

# **Prozac Nation: Young and Depressed in America Study Guide**

**Prozac Nation: Young and Depressed in America by Elizabeth Wurtzel**

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# Contents

[Prozac Nation: Young and Depressed in America Study Guide.....1](#)

[Contents.....2](#)

[Plot Summary.....3](#)

[Prologue: I Hate Myself and I Want to Die.....4](#)

[Chapter 1, Full of Promise.....5](#)

[Chapter 2, Secret Life.....6](#)

[Chapter 3, Love Kills.....7](#)

[Chapter 4, Broken.....8](#)

[Chapter 5, Black Wave.....9](#)

[Chapter 6, Happy Pills.....10](#)

[Chapter 7, Drinking in Dallas.....11](#)

[Chapter 8, Space, Time and Motion.....12](#)

[Chapter 9, Down Deep.....13](#)

[Chapter 10, Blank Girl.....14](#)

[Chapter 11, Good Morning Heartache.....15](#)

[Chapter 12, The Accidental Blowjob.....16](#)

[Chapter 13, Woke Up This Morning Afraid I Was Going to Live.....17](#)

[Chapter 14, Think of Pretty Things.....19](#)

[Characters.....20](#)

[Objects/Places.....25](#)

[Themes.....27](#)

[Style.....30](#)

[Quotes.....32](#)

[Topics for Discussion.....34](#)



# Plot Summary

Prozac Nation is an autobiographical account of Elizabeth Wurtzel, an adolescent growing up depressed in New York City. Since her depression is not easily diagnosed and the mental health field is still new and growing, she is not correctly diagnosed until her twenties. This autobiography tracks what happens to Wurtzel and the ways that depression and its symptoms affect her life and her outlook.

As a child, Wurtzel is the ideal child. She is brilliant and accomplishes a number of things before she is twelve, including writing a children's book. She gets straight A's and is seen as a privileged, gifted child. However, as Wurtzel gets older, she starts to act out and have behavioral problems. She experiences more and more depression episodes, although her mother cannot determine why or what to do about the behavior. Wurtzel's parents divorce and the impact of their negativity towards each other affects her and deepens her depression. Her father plays almost no role in her life and even causes problems when it comes time to pay the bills for her therapy.

Wurtzel frequently runs from one location to another with the thought that things will finally be better somewhere else. She moves from New York City to attend college at Harvard. While there, she experiences a huge breakdown and ends up at the college medical facilities. However, she continues to decline. She will leave school and go to Dallas and even England in the hopes that a new geographic surrounding will improve her mental state of mind. For a time, these new locations seem to help, but then she will slip and regress to her former depressed state. Unlike other forms of mental depression, her symptoms do not mirror those of a schizophrenic or manic depressive. For this reason, therapists have a hard time controlling Wurtzel and her mood swings.

Through effective therapists and eventually the use of a new drug called Prozac, Wurtzel finally manages to gain control of her life and experience a normal lifestyle. Prozac can take a few weeks to work and it is during this time that Wurtzel finally attempts her first suicide attempt. Surprisingly, she does this only after she is starting to feel better for the first time in years. She is saved and has a new sense of a love for life that is rewarding to her.

She is then amazed at how the issues of mental depression gain in popularity and the drug of Prozac makes its way into the mainstream of American society. It has had a tremendous impact on society. Through its effectiveness, more and more people start talking about mental illness and depression in particular. As more people are brought into the conversation about mental illness, it becomes more familiar and common for people to diagnose themselves (correctly or not) with the disease.



# Prologue: I Hate Myself and I Want to Die

## Prologue: I Hate Myself and I Want to Die Summary and Analysis

The novel starts in the middle of Wurtzel having a nervous breakdown. She is sobbing on the bathroom floor during a party, her black chiffon dress stark against the white bathroom tiles. She is sobbing and crying because of a number of small mishaps that have happened that evening, but also because she is coming down from a self-medicated high on cocaine. Initially, she took the cocaine with a friend because she was having problems socializing at her own party, but with the cocaine, she immediately became confident and more friendly.

Wurtzel has recently decided to get off her lithium, which is why she is in such a precarious mental state. She has stopped taking her lithium because she is convinced that it is causing her to have Graves' disease due to a recent test. She is told that things will get bad for her if she stops taking the lithium, but she wants to stop cold-turkey anyways. Her friends try to come into the bathroom to help Wurtzel, but she is too far beyond them to be much help.

Wurtzel remembers the first time she had an overdose. She was twelve and at summer camp in 1979. She swallowed ten caplets of Atarax, a prescription allergy medicine that she is taking for hay fever. She has decided that all of the activities and games are for naught because they are all going to die anyway. After a day, her counselor comes to check on her and eventually brings the head counselor to check on Wurtzel. She gets into some trouble for taking her own medicines rather than giving them to the camp nurse, but they assume the problem is an honest mistake and not an overdose.

Two days after the breakdown at her own party, Wurtzel visits Dr. Ira, who she refers to as the Fifth Avenue Crack House because all he does is give her pills. He gets upset with her for getting off the lithium and tells her that her fears of Graves' disease are totally unfounded.



# Chapter 1, Full of Promise

## Chapter 1, Full of Promise Summary and Analysis

Wurtzel compares depression to being more like a cancer. It grows slowly over time and then suddenly, bam! It's there and threatening your life and every daily action. Wurtzel wasn't raised by crazed hippie parents — quite the opposite. They were fully immersed in their marriage and with Elizabeth when the cultural revolution began. However, when they became discontent with each other, they didn't stick it out together. They divorced.

When they divorce, it becomes quite clear how different these two people really are. While Wurtzel's mother urges her to have a solid, middle-class upbringing, her father encourages her to live off the land and be an artist. They divorce by the time that Wurtzel is two, but their divorce causes them to fight and places Wurtzel wholly in the middle of their arguments. Wurtzel also remembers that during her erratic visits with her father, he would spend most of the time sleeping.

Over the years, Wurtzel talks with other children of divorced parents and knows that her own events are common and trivial compared to others. Nonetheless, her parents' divorce had a strong negative impact on her upbringing. Wurtzel and her mother become more like friends than mother and daughter. There is no reason initially to discipline Wurtzel because she is very independent and can entertain herself for hours. She is a smart, gifted child. She is a golden child. She wins Hebrew competitions at school, although she does not live in a fully kosher home. People often describe her as full of promise, so when she falls, she never has to worry about a crash landing, she says, because she never really even got a chance to take off.



## Chapter 2, Secret Life

### Chapter 2, Secret Life Summary and Analysis

Twice a week, Wurtzel goes to Dr. Isaac's office, which she doesn't mind at all, despite the fact it's not a common activity for an eleven-year-old. He gives her various reasons as to why she has the issues she has, such as her parents' divorce or the fact that she is overly precocious. She was sent to Dr. Isaac after a teacher found her cutting herself. She agrees to go to Dr. Isaac on the solemn swear that she will stop doing it, and makes the teacher promise to never tell her mother about the razors.

Wurtzel explains that she cuts herself because she feels like she is a huge mistake, that everything about her is wrong. She feels a sense of peace and power when she can cut her pale, white legs and the art of hiding the scars from her mother becomes a game in and of itself.

Wurtzel starts to cut school and her grades start to go downhill. The girl that used to berate herself for getting anything less than an A is now coasting along with B's and C's. However, when her mother sees her report card, she bursts into tears and asks what has happened to her perfect daughter. No matter what Wurtzel does, she feels out of place and cannot understand why her internal pain is not reflective and obvious to anyone else on the outside who cannot seem to understand that all the effort is worthless.

Wurtzel realizes that she has gotten so impossible and unpleasant that she needs to do something to improve herself. The psychiatrists try to help her and she feels like she is unraveling. Meanwhile, her mother is refusing to acknowledge that anything is wrong with her. She treats her like a normal kid rather than reacting to the depression. Wurtzel reflects that this is perhaps the best thing for her at the time and can't blame her mother for her reaction. Eventually, the nightly scene is Wurtzel lying on her bed, helpless, and her mother, upset that her daughter is going through these problems, lying on her bed and sobbing. On some level, Wurtzel acknowledges that she cannot let her mind go too far because it would destroy her mother. She's not sure why this makes sense to someone as depressed as she is, but she says this is what happened to her.

At age twelve, Wurtzel finds herself cutting school and waiting until her mother has left the apartment to return and watch television shows or generally avoid the world rather than go to school.

One day, she meets her friend's older brother with whom she connects. His name is Abel and when he starts to hook up with her. The physical contact brings her happiness that she welcomes wholeheartedly. When she turns thirteen, she thinks the entire world is horrible. She is stuck at camp again. She sobs with anyone who will listen about how awful life is and how she is suffocating under the darkness. She is lost and cries, despondent despite the fact that her friends try to console her.



# Chapter 3, Love Kills

## Chapter 3, Love Kills Summary and Analysis

By the time Wurtzel is in the eighth grade, her parents have started fighting again just like they did before their divorce. They fight over her and what to do about her condition. Ironically, it makes Wurtzel's depression even worse.

Her father will not pay for her medical bills and her mother spends much of her time arguing with him that it is his responsibility to do it. Her mother will call her father and berate him for his virtual abandonment of Elizabeth and hang up on him, crying and wailing. It makes Wurtzel believe that she is more trouble than she's worth. She starts to wish she were a drug addict or junkie so that she could have a tangible thing that she needed to get rid of, rather than this nameless, directionless depression.

Her psychiatrist spends as much time counseling Wurtzel as he does keeping her parents at bay. Her mother determines Dr. Isaac is a guru, while her father reacts to Wurtzel's depression by reading all of her sad and dark poetry, enthralled by it. Suddenly, Wurtzel is interesting to her father. Her mother, meanwhile, mourns as she watches her daughter become more and more morbid and depressed.

Wurtzel is resentful that she was sent to camp for five years in a row, despite the fact that she truly hated it. She feels that she didn't deserve it and would have been an easy kid to leave with a babysitter or left alone, as she easily entertained herself. Instead, she spends day after day in the director's office, telling him that she will take a drug overdose or worse. The director gets used to these declarations and she gets nowhere with these threats. She realizes that she has an odd relationship with her mother. She never once longs for her mother, even during her darkest days at camp. They are in a distorted, dependent relationship that Wurtzel starts to first understand.

Wurtzel's father refuses to pay any of Dr. Isaac's bills, although insurance pays for almost all of it. What he doesn't realize is that by not paying the bills, it makes Wurtzel's life so much more complicated, chasing down insurance forms and hearing her mother complain about the money issues.

Wurtzel is sent to her aunt's house and spends time with her cousin Pamela. They hang out occasionally, but think they don't have much in common. Later, she'll find out that Pamela also had black-out depression episodes and they never talked about their common issue.



# Chapter 4, Broken

## Chapter 4, Broken Summary and Analysis

In 1980, Wurtzel's father walks out on her for good. In the years before he finally left, Wurtzel's mother had run out of money and had to take her father to court in order to get any money. Her world becomes a constant battle between lawyers and court appointments.

She tries to fit in and be normal, but fails miserably. She finally resigns herself to her depressed personality, and this resignation gives her some stability. She tries to shelter herself by being a perfect student with zombielike commitment to getting straight A's and appearing flawless — at least on paper. In this vein, a boy named Zachary comes along and they start dating, much to Wurtzel's astonishment. When her mother sees her dating this ideal catch, she relaxes, thinking that Wurtzel cannot be that boy to have attracted a boy this good. Dating consumes Wurtzel. She starts to believe that she will renounce everything and marry Zachary and be with him forever.

While she is babysitting, her father calls to cryptically tell her that he will be going away for awhile and not to question that he loves her. She isn't alarmed by the conversation because he can sometimes talk mysteriously like this. She gets off the phone quickly so that she can call Zachary. Shortly thereafter, Zachary dumps her, saying she was just a way to have fun. Wurtzel is thoroughly distraught. Without bothering to excuse herself, she will break out into crying jags and severe depressive episodes. Her extreme behavior drives her mother crazy. When Wurtzel is on a cross-country trip, her mother goes through her drawer and finds the birth control pills she had because of her relationship with Zachary and becomes wildly upset, questioning how Wurtzel could do that to her. Wurtzel cannot understand why her mother is allowed to be so wildly upset when it is Wurtzel that is going through the horrible break-up.





# Chapter 5, Black Wave

## Chapter 5, Black Wave Summary and Analysis

Wurtzel is running. She's not sure if she's running away from her life or because she's scared. She spends her time being scared of people and then being scared of being with people. She cannot find herself and spends hours wishing that everything was okay. Then, one day, she's actually running for her life across Harvard. She has slept with her best friend's boyfriend. As she is running across the campus, she thinks that this is true insanity.

When her roommate catches up to her, she sees Wurtzel's face and stops yelling and threatening her life. Instead, she looks at her and sees something in her face and tells her that she's crazy. Wurtzel is truly crazy — and Wurtzel cannot agree more. She walks straight to the Mental Health facilities, the Stillman Infirmary. Dr. King, the therapist there, helps her by talking with her father about handling the insurance forms, which Wurtzel thinks might be one of the nicest things anyone has ever done for her.

Wurtzel has complicated her mental condition by taking a great deal of drugs. In fact, she takes so much Ecstasy that she and her friends are known for it on campus. One day, while at her boyfriend's apartment, she wakes up and realizes she has missed her grandparents' visit to Harvard to see her. She starts to scream and screams consistently under Noah takes her straight to the Emergency Room at the University Health Services.

Throughout Winter Break, Wurtzel hides in her college room, engrossed in her Justice class books. Her mother comes to visit and accuses her of being a drug addict and questions whether she should continue to pay for Harvard. When confronted, Wurtzel starts to berate her mother, telling her that she used to be a perfect little girl, did her mother remember that? Wurtzel realizes she has gone too far and makes her mother hysterical so that by the end of her rambling, both she and her mother are hysterical. Wurtzel apologizes for being so hateful and her mother says she knows that Wurtzel is hateful and resentful of everyone.



# Chapter 6, Happy Pills

## Chapter 6, Happy Pills Summary and Analysis

Wurtzel is in her room trying to study. She is supposed to be reading *The Odyssey*, and although she has heard it is a great read, she can't concentrate on the book. Instead, she picks up the receiver and calls her father. She hadn't spoken to him in a year before she left for college, but shortly before going to Harvard, she visits him down in Florida. She even tries to be friendly with his new wife. However, like most of their communications, this one eventually dwindles.

Although she doesn't realize it, Wurtzel calls her father to pick a fight. She immediately asks him if he has paid for the insurance forms. When he balks, she starts to cry. She tells him that all he does is give her nothing but a bunch of words. By the end, she tells him that she's had enough and is through with him.

Wurtzel starts to have death fantasies all the time, although she knows somewhere inside her that she will stay alive. She gets fed up with it and walks into the University Health Services again, citing mental problems, and signs on the dotted line. It gets her out of her classes and exams. She sees a new therapist called Dr. Saltenstahl, who she likes despite the fact that she won't give her any prescription pills. Unfortunately, Dr. Saltenstahl is thoroughly booked. There is little that Dr. Saltenstahl can do since Wurtzel is not suicidal, so it leaves Wurtzel back in limbo. She's not desperate enough to be institutionalized, which would then be covered by insurance. Until then, she's on her own.



# Chapter 7, Drinking in Dallas

## Chapter 7, Drinking in Dallas Summary and Analysis

During the summer of 1987, Wurtzel goes to Dallas, Texas. She has finished her sophomore year at Harvard and won awards in Journalism. She has been obsessed with Texas since she was a little girl, but once she arrives, the reality of her dream location is a bit different. At first, however, she is mysteriously happy in a place that she calls "depressed and depressing." There is a small counterculture in Dallas, which she enjoys and adores her new apartment. She thinks that she could be truly happy in Dallas except for one thing: since she grew up in New York City, she cannot drive, and this ultimately chains her.

Wurtzel starts to crack slowly. She starts to work extra time for the paper she is working for. She will work on projects that no one else wants and comes into work hours late. However, since she has done such great pieces in the past, her increasingly wacky behavior is forgiven.

By the time her mother comes to visit, it is normal behavior for her to drink all week and go over to her cousins' house to lay out by the pool. Her cousin wants to throw Wurtzel a birthday party. Instead, Wurtzel spends the day hanging out with random people at a bar, drinking. She is hours late for her own birthday party that her mother throws in her honor. By the time she gets there, her mother is thoroughly disgusted with her. She is upset and still drunk when she gets back to her house that evening. She walks to the Morning News music critic's house randomly. She gets to his house and starts to pound on his door as if the presence of this near-stranger can fix all of her problems. Her screaming gets the attention of the gas station attendant next door and he drives her back to her house again.

When she wakes up, her mother is standing above her bed. She tells Wurtzel that she has pushed her over the edge. She tells her that if she wants to go back home, she can, but her behavior will not be tolerated and she will pay for her own ticket home. Later that week, she is contacted by the producers of Oprah to be on the show to discuss her current relationship with her father. They picked up the story that she had written in *Seventeen* and now want her on their show. Initially, she agrees, but then realizes the key to her happiness would be to not appear on that show.

The rest of her time in Dallas is just as chaotic. Wurtzel dates a police-beat reporter who she decides is her key to happiness and obsessively remains with him. If he doesn't call, she freaks out.

After another restless evening, Wurtzel calls her mother and tells her that she thinks it's time to come home. Her mother says that she knows Wurtzel has an unnamed grudge against the world, and believes that she needs to get into therapy right away.



# Chapter 8, Space, Time and Motion

## Chapter 8, Space, Time and Motion Summary and Analysis

Wurtzel starts making promises to herself. She will go to Cambridge and treat it like a recovery period, staying away from obsessive relationships and working hard. Since she cannot have Dr. Saltenstahl as a therapist, she goes with her recommendation: Dr. Diana Sterling. She makes sense to Wurtzel because she has a good, stable life herself, which is rare among her therapists.

Her life in Cambridge is so calm that she has few things to talk about with Dr. Sterling. She gets a job working for the Harvard Police Department two nights a week, but it messes up her schedule tremendously. Also, the lack of sunshine has a negative impact on her persona as well. She finally calls Dr. Sterling and tells her that she thinks she's having a nervous breakdown, but she's not sure why.

A few days later, Wurtzel wakes up covered in blood. Blood is everywhere and she calls her friend, telling him that she is dying. It's October of 1987, and Wurtzel rides to the infirmary covered in blood to find out that she has had a miscarriage. She is hysterical when she finds out that she was pregnant and has now lost the baby. They give her a great deal of drugs to keep her calm while she stays in the infirmary overnight. Now, she cannot imagine ever getting better.

She parties and laughs with her friends, saying that she thought she was going crazy when in fact she was just having a miscarriage. Then, Wurtzel starts to use her miscarriage as an excuse for everything, bringing it up constantly in social settings. She starts to crack up.

She starts to go insane and a doctor and some orderlies are sent to get Wurtzel from her room and take her to the infirmary. She starts to yell that she has to do her papers for a Space, Time and Motion class or else she will really lose it. However, when she's there for a little while, she realizes that she feels better simply because no one can touch her.



# Chapter 9, Down Deep

## Chapter 9, Down Deep Summary and Analysis

Wurtzel is finally released and her entire apartment feels depressive. It's the perfect site for a nervous breakdown, in direct contrast to her light and airy apartment in Texas. There are four of them in the house and they are convinced that something is wrong with the house because they all experience something bad to them.

The day after Halloween, Wurtzel wakes up to darkness and cannot get out of bed. She forces herself out of bed and calls her mother in the hopes of experiencing something normal. However, they get into a huge fight instead.

Wurtzel has been given the name and number of a boy who has had a similar family background that she had. She calls him out of the blue. They eventually begin dating. She quickly goes from dating to obsessing about him. Even when they are having sex, he is too far away for Wurtzel and she cannot be apart from him for even a moment. When he goes away to visit his parents and sister, she freaks out. She calls him at all hours of the day and night, even though he has told her to leave him alone. She knows that she is going crazy, but she cannot help it.

She travels to Texas in the hopes of distracting herself, but realizes it's not helping. She goes back to Cambridge and sees Dr. Sterling because she knows she needs a lot of help.



# Chapter 10, Blank Girl

## Chapter 10, Blank Girl Summary and Analysis

Wurtzel is in the infirmary, reading a book and watching television. The U.S. Figure Skating Championship is on TV and she is captivated by Debi Thomas. Although she will later find out that these women suffer a similar fate of loneliness, she thinks that Thomas is a star and gets overly carried away in Thomas' joy of the moment of competing. She remembers crying over Robert Redford's performance in *The Natural* and her mother asking her if she is related to the character. However, in reality she is crying because she has gifts, but they are unspecific and she has no particular way to express this.

Dr. Sterling agrees that Wurtzel needs to continue her schoolwork while in the infirmary. However, she starts to become obsessed that Dr. Sterling is going to leave her, too. She worries that she will never be able to find a solution to her depression and that the potential outcome is so disastrous that it would lead to her eventual suicide. Dr. Sterling diagnoses that Wurtzel's main symptoms are severe anxiety and agitation. In a way, Wurtzel is suffering from a type of meta-depression.

After taking a Xanax, Wurtzel is still at Stillman and clutches her pillow, convinced that she is going to be taken away by the men in white. It's not until Dr. Sterling points out that she's already at the place where the "men in white" would take her that she calms down. Wurtzel becomes self-reflective, realizing that she is wholly self-destructive and that other people like Rafe are not the reason why.

Some friends visit her while at Stillman, but after they are gone, she starts to cry and cannot stop. She cries and cries and cries until she finally calls Dr. Sterling and screams at her over her lack of clarity. Dr. Sterling won't prescribe a narcotic for Wurtzel, but gives her Mellaril instead, an antipsychotic. Only after a few minutes of Mellaril, her tears stop and all feelings subside. Dr. Sterling is so happy with the effect that Mellaril has on Wurtzel that she puts her on the drug three times a day. She is calm enough to do work and be productive, and when Rafe calls her to say that he won't meet up with her, she registers the words but they have a minimal effect on her.



# Chapter 11, Good Morning Heartache

## Chapter 11, Good Morning Heartache Summary and Analysis

Despite the fact that they have been broken up for awhile, Wurtzel goes to see Rafe at Brown. She realizes that Rafe loved her and really cared for her, but he also was interested in the parts of her that were obsessed with him and utterly fell apart when she could not be with him all the time. Her depression was a part of why he liked Wurtzel and he made her less healthy because of this.

Wurtzel decides she needs to go back to school and devote herself to Harvard and therapy full-time. Dr. Sterling convinces her this is the best option and she agrees. Meanwhile, Wurtzel's mother is telling her to take time away from school to dedicate herself exclusively to therapy and getting better. Wurtzel thinks her timing is horribly bad and once again gets the feeling like her mother is treating her depression as if it were a broken car and it just needs to be fixed already. She tries to explain that she believes she's getting better, but her mother takes some convincing. After the phone call, however, Dr. Sterling has to convince Wurtzel that her mother is wrong and plainly tells her that she thinks both of her parents are slightly mad.

When Wurtzel returns to Harvard, she doesn't want to go to Stillman, but has trouble being alone in her apartment. She is haunted by constant thoughts of suicide. Instead of the mental institution, she chooses to go to California again to visit her cousin, once again choosing a random location and assuming it will be the next way that she can fix all of her problems. As soon as she's there, she begins obsessively reading and writing, interviewing Joni Mitchell and contemplating taking time off to write an entire novel about Mitchell. Despite her cousin's pleas to relax, she works constantly.

By the time she leaves California, she is no longer obsessed with Rafe. She believes that all of the sun-soaking has righted her and she feels much better. When she is back home, she no longer has the energy to go to her therapy sessions, so she talks with Dr. Sterling over the phone instead. Her roommate Samantha once had mental depression like Wurtzel is experiencing, but broke out of it, and when Wurtzel starts to cry, she tries to find people for Wurtzel to talk with. Suddenly, Wurtzel remembers that Samantha's ex-boyfriend Manuel lives in London and helped her during her bad times. Samantha agrees that Manuel would be great for her and soon Wurtzel is on the way to London.

It's early enough in the semester for Wurtzel to find a way to take independent studies that will help her to get credits while in London. She packs her books and is ready to go. Nearly everyone approves except for her advisor, who plainly tells her he thinks it's a bad idea because he visited her in the hospital and thinks she needs to stay here.



# Chapter 12, The Accidental Blowjob

## Chapter 12, The Accidental Blowjob Summary and Analysis

Just before she leaves for London, Wurtzel calls Rafe to tell him that she is leaving and won't be returning for awhile. Just before she leaves, she goes to a wedding and meets a man there that is actually from London and will be there when she arrives. She doesn't sleep well on the plane, but when she arrives, Barnaby picks her up and takes her back to his apartment. When he tries to come on to her, she immediately asks to leave to go back to Manuel's apartment. She then realizes that she has no contacts, friends, or friendly environment to turn to here since she knows absolutely nothing.

When she gets to Manuel's, she is treated with nearly perfect scorn by him and given a horrible room. Manuel starts to be mean to her and she realizes that he and Samantha did not have the best ending to their relationship. She is miserable and spends hours on the phone, calling people back home to beg to come back home. Her friend Samantha tells her to try to enjoy the beauty of the city since she is there. However, when she calls her mother, she immediately tells her to cut her losses and come home now. Since she is so adamant, Wurtzel backs down and refuses to go. When she returns back to Manuel's, she explains that she is crazy and tries to get him to understand her a little better. It seems to work because he promises to take her out to dinner next week with some friends.

She goes to take a shower and Manuel leaves with her crying on the floor. When he returns, she is in the same position, so he picks her up and kisses her. Nevertheless, the rain and constant dreariness in London sets in and Wurtzel finds living in London to be another horrible experience. She starts taking more and more Mellaril to dull the pain since supposedly one cannot overdose on the drug. She even gets food poisoning while in London, but drags out returning home to the States. Noah Biddle, her freshman-year boyfriend, convinces her to stay in London so they can go on a grand tour together. Since he has plenty of money and convinces her that it's the right thing to do, she stays.

As soon as he arrives, he's excited to be in London, but her mood is the exact opposite. She makes his life a near-perfect living hell, complaining about her nervous breakdowns while he just wants to go and visit Big Ben. Despite their touring and traveling, Wurtzel's mood never improves and she mopes the entire trip. When Biddle finally accuses her of being bored with life, she brightens and tells him she thinks he is finally catching on to her problems.





# Chapter 13, Woke Up This Morning Afraid I Was Going to Live

## Chapter 13, Woke Up This Morning Afraid I Was Going to Live Summary and Analysis

Wurtzel is walking to Stillman again after returning back to the States. She is supposed to pack clothes but since she returned from London ten days ago, she hasn't changed clothes, so why should she now? The inevitable pattern of clean, dirty, clean again, etc. tires Wurtzel.

Since she has come back from London, Wurtzel has stopped fighting her depression and has decided to accept her constant lows. In essence, she refuses to get better from now on. Dr. Sterling comes to see her and realizes that Mellaril is not working for her anymore. Before she left for London, she qualifies to take a new drug called Prozac, for which she appears to be the perfect candidate. She can also qualify for free medical help. Dr. Sterling lectures Wurtzel on the various forms of drugs so that Wurtzel can understand why she is taking Prozac over other drugs.

Wurtzel has been officially diagnosed as having atypical depression. It is not an easy diagnosis, but Sterling and other psychiatrists determine that Wurtzel is too consistently low to be bipolar, despite her occasional manic-like episodes (such as the intense production cycles she has while in Dallas). The sufferer's mood can also be somewhat lifted by outside surroundings, although the overall disease is long-term and chronic. Also, the atypically depressed are more likely to be the walking wounded, the functionally depressed. The unfortunate result of this is that without proper treatment, the atypical depressive will eventually commit suicide out of desperation for the years of sadness.

Now that she can look up her disease in the American Psychiatric Association manual, it makes her depression seem more manageable. She thought that she would get progressively worse year after year and now she feels like there is finally some hope.

However, antidepressants take anywhere from ten days to three weeks to work. Without her Mellaril, Wurtzel is in a kind of depression hell without any medication as she waits for the Prozac effects to kick in. She curls up in her typical fetal position and listens to sad music like Lou Reed over and over again. Dr. Saltenstahl comes to visit her at Stillman a few times a day and assures her she will be fine one day. She begs for shock therapy; anything to make her depression alleviate. Instead, her dose is increased from one pill to two.

She returns back to her apartment and is still waiting for the Prozac to work when she gets a call from Elaine, a colleague of her mother's. Elaine tells her that her mother was mugged and attacked while walking down the street. She finds out that her mother has



been badly hurt, puts down the phone and gets back into bed. She prays for adrenaline or for the Prozac to suddenly start working. She needs to rise up and take care of her mother.

She visits her mother at the Roosevelt Hospital and sees that she is in bad form. She cries and promises to stay by her mother and take care of her. Although her mother assures her that she is fine and can handle it by herself, they both realize when they arrive home that Wurtzel desperately needs to be there to help her recover. However, while at home, her mother tells her that something is wrong with her. She's depressed and that is the real problem in Wurtzel's life. Since her mother has never addressed her depression in such a straightforward manner before, Wurtzel is shocked — and then relieved. And when Wurtzel hears the words "You're depressed" coming from her mother's mouth, the diagnosis becomes a reality for her. Finally, Wurtzel thinks, she understands.



## Chapter 14, Think of Pretty Things

### Chapter 14, Think of Pretty Things Summary and Analysis

The suicide attempt startles everyone, especially Wurtzel. Suddenly, she starts feeling like the Prozac is kicking in, although she still feels like her philosophical convictions — that life sucks — are still within her. She feels badly for borrowing money from her mother for going to London and creates a plan. She will make enough money to pay her mother back and then kill herself. She keeps telling herself that she is not scared and that she is ready to die.

She goes to see Dr. Sterling on a Sunday and tells her that she wants to kill herself. She describes the act in implicit detail and even has the perfect soundtrack for the event. Dr. Sterling responds by suggesting a real psychiatric lock-up. This is a step worse than Stillman, and Wurtzel cannot bear the idea of it. Instead of causing a scene, she asks Dr. Sterling if she can go to the bathroom. She races upstairs and outside to freedom, eventually locking herself in the bathroom. She starts to swallow the pills rapidly, not needing any water to get them down. Her thoughts calm down and slow. She curls up in the fetal position and decides that she will never leave this position.

Then she hears noises and realizes that Dr. Sterling is pounding on her bathroom door, demanding that she come out. Finally, Wurtzel unlocks the door and Dr. Sterling takes her directly to the emergency room. As soon as they arrive, she starts to throw up violently. As she recovers, they put a policeman outside her door since suicide is an illegal act. She is moved from the hospital to Stillman to recover. Suddenly, she has a manic lust for life. She is worried that her mother will find out about her suicide attempt.

Wurtzel also realizes that she has fallen in love with her depression and that it is the part of her character that makes her worthwhile. She starts to slowly feel better and better about her life and then one day, something changes in her. She wakes up safe in her own skin and looking forward to the day. It happens just like that. She just wants to live an in-between, normal life.

# Characters

## Elizabeth Wurtzel

The protagonist and author of the autobiography, Wurtzel documents her life from the age of eleven until she finds the Prozac drug in her twenties. Wurtzel is eventually diagnosed with atypical depression, which is why she is a difficult case to diagnose and treat over the years. In addition, while she is experiencing many of her depressive episodes, mental health is still a hush-hush topic that is not open in society. By the end of the novel with the introduction of the Prozac drug, society and mental health depression as a whole will be a much more discussed topic.

In her childhood, Wurtzel lives with her mother and deals with the frustrations of having divorced parents who fight often over her disease. In addition, her father's reluctance and often refusal to pay her medical insurance bills makes her life more difficult and exacerbates her depression. Wurtzel is a gifted child who is highly talented and accomplishes a number of things before she turns eleven. However, she also attends her first therapy session at age eleven. Throughout high school and while attending college at Harvard, Wurtzel slips deeper and deeper into depression.

She acts erratically, and becoming obsessed with the idea that a man (typically her boyfriend at the time) will save her. When they inevitably disappoint her no matter how hard they try not to, she falls into a depression and sadness that far outweighs the true emotional importance of the relationship. She runs from location to location, looking for another escape and another excuse to get better. Through it all, she is on lithium, Mellaril and other drugs in an attempt to control her teetering emotional and psychological state.

Wurtzel is a highly likeable and relatable character, even if the reader does not also suffer from depression. Her account of high school and college life is reminiscent of a typical adolescent lifestyle with the vast exception of having an as-yet undiagnosed form of depression. Had her depression been diagnosed earlier, she might have enjoyed a more successful college experience, but since Prozac was a new drug on the market, its timing proved to be the real catalyst for restoring her life.

In the end, it is with the help of Dr. Sterling, a therapist that she meets while at Harvard, with whom she will make the most progress and eventually gain a more normalized lifestyle. She will take Prozac, the effects of which will play a profoundly positive role on her life.

## Sarah Wurtzel

Elizabeth's mother Sarah has an overwhelming influence and role in Wurtzel's life. After her parents divorce when she is two, Wurtzel lives with her mother who plays the main (and sometimes only) parenting role for the girl. She supports her financially,



emotionally and psychologically, but the relationship between mother and daughter changes to become more of a symbiotic "friendship" relationship over the years. Wurtzel is there to help her mother through her difficult times as much as Sarah tries to understand and comprehend her daughter's depression.

Wurtzel says that the relationship between Sarah and her father Donald contributes to her depression since they fight frequently over her depression and possible treatment options. When Wurtzel's father refuses to pay treatment, it is Sarah who continues to help support Wurtzel and get her to therapy and find the prescription drugs she might need. However, her overreactions and dramatic responses to both Wurtzel and her father are a part of why Wurtzel's depression remains a severe problem. At times, Wurtzel will make a decision she believes is the right one to help treat her depression and her mother does not give her the supportive talks that Wurtzel expects at the time.

Sarah does try her best as a parent to help quell Wurtzel's depression. Even Wurtzel admits that her approach to treat Wurtzel as if she were totally normal was a way for Wurtzel to reign it in and perhaps not lose her mind as much as she might have except for the fear that it would also send her own mother over the edge. In this way, Wurtzel has to balance her own problems against that of her mother; sometimes to a beneficial effect for her (in the case that she cannot wallow too much in her misery) and sometimes to a detrimental one (when she consoles her mother after she finds out she had sex with her very-recently-ex boyfriend).

When Sarah suffers an attack from a mugger, Wurtzel comes to be with her at the hospital and then take care of her once she returns to her apartment in the city. Despite the fact that Wurtzel can hardly take care of herself, she manages to effectively help her mother and causes a role reversal of sorts in their relationship. It is during this time that Sarah tells Wurtzel that she understands what her daughter is going through and that many of her actions are not her fault; it is the fault of the disease. Wurtzel isn't sure if her mother has said this before and she didn't hear it because she wasn't on Prozac or if this is a first-time revelation, but regardless, it is a huge breakthrough for Wurtzel. For the first time, a feeling of acceptance from her mother shines through and Wurtzel sees improvement afterward.

## **Donald Wurtzel**

Elizabeth's father, Donald plays a mostly negative role in his child's life. He divorces Sarah (Wurtzel's mother) when Wurtzel was two years old, but plays a minimal role in her parenting afterwards. He sleeps constantly during the first few parenting visits that she has with him and Wurtzel just assumes that fathers sleep often since she doesn't know otherwise.

As Wurtzel's depression increases, he starts to refuse to pay the medical bills despite the fact that insurance has paid for most of her treatment. When he disapproves of Dr. Isaac, for example, he outright refuses payment altogether, making what he believes is a stand against Sarah. What he doesn't realize is that his lack of financial participation



has a more negative role on Wurtzel herself, who has to spend extra time chasing down insurance forms or being denied treatment completely.

Donald doesn't pay much attention to Wurtzel until she becomes depressed. Then, her dark poetry and morbid musings become a source of interest to him. In order to escape life and responsibilities, however, he leaves and quits communicating with Wurtzel for nearly a year. She finally tracks him down through her grandmother while he is living with his new wife in Florida and speaks with him right before she goes to college .

She finally ends her relationship with him during college after a phone call. He tells her that he won't pay any more insurance because that's her mother's job, and Wurtzel finally tells him that she gives up on him and their relationship entirely.

## Rafe

Wurtzel's boyfriend in college, they meet through a mutual friend who believes they will bond because both have had similar family problems and Rafe is familiar with the effects of depression. Wurtzel calls him randomly years later and they start talking and eventually dating. She will become obsessed with Rafe, which he handles fairly well until it is time for winter break.

Since Wurtzel cannot stand to be apart from Rafe even for a moment and feels like he is too far away even while they are having sex, she does not react well when Rafe tells her that they will not see each other during the entire four weeks of winter break. To her, it seems like an eternity. Her mental illness causes her to overreact and obsess even more about him. She knows that she is cracking up and doesn't seem to be able to control it — or care. She calls him at his house at all hours of the evening despite the fact that his sister is also ill and she is driving his mother crazy.

Wurtzel will later see that Rafe almost enjoys her obsessive behavior and depression in their relationship and seems to nurture it in Wurtzel. Since he comes from a family where disasters and drama are commonplace, he is drawn to Wurtzel. She will compare his behavior to later boyfriends and realize that while other boyfriends didn't like her depressive actions and preferred her when she was feeling better, Rafe was the opposite, which wasn't healthy for her or their relationship.

## Dr. Sterling

Wurtzel's therapist at Harvard, Dr. Sterling is responsible for saving Wurtzel's life in a variety of ways. First, she is a huge source of support for Wurtzel during her darkest days. Also, she is a voice of reason during times when her mother or parents in general are not being supportive or acting as clear role models for her. She helps Wurtzel when she is in the infirmary at Harvard and also sees that for Wurtzel, continuing her schoolwork is an effective and strong way to allow Wurtzel to have a more normal lifestyle.



Dr. Sterling places Wurtzel on a range of medications, including Mellaril, which helps her to stabilize her emotions and calm down. Also, the drug is beneficial because she cannot theoretically overdose on it as it is an anti-psychotic. Dr. Sterling will be the one that will help Wurtzel discover the drug that changes her life — Prozac. Just after going on Prozac, Wurtzel has her first suicide attempt and Dr. Sterling is there to save her and also help to explain why she suddenly decided to take her life. She also explains to Wurtzel why her sudden rush and love of life after a suicide attempt is a normal response to her behavior. In all, Dr. Sterling is an incredibly powerful and positive influence in Wurtzel's life.

## **Samantha**

During her time at Harvard, Wurtzel rooms with a girl named Samantha, who also used to have depression problems. Since she was dating a man named Manuel at the time, Wurtzel and Samantha concoct a notion to have Wurtzel stay with him in London as a means of recovery for Wurtzel. The plan fails miserably, but Samantha does honestly try to help Wurtzel when she suffers extreme bouts of her depression.

## **Dr. Isaac**

Also referred to as the Crack Pusher by Wurtzel, Dr. Isaac is Wurtzel's first therapist and prescribes a number of medications for her, including lithium. Since it is in his best interest (according to Wurtzel) that she stay on the lithium, she ignores his warnings about quitting lithium cold turkey because she fears Graves' disease. She will later return to the prescription after her condition worsens considerably. Later, Wurtzel cannot rate how effective Dr. Isaac and his treatment plans were for her since she feels he spent most of his time dealing with her parents and their outbursts rather than treating the problem at hand, which is her depression.

## **Manuel**

The ex-boyfriend of Samantha, Wurtzel stays with him while in London. At first mean to her, Manuel eventually warms up and Wurtzel later says that she gave him an accidental blowjob as a result.

## **Wurtzel's sophomore advisor, Chris**

The only person against Wurtzel's trip to London is her sophomore advisor, Chris. He tells her that he has seen her condition and visited her in the hospital after her breakdown. He knows about her miscarriage and believes that she needs to stay at Harvard and really immerse herself in her studies.

## **Dr. Saltenstahl**

The first therapist that Wurtzel meets at Stillman, the Harvard infirmary. She really likes Dr. Saltenstahl, but since she is booked, she goes to see Dr. Sterling instead. Dr. Sterling is a recommendation from Dr. Saltenstahl.





# Objects/Places

## Summer Camp

Where Wurtzel is sent every summer, although she feels this is an unjustifiable punishment since she is a gifted child that can easily entertain herself. She experiences her first overdose at summer camp, although she is so young at twelve that the counselors write it off as an accident. After the fifth year of summer camp, Wurtzel spends the last year in the director's office every day, threatening overdoses and other problems unless she is sent home.

Ultimately, Wurtzel blames her deterioration on summer camp. She feels that she was sent away for no reason.

## Mellaril

The first drug that helps Wurtzel relax and lowers her highly emotional responses to everything. She will take this antipsychotic drug three times a day.

## Harvard

Wurtzel attends Harvard and her depression and detrimental actions worsen. It is also at Harvard where she meets Dr. Sterling, who has a great deal of positive support for Wurtzel.

## Stillman

The institutional infirmary where Wurtzel spends time recovering after her depressive episodes

## Prozac

The namesake of the book, Prozac is a miracle drug that ultimately helps Wurtzel restore her normal daily lifestyle before the depression became out of control.

## Dallas

Wurtzel takes a break from Harvard and writes for a paper in Dallas. Here, she has another breakdown and self-medicates by drinking too much alcohol, ultimately missing the birthday party her mother flies from New York to throw for her.



## **Atarax**

The drug for hay fever that Wurtzel uses as her drug of choice for her first overdose at age twelve while at summer camp.

## **London**

Another location that Wurtzel runs to in an effort to fight her depression, she visits London and stays with the ex-boyfriend of her roommate at Cambridge. The trip is a total disaster.

## **California**

In order to get over Rafe and stay out of her depressing apartment and away from her suicidal thoughts, Wurtzel visits her cousin in California. All of the sun helps Wurtzel and makes her feel better about her situation and helps her get better after Rafe.

## **Schoolwork**

Oftentimes, one of the anchors that leads Wurtzel back from her depression and into normal life again will be reading and her devotion to her schoolwork, which shows her desire to have a normal, balanced life.



# Themes

## Depression

The main focus of the book and the reason behind Wurtzel's behavior, depression and its many forms takes center stage throughout the novel. At times, it is as if Wurtzel is only a puppet and her actions are not her own simply because of the influence of her depressive disease.

One of the biggest hurdles for Wurtzel with her mental illness, especially in her adolescent years, is a misunderstanding of exactly what she is dealing with. Depression is not a widely talked about topic during her childhood as it is today (a fact she attributes largely to the impact and help of Prozac to millions). For this reason, her depression is seen as a problem that she needs to "just fix." There are numerous people in her life, including her mother, that treat Wurtzel's sickness as if this were behaviors that she could simply "fix" as if it were a mere broken part on a car. Other friends will tell her that happiness is a choice and she needs to go after it. To a child who is gifted and highly intelligent, treating her illness as if she is doing something wrong and not working hard enough to fix the problem has a detrimental impact on her psyche.

Another hurdle for Wurtzel with her mental illness is that her particular form does not fit the usual rules and symptoms known about depression at the time. She is fine enough to not be institutionalized but not normal enough to function well in the outside world. For this reason, she remains in a kind of depressive limbo where nobody can quite determine what to do with her. Of course, this ambiguity leads to self-medication of legal, prescribed substances like taking too many Mellaril, but it also encourages illegal drug use like cocaine, Ecstasy and alcohol in excessive amounts. The escape that these drugs give her are a temporary patch to the pain that she feels each day.

When Wurtzel is finally diagnosed as having atypical depression, she feels relief. Her symptoms can be claimed and analyzed. Also, Prozac becomes available and its effects on her are extremely positive (despite the last-ditch suicide attempt). She is able to target her depression and finally release it from her life. Since it becomes part of her character and personality, this is at first a difficult task, but over the course of a few days, Wurtzel literally wakes up and feels safe in her own skin again.

## Self-Medication

Throughout her adolescence, Wurtzel is plagued with depression. She is not diagnosed with a particular type of depression, however, and her lack of clarity on the specific diagnosis causes her a lot of uncertainty.

One of the ways that Wurtzel is able to control her depression, her moods and her overall unhappiness is through self-medication. Although she often does not actively seek a solution to self-medicate her depression, she will use a variety of methods to



help alleviate her unhappiness. For example, she will often move from one location to another in order to "kick" the problem of her depression. In another town, she'll tell herself, things will be better. Her depression will go away because she will start a new life far away from the complications and obsessions of the current one. What she does not recognize is that the complications surrounding her current environment have all been caused by her and a location change will not impact her life at all; in order to change things, she herself must change. However, Wurtzel doesn't recognize this and she travels to Harvard, Dallas, California and even London in an attempt to assuage the intense sadness and depression she constantly feels. At first, arriving in a new location helps her (later, she will find out that this is a symptom of atypical depression, which is her diagnosis), but after the novelty wears off, she is left with the same feelings of depression and restraint.

In addition to location changes, Wurtzel also self-medicates herself using the popular forms of prescription pills, illegal drugs and alcohol. While she is living in Dallas, it is not uncommon for her to drink heavily throughout the week. In fact, she misses her own birthday party thrown by her mother due to her excessive drinking. When she first comes to Harvard, she takes so many Ecstasy pills that she and her friends are known for their drug use. She takes cocaine when she throws a party at her own house because she cannot seem to get up to greet her guests. When she is in London and thoroughly depressed, she pops too many Mellaril daily in an attempt to lessen the depressive thoughts. Excessive consumption is yet another way for Wurtzel to try to stop her depression when it does little more than cover up the problem and allow the real disease to continue to fester unchecked.

## Suicide

One of the most ironic parts about Wurtzel's depression and her mental illness is her lack of desperation. Wurtzel is technically a functioning depressive. She is miserable, highly emotional and intense, yet she is not suicidal. Since she does not attempt a suicide, she cannot be institutionalized and have her insurance pay for it. In other words, she's not crazy enough because she's not desperate enough to want to kill herself.

Throughout her adolescence, Wurtzel notes how ironic it is that she is depressed, but not depressed enough for the insurance companies. She does not feel suicidal for most of her depression, but as the symptoms increase and the prescription pills lose their effectiveness, the possibility for suicide increases. Wurtzel is eventually diagnosed as an atypical depressive, which means that she is one of the "walking wounded." She is able to function in life, but does so through a thick cloud of depression.

Ironically, it is as Wurtzel is finally getting better that she decides to take her own life. After her mother is mugged and hurt badly, she feels guilt for taking money to go on the disastrous London trip and decides that she will pay her mother back and then commit suicide. She visits her therapist and explicitly describes in detail how everything will occur. Her therapist wisely suggests that Wurtzel be put in a lock-down situation. Finally,



Wurtzel is desperate and mad enough to have warranted institutionalized, but Wurtzel flips out. She runs away and overdoses on pills. Her depression has finally reached its nadir and she is getting recognized for its severity and she runs away.

Her therapist finds her and saves her, but Wurtzel's suicide attempt is the final straw. Afterward, she will feel better and the Prozac medication will take hold. She reaches the point of committing suicide but finds her way back to climb out of the depressing darkness.

# Style

## Perspective

The perspective of the novel is thoroughly from the point of view of Wurtzel. The reader never receives any other commentary from other individuals throughout the book. For this reason, the reader relates highly to Wurtzel and feels as though they are hearing a story from the point of view of a friend, rather than just an author writing a book. The reader relates to her emotions and events. Since she clearly defines her emotions and why she reacts the way she does (or when she admits that she realizes that she's crazy but cannot control her actions), the novel has more authenticity and clarity.

The point of view exclusively from Wurtzel is important, since for most of the novel she is misunderstood by her friends and family, especially her mother. Her depression is not understood by anyone, including herself and her therapists. This confusion is especially relevant throughout Wurtzel's depictions of events since she never lets on that a true diagnosis of her depression will ever be found, which leads to the confusion and sense of desperation that is evident throughout the novel.

It would be helpful to hear another important character's perspective during these same events. Since the reader is so thoroughly immersed in Wurtzel's world, another perspective would most likely break up the train of emotion and drama that Wurtzel provides by keeping the perspective solely in her world. However, especially from her friends, Dr. Sterling or her mother, another perspective would help to clarify Wurtzel's actions a little more.

## Tone

The tone of the book is basically straightforward throughout the book. Even during her most explosive times, Wurtzel remains steady with the reader, not allowing the emotional events to change her writing style. She does not throw in superfluous adjectives or adverbs in order to heighten the intensity of the experience; she just lets the unusual events speak for themselves. Her tone is basically consistent throughout, but without warning, the book will take an unexpected twist. The text will move from standard script to italicized writing to indicate a change. In this way, the reader is suddenly taken on a side trip with Wurtzel. Although another perspective is not available, these italicized sections provide additional information and insight into Wurtzel's world.

Oftentimes, these italicized departures are more emotional and reflective pieces of Wurtzel's mind, giving the reader a more complete view of what she thought about the event at the time. She will give private thoughts about an event or lead the reader down a digression that allows us to hear her thoughts on a specific topic, such as divorce and



children. In this way, the reader enjoys a kind of private conversation, as if they are reading Wurtzel's diary during the time that these events are taking place.

## Structure

The structure of the novel is very basic. There is a prologue and an epilogue with fourteen chapters in between. There is also an afterword to the epilogue which gives updates on Wurtzel's opinions on Prozac and the possible over-medication of people in the United States. While the advance of Prozac has undoubtedly helped millions of people like herself live a more normal life, there are other individuals who use the drug as a crutch to avoid other issues in her life. However, before Wurtzel starts to take Prozac, her life is a series of depressive episodes accompanied by some light, hopeful moments when she starts to date someone new or moves to a new location.

There are no subplots in the novel and the only time the book deviates from its strict linear depiction of Wurtzel's life is through the italicized moments of her writing. Even then, the reader is not lead well off into the future or too far into the past, but instead hears Wurtzel's private, reflective thoughts on a topic. In this way, the reader feels like they are simultaneously reading Wurtzel's diary and reading an autobiography at the same time. For this reason, the structure of the novel plays well into the roller coaster that is Wurtzel's life.



## Quotes

"Everything's plastic, we're all going to die sooner or later, so what does it matter. That was my motto." p. 12

"And I can't believe, looking at myself in the mirror, seeing what to all eyes must appear to be a young and healthy twenty-five-year-old with flushed skin and visible biceps — I can't believe anyone in his right mind would deny that these are just too damn many pills." p. 19

"And the scariest part is that if you ask anyone in the throes of depression how he got there, to pin down the turning point, he'll never know. There is a classic moment in *The Sun Also Rises* when someone asks Mike Campbell how he went bankrupt, and all he can say in response is, "Gradually and then suddenly." When someone asks how I lost my mind, that is all I can say too." p. 22

"For years, my mom tugged toward trying to give me a solid, middle-class, traditional upbringing, while my father would tell me that I should just be an artist or a poet or live off the land, or some such thing." p. 27

"But then I never had to worry about a crash landing because I never even took off." p. 41

"And for the first time, I really understood just how much it must have killed my mother to have him interfere with her parenting." p. 90

"Why do I spend so much time looking out my dorm room window at Harvard Yard, watching the boys with their jeans slung low on their hips, playing hackysack, kicking little beanbags around on the sides of their Top-Siders like everything is fine, not acting like they're doomed at all?" p. 108

"And what I thought, every time I thought about my father, every time his name came up, was quite simply: I WANT TO KILL YOU. I wanted to be more mature, more reasonable, I wanted to have a big, fat, forgiving heart that could contain all this rage and still find room for kind, beneficent love, but I didn't have it in me. I just didn't." p. 138

"I looked behind me and saw a trail of blood, left in dots and splatters on the floor and smears on the wall like a Jackson Pollock painting." p. 187

"Only one person bothers to point out the madness of this plan. My sophomore year advisor, who is also the head of my department, tells me I'm making a big mistake." p. 264

...Noah says to me, "How can you be tired of London? Samuel Johnson said that anyone who is bored with London is bored with life." "Noah," I answer, "I think you're finally catching on." p. 287



"And then something just kind of changed in me. Over the next few days, I became all right, safe in my own skin. It happened just like that." p. 329



## Topics for Discussion

Before she receives Prozac, name some of the ways that Wurtzel self-medicates. Give examples of her medication through prescriptions as well as her own forms of self-medication.

Discuss how Wurtzel uses either men or different locations against her depression.

What role does her father play on her depression and mental illness?

What role does her parent's divorce play on her mental illness?

Why does Wurtzel have such a tough time with medical insurance? Discuss how she is in a type of mental illness limbo because she is desperate but not suicidal, and the impact that has on her insurance coverage and treatment options.

What type of depression is Wurtzel finally diagnosed with and what are its symptoms? Does this help her to explain her behavior over the years and if so, how?

Discuss Wurtzel's relationship with her mother, especially towards the end of the novel. Do you think her mother's realization of Wurtzel's depression is real or do you think it is because, thanks to Prozac, Wurtzel can finally hear it for the first time?