

Airhead #1: Airhead Study Guide

Airhead #1: Airhead by Meg Cabot

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Contents

[Airhead #1: Airhead Study Guide.....1](#)

[Contents.....2](#)

[Plot Summary.....3](#)

[Chapters 1 - 6:.....4](#)

[Chapters 7 - 12:.....8](#)

[Chapters 13 - 18.....11](#)

[Chapters 19 - 23:.....15](#)

[Chapters 24 & 25:.....18](#)

[Characters.....20](#)

[Objects/Places.....23](#)

[Themes.....25](#)

[Style.....27](#)

[Quotes.....29](#)

[Topics for Discussion.....30](#)

Plot Summary

Emerson Watts is a not-so-normal 16 year old who attends Tribeca Alternative high School in New York. Emerson and her sister, Frida, are the daughters of professors. Em is a feminist, her sister is not. Em and her best friend, Christopher, like playing video games and making fun of the popular kids at school. Kids like Whitney Robertson, a member of what Em and Christopher refer to as the Walking Dead. Em's sister is into popular culture and fashion magazines. Em and Christopher take Frida to the opening of a Stark Megastore so she can see her current celebrity crush, British musician Gabriel Luna. As Frida fawns over the celebrities, Em and Christopher spend time making fun of them. Protesters called the ELF disrupt the store's opening, complaining that the megastore is forcing out local businesses. Their disruption causes a giant TV screen to crush Em; just as the face of Stark, model Nikki Howard, passes out.

Em wakes up to find that her brain has been transplanted into Nikki's body. Em has been declared dead, and she is now responsible for fulfilling Nikki's Stark contractual obligations. If Em doesn't do as she is told, her parents will be fined 2 million dollars and possibly brought up on criminal charges. Em goes home to Nikki's place and her roommate, Lulu, a celebrity's daughter who is not the brightest girl in town. Em finds herself stuck in a romantic triangle between Nikki's ex, Brandon Stark, and musician Gabriel Luna. Em tries to take Nikki's place, but can't forget her old life and Christopher. She arranges to attend her old school, hoping to be close to him again.

Em learns that Nikki's life isn't as easy and meaningless as she once thought. She also learns that Nikki wasn't a true friend to Lulu, who is an excellent friend to Em. Em desperately wants to make a connection with Christopher, especially after she realizes he is devastated by Em's death. The story ends with Em and Lulu going to spend time with Em's family. The book's subplots are left open for the next installment of the book.



Chapters 1 - 6:

Chapters 1 - 6: Summary

CHAPTER 1

Emerson, Em, Watts is barely awake as she gets ready to give a two minute oral persuasive speech in Mr. Watts' class. She looks over to see Whitney Roberson gazing at herself in the mirror. The two girls mouth insults as Em gets up to give her presentation. Em's speech is on how education has failed girls and how women don't design video games even though they play them. No one is listening to her, even the teacher. Em even begins to talk about nonsense and no one notices. Em's friend Christopher is sleeping in the back of the room. Whitney is the next to speak. She has the class's attention because she is slim, beautiful and popular. She persuades the class that society doesn't make women feel bad about themselves - that obesity does. She tells the class people can be beautiful, like her, with the right attitude, working out, dieting and money. Everyone loves her speech. Em is horrified and tries to argue. Whitney tells her she is jealous. Em is relieved to know that at least Christopher wasn't taken in by Whitney's beauty.

CHAPTER 2

Em is being forced by her mother to take her sister to the Stark Megastore grand opening. Fourteen year old Frida Watts (named after Frida Kahlo) was invited by her friends to spend the weekend in the Hamptons, but doesn't want to miss the opportunity to meet Gabriel Luna, a singer, at the store opening. Em and her mom are not happy about the megastore opening as it put local businesses out of business. Em is watching helplessly as her sister turns into one of the school's personality-less zombies, ala Whitney. Frida is horrified that Em will be taking her to the store, she is afraid Em will embarrass her. Frida accuses Em of being mean to boys, with the exception of Christopher whom Frida refers to as Em's boyfriend. Em and Christopher are best friends. Em would like to be more, but she is certain that Christopher doesn't see her as a girl. Em is a tomboy. She likes to read and has no girl friends. She has tried to be girly, but her attempts failed. Em isn't looking forward to taking her sister to the store opening. Em tells their mother that Frida is planning to try out for the cheerleading squad. Their feminist mother isn't happy to hear this. Em's family lives in Manhattan, NY, but her father spends the week in New Haven, CT, because of work. As a result he is only home on the weekends and tends to let his daughters do whatever they want.

CHAPTER 3

Em and Christopher take Frida to the Megastore to get Gabriel Luna's autograph. Em is surprised to find she likes Gabriel's music and even thinks he is hot. While standing in line to get Gabriel's autograph for Frida, Em and Christopher talk about Nikki Howard. She is the spokesmodel for the company and there are large TVs depicting the model in



various positions. Frida tells Em and Christopher that Gabriel likes a girl with brains. The two laugh at this idea. Frida gets upset with Em and tells her that Nikki is a feminist, how else could she have build such a large empire so young. She also tells Em that Em isn't really a feminist if she can hate Nikki for her success. Frida tells Em she should try harder to look better and not be a dork. Em is embarrassed until Christopher expresses that he thinks Em looks fine. Nikki Howard appears at the store in front of them. She is holding a little white dog and is flanked by her friends. One of whom is the daughter of a director, Lulu Collins. Em tells Christopher that Nikki's friends are famous for being famous. Frida gets out of line to get Nikki's autograph just as they arrive at the table for Gabriel's autograph. Em notices he is really attractive. Gabriel, like Christopher, is staring at Nikki. As Frida approaches Nikki, a protester of the megastore (from the organization E.L.F) fires a paint gun at a TV over Nikki's head. The TV falls, Nikki is pushed out of the way, but Frida is in danger. Em pushes Frida out of the way, but the TV comes down on Em and her world goes dark.

CHAPTER 4

Em is inside her head thinking to herself. She can hear her mother begging her to open her eyes, she sounds like she is crying. Em's eyelids and mouth won't open, she feels as if she has turned to stone. Em thinks about how Christopher's hair looks under water and wonders how she can be under water if she isn't wet. She is tired and goes back to sleep.

Em wakes up to find herself in a hospital bed hooked to tubes and wires. She doesn't know why she is there, but she is still really tired. She is also thirsty and calls for her dad. Her dad looks as if he hasn't shaved and showered in a long time. He jumps up and runs for a doctor when he hears Em's voice. While he is gone, she falls back into a deep sleep.

Em wakes again to find her mother, father and two doctors sitting at her bedside. When Em speaks, her mother bursts into uncontrollable tears. The doctors check Em's eyes and ask her some questions. Em's voice sounds really strange and she keeps asking the doctors why, but no one will answer her. She wonders how much school she has missed and worries about the amount of homework she will have from her AP class. The doctor tells her that her parents are just surprised that she is doing so well. Em falls back asleep. When she wakes again it is night and there is a gorgeous guy sitting next to her bed.

CHAPTER 5

The boy at her bedside is Gabriel Luna. He gives her roses and asks how she is feeling. Em is certain Gabriel is a hallucination. She thinks he would be perfect if he was Christopher, but she hasn't seen Christopher yet and she is a little annoyed. Gabriel asks if she remembers him from the Stark Megastore opening a month ago. Em does and Gabriel seems surprised. He tells her he had to sneak into her room and turns to leave when Em tells him she is tired. Em asks him to stay and, thinking he is just a hallucination, touches his hand. She never gets to touch Christopher's hand because he



always moves away. Em notices her nails look nice and thinks her sister must have glued on press on nails while she was sleeping. She also notices that her hands look slimmer. She asks Gabriel to sing her to sleep and he tells her he didn't think she arrived at the store opening in time to hear his song. He sings and Em drifts off to sleep. She hears someone asking Gabriel how he got into her room. Em falls asleep in awe that Gabriel Luna is in her room.

Em wakes again to find Lulu Collins and Nikki Howards dog, Cosy, next to her in the hospital. Lulu tells Em that it was impossible to find out where she was. She tells Em that Kelly wouldn't give her any information. She also says that Gabriel sent tons of roses to the loft they share and that Brandon is getting upset. Lulu keeps calling Em by the name Nikki. Em realizes that she knows Lulu from her sister Frida's gossip magazines. She can't believe that the dog, Cosy, loves her so much. Em also realizes that Gabriel must not have been a hallucination like she first assumed. Em tells Lulu that she isn't Nikki and that Lulu has made a mistake. Lulu thinks Nikki has amnesia and that is why she has been hidden away from everyone. Lulu freaks out and begins to shake Em, begging her to remember her life. The machines go off and Lulu is physically hauled out of the room by an orderly. Em's mom and the doctor come into the room and the doctor puts something into Em's IV to make her sleep. Em's mom asks the doctor if they should tell Em what is going on. The doctor says that it isn't the time.

CHAPTER 6

Em wakes to find Frida in her room. Frida looks terrible and she seems to be nervous around Em. Em tells Frida she is thirsty and begins to ask Frida some questions, but she is interrupted by her parents and Dr. Holcombe. The doctor sends Frida to get Em some water. Em tries to drink the water, but can't get the cup to her mouth correctly. She asks everyone what is going on and wonders why they all look at her like they don't know her. The doctor explains that Em was hurt at the store opening over a month ago. Em freaks out and wants her homework and to speak with Christopher. The group tells her that they had to do an unusual procedure to save her life. Em has been in a medically induced coma and is just now being allowed to come out of it. Em says she feels fine, but when she tries to drink she realizes that more is wrong than she understands. The doctor tells Em that recovery will be long and that they weren't certain the procedure would work. She is still hooked up to machines and must stay hooked up. Frida is sent to get Em's favorite dessert, chocolate chip cookies, ice cream, and hot fudge. Em would normally be thrilled to eat the concoction, but now all the sugar makes her feel sick. The dessert seems unappetizing. She eats a bite for the sake of the doctor and her parents. Everyone is excited that she has eaten and are beginning to treat her more normally. Em wonders what the doctor did to her. She admits she doesn't feel like herself.

Chapters 1 - 6: Analysis

CHAPTER 1



Emerson is a smart girl whose professor parents named her after a poet. She is a feminist and doesn't understand how some girls, like her classmates and her sister, seem to instinctively know how to pick out and put on make-up or be feminine. Emerson takes offense at Whitney's position that all girls can look like Nikki Howard, a super model, if they try hard enough. Em feels that no one pays attention to her speech because she isn't like Whitney.

CHAPTER 2

Frida is 14 and is well on her way to becoming an airhead. She is a bright girl who also attends Tribeca Alternative High School with Em. Like Em she is also on academic scholarship. Frida is enthralled with the idea of meeting celebrities. Em confesses to liking Christopher, but she also admits he doesn't like her as more than a friend. Em's family background is discussed in this chapter. Her parents are academics and her mother is a feminist. Her father feels a lot of guilt for being gone during the week and only home on the weekends.

CHAPTER 3

Frida isn't kind about the way Em looks. Em would like to look like Nikki, but she knows she never will and she is relatively comfortable with herself. Even though it is possible she hides her envy of the model by using sarcasm and feminism. This chapter finishes the introduction of characters and background.

CHAPTER 4

Em is in the hospital and it is clear that whatever has happened to her is serious. It is also clear that something is not quite right with her recovery. The author puts a lot of emphasis on the fact that Em's voice sounds unfamiliar and high-pitched to her own ears.

CHAPTER 5

This chapter develops the plot for the rest of the book. There is some mystery about Em's condition and some foreshadowing about what is about to happen. The chapter builds suspense and intrigue.

CHAPTER 6

The doctor finally tells Em that she has undergone a new medical procedure. It is still unclear what that was. The reader knows that Em was near fatally crushed by the TV monitor. The reader also knows that Nikki Howard passed out at the same time that the TV came down. It is apparent that everyone but Em knows she has changed in appearance. But only her family and the doctor know that she is now in Nikki's body. However, that has not yet been stated clearly by the author.



Chapters 7 - 12:

Chapters 7 - 12: Summary

CHAPTER 7

The nurse and doctor come in the middle of the night to take Em for testing. The nurse tells her not to wake her mother as her mother is really tired. Em is on a gurney in the elevator when she realizes she is being kidnapped from the hospital by Lulu and Nikki Howard's boyfriend, Brandon Stark. Em fights them as they put her in a limo and order the driver to take her to Nikki Howard's home. Em is convinced they are nuts and tries to tell them she is Emerson Watts, not Nikki Howard. They look at her with pity. Brandon is heartbroken that she doesn't remember him. Lulu and Brandon are convinced that Nikki, Em, has been brainwashed. Lulu knows that Scientologists are behind it. As the limo stops at their destination Em asks the driver why the others think she is Nikki. He tells her it is because she is, and then he turns the rear view mirror so she can see herself. Em screams at what she sees.

CHAPTER 8

Brandon and Lulu haul Em into the apartment building where Lulu and Nikki share a flat. She is dressed in a hospital gown, but the elevator operator doesn't seem to notice. Nikki and Lulu's apartment is luxurious, modern and all white. Lulu goes to fix Em food and Brandon kisses her. Em has never been kissed before and can't decide if she is enjoying the kiss because of Nikki's body or because of her own feelings. She doesn't understand why everyone doesn't kiss all the time. Em begins to wish that Christopher would have kissed her, as it is her first kiss, and wonders if it would be even better than this kiss. She breaks off the kiss and Brandon is hurt. He tells her they have been dating on and off for 2 yrs. Lulu comes in with clothes and Em goes into Nikki's room to change. There is nothing in Nikki's room but clothes, shoes, make up, a Stark brand TV and Stark brand pink lap top. None of the identifying things that hang on Em's walls at home. Em looks at her new hair and body in the mirror and can't believe what is happening. She can't believe her parents and the doctors were hiding all of this from her.

CHAPTER 9

Lulu brings food for Em and she is surprised how happy she is to have fish and miso soup, stuff she would never have eaten before. Lulu takes out Nikki's modeling book hoping to spark her memory. Brandon wants to know if she was brainwashed by Al Qaeda; Lulu tells him it must be Scientology. Em explains again that she isn't Nikki. Brandon remembers that Em Watts was the name of the girl crushed by the TV at the store opening. Em remembers what happened now and is told by Lulu that Nikki passed out and was cradled by Gabriel, but wouldn't wake up. Since then Nikki has been missing and her publicist, Kelly, and Brandon's dad would only say that she was



recuperating from hypoglycemia and would be home soon. Lulu and Brandon didn't buy it. Brandon searched his father's office for info on the company's missing model and found out where she was. Lulu tells them that she thinks Em and Nikki changed bodies and souls when the accident happened. They just need to find Em's body and switch them back. Brandon tells them they can't do that because he read that Em is dead.

CHAPTER 10

Lulu and Brandon discuss the spirit switch and wonder where Nikki's spirit is. They propose calling Kelly, whom Lulu blames this all on. Em remembers a science show she once watched with Christopher. It was about brain transplants. A living brain transplanted into a brain dead donor's body. Em is convinced she is the recipient of the first successful attempt to do this. She doesn't tell Lulu and Brandon, but asks them to give her a little time to think about things before they tell anyone where she is and what they know.

CHAPTER 11

Em wakes up to find they all fell asleep in the living room watching MTV. She is awakened by the intercom phone. Justin Bay, Lulu's boyfriend and star of the "Journeyquest" movies, is downstairs. He insists on talking to Nikki. Em finds out that Nikki and Justin have been seeing each other behind Lulu and Brandon's backs. Justin kisses Em and tells her she wanted to be with him when they were in Paris. Em is shocked and confused. She also realizes that Nikki's body reacts to Justin more than she did to Brandon. Em tells him to stop and Justin is pulled off of Em by Gabriel who has come to check on her. He went to the hospital and realized she was gone, the hospital is going crazy. Gabriel tells Justin that the paparazzi are on its way. Em tells Gabriel she wants to go back to the hospital. Gabriel takes her on his Vespa because she is too famous to go on the subway.

CHAPTER 12

Em scoops up Cosy and gets on the bike, her arms around Gabriel. As they cruise through the city she thinks about how lucky she is to be alive. Gabriel escorts her into the hospital and tells her he thinks she is in the hospital receiving treatment for drugs and alcohol. He is glad that she decided to return to continue treatment. He tells her she needs to take better care of herself and that he remembers how bad she looked when she passed out at the store. Em is completely embarrassed that he thinks she, Nikki, is a mess. They arrive on the elevator and are immediately swarmed by doctors and Em's family. Frida is excited to escort Gabriel to the cafeteria so that Em can talk to the others. Em's mom asks why she has Nikki Howard's dog. Em tells her it all started when her brain was put into Nikki's body. Everyone freezes. Em goes with Dr. Holcombe to talk about what happened.

Chapters 7 - 12: Analysis

CHAPTER 7



Lulu and Brandon genuinely care for their friend, Nikki. Lulu, in her shallow hyper way, is worried that her friend is being brainwashed. Brandon is hurt that his girlfriend doesn't remember him. Em thinks they are crazy until she sees herself in the mirror. When Em sees Brandon she feels like she knows him, but she attributes her reaction to having seen him in magazines.

CHAPTER 8

Em has never been kissed and in all of the confusion still thinks about Christopher. Nikki's home seems to be very sterile and there is nothing in her room that gives the reader a clue about Nikki's personality.

CHAPTER 9

Brandon and Lulu are so silly that they immediately believe that it is possible Em and Nikki have changed bodies. Em can't believe they are so dumb. Lulu and Brandon tell Em that Nikki doesn't have family. She is legally emancipated from her parents and she never discusses them. Lulu thinks they must be poor and live in a trailer.

CHAPTER 10

Em realizes that her brain is in the body of a world famous super model. She begins to understand the complications that will go along with this and wishes she was in the body of the Incredible Hulk instead, it might be easier.

CHAPTER 11

Em is glad to be called downstairs and plans to escape back to her family and the hospital. She is horrified to find that Nikki lets her dog relieve itself on the marble entryway and that Nikki has the doorman clean up the mess. She begins to dislike Nikki when she discovers that Nikki has been betraying her best friend and her boyfriend.

CHAPTER 12

Gabriel is a genuinely nice person who is concerned for Nikki's health. He is also attracted to her. Em finds herself attracted to Gabriel as well. He isn't the airheaded celebrity she thought he would be. Em realizes that Nikki's reputation is now her reputation as well. She is ready to confront the doctors and her family to find out what is going on.



Chapters 13 - 18.

Chapters 13 - 18. Summary

CHAPTER 13

Em is sitting between her parents in Dr. Holcombe's office. Dr. Higgins is there as is Mr. Phillips, a representative of Stark Enterprises. Em is not the first person to have received a brain transplant. The others in the past have chosen to stay out of the public eye because of the ethical issues involved. Mr. Phillips tells Em that her parents made some agreements on her behalf before the surgery. The doctors tell her that Nikki had a previously unknown brain defect that killed her at the same time as Em. Em's parents agreed that Em, as Nikki, would honor all of the former model's contractual obligations and that if she didn't, they would have to pay back 2 million dollars, legal fees, and possibly face criminal prosecution. Em is horrified. Mr. Phillips tells her that she, Em, has been declared legally dead by the state of New York. She is now, in fact, Nikki Howard.

CHAPTER 14

Em's parents tell her she doesn't have to become Nikki if she doesn't want to, they will find a way to come up with the money. Em can't let them do that. She is waiting for more tests to be run before she is released from the hospital and back into Nikki's life. Em isn't worried about modeling, she is worried about Stark Enterprises. She noticed someone was tracking Nikki's movements on her laptop and Em suspects it is Stark. Mr. Phillips tells her that the story is she - Nikki - passed out and has amnesia. Em realizes Lulu and Justin will believe this because they believe anything. The amnesia will cover Em if she doesn't recognize things from Nikki's life. Frida returns from taking Gabriel to the cafeteria. She is upset that Em gets to be Nikki and then she tells Em how hard it was thinking that her sister was gone. Em is told by her parents that she can continue at her school if she wants, and she wants too. Her family tells her that Christopher was very upset at her funeral, and that they had her body cremated. Em thinks she can return to school as Nikki and keep an eye on Christopher and Frida.

CHAPTER 15

Em is in her hospital room alone when Lulu comes in disguised as a nurse. Em tries to tell her that she is really Nikki with amnesia, but Lulu isn't convinced. She looks at Em's nails and tells her that she knows she isn't really Nikki because Nikki would never destroy her nails or be intentionally unattractive in any way. Em tells Nikki the truth about the brain transplant, but Lulu doesn't believe her. She refuses to believe Stark would replace Nikki with someone who knows so little about fashion and modeling. Lulu agrees not to tell anyone, even Brandon, that Em is now Nikki. Em tries to tell Lulu that she and Nikki have been being spied on through their computers by Stark Enterprises,



but Lulu is chased out by a nurse before Em can explain fully. Em realizes that even though Lulu is an airhead she is also a very nice, loving person.

CHAPTER 16

Em is getting ready to leave the hospital. She is amazed that Nikki's body is in such top physical shape, as her old body was not. She is still getting used to the fact that Nikki's body gets sick when she eats processed and junk foods. Em never like fish and vegetables but Nikki's body loves them. Frida come in and tells Em she made the cheerleading squad. Em yells at her sister and thinks she is becoming a part of the Walking Dead at school. Frida is angry and hurt, she doesn't understand why her mother and sister can't just accept her the way she is. Em says good-bye to her parents and promises to meet for dinner on Friday. Em thinks to herself that she will not call them on her Stark issued phone. She is met by Nikki's publicist, Kelly, who has no idea she has been transplanted and believes she has amnesia. They are chased by paparazzi as they get into a limo and head to a photo shoot with Robert Stark, head of Stark Enterprises. Brandon is in the car and is looking angry. Em finally breaks down and cries. She can't be Nikki, she doesn't know how. Kelly is rattling off book deals, magazine covers, and talk shows she will be on. Kelly notices her nails and calls for a nail tech to meet them at Stark. Em tells Kelly she can't do this. Kelly tells her she better get over it, that there are more than 30 people whose jobs depend on her and her business. Em wonders how she could have been so arrogant as to think Nikki's job wasn't important.

CHAPTER 17

Em is whisked away for hair and make up. Her make up artist, nail artist, and hairdresser are being snarky to her as they berate her for the condition her looks are in. When her hairdresser feels the stitches in the back of her head all of them change their demeanor and become kinder and more gentle with her. Em changes into a flowing white dress and is posed with Brandon and his father while the photographer takes test shots. She is uncomfortable and has no idea how to pose. She sees her agent again, a middle aged woman named Rebecca Lowell, and is snapped at by Brandon who is upset she was on Gabriel's bike.

CHAPTER 18

During the photo shoot Brandon asks if he can drop by later. Em doesn't think it's a good idea considering how turned on Nikki's body gets when a boy kisses her. She tells him she is going to go to bed early because she has school in the morning. Brandon offends her by telling her he thought school was just a publicity stunt. Em tries to talk to Mr. Stark after the shoot, telling him she thinks Nikki's family and friends should know she is dead and that her computer is being monitored. Mr. Stark doesn't acknowledge her and walks away while she is talking. Brandon isn't surprised as his dad doesn't talk to either him or the "talent." Rebecca is supportive of Nikki's return to school and gives her back her purse which Nikki dropped the day of the accident. Em looks through the



purse in the limo ride home and is excited that Nikki is wealthy. She arrives home to find a surprise party for her return. She is hugged tightly by Lulu's boyfriend, Justin.

Chapters 13 - 18. Analysis

CHAPTER 13

Em feels let down by her parents. She is angry and confused. She feels guilt that she is inside another person's body. Em has now been faced with the fact that her former life is over and she will never be able to be Em again. Stark Enterprises is the major donor to the hospital and is responsible for her transplant, she owes them. Em isn't ready to just become Nikki and leave her life behind.

CHAPTER 14

Em realizes Stark only saved Nikki because she is the face of their brand. She also realizes that she doesn't like the idea that Christopher and her grandmother think she is dead. Em arranges to return to school, using her parents' belief in education to get them to agree. She isn't ready to let her sister and Christopher move on in life without her. Em knows she can't tell anyone about what happened or her parents may go to jail.

CHAPTER 15

Em and Lulu are beginning to bond. Em may be book smart, but Lulu is the person who is Nikki's life smart. Lulu knows that Em will need guidance adapting to Nikki's life and she seems up to the challenge. Em is beginning to understand that she may have misjudged the people in Nikki's life.

CHAPTER 16

Em is getting a first hand look at the high pressure Nikki lives under. She is faced with being responsible for the livelihoods of others. She is being manipulated by Stark, her love life is a mess and her publicist is pushing her to her breaking point.

CHAPTER 17

Em can't stand being fussed over and is feeling self conscious about all of the criticisms. She tries to absorb everyone's advice about beauty and learns that her ex, Brandon, had been cheating on her. Her make up team seems to not believe that she has amnesia until her hair dresser feels her scar. Again Em thinks about how hard Nikki's job is and about how Stark is spying on her.

CHAPTER 18

Em is shocked by how poorly people treat her. She, Nikki, is treated as an object in pictures and as a person. She isn't listened too at all and people are demanding.

Brandon expresses that his father ignores him too. Em is relieved to find Nikki has money as it means she will have a certain amount of freedom.



Chapters 19 - 23:

Chapters 19 - 23: Summary

CHAPTER 19

Lulu helps Em get dressed and the group goes to Cove, a nightclub in Manhattan. Nikki is a VIP so they are all let in the hottest club in town. Nikki is given her usual drink by the bartender, water with orange. She doesn't drink, but only the bartenders know. Em is hit on by Lulu's boyfriend and she pours a drink on his head. Em goes to tell Lulu she is leaving. Lulu tells her she knew about Nikki and Justin, she doesn't love Justin and Nikki just couldn't help loving to be kissed and having men adore her. The girls decide to leave. Em sees Brandon fighting with the DJ and goes to help him. He is drunk. He wants the DJ to play the song he has recorded but the DJ tells him the song sucks. Brandon becomes violent. Em kisses him to stop a fight. When they stop kissing she sees Gabriel and he looks confused by her behavior. Brandon carries Em to the limo and passes out. Before he passes out, he and Lulu agree that this new Nikki is nicer and less of a bitch. Lulu tells Em that Brandon does this a lot and never remembers in the morning. Em decides to try to understand Brandon, but now she has to get ready for school the next morning.

CHAPTER 20

Em arrives at school to find things pretty much the same. Her sister comes up to her and Em tells Frida that her cheerleading uniform is cute. Frida is surprised by her sister's comment. Em enters the school and is shown around. She is given her old locker and is put in most of her old classes, though she wonders if she can keep up after being out for a month. She goes to speech and is given her old seat. Whitney Robertson tries to be friendly to her and Em accepts her politely. Em is shocked speechless when she sees Christopher in speech class. He is wearing a Polo shirt and his long hair is cut short. She wonders at his preppy look and if he has become one of the Walking Dead.

CHAPTER 21

Em corners Frida in the bathroom to ask about Christopher's hair. Frida tells her his father made him cut it for the funeral and she thinks it is respectful. She tells Em that Christopher now spends lunch in the computer room then asks her how many boyfriends she needs now and accuses Em of being vain. Em finds him in the computer room, but Christopher is more interested in video games than Nikki Howard. She asks him about an email address so he will talk to her. She tries to talk about "Journeyquest", but he said he doesn't play that game anymore. Em shakes his hand before leaving and thinks he seems like the person who has died. She is also a little miffed that most guys melt around Nikki, but Christopher doesn't give her any attention.



Frida meets Em outside of the lunch room. She was worried Em wouldn't show up and is anxious to show that she knows Nikki. Frida promised the JV cheerleaders that Nikki would eat with them. Em wants to know what is wrong with Christopher. Frida tells her he is a weirdo and that she can do better than him now. Then Frida realizes Em really cares about Christopher and she suggests Christopher is upset over Em's death. They enter the café and sit. Everyone notices what Nikki has for lunch and stares at her. Whitney and her friend Lindsey come to sit at the table along with Whitney's boyfriend Jason. After lunch Whitney invites Em over. Em politely refuses and tells Whitney she has a photo shoot.

CHAPTER 22

It has been almost 24 hours since Em left the hospital and she has not called her parents, nor has she returned their numerous calls and messages. Em finds today's photo shoot easier to navigate, but just as uncomfortable. She doesn't feel like pretending to be happy, she is too sad about Christopher. She gets into the limo to go home and makes a stop at the Apple store to get a non-Stark computer and phone. On the way out she sees Gabriel. She tells him she wasn't drunk at the club and she isn't dating Brandon. He tells her he isn't a "prat" but worries that she doesn't understand that little girls look up to her. She asks if he wants a ride and she says no. He tells her he played a new song at the club, it is called Nikki. He kisses her lightly and leaves.

CHAPTER 23

Em arrives home with her new electronics and finds Lulu getting a massage from the housekeeper, Katerina. Em has a breakdown when she tries to tell Lulu about Christopher, Stark spying on them, and Gabriel. Lulu stops everything and tells Katerina to order them banana splits, then she sits next to Em and asks what is going on. Em tells her everything. Lulu tells her she doesn't use the Stark computer. She tells her that Gabriel is in love with her and that Christopher is afraid of his passion for her. Lulu goes on to tell Em that every girl can inspire love in men and that they must be careful not to break a man's fragile heart. She proves her point by getting the delivery guy to ask her out. She tells Em that she needs to find common ground with Christopher. The two eat their ice cream and have a food fight, cleaning it up before bed.

Chapters 19 - 23: Analysis

CHAPTER 19

Em finds out more about Nikki's life and Lulu's depth of character. She also begins to wonder if Brandon is more than just a pretty face and is hurting inside.

CHAPTER 20

Em is finding that she can step back into her old life, but she can't experience it the same way that she did as Em now that she is Nikki. Everyone stares at her. She finds Christopher even more attractive than she did before, but he won't even look at her.



CHAPTER 21

Christopher is a shell of his former self. He is missing his best friend and it is possible he wants nothing to do with Nikki because she was there when Em died. Frida seems to hit on some truth when she suggests Christopher didn't know he loved Em until she died. Em is frustrated that Nikki can have everything she wants except, apparently, Christopher. The sisters bicker as Frida is obviously jealous of Em's life as Nikki. She wants to use her connection to Nikki so she can be popular and doesn't appreciate the toll being Nikki is taking on Em.

CHAPTER 22

Nikki wants to make sure she can't be traced by Stark in her new private life. She is happy to see Gabriel and is confused by her feelings for him. She feels frustrated that he thinks she is a drug addict and a drunk.

CHAPTER 23

Lulu is an amazing and trusting friend. Her naivete makes her candid and affectionate. She challenges Em to find the spark within herself and to use it to solve her dilemma with Christopher. As silly as Lulu is, she gives sage advice and is a true friend to Em. This chapter represents a turning point in Em's life. Her advice from Lulu allows her to harness the power she has as both Em and Nikki to move forward in her life. Nikki's life will no longer control her, she will control it.



Chapters 24 & 25:

Chapters 24 & 25: Summary

CHAPTER 24

Em is determined to see Christopher in the computer lab. She finds him 15 minutes before class begins and hands him her new laptop, asking him to hook up her remote access to the school's email account. Christopher won't look at her and she begins to think Frida and Lulu are wrong about his feelings for Em. She engages him in conversation and tells him she remembers him from the accident at the store where the girl died. She asks if he misses Em. Christopher says he does and then says nothing more. Em half expects Stark Enterprises to come out of the sky and get her in trouble. She badly wants Christopher to know she is Em, but she can't pay the 2 million she would owe if her secret gets out. She turns to leave when Christopher tells her that Em was his best friend. Em turns around, goes back to him and pulls a sheet of glow in the dark dinosaur stickers on the desk in front of him. Then she runs out.

CHAPTER 25

Em decides to take pizza to her parents' house to make up for ignoring them lately. She brings new non-Stark phones with her, one for each parent and one for Frida. Lulu doesn't understand where they are going and why they are bringing pizza. Em doesn't explain. She feels sorry for Lulu that her parents don't care about her. Frida opens the door wearing face cream and sweats. She freaks out when she sees Nikki and Lulu and screams for her mom. Em tells Lulu that she is having WiFi installed to keep Stark from spying on them. Lulu tells her the cable guy asked her out, but he is a Capricorn so the relationship won't work.

Chapters 24 & 25: Analysis

CHAPTER 24

This is a short chapter. Em confronting Christopher shows the reader that she is ready to take some control of her life back. She can't stop thinking about Christopher and he is the only thing she wants. She is afraid of what Stark will do if she tells Christopher the truth, but she may be willing to risk the consequences in order to reconnect with her best friend and love.

CHAPTER 25

Christopher still hasn't said anything about the stickers, but Em can tell he is thinking about them and is confused. She knows she needs to see her parents and the pizza is a peach offering. She is also coming to care about Lulu and wants her to become a part

of her family and inner circle. Most of the subplots are partially resolved and the book is set for the next installment in the series.



Characters

Emerson Watts.

Emerson "Em" Watts is a 16 year old girl who attends an alternative high school in New York. Em isn't a popular girl and she doesn't pay attention to popular culture, fashion, or celebrities. Em is a feminist who hates Stark Megastores and everything it represents. Em is in love with her best friend, Christopher, who is a lot like her. Em's brain is transplanted into the body of supermodel Nikki Howard after the two die simultaneously at the Stark Megastore grand opening. Em finds herself flirting with the singer Gabriel Luna and clubbing with the most popular celebrity at the moment. Em is a smart girl who refuses to drop out of school now that she is Nikki.

Christopher Maloney.

Christopher Maloney is Em's best friend. Christopher is a 16 year old junior in an alternative high school in New York. Christopher is a video game player who enjoys playing a game called "Journeyquest". He dislikes sports and celebrity culture. Christopher doesn't think of Em as a girlfriend, but as a best friend. Christopher is devastated when Em is killed. Christopher is known for his long, messy hair and unpopular clothing. His look changes after Em's death when he cuts his hair short and begins to wear preppy clothes.

Nikki Howard.

Nikki Howard is the IT girl of the moment. She is a beautiful celebrity model who is the spokesmodel for Stark Enterprises. Nikki Howard has a congenital brain defect and dies of an aneurism at the same time Em is crushed by a falling TV monitor. Nikki is not a nice person. She works hard and her career supports many other workers. Nikki is a hard partier with a messy love life. She lives with Lulu, and has a dog who travels with her everywhere.

Lulu Collins.

Lulu Collins is the daughter of a famous film maker. Lulu is famous for being famous. Her parents don't pay attention to her and she lives with Nikki even though she is only 16. Lulu has elfin, petite features. She is a nice person, if not more than a little gullible. Lulu knows that Nikki is now Em, but thinks Nikki and Em had a spiritual transfer of some kind, most likely the fault of Scientology.



Frida Watts.

Frida Watts is Emerson's 14 year old sister. Frida attends Tribeca Alternative High School and is named after the painter Frida Kahlo. Frida doesn't have the same views as her sister. She loves popular culture and is a huge fan of Gabriel Luna. Frida dreams of being a JV cheerleader and makes the JV team. She loves her sister, but is jealous that her sister is now Nikki Howard and gets to hang out with celebrities.

Brandon Stark.

Brandon Stark is the attractive son of Robert Stark, owner of Stark Enterprises. Brandon has a bad relationship with his father and drinks until he blacks out. Brandon is Nikki's ex-boyfriend and he has been cheating on her. Brandon wants to be with Nikki and likes her better now that she is Em. Brandon believes that Nikki has amnesia.

Justin Bay.

Justin Bay is a famous actor and Lulu's boyfriend. Justin is in love with Nikki and the two have been having an affair behind Lulu's back. Justin hits on Em, as Nikki, at Cove and she pours a drink over his head.

Kelly Foster-Fielding.

Kelly Foster-Fielding is Nikki's high powered, fast paced publicist. Kelly doesn't know that Nikki is now Em. Kelly doesn't have much sympathy for Nikki and feels that Nikki needs to get over her problems.

Rebecca Lowell.

Rebecca Lowell is Nikki's agent. Rebecca is the person who first discovered Nikki and introduced her to modeling. Rebecca is a red headed, middle age woman who seems to genuinely care for Nikki's well being. Rebecca is supportive of Nikki's, Em's, decision to go to high school.

Gabriel Luna.

Gabriel Luna is a British singing sensation. Gabriel writes a song for Em, Nikki, and is concerned that Nikki doesn't realize she is a role model for young girls. Gabriel is always around when Em needs help. He is the person Frida wanted to see the day Em was killed.



Whitney Robertson.

Whitney Robertson attends Tribeca Alternative with Em and Frida. Whitney is one of the Walking Dead. She is unkind to Em and Christopher, but wants to be best friend with Nikki.

Dr. Holcombe.

Dr. Holcombe is the doctor responsible for Em/Nikki's successful brain transplant. His hospital is financed by Stark Enterprises. Dr. Holcombe is not concerned with Em/Nikki other than as a patient

Karen and Daniel Watts.

Karen and Daniel Watts are Em and Frida's parents. They are professors.



Objects/Places

Tribeca Alternative High School.

Tribeca Alternative High School is the school where Em and Frida attend high school. Tribeca is run by a popular crowd, one Em isn't a part of and Frida wants to belong to. Tribeca is in Manhattan, NY. Christopher also attends Tribeca, where he and Em eat lunch together and have speech class together. After Em becomes Nikki, she decides to go back to Tribeca Alternative so she can keep an eye on Christopher and Frida. Tribeca is a bad experience for Em, but a good experience for Nikki.

The Stark Megastore.

The Stark Megastore is an all inclusive store where people can purchase electronics, clothing, and anything else they desire. The store is protested by many people who are upset that the store is forcing local small businesses to close. The Stark Megastore is hosting a grand opening when Nikki and Em die. Stark Megastore is just one of the many businesses owned by Stark Enterprises. Nikki Howard is the new face of Stark's marketing.

Photo Shoots.

Nikki Howard is a model and makes her living by working at photo shoots. Em thinks that being a model will be easy until she works her first photo shoot as Nikki. Em is placed in uncomfortable and painful positions at the shoot. She is treated as talent and not as a human being. As Em poses with Mr. Stark and Brandon she realizes that Nikki's life and job aren't easy.

Cosabella.

Cosabella, Cosy, is Nikki's small dog. Cosy lives with Nikki and Lulu. Cosy goes everywhere with Nikki and has attached herself to Em.

F.O.N.

F.O.N. is the name given to Friends of Nikki by Em and Christopher as they make fun of the people who are famous just for being famous.



Journeyquest.

Journeyquest is Em and Christopher's favorite video game. The game was made into a movie, but Em and Christopher thought the movie was terrible. After Em dies Christopher is unable to play Journeyquest.

The Walking Dead.

The Walking Dead is the name Em and Christopher give the popular kids at their high school. They see the Walking Dead as people who are silly and shallow. Em realizes later that she is literally the Walking Dead after her brain transplant.

E.L.F.

E.L.F is the organization that causes the TV monitor to fall, killing Em. ELF is a group of protesters who are against Stark Megastores and Stark Enterprises.

Scientology.

Scientology is a religion that is popular in Hollywood circles. Lulu and Brandon are convinced that Scientologists brainwashed Nikki into thinking she was Em.

The Cove.

The Cove is a popular nightclub. The bartenders at the Cove know that Nikki doesn't drink and always make a fake water drink for her. Em is at the Cove when Brandon tries to fight the DJ. Gabriel plays his song "Nikki" for the first time at the Cove.

Nikki & Lulu's Apartment.

Nikki and Lulu live in a high rise in a modernly decorated apartment. The girls are roommates. Everything in the apartment is controlled by a master remote. The electronics in the apartment are being monitored by Stark Enterprises.



Themes

Feminism.

"Airhead" is about the misconceptions people hold about feminism and the role of women in popular culture.

Em doesn't see Nikki and her friends as real people because they work in the fashion and entertainment industry, and aren't concerned with education. Em feels that women like Nikki who are overly concerned with their looks must be unintelligent. She judges her sister for wanting to be one of the popular girls at school and for being on the cheer leading squad. Em believes that looking like a model and being a feminist are incompatible. Once Em becomes Nikki, she understands that the opinions she held about women like Nikki and Lulu are not accurate.

Frida is brought up in a feminist household, but she doesn't feel that popularity, fashion, and feminism are incompatible. Frida is intelligent and focuses on her grades, but she is also a witty and popular cheerleader.

Lulu is wealthy, beautiful and famous, but not very intelligent. However, Lulu is a kind and loving person who takes Em under her wing and provides her with support. After getting to know Lulu, Em admits to herself that she was wrong about her.

Nikki is being used by the modeling industry and by Stark Enterprises. Nikki is a pretty face and a commodity to them. Stark isn't concerned about Nikki's death, just about the fulfillment of her contracts. Nikki is beautiful and, as much as Em hates it, her beauty allows her access that Em didn't have when she was just her plain self.

Popular Culture.

"Airhead" is commentary on the current state of popular culture. As the reader learns more about Brandon, Nikki, Lulu, and the others, they come to find that not everyone is the way they are portrayed by the media and the paparazzi.

Nikki is not a very nice person. She is portrayed as loving her boyfriend and her best friend, but she is really betraying them both by dating her best friend's boyfriend. Gabriel and others think that Nikki is hooked on drugs, but in reality she only drinks water when she is out at bars. The reader is allowed to assume that Nikki eats only fish and vegetables so she stays thin, but Em realizes that Nikki loves fish and vegetables and has a hard time digesting other things.

Lulu is famous for being famous. To people like Frida, she is an icon, but Lulu has her own issues. Lulu's parents don't care about her and Lulu lives on her own even though she is only 16. Em begins to feel sorry for Lulu and invites her to spend time with her family.



Brandon Stark is famous because his father is rich and powerful. However, Brandon's father treats him poorly. Brandon is eager to prove himself and become a musician, but his music isn't very good. Brandon has a drinking problem which Em feels needs to be addressed.

Frida is in awe of the Friends of Nikki. She is jealous of her sister's new life and doesn't understand why Em isn't more excited. Frida is the other side of the pop culture coin. People like Frida buy into celebrity culture. She thinks that everything she reads is real and assumes that stars are always happy and enjoying their life.

Search for Identity.

"Airhead" is a story about teens searching for identity. Rich, poor, pretty, and plain.

Em is literally searching for identity now that she is Nikki. Em went from being the type of girl who is invisible to being the most visible girl in the world, and she sort of likes it. Em is having a difficult time reconciling her long held values with the realities of her new life as Nikki Howard.

Christopher's identity changes after the death of his best friend. Christopher's identity is tied up in his life with Em. They play games together and talk about things. After Em dies, Christopher cuts his long hair, gives up Journeyquest, and begins to dress like a prep. He seems lost without his best friend.

Nikki is no longer living and to those around her, she has changed. The doorman notices she is more responsible, the people on set notice she greets them, Brandon thinks she is nicer, and even Lulu tells her she isn't as bitchy. It is just a matter of time before Nikki's public identity changes now that she is really Em.

Frida struggles to break out of the feminist value system she was raised in. Frida tries to reconcile her love of girlie culture with her family's social positions.



Style

Point of View

"Airhead" is told in the first person point of view by Emerson Watts. The reader is included in all of Em's thoughts and feelings. Em has many discussions inside her head as she is not allowed to confide in others about her new life. Em often argues with herself and has a sarcastic sense of humor. The only scenes the reader is allowed to see are the ones which include Em. The reader is not privy to the thoughts and feelings of other characters except through their dialogue or facial expressions. Em's internal dialogue reflects her character's growth throughout the story.

Setting

"Airhead" is set in present day Manhattan. The majority of Em's life, pre Nikki, takes place at Tribeca Alternative, home, and the Stark Megastore grand opening. It is in these settings that the reader becomes familiar with Em's dislike of pop culture icons. The relationship between Em and Christopher forms for the reader in these settings, as does the tension between Em and Frida and Em and the Walking Dead.

The Stark Megastore opening is the place where the reader is introduced to Nikki, Lulu, Cosy, and Gabriel. It is the place where Em and Nikki's world intersect, both literally and figuratively.

Em's realization that she has died and become Nikki takes place in the hospital. The hospital is also where Em is introduced to Nikki's friends and her life. This introduction to Nikki's life continues as Em leaves the hospital and moves back to her apartment. Nikki's apartment is modern, clean and sterile. The lack of personality and personalization hinders Em in her need to learn about Nikki's personality and personal identity.

Em attempts to meld her old world with her new one when she returns to the setting of Tribeca Alternative. Now Em is able to see her high school experience from a different perspective. She has a different experience with her classmates and with Christopher.

Language and Meaning

The language in "Airhead" is witty and fun. Em's voice is that of a normal teenage girl who is opinionated and a little lost.

The author makes use of many current real life pop culture references and alludes to certain celebrities having been given brain transplants. Depending on the age of the reader, many of these references may not be understood. F.O.N. is used to help the



reader make connections between Lulu and Brandon and current personalities who are famous for being associated with reality TV.

As Em and her mother are feminists, there is a lot of feminist thought and language in the text. For example, as Nikki, Em comments to the photographer that she feels her pose is a tad misogynistic and she inwardly reflects that she isn't seen as a person.

The ELF is used to highlight the cultural conflict which often happens as stores such as Wal Mart and Sam's Club move into cities and suburbs.

Structure

25 chapters.



Quotes

"To most people, zombies are the undead. But to Christopher and me, Zombies are the popular people at TAHS, who are very similar to the undead in that they have no soul or personality." Ch. 2, p. 13.

"Funny how, all of a sudden, I wasn't feeling so fine anymore." Ch. 3, p. 36.

"The few times I'd ever touched Christopher's hand with mine, he'd moved out the way with lightening-fast speed, thinking it was an accident (it so wasn't)." Ch. 5, p. 55.

"This, more than anything else - including the roses from Gabriel Luna, which were still on the window sill, though they were a lot droopier than before, and that extremely odd visit from Lulu Collins - disturbed me." Ch. 6, p. 67.

"But that was the problem. He wasn't. Interested in me, I mean." Ch. 8, p. 95.

"I looked back and forth between the two of them. And wondered if I could possibly have been kidnapped by two stupider people." Ch. 9, p. 118.

"He thought Nikki Howard had spent the past month in the hospital because she'd been in rehab?" Ch. 12, p. 154.

"Because up until that moment, I hadn't felt as if I'd lost my former self." Ch. 15, p. 213.

"I said I thought the pose was kind of misogynistic, because it implied that women needed a big strong man to support them." Ch. 18, p. 229.

"My mom, the women's studies professor, had always urged Frida and me never to act dumb just to win a guy." Ch. 21, p. 283.

"If this, I realized, was the kind of company Frida was keeping, then I had been quite badly underestimating the TAHS JV cheerleading squad - and possibly cheerleaders everywhere." Ch. 21, p. 296.

"When you realize you need to make a connection with someone, you know you have to do it as soon as possible or you'll lose the courage to do it at all." Ch. 24, p. 326.

Topics for Discussion

Why does Emerson Watts dislike the Walking Dead at her school? What have they done to earn her dislike? Do you think she is slightly jealous of them? Why or why not?

Do you think that Christopher looks at Em as a girl? Is he attracted to her looks? To her personality? How do you know? Do you agree with Lulu's theory that Christopher only realized he loved Em after she died? What in the text makes you think the way you do?

Frida is upset that Em isn't supportive of her desire to become a cheerleader. Do you think Em is guilty of the same types of judgement that the Walking Dead is? What makes Em realize she needs to support her sister's decisions? How does Frida respond to Em's support?

What is at the heart of Frida's anger toward Em now that she is Nikki? Is it fear? Jealousy? Disbelief? Use the text to support your answer.

Nikki Howard has no parents, no past, and no meaningful relationships. Why does the author portray Nikki this way? How does it add to the plot? How does it affect Em's ability to become Nikki? Does anyone really know Nikki Howard, or is she just a pretty face? Why do you feel the way you do?

Lulu is an interesting character. She is famous for nothing and is wealthy, she is a kind person, but she is also an airhead. How does Lulu help Em? What was her relationship like with Nikki? Why does Lulu seem to so readily accept that Nikki is now Em?

Why is it important to the plot that Lula and Brandon are not very bright? How does this help with the believability of the situation? What does this cut out of the story which might have been tedious to the reader?