

It's Not Summer Without You Study Guide

It's Not Summer Without You by Jenny Han

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Plot Summary

Isabel, known to all her friends as Belly, is in the summer between her junior and senior years of high school. It's the first summer that she's ever spent at home. Prior to this summer, Belly, her mother Laurel, and her brother Steven, spent every summer at the beach house in Cousins that belonged to Laurel's best friend, Susannah. Susannah has died of cancer and the families are struggling to deal with their grief. Added to the situation is Belly's recent relationship with Susannah's older son, Conrad. Belly has always had a crush on Conrad and the previous summer he seemed to return her affection. Conrad, away at college, had driven to Belly's house to visit a couple of times and it seemed they were headed for a boyfriend-girlfriend relationship. Belly invites Conrad to her prom and he is reluctant. When she says she'll go with someone else, Conrad is obviously jealous and agrees to go. He doesn't bring a corsage and is ill at ease, making it obvious to her friends that he doesn't want to be there. When the prom is over, their budding relationship seems at an end. Susannah, nearing death at that point, doesn't know things went wrong between Belly and Conrad, but Conrad's younger brother Jeremiah does and berates Conrad for ruining Belly's prom.

Early in their first summer spent away from the beach house, Jeremiah calls Belly with the news that Conrad has gone missing from summer school and isn't answering his phone. Belly and Jeremiah go in search of Conrad and discover he's gone to the beach house. When they arrive, Conrad reveals their father, Adam, is planning to sell the house. Conrad, Jeremiah, and Belly believe they can't do anything to stop the sale and throw a party they believe to be their last event at the beach house. Belly drinks a great deal and, during the night, calls her mother. Belly is obviously drunk and is crying which prompts Laurel to drop everything and rush to the beach house. She berates the three for their actions and helps clean up the mess from the party. She then asks Adam to join them for breakfast.

When Adam arrives, Laurel takes control. She points out that the beach house belonged to Susannah and admits that she has no say-so in the fate of the house. But she also points out how important the beach house is to Conrad and Jeremiah, eventually reaching Adam so that he agrees he won't sell the house on the condition that Conrad pass all his summer classes. Though Laurel promises that Belly will be grounded for a long time, she sees that the final day with Conrad and Jeremiah is important to Belly and agrees to let Belly stay behind to help Conrad study for his summer finals. They do, staying with the studying until the moment they have to get Conrad back to school.

On the way, Belly allows herself to cry for the passing of her childhood. She realizes things will never be the same with Conrad and Jeremiah, and that she'll never return to the beach house in the same way. At school, Conrad heads for class while Belly and Jeremiah wait for the results, though they know Conrad has never failed at anything he set out to accomplish. At one point, Jeremiah gives in to his own love for Belly and kisses her. She responds but is confused by her emotions, believing that she's always been in love with Conrad and always will be. Conrad sees the kiss and is obviously angry. The three set out for Belly's house but a storm forces them to stop at a motel for



the night. The next morning, Conrad says he has a friend who will pick him up and refuses to go on with Jeremiah and Belly. Belly accepts that whatever they might have had is over and that her friendship with Jeremiah is deeper and more solid than her crush on Conrad.



Chapters 1 through 4

Chapters 1 through 4 Summary

As the story opens, Belly is beside the pool at the beach house in Cousins. Conrad and Jeremiah arrive from surfing and Conrad kisses her. Jeremiah teases that they need to "get a room" before tossing Conrad into the pool. Jeremiah and Belly jump in as well. Then Belly is dragged back from her daydream of her previous summers at the beach house. She's actually poolside in her hometown with her best friend, Taylor. Just then Cory Wheeler puts a cold soda can against Belly's back. She screams and is obviously angry. Cory apologizes, offers her the soda, and leaves. Taylor points out that Cory likes her and Belly denies it. She actually knows it's true but wishes it wasn't. Taylor is asking what Belly will wear to Justin's party that evening. Belly really wants to stay home but has already agreed to go.

In chapter two, Belly thinks back to the previous summer. She and Conrad had kissed that summer and she feels certain there's a deeper relationship emerging. When they leave the beach house, Conrad goes off to college and Belly waits, hoping for a phone call. When it finally comes, Steven can't imagine why Conrad is calling Belly but Belly is defiant, saying it's not impossible that Conrad likes her. Conrad is dealing with Susannah's illness. Though Belly knows it's not the same, she also knows that she loves Susannah as if Susannah were her mother. While Conrad is dealing with his pain, Belly is able to make him laugh. Several times Conrad drives the three hours from college to visit Belly.

In chapter three, Belly goes home early, ostensibly to get ready for Justin's party. Steven is at his summer job at Best Buy, saving money for college. Her mother is apparently working but she seldom leaves her office these days. She's executor of Susannah's estate and spends a great deal of time on the phone with Susannah's lawyer. Susannah left some specific instructions, including a diamond necklace for Belly's wedding day. Taylor arrives at Belly's house so the two can get ready for Justin's party together. She forces Belly into a shower then pleads with her to wear a specific sundress. Belly stops by her mom's office on the way out. She knows Laurel probably won't stop to eat so makes her mother a sandwich and leaves it on the kitchen cabinet.

Half the students in Belly and Taylor's class at school are at Justin's party. There's liquor and no parents to chaperone. Belly has a sip of a wine cooler but pours out the rest. Taylor connects with her boyfriend, Ben Davis. Belly sees Taylor talking with Cory and seeks a way to avoid them. She lies down in the middle of the trampoline and Cory soon joins her. She can tell he's about to ask her out and she says she has to go to the restroom, excuses herself, and leaves. Belly encounters Taylor and says she's going home, that she doesn't feel like being at the party. The girls argue, both saying nasty things, but quickly make up. Belly says not everyone can be like Taylor and she laughingly says Belly could try. At home, Belly sees her mother hasn't eaten the sandwich. She takes stock of her life as it is now. She says that maybe if she allows



herself to go out with Cory, to go to some movies with Taylor and Davis, and to spend time at the pool, she might forget how wonderful her life was prior to Susannah's death and her fight with Conrad.

In chapter four, Jeremiah speaks out. He says seeing his father cry was a blow because his father had never been the kind to cry. It's the day after his mother's death. Jeremiah asks Conrad what will happen next and Conrad predicts people will begin showing up. Conrad then goes upstairs to his room and Jeremiah follows, but hears Conrad crying and doesn't go into his room.

Chapters 1 through 4 Analysis

Belly says she would rather just go home than to go to Justin's party. She could have agreed to go in order to keep the peace with Taylor but she may also have agreed to go because she really does want to get some normalcy into her life during this first summer she's ever spent away from the beach house at Cousins.

Belly's relationship with Conrad is presented in a series of flashbacks and memories. Belly's mother, Laurel, has been best friends since childhood with Susannah. The two families spent every summer together at the beach house at Cousins. Belly was very close to Susannah, Conrad, and his brother, Jeremiah. The reader will learn over the coming chapters that Belly had dated Conrad the previous year but they broke up after a disastrous prom date. To make matters worse, Susannah died the previous year after battling cancer. Taylor believes Belly should move on to a new boyfriend in order to get over Conrad. Belly believes that getting over Conrad will mean that she also has to get over Susannah's death and she isn't ready to let go of that pain. There are some interesting issues introduced in Belly's thinking from the beginning of this. Belly is holding on to her pain over Susannah's death but it seems possible that it's guilt she feels over a fight with Conrad and over her reluctance to be with Susannah as her life came to an end. Belly insists that Conrad was more than a teenage crush but will later realize that's exactly what it was.

Chapter two ends with a serious note of foreshadowing. Belly says that Conrad had driven from college to spend time with her. That evening, she and Conrad were watching television and Steven pushes his way between them on the couch. Someone suggests they go for ice cream and both Steven and Laurel agree to go. Belly says she can't imagine being on a date with her mother and brother in the backseat, but that it turned out to be fun. She says it was a good night and good memory, and that "by May, it was over."



Chapters 5 through 7

Chapters 5 through 7 Summary

In chapter five, Belly recalls wearing red-framed glasses to Susannah's funeral because Susannah had liked them. Laurel is at home when she gets the news that Susannah has died. She makes plans to immediately go to Susannah's house in Boston and Belly and Steven will drive up the day of the funeral. Belly and Steven are alone the night after Susannah's death and Belly asks how Steven thinks Mr. Fisher, Susannah's husband, is handling the situation. Steven predicts he's using alcohol to cope and Belly says she stops asking questions at that point. At the funeral, Belly notices her father's arrival. He is seated at the back and waves at Belly.

Back at Susannah's house, Belly, Steven, and Jeremiah slip away upstairs. There are many people in the house and lots of food. Belly offers to go get food for Jeremiah and he gratefully accepts her offer. Laurel helps Belly load up two plates and Belly asks if she's seen Conrad. Laurel says she believes Conrad is in the basement. She makes a third plate and sends Belly downstairs with it, promising to take the two plates up to Steven and Jeremiah herself. When Belly gets downstairs she discovers that Conrad is on the couch with his head in a girl's lap. The girl turns out to be Aubrey, a former girlfriend. Belly leaves the plate and heads back upstairs but Conrad follows. He seems to expect some comment from Belly and she says she's sorry to have interrupted. Conrad responds with "grow up" and Belly returns with "go to hell." Conrad says it's now evident that Belly is still just a child and that dating her was a "huge mistake." The scene grows more heated and by this time they are near enough to the main room that several people watch the argument. Belly goes upstairs and cries. Her father joins her soon after but Belly says the only person she really wants to comfort her at that moment is Susannah.

In chapter six, Belly is awakened by a phone call and expects it to be bad news before she answers the phone. It's Jeremiah and he says that Conrad is missing from summer school. Belly says she hasn't heard from him and doubts that he would want to hear from her, but she can't help but note the panic in Jeremiah's voice. She agrees to go with him to search for Conrad. Belly struggles with her next decision but decides she won't tell her mother where she's going.

In chapter seven, Belly goes to Taylor's house where she's meeting Jeremiah. Taylor agrees to say that Belly is staying with her - the story Belly told her mother. Taylor is full of advice, including that Belly be sure to look her best for her final meeting with Conrad. Taylor urges Belly to use the trip to get closure on her feelings for Conrad. Belly admits to herself that it wouldn't be summer without seeing both Conrad and Jeremiah and that she's secretly glad to be going. Jeremiah arrives and as he and Belly prepare to leave, Taylor uses a childhood nickname for Belly, "Cinderbelly." The term makes Belly laugh and reminds her of the depth of her friendship with Taylor.



Chapters 5 through 7 Analysis

Belly is faced with a decision when she agrees to go with Jeremiah to look for Conrad. She wants to tell her mother where she's going but senses that her mother is not coping well with the current situation. Belly has pointed out several times that Laurel is at her best when she's needed. The fact that she was needed to help deal with Susannah's funeral meant she didn't immediately fall apart over Susannah's death. Later, however, Laurel seems to drift into her own world of grief and seems to barely notice what's going on around her. Belly takes all this into consideration along with the fact that she knows how much her mother loves Conrad and Jeremiah. Belly knows Laurel would want to help but isn't certain she's capable. She's wrong on this point but she seems to believe her mother is so fragile that another blow might break her. Belly decides to leave without telling her mother the truth in an effort to protect her. Her intentions are good though misguided. Another aspect of this scene is that Belly is consumed with not only her own grief but with that of her mother as well. Belly has come to hate being with her mother because Laurel is so sad. She feels guilty that she's happy at the prospect of getting away from Laurel for a day. Though Belly doesn't say this, it also seems possible that Laurel would not allow Belly to go and that Belly doesn't ask permission in order to avoid that.



Chapters 8 through 11

Chapters 8 through 11 Summary

In chapter eight, Jeremiah remembers the moment the previous summer when he'd been clowning around with Belly at the poolside. Conrad joined them and a short time later Belly left to get a soda. Jeremiah says he watched Conrad watching Belly walk away and that it was a "game changing moment," one he knew meant that things would never again be the same. Jeremiah says he wanted to tell Conrad that he had ignored Belly for all their lives and that he couldn't simply stop ignoring her now because he felt like it. Jeremiah says that when Conrad went missing from summer school, he hadn't wanted to call Belly. He is still mad at her because she chose Conrad but more importantly, she hasn't called and stayed in touch with him after his mother's funeral - something a true friend would have made time for. Jeremiah admits that he is no longer mad at Belly as soon as they're together again. He says when he's with her he wants to kiss her in an effort to make her forget Conrad.

In chapter nine, Belly asks how they're going to find Conrad. Jeremiah says the first part of his plan is to go to the Brown campus to see if they can find Conrad or any information about him. Belly says she really just wants to know everything is okay between her and Jeremiah.

In chapter ten, Belly remembers the last time she'd gone to see Susannah. She'd told her mother she didn't want to go, had pleaded upcoming tests and the need to study, but her mother was adamant. Belly takes the train to Boston and her mother picks her up. Laurel says Conrad isn't at the house and warns Belly that Susannah doesn't look well. Belly admits to feeling guilty because she doesn't want to see Susannah and hasn't visited often since Susannah became ill. There is a hospice nurse named Nona who is on the porch when Belly arrives. She says Susannah is waiting and Belly goes inside alone. The conversation turns to Conrad and Susannah asks Belly not to be angry at Conrad, then asks that Belly look after him.

In chapter eleven, a song comes on the radio and Jeremiah says it was played at one of his proms. He says he's been to a total of five proms and Belly knows it's because he always makes people feel special so that any girl would be pleased to have him as a date.

Chapters 8 through 11 Analysis

When Belly and Susannah are talking about Conrad, Belly says that Conrad "broke up with me." She is right about the wording of the situation but then thinks about it. She says it had always been Conrad's decision whether they would be together. This is evidence of Belly's blind devotion and Conrad's self-centered attitude. Belly remains willing to forgive him for some time and continues to seem to hope that he'll want her.

Jeremiah has obviously had the same crush on Belly that Belly has on Conrad, and probably for the same length of time. Jeremiah is an example of the coming of age theme in that he recognized that things had changed between Belly and Conrad the previous summer. Jeremiah says he knew at that moment that things would never again be the same.



Chapters 12 through 15

Chapters 12 through 15 Summary

In chapter twelve, Belly recalls her prom. She calls Conrad and asks him to take her. Conrad is obviously not excited about the possibility and Belly says it's okay. She says Cory Wheeler has already asked to take her and that she'll call him and accept his offer. Conrad says he doesn't want her to go with anyone else and agrees to take her, though it's obvious he doesn't want to and is only going to keep her from attending with someone else. Belly says she has a boutonniere for Conrad but he says he'd forgotten her corsage back at his dorm.

When they arrive at the prom, it's obvious that Conrad is not happy to be there. He hugs Taylor but isn't overly friendly. He doesn't make an effort to mix with Belly's friends. When they leave, Conrad says he has an important test coming up and that he might head back to school rather than spending the night. Belly knows he wants to end their relationship and finally puts that into words. Belly gets out of the car and walks away. Conrad yells out after her but she doesn't stop. She says it occurs to her that things might have been different if she did.

In chapter thirteen, the reader sees the prom from Jeremiah's perspective. He says his mom "freaked out" when she learned Conrad was taking Belly to the prom. She'd become involved, giving advice on the corsage Conrad should get for Belly and tells him he should make the night memorable for Belly. When Susannah questions Conrad about the prom, he is noncommittal. He says it went okay, then lies and says the corsage looked nice and that he and Belly "danced all night." He makes up a theme and Susannah says she can't wait to get the professional photos back so she can frame one.

In chapter fourteen, Belly and Jeremiah arrive on campus. They find Conrad's room and his roommate, Eric Trusky. Eric says he doesn't know where Conrad is and suggests they see the R.A., a young man named Ari. Eric leaves the room and Jeremiah and Belly take a seat, thinking. Just then a girl named Sophie appears and says she believes Conrad was going to surf, prompting Jeremiah and Belly to the conclusion that he's at the beach house. Jeremiah calls his dad, saying that Conrad is in Cousins and promising to bring him back to school.

Jeremiah goes down the hall to see Ari and Belly snoops around the room a little. She finds a necklace with the infinity symbol and knows it's for her because of some time they'd spent together the previous months working on math problems. Jeremiah returns and says Conrad is in "self-destruct mode," meaning he can't be expected to bring Conrad back from Cousins without Belly's help. She agrees to go. Belly says she puts on the necklace though she can't explain why.



In chapter fifteen, Belly grabs up textbooks, notebooks, and Conrad's laptop, cramming as much as possible into a bag so that Conrad can pick up the studies for his midterms. They set out without talking much but Belly says that's okay with her because she's busy thinking.

Chapters 12 through 15 Analysis

At one point during prom, Taylor advises Belly to not let Conrad ruin her prom. Belly admits to being embarrassed that Conrad didn't bring her a corsage. Conrad's self-centered attitude is evident throughout this situation and he does ruin it for Belly. When they leave the prom, Belly asks Conrad if his mother had made him attend prom with her. Conrad denies it but takes so long to answer that Belly doesn't believe him.

When Belly tells her mom and Steven that she and Conrad broke up, their reactions are not what Belly or the reader might expect. Steven has been a huge fan of Conrad. Steven is apparently a bit younger than Conrad and was surprised when Conrad began seeing Belly as a girlfriend. It may have been tempting for him to take Conrad's side but he doesn't. He tells Belly that Conrad "isn't worth" her heartache. Belly's mom says she was "afraid" their romance wouldn't survive and goes on to say there are "more people involved." With that comment out in the open, Belly suddenly realizes that Susannah is pleased that Conrad and Belly are seeing each other and that she'll be disappointed to learn they broke up.



Chapters 16 through 18

Chapters 16 through 18 Summary

In chapter sixteen, Belly recalls a night when Conrad had called her. He drives to her town from school and Belly waits until her mother is asleep, then meets him on the corner near her house. Belly and Conrad drive to the beach house at Cousins. The next morning, Belly's mom calls, furious. Belly says she left a note but remembers that she didn't. Belly says she's at the beach with Conrad and her mother tells her to be home by the end of the day. She says that it will be the last fun Belly has "for a long time." Belly and Conrad spend some time kissing over the course of the day. It seems that things might go farther but Conrad points out that Belly is a virgin and doesn't allow it to happen. They arrive home after midnight and Belly says she doesn't regret the trip, despite her mother's anger.

In chapter seventeen, Belly and Jeremiah get near the beach house and Belly attempts to untangle her hair that has been blowing in the wind. When they get there, they find there's nothing in the house to eat and Belly agrees to go out for food. In town, Belly encounters Maureen O'Riley, owner of the millinery shop. She asks about Susannah and expresses her condolences when Belly says Susannah has died. Back at home, the boys are drinking beer and Belly drinks as well. She says it isn't because she likes beer but because, as always, she wants to be included in whatever the boys are doing. Conrad's phone rings and, without picking it up or even looking at it, he says Jeremiah can tell "him" he isn't leaving the beach house. Jeremiah takes the phone and goes inside. Belly and Conrad are alone on the porch and Belly says she knows she could say something at that moment, but doesn't and the opportunity seems to pass. They sit together without talking and Belly says she's trying to memorize the beach because she knows it might be the last time she sees it.

In chapter eighteen, Belly and the boys are watching television. She believes Jeremiah might be waiting to talk to Conrad until she's out of the room, so says she's tired and heads up to bed. Belly is ready for bed when Jeremiah stops by her room. He says that he's certain they can talk to Conrad the following day.

Chapters 16 through 18 Analysis

Belly is preparing for bed but when she opens her overnight bag, discovers that Taylor had packed a ridiculous pair of shorts and matching tank top covered with little red hearts. Belly had expected to be wearing the oversized t-shirt to bed. She notes that none of her own clothes are in the bag now and that Taylor has replaced them with her own clothes - very short cutoffs, a new bikini, a sundress, and a pair of platform sandals. Belly notes that Taylor's willingness to give up her sandals for a night was "altruistic" of her, but she's still upset that Taylor had replaced all Belly's clothing rather than just adding some options for her. Belly says this is typical of Taylor, imposing her

own will on others rather than making suggestions and letting others decide for themselves.



Chapters 19 through 23

Chapters 19 through 23 Summary

In chapter nineteen, the perspective switches to Jeremiah. He says he knows that Belly expects him to stay downstairs and try to talk to Conrad about returning to school. He says he knows this because Belly is "easy to read." Jeremiah notes Belly's pajamas when he stops by her room and wonders if they're comfortable to sleep in.

In chapter twenty, Belly wakes but takes some time getting out of bed. She allows herself the luxury of pretending "it was any other morning in the summer house." Belly knows she'll soon be returning home where she'll spend the rest of her summer with Taylor. She accepts this is the final visit to the beach house. Belly calls Taylor who says Belly is "retarded" for allowing herself to be caught up in Conrad's drama. Belly then calls her mom, saying Belly is struggling with a breakup and that she'll be spending another night with her. Her mother says Belly is a good friend and asks that she say "hello" to Taylor's parents. Belly notes that her mother doesn't even question her and puts it down to her continuing grief over the loss of Susannah.

Belly goes downstairs and Conrad says Jeremiah and Belly should leave soon if they intend to "miss the Fourth of July traffic." Jeremiah says they aren't leaving without Conrad and he says he isn't leaving. Conrad then says he's headed back to the beach and walks away. When he's gone, Belly and Jeremiah argue, Belly saying she'd believed Jeremiah was going to "work on" Conrad and Jeremiah saying that pushing Conrad never accomplishes anything.

In chapter twenty-one, Belly finds Susannah's old floppy hat and it brings her a moment of misery. Belly goes for a swim and appreciates a few moments to herself. Jeremiah interrupts her swim, saying he's headed for town and plans to pick up a pizza, alerting Belly to the fact that she'd been swimming for an hour and a half. Belly stays in the pool for another hour. When she gets out, Conrad is there and hands her the towel. He says that Belly wouldn't notice anything when she's swimming and seems to respect her for that dedication.

In chapter twenty-two, Steven calls. He says he'd seen Taylor at the mall and had deduced that she was lying about Belly's whereabouts. Belly says she's with Jeremiah and briefly explains the situation. After she and Steven get off the phone, Belly hears a car drive up. Belly goes downstairs and finds a woman in the house. Conrad joins them and she identifies herself as Sandy Donatti, Mr. Fisher's real estate agent. Conrad says he sent the movers away and that the house is not for sale. Conrad says the house is not his father's to sell and Sandy says she's going to call Mr. Fisher. Conrad encourages her to do that. When Sandy leaves, Conrad says that Belly shouldn't tell Jeremiah about the house being for sale. Conrad says Belly can't ever keep secrets from her "BFF," but asks that she do it this once. She reluctantly agrees, and says that it's "for now."



In chapter twenty-three, Belly watches as the boys go surfing. She hopes Jeremiah will have a chance to talk to Conrad and grows melancholy as she takes in the scene. Belly is taking a sip of a beer when Mr. Fisher arrives. She suddenly wishes she and Jeremiah had simply forced Conrad into the car and back to school when they arrived at the house. Mr. Fisher talks with Belly for a short time, asking if Conrad is alright and if she has plans for college. Belly says as she's talking to him she feels like she had as a child when she was "In Trouble" with Mr. Fisher.

Chapters 19 through 23 Analysis

When Conrad leaves the house after refusing to give in to Belly and Jeremiah's demands that he return to school, the air is tense. Belly and Jeremiah immediately argue and then apologize for it, but Belly notes that it's customary for Conrad to "set the mood." She knows that things won't be okay for anyone until Conrad is back on track.

When the real estate agent arrives at the house, Conrad introduces himself and then introduces Belly, "my girlfriend." There's no indication why Conrad does this but Belly admits that even knowing the beach house is for sale is information that takes second place to the fact that Conrad called her his girlfriend.

There's no indication as to Conrad's motives for not telling Jeremiah about Mr. Fisher's plans to sell the beach house. It seems reasonable that he would simply tell Jeremiah so the two could be united in their front against the sale.



Chapters 24 through 27

Chapters 24 through 27 Summary

In chapter twenty-four, Belly remembers a special blender Mr. Fisher had at the beach house when she and the boys were small and spending summers together. They had all known they weren't to touch the blender which Mr. Fisher used for making milkshakes. One day Belly and Jeremiah decided to make Slurpees using ice, Kool-Aid, sugar, and Mr. Fisher's blender. They'd needed to stir the concoction and Belly hadn't put the lid back on tightly enough. When they started the blender again, the purple mess had gone everywhere, including on Mr. Fisher's briefcase. Mr. Fisher was furious and Susannah had told him it was an accident and he should let it go. When Mr. Fisher was telling Jeremiah he'd been told not to touch the blender, Conrad interrupted, saying they all knew they weren't supposed to but that Mr. Fisher had never told them not to. Belly remembers her mother insisting that Steven take Belly out of the room as Jeremiah also left the room, leaving only Laurel and Mr. Fisher. Belly hadn't understood but Steven says Mr. Fisher is in more trouble than Belly and Jeremiah.

In chapter twenty-five, Conrad and Jeremiah return with their surfboards. Mr. Fisher immediately says that Jeremiah's job was to get Conrad to return to school, not to "interfere with the sale." Mr. Fisher says that Conrad's "tantrum" can't stop the sale and that the movers will be returning to pack up the house. Conrad says Mr. Fisher can't sell the house and Mr. Fisher responds that Conrad isn't the only person who lost someone when Susannah died. He points out that he lost his wife. When Mr. Fisher leaves, Conrad and Jeremiah begin to argue. Jeremiah says Conrad should have told him of their father's plans and Conrad says Jeremiah would not have taken a stand against those plans, even if he'd known. They try to put Belly in the middle of the argument, a fact that makes her mad.

Chapter twenty-six reverts to Jeremiah's perspective. He recalls a time when Conrad had been very involved in wrestling and their father had been constantly giving Conrad pointers. Jeremiah and Conrad sometimes wrestled and one day Jeremiah pinned Conrad. Instead of their father being appreciative of Jeremiah's prowess, Mr. Fisher was scornful of Conrad, saying he hadn't been following instructions of he wouldn't have allowed Jeremiah to pin him. After the wrestling is over, it's Conrad who says Jeremiah did a good job, and Mr. Fisher off-handedly follows suit. Jeremiah says that he knows Mr. Fisher will never be "father of the year" and that he has his flaws. However, he realizes their dad came home when their mom was sick and needed him most. He'd done what he had to do, made Susannah happy in her final days, and that is enough for Jeremiah. He says Conrad can't see their father's efforts for what they are and continues to hold a grudge. When Jeremiah gets home from another trip to town, he has lots of liquor and calls on Conrad to help unload everything. Jeremiah announces they're having a party.



In chapter twenty-seven, Belly finds an old journal that she'd started keeping one summer. She sees entries such as the fact that she'd caught Jeremiah dancing in the mirror and knew that Conrad had eaten all the blue popsicles, though he wasn't supposed to, and that she hadn't told on him. Belly also finds a telescope her father had purchased for her when she was interested in stars and constellations. She says he is often proud of her and that she is pleased when she makes him proud. She says he, unlike Mr. Fisher, would never yell or cuss over spilled Kool-Aid, and that she hasn't always appreciated him as much as she should have.

Chapters 24 through 27 Analysis

Belly talks about the beach house as being a fairly "trouble-free zone." She says it's because Laurel and Susannah were intent on their friendship and on spending time doing things they enjoyed. The kids were not the focus of the adults' attention while at the beach house, meaning many of the rules were relaxed. It seems this would be a major reason Belly enjoyed the beach house and that it carries such fond memories for all the children.

The first indications that there were serious problems in the Fisher household are seen by the reader when Mr. Fisher arrives at the beach house. He says he intends to sell the house and Conrad says it isn't his to sell. Mr. Fisher argues, saying that he has control and the argument turns hostile. At that point, Mr. Fisher says that Conrad isn't the only person who lost someone when Susannah died, and Mr. Fisher says he lost his wife. This infuriates Conrad. The reader will soon learn that Mr. Fisher had left the family prior to Susannah's illness but apparently returned after her diagnosis. Conrad can't seem to accept or forgive his father for this. The entire situation seems another example of Conrad's selfish attitude.



Chapter 28 through 30

Chapter 28 through 30 Summary

In chapter twenty-eight, Belly remembers a rare weekend when both her father and Mr. Fisher were at the beach house. She says they had little in common. On this particular weekend, Laurel and Susannah were dressing to out on a date with their husbands. Susannah had offered to put some makeup on Belly and she'd enjoyed the female attention. Belly remembers watching her parents that night and it seemed they were genuinely happy. She says later she'd talked about Taylor's parents and their divorce. Taylor's parents had fought constantly but Taylor says she still wanted her parents to be together so they were a family. Belly is haunted by the fact that her parents never fought at all. She says she isn't certain whether they simply didn't care enough about their marriage to fight for it or if they'd never actually been in love at all.

In chapter twenty-nine, Belly discovers the party about to kick off downstairs. She remembers all the pizza parties they'd had with Susannah in charge and compares this event to those parties. She says this time there's beer and tequila and that she's accepting this as the last party at the beach house. She wishes Steven was with them, making the foursome complete. At one point someone suggests the game, "Truth or Dare," and Belly says it's "dumb," but is convinced to play along. She learns that Jeremiah has had a girlfriend and she feels somewhat betrayed that she didn't know, though she realizes Jeremiah doesn't owe her any explanations.

In chapter thirty, Belly realizes she's supposed to be back at Taylor's for a party. While she's talking to Taylor on the phone, the girls argue, each feeling the other isn't being a good friend. At one point, Taylor says it's time for Belly to get over Conrad, that he doesn't like her and probably never did. Belly responds by saying that at least she hadn't give up her virginity to a guy who shaves his legs, working on a secret Taylor had told about her boyfriend, Davis, who is a swimmer. They girls hang up in anger.

Chapter 28 through 30 Analysis

At one point during the party, Belly sits by Jeremiah who announces she can't drink because she's a minor. She points out they are all minors and Jeremiah says Belly is so young his mom would kill him for letting her drink. Belly says it's the first time any of them have talked about Susannah and it seems to be somewhat cathartic. Jeremiah has said this to Belly - that his grief would have been easier to stand if he'd had her to lean on. Jeremiah says that neither Conrad nor Mr. Fisher is willing to talk about Susannah.

The argument between Belly and Taylor is typical of the girls. Belly says when she and Taylor argue they tend to be really angry for a week or two and, during that time, will make their friends choose sides. Belly realizes that Conrad and Jeremiah, even after



their argument over the sale of the beach house and Conrad returning to school, will argue differently. An interesting point about the argument is seen when Taylor and Belly are about to hang up. Taylor says that Belly had better not wear her favorite platform sandals, which Taylor had put in Belly's bag. What's interesting is that Belly hated the fact that Taylor put them in her bag but now says she's wearing them, obviously trying to make Taylor angrier.



Chapters 31 through 35

Chapters 31 through 35 Summary

In chapter thirty-one, the party kicks off and lots of people arrive, many that Belly doesn't know. She dances with Jeremiah and decides she wants to go for a swim. Conrad intervenes, saying Belly has had too much to drink and shouldn't go in the water. She goes to the beach anyway and walks into the water, arguing with Conrad the entire way. She walks into the water though the desire to swim has actually dissolved. Just when she comes to think Conrad won't follow her, he does, hoists her over his shoulder and drops her onto the sand. She's furious at his treatment but more so at her own actions. Belly makes her way back to the house, ignores a boy's request that she join him for a swim and steps on a girl's foot on the way. She goes to her room and realizes the bed is spinning when she lies down. She calls her mom and begins to cry. She tells Laurel she's at the beach house and that Mr. Fisher is going to sell it. She is still talking to her mother but is so dizzy she can't stay awake.

In chapter thirty-two, the perspective switches back to Jeremiah. He says soon after Belly goes to bed, he tells everyone to leave, leaving him alone with Conrad. They argue with Jeremiah trying to push Conrad into saying what he feels for Belly and where their relationship stands. Jeremiah says he knows Conrad likes Belly but also knows Conrad will never be the kind of person who can make Belly happy. Conrad says he doesn't like Belly and counters, asking Jeremiah if he likes her.

In chapter thirty-three, Belly's mother wakes her, roughly shaking her, and Belly remembers the drunken call to her mother the night before. Laurel says they're leaving immediately but Belly argues, saying Laurel doesn't understand that Mr. Fisher is trying to sell the beach house. Laurel says it isn't their house and that Belly hasn't helped matters. Belly counters, saying that Susannah would want them to save the house. The argument turns nasty with Laurel pointing out that Belly isn't the only person grieving for Susannah. Belly wants to hurt her mother and says she wishes Susannah were her mother. Belly then says Susannah would never forgive Laurel for letting the house be sold away from Conrad and Jeremiah, and Laurel reacts by slapping Belly.

Belly runs from the house and Jeremiah follows. He says the battle is lost and that she should just go home with Laurel. Laurel joins them and apologizes. She then says that she's been so consumed by her grief over Susannah's death that she hasn't stepped up to her duties to Jeremiah and Conrad. She pledges to talk to Mr. Fisher.

In chapter thirty-four, the perspective switches back to Jeremiah. He recalls a summer when Belly had caught a cold and he'd been pressed by his mother to stay inside and keep her company. He'd reluctantly done so, and been surprised that they enjoyed spending the day playing poker and watching television. When Jeremiah came down with a cold, Belly had reciprocated, spending the day in with him.



In chapter thirty-five, the perspective remains with Jeremiah. Laurel announces that Mr. Fisher is coming for breakfast and puts the three to work, cleaning and helping make a meal. Asked why she's cooking for him, she says Mr. Fisher is a child and, like any child, gets cranky when he hasn't been fed. Laurel sends Jeremiah to the store and he apologizes for letting Belly drink, eventually coaxing a genuine smile from her and noting she is "easy" to get back to a good humor.

Chapters 31 through 35 Analysis

After everyone leaves the party, Jeremiah and Conrad are alone. Jeremiah says he's mad because the house is such a mess but Conrad points out the party was Jeremiah's idea. Jeremiah silently admits that's the truth and that he's really mad because of Belly and Conrad, and their ongoing relationship that just can't seem to completely resolve itself. By this point, the reader is fully aware that Jeremiah is crazy about Belly but is unwilling to try to make her see him as a boyfriend because of her obvious worship of Conrad. There's an interesting conversation between the brothers. Jeremiah insists that Conrad decide whether he likes Belly and Conrad hesitates. Jeremiah says that if Conrad will just say that he likes Belly, he'll step aside and let their relationship play out. Jeremiah does, however, admit that he'd try to attract Belly's affections at this point if she were involved with anyone other than Conrad. What becomes interesting is that Conrad, apparently knowing that Jeremiah likes Belly, says that he doesn't. Jeremiah, having asked Conrad for an answer, then knows that Conrad is lying about it and that he really does like Belly. It seems both are looking for something from the other but neither is willing to make a next move for fear that it will hurt the other. However, neither is willing to step completely away. In Jeremiah's case, it seems that his unwillingness is because he truly loves Belly. In Conrad's case, it seems that he loves Belly but that he is too selfish to enter into a loving relationship.



Chapters 36 through 38

Chapters 36 through 38 Summary

In chapter thirty-six, Conrad joins Belly, helping carry out trash bags. He asks if she'd called Laurel and she hates to admit she had, expecting him to say something derogatory about calling her mom. Instead, he thanks her for making the call. The meal is ready by the time Mr. Fisher arrives and he thanks Laurel for coming, believing she'll be helping him convince the boys his course of action is the correct one. Laurel soon points out that the boys have lost their mother and shouldn't be uprooted from the house as well. Mr. Fisher says he knows Susannah has always made Laurel feel as if she has a stake in the house but points out that Laurel doesn't share ownership in any form. Mr. Fisher stands to leave but Laurel demands he sit, then orders the three young people from the room. No one argues with her demands.

Belly and Jeremiah listen from upstairs and she hears Mr. Fisher say Susannah is everywhere in the house. Belly says she "almost" feels sorry for him, but Laurel hits harder in her comments. She says Mr. Fisher was "a sorry husband" but that Susannah had loved him completely, taking him back despite Laurel trying to convince her not to. Laurel challenges Mr. Fisher, daring him to prove she's wrong about him by letting the boys keep the house. When Mr. Fisher comes from the kitchen, he sends Jeremiah to get Conrad. He says he won't sell the house if Conrad goes back to school and finishes the summer session without failing any of his classes.

They walk Laurel to the car and Conrad asks if she'll be coming back. She pledges to return anytime she's invited. Laurel agrees Belly can remain one more night at the beach house to help Conrad study.

In chapter thirty-seven, the perspective switches again to Jeremiah's perspective. He says the house was "a wreck" and he'd been in his boxer shorts when Laurel arrived one day at his house in Boston. He'd been trying to get ready for a banquet and Laurel had taken over, getting him out the door and promising to watch over his mom while he was gone. He'd picked up Mara and later that evening, she'd asked if he believed they'd be together after they each headed out to college in the fall. He'd said no. Jeremiah says he was relieved not to have to think about Mara because all he had room for was his mother and her illness. He says he'd been so grateful to have Laurel around for an entire week he hadn't given a thought to how she was managing to stay gone from home so much.

In chapter thirty-eight, Jeremiah and Conrad want to go to sleep and Belly gives in, allowing them a nap before making them get started helping Conrad study. Belly goes for burgers and wakes the boys, making them get started on the studying at the kitchen table. Everyone is assigned tasks designed to make the studying easier for Conrad and they set to work.



Chapters 36 through 38 Analysis

The scene in which Mr. Fisher makes a deal with Conrad is evidence of his favoritism. He simply seems to expect that Jeremiah will do the right thing, go to college and remain in school, without any pressure. He makes the deal with Conrad and when Conrad agrees to the terms of Mr. Fisher's deal, Mr. Fisher insists they shake on it, "man to man."

Belly says she'd often wishes as a child that Susannah was her mother but it seems just the tendency of a child to see something that seems more attractive, probably because it's viewed from a distance. Jeremiah and Conrad both seem to depend on Laurel more than might have been expected, and this seems an extension of their summer spent together. When Belly calls Laurel and accuses her of being so wrapped in her own grief that she can't help anyone else, Laurel suddenly realizes that's exactly what she's been doing. It takes that to snap her out of her trance and to make her see that she's been neglecting her duties to herself, to Belly, and to Conrad and Jeremiah.

The final scene of chapter thirty-eight shows Belly, Conrad, and Jeremiah around the kitchen table, working to help Conrad study. Belly and Jeremiah are making notes for Conrad. Belly remembers the summers of their childhood in which Conrad would be reading an entire encyclopedia or coming up with experiments with his chemistry set. Belly's final thought of the chapter is that she missed this side of Conrad as the person she'd fallen in love with, and wished he could come back to her. Belly doesn't seem to be willing to realize or admit that Conrad has grown and changed, just as she has.



Chapters 39 through 43

Chapters 39 through 43 Summary

In chapter thirty-nine, Belly suddenly remembers her fight with Taylor but says, just as has always been the case, she can barely focus on anything other than the beach house once she's arrived there. In chapter forty, they take a break from studying. Jeremiah and Conrad grab Belly, one with her feet and the other with her hands, and throw her into the pool, yelling "belly-flop" as they do. Though she says they are "jerks," she's secretly glad to see them united in something. They pack up and head for school, Jeremiah driving and Conrad taking a nap.

In chapter forty-one, Jeremiah and Belly have a sandwich while they wait for Conrad to take one of his tests. Jeremiah asks Belly why she didn't come around after Susannah died and she says she didn't think he'd want her there. Conrad announces he'd "killed" the first test and heads off for a second. Jeremiah and Belly are waiting in the car and Belly asks if Conrad ever talks about her. Jeremiah tells her not to ask that of him, then they're kissing and Belly realizes she's kissing him back. They look up to discover Conrad is watching them. He walks away with them trying to call him back. There's a moment of understanding for Belly in which she realizes Conrad will never be there for her as Jeremiah will. Belly goes after him and Conrad tells her that it's Jeremiah who wants her and that he never had.

Belly can't decide what to do. She feels she did wrong by kissing Jeremiah then chasing after Conrad, but doesn't know how to fix the situation. She finally returns to the car and Jeremiah tosses her the keys, telling her to drive. They get caught in a rainstorm so severe they can't see and decide to stop for a motel room. Belly calls her mom who says they should stay put and come home early the next morning. Belly takes the bed and the boys go to sleep on the floor. They are still only a short time when Jeremiah begins to snore, a fact that annoys Belly because she says he's always been able to fall asleep in a matter of minutes, regardless of the situation. Then she hears Conrad's voice. He says he's sorry and that he hadn't meant what he said about never wanting her.

In chapter forty-three, Belly wakes early, showers, and dresses. When she returns to the main room, the boys are up. She hopes Conrad will look at her, give her some sign as to where things stand, so she'll know what to do. He doesn't until he finally announces that a friend is coming to pick him up to take him to the beach house to get his car, leaving Jeremiah to take her home. Jeremiah and Belly head out and Jeremiah is being very polite. Then Belly takes his hand and says, for the first time, she knows it's the right thing.



Chapters 39 through 43 Analysis

While they are in the motel room, Belly wishes Steven had been with them. She believes that if Steven had been present, she'd be the one left out most of the time and chasing after the three boys, rather than being caught in the middle. Ironically, Belly has always wanted to be included in the boys' activities and now there's a fight because she is.

When Conrad announces that he's headed to the beach house to get his car with a friend, Belly knows that their relationship is over. She realizes she has been pushed away for the last time and wonders if Conrad realizes it too. She says she is no longer the girl who will come running back to him even when he pushes her away. Without intending to let it happen, Belly has done what Taylor wanted her to do - finish her relationship with Conrad.

There's an epilogue titled "a couple of years later." Belly says she'd always imagined a scene from her future and in this scene the same boy always rushes ahead of her in the rain, opened the passenger door of a car, and asks if she's sure. Belly says she always says she isn't. She then says the future is "unclear, but it's mine." This section seems to indicate that Belly imagines her future with Conrad. The story has a sequel and those who read it will find it opens with Belly dating Jeremiah and the two of them, along with Taylor, attending the same college.



Characters

Isabel

Known as "Belly," she is about to enter her senior year of high school and is struggling to deal with the changes of her life. Belly has spent every summer of her life with the family of her mother's best friend at a beach house. Now the friend has died of cancer and Belly is spending her first summer at home. She hates the situation and is still grieving for her mother's friend Susannah - who seemed a second mother to Belly - and for a recently broken relationship. Belly has trouble reconciling herself to settle in to the typical summer activities of her friends and finds herself working hard to avoid being asked out by a very cute boy from her school. Belly is also struggling to create her own identity. She has spent most of her childhood chasing after her brother Steven and Susannah's sons, Conrad and Jeremiah, all three a little older than Belly. Now she's trying to fit in with her friends and dealing with the fact that her life is changing. Belly is a strong character but she flounders as she tries to deal with her raging emotions with regard to Susannah's death, her mother's grief, and the changes of her life. Belly doesn't want to move on with her life, she wants to go back to the happier time of her life. As the summer progresses, she finds herself willing to fight for what she believes is right and learns to deal with her grief over the loss of her friend, a relationship she'd always dreamed of and her childhood.

Jeremiah Fisher

The younger of Susannah's two sons, Jeremiah seeks to please those around him. He is a strong young man though his strength is often covered by the fact that he tries desperately to be what others need him to be. When his mother is dying of cancer, Jeremiah feels guilty each time he leaves her to do things with his friends. Jeremiah is jealous of his older brother Conrad but not to a debilitating degree. Mainly, he's jealous of the fact that Belly has such a crush on Conrad that she can't see him in the light of a potential boyfriend. Jeremiah also recognizes that his father favors Conrad but doesn't hold that against Conrad as many teenage boys might. When Jeremiah manages to hold his own against Conrad in a wrestling match, he is acutely aware of the fact that their father is not pleased with the outcome. He doesn't approve Jeremiah's tenacity but berates Conrad for the loss. Jeremiah is genuinely friendly. His actions and attitudes are immediately evident and everyone wants to be his friend. This is seen in the fact that he goes to several proms because many girls want him to be their date. Belly understands that Jeremiah will do everything to make that girl feel she is the most important person at prom, and others sense this in Jeremiah as well, making him a popular young man. Jeremiah is jealous of Conrad's relationship with Belly but when Conrad seems to be in trouble, Jeremiah calls on Belly to help bring him back on track.



Conrad Fisher

He is Susannah's son and Jeremiah's older brother. He seems self-confident but is mainly self-centered. Conrad is a couple of years older than Belly when he seems to notice her crush on him. He begins calling her and they seem to become a couple but Conrad isn't devoted to the relationship and disappoints Belly tremendously when he takes her to her prom. When Conrad learns that his father is about to sell the beach house, he rebels, leaves school, and pledges to remain in the house, stopping the sale.

Susannah Fisher

Laurel's best friend since childhood, she is like a second mother to Belly. Susannah treats Belly well, putting makeup on her when she is a child watching the adults prepare to go out for the evening and hungry for news of Belly's prom. Susannah dies of cancer and her death creates a huge gap in the lives of those who loved her.

Laurel Conklin

Belly's mother, she and Susannah were best friends from childhood and remain close as adults, spending every summer together at Susannah's beach house. Laurel grieves after Susannah's death and has trouble pulling her life back on track. It's not until Belly calls from the beach house, obviously drunk and crying, that Laurel is able to shake free from the depth of that grief to take control of the situation.

Adam Fisher

Susannah's husband, he is, in many ways, Susannah's opposite. Adam is heart-hearted and doesn't understand the importance of the beach house. He is very strict with the children and obviously prefers Conrad over Jeremiah. Adam plans to sell the beach house until Laurel intervenes. Adam has had an affair prior to Susannah's death and the boys hate him for that though Jeremiah remains civil when Conrad doesn't.

Steven

Belly's older brother, he is a constant fixture at the beach house for summers until the summer Conrad discovers his father is about to sell the house. Steven is very protective of Belly.

Taylor

Belly's best friend in school, Taylor is pushy and believes she can push Belly out of her grief for Susannah and for her broken relationship with Conrad. Taylor believes she



understands the best way for Belly to get past her grief over Conrad but Belly doesn't believe that Taylor understands the depth of her heartbreak.

Cory Wheeler

A cute boy who attends Belly's high school, he apparently likes Belly. Her friends, specifically Taylor, are pushing Cory to ask Belly out and she's trying desperately to avoid that situation.

Mr. Conklin

Belly's father, he is divorced and only occasionally visits the beach house even before the divorce. He is mild-mannered and Belly says she didn't fully appreciate him as a young child.



Objects/Places

Cousins

This is where the beach house is located.

Best Buy

This is where Steven has a summer job.

A Diamond Necklace

This is the item Susannah leaves with instructions that it's for Belly's wedding day.

Brown

This is where Conrad is attending school when he learns the beach house is for sale.

Boston

This is where Susannah lives when she isn't at the beach house.

The Corsage

This is the item Belly expects from Conrad but that he forgets, which embarrasses her.

Red Framed Glasses

This is the accessory Belly wears to Susannah's funeral because Susannah had said she liked how Belly looked in them.

The Basement of the Fisher House

This is where Conrad is with his girlfriend when Belly brings Conrad a plate of food following Susannah's funeral.



Taylor's House

This is where Belly pretends to be going when she's really going with Jeremiah in search of Conrad.

The Mall

This is where Steven encounters Taylor and discovers Belly isn't staying at Taylor's house.



Themes

Coming of Age

The book is a traditional coming of age story in many ways with Belly being the primary example of the theme. Belly is facing the end of her childhood which is punctuated by the death of a close family friend, Susannah, and breaking up with her childhood crush, Conrad. To make matters worse, Belly is facing the fact that she will never again spend an entire summer at the beach house at Cousins, a tradition she has participated in for her whole life. Belly doesn't want to let things change in order to grow and mature, and she seeks ways to avoid the changes rather than accepting them. Belly has always embraced the summers at the beach house. She admits that the moment she's there she doesn't miss the parties and other summer events Taylor talks about later in the year. When Belly returns to the beach house with Jeremiah in search of Conrad, she immediately falls into that routine. Though she's promised Taylor to return for another summer party, she doesn't even think to call to say she won't make it. Belly believes her childhood crush on Conrad is love and can't imagine that she'll ever feel differently. Her friend Taylor chastises Belly and tries to push her into participating in the traditional summer events. Belly believes Taylor doesn't understand her grief over Conrad but in actuality, Belly has invested too much into the breakup. When Conrad, Belly, and Jeremiah are leaving the beach house taking Conrad back to college for his summer finals, Belly realizes this chapter of her life is coming to an end.

The Effects of Grief

Susannah's death makes the biggest impact on Belly though at the time she can't differentiate between her grief over Susannah's death and her grief over breaking up with Conrad. Belly holds tightly to both kinds of grief, believing that letting her crush on Conrad go would somehow lessen her memories of Susannah. She would rather wallow in her grief but her friend Taylor won't let her. Belly watches her mother's grief play out as her mother spends as much time as possible alone in her office. Belly accepts this as her mother's way of coping and really wishes she could do the same. Laurel is actually doing little toward coping with her grief. She is wrapped up in it, allowing it to consume her life and seeming to care little whether she carries on with her daily duties. Belly steps in and begins to try to take care of her mother. This comes to a screeching halt when Belly calls from the beach house, obviously drunk. When Laurel arrives, Belly says she hadn't felt she could call on her mother which shakes Laurel out of the depths of her grief. Another important aspect of this is seen when Jeremiah talks about Conrad and his father crying - events that have seldom happened prior to Susannah's death. Jeremiah tells Belly that he desperately wanted to talk to her after Susannah's death because no one else would talk to him about his mother. Conrad seems to cope by not talking about his mother.



The Dynamics of Friendship

The dynamics of friendships is an important theme in this story because Belly is friends with Steven, Conrad, and Jeremiah and the boys are each friends with each other. The fact that three are boys affects the dynamics to a great degree, especially when Jeremiah and Conrad notice that Belly has matured into a beautiful young woman both are attracted to. The fact that Belly is crazy about Conrad and that Jeremiah is crazy about Belly complicates the situation, as does the fact that Steven doesn't initially realize why Conrad is calling Belly after their summer at the beach house. Another important aspect of this theme is seen with Belly and Taylor. Taylor is pushy and tries to bend Belly to her will, a fact that Belly seems to accept most of the year though she rebels completely the first summer she is forced to stay away from the beach house. Their friendship is further complicated by Belly's tendency to completely immerse herself in the happenings at the beach house to the point that she doesn't miss Taylor and doesn't even remember to call Taylor when she isn't going to attend a party, as had been planned. Belly notes that she and Taylor argue vehemently, calling on their friends to pick sides while they are mad at each other but always making up within a couple of weeks. Belly also notes that the friendship between Conrad and Jeremiah is different and not just because they are brothers. She realizes the boys aren't affected by their arguments in the same way that the girls are.



Style

Point of View

The story is written in the first person from the limited perspective that switches between Belly and Jeremiah. The switching is not confusing because each chapter from Jeremiah's perspective is labeled with his name. The limitation means the reader is not privy to the thoughts of anyone other than Belly and Jeremiah unless Belly or Jeremiah is aware. The fact that the perspectives alternate also means the reader may not be aware of Belly's thoughts or of Jeremiah's thoughts when a scene is first described. For example, when the three have a party at the beach house, Belly says she's going swimming but Conrad insists that she doesn't. Belly goes onto the beach and she and Conrad argue, ending when Conrad picks her up and drops her on the sand. Jeremiah's thoughts are not included in that chapter but he later reveals that he's angry because they are obviously still attracted to each other but unable to work it out. Jeremiah asks Conrad if he likes Belly and Conrad says he doesn't. Belly isn't privy to that conversation but later asks Jeremiah if Conrad ever talks about her, a question that makes Jeremiah mad. There's another important aspect of this perspective. Belly isn't aware of how much Jeremiah came to depend on her mother during Susannah's illness. Jeremiah reveals that he was about to go to a banquet when Laurel showed up at their house. Jeremiah was struggling with guilt, not wanting to leave his mother alone but feeling an obligation to the girl he was taking to the banquet. Laurel's arrival meant Jeremiah could go without feeling guilty and she even took over ironing his shirt. Jeremiah admits later that he was relieved to have Laurel there, another adult to help take on some of the burden, and that he never gave a thought to how she was coping with her own life during that time.

Setting

The story is set in a fairly modern-day time and place. Belly's hometown is not named, leaving it to the reader's imagination. It is likely in New England near the beach house and Brown University. Brown University and the beach house, located at Cousins Beach, anchor the book in New England. The overall settings are accurate though the specific settings - the beach house, Conrad's dorm room, and the store where Belly buys food - are figments of the author's imagination. Likewise, the specific settings of Belly's house, Taylor's house, and the pool where the girls are when the book opens, are also figments of the author's imagination. There are sufficient details to allow the reader to picture the places but the descriptions are also vague enough that the reader can imagine the story set almost anywhere. The settings are believable though it seems a bit unreasonable that the parents would allow liquor and an unsupervised party attended by teens the age of Belly and her friends. The majority of the characters of the story are wealthy and the settings relate that fact. The copyright of the book is 2010 and it seems reasonable that the book is set in that time period. The characters have cell phones readily available, which is an indication of the time setting.



Language and Meaning

The book is the second in a series. Though it can be read as a stand-alone, the reader who hasn't read the first in the series will not understand the full story of how Belly and Conrad came to be together in the first place. This background is not vital to understanding the story. The story is written in a straight-forward manner and the action moves quickly through a combination of dialogue and narrative. The dialogue is acceptable and believable to the time, characters, and situation. There is not a great deal of slang and it seems the characters are educated young people who have been taught to speak properly. However, they are not overly proper and their dialogue seems believable. A reader with an average vocabulary will find few unfamiliar words. Those that are unfamiliar will be easily identified through the context of the sentence. There are references to sex and alcohol use that some readers may find offensive. At one point, Belly refers to Taylor losing her virginity. In another, she talks about Conrad stopping their kissing and touching because he knows Belly is a virgin, but says that he isn't. The boys come by liquor without much trouble for a party at the beach house but Belly is given a wine cooler at another party at a friend's house.

Structure

The story is divided into forty-three chapters of varying lengths. Some chapters are titled only with the words "chapter" and a number while other chapters have titles. For example, chapter one is titled "Chapter one, July 2." The second chapter is titled only "Chapter Two." Other chapters have titles that include dates but some are titled with the chapter number and "Jeremiah," indicating the perspective changes in that chapter. Each chapter has a seashell on the title page above the chapter title. Some chapters are also divided into subsections. These divisions are marked with a seashell as well. The chapters vary greatly in length. Chapter two is more than fifteen pages and chapter twelve is fourteen pages. However, chapter eleven is only two pages and chapter fifteen is less than two full pages. The basic storyline flows in chronological order, beginning on July 2 and covering several days over the Fourth of July holiday. However, the book is filled with flashbacks. Some take up an entire chapter while others take up only a few paragraphs or a few pages. The characters go on a journey toward saving the beach house and toward adulthood. The structure of the book is aimed at presenting this quest through the story, which accounts for the lack of strictly adhering to chronological order.



Quotes

"I was getting pretty sick of Taylor pushing me in this direction and that direction, dressing me up like one of her shabbier, less fortunate dolls. It had always been like this with us" (Chapter 3, p. 24).

"And no matter what you do or how hard you try, you can't stop yourself from dreaming" (Chapter 3, p. 26).

"It confirmed every mean and low thing I'd ever thought about myself, the stuff you hope and pray no one will ever know about you. Because if they knew, they would see the real you, and they would despise you" (Chapter 5, p. 41).

"And no matter what you do or how hard you try, you can't stop yourself from dreaming" (Chapter 3, p. 26).

"It confirmed every mean and low thing I'd ever thought about myself, the stuff you hope and pray no one will ever know about you. Because if they knew, they would see the real you, and they would despise you" (Chapter 5, p. 41).

"All this time, I'd made such a big deal about me and Conrad, how we were some kind of couple. But I'd had to beg him to go to the prom with me, and he hadn't even remembered to bring me flowers" (Chapter 12, p. 77).

"He'd gotten to take Belly to her prom and he acted like it was some big chore. If it had been me, I would have done it right" (Chapter 13, p. 89).

"Like always, it was Conrad who dictated the mood of the house, how everyone else felt. Nothing would feel right again until things were right with Conrad" (Chapter 20, p. 136).

"Bad because I had the vague sense that Steven and I weren't as important here, that there were other things that occupied my mother's mind - memories we had no part of, a life before we existed" (Chapter 24, p. 157).

"And then I remembered. I'd drunk dialed my mother" (Chapter 33, p. 209).

"'Because he's a child and children are cranky when they haven't been fed,' she said in that dry way of hers" (Chapter 35, p. 224).

"I loved him longer and truer than I had anyone in my whole life and I would probably never love anyone that way again. Which, to be honest, was almost a relief" (Chapter 39, p. 251).

"It wasn't enough to know that, deep down, he loved me. You had to actually say it to somebody, show them that you cared" (Chapter 41, p. 263).

"It wasn't enough to know that, deep down, he loved me. You had to actually say it to somebody, show them that you cared" (Chapter 41, p. 263).



Topics for Discussion

Who is Belly? What are her strengths? What are her weaknesses? What are the challenges she faces during the first summer she doesn't spend at the beach house?

Compare Jeremiah and Conrad. How are the boys similar? How are they different? How are they treated differently by their father? What is the impact of this treatment?

Describe how Belly's relationship with Conrad changes over the course of the story. Compare that to how her relationship with Jeremiah changes over the course of the story.

What is the effect of Susannah's death on Belly? On Laurel? On Conrad? On Jeremiah? Which of the characters is most intensely impacted? Why?

Compare Laurel and Susannah. How are the two women similar? How are they different? What is Laurel's reaction to Susannah's death?

Who is Steven? Who is Taylor? Who is Cory Wheeler? Who is Mara? Who is Sophie? Who is Aubrey? How is each connected to Belly? How does each impact Belly's life?

What is the most important setting in the story? What is the most important theme? Why are these important?