

# **Story of a Girl Study Guide**

## **Story of a Girl by Sara Zarr**

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# Plot Summary

This novel for young adults is exactly what its title proclaims - the story of a girl, seventeen-year-old Deanna, as she struggles to put a painful incident from her past behind her and move into a more hopeful future. As it portrays Deanna's relationships with family and friends and with herself, the narrative also explores themes related to the power of forgiveness and the necessity for honesty.

The narrative begins with a prologue, a brief description of events when Deanna was thirteen years old - specifically, her father's discovery of Deanna having sex with seventeen-year-old Tommy in the back seat of his car.

The narrative begins three years later, when Deanna is seventeen and on the last day of her sophomore year, being taunted by seniors who have all heard the story of what happened the night Deanna got caught. Deanna is rescued from her tormentors by her best friend Jason with whom, Deanna reveals in narration, she would like to have more of a relationship but who happens to be going out with her other best friend, Lee. Life at home for Deanna isn't much better - her father is unable to either forgive or forget what he saw her doing that night, her mother avoids any sort of conflict whatsoever, and her brother Darren lives in the basement with his girlfriend, former party girl Stacy) and their infant daughter April.

Deanna fantasizes about one day moving into an apartment with Darren and his family, and in order to earn some money to enable that to happen, gets a job at Picasso's, a pizza place where, she is shocked to discover, Tommy also works. Realizing that she doesn't have much choice, Deanna accepts the reality of the situation and strives to keep distance between her and Tommy, but he continues to call her by an old nickname (which she now hates) and to insinuate they should get back together. For her part, Deanna still finds him attractive, and over the course of her summer employment, finds it increasingly difficult to resist him. At the same time, things become more and more difficult at home (Stacy, frustrated with her life as a teenage mother, unexpectedly moves out, leaving a resentful Darren and tearful April behind) and with Jason (while Lee is away at camp, Deanna confesses her true feelings to Jason and the two of them kiss).

Upset over the situation at home and feeling guilty about what happened with Jason, the increasingly vulnerable Deanna lets herself get taken by Tommy to the beach where they used to make out. They start back into their old sexual routine, but Deanna breaks away, realizing that she wants something more for herself than what she had before. Taking advantage of her new courage and belief in honesty, she convinces Darren to forgive Stacy (who by this time has returned) and in an intense confrontation, lets her father know how much his distance has hurt her. When her mom insists that her dad say that he loves her, he is unable to and leaves.

As the summer draws to a close, Darren and Stacy decide to move out into a place of their own, compassionately refusing Deanna's offers of money and saying she can't



move in (because she needs to find her own way of escaping life in the house) but adding that she will be more than welcome to babysit. Meanwhile, Deanna finds herself able to forgive Tommy, and Jason preempts Deanna's intention to apologize to Lee by apologizing himself. Then, a couple of days before school begins, Deanna's dad offers to help her find a car to buy with the money she had saved to move in with Darren - a gesture that she sees as an opening towards reconciliation. Finally, when she arrives at school for the first day, Deanna is met by both Jason and Lee and the three of them face the coming year together.

# Part 1, Chapters 1 and 1A

## Part 1, Chapters 1 and 1A Summary

This novel for young adults is exactly what its title proclaims - the story of a girl, seventeen year old Deanna, as she struggles to put a painful incident from her past behind her and move into a more hopeful future. As it portrays Deanna's relationships with family and friends, and with herself, the narrative also explores themes related to the power of forgiveness and the necessity for honesty.

Narrator Deanna describes how, when she was thirteen, she was discovered by her father in the back seat of a car with Tommy, the seventeen year old best friend of her brother. She describes how she transformed the experience into an imagined situation about a "surfer" girl, and comments that in the three years since, her father hasn't really spoken to her or really looked at her.

Three years later, and on the last day of school, sophomore Deanna is taunted by a gang of senior boys, all of whom (Deanna comments in narration) know about her history with Tommy, as does the entire school. The assault is interrupted by the arrival of Jason, Deanna's best friend, who is himself roughed up by the seniors before they head off for a keg party. As Deanna and Jason take their usual bus ride home together, Deanna describes in narration how they got to be friends, and how Jason is going out with her other best friend, Lee. She also tells how she and Lee got to be friends, bonding over both Deanna's story of what happened with Tommy and her dad, as well as Lee's response - "Well, everyone has stuff they wish they could change, right?" Finally, she talks about how she sometimes feels left out when she sees Lee and Jason together, hinting that she has a romantic interest in Jason.

Eventually, Deanna gets off the bus, leaving Jason to finish his trip and walks home (see "Quotes", p. 11). There she is greeted by her father (who pointedly hints about the need for Deanna to stay out of trouble over the summer) and mother (who offers her ice cream she didn't ask for). Deanna goes to her room and hangs out with her infant niece April, daughter of her older brother Darren and his girlfriend Stacy, both teenagers, both working at Safeway, and both living in the basement. Deanna describes how comfortable and loved she feels with April, and how she plans to save enough money so that the four of them can get a place together. "They'd see," she says, "how much easier things would be with me around."

1A, "Most Popular Versions of the Story" This section includes three versions of the story of how Deanna and Tommy got together. The first is that she is "a total nympho" (engaging in sex acts with Tommy after looking at Darren's pornography together), while the second is that she is "a complete psycho" (that she became obsessed with Tommy and threatened to kill herself if he didn't spend time with her). The third is that she "is beyond pathetic" (letting him have sex with her just so he'd pay attention to her).

## Part 1, Chapters 1 and 1A Analysis

This first section is essentially exposition, or the offering of essential information - about the narrative's central character (Deanna), her situation (trying to move beyond a mistake in her past), and thematic focus (Lee's comment that everyone has something they want to change). It does so in a straightforward narrative style that has clear, strong echoes of the way young people of Deanna's age actually talk. The narrative also has a notable lack of self-dramatization (although there are hints of self-pity later in the story) and, perhaps most notably, a lack of apology. She beats herself up about what she did not because it was morally wrong or sinful, but because she knows it was stupid. Deanna presents herself here and throughout the narrative as acknowledging what she did, acknowledging it was a mistake, acknowledging why she did it, and acknowledging that she needs to move past it, but not apologizing for it. Her story, the "story of a girl," is how she moves from not having any idea how to make that movement - from self-doubt to self-confidence, from fear to courage, and from silence to speaking out with integrity and honesty.

Aside from the seeming realism of the work's writing style and dialogue, it must also be noted that the context of Deanna's life also comes across as uncomfortably realistic - distant parents, preoccupied with their own difficulties and circumstances...teen lives unwittingly and unwillingly transformed by unexpected pregnancy, teen sexuality emerging from profound vulnerability. All these aspects of the novel combine to create the sense that the work has a great many elements that could be found relatable by its apparent target audience - young teenaged women who may find, in Deanna's story, echoes of their own lives ... if not her sexuality, then the loneliness, vulnerability, and frustration that triggered her acting on it.

One last point to note about this section is the interjection of Chapter 1A, the first of several such interjections throughout the narrative. Most of the latter interjections consist of transcribed entries from Deanna's journal, but the entry here is particularly interesting, in that it provides additional context for Deanna's unhappiness.

## Part 2, Chapters 2 and 3

### Part 2, Chapters 2 and 3 Summary

Deanna describes how her imagined stories "about the girl on the waves", first imagined the night she was caught with Tommy became journal entries after a teacher suggested that the class keep a journal - not just a diary (an idea Deanna hates), but an expression of personal feelings. After a couple of false starts, Deanna starts giving the girl on the waves her own feelings and memories. The morning after leaving school, on the day she's planning to start job hunting, Deanna hangs out for a while with Stacy, whom she describes in narration as having been tough and formidable in school, and who is now struggling with how to hold onto that part of her life and still be a good mother. Later, Deanna meets up with Lee and together they start dropping off Deanna's resumes. At the first location, Deanna gets the strong sense that the clerk taking her resume knows about her and Tommy, but Lee reassures her. After dropping off a couple more resumes to stores that don't appeal to her, Deanna (still accompanied by Lee) goes to an independent pizza restaurant named Picasso's, where the owner (overweight but friendly Michael) hires her almost immediately. That night while talking with Stacy, Deanna lets slip her idea about living with Darren and Stacy and April, but covers when she sees Stacy's flash of suspicion. That evening, out with Jason and Lee, Deanna again mentions her plan, hinting that Darren and Stacy already know about it and avoiding Jason's slightly suspicious gaze. Back at home, Deanna's work on her journal (now incorporating real memories of herself and her father) is interrupted by a brief, friendly conversation with Darren, whom she describes in narration as being a good brother and a good dad, in spite of his tendency to have a temper like their father's.

The Sunday morning she is scheduled to start work, Deanna's mom visits her in her room, inviting her to join the rest of the family for a special breakfast and commenting on how she used to spend Sunday mornings at church. This leads Deanna to reflect on how Lee still goes to church and believes in its teachings. Meanwhile, Mom's plans for breakfast fall apart when Dad (in spite of triggering an unexpected surge of fond childhood memories in Deanna) triggers an argument with Darren, who takes Stacy, Deanna and April out for breakfast. Deanna worries in narration about what her leaving home permanently would do to her mother. Later that day, at Picasso's, Deanna is shocked to discover that one of her coworkers is Tommy, who calls her by an old nickname and refuses to stop doing so. Deanna confesses her and Tommy's history to Michael, who talks about how much he needs her and offering to help her keep distance from Tommy if she needs it. Later, when Darren he picks her up from work, Deanna is tempted to tell him about Tommy, but instead keeps the information to herself. Meanwhile, Darren shocks her by suggesting that he and Stacy have been thinking of moving out. The next day is Dad's day off and, unwilling to spend any time with him, Deanna hangs out with Jason, glad to have some alone time with him. She tells him about her job, but leaves out the part about Tommy working there. Deanna comments in narration that she got just what she wanted from the visit or "the familiar feel of Jason's

carpet under [her] feet, the smell of his room, his face, the history of [their] friendship everywhere [she] looked."

## Part 2, Chapters 2 and 3 Analysis

Important elements in this section include what might be described as the instigation of the plot - in other words, it contains the first of the series of events that move Deanna along on her journey of transformation. The most important of these events is Deanna's getting the job at Picasso's, but other important events include the discovery that Tommy also works there and the revelation from Darren that he and Stacy are planning to move out. Both these events are significant obstacles to Deanna's primary purpose and intention - to put her past behind her by moving out into a new life with Darren and his family. As the narrative progresses, she encounters further obstacles and challenges which, in turn, increases her emotional instability and leads to the climactic turning point in her life (Part 4, Chapter 8) where she realizes that her life doesn't have to be defined by her past any longer.

Other important elements in this section include developments in the "girl on the waves" motif and Deanna's reference, in narration, to Darren being like his father. This is the first of several references throughout the narrative to the similarities between Dad and his children, both physical (in Darren's case) and emotional (in the case of both Darren and Deanna, who reveal, over the course of the story, a similar streak of judgmental-ness, a similar tendency to lack compassion, and a similar stubborn stuck-ness in anger). For both Darren and Deanna, the ability and desire to overcome this similarity, and by doing so transcend their unhappy home life, becomes a key point in their mutual challenging of each other to do exactly that - transcend who their father is and become who they are.

Finally, there is the development of the triangular relationship involving Deanna, Lee and Jason, which is effectively portrayed throughout the novel and suggests, without overt declaration, the desperate loneliness at work in the lives of all three and the mutual respect, affection and trust that helps them alleviate that loneliness. The narrative portrays them quite clearly at a good place in their triangular relationship, a situation changed (to an enigmatic but evident degree) by choices they each make over the course of the story but not so fundamentally that the relationship changes. A related point is the almost passing reference, in narration, to Lee's religious faith, which adds a layer of depth and intrigue to Lee's character as well as, indirectly, to Deanna's journey of transformation. Specifically Lee, in clear contrast to Deanna, has something she believes in. Whether that affects, defines or triggers the compassion Lee later displays in response to her knowledge of the kiss between Jason and Deanna is not a connection the narrative overtly makes. The reference here, however, does foreshadow Deanna's narrative comment at the end of Chapter 12 (see Part 6) that suggests that she is choosing to believe in her family. The implication of both these comments is that belief in the positive side of ANY experience (faith, family, or in the case of this triangular relationship, friendship) can provide fertile ground for the sort of pain-transcending



openness displayed first by Lee and later by Deanna, an implication the action of the narrative and its resolution seems to support.

## Part 3, Chapters 4, 5 and 6

### Part 3, Chapters 4, 5 and 6 Summary

One night at Picasso's, Tommy invites "Dee Dee", as he calls Deanna, to stay with him after the restaurant closes and smoke some marijuana. This causes Deanna to remember the occasion when she first felt drawn to him - one night at home, when Tommy had been visiting Darren, caught her trying on makeup, told her that it looked trashy, and that he liked girls looking clean. That night, she comments in narration, was the first time she felt like anyone was really paying attention to her. Back at work, still feeling drawn to him, Deanna rejects his advances again, supported by Michael. That night, Deanna writes about her feelings in her journal, giving her thoughts to the surfer girl and determined that her memories of Tommy would no longer affect her, but remembering, in spite of herself, how it felt to belong to someone the way she once belonged to her dad.

Deanna overhears an argument between her parents - her father angry that Deanna didn't tell him about getting a job, her mother suggesting he be more compassionate, her father saying his memory of catching her with Tommy is too fresh in his mind. Later, just before starting her shift at Picasso's, Deanna has a pizza with Lee, made by Tommy, who Deanna finally reveals is the Tommy who she was caught with. The vulnerable Lee, meanwhile who is about to leave on a camping trip with her family, asks Deanna for advice about her relationship with Jason, saying that he wants to have sex and she's not sure. Deanna, upset by the idea of Jason having sex with someone other than her, speaks sharply to her in spite of her desire to be a good friend, and goes off to start her shift, leaving Lee in tears. At the end of the shift, Deanna's narration of a conversation between her and Michael reveals her desperation to get out of Pacifica and her simultaneous belief that she never will. She is picked up from work by Stacy, who spontaneously suggests that they get Deanna some fake ID, and that the two of them go out and party. Deanna's comments about how Darren might feel about that lead Stacy to realize that it would be better to go home, which in turn leads Deanna to again fantasize about the new home she, Darren and his family will one day make together.

The next day, after throwing away all the material in her journal she'd written about the surfer girl, Deanna goes into the basement and visits Stacy. There, she discovers a forgotten box of red hair dye, and talks Stacy into coloring her (Stacy's) hair. During the process, Stacy confesses that she hates just about everything about her life and later, once the successful dye job is revealed, comments that she "could be anyone". Later, she greets Darren, who comments on how sexy she is. She complains about that being all she has to say, and later drops Deanna off Picasso's, her (Stacy's) attitude returning. Deanna has a busy night, her time at the restaurant made even worse by the arrival of some of Tommy's old school friends who taunt her, along with Tommy, about her reputation. Later, when Stacy doesn't show up, Deanna accepts a ride to Safeway from Michael, whose overtures of friendship Deanna uneasily rejects - she doesn't feel like



talking. At Safeway, she discovers that Stacy left early, and that her car is still in the parking lot. Deanna starts the walk home, and is offered a ride by a passing, stoned Tommy. Being with him in his car reminds Deanna of how it was to be with him before, and again feels temptation. She gets past it and gets out at home, where Darren is surprised to learn that Stacy isn't with her. Deanna goes to bed, afraid to write in her journal ... about the girl on the waves, about anything.

## Part 3, Chapters 4, 5 and 6 Analysis

The major element to note in this section is the tension between Deanna's desires and feelings (i.e. her inner life) and how she behaves towards the people with whom she interacts (i.e. her outer life). Specifically, there is tension between her desire for Tommy and her determination to not give in to either those desires or his apparent desire for her, as well as tension between how Deanna wants / intends to behave with Lee and how she actually does behave. Both tensions are the result of a fundamental aspect of Deanna's character that seems to thread through all her relationships - she wants her feelings and needs to be respected, valued, and ultimately fulfilled.

In terms of Deanna's relationship with Tommy, she aches for the validation that their physical relationship once brought her and how it fulfilled her need for comfort and to feel attractive, but the long-felt pain that resulted from how their relationship turned out prevents her from acting on the opportunity to have her needs once again fulfilled by him. In terms of Lee, she aches for the connection and, again, the validation that closeness with Lee brings to her life, but values and seeks another sort of validation and closeness from Jason, the sort that Lee actually has. Because of this, she (Deanna) can therefore NOT have the closeness she wants from Jason, and therefore vents her frustration on the person she thinks is obstructing that closeness - Lee. In other words, and in both cases, Deanna directs her resentment and pain onto the people she believes to be the sources, or at least the triggers, for that pain - Tommy (who possibly deserves the venom Deanna directs at him) and Lee (who clearly doesn't).

All of this, of course (and as the narrative clearly suggests) is really about Deanna's longing for support, recognition, respect, understanding and comfort from her dad, all of which she continually struggles to get until the very last chapter.

Meanwhile, it's interesting to consider the parallels in experience and perspective between Deanna and Stacy.

## Part 4, Chapters 7, 7A, 7B and 8

### Part 4, Chapters 7, 7A, 7B and 8 Summary

The next morning, a note is discovered in Stacy's car, telling Darren and his family not to worry and that she's sorry. Back at home, Darren calls Stacy's family, but discovers that no-one knows where she is and no-one really cares that she's left. After Darren goes out to look for Stacy, Deanna calls Jason and tells him what happened, arranging with him to meet the next day and discovering, to her relief, that Lee has said nothing to him about what happened between her and Deanna at Picasso's. Meanwhile, when April starts fussing and Dad manages to calm her down, Deanna is reminded again of how much she misses her closeness with him, wishing there was some way to bridge the gap of the last three years but not taking the chance of the moment. When Darren comes back, Deanna tries to explain what she knows about why Stacy left, but Darren remains angry and resentful. Later that night, Darren suddenly has an idea about where Stacy might be (see "Objects/Places - The Lighthouse"), and as he prepares to take April with him to go looking, Deanna reveals her image of her being part of his, Stacy and April's life. He tells her, gently but firmly, that he and Stacy have to find their own way, and so does Deanna. Deanna rejects the offer of a ride to work from the departing Darren, and also rejects the offer of food from her tired, worried mother, heading off to work on her own.

After telling Deanna she can leave early if she wants, Michael himself leaves early to help a family member. As he and Deanna are closing up, Tommy asks Deanna if she can help him get together with Lee. When she curtly refuses, he comments that she used to be nice to him, and she realizes that there were times they were nice to each other. Later, when Tommy offers her a ride home, Deanna accepts, and makes no comment when he turns towards their old make-out spot rather than her home. After they park, they quickly fall into the old rituals of when they were first together, but Deanna feels increasingly uncomfortable, eventually slamming out of the car and bursting into tears as she cries out her questions. Why did he do what he did when she was only thirteen? What did he think of her? Why didn't he ever just take her out? Did he think she was an easy target? Why did he tell everyone? Tommy, at a loss for words, just gets back into the car. Meanwhile, in narration, Deanna recalls the circumstances that led to her loneliness - her father losing his job of thirteen years at a paper company, his subsequent anger at her mother, and their apparently mutual loss of interest in her. She also wonders how something that had once been so nice got so misinterpreted by so many people. After she cries herself out, she gets into the car and Tommy drives her home, apologizing as he drops her off. She too says she's sorry, realizing that she is finished with Tommy for good, and goes into the house. "I'd never really left that life," she comments in narration. "It had only been on pause."

## Part 4, Chapters 7, 7A, 7B and 8 Analysis

Deanna reaches an emotional and situational low point in the first part of this section, a situation illustrated by the journal entry of Chapter 7A. Faced with what seems, to her, to be rejection after rejection and frustration after frustration, and filled with a simple longing for a simple past, it comes as really no surprise that in Chapter 8, her deepening vulnerability results in her seeking attention and comfort from the only place she knows she can get it, at least temporarily - Tommy. But what is particularly interesting about this section of the book is that the low point transforms into a high point, a narrative technique commonly referred to as a reversal. In other words, Deanna becomes aware of why she is doing what she is doing and, for whatever reason, finds the courage and the passion to act according to the dictates and desires of her so-called "better" self, the part of her no longer willing to accept the ultimately cold comfort that Tommy and his sexual attentions have to offer.

The events of Chapter 8 in fact, mark an important turning point in Deanna's overall journey of transformation, in the so-called "story" of this particular "girl." As the result of her reactions to Tommy, she realizes her own potential for power and strength and, from now until the end of the book, slowly builds upon the foundations of identity and integrity she first taps into here. What's also important to note about this section is how it adds layers of depth to Deanna's character and experience - specifically, in terms of her awareness of her father's circumstances and the compassion, albeit reluctant, that awareness triggers in her. What makes Deanna such a complex engaging character is how that compassion, clearly justified, is in conflict with her resentment and anger, also clearly justified. For her, there is little, if anything, about her life and relationships, not to mention the people with whom she has those relationships, that is black and white, or cut and dried. Anger coexists in her alongside compassion, frustration with perspective, sensitivity with callousness - in other words, she lives a very human life, with messy complicated feelings and reactions that, as previously discussed, suggest she would be a character that readers could very easily identify with.

## Part 5, Chapters 9, 9A and 10

### Part 5, Chapters 9, 9A and 10 Summary

The next day and after a phone call from Mom (during which Deanna remembers how nice her mom had tried to be the day before), Stacy comes back, confessing she was at a friend's. After she goes downstairs, Deanna calls Darren, who says he wants Stacy out of the house. Deanna tells him she's not going to tell Stacy that and urges him to come home. She then calls Jason, and gets him to meet her earlier than originally planned - she doesn't want to be at home when Darren and Stacy reunite. She and Jason go to a dingy shopping mall where, at the food court, Deanna is grabbed by the same guys who taunted her in Chapter 1. After running off, Deanna breaks down and tearfully asks Jason if he ever thought of her as a girlfriend. He confesses that he did, but doesn't any more because of Lee. After catching their bus, Deanna confesses that she doesn't want to go home. The hesitant Jason invites her back to his place where, after a quick lunch, Deanna's question about whether Jason would have asked her out if she hadn't been caught with Tommy is interrupted by a telephone call from Lee. Deanna hurries out of the room, but is soon followed by Jason, who tells her that Lee got "all weird" when he said Deanna was there. When he asks what's going on, Deanna tells him she could be a good girlfriend, and they kiss. She, however, pulls herself away, remembering how good Lee had been to her and frustrated at having to find her own way out, when she always ends up running into herself. Jason suggests that she leave, and Deanna steps out into the foggy afternoon.

In this journal entry, Deanna writes about what she would tell the surfer girl - that you can never get away from your memories, unless "something / someone? / can do more than just cover the wound."

When Deanna has to stay late at work because Tommy never showed up Michael, who has been aware throughout the shift that she's upset, convinces her to open up to him. When she asks if he'd ever hurt someone he cared about, he confesses that he has, telling her that he very much loved the women he had married in an attempt to convince himself he wasn't gay. He then gives her a ride home, and Deanna, unwilling to confront her family, sneaks in her always open window. Eager to see Darren, she goes downstairs and discovers that he is alone - Stacy and April are not there. He stirs, and when Deanna asks what happened, tells her to wait until the morning. She lets him go back to sleep, reflecting on how special he is to her. The next morning, while Mom is trying to convince everyone to have some instant oatmeal, Dad asks Deanna how she got home, becoming suspicious when she tells him she got a ride from her boss. Deanna, in turn, responds to his suspicions by saying that she fucked her boss and accusing her dad of automatically thinking badly of her. He comments that he has reason to, and Deanna realizes they're on the edge of something important. She tells him she thinks he hates her, and when Dad asks whether that's what she really thinks, Darren asks what she's supposed to think. Mom insists that Dad say he loves her, and Dad comes close, but instead goes out in his car. Darren and Deanna take refuge

downstairs, where Darren reveals that he's asked Stacy and April to stay away for a while until he figures out whether he wants Stacy back full time. Deanna comments that he can't pick and choose who the baby of his mother is, and that he has to apologize, realizing at the same time that she has to confess to Lee what happened with Jason.

## **Part 5, Chapters 9, 9A and 10 Analysis**

While events in Chapter 8 mark an important turning point, events in Chapter 10 serve as the novel's climax, its point of highest emotional, narrative, and thematic tension. Deanna could not have spoken her mind to her father if she had not done so earlier to Tommy - in short, the sequence of events over these two sections can clearly be seen as an example of how structure is a reflection/manifestation of character, and vice versa (see "Style - Structure"). There is clearly the sense here that Deanna is becoming both stronger and more courageous, less self-pitying (a state that some of her journal entries and narration tend to suggest) and less willing to both perceive herself as, and act as, a victim. She is, in short, clearly both ready and willing to move on from her past, a situation that is clearly a contrast to both Darren and her father, and which, as later events confirm, serves to inspire both of them to at least a degree of both letting go and moving on. Deanna is, in short, both a hero in her own life (in the sense that she makes difficult personal choices and sacrifices in order to achieve a victory/transportation) and, as a result, an inspiration in the lives of others.

All this is not to say that she is perfect, or that at this point in her life all her problems have been solved. There is still the messy situation with Jason and Lee, triggered as it was by Deanna's lingering need and insecurity. Yes, she has addressed the situations with her father and with Tommy that created and defined the context for that need, but she still hasn't effectively addressed how she can healthily meet that need - or, for that matter, the sort of relationship/connection that will feel that need. That comes in the following sections - for now, though, she is far from a flawless hero, still troubled by her demons; a situation which in many ways, makes her such an engaging character that audiences can relate to and feel sympathy for.



## Part 6, Chapters 11 through 13

### Part 6, Chapters 11 through 13 Summary

The next day, Deanna tries to get hold of Jason, but can't. Later, she is surprised at work by the arrival of Darren, Stacy and April, who stop by briefly just so Deanna can see them together. Meanwhile, Darren is surprised to see Deanna working with Tommy and threatens to hurt Tommy if he ever touches Deanna again, but Deanna says she's handling it. Later, Deanna realizes that she no longer hates Tommy, and feels better about herself than she has in a long time. That night, Stacy picks Deanna up from work, and as they're driving home, thanks her for talking with Darren. Deanna repeats Lee's comment (Chapter 1) that everyone has something they'd like to change, and Stacy agrees, adding (to Deanna's surprise) that Darren respects her and thinks she could do well at college. Parked outside the house for a moment, Deanna reflects on her image of the new family she wanted to make for herself and lets it go, realizing that she already had a new family with them, just not the sort that she imagined.

The next day, Deanna tells the uneasy Jason that she intends to tell Lee about the kiss, following through on her newly discovered faith in honesty. She then cleans her room thoroughly, placing her journal near her bed ready to be written in. Afterwards, she tells Stacy that she (Deanna) intends to give her and Darren all the money she makes over the summer so they can move out, adding that she would like to be able to come visit. Stacy suggests that Darren might not be happy about the money, but Deanna insists that she's going to go ahead. That night Deanna, eventually joined by Darren, prepares a sit down dinner for all the Lamberts (minus Stacy, who is working). Mom is surprised and relieved to see what they've done, but Dad is late. The rest of the family, including April, is sitting at the table when he comes in, and Deanna wonders about his reaction. Later that night, Mom invites Deanna to cuddle on the couch in front of the television, and Deanna weeps a little, recalling Lee's comment about the value of believing in something (i.e. her family) when it makes "more sense not to".

Over the next few days, as the Lamberts fall back into their busy routine, Deanna plans what she's going to say to Lee. Her plans are derailed however, when Lee calls to invite her to join her and Jason at Taco Bell. Deanna, playing out all the various possible conversations in her head and finding none of them satisfactory, meets her friends, notices that they're both behaving a little strangely, and at one point decides she can no longer stay silent and starts to talk to Lee. Lee, however, quietly assures her that everything is okay. Later, when Deanna is at home, Jason calls and confesses that he told Lee everything. Deanna immediately assumes that their friendship can never be the same again, and breaks down in tears.



## Part 6, Chapters 11 through 13 Analysis

The narrative's thematic interest in honesty and vulnerability comes to the forefront in this section. The narrative here creates the sense that because Deanna has set the future course of her life in motion (i.e. discovering her capacity to be honest and acting to build on the sense of healing freedom that she feels as the result of being honest), there is room for other possibilities for fulfillment to emerge. Her cleaning her room is a metaphoric externalization / representation of this - in the same way as she is clearing away the physical clutter with which she has surrounded herself, she is also clearing away the emotional clutter that has prevented her from moving on in her life. Her placing of the journal within easy reach is also a symbol of this newness of life - she has clearly reconnected with important aspects of her inner life, and the presence of her journal is an indication that she is prepared and able to give those inner experiences an outer life. This is also the metaphoric content of the scene between Deanna and her mother, as well as the scene around the dinner. Deanna, as the result of her experiences, is opening herself to others, acting on the sense of compassion that has always been present within her but which she has been prevented from acting upon by her anger, resentment, and frustration.

Once again, however, the narrative skillfully juxtaposes stages of completion and fulfillment with stages of incompleteness and uncertainty - in this case, between the easing of tensions within Deanna's family with the apparently increasing tensions within her relationships with Jason and Lee. Again, however, it must be noted that these tensions are, for the most part, the result of Deanna's assumptions about the relationship and the situation. She assumes that Lee is angry in the same way as she assumed (albeit with good reason) that everyone was looking at her and judging her as the result of what happened with Tommy when she was thirteen. It seems that in terms of her relationships with Lee and Jason, Deanna hasn't yet applied, or isn't yet able to apply, the lesson she learned about herself as the result of breaking free from her relationship with Tommy and challenging her relationship with her dad - she has to express and/or deal with the truth of her experience herself. Jason preempts her doing so here, but in the final moments of the book, Deanna finally gets her chance and, instead of hiding behind anger or resentment or fear, draws on her newly found courage to take that chance.

## **Part 7, Chapters 14 through 16**

### **Part 7, Chapters 14 through 16 Summary**

That same night, Deanna tells Tommy she forgives him for what he did, commenting in narration that getting over what happened was possible for both of them only because he said he was sorry...like she has to do with Lee. Over the rest of the summer, however, she becomes more and more unwilling to talk to either Jason or Lee, confessing to Darrin what happened, both the kiss and Lee's apparent forgiveness. Darren urges her to remember what she said to him about forgiving Stacy, talking about how he and Deanna both have the option of being unlike their father. She realizes he's right, but still can't bring herself to talk to Lee. Some time later, Darren and Stacy prepare to move out, continuing to refuse Deanna's money but saying there will still be lots of chances for visits ... and free babysitting.

As summer draws to a close, Deanna has a conversation in the kitchen with her dad, following weeks of them avoiding each other. He offers her a spoon for her coffee, comments non-judgmentally about the challenges of her upcoming school year, and suggests the possibility of looking for an old car for her to buy with her saved money from work. After he goes, Deanna realizes that they're moving forward in their relationship, and writes a note to Lee, inviting her to meet for a chat on the first day of school. After mailing the letter, Deanna happily goes into the house, "for once walking through the front door unafraid."

Chapter 16 - On the first day of school, Darren gives the nervous Deanna a ride. At first, Deanna thinks Lee isn't at the prearranged meeting place and wants to leave, but Darren points out that Lee, accompanied by Jason, has spotted them. He reminds again her that she doesn't have to be like their father and she gets out of the car. She joins Lee and Jason, whose greetings are slightly awkward, asking if they're ready for junior year. Deanna shakes her head no. Lee says "Okay then...let's go" and picks up her backpack.

### **Part 7, Chapters 14 through 16 Analysis**

Here in this section Deanna continues to move forward into her future and into new relationships with her family and friends, facing and accepting the realities of her present and possible future without any of it being, or at least feeling, haunted by the circumstances of the past. Without overtly saying so in narration, she comes across as freer and freer all the time, more connected to herself and open to genuine experiences with her family and friends, whatever those experiences might be and whatever her initial uneasiness and/or reluctance. In other words, she's getting past her fear and acting more and more from a place of courage.

It's interesting to note, however, that at first glance Deanna appears to not actually apologize to Lee. Her actions at the end of the narrative, however, suggest and/or imply that the relationship between the three friends, while changed and somewhat damaged, has enough of a foundation of courage (on the part of all three) and forgiveness to at least move forward and evolve. Lee's final words, themselves evoking forgiveness, companionship, and compassion, seem to take herself and the others into that new future together. Her "let's go" seems to acknowledge everyone's uncertainty about what awaits them (as friends, as students, and as people) and, as well, the bonds of friendship which, although somewhat dented, may continue to help them through whatever happens in the same way as it had/has in the past.

It's also interesting to note that this is also the implication of Deanna's interaction with her dad in the previous chapter. That relationship is profoundly wounded, but Dad does seem to be making steps towards reconnection, steps that can be seen as being similar to those taken by both Lee and Deanna in the subsequent chapter. Granted, Dad and Deanna seem to have much further to go, in terms of reconciliation, than do Lee and Deanna, but the steps are being taken, and Deanna, for her part, seems willing (albeit reluctant) to finally follow those steps where they are leading her without fear that they're taking her in a circle right back to her past.

# Characters

## Deanna

Deanna is the book's central character, protagonist, and narrator. As the result of events described in the work's prologue (being caught by her father, at the age of thirteen, having sex with a seventeen-year-old boy), and as the result of several years of intensely uncomfortable, taunting aftermath, Deanna begins the story in a place of desperation. Determined to leave her old life behind, both her physical life at home and her painful, angry, bitter emotional life of suffering at the hands of those who torment her (including her father), she invents a fantasy future for herself. Part of that future involves her moving in with her brother and his family (which includes a new baby), while another part involves developing an intimate relationship with her friend Jason, in spite of his being involved with another of her friends. Over the course of the narrative, however, Deanna comes to realize that the probability of her fantasies becoming reality is minimal and, as a result, the confusion, longing and self-loathing she feels results in her almost recreating the past incident that ruined her life. At the last moment, however, she chooses to put herself and her life onto a different footing, and as a result, makes a series of changes that end up with her being on track for a life that may not be what she dreamed of, but which is a good life nevertheless. Her story, in short, is one of personal transformation, redemption and fulfillment, all of which are triggered by choice, by the decision to take action, and by an eventual, courageous, hard-won refusal to stay trapped by the mistakes of her past.

## Darren

Darren is Deanna's older brother, a former regular drug user, now teen father described several times in narration as physically being similar to his father and portrayed as closed off, judgmental, and angry just like his father. As the result of events in the narrative, in particular Deanna's personal transformation, Darren becomes more willing and able to forgive and embrace love than his father, to the point where he (Darren) is able to remind Deanna to, essentially, practice what she preaches and have the courage to live a life of emotional honesty and integrity.

## Stacy

Stacy is Darren's teenaged girlfriend and the mother of his baby, a former party girl whose courage and outspokenness Deanna once admired and feared. Frustrated with what her life has become since the birth of her daughter April (see below), at one point Stacy flees the basement she shares with Darren and their daughter, but returns a couple of days later having realized that she has a responsibility to provide the best life she can for her baby. She, like Darren, can be seen as having a journey of experience and transformation that simultaneously echoes and foreshadows that of Deanna -



specifically, a movement from anger and resentment at the past to looking forward to, and moving into, a more hopeful future.

## April

April is Darren and Stacy's infant daughter, a source of pure joy for Deanna, and a trigger for feelings and/or transformations in several of the characters. April triggers resentment in Stacy, a growth of responsibility in Darren, and the emergence of a degree of sensitivity in Darren and Deanna's dad. As the result of glimpsing this sensitivity, Deanna feels several things - happy memories of time with her Dad, a recognition of gentleness in him in spite of his anger towards her, and a longing for reunion with him. In short, April's presence is also a trigger for Deanna, an important catalyst for the eventual, incremental transformation of the tense relationship between Deanna and her dad.

## Tommy

Tommy is the boy who Deanna was having sex with when they were discovered by her father. Twenty years old at the time that most of the narrative occurs, Tommy is portrayed as having a strong sexual attraction, a certain charm, and a certain shallowness of attitude. To his credit, however, once Deanna reveals the depths of pain in her that his actions caused, he does apologize and take more steps to try and make things better for her and for them both as friends.

## Jason

Jason is Deanna's best friend, portrayed in narration as also being something of an outsider. He defends Deanna from the verbal and physical attacks of high school bullies, is an un-judgmental ear when she wants to talk about life at home, and reluctantly admits to having occasional romantic feelings about her. This confession triggers Deanna to act on HER attraction to HIM, leading to a passionate kiss that results, for both of them, in confusion and a certain drifting apart. Jason's confession of what happened to Lee triggers uncertainty in all three of them about how the relationship can survive, but the narrative suggests that Lee's capacity for forgiveness and understanding is the primary force in putting the relationship onto some kind of new track.

## Lee

Lee is Deanna's other best friend. Smart and witty, she too is an outsider like Deanna and Jason, and she too finds comfort in the triangular friendship they have developed. Her security in that friendship is challenged first by Deanna's sudden sharp tongued resentment and by the fact that her two best friends kissed each other, but in a

particularly strong manifestation of the novel's thematic interest in redemption and transformation, finds it in her to, it seems, forgive them both and keep loving them.

## **Deanna's Dad**

Deanna's father is a powerful presence in both her life and in the narrative of that life. He is portrayed as physically strong, emotionally limited, and morally judgmental, the various resentments and experiences of unhappiness in his life triggered by several factors. The strongest are the loss of his job after thirteen years of loyal service, and his discovery of Deanna and Tommy. In short, Dad feels betrayed by many circumstances in his life, the pain of that betrayal emerging as anger and narrow mindedness. He is held up as an example of how not to behave (i.e. holding onto the past) by both Darren and Deanna who each, at different times in the narrative, tells the other to move past their pasts in a way their father could not. Eventually, after being confronted by Deanna about his attitude towards her, Dad appears to take small steps towards letting go of his past and perhaps, in time, engaging with a more positive future in the same way as his son and daughter do.

## **Deanna's Mom**

Deanna's mom is what might best be described as a peacekeeper, someone who tries to ensure that everyone in her family gets along but in doing so, at least according to Deanna, she seems to avoid dealing directly with any of the situations or circumstances that keep the family from doing so. Eventually, however, when she sees Deanna challenging Dad's attitudes towards her, Mom undergoes a transformation of her own, albeit a small one, and makes a greater effort to be someone her daughter can be comfortable and emotionally open with.

## **Michael**

Michael is the owner and manager of Picasso's, the pizza restaurant where Deanna gets her first job. Friendly and sloppy, Michael is a bad businessman but a good friend, at time serving as an ally for Deanna in her struggle to sort out her life and resist Tommy's attractions. Michael's wisdom triggers increased insight in Deanna, helping her along her journey of transformation and causing her to think differently about herself and her life.



# Objects/Places

## Pacifica

Pacifica is the small city on the west coast of the United States where Deanna, her family, her friends, and her enemies all make their home.

## Terra Nova High School

Terra Nova is the small school in the small town of Pacifica that Deanna and her friends all attend. It is also the school that Tommy, Darren and Stacy attended. Outsiders like Deanna, Jason, and Lee are treated to verbal and at times, physical abuse. This place is both a trigger for and a source of Deanna's fundamental unhappiness.

## Deanna's Home

Deanna's badly decorated home, rundown and unkempt since her father lost his job is, a place that she merely inhabits while she's waiting for her life to improve. In need of a coat of paint on the outside, painted in uncomfortably garish colors inside, Deanna refers to the house as "the daily dead end" and a place she is desperate to escape. By the end of the novel, however, she comes to realize that for the moment, it's the best she's got.

## Deanna's Bedroom

Deanna's room in the family home is portrayed as being messy but comfortable. By the end of the narrative when she is determined to clean out her feelings and attitudes about herself and about her life, she cleans the bedroom up. The state of Deanna's room is intended to be seen as a metaphorical reflection of her inner state of being when it is clean or messy.

## Deanna's Bedroom

Deanna's room in the family home is portrayed as being messy but comfortable. By the end of the narrative, when she is determined to clean out her feelings and attitudes about herself and about her life, she cleans the bedroom up, the implication being that in both its messy and clean phases, the state of Deanna's room is intended to be seen as a metaphorical reflection of her inner state of being.



## Deanna's Journal

Inspired by a teacher at school to put her thoughts down on paper, Deanna starts a journal with imagined stories of a "surfer girl" that first came to her while she was engaged in her early, precocious sexual relationship with Tommy. For a while she uses her stories of the girl as a vent for her own feelings, but eventually throws all her writing away. By the end of the narrative, however, and at the same time as she's cleaning her room, Deanna pulls out the neglected journal and resolves to start using it again. The journal can, throughout the novel, be seen as a reflection and manifestation of Deanna's inner life.

## Picasso's

Picasso's is the dark, shabby Italian restaurant owned and operated by the congenial Michael where Deanna gets her first job and is shocked to discover that Tommy works there as well.

## Tommy's Car

In the prologue and throughout the narrative, Tommy's classic Buick is portrayed as having a sexually stimulating atmosphere and air about it. In the prologue, he and Deanna are caught having sex in its back seat, while later in the narrative, Deanna's vulnerability and desperation lead her to repeating the act. She thinks the better of it and moves on, but to Tommy, his car is sex.

## Stacy's Hair Color

At one point in the narrative, Deanna finds a box of hair color in the bottom of Stacy's purse and talks Stacy into using it. The resultant color, a vivid difference to Stacy's natural color, is a trigger for her to act on the escalating sense of boredom building in her, boredom that builds into the impulsive decision to leave the home, the relationship, and the baby for a couple of days. She returns wiser and more compassionate and at the same time, more confident in sticking up for what she believes in and telling Darrin her opinion.

## The Lighthouse

About a year before the narrative proper begins, before April was born, Darren and Stacy visited a small community whose scenic view was dominated by a lighthouse. Since that time, Deanna comments in narration, Stacy had fallen in love with lighthouse. When Stacy runs away, Darren decides that's where she's got to be.



## Dad's Coffee Mug

Throughout the narrative, Dad is portrayed as drinking out of and taking good care of a coffee mug from the place where he used to work. There is symbolic value here, in that in holding on so tightly and regularly to this mug suggests that he is also holding on, just as tightly and perhaps even more frequently, to the traumas in the past (particularly Deanna's encounter with Tommy) that have so hurt, damaged, and upset him. Eventually, however, Dad is portrayed as letting go of that past just enough that he can start rebuilding that relationship. As part of the scene, he is portrayed as cleaning the mug and hanging it up, perhaps a symbolic suggestion that he is cleaning himself up and preparing to hang the past behind him and move openly into the future.

# Themes

## The Power of Reputation

The issue of how to deal with having a bad reputation - how to cope with it, recover from it, transcend it and bury it - is the issue at the core of both the narrative and the experience of Deanna at the center of the narrative. It is a very personal struggle that as in most good writing, has universal overtones. In other words, Deanna's experience is, to some degree or another, that of any/everyone who has struggled with having an experience from the past define his and her present and future. Here it's important to note that the constrictive effects of a good reputation can, in their own way, be as damaging as those of a bad one.

It's also important to note that this theme manifests on another level as well. Given that reputation is, in essence, something that people have come to believe defines another person as the result of that person's past actions, it could be argued that ALL the characters other than Deanna, to one degree or another, are dealing with the results of their reputation. Dad is a prime example. Within his family, he has the reputation of being stern and unforgiving, judgmental and negative. As the result of the confrontation with his family in Chapter 8, everyone begins to see the human being beneath that reputation, which in turn, leads the characters to realize that there is more to Dad than what they believed.

## The Power of Forgiveness

On the other side of the coin from the work's thematic interest in reputation and its power is its parallel interest in forgiveness and ITS power. Yes, it's true that Deanna is never forgiven, at least by the community at large, for what she did to earn her reputation. But she is clearly on her way to be forgiven at home by her father, and is in turn on her way to forgiving HIM. In the context of this relationship, at least, forgiveness is a fundamental component of transcending reputation on BOTH sides of the conflict - Dad's emerging forgiveness of Deanna helps him overcome his absorption in her reputation, Deanna's emerging forgiveness of Dad helps her overcome her absorption in his. On another level, forgiveness can be seen as a means of overcoming fear and finding courage. This is evident in the relationship between Lee and Deanna, in which both characters, through forgiveness, transcend their fear of the future and find courage to face the truths of their present (that they care for each other in all their frail, needy humanity) and are lovingly willing and able to help each other face the future. Perhaps most importantly, the narrative explores the importance of forgiving the self. Deanna's forgiveness of herself for her relationship with Tommy is a fundamental component of her emerging, deepening ability to transcend her reputation and get on with her life. In short, forgiveness is, in the novel, portrayed as being all about letting go of the past and facing the reality of the present, perhaps damaged by the past but also ultimately, inevitably, and perhaps even unarguably both distant and different from it.

## The Necessity for Honesty

In the thematically focused eyes of the narrative, both transcendence of reputation and the power of forgiveness are grounded in honesty. Characters face and admit the facts of what happened rather than the implications of those facts. They also acknowledge the feelings that have been triggered by those facts rather than suppressing hurt while indulging in anger and resentment. Finally, they look clearly or are forced to look at what role their actions played and continue to play in both the causes of those events and how the results of those events can be transcended. In other words, characters are challenged, throughout the narrative, to face the truth and move through their lives based on that truth, that honesty, rather than live according to assumptions. Doing so, the narrative clearly suggests, is a potent way to deny the influence of reputation and to tap into the power of forgiveness. Granted, doing so is not always easy - Deanna knows the truth about herself but, for much of the narrative, is trapped by her feelings about what happened and about her subsequent reputation. But by tapping deeply into honesty about herself, with herself, and with others, she becomes increasingly able to escape that trap and, in doing so, challenges those around her to do the same. By honestly and directly facing the many aspects of her reality, she encourages others around her to honestly face the reality of the situation, move past the traps of judgment and assumption they have fallen into, and emerge into a more open, truthful, and honestly respectful way of dealing. In short, Looking past feelings about both incident and character to the honest truth, the honest facts about events and individuals can and will help the self to recover from both past and present challenges and move into a revised present and more positive future.

# Style

## Point of View

The story is told from the first-person and past tense point of view and specifically from the perspective of central character and narrator Deanna. This first person narrative engages the reader thoroughly and effectively in Deanna's experience, drawing the reader immediately and intimately into her struggles with her reputation, her feelings, attitudes and responses. It's important to note, however, that while this point of view is both limited and subjective, it is nevertheless an effective way of vividly experiencing other characters and their relationships with the central character. The reader sees and experiences the actions and reactions of the people interacting with Deanna in the same emotionally charged way that she does. As a result, the reader would likely, given the universality of the subject matter identify even more strongly with the character and her situation.

All this is particularly important given the novel's subject matter. A reputation, and the experience of coping with one, is all about what the subject of that reputation (i.e. Deanna) perceives as the attitudes of others. In other words, the first person narrative point of view is also the book's thematic point of view, with the nature of the story itself reflected in, and defined by, the way in which that story is told. It is an effective intertwining and inter-relationship of style and substance, offering an indication of meaning in how the story is told in addition to the content of the story itself.

## Setting

[Please write in here]

## Language and Meaning

In the same way as Deanna lives a life which, in its external circumstances, would be familiar to many contemporary teens, she also speaks and writes about it in a way that many teens would themselves speak about their lives, or their friends' lives. Her words and her way of using them are in many ways frank and uninhibited, sprinkled with profanity, and above all uncomplicated. Her vocabulary is essentially straightforward and simple. Events and experiences are what they are. There are few, if any, metaphors. Emotions happen as they happen, she writes about them as she feels them. While she is, at times, self-pitying, she is not self-dramatizing and this lends an air of edgy, volatile honesty to the way she tells her story. Even her imaginings of the surfer girl, her idealized alter ego, are recounted in a matter-of-fact way - the surfer girl simply does this or does that with few extravagances of imagery or symbolism. In the same vein, the brief journal interludes (i.e. Chapters 7A, 9A) which are, arguably, the most "poetic" sections of the work, are written in such a way as to trigger reaction and insight in the reader directly and clearly, rather than hinting and suggesting as more metaphor-

oriented writing tends to do. This, it seems, is a function of Deanna's fundamental identity and perspective - ultimately, she's a realist. Such symbols that there are perceivable as such by the reader, not because Deanna describes them in that way. This is arguably one of the most effective ways to use symbolism and meaning, in a way that doesn't draw attention to itself, that is unselfconscious and evocative rather than heavy handed and full of meaning.

## Structure

For the most part, the narrative is structured in a traditionally linear fashion. Event leads to event, cause leads to effect, action leads to reaction, all motivating and/or defining Deanna's journey of transformation. In fact, the narrative is in many ways defined as much by event as by Deanna's reaction to and/or interpretation of those events - in other words, it is driven more by plot and plot's relationship to character than by other narrative elements such as imagery, metaphor, emotion, and reflection. In many ways, the emphasis on plot rather than on imagery and/or emotional exploration is, like the book's use of language and its point of view, reflective of Deanna's essential nature. As discussed above, she tends to be matter of fact and realistic, grounded in the present time and the present experience. There are occasions when she does detour into the past, her memories taking the form of flashbacks in which she narrates events and circumstances that, in her experience, were critically important in defining her present. For the most part, these detours are triggered by experiences in the present that clearly and specifically echo experiences in her past. Examples include her passing recollection of a conversation with Lee about religion, triggered by a conversation with her mother about church and her recollection of her first time with Tommy triggered by Tommy's asking her to stay behind after work and smoke some marijuana. For the most part, though, the book is essentially straightforward and engaging storytelling.

## Quotes

"I was thirteen when my dad caught me with Tommy Webber in the back of Tommy's Buick, parked next to the old Chart House down in Montara at eleven o'clock on a Tuesday night. Tommy was seventeen and the supposed friend of my brother Darren. I didn't love him. I'm not even sure I liked him." (Prologue, p. 1).

"...in my head I wrote the story of a girl who surfed the cold green ocean, when one day she started paddling in the wrong direction and didn't know it until she looked back and couldn't see the shore." (Ibid, p. 1 (2)).

"Every time someone in school saw my face, I knew they were thinking about it. I knew this because every time I looked in the mirror, I thought about it too." (Ibid, p. 6).

"It was the worst part of every day, when the bus got to my stop and I had to leave Jason, him still rolling, still on his way to something, while I'd reached the daily dead end known as my house." (Ibid, p. 11).

"What did it feel like, I wondered, to be kissed like that right out in public? Not like some passionate tongue-wrestling thing, just a kiss to declare 'We are each other's'. I'd never been kissed like that, not by Tommy or anyone else. No one had declared me for his, not for the whole world to see, anyway." (Ibid, p.37).

"Maybe she was an innocent bystander, like those people you read about, standing around minding their own business when the stray bullet shoots them exactly through the heart. Or maybe not so innocent. It didn't matter. In the end, she'd be the one left to walk through that door every day and try to figure out what went wrong." (Chapter 3, p. 50).

"It's amazing, the things your body will do just when you don't want them to: hear speeding up, fingers aching. I'd always liked his voice, low and laidback, the kind of voice that made you listen, a voice that still caused me to teeter when I heard it saying my old nickname." (Ibid, p. 55).

"Something in me surged again, and I should have told him to go to hell but I didn't want to give him anything, not one single hint that he could still make me feel things, even hate." (Ibid, p. 56).

"It was more like a feeling like when I'd get picked first for volleyball...it was knowing someone else thought about me for more than one second, maybe even thought about me when I wasn't there." (Chapter 4, p. 65).

"It was the look that meant you had all her attention, that she'd drop everything to hear what was on your mind and then do anything she could to make it better. On a good day, I'd take that look and start talking. On a bad day, all I could think was that I didn't deserve it." (Chapter 6, p. 75).



"In a place like that, I'd be able to reach across whatever it was that couldn't let me be the kind friend Lee needed that night, or to be the kind of daughter my dad wanted. I'd reach across and grab the hand of that other Deanna and say come on, it's okay now. You're home." (Ibid, p. 82).

"At least back then, I belonged to someone. Tommy had chosen me, and whatever it really was, the two of us were SOMETHING, something that we weren't without each other." (Chapter 8, p. 121).

"I was never going to find a guy like Jason for myself. I knew it. I would never be that person, the one who made her parents proud and was there when her friends really needed her. I would never be part of Darren and Stacy's family, not the way I'd pictured." (Ibid, p. 122).

"It was both sad and funny, you know, how two people's memory of the same thing could be so different. And that was the whole problem, really, that this thing had happened between us, and to Tommy it was one thing and to me it was something else, and once my dad got involved it became something else again ... add onto that the whole jury known as Terra Nova High School and who knew anymore what had really happened?" (Ibid, p. 125).

"There were things I thought in my head while I looked at him but couldn't say - things like: I'm glad you're back, Darren. Sorry about yesterday. Darren, I understand what you have to do. I tucked the corner of the blanket under the mattress, careful not to touch him, and then went up to bed." (Chapter 10, p. 155).

"I could almost feel it, like an audible click, the house and us in it finally latching onto the tracks, taking us wherever it was we'd been needing to go...I understood that this wasn't only about me and dad, or me and Tommy. Mom and Darren, even Stacy, even April, Lee, Jason, and now Michael - we were all part of this thing that had happened, two people in the back seat of a classic Buick, doing something private..." (Ibid, p. 158).

"...Stacy and I went inside the house, the actual house, where in a way we DID have our own little family, not a made-up one that only existed in my head, but a real one where at least Darren and Stacy and me had figured something out. Somehow we had found our own small island of declaration for each other." (Chapter 11, p. 168).

"Getting the truth into the wide open was the only thing that worked with Tommy, the thing that got my dad to finally LOOK at the way it was, the thing that had brought Stacy and Darren back together." (Chapter 12, p. 169).

"Dad stopped, and I imagined us through his eyes ... his tired wife, who never complained; his son who looked exactly like him; his daughter who used to be his baby, his baby girl; and now April, his granddaughter, who had a whole life in front of her, with no real mistakes in it yet. Could he look at us someday, I wondered, maybe today, and not be disappointed? Could he see us, and himself, for who we really were?" (Ibid, p. 173).

"He can't forgive you, or me, or Stacy, or the paper company, not really. Or himself, you know? He can't get past any of it and actually live a life...so don't go thinking you're special or different, that if you let this thing with Lee just stay like it is that it won't hurt you." (Ibid, p. 183).

"It came down to the smallest things, really, that a person could do to say I'm sorry, to say it's okay, to say I forgive you. The tiniest of declarations that built, one on top of the other, until there was something solid beneath your feet. And then - and then - who knew?" (Chapter 15, p. 187).

"Sometimes rescue comes to you / It just shows up, and you do nothing / Maybe you deserve it, maybe you don't / But be ready, when it comes / to decide if you will take the outstretched hand / and let it pull you ashore." (Chapter 15 A, p. 189).



## Topics for Discussion

What part of Deanna is represented and embodied in the "surfer girl" or "the girl on the waves?" What aspects of her life and experience are reflected in her relationship with the surfer girl, both in terms of what she writes about the girl and the different ways she treats what she writes?

Consider and discuss the parallels and differences between Deanna and Stacy. In what ways are their situations and attitudes alike? In what ways are they different? In what ways are the actions taken by Deanna to change her situation similar and different to those taken by Stacy?

Have you ever had an experience, either positive or negative, that you feel has unfairly defined your life? An experience you have felt necessary to try and escape? Discuss that experience, how people reacted to you because of that experience, and how you managed to transform your life or didn't.

Have you ever, like Deanna, found yourself in a relationship with someone you knew was a bad idea but couldn't help getting involved? How did you navigate that experience?

Consider Deanna's comment, quoted on page 125, about how different people have different reactions to the same event. Discuss a similar situation in your own life, of different people having very different perceptions of the meaning, value, and importance of the same event. What, do you think, triggers those different perceptions? How do those different perceptions change and define future relationships?

Several times throughout the narrative, the word "declaration" is used to describe a positive value, a positive event - in other words, people speak their feelings out loud, their determination to bring something positive into being. What is your experience of the value of "declaration?" What difference has speaking a goal, a truth, or a feeling made to you? To enacting your goals? To a relationship?

What has been your experience of the power and value of forgiveness? What have you been forgiven for, and how did that affect you, your actions, and your relationships? What have you forgiven others for, and how did that affect your relationship with that other person? How did it affect you?

What is your experience of having a reputation - a good one or a bad one? What are the negative aspects of having either kind of reputation? What are the positive aspects?

What role does a person's reputation have on your views of them? Your experiences of them? The way you interact with them? Have you ever discovered a side of a person that goes against his or her reputation, either a good one or a bad one? How has such a discovery changed your relationship with that person?



What is your experience of honesty? What is your experience of a situation in which being honest has made things better or worse? Have you had a situation where being dishonest has made things better or worse? Is honesty ALWAYS the best policy? Why or why not?

Consider and discuss the various reputations of the various characters and how those reputations are changed. For example, what sort of reputation (i.e. assumed characteristic or identity) does Lee have with Deanna? Does Stacy have with Deanna? Does Tommy have with Darren? Does Tommy have with Deanna? Consider also the ways in which changes in these characters and their reputations mirror and/or reflect changes in the novel's primary reputation-related conflict (i.e. with Deanna).