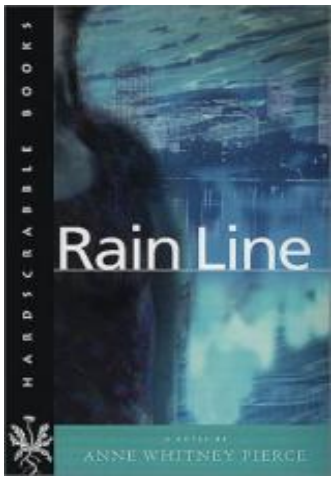
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Rain Line

by Anne Whitney Pierce



About the Book

A beautifully written novel of grief, recovery, and love.

"To this day, I wonder if Danny knew he was going to die."

Following a drunken celebration of a college hockey victory, a car goes off a bridge and plunges into a river. The passenger, a young woman, escapes; the driver, her boyfriend, drowns. In a clear, compelling voice, Leo Baye, the narrator of Anne Whitney Pierce's powerful first novel, traces the aftermath of a tragedy -- struggling with her guilt over her own survival and slowly coming to terms with the less-than-perfect nature of the relationship she has lost.

Though a star of the Harvard hockey team, Danny McPhee had remained at heart a Cambridge "townie" whose Irish-American family ran a fish market. That sense of alienation was perhaps his strongest connection with Leo, another Cambridge native whose dysfunctional family has crossed a line from "shabby genteel" to outright eccentric. Having fled when she was seventeen, Leo is now driven back to the crumbling home of her childhood by confusion and depression, but once there, she must fight to keep from being absorbed again by the familiar routines of her family's precarious existence.

Danny's memory continues to exert a powerful influence on Leo, even as she begins to resume her normal life as a student at the Beacon Conservatory, working on her thesis and practicing the music that will be her audition piece. She forces herself to go through the motions of daily life, taking the bus and playing her violin, and she begins to reconsider her relationship with Danny, a frustrated young man who was constantly on the verge of violence. Her efforts to reconstruct her life, however, are dealt a severe setback when she learns that she is pregnant with Danny's child.

Anne Whitney Pierce offers a moving, insightful tale of a young woman's efforts to extract meaning from tragedy and rebuild her life on her own terms. **Rain Line** is a profound, ultimately optimistic novel of grief and recovery.

Discussion Guide

1. The novel begins with an attention-grabbing opening line: "To this day I wonder if Danny knew he was going to die." How do you respond to this as an opening? What expectations about the novel does it establish? What does it suggest about the eventual arc of the story?

2. What do you think about Danny's behavior during the accident? Did he want to die? What does Leo think?

3. Most people, if they think of Cambridge at all, think of it as the home of Harvard and MIT. How is this story informed and colored by its setting in a very different kind of Cambridge? How important is the setting to the story?

4. Danny is a student at an elite school who comes from a working class background. Leo comes from a family that formerly had money but has fallen on hard times. What role does class play in this novel? In what ways does it correlate or fail to correlate with education?

5. Many of the characters in this book exhibit a special skill or talent: Leo plays the violin, Danny is a hockey star, Kilroy plays chess, Leo's father is an inventor, her mother a singer. How are the characters revealed through their particular enthusiasms? How do their activities shape your perception of them?

6. Many of these characters feel they lack control over their own lives. To what extent is this true and to what extent is it rooted in their own perceptions? What are some of their strategies for compensating for this lack (or perceived lack) of control? At first glance Kilroy, obsessed with a game of strategy and domination, might seem to fall into this category; to what extent does he or does he not?

7. Do Leo's obstetrician, Dr. Early, and her music teacher, Ettore, serve as surrogate parents for her? What do they offer her that her own parents cannot?

8. What do you think about Leo's decision to re-establish contact with Danny's family? Is it selfish on her part? What are her expectations of this move? How are they met or not met? How does it affect the McPhees?

9. What is the function of the relationship between Lydia and Po in the story? How does their easy rapport contrast with the relationships of the other characters? How does it contrast with their own difficulties communicating with others?

10. According to Danny, Kilroy "knows something big." What do you think this big thing is that Kilroy knows? Is it the lack of this knowledge that makes Danny unhappy? By the end of the book, does Leo also know this "big thing"?

Author Bio

Anne Whitney Pierce is the author of a book of short stories, **Galaxy Girls: Wonder Women** (1994), winner of the Willa Cather Fiction Prize. She lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Critical Praise

"Pierce has a fine eye and ear for the two societies . . . there is guilt and coping aplenty here, but it is firmly handled."

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