

PLOT SUMMARY OF THE STONE ANGEL

Ninety-year-old Hagar Shipley, who lives with her son Marvin and his wife, Doris, reminisces about her childhood in Manawaka, a fictional town in western Canada. She grew up in a large house with a stern father, her brothers, Matt and Daniel, and the housekeeper, Auntie Doll. She recalls the day Daniel fell through the ice while skating. He was rescued but developed a fever and died.

The narrative returns to the present. Over tea, Marvin says he is considering selling the house and buying something smaller. Hagar insists that the house is hers. Marvin reminds her that she made it out to him when he took over her business affairs, but Hagar still regards it as her own.

Hagar is visited by the minister, Mr. Troy, but she has little patience with him. The narrative then returns to Hagar's youth. She recalls being sent to an academy for young ladies in Toronto. She hoped to become a schoolteacher, but her father insisted that she keep the accounts at his store. Hagar met Brampton Shipley at a dance, and married him against her father's wishes.

Back in the present, Hagar discovers that Marvin and Doris are planning to move her to a nursing home. Later, she reminisces again, this time about the death of her brother Matt, and how her father cut her out of his will.

After another episode in the present, in which it is clear that Hagar is forgetful and confused, she gazes at the photographs in her room. This prompts more reminiscence, of shopping trips with her husband, in which Bram's boorish behaviour made her Marvin and Doris try to persuade Hagar that she will receive better care at the nursing home. Hagar wonders whether they will be able to force her to move.

In the doctor's office, Hagar recalls how Bram boasted about how successful he would be. He planned to switch from farming to raising horses, but he was not a good businessman and nothing ever came of his plans.

When Hagar sees Dr. Corby, she loathes the physical examination. After supper, Marvin and Doris take her for a drive in the country, but Hagar is alarmed when she discovers they are visiting the nursing home. While there, Hagar finds fault with everything. She meets two residents of the home, Miss Tyrwhitt, whom she dislikes, and Mrs. Steiner, to whom she takes a liking. She also recalls the birth of her first son, Marvin, and for a moment thinks a man in the summer house is her late husband.

As she waits in the hospital for x-rays to be taken, Hagar returns to memories of her marriage. While her life was filled with household chores, her husband would often prefer to spend time duck-shooting or drinking.

The doctor recommends that Hagar be admitted to the nursing home, but she still resists. She recalls her second son, John, who used to get into fights at school and engaged in dangerous games with his friends. She recalls how, after watching Bram create an embarrassing scene in the store formerly owned by her father, she decided to leave him.

Back in the present, Marvin tells Hagar she must move into the nursing home in a week's time.

Hagar makes plans to flee before she can be taken to the home. Then the narrative returns to her decision to leave Bram, who had no objections to her departure.

Putting her plan of escape into action, Hagar cashes her old-age pension check, buys food supplies and takes a bus to a quiet place called Shadow Point. Once in the countryside she finds an abandoned building, near to the fish cannery, long since closed. It is in a valley near the sea. She inspects it with approval. Her new abode leads into another flashback, to her memories of her life after she left Bram, when she worked as a housekeeper for an elderly man, Mr. Oatley.

Hagar wakes in her makeshift home. She shivers in the cold as she lies on a mildewed, damp mattress.

The narrative goes back to Hagar's life during the Great Depression of the 1930s. John found it hard to find work, and returned to Manawaka to live with his father. Two years later, Bram became sick, and Hagar returned to live at the family home. Drought and economic depression

had hit the region, and Hagar found their house in poor condition. Bram was so sick he did not recognize her, and it was John who cared for his father until his death. 103

Hagar wakes in the morning feeling sore. She drinks from a pail of rain water, and then walks down a path to the sea. She encounters two children playing, but when they see her they run away. She walks through a wooded area and rests on a fallen tree trunk, where she recalls her life with John after Bram died. Their relationship was a quarrelsome one. Eventually, when Hagar returned to Mr. Oatley's house, John refused to accompany her. Returning the following year, Hagar learned that John planned to marry Arlene Simmons. Hagar disapproved of the match.

The chapter ends in the present, with Hagar walking to the cannery.

Hagar explores the cannery and settles herself on some old boxes. A seagull flies around the room; Hagar throws a box at the bird, injuring it. At night, a man enters the cannery. He is Murray Lees, who says he has come to the cannery for some peace and quiet. As they drink the bottle of wine Lees has brought with him, Lees tells Hagar about how his son was killed in a fire at the family home.

The narrative returns to the past. Hagar relates how John and Arlene were killed when John bet his friend he could drive a truck across a railroad bridge. They were hit by a freight train. Hagar returned to Mr. Oatley's house.

In the cannery, Lees has been listening to her story and commiserates with her. They spend the night together, leaning against boxes. Lees comforts Hagar when she wakes up in the night sick.

In the morning, Hagar finds that Lees has gone. He returns with Marvin and Doris, who express relief that Hagar is safe. Suffering from exposure, Hagar is taken to the hospital where she lies in a ward of about thirty women, complaining about the lack of privacy. At first Hagar dislikes the patients in the adjoining beds, but later finds she has something in common with Elva Jardine, who comes from a town close to Manawaka. They exchange news of people they knew. When Marvin and Doris visit, they tell Hagar that Tina, her granddaughter, is getting married. Hagar pulls a sapphire ring from her finger, and asks Doris to give it to Tina.

Hagar is moved into a semi-private room, which she shares with Sandra Wong, a sixteen-year-old girl who is to have her appendix out. Hagar tries to calm Sandra's fears. Doris visits with Mr. Troy. The clergyman sings a hymn, and the words make Hagar realize that her

unhappiness in life has been caused by her pride. Later, she receives a visit from her grandson. In the night, Sandra is in pain. Hagar fetches a bedpan for her, struggling the few steps to the bathroom and back. A nurse arrives and is horrified to find Hagar out of bed, but when the nurse leaves, Hagar and Sandra laugh together about the incident. Marvin visits, and Hagar tells him he has always been good to her. Finally, Hagar, close to death, holds a glass of water in her hands and is ready to drink. The novel ends at this point.