

# **Pants on Fire Study Guide**

## **Pants on Fire by Meg Cabot**

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## Plot Summary

"Pants on Fire" is a novel by author Meg Cabot. In this novel, Katie Ellison is surviving the summer between her junior and senior years of high school. Katie has had it all up until now. She's dating one of the cutest and most popular boys in school, Seth Turner. Katie and Seth have been dating since the ninth grade, but lately, she has also been kissing one of the other guys on the high school football team, Eric Fluteley. Katie's seemingly perfect life gets turned upside down when her childhood friend returns, Tommy Sullivan.

Not only does Tommy Sullivan's return make Katie start questioning her feelings for him, but it also causes a town scandal. Tommy Sullivan was initially run out of town because as a junior high school reporter, he worked with the local newspaper to expose a cheating scandal. The famous football players of the championship high school football team cheated on their SATs and Tommy Sullivan exposed them all. After causing the team to forfeit the state championship, little Tommy Sullivan became the most hated kid in town. While he moved away to escape it, now he's back and the town hasn't forgotten.

In the end, Katie realizes that telling the truth can actually set her free. She admits many things to herself, but she also starts to tell the truth to Seth and the rest of the town. Her decision will change Katie's life forever.



# Chapters 1 and 2

## Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

Katie Ellison is waitressing at the Gull n Gulp for the summer. She's best friends with Sidney van der Hoff. Katie's boyfriend is the kicker for their high school football team, Seth Turner. The waitstaff saves the corner booth for Quahogs, which is the nickname the town uses for the football players. While Katie seats her boyfriend and his friends in the corner booth and takes their order, Sidney points out that Morgan Castle is at a table with Eric Flutely. When Katie is coming out of the kitchen with one of the patron's birthday cake, Eric takes the cake from Katie, puts it down, grabs and kisses Katie.

Katie is on her cell phone in the bathroom with Sidney. Sidney is insisting she knows why Morgan was in the Gull n Gulp tonight, even though she is a vegan. Katie thinks Sidney has found out about her and Eric, but Sidney just thinks Morgan is checking out her competition for the Quahog Princess pageant, which is Katie and Sidney. While Katie is in the bathroom, on her brothers, Liam, starts knocking on the door. He's trying to tell Katie who he saw at the bowling alley that night, which is Tommy Sullivan. When he tells Katie this, she is so shocked that she drops her phone, which breaks into three pieces all over the floor.

## Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

Katie mentions cheating on someone in a small town as the chapter unfolds. She is foreshadowing the fact that she is cheating on her boyfriend with one of the other football players, Eric Flutely. Katie seems to be hiding this from her best friend, Sidney, and is definitely hiding it from her boyfriend, Seth. It foreshadows Katie continuously trying to hide her relationship with Eric behind everyone's back as the novel unfolds.

The fact that it shocks Katie so much that Tommy Sullivan is back in town suggests that something happened between him and Katie. Katie has already admitted to the reader that she is a virgin, so it isn't that. It could be that they were boyfriend and girlfriend, or just that Katie had a huge crush on him. This complicates Katie's love life even more because she is already juggling Eric and Seth.



# Chapters 3 and 4

## Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

The next morning, Katie rolls out of bed and heads to the Y, where Liam is working out for his tryouts for Quahog football team. She's trying to get the details of Liam's run-in with Tommy. Liam finally says Tommy asked about her. Liam says he told Tommy Katie is running for Quahog Princess and is dating Seth Turner. When Sidney calls, Katie tells her she's at the Y with Seth, who comes up to her while Katie is talking to Liam. Katie doesn't mention Tommy, who moved to Westchester after the "wall" incident in town. Katie and Sidney are on the private beach at the yacht club, when Sidney points out a hot guy that is kitesurfing. The guy approaches the girls and says hi to Katie. It's a new and improved looking Tommy Sullivan.

Katie gets, walks into the water and immerses herself in it. When she gets back, Sidney asks who the guy was. Katie says it's one of her brother's friends from football camp. Sidney mentions what a hottie he is. Seth drives Katie to work and when rides her bike around back, Eric is waiting there for her and kisses her. The hostess at work tells her that a hot guy came by looking for her. Katie calls Liam and confirms he told Tommy where she works. Katie also describes the guy she saw at the beach and Liam confirms that's what Tommy looks like now. When Katie comes back in from calling Liam, Tommy is sitting in the corner booth reserved for Quahogs. When Tommy sees her, he says hi and it's been a long time.

## Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

Katie infers that she was involved with defacing a wall in town with Tommy Sullivan. Because of the incident, Tommy and his family moved away. The implication is the town people don't know that Katie was involved as well. Now that Tommy is back in town and so hot, it implies that Katie will start a relationship with him too. This means that Katie will soon be juggling three guys instead of the two she is already juggling. Katie implies that she somehow wronged Tommy in eighth grade. This suggests that she was involved in or responsible for the wall incident, but allowed Tommy to take the fall for her.



# Chapters 5 and 6

## Chapters 5 and 6 Summary

The first thing Katie says to Tommy is that he can't sit at the table he's sitting at. He mentions that he didn't think she was "drinking the Kool-aid" too. Tommy makes a statement that makes Katie realize that he saw her kissing Eric out back before her shift. They arrange to meet at her father's boat that night. After Tommy leaves, she finds out he lied to the hostess about going to the high school and that's why she sat him in that booth. She also talks with one of the other waitresses. When Katie tells Shaniqua the guy is Tommy Sullivan, Shaniqua asks if it is the same Tommy Sullivan the gym wall has spray-painted on it, "Tommy Sullivan is a..." about. Katie confirms it is one and the same.

Katie calls Seth to tell him she thinks she's coming down with something so he shouldn't meet her tonight for their nightly makeout session in the parking lot after her shift. When Katie arrives at the dock where her dad's boat is docked and she sees Tommy there waiting for her, she knows she's in trouble.

Through their conversation, it is revealed that Tommy and Katie were friends. He was a writer for the school paper and she was a photographer. It seems like their friendship was a secret because Tommy is the least liked boy in town. Katie also finds out that when Tommy left town, he enrolled in military school. Tommy mentions Katie dropping him "like a hot potato" and teases her about how much she's changed. He mentions how minus the fact that Katie is juggling two boyfriends, she is now perfect Quahog Princess material, when she used to despise what it all stood for in the first place. Then, Tommy tells her that he's enrolled at the local high school for their senior year.

## Chapters 5 and 6 Analysis

Tommy implies that when he and Katie knew each other that she wasn't all caught up in the Quahog football team spirit thing. Katie provides further indication that she is the one responsible for spray-painting the defamatory comment about Tommy Sullivan on the wall of the new gym at the high school. Katie also finds some solace in the fact that Tommy Sullivan is a liar too, which means she is not the only one telling lies around town.

Now that Tommy knows Katie's secrets, it foreshadows him blackmailing her now that he is back in town. Additionally, Katie is already finding herself attracted to Tommy, which means that she might be juggling three boys instead of the just the two.



# Chapters 7 and 8

## Chapters 7 and 8 Summary

"Pants on Fire" is a novel by author Meg Cabot. In this novel, Katie Ellison is surviving the summer between her junior and senior years of high school. Katie has had all up until now. She's dating one of the cutest and most popular boys in school, Seth Turner. Katie and Seth have been dating since the ninth grade, but lately, she has also been kissing one of the other guys on the high school football team, Eric Fluteley. Katie's seemingly perfect life gets turned upside down when her childhood friend returns, Tommy Sullivan.

Not only does Tommy Sullivan's return make Katie start questioning her feelings for him, but it also causes a town scandal. Tommy Sullivan was initially run out of town because as a junior high school reporter, he worked with the local newspaper to expose a cheating scandal. The famous football players of the championship high school football team cheated on their SATs and Tommy Sullivan exposed them all. After causing the team to forfeit the state championship, little Tommy Sullivan became the most hated kid in town. While he moved away to escape it, now he's back and the town hasn't forgotten.

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# Chapters 9 and 10

## Chapters 9 and 10 Summary

Tommy comes up behind Katie while she's looking at her developed pictures. Tommy agrees with Mr. Bird that she has talent for capturing people but should give up photographing wildlife. While Katie is making a payment on her camera, Tommy finds out she bought a \$2,000 camera and has it on layaway. He makes a comment about her entering the pageant for the cash prizes, which is why Katie is participating. As they exit the store, they run into Eric. He asks Katie to come over later to help him pick out the headshot she took of him to send in with his college applications, which Katie knows is code for her to come over and makeout while his parents aren't home. Eric asks who Tommy is because he says Tommy looks familiar. He introduces himself as Tommy Sullivan. As Eric drives away, Eric tells Tommy good luck and says he'll need it. Tommy suggests Katie show her photography as part of her talent for the pageant, but she tells him she's playing the piano. He guesses the song she's playing, which is correct.

Katie shows up to pageant rehearsal. As the girls are practicing, the fourth contestant, Jenna, doesn't have a male escort for the gown portion of the pageant. Ms. Hayes, the pageant director and wife of the football coach, is astonished. She tries to get Eric or Seth to do it, even though they are already escorting Morgan and Katie. Katie gets mad when both boys try to talk their way out of it. Then, Eric speaks up and says Katie should call Tommy Sullivan to get him to do it now that he's back in town and probably doesn't have anything to do the following night.

## Chapters 9 and 10 Analysis

Tommy and Katie know each other very well from being friends so long ago. While Katie has changed a lot on the outside, she is still the same person she has always been on the inside. Katie is having an inner struggle with what is right and what is wrong. Part of this is her juggling of two boyfriends. While she doesn't seem to hold herself to high standards sometimes, when both of her boyfriends deny escorting Jenna, Katie thinks it's unkind for the boys to hurt Jenna's feelings since she is a human being. This is somewhat ironic since Katie would be hurting Seth's feelings if he found out about Eric.



# Chapters 11 and 12

## Chapters 11 and 12 Summary

At first, everyone stays silent. As the pageant rehearsal continues, Seth says he cannot believe Katie didn't tell him Tommy was back in town. He mentions that his brother lost his college scholarship because of what Tommy did. Katie can feel Seth tensing up more and more as rehearsal continues. Sidney mentions that the guys are probably planning a blanket party for Tommy later on, which is when they throw a blanket over the victim and beat him up. The exception is they don't bother throwing blankets over the victims anymore because most of the cops are former Quahogs, so they don't arrest the players involved.

As Mrs. Hayes asked, Katie shoots some photos of rehearsal for the paper to print as publicity in the morning edition of the local paper. Katie kisses Seth goodbye and rides off on her bike. As Katie drops off the pictures to the town paper, she sees Tommy coming out of the editor's office. When she asks the editor what Tommy was doing there, he says it's none of her business. Katie blurts out that the Quahogs are planning a blanket party against Tommy.

Katie decides to call Tommy right before she has to leave for work. His grandmother says he's not home and when she can't find Tommy's cell, Katie says to just tell him she called. Katie makes it to the restaurant and Eric walks up behind her. She ends up breaking up with Eric because she realizes she loves the part he plays as an actor more than she likes him as a person. When Katie goes into the restaurant, the staff is throwing her a surprise party as her sponsor for the pageant. Katie works until closing and calls Seth to tell him not to meet her because she's too tired. As she is getting on her bike to leave, she hears someone calling her and all of the tiredness drains out of her body.

## Chapters 11 and 12 Analysis

Katie starts to believe the sole reason Tommy came back to town is to ruin her life. Katie continues to struggle with right and wrong and whose side she should be in on the whole debacle. She feels compelled to tell the editor about the blanket party so that he'll do something to stop it from happening to Tommy. Katie should tell Tommy directly so that he won't get attacked, but whomever Katie tells, she is ultimately betraying her boyfriend even more so than she already is by cheating on him.

The person calling Katie is Tommy. The tiredness drains out of her body because she is happy to see him.



# Chapters 13 and 14

## Chapters 13 and 14 Summary

When Katie first turns around she mad and defensive toward Tommy. He says he's there because his grandmother says she called and when he called Katie's house, her dad said she was here. Katie asks Tommy what he was doing in Mr. Gatch's office. He asks what Mr. Gatch told her, and Katie realizes Tommy knows she asked Mr. Gatch because Tommy knows Katie so well. When she responds that it's none of her business, Tommy agrees.

Katie tells Tommy about the blanket attack she thinks the football team might be planning and he laughs. Suddenly, Tommy starts kissing Katie and picks her up and puts her on the hood of his Jeep. Katie feels as if Tommy is kissing her like no other guy has ever kissed her before. When they are finished, Tommy says he thinks Katie takes such great pictures of people because she doesn't it without changing them. He also says that more than lying to other people, Katie is lying to herself. As they start to kiss again, Sidney pulls up in her car and sees them.

Sidney throws her car in reverse and peels out of the parking lot. She starts calling Katie's cell phone immediately, but Katie keeps sending the calls to voice mail. Katie jumps on her bike and starts riding home. Tommy follows her home in her car and tells Katie she's overreacting. Katie stomps into the house to find that her parents are waiting up for her.

Katie goes to bed but can't sleep. She must nod off at some point because when she wakes up, Sidney is standing over her bed. Sidney tells her she wouldn't be able to resist kissing that guy either because he is so hot. Sidney tells Katie they have nail appointments and mentions that Katie shouldn't let Seth find out about Mr. Football Camp or Seth will pound his face in.

## Chapters 13 and 14 Analysis

There is a fine line between friendship and romance when it comes to the relationship between Katie and Tommy. Katie is worried that Sidney is going to spread it around town that she was kissing Tommy Sullivan, which will cause the whole town to hate Katie because they all hate Tommy. When Sidney tells her she can't blame Katie for kissing him, Katie is relieved. But then Katie realizes that Sidney doesn't know who Tommy really is. Sidney thinks Tommy is some guy that Liam met at football camp.



# Chapters 15 and 16

## Chapters 15 and 16 Summary

After spending the day at the spa with Sidney and her mother, Katie arrives home. Her brother is telling her parents about tryouts and proudly announces to Katie that he made junior varsity. As Liam starts telling them about the speech the coach made about people being envious of Quahogs and mentioning indirectly what Tommy Sullivan did the year they had to forfeit the state championship, Katie accuses Liam of drinking the Kool-aid.

Liam continues on to say that Tommy lied about the entire scandal. Katie says Tommy is not a liar. They continue to argue as their mother is listening to the messages on the answering machine. Tommy left a message for Katie about what happened the night before and leaves his cell number. When Liam hears this, he starts berating Katie even more and Katie goes after him. Her father separates them and she only has 30 minutes until she has to leave for the pageant.

Katie arrives at the tent for the pageant contestants. When she opens the tent flap, she finds total chaos. Mrs. Hayes is yelling at the sound guys because of a microphone situation. Sidney is yelling at Dave for renting a tux that clashes with her dress. Morgan is upset because she forgot the rosin so she won't slip in her heels. Jenna has had a complete makeover, so she looks shocked.

Seth shows up. After a few minutes, he asks Katie if they are okay because he says she's acting like she's not that into him anymore. Katie feels guilty and starts to lie to him. She steps outside the tent, saying she left something in her bike basket. Tommy Sullivan is walking up the path to the tent. This is when Katie realizes that she isn't into Seth anymore because she is into Tommy Sullivan.

## Chapters 15 and 16 Analysis

Ironically, it is Katie's own brother that is convinced that Tommy Sullivan lied about the whole cheating scandal. While Katie always assumed it would be Sidney or Tommy that outs Katie for the liar that she is, it foreshadows that it might be her own brother that reveals the truth to the rest of the town. Katie's lies are piling up. Eventually, because she is having a hard time keeping track of the lies she's told, she's going to trip up and the truth is going to come out, one way or another.



# Chapters 17 and 18

## Chapters 17 and 18 Summary

Katie realizes how much she likes Tommy as he approaches her. He starts to tell her that he doesn't know what she thinks last night was about but that he didn't come back to Eastport to ruin her life. Tommy says that's not why he's there and says that Katie was an active participant in the kissing. She asks him again what he was doing in Mr. Gatch's office. She gives up and starts kissing Tommy.

Tommy starts kissing her back, but then tells her that they have to talk. She tells him talking is overrated. Tommy says he will either be her boyfriend or he's gone. He tells her to think about and let him know after the pageant. As Tommy walks away, Sidney comes out of the tent. Tommy tells Sidney hi. Sidney still doesn't realize who Tommy is. She helps Katie straighten out her hair and dress for the pageant.

When they re-enter the tent, Dave, Sidney's boyfriend asks what happened to Katie's lipstick. Sidney says she's reapplying. Seth is in the corner talking to Jenna, which is odd since he never talked to her when she had all of her piercings in and was dressed in all black. When he sees Katie, he seems surprised to see her.

The pageant unfolds and seems to be going well. When Katie returns to the tent after playing her song on the piano, Eric points out that Tommy Sullivan is sitting with Mr. Gatch in the audience. Sidney starts to deny that it's Tommy Sullivan but stops when she looks at Katie, who is shaking her head. Seth tells Dave to call the guys to meet them after the pageant to give Tommy a welcome back party. Morgan tells the guys they need to let it go because it was a long time ago. Right before Seth escorts Katie on stage, she tells him her name is not babe but is Katie.

## Chapters 17 and 18 Analysis

The way Seth is reacting to Jenna now that she has had her makeover foreshadows the two of them becoming boyfriend and girlfriend. It's ironic because Jenna and Seth are in completely different cliques at school. It might just prove that opposites do attract. Katie and Tommy's relationship has come full circle. Katie had to choose between Tommy and everyone else back in eighth grade after Tommy broke the scandal. Now, Katie is once again faced with choosing between Tommy and everyone else in town, including her boyfriend, Seth.



# Chapters 19 and 20

## Chapters 19 and 20 Summary

It's the question and answer portion of the pageant. Katie listens as Sidney recites what true love is. When Mrs. Hayes asks Katie why she likes quahogs, Katie starts with her rehearsed answer but then stops and starts to tell the truth. She admits she hates the mollusks and the football team. She tells Seth that his brother got what he deserved for cheating. Seth breaks up with her. Katie goes on to admit she is the one that painted, "Tommy Sullivan is a freak" on the gym wall. Katie apologizes to Tommy and she apologizes for ruining the pageant, jumps off stage and rides off on her bike.

Katie is talking to Jill and Shaniqua at the restaurant. They're asking about her and Seth really being broken up and what her parents said about her confession. Katie says Seth asked for his letterman jacket back and her parents grounded her for the rest of her senior year. Dave, Sidney, Morgan and Eric come in to the restaurant. Sidney one first place in the pageant and Morgan won second place.

Prodded by Dave, Sidney tells Katie she's still her best friend and she doesn't have any hard feelings. She starts to thank her for not telling the whole truth, but Katie cuts her off. Sidney tells her that Seth and Jenna are seeing each other now. The restaurant staff also starts seating anyone in the corner booth, deciding it's not fair to treat any group of people differently.

Sidney is a little astonished as Jill hands Sidney a beeper to wait for a table to become available. When Katie leaves the restaurant, she finds Tommy outside waiting for her.

## Chapters 19 and 20 Analysis

Sidney starts to panic when she realizes Katie is going to admit to the spray painting incident. It seems like Sidney is so concerned because Sidney was with Katie, even though Katie admits to doing it alone. Sidney was definitely involved with Katie painting on the gym wall but Katie is taking all of the blame for the incident and not implicating Sidney in it.



# Chapter 21

## Chapter 21 Summary

Tommy says he knows that Katie didn't paint the wall. He says he knows she just admitted it because she felt guilty for not stopping Sidney, Seth and whoever else was involved in painting it. Tommy says he was there that night. He watched as Seth painted the "F" and then Katie ripped the can from his hands and wrote freak. Katie admits she did it because she and Tommy were friends.

Tommy ends up admitting the reason he came back is to be the sports columnist at the Gazette. He also gives Katie her camera, saying Mr. Bird and Mr. Gatch paid for it because they hate the Quahogs as much as Tommy and Katie do. Tommy also says Mr. Gatch expects her to work it off by taking pictures for the paper. Tommy also hands Katie back the \$1,600 she had paid toward the camera already.

Tommy admits he also came back to see if he is still in love with Katie. He says he is. She says she's taking a vacation from all guys except him and they kiss.

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# Characters

## Katie Ellison

Katie Sullivan is the main character and narrator of the novel. She is in high school, and it is the summer between her junior year and senior year. Katie works as a waitress at the Gull N Gulp, which is a local seafood place in small seaside town of Eastport, Connecticut.

Katie is an environmentalist. For this reason, she opts to ride her bike around town rather than have a car. Additionally, she uses the money she makes to buy equipment and supplies for her passion, photography. Rather than work to save for a car, Katie is working and making payments on a very expensive camera that she has on layaway at the local photography shop.

Katie is also a compulsive liar, but more with little white lies than huge lies. She's mostly lying to herself, however, because she is portraying herself as what people in town want rather than what Katie herself wants. Her little white lies start to add up. As they do, the way Katie has been living her life peaks and she ends up telling the truth about everything.

Katie telling the truth leads to the destruction of her relationship with Seth. On the other hand, it leads to the start of her romantic relationship with Tommy Sullivan. The truth also leads to her loss in the pageant, but leads to her getting her camera paid for by the local newspaper so she can take photographs for the sports column Tommy will be writing.

## Sidney van der Hoff

Sidney van der Hoff is Katie's best friends. The girls have been best friends since elementary school. Sidney is dating the high school football team quarterback, Dave Hollingsworth. Sidney is also one of the other contestants in the Quahog Festival Pageant.

Sidney is very name brand conscious, so she is always wearing the latest in name brand clothes and shoes and carrying a designer handbag. Sidney also loves to sing, so her talent for the pageant is singing.

Throughout the novel, Sidney fails to recognize Tommy Sullivan. Sidney keeps thinking he is a hot guy that Katie's brother met when he was at football camp. It's Sidney that catches Katie kissing Tommy in the parking lot of the Gull N Gulp and outside of the pageant tent. Even when Sidney finds out Tommy's true identity, she vows not to tell Katie's boyfriend.





## Seth Turner

Seth Turner is Katie's boyfriend. He is on the high school football team. Seth is following in the footsteps of his older brother, who was also a star player on the football team. While Seth is not dumb, he is also not as smart as Katie, so Katie is able to fool Seth times throughout the novel.

Seth ends up breaking up with Katie when he finds out that she has been hiding the fact that Tommy Sullivan is back in town. Seth is Katie's escort for the pageant, but after they break up, he ends up dating one of the other contestants, Jenna Hicks.

## Liam Ellison

Liam Ellison is Katie's younger brother. He is in between eight and ninth grade over the summer when the novel unfolds. He is working out all summer because he plans to try out for the Quahogs football team before school starts.

It is Liam that tells Katie that Tommy Sullivan is back in town. Since he has been working out, girls Liam's age seem to be following him everywhere and calling the house constantly for him. When Liam makes the team, he and Katie get into a fight when Liam finds out she has been talking to Tommy after what he did to the team four years earlier.

## Eric Fluteley

Eric Fluteley is a member of the high school football team. Eric is also the boy Katie is cheating with behind Seth's back. While Katie is kissing Eric, Tommy catches them. Tommy uses this information to tease Katie and put her on edge about him trying to ruin Katie's life.

Katie ends up breaking it off with Eric. Eric ends up escorting Morgan Castle in the pageant. After Katie breaks up with him, Eric also ends up dating Morgan.

## Tommy Sullivan

Tommy Sullivan is a boy that left town in eighth grade and has now returned over the summer before the senior year of high school. He left town because he exposed the football team members that were involved in a SAT cheating scandal.

When Tommy returns to Eastport, most of the people do not recognize him. He's much taller and more buff than he was when he left town. Tommy returns because he lands a job as a columnist for the local paper. Tommy will be covering the sports section for the paper.



Another reason Tommy returns is to find out if he still has feelings for Katie. By the end of the novel, Tommy and Katie admit their feelings for each other.

## **Morgan Castle**

Morgan Castle is another of the contestants in the pageant. She is a relatively quiet girl. Her sponsor for the pageant is the local healthy restaurant in town. Eric Flutely is her escort in the pageant. When Morgan finds out that Tommy Sullivan is back in town, she tries to urge Seth and the other boys to just forget about it and leave Tommy alone. By the end of the novel, Eric and Morgan are dating.

## **Jenna Hicks**

Jenna Hicks is being forced to participate in the pageant by her mother. Jenna normally dresses in all black and she has piercings all over her face and in her ears. Her friends ambush her right before the pageant to give her a makeover, so that she looks completely different. Jenna and Seth realize that they have more in common than they thought. Jenna and Seth start dating after he and Katie break up.

## **Dave Hollingsworth**

Dave Hollingsworth is Sidney's boyfriend and escort in the pageant. He is also the quarterback of the Quahogs football team. Katie refers to Dave as the "smootherover" because he is always trying to make everything right. Sidney ends up mad with Dave at the pageant because he chooses a blue tuxedo that clashes with her red dress. Dave also tells Seth that he can't go after Tommy after the pageant because they have to help the girls celebrate their wins.

## **Patty**

Patty is the manager at the Gull N Gulp. She is also the one that catches Katie kissing Eric by the drink machine. Patty doesn't like gossip so all of the staff tries to be on their best behavior when Patty is working. In the end though, Katie finds out that Patty gossiped about catching Katie kissing a guy that wasn't her boyfriend. Patty also throws a surprise party for Katie before the pageant.



# Objects/Places

## Gull n Gulp

The Gull N Gulp is a seafood restaurant in Eastport, Connecticut. It is also where Katie works as a waitress. The Gull N Gulp is Katie's sponsor for the Quahog Festival Pageant.

## Eastport, Connecticut

Eastport, Connecticut is a small seaside town. It is a relatively small town. The town population swells during the summer months when the tourists come into town. The town is known for its quahogs, which is a type of mussel and is also the name of the high school football team mascot.

## The Wall

The Wall refers to the wall on the school gymnasium. Someone spray painted "Tommy Sullivan is a Freak" in dayglo orange on the wall. It has been there since Katie was in eighth grade and right before Tommy left town. The town hasn't had the money to sandblast it off because it costs \$7,000 to fix. Katie admits to painting the wall at the pageant, but it turns out that it was Seth, Sidney, Dave and Katie.

## Bike

Katie rides her bike everywhere. She believes it is better for the environment than driving a car. She also rides her bike because she thinks it is good exercise.

## Camera

Katie has a very expensive camera on layaway. She is using the money she makes at the Gull N Gulp to make payments on it. Toward the end of the novel, she only owes \$400 more dollars. After she admits everything at the pageant, the editor of the newspaper and the camera shop owner give Katie the camera and return all of the money she paid toward the camera because they hate Quahogs, too.

## Corner Booth

The corner booth in the Gull N Gulp is reserved for VIPs. VIPS in Eastport are the Quahog football players and their guests. After Katie speaks out against the Quahogs at



the pageant, the restaurant decides not to reserve the booth anymore. They start seating people there on a first come first serve basis.

## **Newspaper Office**

Katie is dropping off photos for the pageant when she sees Tommy meeting with the editor of the paper at the newspaper office. She asks the editor what Tommy was doing there. Later, Katie finds out that Tommy was meeting with the editor because Tommy is going to write the sports column when their senior year starts.

## **Pageant Tent**

The pageant tent is a tent at the festival. It is where Katie and the other pageant contestants gather and get ready to participate in the pageant. It is also where the contestants and their escorts are when they find out that Tommy Sullivan is back in town.

## **Gull N Gulp Parking Lot**

The Gull N Gulp parking lot is behind the Gull N Gulp. This is where Katie sits with Seth in his truck to makeout after her shifts are over. The parking lot is also where Sidney catches Tommy and Katie making out.

## **Answering Machine**

The answering machine at Katie's house is always full of messages from girls for her brother Liam. Tommy also leaves a suggestive message on the machine that tells Liam and Katie's parents that something happened between her and Tommy. This sparks an initial disagreement between Katie and Liam.

# Themes

## Truth

The primary theme throughout the novel is that of the truth. Katie continuously struggles with telling the whole truth. It is as if Katie cannot help but to lie. At one point, she even thinks about how her brother used to call her "Liar, liar, pants on fire," when they were younger.

Katie chooses to lie in order to protect herself. She also seems to tell lies to protect the feelings of others. For example, she lies about Eric and sneaks around with Eric behind Seth's back. She does this because she doesn't really want to be with Seth, but she also doesn't want to hurt Seth's feelings.

The biggest truth Katie struggles with is the truth, or the lies, she is telling herself. She tries to convince herself throughout the novel that she is who she is pretending to be. In the end, however, the truth comes out. Katie admits her feelings about the Quahogs and about Tommy Sullivan.

## Coming of Age

One of the other primary themes that run throughout the novel is growing up and coming of age. Katie struggles with who she is and how she feels on the inside compared to who she is and what other people want her to be on the outside. Katie deals with the consequences in life that comes with telling lies and then having to confess the truth.

Katie also faces the rite of passage of having her first true love. While she has been dating Seth for years, Katie has always known to some extent that she doesn't love him. She was more in love with the thought of Seth. When Tommy Sullivan returns to Eastport, Katie realizes that she has true feelings for him.

## Family

Family is another central theme in the novel. This is because the storyline is about the lives of this particular family—the Ellisons. While every family has their trials and tribulations, Katie'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

"Pants on Fire" is written in the first person point of view. The narrator of the novel is also the main character of the novel, Katie Ellison. The narrator is telling the story as it unfolds, but she also switches back to some past events in her life to provide the reader with some perspective.

The point of view of this novel is an intimate one that allows a reader to connect closely with the main character, who also happens to be the narrator of the story. The point of view also allows the author to inject her own opinions into the narration and to expand on the events taking place to her, the members of her family and the people of the town without having to move out of character or interrupt the flow of the narration. For these reasons, the point of view works well with this novel and the author's writing style.

## Setting

The novel is set in Eastport, Connecticut. The author never states the specific year or time period, but it seems to be in the 21st century. The setting of this novel is important because it is about the occurrences in this particular town that sets the scene for the entire plot of the novel.

The setting of this novel works well with the plot. At first, the reader is not aware of Katie's tendency to tell little white lies, or that she has been hiding a pretty big secret since eighth grade. However, as events unfold, one secret after the next is either explained or inferred.

## Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is modern. The language of the novel is not formal and appears to be set in modern times, such as the 21st century. The language is educated, strong and descriptive enough that it creates a flow that leaves the reader impressed with the words as much as the plot when the novel ends.

The language of the novel is appropriate to the plot because it is accurate to the characters in the novel and the education level of the writer. The novel is not in love with its own words, but it is descriptive enough that the reader finds enjoyment in the words as well as the plot. The language is not difficult to understand, however, and everything is clear in its context. For this reason the language of the novel fits well with the plot of the novel.

## Structure

The novel consists of 21 chapters. Each chapter is between 5 and 20 pages long. The chapters tell the story both in exposition and dialogue. The author is the narrator and main character of the book, so it seems as if she is injecting her own voice throughout the novel—as if she has become Katie. This allows the author to provide her own opinions of the events surrounding the setting of the novel, as well as the actions taking place within the plot, but from the eyes and words of Susannah.

The novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot follows truth. The subplots involve coming of age and the trials and tribulations of the family.



## Quotes

"Oh my God, what's she doing here?"  
Chap.1, p. 1

"Timmy Sullivan's back in town."  
Chap. 2, p. 16

"Yeah. Some other Thomas Sullivan who told me he'd been in your class at school and wanted to know how you were doing and has red hair."  
Chap. 3, p. 20

"Hi, Katie. Long time no see."  
Chap. 4, p. 34

"And from what your brother told me, this is the place I'm most likely to find you without your boyfriend or should I say, boyfriends?"  
Chap. 5, p. 36

"I've enrolled at Eastport High. I'll be going there this fall."  
Chap. 6, p. 49

"Tommy! You, you can't do this."  
Chap. 7, p. 50

"Tommy Sullivan is back in town."  
Chap. 8, p. 58

"You've got a great eye for capturing people. Pelicans? Not so much."  
Chap. 9, p. 63

"Hey, I know. Katie, why don't you call Tommy Sullivan and ask him to escort Jenna, now that he's back in town?"  
Chap. 10, p. 77

"The Quahogs are planning a blanket party for him."  
Chap. 11, p. 83

"Liar, liar, pants on fire."  
Chap 12, p. 85

"Your concern for my welfare is touching."  
Chap. 13, p. 95

"Did I harsh on you? No. I fully understand."  
Chap. 14, p. 105





"Oh my God! You've drunk the Kool-aid!"  
Chap. 15, p. 112

"You know. Your E. coli."  
Chap. 16, p. 118

"I don't know what you're thinking, macking with Mr. Football Camp five minutes before you're supposed get out on stage."  
Chap. 17, p. 126

"But, Sidney, it's just that I can talk to him."  
Chap. 18, p. 133

"Katie! Don't!"  
Chap. 19, p. 140

"Oh, that's not the Quahog table anymore. New restaurant policy."  
Chap. 20, p. 145

"I am. From every guy but you."  
Chap. 21, p. 153



## Topics for Discussion

Who is Katie Ellison? Why does she feel like she is an outsider in her own town? What does Katie recall about her childhood? What is Katie's biggest demon that haunts her throughout her life? Why is this important? How does it change her life?

Discuss the relationship between Katie and Seth. Are they really in love? Is there love, guilt or a sense of obligation in their relationship? How does Katie feel about Seth? How does Seth feel about Katie? Why does Seth think Katie is acting strange? What does he do about it?

How does Katie feel when she discovers Tommy is back in town? How does this affect Katie? How does Tommy react to Katie? Why does Katie think Tommy is back in town?

Who is Tommy Sullivan? Why did Tommy leave town when he was younger? Why does there seem to be a strain in the relationship between Katie and Tommy at times? Why does Tommy come back to Eastport? What happens to Tommy?

Who is Seth? Why do you think he gets so angry when he finds out Tommy is back in town and Katie didn't tell him? What do you think happens between Seth and Jenna?

Who is Tommy Sullivan? Why do you think he really comes back to Eastport? Why do you think he keeps his column a secret from Katie? What do you think happens to Tommy when everyone finds out about his column?

Discuss Katie's lies. What impact does it have on the characters of the novel? How does it motivate them or hold them back? Why is it an issue to the characters? Does it have anything to do with way that relationships develop and evolve? What impact does it have on the overall desire to expose the truth?