

# **Get in Trouble Study Guide**

## **Get in Trouble by Kelly Link**

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# Plot Summary

This study guide was created using the following version of this book: Link, Kelly. *Get in Trouble*. Random House Trade Paperback, 2015.

*Get in Trouble* is a collection of nine short stories that are connected by multiple themes instead of recurring characters. Each story stands alone.

The collection opens with “The Summer People” a haunting story of a teenaged girl tasked with caring for magical creatures known as Summer People, who cannot escape her duties. “I Can See Right Through You” is about a Demon Lover who contacts Meggie during a slumber party Ouija board session and falls in love. They both become famous, but their relationship does not last.

“Secret Identity” is the story of Billie, a 15-year-old girl, who has gone to meet a much older man after meeting him online. The man is unaware of her age and leaves the hotel after he sees the girl. Through Billie’s letter, she apologizes to the man and tries to explain why she did what she did and how she remains in love with him.

“Valley of the Girls” tells the story of a young man locked in a tomb with his sister while she seeks her revenge for how he humiliated her.

In “Origin Story” a young man and woman discuss their previous relationship with each other and flirt with renewing it. They explore her burgeoning superpowers and address his fears about his powers not being enough to save the world. But the woman has a secret child and grapples with whether or not to tell him the child may be his.

The story “The Lesson” finds a young, married, gay couple anticipating the arrival of their child via surrogate. While the birth mother is having complications with her pregnancy, the men attend their friend’s wedding on an island. While they are away, she goes into premature labor and the baby struggles to survive.

“The New Boyfriend” examines the relationships of teenage girls and the competition between them. When Ainslie receives a gift of a Ghost Boyfriend, Immy is jealous. She begins her own relationship with the Ghost Boyfriend to exorcise her jealousy and comes to terms with her friendships and burgeoning sexuality.

“Two Houses” tells the story of two spaceships on a long voyage in the future. Passengers on one of the ships are awakened for a birthday party. They celebrate by having cake and telling ghost stories, including one about two houses in which one a grisly murder took place.

“Light” is story of a woman living in Florida whose husband has left her. Her brother comes to stay with her and starts a relationship with one of his sister’s employees. When the employee attempts suicide, the woman decides to flee after a hurricane opens up a pocket universe.

The stories use magical realism and the supernatural to heighten the reality of the story. Other themes explored include escapism and alienation, dysfunctional relationships, and how the characters throughout the collection must grapple with the growing pains of coming of age.



# Stories 1 and 2

## Summary

The first story in the collection is titled “The Summer People.” Fran, who has the flu, is asleep when her daddy wakes her up. He tells her that he is leaving for a few weeks and that she needs to take care of the summer people. She asks, but he does not tell her where he is going. He shows her the monkey egg, one of her old toys, reminding her that he does not like them. She asks that he stay and look after her, but he tells her he cannot because he needs to go away to get right. She asks about his drinking and he tells her that he is “talking about a lifetime” (6).

Fran has a fever of 102.3. She returns to school on Friday and sees Ophelia Merck, the daughter of a wealthy family who used to summer at their lake house, but now live there year round. Rumors about why the family moved vary from Ophelia being a lesbian to her father being sued for malpractice. While at school, Fran’s temperature spikes again and Ophelia offers to take her home. They stop at a convenience store where Fran has to buy things to set up the Roberts’ house for her daddy. Fran talks to Andy at the store about the liquor her daddy makes because they live in a dry county. On the way to the Roberts house, Ophelia and Fran talk about college and Fran explains that her family is not the type to leave the town.

They arrive at Fran’s house and Ophelia goes inside with Fran. She tells Fran that someone should be looking after her while she is sick. Fran tells her that she “don’t go for girls” (13). Ophelia picks up the monkey egg and Fran shows her how it works: the toy vibrates before revealing portholes until it cracks open and a monkey pops out. Ophelia compares it to a Faberge egg. Fran tells her about the other toys. Before Ophelia leaves, she tells Fran she will pop by to check on her in the morning.

When Ophelia arrives the next morning with breakfast sandwiches, Fran is burning up. Fran refuses to go to a doctor and gives Ophelia an envelope and directions to a house. She instructs her to take the envelope to the third door down the hall and bring back whatever is given to her. She tells her to “be bold” (17) and that everything will make sense when she gets there.

Ophelia goes to the house and follows Fran’s instructions. She spots a carving that reads: “BE BOLD, BE BOLD, BUT NOT TOO BOLD” (18). When Ophelia slides the envelope under the door, and something slips out of her pocket. She waits outside for a response. Ophelia returns to Fran and asks who lives in the house and Fran explains that they are the summer people.

Ophelia gives her a glass with an embroidered note telling Fran to drink the potion. Ophelia describes her experience like something out of a fairy tale, especially how two foxes went into the house and returned with the potion for her. Fran tells Ophelia she is a true friend and that she will find a way to make it up to her. Ophelia promises to not



tell anyone what she saw. Fran falls asleep, and when she wakes up, Ophelia asks about the summer people and all the stuff they collect in the house. Fran explains that they make things like the toys and they are indebted to those who do things for them. The agreement, however, is that whomever takes care of them cannot leave. Fran's mother took care of them until Fran was old enough and then her mother left. Ophelia tells Fran that it was not right for her mother to do such a thing and Fran explains that she would like to get away once in a while.

Fran tells Ophelia about a bedroom in the house where if one sleeps there, they will see their heart's desire. Fran offers to take her to the house and show her the room and get the iPod Ophelia dropped at the house. At the house, Fran finds Ophelia's iPod, which the summer people have made her a new case of walnut, ebony, and gilt. Ophelia begins to say thanks and Fran cuts her off, explaining that she do not like to be thanked. Fran takes Ophelia to the bedroom and warns her that she should never go into the room where she slid the envelope on her first trip. Ophelia asks how they tell her what they need and she explains that they get in her head somehow and let her know. Before Fran leaves, she explains that they will have left her a gift that they think she needs or wants. As Fran leaves, she finds a guitar with silver strings on the porch.

Two men appear: Ryan and Kyle, both looking for Fran's daddy and his private stash of liquor. Fran leads them into the house and tells them to go into the third door on the left. Fran finds one of the summer people on the porch with a knife. She stares at him and then runs away. Fran leaves town with the guitar and monkey egg. When Fran gets to New York City, she sells the guitar and a Lebanese boy steals the egg. Two years pass and she thinks she will eventually go back.

The second story in the collection is "I Can See Right Through You." Fawn and the demon lover have a falling out after a sex tape and the demon lover turns to Meggie after a sex tape is leaked. The story is non-linear, with vignettes of different time periods. The first is 1991 after a movie is released and the demon lover and Meggie are celebrities. Meggie tells him a story about when she was young and playing with an Ouija board with a friend. The planchette spells out Meggie's name and how the demon lover will find her and tells her that he loves her. The story shifts briefly to a nudist colony in 1974 where 22 people disappear and then back to 1990 where the kiss between Meggie and the demon lover has become an iconic screen kiss.

The section in 2012 shifts briefly to second person and how fame has affected your life. It returns to third person with a section in 2010. Meggie and the demon lover have their annual Halloween party. The demon lover thinks about what it means to be a demon lover, how he does not age and his hairline does not recede. The story returns to the nudist colony where ghost hunters inspect the buildings. The demon lover thinks about people disappearing and the possibility of them returning. A film crew is setting up for a film about the nudist colony. The demon lover calls Meggie's name and she appears. They go to her trailer and she explains about the nudity in the film. They talk about the falling out the demon lover had with Fawn. Meggie tells him he should go back to Fawn, but he says he does not love her. He wonders who lives in the house he used to share with Meggie.



On set the next day, the demon lover asks a woman who had a near death experience what was so great about it. He meets Ray, who tells the demon lover a joke and says he has seen all of the demon lover's movies. The demon lover thinks that "everyone he meets has seen his sex tape" (63), but it is never mentioned. That night, he wonders where he will stay and Meggie tells him that he should go back to Fawn. A séance is filmed at the nudist colony and nothing happens. Meggie talks about how the mystery of the nudist colony has never been solved.

Meggie and the demon lover talk about what went wrong in their relationship. Meggie has told Ray some things about their relationship and when they lived together, and he wonders just how much. The demon lover begins to flirt with Pilar, who is naked, like most everyone on set. She shares a cabin with Juliet, the missing girl. The demon lover and Pilar have sex and then dress in case Juliet returns. The demon lover takes Pilar's iPhone while she is asleep and texts Fawn, calling her a bitch and whore among other names. The demon lover goes to Meggie's room and finds her in bed with Ray, who has his hand on Meggie's breast. The next morning, Pilar confronts the demon lover about the texts on her phone and he blames it on being drunk. Fawn reaches out to Meggie and the demon lover thinks he should have left. Meggie tells him that the next episode of the series will be at the Winchester House. She gets in the car to leave. Juliet returns and Meggie vanishes, leaving the demon lover as a suspect, but is not charged. He tells the media that Meggie left with Ray, but no one believes Ray exists and Ray does not appear in any frame of video for the show.

## Analysis

"The Summer People" is the opening story in the collection. While this world is not shared explicitly by the other stories, it seeks to establish a world in which the reader enters with the expectation of the norm. Fran is living with her father. They are not wealthy and the father struggles with and swings between alcohol benders and repenting with the church. Fran narration demonstrates her dysfunctional relationship with her father. She is sick and needs to be cared for, but her father leaves her because he has to get to church. This isolates Fran. She is further isolated when she makes an attempt to return to school. Fran is not interacting with other students or participating in class. She knows she is ill and needs help. When she does connect with a classmate it is Ophelia.

Ophelia as a character is painted as isolated like Fran, but for different reasons. While Fran is isolated because of her socioeconomic background, Ophelia's family has money. Ophelia's isolation stems from rumors, not merely about her father, but rather because of rumors about her sexuality. Fran puts a boundary up to ensure that Ophelia does not get the wrong impression about Fran. This defensiveness is likely less about Ophelia's sexuality and more about Fran's protectiveness of her own secret: the Summer People.

As Fran's health deteriorates, Fran must seek help from Ophelia. Instead of getting a doctor, Fran sends Ophelia to the Summer House to get something from the Summer



People. Before Ophelia is sent to the house, she has been introduced to a type of magic to help her prepare to believe. Ophelia sees the monkey egg, which symbolizes the entrance into a magical world and introduces the theme of magical realism. Ophelia reveres the eggs, likening its value to a Fabergé egg. This reverence for the egg may be part of the reason Fran feels she can trust Ophelia. Fran knows she needs the Summer People's help, but in order to receive it, she must rely on Ophelia. Fran's trust of Ophelia becomes a metaphor for the trust the reader places in the author. While the world the author builds may differ from the expectations of reality, the reader knows to follow.

As Ophelia makes her way through the Summer House, she follows Fran's guidance, but ends up dropping her iPod in the process. The Summer People interpret this as a gift. This is not intentional, but it opens an opportunity for Ophelia and Fran. Fran is bound to the Summer People and caring for them. Her situation is symbolic of Fran's social status. In contrast to Ophelia, Fran does not have the opportunities to get out of her situation because she is prohibited, not just by her obligation to the Summer People, but because of her family's socioeconomic standing. Without the Summer People, Fran may not be able to get out through education or what money can provide, while Ophelia likely could. Fran sees her opportunity to escape in Ophelia. When the Summer People offer the jeweled iPod case for Ophelia, Fran sees that they are accepting of her.

When Ophelia makes her way through the house and reads the signs about being BOLD and receiving the potion for Fran, the reader may get a sense that the author is making an allusion to Alice in Wonderland, or perhaps one of Grimm's Fairy Tales. As with the original Grimm Fairy Tales, the ending is not happily ever after. The Summer People dispatch with the men who attached Fran in an effort to get to her father.

When Fran arranges for Ophelia to take care of the Summer People, she gives herself the opportunity to escape. Two years go by and Fran contemplates returning, but it is likely that she will never go back. She thinks that she will, but her life is different. She has grown up and seen what may be available to her outside of her hometown. It is not as though Fran is now privy to a great life. Hardships remain, but she is outside of a world in which she felt trapped. When the monkey egg is stolen from Fran, it is as though someone has taken a key to her past. The monkey egg is gone, just as Fran is.

"I Can See Right Through You" continues with the theme of coming of age. Like Fran transitioning into the next phase of her life, so do Meggie and the Demon Lover. While the Demon Lover is immortal, it may seem strange to understand his character in terms of coming of age. His immortality gives him repeated opportunity to understand the changes he witnesses in other people's lifetimes. He may be able to find a place in current day, but he eventually comes to admit that he must move away from where he was.

The dysfunctional relationship between the Demon Lover and Meggie begins when she is a teenager and she and her friend are playing with an Ouija board. Like the monkey egg in the previous story, the Ouija board becomes the entrance into the otherworldly. The Demon Lover is able to first communicate with Meggie through the board. He





professes his love and devotion to her. While he eventually finds his way to her, their relationship is not easy. The author chooses to show the relationship with the background of celebrity. This offers social commentary on how people view celebrity and attempt to understand what is happening in relationships that people would not have a true understanding of. In this way, the reader or audience becomes part of the dysfunctional relationship with celebrity.

The Demon Lover remains devoted to Meggie, but their relationship has faltered. He married Fawn and is now in the process of divorcing. He returns to Meggie, only to find that she has moved on with her life. While she maintains a connection with the Demon Lover, Meggie lives in a different reality than him. She is not merely a performer, but uses her celebrity to offer commentary on the supernatural. She uses reality television as her platform, but much of what is around her remains unknown. While it could be argued that the nudist colony is used as a metaphor for celebrity culture and how they become exposed to the public, the nudist colony may also be a metaphor for Meggie as her past relationships.

If the Demon Lover is not viewed as an actual demon, but rather as an accumulation of past lovers that haunt Meggie, he becomes symbolic of a past from which Meggie must break free. She is not interested in staying with the Demon Lover. She does not dismiss him outright, but does not engage with him in a way that gives him hope. He appears jealous of Ray, but as the story closes, Ray is presented as something or someone that may not have existed.

Because the story is told through the lens of the Demon Lover, the reader witnesses Meggie disappearing. If the Demon Lover is representative of her past, Meggie is then seen as moving away from destructive relationships and seeking something better for herself. The use of immortality in the Demon Lover allows the reader to then understand that he remains in her mind as he was when they were young. That is how she will remember him and move on.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why does Ophelia help Fran?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What does Fran's decision to leave Ophelia reveal about her character?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Why does the Demon Lover tell the media that Meggie left with Ray?



## Vocabulary

malpractice, deadpan, counterpane, filigreed, delirious, spyglass, lintel, fusty, frolics, tintypes, dirigibles, tethered, zeppelins, opined, beholden, chifferobe, inlaid, busk, piecemeal, restitution, talisman, planchette, declivities, pantomime, stucco, proprietor, alibi, psychometric, gimmick, uncanny, kleptomaniac, masochist, phosphorous, guise, tableaux, glint, scrutiny, junkets, endearment, dubious



# Stories 3 and 4

## Summary

The third story is titled "Secret Identity" and is in epistolary form. It is a letter to Paul Zell from a 15-year-old girl who pretended to be older. It opens with the girl explaining that she has made false starts of the letter, but is now choosing to pretend she is not writing it to Paul. She apologizes and asks that they pretend they do not know each other, imagining them in New York City in a hotel restaurant. She admits that most of what she has told him is a lie, and that they may be in love. Paul is 34. They met online through FarAway. She apologizes again and writes about the hotel lobby and Aliss, the hotel clerk. She mentions girls she has had problems with in school. She reveals that Melinda Bowles, the 32-year-old woman she pretended to be, does not play chess or video games or know that Paul exists, but is real. She begins referring to herself in the third person, revealing her name to be Billie.

Billie goes to the hotel desk to see if Paul has left something for her, but Aliss cannot find anything. She explains that she does not know much about superheroes. Aliss redirects Billie to the convention registration if she is at the hotel to audition. Billie does not understand. Conrad interjects into the conversation. Conrad clearly knows Aliss and she confronts him about where he went the night before. Aliss finds an envelope for Billie and gives it to her. Inside she finds a room key. She confesses that she having a difficult time in school and at home and how much time she spends online. She does not have a lot of friends and plays in FarAway a lot. She admits that she used Melinda's, her sister, identity online.

Billie returns to telling Paul about Conrad, who she guesses is in his late teens to early twenties. He asks her if she is at the hotel to audition to be a sidekick and she wonders why people keep asking her this. She admits to Paul that she did not care about what Paul looked like. She asks if he saw her. She returns to talking about herself in the third person, revealing that Billie went to Paul's hotel room. She goes through his suitcase, commenting on the neatness of his packing. She finds a ring and slips it on. She did not bring anything with her so that she did not rouse suspicion. The letter continues to shift from first to third person as she describes being in the hotel room and how their timing is off. She does not want to wait until she is older because she does not think she will ever fall in love with anyone else. She asks Paul if he feels like someone is watching him. She writes about the characters in FarAway and the spells and healing herbs they have. She leaves the hotel room and talks with one of the superheroes. Knowing Paul is late, she explains that she checked the front desk for messages to no avail. She returns to the hotel room and begins to drink from the minibar. She admits that she does not remember much of what happened next, except that she was vomiting and someone was holding her hair. When she gets up again, Paul's suitcase is gone.

Billie begins part two of her letter, returning to third person and Conrad. They talk and have espresso. Conrad says it will make Aliss jealous to see him with Billie. He guesses



her age at about 16 and asks if she came to the city to meet up with a “pervert she met online” (110). Billie explains that she was pretending to be her older sister. They talk more about superheroes and Conrad explains about the “superhero triangle” (113), which indicates the likelihood of one becoming a superhero. It includes playing chess, weird coincidences, and bed-wetting, along with a special ability. Billie denies that she will become a superhero. Conrad invites her to a party in the penthouse. She goes back to the room and the key still works. Outside, she runs into Lightswtich, the superhero she encountered earlier. They talk and she gives Billie her card in case she wants to become a sidekick. Later Billie goes to Conrad’s party. She continues to wear the ring, slipping it off and on. Conrad tells her his superpower is money. He shows Billie the butter sculptures that Ernesto has made that are being stored in a walk-in freezer. The sculptures are of supervillains as chess pieces. Conrad starts a food fight with the sculptures. When they are done, Conrad asks if it was fun. Billie tells Paul in the letter that it was fun and that she understands why supervillains destroy things. As Billie and Conrad are parting ways, she checks to see if Paul’s ring is still in her pocket. Later she puts the ring in an envelope and addresses it to Ernesto and writes a note. She explains that the ring is Paul’s and that if he comes back for it he may give Ernesto a reward. She closes the letter by telling Paul that she did not lie about everything and that she loves him. She tells him that she will return to New York City when she is 18 and wait in Bryant Park with her chess set and tells him “your move” (130).

The fourth story is “Valley of the Girls” is told from the first person perspective of an unnamed young man. He remembers considering working out and eating healthier, but returned quickly to his old ways. He and Hero are locked inside a pyramid together and she has a poisonous snake and admits she has made a mistake. The man asks for the code to get out, but she will not give it him. He thinks about Alicia and the other names of people written in hieroglyphs. Hero refuses to speak to him. He looks at the walk-in closet in the burial chamber. Inside are pillows, jewelry, makeup, and a mummified cat that Hero is keeping for her afterlife. He considers the afterlife of a mummy and how people dig up mummies and the pros and cons of a curse. He asks her to let him out and Hero asks if he remembers Vyvienne crying. He does not understand why she cares because Hero does not like Vyvienne. He tells Hero that people will find them because they have implants, which function as birth control and to make them ill if they consume drugs or alcohol, but he has friends who help him get around getting sick.

He thinks about the different girls he has gone out with. They talk about their Faces, which is a doppelganger. He is regarded as handsome and popular, while Hero is regarded for her intelligence, even the politicians have Faces. He explains that The Olds look after them, ensuring they get into good schools and the like. Hero has planned to kill herself and kill her brother as well. A video of a couple having sex with his and Hero’s Faces has gotten out, making it look as though they have an incestuous relationship. He thinks about how the Egyptians thought the spirit of the person in the pyramid left each night through a false door. Hero is bitten by the snake and dies before she can give him the code to escape, leaving him to face his impending death.



## Analysis

“Secret Identity” tells the story of a dysfunctional relationship between Billie, an underage girl, and Paul, an older man whom she met online. The author presents the story in epistolary form, using the letter form to allow Billie to best express herself given the circumstances.

Billie is aware that what she has done is wrong. She presented herself as much older. Having the story told from Billie’s perspective allows the reader to empathize with both Billie and Paul. If the story were told from Paul’s perspective, he may have been viewed as predatory, whereas Billie’s perspective allows the reader to understand that she is a young woman who is coming of age. For both characters, the virtual relationship may have been real. While Billie is not ready to let go of the relationship – or her love for Paul – as is evidenced by the conclusion of the story when she explains that she will wait for Paul in New York on her birthday when she comes of age.

The only insight into Paul is a brief memory that Billie has while she is severely intoxicated and vomiting. While she is not clear on whether or not it was Paul or someone else, she remembers someone holding back her hair and then she notices that Paul’s luggage is gone. If this was Paul, this demonstrates his care for Billie, but also his rejection of the relationship. Her letter may help him to understand where Billie came from in pursuing the relationship, but it is something he rejects. He does not engage her in any other way.

As Billie composes her letter, she alternates from the first person to the third person. This becomes a metaphor for her personal growth. If this story is an examination of the coming of age theme, the sections in which Billie shifts to third person demonstrate how she is not ready to deal with the emotional consequences of the relationship. Billie believes the love to be real, but also must come to terms with the fact that she has misrepresented herself and lied to Paul. She may be able to state plainly that she loves Paul, but Billie is young and likely does not understand that she has fallen in love with a figment of her imagination. Her intermittent honesty throughout their online relationship does not reflect the reality of the relationship. Even when she acknowledges that she has lied to him, she is able to justify the lying because she is submersed into her own narrative.

Billie is unhappy in her home life and is looking for a way to escape. She wants to be older than she is and experience other aspects of life. While she is at the hotel, she is confronted with two different realities of grown up life. There are two conventions in the hotel where she is set to meet Paul. One is a conference of super heroes and the other is a conferences of dentists. While at the hotel, Billie does not engage with the dentist conference because that would be an acceptance of reality. Should would not be able to interact or understand that group. Because that group is squarely rooted in the real world, Billie’s rejection of it demonstrates her immaturity. The group that Billie does interact with is the superhero group. While she is able to communicate with the group, she does not fully commit to the group or the idea of becoming a superhero or a



sidekick. In a way, Billie's alternating narrative between first and third person is a metaphor for how she interacts with the superhero group. She resists the superhero group enough to demonstrate to the reader that she is maturing, but because it is the group she interacts with, it allows the reader to see her youth and how she is not really prepared for real life as an adult.

Billie writes about her interaction with Conrad largely in the third person. In doing so, she is able to connect herself with someone closer to her own age (she is not quite 16 and he is around 18). She does not accept that connection as being appropriate, which is why she uses the third person. He invites her to a party and she attends. While at the party, Conrad takes her into a freezer where butter sculptures are kept. The sculptures are of supervillains and Conrad encourages her to destroy them. They have a food fight, which is something considered immature, but it also allows Billie to confront perceived villains. She may have engaged in her relationship with Paul because she was unhappy at home. In this regard, the sculptures are symbolic of how she perceives her home life and how her actions with Paul and her trip to New York City reflect her rejection of that home life. Further, the sculptures are made from butter, which is malleable. It can exist in a solid or liquid form, but is also able to be molded in a softened, but not liquid state. The butter symbolizes Billie's transformation from girl to young woman and all the ways what happens around her will work to shape her into what she will become.

"Valley of Girls" continues with the themes of dysfunctional relationships and coming of age. In this story, the first person narrator is unnamed. The narrator builds the world in which the reader sees him, but throughout the story, it is unclear who he is, and as the story concludes, his identity remains unclear, even suggesting that who the reader assumes he is – Hero's brother – that he may actually be her brother's doppelganger.

By setting the story in the tomb, it demonstrates the isolation the characters feel. If the narrator is the doppelganger, it allows the reader to understand that those who pretend to be others are left without identity. They are forgotten. The narrator would like for his tomb to be opened and a curse be released. This would offer him power in the afterlife that he did not experience in his real life.

Hero locks them in the tomb together and holds a poisonous snake in her hand. The snake was likely meant for the narrator, but she is the one bitten. She is unable to give the narrator the code to get out of the tomb, understanding that she is sacrificing herself to stop him. She may know that he is not who he says he is, but she may also be motivated by the shame of the perception that she and her brother were thought to have had a sexual relationship.

The Faces who represent the public image of the people can be regarded as symbolic of actors. By suggesting performance, the character Hero may allude to a famous play. The name Hero may be an allusion to the character Hero in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*. In the play, Hero's reputation is damaged by her betrothed seeing someone else dressed to look like Hero to prevent her marriage to Claudio. While Shakespeare's Hero is offered a happy ending in which the misunderstanding is revealed before anyone is killed, the Hero in this story dies from the snake bite.



## Discussion Question 1

Why does Billie keep the ring she finds in Paul's luggage?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Conrad encourage Billie to destroy the sculptures?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Hero plan to commit the murder-suicide in the tomb?

## Vocabulary

pretentious, malevolently, levitates, atrium, penitent, salient, incognito, penance, subterranean, agoraphobic, behemoth, alias, personage, banter, nemesis, improbable, telekinesis, teleportation, mausoleum, amulet, hieroglyphs, antechamber, divan, viscera, epaulets, pompadour, regalia, geopolitical





# Stories 5 and 6

## Summary

The fifth story in the collection is “Origin Story.” The story takes place at a Land of Oz theme park. A couple are hanging out in the ruins of the theme park. Bunnatine Powderfinger and Biscuit are drinking and talking. Bunnatine thinks there is an ant in her underwear while she discusses the attractiveness of Margaret Hamilton, who played the Wicked Witch of the West. They talk about fairy tales such as Rumpelstiltskin and Little Red Riding Hood. She is drawn to Biscuit and feels as strongly about kissing him as pushing him away. He tells her he was fond of her mother and she says her mother liked him as well. Bunnatine thinks about parallel universes. They talk about Volan Crowe, whom they went to high school with who made comics. They talk about super powers and Biscuit asks her to show him hers, which is floating. She takes off her underwear and floats in front of Biscuit. He pulls her close and sticks his head and hand up her dress.

Later they discuss superheroes and their laundry and what happens. Biscuit asks if she remembers sneaking in to ask her mother questions while she was asleep to see if her mother would reveal the identity of Bunnatine’s father. Bunnatine tells Biscuit that her mother never remarried because she is waiting for Bunnatine’s father to return. Biscuit asks why she never told him that before and she assures him of their friendship. They get into an argument over whether Bunnatine hovers or flies. She remembers a time when she was 14 and got into a car with a strange man. She mentions that the police never found out who killed Biscuit’s parents and he tells her that he took care of it. He asks her why she does not leave and she admits that she is content, but needs to find a new job. They talk about Angel’s leather pants on Buffy the Vampire Slayer and how that signaled he was evil. Bunnatine wonders if he needs to get new leather pants each time he becomes evil or if he keeps them in a closet. Biscuit admits that he will not always be able to save the world and that it is a matter of time before he screws up. When Bunnatine gets home, she wonders if she should tell Biscuit about her kid, but she does not know if the child is Biscuit’s or not.

The sixth story in the collection is called “The Lesson.” Thanh and Harper are expected at a wedding and are fighting over money and work. The wedding is taking place on an island off the coast of South Carolina. They are a gay couple who have hired a surrogate to have a baby for them; her name is Naomi and she is also the egg donor. They do not know the gender of the child and Naomi is currently on bed rest. Their fight continues and they wonder if they should go to the wedding because of the baby. Naomi encourages them to go because there is nothing to be done but wait. Thanh and Harper fly out to Fleur’s wedding, whom they know from Bikram yoga. They are staying at the Bad Claw Lodge, which is somewhat dilapidated. Inside is a piece of taxidermy of an extinct animal that the island is named after. Fleur wonders if the animal is worth more than the house. She tells them there is no phone or cell service. Thanh and Harper again start to argue, this time over whether they should return to the mainland to check





for messages from Naomi or Han, Thanh's mother. Harper figures out that he can swim to the mainland at low tide.

Harper takes a boat back to the island and takes Thanh aside to talk. In his conversation with Naomi, Harper learned that they're having a boy and that the doctors have given Naomi something to stop her contractions and another drug to help the baby's lungs if he is born prematurely. At night, they hear strange noises in the cabin and in the morning, the wedding guests head for to the beach. Fleur has brought lots of wedding dresses that she bought with poker money at a bridal basement sale. She has everyone put on a dress. Harper realizes that while the dresses are meant to be fun, he does not find it so.

The baby is born and Harper goes to the mainland. Thahn stays on the island and is drinking. When Harper returns, he tells him about how William, the baby, is being treated, and the risks he faces, including the possibility of cerebral palsy, blood transfusions, and brain bleeds. The next morning, Harper asks Thahn if he remembers anything Harper told him the night before. They take a boat to the mainland and travel to the Children's Hospital. They eventually bring William home from the hospital and he learns to walk. As he gets older, Naomi tells Thanh that she forgets "that he didn't die" (211).

## Analysis

"Origin Story" opens with an allusion to the Wizard of Oz. The setting is a run-down Wizard of Oz theme park. Both Bunnatine and Biscuit are talking about the story, during which Biscuit sexualizes the death of the Wicked Witch of the West. Further allusions through the story include fairy tales and Buffy the Vampire Slayer.

It is clear in the story that Bunnatine and Biscuit have a past with each other. They appear to know and understand each other well, but Biscuit appears to hold power over her. It is not necessarily in a negative way, but rather in a way that overshadows her personal growth. As a superhero, he questions how long he will be effective. He has resolved his quest to avenge his parent's death, which is a common trope in superhero narratives.

Bunnatine is in a different place than Biscuit. She is in the process of becoming a superhero, refining her powers and understanding her capabilities. Biscuit wants to see how her powers are coming along. He asks for her to demonstrate her ability to float. In doing so, however, he sexualizes her. Much as is seen with how comics are drawn, the male superheroes may have capes or be drawn with emphasis on muscles, but female superheroes are highly sexualized in their depiction. As soon as Bunnatine begins to demonstrate her power, Biscuit performs oral sex on her. In much the same way that he sexualized the Wicked Witch of the West, he views women through the lens of sexuality.

Afterwards, Bunnatine is further marginalized by the conversation about laundry. While the conversation is presented in a comical fashion, and does prompt an interesting



perspective, laundry is more closely related to the perception of feminine roles. Bunnatine appears to feminize Angel in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* by trying to ascertain how he deals with the leather pants that indicated that his character was an evil character.

As the story draws to a close, Biscuit is coming to terms with the limits of his superpowers. He acknowledges that he will not always be able to save the world. In a way this offers opportunity to Bunnatine. Perhaps it will be her to make up for what he is unable to do, perhaps it will be someone else.

By the time Bunnatine returns home, the reader learns that she has a child and that Biscuit may be the father. She contemplated telling him, but chose not to. She is unsure of whether or not the child is his, but it may be that she does not want to lose her child to him. In much the same way Bunnatine waited for her own father to return when she was younger, she may fear that her child would bond with Biscuit only to have him leave. She wants to protect her child the alienation she felt when she was younger.

“The Lesson” is the most straight forward of any of the other stories. The story does not use magical realism or any supernatural elements. Instead, it puts a gay couple at the forefront who are about to have a child via a surrogate.

The story explores Thanh and Harper’s relationship and the issues they face as they are maturing. This continues to develop the ongoing theme of coming of age throughout the novel. Where this development is different is in a shift in age and gender. Previous stories have addressed young girls and women coming of age, whereas “The Lesson” seeks to understand two men coming to terms with the impending changes in their relationship and how having a child will affect it.

Naomi, the surrogate, is on bedrest when Thanh and Harper leave for their friend’s wedding. They question whether or not they should go, but at Naomi’s insistence they do. The wedding is a destination wedding on an island. The island is accessible by boat and does not have telephone or cell service. This isolates the men from being able to keep up-to-date on the Naomi’s pregnancy and getting to her should she go into labor. She does go into labor and the baby is born prematurely. Harper leaves the island to get information and brings the news back to Thanh. While Thanh is on the island, he is able to recognize that his life is moving away from the life he lived before. While previously he would have enjoyed Fleur’s wedding dress, dress-up game, he feels disconnected. He understands that his life is changing. Understanding this leads to acceptance on his part.

The child is born and Thahn and Harper return to the mainland and go to Naomi. It is clear that the baby’s survival is unlikely. As the story comes to a close, it jumps time and the reader learns that the baby survived and has thrived. During a conversation, Naomi explains that she forgets “he didn’t die” (211). William’s survival seemed so unlikely. The time jump allows for the reader to feel similarly.



## Discussion Question 1

Why does Biscuit ask Bunnatine if she remembers asking her mother about the identity of her father?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Bunnatine decide not to tell Biscuit about the child?

## Discussion Question 3

Why do Thanh and Harper decide to go to Fluer's wedding?

## Vocabulary

gondolas, pylons, nemesis, prophylactic, pillage, cabaret, tethered, atrocious, precariously, astute, embellish, frangipani, yurts, dormer, surfactants, amenable, cairn, oscillating, inordinate



# Stories 7 and 8

## Summary

The seventh story in the collection is “The New Boyfriend.” It begins at Ainslie’s birthday party where she receives a new Boyfriend as a gift, which comes in a coffin. They post pictures online of the sushi and cake they ate. The Boyfriend is a life-size doll that can interact with humans. Ainslie has a vampire and a werewolf Boyfriend already, and now a Ghost boyfriend. The other girls do not have one and Immy, who wants a Ghost boyfriend, is jealous. The Ghost boyfriend has two settings” embodied and spectral. The girls drink homemade absinthe. Immy tells Ainslie she left her gift at home after Immy opts not to give the choker with an antique locket to her. The girls discuss a name for the Ghost boyfriend and Ainsley settles on Mint. Listening to the girls, Immy thinks how friendship “is more like a war” (221) at times. Mint is set to spectral and the girls dance with the other Boyfriends. Oliver, the Vampire Boyfriend, tells Immy he wishes she was happier. Immy withdraws from the party and goes to the closet where the Mint is kept. She looks at the braided hair in the locket she was going to give to Ainsley. She puts the braided hair in the compartment at the back of Mint’s throat. Elin, one of the other girls, watches Immy. They talk and Elin reveals that she does not understand the appeal of the Boyfriends.

Because Mint is set to spectral, Ainsley explains that she will just see Mint out of the corner of her eye and that he should watch her because that is what ghosts do. Later, the girls are asleep and Immy wakes from a nightmare to find Mint at her side and then he disappears. A couple weeks go by and Ainsley and Immy talk about Mint. Immy asks if Mint watches Ainsley when she sleeps. She replies no and considers that creepy. The girls go to school and Immy texts Ainsley that she dreamt about Mint, but Ainsley does not reply. One afternoon, Sky asks to turn on Mint and Ainsley says no, not even in embodied mode. Immy remembers how much time they all spent playing with the other dolls. Immy goes to the basement and opens the coffins and finds Mint. She introduces herself to him and tells him that she would not keep him in the basement if he were hers. She wonders whose hair was in the locket. Immy rationalizes that if people have ghosts inside, what would prevent a “real ghost in a fake boy” (237). On the way home with her dad, Immy asks him if he believes in ghosts and he tells her he has never encountered one. She also asks if he believes in true love. He questions why she is asking about death and love. She wonders about how love is portrayed in movies and he explains that that view of love is just a trick. They continue talking and Immy admits that sometimes she hates Ainsley, and her dad explains that is “part of love, too” (241). Immy decides ghosts are real and that she is in love and that she is having an affair with Ainsley’s Boyfriend. Ainsley discovers that Mint has been switched on and she wonders how it happened. Immy does not admit that she is responsible. Immy makes a plan to spend time with Mint over spring break when Ainsley and her family are away. Ainsley tells Immy that she asked her mother if they could sell Mint on eBay, but her mother refused. She is also upset that after Ainsley put a red streak in her hair, her mother did



so as well. A few days later, Immy sneaks into the house to see Mint and tells him that she loves him. She considers turning him off, but cannot bring herself to do so.

Immy proceeds with her plan to sneak Mint out of Ainsley's house and take him to a storage facility so they can spend time together. They sit on the couch together at the storage unit and hold hands. She asks his real name and how he died, but he does not remember. Over spring break Immy spends as much time with Mint as she can. He tells her about the stuff other people have in their storage units. They dance and she asks which hair is his in the braid because there was one strand in the braid that was different than the rest. He replies both and tells her he will never leave her and asks her to stay with him. On another night, she goes to the storage unit and overhears Mint saying the exact same things he said to her about never leaving her. She is confused and reaches into his mouth to get the braid; he fights her and bites down on her fingers. She gets away from him and takes the braid with her. At home, she tweezes the blond hair from the braid and puts the dark hair in the locket intended for Ainsley. She then puts the blond hair in a medicine bag and goes to bed. The next morning she explains to her dad that she and her friends wanted to play a joke on Ainsley by hiding the Boyfriend and asks for his help to put the Boyfriend back because she has had a change of heart. At school, Immy gives Ainsley the locket.

The eighth story in the collection is "Two Houses." It opens on Portia's birthday party and Gwenda is being woken up after seven years; they are on a spaceship called House of Secrets. They celebrate Gwenda's birthday after Portia admits that it was her idea to throw Gwenda a surprise party. Originally there were two ships, the other called House of Mystery, but it has not been seen in 30 years. Maureen tells Gwenda that Sisi saw House of Mystery, but when they replayed the visuals, there was nothing recorded.

They all start telling ghost stories. Maureen tells about Halfmark House, which was built in 1508 and the ghost that lived there. Portia asks for the gravity to be turned off so they can float like ghosts. Gwenda thinks that the gardeners in Maureen's story were ghosts. Sullivan tells a story about a tornado and a missing girl at Halfmark House. The girl died from being almost cut in two from a fallen tree. They all drink and continue telling stories. Sisi tells the story of a house installation being built and a replica of a house in the United States where a homicide took place, being recreated on the property. Liam, the heir to the property, and his mother are invited to live in the installation. They were never told which one of the houses was haunted and Liam's mother burned down the one they lived in. On the ship, Gwenda reaches forward and realizes she cannot tell the difference between the House of Secrets and the House of Mystery.

## Analysis

"The New Boyfriend" examines the relationships between young teenage girls and returns to the coming of age in an adolescent form. The premise allows for the girls to explore their burgeoning sexuality. Instead of focusing on a real boy who likes one of the girls, but not the others, the author gives Ainslie, the leader of the group of girls, a Ghost Boyfriend. The boyfriends are life-like dolls that interact with the girls, but are first



devoted to Ainslie. The Vampire Boyfriend and the Werewolf Boyfriend interact with the other girls, but it is as if Ainslie has tired of them and has allowed them to reach out to the others.

The Ghost boyfriend differs from the others in that he can be set embodied, in which he can interact like the other dolls, or spectral, which makes him a spirit. Immy is aware of her jealousy of Ainslie. It extends beyond the dolls, but that is where Immy concentrates her jealousy. She knows it is wrong, but her awareness of her feelings does not lead her to rejecting them.

The story blends magical realism and the supernatural into attempting to understand the relationships between teenage girls. While the other girls go about the party as they would normally. Immy is reluctant to give Ainslie the gift she got her, in part because of Ainslie's behavior and also because she is self-conscious of the gift. Nothing seems to be enough for Ainslie and this makes Immy feel inferior. Immy begins to withdraw from the party. She actively isolates herself from the others. In doing so, she creates an opportunity to exert power of Ainslie.

Immy goes to the Ghost Boyfriend and takes a braid of hair from the locket she was going to give to Ainslie for her birthday. She places the braid in the compartment in the mouth of the Ghost Boyfriend. Elin sees her doing it, but does not say anything about it or threaten to tell Ainslie. Elin explains that she does not see the appeal of the Boyfriends. This indicates that Elin has matured beyond the boyfriends and is the first to walk away from the childishness of playing with dolls. It is likely her interest has diverted to real boys. She does not out Immy likely because she does not want to betray her friend, but also because she does not view it as a big deal because the dolls are not real.

The Ghost Boyfriend is set to spectral mode. It is a novelty and Ainslie explains that the setting means she will just see him out of the corner of her eye. In school, when Immy texts Ainslie that she dreamt about Mint, this demonstrates how Immy is being aggressive toward Ainslie. She likely knows that Ainslie will not respond to the text. The act of dreaming is not something that can be controlled. Immy is able to provoke Ainslie without any real consequence.

Immy decides to pursue whatever relationship she can with Mint. She plans to take the doll from Ainslie's house while Ainslie and her family are away on vacation. While Ainslie may not fully understand what Immy is doing, she knows enough to know it is somehow connected to Mint. She asks her mother if she can get rid of the doll, but her mother refuses because of the amount of money that was spent on the gift.

The tension between Ainslie and her mother is indicative of teen-aged relationships. Her mother gets a streak of red in her hair because Ainslie does. Ainslie is embarrassed by it, whereas her mother is trying to connect to her daughter and also recapture her youth.

Ainslie's relationship with her mother is in contrast to Immy's relationship with her father. She looks to her father for advice and understanding. While Immy gravitates toward



Mint and takes action to steal him from Ainslie, she feels guilty. She also does not fully understand all of what she is feeling. Immy speaks with her father about love and he is able to advise her that while she may love Ainslie because she is her friend, it is natural to have adverse feelings toward her as well. Her father does not know about the doll and how Immy has projected genuine feelings toward the doll, but he is able to help her understand part of what is going on with her.

That understanding offered by her father, likely helps Immy to reject Mint, but not exclusively. There are two types of hair in the braid and that has contributed to Mint's behavior. Immy does not know if there is a real ghost inside of Mint or if it is merely the doll. Regardless, Mint appears to hold interest in someone else. Immy destroys the blond hair that was in the braid and removes the braid entirely from Mint. He attempts to fight her, but she is able to get the braid out.

Immy destroys the blond hair and puts it in a medicine bag that she keeps for herself. She returns the braid to the locket and gives the locket to Ainslie at school. The braid is likely a piece of mourning jewelry, in which a locket of hair is braided and kept in a locket or formed into some other type of jewelry, such as a bracelet. In giving Ainslie the locket, it symbolizes the end of their friendship. The girls may not recognize it in the moment, but it is the likely fate.

"Two Houses" is a story set on a spacecraft. It is the most futuristic of the stories in the collection and balances science and the supernatural. The people on the spacecraft are awakened early to celebrate a birthday. The two spacecraft involved in the mission are called House of Secrets and House of Mystery. The names of the ships allude to the two house in the ghost story. In space, one of the ships is missing, but Sisi thinks she has seen House of Mystery, the missing ship.

During the course of the ghost stories, it is revealed that there was an installation of a murder house in which one is the real house and the other is a recreation. In doing so, it demonstrates how there is no way of knowing whether the spaceship that they are on is the one that is continuing the mission or the one that has been lost. This allows for the theme of alienation to be developed. It is unlikely to find a place more remote destination than space. By having the girls tell ghost stories, it indicates that they are likely on a ghost ship, suggesting that they are actually on the ship that was lost.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Immy decide not to give Ainslie the locket during her birthday party?

## Discussion Question 2

What does Immy's relationship with Mint reveal about her character?



## Discussion Question 3

Why was nothing on the recordings when they were played back after Sisi saw the other spaceship?

## Vocabulary

settees, discernible, malice, spectral, impressionable, fathomless, manifest, ransack, tureens, vitreous, succubus, berth, dilation, subliminal, alchemical, emanations, convivial, redundancy, archaea, precipitously, mullioned, coniferous, consortium, ersatz





# Story 9

## Summary

The ninth and final story in the collection is called “Light.” It opens in a bar in Florida with a man reading a children’s book. He asks a woman for a light and Lindsey tells him she does not smoke. He calls her a “Stupid bitch” (289) and tells her he wants a light. She tells him she is a children’s librarian and wants to know why he is defacing the book. Lindsey overhears a woman named Caroline talking about over-the-counter shadows and babies who are born with two shadows. Lindsey and the man end up back at her place and “their four shadows fell across her double bed” (292). The next morning she finds his amputated shadow and strong-smelling towels in the bathroom. She cleans up and puts the shadow down in the disposal.

Lindsey lives in Florida Keys and there are lots of iguanas. At work, she thinks about how she would like “to replace Bickle and Lowes with women” (298) after catching them drunk. Her brother Alan calls and asks if he can stay with Lindsey for a while; he calls her Lin-Lan. The previous time they saw each other was after her husband Elliot left her. Elliot and Lindsey met in a pocket universe and she brought him back with her. Alan tells her that he thinks their parents have become nudists. He comments on how she would leave the bathroom door open when they were kids and that it might be why he is gay. Alan gets bit by a large iguana. Lindsey explains she has been feeding the iguana and calls him Elliot. Alan claims to see a sleeper who looks like Lindsey, but she does not believe it. Instead she thinks the sleeper may look like Alan.

A storm is coming in and they reminisce about a hurricane when they were younger. They drink Rum Runners.

Later Jason, a new nightshift employee, comes to dinner. More information is given about the pocket universes, which are about the size of Maryland. Some even contain other pocket universes. Alan and Jason talk about the mermaids that were brought in from one of the pocket universes and how they are an invasive species. Jason starts to leave, but Alan does not want him to. Lindsey leaves and goes to a bar and picks up a man. The next morning, she sees that Jason is still at her place. Lindsey tells the man she has two shadows and he does not care. They talk about the incoming hurricane. He tells her his name is Alberto. He asks to use the bathroom and returns with blood on his arms, asking for a tourniquet. Jason had attempted suicide in the bathtub by slitting his wrists. Alberto wraps Jason’s wrists with towels and duct tape. He asks her who he is and she explains Jason is one of her employees. Lindsey confronts Alan who explains that they got drunk and high and had sex. Jason explains that he was happy and used the potato peeler on his wrists because he did not want to stop feeling the way he did. He asks if Lindsey is going to fire him and threatens to sue if she does.

Alan goes with Jason when the ambulance arrives and Alberto asks Lindsey for a beer. She asks him to leave and tells him she does not like nice guys. She cleans up after he



leaves and thinks about how “people with two shadows were supposed to get in trouble” (323). Jason is later released from the hospital and goes back to work, where he is instructed by his doctor not to lift anything heavy. Lindsey questions why Jason wants the job and he explains that he needs the benefits to cover the emergency room bill. There is a voluntary evacuation of The Keys because of the incoming hurricane. Lindsey and Jason talk about Alan and she explains that Alan “has the power to cloud and confuse the minds of men” (328). Lindsey decides not to evacuate and goes home. She loses power and she goes to Elliot’s room and finds a body on the bed. It is one of the sleepers and looks to be the one who either looks like Lindsey or Alan. She gets the air mattress from the garage and takes the iguana to the bathtub with her and pulls the half-inflated mattress over them to ride out the storm. Once the storm passes, she goes outside, but “it had become someplace entirely” (332). She goes into her house and packs up a few things and the iguana and heads off into the pocket universe.

## Analysis

“Light” is the final story in the collection. It opens with a misunderstanding between Lindsey and a man in a bar. Lindsey overhears women talking about babies born with two shadows and how people are able to purchase additional shadows. The shadow symbolizes the duality of people. There is the face that is shown to the world and the one that is kept private. Despite the misunderstanding, Lindsey and the man have a one night stand at her place. It is revealed that she was born with two shadows, while one of his has been purchased.

Lindsey has difficulty connecting with people. She loved Elliot, whom she brought back from a pocket universe, but he has left her. She seems to want him to return and does not attempt to build any other relationships. Her brother Alan also has difficulty with relationships. When Lindsey has one of her new employees over the house, Alan seduces him. Whatever seductive power Alan has, Jason decides that it was enough that he attempt suicide to preserve his happiness.

The relationships feel fragmented and incomplete. It is difficult to understand why someone would attempt suicide following a one night stand in order to preserve happiness. Alan and Jason did get high before they slept together, and it is suggested that the drugs may have been laced.

Prior to Jason’s suicide attempt, Lindsey has another one night stand, this time with Alberto. After Jason is discovered in the bathtub, Alberto asks to get cleaned up and appears to want to stay. Lindsey rejects this. She cannot connect with anyone. She tells Alberto pointedly that she does not like nice men and it appears that Alberto is a good man.

Lindsey is the most mature of the female characters in the collection. That is not to suggest that she does not suffer from some type of arrested development. Just as many of the younger girls struggle with coming of age, Lindsey seems to struggle as well. Her



most consistent relationship is with an iguana, a cold-blood animal not known for being affectionate, whom she has named after Elliot.

When the hurricane warnings begin, Lindsey rejects the orders to evacuate. She decides to ride out the storm, perhaps as an act of self-destruction. During the storm, she protects the iguana and herself in the bathtub, pulling a mattress over them. While Lindsey may be self-destructive, she still opts to be protected. She does not run out in the face of the storm, rather she rides it out. The hurricane becomes her rite of passage.

Once the storm is over, Lindsey is confronted with a new pocket universe opening up. She understands the consequences of the pocket universes. She knows that the mermaids has become invasive because they were brought back. Further, she knows that she is haunted by bringing back Elliot. She has traveled to multiple pocket universes in her past. It is as if she is searching for something or someone. She may have been able to bring back Elliot, but she was not able to keep him.

Lindsey opts to go into the pocket universe and gives no indication that this is a place from which she will return. While she has felt isolated in her life, she can escape into a new world and the possibility that holds. There is no guarantee that her journey will be good or bad. Rather, she is willing to embrace the unknown as opposed to staying with what she knows in her present life.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why does Lindsey destroy the shadow that the man left behind?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What does Lindsey's decision to ride out the hurricane reveal about her character?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What are the implications of the sleeper looking like both Lindsey and Alan?

## **Vocabulary**

languorously, derelict, lecherous, conical, torrents, malign, reliquary, indigenous, exhibitionist, dissidents



# Characters

## Fran

Fran is a teenage girl who is home sick while her father goes off after binge drinking. She is in charge of taking care of the Summer People, magical people who live in a house in the woods. Fran took charge of caring for them after her mother taught her about the Summer People and took off.

Fran wants to get out of the town, but remains faithful to the Summer People. When Ophelia helps her out when she is sick, she recognizes her opportunity to escape. While Ophelia is sleeping in the house, Fran takes off and goes to the city.

## Demon Lover

Demon Lover is an immortal who fell in love with Meggie, whom he reached out to while she was playing with an Ouija board. They had an affair and then he went on to marry Fawn. He was an actor and had a sex tape released.

He wants to reconnect with Meggie, but she has started a relationship with Ray. He is accused of being responsible for her disappearance when Meggie runs off without a trace.

## Meggie

Meggie is a mortal who had an affair with the Demon Lover. She has moved on from their relationship, but he keeps returning. She disappears without a trace and the Demon Lover is blamed, but never arrested for her disappearance.

## Ophelia

Ophelia is a teenage girl who is a lesbian. She befriends Fran and helps her when she is sick and with the Summer People.

## Bunnatine

Bunnatine is a young woman with burgeoning superpowers. She was previously in a relationship with Biscuit and they may have had a child together, but she is not completely positive that Biscuit is the father.



## **Hero**

Hero is the sister of the narrator “Valley of the Girls.” She has decided to kill herself and her brother in an effort to rid them of the shame of the world thinking they had an incestuous relationship. The sex tape was created by their doppelgangers. She dies when she is bitten by a poisonous snake.

## **Billie**

Billie is a 15-year-old girl who pretends to be much older to attract Paul. She misrepresents herself during their online relationship. She writes him a letter to explain what she did and why and promises to wait for him until she is of legal age.

## **Paul**

Paul is the older man with whom Billie has a relationship online.

## **Lindsey**

Lindsey is a woman living in the Florida Keys who escapes to a pocket universe after a hurricane.

## **Immy**

Immy is a teenage girl who tries to steal her friend’s Ghost Boyfriend.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Monkey Egg

The Monkey Egg symbolizes the entrance into a world the author creates where magical realism heightens the way in which the reader sees the worlds of the characters.

## Boyfriend Doll

The Boyfriend Doll symbolizes the awareness Immy, Ainslie, and the other girls have of their sexuality and how they are changing as they mature.

## Floating

Floating symbolizes how Bunnatine is trying to harness her power, but cannot seem to manifest a power that will move her forward.

## Letter

The Letter symbolizes Billie's struggle to accept who she is versus who she wants to be by trying to grow up too fast and escape her home life.

## Chessgame

The Chessgame symbolizes how Billie is trying to manipulate Paul into coming back to her.

## Faces

The Faces represent how people present themselves to the outside world and how they may be different in their private life.

## Ouija Board

The Ouija Board symbolizes the opening that allows toxic people to get through. Meggie has moved away from the Demon Lover, but he keeps returning to her.



## **Butter**

Butter symbolizes how Billie is growing up and maturing. She is easily molded and convinced that her love for Paul is real.

## **Braid**

The braid in "The New Boyfriend" symbolizes mourning jewelry and how the friendship between Ainslie and Immy is coming to an end.

## **Pocket Universe**

The pocket universe symbolizes Lindsey's need for escape and to leave her life behind.



# Settings

## Summer House

The Summer House is where the magical Summer People live. It is where Fran takes care of them and introduces Ophelia to them to take over their care.

## Pocket Universe

In the story "Light," Lindsey visits pocket universes on her travels. They are dimensions people can enter and have brought things back, like mermaids. Lindsey ends up going to a new one that has opened up after the hurricane.

## Wizard of Oz Themepark

The theme park is where Bunnatime Powderfinger and Biscuit meet and spend time together, and work on their superpowers in "Origin Story."

## Ainslie's House

Ainslie's House is where Ainslie keeps her boyfriends in their coffins in the basement. It is where Immy places the hair in Mint's mouth and turns him to spectral mode in "The New Boyfriend."

## Hotel in New York City

The hotel is where Billie has traveled to meet up with Paul Zell in "Secret Identity." She stays in his room and orders room service and gets drunk from the mini bar.





# Themes and Motifs

## Magical Realism

The author employs magical realism in several of the stories in the collection, using it to add urgency and importance to the actions of the characters. The first example happens in “The Summer People.” The story reads as though a young girl is left to care for a summer house while her father is away.

As the story unfolds, it becomes clear that the Summer People have magical powers and demand loyalty from the person who cares for them, in this instance Fran. Fran feels trapped and takes advantage of the night Ophelia spends in the summer house to escape. By the conclusion of the story, Fran has been gone for a few years. She thinks she will return, but it seems doubtful.

Other examples of magical realism in the collection are the way the monkey egg comes to life and the pocket universes that open up and people are born with two shadows in “Light.”

In “The New Boyfriend,” Immy must confront her jealousy of her friend Ainsley. She attempts to steal Ainsley’s ghost boyfriend Mint. She slips a braid of hair into a compartment in the doll’s mouth. When the ghost boyfriend is turned on, he interacts with Immy enough that she believes that she is falling in love with Mint. Her feelings are not limited to the first blush of romance or daydreaming. There is real consequence in how Immy views her actions in conjunction with her relationship with her friend. She knows that stealing her friend’s boyfriend is wrong, but is able to do so because the boyfriend is not real.

Another way in which magical realism is used is with pocket universes and shadows in “Light.” Both the first and final story of the collection feature strong use of magical realism. From the first use of the monkey egg in “The Summer People” the reader is introduced to the heightened reality.

By the time the reader reaches “Light,” the magic has expanded into an entire universe. Linsey was born with two shadows. It is as if she belongs in two different worlds. When the pocket universe opens up after the hurricane, she leaves her present world behind. The reader does not know what waits for her; it is left to the imagination.

## Supernatural

Expanding upon the theme of magical realism, the author uses the supernatural to enhance character development, as with the Demon Lover and Meggie and Immy and the Ghost Boyfriend.



“I Can See Right Through You” is told from the perspective of a supernatural character. By having the Demon Lover be the primary focus of the story, it offers a lens through which to view the ordinary world. Meggie meets the Demon Lover through the Ouija board. She works on a reality show in which séances are conducted and people are ghost hunting. The irony is that they are in the company of a supernatural being, but – aside from Meggie – are completely unaware.

Other stories use the supernatural too. “Two Houses” appears to be a traditional science fiction story, but soon evolves into a classic ghost story, featuring a murder house. The characters are haunted not merely by the story, but also by the absence of their sister ship that was lost as well.

In “The New Boyfriend,” there are three types of boyfriend dolls: a vampire, a werewolf, and a ghost. All three are classic supernatural beings. The author reduced the vampire and werewolf to comic representations of how these supernatural beings are portrayed in some contemporary popular fiction. Instead of focusing on the vampire and werewolf, the author explores the ghost boyfriend.

It is unclear whether or not Immy would have connected with the ghost boyfriend had she not placed the braid inside the mouth compartment. It is possible that Immy conjured a ghost (or two) with the braid. Whatever ghost appeared, Immy is left grappling with her feelings for him. She was initially jealous that Ainsley had the door, so it is possible that she would have connected with the ghost boyfriend regardless. By putting the hair in the doll’s mouth, Immy is confronted with a much more authentic experience. Sensing that it has gotten out of hand, Immy returns the doll and removes the braid.

## Escapism and Alienation

The author uses the theme of escapism and alienation to suggest that the characters need to remove themselves from their reality, often because they feel alienated, such as when Fran escapes, Lindsey leaves, and Hero and her brother are locked in the chamber.

Fran and Ophelia connect because Ophelia helps her when she is sick, but the two girls are able to bond because of their status as outsiders. This may be a fresher experience for Ophelia because of the recent rumors about her sexuality. These rumors alienate her from her previous social circle. She reaches out to Fran without intent other than to help when she is sick. But Ophelia does pursue a connection with Fran, like when she brings her breakfast and continues to help her with the Summer People.

Fran wants to escape, but feels trapped. She knows that she is unable to break her commitment to the Summer People. When she sees that the Summer People like Ophelia, Fran decides to make her escape.

Similarly Lindsey in “Light” feels alienated from others. She has difficulty with relationships and has a series of one night stands. She longs for Elliot who left her. After



the hurricane, she decides to leave through the newly formed pocket universe. Unable to cope with her life, she decides to completely alienate herself from her world.

Hero locks herself and her brother in the chamber of the tomb because she felt he shamed both of them. She feels that her brother must be punished for his behavior and the embarrassment he brought to the family. He knows that the perceived incestuous relationship is fake, but the outside world does not. Hero feels that the only appropriate thing to do is to destroy both of them. She dies from the snake bite, but her brother – or possibly who she thinks is her brother – is left in the chamber to decide whether he wants to escape the chamber with a quick death from poison, or to die a slow death.

## Dysfunctional Relationships

The author uses the dysfunction relationships of three key relationships in the collection to demonstrate the universality of the power of unhealthy relationships on the emotional development of the characters.

The relationship between the Demon Lover and Meggie is the first truly dysfunctional relationship in the collection. Obviously a relationship between a demon and a mortal will have issues. While the Demon Lover wants to stay in Meggie's life and be with her, she rejects him. She tells him to go back to his wife Fawn. Instead of returning to his wife, he sends her hateful texts from another woman's phone. He becomes jealous of Ray and believes that Ray has something to do with Meggie disappearance at the end of the story. Instead, he is blamed for the disappearance, although he is never charged.

Bunnatine and Biscuit's also reflect a dysfunctional relationship. They have a history together and are talking about their individual pasts more than their past together. While it appears that Biscuit is trying to encourage Bunnatine's develop of her superpower, when she demonstrates her ability to float, he turns it into something sexual. She is as attracted to him as much as she wants to push him away. He seems interested in the relationship, but Bunantine's behavior suggests that he would not be able to commit. When it is revealed that Bunnatine has a child and Biscuit may be the father, it is clear that she does not want to tell Biscuit about the child. She is unable to handle the emotional consequences of confessing the existence of the child to him.

Probably the most dysfunctional relationship in the collection is that of Billie and Paul. Their relationship is seen entirely through Billie's perspective as she writes to Paul, confessing what she has done. She pretended to be older and pursued an online relationship with Paul, only to have him abandon her when he learns her true age. Billie struggles with how to best express her experiences from going to the city to meet Paul and then interacting with Conrad, a young man who, albeit older, is much closer in age to Billie. The true demonstration of her struggle with emotional development comes from the way in which she writes her letter. She alternates between the first and third person is an effort to understand her actions and how she spent her time while at the hotel. Her moods range from embarrassed, to confused, to empowered and emboldened. She



declares her love for Paul and vows to wait for him and hopes he will come back to her when she is older.

## Coming of Age

The author uses bildungsroman, or coming of age, in the stories as a cohesive thread throughout the collection. Most of the primary characters in the collection are teenage girls: Fran and Ophelia, Immy and Ainslie, and Billie. Each of the characters goes through an event that leads them to experience personal growth.

Fran and Ophelia forge a fast, but brief friendship. Both are in transitional periods in their lives. Fran wants to escape and see what life is like outside of the small town she lives in, while Ophelia is struggling to find her place in the community. Fran's decision to leave may be viewed as somewhat callous toward Ophelia, but Ophelia is looking for acceptance, and the Summer People offer that with their first gift.

Immy and Ainslie have been friends for some time, but they are starting to see how they are drifting apart. This perspective is largely limited to how Immy views her friendship with Ainslie. She is aware that something is wrong, but lacks the experience to understand fully what is happening. She projects that separation on how she interacts with the ghost boyfriend. Because of her jealousy, Immy wants to take something from Ainslie and attempts to steal her ghost boyfriend. In later years, this scenario may play out with an actual boyfriend, but Ainslie is unaware of what Immy is doing. Ainslie recognizes something is off with the ghost boyfriend, but she does not know what exactly. When Immy changes her mind and returns the doll, it shows Immy's emotional maturity. She is able to talk to her father and come to some sort of understanding about what she is feeling. It does not make the feelings go away, but it helps her understand her own motivations.

Billie's emotional growth has an even bigger consequence. Because Billie is a minor and has traveled to be with Paul, she puts him at risk of being identified as a predator. Since Paul is never directly referenced as interacting with Billie in real life, it can be assumed that Paul is a decent man who was duped by a teenage girl pretending to be much older. Billie is aware enough of what she has done to sincerely apologize through her letter. She proceeds to tell Paul every detail of what happened on her trip, including her interaction with Conrad. In doing so, she may think she is divulging the details to make Paul jealous of her spending time with another man. Ultimately, she reveals that she remains in love with Paul and will wait for him when she is of age and tells him where to meet her. Her devotion shows her immaturity and how she continues to idealize the relationship that she created outside of the real world.



# Styles

## Point of View

The point of view of the collection shifts from story to story. The lens through which the world is viewed is through that of women experiencing some type of coming of age moment. The stories in the collection which do not follow this pattern are “The Lesson,” in which a male gay couple is at the heart of the story, and “Valley of the Girls,” which is narrated by a young man.

There are nine standalone stories in the collection. Feminine perspectives are at the forefront, largely from young women and girls. Teenage girls, such as Fran, Billie, and Immy are all trying to find their place in the world and escape. The older women in the story, who are still quite young, are also interested in escape, such as Lindsey.

The majority of the collection is in third person. “The Summer People” is in third person, past tense; “I Can See Right Through You” is third person, present tense; “Origin Story” is third person, past tense; “The Lesson” is third person, past tense; “The New Boyfriend” is third person, past tense; “Two Houses” is third person, past tense; and “Light” is third person, past tense.

“Secret Identity” alternates between first and third person and is in epistolary form. “Valley of the Girls” is first person, past tense.

## Language and Meaning

The language in *Get in Trouble* is accessible and conversational. The dialogue of the characters is natural and appropriate for the ages of the characters. Some slang and swear words are used throughout sparingly.

The focus of the stories is a heightened state of reality, using magical realism and the supernatural to elevate the stakes of the characters. Most of the characters are going through some type of life event that makes them reevaluate their position in life.

There is not an over-reliance on dialogue, but it is used throughout the collection. Most of the stories are in the third person and offer insight into the minds and motivations of the characters.

There is some description of magical things, such as the monkey egg and the way the Ghost Boyfriend works. Some terminology indicative of the superhero genre is used.

## Structure

There are nine stories that make up the collection. Each story stands alone. No characters appear in one story and then pops up in another.

The stories in the collection vary in length. All of the stories are longer works of short fiction. The average length of the stories is about 40 pages.

The stories are told in a linear fashion. The exception to this is “I Can See Right Through You.” The story jumps around in time as the Demon Lover is remembering different events.

The opening story sets the tone for the remainder of the collection. In “Summer People” Fran escapes. This mirrors the escape that Lindsey makes when she enters the pocket universe in the final story “Light.”



## Quotes

She finally tore her gaze away and ran down the stairs like the devil was after her.”  
-- Narrator (chapter 1 paragraph 290)

**Importance:** The quotes demonstrates Fran's need to escape and how this is her only opportunity to get away without being lured to stay.

When people disappear, there’s always the chance that you’ll see them again.”  
-- Narrator (chapter 2 paragraph 83)

**Importance:** The quote shows how people are haunted by their past, just as Meggie is by the Demon Lover.

I’ve met you before. Well, not you, the previous you. Yous. You never last. We never last. She moves on. You disappear.”  
-- Demon Lover (chapter 2 paragraph 214)

**Importance:** The quote illustrates how people are reminded of past relationships in new relationships as they come to terms with what they are looking for.

Everything I ever told you about myself is more or less a lie. But you don’t know that yet.”  
-- Billie (chapter 3 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** The quote allows the reader to understand that Billie is both truthful and a liar throughout her letter to Paul. Just as she alternates from first to third person, she alternates from her truths and her lies.

Maybe your curse kills lots of people. I know which one I’m hoping for.  
-- Narrator (chapter 4 paragraph 37)

**Importance:** The quote demonstrates how the narrator wants recognition in his afterlife.

She’d wanted to kick him, make him stop trying to take care of her, and also to go on kissing him.”  
-- Narrator (chapter 5 paragraph 63)

**Importance:** The quote shows Bunnatine’s desire for her independence and to be seen as an equal instead of being overshadowed by Biscuit.

One day she says to Thanh, Sometimes I forget that he didn’t die.”  
-- Narrator (chapter 6 paragraph 37)

**Importance:** The quote illustrates the extent of the hardship overcome in bringing the child into the world when it seemed likely that the child was doomed.



She's in a horrible mood because she's a horrible friend who wants everything that belongs to Ainslie."

-- Narrator (chapter 7 paragraph 49)

**Importance:** The quote illustrates Immy's jealousy of Ainslie and how she feels guilty about it, but does not know how to make it go away.

None of this is okay. But it's not real. So it's okay."

-- Narrator (chapter 7 paragraph 187)

**Importance:** The quote shows how Immy is able to justify what she is doing to her friend because she views it as a hypothetical betrayal rather than a real one.

Space was full of mysteries. Space was full of secrets."

-- Narrator (chapter 8 paragraph 43)

**Importance:** The quote illustrates the isolation and unknown of space.

Their four shadows fell across her double bed, sticky and wilted as if from lovemaking that hadn't even begun."

-- Narrator (chapter 9 paragraph 22)

**Importance:** The quote demonstrates how the shadows interact with others before the intent of the individual is known.

Elliot wasn't the first thing Lindsey had brought back from a pocket universe.

-- Narrator (chapter 9 paragraph 104)

**Importance:** The quote illustrates Lindsey's attraction to the pocket universes, foreshadowing her escape into one.