

Sophie & Carter Study Guide

Sophie & Carter by Chelsea Fine

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Contents

[Sophie & Carter Study Guide..... 1](#)

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

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

[Chapters 1-4..... 4](#)

[Chapters 5-8..... 6](#)

[Chapters 9-12..... 8](#)

[Chapters 13-18..... 9](#)

[Chapters 19-23..... 10](#)

[Characters..... 11](#)

[Objects/Places..... 14](#)

[Themes..... 16](#)

[Style..... 18](#)

[Quotes..... 20](#)

[Topics for Discussion..... 21](#)



Plot Summary

Sophie and Carter is a novel by new writer Chelsea Fine. Sophie is a few weeks from high school graduation, but she is not the typical teenager. Sophie has three younger siblings whom she has been raising in her mother's absence. Carter, her next door neighbor, is the only one who knows the truth. At school, Sophie and Carter pretend they barely know each other, but at night each is the other's only salvation. *Sophie and Carter* is a touching love story about a new brand of teenager, the ones who are forced to take on more responsibility than any teenager should have to shoulder.

Sophie runs into Carter in the hallway and is pleased to see him, but their flirtation appears to go only skin deep. Later, as Carter follows Sophie home he thinks of how empty his day would be without these little contacts with Sophie. School is a place where they can be normal, albeit a strange sort of normal. At home, however, everything changes. Sophie takes on the burden of raising her three younger siblings alone, while Carter must care for his beaten down and brain damaged mother.

Sophie helps her siblings with their homework, catching glimpses of Carter through their kitchen windows as he helps his mother deal with the hallucinations brought on by too much alcohol and mental illness. At the same time, Carter catches glimpses of Sophie as she tries to keep the chaos of three growing kids under control. It is only after the kids are in bed and Carter's mother is passed out that they are able to find a little comfort in each other as they sit on the porch swing and watch the neighborhood settle down for the night.

Sophie becomes jealous when a girl Carter once dated asks her about him. Later, Sophie and Carter argue when he accuses her of dating the wrong kind of boy. The angst brings up memories for both of them, Sophie remembering instances in which she saw Carter's long gone father beating him and Carter remembering a day when Sophie's mother placed her daughter in danger by bringing home her unsavory clientele.

Carter overhears Sophie telling his mother how difficult it is for her son to love anyone. Carter is touched by Sophie's words and surprises them both by admitting to his feelings for Sophie. Later, Sophie sneaks into Carter's room and confirms what he has always known, that she loves him too. A few days later, Carter's mother is taken away by the state when she accidentally lights the house on fire. A short time after that Sophie and Carter graduate from high school. Together, they decide it is time to change their lives, to make a new start. Carter packs up Sophie and her siblings, taking them away from the life they have led to make a new life together.



Chapters 1-4

Chapters 1-4 Summary

In Chapter 1, Sophie is late for English, a class she dislikes and is often late for. Sophie sees Carter in the hallway and stops him, flirting with him in an easy, relaxed way. Sophie and Carter have known each other a long time because their houses are next to one another. Under the shallowness of their flirtation Sophie feels the connection that they share only outside the school walls. Sophie is in love with Carter, but he is the last person she will admit this to, afraid of ruining their special connection.

In Chapter 2, Carter walks home behind Sophie as he has always done. They never walk together, but when Sophie is not there he feels abandoned. Sometimes Sophie will drop a note on the sidewalk for Carter. Today the note is covered in smiley faces and tells him to stop looking at her butt. It makes Carter smile because he knows she is trying to bring him a small amount of happiness before he has to go home and face his mother.

In Chapter 3, Sophie's mother is a prostitute who often leaves the home for weeks at a time. It used to be that she would come home after a few days, but recently she has not returned for months. Sophie will usually wait until she and her three siblings are desperate for money before tracking down her mother to ask for money. That time is coming quickly as the rent is due and the kids need some clothes. Sophie puts it off however, because it is an unpleasant duty. Instead, Sophie works on her own homework until the kids come home. Then Sophie becomes the mother, preparing a snack and pushing the kids to do their own homework, all the while counting the moments until she and Carter will sit alone on the front porch swing.

In Chapter 4, Carter's mother is hallucinating that there are bugs on her skin. Carter calms her down by spraying what she thinks is bug spray on her arms, but is really just water. When she is calm, Carter returns to the kitchen and looks through the window, catching sight of Sophie directing the children in their homework. Carter can see the kitchen table is unsteady, causing one of the kids to spill a glass of water.

Chapters 1-4 Analysis

In these first chapters of the book, the author introduces the main characters and the conflict that will drive the plot. Sophie and Carter are both children whose parents have let them down and left them with more responsibility than a child should have to take on. Sophie's mother is a prostitute who is addicted to drugs, leaving the family while she pursues her employment and her addiction. While Sophie is glad not to have the dangers of her mother's lifestyle in the home around the children, she is unhappy to shoulder the responsibilities without the benefit of an independent income. Sophie is forced to contact the unsavory people in her mother's life just to get money for basic



needs like rent, food, and clothing. It is an unhappy situation and the only relief Sophie gets from it is the nightly visits from Carter, her best friend and next door neighbor.

As Sophie struggles to raise her younger siblings, Carter has a mother who has been brain damaged and left broken by an abusive spouse. Carter feels he must care for his mother, although he has been told she should be in a hospital, because he was unable to fully protect her from his father. Carter struggles to save his mother from herself, but this struggle is never ending. Both Carter and Sophie are in terrible situations that should not have come to pass. While they try to be normal teenagers at school, refusing to allow anyone to know about the depth of their dependence on one another for survival, they continue to shoulder their burdens in silence in fear of losing the things that matter most to them.



Chapters 5-8

Chapters 5-8 Summary

In Chapter 5, Sophie puts the kids to bed and then goes out to sit on the porch swing. Carter joins her after a few minutes, bringing with him a bag of groceries for Sophie and the Littles. Sophie is grateful, but she knows showing too much gratefulness will only embarrass Carter, so she does not say what is on her mind. Instead, Sophie looks at the long scar on Carter's arm and thinks of the torture he suffered at his own father's hands. In a moment of vulnerability, Sophie lays her hand on Carter's even though they never touch during these moments alone. Carter responds by holding her hand.

In Chapter 6, as Carter sits holding Sophie's hand, he remembers a night several years ago when one of her mother's customers tried to hurt Sophie. He recalls how he had wanted to rush over there and protect her even though he was only ten at the time. Carter has always felt protective toward Sophie.

In Chapter 7, the next morning is chaos as Sophie tries to get the kids up and ready for school. Carter comes in and Sophie gives him a mug of coffee. Sophie and kids do not drink coffee, but they make some every morning for Carter who does not have a coffee machine because of the danger it poses to his mother. As Carter sits down to drink his coffee, he shoves something under a leg of the table to keep it steady.

At school, Sophie does not see Carter but this is normal. Instead, a girl Carter once dated, Whitney, comes to Sophie to ask about him. Sophie dislikes Whitney, but her relationship with Carter only makes her hate Whitney more. As Whitney talks about Carter, Sophie finds herself remembering the day two years ago when Carter defended his mother from his father, beating his father despite the horrible knife wound Carter's father inflicted him with along the length of his arm. Sophie thinks no one but she knows Carter.

In Chapter 8, during class, one of Carter's friends asks him about Sophie, mentioning her attractive looks and her past relationship with one of the more popular boys. Carter is annoyed by his friend's assessment of Sophie and his jealousy of her relationship with the other boy. Carter thinks of all the times he came to Sophie's aid when her mother first began to disappear for days on end. Carter thinks no one knows Sophie like he does.

Chapters 5-8 Analysis

In these chapters, the author introduces backstory to her readers through the memories of Sophie and Carter. The reader soon learns how Sophie was once nearly victimized by one of her mother's clients and how Carter beat his father, forcing him to finally leave the home after years of brutal abuse. The reader sees how bad things have been for both children, how they both had to defend themselves from the adults in their lives



despite their youth. The reader can also see from these stories how each has never had anyone to share their burden with except one another.

The reader is also given insight into the complicated emotions both Sophie and Carter feel for one another. Sophie is deeply in love with Carter and this becomes clear when she shows the reader her deep jealousy at the knowledge that Carter has been with several girls at school. Even though Carter has a policy of never creating a committed relationship with any of these girls, Sophie is still jealous of the kisses he shares with these other girls. At the same time, Carter is clearly unhappy with a relationship Sophie had some time before with a boy who did not know her circumstances and therefore could not offer her support. Carter is also jealous, but his feelings are muddied by his need to protect Sophie from the world, an instinct that has also caused him to hold onto to his mother, placing himself in the impossible position of being caretaker to a mentally ill woman.



Chapters 9-12

Chapters 9-12 Summary

In Chapter 9, Sophie is consumed by jealousy all day, causing the Littles to go to bed without fuss to prevent her wrath. On the porch swing, Sophie reminisces with Carter, remembering picnics they once took in the dark and spoke of dreams to move to Hollywood. Carter joins in, talking about trips to the abandoned mines after they got their driver's licenses.

In Chapter 10, Sophie tells Carter about Whitney and he detects something in her voice. Carter thinks about his conversation with his friend that day and tells her that she deserves someone better than the popular boy she once dated. They begin to argue and Carter tells Sophie she needs someone who cares about her and is willing to take care of her. Sophie bristles at first, but then tells Carter he deserves the same.

In Chapter 11, desperate for money, Sophie finally makes a call to try to find her mother. Sophie learns that her mother has quit the streets and is working as an exotic dancer. Sophie goes to Carter and asks him to drive her to the club where her mother works. While he dresses, Sophie sits with his mother in the living room. When Carter's mother begins to get agitated, Sophie brushes her hair and talks to her about Carter. Sophie tells Carter's mother that Carter is a good man and that he loves intensely. As she talks, Sophie realizes that Carter loves her.

In Chapter 12, Carter overhears Sophie talking about him with his mother. Carter wants to tell Sophie he loves her, but he cannot find the right words. Instead, they drive into town in silence. Carter assures Sophie that he is there for her before they head into the club.

Chapters 9-12 Analysis

In these chapters, Carter and Sophie come closer to realizing their true feelings for one another. They criticize one another for their choices in mates, but in truth they are expressing their jealousy toward one another. Then, as Sophie talks about Carter, she realizes he has loved her all along and this makes her happy even though neither of them are ready to say the words aloud.

Sophie finds herself in a financial bind, so she calls her mother's manager and learns that she has quit one job to take another. Sophie needs money and she needs to see her mother, but her mother's lifestyle places her in a dangerous situation. For this reason, Sophie turns once again to Carter who has been her protector since they were small children. This adds a little tension to the plot as the reader wonders what might happen to two young people as they enter an adult world.



Chapters 13-18

Chapters 13-18 Summary

In Chapter 13, Sophie and Carter go into the club and ask the bartender about Sophie's mother. The man immediately begins suggesting that Sophie join her mother in exotic dance. Carter tries to protect Sophie, but she stands up for herself. Finally they learn where they can find Sophie's mother. Sophie's mother is a drug user and is clearly using something at the moment. Sophie's mother cannot remember how many children she has. Sophie asks for money and her mother hands her three thousand dollars in cash. Sophie and Carter leave a few minutes later and Carter drives not to their homes, but to the mines. This makes Sophie cry because of his thoughtfulness.

In Chapter 14, Carter takes Sophie to the mines and just sits with her in an attempt to cheer her up.

In Chapter 15, Sophie takes coffee over to Carter because he was unable to come to her house due to his mother's hallucinations. While Carter drinks his coffee, Sophie sits with his mother and brushes her hair again.

In Chapter 16, Carter blurts out that he loves Sophie when she joins him in the kitchen. Sophie admits she knows, then they are interrupted by his mother.

In Chapter 17, Sophie is excited that Carter admitted his love. Sophie cannot wait until it is time for Carter to come sit on the swing with her, but is disappointed when he calls to say he cannot make it. Sophie lies in bed that night and watches through her window into Carter's. When he comes to bed and switches out the light, Sophie decides to sneak into his bedroom. Sophie tells Carter that she loves him too.

In Chapter 18, as they lie in bed together, Sophie kisses all of Carter's scars.

Chapters 13-18 Analysis

In these chapters, the author shows the reader how easy it would be for Sophie to go down the same road her mother went. Sophie is in a position where she needs a great deal of money, but does not have the education, the experience, or the means to get it. It would be so easy for Sophie to become what her mother is, but Sophie continues to resist it despite all her hardships. The reader can see that if not for Carter, Sophie might be much worse off than she is. This is not because of Carter's financial support, but his emotional support, showing Sophie how she is better than this world.

Carter and Sophie finally admit to one another their love. It is touching and it seems to change things for them. Together they are much stronger than they ever were apart. This gives the plot some hope, showing the reader that this couple might survive their hardships as long as they have each other.



Chapters 19-23

Chapters 19-23 Summary

In Chapter 19, on graduation day, Sophie notices all the kids in her class who have proud parents sitting in the audience. No one has come to see Sophie graduate except for Carter, who is also graduating without family in the audience. After the ceremony, they go off together instead of celebrating with their friends.

In Chapter 20, when they reach their houses, Carter shows Sophie the picnic he has set up for them under a tree in their mutual backyards.

In Chapter 21, Sophie tries to draw Carter out after a fire in his house.

In Chapter 22, Carter's mother started a fire in their kitchen while he was with Sophie and the Littles at a school carnival. The police and social services took his mother away, committing her to a hospital. Carter has tried to prevent this, but it was inevitable. Now Carter feels free to start over somewhere else.

In Chapter 23, Sophie, Carter, and the Littles pack up Carter's truck and leave their homes to make a new start somewhere else.

Chapters 19-23 Analysis

Sophie and Carter graduate from high school; a situation that allows Sophie the freedom to get a job and end her dependence on her mother. At the same time, Carter's mother is finally admitted into a hospital, freeing him as well. As Sophie and Carter's romance grows, they depend on one another even more. This allows them to feel free to start a new life together, with Sophie's siblings, in a new place. This leaves the reader with the hope that these children will survive without the interference of the adults who let them down so completely.



Characters

Sophie

Sophie is a high school senior. Sophie is also the eldest of four children. Sophie's mother is a prostitute who has become addicted to drugs in the last few years. For this reason, Sophie's mother is rarely around, leaving Sophie to care for her young siblings whom she refers to as the Littles. This is a huge burden for Sophie that has become easier in recent months because she is now eighteen and can act as guardian to the children at the schools and with doctors. However, Sophie remains dependent on her mother for money because she cannot work until she finishes high school.

Sophie has struggled with her life, but she is aware that she is not the only one suffering. Sophie has watched since she was a small child her neighbor, Carter, take beatings from his cruel father. Carter's father has left the family, but his frequent beatings of Carter's father have left his mother mentally ill, forcing Carter to care for her as if she were a small child. Due to their similar hardships, Sophie and Carter often turn to one another for comfort, often spending the evenings on Sophie's porch swing at the end of difficult days.

Carter

Carter is an only child. Carter's father was a cruel man who beat him and his mother violently throughout Carter's childhood. Carter often tried to deflect his father's attention from his mother to him, taking some of the worst beatings. However, Carter's father did beat his mother and left her with mental difficulties that are exacerbated by her addiction to alcohol. Carter remembers the kind woman his mother once was and tries to care for her instead of allowing the social workers to put her in a mental institute.

Carter finds it difficult to connect to other people and for this reason is not truly close to anyone but Sophie despite a long dating history. Carter feels a need to protect Sophie, however, and therefore has let her into his life. In the end, Carter admits his feelings for Sophie and they band together, going off to make a new start together in which they do not need to rely on anyone, specifically the adults who have so desperately let them down.

The Littles

The Littles are Sophie's younger siblings. Michael, fourteen, is the closest in age to Sophie and takes on the role of man of the house despite Sophie's struggles to allow him to have something of a normal childhood. Abram is twelve and the wild one of the bunch. Chloe is the baby at six. Sophie worries most about Chloe because of the special care required of such a young child. However, now that Chloe is in kindergarten, the weight of childcare has been removed from Sophie's shoulders.



Carter's Mother

Carter's mother was once a kind, caring woman. However, after years of abuse at the hands of her husband, Carter's mother is mentally unwell. Carter's mother often has hallucinations and suffers from severe paranoia, causing her to be a danger to herself. Not only this, but Carter's mother is also an alcoholic whose mental issues become more intense when she drinks. Carter remembers his mother as the kind woman who once read to him and showed him great compassion, therefore he does all he can to keep her in the home. Unfortunately, his mother is a danger to herself and is eventually admitted to a hospital.

Sophie's Mother

Sophie's mother is a prostitute who has become addicted to illegal drugs in recent years. Sophie's mother disappears for months at a time and finally has stopped coming back at all. When Sophie goes to see her to get money, her mother cannot even remember how many children she has or how old they are. This shows how deeply her addiction has impacted her mental capacity. In the end, Sophie has a choice between joining her mother in her profession or rise above it. With Carter's help, Sophie chooses to rise above.

Carter's Father

Carter's father was a dark, violent man who often beat his son badly. Sophie was witness to some of these beatings, including the final fight between father and son in which Carter's father cut his arm badly, but Carter gave back as good as he got, finally forcing his father out of the house. Carter never saw his father again after that fateful night; something he is grateful for.

Whitney

Whitney is one of many girls Carter has dated in the past. Although Carter tells all his dates that he cannot make a commitment to anyone, Whitney is crazy about Carter and hopes that they will go out again. Whitney drives Sophie crazy by asking questions about Carter and passing along lies Carter has told her to hide the truth about his many scars, especially the long scar along his arm. When Sophie tells Carter about Whitney's questions, she inadvertently reveals her own jealousy.

TJ

TJ is a friend of Carter. TJ finds Sophie attractive and asks Carter about her, causing Carter to become annoyed by TJ's comments. Carter and Sophie do not let people at school know how close they really are, but people still talk to them about one another



because they know they are neighbors. Carter finds himself forced to pretend he does not notice Sophie's many attributes and that he does not care about her, but in truth he is jealous when TJ admires her and talks about her relationship with Evan Walters.

Evan Walters

Evan Walters is a popular boy at school that Sophie once dated. Sophie really liked Evan, but he was a shallow person and she felt she could not share with him the truth about her home life. For this reason, Sophie eventually broke up with Evan. After speaking to TJ, Carter confronts Sophie about Evan and insists that she needs someone in her life who can help take care of her.

Pete

Pete is an associate of Sophie's mother whom Sophie is often forced to call in order to find her mother. Pete is part of a world that is very adult and unsavory, leaving Sophie feeling dirty each time she speaks to him. This feeling of unpleasantness is increased whenever Pete suggests that Sophie join her mother's profession.



Objects/Places

Notes

Sophie often drops funny notes for Carter on their walk home from school to make him laugh.

Groceries

Carter brings Sophie groceries early in the novel because he can see she and her siblings need more food.

Bugs and Aliens

Carter's mother often sees bugs or aliens when she is in the grip of her hallucinations.

Hairbrush

Sophie uses a hairbrush to comb out the hair of Carter's mother in order to calm her down during her episodes of paranoia and hallucinations.

Table

Sophie's kitchen table is where she and the kids all do their homework and have their meals. Carter fixes the table when he sees through the window that it is unbalanced.

Coffee Maker

Sophie has a coffee maker she uses to make Carter a cup of coffee each morning because it is too dangerous for him to have one around his mother.

Windows

Carter and Sophie each study one another's lives through the windows of their homes.

Porch Swing

Sophie and Carter meet on Sophie's porch swing every day when the Littles are in bed.



Tree

Sophie and Carter used to have picnics in the dark under a tree that sits between their two yards.

Penrose Street

Sophie and Carter live in neighboring houses on Penrose Street.

Old Mine

Carter and Sophie would go out to the old mines after they both got their driver's license in order to hang out and smoke.

Nightclub

Sophie is forced to visit her mother in a nightclub in order to get money for rent, food, and clothing for her siblings.

Themes

Responsibility

Sophie and Carter are two teenagers who, due to circumstances beyond their control, are forced to take on responsibility that should be taken by an adult, not a child. Sophie is forced to care for her three younger siblings because her mother is a drug addict who rarely comes home. Sophie does not want her family separated, therefore she takes on the burden of raising three children even though she herself is still a teenager. Added to Sophie's burden is the need to contact her mother from time to time in order to get money. This causes Sophie to have to dive into the dark world of prostitution in which her mother lives.

Carter had a father who was violent and abusive toward him and his mother. Even as a small child Carter tried to protect his mother, attempting to draw his father's anger toward him instead of her. This led to many beatings, but did not save his mother from so many fierce beatings that she suffered brain damage along with the depression that caused her to become an alcoholic. Carter remembers the woman his mother once was and this causes him to do all he can to continue protecting her, attempting to care for her so that she will not have to spend the rest of her life in a mental institute. This sense of responsibility both on Sophie and Carter's part makes responsibility a theme of the novel.

Dysfunctional Families

In the definition of family, there is the implication that there will be a mother and father who will care for any children they bring into the world. However, in Sophie's case, the father was never present. In fact, Sophie suspects that she and her siblings all have different fathers. At the same time, Sophie's mother has been an unreliable parent and has recently failed to come home at all for months on end. For this reason, Sophie becomes the head of the family, a child herself. The family unit continues to work, but can be defined as dysfunctional because of the lack of an adult parent.

Carter's family is basically dysfunctional as well. Where Carter's mother should have supported him and protected him from danger, Carter was forced into a situation in which he had to protect his mother from his father's violent temper. In the absence of a father, after Carter's father left the home, Carter has been placed into the parental role. Carter must care for his mother, protect her from herself and prevent the social workers from taking her away. Carter's family has turned upside down, making dysfunctional families a theme of the novel.



Friendship and Love

The most important theme of the novel is friendship and love. For Sophie and Carter, a normal childhood has become a distant dream. Instead, Sophie and Carter go to school and play the role of carefree teenager when in reality they have a great deal of responsibility on their shoulders each time they return to their homes. For Sophie and Carter, the future is a very bleak place with few opportunities open to them. Sophie can dream only of getting a job so that she will not be dependent on her mother for the means to care for her siblings. For Carter, his mother's situation keeps him glued to her side so much of the day that he does not even have dreams of his future. For each of these children, it seems they are only one mistake from being forced into the same addictions and darkness their parents fell victim to.

All though Sophie and Carter do not have all the opportunities open to them that their schoolmates have, they do not fall into the same darkness that their parents did. Sophie has Carter to look forward to, his company and his common story of pain. Carter too has Sophie to lean on, to tell his darkest fear to and not worry about her judging him. Carter and Sophie have their friendship, a spark of hope, and soon discover that they have love as well. Despite the bleakness of Sophie and Carter's situation, the story ends on a note of hope because they have each other and they can make a new start together. With each other's help they will survive. This makes friendship and love the most important theme of the novel.



Style

Point of View

This novel is told in the first person point of view. The author uses a new style of first person narration in telling her story through the eyes of two main characters, Sophie and Carter. The author titles each chapter by the name of the character who will be telling their story in that chapter, making it clear to the reader who is speaking. In this way, the author is able to show the thoughts and emotions of the characters, often repeating events or dialogue in order to show both characters' reaction to the event or dialogue.

The point of view of this novel works well because it establishes an instantly close relationship between reader and characters. The point of view is utilized in such a way that the reader is well aware of the thoughts and emotions of both the main characters, learning from each their own reactions to their own situations as well as their feelings for one another. It is a unique point of view that is becoming more common, which develops well and tells a deeply personal story.

Setting

The novel is set in an unnamed town. Sophie and Carter live in a poor side of town where criminal activity is common and the quality of the housing is less than ideal. Sophie and Carter's houses are next door to one another. In fact, the kitchen window of Sophie's house looks into Carter's kitchen and her bedroom window looks into Carter's bedroom. For this reason, Sophie and Carter have witnessed some of the most violent and difficult moments of one another's lives.

The setting of this novel is appropriate to the characters in the novel. The author has written a story about two poor kids whose home life is difficult and filled with unwarranted amounts of responsibility. For this reason, the author has set her story in what could be the poor section of any major city. This setting works well with the plot and allows the reader to more properly understand how these teenagers have found themselves in the conflict that drives the plot of the novel.

Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is a simple English. The author does not use any slang or foreign languages to tell her story. The story is the language of a young person who might not be overly educated, but is educated enough to avoid the weakness of slang or improper grammar.

The language of this novel is simple, which fits with the age of the main characters who narrate the story. However, the author uses no slang even though it would seem logical



that two teenagers who have grown up in the poor section of town and have suffered some of the indignities these teenagers have suffered would speak with a little less refinement. The language is simple enough for even the youngest readers to understand and does tell a compelling story, making the language basically appropriate for the novel.

Structure

The novel is divided into twenty-three chapters. The chapters alternate between Sophie and Carter as the narrating character, each following the other as though in response to the previous chapter. The story is told in dialogue and exposition with the characters telling their story in the present tense as though recording it as it happens.

The novel contains one main plot and a few subplots. The main plot follows the relationship between Sophie and Carter as they come to the realization that they love each other. One of the subplots deals with Sophie's relationship with her mother while another follows the dysfunctional relationship between Carter and his mother. Each of the plots comes to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.



Quotes

"'Doodle' is a word my mom would use when she wanted to call me lazy." (Chapter 1, p. 4).

"The houses are small and crooked, but the trees are large and stand up tall. Large oaks stretch their canopies over the leaky roofs and peeling paint of the homes below, keeping the secrets in and the sunlight out." (Chapter 2, p. 8).

"She's sober sometimes; she's crazy all the time." (Chapter 4, p. 15).

"I'm packing lunches and checking homework and making breakfast all at the same time. The TV's on, the radio's on, the frying pan's sizzling, the coffee maker's beeping, and the boys are yelling at each other about a baseball hat." (Chapter 7, p. 27).

"Sophie's hand feels good in mine. She doesn't pull away and that's more than I deserve." (Chapter 10, p. 38).

"Around the living room I see familiar patches of drywall touch-ups from the various holes Carter's father put in their walls. His temper didn't always start or end with Carter's body. Apparently the house took a beating as well." (Chapter 11, p. 43).

"Our moment is over so I slowly release her. She moves away from me and a piece of me dies." (Chapter 12, p. 48).

"I'm staring at the coffee cup like it's a foreign object. Sophie brought me coffee. It's no big deal. But it is." (Chapter 16, p. 58).

"Sophie's lips against me make every punch, every kick, every wound, every scar worth it." (Chapter 18, p. 65).

"I'm sitting cross-legged on the damaged kitchen floor praying the sound of my thudding heart doesn't disturb the silence I know he needs right now." (Chapter 21, p. 71).

"On graduation night my mom lit the kitchen on fire." (Chapter 22, p. 72).

"Carter Jax has already made all my dreams come true. And it's only the beginning." (Chapter 23, p. 76).



Topics for Discussion

Who is Sophie? Why is she rushing to English class at the beginning of the novel? What is her relationship with Carter as it is introduced in chapter 1? Why does Sophie not express her feelings for Carter at school? Why do Carter and Sophie flirt at school, but pretend they are not close friends? What does this say about Carter and Sophie as characters?

Why does Carter follow Sophie home from school, but not walk with her? What are Carter and Sophie trying to hide? For what reason? Why does Carter watch Sophie through the window of his kitchen? What does he see? What is Carter doing at the time? What is wrong with Carter's mother? Why?

Why does Sophie look forward to seeing Carter in the evenings? What do they do together? Define Sophie and Carter's relationship. What are Sophie and Carter's lives like as described in chapters 5-6? How have they come to this point in their lives? Why are they friends? Why do they hide their friendship? Is there something more between them than friendship? Explain.

Where is Sophie's mother? Who are the Littles? Why does Sophie feel she has to be a parent to the Littles? How does caring for the Littles impact Sophie's life? How does she care for them? Where does Sophie get the money to help the Littles? How does collecting this money impact Sophie's life? What does Sophie want to do once she graduates from college?

Why does Carter not commit to a relationship with the girls he doubts? What does he tell these girls before he goes out with them? How does this impact his social life? What does Sophie think of the girls Carter dates? How does she feel when one of these girls claims to know Carter well, but does not know any of his secrets? How does Sophie feel about Carter? How do these emotions finally come out?

Why does Carter feel like he needs to protect Sophie? What did he witness as a young child that made him wish he could protect Sophie? How has Carter's relationship with his father impacted his feelings for Sophie? For his mother? How did Carter protect his mother from his father? Why does Carter feel like he needs to protect his mother from the mental hospital? What does Carter do to help his mother now?

Why does Carter suggest he and Sophie start new somewhere else? Why does Carter want to keep Sophie with him? Why does Sophie want to take the kids out of their childhood home? What might happen should Sophie's mother return for her children? Is Sophie doing a good thing for her siblings?