chapter 21 Quotes

☝ I’d left a record. People would know I had lived. That counted for a lot.

Related Characters: Miranda Evans (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 330

Explanation and Analysis

At this point Miranda has resigned herself to the fact that she won’t survive. And much like she admired Mrs. Nesbitt’s courage and dignity in the way she faced her death in Chapter 15, Miranda is now trying to come to terms with her own mortality. One of the ways she justifies this to herself is by reflecting on her journal. Unlike Mrs. Nesbitt, who had burned all of her journals and letters before death, Miranda finds comfort in the idea that her words could outlive her. As she walks to what she believes will be her death, she is grateful for the journal’s existence—and the fact that it proves her own existence. She’s struggled so hard to survive since the moon incident and overcome so much, and the idea that people could read about her life and she wouldn’t be forgotten, wouldn’t be just another name on the list of the dead, is something that brings her comfort.

●● But today, when I am 17 and warm and well fed, I'm keeping this journal for myself so that I can always remember life as we knew it, life as we know it, for a time when I am no longer in the sunroom.

Related Characters: Miranda Evans (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 337

Explanation and Analysis

Throughout the novel Miranda has questioned the purpose behind her journal. She has objected to it being a record of the dead, thought of it as a record she's kept to be read by

the survivors, something to keep away from nosy little brothers, and documents that proved her existence. As the book ends, however, Miranda spends its concluding lines redefining what the journal means. She no longer pictures it as an artifact for someone else—Miranda has now embraced her journal as something she's keeping for herself. This is the ultimate act of hope, because it requires Miranda to change her perspective on her own mortality, a complete shift from earlier in the same chapter when she was convinced that she would die. Now Miranda is determined to live, determined to celebrate the moments of her life, and determined to reach a future where she no longer lives within the confines of the sunroom and can look back and reflect on how far she's come.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

May 7. Sixteen-year-old high school sophomore Miranda Evans records in her journal that her dad, Hal, has called to tell her that his new wife, Lisa, is pregnant. Miranda is home alone when Hal calls, as her mom, Laura, is taking her younger brother Jonny to baseball practice and Miranda's older brother Matt is away at college. Hal is very excited about the new baby, and Miranda tries to sound excited too.

We are introduced to Miranda, and through her perspective, her family as well. Miranda thinks affectionately of both her brothers—and despite the divorce, she's close to her father and doesn't want to disappoint him with her apathetic reaction to his baby news.



Miranda then talks to Lisa, her new stepmom, and congratulates her. Miranda tries to dislike Lisa, but always finds that she's very nice. Lisa asks Miranda to be the new baby's godmother, and Miranda feels overwhelmed by this request, but agrees. Miranda then talks more with Hal, and they discuss Miranda's desire to start ice-skating again, as well as Brandon Erlich, a local skater with Olympic ambitions.

Miranda's begrudging affection for her stepmom shows how she values her relationships with her family. Because she wants to please others, Miranda is unable to turn down Lisa's request to be godmother. At the same time, Miranda is still primarily concerned with herself, and worries that this role (which is clearly important to her dad and stepmom) might mean new responsibilities for her.



Later on, after the phone call is over, Laura comes home and Miranda tells her about the baby. Laura says that's "nice," and Miranda thinks about how her parents tried to have a "good divorce." Miranda then thinks more about becoming a godmother, and wonders why Matt and Jonny weren't asked to be godfathers. She hopes Lisa will change her mind about the request.

Once again, Miranda's relationships with her family are emphasized. It is clear how emotionally bound she is to them—especially her mother—and how much she wishes for stability. Rather than feel proud that she alone was asked to be a godparent, she worries about her brothers' reactions.



May 8. On Mother's Day Miranda volunteers to cook dinner for her mother (Laura) and their neighbor Mrs. Nesbitt. Miranda's friend Megan and her mother (Mrs. Wayne) were also supposed to attend, but Megan calls to say she's decided to stay at church instead. Even hours later when she's writing in her journal, Miranda is upset by Megan's decision, and by how much time Megan has been spending with her youth group. Miranda thinks of the various disagreements she and Megan have had about Megan's religion—particularly a fight when Miranda said that Megan hadn't found God, she'd just found Reverend Marshall. Megan had responded that Miranda has defied a figure skater, Brandon Erlich. The journal entry ends with Miranda annoyed about studying and wishing for summer and her driver's license.

Miranda's closeness to her mother is demonstrated through the dinner she plans and cooks for her and Mrs. Nesbitt, who, while not a blood relative, is considered part of their family unit. Megan's last-minute cancellation upsets Miranda, both because of the effort she'd put into dinner, and also because she feels devalued by Megan's choice of youth group over their plans. Each girl's disapproval of the other's priorities is a hint of how the conflicts between them will escalate, and foreshadows the role that Reverend Marshall will play in Megan's downfall.



May 11-12. Miranda recounts several events from her days focusing on grades, a vet visit for her cat, Horton, her friend Sammi being asked to the prom, and Megan making judgmental comments about Sammi's dating life. Miranda is sick of Megan and Sammi fighting every lunch and longs for the time when their friend Becky was alive and they all got along. Since Becky's death Sammi and Megan have both changed—Sammi began dating while Megan began spending all her time at church. Miranda feels that she didn't change at all and has been left behind.

That night while they're doing the dishes, Laura tells Miranda that she has a date the next night with Dr. Peter Elliot. Miranda has a flash of jealousy at her mom's social life, which turns into an argument about her desire to restart skating lessons with Mrs. Daley. Laura accuses Miranda of only wanting lessons so she can brag online about skating with Brandon Erlich's old coach. Miranda responds by accusing Laura of loving her brothers, Jonny and Matt, more than her—even though she knows this isn't true. Later that night, she and her mom make amends and Miranda longs for the future when she'll be in college.

May 13. Miranda describes her summer plans—Laura has granted her permission for skating lessons, and she'll spend the month of August with Hal and Lisa. Miranda offers her approval of the new man that her mother is dating: Peter, a doctor. Peter asks if the family has heard the news that astronomers have determined an asteroid large enough to be visible is going to hit the **moon** next week. Laura has heard this, but Miranda hasn't. Later she brushes it off with a joke about her mom and Peter staying out late to watch the moon.

May 15-16. Excitement about the **moon** builds... at least among the teachers at Miranda's school, who all assign projects based on the moon. Miranda predicts that she'll be sick of thinking about the moon by the time she completes all of the essays and reports, but also thinks it's interesting to consider how the moon she's looking at is the same moon that people throughout history have shared. She gets permission from her older brother Matt to use his telescope to see the asteroid's impact. Her family watches the news and learns that the impact should happen at 9:30 Wednesday night. The reporters say that asteroid collisions happen all the time—but that this one should be visible to the naked eye. Miranda debates whether the event is really worth all this coverage. She decides that while she doesn't think it will be *that* interesting, at least it will be something different than her ordinary life.

Before we even have a glimpse of the apocalyptic events to come, Pfeffer is foreshadowing the ways in which each girl will react to the disasters: Sammi will look for protection from men, Megan will turn to religion, and Miranda will stay pretty much the same—depending on the bonds of her immediate family to help her survive.



Fights with parents, sports, the Internet, sibling rivalry, college—these are all fairly traditional daily concerns for an American teenage girl. Throughout this first chapter Pfeffer is establishing normalcy. She's giving the reader a glimpse of Miranda's typical life as a baseline for the ways in which she'll be breaking down that construct in future chapters.



This entry starts with Miranda focused on the future—her summer plans—and ends by introducing the event that's going to disrupt those and every other aspect of her life—the asteroid's impact with the moon. This is a tipping point that signals change, even if the characters don't know it yet.



At this point Miranda is still viewing the asteroid and moon collision only as it pertains to her. She complains about assignments and wants to know if her family can have a watch party. Her final conclusion, that at least whatever happens will be interesting, reveals how her perspective is currently self-focused. She cares about the moon only as a means to break up the monotony of her life.



May 17. Miranda and Laura fight about mistakes on Miranda's math test and her tendency to be careless in general. Miranda is working on her **moon** assignments in her bedroom when older brother, Matt, calls from college, surprising her because he never calls at 10 pm. He tells Miranda he has a "funny feeling" about the moon and wanted to hear their voices. Miranda, who idolizes Matt, is unsettled. She wants to know what could go wrong, since the asteroid is expected to hit the moon, not the earth. Matt warns her that sometimes people panic for no reason—and advises her to keep writing in her journal because she may want to read about the night when she's grown. When Miranda gets off the phone she feels uneasy about Matt's worries, but tries to rationalize it as stress about his college exams.

Matt's phone call is the first foreshadowing that the moon collision isn't just an excuse for school assignments or media hype. His instinctive unease and warnings for Miranda introduce the leadership role that he will play for her in the rest of the book. Matt's comment about Miranda's journal is also the first time its purpose has been directly addressed. This matter of why Miranda is keeping a journal becomes a central question of the novel as she increasingly wonders about its purpose and audience.



CHAPTER 2

May 18. In the aftermath of the asteroid's impact with the **moon**, Miranda struggles to organize her thoughts to write in her journal. She compares this to the way her mother organizes her thoughts when preparing to write a new book. It is clear from Miranda's first lines that things did not go as planned. Miranda wants to talk to Hal to make sure he's okay, but the phone lines have been giving nothing but busy signals for hours.

It is immediately clear in this entry that all is not well following the asteroid's collision (which at the time of Miranda's writing, has already occurred). Pfeffer establishes Miranda's panicked mood through writing that is discombobulated, and she jumps in time within this entry to build suspense and add to the intensity and anxiety.



In her journal, Miranda jumps backward in her timeline to describe the day from the beginning—including a glimpse of a typical half **moon** in the sunrise sky and her anticipation about the night. She emphasizes how normal the day felt at school and the petty concerns she'd had about school, prom, friend drama, swim practice, and being bored in class.

All of this is to set the stage and create a contrast for the events to come that night. From the vantage point of just a few hours later, Miranda realizes how much her thoughts and feelings about the day have already changed.



Miranda, Laura, and Jonny have dinner together and plan to make a "party" of watching the asteroid's impact with the **moon**. They had invited their neighbor Mrs. Nesbitt to join them, but she said she'd rather watch at home. Their mood is festive as they go outside with binoculars, Matt's telescope, and a plate of cookies to join their neighbors in a makeshift block party, where people are out on their decks, barbecuing, and standing in front of their houses staring at the sky. It gets quiet as they approach 9:30, and Jonny is the first to see the asteroid through Matt's telescope. They all cheer when it appears in the sky.

Miranda emphasizes that the mood in her neighborhood was festive; she is creating a clear sense of before and after, with the asteroid's appearance being the boundary between the two. And though she describes people as being outside, they don't really join together or socialize. Miranda cares about her neighbors in the abstract collective, but except for Mrs. Nesbitt, who is "family," she has no real bonds with them as individuals.



After the asteroid hits the moon, the mood quickly changes. Miranda says that the impact was shocking, and felt like an attack on “Our **Moon**.” The cheering changes to screaming as the moon’s angle shifts and its visibility increases from half to three-quarters while it simultaneously looms larger in the sky. Craters that were before only visible through the telescope can now be seen with just the naked eye, and the moon as a whole feels ominous. The attitude in the neighborhood is the panic Matt predicted, and when the Evanses try and call him they can’t get through. TV channels, cell signals, and the Internet are also not working when they attempt to check for news. Jonny asks if the world is coming to an end, and Laura reassures him that it’s not, and that he still has school in the morning.

Matt calls from a payphone to report that conditions are the same in Ithaca, NY. Laura tries, but is unable to reach Hal or Grandma. The TV signal fades in and out as the Evanses stress-eat the whole plate of cookies and learn that because of the moon’s increased pull on the tides, there have been extensive tsunamis and coastal flooding. The Statue of Liberty has washed away; Cape Cod and all the barrier islands along the east coast are submerged. Laura worries about her publishers in Boston and New York, while Miranda is grateful that Matt and Hal are nowhere near the ocean.

Laura attempts to reassure Miranda and Jonny that the news reports could be exaggerated, and that they are inland and safe. She says that the news tomorrow might be more accurate or optimistic. The TV reporter continued to list cities that are submerged, when he’s interrupted by a report from the White House confirming that hundreds of thousands have died on the eastern seaboard alone. Laura turns off the TV and sends them to bed. Miranda lies awake listening to reports on her clock radio about the similar devastation on the west coast. She can see the **moon** out her window—its new appearance frightens her.

CHAPTER 3

May 19. Miranda wakes up to a phone call from Hal, who has been trying all night to reach them. He and Lisa are fine, and so is Miranda’s Grandma in Las Vegas. As she hears news of how other countries around the world—particularly those with lots of coastlines like Holland and Australia—have been decimated, Miranda struggles to balance her own relief about her family with the growing awareness that the world is not okay.

Miranda’s first instinct is to personalize what has happened, throwing a possessive pronoun in front of ‘moon’ and describing how its changed appearance scares her. Laura’s immediate actions then foreshadow how she will deal with the aftermath: she attempts to contact Matt and checks the news. Prioritizing family and news will be Laura’s dual priorities for the rest of the story. But news, something that they had previously been able to take for granted, is now a precious commodity—its value increased as its access becomes erratic.



Even the cookies that Laura had baked for the party are now part of the Evanses’ panic as they consume them without enjoying them while watching the slow reveal of news. The destruction of New York and Boston—and presumed death of all of Laura’s publishing contacts—marks the de facto end of her writing career (as at this point, the characters can only process such mass death through how it affects them personally). Though Miranda doesn’t realize it yet, her mother’s new job is navigating their family through the emergencies to come.



Laura’s role throughout the book is attempting to shield her children from the harsh realities as much as possible. She almost always fails at this task, but never stops trying. It’s a character trait that Miranda also comes to develop, especially with regards to Jonny. While scared and grateful for her family’s safety, Miranda’s retreat to her bedroom to listen to the news alone marks her need for a private space to learn and process.



This is a moment of false hope. While Miranda should celebrate her family’s safety, it highlights the insular perspective they are all taking. It’s shortsighted to think that because they all weathered the previous night, that all is okay. Miranda’s reaction to news of other countries faring worse is a reflection of her perspective beginning to broaden.



The news that the schools are open that day feeds into Miranda's confused emotions. On one hand, Hal is encouraging her to "get on with our lives and be grateful that we can," and Laura is making a special pancake breakfast, but on the other hand she's learning that while scientists have theories about what happened the night before—namely that the asteroid was denser than they'd predicted and it knocked the **moon** closer to the earth—they cannot predict what the lasting outcomes will be.

Attendance is down at school. Miranda notes that Megan and her church friends are all absent. Ms. Hammish attempts to teach a lesson, but is thwarted by a sudden dramatic lightning storm, which causes the school to lose power. Fearing tornadoes, the students are moved to the hallway for an hour. The reactions of Miranda's classmates vary from joking, to screaming, to crying, to Miranda's laughter when she imagines the world coming to an end while she's stuck in a school hallway.

Laura arrives unexpectedly at school to pick up Miranda. Jonny and Mrs. Nesbitt are already waiting in the car, and Laura hands them each an envelope filled with fifty-dollar bills—she visited the bank that morning before buying gas at \$5 a gallon. She tells them they're going to the grocery store, which has no electricity and is selling everything for \$100 cash per grocery cart.

As they drive through the storm to the store, Laura is solemn as she assigns each of them a task: Jonny is in charge of getting water and supplies for Horton. Mrs. Nesbitt is to get paper goods. Miranda is tasked with canned soups, vegetables, and fruits, as well as vitamins and other first aid supplies. Miranda and Jonny make jokes about how all of this is unnecessary and crazy, but Laura refuses to be dissuaded.

Once they arrive at the store, Miranda is shocked to see that the parking lot is chaos—people are fighting over parking spaces and carts. Inside the store is chaotic too—it reminds Miranda of the emotions she witnessed in the school hallway. While other people focus on meat and produce, Miranda sticks to her mother's plan and buys nonperishables. She, Jonny, Laura, and Mrs. Nesbitt make multiple trips to fill their carts. A man tries to steal Mrs. Nesbitt's cart, but she fights back. Despite feeling panicked about getting supplies for her own family, Laura helps a desperate man shop for his toddler and pregnant wife. Once the store is picked through and the car full, they leave.

Miranda is uncomfortable with the juxtaposition of being told to go about her own life with gratitude while realizing how many people no longer can—although this also might be a commentary on how many people do this exact thing every day, even in a non-apocalyptic world.



Ms. Hammish's attempts at school as usual—trying to teach a lesson despite the weather, the absences, and the students' emotions—build to a failure that dramatically makes the point: normal is over, and things will never be the same. What remains is figuring out how to react to what is happening now and what comes next.



It's been less than 24 hours since the moon collision and the economy has already reacted—cash only, price gouging for gasoline, and a whole cart of food for a fixed price. Laura is quick to recognize these as symptoms of bigger changes ahead.



Laura's instincts in this situation are spot on—but they point to a reality that is terrifying: one in which all of these supplies will be necessary. It is their own sense of fear and discomfort that cause Jonny and Miranda to tease their mom for her plans.



Miranda's tone while recording the events at the store is matter-of-fact. She leans on humor to describe the fights among shoppers and her scramble to fill her cart with essentials. Since she is writing this entry after she is safely home, though, we can see it as a mask to hide her true feelings about the events—and how shocked she was when her hopes that these preparations were senseless collides with the reality of so many people fighting (often selfishly and viciously) for resources.



On the way home they consider what other supplies they may need and stop at a strip mall and convenience store to buy vegetable flats, candles, matches, and batteries. The clerk at one store makes a comment about electricity coming back soon, and Miranda jokingly responds that her mom is panicking and this will make her feel better. Despite her words to the clerk, though, Miranda is no longer teasing Laura. Miranda had compared the first store to a shopping spree game show, but now she's thinking seriously about survival essentials and is proud of herself for thinking to purchase oil lamps.

Miranda shows initiative in this scene—no longer passively following her mother's orders, but coming up with the idea of oil lamps on her own. This signals a change in her perspective and agency. The experiences of shopping have changed her, and though she jokes with the clerk, she no longer believes her own words. Despite wanting to think that none of this preparation is necessary, she's now feeling empowered by her contributions to their collective survival.



When the supplies are home and unloaded, they celebrate by eating a box of donuts that Laura had impulsively bought along with all the batteries, matches, and soap at the convenience store. She thanks Miranda and Jonny for their help, saying she couldn't have done this without them, and then she begins to cry. Miranda ends the journal entry by stating it's been two hours and she hasn't stopped.

Unlike the rest of this journal entry, there's no humor as Miranda describes her mother's breakdown, an indication of how deeply this affects her. Miranda is used to her mother having the answers and doesn't know how to process Laura's emotions.



CHAPTER 4

May 20. The electricity finally turns back on around 4 a.m. Their schools are closed, so Miranda and Jonny stay home with Laura, and their family cat, Horton, who has been acting strangely since the lunar collision.

While the return of electricity gives Miranda hope, Horton's erratic behavior is making everyone stressed. His animal instincts indicate that things are not yet settled.



The Evanses have an email from Matt, who tells them his college finals are trickier with the power failures to work around, and that he'll be back home the following Wednesday. Jonny and Miranda each spend a half hour on the Internet. Miranda uses her time to look for information on figure skater Brandon Erlich—fans have been asking on his message boards, but no one knows his status. Miranda realizes she might have overstated the slight connection between her and Brandon (she used to train with his former coach), because people keep asking her for news, which she doesn't have.

Their complaints about the power outages interfering with things like exams or Internet access underscore how little the Evanses have been impacted by the moon collision so far. Miranda sees fanboard discussion about whether or not Brandon and certain fans are dead—but she's still self-focused on whether or not she's oversold her connection with the skater, not on the tragedy of the many deaths themselves.



Miranda, Jonny, and Laura spend most of the day putting away their supplies. With the electricity on and the sun shining, even Laura feels like maybe she over-reacted and the supplies won't end up being necessary. The journal entry ends abruptly mid-sentence with Miranda recording that the lights are flickering and her wish that the electricity would stay on.

It feels easier to hope for things to return to normal when the sun is out and the lights are on, versus the outages and storms of yesterday. The journal ending mid-sentence, however, proves that Laura and Miranda's hope was misplaced—things are not 'fixed' or back to normal.



May 21. The president—who Laura thinks is an idiot—comes on TV to announce a national day of mourning for Monday, to reiterate the disasters that have occurred so far, to warn people to prepare for worse, and to say that all offshore oil wells and tankers have been destroyed. Laura tells Jonny and Miranda that this may mean shortages for gas and oil heat. Miranda finds this ridiculous, since it's only May and winter is a long way off.

The governor also comes on TV and gives updates: the schools will be closed Monday and Tuesday. Gas is limited, he says, so only get more when your vehicle is below a quarter tank. He also says that he doesn't know when the power outages will stop. After the news, Jonny is upset that the governor didn't indicate whether the state sports teams were safe. Miranda wishes Matt were home and thinks things will be better when he arrives.

May 22. Sick of being stuck at home and since their fridge and freezer are emptied due to unreliable electricity, Jonny, Miranda, and Laura attempt to go to McDonalds. They discover that the price of gas has risen to \$7 a gallon and all of the fast food restaurants are closed. Finally they find a local pizza place that is open. While waiting in line, they exchange news and rumors with the other customers. Among these are rumors that there will be no electricity all summer, that the **moon** will crash into the earth by Christmas, and that the school board has voted not to open the schools the following year.

Laura finds an open bakery and buys days-old cake, cookies, and bread. They eat this with their pizza, but Laura cautions Miranda and Jonny not to expect fresh food “until things get back to normal,” and says she wishes she trusted the president to handle this crisis. Mrs. Nesbitt compares their immediate future to food shortages and rations during World War II, but reassures them they'll be fine and “We'll rise to the occasion.” As she's saying this, the power goes out. But instead of taking it as an ominous sign, they laugh and play Monopoly until the sun sets.

May 23. It's the national day of mourning. The radios broadcast all sorts of prayers—and news of the continued deaths. While they haven't given a number of the dead, they report that the floods have continued and people continue to drown. Laura reassures Jonny and Miranda that they are inland and safe.

Miranda demonstrates her shortsighted perspective in this scene by assuming all the problems with obtaining and delivery oil and heating gas will be fixed by winter. Laura's continued mocking of the president's ineptness feels cheerful and familiar—even though it belies the increased danger of an incompetent leader during times of crisis.



Jonny's reaction to the governor's news demonstrates his own insular interests. Rather than consider the bigger picture of gas shortages and unreliable electricity, he's upset about the sports players he idolizes. Miranda, ironically, demonstrates her own idolatry by assuming things will be better when Matt returns home.



Commodities have changed—now the idea of getting out of the house to get fast food is a special treat, but one that proves unobtainable. At the pizza place, gossip and even socialization are commodities—Miranda and her family have rarely had the chance to exchange news with others since the moon event. And even though they recognize that much of what's being spread is disinformation, it feels better than nothing.



Miranda feels comforted by Mrs. Nesbitt's historical perspective. By comparing what they're going through to what has happened in the past and complimenting them on having risen to the occasion, Mrs. Nesbitt buoys Miranda's spirits. The irony of her hopeful speech ending with the lights going out is an example of the gallows humor that Miranda frequently uses to deflect her feelings.



This section follows the pattern of Miranda recording a threat in her journal, then immediately recording someone reassuring her that it doesn't apply to them. The fact that Miranda needs a record of these reassurances belies how shaken she is feeling.



They receive an email from Matt that he'll be home on Wednesday. Miranda can't wait, but also recognizes that she's got unrealistic expectations that things will go back to normal when he's home. She wishes for school—but only because she wants school lunch.

May 24. Laura takes Jonny and Miranda to look for open stores. Miranda has noticed that Laura looks with pride at her stocked **pantry**, and since she has cash left, she seeks to add to it. But the grocery stores are closed or empty except for school supplies, pet toys, and mops. As they drive around, they see that electronics stores have been looted and boarded up and the sporting goods store has a sign that reads "NO MORE GUNS OR RIFLES."

Laura ends up taking Jonny and Miranda to a dingy, rundown store where she buys them clothing that Miranda thinks is unfashionable and can't ever imagine wearing. Laura buys out the store's stock of gloves, socks, underwear, and long johns—while Miranda "practically dies of embarrassment." On their way back to the car, Miranda makes a comment about the child's mittens going to Lisa for her baby, and Laura then goes back in the store and stocks up on baby gear. Miranda thinks the gesture is sweet, but can't imagine that Lisa will ever put the baby in such unfashionable clothing. She thinks it will be funny to watch her mom give Lisa all the baby stuff when they pick up Jonny from baseball camp and drop Miranda and Jonny off at Lisa and Hal's for the month of August.

May 25. Miranda begins her journal entry by stating that Matt should've been home by now and she, Laura, and Jonny are feeling nervous—especially since it's a clear night and the **moon** appears too big and bright. The electricity is working, so Jonny and Miranda have turned on all the lights in their house—they find this reassuring.

There had been many students and teachers absent at the school that day, including Sammi. Miranda realizes that she hasn't called Sammi or Megan over the long weekend, because everyone is too busy figuring out their own problems to take on anyone else's. No one at school was talking much. Laura had instructed Jonny and Miranda not to talk about the goods they've stockpiled in their **pantry**. Miranda wondered if everyone else was being quiet for similar reasons. In an assembly, their principal, Mrs. Sanchez, announced that after-school activities, the prom, and senior trip were all cancelled, bus service would be stopping the next Tuesday, and that the kitchen would no longer be preparing hot lunches. The lack of lunches creates the biggest reaction—with it escalating to some students breaking windows and having to be removed by cops.

Miranda is self-aware enough to realize that she idolizes Matt and that he doesn't have the power to improve or change their situation, but this doesn't actually impact her desire for him to come home.



Laura's desire to add to her stockpiles is both fueled by and at odds with the lack of supplies available to purchase. It's clear from their drive how values have shifted—both by the items that remain (related to learning, pets, and cleaning—all now non-essentials) and what is gone: food and weapons.



Laura's need to hoard supplies has crossed a threshold where she's buying compulsively—for instance, purchasing child-sized gloves without having an intended child. While Laura is buying essential items just in case the worst happens, Miranda is on the other end of spectrum, still believing she could never be expected to wear such unfashionable goods. When she makes jokes about wanting to see Lisa's reactions to the ugly baby supplies or hoping her mom kept the receipt, Miranda is demonstrating how little she understands the danger to come.



The need to turn on all their lights—much like a young child after a scary movie—is an indication of how nervous Jonny and Miranda are about Matt's tardiness. In such uncertain times, anything not going as planned feels dangerous.



Miranda is beginning to realize that secrets are going to be as much a currency in this new normal as food and supplies. She now looks at her classmates and wonders what supplies they have. Miranda's reactions to her friends reveal that she's formed different priorities—which value life at home over friendships. At the school assembly, it becomes clear that her classmates have too. Their reaction to the loss of school lunches—which they had formerly ridiculed—is stronger than their reaction to the loss of prom, senior trip, sports, or other formerly beloved activities that now seem peripheral.



At lunch Megan tells Miranda about how she's been living in the church for the past week. Her eyes are bright and shiny in a way that reminds Miranda of the way Laura looks when she sees supplies. Megan excitedly describes how at Reverend Marshall's encouragement, her church has been only sleeping 1-2 hours a night so they can keep praying. Miranda tries to reason with Megan, but Megan responds by telling Miranda that she's damned unless she embraces religion. Miranda rejects this idea, partially because her family isn't religious and she doesn't want to be in heaven without them there.

After walking away from Megan, Miranda joins her swim teammates. They're discussing the pool being closed because without electricity it can't be filtered. After they run through several failed scenarios about where they could practice, Miranda suggests **Miller's Pond**, and the team agrees to meet there the week after next. The journal entry ends abruptly when Miranda hears her brother, Matt, has arrived home from college.

May 28. Miranda is relieved that Matt is home. Even though their situation isn't changed, things *seem* better with him there to play baseball with Jonny and help Laura organize supplies. Miranda and Matt have not yet talked about the disaster, and she knows he doesn't have any new information—but she feels like she'll believe it more from his mouth.

Attendance is up in school on Thursday. Matt works on Miranda and Jonny's bikes so they'll have a way to get to school once the buses stop. Peter stops by with a bag of apples—and since he and Laura can't go anywhere on a date, they prepare apple crisp together and invite Mrs. Nesbitt to join them. The simple dinner of pasta and sauce with the apple crisp feels festive and Miranda wonders how long they can live like this. She vacillates between thinking things have got to return to normal and realizing she's starting to forget what it's like to be able to depend on electricity, the Internet, or stores.

Matt tells Miranda that this is a unique time in history when heroes will be made from the people who choose to live heroically. Miranda reflects that Matt's always been her hero, and wonders if she could be one too, even though she's still missing things like ice cream and swimming.

Miranda's comparison of Megan's religious fervor with Laura's attitude toward her supplies underscores that neither female has a healthy coping method for what has happened. They've taken good things to extremes, and are becoming obsessed. Though she doesn't have the introspection to fully analyze it, Miranda reveals her own top priority with her reason for not wanting to go to heaven—Miranda's fervor is directed at her family.



Once again Pfeffer uses the formatting of Miranda's diary endings to indicate a switch in the story's trajectory. Miranda's abrupt change from relating her lunchtime conversation with her teammates to announcing Matt's arrival with short sentences and exclamation marks demonstrates her excitement.



Miranda doesn't acknowledge it, but her parents' divorce has forced Matt to take on a father-figure role in her family. The tasks he's doing—playing sports with Jonny, assisting her mother in household organization, reassuring Miranda just by his presence—are all traditionally paternal.



While Miranda continues to state her desire for things to 'return to normal,' she's simultaneously being normalized into the current state of affairs. This is demonstrated by how quickly she forgets things she used to take for granted, like electricity, going online, and shopping.



Miranda is too hard on herself, while still idealizing Matt. Her belief that she's not heroic because she misses things like ice cream are examples of her own humanity—and a demonstration of how she denies Matt similar foibles.



May 29-30. Electricity is becoming more and more sporadic. Whenever it comes on, Laura rushes to put in a load of laundry—but sometimes this means laundry gets done in 15-minute increments that span a whole day. Because of the lack of electric light, the Evanses are spending more time outside—but they leave the light in the living room window on, so that when electricity does work, they have a signal. They hear on the radio that the list of the known dead will be posted, so when the light comes on, Laura abandons the laundry and rushes to the Internet.

In less than ten minutes, Laura has found the names of thirty people she knows who have died. These include most of her editors, some friends, and her second cousins. She's relieved to find that Mrs. Nesbitt's family isn't on the list—and Miranda is relieved that Brandon Erlich doesn't appear on it. Jonny finds that many baseball players are dead, presumed dead, or missing, and Matt looks up the status of classmates from his high school graduating class and finds that three are dead and many presumed missing. Miranda has more people she *could* look up—campmates and friends who had moved—but she doesn't think it's right to look up or mourn their deaths when she didn't even think of them while they were alive.

Matt looks up each of their own names on the lists of the dead, but they don't appear anywhere. Miranda ends her entry with "And that's how we know we're alive this Memorial Day."

May 31. It rains on the first day that there's no bus service, so Matt drives Miranda and Jonny to school while Laura stays home to work on her book. The schools are even emptier than before, with more than half the students absent. Jonny learns that standardized tests have been cancelled, and when Peter stops by that night, he shares a rumor that schools will be closing altogether in a week. He's heard they'll reopen in the fall when "things are back to normal." Miranda clings to the hope that things *will* be back to normal by September.

CHAPTER 5

June 2. At school Miranda learns that finals have been cancelled. They'll be learning their final grades the next day and if they want to bring them up, they can talk to teachers about extra credit. Miranda worries about Sammi, who had been failing French and planning to bring her grade up with her final, but then realizes Sammi probably won't care, because no one seems to. School will close on June 10, and reopen August 31st.

The ability to spend all day doing laundry in fifteen-minute increments is a sign of their new lifestyle. In the past Laura would've been working on her next novel—now, when she does have electricity and could be on her computer, she instead prioritizes things like watching news, or doing basic chores.



Miranda watches everyone around her process the deaths of people they knew and cared about. She could join their grief by looking up some acquaintances, but instead chooses to respect her family's losses and the lives of people she tangentially knew who may or may not have survived by not going through the motions of professing grief that's less authentic. For someone who desperately wants to belong, this is a sign of maturity.



Once again Miranda uses humor to deflect from a bleak and uncomfortable truth.



In this section each character is coping differently: Laura is playacting at normalcy—writing a book that may never be completed because of lack of electricity and publishers who are dead—while Jonny is celebrating a change for the better—no tests—and Miranda is still hoping for 'normal's' return.



Miranda's response to this news shows that her mental parameters have not yet totally shifted. She's worried about Sammi's French grade, without factoring in that both grades and foreign language skills are no longer valuable commodities in their current environment.



June 3. For lunch, the school serves each student a stale peanut butter and jelly sandwich. It's common knowledge that the schools are closing early because they've run out of food. Miranda knows she shouldn't complain, since due to her mother's **pantry** stockpiles she's eating better than most. She sits with Sammi, Megan, Dave, Brian, and Jenna. Everyone but Megan eats their sandwich quickly, but Megan nibbles at one half and then asks who wants the other. She selects Dave and gives it to him. Miranda is bothered by this exchange.

June 4. Miranda is pleased with all of her grades except for math—when she brings this up to Laura to ask if she should try for extra credit, Laura asks her “What's the point?” This question leaves Miranda reeling. She seeks out Matt and asks him if their mom thinks they're going to die. She wants him to laugh, but instead he's silent for a long time and then says that she and he are both concerned. He elaborates that with the canned goods and garden, they aren't worried about starving to death, but that they don't expect things to be back to normal until the fall, give or take.

Miranda asks Matt not to treat her like a kid and explain what he and Laura are worried about. He shares that her current top concern is Jonny's baseball camp. Laura wants Jonny to have a normal, childhood summer—plus, if he's away at camp, she won't need to feed him. Laura has already cut down on her meals, skipping breakfast and lunch unless Matt forces her to eat.

Matt reassures Miranda that if things go back to normal then colleges will understand why she had a lower math grade this semester. When she presses him, he adds that if they don't go back to normal, her grades will be irrelevant. He makes her promise not to tell Laura about their conversation, and not to start skipping meals because “We need you to be strong.” Miranda worries that she's not strong or good enough—and wonders if she'd give up food for Jonny like Megan had at lunch the day before.

June 5. Mrs. Nesbitt stops by with eggs that a former student had given her. Laura sautés them with potatoes and onions and they all share. Matt contributes a chocolate bar he found in his backpack. After supper they sing and Mrs. Nesbitt tells stories about when Laura was little. Miranda says it almost feels like happiness.

The value of school has completely shifted. It is no longer a place that provides education; it's now a place that provides lunch. And once those food supplies are gone, it will cease to serve its purpose and be closed. Since food is such a valued commodity, Megan's act of very public altruism is unsettling, and Miranda is suspicious of her motives.



The conversation about grades not mattering forces Miranda to realize just how much her mother's priorities have shifted from achievement to survival. This realization shakes Miranda to the core, and, as always, she goes to Matt for both reassurance and honesty.



Matt's candid response to Miranda's questions is eye-opening. The fact that her mother would view Jonny's camp as a way to preserve their supplies is telling, since without reliable phone or mail, sending Jonny to camp feels uncertain.



Miranda is constantly comparing her response to those of others. She recognizes that she's not as religious or sacrificial as Megan—but this doesn't bother her right now. At the same time, comparing herself against Matt or Laura makes Miranda feel inadequate and unworthy.



Miranda's slide-scale for emotions is constantly being reevaluated. While this scene would not have been something she cherished at the beginning of the novel, it is now. And as things get worse, Miranda leans to appreciate smaller and smaller joys.



June 6. At school Megan again gives away the second half of her sandwich, this time to Sammi. Miranda is concerned, but when she questions Megan, Megan responds, “God sustains me. Food doesn’t.” They fight, as Miranda tries to convince Megan that she’s taking her religion to an extreme, and begs her to eat. Instead, Megan makes judgmental comments about Miranda’s need for divine forgiveness. The argument ends with Megan walking away to join her church friends.

June 7. Miranda dreams of her friend Becky who has passed away. In the dream, Becky is standing on the other side of a locked gate. She looks healthy again, and tells Miranda she’s in heaven. When Miranda asks to be let in, Becky laughs and says that she can’t. Miranda asks if Megan is keeping her out, and Becky says it’s because she’s not dead—and not good enough to be dead. Miranda wakes up shaken, as she remembers how desperate she’d felt to die so she could enter heaven.

At school they’re wasting time; the teachers barely attempt lessons. School’s value comes from the rumors and news that spread among the students—today Miranda hears about a secret Dairy Queen that’s still operating, that electricity is gone forever, that solar power is being perfected, and that they’ll all be dead by Christmas. The other benefit of school is lunch—today Megan tears her sandwich in half and winks as she gives a piece to Sammi and Michael.

June 8. Miranda has started to feel numb. She doesn’t want to know about what’s happening in other states or countries. She can’t bring herself to care about people outside her immediate sphere. She judges herself for this because she thinks everyone else in her life does care, but she’s reached her saturation point for fear. And she worries that her diary is going to be “a record of death.”

June 9. On the second to last day of school Miranda is given a flyer about a donation drive for people in New Jersey and New York. While Miranda likes the idea of helping people—the idea of people being worse off than she is—Laura tears up the flyer and vehemently states they won’t be donating. Miranda is shocked because her mother has always been very altruistic, but Laura insists they don’t know what they’ll need that winter if they can’t get heating oil. Miranda argues that things have to be back to normal by winter, but Laura doesn’t budge.

Miranda and Megan’s fights never end with Miranda feeling satisfied, because she’s arguing from a place of logic (i.e.: you need food to survive) and Megan is responding from a place of religious fervor (i.e.: faith will sustain me). This fight foreshadows bigger arguments and the ways their beliefs will continue to diverge.



Miranda’s fears about her worth—which she has been debating in the past few entries with regards to her willingness to sacrifice for others—here manifest in dreams about heaven. Her rejection from heaven exacerbates her feelings of inadequacy.



While most of the rumors being circulated are untrue, in a world where everyone is desperate for answers, Miranda finds comfort in hearing any news—false or not. Megan’s act of generosity with her sandwich is undercut by how she uses the moment to taunt Miranda.



Miranda continues to chastise herself for her normal responses to this disaster. She’s reached a threshold where she can’t process more tragedy, yet feels acutely that she is flawed for shutting down emotionally.



Whereas the day before Miranda had been worried about her own numbness, today she’s galvanized by the belief that she can do something to help others through the drive. Laura’s angry reaction makes it clear that Miranda isn’t the only one whose emotions have shifted, and it takes some of the pressure off Miranda, who was worried about everyone else being more selfless than her.



Miranda seeks out Matt to ask about heating oil. She learns that they haven't been able to get any, and they expect to run out by fall if the reserves aren't restored. The fuel companies have all stated that they don't know if they'll be able to promise any fuel this winter. Matt says they're luckier than most because they have a woodstove, which will heat their sunroom. Miranda finds the conversation absurd, because it's early June and eighty-five degrees out—and no one can predict what winter will be like. Matt makes her promise not to tell Jonny about the conversation. Miranda ends the journal entry by telling how she went in the linen closet to count their blankets—and then stood outside until she felt warm enough to stop shivering.

This is the second time that Miranda has sought out Matt for information, and the second time he's asked her to keep a secret. Both information and the withholding of information hold power. Miranda wants to be treated like an adult, but also doesn't know how to process the bleak truths she's given. While she wants to believe that Matt and Laura's worries are ridiculous, her actions following their conversations prove how seriously she's taking this.



CHAPTER 6

June 11. Miranda hears from her father—apparently Hal has been trying to call them several times a day and hasn't been able to get through. He says that he and Lisa are safe and the pregnancy is going well. Conditions in Springfield, Massachusetts seem similar to where Miranda lives in Pennsylvania. The current plan is still for Jonny to go to baseball camp, then Miranda and Jonny will go spend the month of August with Hal and Lisa. Matt is invited but declines because he thinks Laura will need him at home.

Despite the current global conditions, Laura and Hal are still trying to set up plans for Miranda and Jonny to spend time with Hal. From Laura's perspective, this has less to do with custody agreements and more to do with making her food supplies last as long as possible. If Miranda and Jonny are in Springfield, she doesn't have to feed them.



June 12. Peter stops by for a visit but can only stay for an hour because his doctor's practice is so busy. He warns the Evanses to start wearing bug repellent, and if they can find somewhere to buy it, "Pay whatever it costs," because he's started to see cases of West Nile virus and is hearing rumors of Malaria and other mosquito-borne illnesses. Miranda hears all of this, but still insists in her journal that nothing is going to stop her from swimming at **Miller's Pond**.

Peter's knowledge of the new illnesses and threats to their help is especially valuable now that the news and internet can't be counted on to give updates—in the rare event they even have electricity to access these. Miranda's response to his warnings proves that despite the new conditions, she's clinging to old priorities.



June 15. It's stormed for days and the electricity hasn't come on until this morning, when it only lasts a few minutes. Now that the sun is finally out, Miranda puts on her swimsuit and sneaks out of the house to go swim at **Miller's Pond**. Dan from her swim team is already there, and the two of them spend the day swimming together and then talking on the banks. Miranda reports that they tried to talk about "unimportant stuff" but that the conversation quickly turned heavy—to Dan's grandparents who were killed by tsunamis in Florida, to his belief that the government should have warned people and responded better in the aftermath. They talk about a hypothetical next school year where Dan invites Miranda to prom, and then they kiss. He walks her home and they make plans to meet at the pond again the next day.

Miranda attempts to have a normal day, despite everything that is going on. To a degree, she succeeds—she swims at the pond and has some romantic moments with Dan. But even while they're flirting and talking, they can't help talking about all the trauma they have endured and the people they've lost. Dan's prom invitation for the following spring shows their hope that things will go back to normal, and also that they don't know how to navigate teen romance in this new world—one in which dates and phone calls and the typical forms of flirting and dating are out of reach.



When Miranda walks in the house, Laura is furious that Miranda had left without telling her. As they argue—Miranda for her autonomy, and Laura from a place of fear—they both come to see the others' perspective. Miranda is horrified by the idea when Laura asks her to imagine not knowing where she is, but she still insists that she won't stop going to the pond, no matter the mosquito-risk. Laura relents, saying that as much as she'd like to protect her children from everything, she can't. And that she also wants Miranda to enjoy swimming, the same way Jonny enjoys baseball, and Matt likes running. Laura's escape is gardening—though this year she's growing vegetables instead of flowers.

They end their argument with the agreement that Miranda must tell Laura if she's going somewhere, and Laura asking if Miranda wants lunch. Miranda doesn't miss the odd phrasing of *if* versus *what* and pretends she's not hungry. Instead of eating she helps Laura weed the garden.

June 16-17. Miranda meets Dan at **Miller's Pond**, where they kiss and swim. Laura picks up the family mail at the post office. She's gotten a letter from Jonny's baseball camp—which will still run for the weeks planned, but will be partnering with a local farm where the campers will be required to help. Laura is ecstatic that Jonny will have fresh, healthy food. And while Jonny is disappointed that this means less time for baseball, Miranda and Laura are doing the calculations about how much food they'll save by not having to feed Jonny for those weeks. The thought makes Laura smile.

June 19. They try and call Hal throughout the day to wish him a happy Father's Day, but they are unable to get through. Miranda wonders if Lisa's baby is replacing her and her siblings, and then feels silly since she'll see him in a few weeks. She also feels guilty that some days she doesn't think of Hal at all.

June 21. The heat has been unrelenting and electricity scarce, so Miranda spends as much time as possible at **Miller's Pond** with Dan and other members of the swim team. She has mixed feelings about their other friends showing up, however, because it means she and Dan can't kiss.

Peter comes to visit and brings canned nuts as well news of the spread of West Nile virus. He says people are also dying from food allergies because they're so desperately hungry.

This moment is a clash of the rules Miranda used to live by versus her new normal. While she's always had the autonomy to go out and enjoy her summer, Laura is now terrified by the idea of letting her children out of her sight. Miranda isn't able to understand this until Laura offers a hypothetical where she reverses their positions. Miranda is then able to understand Laura's perspective and her struggle to let them live while also keeping them safe.



Miranda's focus on language and journaling allows her to pick up on the nuance of Laura's question—there's a subtle pressure on that if, which influences Miranda's decision to deny herself lunch.



Laura's decision to allow Jonny to attend baseball camp seems at odds with her current extreme protectiveness. Since mail and phone service is erratic, if he's at camp she won't be able to contact him if something were to happen. Laura's rationale demonstrates her real concern: supplies. If Jonny's away it will allow them to conserve more of the food in their pantry, helping with long term survival.



Miranda rationalizes her guilt about Hal with the thought that he's about to have a new baby—one he'll get to see and care for on a daily basis. Rather than feel upset about being replaced, she feels relief.



Miranda is attempting to have as normal a summer as possible. At home, she can't pretend things are normal, but at Miller's Pond, she's found an oasis in the middle of the ongoing crises.



Peter's arrival always heralds bad news. Miranda recognizes this is because he spends his day with the ill and dying, but still dreads it.



Miranda has a nightmare that starts as a dream date with Dan and ends with Becky guarding a table loaded with food and saying that Miranda can't have any because she's not dead. She wakes up still dreaming about pancakes and decides to be grateful for what she has: for each morning she wakes up, for swimming in **Miller's Pond**, "fake dates" with Dan, and dreams about pancakes.

June 22. Miranda has a good day. Laura figures out a way to make modified pancakes out of the ingredients they have, and then later figures out how to make bread with some yeast she'd forgotten she bought. At **Miller's Pond**, Dan and Miranda have alone time to kiss and hold hands. Hal calls and tells Miranda that things are going as well as can be expected—the baby is fine and they have enough food. He's heard the farmers are planting and trucks are driving. The night ends with the electricity coming back on for three hours—long enough to cool down the house, do laundry, and watch sitcoms with the family. Miranda goes to bed grateful for clean sheets, a cool house, a night of laughter, news from her father, and kisses.

June 24. Miranda prefaces her entry by stating that she and Laura are in a massive fight, then goes back in the timeline to recount her day and explain how they got there.

After swimming at **Miller's Pond**, Miranda and Dan accompany Laura and Mrs. Nesbitt into town. While Laura is getting gas—a complicated process of alternating between the two open pumps in town, waiting in long lines for the \$12 a gallon, three-gallon cap—the others visit the library, which they've been frequenting more often in case it closes. After saying good-bye to Dan at the library, Mrs. Nesbitt and Miranda begin to walk to the gas station when they encounter a food distribution line. Miranda tells Mrs. Nesbitt to wait and runs to go get Dan. The line is guarded by troopers and the mood is jubilant, even when it begins to rain. As Dan and Miranda leave with their bags, they hear the trooper shut down the line because there are no more supplies to distribute.

Miranda's dreams about heaven and food always contain a component of her worrying that she's not good enough. Her reaction upon waking is a furtherance of that theme, as her determination to appreciate what she has and show gratitude demonstrate her desire to be "good."



A "good day" for Miranda is one in which she can pretend life hasn't irrevocably changed. Eating foods that aren't canned or jarred is part of this, as is any time spent at Miller's Pond. And though the pleasures of the day—a phone call, pancakes, laundry, and sitcoms—are all simple ones, Miranda is learning to value them greatly. Her perspective has shifted so that she can appreciate things she had once taken for granted.



Miranda's extreme shift in mood since the previous entry shows that she's still sixteen—a teenager going through ordinary stages of growth and rebellion in a situation that is far from ordinary.



Miranda approaches this day as a smitten sixteen year old. She glosses over the time-consuming task of getting gas, because it doesn't impact her. Her attention is fixated on getting a ride to town with Dan and spending more time together. Likewise, during the food distribution, her thoughts about Dan come before any thoughts of self-preservation. Miranda is excited by the idea of the food, and also by the idea that she helped Dan—and doesn't look beyond that.



As Miranda walks with Mrs. Nesbitt and their bags of food to meet her mom at the gas station, she thinks about how excited Laura will be. Instead Laura becomes very quiet, and instead of driving to the other station to queue up for more gas, she heads home. Miranda recognizes her mood, and once they're back in their own kitchen, asks what the problem is. Laura is furious that Miranda left the line to go get Dan—risking her chance at getting food for her own family. Miranda hadn't even considered that the food could run out while she was fetching Dan—but since it didn't, she doesn't see the big deal. "Family is all that matters!" Laura screams, and from there the fight escalates.

Miranda accuses her mom of thinking they're all going to die and Laura rages that Miranda should never say that again. The fight twists into being about Miranda and Dan, when Miranda describes their relationship as "something special" and compares it to Laura and Peter's. Laura is terrified and demands to know if Miranda is sleeping with him, and says that if she is, she's never allowed to see him again, or go to **Miller's Pond**, or leave the house alone. Miranda responds that her mom doesn't trust her and that she loves Dan, before running to her room. She confesses in her journal that she doesn't really love Dan, but that she hates her mom for making it sound like family is the only thing that matters, and that she doesn't want to live in a world where that's true.

June 25. Miranda skips breakfast and stays in her bedroom the next morning. Matt stops by her room to try and convince her to apologize to Laura, and despite how desperate she is for her brother's approval, Miranda resists and says that while their mom might not think they're going to die, she's refusing to let them live. Matt responds that Laura is scared, and stressed about Jonny's camp and Mrs. Nesbitt's safety, and Peter working too hard. He suggests that Miranda to see Sammi or Megan—and not make Dan the only person she sees. Miranda realizes that she barely thinks of her friends, but agrees to Matt's points and to make up with Laura.

Miranda invites Jonny to come with her to **Miller's Pond** and he excitedly agrees. Seeing him play and have fun makes Miranda realize how little she's considered how he's handling all of the recent events or how bored he must be with nothing to do all day. On their walk back from the pond Jonny worries that because of the lack of balance in his diet, he's not going to grow tall enough to be a professional baseball player. Miranda has the urge to laugh at the frivolity of his problems, but remembers how Matt respected hers and she responds seriously. When they return home Laura is preparing to bake bread, and Miranda offers to help. The gesture repairs their relationship.

Much like with the clothing and blanket drive earlier in the book, Miranda doesn't see the harm in helping other people. Laura, however, has a much more insular view of their situation and sees any act of charity as a threat to her family's well being. She also feels like Miranda's relationship with Dan is a threat, since it clouded Miranda's thoughts and could've cost the family a bag of food.



Miranda's words in this argument are chosen to provoke her mother. Lying about being in love and comparing their few moments and kisses to Laura's relationship with Peter is her attempt at getting Laura to take her seriously. Instead it makes Laura more worried that Miranda will do something even more rash than risk food supplies—that she'll get pregnant, something that would be dangerous and make survival in these times even harder.



Miranda's conversation with Matt is all about trying to see other people's perspective. Miranda hadn't considered all of the fears Laura is juggling, and also hadn't realized that she no longer thinks about the friends who filled her mind and journal entries before the moon's collision with the asteroid. Matt is repeating some of the things Laura has said, but because Miranda so values his opinion, she's able to better hear them when Matt says them.



Miranda's actions with Jonny are a direct result of her conversation with Matt. She takes the time to consider how he must be experiencing the events of the summer and makes an effort to include him. While she realizes they have much bigger problems than whether or not Jonny is tall enough to be a pro baseball player, she also realizes that he deserves her respect in the same way that Matt had respected her worries and questions.



CHAPTER 7

July 2. Laura takes Jonny to baseball camp and comes back excited about a gas station where she can buy five gallons for \$75. Despite the temperature being near 100, Matt decides it's time to start chopping firewood and sends Miranda to gather kindling. When she's done that and other chores, he encourages her to visit Sammi and Megan. Sammi isn't home, but there is still laundry on the line, so Miranda knows the family hasn't left.

At Megan's house, Mrs. Wayne looks ecstatic to see Miranda and sends her up to Megan's room—asking her to talk some sense into her daughter. Miranda thinks Megan looks thinner, but more striking is the fact that she “glows” with happiness during a time when everyone else is miserable. Miranda catches Megan up on her life, but when it's Megan's turn to talk, all she speaks about is religion and salvation. She's going to church every day—sometimes sneaking out at night to go pray with Reverend Marshall.

Megan brings up their friend Becky, whom Miranda has been dreaming of frequently. Megan says that she was so angry at God after Becky died, and it was Reverend Marshall who talked her out of this and made her see God's plan. Reverend Marshall is now counseling her that the disasters are God's will. Miranda protests that it can't be God's will for Megan to starve. Megan counters with prayers and says that true happiness comes from salvation. The two of them cannot find common ground with religion, so Miranda leaves Megan praying and goes home to collect more kindling.

July 3. With Jonny off at camp, Laura suggests that she, Matt, and Miranda cut back to two meals a day. Even Matt is shocked, but he quickly agrees. Miranda agrees more slowly, while jealously picturing Jonny eating the fresh food from the farm attached to his baseball camp. She thinks ahead to the month she'll be spending with Hal and Lisa. She imagines an idealized version of their town where supplies and electricity are still plentiful.

July 4-6. Miranda experiments with which meal to skip—breakfast leaves her too hungry to swim, but she feels guilty watching Laura eat only a half portion at lunch. She settles on eating brunch and dinner. She struggles with resentment toward Jonny, who is being well fed at camp, and with comparisons towards past Fourth of Julys when there were fireworks and parades and things to celebrate.

The character's varied perspectives are striking. Laura doesn't mind paying more per gallon for gas, because the fuel is more valuable than money. Despite the heat wave, Matt is thinking ahead and chopping wood. Miranda is attempting to salvage friendships, despite them feeling less important.



Megan's “glow” of happiness is at odds with the current events. Despite this, Miranda isn't jealous of Megan's religious convictions. The fact that Megan is upsetting her mother and sneaking out to go to the church are strong signals that all is not right with her congregation and Reverend Marshall. Megan's words confirm this for Miranda.



This section highlights the different ways that Miranda and Megan deal with similar problems. While Megan turns to religion and Reverend Marshall, Miranda puts her faith in actions—her response to Megan's prayers is to go home and continue gathering firewood. Rather than hoping for death/salvation like Megan, Miranda is planning for survival in the here and now.



Despite having heard from Hal that conditions in Springfield are similar, Miranda imagines it as a utopia. She needs to hold onto this idea that things are better elsewhere—both as a source of hope and to mitigate her jealous feelings about Jonny eating more and herself going hungry.



Meals may have become less frequent, but they're highly important and emotional, and now associated with ideas of guilt and sacrifice.



July 7. The electricity turns on for the first time in a week full of very hot days—they run around turning on the A/C and dishwasher and washing machine—but it only lasts for ten minutes. After finishing the laundry by hand and hanging it up to dry, it starts to rain and storm. Everyone’s tension is high, and when Matt stays out chopping wood despite the storm, Laura and he get in a yelling match when he returns. While they’re arguing the electricity comes back on for forty glorious minutes. Miranda ends her entry by debating which is better: no electricity, or unreliable electricity? Life as she’s living it, or no life at all?

July 9. Something feels different when Miranda wakes up. It feels slightly cooler than the hundred degree temps they’ve been having, and the sky is a strange gray—but not cloudy or foggy. Miranda asks Matt and Laura about it, and they tell her that the **moon’s** increased gravitational pull is still causing earthquakes, tsunamis, and floods—but now it’s caused volcanoes to erupt all over the world for the past few days. This has caused the sky’s strange gray color—it’s an **ash cloud** blocking out the sun, which means crops will die and major climate shift could occur.

When Miranda asks how long this could last, she’s terrified to hear that it’s a global problem that may not clear for more than a year. Laura tells her that up until this point they’ve been “playacting” at survival, and that now things are going to get serious and they can’t count on the garden. Laura says she’ll only eat one meal a day and, Matt and Miranda agree to cut back too—fasting one day a week and eating two meals three days a week and one meal the other three. They make a plan to start stockpiling water in case the well runs dry and to boil it before drinking from this point forward. Miranda decides to go swimming while it’s still warm, but finds herself shivering when she gets out of the water. She ends the entry by stating that the lists of the dead are about to get a lot longer.

CHAPTER 8

July 11-13. The sky is getting grayer, the days are getting shorter, and the temperatures are much cooler than the previous weeks’ heat waves. Miranda is adjusting to fasting. She says that as the day goes on, she stops being hungry. Peter stops by and approves their plans—especially the boiling of water before drinking. He suggests that Miranda stop swimming at **Miller’s Pond** because he’s scared people will be using it for bathing and wastewater, and it will become a breeding ground. She defies this and goes swimming one last time, hoping to see Dan, but he doesn’t show up. They also haven’t heard from Jonny or Hal. Matt stops running in order to conserve his energy and strength, and because he’s worried about the air quality of the **ash cloud** sky.

The questions that end this chapter are posed to the reader as well. At what point does life stop being something that is experienced and start being just a series of repetitive, meaningless actions? At what point does the cost of living make it not worthwhile? Miranda doesn’t come up with answers to these questions, but leaves them to linger in her journal and with the reader.



While things have continued to be hard in Miranda’s life, she hasn’t considered that there would be new forces that could make things worse. The ashy cloud, which disquiets Miranda immediately, is going to have larger implications, and again demonstrates Miranda’s naivety, as well as the fact that Matt and Laura are still sheltering her as much as possible.



The news about volcanoes doesn’t seem like it should impact Miranda at first—but as Laura and Matt explain the long-term impacts, Miranda realizes how interconnected everything about the planet is. While she may not be facing lava, her life has just gotten significantly more difficult. Laura’s statement about ‘playacting’ sounds insulting, until those feelings are quickly overridden by fear about cutting back on food even more. With the grim closing line, the reader is left wondering if Miranda is picturing her own name.



Things are held in suspense during this section—they’re full of anticipation, but none of the things being anticipated manifest: Dan’s not at the pond, none of them fall ill, no letters arrive from Jonny, etc. They’re all existing in a state of waiting to see how much worse things will become, and trying to anticipate what they should do to prepare. While Matt gives up running pre-emptively, Miranda insists on one last swim, despite Peter’s advice and the risk.



July 14. Miranda accidentally lets Horton outside at night. Normally he is only allowed out during the day—but his behavior has been erratic since Jonny left and he’s also muddled by the daytime gray skies, so Miranda thinks he was just confused when he darted outside as she came in. She calls for him for an hour but he doesn’t return. She feels horrible.

Despite all of the bigger catastrophes they’re facing, Horton’s escape feels personal to Miranda, and she blames herself for letting him out, despite the fact that anyone could have.



July 15-17. Despite Miranda, Matt, Laura, and Mrs. Nesbitt’s search efforts, Horton is still missing. Matt warns Miranda that it’s possible Horton has been killed for food. Miranda is worried about when Jonny returns home from camp and blames her. Laura and Miranda argue when Laura accuses Miranda of caring more about the cat than Jonny—whom they haven’t heard from in two weeks. Miranda responds that Jonny is fine and being well fed while the rest of them are starving. She says it’s clear which of her children Laura is betting on. In her diary she unpacks this thought further—she knows that Laura wouldn’t prioritize herself, but if she had to pick only one of her children to live, Miranda agonizes over who she would choose—and ultimately decides it would be Jonny, since Matt wouldn’t take the food, and Miranda, as a female, would have a harder time surviving alone. Miranda worries that she doesn’t contribute as much as Matt, since all she does is gather kindling, and wonders if she even deserves any of their remaining food.

Miranda realizes what a luxury it is to have a pet these days. The idea that someone else might see Horton as food horrifies her, and her preoccupation with the cat when they haven’t heard from her brother horrifies Laura. Miranda is very much a person concerned with what is immediately in front of her—Jonny, Hal, Sammi, and Megan cease to be present in her mind when they’re not present in her daily life. But Laura’s accusation hits Miranda hard, and makes her reconsider her standing in the family. She must now ask herself the callous and frightening question: which of the family members is most worthy of living? Miranda worries that her gender and her lack of helpfulness disqualify her, but the questions are left to resonate with the reader—who deserves to live and why? Can anyone really make such a decision?



July 18-19. Miranda collapses in the woods while gathering kindling and searching for Horton. When she returns home, she and Laura argue when it’s revealed that Miranda had forgotten to eat. Laura insists that Miranda follow the established rules about meals and asks if Miranda thinks she enjoys watching her children starve. They do not patch up their argument, and Miranda realizes that the longer she goes with out eating, the less appealing the idea of food becomes.

Miranda’s singular preoccupation with finding Horton is her version of penance. She worries about Jonny’s reaction to the loss of his pet, but also feels guilty about her resentment toward him. Jonny hasn’t chosen this, and isn’t even aware that the others are sacrificing for him. Miranda is jealous of even his ignorance.



July 20. Miranda realizes it’s the anniversary of the first time men walked on the moon. It’s a fact that she remembers from all her moon-themed assignments back in May. She wishes that the astronauts had blown it up.

While not rational, Miranda’s emotional response to this anniversary is certainly understandable, as her stress and desperation grows.



July 21. Miranda is gathering kindling and imagining how perfect things could be where Hal lives, when Sammi comes to visit. She's there to tell Miranda good-bye, because she's leaving for Nashville with a guy she met. This idea of boy-crazy Sammi still being boy-crazy makes Miranda giggle, until Sammi elaborates that the guy, George, is forty. Sammi isn't happy about the scenario, but George is well connected and gave her parents lots of supplies. Her mom is encouraging her to go with George because he can offer her protection and a better life. Sammi hopes that they split up once she reaches Nashville and she finds someone she likes better. Like Megan, Sammi points to Becky's death as a motivator for her actions, saying "Life is short and you have to make the best of what time you have." Miranda is upset and scared for Sammi.

July 22. Miranda is excited and relieved to reveal that Horton has come home. They wake up to find him yowling at the door. Laura is also relieved to find five letters from Jonny waiting at the post office, saying that he's fine and having fun. They celebrate by having Mrs. Nesbitt over for supper, which is extra festive with a can of peaches and a jar of apple juice. After supper, it's cool enough that they build a fire in the woodstove and Mrs. Nesbitt tells stories about what things were like after World War II and during the Depression. Horton hops from lap to lap and Miranda feels hopeful that if her family sticks together, they'll survive.

July 25-27. Miranda continues to dream about Becky being a gatekeeper for food and she continues to fanaticize that Springfield, where Hal and Lisa live, is a sort of heaven on earth that hasn't been impacted by the **moon's** collision. So when Laura pulls Miranda aside to tell her plans have changed—that Miranda and Jonny won't be going to Springfield after all—Miranda wants to throw a tantrum. Instead she listens as Laura explains that since Lisa wants to be with her own parents when the baby is born, Hal and Lisa will be stopping to visit them in Pennsylvania before traveling west. Miranda lets go of her idealized version of Springfield and takes a moment to consider how she would feel if *she* were the one pregnant. She knows she'd want to be with Laura, and so accepts the change of plans.

Miranda and Megan have always teased Sammi for being "boy crazy," and Miranda defaults to this mindset when Sammi presents her plan for leaving. She fails to notice that Sammi is unhappy about this plan until she states it. Like Megan, Sammi's reaction to the moon's collision is an exaggerated version of the person she was before. Megan has taken religion to an extreme, and Sammi is doing the same with seeking validation from males. The major difference is that Megan's religious fervor may kill her, while Sammi is hoping that George will help her survive.



It's a day of answers—where Laura and Miranda realize that all of their anxiety was unfounded, because both Horton and Jonny are fine. Their celebration is simple, but Miranda is increasingly learning to appreciate the simple things. Hearing about the hardships Mrs. Nesbitt had to endure during the Depression helps Miranda gain perspective about what is happening now.



Instead of a month with her father, Miranda will only have a few days' visit. The Miranda who opened the book would've been devastated by this news, but now she quickly does the calculations on how this will impact their food supply. She also puts herself in Lisa's perspective and feels real sympathy for what Lisa must be feeling to be pregnant in such uncertain times. Miranda is starting to show a real maturity in the way she reacts to disappointing news.



July 29. Hal and Lisa will be picking up Jonny from camp and arriving the next day. Laura doesn't want Hal to worry about his children, so she declares that while he and Lisa are visiting, they will all eat three meals a day. Miranda is excited about the idea of more food, but wonders if Laura is really doing this to hide the truth from Jonny, who doesn't know they cut back their food intake while he's been gone. Miranda analyzes Laura's motives for not sending Matt off on his own, or encouraging Miranda to find a guy to protect her like Sammi had—because both of these plans would ensure more food for Jonny until he was old enough to care for himself. Miranda decides that Laura loves them too much to send them away, but that doesn't solve the problem of the dwindling supplies in their **pantry**.

It's a sign of Miranda's broadening perspective that she evaluates the cost of eating three meals a day and Laura's motives behind the suggestion rather than just enjoy the windfall. Miranda is starting to think beyond the current moment and is grasping the long-term ramifications and hardships they'll be facing. As she considers these, she also factors in whether it would have benefited any of them to have disbanded and gone their own ways—but her conclusion, as always, prioritizes family.



July 30. Jonny, Hal, and Lisa arrive. There is much mutual scrutiny as everyone tries to deduce how everyone else has suffered. Miranda decides that her dad is only slightly thinner, but much grayer and more wrinkled. She can't tell if Lisa should look more pregnant than she is, but says she looks healthy. While Miranda is excited to see her dad, she's much more excited by the boxes of food and supplies he's brought. He says he got them from the college where he worked, and Matt is especially excited to see that he's brought saws. Hal says that while he's there, he's going to help Matt collect firewood.

While it's been established that Miranda very much loves and wants to please her father, his value at this moment comes not from his presence, but from the supplies he's brought with him. Despite being their father, Hal hasn't contributed much to their well-being since the moon collision. The paternal tasks have all fallen on Matt. For the few days he's visiting, he's going to have a chance to try and help ensure they survive once he leaves again.



Laura gives Lisa all the baby items she'd bought in the store in May. Back then, Miranda had thought that Lisa would reject the cheap clothing, but instead she bursts into tears and cannot stop thanking Laura. They stay up admiring each piece of baby clothing and then Miranda stays up later to write about it. She feels "rich with batteries"—even though she knows that all of these new supplies won't last forever.

Miranda is able to reflect on her superficial attitude toward the cheap baby clothing. So much has changed since Laura bought it at a run-down store, and Miranda recognizes how smart Laura's instincts are—and how much she's made them her own, as Miranda now guards her battery usage.



July 31. Hal says they're going to need enormous amounts of wood, and that it won't be safe to keep it outside, so Laura decides they should empty the antique furniture out of the dining room, protect the floor, and store it in there. Miranda goes to collect kindling and despite being allowed three meals a day, accidentally skips brunch out of habit. Miranda enjoys having Hal and Lisa there and hearing about Jonny's time at baseball camp and working on the farm. Miranda is grateful again that Horton was found safe, and briefly "all felt right with the world."

The care Laura takes to protect her furniture and hardwood floor seems at odds with the survival task at hand. Despite this, it's comforting that she does care about the floor—and thus foresees there being a future when the dining room could be used as a dining room again, not just a place to store essential wood so it won't be stolen and they won't freeze.



August 1. The Evanses have a dinner party and invite Mrs. Nesbitt and Peter. Miranda delivers the invitations by bike while Hal, Jonny, and Matt work on chopping wood. Miranda learns that Peter has closed his doctor's practice and is now working at the hospital, which still has electricity, is incredibly busy, and is guarded by armed security. Peter hasn't left the hospital in a week and is delighted by the invitation.

Much like Laura having to give up the dining room in the house she's so proud of, Peter has had to give up his personal doctor's practice in order to work at the hospital. Both of these personal sacrifices serve the greater good and demonstrate a shifting in priorities.



On her way out of the hospital, Miranda runs into Dan. He's there visiting his mom, who has West Nile virus. Dan tells Miranda that he's leaving—his parents swapped their car for a motorcycle, and they want him to set out on his own so that he has a chance of surviving. Dan tells Miranda that he's liked her since before the asteroid's strike, that he'd been trying to get up the nerve to ask her to prom, and how much their time at **Miller's Pond** meant to him. They kiss good-bye and Miranda compares their situations—the pain of losing and leaving people you love like he's experienced, versus her own experience of having to watch their day-to-day sufferings. She concludes that she's lucky—but that doesn't stop her from mourning the loss of prom and what could have been.

August 2. The dinner party is a success, filled with inventive cooking and good company. There's bread from the last of the yeast, wine, meringues made from powdered egg whites, and pasta with jarred sauce and canned mushrooms. But as the meal comes to an end, Jonny asks, "Are we going to die?" and the mood changes. Lisa leaves the room when he asks about food running out and Hal follows her, leaving behind the core 'family' group that Jonny knows best. Peter says that all they can do is focus on each day and stay hopeful. Mrs. Nesbitt states that she *won't* survive it, but Jonny is young and strong. Miranda asks if things could get worse, and Peter says that even then life will go on—in some form—and Matt brings up how insects are around from the dinosaur era. They share a cynical laugh about the idea of mosquitos outlasting humans.

August 3. Hal announces that he and Lisa will be leaving the next day. Lisa hasn't left her room since the upsetting dinner conversation the night before and is worried about her parents and getting settled before the baby arrives. Hal works with Matt all day to get more firewood, but after dinner he asks Miranda to talk. Hal tells her how proud he is of her, how right the decision to make her the baby's godmother feels, and how much he loves her. Miranda stays sitting long after Hal goes up to bed, thinking through everything that has happened and everything that could happen.

August 4. Hal and Lisa leave in the early morning. Hal hugs them and promises to write, but they know they may never see him again. Lisa drives the car because Hal is crying too hard to see.

Miranda is upset by Dan's leaving because it represents the loss of one of the few positive aspects of her life—but also because he represents a past and future that no longer exist: one with proms and where crushes don't come with such life-or-death baggage. Her comparison of their positions is very typical of Miranda—she always seems to need to know where she ranks in comparison with others, and feels guilty for not having experienced personal loss, but also knows her own hardships aren't insignificant.



Jonny is the youngest person at the party, but the only one brave enough to ask the hard questions. Lisa flees from even hearing them. The answers they give Jonny are respectful and honest—if not especially hopeful. The fact that Laura does not participate in this conversation is telling. She's tried so hard to shield her children—and especially Jonny—from hard truths. And while she doesn't lie to him, she also doesn't offer anything to a discussion that quickly becomes darkly humorous.



Despite having been at her house for days, Miranda hasn't gotten a chance to spend time with Hal. She doesn't resent this because he's more valuable to her as a gatherer of firewood than he is as a paternal figure. She has Matt to turn to for advice and doesn't need him to fill this role. Despite that, it feels nice to hear him compliment her.



Just a week prior Miranda had been dreaming of Springfield as a land of plenty, and now she's stoically saying good-bye to her father, perhaps forever. His short visit kills some of her lasts hopeful fantasies.



CHAPTER 9

August 6. Miranda wakes up missing Sammi and Dan, whom she knows she won't see again. She fears she won't see Hal either. She states that she won't "survive" if she never sees sunlight.

Miranda writes this entry as a hierarchy—with her dad as more personally valuable than Dan, who is more important than Sammi. But she ranks sunlight highest of all. This is a bit of Miranda's personal dramatics, but also related to how Miranda's immediate concerns for survival register even more than her father.



August 7-9. The Evanses are all in short tempers after Hal's departure. Matt snaps at Miranda for going into his room without permission—revealing that he's exhausted, hungry, and furious at Hal for leaving him to be the father figure for Jonny and Miranda.

Throughout the story Matt has had to fulfill Hal's paternal responsibilities. Hal's decision to leave and journey west has just made those responsibilities permanent—which is emotionally exhausting for college-aged Matt.



Despite the replenished food in the **pantry**, Laura has started skipping meals again, which scares Miranda, who sees it as an indication of them not having enough for whatever is ahead. This, combined with the fact that she can't remember the last time they had any electricity, the lack of news in town, and the temperature dropping to not even hit 60, have amplified Miranda's anxiety.

Each time Miranda dares to feel hope—this time in the form of a restocked pantry—someone's actions will indicate that her feeling is foolish. The convergences of all these bad omens, plus the loss of her father, have understandably left Miranda emotionally drained.



August 11. There is a light frost overnight. Jonny tells Miranda he wants to move south and has heard rumors from his friend Aaron, whose dad is on the school board, that some of the schools won't be reopening. Miranda says they can't leave Mrs. Nesbitt, and Jonny suggests splitting up and at least one of them traveling south. Miranda stops the conversation by telling Jonny things will get better. He grins and says that he's been hearing that for months and no longer believes it.

In this conversation with Jonny, Miranda plays a role others often take with her—telling him things will get better. When she is told this, she tries to believe it, but Jonny is already more cynical than she is and finds this empty statement amusing. His proposal of splitting up is completely at odds with Miranda's family-together beliefs.



August 14. Jonny announces he doesn't need any presents for his upcoming birthday. Miranda is annoyed that she doesn't have a way of making a noble gesture like that, besides cutting back to two meals a day, which now feels "normal." The family is worried that they haven't heard from Hal and Lisa.

Miranda's annoyance at not being able to think of a noble sacrifice is very in keeping with her constant need to compare herself to others and be "better"—though her definition of better is very situational.



August 15. Miranda asks Laura if things have gotten better with floods and quakes and volcanoes. Instead of reassuring her, Laura emotionally responds to Miranda's "How much worse can they get?" by detailing how volcanoes are erupting where they've never existed, the quakes and tsunamis are getting stronger, fires are burning, epidemics are spreading, farmlands have already had killing frosts, and a nuclear power plant exploded. They get in a horrible argument about whether or not Miranda realizes how lucky she is. It ends with Miranda saying she wishes she'd left with Hal since Laura doesn't love her, and Laura telling her to get out.

Miranda bikes to Megan's house. She is horrified when she sees how thin Megan has become, but glad that Megan seems happy to see her, and catches her up on her life. Megan is sympathetic and says she's also struggling. She wants to make sure everyone's soul is saved because Reverend Marshall tells her that these hardships are God punishing sin. While Miranda disagrees, they have a good time together, and she's amazed to find herself laughing and enjoying time with Megan. As Miranda prepares to leave, Megan tells her not to come back. She says their friendship makes it harder for her to focus on God and be repentant. As Megan hugs Miranda good-bye, she realizes that Megan barely has the strength to stand, and she flees home.

Laura is waiting in the kitchen when Miranda returns and the two of them embrace and both begin crying and apologizing. Miranda reflects in her journal about how much she loves her mother and how much of a burden Laura has to carry. She ends by saying that if God is looking for sacrifices, her mom is making them.

August 18. The Evanses celebrate Jonny's 14th birthday by playing baseball and having dinner at Mrs. Nesbitt's house. Mrs. Nesbitt manages to make cookies, and Jonny gives a speech about the importance of sticking together, which makes Laura and Miranda cry. Miranda reflects back on her last birthday and the fights she had with Laura over having a boy/girl party. She can't believe she was ever that young, or that things like that seemed important—and she realizes that this sort of indulgent innocence is a privilege that Jonny will never have.

CHAPTER 10

August 22. There's a notice in the post office about a big meeting regarding the coming school year. Miranda is looking forward to school, both because it will give her life a purpose and because it hints at preparing her for a future.

Miranda asks her question not looking for an honest answer—instead she's looking for reassurance—but her demands often force Laura into the position of having to deliver bad news. Since Laura is feeling helpless to protect her family, this combination of Miranda's needs and Laura's inability to meet them results in both characters angrily reacting to the way they've failed each other.



There are moments in Miranda's afternoon with Megan where their friendship feels like it used to—back before Becky died and Megan became fully absorbed by her religion. While Miranda cherishes these moments, Megan views them as sinful. It is because the girls can find comfortable common ground that Megan asks Miranda to never come back. Miranda's friendship makes Megan want to live—which conflicts with the message that Megan's being given by her church.



The afternoon with Megan is a wake-up for Miranda about valuing the people around her and how much they care. While Megan had equated her friendship with sin, her family truly loves and appreciates her—and she feels likewise.



Miranda is able to reflect not only on the ways she has changed and matured since the moon's collision, but also on the ways Jonny has. They've all been required to grow up quickly—but Jonny's been deprived of so much of his childhood. Even if things were to go back to normal—which Miranda now realizes is impossible—he'll never get his innocence back.



Miranda is hopeful in this entry, as school means working toward something, and working toward something means she has a future—an uncertain idea lately.



August 26-27. Now that she knows what school will entail, Miranda angrily reflects back on how hopeful her previous entry was. She's just come from the town meeting where it is announced that since half of the school population and more than half of the school staff won't be returning, they'll only be opening two schools in the fall. The districts have been told to expect no help from the state and will not be able to provide any bus service, electricity, or lunches. They have some heat now, but it is expected to run out by mid-September. Miranda learns a great deal from the crowd's reactions to these announcements. She hadn't realized how few people were left in town, and it seems like most people are as bad off, if not worse, than her family.

Once home, Miranda realizes they use gas for their stove and water heater. Laura reassures her they can use the woodstove for both, but Miranda wonders which is more likely: starving or freezing to death.

Since all students are given the choice between homeschooling or attending either of the open schools, Laura says she'll support whatever decision Miranda and Jonny make.

August 28. Miranda's watch has stopped. She realizes this isn't a big deal since she doesn't have a schedule or a real need for time, but she finds it disorienting, especially since she can no longer look at the perpetually gray sky to help determine time of day. Also, there was a killing frost overnight. The Evanses gather all of the vegetables that can be harvested, but it isn't much. And if it feels like late October in August, they're nervous about what the winter will bring. Also, they're no longer able to get any signals on the radio. Matt suggests this is because the radio stations ran out of electricity, but Miranda fears it means more dire things for the larger world. She ends by wondering how they'd even know if Howell, PA was the last place on earth.

August 29. Miranda has a scary encounter on her way into town to visit the library. While biking down the empty streets, she hears laughter and sees a pickup truck with five armed men—two of whom she recognizes. Evan Smothers was a classmate of hers and Ryan Miller played sports with Matt. The men are stealing the plywood off the fronts of boarded up stores and then looting the insides. The scene makes Miranda think of Sammi and black markets and men who take and demand payment. Even though she's terrified, she backtracks to the police station to report the crimes—only to find that the police station is empty and no one answers her frantic knocks.

While Miranda's mood often varies from entry to entry, it's rare for her to reflect on what she's written before. In this entry she does, and she's furious that she dared to hope that her life could still feel structured or normal in any way. She scorns how optimistic she sounded just a few days before, especially in the face of the stark reality of what remains of her town and their resources.



It takes awhile for Miranda to apply the people's panic from the meeting to her own situation, but when she does, Laura already has a solution.



Laura granting her children the autonomy to make their own school decisions is her way of recognizing the ways they've grown and matured.



Every aspect of this chapter adds to Miranda's disorientation. She can no longer depend on seasons, time of day, or even the belief that the world outside her small town continues to exist. With the rapid loss of so many fundamental "truths," it's understandable that Miranda is feeling bleak about the continued existence of civilization as a whole.



For the first time in this novel, the threat is not from the natural world, but from other people. This shift is terrifying for Miranda—that she'd feel unsafe in her hometown in the middle of the day. Her expectation that the police still exist and would be willing or able to save the day is a demonstration of how, while her perspective has shifted with regards to many survival aspects of her life, she's still struggling to make sense of day-to-day changes.



Since Miranda already knows from Peter that the fire station has been closed, she doesn't try there, but instead heads to the hospital. Instead of being able to walk in to see Peter like last time, she is stopped by armed security guards at the door. They tell her they're privately hired to keep people from stealing food, drugs, and supplies, and that they assume the police have moved south with their families. They also advise her that it's no longer safe for females to be unaccompanied in public—that someday she "might go out for a bike ride and never come home." Miranda is terrified the whole way home. She doesn't know what she's going to do about getting to and from school, and doesn't say anything to Laura about her fears.

August 30. Laura asks Jonny and Miranda for their decisions about school. Jonny has chosen to be homeschooled, but—to Laura's exasperation—the question causes Miranda to burst into tears and run from the room. Matt comes to find her and she explains to him about the men in town and how she doesn't want to tell Laura and cause her more worry. Matt agrees with the guards that Laura and Miranda shouldn't go out alone, and shares that he also feels trapped since he can't go back to college—and doesn't know if there's even a college to go back to. He also volunteers to walk Miranda to and from the school. Her first day will be tomorrow.

CHAPTER 11

The students who show up at Maple Hill Elementary are divided into groups by age: K-5th grade, 6th-8th, and 9th-12th. The high school group, including Miranda, has thirty-one people, but she isn't friends with any of them. They wait in child-sized furniture until their old principal arrives. Mrs. Sanchez tells them that there aren't many high schoolers at either location, and even fewer teachers—at Maple Hill there is only her and one English teacher, with an additional four at the high school. They've decided that all the high school classes need to be held at the high school. The students all react poorly to this news—one panics about getting into college without AP courses, and others say it's not safe to walk through town, contributing rumors about missing girls. Specifically, they talk about how a classmate, Michelle Schmidt, was snatched during the day while walking home from church.

The students in the room slowly begin to give up and leave, but Miranda is enjoying just spending time with kids her own age—even if the talk is about depressing topics like whether or not there's still an FBI, or a point to learning, or even a future. The bleakness of it all hits Miranda and she leaves, stopping at the office to collect homeschooling textbooks for herself and Jonny.

Rather than reassure her, the security guards become the cause of one more fear for Miranda. They also represent another impediment between her and help, as she is no longer able to walk into the hospital and see Peter. She realizes that soon she may not be able to go anywhere on her own, which is part of why she doesn't tell Laura, but the bigger reason is that Miranda is still trying to make sense of what has happened to her and the guards' advice. Her perceptions of the world are changing so rapidly, it's hard for her to keep up.



Laura assumes that Miranda's emotional outburst is just her being dramatic, and it shows maturity on Miranda's part not to correct her because she'd rather take the hit to her reputation than cause her mother to worry more. Miranda also makes the wise decision to attend school at the elementary school because the route to it is safer than the one through town to the high school—where she'd much rather be.



After having worked with Matt to figure out a plan so she could safely get to and from Maple Hill Elementary, Miranda learns the rules have changed again and she'll have to go through town to the high school instead. While female students react to the safety concerns, a male classmate is dismayed about AP courses—either a very privileged prerogative, or he's in denial. Miranda's fears about the dangers of girls being alone in town are confirmed when she hears that a classmate was abducted in broad daylight.



Much like the final days of school in the spring, the value of this day is the exchange of information with other students. Miranda enjoys talking to people who are not family—until she realizes that it's all complaints and pessimism, and she doesn't need more of that.



As Miranda is leaving the office, she notices boxes of school supplies. Seeing piles of notepads and blue books and pencils, she quickly empties her book bag and fills it with these because her journal is full. Miranda is so excited about the prospect of more places to journal that she even sticks extra notebooks under her shirt and fills her pockets with pens. Back home she tells Laura her decision to homeschool and promises to work hard. She then escapes to her room, which feels like “the only safe place left.”

September 1-5. Miranda writes three short entries, each of which gives an excuse for why she’s not going to start schoolwork that day.

At school Miranda enjoyed being around other people, but once home she craves the privacy of her own room. Her joyous reaction to having pilfered a stash of blue books is related to the release Miranda finds in journaling her experiences. Much like her room, journals are Miranda’s “safe place” to record her feelings.



These brief and humorous entries are the author’s way of showing that even in a post-apocalyptic world, we still procrastinate unpleasant tasks.



CHAPTER 12

September 6. Miranda wakes up on a 23-degree day and lazes around in bed all morning, pretending to study history. The heat isn’t working and they haven’t built a fire, so she has to wear multiple layers to stay warm. She’s bored, cold, and hungry, and since her mom is taking a nap, Miranda decides on a whim to go examine the **pantry**—something Laura has asked them not to do. Instead, Laura leaves food out for them on the counter. Miranda assumes Laura doesn’t want them to be anxious about their supplies, but actually, upon seeing the boxes and cans in the pantry, Miranda is reassured. This feeling quickly morphs to anger when she decides that they have plenty of supplies and have been depriving themselves for no reason.

In the **pantry**, Miranda spots the bag of chocolate chips she’d impulsively thrown in her cart during the shopping spree the day after the moon collision. She emotionally rips the bag open and begins to pour them in her mouth—eating so fast she can’t even taste them. Laura catches her, and they have a big argument during which Miranda spills the chips. Laura makes her pick them up and eat every single one in the bag, even when Miranda begs to stop or says she feels sick. When Miranda is done, Laura tells her that the chocolate is the equivalent of three days’ worth of food, so she can’t join the family at a meal again until Thursday. Laura also says that she’d been saving the chips for Matt’s upcoming birthday. After Laura’s lecture, Miranda slinks off to her room feeling sick to her stomach and sick with guilt.

Miranda knows she shouldn’t be going into the pantry—that’s why she waits until Laura is asleep. Her feelings about the pantry are similar to the Greek myth of Pandora with her box—only Miranda fears that if she opens the pantry door, she’ll forever lose hope. When, instead, she finds the shelves aren’t bare, her anger is a reaction to every skipped meal and dire warning she’s received.



Miranda’s anger manifests in her decision to eat the chocolate chips. She feels like they’re hers, since she is the one who put them in the cart, but it’s also obvious she knows her actions are wrong, because she panics when Laura catches her. Laura’s punishment—making Miranda eat every chocolate chip, despite the fact that she feels ill, is designed to make Miranda see the depth of her selfishness. Laura makes the punishment more emotional by waiting until the chips are gone to reveal that she’d been saving them for Matt’s birthday.



September 7-14. Miranda continues to focus on food. First Jonny asks her why she's not allowed to eat, and she lies and tells him she ate a can of string beans. Then, once her punishment is over, she recounts each meal—including the one to celebrate Matt's birthday. While there aren't chocolate chip cookies, Mrs. Nesbitt made oatmeal raisin. Miranda eats one so Laura won't be mad at her, but feels guilty doing so and thinks Megan is right to call her a sinner.

With few other distractions for her thoughts, Miranda fixates on food. Her feelings about foods are distorted by her guilt about the chocolate chips, so that even once she has Laura's permission to rejoin them at meals, Miranda feels reluctant to eat and doesn't enjoy the cookies Mrs. Nesbitt makes for Matt's birthday.



September 16. They receive two letters from Hal. Currently Hal and Lisa are living in a primitive refugee camp on the border of Kansas, because the state has restrictions about letting people in—especially if they're pregnant, and Lisa is showing. Matt translates some of the nuance of the letter for Jonny and Miranda—Hal is looking for the right person to bribe to let them pass through Kansas on their way to Colorado. The letters aren't written in Hal's typically optimistic style, and this haunts Miranda, who fears that if they don't hear from him again, they'll never know if they're safe.

Traditional familial roles are inverted—Miranda wants to still be the child and have her father worry about her, versus the other way around. She's used to her dad being optimistic, and the lack of that cheer in the letter upsets her. Yet again, Matt is being forced into a paternal role and filling the gaps of Hal's absence by comforting Miranda and Jonny.



September 17. Miranda returns from collecting kindling to find Laura crying in the kitchen because she's thinking of the man with the pregnant wife, who she helped to shop back on May 19. Miranda realizes that sometimes it's easier to cry over strangers than the people you know and love.

Laura's displaced emotions and sadness about the man from the grocery store highlight one of the hardest parts of their new reality—the fact that they'll never have information or closure about so many things.



CHAPTER 13

September 18. Laura trips and sprains her ankle. Since Matt and Jonny are at Mrs. Nesbitt's house, Miranda has to go by herself to the hospital to find Peter. But the guards won't let her in to see Peter, and they get pleasure out of Miranda's tears and begging. She stands outside and begs people to bring Peter a message for her, but they ignore her and make her feel like a beggar. When Miranda gets too tired and weak to stand, she sits down on the frozen ground, which causes the guards to harass her about loitering. Finally Matt shows up looking for her—and the guard knows him and allows Matt inside to get Peter. Thankfully Peter has a car, because Miranda is too weak to bike home.

Miranda's notions about how the world works are challenged when she can't get help for her injured mother. Rather than offering protective advice, like the last hospital guards she encountered, these get sadistic pleasure from denying her request to see Peter and watching her strength fail as she stands in the cold for hours. Miranda feels helpless that all her effort is for nothing—it's Matt's connections that get results, not anything she's done.



At their house, Peter diagnoses Laura with a bad sprain and wraps her ankle. Since she can't climb stairs, they move her mattress to the sunroom. Peter gives everyone surgical masks to wear outside, since the air quality is causing lots of asthma. Laura invites him to stay for supper, but he has to go back to the hospital, where he's working 18-hour days to make up for the lack of staff. He promises to come back and check on Laura's ankle.

Peter often acts as a harbinger of bad news, so it's a relief that Laura's ankle isn't more badly injured, and his restrictions sound manageable. Though, it wouldn't be a visit from Peter if he didn't have word of some kind of new trouble—in this case it's the uptick in asthma and decrease in air quality.



Miranda and her brothers talk about how they'll divide up the extra work while Laura is recuperating. Miranda realizes that she needs to step up her behavior, and no more whining or arguing—but she also feels really scared and helpless about how fragile they are and how tenuous their situation is. She slips away to record her feelings in her journal and cry—thinking of Hal and Lisa, the baby, and Grandma—how they might be hurt and she might never know. Then she dries her eyes and goes downstairs to pretend everything is fine.

September 19. Miranda keeps her mom company in the sunroom, and Laura thanks her for the way she went to get help and tells her how brave she's been these past few months. They have a tender moment, and then Laura asks Miranda to cut off her hair because she hates that she can't wash it often. Miranda hacks it off, and Laura offers to return the favor or braid Miranda's hair in cornrows, but Miranda declines. They laugh together and Miranda remembers just how much she loves her mom.

September 20. Miranda goes to visit Mrs. Nesbitt—who has repeatedly turned down offers to move in with the Evanses because she wants to die in her own home, something she expects will happen soon. Mrs. Nesbitt hasn't heard from her son since the **moon** collision, which can't be a good sign. Miranda vows to go back the next day and make sure Mrs. Nesbitt has company and to reassure Laura that she is okay.

September 23. Peter stops by to check Laura's ankle, which is slowly healing. Miranda tells Matt how much older Peter looks now, and Matt responds that all of his patients are dying and his ex-wife and daughters have both died. Miranda wonders how she'll feel when people she loves die.

September 26-29. On a trip to the library, Miranda sees Michelle Schmidt—the girl that had supposedly been abducted. It makes Miranda wonder how many of the rumors they hear are true and leaves her feeling optimistic. She hasn't stopped worrying—but feels like she's gotten used to a state of worry and is enjoying time with her family despite all that's going on. She's settled into a routine of doing housework, hand-washing clothes, visiting Mrs. Nesbitt, and spending time in the sunroom with her family, playing poker and enjoying each other's company. Laura even trusts Miranda to go into the **pantry** and choose dinners—and while their supplies are decreasing, Miranda feels confident they have enough to last.

Miranda's growing maturity is demonstrated in the way she chooses to shoulder Laura's chores without complaint. Her conscientious decision to not argue or let others know how scared and upset she feels are all signs that she recognizes how tasked her family is and her desire to not be a further burden.



This lighthearted scene is a nice contrast to the bleakness of the family's typical life. The way Laura and Miranda tease each other is a clear indication of how close their relationship is, and even though they argue and have been tested by the events of the past several months, how much they love each other.



Mrs. Nesbitt's calm attitude about her own mortality is hard for Miranda to hear. Knowing that their time together is short, she vows to make the most of it, both because of her own affection for Mrs. Nesbitt, but also as a surrogate for her mother, who is unable to make the trip.



Much of this chapter has been about the physical changes in characters—Laura's haircut, Mrs. Nesbitt's slow decline, and now Peter's dramatic aging. All of these leave Miranda worrying about what's to come.



The abduction of Michelle Schmidt had become a cautionary tale for Miranda, one more piece of evidence for why she should never go out alone. When she sees Michelle, then, it makes her stop and reconsider the constant state of fear that has become so normalized. The new tasks that have been added to her days because of Laura's injuries have also helped Miranda's outlook, as has the time they're spending together.



Peter checks on Laura and says that her ankle is beginning to mend and she can be more mobile. Matt brings down a typewriter for her because she wants to record old family stories of a time before electricity. Miranda is amused by the thought that their current life harkens back to that time—and states that family is more important than electricity.

Laura begins work on her legacy—stories about her ancestors who built and lived in the house, much the way they're living there now. Laura is finding hope in looking to the past instead of looking to the future, and writing for herself instead of a publisher.



CHAPTER 14

October 2. Miranda turns on the stove and it's no longer working—their gas has run out. Now the Evanses have to heat food and boil water on the woodstove. This means cutting back from once weekly showers to none at all, and reducing the amount of clothes washing. Miranda is upset by this, not because of the work, but because it's an indication that things are getting worse again. This belief is confirmed when she, Jonny, and Matt go into town and Mrs. Hotchkiss tells them that the library is closing for good.

After the hopeful tones of the last chapter, this one opens more ominously. It's not that things had been getting better, but there had been a kind of status quo for a while, and Miranda had normalized to those conditions. Any change for the worse—even if they have provisions for it, like the wood stove—impact her equilibrium and make her fearful.



Mrs. Hotchkiss makes a comment about the temperature already being below freezing for two weeks in October, meaning that none of them will survive the winter in Pennsylvania. This causes the Evans siblings to bicker about whether or not their family should stay or leave. Jonny wants to go find Hal, even though they don't know where he is. Matt asserts that they have the greatest chance of surviving where they are—reminding them that the disasters are *global*, not local. He also reveals that Hal must've used black market connections to get the supplies and fuel he's had so far: a fact that stuns his siblings and make Miranda feel naïve. Matt tells them they just have to wait for things to get better—Miranda doesn't believe it, but thinks as long as they stick together, it'll be all right.

Miranda loses a bit of her naivety when Matt reveals that Hal had used black market connections to gain supplies. Miranda equates this to the looting men with guns who had scared her in town, or forty-year-old George who used his connections to persuade Sammi to go away with him. Jonny, however, is heartened by this and wants to go join Hal. Matt is the voice of reason between Miranda's emotionality and Jonny's impulsivity. Despite this, Miranda is not reassured.



October 6. Miranda is having a hard time remembering what rain and sunlight are like. With the mail becoming increasingly unreliable, they have no idea what is happening in the larger world, but since the **ash cloud** is worsening, they think volcanoes must still be erupting. Matt and Jonny continue to chop wood, despite the worsening air quality. And Miranda is grateful that the ash cloud blocks her view of the **moon**.

Increasingly, the fundamental beliefs that Miranda has about normal life are being stripped away: her memories of rain and snow, reliable mail, news of the larger world. Despite all this, she still remembers what the moon should look like, and is grateful she's not constantly faced with the view of it now.



October 10-13. The Evanses all decide to cut off their hair because it's becoming harder and harder to keep clean. Matt and Laura argue over whether or not to use the last of the heating oil. He wins, and they will use the oil, but they also decide to close off the upstairs and move all the mattresses down into the kitchen and living room. Miranda mourns the loss of her bedroom, but doesn't feel like she has a place to cry about it.

For Miranda, having a place of her own where she could go and write in her journal was incredibly important. The loss of her room is the loss of much of her remaining privacy. She spends so much of her day in close quarters with her family that this small change hurts—even though it means the physical comfort of heat.



October 14-15. Matt tells Miranda that Megan and Mrs. Wayne's names appear on the 'dead list' posted in town. Miranda struggles to process this, especially since Megan had wanted to die, so she goes to see Reverend Marshall to seek out more information. He tells her that Mrs. Wayne hung herself after they'd buried Megan, and that he won't allow her to be interred beside her daughter. She is horrified to see that while his congregants are all starving, Reverend Marshall hasn't lost weight. Miranda calls him out on his hypocrisy and is escorted from the church.

Miranda feels no comfort in the news that Megan achieved the death she had sought as a sign of her piety. Miranda has long been suspicious of Reverend Marshall and the type of religion he preaches. His judgmental comments about Mrs. Wayne and the way he's profited at the expense of his congregants confirm this. The fact that Miranda calls him on his behavior is a testament to how strongly she loathes him—perhaps comparing his false appearance of sacrifice to the very real sacrifices Miranda and her family members have been making.



Miranda bikes over to the Waynes' house, but finds that it's been looted. She sits in Megan's empty room and reminisces about their friendship. When she goes home, she sits in the **pantry** until it's time for supper. She's not hungry, but eats anyway to prove that unlike Megan, she's going to endure and survive this—especially so that her mom doesn't have to go through what Mrs. Wayne did with losing a child.

Megan's death is a galvanizing event for Miranda. It not only strengthens her resolve to survive, but it also makes her truly consider the impact her death would have on her mother.



October 18-21. Miranda dreams of Megan and hell. She wakes up in the kitchen beside Laura and misses the privacy of her bedroom. Matt volunteers to work at the Post Office on Friday so they don't have to close. When Laura applauds the purpose this gives his life, Jonny and Miranda scoff. Laura tells them "do whatever you want. I'm past caring." This sentiment terrifies Miranda.

Miranda is used to her mother badgering her to work on schoolwork and being a source of optimism. Thus Laura's disinterest in how her children are spending their time disquiets Miranda, who feels like it's an indication her mother has given up on them.



October 24. The temperature reaches 29 degrees and Miranda decides to go skating on **Miller's Pond**. She arrives to see that world-famous figure skater Brandon Erlich is also there, and the two of them skate together. He encourages her and praises her—even when she gets winded after just a few minutes because of the air quality. They discuss his Olympic dreams, her fandom, and their new reality. He asks her to come skate with him again tomorrow.

Throughout the narrative, Miller's Pond has been a place of escape for Miranda. This entry takes that idea to a new (and almost fantastical) level, providing not only space away from her family and a place to skate, but also Miranda's hero/celebrity crush as a skating partner. Even now, though, nothing is perfect. She tires quickly, and they can't escape talking about their bleak realities.



CHAPTER 15

October 26. Laura has sprained her ankle again, preventing Miranda from going back to the **Miller's Pond**. Miranda can't decide if she truly saw and skated with Brandon Erlich, or if she made it up. She's kept busy taking care of Laura, who they've moved to the sunroom so she's out of the way of foot traffic in the kitchen. And even though it means waking up every few hours to go check if the woodstove in the sunroom has burned out, Miranda continues to sleep in the kitchen because it affords her a tiny amount of privacy.

Despite having plans with Brandon, Miranda doesn't seem upset at being prevented from skating. Since Miranda isn't sure if the day with Brandon truly happened—or if it was, presumably, a hallucination caused by stress and hunger—it feels safer for her to not go back and chance the disappointment. Plus, Miranda always thrives on being needed, and she is definitely needed at home.



October 28. Peter stops by and confirms that Laura's ankle is re-sprained. Miranda reflects on the first time Laura sprained it and how it wasn't such a big deal. Now, just a few weeks later, things are much worse.

Laura's first ankle sprain only feels like less big of deal in comparison—at the time it felt terrifying. Miranda's perspective is constantly evolving with their situation.



October 29. During a visit to Mrs. Nesbitt's house, Mrs. Nesbitt tells Miranda that it's better that Laura can't come visit so that she's not the one to find her dead. Mrs. Nesbitt then talks matter-of-factly about what she'd like Miranda to do when she dies—do whatever is easiest with her body and take all the useable supplies from her house, and she bequeaths gifts of jewelry and paintings to each member of the Evans family. She tells Miranda she's already burned all of her letters and diaries, but they may have her photo albums. Miranda reflects that she may never get the chance to grow old like Mrs. Nesbitt, but at whatever age she faces death, she hopes she does so with similar courage.

Mrs. Nesbitt's calm and thoughtful approach to death is a revelation to Miranda. Unlike Megan's fanatical religious desire for death, Mrs. Nesbitt's unsentimental plan feels admirable. Miranda is especially intrigued by the way that Mrs. Nesbitt orchestrated her own legacy—deciding that she's not okay with her diaries and letters being read, but that she wants the Evanses to have her photo albums. In this way, Mrs. Nesbitt is in control of the narrative of her life she leaves behind.



November 1. Matt arranges to buy black market plywood, which he uses to cover the windows of the sunroom and the kitchen for extra insulation. Miranda is furious because he didn't ask, and this blocks out what little natural light was coming in, making her world feel that much smaller.

Miranda is bothered by Matt's actions because they seem to close in her life, but also because he turned to the same armed looters that had scared her in town—and Miranda wants Matt to be above moral reproach.



November 5. The Evanses' well runs dry. They'll have to rely on bottled water, or cutting ice from **Miller's Pond** and boiling it. And without water, there's no reason to use up the heating oil to protect the pipes, so Matt decides they're all moving into the sunroom. Miranda protests, but is overruled. They'll live, eat, sleep, and cook in the sunroom, only venturing into the house to get firewood or food from the **pantry**. Laura gives an impassioned speech about them needing to survive and Miranda begs for and receives one last night of sleeping in the house before her total loss of privacy.

Miranda is less upset about the loss of water than the loss of her privacy. Throughout the narrative, Miranda has demonstrated how much she craves having a space of her own, and though she knew this moment was coming, she doesn't feel ready. While the others can't be excited about this move either, Miranda is so caught up in her own feelings that she doesn't notice or record anyone else's.



CHAPTER 16

November 7. Miranda finds Mrs. Nesbitt dead when she goes to visit her. Miranda kisses her cheek, then follows the directions Mrs. Nesbitt had given her about taking her supplies. While ransacking the house, she finds a box of old baseball cards to put aside for Jonny for Christmas and chocolates for Laura. More importantly, she finds food, medicine, and others supplies. She realizes that Mrs. Nesbitt has likely been going hungry to save supplies for them, and that Mrs. Nesbitt's well hasn't run dry. Miranda fills a bag with supplies and walks home through the woods to avoid being seen—and stops to give Matt the news.

Miranda models her attitude about Mrs. Nesbitt's death on the pragmatic attitude her elderly neighbor had shown in facing it. She is very methodical as she inventories the house for useful items. The moment her stoicism cracks is when she realizes that even before her death, Mrs. Nesbitt must have been sacrificing her own comfort in order to save supplies for the Evanses.



Matt, Jonny, and Miranda make a plan on how to transport the supplies from Mrs. Nesbitt's house to their own. They need to do so quickly before anyone else catches on and begins raiding. Matt drives Laura's van over, while Miranda fills up Mrs. Nesbitt's car and drives that to her house, despite never having driven before. Jonny takes firewood in a wheelbarrow.

While Matt, Jonny, and Miranda loved Mrs. Nesbitt, they have to be focused on the task at hand—figuring out how to transport those supplies before others notice and begin to ransack her house. The noise of cars is so unusual that they know it will spark notice from any remaining neighbors.



While Jonny and Matt bring Mrs. Nesbitt's body to the hospital, Laura and Miranda reminisce about Mrs. Nesbitt and the special items she had bequeathed to each of them. Then they get to work organizing supplies.

Even honoring the dead and sharing memories are done on a timetable. Later there will be time to reminiscence, but first they have to complete survival-related tasks.



November 8-10. Miranda finds Laura crying in the **pantry** over Mrs. Nesbitt. Peter also stops by to comfort her.

The pantry is one of the few places in the house that is still private—it's also off limits to the Evans children.



November 11-15. Miranda thinks it's funny that the Post Office is closed for Veteran's day, but is less amused when she weighs herself and realizes she's down to 96 pounds. She doesn't think any of them are in danger of starving yet, but realizes they're unlikely to get any more supplies and need to be careful.

Miranda rarely has the chance or privacy to consider her reflection or how her body has changed. There is no room for vanity in their quest to survive, and her self-assessment is detached and clinical.



November 18-26. On two consecutive Fridays Matt brings exciting things home from the post office. The first is letter from Hal. Unfortunately, it's an older letter than the latest they've received. While it doesn't contain new information, it still feels hopeful to know that mail is at least being delivered. Miranda debates whether she should miss the people who are alive more than those who are dead—but they're all gone from her life, so it doesn't make much difference.

Miranda's feelings about Hal's letter are complex. She's excited to receive it, disappointed to discover it's old, and hopeful that there will be more news, but ultimately conflicted by the fact that she doesn't know if she'll hear from him again, and that he feels absent in the same way as those she knows are dead.



On the second Friday, Matt brings home Peter and a small black market chicken to celebrate Thanksgiving, which had been the day before when they hadn't been feeling thankful, but now Miranda is almost delirious with the joy of having had real food.

Miranda has no moral objections to Matt getting something from the black market when that thing is food. She doesn't want to conjecture what he traded for it though.



The next day even Laura's spirits seem revived and for the first time in months, she hassles her kids about their neglected schoolwork. They each choose a subject to study, and though Miranda grumbles, she's grateful to have something 'normal' to do.

Laura's attitude toward schoolwork is a reflection of how hopeful she's feeling about her children's chances of survival. When she's despairing, it becomes unimportant to her.



November 30-December 1. Miranda avoids schoolwork by going for a walk to Mrs. Nesbitt's—where, despite it having been ransacked, she finds a set of colored pencils to give Matt for Christmas—and by going skating at **Miller's Pond**. Miranda enjoys the time alone, and questions whether or not Brandon Erlich was ever really there. She notices the lake surface has been hacked for drinking water. They still have water at home, thanks to Mrs. Nesbitt's well, but she, Matt, and Laura are down to one meal a day.

Miranda is so desperate for privacy that she's grateful that Brandon Erlich isn't at the pond—though she's not sure he was ever really there. Yet even on her precious walk alone she's thinking of her family, as evidenced by her search for a Christmas present for Matt.



CHAPTER 17

December 2. It begins to snow. At first this is novel—dingy gray snow when they haven't had precipitation in months—and positive, since they can collect it for drinking water. But quickly they become concerned about Matt, who is volunteering at the post office. As the day passes and snow accumulates, Laura forbids Jonny and Miranda from going to look for him, saying "I can't risk losing two of you!" Finally, once it's dark out, Jonny and Miranda decide to take turns standing at the end of their driveway with an oil lamp. When it's Miranda's turn, the wind blows her over and the lamp extinguishes. As she's sitting in the snow panicking, Matt arrives. Even after they're all safe inside and in dry clothing, Miranda finds the storm eerie.

The author creates a dramatic sense of suspense in this section by spinning out the story with lots of details. We know that Miranda must have made it safely back in the house because she's recording the story in her diary, but the stark emotion and sensory details within her narrative build tension and create a panicked, fearful tone about whether Matt will make it home or Miranda herself will find her way back to the house in the blinding snow.



December 3-4. It continues to snow through the next day, resulting in more than four feet of accumulation. This is great for supplying water, but not great for the roof or how isolated their house is. Matt comments that their bikes will be useless and there aren't enough cars to clear the roads, but he did see a pair of cross country skis in the garage. Laura worries about what would happen if they fall ill and needed help. They don't expect the snow to melt before April or May. Working with pots and pans, they shovel out the garage door so they can open it to get to the real shovels and ladder. Despite Laura's fear, Matt and Jonny carefully clear the snow off the roof of the sunroom while Laura and Miranda melt snow to wash laundry on the woodstove.

Snow brings the blessing of water, but also the dangers of potential roof collapse and being trapped inside. Despite this, it's a change in routine during a time where their days have become monotonous and they've been lacking in purpose.



December 5-7. After being snowed in for a week, Miranda is getting antsy. Matt attempts to use the skis to get into town, but isn't strong enough, so has to turn back. Miranda worries about how claustrophobic they'll all feel if this continues.

Miranda's concerns are valid. Until this point they've been able to go outside—even just for quick walks or Matt's trips to town. Without those, it's four grown people sharing one room at all times.



December 10-13. Jonny finally notices that the others don't eat lunch. He says if they're only eating one meal, he should too, but everyone protests. Miranda thinks that maybe Matt would be the best choice if only one of them were to survive, but knows that Matt would never agree to that. She thinks that she'd give up food entirely if it would help Jonny live. Miranda realizes how much bleaker things have gotten in the past few months and reflects that she should appreciate these as "good times" in comparison to what's to come. Jonny asks Miranda if she minds that he's eating when she's not, and she reassures him, saying that if he survives when they do not, it will have made their lives worthwhile. Matt decides that instead of being hungry all day and then eating dinner before bed, they should eat breakfast and be hungry while they're asleep. This small change makes life better.

December 16-21. Jonny asks Miranda if she's still keeping a journal, and why. She doesn't have an answer for why—but says it's not for him to read. He scoffs—he has enough problems, he says, and has no need to read what she's written. Miranda also doesn't re-read her writing, because each day she thinks that things are bad, but then each new day is worse. She realizes that Lisa's due date has past and records her imaginings about the baby, who she's pretending is a girl named Rachel. While Miranda has no guarantee that Lisa and Hal and the baby are even alive, she dreams of a beautiful future where things are better and they're reunited, there's plenty of food, she bumps into Dan and they get married. She realizes that her family must each have their own fantasy—the only place they have any time apart in their claustrophobic lives.

CHAPTER 18

December 24. On Christmas Eve the Evanses hang ornaments on their clothesline and Miranda is excited to give her family the presents she has hidden away. They hear singing, and go outside to see that a group of neighbors has gathered in the street to carol. They haven't seen these people in months. And though it is a special moment of hopefulness and community, Miranda doesn't expect to see them again soon—everyone is too focused on surviving to socialize.

A few months back, Miranda was having fierce internal battles over the fact that Jonny was being given more food than her. Despite this, when he asks her if he should eat less too, she emphatically disagrees. This change in perspective highlights how Miranda has matured and become less self-focused. She's also started to come to terms with the fact that she may not make it, but if she doesn't survive, she sees her sacrifices as having a purpose through Jonny's life.



While Miranda may not be able to articulate her reasons for continuing to keep her journal, it is apparent to the reader that it's an essential part of her day—it's the place she processes her emotions and tries to make sense of her days. Looking back or lingering in the past—at the way things used to be and the things she used to have—isn't productive, even when the past is only a few days ago. Looking ahead and daydreaming about meeting her half-sister and getting married, however, are a way of maintaining hope.



Miranda finds great comfort in this moment of community. It is such a relief to know that they are not alone—since the last time they gathered as a neighborhood was for the asteroid's collision. Despite this, she knows promises to see each other again are false. No one wants to reveal the contents of their pantries or woodpiles.



December 25. Despite all the hardships, Miranda records that this is “the best Christmas ever.” They feast on broth, pasta, canned clams, and string beans, with Jell-O for dessert. And Miranda isn’t the only one with surprise presents. She receives a new diary and a watch. She is delighted about both of these gifts—even more so when she realizes the watch had been Mrs. Nesbitt’s. One of Laura’s presents is a photo of her as a child sitting in the sunroom with her parents. Miranda compares this meager Christmas with the lavish one after her parents’ divorce, and despite the paltry gifts, she decides that this one was better.

Like a moralistic classic Christmas story, the lesson Miranda learns from their holiday without proper food, decorations, or presents is that it’s better to spend the time celebrating with those you love than to receive an excess of expensive gifts.



December 27-31. The Evanses keep busy with their homeschooling, playing Scrabble, and holding sing-alongs. They hang up the paintings Mrs. Nesbitt left them and some of Matt’s sketches. Miranda reflects on the year that’s ending with gratitude. While she doesn’t know if there’s a future, she’s grateful for her family and the moments she’s gotten to share with them. She makes a New Year’s resolution to appreciate every moment she has left.

Miranda’s resolution reflects her growing awareness that her remaining time may be finite. Though she can appreciate how much they’ve overcome and how long they’ve survived, she knows that unless things change, they won’t last in a holding pattern without new supplies. Instead, she’ll focus on the now.



January 1. Matt’s New Year’s resolution is for him, Miranda, and Jonny to become proficient on the cross country skis. They try and all tire out very quickly, but the prospect of building endurance and being able to travel to **Miller’s Pond** and skate cheers Miranda.

While they all know that the true purpose behind learning to ski is that the last survivor would have a means of escape, Miranda is able to pretend this isn’t so and focus on the pond.



January 3-7. Miranda, Jonny, and Matt practice on the skis. This skill feels even more important after their neighbor, Mr. Mortensen, shows up unexpectedly begging for medicine because his wife is very sick. Laura reluctantly shares aspirin, but all of the Evanses are worried and Miranda feels reluctant to let her mom out of her sight, even to go ski. They know that if anyone gets sick, the skis are their only means of getting to the hospital, and they all watch each other cautiously for signs of illness. When it snows again, skiing becomes harder and Miranda’s spirits sink. She worries they won’t make it and wishes for the optimism of Christmas.

Knowing how catastrophic illness could be in their weakened state, without access to health care or proper nutrition, the characters all feel enormous anxiety. For Miranda this manifests as both knowing she needs to improve on skis and not wanting to let Laura out of her sight. These goals are at odds with each other, however, making her even more anxious when performing either task.



CHAPTER 19

January 10. Laura wakes up ill and soon Jonny is screaming in delirium too. Matt says he’ll go get help, but then realizes he can barely stand. Miranda vows to go get Peter, and she skis to the hospital. But once she gets there, she learns that it’s deserted. The only people left are two nurses who are too scared to go home and learn what has happened to their own families. Every one else—including Peter—has died from the flu.

Their fears about illness manifest in a way that places all the responsibility on Miranda. Knowing that she failed to get help during her last trip to the hospital, she nevertheless tries again—only to learn that there’s no one left to help them. The death of Peter, who’d felt like a safety net for all things medical, is an especially hard blow.



The nurses tell Miranda that there's nothing that they or she can do to help. She can try to keep her sick family members hydrated and pray—but it's really up to chance whether they live or die. Miranda rejects this and skis home in tears, telling Matt "We're on our own," before he collapses. She records her thoughts in case she falls ill and dies, and ends the entry by praying not to be the last one left alive.

January 11-12. Miranda nurses her mother and brothers with very little change. Matt seems the least sick and she's hopeful he'll survive, but Laura and Jonny are too weak to even swallow without assistance. Miranda is exhausted from caring for them, but doesn't feel ill. There are snow- and ice-storms outside.

January 13-14. Miranda wakes up and realizes the sunroom is full of smoke and everyone is choking. With Matt's help she drags Laura and Jonny into the kitchen, then ventures down in the basement to turn off the furnace. She realizes that ice or snow must've fallen down the woodstove's chimney and that she needs to dry out the stove. She does this by staying up all night and burning textbooks, though she doesn't think Matt has the strength to help her move Laura and Jonny back out into the sunroom.

January 15-16. Laura's fever breaks and by the end of the day she's coherent enough to order Miranda to eat, something Miranda has been too distracted to do for days. Laura wants Peter to come look at Jonny, but Miranda doesn't have the heart to tell her Peter has died, so she says it's too late to travel to the hospital. The following day Jonny has started to recover.

January 17-26. Miranda continues to struggle with everyone's chores. At times she resents this. Laura and Jonny are starting to be strong enough to take a few steps, but Miranda worries that Matt damaged his heart when he helped her drag them from the smoky sunroom. Miranda feeds them three meals a day to help them recover, but knows this is a risky use of their dwindling supplies. When Miranda finally agrees to let them help her, she sleeps for two days straight, then wakes to clear the snow off the sunroom's roof, marveling that her whole family survived the flu.

January 27. Laura tells Miranda how proud she is of the way Miranda took care of them all while they were sick. Laura asks if she remembers seeing Peter, or if she was delusional, and Miranda reveals that Peter has died. She tries to offer comfort by saying he died heroically, to which Laura responds, "I wish we didn't need so damn many heroes."

Miranda can't accept the nurses' advice—because if so, there's nothing she can do to save her family, and knowing she's helpless adds to her panic. Miranda oscillates between terror that she'll fall ill too and dread that she'll be the only one to survive.



The weather in this scene adds an extra layer of tension. The conditions are worsening, trapping Miranda in the house. Not that there is anywhere she could go for help, but it makes her exhausting job of caring for three ill people by herself feel extra confining.



The author drags out this scene with many small sensory details—the temperature in the frozen basement beneath Miranda's bare feet, the smell of the smoke, the sounds of the coughs. By drawing out these details and extending the scene, she is able to create a sense of Miranda's perseverance against exhausting conditions.



Miranda's relief about Laura's recovery is transformed into concern about how to tell her about Peter's death. Laura has so little that is hers—her whole life has become about her kids' survival, and Miranda knows her relationship with Peter was a rare bright spot.



At this moment Miranda's personal growth is nearly complete. No longer is she the girl from the book's beginning who obsessed about petty things, picked arguments with her mom, or needed instruction to take action. Miranda is now effectively running the family and making life-or-death decisions that affect everyone. While she may question herself, she doesn't hesitate to care for them.



Despite the ways she's matured, Miranda is still ill-prepared to tell Laura about Peter's death or provide comfort. There's irony in the fact that a conversation that began with Laura praising Miranda for heroics ends with her wishing for the need for fewer heroes.



January 30-February 4. While they're recovering, Laura has the siblings resume schoolwork. Matt remains too weak to even climb a flight of stairs. This upsets him and he worries that he won't ever be strong again, and that he'll be a burden. Miranda reminds him that he hurt himself saving Laura and Jonny, and that he's her hero regardless of his strength.

Matt continues in the almost sacrificial role he's played throughout the story. Now it's his strength—the thing the family had depended on for so long—that he's given up in order to save Laura and Jonny.



February 7. Laura's birthday is celebrated by small tokens of love, like Jonny letting her beat him at chess and Matt walking to and from the stairs. She declares it her best birthday yet.

This journal entry is another example of the characters appreciating their time together, because they realize it's limited.



CHAPTER 20

February 9-18. Miranda and Jonny continue to practice on the skis. Matt works on rebuilding his strength. Laura finds tulip bulbs and roasts them for a special dinner. Miranda thinks of Dan briefly on Valentine's Day. Miranda makes a trip to **Miller's Pond** to skate and has a wonderful time.

Miranda continues to seek out and find small moments of joy. These are often related to escaping for a few moments of privacy, or retreating into daydreams.



February 20-22. Jonny has cut down to one meal a day like the rest of his family. Miranda thinks he peeked in the **pantry** and saw how little food remains. Laura has practically stopped eating. They are startled by four minutes of electricity in the middle of the night, and the next night they try the radio and find that it's broadcasting again. The messages are similar to months ago—lists of the dead and the president promising that things will be better soon. Despite the lack of change, Miranda is heartened to hear that life has continued and they aren't alone.

The rest of the Evanses have spent so long trying to protect Jonny and not restrict his meals the way they have their own. Now, however, they finally have to admit defeat and allow him to make this sacrifice, but Miranda knows that it's not going to be enough—not long term.



February 25-March 3. Miranda chronicles how much electricity they have each day. It varies from none at all to twelve minutes. The phones still don't work, but other than Hal, no one would be calling. After the novelty wears off, Miranda wishes that instead of electricity returning, they had more supplies. She worries that Laura is willing to burn up batteries on the radio because she doesn't think they'll be alive to need them.

While electricity is novel, it quickly ceases to be hopeful, and with its inconsistency, it's often not even helpful. It's less exciting to hear the news say that things will be better soon when you feel that you won't be alive to see them.



March 4-6. Everyone is getting weaker due to lack of food. Miranda looks in the **pantry** and wishes she hadn't. Laura asks her to skip eating a few days a week and Miranda agrees, despite the fact that Matt and Jonny will continue to eat one meal daily. Miranda starts to imagine her ideal order for them to die in: Mom, herself, then Matt—so that Jonny has a chance of surviving.

In the beginning of the novel, Miranda was constantly creating hierarchies of goodness or worthiness. Now she's creating similar lists, but they contain the ideal order of their deaths. Instead of being focused on herself, they're focused on what's best for her whole family.



March 7-16. Miranda resents all the blank pages in her diary that she won't get to fill. Laura faints from hunger because she hasn't eaten for days. Miranda realizes that there are less than ten days of food in the **pantry** if they're all eating, and two weeks if just Matt and Jonny do. Miranda wonders if it's easier to stop eating than just have a few sips of soup, and if she'll be alive to celebrate her birthday the next week. She no longer recognizes her appearance in the mirror, but dreams about a pizza parlor—and thinks that it's heaven.

Miranda's diary, with its blank pages, represents the future she was supposed to have, but she has resigned herself to not surviving. Instead of fighting against this inevitability, she's starting to calculate the cost of her very existence, which continues to deplete her family's supplies.



CHAPTER 21

March 17. Miranda announces that she's going into town. She knows that she doesn't have the strength to make it there and back, but wants to spare Laura from having to see her die. She tells them she's going to check for a letter from Hal about Lisa's baby, but privately tells Matt the truth. She tells them all good-bye and begins the long walk through the deep snow. Miranda makes it to town, and it seems deserted. None of the houses have smoke and there are frozen carcasses of dead pets. The post office is closed—and even though this was just an excuse for her trip, seeing this deflates Miranda, who sinks down on the street—but then she sees a flutter of **yellow paper**. Miranda hasn't seen the color in so long, and she chases it down the dingy gray street.

Much like Mrs. Nesbitt faced her death with calm and logic, Miranda makes a plan that will minimize pain to the rest of her family. She tells Matt so that he won't expend energy searching for her, but knows it's kinder to let Laura and Jonny believe her story. As she walks, she repeats that fiction to herself—until she starts to believe it, and is confronted with the truth in the form of a closed post office. In the midst of such detachment and despair, the yellow paper on the gray street symbolizes hope—and like a magpie attracted to something shiny, Miranda must have it.



The yellow flyer reads "City Hall Open Fridays 2-4pm." Miranda makes her way there and is surprised to find it open. Inside Mayor Ford and Tom Danworth introduce themselves and ask if Miranda is there to sign up for food deliveries. They joke about her skinniness and tell her that food distribution began four weeks ago, one bag per person, and that if she's willing to wait until they're done, they'll drive her home and make sure she's telling the truth about her family to get them all signed up.

Miranda scarcely dares to believe the flyer. If the post office wasn't open, why would City Hall be? Despite this, it's worth the effort, since she can't make it home and has nowhere else to go. The sight of the glib men who joke about her skinniness is just enough to tip the scene out of too idyllic, but Miranda still isn't sure it's real.



Miranda insists on carrying a bag of food herself, and when they arrive Mr. Danworth promises to come back on Monday with more of the supplies they're owed. Laura sobs, Matt shakes Mr. Danworth's hand, and Jonny pokes through the bag as Mr. Danworth reassures them that since they've made it this far, they'll survive. After he leaves, Jonny begs to have dinner, "Just this once," and Laura agrees. As they eat, the electricity comes on and it feels like paradise.

The reaction of each member of the Evans family to the food is in character—Miranda wants the credit, Laura is emotional, Matt is appreciative, and Jonny is curious.



March 18-19. The electricity stays on long enough for them do a load of laundry and wash their hair. It then comes on later and they cook supper in the microwave, which feels luxurious, but even with the new supplies, Laura has started to worry about food again and whether deliveries will be as unreliable as the electricity.

While the others are still jubilant, Laura remains cautious. If the food delivery isn't reliable, then their starvation still isn't prevented, just prolonged.



March 20. It is Miranda's seventeenth birthday, and Mr. Danworth shows up with more supplies, promising to return the following week. Miranda reflects on how much she doesn't know: the fate of Hal, Lisa, the baby, Grandma, Sammi, and Dan, but also on the blessings she has: Matt is climbing more stairs, they have firewood and water, and the temperature has been above zero for a week. She decides to celebrate the day and her family and their love. She also decides why she's writing in her journal—for herself, to document what she's going through now, so that when it's over she can look back at a record of what she endured.

Miranda has worried so much about whether or not she has a future, and the delivery of so many supplies on her birthday is a symbol that she does. In this moment Miranda embraces the unknown, but also appreciates what she has. More importantly, she decides to look forward, to state that her journal is her legacy not for people to read after she's dead, but for herself, for after this ordeal is over and she's survived.





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