

# **Beast: A Novel Study Guide**

## **Beast: A Novel by Brie Spangler**

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# Plot Summary

The following version of this book was used to create this study guide: Spangler, Brie. *Beast*. Alfred A. Knopf. First Edition, October 2016.

*Beast* is a young adult novel of acceptance and romance by Brie Spangler in which the physically large and unattractive 15-year-old Dylan falls in love with pretty, 15-year-old transgender Jamie. Dylan narrates the story, explaining how he came to fall in love with Jamie, and how he almost lost her. For years, Dylan explains, he has been the target of cruel nicknames like “Beast” because of his gigantic nature. He is huge, muscly, and very hairy. Dylan hates his abnormal growth and excess hair, though he tries to focus on the good such as being best friends with the popular JP. JP is not, however, a good best friend, as he too refers to Dylan as “Beast” and uses Dylan as enforcement in his money-lending business. JP also pays Dylan’s barber to shave Dylan’s head when Dylan only asks for a contemporary cut. Angered about this, Dylan storms home where he notices a lost football on the roof, and heads out to retrieve it to get some fresh air. He then slips, falls, and breaks his leg.

Dylan is thought to be depressed, so he is sent to a therapy group. There, he meets a tall, pretty girl named Jamie who loves to do photography. She and Dylan take an immediate interest in one another, begin hanging out, and kiss. It is JP, however, who points out that Jamie is actually transgendered. This shocks Dylan, who is straight. Things get worse when JP announces to the school that Dylan is dating a transgendered girl after Dylan overreacts to JP’s initial attempts at being supportive. This leads to a fight between JP and Dylan. Dylan reconnects with Jamie, who explains that she is not really a guy, but actually a girl and is transitioning. Dylan struggles with this, but decides to keep seeing Jamie. However, Dylan’s mother becomes an obstacle for Dylan when Dylan becomes irresponsible, refusing to check in with her, and worrying her by dating Jamie – not because Jamie is transgender, but because Dylan is already dealing with so much else in his life at the moment.

Still, Dylan continues to see Jamie while avoiding attempts at reconnecting with JP. Dylan and Jamie come to a deeper understanding with one another, accepting one another for the circumstances in which they find themselves, but agreeing they must be a part of one another’s lives, and accepting there is a romantic attachment between them. When Dylan’s mom goes away for the weekend and comes back to discover Jamie has spent the night, she sends Jamie home and grounds Dylan. When Dylan subsequently learns that blood tests he has taken reveal he does not have gigantism – which he hoped could be treated to stop his growth and avoid the cancer that killed his father – Dylan believes he has done something wrong by being with Jamie, so he does not speak to her for months. Only JP’s efforts to bring them back together get them to talk again, though Dylan still wants nothing to do with JP. Dylan and his mom finally come to common ground, in which Dylan will be given greater freedom if he proves he is responsible. Jamie ultimately forgives Dylan, and the two end the novel holding hands, a sign they are back together.



# Chapters One – Eight

## Summary

Chapter One – Fifteen year-old sophomore Dylan is a large, muscular, hairy kid, and is six-foot-four in height. He attends Saint Lawrence Catholic High School, which has recently decided to ban hats. Because of this, Dylan can no longer hide his face. Dylan is best friends with a kid named JP, and is secretly in love with a kind girl named Fern Chapman. JP is handsome, popular, and good with girls. Dylan is grateful for his friendship because JP is not, and never has been, deterred by Dylan's looks or hanging out with him. However, Dylan is not always a good best friend. JP pays his barber to shave Dylan's head completely when Dylan asks for a modern cut instead. Dylan now cannot hide his face behind his hair.

At home, he punches a mirror, and heads out onto his roof to get some fresh air while retrieving a lost football – only to fall off the roof and end up in the hospital with a fractured right leg. Dylan's mom rushes to the hospital from work, telling Dylan she is glad he is okay and that he looks handsome with the new haircut. Dylan asks for his hat, but it is nowhere to be found. A nurse volunteers to go and find one. Dylan's mom reminds him he is handsome, but Dylan does not accept this. Alone with Dr. Jensen, Dylan asks about someone who can change him.

Chapter Two – Dylan has been made fun of for years because of his size and appearance, but is always told to suck it up when he says anything about it. Dylan knows he looks just like his dead father, except hairier, and does not like it. Girls call him gross and nasty. Only his mom is reassuring or encouraging.

In the present, Dr. Jensen asks Dylan about his appearance and why Dylan wants to change. Jensen even asks if Dylan has a history of self-harm given the chain of events between his unhappiness with his looks, the haircut, and the fall. Dylan denies this, but Jensen is not convinced, and tells Dylan's mother. Dylan's mom is horrified by this, but is glad when Jensen recommends Dr. Burns for therapy.

Chapter Three – When school begins as summer ends, Dylan must head to class in a wheelchair. JP is glad to hear from Dylan that the pizza he ordered for Dylan at the hospital made it in. JP talks Dylan up in front of a group of kids, who are interested to learn what happened. Dylan is happy about this, feeling slightly normal because the wheelchair takes away his height. JP tells Dylan the wheelchair will attract girls in pity, and Dylan is happy to learn he is right. Dylan is especially thrilled when Fern agrees to sign his cast. But in the library later, Dylan hears Fern, Madison, and other girls making fun of him for being ugly and falling off a roof. Dylan is crushed. Things get even worse when Fern says she only talks to Dylan because Dylan is friend with JP, which none of the girls can understand why. Dylan is not encouraged by text messages from his mom checking in and reminding him of his therapy session.



Chapter Four – Dylan’s mom picks him up from school and brings him to therapy group at the hospital in Room 12 in the outpatient wing. Dylan quickly realizes he is the only guy in the group, and that some of the girls who attend even look normal. But one girl in particular stands out. She is tall and very pretty to Dylan. Dylan is stunned when the girl says hello and introduces herself as Jamie.

Dr. Burns arrives a few minutes late. She welcomes everyone, including Dylan who she says is new, then asks Jamie to go over the rules. The rules include not sharing what is said in the group, not giving advice, not interrupting, being allowed to ask whatever they want, but not having to answer. The group begins with a partner icebreaker, so Jamie plants herself in front of Dylan to talk. They begin to tell each other personal things, such as Jamie loving photograph and Dylan wanting to change his appearance. Jamie understands this completely but Dylan does not know why. Dylan explains he has no problems, prompting Jamie to ask him why.

Chapter Five – Dylan tells Jamie he does not know why he is in therapy. Dylan does admit he is called the Beast because of his hairy body. Jamie asks to touch his hairy hand, and Dylan agrees. Dr. Burns then calls everyone back together. When Dylan makes offhanded remarks about not belonging in the group because he does not cut himself, he draws the anger of everyone present, including Jamie. Burns intervenes, and everyone apologizes. Dylan zones out, but is brought back by Burns who asks what he thinks about what Jamie said. Not knowing what to say, Dylan says it is cool. After the session ends, Dylan finds Jamie outside the hospital taking pictures of the bus stop when he goes over to look at posters advertising shows for the bands Stuff and for Missed History.

Chapter Six – Jamie asks if she can take a picture of Dylan, but Dylan does not want to have his picture taken. Wanting to keep talking to Jamie, he catches the bus with her. She explains she has diabetes, while Dylan explains he did not intentionally break his own leg. Jamie explains she loves photography because not only does it catch moments in time, it catches vulnerabilities. Jamie assumes Dylan is a football player because of his physical nature, but Dylan explains this is not so. Dylan secretly hates people always assume this rather than that he is smart. His dream is to become a Rhodes scholar and doctor to battle cancer since his father died at 26 because of cancer. Only Dylan’s dead dad knows about his dream. When the bus comes to a stop, Jamie suddenly decides to get off and urges Dylan to come with her, saying it is now or never.

Chapter Seven – Jamie realizes he is in downtown Portland. They get coffee, and sit in Pioneer Courthouse Square to keep talking. Jamie reveals she does not like being so tall, that her dad is a former Trail Blazer while her mother is Swedish. Jamie asks Dylan what he thinks about two women who pass by. His negative descriptions of them make Jamie unhappy. She takes pictures of them, calling them phenomenal women. She then gets ready to leave. She asks Dylan who he is to judge others. Dylan says it is because he lives every day being judged by people who look at him and thank God they do not look like him. Jamie is humbled, and chooses not to leave.



Dylan allows her to photograph his wheelchair wheels, and his broken leg. Jamie confesses she used to make snide remarks about appearances all the time, but is trying to be better. Jamie thanks Dylan for being cool with her. When Dylan's mom suddenly appears, Jamie takes off quickly. Dylan's mom asks only briefly about Jamie, but then angrily and worriedly asks why Dylan was not waiting at the hospital for her. Dylan apologizes. His mom tells him he is allowed to take the bus, but must tell her before he does something like that. Dylan asks his mother how she found him. She explains she asked his father for a sign, and he told her where to go.

Chapter Eight – JP often has dinner with Dylan and his mom because JP's parents are cold and distant. JP enjoys being with Dylan and his mom because he can just be normal with them. While playing video games, JP asks Dylan if he has spoken with Adam Michaels about owing him. Dylan has completely forgotten, and says he will do so soon. At dinner, JP mentions his mom is even worse these days, which causes Dylan to excuse himself so the conversation does not make him think about his father.

JP explains to Dylan's mother that his own mother is still tripping and knocking herself out, throwing things at him, and refuses to go back to rehab. JP's father, JP explains, does not even care. Dylan knows that the loan business JP has begun with other students has been to get his mind off of his home life. Dylan knows that, despite JP's home life, he would still trade places with JP in an instant.

## Analysis

While Dylan is very reluctant to talk about himself, his fears, his feelings, or his dreams with anyone – even his mom or best friend to a large extent – he does open up completely internally. Dylan's inner world becomes the source of the narration for the novel, as Dylan guides readers through the end of summer, the autumn, and winter of his sophomore year of high school. Readers will note that Dylan is very intelligent and very descriptive when it comes to his language – which stands in stark contrast to his assumptions about himself physically. Dylan, who is large and hairy, has earned nicknames like “Beast” (from where the novel draws its name) among the kids at school. Dylan is not an attractive guy, but rather than accepting and embracing this, he allows the commentary and even bullying of others to influence his perception of himself. This is understandable, for it is all he has ever heard. Regrettably, he seems to take his mother's unconditional support and encouragement for granted – and his desire to change in conjunction with his fall from the roof land him in therapy group.

Dylan's internal narration despite his public projections forms the foundation of one of the simple but very important thematic arguments that Brie Spangler lays out – that appearance is not everything. While most focus on Dylan's looks, they fail to see there is a human soul beyond them. Dylan, like all other kids, has hopes, dreams, fears, ideas, and feelings – things that the other kids know nothing about and do not even have an interest in trying to find out about for various reasons. Readers should note, however, that Dylan's fall from the roof changes the status quo: this is the symbolic beginning of a new phase in Dylan's life, one which would not have been possible under



other circumstances. The therapy group that Dylan is forced to attend itself symbolizes actual new beginnings, by way of meeting Jamie.

Dylan at the therapy group is, however, defensive and arrogant. Despite his own personal struggles, he hypocritically and selfishly refuses to see beyond himself to the hurt and pain that lay behind the physical exteriors of others. Readers should note the scene in Portland in which Jamie directly calls Dylan out on this, but notes quite humbly that she herself has been trying to overcome such external judging. Here, Spangler effectively begins the thematic argument that who we are as people is not just what we look like. That appearances are not everything reveals internal or personal lives no one else knows about despite the appearances – such as JP having difficulties at home despite being handsome and wealthy; and the thematic idea that we are not just what we look like: Dylan is more than JP’s massive, dumb-looking best friend, but is actually brilliant. But even then, Dylan dwells on appearances, saying he would switch places with JP in an instant.

## Discussion Question 1

What is Dylan’s physical appearance like? How does this affect his time at school, especially in regards to how his fellow students look at him and speak about him? Why does this have such an effect on Dylan?

## Discussion Question 2

Despite the suffering Dylan has endured for his physical appearance, he still prejudices others based on their physical appearances at the therapy group. Why?

## Discussion Question 3

In Portland with Jamie, Dylan argues he has a right to judge others based on appearance because others judge him based on his appearance. Do you agree or disagree with Dylan that he has such a right? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

blurted, reciprocity, mortifying, elaborate, trudge, ennui, diaphanous, misogynist, vulnerabilities, factoid, aesthetically



# Chapters Nine – Sixteen

## Summary

Chapter Nine – Dylan gets his leg cast examined, and is set to have it removed and replaced. A male nurse, Ryan, compliments Dylan on his muscle and physique. Ryan is amazed at how quickly Dylan is growing. Dylan's mom tells Dylan he is just like his father. Dylan worries he too will die at 26.

Chapter Ten – When Dylan wakes up after surgery to remove the cast and the pins in his leg, his mom is already sitting up and waiting for him. She reveals Dylan has had a pretty visitor who left him two daisies in an iced-tea bottle. Dylan's mom confirms it was Jamie, the girl from the square, and that she had a long talk with Jamie about her having a long road ahead of her. Dylan's mom is impressed that Dylan is okay with knowing and thinking there is nothing wrong with Jamie. Dylan believes his mom is referring to Jamie's diabetes. Dylan's mom explains Jamie described Dylan as a friend, which makes both Dylan and his mom happy. Dylan is angered, however, when he learns his mom allowed Jamie to take pictures of him while he was asleep. Dylan is even angrier when he learns Jamie has agreed to send his mom the pictures by phone. Dylan's anger quickly subsides when he learns that his mom has Jamie's cell phone number. She agrees to give Dylan the phone number if Dylan allows her to keep the pictures Jamie has taken. Dylan agrees. Dylan immediately texts Jamie.

Chapter Eleven – At school, Dylan discusses English Restoration literature with Mrs. Steig before English class ends based on the *Scarlet Letter*. Steig reads one of Aphra Behn's poems, "The Disappointment," which is about a young shepherdess who is very sexually turned on by a shepherd, but the shepherd ends up being impotent. After class, Dylan meets with Adam Michaels, telling him he owes JP, but Adam merely runs away because Dylan is still in a wheelchair and cannot chase him. Dylan knows he is essentially an enforcer for JP. Coach Fowler then speaks with Dylan, asking him to join the football team for what seems the thousandth time. Dylan declines once again. After school, his mom brings him to therapy. Dylan promises to stay at the hospital this time. As soon as his mom leaves and Jamie suggests getting out of there to do something, Dylan agrees to leave.

Chapter Twelve – Dylan and Jamie go across the street to a park and playground so they can be back at the hospital in 90 minutes. They quickly begin to talk about themselves. Jamie explains she wanted to be a mommy when she was little, but did not know how to make it happen. She explains she cannot have children, which Dylan believes must be the fault of diabetes, which is common. Dylan suggests adoption, surrogacy, and other options, all of which Jamie knows about. Jamie is glad that Dylan does not think it is weird that she wants to be a mom.

Jamie also reveals she found out about Dylan's surgery through her friends at the hospital since she is there all the time. She explains she is in therapy constantly





because of her parents, because a guy beat her up at her old school. This enrages Dylan because he cannot understand why someone would beat up a girl. Dylan's chivalrous response flatters Jamie. Dylan then helps hold Jamie up so she can take a picture of the park because the lighting is good. Jamie is amazed by Dylan's strength. She encourages him to be proud of this. They kiss, but Jamie pulls away, saying she is scared. Dylan respects her, but is still floored he has been kissed. Dylan caves in and allows Jamie to then take a picture of him. She tells him to think of something that makes him happy, so he thinks of her. Dylan then allows Jamie to push him back to the hospital.

Chapter Thirteen – Dylan believes that when something good happens in his life, it is because his dad is watching over him from Heaven. However, Dylan is also used to things backfiring on him when they begin to get good. He worries as he heads out a week later to meet Jamie in the rose garden at Peninsula Park. Dylan is thrilled when Jamie shows up, but let down when Jamie still does not want to kiss. She explains it is because the relationship thing is new to her, which in turn surprises Dylan because she is so pretty, intelligent, and humorous. She says it just has not worked out. Dylan and Jamie hold hands and walk through the park instead. Dylan is, however, thrilled to hear that Jamie likes him, and has no problem taking things slow. This reminds Dylan of the roses which are dormant in the winter. He knows they will bloom when they are ready.

Chapter Fourteen – Dr. Jensen decides to refer Dylan to an endocrinologist because Dylan may have acromegaly, also known as gigantism, a disorder that causes people to grow like crazy. Dylan is thrilled because his growth might be able to be stopped and he might avoid cancerous growth like his father. Dylan's mom is worried that such a thing would require brain surgery, but Dylan does not care.

While hanging out with JP and his new girlfriend of the week, Bailey, Jamie comes by to say hello. JP is stunned. As he and Bailey head out, JP tells Dylan they live in Portland and it is all good to keep it weird and live the dream. This confuses Dylan, but Jamie says it was her being called out by JP. Jamie says sometimes people say weird things when they learn she is transgender. Dylan is shocked by this, admitting he did not know. Jamie says she talked about it in group therapy – what Dylan said was “cool.” Dylan finds it difficult to breathe. As he looks closely at Jamie, he can see the masculine features of her face and body. Dylan tries to hobble away on his crutches, but Jamie tries to stop him. When Dylan does not stop, Jamie says they are over. Jamie storms off, leaving Dylan both angry and confused, realizing he has been with a boy the whole time.

Chapter Fifteen – At home, Dylan goes down into his basement where his father used to build model trains and landscapes. Dylan has always hated the trains, wondering why his father would devote time to building them when he could have been with Dylan during his final years. Dylan believes no girl will ever want him, and realizes he has been dumped by Jamie. He then begins to smash apart the trains and landscape as well as punching another mirror. When Dylan's mom gets home, she is horrified by what Dylan has done. She is not only concerned for him, but horrified that Dylan has destroyed what his father had left for him, barely able to move because of cancer but



struggling on to make something to leave for his son. Dylan tells his mom she is crazy if he thinks he is a carbon copy of his dad. She smacks him across the face and tells him he will be lucky to be half the man his father was. She then storms up the stairs.

Chapter Sixteen – Dylan tends to his injuries as best he can. JP talks to Dylan at school, wanting to know why Dylan has been avoiding him. JP quickly realizes Dylan did not know Jamie was transgender. JP says if Dylan and Jamie are cool, then no one should care. Dylan tells JP to shut up. JP says he is trying to be supportive and decent. Dylan tells JP to go home, except JP cannot go home because his mother is a drunk. JP is stunned. Dylan then gets the entire cafeteria to clap, at which time he addresses everyone who is now listening to him. JP announces that Dylan is dating a transgender girl, and instructs people to be nice and leave her alone. Instead, everyone begins laughing and calling him names. Ethan and Bryce are especially nasty, calling Dylan a fag and referring to Jamie as “it.” As lunch ends, Dylan grabs JP by the throat and tells him that if anyone harms Jamie, JP will pay for it. Mr. Copeland sees what is happening, and gives Dylan a detention. Dylan decides to text Jamie. What happened between them is between them, and no one else has the right to give her a hard time.

## Analysis

In this section of the novel, readers learn about one of Dylan’s inmost, darkest secrets: he is scared to death that he will die just like his father before him at the very, very young age of 26. This explains why Dylan intensely dislikes comparisons made between himself and his father. But, as Dylan forgets and Brie Spangler reminds readers, who we are is not just what we look like. Just because Dylan so closely resembles his father does not mean that he, too, will suffer the same fate. What Dylan misses in these comparisons, however, is that his mother is telling him that who someone is, is not just what someone looks like. Dylan’s father was a good, kind, and gentle-hearted man, and Dylan takes after him in these ways especially. However, Dylan, a typical teenager, continues to base everything – especially in those comparisons – on looks. However, the fact that Dylan might have gigantism gives him hope for the future.

Just as something goes right for Dylan, something else goes wrong. It is JP who points out that Jamie is transgender – something Dylan had no clue about because he was too busy lost inside himself at therapy. When Dylan discovers that Jamie is transgendered, he is stunned. Indeed, so much of unusual or new situations is the need for time to make things better by way of growing patience and understanding towards others. This is certainly the case for Dylan. Dylan, who is a straight guy, clearly struggles with the idea that Jamie was formerly a guy who believed he was a girl and so is now transitioning between sexes. Jamie’s physical nature as a male, however, is what gives Dylan the greatest pause of his own heterosexuality. However, the scene in which Dylan and Jamie visit the rose gardens at Peninsula Point has special relevance here, not only for the romance between them but for life in general. The roses will bloom when they are ready and the time is right. Love will occur between Dylan and Jamie when they are ready and the time is right. These things cannot be forced or rushed, but must happen



in time, and therein require patience and understanding on the part of them both. However, JP's cafeteria antics undermine everything.

## Discussion Question 1

What medical news does Dylan receive regarding a condition he might have? Why does this make him happy?

## Discussion Question 2

How does Dylan react when he learns that Jamie is transgender? Are his reaction and confusion understandable? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Dylan react so defensively and angrily when JP attempts to talk to him in the cafeteria? Is Dylan's reaction justifiable? Why or why not? How does JP respond to Dylan's reaction? Why? Is JP to be condemned for this? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

defenestrate, nonchalantly, familial, machismo, meander, chivalrous, obliterated



# Chapters Seventeen – Twenty-Four

## Summary

Chapter Seventeen – Dylan invites Jamie over for dinner with his mom. Dylan's mom worries about this, not because she has anything against transgendered people, but because she does not know that Dylan needs confusion and complication in his life at the moment. She urges Dylan to keep things friendly, but Dylan says she has nothing to worry about. When Jamie is dropped off by her mom, Jessica, Dylan's mom introduces herself as Anna. Jessica and Anna then head out. Dylan explains he is making crab cakes for dinner, because they are Jamie's favorite. Jamie is a little distant and not very talkative. He apologizes for what happened, and says he wants to be friends. Jamie is saddened by this, but agrees. Jamie lays into Dylan about not paying attention in therapy, and not knowing sooner she was transgender, because she was happy to hear him say it was "cool" in therapy.

Jamie explains she was assigned male at birth, even though her gender is that of a girl. She explains she ran with the popular crowd of girls at her old school when she pretended to be a gay guy. She explains it made her depressed because she knew she was not really a gay guy, but a straight girl. Jamie reveals that after she began dressing and acting like a girl, some of her friends broke away, while the other two did all they could for her. She explains her former name, or "dead name" was Jeff, and that when she complimented a guy named Colin as Jeff, Colin beat her up and made her life a living hell along with some former friends. It was after that, Jamie reveals, that her parents had her transfer schools. Dylan then explains what has happened at his school, and declares he will protect her. She reveals she carries around mace and a kubaton with her wherever she goes. Dylan realizes he still finds Jamie attractive and is happy to be around her. When she leaves, Dylan wishes he could speak to his father for even five minutes to know what he would have to say about things.

Chapter Eighteen – All day at school, kids snicker and laugh at Dylan. At home, Dylan writes a mental letter to his dad, saying how much he misses him, saying he needs help, and saying he wants to be mean and without feelings so he can survive high school. He also wants to lose his feelings for Jamie, but Dylan does not write this down. No matter how he prays and wishes, the feeling of a connection with Jamie does not go away. He wants to be with her, he realizes, but is afraid and does not know how to proceed. Suddenly, JP shows up at the house. Dylan is angered, but JP says he is there for two reasons. He explains that first, he told the school about Dylan and Jamie so they would know they had his approval. Second, he wants to know why Dylan never wants to hear about his mother. He says Dylan acts like it is nothing, always leaving when he wants talk about his mom. JP explains his life is a daily torment because of his mother's alcoholism.

JP goes on to say that Dylan and Jamie seemed happy together, and that Dylan should get Jamie back. He says he could rally the school around them, beginning a social



media campaign to do so. JP says he will do this if Dylan gets Adam Michaels in line. This angers Dylan, who chases JP out of the house, which in turn angers Dylan's mother. Dylan calls JP a manipulative asshole. This angers Dylan's mom even more, wanting to know how he could turn his back on his best friend who deals with an alcoholic mother, and that rocky times are normal in friendships. Dylan's mom worries that Jamie is having a bad influence on him, and explains that Jamie's mom revealed Jamie has been giving her own trouble as well. Dylan's mom wants to know if Dylan even wants her around anymore. Dylan responds that he does, that he loves her, and that what they have between them has nothing to do with JP. When Dylan's mom talks about always looking after JP, Dylan slams his hands down and says he does not want to talk about JP anymore. Dylan's mom then leaves him alone, saying they will talk again in the morning. Dylan goes down to the basement, begins repairing some of the model train landscape, and calls Jamie.

Chapter Nineteen – Dylan asks more questions about Jamie's experiences, then explains his own fight with JP and his mom. Jamie reveals her own mother thinks she is going through a phase. As they talk, JP realize he is falling for a girl with guy parts. Jamie explains that she has to use a special restroom at school since she cannot use the girls' restrooms, and explains that one day, everything she is experiencing will be in a history book. Dylan asks Jamie to be patient with him because he is trying to figure things out. He offers to do homework and study with Jamie, and Jamie says perhaps in the future. When they hang up, Dylan feels empty. Dylan then goes and cuddles on the couch with his mom.

Chapter Twenty – When Dylan's mom drops him off at school the next morning, he lets her hug him. Inside school, Dylan encounters a crying Bailey, wanting to know why JP broke up with her. Dylan says everything JP says is crap. He also comes to an understanding with Bailey about Jamie, asking for kindness and respect, especially when Bailey reports that JP said Dylan could not do any better than Jamie. A short time later, Dylan runs into JP. JP tells Dylan that Ethan and Bryce found Jamie online, and did not come to school. JP says he will handle Ethan and Bryce if Dylan handles Adam Michaels. Dylan says his days of handling people for JP are over. JP counters that he runs the school, and letting Adam slide will make him look bad. He says his father has been gone for two months. JP says if Ethan and Bryce do not find Jamie, someone else will. Dylan realizes he has no choice, so he goes and finds Adam. He hurts Adam just enough to make the point to where Adam agrees to pay JP back in payments. Dylan then calls Jamie to see if she is okay.

Chapter Twenty-One – Dylan and Jamie later meet at the mall where he reminds Jamie how dangerous JP, Ethan, and Bryce are to be considered. Jamie says she can take care of herself and just wants to live in peace. Dylan and Jamie get food, then go to Sephora so Jamie can get more pineapple lip gloss. When Dylan's mom walks into the store, Dylan tries to hide, but is not able to do so. Dylan's mom wants to know why he is not in school. When she realizes Jamie is also in the store, she calls Jamie over to her as well. She tells Jamie to leave Dylan alone despite Dylan explaining it was his decision to meet up. Dylan's mom then orders him out of the store, putting her hand on him to do so. Dylan wrenches her arm away, hurting her in the process. Dylan is then



driven back to school, at which point his mom says she does not know what to do about Dylan's behavior lately, and that she is headed to Pittsburgh for a meeting which could lead to a promotion – something very important given college is coming for Dylan. She repeats that her opposition to Jamie has nothing to do with Jamie being transgender, and that she worries for Dylan's own stability. Back in school, JP tells Dylan he does not do payment plans.

Chapter Twenty-Two – Thanks to JP, what little standing Dylan had had in school thanks to his friendship with JP now disappears. At home, Dylan's mom lays down ground rules about her being away in Pittsburgh – such as Dylan needing to answer his phone whenever she calls, and checking in with the Swanpoles across the street. Dylan tells Jamie about this on the phone. She asks him how quickly he can grow a beard. Dylan responds it will take him three days. Jamie tells him to begin growing a beard on Monday.

Chapter Twenty-Three – On Friday morning, Dylan's mom brings him in to get his blood tested for gigantism. The nurse draws Dylan's blood, and all Dylan can do is smile.

Chapter Twenty-Four – Because Dylan looks older than he is, and now has a beard, is able to buy beer at a couple different places. As he seeks to buy beer at another convenience store while Jamie waits. But a kid of about 18 corners Jamie, causing Dylan to get involved despite Jamie's protests. Dylan suddenly feels like the bad guy as Jamie steps away safely. After buying more beer, Dylan tells her he is done buying anymore beer.

## Analysis

Despite the rough patch that Dylan and Jamie go through, they get back together. They have long, serious talks about themselves and the situations in which they find themselves, though Dylan is still reluctant to completely open up. Jamie, though she says much, still holds back some. Both Dylan and Jamie are wounded people, both of whom have been hurt and have had to suffer for their realities. Here, Brie Spangler continues to effectively argue both that who we are is not just what we look like, and that patience and understanding are critical of everyone toward everyone. Jamie, who has been the victim of bigotry, is ironically more understanding of those who are confused, curious, or unsure about her transgenderism. It is why she is so willing to try to make things work with Dylan – apart from her obvious feelings for him.

While Jamie is understandably angry because of Dylan's lackadaisical attitude back during her revelation in therapy, she is graciously and kindly patient and understanding with Dylan. Jamie's patience and understanding here in this situation underscore an immensely important thematic argument which Brie Spangler makes: Patience and understanding are critical of everyone toward everyone, period. Jamie has every right to be angry, but her patience and desire to understand Dylan's concerns about her transgenderism allow for a future between them, even if Dylan reels from confusion in the present. Despite the difficulties that Dylan has had with JP, and despite his lesser



status at school, Dylan would rather have romance with Jamie than a kind of half-friendship with JP. Readers should note that Dylan's repairing of the train model – formerly a rejection of his father and his life as it had been –now symbolizes Dylan's repairing of his relationship with Jamie.

## Discussion Question 1

Despite Dylan's reaction to learning she is transgender, Jamie is patient and attempts to be understanding of Dylan's reaction. Why? Does Dylan deserve this understanding? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

How does Dylan begin to work past his initial confusion and concern over Jamie being transgender? Why is he so determined to move beyond his initial shock?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Dylan continue to bar JP's attempts to make peace? Is Dylan right in doing so? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

euphoria, intangible, cordial, ogles, addendum, symbiote, stasis, intuitive, belligerent



# Chapters Twenty-Five – Thirty-Two

## Summary

Chapter Twenty-Five – On their walk back, Jamie explains that she does not mind compliments from even creepy guys because they are still compliments to her. She says she knows Dylan wants to protect her, but so does everyone, including her mom. She says there are good things happening for trans people all the time. Dylan worries that Jamie must be cold in the skirt she wears, and finds it interesting that he no longer cares about what is under the skirt, but whether or not Jamie is cold. Back home, Dylan shaves his beard off, wanting to look 15 and not like an adult. Dylan admits to Jamie he really hates being so hairy, and especially hates his hairy back. Jamie then says she will shave it for him. Dylan is surprised by this, and by the fact that Jamie says she is happy to help out. When she rolls up her sleeves, Dylan notices the scars from when Jamie used to cut herself. Dylan has nothing but sympathy, and realizes he should have had sympathy for the girls who cut themselves in therapy group. Dylan begins crying, and talking about how he is afraid of himself, and calls himself a tumor because of his gigantism. He worries he will be dead in 11 years, just like his father. Jamie reassures him, then Dylan kisses her scars. Jamie worries she is a failure, but Dylan reassures her that this is not so. For fun, Dylan allows Jamie to put makeup on him. They end up kissing.

Chapter Twenty-Six – Dylan and Jamie end up kissing, and Dylan brings her to his bed. Jamie brings Dylan to orgasm with her hands, but when she presses against Dylan, Dylan realizes she is still a boy below the waist. He hesitates, but then encourages her to orgasm by rubbing against him. Afterwards, they decide to make pancakes.

Chapter Twenty-Seven – After they eat pancakes, they return to Dylan's bed and lay together, drifting in and out of sleep. Dylan explains he wants to go to Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar, and wants Jamie to come with him. He explains he has a theory that evil, like cancer, creeps and builds up. He believes there is a connection between the two things – evil and cancer – as if cancer cells can think and cause evil. Jamie says she idolizes Rhode Island School of Design photography major Francesca Woodman, who committed suicide but whose photography is amazing. They begin discussing how they could work out the future, but Jamie interrupts Dylan to make out with him.

Chapter Twenty-Eight – Dylan and Jamie are awakened early in the morning by the return of Dylan's mom, who is furious to find beer bottles all over, and to discover Jamie has stayed over. Jamie quickly leaves, while Dylan's mom confronts Dylan. Dylan's mom reveals she has come home early because Dylan ignored her texts, and because she knew something was up. Dylan is now grounded for lying to her and going against the rules. Dylan accuses his mom of being overly harsh because Jamie is transgender, but Dylan's mom says this is not true. She does worry how Dylan and Jamie will fit in against the world. She says she does not know what to think, as there is beer everywhere, hair all over the bathroom, and that her son has just had sex with a girl who





has a penis. Dylan says he and Jamie did not drink the beer. It is then that Dylan's mom comments on his makeup, and Dylan remembers he has it on. His mom begs him to talk to her, to help her understand what is going on. The arrival of the mail interrupts the discussion. The mail includes Dylan's test results, which are negative. Dylan does not have gigantism. He is crushed. His mom comforts him, holding him and reassuring him. Later, in the basement, looking over all the wreckage of the trains, Dylan asks his dad for a sign as to whether or not he has done something he should not have. When there is no answer, Dylan believes he has done everything wrong, which is why his dad is not speaking to him.

Chapter Twenty-Nine – Dylan refuses to answer any of Jamie's texts, prompting Jamie to come over. Dylan is in the basement, working on repairing the trains, when he hears Jamie's knocks. Dylan hopes that by repairing what he has ruined, his dad will speak to him like he does for his mom. Dylan's mom has been attempting to understand his sexuality by reading about contemporary sexuality, but Dylan knows he is simply a straight guy. He ignores Jamie, and even his mom, to work on the train set to know he has his dad's approval.

Chapter Thirty – Dylan joins the football team because he knows he can be both a scholar and an athlete, and because he knows it will help give him a shot at college scholarships. Dylan pours himself into football, training on weights and working on his upper body while his leg continues to heal. Coach Fowler is thrilled. JP attempts to talk to Dylan, but Dylan dismisses him, saying whatever JP says these days is pointless.

Chapter Thirty-One – Christmas comes on and Dylan's mom falls into her annual depression over the death of Dylan's dad. Dylan does his best to comfort her, bringing her coffee and asking what his dad has said to her lately. Dylan's mom says that this is between her and his dad. Dylan and his mom exchange a few Christmas gifts, with Dylan vowing to be rich one day so he can give his mom everything. He goes on to watch old home movies of his dad. He then receives four text messages from Jamie, including that she has left him a Christmas present on his front stoop. As Dylan retrieves the gift – a pretzel – he asks his dad for a sign. No sign comes, so Dylan decides to save the pretzel, but not to eat it until he gets a sign.

Chapter Thirty-Two – Dylan continues to train for football, and continues to wait for a sign from his dad. He is to be starting left tackle, with the number 65. After practice one day, JP speaks with Dylan, telling him he misses hanging out and wants to catch up. Dylan walks JP through using the gym, then the two head outside. There, Dylan is stunned to see Jamie, and stunned to see JP put his arm around Jamie, saying it is good she is there.

## Analysis

The weekend Dylan and Jamie spend together leads to sexual relations, and the weekend itself is interrupted by Dylan's mom. Despite the interruption and despite panicking his mom, Dylan feels as if he has had a very good weekend, but like people,



appearances are not everything. Dylan receives word in the mail the very same day that he does not have gigantism. His hope that his condition will be treatable is crushed. Dylan is now more or less susceptible to nature and genetics. He is so devastated by this, he begins to wonder if maybe his relationship with Jamie is not something of which his Dad approves. Frequent pleas for signs from his dad lead to no signs at all, which in turn cause Dylan to refuse to have anything to do with Jamie. This is utterly devastating to Jamie, and is also causes Dylan considerable pain. But while it is clear that Jamie is willing to be patient with Dylan, Dylan is not respectful enough to even give Jamie the time of day. As Brie Spangler argues, patience and understanding are critical of everyone toward everyone – including Dylan toward Jamie.

Everyone deals with some kind of pain, Brie Spangler continues to argue. Dylan is so wrapped up in his own pain that he forgets Jamie herself is experiencing tremendous pain because of his refusal to speak with her. Dylan continues to repair the trains, desperate for a sign from his father – but the repairs symbolize more than just the desire for a sign. They also symbolize Dylan's slow but steady process of rebuilding himself and his confidence. He is learning who he is, and who he is has nothing to do with the nickname he has been given by the kids at school. He joins the football team, knowing he can be a scholar and an athlete, and knowing it will give him a better shot at scholarships for college. Dylan's finding himself also helps him to realize he is not truly himself without Jamie – but he is better off without JP.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Dylan suddenly refuse to have anything to do with Jamie? Why is this so important to him that he refuses to see her, despite the pain he causes not only for Jamie, but for himself?

## Discussion Question 2

Despite Dylan's previous opposition to football, he decides to join the team. Why does he do this? Does this take away from him as a person? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

Why is Dylan so determined to receive a sign from his dad about his current situation? Why does he seek a sign from his dad rather than asking his mom for her thoughts and advice?

## Vocabulary

verbatim, malignant, gradually, idol, flippant, disjointed, jostle, predilection



# Chapters Thirty-Three – Thirty-Seven

## Summary

Chapter Thirty-Three – JP explains he and Jamie are not going out. Jamie says she and JP are friends. Dylan says this is bullshit, that JP wants something. JP tells Dylan that Dylan can be mad at him forever, but what he is doing to Jamie is stupid. Jamie is furious and heartbroken with how Dylan has treated her. Jamie tells Dylan he is ugly inside and out, and heads to leave. JP stops her, saying they had a deal for ten minutes, but it has only been four. It is revealed that JP has paid for an entire photography show for Jamie to occur at Café Crossroads in exchange for her time to meet with Dylan. Dylan calls this effed up, but Jamie says JP is a good person and is the only one willing to make it work with Dylan. JP insists he is trying to be a better person, but Dylan is disbelieving. Jamie says she should never have let JP talk her into the pretzel idea, which is stunning to Dylan. JP tells Dylan he does not know what he has done to Jamie. Dylan says he broke her heart, but Jamie says it is more than that: Dylan was so worried about her getting hurt, only to hurt her worse than anybody else. Dylan then unloads on JP, telling JP that JP treated him like a dog their whole lives. JP is finally defeated, saying he thought the three of them could work things out. Jamie and JP then leave, with Jamie telling JP she wants to play video games. As they leave, a rainbow appears over them, which Dylan takes a sign to let Jamie go.

Chapter Thirty-Four – At home, Dylan is heartbroken. The only thing he looks forward to now is getting his cast off the following day. While updating his phone, Dylan discovers his mom had installed a tracking app, meaning she never spoke to his dad. He is furious. He draws a middle finger on a Post-It note along with the words “Nice try,” slaps it on his phone, and leaves his phone on his bed while he heads out.

Chapter Thirty-Five – Dylan heads to Irvington, a very wealthy and very liberal part of town. There, he goes to JP’s house, and goes out to JP’s insulated, electrically-wired, WIFI-capable treehouse, surprising JP and Jamie who are playing video games. Dylan apologizes, telling Jamie he was never afraid of her, only of himself, and that he had been waiting for a sign when he should have just been doing the right thing all along, anyways. JP then admits that Bryce and Ethan were never going to beat Jamie up, which enrages Jamie. Jamie storms off by herself. JP apologizes to Dylan, asking to start over. Dylan apologizes for what he has said and done, but does not stay. When Dylan returns home, his mom has left him a note saying she is driving around looking for him, and asks him to call so she knows he is safe. He wonders if his mom feels as helpless as he does when he seeks answers and hears nothing in return.

Chapter Thirty-Six – Dylan watches the sunrise on his roof as his mom gets home. She rushes up to see him, and climbs out onto the roof, worried he may jump. Dylan asks her if she has ever felt lost. She says that she has. Dylan wants the app taken off his phone. His mom agrees it will come off junior year if Dylan improves. Dylan’s mom insists she wants to be in his life. Dylan agrees to letting her in by telling her about his



love for Jamie, and what has happened. Dylan's mom also apologizes for being overly concerned about him and Jamie. Dylan asks what his dad would think of him and Jamie. Dylan's mom says his dad would want him to be happy. Dylan's mom says she is okay with inviting Jamie over to dinner, or any girl or any guy. Dylan tells his mom he is straight no matter what contemporary sexuality says. After they come in from the roof, Dylan heads to sleep. When he wakes up, Jamie is in his room.

Chapter Thirty-Seven – Dylan realizes that his mom has brought Jamie up to the bedroom. She excuses herself, telling them to leave the door open. She explains she has been stomping around town all night, and feels very alone. They both admit to thinking about one another all the time. Dylan's mom interrupts them to let them know it is time for Dylan to get his cast off. Jamie goes along. The cast comes off well, and Dylan is reminded to take it easy until football camp in August. Dylan is told that once a break heals, it becomes the strongest part of the bone. Jamie takes pictures. Dylan asks if he and Jamie can walk home. Dylan's mom agrees. As Dylan and Jamie head home, she tells him she does not want them to be horrible anymore, and they hold hands.

## Analysis

Patience and understanding are critical of everyone toward everyone. This becomes apparent when Jamie – graciously and heartwarmingly – gives Dylan yet another chance. She is rightfully angered and enraged with him over the way that he has treated her, and ignored her, but her love for him is greater than her anger is for him. She understands he has been through a difficult time, especially because she has struggled herself with self-acceptance and hardships; and now, this patience and understanding borne of personal experience helps her to reach out to Dylan. Dylan, rightfully and to his credit, strives to make things right with Jamie. He knows he has been wrong, and now wants to do whatever it takes to atone for, and redeem himself for what he has done. The hold of hands between Dylan and Jamie symbolizes a resurgence of hope, a coming together, and a unity in love. Dylan's mom, to her credit, helps out in the process.

Dylan's relationship with his mom also improves. As Spangler argues, appearances are not everything. Despite her constant strength and her role as a mom, Dylan's mom is also a human being. She is more than just a mom. She has feelings, ideas, hopes, dreams, fears, and reasons for crying as well. Dylan only ever seems to understand this around Christmas. But his connection with his mom on the rooftop establishes the fact that he recognizes, truly, that everyone deals with some kind of pain, and that patience and understanding are critical of everyone toward everyone. In so doing, Dylan's actions round out Spangler's arguments that patience and understanding are crucial, but also that everyone deals with some kind of pain. Even JP, for all of his cruelty, has to deal with his own sources of pain. The future between Dylan and JP seem uncertain, but the future between Dylan and Jamie, and Dylan and his mom, seems sure and seems good.



## Discussion Question 1

Why does Jamie ultimately choose to forgive, and return to romance with Dylan? What does this say about her character as a person? Why does this matter so much?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Dylan finally recognize his mother's pain? Why does he finally come to see her as a human being outside of her role as his mother? What does this do for their relationship as mother and son? Why?

## Discussion Question 3

Despite her reservations about Jamie, Dylan's mom actively helps to bring them back together by bringing Jamie to Dylan's room when Jamie comes over. Why does Dylan's mom do this despite her reservations?

## Vocabulary

apathetic, conceivably, sycophant, metaphors, omnipresent, heinous, oscillating



# Characters

## Dylan

Dylan Walter Ingvarsson is a 15-year-old sophomore at Saint Lawrence Catholic High School. At more than six-four in height, Dylan is a massive kid, is very hairy, and is not attractive. Dylan feels horribly about his looks, feelings which are only made worse by all the cruel remarks and comments he receives daily at school, even from his best friend JP. Dylan desperately wants to change his appearance, and struggles with accepting himself through the novel. He worries he will end up dying of cancer at a very young age like his dad because of cancer due to his physical bulk. Only through dating Jamie does Dylan come to be able to accept himself, but also to accept others who are different, to accept that even those who do not seem to be different, like his mom, also struggle with things like heartache. Because of his experiences, Dylan becomes a better, stronger young man.

## Jamie

Jamie McCutchen is a 15-year-old transgendered girl who Dylan meets at study group. Jamie, though appearing to be a boy, explains she is actually a girl in the wrong body. As a result, she is transitioning between physical places. Jamie, because she has been bullied, beaten up, and rendered an outcast by her decision, has had to switch schools. She draws what strength she can from photography, and from her parents, who are themselves accepting but struggling with Jamie's decision. Jamie quickly falls for Dylan, and has enormous patience and understanding with him as he struggles not only to accept her as transgender, but to accept himself for who he is as well. Jamie becomes the light in Dylan's life that helps him stabilize, while Dylan becomes the light in Jamie's life that lets her know she is capable of being loved.

## Dylan's mom

Dylan's mom, Anna, is a sweet, kind, and loving woman who is unflinching encouraging and supportive of Dylan. Still heartbroken 12 years later from the death of her husband, Dylan's dad, Dylan's mom's sole purpose in life is making sure Dylan does well in his. To this end, she worries about Dylan dating Jamie, not because Jamie is transgender, but because such a relationship will be difficult, and because she worries that Dylan does not need any more difficulty in his life.

## Dylan's dad

Dylan's dad, spoken out about but never seen, was married to his mom and died of cancer when Dylan was three. Dylan's dad, according to his mom, was exactly like Dylan: large, hairy, and very muscular, but also with a heart of gold. Dylan worries he



will end up dead like his dad, rather than focusing on the good things about his dad. His dad struggled through the final months of his life to leave his son a model train set and landscape, so that Dylan might have something from him left behind to enjoy as he grew up.

## **JP**

Jeremiah Phillip “JP” Dunn is the best friend of Dylan. Wealthy, popular, and handsome, JP seems to have it all, except that his parents are rarely around and his mother is a violent drunk. JP often escapes over at Dylan’s house, and despite Dylan’s appearance, has never batted an eye. Despite this, JP is not a good person though he insists he is trying. He is a loan shark at school, manipulates Dylan, and often makes fun of Dylan like everyone else.

## **Fern**

Fern is girl at school that Dylan has a crush on. Pretty, popular, and intelligent, Fern appears to be kind toward Dylan. But Dylan overhears her in the library trashing him and making fun of him ruthlessly, which hurts Dylan and causes him to lose feelings for her.

## **Madison**

Madison is a pretty, popular girl at school who makes fun of Dylan. It is Madison’s comment about having to see Dylan’s ugly face when hats are banned that causes Dylan to want to get a haircut. Madison’s cruelty is later seen again in the library when she, along with Fern, ruthlessly make fun of Dylan.

## **Dr. Jensen**

Dr. Jensen is Dylan’s post-emergency room doctor. It is Jensen Dylan asks about changing his physical appearance, leading Jensen to believe Dylan is depressed, and/or suicidal. Because of this, Jensen recommends therapy for Dylan.

## **Bryce**

Bryce is a popular kid and friend of JP’s at school. Bryce, along with Ethan, always makes fun of Dylan for his appearance. But Bryce and Ethan go above and beyond when they learn Dylan is dating a transgendered girl, turning their mockery into outright cruelty.

## Ethan

Ethan is a popular kid and friend of JP's at school. Ethan, along with Bryce, always makes fun of Dylan for the way he looks. But Ethan and Bryce go even further when they learn Dylan is dating a transgendered girl, turning their mockery into outright cruelty.





# Symbols and Symbolism

## Bad haircut

A bad haircut symbolizes humiliation for Dylan. When the no-hat policy goes into effect at school, Dylan wants to get a nice haircut. Instead, JP pays the barber to shave his head. This makes Dylan believe he looks worse, and humiliates him at school.

## Fall from the roof

The fall from the roof symbolizes the beginning of a transformation in Dylan's life. Dylan, hurting from the bad haircut, goes out onto his roof for fresh air and to retrieve a lost football before slipping and falling off. This leads him to the hospital, then to therapy, and then to meeting Jamie.

## Therapy group

Therapy group symbolizes new beginnings. Dylan, along with Jamie and numerous others, attend therapy group at the outpatient wing of the hospital. There, they talk about their problems and do their best to be supportive of one another as they enter new parts of their lives. Therapy enables Dylan to meet Jamie, which in turn creates a new beginning in his life.

## Photography

Photography symbolizes a celebration of life, of moments captured in time, and of vulnerabilities. Jamie loves to take photographs because she takes photos of things that matter in life, and because moments are captured forever in film that will never happen again in real life. At the same time, those moments on film can catch people and the world at its most vulnerable. In other words, her photography is very human, catching what people consider to be their weaknesses, but are really their strengths.

## Roses

Roses symbolize the blooming of love. Dylan and Jamie go on a date to the rose garden at Peninsula Park. There, Jamie tells Dylan she wants to take things slowly. Dylan agrees, comparing the love between them to the roses now dormant due to winter. When the time is right, both the roses and the romance will come.



## Model train setup

A model train setup symbolizes rejected love. While dying, Dylan's father assembled a beautiful model train landscape, complete with trains, for Dylan out of love. Dylan, feeling rejected by Jamie even though he refused to have anything to do with Jamie upon finding out she was transgendered leading her to break up with him, smashes apart the train set in anger over being rejected. In essence, he is also rejecting his father's love, for which he is smacked across the face by his mother for his petty selfishness.

## Gigantism

Gigantism symbolizes hope for the future. When Dylan learns he might have gigantism, he happily submits to blood tests. He knows that if he does have gigantism, it can be treated. This gives him great hope. Unfortunately, it turns out that Dylan does not have gigantism, which plunges him into despair.

## Kissing Jamie's scars

The kissing of Jamie's scars symbolizes acceptance and healing. When Jamie shaves Dylan's hair, he notices the scars on her wrists from cutting. He is deeply moved by this, and realizes just how much she has hurt. He kisses the scars both to demonstrate he is accepting of her past, but also to demonstrate that he wants to take care of her, and heal her by placing kisses on things that hurt – in other words, allows his love of her to make things better and to soothe her.

## Rainbow

A rainbow is a symbol of a false sign. When JP and Jamie head off together after Jamie refuses to have anything to do with Dylan, Dylan sees a rainbow above them. He believes this is a sign of happiness for JP and Jamie, but not for him. He believes this is a sign from his father to let Jamie and JP go. Dylan decides to do just that – until he realizes he cannot live without Jamie.

## Hand holding

Hand holding symbolizes a return of hope, a coming together, and a joining in love. When Dylan and Jamie walk home from the doctor's, they end up holding hands. This symbolizes that they are back together, and that they are joined together in love.



# Settings

## Portland

Portland, Oregon serves as the main setting of the novel. Beautiful even in the rainy weather and under the gray of winter, Portland plays host as the city where Dylan, Jamie, JP, and others, live and attend school. It is in Portland that Dylan meets Jamie at the hospital therapy group, and it is in Portland that Dylan begins his romance with Jamie.

## Dylan's roof

Dylan's roof is a place of healing. It is where Dylan goes to get fresh air and to clear his mind. However, at the beginning of the novel, Dylan slips and falls off the roof, breaking his leg and ending him up in the hospital. This in turn leads to Dylan being recommended for therapy. At the end of the novel, Dylan heads out onto his roof once again to get some fresh air. He is joined by his mother, and the two reconnect and come to an understanding that brings them closer together.

## Room 12

Room 12 of the outpatient wing at the hospital is where the therapy group meets. It is there that Dylan is sent to attend therapy class. It is the same therapy class Jamie attends. It is in Room 12 that the two meet one another, become friends, and ultimately become more.

## Basement

The basement at Dylan's house is where Dylan feels closest to his father. It is where Dylan's dad built a model train set and landscape for Dylan. It is where Dylan later destroys the trains and landscape in anger, heartache, and humiliation, but is also where Dylan later repairs and improves the set as he heals and comes to accept himself.

## Saint Lawrence Catholic High School

Saint Lawrence Catholic High School is generally a nightmare for Dylan. It is where he, JP, Fen, Madison, Bryce, and Ethan attend class, and where Dylan is daily mocked, belittled, and even insulted over his appearance. Dylan hates high school, and struggles to get along until he reluctantly joins the football team where he is accepted for his size and power.



# Themes and Motifs

## Appearances can be deceiving

Appearances can be deceiving, argues Brie Spangler in her novel *Beast*. Human nature compels people to draw conclusions about people based on appearances, but appearances can be deceiving. It is why people must always strive to see beyond mere appearances. (Spangler expands this general argument with a more specific approach—see the next theme.)

From first appearances, Dylan is intimidating. He is a large, hulking, muscular, hairy kid who is clearly not outgoing. Few would guess he is intelligent, or has suffered greatly after the death of his father. From first appearances, Dylan's mom seems to be a normal mother, concerned with the safety and welfare of her son. But in reality, Dylan's mom is a human being with her own hopes, dreams, and sadness.

From first appearances, JP is handsome. He is also wealthy, popular, and well-respected at school. Few would ever guess he hurts inside from the distance of his parents from him emotionally, especially because of his mother's alcoholism. From first appearances, Jamie is a tall, pretty girl. But in reality, she is a transgendered girl in transition.

From first appearances at school, Fern seems to be pretty, kind, and intelligent. In reality, she is a horrible person, ruthlessly mocking and humiliating Dylan. From first appearances in the therapy group, Dylan considers most of the people there to be normal-looking in addition to those who are alternatively dressed. But Dylan learns that just because people appear normal, does not mean they have perfect lives. Dylan draws these lessons from his own experiences with Jamie.

## Who we are is not just what we look like

Who we are is not just what we look like, argues Brie Spangler in her novel *Beast*. While human nature causes people to draw conclusions based on appearances, the sum of a person is not their appearance of what they look like (see the previous theme for the idea of appearances as deceiving). This is especially true with the characters in the novel concerning their physical natures and their inner beings.

Dylan has been slapped with the nickname "Beast" because this is what he resembles physically. He is large, muscular, and very hairy. As such, people believe him to be the dumb, slow football type. But Dylan is more than someone who looks like he belongs on a football field. He is brilliant, very sensitive, and can be very kind. Dylan's appearance is indeed a part of who he is, but is not the only thing that he is. He is much more than a large kid.



By all accounts, JP has everything a guy could want. He is handsome, rich, popular, and constantly surrounded by girls. However, JP's outward confidence masks an inner darkness. He is manipulative, unkind, and can be downright cruel. He also suffers from a difficult home life, thanks especially to an alcoholic mother. While Dylan could be more sympathetic to JP regarding this situation, because Dylan is the only one who knows about this, Dylan himself could be more sympathetic to Dylan because of Dylan's looks and because he knows Dylan on a very personal level.

Jamie is both lauded and mocked as a transgendered girl. Jamie herself is sick of both reactions. People tend to see her only as a transgendered girl, but in reality, there is much more to her than just her physical nature. She is a wonderful photographer, and has a kindness and patience that is unmatched among any other characters in the novel, save Dylan's mom. While being transgendered is a serious part of Jamie's life, it is not the only part.

## **No one is perfect, but one must always try to do good**

No one is perfect, but one must always try to do good, argues Brie Spangler in her novel *Beast*. The majority of the characters in the novel are, for the most part, good people who are striving to do the right thing. None among them are perfect, but their desire to do good or be better is reaffirming of their nature as human beings.

Given his physical appearance and relentless bullying received, one would imagine Dylan to be more sympathetic, kind, and understanding of others. He is not. He is self-absorbed in his own pity at the beginning of the novel, failing to appreciate his mother's unconditional love and support, and failing to appreciate that others in the therapy group are worthy of being heard and comforted. Dylan admits he judges by appearance, and it is clear he takes his mom for granted. But only through Jamie does Dylan strive to make things better.

JP is far from perfect. His redeeming qualities – genuinely wanting to be friends with Dylan despite taking advantage of that friendship, and his wanting to be friends with Dylan despite Dylan's appearance (which drives others away) –are compromised by JP being a loan shark, manipulative, and unkind toward Dylan himself. JP explains later in the novel he is working on getting better, on trying to do the right thing. He finances one of Jamie's photography shows in the vain attempt to get her to speak to Dylan again.

Jamie herself admits she could be a better person. She explains that, despite other people judging her for her physical appearance, she does the same thing. She explains she is working on it, and is trying to be a better person. Her efforts are demonstrated in clear form by the gracious patience and understanding she has with Dylan, and by her desire to see beyond his appearance in order to know him as a human being.



## Everyone deals with some kind of pain

Everyone deals with some kind of pain, argues Brie Spangler in her novel *Beast*. No one in life, no matter their situation, is exempt from some kind of pain. All too often, people assume differences between them mean that no one else can experience or be in pain. This, Spangler reveals, is simply not true.

Dylan's pain is most apparent early in the novel. He is relentlessly mocked and made fun of for his physical appearance. Only his mother and JP understand that Dylan is in pain. However, whereas Dylan's mom is supportive and encouraging of Dylan, JP is largely disinterested and even joins in the mocking of Dylan at school.

Ironically, Dylan, despite his sensitivity and pain, is unable to recognize pain in either his mother or in JP. Dylan assumes that JP's pain in dealing with distant parents and an alcoholic mother can be dealt with because JP is rich and popular. Indeed, Dylan will not even stick around to listen to JP talk about his problems with Dylan's mom. Meanwhile, Dylan, who is so self-absorbed in his own pain, does not stop to think about his mother and the pain she is experiencing – either in the loss of his father, or in dealing with Dylan himself. Just because JP is rich, and just because Anna is Dylan's mom, does not mean they do not experience pain.

Dylan's assumptions about the other kids in therapy also demonstrate that no one is without some kind of pain. Dylan writes off alternatively-dressed kids, and dismisses normal-looking kids. In reality, each of them is dealing with, or suffering from some kind of situation which causes them pain. Only later in the novel does Dylan finally come to accept that everyone deals with pain when he sees that Jamie used to cut herself. Just because someone is rich or appears normal does not mean they do not suffer pain; and just because someone looks different does not mean their pain is made any less.

## Patience and understanding are critical of everyone toward everyone

Patience and understanding are critical of everyone toward everyone, argues Brie Spangler in her novel *Beast*. Only through patience can people seek to understand one another, and only through understanding can people genuinely come together in unity. Differences will and should always exist, but these cannot be exploited at the expense of common humanity.

Dylan, despite all of the pain and hardships he faces because of his physical appearance, proves to be the least understanding and least patient character in the novel at first. He is annoyed by the people in group therapy rather than curious to know more about them. He is dismissive of his mother's unflinching encouragement and reassurance. And he is dismissive of the pain that JP goes through at home. This causes strain in their friendship that comes out later when JP confronts Dylan over this – and Dylan apologizes.



JP himself goes through something of a transition through the course of the novel. Manipulative and condescending towards his own best friend, JP struggles to do better and to be better. Things are put in harsh perspective when Dylan tells JP he wants nothing more to do with JP, and JP is essentially left alone with nowhere else to go. He does his best to be understanding of Dylan, and even goes out of his way to try to help Dylan and Jamie get back together despite his crude cafeteria announcement regarding Jamie. JP has come to recognize real pain in Dylan and Jamie, so he is trying to do the right thing.

Jamie and Dylan's mom prove to be the most effective characters in their patience and understanding of others. Dylan's mom is naturally sympathetic towards others, but the loss of her husband has made her exceptionally tender toward Dylan, as he is the only family she has on the West Coast. Despite her reluctance at Dylan dating Jamie, Dylan's mom never doubts for an instant that Jamie has had to have experienced tremendous hardship in her own life. Indeed, this is what helps Jamie to be so patient and understanding with others. She could very easily dismiss Dylan any number of times for any number of reasons – but she chooses not to. She sees him as a human being worthy of love and understanding. Jamie and Dylan's mom know they have far more in common with others than they do not, and so they allow their humanity to guide the way.



# Styles

## Point of View

Brie Spangler tells her novel *Beast* in the first-person limited-omniscient narrative mode from the point of view of main character, Dylan Ingvarsson. This is done for at least two reasons. First, Dylan is a very introverted, very private kid who keeps his thoughts and feelings to himself as routine mocking and bullying destroy his confidence and cause him to shy away from the public. Even JP and Dylan's mom do not know all of Dylan's inmost thoughts and feelings – but the reader is given privileged access to Dylan that no one else has by being swept up into Dylan's personal narrative. This gives the reader unique insight into Dylan's evolution as a character. Second, the things Dylan is experiencing – from his physical nature to his dating of a transgendered girl – are things that can only truly be understood by the words of the person experiencing them. Dylan's thoughts and feelings are unfiltered, allowing readers to personally relate to, and find relevance with Dylan's internal world – especially as the first-person creates an intimate, person-to-person confidence.

## Language and Meaning

Brie Spangler tells her novel *The Beast* in language that is casual and descriptive. The casual aspect of the language – including a repertoire of curse words – is reflective of Dylan's age (15) and his level of education. Although apart from school he is well-read, he is only a sophomore, and his desire to fit in among contemporary peers is reflective of his use of very common, very casual words. Much of Dylan's inner world, however – his thoughts and feelings about things – lend themselves to an almost poetic way of description, indicating that appearances do not make up a person entirely. In other words, Dylan is not only a hulking, should-be linebacker, but is instead intelligent and sensitive. The language Spangler uses therein is highly descriptive and full of similes. For example, consider on page 36 in Chapter Four where Dylan describes Jamie's voice as something that “reminds me of cinnamon being grated into a mug of hot apple cider.”

## Structure

Brie Spangler divides her novel *Beast* into linear, consecutive, and chronological chapters ranging from One to 37. The simple-and-straightforward approach to the novel creates an easily-traversed plot that spans the width of several months in time. This allows readers to remain focused on the plot, especially on Dylan's thoughts and feelings regarding dating a transgendered girl, growing stronger and better as a person, and seeing beyond his own pain. The step-by-step growth of Dylan is reflected in the step-by-step structure of the novel itself.





## Quotes

Oh my god, now we're going to have to see the Beast's face every day.  
-- Madison (Chapter One)

**Importance:** When St. Lawrence High announces it will no longer allow students to wear hats indoors, Dylan realizes he will no longer be able to hide his face. Madison makes a horrible, offhanded comment about Dylan, using both his nickname and referring to how ugly he is. This sort of thing wears heavy on Dylan, though he does his best to shake it off.

Can you refer me to anyone who can change... me?  
-- Dylan (Chapter One)

**Importance:** In the hospital after his fall, Dylan can only think about how ugly he is. He asks his doctor, Dr. Jensen, if Jensen can refer him to a plastic surgeon. Dylan is so desperate to change his appearance that he is willing to undergo surgery. This leads the doctor to assume Dylan is depressed and self-harming by throwing himself off a roof. This leads Dylan to being forced into therapy.

Of all the people the universe has ever barfed up, who are you to judge, Dylan?  
-- Jamie (Chapter Seven)

**Importance:** When sitting in Portland with Jamie, Dylan is asked by Jamie for his opinion on women who pass by. Dylan judges them harshly, which angers Jamie. She asks him who he is to judge anyone, implying that, as someone self-conscious about his own looks, why would he make others self-conscious about theirs.

Because I'm living it, okay? Every day. I am the one everyone sees and thinks, thank god, at least I don't look like that.  
-- Dylan (Chapter Seven)

**Importance:** This is Dylan's response to Jamie when she asks him who he is of all people to be judging others based on appearance. Dylan explains it is because he lives it every day. This stuns Jamie into silence, who then admits she, too, is trying not to judge others the way that she used to.

Then I only have eleven years left until I die too.  
-- Dylan (Chapter Nine)

**Importance:** Here, Dylan finally reveals his fears about being compared to his father, or being told by his mother that he is just like his father. Dylan worries that he, too, will die at the age of 26 due to cancer. He worries that only has 11 years left to live, but wants to live his entire life instead.



We stare at row after row of sleeping roses. They will bloom when they're ready.  
-- Dylan (Chapter Thirteen)

**Importance:** Dylan does not mind that Jamie wants to take what is happening between them, slowly. Dylan is thrilled that someone likes him. This makes their walk through a winter rose garden all the better. Dylan compares the unfolding romance between him and Jamie to the roses. The roses will bloom in the spring when they are ready, and love between him and Jamie will bloom when it is time.

Then, oh god, she was a boy this whole time. I squeeze my eyes shut as hard as I can.  
-- Dylan (Chapter Fourteen)

**Importance:** When Dylan learns that Jamie is transgender, he is stunned. He cannot help but think he has been, more or less, dating and kissing another guy. He knows he is not gay, and cannot wrap his mind around finding a girl who has stopped being a guy, attractive. The entire experience is distressing, especially because Dylan did not expect what happened to have happened.

Whatever happened with me and Jamie is one thing, but that doesn't mean people have the right to give her a hard time. She didn't do anything wrong.  
-- Dylan (Chapter Sixteen)

**Importance:** When JP tries to be supportive of Dylan about Jamie, Dylan turns on JP and insults him over his alcoholic mother. This in turn causes JP to seek revenge by announcing to the school that Dylan is dating a transsexual person. Dylan is enraged by this, knowing that Jamie does not deserve to be targeted in such a fashion.

But this connection I have with Jamie won't go away.  
-- Dylan (Chapter Eighteen )

**Importance:** Here, Dylan considers how things currently stand with Jamie. He desperately wants to not have feelings anymore, because he has difficulty accepting she is transgendered. But no matter what he does, Dylan cannot shake the knowledge that he has a connection with Jamie. He wants to be with her, he decides, but he is afraid to move forward.

I'm falling for a girl with boy parts. This is weird. Although technically I fell a long time ago.  
-- Dylan (Chapter Nineteen)

**Importance:** Dylan continues to go over in his mind and his heart his feelings for Jamie. He realizes he has indeed fallen for a transgendered girl. He is coming to terms with what he must do next, which is to try to win Jamie back.

I'm afraid of myself.  
-- Dylan (Chapter Twenty-Five)



**Importance:** Here, Dylan finally admits to Jamie the truth about himself. He is afraid of himself. He is afraid of himself because he is worried he will end up dying early like his father. He may have loved his father, but he does not want to be like his father in the sense that he does not also want to die of cancer at such a young age. Jamie is very understanding and reassuring of Dylan when he explains this.

Let's be good.

-- Dylan (Chapter Thirty-Seven)

**Importance:** Here, Dylan and Jamie reunite at the end of the novel. Jamie and Dylan come back together as Jamie forgives Dylan for what has transpired between them. Jamie tells Dylan she does not want things to be horrible between them anymore, so Dylan responds that he wants things to be good – in other words, they will be resuming their romance.