

Memoirs of a Teenage Amnesiac Study Guide

Memoirs of a Teenage Amnesiac by Gabrielle Zevin

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Plot Summary

Memories of a Teenage Amnesiac is a novel by the author of Elsewhere, Gabrielle Zevin. The story follows the main character, Naomi Porter, as she tries to put the pieces of her life back together after suffering from amnesia. When Naomi falls and bumps her head on the stairs of her high school, she wakes up without the memories of the past four years of her life. The doctors cannot find a medical reason for the loss of memory. Some of the doctors as well as Naomi and her physics teacher, believe she might be blocking out a traumatic experience that occurred during the four-year period. The story slowly reveals how Naomi has her pick of traumatic events to choose from.

The first thing Naomi sees when she wakes up after her fall is a handsome young man that is claiming to be her boyfriend as they wheel her into the ambulance. At the hospital, Naomi finds out the boy's name is James, but he is not really her boyfriend. Through interactions with her father, her best friend Will, and some of the other people in Naomi's life, she learns who she was prior to the accident. More importantly, however, Naomi develops into the person she wants to be.

One day, while riding in her new boyfriend, James's car, Naomi gets her memory back. She keeps it a secret, however, and continues to try to live her life the way she sees fit. This coming of age novel forces Naomi to deal with the normal and abnormal circumstances of being a teenager and making the transition into adulthood.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

In Chapter 1, the narrator and main character, Naomi Porter, opens the novel by announcing that she is an orphan adopted from Russia when she was just a few weeks old. She also reveals that she has amnesia from an accident, where she fell down the stairs at school, when she goes back to retrieve a camera that her and her best friend, and co-editors of the high school yearbook left behind. Naomi describes the pain she feels in her head as she rides in the ambulance with someone who says he's her boyfriend, but she doesn't recognize. The boy who says he is Naomi's boyfriend, James, is not really her boyfriend and confesses this to her after they arrive at the hospital. Naomi's father arrives in the ER and James slips out. When Naomi asks where her mother is and her father tells her in NYC, where she lives since the divorce, Naomi realizes she has forgotten her parents are divorced. Her mom comes to the hospital and reminds Naomi the reason she and her dad are divorced is because her mom had an affair with her high school boyfriend and got pregnant. Will visits her and tells her more about her boyfriend, Ace Zuckerman, who is currently away at tennis camp.

Chapter 1 Analysis

The doctors infer that Naomi's amnesia might have been triggered by bumping her head when she fell down the stairs. They also infer, however, that part of her memory loss is psychological, especially in recent years.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

In Chapter 2, a few days later, Naomi is released from the hospital. She only remembers her life up until sixth grade, but the doctors cannot find a medical reason for her amnesia. When Naomi arrives home with her father, she looks at herself in the mirror for the first time since she woke up in the ambulance. She also starts to go through her belongings in her room, in an attempt to remember her life over the past four years. Naomi finds two very interesting things in her room: a food diary and birth control pills. Naomi has a sudden urge to call her mom, but when she does, Chloe, her three-year-old half-sister answers the phone. After speaking to Chloe, who calls her Nobody, Naomi falls asleep for a week or two.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Naomi sees herself as a metaphor as a face that looks familiar to her, such as a cousin or other family member with your features would, but she doesn't recognize her face or her body as her own. Ironically, however, she feels at home in her body, even though she doesn't remember the years that transitioned her from 12 to 16. The two interesting finds Naomi makes in her belongings suggest she is having sex with someone and that she might have a weight or an eating disorder. Chloe mistaking Naomi's name for Nobody is a symbol of how Naomi feels. She feels as if she is a nobody. She doesn't know who she is and feels as if nobody else does either.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

In Chapter 3, Naomi wakes to a tapping on her window and recognize Ace Zuckerman from his pictures. He kisses Naomi, but she doesn't remember him at all. He gives her tennis wristbands because she is also a tennis player. After he leaves, Naomi calls Will to ask how she met Will, which is from working together on the school yearbook. Naomi also asks if she is really in love with Ace. Will tells her that he thinks she is Will's girlfriend because it's good to be on the arm of a jock around their school. The day before Naomi goes back to school, she tries driving a car again, but gets frustrated and gives up. When her Dad drops her off at school the following day, he gives her a gift from her mother, which is a pair of sunglasses. Naomi is sensitive to the temperature and the light since her accident.

Chapter 3 Analysis

In a way, it is as if Naomi is experiencing her life all over again—at least her life for the last four years. In Naomi's current state, she sees Ace in a different light than she did prior to her amnesia. She is trying to figure out what kind of a person she was. When she sees Ace as her boyfriend, she questions just what type of person would like someone like him.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

In Chapter 4, Naomi returns to school wearing the sunglasses her mother gave her. People recognize her but she doesn't recognize them. When she tries to open her locker, Alice Leeds helps Naomi open it and Naomi recognizes her. Naomi recognizes Alice because they were friends in elementary school. By the time Naomi gets to third period, which is her English class, she realizes that her English teacher is Will's mother. While watching a movie in psychics, Naomi has a flashback of being in a planetarium, but she doesn't know if it's an actual memory or something she read in a book or saw in a movie at one time. Naomi wanders from the cafeteria to the greenhouse on the school property, where she runs into James. Naomi finds herself happy to see him again. The interaction between Naomi and James in the greenhouse is laid-back and natural when they return to the halls of the school, James acts cold toward Naomi. Naomi's last class is her photography class. The teacher asks her if she still wants to drop the class, but Naomi says no. When Naomi asks Will why she was planning on dropping the class, he says because he thinks it reminded Naomi of the work her mother does. Naomi and Will head to yearbook after school. On the drive home, they give James a ride because it starts to pour outside. While in the car, they ask James about a ring he's wearing around his neck, which he says is his dead brother's ring.

When Naomi arrives home, she falls asleep. When she wakes up, she goes to Dad's office, where she overhears him having a conversation with someone he is calling "Babe." From this point on, Naomi goes on a campaign to be "normal." In line with this campaign, she goes to house party on Saturday night with Ace. She drinks half a beer and gets so drunk she loses Ace and has to call her Dad to come pick her up. When Naomi's Dad arrives, Rosa Rivera is in the car with him, which appears to be his date. At 3 am. Naomi is sleeping and hears three taps on her window, which is Ace. When he climbs through her window, he tells her a story about the first time she kissed him and how they left her tennis wristbands at his cousin's house in Scottsdale, which is why he brought her new ones when he came back from tennis camp after Naomi had her accident. The next after, while Naomi's dad is serving her breakfast, he tells her that Rosa is not just his girlfriend, but is also his fiancée.

Within a few days of hearing this news, Naomi's dad takes her to visit Rosa at her house. Rosa is six years older than Naomi's father and has twin daughters who are in college. Her first husband died. Rosa is very affectionate and warm toward Naomi. While Naomi doesn't really like Rosa, she also doesn't move away when Rosa is touching her and fussing over Naomi being cold.

That night in her room, Naomi looks at her 10th grade yearbook picture. She's trying to decide who she was and what she was thinking, but she can't remember anything. She takes a pair of scissors from her desk and starts to cut her bangs so they'll look like they did in the picture. Then, Naomi decides to chop off her hair into a short cut.



Chapter 4 Analysis

The physics teacher poses the question that has been running through Naomi's mind, which is why does she only not remember the last four years of her life. The physics teacher infers that it has something to do with Naomi blocking out her years of puberty or the traumatic years of her life. Naomi starts to feel even more separated from the person she was prior to the accident when she is having lunch with Ace and his friends. If she felt like she belonged to this group prior to the accident, she feels even more segregated from them than ever before.

Naomi relates to James because he is a new guy in school. Even though Naomi is not new, she feels like she is because she doesn't remember a lot of her school years and doesn't recognize all of the teachers and students. How James acts toward Naomi in the greenhouse reveals his true persona. The way he acts in the hallway is to hide his true persona and protect himself from the jeers of the other students. The way Naomi feels comfortable around James foreshadows a romantic relationship developing between the two of them. The house Naomi and Will drop off James to is in direct contrast to James's appearance, which is that of an artist—a musician—because he lives in what appears to be a mansion. It foreshadows that Naomi's father is involved with another woman but he is holding back from telling Naomi this because she doesn't remember it from her amnesia.

Naomi is having a hard time understanding why she and Ace are a couple. She realizes that he is not superficial and is a genuine person when he explains why his gift to her was the tennis wristbands. Ace also confirms that he is the one that she has been having sex with when he asks her if they can ever have sex again.

While Naomi doesn't like Rosa on the surface, she is drawn to her subconsciously. Rosa is a warm and affectionate person. This is something that Naomi is drawn to. Especially since Naomi is not speaking to her mother, subconsciously Naomi sees Rosa as a mother figure, as a replacement for her mother. This is also causing an inner struggle within Naomi because she is angry with her mother but she also doesn't want to betray her mother at the same time.

Naomi cutting off her hair symbolizes the end of the old Naomi and the start of the new Naomi.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

In Chapter 5, Ace doesn't like Naomi's haircut, but Will and Alice both do. Alice even invites Naomi to try out for a play that Alice is putting on for the school. Alice mentions that Naomi cutting her hair is as if she doesn't have anything to hide anymore. Naomi suggests to her teacher that her photograph project should be about pregnancy because she is adopted and her sister is not.

Naomi ends up trying out for Alice's play. The tryout after school makes Naomi late for yearbook. When Will asks her why she is late, Naomi lies because she wants to know something about herself that Will doesn't.

Naomi lands the part as Hamlet in Alice's play. During the first play rehearsal, Naomi learns James is working on the video components of the play. She also learns that Alice is bi-sexual. After play practice, James gives Naomi a ride home and she realizes that he knows where she lives. He admits that he looked up her address to visit her but he never did.

Saturday afternoon, before the homecoming dance, the costume designer and Alice's girlfriend, Yvette, and James pick Naomi up to shoot her video for the play. They go to a park and Naomi wears the Hamlet and Ophelia costumes while James shoots video of her. While James is driving Naomi back to her house, she learns he has a job working AV at the local community college. James invites her to come watch some of the movies sometime.

That night at the homecoming dance, Naomi notices a yearbook staffer taking pictures. It comes naturally to her to give him advice on how to shoot better pictures. After the dance, Ace takes her back to his house because his parents are out of town. He tells Naomi that their first time was after the homecoming dance last year and he wants to celebrate their anniversary by having sex again. Naomi realizes that Ace isn't in love with who she really is—and at this point she doesn't even know who she truly is—so she tells him no and breaks up with him.

After the second night of the play opening, there is a cast party at Alice's house. James shows up as Naomi is leaving and offers her a ride home. When they go up to Naomi's closet so she can retrieve the shirt he lent her when she was cold one day at school, they kiss. Naomi's dad interrupts by knocking on the door. Will calls after James leaves and confronts Naomi about her being in love with James. Will warns Naomi about the rumors going around school about James being crazy and being kicked out of his old school for drugs. After she hangs up with Will, James calls to ask her out for dinner on Saturday night, which also happens to be Naomi's 17th birthday.



Before dinner, Naomi's dad gives Naomi her annual birthday gift, which is a novel. This year, the book is blank however so that Naomi can write her own life. This angers Naomi. When James picks her up for dinner, he hands her a CD. She mistakes it for a birthday gift from James, but it is another mixed CD from Will.

After dinner, it is snowing, so James and Naomi go sledding on the front steps of the school. Naomi mentions it is where she and James met. When Naomi brings up the rumors about James, he confirms that they are all true. James tell her the true version of how his brother died (ling cancer), how he took pills that his mother mistook for a suicide attempt, how he fell in love and got dumped by a girl that then led to his trying to kill himself slitting his wrists—all which landed him in an institution. James says he was dropping off his school records the day he found Naomi.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Will watching Ace and Naomi kiss in the school hallway suggests he has feelings that are stronger than friendship for Naomi. Alice suggests that Naomi cutting her hair symbolizes that Naomi is like a blank slate, so that Naomi can be the person she wants to be rather than the person everyone else expects her to be.

James looking up Naomi's address to visit her after helping her after her accident suggests he has romantic feelings for her too.

The contempt and competitive nature between Will and Ace seems to be because Ace senses or knows that Will likes Naomi as more than a friend. Will is just jealous because Ace has Naomi as a girlfriend, but Will is really the one that knows Naomi, including both her likes and dislikes. With Naomi breaking up with Ace, it foreshadows Naomi starting a relationship with James, but Will trying to start a relationship with Naomi.

It's ironic that Naomi gets angry when her father gives her a blank book for her birthday since this is exactly what Naomi wants to do - to write her own life.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

In Chapter 6, when one of the yearbook staffers show up at play rehearsal to take pictures, Naomi knows she has to tell Will she's in the play. After yearbook, Naomi asks Will for a ride home. As they walk to the parking, Naomi has a moment of déjà vu.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Naomi's déjà vu is likely a memory of a time when Will told her he liked her, but she told him she didn't share his feelings. Their walk to the car that day would have been icy and awkward as it is now because Will knows Naomi has been lying to him about why she is coming late to yearbook a few days a week.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

In Chapter 7, the day before thanksgiving break, Mr. Weir, Naomi's photography class teacher tells her she is in danger of failing the class because she has not turned in her project. After school, she and James grab some drinks and walk around town. James drops her back off at school for yearbook, where she tells Will she's quitting yearbook and they get into a big fight. James is waiting for her after yearbook. He drives her to see the headstone of the author of *Sleepy Hollow*. James confesses his love to Naomi, but tells her that if things go bad between them that she has to promise to break up with him and forget about him.

Naomi picks up a call from her mom for the first time on Thanksgiving Day since they last spoke in September. Her mom offers to help with her photography project, but Naomi declines. Naomi's dad reveals to Naomi that Will's dad died and that's why he and his mom moved to Tarrytown.

When James returns from visiting his father in LA, he tells Naomi he has an idea for her photography project. He suggests they use a bunch of his dad's old cameras and ones they buy to throw them down the front steps of their school to memorialize Naomi's journey from her accident. When she goes into the vintage store to buy some old cameras, the man behind the counter says she never picked up the record player she paid to have fixed and he hands it to her. When Naomi presents her project idea to Mr. Weir, he tells her that he expects something deeper from her.

Naomi, James, Alice and Yvette take the train into New York City. When they end up catching a Rockettes' show, Naomi runs into her mother's new husband and half-sister in the lobby at intermission. He begs Naomi to come by their apartment after the show and Naomi agrees. Fuse, the nickname her mother's husband goes by, asks Naomi if she got the pictures from her friend, but Naomi doesn't know what he's talking about. Before the show ends, Naomi says she has a headache and she leaves early with James to ride the subway. She tells James about her sister and then they take the train home, where James's mom picks them up from the train station.

For Christmas, James flies back out to LA to visit his dad. Naomi and her father spend Christmas with Rosa and the twins.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Naomi is starting to question why she can forgive her father for lying about Rosa Rivera, but cannot forgive her mother. Naomi is starting to see there is more to Will than what meets the eye and what he has told her. She actually starts to feel a sense of remorse for their fight—not enough, however, to pick up the phone and apologize the Will.



The inference is that Naomi had a record player fixed for Will, since he is the one that is so obsessed with music in the novel. She doesn't remember because she dropped the record player off in August, right before her amnesia.

What Fuse says suggests that Will went into the city to get pictures of Naomi's life for her photography project.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

In Chapter 8, in January, Naomi and James are driving to his job at the community college when Naomi's memory returns. Suddenly she remembers that Will and she kissed the night before her accident. She remembers the coin toss and that when she came out of the school from retrieving the camera that she kicked a Styrofoam cup that spilled liquid on the stairs. When she slipped in the liquid, she threw herself forward to try to catch and save the camera. Naomi keeps the return of her memory to herself and she suddenly misses her mom. Naomi is also grateful in her mind that James is the one that was standing on the bottom of the stairs when she fell because it could have been anyone.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Naomi and James speaking French in the car could be what triggered Naomi's memory. Once, in a French museum, Naomi got lost while following a woman with a camera bag that she thought was her mother. While her mother found her shortly after this, it could be that Naomi was blocking out everything that had to do with the last four years of her life because that is the traumatic event in her life—her mother leaving their family—leaving Naomi. Naomi subconsciously knows that she fell in love with James because he saved her when she was in need of saving. If someone else had been at the bottom of the stairs that day, Naomi probably would have fallen in love with them instead of James.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

In Chapter 9, while looking for her history book under James's bed, Naomi finds an unopened letter from the film school at USC. When she asks James about it, he gets mad, but opens it and finds out he is accepted. Ace walks up to Naomi at her locker to find out if she's trying out for tennis and James starts a fight with him. When James accidentally elbows Naomi in the eye, Will steps in to try to break up the fight. James and Ace receive suspension and Naomi and Will receive after school detention. Naomi remembers that she did buy the record player for Will—for the records that were Will's father but that Will doesn't have a player to play them.

The weekend before Valentine's Day, Naomi takes James to a drive-in movie and dinner in Poughkeepsie for his birthday. On the way back, James's car runs out of gas and James starts to have a slight breakdown. Naomi calls her dad to bring them gas and when they return to Naomi's house, Naomi's dad talks to James. He tells Naomi that he thinks James is unstable but that he trusts her judgment.

The night before James is supposed to fly out for his tour of USC, he tells Naomi he doesn't think he can go. She promises him that if he's having a hard time that she'll fly out and meet him. When they talk on the phone, he sounds bad and pays for Naomi to fly to LA. Naomi lies to her dad, telling him she has a yearbook conference in San Diego. Naomi buys her father's book at the airport to read on the plane. James is two hours picking Naomi up, which he blames on the traffic.

From the airport, Naomi suggests they take the USC tour, but James drives them to the beach instead. He leaves Naomi there to pick up lunch and surf gear from his father's house. He ends up being gone for almost five hours. When he returns, he tells her he got distracted visiting Marilyn Monroe's grave and then his brother's grave. They go back to James's dad's house, but his dad is away on business. James goes to bed and when Naomi checks her 28 cell phone messages, she finds out her dad knows where she is. When James drives her to the airport the next day, she senses that their goodbye kiss is goodbye forever.

Chapter 9 Analysis

It appears as if James is heading toward another emotional breakdown. He might be off of his antidepressants, but whatever it is, he is having trouble controlling his emotions. Not only is James's mother concerned about his well being, but now Naomi's father is starting to question James's stability as well.

The goodbye kiss at the airport and the feeling it gives Naomi foreshadows James finally succeeding in killing himself. His depression is taking over his life and causing him to act irrational.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

In Chapter 10, on the return flight home, Naomi uploads the CD Will made for her birthday. She finds a slideshow on the CD that includes pictures of her life. This explains what Fuse was talking about when he asked Naomi if she got the pictures from her friend. When the plane lands, Naomi calls Will collect from a pay phone to thank him for the gift and tell him how much it means to her. Will rushes her off the phone because he has a date with his girlfriend, Winnie. On the drive home, Naomi's father grounds her for a month and she tells him she got her memory back. James calls Naomi the Tuesday he gets back from LA. They are able to talk because Naomi's dad left her alone for 10 minutes while he went out to buy coffee. When Naomi calls James's cell phone, his mom answers and tells Naomi he checked in to the psych facility he was in before and that she's sure James will call Naomi in a few days. James doesn't call for a week, so Naomi starts calling the facility where he's staying and leaving messages for him to return her call. When he doesn't Naomi decides to go see James.

Naomi convinces Will to drive her to Albany to see James. When she visits James, Naomi admits that she's had her memory back since January. James tells her that they can't be together. On the way home, they stop at a diner and Will confronts her about having her memory back. Will asks if she remembers their kiss and the day he sent her back for the camera and she fell. Naomi wishes she could love Will because it would be easier than loving James.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Naomi senses that she might never hear from James again because he might never return to Tarrytown from LA. Ironically, he does and he calls her. His call to her is his way of letting her know that he's saying goodbye without coming right out and saying it. Naomi senses this and isn't totally caught off guard when James checks himself into the psychiatric hospital. Naomi realizes for the first time what it's like for Will—to love someone who doesn't or can't love you back.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

In Chapter 11, a week later, Naomi receives a postcard from James telling her to forget him. She finds Will at the yearbook office and bursts into tears in his arms and he drives her home. Winnie, Will's girlfriend, confronts Naomi the next day in the hallway, basically telling Naomi to leave Will alone.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Naomi has missed her opportunity to kindle a romance with Will. Even though they will always be close friends, Will has emotionally moved on to be with someone else. Naomi is experiencing heartbreak for the first time in her life by losing James.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

In Chapter 12, when Naomi's dad lets her off from being grounded, he makes her spend the weekend in the city wither mom. When Naomi arrives, Chloe and Fuse are out for the day, so Naomi's mom shows Naomi some of her work in her studio. One project is a set of photos Naomi's mom took every day of her pregnancy with a total of 225 pictures. Naomi assumes it is Chloe she is pregnant with, but her mother tells her it is a baby that her father and she lost. Naomi gets an idea for her photography project and starts working on it while she's at her mom's apartment. She gets a B minus on the project and the teacher hangs it in the school gallery. Everyone comes to see it.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Naomi realizes that she and Chloe share a mom. In fact, their mom had to work even harder to adopt Naomi than she did to give birth to Chloe. As Fuse philosophizes, love is measured in different things, by different people and is different for each relationship.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

In Chapter 13, Naomi rejoins the tennis team because Ace needs a double partner after his hurts her ACL. The third week of May, when Naomi is helping Alice paint sets for her new play, James returns to school. James invites Naomi to go for coffee. They update each other on their lives, but the feelings between them are not the same. Naomi goes to prom without a date, but hangs out with Alice and Yvette. She notices how Will dotes on Winnie while they are at prom.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Ace and Naomi find a way to mend their relationship through tennis. It's as if James and Naomi fell in love because neither of them had a past. Now that Naomi has her past back, they don't have anything in common anymore. Naomi realizes that Will could be doting on her if things had gone a different direction.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

In Chapter 14, Naomi is at home watching a nature program with her dad and Rosa when Will's girlfriend, Winnie, calls to see if Naomi has talked to Will. Naomi finds out that Will collapsed and was taken away by ambulance. When Naomi and her dad go to the hospital, they find out Will had a collapsed lung but he's going to be fine. Naomi gives the nurse a note to give to Will that says she'll be there tomorrow if he'll have her. Naomi visits Will the next morning at the hospital and every day after that while he's recuperating. Winnie breaks up with Will because she suspects he is in love with someone else. Will asks Naomi to take over his duties on yearbook until he returns to school. At Will's birthday party, Naomi gives him the record player that she had fixed at the antique store. Naomi, her dad, Rosa and the twins make the trip to Martha's Vineyard for Rosa and Naomi's dad's wedding. While she is there, she realizes that she is in love with Will.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Naomi realizes that she is in love with Will and that Will is in love with her. The only thing holding Naomi back is that she thinks Will is happy with his girlfriend. When Naomi finds out that Winnie and Will broke up, she becomes closer to Will, especially after his illness.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

In Chapter 15, on the Sunday that Naomi returns from her dad's wedding, she has to photograph graduation for yearbook because the girl who was supposed to do had a death in her family. At the same time Naomi is taking a picture of James's parents in the audience, Raina is taking a picture of Naomi. James's dad takes a picture of James and Naomi at the graduation ceremony. James asks if the camera Naomi is using is the same camera she fell down the stairs to save when they met, and Naomi says it is. Naomi calls Will on the walk home so they can discuss all of the possible graduation songs the high school could have used. A few weeks later, Will is waiting for Naomi when she comes out of the yearbook office and they walk off together arm in arm.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Naomi and Will find it ironic that Naomi's amnesia all started because they were trying to avoid the walk they are taking together now. It foreshadows that Will and Naomi are officially boyfriend and girlfriend and that the bumps in the road are what helped each of them to realize that they belong together. In a way, Naomi gets a second chance at having the life she truly wants, while this is not a chance that everyone gets to take.



Characters

Naomi Porter

Naomi Porter is a Russian orphan that was adopted by U.S. parents when she was just a few weeks old. Ironically, Naomi was left on the doorsteps of the orphanage inside of a typewriter case and the parents who adopt her are a writer and photographer that write a series of wine travel books.

Naomi is now a junior in high school. She is the co-editor of the school yearbook, *The Phoenix*. While going back into the school one day to retrieve the camera she forgot, Naomi slips, falls down the stairs and hits her head. She is rushed to the hospital and is now suffering amnesia, where she only remembers her life up until the sixth grade. In other words, she cannot remember the last four years of her life.

Her boyfriend is Ace Zuckerman. Her best friend is co-editor of the yearbook, Will Landsman. Once she breaks her relationship off with Ace, she falls in love with James, who is also the boy who found her after her tumble down the stairs of the school.

Cassandra Miles-Porter

Cassandra Miles-Porter is Naomi's adopted mother. Cassandra is half-Scottish and half-Japanese. She is originally from California, but met Naomi's dad when they were in college in New York City. Before Naomi's parents' divorce, Cassandra wrote wine books with her husband, who was responsible for taking the pictures for the books. Four years prior to Naomi's accident, Cassandra and Naomi's father got a divorce because Cassandra had an affair with her high school boyfriend and got pregnant. Naomi has been estranged from her mother since the divorce.

Cassandra has a three-year-old girl named Chloe with her new husband, Fuse. Later in the novel, when Naomi and Cassandra start to reform their relationship, Cassandra tells Naomi that she was pregnant once before Chloe with Naomi's dad, but that they lost the baby.

Grant Porter

Grant Porter is Naomi's adopted father. When he was married to Naomi's mother, he was the photographer for the coffee table wine books the couple wrote and published. Now, Grant writes different kinds of books. Right after the divorce, he wrote a memoir of overcoming the divorce and how it links to current events in the world. He also loves to make lists. Naomi has been living with her father since the divorce and it's her father that she goes home with from the hospital when she is released. Grant's origin is Russian, but he grew up in the Washington D.C. area and met Cassandra while they were attending college in New York City.



Grant has been dating Rosa Rivera and is engaged to Rosa when Naomi has her accident. Since Naomi doesn't remember this when she wakes up, Grant has to break the news to Naomi one night when he has to pick Naomi up from a party because Naomi is drunk and Rosa is in the car. By the end of the novel, Rosa and Grant marry.

Will Landsman

Will Landsman is Naomi's best friend. He is also the other co-editor of the yearbook. It is the loss of a coin toss between Naomi and Will that sends Naomi back into the school to retrieve the forgotten camera and sends her tumbling down the stairs. Will is far beyond his years as a teenage boy. His father died when he was younger and his mother moved to teach in Tarrytown at Tom Purdue High School, so Will could have a private school education at a reduced cost.

Will is in love with Naomi, but Naomi doesn't realize this until late in the novel. After Will's lung collapses from severe pneumonia, Naomi realizes what a great guy Will really is and that they belong together. By the end of the novel, Will and Naomi are a couple.

James Larkin

James Larkin is a new boy at Naomi's school. He is a senior. When Naomi wakes up from her fall, she is in the ambulance and James Larkin tells the EMTs he is her boyfriend so that he can ride to the hospital with her. Once Naomi's dad arrives, James Larkin slips out of the room.

Before moving to Tarrytown, James suffered the loss of his brother from lung cancer. When his brother dies, James becomes very depressed and takes some of his brother's prescription medicine. James's mother, Raina, thinks James tried to commit suicide so she checks him into a hospital for psychiatric care. Around the same time, James has his first girlfriend. When she breaks up with him, James breaks into her room to be close to her things. He uses the girl's knife to cut his wrists and her mother finds James.

By the time James moves to Tarrytown, he is on antidepressants and dealing with his problems, but he suffers a relapse while dating Naomi.

Ace Zuckerman

Ace Zuckerman is Naomi's boyfriend. He is away attending tennis camp for the summer when Naomi falls down the stairs and experiences amnesia. Ace is a jock and a popular boy at school. As Naomi spends time getting to know him again, she doesn't understand what they have in common.



Alice Leeds

Alice Leeds is the first person that Naomi recognizes when she returns to school after her amnesia. The reason Naomi remembers Alice is because Alice and Naomi were friends in elementary school. Alice produces a play and asks Naomi to try out for it. During the play, Naomi and Alice become close friends again. Alice is also bisexual. Her girlfriend at the time of the play and on and off throughout the novel is Yvette, who is also the costume designer for the play.

Raina Larkin

Raina Larkin is James's mother. Since the death of her older son and the problems James has had, Raina is very overprotective of James. Raina answers James's cell phone when Naomi is trying to reach him, so Raina is the one that tells Naomi that James checked himself back into the hospital for help.

Mr. Weir

Mr. Weir is Naomi's photography class teacher. Mr. Weir requires Naomi to really dive into her thoughts and feelings in order to come up with the theme for her class project that is the biggest percentage of her grade. The project is what ultimately reunites Naomi with her mother and allows Naomi to get to know her sister, Chloe.

Chloe

Chloe is Naomi's three-year-old sister. Cassandra and her new husband Fuse are the biological parents of Chloe. Chloe is a precocious three-year-old. She is very intelligent and calls Naomi Nobody as a nickname.



Objects/Places

Tarrytown, New York

Tarrytown, New York is the setting or location where the novel takes place. It is the real setting for the novel *Sleepy Hollow*. Tarrytown is in the upstate New York area, so it is close to the capital of Albany and near New York City.

Tom Purdue

Tom Purdue is the private school that Naomi attends. It is the location where she falls down the stairs and contracts amnesia. The stairs of the school are the first place she meets James. Later in the novel, the same stairs are a sledding hill in the snow for James and Naomi. Ultimately, the novel wraps up where it began on the stairs, with Will and Naomi walking off together as a couple.

Camera

The yearbook camera getting left in The Phoenix office is what sends Naomi back into the school. It's ultimately the object that causes her to fall down the stairs because as she slips, she dives to save the camera from damage and bumps her head. At graduation, it is the same camera Naomi uses to take pictures, even a picture of James.

Albany, New York

Albany, New York is where the psychiatric hospital is that James checks into for help when he falls back into his depression. Naomi convinces Will to drive her to Albany to see James and it is the place where the relationship between James and Naomi falls apart.

Mixed CDs

Throughout the novel, Will makes Naomi mixed CDs. He uses the CDs as a way to express himself and his feelings for Naomi. Each CD has a theme. Each song has a meaning. It is the birthday CD Will makes for Naomi that finally makes her realize that Will loves her and Naomi loves Will.

Yearbook

Throughout the novel, Will and Naomi work on putting the yearbook together. When Naomi has to take over Will's duties after he is sick, the yearbook is what finally unties



the two as friends and eventually as boyfriend and girlfriend. The yearbook is also a symbol of Will's father. The cover they choose for the yearbook cover mimics Will's father's favorite album.

Los Angeles, California

James's father lives in Los Angeles, so James makes several trips during the novel to visit him. When James is accepted to USC for college, James goes to LA to take a tour of the school. James has a breakdown while in LA that causes Naomi to get on a plane to help him. This is the breaking point for James's emotional state and his relationship with Naomi.

Wine Travel Coffee Table Books

The wine travel coffee table books are written and published by Naomi's parents before they divorce. The books represent a happy time in all of their lives. Naomi is represented in the books in footnotes and in the authors' biography, which is what leads to Naomi's idea for her photography project for school.

Photography Project

Naomi's photography project represents the journey of her life in footnotes, just as she was a footnote in her parent's books. The project allows Naomi to truly express herself, but it also saves her from failing the class. The project is so well received that the teacher features it in the school gallery.

Photographs

When Naomi comes home from the hospital, she looks at old yearbook photos and photos of herself to try to figure out who she was and who she is. Since her mother is a professional photographer, photographs have always played a pivotal role in Naomi's life. Naomi also possesses a love for photography because she enjoys taking pictures. Naomi realizes this before she gets her memory back. Photographs also allow Naomi to express herself about her life through her photography class project.



Themes

Relationships

One of the primary themes running through the novel is relationships. The novel reveals that even the individuals that make up a family have different relationships among the family members. For example, Naomi and her father have a closer relationship than Naomi and her mother. Naomi and her mother, however, have a unique relationship of their own.

Friendship is another type of relationship the novel tackles. First, Will and Naomi are best friends, but there is a fine line between their friendship and their romantic love for each other. It seems as if Alice and Naomi were very close friends in elementary school. After Naomi becomes one of the popular people in high school, however, Alice stops being friends with Naomi. The two girls resume their relationship, however, in high school when they put on the school play together.

Romantic relationships are also tackled in the novel. Ace is Naomi's boyfriend prior to her amnesia. Naomi tries to resume the relationship after her amnesia, but she isn't the same person and the relationship doesn't work out. Naomi experiences her first boyfriend or romantic relationship after her amnesia with James. While Will and Naomi are best friends, as they go through bumps in their relationship, their relationship transitions into a romantic one.

Coming of Age

One of the primary themes that run throughout the novel is growing up and coming of age, even against adversity, such as going through the divorce of your parents, amnesia, health issues and mental issue. Naomi struggles with the fact that her coming of age includes not remembering the last four years of her life. Naomi deals with the responsibilities in life of having divorced parents, a depressed boyfriend and trying to find out who she is as a person.

Naomi also faces the rite of passage of having her first boyfriend after her amnesia. Along with having her first boyfriend, experiences her first sexual relationship after her amnesia. Naomi especially struggles with her feelings about herself as a person and how she feels about the people she surrounded herself with before her amnesia.

Family

Family is the central theme throughout the entire novel. This is because the storyline is about the lives of this particular family—the Porters. While every family has their trials and tribulations, Naomi's family has its own family dynamics that are the same and that

are different from those of other families. In the end though, they are a family and they will get through it together, one way or the other.

Style

Point of View

The novel is written in the first-person point of view, from the perspective of main character, Naomi Porter. The novel swings back and forth between the present and the past. The present represents the time after Naomi's amnesia. The past represents the time leading up to the amnesia.

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

Setting

The novel is set primarily in Tarrytown, New York during the 21st century. The main characters are involved in the aftermath of Naomi's amnesia. Naomi is constantly trying to remember the last four years of her life, which is the time frame she lost when she hit her head.

The setting of this novel works well with the plot. At first, the reader is not aware that the character that suffers amnesia. However, as events unfold, the amnesia is a constant part of the plot, the lives of the characters and even the outcome of the novel.

Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is relatively simple and easy to read. The author, however, interjects some foreign words to fit into the setting of the novel. The language is from the 21st century, which is when the novel is set. The language is descriptive enough that it helps to explain the situations and is detailed enough for the reader to truly understand.

Structure

The novel is divided into 15 chapters. Each chapter ranges from five pages to 30 pages long. The chapters tell the story primarily in exposition and some dialogue. The narrator injects her own voice and thoughts throughout the book, providing her opinions and feelings of the events unfolding in the novel.

The novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot is that of human relationships including friendship and romantic ones. One subplot is the coming of age of the characters, primarily Naomi Porter. Another subplot is family relationships.



Quotes

"What happened to the Wandering Porters" (Chapter 1, p. 33).

"Maybe it'll help you remember. But then again, maybe it won't" (Chapter 2, p. 37).

"Still, she's your mother kid" (Chapter 3, p. 58).

"Perhaps a traumatic event from your youth that you have been very much longing to repress" (Chapter 4, p. 68).

"The truth is, I don't even know you. I don't even know what we have in common" (Chapter 5, p. 131).

"All true. Technically, the drugs were prescribed. And technically, I may have tried to kill myself twice, but basically all true. Does it matter? Think. Think before you answer. It's allowed to matter" (Chapter 6, p. 155).

"It's an interesting gimmick, but it wasn't the assignment. Your assignment was to tell a personal story in pictures" (Chapter 7, p. 172).

"I don't like to feel crazy about someone. I don't like to feel my happiness is so tied up in another person" (Chapter 8, p. 182).

"I'm worried, kid. James seems a little out of control" (Chapter 9, p. 196).

"But now, at this moment, you can't hook your boat to mine, 'cause I'm liable to sink us both" (Chapter 10, p. 222).

"Look, Naomi, he was in love with you. We know it. Everyone knows it. But Will is a person of value, and you threw him out when you had James, so now you should just leave him alone" (Chapter 11, p. 227).

"Love stories are written in millimeters and milliseconds with a fast, dull pencil whose marks you can barely see. They are written in miles and eons with a chisel on the side of a mountaintop" (Chapter 12, p. 236).

"You still have paint on your palm. Like mine, the first time we met" (Chapter 13, p. 240).

"You know something stupid? I really missed you this whole weekend, Landsman. I've gotten used to seeing you every day" (Chapter 14, p. 264).

"Isn't it funny that all those months ago we flipped a coin so that we wouldn't have to take this very same walk" (Chapter 15, p. 270).



Topics for Discussion

Who is the true Naomi Porter? Do you think her amnesia is mental or a true result of her fall down the school stairs? When Naomi gets her memory back, why doesn't she tell anyone? When Naomi confesses that she got her memory back to James, does she do it out of a feeling of desperation because she is losing him or for another reason? What does Naomi ultimately realize about her relationship with her mother?

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

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

Discuss the relationship between Will and Naomi. Are they friends, foes or somewhere in between? Is there true competition in their relationship? How does Naomi feel about Will? How does Will feel about Naomi? How do Naomi's feelings change after the amnesia and as the novel unfolds? What does she do about it? What happens to Will?

Discuss the relationship between Cassandra and Naomi. Why does Naomi stop talking to her mother? Is there true competition in their relationship? How does Naomi feel about her mother? How does her mother feel about Naomi? How do Naomi's feelings change after the amnesia? What does she do about it? What happens to their relationship?

Who is James Larkin? Is he a tortured soul or simply a normal teenager going through a difficult time? Why do you think James makes Naomi promise to leave him and forget about him if things go bad? What role does Naomi play in James's decision to check himself back into the hospital?

Discuss Naomi's amnesia. What impact does the amnesia have on the characters of the novel? How does it motivate them and how does it derail their lives? Does what James says or does have anything to do with Naomi getting her memory back?