

# **And We Stay Study Guide**

## **And We Stay by Jenny Hubbard**

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## Plot Summary

As the novel “And We Stay” by Jenny Hubbard begins, Emily Beam is starting the spring semester at her new boarding school. She is attending a new school because her boyfriend Paul recently committed suicide in their old school's library. Through the course of the novel Emily struggles to come to terms with Paul's death and with her own decision to abort the baby they created together. As the themes of friendship, death, and guilt intertwine, Emily learns that she does not have to let her past determine who she will be in the future.

When Emily first arrives at Amherst School for Girls (ASG), she avoids friendship with others as she concentrates on her studies and tries to block out the memories of Paul. Almost from the beginning of her time at ASG Emily cannot ignore the poems that find their way into her head. She begins to write them down. It's a way to work through the pain and guilt she feels because of Paul's suicide which occurred only days after she broke up with him. She had been pregnant with his baby. Even though Paul wanted to keep the child, Emily and her parents had already decided it was in Emily's best interests for her to have an abortion. Once Paul was dead, Emily tried to back out of the abortion when she realized she'd be killing the last living part of him. However, her mother would not listen to her. Emily had the abortion.

Now, Emily has been sent to ASG to get her away from the stories and rumors surrounding the circumstances of Paul's death. Even in a different school, Emily is still haunted by the emotions she feels as she tries to find a place for herself. Her roommate, K.T. takes Emily under her wing from the start, but it is not until much later in the semester that Emily begins to share her story with her roommate. Ironically, Emily learns that K.T. is also attending ASG because a friend of hers committed suicide, too.

Meanwhile, Emily's French teacher Madame Colche learns that Emily has been writing poetry. She shares with Emily a biography of Emily Dickinson, a poet who one lived in Amherst and attended ASG many years prior. Emily Beam relates to Emily Dickinson on many different levels and soon realizes the late poet is her muse. Through the use of a stolen dress, Amber, another student who tries to befriend Emily, manipulates Emily into visiting Emily Dickinson's room in person. It is during her time in Emily Dickinson's room that Emily believes the poet speaks to her.

Through a series of events, a school gossip named Annabelle steals a poem from Emily about Emily's abortion. Annabelle submits this poem to a poetry contest that Madame Colche had wanted Emily to enter. Though Emily is at first mortified that her very private poem has been made public, she decides not to interfere with the course of the competition. She has learned through her poetry that she doesn't have to allow herself to be defined by her past or what she has done in the past.



# Chapters 1-2

## Summary

Emily Bean is sent to a boarding school by her parents with the hopes of giving her a fresh start in a new place. Even though she's away from the rumors and memories of Grenfell County High School, Emily is still tormented by images of her boyfriend's act of shooting himself. She's wracked with guilt over the abortion she had to rid herself of his baby. With the help of poetry and some special friends, Emily is able to come to terms with her past and realize that it doesn't have to define her.

In Chapter 1, the other girls at the Amherst School for Girls have already started spreading rumors about Emily Bean when she begins school there in the middle of the year. She doesn't sound like or look like the others. Her new roommate tries to help by loaning her a pair of shoes like those the other girls wear.

Her first night at ASG, Emily begins writing poems in the mind. She can't go to sleep until she has written them down on paper. The first one entitled "Maze" puts a voice to her feelings of being displaced, lost and in need of direction at her new school.

In Chapter 2, as Emily lies awake before her first morning of classes at ASG, she tries to decide why Paul had shot himself in the library of their school, Grenfell County High School. She wonders if he realized life would go on without him once he was dead. It was her aunt who suggested Emily be sent to boarding school in Massachusetts so Emily wouldn't have to deal with the rumors and gossip in her old school. Although she'd always wanted to have a boyfriend before she'd come to ASG, Emily wants nothing to do with boys now. She had a boyfriend for four months, a time when she felt beautifully confident. Now she avoids boys and tries to avoid poetry.

K.T. wakes to find Emily already dressed and ready for class. Emily remembers her mother telling her to change when she put on a white dress to wear to Paul's funeral. The preacher at the funeral told them they would come to accept not knowing why Paul had done what he had done. On the day Paul had shot himself, no one considered he was the cause of the disturbance when students were told to stay in class or get to one. He'd never been a troublemaker before.

In the present, Emily thinks about how Paul's name is pronounced the same as the word pall. While K.T. is in the bathroom, Emily looks up the meaning of pall. After she's ready to go, K.T. shows Emily to the dining room and helps her get oriented. She warns Emily not to go to the library if she wants to study, as that's where all the girls go to gossip. Emily doesn't feel comfortable calling it a library. She pronounces the word "lieberry."

She remembers Paul coming to get her that Monday in the library. She'd put her hands in the pouch on her sweater because she didn't want to hold hands with him. She'd



broken up with him two days prior. He walked with her into the stacks and pulled out a book. He commented that he'd opened to a poem about a gun. The chapter ends with a poem Emily has written about the desperation that stems from her sorrow and her need to cling to the little hope she has left.

## Analysis

The situation for Emily Bean is introduced quickly in the novel. She's the new girl in the boarding school. The very fact that she begins that school in the middle of the school year makes her a target for those who like to tell stories and gossip. Though it isn't completely clear at the beginning of the story, Emily has been sent to Amherst School for Girls because of some tragic situation at home. It appears that her boyfriend, Paul, shot himself just a few days after Emily had broken up with him.

The theme of friendship is introduced early in the novel. Since Emily will be a target for bullies at ASG, Emily's new roommate, K.T. extends the hand of friendship right away. K.T. loans Emily a pair of clogs to wear that are more like what the girls at ASG wear instead of Emily's Mary Janes. K.T. also shows Emily to the dining room, teaches her the terminology of the school, and tells her the best places to sit. Although Emily is docile through K.T.'s initial act of friendship, Emily thinks to herself that she does not intend to make any friends at ASG. She tells herself that she doesn't want friends because she'd have to lie to them.

Even as Emily is dealing with the shock of beginning a new school, she's also dealing with the grief of losing her boyfriend and with whatever situation made him decide to kill himself. As she waits for K.T. to wake up for classes the first day of school, Emily wonders what might have been going on in Paul's head to make him decide death was the only way to deal with the problem.

Because it was in the library of the school in Grenfell County that Paul shot himself, Emily refuses to pronounce the word library correctly. She instead chooses to pronounce the word "lieberry." It is as if she believes that pronouncing the word a different way will make the library a different place and make her feel better about being there. Emily's word play is important as she notices how similar her boyfriend's name Paul is to the word "pall." Both the name and the word are pronounced the same, but pall is a word that refers to a casket, or a lining or covering of a casket.

Significant also in this section of the novel are the mentions of poetry. A poem written by Emily has been included at the ending of each chapter so far. It is indicated that Emily really didn't write much poetry prior to being at ASG but once she is there, the lines come to her mind effortlessly. She can't sleep until she has gotten them on paper. Notice the simile used to describe the process by which the poems come to Emily. "Lines unspool like ribbons, and she can't sleep until she ties them into bows." (p. 3) A poem is also mentioned as being brought into play on the day that Paul killed himself. As he walked with Emily into the stack of books, he pulled out a book and flipped it



open. It is ironic, and Emily believes completely coincidental, that he opened the book to a poem about a gun.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Emily pronounce the word “library” as she does? What does this mean in terms of Paul’s death?

## Discussion Question 2

Discuss Emily’s poem “Blues.” What is she trying to say in this poem? What does the ship Columbia represent? Who is the speaker in the poem?

## Discussion Question 3

Do you think Emily’s parents were wise in sending her to boarding school? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

elegance, expelled, antiquated, despised, materialize, legacy, prevail, succumb, unfailingly, enduring, disembodied, generated, snippets, beget, ironically, depicted



## Chapter 3

### Summary

In Chapter 3, Emily avoids the other girls by spending much of her time in the library. One day she feels nudged toward the card catalogue where she looks up the poet Emily Dickinson. She finds a volume of her poetry and looks under the subject line “gun, loaded” for a poem. At night, Emily begins reading poems by the famous, reclusive poet. During the day, she follows the rules set out for her by Amherst School for Girls. She’s met and learned the names of all the girls on her floor of Hart Hall. She believes Annabelle Wycoff and Waverley Graham are the friendliest; but, K.T. tells her they are actually just the nosiest and the biggest gossips in the school.

One day Emily asks K.T. why she doesn’t eat breakfast with her other friends. K.T. explains that her only other friends are those girls who are in the string quartet with her. They’re seniors, so they eat breakfast in their rooms. After classes one day, Emily is wired from coffee. She signs herself out and takes a walk through the town. As she walks, she remembers the minister at Paul’s funeral as well as his family and close friends clinging to the idea that no one could have stopped Paul from killing himself. Emily, however, believes it was human error, her human error, that caused Paul’s death. She has not talked to God since the day of the funeral.

She remembers the day in October when she lost her virginity to Paul, who was also a virgin. She wondered why Paul thought she was so perfect. As she considers beauty, she remembers Paul’s sister, Carey. Emily thinks that Carey is truly beautiful. She wonders how Carey is doing as she is still attending Grenfell County High School. At the conclusion of this chapter, Emily includes a poem about Carey and how she might have felt the day of Paul’s funeral.

### Analysis

Emily continues to grieve Paul’s death in this section of the novel. A significant revelation is shared about Emily’s insistent belief that it was her own human error that caused Paul’s death. Even though the preacher at Paul’s funeral and others believe that there was nothing anyone could have done to stop Paul, Emily believes differently. Even as she struggles with her own grief, Emily’s caring personality comes out as she wonders how Carey, Paul’s younger sister, is handling the aftermath of Paul’s death.

Meanwhile, Emily only goes about the motions of being a student at Amherst School for Girls. She doesn’t eat much, relying mainly on coffee to keep her going. She avoids human contact by hiding out in the library. When she calls her parents, she tells them she’s doing fine. As she points out, there are a variety of definitions of fine. Fine means no highs or lows as well as no troubles. Emily’s act of manipulating the meaning of words in this manner is a sign of a wordsmith.



While in the library one day, Emily looks up the poem to which Paul had opened a book on the day he shot himself. The poem was written by Emily Dickinson, a famous poet who had lived in Amherst and had attended the same school, Amherst School for Girls, about 100 years prior to Emily Bean.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why do you think that Emily feels responsible for Paul's death? What "human error" is she referring to when she's thinking about the cause of Paul's death?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Discuss Emily's feeling that a hand nudged her toward the poetry of Emily Dickinson.

## **Discussion Question 3**

Consider Emily's concern for Paul's younger sister, Carey. What does this say about Emily's personality?

## **Vocabulary**

carrel, abuzz, envisioning, ancient, serene, luminous, absurd





# Chapters 4-5

## Summary

In Chapter 4, Emily briefly forgets what had happened in Grenfell when she awakes on the morning of Groundhog Day in her dorm at ASG. After she remembers, the only thing that gets her out of bed is coffee. The girls drink coffee to keep them going to do the difficult work required by the school. In French, she practices changing up her signature to keep her from thinking about Paul's death and what she did in Boston.

Emily had read part of the newspaper article about Paul's death. On Dec. 12, he'd asked permission in his second period class to go to the bathroom. Paul passed the janitor, Mr. Jim, on his way to find Emily. He found her in the library where he'd led her to the stacks and told her he had a gun in his backpack. By the time he was finished, Paul had used three of the six bullets in the gun.

In the present, Emily asks to be excused from her French class. She goes to the bathroom. She thinks about all the things Paul could have been if he had lived. She wonders why she didn't ask the doctor what would happen to the baby once it was aborted. In the bathroom, she looks at the poems she's written. She pulls these pages out of her notebook and puts them in the trash can. When she tries to leave the bathroom, the door is stuck. Madame Colche comes looking for Emily. When Emily is freed, Madame Colche invites Emily to join her for afternoon tea. Madame Colche asks Emily if she's making friends at school and if she misses her old friends. Emily thinks of her best friend, Terra, who moved away at the end of tenth grade.

As they are talking, a woman comes and brings Madame Colche the poems Emily had put in the bathroom trash can. Madame Colche asks Emily if she is a poet, which Emily denies. The teacher suggests that Emily enter a poetry contest sponsored by the Emily Dickinson Society. As she goes out into the rain, Emily remembers the first time that Paul kissed her. She had once thought this was the beginning of their relationship but now realizes it was the beginning of the end. In her room, Emily writes the poem "Ashes." K.T. returns to the room to find Emily asleep and surrounded by used Kleenex.

In Chapter 5, the sidewalks are icy during Emily's evening walk. She finds a pack of cigarettes, which she opens and pretends to take a drag from one. She thinks about Paul and believes he'd never intended to use the gun. He had only hoped to prove his manhood. Emily's walk takes her past The Emily Dickinson House. She walks up to the porch, rolls up the application form for the poetry contest, and tries to stick it in the railing. The front porch light blinks on and off, scaring Emily. She runs back to school, forgetting about the paper still in her hand.

In her dorm room, Emily tells K.T. she's going to the library and asks if K.T. has any matches. When K.T. says she doesn't, Emily says she guesses she could use scissors instead. Before she leaves the room, Emily notices a book, the biography of Emily



Dickinson, on her desk. K.T. says that Madame Colche brought it by for her. Emily looks at the picture of Emily Dickinson in the book and thinks the poet looks sad and thirsty. Emily remembers her thirst being the first feeling that returned on the day that Paul shot himself. Her poem that night describes her feelings as Paul shot himself.

## Analysis

In this section, more information is given about Emily's relationship with Paul. She'd lost her virginity to him and, apparently, gotten pregnant by him. She's had an abortion, but now she seems to regret her decision. She wishes she'd asked the doctor what they would do with the baby they aborted. She imagines it had become a cloud. Several of her poems speak to the hurt she feels at having killed the baby.

Meanwhile, the reader learns that Emily feels it was her fault that Paul killed himself. She mentions that the death was caused by human error, without identifying the error. It could have been her choice to break up with him. It could have been her decision to have an abortion. It could have been the realization that Emily was pregnant. The human error could also have been Emily's feeling that she should have done more to keep from getting pregnant.

Emily Dickinson becomes more and more important as the novel continues. When Madame Colche learns that Emily writes poems, the teacher suggests that Emily submit some of her poetry to a contest sponsored by the Emily Dickinson Society. Madame Colche also loans Emily a biography of Emily Dickinson and her poetry.

Even though Emily tries to get away from her poetry in this section, she cannot do so. In the bathroom, she puts her poems in the trash can, but the janitor finds them and returns them to Emily. Later, she tries to give the flyer announcing the poetry contest back by sticking it in the railing of the Emily Dickinson House. Emily is scared when the porch light flicks on and off. She returns to campus before she realizes she still has the flyer with her. Emily doesn't want to submit her poetry to the competition because she believes she writes it as a way to hide. She hides her true self from others, choosing to reveal her true feelings only through her words.

K.T. continues to try to be friends with Emily. Emily continues to avoid her friendship by spending most of her time in the library. Notice that when Emily asks K.T. about her friends that K.T. tells Emily she doesn't really have that many friends. Even though Emily doesn't see it, K.T. seems to need Emily as a friend just as much as Emily needs her.

## Discussion Question 1

How does Emily use her poetry as a hiding place?



## Discussion Question 2

What is significant about Emily's trip to The Emily Dickinson house? What do you think caused the flashing light?

## Discussion Question 3

Does the knowledge that Emily has had an abortion change your opinion about her? Do you think the abortion was in any way responsible for Paul's actions?

## Vocabulary

wallop, flourish, linear, woefully, pyromania, biography, daguerreotype



# Chapter 6

## Summary

After Madame Colche gives Emily the information about the poetry contest, Emily composes poems in her mind almost nonstop. She has to concentrate to block out the poems as she listens to K.T. talk about Hannah, her former roommate, at breakfast. She says Hannah had at least three boyfriends, all at the same time. Emily has heard others refer to the girl as a whore. K.T. tells Emily she actually likes animals better than people and goes on to tell a story about her cat speaking Spanish. She challenges Emily to tell her a stranger story, and Emily tells her about a dog she saw hit by a car. She explains the situation was weird because the dog seemed to want to get hit by the car. Paul had been driving the truck that hit the dog. When K.T. asks her if Paul cried, Emily said that he didn't cry that day, but she remembers the two days he did cry. Paul cried on the day she broke up with him and on the day that he killed himself.

Emily remembers being shocked that day in the library when Paul actually pulled a gun out of his bag. At the time, she didn't think that it was loaded. Now she thinks that if she had known that there were bullets in it, she would have done something to get it away from him. Paul wanted to keep their baby. However, Emily had tried to reason with him that she wanted to go to college, something she couldn't do if she had a baby. She called Paul selfish. Emily remembered him pointing the gun in her direction, telling her she was the selfish one. Emily tried to respond, but nothing came out. It was at that moment that Ms. Albright had sneaked up behind Paul.

K.T. brings Emily's mind back to the present as she asks if Paul was upset about hitting the dog. Emily remembered Paul making her get out to see if the dog was dead. She'd tried to convince him the dog was a stray, but Paul had continued to obsess that there was nothing he could do to stop. He laid the dog on the side of the road as he blinked back tears. Emily tried to tell him it was okay, but he asked her not to lie to him.

The conversation with K.T. changes to college. Emily tells K.T. that she wants to go to Harvard, but she needs to get scholarships because her parents can't afford to send her there. When K.T. asks Emily why she doesn't want to get out of Massachusetts, Emily confides that she isn't really from Massachusetts. K.T. mentions to Emily that Annabelle and Waverley have been asking questions about Emily's past. If they don't find something out soon, K.T. says that they will start their own investigation. Emily agrees to K.T.'s offer to make something up.

During her trigonometry class, Emily thinks about the new identity she could create for herself. With the exception of the headmistress, no one at Amherst School for Girls knows anything about her past. Even the headmistress knows nothing about the abortion. After Paul's funeral, Emily remembers her father being kind to her for the first time in days when he helped her out of the backseat of the car when they reached Boston. She thinks about Emily Dickinson and her father who had pulled her out of



boarding school saying she had been sick too often. Emily's thoughts change to what attracted her to Paul. He had grown two inches over the summer and developed a masculine frame. She needed someone to fill out her weekends because Terra, her best friend, was gone. Now, it's the smell of Paul's truck, not his touch, that she misses.

In a drugstore later that day, Emily sees a girl steal a tube of lipstick. She tells the girl to put it back. The girl does so. When she pushes her hair out of her face, Emily recognizes her. They are in the same French class. She tells Emily that she'll get kicked out of ASG if Emily tells on her for stealing. Emily doesn't tell, but the girl follows her out of the drug store. They both sit down next to her on the bench outside The Emily Dickinson House. They introduce themselves. The girl, Amber Atkins, asks if Emily was named after Emily Dickinson. Amber claims she was named after a stripper. Amber continues to ask Emily questions, but Emily signals to her that she won't answer. As she sits, Emily thinks about how the world is easier on boys. She believes Paul's choice was simple; but, he took away his chance to make that choice. The chapter ends with Emily's poem "The Middle Heart."

## Analysis

In this section of the novel the reader is given more information about the day that Paul died. Emily remembers how he had begged her to let them both make the decision about what to do about her pregnancy. It can be assumed that Emily and someone else, probably her parents, had decided it would be best for her to have an abortion. Paul was against the abortion. He believed that Emily was selfish for wanting to kill his baby, while Emily believed he was being selfish for wanting her to have a baby. Having a baby would have derailed her plans for school.

At this point in the novel, Emily begins addressing the theme of the difference between boys and girls. It is apparent from Emily's comparison of her father to Emily Dickinson's overbearing father that Emily Bean and her father have not been close. In fact, she remembers his words when they finally arrived in Boston as being the first kind ones he'd said to her in several days. When Emily learns that Emily Dickinson's father had pulled Emily out of boarding school because she was sick so much, she wondered if it was not Emily's father who made her sick.

Meanwhile, Emily believes that boys have an easier life with easier choices than girls. She's begun to notice how girls go over situations in their minds wondering what they might have said or done differently to change the outcome. She's noticed that boys don't do this. She believes that they just seal things up and don't ever think about them again. Emily also believes Paul had an easier choice than she had about the pregnancy. She thinks he could choose either to pay for the abortion or to offer to marry her. He does neither. He kills himself. While it seems wrong to call Paul's actions immature, he was acting immaturity about the situation. He let his emotions get in the way of a situation that he wasn't sure how to handle and was really too young to be facing. Then, he added a gun to that situation. He desperately wanted to prove the point to Emily that he wanted her to keep the baby, but he didn't know how to go about that with just



words. Emily, on the other hand, was caught in a situation that she didn't know how to control. She didn't want to lie to Paul; but, at the same time, she didn't believe the gun he'd brought to school was really loaded. As she's pointed out, girls go over things in their minds trying to determine what they should have done in a situation. Emily still struggles wondering what she might have done differently to keep Paul alive.

Friendship continues to be a theme in this chapter as Emily opens up more to K.T. about her past. K.T. admits to Emily that she really likes animals more than she does people. She also warns Emily that Annabelle and Waverley, the two gossips in the dorm, are pushing her for information about Emily's background. Meanwhile, Emily meets a new girl from school. The two don't meet in the most positive way. Emily catches the girl, who later identifies herself as Amber Atkins, stealing from a local drug store. Amber follows Emily out of the drugstore and tries to talk to her as they sit on the bench across from The Emily Dickinson House. Emily refuses to answer her questions.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Emily assume that a boy's life is more simple than that of a girl? Why does she think Paul's choices about her pregnancy were easier to make? Do you agree with her? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

Discuss Amber Atkins. What type person is she? What do you think her role in the novel will be?

## Discussion Question 3

Although she has never smoked before, Emily has started smoking cigarettes. Why do you think she takes up this habit?

## Vocabulary

obsess, rummaging, rational, patriarchs, paradoxes, melancholy, aligned, swivels, delinquency, stately, doleful



# Chapter 7

## Summary

Even though Emily had given K.T. permission to make up a story about her background, Emily was surprised when K.T. told Annabelle that Emily was an orphan. Annabelle had mentioned when they were in the bathroom earlier that Emily looked sad. This prompted K.T. to make up a story about how Emily's parents were killed in an avalanche. Emily walked out of the bathroom and refused to join K.T. in celebration later in their room. She'd told K.T. she didn't want to lie to anyone there.

Emily remembers the night her relationship with Paul veered off course. There had been a party at Cole Hankin's house. Paul had gone to the door when the police showed up. He'd told the officers the truth, but he had added he would take the keys away from anyone not sober enough to drive. No one had been arrested that night. Emily had actually gotten drunk that night for the first time in her life. She and Paul had sex. Then, he asked for oral sex, which she refused. They had sex again, this time without a condom.

Back in the present, Emily is unable to sleep. She gets her flashlight and the Emily Dickinson biography. Instead of having a family of children, Emily Dickinson had a family of words. Emily remembers that she and Paul had sex fifteen times during their relationship. She'd enjoyed being wanted and needed.

The next morning, Annabelle tells Emily she's there if Emily ever needs anything. Emily complains to K.T. that Annabelle now wants to be Emily's guardian angel. Emily is still angry with K.T. for telling the lie about Emily's parents; but, K.T. tries to convince her the lie was for the best. As she waits for K.T. to get out of the shower, Emily thinks about how she wishes she could write to Ms. Albright. She believes Ms. Albright literally saved her life when she interrupted Paul in the library. She had also changed it figuratively because she introduced Emily to the beauty of life. Emily feels now there are two different versions of herself competing over her life. The chapter ends with the poem "Never Land."

## Analysis

Friendship continues to be a major theme in this section of the novel. K.T. believes she is protecting Emily by feeding gossip girls Annabelle and Waverley a story they can spread around school. Even though Emily doesn't want the truth about her past to come out, she also doesn't want to lie about her past. She blames K.T. for the unwanted attention that Annabelle has started giving her.

Meanwhile, Emily continues to struggle to come to terms with her grief and her identity after the loss of Paul. She feels as if two different versions of herself are fighting for control. One she calls "spooky" and the other is "scarily unfamiliar." Both gain their own



voice through Emily's poetry. Writing about a situation has always been viewed as a wonderful way of healing emotional wounds. Emily is using her writing therapeutically even though she doesn't realize it.

The only person whom Emily seems to miss from her hometown is Ms. Albright, her English teacher. This is the same teacher who interrupted Paul when he was talking to Emily and pointing the gun in her direction. Emily wants to be able to share her thoughts with her former teacher, the one who introduced her to literature and the magic of life itself. She wishes that she could now discuss the words of Emily Dickinson, who was a favorite of Ms. Albright. How ironic that the famous poet had lived just three blocks away from where Emily was now living.

## Discussion Question 1

Discuss Paul's actions at the party when the police showed up. Was he being as mature as Emily believed? Was she being mature when she left?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does K.T. feel it is best to feed the ASG rumor mill with a lie about Emily's background? Why does Emily not want to lie?

## Discussion Question 3

Discuss the meaning of the poem "Never Land."

## Vocabulary

sarcastic, avalanche, spinster, aspires, literally, figuratively, solitary





## Chapters 8-9

### Summary

In Chapter 8, Emily can barely smile at Madame Colche when she walks into her French class. At the end of five weeks of classes, she feels like a zombie from lack of sleep, too little food, and too much coffee. Emily notices Amber winking at her three times during the beginning of class. Madame Colche asks Amber in French if she has something in her eye. Amber's answer in French translates that she has regret in her eye.

After classes are over, Emily checks herself into the infirmary so she can sleep through Fitness for Fun. The nurse leaves her sleeping until time for her to check into her dorm. She tries to sleep in her dorm room, but she keeps having nightmares. She finally gets her flashlight and begins writing. Like Emily Dickinson, she works out her rage by skipping punctuation and capitalizing words that usually aren't capitalized. Emily ends her chapter with the poem "Buttons."

In Chapter 9, Emily learns that Emily Dickinson enjoyed science as well as literature and liked things to have scientific proof. As Emily considers this, she thinks that she used to feel the same way. She wonders what it was that drew her and Paul together and what might have happened if they hadn't been attracted to one another.

Even though there is a party at St. Mark's Academy, Emily has already decided that she won't be going. She feels she is following the advice of Emily Dickinson in "poem 203" where the poet writes "the Soul selects her own Society — / Then — shuts the Door." K.T. tries to convince Emily to go, but Emily refuses to be persuaded. Emily does agree to go for a walk with K.T. before the dance.

Emily spends her time studying Emily Dickinson's poetry and trying to capture her style. She comes up with a poem about what she fears editors will do to her work if they find it after she is dead as was done in Emily Dickinson's case. In the poem, she refers to her writing as a strange prayer.

K.T. and Emily walk on one of the trails through a wildlife sanctuary near the school. K.T. tells Emily she wants to be her friend, but she feels like Emily is using her and the school as a hiding place. She asks if Emily is a lesbian. Emily laughs and agrees when K.T. suggests Emily would rather have straight A's than a boyfriend. As they walk, they see a bald eagle land on a nearby fence post. K.T. believes it is a sign they should room together the following year. She tells Emily she wants to room with her because she is gentle and, yet, still has inner strength. K.T. suggests that Emily should meet a guy she knows at St. Mark's. In front of them, a robin's egg falls from a tree. Before she can stop the emotion, Emily begins to cry as she looks at the destroyed life.



## Analysis

As Emily continues to study Emily Dickinson's life and writing style, she feels more and more connected to the poet who shares her name. She indicates that Emily Dickinson was one who liked science as well as poetry. Instead of believing things based on faith, Emily Dickinson wanted scientific proof. Emily also realizes that the poet used her unconventional punctuation and capitalization as ways of rebelling against authority and expressing her rage.

Notice in this section of the novel that Emily indicates she used to believe in the survival of tadpoles. This reference to tadpoles is significant as Emily is making a comparison to her unborn baby. Emily was probably told at some point that the fetus was no bigger than a tadpole because she indicated earlier she wondered what had happened to the baby as she believed something no bigger than a tadpole would be buried. Her reference to the survival of the tadpole is significant as in her baby's case; it was she who killed that tadpole.

The grief and guilt Emily feels from the loss of her baby also comes out when she and K.T. see the robin's egg fall. Emily realizes this smashing of the egg is similar to her abortion. That egg that could have become a robin loses that ability as soon as it hits the ground. In the same way, Emily has allowed her baby's life to be snuffed out by having an abortion.

Emily thinks about her relationship with Paul and realizes how much she enjoyed the way he wanted her. It was at a party that they'd had sex with no condom. She had been drunk, and Paul had asked for oral sex. She'd refused but didn't fight or say anything when he didn't put on a condom. For the first time she seems to remember that she and Paul thought their relationship would last. She indicates that it fell apart because of crossed signals and parents.

## Discussion Question 1

Why do you think that Amber acts as she does around Emily? What does she mean when she says she has "regret in her eye"?

## Discussion Question 2

As Emily continues to write poetry, she strives to write like Emily Dickinson. She believes Emily Dickinson's odd use of punctuation and capitalization was a way for her to voice her rage. Do you agree with Emily? Why or why not?



## Discussion Question 3

Why does seeing the broken robin's egg upset Emily so badly? Do you think K.T. understands why Emily is crying?

## Vocabulary

infirmary, eschewing, coexist, anonymity, elitists, pathological, coincides, pedometer, lesbian



# Chapters 10-11

## Summary

In Chapter 10, Emily buys socks, cigarettes, and a greeting card for K.T. The greeting card reminds her of a story that Paul once told her about him and his sister, Carey. Carey had cried because she knew Paul would be upset when he couldn't make a maple leaf that had fallen from a tree stick back to its branch.

Emily sits on the bench at The Emily Dickinson House and smokes her cigarette. She walks up to the house and identifies the window that was the poet's. She thinks about how Emily Dickinson was considered to be hopeless as she refused to profess her faith in Christ when she was sent to Mount Holyoke College at the age of 16. At the end of the year, she and twenty-eight other girls stayed true to their beliefs. Emily Bean feels that the challenge of her poetry is to stay true to herself and her story.

She walks around the house to the garden where she sees crocuses blooming. She feels something rock her back and forth. A hand removes her ponytail and brushes her hair down her back. A voice tells her the flowers are hers to take. She cannot bring herself to pick the fragile but determined flowers. She walks back to ASG where she writes a poem in which she pretends to be having a conversation with Emily Dickinson. She calls the poem "The Meeting."

Alone in her dorm room, Emily contemplates the difference between loneliness and solitude. She believes it is solitude that she feels while she is writing. She writes poems for hours using a fountain pen that K.T. gave her. K.T. thought that Emily Dickinson had written with a fountain pen. Emily had checked it out and learned that Emily Dickinson had written with both pen and pencil. The poet had worn a white dress with a pocket sewn on the front to hold pencils and paper. In her poem "Seed" Emily Bean writes about Paul.

In Chapter 11, when Emily wakes Sunday afternoon, she feels like she's been reincarnated. She starts to tell K.T. about what happened to her the night before when she's interrupted by Annabelle telling her she has a phone call. It is Carey Wagoner, Paul's sister. She tells Emily they don't blame her for what happened to Paul. She wants to talk for a minute, but Emily says she'll call her back when she has more privacy.

In a flashback, Emily remembers when she realized she was pregnant. It was on Thanksgiving morning as she was putting on her bra. Her breasts hurt, and the bra seemed too tight. The smell of pumpkin pie, one she usually loved, nauseated her. When her period was five weeks late, she asked Paul to take her home because she was too tired for cheer leading practice. Paul drove her to the pharmacy and got two pregnancy tests. He tried to talk to her about what they'd do if the test turned out to be positive, but she stopped him. He told her he loved her. Then, they went to a McDonalds where Paul waited while Emily was in the bathroom. When she told him she



was pregnant but she didn't want a baby he told her that what she was thinking about wasn't right. She made Paul promise not to tell anyone. However, Emily had already decided she was going to involve her parents in the decision.

In present time, Emily returns to her room and promises to talk with K.T. over coffee. But, when K.T. goes for water, Emily goes to the library. She rereads one of Emily Dickinson's poems. She thinks that the poem is saying that religion was thought up to explain why bad things happen to good people. After she'd told her mother about her pregnancy, her mother told her she was grounded for life. Emily realizes how true those words were as she feels grounded by her actions and her doubt.

In the library, Emily goes for a drink of water. She remembers the newspaper reports of what she and Paul were like. She remembers reading Ms. Albright's account of the day. When she'd walked up behind Paul, she'd asked him for the gun but he raised it and shot at the ceiling. Even so, Ms. Albright had told reporters that she didn't think Paul had any intention of hurting Emily, himself, or anyone else. Paul had run further into the library. Ms. Albright thought he was looking for an emergency exit. He found only a block wall that he shot at before shooting himself. Back at her carrel in the library, Emily feels chills down her back when she sees a crocus is lying across her math book. The chapter ends with Emily's poem "Girl at a Bedroom Window."

## Analysis

Emily's story takes on an eerie tone as she visits The Emily Dickinson House one night after dark. As she kneels in the garden next to some early blooming crocuses, Emily feels as if someone is with her. She feels someone remove her hair from the ponytail, then stroke her hair down her back. A voice whispers to her that she can take one of the crocuses. She doesn't take any of the flowers, but the following day when she takes a study break at the library, she comes back to find a crocus lying on her desk. She cannot find anyone around who might have seen anything or who can tell her who left the crocus.

The theme of Emily Dickinson as Emily Beam's muse is developed in this section of the novel as Emily thinks of the things she has in common with the former poet. Emily Dickinson was considered hopeless at the religious college that she attended because she would not profess faith in Christ as the other girls did. In reality, Emily Dickinson sought the truth and did not want to agree to a lie just to please the public. Similarly, Emily Beam is searching for truth in her own situation. Like Emily Dickinson, Emily Beam searches for God's motives in allowing her to get pregnant and then allowing Paul to shoot himself. She doesn't see God's hand in any of the things that have happened, even though she desperately wants to believe.

From the information given in the novel thus far, it doesn't appear that Emily gave Paul a great deal of input in her decision about her abortion. He seemed to know she might have been pregnant even without her suggesting it to him as he took her to a drug store for a pregnancy test on the day she asked him to take her home from school early. He



tried to talk to her as they drove, but she wouldn't discuss it with him. She only asked him not to tell anyone. Later, when she told Paul she was going to have an abortion, he told her that ending the pregnancy was not right.

## Discussion Question 1

Considering what has been disclosed so far about Paul, do you think he intended to shoot himself? Why or why not? Use examples from the book to support your answer.

## Discussion Question 2

How do you think the crocus came to be lying on Emily's desk? Who spoke to her in the garden? Was it the same person?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Emily make Paul promise not to tell anyone about her pregnancy when she has already decided she will tell her parents? Should the father of the baby or the parents of the girl who is pregnant have more input when making a decision about the pregnancy? Justify your opinion.

## Vocabulary

profess, innate, menagerie, transposes, reincarnated, epileptic, wrath, prudent, atypical, definitive, distill, parse



## Chapters 12-13

### Summary

In Chapter 12, Emily continues to wonder where the crocus came from. K.T. finally comes looking for her after Sunday dinner. She holds her arms out to K.T. for a hug. Madame Colche fixes dinner for the two girls since K.T. told her that Emily had missed dinner. Madame Colche asks Emily if she's told K.T. about the poetry contest she's entering. Madame Colche comments that Emily is a talented poet while K.T. is talented at music. She adds that if Amber Atkins, who is a talented painter were there, she'd have the school's three most talented girls with her.

As the week progresses, Emily considers telling K.T. about her past. She also thinks about her promise to call Carey back. Nearly a week later, Emily puts her notebook of poetry on K.T.'s desk. She leaves out only one poem, one that is much too personal for her to share. She remembers going back to Paul after she'd thrown up in the bathroom the night of the party when they'd had unprotected sex. He rubs her belly and kisses her. Emily thinks that women are created so they easily accept their losses. For instance, even though a woman carries a baby for nine months, it will leave her and belong to the world. The mother is left behind trying to deal with the emptiness. The poem included at the end of this chapter "Mother, Once Removed" is written by Emily to her baby.

In Chapter 13, K.T. reads Emily's poems Monday morning while Emily is in the shower. When Emily returns, the notebook is back on her pile of books. At breakfast, K.T. squeezes Emily's hand telling her they are the best poems she's read in her life, but she doesn't try to discuss them with Emily. K.T. tells her she does need to enter the poetry contest. As K.T. goes for more coffee, Emily looks back over her poems and believes they speak of a girl on the run from her innocence. She decides to take the advice Madame Colche gave her and continue moving forward until the past makes sense.

In Emily's French class that same day, Madame Colche pairs her up with Amber Atkins for a group project. She thinks that the teacher has set this up just to get Emily and Amber together. Amber tells Emily she wants to plan their train trip for their project to Chicago to an art museum. Emily agrees to the pretend destination. The chapter ends with a poem about Amber "Small Things."

### Analysis

In this section of the novel Emily takes a big step in building her friendship with K.T. by sharing with her the poetry she has written. The only poem that Emily sets aside is the one entitled "Mother, Once Removed." Emily feels this poem is far too personal to be shared yet, even with K.T. Unfortunately; it is also K.T. who suffers the brunt of Emily's panic when she is confronted by someone from her past. When Carey calls, Emily is



knocked off guard. It is the first time she has spoken with someone from Grenfell County besides her parents since Paul's death.

Meanwhile, Madame Colche seems to be trying to get Emily to strike up a friendship with Amber Atkins. She arranges for the two to work together on a project in their French class. Instead of putting any effort into the project, Emily allows Amber to come up with a destination for the pretend train trip they are supposed to be taking.

Notice also in this section that Emily indicates she believes women are naturally set up to deal with loss. She uses the example of a woman having to deal with the birth of a baby that has been growing inside her for nine months. After the nine months is over, the baby no longer belongs to just the woman, but to the world in general.

## **Discussion Question 1**

What do you think Madame Colche's advice "fake it til you make it" means?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Why do you think that Madame Colche wants to get Emily and Amber together?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Consider Emily's idea that women are set up naturally to deal with loss. What do you think she means by this idea?

## **Vocabulary**

baguette, contemplates, contradictions, dichotomies, juxtapositions





# Chapters 14-15

## Summary

In Chapter 14, Emily thinks about Chicago as she walks around the track in her fitness class. She thinks instead she should plan a trip to Las Vegas because she had gambled. She remembers writing a letter to Paul two days before he shot himself. She writes three different versions of her break up letter, picking one out of a hat because she can't decide which one to give him if she isn't able to see him face to face. He had planned to pick her up at 7 that night for her birthday dinner. She doesn't feel right about celebrating. Paul is at home and they go for a walk. When she can no longer stand the phoniness, she tells him.

When she goes to the bathroom, Emily passes the phone and worries it will ring and be Carey wanting to talk to her. In the bathroom, Annabelle continues to give unwanted advice. Waverley joins them in the bathroom and the two tell Emily how she should have gone with them to St. Mark's. They tell Emily's she adorable and that they're glad the whore Hannah got kicked out. As Emily passes the phone in the hall again, she promises she'll call Carey after study period from the phone in the library. Another girl is already on that phone. Back at Hart Hall, Waverley is on the phone there until it is too late to call Carey.

Later that night, Emily's hears Paul's name in K.T.'s snores. She keeps thinking about Carey. She wonders how Carey, who had always ridden to school with her brother, is getting to school now. She wonders what has happened to Paul's truck. Her poem "A New Solar System" describing the Wagoner family as independent planets in a solar system ends the chapter.

In Chapter 15, even after seventy-eight days, Emily still feels shame over the things she's done, particularly the abortion. She wonders what might have happened if any number of different things had happened. She thinks of the words "so" and "sew" and wonders if Emily Dickinson was ever able to put words together in just the right order so she didn't need stitches anymore.

She remembers reading one of Emily Dickinson's poems to Paul just a few days before she knew she was pregnant for sure. He'd commented as they sat in front of her house, which was decorated for Christmas, that he didn't like the way people went overboard during Christmas. She'd read him the poem but he said he didn't understand it. She wonders if she'd been able to make him understand if he would still be alive. She's learned that during her Puritan upbringing, Emily Dickinson had looked for signs of God's grace. She refused to profess Christianity because she didn't want to lie, a refusal that caused her to be banished from society.

On the way to breakfast, as Emily hears a poem forming in her head, K.T. notices how distracted she is. Emily says she's feeling nostalgic. K.T. asks if she ever misses playing



with dolls. K.T. reasons that she doesn't think that they are old enough to start playing games with real people yet when they are told they have to pack up their toys. As Emily sits at the breakfast table, Amber tells her they need to finish their French presentation and asks to sit next to her. They explain their project to K.T. when she arrives. After Amber leaves, Emily comments on Amber being strange. K.T. mentions that Emily is the pot calling the kettle black.

K.T. tells Emily it is okay for her to have other friends. She speaks of her roommate the year prior and says this girl, Jhodi, was her only friend. Emily compares K.T.'s story to her experience with Terra. The chapter ends with Emily's poem "Treasures."

## Analysis

Emily continues to punish herself by going over and over what might have happened differently in Paul's story if situations had been different. She wonders if she had been able to teach him about the meaning of Emily Dickinson's poem about the light in spring if he would have not killed himself. She wonders what might have happened if she'd told him differently about their breakup and the abortion. Consider this from Paul's point of view. He knew that Emily was pregnant. He'd already told her that he didn't think aborting the baby was right. He'd promised her that he wouldn't tell anyone that she was pregnant. Now, he was suddenly being told, without even any discussion, that they were breaking up and Emily would have an abortion. He must have felt as if he was not being allowed to have any say or any input into the decision even though the child that Emily carried was his as well as hers.

Note that Emily got angry when her mother suggested to her that she tell Paul what was happening in order to be fair to him. Emily could be angry because she felt that she was the one life was being unfair to, or because she felt Paul should have had more of a say in the decision. Emily did ask her parents to allow her to break up with Paul face to face, a request that indicated she may think them asking her to break things off with him was not fair.

Also in these chapters notice Emily's line of thinking when Annabelle tells Emily that Hannah, K.T.'s previous roommate was a whore. Annabelle doesn't seem to think that Emily could have anything in common with Hannah but Emily wonders to herself what the girls would call her if they learned she'd gotten pregnant and had an abortion. Advancing the theme of the difference in the way boys and girls are treated and perceived, Emily remembers her mother telling her that life was unfair because of the way unmarried boys and unmarried girls who were sexually active were seen differently. Boys were called players and were admired while girls were called whores and looked down upon.

Notice that as the novel progresses, Emily seems to relate more and more to the poet Emily Dickinson. Although Emily Dickinson refused to profess she was a Christian, Emily notices that most of her poems seem to be the product of Emily's search for God. She compares the poet's search for the truth of God's existence to her own search for



God in the death of Paul. Her poem about God taking angels from her (Paul and her baby) indicates she is angry with God for what has happened to her and to Paul. She wonders where God was during the whole situation. She believes God has taken too much from her and has left her with only a shell of herself.

Note the imagery used in this section of the novel. The first comes as Emily drives to Paul's house to break up with him. In the December day, all the limbs are bare of their leaves, just as she says the truth will soon be bared to Paul. Notice also the imagery of sewing that the author also includes in this section of the novel. She incorporates the exacting sounding words "so", "sow" and "sew" into her writing having Emily pose the question if Emily Dickinson was ever able to thread words together in just the right way as to mend herself so that she didn't feel she needed stitches.

The theme of friendship is also discussed in this section of the novel as K.T. tells Emily it is okay for her to have friends other than her. K.T. confides with Emily that it was probably wrong of her to just depend on Jhodi, her roommate the previous year, instead of trying to make several friends. Note also in this section that K.T. asks Emily if she still plays with dolls. Though Emily denies she does, she thinks of her dolls at home. K.T. has no problem admitting she would rather play with her dolls. In fact, she argues that girls are often made to put away their toys far too quickly, forcing them to play adult games for which they aren't ready.

## Discussion Question 1

For what did Emily Dickinson seem to be searching in her poetry? What do you think that Emily Bean searches for as she writes her poems?

## Discussion Question 2

Why is K.T.'s comment that she still plays with dolls significant? What is she trying to say about childhood?

## Discussion Question 3

Discuss Emily's anger when her parents suggest she tell Paul what is happening with the baby to be fair to him. Why do you think she's angry?

## Vocabulary

hypocrite, accusatory, encroached, transitory, sacrament, scoured, nostalgic, repertoire, bereft, coquettish, symmetry



# Chapters 16-17

## Summary

In Chapter 16, for her French presentation, Emily's job is to tell about a side trip the two girls will be taking to visit Terra. She is extra-careful to spend time with K.T. and express her appreciation for her friendship instead of writing poems. The phone in Hart Hall seems to mock her. As she reads Emily Dickinson's biography in the library, the phone rings. It reminds her of her promise to call Carey.

Emily believes that Emily Dickinson's beginning life on West Street as well as her view of a graveyard added to her melancholy personality. Emily has also learned that Emily Dickinson's best friend and cousin died when Emily Dickinson was only fifteen, causing her to retreat into herself. It was at this point she was taken out of Amherst Academy and sent to live with her aunt.

Emily leaves campus without permission and walks to the spot where Emily Dickinson had first lived. In the cemetery, she finds the Dickinson plot and looks at Emily's grave. Emily already knew that she and the poet shared a birth date; but, it is shocking to see it etched in stone. Emily Dickinson had been sick and had expected to die, but Paul had not. As she watches, a sparrow perches on a china doll someone has placed on the grave. The bird looks at her piercingly, sings, and then flies away. She drops to the ground and writes a poem "The Safe Way" about the magic of playing with dolls.

In Chapter 17, when Emily finishes writing, she realizes she is missing trigonometry class. She takes a shortcut through a park and remembers that she had promised Paul that she loved him and that they would get back together when she came back to Grenfell County. She thought that was what he wanted to hear. When she'd told him her parents were making her get an abortion and that was what she wanted because she wanted to have a life, he told her the baby inside her was a life. She tried to convince him that they wouldn't be together forever. Emily told him that her parents would say they owned her until she was eighteen if she told them she didn't want the abortion even though she never mentioned wanting to keep the baby. Paul had wanted to go to Emily's house that night so they could talk to her parents. Paul felt like having an abortion would destroy Emily.

Emily recalls how they had fought. She told that Paul she wouldn't be pregnant if he had worn a condom. He retaliated by telling her it wouldn't have happened if she'd given him oral sex as he'd asked. He picked up a rock, which Emily was afraid he was going to throw at her. He held it until she drove off and then banged himself in the head with it.

Back at the library, Emily finds a note has been placed on the carrel where she was sitting instructing her to see the headmistress. As she waits to see the headmistress, she remembers Paul coming to her house that night anyway. Emily had kept her father from answering the door.



Dr. Ingold asks Emily's reason for leaving campus without permission, and Emily says she had to find Emily Dickinson's grave. Despite her attempt to explain, Emily is punished by being confined to the school campus for one week. If she breaks another rule, Emily may be expelled. Before Emily leaves her office, Dr. Ingold gives her a letter that arrived for her and also comments that Emily Dickinson's hair was almost the same color as Emily Beam's. The chapter ends with Emily's poem "DNA."

## Analysis

Furthering the theme of friendship in this section Emily refers to Terra as her *tres bonne amie*, or very good friend, as she describes the side trip she and Amber plan to make during their French presentation. This seems to be a play to prove to Madame Colche and the others that she does have friends. The reference to Terra as her good friend seems empty when Emily considers that Terra doesn't even know that Emily is in boarding school and would never have approved of her having sex with Paul, getting pregnant, and having an abortion. In this section, it is also noted that Emily uses more of her energy trying to be a friend to K.T. after learning that K.T. lost her best friend, just as Emily lost Paul.

The occurrence of losing friends is another aspect of Emily's life that is similar to Emily Dickinson's. When Emily Dickinson was fifteen, her best friend and cousin died. It seemed to be a turning point for Emily as this was when she turned inside herself. As the novel progresses, Emily Beam seems to have more and more in common with the poet. The two share the same day of birth, December 10th. According to Dr. Ingold, they both have the same color hair. Emily Beam wonders if it was because Emily Dickinson lived on West Street, a street named for the direction in which each day dies, and in a house overlooking a cemetery that she grew to be such a melancholy adult. Along this idea, Dr. Ingold tells Emily Beam that the poet was not as dark as some people think. Although the reference can be seen in terms of hair color as the two are talking about hair color in relation to a daguerreotype of Emily Dickinson which makes her hair appear black. Dr. Ingold reminds Emily that Emily Dickinson spent a good deal of time outside in her garden, not an activity for those completely dark of heart.

The story of Paul and Emily's break-up is shared in this section of the novel. To say that Paul did not take the news well would have been an understatement. He at first seemed concerned about the death of the baby and tried to convince Emily that it wasn't only her body she was dealing with but a part of himself as well. As the two talked, the conversation seemed to break down into a blame session where they each vented their frustrations with the other. Paul was angry enough that Emily believed he would have thrown the rock and hurt her as she tried to get away from him. Instead, he turned his anger on himself, hitting his own head with the rock.



## Discussion Question 1

Why do you think it was so important for Emily to go when she did to see Emily Dickinson's grave?

## Discussion Question 2

How might Emily have handled her break up with Paul differently? Do you think she did as well as she could have? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

Discuss the significance of Emily's reference to Terra in her French project.

## Vocabulary

doles, impressionable, errant, relinquish, intrigued, confine, unsentimental



# Chapters 18-20

## Summary

In Chapter 18, as Emily contemplates her punishment, she wonders if she should just go ahead and leave. Ms. Albright, her former English teacher, has Emily a letter that tells her to enjoy the opportunities in Amherst and to tell Emily D. hello for her. In a burst of anger, Emily throws one of her boots across the library. She sees Amber Atkins peek at her from behind a stack and goes looking for her. She isn't able to locate her; when she returns from getting a drink of water, K.T. is sitting at her carrel. K.T. apologizes to Emily, telling her she had to tell on her because she was afraid Emily had hurt herself. She tells Emily for the first time that Emily cries out in her sleep at least once every night. K.T. also shares that a good friend of hers committed suicide, which was why she was in school at Amherst. Emily says she wishes the girl had told her that the first day she'd arrived. Then, K.T. asks what Emily had ever shared with her. A poem "Absinthe" ends the chapter.

In Chapter 19, Carey calls for Emily again. This time she gets Annabelle who questions Carey and learns that Emily is not an orphan. When Annabelle gets Emily to the phone she says simply "I knew your parents didn't ski." Annabelle stands and stares as Emily tries to talk to Carey. Emily is still on the phone when Annabelle catches K.T. and Waverley in the hall together. Annabelle confronts K.T. about the fake orphan story. The argument soon focuses on Hannah with Annabelle and Waverly blaming K.T. for getting Hannah kicked out of school for telling on her. Emily feels just as she had when Paul had left her house the day she'd broken up with him, as if she'd made an irreversible error. Paul had called on the phone, but her father had not let him speak to her. Emily later called Paul. He suggested they get married, but Emily's mother caught her and made her hang up.

Although she knows it is wrong, Emily hangs up on Carey as the girls on her floor face off against each other. K.T. tells Annabelle she knew that she was behind the bullying notes left for Hannah. Annabelle warns Emily to watch out for K.T. before Waverley grabs her by the arm and pulls her into their room. K.T. tells Emily she told on Hannah for the same reason she told on Emily. She told because she was worried about her. The poem "The Doctor" about a doctor who prays for children not yet born follows this chapter.

In Chapter 20, of all the things that have happened to Emily that day, she is most worried about what Carey wants to talk to her about. Emily had been to counseling, but she hadn't found it particularly helpful because she'd lied to the doctor.

Emily remembers the day she was taken to have her abortion. On the way to the doctor she had thought about how the last living part of Paul was inside her. Suddenly she didn't want to kill that part of him. Her mother tells her that they were making the right decision, discrediting Emily's argument that they are bad for ending the pregnancy. As



Emily watches the snowflakes melt against the window, she realizes the unique baby inside her will die on that day. Her poem “Conception” follows this chapter.

## Analysis

Tempers flare when Annabelle learns that Emily is not really an orphan. Annabelle lashes out at K.T. because Annabelle is angry with herself for getting caught up in the story that K.T. told and believing it was real. She blames K.T. for Hannah being kicked out of school. K.T., in turn, accuses Annabelle and Waverley of bullying the girl. Caught in the middle of their fight is Emily, who is trying to talk on the phone with Carey, who has finally called her back. It is Carey who suffers in the process of the fight as Emily hangs up on her without even telling her why.

As the fight begins, Emily indicates she has a feeling of *déjà vu*. The fight is just like the one she’d had before she broke up with Paul. She knows she’s about to do something that cannot be undone. With Paul, her act of breaking up with him might have been the act that sent him into a tailspin, ending in his death. With Carey, Emily chooses to cut off the conversation as she is suddenly aware of the hateful nature of both Annabelle and Waverley. She does not want them to figure out from any snippets of her conversation what has really happened in her past.

Notice K.T.’s continued efforts to be friends with Emily. She knows she’s gotten Emily into trouble, but she tells her that she did so because she was afraid Emily was going to hurt herself. K.T. shares with Emily that the reason she is at Amherst is because a good friend of hers committed suicide. So, her parents had sent her there for a change of scenery. Her story is similar to Emily’s as they both struggle with the loss of a friend to suicide. Emily is upset with K.T. for not sharing earlier, but K.T. only chides her for not having shared anything with her about her past. K.T. doesn’t consider the sharing of her poems by Emily a suitable substitution for talking face to face.

This is the first time in the novel that the reader learns that Paul tried to propose marriage to Emily. She would not let her father open the door when Paul came to the house the day of her birthday. Then, her father would not let her talk to Paul when he called on the phone. When she sneaked downstairs and called Paul after her parents had gone to bed, he managed to ask her about marriage before her mother caught her and demanded that she put down the phone.

Emily compares herself to Emily Dickinson in this section of the novel as she says they both had roommates who were spies. Emily Dickinson’s roommate had told on Emily for being an unbeliever. Emily Bean wonders if Emily Dickinson’s actions really called for the punishment she received. She also wonders if she should just go ahead and leave ASG and get that part of her life finished.

## Discussion Question 1

Why do you think that Emily is suddenly angry after she reads Ms. Albright’s letter?





## Discussion Question 2

How does Emily Beam's situation at school compare to Emily Dickinson's? How are they different?

## Discussion Question 3

Discuss Emily's reaction to Paul on the day she broke up with him. At first, she didn't want to talk to him. Then, she changed her mind and wanted to speak to him. Why do you think she had a change of heart?

## Vocabulary

heaven, duration, irreversible, waylaid, eloquent



# Chapters 21-22

## Summary

In Chapter 21, K.T. wakes Emily early in the morning after Emily cries out in her sleep. Emily admits she's afraid of Annabelle and doesn't want to leave the room. K.T. offers to make coffee in the room. When Emily compares Annabelle to Buddha, K.T. tells Emily she's the bumpiest pumpkin. Emily says she has the right to be as her boyfriend killed himself. K.T. asks if Paul were the one who got Emily pregnant as well. They spend the morning sharing their stories. After they finish talking, Emily puts her toothbrush and toothpaste in her bag so she can brush her teeth in the library. She thinks that since Annabelle was able to get Hannah kicked out of school, she could do the same thing to Emily. She remembers that after her abortion was finished, she walked out of the coffee shop where she and her mother met back up with Aunt Cindy. She gets on the train and goes to Harvard.

Back in the present, Amber approaches Emily in the dining room, saying she has something she needs to tell her in private. Amber tells her she's taken something and she needs to tell Emily about it because she was there. Emily guesses she's talking about the crocus, but Amber tells her it was something else. She leads Emily to the bathroom in the library and locks them into a bathroom stall together. She first tells Emily she found the long white dress that belonged to Emily Dickinson behind the poet's house. She wants Emily to sweet talk her way back into the house so she can put it back before the house reopens. Emily refuses, telling Amber she's grounded on campus and plans to stay out of trouble until her punishment is over. Emily finds a scrap of paper in the pocket of the dress, which Amber swears she didn't put there. She does admit she took the dress from Emily's room, however. After Emily leaves Amber she sees that the paper has the words "An Unexpected Maid" on them. Emily finds the Dickinson poem that refers to the unexpected maid, but doesn't understand the meaning of the words. Two poems "Anthology" and "Hold Up" complete this chapter.

In Chapter 22, Emily believes she can hear the sound of bells as she runs around the track. She can make these bells rearrange themselves into songs or poems. She thinks about how strongly Paul believed in life when he confronted her in the library Dec. 12. Now, she understands how he felt.

Emily had told K.T. she'd stolen the Harvard sweatshirt on the day she'd had her abortion. Her mother had been mad at her when she finally got back to Aunt Cindy's house. She was grounded, but it was nothing like she felt as she sat in the recovery room with two other girls. She tells K.T. they didn't talk to each other because the voices in their heads had already started. This chapter ends with the poem "Mosaic."



## Analysis

In this section of the novel, Emily finally opens up to K.T. about Paul's death and her abortion. It is a big step for Emily as the theme of friendship threads through the novel. In exchange, K.T. tells Emily that she was sent to ASG because a close friend from her school had killed herself. The two have more in common than Emily had ever thought.

Meanwhile, it seems that Amber has the intent of getting Emily in trouble. She's stolen Emily Dickinson's well-known white dress with a pocket sewn on the right hip. The dress generally hangs in the late poet's room in The Emily Dickinson House. Amber wants Emily to be in charge of returning the dress, even though Emily has been grounded on campus and would get into serious trouble if she were to leave campus again. Note that she leaves Amber with the stolen dress.

During this section of the novel, Emily also shares the details of the day of her abortion. She remembers running away from the coffee shop her mother took her to following the procedure. She got on the train and went to Harvard where she stole the sweatshirt she now wears at school. The picture that Emily paints of her time in the recovery room is poignant as she describes the two other girls who were there with her. One was Latino, and the other black, while Emily was the white girl. K.T. asks if they talked to each other about their procedures, but Emily says they didn't because the voices in their heads had already started. Emily means that they had already begun to rethink and regret what they had done.

### Discussion Question 1

Consider the slip of paper that Emily finds in Emily Dickinson's dress pocket when Amber shows her the dress. Do you think that slip of paper has been in the dress all this time? If not, who put it there?

### Discussion Question 2

Now that Emily has opened up to K.T. about her own past, what does she learn about K.T.? How might this information have helped Emily if she had known it earlier?

### Discussion Question 3

Discuss Emily's story of the afternoon after her abortion. Why do you think that she went to Harvard and stole the sweatshirt?

## Vocabulary

anonymous, endothermic, exothermic, sinew, peal, sync, fervency, parody, mosaics



## Chapter 23

### Summary

Since Emily has been at ASG, she's finished 27 poems, plus the one about her abortion that she hides under her mattress. In addition, she has a variety of poem fragments. It was Emily Dickinson's younger sister who had the poet's work published after her sister's death. Emily can't decide how she feels about this as she wouldn't want her own poems published. She defaces the application form for the poetry contest and throws it in the trash. The next morning when she wakes, she finds Emily Dickinson's dress has been stuffed into her underwear drawer. Emily looks for Amber but can't find her. She stops by Madame Colche's house and asks to be allowed to visit The Emily Dickinson House, but her request is denied.

Emily decides it is time to make something happen. She walks off campus to the house even though she doesn't have permission. She has been on the bench only a few minutes when Amber comes running up. Amber tells Emily she'd stopped by Emily's room and caught Annabelle leaving Emily's room. Annabelle had Emily's poetry notebook in her hands by Amber had taken it away from her.

Emily tells Amber she plans to leave the dress in the yard when she knows everyone is gone. Amber suggests she should leave it in the bedroom, where it belongs. Amber tells Emily she stole the dress for her, because she knew Emily had lost something, something she wouldn't be getting back. She tells Emily that she needs to stand in Emily Dickinson's room for just a minute as a poet, to sense that there is something otherworldly there. Amber promises to wait for Emily until she comes out of the house. she has brought her paints and will be painting while she waits.

Fifteen minutes before the house closes, Emily decides she can't wait any longer. She goes inside where an elderly lady hands her a brochure and tells her the tour is self-guided. She takes some time to look at pictures in the parlor before going upstairs to Emily's bedroom. As she's there, the lady from downstairs joins her. Emily asks if there is a bathroom. She waits in the bathroom until everyone has left the house.

As she waits in the parlor for darkness, she remembers thinking the day that Paul shot himself that for a moment he was right and she was wrong in her beliefs. Then he'd softened and told her that he didn't know what he was doing. He begged her to marry him. She was afraid to say no, but Paul knew she was lying. She is ashamed of herself for using the baby as an excuse not to marry Paul.

Still in the dark parlor, Emily removes her own turtleneck sweater and tries on Emily's dress. She takes it off when she feels tears coming. She removes her boots and walks back up to Emily's room. She remembers feeling like a chosen one when she first began her friendship with Paul. She remembers their first date as they were nervous at first, and then opened up to one another. Paul had told her that day he believed life was



a gift from God. As she thinks about their first kiss, Emily drops to her knees in front of Emily Dickinson's bed and cries.

When she raises her head again, Emily Dickinson's dress is arranged over the chair. Emily doesn't remember leaving it like that. She also doesn't remember leaving her poetry notebook on the desk. She asks the mannequin if she, Emily Dickinson, now believes in heaven. As she fingers the pocket on the poet's dress, she thinks about the pocket in Paul's jeans and wonders what happened to the letter she'd given him. Suddenly the stillness in the room explains the unexpected maid to her. This maid comes from within, and Emily must create a world of meaning for this maid to live in. She realizes also that Emily intended her poems to be found so that other lost daughters and sons would realize they were not alone. She and the silence communicate, creating a poem titled "Pocket" that completes the chapter.

## Analysis

Central to this chapter is Emily's decision that Emily Dickinson knew her poetry would be found and would be published. Emily comes to the realization that the poet knew her words would bring hope and help to future generations of people who for whatever reason were banished, guilty or hurting. As Emily Dickinson's poems had helped Emily work through her own guilt and troubles in relation to Paul's death and her abortion, she realizes that is the reason for writing.

Meanwhile, Amber Atkins shows that even though she may not be the best influence on Emily, she does seem to have Emily's best interests in mind. She'd visited Emily's room earlier and found Annabelle leaving it with Emily's poetry notebook in her hand. Amber took the notebook from Annabelle sensing that Annabelle was up to no good. It is also Amber that arranges for Emily to visit Emily Dickinson's room in private, even though she risks getting Emily in trouble for doing so.

It is in this section of the novel that the reader learns what statement Emily made in her final moments with Paul that has made her feel most guilty. Even though she didn't want to keep the baby she was carrying and knew she didn't want to keep it, she used that life as a way to explain to Paul why they shouldn't get married. Of all the things she had done and decisions she had made, it was the act of using that unborn, unwanted baby that made Emily feel most guilty. She already knew that Paul believed that life was a gift from God and that he treasured that gift, even though he didn't necessarily believe in everlasting life. It seems that one of the things with which Emily struggles is the idea perhaps there is no heaven and she won't see Paul, or those who have died before her, again.

Notice that one of the first questions that she poses to the mannequin in Emily Dickinson's room is that of Emily's final decision on heaven. "Does the poet still believe there is no heaven?" she asks. As she spends time in the room and listens to the voice of silence, Emily is able to put into perspective the idea of the unexpected maid being her muse. In Emily's case, Emily Dickinson is her muse. She also leaves her experience



in Emily Dickinson's room realizing that she did really love Paul despite how cruel she'd been to him.

## Discussion Question 1

Although Amber is a thief and puts Emily in a position that could possibly get her in a good deal of trouble, how is she a friend to Emily?

## Discussion Question 2

Discuss Emily's experience in Emily Dickinson's room. Do you think she is visited by the poet, or does she just finally allow herself to be still long enough to hear her own thoughts?

## Discussion Question 3

Do you think Emily comes to a decision about Paul and her feelings for him during her time in Emily Dickinson's house? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

correspondence, metaphor, ambiguous, kaleidoscope, suffice, awash, docents, cascade, decade, bodice, agape, wanes



# Chapter 24

## Summary

Before she leaves, Emily tells the mannequin that she doesn't believe in heaven either, but she wishes that she did. She plays chopsticks on the parlor piano before sneaking out the front door. Madame Colche rises from the bench across the street and meets Emily at the iron gate. Emily asks if she is in trouble and if she will be sent home. Her teacher tells her she is in trouble, but she doesn't know if she will be sent home. When Emily tells Madame Colche that Emily Dickinson spoke to her while she was in her house, Madame Colche confirms that she did.

Amber and K.T. are waiting when Emily returns to her room. They comfort her, telling her that Madame Colche might be able to soften the blow for Emily as she's been at the school longer even than Dr. Ingold. Amber asks what it was like being in the house alone. Emily promises to tell her sometime; but she says that she needs to make a phone call. Once she's on the phone with Carey, she tells Carey she thinks she knows why she had called. She is guessing that the girl had found the letter Emily wrote to Paul. She is correct. She tells Carey that even though the letter said she would have, she knows she wouldn't have gotten back together with Paul because she'd hurt him beyond repair. Carey has not told anyone that Emily was pregnant and promises not to do so. They agree to meet and talk when Emily is home for spring break.

Back in her room, K.T. shows Emily a note saying that Emily's poem "Mother, Once Removed" has been entered in The Emily Dickinson Poetry Contest. She knows it was Annabelle and Waverley who submitted the poem on her behalf. Emily feels the two plan to broadcast the information that Emily had an abortion to the entire school. Although K.T. insists the two might have done Emily a favor, Emily knows they submitted the poem about her abortion to be mean. Emily's poem "Clouds" ends this chapter.

## Analysis

Even though Emily has tried to keep her abortion a secret, Annabelle and Waverley have found the poem that Emily wrote about that procedure and have entered it to a public poetry contest. Being an optimist, K.T. tries to convince Emily that Annabelle and Waverley might have been acting in Emily's best interests even though their intent was to hurt her. Emily, however, believes the girls were up to no good. Notice that K.T. and Amber have waited together for Emily to come back to campus. Even though they are an odd crew, Emily has made some devoted friends while at ASG.

In her journey through her grief over Paul's death, Emily has finally come to the place that she feels comfortable calling and talking to Carey. She is able to tell Carey the truth about her relationship with Paul and the fact that they probably wouldn't have gotten



back together even though she'd said they would in the letter that Carey found. Carey shows an immense amount of maturity in not telling her parents that Emily had been pregnant with Paul's baby and had it aborted. She believes it would have just caused more sadness for her family. Like Emily, Carey and her family do not believe that Paul intended to hurt himself. He was caught in a situation that offered no good way out.

Also in this section notice K.T.'s answer to Emily when Emily asks her friend if she thinks what she did in having an abortion was awful. She repeats to Emily the words of her pastor after the death of K.T.'s friend Caroline. That pastor has said that since people were made in God's image that perhaps gave them the right to play God every once in while in the times He couldn't be found. K.T. adds that eventually, however, Emily would come to find God again.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why is it significant that Emily does not seem concerned about getting her poem back from the poetry contest, even though it isn't one she would have submitted?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Why does Carey tell Emily that she didn't tell her parents about the pregnancy? Why does Emily reason that it might be best if she did?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What do you think will be Emily's punishment for having left campus without permission?

## **Vocabulary**

silhouette, hunches, probability, metaphor, cornucopia





# Chapter 25

## Summary

K.T. and Emily go to breakfast together the day Emily is to hear her punishment from Dr. Ingold. It begins snowing as they walk to breakfast. On the way back to the dorm there is enough snow for the girls to make snow angels. K.T. messes hers up trying to get up, but Emily's turns out perfect. In their dorm, Emily makes a point of thanking Annabelle and Waverley for entering her poem in the contest. In her room, Amber has left the painting of Emily Dickinson's house for Emily. Emily calls Amber her crazy friend. As Madame Colche knocks on the door for Emily, Emily tells K.T. that she is her best friend.

In Dr. Ingold's office Emily learns she will not be expelled, but she will be grounded from leaving the campus for the rest of the year. She is also to volunteer ten hours a week with the grounds crew to keep the campus flower beds neat. Emily cries. Madame Colche sends her to a quiet place to regroup and promises to tell K.T. After she has cried herself out, she edits her poems. Then, she arranges them on a long table. She plans to send them to Ms. Albright. The only poem she leaves out is "Mother, Once Removed." She doesn't know what might happen to that poem. However, she does know that the poem and what it represents does not have to define her.

## Analysis

Just as Emily's muse Emily Dickinson spent much time in her garden, Emily Beam will be spending a good deal of time in the ASG gardens over the coming months as she is sentenced to do unpaid yard work as part of her punishment. Although some may consider this work punishment, it may fill the purpose of bringing Emily closer to an understanding of Emily Dickinson and the things that the late poet loved.

Emily makes strides in her recovery in this section as she finally recognizes K.T. as a friend and begins sharing with her honestly. She also calls Amber a friend for the first time even though it is because of Amber that she is in trouble. In this section, Emily realizes as she lays out her poems that this is one project that she has completed by herself. She is proud of her achievement and the fact she'd been able to work through her story. She realizes that Paul has a place in her story and that she has him to thank for some experiences in her life. Even her view of love has changed as she calls her set of poems a love story which acknowledges that even lovers fight, move away from one another, and then experience times of great closeness.

Perhaps, Emily's greatest achievement as noted by this section of the novel is that she realizes that she isn't defined by the fact she had an abortion. That is a part of her past, but it doesn't have to affect who she is or who she becomes. The reader is left without knowing if the poem is selected as a winner in the poetry contest. It doesn't matter if



Emily poem has won or not, it is the fact that she has found the truth of her identity and put her experiences in their places that make her a winner.

## Discussion Question 1

Look back over the poems that Emily wrote in the order in which she plans to arrange them. What are your impressions of this arrangement? Do you believe they tell the story that Emily hopes to tell?

## Discussion Question 2

As Emily thinks of her poems, she gives Paul some of the credit for them. Why is this significant?

## Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Emily was given the punishment of working in the school's gardens? Do you think Emily's punishment is just? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

summoned, alabaster, impressionistic, doles, entity



# Characters

## Emily Elizabeth Beam

Emily Elizabeth Beam is the main character and heroine of this novel. She is sent to Amherst School for Girls by her parents and her aunt after her boyfriend shoots himself in the school library at Grenfell County High School. Before he killed himself Paul had gotten Emily from her class and showed her the gun. He'd asked her to marry him and keep the baby she was carrying, but Emily refused. Emily comes to ASG believing she was responsible for Paul's death and feeling guilty about having an abortion.

On the first day at her new school, Emily begins writing poetry. She is unable to stop the words that come to her mind. The majority of her poems deal with her relationship with Paul, the events that led to her pregnancy, their breakup, and her decision to have an abortion. Even as Emily tries to work her way through her past using her poetry, the girls at the school want to know Emily's story. Emily's roommate K.T. tries to make friends with Emily and keep the gossips at bay but Emily disregards her friendship. Over the months, however, Emily slowly opens up to K.T. At the conclusion of the novel, Emily calls the girl her best friend. Once she had allowed herself to get to know K.T., Emily learned that K.T. is also attending ASG because a friend of hers committed suicide. They have more in common than Emily once thought.

Meanwhile, Emily has begun studying the poetry of Emily Dickinson, a late poet who lived in Amherst and attended the school to which Emily now goes. As she studies more and more about the poet, Emily begins to relate to her as she discovers the two have many things in common. Emily hides in The Emily Dickinson House and spends part of an evening in the solitude of Emily Dickinson's room. Emily believes she has a conversation with the poet in which Emily tells her about the unexpected maiden, a term for a muse, which Emily had found written on a scrap of paper in the pocket of the poet's dress.

At the end of the novel Emily realizes that although her story with Paul and her abortion are part of her past, she doesn't have to let these events define who she is or who she becomes. She also finally learns to accept the friendship of K.T. and Amber.

## Paul Wagoner

Paul Wagoner was Emily's boyfriend for four months prior to the time period in which this novel is set. It was by Paul that Emily became pregnant. When Emily broke up with Paul and told him she would be having an abortion, he was upset and seemed not to know how to handle the situation. He tried to talk to Emily and her parents but they wouldn't discuss the matter with him. He got a gun from his grandmother's bedside table and took it to school the Monday after Emily broke up with him. In the school library, he pulled Emily away from her class and tried again to talk to her in the library



stacks. He showed her the gun and asked her to marry him. He knew she was lying when she agreed. A teacher found them in the stacks and tried to get the gun from Paul; but, he ran away and moved further into the library before shooting himself in the stomach.

## **Keller True “K.T.” Montgomery**

K.T. Montgomery is Emily’s roommate at ASG. Right away K.T. takes Emily under her wing, but Emily avoids the girl and her offer of friendship. Sensing that Emily has been through some very traumatic situation back home, K.T. tries to keep the school gossips away from Emily and her past. She even goes so far as to make up a story about Emily. She tells Annabelle and Waverley that Emily is an orphan whose parents were killed during a ski trip. Though she doesn’t think the girls would believe the story, they do. When Annabelle learns that K.T. lied to her, she confronts K.T. in the dorm hallway. K.T. defends Emily against the bullies. As Emily finally opens up to K.T., she learns that K.T. is attending ASG because one of her friends back home in Vermont killed committed suicide.

## **Madame Colche**

Madame Colche is Emily’s French teacher at ASG. She is also a member of the Emily Dickinson Society. When Madame Colche learns that Emily is a poet, she encourages the girl to enter the society’s poetry contest. She also arranges for Emily and Amber to work together on a project for their French class. It is as if she seems to know the two girls will benefit from each other. Madame Colche is the one who comes for Emily after Emily sneaks off campus to return the dress that Amber stole from the Emily Dickinson House.

## **Ms. Albright**

Ms. Albright was Emily’s AP English teacher at Grenfell County High School. She is the teacher who had taken her class to the library the day that Paul shot himself. It was during Ms. Albright’s class that Paul led Emily away from the table and into the stacks. When Ms. Albright had discovered Emily was gone, she had gone looking for Emily and Paul. She’d tried to get Paul to give her the gun but was unable to do so. Ms. Albright later told reporters she didn’t think Paul had intended to hurt anyone including himself. Ms. Albright writes to Emily at her new boarding school. Emily eventually responds by sending Ms. Albright copies of her poems.

## **Amber Atkins**

Amber Atkins is a student of ASG who is in Emily’s French class. Emily meets the girl when she catches her stealing a lipstick at a nearby drugstore. Amber begs Emily not to tell on her and follows her to The Emily Dickinson House where she sits on the bench



with Emily. She tries to strike up a conversation with Emily, but Emily won't talk. Madame Colche sets Amber and Emily up to work together on a project for their French class. Although Emily has been grounded and cannot leave the campus without permission, Amber manipulates her into returning a dress to The Emily Dickinson House that Amber had stolen earlier. Amber believed Emily needed to be alone in the room where Emily Dickinson had written all of her poetry.

## Carey Wagoner

Carey Wagoner is Paul Wagoner's younger sister. She calls Emily at ASG and tells her that she and her family don't blame her for Paul's death. Although Carey wants to talk more, Emily cuts her off and promises to call her later. When Emily does finally call Carey several weeks later, Carey tells her that she found the letter that Emily wrote to Paul but that she hasn't told anyone about it. Carey is the only person besides Emily and her parents who know that Emily had been pregnant with Paul's baby.

## Annabelle Wycoff

Annabelle Wycoff is the girl who seems to lead the group of gossipy girls at ASG. She lives on the same floor of Hart Hall as Emily. Annabelle gets angry with Emily and K.T. when they tell her a story about Emily's parents being killed in an avalanche. In retaliation, Annabelle, with the help of her roommate Waverley Graham, finds Emily's most personal poem, "Mother, Once Removed" and submits it to the poetry contest sponsored by The Emily Dickinson Society.

## Dr. Ingold

Dr. Ingold is the headmistress at ASG. Although she knows the details of Paul's death at Grenfell County High School, she is not aware that Emily had to have an abortion. She is the one who doles out Emily's punishment for her act of leaving the ASG campus even though she was not allowed to do so.

## Aunt Cindy

It is to Aunt Cindy's house that Emily is taken after Paul kills himself. Emily stays with Cindy in Boston while she recovers from her abortion. Cindy is the one who suggests to Emily's parents that Emily attend ASG during the spring semester.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Gigi's Gun

Paul stole a gun from his grandmother, whom he called Gigi, to take with him to school on the day that he shot himself. Emily notes that it was this gun, which she describes as looking like a bold exclamation point, that ended his life.

## Robin's Egg

Emily is distraught when she and K.T. see this bird's egg shatter after falling from a tree. For Emily, the egg and the life it could have carried represent to her the baby that she aborted.

## A Crocus

After visiting the garden at The Emily Dickinson House at night and seeing the blooming crocuses, Emily is surprised when someone leaves a crocus on her textbook at the library the following day. She later learns it was Amber who left the flower. The crocus is a sign of the strange attraction and relationship that Emily develops with the late poet Emily Dickinson.

## A China Doll

When Emily visits Emily Dickinson's grave, someone has placed a china doll there. A sparrow lights on the doll and gives Emily a piercing look. The doll reminds Emily what K.T. has said about playing with dolls and Emily is unable to leave the graveyard without first putting the poem that comes to mind on paper.

## Snowflake

The snowflakes, which are falling when Emily is taken to have her abortion, come to represent Emily's baby. She realizes the baby is unique because it was created by her and Paul. There would never be a chance to make another like it. She tried to get her mother to understand she had realized she would be destroying something one of a kind if she went ahead with the abortion, but her mother would not listen.

## Emily Dickinson's Dress

Amber Atkins tells Emily that she stole this dress from The Emily Dickinson House because she felt it was the only way to get Emily to step into the house. The dress is the



one with the hand-sewn pocket where Emily kept her pencils and paper for quick access to write down ideas for poetry.

## **The Words “An Unexpected Maid”**

On a piece of paper inside the pocket of Emily Dickinson’s dress, Emily finds an old piece of paper with the words “an unexpected maid” on it. After Emily spends some time in Emily Dickinson’s room, she realizes that the words refer to the muse, the one who inspires writing.

## **Emily’s Letter to Paul**

When she chose to break up with him, Emily wrote a letter to Paul telling him her feelings in case he was not at home when she went to talk to him. After Paul’s death his sister Carey found the letter and learned that Emily was pregnant but had an abortion. She had been trying to get in touch with Emily to talk to her about the letter and the information it contained.

## **The Poem “Mother, Once Removed”**

This is the poem that Emily wrote about her abortion. Annabelle and Waverley find the poem and submit to The Emily Dickinson Poetry Contest. The poem is Emily’s most personal. Even though the girls had hoped to upset Emily by submitting that poem, K.T. helps her to pretend in front of Annabelle and Waverley like she is appreciative of their actions.

## **Emily's Poems**

As the novel closes, Emily prepares her poems to send to her former AP English teacher. These poems represent the love story between her and Paul and the steps she has taken to work through her guilt and grief over Paul's death.



# Settings

## The Amherst School for Girls

The Amherst School for Girls is the boarding school to which Emily's parents send her after her boyfriend shoots himself in the school library at Grenfell County High School where she had previously attended school. Much of the action of the novel takes place in the buildings and grounds of Amherst School. The school is located in Amherst, Massachusetts where Emily Dickinson had lived. The poet had also attended school at ASG, though it had been called Amherst Academy at the time Emily attended it.

## Hart Hall

Hart Hall is the name of the dormitory in which Emily lives with her roommate K.T. Much of the drama between Emily and K.T. and the cream puffs, Annabelle and Waverley, is played out in the bathroom and third floor hallway of this dorm.

## Grenfell County High School Library

The Grenfell County High School Library is the place where Paul, Emily's boyfriend, shot himself two days after Emily broke up with him.

## The Emily Dickinson House

The Emily Dickinson House is the home where Emily Dickinson had lived much of her life and wrote most of her poetry. Emily Beam first visits this house when she tries to return the entry form for the poetry contest, but the porch light flashes, scaring her away. The next time she visits she is drawn to the garden where she sees the freshly bloomed crocuses. As she studies in the library later, a crocus appears on her desk. During another visit to the house, Emily tries to return a dress that Amber had stolen from Emily's room. Emily Beam goes to the house during visiting hours and hides in the bathroom until everyone is gone. She returns the dress to Emily's room. While there she believes that she is visited by the late poet.

## A Drugstore

Emily confronts Amber Atkins in this drugstore after she saw the girl steal a lipstick from a display. This encounter marks the beginning of Emily's relationship with Amber.





# Themes and Motifs

## Friendship

Friendship is a major theme in this novel as Emily learns to trust people with her background. There are three people who attempt to befriend Emily during her first semester at ASG. Each of these, helps Emily to realize that her past doesn't have to define her.

K.T. is the first and most important person at ASG who tries to befriend Emily. K.T. takes Emily under her wing as she shows Emily the ropes at the school and teaches her the language. K.T. continues to be a friend to Emily as she tries to keep the gossip girls of the school from learning Emily's story, even though K.T. doesn't know Emily's story herself. K.T. finds the act of befriendng Emily difficult as Emily has already decided that she doesn't want friends because she doesn't want to have to lie to them. When Emily finally opens up to K.T., she realizes that K.T. is also at ASG because of a friend's suicide. The two have more in common than Emily had ever imagined.

Another student who tries to befriend Emily is Amber Atkins. Although Amber is a thief and in trouble herself, Madame Colche, who teaches French to both Amber and Emily encourages the friendship. Amber's major act of friendship toward Emily actually involves making Emily take the chance that she might get into trouble even worse that she already has gotten herself. Amber steals a dress from The Emily Dickinson House with the idea that she will get Emily to return it so that she can spend time in Emily Dickinson's bedroom. It is while Emily is in that room that she begins to gets some closure in her relationship with Paul.

Madame Colche is a teacher who attempts to befriend Emily as ASG. Madame Colche recognizes Emily's intelligence, but she also realizes she is struggling with something much bigger than herself. It is Madame Colche who waits for Emily to come out of The Emily Dickinson House and escorts her back to campus. Madame Colche also sits with Emily as her punishment for leaving campus is doled out.

## Emily Dickinson as Muse

Although she'd never written many poems before, Emily finds herself unable to stop lines from coming to her mind once she starts attending ASG. When Madame Colche learns that Emily writes poetry, she encourages her to participate in a poetry contest sponsored by The Emily Dickinson Society. She also lends Emily a biography of Emily Dickinson, giving her a chance to get to know the poet better. After spending part of an evening in Emily Dickinson's room, Emily Beam realizes that her life can go on, despite what she has done in the past.

Emily Beam and Emily Dickinson have a good deal in common even before Emily Beam begins writing poetry. They share the same first name. They also share the same date



of birth. As Emily Beam does more research on the poet, she realizes the two have even more in common. Both of them had strained relationships with their fathers. Both of them have also struggled with faith in God. As Emily learns more and more about the poet, she begins trying to copy the late poet's style. She relates to Emily Dickinson's habit of not following rules of punctuation and capitalization as a way to express her rage.

Emily Beam has two unusual experiences at The Emily Dickinson House. They lead her to believe that the late poet is mentoring her. First, she visits Emily's garden one night and feels she is being rocked by an invisible hand. She also feels a hand stroke her hair and tell her she's welcome to take one of the flowers. Later, Emily Beam arranges for herself to be locked into The Emily Dickinson House after hours so she can return a dress Amber Atkins had stolen from the house. While she is in Emily Dickinson's room, Emily believes she hears the poet speaking to her, acting as her own personal muse.

## Guilt

Guilt is a major theme in this novel as Emily struggles to come to terms with her boyfriend's suicide and her abortion. Although she's been told Paul's act of shooting himself wasn't her fault, Emily believes she is responsible for Paul's death. She also has realized that by ending her pregnancy, she killed the last living bit of Paul that existed. Through her poetry and her own soul searching Emily comes to understand that she doesn't have to allow her future to be defined by her past.

Emily feels as if she were responsible for Paul's death because it was only two days after she broke up with him that he brought his grandmother's gun to school with him. The day ended with him shooting himself after he tried to talk to Emily about their relationship in the school library. Emily wonders if she could have done anything differently to change the outcome of that day. She also wonders if she really loved Paul at all.

Although Emily had thought at first that she had wanted an abortion, she changes her mind when she realizes she will be killing the last living part of Paul. When Paul was still alive, she had reasoned with him that by having a baby she would be derailing her plans for college. He told her at the time that he felt ending the pregnancy was wrong and that she would come to regret her decision later. It is only after Paul is dead and Emily is on her way to have an abortion that she realizes the only living part of Paul is inside of her. Although she tells her mother she's changed her mind, Emily's mother won't listen to her argument.

Emily spends weeks writing her feelings down in a series of poems. She also picks apart the day the day that Paul shot himself as well as the days leading up to his death as she tries to determine where things went wrong. After all of her soul searching, Emily comes to the realization that she doesn't have to be bound to her past. She realizes that what she has done in her past doesn't have to define who she will become.



## Differences in Boys and Girls

The differences in boys and girls is a minor theme in the novel as Emily explores her feelings about her relationship with Paul and his death. There are three particular instances in which Emily points out differences in boys and girls. The first one of these deals with the way those in the world see boys who are sexually active in relation to girls who are sexually active. Girls also respond to problems differently by going over and over in their heads what they might have been able to do in a different way. Finally, Emily reasons that boys have an easier time when it comes to dealing with the pregnancy of a girlfriend than the girlfriend who is pregnant.

The first difference between girls and boys is the way the world labels those girls and boys who are sexually active. Girls who are sexually active are called whores, while boys who are sexually active are seen as players. Consider, for instance, Hannah's case. Because she has more than one boyfriend, she is automatically labeled as a whore by her hall mates at ASG.

Another difference in boys and girls that Emily points out is the way they react to circumstances in their lives. Emily says that girls will go over and over a situation trying to determine what they could have done differently, but boys just shut their thoughts up in a box and don't think of them again. Emily demonstrates this difference in the way that she thinks back over her relationship with Paul wondering what she could have done to have made it end another way.

Emily also believes that boys have an easier time dealing with the consequences when they get a girl pregnant. She believes Paul has two choices. He can either offer to pay for the abortion, or he can offer to marry her. In comparison, Emily believes that she risks her entire future if she decides to keep the baby.

## Death

Death is also a theme in the novel as various characters deal with it. The death of Paul, Emily's boyfriend, drives the novel's plot. Another important death in the novel is the ending of Emily's pregnancy. Death is also important as it influenced the poet Emily Dickinson in writing her poetry. Finally, Emily learns that K.T., her friend at ASG, is dealing with the suicide of her best friend.

Paul's death is a central focus of the novel as it is the reason that Emily is attending ASG. Emily feels it was her fault that Paul killed himself and spends a good deal of her time trying to come to terms with his suicide. The preacher who officiated at Paul's funeral told the family that no one could have changed Paul's actions because it was God's will. Emily, however, believes that Paul's death was caused by her own human error.

Another death that affects Emily deeply is that of her unborn baby. Paul had told her that an abortion was not right and that Emily would later regret her decision. Emily doesn't



agree at that time. But, after Paul is dead, she realizes she is carrying the only living part of him inside of her. Although she asks her mother at the last minute to reconsider their decision to end the pregnancy, her mother will not listen to her. Now, just as Paul had predicted, Emily does regret the abortion.

Death affects other characters in the novel as well. It is after Emily Dickinson's best friend, Sophie, dies that she retreats into herself. Additionally, many of Emily Dickinson's poems were focused on death and dying.

After Emily finally opens up to K.T., she realizes that K.T. is also dealing with her own grief and guilt over a death. Like Emily, K.T. is attending ASG because her close friend had also committed suicide.



# Styles

## Point of View

An omniscient narrator tells this novel from the third person point of view. The point of view focuses primarily on Emily as she goes through her journey of healing from Paul's death. The narrator refers to Emily by her given name or by the pronouns "she" or "her." The omniscient narrator knows all of Emily's thoughts and actions. However, since the narrator does not know the thoughts of the other characters in the novel, only their actions can be described.

The choice of a third person narrator is interesting in the novel. Emily's story could easily be told from a first person point of view. However, the author might have chosen the third person narrator to keep the reader from being too focused on Emily. The novel lends itself to much more than just Emily's personal story.

## Language and Meaning

As this book is about a girl who realizes her desire to be a poet, it makes sense that poetry would be included in the novel. Some of the poetry included was written by the late Emily Dickinson while other poems were written by Emily Beam. Each chapter ends with a poem written by Emily about some aspect of her relationship with Paul.

Notice that when Emily first begins talking to her roommate at ASG, she realizes she's going to have to learn a whole new language while at boarding school. The terms they use to describe different things around the school don't seem to make sense to Emily. For instance, the dorm in which she lives doesn't look like any dorm she's ever seen. She's also intrigued by the way the dorm is called a "hall" when it is really just an old house. K.T., her roommate, refers to them as "Hart girls," another reference that Emily doesn't understand until she is told they're named after the dorm in which they live. She's also surprised that the cafeteria is referred to as a dining room.

A good deal of imagery is used in the novel. For instance Emily's poems are described as "unspooling" themselves like ribbons that she must tie into bows. In another part of the novel, Emily uses the imagery of sewing as she wonders if Emily Dickinson had ever found a way to string words together and mend the holes in herself to the point that she felt she didn't need stitches.

## Structure

This novel is divided into twenty-five chapters. These chapters seem to run together as there are no chapter numbers or titles to differentiate one chapter from another. The longest of the chapters is the sixth chapter, which is 16 pages in length. The shortest



chapters have only three pages each. Each chapter is followed by an original poem written by Emily Beam.

The main portion of the story, which begins with Emily's first day at Amherst School for Girls, is written in present tense. This story is told in a linear fashion. However, there are many flashbacks to prior events. All of these flashbacks are written in the past tense. The flashbacks are not written in a linear fashion. Instead, each contains only bits and pieces of Emily's background. Each flashback adds more information about Emily's experience with Paul and about her abortion. It is only as the novel develops and progresses that more personal information about Emily and her past is given. The style and method of doling out this information is almost symbolic of Emily and her relationship with K.T., as she at first avoids the girl's friendship and will tell her nothing about her past. Later, Emily feels comfortable telling K.T. the more intimate details of her relationship with Paul and his death.

## Quotes

Maybe that's why the poem comes sweeping in that very first night at ASG.  
-- Narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph 19)

**Importance:** Although Emily has never really been inspired to write poetry before, she suddenly cannot stop the poetry that creates itself in her mind once she begins attending ASG.

That's the thing, though; Emily isn't so sure. A story gets told one too many times and facts melt away like pats of butter.  
-- Narrator (Chapter 2 paragraph 9)

**Importance:** When her aunt criticizes her for commenting that she doesn't want to watch a movie that has taken place in a school library, she tells Emily she's old enough to separate fact from fiction. Emily realizes, however, that many stories have been divorced from the facts simply because they have been told too often.

Hey, what do you know?' Paul said. 'I opened right to a poem about a gun.'  
-- Paul Wagoner (Chapter 2 paragraph 50)

**Importance:** When Paul confronts Emily in the library, he opens a book of Emily Dickinson's poetry to a poem about a gun. Emily believes the fact he opened to that particular poem was pure coincidence.

When Aunt Cindy first mentioned ASG, she said it was famous because of Emily Dickinson, who had been a student there over a hundred years ago, back when it was called Amherst Academy.  
-- Narrator (Chapter 3 paragraph 3)

**Importance:** The boarding school that Emily will attend is well known because it was the school where a famous poet, Emily Dickinson, attended. Emily will later be greatly influenced by the late poet's work.

But Emily knows that God had nothing to do with it: it was her human error that caused Paul to end his life."  
-- Narrator (Chapter 3 paragraph 25)

**Importance:** Although others try to comfort themselves by saying that God was in charge of Paul's death and there was nothing anyone could have done to change it, Emily believes it was her own error that caused him to kill himself.

In this world of uncertainty, she has faith in one belief: that Paul never planned to shoot anyone, including himself. She clings to that belief. The gun was only a power play, a desperate, shortsighted, woefully misdirected attempt to prove his manhood.  
-- Narrator (Chapter 5 paragraph 2)



**Importance:** The only thing that helps Emily to come to terms with Paul's death is the idea that he didn't really intend to kill himself, but was only attempting to gain control of a situation in which he believed he'd been given no say.

Girls go back in their minds over things they wish they had said or done, or not said or not done, while boys put those things in a box with a tight-fitting lid. Girls think they can save boys in need, and Emily was no different.

-- Narrator (Chapter 6 paragraph 158)

**Importance:** Emily torments herself by going over and over her relationship with Paul trying to determine exactly where they went wrong. She seems to think that if she can find that moment where things went bad, perhaps she can figure out what she should have done to save Paul and keep him from killing himself.

This is the challenge: To stay. To stay true. That's what the poems are — a test to see how truthful Emily Beam can be.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 10 paragraph 12)

**Importance:** Emily decides to use her poetry as a litmus test to determine how true she can stay to herself and her own story.

So Dickinson had it figured out in 1860, 135 years ago. Religion was made up by humans to justify why bad things happened to good people.

-- Narrator (Chapter 11 paragraph 108)

**Importance:** When Emily reads one of the poems written by the scientifically minded poet Emily Dickinson, Emily believes that the poet had realized that religion was an institution that had been made up to make people feel better about life.

How right her mother had been: She is grounded for life. Grounded to her past, her doubt, her desk.

-- Narrator (Chapter 11 paragraph 125)

**Importance:** When Emily tells her mother she's pregnant, her mother tells her that after she gets an abortion, she'll be grounded for life. Emily realizes she is grounded for life, but grounded in a different way from just not being able to date again. She is grounded, or held down, by her doubt and her past. She's also grounded by her desk as she sits to write, the way in which she tries to come to terms with what she has done and what has happened to her.

It's not about where you're from; it's about where you've been.

-- Narrator (Chapter 14 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** Going on what K.T. has told her, Emily believes that if life is not about where you've come from but where you've been, she should visit Las Vegas for her French project as she has been a gambler.





When boys scored with girls, they were called players, but when girls scored with boys, they were called whores. It wasn't fair, her mother said, but neither was life.

-- Narrator (Chapter 14 paragraph 35)

**Importance:** This quote signifies one of the differences in the way boys and girls are treated. Several aspects of the double standard are described in the course of the novel.

Sophie's thoughts and feelings had been so like her own that once her friend was in the coffin with the lid closed, a finality too deep to fathom, Emily retreated into herself."

-- Narrator (Chapter 16 paragraph 6)

**Importance:** The death of Emily Dickinson's best friend and cousin was one of the things that caused the young poet to retreat into herself.

A good friend from home committed suicide two years ago. That's why I go to school here and not in Vermont."

-- K.T. Montgomery (Chapter 18 paragraph 16)

**Importance:** Emily never realized how much she had in common with her roommate at ASG until K.T. tells her she was sent to that school after a friend of hers committed suicide, much the same reason why Emily was sent to ASG.

What lived inside of her would die, too, on this day, like a snow-flake. The only one of its kind.

-- Narrator (Chapter 19 paragraph 43)

**Importance:** On the day of her abortion, Emily realizes that the baby she carries was made by her and Paul and it is a unique being. It will be killed just like the unique and delicate snowflakes melt and die.

On December 12, Paul walked down the hall to the library, believing deeply in life, in the power of youth, wanting for Emily to believe in those things, too."

-- Narrator (Chapter 22 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** Although Emily had not understood Paul's belief in life on the day that he had approached her with the gun, she later understood the force that was driving him.

Look, Emily, I have plenty of friends. But none of them are poets. You need to be in that house. It's crazy, I know, for me to say that, but I know you need to stand for a minute in that room. There's something otherworldly in there.

-- Amber Atkins (Chapter 23 paragraph 88)

**Importance:** Amber tries to explain to Emily why she is making her return the dress to The Emily Dickinson House. She believes Emily needs to spend time in Emily Dickinson's room.



That was part of what had frightened Emily so much — that all of a sudden, with the gun in his hands, Paul seemed to possess an alien’s awareness or maybe even the secret to the universe, and in the split second before she dropped to her knees, Emily thought, Holy shit, Paul is right, and I am wrong, and I’m the one who doesn’t get it, and she didn’t know what to say, the right words did not come, and God was not with her, as she’d believed all her life that He would be.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 23 paragraph 117)

**Importance:** Emily realizes she had been afraid at the time Paul held the gun in his hands and that he was right and she was wrong. She worries that God might really have turned His back on her.

Under the bright eye of the Cyclops moon, Emily Beam realizes that Emily Dickinson didn’t write 1,775 poems just to keep them all to herself. She knew they’d be found. She knew they’d be read. She knew they would prove to other daughters of America, and sons, too, all the survivors, that they are not alone.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 23 paragraph 72)

**Importance:** As Emily considers Emily Dickinson’s poems, she comes to the realization that the poet did not intend her poems to be hidden from others. She believes Emily Dickinson had intended her poems to be a comfort to others.