

Going Too Far Study Guide

Going Too Far by Jennifer Echols

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Plot Summary

Going Too Far is a novel by author Jennifer Echols. The story follows the main character, Meg, a 17-year-old girl who is rebelling against her parents and even the authorities. At the beginning of the book, Meg and her friends are arrested for underage drinking and trespassing on a train bridge in their small town in Alabama. As a punishment for their behavior, three of the four teens have to shadow a cop, a paramedic, and a firefighter for the week of their spring break vacation from school. Meg is paired with the cop - the same one that arrested her in the first place. What Meg doesn't realize, at first, is the cop is a boy that she attended high school with just a year prior to her arrest.

As the week of punishment unfolds, Officer Jon After and Meg grow so close that they plan to have a romantic rendezvous as soon as her punishment is complete. John uncovers the secret that Meg has been keeping, which she is a cancer survivor. In the process, Meg also uncovers John's secret, which is that his brother and his brother's girlfriend died on the same train bridge that he arrested Meg for trespassing.

Meg helps John to come to emotional terms with his loss by suggesting the city install a surveillance camera that dispatches directly to the police if someone enters the bridge. She thinks this will emotionally free John from the bond he feels to protecting others from dying on the bridge. John helps Meg to come to terms with the fact she's going to live and she no longer has to live life as if she might die tomorrow.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

The novel begins with Meg, her boyfriend Eric, and her two friends, Tiffany and Brian are drinking beer and walking toward the railroad bridge. They are seniors in high school and Eric and Meg are about to have sex on the bridge. Tiffany and Brian are making out nearby. They are talking about a story that Eric says is false about a girl and her boyfriend being run over by a train on the bridge. Meg thinks she hears something, but Eric says she is just paranoid from the pot they smoked before they got drunk. Then the police lights light up at the end of the bridge.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Meg rebels against authority. Her plans to head to Miami for spring break a week from now and to head off to college in Birmingham in a few months might be derailed by being arrested.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

The cops call through a megaphone for them to come off the bridge. The cop handcuffs each of the boys the railing and puts the girls in the backseat of one of the two cop cars. Shortly after, a train flies back on the tracks. The police officer questions the girls inside his car while completing his forms. Meg confirms that she knows Eric was expelled from college for selling marijuana out of his dorm. Meg says it was she and Eric that were smoking and drinking and that Brian and Tiffany were innocent bystanders.

Chapter 2 Analysis

The police officer seems to know a lot about Meg, Tiffany and Eric, even though they don't know him. It could just be because it is a small town. It could also be because Meg and Eric are constantly getting in trouble. It's ironic that they don't seem to know the cops, however.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

As they drive to the police station, Tiffany and Meg make conversation with the cop. When they arrive, Tiffany's parents are already there to pick her up. Brian's dad comes to get him. Eric's father comes in blaming everyone, including Meg. The older cop, which is the one that transported the boys to the station, says he knows Meg's father from playing ball in high school. When they ask Meg if she wants to call her parent again, she tells them they're not coming because this is the last straw. Her cop leads her to a cell and locks her in. Meg passes out.

She wakes up to Lois waving ammonia under her nose and handing her a Sprite. Lois argues with the cop until he agrees not to put Meg back in the cell. After the cop leaves, Lois tells Meg that they are going to punish them by making them work the night shift during their spring break—one with a cop, one with an ambulance and one with the fire department. When Meg asks about the fourth one, Lois tells her that Eric's lawyer father will get his druggie son off again. This punishment means Meg, Brian and Tiffany will miss spring break in Miami. It also means Meg's parents will miss their first vacation to Graceland because Meg's mom will insist on staying home with Meg.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Meg is using drugs and alcohol to cover the pain of something else that has happened to her in her life. The fact that Meg rides a motorcycle also infers that she likes to put herself in danger. In a way, she is looking to do things that might harm her or even kill her.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

At 6 am, Lois's shift ends at the police station. She offers to drive Meg home, as they are driving out of the parking lot, Meg's office, Officer After, is driving in. when he sees them, Lois floors it and drives Meg to the parking lot of the diner her parents own. Her father glowers at her as she goes into the trailer they live in on the property. She showers, dresses and goes to work. Later, her father tells her that she's going to be riding in the cop car on night shift, work in the diner on morning shift and that he and her mother are going to Graceland. Meg thinks that worse things have happened to her.

A week later, Meg is riding along with Officer After. She works the morning shift at the diner and then tries to sleep at 3 pm. One night, when she's in the car while he's making a traffic stop, she calls Tiffany. She calls Tiffany because she says his hand is on his gun and she wants her to send the ambulance if something happens. Brian isn't talking to either girl and Eric isn't talking to Meg. Meg tells Tiffany the officer's name and describes him and Tiffany says she knows who he is.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Meg thinking that worse things have happened to her indicates that something traumatic happened that is causing Meg to act out in negative ways. Tiffany knowing who the officer is suggests that he is related to someone that they know. This is how Officer After knew Tiffany's name when he was calling them off the bridge. It also explains how the officer knew to call Meg Meg instead of her legal name, Margaret.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

As Officer After handcuffs the guy in the driver's seat, the passenger runs into the woods. As the cuffed driver heads toward the car shouting at Meg, Tiffany hears the conversation, and then Officer After shoves the handcuffed passenger into the backseat of the car, and then the driver. The officer returns to the front seat. As he's filling out the forms, Meg starts questioning him about his wife and kids, but he says he doesn't have a wife and kids. Officer After makes Meg put on her seatbelt and drives to the hospital because he thinks he broke the passenger's arm while he was in pursuit of him. They run into Tiffany and Tiffany tells Meg that John After was in their Spanish class last year, along with some other information about John After. Meg asks him if he is only 18.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Meg is attracted to Officer After. Primarily, this is because he is good looking, and it turns out that he is Meg's age too. The title of the novel implies that Meg and John enter into an affair.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

John After says he's 19. He also tells Meg he has to stay late to get the criminal medical care and then transport him to the station. Tiffany offers to drive Meg to the station to pick up her motorcycle, before Meg goes to her shift at the diner, she grabs her yearbook from the trailer. She realizes that something must have happened to John After to go from a track star and highest scorer on the ACT to stay in the small town and become a police officer. Meg also hints to the fact that she got sick and dyed her hair blue. Meg also realizes that she is developing a crush on John.

After her shift, Meg goes to the park for her jog. She runs into John running there with his shirt off. She suddenly wishes her hair wasn't blue and feels shy around him. He asks her what she's doing here and Meg tells him she runs every day and that she just got off work at the diner. John admits that working the night shift makes it hard for him to sleep so he comes to run to tire himself out. Meg asks if he was going to confess his real age is Tiffany hadn't told her and he said he doesn't point out where he's vulnerable.

Chapter 6 Analysis

The incident that caused Meg to start acting seems to be that she got sick. It could be that she got some sort of disease, but it is more likely that she suffered a mental breakdown from something that happened to her. If something happened to John that caused him to stay in town, this is something that might help Meg relate to John.

Falling in love with John might be just what Meg needs to get her life back on track and to stop rebelling against her parents and other types of authority.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

John and Meg spend the night busting drug deals that are taking place around town. As the other cops are rounding up the sellers, John and Meg are in pursuit of the buyer. As they chase him, Meg notices that John is wearing cologne. The buyer gets away across the train tracks before the train blocks John's car off. Meg tells John he smells good and asks how he wound up with her for the ride along. John admits that he chose her. When she jokes about him getting her alone on a date, he says it's not that at all.

When John insinuates Meg's relationship with Eric is just sex, Meg gets mad, but she also realizes that John is jealous. John says he picked Meg because he reminds her of the girl that died on the train tracks. He says she lived in his neighborhood and that the story is not just a ghost story. Meg helps John locate the buyer and he tells her she has a real "criminal mind."

Chapter 7 Analysis

John sees that Meg is suffering from something that is causing her to dye her hair blue, wear strange clothes and get into trouble. His true goal is to help, but it foreshadows that he ends up falling in love with her in the process. John became a cop to make up for something that he did or something bad that happened to someone he knows. He feels that he can protect others from falling prey to the same and similar fates if he is there to protect them.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

John pulls up to McDonald's at 11:30 pm to allegedly bust loiterers. Instead, they run into his old friends from the track team, Will Billingsley, Rashad Lowry and Skip Clark. The guys joke around with John. Meg now sees John for the 19-year-old he truly is. The guys try to get John to go with them on spring break to the Florida Panhandle. John says he can't because he has to work. Plus, if Eric is going, he can't go anyway. The guys tell him Eric isn't going because he's grounded because of the bridge incident. One of them starts imitating someone smoking a roach and saying he's better than them because he's a high school graduate.

When John walks into McDonald's to buy them coffee, Will starts questioning Meg about her dating Eric, and then about her dating John. The boys try to get John and Meg to come to a party they are having on Saturday when they come back into town. The party is near the University of Alabama Birmingham. John says he has to work and he says Meg is only 17, but the guys give Meg the address anyway. John gets called away on a burglary.

Meg asks him if he works his way up from officer to detective. John says he can but he doesn't want to do that. He says he wants to prevent crimes not investigate them after they happen. After, they go to Meg's parent's diner for breakfast.

Chapter 8 Analysis

One of John's friends insinuates that John didn't graduate from high school. This explains why he never went to college, but instead became a police officer. John's statement about preventing crimes further solidifies that something happened to him or someone he knows that propelled him to become a cop in the first place.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

John tells Meg that Will isn't her type. Meg says she would never date Will because he likes to be the center of attention. John points out that Meg is describing herself. John asks what Meg's plans are after graduation. She says she has a scholarship to UAB. Meg thinks about how she had a few months off from working in the diner when she was 13. Meg tries to find out why John didn't go to college. She finds out he would study art if he did go to college. Meg also discovers John traveled Europe in between graduating from the police academy and when he could start working. John and Meg shake on a truce, but the handshake is a lot less formal and a lot touchier.

Chapter 9 Analysis

The time Meg had off from the diner when she was 13 when the incident must have occurred. John has a crush on Meg too. He's struggling with his feelings for her because he's older than she is. John is also struggling with his feelings for Meg because they are polar opposites. She is rebellious and always in trouble. He is a law abiding police officer.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Tiffany and Meg are sitting on the curb watching the paramedics treat injuries from a car accident at Birmingham Junction. It is the third accident in as many nights that John has been called on. John is directing traffic. Tiffany says she saw Brian at last night's accident on the fire truck and he told her not to call him anymore. Tiffany tells Meg that John likes her. Meg's paramedic friend, Quincy, comes over to the girls. Meg asks him why he was so mean to her on the bridge and he says it was because she was trying to kill herself after he worked so hard to save her four years earlier.

When Meg returns to the car, she finds John reading her notebook—the one she's been taking notes in since she started riding with him. They drive to Martini's to break up a fight. When they arrive, John tells her that he got the night off to go to Rashad's party on Saturday night. John goes into the bar and a mass of people exit the bar. Two of the people are Eric and Angie Pettit, John's ex-girlfriend. They get in Eric's BMW together. John and Meg start flirting with each other and then John calls Angie and Eric over to his car. He tells them they have to call their father's to come pick them up because they are both too young to be at a bar and if Eric even tries to turn his ignition, John will arrest him. John and Meg indirectly agree to have sex at 6:01 am on Thursday, when his shift and her punishment ends.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Quincy hints to the fact that something happened to Meg, or Meg did something to herself, that required him to save her life. He confirms the previous indication that it happened when Meg was 13, which is four years earlier, since she is 17 now.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Meg is trying to help John get a driver's car out of the mud that it is stuck in. Meg catches him checking her out. John tells Meg she's too distracting and tells her to switch places with the driver. Since John is covered in mud, they go by his apartment so he can change. When Meg walks into his living room, she sees it is covered in drawings and realizes they are John's drawings. Meg asks John if she can touch one of the guns he placed on the kitchen table as he starts to clean off the mud. John offers to show her how to use it. John leads Meg into the bedroom and gives her a dry shirt and jacket of his. He takes out a new uniform and goes into the bathroom to change.

Meg sees a drawing of the bridge right across from his bed, where he can see it as soon as he wakes up every morning. When John emerges from the bathroom, Meg reaches up to touch the back of his neck, but Lois interrupts on his radio. John says there is a fatality at Birmingham Junction. When they arrive, Meg, Tiffany and Brian stand off to the side watching the fireman use the jaws of life to extract the body from the mangled car that ran into a pillar. John calls Meg over to see the body in the car, but Brian tries to stop John from making Meg look at it.

Chapter 11 Analysis

The sexual tension between Meg and John is increasing. John wants Meg to see the dead body in the car accident because he wants Meg to learn that there are consequences to her actions. Ironically, Meg already knows this. It is the actions that she has taken in the past that have caused her to act the way she does know because she doesn't care about herself and what happens to her. Meg lives for the moment.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Meg faints. As she starts to come back around, she is told that she fell off the back of the ambulance. As John makes a joke about her stepping off the ambulance and picks her up by reaching under her arms, Meg yells at him that she had cancer. Meg gets a ride with the firemen to her motorcycle and then heads to the park for her run. Her cell phone rings when she finishes. She thinks it's John, but it's Tiffany. Tiffany says John went after Meg last night, but that she stopped him because she didn't want Meg to hit him again and get in trouble. Tiffany wants to know if she should have sex with Brian to get back together with him, but Meg tells her know. Tiffany hangs up on her and when Meg's phone rings again, she assumes it's Tiffany. When she realizes it's not, she asks if it's John, but then finds out it's Eric. He's calling her for a booty call.

That night, Meg buys condoms and meets Eric in the police station parking lot. They drive to the bridge and start to have sex. Meg stops Eric before anything happens and tells him she can't do it sober. Eric is more concerned about having sex with her than the fact Meg tells him she's not attracted to him. She worries that he might try to trap her.

Chapter 12 Analysis

From Tiffany's conversation with Meg, nobody knew that Meg is a cancer survivor, including her so-called friends. John trying to go after Meg suggests that he does care about Meg and her feelings. Meg indirectly admits to Tiffany that she has sex and does the things that she does so she can feel as if she is living life, in case something happens to her again.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Eric threatens to have his father call the health inspector on the diner. Then he pulls out a bag of weed and starts to light up. Meg tries to stop him. She decides to get out of the car, call John to have him pull Eric over and then pick her up. When she gets out of the car, Officer Leroy turns his lights on. Meg tries to tell Officer Leroy that it's not what it looks like, but he tells her to go to John's car because he wants to talk to Meg and that he's pissed. Meg gets in the backseat of John's car.

Meg suggests John was following her. He says he is just hurt that she was going to have sex with Eric. John admits that he cares about Meg. Meg admits that she didn't have sex with Eric because of John. They make up and then he tells her to get in the front seat so they can work. As they check out the stores at the "mall" for burglars, John asks about Meg's cancer. She says it was in eighth grade when John was already in ninth grade, so that's why he didn't hear about it. John guesses Meg became claustrophobic from all the MRIs she tells him she had, but she says no.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Meg has reached a transition in her life. She now realizes that life is worth living. She also realizes the consequences of smoking pot or drinking and driving can have. John and Meg have finally admitted how they feel about each other to each other. Now, they will have the opportunity to get to know each other even better, and on a different level than just two people having sex. It foreshadows Meg learning John's secrets and the two falling in love.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Meg explains that she became claustrophobic because she resisted chemotherapy. She tried to run away from her parents while they were taking her for her first session. The police strapped her down and forced the treatment on her. This is why she doesn't like seatbelts or to be locked in a car. Meg thinks about her roommate, a 10-year-old girl died of cancer. Lois calls for John because there is a robbery in progress at the convenient store. While they're waiting for John's backup, Meg kisses John for luck and they hold hands. John and the other officers bust into the store and get the criminals to drop their weapons.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Meg is finally talking about her feelings about having cancer with someone. She didn't even confide in the psychologists that were hired to help her when she got cancer and refused chemotherapy. Meg also realizes that she has in fact fallen in love with John After.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

When Meg and John pull into the police department parking lot, she asks what time it is. John says it's 6:50 am. Meg realizes that John doesn't want to have sex with her and she says this to him. By the time she gets to her motorcycle, he reminds her she has to send her report to the DA. Meg says she emailed it to the DA yesterday. She drives away.

At the diner, Meg is distracted by thoughts of John. When she checks her email, she finds out the DA has accepted her proposal for stopping other teens from following in her footsteps. The proposal will be implemented into a plan. John walks into the diner. He invites Meg to go to the Redneck Riviera, the Florida Panhandle, with him. He says he'll drive there and they can spend six hours at the beach and then drive back for Meg's shift at the diner.

John and Meg frolic on the beach and watch the sun set. When they get hungry, they buy fresh fried seafood from a nearby place and eat it in the moonlight on the beach. John calls Will on his cell phone to meet up with them while they're in town.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Meg thinks that John doesn't really love her and that all he wanted to do was teach her a lesson. Meg has convinced John to be more like a teenager and enjoy life.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

When John and Meg walk into the club holding hands, the girls are gaping at John and then wondering why he's with a girl with blue hair. They walk to the back of the club to meet up with Will. John goes to get them non-alcoholic drinks and tells Will not to steal her while he's gone. John calls Will on his cell phone from the bar to tell him to move his chair six inches to the left—away from Meg. Will assures Meg that John does like her. He says he's just scared because he's staying in town and Meg is leaving. Will says it's the same situation that broke up John and Angie.

Meg admits to Will that she can't have anything more than casual sex with John until he unchains himself from the bridge. Meg also tells Will she proposed the city put a camera on the bridge that feeds into the police dispatcher so they'll know when someone is entering the bridge without having the police patrol it all the time. Will leaves. Meg and John go out onto the dance floor. Meg suggests they leave now so they have a few hours alone together before she has to go back to work. Meg sleeps a little on the ride home. They grope each other a little and the air is sexually charged by the time they reach his apartment complex parking lot.

Chapter 16 Analysis

Meg is falling more in love with John. She keeps trying to convince herself that she just wants a lusty one night stand with him. Meg refuses to get stuck in the small town, even for John.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Meg and John engage in foreplay for an hour and a half. When Meg tries to get John to have sex with her, he refuses because he says he wants to have sex with a girl that trusts him. Since Meg won't let him kiss her in a corner and she is still fully clothed, he doesn't think she trusts him. Meg runs out of the apartment and John follows. He says he loves her and Meg screams back at him that she loves him. He tells Meg to call him later when she's not mad, but Meg said she doesn't call people.

Later, Meg calls Lois and then at 6:01 am the next morning, Meg calls John. When she tells him she's on the bridge, she hears him put on the siren. He arrives and sees the sign saying that there is a camera being monitored by the police department. Meg convinces John to come on to the bridge with her, but he takes his show off first. All Meg sees is anger in John's eyes as he arrests her and both of their cell phones fall into the river below.

Chapter 17 Analysis

Meg is scared to have sex with John because she knows she has deeper feelings than she's ever had before. Ironically, instead of convincing John he can now follow her to Birmingham, John arrests her instead.



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

Meg awakes in the backseat of John's police car. Quincy is using the smelling salts to wake her up. When Meg asks Officer Leroy where John is, he tells her that John is having a panic attack of his own because his brother and his brother's girlfriend are the ones that got killed on that bridge.

The train roars by and Meg starts to cry. Meg cries all of the way home, driving her motorcycle with Quincy following in the ambulance and Officer Leroy behind him. She changes for work and is still crying when she gets to the diner. Corey and Purcell rush to her to find out what's wrong, but she shrugs it off as teenage angst. Meg even offers to teach Purcell how to read.

Meg calls Tiffany. When Tiffany gets to the diner, she asks Meg what's wrong. Meg confesses everything about John and how sex with him is so different because of how they feel about each other. Then, she asks Tiffany to go to the drugstore with her to figure out what her natural hair color is so she can dye her hair.

Meg asks Tiffany to go to Rashad's party with her so Meg can see John and Tiffany can help to keep Eric away from Meg. The girls also agree to be roommates in an apartment near the college.

Chapter 18 Analysis

Meg dying her hair back to brown symbolizes her acceptance of living. Since she started dying her hair crazy colors as a symbol of dying.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

While walking up to the party, Meg spots John's truck and Eric's BMW. Tiffany and Meg greet Rashad. Will greets Tiffany but almost doesn't recognize Meg with her hair dyed. He says he can't believe what she did to John. He also says that John showed up at his apartment distraught and waving his nightstick around. Eric grabs Meg from behind and Will tells him to let her go. Will puts his arm around Meg to comfort her, but when John sees this he charges Will trying to hit him. John leaves the apartment and Meg finds him in the fountain at Five Points, John says he's to room with Will and join the track team. He thinks Meg should join too. He wants them to save up money and travel through Europe together.

John comes into the diner the next morning. John and Meg are both gleaming from having sex the night before. When Meg's parent pull up in the parking lot, returning from their vacation and her dad sees her natural colored hair, he realizes that Meg is cured.

Chapter 19 Analysis

John and Meg have finally come to terms with their emotions. This includes their feelings for each other, but also for their individual hardships. For John, it is the death of his brother. For Meg, it is surviving cancer.



Characters

Meg

Meg is a 17-year-old girl, living in a small town in Alabama outside the city of Birmingham. Her parents own the local diner. Meg dyes her hair blue and she wears clothes that show off her body. She drinks alcohol and occasionally smokes pot with Eric.

When Meg was 13, she contracted Leukemia. She hides this secret from everyone that she knows. Ever since her diagnosis, she has been dyeing her hair strange colors and rebelling against her parents who forced her into treatment.

Meg is also claustrophobic. She faints when she is contained in small places or feels trapped. Later, Meg tells John this is because the policemen strapped her to a stretcher and forced her to go to her chemotherapy when she tried to run away from her parents. She is also rather promiscuous, having sex with Eric just for the sake of having sex. Meg realizes what true love is and what it feels like to share sex with someone she loves when she falls in love with John.

Officer John After

John After is the police officer that arrests Tiffany and Meg on the train bridge. He is also the officer that Meg has to ride with during her week of punishment. Tiffany realizes that Officer After is John After, a boy that went to their high school the previous year.

It turns out that John is 19 years old. He was on the track team in high school and scored the highest in school on his ACTs. Meg tries to figure out why he didn't go away to college, but instead stayed to become a police officer. It turns out that he stayed because his brother and his brother's girlfriend were killed on the train bridge.

John is tall. He was thinner in high school. After graduating from the police academy, John bulked up so he is now more muscular. He has short blonde hair and hazel eyes. During the week Meg spends with him, John falls in love with her too.

Eric

Eric is the son of a lawyer in town. His father is always getting him out of trouble, including having to do the ride alongs like Tiffany, Meg and Brian have to do for being on the bridge. He was kicked out of college for selling pot from his dorm room. Eric and Meg are having casual sex. Eric is the same age as John After, and it turns out the boys knew each other in high school.



Eric continuously tries to hassle Eric. He first does this by taking Meg up to the train bridge, knowing that John patrols it. It also takes Meg there to have sex when Eric thinks she's hooking up with John. At Rashad's party, Eric tries to convince John that Will is hitting on Meg so the two will get into a fight.

Tiffany

Tiffany is the valedictorian of Meg's class. She is a good girl and never gets into trouble. The night of the bridge incident, Meg gives Tiffany some alcohol. When the police arrive, Tiffany is drunk.

Tiffany is a virgin and turns to Meg for advice on how to get Brian back, after he breaks up with her when they get in trouble. Meg confides in Tiffany about John and helps Meg dye her hair back to its natural color. Tiffany also goes with Meg to Rashad's party to protect Meg from Eric and help Meg talk to John.

Brian

Brian is a boy in Meg's class. He has a crush on Tiffany and wants to have sex with her. After they get in trouble on the bridge, Brian breaks up with Tiffany and tells her not to call him anymore. Brian, too, is a good boy and doesn't typically drink and get into trouble, except for the bridge incident.

Quincy

Quincy is a paramedic. He recognizes Meg the night she is arrested on the bridge. Later, it turns out that Quincy once saved Meg's life when she was dying during her cancer treatments. Quincy also realizes that Meg fainting is because she has panic attacks.

Lois

Lois is a woman in her 50s. She works as a dispatcher at the police station. Lois is the one that convinces John not to lock Meg back up in a cell after Meg fainted in the cell. Lois is also the one that drives Meg home when her parents don't come to bail her out of jail.

Officer Leroy

Officer Leroy is a cop. He's older than John and overweight. He puts Brian and Eric in his police car and drives them to the police station. Officer Leroy is the one that tells Meg John's brother and his brother's girlfriend are the ones that were killed on the bridge.



Purcell

Purcell is the cook that works at the diner. He can't read. He is always struggling with Meg, who gives him a hard time when they work together. By the end of the novel, however, Meg offers to help Purcell learn how to read.

Will Billingsley

Will Billingsley was John After's best friend in high school. Will was also on the track team with John. Will is a virgin. Will thinks Meg knows about John's brother, but realizes she doesn't when Meg and Tiffany show up at Rashad's party. The couple of times that Will, John, and Meg are together in the novel, John always thinks that Will is hitting on Meg.

Rashad

Rashad is another one of John's friends from high school. It is Rashad's party that everyone goes to on Saturday. This is where John and Will almost get into a fight.



Objects/Places

Bridge

The bridge is a train bridge. It hovers over the river in the small town of Alabama where Meg and her friends live. It is rumored that a guy and his girlfriend died on the bridge, but the teenagers are not sure if it's true or just a ghost story. Eric, Meg, Brian and Tiffany are hanging out on the bridge when they are arrested for trespassing. It turns out that the bridge is where John's brother and his girlfriend were killed, making the story true and not a ghost story. As part of her punishment, Meg has to submit a report to the DA. Meg suggests they install a surveillance camera on the bridge and wire it to the police station so they'll know if anyone enters the bridge without having to have the cops patrol the area.

Eggstra! Eggstra!

Eggstra! Eggstra! is the diner that Meg's parents own. Her parents make her work at the diner without paying her. Her father says it's so she can work off the medical bills from her cancer that insurance didn't cover. Meg's mother collects salt and pepper shakers, so each table at the diner has a themed set.

Birmingham Junction

Birmingham Junction is the most dangerous intersection in town. Every night of her ride along with John, they are called to a car accident at the intersection. The final call is a fatality. John forces Meg to see the dead body there to try to show her what drinking and driving can do. This is also where John and Meg get into a fight and she screams at him that she had cancer.

Trailer

Meg's parents and Meg live in a trailer. The trailer is on the property of the diner. Their intentions were to live there while they got the diner up and running. In the meantime, Meg's medical bills had to be paid and prohibited them from moving to another home.

John's Police Car

Meg and Tiffany are arrested and placed in the backseat of John's police car. When Meg has to ride with John, they also ride in the police car. The primary setting of the novel is this car as the week of punishment unfolds and John and Meg get to know each other better.



T-shirts

Meg is constantly wearing t-shirts with funny sayings or characters on it. When John is in civilian clothes, he typically wears police or band t-shirts.

John's Apartment

John's apartment is where Meg discovers John's ability to draw. It is also in John's apartment where John and Meg attempt to have sex for the first time. The apartment is right around the corner from the Birmingham Junction and you can hear vehicles from the highway when you're in the parking lot of the complex.

Artwork

John draws various places that he has been. His artwork features the fountain at Five Points and the bridge. He also has sketches of the places he visited when he was traveling through Europe.

Forms

From the beginning to the end of the novel, John is always filling out police forms. Meg sometimes thinks he's pretending to fill out the forms to avoid dealing with the situation at hand.

Notebook

Meg keeps notes in a notebook during the week of punishment. John reads the notebook. Inside the notebook, Meg has written some of her feelings for John.



Themes

Relationships

One of the primary themes running through the novel is relationships. The novel reveals that even the individuals that make up a family have different relationships among the family members. For example, Meg is much closer to her mother than she is to her father. While her mother tries to protect and stick up for Meg, her father has given up on bailing Meg out because she's always getting into trouble.

Friendship is another type of relationship that the novel addresses. First, Tiffany and Meg are friends in junior high school. They become friends again when they are getting ready to graduate from high school. Meg has closed herself off to getting close to people since she got cancer and survived it. By the end of the novel, Meg and Tiffany rekindle their friendship, even planning to be roommates in an apartment at the University of Birmingham.

Romantic relationships are also important in the novel. Meg and Eric are having a casual sexual relationship when the novel opens. John and Meg start to fall in love as they get to know each other during the week Meg works with John. By the end of the novel, both John and Meg come to know what true love is because they feel it for each other.

Coming of Age

One of the primary themes that run throughout the novel is growing up and coming of age, even against adversity, such as losing a sibling and surviving cancer. Meg struggles with the fact that his coming of age includes having her first true love, which is someone that is policemen when she is somewhat of a delinquent. Meg struggles with her love for John and how far she should go with him sexually.

Brian, Tiffany and Meg are struggling with the transition from high school students to their freshman year at college. They are trying to finish up their senior year, while experimenting with some alcohol and even drugs. They're coming of age also includes being arrested for trespassing and underage drinking on the bridge.

Family

Family is the central theme throughout the entire novel. This is because the storyline is about the lives of Meg's family and John's family. Each of their family situations has affected how these two people deal with their emotions. For Meg, her cancer causes her to rebel against her parents and for her parents to give up on her delinquent behavior. On the other hand, John's family is torn apart by the death of his brother. This

forces John into being a policeman because he doesn't want to see what happened to his family happen to other families.

Style

Point of View

The novel is written in the first-person point of view, from the perspective of the main character and narrator, Meg. The novel swings back and forth between the present and the past. The present represents the time after Meg is in remission from her cancer. The past represents the time leading up to her diagnosis.

The point of view of this novel is intimate, allowing a reader to connect closely with the main character, Meg. The book written in this manner allows the reader to get inside Meg's head, thoughts and inner struggles. The reader cares what happens to the narrator. The point of view also allows the author to inject her own opinions into the narration and to expand on the events taking place around the other characters and the occurrences taking place.

Setting

The novel is set primarily in a small town in Alabama about 20 minutes from Birmingham. The novel unfolds during the 21st century. The main characters are involved in the aftermath of being arrested for underage drinking and trespassing on the local train bridge.

The setting of this novel works well with the plot. At first, the reader is not aware that John After's brother was killed on the train bridge, or that Meg is a cancer survivor. However, as events unfold, the death and cancer are a constant part of the plot, the lives of the characters and even the outcome of the novel.

Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is relatively simple and easy to read. The language is from the 21st century, which is when the novel is set. The language is descriptive enough that it helps to explain the situations and is detailed enough for the reader to truly understand.

Structure

The novel is divided into 19 chapters. The novel tells the story primarily in exposition and some dialogue. The narrator injects her own voice and thoughts throughout the book, providing her opinions and feelings of the events unfolding in the novel.

The novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot revolves 2 primary human relationships - friendship and romantic relationships. One subplot is the coming of age of the characters concerning Meg. Another subplot is family relationships.



Quotes

"It's not long enough for those kids to have gotten killed on it."
Chapter 1, p. 2

"She has a little problem with being restrained."
Chapter 2, p. 10

"They've washed their hands of me."
Chapter 3, p. 28

"You are going to spend your spring break pulling night shift with that cop After, like the DA said on the phone. And then you're going to work morning shift here. If you have the energy to get yourself arrested in the eight hours you have left in the day...Vaya con Dios"
Chapter 4, p. 41

"Tiffany, Officer After is in hot pursuit of another suspect."
Chapter 5, p. 50

"I went through a Goth phase when I was nine. I grew out of it."
Chapter 6, p. 68

"A boy will be your downfall."
Chapter 7, p. 81

"You mean am I serious with John?"
Chapter 8, p. 91

"He's a nice guy, and he would fall in love with you, and you would break his heart."
Chapter 9, p. 101

"Something bad is going to happen here."
Chapter 10, p. 117

"You can draw!"
Chapter 11, p. 137



"Don't stick a needle in me."
Chapter 12, p. 147

"Go to After's car. He wants to talk to you."
Chapter 13, p. 162

"I feel sorry for the officers on that call."
Chapter 14, p. 176

"No sudden change of heart."
Chapter 15, p.190

"Are you ready to go?"
Chapter 16, p. 204

"I'm in love with you."
Chapter 17, p. 213

"You know his brother got killed on that bridge."
Chapter 18, p. 222

"Welcome home."
Chapter 19, p. 245

Topics for Discussion

Who is the true Meg? Why do you think she starts dying her hair and becomes a delinquent? When Meg starts dating Eric, what do you think this does for Meg's own social status? What does Meg ultimately realize about her relationship with Eric?

Who is the true Officer John After? Why do you think he hides his identity from Tiffany and Meg when he firsts arrests them? Why does John keep his brother's death a secret? What does John ultimately realize about his relationship with Meg?

Discuss the relationship between Meg and Eric. Are they friends, foes, lovers or somewhere in between? Is there true competition in their relationship? How does Meg feel about Eric? How does Eric feel about Meg? How do Meg's feelings change? What does she do about it? What happens to Eric?

Discuss the relationship between Meg and John. Are they friends, foes, lovers or somewhere in between? Is there true competition in their relationship? How does Meg feel about John? How does John feel about Meg? How do Meg's feelings change? What does she do about it? What happens to John?

Discuss the relationship between Eric and John. Are they friends, foes, or somewhere in between? Is there true competition in their relationship? How does John feel about Eric? How does Eric feel about John?

Who is John? Why do you think he puts off having with Meg? What role does Meg play in John's decision to go to college?

Discuss Meg's cancer. What impact does this have on the characters in the novel? How does it motivate them and how does it derail their lives? Does she come to terms with being a cancer survivor by the end of the novel? How do you know this?