

# **Before I Fall Study Guide**

**Before I Fall by Lauren Oliver**

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# Plot Summary

Cupid's Day is supposed to be the most exciting day of the year for high school senior Samantha "Sam" Kingston and her friends, Lindsey, Ally, and Elody. After attending a huge party with her friends, Samantha gets in the car with a drunk driver, crashes, and dies. For the next seven days, Sam is forced to relive the day of her death, slowly peeling away layers of truth to find a deeper understanding of what it means to love, lose, and live. In the prologue of the novel, the narrator, Sam Kingston, recalls the "greatest hits" of her short-lived life, saying that if she could choose to relive any of those days, she would, but the truth is that when you die, you never know it's going to be your last day. The last thing Sam remembers is laughing with her friends in Lindsey's car, leaving a party, when there's a flash of light, something running in front of the car, and then the squeal of tires, blackness, nothing.

On the first day, Cupid's Day, Sam is more concerned with how many roses she'll receive from her friends, signaling her popularity, than studying for her classes. Today is also the day she's supposed to lose her virginity to Rob. She goes through the day as usual, with her super popular friends, ruling the school and bullying all who annoy her, including Juliet Sykes, the beautiful and quiet girl she and her friends have been bullying since sixth grade. That night, Sam and her friends attend Kent McFuller's party - even though they find him dorky and weird - and are shocked when Juliet dares to confront them in public, calling them "bitches." The girls fight back by calling her a psycho and dumping their beers over her head. Soon the entire party joins in, pouring their beers over Juliet, singing the theme song to the film "Psycho," physically shoving her out of the party. The only person with any sense of outrage is Kent, who stares at Sam with shocked horror on his face. Sam escapes the uncomfortable situation by running to Lindsey's car, and the girls speed off. As they drive away, a flash of white leaps in front of the car and they crash. Sam dies.

On Day Two, Lindsey wakes wondering what has just happened to her. She thought she was dead and now she wakes up to find that it's Cupid's Day all over again. Through the entire day, Sam can't decide if she dreamt the night before, if she's having extreme déjà vu, or if she's just going crazy. As the day progresses, she realizes that she is actually reliving Cupid's Day, and that she has some control over the way the day unfolds. On the third day, Sam attempts to control the situation, thus preventing her death, by doing everything right and being nice to everyone. She convinces her friends not to attend Kent's party and stay in for a movie night instead. She starts to realize that she has feelings for Kent, and that she is no longer attracted to Rob. When everything starts falling into place, Sam is elated. She is positive this plan is going to work and that tomorrow, she will be faced with a new day: February 13. At Ally's house that night, she nervously watches the minutes tick forward on the clock, knowing that the time of her death; 12:39 is fast approaching. When the clock ticks to 12:40, Sam wants to scream with joy: she has beat death! The celebration is short lived when, an hour later, Ally's mom comes downstairs to tell the girls that Juliet Sykes has killed herself. It becomes clear to Sam that there has been some sort of tradeoff: she has lived, but Juliet has died.



Once Sam realizes that her death and Juliet's death are intertwined, Sam gets to work trying to save them both. On both the fifth and sixth days, Sam tries, unsuccessfully, to save Juliet by sending her roses, speaking to her at the party, and chasing her through the woods. On the fifth day, Sam discovers that the white flash before Lindsey's car crashes is not the brights on oncoming traffic, but Juliet's dress as she hurls herself in front of Lindsey's car. Every day Juliet dies, Sam dies as well. On the final day, Sam wakes with a sense of peace, knowing that the ultimate sacrifice must be made: she must die before Juliet in order to save her. On the final night, Sam pushes Juliet away from the oncoming traffic, taking the full force of the crash on herself, dying in the process. Many readers will be outraged that Sam had to die, but the novel has been building up to this sacrifice since Day One. Although some readers might oppose this idea, in the world that Oliver has created, Sam's sacrifice is what gives her life meaning. She has embraced life and love and that is the true meaning of what it is to live.



# Prologue, Day One

## Prologue, Day One Summary and Analysis

In the prologue, it becomes immediately clear that Samantha Kingston is dead. The novel is told entirely from her first-person point-of-view, and the prologue is no exception. The prologue is told in past tense narration, unlike the individual chapters, which are told in present tense, which signifies to the reader that Lindsey has reached the end of her journey - she has crossed over, or she has saved herself, but the audience doesn't know which. Sam starts her narration by describing what it feels like to die. Your life doesn't flash before your eyes, as everyone claims. Before she died, Sam didn't think about anything or anyone, not her boyfriend, not her best friends, not her family. The only person whose face she saw was Vicky Hallinan, the girl whom her friend Lindsey used to tease in the fourth grade. Before she dies, Samantha remembers Vicky's face when Lindsey said she was too fat to play dodgeball. It is interesting that Samantha would remember Vicky before her death since she does not appear again in the novel. Instead of being specifically important to the novel, this moment is thematically important: the novel deals with bullying, and as the reader will soon find out, Sam's participation in bullying will be the key to her redemption. Therefore, it is no surprise that Sam should relive an image of bullying before her death. This moment is the greatest clue to unlocking the mystery of the novel. The audience, and indeed Sam herself, just don't realize it yet.

From there, Sam recounts the final moments of her life: driving in the car with her friends, Elody playing a specific song on her iPod, Lindsey, the driver, dropping her cigarette between her thighs, the tires skidding on the ice, and the sudden flash of white in front of the car. Lindsey yells something Sam can't quite understand, and then the horrible screeching sound of crushing metal. The smell of smoke. The screams. And then nothing. The important thing about this evening is that Sam had no idea it would be her last. That's the way it is with death. You never know when your last day will be.

Sam's last day begins like many others: Lindsey shouts "Beep, beep" from her car window, waiting to pick Sam up for school. Sam's little sister Izzy tugs on Sam's coat to hand Sam her white cashmere gloves. They smell of peanut butter from Izzy's hands, which annoys Sam. The air outside is freezing cold, and the sky is perfectly pale blue, like the sun has just spilled itself over the horizon. Lindsey is already smoking in the driver's seat, but she hands Sam a coffee from Dunkin Donuts and a sesame bagel. Today is Cupid's Day - the only day of the year when Sam, Lindsey, Elody, and Ally deliberately dress the same - February 12, when the students send roses to each other in classes, with special notes attached. Students measure each other's popularity by how many roses they've received. Lindsey says that Patrick, her on-again-off-again boyfriend had better send her a rose, or else. Sam already knows that Rob, her boyfriend since October, will send her a rose because she was with him when he filled out the request form. Tonight is the big night for Sam: the night when she's going to lose her virginity to Rob. It's been well planned, but her friends seem more excited about this



big leap than she does. It's clear that she just wants to get it over with, and she can barely look her friends in the eye when they tease her about it. Through the conversation, it's clear that Elody is the most sexually experienced of the four friends - she lost her virginity sophomore year and has already had sex with two different guys - but Sam is the only virgin left. Sam then goes on to analyze her own popularity: she and her friends are the most popular girls in school, even though they're not necessarily the prettiest, they don't have the biggest boobs, and they aren't the most lady-like. There's not point in analyzing popularity, Sam says. In high school there's just an inside and outside, and it's pretty easy to see who belongs where: "nobody ever said life was fair" (p. 13). Sam's black and white analysis of popularity - you're either in or out - is vital to understanding her emotional journey in the novel. At the opening, she's very calloused to the way popularity works. She knows she's popular and others aren't, but she doesn't care why, and doesn't seem to understand how being unpopular might "feel" to other students.

When they arrive at school, there's only one parking spot left and Sarah Grudel from the swim team is obviously there first. Still, Lindsey lays on her horn and guns it into the parking spot nearly smashing Sarah Grundel's car - Lindsey drives a Range Rover known as "The Tank" and always jokes that she could emerge from a collision with an 18-wheeler unharmed, which has made her a somewhat reckless driver. Before they run inside, just making it inside before final bell, Elody slips a condom into Sam's hand and says jokingly, "No glove, no love" (p. 15). Through the first two periods of the day, Sam only gets five roses, but she tries not to freak out about it. In her chemistry class, there's a pop quiz and she doesn't understand the questions. Unfortunately, the only person within eyesight of her is Lauren Lornet who's even worse in chemistry than she is. Still, she peeks over Lauren's shoulder and copies her answers. Even though Lauren is helping her out, Sam still thinks about what a dork Lauren is, and how sad it is to be a dork and dumb - at least if you're going to be unpopular, you should go on to great works at Harvard or something. Math class is taught by Mr. Daimler, who's twenty-five and, according to Sam, gorgeous. She and Mr. Daimler often innocently flirt through class, and Sam's stomach is often in excited knots. In this class, Sam gets four more roses, including one from Rob that says "Luv ya" and, written in smaller handwriting "Happy now?" Sam is disappointed. She had been hoping that Rob would say he loved her before their big night together, and "Luv ya" just isn't the same. In the lunch room later, Sam makes excuses for Rob's lack of emotion: he's a jock, and not very good with mushy stuff, but he's strong and makes her feel safe, and she's had a crush on him since she was in sixth grade. In the lunchroom she remembers opening her eyes once when they were kissing, and Rob's eyes were open too, but he wasn't looking at her, he was looking over her shoulder, scanning the room. She also notes that she doesn't really like the way he smells, like lemon balm, but all these things are easily forgiven when you're seventeen-years-old and in love. Sam also gets a note from a stunningly beautiful Cupid - the underclassman delivering the roses - dressed up as an angel. The rose she hands over is also stunningly beautiful. Attached to the rose is a cartoon of a Cupid accidentally shooting an American Bald Eagle out of the sky. The caption says, "Don't Drink and Love." It's from Kent McFuller, a weird kid in class. Sam makes a point of frowning at him and dropping the note to the bottom of her bag. Still, Kent doesn't seem to mind and continues grinning at her. After class, Kent jogs up to Sam and asks if



she's coming to his party tonight. She makes a point of looking bored and says "Maybe" even though she knows she's going.

In the hallway, Sam meets back up with her friends and while they're gossiping about who has received roses from whom, they see Juliet Sykes - a beautiful girl with pale blonde hair - and immediately begin screeching the theme song from "Psycho" and pretend to stab each other with knives. They laugh about the Valogram they send to Juliet every year: a rose with a note that says, "Maybe next year, but probably not" (p. 28). Through this interaction, it's clear that the popular girls are clichés - they are nasty bullies, but it's hidden behind their beauty and their parents' money. Lindsey hates Juliet, and gave her the nickname "Mellow Yellow" in the fifth grade after she discovered Juliet had accidentally wet the bed on a class camping trip. Everyone had called Juliet "Mellow Yellow" for years. As she's laughing, Sam suddenly realizes that she doesn't really know why Lindsey hates Juliet so much. The giggling continues when they hear that Sarah Grundel has been suspended from the high school swim team during Regional competition for being tardy too many times. Later, Lindsey and Sam decide to cut seventh period to get some frozen yogurt from TCBY. On the way, they pass Alex Linment eating Chinese food with Anna Cartullo. Even though Anna's only a junior, there are rumors that she's slept with at least four guys. Alex has a girlfriend, Bridget McGuire, but she comes from a Catholic family and won't let Alex go past second-base with her, which is probably why he's sneaking around with Anna Cartullo. Once, Lindsey wrote AC=WT on the bathroom wall (WT stands for "White Trash") and now there is copycat graffiti of the same acronym all over the school.

After school, the girls all go to Ally's house to get ready for Kent's party, and Sam's big night with Rob. Sam recounts how she and Lindsey became friends - they were at a pool party in seventh grade when Lindsey found two tampons in Beth Schiff's backpack. Laughing hysterically, the two girls ran through the house collecting all the tampons and pads they could find, and threw them into the pool below shouting "Beth, these fell out of your bag!" From then on, the two girls were inseparable. Tonight, they listen to rap music and drink shots of vodka chased with cranberry juice, and drive to Kent's. Elody's already very drunk, and Lindsey is driving because she claims she can drink all night and never feel the effects. Once they're inside the party, the band of girls breaks up, and Rob pulls Sam out of the crowd. He's obviously drunk, but Sam is relieved that he's found her: she gets nervous when she's alone in a crowd. When Rob leans in to kiss her, Sam turns her head and scans the crowd. She spots Kent McFuller laughing about something with Phoebe Rifer, and it annoys her that Kent hasn't noticed her yet. She feels crabby, but doesn't understand why. The girls meet back up in a corner and continue drinking vodka straight out of the bottle, drunk and giggly. When Sam looks up, she sees Juliet Sykes walking through the door and is absolutely shocked. Juliet Sykes should never, under any circumstances be admitted into a party! When Lindsey sees her, a look of fear momentarily flashes across Lindsey's face, which confuses Sam. Juliet's presence at the party is so unexpected, to Sam, it seems like the music has stopped playing and everyone has turned to look at her. Juliet walks slowly, confidently toward Lindsey, stands inches in front of her and says, "You're a bitch," (p. 48). Then she turns to Ally and Elody and Sam, repeating her statement. Everyone is so shocked they don't know how to respond. Lindsey finally pulls herself together and says, "I'd



rather be a bitch than a psycho" (p. 48) and pours her beer out over Juliet's head. The rest of the party immediately jumps on the action and pour their beers over Juliet's head as well, pushing her through the crowd of students, jeering her. With a sick feeling in her stomach, Sam pours her beer over Juliet and then shoves her into the bookcase. When she looks up, Kent is staring at her with horror on his face. He looks at her like he's trying desperately to understand something, and it makes Sam extremely uncomfortable. Trying to maintain her "cool" composure, Sam smirks and shrieks, "I'm not going to go out with you. I would never go out with you in a million years. So you can stop obsessing over me. I mean, I shouldn't even know your name" (p. 50). Kent leans into Sam, staring hard, straight in her eyes, and whispers, "I can see right through you." This rattles and unnerves Sam who rushes out to Lindsey's car with the rest of the girls to escape the uncomfortable situation. By the time they reach the car, having run through the pouring rain, they're laughing so hard they don't even care about the awkwardness with Juliet Sykes anymore. They blast the music, light their cigarettes, and drive away. When the flash of light comes, Lindsey shouts something like "Sit" or "Shit" or "Sight" before the crash that takes Sam's life. Then the narration switches back to italics, as Sam addresses the reader directly by saying some probably thought she deserved to die. Maybe she shouldn't have taken part in bullying Juliet, maybe she shouldn't have said those horrible things to Kent: "But before you start pointing fingers, let me ask you: is what I did really so bad? So bad I deserved to die? Is it really so much worse than what you do? Think about it" (p. 56).





# Day Two

## Day Two Summary and Analysis

Sam feels as though she's falling. Falling through the air where there is no up or down, no walls or sides or ceilings. She thinks she will fall forever, when a thin bleating sound punctuates the silence: her alarm clock has been blaring for 20 minutes. She looks around the room and everything seems fuzzy and slightly distorted, as if it's not her room at all. Then the events from the night before come flooding back to her: Juliet Sykes, the argument with Kent. Before she can take it all in, Izzy bounds into the bedroom shouting that she has to get up, it's late! Lindsey sends a text message to Sam's phone: "Where r u?" Sam snaps her phone shut and sees the date emblazoned on the screen: February 12, Cupid's Day. Her stomach bottoms out, and she retches as if she might throw up. Suddenly Lindsey bursts into the room demanding that Sam hurry up or they'll all be late, on Cupid's Day, no less. Seeing Lindsey, Sam is overwhelmed with emotion: "What happened last night?" she asks, but of course Lindsey has no idea what she's talking about. When Lindsey unzips her coat, revealing the fur-lined tank top all four girls organized to wear today, Sam feels an overwhelming urge to sit down on the ground and burst out laughing. In the car, the rest of the girls think Sam's look of confused fear has something to do with her big night with Rob tonight. By the time they pull into the parking lot at school, Sarah Grundel has taken the last spot, - this happened because today, Sam made them late by sleeping through her alarm. This is the first instance of something Sam has done knocking down and effecting the rest of the day's events. This is an important element to understanding the novel as a whole. In the cafeteria on Day One, the girls were laughing about how a butterfly flapping its wings in China could cause an earthquake in New York. Essentially, Lauren Oliver is emulating this scientific theory in her novel. Although the events of Cupid's Day will always start out the same, Sam's reactions - her behaviors, her actions, even her words - will alter the day into something new, hopefully in a way that makes anything possible. As they run into the building, running late because of their lost parking space, Elody slips a condom into Sam's hands: No glove, no love.

Throughout the day, Sam is inundated with *déjà vu*. People wearing the exact same clothes, looking at her the exact same way, saying the exact same things. As she rushes to class, Sam overhears Sarah Grundel talking about her upcoming swim meet for regionals: she wasn't tardy this morning, so she wasn't suspended from the team. Sam can't quite process what's happening to her. Is she having *déjà vu*? Was it all a dream? Or is she losing her mind? She feels as if the walls are collapsing around her, and she has to steady herself on the lockers. She rushes to the bathroom and bumps into Ally, who's bitching about her body looking too fat. Sam spots the AC=WT graffiti on the walls and wonders again why Lindsey hates Anna so much, which leads her to wonder why she also hates Juliet so much. When the bell rings, Sam rushes to class a bit late, and is forced to take the same seat next to Lauren Lornet to take the Chemistry pop quiz that she still doesn't know the answers to. In math class, Sam gets the same four roses delivered by the blonde-haired Cupid, Marian - who comments on how



beautiful the rose is - and receives the same "Luv ya" note from Rob as well as the goofy cartoon from Kent. Aggravated, and still annoyed with Kent for the comments he made the night before (although they haven't technically happened yet today), Sam snaps at Marian and leaves Kent's rose crumpled on her desk. He chases after her down the hall. When he tries to return the rose, Sam goes out of her way to be nasty to him as a way of revenge. What Oliver cleverly does through the multiple same interactions Sam has with people, is that she gradually adds one-liners that hint about the way these relationships will change. For example, on this, the second interaction in the hallway with Kent, Sam notices how deeply green Kent's eyes are. This could be considered a romantic thought if Sam weren't too busy insulting Kent about how she doesn't need his friendship. As the novel progresses, however, thoughts like these will come about more frequently, emotionally preparing the reader for Sam's change in character, as she slowly falls out of love with Rob, and in love with Kent. When Kent invites Sam to his party, her stomach clenches as she remembers what will happen. Out of the corner of her eye, she spots Rob and runs toward him, burying her face in his fleece, which smells like old pizza, (another clue that Sam will eventually find Rob repulsive). It feels so good to be wrapped up in his arms, Sam worries that she's going to cry. Rob thinks she's overly emotional about his Valogram. Sam tries to convince Rob to hang out alone with her tonight, but he's not taking the bait. He heard about a great party happening at Kent-what's-his-name's tonight and he doesn't want to miss it.

After school, the girls head to Ally's to get ready, just like before. Sam feels nauseous, like she might vomit at any second, which her friends take as nerves about losing her virginity. Sam turns to Lindsey and asks if she was nervous her first time. Immediately, she regrets asking this because she remembers that Lindsey's first time was with an older guy at a party who she had just met. She got drunk, had sex, and the guy didn't even know her name. The friends never talk about it. In fact, there are many things that the friends never talk about, like the fact that they can't hang out at Elody's house after 5:00 because her mother will be there, drunk. They also don't talk about Ally's apparent eating disorder, or the taunts that haunted Sam during the years before she was popular. When she thinks about this, Sam claims, "A good friend keeps your secrets for you. A best friend helps you keep your own secrets" (Page 76). This is an interesting and intriguing way to consider friendship because it insists that friendships revolve around secrets - secrets you keep from others, and secrets you keep even from yourself. To keep a secret from oneself, an individual must be very afraid of what a revelation would mean in their lives. As the reader will come to find out, Lindsey holds quite a few secrets that she doesn't want anyone, perhaps even herself, to understand fully. Driving to the party, Sam is overwhelmed with love for her friends. She knows them deeply, all their idiosyncrasies and oddball traits, she understands and loves. But even Sam's love for her friends won't save her. As the events of the party unfold almost exactly as they had the night before, she realizes that it's not *déjà vu*, it's not a dream, she's reliving the same day all over again. At this precise moment, Rob walks up and wraps his arms around Sam. She says she wants to be alone, that she has to talk to him. It's interesting that Sam would chose to tell Rob about what she's experiencing rather than her best friends. She's afraid that her friends will judge her, or think she's crazy, or worse, that she's joking. It's unclear why Sam thinks Rob will be any different, but she doesn't get the chance to tell him because he thinks she wants privacy to have



sex. When she shakes her head, Rob gets annoyed and walks off, leaving Sam alone with her fears. Then Kent walks up to Sam and places a hand on her shoulder. "Are you okay?" he asks quietly. Sam pulls away from him, thinking that the last thing she needs is pity from Kent McFuller. Again, this is an interesting moment in which the reader sees the relationship developing between Kent and Sam, but Sam, the protagonist, does not. While she struggles to find someone, anyone who will listen to what she is going through, he is right next to her all along. When Sam does find her friends again, she insists that they take her home. The girls look at her like she's crazy; leave a party early? Then Sam realizes the girls are not looking at her, they're looking over her shoulder at someone who's just walked in the door: Juliet Sykes. She walks up to the girls and, as expected, points to each one of them one-by-one and says, "You're a bitch." Lindsey responds with her same, "I'd rather be a bitch than a psycho" line, and the beer begins pouring. Sam can barely shake herself out of her stupor. She can't believe this is happening, and she can't move, can't speak to stop it. When she finally focuses on what's happening, Juliet is rushing toward her, arms outstretched. Sam responds by pushing her backward, into the bookcase. Juliet rushes out one door of the party, and Sam rushes out the other. When she gets to the car, Ally complains that Sam always gets to ride shotgun. While they drive, Sam is completely on edge, shouting at her friends, unable to tear her eyes away from the minutes ticking away on the dashboard clock: 12:38, 12:39 The girls light up their cigarettes and the flash of white streaks in front of the car. Lindsey shouts the word that sounds like "sit" or "shit" or "sight" and suddenly, "well, you know what happens" (p. 91). The most important aspect of Day Two is that Sam realizes she is not living in a dream and she is not crazy. She is actually reliving the events of the day, and that she has some control over the outcome of her actions. The reader will see her struggle to manipulate this as the novel progresses.



# Day Three

## Day Three Summary and Analysis

In her dream, Sam is falling forever. The sound of her alarm startles her awake. Immediately, she reaches for her cell phone and checks the date: February 12, Cupid's Day. When Izzy bounds into the room to say that Sam has to get up, it's late, Sam asks her to tell their mother that she's sick. Sam lies in bed replaying the events of the accident over and over. Although it's scary, Sam allows herself to think that maybe the accidents were real and that she didn't survive. Maybe she's being forced to relive this day because she's in purgatory, or something like that. Again, her past-tense voice (the voice that has reconciled the events of Cupid's Day) interjects in italics to say, "Be honest: are you surprised that I didn't realize it sooner? Do you think I was being stupid? Naïve? Try not to judge. Remember, we're the same, you and me. I thought I would live forever, too" (p. 96). Now, Sam knows for certain that at the end of the day, she's going to die again. Unless she can do something about it. After a few more hours of sleep, Sam readies herself for school and decides, with fierce determination that tonight, there's not going to be an accident. Whatever weird time warp or bubble she's in, she's going to burst it today. When she makes it to school, third period is just beginning: Chemistry. She takes her seat next to Lauren Lornet. Borrows her pen. Copies her answers. At the end of the quiz, she turns to Lauren and says, "You shouldn't be so nice to me." In her own way, Sam is trying to apologize for not being nice to Lauren in return, for mocking her under her breath and behind her back. Lauren smiles and turns her head like she's going to say something, but the teacher slams his book on Lauren's desk and scolds them for talking. Although the teacher chastised them, Sam leaves class feeling like she's just done something good: she's reached out to Lauren. It's clear now that Sam is going to traverse the entire day doing her best to be a good person, to stay out of trouble in the hopes that her death will be prevented. During her next class, Sam accepts the four roses and smiles at Marian. She tucks Kent's note safely between the pages of her notebook. She flirts with Mr. Daimler, the math teacher. After class, Kent bounds up to her in the hallway to invite her to his party. Sam politely declines. In her mind, if there's no party, there will be no accident, and today will be followed by a brand new tomorrow. She sees Rob loping down the hallway and avoids him: she has no desire to see him right now. Kent asks Sam why she flirts with Mr. Daimler; doesn't she know that he's a perv? This question startles Sam and she doesn't know how to answer it. Secretly she accuses Kent of being obsessed with her, and she can't help but feel a little disappointed when he doesn't say anything more personal about it. Doesn't say that she's too good for him, or that there are more appropriate choices for her affection.

In the cafeteria, Sam drops her bombshell on her friends: she doesn't want to go out tonight. Everyone is aghast. Not go out to a senior party? Her friends think she's just having cold feet about her big night with Rob. To coincide with what her friends are thinking, Sam shows them the note: "Luv ya," as if that explains everything. Sam has texted Rob saying that she needs to speak with him, and she can smell his lemon balm



from a mile away as he approaches her in the cafeteria. As soon as Kent's party is mentioned, and the fact that Sam doesn't want to go, Rob's face turns emotionless. He's clearly annoyed. He thinks Sam is backing out because she doesn't want to have sex with him tonight. When Sam says she doesn't feel comfortable discussing this with him in the middle of the cafeteria, Rob rolls his eyes. He makes a few sarcastic jabs at her, and then walks away. As he walks out the door, Juliet Sykes walks in. As she has done the previous two days, Sam is completely taken with Juliet's beauty, her pale skin and her white blonde hair. She turns to Lindsey and asks why she hates Juliet so much. Lindsey clearly isn't expecting a question like this, and she goes pale. Her mouth opens and closes like a fish. All she can say is that she doesn't hate Juliet, but Sam knows that's a lie: it was Lindsey who found out that Juliet didn't receive a single rose on Cupid's Day freshman year, and it had been her idea to send Juliet the single rose with the cruel note. Instead of lashing out at Sam, like Sam feared she might, Lindsey surprises everyone by saying that yes, they are skipping the party tonight and hanging out at home. Sam feels like she could kiss Lindsey there and then.

Sam skips English with Lindsey again to get TCBY yogurt. They pass Alex and Anna at the Chinese restaurant. Today, Lindsey doesn't even ask to tease them, probably because she's trying to keep the peace with Sam. While she's choosing her yogurt flavor, Sam can't help but celebrate. So far, everything's going to plan and hopefully, she'll wake up tomorrow morning on February 13. She wonders what it will be like: will she be in her bed, like normal? Or will she be in a hospital bed waking up from a mysterious disease or coma? Who will be at her bedside, Izzy, her parents, her friends, Kent? When Kent's face flashes into her mind, she immediately pushes it away and tries to replace it with Rob. It's clear now that Sam is starting to fall for Kent, but she's too confused, or perhaps too embarrassed to admit it. She continues to insist that she loves Rob even though it's clear that she has no feelings for him, and in fact, that there is almost nothing that she finds attractive about him. Sam is in a great mood, and she and Lindsey are in stitches laughing hysterically in the yogurt shop. Sam tells Lindsey how much she loves her, truly loves her, and Lindsey accuses Sam of being a lesbian, which only makes them laugh harder. When they get back to the school, Lindsey insists that she needs a cigarette even though the bell has already rung. As Lindsey lights up, Ms Winters, "the Nic[otine] Nazi" charges through the parking lot screaming at them. Both Lindsey and Sam sprint toward the school, splitting up along the way, and Sam leaps into a closet near the gym. While hiding out in the gym closet, she discovers that Ms. Winters is in a relationship with Mr. Otto, the fat gym teacher. She can barely contain her shock, disgust, and hilarity. She cannot wait to get out of the closet and spill the beans to her friends. This will be the biggest gossip to hit Jefferson High in ages. As she waits for the coast to clear, Sam realizes that you think you know people, only to have something like this completely change your viewpoint. In the moment, Sam is talking about Ms Winters and Mr. Otto, but keen readers will also understand that on some level, she is also talking about her friends, particularly Lindsey. She has been best friends with Lindsey since the seventh grade. She knows her better than anyone, and loves her deeply. This thought is foreshadowing to the secrets Sam will uncover about her friend in the later chapters of the novel, and based on her reaction to the teachers', the reader can safely assume that this new viewpoint from which she will view Lindsey will certainly alter her understanding of her best friend.





Sam rushes out of the closet, sprints down the hallway, and runs smack into Lauren Lornet. Lauren is sobbing and screaming at Sam, telling her that Sam has "got to tell them!" Sam has no idea what Lauren is talking about, and Lauren doesn't stop bawling, or slow down her babbling. As she listens, Sam realizes that Lauren has been accused of cheating on the Chemistry exam that morning. She hadn't been doing well in the class, and the Chemistry teacher had warned her that one more failed quiz and she would fail the class. At first, the teacher thought Lauren had been studying hard to earn her perfect scores on today's test and was proud of her, but when he realized that she had the exact same answers as Sam, he believed Lauren had been cheating and he had intercepted the girls while they were talking after the quiz. Sam is guilt stricken. Obviously Lauren truly had been studying hard, doing her best to stay in a class that was clearly too advanced for her, and Sam had ruined that accomplishment for her. Now Lauren is going to be suspended. Although Sam is listening to what Lauren is saying it's like she can't process what she's hearing. She had tried to do everything right today, and still things are going wrong. "I can't help you," she tells Lauren. Lauren is flabbergasted and starts screaming, calling Sam a bitch right there in the hallway. Being called a "bitch" brings back the memories of Juliet, the party, the crash. Sam rushes into the bathroom to splash cold water on her face. She skips the rest of the day's classes trying to compose herself. When she looks in the bathroom mirror, she barely recognizes her own reflection. This extreme reaction shows the reader that Sam is beginning her emotional redemption. Although she failed miserably with Lauren, and is still an unlikable character, the reader knows that Sam is on a long journey. Her conscience between right and wrong is being honed. She is starting to realize the ways her negative behaviors affect those around her, even the people she's not close to.

That night at Ally's house, the girls have a pillow fight before settling down to watch some movies. Although she's far away from the party, Sam still can't help watching the clock, knowing that the time of her death is rapidly approaching. The girls think she's being quiet because of her fight with Rob, and everyone is doing their best to support her. When 12:39 reads on the clock, Sam closes her eyes and braces herself. Everything seems to come to a standstill. And then Ally's mom shouts something down the stairs, asking the girls to turn down the music. Sam opens her eyes and sees the clock: 12:40. She's made it out alive. An hour later, the girls are snuggled tight together in their sleeping bags. Sam is over the moon, unable to suppress her happiness at having cheated death. She did everything right tonight, and tomorrow, when she wakes up, it will be a brand new day. The girls are exhausted and fight against sleep, but soon drop off, one-by-one. Even Sam feels her eyelids start to get heavy, but right before she nods off into sleep, Ally's mom calls down the stairs again. This time, her voice sounds tight. It's very late, and the girls immediately know that something is wrong. Ally's mom comes down the stairs and it shocks Sam to see this grown woman, who is usually put together with tailored clothes and perfect make-up, in her pajamas. Ally's mom speaks softly to the girls and tells them that she's just heard that Juliet Sykes killed herself tonight. Sam's stomach drops. She feels dizzy and weak and nauseous. Lindsey sits as still and shocked as Sam has ever seen her. Ally's mom says that Juliet shot herself, but that there was no note. When the girls find out there was no note, no reason why Juliet did it, Sam swears she hears an exhalation sweep through the room. Clearly everyone was worried that they would somehow be accused of bullying Juliet to her death. Even



though Juliet didn't publicly blame them, their reaction shows that each of the girls knows she is somehow, on some level, accountable for Juliet's death. While the other girls talk amongst themselves, Sam struggles to get over the reality of Juliet's death, and that she would choose such a violent method of suicide. To Sam, Juliet is so beautiful, so serene, she should have drowned herself, or leapt from a high building so she would have floated through the sky. Every image that Sam has of Juliet throughout the entire novel is angelic, almost reverential. This characteristic is important to remember later in the novel. For now, it appears that there has been some sort of tradeoff. Sam has lived, but Juliet has died. Their lives and deaths are undeniably intertwined, but no one understands how or why yet. The idea of sacrifice and redemption are powerful themes that will continue throughout the novel.

All the girls are shocked by what they've heard tonight, but only Lindsey refuses to show remorse for the way they treated Juliet while she was alive, even going so far as to insinuate that Juliet is better off dead. This upsets both Ally and Elody who opt to sleep upstairs, away from Lindsey. Sam sneaks off to the bathroom, but then makes her way through the dark hallways of Ally's house until she finds the storage room. She doesn't really know what she is looking for, but she gropes through various boxes of keepsakes until she finds a box full of Ally's old yearbooks. She flips through the books quickly, scanning the pages for Juliet Sykes' face. She is shocked to see that in almost every picture, Juliet is sitting right next to Lindsey, and that the two girls are wearing matching sweaters, or holding hands. All this changes in the fifth grade photo however, the year Juliet earned the nickname "Mellow Yellow". In this picture, Lindsey is at the front of the classroom with a big, beaming smile, while Juliet is in the background, looking like she wants to blend in with the wallpaper. Sam doesn't quite understand what she's seen, but she quickly snaps the books shut and packs them away. When she turns around, Lindsey is standing over her, as white as a ghost. "You were friends with her," Sam stutters. Lindsey doesn't try to defend or explain herself. She simply says, "It wasn't our fault" but no one, not Sam or the reader, believes her. Sam pushes past her and crawls back into her sleeping bag. She falls asleep quickly, and in her dream, she is falling. Falling forever.



# Day Four

## Day Four Summary and Analysis

Before Sam even wakes on Day Four, she is seething with anger and hurls her alarm clock against the wall. When she sees Lindsey in the morning, she can barely even look at her: "She's a fraud: the whole world is a fraud, one bright, shiny scam. And somehow I'm the one paying for it. I'm the one who died. I'm the one who's trapped" (p. 135). She dresses in her most provocative clothing and defiantly wears them to school even though her parents forbade her. Even though she knows it isn't rational, Sam is angry with her parents, thinking they have no right to protect her now - where were they when she was dying? When the last seconds of her life were slipping away? Today, she is going to do whatever she wants because there are no consequences. Tomorrow when she wakes up, it's going to be February 12 all over again, a clean slate; no one will have any memory of her previous actions, so why bother? She tried to do all the right things yesterday, and look how that turned out. If she was trying to be an angel yesterday, she's letting out her inner demon today. Not only is Sam mad at her parents, she's also outraged with Lindsey for her reaction to Juliet's death and the fact that she's lied all these years: she used to be best friends with her! Although Sam never asks Lindsey this question directly, it's safe to assume that she's questioning her own best friendship with Lindsey: if she could turn so brutally against Juliet, what could she do to Sam?

When Elody gets in the car a few minutes later, Sam is ready to take out her frustration on anyone. Before Elody can even say Hello, Sam snaps that she better not even think about giving her a condom today. Elody is dumbstruck. How did Sam know? The thought of losing her virginity seems absolutely absurd to Sam now. All she can think about is Kent and how angry she is with him too: I can see right through you. Sam is broken out of her stupor when Lindsey slams on her brakes to avoid hitting a squirrel. Sam's anger finally bursts out of her as she screams, demanding to know what the hell is wrong with Lindsey. She berates Lindsey's driving skills, claiming they could train monkeys to drive better than she does, and then turns on Elody for never sticking up for herself. Lindsey has had enough, pulls over to the shoulder of the highway, and demands that Sam get out. She's walking to school today, in the snow, in five-inch heels. Fighting with Lindsey leaves Sam feeling unsatisfied, and she can't bring herself to go to class, so she wanders the hallways for the first four periods. She can't believe that no one stops her: no one asks her why she isn't in class or why she's wearing such ridiculously inappropriate clothes. This fits into the theme of being accountable only to yourself. On Day Four, Sam is constantly searching for someone else to give her the answers, to give her some boundaries, to explain something to her. But of course the most valuable lessons in life aren't taught from someone else, they're learned through one's own experiences. The best lessons are often the toughest lessons, and Sam is at the lowest point of her emotional journey. In a traditional coming-of-age novel, like this novel is, the protagonist must come to grips with the injustices in the world - usually war, poverty, hatred, or death, by grappling with adult emotions. This is exactly the transition





Sam is going through, and Day Four is her final throws of childish tantrums. The reader can expect a huge change in Sam's emotional state for the duration of the novel.

The first class Sam attends for the day is math class with Mr. Daimler. He is shocked to see Sam in such a revealing outfit and openly gawks at her youthful body. Sam doesn't care, in fact, she feels empowered by her adult teacher's lustful attention. Whenever Mr. Daimler looks her way, Sam flashes him a bit of skin, sends him sexy looks with her eyes, or smiles provocatively in his direction. This behavior is completely out of character for Sam, whose flirtation with her teacher was always innocent and childish. It's clear that Sam has no idea what she's getting herself into, or what the possible implications for herself or her teacher could be. Of course, Sam doesn't care about these implications because she knows she will have a clean slate tomorrow. Because she was left feeling unsatisfied after her fight with Lindsey, the reader can expect that she will also feel unsatisfied by her inappropriate flirtations. After class, Mr. Daimler asks Sam to stay behind, and she is positive that he is going to turn her in for detention, but she doesn't care. She is shocked when Mr. Daimler lunges toward her, kissing her roughly on the lips, and presses her into his desk while his hungry hands rove her body. Kissing Mr. Daimler is nothing like Sam expected. His facial hair is rough on her face, and his big hands maul her when she thought he would be gentle. She finds herself counting the holes in the ceiling, screaming inside for him to stop. Eventually, Mr. Daimler regains his composure and awkwardly tries to make Sam promise not to tell anyone. The entire encounter is disgusting, portraying Mr. Daimler as the clear predator that he is. Kent's warning from Day 2, that Mr. Daimler is a perv, resonates in the reader's ears. Before Mr. Daimler was alone with Sam, Kent was the last to leave the classroom, hovering around Sam to make sure she was okay. Moments like this reinforce for the reader that Sam and Kent have a strong connection, even if Sam doesn't understand or realize it yet. When she leaves the classroom, all Sam wants to do is call Lindsey, but then she remembers that they're fighting. The feeling of desperation and dissatisfaction with her actions returns, and Lindsey feels more empty and alone than she ever has.

Wanting to be alone, Sam makes her way to the sophomore bathroom, where no one ever hangs out during lunch break. She tries to open the door, but finds that it's wedged shut. Desperation not to be seen in such an uncool location - she still can't shake some of her past mindsets - Sam heaves her entire weight onto the door, shoving it open. She topples through the door and lands on top of Anna Cartullo who is inside, smoking a joint. It occurs to Sam that she has never seen Anna in the lunchroom, and that she probably hangs out in here because she has no friends. She thinks about the graffiti in the bathroom and wonders if she would have the courage to show her face if the writings were about her. Probably not. Anna is confused by Sam's presence in the bathroom and a bit suspicious. Still, the sight of Sam's disheveled look, complete with the five-inch platform stripper shoes, sends both girls into fits of laughter. Anna suggests that Sam needs to buy a pair of black military boots, like her own. Not caring anymore, Sam suggests that they switch shoes. Then she smokes the rest of Anna's joint. Feeling relaxed, Sam suggests that Anna buy some pillows or hang some posters to really make this room her own. Anna admits that she's thought about buying some M.C. Escher posters, her favorite artist. Referencing M.C. Escher is a symbolic choice, as he



is famous for his drawings of staircases that wrap around and lead into each other, like a maze, never going anywhere. This image is similar to the Sam's struggle in the novel.

After school, Sam rushes out to the parking lot with the hopes of intercepting Lindsey and apologizing to her, but her friends have already left without her. She stands freezing cold in the snow, shivering, when she is approached by a pack of The Pugs, girls that Sam is sort-of friends with but sort-of not. The Pugs suggest that Sam come home with them to get ready for the party, and Sam agrees. On the way home, the girls decide to go to the mall to do a bit of shopping, and Sam has an idea: they stop at Sam's house so she can "pick something up." She sneaks into her mother's purse and steals her credit card, not telling anyone, not even The Pugs. Sam splurges at the mall, buying everything she likes without even looking at the price tag. She knows that her mother will never find out about the charges - they'll be erased by this time tomorrow - but her guilt grows with the addition of each shopping bag. Again, her reckless behavior leaves her feeling unsatisfied. They return to Tara's house - one of The Pugs - to get ready for the party. Sam wears a floor-length evening gown she's just purchased, and a fur shrug. The outfit is ridiculously expensive, but she doesn't care. She takes The Pugs out for dinner at one of the most expensive restaurants in town, where no one questions them after they order a bottle of champagne and the most expensive bottle of wine in the house. Sam is quickly getting drunk, and texts Rob saying that they're on for sex tonight. At the party, Sam quickly finds Rob and tells him to meet her upstairs. When she goes to meet him, she runs headlong into Kent. Of course, he wants to know if everything is okay with her, and he wants to know what happened with Mr. Daimler. Thinking about Mr. Daimler's weight against her chest makes Sam feel like she's going to throw up. True to her old form, Sam takes her negative feelings out on Kent by telling him that it's none of his business - they're not even friends. They're nothing. Sam is so angry and emotional that she just keeps talking, all her frustration pouring out of her, eventually revealing her true soul: "It's not my fault. I can't be like you, okay?" and when she means to say, "I don't think it can be fixed," she accidentally says, "I don't think I can be fixed (p. 176). This outburst is followed by a moment that seems to last forever, with Kent staring intently into Sam's eyes. His hand rests lightly on her elbow. Then he says, "You don't need to be fixed, Sam" (p. 176). This is, arguably, the critical moment in the evolving relationship between Sam and Kent. He understands and cares for her unconditionally. Even though he doesn't know what's going on in her life (and death), his words make a deep impression on Sam. She sees that she can rely on Kent, trust him in a way she couldn't trust her friends or Rob.

Sam pulls away from Kent when she hears Lindsey and her other friends arrive. Her heart catches in her throat. She finds them quickly and tries to talk to them, but it's clear that Lindsey has no desire to speak with her. It's almost like she's getting off on having power over Sam. Sam gives up her struggle for a conversation when she sees Juliet Sykes enter the party, right on cue. She pushes through the crowd, toward Juliet. She thinks about pulling Juliet away from the party, but it's simply too much to deal with. She pushes past Juliet into the room where Rob is waiting for her. Rob is very drunk, lying on the bed with only half his clothes on. Sam has never gone very far with Rob sexually, but she just wants to block everything out: the images of Juliet, the sound of the gunshot, the singing of the theme song to Psycho which is gaining volume in the



hallway. She strips of her dress and presses herself against Rob's naked body, trying not to think about Mr. Daimler. She is emotional and isn't thinking about what she's doing. It's clear that she's becoming emotionally unhinged, and she's looking for something, anything, to keep her grounded. She continues writhing against Rob's body but he's not responding. She thought he would be really into this; maybe he's just in shock. Suddenly, a huge snore bellows from his throat. He's fallen asleep. Sam gathers her evening gown around her body. Her hair is a complete mess, and her face is streaked with mascara. She doesn't care. She just wants to be alone. She puts her dress back on, even though she can't zip it up alone, and pushes her way through the crowds of people that gawk and stare at her. She sneaks into Kent's kitchen, which has a "Do Not Enter" sign tacked on the door, and slumps into the shadows of the dark room. For the first time since she died four days ago, Sam weeps. Kent comes in and finds her sobbing on his floor. He asks if she'd like a drink of water. Kent sits silently with Sam, not asking any questions, which she's grateful for, until it's clear that the party has ended and everyone has gone home. He offers Sam the spare bedroom, which she accepts. Kent leads her to the bedroom, gives her clean pajamas to sleep in, and waits with her until she falls asleep. It's clear now that even Sam sees how special Kent is, and how this potential romance could change her life.



# Day Five

## Day Five Summary and Analysis

Sam wakes up in her own bed, not surprisingly, on February 12. Unlike yesterday, today Sam is thrilled to have her fresh start. Today, she hasn't had a fight with Lindsey; she hasn't kissed Mr. Daimler, and Juliet is still alive. As she lies in bed, Sam creates a mental list of all the things she'd like to do before she dies, even though she knows not all of them are possible. Still, there are some things she absolutely can accomplish, like taking her little sister Izzy to Goose Point. When Izzy bounds into her room that morning, Sam embraces her with open arms. She tells her mother that she's too sick to go to school, and so is Izzy. Her mother is flabbergasted. Sam has never wanted to spend time with her little sister. When Sam says that she and Rob broke up - not really true but also not really a lie - her mother takes pity on her and agrees: they can both stay home. After Sam's mom goes to work, Sam prepares for her day out in the woods with Izzy. It's interesting for Sam to note how much she's changed since she was Izzy's age. She found Goose Point after having a fight with her mother and running away. She was Izzy's age, around eight-years-old, so running into the woods without a parent seemed like a big deal. She walked for what felt like miles, climbing what felt like a huge mountain before finding Goose Point: a huge, flat rock where she laid down and watched the geese migrating overhead. To her childlike soul, it felt like she was on top of the world. She felt as if she had been gone for hours, days, even a lifetime, but when she snuck back into her house, she realized she had only been gone for forty minutes. Now, when she returns with Izzy, Sam isn't even sure they're going in the right direction: everything looks so small! The river she crossed looks like a trickling stream, the mountain she climbed is just a hill, and when she looks over the horizon, she can see the new construction sprouting out from the wilderness. Her English teacher's lectures fill her head, and she is reminded of the Thomas Wolfe adage that "You can never go home again" (Page 204). It isn't the places that change things, it's the people that do. This is an important theme in the novel: even though Sam is reliving the same day over and over again, it will never be the same. She is different. Despite Sam's disappointment, Izzy is wildly impressed.

When she gets home later that afternoon, Sam has text messages from all her friends, and from Rob, but she doesn't reply. Surprisingly, she has no interest in seeing them, and would prefer to spend her final day with those who love her the most: her family. She is overwhelmed with the desire to know that when she dies, her family will have happy memories. She knows that she has been horrible to them since becoming a teenager, and she wants to make amends, even if its just for one day. Her heart is heavy as she thinks about how Izzy will be affected after her death - will people tell her that is pretty like her sister Sam was? Instead of going to the party, Sam convinces her parents to take her out for dinner at her favorite sushi restaurant, where she'll eat everything she loves without worrying about her figure. While she is at the restaurant, Sam enjoys herself immensely, and doesn't even flinch when a group of sophomores enter the restaurant and gawk at her eating dinner with her family: how uncool! One of



the girls catches her attention, though, the blonde-haired cupid, Marian, who would have brought Sam her roses had she gone to school today. There's something about the girl's face that draws Sam's attention, but she doesn't know why. Then one of Marian's friends calls to her, "Hey Sykes!" and it hits Sam like a ton of bricks: Marian is Juliet's little sister. She can't believe she didn't see the resemblance before. Suddenly, she is hit with the overwhelming desire to warn Marian about her sister's impending suicide. Why hadn't she thought of that before? She approaches the table of sophomores, who literally shake in their seats as she walks toward them, and tells Marian that she's Juliet's lab partner. Once she's face-to-face with Marian, who has the sweetest, most angelically beautiful face Sam has ever seen, she finds that she can't just come out and say, Your sister's going to kill herself tonight. So she asks Marian to pass on a message: Don't do it. Of course Marian has no idea what Sam is talking about it, but promises to give her the message tomorrow morning when she sees her. Unfortunately, that will be too late. Although she wanted to avoid the party altogether, Sam knows that if she wants to save Juliet's life, and maybe even her own, she will have to stop Juliet herself.

After her parents go to bed that night, Sam sneaks out of the house and steals her father's car. She drives slowly through the streets trying to remember where Juliet Sykes lives. Eventually she finds the family name on their mailbox. She hasn't really thought through what she's going to say, and is completely unprepared when Juliet's mother, a nervous and soft-spoken woman opens the door. She is immediately suspicious of Sam; Juliet doesn't normally have friends over. Through the crack in the door, Sam can see that the Sykes' house is completely covered in shadows, as if the house itself is dead. The only light comes from the television in another room, where Juliet's father barks gruff shouts at Juliet's mother, who flinches with each phrase. Sam continues her lab-partner lie and says that Juliet promised to take home her assignment for her. Perhaps to get Sam to leave quickly, Mrs. Sykes promises to look for the work upstairs while Sam waits in the hallway. Nervously, Sam looks around, trying to avert her eyes from the television room. She sees a framed family portrait of the Sykes family, and picks it up to investigate it closer. She is surprised and saddened to see that the photo in the frame is not of the Sykes family, but the model family that came with the frame when it was purchased. For Sam, this store-bought portrait highlights the emptiness and injustice of poor Juliet's life. She had a miserable life at school, without any friends, and didn't even have a happy family life to come back to. Sam is overwhelmed with guilt realizing that maybe the Sykes family doesn't have many happy family memories to preserve. When Mrs. Sykes can't find the work, and can't get a hold of Juliet on her cell phone, Sam lamely says that she'll speak to Juliet tomorrow. Even the word "tomorrow" sounds strands on Sam's tongue. As she leaves the Sykes' home, she considers that her soul might be stuck in Purgatory, the Catholic space between Heaven and Hell. Some modern Christians believe that a soul can be prayed out of Purgatory, and Sam wonders if saving Juliet could be her ticket out.

Sam doesn't even bother to pull into Kent's parking lot. She runs inside the party already worrying that she might be too late. She knows that she must look terrible, and everyone gawks at her - her hair is a mess, her makeup runny, and she's still wearing the oversized track suit she had been lounging in before deciding to visit the Sykes





home - but she doesn't care. She runs through the party screaming Juliet's name, but no one understands what she's doing. Finally, Lindsey stops her and says, Juliet Sykes? "Are you serious? She called me a bitch" (Page 224). Another student tells Sam that Juliet is in the bathroom, and that she's been in there for at least twenty minutes. When she finds that the bathroom door is closed, Sam fears that she's too late: that Juliet has already killed herself. Frantically, she calls for Kent, immediately regretting not cleaning herself up before seeing him. Kent isn't bothered by Sam's disheveled appearance; he's more concerned with whether or not she's okay. He quickly unlocks the door, and they both realize that Juliet's not there, she's climbed out the window to avoid others seeing her exit the party, completely embarrassed. Without explaining herself, Sam sprints from the party, through the woods in the pouring rain, calling Juliet's name. She runs through the woods, furious with Juliet for being so selfish. It's clear that Sam hates Juliet for putting her in this position. No matter how bad Juliet's life is she has a choice between whether she lives or dies. Sam would give anything for that choice, and she's angry Juliet doesn't realize how precious her life is. Honking from the nearby road pulls Sam from her frustrated thoughts, and as her eyes focus on the cars screaming past, she sees Juliet huddled in white by the side of the road. "What are you doing?" she shouts. Juliet's face doesn't register any emotion - not surprise, not sadness, not anger. Sam doesn't know what she expected: did she think Juliet would be relieved, even happy, to see her? Even though Juliet's isn't receptive, Sam can recognize the urgency of the situation. Sam tries to speak with Juliet, to explain that she's there to help her. She can't quite get the words out, and she's struggling to connect with Juliet who is silenced by her own anger. Everything she says to Sam is steeped in sarcasm. The cars continue to whiz by, dangerously close. Finally, Sam says, "Maybe you should come away from the road (Page 233), as sickening pictures begin to take shape in her mind. She hears someone calling her name, hears the wail of "Splinter" being played from an approaching car. Juliet looks at her with something like a smile on her face. She says, "Maybe next time, but probably not" before hurling herself in front of the oncoming car: Lindsey's car. Everything clicks into place for Sam then. In the moment before crash, Lindsey hadn't yelled "Sit" or "Shit" or "Sight," she had shouted "Sykes." Juliet's ominous statement, "Maybe next time, but probably not" is an obvious reference to the note Sam and her friends attached to her Valogram every year: "Maybe next year, but probably not" which cements in Sam's mind that yes, she and her friends are to blame for Juliet's death. It's a difficult pill for Sam to swallow, but her guilt over Juliet's death is cut short when she hears the wailing from Lindsey as she stumbles out of the car. Because Sam hadn't been sitting in the front seat of Lindsey's car that night, Elody has died in the crash. For Sam, Elody's death is a payment too steep for her own salvation. She's not willing to sacrifice Elody's life so she can live. All she wants to do now is fall asleep, to start again tomorrow.

Kent takes Sam back to his house, makes her hot chocolate, and gives her dry clothes to sleep in. Tonight, Sam can't wait to fall asleep, to bring this nightmare to a close. Before she falls asleep, Sam asks Kent why he's being so nice to her. He reminds her of the time when they were in second-grade, and Kent was being picked on in the lunchroom. Sam stood up for him, and from that day on, Kent vowed that one day he would stick up for Sam too. There is an important lesson, or clue, for Sam in Kent's memory. Kent teaches her that standing up for someone is the greatest gift you can give



them - the feeling that they aren't alone. This is exactly what Sam had attempted to do for Juliet tonight, but she was too late. The damage to Juliet's soul was too severe. Perhaps there will be no saving her. Elody's death is also important because Sam sees that in order to save someone else, a sacrifice must be made. With this religious theme, one person must die to save the life of another. While keen readers might already pick up on the demands of this situation (and realize that Sam must sacrifice something great to save Juliet), Sam hasn't quite figured this out yet.



# Day Six

## Day Six Summary and Analysis

Sam wakes up to the sound of her alarm with sweet relief. Today, she has two lives to save: Juliet's and her own. She leaves the house, shocking her parents by telling them that she loves them, and hops happily into the car with her friends. When she sees Elody, Sam feels an overwhelming urge to reach out and touch her, just to know that she's real. When they get to school, Sam shouts for Lindsey to stop the car, allowing Sarah Grundel to steal the last parking spot, and smiles to herself. Instead of heading to her first class, Sam says she has a headache and makes her way to the office where they store the Valograms. She takes away the rose meant for Juliet - Maybe next year, but probably not - and pays \$40 for two dozen roses to be sent to her instead, from a secret admirer. She makes a few more adjustments, to her rose from Rob and a new rose for Kent, before freshening up her makeup in the bathroom. When she hears a group of girls giggling about "what a slut" Anna Cartullo is, she confronts them, and then spends the next twenty minutes scouring the graffiti off the bathroom walls. In the lunchroom, Sam tries awkwardly and unsuccessfully to break up with Rob, in front of everyone, but he doesn't understand what's happening. Ally interrupts by telling everyone about the two dozen roses Juliet received during Math class, and how she threw them away. Everyone laughs and comments on how crazy Juliet is, and how she probably sent the roses to herself. Sam is shocked and confused. Why would Juliet throw the roses away? She turns on her friends, snapping that they shouldn't be so mean to Juliet. Elody counters by saying this had been Sam's idea too. Yesterday, Sam had told Elody that she was scared to stand too close to Juliet, fearing Juliet might bite her and that she probably has rabies. This hits Sam like a ton of bricks: ""How is it possible, I think, to change so much and not be able to change anything at all? That's the very worst thing about all of this, a feeling of desperate hopelessness, and I realize my question to Elody is the question that's been tearing me up all along. What's the point?" (p. 262).

But there must be a point, and this is why, like on Day Three, Sam tries to do everything right. She's figured out that Juliet is the key to her salvation. Somehow, she must save her and hope that she also saves herself. As soon as Sam walks into the party, she's accosted by Rob who has clearly forgotten about what happened in the lunchroom. He's very drunk, slurring his words and trying to focus his crossed eyes. He's practically drooling when he tells Sam that he knows a way she can "make it up to him" for acting so crazy today. Sam is disgusted. She tells Rob to wait for her upstairs, naked, and she'll certainly think of a way to make this up to him. Rob is too drunk to notice the sarcasm and anger in Sam's voice, so he dopyly agrees, practically falling over as he rushes to the upstairs bedroom. Then, Sam finds a couple making-out on the staircase and tells them that there's a much more private room upstairs, knowing that they'll walk in on Rob lying naked in bed. Although Sam has decided to do everything right to day, to be nice to everyone, she has not yet reached the peak of her emotional maturity, as the reader sees in her interaction with Rob. Although many readers will think Rob





deserves this treatment, it isn't noble or honorable, and therefore doesn't redeem Sam's past behaviors. Because Oliver is clearly setting Sam up for complete moral redemption, the reader can assume that Sam's treatment of Rob will be different, more mature, tomorrow.

When Juliet enters the party, Sam is ready for her this time. Before Juliet can get her first words out, Sam grabs her arm and drags her to the bathroom. She gives a long and impassioned speech about how sorry she is that she and her friends haven't been nice to Juliet all these years, and that they didn't know how deeply they were hurting her. She says she's sorry and that she hopes they can all move on. She's sure that this speech will win Juliet over, but when she looks up, Juliet has something like a sneer on her face: "You haven't always been that nice to me?" she says dully, and my stomach sinks. She hasn't heard a word I said" (Page 277). Juliet lists all the ways Sam and her friends have tormented her since fourth grade, from stealing her clothes during gym class so she had to walk around in her stinky gym clothes all day, to taking pictures of Juliet when she was showering and plastering them up all over the school, to singing the stupid Psycho song every time she walks into a room. Honestly, Sam doesn't even remember half the things she's done to Juliet, which shows how callous and thoughtless her actions were. Hearing the laundry list of crimes against Juliet, the reader immediately recognizes why Sam's apology isn't enough, not nearly. This sacrifice, acknowledging her sins, is not enough for redemption, not by a long shot. When Sam tries to say that it should be okay, that she sends roses today as another way of apology, smoke nearly pours from Juliet's ears. She knew whom the roses were from. What did Sam and her friends think, that Juliet would actually believe she had a secret admirer? That they could use this to tease her with later? In her anger, Juliet spits out the words that have haunted Sam throughout this journey, "Maybe next year, but probably not." With that, Juliet takes over the conversation. She spills the secrets that Sam has been searching for since discovering the photos of Lindsey back when she was best friends with Juliet. They had become close after Lindsey's parents divorced. Lindsey hadn't been able to sleep at night, and often wet the bed due to her anxiety. And then she drops the bombshell Sam knew was coming: it hadn't been Juliet who wet the bed during that ill-fated camping trip in fourth grade, it had been Lindsey. Juliet had taken the blame to protect her best friend. All these years, she thought Lindsey would grow out of it, that eventually the teasing would stop. But it never did, and then it bloomed out of control. Sam doesn't know how to process this information. All these years of teasing and bullying had simply been Lindsey's way of protecting herself, her own popularity. Everything had been based on one stupid lie, and now look at the consequences. Sam would die because of Lindsey's pride. Sam is so shocked she doesn't even try to stop Juliet as she slips out of the bathroom. Minutes later, she knows she has to follow her. She owes it to everyone involved to try to stop her.

Just as the night before, Sam runs through the woods, through the pouring rain, but this time she knows just where Juliet will be waiting. Before she leaves Kent's house, she steals the keys to Lindsey's car, taking them with her to prevent Lindsey from causing the crash, from killing Juliet and Elody. She races through the woods straight up to Juliet, grabbing her dress before she can throw herself in front of an oncoming car. Sam doesn't understand. Lindsey's car isn't even on the road, so why is Juliet going to kill



herself this way? Even though Sam does her best to save Juliet, it's too late, and these are Juliet's last words to Sam before leaping into traffic: "It's too late" (p. 291). An hour later, Sam drives Lindsey home, both of them in shock over what has just happened. Sam quietly tells Lindsey that she knows the truth, and that she just wants to know why. Why Lindsey made up the lie, and why she spread it around school. Lindsey can't explain herself other than to say, she always thought that one day, Juliet would stick up for herself, that she would tell the truth. In this moment, Lindsey is portrayed just as vulnerably and childlike as Juliet has been portrayed through the novel. It is not enough to redeem Lindsey for her behaviors, certainly not, but it creates enough complexity in her character for the reader's heart to soften. When Lindsey apologizes to Sam, for everything, she is also apologizing to the reader. She has accepted accountability for her actions, and bears the emotional weight of the consequences. The reader hopes that like Sam, Lindsey's character will change for the better after this day. Sam responds to Lindsey's apology with what is arguably the moral of the novel: "People would like you anyway, Lindz.' I don't say if you stopped pretending so much, but I know she understands. 'We'd still love you no matter what" (p. 295). This statement directly combats Sam's early assertion that friends help hide each other's secrets, asking for a friendship based on honesty and love rather than vanity and lies. To cement this theme, Sam closes out Day Six kissing Kent goodnight. The kiss is beautiful, romantic, and magical, everything that her kisses with Rob hadn't been. If Rob represents the old Sam, her old popular life full of vanity, Kent represents her cleansed soul. They kiss in the white snow, which further symbolizes Sam's clean slate, and the reader celebrates with her.



# Day Seven, Epilogue

## Day Seven, Epilogue Summary and Analysis

On her final day, Sam wakes with a sense of peace. Her first thought of the day is that today, she will be saying goodbye. Something has happened to her, to make her realize that there will be no February 13 for her: "I guess that's what saying goodbye is always like - like jumping off an edge. The worst part is making the choice to do it. Once you're in the air, there's nothing you can do but let go" (p. 304). Keen readers will interpret this to mean that Sam is making the choice to die, insinuating that she will commit suicide. Love pours out of Sam as she says goodbye to her family one last time, and she even hands Izzy her prized bird necklace, the one she inherited from her grandmother, knowing how much it will mean to Izzy once she's gone. On the drive to school, she savors the conversation with her friends even though she's heard it six times before. She drinks her coffee slowly, enjoys each bite of her sesame seed bagel. Today, she doesn't bother to intervene with anyone else's life, except in the rose room. She does her best on the Chemistry pop quiz even though she knows that the results don't matter. She shoots down Mr. Daimler when he tries to flirt with her in class, and asks Kent to pick her up before the party tonight. He's shocked, and happy to accept her offer. When she receives her pack of roses from Marion Sykes, Juliet tells the surprised sophomore that she can keep them. Marion looks like she's better with flowers anyway. In the lunchroom, Sam quickly and effectively breaks up with Rob, saying that it's just not working for her anymore. Rob is deeply offended, shouting that Sam can't break up with him, meaning that he is cooler than Sam, so he should be the one breaking up with her, as if he had been doing her a favor all this time by dating her. Rob's reaction not only validates Sam's emotions, but also allows the reader to forgive Sam for being emotionally and physically dishonest with Rob through her interactions with Kent. Although most readers never doubted the growing relationship between Sam and Kent, Oliver ensures that Rob cannot be seen as yet another victim to Sam's selfish, bullying ways. Sam tears her eyes away from Rob's shocked anger when Juliet enters the room, carrying a single rose. Even though the note is too far away for her to read, Sam knows exactly what the note says: "It's never too late" (p. 318).

During sixth period, when she sneaks off for TCBY with Lindsey, Sam asks to make a special stop at the Chinese Restaurant where Anna Cartullo is having lunch with Alex. She hands Anna a copy of an M.C. Escher book, knowing that he's Anna's favorite artist, as a way of apologizing to her. After Day Four, Sam knows that Anna eats alone in the bathroom everyday, and that she might use photos from this book to make the room "her own." Throughout the day, Sam has systematically done her best to apologize to everyone she's hurt over the years, not only giving some relief to those whom she used to torment, but also preserving her legacy. In early chapters, Sam wondered what people would say about her when she died: did she deserve to die for the way she treated people? Sam's behavior on her final day hopefully teaches the reader that life is precious, that you can make changes through small actions, and that life and love are the most precious gifts we are given.



Kent picks Sam up before the party just as she planned. They spend the next twenty minutes kissing passionately in the car, with Sam realizing for the first time, what it feels like to truly kiss someone you're in love with. Many readers will think Sam has earned this right, and are reminded of Juliet's whispering cry on Day Six that she's never even kissed anyone (p. 279). Clearly, Oliver is arguing that everyone deserves their magical moment, their moment when love is all they feel pulsing through their veins. When they feel like they are invincible, that love can conquer anything. Other critics have lambasted Sam's final actions of love, calling them completely selfish. How will Kent feel tomorrow, when Sam is dead? Will his emotions be more severe than they would have been had he and Sam never kissed? Is Kent the final victim of Sam's selfish actions? Reaction to Sam's relationship with Kent is completely open to the reader's interpretation. Many will herald Sam for following her heart, while others will decry her because of it. At the party, Sam separates from Kent and her friends in search of Juliet. When she finds her, she intercepts her before she can deliver her speech to Lindsey and the rest of the girls. Sam's apology is simple: I'm sorry, she says, multiple times, promising Juliet that things are going to get better. Juliet doesn't listen, and sprints toward the woods with Sam chasing after her. Kent follows behind Sam, and he's alerted her friends that something is going on. Chasing after Kent is Lindsey. They will all be there to watch Sam's final act of sacrifice. When she catches up to Juliet, Sam feels a sense of calm wash over her. She knows it was supposed to happen this way all along. When Juliet delivers her final line, "It's too late," Sam grabs her by the shoulders. "It's never too late," she says, and throws Juliet out of the way of the oncoming truck, taking the full blow herself. Sam has made the ultimate sacrifice, her life for Juliet's. She hears Juliet's final words, "You saved me," and knows that it is the opposite: Juliet has saved her. Many readers will be outraged that Sam had to die, but the novel has been building up to this sacrifice since Day One. Although some readers might oppose this idea, in the world that Oliver has created, Sam's sacrifice is what gives her life meaning. She has embraced life and love, and that, Oliver is arguing, is the true meaning of what it is to live. In the opening chapter, Sam admits that she and her friends are invincible, that there are no real consequences to their behaviors, but the ending of the novel proves her, and every other teenager who holds the same beliefs, wrong. Had Sam survived the final chapter, it would underscore her beliefs that there are no consequences. The work Sam had done on herself and her soul would be at risk of decaying after she settled back into life with her popular friends at school. In the epilogue, the reader learns that Sam does not regret her decision, and that she has finally found peace. The only real solution to the novel is for Sam to die, and not to cheat death, no matter how desperately the audience is rooting for her. Oliver's clear hope in writing this novel is that the readers will take the lessons Sam learned during her experiences, and integrate them into their own lives. That way, Sam's life and Sam's love will always live on in the hearts of the readers. Returning to the Biblical themes presented throughout the narration, Sam worked hard for six days, and on the seventh day she could finally rest.



# Characters

## Samantha Kingston

Samantha "Sam" Kingston is the protagonist and narrator of the novel. At the opening of the novel, Sam is a popular girl enjoying her final year of high school. On the day of the novel's setting, which she is forced to relive seven times after her death, Sam is contemplating losing her virginity to her boyfriend, Rob, and how many roses she will receive on Cupid's Day, a public sign of one's popularity in school. At the opening of the novel, Sam's relationships with many around her, except for her relationship with her best friends, is strained, as she seems to value her "coolness" over everything else. She shuns her old friend Kent because he isn't popular, is constantly annoyed by her younger sister Izzy, and has almost no relationship with her mother. She is somewhat rude, snaps at people who look at her the wrong way, flirts inappropriately with her teacher, and is downright disrespectful to anyone "below" her at school, including unpopular and younger students. Essentially, she does whatever she wants whenever she wants, and rarely faces consequences. When Sam dies in a drunk driving accident, however, everything in her life is turned upside down when she is forced to relive her final day seven-times over. As the novel progresses, Sam goes through many emotions as she relives the day of her death: confusion, fear, anger, and finally, acceptance. Each day a new emotion fuels her actions, and she realizes the massive effect even small actions can have on those around you. She begins to unravel many mysteries around her, such as why her friends, particularly Lindsey, are so intent on bullying Juliet Sykes, how Juliet's death is interwoven with her own, and what it means to love and be loved. By the end of the novel, Samantha understands the secret, the secret of what it means to live, and what it means to die.

## Lindsey Edgecomb

Lindsey Edgecombe is Sam's best friend. In many ways, Lindsey is as much to blame for Juliet Sykes' death as Sam is. Throughout the novel, Lindsey's relationship with Juliet becomes clearer. When they were growing up, Lindsey and Juliet were best friends, inseparable, much like Lindsey and Sam are today. When Lindsey's parents got divorced, she suffered terribly, and began wetting the bed. When she accidentally wet the bed on a fourth-grade camping trip, she blamed the bed-wetting on her best friend, Juliet, calling her Mellow Yellow, a nickname that would forever haunt Juliet. After this moment of betrayal, Lindsey began bullying Juliet out of fear that Juliet would expose her. This bullying carried on until senior year of high school, when it finally drove Juliet to take her own life. Although she has many flaws, Lindsey does everything she can to hide her weaknesses from her friends, perhaps to protect her popularity in school. For example, Lindsey never tells anyone the truth about her relationship with Juliet, fearing that if people knew they were once best friends, she too would be labeled a freak. Lindsey also has an eating disorder, which she hides from her friends. Sam accidentally walks in on Lindsey purging in the bathroom, and Lindsey promises her that it was the



only time this has ever happened. Throughout the novel, Lindsey harasses and bullies everyone around her, even her friends (particularly Elody), as a way of making herself appear more important. For Sam, however, Lindsey's harsh wit and mouthy nature endears her. Sam desperately loves Lindsey for many reasons, including her vulnerabilities and brokenness (however hidden they may be), including the fact that she will dance when no one else is, and for her favorite memory: when Lindsey suddenly sprinted across the fields with Sam chasing after her only to say, "I wasn't racing you" (p. 324).

## Ally

Ally is one of Sam's three best friends. Sam most admires Ally's cooking skills - and is sure Ally will have her own cooking show one day, her child-like obsession with cows, and the fact that she sticks her entire tongue out when she yawns, much like a cat.

## Elody

Elody is one of Sam's three best friends. Although she belongs to the clique of girls, she is clearly lowest down on their totem pole. She appears to be the most sexualized of the four girls, and uses her sexuality to make men fall in love with her. Of course this plan doesn't work, and she is often left with a broken heart. While the other girls make fun of Elody's behaviors, Sam sees that she is vulnerable, fragile girl using sex to make herself feel more important. Sam most admires Elody's perfect singing voice, the fact that she once went an entire school year wearing at least one green item every day, and that she snorts when she laughs.

## Rob

Rob is Sam's boyfriend. Through the first half of the novel, Sam contemplates whether or not she should lose her virginity to Rob on the night of the big party. Rob is extremely popular, and most of the girls at Thomas Jefferson high school have crushes on him. Being with Rob makes Sam feel very important, and she equates this feeling with love. On the first three nights of the novel, Sam's attempts to have sex with Rob are foiled, mostly by Rob being too drunk to stay awake, and in the second half of the novel, Sam realizes that she never loved Rob: she loves Kent instead.

## Kent McFuller

Kent was Sam's best friend in elementary school, and has a fluctuating role throughout the novel. For the first half of the novel, Sam sees Kent as she always has since they became teenagers: awkward, nerdy, unpopular, and the butt of her jokes. Kent sees Sam differently, however, and he has always held a place in his heart for her, sticking up for her when other accuse her of being shallow and self-centered. As the novel progresses, Sam begins to see the honesty in Kent's heart, and falls for the way he is





always there for her, supporting and loving her no matter what else happens. By the end of the novel, Lindsey has fallen in love with Kent, but he doesn't realize it because they are living the same day over and over. On her final night, Sam proclaims her love for Kent, knowing that she is going to die. Many readers have cited this as the chief reason why they are unhappy with the novel, as most readers' hearts will break for Kent's loss at the end of the novel.

## **Juliet Sykes**

Juliet Sykes is the victim of Lindsey, Sam, Ally, and Eldoy's endless bullying and torment throughout high school. Sam doesn't really understand why they are so mean to Juliet - they've been picking on her as long as she can remember - but as the novel progresses, Sam gets to the bottom of the mystery. While camping in fourth grade, Lindsey wet the bed and blamed it on Juliet, who simply accepted the torment in the hopes that it would soon pass. But the bullying didn't pass, and in her senior year of high school, Juliet kills herself by jumping in front of Lindsey's car as she leaves Kent's party. This accident results not only in Juliet's death, but Sam's death as well. When she is forced to relive the day of her death seven times, Sam must figure out how Juliet's death factors into her own, and whether altering Juliet's death will provide her with salvation of her own.

## **Marion Sykes**

Marian Sykes is Juliet Sykes' little sister. She is also one of the cupids delivering roses on Cupid's Day and tells Sam how beautiful the rose from Kent is. On the fifth day, Sam attempts to warn Marian about Juliet's impending suicide, but Marian doesn't understand what she's talking about and Sam realizes that she must take care of Juliet herself.



# Objects/Places

## The Tank

The Tank is the nickname for Lindsey's car, a Range Rover. Every time the girls drive through town, someone says, "That thing's not a car, it's a truck" (p. 7). Lindsey claims that in this car, she could go head-to-head with an 18-wheeler and come out without a scratch. This is also the car Lindsey is driving during the fatal crash that takes Sam's life.

## Connecticut

Connecticut is the state in which all four girls, Sam, Ally, Elody, and Lindsey, are from.

## Goose Point

Goose Point is the most endeared place of Sam's childhood, and where she brings Izzy on her day off of school. Goose Point is a giant rock at the top of a hill, flat as the top of a table. From Goose Point - which earned its name when Sam witnessed a flock of geese flying overhead - Sam can see all of Ridgepoint, making her feel like she owns the world

## The Bird Necklace

The bird necklace is Sam's most prized possession. She inherited it from her grandmother and wears it everyday. On her last day, the seventh day, she takes it off and gives it to Izzy knowing that she will die today, and hopes that this necklace will give Izzy some comfort when she is gone.

## Kent's House

Kent's House is where the major party on Cupid's Day is held. His house is buried deep in the woods, with the "biggest, most beautiful lawn you can imagine" (Page 40). It's a massive white house that looks like frosting on a cupcake, with balconies and long porches on both sides. This is where Juliet confronts the girls that have bullied her for years.

## Cupid's Day

Cupid's Day is the way Thomas Jefferson high celebrates Valentines Day. On this particular day, students send roses to one another with special notes attached.





Throughout the day, students' roses accumulate, and it becomes a sign of how popular an individual student is. Because Sam dies on Cupid's Day, she is forced to live through the deliveries of her various roses seven times, and each day she has a different reaction to what she receives. As the days progress, she also alters who she sends her roses to.

## Cupids

Cupids are the undergraduate students assigned to hand out the roses during Cupid's Day. Marian Sykes acts as a Cupid this particular year, and she hands Sam the rose from Kent. Although she experiences this interaction seven times, Sam struggles to understand how these people: Marian, Juliet, Kent, and herself, are all intertwined.

## Thomas Jefferson High

Thomas Jefferson High is the high school Sam and the rest of the teenagers in the novel attend. The school is almost solely for wealthy, uppercrust families in Connecticut.

## The Pugs

The Pugs are a group of girls that are sort-of apart of Sam's clique of friends, but not really. What that means is that Sam and her friends will sometimes talk to or sit with the Pugs when there is no one from their group around, and that the Pugs are constantly trying to impress the more popular girls to be bumped up in the social hierarchy. On day Four, when Sam has a fight with Sam, she spends the day with the Pugs and realizes that they're actually really nice girls.



# Themes

## Friendship

In the first section of the novel, Sam states, "A good friend keeps your secrets for you. A best friend helps you keep your own secrets" (p. 76). This is an interesting way to look at friendship because, in a way, it claims that friendship is based on deception. The reader sees this in much of the way Sam and her friends interact both with each other and with the outside world. Everything they do is centered on their own vanity and popularity, so much so that the girls hide the darkest parts of themselves: their insecurities and vulnerabilities from each other. When Sam discovers that she is living the same day over and over again, she finds that she cannot tell her friends what she's experiencing because she's too afraid they will mock her. Interactions like this beg the question, what is a true friend? Throughout the course of her experiences, Sam realizes that the only true friend she has is Kent: she can tell him anything and everything while still feeling unconditional love and support. Through her relationship with Kent, Sam is able to accept her fate in death and make the ultimate sacrifice for Juliet. The reader is able to compare / contrast this mentality on friendship with Lindsey's mentality. In her fears of being discovered as a bedwetter, she turned on her best friend Juliet in the fourth grade. From then on, Lindsey covered her dark secret by bullying and tormenting Juliet. This led to emotional upheaval in everyone's lives. Juliet, obviously, chose to end this torment by taking her own life. Lindsey, too, lived a life of torment that came out through her negative life choices (such as sleeping with older men), her eating disorder, and her low self-esteem. At the end of the novel, on Sam's seventh and last day, she finally confronts Lindsey about all her secrets, saying that it never mattered who wet the bed in fourth grade. She should have told the truth: they would have loved her anyway. Through these explorations of friendship, the moral of the novel becomes clear: be yourself and true love - whether through romance or friendship - will surely come your way.

## Sacrifice / Redemption

Sam's sacrifice at the end of the novel, throwing herself in front of the oncoming car so Juliet can live, creates a distinct possibility for Sam to be considered a Christ figure. Christ figures in novels generally sacrifice their own life so other characters - whether noble or not - can live. This sacrifice elevates their literary stature, and often, redeems them in the reader's eyes for their past sins. Once Sam discovers that her life is inextricably intertwined with Juliet's, it becomes clear that something, although she doesn't know what yet, must be sacrificed to break this bond. Sam compares this sacrifice to voodoo, but her earlier comparisons with Catholic Purgatory also create a thread to modern Christianity. Sam sacrifices many things in her various attempts to save Juliet: her popularity, her "coolness", her romantic relationship, even her friends - including Elody whose life is unwittingly sacrificed on Day Five - but none of these are enough to save either Juliet or Sam because they are not the ultimate sacrifice. Sam's



ultimate sacrifice at the end of Day Seven has divided critics. Some do not think the sacrifice is enough to redeem Sam for her years of bullying. Others think her sacrifice was too great, that Sam's death leaves behind too many broken hearts (her family, her friends, Kent), to be an even sacrifice for Juliet - who had a less involved family, no friends, and no romantic relationship. These arguments beg the question, what makes a life valuable? Is it the amount of friends one has, or how deeply they are loved? These are the same questions posed throughout the novel. What makes one person more important than another: what clothes they wear? Who they date? How many roses they receive on Cupid's Day? Those who fail to see the importance of Sam's ultimate sacrifice, and her subsequent moral redemption, also fail to pick up on the parallel Oliver is making between high school life and life in the real world, and thus fail to recognize the balance between sacrifice and redemption that is crucial to the moral of the novel.

## High School Life

Because this novel is aimed toward high school readers, it should be expected that many of the gritty themes of high school life are present: eating disorders, bullying, suicide, drinking, and sex. These five topics have split audiences, with some saying that they are too graphic for young readers (the key age is 14 - 16), while others say they must be present to depict the accurate life of a highschooler in today's society. Without a doubt, the reason why "Before I Fall" has been so successful is because of the honest depiction of high school life, warts and all. Many watch groups fear that the novel glamorizes drugs, drinking, and sex, and have attempted to ban the book because of this. In an November 2010 interview with GoodReads website, Oliver responds to this by saying, "Honest to God, I was just trying to write a book that was accurate to my high school experience. The truth is that we drank in high school; we had sex in high school; we did drugs in high school; people had eating disorders in high school. It's very possible that some people haven't been exposed to that and have a very different experience of it, and that's OK. All censorship, I feel, is kind of like when you play hide-and-go-seek with a really little kid, and they cover their own eyes and believe that they can't be seen as a result. Just because you cover your own eyes doesn't mean that this stuff doesn't happen, so there's no point in not depicting it in literature. Literature is a really great, safe place to discuss issues like this, because you're able to bracket it, and it's bounded by a fictional world. It can provide a really easy way for parents and kids to approach difficult subjects." Since Oliver took such a blunt stance on depicting high school as it truly is, particularly in modern times, she succeeds in creating relatable characters with problems that readers can identify with and emotions they can connect with.

# Style

## Point of View

The novel is told in first-person limited omniscience narration through Sam's perspective, which means that Sam speaks using "me" and "I" and that the only character whose thoughts the reader has access to are Sam's alone. The reader is held very close to Sam's emotions and thoughts, as these are the most important factors to understanding the novel as a whole. Because the reader is held so close to Sam, the point-of-view is completely reliable. As Sam is struggling to understand what is happening to her, she has no reason to manipulate the circumstances for her own personal gain. Sam's situation - being forced to relive the day of her death seven times - provides the perfect opportunity for the reader's questions to be answered. Whenever the reader is confused about the events in the novel, whether physical or emotional events, Sam asks the same questions simultaneously, which strengthens the relationship the reader forms with Sam. This relationship is particularly important because Sam is not necessarily a likeable character. She is rich, entitled, spoiled, and by her own admission, "bitchy." Many readers will automatically feel an aversion to her character and may even believe that Sam deserved to die. It is Sam's unabashed fear, curiosity, anger, and eventual reconciliation with death - all of which the reader experiences through Sam's point-of-view - that not only endears her character to the audience, but forces the audience to examine their own lives through her experiences, which makes for an incredibly powerful novel.

## Setting

This novel is set in Ridgeport, Connecticut. This is an uppercrust town with almost everyone living within the upper-middle class economic setting. The majority of the novel takes place within the walls of Thomas Jefferson High School where Sam and her friends are seniors. The high school is typical of many American high schools, with hallways divided by classes - freshman, for example, have a different hallway and different bathrooms than the upperclassman. Because the school educates children of primarily wealthy parents, it is equipped with the latest technological advances, and materials are easy for both students and teachers to access. This characteristic distinctly sets the school apart from most American public schools, for which funds are always a problem. It is because of this that many audience members struggle to relate to Sam, her friends, and the setting in general. Although Sam is living a modern highschoolers' life, hers is a life of privilege that can be alienating to many readers. This feeling of privilege and alienation is continues through the individual house settings - the reader tours through Sam's, Ally's, and Kent's homes, complete with swimming pools, personal gyms, fully stocked bars, and floor to ceiling windows. The only home that is not presented with glitz and glamour is Juliet's home, which, unsurprisingly, is shrouded in shadows and modest furnishings. This is just one of the reasons why many readers will feel a strong connection to Juliet, while feeling an aversion to many of the wealthy



characters. Although somewhat off-putting, these settings of grandeur are integral to the novel's theme that money cannot buy happiness. Despite all the wealth in Ridgeport, Connecticut, which likely contributes to the teenagers' wild belief that they are untouchable, no amount of money can save Sam Kingston. For the first time in her life (and death) she must search her soul for something more than superficial value.

## Language and Meaning

This novel is written for teenaged, young adult readers, and stars characters of the same age range. Because of this, the language is very conversational, with the voice of each character ringing true to what readers would hear everyday in their high school hallways - or what they remember of their high school hallways. Lauren Oliver has clearly researched the voice of her characters deeply, which makes all the language, including the inner thoughts and dialogue completely believable. Oliver does not shy away from the over-sexualization and profanity in teenage language, and it is justly evident in the text. Perhaps the most honest aspect of the language is the banter between the teenage girls, the way they playfully tease each other, flirt with their boyfriends, and bully their victims. It is certainly the language of the novel that has skyrocketed this novel into nationwide success. Because the reader is held so close to Sam's personal thoughts, there is rarely, if ever, a moment of confusion. Even when Sam is considering complex philosophic ideas, including the works of Plato and her own ideas about death, the reader is never confused. Because Sam's story takes place in the busy place of her high school hallways, many different characters occupy the same space simultaneously, with many of them moving in large packs. Through Sam's narration, Oliver deftly creates individuals within the masses, drawing precise attention to the characters, images, moments, and bits of dialogue that matter most. Moments like this draw the reader into a vivid and distinct high school world.

## Structure

This novel is told in seven chapters of equal length, all surrounding the exact same events of the exact same day - February 12, Cupid's Day - relived from Sam Kingston's point-of-view very day for a week. Each of the chapters begins with Sam waking up in her bed to the clang and beep of her alarm clock, and ends with her death. Throughout the course of the day, however, the events are slightly different, depending on the way Sam navigates her day. On the second day (the first day of Sam reliving her death day), almost everything is exactly the same as the first, with Sam confusedly trying to figure out what is going on. There are slight differences, such as losing the parking spot that leads to Sarah Grundel being able to stay on the swim team, which highlight for the reader, and later for Sam, how every event in one's life is linked into the next. This is an important element to understanding the novel as a whole. On the third day, Sam begins to play around more with her surroundings, in the hopes that if she does everything perfectly, she might make it out of the party alive. On the fourth day, she is outraged and reckless, throwing caution to the wind and acting completely out of character because she truly believes that nothing she does has any consequence. On the fifth, sixth, and

seventh days, Sam's experiences become a bit more complex as she sees the world around her, including her relationships with family and friends, differently, and strives to show them all what they mean to her. Although she is dead, through the course of these seven days, Sam becomes a better person and eventually accepts her fate. Because the reader has grown so close to Sam, exploring the new world alongside her, they are emotionally prepared for her death at the end of the novel, and even though they have experienced it six times before, it is the most bittersweet goodbye.



## Quotes

"I'm not going to lie, though. It's nice that everything's easy for us. It's a good feeling knowing that you can basically do whatever you want and there won't be any consequences...Nobody ever said life was fair" (p. 13).

"Isn't it kind of weird how that stuff happens? How everything spirals out from everything else? It's like a web, you know? Everything's connected" (p. 30).

"Plato believed that the whole world - everything we can see - was just like shadows on a cave wall. We can't actually see the real thing, the thing that's casting the shadow in the first place" (p. 68).

"A good friend keeps your secrets for you. A best friend helps you keep your own secrets" (p. 76).

"Maybe when you die time folds in on you, and you bounce around inside this little bubble forever...It's not what I imagined death would be like - not what I imagined would come afterward - but then again it's not like there's anyone around to tell you" (p. 96).

"I hate both my parents right now: for sitting quietly in our house, while out in the darkness my heart was beating away all the of the seconds of my life, ticking them off one by one until my time was up; for letting the thread between us stretch so far and so thin that the moment it was severed for good they didn't even feel it" (p. 136).

"I'm a nonperson, a shadow, a ghost. Even before the accident I'm not sure that I was a whole person - that's what I'm realizing now. And I'm not sure where the damage begins" (p. 177).

"I was still looking for answers then. I still wanted to know why. As though somebody was going to answer that for me, as though any answer would be satisfying. Not then, but afterward, I started to think about time, and how it keeps moving and draining and flowing forever forward, seconds into minutes into days into years, all of it leading to the same place, a current running forever in one direction" (p. 197).

"It amazes me how easy it is for things to change, how easy it is to start off down the same road you always take and wind up somewhere new. Just one false step, one pause, one detour, and you end up with new friends or a bad reputation or a boyfriend or a breakup" (p. 207).

"How is it possible, I think, to change so much and not be able to change anything at all? That's the very worst thing about all of this, a feeling of desperate hopelessness, and I realize my question to Elody is the question that's been tearing me up all along. What's the point?" (p. 262).





## Topics for Discussion

What does it mean to be popular? What does popularity mean to the main characters in the novel? Sam says that "there's no point in analyzing it" because there will always be a line between the haves and the have-nots and "it's just what happens" (p. 18). Do you agree? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Describe the high school life presented in the novel. Do you think this is an accurate depiction of what high school life is like nationwide? Why or why not? How does Sam's high school experience compare and contrast to your own? Do you think Lauren Oliver's voice is authentic? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Compare / contrast the relationship Sam has with Lindsey to the relationship she has with Elody. What is the same about these friendships? What is different? How does Sam's perception of both these friendships change through the course of the novel? Does this surprise you? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Having sex, and discussing sex, is an important aspect in many of the relationships presented in the novel. Why is sexuality so important to the band of girlfriends: Sam, Elody, Lindsey, and Alley? Why does Sam change her mind about the importance of sex, particularly with Rob, as the novel progresses? What does this tell you about her character? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Describe the history of Sam's relationship with Kent throughout their lives. What does she want from him, and how does her attitude toward him change over the course of the story? How do you think Sam's death will affect Kent? Does she deserve to be with him at the end of the novel? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

What do you think about Sam's comment, "A good friend keeps your secrets for you. A best friend helps you keep your own secrets" (p. 107)? How does this one sentence explain the relationships between Sam, Ally, Elody, and Lindsey? How has this mindset affected the four girls throughout the novel? Does it lead to true friendship? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Sam reminds the reader that, "we're the same, you and me" (p. 132). What's your reaction to this assumption? Do you agree with her? Why or why not? Do you find yourself passing judgment on Sam or other characters at any point in the story? Do you think you'd do things differently if you were in Sam's situation the first time around? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.





What is the importance of Cupid's Day, both symbolically and for the plot of the novel? Why is it significant that Sam would die on this day? How does this particular day affect her thoughts and actions - from smoking with Anna Cartullo in the bathroom, to kissing Mr. Daimler, to changing her rose order each morning? Is it just happenstance that Sam dies on this day, or is there deeper meaning to be found in her death? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.