

# **The Body of Christopher Creed Study Guide**

**The Body of Christopher Creed by Carol Plum-Ucci**

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# Plot Summary

Victor “Torey” Adams has been dragged into helping with a prank on the weird kid in the dorm at his high school. The prank more-or-less harmlessly backfires, but Leo, the strange kid, comes out to talk with Torey. Torey is uncomfortable with Leo, but he tries to get over it and be considerate—not entirely successfully.

Torey is worried that Leo has gotten into Torey’s computer and looked at his personal document—specifically, a document about the disappearance of one of the kids from Torey’s previous high school in the town of Steepleton. The kid who disappeared was a social misfit named Chris Creed, and Torey’s document explaining the circumstances of his disappearance is called Creed.doc. He has sent the document to dozens of people through email. With the beginning of Chapter 2, Torey re-reads his own document, telling the reader the story of events from the year before.

Having arrived at church late, Torey, his best friend Alex, and a couple other friends sit in front, where Torey can see the stained-glass image of Christ on the wall—an image that disturbs him because it’s at odds with the story portrayed in the Bible, where Christ is crucified naked. As he’s thinking, Mrs. Creed gets up and asks the congregation to help look for her son, who has disappeared a few days earlier. The rumors say he committed suicide. Or ran away. Or was murdered.

One way or another, Chris left because he was troubled. Torey reflects back on his own interactions with Chris, including when Torey sent him to the hospital with a gushing bloody nose in sixth grade. Just about everyone Torey knows has beaten Chris up at one time or another, because he was so cluelessly irritating. But Torey feels partially responsible for Chris’s unhappiness, so he and his friends get a copy of Creed’s note. That disturbs Torey even more, because Chris specifically wishes he had been born as someone else, someone like...Torey Adams.

Ali McDermott, a classmate of Torey’s who has a kind of shady reputation, lives right across the street from Chris Creed’s house. She’s seen Mrs. Creed doing some strange stuff, and she invites Torey to visit the next day after school so he can see, too.

The next afternoon, Torey is at Ali’s when Ali’s “secret” boyfriend arrives. He’s the troublemaker Bo Richardson, a big, scary looking kid from the wrong side of the tracks. They watch Mrs. Creed search through Chris’s room, looking for his diary. Ali knows it’s behind a picture on Chris’s wall, and they determine they need to get it before Mrs. Creed does.

Torey calls the Creeds and makes up a story to get them out of the house while Bo sneaks over there to get the diary after they leave. Instead, Bo, Ali, and Torey end up in the police station—Bo under suspicion, and Ali and Torey for questioning. Torey’s mother heads off the trouble, but Bo must remain in jail overnight. But Chris’s brother had snuck the diary out to Bo, and he snuck it to Ali.



Chris's diary tells of such things as his interactions with his girlfriend, a beautiful naïve blonde woman. They read the diary and track down the young woman. She ends up being attractive enough, but she is by no means naïve. Although she did hang out with Chris—even having sex once—she didn't consider herself his girlfriend. In fact, most of the scenes in Chris's diary simply didn't happen.

Torey is haunted by the thought that Chris Creed's dead body might be in the Lenape burial ground behind Torey's house. He and Ali search, but don't find a body. Then Alex, Torey's best friend, tells Torey people think Torey and Bo killed Chris Creed. Torey heads to the burial ground again, alone, in the dark, with a single flashlight.

He rolls a rock aside, crushing his leg and exposing a cave with several ancient Lenape bodies within. There is also a more recent body, face hidden by crusted blood. But even as Torey watches, the body burns up, leaving ashy bones behind.

That's the end of the Creed.doc file, and Torey's narrative returns to the present. The body wasn't Creed, but a man from Steepleton who'd committed suicide some years ago, and the body decomposed instantly when the oxygen was let in.

That experience, along with the rumors that still float around—rumors claiming Torey killed Chris and hid the body—push Torey out of Steepleton. He goes to complete his final year of high school at Rothborne, a boarding school. He is convinced Chris is alive, and Torey has been emailing the Creed.doc to people with names he suspects might be Chris's alias in his new life.

The book closes with several responses Torey has received to his email—some skeptical, some supportive, some annoying. The fate of Christopher Creed remains a mystery.



# Chapter 1

## Summary

Victor “Torey” Adams is a senior at Rothborne, a boarding high school. He’s handsome, and a good guitar player to boot, but that hasn’t led to happiness. The main reason he’s at Rothborne is to get away from Steepleton, the town where he was born and raised. Rothborne isn’t bad—although Torey does have to deal with Leo, an annoying socially inept busybody who can’t seem to avoid sticking his nose in other people’s business.

Leo reminds Torey of a kid he’s gone to school with: Christopher Creed. Not that thoughts of Chris Creed are ever far from Torey’s mind. Creed is the reason Torey left Steepleton.

Dr. Fahdi recommended Torey write out the story of Christopher Creed, to bring him “healing.” Now, however, Torey is doing something else with the story he’s written. He’s emailing it to someone by the name of Alex Healy.

In the cover letter to Alex—the email introducing the attached document—Torey explains Christopher Creed just disappeared. He wrote a note, then ran away, or committed suicide, or was murdered. Although Creed was the weirdest kid in town, his disappearance unsettled the town, at least partially because of the lies his disappearance exposed.

Torey explains in his note some people think he had something to do with Creed’s death. But Torey hopes Alex Healy will understand the story that follows. If Alex doubts the truth, he can talk to the chief of police in Steepleton, who will vouch for every word.

Then Torey begins his story.

## Analysis

Chapter 1 rapidly introduces both the protagonist and the mystery the author will carry through the entire novel. Torey is good-looking, from a well-to-do family, and plays the guitar well enough to be admired by his peers. He has also been a football player, but he’s not in such good shape right now. He has been in therapy, and writing about Christopher Creed has something to do with that therapy.

Chris Creed is important enough to have driven Torey from Steepleton to Rothborne, even though Torey has hardly spoken to him since sixth grade. Chris has run away from home. Or committed suicide. Or been killed. Somehow Torey was involved, and—for some reason—Torey thinks someone named Alex Healy knows something about it. But he’s already thought about eighty other folks knew something about it, too.



The Chapter has now set up the questions: Who is Chris, what happened to him, and what does this have to do with Torey?

## Vocabulary

curfew, spastic, ogling, linger, denial, traumatic, recovered, similarities, tingle, flashbacks



## Chapter 2 - 5

### Summary

Torey arrives at church at the last minute, as does his best friend Alex Arrington, and his band mates Ryan Bowen, and Eddie and Pat Kyle. Torey glances up at the stained glass image of Christ on the cross. Christ wears a loincloth, but the Bible says Christ was crucified naked. Torey has expressed this concern to the preacher, but Reverend Harmon told him the truth was less important than the impact the truth would have on people.

The Reverend announces Christopher Creed disappeared on Thursday, and has not been seen since, and he introduces Chris's parents. They explain they're looking for anyone to help them figure out why Chris might have run away, because he's such a normal and grounded kid and has no problems at home.

Torey knows otherwise: Chris is an annoying kid who never seems to know when he's getting on people's nerves, which is all the time. And his parents are strict, stiff, and stern.

That evening, Torey, Ryan, and Alex mess around in the basement, waiting for the Kyles to show up so they can start their band practice. While they're waiting, Torey remembers the time in sixth grade when he whaled on Creed, causing Creed a gushing bloody nose. Alex and Ryan have both beat up Creed as well, sometime during their schooling together.

The boys speculate about what grisly fate Chris may have met with—which way he might have killed himself. They feel the need to read Creed's suicide email, so Alex hacks into the library's computer (from which Creed sent his note), and they get a copy of Creed's note.

In his note, Creed wonders why he couldn't have been born someone else, someone with athletic ability, good personality, and a beautiful girlfriend. Specifically, he wonders why he wasn't born to be someone like Torey Adams or Alex Arrington or any of a handful of other kids in school. Torey feels his life changing as those words bounce around his head. How could they all have missed the fact that Creed was so depressed?

Next day, Torey meets Alex, who is hanging out with his girlfriend, Renee, who loves to gossip about other girls, like Ali McDermott, who Renee accuses of sleeping with every likely boy. Then Ali comes up to Torey, wanting to talk with him about Mrs. Creed. Ali lives right next door to the Creeds, and has seen how controlling Mrs. Creed is—picking Chris's movies and setting out his clothes and other little things to arrange his day. Torey makes plans to visit Ali's house the next night, so that he can see for himself.



After talking with Ali, Torey heads back in to talk with Alex, Renee, and Torey's girlfriend Leandra. Torey shows the note to his friends; they're not convinced Chris wrote the note. Perhaps someone wrote the note for Chris, and then murdered him. Who? Perhaps it was Bo Richardson—one of the "boons," the kids from the town of Pine Barrens.

Torey is annoyed with the insensitivity his friends are showing.

## Analysis

These chapters introduce Torey's friends. But Torey has already changed, and he is beginning to wonder what they offer for him. This establishes one of the conflicts of the book: between Torey and his friends. Because Torey used to fit right in with those friends, this is really the conflict between the Torey from before Chris Creed disappeared and the Torey after Chris Creed disappeared.

Another conflict is also introduced: between the well-to-do folks from Steepleton and the poor folks—the boons—from Pine Barrens.

The final, overriding theme that is introduced is the tension between appearance and reality. It's not due to an inherent ability of reality to camouflage itself, it's with the complicity of the people who observe reality. The symbol that's introduced in these chapters is Jesus's loincloth. Even though he was naked when crucified, the appearance in the stained glass window image is of a clothed Christ.

## Vocabulary

boondocks, hoagie, spigots, compartmentalized, winsome, smorgasbord, reprimand, silhouettes, depressive, obnoxious





## Chapter 6 - 8

### Summary

Monday night, Alex and Ryan don't show up for band practice, so Pat and Eddie Kyle just take off. Torey makes a half-hearted attempt to write some songs, but gets stuck thinking about his girlfriend Leandra and how everybody assumed they were having sex, when in fact they weren't. Alone in the basement, he senses someone looking at him, but sees no one. Nevertheless, he heads back upstairs. Just about when he gives up waiting, Leandra calls.

Cheerleading practice runs an hour late because Ali McDermott didn't show up on time. Leandra is still annoyed when she gets back and gives Torey a call, so all she wants to do is rag on Ali. Torey finds that a little bit ironic, because Leandra professes not to like gossip—but then spends so much time gossiping! In particular, Leandra starts going on about how Ali was probably late because she was out with a greasy, foul-smelling boon. Leandra goes on and on, and Torey finds himself more annoyed than usual.

He's heard so much cruel speculation about Creed, he notices more when it's being done to other people. Specifically, he realizes he's never talked to a boon—he's just assumed they were nasty. And what about Creed? Is he out there somewhere, or murdered, like folks are saying? Torey realizes part of their reason for saying that is they can then avoid responsibility for any part of Creed's unhappiness. It's far easier to blame others.

Tuesday at school, Torey gives Alex grief for missing band practice. Alex remembers another time he hit Creed: when they were about twelve and were walking around the Lenape Indian burial grounds behind Torey's house. Creed had made a treasure map, laminated it, and was teasing Alex about how he'd never find Creed's treasure. Alex just hauled off and hit him.

Alex tells Torey about Mrs. Creed, how she was at the Wawa (the local convenience store/deli) last night trying to run a guilt trip on the kids for not helping find Chris. She was sure he hadn't run away, because she had taken all the money he earned from his paper route and put it in a bank account, and he hadn't touched that account. Mrs. Creed was also expressing the idea that one of the boon kids, Bo Richardson, had killed Chris. She reminded everyone Bo had pushed Chris from the bleachers a year ago, and he'd had to go to the hospital with a broken ankle. Torey remembers that he, too, had sent Chris to the hospital—but no one was accusing him of murder.

Tuesday night, as arranged, Torey heads out to Ali's place. Before he settles in, she warns him they may want to head outside if her mom's boyfriend shows up. Torey doesn't think much of it, and they go upstairs to Ali's bedroom, which has a view into five windows in Creed's house next door.



Every night since Chris disappeared, Mrs. Creed has gone into Chris's room, searching for something. Ali is certain she's looking for Chris's diary, which she knows is behind a picture on Chris's wall. The three Creed boys' bedrooms are identically furnished, even down to the bedspreads.

Ali's mother's boyfriend comes over, and Ali gets her jacket, saying they should leave because he's such a pig, but just then, Mrs. Creed goes in to Chris's room. She enters Chris's closet and unfolds every piece of clothing, looking like a woman on a mission. She removes everything from the closet, puts it on the bed, then refolds the items and returns everything to the closet.

As Mrs. Creed is finishing, thumping and thudding noises come from the room above Ali's bedroom. It's Albert and Mrs. McDermott, making the household aware they are having sex. Ali says Albert has asked her if Ali liked the sound effects. Ali's just grossed out, but her mom is unaware they're even making noise.

Torey suggests she call the police, because even though it's not physical abuse, Albert is using her and her brother. While the adults are upstairs banging around, Ali's boyfriend shows up. It's Bo Richardson. He looks big and tough. This is the first time he's been there while Albert puts on his sound show.

Bo goes upstairs and opens the door, telling them to cut it out, reminding Mrs. McDermott her kids are right downstairs, unable to escape the ruckus. He comes back downstairs and tells Ali and Torey he never had to deal with that kind of problem, but that he's got five younger brothers and two younger sisters—from five different dads. Bo also tells Torey not to let anyone at school know he and Ali are hanging out, because they'd give her so much crap for going out with a boon.

The folks in the Barrens are worried about Creed, too, but mostly because they're sure one of them is going to be blamed.

Mrs. Creed leaves Chris's room—unsuccessful once again at finding the diary—but Bo decides they can't take the chance she'll find it soon. He takes off his shoes and jacket, and heads out the door to get the diary. Torey hesitates, then shoots out the door after him.

## Analysis

Another facet of the tension between appearance and reality is introduced in these chapters: people's opinion of others and what those others are actually like. That's brought to light through two specific characters: Ali and Bo.

Ali is viewed as a slut by the cool girls (including Torey's girlfriend Leandra), but Torey sees she's all right. He also sees a little bit of her background, the home life she's had to deal with—a life that would excuse a lot of bad behavior.



Bo is viewed as foul-smelling, tough, and scary, but within minutes of meeting him, Torey sees Bo is brave, considerate, and kind.

## Vocabulary

sophisticated, despairing, agonize, laminated, contraptions, individuality, diabolical, barracks, unselfish, fanatic



## Chapter 9 - 11

### Summary

Torey catches up with Bo on the way to Creed's house. Bo admits he doesn't have a plan and even though he's broken in to about twenty places, he's not very good at it. In fact, he's stopped breaking in, but he wants this diary.

Torey asks him why, and he explains he was in the principal's office when the call came in about Chris sending a suicide email from the library computer. Next morning, he and Ali went to the library and found Chris's note and put it on a floppy disk.

The cops wanted to know where Bo was the afternoon Chris disappeared. Although his whereabouts are verifiable for the time when the note was sent, after school he was hanging out with Ali in the woods. He and Ali just hang out, talking; they haven't slept together. Even so, he doesn't want to say she was with him in the woods because it would make Ali look bad to her cheerleading buddies. The cops searched his locker, and have the disk. He needs the diary to prove he's innocent.

Torey comes up with a plan, something he's seen in a Hitchcock movie. He calls the Creed house and tells them to meet him at the ball field, and bring money. Then he hurries back home, hoping he's cleared the way for Bo to get into the house.

But later that night Bo, Ali, and Torey are at the police station for questioning. Torey's mom, a criminal lawyer, is there, too; and so is Mrs. Creed. Ali and Torey are freaking out as Chief Bowen questions Bo in the other room. Bo denies doing anything wrong.

Mrs. Adams, Torey's mom, wants to speed things along so the kids can get some sleep before school the next day, so the chief sits down with Torey and Ali and Mrs. Adams. The chief warns them they don't want to get tangled up with somebody like Bo Richardson. In particular, making a harassing, extorting phone call is a serious crime, so he hopes neither of them had anything to do with that. Nothing appears missing from the Creed house, so that's not an issue—but the phone call is serious. Neither Ali nor Torey say anything about the phone call, and Mrs. Adams hustles them out of there. She promises Bo she will take Ali and Ali's brother over to Torey's house, getting them away from the creepy boyfriend.

At Torey's house, his mom wants the whole story from Torey and Ali. Ali's been going out with Bo for about three weeks, and she knows he has nothing to do with Creed's disappearance—she thinks Mrs. Creed did it and is searching for someone else to blame. Mrs. Adams says that's not the case.

She tells the kids about a disappearance long ago. Bob Haines walked into the Lenape graveyard and was never seen again. Digger Haines was a high school football player who was injured and lost a leg. His dad was disappointed, and Digger was teased by the other kids. So Digger just up and left. His dad, Bob, looked for him, but in vain.



Rumors flew that Digger might be dead somewhere, that Bob had driven him to suicide—no one wanting to admit their own part in Digger’s disillusionment. Years later, Mrs. Adams ran into Digger Haines, then a successful lawyer. But Bob had no idea whether or not his son was alive when he wandered into the Lenape burial grounds and disappeared.

Mrs. Adams says she’ll help Bo out, but they need to get some sleep for now. Before she sends them off to bed, she gives Ali her composition book. Bo had been holding it—the book with Ali’s name on the front—and he wanted to be sure she got it in time to prepare for school. Ali and Torey look at each other. That’s not Ali’s composition book.

It is’s Creed’s diary.

## Analysis

These chapters serve to heighten the dramatic tension. The differences between appearance and reality have made for some pretty cruel gossip, but now they threaten to ruin someone’s life. Bo—who Torey now recognizes as a courageous, thoughtful guy—is about to get a crime hung on him. Part of the reason for the suspicion is Bo’s previous criminal record, but part is just because he looks the part.

He got picked up by the police simply because he didn’t belong in that part of town, and when they received notice of a crime they figured it had to be more than coincidence. The only crime so far is an extortionate phone call—and Torey made that call.

Mrs. Adams’s revelation that there was a similar story in the past serves to let the reader know the themes exposed by Creed’s disappearance are not unique to Creed, but are part of the story of the town. By implication, those themes are part of the larger world as well.

## Vocabulary

gimp, nipping, blabbing, relevant, delinquency, petrified, gravelly, gory, dumbfounded, gripping



## Chapter 12 - 15

### Summary

Torey lies in bed, thinking about the tough lives of people like Ali and Bo, and Creed, too. Would any of his friends change if they had to walk in their shoes? He waits as long as he can, but after he's sure his folks have settled down, he goes to Ali's room, where they read Creed's diary.

Creed wrote about his beautiful girlfriend Isabella, who lives in the nearby town of Margate. Ali and Torey are struggling to read his handwriting, then Torey loses patience and turns to the final entry, where Creed has listed ten things good in his life. Ali wants to find some hint that Creed's mom was responsible for his disappearance, and maybe his death. But Torey remembers her on the phone: indignant and angry, but not defensive as if she had something to hide. It's 3:30 in the morning, so Torey heads back to his room to get a little sleep.

Next morning on the bus, Torey's friends give him grief about being grilled by the police chief, Renee's dad. They start speculating that maybe Bo killed Chris Creed, Torey wants to hear none of it, so he moves and sits next to Lyle Corsica, one of the less cool kids.

Torey doesn't want to talk with any of his friends. He walks out of class, finds Ali in the hallway, too. Torey wants to go home and rest, collect his thoughts. Ali reports Creed and Isabella went to a psychic who saw death in the woods.

That reminds Torey of when he was seven, playing in the Lenape burial grounds when he saw exactly what he imagined might be there: an Indian, crouching, arrow poised to shoot. Now Torey wonders if it might be a dead Chris Creed he sees emerge from those same woods.

Bo Richardson shows up, finds Ali and Torey where they talk. Bo tells them he didn't need to break in last night, Chris's brother Justin saw him wandering outside. Justin grabbed the diary and gave it to Bo, rather than let his mom get it. There was a pen with the diary, so Bo wrote Ali's name on the outside, so he could get it to her.

Torey's dad picks him up from school, and when he drops him off at home he tells Torey Bo had confessed to making the phone call after he heard the cops were going to take fingerprints off the phone at the ball park. Torey knows it should be him getting whatever punishment is being handed out for that, but he doesn't know what to do.

Leandra calls Torey at home, demanding to know what's going on with him and those slimy people, Bo and Ali. Torey asks her why she bothers going to church and acting holy if she's just going to turn around and call folks dirt bags and sluts. She thinks he's insane.



After school, Leandra calls again and Ali answers the phone without thinking. She hands it to Torey, but the damage is done; Leandra is sure he's sleeping with Ali.

Torey confesses to Ali that he feels weird. Everybody else is asking where Creed is, but Torey is wondering how he is. Torey is worried he thinks differently than other people, and someday everybody will figure it out. Ali runs down a list of their classmates and the secrets they keep. She knows the secrets because her mom slept with all their dads and passed on the gossip tidbits.

Torey's mom lets them know Ali's mom has gone to rehab in Florida for a couple weeks. Ali and Torey just need to get out of the house, so they head out to the Wawa.

## Analysis

The choices Torey has made have now exaggerated the differences between him and his friends. He's worried he's different—and he is different from his friends. But these chapters also introduce the reader to the idea that everybody is different, and is trying to hide those differences from others.

The conflict between Torey and his friends—between those who want to find reality and those who are comfortable accepting their prejudgments—has been simmering, and is now straining to cut loose.

## Vocabulary

pristine, clomping, agonizing, cul-de-sac, materialized, stilleto, brainwashed, turbo, description, disorderly



## Chapter 16 - 19

### Summary

Torey and Ali go to the Wawa and meet Bo out back. They read part of Chris's diary and discover he had a girlfriend, Isabella Karzden. They decide to try to call her. They call three of the four listings, then run out of change. When Torey goes back inside, he sees Alex and Renee. They argue over Torey's hanging out with Ali. He explains his mom is helping Ali out while her mom is busy for a couple weeks.

Renee is not mollified. She goes out back and finds Ali and starts pushing her around. When Renee starts getting rowdy—both physically and by mouthing off—Bo comes out of the darkness. Bo ends up dropping the news that Renee's dad, the police chief, has been sleeping with Ali's mom for a year. By everyone's reaction, it's obviously true.

Everyone leaves angry or upset one way or another. When he gets home, Torey remembers he's forgotten to make that last phone call. He leaves a message on Isabella Karzden's phone.

The next day at school, Ali decides to stop keeping her relationship with Bo a secret. Torey hangs out with them—their mutual involvement in the “break in” tying them together. Chief Bowen comes to school to pick up Bo Richardson for questioning in the murder of Chris Creed. Torey confesses to making the phone call, Ali confesses to making the copy of Chris's note, but Bo is still hauled off.

Torey and Ali are hauled off, also, but to the principal's office, where they are joined by Mrs. Creed. She is angry with them for trying to protect Bo, who she is now certain is responsible for whatever has interrupted her son's perfect life. Torey, Ali, and even the school principal, Mr. Ames, try to let Mrs. Creed know her son did not have a perfect life. But Mrs. Creed is adamant, and refuses to budge from her belief that Chris was happy at home, therefore someone forged the note. Mr. Ames is emotionally drained, seeing that the Digger Haines story didn't sink in: people would still rather blame others than accept their own role in others' unhappiness.

The next afternoon Torey gets a message in response to the phone call he made to Isabella, Chris's girlfriend. She invites him to come over and talk about Chris. Ali and Torey get a ride to Margate, the seaside town where Isabella lives.

The 19-year-old young woman who opens the door surprises Chris by saying she is indeed Isabella. She has a head full of braids, she's cute, but she's also self-assured—the opposite of the shy girl Chris described in his diary. She has no idea where Chris is, because they are not (and never really were) boyfriend and girlfriend.

Ali realizes Chris made it all up! Isabella says he didn't make it all up. She did feel sorry for him, and went out with him once, but he proved so difficult to get rid of, she thought





maybe he just needed to hook up with somebody, so she had sex with him once. Aside from that, they just visited her aunt once, her aunt the psychic.

Torey and Ali want to learn about that visit, so Isabella invites them to come out to the apartment above the garage, where Aunt Vera lives. Vera tells Torey that when he is alone he will find death in the woods. In fact, he will find Chris dead in the woods. She says Chris killed himself, shot himself in the head—but then she says the details are fuzzy.

Torey doesn't want to find Chris's dead body. He resolves to stay away from the woods forever.. Forever.

## Analysis

In these chapters, Torey's connection to his previous friends is almost completely severed. Leandra, for example, never sees Torey in these chapters, and Torey believes their relationship has just died. While that connection fades, Torey has forged new connections with Ali and Bo.

Symbolically, Torey is moving from the group that wants to maintain appearances at all costs regardless of the underlying reality, to those who care less about appearances but have core strengths rooted in reality. Ali also makes that symbolic transition, when she publicly acknowledges her relationship with Bo.

The action of the book has been carried by Torey's need to find out what really happened with Chris, but that now appears to have come to an end, as Torey has no desire to follow the final lead.

This sets up the final question: what will prevail, Torey's fear of seeing gruesome death, or his need to find the truth about Chris?

## Vocabulary

psychic, decayed, offspring, victimized, badgering, sociopathic, prejudiced, legendary, croaked, bloodcurdling



## Chapter 20 - 22

### Summary

Torey's mom tells him Bo told the chief he knew about his affair with Mrs. McDermott, and he'd already told the chief's daughter Renee. Chief Bowen beat him up, but then resigned. Mrs. Adams thinks Bo will never be charged in connection with Chris's disappearance, because she's pretty sure Chris is a survivor—skills he had to learn to deal with his mom and with his classmates—and no body will be found.

Torey is not so sure. He has a nightmare-filled night, seeing visions of Chris dead in the Lenape burial ground behind Torey's house. Ali says the only way to get rid of those feelings is to go there and see that there is nothing to worry about. They go together.

They go to the central area of the burial ground, a region of white sand and rocks where trees don't grow. Torey leaps to the top of a pyramidal arrangement of three rocks. He sees a cavity formed where the three rocks come together, but when he calls out to Ali, she doesn't answer. Panicking, he leaps on one of the rocks to get down and find her, and the rock almost tips over on top of her where she was trying to look underneath it.

He goes back up, and stretches into the gap between the rocks, and comes up with Creed's laminated map. Before he can look at it, the wind whisks it into the woods, and Torey has no desire to go following it into the trees. Ali and Torey return to the house.

Alex calls, arranging a meeting between just him and Torey for later that night. Alex suggests they go for a walk, and Torey says he doesn't want to go into the burial ground, because it's now creeping him out, after his recent experiences there.

They meet in the woods, and Alex surprises Torey by saying he's got no desire to look for Chris's body, because things have gotten way too serious. One way they've gotten serious is that Renee is after Torey's head, as well as Bo's. She's sure a joking conversation they had at school was a real confession, and she wants them arrested for murder.

Alex thinks Torey knows Bo killed Chris. Torey tells him it was a joke, and when Alex insists, Torey slaps him and pushes him. Renee calls Alex, Torey grabs the phone and yells at her. She must know he's joking, but she's trying to get back at Bo for telling the truth about her dad. She denies it, and maintains she's telling the truth: Bo and Alex confessed.

Even Alex is wondering, and Alex and Torey have been best friends forever, so when Alex leaves, Torey realizes he's got to find Chris's body to prove he and Bo had nothing to do with the death. He heads into the woods.

He briefly sees an image of an Indian, beckoning him through the dark. He makes it to the pyramidal rock arrangement and leaps on top of the rock, but it tips, dumping him



off. It rolls back onto his leg. He rolls it off, hardly feeling the pain, although he sees bone sticking through his flesh. His flashlight reveals a dark hole in the ground that had been covered by the rock.

Torey goes in. He sees several blanket-wrapped bodies of ancient Lenape people, and one body that is out of place. Wearing sneakers, blond hair poking through a blackened, muddy coating of blood covering what remains of the face after a bullet had been sent through the head. Before his eyes, the flesh blackens and burns, leaving ashy bones behind. He screams, somehow climbing out of the hole, and sees red lights and familiar voices.

He wakes in a hospital bed, with a nurse's voice telling him he has to eat to get better. He has a vague memory of the torture of his medical treatment, and thinks he would be better served to stay asleep. Dr. Fahdi comes in then, trying to convince Torey to eat, but Torey engages him in conversation about the portrayals of Christ with a loincloth.

Torey gets transferred to a mental health facility, where he stays for ten days. His mother tells Torey he had discovered the body of Bob Haines, Digger Haines's dad, and the body decomposed so rapidly because it had been deprived of oxygen, then suddenly infused with oxygen when the rock was rolled away. Torey had been certain it was Chris. But still, no one knows what happened to Christopher Creed.

## Analysis

Reality and appearance crash against each other in these chapters. Some things cannot be reconciled. The reality of Chief Bowen's affair is up against the appearance of a healthy family situation, and the family breaks apart. The reality of Alex's friendship with Torey clashes with the appearance of involvement with Chris's death, and the friendship cracks. The reality of Torey's innocence clashes with the appearance of guilt, and he must act to dispel the false appearance and reveal the truth.

The thematic conflict peaks, and now all that is left is the action driven by that conflict. Torey is driven to do exactly what he had claimed he'd never do: go into the burial grounds alone.

As Torey enters the woods, then after he is hurt and is in the hospital, he explicitly thinks about all the ways in which reality is at war with appearance. The discovery of the body and its rapid decomposition bring the action to a close: Torey thinks he's discovered the body. But when it's revealed the body was not Chris's, the thematic conflict remains unresolved.

## Vocabulary

decomposition, phenomenon, diplomacy, silhouette, hypnotic, sandworms, infomercial, schizophrenics, convict, superstitious



# Chapter 23

## Summary

Chapter 23 brings the reader back to the present—the timeframe established in Chapter 1. The chapters that have intervened are all part of Creed.doc, a file Torey has been sending to various people on the internet.

Torey and a couple of his buddies are playing a prank on Leo, the strange kid. It doesn't work, and Torey find himself trying to explain. He ends up apologizing to Leo for getting annoyed with him the night before, saying he's got some problems weighing on him.

Leo surprises Torey by knowing about the Creed story, because he found Torey's website and read it. Rather than discuss it further, Torey walks back to his room, where he reviews a document he put together the night before.

Torey's latest document summarizes the remainder of his junior year at Steepleton. Renee still accusing Bo and Torey of murdering Chris and of spreading lies to ruin her family. Alex finally apologizing to Torey, but they ended up growing apart anyway. Justin Creed telling the principal and the police that Chris had argued with their mother over privileges, and Chris had read aloud the note he intended to send the next day—making nonsense out of Mrs. Creed's claim her son would not have written such a note.

Torey has since found himself able to write lyrics more easily—lyrics he is proud of. Torey continues to search for Creed. He's searching on the internet for people who could be Chris Creed, making combinations from the names of people who Chris wrote he wanted to be. Then Torey reports on three responses he's received, from flattering to hopeful.

## Analysis

Chapter 23 serves to reveal the changes in Torey's character due to the events of the book. He explicitly acknowledges some, while the reader is left to infer other changes.

The final responses serve to illustrate the central question of the book still remains: Is Christopher Creed alive, and, if so, where is he? The fact the questions remain emphasizes the thematic question remains as well: how should the conflict between appearance and reality be resolved?

## Vocabulary

tolerance, bizarre, corresponds, figurative, humiliation, enormous, dissertation, inept, pondering, agonizing



# Characters

## Victor “Torey” Adams

A junior in high school, kicker on the football team, son of well-to-do parents, honors student, guitar player and songwriter. He’s got a life that’s essentially without problems. Unlike his friends, however, he empathizes with those who do have problems. He’s trying to come to terms with his own mistakes and the mistakes of others.

## Christopher Creed

A junior in high school. He was always the weird kid, the one who just didn’t know how to fit in. Just about all the boys in school have, at one time or another, found him to be so annoying they belted him, out of frustration, if for nothing else. Now Chris Creed has left a note saying he wished to be gone, so he is. He has disappeared, and no one knows how or why.

## Ali McDermott

A junior in high school, she has been sleeping around with more than her share of guys. She doesn’t know why—maybe to do something that would horrify her father; maybe to follow in her mother’s footsteps? Despite that bad reputation, she’s not a girl who will gossip about others, and she tries to see people for who they are, rather than what their reputation says they are.

## Sylvia Creed

An ex-Navy pilot, this mother of three boys tries to run their lives with that same military precision. Perhaps that desire for control was one of the factors in her son Chris’s disappearance. Perhaps not. She seems, however, determined to find someone to blame for whatever it is that has happened to Chris.

## Alex Arrington

A Junior at Steepleton High, and Torey’s best friend and band mate. They have been best friends for as long as they can remember, but their relationship is strained by Alex’s connection with his girlfriend Renee and all the hullabaloo surrounding Chris’s disappearance.



## **Susan Ames**

Torey's mother, and a criminal lawyer. She is observant and intelligent, and more aware of reality than Torey tends to give her credit for. She is also quite aware her son is affected by scenes of violence.

## **Daryl Bowen**

Mr. Bowen is the Chief of Police in Steepleton. He is not above throwing his weight around when he thinks he's found the truth, but he might not be as diligent in trying to find the truth as one would hope.

## **Renee Bowen**

High school junior who is one of the cool kids. She loves to gossip, and appears to define herself and her friends by the associations they make. She holds firmly to her illusions even after they are exposed.

## **Dr. Fahdi**

The doctor is trying to help Torey deal with the terrible event he's been through, seeing the body of a man who's died a violent death crumble and burn in front of him. The doctor suggests writing the events might help Torey deal with them, and also suggests finding Chris Creed might be the best therapy of all.

## **Bo Richardson**

Bo is a student at Steepleton High School, and lives in Pine Barrens. He's been in enough trouble with the law to have a file twenty pages thick at the police department. He has had well over his share of hardship, but retains an inner sense of honor and a consideration for the people around him.

## **Leo**

Leo is a socially inept student at Rothborne. His lack of social graces reminds Torey a lot of Christopher Creed.



# Objects/Places

## Steepleton

Steepleton is a middle- to upper-middle-class town, somewhere in the mid-Atlantic/Eastern Seaboard States. The houses are attractive, and there are parks and woods around town.

## Lenape Burial Grounds

In the woods behind Torey Adams's house is a Lenape burial ground. He has played in that burial ground for years, but it begins to hold a fearful significance after Chris Creed disappears.

## Pine Barrens

Pine Barrens (sometimes just called "the Barrens") is a town close to Steepleton. It is lower class, perhaps even filled with "undesirables." The cool kids at high school look down on kids from here, calling them "boons."

## Christopher Creed's Diary

Christopher Creed left a suicide note talking about how he'd like to have any life other than his own. That's pretty much all it said, so Torey and Mrs. Creed are both looking for the diary, hoping it contains hints to Chris's disappearance.

## Steepleton High School Cafeteria

Torey and his friends hang out at the cafeteria at Steepleton High School. It seems to be the only place in the school where all the kids see each other: the smart ones, the slow ones, and the troublemakers. The kids appear to make a lot out of what they see in the cafeteria.

## The Wawa

The Wawa is a convenience store/deli that is the local hangout for the kids of Steepleton and Pine Barrens. Although at times Torey goes here to "get away," he can't really get away from people he knows, as the other kids all hang out here, too.



## **Torey's Guitar**

Torey is the most serious member of his band, and also the only one interested or capable of writing his own music. His peers generally admire his playing, and he is protective of his Ovation guitar.

## **Rothborne**

Rothborne is a boarding school. Torey attends Rothborne after leaving Steepleton, unwilling or unable to deal with the changes in his friends and in himself after Chris Creed's disappearance.

## **Creed.doc**

Creed.doc is the filename Torey has given to the narrative he wrote about the events subsequent to Chris Creed's disappearance. The contents of Creed.doc are presented in Chapters 2 through 22, the same contents Torey is sending out on the internet.

## **Depictions of Christ on the Cross**

Torey is struck by the contradiction between the Biblical story of the Crucifixion, which states that Jesus was naked, and all the portrayals of Christ, that show him wearing a loincloth of some sort. The specific portrayal in the stained glass in his church opens Torey's narrative, and a more general discussion closes the narrative in Creed.doc.





# Themes

## Appearance and Reality

“It’s amazing how things can be so different from how they sound.” Variations on that statement appear throughout the book. Chapter 2, the first entry in Torey’s “Creed.doc” file, starts with Torey’s discomfort at the contradiction between the Bible story of Christ’s crucifixion and the artistic portrayals of Jesus on the cross. All the artistic renditions show Jesus draped with a loincloth, but the Bible says he was naked on the cross. This is not a new disturbance for Torey, but something that bothered him well before Creed disappeared. When he’d pursued it, the Reverend told him the truth was less important than the impact truth would have on people.

That troubles Torey, especially in the context of the church’s prohibition on lying, and here’s this big lie.

Torey had made assumptions about Chris Creed, based on his outward appearance, and those assumptions ended up being wrong. Perhaps Torey’s assumptions (and the assumptions of others like him) played a role in Chris’s disappearance. That triggers him to evaluate his other assumptions about reality based on appearance.

For example, he hasn’t even talked with Bo Richardson aside from not letting Bo use Torey’s guitar some years ago, yet he believes Bo is boorish, scary, and thuggish. When he does meet Bo, he finds Bo to be brave and considerate, even self-sacrificing. His defense of Bo triggers a break between Torey and his previous circle, because they are content to believe the incorrect image they hold.

## Good Illusions vs. Bad

In several places, the book explicitly acknowledges everyone lives with illusion, with beliefs that differ from reality. Leandra believes she doesn’t like to gossip, when she does nothing but talk about others; churchgoers believe Christ died wearing a loincloth, when he was crucified naked; Renee believes her father was hounded by lies of infidelity, when he was shamed by the reality of his multiple affairs; Chris Creed makes up a world where he was the dashing lover of a beautiful shy woman, when they had hardly hooked up—and that was her doing, not his.

When people’s illusions are too far from reality, something breaks, as, indeed, happened with Chris Creed. Within these illusions, however, some are acknowledged as being good, and some as being bad. Renee’s illusions drive her to spread lies about her father and her classmates—some of those lies rather poisonous. Chris, however, fools himself to make the world more bearable. Torey (and, by extension, author Plum-Ucci) separate these illusions into two classes: Renee’s was meant to do harm, and Chris’s to save himself. Some of the other self-delusions are left to the reader to evaluate.

# Style

## Point of View

The Body of Christopher Creed is written in first person, from the perspective of Victor “Torey” Adams, a junior at Steepleton High School. Although this perspective necessarily limits the information the author can provide, it allows the author to present both events and thoughts of the narrator.

Through the interactions with other characters, the reader learns Torey is a sensitive guy, in at least two senses of the word. He is easily disturbed by images of violence, and he empathizes with other people. This puts the reader inside the mind of a character who is making an effort to put himself in the minds of other characters. This choice of perspective has the advantage of presenting a model of what the author hopes readers will do: make an effort to put themselves in the mind of the narrator. It also means the mystery of Chris Creed’s disappearance will never be solved.

## Setting

Steepleton, a middle- to upper-middle-class town somewhere on the eastern seaboard of the present-day United States. The economic strata represented by Steepleton and neighboring Pine Barrens provide a convenient shortcut to establishing a shortcut to designate an “us” and “them,” which provides a framework for the central theme of the novel, distinguishing reality and appearance.

Youngsters from Steepleton (some of whom we are told have “perfect lives”) have little interaction with the kids from Pine Barrens. Each side judges the other based solely on appearance, until something breaks the barrier. For Ali, the barrier is broken by her chance interaction with Bo, while it takes Chris Creed’s disappearance to get Torey to cross that barrier. The setting allows these two groups to be set up naturally, although the author notes every place has “its own version of boons.”

## Language and Meaning

The language is direct and straightforward. The style is a straightforward narrative, and makes little use of metaphor or simile, and sticks to fairly common vocabulary. In general, this is in keeping with the nominal source of the material, a teenage boy. On the other hand, the boy is presented as an honors student, so the language could quite easily have been more stylistically involved.

Torey is a thoughtful character, in the sense he thinks about his own motives and actions and tries to discover the reasons behind them. He is, however, not thoughtful in the sense of trying to connect the events in his life to events outside his life. That is, he doesn’t draw parallels or make analogies that might help him understand. That

language choice creates a focus on the events within the story in and of themselves, which reflect a character choice on the part of the author.

## Structure

The book is written in 23 chapters. The first and last chapters are in “the present.” Chapters 2 through 22 are nominally “Creed.doc,” a summary of the events surrounding the disappearance of Chris Creed. Aside from the bookend chapters, the story unrolls in generally linear fashion, with events reported in the order in which they occurred.

The opening chapter introduces the narrator and establishes the mystery. The reader knows something life-changing has happened to Torey, something that created the need to escape. The central chapters outline the life-changing events. The return to the present in the final chapter allows the reader to judge the extent to which the life-changing events have actually triggered changes in Torey’s character.



## Quotes

He was stiff and stern, almost like an old man caught in a middle-aged guy's body. Mrs. Creed did all the talking, usually. He did all the frowning. (Chapter 2)

This weird kid leaves, but the weirdness stays. It starts coming out of everybody else. I felt like Chris's ghost was in us, trying to speak. Trying to make us feel what he felt, trying to make us understand. (Chapter 11)

Bo Richardson's not all bad, Dad. He's got a good streak that...runs really deep. It's just not...wide.' Whatever. I was tired. (Chapter 14)

I was scared that these allegedly respectable people let this thing get so bad. I guess I thought seeing a situation clearly was just part of being a grown-up. (Chapter 17)

Why do people have so much trouble seeing their own faults but such an easy time seeing everyone else's? (Chapter 18)

Did anyone ever tell you that you get too emotionally involved in things?'... "I didn't think I'd ever had anything to become emotionally involved in before. (Chapter 19)

I was more scared of living people than dead people. I needed dead people to help me fight living people. (Chapter 21)

I felt his wish for make-believe to come alive, for some sort of control over the universe so that if life started to suck, you could just imagine something else into existence. (Chapter 21)

It's not cultural, it's universal. This picking of truths, like you're picking melons at Superfresh. (Chapter 21)

He didn't understand what it was like to have your truths turn to crispy critters in stinking, rotting laughing that smelled like something you could never, ever describe, yet never, ever forget. Flaming pickled cow's ass would not do that smell one-tenth of a hair of justice. (Chapter 21)

I've stayed awake wondering what people think when they spit out some enormous lie, like, do they even stop to think, Why am I saying this? (Chapter 23)

The horror is that I was in mental health, and Mrs. Creed was still cooking dinners, chauffeuring kids to and from school, and making speeches in church. (Chapter 23)

[Maybe Creed] made the decision that Chris Creed—or at least those parts of himself that he wrote that he hated—would die. (Chapter 23)



# Topics for Discussion

## Topic 1

Every day, Torey's girlfriend Leandra makes a deal with herself that she won't talk evil about people. Yet, every day by third period, she's back at it. Does this self-delusion fall into the harmless category, or is this the kind of destructive illusion that has created the whole Chris Creed mess?

## Topic 2

Torey is accused of seeing "everybody's side in everything;" he thinks about what he would be like if he had Bo's life; and Torey later reflects on how he "walked in little Greg's shoes...in Lyle Corsica's shoes...Ali's shoes." Is that accurate; does he really empathize with other people? If so, does this character trait serve him well?

## Topic 3

Torey says Renee's self-delusion is bad because she's trying to do harm, while Chris's self-delusion was fine because he was just trying to cope with his tough life. Do the events of the novel bear that out; was Chris's self-delusion fine?

## Topic 4

Leo, Torey's dorm-mate at Rothborne, reminds Torey of Chris. Torey is short with him, and goes along with a prank on Leo, but he also is willing to let Leo use his guitar. Has Torey changed because of his experience with Chris? Does he treat Leo differently than he had treated Chris?

## Topic 5

The email notes provide several different interpretations of Torey's story, and leave several different impressions of what might have happened to Chris. Why do you think the author left those different possibilities open?