

The Sky Is Everywhere Study Guide

The Sky Is Everywhere by Jandy Nelson

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Plot Summary

The Sky is Everywhere is a novel by writer Jandy Nelson. Lennon's sister, Bailey, unexpectedly died just a few weeks ago, leaving Lennon without her better half, her best friend, and her favorite companion. Every time that Lennon thinks she has gotten past the grief, something happens to remind her of all she has lost. When Lennon returns to school, she meets a new boy, Joe, who begins showing up randomly at her house. At the same time, Lennon discovers that her sister's boyfriend, Toby, is suffering as badly as her and only sharing a few elicited kisses seems to ease the pain. Previously invisible, Lennon now finds herself juggling two boys along with a grief that is becoming overwhelming. The Sky is Everywhere is a novel of grief and of self-discovery that will leave the reader rooting for Lennon to become a racehorse with every passing page.

Lennon returns to school and is embarrassed by the attention that she receives from her classmates. The death of Lennon's sister, Bailey, a few weeks ago has left a huge hole in her life that platitudes and compassion will never fill. In band, however, Lennon is happy to meet the new boy, Joe Fontaine. Beautiful and amazingly talented, Joe has caught the attention of all the girls in band, especially Rachel, Lennon's archenemy.

After school Lennon goes home and finds Toby, Bailey's boyfriend, there. Lennon sits with him in the garden and they talk for a while. It seems to Lennon that only Toby fully understands her grief. However, Lennon is somewhat shocked at the way Toby treats her. She always felt like a third wheel around Toby. Now, though, he treats her like the best looking girl in the room.

A few days later, Joe finds Lennon where she is eating in a tree during the lunch hour and asks her to play the clarinet to his guitar. Lennon refuses and they argue. That night, Toby comes by the house in the middle of the night and Lennon finds herself accepting his kisses. Lennon is mortified, sure that Bailey would be incredibly angry with her. Lennon tells her best friend and sees the same shock and shame on her face.

When school lets out for the summer, Joe begins coming to Lennon's each morning, bearing gifts. For more than a week he comes everyday, getting to know Lennon's grandmother and Uncle Big. Lennon has no clue as to what Joe's motivations might be until the day she breaks down during a family dinner and Joe reveals his feelings for her. When they return to the house, Toby is there and he is unhappy with Lennon's obvious affection for Joe.

The next day, Joe surprises Lennon and Toby at her house, nearly catching them kissing. Later, spends the evening at Joe's where they share an expensive bottle of wine and talk about both the past and the future. They share a few amazing kisses and Lennon knows that it is Joe she wants. Lennon vows to end things with Toby. However, when Toby tells Lennon that Bailey was pregnant when she died, Lennon is overcome with emotion and kisses Toby. Unfortunately, Joe picks that moment to come to see Lennon.



Joe refuses to forgive Lennon based on the fact that his previous girlfriend cheated on him. However, Lennon cannot stop trying. Even Toby tries to explain things to Joe, but neither can get through to him. Then Lennon sees Joe with Rachel. Lennon gives it one more try, taking Joe a bouquet of her grandmother's roses that are said to have aphrodisiac properties. Joe still refuses to forgive. Finally, Lennon writes Joe a poem and leaves it in a special place in the woods. The next day, Joe finds her in this same place and forgives her.



Part 1: Chapters 1-7

Part 1: Chapters 1-7 Summary

In Chapter 1, Lennon is aware that her grandmother is worried about her, but she cannot make herself talk to her about the sudden death of her nineteen-year-old sister a month before of a fatal arrhythmia.

In Chapter 2, Lennon returns to school and finds everything the same, but somehow changed. Everyone is talking about Joe Fontaine, the new student who recently moved to Clover from France. When Lennon arrives for her band class, Joe is sitting in her seat. He had been filling her place as second chair clarinet in her absence. As Lennon tries unsuccessfully to speak to Joe, her best friend Sarah comes into the room and attacks her in a hug. Then Rachel, the first chair clarinet, arrives and ruins the moment.

In Chapter 3, Lennon walks home slowly through the woods, using a scrap of paper she found on the ground to write a poem about Bailey on. When Lennon arrives home, she finds Toby, Bailey's boyfriend, lying in her grandmother's garden. Lennon is taken back to the day she and Bailey first saw Toby as they walked down the street, both with their noses in their favorite books. Lennon's was *Wuthering Heights* and Bailey's *Like Water for Chocolate*. Toby rode by on a horse and from the first moment Bailey was in love. Lennon, on the other hand, felt like a potato around Bailey and Toby. Therefore she is surprised when Toby treats her kindly, clearly there to see her. Toby stays for dinner with Lennon, her grandmother, and Uncle Big. Afterward, Toby and Lennon stay in the living room listening to Bailey's music. When Toby leaves, he hugs Lennon and she thinks she senses some sexual interest coming from him.

In Chapter 4, Lennon and the rest of the band are blown away when Joe plays a trumpet solo. Then, after practice, the teacher asks for hands of those who will be auditioning for All-State the following year. Lennon does not raise her hand and Sarah demands to know why.

In Chapter 5, Lennon is sitting in Bailey's closet in the middle of the night when she hears a pebble hit the window. Lennon knows it is Toby and she wants to ignore it, but she cannot. Lennon lets Toby in and they talk for a while about their shared grief. It seems that the two of them are the only ones in the world who can understand their pain. Toby tells Lennon that he and Bailey were planning on getting married. Lennon is angry that Bailey did not tell her such important news. Then Lennon finds herself kissing Toby and she is both exhilarated and ashamed of it.

In Chapter 6, Lennon eats lunch alone the following day because she is still feeling ashamed for kissing Toby. Joe joins her and tries to push her into playing the clarinet in a duet with his guitar. Lennon refuses and Joe finally gets mad, telling her it was not his idea in the first place, anyway.



In Chapter 7, Sarah comes to Lennon's the next day to drag her out. Over a meal in town, Lennon tells Sarah about kissing Toby. Sarah is surprised, but what hurts Sarah more is Lennon telling her that only Toby understands her grief.

Part 1: Chapters 1-7 Analysis

The first few chapters of the novel introduce the main characters and the conflict that propels the plot. Lennon is a seventeen year old girl whose sister recently died of a fatal arrhythmia. Lennon is devastated without her sister, devastated to suffer such a powerful loss at such a young age. Lennon and her sister were abandoned by their mother as toddlers and have grown up to be much closer than ordinary sisters. However, when Bailey fell in love with Toby, Lennon found herself pushed out, left to her own devices. Now Toby suddenly notices Lennon and she does not know how to deal with the attention.

Toby is a nineteen-year-old boy who thought he had found the girl of his dreams, only to have her die a sudden and tragic death. Toby is struggling to deal with his grief and suddenly turns to Lennon, Bailey's sister, to help him. Their shared grief turns to passion, causing Lennon shame and excitement all at once. Lennon has never had a boyfriend, she has always been the invisible one, the one everyone overlooks. Now that Bailey is gone, Lennon is getting noticed and she does not know how to deal with it.

Lennon is devastated by Bailey's death and she has shut off from everyone. Lennon rarely spends time with her best friend, she hides at school, and she has stopped playing her clarinet except during her band class. All of this is a manifestation of her grief. Joe, a new boy at school, tries to draw Lennon out, but she resists his efforts, so wrapped up in her grief that she does not see that his intentions are honest and kind.



Part 1: Chapters 8-14

Part 1: Chapters 8-14 Summary

In Chapter 8, it is the first day of summer vacation and Lennon has locked herself in her bedroom where she can be alone with her grief. Lennon takes a rejection letter from Julliard out of her clarinet case. Bailey had always dreamed of studying acting at Julliard and the rejection must have been painful even though Bailey just shrugged it off. Now, Lennon throws the letter away. Then she calls Bailey's cellphone, listens to her recorded voice mail message, and leaves a message asking why she did not tell her that Toby had proposed. Then Lennon stares at a picture she recalls Bailey drawing the day their grandmother told them their absent mother was an explorer. The picture ironically depicts the entire family except for Bailey.

In Chapter 9, school has been out for two weeks and Lennon believes the whole family is going crazy. Lennon's grandmother is constantly chasing her around the house trying to make her have tea like they used to do, but Lennon refuses because she is not ready to talk about Bailey. At the same time, Uncle Big has become obsessed with using pyramids to bring bugs back to life. Then one morning while the family is preparing for breakfast, Joe suddenly appears at the door. Lennon is shocked and horrified, especially when her grandmother flirts with him. However, Joe takes everything in stride and even seems to enjoy Lennon's crazy family. Joe pushes Lennon once again to play her clarinet with him, even revealing that her formal teacher, Marguerite, is a good friend of his family. However, Lennon continues to refuse.

In Chapter 10, Lennon's grandmother keeps pushing her to pack up Bailey's things, but Lennon cannot bring herself to do it. It is the middle of the night and Lennon is sitting at Bailey's desk and remembers how their grandmother tried to explain their mother's absence by talking about a family roaming gene, a gene that makes women in the family need to travel and move constantly. When Lennon sees Toby outside, she goes downstairs and they walk to the river. Toby tells Lennon how Bailey wanted to marry by the river so that they could jump into the water after the ceremony. Lennon can imagine such a ceremony. Then she finds herself kissing Toby again.

In Chapter 11, it has been over a week and Joe has shown up at the house every morning. Joe brings breakfast, makes the coffee, and even brings dead bugs for Uncle Big's experiments. Lennon begins to notice that the crazy, grief filled atmosphere is beginning to lift in the house. Upset that Joe has caused this shift, Lennon agrees to play with him but instead just makes terrible noises.

In Chapter 12, as Lennon walks home from work later in the day, she realizes how cathartic it was to blow her horn with Joe. When Lennon arrives home, she discovers that her grandmother has enlisted Joe and his brother to help her rid the house of unlucky items. Most of the furniture and belongings of the house are on the front lawn. While Joe goes to get a third brother, Lennon and her grandmother make dinner. Over



dinner, Lennon suddenly becomes overwhelmed with grief when she realizes that Bailey will never again experience such a family dinner. Lennon runs off into the woods. Joe follows. Joe tells Lennon that he thinks she is amazing and that he likes her, catching her by surprise.

In Chapter 13, Lennon and Joe return to the house to discover that Toby has arrived. Lennon immediately feels uncomfortable having both Joe and Toby in the same house and Toby is staring daggers at Joe. Joe seems weary until Lennon's grandmother introduces Toby as Bailey's boyfriend. Lennon walks Toby out to his truck and makes a date to see him the following day despite her growing affection for Joe.

In Chapter 14, Lennon is suddenly overwhelmed and decides to cut out early and go to bed. Joe gives Lennon a sweet goodnight gesture. In the bedroom, Lennon begins to empty out Bailey's desk drawers and is shocked when she comes across a business card for a private detective. Lennon is doubly surprised because Uncle Big already tried hiring a private detective a few years earlier and failed to find anything about Bailey and Lennon's mother. Lennon did not even know Bailey wanted to find their mother.

Part 1: Chapters 8-14 Analysis

As Lennon continues to struggle with her grief over her sister's death, she finds two boys suddenly attracted to her. Lennon is used to being the one that is overlooked and now she has two boys who seem interested in a romantic relationship. Toby, Bailey's fiancé, shares his grief with Lennon and this often turns into passion. It is a passion that Lennon both craves and is ashamed of. Lennon does not want to be with her sister's boyfriend, but sharing passion with Toby helps her deal with the pain of her grief. It is a difficult situation that Lennon is not mature enough to understand or deal with.

At the same time, Joe begins coming over to Lennon's house and seems unusually at ease with Lennon's unusual family. At first Lennon thinks that Joe is simply trying to be nice by encouraging her to get back into playing her clarinet, but Joe soon reveals that he has feelings for Lennon. This excites Lennon because she has never had a real boyfriend, never had anyone quite as good looking or talented as Joe take notice of her. Lennon is happy to become involved with Joe, but then the complication of Toby reenters the picture. Lennon does not know how to handle her grief and unusual pull to Toby and keep Joe too. It is a difficult situation that is clearly not going to end well.

As Lennon deals with her grief and her boy problems, she also begins to learn that her sister, with whom she thought she shared everything, has secrets. Lennon did not know that Bailey and Toby were engaged, nor did she know that Bailey was searching for their missing mother. It is a difficult situation for Lennon that leaves her wondering just how well she really knew her beloved sister.



Part 1: Chapters 15-25

Part 1: Chapters 15-25 Summary

In Chapter 15, Joe walks Lennon to work the following morning and they talk. Then Joe kisses Lennon and it is a magical kiss filled with all the promise that she has learned from reading such works as *Wuthering Heights*.

In Chapter 16, after work, Lennon returns home to find Toby waiting for her in her bedroom. They do not talk, but immediately fall into one another's arms. They begin to undress and begin to succumb to passion when they hear the door close downstairs. Lennon quickly begins to dress and urges Toby to do the same. Then Lennon realizes it is Joe. Lennon meets Joe at the door and he is surprised to see Toby there, but Lennon convinces him they are only going through some of Bailey's things. Joe then invites Lennon to his house that night.

In Chapter 17, Lennon dresses up to go to Joe's. Lennon's grandmother and Uncle Big tease her, making her feel as though things are returning to normal. Lennon is not sure how she feels about that.

In Chapter 18, Lennon goes over to Joe's. Joe shows her around his house, particularly his messy bedroom. Lennon accidentally sees Joe's journal in which he compares her to a girl named Genevieve. Lennon feels guilty because Joe calls her honest in the journal entry. Joe and Lennon play duets for a while, then sit out in the yard drinking a bottle of wine. Joe tells Lennon how he once was in love, but then he caught his girlfriend, Genevieve, with his roommate.

In Chapter 19, Lennon's grandmother and Uncle Big wake her by standing over her bed teasing her for her clear happiness with Joe. Lennon's grandmother then double checks that Lennon understands about birth control.

In Chapter 20, Lennon calls Sarah, whom she has been avoiding lately and suddenly misses. They go to the river and Lennon tells Sarah about Joe. Sarah then tells Lennon how angry she is with her, and then admits that she too has a new boy in her life.

In Chapter 21, as Lennon walks home, she begins to think of herself as a turtle coming out of her shell. When she reaches the house, she discovers that Toby is there. Lennon is unhappy to see Toby and tells him that what happened between them cannot happen again. Then Joe comes over to give Lennon a musical piece he has written for the clarinet. They kiss before he leaves. When Lennon turns to go back to the house, Toby is in the doorway watching.

In Chapter 22, Lennon plays Joe's composition over and over again. When she is done, she again begins emptying out Bailey's desk drawers. Lennon is surprised to find a notebook with multiple variations of their mother's name. Lennon is shocked that Bailey had done all this work without her knowing about it.



In Chapter 23, when Lennon goes downstairs, she finds her grandmother and Uncle Big unhappy that Joe did not arrive as usual. Lennon explains that he is grounded because the wine they drank was a four hundred dollar bottle of wine. However, Joe surprises them all by arriving a short time later. Joe and Lennon go to summer band practice together and everyone can clearly see they are involved. Afterwards, Lennon takes Joe into the woods to a place where a hippy bed and breakfast owner has set up a bedroom outside. They talk there, and Joe tells Lennon he wants to be her first in everything.

In Chapter 24, when Lennon returns home, she finds Toby there. Lennon is unhappy and is rude about it to her grandmother. Lennon then hides out in her room for a while and begins to continue Bailey's search for their mother. Feeling guilty, Lennon apologizes to her grandmother and goes out to speak to Toby. When Lennon tells Toby about Bailey's secret search for their mother, he tells her that Bailey was pregnant. They cry in one another's arms and Lennon begins to kiss Toby. Unfortunately, Joe walks up and sees them.

In Chapter 25, Lennon is overcome with shame for both betraying Bailey with Toby and betraying Joe.

Part 1: Chapters 15-25 Analysis

As Joe and Lennon grow closer to one another, Lennon tries to end things with Toby. However, Lennon finds it difficult because she feels drawn to Toby in an odd way that has something to do with their grief. However, after it becomes clear that Joe represents a future for Lennon, she finds the strength to push Toby away. This lasts until Lennon learns that Bailey was pregnant.

Lennon is learning things about Bailey that she never would have imagined her beloved sister would keep from her. It is a difficult situation, forcing Lennon to rethink her relationship with her sister. For this reason, Lennon continues to find herself drawn to Toby.

Joe is a good, caring young man who is drawing not only Lennon, but her entire family, out of their shell of grief. However, Joe has been injured in the past by a girlfriend who cheated on him and is weary of this sort of thing happening again. Therefore, when Joe sees Lennon kissing Toby after promising to give him all her firsts, Joe is devastated. Lennon is left filled with horrible shame and unsure what she should do next.



Part 2: Chapters 26-37 and Epilogue

Part 2: Chapters 26-37 and Epilogue Summary

In Chapter 26, Lennon spends part of the night trying to find her mother using Bailey's notebook and method of mixing her name with literary references, but fails to find anything tangible. Lennon then goes down and finds her uncle on the front porch. They talk and Lennon tells Uncle Big that she thinks Bailey had the wanderer's gene too, but Uncle Big suggests that Bailey was content to stay put, but Lennon seems to be the restless one. This shocks Lennon and makes her see herself differently.

In Chapter 27, Lennon is not the only one to miss Joe. It seems her grandmother and Uncle Big miss him as well. That day at work, Lennon makes lots of mistakes and finds herself reassigned. Sarah comes to the deli and is shocked at Lennon's confession of kissing Toby again. However, after a brief argument, Sarah vows to support Lennon no matter what. In fact, Sarah volunteers to dress Lennon up for band practice to help her win Joe back. Unfortunately, Joe misses practice.

In Chapter 28, Sarah sends Lennon to walk to Joe's house. However, Lennon chickens out before knocking on the door and instead hides under a tree and listens to Joe and his brother's practice their music. When Toby suddenly shows up, Lennon cannot sit back and watch. Lennon marches up to the door, shocking everyone with her outfit. Joe refuses to listen to either Lennon or Toby and sends them away. Toby apologizes to Lennon and tells her to not stop trying to win Joe back.

In Chapter 29, at home, Lennon takes the boxes of Bailey's things up to the attic. While rearranging things so that Bailey's things can sit under the window, Lennon finds a box filled with letters, each written by her grandmother and addressed to her mother. Lennon reads a few, but is saddened by all the things she never knew about her mother.

In Chapter 30, Lennon spends several days locked up in her room until Sarah comes and insist that she go out. They go to a movie, but while they are waiting to get their tickets they spot Joe arriving with Rachel. Joe and Lennon make eye contact and Joe purposely places his arm around Rachel.

In Chapter 31, Sarah and Lennon drink and smoke in Lennon's bedroom, talking. Lennon comes up with a plan to get Joe back. Early the next morning, Lennon cuts a huge bouquet of roses from her grandmother's garden even though she knows her grandmother does not like anyone cutting her flowers. Lennon hides the bouquet until she can get away. At Joe's, Lennon gives the roses to Joe's mother when she learns he is not home. However, Joe arrives as Lennon turns to leave. Joe tells Lennon he loves her, but he cannot forgive her. When Lennon gets home, her grandmother is waiting for her. They argue over the roses and Lennon's selfishness since Bailey's death.



In Chapter 32, Lennon starts to leave the house, but realizes her grandmother is all she has left. Lennon returns and asks her grandmother for forgiveness. Lennon encourages her grandmother to talk about her grief. Then Lennon and her grandmother cut up Lennon's much beloved novel, *Wuthering Heights*, when Lennon realizes just how sad the story really is. It seems to help.

In Chapter 33, over tea, Lennon asks her grandmother about her mother. It is then that Lennon learns on the night her mother came to her grandmother's to abandon her children, her grandmother told Lennon's mother if she left she could never come back. For this reason, all these years Lennon's grandmother has blamed herself. Later that night, Lennon realizes that life is just messy and she has to stop hiding and be a racehorse. Then Lennon reads all of her grandmother's letters to her mother.

In Chapter 34, Lennon goes to see Toby and they decide to visit Bailey's grave together. Lennon has not been there since Bailey died and is nervous, but Toby helps. Then Toby and Lennon decide to be more like brother and sister than lovers.

In Chapter 35, at band practice, Lennon tells Rachel she plans to try for first chair at the beginning of the new school year. Then, after practice, Lennon goes back to the bedroom in the woods and writes Joe a poem. When Lennon finds one of Joe's picks there, she decides to leave the poem there.

In Chapter 36, Lennon regrets leaving the poem for Joe. Sarah tries to distract her by talking about their future, of possibly going to Julliard.

In Chapter 37, Lennon returns to the forest bedroom the following day to retrieve the note, but it's gone. Lennon lies on the bed and thinks of Joe. Then she hears the sound of a clarinet. Joe arrives and tells Lennon that before he met her, he began picking up these strange poems written on scraps of paper all over town. When he realized Lennon was the author, it drew him to her and he continued to find the papers. Joe then tells her he is in love with her and that he now understands why she did what she did with Toby.

In Chapter 38, Big is getting married for the sixth time. Lennon and her grandmother bake for the wedding and Lennon can feel Bailey all around them. Later, Lennon goes to the cemetery and leaves a transcription of the letters her grandmother wrote to their mother.

In the Epilogue, a list of places where Lennon's poems continue to be discovered, including the poem she wrote to Joe, which he keeps under glass in his dresser drawer.

Part 2: Chapters 26-37 and Epilogue Analysis

Lennon struggles with what happened between her and Joe. At first Lennon thinks she can win him back with her beauty, but soon realizes that she wounded Joe far deeper than that. Lennon does everything she can to win Joe back, even after she sees him at the movies with Rachel, but everything fails. Lennon becomes desperate to undo what she has done. It is then that Lennon finally realizes how selfish she has been since



Bailey's death and how she has hurt everyone she loves. Lennon begins to make amends, first with Sarah and then with her grandmother. However, it seems helpless when it comes to Joe.

Lennon and Toby find common ground and realize that their feelings for one another were not what they thought, but just a manifestation of their grief. They decide they are better as brother and sister and vow to remain that way. It is a satisfactory ending to a complicated situation, but it fails to repair the damage to Lennon's relationship with Joe.

At the same time that Lennon is dealing with her relationships, she finds herself stumbling upon more information than she has ever had on her mother. Lennon has always believed that her mother left because of a gene - something she could not control. However, Lennon now learns that her mother left and has stayed gone because her grandmother told her to never come back. Lennon forgives her grandmother with the understanding that her mother made her own choices. This helps Lennon to realize that life is simply messy.

Lennon writes a poem to Joe and somehow this poem wins him back. Joe has been collecting the poems Lennon has been writing about Bailey since her death and in reading them all at once, has come to realize that Lennon was hurting and that she turned to Toby in grief and not passion. This helps repair their relationship and Lennon is finally able to move on with her life.



Characters

Lennon Walker

Lennon is a seventeen-year-old girl whose has just suffered the worst loss of her life. Lennon's older sister, Bailey, died of a sudden cardiac arrhythmia just a month before the novel begins. As Lennon tries to deal with this loss, she returns to school and something like a normal life. However, nothing really seems normal to Lennon anymore.

Lennon and her sister were abandoned by their mother when they were toddlers. For this reason, Lennon and Bailey were closer than most siblings usually are. Bailey, a nineteen year old college student, was just beginning her life and planning a future that Lennon soon realizes that she knew nothing about. Each revelation causes Lennon to wonder just how close she and Bailey really were. Then, when Lennon realizes her sister was searching for their long lost mother, Lennon finds herself in a whirlwind, unsure what to do or who to trust.

To add to Lennon's grief, she finds herself drawn to Toby, Bailey's boyfriend. The two seem to feel the same degree of grief and are dealing with it in basically the same way, making it easy for them to do it together. However, grief leads to passion, compounding Lennon's confusion. To add to the mix, a new boy at school suddenly finds Lennon fascinating and confesses to a desire to be her boyfriend. Lennon, who has never had a boyfriend before, has two boys that she is drawn to and unable to choose from. Only disaster can make Lennon face her own shortcomings and help her realize where she wants to be and with whom.

Gram

Gram is Lennon's grandmother. Gram is an artist who spends a great deal of time in her art studio painting green women who all look basically alike. As the novel progresses, the reader learns that Gram is quite an odd woman, a gardening guru who will prune other people's bushes without permission, but become incensed when someone touches her roses, which are believed to have aphrodisiac properties. Toward the end of the novel, the reader learns that Gram has blamed herself for sixteen years for her daughter's decision to never come home again. Gram tells Lennon that on the day Paige, Lennon's mother, decided she could no longer handle motherhood, Gram told her if she left she could never come back. That is exactly what has happened and Gram has carried around the guilt of that ever since. Lennon, however, forgives her and ensures her that it is not her fault, allowing Gram the peace of mind to finally get on with her life.



Uncle Big

Uncle Big is Lennon's uncle. Big is an arborist who knows everything there is to know about trees. Big is also something of a lothario. Big has been married five times and will end the novel with his sixth wedding. Big is a large man, a loving man, who has helped to raise Lennon and her sister. Big proves to be of great compassion for Lennon as she struggles to move beyond her grief.x

Bailey Walker

Bailey is Lennon's older sister. Bailey is an actress who has always professed a desire to go to Julliard. Therefore, when Bailey was denied acceptance to Julliard, Lennon immediately discounted thoughts of going there herself for the clarinet. However, as Lennon learns more about her sister and comes to realize that Bailey was perfectly happy to settle in Clover for the rest of her life with Toby and their new baby, Lennon begins to see that although Bailey was the more outgoing of the two, that Lennon no longer has to hide in the background. Lennon vows to become the author of her own story and to do all the things she had been afraid to do before.

Joe Fontaine

Joe Fontaine is the new boy at school. Although born in California, Joe has lived in France for a great amount of his childhood and speaks fluent French. Joe is a very good-looking boy and is extremely musically talented, playing the guitar, the trumpet, and the clarinet, making him a prime target for all the girls at school, including Lennon's archenemy, Rachel. However, Joe seems to choose Lennon, coming to her house every morning for weeks when summer begins in order to entice her into playing her clarinet with him. Joe becomes friends with Lennon's family despite their crazy tendencies and seems accepting of all the things that embarrass Lennon. However, when Joe sees Lennon kissing Toby, it is the one betrayal he cannot forgive. For this reason, Joe ends the relationship, but soon comes to understand Lennon's emotional state and learns to forgive.

Toby

Toby is Bailey's boyfriend. As the novel begins, Toby is grieving and he turns to Lennon because she was close to Bailey and they are close to the same age. At first Lennon is surprised by this because Toby never seemed to notice her before. However, she soon finds herself a target for Toby's passions. As their relationship grows closer and more complicated, Lennon finds herself torn between the relief Toby offers for her grief and the lack of a true emotional connection between them. When Joe comes into the picture, Lennon is even more confused, a situation that grows even darker when Joe sees Toby and Lennon kissing. It is a difficult situation that Toby tries to help Lennon repair. In the end, Toby and Lennon know that they were only using one another to get



over their grief and decide that a brother-sister relationship would be better for all concerned.

Sarah

Sarah is Lennon's best friend. At first, Lennon pushes Sarah away because she does not want to talk about Bailey and feels that no one really understands. However, Lennon soon comes to realize that Sarah is an important part of her life and that she can better deal with things with Sarah beside her. At the same time, Lennon begins to realize that she is not the only one grieving over Bailey's death.

Rachel

Rachel is Lennon's archenemy. Rachel is the first chair in band for the clarinets, a position she won over Lennon and often lords it over her. Rachel is unaware that Lennon purposely blew the chair test because she prefers to remain in the shadows rather than to take on the solos herself. Rachel is an unpleasant person who often tries to make Lennon feel less than she really is. Therefore when Joe uses Rachel to make Lennon jealous, he chooses the perfect person. However, rather than hurt Lennon, this simply pushes her to come out of her shell and to become the clarinet phenom she was meant to be.

Marcus Fontaine

Marcus is Joe's older brother. Marcus is just as good looking as his brother and as talented musically. Marcus comes to Lennon's house when Gram decides that the house is unlucky and needs to be purified. Marcus, like Joe, seems to find nothing unusual about the oddness of Lennon's family.

DougFred Fontaine

DougFred is Joe's other, older brother. DougFred was dubbed by such an odd name by his brothers when Fred decided he did not like his name and that it did not attract girls properly, so he began going by his middle name, Doug. DougFred is also very good-looking, talented musically, and has a great deal of success with the girls.



Objects/Places

Notebook

Lennon finds a notebook in Bailey's desk drawer that she has used to help her find possible pseudonyms that their mother might be using.

Clarinet

Lennon plays the clarinet. Lennon is very talented with this instrument, but she refuses to shine with it because she has always been in the background in her life and is uncomfortable with solos and other things that will place the center of attention on her. However, Lennon begins to look at things differently when she meets Joe and deals with her grief over her sister's death.

Guitar

Joe plays the guitar as well as the trumpet and the clarinet. Joe is an extremely talented musician.

Gram's Garden

Lennon's grandmother is a very talented gardener who has a very beautiful garden in front of her own house. Lennon's grandmother also likes to walk through town and offer advice and to prune other people's gardens. It is thought that the roses in Lennon's grandmother's garden have aphrodisiac properties, that they make people fall in love.

Wuthering Heights

Lennon's favorite novel is Wuthering Heights and she often compares the people and events in her life to the people and events in the novel.

Like Water for Chocolate

Like Water for Chocolate was Bailey's favorite book. Bailey was reading this book the first time she saw Toby.

Private Detective's Card

Lennon finds a private detective's business card in Bailey's desk, suggesting that Bailey planned on hiring the detective to find their mother.



The Half Mom

There is a painting that Lennon's grandmother painted of Lennon and Bailey's mother. The painting is not finished and their grandmother insists she cannot finish it until her daughter returns, therefore the girls have dubbed it the Half Mom.

Green Ladies

Lennon's grandmother paints women over and over again.

The Sanctum

The Sanctum is the name Bailey and Lennon have given their bedroom.

Forest Bedroom

The Forest Bedroom is a bedroom that a hippie bed and breakfast owner has created in the woods for his guest who like to hike. Lennon takes Joe here and this is where Joe forgives Lennon for kissing Toby.

Clover

Clover, California is where Lennon lives with her grandmother and Uncle Big.



Themes

Grief

The novel begins just a few weeks after the death of Bailey or the main character's sister. This death is the first Lennon has to experience in someone close to her. Lennon lost her mother as a child, but believes her to be still alive and expected to return, therefore she has never really grieved for her. However, Bailey's death impacts Lennon greatly not only because it is her first experience with death, but because she and Bailey were uncommonly close due to the abandonment of their mother and simply their compatible personalities. Bailey was the star, the racehorse, while Lennon had always been content to be the companion pony, the one in the background.

Lennon leaves her sister's belongings in their shared bedroom as Bailey left them as though if she does not touch them Bailey will return. This daily reminder of Bailey's absence allows Lennon to fool herself into think Bailey is not dead. As time passes, however, Lennon finds herself forced to move these belongings, to go through them, to deal with the reality of the situation. As Bailey faces this task, she begins to discover things about her sister she never knew. Lennon learns that Bailey was pregnant, that she was engaged to be married, and that these events had led her to want to find their missing mother. Lennon suddenly realizes that she was not as much the center of Bailey's world as she once thought, but she also realizes that Bailey was not as determined to leave town and be an acting star as Lennon had always believed.

As time goes on, Lennon comes to realize that she will always miss Bailey, that she will always want to talk to her, to share her life with her. However, Lennon soon realizes that she has as much right to live, to shine, as Bailey ever did and she cannot waste her opportunities. Lennon learns to shine in her sister's death. In the end, Lennon still misses her sister, but she learns how to deal with her overwhelming grief and is able to renew her life in a way she might not have done otherwise.

Romance

Lennon and her sister were both big romance buffs. Both loved to read and their favorite books were often literary romance such as *Wuthering Heights*. This causes them both to believe that true love really exists and that one day they will find the love they have always wanted. Bailey seems to have found this in Toby, but Lennon feels like a potato in their presence and someone never noticed or cared for.

After Bailey's death, Toby takes a romantic interest in Lennon that confuses her. Toby wants to be passionate with Lennon, telling her often how beautiful she is. Eventually, they both come to realize it is only their grief that is bringing them together, allowing them to move past the passion and find a real friendship with one another.



Also after Bailey's death, Lennon meets Joe. Joe is a very talented musician who wants to help Lennon find the music in herself again. However, Lennon resists all of Joe's attempts to draw her out until he tells her his interest in her is not simply platonic. Joe and Lennon begin a romantic relationship that dissolves when Joe sees Lennon kiss Toby. It is only then that Lennon realizes that romance is not like it was for Cathy and Heathcliff in her favorite novel. Lennon also realizes that romance can have a happy ending. Lennon does all she can to win Joe back, finally just telling him how she feels about him.

Self-Discovery

Lennon has spent her entire life in the shadow of her sister. Bailey is a very outgoing, effervescent young woman. Lennon likens Bailey to a racehorse, the star of the show. For this reason, Lennon has always settled into the background. Lennon does not like being the star of the show, the center of attention. For this reason, Lennon has put her own talents on a back burner, refusing to take the first chair in band so that she might have all the solos.

After Bailey dies, Lennon finds herself lost. When Lennon tries to explain how she feels to her best friend, Sarah, she tells her that Bailey was the racehorse and Lennon was simply the companion pony, a pony meant to keep the racehorse company but stay in the background. However, with Bailey gone, Lennon suddenly finds herself the center of attention and she is uncomfortable with it.

When Joe confesses his love to Lennon and later ends their relationship because of Lennon's mistakes with Toby, Lennon realizes that she is no longer happy being in the background. Lennon wants the attention, she wants the good looking boy, the solos, and all the attention she deserves. Hence Lennon decides to take her life back and live the life she believes that Bailey would have wanted for her rather than the one she would have had in Bailey's shadow.



Style

Point of View

The novel is written in the first-person point of view. The narrating character is Lennon, a young girl whose sister has recently died. The novel follows Lennon as she struggles with her sister's death and tries to deal with changes in her life brought on both as a consequence of Bailey's death and as a consequence of normal life.

The point of view of the novel is the most intimate point of view an author can choose to use. The first-person point of view keeps the reader completely in the main character's mind, therefore the reader sees the events of the novel only through this one person's eyes. It is somewhat restrictive, keeping the reader from understanding the motives of other character, but it also creates an intimacy between the main character and the reader that leaves the reader very concerned about what happens to the main character. In this book, the reader grieves for Bailey along with Lennon and struggles to figure out life and romance with her as well. Lennon is in a difficult situation that is very confusing for her, sharing every step of it with the reader before she can find a way to share it with others. Hence the point of view of this novel works well with the plot.

Setting

The novel is set in Clover, California. Clover is a small town that is something of a leftover from the hippy generation. For this reason, many of Lennon's classmates have odd names, just as her name is from the beloved Beatle member who was killed in the early 80s, John Lennon. The setting is a laid back kind of place where neighbors know just about everything about everyone else. It is a contrast to the difficult situation that propels the plot, the death of Bailey.

The setting of this novel is romantic, laid back, and close to nature. Lennon spends a great deal of time in the woods, her grandmother has a magnificent garden where she works most days, and Lennon's uncle is an arborist. This gives the novel a sense of the natural, a sense of the circle of life. At the same time, the setting of the novel contrasts the horrifying reality of Bailey's death. This makes it stand out, makes it become almost a character in the novel as Lennon tries to make her way back to the simplicity her life was before this tragedy.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is simple English. The main character of the novel is a seventeen year old girl, therefore much of the language is the type of language such a young girl would use in her day to day life. However, the narrator is also a musical protégée and a fan of classic literature, therefore her speech patterns might be slightly more sophisticated than other girls her age. The author plays on both Lennon's age and



knowledge in her writing, mixing metaphors and using a technique of combining strings of words together to show her excitement.

The language of this novel fits well with the main character, staying true to her personality. The language also features some oddities that show the personality and age appropriate behavior of Lennon's best friend, Sarah. However, there is little in the novel's language that would be difficult for the intended audience to comprehend, such as foreign phrases or exceedingly difficult language, therefore it fits well with the plot of the novel and the characters within.

Structure

The novel is divided into two parts and thirty-eight chapters. Each chapter varies in length, some quite long while others are as short as a few sentences. The novel is told in both narration and dialogue, showing the reader a full story with a beginning, middle, and end rather than simply telling a story.

The novel has one main plot and multiple subplots. The main plot follows Lennon as she grieves for her sister and tries to go on with her life. One subplot follows Lennon's changing relationship with Toby, Bailey's boyfriend. Another subplot follows the budding relationship between Lennon and new boy at school, Joe. There is a subplot that follows Lennon as she learns more about her missing mother and discovers that her grandmother has felt guilty for sixteen years for the decision Lennon's mother made to leave and never return. All the plots in this novel come to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.



Quotes

"Gram is worried about me. It's not just because my sister Bailey died four weeks ago, or because my mother hasn't contacted me in sixteen years, or even because suddenly all I think about is sex. She is worried about me because one of her house-plants has spots" (Part 1: Chapter 1, p. 8).

"My first day back to school is just as I expect, the hall does a Red Sea part when I come in, conversations hush, eyes swim with nervous sympathy, and everyone stares as if I'm holding Bailey's dead body in my arms, which I guess I am" (Part 1: Chapter 2, p. 10).

"This is what happens when Joe Fontaine has his debut trumpet solo in band practice: I'm the first to go, swooning into Rachel, who topples into Cassidy Rosenthal, who tumbles into Zachary Quittner, who collapse into Sarah, who reels into Luke Jacobus—until every kid in band is on the floor in a bedazzled heap" (Part 1: Chapter 4, p. 25).

"I look over at my clarinet abandoned in its case on my playing chair. It's in a coffin, I think, then immediately try to unthink it" (Part 1: Chapter 7, p. 46).

"Gram told us our mom was an explorer because she didn't know how else to explain to us that Mom had what generations of Walkers call the 'restless gene'" (Part 1: Chapter 10, p. 63).

"For a moment, in his arms, with my mind so close to his heart, I listen to the wind pick up and think it just might lift us off our feet and take us with it" (Part 1: Chapter 12, p. 77).

"I am totally out of control" (Part 1: Chapter 14, p. 84).

"I'm moving toward him, unable not to, the pull, unavoidable, tidal" (Part 1: Chapter 16, p. 93).

"I always felt like I was in a story, yes, but not like I was the author of it, or like I had any say in its telling whatsoever" (Part 2: Chapter 26, p. 148).

"Longing like I've never had for the Paige Walker who wanders the world. That Paige Walker never made me feel like a daughter, but a mother who boils water for pasta does. Except don't you need to be claimed to be a daughter? Don't you need to be loved" (Part 2: Chapter 29, p. 169).

"All the air races out of the room, and I race out with it" (Part 2: Chapter 31, p. 181).

"I have a mother and I'm standing so close to her, I can see the years weighing down on her skin, can smell her tea-scented breath. I wonder if Bailey's search for Mom would have led her here too, right back to Gram. I hope so" (Part 2: Chapter 33, p. 191).



Topics for Discussion

Who is Bailey? What happened to her? What was her relationship like with Lennon? How does Bailey's absence impact Lennon's life? Why does Lennon feel this way about Bailey? How does Lennon deal with her day to day life in Bailey's absence? How is this different from Lennon's previous behavior? Why have these changes taken place?

Who is Lennon? Where does her name come from? What instrument does she play? Why is Lennon reluctant to be first chair in her band? Why does Lennon not even consider the opportunity to attend Julliard? Why does Lennon like to be in the background, hidden from view? Where does this come from?

Who is Toby? Why does Toby begin coming to Lennon's house in the first part of the novel? Why does Toby seem to be sexually interested in Lennon? How does Lennon feel about this sudden attention? Why does Lennon feel guilty about kissing Toby? Why does Lennon try to stop these make out sessions? How does Toby react to Lennon's choices?

Who is Joe? Why does Joe want Lennon to play her clarinet with him? What does Joe hope will happen if Lennon does this? Why does Joe begins showing up at Lennon's house each morning? What does he do there? What impact does Joe have on Lennon and her family? Why does it have this impact? What does Lennon think of this situation?

Who is Gram? Why does she paint green women? What is the Half Mom? Why does it hang in their house? What is Gram's talent in nature? Why does she not like people to cut her flowers? How does she react when Lennon cuts a large number of her roses? Why? Why does Gram blame herself for Lennon and Bailey's loss of their mother? What did Gram do? Was it her fault?

Why was Bailey looking for her mother? What was she hoping to learn? What does Lennon originally believe was her reasons? What might Bailey have learned about their mother had she found her? What does Lennon think about her mother? Why does Lennon think her mother left? Why does Lennon think her mother never came back? Does Lennon hope her mother ever will return? Explain.

Why does Lennon compare herself to a companion pony? What is a companion pony? How does Lennon feel about being this kind of person? What makes Lennon begin to see herself differently? How did Bailey's life and personality impact Lennon growing up? What changes when Bailey is not longer around? Why?