

Hold Still Study Guide

Hold Still by Nina LaCour

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Plot Summary

"Hold Still" is a painful story of loss, grief, depression, and the journey toward letting go, and allowing oneself to heal. When Caitlin's best friend Ingrid commits suicide, Caitlin wants nothing more than to hold still, remembering her love for her friend. However, she slowly learns through her good friends and family that she must continue on with life, and that the first step to healing is to let go of guilt.

"Hold Still" by Nina LaCour is the story of sixteen-year-old Caitlin Madison who is devastated one day when her best friend of several years commits suicide. Caitlin is devastated, and finds herself plunged into darkness and depression, wanting little to do with her family, friends, or anything else. After struggling through the summer, she is forced to attend school, where those she knows pressure her for information about her friend's death. Taylor, a local popular boy, soon befriends Caitlin, as does new girl Dylan, and as Caitlin begins to care for them, she finds herself afraid of beginning new relationships, almost in tribute to her beloved deceased friend.

One day, however, Caitlin finds the diary of Ingrid under her own bed and she begins to read an entry every day, keeping her friend alive in her memory. As she reads, however, she slowly learns that Ingrid held a terrible secret life of manic depression, suicidal tendencies, sexual deviance, self-mutilation, and a host of other issues Caitlin only knows the surface of. Caitlin slowly realizes she was not to blame for her friend's death, and that Ingrid's decision was her own, and nothing could have been done. It is only when Caitlin is able to forgive herself, as well as Ingrid, that she is able to move forward. With the help of Taylor and Dylan, along with her loving family, Caitlin is finally able to overcome the tragedy, and begin living her life again. Further, as Caitlin is able to heal, so are the others that surround her who have also been hurting, such as Caitlin's parents, teachers, and Ingrid's own family. With the help of photography, a shared love between herself and Ingrid, and the building of a tree house, Caitlin works through her anger and frustration about her friend's death, and realizes she must let go of the past in order to have a valid and hopeful future. In doing so, she helps others understand their own lingering pain, and allows them to begin to heal, as well.

"Hold Still" is a tragic story of loss, depression, and the severe pain and suffering of losing a loved one. It is also a story of hope and healing and of learning to overcome suffering to find strength and happiness. The book is also a story of forgiveness and a renewed sense of hope.



Summer (pg. 5 - 10)

Summer (pg. 5 - 10) Summary

In "Summer," Caitlin finds out her best friend Ingrid has committed suicide. She tries to control her anguish, and finds herself wandering away from home, catching a bus, and riding it to somewhere she doesn't know. She tries to block her thoughts through random fact review, and pushes away her feelings. After many hours of sitting alone, her father arrives to silently take her home. For several days, Caitlin sleeps and cries endlessly. Her parents decide to take her away for a while, and during a roadside picnic, they try to explain that Ingrid was clinically depressed for many years, and on medication to try to help. Caitlin tunes them out, however, unable to process the thoughts in her grief. That night, in the cabin, Caitlin again uses random facts to drown out her thoughts of Ingrid. By July, Caitlin's father returns home, but her mother and she continue to stay on in Northern California, taking hikes and drives, watching movies and exploring caves, to help keep Caitlin occupied, but in September, the family must return home, so Caitlin can begin school.

Summer (pg. 5 - 10) Analysis

In "Summer," readers are given the main plot line of the story, that of the death of Ingrid, Caitlin's friend. Although at this point in the story, the author chooses not to disclose the details of the death, or of the relationship between Caitlin and Ingrid, it becomes clear even in this brief section that Ingrid committed suicide. This is implied through discussions of her depression, her medication, and the careful way in which Caitlin's parents seem to handle the situation. This foreshadows the knowledge later in the novel of how Ingrid died, and of her spiral into depression over time. Additionally, the relationship between Caitlin and Ingrid is also implied, simply by the way Caitlin reacts to the news. It is very clear she is devastated, and inconsolable. Her complete inability to process the information shows how big of a blow the news is to her. Her parent's concern also show their own pain as a result of their daughter's suffering. Although brief, this section does serve to introduce the suffering and pain Caitlin feels, in a way that readers can fully understand the depth of her anguish over the loss of her friend.



Fall (pg. 13 - 36)

Fall (pg. 13 - 36) Summary

In "Fall," sections 1 - 11, Caitlin wakes up at three a.m. in the morning and unable to go back to sleep, goes out to the car she has yet to learn to drive. She knows her parents are too worried about her to sleep, but every night, she finds herself back in the car instead of in her bed, pulling the cotton from the seats and trying to get rid of her anguish. Only after screaming, crying, and pulling the fur from the seat covers is she able to fall asleep.

In the morning, Caitlin walks the short walk to school, remembering she and Ingrid's past as she worries about how others will want to talk about what happened to Ingrid. Shortly, she is approached by Taylor Riley, a good looking, popular young man Caitlin goes to school with. As he skateboards next to her, he gives his condolences as they enter the school parking lot, where others begin to approach as well, faking sincere sympathy. Taylor, almost embarrassed, asks how Ingrid did it, and Caitlin turns away, thankful her first class in photography. She imagines her teacher coming to her to comfort her.

In class, however, Caitlin is surprised to find Mrs. Delani seems to want nothing to do with her. Caitlin tries to approach, but is rebuked, and she is forced to sit with the others, bewildered by her favorite teacher's lack of any emotion. As she looks around the room, she sees Ingrid's photos from last year in the front, showcased, while her own are pinned in a dark corner of the room. Unable to sit still as she remembers taking the photo with Ingrid, she rises and cleans out her cubby, now caring little of Mrs. Delani's reactions. In the locker, Caitlin finds several photos of Ingrid's, including her favorite of a hill with wild flowers that she now thinks of as a fairytale world that can no longer exist.

All morning, Caitlin remembers her first meeting of Ingrid, in freshman year photography, and how quickly they became friends. In English, Caitlin sees a few she knows, such as popular Henry Lucas, but during roll, a new young woman walks in, named Dylan Schuster. She is dressed in tight clothing, with wild hair and dark makeup, and Caitlin is intrigued. Later, she discovers the young woman has a locker next to hers. She smiles and says hello, but Caitlin barely responds. After school, Mrs. Madison arrives in her Volvo to surprise Caitlin on her first day back. She takes her out for Chinese, but Caitlin soon discovers her mother is merely conning her into answering questions about how she is adjusting, and whether or not she is trying to be social. She suggests a therapist, but Caitlin refuses.

By Friday night, even Caitlin's father is beginning to ask questions, and Caitlin escapes to the silence of her car. She listens to a tape Ingrid's brother made for her over and over again as she does her math homework. In her head, she has a conversation with Ingrid about the first day of school, and she finds herself wishing someone would call. She knows, however, her only friend is dead. When her mother comes out, gesturing



through the window that she should come in, Caitlin ignores her, listening to the painful singer on the tape, feeling his pain.

The following morning, Caitlin is awoken by her father, who has bought her stacks and stacks of wood, as he pushes her to build something to keep her mind occupied. Caitlin, knowing her father is trying hard to make her happy, smiles and feigns happiness as she remembers the first day she and Ingrid cut class, and instead went to the park. In school the following day, Mrs. Delani meets with each student to create goals for the semester, and while she waits, Caitlin recalls attending a showing of Mrs. Delani's artwork. She also listens to the conversations of others, and is annoyed when she hears two popular girls claiming to have heard Dylan, the new girl, is a lesbian, who was thrown out of her school for making out with someone in the bathroom. When she is finally called up for her one on one, Mrs. Delani doesn't even look at her, and barely says anything. Caitlin tries to push her, but the bell rings, and Mrs. Delani goes to her office, quietly closing the door.

Fall (pg. 13 - 36) Analysis

In the first part of "Fall," several characters are introduced, and some of the major themes of the novel are explored. It is clear from the beginning of this section that Caitlin is very disturbed by her friends passing, as is shown by her inability to sleep, and her constant anxiety. However, it is also clear in this first section that Caitlin is not the only person suffering the effects of Ingrid's death, as her parents are clearly deeply worried about their daughter. This idea, that death affects many both directly and indirectly, continues throughout the novel. Caitlin's friends, too, are affected, although in varied ways. Taylor, a love interest in the novel, seems sincerely sorry for Ingrid's death, but his inappropriate curiosity drives Caitlin away. His appearance in the novel, however, combined with Caitlin's descriptions of him, foreshadow his role as a love interest. On the other hand, friends such as Alicia are clearly uninterested in Ingrid's death so much as they are in the gossip surrounding it. Taylor's comment in this section, asking how Ingrid did it, confirms what readers suspect, that Ingrid did, in fact commit suicide. This not only foreshadows knowledge later of how she did it, but also opens the door for a later conversation between Caitlin and Taylor that leads to their blossoming relationship.

Mrs. Delani's reactions in this section also display how differently death can affect people. Caitlin had a close relationship with her photography teacher at one time, but it becomes obvious that Ingrid's death has left Mrs. Delani distraught, and unable to cope with the aftermath, even forcing her to treat Caitlin badly. Her actions, while not outwardly mean, hurt Caitlin deeply, and although one might understand that Ingrid's death has impacted Mrs. Delani, readers can't help but feel angry at the way she deals with the issue. This situation foreshadows a continued struggle between these characters as each comes to terms with Ingrid's death in different ways.

The brief introduction of Dylan Schuster in this chapter also foreshadows relationships later in the novel. Dylan is not the same as the other girls in the novel, such as Alicia,



and Caitlin, in her actions and recollections of Ingrid thus far in the novel, has shown she prefers to be friends with those who may not be in the main stream. This indicates she and Dylan may become friends. This is further indicated as Caitlin finds herself quieting other girls as they bad mouth Dylan. When Dylan ends up having the locker next to Caitlin, readers can only imagine their relationship will continue to bloom.

The actions of Caitlin's parents in the novel show a high level of concern for their daughter. Between mother wanting Caitlin to seek therapy, their constant sleepless nights, and father's attempts to bring Caitlin out of her shell, her parents are showing severe distress over their daughter's situation. This again shows that death, particularly teen suicide, causes not only direct pain, but indirect, as well. When combined with the very deep and raw pain Caitlin experiences, there is a clear theme of suffering, anguish, and pain thus far in the novel that permeates nearly every situation and every relationship.



Fall (pg. 36 - 58)

Fall (pg. 36 - 58) Summary

In the second section of Fall, Caitlin runs into Jayson Michaels, who was good friends with Ingrid. Although Caitlin wants to talk, as it seems does Jayson, their encounter is brief, and Caitlin is left feeling sad. During the weekend, Caitlin is searching for a remote control when she suddenly finds Ingrid's journal under her bed. She reads the first entry, as Ingrid discusses her tormented crush on Jayson, and finds herself torn between wanting to read more, and needing to stop. The following day, she takes the journal to school, unable to leave it behind. At school, Caitlin ponders about Dylan in English as they learn about music and lyrics, and later at her locker, she and Dylan talk a bit. However, when Dylan asks if Caitlin would like to grab something to eat, Caitlin immediately refuses. As she thinks about it later, she realizes she is savoring Ingrid's diary, knowing that when she finishes, there will be nothing left.

In her car later, Ingrid focuses on her lyrics homework as she recalls a night when she and Ingrid went to Ingrid's brothers engagement party. Caitlin loved the music, but there was one specific song that moved her that night, and she was given a CD of the band. She writes her paper about this particular song and, when finished, runs her hand across the wood as she goes inside to sleep. When she rises the following morning, she realizes that, for months after that night, Ingrid existed, but was never fully happy. Feeling justified, she reads another diary entry, where Ingrid writes of Veena Delani, and how much she inspires her, and how, because of her, Ingrid's life might turn out well. Caitlin, upset, skips photography class, and as she waits outside, she thinks of all the ways she let her friend down. Caitlin knows she should have told someone when Ingrid began cutting herself, should have tolerated her crush on Jayson, should have been a better listener and friend. In Precalc, she boldly sits behind Taylor, and angrily tells him Ingrid slit her wrists. She moves desks as Taylor looks at her uncomfortably, and finds she can think of nothing other than what Ingrid probably looked like, nude in the bathtub, bleeding gashes in her arms. She recalls the first time Ingrid cut herself, and wonders why she didn't immediately turn her into the nurse, but she does remember that this was the first time she felt something good was changing.

The following morning, she and her father go shopping for tennis shoes, and her father gently pushes her, asking if she is planning on getting a license, if she has ideas for the wood. In the store, Caitlin feels overwhelmed, and her dad seems to understand. Caitlin sees a girl from school, Melanie, and although she wonders about being friends with her, she knows Melanie is "at risk", and not a likely choice for friendship. Back at school, Caitlin tries to befriend Dylan at her locker, but Dylan clearly needs her morning coffee before she can respond. In photo class, Caitlin realizes she has not turned in a single assignment, but she admits to herself she can't bring herself to taking the photos she wants to, because she doesn't want Ms. Delani to have work Caitlin actually cares about. Given an assignment, Caitlin purposefully takes blurry pictures of passing cars, out of spite.



When Caitlin and Dylan receive the only A's on the lyric project, Caitlin decides to approach Dylan again. The two talk at their lockers, and Dylan admits she is a lesbian, and teases Caitlin that, although she is straight, they can still coexist. Taking the leap, Caitlin offers to go with Dylan to a local restaurant.

Fall (pg. 36 - 58) Analysis

The second portion of Fall introduces several characters, as well as more deeply examines some of the themes within the novel. First, Jayson Michaels is introduced briefly, and it is clear from the short exchange that he and Caitlin share something in common, the grief over Ingrid's death. This foreshadows both Jayson and Caitlin's friendship later in the novel, but also repeats the idea that death brings loss to many, and not merely to the closest of friends.

The discovery of Ingrid's journal is vital to the story, as the rest of the novel focuses highly on information Caitlin gleans from the journal, and her healing through Ingrid's words. From the first entry it is clear Ingrid felt things perhaps more deeply than others, and that her crush on Jayson was far deeper than Caitlin realized. Additionally, her desire to read small bits, to savor Ingrid, shows that Caitlin understands this is the last unknown piece of Ingrid that remains. Her decision to savor it, however, shows her desire to "Hold Still", as the book title indicates. Caitlin is unwilling at this point in the story to let go of her friend, and thus desires to linger each day over Ingrid's lost words. This, combined with her decision not to go with Dylan when asked to lunch, shows she is still clinging to a friendship that no longer can exist. It becomes clear to the reader that Caitlin first has to let go in order to move on, and that, at this point, she is unable to do that.

However, as Caitlin recalls her night with Ingrid when she received the Cure CD, readers also see that Caitlin is able to relieve herself, if even momentarily, through the creative outlet of writing. For the first time in the novel, readers see Caitlin not only touching the wood her father bought, a sign she is beginning to think of things to do with it, but also, the first time readers have seen Caitlin awaken in her own bed. Thus far in the novel, Caitlin has spend the nights in her car, but in this section, she is able to sleep in her bed, although fitfully. Combined with the realization in the morning that Ingrid was never truly happy, it becomes more clear that Caitlin is beginning to understand the depths of her friend's depression.

Caitlin's rocky relationship with Ms. Delani is again shown in this section, and when combined with Ingrid's entry, it is easy to see her frustrations. Ingrid credited Delani for her good days, and for saving her, but to Caitlin, Delani has been rude and short since Ingrid's death. For Caitlin, this journal entry is a direct hit, and her response, to begin creating bad photographs out of spite, in merely a response again her pain. This relationship foreshadows the confrontation between these characters later in the novel.

This section also shows Caitlin's feelings of guilt finally emerging. Although she is learning more about her friend's pain, she is also feeling tremendous guilt for her part in



Ingrid's unhappiness. Her counting the ways she let her friend down shows she is punishing herself. When she turns this anger at herself on Taylor, and brashly tells of how Ingrid died, she is merely expressing her anger at the situation. This encounter also foreshadows she and Taylor's beginning relationship, as Taylor is stunned by her boldness. The graphic depiction of Ingrid's suicide is difficult, but necessary in order to fully grasp the brutality of the act. This fits well with the "open wound" Caitlin and her friends all feel as a result.

Caitlin and Dylan's budding relationship in this section shows a slight shift in Caitlin, but an important one. Caitlin is beginning to long for human contact, and for friends. Although it is clear she is struggling to let go of Ingrid, and holding on to her memories tightly, it is equally clear her desire to move forward is beginning to blossom. This foreshadows both her guilt at finding new friends, as well as her eventual ability to let go of Ingrid, and accept new people into her life without fear or anguish.



Fall (pg. 58 - 81)

Fall (pg. 58 - 81) Summary

In the third section of Fall, Dylan and Caitlin talk over lunch and discuss their English papers about the song lyrics. When a silence occurs, Caitlin asks about Dylan's lesbian encounter the purportedly got her kicked out of school, Dylan laughs, noting that her father merely was transferred. Caitlin offers to show Dylan some of the town that is not simply carbon copied yuppie zones, and she takes her to an old theater she and Ingrid used to visit. Immediately, however, she begins to feel guilty, as though she is betraying her friend. When she admits she and Ingrid used to visit the theater, Dylan merely notes she understands that it must be weird to be there with someone else. Caitlin is relieved to spend time with another person, and grateful to Dylan for not being offended.

In photo class, Caitlin grows more angry with Ms. Delani, and one day confronts her about using Ingrid's photos, but Ms. Delani merely agrees she should get permission to use others' photos, and moves on with the discussion. In the following period, Caitlin is summoned to the counselors office, where she is asked about Ingrid. Instead, Caitlin stubbornly refuses to discuss things, and when she is dismissed, she skips school and goes home to read another journal entry. In it, Ingrid writes to Jayson, noting her desire for him, and her belief that he could help heal her. She also notes that Caitlin doesn't want to listen to her talk of him, and that she is annoyed. Caitlin hides the journal again, immediately annoyed and defensive. Instead of thinking about the situation, she begins dragging the wood to the back of the house, anxious to work on something. Calling back to the house later by her parents, Caitlin is in trouble when the school calls, noting she missed class. Her mother tries to warn her of the dangers of skipping school, but when Caitlin ignores her, she is hurt, and leaves the room, clearly upset.

Hours later her mother knocks on her bedroom door, but only to tell her a boy is at the door. It is clear she has been crying and Caitlin feels ashamed. However, she is also surprised when she discovers the boy at the door is Taylor. He explains he wanted to give Caitlin the quiz assignment, but is embarrassed when he realizes he is wearing an offensive tshirt. He and Caitlin laugh, and he turns his shirt inside out as she thanks him. As he leaves, however, he tells her he is sorry for asking about Ingrid the way he did, since it clearly hurt her. He also informs her she must be in the anger stage of grief, because the way she told Taylor of Ingrid's suicide method was extremely harsh. Caitlin, upset after he leaves, needs a friend and calls Dylan, who agrees to hang out after school. Caitlin sleeps in the car again that night.

The following day, Caitlin tries to explain that her efforts to create bad photographs for Ms. Delani stem from her not wanting to put forth effort, but Dylan admits she thinks Caitlin is trying to call attention to herself. After a brief argument, they walk to Dylan's house nearby, where Caitlin sees a photograph of Maddy, Dylan's girlfriend. She also sees a photo of a little boy, but Dylan seems to not want to talk about him. Instead, they go to the kitchen where Dylan asks Caitlin to go with her into the city to meet her friends



the following afternoon. At home later, Caitlin goes to the car to read another entry in the journal, but finds she cannot get comfortable in the back seat, so she moves up front, where she rarely sits. The entry is Ingrid lamenting about her life, noting that she wishes she could cut deeper to get through the day, but that she can't seem to escape her sadness. She feels a total waste. Caitlin, angry, wonders why Ingrid never told her how she felt, and notes that Ingrid felt like everything was a waste because she chose to make it that way.

Fall (pg. 58 - 81) Analysis

In this section, readers can see that Caitlin is torn between her love for Ingrid and her desire for new friends. When she and Dylan visit the theater, Caitlin knows she feels a need to connect, but at the same time, she also feels extremely guilty, as though she is betraying her old friend. Her decision to call Dylan to hang out also shows her desire for friendship, but again, her decision to sleep in the car shows her reverting back to her comfort zone in guilt. It is clear Caitlin moves back and forth, and is torn in both directions. Dylan's reaction to Caitlin's questions about her lesbian affairs shows, however, that Dylan is far more than her lesbian reputation leads her to be, and that she is patient and kind. This budding relationship foreshadows Caitlin and Dylan's friendship over the course of the novel.

Caitlin's anger at Ms. Delani is increasing throughout the novel, and it is clear this relationship will eventually boil over, and a confrontation will occur. Even Dylan can see that Caitlin's behaviors are purposefully trying to anger her instructor, thereby drawing attention to herself. Her love of photography and her desire to anger her teacher combine to create a duality for her that she struggles with throughout the novel.

Regardless of everything else, it is clear Caitlin is beginning to heal. Her decision to work with the wood shows she is beginning to work through her anger and frustrations in a healthier way. Although she still lashes out, as she does with her mother, she also is clearly trying to overcome the situation. Her defensiveness with Ingrid when she discusses her lack of desire to listen to her talk about Jayson shows that even she knows Ingrid is at times unfair with her statements. Caitlin knows she was a good friend, and often listened to Ingrid's discussions of her crush, but even she had her limits. At the end of the chapter, when Caitlin struggles with Ingrid's journal entry about cutting, even she is aware that Ingrid made choices to be unhappy.

Caitlin's relationship with her mother is another source of concern in this section. Caitlin lashes out often at her mother, even when she is merely trying to help. Her mother is concerned, and hurting for her daughter, and yet her daughter continues to push her away. This continued battle foreshadows their eventual coming together later in the novel. In addition, Taylor's appearance at the door foreshadows his interest in her, but it is also apparent he was hurt by her directness about Ingrid's suicide. This shows Taylor to be a good person, as well as sensitive, which foreshadow his handling of Caitlin's issues later in the novel.



Finally, this section introduces Dylan's own inner pain. When Caitlin mentions the picture in Dylan's room, it becomes apparent that Dylan does not want to talk about the little boy. One can only assume the child is important to her, and that something happened to the boy that hurt Dylan. This foreshadows the revelation later that Dylan too has lost someone close to her, explaining why her reactions to Caitlin are so supportive.



Fall (pg. 81 - 91)

Fall (pg. 81 - 91) Summary

In the final part of Fall, Caitlin is surprised, but happy, when Taylor sits near her in precalc, and offers to work with her on a math project. In the library waiting for Dylan later, Caitlin finds a book of elaborate, adult tree houses, and decides to begin building one from the wood her father gave her. In the city later, Caitlin is awed by the toughness of Dylan, as she remembers Ingrid always crying in the city about the homeless, or the seemingly troubled. When Caitlin meets Dylan's friends, she is surprised at their worldly appearance, and their coolness. After talking for a while, the group separates, and Caitlin and Dylan go to meet Maddy. Dylan seems edgy, but Caitlin notices this seems to disappear the moment she sees her girlfriend. As the three talk, Caitlin finds she adores Maddy, who is an actress, and she finds herself admitting she enjoys building things. Caitlin learns Dylan is extremely smart, having been to physics camp several years, but she also learns from Maddy when Dylan is inside that Dylan, too, has lost someone dear to her.

After a ride home with Dylan, Maddy, and Dylan's mom, Caitlin finds herself wanting to stay with them forever. Inside her own home, when asked, she notes how wonderful her day was, and imagines herself hanging out with Dylan's friends. However she soon remembers Ingrid's diary, and the next entry is about her. In it, Ingrid begs her to think she is normal, laments that she constantly questions her normalcy, and notes that Caitlin often looks at her like she doesn't know her, which frightens her. Finished reading, Caitlin is wracked with guilt, paralyzed by how horrible of a friend she now believes herself to have been. She now believes she could have saved Ingrid, if she had only seen her pain, and feels even more guilty for her happiness with her new friends.

Fall (pg. 81 - 91) Analysis

The final portion of "Fall" sees Caitlin reverting back into her sadness and despair, after a happy afternoon with new friends. Taylor clearly likes Caitlin, as is shown by his desire to work with her on the math project, and this foreshadows their building relationship. Additionally, Caitlin's decision to make a tree house from the wood shows again her desire to begin working on something, showing she is slowly moving forward. This is further shown by her decision to accompany Dylan to the city, and by her ease of conversation with Dylan's friends. Caitlin enjoys the day fully, and learns Dylan, too, has lost someone, as was indicated previously in the book. Caitlin's desire to stay in the car with Maddy and Dylan, and her response to her parents about her day, all show how good she is feeling about her situation, and how positive she is feeling about life. However, when she reads Ingrid's diary, she is again plunged into guilt and despair. Ingrid is clear in her statements that Caitlin is sometimes the reason for her feelings of inadequacy. Although this isn't fair, Caitlin still feels responsible for her friend's

emotions. She feels like a horrible friend, and that maybe, if she had been better, she could have saved Ingrid. This guilt will continue to plague Caitlin, and this foreshadows her bad decisions in upcoming chapters as she struggles to be loyal to her friend., even after her death.



Winter (pg. 95 - 123)

Winter (pg. 95 - 123) Summary

In the first section of "Winter," Caitlin breaks into the photo lab, as she has done several times over the course of the last few years. While there, she imagines a conversation with Ingrid, and it pains her. She knows she is supposed to meet Dylan for lunch, but Caitlin realizes she is not ready to be a friend yet. Instead of explaining that, she hides with the "out" crowd that includes Melanie, the girl from the shopping mall. She doesn't fit in, but she is relieved she doesn't have to speak to Dylan. Later, when Dylan tries to talk to her, Caitlin blows her off, and Dylan is clearly upset. Caitlin begins drawing up tree house plans in an unused bathroom during lunch to avoid people.

Later, Taylor and Caitlin sit on the football field, working on their project, and Caitlin finds it hard to focus, as she clearly likes Taylor. However, her happy moment is ruined when she sees Dylan walking with another girl, and she realizes it has been two weeks since they have spoken. Depressed, Caitlin asks to leave, and Taylor lets her drive his car, which she thankfully remembers how to do. At home, Caitlin admits to being torn by what she is doing to Dylan, her desire for Taylor, and her anguish over Ingrid's death. Confused, she begins building the first part of her tree house as she remembers a night when Ingrid sat making out with a boy she barely knew. As she walks to the house, she realizes she is happy with the beginnings of the tree house, and feels she has accomplished something.

Days later, when Caitlin receives a D on her photo assignment, she and Ms. Delani confront one another, and Caitlin angrily notes that she hasn't helped her succeed, and that she knows Delani believes she is terrible, and that Ingrid was the good photographer. Caitlin is surprised to see Ms. Delani cry, as she soundlessly walks to her office. That afternoon, Caitlin and Taylor drive to Henry's house, where Caitlin feels out of place. When Henry asks her about how hot Dylan's girlfriend is, Caitlin excuses herself, much to Taylor's dismay. He is understanding however, and Caitlin instead walks to the restaurant she and Dylan visited, but eats alone.

At school, Alicia confronts Caitlin about her relationship with Dylan, noting that people are beginning to talk about her. Caitlin defends Dylan, reminding Alicia that she doesn't even know the young woman. Later, in her bathroom, she searches the mirror, wondering if it would be better to be visibly wounded, like Melanie, so that others could see her pain. When she tries to speak with Dylan later, she is ignored, and frustrated, she immediately goes home to read Ingrid's journal. In it, Ingrid again talks about Jayson, as well as the theater, and Caitlin finds herself again plunged into anguish, wondering why her friend felt such a need to escape life, and leave her alone.

Later, Taylor comes to work on the math project, and the two talk briefly. When Taylor notices a photo of Ingrid and comments on how much Caitlin must miss her, she realizes she is lonely. Without thinking, Caitlin pulls off her shirt, and waits for Taylor to



notice. When he does, Caitlin finds herself easing toward him, wrapping his legs around him, and kissing him softly. At first, Taylor responds, but Caitlin suddenly hears Ingrid's words in her head, and panics, knowing this isn't her. Taylor stops kissing her, embarrassed, and gives her back her shirt. As he gets ready to leave, he admits he wanted this to happen, but that the situation just felt wrong. He is gentle, and Caitlin is able to smile as they talk about third grade, when Taylor had a crush on her. Later, she takes her third grade yearbook to the tree house, and is able to find Taylor as she thinks about her life then, without tragedy.

Winter (pg. 95 - 123) Analysis

"Winter" continues the theme of confusion for Caitlin as she struggles between new friends and Ingrid. Her decision to blow off Dylan instead of explaining things to her shows she is not yet ready to confront her true feelings, but this also foreshadows her falling out with Dylan in the next several chapters. Dylan quickly finds new friends, and Caitlin is left alone, feeling guilty on all fronts now. Her memories of Ingrid are beginning to show that, even though she pretended not to notice, there were clear indications that something was wrong even before the suicide. Her work on the tree house, however, shows she is finding an outlet for her confusions and frustrations.

As foreshadowed, Caitlin and Ms. Delani's confrontation occurs, but it does not happen as Caitlin would have suspected. When Ms. Delani cries, it becomes clear to the reader that perhaps she does not hate Caitlin, but instead feels her own level of guilt over the death of one of her prize students. This, combined with her comments and her decision to turn away, foreshadows the two coming together by the end of the novel.

By the middle of this section, Caitlin is again turning back toward her new social life as she accompanies Taylor to Henry's. Although it is awkward, she still makes the attempt, showing she is still healing, despite her guilt. Her statement to Taylor to bring her leftovers softens her desire not to go eat with him, and allows her time to go to she and Dylan's favorite restaurant, another sign that Caitlin is starting to regret her decision in terms of Dylan's friendship. Her defense of Dylan to Alicia shows this even further, but again, it is Ingrid's journal that pulls her down, as she reads about Ingrid's sadness. However, it is also clear here that Caitlin is beginning to feel anger toward Ingrid, instead of guilt, and that she might be beginning to see the truth.

However, this moment of understanding leads Caitlin to bad decisions. Her actions with Taylor in her bedroom show a deep level of longing, and stem from her feelings of loss and anxiety. Although Taylor responds, it is clear he is uncomfortable, and he confirms this by the end of their time together. It is clear, however, that he understands Caitlin's feelings, and doesn't hold them against her, although she believes he does. She is embarrassed and upset, but her feelings in the tree house also show that she is beginning to accept her feelings more readily, as well.



Winter (pg. 124 - 146)

Winter (pg. 124 - 146) Summary

At home, Caitlin is in knots over what happened between her and Taylor, and her mother requests she leave the door open if she is having boys over. Caitlin rudely asks if she should leave it open when Dylan is over, since she is a lesbian, but quickly backs down, realizing her mother is being kind. At school, unable to face Taylor, Caitlin hides in the bathroom only to find Dylan there. As she breezes past her, Caitlin wonders if she can ever forgive her.

Later that night, Caitlin takes photographs of the night sky. The following day, wanting the feeling of developing good photographs she used to feel with Ingrid, she retrieves the reel she used the night before her junior year, when she photographed the lights in the house from her car. She sneaks into the darkroom, but realizes quickly she isn't alone, as Ms. Delani is there. Instead of throwing her out, however, she allows her to finish, even reminding her to close the window she sneaks in through tightly when she leaves.

On Sunday, Caitlin wakes to a cold, sad feeling, and calls Jayson, as it is Ingrid's birthday, and she needs someone to be with who understands. When she explains to him that Ingrid was in love with him, he notes that he kept waiting for something to happen between them, but nothing ever did. When she died, Jayson admits he felt more deserving of his pain, but knew he had no right to feel that way, since their relationship never got off the ground. As he explains his feelings, Caitlin takes him to the old theater, where she finally breaks in, so the two can go inside. Jayson admits he runs by the theater almost nightly, and the two note the irony of both thinking no one knew about the theater. After exploring, the two leave, and Caitlin finally asks if Taylor hates her now. Jayson laughs, and points out that the situation was hot, and Taylor completely likes her.

Later that day, Caitlin goes to Dylan, and explains her recent behavior. Dylan is reluctant, but willing to accept her apology. She explains that Maddy has a role in Romeo and Juliet, and wants Caitlin to come, but Dylan expresses concern that now may not be the right time for such a play for Caitlin. As the two talk, Caitlin tells her of her attack on Taylor, and of her recent bathroom activities. When Caitlin presses Dylan that she wants to go to the play with her, Dylan is direct, noting that she doesn't want to merely be a replacement for Ingrid. Caitlin explains that she is choosing Dylan as a friend, and Dylan relents, noting that Caitlin should ask Taylor to join them.

That night, Veena Delani phones Caitlin, and arranges for a meeting Monday morning, before school. Delani admits, when Caitlin arrives, that they have had a rough start, and that she was hoping Caitlin would drop the class. She explains, however, that she had two wonderful students, one in Ingrid and one in Caitlin, but she lost Ingrid. When Caitlin rebukes her, noting she thinks her work is terrible, Delani explains she actually loves



Caitlin's work. She also explains that Ingrid took thousands of photographs of Caitlin, as she inspired her greatly. Ingrid even won a photo competition shortly before her death by turning in a portrait of Caitlin. She explains, however, that she failed Ingrid by not seeing the pain behind her photos, and Caitlin reminds her she also failed her, by not being there when she needed her. Delani continues to note that, to her, Ingrid is forever entwined to Caitlin, and that Delani knew that if Caitlin reached out, she would have a responsibility to her that she couldn't cope with. Caitlin finally begins to cry when Delani gives her a photo of her swinging, and she remembers the day with Ingrid as they cut school to go to the park. As she leaves Caitlin in her office to recover, Delani points out that the photographs bring Ingrid back a little, and bring a little of Caitlin back, as well.

Later, as Caitlin and her mother are running errands, Caitlin recalls she needs a rope for her tree house. When her mother sees her purchasing it, however, she panics, thinking perhaps Caitlin is planning suicide. Her mother is visibly shaken, and for the first time in months, Caitlin reaches for her, and holds her tightly, reassuring her she is fine. At home, her parents are thrilled when she shows them her tree house, and Caitlin is pleased with the pride she sees in their faces.

Winter (pg. 124 - 146) Analysis

In the second section of "Winter," Caitlin is again short with her mother, but readers notice a change, in that Caitlin actually backs down a bit from her anger, again showing she is beginning to be able to control her emotions better. This is shown, too, by her reaction to Dylan in the bathroom, as she doesn't act out, but instead begins to think of how to ask for forgiveness. It is clear by this point that Caitlin is leaning toward redemption from her friends, as opposed to isolation. This improvement of relationships continues with Ms. Delani, as they meet in the darkroom, but say little. Even this brief exchange, however, shows that Ms. Delani is not angry with Caitlin, as was previously indicated. This introduces the possibility that perhaps these characters can repair their relationship.

Ingrid's birthday is a breakthrough moment for Caitlin, as well. Her choice to involve Jayson is important, as it again shows her reaching out to someone else to help her through the emotional time. Additionally, Jayson's comments about his emotions at the time help to show that as much as Caitlin was hurting, there were others who hurt, as well. His comments seem to spur Caitlin, who finally has the courage to break into the theater to see the inside. This is symbolic, in that her breaking in represents her breaking through the emotional barrier that is keeping her so solidly tied to Ingrid's memory. This helps her later, as she decides to move forward with her relationship with Dylan as well. Her honesty with Dylan, and her willingness to accept that Dylan will have to work to become friends again really shows her dedication to making things right. In addition, the upcoming play foreshadows Caitlin's first date with Taylor, although the knowledge that it is Romeo and Juliet does indicate Caitlin may have issues, due to the content.



The scene between Delani and Caitlin is vital to the story, as it shows a definite change in Caitlin, and explains Delani's reactions thus far in the book. Delani's explanation that her loss of Ingrid, coupled with her own inability to deal with Caitlin, shows her not only as a human being, but also as a caring, compassionate person. Although her actions, like Caitlin's several times in the novel, were wrong, her emotions caused her to have a difficult time facing Caitlin. She knew that if she had to deal with Caitlin's loss, her own inadequacies and emotions would spill over. She wasn't avoiding Caitlin because she disliked her, but because she DID like her. Just as Caitlin worried about her ability to be a friend to Dylan, Ms. Delani worried about being able to be a teacher and influential role model for Caitlin. Caitlin also is able to see just how much she herself inspired Ingrid in this section.

The end of this section, where Caitlin and her mother have their own moment, also shows there is healing happening in Caitlin's life. When she sees her mother, so clearly upset and visibly shaken, Caitlin is finally able to understand the depth of her mother's own pain and concern. Caitlin knew her mother was worried but she was so wrapped in her own feelings to really see the pain of those around her. Through Jayson, Ms. Delani, and her own mother, Caitlin is finally realizing she is not alone in her pain. This allows her to reach out, and bond again with her parents, as she shows them her tree house, which is a further display of her healing.



Spring (pg. 149 - 175)

Spring (pg. 149 - 175) Summary

The beginning of "Spring" finds Caitlin working on her tree house, building up courage to talk to Taylor. At school, when she finally asks Taylor out for Friday, he accepts, happily. When Friday comes, Caitlin struggles with what to wear, and finally asks Dylan to help. Finished, Caitlin looks both alluring as well as sophisticated, and Dylan notes Taylor will be impressed. Caitlin is excited, but in the coffee shop prior to the show, she runs into Ingrid's brother and sister in law. Although they are happy to see one another, Caitlin feels the familiar guilty emotions, but she pulls together and makes it through.

At the theater, Dylan is clearly proud of her girlfriend as the trio takes their seats and looks at Maddy's photograph in the program. When Dylan sees her other friends and waves, but chooses to stay with Caitlin and Taylor, Caitlin admits she is overjoyed at her own happiness. Caitlin enjoys the show, but as the death scenes of Romeo and Juliet play through, it is clear she is struggling. Taylor notices, and helps her through, talking to her calmly, directing her to look at the audience. Following the play, Taylor and Caitlin talk as Maddy and Dylan greet other friends, but soon, Maddy and Dylan are kissing, as are Taylor and Caitlin.

At school, Taylor and Caitlin give their presentation about the asthmatic, and are rewarded with praise. Later, Caitlin refuses Taylor's offer to hang out, and instead visits the DMV, where she finally tests for and receives her driver's license. She calls her mother to come get her, and it is clear when she arrives and is told the news that she is thrilled for her daughter. Caitlin, excited, calls both Taylor and Dylan, but is nervous when Dylan asks her to drive to school, as her car is a stick and she doesn't know how to drive it.

The following morning, Dylan arrives to help teach Caitlin to drive her car. After an awkward but pleasant exchange with her parents, the two take off, with Dylan gently coaching Caitlin on how to drive a stick. Even when she gets flustered after killing it at a red light, Dylan remains patient. At school, Caitlin asks Dylan about parties, as Henry is having one Friday night, and Caitlin has never been to one. Dylan, as always, simply smiles and agrees to go. Later that night, Caitlin invites Taylor to dinner, and, thrilled that her parents want to meet him, he accepts happily. Through dinner, they talk comfortably, but Caitlin admits she wants Taylor alone. When asked to go get ice cream, the couple use their chance, and park for a while, making out. Caitlin is immeasurably happy.

At school, Ms. Delani and Caitlin go over Delani's latest photographs as she explains that her images are ways in which she comes to terms with herself. Caitlin is amazed that she barely recognizes her teacher in some of the photos, as she is relaxed, and even risqué in some. She admits that her current project is working on an emptiness, a feeling of vacancy. Delani explains that Caitlin should come up with her own project to



make up for her missed work, and gives her access to Ingrid's file of photos for inspiration. While she doesn't find any immediately, she does choose a few photographs to take home.

Spring (pg. 149 - 175) Analysis

The opening of "Spring" further shows Caitlin's healing process, as she is able to ask Taylor out. Her concerns over what she looks like shows her interest in Taylor, and her easy relationship with Dylan is an outward expression of her new found ability to forgive herself for Ingrid's death and move on. Even her encounter with Ingrid's older brother and sister-in-law, although clearly uncomfortable, show Caitlin is moving on, as does her reaction to the play. It is understandable that Caitlin is bothered by the content of the play, but at the same time, she also manages to get through it, with the help of Taylor. Their kisses at the end of the play show their relationship is advancing, and readers understand that Caitlin is nearly complete in terms of her transformation to a healthier person.

Caitlin further shows her healing as she finally goes to get her license. Although she struggles with the stick, this moment of her driving herself, with the help of Dylan, is symbolic, in that finally, Caitlin has taken her life back from Ingrid. She loves her friend, but she has made a conscious decision to put herself back in control. This is further indicated by both her desire to go to the party, and her desire to take Dylan, as well as her happiness with Taylor. In both situations, Caitlin has come full circle, able to enjoy her life and her loved ones, while still managing to love her friend.

Caitlin still has one more obstacle to overcome, however, and that is clearly her photography. For the entire novel, Caitlin has avoided photography, both because it is so closely tied to Ingrid and because of Ms. Delani. However, as she and Delani move forward, healing their relationship, Caitlin knows she must continue her art, and do something spectacular. She finds inspiration in Ingrid's photos, as well as in Delani's latest project, and this foreshadows her use of Ingrid's own photos in her project later in the novel.



Spring (pg. 175-211)

Spring (pg. 175-211) Summary

At home later, Caitlin reads another journal entry while in her partially built tree house. In the entry, Ingrid describes her first sexual encounter, which she purposefully planned with two guys she and Caitlin barely knew. She admits to feeling dead, and wanting them to hurt her, so she could feel something. She addresses the entry to Jayson, apologizing that she has screwed it up if they ever get together, but also noting she still hopes they will. Caitlin finds herself wondering how she could have looked at her friend after this, and not seen a difference. Caitlin knows she should go inside, but finds herself reading more entries. These are short messages, addressed to her family and friends, words of apology or desire, or hate. The final entry is addressed to Caitlin and begins with "This is a real letter." Caitlin pauses, knowing she is about to read Ingrid's last words to her in the world. She continues, and Ingrid explains that she is just too sad to continue, that she simply cannot continue under the burden of her constant sadness. She tells Caitlin she doesn't want to hurt anyone, and asks her to find another, better friend, as she points out that she never laughed with anyone else, but that even the laughter no longer feels good. Caitlin, clearly upset, goes to her room to sleep.

The following day, she asks her parents if she can stay home, and they relent. She reads that a date has been set to destroy the theater, and becomes even more upset. Even as she works on the tree house, she finds she remembers her attempt of a speech at Ingrid's funeral, the one she couldn't give when it came time for her to speak. She remembers the sound Ingrid's mother made as they lowered the casket. Later, when Caitlin's dad comes home, she asks for his help, and he finds her crying. As a father, he wipes her tears and searches for answers in her face, but when she asks for help with the roof, he merely responds as she requests, without pushing for answers. Later, when Dylan calls she knows something is wrong, but Caitlin is unable to talk about it.

Caitlin furnishes her tree house, and is lying within its walls when Dylan comes over later. At first she doesn't want to talk, but when Dylan turns to leave, Caitlin realizes she needs her, and asks her if they can just talk somewhere else. At the diner, Caitlin finally admits she has Ingrid's journal, and Dylan is surprised and hurt for her friend. She gives the journal to Dylan to look through, and asks about Dylan's own experience with a lost loved one, but she refuses to discuss it. Later, in Dylan's room, she explains that she had a little brother once, but he died of an illness. She explains that at the time, she thought no one could hurt as she did, but she came to understand that everyone hurt when it came to the death of a loved one, just in different ways. She explains that everyone thinks no one understands, but everyone does understand, if only people are honest and open about how they feel. After a strong hug, Dylan leaves quietly, and Caitlin has an idea.



The following morning, Caitlin drives herself to the city, listening to something new instead of the tape she has listened to since Ingrid's death. She is thrilled as she drives over the bridge by herself for the first time, and is just as thrilled when she arrives at the copy shop, and Maddy is working. She explains that she needs to make copies of Ingrid's journal, and Maddy immediately offers to set her up in the back, knowing how private the situation is. Caitlin, however, gently refuses the offer, and begins copying the journal. When she is finished and after speaking with Maddy, Caitlin finds she doesn't want to leave, because she doesn't want the feeling she has to fade. She realizes, however, that the feeling is one of having friends, and that she doesn't have to worry about it fading away. Together, they make up a story about Ingrid's drawing of a young girl with the word BRAVE underneath, to explain her feelings at the time.

Next, Caitlin takes copies of certain entries to the home of Ingrid's brother, and leaves them with a note, telling he and his wife to talk about it, if they are sad. She stops at a Cafe and chooses the copies she will give her parents. She is also thrilled to find she has found a coffee drink she enjoys. Back in Los Cerros, Caitlin heads to Jayson's home, where, after meeting his dad, she finally gives him the parts of Ingrid's journal she feels he would benefit from. After he reads it, however, he is silent for a long time, and Caitlin is frightened she gave him too much. Eventually, he thanks her, sincerely.

Caitlin's next stop is Ingrid's parents home. When they see her, they are happy but clearly taken aback. Caitlin feels their pain as they hug her, and she knows they are hurting, but happy to see her. They have her photograph, the one Ingrid turned in to win the contest, above their mantle. Susan, Ingrid's mother, explains that she has dinner with Caitlin's mom once a week or so, and Caitlin finds herself surprised that so much happens without her knowledge. When she gives them the pages she has chosen, she feels they are not enough, but when she offers the entire journal, Susan knowingly refuses. She points out there are things in the journal they likely do not want to see, and that, now, they can remember their daughter in peace, without those images.

Later, Caitlin takes Dylan to the theater, and after giving her copies of the journal, she asks to see Ingrid's photos on the screen. As always, Dylan agrees she can accomplish the task, and immediately starts finding solutions.

Spring (pg. 175-211) Analysis

In the second half of "Spring," Caitlin reads several entries that show the real depth of Ingrid's disease. First, Ingrid's first sexual encounter is extremely telling, in that she obviously treated herself badly, believing this was all she was worth. This level of anguish is clear, but to Caitlin, it represents the true torture her friend lived under day to day. Caitlin also finally reads the suicide note within the journal that Ingrid intended for her. The note is simple, in that it is clear Ingrid did not want to continue to live. She makes it very clear that her life was simply not her own anymore, taken over by sadness, and she needed it to stop. Caitlin's reaction is understandable, considering the depth of emotion expressed. The memories that follow, including those of the funeral and of Ingrid's parents, do show, however, that Caitlin is able to now deal with those



feelings, as she was not able to do before. Her parents, as well as Dylan, offer to help, but Caitlin at first pushes them away, needing to focus on her problem alone. Her relenting, however, and choosing to include Dylan in her pain shows she is able to reach out to someone.

Dylan's reaction to the journal is touching, in that she shows genuine care and concern for Caitlin. Her decision to let Caitlin know about her own pain with her younger brother's illness not only brings the two closer, but also brings to light another major theme in the novel, that of the pain of death for everyone involved. Dylan points out that her own pain seemed larger than that of others, and that it took her considerable time to realize that everyone around her was hurting as well. This has been shown throughout the novel with the pain of Caitlin's mother and father, Ms. Delani, Jayson, and others. Everyone showed pain, and everyone felt that their pain was somehow worse than that of others. In the end, though, as Dylan points out, if one is open, honest, and can talk about it, their pain can be shared, and healed over time.

The conversation with Dylan is what spurs Caitlin to give copies of Ingrid's journal. Understanding she has now healed, Caitlin knows the journal entries will help others, as well. Her choices are careful, in that she knows some of the content of the journal would offend some, but her intent is to help those around her. Her conversation with Maddy, and her realization that she had close friends again, reiterates that she has healed. Her visit to Ingrid's home is painful, but it also shows how powerful Caitlin's gesture is. Her parents are clearly happy to see Caitlin and have been following her progress through Caitlin's mother. Their decision not to take the entire journal shows they, too, are in the process of healing, and they are seeking to find peace at last.

The final scene of Dylan and Caitlin at the theater foreshadows Caitlin's use of Ingrid's photographs later in the novel as her project. Dylan, who has been shown to be good at figuring things out, immediately begins to plan, showing again her willingness to help.



Summer, again (pg. 215-229)

Summer, again (pg. 215-229) Summary

In "Summer, again," Caitlin is given her final meeting with Delani to show her photos for the semester. She lays the series of photographs on a table, and calls to Delani. What she shows are photos of a slide show, created using Ingrid's photographs. Delani notes that Caitlin has done so much more, in that her contrast shows the theater, a place Ingrid loved, and her use of lighting highlights images within the photographs that would have been missed with the originals, changing the entire focus of the photos. Delani praises the work, and Caitlin aches with happiness, knowing the work really is good. Caitlin gives Delani her pages of the journal, but notes they are for later, secretly wanting this moment to be about her alone. Delani pins up Caitlin's series on the wall, as a token for next year.

Days later, Caitlin finds herself diving into Henry's pool on the last day of the year party, with Dylan nearby. In the pool, Taylor learns Caitlin is a carpenter and a photographer, and notes she is also beautiful. They kiss gently underwater. Later, Caitlin and Dylan compare how Taylor and Maddy kiss, and Caitlin finds Dylan is blushing. Later, when Henry is angrily noting that life is horrible, Caitlin agrees, but also points out life is not bad all the time.

Later, Caitlin finishes her tree house, and holds a "tree house warming" party on the same day as the demolition of the theater. Caitlin is excited, as all her friends and family are attending and she knows this is a first step. The following morning very early, Caitlin knows she has to go to the theater one more time. Once there, she uses a rickety ladder to spell out I MISS YOU on the marquee, as a message to Ingrid. She leaves Ingrid's journal on a small shelf in the theater, and leaves the building.

In the morning, Caitlin wakes to her parents, who have packed her a lunch to take with her to the demolition. When she arrives, she realizes there are many people who care for the theater, as the crowd is large. As she breathes in the gasoline smell, she realizes the world is changing, and she finds she welcomes it. When the bulldozer crashes the marquee, Caitlin cries, but Jayson is there with a comforting hand on her shoulder. Jayson leaves to go run, and Caitlin remembers the night before Ingrid died. The girls had been studying, when Ingrid asked her what her plans for the future were. At the time, she lamented she wanted to go out of state for college, studying art. Ingrid supports her at every turn, but when it came to her own future, she merely noted she would go wherever Caitlin went. Caitlin knows this was the night Ingrid slipped the journal under her bed, already knowing her own plans.

Caitlin sits at the demo site for quite some time, realizing that she is becoming used to the changes that happen in life, including the disappearance and appearance of people and places. She takes a moment to snap a photograph, using a timer, of her in front of



the now barren landscape. She knows that, in the photo, she appears with "part longing, part sorrow, [and] part hope" (pg. 229).

Summer, again (pg. 215-229) Analysis

In the final section of the book, readers see Caitlin come full circle in her healing process, both through the photographs she turns in as well as through the destruction of the theater. Her photographs, using Ingrid's as a base, make a wonderful statement about both her love for Ingrid, and her own journey of healing. Her use of contrast, lighting, curtains, and other props show not only that she thought about her photos, but also that she put her own feelings and emotions into the process. Her decision to give Delani the journal, but ask her to wait to open it, shows she is finally OK with everything not being about Ingrid. The scene at Henry's shows, too, that Caitlin is accepting herself, and her new friends.

Caitlin's decision to leave Ingrid's journal at the theater shows, once and for all, her decision to put her friend to rest. She is finally able, at the end of the novel, to let go, and let herself move forward. She is no longer holding still, but moving forward. She misses her friend, as is shown through her gesture with the marquee, but she is also putting her in the past. By allowing Ingrid's journal to die with the building, Caitlin essentially buries the misery of the last year. The memories of the final night with Ingrid are no longer painful, but poignant, as Caitlin realizes she does carry her friend with her. Ingrid knew, already that night, her plans, and in her own way, said goodbye to Caitlin. Her final photo, of her in front of the demolition site, is significant, in that she expresses all her emotions, including her new ones of hope and promise. It is at this moment that Caitlin is really free, and moving forward.



Characters

Caitlin Madison

Caitlin Madison is at the beginning of her junior year when her best friend, Ingrid, commits suicide. Caitlin is a gentle person, who cares for Ingrid deeply, and as a result, she struggles to understand her friend's decisions. A pretty young woman, Caitlin is unique in that she tends to follow her own path, instead of doing what those around her do. She is strong and smart and yet she seems to be immovable following her friend's death as depression and guilt invade her mind. It is only when Caitlin finds Ingrid's journal, and when she allows herself to understand that Ingrid was extremely depressed and mentally and emotionally damaged, that she is able to begin to forgive herself. By meeting new friend Dylan, and gaining a boyfriend, Taylor, Caitlin slowly learns she is not responsible for her friend's death, and that she is not disrespecting her friend by moving forward. Caitlin also uses the building of an expansive tree house and photography to help her understand her own pain. Ingrid, she learns, made her own decision, but wants Caitlin to be happy. Caitlin learns that she isn't the only person to have suffered as a result of Ingrid's death, and that everyone heals from the pain and moves forward, if they allow themselves to do so.

Ingrid

Ingrid was Caitlin's best friend from her freshman year to her junior year. Ingrid was outwardly healthy, but she hid deeper secrets such as severe clinical depression, manic depression, and an inner desire to harm herself. Ingrid was, at times, seemingly distant and depressed, but Caitlin did not see her deeper problems until it was too late. One evening, Ingrid slashed her wrists in the bathtub and died. She left her journal, however, for her best friend to find, and in it, she slowly explains the thoughts that ran through her mind nearly constantly. Ingrid hated herself, and wanted nothing more than pain and humiliation that she felt she deserved. She cut herself, had random sex in order to feel something, and often wrote of her depressed feelings. Through the journal, Ingrid is able to explain to Caitlin that her death was a way out for her, and that she simply couldn't deal any more with the depression and anguish she felt daily. She also was able to tell Caitlin that her death, although shocking, was not Caitlin's fault. She is able to convince Caitlin that she can move forward, without fear of reproach from Ingrid. Ingrid's character is one of terrible anguish and pain, but also one who shows the depth of friendship.

Dad Madison

Caitlin's father is a strong male character in the novel. Dad is not overly emotional, but it is very clear throughout the book that he loves his daughter very dearly, and worries about her incessantly following her friend's death. It is Dad who comes to find Caitlin



when she disappears after being told of Ingrid's death, and Dad who plans a summer away to help her heal. Once home, it is Caitlin's Dad who finds wood for her to work with, knowing that to do something with her hands will help her to be able to get rid of some of the emotional turmoil within her. Her father helps her every step of the way through the book, and helps her to find outlets for the overwhelming emotions she feels. Caitlin's father shows the deep love of a parent for a child.

Margaret Carter-Madison

Caitlin's mother, Margaret, is a woman who cares deeply for her daughter. As a result of her daughter's own pain, Margaret too struggles throughout the novel to find her own peace with her daughter. She knows Caitlin is hurting, and wants to help, but Caitlin refuses to allow her mother to assist her. She tries everything to help her, including isolating her, pushing her to make friends, and supporting her whenever possible, but she is often met with distance and a lack of focus. It is only as Caitlin begins to forgive herself for Ingrid's death that Caitlin can begin to understand her mother's pain. As Caitlin heals, so does her relationship with her mother, allowing the two of them to once again become close. Margaret shows, through her own pain and concern, that she, too, suffered as a result of Ingrid's death. Her character is one of strength and patience, but also of deep love.

Dylan Schuster

Dylan Schuster is a new young woman attending Caitlin's high school. Dylan is clearly different, with her tousled hair, unique clothing style and her general disdain for cliques and snobbish individuals. In addition, Dylan is openly a lesbian. She comes from the larger city, where being different is accepted more easily, and her girlfriend, Maddy, still lives there. Dylan quickly becomes friends with Caitlin, although she learns quickly that this friendship will be difficult, as Caitlin still feels loyal to her deceased friend. With Dylan's calm patience, however, Caitlin is able to put the past behind her, and accept Dylan not as a replacement for Ingrid, but a close friend with her own merits. Dylan, too, has lost someone, and it is through her own experiences that Dylan is able to teach Caitlin that she is not alone in her pain. Dylan's character is a strong, independent, different young woman, and yet, she also shows an amazing tenderness and understanding for others.

Taylor Riley

Taylor Riley is one of the most attractive boys in the junior class. He is smart, good looking, and popular, and yet, as Caitlin discovers, he is unlike other popular boys, in that he is also kind, gentle, and caring. Taylor begins in the novel by asking about Ingrid, and his comments strike a chord with Caitlin, as they are unpolished, and almost rude. When she responds, however, Taylor is quick to explain his behaviors, and he and Caitlin become friends. It is clear Caitlin likes Taylor, and vice versa, but Caitlin nearly



ruins it when, in a depressed moment of loneliness, she virtually throws herself at him. Thankfully, Taylor is able to accept this, and move forward with Caitlin. Over the course of the novel, Taylor helps Caitlin to see she is able to love others, and that her guilt over Ingrid is merely a manifestation of her own sadness at her friend's death.

Jayson Michaels

Jayson Michaels is a minor character in the novel, but one with a tremendous role. Jayson and Ingrid were very close, and Jayson continuously waited for something to start between them. Through Ingrid's journal, Caitlin learns of her deep crush on Jayson, but even in life, Ingrid never hid her feelings. However, what Caitlin was unaware of was Jayson's own feelings for Ingrid. When she died, Jayson was merely waiting for his current girlfriend to get over him before he could start something with Ingrid. Her death left him demolished, as his own hopes and emotions were unspoken, and he believed no one else understood his feelings. Like Caitlin, Jayson believed his own pain was more substantial than that of others, even though he had not really dated Ingrid. Jayson's character represents the unseen victims of teenage suicide, those who are seemingly on the fringes of the victims life, but who have a deep emotional connection that no one is aware of.

Veena Delani

Veena Delani is the photography teacher at the school. Veena adored Ingrid, and thought her work to be extraordinary. She praised both Ingrid and Caitlin constantly, but when Ingrid dies, she seems to pay little attention to Caitlin. This is extremely painful for Caitlin, and it is only when Veena is able to discuss the issue that Caitlin learns the truth. Veena saw herself in Ingrid, and was in awe of her work, but when she committed suicide, Veena too felt partially responsible. She was extremely saddened by the death, and realized how responsible she was for her students. She was, for a time, unable to face Caitlin, because she knew she had a responsibility to her, as well, and she merely could not face it at the time. By the end of the novel, Veena comes to accept Ingrid's death, and forgives herself, thereby allowing her to again open her heart to her students, including Caitlin. Veena's character in the novel is representative of the teachers and other community members who know a young person who commits suicide, and who are deeply affected by the situation.

Maddy

Maddy is Dylan's girlfriend from the city. Maddy is a gentle, caring, sweet, gorgeous young woman who seems oddly paired with Dylan, but who also seems extremely happy. It is Maddy who informs Caitlin of Dylan's own tragedy, and Maddy who helps Caitlin to understand why Dylan is so able to understand her own feelings and emotions. Maddy, although a minor character in the novel, remind the reader of the pain that lies within the loved ones of those who experience tragedy.

Ingrid's Parents

Ingrid's Parents are only seen at the tail end of the novel, but their appearance is vital to the story. Throughout the novel, Caitlin avoids discussing Ingrid's parents, although it is implied that they were close, as seen through the memories Caitlin mentions. When Ingrid's parents are introduced at the end of the book, it becomes clear that Caitlin's avoidance is, in part, due to her knowledge that her presence will remind them of their lost daughter. The emotional scene between Ingrid's father and Caitlin shows just how much pain her parents are dealing with, and how much Ingrid's suicide has affected them. Their lack of desire to read the entire journal shows, however, that they too are coming to accept what happened to their daughter, and are able to remember her with love and fondness, without the deep depression and anguish they know she suffered. Their behaviors in the novel show that while they are still deeply hurting over the death of their daughter, they too are struggling to move forward.



Objects/Places

Ingrid's Journal

Ingrid's journal is where Ingrid writes about all of her inner thoughts and emotions. This journal is the book that allows Caitlin to understand her friend's suicide.

Theater

The old theater is a common hangout for Ingrid and Caitlin. This theater is old, worn down, and unused, and yet it holds a special place for the girls. Following Ingrid's death, Caitlin gathers courage to show it to others, and when it is eventually torn down, Caitlin is able to let go.

Tree house

The tree house Caitlin builds is a large, complex tree house, made more for adults than children. The building of the house lets Caitlin express herself creatively, helping her to work through her grief and guilt over the death of her friend, Ingrid.

Suicide

Caitlin's friend, Ingrid, kills herself by slashing her wrists in the bathtub of her home. Suicide is portrayed in the novel as almost a childish, immature response to life.

Lesbian

A lesbian is a woman who prefers sexual relations with another female. In the book, Caitlin's new friend Dylan is a lesbian.

Cutting

Cutting is a form of self mutilation that involves the carving of words and other markings into the skin, in order to feel pain and release pressure and anxiety. In the book, Ingrid is a cutter.

Depression

Depression is a form of mental illness that can cause suicidal thoughts, along with many other symptoms. In the book, Ingrid is a severely depressed individual, and she chooses suicide to end her suffering.

Guilt

Guilt in the novel is a tangible emotion, as Caitlin is plagued by this throughout the novel, as a result of failing to see the depths of her friend's depression.

Photography

Photography, in the book, is an outlet for both Ingrid and Caitlin to express themselves, and their emotions. Their images represent how they see the world.

Los Cerros

Los Cerros is the smaller town in which the novel takes place.

Themes

Healing

One of the most prominent themes in the novel is that of the ability of human beings to heal from emotional trauma. In the novel, almost every character is hurting as a result of the suicide of a young teenage girl named Ingrid. Her best friend, Caitlin, is wracked with guilt, anger, frustration, and a complete lack of understanding that at first makes it difficult to move forward. Caitlin's parents, too, are suffering as they watch their daughter fight with such emotional turmoil. Ingrid's old teacher, Veena Delani, struggles with her own guilt at not seeing how deep her student was hurting, and she therefore struggles to continue her relationships with her existing students. Friends Taylor and Jayson struggle with their own feelings about Ingrid's death, while Taylor also struggles to understand his new girlfriend, Caitlin, and her emotional turmoil. New friend Dylan also struggles, as she wants to be friends with Caitlin, but at times feels she is merely being used as a temporary replacement for Ingrid. Ingrid's parents, too, suffer greatly, as they lost not only their daughter, but an entire life they had grown accustomed to.

Over the course of the novel, however, each of these characters is able to find a way to help heal their emotional anguish. Caitlin, through the reading of Ingrid's journal, gains a better understanding of her friend, and through that, is able to finally forgive herself and let go of her guilt. This, combined with the healing outlet of construction as she builds a tree house and the healing power of photography as she is able to show the world through her own eyes, is able to help her overcome, and heal. Caitlin's parents, too, are able to heal as they watch their daughter slowly come back to the world, perhaps more in tune with the emotions of others, but still able to have close relationships herself. Veena Delani is able to heal as she comes to terms with her own guilt, and allows herself to express care and concern for her other students. Even Ingrid's parents are in the process of healing as they let go of their guilt, and let the good memories of their daughter remain.

Dylan, in the novel, makes a wonderful point about healing as she discusses her own situation following the loss of her brother. Dylan points out that everyone hurts following a tragedy, in different ways and on different levels, but the pain is still valid in all cases. The deep anguish Caitlin feels is matched by those around her, even if she is unable to see it. It is Dylan who reminds readers that it is selfish to believe one's own pain is somehow more deserved than another's, and selfish to think that in healing, we have no affect on others. Dylan realizes that the healing Caitlin allows herself to do also brings healing to those around her.

External Appearances

The external appearances of others is another major theme in the novel. Ingrid is perhaps the most clear example of this theme, as everyone always assumed Ingrid was



fine, internally, aside from perhaps being melodramatic or moody. Inside, however, Ingrid was a mess, and along with her depression came a deep desire to hurt herself, and to end her life. Although no one could see this, Ingrid's journal shows the depths of her true feelings, proving that even her close friend, Caitlin, was unable to see beyond the external appearance Ingrid sought to maintain.

This same theme is clear with Dylan, as well. Dylan dresses and acts in a way that makes others think she is "weird" and "different". In addition, her choice to be a lesbian is shocking to some, who continue to judge her based on these outside appearances. However, after Caitlin gets to know Dylan, it is equally clear she is a kind, generous, loving, caring, completely emotional individual who feels, thinks, and loves in much the same way as everyone else. Although her external appearance may be different, she is just like everyone else.

This theme is again present with Taylor, and Caitlin's original impressions of him. Taylor is good-looking, popular, and genuinely well liked by almost everyone. However, he is not the pompous jerk one would assume him to be, but instead is very kind and compassionate. He is gentle with Caitlin, even when she throws herself at him, and he refuses to take advantage of her. He is not the type of person he is assumed to be, showing that he, too, overcomes stereotypes to be his own person.

Dylan's friends also go against modern stereotypes. They are not average kids, in that they are not what Caitlin is used to. They are from the city and appear much more cool, and much wiser. Once she gets to know them, however, Caitlin realizes they are the same as her own friends. Like others in the novel, they are merely themselves. This holds true for Caitlin's other friends, as well.

Even the theater in the novel adheres to this same theme. The theater Caitlin and Ingrid visit often is run down, old, and near demolition. And yet the theater holds tremendous value for Caitlin and Ingrid, as well as for Jayson, Dylan, and Taylor later in the novel. Although the theater appears worthless, its value is in the eye of the beholder, representing the main focus of this theme.

Guilt

One of the other themes in the novel is the tremendous effect of guilt on a person. In the novel, Caitlin is wracked with guilt following the suicide of her best friend. She knew her friend was often depressed, but she believed it merely to be a state of mind, instead of a clinical issue. As a result, Caitlin feels she is partially to blame for her friends' death, as she didn't realize the extent of her illness. Caitlin finds her life is frozen as she cannot seem to let go of Ingrid. Their lives together were so abruptly interrupted, Caitlin has a difficult time forgetting the past, and making new friends. Her belief that she failed as a friend leads her to withdraw from those she cares about, such as Dylan, nearly ruining their friendship as well. It is only when Caitlin begins to read Ingrid's journal, and understand her inner problems, that she can begin to realize the situation was not her



fault. She, with the help of Dylan, Taylor, her parents, and her teachers, is able to let go of her guilt and forgive both herself, and her friend.

Veena Delani is another character in the novel who shows the power of guilt. Veena prized Ingrid as a student, and believed in her more than almost any other student. When Ingrid passed away, Veena felt guilty, because she didn't see the hidden pain within Ingrid's work. Further, Veena too withdrew from her students and others as she tried to contain her guilt. She knew looking at Caitlin would bring back memories of Ingrid, and as a result, she actually hoped Caitlin would not take her class. When she did, her guilt caused her to ignore the young girl who badly needed her, causing even more guilt. It is only when Veena confronts her feelings, and apologized to Caitlin that she is able to control her emotions and forgive herself.



Style

Point of View

The point of view of the novel is the first-person perspective of Caitlin Madison, a sixteen-year-old junior in high school who has recently lost her best friend as a result of suicide. This point of view is necessary, as the focus of the novel is on Caitlin's overcoming of her grief, and the power of her friends and family's actions to overcome their own issues, and help Caitlin with hers, as well. The point of view is reliable, in that the narrator knows Caitlin's actions, as well as her emotions, inner thoughts, and feelings. Since these are central to the themes in the novel, this first person point of view is necessary in order to create a believable environment in the novel. The emotional growth of Caitlin, as well as her developing sense of the world around her, would not be as clear or well understood without the first person point of view. Further, it is Caitlin's understanding of those around her that allow her to overcome her guilt in the book, and the first person point of view allows the reader to see each step in Caitlin's journey from her viewpoint. Much of the story is told not by dialog, but through both journal entries of Ingrid, as well as through Caitlin's own thoughts. These pieces of information would be lost if it were not for the first-person view.

Setting

The novel is set in Los Cerros, California, a small wealthy town in Southern California. Caitlin's home is in a nicer neighborhood, and she loves her yard, as it is large in size, although the house is simply large and new, as she describes it. Her school, Vista High, is also a wealthy school, and many of the children are from privileged neighborhoods. Like many smaller towns near larger cities, Los Cerros is far removed from big city life, instead preferring the cliques of a small town. It is only when Caitlin leaves Los Cerros to the nearby city that users see larger city life, with more entertainment opportunities, and youths who are less afraid of what others think. The setting is important, as in a larger city, a suicide of a teen might go mostly unnoticed, but in a small town with a high school full of cliques such an event is town news. This is indicated through everyone's questioning of Caitlin about Ingrid's suicide.

Another important place in the novel is that of the old theater in Los Cerros. The theater is important because it shows not only an older part of this small, wealthy city, but also because it adds a character to the city that otherwise would not be present. Caitlin and the others in the novel like the theater because of its older state, and its general state of disrepair. They are able to relate to the building in a way they are unable to relate to others, because it is not pretty on the outside. Instead, it teaches to look past appearances, and enjoy what might be underneath.



Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is simple as it is written from the perspective of a sixteen-year-old, and yet extremely powerful as Caitlin goes through a variety of different emotions and feelings throughout the novel. Most of the characters in the book are younger, as well, leading to nearly an entire novel spoken by young adults. This leads to a simple plot line, and yet one that is easily understood. Again, however, although the language is simple, the depth of emotion and turmoil in the book is compelling, as teens tend to feel things more brutally than others. Caitlin's pain is vivid and real as a result of her descriptive thoughts, and this allows the readers a deeper glimpse inside her mind and her world. In some chapters, there is very little dialog, and the descriptions are necessary in order to convey the story appropriately. This allows the author to give the reader a deeper look inside Caitlin while still keeping the novel streamlined. Additionally, the language of the novel also helps to show Caitlin's emotional growth throughout the novel, as her words become less pained and more hopeful over the course of the novel.

Structure

The novel is comprised of five sections, those of Summer, Fall, Winter, Spring, and Summer, again. Each section is then broken into a number of short chapters of unequal length, all of which are named only by number. The chapters are generally short and contain mere moments of Caitlin's life, glimpses into her world.

The plot of the novel is simple, without extensive subplots or flashbacks to contend with. The premise of the novel is the slow healing process of Caitlin Madison, who falls into a depression following the suicide of her best friend, Ingrid. It is only after Caitlin finds and begins to read Ingrid's diary that she is finally able to understand her friends deep depression, her lifetime of medications and therapy to try to solve her sadness, and her struggle simply to maintain. Caitlin, and those around her also affected by the suicide, slowly learn to forgive Ingrid, and to forgive themselves and move on with life.

The novel's pace is slow, at times, lending to the impression of a teenager's life and her struggle to find happiness following her depression. It is, however, easy to read and engrossing, as readers begin to care about Caitlin and her friends. The story is a great lesson on letting go and allowing the healing process to begin.



Quotes

"Mom says Ingrid's name and I start to hum, not the melody to a song, just one drawn-out note. I know it makes me seem crazy, I know it won't make anything change, but it's better than crying, it's better than screaming, it's better than listening to what they're telling me" (Summer, 1, p. 5).

"She leans out the window and yells, "Caitlin!" as if I might not have noticed my own mother pulling over, like the car she's been driving all my life and the peace is PATRIOTIC bumper sticker didn't tip me off" (Fall, 7, p. 25).

"I was supposed to have gotten my license three months ago, but instead of making three-point turns, I was watching my best friend's casket lower into the ground. Now I can't seem to call the DMV to schedule a new appointment" (Fall, 8, p. 28).

"She carried it with her everywhere. I know this sounds stupid, but I felt kind of jealous of it. Whenever I had to figure something out or vent, I would just call her up, so I couldn't understand why she needed to have this book that was so private" (Fall, 13, p. 38).

"I never realized what a big deal that was. How amazing it is to find someone who wants to hear about all the things that go on in your head. You just think that things will stay the way they are. You never look up, in a moment that feels like every other moment of your life, and think, Soon this will be over" (Fall, 14, p. 44).

"Then, without really realizing it, I start to think of one thing I did wrong for each tree I look at. Wide oak - I didn't tell anyone when Ingrid cut herself. Baby oak - the time I told her I was getting sick of hearing about Jayson's arms and his blue shirt. Tall tree with bare branches - the way I would leave when she got depressed and stopped talking. I should have stayed. I should have just sat quietly, so that she knew I was with her" (Fall, 17, pg. 50).

"And I don't know how that sounds, and I hope that it doesn't seem like I want her to leave. I hold my breath and she says, "Yeah, it must," and she doesn't sound offended, and she doesn't get up to go, and I am filled with gratitude because it's been way too long since I've just spent time with another person. I'm not ready for it to end yet" (Fall, 23, p. 63).

"Maybe she thought I wouldn't be able to handle it, that I was too sheltered or too innocent or something. If she had told me why she cut herself all the time, or that it was the pills that made her act so spaced out, or that she was even on pills, or even saw doctors, or any of it, I would have done my best to help her. I'm not saying I'm a superhero. I'm not saying I would have just swooped down and saved her. I'm just saying the only reason everything was a waste was that she made it a waste" (Fall, 28, p. 81).



"Dylan, in her skintight black jeans, safety-pinned shirt, and bulky armbands, with her hair sticking out in every direction and that black freshly smeared around her eyes, doesn't just smile, doesn't just walk toward Maddy and put her arms around her. No. Instead, every muscle in her whole body seems to lose all tension, her step forward resembles a skip, and she lets out a hey that might as well say, I love you, you are so beautiful, no one in the world is as amazing as you are" (Fall, 31, p. 86).

"My best friend is dead, and I could have saved her. It's so wrong, so completely and painfully wrong, that I walked through my front door tonight smiling" (Fall, 33, p. 91).

"All through my chest and my stomach is this regret over what I'm doing with Dylan, in my hands and my feet is this electricity at the thought of Taylor leaning close to me, and all over my whole body, way, deep inside it, is this hurting over Ingrid. I could scream at the top of my lungs and the sound I would make wouldn't be half as loud as I'd need it to be" (Winter, 6, p. 106).

"I think about where she is now, in a coffin, underground in a cemetery I've only been to once and will never go to again. How it's so easy for her to not feel anything at all, to be just completely gone, to not be around...She got to disappear completely and I feel like I'm about to combust" (Winter, 9, p. 116).

"If I ever grow up and have a kid I don't know what I'll tell her when she asks about my first time. I do know that I won't say "Actually, it was with two guys at once, who I didn't really know, and who weren't even that cute, and it was on a rock in a public park, down by a creek with dirty water, and I won't tell her that I didn't even take my clothes off, that I just stuffed my underwear in my bag and lifted up my skirt and I won't tell her that her didn't hurt as much as I had wanted it to" (Spring, 11, p. 177).

"I can't believe that I could have seen her after this, the day after or even that night, and not have known. But that's exactly what must have happened. Maybe she knew she could act like nothing had changed; maybe she got that good at pretending. Or maybe she thought that I would have noticed, and was disappointed when I didn't" (Spring, 11, p. 178).

"This is a real letter. I hope you get this far but I won't be mad if you don't want to read any of it. This is what I want so don't be sad. You might be looking for reasons but there are no reasons. The sun stopped shining for me is all. The whole story is: I am sad. I am sad all the time and the sadness is so heavy that I can't get away from it" (Spring, 11, p. 185).

"I imagine what would happen if everyone turned their regrets into wishes, went around shouting them. Signal lights would change at intersections, and as the people on opposite sides of the street stepped off the curbs, they would call to one another— Finish college! Exercise at least three times a week! Never start smoking" (Spring, 20, p. 201).

"A quiet hill, damp grass under our bare feet. Scar tissue spelling ugly. Clear blue eyes. I'll go wherever you go. Tall glasses of champagne. Hold still. We look amazing.



Dancing in a yellow dress. The creek. You might be looking for reasons but there are no reasons. Slipping nail polish into pockets. I don't want to hurt you or anybody so please just forget about me" (Summer, again, 4, p. 222).

"It isn't the happy ending that Ingrid and I had dreamed up, but it's all a part of what I'm working through. The way life changes. The way people and things disappear. Then appear, unexpectedly, and hold you close" (Summer, again, 7, p. 226).



Topics for Discussion

Part of Caitlin's healing process throughout the course of the book is shown in the way Caitlin deals with her grief. How does Caitlin deal with grief at the beginning of the novel? How does this change over the course of the novel, and what various methods does she use to get through her problems? What causes Caitlin to change over the book?

Describe Caitlin's relationship with Ingrid, both from Caitlin's original point of view and from her view following the reading of Ingrid's diary. How did Caitlin view the relationship, and how did this differ from reality? What caused Caitlin not to see some of Ingrid's deeper issues? How does Caitlin feel about her inability to really know her friend?

Describe the various people in the book who play a role in Caitlin's recovery. What is their relationship to Caitlin? How do they help her with her grief? What do these individuals each help to show Caitlin about herself and her own life?

In the book, Caitlin builds a tree house. Explain the significance of the tree house. What does it mean? How does it help Caitlin? What does it show others?

The old theater plays an important role in the novel. Why is this theater so important to Caitlin? What leads her to share it with Dylan, Jayson, and Brandon? How does this sharing lead Caitlin to be able to let go of Ingrid and her past? How does Caitlin feel when the theater is torn down?

Explain the role of photography in the book. Why is imagery so important to the author? What is she trying to say in the novel through the use of photography? How does this relate to the theme of external appearances and internal emotional turmoil?

Ingrid's journal depicts a very sad, depressed young woman. What are some of the things Ingrid writes that suggest she has deep issues? How does the journal help Caitlin to understand her friend's decision to end her life? Why do you think Caitlin chose to share the journal with others? How does this act serve to help Caitlin let go? What does she think this gesture will do for others? Why?