

The Truth About Forever Study Guide

The Truth About Forever by Sarah Dessen

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Plot Summary

The Truth About Forever, by Sarah Dessen, follows teenager Macy Queen through the most pivotal summer of her life. Although she is privately still reeling from the death of her father less than two years earlier, Macy makes an effort to appear fine, even perfect, until she begins a part-time job at a catering company and becomes friends with its diverse group of young employees. As she gradually evolves under their influence, Macy realizes that it's okay to embrace life without fear.

Macy Queen's summer begins with sending her boyfriend, Jason, off to "brain camp" and taking over his job at the public library, where her co-workers are determined to make her life miserable. When her mother hosts a cocktail party to drum up business for her real estate company, Macy meets the staff of Wish Catering and pitches in to help them when everything seems to be going wrong. The owner, Delia, says that Macy has a knack for the business, so when Jason unexpectedly says that they should take a break from their relationship, Macy impulsively takes Delia up on her offer of a job.

As she gets to know the Wish crew, Macy is attracted to Wes, Delia's nephew and a talented artist who makes astonishing sculptures out of scrap metal and other junk components. The two become close friends by playing Truth, an ongoing game in which one player asks a question and the other must answer truthfully. As the questions become more personal and revealing, Macy begins to realize that it's okay to let others see her as she really is, flaws and all. Macy also becomes close with Kristy, another Wish employee, who helps her see a number of truths that she has been avoiding, including the fact that her relationship with Jason is completely wrong for her.

In the meantime, Macy's older sister, Caroline, has begun renovating the family's beach house, a project about which their mother, Deborah, is completely unenthusiastic. Since her husband's death, Deborah has focused her attention on work in order to avoid facing her grief, and she is anxious that Macy remain the perfect daughter. Accordingly, she becomes very upset when she begins to see changes in Macy and tries to re-exert control, eventually forbidding her to see her friends from Wish anymore.

In the end, Macy's two worlds collide when her mother is forced to hire Wish to cater an important event. Eventually, her mother sees that she can't control every aspect of her world and that the changes Macy is going through are positive ones, and Macy learns that forever does exist, but not in the way she had imagined before.



Chapters 1 and 2

Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

The Truth About Forever tells the story of Macy Queen, a teenage girl who has been profoundly affected by her father's death more than a year earlier. She and her mother live a very controlled life until Macy takes a part-time job with a catering company, where she becomes involved with a group of friends who seem to thrive on chaos. During the course of the summer, Macy goes through profound changes that help her push past her fears and learn to embrace life again.

Macy Queen is helping her boyfriend of a year and a half, Jason Talbot, pack for his upcoming trip to "Brain Camp," a summer camp for smart teens. Jason is the ultimate brainy kid who takes all advanced-placement classes, is the statewide math champ, and has the highest grade point average in his high school's history. He's more serious than she is, but that's OK with Macy because she thinks he's exactly what she needs.

After accompanying Jason to the airport, Macy reflects on her father's death and how it changed her life forever. She and her dad enjoyed running together, but on the morning after Christmas, she'd stayed in bed an extra five minutes and her father had suffered a heart attack and died just as she caught up to him. Since then, Macy has become familiar with "the face" — a sympathetic look she gets from everyone who knows her as the girl who saw her father die.

Arriving home from the airport, Macy finds that a package has arrived, addressed to her father. Before his death, he was known for ordering all sorts of products that were advertised on TV as being miraculous such as systems for organizing foil and plastic wrap, remote-controlled coffee makers, etc. and the packages continued to arrive after his death despite his family's efforts to stop them. Macy loves the useless products because they remind her of her beloved father, so she secretly keeps them hidden in an attic space above her room.

Macy's mother, Deborah, carries on the real estate business she started with her late husband, and in the book's second chapter, she is hosting a cocktail party at her home in the hope of attracting new clients. As Macy is helping with the party, she meets the crew of Wish Catering, the company that is providing the food and bar service. The group includes Wish owner Delia, who is nearing the end of a pregnancy, handsome Wes and his younger brother Bert, and clumsy, scatter-brained Monica. The staff is having a bad day so Macy pitches in to help in the kitchen, and as the party winds down, Delia says she's got a knack for the catering business and should contact her about a job. Macy says no thanks, since she has already agreed to take over Jason's job at the library for the summer, but she's attracted to the group. Sitting on the roof of her house outside her bedroom window, which is her special spot to think and be alone, she watches somewhat wistfully as the catering van pulls away from her house.



Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

The first two chapters of *The Truth About Forever* introduce several of the book's main characters, including Macy, her mother, Jason, Delia, Wes, and the other Wish Catering employees. The reader learns a great deal of information about Macy, including the fact that her father's death (and the fact that she witnessed it) has profoundly affected the girl she is today. We also get a sense of the guilt she feels because she chose to sleep later on the morning he died, rather than going running with him as she typically would have done. The EZ Products that continue to arrive at the Queen home symbolize Macy's father and his continued presence in her life, as each month she receives another reminder of him. We also learn that Macy and her mother have handled the death very differently, with Deborah giving most of his belongings to Goodwill in an effort to move forward while Macy secretly keeps the products that continue to arrive. Macy's need to keep the packages secret from her mother symbolizes much about the current state of their relationship; on the surface, they go to great effort to ensure that everything looks fine and normal, but both harbor hidden pain that they refuse to acknowledge, even with each other. The book's first chapter also briefly mentions a Christmas gift Macy's dad had promised her, but he died before he could give it to her, a small piece of information that will become important late in the book and close a loop joining Macy's old personality with the person she is becoming.

Chapter two introduces a theme that will be important throughout the book — Macy's need to be perfect since her father's death. Striving for physical perfection is part of her effort to make it appear that she is fine, which is also important to her mother's need to push the death aside and ensure that everything appears normal at all times.

Another important aspect of chapter 2 is the introduction of the Wish Catering staff, all of whom will become important people in Macy's life. The reader should note the stark contrast between the orderliness and predictability of the life Macy and her mother lead and the chaos that follows the Wish crew. The game of "gotcha" that Wes and Bert play will also be a factor throughout the book and it will come to symbolize Macy's feeling that life holds shocks that can instantly change the way a person feels. Watching the catering van drive away will also become an important symbol that is repeated throughout the book as Macy deals with the concept of things and people moving away from her.



Chapters 3 and 4

Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

As the book's third chapter opens, Macy reveals that she has trouble sleeping. She's always been a light sleeper and so it's ironic that she missed the final run with her dad because she was sleeping soundly and didn't want to get up. Since his death, she's developed a fear of sleeping because something bad might happen. When she does sleep, she dreams about running, an activity she's enjoyed since she was 6 years old and shared with her father. However, she quit her high school track team after his death and cut her teammates out of her life, as she did with most other people.

Macy begins her job at the library and she is miserable from the beginning. Two other girls, Amanda and Bethany, work there, and they're very cold and unfriendly toward her. When she complains about them in an e-mail to Jason, his response is cool and business-like, sounding more like a colleague than a boyfriend. At dinner, her mother asks Macy if everything is OK, and she responds that she's fine, noting that since her father's death, both she and her mother refuse to acknowledge any other emotion.

In another email to Jason, Macy tells him how much she misses him, then ends by saying "I love you," something they've never said aloud before although she thinks it's been implied. After sending the e-mail, Macy climbs out her bedroom window and sits on the roof, reflecting about her sister, Caroline, who had been a wild teenager and often snuck out the window. Now Caroline is married to Wally Thurber, who is 10 years older than she is, and they live in Atlanta. Unlike Caroline, Macy never sneaks out, and Caroline often encourages her to be more social and less serious.

Work at the library gets worse instead of better, and Macy finds herself home alone when her mother goes out of town on business for the weekend. Macy reflects about the family's beach house, which was very special to her father and also to Macy, but no one has gone there since his death. While at home alone, Macy receives another e-mail from Jason, saying he thinks they're getting too serious and suggesting that they take a break from their relationship for the rest of the summer. Devastated, Macy goes out for a drive and when she sees the Wish Catering van, she impulsively follows it.

Macy catches up with the van at a historic mansion where Wish is catering a wedding reception. She meets Kristy, Monica's sister and another Wish employee, who is a pretty, bubbly girl whose face is marked by two faint but visible scars. The catering staff is running late and Macy pitches in to help, then reminds Delia of her job offer and is put to work on the spot. The staff is friendly and fun, but disorganized and the evening is almost as chaotic as her mother's event. During the evening, she begins to learn more about the catering business, but she is apologetic when she thinks she has further upset Molly, the bride, who is unhappy with the napkin design. The napkins were supposed to say "Molly and Roger, Forever" but the addition of a set of ellipses after the word "forever" seems to indicate that the future of their marriage is in some doubt.



At the end of the evening, Wes and Bert appear. Delia reveals that they are her nephews, and Bert has celebrated his birthday by buying an old ambulance that he calls the Bertmobile. As Delia heads for home, the rest of the crew prepares to go out in the Bertmobile and invite Macy to come along, but she declines because she does not want to remember her previous ride in an ambulance, when her father was dying, so she simply goes home.

Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

This section introduces one of the book's primary themes, the concept of forever. Macy had little reason to consider the meaning of forever until her father died and she was forced to realize that perhaps there is no such thing as forever. She is forced to come face to face with the concept at the wedding when the bride believes that the addition of ellipses after the word changes the meaning entirely and implies that the "forever" of her marriage is in question. As the book's title implies, the meaning of forever will continue to be debated throughout the novel.

Macy's relationship with running is also an important part of her personality and will continue to surface as the book progresses. It is one of the many things she lost when her father died, but along with other parts of her personality, it is something she consciously chose to shut down. Kristy's scars are also mentioned for the first time in this section, contrasting with Macy's need for physical perfection as part of her desire to keep up the appearance of normality in her life.

At the end of the section, Macy again watches the Wish crew drive away from her as she realizes that the part of her that would have taken a chance and gone with them died along with her father.



Chapters 5 and 6

Chapters 5 and 6 Summary

Macy tries to write an appropriate response to Jason's email, but everything she writes makes her feel like a failure, so she decides not to respond at all, and she does not tell her mother about their break-up. She does tell her mother about the catering job, and when her mom is puzzled by her decision to work there, Macy brushes it off and says the job is just for fun.

Even when her mom is out of town, Macy continues to do what she is supposed to do — go to yoga, eat dinner at the same time, etc. When she returns to the library on Monday, Bethany and Amanda let her know that they're aware of her break-up with Jason, making her feel even worse. When Delia calls that evening, asking if she can help her make finger sandwiches for an event the following day, Macy decides to deviate from her usual routine and goes to Delia's house. It is in a rural area and she must stop at a roadside produce stand to get directions. When she finally arrives, Macy is distracted by an unusual sculpture on the property. It is very large, made of rusted metal and shaped like an open hand with a heart shape cut out of the palm and a smaller bright red heart hung within it. As she looks at the sculpture, she accidentally gets her wheel stuck in a very large pothole. Wes appears and pulls her car out, telling Macy that Delia refuses to get the hole fixed even though it's dangerous.

As they're making sandwiches together, Delia says that Wes made the sculpture. She comments that he thinks he can fix anything, but says that some things are meant to be broken and chaotic. She tells Macy that Wish Catering was started by her sister, Melissa, whose nickname was Wish and who died of breast cancer, leaving her sons Wes and Bert with Delia. Macy also learns that Wes made the unusual sculpture. She is moved by Delia's story about Wish's death, but decides not to mention her father's death.

As Chapter 6 begins, Macy and the rest of the catering staff are working at a retirement party. Things are as disorganized as usual, but Macy finds the chaos a welcome change from the quiet boredom of the library job, although she still thinks of that as her real life. Kristy continues to invite her to go out with the group after each job, but Macy always refuses.

Arriving home, Macy is shocked to see her father's dilapidated truck in the driveway. She has always had a secret hope that someday her dad will simply appear at home and that his death will have been some sort of big mistake, but she finds that her sister, Caroline, is the one who brought the truck. The following day, Macy has lunch with Caroline and her mother, and Caroline announces that she has visited the family's beach house and wants them to fix it up again. Deborah doesn't want to do it, finding the entire topic too painful, but Caroline is insistent, reminding Macy and her mother about how much their father loved the house and all the good memories they had there.



Having lunch with her mother and sister causes Macy to be late returning to the library and she is chastised by Amanda and Bethany. This makes Macy realize that despite all her efforts, she isn't perfect and can never be. After the next catering job, she agrees to go out with Kristy, Wes, Bert, and Monica.

Chapters 5 and 6 Analysis

The topic of perfection is woven throughout chapters 5 and 6. Macy is baffled that her simple declaration of love has caused Jason to retreat from her, but she still feels like the failure is somehow hers. Even when her mother is away — when no one is looking — she does the right thing, maintaining her mother's timetable for meals even though she is eating alone. Amanda and Bethany continue to exude perfection and make Macy feel even more imperfect despite her best efforts, and at the end of chapter 6, she finally realizes that she'll never achieve perfection, and by agreeing to go out with her new friends at Wish, she symbolically turns away from the concept and turns toward chaos and the unknown instead.

Macy's first visit to the area where Delia and the other Wish employees live further draws the distinction between perfection and chaos. Delia enthusiastically embraces chaos, and even refuses to fix the dangerous pothole in her driveway because she insists that some things are meant to be broken and it's the universe's way to providing contrast. This attitude foreshadows many other events to follow, including the comparisons between Wes' mother and Macy's father, and the way various characters in the book view the world. Despite her best efforts to maintain order and achieve perfection, the only interesting and life-affirming events in Macy's life occur as a result of chaos.

The sculptures that are introduced in this section will be of extreme importance throughout the book, including the materials they're made of and the various concepts they symbolize. It is important to note that they are made of broken pieces that most people would view as junk, but Wes is able to arrange them in ways that are beautiful and meaningful, just as the junk that is part of the characters' lives can become part of what makes them special and unique.



Chapters 7 and 8

Chapters 7 and 8 Summary

In preparation for going out with the group, Macy goes to the trailer where Monica and Kristy live with their grandmother, Stella, and where Kristy gives Macy a makeover. Macy learns that Kristy's scars are the result of a car accident that occurred when she was 12, in which her mother was driving drunk. The girls' mother left shortly after that and they have lived with their grandmother since then, in the same area as Delia, Wes and Bert.

After Kristy finishes styling her hair and dressing her in some of her clothes, Macy looks in the mirror and finds that she looks different than usual, but she likes the look. Bert picks the girls up in his ambulance and they go to a park where a large group of high school students are gathered, including a few that Macy recognizes. Wes is there, prompting the lurch in her stomach that Macy feels each time she sees him. Macy is approached by a girl named Rachel, with whom she ran track in middle school. Rachel is drunk and mentions the death of Macy's father, so her new friends now know the secret she's been hiding, but they don't react with the pity she's become accustomed to. Later, Macy, Monica and Kristy sit in the converted ambulance and talk about boys. Kristy comments that Macy doesn't swoon over Wes the way most girls do, and Macy tells the girls about Jason, saying he's perfect and has made her a better person. Kristy thinks the opposite, telling Macy that it sounds like Jason makes her feel bad about herself and that she should have higher standards and stop being afraid to be alive.

When Kristy and Monica go to get more beer, Macy stays behind and in a few minutes, Wes appears. He's been in the woods collecting scrap metal for his sculptures, and as they sit in the ambulance, Macy asks about his tattoo, which has the same design as the heart-in-hand sculpture. He explains that the design is one his mother used to draw when he was a child, signifying the connection she felt between the heart, representing feelings, and the hand, representing action. They talk about the deaths of his mother and her father, and she tells him that she stopped running after her dad died. Wes says that he's a runner also, and suggests that they run together sometime to see who is faster. When their curfew approaches and the others return, Kristy tells Macy that she's now clearly swooning over Wes.

As chapter 8 opens, Macy's sister Caroline is visiting. She tells about her meeting with the contractor who will be doing the renovations on the beach house, but her mother barely pays attention to the photographs Caroline shows. Later, as Macy is folding her laundry, her mother sees the glittery tank top she'd borrowed from Kristy and expresses concern because it is clearly unlike anything Macy would normally wear.

When Macy and Caroline go to a farmer's market, they run into Wes, who is selling his work there. Caroline, who majored in art in college, is enthralled with the sculptures and buys a few, while Wes gives a small sculpture of an angel to Macy.



Chapters 7 and 8 Analysis

Again, perfection is an underlying issue in this section of the book. While Kristy's scars keep her appearance from being perfect, Macy is learning that she has many other attributes that other acquaintances like Amanda, Bethany and even Macy herself don't possess. Kristy also gives Macy a different perspective on Jason even though she's never met him. Amanda and Bethany consider him perfect, as does Macy, but Kristy immediately perceives that he makes Macy feel bad about herself rather than making her a better person, as she has told herself. The gradual transformation in Macy's personality and attitude is foreshadowed by the change in her appearance when Kristy gets her ready to go out. The clothes and hairstyle are not a look that Macy would have chosen on her own and she doesn't feel like herself, but at the same time she likes the changes.

This section also moves the relationship between Macy and Wes forward as they have their first private conversation. She learns about his deep connection to his mother, which mirrors her relationship with her father. Her relationship with running also comes into play again through her history with Rachel and the revelation that Wes also enjoys running. Macy's growing relationship with the Wish group continues to evolve as they become the first people to react to the news of her father's death without the extreme pity she's come to expect, signifying that these relationships will be different from any others she's ever experienced. The girl from her past, Rachel, is far less in tune with Macy despite their shared history than the new friends she's only known for a few days. The sculptures continue to be important symbols of the past, present, and future of Wes and Macy.



Chapters 9 and 10

Chapters 9 and 10 Summary

At a catering event, Macy sees the Talbots, Jason's parents. Mr. Talbot speaks to her in a patronizing way, expressing the hope that she and Jason can work things out, but making it clear that Jason can't be distracted from his goals. Kristy overhears the conversation and takes offense on Macy's behalf, retaliating by refusing to let Mr. Talbot eat any of the shrimp she is serving. Macy realizes she no longer fits into the Talbots' world, but thinks it's OK because she fits in with her new friends.

Delia forgets to fill the catering van with gas, so the tank runs dry as Wes and Macy are leaving the event. They are in a remote area, but begin walking in search of a gas station, and they begin playing a game called Truth in which each person gets to ask a question and the other has to tell the truth. The game ends only when one player refuses to answer a question and the other player answers a final question. Macy begins by asking Wes why he got sent to reform school, and he says he was caught breaking into a house. Wes asks Macy about her boyfriend and she tells him about her e-mail to Jason, his opinion that she wasn't taking the library job seriously, and his feeling that they were getting too serious after she said she loved him. Macy asks about his most recent girlfriend and Wes tells her he has a current girlfriend, Becky, who is in a rehab facility. Wes then asks why she stopped running and she tells him the story of her father's death, which she has never told anyone. Before he can discuss it with her, a car comes along and gives them a ride to the nearest gas station.

Macy's mother, Deborah, is under a lot of stress, but Macy knows this is nothing unusual because she focuses so much attention on her work as a real estate developer. Although Deborah insists that she is fine, Caroline is worried and wants to schedule a family vacation after the beach house is finished. Eventually Deborah agrees to spend the week of August 8 to 15 at the renovated house, immediately following the grand opening of her new townhouse development.

Macy and Wes are now close friends and she feels comfortable around him without feeling she needs to be perfect. Their game of Truth continues, and when they're at a party together, they discuss Macy's reputation as a goody-goody and her need to be perfect, as well as the fact that girls stare at Wes and swoon over him.

Kristy surprises Macy by appearing at the library and talks her into going out for lunch. When she returns from lunch, Amanda and Bethany are haughty toward her and Macy realizes that she'll never be like them, and that she is glad about that. She is happy that she no longer cares what they think.



Chapters 9 and 10 Analysis

In chapter 9, Macy takes another step away from her old life and closer to her new feelings. Her conversation with Jason's parents make it clear that she isn't part of their world anymore, and perhaps never had been. She has known the Talbots much longer than she has known the Wish crew, but it is her new friends, particularly Kristy, who have her back when the Talbots are patronizing toward her.

However, the most important element in chapter 9 is the beginning of the game between Macy and Wes. As they are walking in search of a gas station, they begin by playing a superficial word game, then move into the much more potentially intense game called Truth, which will become a central and very significant part of their relationship for the remainder of the book. Even though they barely know each other at this point, they immediately leap into deeply personal questions and both begin to learn important information about each other. It is important for the reader to pay particular attention to the Truth game because it plays an increasingly significant role in the relationship between Macy and Wes, and in the personal changes Macy goes through during the summer. The game is symbolic of Macy's growth, as it provides her with opportunities to fight her fears and open up to Wes in ways she would not otherwise be comfortable with, and it forces her to face truths she's been avoiding in every area of her life.

Chapter 10 begins with two seemingly insignificant conversations that foreshadow much more pivotal events that will take place later in the novel. One involves Macy's concern about her mother's well-being and in the other, Deborah agrees to a specific week for a family vacation.

The theme of perfection also comes into sharp focus in this section as Macy realizes that Wes is the only person with whom she doesn't feel the need to appear perfect because he already knows her secrets, thanks to the Truth game. The conversation between Macy and Wes at the party reveals how different their backgrounds are, providing a stark contrast to the striking similarities between Wes and Macy themselves despite their diverse backgrounds. The contrasts between Macy's old life and the new one she's forging is highlighted when Kristy visits the library and points out how different Macy is from Bethany and Amanda. In this scene, and throughout the book, Kristy serves as a figurative alter-ego for Macy by noticing and articulating things Macy either doesn't recognize on her own or chooses to ignore in her quest for perfection. At the end of chapter 10, Macy's realization that she no longer cares what Amanda and Bethany think foreshadows the eventual climax of their relationship.



Chapters 11 and 12

Chapters 11 and 12 Summary

Macy is at Kristy's trailer where Kristy is trying to convince her to go on a blind date. As they talk, Kristy questions Macy's relationship with Wes, finally concluding that while they say they are friends, they secretly want the relationship to be more. Macy refuses to go out with Kristy and the boys she's set them up with, and instead she walks around Stella's elaborate garden, where she sees a large, unusual sculpture that is obviously one Wes has made. Wes appears and the two go to World of Waffles, a restaurant where Wes spends a lot of time. Wes tells Macy that he made the sculpture for Stella to thank her for her kindness during his mother's final illness. Macy and Wes talk about his mother and her father, comparing the way their families have dealt with their losses. While Macy's mother got rid of all her father's belongings and erased nearly every trace of him, Delia has saved many of Wish's things. Wish had a habit of making lists and sometimes Wes finds one of the old lists around the house. He takes this as a sign from his mother, just as Macy takes the monthly arrival of the gadgets her father loved as a sign from him.

The following morning, Macy's mother has a talk with her. She questions Macy about her job at the library, and finally reveals that she ran into Jason's mother, who told her that Jason has broken up with Macy. Deborah expresses concern that Macy didn't tell her this news, as well as general concern about the way Macy's life is going, including the time she spends with her new friends. She also is concerned that Macy is not focused on studying for the SATs and other appropriate priorities, but Macy reassures her that everything is fine. After the talk ends, Macy thinks that her mother now considers the problem solved.

The mail brings a package for Macy. Inside is a note from Caroline, saying she is sending Macy something she found at the beach house. It is a wrapped gift, and Macy realizes it's the Christmas present her father promised her the day before he died. She puts it away in the attic, where she stores the gadgets she continues to receive each month.

Chapter 12 opens with another round of Truth between Macy and Wes. They know a lot about each other now, thanks to the continuing game, and Macy feels comfortable with him because he is the one person she can count on to say exactly what he means.

As the group helps Bert get ready for a meeting of his Armageddon Club, Macy gets an opportunity to see the inside of Wes and Bert's house. Wes' room is sparse, but includes a photo of his mother. Wes invites Macy to go to a party with him. Kristy is there and is surprised to see Wes and Macy together, but Macy assures her that they're still just friends. While Wes is talking with some other people, Macy gets involved in a drinking game with some boys, and after she's had a few drinks, one of the boys comes on to her. As he's about to push her outside, Wes appears and rescues her.



After they leave the party, Wes and Macy sit in his truck in her driveway and continue to play Truth. She tells him that she'd like to stop being afraid, and that one of her fears is talking honestly and openly with her mother, even though she wants to do that. When it's Macy's turn to ask a question, she asks Wes what he would do if he could do anything. After thinking for a moment, he passes. Macy is shocked, because this means that if she answers the next question he asks, the game will be over and she will win. He says he wants to wait a while before asking the question and she agrees. Macy's mother arrives and sees Macy and Wes together, but goes into the house without commenting. Macy tells Wes that his final question had better be a good one, and he assures her that it will be.

Chapters 11 and 12 Analysis

Chapters 11 and 12 are important because both are filled with significant foreshadowing and clues about events that will be pivotal in the plot's conclusion. Among the most important developments are the arrival of the mysterious gift from Macy's father and the fact that she puts it away without opening it; the conversation between Macy and her mother after which Macy realizes how little attention her mother is really paying to her; and the coming end of the Truth game when Wes surprisingly refuses to answer a question that appears simple on the surface. Bert's Armageddon Club seems to be an insignificant detail here, but later leads to a turning point in Macy's relationship with her new friends from Wish Catering.

Kristy continues to be an important influence in Macy's life, providing a mirror to feelings Macy either doesn't know she has or refuses to acknowledge because of her fears. She sees the attraction between Wes and Macy even though both of them insist that they are simply friends and she refuses to allow Macy to ignore things that she prefers to deny.

The conversation between Macy and her mother is a significant one in the evolution of their relationship. On the surface, Deborah seems very concerned about Macy's well-being and expresses disappointment that Macy didn't tell her about her break with Jason. Even though she says all the right things, Macy realizes that the entire conversation is superficial and meaningless. She knows that in her mother's mind, the discussion has resolved the issue and she can now move on to other concerns, never recognizing Macy's need to have a deeper, more honest relationship with her. Even though they continue to go through their daily rituals such as having dinner together, Macy and her mother are miles apart emotionally. This is particularly disturbing to Macy because she is happier than she's been in a long time and cannot understand why her mother doesn't see that. Macy is beginning to recognize her mother's need to keep things exactly as they have always been, refusing to allow Macy to grow and change in ways that Macy thinks are positive, not harmful. Macy's need to talk with her mother is increasing, but this conversation, which could have moved their relationship forward, only serves to push them further apart.



Chapters 13 and 14

Chapters 13 and 14 Summary

Macy, Caroline, and Deborah are looking at photos Caroline has taken of the beach house. Caroline is very enthusiastic about the progress of the renovations, but their mother is distracted and uninterested.

A few night later, the Wish crew caters a party and when they are dropping Macy off afterward, Delia asks if she can come in and use the bathroom. Bert is upset because this delay means he will miss a TV show about Armageddon, so Macy invites the group to watch the show at her house, knowing her mother isn't at home. A short time later, Deborah arrives unexpectedly and is clearly unhappy to find the Wish group there. She overhears Wes commenting on having been arrested and becomes even more upset, telling Macy that her friends must leave as soon as the program ends. She also informs Macy that Jason will be in town for a few days to visit his sick grandmother. Macy realizes that the fun she's been having during the summer is about to come to an end.

The next day, Macy wakes up in a bad mood after having a series of bad dreams during the night. Her mood only gets worse when her mother tells her that she is no longer allowed to see the Wish crew outside of work. Macy tries to argue with her, saying that her friends are good people and that she hasn't done anything that warrants punishment, but her mother is distracted by work and ends the conversation.

When Macy is ready to leave for the library, her car is blocked so her mother offers to drive her to work. On the way, Macy tries to tell her about a disturbing dream he had about her father, but her mother refuses to get engaged in the conversation. As she drops Macy off, she tells her to be at the new townhouse development at 6 o'clock to help her with an event and drives away.

At the library, Amanda and Bethany are clearly anticipating Jason's arrival, but everyone is surprised with the person coming through the door is Wes. He approaches Macy, but Amanda and Bethany are attracted to him and try to get his attention instead, but they're dismayed when they learn that he is there to see Macy. When Wes says it's too bad Macy can't help with some Wish business, she impulsively gets up and starts to go with him even though the girls warn her that if she leaves work early, she can't come back. Macy leaps over the desk and leaves the library with Wes.

Chapters 13 and 14 Analysis

Chapter 13 is a very significant one because it is the point at which Macy's summer begins to shift in the opposite direction. When the book began, the path her summer would take seemed very clear such as studying for her SATs, working at the library, waiting for Jason's return, going through her regular routines with her mother, but events took a major turn when she began working at Wish. Gradually, over just a few weeks,



her world began to shift. Now, as Bert's TV show about Armageddon plays symbolically in the background, Macy's two worlds collide when her mother meets her friends, and it is clear to her that, just as with the concept of Armageddon, only one world can survive. This chapter is filled with symbolism, particularly involving the image of Armageddon as a symbol for the crumbling of Macy's new world.

Contrast is also an important theme in this section. The easy banter among the Wish crew as they gather at Macy's house is a stark contrast to her mother's terse, uptight manner. In addition, Deborah's idea of beauty, which involves only physical appearance, is a direct contrast to Macy's concept, which considers Kristy beautiful despite the scars that mar her physical appearance.

Chapter 14 begins with Macy's dream about her father, which is deeply disturbing to her. She wants desperately to talk with her mother about it, but is unable to open a dialogue about it because her mother's insistence on keeping everything "fine" will not allow it. At this point, there is a clear indication that Macy's frustration is building to a fever pitch and is destined to lead to an explosion. In another scene between Macy and Deborah, her mother once again shows less concern for her daughter than for her work, which is ironic because Deborah initiated the conversation to convey her concerns to Macy, but continually allows work to interfere, giving Macy no opportunity to really talk with her. This chapter also includes a good example of parallelism when Deborah drives away after dropping Macy at the library, mirroring Macy's earlier dream in which her father was driving away and she was unable to catch him.

Despite the feeling of impending doom as her mother attempts to narrow her world, Macy makes one last stab at freedom by leaping over the library desk to leave with Wes. As she leaves the library, she walks into the light, symbolizing her escape from the darkness the library had placed on her soul and the brighter world of her life with Wes and her other friends.



Chapters 15 and 16

Chapters 15 and 16 Summary

As they prepare food for a Wish Catering event, Wes is still amazed about Macy's exit from her library job. She makes light of it, but admits to herself that it hasn't really sunk in yet. When Delia asks them to take her toddler outside for a while, Macy gets her first opportunity to see the area where Wes makes his sculptures and continues to be enthralled by them. Back at the house, Macy and Delia have time to talk and Macy says her mother expects her to be perfect. Delia disagrees, but Macy says she worries about her mother and thinks she works too much because it's the one thing she can control. Delia encourages Macy to talk to her mother about her feelings, especially her struggles with her father's death.

At their catering event, everything goes perfectly for the first time in Wish Catering history. As the event winds down, Delia worries that things are going a little too well and says that she actually needs some chaos. A few minutes later, she gets her wish when she goes into labor.

The Wish crew takes Delia to the hospital and Macy struggles with being in the same location where her father died. As they wait for the baby's birth, Macy is also concerned about missing her mother's event; since her mother had driven her to the library earlier, she is stuck at the hospital with no way to get there. She tries several times to call her mother, but is never able to get through and finally leaves a message explaining the situation and saying she'll get there as soon as she can.

Delia has a healthy baby girl, and after seeing her delight in her new daughter, Macy is overcome with emotion. She misses her mother — more accurately, she misses the way her mother was before her father's death — and goes to an empty alcove at the hospital to cry. Eventually Wes arrives and comforts her, then drives her to the townhouse development to meet her mother. Before he leaves her there, he mentions that he might go running in Macy's neighborhood the next morning, and that he might also be ready to ask her the final question in the Truth game.

After Delia's encouragement, Macy feels ready to try talking with her mother, but she doesn't get the chance. Deborah is furious because Macy has missed the event and quit her library job. The next morning, she tells Macy that she must work for her for the rest of the summer and otherwise is grounded. She also forbids Macy from seeing her friends from Wish, since all the changes in Macy's behavior began when she took the catering job. As she is facing the bleakness of her life, Macy hears footsteps running past her house. It is Wes, who slows down as if hoping she'd come outside, but when she does not appear, he continues running.



Chapters 15 and 16 Analysis

Chapters 15 and 16 contain some excellent examples of irony. In particular, the chaos that usually marks each Wish Catering event finally disappears, but the single thing that goes wrong is the beginning of Delia's labor and its effect on Macy's plan to meet her mother. The event that contains the least amount of chaos also produces the most disastrous results to date. The ongoing theme of perfection also plays a major role in this section as Macy talks openly with Delia about her mother's desire for perfection in everything around her, including her daughter, and her need for something that she can control. This conversation foreshadows events to come in chapter 16, when Deborah assumes total control of Macy's life.

The section also contains examples of parallelism and contrast. Macy finds herself at the same location where her father died, but this time she's there for a happy event. The last time she was at the hospital, a life was ending and this time one is beginning. After her last visit to the hospital, a large part of her life died, and this visit results in the death of her new life when her mother banishes her friends and grounds her for the rest of the summer, essentially forcing her to return to the life that had died previously. Seeing Delia with her new daughter provides a stark contrast to Macy's current relationship with her own mother and prompts to her break down and cry, finally losing her carefully-orchestrated control. Finally, her attempt at perfection in her physical appearance falls apart when she arrives at her mother's event in complete disarray from crying.

In the final paragraphs of chapter 16, Macy's relationship with running comes into play again. Not knowing about the blowup between Macy and her mother, Wes runs in her neighborhood as promised, and his continuation past her house symbolizes the fact that he is running out of her life.



Chapters 17 and 18

Chapters 17 and 18 Summary

Macy is abiding by her punishment, working with her mother during the day and maintaining an 8 p.m. curfew, with only an hour and a half of free time each evening. She has stopped sulking openly and is now merely cold toward her mother, but the two are existing together peacefully. Macy thinks her mother must know she is unhappy, but that it didn't matter because she is "her" Macy again — dependable and controllable. Macy misses her friends terribly, especially Wes. She has spoken to both Wes and Kristy by phone, but has not seen them.

One night, Macy is surprised to receive an e-mail from Jason, suggesting that they stay in touch and remain friends. Feeling in danger of slipping back into her old life, she lets her mother think she's going to yoga class, but goes to see her Wish friends instead. When she sees Wes, she realizes that she'll never go back to Jason, but she's disappointed when Wes declines her suggestion that they hang out together until her curfew. He seems uncomfortable, and as she's driving home, Macy impulsively turns around and goes to the World of Waffles, where she sees Wes through the window. He's with his girlfriend, Becky, and Macy realizes that their friendship had just been temporary and now both were moving ahead separately.

When chapter 18 begins, two weeks have passed and Macy is worried about her mother, who has been working very hard and is under a lot of stress, often going without sleep or food. In the meantime, Macy has been exchanging e-mails with Jason but continues to think about Wes. She talks to Kristy occasionally and is surprised that Kristy has not mentioned that Wes is back together with Becky.

As Deborah becomes increasingly anxious about the opening of the townhouse development, Caroline arrives and announces that the renovations on the beach house are finished. She reminds Macy and her mother that their beach vacation will begin the following Sunday, the day after the grand opening party, but Deborah doesn't remember agreeing to those plans and says she can't possibly get away from work. Deborah and Caroline argue bitterly, and Caroline leaves. A few minutes later, Deborah tells Macy that the caterer she's hired for the grand opening has quit and asks for Delia's phone number. Macy doesn't think she'll agree to do it, but supplies the number anyway.

Chapters 17 and 18 Analysis

The contrast between movement and inertia is a prevalent theme in chapters 17 and 18. Macy's formerly busy life has ground to a screeching halt and she once again lives in a silent, monotonous world. At the same time, the world outside her is moving quickly. Ironically, Bert has found a girlfriend at his Armageddon Club, signifying that perhaps even end-of-the-world enthusiasts can find hope in odd places. Kristy has also found a



boyfriend, Delia is moving forward with her family, Caroline has completed the beach house renovations, the townhouse opening is approaching quickly, and Wes has become very busy with his art work and a new job.

Jason's e-mail threatens to pull Macy even further back into her old life, but she has changed enough that she isn't willing to completely surrender without one last fight, so she goes back to see her friends. However, rather than welcoming her, Wes is clearly uncomfortable and Macy thinks she knows why when she sees him with Becky, engaged in an intense conversation. The "gotcha" game comes back into the picture as Macy feels the same sudden shock she experiences when Bert jumps out at her.

The story intensifies during chapter 18 as Deborah's stress level escalates along with Macy's concern for her well-being. Caroline, the former wild child who gave her parents plenty of worry, has now become the most mature member of the family, the only one willing to recognize her continued grief and deal with it openly as she tries to make her mother see what she is doing to herself and to Macy. Despite their different personalities, Caroline has seen the positive changes in Macy but is unable to make her mother give up her need for complete control. The concept of forever comes into play again as Caroline tells her mother that a weeklong vacation isn't forever, but Macy realizes that for Deborah, a week away from her controlled world might as well be forever. In an ironic twist, Macy notes that the tagline of the new townhouse development is "Come change with us," something her mother clearly feels unable and unwilling to do.



Chapters 19 and 20

Chapters 19 and 20 Summary

A week after Caroline left in anger, she still refuses to talk with her family, and everything is going wrong with the plans for the gala with one exception. To Macy's surprise, Delia has agreed to cater the event. The night before the gala, things seem to be improving when suddenly Caroline arrives with several of Wes' sculptures and begins setting them up on the lawn. Caroline tells her mother how talented Wes is, and says that he learned to weld at reform school, has been taking college-level art classes for two years, has won a prestigious award and has had some showings of his work, all of which surprises Macy and seems to impress her mother, who suggests leaving the sculptures up for the gala.

When Macy wakes up the next morning, she sees Wes standing outside her house. He asks why she hasn't answered his calls and she tells him about seeing him with Becky, and says that they both knew their breaks from Becky and Jason would end. Wes asks if this is what she wants and although she realizes this is the final question in their game of Truth, she says yes. Before he can respond, bits of white fabric begin falling from the sky and Macy realizes that a strong wind has shredded the large tent that had been set up for the gala. In the confusion, Wes leaves.

A few hours later, it's time for the gala and since a large storm is brewing and there is no tent, the party is moved inside Macy's house. As everyone scrambles to get things ready, Macy goes to her room and finally decides to open her father's Christmas gift. It is a hand-in-heart sculpture and Macy realizes that it is a sign.

When Macy goes downstairs, there is chaos everywhere and her mother finally snaps. The Wish crew arrives and Delia begins addressing all the problems and putting things in order as Macy goes to help her mother. She can't find the words to help Deborah calm down, but simply puts her arms around her and holds for for a while, thinking that she is finally letting her mother know how she feels.

Returning to the kitchen, Macy asks about Wes and learns that he will stop by later if he's needed. As Macy objects, Kristy explains to Macy, her mother, Caroline, Delia, Monica, and Bert that Macy and Wes want to go together but won't admit it. She reveals that when Macy saw Wes at World of Waffles, he was breaking up with Becky, not getting back together with her. Macy thinks it's too late for her and Wes, but Monica assures her that it's never too late.

Chapters 19 and 20 Analysis

Macy's two worlds collide one last time as Delia agrees to cater the gala and Caroline decorates the lawn with Wes' sculptures, symbols of all the changes Macy has gone through over the course of the summer. When a storm brews, the sculptures stand



strong while the tent — one more symbol of her mother's attempt to control the events around her and make everything appear to be perfect ends up in tatters. Deborah's attempts at perfection are going completely awry at this point, and the harder she tries to salvage things, the worse the situation gets. Ironically, it is Delia, who lives in chaos and thrives on it, is the only person who can get things organized and salvage the event.

Deborah also begins to learn that things are not necessarily what they seem and perfection has many faces when she learns more about Wes. She had written him off immediately when she learned that he had been arrested, but Caroline has taken the time to learn more about him and makes her mother see that his reform school experience pales in contrast to his talent and accomplishments.

Kristy once again serves as Macy's alter-ego, telling everyone, including Macy herself, what she is afraid to face. Again, the girl who can't be perfect according to Deborah's standards turns out to be exactly the right person to set things right between Wes and Macy. Ironically, it is Monica, who has been famously silent during all their interactions, finally speaks up, repeating Macy's own words and reassuring her that it is not too late to forge a relationship with Wes.

In another important piece of symbolism, Macy's father's final gift to her is a heart-in-hand statue. Since it was purchased more than a year before she met Wes and became affected by his work, this is a signal from her father that Macy is on the right track and should continue to pursue the path she is on. It is a reminder that he will always hold her heart in his hand, just as she will hold his.



Chapters 21 and 22

Chapters 21 and 22 Summary

Despite the earlier chaos, the party goes beautifully and Deborah seems much more relaxed than usual. Macy realizes that all her problems with her mother haven't been solved in one night, but she thinks they have made a good start.

Jason arrives and he and Macy go outside to talk. He looks at the statues and even though Macy tells him they have meaning, he expresses the opinion that in the end, all they are is junk. Jason confesses that he has handled their relationship badly, and he suggests that each of them make a list of what they expect from a relationship and use them to determine whether they should get back together or break up. He is baffled when Macy says that won't work, and as he's asking her to explain what she means, she sees Wes. When she walks down the driveway toward where he's standing, she sees a sculpture he's brought. It's an angel and it's different from the others Caroline had set up in the yard because it's the only one with wings. Macy realizes this is so she can fly.

Macy runs to Wes and tells him there has been a change in the rules of their Truth game. In order for her to win, she has to answer the question that he'd passed on earlier. He asks the question, "What would you do if you could do anything?" and she responds by kissing him.

In the book's final chapter, someone wakes Macy just as her father had done the day he died. Like before, she is tempted to sleep longer, but gets up and puts on her running clothes. This time, the person waking her is Wes. As she leaves the house to run with him on the beach, she notes that she and her mother spend each weekend at the beach house now, although Deborah still brings work with her. Sometimes Wes or Kristy comes with them, but Macy also enjoys the rides she and her mother take alone. They are talking more now, although it hasn't been easy.

As she runs to join Wes, Macy seems to hear her father encouraging her. She and Wes continue their game of Truth, and Macy thinks that the game could go on forever. She now realizes that the truth about forever is that it is always changing, and that it is happening right now.

Chapters 21 and 22 Analysis

As the party continues, chaos turns to order, signifying that the chaos that has recently become Macy's life will also resolve itself soon. When Jason arrives, it takes only a few minutes for Macy to realize how wrong they are for each other. Somewhat like her mother, he wants life to be orderly and controlled, and for everything to go according to plan, while Macy has come to appreciate the fact that change can be good and a little chaos keeps things interesting. The vast differences in their personalities and the



significant changes Macy has undergone are clear in two aspects of their conversation. First, he intends to resolve their relationship in an orderly fashion, by making lists just as he did in preparation for his trip to camp. Macy appreciated this approach when she was helping him pack, but now she sees that it's a ridiculous way to conduct a personal relationship, although Jason, who hasn't changed at all, sees no reason why it wouldn't work. Second, when Jason assesses the statues, he can't get past the materials that they're made of. All he sees is junk, while Macy sees beyond the individual parts to the beautiful piece of art they have become.

The symbolism of the statues continues to be important in the book's final chapters as Wes delivers one he has clearly made for Macy. The wings make it different from any of the other statues he has made, symbolizing his view of Macy as a unique and special person, and the wings obviously signify her ability to continue growing, changing and soaring higher rather than staying stuck in the small life she'd been living. Their game of Truth also continues to be a central theme in their relationship. Just as she's done from the beginning, Macy uses the game to help her communicate things that are difficult for her to say outside its confines.

The book's last chapter makes it clear that tremendous changes have taken place in Macy's life and that of her mother. Deborah has accepted Wes and Kristy despite their flaws and is learning to relax more, but still has a long way to go. Macy is running again, this time with Wes rather than her father. The book comes full circle as it is Wes who wakes her up to run and she again is tempted to sleep longer, but gets up to move into the future. In the final paragraphs, Macy finally realizes that forever exists even if it isn't as she'd pictured it before her father's death. She now knows that forever continues to change and evolve, and that it isn't some concept that is out in the distance somewhere. "Forever" is happening all around us, all the time.



Characters

Macy Queen

Macy Queen is a 17-year-old high school student and the book's central character. When the book opens, she is a serious student focused on studying for her SATs and maintaining an appearance of perfection both in her physical appearance and her behavior. The past two years of Macy's life have been shaped by her father's sudden death from a heart attack that occurred while he was running. Macy's grief is complicated by a sense of guilt because she usually ran with her father, but on the day he died, she chose to sleep longer instead.

Macy begins the summer between her junior and senior years by sending her boyfriend, Jason Talbot, off to "brain camp" and taking over his job at the public library. Her life begins to take a turn when she impulsively takes a second job with Wish Catering, where she becomes friends with a group of other teens who are very different from the rest of the people in her life. Among them is Wes, a good-looking boy who is also a talented artist. Her friendship with Wes, Kristy, Delia, and the other Wish crew members cause Macy to question many things about her life, including her fear of really living life and moving past her father's death.

Wes Baker

Wes Baker is a strikingly handsome teenage boy who works for his aunt at Wish Catering. Although his good looks are the first thing people notice, there is much more to Wes. He has been deeply affected by the death of his mother; is very protective of his younger brother, Bert; and has spent a few months in reform school after a minor breaking and entering incident. It was there that he discovered his talent for art, particularly creating unusual sculptures from scrap metal and other pieces of junk.

Wes forms a close friendship with Macy Queen when she joins the Wish staff, primarily through playing an ongoing game in which each player has to answer a series of questions with complete honesty. Eventually, Wes and Macy can no longer deny their attraction to each other and he becomes a strong influence in helping her overcome her paralyzing fears.

Kristy Palmetto

Kristy Palmetto is an outgoing, fun-loving teenager who works for Wish Catering. Her face has been scarred from a car accident that occurred when she was 12, but those who meet her quickly forget about the scars in favor of her charming, quirky personality. She lives with her grandmother, Stella, and sister, Monica, because her mother left the family after causing the accident while driving drunk.



After they become friends, Kristy serves as something of a mirror for Macy, pointing out things that are obvious to her and the reader, but that Macy either fails to notice or chooses to ignore.

Deborah Queen

Deborah Queen is Macy's mother and owner of a successful real estate development business started by her late husband. Since the death of Macy's father, Deborah has retreated into work as a way to avoid facing her grief, and she is determined to keep Macy from changing or evolving because she feels a need to keep everything predictable and under her own control.

Caroline Thurber

Caroline Thurber is Macy's older sister. Formerly a wild teenager known for sneaking out and getting into trouble, she is now settled down and married to Wally, a man 10 years her senior, with whom she lives in Atlanta. Her decision to renovate the family's beach house and her art background that prompts her to embrace Wes' sculptures are pivotal to the book's plot.

Delia

Delia is the owner of Wish Catering, a company she took over after the death of her sister, Melissa (nicknamed Wish), who was the mother of Wes and Bert. Delia teaches Macy some important lessons about the value of chaos and uncertainty in one's life.

Monica Palmetto

Monica Palmetto is Kristy's sister and a fellow Wish Catering employee. She is known for speaking very little.

Bert Baker

Bert Baker is Wes' brother and a fellow Wish Catering employee. His primary interest is the concept of Armageddon.

Jason Talcot

Jason Talcot is Macy's boyfriend. He is extremely smart, but very regimented with high expectations for himself and Macy.

Amanda and Bethany

Amanda and Bethany are teenager girls who work with Macy at the library information desk. Their primary goal is to prove their superiority to Macy and make her life miserable.



Objects/Places

Wish Catering

Wish Catering is a small firm started by Wes and Bert's mother and now run by her sister, Delia. Macy works there, along with Wes, Bert, Kristy, and Monica. The firm provides excellent food, but chaos surrounds every event at which they work.

Sculptures

The Sculptures are works of art Wes makes from scrap metal and other pieces of junk. They are intricate works with moving parts, and many feature a heart-in-hand element that is significant to both Wes and Macy.

Wildflower Ridge

Wildflower Ridge is the real estate development where Macy and her mother live. It was developed by Macy's parents and is the site of a new section of townhouses now under construction.

Queen Family Beach House

The Queen Family Beach House has not been used since Macy's father died until her sister Caroline decides to renovate it.

Gotcha

Gotcha is a game played by Wes and Bert in which one jumps out and tries to scare the other.

Truth

Truth is a game played by Macy and Wes in which one player asks a question and the other must answer absolutely truthfully.

Bertmobile

The Bertmobile is a converted ambulance that Bert drives.



Lakeview Branch Library

The Lakeview Branch is a branch of the public library and the site of Macy's summer job at the information desk.

Brain Camp

Brain Camp is the name Macy gives to the summer program for bright teens where Jason spends his summer.

Roof

Macy's bedroom looks out over a section of roof. She often climbs out the window and sits on the roof to think.

World of Waffles

World of Waffles is a restaurant Wes used to visit with his mother. He now goes there often to plan his sculptures.

Sweetbud Drive

Sweetbud Drive is the street on which Delia lives with her husband and daughter. Wes and Bert live next door in the house once owned by their late mother. Kristy and Monica live nearby with their grandmother.



Themes

Forever

As the title implies, one of the book's primary themes is the concept of forever. Macy Queen is no longer sure that forever exists after the unexpected death of her father. Since his death a year and a half earlier, Macy has lived a very small life, cutting out favorite pastimes such as running and narrowing her circle of friends to just her boyfriend, Jason. She simply plugs along, with each day being much the same as the day before, until she encounters and befriends the group at Wish Catering. At one of the first events she works, Macy comes face to face with the meaning of forever when the bride becomes very upset that her napkins are printed "Molly and Roger Forever . . ." rather than "Molly and Roger Forever" because she thinks the addition of ellipses implies that their marriage might last forever and might not.

Later, as they are becoming closer friends, Kristy lectures Macy about the meaning of forever. Kristy has a clear understanding of the concept because she nearly died in a car accident when she was 12. She explains to Macy that anyone's forever could end in an hour or it could go on for many years, so it's important to make the most of every minute. Kristy's influence is very important to Macy's evolving understanding of what forever really means.

The concept of forever crops up frequently throughout the book as Macy realizes that a short period of time can seem like forever and a long period can fly by quickly. By the end of the book, Macy comes to understand the truth — that forever isn't a finite thing, but is always changing and is not something that's out in the distance, but rather it is what is happening right now.

The Inevitability of Change

The inevitability of change is as important as the concept of forever as themes in this novel. Macy's life changed dramatically when her father died suddenly, but after that, very little changed. Macy's mother retreated into her work, where she could control events, and she set up a very structured life in which she and Macy ate meals at the same time each day and even stuck to the same foods. Macy is satisfied with this limited existence until she impulsively joins the staff of Wish Catering and begins to find herself changing bit by bit. She resists at first — for example, she protests when Kristy gives her a makeover before they go out for the first time, but when she looks in the mirror, she is pleased with the changes in her appearance.

However, Macy's mother is very displeased with the changes she sees in her daughter. The more Macy changes, the more her mother tries to pull her back into her old familiar patterns. Macy realizes that her father's death has given her mother a need to control everything in their world, and that any sort of changes she makes frighten her mother



because she feels that Macy is slipping beyond her control. Ironically, the tagline on Deborah's townhouse development is "Come change with us" but she is incapable of changing herself or accepting changes in Macy.

As the novel progresses, the change in Macy becomes intolerable and her mother tries to put a stop to her relationship with Wes, Kristy and the other Wish staff members. However, Macy has already evolved to a point at which she is unwilling to return to the small world she inhabited before, and she pushes forward, embracing the opportunity to grow and eventually helping her mother begin to change as well.

Perfection

Perfection is a theme throughout the novel as Macy strives to be perfect for a number of reasons. When the story begins, she is anxious to prove to everyone around her that she is OK following her father's death, so she works hard on her appearance, her grades and her behavior, believing that nothing short of perfection is acceptable. She frequently mentions that Jason is perfect, not realizing that he is simply disciplined to the point of being robotic. She finally admits to Wes that she equates perfection with being in control, which is very important to her because it makes her feel safe. It is Wes who gradually helps her realize that perfection is not only unattainable, it's undesirable. Wes likes flaws, seeing them as strengths rather than weaknesses. He and Delia both believe that life is more interesting when there is a little chaos and unpredictability, and Wes takes the concept even further by creating beautiful artwork out of imperfect junk.

Macy's need for perfection fits in beautifully with her mother's need to control the world around her. She admits to Delia that her mother expects her to be perfect, and that opinion is given more weight when her mother grounds Macy and forbids her to see her friends after she commits a single, unavoidable infraction. As Macy evolves throughout the summer, she realizes that there is no such thing as perfection and that to aspire to it means cutting yourself off from life's most rewarding experiences.



Style

Point of View

The Truth About Forever is told through the eyes of a first-person narrator, Macy Queen. The narrator is articulate, honest, and straightforward, describing events both past and present in a manner that enables the reader to gain a clear understanding of her actions, thoughts, and feelings. All actions by the book's other characters are filtered through Macy's observations and perceptions.

The book includes somewhat equal portions of exposition and dialogue, providing the reader with an opportunity to understand Macy's view as well as form independent opinions based on conversations between various characters. This includes conversations that Macy overhears, but in which she is not personally involved. The book also includes flashbacks to previous conversations, particularly those between Macy and her father prior to his death. Even though the narration is by Macy, in dialogue the author takes care to use expressions and speech patterns that are particular to specific characters to give the reader a better sense of what those characters are like.

Setting

Although it is never specified, it is apparent that the book takes place in a small to mid-sized community in Georgia. This is implied because Macy's sister, Caroline, lives in Atlanta, but is able to stop by for frequent visits, indicating that the drive is not very far.

The book's scenes are set in a variety of locations throughout Macy's town. Many take place at the home she shares with her mother in the Wildflower Ridge subdivision, and in the development's common area as it is being used for events related to the opening of the townhouses. A number of scenes take place at Delia's home, which is also the operations center for Wish Catering, and at the nearby homes of Wes and Kristy. The public library is the setting for scenes involving Macy's summer job there, along with various sites at which Wish has catering jobs, and the World of Waffles, a restaurant favored by Wes. Scattered scenes take place at parties and other gatherings where Macy and her friends congregate.

The book's final scene takes place at the Queen family's beach house, presumably on the Georgia coast, a location that has been mentioned frequently throughout the book.

Language and Meaning

The language used by the author of The Truth About Forever is casual and easy to read, but also articulate. It is appropriate for a book being narrated by a teenage girl who is known to be very intelligent and a good student. The language changes as



needed to reflect various characters as they speak and write. For example, Jason's dialogue and e-mails are stiff, formal and somewhat stilted, reflecting his serious, brainy personality. By contrast, Monica's nickname of Monotone is reflected in her slow, slurred speech patterns, and Macy's mother's tense, high-strung personality comes through clearly in her dialogue.

The book is aimed at teenage girls, and the language and writing style reflect that target audience. However, the author never talks down to the audience and the book includes a large number of challenging words and expressions designed to encourage readers to aspire to a higher level vocabulary.

Structure

The Truth About Forever is divided into 22 numbered chapters of unequal length, with the earlier chapters being much longer than the final chapters. At times, single events spill over into more than one chapter, while a few days or even weeks pass between other chapters. When that is the case, the author clarifies the amount of time that has passed.

The plot is straightforward and moves along quickly. The story opens at the beginning of summer and while the timing of the end is not clear, it is implied that it is the following summer, as a fair amount of time seems to have passed between chapters 21 and 22. Most of the exposition and dialogue take place at the present time, but the book also includes Macy's memories of previous experiences, particularly the death of her father and other events involving her relationship with him. With the exception of the last chapter, the plot follows Macy and the other characters through the first couple of months of a single summer, primarily tracking Macy's evolution over the course of those weeks as her new friends help her fight her fears and begin to move forward following the death of her beloved father.



Quotes

"I might have been the girl whose dad died, the girl who was there, and everyone might have known it. Like so much else, I could not control that. But the fact that I was angry and scared, that was my secret to keep. They didn't get to have that, too. It was all mine" (p. 8).

"I knew she blamed herself for his death, thought that maybe it was the added stress of Wildflower Ridge that taxed my dad's heart, and if she hadn't pushed him to expand so much everything would have been different. This was our common ground, the secret we shared but never spoke about. I should have been with him; she should have left him alone" (p. 20).

So now I only ran in my dreams. In them, there was always something awful about to happen, or there was something I'd forgotten, and my legs felt like jelly, not strong enough to hold me. Whatever else varied, the ending was the same, a finish line I could never reach, no matter how many miles I put behind me.
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"I'd never really allowed myself to mourn, just jumped from shocked to fine-just-fine, skipping everything in between. But now, I wished I had sobbed for my dad Caroline-style, straight from the gut" (p. 48).

"More than our old house, or our Wildflower Ridge place, the beach shack was my dad. I knew if he was haunting any place, it would be there, and for that reason I'd stayed away" (p. 56).

"I'm not a spontaneous person. But when you're alone in the world, really alone, you have no choice but to be open to suggestions" (p. 59).

"But even five minutes into our friendship, I knew that this Kristy was different" (p. 63).

"I looked back over at the door, feeling terrible. Who knew three dots could make such a difference? Like everything else, a love or a wish or whatever, it was all in the way you read it. "Macy." I glanced up. Kristy was watching me. She said, "It's okay. It's not your fault." And maybe it wasn't. But that was the problem with having the answers. It was only after you gave them that you realized they sometimes weren't what people wanted to hear" (p. 72).

"Maybe in another life, I might have been able to take a chance, to jump into the back of an ambulance and not remember the time I'd done it before. But risk hadn't been working out for me lately; I needed only to go home and see my computer screen to know that. So I did what I always did these days, the right thing" (p. 80).



"As I picked a pen out of the jar by the phone, pulling a notepad closer to me, I had a sudden pang of worry thinking about this deviation from my routine. But this was just one night, one chance to vary and see where it took me. The fireflies were probably already out; maybe it wasn't just a season or a time but a whole world I'd forgotten. I'd never know until I stepped out into it. So I did" (p. 87).

"The thing about Wes," Delia said to me, unwrapping another package of turkey," is that he thinks he can fix anything. And if he can't fix it, he can at least do something with the pieces of what's broken" (p. 92).

"It's not that I believe everything happens for a reason," she said. "It's just that . . . I just think that some things are meant to be broken. Imperfect. Chaotic. It's the universe's way of providing contrast, you know? There have to be a few holes in the road. It's how life is" (p. 93).

I felt bad that I didn't tell her about my dad, chime in with what I knew, how well I knew it. With Delia, though, I wasn't that girl, the one whose dad had died. I wasn't anybody. And I liked that. It was selfish but true" (p. 97).

"I nodded, but I didn't know. I'd chosen instead to just change my route, go miles out of the way, as if avoiding it would make it go away once and for all. I envied Delia. At least she knew what she was up against. Maybe that's what you got when you stood over your grief, facing it finally. A sense of its depths, its area, the distance across, and the way over or around it, whichever you chose in the end" (p. 97).

"So while at home I was still fine-just-fine Macy, wiping up sink splatters immediately and ironing my clothes as soon as they got out of the dryer, the nights when I arrived home from catering, I was someone else, a girl with her hair mussed, a stained shirt, smelling of whatever had been spilled or smeared on me. It was like Cinderella in reverse: if I was a princess for my daylight hours, at night I let myself and my coposure go, just until the stroke of midnight, when I turned back to princess again, just in time" (p. 105).

"Then about a year and a half too late, it hit me. I was never going to be perfect. And what had all my efforts gotten me, really, in the end? A boyfriend who pushed me away the minute I cracked, making the mistake of being human. Great grades that would still never be good enough for girls who Knew Everything. A quiet, still life, free of any risks, and so many sleepless nights to spend within it, my heart heavy, keeping secrets my sister had empowered herself by telling. This life was fleeting, and I was still searching for the way I wanted to spend it that would make me happy, full, okay again. I didn't know what it was, not yet. But something told me I wouldn't find it here" (p. 112-113).

"She had this whole thing about the hand and the heart, how they were connected." He ran a finger over the bright red of the heart, then looked at me. "You know, feeling and action are always linked, one can't exist without the other" (p. 139).



"I was about to protest again, but then I stopped myself. Maybe for once I should just let something happen, I thought. I looked down at the angel in his hand, at those sparking bits of glass. I did want it. I didn't know why, couldn't explain it if I had to. But I did" (p. 153).

"The truth was, since our night stranded together, I felt comfortable around Wes. When I was with him, I didn't have to be perfect, or even try for perfect. He already knew my secrets, the things I'd kept hidden from everyone else, so I could just be myself. Which shouldn't have been such a big deal. But it was" (p. 187).

"In the last few weeks, I had changed. But in my mind, those changes had been for the better. I was finally getting over things, stepping out of the careful box I'd drawn around myself all those months ago. It was a good thing, I thought. Until now" (p. 221).

"Of course she'd think I could tell her anything: she was my mother. In truth, though, I couldn't. I'd been wanted to talk to her for over a year about what was bothering me. I'd wanted to reach out to her, hold her close, tell her I was worried about her, but I couldn't do that either. So it was just a formality, what we'd just agreed on, a contract I'd signed without reading the fine print" (p. 222).

"With just a few weeks of being friends with Kristy, and more importantly, Wes, I had changed. They'd helped me to see there was more to the world than just the things that scared me. So they had affected me. Just not in the ways she was afraid of" (p. 268).

"This felt right. Not just leaving, but how I was doing it. Without regret, without second guessing. And with Wes right there, holding the door open for me as I walked out into the light" (p. 276).

"Then, a life was ending. Here, one was about to begin. I didn't believe in signs. But it was hard to ignore the fact that someone, somewhere, might have wanted me to go through this again and see there was another outcome" (p. 291).

"I felt something ache in my chest, and suddenly I knew I was going to cry. For me, for my mother. For what we'd had taken from us, but also for what we'd given up willingly. So much of a life. And so much of each other" (p. 294).

"After what happened with Wes, though, I'd stopped resisting my punishment. It was weird how, with things pretty much done between us, I could so easily go back to the life I'd had before. I found myself forgetting the girl I'd become, who'd been, if not fearless, not as afraid" (p. 317-318).

"But as I stood watching her, I realized how truly hard it was, really, to see someone you love change right before your eyes. Not only is it scary, it throws your balance off as well. This was how my mother felt, I realized, over the weeks I worked at Wish, as she began to not recognize me in small ways, day after day. It was on wonder she'd reacted by pulling me closer, forcibly narrowing my world back to fit inside her own" (p. 351).

"Everyone had a forever, but given a choice, this would be mine. The one that began in this moment, with Wes, in a kiss that took my breath away, then gave it back - leaving me astounded, amazed, and most of all, alive" (p. 370).



Topics for Discussion

Discuss Macy's relationship with Jason. What is her opinion of their relationship and the way he treats her? How does Macy's view differ from Kristy's? Which girl's opinion do you think is most accurate, based on how Jason is portrayed in the novel?

What is the significance of Wes's sculptures in the novel? What do they represent, and how do they affect Macy's eventual transformation?

Why is the novel's title appropriate to the subject matter? What does Macy believe is the truth about forever when the book begins? How does her view of forever change as the novel progresses? What are some of the things that influence that change?

Discuss the symbolism of Armageddon and the accompanying tsunami in the novel. Why are they appropriate mirrors to what is happening in Macy's life?

What is the significance of the beach house in the novel? Why is it so important to Caroline? Why does Deborah avoid the subject? What role does the house play in furthering and eventually resolving the plot?

Discuss the contrast between perfection and chaos in the novel. How do the various characters, especially Macy, Delia, Wes and Kristy, feel about each concept? How do the two concepts work together and against each other?

Why is change such an important theme in *The Truth About Forever*? Who do you think changes the most by the end of the book, and why? Who changes the least, and why?

Compare and contrast Macy's father with Wes' mother and the effect of their deaths on their children. What did they have in common and how were they different? How did their families differ in their reactions to their deaths? How do their deaths factor in the relationship between Macy and Wes?